

RELIGION  
OF THE  
GODS

*Ritual, Paradox, and Reflexivity*



Kimberley Christine Patton

# Religion of the Gods

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*Ritual, Paradox, and Reflexivity*

KIMBERLEY CHRISTINE PATTON

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MOSES H. ROLFE

May 8, 1848

April 18, 1907

*“He sleeps but wakes elsewhere  
For God hath said Amen”*

*Grave epitaph  
First Parish Burying Ground  
Newbury, Massachusetts  
1635*

*For Moses*

*Amín*

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*Die Welt steht auf mit euch*

Jetzt wär es Zeit, daß Götter traten aus  
bewohnten Dingen . . .  
Und daß sie jede Wand in meinem Haus  
umschlugen. Neue Seite. Nur der Wind,  
den solches Blatt im Wenden würfe, reichte hin,  
die Luft wie eine Scholle umzuschaukeln:  
ein neues Atemfeld. Oh Götter, Götter!  
Ihr Oftgekommenen, Schläfer in den Dingen,  
die heiter aufstehn, die sich an den Brunnen,  
die wir vermuten, Hals und Antlitz waschen  
und die ihr Ausgeruhtsein leicht hinzutun  
zu dem, was voll scheint, unserm vollen Leben.  
Noch einmal sei es euer Morgen, Götter.  
Wir wiederholen. Ihr allein seid Ursprung.  
Die Welt steht auf mit euch, und Anfang glänzt  
an allen Bruchstellen unseres Mißlingens . . .

Now would be the time for Gods to step forth  
From inhabited things . . .  
And knock down every wall  
In my house. New page. Only the wind,  
Flinging such a leaf into change,  
Would suffice to blow up the air like soil;  
A new breathing-field. Oh Gods! Gods!  
You often-come, sleepers in things,  
Who resurrect gaily, who at the well  
Which we imagine bathe throat and face,  
And who easily add their restedness  
To that which seems full, our full lives.  
Once more let it be your morning, Gods.  
We repeat. You alone are the primal source.  
With you the world arises, and a fresh start gleams  
On all the fragments of our failures . . .

—*Rainer Maria Rilke*

Trans. Murray Stein, with corrections by author

Ich begreife im Leben der Götter (das doch wohl im Geistigen immer wieder  
sich erneut und abspielt und recht hat) nichts so sehr als den Moment, da sie



sich entziehen; was wäre ein Gott ohne die Wolke, die ihn schont, was wäre ein abgenutzter Gott?

I grasp nothing in the life of the Gods (which in the spirit most probably ever renews itself and runs its course and has its truth) so much as the moment in which they withdraw themselves: what would be a God without the cloud which preserves him? What would be a worn-out God?

—*Rainer Maria Rilke*, Letter to the Fürstin Marie  
von Thurn und Taxis, September 23, 1911.  
Trans. Murray Stein

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September 30, 2007  
800th birthday of Jalāluddīn Rūmī

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# Religion of the Gods



CHART OF VASE SHAPES

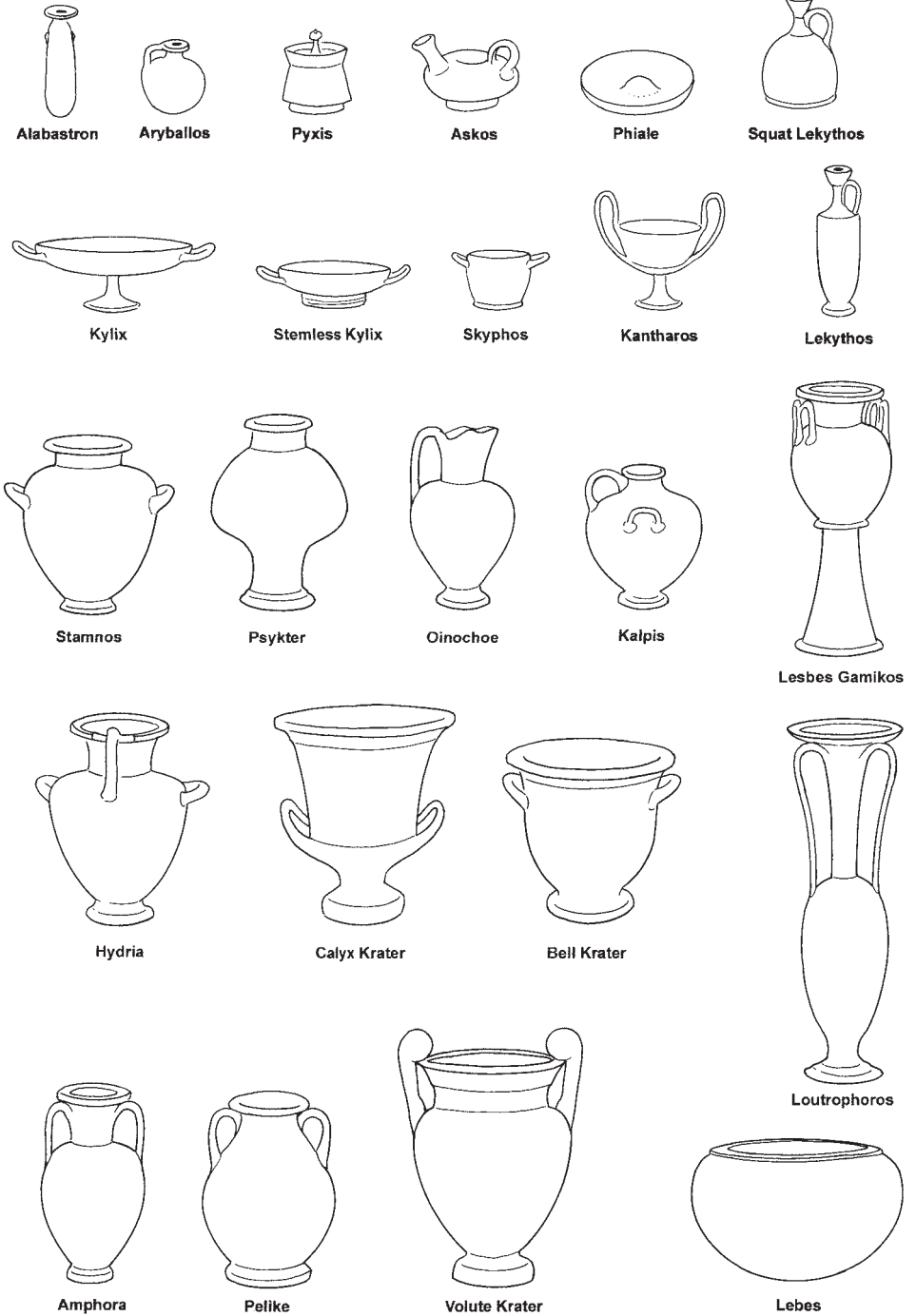


FIGURE I. Chart of vase shapes.

# Introduction

## *The Problem of Sacrificing Gods*

### The Mystery of the Berlin Painter

What to make of the strange image of a god performing religious rituals?

Years ago, while walking through the familiar classical galleries of the Boston Museum of Fine Arts, I was arrested by a detail of Attic red-figure vase-painting that had escaped me before: an altar (see Catalogue, **no. 29; Figs. 2, 3**).<sup>1</sup> Not an unusual feature. Making offerings to the divine was a potent, ubiquitous fact of ancient Greek religious life: “The central ritual of Greek religion, from the pouring of libations onwards, is the offering to the god.”<sup>2</sup> This particular altar is the organizing axis of the register of a great three-handled kalpis-hydria, a water-carrying vessel. The vase is ascribed to the Berlin Painter, one of the great masters of ancient Greek vase-painting. It dates from about 485 B.C.E., that is, from the very late archaic period—in fact between the two times of Hellas’s greatest menace from Persia.

What stopped me was that the altar was not the focus of a sacrifice performed by human beings. Instead, six Olympian gods and goddesses converged on it from either side. The deities appeared to be themselves worshipers at a sacrifice, forming their own procession.<sup>3</sup> What did this majestic vase mean?

A painted plaque from the archaic Saptouli cave-site near Pitsá gives us the elements of canonical Greek animal sacrifice (**no. C-27; Fig. 4**). The animal victim, in this case a ram, is led to the altar in procession, accompanied by the music of flutes. The atmosphere is one of order, peace, and holiness. The worshipers bear the ritual implements of wine jug, basket (*kanoun*), barley (*oulai*), and woolen



FIGURE 2. Gods participate in a libation at an altar. Nike or Iris with oinochoe, Apollo with phiale, Artemis and Leto. Attic red-figure kalpis-hydria by the Berlin Painter, c. 485 B.C.E.

fillets, called *stemmata*. The wine jug, or oinochoe, was used to fill the libation bowl, or phiale, whose contents were poured out as an offering, either directly onto the altar to the Olympian powers, or into the ground to the chthonian powers or to the dead—that is, to the underworld.

Despite the contemporary belief that “the normal sacrificial cult is a cult without revelation or epiphany,”<sup>4</sup> primary evidence suggests that the Greeks believed that the gods both attended and responded to sacrifice. In Book 12 of the *Odyssey*, the island Phaiakians are described as being so blessed that when they sacrificed they could actually see the gods’ huge, luminous forms superintending. The presence of the deity is often implied in art by a cult statue, as we see in an archaic belly-amphora in Berlin, in which Athena Promachos receives a sacrificial procession at a stone altar (no. C-30; Fig. 5) or in a trefoil oinochoe from the same museum showing a Dionysiac herm presiding over a flaming altar as two worshipers approach with basket and flute (no. C-31). But sometimes it is no stiff image that the vases show us at the altar, but the god’s epiphany in his or her sacred animal or bird—as in a black-figure hydria



FIGURE 3. Berlin Painter kalpis-hydria, Side B. Athena and Hermes.



FIGURE 4. Canonical scene of animal sacrifice. Archaic pinax from the Saphtouli cave at Pitsá, sixth century B.C.E.



FIGURE 5. Athena Promachos with shield and spear receives animal sacrifice at a stone altar. Black-figure belly-amphora, c. 540 B.C.E.

in Uppsala (no. C-1), in which an enormous owl just outside Athena's temple (as designated by the column) surely stands for the numinous presence of the goddess herself. The divine bird is the focus for the worshiper, hand raised in a canonical gesture of awe or reverence at the appearance of a deity, and also for the sacrificial beasts symmetrically ranged around the altar that is the bird's platform. Finally, there are vases like the Louvre red-figure bell-krater from the classical period (no. C-35) in which the "living god" himself, in this case the ephobic Apollo with laurel staff and crown, serenely observes a sacrifice to himself in full swing with grilling meat, cake offerings, and poured libations upon an altar behind which grows the tree that is special to him, the laurel.

Except for those anomalous vases like the Berlin Painter hydria in Boston, the mechanism of Greek sacrifice seems transparent. Socrates is crystal clear on the subject in the *Euthyphro*, helpfully articulating those formulas with which we have grown so comfortable in describing the bargain-driven ancient religious mentality. "Doesn't sacrifice mean to give gifts to the gods; and prayer means to ask (things) from the gods?"<sup>5</sup> A few minutes later, Socrates quizzes Euthyphro as to whether piety is not then actually the skill of trading with the gods (ἐμπορικὴ τέχνη).<sup>6</sup> But what to think when an archaic Athena Polias, a seated urban goddess, is depicted with a phiale in her hand (no. 7)?<sup>7</sup> Or stranger still, when the Delphic Apollo beatifically smiles as he tips that phiale pouring out into the ground a drink offering of wine, energetically painted with added red (no. 59; Fig. 6)?



FIGURE 6. Apollo, seated, with tortoise-shell lyre, extends phiale to pour a libation; raven watches. Attic white-ground kylix by Onesimos?, c. 480 B.C.E.

Are the Greek gods in this vase worshipping some power greater than themselves? Perhaps the younger Olympic gods are making offerings to Zeus. If so, why does Zeus himself, who cannot be beguiled and whose mind “it is not possible to overreach,”<sup>8</sup> grasping his thunderbolt, pour wine from a libation vessel on a column-krater now in St. Petersburg? (no. 44; Fig. 7). Zeus should be the recipient of worship, not the worshiper. Yet his ritual gesture, pouring from a god-sized phiale, clearly implies sacerdotal action, unavoidably conveying multivalency. What are we to make of a sacrificing Zeus, whose fixed decree, in the ancient Greek religious imagination, orders heaven and earth, and who by the fifth century B.C.E. had acquired in Hellenic philosophy the role of First Cause and virtual apex of justice? Who could possibly be the recipient of the libation of Zeus? The high gods who pour out wine have turned us into a classical game show: “What is wrong with this picture?” The answer I propose will be a radical one: nothing.

#### “They Cannot Possibly Be Sacrificing”: Methodological Questions

In “a new breathing-field,” when a paradox emerges in the history of religion, theoretical premises are challenged and established theologies dissolve and



FIGURE 7. Zeus, standing, with name inscribed, holding phiale with cascading wine. Athena, standing, with helmet, holds oinochoe. Attic red-figure column-krater, the Diogenes Painter, late archaic.

reform. Or so they should, in productive encounter with the paradox. Despite scholarly preoccupation with theory, theory can only illumine religious data; it can never “explain” human religiousness—not because religiousness is inherently mystifying, but because it responds to mystery, and because its data are always proliferating and changing the landscape of what can be known and hence interpreted.<sup>9</sup>

Religious thought is an irreducible form of thought, which always, in the end, stands beyond the reach of any explanatory formulaic thought that does not entirely share its epistemological premises and operations. The religious imagination, which Henri Corbin, following Ibn ‘Arabī, calls *imaginal knowledge*, “apprehends its proper object with as much right and validity as the senses and the intellect do theirs.”<sup>10</sup> Thus while theory about religious experience based on either the methods of senses or those of the intellect may partially illumine, it will always be inadequate.

The mutual exclusivity of the “history” and the “phenomenology” of religion is no longer defensible. As Jonathan Z. Smith wrote over two decades ago of the pan-Babylonian school, whose exponents “saw clearly the need to ground comparison and patterns in a historical process,” “the two chief options followed by students of religion since then have . . . been either to continue its diffusionist program shorn of its systematic and theoretical depth . . . or to cut loose the pattern and systematics from history. . . . We have yet to develop the responsible alternative: the integration of a complex notion of pattern and system with an equally complex notion of history.”<sup>11</sup>

It is my belief that it is virtually impossible to solve the hermeneutical problem of the “libating gods” in ancient Greek vase painting by staying within the evidence afforded by the tradition. One needs to look elsewhere, and to subject these images to the multiple recombination afforded only through comparative analysis. Such a survey reveals examples of the “religion of the gods” throughout history and across the globe.

We cannot solve a paradox, yet we can consider how to ask whatever appropriate questions it may elicit. The approach that makes this work different from the previous, often painstaking work done on this iconographic theme is that I assert our knowledge of Greek religion, such as it now stands, cannot fully illumine the mystery of the divine scene on the Berlin Painter’s hydria. Rather, as W. Brede Kristensen suggested, the ancient Greek religious mentality is so alien to us in the present, so unsystematic, so apparently *sui generis*, despite its many Near Eastern and other influences, and, outside of the philosophical traditional, so chronically non-self-reflective that we are forced to look outside its boundaries.<sup>12</sup> We do this to locate an Other, that which will hold up a mirror to the original perplexing image, even if that image is reversed.<sup>13</sup> Jean-Pierre Vernant’s chastened statement still holds: “The era is past when one could believe that it was possible to develop a theory of sacrifice embracing all centuries and all civilizations.”<sup>14</sup> I believe, however, that to understand these ancient Greek images, the approach of comparative religion is the most fruitful. What other religions express in analogues both ideational and in praxis possibly represents something fundamental in the divine nature itself, or, if one prefers, its human construction.

With the exception of the Vedic hymns and Brahmanical commentaries, where it is impossible to deny that “the gods sacrificed to sacrifice with the sacrifice” (*Rgveda* 10.90.16; 1.164.50) because the texts are so explicit, legends or iconographic evidence of gods engaged in ritual performance are inevitably attended by conflicted interpretive responses—both ancient and modern.<sup>15</sup> Traditional theological reaction within the closed system of religious thought to the paradoxical “ritualizing deity” tends to focus on the issue of the ways in which ritual actions, oriented to a higher entity as they are assumed to be, imply inferiority and contingency. Omnipotence, or at least ultimate hierarchical superiority in the cosmic order, is intelligible as a defining attribute of the gods. The crucial restriction is that gods, since they are omnipotent, hence at the top of the scale of worship, cannot themselves worship. Ritual, worship, and in particular “sacrifice” implies contingency, dependency, and hierarchically based action originating at the subordinate level of a relationship: *do ut des*, “I give so that you might give [i.e., in return].” The religion of the gods, that is, the divine capacity to perform rituals, is traditionally “unintelligible,” in that it seems to unequivocally compromise omnipotence. It is unseemly and unbecoming a god, or, as one of the conversants exclaims in a discussion imagined by Plutarch at Delphi about Apollo’s expiatory libations after slaying the Pytho, “terribly strange and paradoxical.”

Modern scholarly objections to ritualizing deities, expressed from outside the tradition’s closed thought-world, often encode these assumptions about



divine omnipotence and its compromise by the unacceptable idea of divine ritual: “this cannot mean what it seems to; gods cannot sacrifice.”<sup>16</sup> Contemporary scholars who *do* believe that the gods in Attic vase paintings should indeed be interpreted as pouring libations, or Odin as sacrificing “himself to himself” in *Hávamál*, or Allāh and the angels as performing *ṣalāt* for the Prophet, often do so from a stance that assumes that the human activity of religious action is being projected onto the deity.

The fountainhead of this idea might be located in the philosophy of Ludwig Feuerbach, who, in his most important works *The Essence of Christianity* and *The Essence of Religion*, rebelled against the theistic thought of his teacher Hegel. In contrast to Hegel’s notion of divine self-realization, Feuerbach’s theory viewed religion instead as a product of human self-consciousness, which, beyond “mirroring,” can and does create its own “other,” its own object of contemplation and relationship, the deity: for example, “the source of Monotheism is man, . . . the source of God’s unity is the unity of the human conscience and mind.”<sup>17</sup> Eventually characterized as a paradigm of “projectionism,” Feuerbachian ideology, passionately albeit somewhat inconsistently expounded in his lifelong writings, informed the philosophical platforms of Nietzsche, Marx, and Freud (Ricoeur’s “suspicious thinkers”), but also, in its insistence upon relationship between self and other, shaped the theological schema of Martin Buber and the central preoccupations of Emmanuel Lévinas. At issue for Feuerbach was the nature of that transcendentalized other, whose origin and teleological function, *pace* Hegel, was solely comprised in human attainments: “God is essentially an idea, a model of man; but a model of man does not exist *for itself*, it exists for man; its sole meaning and purpose is that man should become what the model represents; the model is simply the future man, personified and conceived of as an independent being. For this reason God is essentially a communist, not an aristocrat; He shares everything He is and has with man; all His attributes become attributes of man; and with full right, for they originated in man, they were abstracted in man, and the end they are given back to him.”<sup>18</sup>

Hence the image of worship by God or the gods must inexorably represent the human activity of worship, and it must do so for human ends. Typical of this approach, for example, are the remarks of the Islamicist Shelemo Dov Goitein, who in his consideration of Islamic prayer wrote in 1968, “Finally, God himself is described as praying. ‘(The pious), from their Lord (are) prayers upon them and mercy.’ Since God is addressed in prayer, it seems strange that he himself should be engaged in this pious work. Therefore, *ṣalāt*, while referring to God, has been rendered in modern translations by ‘blessings’ and similar phrases. This is a misunderstanding of religious psychology. Since prayer is the most significant occupation of the pious, it is unimaginable that God should not pray himself.”<sup>19</sup> Through a Feuerbachian application, Goitein purports to have said all that is necessary about the religious imagination.

The classic work on sacrificial typology, Henri Hubert and Marcel Mauss’s *Sacrifice: Its Nature and Function*, has exerted a profound influence on the phenomenological study of sacrifice. Yet it is driven by the same assumptions. As

Elizabeth Pritchard observes, “despite the authors’ assertion that sacrifice is only possible if there must exist for the sacrificer outside entities or forces to which the sacrificer believes his/her existence is owed—indeed outside entities that are so powerful that the intermediary or ‘victim’ is destroyed by the power of intense contact with these ‘outside forces,’” they nevertheless collapse at the end with the assertion that the “‘outside forces’ are really only a hypostasization of the community and that sacrifices play a functional role in maintaining the strength of the societal bonds.”<sup>20</sup>

Not only unfazed by the apparent radical anthropomorphism of an observant god but rather embracing it as an axiomatic explanatory device, exponents of such theories reason as follows: Human beings as ritualizers tend to create ritualizing gods. The human religious imagination, because it so consistently anthropomorphizes deities, is untroubled by the paradox that gods are traditionally the focus of ritual orientation and the recipients of ritual action, not themselves the instigators of ritual—for where then are focus and recipient? The logic goes that the gods are projected constellations of human nature, “big people”; hence they do everything that people do, including worship, no matter how theologically self-contradictory such an idea might appear.

It is this second contemporary view about what is “really” operating from *within* the religious traditions that will interest us most in this book. This view starts from particular philosophical premises about the nature of the divine being that are so embedded in the study of religion since Feuerbach, Marx, Freud, and Durkheim as to be accepted as *sine qua nons*, without internal problematization. It is not my purpose in this book to challenge the projectionist theory of religion. Rather, I want to show that it is quite often set forward as an adequate explication of divine religious activity, as though there were nothing more to be said. On the contrary, in the cases we will explore in these pages, it is entirely inadequate. Even if we concede its premises (which I do not, but these cannot be debated here), what projectionist theory fails to do is to describe *how the phenomenon of the ritualizing god manifests itself, functions, and is understood from within the tradition*. Such a descriptive effort, rarely undertaken, is worthwhile because it can illumine both the subtleties and religious results of the relationships between ritual and theology that emerge in each of the cases I will consider. Among the subtleties is the fact that divine ritual almost invariably does *not* exactly resemble human ritual, as a purely applied Feuerbachian model might have it. Why not? Among the results “on the ground” are the ways in which divinely performed rituals, as represented textually and iconographically, often have the historical effect of reinscribing and reinforcing particular devotional forms at the expense of others. Why?

Anticipating Feuerbach, wandering pre-Socratic thinker Xenophanes of Colophon famously wrote, “The Ethiopians imagine their gods as black with snub noses. The Thracians imagine their gods as blue-eyed and red-haired. The Egyptians imagine their gods as light-complexioned with black hair. If oxen and horses and lions had hands, and could paint with their hands, and produce works of art just as men do, horses would paint the forms of gods like horses, and oxen like oxen. But the divine is one and has no countenance and

no colour.”<sup>21</sup> The critique of the gods of antiquity as anthropomorphizing projections of human desires and behaviors was to resonate millennia later in Western philosophy and psychology, but during the late archaic period in ancient Greece stood as a radical critique of both religious and civic structures of thought.<sup>22</sup> The ritualizing deity, counterintuitive as it was, was perhaps the most extreme example of projection Xenophanes might have imagined. Yet the idea clearly existed contemporaneously in the ancient Greek religious imagination, namely, in the form of hundreds of vases, the majority of them painted in dark red and bright black between the years of 510 and 440 B.C.E.—not only by the marginal vase-painters of Attica but also by its masters. The iconography of the over three hundred classical vases treated in this work is troubling at best if we retrace the steps of those scholars who have considered them. The Olympian gods, including Zeus, are shown pouring libations onto altars, and even tearing animals or roasting sacrificial meat. As I hope to show, however, these representations of ritual are not anomalous within the context of ancient Greek religion, but are rather a paradigmatic intensification of its categories of theological thought.

In many other religions of the world, some dead, some alive, some historically related to or interactive with ancient Greece, and some utterly remote from it in time and space, other “high gods” were also portrayed as themselves engaged in worship. Therefore, we may have to rethink the category of ritual worship itself. In the self-understanding of religious traditions that portray the gods as religious actors, is ritual, when performed by gods, understood to be the same thing as when it is performed by human beings?

Certain categories of the modern study of religion such as “worship,” “sacrifice,” and “ritual,” have been reformulated over the past century (e.g., by Max Müller, Edward Tylor, James Frazer, Foustel de Coulanges, Robertson Smith, and Jane Harrison), and almost depleted through exhaustive definition (e.g., by Hubert and Mauss, and Karl Meuli), redefinition (e.g., by Clifford Geertz, Georges Bataille, Victor Turner, René Girard, Walter Burkert, Bernard Malamoud, and Jean-Pierre Vernant), and most recently, deconstruction (e.g., by Frits Staal) or anthropological critique (e.g., by Nancy Jay).

I have found that despite the riches they offer in their variety, existing theoretical models cannot help in the interpretation of these vases, nor any other cases of what I will call “divine reflexivity.” This is for the simple reason that these models only “work” when God or the gods are the *object*, and not the active *subject* or agent of ritual. When ritual has a divine, rather than a human subject, these categories appear to be unusable. In the special but not rare image of an enthroned Zeus clearly pouring a wine offering onto an altar in a sanctuary, previous definitions and deconstructions lead to theoretical paralysis.

To whom are the gods sacrificing? The vases show that the Greek gods, anthropomorphic to an extreme, could participate in every human behavior—not excluding worship itself. I ask in this book whether some mystical identification of roles between devotee and deity should be inferred, or whether this is better understood as an ideal paradigm for human worship. Ultimately, solutions such

as the “humanization” of the gods; sacrifice to a higher, absent deity; and atonement for the overthrow of a previous divine generation prove inadequate. I propose that a new phenomenology should be imagined, one that combines theology and cult and, I believe, solves the paradoxical deployment of normal sacrificial categories. I argue that the gods were seen in ancient Greece as the source of cult, rather than exclusively as its object. Not only the instruments of cult but also cultic actions—in other words, religious behaviors—were attributed to the gods. Appropriate theological description must embrace that aspect of the divine nature that self-referentially and self-expressively *engages in* worship. I call this concept “divine reflexivity.”

“Divine reflexivity” I will define for the moment as the ritual performance by a deity of an action known as belonging to the sphere of that deity’s human cultic worship. What I wish to stress initially in this coined phrase is the word “divine,” carrying with it the notion of “transcendent”; “immortal”; “other than human”; “superhuman”; “godlike.” Whatever we may think about gods as social constructions or as metaphysical entities, what must be clear is that they are not generally understood from within their given traditional context as “big people.” Gods are different. Exegesis of their represented actions, then, requires a nuanced balance between emic epistemology and etic knowledge, with an eye to humility in deploying the latter, and an awareness of the limitations of the very distinction. The history of religion does not survey religious phenomena from a superior vantage point, but rather as a discipline with its own assailable premises, which are to some degree impoverished by the continuing ideal of “objectivity” and “detachment.”<sup>23</sup>

I hope to show in comparative context that gods who are portrayed as performing ritual actions are not, within the framework of the religious traditions that envision them thus, imitating mortals. Nor is it even accurate, in my view, to say that mortals are imitating them. I have come to believe that when the high gods pour out wine, they are in fact acting religiously through, on behalf of, and because of themselves. Their religious actions, even those such as sacrifice that on a mortal level would certainly require a recipient, are not directed to a being higher than themselves.

Religion itself is a part of the gods’ essence and domain; when they practice human-type religious actions, they do so *as gods*. The causes and effects of the cultic mechanism in their case is, as Rudolf Otto termed it, “wholly other.” A ritual performed by a god is not aimed outside the god’s self as a human ritual would be. Instead, it refers back only to the god. The ritual emanates from and is reabsorbed into the numinous parabola of his or her own inexhaustible energy. Humans practicing the same ritual are undeniably participants in this parabola, which then return ritual energy to the gods. But human beings are not the source of religion. The gods are.

Furthermore, as Hegel has argued on the level of philosophical theology, particularly in “The Concept of Religion,” self-containment and self-referentiality are some of the most persistent attributes of divine nature, closely related to its autonomy, self-subsistence, and self-expression.<sup>24</sup> Religion, itself directed to the divine, is in Hegelian axiom revealed, in Dale Schlitt’s words, as “God’s own

coming to self-consciousness . . . a movement of self-positing divine inclusive subjectivity.”<sup>25</sup> Hegel’s concept of religion may help to explicate the ways in which, since gods are not only superior but also ultimate beings, their actions tend indexically to refer to themselves, not to spheres of action outside themselves. This self-referentiality, this divine reflexive nature, is called in Islam “Ipseity.” The actions of the gods express divine motivations, strategems, and nature, and are the basis for any human constructions, institutions, or actions, including religious ones.

Let me illustrate with a case of divine reflexivity from a tradition other than ancient Greek. In at least five notable points in the Babylonian Talmud (formalized c. 400–600 C.E., but containing material centuries older), God himself seems to practice Judaism. He observes *mizvot*, wears ritual garments, and absorbs himself in scripture. As in the vase-paintings of Olympian gods who oddly pour libations, a divinity is associated not only with cultic objects but also with cultic actions. According to *Berakhot* 6a, the incorporeal Hebrew God wears scroll-bearing phylacteries. He wraps himself in the *tallit*, worn by the *Ba’al Tefillah*, the leader of prayer at the synagogue—the prayer shawl symbolizing submission to God’s will—in order to instruct Moses in a penitential service in *Rosh Hashanah* 17b. Tractate *’Abodah Zarah* discovers him studying and reflecting on his own Torah (*oseq battorah*) for three hours each day.<sup>26</sup> In the commentary to the first tractate of the first order of the Mishnah, *Berakhot* (Benedictions), God offers a heartfelt prayer that the attribute of his mercy may overcome that of his justice, which starts with the variant formula, “May it be *My* will that my mercy overcome my justice and all my other attributes.”<sup>27</sup> Challenged by one of the *minim* in *Shabbat* 30 as to where God ritually bathed to purify himself after burying Moses, a rabbi retorts, without hesitating, not that God, the source of ritual purity, had no need to purify himself after contact with a corpse, but rather that he bathed in a *mikveh* of fire.

Do these nonphilosophical sermonic images indicate a clear-cut case of extreme anthropomorphism? In other words, when God performs a specifically Jewish religious action, is he still acting as Master of the Universe, or simply as a larger and more powerful Jew? Anticipating the reductionist arguments of Karim W. Arafat on the Greek case, one early twentieth-century scholar calls these examples of God’s practiced religion “the humanizing of the Deity and endowing Him with all the qualities and attributes which tend towards making God accessible to Man.”<sup>28</sup> Is this really sufficient? Or does God maintain a special role as the theurgic performer of ritual action by dint of his quintessential holiness? If in the Talmud he is in fact still acting as God, does that in any way affect how he practices his own religion? If so, to what end?

Similarly, talmudic translator and editor Arthur Cohen insists, “However these passages may be explained, it is impossible to maintain that their authors actually believed in a corporeal God Who actually performed the actions ascribed to Him.”<sup>29</sup> But why is this protest made, and is it at all helpful? Even one of the most compelling new frameworks for the study of ritual, provided by Catherine Bell in two successive books, is theoretically applicable only when one assumes that religion begins in one place and moves in one direction:

from earth to heaven (or to wherever the gods are conceived as dwelling), from the mortal realm to the immortal. Bell tells us that “the deployment of ritualization, consciously or unconsciously, is the deployment of a particular construction of power relationships, a particular relationship of domination, consent, and resistance.”<sup>30</sup> But what happens to this “deployment of power relationships” when God, than whom there is nothing higher or more powerful, wears a prayer shawl, or even more disconcertingly, prays to himself? Are these not also ritual actions, performed in the context of Jewish piety, and familiar from the realm of human worship? If we are to turn to Bell’s methodology for help in understanding these playful and yet pointed fantasies of the *amoraim*, who dominates? Who consents? Who resists? Like so many others, Bell’s analysis of “ritual” requires a hierarchy. When the hierarchy is removed, we are adrift with the gods who are continually and cryptically practicing their own religion.

In other words, how can God or the gods worship, sacrifice, or perform a ritual? I will show that in the case of the divine libation theme on Attic vases there can be no logical explanation other than that the gods are indeed offering—practicing religious acts. I will also show that once this interpretive possibility is accepted without prejudice, far from being anomalous, these images are entirely consistent with other theologically meaningful artifacts from the same historical and cultural milieu. Ancient Greek religion itself provides the context for the images. The problem was always and only ours as religionists. If, in the historical evidence we will encounter in the traditions to be considered, the divine is not the object (the recipient) but the subject and agent of the religious action (the sacrificer or devotee), I would suggest that it is heuristically unhelpful to persist in the idea that there is something peripheral or exceptional about this phenomenon. Rather, we must rethink how we understand “religion.”

The performative or devotional aspect of religion is conceived of from within the religious perspective itself not as the realm of mortals but rather as the appropriate sphere of the gods who are its object. As early as the *Enuma Elish*, where we hear that “Marduk established his sanctuaries,” it is clear that gods are often intimately involved with the establishment and many ongoing aspects of their own worship. In the “Comparanda” section of the catalogue presented here, it will become clear that the Greek gods are no exception. They hover over their own altars with reverent gestures; they bring flowers and carry incense burners, libation bowls, and even animals. Why then should it be such a surprise when in iconography they lay the flowers onto the altar, burn the incense, or pour out wine from the libation bowls? Perhaps cultic action is as much an attribute of the divine as other attributes with which we are more familiar and comfortable, such as holiness, flight, kingship, a conch shell, or a scroll.

The work of Mircea Eliade has shown that within religious frameworks, humans are theomorphic; that is, their religious acts imitate those of the gods: “A sacrifice, for example,” he writes in *The Myth of the Eternal Return*, “not only exactly reproduces the initial sacrifice revealed by a god *ab origine*, at the beginning

of time, it also takes place at the same primordial mythical moment; in other words, every sacrifice repeats the initial sacrifice and coincides with it. All sacrifices are performed at the same mythical instant of the beginning.”<sup>31</sup> When described as the actions of deities, religious actions surely have a didactic and also a stabilizing effect on human behavior—an Eliadean pattern or divine paradigm. However, I hope to nuance Eliade’s beliefs, and to expand on them: Divine religious actions also have an intensifying effect on human cult, which sets up an ongoing parabola of worship between the transcendent and immanent realms, having its source in the former. In other words, human cultic actions are far more than copies of a blueprint drawn long ago by master architects.

Undeniable is the relationship between the libation poured out by Apollo on his Delphic omphalos on the tondo of a classical vase (no. 204; fig. 8), and that poured out by the mortal priest standing in Apollo’s sanctuary in fifth-century B.C.E. Delphi: This iconography implies profound reciprocity. Yet these cases of divine reflexivity mean even more than this; in some cases, they intensify and elevate certain forms of observance. The gods do not sacrifice merely to instruct human beings on proper religious observance; in other words, the effect of the performance is not merely mimetic; it is, rather, generative and attributive. The gods sacrifice, rather, on their own behalf—in effect, because of themselves. They originate, perform, and thus ratify their own cults. Hence, in the case of ancient Greek divine epithets, for example, as Walter Burkert observes,



FIGURE 8. Apollo, with lyre, pours from phiale onto omphalos decorated with fillets. Artemis, Hermes; Leto with phiale. Attic red-figure bell-krater, manner of the Dinos Painter, 420–400 B.C.E.

“Many [divine epithets] are taken from sanctuaries . . . or from ritual, as if the god himself were performing the ritual act—Apollo Daphnephoros [laurel-bearing Apollo], Dionysos Omestes [Dionysos the raw-eater].”<sup>32</sup> Greek gods thus were often called by the cultic functions that human beings practice in their honor. Apollo wears his own laurel, as one would in worshipping Apollo; Dionysos eats torn animal victims raw, as the Dionysos-possessed maenads were said to do. The god performs the ritual that is his.

Burkert’s discussion of divine epithets makes it clear that a Greek god, like most gods in pantheistic religious systems, is only one dimension of a multidimensional cosmos of power, but is also at the center of a sphere or domain of activity that is particularly dedicated to him or to her—and hence is susceptible both to human imprecation and to the theurgic activity and intervention of the god: “Many [divine epithets] are formed spontaneously to denote the domain in which divine intervention is hoped for; in this way each god is set about with a host of epithets which draw a complex picture of his activity. Zeus as rain god is *ombrios* or *hyetios*, as centre of court and property *herkeios* and *ktesios*, as guardian of the city *polieus*, as protector of strangers *hikesios* and *xenios*, and as god of all Greeks *panhellenios*.”<sup>33</sup> In other words, in the view of its adherents, practiced religion may belong to the sphere of, and have its source in, the divine. The gods practice religion because religion in its essence belongs to them.

Relying on the evidence of the history of religions, one may observe the religion of the gods, driven by a cultic dynamic that I call divine reflexivity, *is not simply human ritual carried out on a cosmic plane*. It is rather in some sense unique to the gods, and has unique cultic features following existentially and naturally from their special status. “The religion of the gods” is also not always foundational, carried out once in primeval *illo tempore*, although it can have that dimension; nor, on a related note, is it invariably some kind of memorial celebration of that foundational act to be reenacted over and again. It is rather, frequently, ongoing consecrated action *continuously occurring in a kind of parallel time* in which the mythical past and ritual present collapse. This is a different kind of time; it is “cultic time.”<sup>34</sup> The gods’ ritual actions are synergistic happenings in the still vacuum of the other, suprasensible world, paralleling and perhaps even inspiring participatory religious action on earth, but still removed from it.

The painted image of the classical god who sacrifices is not ritual itself but rather the representation of ritual. It is not injunctive of ritual action in the same way that a ritual text might be; it does not prescribe the sequence of steps in the choreography, but rather freezes and represents an idealized moment in the offering, one that encodes the proper aesthetics of ritual. However, the telos of the representation goes beyond selection and elevation of a moment of power. Because the god is portrayed performing the sacrificial ritual—pouring out the libation—the ritual itself is inscribed with a kind of ultimacy, even urgency, which in turn necessarily energizes human ritual orientation and activity. The vase-paintings show that cultic time is imagined as a multivalent matrix in which two communities of very different entities practice religious action that mirrors but does not mimic.



As Coenraad van Ouwerkerk says, Hans-Georg Gadamer postulates in *Wahrheit und Methode* that a representation “enhances [and, we might add, intensifies] the ontological reality of what is represented.”<sup>35</sup> “A representation . . . could not only reveal and throw into relief certain aspects of an object, otherwise hidden or unobserved, but could also make personal and intimate, what in reality is distant and alien. Rendering an object present in a representation, is a specific way of having access and relating to it.”<sup>36</sup> The application of this idea charts both intention and effect of such representations in ways that manage to transcend simplistic notions of the god as human writ large.

If, for example, we take the talmudic evidence cited above as neither meaningless nor as mere anthropomorphizing, we see that on its own terms, power flows with a far more centrifugal force: from and around the deity. Then our interpretive task has become different. It would be to determine why religion is not just consecrated to but also ascribed to God during this particular period in (in this case, Jewish) history. That is, what is the particular and special value of these types of religious observance that would occasion the need for their intensification using the paradoxical idiom of an observant God? I will show in chapter 8 that possible answers lie in the particular ways that God is observant, central as they are to Rabbinic Judaism in the first to sixth centuries C.E. after the destruction of the Second Temple.

Within the parameters of this inquiry, I will allow the term “sacrifice” to retain its primary meaning, namely, “the act of offering something to a deity in propitiation or homage, especially the ritual slaughter of an animal or person.”<sup>37</sup> The word’s etymology comes through the Old French and Middle English from the Latin *sacrificium*, which comes from *sacer*, meaning “sacred,” + *facere*, “to make.” By no means has the practice of sacrifice been confined to slaughter alone. Anything can and has been offered to a deity in propitiation or homage.

In a larger context, I will view sacrifice as part of a larger sphere of human religiosity, namely worship, having as its primary canonical meanings “the reverent love and allegiance accorded a deity, idol, or sacred object and a set of ceremonies, prayers, or other religious forms by which this love is expressed.”<sup>38</sup> The term “worship” comes to us through the Middle English from the Old English *weoroscipe*, meaning “honor,” from *weoro*, “worth” and *scipe*, “ship.”

Both of these terms, sacrifice and worship, describe a dynamic transfer, within a religious context, of something to a numinous object or energy. One offers gifts (sacrifice) or ceremonially enacts a feeling (worship) toward a god or goddess—at the very least, a power greater than oneself. Something of worth is transferred from a lesser to a greater being. Note that our usual use of these terms seems to assume the mortality, and in a sense, the inferiority of the donor. The divinity, and implicit superiority, of the recipient sharply distinguishes it from the humanity and finitude of the donor.

In light of the evidence to follow, I hope these definitions will begin to resonate ironically. What if the sacrificer—or, on a more general plane, the worshiper—possesses the quality of omnipotence? What becomes of this dynamic, which we take so much for granted when we reflect on religious

thought, encoded in ritual, from its most exteriorized to its most sublimated forms? For example, would the motive for sacrifice continue to be propitiation or homage? Of whom or what? What is worship if a deity, especially a supreme deity in a hierarchical system, performs it? Does it remain the “reverent love and allegiance accorded a deity”? Is it self-reverence? Or is it something else?

Are these very questions culture-bound? As Veena Das has noted, “what are considered universal features of the sacrificial process draw rather heavily from assumptions about man, society and God in Semitic traditions.” As an example, she gives one of the assumptions of anthropological discourse on sacrifice as the concept that “the sacrificator is a bearer of pollution, sin, or guilt and the sacrificial cult provides the means for cleansing the person or the social body of these moral stains. Further, the immolation of the victim becomes the central moment of the sacrifice since it constitutes the renunciation of a significant object by the sacrificator to bring about a sudden and violent cleansing of sin, the separation of that which has been wrongly united, and a release of powerful forces (Hubert & Mauss 1964; Evans-Pritchard 1956; Turner 1977).”<sup>39</sup> Sacrifice as a mechanism of renunciation and cleansing may be seen to operate, if on a very muted scale, in ancient Greek sacrifice, especially in accordance with Meul’s and Burkert’s theory of the sympathetic identification of hunter and hunted, which had its genesis in the Neolithic Central Asian steppes. But surely it cannot be said to operate if the gods themselves bring the sacrificial offerings to the altar.

With these questions in mind, let us turn to some of the puzzling situations in which hypothesis does indeed become reality. What does it mean for the Greek gods to pour libations in the fifth century B.C.E.? For the ancestors of the Vedic gods, the Sādhyas, to sacrifice Agni, god of fire? For Indra to drink Soma in texts from 1000 B.C.E.? For the God of Israel to demand the death of Isaac in patriarchal times, then substitute a ram for Abraham’s firstborn so that the sacrifice might be accomplished? For the same God to immolate his own firstborn son in first-century Christian scripture, and for Christ simultaneously to act as high priest and offer up himself in the Epistle to the Hebrews? For Odin to hang on the World-Tree as his gallows, having pierced himself with his own spear in the same manner that sacrificial victims are hanged on tree limbs as dedications to Odin? And in the larger sphere of worship, what does it mean for the Talmud to portray YHWH as reading the Torah three hours a day, or as wearing a prayer shawl? For the Qur’ān to describe Allāh as ritually interceding for Muḥammad?

In his *Religious Worlds*, William Paden posits, “Religions create, maintain and oppose worlds. Their mythic symbols declare what the world is based on, what its oppositional forces are, what hidden worlds lie beyond or within ordinary life.”<sup>40</sup> A “world,” then, is the self-contained and self-validating realm created by a religion, which does not make it impervious to comparative thematic inquiry. “The idea of a world helps mediate the ideas of difference and commonality. In spite of their differences, religious worlds have in common certain general forms of mythic and ritual behavior. . . . The *content* of this

behavior is always specific and historical. But the *form* of the behavior shows typical cross-cultural categories at work. . . . So the idea of worlds deals with the realm of particular historical matrices, yet also allows us to see typical or analogous ways by which worlds are constructed.”<sup>41</sup>

If we accept this both/and approach, then we do not have to make the artificial and, in my opinion, bitter choice between a historical or a phenomenological approach to the study of a religious question. For in making such a choice, we are robbed. The methodological approach guiding this work is based on the belief that religious evidence is at the same time culturally and historically specific as well as part of a larger picture in which common structures emerge, and can be talked about interpretively. It is essential to start with primary religious evidence, and equally essential that we assume that it was in fact meaningful to those who created it. This may seem obvious, but in fact it has by no means been conceded by scholars who have interpreted the sacrificing gods, as chapter 4, a history of previous scholarship, will show. It is especially important in dealing with material evidence when no texts are available to aid in interpretation.

According to Turner, Paden, and others, all such worlds maintain what is sacred, and maintain the integrity of their own views. Through acts of language and observance, through configuring activities, through gods and symbols, these worlds are made credible. Religion is as much encoded action as it is doctrine or accumulated belief. Religious action is represented repeatedly as practiced by the gods. If we assume that the gods are “configuring activities,” then their worship becomes, to the “impartial” observer extreme anthropomorphism. I will argue that this leads to distortion even within the framework of the traditions themselves.

If, as Nancy Jay has said, sacrifice is a way to ingrain and differentiate subject and object, sacred and profane, divinity and humankind, how should we understand sacrificing gods? What is the intended meaning when in the scripture and religious art of a culture, the gods themselves configure and sacralize the world through that ultimate world-shaping system, ritual, and especially sacrifice? Objects correlate to subjects. Things are sacred in relation to something. Do these specific and apparently anomalous phenomena negate a traditional understanding of the devotional relationship between divine and human? Or do they deepen it?

On a related plane, when do sacrificing or worshipping gods appear in the chronological development of a religion? Do any factors appear to be shared between the sociological situations of the religions considered, or the internal pressures it might have faced at the time? In other words, is there a time at which the notion of the divine itself engaged in an act of worship seems more likely to occur in a given history of belief and practice—whether in art, scripture, myth, oral tradition, or creed—than at some other time?

This book proposes that the gods are as much the originators as the objects or recipients of cultic action and that human religiosity falls into the divine sphere—rather than divine ritual falling into a range of human religious phenomena, or as Jay puts it, “a god stands for the concept of a sacrificer’s

object . . . sacrificial religions cause what they signify.”<sup>42</sup> Jay calls for an “active purifying of the gods through the recognition of them as human.” Contrary to this, I call for a counteractive purifying of the gods through a cleansing of the intellectual prejudices of the past century’s insistence on religion as a human projection, for in the case of “religious gods,” it actually obstructs the process of interpretation from within. As Firozi Kotwal and James Boyd assert, “ritual practices . . . have their own meaning and value as actions, not only as ‘symbols’ of concepts. A defensible hermeneutic demands an understanding of rituals on their own terms.”<sup>43</sup> The present work essays a defensible hermeneutic of what are in the most powerful of ritual actions—those performed not by humans but by their creators, the gods—“on their own terms.” Normally “human” ritual actions can thus have the divine as their subject—in fact, as their engine.

How can we see the images of the gods who pour out wine on classical vases as the Greeks saw them? How can we respond to the challenge set forth by Folkert van Straten, who writes—in particular of the puzzling images of the “god’s portion” on the altar, but applicable to sacrificial iconography in general—“It is not wise to try to identify the object by establishing what it looks like to *us*. We should not try to recognize it, taking the visible world as *we* know it as our frame of reference. The Greek vase painters painted these scenes with their contemporary compatriots in mind. It is *their* frame of reference we must try to reconstruct.”<sup>44</sup>

Who, then, were the ancient Greek gods to the ancient Greeks? They were not big people, nor were they ever thought of as such. Classicist Mary Lefkowitz insists on the value of this simple but crucial methodological point in her recent *Greek Gods, Human Lives*, and in the process highlights one of the important biases in the classical scholarship of the last century, when she observes that “Modern writers and readers often find it very hard to imagine that the ancient Greeks could have believed in their own very different gods. They are sympathetic to the ancient thinkers and writers who themselves were critical of how the gods were portrayed in epic, and they are comfortable with the portrayal of the gods in the works of later poets, where they appear to behave more like human beings than like deities, without concern for the common good or for justice.”<sup>45</sup> Lefkowitz shows how the Greek gods have been distorted in modern presentations, as for example in Edith Hamilton’s *Mythology*, published in 1940 and often reprinted, which renders the gods “more approachable, more humane, and more closely involved in human life than they actually were in the tales the Greeks told. *The gods were ageless, immortal, and powerful.*”<sup>46</sup> Lefkowitz writes of the authors of Greek and Roman literature, “I start from the assumption that the narrators of these works of literature composed them primarily for audiences that believed those gods existed, and that the myths conveyed, however literally or figuratively, essential truths, even though those truths are often harsh. That is not to say that ancient writers did not allow the characters in their stories to question the motives and even the existence of the gods. *I simply make the observation that they wrote about the world as if it were controlled by the gods, and as if action on the part of the gods was normal and not in any way artificial.*”<sup>47</sup>

Part of the thicket ensnaring previous scholars is the conception that gods were in fact big people, so their ritual actions were simply human actions writ large. The other, diametrically opposed prejudice has been a rigid and hierarchically based notion of what is and is not appropriate for a god to do so as to be consistent with his or her god-nature. If, as scholars of the history of religion, we venture into the evaluation or even the description of phenomena, we are also reluctant theologians. As the critique of phenomenology has shown, complete objectivity is an impossible telos. We are then left to attempt what Smith invokes: “the integration of a complex notion of pattern and system with an equally complex notion of history.”

In part I of this book, “The Ancient Greek Gods in Ritual Performance,” I hope to provide an overview of the Hellenic evidence for this problem. With a few startling exceptions (see “Comparanda”), our vase-paintings depict gods and goddesses using the vessels of libation, the oinochoe or phiale, or both. They are engaged in pouring what we might call drink offerings. In chapter 1, I consider the question of how best to understand the ancient Greek ceremony of libation within its religious context. What kind of an offering was libation, and to whom, in anyone, was it offered? How did it reach its recipients? In what sense is libation “sacrifice”? In chapter 2, I discuss some of the more important iconographic issues pertaining to the Greek evidence for the theme of “gods pouring libations,” namely, that of red-figure vase-painting. This chapter refers to a representative catalogue of such vases from the late archaic, classical, and Hellenistic periods of antiquity, and includes an analysis of their cultic features. Chapter 3 treats the known ancient literary evidence that may bear upon the question of divine libations in classical art. Chapter 4, a history of interpretation, explores what has been said about the problem of the sacrificing gods, and the implications of each commentary. Chapter 5 addresses the intellectual reasons for why the Greek god with libation bowl in hand has been so problematic. I analyze the common theoretical stumbling blocks I have observed in the secondary literature, both religionist and archaeological. I then suggest a workable theoretical solution, based in what I believe to be an ancient Greek understanding of the relationship between their gods and their practiced religion. I describe a new descriptive category, “divine reflexivity,” which can dissolve some of the previous hermeneutical obstacles, in that it comprises rather than avoids paradox, and allows religious worlds both self-referential and self-organizing potentials. The chapter concludes with seven characteristics that are the signifying characteristics of divine reflexivity.

Part II, “The Wider Indo-European World: Polytheism,” treats divine reflexivity in three polytheistic religious systems that share an Indo-European genesis with ancient Greece. The gods’ habit of sacrifice in a civilization that is demonstrably historically related to that of ancient Greece, that of Vedic India, provides the backdrop for the two close studies presented here in chapters 6 and 7. The extant corpus of Vedic literature offers two important features which, while not exactly the same, are surely similar in outline to this particular ancient Greek religious situation: sacrificing gods, and a strong focus on libation—on the offering of consecrated liquids in order to sanctify. These two

features are found nowhere else, either in such force or in conjunction with each other. Chapter 6 examines an ultimately heretical but historically influential Zoroastrian creation myth, the thousand-year sacrifice performed by the high god Zurvān. Chapter 7 analyzes the self-immolation of the hanging god Odin, self-told in Norse skaldic poetry.

In part III, “The Peoples of the Book: Monotheism and Divine Ritual,” I consider a complex of related issues among three monotheistic faiths of Northwest Semitic origin. I will not treat intensively, but will refer to, the cultic prescriptions set forth in the Pentateuch, the exegesis on the *aqedah* (binding of Isaac) in Christian theologies of the crucifixion, and Christ’s multivalent sacrificial and sacerdotal roles in the Eucharist. Chapter 8 treats the talmudic passages mentioned above concerning God’s piety, and chapter 9, the problem of the God and the angels’ *ṣallāt* for Muḥammad described in Sūrah 33:56 of the Qur’ān.

As students of the history of religions we need to learn to tolerate, rather than to seek to rationalize or to reconcile the paradoxical when we encounter it. For encounter it we will, again and again. Epistemology alone bears out this prognosis. Here, in what I call divine reflexivity, we have the apparently irreconcilable clash of theology (the omnipotence and ultimacy of the gods) and cult (the actions of contingent or lesser beings made in propitiation of noncontingent, greater and usually greatest ones).

I hope that the issues I raise, summarized in the conclusion, will be seen as specific to the cultural context of each religious tradition and at the same time more phenomenologically universal. My goal is to show how the paradox of a god who practices religious action, which we understand as a seeming contradiction, does not imply religious deviance, heresy, or anomaly, but rather reveals a deep, ubiquitous structure within the history of religions.

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PART I

# Ancient Greek Gods in Ritual Performance



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# I

## Is Libation Sacrifice?

Before it is clear why a religious image is exceptional or unorthodox (“marked,” to borrow the Prague School term used in Indo-European linguistics), we need to know what the norm is—the “unmarked” case. The unmarked ritual case in ancient Greek religion would be the basic mortal gesture of libation, that is, of pouring out liquid offerings in a gesture of reverence or of giving to the divine. The marked case would be when a divine figure pours out an offering—on our vases, an urgent paradox. The immediacy and vividness of the spilling wine depicted in added paint in these scenes offer a strong visual retort to any doubt as to whether the gods are receiving or offering in their phialai. Depictions of both unmarked and marked cases proliferated in the fifth century B.C.E.<sup>1</sup> Drink offerings brought by both mortals (to obtain the good will of the immortals) and by the immortals themselves (for reasons of their own) appeared in art with more frequency than ever before. Occasionally, as the next chapter’s evidence will show, mortal and immortal libation scenes were painted on opposite sides of the same vase—perhaps signaling, in the cultic realm, a kind of mirroring, reciprocity, or other relationship.

Before seeking to comprehend the paradox that the Greek gods perform ritual, we might pause to consider what kind of ritual it is that they perform. Overwhelmingly predominant in the corpus of vases showing “sacrificing gods” is the performance of libation. Although there are several known examples of gods leading animals to the altar or actually involved in their killing or cooking (see “Comparanda,” nos. C-36 to C-43), these comprise only a handful; on the other hand, there are at least several hundred scenes of divine libation. But there may be more than this to the emphasis on libation as a divinely performed ritual. Regally enthroned with offering-bowl

outstretched, standing above a flaming altar as they deliver its contents of red wine onto the fire, or simply pouring the liquid into the ground, the gods are time and again depicted in the act of libation. What is libation, and why is it the primary ritual featured in these artifacts?

### “A Peculiar Way of ‘Giving’ ”

οὐ γὰρ μοί ποτε βωμὸς ἐδεύετο δαιτὸς εἶσις,  
λοιβῆς τε κνίσης τε· τὸ γὰρ λάχομεν γέρας ἡμεῖς.

Never yet has my altar gone without fair sacrifice, the libation and the savour, since this is our portion of honour.<sup>2</sup>

In vain Zeus defends Ilion’s faithful worship at his altars in *Iliad* 4.48–49; Hera remains hell-bent on the city’s catastrophic destruction. Although the great sky-god praises sacrifice in general, using the revealing Homeric term δαίς (meal), he then specifies certain elements of blood-sacrifice as the gods’ γέρας: “our portion of honour.” These are neither blood nor entrails nor meat; for in Greek animal sacrifice these serve, respectively, to mark the altar, to honor the attending priests, and to feed the participants.<sup>3</sup> Rather, they are “the libation and the savour”; these specifically belong to the gods. We know from the aetiological sacrifice of an ox by the Titan Prometheus to Zeus in Hesiod’s *Theogony* (535–561) that the gods inhale the sweet smoke, smelling it as it rises from the meat grilling in the altar-flames. But why is libation especially reserved for the gods on Olympus, and how can it ever reach them? Simply put, the offering goes *down* while they are always *up*.

As Walter Burkert remarks, “the libation is usually accepted without question as a drink offering, a gift of food. That the earth drinks is said explicitly enough. Mythology must then admittedly attribute curious needs to the dead and subterranean beings, and why wine is poured straight into the ground for the Heavenly Ones remains unexplained.”<sup>4</sup> According to this line of reasoning, the phiale is put into the hand of the god so that the deity can “catch” the precious stuff before it is lost. But then why do these gods pour out the liquid with such abandon onto altars? Why do they not seek to conserve and consume it?

In the most general of terms, libation is that liquid which is poured out as an act of consecration. As an accompaniment to simple prayer or at a symposium, a little is spilled out on the earth and the rest is consumed. In chthonian sacrifice it sinks into the ground—if honey, milk or oil, literally understood as nourishment for the dead, or if water, their bath; it may also head to the underworld in honor of the powers who dwell below—Pluton, Persephone, the heroes, or the *Semnai Theai*.<sup>5</sup> In animal sacrifice it is poured midway through the ceremony onto the toiling flames, making them leap higher and, according to the testimony of Euripides’ *Ion* (1032–1033), libation also concludes the proceedings, as wine is poured onto the smoldering altar. But the heavenly conceit that wafts the smoke offering to the sky-dwelling ones is absent in the

case of libations at an altar, where Zeus speaks of them. There is no way in enacted cult that liquid offerings seem to reach the gods on Olympus. As Burkert complains, “Libation is quite a peculiar way of ‘giving’: you pour out wine on the soil, and there it stays: How are the gods in heaven to get any of it? Mycenaean and Greeks tried to evade this problem by putting a libation bowl into the hand of the god, or by pouring libations into the fire on the altar; but this is secondary, as especially Hittite evidence shows; and the Greek god with the libation bowl in his hand, as if pouring offerings to himself, becomes a new problem of interpretation.”<sup>6</sup>

Burkert suggests that the libation bowl wielded by the gods themselves, hundreds of examples of which we shall encounter in the next chapter, was an iconographic solution to an awkward problem. It was hard to envision “giving” to the gods by pouring wine into the ground or, we might note, even onto an altar, where as alcohol it evaporated in the fire or rolled onto the ground. Consider, for example, a cult scene like that shown on an archaic black-figure vase from Athens where Athena or her statue receives a libation poured directly by a worshiper onto her flaming altar (marked ΑΘΕΝΑΙΑΣ, belonging to Athena) (no. C-14; Fig. 9). In a fascinating stamnos by the Eupolis Painter in the Louvre depicting a festival—perhaps that of the mysterious Lenaia held in Gamelion, or of the better-known Anthesteria—maenads bring oinochoe and kantharos with wine-offerings to the cult image of Dionysos standing on a base (no. C-25).<sup>7</sup> According to Burkert, the Olympians stretch forth their phialai to receive the libation directly; and this solves our iconographic problem. The gods hold these vessels because this is how they get their drink-offerings.

There are a number of examples from vase painting where mortals seem to offer the libation to the god without the intervening step of pouring it out



FIGURE 9. Athena receives a libation poured onto her altar, inscribed ΑΘΕΝΑΙΑΣ “belonging to Athena.” Attic black-figure vase fragment, late archaic.

onto the ground. In a red-figure amphora from the early classical period by the Sabouroff Painter in the British Museum, Athena, clearly not a statue, holds her doffed helmet and contemplates a libation extended to her by a woman with the ritual paraphernalia of oinochoe and phiale (no. C-17). In an amphora in Munich by the Waterkeyn Painter (no. C-23), she even stretches out her hand as if to take the proffered phiale from a female devotee. Astride a hurtling panther, Dionysos is greeted by a maenad with phiale and oinochoe in a fourth-century pelike in the British Museum (no. C-20). And the same god, “the one with the black goatskin,” consistently extends his kantharos with great interest to someone who can fill it with wine from an oinochoe, as in the well-known amphora by the Amasis Painter (no. C-21) in Munich, where the god is attended by young men.<sup>8</sup>

These are not numerous, however, and they do not begin to aid us in our efforts to interpret the vase-paintings of the years 510 to 450 B.C.E. This is because far more frequently than receiving “a drink” of wine in a shallow bowl, the deity depicted in vases does the opposite. With a sacrificial assistant hovering nearby with the oinochoe that has been used to fill the bowl, the god or goddess pours the wine out onto the ground or onto an altar. Lest there be any doubt that the high gods are themselves performing libations rather than receiving them, the Catalogue clearly shows in many examples that the wine as it rolls out is unmistakably depicted in added red—red as vigorous as that used to show the leaping flames of the altar. These are not images of cult statues, but those of real gods participating in vital cultic activity.

It is to Burkert’s initial perplexity that we first turn our attention. Libation, “pouring out,” is quite a peculiar way of “giving”—a mercurial, strange form of sacrifice. For unlike the case of animal sacrifice, from whose meat the Greeks made splendid feasts for the whole community, the sacrificer could not recover any of the substance offered. That seems to have been part of libation’s power. One surrendered something precious forever, in milk, honey, oil, or wine: “the precious commodities of a society familiar with hearth and hunger were poured away irretrievably.”<sup>9</sup> One of the more famous libations in ancient history was the one made by the intrepid, manic Alexander in the late fourth century when, on his march through Asia, he poured a helmetful of scarce water into the Gedrosian desert sands.<sup>10</sup> By “discarding” the liquid to the earth where it would be lost, except to those powers for whom it was intended, the king underlined his faith in his mission and his arrogant freedom from human limitation. He also revitalized the hope of his troops, showing that if they could not drink, neither would he. This renunciatory aspect of libation points clearly to ritual’s larger function of transforming anxiety. As Burkert puts it, “what happens . . . is a concentration and shift of anxiety from reality to a symbolic sphere, and this makes it possible to handle anxiety to some extent. . . . Religious ritual, by producing anxiety, manages to control it.”<sup>11</sup>

Hans Dieter Betz comments on the question, “If at the beginning libations were gift offerings, they were most likely understood as gifts to the deity in return for benefits received. By the seemingly wasteful giving up of some vital resources, libations constituted fundamental acts of recognition and gratitude as well as

hope for future benefits. Thus they were part of the communication with the divine sphere of life through the exchange of gifts. This may also explain why the gods themselves are often shown offering libations."<sup>12</sup> Frustrating is Betz's vagueness concerning how libation's "communication" function explains why the gods offer libations. And since the liquid disappears into the earth and cannot be visibly divinized, transformed, or redistributed, should libation even be called "sacrifice" at all? The question is a challenge to historians of ritual, and also highlights a thorny conundrum in two of the main scholarly languages in classical studies: German and English. In German, the verb *opfern* (to sacrifice) and the noun *Opfer* (sacrifice) have their roots in the Latin *operari*, "to work" (hence, "to perform [religious service]; to worship"). This reflects an ancient tradition of using a more general verb as a euphemism for animal sacrifice, which was ritualized slaughter. That the Greeks used ῥέζειν (to act) to mean "to sacrifice" is confirmed by Plutarch when he writes of the ancients that "being frightened and alarmed, they use the terms 'to accomplish' (ἔρδειν) and 'to act' (ῥέζειν) when they are doing a great thing, namely live sacrifice (that is, the sacrifice of living things)."<sup>13</sup>

Erika Simon entitled her 1953 study of gods who pour libations on Attic vases *Opfernde Götter (Sacrificing Gods)*. Martin Nilsson took strong exception to this, which he considered an imprecise and inappropriate extension of the German term *Opfer*.<sup>14</sup> Among other severe criticisms, he suggested that she change the title to *Spendende Götter (Libating Gods)*. However, Nilsson's was a losing battle. The term *Opfer* has been (and will likely continue to be) used by many German scholars in the same way that Paul Stengel did when he titled his comprehensive *Opferbräuche der Griechen*—as a general term encompassing any kind of religious offering, including both animal and liquid votives as well as that of cakes, boughs, and other gifts for the gods.<sup>15</sup> Thus, Krister Hanell's treatment of ancient Greek libations in the *Real-Encyclopädie der klassischen Altertumwissenschaft* is found under the general term "Trankopfer."<sup>16</sup>

Among English-speaking scholars, since it is more closely scrutinized and often deconstructed, the general term "sacrifice" has been increasingly restricted to the specific meaning of "animal sacrifice," used exclusively to designate the ritual killing of animals, whether consumed or not. As a category, "liquid offerings" are excluded from the term "sacrifice," the latter no longer being allowed to serve as an umbrella term for this sphere of religious action. But the discussion leaves open certain fundamental questions about libation. As Jean Rudhardt asked of libations, "in what sense are they sacrifices and what is their value or utility for the gods?"<sup>17</sup> Into what category of religious action does libation fall? Is it an offering? If so, how does it reach or even benefit its target? Are the gods who pour from phialai really sacrificing gods? If so, for whom is their sacrifice intended?

## An Ancient Ritual

The act of pouring or drinking a liquid offering is one of the oldest, most ubiquitous, and least understood forms of religious action in the world. The Iranian

cult of the consumed liquid of immortality, *haoma*, is very old, and predates the traditional dates of Zoroaster, who, according to tradition, was at first vehemently opposed to it. That it became such a foundation of the cultic structure of Zoroastrianism attests to later, atavistic reforms that reappropriated the ancient drink—and external sacrifice in general. The corresponding Vedic *soma* is both a plant from which juice is pressed and mixed with water and milk to make the elixir, and a deity (King Soma in the *Rgveda*). Calvert Watkins has suggested that there is a strong linguistic and thus, by inference, a religious tie between the Indo-Iranian usage of cereals in both martial and magical ritual texts and the mixed potions of barley, honey, wine, and often cheese or milk prepared in Greek epic literature and archaic poetry.<sup>18</sup> These range from the drink of wheat and wine that Andromache gives to Hektor's horses,<sup>19</sup> to Hekamede's drink of hospitality filling Nestor's famous cup and those of his guests,<sup>20</sup> to the potion which Circe instructs Odysseus to prepare to summon the dead.<sup>21</sup> These are all strangely reminiscent of the Eleusinian *kykeon* drink of immortality first made up by Metaneira, at the behest of the grief-wracked Demeter, out of water, fermented barley, and pennyroyal,<sup>22</sup> which some claim may have contained a hallucinogenic pharmacologically related to the effective element in Soma.<sup>23</sup>

Babylonian and Assyrian texts seem to indicate a dual function for libation. The king, as heaven's regent on earth, was obligated to pour libations to the gods, in propitiation or thanksgiving. However, libation was also used for purification and magical purposes. This ancient Near Eastern function is reflected in Egyptian magical papyri as late as the Hellenistic period.<sup>24</sup>

That libation was a vital form of proto-Greek religious behavior, dating from as early as 2000 B.C.E., is attested by the numbers of elaborately carved rhyta, libation vessels, from Minoan Crete. The shapes of those that are known range from seashells to bull's heads to beautifully polished conical stone vessels with curved handles. Several of them, such as the Late Minoan I Peak Sanctuary Rhyton from Zakros (1550–1500 B.C.E.), have revealed important religious information.<sup>25</sup> Wall paintings from the Palace at Knossos show a rhyton bearer advancing in ceremonial procession, presumably toward the throne of king, queen, or goddess. Many seals and rings show sacrificial scenes including libation pitchers set out with bread and fruit offerings.

The initial temporal or functional separation that seems to have existed in the Minoan period between drink offerings and animal sacrifice was later eradicated. A combination of the two forms occurs as early as the important fourteenth-century painted sarcophagus from Aghia Triadha in Crete with a rare depiction of animal sacrifice, in which a procession of men and women carry large buckets, while the priestess is shown pouring a container of liquid into a large krater.<sup>26</sup> However, vestiges of this ritual separation remain in Asia Minor up through the archaic period, notably at shrines of citadel goddesses whose worship also preserved an older fertility cult, like that of Athena Lindia at Rhodes.

## Types of Libation in Ancient Greece

Libations, of wine pure or mixed, of honey, oil, milk, water, or blood itself cascaded in and punctuated virtually every private prayer and every public sacrifice in ancient Greece.<sup>27</sup> At least four technical names characterize drink offerings, with deployment depending on their composition and religious context—λοιβαί, χοαί, σπονδαί, and νηφάλια. In the private sphere, libations were poured as part of every prayer. The term “libation” is derived from the Latin *libatio*, “sacrificial offering of drink,” which in turn is related to the Greek λοιβή. Λείβειν is an archaic word at least as old as Homeric times meaning “to drip; to pour out drop by drop.”<sup>28</sup> Simple libation had three steps: one prepared the liquid; one poured out a few drops of the liquid, usually accompanying the libation with a prayer;<sup>29</sup> then one drank what remained of the liquid. In the Homeric epics, sometimes a special cup is reserved for this purpose, such as Menelaos’s gift of the goblet to Telemachos “so you can pour libations to the immortals,”<sup>30</sup> and even sometimes only for a special god, such as Achilles’s cup with which he only poured to Zeus father.<sup>31</sup> Λοιβή is a poetic word, virtually unused in inscriptions, where it is replaced by σπονδή. But the union of this kind of libation and spontaneous, often personal prayer remained throughout historical times,<sup>32</sup> with perhaps its most poignant instance coming in the *Phaedo* 117 B–C, where Socrates asks if he might pour a few drops of his poison (ἀποσπείσαι) as a libation to the gods before he drinks the whole draught; he is gently prevented by the prison official, who apologetically tells him that only just the dose required to kill him has been prepared.

The two more frequent words for libation, σπονδαί and χοαί, present a challenge for sacrificial typology. The dichotomized thinking of the earlier half of the past century posited an Indo-European cult of “sky-gods,” to whom belonged ritual σπονδαί, which merged during the Bronze Age with an oriental-Minoan matriarchal “earth cult,” featuring χοαί to form a later “synthesized” Greek religion. Contrary to this vision, the chthonian cult, and hence the liquid offering poured into the ground, was extremely important in the Indo-European heritage. Possibly entering Greek culture from Anatolia during the Bronze Age (cf. the Hittite cognate *šipanti*), σπένδειν-σπονδή, “libate”-“libation,” has a specific range of meanings limited to the legal and sacral field; it appears in Latin as *spondere*.<sup>33</sup> The terms χέω and χόη, cognate with the Vedic *hūtar*, come from the Indo-European root \*ǵheu, “pour.” Whereas σπένδειν is primarily a religious term, χεῖν has a number of attested secular uses as a verb of pouring.<sup>34</sup>

In general, σπονδαί are assumed to be offerings to Olympian gods; χοαί to appease the deities of the underworld, or to summon the dead from their grim slumber.<sup>35</sup> Σπονδαί moistened altars, whereas it was into the earth that one poured χοαί, and the animate earth was said to drink them.<sup>36</sup> Σπονδαί were often poured out in short drops, with the remainder consumed entirely; χοαί were poured out entirely, corresponding with holocaust sacrifices,



where the animal was slaughtered (undivided and uneaten by human beings), burnt whole, or thrown into the sea.<sup>37</sup> Usually, σπένδειν implies the pouring of wine.<sup>38</sup> In the cult of the dead and of the χθόνιοι, so much in need of soothing, one frequently poured milk, honey, gruel, and oil; these were the main ingredients in funerary cult and were called νηφάλια.<sup>39</sup>

In the private sphere, libations were closely associated with actions of hospitality, and with communal eating and drinking, all of these sacralized to some extent. One poured libations to Zeus as a sign of hospitality to consecrate a new friendship.<sup>40</sup> Drink offerings commenced a meal,<sup>41</sup> and as the meal was ending, one let a drop of unmixed wine fall to the *Agathos Daimon* (no. 15), then took a small sip oneself.<sup>42</sup> At drinking-symposia, one sang a paean and poured three times to the gods: The first drink belonged to Olympian Zeus and the rest of the Olympians, the second to the heroes, the third to Zeus Soter.<sup>43</sup> Ancient Greek symposia were highly ceremonial gatherings in which almost all wine-drinking took place. They were a time-honored institution of the upper classes, as Herbert Hoffman writes in his recent monograph on the corpus of the classical vase-painter Sotades, largely consisting of decorated drinking-vessels, phialai and rhyta.<sup>44</sup> Not only the participants drank: The gods and the dead were ritually included by pouring out libations for them. Thus drink offerings to the powers above and below flowed into the drinking of the living, functionally uniting the multiple worlds of existence, just as drinking wine dissolves normal social boundaries: “To the Greeks it was the most noble form of social activity, a tradition that combined the pouring of solemn libations (*spondai*) to the gods and to the dead with manly fellowship, music, and other entertainment. . . . Even from earliest times, the table fellowship of the banquet, with the libations that were poured, was aimed at establishing links between the living and the gods, as well as with the heroes and the spirits of the dead.”<sup>45</sup>

In both legendary and historical worlds, one poured libations before voyaging or engaging in a perilous enterprise, as for example, a sea voyage.<sup>46</sup> No traveler embarked on a journey (no. C-9)<sup>47</sup> and likewise no warrior departed for battle (no. C-10 [Fig. 10], and C-11) without first pouring libations or having them poured by a friend on one’s behalf.<sup>48</sup> Beloved in vase-painting since the sixth century B.C.E., the theme of the departing warrior often took some interesting twists: The saddened wife who assists her husband’s libation is chronically replaced by the goddess Nike herself, as in nos. 131 (Fig. 11) and 132. It is not only for a mortal departure that drink offerings are accomplished. In a common tableau, the Eleusinian goddesses Demeter and Persephone pour for the departing divine hero, Triptolemus, as he mounts his winged chariot on his mission to teach mortals the cultivation of grain.<sup>49</sup> In the public sphere, libations accompanied by paeans expressed joy at victory or signified the reestablishment of peace.<sup>50</sup> Oaths were sealed with liquid offerings—in the case of the gods themselves, the waters of the Styx.<sup>51</sup> Contracts and peace treaties were so commonly concluded with libations, signifying a mutual entry into obligation, that such agreements came to be called, simply, σπονδαί.<sup>52</sup>

Although they could be poured as autonomous offerings, “libations have their truly significant meaning for Greek cult as (an) accompaniment to other



FIGURE 10. Warrior in armor leaving home, extending his phiale to his wife, who raises her veil and pours from an oinochoe. Attic red-figure amphora by the Kleophrades Painter, late archaic period.



FIGURE 11. Libation scene at a warrior's departure; Nike pours from oinochoe as he extends a phiale. A woman (his wife?) holds his helmet and shield. Drawing of an Attic red-figure krater by the Niobid Painter, c. 460 B.C.E.

sacrifices.”<sup>53</sup> Drink-offerings accompanied even the smallest gift offering, including nonbloody ones.<sup>54</sup> In Homer, no animal sacrifices take place without libations. That there were sacrifices without libations (*ἄσπονδοι θυσίαι*) is attested by the scholiast to *Oedipus at Colonus* 100.<sup>55</sup> But sacrifices without libations are infrequent as a rule. To each type of sacrifice a particular form of libation was attached, which was one of the cultic features that gave sacrifice its special character.<sup>56</sup> Perhaps most important for this inquiry, libations were performed at the beginning of what is often termed “Olympian” sacrifice, poured once during its progress onto the flames surrounding the cooking meat, and once onto the remains to conclude the rite. On a white-ground lekythos from the early classical period in London (no. C–6), a wreath-crowned priest demonstrates such a *σπονδή* as he pours from a libation bowl onto a burning altar. And on a later red-figure amphora by the Phiale Painter, one sees all of the human counterparts of the divine scene of the Berlin Painter vase in Boston: A woman, pouring wine from an oinochoe into the phiale held by a man, makes a libation offering with him onto a blood-stained altar, above which a boukranion, the skull of a sacrificed bull, is suspended (no. C–5; Fig. 12).



FIGURE 12. A man with phiale and a woman with oinochoe make a libation offering at a bloodstained altar. Attic red-figure amphora by the Phiale Painter, c. 430 B.C.E.

## The Phiale: The Sacred Bowl of Libation

Although some *χοαί* often called for large vessels that were tipped by hand into the ground,<sup>57</sup> most libation rituals had a special bowl dedicated to them: the phiale. The phiale could be used for drinking; it appears in symposia scenes, including those of the gods themselves, such as the Kodros Painter's red-figure stemmed cup with a reclining Pluton raising a phiale, accompanied by Persephone in the tondo (no. C-13; Fig. 13).<sup>58</sup>

This usage, which as Heinz Luschey has emphasized, is particularly characteristic of the gods, the uppermost echelon of a striated society. Hoffman observes that "Banqueting . . . was the pastime of the gods, who were thought of as engaged in an eternal symposium on Mount Olympus."<sup>59</sup> At their symposia, the images show us, the gods drank from phialai.

The role of the hand-held phiale in the human realm is charged with numinosity; it is first a libation bowl, a drinking bowl for gods, and only secondarily a vessel for humans. It is this bowl from which the gods are always shown drinking. And it is this bowl from which they are almost always shown libating, except for those scenes depicting Dionysos and certain divine figures with chthonian aspects such as the hero Herakles, who all prefer the wine-god's emblematic kantharos.<sup>60</sup> Luschey has argued on the strength of this evidence that the phiale has a sacramental character and is sacred to the gods; it "belongs" to them and not to mortals.<sup>61</sup> By extension this would imply that every symposium on earth replicates a divine symposium held by the gods.

Arguing from the antiquity and efficacy of the ritual complex of drinking and libations at symposia, and from the mirroring image of the celestial banquet—the "metasymposium" of those who never have to return to quotidian lives—Hoffman has proposed an intriguing solution to the statistical frequency of ancient Greek vases in tombs and in sanctuaries: "The reason for the extraordinary importance attached to pottery vessels as temple and funerary offerings has to do with banqueting . . . drinking vessels were conceived by the Greeks to possess the same magical power to establish a link with gods and heroes for the benefit of the buried dead as they did for the benefit of the living in their own ritual observances on earth."<sup>62</sup> In other words, if Hoffman is right, the gods and the dead received from human devotees votive drinking vessels—charged objects that were special to them—at their special places; the whole ancient Greek cosmos was in some sense a great drinking party, and the vases we now prize, and whose aesthetic values and purpose we continually debate—represented an effort to keep the wine flowing between its various existential constituencies.

Some have universalized the "banqueting" interpretation to other, far more ambiguous scenes where the gods hold phialai. Paradigmatic of this approach are the observations of John Kroll on the archaic black-figure kalpis on the Roman art market in the early part of this century, mentioned in the Introduction (no. 7). The vase depicts Athena, seated, holding her helmet, extending her phiale toward a sanctuary with a flaming altar attended by a priestess. A serpent rears up from behind the throne of the goddess; a sacrificial bull is depicted at the right. In



FIGURE 13. Symposion of deities with phialai. I: Pluton, on couch with phiale and Persephone. Attic red-figure kylix by the Kodros Painter, classical period.



FIGURE 14. Zeus on couch with phiale, and Hera (both with scepters), Ganymede; Poseidon, on couch with trident, and Amphitrite.



FIGURE 15. Dionysos, on couch with thyrsos, and Ariadne; Ares, on couch with spear, and Aphrodite.

arguing against the identification of the vase-image with the archaic cult statue of Athena Polias on the Athenian Acropolis, Kroll writes, “there is no statue base beneath Athena’s stool nor any other detail of style or iconography to suggest that the Athena is a statue. . . . On the contrary, the circumstances that she is seated at the altar outside the temple and on a portable stool rather than a throne imply that it is Athena in person who has come to partake of the offerings; and, as any banqueter would, she has sat down, removed her helmet, and extended her cup, the phiale, the normal drinking-cup of the gods.”<sup>63</sup> That it is Athena herself and not a statue who sits on the stool is almost certain. On the other hand, whether she extends her phiale to receive a drink or to pour one is far from certain. Many of the vases in the catalogue presented here show Greek gods seated exactly as Athena is; and out of many of their extended phialai spill wine libations.

Although not exclusively a sacrificial utensil, but rather an élite drinking vessel, the phiale was primarily and almost exclusively used in libations.<sup>64</sup> The bowl was an evolved form of libation vessel, different from other drinking vessels such as the stemmed cup and skyphos. It was flat and shallow, with no lip, no handle, and no foot. It had a raised boss in the center (*omphalos*), so that one could grasp it from below for pouring (see, for example, the pottery example by Sotades, no. P-6; Fig. 16).<sup>65</sup> In the more delicate of the vase-paintings, we can observe how both mortals and gods held the bowl, with thumb on the edge and middle finger underneath at the center (see no. C-2, a white-ground lekythos in London by the Aeschines Painter, showing a standing man pouring a libation from a phiale into the ground; the wine, in added red, is visible as it falls). If metal, the phiale was often multiply lobed, and the lobes are often clearly visible in the vase-paintings. As was typical of libation, unless one was offering to the dead, in which case the entire contents of the phiale were poured into the ground, some of the liquid was spilled onto the ground or altar and the rest was drunk (as in no. C-12, an amphora at Oxford that depicts a man drinking from a phiale after pouring a libation).



FIGURE 16. Athenian terracotta phiale by the potter-painter Sotades, mid-fifth century B.C.E.

Although one could simply pour libations from the phiale, often a more elaborate ceremony took place, and it is this that we often see in the vases that depict libating gods. The wine was poured into the phiale from another sacrificial vessel, a wine jug called an oinochoe. The phiale and oinochoe became an iconographic formula repeated endlessly in classical vase-paintings. They were either wielded together by one individual, as in the scene on a late archaic stemmed cup by Douris of a youth making an offering at an altar using both vessels (no. C-4), or else the wine was poured into the phiale of the sacrificer by an attendant or another participant, as in the red-figure amphora in Boston where a woman and a man offer libations at a blood-stained altar (no. C-5).<sup>66</sup> This familiar mortal tableau, then, is the model for the scene we observe in the Berlin Painter vase now in Rome (no. 29; Figs. 2 and 3), where the winged figure Iris (or Nike) holds the oinochoe for the god Apollo, who is in the process of pouring a libation at the wreathed altar. But the mortal scene has been transfigured: The gods are doing the pouring.

Why are the Greek gods represented in Attic art holding phialai in their hands from the early to the mid-classical period? At least one suggestion has to do with the image of the Orient, the home of the vessel, in the ancient Greek social mind. The phiale came to Greece as early as the ninth century B.C.E. from Asia Minor and the Near East, where fine examples in precious metals have been found such as the bronze examples from excavations at ancient Sam'al (no. P-2) and Karkemish (no. P-3).<sup>67</sup> In the great lion-hunt relief from the North Palace at Nineveh, the Assyrian king stands before an offering-table; he pours a cascading libation from a phiale over his dead prey, heaped up in leonine splendor (no. P-1; Fig. 17). However, starting at around 500 B.C.E., there is an explo-



FIGURE 17. The Assyrian king, standing before an offering table, pours a wine libation from a phiale over dead lions. Stone wall relief from the palace at Nineveh, 645–635 B.C.E.

sion of phialai in vase painting and in temple dedications. Hoffman strongly suggests that the phialai dedicated in Greek temples, conforming as they did to the daric standard, were Persian: spoils of war (*aristeia*: “rewards of valor”), gifts, bribes.<sup>68</sup> Following Lushey, he notes the vessel’s lineage: “The shape was introduced to Greece from Persia, where gold and silver phialai were used for ritual drinking and where such objects were traditionally presented by the Great King as royal gifts to faithful vassals and to ambassadors from foreign states.”<sup>69</sup>

Phialai in their fundamental ancient Near Eastern form were ideally rendered in metal, and many phialai in precious metal are mentioned as votive offerings in sanctuary inventories, including the treasuries of the Athenian Acropolis. Dietrich von Bothmer contends, “The function of the phiale made it a vase of and for the gods, and almost demanded that it be made of noble metal.”<sup>70</sup> Most extant metal phialai are silver; very few gold bowls survive. The Museum of Fine Arts in Boston owns a rare and beautiful example from the site of the original Olympic games, dating from the late seventh century B.C.E. (no. P-4).<sup>71</sup> Chapter 3 presents evidence suggesting that the libation bowls held by the gods in our vase-paintings were, in the artists’ imaginations, gold: the superimposed painting of metallic lobes, for example, or embossing.<sup>72</sup>

Most of the surviving classical Attic phialai are not metal at all however, but terracotta, as is the signed example by Sotades (no. P-6; Fig. 16) in Athens or the ivy-leaf decorated phiale from the Kanellopoulos Collection in Athens (no. P-7). In addition to images of precious metal phialai on red-figured clay vessels, there is also the highly complex art historical problem of whether the clay pots themselves substitute for golden phialai in votive contexts, and if so, why.



### The Role of Σπονδαί in Animal Sacrifice

What kind of libation are our deities performing? An initial survey of the iconographic evidence seems to point to the probability that the Olympians are practicing their own version of Olympian cult. What arguments support this hypothesis? The first is the presence of altars, often with built fires and the blood stains of habitual cultic use, in almost a third of the catalogue entries (71 out of 247). Together with the ubiquitous oinochoe and phiale, the altar is an indispensable element at the highly orchestrated *θυσία*. But this did not stop a scholar of the stature of Walter Otto from asserting that all of the libations poured by the gods, even onto altars, were ultimately intended for the primordial earth, their ancestress Gaia.

The second argument for Olympian sacrifice by the gods is the fact that when the liquid offering is visible in the vase-paintings, which, as mentioned earlier, it often is, the divine libations are almost certainly all offerings of wine. A bold crimson stream, added in red by the pot painter, falls from the lip of the libation bowl. The liquid offering par excellence of blood sacrifice was wine; in Olympian cult, milk, honey, and oil were almost completely obscured except as ingredients to bind the crushed grain for sacrificial cakes. However, the libations of *χοαί* (for the dead) and those which were part of *σφαγή* (the ritual slaughter of an animal for the underworld powers) employed not only propitiatory or nourishing liquids such as milk or honey, or purifying liquids such as the water that Oedipus must pour as a *καθαρισμός* for his trespass in the grove of the Furies, “daughters of earth and darkness.”<sup>73</sup> Wine was also used in such sacrifices. According to Lucian, wine for the dead was unmixed<sup>74</sup>—as it was in *σφαγή*<sup>75</sup>—perhaps because, in its purer potency, the dark, crimson flood was a homologue for the blood of the victim as it rolled below.<sup>76</sup> As a rule, the wine used in *θυσία* was mixed with water, a consecrated drink-offering reflecting quotidian ancient Greek drink.

Σπονδαί have a fixed place in animal sacrifice (*θυσία*, literally, smoke), appearing at the very outset and in ritual repetition thereafter. Aristophanes’ *Peace* shows how the cry *sponde, sponde!* inaugurated the sacrificial action.<sup>77</sup> Wine was poured onto the meat as it was roasted on the altar’s flames. Libations also concluded the sacrificial meal, as Euripides reveals in *Ion*, when wine was poured over the flaming remains.<sup>78</sup> “Thus the sacrificer with the libation bowl in his hand above the flaming altar became a favorite iconographical motif.”<sup>79</sup> Vase-paintings do indeed show people (and gods) in the process of pouring a cup on a piece of meat burning in flames on or above the altar—as in, for example, **no. C-8**, a red-figure oinochoe from the Louvre by the Kraipale Painter that shows a youth roasting viscera over a sacrificial fire, while a priest, left hand raised in reverence or prayer, pours a libation from a cup held with his right hand into the flames. **No. C-35** also shows a libation in progress during the cooking of the meat. On a shattered red-figure stamnos in London from the Polygnotan group (**no. C-33**), Nike herself appears above the sacrificial scene like a holy little helicopter, energetically pouring wine from her oinochoe

onto the flames as they consume the spitted meat and pelvis with the ox-tail (ὄσφύς).

Animal sacrifice in Greece was an elaborate, festive affair, and its scripted action as revealed by the Homeric epics and classical tragedy has been described in sequential detail by Burkert in his *Homo Necans*, and recently illustrated by Folkert van Straten in *Hiera Kala*.<sup>80</sup> Here I offer a skeletal summary, largely following the schemata of Burkert and von Straten, with representative references to the iconographic catalogue in this volume.

