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Reorienting the Shamanic Axis
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Reorienting the Shamanic Axis: Apollo from Wolf to Light

Carl Anton Paul Ruck

Abstract:

Delphi was the universal axis mundi or central connection with the theological cosmos for the ancient Greco-Roman world, the seat of the most renowned shaman of antiquity, the Pythoness prophetess. The long sequence of priestesses who held the office delivered oracular responses from mythical times as early as the mid second millennium BCE until the last recorded pronouncement around the year 395 CE. During this expanse of time, Greece transitioned from Pelasgian/Minoan worship of a goddess to the Indo-European evolution of the patriarchal family of Olympians, over which the male deity Zeus presided as father or sibling. The pathway of shamanic prognostication was reoriented from its former connection downward through the Corycian wolf cave on Mount Parnassos to the chthonic realm of Gaia and it was reassigned upon the building of the Delphic Temple sanctuary in the eighth century upward to Zeus, with the deity Apollo functioning as mediator, replacing his former pre-Indo-European persona with his new identity as son of the divine father, whose pronouncements the priestess thereafter delivered. The numerous mythical figures in the catalogue of those particularly beloved of the Apollonian deity and his twin sister betray their former role as recipients of human victims, once enacted in the bull dance at the Minoan labyrinth on Crete and by the lover's leap from the twin cliffs that loom above the Delphic sanctuary. They were prepared for their ordeal by the ingestion of a variety of psychoactive sacraments, prime among them was one associated with the wolf and its canine analogues. This entheogen was a mushroom, and the animals' fondness for the ecstasy it induced set the pattern for the bonding of humans into packs of warriors and the institutions of society. It can be traced back to the haoma sacrament of the Zoroastrian Persian elite, and indications of it occur as early as the Homeric tradition and persist throughout Europe until the late medieval period, and perhaps even later. In the reorienting of Delphi's shamanic axis, Apollo's lycanthropic persona was displaced and reinterpreted as related not to the 'wolf' (lykos), but to the 'light' (lux) of his solar manifestation. The deadly twanging of his toxic bow was transmuted into the harmonious, but equally entrancing, spell cast by the music from the plucked strings of his lyre. Apollo is paired with Dionysus as inspiring antithetical modes of human mentality, with Apollo presiding over the separation from Gaia and rational control over nature, and his half-brother finding the source of inspiration in the mediated encounter with the irrationality of the natural wilderness. At Delphi, Dionysus replaced his brother's former role at the Corycian Cave.

KEY WORDS: *Amanita muscaria*, Apollo, Artemis, Bacchant, berserker, Corycian Cave, Delos, Delphi, Dionysus, ergot, ethylene, haoma, Hermes

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A New Age of Deities

The common portrayal of the Greek god Apollo as the apogee of rational perfection in the ancient Greco-Roman world is a pious ruse to hide his darker aspects as the wolf-god (Gersenson 1991). The lycanthropic theme probably implies the traditional opposition between Apollonian and Dionysian modes of ecstatic shamanism, divine communion, and altered states of consciousness. In much the same way that Christianity expropriated and incorporated aspects of paganism, the Greek deities of the Classical Age evolved from earlier manifestations as an assimilation of their divine personae, rituals, and iconography from former times, remembered as the Pelasgian or Minoan peoples, with a culture centered upon the dominance of a goddess, into the traditions of the Indo-Europeans who began migrating into the Greek lands in the second millennium BCE with what would become their patriarchal family of twelve Olympians, six males and six females, headed by Zeus, as either their father or sibling.

The former dominance of the female is reflected in the goddess Aphrodite, who eventually was counted a daughter of Zeus, although more ancient accounts recorded that she was born a generation earlier, and although Zeus controlled the universe, even he could not withstand the force of the sexuality that she inspired as the goddess of love. Two prominent deities, although children of Zeus, remained outside the family with their celestial home on Mount Olympus or on the grand avenue of the Milky Way, but by most accounts they were received as welcome and frequent visitors from the chthonic realm, over which presided Hades, a brother of Zeus. These were Persephone and **Dionysus**, and their close association with the netherworld and femininity similarly reflects their more ancient personae.

They easily incorporated their former identities into their Classical manifestation inasmuch as they repeatedly revisited the past in their oscillation between the chthonic and celestial realms. Hermes, although firmly an Olympian as a son of Zeus, was also a frequent visitor to the chthonic realm, inasmuch as it was he who escorted souls to and from their entombment among the dead.

