

GALATEA COMES ALIVE

BY HELENA CARUS

THE Greeks had many kinds of divine beings, divinities as diverse as the strata of development among the people themselves, for the Greeks of the fifth century in the various cities and countrysides numbered among themselves men as civilized as we can ever hope to be, and men as primitive as any living tribe engrossing our anthropologists. We are apt to forget the difference between the Athenian of that time and the Thessalian or the Arcadian; and the Athenian cherished in his tolerant pantheon the divinities of every Greek, later even welcoming those of barbarians.

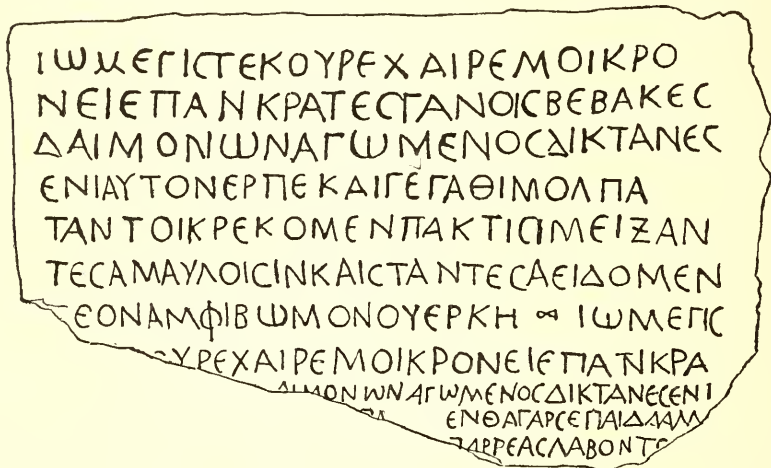
How diverse are the aspects of one and the same Protean God! The Apollo Augieus who guarded Athenian doorways was more related to the Herms who guarded the fields than to his own completely divinized, intellectualized aspect as the Pythian. Those Herms are hard to visualize as the same god shown us by Praxiteles at Olympia. Zeus Ktesios who guarded storerooms, and Zeus Meilichios, the huge snake upreared, are startlingly unlike Phidias' great father of gods and men. During those few centuries wherein the Mycenaean culture was slowly assimilated to that of the Dorian invaders, every tribe in the hilly land was more or less isolated; more or less independently developing its individual rites, sanctities and gods. When the local games at Olympia, Corinth, and Delphi grew to be the vast invited concourses we know from the historians, each tribe added its facet of color and feeling to the gods which were slowly crystallizing into the twelve of Olympus. Poets, sculptors, and those barely recorded priestly dynasties at Olympia, Delphi, and Eleusis were the crystallizing media which gradually reduced the Olympians to *objects d'art*, but, in the fourth and fifth centuries, that moment of Greek flowering, every god and hero in the great assembly of divine beings scintillated with colors

and attributes as different as the many rituals which had gone into their making, and each god and hero lived for the Hellenic world more vividly than we can imagine any god or gods.

For the Greek lived his religion, kept it a vital part of his being by "dancing out the mysteries."

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To come upon the records of the ritual dance is to be startled out of that statuesque concept of the Greeks we have all gathered from reading the usual Homer, Plutarch and Xenophon, and from imbibing the traditions of the Renaissance. Even those who have read much deeper and have noticed mysterious references in Euripedes, Plato and the pedestrian Pausanias, would very likely be startled by the experience of finding these records assembled and interpreted by certain archaeological discoveries, certain unmistakably authentic inscriptions.



Fragment of Hymn found in Crete.

How startling is this experience is recorded by the very scholar whose study of Greek religion—*Prolegomena to the Study of Greek Religion*, J. E. Harrison, Cambridge—is the usual introduction of students to the subject. In a latter book, *Themis*, which published the finding of an inscribed stone in Crete which threw illuminating gleams into every obscure corner of her research, Miss Harrison's excitement sympathetically excites the reader and sets him to a revisualization of his individual concept of the Greeks, a re-

alization so inspiring that the experience cries aloud to be shared. In this inscription are evidently recorded the accompanying words of a ritual dance. They are translated as follows:

"Io, Kouros most Great, I give thee hail, Kronian, Lord of all that is wet and gleaming, thou art come at the head of thy Daimones. To Dikte for the Year, O, march, and rejoice in the dance and song,

That we make to thee with harps and pipes mingled together, and sing as we come to a stand at thy well-fenced altar.