Preparations for the θυσία focused on purity—the participants bathed and dressed in clean clothes,<sup>81</sup> and adorned themselves with ornaments and wreaths.<sup>82</sup> They formed a procession (πομπή) and led the animal victim, bound with woolen fillets, horns covered in gold.<sup>83</sup> The worshipers carried certain paraphernalia, some of which are visible in the archaic Saphthouli pinax mentioned in the Introduction (no. C-27): a basket filled with grain (κανοῦν) which hid the knife (μάχαιρα), a water-jug, and an oinochoe for wine libations.<sup>84</sup> An incense burner, called a thymiaterion, was also often carried in the procession, set up and lit to fill the atmosphere with scent.<sup>85</sup> The destination of the πομπή was the altar, already stained with blood from previous sacrifices—as we so often see it in our vases (see, for a gory example, no. C-32, a cult scene of Apollo on a bell-krater by the Hephaistos Painter in Frankfurt).<sup>86</sup> A large receptacle (σφαγείον) was set before the altar to collect the blood, and the table (τράπεζα) for the division of the animal's body.

As is the case with simple depictions of libations, vase-paintings often imagine the cult image of the deity, with or without hierophant, receiving the procession for an animal sacrifice. Examples are Athena Promachos on an archaic black-figure cup (no. C-29) and on a belly-amphora in the Pergamon Museum in Berlin (no. C-30) or the Dionysiac herm on the oinochoe (no. C-31) in the same collection. Musicians accompanied the procession; all was festivity. “Nothing here suggests the coming death of the animal which is central to the ritual act”<sup>87</sup>; except, perhaps the great ropes that visibly restrain large animals as they were led in procession on the vases. Durand and Schnapp extend Burkert’s notion of ritual as controlled anxiety further: Sacrifice euphemizes, marginalizes, and even suppresses the anxiety—producing the violence that is at its core. “The human order, etc. . . .” “The human order guaranteed and required by the gods is thus established, around a dangerous act which contains within it the seeds of a violence that could destroy that very order. This violence, then, must be kept at a distance to prevent it from contaminating or insinuating its way into the ritual procedure. The act of sacrificial killing is treated with discretion, being omitted, for example, from the depictions of the ritual.”<sup>88</sup>

The priest washed his hands in the water of a lustral basin (χέρνυψ). It is this moment that is captured in a krater in Boston in the manner of the Kleophon Painter, dating from around 440 B.C.E. (no. C-28). As his assistant leaned over the sheep victim, steadying the animal with two hands on either side of its head, the priest dipped his hands into the water to sprinkle the sheep, which caused it to shake its head—taken, euphemistically interpreted, as its

willing assent to the sacrifice.<sup>89</sup> After a brief silence and prayer (εὐφημεῖν), the participants flung unground barley grounds (οὐλαί) onto animal, altar, earth.

The knife was then uncovered in its basket.<sup>90</sup> The ἱερεὺς stepped toward the sacrificial animal, cut a few hairs and threw them into the fire; the victim was no longer unblemished.<sup>91</sup> As Burkert observes, “This is another, though more serious, act of beginning (ἄρχεσθαι), just as the water and the barley grains were a beginning.”<sup>92</sup> The victim was stunned with a blow to the head. At the death-blow, the women screamed, which in *Seven against Thebes* Aeschylus calls “the Greek custom of the sacrificial scream.”<sup>93</sup> The animal’s throat was swiftly cut, and, as was the case in ancient Israel, the altar was splashed with the blood of the animal (αἱμάσσειν τοὺς βωμούς) caught in the bowl. This ritually manipulated blood is often emphatically depicted in vases with added red, in many cases also apparently splattered by the artist onto the vase-picture of the altar, rather than carefully painted, in order to reproduce the effect in lived cultic architecture.<sup>94</sup>

The animal victim was carved up on the τράπεζα. The viscera were gath-ered first; the priest plunges his hand into the opened chest and pulls out the organs (τά σπλάγχνα): heart, lungs, liver, and kidney in an order dictated by tradition. The heart was put on the altar, the lobes of liver examined by a seer. The entrails were roasted and eaten, with the priest receiving the choice portions, the γέρας. That which would not be eaten, the thigh-bones (μηρία) and pelvis with tail (ὄσφύς) were put on the altar “in their proper order (εὐθετίσας)” as established by the archetypal sacrifice of Prometheus at Mecone.<sup>95</sup> The fire consumed these remains.

Libations formed the coda of the θυσία. The remainder of the meat were spit-ted and wrapped in bundles, and seared in the flame; prayers to the gods were made and at this point, libations poured upon the altar, as in *Odyssey* 3.459–460: “The old man burned these on cleft sticks, and poured the gleaming wine over”<sup>96</sup> (see nos. C–8, C–33, and C–35). “As the alcohol causes the flames to flare up, a higher reality seems present. Then, as the fire dies down, the pleasing feast gradually gives way to everyday life.”<sup>97</sup>

The body was spread out on the same table, which was used in the second division of the meat.<sup>98</sup> The rest of the meat was cut into portions and boiled; “[t]he pictures show cooking, but never eating, since nourishment itself is not the main point.”<sup>99</sup> Often, everything must be eaten on the spot (ὄφρα); but the meat was sometimes brought to table and threaded on spits, whereupon it was carried away to be eaten outside the sacred zone.<sup>100</sup> The same rite took place at the end of the sacrificial meal—one detached the tongues of the victims, threw them on the fire, then proceeded to pour the prepared wine onto the flames.<sup>101</sup> Then one drank the wine.<sup>102</sup>

Intelligible on one level, then, is the late classical bell-krater at the Louvre in which Hermes, bearing a garlanded caduceus, festal wreaths, and a decorated phiale, leads a ram to sacrifice at a small altar (no. C–42), or the red-figure oinochoe by the Karlsruhe Painter of an earnest little Eros *splanchnoptes*, carrying off spitted meat from a sacrifice (no. C–40). Also apparently status quo would be the scene on a black-figured olpe in Ferrara of Athena holding two



FIGURE 18. Athena roasting the entrails of a sacrificed animal. With her right hand, she pours a libation from a phiale onto the fire. Drawing of an Attic black-figure olpe, 480–470 B.C.E.

spits in her left hand on which are wrapped sacrificial entrails roasting over a low altar-fire, while with her right hand she douses the flames with a phiale (no. C-37; Fig. 18). With the exception of Dionysos, who tears apart a hind in an ecstatic dance on a famous stamnos in London (no. C-39; Fig. 19) and, on a pelike, before a flaming altar in no. C-38, the gods do not themselves kill animals in vase-paintings. However, this is entirely consistent with the visceral reluctance on the part of ancient Greek artists to treat the moment in sacrifice when the animal is slaughtered.<sup>103</sup> As Jean-Louis Durand writes of the vase-paintings, “Death and sacrifice are separated without exception. The gesture which opens the death-passage in animal throats is never depicted.”<sup>104</sup> On another level, though, we are in very strange cultic country indeed. These sacrificers shown at various stages of sacrifice, are gods—the very gods to whom animal sacrifice is dedicated. The gods are most frequently depicted pouring libations onto the leaping flames of blood-splattered altars. But these vase-paintings are not scenes of epiphany; no mortals assist the gods in their sacrifice, or appear in the vicinity of the divine rituals, hands raised in reverence. The *σπονδαί* of the gods take place in a realm wholly other than that of mortals, and although the gods may appear at mortal sacrifice, there is apparently no disturbance here of their timeless offerings by their worshippers. Only the reverse sides of these vases, where people sometimes pour their own offerings, hint that the gods’ ritual acts are or should be imitated in the world where things perish.



FIGURE 19. Dionysos, in ecstasy, tearing a hind in half (*sparagmos*). Attic red-figure stamnos by the Hephaisteion Painter, 480–460 B.C.E.

## ΧΟΑΙ

Not all of the vase-paintings of divine libations are obviously scenes of Olympian cult. Some do not include altars, but show the gods sitting or standing, pouring from the *phiale* directly into the ground. Could these be intended to represent *χοαί* rather than *σπονδαί*? What would be the implications of such an interpretation? While *χεῖν* had a wide application as the verb “to pour,” *χοή* was the technical term limited to those below, as, for example, it is used in *Odyssey* 10.518: *χοῆν χεῖσθαι νεκύεσσι*, “to pour libations to the dead.” One honored and cared for one’s dead by pouring drink-offerings for them directly into their graves.<sup>105</sup> As we have noted, offerings of honey, oil, milk, or grain gruel (*πέλανος*) were given to the dead as part of ordinary funerary cult. These were generally referred to as *νηφάλια*, literally “sober things.” Whereas *σπονδαί* are usually wine, they can be any liquid; most *χοαί* are *νηφάλιοι* or *ἄοινοι* (wineless). For example, the Erinyes are harangued at their slumber party at Apollo’s temple by the ghost of Clytaemnestra about the *χοάς τ’ αἰόινους νηφάλια μειλίγματα*

(wineless libations, a sober appeasement) which she faithfully brought them while she was alive.<sup>106</sup> However, this alone does not rule out *χοαί* as the libations depicted by some of our vases; one could also pour wine for the dead, a practice that had already taken root in epic tradition.<sup>107</sup> One could even pour a *χοή* in the middle of drinking from a cup.<sup>108</sup>

Just as *σπονδαί* are completely interwoven into Olympian sacrifice, so *χοαί* are part of all aspects of ordinary funeral cult. The ceremony of making solid offerings at cremation (*ἐναγίζειν*) and liquid offerings after burial (*χεῖν*) were often confused; Hesychios's definition of *ἐναγίζειν* includes the pouring of *χοαί*. And cathartic *χοαί* of pure water, called *λουτρά*,<sup>109</sup> are encompassed as part of the more general verb *ἐφαγνίζειν*—"to make offerings on a grave."<sup>110</sup> Such libations clearly have a purificatory function; but they are intended for the dead to achieve purity (*ἀγνεία*), not the living who pour them. The Greeks spoke of all kinds of libations as the "bath of the dead"; they both functionally and symbolically repeat the bath of the corpse, as is implied in the *Oedipus at Colonus*.<sup>111</sup>

Apart from catharsis, a primary role of *χοαί* is alimentary. The libations are a necessity for the dead—they literally feed on them, according to Lucian: *τρέφονται ταῖς χοαῖς* (they are nourished by the libations).<sup>112</sup> The *πέλανος*, a kind of gruel of grain, honey, and oil, could be offered to both the dead and to the gods. It is the *πέλανος* that Electra brings to her dead father in *Libation Bearers* 92.<sup>113</sup> Poured out with a prayer, it offers a bond between living and dead; in pouring it from the realm of light and air, the living both feed and demand the protection of those who lie below. Attic graves and monuments were equipped with a number of contraptions to facilitate libations.<sup>114</sup>

Beyond their alimentary role, *χοαί* were apotropaic. When they were made up of soothing liquids such as honey or milk, libations could appease volatile and dangerous powers of the netherworlds (the *μειλίγματα* of *Eumenides* 107). Such *χοαί* can exorcise the evil brought by a vexatious presence, such as a nightmare or the apparition of the dead person for whom one pours the libation.<sup>115</sup>

Within the realm of *χοαί*, beyond those ordinary liquid offerings which seek to bathe, feed, calm, or distance the dead, there is also a special group whose purpose is necromancy. These are libations that counterintuitively seek to attract the dead—to reinterest them in the world above, and to summon them back into communication with the living.<sup>116</sup> Mighty examples are the libation prepared by Queen Atossa to raise the dead Darius in Aeschylus's *Persians* 609–618, of milk, honey, oil, and wine,<sup>117</sup> and the Chorus's plea made directly to the ghost of Agamemnon in *Libation Bearers* 150–163 both in conjunction with and in condemnation of the atrocious funerary libations offered by Clytaemnestra.

Various spoken or sung rituals accompany libations to the dead. Atossa offers "chants and threnodies" as she makes her offering (*Persians* 619–620). In *Libation Bearers* 22–23, the chorus comes "sent forth from the palace . . . to convey libations to the accompaniment of blows dealt swift and sharp by my hands";<sup>118</sup> songs of vengeance will follow at the tomb of Agamemnon (*Libation Bearers* 158–164).

Even Electra wonders what to pray when performing the rites prescribed by Clytaemnestra for her dead husband; libations are offered with *λεγόμενα*.<sup>119</sup>

What was the function of *χοαί*, and what were they intended to achieve? Betz notes of “the more magically oriented libations for the dead, of which we possess literary accounts” that “their specific role and function, despite ancient attempts at explanation, remain somewhat ambiguous.”<sup>120</sup> In *Odyssey* 11.34–50, the blood of the sheep slaughtered by Odysseus enables the “strengthless dead” to speak; they are otherwise mute. But the ritual logic of the blood of victims sacrificed on behalf of the dead, such as that of the twelve Trojan captives slain by Achilles on the bier of Patroklos (*Iliad* 23.23–24),<sup>121</sup> is difficult to determine, that is, what did such sacrifice do for the dead? Did such blood bathe or nourish them as did water or milk? The answer again seems to lie in the potency of destruction, of loss that cannot be recouped. Spilled blood is a good offering for the dead because like them it is poured out, never to return.

The utter irretrievability of libations to the dead seems structurally tied to the nature of funerary customs of destruction.<sup>122</sup> In prehistoric warrior burials in the Central Asian steppes and Asia Minor, we find destruction and burning of the dead one’s possessions, almost as a way of uniting him irretrievably with the next world.<sup>123</sup> At Marathon, the tholos grave of a king or warrior dating from the fourteenth century B.C.E. features the symmetrically opposed skeletons of two horses placed at the mouth of the *dromos*; they were sacrificed with him when he died.<sup>124</sup> Similarly, libations are completely lost—“destroyed,” as it were—as they soak into the ground.

Is it conceivable that the Olympian gods on our vases are pouring libations to the dead or to the earth? It is true that ancient Greek religious practices associated with sky and earth, respectively, seem divorced from, rather than married to, one another. This was true even in the dichotomy between the sacrificial blood of the holocaust animal, which was allowed to drain down, and that of the Olympian victim, which gushed up toward the sky and onto the raised altar. However, symbiosis between remote Olympian gods of the sky and heroized ancestors occurred at sanctuaries throughout Greece; some well-known examples are the worship of Athena and Erechtheus on the Acropolis, or that of Zeus and Pelops at Olympia.<sup>125</sup> In fact, although the shining splendor of the Olympian realm depends on its very remoteness from death, the eternity of death strangely mirrors the eternity of the gods: Neither the dead nor the gods can ever change.<sup>126</sup>

Depending on the interior logic of both ancient Greek myth and practiced cult insofar as we understand them, we would have to ask to whom or on whose behalf would the Olympian gods pour *χοαί*? The ascendant generation of Greek gods, consisting of Zeus, his siblings, and offspring, gained power *διὰ κρατερὰς ὑσμίνης* (in cruel battles)<sup>127</sup> by overthrowing a previous divine generation, that of the voracious patriarch Kronos and the race of Titans, children of Ouranos and Gaia (*Theogony* 453–885). The Titans were driven to the netherworld, a place of misty gloom at the ends “of the dark earth” held fast with walls of bronze. Are the sacrificing gods pouring apotropaic or propitiatory libations to neutralize or appease their outraged ancestors, confined to the netherworld?

There is no indication from myth that the generation of Zeus felt remorse at the outcome of their battle with their older relatives, or that these deaths required ritual expiation, and it is uncertain just how dangerous the Titans are. Unlike the Norse Ragnarök, Greek mythology does not anticipate a time when the primordial forces—even those of Chaos, who first came into being (*Theogony* 116)—will burst their fetters and destroy the divine order. Nevertheless, in Vedic mythic literature, this is exactly the scenario. Sacrifices are performed by the current generation of gods for the Sādhyas, an ancestral generation of gods who have retreated from the universal playing field.

Γαῖα, the Earth herself, is also a likely recipient for the gods' libations, if a recipient there must be (and this is a very important "if"). For she is ancestress of all generations of the gods, both old and new. Who really received *χοαί*? That the earth was thought to drink them is indisputable. We know this from *Libation Bearers*, where the libation is twice called γάλοτος, "to be drunk by the earth," in 97 and 164; the phrase is repeated in *Persians* 621. That the offerings were thought actually to reach the dead is also clear, as Electra's words reveal: ἔχει μὲν ἤδη γαλότους χοὰς πατήρ (my father has by now received the libations) (*Libation Bearers* 164). In *Persians* 219–220, the chorus even distinguishes them as two separate recipients: "Next thou must libations pour to Earth and dead."<sup>128</sup> Jean Rudhardt notes, "The earth receives them [libations] in a manner so evident that sometimes one expresses oneself as though they were destined for it."<sup>129</sup> Chthonian offerings were utterly bound to the realm of the earth and the symbolic movement downward into the ground that is their telos.

### The Identification of the Drink-Offering with the God

We asked at the outset why the Greek gods are so often represented in the act of pouring libations rather than performing some other ritual, and whether there was some special relationship between the god who receives libations, the god who pours them out, and the poured-out liquid itself. Throughout the history of libation pouring in the ancient world, intimations of the liquid offering as a conveyer of divine identity continually surface. This has not been the case with animal sacrifice.

The correlation of ancient Greek libation with the "pouring out" of *human* identity—that acquired during a lifetime—is made by Burkert, who perceives the dying Oedipus's prescribed libation to the Eumenides at the grove at Colonus (*Oedipus at Colonus* 461–492) as an augury of and parallel to the king's final exit, uniquely symbolic of his passage from life to death.<sup>130</sup> As he is to empty out the required vessels of their pure water and honey into the earth, so, according to Burkert, the ritual anticipates Oedipus's mysterious death, where he will be literally "swallowed up by the earth," like a libation. Ismene and Antigone are told by the messenger that their father's body, like a draught for the dead, is unrecoverable: ἀλλ' ἢ τις ἐκ θεῶν πομπὸς ἢ τὸ νερτέρων εὖ νοὺν διαστὰν γῆς ἀλύπητον βᾶθρον (either it was some messenger of the gods or else the painless base of the



infernal earth opened itself by separating).<sup>131</sup> Oedipus's body, and thus his continued identity on earth, is gone for good; his daughters may perform no funerary cult for him. "The act of 'pouring' is a paradigm of the state of non-reversal."<sup>132</sup>

The argument that can be made against Burkert's thesis is the fact that it is not Oedipus at all but his daughters who must carry out the initial libation for him, as he is too old and weak. Furthermore, even they do not accomplish the ritual, since they are captured and held by the evil Creon. Whether or not Burkert's analysis is valid, the concept of the libation as a religious conveyer of identity is far older than the Greeks. Not only was the ceremony integral to ancient Indo-European religious ritual; "that which is poured out" also seems to have been strongly associated with divine power itself. This is most striking in the relationship of the various verbs for pouring.<sup>133</sup> The Vedic sacerdotal title for an important priest was *hotar* (*hotr*), which in the Avesta was *zaotar*.<sup>134</sup> Both of these are derived from the Sanskrit verb *hūtar*, meaning "to pour a sacrificial offering." Calvert Watkins suggests that the English word "god" comes from the same stem; he proposes the following etymology: *hūtar* gives us the participle *hutāh* (the god Agni, for example, is often called *ā-huta-*, "the libated one").<sup>135</sup> The corresponding Greek verb χεῖν has the verbal adjective χυτός; the "libation root" is observable in proto-Germanic languages in forms such as the Gothic *giutan*, finally becoming the German "Gott" and the English "god." Thus, rather than only meaning "the one to whom offerings are made," the word "god" may also mean "the one who is poured out as a libation."<sup>136</sup>

Controversial Hittite texts apparently speak of pouring the libation wine that *is* the god from a large vessel into a drinking cup. An example of this is a Kumarbi text, KUB 10.69.4.2–3: "The king [and] queen, seated, drink Simesu (a Hittite god)." In an effort to avoid Eucharistic connotations, this verb has often been rendered as "gives to drink." For example, H. Craig Melchert supports the view of Jaan Puhvel that the verb should be translated "drink to the honor of," based on the argument that the verb *šipant-*, "to libate" takes either the dative or the accusative, and that the verb "to drink" (*eku-*) should be translated similarly.<sup>137</sup> However, Harry E. Hoffner, professor emeritus of the Oriental Institute at the University of Chicago, notes that these phrases alternate with "he drinks the cup of God X," which, according to Hoffner, "shows that the cupful of beverage actually represented the god."<sup>138</sup> And according to the late Hans Güterbock, a phrase such as "they drink the god" means "that the liquid, presumably wine, is the god, and [a] passage which says 'they pour him into the cups' seems to clinch this."<sup>139</sup>

Where the ancient identification of liquid with deity cannot be disputed—because it is unequivocally stated—is in the case of the wine-god Dionysos. In Euripides' *Bacchae*, Teiresias says of his divine lord, οὔτος θεοῖσι σπένδεται θεὸς γεγώς, ὥστε διὰ τοῦτον τὰγάθ' ἀνθρώπους ἔχειν (he is poured out to the gods, being a god himself, so that through this [action], good may be the lot of human beings).<sup>140</sup> E. R. Dodds comments on these lines, "He, being god, is poured out in offering to the gods, so that to him men owe all their blessings (because the libation of wine was part of a prayer). Σπένδεται is quite certainly

passive (not middle as L.S.<sup>8</sup>) nor is there any play on the middle sense (as Paley, etc., fancied). The statement that Dionysos ‘makes a truce with the gods’ would have no meaning in the context. The thought is curious, recalling Paul’s mystical ἐγὼ γὰρ ἤδη σπένδομαι (2 Timothy 4.6), ‘I am poured out as an offering.’<sup>141</sup> Dodds finds a “closer parallel” in “the Indian belief in the identity of the god Soma with the Soma-libation,” quoting the observation of Charles Eliot that “some of the finest and most spiritual of the Vedic hymns are addressed to Soma, and yet it is hard to say whether they are addressed to a person or a beverage.”<sup>142</sup> Citing the Thracian cult of Dionysos βότρυς, Dionysos the Vine-Cluster,<sup>143</sup> Dodds concludes: “It is tempting to see here not merely the rediscovery but the survival of an ancient religious idea.”<sup>144</sup> Tempting indeed, and the ancient idea continues to survive in different guises, as a poster outside the Kaiser Wilhelm Cathedral in Berlin might illustrate (see O–5; Fig. 20): the Holy Spirit is represented as a great pitcher in the sky, pouring out its contents onto humanity.

#### Libation: Common to All Rituals; Offered to All Gods

In the catalogue of a 1991 show at the Antikensammlungen in Munich on the sacred and secular usage of wine in ancient Greece (*Kunst der Schale, Kultur des Trinkens*), Susanne Pfisterer-Haas notes the archetypal, generalized nature of



FIGURE 20. Poster at Kaiser Wilhelm Cathedral, Berlin: God’s Spirit as a pitcher pouring itself out onto humanity. “Gottes Geist weckt Freude und Hoffnung” (God’s Spirit Awakens Joy and Hope). Contemporary.

the depictions of libations in classical art. “Wine offerings in vase-images are never to be related to a specific situation, but rather reproduce in a paradigmatic, exemplary way important moments in the life of a human being.”<sup>145</sup> Such scenes are timeless and nonhistorical. The vase-paintings of libation are in a sense generic ritual scenes just as libation itself is in a sense a generic ritual, not especially associated with any one type of petition, ceremony, or sacrifice, but performed as an integral part of all ceremonies in which human beings interacted with the other world.

Not all ancient Greek gods received honey-cakes or slaughtered animals; not all received their sacrifices by day, by night, on a βωμός or on an ἐσχάρα. But libation is also the generic offering of ancient Greek religion—all gods received libations. Furthermore, it was common for libations to be addressed not so much to one particular god as to all of the gods, as in the *Odyssey*'s tale of the Phaiakians' send-off of the wanderer Odysseus: οἱ δὲ θεοῖσιν ἔσπεισαν μακάρεσσι, τοὶ οὐρανὸν εὐρὺν ἔχουσιν (they poured a libation to all the blessed immortal gods who hold wide heaven).<sup>146</sup> The scholiast to *Iliad* 9.158 says that only Hades, whom Achilles calls “among all the gods the most hateful to mortals,” receives neither libations nor sacrifices.

Libation is often dismissed as a simple ceremony whose only ritual role is as a mark of deference to supernatural powers. However, legend indicates that the ritual had more efficacy. Serving an apotropaic role, libations could be a response to bad omens and to the “green fear” that ensues, as in the trembling Achaeans' response to the thunder of Zeus in *Iliad* 7.480–481: “They spilled the wine on the ground from their cups, and none was so hardy as to drink, till he had poured to the all-powerful son of Kronos.” Drink offerings from goblets highlight the sacrifice made by Chryses to Apollo to alleviate the plague in *Iliad* 1.462–474. “Libations and savour” seem to have a peculiarly persuasive power over the gods, and can even weaken their Olympian resolve. In *Iliad* 9.497–501, the aged Phoinix, begging Achilles to recover from his dangerous sulk, tells us that even “the very immortals can be moved; their virtue and honour and strength are greater than ours are, and yet with sacrifices and offerings for endearment, with libations and with savour men turn back even the immortals in supplication, when any man does wrong and transgresses.”<sup>147</sup>

The singling out of “libations and savour” resonates in *Iliad* 9.500 with the statement of Zeus in *Iliad* 4.49. These are the aspects of sacrifice, drink and smoke offerings, which are specifically consecrated to the gods, and which, if we are to believe Zeus, they especially like. Indeed, drink offerings and animal sacrifice are often mentioned in tandem, as if of equal value, in great festival offerings.<sup>148</sup> In his ode in honor of Aristagoras of Tenedos, Pindar celebrates the devotion to Hestia of the people of Tenedos πολλὰ μὲν λουβαῖσιν ἀγαζόμενοι πρόταν θεῶν, πολλὰ δὲ κνίσσῃ (honoring you [Hestia] with libations as first among gods, and with much sacrifice).<sup>149</sup>

To recapitulate, the act of libation, and the very liquid poured out in its performance, were special to the gods. Libation was a ubiquitous ritual in ancient Greece, associated with every form of sacrifice and appropriate for every kind of ceremonial transition. Libation had its own vessel, the phiale, which was

also singled out in art as the special cup of the gods. As we have seen, ancient Indo-European religion may even have identified the liquid poured out with divinity itself, an idea preserved at least in the case of the wine of Dionysos through the fifth century B.C.E. and beyond, perhaps expressed in the consumed wine of the Christian Eucharist, where the wine becomes the blood of Christ and by extension, of God himself.

Ironically, this universal quality of the ritual may be part of the reason why it has been so hard convincingly to decode the scenes of sacrificing gods, to offer an iconology rather than just a description of iconography. When the gods pour libations on vases, the search for “invisible recipients” of the divine drink offerings may be a distraction. Libation is, to use Pfisterer-Haas’s phrase, “paradigmatic and exemplary” of the rituals that are consecrated to all the gods. However, libation is by no means the only ritual the gods perform in late archaic and classical vase-painting. As will be dismissed later, other, unique scenes of particular gods engaged to varying degrees in particular ritual actions—in fact, actions that are specific to their own individual cults—belong, I believe, in the same “force field” as the original vases of divine libations.

### Is Libation Sacrifice?

Let us return to our original question. Can we speak of the Greek gods who pour libations in fifth-century Attic vase-paintings as “sacrificing gods”? What kind of a ritual is libation? Is it sacrifice, which is defined as “primarily, the slaughter of an animal as an offering to God or a deity”?<sup>150</sup> This is certainly not the case; in libation, nothing is killed.<sup>151</sup> Does libation even carry the implied, secondary meaning of sacrifice, namely, “the surrender to God or to a deity, for the purpose of propitiation or homage, of some object of possession”?<sup>152</sup> It is particularly tricky to imagine an accurate taxonomy for the ritual of libation. It is debatable to whom libation is surrendered, and for what purpose.

Two modern scholars have offered highly divergent theories on exactly what it is that libation accomplishes. In one of his more daring forays into sociobiology, Burkert suggests that libation is a kind of reinforcement of identity in sacred topography, whose chief purpose is not to “give” something to the gods at all, but to make a “mark” that the worshiper has been there, at a certain place. In considering the frequent nature of libation, he reiterates the conservative nature of ritual, which “seems to bear rather a high survival value for the pious community.”<sup>153</sup> Along these lines he writes, “‘Ritual’ is something atavistic, compulsive, nonsensical, at best circumstantial and superfluous, but at the same time something sacred and mysterious.”<sup>154</sup> The actions of ritual, those things that Plutarch and Pausanias call *δρόμμενα* (things that are done),<sup>155</sup> involve, according to Burkert, a strong similarity to ritual behavior in biology—namely, a “stereotyped pattern of action, independent of the actual situation and emotion; repetition and exaggeration, theatrical effect; and the function of communication.”<sup>156</sup> Stressing the communicative function of libations, Burkert notes that libation produces a result; there is a solidarity among those who

drink as among those who eat together. For that reason, it is a ceremony closely associated with hospitality, alliances, peace treaties, departures, and separation. In other words, libation is deeply conservative in that it stands against anything that threatens to dissolve a valued bond of community.

Burkert maintains that “once we adopt the biological perspective, we cannot overlook the fact that marking a territory by pouring out liquids is a ‘ritual’ behavior quite common in mammals, especially predators; we are all familiar with the dog’s behavior at the stone.”<sup>157</sup> Although he concedes that “to connect this with libation seems to be an outrageous joke,” he also claims that some aspects of twentieth-century folk “ritual behavior” at frontiers or boundary stones are quite similar to what the dog does, namely, “the marking of ‘familiar, conspicuous objects’ and ‘novel objects’—functioning “to maintain the animals’ familiarity with its environment.”<sup>158</sup> That is, pouring out liquids from metallic or clay vases into the ground or onto altars to douse sacrificial flames is generically related to the marking of stones and objects by dogs on their rounds. Presumably, then, libation is a way of reinforcing the status quo of the relationship between human community and sacred territory. Hence, “the similarity to libation ceremonies, from Hattusa to Delphi, seems to be more than superficial.”<sup>159</sup>

Many objections might be raised to this potentially specious approach, not the least of which is the fact that male dogs, when involved in territorial marking, do not urinate on the ground; they urinate on bushes, trees, and stones. Burkert’s analysis, while it might seem to hold for *σπονδαί*, eclipses an entire category of ancient Greek libations which are every bit as central as libations onto altars and herms, namely earth-bound *χοαί*. Burkert’s reference to biological comparanda seems to offer very little understanding of the solemn and extremely diverse nature of libations. As we have seen, liquid offerings accomplish many functions, some of which have very little to do with territory. For example, Burkert says that even funerary libations make marks at the tomb of the deceased, which, he maintains, is “a signal communicating that the family of the dead person is still alive and flourishing.”<sup>160</sup> This can hardly be the primary motive for grave libations, which are clearly meant as gifts for the deceased; white-ground lekythoi show family members, oinochoe in hand, approaching the deceased who waits sorrowfully, seated at his or her tomb. But as we have also seen, Burkert is particularly troubled about how the gods get any of the liquid of libation. By reducing the ritual to a simple ceremonial mark of respect (that actually camouflages its even simpler role as a mark just made for the sake of marking), Burkert resolves one of his more profound problems with Greek cult in general: “There is no direct correlation with beliefs; wine for the Olympian gods is poured onto the ground.”<sup>161</sup>

Jean Rudhardt takes a very different view of this problematic religious act. He accounts for the interjection of libation in so many rituals by seeing the drops of liquid dedicated to the divine powers as a kind of numinous catalyst that “mobilize[s] the religious force that operates the subsequent rites.”<sup>162</sup> For Rudhardt, this activation of power is central to the sacral action of libation. Free of the literalistic concerns of Burkert about how the gods get the liquid, Rudhardt

concedes that a poured libation does not constitute an actual gift for them. In fact, he asserts:

Nothing indicates that the poured liquid is offered to the divinities; not only is it the case that the texts mention libations, ignoring their destined recipients in silence (*Il.* 2, 341; 4, 159; *Soph. El.* 270; *Aristoph. Wasps*, 1216–17; *Xen. Hell.* 4.7.4; 7.4.36, etc.) but one should note above all that the texts which are the most precise, distinguishing between libation in the narrow sense of the word, the act of pouring the liquid and the prayer which is associated with it, render the gods as auditors of the prayer but do not portray them as directly interested in the poured liquid (*Xen. An.* 4.3.13–14; *Cyr.* 4.1.6–7; *Thrasymachus* fr. 4 Muller).<sup>163</sup>

Rudhardt finds, however, that the ritual has another role: “the dispersal of liquid establishes a specific rapport between the divine world and that of humans, and creates a situation favorable to the efficacy of prayer.”<sup>164</sup> He also suggests that when a part of the liquid is poured out in *σπονδαί*, the remainder of the contents of the vessel is also consecrated. Thus drinking the remainder of the wine unites the devotee to the divine forces evoked by the absorption of the liquid, and ensures his protection by them.<sup>165</sup>

In Rudhardt’s view, an anthropomorphic relationship with the gods is superimposed over this basic mechanism of activated power. Libation is a perquisite of the gods, as much as the smoke of the sacrifice. This is a way, as one invokes the gods, of interesting them in “the poured-out liquid” as in an offering.<sup>166</sup> Thus libation is associated with other rites to which one accords efficacy and prayer. “Libation plays a role favorable to the events which it inaugurates.”<sup>167</sup>

Rudhardt’s interpretation takes Greek religion far more on its own terms than does Burkert’s. But it contains a perfect internal contradiction. Because the recipients of libation are sometimes not mentioned as it is performed, it is Rudhardt’s belief that the gods are interested in the prayers made to them rather than the liquid that is simultaneously poured out. The liquid is a kind of magical conveyer of power, a catalyst that ensures that the ritual will “work” and the prayer will be heard. However, one then has to contend with *Iliad* 4.48–49, *Nemean Ode* 11.6, and other passages that stress that libations are indeed treasured by the gods—not to mention some of our vase-paintings that show the gods happily stretching out phialai to receive them! In Rudhardt’s proposed framework, this can be dismissed as “an anthropomorphic overlay” of meaning.

Literary, inscriptional, and iconographic evidence tell us that libation functioned independently of animal sacrifice; the ritual established boundaries, sealed oaths and treaties (especially treaties of peace), bathed, nourished, and summoned the dead and propitiated the powers of the underworld. No warrior would leave for battle without first offering a libation to the gods. But neither would any sacrifice be undertaken without first bringing the wine jug in solemn procession to the altar. In classical Greek religion, the two types of ritual, the

pouring of liquid and the slaughter of animals, were structurally intermingled. Wine was poured on the altar, inaugurating the sacrifice, and doused the flames at its conclusion.

Libation may indeed be a marker of crucial limits, a supernatural medium that attracts the gods and the dead, fueling the efficacy of all rites. It is perhaps the remnant of an earth-oriented Indo-European offering ritual that began as pure ancestor worship. The argument against libation as *sacrifice* is that it is purely a sign of reverence, and not an actual gift. However, what else would it be? We can easily imagine how the Eumenides might receive water at their grove in Colonus, or Demeter Chthonia receive oil in the soil at Phigalia.<sup>168</sup> The problem in our limited imagination arises purely in the case of the Olympian gods. We cannot imagine that the Olympian gods were thought of as receiving the wine of sacrifice directly, except in those numinous vase-paintings where they hold out their bowls; but “in reality” libations are “lost” in the altar-flames or in the earth. But this is perhaps too literal-minded, and religion, while often concrete, is seldom literal. Neither do the high gods receive the meat that is cooked on their altars, and yet they miss it mightily if it is absent. Zeus’s words are clear enough: The libation and the savor are not only part of animal sacrifice but they are also the special part that belongs to the gods who live on high, their “fair portion of honour.” Ancient Greek libation of any sort is performed not in a vacuum but for the sake of divine powers, to importune or appease them. Libation, when poured, belongs to the gods. It thus should be considered as part of the larger sphere of ancient Greek religious action of sacrifice. It would be easier to interpret the vases if we did not classify libation as “a possession surrendered to a deity,” since deities are represented as doing the surrendering. But the paradox of gods who pour out libations cannot be so easily resolved.

## 2

# Iconographic Evidence

Let us return to the characteristically noble vision of the Berlin Painter as it is expressed in the vase in Boston (**no. 29; Figs. 2, 3**).<sup>1</sup> MFA 1978.45 stands (max.) 40.2 cm in height, its kalpis shape bringing to the hydria form a lower, fuller appearance. It has three handles, two symmetrically placed on the shoulder and one connecting neck to shoulder. Below the symmetrical handles appear exuberant horizontal palmettes caught up in spirals with two lotus buds. In vogue for several decades during the subarchaic period of vase-painting, the shape probably has its genesis in bronze vessels.

The entire decorative field of the vase, called the register, is involved in this sacrificial scene. Although palmettes, lotus buds, and spirals above and meanders below frame the gods, the Berlin Painter does not conventionally limit the actual field of depiction for the kalpis shape with ornamental designs. The Swiss connoisseur Herbert Cahn, into whose hands the vase came, probably from an Etruscan grave, remarks: “[N]ew to this hydria is the concept of covering the whole body of the vase with large figures.”<sup>2</sup> It was one of the characteristics of the Berlin Painter that his divine figures tended to be as large and majestic as the shape of his pots would physically allow. The upper bodies of the gods fill the shoulder of the vase; the actions of their sacrifice circles and encompasses its entire field; the sacrificial scene is thus very difficult, if not impossible, to photograph without distortion. In the detail, strength, and resolution of the work, Cahn finds in this vase “the master at the apex of his artistic career, in his finest script.”<sup>3</sup>

We see that Apollo, the god of music and light, is closest to the altar. In an apparently sacerdotal role, he bears his seven-stringed lyre, the kithara, over the altar, and with his right hand tilts a libation



bowl directly downward, at an angle perpendicular to the ground. He holds the bowl outward, facing the viewer, so that we can see its interior and central boss—the *mesomphalos*. The god turns back to Iris, one foot—the one closest to the altar—facing the viewer, with toes only visible, and the other visible lengthwise. Apollo appears to be about to pour the contents of his bowl, which Iris holds her oinochoe to fill, onto the altar. The god's hair is long, and a broad decorated band attached to his lyre reaches almost to his feet. Like Athena and Hermes, Apollo wears a laurel crown; Iris, Leto, and Artemis wear diadems. Apollo flanks the altar with his sister Artemis and mother Leto. Artemis, in chiton and beveled cloak, may well hold another phiale in her left hand; that section of the painting has disappeared.<sup>4</sup> In her right, she raises part of her garment. Her quiver stands behind her. Her mother Leto, with lighter hair, brings in her right hand a lotus bud to lay on the altar. Upon the altar itself a wreath has been laid with two blossoms;<sup>5</sup> it is decorated with a frieze that has an ornamental band of Lesbian cymations.

The messenger goddess Iris stands behind Apollo, proffering her wine vase as if to fill the god's phiale. Her wings extend well beyond the handle where, to her left, the intermediary god Hermes, conductor of souls, hurries away with *petasos* (traveling hat) and winged boots; his hand is raised in the gesture of reverence or awe associated with epiphany.<sup>6</sup> On the right, behind the mother and daughter who so frequently appear in tandem in other examples of this scene, strides Athena, daughter of Zeus and goddess of war and wisdom. She approaches the sacrifice in grandeur, spear thrust in front of her. Her helmet, removed and held at arm's length, reveals disc-shaped earrings. The central scene of the composition breathes peace and sacrality; at its periphery, all is urgency, motion, and perhaps even ambivalence in the counter-moving figure of Hermes.<sup>7</sup> Hermes's gesture will occur elsewhere on the vases in this catalogue: It is the *mortal* gesture at the presence of numinous power, such as occurs at an epiphany or is concentrated in a sacrifice. We see it, for example, in the reaction of the woman to whom Nike displays an oinochoe and phiale at an altar in **no. 167**, a red-figure lekythos in the early classical period from the Ashmolean Museum.

Four of the gods have their names written in conventional retrograde Attic Greek script above their heads: ΛΕΤΩ ΑΡΤΕΜΙΣ ΑΘΕΝΑΙΑ ΕΡΜΗΣ: Leto, Artemis, Athen(ai)a, Hermes. Interestingly, Apollo and Iris, the most active participants in the sacrifice, are not named. Perhaps, to a contemporary eye, such redundant labeling renders the tableau more of an elegant cartoon than a great work of art. But this is not an uncommon feature of ancient Greek vases, and makes identification of the principals in this startling scene indisputable. They are indeed the high gods, and they are indeed worshipping—or at the very least, taking active part in the performance of a ritual.

As we have said, the motif displayed on the Berlin Painter vase is not unique. It is an outstanding example from a corpus of several hundred iconographically related vase-paintings, some black- but mostly red-figure, most of which date from between 510 and 450 B.C.E.—that is, from the late archaic to the early classical period. With so many remaining examples, we can only wonder

how many more variations on this theme have been lost to religious history. Although Erika Simon's groundbreaking work (see chapter 4) offers a partial catalogue, it has not been updated since 1953 in light of new discoveries. Nor does Simon analyze these vases in specific sacrificial categories, other than anecdotally.

To illustrate the theme of divine libations in antiquity, I include in the catalogue 247 artifacts, only a few of which can be illustrated. Vase-paintings are primarily represented, but I have also included marble and bronze sculptural evidence, including stone votive reliefs; I do not treat numismatic evidence.<sup>8</sup> The catalogue is arranged chronologically, with the period between 510 and 450 B.C.E. divided by decades. Within the time period divisions, I have arranged the catalogue entries by media, and within each medium, by deity. The artifacts are designated by the portrayed sacrificing deity who has primacy—so, for example, the vases where Athena attends with an oinochoe the libation of Herakles are grouped under Athena, as are those where she herself pours from a phiale; but those where she attends Zeus are grouped under Zeus.

An exception to this rule is the case of Olympian sacrificial scene featuring multiple divine libations on a relief or vase such as **no. 35 (Figs. 21, 22)**, a red-figure stamnos in London by the Berlin Painter from his middle period (circa 480 B.C.E.). A thematic companion piece to the Boston hydria, the stamnos, like the hydria, features a group of gods encircling the vase, in this case in a procession of eight, culminating in the throne of Zeus. Hermes is there; Demeter with her torches; Dionysos with the sacrificial vessel characteristic of him—not the phiale, but the kantharos; at the handle, a winged Iris or Nike; Apollo with his lyre and holding a tipped phiale; Artemis with an oinochoe; and Zeus, with scepter and libation bowl held up to his own eye level, parallel to the ground. These are grouped under the heading “Assembly of Deities.” Whenever possible and relevant, I show photos of the front and back of the vases. Some of the scenes are obviously connected to mythical stories, such as Herakles's entry into Olympus (e.g., **nos. 5, 14, 25, 54, 55, 182**), the birth of Erichthonios (e.g., **nos. 92, 210**), the presentation by Zeus of the infant Dionysos to the nymphs of Nysa (e.g., **no. 144**) or the mission of Triptolemos (e.g., **nos. 24, 173–175, 177–181**, etc.) Others seem to bear absolutely no relation to myth, a fact that cannot be minimized in any hermeneutical efforts of these images: Instead of a sacred past, even a reenacted one, they seem to represent a religious *present*.

Iconographic examples of “sacrificing gods” appear much earlier than the vases, virtually exclusively in sculpture. Typical of the archaic period is the bronze cult or votive statue of Apollo, a graceful kouros found in Piraeus in 1959. He steps slightly forward; in his left hand he is restored, on the basis of contemporaneous statues, holding a bowl. In his right, palm upturned, he extended a libation bowl, of which a fragment remains (**no. 2**). He may have looked like the cult statue represented on an early fourth-century Apulian fragment from Tarento (**no. 218**). A combination of threat and benevolence, the Piraeus Apollo with phiale dates from around 525 B.C.E.

One may compare the even earlier votive male head of a statue of the mid-sixth century at Delphi from the Halos deposit; this work in ivory is part of an



FIGURE 21. Libation scene on Olympus (compare to Figs. 2 and 3). Iris; Apollo with lyre and tipped phiale; Artemis with oinochoe; Zeus, with scepter and phiale. Attic red-figure stamnos by the Berlin Painter, middle to late, c. 480 B.C.E.

extant chryselephantine statue of an enthroned figure, almost certainly Apollo (no. 1; Fig. 23). The statue has a gilded silver plate on its head, and two large curls of hair on the breast. The lost right hand of the statue was restored by Pierre Amandry with a fluted gold phiale, part of the same hoard. It was accompanied by an also nearly life-sized ivory head of Artemis, wearing a golden diadem. Ionian in origin, these votives have been speculatively associated with Croesus's dedications at the oracle in Herodotus *Histories* 1.47.<sup>9</sup>

Apollo is the most frequent libation bearer in ancient Greek art; perhaps this is understandable. From his role as the prophetic mouthpiece of his father Zeus at Delphi, and from his power as purifier (central to Pythagorean mysticism), Apollo's priestly function might seem natural.<sup>10</sup> One of the more powerful Delphic images from antiquity is the one already mentioned, found on the tondo of an Attic white-ground kylix from 470 B.C.E., discovered at the shrine itself (no. 59; Fig. 6).<sup>11</sup> It shows the sacrificing Apollo, surrounded by his own particular attributes of laurel crown, tortoiseshell lyre, and raven, solemnly watching. The interior of his embossed phiale is visible as he pours; the vigorously painted red



FIGURE 22. Hermes; Demeter with torches; Dionysos with kantharos and thyrsos.

wine of the libation falls toward the ground. We may compare this scene to one on the tondo of a cup by one of the followers of Makron dating from the decade 470–460 B.C.E., now in London (no. 106; Fig. 24); a laurel-crowned Apollo sits alone holding a kithara and a phiale, this time at an altar. The altar's reference to human cult is reinforced by the mortal libation scenes on the outside of the cup: Around the interior column of a sanctuary stand a man with a scepter and phiale, a woman with oinochoe, and a man wearing a wreath-crown with a staff, also extending a phiale (Fig. 25). These are scenes comparable to the British Museum's two Dionysos figures mid-*sparagmos* (nos. C-38 and C-39), discussed in chapter 1, one of which dances in sacrifice with no altar, the other of which includes it.

Artemis, Apollo's sister who appears on the other side of the altar in the Boston hydria, can also be a solitary sacrificer; in no. 27, a white-ground lekythos from around 490 B.C.E. by the Pan Painter at the Ermitage, she graciously appears with quiver and phiale, feeding a swan. In no. 60, the Oreithyia Painter renders the goddess, accompanied by a fawn, visibly pouring a libation into the ground; in the Louvre's white-ground lekythos (no. 109; Fig. 26), she runs accompanied by a bull, carrying a flaming torch, her phiale overflowing and

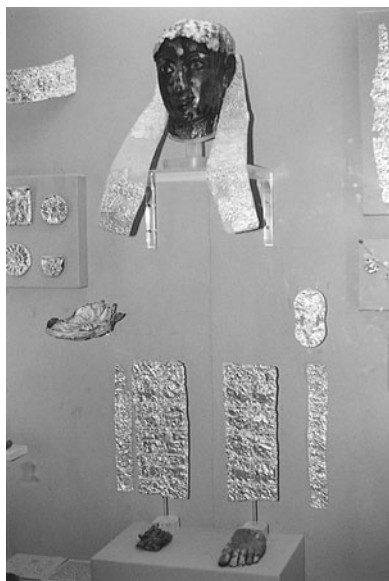


FIGURE 23. Seated Apollo, reconstructed, holding gold phiale. Chryselephantine statue from Delphi, sixth century B.C.E.



FIGURE 24. Divine and mortal libations on same vase. Tondo: Apollo alone, sitting by altar with staff and phiale. Attic red-figure cup, followers of Makron: the Painter of London E 80, 470–460 B.C.E.



FIGURE 25. Mortal libation scenes.



FIGURE 26. Artemis running with bull, bearing flaming torch and overflowing phiale. Attic white-ground lekythos, manner of the Bowdoin Painter, early classical period.

spilling onto the ground in her flight. But like Apollo, Artemis can also engage in cultic observance at an altar. In **no. 108**, another white-ground lekythos, this time dating from the early classical period and shattered in the shelling of a bunker in Berlin in 1945, Artemis stands at an altar with a flaming torch, her oinochoe held to pour. One of the simplest and yet perhaps most compelling scenes of Artemis in ritual performance is a classical black-figure lekythos in Würzburg's Martin von Wagner-Museum by the Bowdoin Painter (**no. 110**). The goddess holds a branch in her left hand that ends in volutes; with her right hand, she pours a libation from a phiale onto an altar on which sits a fruit. A bird perches on the altar. A fawn, one of the animals sacred to the goddess, steps delicately behind her. Beazley, who originally called the female figure portrayed on this vase "a woman," later admitted the view of Möbius—that she was Artemis, and that the bird was indeed a raven.<sup>12</sup>

But Apollo and Artemis seldom pour libations in solitude. Because the brother and sister, in relation to one another—or together with their mother Leto—are such a frequent iconographic grouping in the paintings we are considering, it has been suggested that these vases emphasize a cult with its roots on Delos, birthplace of the twin gods. This idea is supported by an amphora after the Nikoxenos Painter in Hannover which shows a vigorous palm, growing from or behind the altar, symbolic of the palm tree on Delos on which Leto leaned for support while giving birth to the divine twins (**no. C-55**). No divine libations occur here, but the group is familiar enough, and believed by many scholars of iconography to be the prototype of the "the Delphic triad" at libation. The Berlin Painter rendered such a scene (one of the first) very early on in his career, soon after 500 B.C.E., on a hydria in Vienna (**no. 17**); As late as 470 B.C.E. he treats the scene again in **no. 64**, an amphora from Richmond, Virginia, in which Apollo appears at an altar on one side of the vase with kithara and phiale, and Artemis on the other, with quiver and oinochoe held out for her brother beyond the handle. In the Getty's Bareiss Collection we find a classical example on a beautiful trefoil oinochoe attributed to the Richmond Painter; the vase depicts the two deities offering a libation (**no. 191; Fig. 27**).

In contrast, however, Athena, who is not a Delian, pours libations, too: One of a pair of small bronze statuettes discovered on the Sparta acropolis shows her holding a libation bowl as if pouring; the angle of the phiale is such that the liquid could not be retained if the goddess were meant to receive it (**no. 3; Figs. 28, 29**). The way in which the phiale is held is comparable to that of a terracotta of Athena with polos from Rhodes (**no. 202**), a helmeted Athena with phiale from the Kanellopoulos collection in Athens from the late classical period (**no. 239**), a bronze Hermes from the same collection (**no. 241**), and a bronze Zeus or Poseidon in Munich (**no. 200**), where the angle of the bowl is extreme.

Scenes of divine libation on vase paintings begin in earnest in the years 510–500 B.C.E., the decade of the restoration of the Alcmeonids and the democratic reforms of Kleisthenes. Most common in these scenes of divine libation is the enthroned god. A superb cup in Tarquinia shows Zeus enthroned with thunderbolt and phiale, and attended by Ganymede with oinochoe (**no. 4**). Hebe,



FIGURE 27. Apollo, with laurel and branch, pours libation (in added red) from large embossed phiale onto flaming altar; Artemis with oinochoe. Attic red figure trefoil oinochoe, attributed to the Richmond Painter, c. 440 B.C.E.

Hermes, Athena, Hestia, Aphrodite, and Ares are present, all with names inscribed. The central libation scene is similar to the one on **no. 13** (Fig. 30), a pe-like by the Geras Painter in the Louvre, where Zeus, with eagle-bearing thunderbolt, extends his phiale to be filled by Ganymede, and **no. 40**, a later calyx-krater by the Eucharides Painter. Douris gives us a kylix now in the Getty, which shows the pair making a libation at an altar (**no. 41**).

Although Ganymede is undeniably identified with Zeus, it is not necessary to attach any particular erotic significance to the figure of the boy in these scenes. Ganymede's role in pouring for the libation of Zeus is defined by his role on Olympus as cupbearer for the gods. In that capacity, he joins Iris or Nike and Athena to him or to Hera, Artemis to Apollo, Aphrodite to Ares, and Ariadne and maenads or satyrs to Dionysos as frequent sacrificial attendants to the gods. For example, on a kylix from about 480 B.C.E. by the Castelgiorgio Painter from the British Museum (**no. 46**), while Ganymede pours from an oinochoe for an enthroned Zeus on the left, Iris or Nike is attending Hera's libation on the right; Ganymede is one of two attendants for the libating royal pair. And in **no. 10**, an amphora in Munich, it is Iris, with winged boots, who attends the royal couple with phiale and sacrificial vessel. The libation scene





FIGURE 28. One of two archaic bronze statuettes of Athena from Sparta; she extends a phiale with a central boss downward.

per se does not have an erotic connotation; Ganymede is a logical addition to the retinue of sacrificial attendants.

Is the ubiquitous winged female, the sacrificial attendant par excellence, identifiable as the messenger goddess Iris, or is she Nike, the “goddess” of personified victory who is so closely associated with Athena that she perched on the hand of Pheidias’s colossal Parthenos?<sup>13</sup> The winged messenger goddess is more likely to be Iris when she carries a caduceus, or wears winged boots. These attributes tend to appear on the figure in the late archaic period, and to



FIGURE 29. Drawing of libating archaic Athena statuette from Sparta.



FIGURE 30. Zeus, with eagle-bearing thunderbolt scepter, and phiale; Ganymede pouring from oinochoe. Attic red-figure pelike by the Geras Painter, late archaic period.

taper off in the early classical. A minority opinion sees her as Eos, the dawn goddess, as for example in **no. 97**, a kalpis by the Niobid Painter known only recently to the public, although some inscriptions (e.g., **nos. 39, 166**) tell us that this cannot be true in every case.

In **no. 10**, the very early amphora by the Nikoxenos Painter where the figure brings the vessels of libation to the throne of Zeus, she has winged boots just like those of the other messenger deity Hermes, who is also pictured behind the throne of Poseidon. In a similar scene from the late archaic period appearing on the fragments of a pelike in Berlin by the Argos Painter (**no. 39; Fig. 31**), an enthroned Zeus extends his phiale to the winged female figure, who holds up a caduceus, and lifts up a metal oinochoe. Poseidon is seated to the right with his own phiale. All three figures are identified by inscriptions: ΖΕΥΣ ΠΟΣΕΙΔΑΝ (retrograde); and, in a partial inscription, ΠΙΣ or ΝΙΚΕ. However, an early classical pelike in the British Museum by the Villa Giulia Painter portrays a god with white beard and scepter, gesturing with outstretched palm above a flaming altar while the winged goddess, with oinochoe and phiale held over the altar, faces him, and here the inscriptions are clear: The god is ΖΕΥΣ and the ministrant, ΝΙΚΕ (**no. 166**).

Although the cult of Athena Nike is attested as early as the archaic period, the gradual distinction between the goddess Athena and her attribute happened gradually over the course of the fifth century.<sup>14</sup> With the growing popularity of the figure due to the Persian War and the bellicose decades that followed in



FIGURE 31. Zeus with phiale extended to Iris or Nike, with caduceus and oinochoe. Poseidon with phiale extended to right. Attic red-figure pelike fragment. The Argos Painter, late archaic period.

Athens, she was more readily identified as Nike, taking over the role of the messenger and sacrificial attendant Iris, who recedes in iconographic importance. They may in fact overlap, but perhaps only during the late archaic period. By 460–450 B.C.E., Nike is the divine sacrificer.

Except for Ganymede, who stands, all the deities in the Tarquinia cup (no. 4) are enthroned. So rare is it for a mortal to be represented as seated while pouring a libation (in one of a few exceptions, a seated Phoinix is served wine into a phiale by Briseis on a kylix by the Brygos Painter (no. C-3), but we do not see him actually pour) that the seated condition of the figures on an early classical Acropolis fragment (no. 36) was enough for Graef and Langlotz to identify them as divine.<sup>15</sup>

There has been vigorous debate over whether enthroned gods on vase paintings represent cult statues or “living gods.” Those who argue that they are cult statues (as some undeniably seem to be, such as the much later Apollo on an Apulian fragment in Amsterdam (no. 218) or Sabazios and Kybele, who are shown on a base, depicted on the classical Polygnotan krater from Ferrara [no. 195; Fig. 32]) have a problem with which to contend. Liquid often spills from the tipped phialai held by these figures, as it does clearly in no. 36. Even in the instances in which the phiale is held at a parallel angle by the libating deity (89 out of 247, or 36 percent of the scenes), the liquid is still often visible as it splashes from phiale to ground, as for example, in the vase from Ferrara. In vase-painting, any correlation one might hope to make between the staring cult statue and the

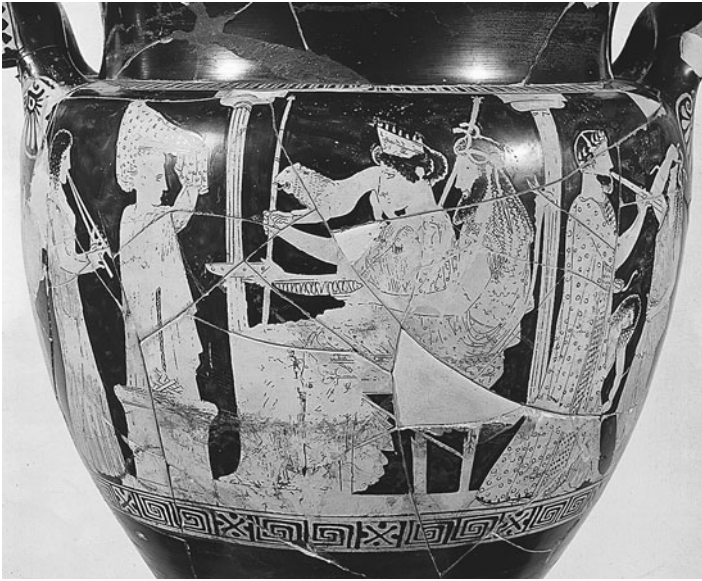


FIGURE 32. Underworld deities hold phialai, libations visible in added white. Cybele and Sabazios? Dionysos and Semele or Ariadne? Hades and Persephone? Attic red-figure krater by the Group of Polygnotos, c. 440 B.C.E.

receiving of wine, or between the animate deity and the pouring of wine is continually contradicted by the evidence. This theme is rather represented in a continuum of cultic activity, where no clear categories apply, and god and statue are one.

The apotheosis of Herakles, welcomed by the libations of the gods in response, is a popular theme in the early decades of the fifth century; in no. 5, red-figure cup fragments by the Sosias Painter from the Athenian Acropolis, we reconstruct Zeus seated on a sphinx throne with his scepter, Hera by his side; Kore, with a high polos, grain ears, and holding a phiale, stands near Demeter. Iris fills the libation bowl. A second phiale is visible. The same theme is treated by the same painter in no. 20 (Figs. 33, 34), an extraordinary cup in which on side A, Herakles is welcomed by the collective libations of the Olympian deities installed on leopard-skin thrones. Nearly everyone seems to be in possession of a phiale. On side A (Fig. 33), Zeus and Hera preside with scepters, both with phialai extended; they are attended by the winged Iris with oinochoe. Poseidon and Amphitrite, the latter clutching a fish, both hold out phialai; Aphrodite is present with Ares; with much of her form abraded, but with her arm visibly extended, as are Ariadne and Dionysos (the latter, again, with his arm extended as if to pour). Side B (Fig. 34) portrays the three goddesses of the seasons, standing, with fruited boughs; the enthroned Hestia (with head veil) and an unidentified goddess, both with phialai; and the triumphal escort of Hermes and Apollo. Herakles, hand raised in the gesture of



FIGURE 33. Entry of Herakles into Olympus, welcomed by the libations of the Olympian deities on leopard-skin thrones. Zeus and Hera, Iris, Poseidon and Amphitrite, Attic red-figure cup by the Sosias Painter, 500 B.C.E.



FIGURE 34. Entry of Herakles into Olympus, welcomed by the libations of the Olympian deities on leopard-skin thrones. The three goddesses of the seasons, Hestia (with head-veil) and an unidentified goddess, both with phialai; Hermes, Apollo, Herakles, and Athena. Attic red-figure cup by the Sosias Painter, 500 B.C.E.

reverential awe we have seen in the Hermes of Boston's hydria by the Berlin Painter, is given an inscription in the vocative as he hails his lord: ZEY ΦΙΛΕ—"Beloved Zeus." Athena brings up the rear. And in a more fragmentary version of this scene, **no. 86**, a red-figure cup by the Providence Painter, an enthroned Zeus greets Herakles by extending a phiale.

One of Athena's more ambiguous roles is to pour for the enthroned or standing hero Herakles, as she does with an oinochoe in **no. 6**, a black-figure skyphos in London. Other examples are **no. 14** and the tondo of **no. 25**, by Makron; in **no. 105**, a Louvre oinochoe by the Niobid Painter in the early classical period, an altar is present, clearly making reference to human-style cult. The recipient of chthonian cult, Herakles holds, almost without exception, a kantharos. The function of Athena as sacrificial ministrant to Herakles, who is an ultimately divinized hero, is comparable to that of Demeter and Persephone pouring for Triptolemos, as in **no. 24**, a pelike by the Geras Painter, and many other comparable vases that can be seen in the catalogue. Both are reversals of the normal hierarchical equation we observe in these vases, where a lesser figure ministers to a more powerful deity, as Ganymede or Iris do on behalf of Zeus—although these two examples, interestingly, maintain normal gender roles for libation. Nike occasionally pours for Herakles, as in a stamnos fragment from Oxford, while Athena looks on (**no. 26**). Athena also holds the libation bowl while seated, as in **no. 16**, a black-figure kalpis by the Athena Painter. The goddess is painted in her sanctuary flanked by two owls on altars (compare **no. C-1**). In **no. 56**, a small column-krater by Myson, she is also shown seated with a phiale. But in **no. 8**, a small black-figure hydria in Mykonos, she has sprung from her contemplative pose to her feet; wearing a high Corinthian helmet, she energetically pours a libation onto a flaming altar.

Dionysos also makes his entrance on the stage of divine libations during the late archaic decade (510–500 B.C.E.). In **no. 9** (**Fig. 35**), an intact, very early red-figure kantharos in Boston by the Nikosthenes Painter, the standing god, with ivy crown, pours from a kantharos onto a burning altar. A maenad to the left of the altar seems to extend her hands *beneath* the red stream of wine and toward the flames. The scene is framed by dancing maenads. John Beazley conjectures that the maenad is strewing handfuls of groats (οὐλαί) on the altar, which she takes from the *κανοῦν*, or sacrificial basket lying on the ground in front of the altar.<sup>16</sup> This vase in Boston is a miracle of cultic self-referentiality, for the kantharos is Dionysos's special vessel, established as his own in ancient Greek iconography long before the first libating gods appear (as, for example, in the scene on the archaic black-figure amphora by the Amasis Painter in Munich, **no. C-21**). Libations are poured to Dionysos from the kantharos, and he is virtually never shown pouring libations from any other type of container. Hence the image renders the god performing a cultic action, within the sphere of his own cult, which appears on the same cultic vessel that it portrays. In other words, *the kantharos, belonging to Dionysos, portrays the god ritually deploying the kantharos*. Both vase and god self-represent, and thus self-ratify and intensify the ritual focus.



FIGURE 35. Dionysos pouring from kantharos onto altar with maenads. Attic red-figure kantharos by the Nikosthenes Painter, 520–510 B.C.E.

Some Dionysiac scenes occur in an apparently purely mythical context, when maenads or satyrs pour for the god's libation, as in the case of **no. 30**, a red-figure pelike in which Dionysos with thyrsos and tipped kantharos receives wine from an oinochoe poured by a maenad wearing the animal skins of the cult; that of **no. 72**, an oinochoe by the Dutuit Painter in Paris; or **no. 71**, an amphora by the Alkimachos Painter, one of whose sides features a satyr pouring for the god while the other side features a maenad doing the same. In the vision of the Eucharides Painter, it is Ariadne who ministers to her dancing, vine-bearing lord (**no. 68**). And surely the mad one, Jane Harrison's "savage god," who tears apart a hind with his hands in a stamnos by the Hephaisteion Painter (**no. C-39**) belongs to the realm of religious imagination and not to that of realized cult.<sup>17</sup> But Dionysos also pours libations from his kantharos at altars, a visual reference to the real world of *polis* cult—as, for example, in the kylix from Orvieto by Douris in Boston (**no. 66**; **Fig. 36**). Unwilling to be shackled either by the fetters of Pentheus or the confines of ritual categories, the god dances with maenad and satyr before a flaming, blood-splattered altar as he grasps the halves of a severed animal in a pelike from Nola (**no. C-38**; **Fig. 37**): The realms of myth and ritual collide.



FIGURE 36. Dionysos extends his kantharos over an altar, with maenads. Attic red-figure kylix, signed by Douris as painter, c. 480 B.C.E.



FIGURE 37. Dionysos, tearing bleeding animal victim (hind) at a flaming altar; maenad dancing; satyr playing pipes. Attic red-figure pelike by the earlier mannerists, undetermined, early classical period.



Divine libations associated with Dionysos are also associated with his birth; these may probably be interpreted as religious gestures of welcome. Makron paints an honorific scene in which Zeus, preceded by Hermes, carries the grape-waving infant Dionysos toward an altar, where two goddesses or perhaps two nymphs of Nysa await the pair, one holding an oinochoe and a leafy sprig; the other, a sacrificial basket (no. 21). Poseidon with his trident and Athena with her aegis and spear follow in the procession. The illustration of this mythical scene is recapitulated in the scene on a red-figure stamnos in the Louvre (no. 144), where Zeus hands the child Dionysos to a Nysa nymph; a mysterious female figure sits enthroned like a deity inside an architectural structure, holding out a phiale and the thyrsos, the wand of Dionysos; does she represent a nymph—or perhaps the heroized Semele and the building, a herōon?<sup>18</sup>

The years 500 to 490 B.C.E. saw the continued political authority of Kleisthenes, the tyrant-reformer, and the growing menace from Persia that culminated in the invasion at Schoinia beach at Marathon. During this period Hermes, commonly a peripheral observer at these scenes of divine libation (as in, for example, in no. 29; Fig. 3), suddenly has his own show. In a red-figure cup by the Hermaios Painter in London, the god appears with petasos and winged boots, earnestly walking along, spilling wine from his phiale as he goes (no. 18). The Berlin Painter renders a Nike running (or perhaps alighting) with phiale and oinochoe on a lekythos now in Harvard's Sackler Museum (no. 19); a few years later, between 490 and 480 B.C.E., he creates an airborne Nike with ritual incense burner (*thymiaterion*) emptying a phiale onto an altar (an oinochoe in the British Museum, no. 31, Fig. 38).<sup>19</sup> She holds the phiale at an angle reminiscent of the one that her creator gives the Apollo in his hydria in Boston, also comparable to the gesture of the goddess identified as Hera in no. 38, a lekythos by the Brygos Painter. This decade also gives us the earliest of nine vases included in this catalogue in which divine libations on the tondo or one side of the vase are mirrored—or perhaps referenced—by a scene of mortal libation on the outside or the opposite side. In no. 15, the tondo of a fragmentary cup from the Athenian Acropolis shows a standing Athena with armband and spear pouring a libation. On the cup's outside, on side B, a hand holds a short-footed kantharos. The inscription, presumably representing what is said by the owner of the hand, says: σπ[ένδω τῷ δαίμονι τῷ ἀγαθῷ] (I am making a drink-offering to the Agathos Daimon).

The threatening years between the Battle of Marathon in 490 and the invasion of Xerxes in 480, the decade of the floruit of Heracleitus of Ephesus, were those which produced the magnificent hydria by the Berlin Painter in Boston that has been our starting point. The same artist painted several other scenes of divine libation at around the same time. On a stamnos by the Berlin Painter in the Metropolitan Museum of Art, Athena pours for Zeus and the polos-wearing Hera, both of whom proffer libation bowls (no. 22; Figs. 39, 40). On the reverse of the vase is the libation at the departure of a warrior. And an amphora in the Ashmolean Museum envisions a standing Zeus extending his phiale over a flaming altar, while Nike pours (no. 23). During this decade we encounter for the first time the Eleusinian goddess Demeter and the missionary hero Triptolemus involved in a scene of libation—as in no. 24 (Fig. 41), a lost vase once in Berlin. Seated on



FIGURE 38. Nike flying with thymiaterion and phiale emptying onto altar. Attic red-figure oinochoe by the Berlin Painter, 490–480 B.C.E.

his winged throne or chariot, Triptolemos sits ready for departure. “[T]his extraordinary throne is that of Triptolemos, the Eleusinian missionary charged by the goddesses . . . with announcing the benefits of cereal culture.”<sup>20</sup> Triptolemos extends his phiale to Demeter with a high polos, who pours from an oinochoe. Over the next two decades, this pair and Demeter’s daughter Persephone (Kore) become an “Eleusinian Triad” to balance that of Delos mentioned earlier; they appear repeatedly in libation, as in **no. 51**, a bell-krater by the Oreithyia Painter in Palermo. These scenes are of an iconographic genre, and seem to represent libations of departure; but the role of sacrificer continually rotates. Sometimes Triptolemos holds the phiale and offers the libation; sometimes he watches as Demeter or Persephone wields both oinochoe and phiale. It has been suggested that the vase-paintings depict the closing ritual of the Eleusinian Mysteries.<sup>21</sup>

Zeus emerges as a frequent sacrificer on the vases painted in the decade of 480–470 B.C.E., as the walls of Athens were fortified and Pindar composed his odes in honor of the Olympic victories of Sicilian dynasts. The Syleus Painter created two similar pelikai of the great god at libation, in one served by Nike (**no. 42**) and in one, by Ganymede (**no. 43**). However, it is to the column-krater from this period by the Diogenes Painter mentioned in the Introduction that I wish to call attention (**no. 44**; **Fig. 7**).



FIGURE 39. Athena pours from an oinochoe for Zeus and Hera, who extend their phialai. Attic red-figure stamnos by the Berlin Painter, 490 B.C.E.



FIGURE 40. Libation at the departure of a warrior, made by a woman with oinochoe and phiale. Seated elder (father?).



FIGURE 41. Triptolemus, on his winged throne, extending phiale. Demeter, with polos, pours from oinochoe; wine visible. Attic red-figure pelike by the Geras Painter, late archaic period.

On side A, Zeus, standing, holds a phiale from which wine cascades; Athena extends an oinochoe. Zeus is identified by two features of the image: his thunderbolt, the numinous object which is uniquely his, and his inscribed name, ΖΕΥΣ. Athena is identified by her helmet and aegis, again, only associated with her godhead; she could not be mortal, and she could be no other deity. These belong to the first category of the representation of divinity I want to highlight, that of *divine attributes*, which are a crucial feature of religious iconography from almost all of the world's religions, whether dead or alive: Certain garments are worn by particular gods in their visual representations, and certain objects associated with them. These attributes are not transferable. They “belong” to the gods’ sphere, as Viṣṇu holds a conch shell and Kālī has skull jewelry.

There is a second category of religious “ownership” inherent in this image, however. Zeus holds a phiale, and Athena an oinochoe. These are recognizable mortal cultic paraphernalia. But because they are associated with the worship of the gods, they also belong to the gods and are also attributive. To Apollo, for example, belong both his oracle, which he himself established on Parnassos, and any omphalos that represents his prophetic power. The shrine at Delphi is Apollo’s, just as the shrine at Eleusis is Demeter’s: threshold, doors, altar, and ritual objects. The altar beneath the Athena Nike temple says “I am the altar of Nike.” Sacred and “set apart” as belonging to the gods are places or objects associated with the second category, that of the physical elements of religious worship. We are not so surprised, therefore, when we encounter the cult statue of the

Hellenistic Isis, for example, holding a sistrum, an instrument of her own cult, or even a medieval painting of the Madonna and child in which the divine child Jesus is shown with a gold cross hung around his neck, referencing the crucifixion as yet unrealized—for the cross belongs to him, a timeless and immortal entity, as does its wearing as a religious token. Although this category of divine belonging may seem incongruous, a moment's reflection seems to endorse it by the inner logic of religion itself. The elements of religion are, of course, in a category that is "other" than the elements of the secular world. The elements of religion, building-blocks of meaning, belong to the gods whose worship they serve.

But Zeus and Athena in this column-krater do not merely hold the phiale and oinochoe, vessels with which they themselves are so often offered libations. They take action. Athena brandishes her oinochoe as if having poured wine into the phiale of Zeus. Zeus pours wine onto the ground; the wine is painted onto the vase. Thus there exists, not only in the case of these vases but also in ancient Greek religion itself, a natural third category: the actions of ritual performance. These, also, belong to the gods. When we see a god performing an act of religious worship, therefore, we are observing that god's sphere of holiness and potency. Religious *actions* are no less divine attributes than are distinguishing features such as the thunderbolt or aegis, or the physical elements of cult.

This hierarchy might then be understood as follows:

Belonging to the god:	Zeus	Athena
Divine attributes	beard, thunderbolt, name	helmet, aegis
Religious objects	phiale	oinochoe
Religious actions	pouring a libation from a phiale	pouring the wine for a libation into a phiale from an oinochoe

In other words, I suggest a "continuum of belonging" to the divine sphere which includes religious actions as well as objects that are appropriate to the specific divinity portrayed. Because libation, as we have seen, is a generic act of worship, it "belongs" to all the gods, and hence this inclusive line of reasoning has been overlooked.<sup>22</sup>

During this decade, Poseidon makes a rare cameo appearance as a sacrificing god, holding a phiale in **no. 49**, a stamnos in which Nike attends him with her oinochoe; Dionysos, with his thyrsos, waits holding a kantharos downward as if having just offered his own libation. An amphora by the Providence Painter in the Ashmolean Museum gives us a robust Poseidon, standing with trident and phiale (**no. 50**). These rare examples of Poseidon as the pourer of libations are crucial for our overall understanding of these vases. As we have seen, although some of these scenes can be interpreted according to myth, to our knowledge no myth recounts libations performed by Poseidon. Thus we are dealing with religious images that are not necessarily narrative, but perhaps more theological and descriptive.

In two vases from the decade of 480–470 B.C.E., the theme of Athena as

sacrificial ministrant to Herakles is notably treated. One is **no. 57**, a cup from Munich by Douris, on whose tondo the hero is seated on the folds of his own Nemean lion skin, with his kantharos extended; his hand is raised in a gesture of reverence at the epiphany of his divine protectress. Holding her owl, Athena pours into the kantharos from an oinochoe. In **no. 58**, an amphora by the Dutuit Painter in the Louvre, Herakles leans on his club in the libation scene.

In **no. 88**, a column-krater by the Mykonos Painter in the Louvre, Nike proffers Poseidon a phiale, and Zeus receives one from an unidentified goddess. However, the theme of Nike herself making offerings also flourishes in this era. Flying Nikes pouring phialai at altars are rendered on lekythoi in Athens by the Bowdoin Painter (**nos. 74 and 75**); the charming vision of the Dutuit Painter on a hydria in London portrays her as a whirlwind of wings and drapery, lighting with oinochoe and phiale (**no. 76**). In **no. 78**, a lekythos in London, the goddess holds phialai in both hands over a flaming, bloodstained altar. The love-godling Eros, who so often attends Aphrodite with the phiale in vase paintings, also flies with phiale and oinochoe on the neck of a Dutuit Painter oinochoe in Munich (**no. 85**).<sup>23</sup> Finally from this decade, mention should be made of the enthroned figures, one of whom holds a phiale, portrayed on the celebrated Locrian reliefs from Reggio di Calabria in southern Italy (**no. 89**). These divinities are probably Persephone and Hades, and might be compared to the similarly chthonian pair in **no. 195**, as well as to the much earlier archaic plaques from Sparta that feature anonymous underworld deities accompanied by serpents and dogs; they grasp the kantharos rather than the phiale (**nos. C-47 to C-49**).

The early classical decade of 470–460 B.C.E. began with Sophocles's first dramatic victory in 468 and Aeschylus's *Seven against Thebes* in 467. It saw the ascent of Cimon, commander of the operations of the Delian League, and the return of the "bones of Theseus" to Athens after his conquest of Skyros.<sup>24</sup> It ended with the fall of the Areopagus in 461 and the Athenian breach with Sparta in 460. Zeus continues to pour libations in the vases of this period, as in a fragmentary lebes-gamikos by the Providence Painter found in the Athenian Agora (**no. 90**), where Zeus extends his phiale to Athena, who extends her oinochoe in a scene reminiscent of **no. 44**.

In two scenes, one on a column-krater in Bologna (**no. 91**) and one on a bell-krater in Palermo (**no. 93**), Athena ushers Herakles into Olympus before the enthroned Zeus, who extends his phiale in welcome; the proud god with his paternal headache even holds the same welcoming phiale at the birth of his daughter Athena from his head in a hydria in Paris, as Hephaistos looks on with his double axe (**no. 94**; **Fig. 42**). In a superb stamnos in the Louvre by the Providence Painter (**no. 95**; **Fig. 43**), a bowl-bearing, enthroned Zeus tips his phiale for Nike, who pours wine into it from her oinochoe; Apollo, standing with kithara, is the other figure in the center; while Hera, without bowl, is enthroned opposite Zeus. The composition is comparable to scenes such as those in **no. 22** or **no. 47**—the latter in which Nike, acting as a kind of bridge between the sacred couple, grasps Hera's hand with one hand, and with the other pours into Zeus's phiale from an oinochoe. One of the most magisterial examples of this theme from this period is also one of the very most recently known, in the

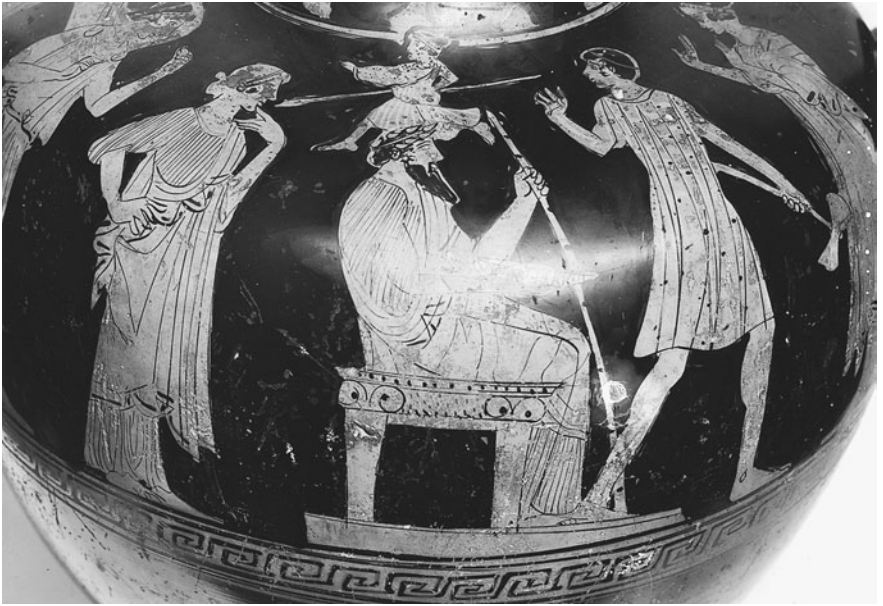


FIGURE 42. Enthroned Zeus extends a phiale while a miniature Athena is born from his head. Hephaistos looks on with his axe. Attic red-figure hydria by the painter of Tarquinia 707, c. 470–460 B.C.E.

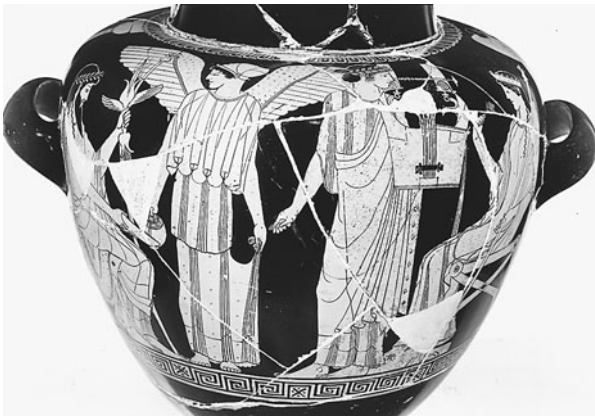


FIGURE 43. Zeus with phiale; Nike with oinochoe; Apollo and Hera. Attic red-figure stamnos by the Providence Painter, early classical period.



FIGURE 44. A winged goddess (Nike? Iris? Eos?) stands holding an oinochoe between Zeus and Hera, who extend phialai. Attic red-figure kalpis, newly discovered work by the Niobid Painter, 470–460 B.C.E.

public domain only a little over a decade: the Niobid Painter's as yet unpublished kalpis, treating the winged goddess with oinochoe standing between Zeus and Hera with outstretched phialai (no. 97; Fig. 44).

In various ritual combinations, the popularity of the "Eleusinian Triad" escalates during the decade 460–450 B.C.E. The Niobid Painter paints a superb example in no. 101. In one of the vases bearing this theme, a calyx-krater in Munich (no. 101), Side A shows Demeter with oinochoe and Kore with scepter, grain, and phiale flanking the empty chariot of Triptolemos; on Side B, a be-wreathed woman proffers a phiale to a seated man with a staff. And on a highly unusual stamnos by the Painter of the Yale Oinochoe in Oxford (no. 102), mortal worshipers seem to be present on both sides. On side A, Demeter with scepter and ears of grain, stands at an altar, served by what seems to be a mortal woman and flanked by two other women; on the reverse, a female figure who wears Persephone's customary headdress receives a phiale and an oinochoe from one of two women who are present with her. The headdress reappears in no. 103, an Attic white-ground cup in Oxford in which Persephone pours libations at a black-and-white-striped altar.



But the Delians (or perhaps more accurately, the Delphians) hold their own in the years between 470 and 460 B.C.E. Examples are the stand of a *lebes gamikos* in Athens, where Artemis holds the *phiale* in a perpendicular display like that of the *phiale* of Apollo in our Berlin Painter vase (no. 111); the Altamura Painter gives us an energetic view of the brother and sister at an altar (no. 113; Fig. 45) in an *oinochoe* from Sunium; in no. 114, the same painter renders the scene on a *krater* in Hamburg, this time showing Apollo's *phiale* held parallel to altar, and showing both Artemis and Leto with *oinochoai*. And in an elegant *hydria* in London (no. 115), the Altamura Painter shows us the triad appearing in a scene of multiple libations without an altar—Apollo with his *phiale* tipped toward the ground; the embossed interior is visible. Artemis, to his left, holds a bow in her left hand and pours from the *oinochoe* held in her right hand; the wine is visible in added red. Leto, bearing a bough, holds a *phiale* in the same position as Apollo's; wine also pours from her *phiale*. An important bell-*krater* in New York's Metropolitan Museum of Art (no. 119; Figs. 46, 47) by the Villa Giulia Painter depicts, on side A, Apollo standing with his *kithara* and *phiale* between Leto on the left with a *phiale* and Artemis on the right, attending him with an *oinochoe*. The deities' names are inscribed orthograde: ΛΕΤΩ ΑΠΟΛΛΟΝ ΑΡΤΕΜΙΣ. On side B, mortal libations are performed by a woman with an *oinochoe*.



FIGURE 45. Apollo and Artemis at an altar. Attic red-figure *oinochoe* by the Altamura Painter, c. 470 B.C.E.

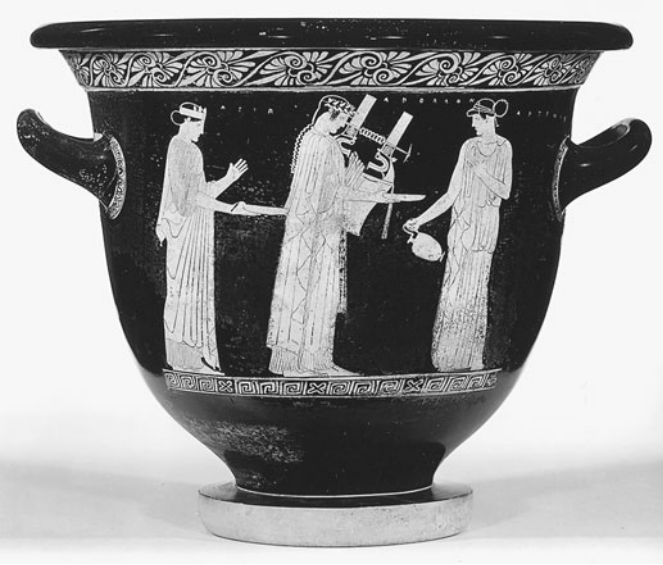


FIGURE 46. Divine and mortal libation scenes. Apollo with kithara and phiale between Leto with phiale; Artemis with oinochoe. Name-inscriptions: ΛΕΤΩ ΑΠΟΛΛΟΝ ΑΡΤΕΜΙΣ. Attic red-figure bell-krater by the Villa Giulia Painter, c. 460–450 B.C.E.



FIGURE 47. Woman running; old man with scepter; woman with oinochoe and phiale.

Aphrodite, accompanied by Eros, makes her entrance with phiale on a white-ground pyxis depicting the Judgment of Paris by the Penthesilea Painter, also in the Metropolitan Museum (**no. 120; Fig. 48**). Athena is there with helmet and spear; Hera wears her marriage veil and holds her staff; Aphrodite holds the phiale as her attribute in the same way that the other goddesses hold their special items. Interestingly, divine libations play an important role in what seems to be another rendition of the Judgment of Paris (absent Paris?) on a red-figure pyxis from the same decade, this one by the Wedding Painter and now in Athens at the National Museum (**no. 138**). The pyxis frontally portrays a seated goddess, holding a distaff (?); an enthroned Aphrodite, crowned, with scepter and swan, receiving a flying Eros with oinochoe and phiale; an enthroned Hera with phiale extended; and an enthroned Athena, who also holds out her phiale with its interior visible. This iconography of Aphrodite's resurfaces in **no. 209**, a pyxis-lid in Copenhagen from the late fifth century B.C.E., a Judgment of Paris scene in which Aphrodite's chariot is pulled by winged Erotes, both with phialai.

The Niobid Painter twice treats Dionysos at his altar during this decade, once on the reverse of a judgment of Paris scene on an amphora in London; Dionysos extends his kantharos as a maenad attends him with oinochoe (**no. 121**). In the second, another amphora in New York (**no. 122; Figs. 49, 50**), Dionysos again pours onto an altar, this time with his kantharos tipped downward even further so that there can be no doubt as to whether his intentions are to receive or to pour out the wine, as a bough-bearing maenad attends with an oinochoe. Side B of the New York amphora depicts a mortal, perhaps, as Beazley suggests, a king because of his scepter, holding out his phiale in a scene of libation; a woman attends with bough and oinochoe.

Nike has a new role in the vases from this period; in addition to her familiar figure standing at the burning altar, pouring wine as in **no. 123**, a lekythos in the Athens National Museum, or flying to the altar with oinochoe and phiale in a vigorous scene on an amphora in Boston by the Alkimachos



FIGURE 48. Judgment of Paris. Aphrodite, holding phiale, with Eros; Athena with helmet and spear; Hera with veil and staff; Hermes with winged boots and caduceus; Paris; man with staff. Attic white-ground pyxis by the Penthesilea Painter, 465–460 B.C.E.



FIGURE 49. Mirror scenes of divine and human libation. Dionysos offering wine from kantharos onto altar; maenad attends with bough and oinochoe. Attic red-figure neck-amphora by the Niobid Painter, c. 460 B.C.E.

Painter (no. 127), we find her attending mortal warriors in their libations of departure. Nike pours for a warrior in a krater from Ferrara by the Niobid Painter (no. 131; Fig. 11, discussed in chapter 1); the warrior seems unsurprised to discover her there in all her glory holding the oinochoe, but patiently extends his phiale, perhaps as one might approach a large exotic bird that has landed on one's porch. The departing warrior's wife, whose normal ritual role this would be, stands by soberly holding his helmet and shield; analogous is the scene on an amphora in London, no. 132. The theme will be reprised later in the classical period with the Achilles Painter's rendition on a lekythos in the Louvre (no. 168). In the meantime, another winged deity, Eros, has grown from the small boy we have been seeing to a young man in the Charmides Painter's amphora in the Louvre (no. 137), where he pours a visible wine libation onto a blood-sprinkled altar.

In the last decade of the early classical period, 460–450 B.C.E., Pericles emerged as a radical leader of Athens. At war at last with the Peloponnesians, Athens added central Greece to its sphere of domination; in 454 the Athenian tribute lists began. Aeschylus produced *Agamemnon* in 458; 455 saw the first



FIGURE 50. Mortal (Beazley: “King”) in libation; woman attends with bough and oinochoe.

production of Euripides, and traditionally the historian Herodotus dwelled in Athens. These years also produced the most “libating god” scenes of any time period in our collection (58 out of 247; the decade preceding it, 470–460 B.C.E., is second, with 55; 480–470 B.C.E. has 51).