Fungi and Viticulture

Dionysus as the patron of viticulture was obviously associated with an intoxicating drink, and the manufacture of wine as a product of the controlled growth of fungal yeasts was contrasted with his former persona represented by the wild vines that resembled the grapevine but were toxic in their natural state, typically ivy, bryony (wild cucumber), and smilax (bindweed or wild morning glory), all producing poisonous clusters of berries that resemble the grapes. These plants were emblematic of the wildest of all things that grow, going back to the Indo-European homeland before the migration and agriculture, something totally seedless and uncultivable, a psychoactive mushroom, described as a natural fermentation of earth, and hence recognized as a relative of the yeast. The mushroom, in fact, is neither plant nor animal, but a separate category, and as such it functions in myth as the ultimate mediator between oppositional dichotomies (Toporov 1985).

This wild aspect of **Dionysus** was ritualized in the ecstatic mountain revels of the bacchants, among whom he materialized, crossdressing as a woman, and whose shamanic wand was the thyrsus or narthex, symbolic as the container for wild plants gathered by root cutters, traditionally stuffed with ivy as the wild antithesis to the grapevine, or topped with a pinecone, suggesting the mystical vision asso-



ciated with the pineal gland, so named because of its resemblance to the pinecone and identified in antiquity as the third eye that was the gateway for the journey of the soul. The thyrsus is thus emblematic of the vision accessed by the gathered plants it contains.

The fungus as the primordial referent for the root cutters' ritualized enactment is clearly seen in the common culinary designation of the stem or stipe of the mushroom in Latin as its thyrsus, whereas the narthex has the obvious etymology as the 'container for narcotic plants or drugs.' The thyrsus does not indicate that the bacchants were actually engaged in root cutting, but only that the ritual celebrated the deity's manifestation before viticulture, and the fantasies of satyrs and other bestial apparitions during the revels are typical of the scenario for the gathering of magical plants, as is the metaphysical experience of sexual engagement with the botanical anthropomorphisms. Most obvious as merely metaphoric is the tradition that the women pulled bulls limb from limb with their bare hands, hardly plausible for the ferocious animal, but completely appropriate for a plant with a taurine identity. The 'mushroom' in English is named for its 'bellowing' apparition bursting from the ground as a 'moo-shroom,' derived from Late Latin *mussare*, via French *mousseron*, onomatopoeic for the mooing sound of bovines. In Greek mythology, these cows are invariably in estrus, prodded by the sting of the cow-fly, *Tabanus bovinus* (Ruck 2017b).

Magical plants have indwelling spirits with modes of fantasized materialization that are often suggested by human observation of the intoxication accessed by the animals that graze upon them. The particular mushroom of the Indo-European homeland, as still practiced in Siberian shamanism, is the *Amanita muscaria*, a fungus considered the bull of heaven

and associated with lycanthropy and wolves and related canines, in particular the fox. As its specific botanical nomenclature indicates, it is often surrounded by flies (*muscas*). The bacchants were named Bassarides for the fox pelt that they wore, entire, as their headgear, and the design of the animal's pointed red snout was imitated in the felt version as the Phrygian cap. It is customary for shamans to assume a manner of dress consubstantial with the visionary sacrament or its animal materialization. The Phrygian cap has a long history as emblematic of liberty and as the badge of societies privy to occult knowledge (Ruck, Hoffman & González Celdrán, 2011). In folkloric tradition, it occurs as the episode of lycanthropy in the tale of 'Little Red Cap,' *Rotkäppchen*, known in English as 'Little Red Riding Hood,' whose travel cap indicates that she is upon an initiatory journey, commonly depicted with both the mushroom and the wolf. Another cycle of medieval tales centers upon the trickster and blacksmith dwarf Reynard, a fox and the origin of *renard* in French, whose name derives from the numinous power of the old Germanic religion; he is often paired with his wolf uncle Isengrim. Among the fantasies induced in the bacchant revels, the women metamorphosed into packs of hounds led by the wolf goddess of rabidity.