Io, etc.

For here the shielded Nurturers took thee, a child immortal, from Rhea, and with noise of beating feet hid thee away.

Io, etc.

.....
 of fair dawn?

Io, etc.

And the Horai began to be fruitful year by year (?) and Dike to possess mankind, and all wild living things were held about by wealth-loving Peace.

Io, etc.

To us also leap for full jars, and leap for fleecy flocks, and leap for fields of fruit, and for hives to bring increase.

Io, etc.

Leap for our Cities, and leap for our sea-borne ships, and leap for our young citizens and for good Themis."¹

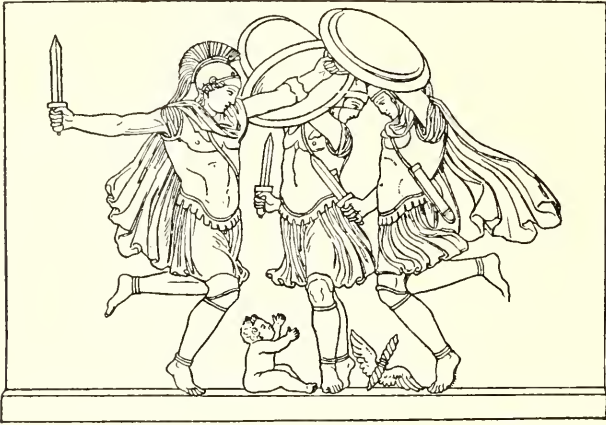
We call upon the god, Zeus, the young-man-initiate, to be one with us in the dance with which we arouse the fertility of spring. Zeus, the young-man-initiate, has been thrust forward, has been conceived, has been created, out of our collective emotion in this dance wherewith our beating feet have aroused the earth to her spring budding. Zeus, the young-man-initiate of the tribe, is very real to us, is very alive to us, because we have been one with him, he is one with us in this exciting, necessary performance without which the earth cannot bloom, cannot give grain and fruit. Most important of all, it is not the old citizens who must perform this serv-

¹The above translation is quoted and the illustrations in this article are reproduced from Jane Ellen Harrison, *Themis. A Study of the Social Origin of Greek Religion?* by permission of The Macmillan Company, publishers.

ice, it is the young-men-initiate of the tribe in the full vigor of their unspent, newly recognized manhood.

This Cretan inscription throws light upon the Thesmophoria at Athens—that woman's seed-time festival which appears to have been universal from Thrace to Cape Malea with but slight variations. Perhaps a composite picture would be forgiven a quite un-scholarly mind.

At the new moon of the autumn seed time, the women, mothers



Dance of the Initiates

and maidens, left their homes and lived for some days in leafy booths set up about the fields. Let us hope they left full larders for men and children—though perhaps they often failed in this, making explainable the masculine resentment mirrored in Aristophanes' speech: "They keep the Thesmophoria as they always used to do"—these conservative women of the dawn of the 4th century.

These women sat for a time—in some places a trying, long ordeal, upon the bare earth, beating with their hands the broken clods and mourning with dirges the death of vegetation.

Is it not easy to visualize the projection out of their emotion of Demeter, disconsolate, mourning her daughter Persephone?

Then the women aroused themselves and prepared the basket of seeds—(Thesmophoria—basket carrying). Into the small cups of the clustered baskets went the barley, wheat, lentils, peas and onions of the frugal dietary; into the center basket went the phalli of paste; and upon the head of the leader or priestess, who tra-

versed without fail each family's holdings, the basket was carried about the fields. Following her came all the women and maidens, carrying magic things, everything imaginable of magic fertilizing power. Women carried their husbands' swords and spears, the spearheads thrust symbolically deep into the fertile fir cone, which two later became Dionysos's thyrsus. Maidens carried leafy branches, evergreens of unfailing foliage, and beat with those symbols their dancing summons upon the turned furrows.