One of the most extraordinary is no. 145, a red-figure pyxis by the Agathon Painter in Berlin’s Pergamon Museum. A bearded divinity crowned with leaves, identified by Erika Simon, John Beazley, and Ursula Kästner of the Pergamon Museum as Zeus, stands with a scepter at a flaming, blood-flecked altar.<sup>25</sup> There he pours a libation from a metallic phiale in front of a column marked with stripes of red (blood?), perhaps representing the interior of a sanctuary. An offering-table (τράπεζα) stands behind him. A female figure proceeds toward the libation with a sacrificial basket. Another τράπεζα appears after her. Hera is next, running with her scepter, her hand outstretched.<sup>26</sup> Next we see a bloodied omphalos or low rock altar. A sacrificial attendant bearing oinochoe and phiale hastens toward the central scene. If these figures are indeed divinities, they are steeped in the ambience of sacrifice, and surrounded by the apparatus of cult.<sup>27</sup>

Not as complex, but lovely in their own right, are the two vases by the

Lewis Painter depicting Zeus and his daughter Athena in libation scenes. **No. 146**, a skyphos in Leipzig, envisions Zeus standing up from his throne, holding his long scepter and extending a phiale. Athena, all the way on the other side of the vase, seems to look back over her shoulder at him as she runs with her spear, holding her helmet before her. **No. 147**, another skyphos, this one found in Cerveteri and now in Vienna, offers a less animated scene; Zeus, enthroned, offers his tipped libation bowl to Athena, who pours for him from an oinochoe. But Athena has her own moment in **no. 149 (Fig. 51)**, a Nolan amphora by the Achilles Painter in New York. A female who seems to be mortal, perhaps a priestess, pours from an oinochoe into the phiale of Athena, who watches with great interest. This vase is typical of scenes that would be readily interpreted as an offering of wine *to* the divine being *by* the human being depicted; and this would seem to make absolute sense. However, the iconography of the vase itself says otherwise. The wine does *not* stay in Athena's libation bowl, as it should; it splashes therefrom onto the ground, following the normal trajectory from oinochoe to phiale to earth or altar.

The Niobid Painter weighs in heavily during this period, and he is most interested in the grouping of Apollo and Artemis and/or Leto at libations. From his hand we have an altar scene on a pelike at Karlsruhe (**no. 154**) and a hydria



FIGURE 51. Athena spills wine from her phiale onto the ground; a female figure pours from an oinochoe. Red-figure Nolan amphora by the Achilles Painter, 460–450 B.C.E.

in Paris (no. 160), in which Hermes watches as Artemis pours for a seated Apollo; Leto crowned, bearing another phiale, approaches with laurel boughs and scepter. No. 161, a majestic hydria from Lalysos, is a personal favorite of mine, perhaps because I had to go through so much to photograph it—ultimately, after a long procession involving several celebrants down the arcades of the Rhodes Archaeological Museum, the vase and I ended up in a sunlit courtyard used to store cleaning supplies. Two female figures, presumably Leto and Artemis, flank Apollo, who grasps a kithara and wears a laurel wreath, at an altar on which blood stains are visible. On the left, Leto extends a phiale with decorated rim toward her son. On the right, Artemis, wearing a diadem, carrying a torch, and standing next to a throne, tips a phiale downward. The libation scene on no. 162 (Fig. 52), a neck-amphora in Würzburg, seems to take place in the interior of a sanctuary, indicated by a Doric column behind the altar. Apollo cradles a laurel branch and tortoiseshell lyre as he extends a phiale over an altar. Artemis appears to his left with an oinochoe; Leto, to his right with a phiale.

A Boeotian treatment of these gods from this period, on a calyx-krater in the Athens National Museum, has a decidedly Delphic tone, featuring a wreathed



FIGURE 52. Apollo with laurel wreath and tortoise-shell lyre extends a phiale over an altar, in a sanctuary? Artemis to left with oinochoe; Leto to right with phiale. Attic red-figure neck-amphora by the Niobid Painter, c. 450 B.C.E.

omphalos and a tripod on a column (no. 150). Apollo, in himation and chiton, with kithara, holds a phiale, with its embossed interior visible, over the omphalos. Artemis, with quiver and torch held downward, pours from an oinochoe into her brother's bowl. To Apollo's left, Leto extends her libation bowl. Two vases showing the brother and sister gods at divine libation also represent mortal libations on their reverse sides: The Sabouroff Painter's tableau of Apollo and Artemis adds emphatic red to represent the liquid of the libation and the flames of the altar (no. 151); on the back of the vase, a woman runs, holding a phiale. And on a large volute-krater in Boston from around 450 B.C.E. (no. 153), Apollo, crowned with laurel and holding a bow, extends a phiale toward his sister Artemis, who holds a kithara and an oinochoe by her side. An interior column represents a sanctuary. Leto, to the left of the column, fashions a wreath. No altar is present at the scene. On side B, three women surround an altar. The woman to the left holds an oinochoe and laurel branch; the central woman, holding a scepter (perhaps a priestess?) holds the phiale over an altar. A woman to the right holds up her hand.

After 460–450 B.C.E., the number of scenes of divine libations tapers off sharply on extant vases. The first two decades of the classical period proper (450–430 B.C.E.) encompassed the construction of the Parthenon, and saw the peace made with Persia in 449 blighted by the invasion of Attica by Sparta in 446. Sophocles's *Antigone* was probably produced in the later 440s, and Euripides's *Alcestis* in 438. In 437 the Parthenon and chryselephantine statue of Athena Parthenos were dedicated; her sculptor, Pheidias, was prosecuted for embezzlement and fled to Olympia. In 431, the Peloponnesian War began, a national hemorrhage from which Athens would never fully recover.

The classical pantheon is still represented at libation; on an amphora in the Louvre, Zeus extends his phiale to Nike, who pours from an oinochoe (no. 170); the scene is repeated with Hera as principal in no. 171, an oinochoe in London. Poseidon is regally enthroned with his trident, clutching a phiale on an amphora by the Painter of the Louvre Symposium (no. 172). In no. 177 (Fig. 53), a hydria depicting the departure of Triptolemos on his magic chariot with overflowing phiale extended, and a crowned Demeter pouring from an oinochoe, gives us name-inscriptions for the deities: ΤΡΙΠΤΟΛΕΜΟΣ ΔΕΜΗΤΗΡ. The theme is also treated by one of the classical period's vase-painting masters, Polygnotos (no. 178). Athena, too, continues her duties pouring for Herakles and his kantharos, especially clearly on an Attic white-ground lekythos in London (no. 182); the goddess is labeled ΑΘΕΝΑΙΑ. No. 183, which also treats the Athena-Herakles libation, is a Boeotian lekythos found in the *polyandrion* (mass grave) in Thespiai.

A perfect example of the kind of mirroring of divine and mortal cultic actions we sometimes encounter in these vases, a Boeotian skyphos in Athens by the Painter of the Argos Cup depicts Apollo holding a lyre and maenad holding thyrsos, both with phialai (no. 184). She pours into his bowl, from which the liquid spills. The earthly libation scene on the reverse shows two women making a libation at an altar; a boukranion (bovine skull) is suspended overhead. And in a perfect example of how there is always something new under the sun





FIGURE 53. Departure of Triptolemos, on winged chariot with overflowing phiale; Kore; Demeter pouring from oinochoe. Attic red-figure hydria by the Painter of London 183, classical period.

in ancient Greek religious art, a bell-krater, also Boeotian and also in Athens, gives one a start (no. 188) if one turns it around (as I did, under the eyes of a watchful ANM guard who did not appreciate my exclamation). Side A is a canonical scene of divine libation, the type with which we have become (more than) familiar: The god Apollo, holding a tortoiseshell lyre, holds out his phiale for Artemis, with quiver and bow, who pours for him from her oinochoe. But side B is the home of what seem to be *two* Apollos, one seated, and one standing, each with lyre and laurel wreaths. Are they Apollo's priests? Music students? A round disc shaped like the interior of a phiale is centrally suspended above them.

In no. 189, an oinochoe in Berlin, the stances of Apollo and Artemis and the positions in which they hold the libation vessels reprise almost precisely the scene on the Berlin Painter's hydria in Boston (no. 29; Figs. 2, 3). Apollo gains other attendants as well in this decade: on the delicately rendered fragment of a cup from Orvieto in New York by the Calliope Painter, the god is accompanied by a female divine figure—perhaps Artemis, holding her bow in her lost right hand; perhaps a Muse, even Calliope herself; each hold phialai parallel to the ground (no. 192). In no. 193, a bell-krater in Syracuse, Italy, Apollo with kithara offers a visible libation poured for him by Ganymede, whose oinochoe still drips wine from its lip.

But this is also the era of the “foreign” gods, as the religions of Asia Minor, Syria, and Thrace begin to make their way into mainland Greece, the islands,

Etruria, and Sicily. As discussed earlier, two enthroned deities with phialai preside over a krater from Spina, which seems barely able to contain its subjects (no. 195; Fig. 32). Hades and Persephone have been suggested as identifications for the deities, but their divine attributes point further east; the god wears a snake headdress, and the goddess has a lion on her shoulder who helps her to grasp her scepter. Beazley, who once believed these deities to be Dionysos and Ariadne (a reasonable choice, given the krater's iconographic programme), has since ceded to Erika Simon's identification of the gods as Sabazioi and Kybele.<sup>28</sup> An altar, piled with wood, stands before the pair. A priestess approaches with a covered basket on her head, as does a votary playing the double flute. A celebrant approaches with a tympanon, a musical instrument sacred to Kybele's cult. Around the register of the vase, an ecstatic dance explodes.

Are these gods dead or alive? They sit on a kind of pedestal or base in an interior or sanctuary scene; these elements suggest that they are cult statues. Yet confusingly, liquid pours from their phialai, delineated in added white. Claude Bérard and Jean-Louis Durand see in this scene a kind of *participation mystique* between the divine and human figures. "This group [the two deities] cannot be separated from the right-hand section of the frieze. In fact, the libation cups are not merely decorative accessories or attributes; they are functional: liquid flows and spreads to the foot of the altar in front of the pedestal. (This essential detail is scarcely visible in the photographs, since it is painted in added white, which is extremely fugitive.) Although static, this mysterious couple thus participates in the general action, carrying out a libation, as if in response to the musicians and dancers who frame them."<sup>29</sup>

At the start of the last thirty years of the fifth century, Attica was devastated, first by the plague and then by the Peloponnesians. Sophocles presented *Oedipus Tyrannos* around 430; Pericles died the next year, and Kleon rose to power. The peace of Nikias in 421, the year Aristophanes composed his *Peace*, gave way to the perilous rise of Alkibiades, culminating in his doomed Sicilian Expedition in 415 and the flight of its leader, charged with sacrilege, to Sparta. Of Zeus or Hera we see no more until the marble reliefs of the fourth century, but on a lekythos in the British Museum (no. 203), Athena or her statue with a phiale sits on a rocklike formation in a sanctuary designated by a column, a pouring lion spout, and a perirrhanterion (lustral basin). A horseman approaches from the right on foot, leading a rider on horseback. Apollo is himself the rider on no. 205, a fanciful oinochoe from the late fifth century in the British Museum. Astride a griffin, perhaps returning from the Hyperboreans, the god is greeted by Leto and his sister Artemis, holding a phiale. A superb bell-krater after the manner of the Dinos Painter in London from 420–400 B.C.E. portrays Apollo, with lyre, pouring from a phiale onto an omphalos decorated with fillets (no. 204; Fig. 8). Artemis, with quiver and torch, holds an oinochoe. Hermes approaches from the left with caduceus and winged boots, and to the right, Leto, crowned, holds a phiale parallel to the ground. But a red-figure pyxis from Spina by the Marlay Painter in Ferrara's Museo Nazionale adds some unexpected elements, both Delian and Delphic, to the usual libation scenes of the triad (no. 206). The personified Delos herself appears identified by an inscription:

ΔΗΛΟΣ. She is seated on an omphalos with phiale extended. The central scene of divine libation, framed by an olive or laurel tree to the right (representing Delphi) and a palm tree to the left (representing Delos) shows Apollo with his lyre, extending his phiale over a smaller, filleted omphalos. Artemis, with her quiver and torch, holds the oinochoe. On the far right, Hermes watches near a tripod. Leto approaches from the left with phiale.

A decidedly stiff-looking cult image of Aphrodite from circa 410 B.C.E. holds two phialai in a squat lekythos in Oxford (no. 207). The goddess is flanked by a pair of thymiateria (incense-burning being a special aspect of her cult), two erotes, and two women. The curators at the Ashmolean speculate that the vase may depict the sanctuary of Aphrodite and Eros on the north slope of the Athenian Acropolis. In no. 208, a calyx-krater from the Louvre, Dionysos is less circumspect than ever, running with his thyrsos before a rider wearing leafy crown and holding his own thyrsos, signaling his participation in the god's cult. As he runs, the god spills out wine from his kantharos.

The scene on a calyx-krater in the Schloss Fasanerie focuses on the divine inhabitants of the Erechtheion (no. 210; Fig. 54). The "living" Athena and the aging king Kekrops, with a snake tail, bring liquid offerings at the birth of Erichthonios; Nike attends them with an oinochoe. The basket of Erichthonios stands closed, covered with a cult rug, next to the sacred olive tree of the Acropolis. The

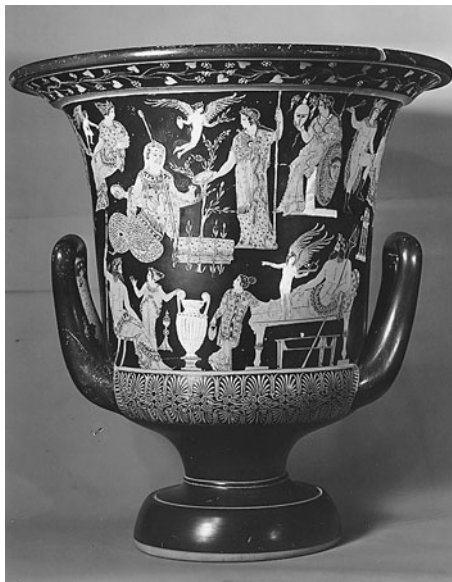


FIGURE 54. The divine inhabitants of the Erechtheion: Athena and aging king Kekrops, both with phialai, bring liquid offerings at the birth of Erichthonios. Nike with oinochoe. Basket of Erichthonios, sacred olive tree of Acropolis. Attic red-figure calyx-krater by the Kekrops Painter, late fifth century B.C.E.

scene is superintended by a seated cult statue of Athena. Poseidon with his trident is stretched out on a couch (*klinē*); the enthroned Zeus is present at the bottom left. Hephaistos, above the right handle, holds his tongs. Aphrodite and Eros watch from the other side. Erika Simon suggests as an interpretation for this scene the Deipnophoria, the “bringing of food” celebrated for the daughters of Kekrops, in which Hephaistos takes part.<sup>30</sup>

The end of the fifth century B.C.E. sees the beginning of an important iconographic trend: the portrayal, on votive reliefs, of deities with libation vessels. The reliefs do not quite pick up from where the vases leave off. The libating gods of the reliefs are not so lively, nor do they operate in a world so rarified as that of the vases, where few mortals are ever present. In the reliefs, the gods are often approached by devotees intelligible as mortal by their much smaller size; human religiosity, then, plays a much larger role than on the vases. Most frequent is the depiction of a deity actually presiding at his or her altar, greeting worshipers as they approach, showing them a phiale as if to reinforce their devotion. In **no. 212**, for example, a Pentelic marble relief from Attica from around 400 B.C.E. and now in the Louvre, a seated Zeus extends his phiale to a veiled goddess, presumably Hera, who holds an oinochoe. A helmeted god, perhaps Hermes, is also present; but so is a small male worshiper who enters, hand raised, at the right. This relief shares some common iconographic elements with **no. 213**, a relief in the Vatican. A relief in the wall of a primary school in Megara shows Ares, an almost unheard-of sacrificer up until now, holding a phiale to Aphrodite’s oinochoe (**no. 214**). Once again, a small male is included, as is the case in a far more evolved and better-preserved version of the same scene on a relief in Venice (**no. 215**): Ares with chiton, chlamys, helmet and shield, holds a phiale toward Aphrodite, who pours wine into his bowl, held over an altar. In the Venice relief, the worshiper raises his hand in reverence as he observes the scene. A relief from Corfu depicts Asklepios and Hygieia at an altar (**no. 216**); the ubiquitous mortal worshiper beholds their libation. But in **no. 217**, a relief from Tegea, the god of healing and his daughter are frontally depicted, holding, respectively, an oinochoe and phiale; also present are snakes, sacred to Asklepios.

The years 400 to 100 B.C.E., the centuries when Athens passed from Spartan domination and the rule of oligarchies through the ascendancy of Philip of Macedon to the era of increasing Roman influence, offer two vase-paintings of gods with phialai, both of them Apollo, both of them apparently cult statues; the Apulian fragment of Apollo in his temple, now in Amsterdam (**no. 218**; **Fig. 55**) and a tiny statue of the god on a column who oversees the horrific scene of Medea slaying one of her children, depicted by the Ixion Painter on an amphora in the Louvre dating from the first quarter of the fourth century (**no. 219**).

But the evidence of vases slips away at this time, and reliefs are in the ascendancy. Zeus Meilichios with phiale appears on two reliefs from the Piraeus: **no. 220** (**Fig. 56**), in which a procession of devotees approach the seated god bearing a sacred basket, and **no. 221**, which includes the god’s altar. In **no. 222**, a fourth-century relief in the Athens National Museum, the same scene occurs, but in this case, the devotee brings Zeus an ox directly. Demeter, enthroned



FIGURE 55. Gilded cult-statue of Apollo in Doric temple, holding bow and phiale. The "living god" appears outside. Apulian red-figure krater fragment by the Painter of the Birth of Dionysos, 400–385 B.C.E.

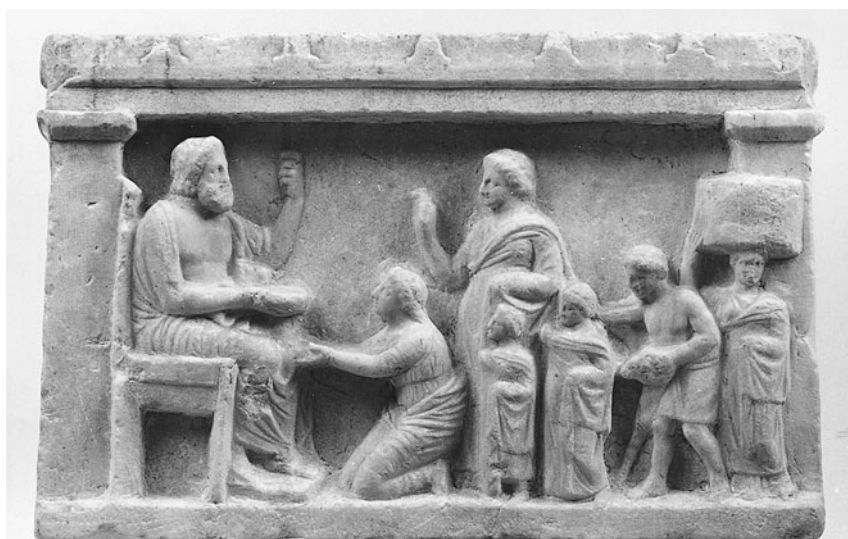


FIGURE 56. Seated Zeus Meilichios (or Asklepios) with phiale; kneeling worshiper. Attic marble relief from Piraeus, fourth century B.C.E.



FIGURE 57. Demeter, with polos and phiale, greets her worshipers leading a boar to her altar; Kore holds a torch. Attic marble relief, fourth century B.C.E.

with a phiale and accompanied by Hekate or Kore with two torches, receives the gift of a pig in a votive marble relief also in Athens (no. 223); in no. 224 (Fig. 57), a relief in the Louvre, the standing goddess majestically displays her phiale to the human couple and their child, who bring a boar to her altar.

Extremely puzzling is the strange group of marble votive reliefs from the Athenian Acropolis published by Olga Palagia.<sup>31</sup> The reliefs date from around the second half of the fourth century B.C.E.. In no. 225, Athena, wearing a polos and snaky aegis, is shown as a half-figure, holding a phiale downward to the ground, and a pomegranate. Three oversized phialai are suspended above her; one to the left and two, with *mesomphaloi*, to the right. Palagia suggests that this and two other similar reliefs (absent Athena with phiale) may be associated with the cult of the Graces “before the entrance to the Acropolis” mentioned by Pausanias, who says that the figures are “allegedly works of Socrates, son of Sophroniskos.”<sup>32</sup> She therefore identifies the three female figures to the right who hold their hands to their chests as the three Graces; like Athena, they are also shown as half-figures in polos and high-girt peplos.

Apollo and Artemis dominate the reliefs. In no. 226, in Athens, a god-sized figure, probably Apollo, pours from a phiale onto an altar as a raven watches from a tree and a group of mortals approach with a small animal; a woman carries a *κρονοῦν* on her head and a jug in her hand. In no. 227, the seated Apollo holds a palm branch in left hand, and extends a phiale in right; a

tiny girl touches the god's knee. The goat-footed god Pan holds an oinochoe; this is the first but not the last time we see him in this role. A marble relief of about 330 B.C.E. from the sanctuary at Brauron portrays a procession of men, women, and children bringing offerings to the altar, the most prominent of which is a bull (no. 228). Artemis waits at the altar, twice as tall as her devotees, wearing a high-cinctured peplos. She holds a bow in her left hand, and a large phiale in her right, which she seems to pour over the altar, near the head of the bull. But the dynamic duo still appear together; on the stone plaque from Attica from the beginning of the fourth century B.C.E. found in Sparta that I referred to in chapter 1 (no. 231), Apollo extends his phiale over an omphalos between two doves as Artemis attends with her oinochoe.

In a marble relief from the fourth century B.C.E., Aphrodite leans on a tree as she extends her phiale toward a small male, who raises his hand in astonishment or awe; Delivorrias suggests that it represents the original cult statue of Aphrodite from her sanctuary at Daphni (no. 232).<sup>33</sup> On a Parian marble votive relief in the Treviso Museum, a long-haired Dionysos wearing a himation holds the thyrsos in his left hand and the kantharos in his right toward a small Pan (no. 233). Pan holds oinochoe in his right hand, with which he fills the kantharos of Dionysos; Hermes stands next to Pan.

As deities from Asia Minor and Thrace began to infiltrate Athenian worship in the fourth century, so their images acquired libation bowls from the Olympians. A marble relief from the fourth century B.C.E. in the Athens National Museum represents a daunting divine crowd at the throne of the regal Kybele, who holds a phiale, while her lion rests at her feet (no. 234). A retinue of chthonian deities attend her, among them Dionysos with thyrsos and kantharos, Pan; Demeter, Hekate, or Persephone with two torches, Asklepios with his snake, and the Kouretes with their shields. A number of much smaller mortal worshipers enter to the right of the offering table with food gifts. In Berlin is an equally spectacular Pentelic marble relief of the "Mother of the Gods" with phiale and signature tympanon dating from 390 B.C.E. (no. 235).

The Thracian goddess Bendis even makes an appearance (no. 236) in a marble relief from Piraeus, now in Copenhagen. Wearing a Thracian cap, Bendis carries her attribute of two spears and extends a phiale toward two small male devotees, much like Artemis in the relief from Brauron. Serapis and Isis, displaying phiale and oinochoe, respectively, are represented from Delos (no. 237). And a votive plaque in Athens (no. 239) dating from sometime between the fourth and second centuries C.E. in the National Museum at Athens has always intrigued me: It features an unidentified goddess, on a throne decorated with a griffin, with a phiale on her knee. She gazes as a mortal approaches an altar bearing a cake offering. The plaque's inscription reads TEΛETH (initiation; a celebration of the mysteries).

A stone relief from Kyzikos in an architectonic frame from the first century B.C.E., now in Istanbul (no. 243; Figs. 58, 59), presents a crucial graph of religious activity in the dual realms. On the upper level, a standing Zeus, identified from his scepter and the eagle at his feet, pours a libation onto a flaming altar. The lower register displays a scene of mortal sacrifice with a heifer tied to



FIGURE 58. Stone relief in architectonic frame, from Kyzikos, first century B.C.E. Upper register: Standing Zeus pours libation onto flaming altar. Lower register: Scene of mortal sacrifice, with heifer tied to ring at the base of a flaming altar, worshipers.

a ring at the base of another flaming altar, to which devotees bring offerings. Celestial and mundane scenes of sacrifice *take place simultaneously and are clearly related*. Yet the worlds above and below are definitively separated.

From the Imperial period, a rectangular stone base in the museum at Corinth (no. 245) from the first century C.E., a male figure representing Zeus Chthonios holds attributes of chthonian power, a cornucopia in his left hand and a phiale in his right. From second-century Lydia comes a votive stele to the Phrygian god Mên Tyrannos, who holds a pine cone; the Mother of Mên, identified in the inscription as  $\tau\epsilon\kappa\omicron\upsilon\theta\alpha$ , appears with a phiale for libations (no. 246).<sup>34</sup> Numerous reliefs and coins of Mên show him pouring libations. Finally, in a splendid floor mosaic from a house near the Temple of Bel at Palmyra (no. 247; Fig. 6o, circa 160–260 C.E.), Asklepios sits enthroned with



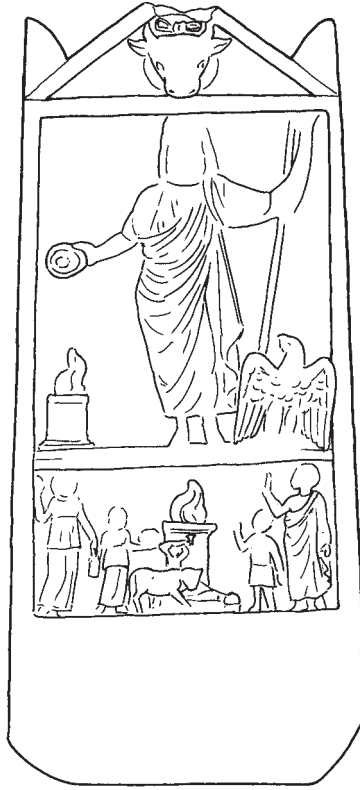


FIGURE 59. Drawing of Kyzikos relief.

his snake-entwined staff, his name spelled out in tesserae. As if to emphasize that divine libations are real, even in stone, the red wine of the god's libation spills onto the flaming altar.

### Analysis of Cultic Features

What overall patterns emerge from this evidence? Is a given sacrificing god enthroned or standing? Is the phiale tipped downward, held parallel to the ground, or held perpendicular to the ground? Is the libation visible (that is, can we see the liquid as it falls)? Is there an altar or omphalos present in the scene? If there is an altar, is it flaming, blood-marked, or garlanded? Are mortals present at the scene of the divine libation?<sup>35</sup> Finally, in the case of vases, is a mortal libation scene depicted on the reverse of the vase?

I have broken down the results in longer overall periods of time than I use in the catalogue, combining the decades and centuries into units that seem to make historical sense.



FIGURE 60. Asklepios enthroned, with name inscription and snake-entwined staff, pouring from a phiale onto flaming altar. Hellenistic floor mosaic from Palmyra, 160–260 C.E.

The results are shown in the charts given in n. 36.<sup>36</sup> The majority of the divine libation scenes (71 percent) portray the gods as standing while pouring, although close to a third show the gods as enthroned. Of the portrayals, 52 percent show the phiale held by the deity as tipping down far enough for liquid to spill out; 36 percent represent the phiale as parallel to the ground; and 11 percent show the phiale held perpendicular to the ground, like a pie plate, as we saw in the case of Apollo in the hydria in Boston (no. 29; Figs. 2, 3). No conclusions can be drawn about whether or not the god is meant to be seen as offering libations based on enthronement or on the angle of the phiale; in a number of cases, as we have seen in the catalogue descriptions above, even though the phiale is held parallel by either a seated or a standing deity, the liquid is still shown spilling out of the bowl and falling to the ground. The presence of cultic actions and elements is significant: The liquid of the libation is actually visible in almost 17 percent of the images, and close to a third (28.5 percent) feature altars as part of the libation scene. Of that number, 41 percent are either flaming, blood-marked, or both; these are altars in active use. Mortals are present at the scene of libation in only 14 percent of the scenes, but that number is inflated by the votive reliefs of the late classical period, which account for 60 percent. Mortals are virtually never present in scenes of divine libations on vases, or their identification as such is controversial. But in at least nine cases, scenes of mortal libation are found on the reverse of vases that depict sacrificing gods. Divine cultic activity is mirrored by its human counterpart.

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# 3

## “Terribly Strange and Paradoxical”

### *Literary Evidence of Sacrificing Gods*

Is there anything in ancient literature that might shed light on how the vases we have contemplated in chapter 2 can portray the gods as pouring libations? Nowhere do the Greeks themselves explicitly tell us what religious meaning they attached to these images. Contemporary written interpretations of Olympian gods who pour out wine offerings from cultic bowls are lost, or never existed. However, two sets of written evidence may have some bearing on the questions before us. These comprise both descriptions of actual cult statues and a more nebulous category, spanning multiple centuries, made up of classical passages in which gods take part in the performance of ritual—with or without editorializing on the part of the ancient author. The latter evidence is not a definitive body that testifies to a particular interpretation, but is instead a collection of literary occurrences that perhaps afford some insight into the vase-paintings.

#### Descriptions of Statues

Even though the statues themselves are gone, ancient authors have left us several descriptions, both eyewitness and hearsay, of Greek cult statues that were said to have held libation bowls. These constitute perhaps the simplest category of literary evidence, representing a kind of extension of the catalogue. Because a historical literary description does not have the value of an extant artifact, however, I have not included this evidence in the analysis of iconographic features at the end of chapter 2.

*Athena Polias on the Acropolis of Athens*

Classical inscriptional evidence attributes a hand-held golden libation bowl to the archaic wooden statue (ξύονον) of the Athena Polias, which was ceremonially clothed every four years in the Great Panathenaia. Although the date of the Polias has never been established, it is believed to date from the early archaic period; Plutarch thought it remarkable that the Athenians still preserved it to his day, and Philostratos cites the Polias in his list of the most ancient images of the gods.<sup>1</sup> Pausanias says that the Athena Polias was venerated long before the *synoikismos* of Attica and that it was said to have fallen from the sky.<sup>2</sup>

Was the Polias enthroned or standing? Among the four vase-paintings upon which Frickenhaus based his reconstruction of a seated Athena Polias holding a phiale is **no. 7**, mentioned in chapter 1, a scene in which the goddess sits before her altar, and in which she clearly holds a phiale.<sup>3</sup> No base indicates that she is a statue, however, and, as mentioned earlier, John H. Kroll, in his 1982 study of the ancient image of the Athena Polias, has challenged this idea.<sup>4</sup>

Inscriptions rendered by the “Treasurers of Athena” in the late 370s and early 360s B.C.E. list the statue’s precious ornaments.<sup>5</sup> These are catalogued among the treasures kept in the ἀρχαῖος νεώς (the Erechtheion), and are listed as στεφάνη, ἥν ἡ θεὸς ἔχει· πλάστρα, ἃ ἡ θεὸς ἔχει· ὄχθοιβος, ὃν ἔχει ἐπὶ τῷ τραχήλῳ· ὄρμοι πέντε· γλαυξ χρυσοῦ· αἰγίς χρυσοῦ· γοργόνειον χρυσοῦ· φιάλη χρυσοῦ, ἥν ἐν τῇ χειρὶ ἔχει (a diadem that the goddess wears, the earrings that the goddess wears, a band that the goddess wears on her neck, five necklaces, a gold owl, a gold aegis, a gold gorgeoneion, and a gold phiale that she holds in her hand).<sup>6</sup> Kroll notes that “the phiale is said to be of gold and held in the goddess’ hand specifically to distinguish it from several, predominantly silver phialai that were deposited in the cella of the Erechtheion as votive offerings.”<sup>7</sup>

We know from Plutarch and Pausanias that the visible external elements of the Athena Polias (helmet, arms, gold ornaments) were later additions. Therefore, according to Kroll, “This leaves only one component that could antedate the sixth century: its body or core, which was hidden beneath the *peplos* and may very well have gone back to the time of the Bronze Age kings of Athens, if not much earlier still. If the nucleus of the image was indeed as ancient as the sources insist, we may readily envisage it as a primitive, aniconic, or quasi-iconic fetish of wood.”<sup>8</sup> But can a truly primitive, aniconic image hold a phiale? Since this was a common feature of large images of divinities in antiquity, at least as early as the middle archaic period—as in our catalogue **nos. 1–3**, perhaps the phiale was added as the Polias acquired accessories—at that time, or even later, much as very old Roman Catholic statues such as the Black Madonna or the Infant of Prague have done.<sup>9</sup>

*Nemesis at Rhamnous*

Pausanias describes Pheidias’s statue of Nemesis as holding a phiale in her hand. Nemesis, “the most inexorable of all the gods towards mortals of wanton

violence” (ἡ θεῶν μάλιστα ἀνθρώποις ὕβρισταῖς . . . ἀπαραίτητος)<sup>10</sup>, was the subject of this image “along the road by the sea to Oropus,” about sixty stades from Marathon. Pausanias tells us that the statue had a potent association with the battle of Marathon. Greek legend had it that the Persians who landed on the beach at Schoinia in 490 B.C.E. were so confident of victory that they brought with them a piece of Parian marble with which to make a trophy.<sup>11</sup> Years after the Athenians crushed the Persians on the plains of Marathon, Pheidias is supposed to have made the statue out of this marble.<sup>12</sup> On her head, Pausanias says, was a crown with deer and “not-large statues” of Nike. “In her hands, in the left she holds an apple branch, and in her right a phiale; on the phiale are fashioned Aethiopians (ταῖς δὲ χερσὶν ἔχει τῇ μὲν κλάδον μηλέας, τῇ δεξιᾷ δὲ φιάλην, Αἰθίοπες δὲ ἐπὶ τῇ φιάλῃ πεποίηνται).”<sup>13</sup> An extant analogue to this wonderful bowl is the gold phiale also decorated with heads of Ethiopians from the Panagiurishte Treasure in Sofia.<sup>14</sup>

### “Bonus Eventus” (Τύχη)

In *Historia Naturalis* 34.77, Pliny the Elder (23/24–79 C.E.) describes the “Bonus Eventus” (presumably, the Tyche; like Nemesis, another concretized abstraction) of the painter and sculptor Euphranor as having a phiale in her hand. Dated to 364 B.C.E. by Pliny’s placement of him at the battle of Mantinea, Euphranor also created the Apollo Patroos found in the Athenian Agora.<sup>15</sup>

### *Apollo at Daphne*

The rhetorician Libanius (314–393 C.E.) gives a description of the Apollo Kitharoidos of the sculptor Bryaxis at Daphne near Antioch in his *Orationes* 60. Bryaxis was an Athenian sculptor who worked on the Mausoleum of Halicarnassus in 350 B.C.E. Antiochus Epiphanes appears on the the obverse of coins that feature the statue.<sup>16</sup> Libanius was quite transported by this Apollo, which held a phiale: “Imagination brings before my eyes the countenance, the phiale, the lyre, the tunic reaching to the feet (τὸ πρόσωπον, τὴν φιάλην, τὴν κιθάραν, τὸν ποδήρη χιτῶνα) . . . the delicacy of the neck in the marble, the girdle about the bosom which holds the golden tunic together, so that some parts fit loosely and others hang loose. . . . He seemed as one that sang (ἐφκει γὰρ ᾄδοντι μέλος).”<sup>17</sup>

### *The Dionysos of Ptolemy Philadelphus*

In his *Deipnosophists*, written around 192 C.E.,<sup>18</sup> Athenaeus of Naucratis quotes Kallixeinos of Rhodes’s report of an ostentatious procession staged by Ptolemy Philadelphos.<sup>19</sup> The Hellenistic ruler was carried along in a decorated wagon with a cult image of the libation-pouring Dionysos: “ἐπὶ δὲ ταύτης ἐπῆν ἄγαλμα Διονύσου δεκάπηχυ σπένδον ἐκ καρχησίου χρυσοῦ (upon this [float] there was a statue ten cubits high of Dionysos pouring libations from a golden drinking cup).”<sup>20</sup>

It seems more than probable that like the *καρχήσιον* of the massive Dionysos, the vessels held in actual statues of the gods were usually gold. Gold was believed to belong to, and to be appropriate for, the Olympians. Although, as we noted earlier, Athena had silver phialai dedicated to her in the Erechtheion, the Athenian temple inventory specifies that the phiale held by her cult statue was gold. A survey of the phialai dedicated during archaic and classical times at Hera sanctuaries indicates that they were, without exception, made of gold.<sup>21</sup> Pieces of an archaic chryselephantine Apollo statue, together with a related find—a splendid gold phiale—were discovered in 1939 under the Sacred Way at Delphi, in trenches below the Stoa of the Athenians and the Naxian Sphinx. The statue's fragments were reassembled by Pierre Amandry; on display with a sister statue of Artemis in the Delphi Museum, the Apollo is shown holding the phiale (see **no. 1; Fig. 23**).<sup>22</sup> And in the satirical libation scene of Aristophanes' *Peace*, Hermes is especially susceptible to the manipulations of Trygaeus because the libation bowl offered him is gold; he comments that he has "always had a real weakness (soft spot) for gold (plate) (ὡς ἐλέημων εἴμ' ἀεὶ τῶν χρυσιδῶν)."<sup>23</sup>

The phialai of cult statues, as Rice has it "probably just positioned to suggest the action" of pouring libations, were actually gold; we probably even have one in the archaic Delphi Apollo.<sup>24</sup> Similarly, the frequently embossed shapes in the libation bowls of the catalogued vase-paintings indicate that they were thought of as metal, not ceramic. It is at least likely that these gods and goddesses, frozen serenely in black and red, are pouring from golden phialai—with the action no longer suggested but realized in painted streams of wine.

### Early Literary Episodes of Gods in Ritual Performance

Ancient literature also includes several important if stylized testaments in which divine entities do indeed take part in a variety of cultic activities. These, in turn, occur in a variety of literary genres. One of the most important and controversial (the libation of Hermes in Aristophanes's *Peace*) is from comedy, and the *Hymn to Hermes*, wherein the infant god sacrifices twelve cattle in an Olympian *δαίς*, also contains comic elements that call into question how seriously we can take these divine characters. In some cases where the gods render offerings, there is no explicit recipient; in others, the gods "sacrifice to other gods," or to themselves. Each is unique and irregular in its own way, whether due to the god's disguise, the absence of cultic language, or the absence of a clear motive or context for the act. In all cases, the god's apparently anthropomorphic behavior may serve as a strategem of reduction—an effort to make him or her more "manageable" and accessible, either to the other protagonists or to the audience.

These passages are grouped according to the more general cultic categories into which they fall. The first group of passages shows the gods in the performance of divine *δρόμμενα*: "things done," or ritual performance. Some treat libating gods; some deal with gods who offer animal sacrifice. In another category

are literary episodes of gods who engage in cultic behavior, using ritual gestures or disguised as hierophants; included in this group are gods who serve as the eponymous priests of their own cults.<sup>25</sup> Then there is the category of divine λεγόμενα, “things said.” Oaths, as we have seen in chapter 1, are sworn in a ritual context and are frequently accompanied by libations; this is no less true of the oaths of the gods. Finally, there are instances in literature of deified mortals who render offerings to themselves, and related ancient commentary on this exalted narcissism.

*How strange is a god who worships?* I have characterized the “offering gods” theme as surprising, even troublesome. We may also assume that our reaction is due to the chasm of years that separate us from those who made and saw these vases. It is true that our understanding of the religious world of antiquity will always be imperfect. Yet the first recorded “editorial comments” on the idea of a god who pours libations—also reactions of confusion or even revulsion—come from ancient rather than modern sources. These passages are not without insight. Occasionally (but not exclusively) in satire, we are made to feel through the eyes of the ancient author the conceptual peculiarity of a religious god—or the irony, if the god is presented as actually worshipping himself or herself.

## ΔΡΩΜΕΝΑ: Ritual Actions Performed by Deities

### *Episodes of Divine Libation*

In the only clear-cut Homeric episode of divine libation, a disguised Athena pours out wine and prays to Poseidon (*Odyssey* 3.55–61). When she visits the palace of Nestor in disguise as Mentor, the companion of Telemachos, Athena is handed the golden goblet by Nestor’s son Peisistratos, who charges the disguised goddess to pour a libation and pray to Poseidon:

My guest, make your prayer now to the lord Poseidon,  
for his is the festival you have come to on your arrival;  
but when you have poured to him and prayed, according to custom  
(αὐτὰρ ἐπὶν σπείσῃς τε καὶ εὔξῃαι, ἧ θέμις ἐστί),  
then give this man also a cup of the sweet wine, so that  
he too can pour, for I think he will also make his prayer  
to the immortals. All men need the gods. But this one [i.e., Telemachos]  
is a younger man than you, and of the same age as I am.  
This is why I am giving you first the golden goblet.<sup>26</sup>

“Having spoken in this way, he put in her hand the cup of sweet wine (ὡς εἰπὼν ἐν χερσὶ τίθει δέπας ἡδέος οἴνου).”<sup>27</sup> An honored guest (although how honored is unsuspected!), it is now incumbent on her to do the same. The disguised goddess is happy at his wise prudence “because she was the first to whom he gave the golden cup (χρῦσειον ἄλεισον).”<sup>28</sup> And so “straightaway she prayed to the lord Poseidon (αὐτίκα δ’ εὔξετο πολλὰ Ποσειδάωνι ἄνακτι).”<sup>29</sup>



Hear us, Poseidon, who circle the earth, and do not begrudge us the accomplishment of all these actions for which we pray you. First of all to Nestor and to his sons grant glory, and then on all the rest of the Pylians besides confer gracious recompense in return for this grand hecatomb, and yet again grant that Telemachos and I go back with that business done for which we came this way in our black ship.

This passage raises a number of intriguing ritual and theological problems. Athena prays to Poseidon just as Peisistratos did, and she pours a libation just as he did. But unlike Nestor's son, Athena knows that Poseidon is in the land of the Ethiopians; can he hear her? She is in disguise. Does that affect her standing as a petitioner? Does her prayer to him have mortal or divine status? Which identity is paramount? Line 62 is highly revealing. "So then she prayed, and she herself was accomplishing everything (ὧς ἄρ' ἔπειτ' ἠράτο καὶ αὐτὴ πάντα τελεύτα)." The verb τελευτᾶν is in the imperfect, conveying the sense of an *ongoing* process which seems to be happening in a universe parallel to what is expected and visible.

The scene *apparently* depicts a mortal guest of Nestor's house praying to the sea god on behalf of the assembled community. But the prayer is not what it seems, because in reality it is a deity who prays it, and so neither is the result what it seems. We do not next learn that Poseidon grants or denies Mentor's prayer, which would be the usual Homeric sequence. Instead it is clear that while Athena is at an equal level in entreating the power of Poseidon, she herself is also fulfilling the demands of the prayer through the efficacy of her own power, summarized by the narrator in the word αὐτῆ.

The Berlin Painter shows the god Hermes fleeing, as if in awe, from the central scene of libation in the hydria in Boston (no. 29). In Aristophanes's *Peace*, written in 421 B.C.E. in anticipation of the ratification of a peace treaty with Sparta, the Attic comic poet portrays the one and only surviving case of a god who unmistakably pours libations in Greek literature: Hermes.

The citizen Trygaeus begs Hermes to help the chorus, Greek farmers, in "hauling up Peace," that is, the great statue of the goddess Peace, from a deep, rocky pit. Trygaeus claims that the Sun and the Moon, fattened because the barbarians sacrifice to them, are growing obstreperous and plotting to take over Greece and the cults of the Greek gods for themselves. If Hermes will do this, "we will hold the great Panathanaea in your honour, and also all the other cults of the gods—the Mysteries, the Dipolieia, the Adonia, in honour of Hermes: and the other states everywhere, released from their troubles, will sacrifice to you as Hermes the Averter of evil, and you will have many other benefits as well."<sup>31</sup> Without a gram of compunction, Hermes's greed and vanity inspire him to take the bait.

To accomplish this, Trygaeus persuades Hermes to offer a prayer for the collective desire for Peace: "To begin with, I give you this as a present so that you'll have something to pour libations with (πρῶτον δέ σοι / δῶρον δίδωμι τήνδ', ἵνα σπένδειν ἔχης)."<sup>32</sup> The "something" turns out to be a wrought gold

phiale; Hermes bursts out, “Dear me, what a soft spot I’ve always had for gold plate! (οἶμι ὡς ἐλεήμων εἶμι ἄει τῶν χρυσίδων).”<sup>33</sup>

Seeing that Hermes will comply and publicly pray for their cause, Trygaeus orders the chorus to begin their construction work as soon as possible. The chorus-leader flatters Hermes: “And you, cleverest of gods, you be in charge of us and tell us, like a master-builder, what we need to do (σὺ δ’ ἡμῖν, ὦ θεῶν σοφώτατε, / ἅττα χρὴ ποεῖν ἐφεστῶς φράζε δημιουργικῶς).”<sup>34</sup> Then Trygaeus pressures him: “Come on, hurry up and hold out the bowl, so we can get boldly on with the job after praying to the gods (ἄγε δὴ, σὺ ταχέως ὑπεχε τὴν φιάλην, ὅπως ἔργω ἴφιαλοῦμεν εὐξάμενοι τοῖσιν θεοῖς).”<sup>35</sup> Hermes complies:

Libation, libation!

Speak fair, speak fair!

As we pour libation, let us pray [or: we pray] that this day may be the beginning of many blessings for all the Greeks, and that every man [who zealously assists with the ropes] may never again take up a shield.

σπονδὴ σπονδή·

εὐφημεῖτε εὐφημεῖτε.

σπένδοντες εὐχόμεσθα τὴν νῦν ἡμέραν

Ἕλλησιν ἄρξαι πᾶσι πολλῶν κ’ αγαθῶν,

χῶστις προθύμως ξυλλάβοι τῶν σχοινίων,

τοῦτον τὸν ἄνδρα μὴ λαβεῖν ποτ’ ἀσπίδα.<sup>36</sup>

A repartee between Trygaeus and Hermes ensues about the evils of war and the joys of peace, including curses on those that would make war (for example, “May he, Lord Dionysus, never-endingly be extracting arrows from his funny-bones!”)<sup>37</sup> until Hermes at last takes on the role of the chorus leader:

(453) HERMES: But for us may there be blessings. Strike up the paean: hail!

(454) TRYGAEUS: Leave out the striking: just say “hail.”

(455–456) HERMES: All right, I simply say: hail, hail, hail! To Hermes, to the Graces, to the Seasons, to Aphrodite, to Pothos (Desire).

(457) TRYGAEUS: But *not* to Ares.

(458) HERMES: No!

(459) TRYGAEUS: Nor to Enyalios either.

(460) HERMES: No!

A bona fide god in Greek literature, undisguised and unabashed, who pours libations! But what a complicated type he is, and how complex is his situation. Some exegetes have utterly ignored the religious problem; Cedric Whitman, for example, provides a lengthy summary and analysis of the play without even mentioning the fact that Hermes pours a libation; he simply says that the god

“has been bribed . . . with a gold cup.”<sup>38</sup> But lines 435–438 undeniably represent the common prayer accompanying libation. Here, according to Oxford editor Maurice Platnauer, the reader is in very hot water and must be rescued. Platnauer refuses to let Hermes act as the sacrificer. While conceding that the first two lines (the ritual formula σπονδὴ σπονδὴ / εὐφημεῖτε εὐφημεῖτε) are Hermes’s, at the σπένδοντες εὐχόμεσθα (as we pour libations, let us pray), the editor stops cold, and gives the difficult lines to the *choregos*. This even though, first, the entire, tightly knit dialogue up to the enactment of the libation has taken place exclusively between Trygaeus and Hermes and, second, the entire import of the scene is that Hermes has been persuaded by Trygaeus to pour a libation and pray to the gods that the goddess Peace may be hauled up from her pit, in return for which he will receive exclusive honors at festivals previously dedicated to other gods: the Great Panathenaia (Athena), the Dipolieia (Zeus), the Mysteries (Demeter and Persephone), and the Adonia (Adonis and indirectly, Aphrodite). “Hermes can scarcely himself pray,” Platnauer reassures us. “The lines are best given to the coryphaeus; see app. crit.”<sup>39</sup> But the scholion on line 433 (τοῦτο ἀξιόσοι τὸν Ἑρμῆν λέγειν, They claim that Hermes says this is the speaker of this) says the opposite.<sup>40</sup>

The dilemma that Hermes’s libation presents the religious historian is complex. Hermes acts as a mortal by pouring out the libation on behalf of the community, but then names himself as a recipient. At least one editor speculates that he drinks from the bowl when he says his own name, then pours a libation to the Graces, to the Seasons, and to Aphrodite, and to Pothos.<sup>41</sup> Is he then acting as a mortal celebrant or, despite his narcissistic motives, as a god importuning other gods? Brigitte Eckstein-Wolf, whose interpretation of sacrificing gods we will consider in chapter 4, claims that if Hermes pours, “he pours with Trygaeus and his associates to “the gods,” that is, all the gods except for himself, [since he has] already placed himself on the side of the mortals. . . . The entire (construct of an) ambitious and therefore libation-pouring Hermes is thus a joke on the part of Aristophanes . . . therefore the situation is to be rejected in any attempt at an interpretation of the divine libation scenes.”<sup>42</sup> Gerhard Neumann takes just the opposite view, rebutting Eckstein-Wolf: Hermes most appropriately pours *as a god to other gods*: “The situation in Aristophanes *Pax* 423 ff. gives us to understand the cultic sphere as the central domain of the association of the gods with one another, at least in the classical period, if one does not take it as a joke of the author like Brigitte Eckstein-Wolf.”<sup>43</sup> Ironically, this discussion clearly circles back to one of the central problems set forth by the vases: When the gods pour libations, are they acting like people or like gods? It should be evident by now that to come down on either side brings with it a swarm of theoretical difficulties. Let us then leave Hermes with his cherished golden phiale and press on to another divine offering in comedy.

In Latin literature we find the sacrificing god as the catalyst of domestic uproar and the focus of satire. A raucous Jupiter, in disguise, pours libations and performs sacrifices to himself in Plautus’s *Amphitruo*, written in the early second century B.C.E. The premise of the play is that the father of gods and mortals,

lusting after the matron Alcmena, assumes the shape of her absent husband Amphitryon while he is away defending Thebes. This predictably leads to an uproar between the cuckolded mate and his wife, now pregnant with Herakles, when he returns. At lines 931–934, Jupiter, in disguise as Amphitryon, takes an oath by Jupiter (himself); and at lines 966–983, the bogus “head of household” is obliged to perform the rites which he says he promised (at lines 946–947) if he returned home safely from battle.<sup>44</sup> These sacrifices as well will be offered to—whom else?—Jupiter. The irony of this is not lost on the jolly deity as he ambles around stage amid the wreckage of his mortal subjects’ lives. Jupiter tells his gleeful servant Sosia (actually his son the god Mercury, also in on the fun), “I will perform that sacred offering inside which I vowed (*ego rem divinam intus faciam, vota quae sunt*).”<sup>45</sup> He then commands Sosia to divert Amphitryon during his dalliance with Alcmena, and orders him to manage this as the servant knows he would want it; Sosia should “minister to me while I am sacrificing to myself (*atque ut ministres mihi, mihi quom sacrificem*).”<sup>46</sup>

The comic mechanism of this particular scene revolves around an absurdly self-conscious portrayal of divine reflexivity. But it also underscores the point that, at least in comedy, the ancients regarded the imagined “sacrificing god” with the same ironic awareness that we might today. Rather than accepting offerings from groveling mortals while watching from an apex of remote splendor, a deity is caught up in a routine cultic action as it is performed on earth. He seems to manipulate the action, to pull the very strings that facilitate his own gift-getting. Plautus’s play is the only instance in which it is specifically stated that the god is pouring libations to himself, and that occurs in disguise as part of a farce.

An explicit ancient comment on what was *not* appropriate for a god to do in the sphere of ritual appears in a short tractate by Plutarch called *De defectu oraculorum* (*On the Obsolescence of the Oracles*), dating circa 100 C.E. The reader overhears an imagined symposium between five young intellectuals. In a quasi-doctrinal commentary thinly disguised as debate (an exegetical technique favored by its author), they discuss an apparently burning issue in the Greece of their time: Why had so many long-hallowed oracles lost their power and become moribund?

Among the shrines of interest to the speakers is the famous temple of Apollo at Delphi, where the discussion takes place and where Plutarch himself served as a priest for thirty years. The character Cleombrotus angrily criticizes the traditional aetiology of the Pythian oracle on the slopes of Mount Parnassus. He also expresses his disgust with the tradition that Apollo had to flee and purify himself by pouring libations after the slaying of the Python: “For it is altogether absurd, my dear companion, for Apollo, after having slain a beastly creature, to flee to the ends of Greece needing purification (ἀγνισμοῦ δεόμενον) and there to pour certain libations (χράς τινας χεῖσθαι) and to perform those [rites] which people perform in order to make expiation and soothe the wrath of spirits whom they call ‘the tormenting ones’ and ‘the blood-avengers,’ as if (those spirits) were prosecuting the memories of some unforgotten, bygone acts of pollution.”<sup>47</sup> Cleombrotus waxes even more scornful: “And the tale which I’ve already heard about this flight and the removal from one place to another is terribly

strange and paradoxical (ἄτοπος μὲν ἔστι δεινῶς καὶ παράδοξος) indeed; but if it contains any particle of truth, let us not suppose what was done in those times about the oracle to have been any small or common affair.”<sup>48</sup>

On the basis of the antiquity and ubiquity of this myth, and the common occurrence of tales in which the gods slaughter other creatures,<sup>49</sup> a strong case can be made that it is *not* the concept of a divine murder that outrages the young philosopher but rather the need for divine atonement in the form of libations. In the passage immediately preceding his outburst, Cleombrotus speaks of the ritual reenactment of this tale, a poorly attested festival known as the Septerion. A small boy, accompanied by the torch-bearing “Labyadai,” must set fire to a wooden structure on the “threshing-floor” at Delphi, endure “wanderings and servitude” across the wastes of Greece just as Apollo did, culminating in “the purifications that take place at Tempê (οἱ τε γιγνόμενοι περὶ τὰ Τέμπη καθαρμοί)” — the valley of Tempê in Thessaly. This was where Apollo was supposed to have fled after slaying the snaky Python.<sup>50</sup>

Perhaps even more sharply than on the murder itself, Plutarch’s attention is focused on the unacceptability of the idea of divine atonement for blood-guiltiness. Cleombrotus implies that a god does not himself require purification. Certainly he does not need to pour expiatory libations. Finally, he insists that if this unimaginable sequence did in fact occur, then one ought never consider it normal divine behavior. Thus at least one ancient source testifies that the idea that a god might enact a religious ritual typically performed by a mortal seems profoundly strange.

Or does it? Perhaps it is not Apollo’s libation itself, but the one-time atonement for a “historical murder” that is problematic. This will become a crucial distinction when, in chapter 4, we encounter the theory of Erika Simon, who holds that virtually all depictions of the libating Apollo in the second half of the fifth century had as their aetiology this myth. One objection emerges immediately: Cleombrotus refers to Apollo’s alleged libations as *χοαί*, blood-guilty offerings poured into the ground to appease the underworld powers. Yet the majority of vase-paintings depict Apollo pouring from a *phiale* onto an altar or occasionally an omphalos: Apollo is pouring Olympian *σπονδαί*, ritually the polar opposite of *χοαί*.

The Plutarch passage is also important on another level: It indicates a point of myth concerning the gods beyond which the character in the discussion simply will not go; it violates his theological threshold. It is too absurd for him to stomach. This repulsion has to do with his own understanding of the nature of a god, and what is appropriate (or even possible) for any god to do. It is a theological dilemma that spans both ancient and modern worlds.<sup>51</sup>

### Animal Sacrifice by Gods

Most notorious of Greek sacrificial aetiologies is the archaic account of the sacrifice of the trickster god Prometheus in Hesiod’s *Theogony* 535–561. The Titan retains the meat of an ox for himself while setting before the supreme god

Zeus its bones, covered with fat, “and since then the tribes of men upon earth burn white bones to the deathless gods upon fragrant altars (ἐκ τοῦ δ’ ἀθανάτοισιν ἐπὶ χθονὶ φύλ’ ἀνθρώπων/ καίουσ’ ὄστέα λευκὰ θυγέντων ἐπὶ βωμῶν).”<sup>52</sup> Prometheus is, of course, a Titan, one of the older generations overthrown by Zeus.

Zeus is enraged by Prometheus’s sleight-of-hand, yet the story becomes in Greek religious history the prototypical sacrifice, explaining forevermore why the gods get only the savor of the roasting meat, while the mortals get the meat. But does the narrator understand this event as cult, or Prometheus’s actions as a sacrifice? Curiously, except for the concluding word βωμῶν (altar), the account contains no language that is explicitly connected with cult.

Analogous to the sacrifice of Prometheus, although perhaps not as aetiological (and certainly more generous) is the sacrifice of the newborn Hermes to the twelve Olympians in that god’s *Homeric Hymn* at 128–133. Dating from the mid-sixth century B.C.E., this text offers the biography of a divine child. The infant Hermes invents the tortoiseshell lyre, and sings upon it; he steals the cattle of Apollo, and discovers fire in the course of slaughtering two of them, “clearly a Twelve-God sacrifice of a kind later recorded at Olympia.”<sup>53</sup> When the “curved-horned bellowing cows” have been pierced in the spine, and their fatted meat hacked out, Hermes roasts their meat, the chine, and dark blood together.<sup>54</sup> The skins were stretched out on hard, dry rock, then

Hermes, rejoicing in his heart, dragged the rich cuts  
onto a smooth, flat stone and divided them into twelve portions,  
distributed by lot. And he added to each a perfect special portion  
of honor.

Ἑρμῆς χαρμόφρων εἰρύσατο πίονα ἔργα  
λείψω ἐπὶ πλαταμῶνι καὶ ἔσχισε δώδεκα μοίρας κληροπαλεῖς·  
τέλεον δὲ γέρας προσέθηκεν ἐκάστη.<sup>55</sup>

The passage continues,

Then glorious Hermes craved for the meats of the cult,  
for the sweet savour made him weary, even though he was a god.  
But not even so was his bold heart persuaded  
even though he longed very much to pass them down his holy throat.<sup>56</sup>

ἐνθ’ ὄσις κρεάων ἠράσσατο κύδιμος Ἑρμῆς·  
ὀδμή γάρ μιν ἔπειρε καὶ ἀθάνατον περ ἔοντα  
ἦδεῖ· ἀλλ’ οὐδ’ ὥς οἱ ἐπείθετο θυμὸς ἀγήνωρ,  
καὶ τε μάλ’ ἰμείροντι, περὴν ἱερῆς κατὰ δειρήης·

Hermes’s behavior seems clearly sacrificial; and he is clearly divine. Unlike the generic language of Prometheus’s sacrifice, the hymn makes explicit use of religious language: The noun ὄσις (sacred rite) gives the episode definitive cultic import; this term occurs in specifically ritual contexts in Greek literary and inscriptional evidence.<sup>57</sup> Human custom does seem to imitate his actions, but

not with the treacherous overtones of the swindling of the gods implied by the *Theogony* episode. In mundane Olympian sacrifice, as in this supramundane offering by Hermes, the gods get their portions, are assigned “perfect honour,” and deeply inhale the burning aroma.

How, if at all, are the actions of the Titan Prometheus and the infant Hermes related to the human choreography of sacrifice? It may be obvious to us that extant practices created the shape of the story; in other words, that the shape of mortal worship influenced that of its constructed immortal form. But does the story know that? How self-conscious is the myth? Karl Kerényi comments on these two divine sacrifices, “a sacrifice presupposes sacrificers as well as receivers, and Hesiod proceeds on the assumption that men are already in existence, participating in the sacrifice. In the Homeric *Hymn to Hermes* (1–137), no mention is made of men as sacrificers. Often the sacrificers and the beneficiaries of sacrifice are identical. In . . . [*Hermes*], the identity is not even yet mystical, for the sacrifice is invented before the existence of men. Hermes did not represent mankind, but Prometheus did.”<sup>58</sup>

Nowhere does the *Hymn to Hermes* state that human beings have not yet been created. It is true that Hermes acts like a mortal by sacrificing the cattle and roasting their meat. His hunger seems human enough. There is no question of his piety.<sup>59</sup> But Kerényi’s comments are germane in the sense that we are reminded that no human beings are in fact involved in this sacrifice, as they were at Mekone. Do the sacrificing gods represent humanity? Or do they, like Hermes, present their offering in a golden vacuum, elevating the act to a higher plane, much as they raised battle and its wounds in the *Iliad*?<sup>60</sup> Are they overgrown devotees, or are they as remote from the mechanisms of earthly sacrifice as Artemis is from the death throes of her once adored Hippolytus?<sup>61</sup>

Hermes is a deity with chthonian associations. But this is an Olympian sacrifice. As Apostolos Athanassakis has observed, since this sacrifice takes place in the morning, and involves slabs of sheer meat, with no grains or fruits, and as it is “both propitiatory and expiatory,” it cannot be called a chthonian sacrifice. Susan Shelmerdine maintains that the Hermes episode emerges with features that are more those of a δαίς (feast) than a sacrifice. Shelmerdine sees Hermes’s “preparation of this feast for the twelve gods” as “another part of his plan to win a place of equal honor among the gods through a challenge of and reconciliation with Apollo.”<sup>62</sup>

As a god, Hermes is even greatly affected by the “sweet savour” of his feast or sacrifice. Athanassakis ponders, “[S]ome scholars have thought that Hermes does not eat the meat that he roasted to conform with the chthonian side of his character. We know that victims were offered to him by Homer (*Odyssey* 14.435; 19.396–8). That Hermes does not eat meat is very strange, since it was a craving for meat that made him steal the cattle. I am afraid that the reason behind this curious behavior will elude us for quite some time.”<sup>63</sup>

Might it be possible that Hermes does not eat the meat because, as one of the gods, he knows that his portion is only the smell of the sacrificial smoke? Hungry as he is, Hermes actually behaves like a god in abstaining

from consuming the meat, but rather savoring the smoke—just as Zeus told us in *Iliad* 4.48–49 that the gods love to do. This highlights one of the central tenets of the present work: the religious actions of the gods resemble but slightly differ from those of mortals and are appropriate to their other, divine status.

### *Ritual Gestures Used by Deities*

At least part of the iconographic problem of gods holding phialai in Greek art is that it is unclear whether in the case of cult statues and certain of the images on vases, particularly those of Zeus, the gods stretch out their bowls so as to receive the wine, and not to pour it back out again in a libation. Aristophanes’s *Birds* makes reference to the custom of placing a piece of sacrificial meat into the outstretched hand of the god—that is, the hand of his or her cult statue.<sup>64</sup> Peisetaerus explains that when Zeus has an eagle on his head, Athena an owl, and Apollo a hawk, “It’s so that when someone sacrifices and then offers [lit., gives] the entrails, as is the custom, into the hand of the god, they [i.e., the birds] themselves can take the entrails before the god [does].”<sup>65</sup> The question of whether the gods ever stretch out their hands to give or confer rather than receive something comes up in a later Aristophanic effort, *Ecclesiazusae* (*Assembly Women*), written around 392 or 391 B.C.E. Athenian women take over running of the city and introduce community of property. When cajoled by an enthusiastic enforcer to bring his property in for distribution, Citizen refuses, saying that it is unlikely that anyone with common sense will comply and surrender their goods. “That is not the custom; rather, it’s incumbent on us only to take, damn it! The gods are the same way. You’ll know from the hands of [their] statues, [that] whenever we pray [to them] to give us good things, they [nevertheless] stand holding out their hands turned up, not so that they can give, but rather so that they can take something.”<sup>66</sup>

### *The Disguised God*

The gods depicted pouring libations on classical vases are most naturally seen as having not simply a mortal but more explicitly a sacerdotal function. Although private citizens could and did sacrifice animals and pour libations to the gods, the majority of these functions taking place at altars (as in our vases) called for the services of members of an institutionalized priesthood. Priests, dedicated to a particular god, conducted the services of both urban and rural cult; priesthoods were sometimes hereditary and/or made for life, but far more frequently were periodic appointments or elections from the prominent citizenry of a given community. In effect, when Apollo or Athena pours a libation at a flaming sacrificial altar, the deity is acting like a mortal priest. It is not surprising, therefore, that one of the dominant themes in literary testimonia for gods performing ritual actions is the “god in disguise” as a mortal, and frequently as a priest or priestess. The divinity plays the part of an intermediary on his or her own behalf, performing the actions of his or her own cult or carrying cult



implements. Rarely do things bode well for the mortal who meets the supernatural hierophant, as the god is often bent on destruction, revenge, or at least some kind of mischief.

The theme of the disguised god appears in the *Odyssey* passage considered above in which Athena as Mentor prays to Poseidon and pours a libation, and in the Plautus comedy featuring a hidden Jupiter. It becomes far more common later on, especially in the Hellenistic period, when with the advent of the divinized Macedonian rulers, the lines between human and divine status generally underwent a metamorphosis. We know of the Hellenistic phenomenon of the θεῖος ἀνὴρ; the following passages treat the βρότειος θεός.

A fifteen-line fragment of Aeschylus's play *Hydrophoroi*, also called *Semele* (part of a tetralogy with *Xantriae*, *Bacchae*, and *Pentheus*, produced with the satiric *The Nurses of Dionysos*), preserves a Hera disguised as her own priestess, who collects offerings for the river nymphs of Argos.<sup>67</sup> Semele was induced by Hera (disguised as an old woman) to persuade her lover Zeus to appear in his true form, as a thunderbolt. The Theban princess was incinerated, and Zeus snatched up the fetal Dionysos from her womb, sewing it into his thigh until the god was ready to be born. These are later versions of the myth; in Aeschylus's time, as Hugh Lloyd-Jones points out, it would be natural for Hera to appear disguised as a priestess, arriving in Thebes from Argos, the center of her worship.<sup>68</sup> Her speech praises the nymphs, "glorious goddesses for whom I gather [offerings], / the life-giving children of Inachus the Argive river κ[υδραὶ θεαί], αἶσιν ἀγείρω, / Ἴνάχων Ἀργείου ποταμοῦ παισὶν βιοδώροι[ς]." <sup>69</sup>

In one of the more haunting instances of divine disguise, Euripides's *Bacchae*, the god Dionysos arrives as the missionary leader of a band of Asiatic maenads at his maternal home of Thebes. Thus, unbeknownst even to his faithful maenads, the god masquerades as the chief celebrant of his own mysteries, and leading the women in roaming celebrations on the mountains—the ὄρειβασία. He comes to establish his worship in the *polis*, and to prove to the hubristic king Pentheus "who now revolts against divinity (θεομαχέι), in *me*"<sup>70</sup> that Dionysos is "god indeed."<sup>71</sup> And thus "[t]o these ends I have laid my deity aside and go disguised as a man (ὦν οὐνεκ' εἶδος θνητὸν ἀλλάξας ἔχω μορφήν τ' ἐμὴν μετέβαλον εἰς ἀνδρὸς φύσιν)."<sup>72</sup> This ruse proves to be the dramatic engine of the play, and its unmasking the climactic religious revelation at the end when Dionysos returns to pronounce sentence on the sacrilegious Thebans.<sup>73</sup>

Self-conscious literary pieces meant for recital to a select audience rather than devotional hymns meant for use in worship, the *Hymns* of Callimachus (305–240 B.C.E.) nevertheless contain important religious information. In the *Hymn to Demeter* (40–56), the goddess suddenly metamorphoses into her own priestess in order to defend her magical and beloved grove of trees in "holy Dotium."<sup>74</sup> Erysichthon, the brash son of the king Triopas, tries to destroy the grove with twenty man-servants armed with axes. When the first tree "reaching to the sky" (αἰθέρι κύρον) is struck, it shrieks in pain to the others.<sup>75</sup> Demeter

hears the tree and asks with fury, “‘Who is cutting [down] my beautiful trees?’” The hymn’s narrative continues, “At once she took the appearance of Nicippe, her public priestess appointed by the city, and took in her hand fillets and a poppy, and she held the key on her shoulder.”<sup>76</sup>

In an encounter reminiscent of the warning that the priest Chryses delivers to the hubristic Agamemnon in *Iliad* 1, Callimachus’s Demeter-in-disguise, a “priestess” holding symbols sacred to her own cult, thrice warns violent Erysichthon to desist. He looks at her with the fierceness of a lioness who has just given birth, and threatens to kill her, claiming that he wants the tree to build a great banquet hall, where he plans to sate his comrades continually with delicious feasts.<sup>77</sup> “Unspeakably angry,” Demeter changes her form back to that of a goddess (γείνατο δ’ αὐ̄ θεύς).<sup>78</sup> She curses the leader of the tree-murdering tribe with a λιμὸν αἰθῶνα, a “hellishly burning hunger” that drives him to feast continually—a hideous parody of his original arrogant desire—and literally to eat his parents out of house and home.

The religious reciprocity between gods and human beings during the Hellenistic period produces a curious phenomenon in inscriptions from that period found in Bulgaria, Edessa, and in Asia Minor: Gods are listed as holders of their own eponymous priesthoods.<sup>79</sup> A fourth-century B.C.E. inscription from Dionysopolis in Thrace, initially misunderstood as listing Bacchic initiates (μύσται or θιασῶται), is instead a list of eponymous priests of Dionysos, if one accepts the reconstruction of G. Mihailov for its title: [οἶδε ἱέρην]ται Διονύσου μετὰ τοὺς ἱερησαμένους διὰ βίου (these are priests of Dionysos after [i.e., replacing] those who are priests for life).<sup>80</sup> On a partially preserved pair of columns of names that give names and patronyms (for example, Column B, Line 6 gives [Π]εδιεύς Ὑγιάινοντος), one reads the single name Διόνυσος. Gods are known from other cities to hold eponymous magisterial office as king, archon, hipparch, prytanis, demiurge, and hieromnamon (the sacred recorder sent by each Amphictyonic state to their collective council).<sup>81</sup> But in this case, “the god was—in an undoubtedly difficult year—his own priest.”<sup>82</sup>

Other examples exist: In the case of the στεφανηφόροι, the “crown-wearing” magistrates at Miletos, Iasos, Amyzon, and elsewhere, “the eponymous magistrates have a very apparent sacerdotal character and one could say that in these cities the eponymous Apollo is his own priest.”<sup>83</sup> Robert believes that the list of priests of Dionysos in Dionysopolis is also a list of eponymous magistrate priests, and that is why, since a mortal could not be found to fulfill one of the slots, the god himself was named. When Akornion finally filled the priesthood “after many years,” he was taking the place on the list of Dionysos himself. This phenomenon cannot be separated from the deities serving as eponymous archons and such, but the sacerdotal nature of the appointment deserves special attention for this inquiry. Perhaps this may be seen as the natural development of the mentality that allowed the “sacrificing gods” in the fifth century: If the gods can act like priests, then they can also hold priest-hoods.

## AEGOMENA: Ritual Oaths and Prayers Spoken by the Gods

Greek literature from the epic, archaic, and classical periods reveals several instances of gods who paradoxically use formulaic religious expressions—sometimes invoking their own power, and sometimes naming powers other than themselves. These divine oaths represent, and like the preceding passages, effectively cast the gods in the role of “pious” individuals. But what kind of piety is the gods’ own?

In the *Iliad* and the *Odyssey*, the Olympians swear by each other, the head of Zeus, and the waters of the Styx. In *Iliad* 14.271–279, Sleep demands that Hera call on Kronos and the gods below to witness her oath that she will grant him Pasithea, one of the younger Graces, as his wife:

So she spoke, and Sleep was pleased and spoke to her in answer:  
 “Come then! Swear it to me on Styx’ ineluctable water.  
 With one hand take hold of the prospering earth, with the other  
 take hold of the shining salt sea, so that all the undergods  
 who gather about Kronos may be witnesses to us.  
 Swear that you will give me one of the younger Graces,  
 Pasithea, the one whom all my days I have longed for.”  
 He spoke, nor failed to persuade Hera of the white arms,  
 and she swore as he commanded, and called by their names on all those  
 gods who live beneath the Pit, and who are called Titans.<sup>84</sup>

In the *Homeric Hymn to Pythian Apollo*, Hera actually prays to the Titans for a child apart from Zeus, and both before and after the prayer “lashes the earth with her stout hand (ἵμασε χθόνα χειρὶ παχείῃ),” a standard gesture of supplication to the underworld deities.<sup>85</sup> The text of her prayer hearkens back to *Iliad* 14.271–279:

Then forthwith mighty, cow-eyed Hera prayed  
 and with the flat of her hand struck the ground and spoke:  
 “Hear me now, Earth and broad Sky above,  
 and you Titans from whom gods and men are descended  
 and who dwell beneath the earth round great Tartaros.  
 Harken to me, all of you, and apart from Zeus grant me a child,  
 in no wise of inferior strength; nay, let him be stronger  
 than Zeus by as much as far-seeing Zeus is stronger than Kronos.”<sup>86</sup>

In *Iliad* 15.36–40, Hera swears to Zeus (that she has had no part in afflicting Hektor and the Trojans) by earth and heaven, and “the dripping waters of the Styx, which oath is the biggest and most formidable oath among the blessed immortals,” the sanctity of Zeus’s own head, and their marriage bed.<sup>87</sup> In *Odyssey* 5.184–186, Kalypso swears that she is not plotting against Odysseus by earth and heaven and the waters of the Styx, using the same formula. In the *Homeric Hymns*, the gods also swear by earth and heaven and the waters of the

Styx (Leto in the *Hymn to Apollo* 83–88, Demeter in the *Hymn to Demeter* 259–262, Hermes in the *Hymn to Hermes* 518–520); the head of Zeus (Hestia in the *Hymn to Aphrodite* 26–28, Hermes in the *Hymn to Hermes* 274); and the “well-adorned doorway of the immortals” (Hermes in the *Hymn to Hermes* 383–384).

The underworld stream that Hesiod’s *Theogony* calls the Στυξ ἄφθιτος (imperishable Styx)<sup>88</sup> and whose water is also ἄφθιτος<sup>89</sup> is the quintessentially binding current. As Gregory Nagy has expressed it, “the waters of the Styx are an elixir of life.”<sup>90</sup> We come to the heart of the matter in Hesiod’s *Theogony* 793–805, where we hear of the high cost of oath-breaking among the eternal ones; the poet tells us that “whoever of the deathless gods that hold the peaks of snowy Olympus pours a libation (ἀπολείψας) and is forsworn, lies breathless until a full year is completed.”<sup>91</sup> The perjured god lies stricken in an “evil trance” (κακὸν . . . κῶμα) for a year, unable to be nourished by ambrosia or nectar, and is ostracized from the gods’ councils and feasts for a full nine years after that. “Such an oath, then, did the gods appoint the eternal and primaeval water of Styx to be.”<sup>92</sup> So the Styx is not only invoked in divine oaths; it is actually poured out in the libations of the gods, just as libation accompanies mortal oaths. But there the mirror image ends: if their oaths are broken, the Olympians face supernatural punishment of inhuman proportions, for they, the holiest of beings, have dipped their bowls into the holiest of rivers.

The gods who pray and swear in the preceding passages clearly do not invoke their own power, but that of other numinous entities. The examples in which “earth” powers are invoked once again raise the question we encountered in chapter 1: Are we dealing with a hierarchy that envisions the old, chthonian divine order as more powerful than the newer, Olympian one, and thus able to guarantee the oaths of the gods? Are Kronos and the overthrown Titans, or the underworld in general—the world of the river Styx—more powerful than Zeus, his sister, and their offspring? Does Hera pray to the underworld powers in the *Hymn to Apollo* because they can grant what Zeus cannot, or because she wishes to circumvent him? If the former, then this might provide a possible explanation as to whom the gods are pouring libations in the vase-paintings. If the latter, then we must look elsewhere for answers to our iconographic question.

In the comic fantasy by Aristophanes, *Birds*, the birds are coaxed by the Athenian Peisetaerus to build a kingdom in the sky, and the gods are lampooned. Poseidon responds to one of the con artist’s ideas by swearing to himself:

POSEIDON: “By Poseidon, you’re really hitting the nail on the head!”

(νῆ τὸν Ποσειδῶ, ταῦτά γέ τοι καλῶς λέγεις; lit: you’re saying these things well indeed!).<sup>93</sup>

We laugh at this 2,400 years later, but why? In the usual turn of speech, a mortal swears by a power greater than herself. When the supreme power, seeking a way to emphasize his words, swears by his *own* name, the paradox amuses. One need look no further for confirmation than the courtroom scene

in the 1980s movie “Oh, God!” God, played by droll elder George Burns, is asked to testify as a witness on behalf of the mortal he has befriended. He puts his left hand on the Bible, croaks, “Good book,” and raises his right, promising to “tell the whole truth and nothing but the truth, so help me Me.” It is the self-referentiality of the oaths of both Poseidon and Burns-as-God that is funny; there is no higher authority to guarantee the oath, and so the deity who swears must invoke his own godhead.

### *Deified Mortals*

Two passages comprise a thematic coda to the passages discussed above. Both treat deified mortals who offer to themselves. Strabo, a Peripatetic historian from Pontus (64/3 B.C.E.–C.E. 21), became a Stoic whose writings tend toward skepticism on religion.<sup>94</sup> He quotes Artemidorus’s account of the visit of Alexander the Great to Ephesus in *Geography* 14.1.22 (C641). Alexander offers to pay for the restoration of the great temple of Artemis (which had been burned by an ancient arsonist, Herostratus) “on the condition that the inscription should bear his name (as benefactor) (ἐφ’ ᾧ τε τὴν ἐπιγραφὴν αὐτὸν ἔχειν).” However, “they did not want this, just as they would have wanted even less to seek glory by the robbing of temples and fraud. And he [Artemidorus] praises the Ephesian who said to the king [Alexander] that it would not be appropriate for a god to set up votive offerings to the gods (ὡς οὐ πρέπει θεῶ θεοῖς ἀναθήματα κατασκευάζειν).”<sup>95</sup> This unctious episode describes Ephesian pandering, or else could be interpreted as propaganda on the part of Artemidorus. But no more explicitly negative answer could be given by an ancient source to one of our initial questions: In ancient Greek religion, can a god bring offerings to another god?<sup>96</sup>

Ironically, in the next passage (14.1.23) we find reference to a statue of Alexander, the alleged god, making libations. Still paraphrasing Artemidorus, Strabo relates that Cheiocrates,<sup>97</sup> who completed the work on the Artemis temple and was also the builder of Alexandria, had apparently “promised Alexander to fashion [Mount] Athos into him [i.e., Alexander’s own image], [portraying him] as if pouring a libation from some kind of ewer into a phiale (ὑποσχέσθαι Ἀλεξάνδρῳ τὸν Ἄθω διασκευάσειν εἰς αὐτόν, ὡσανεὶ ἐκ πρόχου τινὸς εἰς φιάλην καταχέοντα σπονδήν).”<sup>98</sup> The artist seemed to want to incorporate the Macedonian ruler into the ubiquitous sculptural tradition of the god holding a libation vessel. We cannot be sure whether or not Alexander was already divinized when Cheiocrates made his promise. If he was not, then the Macedonian Mount Rushmore would depict Alexander the king in a colossal act of mortal worship. If he was in fact considered to be divine at the time, then an old ambiguity would be clarified: the god (Alexander) would explicitly be pouring a libation (καταχέοντα σπονδήν) rather than merely extending a libation bowl. This would not be inconsistent with the import of Strabo’s previous story about the scrupulous Ephesians. One is reminded that the objection about a god offering to other gods was from an Ephesian, not from Alexander,

who did not seem to find his status as a god confusing when it came to practicing religion.

The idea of a god being his or her own hierophant is also at the root of the megalomania of the Roman emperor Gaius (Caligula, 12–41 C.E.). Rejecting the Augustan principate for a more Hellenistic concept of monarchy and probably mentally ill to boot, Gaius’s career as emperor is chronicled by the political analyst Dio Cassius.<sup>99</sup> In the latter’s Roman history, written between 207–229 C.E., Gaius styled himself Jupiter Latiaris, making his wife Milonia Caesonia and “others who were wealthy” priests. The weirdness only escalates: “And moreover, he consecrated himself as a priest to himself and declared his horse to be a co-priest (καὶ προσέτι καὶ αὐτὸς ἑαυτῷ ἱερᾶτο, τὸν τε ἵππον συνιέρεια ἀπέφηνε).”<sup>100</sup> Expensive birds were sacrificed (ἐθύοντο) to him daily.

In his *Rituals and Power*, a study of Roman imperial cult in Asia Minor, S.R.F. Price discusses the temple at Smyrna dedicated to Tiberius, whose cult statue represented the emperor in a toga and perhaps with a veiled head. As Price notes, “the implication of the veiled head is that the emperor was shown as a priest.”<sup>101</sup> And as he further clarifies, “It might seem to break all the categories to find the emperor as the object of cult himself shown as a priest and even holding their sacrificial patera over an altar. . . . But the gods often held their own eponymous priesthoods . . . and are often shown making sacrificial offerings of this kind.”<sup>102</sup> The reflexive conflation and interchangeability of sacrificial roles characterizing the imperial period was not an innovation, but drew from centuries of “breaking categories” in the ancient Mediterranean world. Gods had long behaved as priests when such an identification (already implicit) suited their purposes.

In the next chapter we will explore how other scholars have reacted to this “breaking of categories” represented by sacrificing gods.

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# 4

## “Divine Libation”: A Century of Debate

### Modern Anxieties

Ancient literary descriptions of cult statues holding libation bowls add to our catalogue of evidence, as well as give us a sense of the ubiquity of this type. But they do not tell us *why* the gods were carved in stone or cast in bronze holding the phiale. As we have seen in chapter 3, occasions of divine libation in ancient literature are sparse and problematic: burlesques, stylized anomalies, and didactic philosophical tracts. With the possible exception of Hermes’s libation in Aristophanes’s *Peace*, they also seem strangely divorced from the visual evidence; neither myth, nor hymn, nor drama reflect the vase-paintings, and the reverse is also true. Thus we are forced to interpret these surviving images on their own terms. However paradoxical to us, this divine behavior existed in the ancient Greek religious imagination—and not at the periphery. What if we momentarily allow the problem of divine libations to become central, rather than peripheral—and to direct our questions about ancient Greek sacrifice? How many of our categories must be revised?

One of the recurrent aspects of this paradox as it is treated in the secondary literature is that the sacrificing god seems to challenge, or even to threaten, fundamental notions of what an ancient Greek god might be. Later, in other religious traditions, we will find that the god as ritual participant emerges as not only natural but theologically essential. In still others, the idea of a god who worships can be just as jarring as in the Greek case—and yet the idea most emphatically does exist in the literature or art of those traditions. In the sense that orthodox *Religionswissenschaft* has usually described it, could godhead include the activity of worship? Would a god really pour libations, offer



sacrifices, or pray? If so, would that change the nature of godhead? Or does “the problem” reside purely with our own limitations, and not with the serene eyes and golden bowls of the Olympians or their creators, the long-dead potters and painters whose kilns clustered at the gates of the Kerameikos? As Paden puts it, “Other worlds and other gods do co-exist with our own world and our own gods, and they are threatening precisely because they have a different set of premises from ours and thus explicitly or implicitly call into question the absoluteness of our own assumptions and commitments.”<sup>1</sup> In this case, our specific commitments may be to the hierarchy of sacrifice that *we* have ascribed to ancient Greek religion.

That hierarchy is laid out in the principle of *do ut des*. More elegantly, Porphyry’s *Περὶ ἀποχρῆς ἐμψύχων* (*On Abstinence*), a work of the third century C.E., preserves the beliefs of the late classical philosopher Theophrastus that τριῶν ἔνεκα θυτέον τοῖς θεοῖς (there are three reasons to sacrifice to the immortal gods): ἢ γὰρ διὰ τιμὴν ἢ διὰ χάριν ἢ διὰ χρεῖαν τῶν ἀγαθῶν (for the sake of honoring them, or to express gratitude, or in order to receive certain benefits).<sup>2</sup> Simply expressed, the individual or the community gives something to the god, who in turn confers favor or protection. The gods usually appear in works on Greek religion as the gracious if somewhat detached recipients of sacrificial offerings, whether on Olympus, embodied in cult image, or manifest in sudden epiphany. They, in turn, confer favor or protection on the sacrificing individual or community. The boundaries of canonical sacrificial roles have been viewed as static, not fluid.<sup>3</sup> In the words of Jean-Pierre Vernant, “This presence of the gods in the entire universe, in social life, and even in men’s psychological life, does not mean that there are no barriers between the divine and the mortal creatures; indeed the barriers not only exist but are, in a sense, insurmountable. The gods are a part of the same universe as men but it is a universe with a hierarchy, a world of different levels where it is impossible to pass from one to another.”<sup>4</sup>

This group of solemn gods from the mind of the Berlin Painter confronts us with apparent anarchy. The fluid sacrificial activity challenges received opinion; and the “barriers” invoked by Vernant are dissolved in a powerful reversal. Gods worship as mortals do. *They join them at the level of obeisance*. To worship, as we understand the term, implies a recipient who is superior. But who is superior to the Olympians? Thus the barriers have become permeable, in a way that extends far beyond the well-known visits of the immortals to earth to rape, kill, or carry off mortals. Who, then, has invaded whose realm? Are the gods made more human by pouring libations? Or does it become clearer that human beings are projecting their needs and acts onto the world of the gods, up to and including even the practice of cult? Does the human act of libation make the gods seem closer to the human, or farther away and more remote? Why are the gods themselves offering? By worshipping, are they rendered, oxymoronically, as contingent omnipotency? And above all, to whom do they offer? Scholars have responded to such questions with a range of contradictory answers.

The history of classical scholarship concerning this problem commands attention in that it evokes much larger questions about what has been considered normative in ancient Greek religion. The reactions of those who have written on this theme reinforce a sense of an unknown country; they have found it strange or even disturbing.<sup>5</sup> Writing years after the explanations offered by scholars of the caliber of Erika Simon and Martin Nilsson, Eugene Lane still can comment on the Hellenistic god Mên, “it is clear that Men is holding a patera for libations. This is a type which, as is well known, goes far back in Ancient Greek iconography, particularly numismatic. . . . Still, I do not know whether it has ever been satisfactorily explained why a *god* should be pouring libations.”<sup>6</sup>

The discussion that follows bears witness to the confusion that has attended efforts to interpret these images. With some exceptions, two intellectual tendencies prevail. In the first place, one notes a real reluctance on the part of classical scholars to confront or analyze the anomaly. Comments dating from the late nineteenth century onward are characteristically brief, and are sometimes included almost as an afterthought to a more general discussion of libation or the larger theme of sacrifice. More common, however, is an aside—a “stab in the dark” at an explanation of this religious phenomenon—in the scholarly publication of a particular artifact or group of artifacts that happen to feature the libating gods theme.

Perhaps for this reason, explanations tend to be dismissive. However, one might also argue that their brevity and almost offhand tone illustrate the fact that “Otherness is a challenge that has always been met through the self-defensive activity of interpretation. The typical response to otherness—or foreignness—is to defuse it by explaining it in some fashion.”<sup>7</sup> The history of reluctance to acknowledge the importance and the admitted difficulty of the question of what I have termed “divine reflexivity” in fifth-century Greece is hard to understand in light of the fairly extensive body of evidence left to us.

Neglect tends to be accompanied by a second characteristic that is just as frustrating: vagueness. Interpretations are often fragmentary in nature, answering only one potential aspect of the question, “What can this mean?” Rather than shedding light on *why* it is so hard to offer a satisfactory answer, past scholarship has tended to lose itself in contradictory, non-historically specific generalizations about what developments in late archaic and early classical Greek religion could have precipitated this phenomenon.

It is not my intention to offer yet another glib solution to a very difficult problem. We may never be able to understand the mystery rendered by the Berlin Painter. In this chapter, I summarize and critique major interpretive efforts to date. Each scholar is aware of the work on divine libations preceding him or her; each has responded to the hermeneutical challenge in a unique and nuanced way. Interpretive schools of thought into which the major thinkers on the *opfernde Götter* might be grouped do emerge. My intent is to make the complexity clear before offering my own interpretative hypothesis in the next chapter.