Amanita muscaria

This particular mushroom accesses not only visionary experience, but also is unique in engendering heightened physical strength (Keewaydinoquay 1984), such as the bacchants experienced, and it functions in the initiatory bonding of men into warrior fraternities, best known as the medieval Nordic berserkers, but also traceable back to the mid second millennium BCE and documented in the Homeric oral tradition as the episode of the night-



raid of the *Doloneia* (Ruck et al. 2007), and historically at the time of the Emperor Trajan among the Thracian Dacian peoples, named as the 'Wolves.' Among the elite troops of the sixth century BCE Persian Achaemenid Emperors were the '*haoma* wolves,' named for the Zoroastrian sacrament, which was probably this same mushroom. The Greeks knew of it at the time of the first-century CE Plutarch as [*h*]ómomi and claimed that it was mixed with the blood of a wolf and cast where the light of the sun would never fall upon it. As a night predator, the wolf is associated in folklore with darkness, thieving, and trickery. The moly (*mólu*) that the trickster deity Hermes gives to Odysseus in the Homeric episode as a counter-charm to the potion of the great sorceress Circe is probably a verbal corruption of the same Word (Ruck 2017b).

It grew with a black root and a white flower, descriptive of the soil that adheres to its bulbous base and the white scabs like blossoms adorning its cap. In a fourth-century BCE Greek vase painting that identifies the Phrygian cap as a mushroom, it has polka dots (Wasson, Hofmann & Ruck 1978, pl. 7). It is customary to encode the botanical identity with riddling speech. Another such obfuscation is its description as a plant that grows with a double stem and as the liver of Prometheus that served as food for eagles (Ruck 2017b). The *Amanita muscaria* grows both up and down as the stipe extends into the characteristic dumbbell shape of the fruiting mushroom, and it commonly is food for birds, particularly the raven in Europe (Klapp 2013), but the eagle as the thunderbird plays the same role among indigenous peoples of the New World, where it is also known as a wolf sacrament (Hoffman 2001).

The Wolf God

In his pre-Olympian identity, Apollo was the deity that materialized among the packs of wolves. He also bore the epithet of 'fly-hunter,' presumably because he drove away the cow-flies that settled on the carcass of sacrificed bovines (Ruck, Staples & Heinrich 2001). Artemis, his former goddess, evolved into his twin sister in the Olympian family, but she, too, had a similar involvement with lycanthropy and the mushroom. Her Thracian analogue as Bendis wears the Phrygian cap, and in the myth of Actaeon, Artemis turns the hunter's pack of hounds into wolves that attack their master as he metamorphoses into a stag. She herself hunted with hounds, and her particular animal is the deer, noted for its fondness of the mushroom and the ecstasy it accesses. In medieval tradition, the common motif of the deer hunt probably always implies the metaphysical search for the mushroom. In Christian hagiography, two early saints glimpsed a vision of the Crucified deity suspended amid the antlers of a stag while out on the hunt.

The original sanctuary at Delphi was the Corycian Cave high on Mount Parnassos above the ruins of the Temple sanctuary (Fontenrose 1959). It was supposedly first discovered by a pack of wolves from the god's Anatolian/Phrygian homeland, Lycia, identified as the land of wolves in their numismatic insignia. The cave is also called the wolf cave. A huge natural rock formation at the back of the first subterranean chamber suggests the image of a wolf, lurking above the passage to sunless darkness deeper within, reportedly as many as forty chambers, responsible for its modern name as the *Sarantavali*, including a subterranean lake that drains into the Castalian Spring far below at the base of the twin cliffs opposite the eastern façade of the Temple remains. The en-



trance of the Cave viewed from within resembles the shape of a mushroom. The sanctity of the cave dates back at least to the Neolithic, perhaps derived from the psychoactive ethylene fumes emanating from natural seismic faults and concentrated in its chambers. The Cave bears the same name as the Anatolian Cilician Corycian Cave, noted for the saffron growing in a deep hollow open to the sky, hence named as a 'sack', and as the lair of the monstrous serpent Typhon.

Wolves similarly led Leto to the sacred isle of Delos, where Apollo and his twin sister Artemis were reborn into their new identities as children of Zeus. This birth on Delos represents their evolution from earlier divine personae, where they were versions of deities who presided over rituals of human sacrifice, as in the bull dance in the labyrinth of the Goddess's temple at Cretan Knossos, mistakenly identified by its first archaeological excavator as a palace of King Minos, one of the judges of souls in the netherworld (Castleden 1997). Knossos has analogues to the Neolithic Çatalhöyük in Anatolia and its bull sanctuaries. The perilous dance on Crete was a ruse that masked the offering of human life. The folk etymology of the deities' names in antiquity recognizes them both as 'destroyers,' and although Classical scholars have been reluctant to face this aspect of ancient religion, the offering of human victims is depicted even in the frieze of the Athenian Parthenon, perhaps the most iconic building of the Western tradition (Connelly 2014).