At some moment during the proceedings the women bathed in the nearby sea or nearer river, each carrying with her a yearling pig. Then these "pigs of purification" were slain and left to rot in chasms ("pots in the earth," *megara*) and the remains of last year's pigs were retrieved and strewn for magic fertilizer upon the fields or upon the seeds.

These are the swine engulfed when the god Hades rode down the chasm with ravished Persephone in his arms.

In no place did this seed-time magic entirely lose its memory of early moon-worship. The women would march three by three, the field-altars would sometimes be in threes; even at Eleusis, where the mysteries underwent many mutations and almost forgot their origin, Hekate, the three-faced moon, is the friend and consoler of her supplanting derivative, the beneficent mother Demeter.

Out of this yearly performance of intense participation arose Demeter; and at Eleusis, Demeter with her daughter, queen of that underworld where seeds germinate and the dead go to perform their fertilizing functions, and with that protégé of the two goddesses, the young Dionysos, formed the sacred three around whom the mysteries developed into which every Athenian was initiated; that is: made to enact and participate, to dance out the symbolic rites of the production of the food which, in this way, became food for his spirit as well as for his body.

It seems as though the Olympic festival, known to us general readers as athletic contests only, exhibits the most amazing and inspiring aspects of all other rites under this new light from Crete.

The tradition of the founding and refounding of these games runs something like this:

Herakles founded the footrace. Was this Herakles, the hero, the god, or was he the Cretan Daktyl or initiated-young-man? He came to Olympia with his companions, the other Daktyls—and raced

with them in the ancient holy place where a wooden-pillared, sun-dried-brick temple to Hera nestled under the mountain of the local initiations. A dream instructed Herakles to crown the victor with the leaves of a certain wild olive-tree to be designated to him by its festoons of spiderwebs and dew. Everywhere in that region grew the wild olive; they had so plentiful a supply that the companions slept on heaps of the green branches. The gray olive is everywhere reminiscent of the moon, the moon's own tree, drawn by the moon out of her other self the earth; but an olive-tree hung with spider webs, the moon's veils, and gleaming with dew, the moon's moisture, was doubly, triply associated with the moon. Perhaps the goddess whose temple stood there, archaeologists think, already in 1000 or 900 B. C., and who later was known as Hera, wife of the triumphant patriarchal Zeus, perhaps that goddess was originally the Moon.

Then came Pelops to Olympia, whose contest for the crown and the bride is told by Pindar in his First Olympian Ode.

“When toward the fair flowering of his growing age
The dawn began to shade his darkening cheek,
Pelops turned his thoughts to a marriage that lay ready
for him,

To win from her father of Pisa famed Hippodamia.
He came near to the hoary sea, alone in the darkness,
And cried aloud to the Lord of the Trident in the low thundering waves.

And he appeared to him, close at his foot,
And Pelops spoke to him: “Come, O Poseidon,
If the kindly gifts of the Cyprian in any wise find favor with thee,

Do thou trammel the bronze spear of Oinomaos,
Speed me on swiftest chariot to Elis
And bring victory to my embrace.
For thirteen men that sued for her he hath overthrown,
In putting off the marriage of his daughter.”

Oinomaos was king of Pisa by power of his prowess. He had doubtless won a bride and thereby become king in his youth. Now in their turn came suitors to contest for his daughter. Thirteen men had taken famed Hippodamia in their chariots, to escape the king to Elis. But he always overtook them, thrust his spear into the back of the contestant, and returned with his daughter to his house. These thirteen must be the thirteen lunar months which do not fit the solar year. Pelops bribed Myrtillos, the charioteer of the king, with the promise of a night with the bride, and he, therefore, with-

drew the pins from the axles of Oinomaos' chariot, who in pursuit was spilled out upon the rough road and killed by Pelops. Later Pelops set his six sons by this marriage in turn to race for the kingdom.