### “The Humanization of the Gods”

The first important modern comment on scenes of divine libations in early classical Greek art took what might be considered the most self-evident approach: The gods are shown as behaving like people.<sup>8</sup> This assumption naturally followed from the hypothesis of a “humanization” of the gods in the Greek religious imagination, commencing at the time of the transition from the archaic to the classical periods.

In 1881, the art historian Adolf Furtwängler discussed the design of a tondo inside a fifth-century white-ground kylix from Athens (no. 141; Fig. 61).<sup>9</sup> In this fragmentary scene, a regally enthroned being with a staff in the left hand holds out a libation bowl in the right which is literally embossed on the cup, represented in relief. Although the upper torso and head are missing, the arms and hands are feminine in aspect. Another figure (whose identity has also been lost save an arm, hand, and a fraction of the entire vertical plane of the standing body), also delicately rendered, fills the outstretched phiale with a wine jug. Furtwängler claimed that this scene depicted an offering poured out by Kore (Persephone) to Demeter. His explanation inaugurated a century of debate on the topic that would be almost exclusively dominated by German classical scholars.<sup>10</sup>

Furtwängler adamantly refuses to see any overtones of worship in the gesture he has isolated. He characterizes this particular scene as typical of an effort

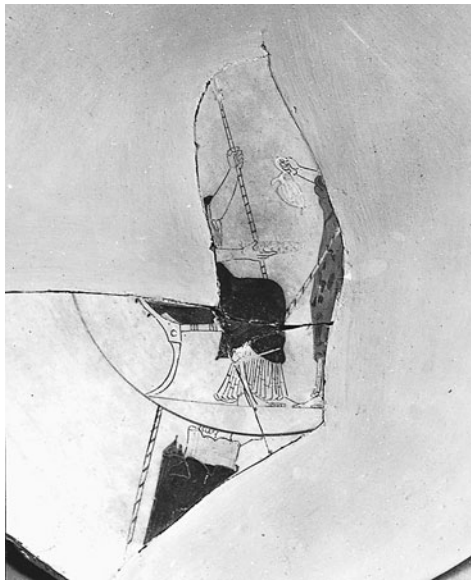


FIGURE 61. Libation scene: seated deity with scepter and phiale; standing deity with oinochoe. Attic white-ground kylix from Athens, 470–460 B.C.E.

in the classical period to portray the younger gods as serving the older—a “social” reading that reflects the hierarchy of Furtwängler’s own time and class.<sup>11</sup> “Pouring,” in his view, was simply an Olympian sign of reverence between the two generations. In the same league as Kore are grouped the “pouring” portrayals of Nike, Iris, Hebe, Hygieia, Hermes-Kadmilos, Eros, the satyrs and maenads, and so forth. He connects this with the classical stone grave reliefs in which the mother or sister of a dead hero brings him drink offerings at his tomb. In other words, the liquids are poured to the one who possesses a higher degree of sanctity than the one who pours. And the liquids are *drinks*. In no way should the gesture be thought of as prelude to mortal-style libation and prayer; he denies it any significance as an act of worship *per se*.<sup>12</sup>

In Furtwängler’s time, of course, far fewer examples of offering gods as such were known or studied. Subsequent analysis has revealed two important facts that contradict his fundamental premises. Foremost is the fact that we frequently find in both vase-paintings and reliefs a higher order of gods such as Apollo, Artemis, Ares, and Athena holding phialai, as well as the highest gods such as Hera and Zeus. So the phenomenon is not confined to members of the younger, less empowered generation of gods such as Kore, Iris, or Hermes (all of whom, incidentally, ought not to be grouped so haphazardly with decidedly supernatural creatures such as satyrs, or mercurial creatures such as maenads, who in any given image might potentially be construed as mortal). Second, the gods are in fact often depicted actually making libations, even (surprisingly) when they are enthroned.

Furtwängler does mention cases of gods such as Apollo and Kore in admittedly religious actions by themselves, pouring *σπονδαί* near altars. He accounts for these as “a final consequence of the humanization of the gods, who now appear as pious and in a certain sense conditioned beings.”<sup>13</sup> He is followed in this by Christos Karouzos and Werner Fuchs, although Luschey only accepts his theory in the case of the guilty Apollo (see below).<sup>14</sup> Furtwängler locates the source of the motif in the iconographic influence of the epoch of Pheidias, with its strong tendency to “transfer to the gods typological scenes that have been formed on the basis of human circumstances.”<sup>15</sup> Thus, he explains, the ancient Greeks even went so far as to put libation bowls in the hands of cult statues, which directly derived from their custom of depicting the higher gods as being served drinks by the younger gods. Since the gods poured for each other, human beings wanted to “imagine them (the gods) even offering libations.”<sup>16</sup>

He does not say how this “final result” occurred from the supposedly nonreligious “enthronement” scenes found on the vase-paintings. However, it is clear from his language that he considers it somewhat of a degradation of the divine. The pure, deathless Olympian realm is compromised by mortals anxious to drag their gods down to their level by having them perform familiar activities, even religious ones. Yet the majority of the vase-paintings were executed before Pheidias was twenty years old. Neither of Pheidias’s monumental chryselephantine statues at Olympia or Athens held a phiale, nor do any of the gods in his “humanizing” reliefs such as the seated retinue on the east frieze of the Parthenon, generally thought to be reviewing the Panathenaic procession.<sup>17</sup>

Crucial in this early stage of the modern discussion is the notion of *Übertragung* (transference) of human ritual activity to the gods.<sup>18</sup> It arises from the fundamental concept that human beings project their own attributes and behaviors onto the divine, and that every representation of the divine always encodes the human habitus. Taken to its final conclusion, it has formed one of the more powerful arguments against the objective reality of a supreme being. It has formed the stylobate for intellectual systems as stark as Marx's dialectical materialism and as clinical as Freud's theory of infantile, father-obsessed religiosity. Whether identified as "anthropomorphizing" the divine or "projecting onto" God attributes of our own nature, the idea, which we trace in antiquity, has both anthropological and theological aspects.

Furtwängler's hypothesis assumes that the phenomenon of transference can extend as far as worship. In other words, the immortals are seen by mortals as imitating human behavior. The model is not one of humans aspiring to divine imitation (as is so often the case in the lore surrounding the ancient Greek hero). This explanation would also therefore imply that gods in the images we are considering, like people, worship the gods. However, as they *are* the gods, the result is entrapment in a disturbingly circular idea. Circularity does not make it wrong; but it is necessary to spell out its implications.

One of the important problems with Furtwängler's concept of a classical "moment" of *Vermenschlichung der Götter* is that the quality of "anthropomorphism" in the θεοί had been evident long before the period during which these vases were painted.<sup>19</sup> That the gods seem to reflect human behavior and not the other way around was most radically expressed in the Homeric epics and Hesiodic poetry, where the Olympians appear as subject to every aspect of human frailty, but on a titanic scale. In *The Birth of Tragedy*, Friedrich Nietzsche commented that they "justified human life by living it themselves—the only satisfactory theodicy ever invented."<sup>20</sup> Centuries of Greek tradition proposed an insanely jealous Hera, a sex-addicted Zeus, a vicious Aphrodite, a churlish Ares, a thieving, lying Hermes. Although they have their moments of majesty, these were the gods of ancient Greece; they may have been exemplifying "humanization" as early as the thirteenth century B.C.E., if we are to believe the latest research in Homeric philology.<sup>21</sup>

Not until the second half of the sixth century do alternative, sublimated religious movements become visible in Greece: the archaic Orphic and Pythagorean cults centering on purity, the afterlife, mathematics, or music, and the early pre-Socratic philosophers of Ionia such as Anaximander of Miletus and Heraclitus of Ephesus, who began to build the first speculative bridges between religion and science. Xenophanes of Colophon, whom we have mentioned, sees anthropomorphism in religion as degenerate. His complaints about the immorality of the gods of Homer and Hesiod are notorious, supported by the claim that human beings fashion deities exactly in their own depraved image (see Introduction). Believing this to be a primitive phenomenon, he is not singling out his own age in particular, but Olympian religion in general. And he precedes Pheidias's floruit by a century. Furtwängler does not address the question of

why this phenomenon became so prevalent at this particular time. Why do the gods begin to sacrifice on so many Attic vases from 510 to 460 B.C.E.? Their *Vermenschlichung* surely did not begin with the era of Pheidias.

A captivating elaboration on the theme of *Vermenschlichung der Götter* was advanced by the noted classical art historian Karl Schefold in 1937, but with a somewhat different spin. He does agree with Furtwängler that mortal religious behavior has been transferred (*übertragen*) to the gods. However, rather than merely consisting of the pathetic spectacle of human beings ascribing their own rituals to the divinities, the gods are presented as having also autonomously and calmly assumed human ritualism.<sup>22</sup> Furthermore, once they have appropriated an act of worship, as they do libation in the vase-paintings, that ritual act assumes a certain aura that it does not have when simply performed by mortals. Schefold's comments are characterized by a degree of respect for these scenes that is absent from those of his predecessor.

As is typical of many others, Schefold makes his remarks in passing; they occur in the context of a long article concerning the treatment of cult images in the fifth century. He correctly notes that the “living god” and his or her cult image could appear in the same vase-painting during this period.<sup>23</sup> On a subtler and far more problematic plane, images that are not easily categorized are also common. Their status is ambiguous. These show the god or goddess in the physical attitude (and with a trace of the solemnity) typical of a cult image. However, they lack the stiff, staring quality that makes their identification as cult images certain; they seem to be rendered with an intentional flexibility. Enthroned deities are the most obvious example, but standing examples are also common.

The focus of Schefold's observations is an image of Zeus on a hydria by the Providence Painter in Warsaw from about 460 B.C.E. (no. 45).<sup>24</sup> Seated on a splendid throne which in turn is depicted standing upon on a statue base, the god holds a thunderbolt in his left hand, and in his right a phiale, into which Athena is about to pour. Nike stands behind Zeus, ready to crown him with a wreath. “The sacrifice and ceremony of the scene are transferred from the (realm of) mortals to (that of) the gods. No gestures are so powerful as the gentle movements from the calm tranquillity of these higher beings.”<sup>25</sup>

Schefold's brief remarks are important in two ways. He does not shrink from calling the proceedings “sacrifice” and “ceremony.” For him, they are clearly religious in nature, although the scene would certainly fit Furtwängler's criteria as that of a more powerful, older god being “served” by a younger one who pours for him. He also touches on the supernatural atmosphere that surrounds these scenes, one of timeless omnipotence and calm. The very ordinary “gesture” of libation (which is what the ritual is called in the work by Gerhard Neumann in 1965) assumes a special kind of power when the gods perform it. The ritual itself is elevated to a higher plane. This observation of Schefold's touches on what I believe to be a crucial aspect of the “worshipping god” phenomenon not only in the ancient Greek but also in other religious traditions, as will be shown.

The last word on the subject to date is also Furtwängler's most recent intellectual heir. In a monograph by Karim W. Arafat, we have a specific treatment of the image of the libating Zeus in late Archaic and early Classical art.<sup>26</sup> The Ζῆνες of his study are divided into two groups: those which portray the Father of Gods and Mortals in libation scenes with Hera, and those which portray him pouring offerings alone.<sup>27</sup>

Why are these scenes so perplexing and what do they mean? "It is impossible to know whether these matters were so unclear to the Greeks. Unlike (other vase-painting) . . . scenes, it is not immediately apparent what is happening on these vases. But it may be that nothing is going on beyond the libation that we see. There need be no reference to the *hieros gamos* or Theogamia or other rite, cult, or festival. If there were such a reference, we might expect it to be made explicit, although it must be acknowledged that there is a difference between what would be explicit to us and what would be to a fifth-century Greek, particularly an Athenian."<sup>28</sup>

Arafat's refusal to pinpoint the *aition* for a divine libation scene, thus allowing it to be just what it looks like, is similar to the priestly tone of Himmelmann-Wildschütz, whose theory is discussed below. If it looks like a libation, why not simply let it be a libation, and look no further? Both reject Erika Simon's "detective" search for mythological and sometimes real cultic allusions in the art. Beyond that, however, he diverges sharply from any attempt to ascribe special religious meaning to libations poured by the gods. Arafat seems convinced that a mountain has been made out of a molehill. "Libations were everyday events, the gods indulge in other everyday activities familiar to mortals (fighting, drinking, loving, etc.), so why need there be any implicit meaning to scenes of libations among the gods, without whom libations were, in any case, unintelligible? This does not mean that libations were carried out casually, however, and many of the scenes show a considerable deal of solemnity."<sup>29</sup> In the work of Arafat and others, classical scholarship has seen a reassertion of the "humanization of the gods"; it is against this tendency that Mary Lefkowitz writes (see Introduction). For Arafat, sacrifice is not a special category of divine activity. He is willing to concede its "solemnity" as setting it apart from other mortal activities performed by the gods. Beyond that, he does not see why it should be singled out by the scholars preceding him as having any particular meaning.

This attitude is typical of a purely archaeological approach to an iconographic problem. Reductionism is mistaken for objectivity. A serious theoretical obstacle arises to our acceptance of Arafat's structurally careless approach. Libation is *not* normal, undifferentiated mortal behavior, in which the transaction is merely between mortals. Rather, it is an act of worship. The concept of "worship" brings with it the assumption of a *hierarchy of offering*: Mortals bring gifts to beings superior to themselves. We circle back to the vexing question: If "worship" as performed by the high gods means exactly what it does when performed by human beings, then what power would be an appropriate object of the gods' worship? Who receives the religion of the gods?

## The Phiale as Mediating Element between Realms

Another broad school of thought seeks to find an answer to the question, “Why are the high gods pouring out wine?” by focusing on the instrument of cult itself, the libation bowl. Whatever their differences, these scholars agree on the centrality of the sacrificial vessel (occasionally a *kantharos*, but usually a *phiale*) as the visual and ritual focus of the vase-paintings. According to this conceptual approach, the vessel itself assumes the most importance in the image—serving as a kind of mediator between the realm of human and divine, or, in one case, between the gods themselves. The ritual itself, and its paraphernalia, are stressed as paramount; any mythological etiology for them is denied or minimized. It is interesting to contrast this line of thinking with that of Erika Simon, which finds divine ritual libations as essentially meaningless without episodic myth to illumine them. Although “myth-and-ritual” has often been expressed as an interlocked idea in the history of religions, perhaps it is telling that a paradox such as a “sacrificing god” in art provokes the proponents of each to a polite brawl.

A ritualistic focus first occurs in the thought of Heinz Luschey, who made the important observation that the libation bowls in some sense belonged to the gods who held them. In an entry written for the Supplement to the Pauly-Wissowa *Real-Encyclopädie* over a decade after his Munich doctoral dissertation on the *phiale*, Luschey briefly interprets the iconography of the mysterious *phiale*-bearing deities of the classical period.<sup>30</sup> He maintains that a natural development from the custom of pouring libations *to* the gods out of ritual bowls was the notion that the libation bowls themselves also actually *belonged* to them.<sup>31</sup> Presumably it would then be a short logical leap to portray the god who received the liquid offering as the one who held the *phiale*, the cult instrument, rather than the mortal who poured out the wine. In support of this line of reasoning, Heinz Luschey invokes the passage in *Iliad* 16.225–227 in which Achilles dedicates a certain golden goblet (*δέπας*) exclusively to libations to Zeus.<sup>32</sup> He claims that at the beginning of the fifth century B.C.E., *phialai* were added to sculpture depicting the gods, especially to cult statues, “as an expression of the [idea of] the reception of libations, and later [as an expression] of [their] bestowing blessings.”<sup>33</sup>

The idea of the transference of a cult instrument from devotee to deity is fascinating, but Luschey does not explain how we (and the *phiale*) are to make the leap from the hand of the libating mortal to the hand of the receiving god. This argument depends heavily on the confinement of the motif of divine *phiale*-bearing to cult statues, and that is exactly where Luschey tries to keep it. One could concede that a ritual bowl might be added to an immobile, ceremonial cult statue as an attribute. But it does not explain why the god would begin to use it! The evidence we considered in chapter 2, from the late archaic Acropolis sherds on, shows more dynamic scenes of the gods actively pouring offerings, with red wine added on with paint as it splashes onto an altar or toward



the earth. These are clearly not cult images. Luscheý's transition from the idea of "the reception of libations" (which makes the deity passive, the one who is poured to) to that of their "bestowing blessings" (in which the deity is active, the one who distributes, presumably by pouring) is facile. The first half of the argument appears to undermine the second.

Sculptural dating shows that the god-with-libation-bowl theme becomes prominent in sculpture as early as the late sixth century (e.g., nos. 1–3); although the Piraeus Apollo discovered in 1959, and the Halos deposit found at Delphi (with the libating Apollo) the same year as *Die Phiale* was published, may have been unknown to Luscheý, he also does not seem to take the vase-paintings into account. The scene of Dionysos pouring wine from a kantharos onto a burning altar by the Nikosthenes Painter in Boston discussed in chapter 2 appears as early as 510 B.C.E. (no. 9; Fig. 35).<sup>34</sup> Reliefs do not pick up the theme until the last quarter of the fifth century, and libating gods are especially prominent in reliefs of the fourth century. In the case of these reliefs (as in no. 228, showing the Brauronian Artemis greeting a throng of worshipers) we may in fact be dealing with a cult image, but it is very hard to distinguish between what portrays a statue and what a "living god," as Schefold's work shows.

Perhaps in response to Furtwängler's stance, Luscheý maintains that "a humanization of divinity" can only be properly attributed in the case of the ritual atonement for Apollo's slaying of the Pytho.<sup>35</sup> His main argument lies in the concept of transference from the human to the godly sphere. This is not simply transference of the general behavior of worshiping. For Luscheý, it is actually symbolized by the transfer of the phiale itself, from mortal to immortal hand.

Due to its timing, an important article by Brigitte Eckstein-Wolf was obscured to a large extent by the meteor of Erika Simon's *Opfernde Götter*.<sup>36</sup> Eckstein-Wolf saw the phiale as a symbol or signifier of the connection between humanity and the majestic, remote gods of fifth-century Attica. For her, the libation bowl added a new dimension to the images of the gods, but only as an attribute borrowed from the human realm.<sup>37</sup>

A bell krater from Syracuse depicts Artemis and Leto flanking the citharode Apollo who stands holding a phiale; Ganymede, Hermes, and a deer are also in attendance (no. 193). Eckstein-Wolf rejects the concept of each god sacrificing to that god who surpasses him or her in power, mirroring a normal human hierarchy, since there always remains the thorny challenge of the libating Zeus. Nor, she claims, should we think of Apollo's libation as a thank-offering after a citharodic victory, even though he holds the lyre. She accounts for the laurel wreath that Artemis is about to set on Apollo not as a victor's crown but simply as a special expression that renders him honor. "But then the question remains, to whom is the god pouring?"<sup>38</sup>

Although in this vase-painting the wine is clearly visible as it flows from the slanted bowl, Eckstein-Wolf insists that if we focus with intention on the bowl, we will arrive at a strange conclusion. "Apollo is certainly not pouring the wine out. Rather, he holds the bowl gently, and *without his action*, the wine flows onto the ground. The assumption that Apollo would be depicted in the

act of a libation seems highly unlikely. *The bowl is pouring libations, not the god: “Die Schale spendet, nicht der Gott”* [italics mine].<sup>39</sup>

Eckstein-Wolf’s radical claim is that not the divinity but the bowl was pouring the libations we see clearly flowing out. The god’s portrait, the old archaic divine “image of existence” (which she called *Seinsbild*) was transformed into an action image in classical times. Despite such a change in the content, she argues, the form was not affected. “The libation utensil appears as an attribute”; rather than a separate mythological *aition* for each case, the same idea underlies all the offering divinities.<sup>40</sup> The phiale assumes a pivotal mediating role, just like the frequently appearing winged sacrificial ministrant, Nike: “[T]he phiale as a holy cult apparatus of drink offering has a part in both spheres: the human as well as the divine, which it is Nike’s duty to bind together.”<sup>41</sup> Here she anticipates the views of Herbert Hoffman, discussed in chapter 1, of the phiale as a kind of magical, autonomous cultic emblem that can bring realms together.

In Eckstein-Wolf’s decisive vision, however, divine libation clearly derives its meaning from human libation. The ceremony of libation thus becomes a fluid connector between gods and mortals. The gods sacrifice in a kind of “second dimension or sphere,” which makes clear that the divine is a realm apart from the human; paradoxically, a human ceremony is the vehicle for this partition. But then Eckstein-Wolf strays into deeper waters. She says that the presence of a human cult instrument, the bowl, in the hand of the god “thus shows that he has attained a new, peaceful loftiness as the result of a greater distance from humanity, but that nevertheless a relationship with human beings belongs to his being.”<sup>42</sup> Eckstein-Wolf believes that the instant in which the gods were depicted holding the phiale ushered in a development no less significant than the classical separation of the human from the divine realms. According to her reasoning, the alliance must first be evidenced, if the dissolution is to be fulfilled. “The libation images of the gods unite both images in themselves: the bowl in the hand of the god assures a new, peaceful loftiness out of the greater distance. . . . The bowl of the gods is the expression of the distance and a simultaneous striving towards nearness, and it is no accident that the *floruit* of libation depictions of the gods coincides with the *floruit* of the divinities rendered as statues, [as well as] with the depiction of human libation and that of the ministrant Nike.”<sup>43</sup> “Nah ist und schwer zu fassen der Gott,” as Friedrich Hölderlin wrote in his poem “Patmos”—“the god is so near and yet so difficult to grasp.”<sup>44</sup>

Eckstein-Wolf’s theoretical reasoning is a closed circle. To accept any one of its results, one must accept all of its premises. The notion that the images of divine libation of the fifth century “unite two conflicting poles in themselves” is problematic because there is no evidence from the history of Greek religion that such poles existed.<sup>45</sup>

Gerhard Neumann rightly points out that the gods in classical art adopt many gestures of reverence or of prayerful awe (σέβειν). He examines gestures in vase-painting, including those adopted by gods. One good example is the mortal gesture of raising the index finger with the other fingers folded, indicating reverence or awe before altar or statue of deity.<sup>46</sup> Like the gesture of libation,

this was not confined to mortals. In the archaic period, vase-painting saw Herakles transformed from a boastful character to an unmistakably solemn and pious one through his cultic gestures, like the raised index finger and libation.<sup>47</sup> In first half of the fifth century, Herakles approaches the gods during his induction into Olympus using the former gesture.<sup>48</sup> As we have seen in chapter 2, he is also depicted pouring libations originating from an oinochoe held by his divine patroness, Athena.<sup>49</sup> In a black-figure vase in Naples, Apollo uses the gesture of two raised fingers toward an altar.<sup>50</sup> Such a human gesture of reverence used by a god indicates a special warning that the *temenos* area is near, as well as the solidarity of the gods toward one another. Neumann sees divine libation in classical times as expressing relation between the deities. They adopt a human means of communication between themselves, that is, a conventional gesture.

According to Neumann, the change in Herakles's iconography indicates that cultic gesture has been elevated to the solemn and social customs of the gods.<sup>51</sup> The gods often use such gestures toward each other. When they do, "it reflects the relations of the gods to one another under the auspices of cultic form."<sup>52</sup> Neumann's "reductionist" approach to votive gestures can illumine our thinking about the gods who sacrifice, if we accept these representations "as an agreed-upon mutual expression of the bond among the gods between each other as denizens of Olympus."<sup>53</sup>

In this sense, the special cultic gestures can, in the case of divinity, be understood as an analogy to the elementary conventions of humans, which are governed by practical rules. From this perspective, the problem of "libating gods" may be seen in a new light. The libation of the god, too, can be considered as a conventional expression of the connection and solidarity of the gods as denizens of Olympus. However, it remains as a question whether in each special case the holy thing, the altar, beside the other god honored through these gestures—and independently of him—should also be paid reverence. Such an interpretation would be consistent with that [line of thinking] according to which the act of libation can be rendered independently."<sup>54</sup>

Neumann cites contemporary literature of the period as making clear that the conventions of the cultic realm had been elevated to the realm of the gods. It is noteworthy, however, that he denies that the religious overtones of that realm have in any way affected the Olympians, even when they adopt its conventions. They might as well be pouring each other cups of tea.

Although a lifelong focus of the thought of Zurich's Walter Burkert has been ancient Greek sacrifice, he exhibits relatively little interest in classical scenes of divine libation, beyond the acknowledgment that they are, indeed, a puzzle.<sup>55</sup> His view of libation, as we noted in chapter 1, is problematic. Although he recognizes the antiquity and ubiquity of the ritual and concedes that "libations which the earth drinks are destined for the dead and for the gods who dwell in the earth," as we have seen, he finds it odd that the Olympian

gods could not conceptually receive any of the liquid; it was lost forever.<sup>56</sup> This may be closely related to his view of the “fundamental sense of libation: raising to hope through serene wastefulness.”<sup>57</sup>

An otherwise careful mind seems to lose itself in the speculative reconstruction of the function and meaning of ritual. “Even the gods themselves, however, are shown holding the libation phial in real statues and especially in paintings. Perhaps the priest would pour the wine into the divine libation bowl and the wine would flow from there in turn. The god, as it were, makes the offering to himself, or rather, he is drawn into the giving and taking of the serenely flowing stream, an epitome of self-sustaining piety.”<sup>58</sup> Burkert offers an interesting hypothesis about how an actual cult statue with phiale may have been used, how the wine was manipulated, and so forth. However, he then groups together without justification the “libating gods” of an actual cultic setting (in a sanctuary on Aegina or Delos, for example) with the highly problematic, and perhaps otherworldly, setting of the vase-paintings, where we are clearly not in a historical place or time.

The only way Burkert’s remarks about the priest pouring the wine into the god’s bowl and the wine flowing thence make any sense for the vase-paintings is if they depict cult statues; whereas, as we have seen, the sacrificing gods are far from static. One has only to see the many images of the phiale-bearing Artemis as she strides or the hovering, airborne Nike at an altar to know that this cannot be true. On the ornate register of the Berlin Painter vase—as on other vases—it is not a priest, but another deity who pours the wine.

The inadequacies of this treatment in terms of the history of religion lie not only in its oversimplification but also in its vague mysticism. “Self-sustaining” is anticipated by Himmelmann-Wildschütz; but Burkert’s use of the word “piety” conjures up, again, the hierarchical issues of sacrifice. The concept of a god “making offering to himself” has no known religious context in ancient Greece. We are told by Hesiod in *Works and Days* of the disastrous silver age, in which human beings could not raise enough food or livestock to offer sacrifices upon the altars of the gods; so, too, in the *Homeric Hymn to Demeter* 310–313.<sup>59</sup> In neither of these accounts do the gods contemplate making offerings themselves, in an effort to restore religiosity. Burkert leaves them dangling, as vaguely symbiotic participants in an exchange of liquid. While offering some noteworthy insights, Burkert does not seem to have solved what he calls this “new problem of interpretation.”<sup>60</sup>

### The Hope of Mythology: “Die Götter opfern wirklich”

The first and only thorough study of the topic of these vase-paintings dates from 1953, the published Heidelberg dissertation of Erika Simon: *Opfernde Götter*.<sup>61</sup> Her controversial main assertion was that libation scenes should be interpreted mythologically; and she was willing to propose such explanations for at least five of the most frequent of these scenes. Simon has three central premises, which focus, respectively, on the relationship between cult statues

and vases, on the religious influence of Aeschylus and Pindar on their time, and on the interpretation of the phiale when held by a god.

First, she asserts that there was no iconographic continuity, and hence no continuity of religious meaning, between the stiff cult statues of the sixth century and the vital depictions of gods carrying libation bowls on fifth-century vases. Archaic cult statues occasionally carried phialai as attributes. These statues are themselves sometimes depicted in fifth-century vase-paintings as part of a cultic or ritual scene. Thus she refutes Furtwängler's and Schefold's contention that the strange vase-paintings of the gods offering sacrifice were directly influenced by the archaic cult statues holding phialai that preceded them in the sixth century.<sup>62</sup> She summarizes this position: "Therefore it could be asserted that the 'sacrificing gods' are in reality not the pourers but the recipients [of the libations], to whom the gesture of sacrifice has been transferred from the human sphere."<sup>63</sup> She maintains that there was no "transference forward" between the two genres of religious image.<sup>64</sup>

Simon takes the opposite path from Eckstein-Wolf, who claims that the phiale itself, rather than the god, does the pouring. For Simon, the gods in these situations pour in the actual sense of the word. She limits herself to the analysis of scenes in which the libation is unequivocally depicted. She also distinguishes between the few images in which the wine is being visibly poured from the phiale, and the many gods who "peacefully" hold the bowl. Therefore, for each separate deity, separate situations out of the mythological tradition must be found, in which these bring an offering. She concedes that in the case of the phiale-bearing cult-images, as well as the depictions of them in vase-paintings, "[T]he bowl in the hand of the cult images must be interpreted in the sense of the reception of [sacrificial] offerings."<sup>65</sup> She fully believes that the cult statues were meant to receive libations in their outstretched bowls. Yet the same interpretation cannot be true for the gods of vase-paintings who move and sacrifice. "Athena is depicted . . . not as an archaic Palladion, but as a living goddess. . . . Situations in which they [the gods] appear in vase-painting with phialai should hardly be thought of as a transferal of attributes from cult-images. The libation bowls in the hand[s] of the gods must at any given time *be inferred from the situation that is depicted*" (italics added).<sup>66</sup>

Part of the argument that the two groups of images belong to completely different categories rests heavily on the notion that the Greeks themselves saw the cult statues as very different from the imposing deities who strode freely about the registers of classical vases. Most of these are not stiff cult images but "living, breathing gods," as Simon puts it, who are themselves sacrificing.<sup>67</sup>

As evidence for this, she points to a krater depicting the Iliupersis from about 460 B.C.E., which features an Apollo sanctuary.<sup>68</sup> This religious precinct, whose identity is established in typical fashion by the use of a column, contains a small, naked, phiale-bearing statue of Apollo. It has the fixed stare and markedly rigid demeanor of a cult image. However, nearby stands the living god himself, fully clothed, and towering above the statue. Simon's point is that these are two different entities in the Greek religious imagination. Thus the phiale meant one thing in the hand of a cult statue and something very different in the hand

of a “living, breathing god.”<sup>69</sup> And the gods who appear in images such as those who form the tableau of the Berlin Painter’s vase in Boston must themselves be making and not receiving libations.<sup>70</sup>

Simon’s second, important point concerns the vitality displayed by the gods in these vase-paintings. The motif of the sacrificing gods enjoyed only a short, idiosyncratic florescence, which was highly localized in Attica. According to Simon, the idea resonated with the early fifth-century trend toward anthropomorphization, or perhaps a revitalization of a sense of the numinous, such as is reflected in the dramas of Aeschylus, on whose stage the gods “walk,” and in the poetry of Pindar.<sup>71</sup>

In support of Simon’s theory, one might consider, for example, the striking confrontation between the angry Apollo in his Delphic sanctuary and the hideous Erinyes awakened on its very floor (*Eumenides* 179–234). In these plays, the gods are actually dramatic characters, who interact with the human protagonists—Athena converses with and offers to protect Orestes (397–489); the goddess appears at the play’s end as supernatural chairman of the jury to cast the deciding ballot to absolve Orestes and in the end mollifies the Erinyes (566 ff.). The lifespan of Aeschylus (525/4–456 B.C.E.), the earliest of the great triumvirate of tragedians, exactly corresponds to the rapid iconographic ascendancy and equally precipitous decline of the sacrificing gods theme in vase-painting.

Simon claims that in the plays of the slightly later tragedians Sophocles (496–406 B.C.E.) and Euripides (485–406 B.C.E.), the gods are far more removed from human affairs; nor do they act or move upon the stage. In the case of Sophocles, the gods are as a distant thunder (especially illustrative are the three Theban plays), even when they appear in the play (*Ajax*, prologue scene). In the hands of Euripides, things are even worse; the gods are cold, distant, and exploitative. The most chilling scene of this style of treatment is the dialogue between the dying Hippolytus and his adored queen of heaven, Artemis, who gives a clinical farewell to her devotee and promises to avenge him (or more correctly, herself), while also telling him not to get too close lest he pollute her (*Hippolytus* 1391 ff.).

The lifespan of the great Boeotian lyric poet Pindar (518–438 B.C.E.) similarly encompasses the late archaic period, the watershed decade of the Persian War, and the buildup of Athenian thalassocracy. Pindar’s elaborate poetical language, often reminiscent of Homeric themes and style, was that of a political and religious conservative whose main concern was honor. His gods receive praise, whether in hymns, paean, encomia, or dirges; they are very much a present and luminous reality in his universe.<sup>72</sup>

Through the reverent lens Simon trains on Aeschylus and Pindar, a rich, multivalent symbolic form becomes an isolated anomaly in the history of Greek art. Yet the multivalency necessarily attending an iconographical paradox like that of a sacrificing god cannot be explained completely by religious fashion or literary influence, even if Simon analyzes the latter as symptomatic rather than causal. Rather, its roots must run historically or symbolically deeper. She rejects the traditional explanation of the “humanization” of the

gods because in most cases traditional occasions of human libation, such as a warrior's departure, are not depicted.

Simon's third argument is that any legitimate interpretation of the phiale should be dictated by the context. For example, she maintains that the scenes on vases that depict Aphrodite bringing a phiale to the Judgment of Paris, or offering a golden libation bowl to Sappho,<sup>73</sup> or to a young love whom she pursues in the woods, are not to be considered within the sphere of ritual activity. Similarly, she dismisses the liquid carried so frequently in the ritual bowl by Aphrodite's son Eros for his mother as a "love potion."<sup>74</sup> She also deliberately excludes libation scenes with "messenger" gods like Iris, Nike, and Hermes.

Simon is also unequivocal in classifying those symposia scenes in which the gods lie on couches and extend phialai as truly borrowed from the human sphere. Interestingly, as noted above, she is not willing by the same token to extend the principle of transmission of behavior from the human to the divine sphere to the libating gods who appear on the vases she analyzes, but maintains that they must be involved in a unique form of piety that pertains only to their divinity.

We return to that persistent question: To whom do the gods sacrifice? Simon relies heavily on the idea that the libating gods were offering to another, unseen power. The actual recipient of the divine sacrifice is only pictured in libations of greeting; otherwise, he or she must be "imagined" by the viewer. This could be a higher god (Athena to Hera on behalf of Herakles; or Zeus in the case of the penitent Apollo). Far more common proposed Simonian recipients were the chthonian powers, specifically the overthrown Titans. With these, she maintains, the new order sought a kind of rapprochement. Like Oedipus at the grove at Colonus, the Olympians also were constrained to propitiate these underworld powers. This she bases on various texts, among them the oaths cited in our chapter 3, such as those taken by the waters of the Styx by Hera in the *Iliad* and in the *Homeric Hymn to Apollo*.<sup>75</sup>

Simon's mythological explanations for the scenes of divine libation are credible to varying degrees; but all of them require, to a certain extent, the suppression of iconographic evidence. In the case of Athena, she focuses on the scenes showing the goddess pouring for Herakles. According to Simon, she is welcoming the new god to the divine realm—"the graduation of her protégé," as Boardman notes.<sup>76</sup> But, as we have seen, on the vases Athena sometimes offers by herself (e.g., no. 8) or pours for her father Zeus (e.g., no. 22).<sup>77</sup>

The theme of the "Delian triad" of Apollo with Leto and Artemis, she says, stems from the earlier monumental group, perhaps sculptural, with Apollo as citharode; the phiale was added.<sup>78</sup> Simon claims that Apollo is pouring libations to Zeus and to the chthonian powers in expiation for the slaughter of the Python. However, the occasional presence of the omphalos in some of the vases which we have seen suggests Delphi and not the Tempê valley. Furthermore, Apollo often pours at an altar. These are σπονδαί; for Simon's argument of chthonian propitiation to make sense, Apollo should pour χοαί, into the ground.<sup>79</sup>

Simon believes that the libation scenes involving Dionysos started out as simple scenes of pouring, where the god first receives wine into his kantharos

(e.g., chronologically, nos. C-21, C-15, and C-19). From there, she thinks, it was a short step to showing the wine as overflowing and spilling out; for the kantharos of Dionysos is inexhaustible.<sup>80</sup> Scenes that depict Dionysos’s libation without an altar (a visual reference to mortal religion) are an expression of his double nature as victim and perpetrator of the chase, as hunter and hunted, and thus, presumably, as sacrificed and sacrificer.<sup>81</sup> She insists, however, that those libations poured by Dionysos at an altar are very different; she views them as iconographically dependent on the common type of the libating Apollo. Simon maintains that the similarity of the scenes of Apollo and Dionysos at an altar are a visual expression of the two gods’ cultic symbiosis at Delphi.<sup>82</sup>

When considering the vases that show Dionysos performing an animal sacrifice (nos. C-38 and C-39), it is interesting that Simon seems to draw closest to surrendering the notion of a divine recipient. “The question of in which god’s honor Dionysos performs these ritual actions can only be answered thus: The tearing of a fawn, an act of maenadic ecstasy, does not point outside the Dionysiac circle, but expends itself in its own being.”<sup>83</sup> She cannot conceive of an object for Dionysos’ sacrifice: “nor does there exist beyond the Dionysiac realm which represents something total and self-contained a recipient of the libation offered by the god in [his] drunken dancing.”<sup>84</sup>

In Simon’s interpretation, the enthroned Zeus and Hera, served by Iris, celebrate their sacred marriage (ἱερός γάμος) and pledge the Ἥρας τελείας καὶ Διὸς πιστώματα.<sup>85</sup> The oinochoe of Iris, she says, is filled with the waters of the Styx for the marriage oath. But as Arafat objects, there are many representations of Zeus, and some of Hera, in which these gods appear alone holding the libation bowl—quite apart from each other. Some of these portray red wine as the libation liquid, not water.

In the case of the Eleusinian deities, Simon interprets the libations poured for or by Triptolemus as departure libations before that hero’s global mission with the gift of grain. Those which simply show the two goddesses holding phialai represent departure libations poured on the occasion of Persephone’s descent to Hades—even though the *Homeric Hymn to Demeter* makes clear that there would not have been much opportunity for this ceremony when the young maiden was snatched by Hades from below the meadow where she was playing with her companions! In those rare scenes where Plouton appears at Eleusis, he is welcomed by the goddesses just as Herakles is on his entry into Olympus, with libations.<sup>86</sup>

As we shall see, the merit of Simon’s approach was hotly debated. However, we might now call into question one of its central tenets, which is the connection between myth (stories about the gods) and portrayed ritual (on the vases); this notorious marriage is by no means universally accepted.<sup>87</sup> As Paul Veyne comments,

I am not even sure that it is necessary to make an exception for etiological myths. Very few Greek myths explain rites, and those that do are less the invention of priests, wishing to lay the foundations for a rite, than the imaginings of ingenious local minds, who fabricated a



fanciful explanation for whatever cultural peculiarity intrigued the traveler. Myth explains rite, but . . . [certain] rite is only a local curiosity. Varro's Stoic distinction is still fundamental: the gods of the city, to whom men made cult; the gods of the poets, that is, those of mythology; and the gods of the philosophers."<sup>88</sup>

Veyne's skepticism is entirely appropriate when applied to Simon's approach, which works for scenes such as the entry of Herakles into Olympus and for the libations that attend the birth of gods—the nymphs who welcome Dionysos; the libation of Zeus at the birth of Athena; and the libation of Athena to welcome the hero Erichthonios. But we can find many more gods and ritual situations in this genre of theme on classical vases than Simon has myths for. As we have seen, even her mythological explanations for certain individual gods can be questioned; but, on an even more dubious note, to whom does Poseidon pour, or Ares? Hermes? And where are the myths for the later classical and Hellenistic adaptations of the theme in votive reliefs, as when Asklepios, Cybele, Bendis, or Mên pour from phialai?

### In the Wake of *Opfernde Götter*

Within two years after the publication of Simon's book, it was reviewed in four major publications; all of the authors were prominent in the field of classical art and archaeology.<sup>89</sup> From the time it appeared, it was cited in any discussion of divine libations in ancient Greek art, and without exception this has continued to be the case to the present. Before the end of the 1950s, however, the book was also censured by other scholars, even for its very title; some took sharp exception to its uncomfortable premise that the high gods were indeed offering sacrifice, a form of religious worship.<sup>90</sup>

The work of a young woman in her mid-twenties, *Opfernde Götter* received such attention for two reasons. It was only the second in a select series of dissertations published by the Deutsches Archäologisches Institut. It also offered a thorough treatment of a theoretical problem simmering for decades, and advanced a new and controversial hypothesis: The fifth-century scenes on vases of the major deities pouring libations were all inspired by events from their respective mythologies. The intensity of the responses to *Opfernde Götter* show that Simon had hit a nerve. Although initial scholarly response, as represented in Boardman's review, was affirmative, criticism grew to a crescendo until Simon's approach was bluntly and perhaps unfairly rejected by Nilsson, and then elegantly controverted by Himmelmann-Wildschütz. The latter offered a nuanced critique that convinces far more than Nilsson's in that Himmelmann's alternative explanation is so much more adaptable to the wide body of evidence. Yet the attention that Simon focused on these strange scenes and the questions that she asked, even when her answers were rejected by many, continue to be important.<sup>91</sup>

In the *Journal of Hellenic Studies*, John Boardman notes that the old idea of the "humanization of the gods" would not stand much longer.<sup>92</sup> In support of Simon, he points out that none of the scenes under consideration reflects any

familiar “mortal” libation scenes (such as the departure or homecoming of a warrior); in fact, in the sixth and early fifth centuries, the opposite seemed to be true in iconography. Mortals were portrayed in a divine fashion, such as in the case of the heroic setting of secular marriage scenes.

Of Simon’s quest for mythological occasions “on which divine libations might be expected,” Boardman comments, “Such occasions are not easy to find, some are rather obscure, others lacking completely; but the approach to these seems correct, even though the explanations are not all equally convincing.”<sup>93</sup> Noting the appearance of Eckstein-Wolf’s work on the same subject, he says that the latter’s skepticism about divine sacrifice is understandable but unduly pessimistic.

He reviews Simon’s explanations for the various deities; Apollo pouring to atone for the murder of the Pytho he seems to accept, but comments on Dionysos, “such scenes are more a demonstration than an occasion, although the Anthesteria festival is reflected in some.”<sup>94</sup> In the end, he calls the book a “tidy, new, and therefore welcome attempt to interpret an important series of scenes: more remains to be said, but it is refreshing to find an iconographic subject on which too much has not already been said treated in this way.”<sup>95</sup>

Marjorie Milne in the *American Journal of Archaeology* has much more to say.<sup>96</sup> She is essentially positive about the book, giving it high marks for careful archaeological documentation. Like Boardman, she recognizes its importance.<sup>97</sup> Contra Eckstein-Wolf, Milne believes that Simon makes a good case for the “libation-purification” interpretation of the Apollo scenes on vases, citing the oinochoe in which Apollo arrives fasting at the village of Deipnas, and is served wine by a local nymph.<sup>98</sup> Simon’s interpretation of scenes of Zeus and Hera served by a winged goddess as the Styx-bound marriage oath of a *hieros gamos* strengthens Roulez’s suggestion.<sup>99</sup> Milne points out the novelty of Simon’s interpretations for the Eleusinian deities.

Milne’s chief quarrel is with the religious inferences drawn by Simon from these scenes, calling the author in this aspect of her work “sometimes less happy. She fails to prove that there is a special nuance of appeasement and reconciliation in libations offered by the gods.”<sup>100</sup> She also strongly calls into question the notion of the Olympian gods seeking to propitiate or in any way sacrifice to the underworld or older powers.<sup>101</sup> As for the so-called libation of Athena to the Erinyes in Aeschylus’s *Eumenides* 1006, Milne also complains that

Miss Simon is too apt to treat the Titans and the Erinyes as if they were beings of much the same kind. This no doubt springs in part from her conviction that Aeschylus is a better guide than “Religionsgeschichte” to the vase paintings of his day. For his *Eumenides*, however, Aeschylus created a new myth. Athena’s involvement in the action, the Erinyes’ reproach of the younger gods (778–808), and Athena’s reference to the thunderbolt of Zeus (827) . . . are all merely a part of the dramatic development of this new myth. They are not evidence that the Athenians of that day believed there was conflict between the Erinyes and the Olympians.<sup>102</sup>

Probably the most categorical rejection of Erika Simon's work came from the Swedish scholar Martin P. Nilsson, in his work on the Hellenistic and Roman mysteries of Dionysos.<sup>103</sup> His objections hinge primarily on one of the most natural questions that occurs when anyone, classicist or otherwise, confronts these images: To whom are the gods sacrificing? Finding no satisfactory answer, and no objects of worship depicted in the vases or sculptural evidence, Nilsson rejects the term "sacrifice" altogether as implying the normal hierarchy of sacrificer, victim, and recipient deity.<sup>104</sup>

His discussion is inspired by a marble relief in the Carl Milles Collection at Lidingö near Stockholm, which portrays a bearded, priestly figure, wearing chiton and hide, and having archaic, spiralized hair and beard. The man, whom Nilsson refers to as "either Dionysos or his priest," holds a cluster of grapes in his left hand, and in his right, a horn from which a libation is poured onto a square garlanded altar before him.<sup>105</sup> On top of the altar is a pile of fruit and the head of a goat. At its corner stands an ithyphallic herm of Priapus; it also wears a hide, which is knotted on its chest. The liquid poured out onto the altar appears to be rendered clearly in stone.

It is interesting that Nilsson rejects his first impression, which is the obvious one. "At the first glance one would say that Dionysos is represented sacrificing to Priapus, but there are very serious objections to such an interpretation."<sup>106</sup> He then attacks the conceptual premise of Simon's title, *Opfernde Götter*. Although he concedes that it is "an interesting book," he says "it is misleading, for it suggests a god offering a sacrifice to some other god. In fact such a god is never represented; the gods of the vase paintings which she treats pour out libations, holding a phiale in their hands. They are not comparable to our relief. The book ought to have been called 'Spendende Götter in der attischen Vasenmalerei.'"<sup>107</sup> Nilsson feels that the German *opfern*, representing the general idea of sacrifice, implies an object or recipient of devotion, whereas the ancient Greek *σπένδειν*, "to pour out a libation," does not. As we have seen in chapter 1, it is far from clear that the act of libation in antiquity had become so stylized; the recipient of libations is specified at some times, and not at others. The distinction ends up being counterproductive to his own case.

He goes on to suggest that two other reliefs, both Hellenistic, are more relevant to the one he is considering. One is of Artemis Eupraxis, "carrying a sacrificial basket and kindling the fire on an altar with a torch." The same objection is made: "Here too there is no god who receives the sacrifice."<sup>108</sup> Two worshippers, a man and a woman, also stand before the altar. The second is a bronze relief from Delos that depicts Artemis holding two torches and kindling a fire on an altar with her right hand. A satyr on the other side seems to place wood on the altar and to blow the fire. To the left behind Artemis, another satyr approaches, carrying a jug in his right hand and a *liknon*, a fan-shaped wicker basket common to the cult of Dionysos, on his head. To the right is a small cult statue standing on a pillar.<sup>109</sup> Nilsson insists that "both reliefs show the goddess Artemis . . . not performing a sacrifice: she looks away from the idol. The sacrifice is made by the Satyrs. The interpretation is that the goddess receives the sacrifice by purveying the sacrificial fire."<sup>110</sup> Yet a Hellenistic vase painting

that depicts Themis appearing with a sacrificial basket and a torch before Bendis is dismissed by Nilsson as “allegorical: it is right to venerate the newly introduced goddess Bendis.”<sup>111</sup>

Several observations might be made about this allegedly corroborative evidence. In the first place, Nilsson bases his argument on the idea that the Delian Artemis is not worshiping, even though she carries cultic implements and lights the sacrificial fire. He bases this on the convenient presence of the satyrs, casting them as the worshipers. This is faulty reasoning. In fact, the whole group, including Artemis, is depicted as engaged in the offering. Furthermore, in the original relief he is discussing, there is no mortal or semidivine figure other than the Dionysiac character in sight, so he cannot say that anyone other than the figure at the altar is making the sacrifice.

Nilsson’s second complaint is that no god receives the sacrifice (as on the first Artemis relief, on his Dionysos relief, and on Simon’s vases). This seems an odd argument against the possibility of anyone, god or mortal, making a sacrifice, as a diachronic survey of Greek figural art reveals that it usually fails to depict a recipient in a sacrificial scene, except for an occasional cult statue. Yet in the two cases he presents where there clearly is a cult statue present (the Priapus in the Dionysos relief and the little pillar statue with long robe on the second Artemis relief), he disqualifies these statues as being too ridiculous to consider as recipients. Why? Because it is a god who is shown sacrificing.

When there is incontrovertibly a divine recipient, as in the Themis-Bendis vase, Nilsson seems to insist on a dubious distinction between what he calls “veneration” (the goddess Themis bringing a sacrificial basket to the goddess Bendis) and “sacrifice.” Suddenly, it is not that he considers there to be a difference between sacrifice and libation, as he earlier seems to suggest. Rather, there is now a difference between sacrifice and any other kind of worship. In other words, even though the goddess Themis is clearly bringing something (a sacrificial basket and a torch) to Bendis, she is not sacrificing to her. She is venerating her.

“That a god should sacrifice to another god implies a contradiction. The Greeks felt so.”<sup>112</sup> Nilsson makes much of the Strabo passage discussed in the previous chapter, in which Alexander’s offer to the Ephesians to dedicate the temple of Artemis is rebuffed on the grounds that it was not proper for a god to make offerings to another god.<sup>113</sup> He combatively adds, “It does not matter if the anecdote is historical or not, it shows what the Greeks thought.”<sup>114</sup> Again, Nilsson assumes that sacrifice, even divine sacrifice, must have a recipient.<sup>115</sup> That recipient must logically be another god, which is cause for modern theoretical confusion; but can we say that such offense was taken by the ancients, and construe an entire theology of images based on one propagandistic incident? Nilsson continues,

If then it is impossible to take the said representations as sacrifices in the common sense of offerings brought to a god, another explanation must be found. In certain cases the representations are similar to a libation at a farewell or banquet, but this is not sufficient for the scenes

adduced. Vase paintings sometime represent statues of gods with phialae in their hands. It cannot be meant that the statues are pouring out libations. Likewise a cup or a *kantharos* is the common attribute of the gods on the votive tablets from Locri in South Italy. The gods are standing or seated, sometimes a sacrifice is brought to them. They cannot possibly be sacrificing or pouring out libations.<sup>116</sup>

He also refers to the passage from the *Ecclesiastuzae* 780 ff. considered in chapter 1: “One is reminded of the words of Aristophanes that when we pray to the gods for something good, their statues stand stretching out the hand upturned—not as to give anything, but to get something.”<sup>117</sup>

Nilsson’s solution? “I think that the most common act by which veneration was paid to a god was transferred to the representations of the gods themselves in order to show their divine nature. The god’s attitude is, so to speak, a projection of the worshipper’s attitude.”<sup>118</sup> He then repeats his adamant objections to applying Simon’s interpretation to this particular piece. “The idea of the great god Dionysos sacrificing to Priapus seems to me to be really too strange to be accepted. If this seemingly obvious interpretation is rejected it must needs be supposed that the majestic figure is the priest who has donned the attire of the god.”<sup>119</sup>

With this final flourish of circular reasoning, Nilsson has talked himself into an “ironclad” interpretation for his Hellenistic relief at Lindingö. Let us examine the course of this reasoning: 1) He begins by saying that the relief portrays a figure clad in the clothing typically worn by Dionysos, so that the obvious interpretation is that it *is* the god. 2) He notes that Dionysos seems to be pouring a libation onto a burning altar, immediately behind which stands a small ithyphallic herm of the god Priapus, so that the obvious interpretation of this scene would be that Dionysos is making an offering to Priapus. 3) He states that it “implies a contradiction” for a Greek god to sacrifice to another god, that the gods in art “cannot possibly be sacrificing or pouring out libations,” and finally, to put the nail in the coffin, that the idea of the “great god Dionysos” sacrificing to Priapus (or any other god, one infers) is “really too strange to be accepted.” 4) He concludes that, because he has decided the scene can’t mean what it seems to mean, that the figure is a priest dressed as Dionysos, and not the god himself.<sup>120</sup>

Unfortunately, even if these controversial gods “cannot possibly” be sacrificing or pouring out libations, that is exactly what they are doing. If only the red wine pouring out from the bowl were not so often emphatically painted on these vases! But it is. As van Straten implies, it is perhaps wiser to concede that we are limited in our capacity to understand these images than to state emphatically that they cannot mean something simply because, as yet, they make no sense to us. No phenomenology of religion is ever ultimately flexible enough for the troubling exceptions.<sup>121</sup> And the silently sacrificing gods are a critical exception to what we thought we “knew” about ancient Greek religion.

Writing in *Gnomon* a year later, Hans Möbius conceded, “That divinities, to whom sacrifice is due, themselves are depicted bringing sacrifice, appears to

be a paradox; and yet such images do appear, by no means infrequently, on Greek vases of the fifth century B.C., especially during the first half.<sup>122</sup> Like Boardman and Milne, Möbius notes that these images had never been properly treated until the two independent theses of Eckstein-Wolf and Simon appeared. He notes that Simon takes the opposite hermeneutical path from Eckstein-Wolf. Having limited herself to scenes of certain major deities in which the libation is clearly depicted, she makes it incumbent upon herself to “find” a myth in the lore of each deity that “must” inspire the respective scenes.

Echoing Milne, Möbius says that not all these pictorial aetiologies are perfectly convincing; but he goes further than she does, by saying that to attribute a mythologically meaningful approach to the vase painters, and especially to the crucial offering scenes, seems to him methodologically correct.<sup>123</sup> Nevertheless, he has some form of quarrel with each explanation.

For Athena, his substantive criticism of Simon’s approach lies in the fact that when she offers a libation to Poseidon in *Odyssey* 3.41 ff., she does so in her role as Mentor. He agrees with Milne that Athena’s “sacrifice” to the Eumenides in the drama of Aeschylus (of which Simon’s identification is already highly questionable) is an invention of the poet. He complains that only two of the Athena and Herakles scenes include an altar. These, he says, are borderline cases of the canonical vase-painting scene in which Athena fills Herakles’s vessel with wine. No sign of cult is manifest in the many examples of the latter, and Herakles does not necessarily appear to be pouring an offering. “Here we have, as the author herself concedes, an instance in which a standard image of the time is changed into a sacrificial scene.”<sup>124</sup> He also believes that it is entirely reasonable to look to Hera (the divine antagonist, and later Olympian hostess of Herakles) as a recipient of these offerings.

Möbius believes it to be unnecessary to postulate a larger sculptural group of Apollo as citharode with Leto and Artemis as inspiration for the trio on libation scenes; he points out that the trio (without oinochoe, phiale, or altar) was ubiquitous in late black-figure vase-painting, until it disappeared just after 500.<sup>125</sup> He says that the *aition* determines a new religious standard, one that distinguishes it considerably from the formal, related musical trio. However, he is entirely convinced that the libating Apollo must always be Pythian, and that it is the Delphic Septerion festival to which his “sin-offering” is always related; Apollo was purified at Tempê so that he could be consecrated as a purifier.<sup>126</sup> He notes that Eckstein-Wolf has refused to consider this explanation, because the ancient texts tell us that *χοαί* were poured in the Tempê Valley, that is, into the ground, whereas on the vase-paintings, the action clearly takes place at Delphi, and the libations are poured onto an altar (*σπονδαί*) or onto the *omphalos*.

For the pouring Dionysos, Möbius notes that there also existed such scenes in preliminary black-figure form, but under the influence of the sacrificing Apollo, they were changed and made to resemble the Delphic sphere. A specific reason for the libation in Dionysos’s case does not present itself, even if the recollection of the Anthesteria festival does glimmer a bit. In the images where Dionysos “circles the altar in a wild dance, one gets the impression

not that he's actually offering, but rather that his *kantharos* is automatically overflowing as a symbol of inexhaustible abundance; correspondingly, [these scenes] also lack a sacrificial ministrant with a pitcher."<sup>127</sup> Möbius believes that the offering is not intended for any other god, but that myth and cult combine in a unity of revelation of the Dionysiac being.<sup>128</sup> This parallels the thought of Himelmann, discussed later in this chapter.

Möbius agrees with Simon that when Zeus and Hera seem to pour to each other, that is not a visual excerpt from an assembly from the gods, but that "the ceremony must have its own indwelling sense," concerning which, he concurs with Simon, is the Styx-sworn oath of the *hieros gamos*. As the human custom before marriage has in that case been transferred to the divine realm, it also makes sense, in his opinion, that the customary departure libation is poured by Demeter and Kore before Triptolemus leaves to promulgate the gift of agriculture. He enhances Simon's argument that this transference, which also appears in the "welcoming" libations of Kore to Hades and Plouton to Eleusis, is accounted for by the "immediacy" which brings the human and the divine together in the context of the Great Mysteries at Eleusis.<sup>129</sup> Möbius notes that the depictions of the libating gods in the second half of the fifth century were gradually detached from cult scenes, and the actors were no longer deities, but mortals. Nike, the ubiquitous sacrificial ministrant, is the only offering god who remained a longer-lasting iconographic influence.<sup>130</sup>

In *Revue Archéologique*, Charles Picard delivers an ambivalent, often self-contradictory review.<sup>131</sup> He seems more entranced by Simon's style ("stimulating, subtle, and engaging") and her iconographic fluency than by the substance of her argument. He calls the "mythological" hypothesis into question, and emphasizes as well that *Opfernde Götter* makes only a limited contribution to a vast subject. In choosing only a limited series of ceramic "documents," "the author could not claim to offer us a solution which is valid in every case."<sup>132</sup> Invoking Nilsson, he also attacks the title, which he finds enigmatic and misleading.<sup>133</sup> How can a true sacrifice by the gods be supposed? "Could a Greek god make a sacrifice to another god?"<sup>134</sup> Also like Nilsson, Picard complains that no divine recipient is ever visible in these scenes. Dramatically, he asserts that "the libation from the outstretched *phiale* is destined nowhere but into the void."<sup>135</sup>

He agrees that the ceremony of libation, when the gods perform it, "has a revelatory nature strictly adapted to the celestial personality of the (specific) libating deity."<sup>136</sup> Like previous reviewers, he is willing to accept the Tempê-Delphi purification *aition* for Apollo, whom he says pours to Zeus (note that Zeus is not visible, either, but is accepted by Picard as the recipient of Apollo's libation!) for the second half of the fifth century.<sup>137</sup> He believes that the offering Dionysos was the result of his association with Delphi, and the subsequent influence of the ubiquitous offering Apollo. In an original vein, Picard suggests that Dionysos does not have a ministrant with oinochoe because the overflowing *kantharos* is so large.<sup>138</sup>

Picard says that the libations offered to Triptolemus could express his initiation as a young hero by the Eleusinian goddesses into their mysteries, in fact, a presentation of the *kykeon* drink. He also says that some vase-paintings as

early as the fifth century treat Triptolemus as a god. In any case, Picard maintains, whether it emphasizes Triptolemus’s civilizing mission at its departure point or his initiation, the scene is special. It is difficult to see in it the traditional “stirrup cup” offered to a traveler.<sup>139</sup> Highly insightful, he believes, are Simon’s analyses of the libations made by Demeter on the occasion of the descent of Persephone into Hades, which, although they have the normal overtones of departure, at the same time also evoke specific ideas of birth, marriage, and death.

Picard notes that Simon’s analysis is refreshing, happily contrasting with “dull ceramic catalogues”; she is in control of the evidence, but also seeks to express what the Greeks of the fifth century thought about the world (and sacred actions) of the gods. Finally, he takes the opportunity to condemn the work of Eckstein-Wolf as ill-founded scientific pessimism, written in an obscure manner. “For Miss Eckstein-Wolf, the statues with phiale do not say what they would seem to say: They would show the god [proper] pious activity to humankind by himself performing the libation, so as to urge people to offer it [the libation] to the superior powers.”<sup>140</sup> Sarcastically, he says that it is the right of “certain erudites” to stop there, that it does seem “strange” that suddenly at the beginning of the fifth century there began to be such a diversification of the simple rite of libation into special circumstances appropriate for each god. He notes Eckstein-Wolf’s total rejection of any reflection of the purification myth in the sacrificing Apollo scenes, which corresponds with her reticence to accept any interpretation bearing overtones of mysticism.<sup>141</sup>

Simon may be guilty of the somewhat glib concordance of her own theory with diverse, often ambiguous evidence, according to Picard, but he defends the book as comprehensive and articulate in a field of inquiry neglected up to the time it was written. “The essential thing, said a French poetess, is to go before the gods.”<sup>142</sup> That is what he feels Simon was willing to do in her book, and therefore he forgives her occasional “audacity” on some points: “felix culpa.”<sup>143</sup>

### Olympian Libations to the Chthonian Earth?

In 1956, Walter F. Otto defended the Greek gods against those who sought to “spiritualize” them, or to attribute to them mystical or redemptive overtones. In his most ambitious work, *Die Götter Griechenlands* (1934), Otto had asserted that there is in ancient Greek religion “no soulful devotion, no sacrifice of what is most precious, even of self, no communion of heart with heart, no bliss of oneness.”<sup>144</sup> These were gods, he said, who “could have no thought of redeeming man from the world and raising him to themselves.”<sup>145</sup> Such dangerous anachronisms resulted from the influence of Christianity, Judaism, or “oriental religions.”<sup>146</sup>

Otto relentlessly opposed the notion that the worship of the Greek gods entailed any kind of magical or supernatural belief. He cast Homer as a reformer; “natural idealism or ideal naturalism remains the basic character of this new and in a true sense Greek religion.”<sup>147</sup> He strongly believed that the “perfect



moment" represented by Zeus and the gods, although it elevated humanity, was indicative of a great, nontraversable boundary between them: "Always the interval between deity and man remains, even when deity loves man. Indeed, the delimitations are purposefully accentuated. The gods retain their own existence, from which man is by his nature forever kept apart."<sup>148</sup> He was strongly influenced by the German romantics Goethe and Hölderlin, from whom he quotes freely. However, his books are notable for their lack of critical apparatus; they acknowledge no secondary literature.

The "sacrificing gods" theme arises only once in Otto's work, in the impassioned *Theophania*. True to form, neither Simon's work nor that of any other scholar is mentioned. Otto does not probe, question, or speculate on the topic; he states his opinions as fact. He claims that when Zeus pours out offerings with a libation bowl in Greek vase-paintings, "he is thus offering to the primeval godhead, which embraces and upholds everything, including the gods, and has a name no more, if one does not want to name it, in the Greek sense Gaia (Earth), the original, archaic essence, which out of herself gave birth to the Heaven (Hesiod, *Theogony* 126), or, as Hölderlin has it, 'Nature,' " 'which is older than Time and above the gods of evening and the orient.'<sup>149</sup> Otto's statement is important in two ways. First, he claims that Zeus *is* in fact offering to another power, which although he does not explicitly claim is greater than the ruler of the universe, is certainly older. Second, he claims to know which power it is: the earth, Gaia, ancestress of Zeus, and mother of all things. The critical upshot is that, like Simon, he believes that an Olympian power is relating to an underworld power by pouring liquid down into the earth.

This is very much in keeping with Otto's romanticizing of Gaia as a manifestation of the *Urgöttlichen*, who once passionately embraced Ouranos and now yearns toward him.<sup>150</sup> Ancient Greek religious genealogy, in his opinion, offers a primal source to which it makes natural sense for even Zeus to offer. This is corroborated by the fact that libations were poured downward, where Earth could drink them.

Two obvious flaws appear in Otto's assertion. It is not only Zeus who pours in vase-paintings, but nearly every other god. To whom are they offering? To Zeus? To Gaia also? Furthermore, the majority of the offering-god scenes, including many of Zeus, feature an altar onto which libations are poured, as if the prelude or conclusion to an Olympian sacrifice. How then can we construe all offering scenes as chthonian?

But with a curious mixture of scorn for mainstream interpretation and elevated awe toward the ancient Greek gods, Otto's aim was not so much to describe their worship as to illumine their being. For, like them, he did not seem to care too much about the world of mortals. He was an ahistorical visionary who cast himself as a kind of lone protector of the gods in the modern era, defending them against nefarious appropriation.

In this respect a disciple of Otto, Werner Fuchs entered the controversy with a repudiation of both Simon and Eckstein-Wolf.<sup>151</sup> Like many scholars, Fuchs relied on one piece of iconographic evidence as his springboard for a much wider discussion. This is a superb votive relief in Pentelic marble dating

from the second half of the fifth century B.C.E. It depicts a small worshiper approaching two much larger, presumably divine entities: a standing female deity who draws back her veil, holding an oinochoe, and a bearded, enthroned god stretching forth a phiale, whose central boss is plainly visible, in his right hand.<sup>152</sup> Despite earlier interpretations of the pair as Zeus and Hebe, Herakles and Hebe, and Hades and Persephone,<sup>153</sup> Fuchs calls for the identification of the figures as Hygieia and Asklepios, invoking comparable fifth-century Attic reliefs now in Corfu,<sup>154</sup> Brocklesby Park,<sup>155</sup> and elsewhere.<sup>156</sup>

Although affirming that the libation scenes in the reliefs do not so much express the heroic character of Asklepios as place them squarely in the great classical tradition of sacrificing gods, Fuchs has firm opinions of their interpretation. He does not dismiss Simon’s mythical-episodic interpretation on the grounds that her theory requires divine recipients of divine libations to be mainly imaginary; he points out that recipients of animal sacrifice are seldom depicted, either. While characterizing her explanatory myths as “unsatisfactory,” he stubbornly insists, in defense of her basic approach, that “there is no cult or sacrificial rite without myth.”<sup>157</sup> Therefore, he also waxes scornful of Himmelmann’s mystical, hard-to-grasp notion of divine libation as a “self-affirmation of their own divinity.”

Fuchs believes that the prominence in the classical period of depicted libations, both those made by gods and those made by mortals, share a common source. He rejects Himmelmann’s complaint that to posit any recipient for the divine libation would impose an unacceptable conditionality on the deity who pours.

As suggested above, the depiction of an offering in each case requires as a condition one who offers. Even if the god holding the phiale as an attribute is interpreted as the recipient of sacrifice, as has been done, he does not escape this condition either. *The recipient of sacrifice first acquires his significance through the one who sacrifices to him.* Overall, it should not be so hard to find the mythical reason why gods sacrifice. Every Greek theogony contains the fundamental notion that the Olympians were not always Olympians; they overthrew older, more fearsome or more gracious divine powers. Within this framework one ought to seek the myth for the sacrificing god, not in the predominantly late antique view of a “self-portrayal of [one’s] own holiness.”<sup>158</sup>

Like Otto, Fuchs believes that his explanation is the simplest and most self-evident: The high gods pour out wine to Mother Earth. As corroboration, he cites a personal conversation with Walter F. Otto in the late fifties, which seems to take on numinous proportions in the retelling. Fuchs related his dissatisfaction with Simon’s explanatory myths for the scenes: “Otto asked in return where the libation went. ‘To the earth,’ I replied. ‘Well then, when they pour, the gods pour to Her, to Mother Earth.’ ‘So as to remind themselves of their common origin with mortals?’ I asked. After a long pause, the venerable man said, ‘Perhaps. Yes. It might be so.’”<sup>159</sup>

Fuchs's model, which has the Olympians pouring to Earth, does not adequately address the fact that the majority of the gods in vase-paintings in fact pour onto altars. Such libation was a common enough prelude or postlude to an Olympian, rather than a chthonian sacrifice. Fuchs does note that even in the case of altars, the wine ultimately trickles onto the ground.<sup>160</sup> However, that argument is far from tenable: If the gods are making libations to Gaia, why depict an intermediary altar at all? Of course, his choice of evidence in the reliefs is selective; they do not show any altars. As one can see from a brief glance through the catalogue, such scenes are far from the rule. Altars are ubiquitous in scenes of divine libation.

We leave Fuchs agog with the imagined radiance of classical Greek religious "freedom," the "true religiosity" evidenced by the phiale-bearing gods. "In their classical period the Greeks appeared as free and humane people, because they were determined by the gods, and their gods (appeared) as free and at the same time contingent, humane deities, who demanded no human victims. . . . Through the new, classical theme of libation-pouring gods and sacrificing mortals, true religiosity could be maintained in freedom. The bowl in the hand of the gods indicates not the divinity of the gods, but their humanity; in the hand of the human, it expresses the mortal's participation in the divine realm."<sup>161</sup> This ahistorical and rudderless idea of a "golden age" of Greek religion, signified by these vase-paintings, stuns with its romanticism. And what is "true religiosity"? Fuchs does capture the reciprocity that seems to bind sacrificing god to offering mortal; however, I will suggest in the next chapter that the gods' libations do not indicate their "humanity" but underline their divinity.

### "Not Mythical Episodes but Images of Being"

Erika Simon has identified the work of Nikolaus Himmelmann-Wildschütz as the most important response to her pioneering *Opfernde Götter*.<sup>162</sup> One can understand why. Rather than offering a superficial defense such as Nilsson's (which ends by collapsing upon itself), this scholar dives deep into the heart of Simon's ideas, as well as those of Eckstein-Wolf and others, and thoughtfully refutes them on their own terms. He is familiar with and respectful of what has already been written on the subject, even though he profoundly disagrees with his predecessors. His own explanation for the numerous images of the "spendende Götter" completely differs from the preceding general hypotheses offered as alternatives to Simon's.

Far from dismissing the frequent portrayal of the libating gods as an annoying footnote in ancient Greek iconography, Himmelmann calls it "the most important religious phenomenon in all of classical art."<sup>163</sup> He claims that what we have is in a fact a brand new category of picture, in which the gods are exempt from all episodic contingency. He conceives of the world of the ancient Greek gods not as a mirror of the overheated, turbulent human world, but rather as a timeless, self-sustaining universe. Greek gods exist only for themselves. Their purpose is to *be*, not to *do*. Human beings may react to, importune, or

seek to emulate them. But that is not the gods' concern; they are unaffected by the human drama below them, even though it is so drastically affected by the divine. This immortal “state of being” in splendid isolation takes place on a different, higher plane than the mortal.<sup>164</sup> Accordingly, Himmelmann believes that archaic cult statues did not relate in any way to their viewers, even devotees.<sup>165</sup>

Even more important, he feels that research indicates that “the phiale in the hand of a [cult] statue or an unmoving solitary figure cannot be related to mythical events.”<sup>166</sup> Rather, “it functions as a formulaic designation of a sacrificial recipient, intended to make visible his (the recipient's) relationship to the sacrificing mortal.”<sup>167</sup> Furthermore, he maintains that the god with the libation bowl from fifth-century vase-painting, whether motionless or animated, has an unassailable iconographic heritage in the earlier phiale-bearing cult statues.<sup>168</sup> As in the case of the earlier plastic images, the gods' libations are an expression of their divine nature. These he calls *Daseinsbilder*: “images of being.”

The scholarly consensus dissolves when confronted with the far more frequent representations of actively libating gods. The first is the school of Eckstein-Wolf, which Himmelmann describes as an elevation of a literal interpretation of libation scenes, which finds in the phiale a symbol of the connection between human and god.<sup>169</sup> Even if one concedes this possibility in the case of individual divine figures, Himmelmann claims that it is inadequate for the “self-sufficient,” self-contained world of the actively libating gods of vase-painting. His criticism is reinforced by the evidence from antiquity: Human beings virtually never appear with libating gods until the Athenian reliefs of the late fifth and the entire fourth centuries, and then they are invariably distanced from the offering scene by their size and servile attitude.<sup>170</sup>

His main dispute, however, is clearly with Simon. Himmelmann insists that unique mythological explanations for each of the major scenes of divine libation are untenable for two reasons. The first is that there are so many scenes on vase-paintings for which myth and legend do not provide us with an *aition*. He concedes that in myth there certainly do exist times when gods “apparently or actually” pour libations on occasions of prayer, oath, purification, reception, departure, or carousing. But these instances do not suffice to explain the abundance (or, one might add, the variety) of images that appear at the beginning of the fifth century.

That one cannot always find a narrative episode for each one of the abundant number of themes points to more than just a preliminary deficiency in Simon's approach; rather, it indicates a serious hermeneutical breakdown. For example, if one recognizes that the “sacrifice of marriage-oath” for the scenes of Zeus seated across from Hera as one or both deities pour out a libation, then what does one do with the presence of Athena, Apollo, or Ares, or Nike in the same scene, or with Zeus alone? The image must then be given a completely different explanation. What mythical episode is being portrayed? What about the libating Poseidon, Ares, or Athena shown offering with an unnamed young woman (perhaps Pandrosos)?<sup>171</sup> He especially cites the depiction of the four seated deities on the pyxis in Athens (no. 138), arguing that “it does not portray

a unique mythological episode,” but rather is presumed “to belong in the range of timeless images of being, that is, images of appearance.”<sup>172</sup>

In sum, Himmelmann has made a new contribution to the discussion. His critique highlights the fact that Simon’s evidence is selectively drawn to illustrate potentially mythological scenes. Simon ignores a wide range of examples which do not do that at all, but which clearly seem to belong to the same iconographic corpus—yet almost certainly contradict her interpretation. Instead, Himmelmann implies that they offer various aspects of a specific, and homogeneous, religious consciousness.

His second objection is more conceptual, and lies at the heart of our original question, which is one for the history of religion. It is as follows: If, in the vase-paintings, we are dealing with a mythical episode (that is, a story about a god who performs a literal offering), the depicted sacrificing god cannot also simultaneously be a recipient of the offering.<sup>173</sup> Erika Simon characterizes the divine cult statue peacefully holding the bowl as a recipient of offerings. Therefore, in the case of the same god clearly pouring out a libation with the same bowl on a vase-painting, she is compelled to postulate an undetermined recipient.<sup>174</sup> Simon’s interpretation assumes that the mysterious recipient is “off-camera” in the vases. This is frustrating, since the sacrifice of libation is so often also generically oriented, without necessarily implying a specific recipient on the other end.

Himmelmann uses the already familiar case of the libating Apollo, the range and depth of whose images dominate the corpus of vases under discussion. He notes the almost universal acceptance of the idea which, although not original with Simon, she brought to the fore, namely, that the vase-paintings reflect the transmission through both legend and cult of the god’s performance of a purificatory offering in the Tempê Valley after the murder of the Python. But who are the recipients of the expiatory sacrifice?<sup>175</sup> As we have seen, Simon proposes Zeus and the Erinyes;<sup>176</sup> Himmelmann adds as a candidate the slain dragon itself. However, referring to a typical scene of Apollonian libation on an amphora in Würzburg (our **no. 162**),<sup>177</sup> he paints a bleak picture of what is missing, but which, if Simon is right, should logically be there: “These [that is, potential recipients such as Zeus or the underworld gods] are neither present themselves, nor does the kind of sacrifice [depicted] give a hint of them. The purifier is absent, the slaughtered piglet, whose blood takes away the stain. A chthonian libation is not intended; for that [normally] takes place on the bare earth, not on an altar, such as the pictures often show.”<sup>178</sup>

Himmelmann’s point? This shows no sign of being either a purificatory or a chthonian sacrifice. Although we might argue that it is not for us to deem divine sacrifices deficient in light of what is expected in human sacrifices, he is the first scholar to question the hitherto unchallenged interpretation of Apollo scenes on the grounds of actual sacrificial practices. He also claims that the killer of the Python must appear as a naked hero, not a solemnly clothed citharode; the scene cannot be thought of as a ceremony, however expiatory, occasioned by the slaying of the Python.<sup>179</sup>

Himmelmann’s objection to the concept of an actual sacrifice performed by the gods and, hence, of an unseen recipient, is profound. The implication of

such a concept, he claims, is to malign the gods' omnipotent nature. "Certainly it is scarcely thinkable that the images of the gods show them in a conditioned role, in the service of an uncertain recipient."<sup>180</sup> Thus both interpretations are rejected on the grounds that they violate the meaning of the images themselves. The first does so by claiming that the pictures of the gods sacrificing make an intellectual reference to humanity. The second does them an injustice by positing an unknown recipient. "Neither finds support in the monuments themselves: It is too obvious that the sacrificing gods are the central figures of the representation; too deep is the intentional autonomy [lit., 'for-itself'] of self-sufficient action."<sup>181</sup>

His final, and perhaps his most intriguing argument in favor of this thesis is that the kind of worship depicted in these scenes is appropriate to the god or goddess. The principle of the individuality of divine sacrifice, unique and peculiar to the divinity who offers it, is corroborated mainly by two cases: the incense-burning Aphrodite, and the kantharos-pouring Dionysos.<sup>182</sup>

Himmelmann notes that by virtue of Simon's insistence on mythological interpretations for the scenes, she has talked herself into a corner in the case of Aphrodite. Since there is no myth of a libation-bearing Aphrodite, and no logical recipient for such a gift on her part, Simon dismisses the possibility of a sacrificing Aphrodite. This, we might note, is the same close-minded reasoning that tripped Nilsson: If one denies that a particular religious phenomenon exists, then therefore one must be seeing something other than that phenomenon. We recall Simon's explanation of Aphrodite's libation bowl as a container for a love-potion.<sup>183</sup> As proof, she cites the scenes with Eros, who spills the contents of a phiale into the eyes of a raging Menelaos, who drops his sword and forbears slaying his untrue Helen.<sup>184</sup>

However, on a vase at the Louvre (no. 137), Eros is also portrayed completely alone, where he pours out his phiale onto the blood-sprinkled altar; this can only be meant as a true libation.<sup>185</sup> Furthermore, on another rescue of Helen on a vase in Rome, Aphrodite herself appears, but holds her libation bowl with the inside facing her.<sup>186</sup> The phiale belongs to the goddess, as does the scepter.<sup>187</sup>

Most interesting is the frequent appearance of the thymiaterion (ritual incense-burner) held by Eros or Aphrodite.<sup>188</sup> It seldom appears outside of her realm, and is associated with no other divinity with the same consistency. "In the presence of the limited employment of this device, these images obtain a heightened interest, in which the goddess is occupied with it [the thymiaterion] while actively sacrificing."<sup>189</sup> Nilsson's problem, which he stated repeatedly, was that there was no recipient in sight. He therefore insisted that the Dionysos and Artemis in the Hellenistic reliefs were not sacrificing. Himmelmann's argument implies (although he stops short of saying so outright) that in a sense, the goddess Aphrodite herself is the recipient, not some "strange, unknown divinity." But she is most definitely also the sacrificer.

It is the unique sacrifice due to her. This is the rite which she herself once established as a means of sanctification of those who worship

her with it. She herself performs and enjoys this act in her image of self-sufficient manifestation. She is the power and the conditionality of her divinity. Sacrifice is holy, godly activity; the sacrificing gods are not taking over a human activity; the sacrificing human is rather more imitating the gods, who entrust him with the potential of having a share in their holiness (“as mortals we follow the laws of the gods” [θνητοὶ θεῶν νόμοισι χρώμεθα] Euripides, *Hippolytus* 98).<sup>190</sup>

One of the earliest depictions of a sacrificing Dionysos, on the kantharos in Boston discussed earlier (no. 9; Fig. 35), shows the god as he empties his kantharos onto a burning altar. Again, there is little hope of finding an unknown recipient of these libations; on the contrary, the presence of the kantharos that is peculiar to Dionysos alone proves that the god is executing a rite intended only for himself.<sup>191</sup>

For Himmelmann, the libation scenes constitute epiphanies. They are portraits of the gods “whereby they show their holy being as self-sufficient.” They do so by bringing that offering which is unique to them. However, this is only true in the case of Aphrodite and Dionysos. Himmelmann sides with Luschej in claiming that since the phiale is virtually the only bowl held by the gods in art, it is “the vessel of the gods.”<sup>192</sup> By “self-sufficient,” he means that the gods do not require or reflect human practices of worship. Rather, the practices are seen in the vase-paintings as emanating from them. “These pictures are certainly not mythical-episodic, nor do they intend to relate the god and his action to humanity; they are rather timeless images of existence, which serve only the contemplation of divinity and its essence. . . . Libating gods are manifest gods in the self-portrayal of their own particular holiness.”<sup>193</sup> Any god holding a phiale in classical art is involved in both receiving and pouring; in the world of the gods, no real distinction should be made between the two conditions. “We now do not any more admit as valid in divine images the artistic distinction between the attributive, held cup and the actively executed libation: for one cannot be the opposite of the other, but rather, both indicate the same thing, the divinity of the deity.”<sup>194</sup>

This of course evokes the concept of the gods as themselves paradigmatic of forms of worship. In *Die Gestalt und das Sein*, W. F. Otto wrote, “The holiest celebrations in the worship of all peoples are a recollection and an exact repetition of what was performed by the gods themselves in the beginning of time.”<sup>195</sup> According to Plato’s *Laws* (653D), the gods taught humans to celebrate ceremonies so as to keep them occupied and to relieve their boredom. “The power of the Greek gods comes not out of their will but rather out of their existence, out of their situation, out of their archetypal essence. What is depicted in the ‘image of existence’ in visionary ways, is the gods’ necessary fidelity to [their] being, which belongs to their functional archetypal nature.”<sup>196</sup> Ultimately, Himmelmann’s approach can be described as Platonic. He cites the great myth of Phaedrus, in which the Olympian gods move through the heavens at the apices of eleven groups led by Zeus the orderer (*Phaedrus* 246 ff.). Each human soul fixes its gaze upon that divine leader most congenial to itself

(252–253). For “there exist now many holy plays, dramas, and revolutions in heaven, which the race of the holy gods execute, of which each does that which is according to their being (πράττων ἕκαστος αὐτῶν τὸ αὐτοῦ)” (247A). Himmelman’s belief is that “these images are related to the Platonic ideas, and their eternal power is of the same sort as these, namely to be ‘functioning archetypes.’”<sup>197</sup> Each god offers according to his or her own being. Because they cannot be conditioned or subsumed, the gods do not sacrifice to any other entity; they simply and eternally sacrifice. History of religion or anachronistic theosophy?

For Himmelman, the bowl in the hand of the god was meant to evoke nothing less, but just as important, nothing more, than the divinity of the god. A god’s participation transformed the act of libation from an outwardly to an inwardly directed ritual.<sup>198</sup> Proceeding from Eckstein-Wolf’s observation of the function of the phiale, the vision of classical Greece he has given us is one in which the gods dwelled at an extreme distance in self-sufficient, frozen sanctity.

The logical conclusion of this brilliant exegesis, and its major weakness, must be that the gods’ connection to the world of practiced human religion is nil. Divine ritual exists in a vacuum. But was the religious world of classical Athens so noticeably divorced from divine activity? The construction of the Parthenon, Nike Temple, and especially that multivalent cultic home, the Erechtheion; the continuing preeminence of the Eleusinian Mysteries; the introduction of the cult of Asklepios, the purification of Delos, and even the desperate pleas to and ultimate rejections of the gods during the time of the great plague—all testify to the tremendous Athenian sense of divine proximity.<sup>199</sup> Himmelman’s classical theology seems to have gnostic resonances. By contrast the notion of “cultic time,” implied in the theory of divine reflexivity, accepts the uniqueness of divine ritual but at the same time argues that the Greeks imagined continual human ritual interactivity with the prototype and source. As I will argue, ritualizing gods in ancient Greek art are not depicted in a vacuum, but rather, in a parabola.

### Divine Libation as Ritual Prototype

Is this a divine paradigm of ritual, performed *in illo tempore* by god, ancestor, or hero? The Vedic *Taittirīya Brāhmaṇa* says, “Thus the gods did; thus men do,” to which Mircea Eliade responds, “This Indian adage summarizes all the theory underlying rituals in all centuries . . . therefore, every ritual has a divine model, an archetype.”<sup>200</sup> To take an outstanding example, the religious evidence at Brauron clearly supports the idea that “In mythology Iphigeneia is the victim, priestess, and double of Artemis.”<sup>201</sup> As we have observed, on Greek vases that depict a scene of divine libation, one sometimes discovers on the reverse a mortal priest also pouring a libation onto an altar. The “doubling” of sacrificial scenes suggests a mutual mirroring of the ideal and real worlds of worship.

The excavator at Strymi, and for many years Ephor of Antiquities in Macedonia, Giorgios Bakalakis was a forceful proponent of such an approach. He



believed that libation by deities in Greek art constituted a divine prototype for mortal behavior.<sup>202</sup> His views are offered in the report of his excavation at Strymi, during which a shattered Attic red-figure pelike surfaced. Side A features a phiale-bearing Apollo, flanked by Artemis with an oinochoe and Leto with a laurel branch; side B, a maenad with arms upraised fleeing from a satyr.

On two grounds, Bakalakis rejects the arguments of Otto and Fuchs advocating Earth as the object of divine libation. First, he complains that the Earth is virtually absent from the scenes. “She is absent not only in the [specific] representations of libation, but in general; few and [highly] circumscribed are the ways in which she is depicted in Greek art.”<sup>203</sup> Hermes can pour libations to the earth; “not, however, the godly lords of Olympus, because in this way they “abolish themselves” (αὐτοκαταργοῦνται).<sup>204</sup> The concept that Olympian offerings to chthonian powers constitute self-negation is original with Bakalakis. One might almost call it an aesthetic judgement, but one that compels because it is so visceral.

Bakalakis’s solution is inspired by the archaic “Marketplace of the Gods” at Delos published by Charles Picard in 1951.<sup>205</sup> Picard describes areas in the mid- and late-archaic period consecrated as meeting places for the gods. These consisted of a *temenos* outside of the walls, but just as often inside the communal enclosure, which were reserved for epiphanies of the gods—for the times when they assembled on earth.<sup>206</sup> He postulates that these legendary apparitions became “fixed” by the erections of statues.<sup>207</sup> He also suggests that the divine “prototypes” may have inspired the open places of human commerce known as agoras, as the latter were not organized until a much later date. Thus the “religious need” to group the cult places of the deities in the same *peribolos* of the sanctuary, ubiquitous throughout the Hellenic world, must have in turn influenced the contrivance of Greek agoras. These primitive ἀγοραὶ θεῶν “were the divine model offered . . . as early as the archaic period, for future human agoras.”<sup>208</sup>

Picard describes no fewer than fifteen such “agoras of the gods” set apart from but close to human agoras throughout Greece and Asia Minor.<sup>209</sup> He gives special attention to the Delian temenos of Peisistratid cult statues (Zeus, Hera, Athena; Leto, Apollo, and Artemis) and altars not on Mount Kynthos but in the marshes of Inopus, near the sixth-century Letoön.<sup>210</sup> Later the Delian Dodekathéon, a small hexastyle Doric temple of the fourth century B.C.E., was erected near the Peisistratid statues. Although divine agoras are not the same as altars of the twelve gods, Picard states that “it seems to me that the ἀγοραὶ θεῶν influenced, at least, the celebrated cult of the twelve gods and on the other hand, the establishment of human agoras.”<sup>211</sup>

Bakalakis believes that the process of conversion (or reduction) of the gods to some common human institution—such as a place to assemble on earth—was characteristic of the classical Greek temperament. He also thinks that it can help us to understand why scenes of divine libation date from the fifth century B.C.E. If, built by members of newly emerging city-states, ancient Greek agoras depended on the divine prototypes from late archaic times, then why not ancient Greek libations? The Greeks actively sought and therefore imagined divine prototypes for their actions, both political and spiritual.<sup>212</sup> “Exactly as the

Greeks had slightly earlier conceived of a "sacred prototype" for their [own] agoras, and had established the "agoras of the gods" nearby, so they felt the need for [such] a sacred prototype in their libations in classical times, because this corresponded to the spiritual condition of the age. And by the original influence of mortals who always were very pragmatic in their 'relations' to divine beings, they were at least raised to a divine archetype."<sup>213</sup>

In a terse but interesting 1975 monograph that is often overlooked on account of its idiosyncratic English, Elpis Mitropolou published and analyzed a comprehensive survey of the fifty-nine late-classical marble votive reliefs known up at that time which depict "a libation scene in which one figure holds a phiale or kantharos and the other holds an oinochoe, or one figure holds both vessels."<sup>214</sup> Although most were made in Attica, there are others whose provenance is Thessaly, the Peloponnesos, Delos, or Corfu. She classifies these according to the five identities of the figure holding the oinochoe: If female, it is designated as a goddess, "heroine," or priestess; if male, as "a god or an oinochoos."<sup>215</sup>

Mitropolou reviews and critiques interpretive scholarship on the meaning of libation. She dismisses Simon, saying "It is not necessary to try to find a different meaning for the libation in the case of each god and each pair of deities."<sup>216</sup> She favors the notion of a "divine prototype," advanced by Bakalakis, whose root lies in "social conditions" (namely, the rise of the polis during the classical period).