The transition to the new personae of Apollo and his sister is narrated in the mythical tradition of the hero Theseus, with the troupe of liberated dancers who landed on the island and performed a choreographic imitation of the windings of the labyrinth around the altar that marked the birth site in the sanctuary. The event was commemorated annually in Classical

times by troupes of pubescent boys and girls sent to the island on the same carefully preserved and repeatedly restored ship on which Theseus had once sailed, where they were symbolically flagellated as they danced, as a substitution for their ritual sacrifice. In this rite, they chewed upon pieces of the sacred olive tree that sprouted at the site of the deities' birth, but the original fungal sacrament was honored in the secret offering sent each year supposedly from the Hyperborean homeland, in remembrance of the first couple who were sacrificed when they arrived upon the island from that fantasized utopian origin of the Indo-European migrants (Ruck 1983). The Classical persona of Apollo has assimilated two sources for his origin, the Anatolian and the Hyperborean, beyond the Central Asian Altai Mountains. The latter figured frequently as the destination for Apollonian shamans in their ecstatic trance.

The sacrifice of the mythical Iphigenia to Artemis was still commemorated at the goddess's sanctuary at *Vravrona* on the northeastern coast of Attica in Classical times by the sham ritual victims, who were spared from death by a mere scratch from the slaughtering knife. The ruse was always that the victims were transported to paradise, and Iphigenia metamorphosed into a hind upon the sacrificial altar and journeyed to the Crimean Peninsula, which was considered the farthest frontier of the Greek world, bordering with Hyperborea, where she became a priestess of Artemis, entrusted with sacrificing any foreigner landing upon the shore. Even at Delphi still on occasion victims might be hurled from the top of the twin Phaedriades Cliffs looming above the Temple complex, 'shining,' as is their name, ominously in the failing light of the setting sun.



Beloved of God

These victims are mythologized in the various human lovers who became especially dear to their deity. The catalogue is long, and involves a variety of plants with psychoactive potency or funereal connotations. Such was the maiden Daphne, who metamorphosed into the highly psychoactive Pontic laurel, which the oracular priestess at Delphi chewed to enter her clairvoyant state. Its transmuted toxicity is still commemorated in the tradition of the inspired poet laureate. Phaëthon was another lover of the god, who fell to earth from his solar chariot. His death is commemorated in the swan song, the god's special bird, whose first song is its last, the description of the paradise beyond this realm of life (Plato, *Phaedo*, 84d). His sisters, the *Heliades* or 'Daughters of the Sun,' turned into poplar trees, named as a 'populace,' standing in the otherworld. Their tears drip in a gummy exudation of the tree as globs of amber, which was a metaphoric analogue of fungi growing at the base of the trees (Pliny, *Naturalis historia*, 22.96.1). Amber itself was a magical rock that was considered an antidote for madness, and its electrostatic magnetism associated it with eroticism. Another beloved of deity was the boy Hyacinthus, whom Apollo killed accidentally, so-called, as is the ruse for human offerings, and who metamorphosed into the flower that bears the words of the god's lament on its petals. Another of Apollo's favorites was Cyparissus. He died of grief for accidentally killing the stag given him by the deity and thereupon metamorphosed into the cypress tree, symbolic of the cemetery. Daphnis, a male version of Daphne, went blind from intoxication and died, falling accidentally from a cliff. When Daphis died, it was said that the wolves howled in grief. Apollo was traditionally linked to cliffs off which mad-

dened lovers leapt to their deaths (Nagy 1990).

Apollo gave his lover Cassandra clairvoyant vision so that she would foresee her own death and the destruction of her entire city of Troy. Coronis, the 'crow,' he shot with his toxic arrows for infidelity, but their son Asklepios, he saved from the funeral pyre to be the patron of druggists, *iatroí*, although he, too, died for bringing a beloved of Artemis back to life, temporarily. The crow probably is another version of the raven's bread, such as fed the biblical Elijah with the food of prophecy in the desert. The crow of Apollo was rewarded by transcendence to the constellations, where it rests significantly beside the bowl for the sacred drink, both entwined by the serpent as an analogue of the toxins it contains.

Apollo flayed the satyr Marsyas alive, and the skin was still on display at the time of the historian Herodotus as the source of the Anatolian river that bore his name. The episode was the etiology of an Apollonian festival in which the skins of slaughtered beasts were presented to him. Animal sacrifice was a pacified substitution for human victims. King Midas had judged Marsyas the victor in the musical contest with the god. Apollo gave him the ears of an ass, which the king attempted to hide beneath his Phrygian cap, but they grew into reeds for the pipes of Pan. 'Ass's ears' is probably a descriptive name for ergot (Ruck, Hoffman & González Celdrán 2011), a fungus parasitic on grain that is a source of the psychoactive LSA. The ergot was recognizable as a mushroom, and in the ethnobotanical motif of wild and cultivated grains, it plays a similar role of mediator as in the symbolism of **Dionysus**. Both wine and leavened bread are products of fermenting yeasts, and the two foods, as the liquid and the dry, were considered parallel triumphs of cultivation.