Now Hippodamia, the horse-rider, appears to have been the moon, and Pelops the charioteer, the sun. At some time before the Olympic records begin, the solar year of thirteen months and the marriage of sun and moon was commemorated at Olympia at the moment of the coinciding of those two periods; that is the explanation of the four year period of the festival. The games were held at alternating periods of forty-nine and fifty lunar months, falling one time two weeks before and the next time two weeks after the older festival to Hera, the games of the women (immovably fixed) at the full moon.



Marriage of Moon and Sun with dancing Initiate

Every four years a college of sixteen women of Elis met to weave a new robe for Hera, and then, at its dedication, held a race of the maidens to choose out the bride of that period.

When Zeus, representing patriarchy and the solar year, came to be almost supreme at Olympia, the priesthood, with characteristic tact, set his festival one time before, the next time just after the older festival.

It is traditional that at the beginning the men's games consisted of naught but the footrace to choose out the "hero." The other contests were added little by little during several centuries. Even after the other contests became so very spectacular, the winner of the footrace was always the one who gave his name to the Olympiad

and who was united in marriage to the winner of the race of the maidens. Sir James Fraser is the authority for this mystic marriage, but whether it was carried out in historic times seems not to be recorded.

Now the program of the men's games at Olympia followed this order. Sacrifice and dance at dawn of the first day, then the foot-race to choose out the hero, the representative of the divine force for the period of the four year Olympiad; afterwards came the other contests, and last of all, the splendid procession led by the leaf-decked hero to make sacrifice at all the altars. Is it not easy to put into the mouths of the young men who danced at the moment of sacrifice on that first morning the words of the ritual song found inscribed on the stone at Paleokastro in Crete? And do not those words throw illuminating gleams upon the sanctity accorded the Olympic winner, who returned to his city to be acclaimed for the rest of his life, for whom his fellow citizens tore a breach in their walls, leading him into his city in a chariot behind four white horses like the sun-god whose representative he was?

* * * *

They are thrilling concepts, these realities of the Greek religious life. In the light of such discoveries as the Cretan inscription it seems easier to understand that ascent in a few centuries from primitive life to the magnificent flowering which must astound men as long as they can be aware at all.

Can we visualize the concepts of those Greeks? We who have so many dry scientific factual concepts, can we understand the feelings of men who participated actively and eloquently by dance and song in the awakening of spring, in the burial of seed time, in the marriage of Sun and Moon? The mystic rituals enacted by some of our contemporaries, though directly inherited from these same Greeks, have been so devitalized by the attrition of centuries of theological revision that they do not appear to react so powerfully upon their participants as to bring about any flowering of artistic or intellectual genius. Little by little all ritual but the palest other-worldliness has been edited out of catholic practice. Is it by participation in earthly, healthy Sun and Moon concepts that we can best preserve vitality?

It has been the enthusiastic opinion of many thinkers, this idea that by close contact with earth, with primitive life-forces, we re-

new vitality and refresh spent strength. From the old legend of the giant Anteus whom Herakles could only conquer by lifting high in the air since contact with his mother, the earth, ever renewed his strength, through a succession of Greek sages and philosophers down to our strange Rousseau and his romantic followers; Wordsworthian nature-lovers, down to the dimly visioning half-conscious Tolstoi, this feeling for the Earth has sung itself with every possible modulation. Now sociologists, anthropologists and even biologists are putting good reasons behind the intuitions of poets and philosophers, till we come to moderns with their seemingly incontrovertible theses of participation with the powers of nature.