Mitropolou notes among her reliefs, where a phiale or kantharos is held by a male figure, that there is only one example where the kantharos is held by a mortal; the rest are held by deities or heroes.<sup>217</sup> On these grounds, she thus upholds Furtwängler and "humanization": "The performance of the libation scene by the Greek deities or heroes is seen as a symbolic representation of man performing the libation scene to get the help of the deities or to thank them. . . . So the act of making libation was simply transferred in votive reliefs from human beings to the deities or heroes."<sup>218</sup> As is typical of previous categorical statements on the subject, this is simply asserted; we are not told why, except for the startling implication of a kind of imagined atonement theology: "The deities make the libation to themselves on behalf of the people."<sup>219</sup> What can this possibly mean, and what in ancient Greek religion upholds this?

Mitropolou vastly confuses the issue by also subscribing to a "libation to the earth" theory, pointing out that "Greeks made the libation to the earth before the start of their meals (as people nowadays say prayers) . . . and these scenes imitate that votive act."<sup>220</sup> She consequently disagrees with Bakalakis that the representation of the earth is necessary for the idea to work, and she rejects his prophecy that Olympian deities would "abolish themselves" by pouring libations to the earth. Thus, according to Mitropolou, either this theme is a divine prototype (the gods are imitating people and heroes by performing acts of worship to themselves) or else they are offering reverence to a greater ancestral power (that is, to Gaia). That these explanations are logically exclusive of one another, at least as she presents them, does not seem to bother Mitropolou. But perhaps she is entitled to the same kind of paradoxical thinking that seems to have produced this iconography.

Ongoing Confusion (*Kunst der Schale: Kultur des Trinkens*)

In 1991, the Antikensammlungen of Munich exhibited some of its finest ancient Greek vases in a show that focused on the art of the drinking cup. Entitled “Kunst der Schale: Kultur des Trinkens” (The Art of the Cup: The Culture of Drinking), the show explored the culture of wine. Although this theme is often associated with the popular topic of the ancient symposium, the show also included vases that depict the pouring of libations. An entire display case was devoted to vases illustrating the ritual of libation. Another was called “Spendende Götter.” However, even within its limited scope, the short entry in the show’s catalogue offers serious internal contradictions. The author, Susanne Pfisterer-Haas, attempts a smorgasbord of interpretation for four different vases.<sup>221</sup> Culled from previous scholarship, the four approaches offered by the article seem to assume that each scholar’s interpretation only makes sense for one particular case.

Pfisterer-Haas takes Himmelmann as her springboard when she claims that when libation is executed by the gods themselves, it becomes “the essence of self-delight in their own divinity.”<sup>222</sup> In the next sentence, she contradicts herself in the interpretation of a potent gathering of deities at a libation portrayed on a red-figure belly amphora by the Nikoxenos Painter, dating from 500 B.C.E.<sup>223</sup> Zeus, identified by lightening bolts and his eagle scepter, and Hera receive a bare-breasted Iris bearing an oinochoe and phiale. Athena is present, as is Hermes; seated in a throne across from his two siblings is Poseidon. The author tells us not that Zeus is rejoicing in his own divinity, but that he is about to pour a libation “either as a proxy for the rest of the gods or to render to them the libation which is due them.”<sup>224</sup> But why assume that the divine libation has a specific object in this case? Close examination of the vase leads to the real question: Why assume that Zeus is about to make a libation at all? It is not he, but Iris, who holds the sacrificial paraphernalia.

In an early classical stamnos in which Zeus extends the phiale while Nike holds the oinochoe, Pfisterer-Haas decides that Zeus is no longer the sacrificer.<sup>225</sup> “On the picture on the stamnos, the scepter characterizes him as the ruler, the libation bowl as the foremost sacrificial recipient.” This is a complete interpretive switch from the previous vase. But how are the two scenes different? On what basis can one argue that the first Zeus is offering, whereas the second is receiving a libation? Both figures are enthroned. There are more gods present in the first one, on whose behalf she says (without foundation) that Zeus might be offering. If anything, the first Zeus would be more likely to be a recipient, since Iris brings him the bowl and vessel, whereas the second holds the phiale and would seem far more likely to be pouring the offering.

On a third vase, the goddess Athena and a crowned female figure bearing a libation bowl stand opposite each other.<sup>226</sup> Both are “enthralled by the solemnity of the action which takes place in honor of the goddess.”<sup>227</sup> Athena is neither

offering nor receiving, but is somehow contemplating a sacrifice that is spontaneously and autonomously occurring. The idea of the ritual executing itself is derivative from Eckstein-Wolf’s electrifying but far-fetched “die Schale spendet, nicht der Gott.” However, Eckstein-Wolf meant her idea to apply to *all* the vases in her catalogue. Here the eclectic approach acquires a third variation, applied to only one example.

Things get even murkier in the case of a kalpis hydria featuring Aphrodite. The goddess appears frontally with scepter and a goose, a bird often associated with the goddess, between two female figures. The left figure holds a sacrificial vessel and a richly decorated libation bowl. “The question of whether the goddess herself is performing sacrifice between two goddesses, or whether she appears to two mortal women who will execute the wine-offering to her glory, poses itself only to the modern observer. For the people of antiquity, the sacrificing goddess was identical to the goddess who received sacrifice.”<sup>228</sup> This provocative (and somewhat categorical!) statement is delivered without justification. Why were the two identical?

Pfisterer-Haas rushes on to Dionysos, whom she observes is “more frequently . . . presented wine by his companions than the other gods,” as on a red-figure krater by the Brygos Painter.<sup>229</sup> She asserts that because Dionysos’s special vase is a kantharos, the meaning of his action is also different from that of the other gods; no distinction should be made between drinking (receiving) and pouring.<sup>230</sup> As in the case of the Aphrodite scene, the question is based on a series of theoretical assumptions, which, taken as a starting point, lead to the remaining confusion.

## Recent Ideas

The more recent past has seen only sporadic treatments of the problem of the sacrificing gods on Attic vases. We have already mentioned the work of K. W. Arafat. Paul Veyne has argued that when libation bowls appear in the hands of the gods, libation should be understood as a “rite of passage” on the way to sacrifice and not as sacrificial offerings at all.<sup>231</sup> He rejects the notion of the gods “making a gesture which humans must imitate and repeat . . . [whereby] the gods exemplify *pietas* toward the gods,” that is, setting a good example for human beings. Veyne’s objection is almost aesthetic: “The subtlety of the thought of *homo religiosus* is so majestic! Can we not think of a more poetic explanation? Can one not explain these gods with libation bowls in some way other than didactic intentionality?”<sup>232</sup> Although Veyne clearly admits that the altar was understood as the possession of the god (and was sometimes inscribed as such), he also subscribes to the view of libation (and incense) offered thereon as “apparently without a precise divine destination.”<sup>233</sup> This leaves him with the familiar problem of no recipient for divine libations; he concludes that therefore libation should be classified separately from sacrifice. After reviewing the ancient Greek evidence, and concentrating on later Hellenistic and especially

Roman votive reliefs and sculptures, Veyne concludes that because libation-pouring is a prelude to sacrifice proper (in which sacred action he claims the ancient gods are never represented), it must represent a kind of ritual zone in which both deities and mortals can participate in inaugurating a *heilige Handlung*.<sup>234</sup> Thus, Veyne muses, divine libation serves as a kind of passport or foyer to the real destination, a geste as opposed to the gift-giving action of sacrifice. As such, the phiale (or Latin patera) in the hand of the god is to be understood only semiotically as “a qualifying adjective: sacred, holy,” tautologically reiterating the divinity of the god who holds it.<sup>235</sup>

Veyne is right to look beyond the unsatisfying concept of divine libation as paradigm or lesson for mortals. His notion of the ritual bowl as “adjective” about the god comes close to the concept of both bowl and act of libation as divine attributes explained in chapter 5. Yet his sharp distinction between libation and animal sacrifice, geste and action, misses the mark, in that apparently both gods and humans participated in a ritual continuum that included all of these; the red wine painted streaming from the bowls in the images of gods who poured it out was surely a sign of efficacious activity on their part, extending beyond the simple signification of their status.

Finally, Herbert Hoffman, whose work we have already cited, offers an explanation growing out of the Oriental origin of the phiale, its royal pedigree and function, and the Athenians’ fascination with things Persian during the fifth century.<sup>236</sup>

The reason why a characteristically Persian shape of drinking vessel should be shown in the hands of Greek gods and heroes (and be used by Greek mortals for pouring libations to these spirit entities) has to do with a utopic fantasy widely held in Greece at this time: Persia was idealized as the paragon of luxury and of superior material civilization. “Persianism,” the copy of Persian style and fashion in the fifth century not only permeated the very fabric of Greek life, it also profoundly influenced Greek eschatology. The Great King’s banquet, embodying the utmost in imaginable extravagance, had come to define the Greek ideal of paradise.<sup>237</sup>

Like Veyne’s, Hoffman’s semiotic approach seems to bracket the fact that the gods not only hold these vessels but time and again are shown actually pouring libations from them. This fact is interpretively impossible, hence ignored.

The modern history of scholarship on the sacrificing gods reveals a fascinating series of interdependent reactions to ancient religiosity. Does divine libation mean something different in each god’s case? Or can one unified iconographic theory explain the ancient Greek vase-paintings? In chapter 5, I outline the internal philosophical contradictions in the preceding theories. I then offer a theoretical solution to this iconographic problem, which takes as a starting premise the idea that most or all of the sacrificing gods’ scenes reflect a single religious idea. I believe that this pictorial “idea” is a tree with its roots in a particular outlook on ritual: Ritual has its source in divine agency and action. We are left with only the

“branches” of the tree—the artistic expressions of this outlook—the gods pouring libations. Because only the branches are visible, we have been left benighted by the Greeks, who sometimes did not explain themselves.

I will try to show how and why these images depict the relationship of Greek immortals to forms of ancient Greek religion, and what the nature of this relationship might be.

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# 5

## The Problem Defined and a Proposed Solution

### *Divine Reflexivity in Ritual Representation*

Those scholars whose thought has evolved beyond the sacrificial model of *do ut des*—such as Meuli, Gernet, Bataille, Burkert, Girard, Vernant, Detienne, and Jay—have created elaborate, often contradictory paradigms: Sacrifice is institutionalized violence, it substitutes for the murder of human beings, or else preserves the symbiotic relationship between hunter and hunted, originating in the Central Asian steppes. It articulates and reinscribes hierarchies of gender and status, or is merely a pious pretext for the communal distribution of scarce protein, with the veneer of worship appearing later. It is a response to an excess of resources, or alternatively, to their dearth.

Hubert and Mauss have explored the magical power of the god as victim, from Osiris to Dionysos to Puruṣa and Christ.<sup>1</sup> But what is the theoretical foundation in Greek religion for the god as sacrificer? “The structuralist approach to myth, represented by Claude Lévi-Strauss, sees myth as a language that reconciles social oppositions. There is much value in showing the detailed way in which myth contains socio-cultural structures and dynamics, but structuralism does not deal with what myth meant religiously in the lives of its participants.”<sup>2</sup> The same critique might also be made of much of contemporary ritual studies.

### Sources of Theoretical Confusion Occasioned by Libation-Pouring Gods

The “libating gods” in classical vase-painting and other media have caused five major forms of theoretical confusion for the historian of Greek religion. I here distill these problems with the approaches outlined in chapter 4. Some of them are dependent upon each other;



that is, once a problematic assumption has been made, rather than having it lead to clarification, other interpretive problems arise therefrom. Most begin with a problem of classification; the artistic phenomenon of a “god who pours a libation” cannot be accurately classified or theorized according to “known” categories of thought in Greek religion. The attempt to apply these inadequate categories has led to interpretations that necessarily exclude some or a great deal of the iconographic evidence, or that suffer what is portrayed to undergo a sea change into what cannot be portrayed or intended.

### Problem #1: “Divine” Omnipotence versus “Human” Contingency

The ancient Greek gods were not understood as contingent, mutable beings who recognized any power greater than themselves. Human beings, on the other hand, were seen in ancient Greek religion as both contingent and mutable. At every phase of Greek religious history, mortals oriented themselves by worshiping the gods, whom they regarded as superior to themselves. No matter how anthropomorphic the gods may seem to us or to Xenophanes, this hierarchical separation was, in the parameters of the Greek religious imagination, absolute; myth dwells on the times in the remote past when those limits were transgressed, to the agony of all. As Jenny Strauss Clay notes, “*menis* is the reaction of the gods to conduct which is superhuman or which tends to erase the distinctions between gods and men. Patroclus and Diomedes arouse the *menis* of Apollo at the moment they are characterized as δαίμονι ἴσος, ‘equal to a *daimon*’ [*Iliad* 16.705, 5.438]. In the latter passage Apollo makes explicit the reason for his intervention and warns Diomedes . . .”<sup>3</sup>

Φράζεο, Τυδεΐδη, καὶ χάζεο, μηδὲ θεοῖσιν  
 ἴσ' ἔθελε φρονέειν, ἐπεὶ οὐ ποτε φύλον ὁμοῖον  
 ἀθανάτων τε θεῶν χαμαὶ ἐρχομένων τ' ἀνθρώπων.

Take thought, son of Tydeus, and withdraw, nor desire to have  
 a mind equal to the gods, since never the same is  
 the breed of gods, who are immortal, and men who walk groundling.<sup>4</sup>

Worship, a quintessentially human behavior, brings with it an implied hierarchy: The worshiper is less powerful, less ritually pure, and less holy than the worshipped. Therefore, when the immortals themselves make offerings, they are acting in a way that seems contradictory to their essential nature. That is, they are acting like mortals—not insofar as they are adulterous or quarrelsome, but far more paradoxically, insofar as the performance of ritual action seems to imply their inferiority, contingency, and mutability.

### *Resulting Theoretical Confusion #1: Anthropomorphic Explanations of Divine Ritual*

If worship is by definition an activity dedicated to some power greater than one's own being, how can gods worship the way mortals do? These scenes

seem to present a hierarchical impossibility, and for that reason, as we have seen, some scholars go so far as to deny that they represent gods in the act of sacrificing. The category of “worship” is seen as “humanizing” the gods, that is, making them less than omnipotent. Historical and literary trends in the period from 510 to 460 B.C.E. are then sought to justify this alleged degradation.

### Problem #2: “The Hierarchy of Sacrifice”

To what power would the members of the Greek pantheon owe worship? If the gods of the vases are actually performing ritual actions, then one must prove that there is a logical reason for the actions, and a logical cultic “direction” in which they should work. This is a comfortable lens through which to view the sacrificial ministrations of “lesser” or “younger” gods such as Iris or Persephone, who pour for more powerful or older gods such as Athena or Demeter. Furthermore, members of the second generation of deities, the children of Zeus—such as Athena—are often portrayed on the vases serving Zeus and Hera. Yet this assumption of a hierarchical model of sacrifice in the case of the gods falters when Zeus or Hera pour libations; then they are regarded as offering to the Titans—their predecessors, whom they were compelled to overthrow—or to Gaia, Mother Earth, their primeval ancestress. This accords some kind of vestigial superiority to these assumed, shadowy recipients, whom we never see, despite literary evidence from the *Theogony* to the pseudo-Aeschylean *Prometheus* that makes it clear that Zeus is the unchallenged leader of the dominant divine order in the Greek cosmos.

An attendant confusion about the vase representations concerns the question of whether the act of pouring the wine from the oinochoe into the phiale represents a sort of obeisance to the god holding the phiale, or whether it represents simply a mutual act of sacrifice. Does the oinochoe bearer have less power than the phiale bearer? The concept of “obeisance,” implicit in a hierarchical model, might certainly apply when Iris fills the oinochoe of Apollo, or Athena pours for Zeus; but what to think when Artemis, the sister and twin of Apollo, pours for her brother—or, even more confusingly, when the mighty Athena ministers for the libation of a hero such as Herakles, or the goddess Nike pours for a departing mortal warrior?

### *Resulting Theoretical Confusion #2: “Invisible Recipients”*

The need to establish familiar and ritually “logical” hierarchies of sacrifice is applied to the libations poured by deities. This reflects the assumption that gods must worship for the same reason that people do, namely, to honor or importune beings greater than themselves. But if this assumption is true, in many cases the alleged “divine recipients” must therefore be invisible, since they are not portrayed in the central scene of the image.

## Problem #3: The Enthroned God: Recipient or Sacrificer?

The “sacrificing god” scenes, whether represented on vases, coins, statues, or reliefs, all fall somewhere along a spectrum of three different votive aspects.

- A. They are clearly cult statues, or, in the case of vase-paintings, portrayals of cult statues of divinities who extend the libation bowl from an enthroned or standing position. All “cult statues” in all forms of media have been assumed to be “recipients” of libation by virtually all previous scholars. In this first case, *the gods as represented are themselves cultic objects*.
- B. They are clearly animated divinities who are holding a cultic object, such as a libation bowl or an incense-burner or standing in proximity to one, such as an altar or lustral basin. It is not clear in these instances how or whether the gods are using these objects. In the cases where no wine is visible pouring from phiale to altar or ground, it is impossible to tell whether these gods are intended by the artist to be understood as giving or as receiving offerings; the question is insoluble from the iconographic contexts. These are clearly not cult statues, but *“living gods” portrayed in association with cultic objects*.
- C. They are animated deities who are unmistakably performing an act of worship. For example, if they hold a libation bowl, the wine is visible splashing onto an altar or onto the ground. In this category fall *“living gods” performing cultic actions*.

*Resulting Theoretical Confusion #3: False Criterion for the “Direction” of Sacrifice*

There is often no way of telling exactly into which category any given image falls. Is it a seated cult statue? Is it the real god or goddess? Is he or she pouring out of the phiale, or is he or she stretching out his bowl to receive the wine? The interpretation of the image has often hinged on subjective opinion as to whether it portrays categories A, B, or C—the god as an object of cult; the god as a living entity, holding or in proximity to cultic objects; or the god as a living entity who actually uses a cultic object to perform an act of worship.

Based on these limited categories, we might well wonder whether the “enthroned” deities who stretch forth the libation bowl belong in the category of sacrificing gods at all. If the god is enthroned, the phiale is almost without exception parallel to the altar or to the ground, rather than tipped. Although the god may watch with lively delight as his or her bowl is filled (as in the tondo of the kylix by Douris at the Getty Museum [no. 41] in which Zeus’s vessel is filled by Ganymede as the highest god is seated before an altar), these are clearly the majestic, if animated, descendents of seated cult images.

The “enthronement” of the goddess, and, correspondingly of her viceroy on earth, the king, was a crucial feature of Minoan-Mycenaean religion. In fact,

the identification of divine figure, mortal ruler, and throne was so complete that many small “chair gods” survive from the Mycenaean period—small terracotta idols that resemble thrones, but that have breasts and sometimes facial features. The throne of the god was one of the few religious features that survived the Dark Ages, to emerge in the Geometric and Archaic periods in the myriad statuettes of the seated goddess offered at sanctuaries.<sup>5</sup> These are small replicas of the main cult image, which was also seated; the archaic statues of Athena Lindia at Rhodes, Athena Polias at Athens, Hera at Samos, and many others were shown enthroned, rather than standing.

The seated god’s extension of the vessel may be a symbol of divine or royal authority, having as its iconographic ancestor the frequent Mesopotamian scenes of “the king and the cup,” such as are found on Ur III seals.<sup>6</sup> This is repeated in many scenes from the Minoan-Mycenaean period, most notably, a gold signet ring dating from 1450 B.C.E. from Tiryns, now in the Athens National Museum. Four animal-headed worshipers approach an enthroned goddess, who hails them with her upraised cup. Each bears a jug that distinctly reflects the later form of the oinochoe, the vessel used to fill the phiale. Fascinating iconographic parallels exist from Sparta on archaic reliefs depicting chthonian deities extending that infernal vessel, the kantharos (nos. C-47 and C-48). And in scenes in vase-paintings such as that of the enthroned Cybele and Sabazios in the underworld scene on a Polygnotan krater, the gods preside on a kind of statue base in divine majesty, their bowls extended as a symbol of regal authority (no. 195). And yet the matter is not so easily resolved. For from these gods’ bowls spill libations, while the sacred dance of an orgiastic chorus whirls through their sanctuary. The “enthronement” of gods in vase-paintings, whether they represent cult statues, living gods, or something in between, cannot be used as a valid criterion for determining whether the gods are offering or receiving libations in their outstretched phialai.

#### Problem #4: Frequency of Libation as a Ritual Act by the Gods

The scholarly discussion tracked in chapter 4 has centered on scenes of libation as a specific act of divine worship, since it is by far the most popular one during the sixty-year period in question. As a result, the debate has gotten sidetracked, speculatively focusing solely on the role of *liquid* offerings when the gods pour them. This ignores the fact that the same time period produced a number of other representations of the gods involved in a wide spectrum of ritual performances other than libation. Libation is only one element of the religious activity undertaken by the Olympians.

In vase-paintings, gods frequently hover near their altars—but not in a passive, waiting mode, as if expecting offerings, but in an active, attentive mode, almost as though they were tending the altars. For example, in no. C-54, a Panathenaic-style amphora by the Nikoxenos Painter in Berlin, Athena presides at her altar with a kithara; in no. C-58, an amphora by the same artist in the Louvre, the goddess draws even closer, bending almost tenderly as she extends her

hand over her flaming altar. In nos. C-52 and C-53, red-figure lekythoi in Athens, Artemis appears with flaming torches before her altar. There is a palpable energy in the atmosphere of these images. It is that of the attentive bond between the god and his or her own offering-place—and there is arguably no more central feature of *human* cult in Greek religion than the altar.

That bond intensifies in a votive relief in Copenhagen (no. C-62). Artemis Eupraxia does not merely superintend, but actually lights her own altar with her torch, holding a sacrificial basket aloft, as a retinue of smaller, mortal worshipers approach. On the hydria by the Berlin Painter now in Italy (no. 29; Figs. 2, 3), in addition to the libation of Apollo, we find another divine offering: Flowers and a garland are laid on the altar, and Leto is bringing a blossom. In an early classical cup from Capua by the Euaion Painter (no. C-61; Fig. 62), Demeter lays a bunch of wheat—her own sacred emblem, province, and gift to humanity—on an altar; the cup is inscribed ΔΕΜΕΤΡΟΣ, “belonging to Demeter.” Aphrodite often burns incense using a ritual burner, the thymiaterion—as in no. C-68, a calyx krater in Tübingen, and no. C-63 (Fig. 63), a hydria in New York that depicts a similar scene. A Roman copy of a monumental Eleusinian relief, no. C-65 (Fig. 64), shows the great goddesses of Eleusis dropping incense onto a small burning altar. Apollo washes his hand in an act of ritual purification at a lustral basin in a neck amphora by the Nikon Painter dating from about 475 B.C.E. (no. C-66; Fig. 65).

Gods can appear with sacrificial animal victims at altars, or even lead them there, as in a spirited design on an early Hellenistic bell krater in the Louvre (no. C-42) in which the god Hermes, wearing a cape and winged boots, and holding a garlanded caduceus, festal wreaths, and a decorated phiale, leads a ram to sacrifice at a small altar. Interestingly, as is sometimes the case with



FIGURE 62. Demeter lays a wheat bunch on an altar. Genitive of name is inscribed: ΔΕΜΕΤΡΟΣ. Attic red-figure cup, the followers of Douris: the Euaion Painter, early classical period.



FIGURE 63. Aphrodite sprinkling incense at an altar. Thymiaterion (incense burner) nearby. Eros hovers. Satyr and maenad. Attic red-figure hydria, 370–350 B.C.E.

“mirror” images of divine and mortal libation, the reverse side of the krater depicts a mortal woman at an altar. In **no. C-36**, a vase in Boston attributed to the Telephoros Painter, Dionysos, dressed for his own cult in leopard skin and grasping a thyrsos, dances as he swings an unhappy-looking small panther or ocelot near a flaming altar. But just like the gods who do not merely attend their own altars but light or lay flowers on them, these gods also sometimes kill the animals they bring. Perhaps the greatest shock value is afforded by the ecstatic Dionysos who tears a hind in **no. C-39**, the stamnos by the Hephaisteion Painter which we have discussed previously; the god himself performs the kind of ritualized killing represented on the Brygos Painter’s cup at the Bibliothèque Nationale in Paris, in which one maenad in a Dionysiac thiasos has torn a fawn in half (**no. C-34**). The scene becomes explicitly sacrificial in a pelike in the British Museum (**no. C-38**) where the god rends the animal in the presence of an altar. A black-figure olpe in Ferrara’s Museo Nazionale finds Athena with helmet, shield, and aegis, holding two spits with her left hand, around which are wrapped the entrails of a sacrificed animal. The goddess roasts the meat over a fire which probably burns on an altar beneath, although it is hidden; with her right hand, she pours a libation from a phiale onto the flames. In **no. C-40**, an oinochoe by the Karlsruhe Painter in London, Eros triumphantly ports away sacrificial meat on a spit.



FIGURE 64. Roman version of an Eleusinian relief of Demeter and Persephone, who drop incense onto a small flaming altar. Imperial period, marble copy of fourth-century B.C.E. Attic work.

*Resulting Theoretical Confusion #4: Failure to Consider Evidence of Divine Ritual other than Libation*

Divinities in the classical period are portrayed as performing many common ritual actions, not just libation. Therefore it is highly misleading to focus exclusively on libation, as has been done, or to analyze its unique features in an effort to shed light on this iconographic paradox. As we saw in chapter 1, libation has been difficult to ignore because it is the most frequent ritual action performed by the gods. But in these images, libation is not the only subject; the gods display many kinds of religious behavior—all of it recognizable from the mortal realm. A continuum of cultic involvement on the part of the gods is presented in this iconography, ranging from fairly passive association with the physical elements of cult to active, even ecstatic enactment of ritual actions.

**Problem # 5: Mythic Episode versus “Immediate” Cult Scene**

Hermeneutically, there seem to be only two possible ways of interpreting Greek gods shown pouring liquid offerings. These are drastically opposed.

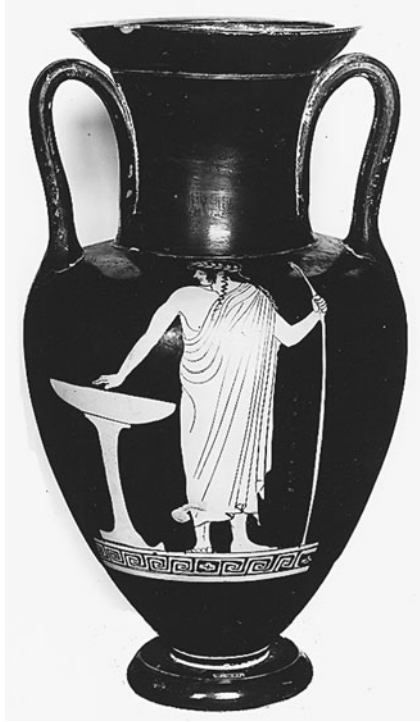


FIGURE 65. Apollo washing his right hand at perirrhanterion (lustral basin) in his own sanctuary. Attic red-figure neck-amphora by the Nikon Painter, 480–470 B.C.E.

- A. They owe their meaning to specific episodes from myth. As we noted in chapter 4, this may work in certain cases—such as the entry of Herakles into Olympus, the departure of Triptolemus with the gift of grain, or the birth of Erichthonios. But it presents problems in cases such as that of the mutual libation of Zeus and Hera, or the offerings of Apollo and Artemis poured over omphalos or altar. The approach breaks down completely when there is no known mythic episode to explain the scene, that is, Poseidon pouring from a phiale assisted by Amphitrite, the sacrificing Ares, or Athena pouring libations unaccompanied by Herakles. Freestanding statues holding phialai are impossible to explain with this line of interpretation except by arbitrarily deciding that they are the “recipients” of mortal libations (this is related to **problem # 3**). Such a decision, however, presents difficulties in that the generally sharp angle of their libation bowls would seem to preclude pouring anything into it; the wine would spill out onto the ground.
- B. The images are cultic depictions of gods actually performing acts of worship.



*Resulting Theoretical Confusion #5: “Lost Myths”  
and Invisible Recipients*

If we accept possibility A, we must confront the fact that there are not enough mythic episodes to explain all of the permutations of the sacrificing god scene. In trying to account for the data, the search for stories in which the gods pour libations (or those in which they might) winds up on the evanescent trail of “lost myth.” But if we turn to B, and accept the possibility that these are true scenes of ritual separate from narrative myth, we must ask for whom the gods are pouring libations, and why?

Both interpretations assume a divine recipient of the libations—some greater power than the gods who do the offering, a power worthy of receiving the honor they impart. But in these vase-paintings, there is no recipient in sight.

Divine Reflexivity: A Proposed Solution

By now I hope it is clear why there has been so much confusion in previous scholarship on the vexing topic of the sacrificing gods. I would like to suggest that if we hope to understand these scenes, it is not helpful to rely on the “canonical” model of ancient Greek sacrifice in which mortals offer gifts to the gods, who in some way receive them.

Rather, I would propose, as an approach to this iconographic mystery, that the gods be considered not only as the object of cult but more important, reflexively understood within the tradition as the source or subject of cult—that is, as the origin and catalyst for religious behavior, including human. The idea that the gods conceive and introduce their own solemn festivals to mortals is not alien to ancient Greek religion. The *Homeric Hymn to Apollo* reminds the god that he said to Telephousa, “here I intend to build a beautiful temple to be an oracle for men who will always bring to me here unblemished hecatombs.”<sup>7</sup> In the *Hymn to Demeter*, we listen as that great goddess ordains her own mysteries: “Let all the people build me a great temple and beneath it an altar under the steep walls of the city, above Kallichoron, on the rising hill. I myself shall introduce rites (ἄργια δ’ αὐτῆ ἐγὼν ὑποθήσομαι) so that later you may appropriate my mind by their right performance.”<sup>8</sup> In Plato’s *Laws*, as Himmelmann reminds us, the author recounts the divine origin of religious festivals: “Now these forms of child-training, which consist in right discipline in pleasures and pains, grow slack and weakened to a great extent in the course of men’s lives; so the gods, in pity for the human race thus born to misery, have ordained the feasts of thanksgiving as periods of respite from their troubles; and they have granted them as companions in their feasts the Muses and Apollo the master of music, and Dionysos, that they may at least set right again their modes of discipline by associating in their feasts with the gods.”<sup>9</sup> Religious activity is part of the natural sphere of the Greek god.<sup>10</sup>

But it is not just any religion the gods practice. A closer look at some of the examples from the “Comparanda” section which we considered above in

**problem #4** reveals a crucial aspect of the gods' religious behavior: *gods practice those forms of religion that are specific to their own particular form of worship*. Himmelmann first observed that Dionysos tends to pour only from the kantharos, which is his special vessel, and the vase which is emblematic of his cult—and that Aphrodite often burns incense, incense-burning being an important aspect of her cult.<sup>11</sup> This observation if pursued, leads into a world of thought that requires new models.

For me, the case was sealed when, on one hot summer day at the Ashmolean Museum in Oxford, I met Apollo, the god of purification and Pythagorean mysticism, washing his own hand at a lustral basin—a *perirrhanterion*. The scene was painted on a classical amphora (**no. C-66: Fig. 65**). Ritual purification with water at just such a basin is a central aspect of the cult of Apollo; purity is his distinct sphere.<sup>12</sup> Apollo practices and reinforces his own religion. The search for a recipient for these religious actions performed by the gods, including libations, is endlessly problematic. Iconographically, the gods naturally “attract” both the votive objects and the votive actions associated with their worship. This I call “divine reflexivity”—cultic behavior appropriate to the sphere of the individual deity and which thus is ascribed to his or her agency, reflexively iterating the god's particular characteristics and powers.

With divine reflexivity as an explanatory method, pieces began to fall into place. For example, in **no. C-61 (Fig. 62)**, the cup in Brussels in which Demeter lays a wheat bunch on an altar, the goddess does not lay a flowering branch, a cake, or a fish, but a bunch of wheat; as is characteristic of all ritual action, this is not an arbitrary choice. Wheat is Demeter's own attribute—a possession and signifier of her sacred sphere of influence. The genitive of her name inscribed on the cup, ΔΕΜΕΤΡΟΣ, surely means that the cup itself is dedicated to her and belongs to her. But we may also take it to mean that the grain is uniquely hers. The altar is hers. *The offering act itself is also hers.*

In these scenes of divine libation we have neither the iconographic representation of myth nor aggravated anthropomorphism. We have many vase-paintings that superbly display these attributes, for example, **no. C-44 (Fig. 66)**, a black-figure hydria in Berlin, which depicts a gathering of Olympians, each with his or her unique, identifying attribute; and **no. C-45**, a skyphos by Makron in London, in which the seated king Eumolpos observes a procession of deities: Zeus with his scepter and thunderbolt, Dionysos with his leafy crown and stalk of wild ivy, Amphitrite and the enthroned Poseidon, both clutching dolphins. Thus ritual *actions* are as much attributes of the ancient Greek deities as these more familiar specific attributive *objects*.

## Reflexivity: Heritage and Fields of Meaning

I choose the term “reflexivity” because it carries with it all the sense of paradox and self-referentiality the vases themselves bear.<sup>13</sup> As it emerges, reflexivity is a crucial element of the divine—the idea of God or the gods or the spirits—but also of ritual itself. Hence, a representation of a sacrificing god, since it comprises



FIGURE 66. Attic black-figure hydria. Gathering of Olympians each with an identifying attribute unique to him or her. From left: Dionysos with his kantharos, Hermes with his caduceus; Hera, with spear; Zeus, with thunderbolt.

both divine agency and ritual, namely, encoded, efficacious performance, is doubly reflexive, like a room with mirrors set on both sides.

In 1708, “reflexive” was attested in the English language as meaning “turned or directed back upon the mind itself.”<sup>14</sup> As Barbara Babcock writes, “Reflexivity is a paradoxical concept because the type of self-referential activity—consciousness of self-consciousness—that it denotes involves . . . epistemological paradox . . . , in which the mind by its own operation attempts to say something about its operation—an activity difficult to contemplate and to describe without conceptual vertigo and verbal entanglements.”<sup>15</sup> Babcock notes that the reflexive and perceiving self (as opposed to the experiential self) is “regarded as a higher form of consciousness, and it is frequently regarded as transcendent, if not divine.”<sup>16</sup> From Aristotle’s definition of God as “thought of thought” to Kant’s “transcendental reflection,” reflexivity is seen as a higher—in fact, the highest—function of universal mental activity. It is the appropriate province of the divine.

The Introduction referred to the Hegelian delineation of the “self-enclosed,” self-subsisting nature of God, and the complete difference of God’s ontological nature from that of other things. In Hegel’s phenomenology of religion we have perhaps the most articulate expression of reflexivity as a necessary aspect of the divine. In his lecture “The Concept of Religion,” Hegel said,

The things and developments of the natural and spiritual world constitute manifold configurations, and endlessly multiform existence;

they have a being differentiated in rank, force, intensity, and content. The being of all these things is not of an independent sort, however, but is quite simply something upheld and maintained, not genuine independence. If we ascribe a being to particular things, it is only a borrowed being, only the semblance of a being, not the absolutely independent being that God is. God in his universality, this universal in which there is no limitation, finitude, or particularity, is the absolute subsistence. Whatever subsists has its roots and subsistence only in this One. If we grasp this initial content in this way, we can express it thus: "God is the absolute substance, the only true actuality."<sup>17</sup>

Hegel goes on to argue that God as Spirit *must* manifest itself, and in so doing, allows for the possibility of consciousness:

Spirit is an absolute manifesting. . . . The making or creation of the world is God's self-manifesting, self-revealing. In a further and later definition we will have this manifestation in the higher form that what God creates God himself is, that in general it does not have the determinateness of an other, that God is manifestation of his own self, that God is for himself—the other (which has the empty semblance of [being] an other but is immediately reconciled). . . . Here for the first time we have consciousness, the subjectively knowing spirit for which God is object. From this it follows that God can be known or cognized, for it is God's nature to reveal himself, to be manifest.<sup>18</sup>

Hegel's critique of the Greek gods, echoing that of Xenophanes, as "products of human imagination or sculptured deities formed by human hands," whose "finitude" and "particularity," the production "of phantasy for phantasy"<sup>19</sup> does not negate the potential value of his theory of God's necessary self-manifestation in consciousness—and, I would argue, in cult—for the interpretation of the gods' rituals in ancient Greek or any other religion. It is a mistake to think that because the gods of pantheistic systems of antiquity were so easily pictured in art, literature, and cult that the ancients believed them to be thereby easily circumscribed, a divine that is "grasped neither by pure thinking nor in pure spirit." Rather, divinely performed ritual would seem to be an exemplary illustration of Hegelian phenomenology, an expression and manifestation of divine being.

Ritual itself is an intensely reflexive phenomenon. As Roy Rappaport notes, the performer of the ritual subordinates himself to the "order that the ritual encodes simply by performing it." However, "the reflexive act of subordination also establishes that to which there is subordination. To exist, a liturgical order must be performed. Liturgical orders, the orders encoded in ritual, are *substantiated*—provided substance, or realized—made into *res* only in instances of their performance. The relationship of performer to performance is extraordinarily intimate, or even inextricable. By participating in a ritual, the performer becomes part of an order which is utterly dependent for its very existence upon instances, such as his, of its performance."<sup>20</sup> Ritualizing gods pose a challenge to almost every attempt to theorize ritual. When a god is the performer, one can

argue that the ritual is even more dependent “for its very existence” upon its performance than if a human being is the ritualizer. One cannot, however, argue that the god is somehow “subordinate” to the order of the ritual. In the case of the ritualizing god, the reflexive relationship of performer to performance is even more intimate, in that the divine performer not only originates the ritual order he or she follows but also imbues it with the only meaning it can have. The origin and “purpose” of the ritual order is one and the same: the self-expression of the god performing it. The ritual, not the god, is subordinated.

I have attempted to show in the previous chapters that the phenomenon of the ritualizing god occurs in any number of other religious traditions, and that when this idea is found, it “describes” the divine realm as the source and agency for the world of all ritual action, including human religious behavior. The representation of sacrificing gods, or gods performing other rituals, both self-referentially comments upon the religious system as a whole and at the same time intensifies it.

Barry Sandywell writes of the philosophical question of reflexivity, “Generically every self-referential system can be described as *reflexive* to the degree that it possesses the capacity to turn back upon its own organization and operations in order to perform work on itself as a routine practical feature of its functioning. . . . Minds routinely engage in ordered forms of reflexion and self-reflexion. Systems which are capable of self-directed movements are today described as *behavioural systems*. Unlike inert objects they engage in *behaviour*, acting upon and changing their environments.”<sup>21</sup> Religious systems, of course, because they aspire to a *Weltanschauung* that is total, comprises everything, and thus aims at epistemological comprehensiveness, are supremely self-referential. They chronically turn back upon and maintain their own operations, partly through the process of the ongoing reinterpretation of new historical realities in light of established, eternalized paradigms.

The gods in ritual performance are surely nothing if not self-referential. Their religious actions point to their own numinous selves, and refer to their own worship as practiced by mortals.<sup>22</sup> It is important, however, for the nuanced construction of the category that it is understood that gods worship uniquely as gods. Thus in the *Hymn to Hermes* passage which we considered in chapter 3, Hermes does *not* eat the meat of the sacrifice he has prepared because he is not a mortal performing a mortal sacrifice—he is a god, and so, like the God of Genesis 8:21, enjoys the “sweet savour,” the part that the gods appropriately receive. This issue of the special nature of “the religion of the gods” will occur repeatedly in the comparative material presented in the second half of this book. Divine ritual is not the same as human ritual.

### How it Works

I set forth this interpretation not simply because it differs from those preceding it but because I believe that it is the only one flexible enough to account for

all the evidence. It requires that no exceptions be made and no evidence suppressed in order to make sense. Let us briefly return to the five major problems resulting in theoretical confusion that we have identified, to see if this particular interpretive approach might help to resolve some of them.

*Problem #1: "Divine" Omnipotence versus "Human" Contingency*

Among others, W. K. Arafat assumes that worship originates in the mortal realm. But if we start from the premise that sacrifice, and in fact all forms of worship, might have been seen in antiquity as originating with the gods and belonging to them, then we do not have the problem of the gods being "humanized" by a mortal act.

The notion of divine libation as divine reflexivity or self-referentiality does not see the performance of religious ritual as rendering the gods "like" humans, or "humanized" in some way that degenerates their powers. An act of normally human worship thus becomes an expression of the god's role as the source of human cult, rather than ballast that drags him or her down to the human level of contingency or inferiority. In this way, it is faithful to the ancient Greeks' conception of the deities as perfect and omnipotent. It does not require an interpretation that does violence to the indigenous ancient Greek concept of the gods' immortality or perfection.

*Problem #2: "The Hierarchy of Sacrifice"*

Introducing the idea of divine reflexivity, it is no longer necessary to establish that a superior god is an inferior one in the libation scenes. If both cultic objects (flowers, grain, phiale, wine, blood, lyre, sacrificial animal victim) and cultic actions can be associated with the deity as numinous attributes, there is no need to posit an invisible "divine recipient" of the offering made by that deity. The god is in relation to no other entity than herself and the mortals who also practice the rite.

*Problem #3: The Enthroned God: Recipient or Sacrificer?*

It is also not necessary to determine whether a deity is a portrayed cult statue, a living god standing with a bowl in hand as if either to receive or pour, or a living god definitely pouring. *Not only cultic objects but also cultic actions are attributes of divinity, and thus "belong" to the god or goddess.* Thus it is as appropriate for Aphrodite to carry a thymiaterion as it is for her actually to burn grains of incense in it, and as appropriate for Dionysos to hold a kantharos above an altar as actually to rend an animal. It is appropriate for Apollo to wash his hands at a perirrhanterion, for this is an important purifying action associated with his particular cult. The god's self-originating ritual may be construed as paradigmatic, but does not need to be seen as so. Neither is it necessary to decide whether an individual god is pouring or receiving libations, as both actions are part of the larger divine sphere of religious activity.

*Problem # 4: Frequency of Libation as a Ritual Act by the Gods*

If libation is seen as but one of the multiple cultic actions associated with the gods in Greek art, it is not necessary to distinguish it from any of the others. As noted in chapter 1, libation is a ritual that is generic to the worship of all the gods, as opposed to the specificity of some of the other ritual acts considered thus far. The ubiquity of scenes of libation in classical art have confused the picture, because the phiale and the act of pouring from it belong to all the gods. In this approach, libation surrenders its privileged place and takes a proper place on a broader spectrum of ritual actions that can be both dedicated to the gods and performed by them.

*Problem # 5: Mythic Episode versus “Immediate” Cult Scene*

The explanatory device of divine reflexivity does not require a mythical episode, known or unknown, for each scene. It allows for mythical influences, but does not require them. The gods are actually worshiping in a recognizable cultic context, but they are not worshiping exactly as mortals do—that is, they are not worshiping something or someone else. They are worshiping because they are the source of, and reason for, all worship. The paradox is not resolved, but it has its own internal logic.

*“Dances with Gods”: Cultic Reciprocity*

By no means do I wish to imply that the “religion of the gods” has no relationship to human religiosity. In fact, divine reflexivity entails the opposite: an intimate, dynamic relationship mediated by the parabolic ritual action itself. As Paden observes,

A god is not just a bare object—like a statue in a museum—but part of a bilateral relationship. A god is a god *of* someone or *to* someone. Only in the eyes of a religious person can a god be a god as such. A god is a category of social, interactive behavior, experienced in a way that is analogous to the experience of other selves. With gods one receives, gives, follows, loves, imitates, communes, negotiates, contests, entrusts. A god is a subject to us as objects and an object to us as subjects. We address it, or it can address us. Part of this relational quality is even evident in the etymology of the English term *god*, which traces back to a root that means either “to invoke” or “sacrifice to.”<sup>23</sup>

I suggest that these vases iconographically imagine the gods not only as having established but as themselves continually performing their rites in ongoing “cultic time,” just as the talmudic God prays each day that his mercy might overcome his justice. Unlike the picture of a kind of pristine vacuum implied by Himmelman, the gods’ worship seems to both parallel and respond to human cultic observance. This is why mortal libation scenes appear on the opposite side of the vases. As the gods pour, so do mortals. As mortals pour, so do

the gods. From an emic perspective within the ancient Greek tradition, however, ritual action originates with the gods, not with humans imitating gods. The distinction is pivotal, in my view, to an accurate and nuanced “translation” of this corpus of iconography.

### Essential Features of Divine Reflexivity

It is now possible to articulate the characteristic and even recurrent features of the phenomenological category of divine reflexivity, a self-referential operation in the sphere of the religious imagination that unites cultic semiotics and theological meaning. These might be set forth as follows:

1. Its representation in text and artifact offers a kind of intensification and ultimacy to the ritual portrayed as performed by a deity.
2. Such intensification can function conservatively to reinscribe the central significance of the ritual during historical periods of crisis when the religious system itself is threatened or changing; it strategically allows the religion to maintain its most valuable forms of expression.
3. The rituals performed by gods are *not* generally identical to those prescribed for mortals, and hence cannot be said to be simple anthropomorphisms; they usually are modified by the sacrificer’s divine status. Divine religious acts are both *like* and *unlike* human ones. The aspect that is unlike human behavior is related to the nature of a god as *Other*—ontologically “bigger” in scope and potentiality than a human being.
4. Nevertheless, ritualizing gods undertake religious behavior in the interlocking condition of “cultic time”; their religious practices are correlative to the ritual actions of mortals.
5. Such divine religious actions usually are not understood as having ceased with a primordial ritual event at the beginning of time, but rather as occurring on an ongoing basis, continually in symbiotic tension and relationship with human religious actions and structures. The image is one of “mirroring,” but does not include the notion of static or passive mutual reflection that mirroring implies. It is a dynamic, interactive process.
6. Divine reflexivity is paradoxical in hierarchical religious systems, insofar as deities generally are imagined as focal cultic entities and the natural recipients—not the instigators—of cultic behavior and gifts. When the phenomenon occurs, it can create theological discomfort within the self-referential thought-world of the religious system, which imagines ultimacy, not contingency, for the divine; ritual is seen at first glance as contingent, subordinate behavior.
7. Such emic conceptual discomfort in the face of paradox is often later echoed by etic discomfort. This can be found either in the form of



condemnation in the religious polemics of other traditions, or in the form of dismissal by modern scholarly treatments of ritualizing gods as anomalous or in certain cases cast as “misunderstood” by the tradition itself.

### Historical Questions

Why do these images appear and then disappear during such a brief period in Attic history? Do the classical Greek images of sacrificing gods serve some kind of didactic function? Are they intended to inspire piety, to urge specific ritual actions on the part of mortals, as was clearly the case in the myth of Zurvān’s priestly sacrifice (see chapter 6) or the observant God of the Talmud (see chapter 8)? This is a possibility that cannot be ruled out, especially given the short duration of their appearance. Divine libations arrive on the vase-painting scene at a time when a dissolution of aristocratic social and religious authority was precipitated by the reforms of the Athenian statesman Kleisthenes. Returned to Athens in 511/10 B.C.E. by the Spartan Kleomenes at the time of the expulsion of the Peisistratids, and elected archon in 508/7 B.C.E., Kleisthenes passed far-reaching democratic reforms such as land redistribution, representative taxation, and tribunal government, and all but legislated away the lavish funeral ceremonies at the ancestral tomb so popular among the aristocratic clans of Attica.<sup>24</sup> The subsequent invasions of Attica by Persia, a “barbaric” foreign power that menaced Greek autonomy, and which in 480 B.C.E. devastated the shrines of her holiest high place—the Acropolis—may also have contributed to an atmosphere of collective religious anxiety.

The most important “fact” about the first half of the fifth century B.C.E., as Athenian society responded to the reforms of Kleisthenes, is that, in words of Margaret Miller, “the society profoundly moved from aristocratic to democratic dominant ideology.”<sup>25</sup> This was a radical shift, as Delian League funds were removed to Athens, and Perikles’s political success in the 440s extinguished long-entrenched internal struggles. It is possible that during this radical ideological shift that overturned archaic organizational units of power, a shift taking place over only a few decades, the highly conservative social institution of sacrifice was reinforced and upheld by the images of sacrificing gods: Nothing more strongly reinscribes the significance of a ritual than the representation of a god’s performance of it.

Here then the nature of religious systems as self-referential and self-reinforcing behavioral systems may have played itself out historically, during an era where patterns of crisis and response are discernible. The reinforcement of ritual in the ubiquitous vase-painting images, dedicated in sanctuaries, buried in graves, and traded in Magna Graecia and Etruria, may have mattered most at a time when the connection between mythic order and mimetic ritual was threatened. As Gregory Nagy observes, “[T]he concept of *mimesis*, in conveying a reenactment of the realities of myth, is a concept of authority as long

as society assents to the genuineness of the values contained by the framework of the myth."<sup>26</sup>

The theme of the sacrificing gods in the art of the late archaic and early classical period in Greece was only quasi-mythic; yet images of divine libations represented an ongoing enactment of the realities of religious ritual itself. Therefore, as the notion of "divine reflexivity" implies, worship performed by the gods might have been an institution referencing itself. As the archetypal originators of ritual, the Olympians reinforce ritual in the vase-paintings by themselves performing it. Ritual is, above all, conservative. If the archetype is lost or threatened, then reenactment and imitation will help to recreate that link.

The libating gods in vase-paintings mostly exit the iconographic stage, around 450–440 B.C.E.—a time beginning with the Peace with Persia (449 B.C.E.) and concluding with the construction of the Parthenon—in other words, at a time of Athenian political self-confidence and religious stability, even optimism. By the end of the shift, "the people of Athens could see themselves as globally aristocratic vis-à-vis the rest of the Greek world," building upon the notion of a pure and autochthonous blood line, and the city's role in winning the wars that had threatened all of Greece from the East. Observes Miller, "One may see the 'Periklean building programme' as symptomatic of [collective Athenian] confidence when that thought revolution has been largely effected."<sup>27</sup> By the time of Thucydides's account of Perikles's funeral oration in 431/0, Athens thought of itself as "a school for all Hellas." Perhaps it was no longer necessary to reinscribe foundational ritual piety so strongly, since the threat to those forms and practices had diminished.

The sacrificing god offers a perfectly interlocking metaphysics, in which the divine agent of ritual can certainly be construed as a projection of human behavior, so mirroring the human. But even admitting this possibility, crude projectionism does not satisfactorily exegete the sacrificing god, who assumes within the closed semiotic system of the tradition an autonomy that is capable of instigating and affecting human religious behavior. Such an idea about a god is more than a model for religious actions; it is a pure absolute with its own independent power. In other words, scholars who argue that the gods on the vases poured offerings in imitation of the ancient Greeks as they themselves worshiped may be correct. But conversely one might argue that the ancient Greeks saw themselves as imitating the gods as *they*, that is, the *gods* themselves, worshiped. Which world reflected which? Both views are equally defensible, and perhaps their apparent mutual exclusivity is due only to our own inability to think paradoxically—"beyond what is expected." The libations and other forms of ritual performed by the gods serve an important function: They insist that we expand our appreciation of the omnipotence, rather than the contingency, ascribed to the Greek gods.

This paradoxical thinking is just what is required for a scholar of comparative religion if he or she is truly to comprehend the heart—the internal logic, the "root metaphor"—of a religious tradition, be it weighted on the side of the cultic

or the theological, praxis or theory. Paradox is the rule, not the exception, in religion. Christ was fully human, and yet also fully divine. Buddhist philosophy eschews the mundane world as unreal, and yet *stūpas* containing the Buddha's relics abound in Eastern Asia and are centers of great religious power. The Qur'ān in one passage calls for Allāh alone to judge heresy, and yet mortal *mul-lahs* can call for the death of a heretical author on the strength of another passage. In each of these cases, both categories are to be thought of as paradigmatically representative of the tradition; yet they are also apparently mutually exclusive.

The forays into other religious traditions in the following chapters are not intended to confuse the questions raised by the Greek case, nor to deny its uniqueness. However, this survey is intended to investigate how and why other gods in other religions worlds perform ritual actions, in the hope of better understanding divine libations on classical vases. Over and again, whether the model is a foundational cosmic act that is then reenacted in mortal ritual or an ongoing divine ritual activity in which mortals participate, the intimate relationship of the divine to the specifics of worship emerges as a ubiquitous phenomenon, built into the very structure of cult and marrying it to enacted theology.

The gods do not merely receive veneration or sacrifice; they perform ritual and thus ratify it, conferring upon it ultimacy; the same ritual performance is thereby inaugurated in the mortal realm. The ritual, whether in the form of pious observance or sacrificial gift, is returned to the gods who began the process and from whom religion is born. Religion is thus best understood as purely reflexive; it is created and self-referentially enacted by the divine for its own sake. Because Allāh prays for Muḥammad, a believing Muslim is enabled to pray for him as well, so that the prophet may pray for the believer. *Do ut des*, by all means; the inscription on a bronze geometric figurine of Apollo in Boston dedicated by Mantiklos can mean little else: "Mantiklos dedicated me to the Fardarter of the silver bow, as part of his tithe, do thou, Phoibos, grant him gracious recompense."<sup>28</sup> I give so that You may give in return.

The testimony of the traditions explored in the following chapters, however, restores the other half of the reciprocal equation: *das ut dem*. You, the god, give so that I, a mortal, may—and must—give in response.

PART II

The Wider  
Indo-European World

*Polytheism*

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# Introduction

## *Ritualizing Gods in Indo-European Religious Traditions*

The previous chapter offered the notion of the gods' reflexive and hence cultically generative sacrifice as an explanatory device that alone seems adequately to address the theoretical challenges encountered on classical Attic vases. The second half of this book will examine cases of sacrificing or ritualizing gods in traditions other than ancient Greek. Past efforts to interpret the Attic vases may have been crippled by the frequently narrow methodologies of classical *Religionswissenschaft*, since the evidence of ancient Greek religion is only sporadically considered in the context of the comparative study of world religions. Liberating the sacrificing Greek gods from "the Classics" allows them to "breathe" and to recombine in a wider sphere of religious history.<sup>1</sup>

Part II considers sacrificing gods in several traditions that apparently share linguistic, cultural, political, and cultic genealogies with the ancient Greek world: Vedic, Zoroastrian, and ancient Norse religions. Rituals performed by deities were known throughout the polytheistic traditions of Indo-European heritage, which perhaps originated in ancient Central Asia and were believed to have reached the Mediterranean during the Bronze Age—around the time known as Early Helladic III.<sup>2</sup> Although Vedic Sanskrit and Homeric Greek have long been recognized as linguistic relatives, the systems of thought they express also share a number of elusively similar religious concerns including related names and functions for deities and a strong orientation toward sacrifice, especially libation. Indo-Iranian traditions developed along related if distinct lines, and also featured divine sacrifice.<sup>3</sup> Parallels do seem to exist between certain features of Vedic and Brāhmaṇical sacrificial texts and the Attic vase-painting that were being produced within a century of the latter. In ancient

Indian tradition, the gods' unceasing sacrifice is the vital artery of the Vedic circulatory system; this hieratic performative idea, attested in sacred literature, is paradigmatic rather than problematic.<sup>4</sup>

Vedic literature spans a thousand years from the time of the entry into, migration to, or emergence through cultural transformation in, the Indus valley by Indo-Aryan peoples—at a time around 1500 B.C.E.—to the completion of the Upaniṣads in the sixth century B.C.E.<sup>5</sup> The primordial sacrifice of the giant Puruṣa by the gods provides raw material for the creation of the cosmos, as *Ṛgveda* 10.90.16 sings of the gods' prototypical (and highly ritualized) act, “The gods sacrificed to the sacrifice with the sacrifice.” As Bruce Lincoln has shown, this divine immolation of the First Person is reiterated in other Indo-European cosmogonies.<sup>6</sup>

Animal sacrifice is part of the range of Vedic sacrifices, classically occurring within and without the sacred circle of the *vedi* (hourglass-shaped altar, and three offering fires). But liquid offerings, as in the Greek case, not only punctuate all forms of sacrifice but are also constitute a crucial form of offering in and of themselves. Libations mentioned in the texts include milk, clarified butter (*ghī*), rice and vegetable preparations, and the potent elixir *Soma*. In myth, the latter has its fiery origin in an oblation offered by the gods themselves.<sup>7</sup> In the *Chāndogya Upaniṣad*,

The world is the fire, the sun is the firewood  
its rays are the smoke, day is the flame.  
The moon is the ember, the constellations are the sparks.  
In this fire the gods offer their oblation,  
and from this King Soma arises.<sup>8</sup>

According to *Ṛgveda* 8.14.15, the god Indra is the supreme *Soma* drinker, in his effort to gain strength for battle. His action is imitated in the ritual use of *Soma*, which, as was true of Greek σπονδαί, was both poured out and partly consumed by the priests as a sacrifice.

Within the context of the *agnihotra*, the conspicuous, repetitious oblation sacrifice in which the sacred fire is fed with milk and other liquids at early morning and at sunset, the Vedic gods as poet-priests create, offer, receive, and often are themselves the sacrifice. In fact, the sacerdotal function of the Vedic gods, in a sense, defines them. As Christopher Minkowski observes, “The deities addressed in the Vedic *yajñas* are not, as a class, the same sort of deities worshipped in later Hindu bhakti devotionalism . . . the deities are in a certain sense the performers of the rite as well as its recipients.”<sup>9</sup> In the very concept of sacrifice (*yajña*), sacrificer and recipient of sacrifice are continually conflated, interchanged, and even identified. This is expressed centuries later in the *Bhagavad Gītā*,

The (sacrificial) presentation is Brahman; Brahman is the oblation;  
In the (sacrificial) fire of Brahman it is poured by Brahman;  
Just to Brahman must he go,  
Being concentrated upon the (sacrificial) action that is Brahman.<sup>10</sup>

*Ṛgveda* 10.90.16 tells us that the *dharmas*, ritual laws or “foundations” created by the sacrifice of the primal giant Puruṣa, reach the *Sādhyas*, a previous generation of shadowy divinities who live in the “dome of the sky”; *Ṛgveda* 1.164.50, an obscure hymn called “the Riddle of the Sacrifice” (*Asya Vāmasya*), reiterates the language of *Ṛgveda* 10.90.16: “With the sacrifice the gods sacrificed to the sacrifice. These became the first ritual laws. These very powers reached the dome of the sky where dwell the *Sādhyas*, the ancient gods.”<sup>11</sup>

The *Sādhyas* were on earth even before the archaic *Devas*.<sup>12</sup> They were the first to go up into heaven, shutting the door behind them.<sup>13</sup> They took Sacrifice and Soma with them. Like the ancestors of Zeus in the Greek theogony, the *Sādhyas* were a deposed generation of divinities; like Hermes and Prometheus, the *Sādhyas* were the first sacrificers.<sup>14</sup> In *Kāthaka Saṃhita* 26.7, when there was nothing to sacrifice but the god of fire, Agni, they sacrificed Agni; and Agni is himself high priest of sacrifice, bearing the smoke of the offering to the celestial realm. *Ṛgveda* 1.1 says, “I praise Agni, the one who is set before, the god of the sacrifice, the priest, the invoker” (*yajñasya devam*).

The Vedic sacrifice seems to have been understood as a process that sustained the continuing existence of the cosmos; hence its proper performance, including pronunciation and metrics, was attended with an increasing anxiety that is reflected in the sacrificial texts themselves. Later critiques, such as *Brahma Purāṇa* 79.9, go so far as to insist that without sacrifice, neither this world nor the other world can have any existence.<sup>15</sup>

Significantly, perhaps, in Vedic religion, as in Greek, the sacrifice one makes to one’s ancestors, the *piṇḍapitr-yajña*, is a reverse mirror image of the sacrifice one makes to the gods; the dead, the living, the terrestrial, and celestial are one. The sacrificer, whether divine or mortal, becomes in a sense the object sacrificed: The offering substitutes for him, after the sacrificial model of primal man-god Prajāpati. The “doctrine of sacrifice,” which Renou has written “assumes a force of magical origin which compels the gods,” is greater and at the same time separable from them.<sup>16</sup>

Although the gods receive and in fact require sacrificial offerings as food, when they themselves sacrifice, there is no explicit recipient. The gods’ continual sacrifice is not directed to other gods, but rather, as *Ṛgveda* 10.90.16 and 1.164.50 have it, “to the sacrifice”; it is an energetic cultic act of creation that renews and sustains the universe. And indeed, *Śatapatha Brāhmaṇa* 2.3.1.5 says that “the sun would not rise, were he (the sacrificer) not to make that offering.”<sup>17</sup> But the sacrifice is also quintessentially *about* itself and *productive of* itself as an act of meaning. In these accounts in Vedic literature, the divine is a source of ritual, not a recipient of it. Sacrificial ritual itself is the efficacious power. As the performance of sacrificial rituals themselves became increasingly axial in Vedic ritual, “only gods directly associated with the ritual retained priestly interest.”<sup>18</sup> The pantheon waned in power as the sacrifice itself and the Brahmins, its human agents, waxed more potent; concurrent with this development, however, came an expression of instability that may be comparable to the rise of sacrificing gods as “priests of their own cults” on Greek vases.



In an enigmatic development in the history of Vedic literature that may parallel our suggestion about Athenian response to radical change in the classical period, the Brāhmaṇas, the later ritual commentaries on the R̥gvedic poems, are preoccupied with the theme of the loss of the sacrifice by the gods or the failure of the sacrifice to work properly. “Sacrifice,” autonomous, willful, evanescent—and speedy—arbitrarily departs the celestial sphere over and again, “leaving the gods in a big jam,” as Brian K. Smith has put it.<sup>19</sup> The gods’ anxiety over its disappearance, perhaps reflecting historical religious concerns with the compromise of the rite, animates them to search throughout the cosmos for it. Most conspicuous in later Vedic commentarial literature such as the *Śatapatha Brāhmaṇa*, the *Aitareya Brāhmaṇa*, and the *Taittirīya Saṃhita*, this theme is reminiscent of the strange persistence of marine chaos in biblical narratives of times well after the creation account, requiring God to vanquish the monster and restore order on an ongoing basis.<sup>20</sup> Smith observes that in these poems, “Simple creation is insufficient and is to be followed up by a organizational effort that rectifies chaos. . . . The sacrifice must be ‘restrained by’ and returned to those to whom it properly belongs, namely the Brahmins.”<sup>21</sup> Although the gods are both performers and recipients of the sacrifice, in the event of the its loss or flight, it is the proper metric recitation of the mantrayic syllables—the knowledge of whose performance is controlled by the Brahmanical (priestly) caste—that will restore it. “The sacrifice as food departed from the gods; the gods said ‘The sacrifice as food hath left us; this sacrifice, food, let us search for. They said ‘How shall we search?’ ‘By the Brahman and the metres, they said.’ They consecrated the brahman with the metres; for him they performed the sacrifice up to the end; they also performed the joint offerings to the wives [of the gods]. Therefore now in the consecration offering they perform the sacrifice right up to the end.”<sup>22</sup> The rectification is almost invariably an effort to recover the proper recitation of the sacrificial mantras, whose abrogation is assumed to have caused the flight of Sacrifice.

Why this theme surfaces at the time of the Brahmanical commentaries is unclear. Not only are the gods the ubiquitous agents and arbiters of sacrifice, but they are represented as agitated, bereft, and in a state of ritual anxiety. The recurrent theme of the gods’ effort to recover and reestablish the lost sacrifice through the conservative reinscription of ancient mantrayic recitation, inseparable in the Vedic religious imagination from the sacrifice itself (as ritual and as divine entity) and in fact encoding its efficacy, may have arisen during a historical period (the sixth century B.C.E.) when the appearance of Buddhism and Jainism, both philosophically oriented away from the practice of exterior sacrifice and instead to its interiorization, were experienced as threats to ritual transmission, memory, the preservation and superiority of the priestly caste, and to the “perfect” continuation of sacrificial forms.<sup>23</sup> Here there may be a parallel to the proliferation of the representation of divinely performed sacrifice in ancient Greek vase-painting of the fifth century as a response to the dismantling of archaic political, social, and religious structures by democratic reforms.

The divine scene in the Berlin Painter vase in Rome takes place in a contained, timeless world that does not include mortals; yet half of the other vases

that show divine libations also show mortals libating on the reverse. The gods perform an act more than simply “typical” of humans; it is quintessentially human in that it represents obeisance to and reverence for omnipotent beings whose powers transcend the human condition. Despite the primordial theomachy that tells how the Olympians overthrew the Titans, the ancient Greek evidence does not seem to point to an aboriginal, foundational act of sacrifice by the gods, as in the Vedic myth of the primal sacrifice of Puruṣa. Rather, as in the other Vedic myths of the *continuing* involvement of Prajāpati, Varuṇa, Mitra, Agni, Viṣṇu, and Indra in the *yajña* in all its forms, the Greek iconography presents the viewer with an aetiology of ritual that is intended to inspire and interact with “present” cult and perhaps, like the case of the Brāhmaṇas, to reflect immediate cultic concerns. The repeated acts of the gods generate the repetition of libation as a generic act. The gods “ceaselessly” pour, apart from and yet in concert with their human worshippers; all are caught up together in the larger sphere of the ritual action, libation.

In both Vedic and Greek cases, the sacrificing gods are more than “role models”: in effect they create and maintain their own religion. In the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, rationalist theories of the origin and mechanism of religion have explicitly assumed and influentially argued that humanity “creates” not only the gods but also the religion that links the two. This idea has skewed assumptions about how ancient sacrificial traditions themselves saw the origin of ritual practice, creating anthropomorphic gods who are given human ritual behaviors. The Indo-European testimony seems to suggest a divine genesis for ritual action; in the Vedic case, the gods “create” sacrifice in a cosmos that is then maintained by their ongoing sacrificial activity, facilitated and even eventually eclipsed by their human counterparts. Anxiety over an unspecified threat to the hypostasized Sacrifice then creates an atmosphere wherein the gods lose track of it continually and can only restore it by reinscribing Brahmanical power: the power to recite. In the Greek case, archaic ritual may, similarly, have been experienced as threatened by aristocratic Athenians, and hence was reinstated through the artistic theme of the gods as priests of their own cult.

We will go on to consider in detail two Indo-European cases of divine reflexivity in polytheistic theologies: In heterodox Zoroastrian cosmogony, the god of time, Zurvān, sacrifices for a thousand years in order to conceive his twin children, Ohrmazd and Ahriman. And an Old Norse skaldic poem offers the startling image of the highest god of the Norse pantheon, Odin, self-immolated upon the World Tree. That the religious morphologies in these cases are comparable is surely a function of their shared genealogy. But at the same time, it must be more: the god who is the central actor in his own cult is also an apparently irrepressible phenomenon, the ultimate example of what Henri Atlan calls a “self-organizing system.”

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# 6

## Zoroastrian Heresy

### *Zurvān's Thousand-Year Sacrifice*

For him [the Christian apologist Eznik] the perfection of God is axiomatic; therefore if the Zervanites admit that Zurvan is imperfect, it follows that there must be a perfect being higher than he. Moreover, does not Zurvan's performance of sacrifice argue the existence of such a higher being to whom the sacrifice is directed? To whom did he offer sacrifice?<sup>1</sup>

—R. C. Zaehner

A repeated archetypal act, a sacrifice where the god is not the recipient but the officiant, a doctrine of salvation that originates in this ritual action and draws its inspiration therefrom—this world seems as strange to our Western mentality as it did to Eznik and Theodore bar Kônai. Nevertheless it is a world that we would be wrong to be misapprehend. It is the world of the Brāhmaṇas—and also that of the Upaniṣads.<sup>2</sup>

Let us turn to another divine sacrifice whose remote origins also lay in ancient Indo-Iranian polytheism, but whose ritual mechanism—and theological implications—were more explicit than the “sacrifice to sacrifice with sacrifice” of the Vedic gods. Now known primarily as an obscure Zoroastrian heresy, the religion of the god Zurvān (Zurvān i akanārak, “Limitless Time”) was a persistent element in the religious history of ancient Iran.<sup>3</sup> It may even have been a feature of Iranian religion during the Sasanian period (early third-early seventh centuries C.E.)—before the forces of Islam met and decimated those of Yazdigird III at al-Qādisīyah in 635.<sup>4</sup>

What brought about the sacrifice by Zurvān? According to the fragmentary cosmogony available to us, Zurvān, often called in the ancient sources “the great God,” was the divine parent of twin brother

spirits, Ohrmazd and Ahriman. These were implacable enemies, familiar from orthodox Zoroastrianism as Spenta Manyu, Bounteous Spirit, and Angra Manyu, Destructive Spirit.<sup>5</sup> In their pitched battle the universe still writhes—good against evil, light against darkness, the truth against the lie. This egalitarian-seeming “twinship” of the two spirits was both the result and the cause of an in-exorable dualism.

“They say—that whereas absolutely nothing yet existed—,” writes the Armenian Christian apologist, Eznik of Kolb, at the time of the late Sasanian period, “neither skies, nor earth, nor any other creatures which are in the skies or on the earth—there existed one named Zurvān. . . . For a thousand years he had offered sacrifice in order to have a son who had the name Ohrmazd, and who would create the skies and the earth and all they contained.”<sup>6</sup> Then came a divine moment of doubt, disastrous for the cosmos. “And after offering sacrifice for a thousand years he began to ponder, saying, ‘Are these sacrifices which I offer of any use, and shall I have a son Ohrmazd, or do I strive in vain?’ And while he considered thus, Ohrmazd and Ahriman were conceived in their mother’s womb.”<sup>7</sup> Three other contemporaneous writers offer parallel texts describing the Zurvanite cosmogony: the Armenian Etišē Vardapet, and the Syrians Theodore bar Kōnai and Yohannān bar Penkayê.<sup>8</sup> With some slight variations, their stories are essentially in agreement. From Zurvān’s “doubt”—a defect in an otherwise perfect and omnipotent godhead—Ahriman, the Aggressor, “full of the lie” (*drugvant*) is conceived.<sup>9</sup> From the untainted divine nature, Ohrmazd, “sweet-smelling and radiant,” and eventual author of the universe, is later born. However, it is crucial that both sons be incarnated aspects of the deity himself.

When the great god perceived that there were two sons in the womb, Zurvān swore that whichever son was born first would receive his kingdom.<sup>10</sup> The fetal Ohrmazd guilelessly revealed this to Ahriman, who was blocked at the birth canal by his twin. The evil one ripped open his mother’s womb at the navel, presenting himself to his father as firstborn. According to the account of Etišē, the hopeful parent was horrified by this vision.<sup>11</sup> “Zurvān said to him, ‘Who are you?’ He said, ‘(I am) your son, Ohrmazd.’ Zurvān said to him, ‘My son is luminous and sweet-smelling, but you, you are dark and love to do evil.’ And after having wept bitterly, he gave him sovereignty for (nine?) million years.”<sup>12</sup>

When the long-awaited Ohrmazd, the son “for whom he had offered sacrifice”<sup>13</sup> was finally born, the rejoicing Zurvān handed over the barsom (*burseme*) or a bundle of sacred twigs to him. He bid his heir offer sacrifice for him, just as he had previously sacrificed for Ohrmazd. “And having taken the twigs which he held in his hand, with which he offered sacrifice, he gave them to Ohrmazd, and said, ‘Up until now it is I who for you offered sacrifice; henceforth it is you who will offer sacrifice for me.’”<sup>14</sup> Yohannān bar Penkayê adds a report of Zurvān’s resolve. “I will give him these sticks [rings]—they are called *būrsemē* [*bursumē*]—and I will give him power to create heaven and earth.”<sup>15</sup> Ohrmazd, holder of the sacrificial emblem, who was conceived in order to “create heaven and earth and all that they contain” proceeds to do just that. Ohrmazd’s name is a form of the name of the supreme Zoroastrian deity Ahura

Mazdā, who sacrifices in the Avesta, and who will again offer up a great sacrifice at the end of time.

Zurvān did not simply engender two sons, Ohrmazd and Ahriman; he sacrificed to do it. As we will see, his sacrifice employed the hymns and cult instruments of the ancient Mazdean liturgy. Zurvān did not just give his celestial kingdom to Ohrmazd; he gave him the most important cultic implement of priesthood, the *barsom*, and demanded that the son take over his sacrificial duties. We are dealing, then, with a familiar problem: the collision of cult and theology. The implications of this collision greatly troubled the Christian Eznik; did they trouble the Zurvanites? Why, how, and to whom does Zurvān sacrifice?

In this ancient and complex case of divine reflexivity, I suggest that both the sacrifice of Zurvān and his conferral of the hierophantic mantle to his celestial son were in fact related to the actual authority of the historical zoroastrian clergy, and aimed to ensure and reinforce its conservation. This hereditary priesthood was in a sense, the unchanging core of Persian religious power. Its multivalent Indo-Iranian religion long preceded Zoroaster's alleged reforms. Rather than being expunged, its pantheon and practiced rites seem to have been recast by the prophet in the forge of ethical monotheism, observable in the sacred oral tradition of the Avesta. Zurvanism tried to "rescue" Zoroastrianism from dualism, but it, too, not only preserved but actually valorized and promoted the priestly cult. This is the "intensification as historical response" described as the second feature of divine reflexivity in chapter 5; the god as high priest, as I noted there, "strategically allows the religion to maintain its most valuable forms of expression."

Historical evidence may suggest the origins of Zurvanism in the Hellenistic Arsacid periods, when native Iranian religion was all but submerged in Alexander's Hellenizing wake—only to resurge strongly in the centuries that followed. In fact, Alexander is specifically blamed for the religious chaos and the dispersal of Avestan teachings in the *Dēnkart* (Acts of the Religion), a difficult document in Pahlavi written in the ninth century C.E. but whose primary material dates from the late Sasanian period.<sup>16</sup> It has also been suggested by a number of scholars that the Zurvanite religion reached its apex of influence during the monarchical rule of the Sasanian dynasty. This corresponded chronologically to an unprecedented expansion of sacerdotal influence in the courts approaching theocracy. Was the centrality and even autonomy of Mazdaism's oldest rite in the Zurvanite creation myth an accident—or rather, was it a deliberately ritualizing conception of the highest deity during an especially mercurial period in the history of the religion?

Because the cosmogony we have just briefly considered explicitly makes him the sovereign and preexistent power in the universe, Zurvān's action of sacrificing for a thousand years in order to conceive a son legitimates and centralizes the ritual. As in the story of the Indian Prajāpati, creation must be inaugurated by means of a sacrifice. And as we have seen throughout the Vedas, the god's sacrifice itself has a theurgic power. But unlike in the ancient Indian hymns, sacrifice is the prerogative of a single divine power who will create two more.

By giving the twigs to Ohrmazd, Zurvān also hands over his religious authority as high priest. He reinforces his son's status as priest and creator of the universe, now high priest of *human* religious practice. In fact, as the present high priest of the Parsi fire temple in Bombay explains, it is to Ohrmazd that the priest of the Zoroastrian fire ceremony (*yasna*) is homologized. I propose that the high profile of ritual sacrifice in the Zurvanite cosmogony was introduced for reasons that were external to the myth. However, these motives bore a strong correlation to developments in Zoroastrianism and its priesthood during a decline in the Arsacid period and aggressive renaissance during the Sasanian period in Iran.

### “As the Holy One I Recognized Thee”: The Fire of Zoroaster

As is so often the case in the history of religions, the orthodoxy that ultimately branded Zurvanism heretical was itself born in heterodoxy. What changed very little through the transformations of the Persian religious landscape was orthopraxy: the sacrifice itself. In fact, the persistent conservatism of ritual speaks to a hierarchy of power that transcends doctrine, even during the times of the most intense persecution of “foreign” and heretical elements. More powerful than kings were the members of the ancient hereditary caste of priests, and because their power derived from their ability to perform the sacrifice, in a very real sense the sacrifice was more powerful than they were—as in the later Vedic ritual commentaries.

The date (sometime during the second millennium B.C.E.?), manner (invasion or gradual migrations?), and directionality (from Central Asia or the Caucasus?) of Indo-European entry into ancient Iran remains highly difficult to determine; the Medes ultimately inhabited the northwest and the Persians the southwest of the country. Ancient Indo-Iranian religion has been reconstructed from the Indian Vedas and the Avesta, the ancient Iranian scripture—the latter, thanks to the faithful observance of the Bombay Parsis, the efforts of Antequil-Duperron, and nineteenth-century philology. The earliest stratum of the Avesta reveals innumerable religious correspondences with India; for the most archaic period, the linguistic connection with Vedic India probably also represents religious realities, as discussed by Calvert Watkins.<sup>17</sup> Some more important examples are terms for the class of supernatural beings called (Indic) *deva*/Avestan *daēva* and for those called *asura*/*ahura*, for the god *Miṭra*/*Mithra*, for the sacred liquor (*soma*/*haoma*) and the words “priest” (*hotr*/*zaotar*) and, most essentially, “sacrifice” (*yajña*/*yasna*).

On both sides of the range of the Hindu Kush, the pantheon divided itself between the asuras and the devas. There was also an important choice to be made between good (*rta*/*aša*) and evil, “the lie” (*druh*/*druj*). There was a shared belief in the existence of a realm of celestial life after death for those who chose the good, and in a kind of apocalyptic revelation or return of a golden age at the end of time. On the level of cult, animal and *soma* sacrifices were offered; religion centered in the household, with liturgical specialists paid to assist. Gradually, their power grew until it eclipsed but did not eradicate the domestic cult.<sup>18</sup>

According to the traditions of his life told in the 9th-century Zoroastrian texts, Zoroaster was collecting pure water for a *hōm* (Av. *haōma*) ritual when he was brought into the radiant presence of Ohrmazd, in western reconstruction, *Ahura Mazda*. Zoroaster tried to forge out of this polytheistic matrix a kind of ethical monotheism.<sup>19</sup> *Yasna* 43:5 describes that moment. “As the holy one I recognized thee, O Wise Lord, / When I saw thee at the beginning, at the birth of existence, / appoint a recompense for deed and world; Evil reward to the evil, good to the good, / Through thy wisdom, at the last turning-point of creation.”<sup>20</sup>

Those scholars who subscribe to the historicity of Zoroaster think that he may have lived in Chorasmia, or in Sogdiana, in the upper basin of the Amu Darya. Sasanian orthodox tradition puts his birth at 628 B.C.E. and his death at 551 B.C.E., and the name of his royal protector, Vištāsp, from Avestan Vištāspa, is the same as that of Darius’s father. But philological research has shown the language of the *Gāthās*, the five ancient Avestan hymns attributed to Zoroaster—because of their different meter, dialect, and literary genre—to belong to a much earlier linguistic stratum than the rest of the *Avesta*, which dates from around 1000 B.C.E. In fact, the language of the *Gāthās* resembles quite closely that of the Ṛg Veda. Thus the life of the prophet has been set back by some scholars to the dawn of Aryan Iran, between the eighteenth and fifteenth centuries B.C.E.<sup>21</sup>

P. Oktor Skjærvø suggests that lost origin of the myth of Zurvār’s millennium sacrifice may lie in an exegesis of *Gāthic* passage Y. 44.3: “Who is the primeval father of *aša* [cosmic/ritual Order] by virtue of its conception (*zaθā*)?”<sup>22</sup> The *Gāthās* (songs) remain obscure to us because they are embedded in a lost tradition, one that probably included initiatory training and the oral transmission of sacred knowledge.<sup>23</sup> Within the *Avesta*, they are contained in a longer text called *Yasna*, one of the main divisions of the scripture which was, and continues to be (as its name implies), recited by the priests during the ceremony of preparing the sacrificial *haoma*.<sup>24</sup>

Of the other texts surviving in the *Avesta*,<sup>25</sup> we shall have reason later to refer to the *Yašt*s (hymns). These are liturgical poems, grouped according to the time for specific prayers, which are each addressed to one of the twenty-one Zoroastrian deities such as Mithra, the goddess Anāhītā, or Verethraghna, the god of victory. Transcribed and fixed in its definitive form in the major rehabilitative efforts of the Sasanian period, only one-fourth of the *Avesta* is thought to remain; the rest of its twenty-one books were lost under Arab rule, and are available to us only in the summary of the Middle Persian *Dēnkart*, a ninth-century compendium of Zoroastrian doctrine.

Zoroaster the *zaotar* is historically cast as a radical theologian who was put to death in his old age; class struggle can clearly be detected in his recasting of the Vedic pantheon. He is thought to have attacked the rites of blood sacrifice and the *haoma* sacrifice;<sup>26</sup> these religious features were strongly identified with the gods of the warrior class, the *daēvas*, whom he demonized. Indra, the great warrior god who downed *soma* in the *Ṛg Veda*, became a *daeua*, although in India, the *devas* were beneficent: “the heavenly ones.” Zoroaster preached an



exclusive devotion for the deities of the priestly function, the *ahuras*, the Vedic *asuras*—in India, a special class, by no means trustworthy, with occult powers. In other words, through a deliberate reversal of sacred forms, Zoroastrianism endorsed the power of the priesthood from the outset by conferring on it the mantle of ultimacy and of exclusivity—and by castrating the religion of the warrior class. And far from calling for the absolute abolishment of sacrifice, the new religion appropriated and centralized it. The *Avesta* is alive with ritual prescription.

### “Classical” Mazdaism and the Crisis of Dualism

Never as aggressively monotheistic as Judaism or Islam, Zoroastrianism does represent an original attempt to unify polytheistic religion under one supreme god. Its dualism seems never to have been intended absolutely. Zoroaster concentrated on his Wise Lord, on whom he conferred a divine entourage against evil; yet it is hard to tell whether he intended exclusive monotheism for Ahura Mazda. Yet at the same time, Zoroaster acknowledged and hypostasized evil.<sup>27</sup> The struggle between truth and falsehood, with its Indo-Iranian ancestry, was elevated to a universal struggle to the death. The two spirits, Bounteous One and Destructive One, were polarized at the beginning of time between these. But they are not just two spirits; they are twins. In what is believed to be the very oldest of the Avestan texts lay the seeds of a disastrous theology: “In the beginning the two Spirits (*Manyu*) who are the well-endowed (?) twins were known as the one good, the other evil, in thought, word, and deed. Between them the wise choose the good, not so the fools. And when these Spirits met, they established in the beginning life and the absence of life that in the end the evil should meet with the worst existence, but the just with the Best Mind.”<sup>28</sup> The *ahuras* chose, with most becoming *ašavans*, partisans of *aša*, while the apostates became *drugvants*, partisans of the *druj*. After them it was the *daevas*’ turn; all chose wrongly. Ever since then, the *daēvas* have tried to influence human choice as well. Armies headed by the spirits oppose each other in a frightening symmetry of exact counterparts, Good Mind opposing Bad Mind, and so on. In the struggle between them the whole universe, celestial and terrestrial, is enlisted.

According to indigenous legend, Zoroaster was born in Azerbaijan and fled to Bactria. In the western reconstruction, persecuted, he had to flee south, probably to eastern Iran, where he converted King Vištāsp, who gave him asylum. Conversion to the new religion in Iran was a slow process. That of the clergy was a major triumph, but it took place long after Zoroaster’s death.<sup>29</sup> These were members of the ancient polytheistic priestly caste, the Magi, who are said by Herodotus to have been a Median tribe with skills both liturgical and oneiromantic.<sup>30</sup>

Darius I (522–486 B.C.E.) and the other Achaemenids incised the name of Ahuramazdā in their inscriptions, but neither he nor his successors mentioned

Zoroaster. Nor did they mention the *Ameša Spentas*, The Bounteous Immortals, his divinized attributes. Xerxes, Darius's son and successor, tells us how he destroyed a cult site or temple of the *daēvas*, at an unnamed place, and set up an inscription mandating the worship of Ahura Mazda.<sup>31</sup> This marked an official end to the religious tolerance initiated by Cyrus. Artaxerxes II (405–359 B.C.E.) boasted of being the protégé of Ahura Mazda, Mithra, and Anāhitā. The bas-reliefs from Persepolis offer us some idea of the Mazdean cultus; they portray ritual gestures, costumes, altars, and the mortar used to pound the *haoma*.<sup>32</sup> The god Ahura Mazda appears iconographically within a winged disk, sometimes said to symbolize the sun. The body of a small bearded man often grows out of the disk, which can accompany winged lions or bull-men.

Herodotus gives us our first foreign description of Persian religious customs. He notices that they have no statues of gods, sacrifice in the open air, kill animals whose flesh they consume, and do not bury or cremate their corpses but expose them on hills where they were devoured by vultures.<sup>33</sup> He calls their chief god “the Sky.” Zoroastrian doctrine must have reached western Iran before the time of Aristotle (384–322 B.C.E.), who alludes to its dualism in his *On Philosophy*, noting that the Magi preached the existence of two principles, Oromasdes and Areimanios.<sup>34</sup>

By the time of Plato and Aristotle, Zoroaster was already cast as an archmage.<sup>35</sup> The Greeks attributed the “wisdom of the Magi” to Zoroaster, whom they considered to be a demigod—“the son of Ahura Mazda.” He was thought to have instructed Pythagoras in Babylon and inspired the Chaldean doctrines of magic and astrology.<sup>36</sup> In fact, the *Máγοι* or *Μαγουσαῖοι* known in classical Greece were no longer natives of Iran, nor were they orthodox Mazdeans. They probably migrated west at the time of Xerxes—perhaps, as some have speculated, in response to his purge of *daēva* worship. They probably came to Asia Minor by way of Mesopotamia; their spoken language seems to have been Aramaic. Zaehner suggests that in Babylon, exiled heretical Zoroastrian *daeva*-worship encountered the idea of Time, represented by the boundless firmament, whom its adherents adopted as its supreme deity.<sup>37</sup> By the classical period, there were temples of Anāhitā at Hypaepa in Lydia and Hierocæsarea.<sup>38</sup> A bas-relief from Daskylaion in Istanbul portrays two Magi performing a sacrifice.<sup>39</sup>

Cumont maintained that “it was the Zervanite system that the Mazdeans of Asia Minor taught the occidental followers of the Iranian religion.”<sup>40</sup> However, their teachings also included *dēvāsnih*, referred to by Clement of Alexandria: “The Magi worship angels and demons.”<sup>41</sup> It is a tantalizing fact that the Mithraic mysteries, that strange hybrid cult adopted by the Roman military, placed Kronos-Zurvān at the head of their pantheon—and that it allowed for offerings to Ahriman. Nowhere is the co-equal potency of the good and evil principles so thoroughly realized as in Zurvanism.

It is widely speculated that Zoroastrianism, refracting Iranian beliefs about angels, apocalypse, resurrection, the eternality of the soul, and the return of a golden age, influenced Judaism and perhaps both orthodox and Gnostic

Christianity.<sup>42</sup> Following Jewish precedent, Christian writers identified Zoroaster with Ezekiel, Nimrod, Seth, Balaam, Baruch, and even Christ. However, the Greeks, including Plato and Aristotle, also saw in Zoroastrianism a dualistic view of world and destiny.<sup>43</sup>

But Zoroastrian dualism pits life against nonlife, rather than matter against spirit. Despite the later Gnostic and Manichaean legacy, both matter and spirit are enlisted in the fight against disorder and death, a fight whose triumphal outcome is already guaranteed. God's omnipotence is conceived as only temporarily limited. Human beings must enlist in the struggle, and keep themselves pure, avoiding defilement and contact with dead matter, so that they can regain their heavenly homeland, dwelling in perpetual light. "Thus Zoroastrian ethics, although in itself lofty and rational, has a ritual aspect that is all-pervading."<sup>44</sup> Just how all-pervading is visible in the myth of Zurvān's sacrifice.