The lovers of Artemis fared no better. The horses of her beloved Hippolytus mangled him, frightened by the bull from the sea. Callisto metamorphosed into a bear when Zeus made love to her disguised as Artemis. Callisto was rewarded by transport to the stars as the constellation of the Great Bear. Girls at menarche, dressed as bear cubs, were consecrated at *Vravrona* to the goddess because of the sexual pheromone they shared with bears. Bears and wolves are interchangeable in the motif of bestial transmogrification, and the hibernation of bears set the pattern for the periodic disappearance of shamans into the mystical trance accessed by entheogens and for the long absence of mythological heroes like Odysseus, who is named with an ursine epithet.

As a pacified version of the human victim, boys and girls dedicated their first signs of puberty to the deities, the shaved facial down and the soiled menstrual straps. The unstable mediation of the Olympian twins with their former personae is sensed in his never himself growing facial hair, and her perpetual virginity. The various plants associated with the deities are summarized as 'apples' (Golden Apple of the Tree of the Hesperides, Apple of Discord, Apple of Atalanta) of doubtful hypothesized Indo-European origin, which perhaps because of the similarity to the name of Apollo displaced the Greek/Latin *mêlon/malum* as the 'evil' fruit of the Tree in Eden. The *mêlon* is homonymous with the word for 'fleece,' yielding the sacrificed Golden Fleece hanging on a tree as its fruit, analogous to the Tree of the Hesperides, east and west at the farthest frontiers of the Greek world, both trees, like the one in Eden, guarded by a serpent and offering empowered knowledge as an entheogen. The mushroom is commonly seen as the fruit of its host tree. The Greek vase referenced above for the spotted Phrygian cap clearly identi-

fies the mushroom as the golden apple of the Hesperides tree and as the anthropomorphized plucked head of the Gorgon Medusa.

The Good Shepherd

In all likelihood, Lycurgus, the legendary lawgiver of Sparta, was the hereditary title of an Apollonian shamanic priesthood, as the Werewolf or 'Wolf-man.' The name of Apollo is derived from the *apella*, the grouping of the people into tribes or herds. The Spartans invoked him euphemistically as the 'Wolf-killer' who protected their flocks from the depredation of wolves. As a puberty rite of initiatory qualification into the pack, the elite Spartan boys were forced to live for a year in the wild like wolves by thievery as outlaws. It is the good herdsman's task, however, to cull the flock. Each year, the ephors of Sparta, whose authority as 'oversers' surpassed even that of the dual kingship, declared a war of ethnic cleansing against the non-Spartans living enslaved among them. The young warriors metamorphosed into wolves through the agency of the psychoactive wolf's-bane (aconite) and issued from the cave at Tainaron for a night of terror, in which they slaughtered at will in honor of the Apollo, whose Temple they dedicated in the Arcadian highlands at Bassai (Ruck 2014). This was the same cave through which the hero Heracles retrieved the hound Cerberus from the underworld, and where Orpheus lost Eurydice while ascending.

Word Play

Delphi was considered the 'navel' of the universe, so marked by the *ómphalos* stone enshrined in the sanctuary and anointed daily. Apollo claimed it by defeating the giant serpent that lurked in the Corycian Cave, reorienting its sanctity from the womb of Gaia to the celestial



realm of his new Olympian father. By punning on the verb to 'putrefy,' he transformed the rotting remains of the Python/Typhon (identical by metathesis) into the verb 'to learn from inquiry' (*putheîn*). The symbolism implies the motif of fertility through putrefaction. After conquering the Python, Apollo transformed himself into a dolphin, so named for its similarity of shape to the 'womb' (*delphús*), and he found a shipload of men whom he brought to Delphi as the first 'brotherhood' of priests, after whom the place was subsequently named Delphi (*Delphoi*) for the womb mates (*adelphoi*). A masculine plural, however, is an anomalous site designation. Instead places tend to be named in the plurality of females, for instance Mycenae, Thebes, and Athens.