For contemporary thinkers are persuading us along that path. Havelock Ellis with his *Dance of Life* means just this mystic participation with our world which the Greeks practiced and induced in their ritual dances. Aldous Huxley, in his essay "One God or Many" calls upon us for our vitality's sake to participate with the diversity of our world by means of Dionysiac and Corybantic excitement. Friederich Nietzsche, whose brilliant intuition first laid out the tracks of discovery as to the relation of the Dionysiac mysteries to the pinnacle of Attic tragedy, preserved even over the threshold of his madness the magnificent inspiration of his mystic participation with earth in her most sublime aspect, which had been his experience while striding through the high Engadine and shouting aloud the great strophes of his third book of *Zarathustra*.

What were these Dionysiac mysteries which culminated in Orphism and crystallized in Euripedes to flicker and all but die through nineteen centuries of theology?

Dionysos came late; no one knows exactly from where. Perhaps he came from Thrace, perhaps from Asia, perhaps from Crete, the birthplace of mysteries, the home of priests who were summoned to purify cities, endangered as Athens had been through lax customs. Perhaps the word Dionysos means "Zeus, young-man," and he is this young Zeus called upon by the Cretans to "come, Lord of all that is wet and gleaming!"

The rites of Dionysos were rites of "becoming one with the God." You participated in a mystic madness and you felt yourself enriched afterwards.

Before the coming of the vine from Asia, Dionysos' followers chewed ivy leaves, as did the Pythian prophetess, to induce this

mystic madness of "losing yourself to enrich yourself." Wine, mildly alcoholic, brought the abstemious Greeks just enough intoxication to fulfill the demands of this madness. All Dionysiac rites were performed at night, by gleaming shadowing torchlight, and cymbals, dance and prayer were conducive to the overstepping of mental dimensions. You danced in the darkness, a solemn pacing around alone or in companies, you sang the calling songs, you drank the juice of the sacred vine, soon you saw satyrs and panni and maenads among the people, you followed the young men who carried the image of the God, the ivy-decked log, to the music of the Dithyrambos from the sanctuary "in the Marshes" to the great theatre under the Acropolis where tomorrow and the following days the contesting poets would present their new tragedies. You



The shielded Nurturers.

spent the whole night dancing in the sacred madness of participation with that God who was one moment a man, the next a tree, the next a bull or goat, the next a god standing calm-bearded in divine fire.

Every year in the spring time when violets and pansies bedeck fair Athens and nestled on the very rocks of the citadel, you re-

lived the calling of Dionysos, you participated in his madness, you danced and sang the Dithyrambos. You could not but go next day to whatever work was yours, sublime or humble, without some new aspiration toward perfection. If you were not Phidias perhaps you were a potter.

In 1850 the Athenians still collected yearly in the marshes on the day of the Dionysos festival for a day and night of picnicking and dancing. The laying aside of the national costume had more to do with the giving up of this ancient custom than any fulminations of the clergy, thought Sir Thomas Wise, British ambassador, who recorded the practice.

Perhaps if we lived in such a land, where the atmosphere was deepened with Mediterranean purple, red and gold, the tillable earth tended by centuries of religious magic-working love and hunger, with an Acropolis towering over us upon which we had expended not only heart's blood in siege and evacuation but nearly every penny of our material resources afterwards: perhaps then we could respond fully, utterly, when some Pindar called us with his Dithyrambos:

“Look upon the dance, Olympians,
 Send us the grace of victory, ye gods,
 Who come to the heart of our city
 Where many feet are treading and incense steams:
 In sacred Athens come to the market place
 By every art enriched and of blessed name.
 Take your portion of garlands pansy-twined,
 Libations poured from the culling of spring,
 And look upon me as, starting from Zeus,
 I set forth upon my song with rejoicing.

Come hither to the god with ivy bound;
 Bromios we mortals name Him and Him of the mighty
 Voice.

He comes to dance and sing,
 The child of a father most high and a woman of Cadmus'
 race.

The clear signs of his fulfillment are not hidden,
 Whensoever the chamber of the purple-robed Hours is
 opened

And nectarous flowers lead in the fragrant Spring.
Then, then, are flung over the immortal Earth
Lovely petals of pansies, and roses are amid our hair ;
And voices of song are loud among the pipes,
And dancing-floors are loud with the calling
Of crownèd Semèlè."