Whatever its fluctuating degree of popularity during Sasanian times, Zurvanite cosmogony eventually disappeared (or perhaps was expunged) from the Mazdean religion. Preserved in the *Greater Bundahišn*, "Primal Creation," a cosmology written in Pahlavī from the same period, but "clearly containing material from the Older Avesta,"<sup>45</sup> and in the *Selections of Zādsparam*,<sup>46</sup> we have the orthodox Zand version of the beginning of all things.<sup>47</sup> The *Bundahišn* teaches that Ohrmazd once existed in infinite time, in infinite light.<sup>48</sup> Ahriman dwelled below him in infinite darkness. Between them was the Void. Seeing a ray of light, Ahriman hustled up to the light-world, bent on its annihilation. The divine worlds were no longer separated and inviolate. This created that despicable "mixed state" of creation, of evil blended in with good, which was the nemesis of Zoroastrian dualism. Omniscient Ohrmazd, foreseeing the battle that the two principles would fight while Ahriman was "ignorant and unobservant," tricks Ahriman into agreeing to fix a time for battle, knowing that "in this wise the Destructive Spirit would be made powerless." Ohrmazd "knew that if he did not fix a time for battle against him," then Ahriman "would do unto his creation even as he had threatened; and the struggle and the mixture would be everlasting; and Ahriman could settle in the mixed state of creation and take it to himself."<sup>49</sup>

The millennia are divided into a measured structure comprising twelve thousand years. For the first 3,000 years, Ohrmazd's utterance of words of power, specifically, the *Ahunawar* prayer, which predicts the gloomy fate of Ahriman, cause the diabolical one to swoon back into the darkness. When Ahriman is awakened, Ohrmazd first sacrificially creates the world of thought and six *Amahrspands* the *Avestan Ameša spentas*, "Bounteous immortals." Ohrmazd then creates the material world, over aspects of which each of the *Amahrspands* preside: Good mind over cattle; Best Righteousness over fire; Desirable Dominion over metals; Holy Devotion over Earth; Perfection over water; Immortality over vegetation.<sup>50</sup> Primal Man, Gayōmart, was a bright, spherical being, like the creator, and he is presided over by Ohrmazd himself. Ahriman offers a counter-creation. Breaking through the ceiling of the sky, Ahriman begins to at-

tack the new material world created by Ohrmazd. He puts salt in the Ocean and poisonous plants and snakes on the Earth. He slays Primal Bull and Primal Man. He adds smoke to hitherto pure and shining Fire. With Sky sealed over, Ahriman is trapped in the material world.

For next trimillennium, the time of the terrible admixture, the first human couple, created from a rhubarb plant, make plain to the demons that they are vulnerable to Druj, the Lie: the hapless pair attribute to Ahriman the creation of the material world and its living things; they drink goat's milk, fall ill, and complain; and they ritually sacrifice an animal.

During the final 3,000-year period, creation degenerates, setting the stage for the final cataclysm and renewal. Three saviors will appear, each a posthumous son of Zoroaster, whose semen, preserved in a lake, will impregnate three maidens who venture to bathe there. Only the last savior will be successful. He will raise all deceased humanity, returning from their dispersal to the four corners of earth. For three days, a river of molten metal will purge humankind. The wicked will be horribly burned, but the hot metal will be as warm milk to the righteous. Everyone will drink white *haoma*, the liquid of Immortality, prepared from the sacrifice of the cosmic Bull. The Earth will be "made excellent" and elevated to the stars, where it will be met by paradise, the House of Song. Ahriman will be immobilized or destroyed forever.<sup>51</sup>

Thus in the *Bundahišn* one important difference from the Zurvanite creation myth emerges. Both Ohrmazd and Ahriman preexist. Zurvanism was an effort to solve this theological problem of origins. Although systematized, condemned, transcended, and reformulated by later Iranian theologians, the problem had its origins in the teachings of Zoroaster himself, in the doctrine of the twin spirits. Where did they come from?<sup>52</sup>

## History and Heresy

After the end of Zoroaster's career, traditionally, in martyrdom, the old religion seems to have reasserted itself. The abstract divine entities were reduced to mere deities, with male and female characteristics; deities were never again designated by words for human faculties: "triumphant Zoroastrianism 'recovered' the essential part of the archaic religion, at the price of changing its perspective."<sup>53</sup> To do so, it had to give up its monotheism and succumb to dualism; it had to give up its purely ethical trajectory and center itself in archaic ritual as well as reintroduce its multiple gods and divine figures as servants of Ahura Mazdā. In the later *Avesta*, all the gods unmentioned by Zoroaster in "his" five poems had reemerged: Mithra, Anāhitā, Apām Napāt, and Vayu, and many more.

The Arsacid (Parthian) period, which began with the occupation of the Seleucid satrapy of Parthia by the seminomadic Parni in 247 B.C.E. and ended with the replacement of the Arsacid line by a collateral branch from Atropatene

in 10 C.E.,<sup>54</sup> saw the submersion of Iranian religion by the Hellenism brought about by Alexander's conquest of Persia. Despite some coins depicting the persistence of five temples at *staxr* for example, most numismatic evidence seems to indicate that the thoroughly Hellenized Parthian princes had lost interest in indigenous religion; no coins from Susa, the administrative capital, portray Iranian deities. In the first century B.C.E., Iranian religion reemerged at Commagene in billboard, syncretistic style: The ruler Antiochus I erected a tumulus populated by colossal seated stone figures with Greek-Iranian names: Zeus-Oromazdes, Apollo-Mithra, and so forth.<sup>55</sup> Finally, the name Zarathustra appeared in the third century C.E., and through a roller-coaster ride of orthodoxy and heresy, "the Good Religion" became the official religion of the Iranian empire.

When the older gods resurfaced in new forms, another change also occurred, one of perhaps even greater import. The original good twin, Spenta Manyu, lost his autonomous existence; he was absorbed into Ahura Mazda and identified with him in the struggle against the Adversary. Zurvanism was provoked, in a sense, by this collapse. Whereas in an ancient *yašt* the two spirits fight each other, in the later Avestan *Vidēvdāt*, Ahura Mazda is countered by Angra Manyu as they respectively create good and bad things. Ahura Mazda, Ohrmazd, was no longer uniquely transcendent or one and only, as Zoroaster had envisioned him. He now faced the antigod as an equal. This failure to "integrate the Ahura par excellence (the sole Ahura: Mazda) in opposition to the Daevas, on pain of falling back into the 'sin' of dualism" had profound consequences.<sup>56</sup> As we might assume from the inherent theological conundrums in *Yasna* 30 and the *Bundahišn*, the collapse demanded a response. "Since Ahura Mazda could no longer be the father of the two adversaries, the question of their origin was inevitable."<sup>57</sup>

Zurvanism tried to solve these problems of theodicy by positing *one* primeval divine parent of the twins. As Zaehner observes, "the history of religion proves that the nature of man seems to demand a unified godhead. This reaction duly appeared: it is what we call Zervanism."<sup>58</sup> It is Zurvān (Infinite Time, also called "Fate") who is the father of Ohrmazd and Ahriman. A controversial disc-shaped fragmentary bronze pinhead from Louristan, at one time in the Harramaneek Collection in New York, shows the great, wide-eyed Zurvān and the two spirits who are his children emerging from the side of his head (see catalogue, **no. O-1**).<sup>59</sup>

It is generally held that Iranian Zurvanism took shape in Alexander's wake. One proof of this is the Mazdean "divine quaternity," which seems to be an adaptation of the Zurvanite one.<sup>60</sup> The latter is attested in several texts citing, besides Zurvān, three other names given as those of separate gods—but which must be hypostases of the first one, also called "the god with four faces" in Manichaeism. In the Zurvanite quaternity, Zurvān is associated with Light, Power, and Wisdom. In the *Bundahišn*, Ohrmazd is associated with light (his throne), his goodness, and his (infinite) time. It would seem that orthodox Mazdaism replaced Zurvān and his names with Ohrmazd, whom they put at the beginning of the series.<sup>61</sup> Evidence of this Mazdean quaternity appears as

early as the first century B.C.E., but may have originated in the first centuries of the Arsacid period in connection with the spread of astrology.”<sup>62</sup>

Zurvanism is most strongly associated with the Sasanian period. How prevalent was it? Was it the form of the aggressive state religion that persecuted so many religions, including the Babylonian talmudic academies?<sup>63</sup> Assembling the relevant sources for the first time in his problematic *Zurvan: A Zoroastrian Dilemma*, R. C. Zaehner maintains that the answer is probably quite complicated, and that Zurvanism was alternately in favor and condemned.

When Ardašīr I overturned the Parthian rulers, under whom Persian religion had sunk into a swamp of obsolescence, a new hyperbole set in at every level of the autocracy. The Persian monarchy was centralized under the “King of Kings.” The term *magus* was still in use in the Arsacid period; the Sasanians created the role of the *magupat* (chief of magi) and later, its superlative *magupatān magupat*. For the first time in Iranian history, the Mazdean cult was elevated to official status. And for the first time in its long history, Zoroastrianism developed as an organized religion with a veritable pontiff, and a hierarchical ecclesiastical structure that may have been a defensive response to Christian and later, to Manichaean structures—both of which it fought with vigor.

Book IV of the *Dēnkart* tells us how the Zoroastrians went about resuscitating their faith, and bespeaks the unprecedented power of the priesthood. We hear a tale of the ingathering of the Avesta, in either written or oral form, to the king’s court: “His Majesty, the King of Kings, Artsaχšaθr (Ardašīr I), son of Pāpak, following Tansar as his religious authority, commanded all those scattered teachings to be brought to the court.”<sup>64</sup> The mysterious Tansar, an *ehrpāt*, or theologian, about whom we know very little that is not legendary, undertook to establish a fixed canon. The *Dēnkart* reports that “Tansar set about about his business and selected one and left the rest out of the canon.”<sup>65</sup>

Šāpūr I, the captor of Valerian, was crowned in 242 C.E. According to a tradition in the *Fihrist*,<sup>66</sup> Mani was present; the *Kephalaia* says that Mani was granted an interview with the king and that his followers were given complete freedom to preach their doctrine.<sup>67</sup> It appears that the Manichaeans enjoyed high favor during Šāpūr’s reign. Telling is the fact that Manichaeans had taken for the name of their supreme deity, also called the “Father of Greatness” or “Father of Light,” not that of Ohrmazd—who has a far less ambiguous connection with light—but Zurvān. Adopted during the reign of Šāpūr, it strongly suggests the ascendancy of Zurvanism during this period.<sup>68</sup> In the northeastern section of Iran, large Buddhist colonies had begun to translate Buddhist scriptures into Sogdian. To translate the supreme godhead, “Brahmā,” they used *Azrua* (the Sogdian form of Zurvān); the name Ōhrmazd was Xurmazd. “The conclusion, therefore, is ineluctable: at the time of Mānī, who began his mission in A.D. 242 in the reign of Šāpūr I, Ohrmazd was not regarded as the supreme god. There was one higher than he, and that was Zurvān. Zervanism was the current form of Zoroastrianism at the time.”<sup>69</sup>

According to the *Dēnkart*, Šāpūr “further collected those writings from the Religion which were dispersed throughout India, the Byzantine empire, and other lands.”<sup>70</sup> Šāpūr was interested in writing “which treated of medicine, astronomy, movement, time, space, substance, creation, becoming, passing away, change in quality, growth (?) and other processes and organs.”<sup>71</sup> These were added to the *Avesta* and deposited in the Royal Treasury. Šāpūr seems to have incorporated a variety of Greek and Indian texts into the *Avesta*, “and he examined (the possibility) of bringing all systems (?) into line with Mazdayasnian Religion.”<sup>72</sup> Of special interest to us are those texts sought by the king that treated space and time. These were the centerpieces of Zurvanite theology, and it is entirely likely that if he resorted to Western texts in this collection process, Šāpūr drew from Zurvanite material under the name of Zoroaster in the Greek-speaking world. “Šāpūr strengthened and supported that belief (Manichaeism) by the introduction of foreign matter akin to the already current Zurvanite ideas.”<sup>73</sup>

The Pahlavi sources are silent regarding the years between Šāpūr I and Šāpūr II: an odd silence, because these years span the career of one of the longest-lived zealots in religious history, the high priest Kartīr. Zaehner claims that during this period, Zurvanism was out of favor and was, in fact, vigorously persecuted. The career of Kartīr extended over the reign of six kings, from Šāpūr I to Ohrmazd through the three Vahrāms (242–293 C.E.). He was still there under Narseh I, according to the Paikuli inscription. Just a simple *ehrpāt* under Šāpūr I, Kartīr was made by Ohrmazd “*magupāt* of Ohrmazd” (Chief of the Magians of Ahura Mazdā).

Under Vahrām I (273–276 C.E.), there was a severe reaction to the religious tolerance of Šāpūr, instigated by Kartīr. According to Hamza,<sup>74</sup> Mani, who had been tolerated under the previous two monarchs, was captured on the charge of anti-Zoroastrian heresy, cross-examined by a council of learned doctors, and put in prison, where he died. Under Vahrām II, Kartīr was named “Savior of the Soul of Vahrām,” “grandee of the realm” and “judge of the empire.” He was also elevated to “master of rites” and “ruler of the fire of Anahit-Ardashīr at Staxr and of Anahit the Dame.”<sup>75</sup> Kartīr proclaimed in an inscription discovered at Ka’beh i Zartūšt, dated from the reign of Vahrām II (in the early 370s), that under his authority, “the affairs of Ohrmazd and the gods prospered, and the Mazdayasnian religion and the Magian hierarchy received great honour.” He also boasts of propitiating “the gods, water, fire, and cattle” and of expelling “the teaching of Ahriman and the demons” from the empire. He says that he chastised “Jews, Buddhists, Brahmans, Nasoreans (Judeo-Christians?), Christians, Maktaks (Mandeans or Manicheans?) and Zandīks (Mazdean heretics).” He then goes on, “Heretics and (apostates?) who were within the Magian community were spared for the Masdayasnian religion and Magian community but not for propaganda: I chastised and upbraided them and improved them.” He says that that he converted “demon-worshippers to worship of the gods.”

It is clear that, goaded by Kartīr’s religious imperialism and zeal, the Magians became all-powerful. “Kartīr, in fact, is interested in reviving the characteristic aspects of Zoroastrian religious practice which were almost certainly

common to Mazdeans and Zervanites.”<sup>76</sup> More tantalizingly, Kartīr’s inscription at Naqš-i Rājab tells the reader to remember “that heaven exists and that hell exists, and that whosoever is virtuous will go to heaven, and whoso is vicious will be cast into hell.” The *Šikand Gumānīg Vizār*, chapter 6, mentions the Daharīs, those who worship *Dahr*, the Arabic word for Time. “They consider that this world . . . and the intermixture of the one with other is derived from the principle of Infinite Time; and that . . . virtue remains unrewarded and sin unpunished, that heaven and hell do not exist, and there is no one who attends to virtue and sin; and further that phenomena are only material and that the spiritual does not exist.”<sup>77</sup> This description of the Time-worshippers is strikingly similar to the position refuted by Kartīr.

Šāpūr II, who ascended to the throne in 309 C.E., called one of the earliest versions of what we might now call an “ecumenical conference”: “He summoned men from all lands to an unprejudiced (?) disputation to examine and investigate all creeds.” As is often the case with such gatherings, things got ugly. Although the *Dēnkart* just tells us that the priest Ādurbād was “vindicated by the consistency of his argument,” we learn from another source that he was in fact vindicated by refusing to recant when molten bronze was poured onto his chest. Satisfied with the frank and unprejudiced disputations, Šāpūr announced to the assembled, “‘Now we have seen the Religion upon earth, we shall not tolerate false religions and we shall be exceedingly zealous.’ And thus he did do.” The reign of Šāpūr II may have been “the high-water mark of orthodox Mazdeanism.”<sup>78</sup>

Under Vahrām V (420–438), the title *magupātān magupat* (chief high priest) was created. A certain Mihr-Narsē, who also served under Vahrām, was made prime minister under Yezdigird II. The *Mātiyān i hazār Dātastān* says that Vahrām V had kept this man in the service of fire-temples, a vocation which, according to Maš’ūdī, Ardašīr also pursued when he abandoned the world.<sup>79</sup> The frequenting of fire-temples by Mihr-Narsē seems to signal more of a forced retirement from public service than a monastic commitment, in that “at the command of His Majesty, the King of Kings, Yezdigird, son of Vahrām, he was received back into a position of trust because of his reputation as a sinner.”<sup>80</sup> According to the Armenian Christian Elišē Vardapet, whom we have already met, it was Mihr-Narsē who issued an edict to convert the rebellious Armenian Christians, whom he said were “deaf and blind and deceived by the demons of Ahriman.”<sup>81</sup> The edict reported by Elišē, who was an eyewitness, includes the Zurvanite cosmogony we have already mentioned—one that is clearly derivative from the same source as the other three we mentioned earlier.<sup>82</sup> We know that when his proselytizing was rebuffed and its recipients, the Armenian clergy, responded with violent language, Yezdigird II sent a punitive expedition to the province of Armenia, followed up by a large contingent of Magian priests. It is highly unlikely that if Elišē wanted to win converts to Christianity by describing the edict, he would include some document other than an orthodox one if the learned men in his own country could refute him.<sup>83</sup> Hence, “we are . . . justified in believing that the so-called edict of Mihr Nasē, though



derived from other sources, nevertheless represents approximately the official doctrine at the time of Yazdigird II."<sup>84</sup>

King Qubād (488–496 and 498/9–531) granted an interview to Mazdak, a reformer inspired by the teachings of Mānī.<sup>85</sup> Qubād was convinced, and during his first tenure, Mazdak held religious sway. The Mazdakites favored the abolition of social inequalities, especially ownership of private property. The aristocracy and the clergy naturally howled, and Qubād was deposed for his brother Jāmāsp. When he regained the throne two years later, he had seen the light: The Mazdakites were liquidated.<sup>86</sup> However, he had set the stage for another reactionary purge.

The *Dēnkart* relates the contemporary state of affairs under the ruling king of kings, Xusrau I (ruled 531–589), son of the pathetic and controversial Qubād. It is highly probable that Zurvanism enjoyed a resurgence before Xusrau I reestablished “true” Mazdean doctrine.<sup>87</sup> In religious and other texts, Xusrau is called *Anōšarvan*, “with the immortal soul,” a unique title of approbation. “After he had put down irreligion and heresy with the greatest vindictiveness according to the revelation of the Religion in the matter of all heresy,” says the *Dēnkart*, he strengthened the caste system and issued a decree encouraging more religious “discussion.” However, it is clear from the recorded text of the edict, which most scholars believe is genuine, that he put far more emphasis on praxis as determined by religious authorities than on free thought.

The truth of the Mazdayasnian religion has been recognized. Intelligent men can with confidence establish it in the world by discussion. But effective and progressive propaganda should be based not so much on discussion as on pure thought, words, and deeds, the inspiration of the Good Spirit, and the worship of the gods paid in absolute conformity to the word. What the chief Magians of Ohrmazd have proclaimed, do we proclaim; for among us they have been shown to possess spiritual insight.

... we have recognized that, in so far as all dubious doctrine, foreign to the Mazdayasnian religion, reach this place from all over the world, further examination and investigation prove that to absorb and publish abroad knowledge foreign to the Mazdayasnian religion does not contribute to the welfare and prosperity of our subjects *as much as one religious leader (rat) who has examined much and pondered much in his recital [of the ritual]*; with high intent and in concert with the perspicacious, most noble, most honourable, most good Magian men, we do hereby decree that the Avesta and Zand be studied zealously and ever afresh so that what is acquired therefrom may worthily increase and fertilize the knowledge of our subjects.<sup>88</sup>

The author of the *Dēnkart*, a theologian supposedly descended from the saintlike Ādurbāδ, had as his goal the creation of the triumphal tale of the Mazdean form of Zoroastrianism. Hence the *Dēnkart*, which betrays far less vestigial Zurvanism than the *Bundahišn*, consistently emphasizes a dualist doc-

trine whereby the two spirits, completely separate from and opposed to each other, both preexisted the world.<sup>89</sup> Zurvān is unknown to the *Dēnkart*, except where he is described as an hypostasis of Ohrmazd. Apostate kings such as Qubād were not dear to the hearts of the authors of the *Dēnkart*, which glorifies the reigns of Šāpūr II and Xusrau I, both of whom violently suppressed an onslaught of heresy and reestablished “the good Religion” with theocratic brutality.

However, the *Dēnkart* does mention the heretical worship of “devil-worshippers” (Pahlavi *dēvāsn*): “Their power to propagate the religion of Ahri-man in the name of Ohrmazd is restricted and they keep their heresy hidden.”<sup>90</sup> As Zaehner points out, “This brief remark is particularly instructive: it amounts to an admission that the sorcerers did not worship the powers of darkness exclusively, but also paid tribute to Ohrmazd.” This is born out by certain observations of Western writers concerning the two separate views about Ahriman among the Magi they knew, such as those of Plutarch: “The lord of the opposite fate, whether a god or a daemon, they call Hades (Ahri-man).”<sup>91</sup>

Zaehner’s (by no means uncontested) analysis of the evidence leads to the following outline of the religion of the Sasanian dynasty. Zoroastrianism was revived by Ardašīr I, assisted by the theologian Tansar. Šāpūr I attempted to ingather foreign and speculative elements to the *Avesta*, which may have included Zurvanite texts; the priest Ādurbād offered a single canonical view on which the king based his religious platform, and which became a standard for Mazdean doctrinal purity thereafter. Under Vahrām I, there was a Mazdean reaction to Šāpūr’s eclectic tolerance, and the powerful career of the Magian priest Kartīr was launched. Persecutions of both non-Zoroastrians and heretics within the religion were widespread. Under Šāpūr II, a council was summoned to consider religious questions; the dualist view of Ādurbād prevailed. Under Yezde-gird II, the Zurvanites prevailed, and Mihr-Narsē as prime minister was their champion. Qubād’s affair with the teachings of Mazdak produced doctrinal chaos and roused the wrath of the Magian clergy. Under Xusrau I, Ādurbād’s doctrine was again upheld.<sup>92</sup> In the tolerance of Xusrau II, all religions were equal, but Christianity was probably more equal than others.

Why was Zurvanism considered heresy? Scholarly views on this question differ greatly. Duchesne-Guilleman says that it “upset the very essence of Mazdaism and was therefore condemned as heretical.”<sup>93</sup> Zaehner claims that it threatened dualism; according to him, the Zurvanites tried to “re-establish the Unity of godhead by positing a principle superior to Ohrmazd and Ahriman, thereby doing away with that essential dualism which is the hub of the Zoroastrian position.”<sup>94</sup> However, while the very Avestan passages in the *yasna* attributed to Zoroaster sow the seeds for this dualism of good versus evil in the story of the twins Spenta Manyu and Angra Manyu, neither the priest-prophet nor orthodoxy afterward appears to have endorsed it: Ahurā Mazda, the Wise Lord, was the supreme “champion of the *Arta* [*aša*].”<sup>95</sup> It is true that there does not seem to be one god, but two who are intimately related—twin brothers—in original Zoroastrianism, which is neither monotheistic nor polytheistic. It is also true

that outside observers, including the Greeks, believed that the worshipers themselves saw them as coequal in power. But contra Zaehner and the standard, legitimately founded assessment of radical dualism, one can also agree with Varenne when he says that “it does not seem that the Zoroastrians had ever professed a radical dualism. For the orthodox, Ahura Mazda is the only sovereign god: the two Spirits are a projection of his omnipotence into two opposed but complementary forces.”<sup>96</sup>

In other words, although it tried to provide a solution to the theological problems that had vexed and continue to vex Zoroastrianism, Zurvanism may have been condemned for two reasons. In the first place, it posited a deity, infinite and preexisting, which was greater than Ohrmazd (Ahura Mazda). Zurvān actually had to bring the good into existence as his son. Its heresy may not have been that it tried to resolve the dualism that resulted from the collapse of Spenta Manyu into Ahura Mazda by creating one supreme god, but that in so doing it was not classically monotheistic enough: it undermined the sovereignty of Ahura Mazda by implicating him in a cosmogony in which he was only a dependent cocreator. A second, perhaps more profound reason, was that the religion of Zurvān traced both good and evil to the supreme deity. Orthodox Mazdaism could always view Ahriman as a force completely other than Ohrmazd. But if both Bounteous and Destructive Spirits could be conceived by one supreme god, then God himself was of a dual nature and *not* completely of the realm of light. The disturbing doctrine of Zurvān’s “doubt” as the origin of evil left no other conclusion; and as we have seen, some sources strongly suggested that Zurvanites honored both aspects of the godhead, *aša* and *druj*, *ahura* and *daēva* alike.

Upon their condemnation as heretical, Zurvanite texts were lost from the Pahlavī corpus, and consequently are extremely hard to reconstruct today. Except for the very late *‘Ulemā i Islām*, we are compelled to rely on non-Zoroastrian texts that are Christian and Manichean, and therefore implicitly hostile. However, they are far from useless. Mazdean orthodoxy contains some otherwise inexplicable traces of Zurvanism. For example, the Mazdean orthodox writer Mānushchihir writes that “Ormazd, the lord of all things, produced from Infinite Light a form of fire whose name was that of Ormazd and whose light was that of fire.”<sup>97</sup> The phrase can only be accounted for as a clumsy adaptation of a Zurvanite text that said that Zurvān created Ohrmazd.

### What Is the *Yasna*?

The defeat at al-Qādisiyah in 635 of the forces of Yazdigird III, the last Sasanid, sounded the death knell of the domination of Mazdean religion.<sup>98</sup> Islam tolerated its predecessor in principle, but in practice, persecutions and forced conversions were the rule. Called Gabars by the Muslims, the Zoroastrians survived in Iran as a persecuted minority at Yazd and Kirman; at Persis, the Achaemenid seat, some remnant of the cult of Ahura Mazda survived. From

the tenth century C.E. onward, they migrated to India, finding asylum in Gujarat. There they surrendered the religious elements that offended Hindus, such as blood sacrifice, and the study and practice of astrology and theosophy. Ever since they were attacked for dualism by Christian missionaries to India, they have been emphasizing monotheism.

We have seen that Zoroastrianism integrated the mythology and worship of the older Indo-Iranian religion. It could not eradicate Mithra or the *haoma* sacrifice, but had to claim them as its own. We have also suggested that the same is true for the Zurvanite reform of Zoroastrianism—in fact, to a greater degree. The cosmogony of Zurvān, which purports to tell the very beginnings of the world, is completely ritual-centered. That ritual is the ancient *yasna* (cognate with the Vedic *yajña*), whose proper performance, as we have seen, was so critical to the maintenance of reborn Zoroastrianism. The killing of the primordial bull by Ahriman in the orthodox cosmogonic accounts and the withering of the first plant, later pounded and mixed with water by Ohrmazd's creations to allow plant life to develop on the earth, may have formed the prototypes for the *yasna*, which was, as Philip Kreyenbroek describes, “intended to create a link between heaven and earth through ritual offerings of the juice of the *haoma* plant, and initially also through animal sacrifice, in the presence of the life-giving elements water and fire, which also received offerings.”<sup>99</sup> Boyce suggests that, as is still the case in modern Persian Zoroastrian ritual, the rite was conducted in the early morning, just after sunrise.<sup>100</sup>

Certain important features of the ancient Indo-Iranian liturgy performed by Ohrmazd in the orthodox, and Zurvān in the heterodox creation myths we have considered are recognizable in the modern Zoroastrian fire sacrifice. Other sacraments, such as those of initiation of the young (*naojote*, in which children at the age of twelve are adopted by the fire), repentance and confession, and three distinct ceremonies of purification have survived and are still practiced in modern Zoroastrianism. Funerary rites and ritual aspects of deposition in the Towers of Silence persist, as do six seasonal festivals, the *Gahanbars*, in addition to the days celebrated with prayers for the dead at the end of the year. However, the ancient *yasna* was and is the central cultic activity of the religion.

There is speculation that in the service of Ahura Mazda, Zoroaster may have demanded the incorporation of some liturgical reforms. Nevertheless, it is generally understood that in the essence of its worship Zoroastrianism retained the ancient sacrificial rituals of the Magi. Three main fires, the *Farnbag*, *Gushnap*, and *Burzen-Mihr*, were associated (in Dumézilian tripartite style) with the priestly, warrior, and agricultural classes. These in turn were designated *Aduran* (village fire) and *Varhran* (provincial and royal fires).<sup>101</sup>

Herodotus thought that the devotees of ancient Magian religion worshipped, among other natural elements, fire.<sup>102</sup> He also tells us that they held their ceremonies in open spaces, out of doors. But contra his assertion that the Persians had no temples, cultic structures have been found in the form of terraces, towers, or square rooms. These rooms contained openings through

which the fire could be seen, eternally ablaze. The ruins of *čahārṭāq*'s, which have four gates or doors, have been discovered throughout Iran; and from the time of the Sasanian kings, numismatic evidence shows altars aflame on raised platforms, not sheltered but visible as a sign of the marriage of imperial and sacred authority.<sup>103</sup> These structures did not house statues of the god or goddess, which signified his or her real presence on earth, but the living fire without which no worship was possible.

The fact that Zoroaster instigated no purge of the fire icon, such as Muḥammad undertook of pre-Islamic idols at Mecca, is significant; rather, while preserving its role as ritual axis, he insisted on its sublimation. Fire-centered orthopraxy, prominent in the Vedas,<sup>104</sup> was appropriated and spiritualized in Zoroastrian ritual. As the high priest of the Bombay Parsis, Dastur Kotwal, explains, Ahura Mazda, Good Mind or Bounteous Spirit, was quickly thought of as perpetual, pure light itself—and fire was concentrated light made manifest on earth.<sup>105</sup> The maintenance of its purity thus became—and continues to be—a powerful concern having both ethical and ritual dimensions for the Iranian and Indian Zoroastrian (Parsi) communities.

According to tradition, the spiritual meaning of fire—called “son of Ahura Mazda”—was discovered by an ancient king, Hoshang. Dastur Kotwal says, “He assembled all his court and said, ‘This is a divine glow.’ A person who has wisdom would praise it.” According to Kotwal, “Zoroaster spiritualized fire.” When Ahura Mazda approaches Zoroaster, Zoroaster tells us that

To his question: “To whom wilt thou address thy worship?”  
I made reply: “To thy fire! While I offer up my veneration to it,  
I will think of the Right to the utmost of my power. (*Yasna* 43:9)

“According to us,” says Kotwal, “all naturally lustrous objects are worthy of veneration. The sun, moon, the stars, lights, all light. Now, what is God? What is Ohrmazd, or Ahura Mazda? Our religion teaches that Ahura Mazda is a stream of light. When we consider fire in the material world, we remove its earthly impurities through ceremony, and make it as pure as it is in the mansion of Ahura Mazda. After consecration, a ray of light descends on that earthly fire and a link is established between devotee and God. . . . [W]e do not worship fire, as has sometimes been said, but we worship Ahura Mazda through the agency of fire.”<sup>106</sup> Fire is “gladdened” by taking away the impurities from it (whereas fire from a corpse is “harrassed”) by sifting, purifying, consecrating. The first fire, the hearth fire, is worshiped as the presence of Ahura Mazda on earth. Personal prayers and hymns are offered to it. After a sacred rectangle is demarcated by a furrow in the ground, or a rectangular room established, the second fire is lit. This fire, to whom sacrifices are fed, is the eater of dedicated offerings; its job as messenger is to carry and distribute them to the world beyond. An elaborate ceremony is required to establish a new fire; purification and regeneration have their own rites.

In tribute to its characteristically Indo-European domestic origins, Zoroastrians keep a sacred fire burning in their house (usually a lamp) before which

they recite their daily prayers. In fact, the Vedas and the *Avesta* make clear that the head of the household is the sacrificer; the liturgist, originally only a paid advisor. Hence it is thought that the *zaotar* Zoroaster had to search far and wide for a sponsor before he was finally hired by Vištāsp.

The holy fire cannot be allowed to extinguish itself. It must be fed at least five times a day. Every feeding of the fire requires the recitation of prayer. The principal Zoroastrian ceremony, the *yasna*, is a sacrifice of *haoma* (sacred drink) conducted before the sacred fire, accompanied by the recitation of large parts of the *Avesta*.<sup>107</sup> There are also offerings of bread and milk. Initially, before the Parsi conformation to Hindu sensibilities that became normative, there were animal offerings of meat or fat. The scrupulous maintenance of ritual purity, so characteristic of Zoroastrianism, is critical during the performance of the fire ceremony.<sup>108</sup> One may only approach the fire having bathed and changed one's clothes and with a cloth over one's mouth. A stone relief of the Achaemenid period in the Istanbul Archaeological Museum shows a priest wearing a mouth-cover while presiding at a sacrifice nearly identical to the one worn today by modern Zoroastrian priests in the fire-temples of Bombay.<sup>109</sup> A special light is strongly associated with the *yasna*, which has its own name: *kwarrāh*, meaning "radiance" or "glory." "A priest who performs his ceremonies sincerely, in touch with the spiritual powers, acting as a servant of God, has *kwarrāh*—a sort of glory or aura on his face."<sup>110</sup>

Kotwal observes that the purpose of rite is to allow "man to establish contact with the spiritual world" (the archangels, angels, and guardian spirits, the Avestan *ameša spentas*, *yazatas*, and *fravashis*) and "to invite the powers to the earth, because they are the guardians of all things." In fact, in ancient Iran, as in Vedic India, the role of ritual fire is above all meditative: "the gods were able to keep their immortality only to the degree that mortals nourished them with oblations, just as mortals won their place in Heaven by preparing their offerings and consuming them together with their divine guests."<sup>111</sup> Without the divine fire-god who graciously dwells on earth, there is no access to the invisible world of the immortal ones. There can be no communion and no feast.

In the ritual of the *yasna*, every level of creation is present. The divine hierarchy, that of the seven *Ameša Spentas*, is homologized in the ritual elements themselves.

Ohrmazd, the first of the seven archangels, presides over man and is represented by the priest. The second archangel, Bahman, Good Mind, is the guardian of the cattle and is represented by clarified butter. Ardavahisht, Best Righteousness, is the lord of fire, which is present in all our ceremonies. Fourth is Shahrevar, Desirable Dominion, who presides over metals, present in our metal utensils. Fifth is Spendārmad, Holy Devotion, ruling over earth, and of course we perform our ceremonies on earth. Then there is Hordād, Perfection, the lord of water. Water is used in the *yasna* ritual to make an infusion with the *haoma* or *hōm* twigs. *Hōm* represents Amurdād, Immortality, who presides over vegetation. Our Hindu brothers say *soma* for *hōm*.

The *hōm* twigs, which were brought over with us from Iran, are the center of the *yasna* ceremony.”<sup>112</sup>

### Zurvān: The Sources and Their Implications

The cosmogonies of Eznik, Elišē, bar Kōnai and bar Penkayē seem to derive from a common original, which Marijan Molé and others think must have been genuinely Zurvanite, rather than a Mazdean polemic. Despite their Christian agenda, these four accounts bear a close resemblance to the *ʿUlemā i Islām* (Doctors of Islam), which although late (ninth to eleventh centuries), is the only extant Zurvanite text.<sup>113</sup> The template for our texts may have been the Pahlavi work of Theodore of Mopsuestia, known to us only from a summary in Greek given by the Byzantine scholar Photius, Patriarch of Constantinople in the late ninth century C.E., Photius heaps scorn on Theodore’s story of creation.

A scroll of Theodore was read, *On Persian Magic*, which concerned what constituted [their] religious difference(s), in three discussions. . . . In the first discussion he sets forth the loathsome doctrine of the Persians, Zarada explained, namely, that of Zurvān, whom he presents as ruler of everything, and whom he also calls Fortune [or Fate]. And because he [Zurvān] sacrificed [literally, “poured libations”], so he gave birth to Ohrmazd; he bore him and also Satan, and [Theodore also tells] about the mixing of their blood. And thus he makes his case in the first discussion, openly advancing, as the phrase goes, [this] sacrilege and most shameful doctrine.<sup>114</sup>

Who is Zurvān? What are his divine attributes? He is preexisting, when there was nothing, “neither skies nor earth.” He is Great; Elišē calls him “Zurvān, the great God.” This title is often corroborated: the *ʿUlemā i Islām* tells us of that prehistoric time, “in spite of all the *grandeur* (*buzurgvārī*) that surrounded it (Time), there was no one to call it creator.”<sup>115</sup> The repetition in the texts of *vazurg*, *vazurgvār* (great) was a “standing epithet of the infinite Zurvān who as such is the source and origin of all things good and evil.”<sup>116</sup> Similarly, the Syriac writer Šahristānī calls Zurvān “the greatest of the light people” or simply *zurvānu l-kabīr*, “the great Zurvān.”<sup>117</sup> In Manichean texts, Zurvān is the Iranian equivalent of “the Father of greatness” of Theodore bar Kōnai.

The Syriac writer Šahristānī notes that Ahriman arose from Zurvān’s “single reflection,” that momentary, cosmic divine mistake, whereas “Ohrmazd arose from that wisdom.”<sup>118</sup> Good is born out of the inherent nature of the divine, evil from its imperfection; they are condemned to battle until the end of time. Despite that distinction, we are still left with a god who is purely bina-tured, composed of both light and darkness; he is the father of good and evil alike.<sup>119</sup> Continues Šahristānī, “some of the Zurvāniyya think that there was always something evil with God, either an evil thought or an evil corruption, and that is the origin of Satan.”<sup>120</sup> “Always something evil with God!” No wonder Zurvanism became anathema to Mazdeans, Christians, and Manichaeans

alike. It was neither ethical monotheism nor pure dualism; it was something more frightening, or more existentially authentic.

What is crucial about the births of these twins, these opposing moral forces, and about the roles they play, is that the entire cosmic drama takes place and is to a great extent determined by the requirements of sacrifice. In the Zurvanite story, sacrifice resulted in the creation of Ohrmazd, just as all creation is said to have been created by sacrifice. This is very much in line with the orthodox idea of sacrifice being created *in illo tempore*, “before the fall,” as the *Bundahišn* tells. “For [Ohrmazd] knew that when the Aggressor came, the day would be divided into five periods; for before the Aggressor came, it was always mid-day, that is Rapiθwin. At the Rapiθwin time Ohrmazd and the Ahmraspands fashioned the “idea” [*mēnōk*] of sacrifice. By the performance of sacrifice all creation was created.”<sup>121</sup>

Theodore Abū Qurra, christian bishop of Harran (c. 740–820 C.E.), whose source is Eznik, fills out the picture of this sacrifice. Writing in Arabic, Abū Qurra tells us that a group of Magians told him to drive out some star-worshipers, saying that “‘what we possess is the truth.’ They stated that the great god was called Zurvān, and that Zurvān was Fortune (Persian *ba xšt*, the same word used by Eznik).”<sup>122</sup> After his wife had been pregnant with Ohrmazd for seven hundred years, the great god doubted whether his son had been conceived. From this doubt, Ahriman was conceived and born after a short interval, but Ohrmazd did not then follow right away. Ohrmazd was born only after the completion of the thousand years: Only after the supreme deity has fulfilled the prescribed period of the sacrifice are light and goodness born.

Of what cultic elements does Zurvān’s sacrifice consist, and why? Photius uses the participle *σπένδων* (pouring libations) to describe the sacrifice of Zurvān in his mighty effort to create Ohrmazd. This is reproduced by Yohannān bar Penkayê, whereas the other sources simply give “sacrifice.” In fact, as we have seen, the pressing, pouring out for the fire, and drinking of the sacred plant-juice *haoma* was the central rite of the *yasna*. Eznik uses the word *yašt* to describe Zurvān’s action, which derives from the Iranian and means “sacrifice”; the hymns of the *Avesta* are called *Yašts*. “Zurvan, then, is performing the Magian liturgy, the interminable mumblings of which so struck the Greek and Syriac writers.”<sup>123</sup> Šahristānī writes: “the Great Zurvan stood and mumbled [prayers] (*zamzama*) . . . that he might have a son.”<sup>124</sup> Mas’ūdī tells us that *zamzamat*, “mumbling,” was the disrespectful term by which the Arabs satirized the *Avesta*.<sup>125</sup> It is the Avestan hymns, the *yašts*, that, according to Eznik and other sources, Zurvān murmurs as he sacrifices. We have seen the importance of the recital of the *Avesta* in the decree of Xusrau I: No foreign knowledge contributes to the good of the king’s subjects “as much as one religious leader who has examined much and pondered much in his recital.”<sup>126</sup> Eznik and bar Penkayê specify that it is the bundle of twigs, the *barsom*, with which Zurvān conducts the sacrifice. Finally, the presence of the *hōm* twigs implies the sacrifice of the *haoma*. Thus three key ritual features are alluded to in the various versions of the Zurvanite cosmogony: the pouring out of libations, the recitation of the hymns of the *Avesta*, and the use of the *barsom* or ritual twigs, which



Kotwal calls “the center of the *yasna* ceremony.” Zurvān has performed a complete *yasna*.

Thus we form a picture of a god who exists “when absolutely nothing yet existed,” a First Cause who is omnipotent, hermaphroditic, and who contains both darkness and light as well as moral good and evil in his nature. This Great God undertakes a *yasna* whose components, albeit evolved, date from at least one and perhaps two millennia before. As Zaehner puts it, “This, then, is the Magian liturgy transported into eternity”;<sup>127</sup> and this, then, is also a paradox whose implications did not go unnoticed, a contested divine reflexivity.

To whom does Zurvān sacrifice? Eznik alleges that when asked, the Magians reply that he sacrificed to Fate or Fortune (*p'ark'*).<sup>128</sup> However, as we have seen in the works of Theodore, Zurvān is called ὄν καὶ Τύχην καλέει. Fortune or Fate was a hypostasis of Zurvān, and perhaps, like its sister the Hellenistic Tyche, was the most adamant force in the universe. As expressed in the text *Mēnōk i Khrat*, “though one must be armed with the valour and strength of wisdom and knowledge, yet it is not possible to strive against fate.”<sup>129</sup> Ādur-Hormizd mentions the “Fortune” hypothesis, but suggests that the sacrifice was offered rather to the natural elements.<sup>130</sup> “The sense, however, is fairly plain. Zurvan offers a sacrifice to Fortune as an hypostasis of himself. He is at the same time priest and God.”<sup>131</sup>

Sacrifice assumes a major role in the ponderings of Eznik about whether Zurvān was perfect or imperfect.<sup>132</sup> He asserts that if Zurvān were perfect, he would not have needed to sacrifice to produce a son. If imperfect, there must have been something superior to him. As a Christian apologist, Eznik must posit a being that is supremely and unequivocally good. Our usual question, appearing in an ancient mouth, may in this case be answered by the glorified autonomy and preeminence of ritual itself. As Zaehner notes, “the Magian sacrifice has virtue in itself, irrespective of its object, for Ohrmazd too performs a sacrifice at the end of time.”<sup>133</sup>

The result of Zurvān's sacrifice is Ohrmazd, the demiurge. When the exhausted divine father hands the twigs to Ohrmazd, thereby investing him with the priesthood, he says, “It was for your sake that I sacrificed; now it is you who must sacrifice for me.”<sup>134</sup> Ohrmazd will both create creation by sacrifice and then renew it in the same way in the last days. Thus, in the creation myth, we find a legitimization of the priest's identification with Ohrmazd as manifested in actual cult.

In orthodox Mazdean scripture, the priesthood of Ohrmazd is confirmed. The *Bundahišn* says: “[Ohrmazd] himself donned a white garment and it had the stamp of priesthood: for wisdom is ever with the priests who are guides to men, and all men are their pupils. And the office of Ohrmazd was the act of creation, and it was through wisdom that creation must be created. Therefore did he don the robe of the wise [which is the robe of] priesthood.”<sup>135</sup> But in the Zurvanite vision, “[it] was from the hands of Zurvan himself that he received his priestly investiture.”<sup>136</sup> In its central myth, Zurvanism invested the priesthood with the signal authority of Ohrmazd from the highest possible source.<sup>137</sup> It is Ahriman, whom bar Kōnai calls “dark and ugly,”<sup>138</sup> who “went forth and mastered the world”;<sup>139</sup> winning his father's kingdom through treachery, but it

is to Ohrmazd that Zurvān gives the *barsom*. It is Ohrmazd who will be the Melchizedek of heterodox Zoroastrianism.

### Why Does Zurvān Sacrifice?

Its latter-day heretical reputation notwithstanding, historical Zurvanism actually betrays a deeply conservative mythical element. In its creation story, its sovereign deity appears as his own high priest, performing the central sacrifice of practiced religion. This endorses and reinforces traditional Mazdean liturgy. The cosmogony then further legitimates the priestly function by making the deity's "good" son, who is light incarnate and ruler of the celestial realm, the one to assume the sacerdotal role. As Zurvān sacrificed for him, so Ohrmazd is now to sacrifice for Zurvān, both at the present moment and at the end of time. In handing over the sacred twigs, Zurvān becomes inferior to Ohrmazd. What then, is paramount in the myth? It is the practice of sacrifice and exchange of the ability to sacrifice, played out on a universal scale.

Zurvān divests himself and invests his son with the office of priest. Dastur Kotwal notes that, during the *yasna*, Ohrmazd "presides over man and is represented by the priest." Here in the Zurvanite myth we have an emphatic foundational consecration and installation of Ohrmazd, Ahura Mazdā, as the great divine priest. Therefore we also witness a reemphasis of the divine model energizing the mundane, flesh-and-blood priesthood.

We have mentioned that Eznik is uncomfortable with the association of sacrificial paraphernalia with a god. Eznik interprets Zurvān's motive in handing the *barsom* to Ohrmazd as an attempt on the part of the infinite father to be rid of his divine doubt, the crisis of faith that generated Ahriman. For a god to sacrifice implies weakness, incompetence, and inferiority to another, unnamed and invisible but certainly greater power.<sup>140</sup> And in Eznik's commentary, East meets West; sovereign and self-sufficient ritual encounters sovereign and self-sufficient Lord.

If he [Ohrmazd] were God and had power to create heaven and earth, why should he need to have the *barsōm* and to perform sacrifice, that he might free his father from doubt? Why was he, who could create heaven and earth without the *barsōm*, unable to rid his father of care without the rods? Thus it is plain that the father was without intelligence and power and placed his reliance in another, and that the son was likewise without intelligence and power. For the one could not give birth to his son without performing sacrifice, and the son could not release him from his doubts without taking the rods into his hand."<sup>141</sup>

For Eznik, ultimate sovereignty and the attributive action of sacrifice cannot coexist. He goes on to demonstrate that Zurvān cannot be the true king and creator of the universe.<sup>142</sup> We are reminded of Marijan Molé's diagnosis of this discomfort, cited at the beginning of this chapter.

Zaehner believes that, by attacking the Zurvanite doctrine—as so often

may be true in the case of polemic—Ezriq exposes a clear picture of how it was understood by Zurvanites.<sup>143</sup> Because the Great God did doubt, Zurvanites may have indeed held him unworthy of the priesthood. He surrendered his kingdom to the Evil twin Ahriman.<sup>144</sup> But it is *sacrifice* that will win the kingdom back for the good. Thus to Ohrmazd Zurvān “gave the *barsōm*, the emblem of priesthood, so that he could by virtue of sacrifice bring the power of Ahriman to naught.”<sup>145</sup> Interestingly, here heresy and orthodoxy converge in a mutual picture of a dispersal of this threatening doubt. The Greater *Bundahišn* proclaims that when the 12,000 years have passed, at the end of time, “two lies remain, Ahriman and Āz. Ohrmazd comes down to earth and is himself the *zōt* priest and Srōš, the Blessed, the *rāspik*. He holds the girdle in his hand. The Foul Spirit and Āz will be greatly and strongly smashed by the magic power (*nērang*) of the *Gaθās*, and <they fall> back to the darkness and gloom.”<sup>146</sup> “[T]hereby the power of Ahriman is broken: finally *no doubt remains*.”<sup>147</sup>

This is a history either of a polytheistic religion struggling with the implications of monotheism—or else, perhaps, the reverse. The Hellenistic genesis of Zurvanism seemed to lie, appropriately enough, in two quarters. It sought to resolve the theological problem of the dualism of coequal Good and Evil Spirits. At the same time, it offered a transcendent endorsement of ecclesiasticism, which reemerged after near-drowning by Hellenism in the Arsacid period to unprecedented power in conjunction with Sasanian royalty. The centrality and quasi-autonomy of Zurvān’s sacrifice, the *yasna*, in the Zurvanite myth of creation accomplished a conservative sanctification of ritual whose members had the earthly power to sacrifice—which is in fact what the Sasanian period brought. However, the infinitude of the preexistent supreme god Time is compromised by his sacrifice. This criticism is made by Ezriq, a Christian apologist, but also seems to reflect a dualist Zurvanite view of the godhead as at worst essentially flawed or, at best, as ambivalent, binatured, and contingent.

Zurvanism, with its heritage of worshiping the dark side of the divine, did not, as one might expect, generate alternative forms of worship. Rather, born during a period of eclipse, it conservatively reinscribed clerical authority by clothing the first and greatest immortal with the power to sacrifice—and by having him clothe with the same power his son, who is traditionally seen as homologous with the ritualizing mortal priest. This, I suggest, would have lent itself admirably to the theocratic agenda of the Sasanians and to the enhanced power of the Mazdean priesthood. Driven by the story of a sacrificing, Janus-like god, a story far from senseless in light of its cultic history, Zurvanism came into its own.

# 7

## “Myself to Myself”

### *The Norse Odin and Divine Autosacrifice*

... everything that involves Óðinn is marked in this way . . . he has often been seen as a sort of shaman-god to whom sacrifices are made by hanging—and nothing, absolutely nothing in his affairs has the clarity of rational phenomena.<sup>1</sup>

Vicious lord of the battle-slain (*Valfǫðr*) and the dead (*drauga dróttinn*), incurable necromancer, inspired patron of the skalds and their esoteric poetic arts—wherein history was largely recorded and transmitted—and one-eyed keeper of the runes,<sup>2</sup> the Norse god-magician Odin fluctuates ominously on the boundaries of the tripartite structure established by Georges Dumézil for far-flung Indo-European pantheons.<sup>3</sup> Odin carries both the “magical” aspect of Dumézil’s first or sovereignty function, as well as sharing with his son Thor of the thrown hammer aspects of the second or war function. The god Frey, whose ithyphallic image may have been seated at the ancient “temple” or ritual feasting-hall at Uppsala, alone obediently conforms to his “assigned” Dumézilian realm of influence, that of the third function of wealth and fertility. Like Zeus descended from a primeval race, and like Zeus the partner in many liaisons and father of many divine offspring, Odin also reprises the role of the Greek god as father of all (*Alfǫðr*).<sup>4</sup>

Odin is impossibly old (*aldinn*) and infinitely wise. He played a part in the creation of men, giving them *ǫnd* (breath, life, spirit).<sup>5</sup> He is in fact the purveyor of immortality; Snorri Sturluson’s *Prose Edda*, a skaldic handbook of ancient myths compiled in the thirteenth century by a wealthy Icelandic farmer and ambassador for the Norwegian king Hákon Hákonarson,<sup>6</sup> says of Odin, “He will live throughout all ages, ruling his whole kingdom and governing all things great and

small. He fashioned the earth and the sky and all that is in them. . . . But the greatest is this, that he created man and gave him the spirit which shall live and never perish, even though the body rot to soil or burn to ashes.”<sup>7</sup> Odin is deeply generous, bringing gifts to the gods and to humanity, such as the intoxicating art of poetry (which he stole as mead from the dwarfs and giants), and the magical runes that when “cut and colored” can make the hanged walk and talk again—gifts bought at steep cost to himself. He is also violent and cruel, the god of war and dissension; nothing pleases him more than fratricidal strife and the mutual slaughter of kinsmen and friends.<sup>8</sup> He is a sorcerer, the master and originator of *galdrar* (shape-shifting, magical travel, the command of helping spirits, and communication with the dead), *seiðr* (divination and the induction of sickness or death, “marked” in the human realm as powers that belong to women), and *ffolkyngi* (revelation of closed places like mountains and burial mounds, and binding those who dwell therein).<sup>9</sup> He is Sigfǫðr (victory-father), *Bileygr* (the one with eyes that evade), and *Báleygr* (one with eyes that flame). No deity is described in richer detail in the extant Scandinavian literary sources; no god is stranger and less easily comprehended.

Dumézil himself wrote of Odin, referring to his relentless quest for esoteric knowledge,

Odin is the head of the gods . . . in the mythology he is their only king until the end of time, and consequently, the particular god of human kings and the protector of their power, even when they glory in being descended from someone else. He is also the god who sometimes requires their blood in sacrifice. . . . He is . . . the father of all the gods, while his own ancestry links him to the primordial giants. He is the clairvoyant one. This gift was assured to him and symbolically expressed by a mutilation which would seem to have been voluntary: he is one-eyed, having given his other eye in payment to the honeyed source of all wisdom.<sup>10</sup>

Odin is believed by most—although not by all—to have been a presence among the Germanic peoples of the Early Period and the Migration Periods, but perhaps not ascendant until the Viking Age (c. 800–1066 C.E.). The distribution of toponyms suggest that even at that time, his cult probably flourished chiefly among the fractious societies engendered by the martial warlords of Denmark and southern Norway. Even so, as king of the divine race of the Æsir, he was honored as the supreme deity of the pantheon throughout Scandinavia. He was the recipient par excellence of sacrificial offerings, the central religious rite of the Vikings. The sacrificial verb that is perhaps most frequently used in the extant literary sources to mean “sacrifice, consecrate as a sacrifice, dedicate” is the verb “to give.” For example, when in *Víga Glúms saga* Thorkell the Tall, who has been expelled from northern Iceland by Glúmr, enters the temple of Frey, he prays, “‘Frey, you who have long been my patron, and accepted many gifts and repaid them well, now I give (*gef*) you this ox, so that Glúmr may leave the land of Thverá no less compelled than I leave it now. Let some sign be seen whether you accept or reject it.’ The ox was so moved that he bellowed and

dropped dead.”<sup>11</sup> The passage does not relate that Thorkell then cuts the throat of the ox or drowns it in a well or at a waterfall where spirits dwell, common forms taken by Germanic sacrifice. It just says that the fugitive “gives” the ox to the god. The verb pertains no less in cases of human sacrifice, especially in the case of the lord of the battle, whereby even the slaying of one’s enemies in war or blood-feud could be seen as a sacrifice; the formula recited to one’s victim was, “I give you to Odin.”<sup>12</sup>

How extraordinary, then, to read in strophe 138 of *Hávamál*, “The Speech of the High One,” in the *Elder* or *Poetic Edda* (compiled c. 1270 C.E.) that Odin, who is *Yggr* (the Awful) and *Hár* (the High One) was “given (or offered) to Odin (*ok gefinn Óðni*)—myself to myself (*sjálfr sjálfum mér*).” Odin was *hangaguð*—“god of the hanged”; in this poem, he is himself hanged. The god engages in an autosacrifice of cosmic scope; and he narrates the story of his own agony.

138. I know that I hung  
on the wind-swept tree  
for nine full nights,  
wounded with a spear  
and offered to Óðinn,  
myself to myself;  
on that tree  
of which no one knows  
from what roots its rises.

Veit ek, at ek hekk  
vindga meiði á  
nætr allar níu,  
geiri undaðr  
ok gefinn Óðni,  
sjálfr sjálfum mér,  
á þeim meiði,  
er manngi veit,  
hvers hann af rótum renn.

139. They did not comfort me with bread,  
and not with the drinking horn;  
I peered downward,  
I grasped the runes,  
Screeching I grasped them;  
I fell back from there.

Við hleifi mik sældu  
né við hornigi,  
nysta ek niðr  
nam ek upp rúnar,  
œpandi nam,  
fell ek aprt þaðan.<sup>13</sup>

The *Poetic Edda*, far older in origin than *The Prose Edda*, consists of thirty lays or poems.<sup>14</sup> Half of these poems treat mythic events that happen to the gods; the rest celebrate Germanic heroes like Sigurd or Helgi. The *Poetic Edda* contains poems such as *Völuspá* (The Sibyl’s [or Wise Woman’s] Prophecy); *Hymiskviða* (Thor’s visit to Hymir), and *Alvissmál*, a poem containing interpretations of various words, genealogical poems, and so forth. *Hávamál* is an obscure collection of ancient verses in the genre of wisdom literature, a collection of maxims compiled under a single title at an early date; their only link seems to be the divine character of Odin himself.<sup>15</sup>

The passage continues:

140. I learned nine mighty songs  
from the famous son  
of Þóthór, father of Bestla,  
and I got a drink  
of the precious mead,  
I was sprinkled with Óðrerir.

141. Then I began to be fruitful  
 and to be fertile,  
 to grow and to prosper;  
 one word sought  
 another word from me;  
 one deed sought  
 another deed from me.<sup>16</sup>

Like Hesiod's *Works and Days*, most of *Hávamál* is practical "how-to" information for daily living; it expounds the necessity of keeping one's wits about one, the obligations of friendship and hospitality, and how to deal with misfortune. But it also contains magical chants and spells. Preceding a catalogue of magical practices that someone, perhaps Odin, has mastered, appear the brief, cryptic verses cited above. This is the only surviving account of the myths of Odin's autosacrifice, and no other literary sources incorporate any of its elements.<sup>17</sup> Therefore, as in the case of the Attic vases showing the gods pouring libations, we are without interpretive context for this tale. As E.O.G. Turville-Petre writes, "No more mysterious myth is recorded in Norse literature than that in which it is told how Óðinn hung for nine nights on a windswept tree."<sup>18</sup>

The most obvious solution is that the myth, which may date to the ninth century C.E. or earlier, reflects direct Christian influence. This view was established at the end of the nineteenth century by Sophus Bugge<sup>19</sup> and adopted by others.<sup>20</sup> The parallels between the hanging Norse god and the crucified Christ, especially in the latter's medieval depictions, are intense: Odin hangs from Yggdrasil (the horse of Ygg [one of Odin's names]). Yggdrasil is the World Tree of the Norse cosmos, while the cross is portrayed as the Tree of Life by the early church; the cross-tree is often called the rood-tree, a paranormal tree without roots—while the roots of Odin's Yggdrasil, as described in *Grímnismál* 31, comprise the cosmos, with giants dwelling beneath one, Hel under the second, and the men of Middle World under the third.<sup>21</sup> The wind batters Odin's self-sacrifice, just as a medieval poet saw Christ dead "in the wyld wynde."<sup>22</sup> Both divine figures are pierced with a spear, Odin *geiri undaðr* in *Hávamál* 138 and Jesus in John 19:35 and 37 ("They shall look on him whom they have pierced"). Odin thirsts horribly, as does Jesus, who is given vinegar to drink (Mt. 27:48, Mk. 15:36; Lk. 23:36; Jn. 19: 29–30). Christ cries out "in a loud voice" before death (Mt. 27:46, 50; Lk. 23:46; Mk. 15:34, 37) just as Odin, "screeching" or "howling" (*æpandi*) as he falls, gathers up the precious runes. Even Odin's nine nights on the gallows-tree may be seen as a multiple reflection of Christ's traditional three hours on the cross and three days in the realm of death before his resurrection.<sup>23</sup> The English tribes were converted from the practice of Germanic religion to Christianity in the sixth or seventh century C.E., the Saxons, under Frankish force, in the eighth century C.E., and the Danes in the tenth century C.E. (965) under German pressure; Iceland (c. 1000), Norway (1024, but already begun under Hákon Aðalsteinsfostri, c. 935), and Sweden (the first Christian king, Olof Skötkonung, died in 1021) held out the longest; it was not until the twelfth century C.E. (c. 1100) that the Æsir reigned no more. Was this episode an Old Norse version of the crucifixion of Christ?<sup>24</sup>

The “invasion” or intertwining of the figures of Odin and Christ is perhaps nowhere more graphically represented than on a runic stele raised by the first Christian king of Denmark, King Haraldr Bluetooth (died 986 c.e.) in what had been the pagan sanctuary at Jelling in East Jutland. The stone clearly represents the crucifixion of Christ, arms outstretched, but there is no cross, and the figure of Christ is shown suspended in intertwined knots or vines, fettered just as human sacrifices were bound over to Odin.<sup>25</sup>

However, the picture is far from simple.<sup>26</sup> Every element of the poetry of *Hávamál* can be defended not only as indigenous and pagan but also as specific to the cult of Odin himself. Odin’s nickname was “God of the Hanged.” He was not merely the patron of the hanged; he also frequently received human sacrifice by hanging. Not only was the spear his special weapon; as well, victims to Odin were ritually marked with the spear before they were hanged, and it was common for warriors and kings, even when dying in bed, to be “marked for Odin” with a spear wound. In other words, Odin sacrifices himself to himself (*gefínn Óðni, sjálfir sjálfum mér*), exactly in the same way that victims are uniquely sacrificed to him. The mythic god of skaldic poetry *inaugurates* the features of his own cult, but religious history tells us that this Odin of poetry actually *imitates* aspects of the known Odinic cult. This is the circle of divine reflexivity, and in none of the religious cases we have considered—or will consider—is the ritual logic spelled out more explicitly.

Why does Odin sacrifice himself to himself? *Veit ek*, he says in strophe 138, “I know.” Odin is a magician, master of the runic letters and the supernatural power they contain; this myth tells how he seized them. The agony of his ordeal as well as its goal strongly resembles an initiation, “something like a shamanistic test Odin took upon himself in order to learn esoteric magic.”<sup>27</sup> A strong case can also be made for a ritualized death, undergone by the highest power in the universe, in order to gain access to the realm of the dead—and we know that in pre-Christian Scandinavia the dead were believed to have special wisdom unavailable to the living.<sup>28</sup> Whatever the reasons for Odin’s ordeal—a reflexive sacrificial mystery which, like that of Christ, is so exalted that it may be beyond comprehension—the specificity of its cultic features do not require the influence of Christianity. Rather, they serve as an idiosyncratic confirmation of the particular power of a pagan god. Odin sacrifices himself to himself in the unique ritual terms of his own cult. He becomes his own cult’s centerpiece. In order to make this case, it might be best to analyze the individual religious elements of *Hávamál* 138–140.

## The God

None of the other gods of the Scandinavian pantheon have the mania or the sorcery to attempt what Odin undertakes on the World Tree; if they are mutilated, like Týr by the monster wolf Fenrir, for example, it is because they have been tricked, and certainly not by intention; it is not with the sense of withstanding bodily pain for the sake of gaining something greater. In a sense Odin



alone truly comprehends the essence and economy of sacrifice, and in the account we are considering, he is at once recipient, high priest, and victim. Metamorphosis is Odin's province. The "grey-bearded one," who ranges abroad as an unexpected guest in the realm of his mortal subjects with an old blue coat and broad hat, Odin is a shape-shifter and a sneak. A mercurial and amoral deity, like the Greek god Dionysos he is closely identified with transformative liquids—the blood of sacrifice, the well-waters of divination, or the stolen mead of poetry.<sup>29</sup> Creator and father of all, "the towering god of the Germanic pantheon,"<sup>30</sup> Odin is at the same time *Göndlir*, "the bearer of the magic wand"; *Hnikarr*, "the spear-thruster"; and *Bólverkr*, "the evil-doer." He is a conjurer, and a nasty one; he embodies what Dumézil called "impulsive intelligence," and as Boyer puts it, "absolutely nothing in his affairs has the clarity of rational phenomena."<sup>31</sup>

Odin is surrounded with magical animals and magical possessions. From his seat, Hliðskjálf, Odin sees all that comes to pass.<sup>32</sup> He watches the universe with his ravens Huginn (Thought) and Muninn (Memory) perched one on each shoulder, sending them out "hovering every day the whole earth over" (*Grímnismál* 20) to bring him wisdom from the world's far corners. Birds of death, ravens are often described as feeding on corpses in skaldic poetry; they appear on battle standards to convey to enemies that they themselves will soon be raven-food.<sup>33</sup> Similarly, Odin's wolves Geri (Greedy) and Freki (Ravenous) stalk the soaked battlefields for corpses to devour.<sup>34</sup> Odin has an eight-footed horse, Sleipnir, son of Loki when he took mare-form and the stallion Svaðilfari, owned by the giant builder of Ásgarðr; as *The Prose Edda* puts it in *Gylfaginning*, "The names of the horses of the gods are as follows: Sleipnir is the best; Óðin owns him, he has eight legs."<sup>35</sup> His multiple legs may derive from an iconographic device to represent equine swiftness, such as appear on the stones of Alkskog Tjängvide, Ardre I and VIII, and Lärbro Tängelgårdar I and II in Gotland.<sup>36</sup> Sleipnir carried Odin's son Hermodr to Hel, the world of the dead, to demand the return of Baldr.<sup>37</sup> Odin possesses a spear, Gungnir, which strikes at whatever he aims. On his arm he wears a golden ring, the precious Draupnir, which every nine nights generates eight more rings just as magnificent.

Adam of Bremen glosses his mention of the god Wodan with the word "furore."<sup>38</sup> The name of Old German Wōtan/Norse Óðinn derives from the proto-Germanic *Wōðanaz* < \**Wātónos*.<sup>39</sup> The root is expressed in the Gothic *wōths* "possessed," and the Old Norse *óðr*, "raging, raving, possessed." In German these words are connected to the verb *wüten*, "to rage"; Odin is *wütendes Heer*, leading his raging army. Odin is the god of war, but in a special sense; he is the dispenser of a kind of warlike ecstasy. Norse poetic kennings for battle are "Odin's Tempest," the "Ygg's Game," "Odin's Fire." Dumézil ties his name to "drunkenness, excitation, poetic genius," citing the Old English *wōð*, meaning "chant."<sup>40</sup>

In fact, Odin was believed to lead a special group of soldiers of fortune who dedicated themselves to him. In *Ynglingasaga* 6, Snorri Sturulson says that Odin's men shunned mailcoats and "were mad as dogs or wolves," "bit their shields," and "were as strong as bears or bulls. They slew men, and neither fire nor iron bit

on them. This is called going berserk (*berserksgangr*).<sup>41</sup> In Book 7 of Saxo Grammaticus’s *Gesta Danorum*, the berserk Harthben swallows live coals and murders six of his own men.

Dead Odinic warriors (*einherjar*) were entertained in *Valhöll* (hall of the slain) where they were waited upon by the valkyries (choosers of the slain), who bound those preselected for death in battle (*herfjöturr*, “host fetter”) and brought in new dead from the field. Odin tried to surround himself with as many slain heroes as possible for the final eschatological battle against the enemies of gods and humans, many of whom had lain in wait since the beginning of time.<sup>42</sup> With his ghoulish host, Odin sought to stave off the Ragnarök, nevertheless knowing from the seeress whom he awoke from her grave at the gates of Hel to learn the fate of Baldr, and whose prophecies comprise *Völuspá*, that his efforts would be futile. The gods would die and the world would sink beneath the cosmic ocean from whence it was originally raised.

The antiquity of the worship of Odin in Scandinavia is much disputed. In 98 C.E., Tacitus writes in *Germania* 9 of the Germanic tribes that *deorum maxime Mercurium colunt* (“of the gods they worship Mercury most”). Most scholars identify the god Mercurius with the German \*Wōdan(az), especially as he is the recipient of human sacrifice, and we have noted Dumézil’s belief that \*Wōdan(az) represented the magical aspects of Indo-European divine sovereignty, as the counterpart of the Vedic Varuṇa.<sup>43</sup> Except for Tacitus’s account, we have only one other report of a pagan offering to Wodan, in the *Vita Columbani* (640 C.E.). Mercurius receives dedications on inscriptions in Roman-occupied German territory, but Mercurius was also used in Latin to designate the Celtic battle god Lug.

Was the worship of Odin a relatively late phenomenon in Scandinavia? Some contend that the cult reached the north around 200–400 C.E., and spread north. Others say that Odin was little known before the Viking Age.<sup>44</sup> The Danish archaeologist Karl Nikolai Henry Petersen (1849–1896) claimed that the legends of Odin’s migration north were true, and that the god was a late-comer.<sup>45</sup> He also proposed that the legendary warfare between the rival tribes of gods, the Æsir and the Vanir, reflected the struggle of an older, more naturalistic cult and a later, invasive cult (a similar exegesis to the one that was applied to the conflict between the Erinyes and the gods of Olympus in Aeschylus’s *Oresteia*).<sup>46</sup> Karl Helm has followed Petersen, calling Tacitus’s statement a generalization of a religion practiced by only a portion of the Germanic territory, whereas the cult of the sky god \*Tīw(az) was prominent elsewhere.<sup>47</sup> Helm claims that Odin was not Germanic in origin but rather Roman or Byzantine, his premise being that the Germans did not have a single king but were divided and thus could not have conceived of a sovereign deity; they could only reflect the monarchies of neighboring kingdoms—thus Tacitus’s Mercurius. Dumézil, a sponsor of Odinic antiquity and autochthony, refutes this, pointing out that the Vedic tribes were as divided as the Germans, attributing no more power to their kings; yet they had a single, sovereign deity, Varuṇa.<sup>48</sup>

Odinic place-names are unevenly distributed, concentrating in Denmark and southeastern Sweden, especially Gotland. Such names are far less common

in Norway, where there are only twelve place names, mostly in the southeast, with “Óðin-”; middle and northern Sweden appears to be similarly free of Odin-worship.<sup>49</sup> Turville-Petre has suggested that where military chiefs prevailed, so did the cult of Odin. In Iceland and southwestern Norway, where loyalties grew from blood-relationship, the social contract focused on a hereditary agricultural aristocracy—prominent farming families whose values lay in kinship and independence from kings. There, Thor, Njord, and Frey were venerated, although the place-names of fertility gods are as prevalent in Sweden as in Norway. According to this theory, Odin was the sponsor of men without land or family ties, dastardly heroes like Harthben and Starkaðr and brutal kings caught up in intrigues of vengeance.<sup>50</sup> Norway was violently united by Haraldr Finehair and his son Eiríkr Bloodaxe in the ninth and tenth centuries. The kings seized hereditary estates; all farmers were obliged to be tenants of the crown. Many fled to Iceland, emigrating to preserve their traditional way of life and rule by leading farmers, independent of kings and central government. They lost no love for Odin. Strangely, the chief sources about Odin are mostly written in Icelandic, even though his cult is not attested in Iceland. This may be because as the god of poets, Odin comes to us mainly through poetry.<sup>51</sup>

Odin is restless, insatiably curious, a strategist rather than a champion, a morbid and often utterly deceptive god. Unlike his son Thor, popular with the peasants who continued to wear his hammer as an amulet around their necks long after the advent of Christianity, Odin did not protect common humanity; and unlike Frey, he did not promote the growth and harvest of crops. Like his worshipers, he was a berserk. Because of Odin’s ascendancy in the Viking Age, Dumézil despaired of Scandinavian religion: “In vain do the Scandinavian gods punish sacrilege and perjury, avenge violated peace or scorned law. No one incarnates in *pure*, exemplary fashion those absolute values that a society, even hypocritically, needs to shelter under high patronage. No divinity is any longer the refuge of the ideal, or even of hope. What divine society has gained in effectiveness, it has lost in moral and mystical power. It is now no more than the exact projections of the bands or the terrestrial states whose only concern it is to gain or overcome.”<sup>52</sup> Ironically, Odin does incarnate in *pure*, exemplary fashion a paradigmatic ritual—his autosacrifice. That is perfectly accomplished, although ultimately ineffective in staving off the jaws of Fenrir and the destruction of the entire generation of gods—a battle written in fate as its name suggests, its outcome inevitable.

### God of the Spear; “God of the Hanged”: Sacrifice to Odin

We have seen how in *Hávamál* Odin sacrifices himself in a particular way—wounded by his own spear, and hung on a tree. In fact, in so doing, Odin reiterates the forms of his own cult. For he himself requires and even causes the sacrificial deaths of human beings, by spear and by gallows; and he himself endures a god-sized death, whether real or initiatory, by magical spear and timeless gallows. His truest face, then, may be the fearsome carved head in the

stave church at Hegge, Norway (Catalogue no. O-2; Fig. 67). One-eyed, his outstretched tongue hangs from his mouth: He is the hanged god.

That this type of sacrifice was Odin’s, and was not a mythical but a historically realized cult practice, is demonstrable from contemporaneous stone and story. And as the story of Víkarr shows from the fourteenth-century *Gautreks saga*, the innocence or guilt of his victims was of no consequence to the *hangaguð*. For Odin loved the slaughtered, especially the pierced and the hanged, for reasons of his own: They were privy to esoteric wisdom, the awe-ful wisdom of the dead.

Historical testimony indicates that the style of Odinic sacrifice was, in fact, unique to him within Germanic religion, just as maenadic dance belonged to Dionysos and the slaughter of pigs to Demeter. Literary and archaeological sources show that normal Germanic sacrificial ritual primarily revolved around libation and communal sacrificial meals.<sup>53</sup> To execute normal sacrifice was *at blóta*; the offering was called *blót*. The highly restricted term for sacrificial blood was *hlaut*. Animals were slaughtered with a sword or an axe; their blood was collected in a sacred vessel. It was there either examined by augurs, who from it divined the future,<sup>54</sup> or else it was sprinkled over the participants or on divine emblems, such as the carved limbs and tree stumps like those found in bogs in northern Germany and Denmark. Horses, cattle, pigs, sheep, and dogs were sacrificed.<sup>55</sup> The meat of sacrificed animals was cooked, some for the gods, the rest for the participants.<sup>56</sup>



FIGURE 67. Wooden carved head from the stave church at Hegge, Norway, thirteenth century C.E. Probably the one-eyed god Odin with his strangling tongue: “Lord of the Hanged.”

Snorri Sturluson's description of a communal sacrifice in Trondheim, Norway, in chapter 14 of the *Saga of Hákon the Good* (*Heimskringla*) is perhaps the most complete remaining to us.<sup>57</sup> "It was an old custom, when sacrificial offerings were to be made, that all the farmers should gather at the spot where the *hof* lay, bringing with them supplies of food sufficient for the entire period of the festival." The passage describes the slaughter of a large number of horses, cattle, and "lesser animals." The blood (*hlaut*) that flowed was collected in bowls, and a brush or broom was used to sprinkle the blood on the inner and outer walls of the temple and on the assembled male congregation.<sup>58</sup> The animal meat was boiled in suspended cauldrons over fires built in the middle of the floor. The sacrificial cup was passed over the fire; the man who had given the sacrifice would consecrate (*signa*) this as well as the sacrificial food. A toast was first drunk to Odin for victory, then toasts to Njorð and Frey for a bountiful harvest and for peace. A toast was drunk to the memory (*minni*) of deceased kinsmen.<sup>59</sup>

Solemn feasts were celebrated every nine years, in multiple blood sacrifices; for the number nine, far from being explicably sacred as a multiple of the Jewish and Christian three days of resurrection or trinitarian preoccupations, was always especially charged in Germanic religion.<sup>60</sup> Thietmar of Merseburg, writing in the year 1000 C.E., tells us about Denmark's principal temple at Leire: The Danes sacrificed each ninth year ninety-nine human beings and the same number of horses and dogs.<sup>61</sup> Nine, the number of nights Odin hangs upon the World Tree, is also a number of power in Siberian and other circum-polar forms of shamanism, and, as we shall see, this cultural matrix, an "ensouled world," as Neil Price calls it, has had as much if not more influence upon Viking religion and myth as the Celto-Germanic traditions in their Scandinavian form.<sup>62</sup>

Classical authors frequently refer to human sacrifice among the continental Germans.<sup>63</sup> In the same passage mentioned above (*Germania* 9), Tacitus remarks that although the Germanic gods Hercules and Mars could be appeased with animal sacrifice, Mercurius (Wodan) required human sacrifice. In *Germania* 39, Tacitus describes a sacred grove established by the Semnones, the elite of the tribe of the Sūebi (modern *Schwaben*), where gruesome human sacrifice occurred.<sup>64</sup> According to Tacitus, anyone entering the grove had to be bound with a chain in deference to the ruling god there (*regnator omnium deus*).<sup>65</sup> Wodan must be the candidate of choice for this deity, given the god's propensity for fetters, including the *herfjoturr* with which he binds his enemies with panic,<sup>66</sup> and especially the "fetter grove" (*fjoturlundr*) where Dagr slew Halgi with a spear that Odin lent him.<sup>67</sup> Procopius (*De Bello Gothico* II.14.15) says of the men of Thule that they offered the first victim taken in battle to Ares.<sup>68</sup> Not only was the sacrifice bloody but men of Thule would also hang the victim on a tree, or cast him among thorns. Jordanes (*Gelta* V), like Procopius writing in the sixth century C.E., relates that the Goths sacrificed prisoners of war to Mars, believing that the god of war needed human blood.<sup>69</sup>

As Germanic religion evolved in Scandinavia, accounts of human sacrifice persisted.<sup>70</sup> A relationship between royal life and fertility is implied; there are

stories of kings who were on rare occasion sacrificed *til groðrar* (for growth) at the harvest. *Ynglingasaga* tells us that when the crops failed, the Swedes slaughtered their king Dómalði, and smeared their altars with his blood.<sup>71</sup> *Guta saga*, a thirteenth-century history of the Gotlanders, mentions that the landowners of Gotland used to sacrifice their sons and daughters as well as their cattle.<sup>72</sup>

Human sacrifice by hanging is a recurrent theme in the sources.<sup>73</sup> From the time of Tacitus on, there has been a literary and iconographic tradition of designated sacred groves for death by hanging outside enclosed walls or formal sanctuaries. The existence of open-air sacrificial groves, albeit only yielding animal osteological remains in this case, was corroborated in the mid-1980s by excavations beneath the floor of a medieval church on the island of Frösö in the Storsjö lake near Östersund in Sweden. The Frösö church excavation revealed the decayed remains of a birch tree deliberately felled sometime in the eleventh century and, scattered in a nine-meter radius outward from the tree trunk, a large assemblage of bones from mostly game animals such as bears, and the heads of elks, stags, reindeer, sheep, pigs, and cows slaughtered, apparently, while the tree was still standing, up through the tenth century.<sup>74</sup> It is not certain that all the victims who swung from a tree were actually executed by the noose. Both the descriptions of Procopius and the account of Adam of Bremen from around 1070 C.E. suggest that their precious blood was sprinkled before they were strung up; the hanging would occur after they were dead.<sup>75</sup>

We know that both animal and human victims could be thrown over cliffs. In the Icelandic *Hrafnkels saga* (VI), the horse Freyfraxi is pushed over a cliff into a pool below by his owner, who says, “It is right that he who owns him should receive him.”<sup>76</sup> When acceptance of Christianity was debated at the Icelandic Althingi in the year 1000, adherents of the Christian party complained that the “heathen sacrifice the worst men,” hurling them over rocks or cliffs (*Gautreks saga* I–II reports that men and women of Gautland would throw themselves over the family cliff in times of famine, believing that they would go to Valhöll “Great Assembly”).<sup>77</sup>

This phrase about “heathen sacrifice” focuses a crucial debate in Germanic studies: Did human sacrifice exist at all, and if it did, was it only the *worst* men who were sacrificed? Inland bodies of water and bogs, which due to an age of cremation have yielded far more sacrificial offerings than graves, offer confusing testimony. The bogs have offered up an array of jewelry, and from the Iron Age, the gods were presented with gifts of food, especially gruel in containers.<sup>78</sup> Animal remains abound: numerous horses and dogs, who played a major role in funerals. There can be no doubt that these were ritually sacrificed, in that certain body parts were consistently missing.

However, human remains have been found in two different contexts in the bogs. The first type of victims, mainly women and children, were found in sacrificial sites together with other evidence of sacrifice—such as at Oberdorla, where wooden idols and numerous animal bones are found besides human remains.<sup>79</sup> These must surely be sacrifices. But those who are found in isolation present a problem: Are we dealing with sacrifice or “sacral execution”? The question of to what extent the death penalty originated in human sacrifice has

been much debated by scholars of ancient Germanic law.<sup>80</sup> Tacitus, in *Germania* 19, says that young women found guilty of adultery by the tribes had their hair cut off and were stripped naked and flogged out of the community. This is how the naked body of a young girl from Windeby, found in the peat of Domland south of Eckernförde in Schleswig, now in the Landesmuseum in Schloß Gottorp, has been interpreted—blindfolded, one side of her head shaved, with a collar of ox-hide around her neck; the “excommunication” described by Tacitus seems to have been extended to capital punishment. Far more ambiguous is the detached and probably severed head of a man, rope still in place around his neck, discovered in the peat bog at Tollund, Denmark, who died by strangling during the Migration Period (third to sixth century C.E.). Does this represent a Germanic or a Celtic victim? A criminal or a sacrificial execution? Was the strange gruel he consumed before he was hanged a ritual meal? Why was he hanged and then decapitated?<sup>81</sup>

Let us return to Odinic sacrifice and to the spear, Odin’s favorite weapon. His spear Gungnir was forged by dwarfs (*Skáldskaparmál* 44). The poet Egill called him “Lord of the Spear” (*geirs dróttin*).<sup>82</sup> Hence, to have a spear thrown over one’s head or to be marked with a spear was to be dedicated to Odin. In *Völuspá* 24, Odin himself hurls his own spear to open the hostilities between Æsir and Vanir, thus consecrating the battle-dead to himself. And so, too, on the mortal plane, a Viking warrior could devote the entire legion of the opposing enemy to Odin by hurling a spear over their heads with the words, “Odin possess you all!”<sup>83</sup> As is so often implied in the Greek *Iliad*, especially when a god is involved directly in the battle, death becomes, in this way, sacrificial death.

The spear not only whistles over the heads of those whom Odin chooses; it pierces their flesh. In order to gain the hope of Valhøll, to “go to Odin,” one had to mark oneself before death with the god’s sign—that is, receive a ceremonial cut from the point of a spear, thus symbolically avoiding a natural death.<sup>84</sup> In chapter 9 of *Ynglingasaga*, where the euhemerized Odin is a mortal king of the Swedes, he has himself marked with a spear point so that he would go directly to the world of the gods (*Godheimr*). Later, the god Njord also dies of disease, but lets himself be wounded for dedication to Odin before he dies. Odin’s ritual action on Yggdrasill is thus illumined. “It was appropriate that Odin, as he hung on the tree, should be stabbed with his own weapon.”<sup>85</sup> In a pattern that we have already observed, since the spear belongs to Odin, so does the sacrificial wounding by the spear. The spear wound “belongs” to Odin and thus he inflicts it *on himself for himself*.

An equally efficient but even worthier form of Odinic sacrifice was death by hanging oneself; the hero Hadingus did this.<sup>86</sup> Again, the familiar hermeneutical paradox emerges: Although historians of religion might perceive that in the myth the chief of the gods emulates human cult practice, the Norse saw such suicide as emulation of Odin’s sacred act. A poet of the mid-tenth century called Odin “lord of the gallows” (*gálga valdr*)<sup>87</sup> and “god of the hanged” (*hangatýr, hangagoð*).<sup>88</sup> But the skalds also knew him as a victim of the gallows; he was called Hangi (the hanged)<sup>89</sup> and “the load of the gallows.”<sup>90</sup> The center panel of a

memorial stone from Lärbro Stora Hammars in Gotland shows a warrior about to be traditionally hanged from a tree (no. O-3; Fig. 68). The twisted knot of triangles floating in the air is associated with Odin, like Varuṇa, the god of fetters and bonds. An eagle, which along with the raven was often associated with Odin’s cult, descends from the sky.

For Odin there are no scruples concerning guilt or innocence of his victims. The most important, and most horrifying, account which we have of his cult concerns the highest possible human sacrifice, that of a king—an innocent king. It is the story of the hero Starkaðr’s sacrifice of King Víkarr to Odin, found in chapter 7 of *Gautreks saga*, from the fourteenth century.<sup>91</sup>

The legendary champion Starkaðr son of Stórvíkr, descended from giants and one of Odin’s favorites, was the foster brother of King Víkarr of Agðir in southwest Norway. Starkaðr and Víkarr were great friends, and had exchanged gifts. Víkarr helped Starkaðr to gain vengeance on Herthjófr, who had carried him away from his home. One day Víkarr, sailing from Agðir to Hǫrðaland, was



FIGURE 68. Carved stone monument from Lärbro parish, Stora Hammars I, Gotland, Sweden, eighth century C.E. Center panel: warrior about to be hanged from a tree as a sacrifice to Odin. Odin’s eagle and twisted knot of triangles are depicted.



becalmed with his men off an island. As Pálsson and Edwards render the story, “They tried divination to find out when the wind would be favourable and were told Odin expected a human sacrifice from the army, the victim to be chosen by lot. So they drew lots throughout the army and every time, King Vikar’s lot came up. They were all very shaken by this, and it was decided that all their leading men should have a meeting the following day to consider the problem.”<sup>92</sup>

Starkaðr was awakened the same night by his foster-father Hrosshársgrani (Horse-hair-bearded), who rowed him in the dark to a neighboring island. There the hero encountered eleven men sitting on chairs. As Hrosshársgrani sat down in the empty twelfth chair, others greeted him by the name of Odin. Starkaðr understood that he was in the presence of the assembly of the gods. He was then condemned with conflicting destinies by the assembly of gods. Thor, who had been rejected by Starkaðr’s father’s mother for a giant, said that the hero’s race would die with him; Odin, to counter Thor’s curse, gave him three lifespans. Thor cursed him to do a dastardly deed during each one of those spans. Odin said Starkaðr would have splendid weapons and treasures in plenty; Thor said he would never own land. Odin gave Starkaðr the gift of poetry, creating verse as easily as normal speech; Thor swore that he would not remember a line of his verse. Odin said that his protégé would be prized by noble men; Thor, that he would be despised by the commonality.<sup>93</sup> As Hrosshársgrani and Starkaðr returned to their boat, they took up the question of the sacrifice of Vikarr.

“Then you will send King Vikar to me,” said Grani Horsehair. “I’ll tell you how to go about it.”

Starkad agreed, and Grani Horsehair gave him a spear which he said would appear to be only a reed-stalk. Then they joined the rest of the army, just a little before daybreak.

In the morning the king’s counselors held a meeting to discuss their plans. They agreed that they would have to hold a mock sacrifice, and Starkad told them how to set about it. There was a pine tree nearby and close to it a tall tree trunk. The pine tree had a slender branch just above the ground, but stretching up into the foliage. Just then the servants were making breakfast. A calf had been slaughtered and its entrails cleaned out. Starkad asked for the guts, then climbed up the trunk, bent down the slender branch and tied the calf guts around it.

“Your gallows is ready for you now, my lord,” he said to King Vikar, “and it doesn’t seem too dangerous. Come over here and I’ll put a noose round your neck.”

“If this contraption isn’t any more dangerous than it looks,” said the king, “then it can’t do me much harm. But if things turn out otherwise, it’s in the hands of fate.”

After that he climbed up the stump. Starkad put the noose round his neck and climbed down. Then he stabbed the king with the reed-stalk. “Now I give you to Odin,” he said.

At that Starkaðr let loose the branch. The reed-stalk turned into a spear which pierced the king, the tree stump slipped from under his feet, the calf guts turned into a strong withy, the branch shot up with the king into the foliage, and there he died. Ever since, that place has been known as Vikarsholmar.<sup>94</sup>

Starkaðr had accomplished the first of his dastardly acts. In remorse, he fled Hǫrðaland to Uppsala, where he served the Yngling kings Alrekr and Eiríkr. He grew moody and silent.

The parallels between the horrible story of Víkarr—in which the god ensures that he will not be denied his chosen victim—and that of Odin in agony upon Yggdrasil are clear. Both victims, human and divine, are simultaneously stabbed with a spear and hanged in a tree. The verb *gefa*, mentioned at the beginning, is the operant sacrificial term of dedication in both accounts. Odin says he was “given to Odin, myself to myself” (*gefinn Óðni, sjálfr sjálfum mer*). Starkaðr says, as he lunges at his king, “Now I give you to Odin” (*nú gef ek þik Óðni*).<sup>95</sup> The Víkarr story is germane to our inquiry in that it shows how and why Odin is sacrificed as he is. As Turville-Petre writes, “the highest sacrifice to Óðinn of which we have read in this world was that of King Víkarr, for not only was he hanged and pierced, but he was also a king. But a still higher sacrifice must be that of the king of the gods, swinging in the wind from a tree and gashed with a spear.”<sup>96</sup> The god’s story has become the founding sacrifice; the story itself derives from cultic reality, the practiced sacrifice. However, within the framework of religious understanding, the cultic reality is aetiologically anchored in the distant past, a divine precedent.