The Python designated originally a hermaphroditic totality comprised of a female and her serpentine consort, and she also was named as the womb goddess *Delphyne*. The oracular priestess was called the Pythoness, and she was attended by a sisterhood of novices, after whom the place was formerly named as *Delphai*. The previous dominance of females was maintained after the arrival of Apollo, but the prophetess was thereafter administered by the priesthood and her irrational babbling responses were reformulated by the brothers as a versified riddle, a piece of poetry.

The ancient Corycian Cave was architecturally recreated in the eighth century at the present site of the sanctuary remains in the subterranean chamber that perhaps tapped into the ethylene fault at the back of the Temple to which she descended for the consultation (Hale 2003). She prepared for the ordeal by bathing in the spring of Castalia that issues from the base where the twin looming cliffs join, preparing herself to receive the god's rapture as her lover. The Castalian Spring became a type for a well, not of ecstatic

babbling, but a fountain of poetic inspiration. The myth of the nymph Castalia claimed that she had thrown herself from the cliffs above to escape the god's embrace. The whole of Mount Parnassos became the citadel of the Muses to spread light to the world.

God of the Twilight

Apollo's lycanthropic involvement as a wolf-god (*lykos*) was given a false etymology, not derived from the 'wolf,' but from the 'light' (Latin *lux*, Greek *leukós* for 'white') of the sun and its solar illumination, explained as shining and making everything white. The god's tenuous claim to the light of the day, however, is reflected in the word for the dangerous time of the dawn and the twilight as the 'wolf-light' (*lykóphos*). Similarly, the dangerous time when werewolves are abroad, the 'wolf-walk' (*lykábas*) is forced to mean the 'path of the sun' and glossed as a period of time, perhaps a year: a period of time implies that when time is up, it's time to die. Even the famous admonition to know thyself, *gnóthi s'autón*, as once inscribed on the Delphic Temple, forewarns us of our mortality.

As an archer, Apollo and his twin Artemis shoot poisoned arrows, the words for 'poison' and 'arrow' being homophonous in Greek (*iós*). 'Toxin' comes from the Greek word *tóxon* for the bow (Ruck 1976). Apollonian shamans traditionally journeyed on the arrows of the god. It is Apollo who shoots the toxin of plague, named as a *plegé* or 'strike or hit.' He is the cause of the plague at Troy, and the twin deities shot the arrows that fatally poisoned the children of Niobe. A 'paean' is a song or lyric poem expressing triumph or thanksgiving. It comes from the Greek verb 'to hit' (*paieín*) and was an epithet of Apollo as *Paión*, the 'striker,' and it could be addressed to him in the hope that he might



undo the plague that he had caused. Paeon, however, was also the name of a divine physician, whom he killed. The deadly twanging of Apollo's poisonous bow and arrows could be harmonized as the spell cast by the strumming of his lyre, and he becomes the 'Leader of the Muses,' *Musagètes*. He thus becomes the patron of music, as the transmutation of deadly sounds into celestial harmony.

Bee Maidens

Every other year, however, the god of the lower sanctuary went into exile and the ritual reverted to the site of the ancient Corycian wolf cave. Meanwhile another deity stood in for him as a surrogate substitute for a ritual regression to the old rites of ecstatic possession and lycanthropy. He turned over the sanctuary to one of his brothers, either Hermes or **Dionysus**. These revels are commemorated in the column of the dancing three bacchant Thyiades that once stood before the god's Temple. The priestesses of the cave ritual were named as three bee-maidens, a designation rich in metaphoric symbolism, inasmuch bees not only display the matriarchal society of the hive, but also set the pattern for herbalists, gathering the nectar of flowers to produce honey with its implication of mellifluous shamanic speech, but also the toxins of their sting. In this regard, they are analogous to serpents in antiquity, whose sting came from the flowers they ate, and they conversely transferred their toxins to the plants in their vicinity. Honey was the source of the earliest fermented intoxicant as mead, which is cognate with 'mad,' 'mania,' and the source of the common word for 'drunk' in Greek. The first Temple at Delphi was remembered as a beehive, such as is commemorated in the fifth-century BCE *thólos* Temple in the Pronaos sanctuary, below the Apollonian Temple complex.

Such bee-maidens gathering flowers as a sisterhood are depicted in a scene of visionary experience on the golden shaman's ring from Minoan Crete. Mead, like wine, would be fortified with apian additives to access shamanic potency.

Apollo among the Shepherds

During this period of divine interregnum, Apollo was supposedly tending cows, conversing with the country bumpkins on matters of poetry and philosophy, the origin of the genre of 'Pastorals.' It was well known in antiquity that this was farcical. The cows of myth are always in estrus. Everyone suspected in antiquity that the lonely herdsman might on occasion vent his sexual frustration upon the beasts entrusted to his care, alone in the night (Broeck 2009).

As an infant newborn son of Zeus, Hermes stole away these cows that Apollo prodded, turning the footprints of the bovines, named in Greek as 'forward walkers' (*próbata*), backwards as a magical trick of world reversal (Ruck 2017b). It was also Hermes who invented the lyre that same day to replace the toxicity of his brother's deadly bowstrings. The assigning of the cave ritual to Hermes as the conclusion of the Homeric hymn is integral to its theme of cleansing Apollo of his chthonic involvement. Since **Dionysus** and Hermes maintained more flexibility with aspects of their pre-Olympian personae, they could with impunity assume the burden of their brother's darker past identity. Apollo requires someone closely related to perform this role, a brother, a beloved, a heroic surrogate (like Heracles or Oedipus), or a son (like Asklepios). There was another son who plays the same role for his divine father.

Ion of Athens

These rites at the Corycian Cave are paired with the Cave beneath the



Acropolis at Athens in the myth of the birth of Ion, the eponymous founder of the Ionian tribal group of the Greeks, who spearheaded the sixth-century BCE Age of Enlightenment, over which the Apollo of Delos presided. Creusa, the 'Queen' of the city (as her name is merely a title), conceived Ion when she plucked a crocus in the Cave of the Long Rocks beside the entrance to the Acropolis, and when her son was born, she abandoned him in the same cave, but the infant was saved by Hermes and brought to Delphi, where he was raised as a Temple slave and adoptive son of the Pythoness. Creusa's conception of her son via the intermediary of the plucked flower has obvious reference to the bacchant rituals of root cutters. Apollo materialized in the cave, radiant with the golden color of the flower, since it was an entheogen consubstantial with his divine spirit. Creusa thereafter married a foreigner Xuthus, who became nominal king only by marriage to the titular queen, but their union was without issue. Such failure of the supposed king to beget a male heir is a mythical motive implying that whatever children are born belong to the mother by right of matrilineal descent. A similar situation occurs with Aegeus, married to the 'Queen' Medea (a doublet name for Creusa and the Gorgon Medusa), and the birth of the Athenian hero Theseus.

As Euripides told the tale in his *Ion* tragedy, the couple journeyed to Delphi to seek a solution to their childless state. The Pythoness assigned Ion to Xuthus as his son, presumably begotten, as Xuthus concludes, from a drunken revel with a bacchant years ago in the Corycian Cave. It is quite possible that that bacchant was Creusa as the queenly delegate of her city for the ritual at Delphi, and that Xuthus is a surrogate analogue for the cave's lycanthropic deity. The Cave at Athens was topographically aligned with the Cave on Parnassos by a repeated ritual sighting of

an altar of Zeus on the crest of the intervening mountain range (Ruck 2018).

Creusa in jealousy almost kills Ion with the poison associated with such cave revels. She was costumed in the play with a charm bracelet dangling two phials of Gorgon blood, one a panacea, the other a lethal toxin. These she has inherited, given originally to her ancestor, the serpent Erichthonios, foster son of Athena. The inheritance identifies her as a mythical doublet for the Medusa. The mother and son recognize each other when the Pythoness reveals the tokens that Creusa had deposited with the abandoned infant, a tapestry depicting the Gorgon head, and golden serpents, equating the abandoned Ion as a symbolic analogue of Athena's Erichthonios. The goddess with her serpent foster child is a motif repeated in the role of the Pythoness with Ion, recalling the original Python/ Typhon of the Corycian Cave as well. These tokens implicate Creusa/Medusa and the crocus that materialized as Apollo with the symbolic complex of the wild mushroom, and Ion as consubstantial with its toxin, the real meaning of his name, and so emphasized by Euripides' punning in the words of the play, but given the false and ridiculous interpretation of 'moving' when Xuthus greets him as his son, effusively in a scene of burlesque pederasty. The Promethean herb that grew with a double stem was said to resemble the crocus of the Corycian caves.