### The Gallows: The World Tree

The Lärbro Stora Hammars stone shows its victim hanging from a tree. Like Víkarr, Odin hung from a tree and not a gibbet. But Odin’s gallows was the World Tree. Yggdrasil, the primordial cosmic axis, is called an ash in the poems, although it also seems to have qualities of the sacred evergreen, the yew; it supports the worlds of the universe, which number, according to varying traditions, three or nine. In his 1996 study on the world pillar in circumpolar religions, Åke Hulthkrantz presents the main shared features of this archetype:

[T]he world tree, a symbolic representation of the sacred centre of the world, . . . an axis that measures the three main rooms of the world (and their subdivisions in a great plurality of rooms): heaven, earth, and the underworld. The tree runs through all these worlds, and is a means of communications between them, sued by spirits and shamans. In Siberia shamans may have their own trees which are representatives of this world tree, and which they may climb. Sometimes the tree is marked to indicate seven, nine, or up to thirty levels in the sky. . . . The tree is often crowned by a bird, usually an eagle

(like the Russian imperial double eagle in Siberia, the thunderbird in North America).<sup>97</sup>

According to *The Poetic Edda's Grímnismál* (st. 31), the roots of Yggdrasil reach into three worlds: Jötunheimr, the home of the giants; *Hel*, the realm of the dead; and Miðgarðr, the human dwelling-place, created by the gods for people from the eyebrows of the primal giant Ymir.<sup>98</sup> Snorri Sturluson offers a different version in *Gylfaginning*, chapter 15, where he says that the tree has one root in the sky, among the Æsir, in their home Ásgarðr, where Valhøll was also found. Ásgarðr is connected with the earth by the rainbow bridge Bifröst, guarded by the mysterious god Heimdallr, whose name also means "Pillar of the Earth." The guards travel over Bifröst to hold their daily courts at the earth's center under the boughs of Yggdrasil.<sup>99</sup> Wrapped around the World Tree's trunk, the serpent of Miðgarðr supports the cosmic structure, biting its own tail (*Gylfaginning* ch. 34). If the serpent were to free himself, the universe would collapse.

Beneath one of its roots is Mímir's well, the well of wisdom, where Odin's eye was left on deposit. There is the well of fate (Urðarbrunnr), guarded by the three Norns called Urðr, Verðandi, and Skuld (Fated, Happening, and What Will Be). The Norns pour mud and water from the Well of Fate on Yggdrasil's roots. Under another root is a third well, Hvergelmir (Roaring Kettle?).<sup>100</sup> Yggdrasil is populated with other symbolic creatures: An eagle, "Swallower of Corpses," lives at the top of the tree in the northern sky, and, via a squirrel who runs up and down the trunk, exchanges scathing messages with the serpent Níðhoggr, who lies coiled in its bottom roots.<sup>101</sup> It is not only Odin who suffers in the *Hávamál*; the tree from which he hangs undergoes unceasing torment. Despite its antiquity and centrality, Yggdrasil is "the ever-perishing tree."<sup>102</sup> *Grímnismál* says,

The ash Yggdrasil endures hardship  
More than men can know,  
The hart bites its crown, its sides decay,  
The serpent Nidhogg tears its roots.

At Ragnarøk, Níðhoggr will escape and devour Thor. Yggdrasil will shudder and creak.

That the episode of Odin's suspension in the World Tree was not an isolated or obscure myth in the Scandinavian hoard is clear from the very name of that tree. "Yggdrasil" is a poetic kenning. It literally means "Horse of Yggr" (Yggr, "the Terrible; the Inspirer of Awe," is one of Odin's many names; *drasil*, a common poetic word for "horse"). "Horse" was itself a common moniker of the gallows; hanged mortals were said to "ride" it. So the earthly gallows is often called, in a kenning, "Sigarr's horse" (*Sigars jór*), alluding to the legend of Sigarr who hanged his daughter's lover, Hagbarðr. Men swing on the gallows, the verb *riða* meaning either "to ride" or "to swing." So Sigvatr said, in a lay in memory of St. Óláfr, "men ride to the world of death on Sigarr's horse."<sup>103</sup> Yggdrasil is thus "the gallows of Odin," which he rides by hanging upon it unto death. Odin's gallows is no less than the center-beam of the world.

As a transmondial pillar, Yggdrasill is far from unique, as Neil Price observes, since “the idea of a number of layered realms of existence linked by a single axle is found in many northern aspects,”<sup>104</sup> from the Finno-Ugrian cultures of the Baltic to Finland to Siberia, with relationships to the Cane-of-the-Sky in Northwestern Canadian mythologies. “In Eurasian belief the tree is the medium by which the shaman travels from one world to another, climbing its trunk to another plane of existence. Sometimes each world has its own tree . . . in examples with a single tree, the roots become especially important, and it is these that the shaman follows on his or her journeys.”<sup>105</sup> And it is indeed at Yggdrasill’s roots, extending into all of the extraterrestrial worlds, that the primordial shaman Odin searches for the runes, runes that when cut and colored can make dead men walk and talk, as in *Hávamál* 157:

That twelfth I know,            if on tree I see  
    a hanged one hoisted on high:  
 Thus I write                    and the runes I stain  
    that down he drops  
    and tells me his tale.<sup>106</sup>

The implications of Yggdrasill in relationship to its “family tree” for the exegesis of the *Hávamál* episode are clear: It is not the Christian crucifix, but rather a cosmic conduit of communication between worlds whose heritage and features are central to many circumpolar religions, intimately bound up with shamanic ordeal, initiation, and access to supernatural realms of knowledge.

### Master of the Runes and Mantic Wisdom

The aspect of the gnomic account of the self-immolation of Odin upon Yggdrasill that is perhaps the most powerful countertype to the passion narrative of Jesus is not a particular cultic feature but rather its voluntary nature. In both cases, the divine figure autonomously offers himself up for an ultimate purpose. Christ surrenders himself to God, his father, whom liturgical tradition addresses in the Eucharistic rite: “He stretched out his arms upon the cross, and offered himself, in obedience to your will, a perfect sacrifice for the whole world.”<sup>107</sup> Jesus offers himself to God for the sake of the whole world, and in one predominating strand of meaning, to atone for its sins as a blood-sacrifice after the prototype of the Paschal lamb.

But what of Odin? The Norse god not only endures as a victim but himself inaugurates the nine nights’ ordeal on Yggdrasill. Like Christ, he is sacrificer and sacrificed. Yet the *Hávamál* passage makes clear Odin’s motives, which are quite different from those of Christ. There can be no doubt that the Norse understanding of sacrifice was a classic one: *do ut des*. *Hávamál* 145 says that a gift always looks for its return, warning that it is wise not to pester the gods with too much sacrifice. Odin, too, looks for his return in his autosacrifice.

A relentless seeker after occult wisdom, Yggr hung on his tree-horse in order to “grasp the runes.” And he succeeded. After nine nights of fasting and

suffering, he gained the magical runes and their associated knowledge, not only for himself but also for human beings. The letters of the runic alphabet are known as the creation of Odin, who according to the historicizing narrative of chapters 6–7 of the *Ynglingasaga*, is the master of all magic.<sup>108</sup> “When Ása-Óthin came to the Northlands, and the *díar* with him, they introduced and taught the skills practiced by men for a long time afterwards. . . . [H]e knew the arts by which he could shift appearance and body any way he wished . . . [H]e spoke so well and so smoothly that all who heard him believed all he said was true. All he spoke was in rimes, as is now the case in what is called skaldship. He and his temple priests are called songsmiths, because the art began with them in the northern lands.”<sup>109</sup>

Odin’s myths show him to be consistently willing to pay a terrific price for what he desperately wants. Odin is one-eyed because he wished to drink the mead of the wellspring of the god Mímir and was forced to leave his eye on deposit (*Gylfaginning* ch. 15). According to the *Heimskringla* (*Ynglingasaga* 4), Odin embalmed with herbs the head of Mímir, which the Vanir had severed in anger, to keep it as an oracle. *Ynglingasaga* 7 gives a kind of shamanic aretology of Odin: “Óðinn had with him Mímir’s head, and it told him many tidings from other worlds; and at times he would wake up dead men out of the ground or sit beneath the hanged; from this he was called Lord of Ghosts or Lord of the Hanged. He had two ravens, which he had endowed with the power of speech; they flew far over the land and told him many tidings. In this way he became very wise. And all these skills he taught with runes and those chants [*ljód*] that are called *galdrar*; because of this the *Æsir* are called *galdrasmíðr* [workers of magic].”<sup>110</sup> There are known to have been two kinds of magic in the Scandinavian world: *galdr*, which were spells or incantations, just mentioned, and *seiðr*, a kind of shamanistic spell that enables the practitioner to journey to distant countries in another shape while the body remains unchanged, as well as affording divinatory powers.<sup>111</sup> It is of no small import to the issues we are considering in this chapter that the ritualistic complexes of both blood sacrifice and *seiðr* have their origins among the gods, in the person of the great goddess Freyja: “The daughter of Njǫrðr was Freyja; she was a *blótgyðja* [priestess of sacrifices]; she was the first to teach *seiðr* to the *Æsir*, as it was practiced among the Vanir.”<sup>112</sup>

But it is the warrior god Odin who continues to practice *seiðr*, this toxic art taught to the gods by a goddess, and then to women; it is Odin who is most intensely identified with it: “Óðinn knew the skill from which follows the greatest power, and which he performed himself, which is called *seiðr*. By means of it he could know the futures of men and that which had not yet happened, and also cause death or misfortune or sickness, as well as take men’s wits or strength from them and give it to others.”<sup>113</sup>

“But,” *Ynglingasaga* warns,

this sorcery brings with it so much *ergi* [wickedness] that manly men thought it shameful to perform, and so this skill was taught to priestesses [*gyðjur*]. . . . Óðinn knew everything about treasures hidden in

the earth, where they were concealed, and he knew such chants [*ljód*] that would open up for him the earth and mountains and stones and burial mounds, and with words alone he bound those who dwelled in them, and went in and took what he wanted. . . . Most of these skills he taught to those in charge of the sacrifices [*blótgoði*]; they were next to him in magical knowledge [*fróðleikr*] and sorcery [*fjǫlkyngi*]. But many others learned much of it, and for this reason sorcery [*fjǫlkyngi*] was widespread and continued for a long time.<sup>114</sup>

Like the fallen angels of the apocryphal Jewish mystical text I Enoch, Odin is thus the divine source on earth of “dark arts,” and their teacher to humankind. Furthermore, as such he transgresses gender boundaries, being the supreme master of a web of skills so nefarious that it can only be taught to women, as it would sully the honor and manliness of any man. According to stanzas 148–163 of *Hávamál*, Odin can cast many spells that cure sickness, stop misdeeds as they fly, scatter witches, inspire hopeless love, and so forth.

The wisdom for which Odin performs his autosacrifice is that which is refracted through poetry, the skill of the bards. In the episode of his hanging from the World Tree, the high god learned nine mighty songs (*galdrar*, the magical chants mentioned in *Ynglingasaga* 7) from the son of *Bólthórr*. He got a drink of the “precious mead,” that of poetry. Poetic genius is dependent on Odin, who is its source. It was he who boldly stole the mead of poetry from another world, made of the blood of the divinely created giant *Kvasir*, through a series of theriomorphic antics.<sup>115</sup> Odin’s patronage of poetry, as we have said, may already be implicit in his name, if *Dumézil* is correct in translating the Old Norse term *óðr* as “inspired mental activity” beyond just reasoning intelligence.<sup>116</sup> The Germanic \**Wodan[az]* would then mean “master of inspiration.” As we have seen in *Ynglingasaga* 6, Odin himself spoke in rhymes.

The *rúnar* that Odin grasps in *Hávamál* 139 are almost certainly the runic letters and their attendant magical force; over 5,000 runic inscriptions have been found, including some with pictorial scenes from Odin’s lethal battle with the wolf *Fenrir* at the *Ragnarök*. It has been suggested that *rúnar* comes from \**rūnō*, a hypothetical Germanic word meaning “magic secret,” which also presumably generated the word *raunen*, “to whisper.”<sup>117</sup> This is a derivation similar to the word “mysteries” and “myth” from the Greek *μύω*, “to close one’s lips or eyes”—the runes would then bear in their name the thought of a covert message. However, *Richard Morris* argues for a suggestion made a century ago, whereby *rún* may be related to dialect terms for “cut.”<sup>118</sup>

As archaeological evidence now seems to show, runes were used not only for magic (hence inscribed in media such as stone that would survive) but also for trade and other everyday use, as the excavations of the wharf area in *Bergen* show. Their magico-religious use remains unclear; they may have been used for healing as well as for incantation. The signs used for divination in *Tacitus’s* account of the first century C.E. (*Germania* 10) may already have been runes.<sup>119</sup> He reports that from a number of sticks from a nut-bearing tree, scored with special signs and held in a white cloth, three were selected.

The oracle's meaning was derived from the signs scored on the three chosen sticks by a priest if the issue was public in nature, and by the head of the household if it was private.

The runes may have their origin in Denmark, although most runologists look to the classical alphabets of the Mediterranean.<sup>120</sup> There is no evidence of the earliest runic development; some linguists believe that they must have been invented quickly by an individual or a group. The twenty-four-character runic alphabet, divided into three groups of eight, was called the *futhark* after the first six. Runes can be documented as early as 200 C.E., with the earliest runic inscriptions appear on small objects such as spearheads, buckles, amulets, and horns. By the fourth century C.E., they were being chiseled on stone, especially in Norway. They were in use for over a millennium.

But for the early Scandinavians, the runes came from the gods, as stated by the Swedish stone of Noleby, carved around 600 C.E. Runic inscriptions do not mention Odin as the inventor of runes, as does the poetry of *Hávamál* 138–139 and *Sigrífumál* 3. However, he is the supreme magician of Old Norse religion; the runes, whenever they were invented, would surely have almost immediately been gathered into his domain.<sup>121</sup> For the skalds themselves, the story of Odin's discovery and appropriation of the wondrous runes extended the umbrella of his theurgical patronage. It thus enhanced the power whence the poets derived their authority. Small wonder that the story of Odin's howling grasp of the runes is known only in ancient poetic lays.

### The Fruits of Sacrifice: Access to the Wisdom of the Dead

The runes are found below; Odin must look downward (*niðr*) to seize them. They are the treasure of the underworld, where the unknown roots of Yggdrasill run. In grasping the runes, Odin gains another, greater prize: the wisdom of the dead. He cannot leave them alone. In *Baldr's Dreams* (*Baldrs Draumar*), an elaboration of the Baldr episode in the *Völupsa*, he wakes the "hoary seeress" to find out what she can tell him of the horrible future of his son:

Then Óthin rode        to the eastern gate,  
Where the hoary seeress'    howe [mound = grave] he knew,  
There spells he chanted    to charm up the dead,  
Till unwilling arose       the witch and spake:

What man is this,        to me unknown,  
Who maketh me fare       such fear-fraught ways?  
Was I buried in snow     and beaten by rain  
And drenched with dew,    dead was I long.<sup>122</sup>

His obsession with the dead, particularly with the hanged, is a recurrent theme in the literary sources. He sends his ravens to seek them out. Rather than letting them swing in peace, he goes to them in person using incantations, and

wakes them up for a ghoulish chat. In *Hávamál* 157, as we have seen, Odin shows a special relationship to those who populated the gallows: If he sees a hanged man above him, the hanged god, cutting the runes, could converse with him. Similarly, *Heimskringla* says that Odin “would call to life dead men out of the ground, or he would sit down under men who were hanged.”<sup>123</sup> A poet of the eleventh century confirms this habit, calling him “visitor of the hanged” (*hanga heimthingaðr*).<sup>124</sup>

Why this intense interest in the dead? The ancient Norse prized inspiration from the dead within the earth. As “Lord of the Ghouls” and “Lord of the Hanged,” Odin’s quest for their occult wisdom is the paradigmatic expression of this idea. However, it does not start with him. There is some evidence that new kings were invested on the tombs of their ancestors; for example, “many burial mounds had flat tops, as though they were intended to be used for public ceremonies. Mounds of the Migration Period sometimes had ancient standing stones or carved stone balls placed on them. The burial place of the kings at Uppsala was also the place of the local assembly.”<sup>125</sup> Scattered references in literature tell of kings and seers sitting on burial mounds, perhaps to claim the authority or title of the former king, but also to seek inspiration.<sup>126</sup>

In a tantalizing conjunction of themes, the writings of a Christian bishop in the Northlands suggest that Odin had learned the art of poetry from the hanged themselves. Early in the thirteenth century, Bishop Bjarni Kolbeinsson avers,

I did not grow wise under waterfalls,  
I never dabbled in magic;  
by no means did I learn  
the prize of Ygg (the art of poetry)  
under the hanged.<sup>127</sup>

Thus, by undergoing death himself, Odin was in the company of the dead, and at the heart of their occult wisdom. What better way to gain it? As Turville-Petre notes, “Oðinn, swinging on the tree of the world, was in the company of the dead, sharing the wisdom which only they possess. But this is nearly the same as to say that the god himself was dead. If wisdom could be won from a dead delinquent swinging from the gallows, how much more could be gained from Oðinn after he passed through the world of death.”<sup>128</sup>

W. Brede Kristensen believed that it was through Odin’s literal and salvific death that he was able to resurrect the runes. “The dying Odin . . . brings superhuman or magical power out of the depths (‘sought below’) up into our world (‘and lifted up the runes’). By means of divine death men have obtained power over death; they have gained health and salvation.”<sup>129</sup> It was Odin’s son Hermóðr who, riding his father’s horse, descended into Hel to bring back his brother Bald.

The self-sacrifice of Odin is widely seen as an initiation ritual; it may include elements of ecstasy or trance, such as seem to appear in the ritual of the sorceress, also a nine-day vigil, described in the twelfth-century *Sólarljóð* (Song



of the Sun). In this hard-won solar vision, though, the subject ascends, “raised up on a horse,” whereas Odin’s directionality is down:

On the chair of the *nornir*  
I sat nine days,  
Then I was raised up on a horse,  
The giantesses’ sun  
Shone grimly  
From the cloud-dripper’s clouds.<sup>130</sup>

Shamanic practices in Finnish lore, which involve a nine-days’ nonlethal suspension in a birch tree, have also been raised as convincing parallels to *Hávamál*.<sup>131</sup> Van Hamel compares Odin’s fasting to the importance of fasting in Irish legends, which confers mystical fortification on those who practice it against enemy powers.<sup>132</sup> The goal of these rituals was extraterrestrial experience, not actual death. Nevertheless, the model of ceremonial initiation would perforce carry with it the idea of a symbolic death followed by a rebirth and a new identity. There is no evidence of such mysteries in the Old Norse literary sources.<sup>133</sup> Nor are there certain typical circumpolar shamanistic practices associated with Odin, such as drumming or healing, although others surely are present in his quest for esoteric knowledge, ecstasy, self-mutilation, shape-shifting, association with magical animals, or traffic with the dead and other spirits. Possible influences by (or independently emerging parallelisms with) Siberian shamanism upon Old Norse religion have been carefully considered for decades.<sup>134</sup> So has the role of the heavily shamanistic and sacrificial traditions of the Sámi (Lapps), including their pantheon, powerful animism, “living” topography, ritualized forms of hunting and warfare, and particularly the relationship of the extensive Sámi magical complex (*noaidevuohta*) to Norse *seiðr* (and therefore its paradigmatic practitioner, Odin), charted by Håkan Rydving and Åke Hultrantz.<sup>135</sup>

But did Odin actually die in his ordeal? Did he undergo the sacrificial death of his own cult? *Hávamál* does not tell us that Odin dies, as he most certainly does at the apocalypse of the Ragnarök, foretold in the *Völuspá*. Rather, the result of Odin’s experience is his effective flourishing:

141. Then I began to be fruitful  
and to be fertile,  
to grow and to prosper;  
one word sought  
another word from me;  
one deed sought  
another deed from me.

There is no mention of a death or a resurrection in these verses. Yet fertility, blessedness, and prosperity are the ubiquitous gift of the death, of a god or a hero, from the slain and reborn wine-god Dionysos, to the civic boon of the body of the dying Oedipus at the grove at Colonus, to Jesus’s metaphor of the

grain of wheat in John 12:24,<sup>136</sup> to the European cathedral imagery of the Green Man, disgorging vegetation from his mouth, who watches over the bier of the Christ soon to rise.

### The Meaning of Odin's Sacrifice

Víkarr's story reveals that if Odin's victims were both gashed with a spear and hanged at once, the ritual through which they were offered was more complete. The god himself is pierced with a spear and hung. Therefore Odin's autosacrifice is perfectly performed. He hangs on his own “super-gallows,” the cosmic Yggdrasill, a mondial axis, in an agony which Jaan Puhvel has called “the ‘supreme mystery’ of Germanic theology, Odin's primordial self-sacrifice on the world tree.”<sup>137</sup>

As recipient of hanged sacrifices, Odin sacrifices himself in precisely the same fashion that human and animal sacrifices are made to him. He thus becomes the supreme exemplar of his own cultus. “This is partly a validation myth wherein the god as the founding initiate ‘charters’ a centerpiece of his own cult, namely the sacrifice (including self-immolation) by hanging and stabbing that was practiced by his votaries.”<sup>138</sup>

Since *Hávamál* cannot be dated any earlier than the ninth century C.E. (despite the fact that it has much inherited material that is centuries older), it is entirely possible that some kind of paradigmatic dialogue was going on between the two religious competitors for the Northlands. If that were the case, however, the episode may not be so much derivative from as it is responsive to the Christian theological challenge. It is equally possible that the passage represents the pure reinforcement of Odin's own cult by Odin himself in the pre-Christian imagination. Beyond their apparent cultic similarities, there is good reason that the Odin of the Speech of the High One has been compared to the Gospels' Christ. “The sacrifice of Óðinn to himself may thus be seen as the highest conceivable form of sacrifice, in fact so high that, like many a religious mystery, it surpasses our comprehension. It is the sacrifice, not of king to god, but of god to god, of such a kind as is related in Scripture of the sacrifice of Christ.”<sup>139</sup> A god's sacrifice to himself (and there can be no doubt of the identity of the recipient in the Norse poem) possesses an ultimacy that shatters sacrificial norms and redefines sacrifice itself.<sup>140</sup> As we have seen so often, this particular form of sacrifice belongs to Odin, as does death itself. That he therefore undergoes this sacrifice and, perhaps, death itself is not rational; but it is absolutely true to Odin's divine nature. Odin defines his cult through offering himself; offering himself, he expresses his own nature. As Kristensen writes, “Here the ‘I have hung myself upon the tree as a sacrifice to Myself’ is thus a self-consecration, a self-sacrifice; the offering is the god himself. ‘Death’ on this tree is the actualization of absolute life, of which this tree is the bearer.”<sup>141</sup>

In the case of Odin, interest attending divine sacrifice—sacrifice ritually performed by a god—has taken a new twist. According to this view, Odin cannot possibly sacrifice himself unless Norse mythology has been influenced by

Christianity, and Odin is actually Christ. However, the evidence of the history of religions suggest otherwise. Odin's hanging, his wounding with a spear, his gallows-tree, his nine nights, the voluntary and autonomous nature of his action and even his use of the verb "to give" all point in one direction: back to Odin himself, and to his worship as attested in other religious art and Old Norse literature.

This is a view that is now generally accepted; however, I would suggest that the reasons for the earlier equation of Odin and Christ include, but also may extend beyond, the historical Christianization of Scandinavia. The self-sacrifice of Christ is the only instance of divine reflexivity with which late-nineteenth-century Western scholars such as Bugge and his early-twentieth-century followers were familiar and to which, in a sense, they were theologically reconciled. Hence, they were not willing to extend that theological paradigm independently to Odin. In fact, the similarities of Odin's sacrifice to the crucifixion are due not to syncretistic amalgam, but rather to the nature of divine reflexivity itself—especially, to the intimate involvement of the deity with his or her own cult.

PART III

# The Peoples of the Book

*Monotheism and Divine Ritual*

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# Introduction

## *The Special Interpretive Challenge of Divine Ritual in Monotheism*

Sacrifice to whom, if they *are* the gods? Pray to whom, if he *is* God? The supreme power can worship; is conceived of as worshipping. The question of where the gods orient their religious acts may be irrelevant in that it applies human categories to divine subjects. I argue that from the standpoint of the traditions where these phenomena appear, they are best understood as an expression of original essence and power. The facile interpretation of “anthropomorphism” does not best illumine the sacrificing or ritualizing god. Rather, as I have argued, the shared idea is that the divine influences the human realm and expresses itself by generating human religious practices. “Anthropomorphic ideas of deity signify theomorphic ideas of man.”<sup>1</sup>

Karl Rahner’s theological method, which “declares all theological statements to be inherently anthropological and vice versa”<sup>2</sup> may apply here: “As soon as man is understood as that being which has absolute transcendence toward God . . . , then anthropocentricity and theocentricity in theology are not contradictories but strictly one and the same thing seen from two different aspects, and each aspect is unintelligible without the other.”<sup>3</sup> Divine reflexivity describes a pivotal religious idea that has remained largely unintelligible, at least in the Abrahamic monotheistic traditions. As we have seen, clear analogues to the Greek sacrificing gods exist in other Indo-European traditions. But worshipping gods are not confined to ancient polytheisms. Forms of religious behavior by the supreme being in monotheistic traditions can range from sacrifice to prayer to the use of ritual implements or clothing to reading and interpretation of scripture.

In turning from “polytheistic” to “monotheistic” religions, we leave behind those traditions that acknowledge a plethora of universal entities, which are often related to one another through genealogy or

hierarchies of power. We enter a thought-world in which there is only one supreme deity who lacks human form or attributes, although this has remained not only a constant telos but a point of oscillation and bitter contestation—in the efforts of the ancient Israelite writers of the Pentateuch to downplay God’s ancient Near Eastern role in the earliest texts as the supreme god in the council of other gods, for example; in the Protestant Reformation rejection of the veneration of saints; in formative Islamic repudiation of the doctrine of the Christian Trinity as can be read in the mosaic inscription in the interior of the Dome of the Rock in Jerusalem or in Wahhabi polemics against the perceived multiplicity of Muslim worship at *dargahs* in India or in Africa. Instances of divine reflexivity in monotheistic religious traditions *de facto* imply deep tensions, in that to ascribe ritual to God seems an extreme form of anthropomorphism and seems to dis-articulate his unified being.

The charge of “absurdity” made by Cleombrotus in *De defectu oraculorum* about the story of Apollo’s need to offer expiatory libations to purify himself after the slaughter of the Python draws its theological power from the idea of the inappropriateness of a god’s sacrifice. Even within polytheistic systems, as we have seen, the ontological separateness of the gods from human limitations is preserved and upheld, in some cases extending to the philosophical critique of divinely performed ritual. How can a god bear the exigency of ritual requirement? In monotheism the stakes may be higher. All of the Abrahamic traditions have historically resisted the circumscription of God’s uniqueness and power; ritual, in that it both expresses and reiterates the quintessentially subordinate relationship of human being to god, cannot be an act of God. Yet another paradox immediately presents itself: God’s agency is illimitable. No act is impossible for God, even a ritual act that on its face compromises his omnipotence.

I will examine examples of this phenomenon in the so-called Peoples of the Book, to borrow an Islamic designation for Judaism and Christianity. I include Islam itself under the umbrella of the phrase, since the centrality of the Qur’an inspired in that tradition a respect for its scripturally founded predecessors. In these traditions God is not “lord of lords” (even though, as for example in the case of ancient Israelite religion where God was *el elohim*, a case can and has been made for an evolution in religious texts to monotheism from a more polytheistic background) but is rather unquestionably supreme and unique. God’s uniqueness makes it all the more problematic when scripture, art, or song represent him as engaged in ritual activity, that is, apparently worshiping.

Whereas in ancient Greece, Iran, India, or perhaps even in the Norse world, we can still make a reasonable case that the gods themselves might worship their own ancestors, or perhaps another order of gods worthy of worship (perhaps because they are older than the present order of gods, like the Titans or the Sādhyas, or angrier than them, like the Erinyes), in the case of monotheism there is no such recourse. This is pure divine reflexivity, whereby the ritual action of the Supreme Being cannot possibly be construed as redounding upon any other entity than God’s own self.

Several elements unite the following cases. Crucial is the great significance attached to the preservation and continuation of the believing community.

I will argue that this significance, in fact, precipitates the appearance in each tradition of an “observant God.” Monotheistic traditions, like certain polytheistic ones, have tried to show ritualized activities such as the study of scripture and prayer in groups as central to piety; they have tried to sublimate sacrifice or to abolish it, and sought to establish prayer as a foundational action of the faith. To validate a specific ritual action, all three traditions portray God himself as observant and pious—as practicing that ritual. God is not free of religious obligations! In the talmudic passages involving God’s worship, we see ritual superseding expected theology: God reads Torah, prays, and wears both prayer shawl and phylacteries. Prayer (*ṣalāt*) in Islam is public intercession; along with his angels, God is said in the Qur’ān to pray for the Prophet and thus establishes the cultic basis for the *ṣalawāt*, the blessings on Muhammad, who will then intercede for the one who prays. This is paradigmatic and generative action, but can we rightly call it “anthropomorphic,” even as analysis.

As we will see, God’s prayer or other forms of worship in these monotheisms are both like and very unlike human worship; the religion of the observant Godhead has unique characteristics that mark it clearly and self-consciously as divine, as “other” than ritual writ larger.

### Christian Sacrificial Theology and Self-Referentiality

Perhaps the most complex case of divinely performed ritual is found in Christianity. In positing both the internal relationships of the Trinity and the liturgical operations of the Eucharist, ancient Christian theology draws its strength from a rich conflation of sacrificial roles. Two principal “diagrams” of sacrificial hierarchy emerge from an examination of the historical tradition. They are equally important, not only to this inquiry but also to the structure of Christianity itself. They reveal that God himself has a dual nature, both as deity receiving the voluntary sacrifice of Christ, and—more darkly and problematically—as sacrificer.

The tradition of the crucifixion as refracted not only through the Gospels but through patristic, medieval, and modern exegesis represents an autosacrifice: Christ, as the willing victim offers himself up; this one-time sacrifice is reiterated in the cultic reenactment of the Eucharist. In the Gospel texts of the Last Supper that have become foundational for the Eucharist, Christ is cast in a proto-priestly role. He controls the action, as for example, in the account in Matthew:

Now as they were eating, Jesus took bread, and blessed, and broke it, and gave it to the disciples and said, “Take, eat, this is my body.” And he took a cup, and when he had given thanks he gave it to them, saying, “Drink of it, all of you; for *this is my blood of the covenant, which is poured out for many for the forgiveness of sins* (τοῦτο γάρ ἐστιν τὸ αἷμά μου τῆς διαθήκης τὸ περὶ πολλῶν ἐκχυννόμενον εἰς ἄφεσιν ἁμαρτιῶν).”<sup>4</sup>

The “pouring out” of Christ’s blood, a translation of a form of the *koinē* verb ἐκχεῖν, is a crucial idea underscoring the voluntariness of his death. It carries



with it the ancient idea of the emptying of the precious contents of vessel in the service of some higher objective. In Philippians 2:6–7, Christ is praised as one “who, though he was in the form of God, did not count equality with God a thing to be grasped, but emptied himself (ἀλλὰ ἑαυτὸν ἐκένωσεν), taking the form of a servant, being born in human likeness.” The verb used in this instance is ἐκένωσεν, a form of κενόω, “to empty, deprive of power.” It is used in the Septuagint translation of Genesis 24:20, when Rachel “quickly *emptied* (ἐξεκένωσεν, Hebrew *watt’ar kaddah*) her vessel into the trough” so that Isaac’s servant and his camels could drink. The Hebrew verb translated by ἐξεκένωσεν in the Genesis passage is *’arah*, having the sense of “to empty, to expose or strip.”

In the Synoptic Gospels, the Gospel of John, the Epistles, and in patristic literature, explicit typological parallels are drawn between the efficacious bloodshed of Christ and a number of paradigmatic sacrifices in Hebrew scriptures.<sup>5</sup> Identifications are made between the mediating sacrifice of Christ and: first, the covenantal sacrifice between God and Moses at Mt. Sinai (Heb. 9:18–21); second, the expiatory and apotropaic blood of the paschal lamb (Jn. 19:31; 1 Cor. 5:7)—this is explicitly worked out by Melito, bishop of Sardis, in the second century, and later by Gregory Nazienzus, *Oration I*; third, the expiatory or cleansing sacrifice of a goat or heifer outside the camp for purification (Heb. 13:11–12); fourth, the sacrifice of one goat on the Day of Atonement, whose blood was sprinkled in the very heart of the sanctuary, the Holy of Holies, to purify it; and fifth, the driving out of another into the wilderness as a propitiatory offering to Azazel, the prince of demons—in the Epistle of Barnabas, for example, Christ is portrayed as the exile, the scapegoat.

In the Epistle to the Hebrews, Christ is seen in specifically sacrificial terms as both the new High Priest replacing the High Priest of the temple, and as the new victim, whose sacrifice both replaced and transcended the daily offering (*tamid*) at the temple on behalf of the Hebrew people (Heb. 7:26–27): “He has no need, like those high priests, to offer sacrifices daily, first for his own sins, and then for those of the people; he did this once for all when he offered up himself.”<sup>6</sup>

This sublimation is most emphatically set out in the highly stylized, symbolic message of Hebrews, but it also informed actual liturgical interpretation of the Eucharist from the beginning. The sacrifice of Jesus offered the “surety of a better covenant” (Heb. 7:22). Heavenly worship, the liturgy, is established by God himself: “We have such a high priest, one who is seated at the right hand of the throne of the Majesty in heaven, a liturgist (*leitourgos*) in the sanctuary and true tabernacle which is set up not by man but by the Lord” (Heb. 8:1). In post-Pauline trinitarian doctrine, Christ as “a high priest forever after the order of Melchizedek” was also understood as God incarnate.<sup>7</sup> In the Eucharist, then, God is sacrificing himself, as W. Brede Kristensen argues; “on the altar the divine sacrificial death is again and again repeated and actualized. The bread is the body of Christ which is sacrificed and consecrated. The meaning of the divine sacrificial death is indicated even more clearly when the human sacrificer disappears. The idea behind this rite is that God sacrifices Himself. But at this

point the realm of cultus is left behind, and we enter the realm of religious myth or credal formulation.”<sup>8</sup>

Kristensen can be contested on one point: The realm of cultus is not left behind in the case of the self-sacrificing deity, but is rather amplified by the Christian doctrine of the ritual sacrifice of God by himself. God provides his own gifts to himself, which the congregation returns to him at the offering of the communion. This sacrificial circularity is even more explicit in the Order of Preparation preceding John Chrysostom’s fourth-century Eucharistic liturgy, still used throughout the Eastern Orthodox Church, where the priest, acting as Christ, actually “crucifies” the Lamb—the bread of the Eucharistic host—at the imperative of the deacon, by cutting it partially through horizontally “so as to form a cross.”<sup>9</sup> He then pierces it, reenacting the piercing of Jesus’s side by a soldier’s spear as described in John 19:34.

This reflexive sacrificial conflation—the priest as both crucifier and as Christ, Christ as both sacrificial victim and High Priest of his own autosacrifice—is reflected in a Byzantine iconic type traditionally located in the niche of the sanctuary of an Eastern Orthodox church. Christ, served by angels as deacons, is shown holding the Eucharistic cup and administering communion to the Apostles with the spoon (used in Eastern churches for communicants of any age). Here, in cultic time, the icon represents an eternal image of the heavenly liturgy paralleled by the earthly liturgy enacted below. Constantine Kalokyris describes this as follows:

An attempt to make perceivable that which is mystically enacted in worship is also the purpose of the representation of the Divine Liturgy in the niche of the Sanctuary, where Christ is represented ἱεουργῶν ἑαυτὸν (officiating over Himself) as He transmits His Body and Blood to the Apostles. . . . Because the priest repeats by the liturgical act that which is enacted in Heaven by the Great Hierarch Christ, this ideal performance of the Divine Liturgy in Heaven is represented in the niche as a more perceivable expression of it in the scene in which the Lord receives the Sacred Gifts carried with fear by the angels dressed as deacons.<sup>10</sup>

At the climactic moment of the Eucharistic liturgy, the cantor (or congregation, taking the cantor’s part) sings, Τὰ Σὰ ἐκ τῶν Σῶν Σίω προσφέρομεν—“We offer You these gifts, *which are Your own*.”<sup>11</sup> The sacrifice of the Eucharist is a gift offered by the collective, mystical Body of Christ, the congregation, back to the original owner. And at the same time, it is understood as a self-offering and self-actualization by God, of the kind later exegeted by the neo-Platonic Syrian Christian mystic Dionysios the Areopagite: “The cause of all things, by a beautiful and good love of all, through an excess of loving goodness, comes to be outside himself by the providences of all beings . . . and from being above all and transcending all is brought down to being in all.”<sup>12</sup> Christian liturgical “action” cannot be understood without the positing of multivalent reciprocity, whose theurgic efficacy is at its core reflexive.<sup>13</sup>

## Aqedah and Crucifixion

The idea of divine reflexivity does not confine itself, however, to Christ as divinized victim or as divine autosacrificer, whom Origen compares in his *Homilies on Leviticus* (3) to the Levitical priest consuming the meat of the sin-offering. There are strong indications that the aqedah also drives the passion narratives. God sacrifices his *yahid*, his beloved child. In Genesis 22:9–14, Hebrew scripture reveals a deity who provides his own animal victim as a substitute for Isaac. God mandates a sacrifice, and then permits the eleventh-hour rescue of Abraham’s son. But by providing the substitute animal victim, God in effect sacrifices to himself, with Abraham as the agent. The crucifixion of Christ seems to complete the story. Jesus replaces Isaac as the unthinkable, and therefore most precious victim—the firstborn son. God replaces Abraham as reluctant and yet devoted parent, able to withstand this, the ultimate test of faith.<sup>14</sup>

Modeled on the Hebrew story of the aqedah, the elaborated crucifixion portrays the Supreme Deity as sacrificer by his allowing, once and for all in history, the supreme act of sacrifice in Canaanite, Phoenician, and Israelite cultures: the slaughter of the firstborn, for which we have archaeological evidence from Carthage and Canaan. Jon Levenson points to Jesus’s alleged lineage, his status of sonship and chosenness, and his sacrificial-seeming death and its interpretation.<sup>15</sup> Both in casting Jesus as the new Isaac, the son of God sacrificed by God and to God, and especially ironically, in its supersessionism toward Judaism, Christian theology reacted, however “unconsciously,” in the ancient terms of a Jewish archetype: the replacement of the older son by the younger and the latter’s necessary destruction and restoration.

In the Christian reformulation of the aqedah, God offers his own son to himself on behalf of his created beings, who have fallen into sin, thus validates and redeems his own universe through a cultic action. As Levenson has shown in *The Death and Resurrection of the Beloved Son*, because of its setting during the Passover season, the crucifixion attracts the aqedah story, with Isaac the willing victim and Abraham the sacrificer. Furthermore, the daily sacrifices in the Temple and the Eucharist are intended to recall the main sacrificial events in both religions—the binding of Isaac on the one hand and the death of Jesus on the other.<sup>16</sup> Jesus becomes the victim, and God himself the sacrificer. The parallels of the crucifixion to the aqedah were commented on extensively in patristic literature, as for example, in the second-century Epistle to Barnabas, where Isaac’s life is portrayed in Christianity as a prototype for Jesus’s suffering.<sup>17</sup>

Strong hints of this “autosacrifice” by God of his son are presented by early Christian writings within a context of theological necessity. In this way a philosophical foundation was laid for what clearly had the potential to appear as cruel and bizarre exigency.<sup>18</sup> Texts such as Romans 3:22–25 undeniably indicate God as the subject of the sacrifice of Christ (“For there is no distinction; since all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God, they are justified by his

grace as a gift, through the redemption which is in Christ Jesus, whom God put forth as an expiation by His blood (ὃν προέθετο ὁ θεὸς ἱλαστήριον). The sacrificial term *hilastērion* is explicitly used in the Septuagint to translate the covering cloth of the ark or mercy-seat that was sprinkled and thus purified with blood on the Day of Atonement. In the same vein, the First Letter of John, 4:9–10, states that “God sent his only son into the world so that we might live through him. In this is love, not that we loved God but that he loved us and sent his son to be the atoning sacrifice (ἱλασμὸν) for our sins.”<sup>19</sup> Several other passages hint that the sacrifice of Jesus was inaugurated by God, but are not as explicit—for example, John 3:16 (“For God so loved the world that he gave his only son, that whosoever believes in Him should not perish but should have eternal life”), Romans 8:3–4, and Romans 8:32. Comments Levenson: “John’s statement in 3:16 [is] that God gave his only begotten son in order to secure life for the believers . . . the underlying identification of Jesus as the son of God has brought about a refashioning of God in the image of the father who gives his son in sacrifice. The father’s gift to God has been transformed into the gift of God the Father . . . the father’s motive is . . . like Abraham’s . . . a love greater even than that of his beloved son.”<sup>20</sup>

The interpretation of the motivation for God’s sacrifice is one of the most complex of early Christian theological debates. Chrysostom’s commentary on the Epistle to the Hebrews clearly understands the sacrifice as a kind of self-propitiation of an angry God: “He went up as a sacrifice which had power to propitiate the Father.”<sup>21</sup> Contradicting himself, he then reverts to the model of a more loving God, in keeping with Levenson’s emphasis. As Frances Young expresses it, “God’s love in surrendering his Son for the salvation of the world is compared with Abraham giving up Isaac in sacrifice.” Origen, in a different theology privileging the category of ransom over that of propitiation, offers a picture of Christ’s death as aversion of the devil: “The slain lamb of God is made, according to certain mysterious principles, a purification for the whole world . . . according to the Father’s love to man, he submitted to death purchasing us back by his own blood from the devil who had got us in his power.”<sup>22</sup>

The tension implicit in the fundamentally inconsistent theological ideas of the crucifixion as self-propitiation to appease God’s wrath or self-sacrifice to avert the devil was, argues Gustaf Aulén in *Christus Victor*, to a large extent resolved by Athanasius in his *De Incarnatione*. Evil and human disobedience tears God between his attributes of loving goodness and that of divine consistency. We might note a strong resemblance to the divine dilemma faced by God in the talmudic tractate *Berakhot*, wherein God prays that “My mercy may overcome My justice, and all my other attributes.” Human transgressions required the death of humankind. But God’s love (as well, one might observe, as the strictures of the Noahide covenant) does not allow the utter destruction of his own creatures. Young argues that through Athanasius’s lens, Christ’s sacrifice was a “self-propitiation offered by God to God to make atonement for the existence of evil in his universe.” Theologically, the circle is closed.

Nowhere is this extraordinary interchange of hieratic roles within and without the Christian godhead more poignantly imagined than in El Greco's *The Trinity* (1577–1579, Museo Nacional del Prado, Madrid). In this painting, executed for the “attic” of the high altarpiece of Santo Domingo el Antiguo in Toledo, and designed to go above his painting of the Assumption, El Greco portrays God the Father not as a dispassionate recipient of atonement but as a mourning father—an old man supporting the body of his slain son in the well-known earthly scene of deposition that usually features Mary (no. O-4; Fig. 69).<sup>23</sup> The central figures of living father and dead son are surrounded by grieving angels; in the form of a great dove, the Holy Spirit flies above. Christ's body is solid and incarnate, although it has already lost its vital tones, and is mottled, a greenish-brown hue. But the Cretan painter has also incarnated God the Father for this unorthodox Trinity. God is very much a corporeal presence, with a normal and vital complexion, and a visage contorted in grief. In a collapse of two realities normally kept iconographically distinct, we are simultaneously in heaven and on earth, for in the passion chronology, the Resurrection has not



FIGURE 69. El Greco, *The Trinity*. The persons of the Trinity are represented at the deposition of Christ's body: God the Father, grieving, wearing a mitre, cradles the body of Jesus; the Holy Spirit as a dove. 1577–1579 c.E.

yet taken place, nor Jesus's body been buried. That God is not only the divine recipient and bereaved parent in this drama, however, but also the hierophant of the sacrifice is underscored by the ecclesiastical mitre that he wears.<sup>24</sup>

Christian scripture leaves no doubt that the Supreme Being, possessing perfect power and wisdom, conceived a son in mortal frame and allowed him to be born. Nor does it leave any question as to whether this son was loved by his heavenly father; indeed, the son's mission on earth was to tell the news of that love, and its implications for human life. If God is understood by Christian doctrine to be omniscient and omnipotent, there could also be little doubt that he allowed his son to be killed. To be fair, one must venture beyond the sense of "allowed" and into the uneasy realm of intentionality. Through the Holy Spirit, God conceived Jesus the Christ, and with him a plan for his life that would end, inexorably, with his brutal death. *Why* would God sacrifice his only son?

In the story of the crucifixion, Jesus is the willing victim. In Eucharistic theology, he is the priestly self-sacrificer. But in addition to these types or perhaps beyond them, in a darker country, God is the priest presiding at the sacrifice of his own son. He is judge, executioner, and chief mourner.<sup>25</sup>

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# 8

## The Observant God of the Talmud

A certain Min said to Rabbi Abbahu: Your God is a priest, since it is written, That they take for me Terumah [wave offering]. Now, when He had buried Moses, wherein did He bathe [after contact with the corpse]? Should you reply, "In water": is it not written, *Who hath measured the waters in the hollow of His hand?*—"He bathed in fire," he answered, "for it is written, *Behold the Lord will come in fire.*" Is then purification by fire effective? "On the contrary," he replied, "bathing for [purposes of purification] should essentially be in fire, for it is written, *And all that abideth not the fire ye shall make to go through the water.*"<sup>1</sup>

—(b. Sanhedrin 39a)

An involved, idiosyncratic, and emotional deity almost leaps from the pages of the haggadic portions of the Babylonian Talmud (Bavli).<sup>2</sup> This collection had as its ostensible goal a written record of the extensive rabbinic discussions about the Mishnah in the three academies in Babylon.<sup>3</sup> Oral commentary was generated and circulated through memorization between the third and fifth centuries C.E., much as the Homeric rhapsodes preserved the epic poems for centuries by continually reciting them.<sup>4</sup> The dialogues of the Bavli were finally committed to memory in the sixth or seventh C.E. under the threat of oblivion, in response to the persecutions of fiercely anti-Jewish Zoroastrian rulers.<sup>5</sup> Its final redaction came soon after.<sup>6</sup> "The ocean of the Talmud," as an ancient Hebrew phrase calls it, is a document teeming with a wealth of halakhic argument, parable, and often uniquely imaginative digression, "vast in extent, unfathomable in depth, with an ocean-like sense of immensity and movement about it."<sup>7</sup> And by no means can one derive from the Talmud a theologically or even temperamentally consistent vision of the God of Israel.



Nevertheless, throughout these tractates, God engages in some startling and highly anthropomorphic activities. He maintains a daily schedule, and solicits advice from his angels on protocol.<sup>8</sup> He rejoices with his creatures, weeps for their misdeeds, and also for their tragedies, even though, in yet another of countless paradoxes, he himself has allowed or even caused them.<sup>9</sup> He “visits the sick, sympathizes with the mourner and buries the dead.”<sup>10</sup> In *Berakhot* 61a, God braids Eve’s hair to make her beautiful for her marriage to Adam.

This would be extraordinary enough, but God’s human-style behavior does not stop with these. At certain points in the Talmud, God also seems to practice Judaism: He observes *mizvot* (religious commandments), wears consecrated accoutrements, and performs ritual actions. As in the ancient Greek case of the Olympians who oddly pour libations from sacred bowls at altars, a divinity is associated with both cultic objects and with cultic action.

In the talmudic dialogue cited above (*Sanhedrin* 39a), the God of Israel is charged by a sectarian, or *min*, with being a priest, since God is biblically accorded in Exodus 25:2 the *terumah* or wave-offering that as a rule was given to priests.<sup>11</sup> But the theme of ritual and hierarchical reversal does not stop there, for the *min* goes on to taunt Rabbi Abbahu with the absurdity of the tradition of God’s being made ritually unclean by his burial of Moses, subjecting himself to the same purity laws set forth in Leviticus 22:4–6 that apply to the Israelites—for after all, where would the Lord of the Universe bathe after being contaminated by contact with a corpse? What *mikveh* (ritual bath) would have been vast enough to contain him, filled with what waters, since Isaiah 40:12 tells us that he can hold all the waters of cosmos in the hollow of his hand?

Astonishingly, Rabbi Abbahu does not retort that God would surely have transcended the impurity of Moses’s corpse and thus would have had no need to bathe. Rather, he responds on the strength of Isaiah 66:15 that *God bathed in fire*. This was the purification appropriate to the Lord, and not only to him. In Numbers 31:19–23, God’s statutes are explicated to the Israelite army by Moses and the priest Eleazar; the Midianite spoils of war, including the captives, are to be purified: “gold, silver, bronze, iron, tin, and lead—everything that can withstand fire, shall be passed through fire, and it shall be clean. Nevertheless it shall also be purified with the water for purification; and whatever cannot withstand fire, shall be passed through the water.” In yet another rhetorical surprise that seems to oscillate between metaphor and halakhah, R. Abbahu concludes that “bathing [for purposes of purification] should essentially be in fire”: in other words, it is not that God’s fiery *mikveh* is an aberrant form of the human ritual bath. Instead, God’s ritual environment (fire) is the source and gold standard for the human *mikveh*. Water is an inferior substitute for divine fire and is chosen only by default, on account of the human inability to withstand the flames that are the deity’s natural choice for purification.

We will examine in detail four of these “moments.” According to *Berakhot* 6a, the incorporeal Hebrew God wears scroll-bearing phylacteries; he wraps himself in the *ṭallit*, the prayer shawl worn by the precentor—the leader of prayer at the synagogue—in order to instruct Moses in a penitential service in *Rosh Hashanah* 17b. Tractate *ʿAvodah Zarah* discovers him studying and reflecting

on his own Torah (*oseq battorah*) three hours each day.<sup>12</sup> And perhaps most paradoxically of all, in another passage in *Berakhot*, God offers a heartfelt prayer to himself which starts with a variant, customized version of the usual formula, “May it be My will . . .”<sup>13</sup>

Do these nonphilosophical rabbinic images bespeak a clear-cut case of extreme anthropomorphism? In other words, when God performs a specifically Jewish religious action, is he still acting as the King of the Universe or simply as a larger and more powerful Jew?<sup>14</sup> As I noted in the Introduction, Schechter calls these examples of God’s practiced religion “the humanizing of the Deity and endowing Him with all the qualities and attributes which tend towards making God accessible to Man”; whereas Cohen insists, “however these passages may be explained, it is impossible to maintain that their authors actually believed in a corporeal God Who actually performed the actions ascribed to Him.”<sup>15</sup> This chapter will not attempt to survey the trajectory of divine anthropomorphism in Jewish theological history, from the throne and feet and face of the Lord of the Torah to the fantastic imagination of God’s dimensions in the *Shi’ur Qomah* to the apophatic critique by Maimonides to the thoroughgoing Jewish European rationalism of the nineteenth century; rather, it will seek to undertake a focused response to particular questions raised in these talmudic passages in the context of our inquiry, concerning divine ritual practice.

I would suggest that the passages in question theologically “mean” something different and greater than what Schechter and Cohen imply. As I argued in chapter 5, the portrait of a ritualizing deity intensifies and elevates certain forms of observance. Furthermore, especially in this case, these forms are performed by God himself, not just once at the beginning of time, but continually. If we take this talmudic evidence as not meaningless (or desperately inadequate, following a Maimonidean critique), we see that power flows with centrifugal force: from and around God. Thus the heuristic task would be other than to “deconstruct” the praying God but, rather, to determine why religion is not just consecrated to but also *ascribed* to God during this particular period in Jewish history. That is, what is the particular and special value of these four types of religious observance that would occasion the need for their intensification using the paradoxical idiom of an observant God?

These passages also belong to the broad genre of midrash, Jewish narrative commentary on the Bible. Although vividly imaginative, they also seek to communicate God’s nature, and to teach about holy activity. As David Stern writes in his *Rabbinic Fantasies*, “The genius of midrash (the earliest form of Jewish narrative) is that it exists in a kind of grey area between those separate domains of imaginative literature on the one hand, and exegetical commentary on the other.”<sup>16</sup>

It will be the purpose of this section to examine this material in a very different light. I contend that these passages embody the phenomenon of divine reflexivity. I will clarify my assumptions at the start: I take the texts, however whimsical, to be *sayings about God*, and not about a divinized observant human being. Without denying the deliberate tension between God’s alleged incorporeality and the anthropomorphism in these rabbinic images, I believe that we are to understand the subject of the passages in *b. Berakhot* 6a, *b. Rosh*

*Hashanah* 17b, b. *Avodah Zarah* 3b, and b. *Berakhot* 7b as genuinely practicing religion. Furthermore, I maintain that the subject is doing so *as God*, that is, as the I AM, whose power cannot be circumscribed: in other words, as the God of Israel. I will show that the purpose of these talmudic passages is quite other than “making God accessible to man,” and it also goes beyond the simple “paradigm” model of *imitatio dei*.

In examining these four passages, I have two goals. The first is to show that the talmudic representation of God’s own worship was introduced to serve specific motives that were in fact historically crucial to the survival of Judaism. The Talmud envisions these scenes at a particular moment, a time of great loss and danger to orthopraxy. In the sudden absence of the Temple and thus the possibility of sacrifice, rabbinical authorities sought to encourage the study of Torah and statutory prayer as the central pillars of faith—or indeed, according to certain talmudic discourse, explicitly to replace sacrifice as the supreme, mandatory devotional act. And in the face of a strong sectarian threat in the first centuries C.E., they also sought to reinforce their particular theology and praxis as normative.

Second, I also propose that on closer examination, each of God’s ritual actions, taken within their greater liturgical and theological context, do not necessarily correspond to human praxis on a one-to-one basis; rather, they reveal a kind of analogical patterning, as divine participatory acts of piety similar to those of human beings, but with ritual features that are unique to God. God’s worship is *not* in essence “just like” that of mortals, even if it is at the apex of the continuum in which they also worship. It is a special kind of Judaism: the practiced Judaism of God during the rabbinic period.

The third feature in the definition of divine reflexivity in chapter 5 highlights the ways in which the divine nature both resembles and unmistakably distinguishes itself from human nature: “The rituals performed by gods are *not* generally identical to those prescribed for mortals, and hence cannot be said to be simple anthropomorphisms; they usually are modified by the sacrificer’s divine status. Divine religious acts are both *like* and *unlike* human ones. The aspect that is unlike human behavior is related to the nature of a god as *Other*—ontologically ‘bigger’ in scope and potentiality than a human being.”

This idea of simultaneous divine similarity to and dissimilarity from human characteristics and abilities is poetically treated in Tractate *Shirata* in the *Mekhilta According to Rabbi Ishmael*, commenting upon the Song of Moses in Exodus.<sup>17</sup> In contemplation of the passage, “Who is like you, O Lord, among gods? Who is like you, majestic in holiness, terrible in glorious deeds, doing wonders?” (Ex. 15:11), *Shirata* offers these kinds of distinctions in the rhetorical effort to establish God’s uniqueness:

“Who is like you among those whom others call gods, but in whom there is no substance, of whom it is said: ‘They have mouths but cannot speak’ (Ps. 115:5).”

These have mouths but cannot speak, *while the One who spoke and brought the world into being is not that way.*

*But he can say two things in a single act of speech, which mortals cannot do.*

For so Scripture says, “God has spoken once, two things have we heard” (Ps. 62:12); “Is not my word like fire” (Jer. 23:29); “And a sound does come out from his mouth” (Job 37:2). . . .

The trait of a mortal is such that he cannot say two things in a single act of speech, but the One who spoke and brought the world into being [can say two things in a single act of speech for] he said the Ten Commandments in a single act of speech, which mortals cannot do.

The trait of a mortal is such that one cannot hear two people crying out at one moment, but the One who spoke and brought the world into being is not that way.

For even if everyone who comes through the world comes and cries out to him, he hears their cry: “O you who hears prayer, to you all flesh comes” (Ps. 65:3).<sup>18</sup>

God’s powers are thus elucidated, with profound implications. Following the rabbinic method of scriptural justification of each statement about God’s nature, the *Shirata* author shows that whereas humans can only say one thing at a time, God can say two—or ten, as when he uttered the Ten Commandments in a single speech-act!<sup>19</sup> Whereas we can only hear one person crying at a time, God in his infinite compassion can hear two (and by extrapolation, countless) cries simultaneously.

The trope continues for a number of further comparisons, all marked by the repeated formula, “But the One who spoke and brought the world into being is not that way.” Unlike mortals, God is more frightening for those who are near at hand to him than those who are at a distance. Unlike mortals, God does not build first the lower stories and then the upper ones; he builds first the upper stories and then the lower (“In the beginning, God created the heaven and the earth” [Gen. 1:1]). Unlike mortals, God roofs his world not with wood, stones, or mud; he uses water (“Who makes of water a cover for his upper chambers” [Ps. 104:3]), and so forth.<sup>20</sup> Most strikingly,

[T]he trait of mortals is that when one comes to make a form, one begins with the head or with some other limb and afterward completes the whole.

But the One who spoke and brought the world into being is not that way.

He forms the whole figure at once:

“For he is the one who forms the whole” (Jer. 109:16).

All that God does, even that which in some part functionally resembles human activity, he does differently. As Simon Rawidowicz observes, “God’s existence is *toto genere* different from the existing of all existing besides Him.”<sup>21</sup> God is both like and unlike his creatures, and this principle is crucial in the exegesis of divinely performed ritual.

“Torah, Piety”: The Destruction of the Temple  
and the Life Raft of the Law

Once, as Rabbi Yoḥanan ben Zakkai was coming forth from Jerusalem, Rabbi Joshua followed after him and beheld the Temple in ruins.

“Woe unto us,” Rabbi Joshua cried, “that this, the place where the iniquities of Israel were atoned for, is laid waste!”

“My son,” Rabbahn Yoḥanan said to him, “be not grieved. We have another atonement as effective as this. And what is it? It is acts of loving-kindness, as it is said, ‘For I desire mercy and not sacrifice.’” [Hos. 6:6]<sup>22</sup>

The destruction of the Temple by the imperial Roman forces of Vespasian in 70 C.E. broke the heart of Israel as well as what Eliade would call her *axis mundi*. The first destruction ruined the Solomonic temple and caused the century-long exile in Babylon. This event was construed by the Israelites as their punishment for the idolatry condemned by the prophets. The majestic Second Temple, whose construction was undertaken at the end of the sixth century B.C.E. and whose embellishments continued to be added under Herodian rule into the first century B.C.E., was understood by many Jews since the time of Ezra and Nehemiah as an architectural testament to the reconciliation of God with his people.<sup>23</sup> The Temple was the liturgical focus of Israel’s cultus and the geographical focus of its prayer. The second destruction, therefore, was a theological crisis of the greatest magnitude.

What was to be the response of first-century Judaism to the Roman destruction of the Temple? There can be no doubt that some construed it in the same way, as God’s wrathful punishment of Zion for her iniquity. This viewpoint was a natural exponent of the cornerstone belief in God’s omnipotence. A striking example is found in II Baruch, a pseudepigraphical work purporting to have been composed by the scribe of the prophet Jeremiah and to describe the destruction of the First Temple. In fact, the book has been dated to the early second century C.E.<sup>24</sup> The Lord announces that “This city will be delivered up for a time, / And the people will be chastened for a time” (II Baruch 4:1). He then will send his angels to prepare the tabernacle for the enemy assault, commanding them to gather up the precious things stored within, and to let them be swallowed up in the earth (II Baruch 5:8–9). There the cult objects will wait until the apocalypse, when the Temple and its cultus will be restored. God’s angels will destroy the walls of the temple themselves “so that the enemies do not boast and say, ‘We have overthrown the wall of Zion and we have burnt down the palace of the mighty God’” (II Baruch 7:1).<sup>25</sup> According to this vision, God not only allowed but also assisted in the Temple’s destruction.<sup>26</sup>

But this was largely an atavistic theology, superimposed on a cruel new reality difficult to construe as divine punishment for Israel’s own sins. Although much midrashic literature stops short of saying that God was power-

less to prevent the Temple's destruction, it sometimes shows him lamenting the ruin of his own house. The Shekhinah, the imminent presence of God on earth, resided in its inner sanctum, the Holy of Holies, with the ark of the covenant. And when its beloved sanctuary was ruined, a *mashal* (parable) tells us that the radiant tenant departed in tears, clinging to the very walls it had indwelled:

R. Aha said:

It is like a king who departed from his palace in anger. But once he departed, he went back, and embraced and kissed the palace's walls and the palace's columns, and wept, saying: Farewell my palace, farewell my kingdom's home, farewell my precious house, farewell from now, farewell.

Similarly, when the Shekhinah was departing from the Temple, it went back, and embraced and kissed the Temple's walls and the Temple's columns, and wept, saying: Farewell my palace, farewell my kingdom's home, farewell my precious house, farewell from now, farewell.<sup>27</sup>

In *Lamentations Rabbah* 1:1, God asks his angels to tell him what a king of flesh and blood customarily does when he mourns. He then proceeds dutifully to carry out what they recommend, only on a God-sized scale—for example, in order to “hang sackcloth over his door,” God blackens the entire sky. David Stern comments:

Not only does God wish to follow the model of the human king in the practices of mourning; but to do so, He must seek instruction from the angels in the correct procedures. The true irony behind this request lies in what it implies about God's innocence, His need for instruction. Without the angels, God is utterly at a loss, entirely ignorant of the protocols of mourning. This picture of God may strike us, perhaps, as rather whimsical, especially given our ideas about divine omniscience. Yet, in fact, how could God know how to mourn? He himself is untouched by death. And if the Destruction was indeed the unprecedented catastrophe that the Rabbis believed it to be, God himself must have been as unprepared for its devastation as were its human victims.

The real power of this passage lies not only in its depiction of God as a human-like mourner but in the ultimate reality it confers upon the human tragedy by making *even God its mourner*.<sup>28</sup>

We will return to Stern's important idea that God's participation in a human religious custom confers on it an “ultimate reality.”

The response of Judaism to the catastrophe cannot be uniformly characterized because there were many varieties of Judaism before the events of 70 C.E. In addition to the rebel zealots and apocalyptic communities such as those whose scrolls were found at Qumran, we know of the obscure and contentious

Sadducees, whose alleged identification with the aristocrats or with the temple priesthood is not born out either in Josephus or in rabbinical sources, nor is even made explicit in the New Testament. Both Sadducee and Pharisee priests are mentioned in the sources. The Sadducees, however, seemed to have rejected both the doctrine of personal immortality and the interpretations of halakhic purity held by the far more influential Pharisees. The horror that befell the Temple seems also to have eradicated the religious influence of the Sadducees, ratified Pharisaic ideology and praxis, and ushered in the dawn of paramount rabbinical authority. The florescence of the rabbinical academies in Palestine and then, over the following several centuries, in Babylon, grew out of the Pharisaic conviction that the ritual fulfillment of the entire Torah was incumbent on every Jew, universalizing but also replacing the role of the Temple cult in fulfilling Israel's obligations to God. As Jacob Neusner puts it, "the purity laws, so complicated and inconvenient, were extended to the life of every Jew in his own home. The Temple altar in Jerusalem would be replicated at the table of all Israel."<sup>30</sup> Legendarily smuggled out of the ravaged city in a coffin, Yoḥanan ben Zakkai, the youngest of the disciples of Hillel, one of the greatest of the 150 *tannaim* (teachers), founded his academy at Javneh and thus "rescued Judaism from the shipwreck of the Roman destruction that overwhelmed the Jewish nation in the year 70. Javneh became the rallying-ground of Jewish learning and the centre of Jewish life."<sup>31</sup>

This, then, is the figure who comforts his disciple Joshua ben Ḥananiah.<sup>32</sup> As Neusner says: "To Yoḥanan ben Zakkai, preserving the Temple was not an end in itself. He taught that there was another means of reconciliation between God and Israel, so that the Temple and its cult were not decisive. What really counted in the life of the Jewish people? Torah, piety."<sup>33</sup> To understand God's peculiar performance of his precepts, rituals and *mizvot*, the commandments of the religion formulated by him and dedicated to him, it is to "Torah, piety" that we must direct our gaze. The pre-70 C.E. Pharisaic practice of teaching the Law in synagogues, and expounding and realizing the Law in daily life, was put to a greater test than perhaps its adherents had expected. Pharisaic Judaism was in the process of becoming, as it were, the solo actor on a bright stage. "Torah, piety": Gradually these were the new collective offerings of the Jewish people, replacing the shewbread, the incense, the *kasher* animal slaughtered on the altar.

As explored in the previous section, early Christianity appropriated the symbolic meaning of ancient Hebrew traditions of sacrifice toward the understanding and description of the crucifixion of its savior. This appropriation took place on two levels: the theological, in which the Hebrew scriptural account of the aqedah, the binding of Isaac, was used in Christian exegetical writings to cast God as the sacrificer and sacrificial recipient of his own son. It also took place on the cultic level, in which aspects of the elaborate sacrificial cult of the Jewish temple cast Christ as high priest, ritual victim, and sacrificer of himself.

Christian sacrificial theology that made reference to the Temple cultus made it clear that the cult itself was obsolete. But unlike Pharisaic Judaism, it did not seek alternatives to the Temple cult, but rather saw it as sublimated in the crucifixion, ratified in heaven, and reenacted in the Eucharist. In the

Epistle to the Hebrews, discussed earlier, Christ as high priest of his self-sacrifice, the ultimate *qorban*, had made those sacrifices that used to be required daily and annually “once for all.”<sup>34</sup> Although surely not representative of the range of Christian devotional theologies in the first century C.E., the Epistle to the Hebrews offered spiritualized images of the lost Temple cult that later became organizing icons in the worship of the Constantinian Church. By contrast, Pharisaic Judaism, the main sect left standing after the debacles of first-century Roman suppression, tenaciously had to refashion an alternative to the Temple’s schedule of consecrated actions. Torah study became a holy activity in and of itself. Even in the Mishnah, the law code of Judaism orally circulated from the second century B.C.E. onward, we find the sanctification of a concern for intellectual consistency: “[I]ts numerous unresolved disputes, its sporadic use of biblical proof texts and its occasional narratives all reflect the value of study as a religious ritual in its own right, and eventually the activity of studying God’s law was as important in Talmudic religion as was the content of that study.”<sup>35</sup>

The necessity of reinforcement of the Torah and its study and of the ritual observances and purity laws became a preoccupation of the rabbis. The first reason, as we have said, is that classical Israel had lost its sacrificial focus. The second was that rabbinic authority was challenged within its Hellenistic environment by sectarian movements: Jewish Christians, gnostics, and other splinter groups, all of them called *minim*. It was necessary to lift up the Torah and the laws of purity in a way that was intense and radical—in a mode of discourse that had real power. One clear manifestation of this imperative in the rabbinic imagination was the idea of God’s own religious observance.

In the world of the Talmud, we already encounter a vital God whose presence is often denoted by the Shekhinah. On earth, God fairly glows: His Shekhinah (literally, “dwelling”), is often represented as shining or effulgent. *Berakhot*, dealing with the proper nature and orientation of prayer, the main components of the daily prayers, and the prescribed thanksgivings to be recited over meals, portrays God as a deity who is anything but a *deus otiosus* or an absent father.<sup>36</sup> He is present in his own house of worship whenever the minimum number assemble to honor him. “Rabin ben R. Ada says in the name of R. Isaac: How do you know that the Holy One, blessed be He, is to be found in the Synagogue? For it is said: *God standeth in the congregation of God*. [Ps. 82: 1]. And how do you know that if ten people pray together the Divine Presence is with them? For it is said: *God standeth in the congregation of God*. [*Sanh.* 2b].”<sup>37</sup>

God stands in the congregation of God; he judges with those who judge.<sup>38</sup> He is present with those who study Torah.<sup>39</sup> These are activities that *provoke* the presence of God; he participates in the collective liturgical, judicial, and halakhic life of Israel. This has a theurgic effect; God’s presence provides a supernatural ratification of human affairs. As the Palestinian Talmud comments on *b. Berakhot* 6a, “However high He be above His world, let a man but enter a Synagogue, stand behind a pillar and pray in a whisper, and the Holy One, blessed be He, hearkens to his prayer. Can there be a God nearer than this, Who is close to His creatures as the mouth is to the ear!”<sup>40</sup>



*Berakhot* 6a and b: God Wears Tefillin

The rabbis did not wish to restrict God in time and space. They taught that God is both everywhere and radically near; God hears even a whispered prayer. Nevertheless, it is unsettling to discover him wearing *tefillin* wound around his mighty right arm and strapped above his forehead at the spot directly over the area between his all-seeing eyes.

R. Abin son of R. Ada in the name of R. Isaac says [further]: How do you know that the Holy One, blessed be He, puts on *tefillin*? For it is said: *The Lord hath sworn by His right hand, and by the arm of His strength.* [Is. 62, 8] “*By His right hand*”: this is the Torah; for it is said: *At His right hand was a fiery law unto them* [Deut. 33, 2]. “*And by the arm of His strength*”: this is the *tefillin*; as it is said: *The Lord will give strength unto His people.* [Ps. 29, 11] And how do you know that the *tefillin* are a strength to Israel? For it is written: *And all the peoples of the earth shall see that the name of the Lord is called upon thee, and they shall be afraid of thee,* [Deut. 28, 10], and it has been taught: R. Eliezer the Great says: This refers to the *tefillin* of the head.<sup>41</sup>

*Tefillin*, called “*phylacteries*,” in the New Testament are the reminders of God’s covenant with Israel “as a mark on your hand” and “a memorial between your eyes” (Exodus 13:16). Although repeatedly evoked with such splendid images as these in God’s commandments to Israel to remember her deliverance from bondage, *tefillin* are never described in Hebrew scripture. As we have seen from the specifications God exacts for his altar and later, for his temple, this was not because he was not particular about his cult places or practices. So, jumping into the breach of biblical silence (and, in the process, ratifying and additionally regulating existing practice), the rabbis specified how *tefillin* were to be made and when worn (*Menahot* 34b–37b).

Traditionally, *tefillin* are two small cubical black leather boxes containing parchment made from the hide of *kasher* animals. Each of the *tefillin* contains the same four biblical passages, which are written by a scribe on one piece for the arm, and on four separate scrolls for insertion into four parallel compartments worn on the forehead. On the head-box is written the Hebrew letter *shin*. They are worn on the inner left arm, opposite the heart (*shel yad*) and on the forehead above the space between the eyes (*shel rosh*). The strap circling the head is knotted at the nape of the neck in the shape of Hebrew letter *dalet*. The remaining part of the strap of the hand is bound around the palm forming the Hebrew letter *yod*, and Hosea 2:21–22 is recited. *Shin, dalet, yod* combine to make *Shaddai*, one of the names of God. Originally, *tefillin* were worn throughout the day. Today they are worn only during the morning service, and only by Jewish males. Since they serve as a reminder, they are not required on the Sabbath or on major festivals, which are themselves considered to be sufficient reminder of the covenantal relationship to God. *Tefillin* are not worn on the first day of mourning, by a groom on his wedding day, or by lepers or the excommunicated.

In the passage above, Rabbi Abin (Avin) seeks to show how we know, based on scripture, that God wears *tefillin*. Isaiah 62:8 is invoked to illustrate that his “right hand” was the Torah, “a fiery law unto them,” according to Deuteronomy 33:2. The “arm of his strength” in the Isaiah passage represents the *tefillin*, according to R. Abin. Although the passage does not specify on which arm God wears the *tefillin*, talmudic-style analysis would seem to suggest that “the arm of his strength” is in fact, God’s right arm, since it is his right hand that is the all-powerful Torah. Already we have a possible “complementary” aspect to God’s ritual practice: Unless one is left-handed, human *tefillin* are worn on the left arm. Deuteronomy 28:10, according to R. Eliezer, proves the divine practice of wearing *tefillin* on the divine head. “And all the peoples of the earth shall see that the name of the Lord is called upon thee, and they shall be afraid of thee.” This is also an interesting proof-text for human religious practice: As we have seen, the boxes and straps of the *tefillin* do in fact spell out the name of God.

Now, why would God wear these? Notable in and of itself is the fact that the rabbis, who are in the habit of explaining everything, do not deem it necessary to explain this. The answer lies in examining what is written on the mortal pieces of parchment together with what is written on God’s scrolls inside the compartments of his boxes.

For millennia, the *tefillin* have contained four sets of verses: Exodus 13:1–10;<sup>42</sup> Exodus 13:11–6;<sup>43</sup> Deuteronomy 6:4–9;<sup>44</sup> and Deuteronomy 11:13–21.<sup>45</sup> These passages speak of his power in choosing and delivering Israel from bondage; they exhort his people to remember God’s deliverance of them from bondage, always to love him with their whole being, and to shun the gods of neighboring peoples. As May and Metzger comment on Deuteronomy 6:4–9, the first passage of the Shema’, “[t]here are not many gods but *one* LORD who is sovereign and unique; thus Israel is to have only one loyalty.”<sup>46</sup> The biblical verses worn by the Israelites in their *tefillin* have a common—and reflexive—focus: They each mention the *mizvah* of wearing *tefillin*; and a common theological theme: They celebrate the uniqueness of God.

God’s *tefillin* scrolls, correspondingly, celebrate the uniqueness of Israel. As the *Berakhot* passage continues, God sings the praises of his chosen nation.

R. Naḥman b. Isaac said to R. Ḥiyya b. Abin: What is written in the *tefillin* of the Lord of the Universe?—He replied to him: *And who is like Thy people Israel, a nation one in the earth* (I Chron. 17, 21). Does, then, the Holy One, blessed be He, sing the praises of Israel?—Yes, for it is written: *Thou hast avouched the Lord this day . . . and the Lord hath avouched thee this day* (Deut. 26, 17, 18). The Holy One, blessed be He, said to Israel: You have made me a unique entity in the world, and I shall make you a unique entity in the world. “You have made me a unique entity in the world,” as it is said: *Hear, O Israel, the Lord our God, the Lord is one.* (Deut. 6, 4). “And I shall make you a unique entity in the world,” as it is said: “And who is like thy people Israel, a nation one in the earth” (I Chron. 27, 21).<sup>47</sup>

God has made a marriage vow with Israel; this is his part of the covenant. His *tefillin* confirm Israel's uniqueness and affirm his own choice, just as Israel's do for him. A mutual covenantal element explains the relationship of these two, on the analogy of the marriage of Hosea and Gomer. They are a recitation of re-marriage on covenantal grounds, after the model in the second chapter of Hosea. Hosea undertakes another wedding to his Gomer the harlot, despite her unfaithfulness. God will never cease to love his own, seeking to win back those who forsake him.

As we read in Hosea 2:19–20: “And I will betroth you to me forever; I will betroth you to me in righteousness, and in justice, in steadfast love, and in mercy. I will betroth you to me in faithfulness; and you shall know the Lord.” Hosea 2:23 reiterates this vow: “And I will sow him<sup>48</sup> for myself in the land. And I will have pity on Not Pitied, and I will say to Not my people, ‘You are my people’: and he shall say, ‘Thou art my God.’”

The marriage relationship was a familiar figure of speech depicting God's relation to Israel.<sup>49</sup> Human *tefillin* contain four verses in which Israel is dedicated to God as her chosen deity, the one true God. Yahweh's *tefillin* say that he is devoted to Israel as his chosen people by the covenantal relationship they share. Some of the earliest prayers in Hebrew liturgy, found in *Lamentations Rabbah* 1:45 and *b. Bererakhot* 11b, echo this adamant bond of faithfulness: “With great love hast thou Loved us, O Lord our God, with great and exceeding pity hast Thou pitied us.”

The rest of the verses contained in God's *tefillin* bear this out:

R. Aḥa b. Raba said to R. Ashi: This accounts for one case, what about the other cases?—He replied to him: [They contain the following verses:] *For what great nation is there, etc.; And what great nation is there, etc.* (Deut. 4, 7, 8); *Happy art thou, O Israel, etc.;* (Deut. 33, 29) *Or hath God assayed, etc.;* (Deut. 4,34) and *To make thee high above all nations* (Deut. 26, 19).<sup>50</sup>

When worn by a mortal, the *tefillin* bind one to God as the only true God, solely to be loved, worshiped, and obeyed. “The biblical portions define the foundations of Judaism in terms of God's unity and the acceptance of Divine rule, as well as God's providence and faith in the world's redemption, as symbolized by the Exodus from Egypt. Thus, the act of binding oneself with the *tefillin* serves as a regular reminder to the Jew to be bound up in service to God, with heart, mind, and might.”<sup>51</sup> When worn by God, God's *tefillin* contain his response. They beautifully provide the missing half of the puzzle—that is, the loving divine answer to the message of the scrolls worn by mortals. Taken together, they spell out the theme of the marriage-covenant. The two sets of scrolls provide an interlocking, dually reinforced affirmation of mutual choice and devotion. God's biblical passages are *not* the same as people's. Thus what is at work here is by no means a simple case of intended imitation of the immortal by the mortal or vice versa, but rather a powerful, theologically intentional principle of complementarity.

### God's Six Prayers in Four Cases

R. Aḥa b. Raba (Rava) is concerned that God's phylacteries would have too many cases if they are to contain so many prayers. Although he has six passages of scripture (two extra), God wears four cases on the *tefillin* of his head, just as people do. Clearly, there is the sense that God's *tefillin* should match people's. R. Ashi has a reassuring response: In three of the cases, God has two similar verses written and inserted.

If so, there would be too many cases? Hence [you must say]: *For what great nation is there*, and *And what great nation is there*, which are similar, are in one case; *Happy art thou, O Israel*, and *Who is like Thy people*, in one case; *Or hath God assayed*, in one case; and *To make thee high*, in one case. 6b) And all these verses are written on [the *tefillin* of] His arm.<sup>52</sup>

Again, what is the text's real purpose? Why is it necessary so carefully to specify that even though God wears six verses, he does not wear six *cases* but rather the normative four? Deviation from established custom was perceived by the rabbis as extremely dangerous. For example, the Mishnah states explicitly that one may not wear oval-shaped or gold phylacteries. This relates in a general way to the rabbinic struggle against nonrabbinic communities, and the need to affirm a uniform practice after the destruction of the temple. God must wear the same number of cases as his people do lest they say, "since God has six scriptural passages, so can I."

Controversy had surrounded the contents of the *tefillin* during the late first century C.E. Both the daily prayers, the Shema<sup>5</sup>, and the *tefillin* used to include the recitation of the Decalogue (Deuteronomy 5:6–21). Both Babylonian and Palestinian Talmud (*b. Berakhot* 12a and *y. Berakhot* 3c) give clear testimony that the Decalogue was excised from daily prayers to counter the attack of the *minim* that the law resided only therein. *Y. Berakhot* 3c reads, "It used to be lawful to recite the ten commandments every day. Why then do they not recite them now? Because of the claim of the *minim*: so that they may not say, 'only these [words] were given to Moses on Sinai.'" *Minim* is a coverall term for groups the rabbis judged heretical in belief or practice. Some of these sectarians refuted the divine origin of the entire Torah, claiming that only the Decalogue was God-given. Mann identifies the *minim* with a gnostic group.<sup>53</sup> Vermes thinks they were Christians and/or Jewish Christians.<sup>54</sup> Moore confesses ignorance as to their identity.<sup>55</sup>

Archaeological evidence indicates that pre-Diaspora *tefillin* used to contain a fifth scroll for the Decalogue. At Qumran, variations in first-century custom were apparent in both the order of the four basic paragraphs—and in an addition to them—for Deuteronomy 5:1 also appeared in the Qumran phylacteries.<sup>56</sup> This passage was clearly related to the recitation of the Decalogue (Deuteronomy 5:6–21) and its inclusion in *tefillin* prior to the destruction of the Second Temple.<sup>57</sup> Ritual uniformity had been achieved by the second century. The *tefillin* of

the cave at MuRabbah'at, dating from the Bar Kokhba uprising (132–135 c.e.), were identical with rabbinic practices.<sup>58</sup> The recitation of the Decalogue in the daily morning prayer ceased before the second century, and its inclusion in the *tefillin* disappeared at the same time.

Rabbinic Judaism was determined not to provide sectarian movements with any grounds for distortion. Like a bright starfish that will, without hesitation, surrender whichever legs it must to permit its escape from danger, the tradition relentlessly excised from its practice a custom as precious and fundamental as the saying and wearing of the Ten Commandments. It sacrificed the part in order to save the whole. It was crucial that God wear the *tefillin*, but just as key that he wear the right number of cases: the regular number. Whatever God did was infinitely more powerful than what people did; therefore the rabbis wanted his religious practices to be orthoprax, and never the basis for unorthodox piety.

### *Rosh Hashanah* 17b: God Wears the Ṭallit

God's covenantal relationship with Zion is reiterated in a passage from *b. Rosh Hashanah* 17b.<sup>59</sup> But here he does more than wear affirmations of Israel's uniqueness among the nations of his world on forehead and arm. God actually dons the fringed ṭallit customarily drawn over the head by the prayer-reader (*Ba'al Tefillah*) of a synagogue congregation.

"And the Lord passed before him and proclaimed" [etc.] [Ex. 34, 6].

R. Joḥanan said: Were it not written in the text, it would be impossible for us to say such a thing; this verse teaches us that the Holy One, blessed be He, drew his robe round Him like the reader of a congregation and showed Moses the order of prayer. He said to him: Whenever Israel sin, let them carry out this service before me and I will forgive them. "*The Lord, the Lord*": I am the Eternal before a man sins and same after a man sins and repents. "*A God merciful and gracious*": Rab Judah said: A covenant has been made with the thirteen attributes that they will not be turned away empty-handed, as it says, "*Behold I make a covenant.*"<sup>60</sup>

A wool or linen mantle still worn by observant Jewish men, the ṭallit had tassels with eight threads doubled over and fastened at its four corners as commanded by God to Moses in Numbers 15:38–41.<sup>61</sup> After the Diaspora, the shawl-like garment, probably resembling the Bedouin *abbayah*, which had been worn daily by rabbis and scholars and by the wealthy, tended to become a more ritually marked vestment, mandated for prayer.<sup>62</sup> It is worn by males during the morning prayers, for every additional service, and all day on Yom Kippur during the five prayers.<sup>63</sup> Strictly observant Jews don both *tefillin* and ṭallit to walk from home to the synagogue. The ṭallit is donned with a blessing, "Who has commanded us to wrap ourselves in *zizit*." After the blessing, the ṭallit may not be dropped to the shoulders until the person has wrapped himself entirely

in it, covering his head, and remaining that way “for the time it takes to walk four cubits.”<sup>64</sup> The *ṭallit* is specifically a prayer shawl; “to be enfolded by the *ṭallit* is regarded as being enveloped by the holiness of the commandments of the Torah, denoting a symbolic subjection to the Divine Will.”<sup>65</sup>

In rabbinic times, the leader of prayer, the one who “descended before the Ark” on the east wall of the synagogue, had an extraordinarily important role in the discharge of the *mizvot* of statutory prayer. For prayer, the rabbis stressed attaining a right frame of mind and an attitude of devotion (*iyyun tefillah*, *b. Shabbat* 127a). Although *b. Berakhot* 24b and 31a emphasize the formation of the words of prayer with one’s lips, rather than their declaration in a loud voice, one can also discharge one’s religious obligation by listening attentively to the *Ba’al Tefillah* and responding, “Amen.”

The designated reader, or anyone called to the Reading of the Law, must put on a *ṭallit* before reciting the Torah blessings.<sup>66</sup> As Ismar Elbogen remarks in his study of the history of Jewish liturgy, “Someone who was to step out of the ranks of worshipers to perform a liturgical function had to be properly dressed; he owed this to the dignity of the congregation. Not only defects in one’s clothing, but certain kinds of clothing were considered improper and rendered the wearer unsuited to serve as precentor (*m. Megillah* 4:8, *t. Megillah* 4:30). The precentor used to wrap himself in his coat. From this, scholars became accustomed to put on special clothing whenever they visited the synagogue or set about praying anywhere else. . . . In particular they used to put on the particular type of coat that in the Talmud is called *ṭallit*.”<sup>67</sup> Thus, resonating with the irony that has become so familiar in dealing with divine reflexivity, we find this imagined God of *Rosh Hashanah* enveloping himself in a symbol of submission to his own will, “like the leader of prayers in a synagogue,” seeking to lead his people in right worship of himself.<sup>68</sup>

The “proof-text” of this paradox in the talmudic passage is Exodus 34:6–7. Rabbi Yoḥanan discusses God’s revelation of his own attributes to Moses: “The Lord passed before him, and proclaimed, ‘The Lord, the Lord, a God merciful and gracious, slow to anger, and abounding in steadfast love and faithfulness, keeping steadfast love for thousands, forgiving iniquity and transgression and sin, but who will by no means clear the guilty, visiting the iniquity of the fathers upon the children and the children’s children, to the third and fourth generation.’”<sup>69</sup> But Yoḥanan’s discussion has deeper implications. Yoḥanan teaches that Exodus 34:6–7 also reveals God as the source of an order of prayer. It is the proof-text for the institution of a liturgical service. The passage from the Torah containing the thirteen attributes was read as part of the prayer service. It had the special force of repentance. According to the talmudic exegesis, God has made a covenant with his thirteen attributes (that is, aspects of his own nature), guaranteeing that the people of Israel “will not be turned away empty-handed” when they recite them. God not only self-reveals; he also institutes prayer. Thus the rabbis are able to say that “he drew his robe round Him like the reader of a congregation and showed Moses the order of prayer.”

The introductory phrase, “God is *like* the reader of a congregation,” warns us that, however briefly, we are in the realm of the *mashal* (parable). When he

dons the *tallit* and shows Moses the order of prayer, God is acting as a synagogue leader would to familiarize a congregant with a liturgy. *But as God*, he is offering the terms of repentance: the recitation by mortals of his attributes that he himself recites. The talmudic perspective sees all of this happening at the time of the original conversation between God and Moses. *Rosh Hashanah* therefore presents a thoroughly self-referential situation.

God's wearing of the *tallit* and behaving in this way reinforces synagogue prayer in general, but also a specific prayer within that order of prayer, as he himself is shown to be both its source and teacher. This echoes his role as source of the moral and religious code of Israel, the Ten Commandments. It is different, however, in that it affects the realm of contemporary cult practice, offering an explicit aetiology for a particular liturgical feature.<sup>70</sup>

That the Talmud itself is aware of the paradoxical, even shocking import of this passage is attested by the formula "Were it not written in the text, it would be impossible for us to say such a thing." The "text" in which "it is written" to which the rabbis refer is the scriptural justification for the midrashic idea—in this case, Exodus 34:6, undergirding the image of God in a prayer robe through a miracle of exegetical creativity. Moshe Halbertal has systematically evaluated the rare instances, including *Rosh Hashanah* 17b, where this "If not" formula occurs in rabbinic literature, remarking that its presence "alerts us decisively that we are about to face an unusual issue that, were it not for the text, the exegete would not be able to express of his own accord. . . . [T]he expression points to a theological meaning of the text which is irresolvable."<sup>71</sup> Halbertal characterizes the position of the exegete as one of "aghast wonder." Interestingly, he shows that the "If not" formula almost always accompany *midrashim* that reverse or apparently compromise God's role vis-à-vis human beings, "stretching the humanization [of God] to its limit if not further . . . the authoritative stance of God towards man is completely blurred."<sup>72</sup> For example, in *b. Berakhot* 32a, God's fury in Exodus 32:10 ("Now let me alone, so that my wrath may burn hot against them and I may consume them; and of you I will make a great nation") allows Rabbi Abahu to say, "If the text had not been written, it would be impossible to say such a thing: This teaches that Moses took hold of the Holy One, blessed be He, like a man who seizes his fellow by the garment and said before Him: Sovereign of the Universe, I will not let Thee go until Thou forgivest and pardonest them." As Halbertal observes, the social space between God and Moses is collapsed by the analogy; a man grabs his equal's coat to coerce or plead with him. The formula occurs again in *Sifrei Numbers Beha'lotacha* 96, which resolves the traditions of Moses's death in Reuben's portion of Moab with that of his burial in God's portion: "Moses was carried in the hand of God for four *millin* from the portion of Reuben to the portion of Gad."

In the end, the use of the formula has to do with the power of love to subvert hierarchies and hence, strangely, to break them open, resulting in revelation. Here in the prayer-robed God, of whom, had the text not been written, it would be impossible to speak, we may perhaps find resonance with the icon of Christ feeding the Apostles from the Eucharistic cup, or Allāh and the angels

praying for Muḥammad. For Halbertal, the implications of these talmudic reversals extend infinitely, like mutually reflecting mirrors.