The myth encodes the transition to patrilineal descent since Ion is publicly acknowledged as the son of his mortal father, but he is really the son of his mother with the divine father. The tale is analogous to the reorientation of the shamanic axis at Delphi, inasmuch as it also marks the abandonment of human victims in the Athenian tradition. Creusa alone of her sisters survived, since all the others upon reaching puberty had been sacrificed in



the very same cave where she conceived Ion from Apollo, and where her dead serpent father was buried. Ion is another version of the Python, and like Apollo who had no land of his own to claim until he took possession of the Cave on Parnassos, Apollo has managed to give his bastard son a patriarchal inheritance as the putative son of his lycanthropic double Xuthus. Thus, the solar deity was protected from contamination with the cave rituals from the past that he had relinquished in becoming the son of his Olympian father. Apollonian inspiration is derived from a separation from the material universe,

whereas Dionysian is strengthened by renewing its covenant with the natural wilderness.

Apollo and **Dionysus** never confront each other directly in the mythical tradition, but only through proxies. Although **Dionysus** plays no role in the Homeric poems, as early as the mid second millennium BCE in the generation before the Trojan War, Orpheus as a devotee of the solar manifestation of Apollo was slaughtered in a bacchant revel, as an analogue of Pentheus, both sacrificial victims to Apollonian transcendence.

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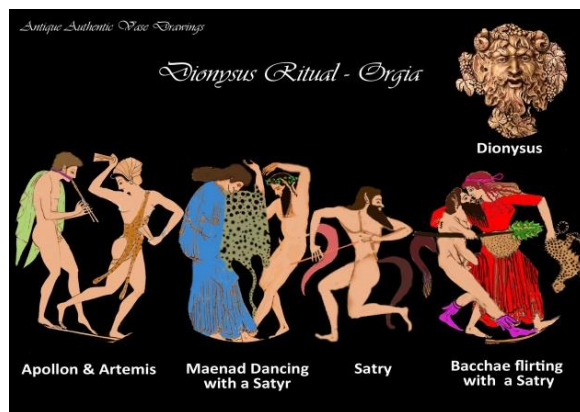
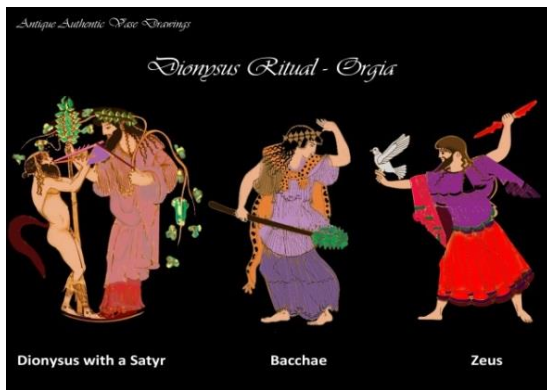
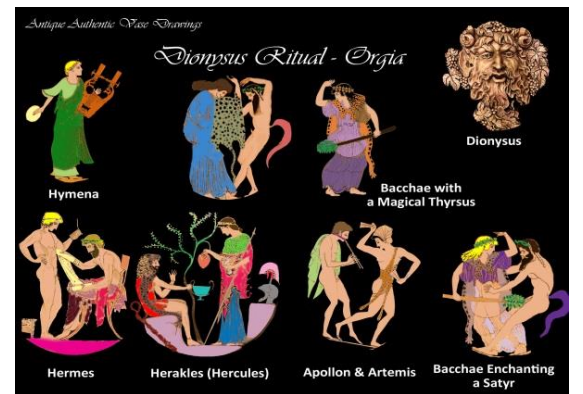
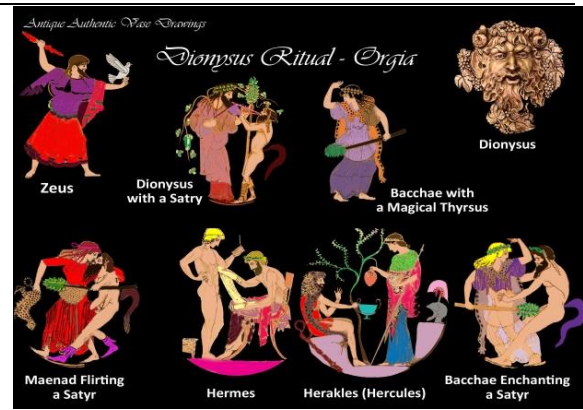


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Greek Paintings were made by Dr. Ümit Sayın for SexuS Journal.



**Corycian Cave, Delphi, view from interior, fungal effect of light on wet ground.
Photos by Mark Hoffman (Entheomedia)**



**Corycian Cave, Delphi, view from interior, fungal effect of interior interposed natural stone formation.
Photos by Mark Hoffman (Entheomedia)**



Corycian Cave, Delphi, author at mouth of the cave. Photos by Mark Hoffman (Entheomedia)