This unique midrashic anthropomorphism creates an intimacy between God and man that disturbs the most basic understandings of analogies of personification. The strength of love is its ability to disrupt the unsaid connections in the lives of people within which there are clear authority relations. Love is that which causes authority figures to change into dependents; love breaks the rules. The peak of religious life is found in a place where the humanizing metaphor arrives at the edge of paradox, as a result of intimacy that breaks the structure of the authority that is supposedly a given in the relationship between man and God.<sup>73</sup>

### *Berakhot* 7a: God Prays

R. Joḥanan says in the name of R. Jose: How do we know that the Holy One, blessed be He, says prayers? Because it says: Even will I bring them to My holy mountain and make them joyful in My house of prayer. [Isaiah 56, 7]. It is not said, “their prayer”, but “My prayer”; hence [you learn] that the Holy One, blessed be He, says prayers. What does he pray?<sup>74</sup>

The scripture on which this is a commentary (Isaiah 56:7) in its wider context seems to be an inclusive declaration that Gentile offerings are accepted on God’s altar: “And the foreigners who join themselves to the Lord, to minister to him, to love the name of the Lord, and to be his servants, every one who keeps the sabbath, and does not profane it, and holds fast my covenant—these I will bring to my holy mountain, and make them joyful in my house of prayer; their burnt offerings and their sacrifices will be accepted on my altar; for my house shall be called a house of prayer for all peoples.”<sup>75</sup>

“My house of prayer” (or, as R. Joḥanan calls it, “the House of my Prayer”) offers an expansive image. The root of *tefillah*, “prayer,” means “to think, entreat, intercede, judge”; its reflexive derivative, *lehitpallel*, has the etymologically derived sense of “judging oneself.” Setting aside the question of the new and special characteristics of prayer in the rabbinic period, we can observe some qualities of continuity throughout Jewish history. *Tefillah* is not only the asking for needs to be met, but in the highest sense, it is the “intimate communion of the created and the Creator, speaking deep to deep.”<sup>76</sup> In Hebrew scripture, God seeks humankind as readily as the reverse (Isaiah 50:2, 65:12). The power of prayer has its roots in the Jewish belief that mortals can communicate with God, and that God hears and responds. As God created man and woman in his own image—and so has a personal interest in them—there is a spiritual connection between creator and creatures; the Psalms especially express this yearning for closeness to God, often associating prayer with that search. *Exodus Rabbah* 21:3 says that “[W]hoever directs his heart . . . to Him in prayer is



heard.” *B. Berakhot* 10a says that no one should ever despair of supplicating God, “even if a sharp sword rests on his neck.”<sup>77</sup> A prayer may be as simple as that uttered by a desperate Moses on behalf of the leprous Miriam,<sup>78</sup> or as complex and formal as Solomon’s extensive petition at the dedication of the First Temple (1 Kings 8:22–53).

So in *b. Berakhot* 7a, God’s prayer is his self-communion, and furthermore, it is not a communion without struggle. For the sake of his creation, God prays for one of his divine attributes to overcome the other. Incredibly, he makes *himself* contingent, limiting and defining his own nature with respect to humankind.

### Prayer in the Rabbinic Period

The liturgical laws in the Hebrew Bible have much to say about sacrifice, but almost nothing about verbal utterance. Biblical laws governing sacrifice, a “choreographed, dramatic act of public worship in and of itself,” give virtually no provision for liturgically incorporated prayer.<sup>79</sup> The only exceptions were two: first, the pilgrim’s declaration on bringing first fruits to the Temple ([Deuteronomy 26:5–10], which begins “[A] wandering Aramean was my father,” describes Israel’s delivery from bondage in Egypt, and concludes, “[A]nd behold, now I bring the first fruit of the ground, which Thou, O Lord, hast given me”) and second, the priestly confession on the Day of Atonement ([Leviticus 16:21–34], in which two goats are made to absorb symbolically the sins of the people. One goat is offered for God; one driven into the wilderness to Azazel, an evil spirit or desert demon. The actual text of the priestly confession is not given in the Pentateuch, although a version may be preserved in a Second Temple formula (*m. Yoma* 3.8).

During the Babylonian exile, communal prayer developed outside Eretz Yisrael as a replacement for sacrifices. After the Second Temple destruction, the rabbis built on precedent by recognizing a daily prayer service: *avodah shevalev*, “the service of the heart.” In *Ta’anit* 26, the pivotal commandment in Deuteronomy 10:13 (“And if you will obey my commandments which I command you this day, to love the Lord your God, and to serve him with all your heart and with all your soul”) is explicitly construed by the rabbis as a ratification of prayer. The question about the scriptural statement, “Which is the service of the heart?” is answered simply, “Prayer.” Just as Joḥanan ben Zakkai comforted Joshua mourning the Temple in ruins with the reminder that in acts of loving-kindness, “we have another atonement as effective as this,” so the concept of “service” (*avodah*), once connected with the temple and its worship, finds a substitute in prayer. One of the two important reasons for statutory prayers was the claim that they were ordained by the patriarchs. The other was that they correspond to the perpetual offerings in Temple times (*b. Berakhot* 26a–b).

But prayer is not simply a substitute for the lost Temple and its cult; more is claimed for prayer. In *b. Berakhot* 32b, we read that “greater is prayer than

sacrifices. Greater is prayer than good deeds.”<sup>80</sup> The example to illustrate the precedence of prayer over good deeds given by rabbis is that of Moses, whose good deeds were not answered, but only his prayer: He was allowed to see the promised land before his death (Deuteronomy 3: 26–27).

The Talmud itself (*b. Berakhot* 21a) states that the religious *obligation* of offering up prayers is rabbinic, not biblical. *B. Berakhot* 4:1 states that one should pray three times a day, in the morning, in the afternoon, and at night.<sup>81</sup> Set formulas were ascribed to the men of the Great Assembly; congregational prayer was expanded to include morning benedictions (the *Shema* and blessings), the *Amidah* or *Tefillah* (the eighteen benedictions), and the reading of the law, which combined Torah study and worship. A liturgical pattern for daily, Sabbath, and holiday worship took shape. In addition to statutory and private prayers, public prayers were specified (that is, for rain in a time of drought in *Taanit* 2:1–5). Nonobligatory prayers, such as *kinot*, *piyyutim*, and *seliḥot* were composed. Prayers appeared in poetry and prose and were added to the prayer-book, used in public worship. Other forms were ordained for use in the home: the grace after meals, *havdalah*, the *kiddush*.<sup>82</sup>

*B. Berakhot* 4:4 and *Avot* 2:13 emphasize the need to retain a personal and spontaneous element in prayer; prayer as fixed or rote negate its purpose and effect. *Y. Berakhot* 4:3 and 4:8a urge one to “offer an original prayer each day.” Nevertheless, in rabbinic Judaism, prayer is mandatory, not a “spontaneous activity” or an outpouring of devotion or petition, as conceived especially by Protestant Christianity. The prayer that emerged from the crucible of the rabbinic movement was not the same as the later *kavvanot*, medieval mystical meditations and devotions revolving around divine mysteries; nor is it the prayer of Hasidism, a supreme religious act whose ecstatic expression in worship aims to achieve mystical communion with God (*dev'kut*). Rabbinic prayer, at the time that God prays, is a *mizvah* and not optional. All *mizvot* occur within a legal framework.<sup>83</sup> The rabbis were suspicious of too much and the wrong kind of prayer. *B. Berakhot* 33b says that man should use only standard scriptural praises established for use in prayers. Prayer must not be uttered “in the midst of sorrow, idleness, laughter, frivolous chatter, or idle talk, only in the joy of performing a commandment” (*b. Berakhot* 31a). God’s prayer, then, upholds and strengthens a mandatory practice, a ritual obligation that was explicitly expected and hoped to replace the elaborate sacrifice of the Temple. God is imagined as praying at a time in the history of Judaism when the habit of prayer has become, of necessity, greatly emphasized.

### Collective Nature of Prayer Stressed over Personal

Neither does rabbinic prayer conform to an image of individual, private devotion. Personal supplications outside of ritual were to be kept short (*b. Berakhot* 61a). A minyan was required for important features of the daily prayers; without the minyan, these were omitted, and as we have seen previously in *b. Berakhot*

6b, this is no small matter to God: “R. Joḥanan says: Whenever the Holy One, blessed be He, comes into a Synagogue and does not find ten persons there, He becomes angry at once. For it is said: Wherefore, when I came, was there no man? When I called, was there no answer? [Isa. 50: 2].”

In the same spirit, “[C]orporate prayers set in the first person plural, or those offered on behalf of others, have greater significance than private, self-centered prayers.”<sup>84</sup> *B. Berakhot* 29b tells the story of a rabbi departing on a journey, who composed a prayer for the occasion that began: “May it be Thy will, O Lord my God, to conduct me in peace, and to deliver me from every enemy and ambush by the way.” A colleague objected, saying, “Always should a man associate with the community when praying. How should he pray? ‘May it be Thy will, O Lord *our* God, to conduct *us* in peace, etc.’” (italics added). *B. Berakhot* 29b–30a says a man should pray not only for himself but think of others as well, using the plural injunctive “grant us,” not “grant me.” Communal prayer in the context of congregational worship is of greater significance than private prayer (*b. Berakhot* 8a, *Deuteronomy Rabbah* 2:12); *b. Berakhot* 6a is even more radical: “A man’s prayer is only heard [by God] when offered in a synagogue.” In synagogue liturgy, the use of first person was and is very rare. Even rarer, then, is God’s prayer, for it is supplication made by the ultimate “first person.”

Furthermore, contrary to what we may understand or be comfortable with—living as we do in an era that stresses individual spirituality—prayer was not necessarily the supreme act of devotion after Javneh. Greater though prayer might be than good deeds or sacrifices, greater yet and valued more even than prayer was the reverent study of Torah. “Rabbinic piety came to be organized around gratitude for the law and joy in its fulfillment. The law was understood to be a divine gift; to observe the law meant to strengthen one’s link to its giver. . . . Study of the law was both the highest intellectual activity in which a Jew might engage and also a practical activity designed to further this expansion of opportunity. Enlarging the scope of the law was not felt to be adding to the already heavy burden; on the contrary, it increased the portion of one’s life that could be constructed in response to the voice of God.”<sup>85</sup> Both *b. Shabbat* 11a and *b. Rosh Hashanah* 35a tell us that some scholars only prayed occasionally. In *b. Shabbat* 10a, a rabbi who spent too much time praying is rebuked by his colleagues for putting temporal over eternal concerns; it is Torah study, not prayer, that links human beings to the infinite. Some holy men were renowned for their ability to have their prayers answered (*b. Berakhot* 34b); scholars would ask these to pray for them.

### The Holy of Holies: Place of God’s Prayer

One of the most simple and moving Talmudic directives on prayer was that of Rabbi Eliezer: “When you pray, know before whom you stand” (*b. Berakhot* 28b). But in the next part of the *Berakhot* 7 passage about God’s prayer, we encounter

an interesting reversal: God “stands” in the presence of a mortal, Rabbi Ishmael ben Elisha, and the latter formulates God’s prayer for him as a blessing.

It was taught: R. Ishmael b. Elisha says: I once entered into the innermost part [of the Sanctuary] and saw Akathriel Jah, the Lord of Hosts, seated upon a high and exalted throne. He said to me: Ishmael, my son, bless me! I replied: May it be Thy will that Thy mercy may suppress Thy anger and Thy mercy may prevail over Thy other attributes, so that Thou mayest deal with Thy children according to the attribute of mercy and mayest, on their behalf, stop short of the limit of strict justice! And He nodded to me with His head. Here we learn [incidentally] that the blessing of an ordinary man must not be considered lightly in your eyes.<sup>86</sup>

What an encounter! In this recapitulation of the previous discussion of God’s prayer, we are suddenly transported from the realm of the holy and abstract into the immanent, concrete world—in fact, to God’s dwelling place on earth, where his “prayer” is transformed into a blessing from a mortal—extraordinarily, solicited by him. With his nod, God acquiesces to Ishmael’s blessing, whose words are, as we will learn, those of God’s own prayer.

About 960 B.C.E., at the dedication of the Temple, the tension implicit in the notion of an earthly, finite “house” for the holy, infinite One appears already in Solomon’s words: “But will God dwell on the earth? Behold, heaven and the highest heaven cannot contain thee; how much less this house which I have built!” (1 Kgs. 8:27). However, the Temple has a special role as a focus of human prayer. Because of God’s gracious condescension to live among his people, Solomon directs the prayers of Israel to the Temple, asking God to “hear the plea of your servant and of your people Israel when they pray toward this place” (1 Kings 8:30; see also 2 Chronicles 6:21, 26). And “[I]f your people go out to battle against their enemy, by whatever way you shall send them, and they pray to the Lord toward the city that you have chosen and the house that I have built for your name, then hear in heaven their prayer and their pleas, and maintain their cause” (1 Kings 8:44). In 1 Kings 8:46–50, Israelites taken captive are enjoined to turn to the land, the city, and the house of God, where he is urged to hear their prayer and forgive their transgressions. In the book of Daniel, written c. 165 B.C.E. in response to the persecution of Antiochus IV, the exiled Daniel is said to have worshiped three times daily in an upper room of his house in Babylon where he “had windows made facing Jerusalem” to the west (Daniel 6:11). By the Mishnaic period, the custom became the legal norm (*b. Berakhot* 4:5). All Jews “should direct their hearts to one place in worship.”<sup>87</sup>

We encounter in this story a compelling geography of the sacred. Every Jew living in the Diaspora is bound to turn toward Israel when he or she prays. If in Israel, one should turn toward Jerusalem. If in Jerusalem, Jewish prayer is directed to the Temple Mount. If one is actually on the Temple Mount, the prayer is directed to site of the Holy of Holies within the Temple itself. And here, enthroned in the Holy of Holies, we discover God himself blessed by Ishmael

with the words of his own prayer! In this centrifugal diagram of mandated prayer, divine prayer for the resolution of a volatile divine polarity resides at the center.

### “What Does He Pray?”

R. Johanan has asked what God prays. In the name of Rab, Rabbi Zuṭra b. Tobi informs him of the exact divine wording: “May it be My Will that My mercy may suppress My anger, and that My mercy may prevail over My [other] attributes, so that I may deal with my children in the attribute of mercy and, on their behalf, stop short of the limit of strict justice.<sup>88</sup> The content of God’s prayer is compelling. “May it be My Will”—his own customized variant of the formulaic “May it be Thy will,” beginning the majority of the countless prayers in rabbinic literature—“that My mercy prevail over My justice and all My other attributes.” This is a direct reference to the thirteen divine attributes enumerated in Exodus 34:6 and discussed in the passage in *b. Rosh Hashanah* 3b. This is not a unique theme in the Talmud; for example, *b. Rosh Hashanah* 17b contains a collective rabbinic observation of God’s two attributes and their paradoxical coexistence:

R. Huna contrasted [two parts of the same verse]: It is written, *The Lord is righteous in all his ways*, and then it is written, *and gracious in all his works*. [Ps. 147, 17] [How is this?—At first righteous and at the end gracious. R. Eleazar [similarly] contrasted two texts. It is written, *Also unto thee, O Lord, belongeth mercy*, and then it is written, *For Thou renderest to every man according to his work*. Ps. 67, 13. [How is this?—At first, *Thou renderest to every man according to his work*, but at the end, *unto thee, O Lord, belongeth mercy*. Ilfi . . . [similarly] contrasted two texts: It is written, *abundant in goodness*, and then it is written, *and in truth*. [Ex. 34, 6].

But nowhere else in the Talmud does God himself pray. Although judge of the world, God wishes to let a higher compassion (*middat haddin*) overwhelm his sense of what the world truly deserves (*middat haraḥamim*). The rabbis called him *Raḥmana* (the Merciful); *Avot* 2:19 teaches that “the world is judged by grace.”

This is in fact a divine version of the efficacy of prayer toward the same human goal. *B. Yevamot* 64a tells us that prayer can turn God’s attribute from one of anger to one of compassion: “The Holy One, blessed be He, longs for the prayer of the righteous. Why is the prayer of the righteous likened to a shovel?<sup>89</sup> In the same way that a shovel removes produce from one place to another, so that the prayer of the righteous turns his attribute of anger to one of compassion.” Prayer serves to overcome our own evil impulses.

*Y. Berakhot* 7d also asks for the triumph of one human attribute over another: “May it be acceptable before Thee, O Lord my God and God of my fathers, that Thou break and cause to cease the yoke of the evil impulse from our hearts, for Thou hast created us to perform Thy will and so we are bound to do. Such is Thy desire and such is our desire, too. But what impedes us? The

leaven in the dough. It is revealed and known before Thee, O Lord my God and God of my fathers, that Thou cause it to cease from upon us and subdue it so that we may do Thy will as our will with a perfect heart." Human beings do not have the strength to resolve the dual claims unceasingly brought to bear upon our moral compass; God does. In the vision of the Talmud, one relies on prayer to God to achieve the right outcome. God's own prayer can achieve this transformation from justice to mercy. As the source of all being, he alone can reorder not only *our* own but also *his* own inclinations. It is his goal, and his prayer is efficacious.

This dualistic divine internal conflict is a self-contained struggle on a titanic scale. And the resolution asked for by God will not be some relative synthesis but rather the temporary triumph of one of his qualities which is the complete opposite of its rival.<sup>90</sup> We have already seen God's transfer from the Throne of Judgment to the Throne of Mercy in *b. Avodah Zarah* 3b; this is also echoed in *Leviticus Rabbah* 29:1 and 29:3 and most dramatically in the passage from *Pe-siqta de-Rav Kahana* which is read at the Liturgy of the New Year.

When the Holy One, blessed is He  
ascends His throne on the New Year,  
He first sits on the Throne of  
Judgement. But when Israel, assembled  
in the synagogue, sounds the Shofar,  
He rises from the Throne of Judgement  
and ascends the Throne of Mercy.<sup>91</sup>

In the ancient Near Eastern *Poem of Erra*, the god Erra (scorched earth) is provoked by the god Išum (fire) into dethroning Marduk, the king of Babylon, and laying the city waste; the two gods then seem to switch roles and Erra is rebuked by Išum for the slaughter of just and unjust alike; Erra restores both Marduk and the city.<sup>92</sup> Jon Levenson wonders whether "the superficial narrative of the poem, in which the two are represented as different gods, is best not accepted as definitive, but rather viewed as a projection . . . of the deep psychological dynamics internal to one God, Erra-Išum."<sup>93</sup> In the Hebrew Bible, just one God—the only God—does indeed seem to suffer a continual psychic pendulum swing between his two main attributes. He is inherently benevolent and restorative, and yet, just as deeply rooted in his nature, his chaotic and destructive side continues to threaten creation.<sup>94</sup>

We have seen that the idea of God's goodness and the idea of his absolute sovereignty are in contradiction. Affirm either, and the other is cast into doubt. *It is characteristic of Judaism that it tends to accept the contradiction as tolerable rather than to reject it as fatal.* That is, Judaism generally sees it as a *paradox*, a mystery of the faith, if you will, or a creative tension. . . . This dialectical theology of divine goodness and total sovereignty, in which each is read in the light of the other, underscores our awareness of the eeriness, the uncanniness of the God of Israel.<sup>95</sup>

*B. Berakhot* 7a proceeds with a discussion of the mood of anger as it occurs in God, and the length of time one must wait for it to pass. Apparently God is angry every day.<sup>96</sup> And so it is important that God prays each day, not that he once did pray. The divine self-intervention must take place continually, unceasingly. Furthermore, his prayer is far more than a divine model for pious humanity. It is a mechanism for the ongoing preservation of the world, a petition that only God can make and, reflexively, that only he can grant. Just as God can swear only by his own holiness in Psalm 89:34–36,<sup>97</sup> so there is no authority to hear or grant God's prayer higher than himself.

### Why Does God Pray That His Mercy May Prevail over His Justice?

The dichotomy between God's mercy and his wrath, and the profound hope for the prevalence of the former over the latter, was a ubiquitous theme throughout Hebrew scripture as it corresponded to Israel's cataclysmic history. But perhaps at no time was this hope so poignantly invoked as after the Roman destruction of the Temple. The prayer in *Berakhot* is God's own hope for himself. Although the scene with Rabbi Ishmael takes place with God still dwelling on the mercy seat within his house, the story was probably told and surely redacted after the razing of the Temple and the flight of Johanan to Javneh in 70 C.E. Analogous talmudic texts bear this out in their chronology: "*Since the Exile*, the Shekhinah mourns and God prays: May it be My Will that in My dealings with My children My mercy overcome My Justice [italics added]." What was to be the theological interpretation of the destruction of the Temple?

Sacrifice was still possible among the ruins until the final Roman architectural insult on its site in 135 C.E., and Israel could hope for the Temple's restoration—as witnessed in the yearning of *γ. Berakhot* 7d: "Rebuild Thy Temple and Thy city speedily in our days."<sup>98</sup> But Hadrian's violent suppression of the Bar Kokhba uprising of 132–135 C.E. caused the martyrdom of Rabbi Akiva, with the *Shema*' on his lips—he who had reorganized the Mishnah and found biblical bases for the tenets of the oral law. Its lethal climax also saw the prohibition of circumcision, and the end of any surviving hope for the renaissance of the Temple cult with the construction of a temple of Jupiter Capitolinus on the foundations of the sacred ruins. Not only was the sacrificial cult extinct but so was any hope of its reinstatement in the near future.

We have seen that in midrashic parables, God was thought to mourn the loss of his Temple as a king mourns that of his palace. In *Pisqa de-Rav Kahana*, providing an exegesis on Isaiah 40:1 ("Comfort ye, comfort ye My people"), God beckons the prophets to go together with him to comfort Jerusalem: "Comfort her, ye who are in the regions above, comfort her, ye who are in the regions below. . . . It is all these I mean by ye when I say comfort ye, Comfort ye with Me."<sup>99</sup> But Rabbi Abin (Avin) poses the hypothetical situation of a king whose palace burns down: "Who is to be comforted, the palace or the owner of the palace? Is it not the owner of the palace who should be comforted?"

Likewise, the Holy One, saying, The Temple is My Palace, 'And it is My palace that lieth waste' (Haggai 1:9), went on to ask, Who then requires comforting? Is it not I? Hence *Comfort, comfort, My people* (Isa. 40:1)—comfort Me, comfort Me, O my People."<sup>100</sup> God's mighty grief and his demand for comfort from his beloved creatures pierce the heart of the hearer.

But just as the first destruction of the Temple by the neo-Babylonians in the sixth century B.C.E., and the first exile, were construed as God's punishment upon Israel's wickedness and unfaithfulness, so a certain school of thought attributed the same reason to the second national disaster. In many writings, God's wrath and mourning exist together. Certain parables make it clear that God regrets his decision to allow the disaster as much as he mourns the Temple's loss; but it is regret for a decision clearly made by him.

That the loss of the Temple was seen, at least by some Jewish writers of the Roman Imperial period, as a deliberate act or allowance by God is proved not only by 2 Baruch but also, for example, by *Lamentations Rabbah* 2:7. God was, after all, omniscient and all-powerful. Commenting on Lamentations 2:7, "The Lord has rejected His altar,"

R. Haggai said in the name of R. Isaac:

It is like the inhabitants of a province who prepared banquets (literally: set tables) for the king. They provoked him, but he bore with them. The king said: The only reason the inhabitants of this province provoke me is because [they rely upon] these banquets that they have prepared for me. Here, it is thrown down in their faces!

Similarly, the Holy One, blessed be he, said: The only reason Israel provoked Me is because [they rely upon] the sacrifice that they used to offer before me. Here, it is thrown down in their faces!<sup>101</sup>

As in the case of 2 Baruch, certain first- and second-century C.E. Jewish writings purporting to respond to the First Temple destruction in fact treat the second event, much as Herodotus wrote of the Persian War while in fact providing political and moral commentary on the Peloponnesian War, or Arthur Miller treated the Salem witch trials in his play *The Crucible* while living through the McCarthy hearings, a contemporary "witch hunt." If in fact the second destruction was any barometer of God's wrathful justice against Israel, then the rabbinic report of his own prayer that his mercy, the more clement part of his nature, might overcome his angry side is indeed understandable. After 70 C.E., Judaism was reoriented, but with a definite hope for God's clemency, and, perhaps as *Berakhot* 7a shows, a need to insist on it.

"The House of My Prayer"

God is praying. But to whom? I would suggest that he is praying as much "from himself" or "because of himself" as "to himself." "To whom is God praying?" is



a question that invites a rationalistic answer unworthy of subtle and paradoxical midrash. The phrase “The house of My prayer” in Isaiah 56:7 may not anticipate *b. Berakhot* 7a, but may make a more general statement about prayer. Prayer that is directed to God is as much “God’s prayer” as the one he makes himself. Prayer is a consecrated activity; whether supplication or praise, spontaneous or prescribed, individual or congregational, it is part of God’s sphere and it acquires his attribute of holiness. It belongs to him. When God prays, he undertakes and takes part in prayer. Midrash is “parabolic” not only in that it often makes its theological points through parables; parabolic, too, is the energetic realm of prayer, catapulting endlessly from God to his people and back again. God and Israel are at each end of the inclusive parabola that is prayer. Ultimately, however, prayer, whether divine or human, is God’s.

An excellent analogue is the genre of blessing. In Hebrew scripture, human beings bless one another. But Christopher Mitchell has convincingly shown that throughout known patriarchal blessing promises, God is the original source of blessing.<sup>102</sup> Blessing is never procured through the autonomous, magical power of the spoken word. God makes promises in the first person; moreover, the biblical narratives describe God as able to fulfill his promises directly. For example, God says to Abraham concerning Sarah, “I will bless her, and give a son to you from her (Gen. 17:16).” The fulfillment is reported by the simple statement, “YHWH did to Sarah what he said he would do” (Genesis 21:1). There is no mention of any means or indirect agent. In Genesis 12:3a, there is an apparently deliberate effort to portray God as the originator of blessing and curse: “I will bless those who bless you, and him who curses you I will curse.”<sup>103</sup>

To summarize: God’s prayer has two crucial didactic purposes in *b. Berakhot* 7a. In the first place, it reinforces prayer as a *mizvah*, at a time when prayer had explicitly replaced sacrifice in the liturgical life of Israel. A personally involved God participates in ritual prayer himself. Second, it portrays God as desiring his merciful attributes to prevail over his just (or wrathful) ones. The theological truth that God would always ultimately show compassion toward his people had been affirmed throughout the history of Israel, indeed at every apocalypse and every renewal of the covenant. But it was especially important now that God’s very house, the “tent of meeting” where he had said he would meet with his people (Exodus 25:22) had been wiped from the earth. Some writings of the period, such as 2 Baruch and even *Lamentations Rabbah* make it clear that God was indeed wroth to allow such an event, although Israel is hard-pressed to explain why. Even those writings that mention God’s anger also describe his broken heart, and the mourning that attends his sorrow. But both theologies, which are for all practical purposes the same theology, would demand a reassurance—the same that God had given through history—that his mercy would consistently, in fact, daily prevail over his justice.

Finally, this prayer is happening in the present: “God prays,” not “God prayed.” God’s continuous activity is a not a one-time intercession with himself. Like the worshipful study of Torah in the passage we will next consider, it is an ongoing theurgic act. In the Hebrew Prayer Book, God is said to be “renewing the creation every day continually.” God’s prayer, like the sacrifices of

the Vedic gods, does not end. But whereas the Vedic divine sacrifice is a cosmically recreative act, the prayer of Akathriel Jah is a redemptive act that spares the cosmos. This redemptive, reflexive verbal action is imagined as taking place at the world's very center, the Holy of Holies.<sup>104</sup>

### God Studies Torah: *ʿAvodah Zarah* 3b

In the talmudic tractate *b. ʿAvodah Zarah*, we find the rabbis embroiled in a heated conference about whether God laughs and if so, when.<sup>105</sup> They are intrigued by Psalm 2:4: "He who sits in the heavens laughs." There is only one day on which God laughs, according to Rabbi Isaac, which some connected with Rabbi Jose's representation of the great battle of the Messianic age, when idol-worshippers will pass themselves off as pious proselytes only to be exposed under the leadership of Gog and Magog (Ezekiel 39). These will most surely be laughed at by God. But Rab Judah counters in the name of Rab that God laughs during the course of his normal daily routine—when he is sporting with the great sea-dwelling Leviathan at day's end. In the course of the rabbinic conversation, we also learn that God studies his own Torah in the morning.

Then each of the proselytes will throw aside his religious token and get away, as it is said, *Let us break their bands asunder*. [Ps. 2:1], and *He that sitteth in heaven laugheth* [Ps. 2:4]. [It was on this that] R. Isaac remarked that there is no laughter for the Holy One, blessed be He, except on that day. But is there not, indeed? Yet Rab Judah said in the name of Rab: "The day consists of twelve hours; during the first three hours the Holy One, blessed be He, is occupying himself with the Torah, during the second three He sits in judgment on the whole world, and when He sees that the world is so guilty as to deserve destruction, He transfers himself from the seat of Justice to the seat of Mercy; during the third quarter, He is feeding the whole world, from the horned buffalo to the brood of vermin; during the fourth quarter He is sporting with the Leviathan as it is said, *There is leviathan, whom Thou hast formed to sport therewith?*" [Ps. 104:26] Said R. Naḥman b. Isaac: Yes, he sports with His creatures, but does not laugh at his creatures except on that day.<sup>106</sup>

Next, sadly, R. Aha comments to R. Naḥman b. Isaac: "Since the day of the destruction of the temple, there is no laughter for the Holy One, blessed be He."<sup>107</sup>

### *ʿOseq Battorah*

We have noted that Torah study is the supreme devotional activity, valued even more highly than prayer. Thus it is important that God himself is said to undertake this activity daily; in fact, as for the pious, it is his first scheduled period of each day. But exactly what is the Holy One doing in relation to Torah? Could

it not be the case that he is simply contemplating his own creation, or making provisions for its further dissemination among humanity? The Hebrew phrase used in this passage, the substantive participle *oseq battorah*, in mishnaic and talmudic usages carries with it far more meaning than simply “one who is studying.” With a secular object, *oseq* means “occupying oneself with, doing business, arguing or dealing with (an affair).”<sup>108</sup> Sacred objects such as the Law or Torah attract this activity, so that it has the expanded meaning of “occupying oneself with, studying, reflecting on, or teaching” the Law (or Torah) (*oseq battorah*). In the Mishnah, which is older than the Gemara, *oseq battorah* has the same sense. *Avot* 6a speaks of “everyone who occupies himself in Torah”; “You have no student except one who studies the Torah” (*Avot* 6b).<sup>109</sup>

At least half of the time when *oseq* appears in the Talmud, it is with the Law or the Torah as object, in forms of the same phrase as in *b. Abodah Zarah*.<sup>110</sup> In *b. Soṭa* 21a, we learn that “Hillel occupied himself with the Torah.”<sup>111</sup> The sentence “He is occupied with the Law of his creator [especially the Torah or verses of it]” occurs in *b. Berakhot* 9a; *b. Rosh Hashanah* 59c; *b. Shabbat* 4b; *b. Ta’anit* 64b; and *Lamentations Rabbah* 16a. Other instances include: “He is occupied with the Torah for three hours each day” (*Deut.* 32:4); “They were sitting occupied with that verse” *Pirque de-Rav Kahana* 316:7; *Lamentations Rabbah* 83:7; and *b. Sukkoth* 55b.<sup>112</sup> Similarly, in the reflexive, when used with Law or Torah, it means “one who occupies oneself with”: for example, “If you want to occupy yourselves with the Law, you should recite Shema before midnight and (then) occupy yourselves.”<sup>113</sup> We have seen that the divine presence is with those who are “sitting and studying Torah” (*b. Berakhot* 6a). Of Rabbi Akiva (called “the Rescuer of the Torah” in *Sifre to Deuteronomy* 48), the rabbis taught in *b. Berakhot* 61, “Once the wicked Government [i.e. Roman] issued a decree forbidding the Jews to study and practise the Torah. Pappus b. Judah came and found R. Akiba publicly bringing gatherings together and occupying himself with the Torah (*oseq battorah*).”<sup>114</sup>

To repeat our question, why does God study Torah? To undertake a response, we must first appreciate the nature of his relationship with the Torah during the rabbinic period. First of all, especially after 70 C.E., *oseq battorah* was more than study of Scripture, an enriching activity. Like prayer, it was a *mizvah*, an orienting religious activity, one that changed the actor, in turn activating divine interest. A people that had survived by choosing to “make a fence around the Torah” and if necessary, literally die rather than be religiously assimilated, was strongly dependent on the halakhic judicial process. But Torah was more: It was the mind of God.

What they [the Pharisees] sought was the full and inexhaustible revelation which God had made. Contents of that revelation, they held, was to be found in the first instance in the Written Text of the Pentateuch; but the revelation, the real Torah, was the *meaning* of that Written Text, the divine thought therein disclosed, as unfolded in ever greater richness of detail by successive generations of devoted teachers. “Apart from the direct intercourse of prayer,” says [Travers]

Herford, “the study of Torah was the way of closest approach to God; it might be called the Pharisaic form of the Beatific Vision. To study Torah was to think God’s thought after Him, as Kepler said.”<sup>115</sup>

The rabbis thought that Proverbs 8:22–23 identifies the Torah with pre-existent wisdom. Wisdom says, “The Lord created me at the beginning of his work, the first of his acts of old. Ages ago I was set up, at the first, from the beginning of the earth.” As such, the Torah was agent of the process of creation and the structure of the cosmos. *Genesis Rabbah* 1:1 says that God planned the universe using the Torah: “The Torah said, I was the architectural instrument of the Holy One, blessed be He.” Spinning a *mashal* of its own, the Torah points out that a human king, when he constructs a palace, does not follow his own ideas but those of an architect. An architect has parchments and tablets to know how to plan rooms and entrances. “So did the Holy One, blessed be He, look into the Torah and created the Universe accordingly.” Similarly, Philo writes, “God having determined to found a mighty state, first of all conceived its form in His mind, according to which form He made a world perceptible only by the intellect, and then completed one visible to the external senses, using the first one as a model.”<sup>116</sup>

The study of Torah also provided a divine link to the hereafter. The tractate we have been considering, *b. ’Avodah Zarah* 3b, asserts shortly after the story of God occupying himself with Torah that “To him who is engaged in the study of Torah in this world, which is likened unto the night, the Holy One, blessed be He, extends the thread of grace in the future world, which is likened unto the day, as it is said: *By day the Lord*, etc.”

In other words, the study of Torah was the quintessential activity of Judaism in this time period. God gave the Torah, and Israel alone accepted it.<sup>117</sup> Originally “the ideal of the religion of the Rabbis was the extension of God’s Kingship over all the peoples of the world.”<sup>118</sup> The *Sifra* to Leviticus 18:5 (“Ye shall therefore keep My statutes and Mine ordinances, which if a man do, he shall live by them”) claims that “even a Gentile who obeys the Torah is the equal of the High Priest.” Nevertheless Rabbi Joḥanan sharply clarifies: “A Gentile who occupies himself with the study of Torah is deserving of death, as it is said, ‘Moses commanded us a Torah, an inheritance for the assembly of Israel [Deut. 33:4]—the inheritance is for us, not for them’” (*b. Sanhedrin* 59a). Similar to the struggle over the Decalogue, but with a radically different approach (for the Torah could not be likewise dropped from the *tefillin*), forceful efforts to distinguish Israel’s receipt of the Torah, as Cohen observes, “were in all probability called for by the rise of the Christian Church whose members also studied the scriptures and claimed that the Divine Grace rested upon them.”<sup>119</sup>

There can be no doubt that God’s daily three-hour Torah session serves as a powerful endorsement for the holy activity of *’oseq battorah*. God not only gives the Torah; he is its student. This seems to be the understanding in *Exodus Rabbah* 30:9: “The attributes of the Holy One, blessed be He, are unlike those of a human being. The latter instructs others what they are to do but may not practice it himself. Not so is the Holy One, blessed be He; whatever he does

He commands Israel to perform.” But is God’s study of the Torah described in *‘Avodah Zarah* purely to inspire mortals to do the same? Tractate *Baba Mezi’a* provides a surprising answer: Interpretation of the Torah, and even the Torah itself, has become the exclusive province of the rabbis now, and no longer belongs to God.<sup>120</sup>

### The Torah Prevails over Miracles and Is No Longer God’s

In the wake of the loss of the sacrifice, “rabbinic intellectualism turned into a disciplined argument the interplay of proof and refutation, a holy activity.”<sup>121</sup> The wording of sacred texts became ascendant over the circumstances in which they were pronounced; this would have important repercussions in post-talmudic spirituality.<sup>122</sup> One of the most important effects of this process was the diminishing of the influence of miracles. In the miracle-oriented Hellenistic, Imperial, and Late Antique periods, we must see this as yet another rabbinic concern for the sanctity and uniqueness of the *ancient* revelation of the Torah on Mount Sinai.

Rabbi Eliezer ben Hyrcanus disputed with the entire remaining rabbinat concerning an issue of ritual uncleanness of a tiled oven. He challenged them, “If the *halachah* agrees with me, let this carob-tree prove it! Thereupon the carob-tree was torn a hundred cubits out of its place—others affirm, four hundred cubits. ‘No proof can be brought from a carob-tree,’” they retorted.<sup>123</sup> A stream flowed backward, inspired by the same oath on the part of Eliezer, and the walls of the schoolhouse began to fall to prove that he was right, until they were rebuked by Rabbi Joshua, “When scholars are engaged in a *halachic* dispute, what have ye to interfere?” Whereupon the walls did not fall, in honor of Joshua, nor stand upright in honor of Eliezer (“And they are still standing thus inclined”). Finally the rabbis were challenged by the heavenly *Bat Qol*, literally, the “daughter of a voice,” who cried out, “Why do you dispute with R. Eliezer, seeing that in all matters the *halachah* agrees with him!”

But even this was not enough. In a surprising turn of events, God himself was rebuked by the rabbis. “But R. Joshua arose and exclaimed: ‘The Torah is not in the heavens (*Hattorah lo’ bashamayim hi*)’,”<sup>124</sup> What did he mean by this?—Said R. Jeremiah: That the Torah had already been given at Mount Sinai; we pay no attention to a Heavenly Voice, because Thou hast long since written in the Torah at Mount Sinai, After the majority one must decline.”<sup>125</sup> R. Nathan then quizzed Elijah about God’s reaction to this, “What did the Holy One, blessed be He, do in that hour?—He laughed [with joy], he replied, saying, ‘My sons have defeated Me, My sons have defeated me.’”<sup>126</sup> All the objects that Rabbi Eliezer had declared as clean were then burned in a fire, and by vote he was excommunicated.

This emphasis on the subservience of even God to his own Torah serves to counter the influence of a charismatic personality who challenges the established rabbinic school. As Anson Laytner points out, “What is so extraordinary about this story is that in so miracle-minded an age, the Rabbis could reject all

proofs based on miracles, which is to say they rejected divine input—even revelation by means of the Bat Kol—in their halakhic decisions. . . . It is as R. Jeremiah interprets: once God gave the Torah to Israel, it is Israel's to use, and Israel has the freedom to challenge God's will based on the laws themselves."<sup>127</sup> In the Hellenistic atmosphere of charismatic holy men, the rabbis felt it necessary to downplay miraculous events; such individualistic phenomena detracted from their own collective authority.<sup>128</sup> It is interesting that the *Bat Qol* is obeyed elsewhere in the Talmud. Alexander Guttman makes the case that because Eliezer was arrested and acquitted by Roman authorities on charges of Christianity, and because this particular dispute centers on ritual purity laws, it was absolutely necessary to counteract the authority of this particular "holy man." "The *Bat Qol*, a post-Biblical revelation, at first recognized as the highest authority in deciding the *Bet Hillel* versus *Bet Shammai* controversies and playing elsewhere a role in legal matters, later became all but outlawed. This step was taken about the time when Pharisaic Judaism became aware of the imminent danger coming from nascent Christianity which had previously been considered as one of the many obscure ephemeral sects. With such revelation, all other miracle had been outlawed, too, as an active agent influencing the decision of *halakic* controversies."<sup>129</sup>

God's Torah no longer belonged to him to alter or even to interpret on an ongoing basis. One of the qualities of divine reflexivity, as we have observed, is its function in reinforcing religious dogma and practice. When the idea appears in art, liturgy, or scripture, something—usually some aspect of worship or belief that is threatened or problematic—is often endangered.

God occupies himself with Torah in *Avodah Zarah* because, in a sense, Torah study, and not his numinous intervention in history, was the new systole and diastole of Judaism. "To learn Torah was thus a kind of sober mysticism, a reliving of the events at Sinai, while to add to the growing body of 'oral' law was to share in a divine activity. Already in the Talmud God is depicted as studying Torah several hours a day (B.T., 'A.Z. 3b), but the kinship between the rabbi and God was felt to be even stronger. By increasing the amount of Torah in the world, the rabbi could do what previously only God had been held able to accomplish."<sup>130</sup> Every Jewish male of age studied Torah; everyone sought to participate in it, including God. The rabbis had stepped onto his platform, and as they studied together, Great Originator of the Law and its devoted exegetes, Father of All and his quarrelsome children, the Torah was enriched and enlivened.

### Why Does the Talmudic God Observe?

Why does God behave in these ways? Should the interpretation of such midrashic texts cause us to label it, in the spirit of the rabbis, *teyqu*—an insoluble problem? Since the imitation of God was such an important goal of rabbinic teaching, perhaps we should simply be content with Arthur Cohen's assessment of the genre of talmudic passages that we have been considering: "More

probably the thought behind them is the doctrine of imitation. . . . the Imitation of God is a cardinal principle of human conduct in Rabbinic ethics, and it applies to the whole of life—to religious observances as well as to moral conduct. God is accordingly represented as Himself obeying the precepts which He desires Israel to observe.”<sup>131</sup>

These descriptions of divinely practiced religion are indeed strange. The irony and playfulness of the portraits of God we have seen are true to the spirit of Haggadah; they make us smile, or do a double take. But the rabbinic idiom often relies on wit or shock value as a rhetorical enforcer.<sup>132</sup> At the same time, it reinforces certain ritual observances, the *mizvot* which were rabbinic Judaism’s centerpiece. The observant God of the Talmud is no exception.

As in the ancient Greek case, divine reflexivity in the rabbinical imagination was a response to a specific period in religious history. The tradition reacted to assault by promoting certain alternative forms of worship. The Temple and sacrifice were gone; prayer and the devotional study of the law replaced them. God himself therefore prayed and studied the law. Divine reflexivity also reinforced very particular types of praxis, as part of a general effort to suppress sectarian movements such as Jewish Christianity and gnosticism. As also may have been true in the Greek case, divine reflexivity arose when certain practices central to the faith were endangered and facing very real threats. In an atmosphere of collective religious anxiety, scriptural ideology can and will perform this custodial function.<sup>133</sup> As the Talmud “throughout the centuries of persecution and darkness . . . saved Israel from intellectual and moral degradation,”<sup>134</sup> so these paradoxical instances of God’s practiced religion are consistent with that effort and perhaps with that result. To return to David Stern’s point, God’s undertaking of these practices confers on them an “ultimate reality” which no human being, no matter how revered, could offer. In so doing, the practices are concretized, ratified, and intensified within the tradition by its supreme focus and ultimate ground of being—God himself.

It is important that God’s ritual behavior often has a character unique and highly appropriate to himself. He is not, as we wondered at the beginning of this discussion, simply a larger Jew. He is Lord of Israel and “master of the Universe.” We have seen that his religion is *not* exactly like that of human beings. It is rather, deliberately and carefully presented as modified to fit God’s unique and omnipotent nature. That is what gives these passages their power; they are extremely attentive to the ritual nuances resulting from the strange situation of God as observant religious practitioner. The scrolls in divine *tefillin* have prayers that differ from these found in human *tefillin*, reflecting his part of the covenantal relationship with Israel. When God mourns mortal loss, he does so in his own immortal way and on his own global scale. When he prays, he modifies the human formula, and prays that it be *his* will that his mercy might overcome his justice.

This, then, goes far beyond the divine establishment of paradigm. This is reciprocal religion. As in the case of divine libation in classical Greek vase-painting, where certain iconographic details make it clear that the gods’ practiced rituals in fact belong uniquely to them, the divine inhabits its own world

and makes its own rules. Far from being “anthropomorphic” when undertaken by God, religious observance is in fact both *like* and *unlike* its human analogue. Just as in ancient Greek epic, where there are tantalizing reference to the gods’ own special language, whereby in the *Iliad* the river Skamandros is called Xanthos and in the *Odyssey*, Circe’s plant is called *moly* by the gods, the ritual sphere of action of which God himself is the center and agent refers to the known elements of religious tradition, but in a “marked” way. We might even consider whether it is the human religious observance that is the variant, responsive to divine catalysis. The “religion of the gods” can serve as a model for human beings, but it has ontological self-sufficiency, and not just because observance itself is holy: Divine reflexivity does not derive its “charge” from religious demarcation. In the religion of Israel, as the faithful conceive it, religious activity originates in the godhead and is then refracted by the human realm, not the other way around.



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# 9

## “God and His Angels Pray for the Prophet”

*A Qurʾānic Paradigm*

Call down blessing on him with that *ṣalāt* with which Thou didst call down blessing on him in the *miḥrāb* of Thy transcendent holiness and the Ipseity of Thine intimacy.

—Aḥmad al-Ṭijānī<sup>1</sup>

*Ṣallā ʾllāh ʿalayhi wa-sallama*: “God bless [the Prophet] and give him peace.” This benediction, one of the most common in Islam, is known in Arabic as the *taṣliyah*, or *aṣ-ṣalāt ʿalā Muḥammad*.<sup>2</sup> A Muslim would no more mention the Prophet’s name without this formulaic prayer, the “calling down of blessings upon the prophet” (*ṣalāt ʿalā ʾn-nabī*), or that of Allāh without phrases of magnification, than the rabbis would have mentioned the name of God without adding, “blessed be He.”<sup>3</sup>

From the time of the earliest Muslim commentaries through the present, the devotional *taṣliyah* has been exclusively derived from the Qurʾānic Sūrah 33, verse 56:

“Allah and His Angels send blessings (*yuṣallūna ʿalā*) on the Prophet. O ye that believe! Send ye blessings on him, and salute him with all respect.”<sup>4</sup> The practice of the benediction has been described as nothing less than a divine command: “Know that the command to call down blessing on the Prophet was given in the second year of the *Hijra*, and it is said that it was on the night of the *Isrāʾ*; there is a tradition . . . that the month of Shaʿbān is the month of calling down blessing on the chosen Prophet because *the verse commanding it was sent down in that month* [i.e. Qur. 33,56].”<sup>5</sup>

The verse that is the basis for the *ṣalāt ʿalā ʾn-nabī* originally described not a human blessing of the Prophet but the action of God and his angels. We find a harbinger of its usage earlier in the Sūrah,

at 33:43: “Oh, ye who believe! Celebrate the praises of Allah, and do so often; and glorify Him morning and evening. He it is Who sends Blessings on you, as do His angels, that He may bring you out from the depths of Darkness into Light: And He is Full of Mercy to the Believers.” As in verse 56, only one verbal phrase is used: *ṣallā ʿalā*, even though—for reasons that we shall consider presently—it is often translated from the Arabic differently when God is the subject than when the angels are.

However, like those devout exegetes, we immediately confront a thorny conundrum: The verb describing the action of God and the angels, *ṣallā ʿalā* in all other contexts means “to pray for or over”—in other words, “to pray on behalf of” someone. That is how it is used in its other Qurʾānic contexts where the subjects of the verb are human rather than divine. *Ṣallā ʿalā*, as Aḥmad al-Tijānī rightly observes, carries with it the liturgical force of the *ṣalāt*, the five daily formal prayers enjoined upon the faithful in the Qurʾān.<sup>6</sup> *Ṣallā ʿalā* means “to perform ritual intercession for.” Or that is what it *would* incontrovertibly mean, were not Allāh *al-wāḥid* (the One),<sup>7</sup> *al-ḥayy* (the Living),<sup>8</sup> *al-muta ʿālī* (the exalted in and through himself; great above all, most high).<sup>9</sup> Does God, whose transcendence Islam describes as inconceivable, and who cannot be limited, really “pray for” the Prophet, one of his own creatures? Immediately we are in very deep and by now familiar waters.

God’s prayer for the Prophet in the Qurʾān represents perhaps the most acute case of divine reflexivity we have considered thus far, in that from its beginnings Islam has insisted so strongly on the uniqueness, indivisibility, and absolutely uncompromised noncontingency of the godhead. Whereas the libation of Zeus or Apollo may have seemed to the ancient Greek philosophical mind “strange and paradoxical” or even “absurd,” within Islamic theology and corresponding heresiology, the idea of God performing ritual prostrations in prayer borders on inconceivability. That such a description is found first not in later theological speculation but in the Qurʾān, the holy revelation of God to humankind, and not once but twice, along with many other passages that seem to support this vision of God’s dynamic prayer, is hard to imagine.

The verbal noun *tashbīh*, when used in describing God, describes a heretical theological move of “comparing; immanence; symbolic interpretation; anthropomorphism.”<sup>10</sup> It may, for example, attend the comparison of “a Divine Quality to a cosmic or human one in order to make it comprehensible.”<sup>11</sup> This and its accompanying terms *tāʾīl* and *tanzīh* represent the monumental theological and philosophical debate within Islam examined below in the section on Allāh. This was the nigh-impossible struggle to render intelligible, and to worship, a living deity, while also avoiding the dangers of dragging that unspeakably powerful, abstract deity down to human level. If Judaism was deeply perturbed over the centuries by this problem (as for example, witnessed in Moses Maimonides’s impassioned proofs against divine anthropomorphism in his *Guide for the Perplexed*), Islam was agonized.

But is the case of Sūrah 33:56 an instance of anthropomorphism? God’s *ṣalāt* is not so much a divine quality as a divine action. And how “human” is that action? How much is it conceived of as resembling human prayer?

Muslim theologians did struggle with how best to understand God’s paradoxical *ṣalāt* upon his Messenger, Muḥammad—and some, like the great Sufi mystic Maulānā Jalāluddīn Rūmī, reveled in it. For the philosopher Ibn al-ʿArabī, God’s prayer was not only not paradoxical; it was the heartbeat of the theophanic imagination. Basing his discussion on Sūrah 33:42, God becomes, in Ibn ʿArabī’s writing, the *muṣallī*, “he who prays,”<sup>12</sup> mirroring the rabbinic image of the *ṭallit*-wrapped God as the *Baʿal tefillin*.

In the previously considered classical Greek, ancient Israelite, Christian, and talmudic traditions we have seen that if we have a “problem” in ancient theological interpretation, then we have a corresponding problem in modern critical interpretation. Writing in the early twentieth century, Hartley Hirschfeld represents Sūrah 33:56 as indeed indicating God’s own prayer. Without hesitation, he compares this passage to the talmudic examples upon which we have just been speculating.<sup>13</sup> Writing in the 1930s, James Robson takes strong exception to this.<sup>14</sup> “To some who are learning Arabic the use of the verb *ṣallā* in connection with Allah raises a difficulty. They have learned that it means ‘to pray,’ and therefore they wonder whether the conventional phrase used after Mohammed’s name expresses a wish that Allah may pray for the Prophet. The writer has even heard a missionary telling Arabs that that was what it meant, and that therefore it was nonsensical. But surely Arabs know their own language, and therefore it is better to find out what this difficult phrase really means.”<sup>15</sup>

Robson’s characterization of the phrase as “difficult” and his desire to find out “what it really means” is a sign that divine reflexivity is at play. We have encountered this confusion before in the case of other iconographic and literary materials featuring divine beings performing ritual actions. The more transcendent, potent, and monolithic the supreme deity, the higher the degree of what the translator of al-Tījānī calls “Ipseity” attributed to the god, then the more “difficult” things often become for the rationalist theologian or modern scholar—and the more contorted the efforts to explain the evidence as meaning something other than what it clearly purports to mean. Islam is rightly perceived as “supremely” monotheistic, disseminating the pure, clear light of the fire of divine Unity. The modern interpretive problem before us has its origin in a limited understanding of the nature of the divine in Islam and of the worship ascribed to it. I raise the question of whether the “problematic” scriptural passage, even if understood quite literally, is indeed divorced from, rather than reflective of, the self-understanding of the tradition.

An irony emerges. By protesting that the *ṣallā ʿalā* cannot really mean “pray for” if Allāh is its subject, those who protest are limiting God’s nature as it is magnified by Islam. In effect, the protest determines what he can and cannot do: He can be and do everything else in his created universe *except* himself pray for the Prophet. The problem stems, as in the other cases we have considered, from the assumption that God’s worship is exactly like human worship—the offering of a lesser, contingent being to a greater, noncontingent one. If one refuses the obvious meaning of *yuṣallūna ʿalā* in Sūrah 33:56, one must approach the sin of *shirk* by attributing to God a contingency. Apparently prayer

is an “off-limits” activity for him. He cannot pray for a lesser creature. This would *seem* to be sensible, since God is Glorious, *al-wāsiʿ* (the comprehensive),<sup>16</sup> *al-qādir* (the powerful),<sup>17</sup> *al-badīʿ* (the Absolute Originator).<sup>18</sup> But Islamic doctrine also says that first and foremost, there is nothing that God cannot be or do!

In fact, as I shall argue, two elements support and ratify, rather than undermine, a literal interpretation of Sūrah 33:56—“God prays for the Prophet”—which I maintain is the phrase’s most obvious and at the same time its deepest meaning. The first is one of the most essential metaphysical qualities of God (*ṣifāt Allāh*) as defined by Islam<sup>19</sup>—his self-sufficiency, embodied in the names of *al-qayyūm* (the self-subsisting)<sup>20</sup> and *al-ghanī* (the self-sufficing).<sup>21</sup> Second, but just as important to our enquiry, is his reciprocal relationship to the cultic life of Islam, both directly and as mediated by the Prophet.

I contend that both of these allow God to be the subject of prayer. As with the Greek vases, and as with the talmudic “anomalies,” my starting assumption is that the religious tradition is “innocent until proven guilty.” That is, I assume that what is “really meant” in Sūrah 33:56 is exactly what it says. My goal will be to discover whether there are good grounds within Islamic scriptural theology and devotional practice to support this assumption.

Is this divine prayer in a self-contained mode? God’s *ṣalāt* is intercessory, not contemplative.<sup>22</sup> The divine prayer for “drawing down of blessing on” Muḥammad *by God* becomes the basis for the mortal prayer for “drawing down of blessing on” the Prophet *by human beings*, arguably the most frequent and efficacious devotional prayer in Islam.<sup>23</sup> The believer is enabled to intercede for the Prophet because the Qurʾān asserts that God himself intercedes for him or her.

When the believer pronounces the *ṣalāt ʿalā ʿn-nabī*, God’s prayer for the Prophet is not only referenced, but initiated—set in motion: “cultic time.” God’s divine prayer in Sūrah 33:56 signals his unending participation in the blessings that are uttered on Muḥammad by mortals through a life of prescribed ritual prayer. As we shall see, the circle of prayer is completed in that the mortal *taṣliyah* then allows Muḥammad to intercede with God on our behalf.

Far from an anomaly that needs mitigation by a less controversial translation, the literal *ṣalāt* of Allah for the Prophet is *not* invalidated because it seems paradoxical. Instead, the idea bears with it the sense of a profound communion between Creator and creature, a communion having as its inspired model the original relationship of the Prophet to his God. There has developed in Islam a mechanism of ritual intercession more complex than any other we have encountered thus far. But the idea of reciprocity, and underlying that, of divine reflexivity, remains the driving force. “God Most High informed His worshippers of the rank which His Prophet holds with Him in the heavenly host, by praising Him in the presence of the angels of access, and by the *ṣalāt* of those angels for Him. Then He commanded *ṣalāt* and a greeting of peace from the people of the world below, so that the people of both worlds, above and below, might unite in His praise.”<sup>24</sup>

Origins of a Sacrament: *Ṣallāʿalā* in the Qurʾān

Philological scrutiny of pre-Islamic Arabic yields neither the noun *ṣalāt* nor the denominative verb derived from it, *ṣallā*. *Ṣalāt* almost certainly comes from the Aramaic verbal root *šly* meaning “to bow down” (*selōtā*).<sup>25</sup> It does not mean “spontaneous prayer.” That is signified by the Arabic word *duʿā*. *Ṣalāt* means, *exclusively*, “ritual worship, divine service.” *Ṣalāt* occurs in several Semitic dialects with the meaning of “prayer”; it was used by Aramaic-speaking Jews for the obligatory recital of the Eighteen Benedictions thrice daily.<sup>26</sup> In its Qurʾānic incarnation, *ṣallā* means simply “to perform the *ṣalāt*,” that is, “to pray ritually” (which does indeed involve bowing down) and carries with it the sense of public praise.<sup>27</sup> *Ṣalāt* seems to have been introduced into Islam by Muḥammad himself to refer to the devotional practice of the new religion—and, we might infer, to distinguish it from that of pre-Islamic veneration of Allāh.

Used with *ʿalā*, *ṣallā* carries with it the sense of intercessory prayer. In its two Qurʾānic attestations (apart from the two times it appears in Sūra 33 with God as subject), the phrase appears in the imperative with a human subject, the addressee being Muḥammad or another less exalted mortal. In these other contexts, *ṣallāʿalā* means “to pray upon or over” or “pray for.” In Sūra 9, which deals with idolators, disbelievers, and hypocrites, verse 84 enjoins, “Nor do thou ever pray (*ṣallāʿalā*) for any of them that dies, nor stand at his grave; for they rejected Allah and His Messenger, and died in a state of perverse rebellion [or: while they were still sinners].”<sup>28</sup> *Ṣallāʿalā* is indeed used in later tradition for some kind of funeral prayer. To underscore the idea of intercession at a bier, Qurʾānic interpreter Muhammad Zafrulla Khan renders this verse, “Pray not for any who dies, nor stand by his grave asking forgiveness for him.”

In contrast to the harsh verse 84, verses 101–104 of Sūra 9 offer a positive mandate of intercession by the faithful for the “desert Arabs round about you as well as (desert Arabs) among the Madīnah folk. . . . Perhaps Allah will turn to them (in mercy): For Allah is Oft-Forgiving, Most Merciful. Of their goods take alms, that so thou mightest purify and sanctify them; and pray on their behalf (*ṣallāʿalā*), verily thy prayers are a source of security for them. . . . Know they not that Allah . . . is verily He, the Oft-Returning, Most Merciful?” Again, there can be no question here of anything other than intercessory prayer, as the idea is repeated in substantive form.

In Christian communities using Arabic or related languages, the terms *ṣalāt* and *ṣallā* have undergone an expansion in scope corresponding to their limitation in Islam. In Christian Coptic usage, the verb *ṣalāh* connotes both private devotional and public devotional prayer, like the Latin *orare*, the German *beten*, or the English “pray.”<sup>29</sup> *Ṣallā* can mean “to pray spontaneously” or it can retain its very formal usage as in Islam; it is often used to denote one’s participation in the Christian Mass.<sup>30</sup> The phrase *ṣallāʿalā* occurs in the Arabic New Testament, in the Epistle of James 5:14. The sick man is told to send for the elders of the church and they will pray “over him,” that is, including the sense of

“for him.”<sup>31</sup> But in Christian Arabic usage, *ṣallā ʿalā* can also simply mean “consecrate” or “bless” something, such as water or oil.<sup>32</sup>

By contrast, in Islamic Arabic usage, the verb *ṣallā* has always been very limited in scope. If the subject is human, it means “to perform the *ṣalāt*.”<sup>33</sup> *Ṣallā ʿalā* has the delimited sense of “to perform (usually public) worship on behalf of someone.” Popular devotional prayer-manuals use it for Muḥammad’s prayers for himself; a prayer might be called “that which the greatest of [*ṣayyids*] prayed for (*ṣallā ʿalā*) his noble self.”<sup>34</sup> But what if the subject of *ṣallā* is divine?

### What is *Ṣalāt*?

“Bow down in adoration and bring thyself the closer (to Allah)!” (Sūrah 96:19).

At the beginning of this chapter, Aḥmad al-Tijānī asks God to call down blessing on Muḥammad “with that *ṣalāt* with which Thou didst call down blessing on him” in the Qurʾān (Sūrah 33:56). The *ṣalāt* is the prayer-liturgy of the five daily times, including noon on Friday, with variants for special occasions. In the Qurʾān, *al-ṣalāt* is frequently mentioned, even the special Friday congregational *ṣalāt*.<sup>35</sup> Western scholars believe that the evolution of the liturgy of the five prayer-periods and their ritual form was gradual. At the start of his revelation, according to tradition, Muḥammad did not have a litany with which to worship God. To Sūrah 96:1, the revelation traditionally reckoned as the first given to him, along with the next two verses,<sup>36</sup> it is said that the Prophet responds to the angel commanding him to “Proclaim! In the name of thy Lord and Cherisher, who created humankind from a (mere) clot of congealed blood,” with the bewildered, “I have nothing to recite” (or: “I cannot recite”).<sup>37</sup> The divine answers to his protests in this dialogue became the first text for recitation.<sup>38</sup>

Observant Muslims, on the other hand, “have no doubt that the prayer-rite, as they experience it, is both primitive and fundamental, a dictation of the Prophet himself.”<sup>39</sup> For example, it is “Muḥammad who taught us the phrases we should say at the standing, the bowing, the prostration.”<sup>40</sup> As in rabbinic Judaism, performance—bearing as it does the gravitas of observance—is crucial.<sup>41</sup>

The *ṣalāt* consists of five daily prayer rituals, three of which are established in the Qurʾānic verses 4:103, 11:114, and 17:78 and 79 (which self-referentially commands the believer to “recite the Qurʾān at dawn”).<sup>42</sup> The five prayers, “man’s communion with the Divine,”<sup>43</sup> and corresponding physical motions have been fixed for centuries.<sup>44</sup> The body’s prostration reflects and at the same time effects the soul’s submission to God;<sup>45</sup> everything else is in a sense commentary. “The most excellent of the ways of worship is the *ṣalāt*, since it is a pillar of the faith, and includes within itself the invocation of God Most High and the declaration of His transcendence, and thanks to Him; and *ṣalāt* is the negation of immorality and of blameworthy or insolent conduct, and purifies and strengthens the body.”<sup>46</sup> The importance of the *ṣalāt* cannot be overestimated in the ritual life of Islam. Qurʾān Sūrah 14:40 pleads, “O my Lord! make me one

who establishes regular Prayer [*ṣalāt*], and also (raise such) among my offspring.” While it is “the most potent means of establishing and strengthening one’s communion with one’s Maker and of drawing near to Him,”<sup>47</sup> Islamic *ṣalāt* is formal and collective. Muslim children are first taught the set prayers by oral recitation, not how to pray extemporaneously or silently; there is nothing about “interior” spirituality in Muslim school primers.<sup>48</sup> The Islamic ideal and practice of ritual prayer is similar to that of orthodox Judaism: The prostrations of *ṣalāt* should be congregational, if possible. As in Judaism, collective, *ritualized* prayer is the vehicle by which one offers oneself completely and unconditionally to God. In the words of Seyyed Hossein Nasr, “the spiritual is never opposed to the formal. Rather it always makes use of the formal, which it interiorizes.”<sup>49</sup> Saints, for example, have often deeply spiritualized the *ṣalāt*.<sup>50</sup>

All prayers will be heard, even those of one who has neglected God for a long time. In Sūrah 2:186, God reassures Muḥammad, “When My servants ask thee concerning Me, I am indeed close (to them): I listen to the prayer of every suppliant when he calleth on Me”; God promises in Sūrah 40:60, “Call on me; I will answer!” In *ṣalāt*, there is a sense of leaving the world of the senses and standing before God—indeed, of complete humility, surrender, and annihilation in God. In a sense, because it represents this attitude and this communion, it never ceases: “Muslim prayer is not a part-time activity; it is a continual act of dedication to the end that the Divine Purpose inherent in man’s creation is fulfilled.”<sup>51</sup>

Both early Muslim and later Western translators rightly encounter extreme theological difficulties when God is the subject of the phrase *ṣallā ‘alā*, “to pray for” or “to perform the *ṣalāt* for”—for how and to whom can God pray?<sup>52</sup> Therefore Sūrah 33:43 is rendered as “It is He who blesses you, and his angels bless you” by A. J. Arberry, and 33:56, as “God and his angels bless the prophet.”<sup>53</sup> A Muslim rendition gives: “God blesses you, and his angels invoke blessings on you [the Prophet].”<sup>54</sup> This translation at least preserves the fact that it is the same verb that is used for God and the angels. But the plain sense of the verse remains.

### Muslim Interpretation of the Qur’ānic *Ṣallā ‘alā*

Can God be imagined as bowing down with his forehead touching the ground in ritual prayer? To whom would he bow? This is just the most literal aspect of the multivalent discomfort caused by a literal interpretation of *ṣallā ‘alā* when God is its subject. Al-Suyūfī addresses this problem directly when he writes, “The honour with which God most high honors Muḥammad is fuller and more universal than that with which he honoured Adam when he commanded the angels to prostrate themselves before Him, for it is not possible that God himself took part in that earlier honouring.”<sup>55</sup>

Classical Muslim interpretive authorities were well aware of the paradoxical implications and perhaps even heretical dangers of such an interpretation (and



of such an image) of the Qur'ānic statement that God *ṣallā 'alā* his Prophet. In the dictionaries *Lisān al-'arab* and *Tāj al-'arūs*, there are several attempts to explain *ṣallā 'alā*: when used of Allāh, it means that he “shows mercy” or “praises”; when used of angels, it means that they pray for and ask God to forgive someone.<sup>56</sup> That the angels also “pray for” Muḥammad in Sūrahs 33:43 and 33:56 presents no such theological problems, as in Islam the angels are essentially only luminous hypostases of God's mind. Although they are “intertwined with all dimensions of human life,”<sup>57</sup> they are in many respects inferior to human beings, and certainly not as multidimensional as mortals are in their relationship to God.<sup>58</sup>

In his commentary on Sūrah 33:56, al-Zamaksharī says that the phrase denotes mercy from God to Muḥammad.<sup>59</sup> Al-Tabarī holds that when Allāh is the subject of *ṣallā*, it means either “to bless” or “to show mercy.”<sup>60</sup> However, the translation “shows mercy to” can be challenged by Sūrah 2:157: “They are those on whom (descend) blessings (*ṣalawāt*) from the Lord and Mercy (*raḥmah*), and it is these who receive guidance.” Since *raḥmah* indisputably means “mercy,” *ṣalawāt*, the nominal plural of *ṣalāt*, is said by both *Lisān al-'arab* and *Tāj al-'arūs* to mean “praise” from Allah. Commenting on the same passage (2:152), al-Baiḍāwī says *ṣalāt* from Allāh is his declaration of purity and forgiveness.<sup>61</sup>

Other meanings of *ṣallā 'alā* are said by the classical dictionaries to be “magnify,” “bless,” and “exalt.” The *Tāj* qualifies this by saying that when *ṣallā 'alā* is used with reference to Muḥammad (presumably as object), it has only the sense of magnifying him. However, Ibn al-'Arabī, holding true to the literal meaning of the old Semitic root *ṣallā*, insists that *ṣalāt* for Muḥammad is prayer for him.<sup>62</sup>

Ibn al-Qayyim al-Jawziyyah (d. 751/1350 C.E.), a follower of Ibn Taymīya, refutes the view that *ṣallā* can mean “to show mercy,” since if *ṣallā* and *raḥima* are the same, one should be able to say *irḥam Muḥammadan* (“show mercy to Muḥammad”), but this would never be said. One can say *irḥamni* (“show mercy to me”) but never *ṣalli 'ala ya*. Where *raḥma* can be appropriately used, for example, as pertaining to the treatment of an enemy, *ṣalāt* cannot, for it involves speech. He trenchantly points out that since one verb is used in Sūrah 33:56 for what Allāh and the angels do, *they cannot do different things*. Running into the wall of *ṣallā 'alā*'s literal and customary meaning, “to pray for,” he therefore concludes that the verse must mean that both Allāh and the angels praise Muḥammad. The same verb is used immediately afterward for what human beings are to do: “O ye who believe, do you also invoke blessings on him.” So Ibn al-Qayyim believes that this directs people also to praise the Prophet.<sup>63</sup>

Popular prayer manuals from this century, which often reflect exegetical traditions much older than their date of publication, offer important commentary on God's *ṣalāt*. The intensity of their speculation is in direct proportion to the depth of the paradox and to its possible heretical potential; one senses that the question must be carefully and convincingly handled. 'Alī al-Makkī writes,

Opinions differ as to the meaning of *ṣalāt*. It is said that from God its meaning is mercy and complaisance, and from angels and men

petition and asking forgiveness. And it is said that the *ṣalāt* of God is His mercy and the *ṣalāt* of angels prayer for blessing. And it is said that the *ṣalāt* of God is His mercy combined with magnifying and that of the angels is asking for forgiveness, and that of men, humble beseeching and petition. And it is said that God’s *ṣalāt* for his prophets is praise and magnifying while His *ṣalāt* for others is His mercy.

Ibn al-ʿArabī said: *Ṣalāt* from God is mercy, and from human beings and others, angels and jinn, it is bowing and prostration and petition and praise, and from birds and owls it is praise. Each creature knows his own *ṣalāt* and *taṣbīh* . . . and al-Ḥalīmī set forth the meaning of God’s *ṣalāt* for His Prophet as His magnifying of him.<sup>64</sup>

Al-Makkī prefers the sense of “magnifying” because “one meaning can be given to the word *ṣalāt* whether it is attributed to God or to angels or to the believers who are commanded to it.”<sup>65</sup>

By now, one may sense the complexity of the pattern of worship’s paradigm and imitation in the *taṣliyah*. Humans are enabled to *ṣallā ʿalā* the Prophet Muḥammad because God *ṣallā ʿalā* him in the Qurʾān: Human beings, in a sense, take God’s place in this observance, reflecting and repeating the divine *ṣalāt*. But one form of the *ṣalāt ʿalā ʿn-nabī* goes so far as to asks God to take *our* place in this action: “and replace us, with Thy pure and generous favour, in calling down blessing on him.”<sup>66</sup> The conception of the higher status of both God and Muḥammad and the purity of their relation is responsible for this; God alone can truly *ṣallā ʿalā* Muḥammad:

If you say, what is the explanation of the fact that although God commands us to call down blessing on the Prophet, we yet say, “O God call down blessing on Muḥammad,” asking God to call down blessing instead of doing so ourselves, I reply that this is because the Prophet is pure, without blemish or failing, while we have both blemishes and failings. How shall one full of blemishes and failings call down blessings on the pure and perfect Prophet? Therefore we ask God to call down blessing on him, that the blessing may be called down by a pure God on a pure Prophet.<sup>67</sup>

Why the plethora and variety of (often contradictory) interpretations of one Qurʾānic phrase within Islamic tradition itself? Perhaps it is because in the idea of God’s *ṣalāt*, Muslim theologians have perceived that they must explain the inexplicable: a ritual that *is* unique, having its own rules different from the ones given to human beings. God’s *ṣalāt* lies at the heart of the divine being, and occurs unlike human rituals, eternally—in “cultic time.” “After all explanations the worshippers feel themselves in the presence of a mystery on which some have loved to ponder, picturing a Divine *ṣalāt* continuous from before all worlds, in the *miḥrab* of the essence of the Divine Being. Others have dwelt on it as a communion of love, ‘the calling down of blessing by the Beloved on his beloved.’”<sup>68</sup>

## The Taṣliyah

Constance Padwick, who collected and analyzed hundreds of modern popular devotional prayer manuals, noted that fully one-third of their contents consists of variations on the *taṣliyah*, the single-sentence prayer, “May God call down blessing on our Lord [Master] Muhammad and on the family of our Lord Muhammad and greet them with peace.”<sup>69</sup> The *mu’adhdhin* may call out the *taṣliyah* from the minaret. All prayers should begin and end with *tamhīd* [“Praise be to God”] and *taṣliyah*.<sup>70</sup> “The *taṣliyah* has become an essential, sometimes it would seem, the essential of the life of salvation and devotion.”<sup>71</sup>

It is also the most potent of Muslim prayers. As Annemarie Schimmel notes, “although thousands of prayers and poems speak of the Muslims’ hope of Muhammad’s intercession for them and for their families, there is one means to this end that is much more powerful than anything else: to implore God to bless Muhammad and his family. The Koran itself says (Surah 33:56) that God and his angels ‘pray upon,’ that is, bless the Prophet.”<sup>72</sup> The influence of the *taṣliyah* was highly esteemed in the development of Islamic prayer. It came to have a special efficacy and increasingly, in the view of Fritz Meier, a quasi-magical autonomy—not so much in the sense of a direct ability to influence things, but rather in its conferral of sanctity upon the supplicant, which God rewards.<sup>73</sup> The individual’s own supplications may remain unarticulated, for tradition holds that the *taṣliyah* alone suffices; God will comprehend and look favorably on the unspoken cache of personal prayers in the heart.<sup>74</sup> In the *Ḥadīth*, Muḥammad’s own words specifically support this belief: “whoever one hundred times a day speaks the blessing over me, for him God will fulfill one hundred requests, seventy in the other world, and thirty in this.”<sup>75</sup>

Many other popular devotions testify to the importance of the *ṣalāt ‘alā ‘n-nabī*: “If a man brings on the Day of Resurrection as many good works as those of all the people in the world and does not bring with them the calling down of blessing on the Prophet, his good works are returned to him, unacceptable.”<sup>76</sup> Conversely, “one of the saints saw sleep in a hideous form, and he said, ‘Who art thou?’ It answered, ‘I am thy misdeeds!’ He said, ‘And how can I be delivered from thee?’ It said, ‘By much calling down of blessing on the Prophet.’”<sup>77</sup> “(God said to Muḥammad): ‘He who, when thou art mentioned, fails to call down blessing on thee, when he enters the Fire shall be banished from God Most High.’ And I said, ‘Amen.’”<sup>78</sup>

When did the *taṣliyah* become obligatory in the prayer-rite itself? The prayer manuals do not say. Initially it may have been a response to the *ādḥān*, the call to prayer. The relatively early al-Bukhārī (d. 256/870 C.E.) writes on the *ādḥān* but does not mention the prayer, raising an interesting questions concerning the evolution of the Prophet’s status in Islam.<sup>79</sup> Al-Sha’rānī (d. 973/1565 C.E.) forgives the omission of the *ṣalāt ‘alā ‘n-nabī*, implying that it could be distracting: “As for the position of those who do not make the *ṣalatu ‘alā ‘n-nabī* obligatory in the last *tashahhud* they hold that the preoccupation of (the man engaged in) the prayer-rite is continuously with the presence of God

himself, and perhaps the awe of that presence may so strongly dominate the heart of the worshipper that he may be unable to turn from the greatness of the divine interview to the thought of anyone else.”<sup>80</sup>

But in the circularity of cultic power that we have come to expect in this kind of case, God performs that ritual action most essential to the development and reinforcement of Islam, namely, the magnifying of the Prophet. For it was Muḥammad who in his actions and especially in his person transformed desert religion, who with his *lā ilāha illā ʿllāh* (there is no God but God) “replaced the ultimacy of tribal affiliation with membership in the larger community of believers. . . . Islam had valorized the individual and so re-shaped Arab society and its images of immortality.”<sup>81</sup> We can only ask God to call down blessing on us because he called down blessing on the Prophet: “What work can arrive at such a result? What power or means can attain it? How could it come about that the Mighty King should call down blessing on his poor and lowly servant, but for his care to obey the Prophet, and the greatness of that Prophet’s influence with the Almighty?”<sup>82</sup>

### Robson’s Dilemma

As we mentioned earlier, James Robson raises serious objections to the idea that the *taṣliyah* is in fact based on Sūrah 33:56. He does so on two grounds, one philological, the other, far more telling, having to do with what he imagines to be the mechanism of religious mimesis. To translations such as Palmer’s (“Verily, God and His angels pray for the Prophet”),<sup>83</sup> Robson retorts that “it is extremely difficult to believe that Mohammed himself could have understood it this way.”<sup>84</sup> It is worth looking more closely at the argumentation that underlies this response to divine reflexivity, in that it reveals much of the theological problematic surrounding the category. And despite its anchor in the first half of the last century, Robson’s type of objection to prayer performed by God remains both current and symptomatic.

On the translation score, Robson claims that *ṣallā ʿalā* really has two meanings, “pray for” and “send down blessing upon.” “In Syriac we find an interesting parallel, for the verb *ṣali* followed by *ʿal* means either ‘to pray for’ or ‘to bless.’ It is therefore not surprising that the corresponding verb in Arabic should have more than one meaning.”<sup>85</sup> He fastens onto the notion of “blessing” as a way out of the uncomfortable translation “pray for,” endorsing Sale’s translation of Sūrah 33:56–57 (“Verily God and His angels bless the Prophet. O true believer, do ye also bless him, and salute him with a respectful salutation”). The dictionary *Lisān al-ʿarab* says, “Since God (Praise be to Him!) commanded us to invoke blessing on him and we cannot attain to as much of that as is necessary, we transfer it to God and say, ‘O God, do Thou bless Mohammed, because Thou knowest best what is fitting for him.’” Commenting on this passage, Goldziher explains that we are impure and unworthy to bless Muḥammad worthily, “therefore we ask Allah to bless him that the blessing come from a pure Lord to a pure prophet.”<sup>86</sup> According to Robson, when God

is the *subject* of the verbal phrase, the second meaning (“bless”) is to be preferred. Robson does not offer that the second translation may have evolved *because* God is the subject.

Ibn Qayyim, referring to the tradition which says that if one should *ṣallā ʿalā* Muḥammad, God will *ṣallā ʿalā* him ten times, says that therefore the verb must mean “praise.”<sup>87</sup> Finally, Qayyim mentions the common explanation that *ṣallā ʿalā* means “to bless” and says that this is in keeping with the meaning “to praise.” He goes on to speculate on the tradition in which people are told to pray that Allāh may *ṣallā ʿalā* Muḥammad as he did Abraham, the invocation ends by addressing Allāh as *al-ḥamīd al-majīd* (praiseworthy and glorious), arguing, as Robson summarizes, that “as one usually uses in prayer a name of Allah which has some relation to the object for which one is praying, this suggests that people are told to pray that Allah may bless Mohammed.”<sup>88</sup>

The difficulty with the translation—and hence the understanding—of *ṣallā ʿalā* remains. Robson frequently paints himself into a corner, relying, in a certain sense, on a tautological argument, since in modern English, the word “blessing,” like “prayer,” traditionally encodes the notion of intercession to a third, more powerful party. But Robson and others gravitate toward “bless” for a reason. In its origins, the English word “bless” carries as much divine reflexivity as God’s Arabic *ṣalāt*. The Old English *blētsian* or *blædsian*, “bless,” comes from *blōd*, “blood.”<sup>89</sup> “Bless,” then, meant “to make or consecrate with blood” (as in Exodus 12:23). It was the word chosen at the English (Anglican) conversion to render the Latin *benedicare*, “to praise.” It was also used to render the Hebrew “to bend the knee, worship.”

“Bless” means “to consecrate by a spoken formula or charm; later, by a prayer.” In Old and Middle English usage, however, it meant “to call holy, to adore (God) as holy” and “to pronounce words that invoke divine favour” (OE); “to invoke blessings on” (ME). Most telling is the Old English meaning “to confer well-being upon; to make happy, to prosper,” which was originally said exclusively of God.<sup>90</sup>

Even without its etymological implications, the modern concept of “blessing” still involves the invocation or transfer of power from a more powerful to a less powerful party; from a religious viewpoint, it could only come from God. This is historically confirmed by Christopher Mitchell in his study of the concept *brk* in Northwest Semitic religious texts, cited in the previous chapter.

The original use of *brk* in NW Semitic was for god(s) blessing man, i.e., bestowing children, wealth, etc. The other uses clearly derive from this original use. There is really no support for the almost universal assumption that the original view of blessing in NW Semitic was an animistic conception akin to the pre-Islamic Arabic conception associated with *baraka*. . . . The Arabic blessing conception was conformed to the animistic Arabic religion, and when under Islam the religion became monotheistic, the blessing concept followed suit. The extant extra-biblical NW Semitic texts present a thoroughly polytheistic view of blessing in conformity to the religion of the people.

The use of *brk* for man blessing man clearly developed from the first use for gods blessing man, since it constitutes an entreaty for the gods to bless the person whom the human subject “blesses.” The use of *brk* in the praise of God is a subsequent, inner-biblical development arising from the use of *brk* in human benedictions.<sup>91</sup>

But in the same tradition discussed by Ibn al-Qayyim (“*ṣallā ‘alā* Muḥammad as You did Abraham”), the next petition is that God may *bāraka ‘alā* (unequivocally, “send *barakah* down on; bless”) Muḥammad. Then how can *ṣallā ‘alā* also mean “bless”? Robson equivocates. “Clearly while the two verbs are related in meaning, there must be some difference, but it is not easy to decide how to express it.”<sup>92</sup> Robson concludes that it is appropriate to translate *ṣallā ‘alā* as “bless” *except* when it is used in conjunction with *bāraka ‘alā*, where some other translation must be found. “To translate it as ‘praise’ sounds very unnatural in English; so one might try to get round the difficulty by using some phrase as ‘express approval of,’ ‘acknowledge,’ or ‘show favor to.’”<sup>93</sup>

Robson’s second argument is based on a technicality, and one of dubious application at that. “Moslems themselves have found a difficulty in this, as they have noticed that the verse gives men a command about what they are to do, whereas the formula is a prayer that Allah may do it.”<sup>94</sup> What Robson describes is a pure case of *imitatio dei*, of action mandated by the divine and derived from God’s action. This idea is very common and in fact fundamental to many religious aetiologies. An auxiliary second reason he offers is that in 33:56 the verb *sallama* is clearly used in the sense of “saluting,” but in the usual formula it has a different meaning (“to keep safe, to protect”). “One may therefore reasonably conclude that if the formula were really based on the Koranic verse, it is unlikely that one of the words would be used in a different sense from the original.”<sup>95</sup> This is specious reasoning. The transmission of religious traditions does not work in this legalistic way; aetiologies for ritual are frequently not exact but no less firmly held. Robson’s is not an argument against the Qur’ānic derivation of the practice of praying for the Prophet. Furthermore, as we have seen, many other *ḥadīths* derive it from Sūrah 33:56. We are reminded of the objections of the ancient scholiast on Hermes’s libation in the *Peace*.

Robson raises the possibility of whether “the familiar tradition referred to already has not been invented to get over the difficulty.” He continues, “One common introduction to it is that some people tell Mohammed that they know how to salute him, but wish instruction on how to invoke blessing on him. He replies by telling them to say, ‘O Allah, bless Mohammed and Mohammed’s family as Thou didst bless Abraham’s family. . . .’ Here authority is given by the prophet himself for doing something different from what the Koran tells people to do, assuming that 33:56 is the basis of the practice.”<sup>96</sup>

Robson reports that even though earlier in history, Muḥammad’s name was always given first in the formula, followed by that of any other person to be “blessed,” there is some indication that the prayer was not used exclusively of Muḥammad.<sup>97</sup> Robson cites a much-discussed tradition of how the Prophet himself said, “O God, *ṣalli ‘alā* the family of Abū Aufā.”<sup>98</sup> “The explanation

which seems to give most satisfaction is that, since this word is to be applied particularly to Mohammed, he has a right to transfer it to others if he wishes. But this is rather a weak attempt to adapt a larger usage to earlier times.”<sup>99</sup> The “weak attempt” that Robson derides is, in fact, just how religious aetiology functions; consider, for example, how the sensibilities and customs of the Greek Geometric Age were read back into the Homeric epics set in the time of Mycenaean royalty.

The whole formula (“may Allāh grant him and give him peace!”) usually appears only after Muḥammad’s name appears. But there are also Qur’ānic examples of its use after the name of Adam (4:83), Abraham (2:23), Moses (4:95), David (2:4), and Jesus (4:86), which are the bases for early honorific mentions of these saints. Robson therefore concludes, “these usages, [attested] as late as the second half of the fourth century of Islam, indicate that the later practice of reserving the invocation for Mohammed alone had not yet fully developed.”<sup>100</sup>

A strange compromise emerges. Robson insists that if Sūrah 33:56 is to be considered as the basis of any later practice, it is not to be found in the common invocation “which has already been shown to do something different from what that verse commands.”<sup>101</sup> But “it can be said that the command is obeyed, to a certain extent in the *regular* prayers.”<sup>102</sup> Robson notes that in the *taḥīya* (the salutation which comes before the profession of faith, the *tashahhud*), one of the phrases used is “Peace be upon thee, O Prophet, with the mercy of Allah and his blessing.” After the *tashahhud* there is a prayer for blessing on Muḥammad. “[B]y a certain stretching of the meaning of the Koranic verse,” Robson says that this may be taken to fulfill the first part of the command of Sūrah 33:56: “While *ṣallā ‘alā* can be translated as ‘to bless’, it can also mean ‘to invoke blessing.’ So if 33:56 may be translated, ‘Verily Allah and His angels bless the Prophet; O believers, invoke blessing on him and salute him with a salutation,’ the command can be said to be fulfilled in these parts of the regular prayers.”<sup>103</sup>

In the final analysis, Robson asserts that Sūrah 33:56 cannot be the basis for the ritual *taṣliyah*, but can be the basis for part of the regular *ṣalāt*. He is willing to accept it as such only if God “blesses” but does not “pray for” the Prophet. But this is not what is asserted by the *ḥadīths*, which despite any questions of the meaning of *ṣallā ‘alā*, usually ground the *taṣliyah* squarely in the Qur’ān—specifically in the verses that have been our focus. In other words, Robson creates his own solution to his own problem. In so doing, he reveals that his “problem” is not one of translation at all, but one of theology. In this his is symptomatic of much rationalist exegesis throughout historical instances of divine reflexivity.

“Without Enquiring How and without Making Comparison”:  
Who Is Allāh?

We have seen that Muslim tradition does ascribe its most important invocation, the calling down of blessing on the Prophet, to Sūrah 33:56. Human beings *ṣallā*

‘*alā* (call down blessings on) Muḥammad *because* God *ṣallā ‘alā* (prayed for) Muḥammad, in order that Muḥammad will *ṣallā ‘alā* (intercede for) human beings. In other words, as in the previous cases of divine reflexivity we have examined, God’s action is the basis for and reinforces a mortal ritual action which is essential to the cultic life of the religious tradition. “The Koran itself says (Surah 33:56) that God and his angels ‘pray upon,’ that is, bless the Prophet. Could the believer do anything better than follow the example given by the Lord Himself?”<sup>104</sup>

Perhaps, then, it is worth discovering what is really bothering Robson. I suggest that his problem is, in fact, philosophical—or, to be more precise, theological. As Padwick puts it, “there lies the rub. Some explanation must be given of the term *ṣalāt ‘alā* which covers an activity in which God Himself takes part.”<sup>105</sup> The distress comes from what to Islam is almost worse than a paradox, bordering on a heresy—the underlying anthropomorphism attending the idea of a praying God. It comes from the idea that God’s worship resembles human worship, in other words, that divine ritual, because it is Muslim ritual, should counterintuitively involve utter submission—to God.

Islam is by reputation the theocentric religion par excellence. Who is *Allāh*, the special form of *al-ilāh* (in Arabic, “the god”)<sup>106</sup> His Qur’anic epithets portray a being self-sufficing, all-powerful, knowing, and encompassing. *Allāh*, or God, is the king (*al-malik*), the watcher and reckoner but also protector and guide.<sup>107</sup> He is the eternal creator (*al-khāliq*)<sup>108</sup> and the beginner (*al-mubdi*).<sup>109</sup> In a very real sense, “nothing exists save him and that which He has made.”<sup>110</sup>

Whatever is in the heavens and on earth—Let it declare the praises and Glory of Allah. For He is the exalted in Might, the Wise. To Him belongs the dominion of the heavens and the earth: It is He Who gives Life and Death; and He has power over all things. He is the First and the Last, the Evident and the Hidden: And He has full knowledge of all things. He it is Who created the heavens and the earth in six Days; and is moreover firmly established on the Throne (of authority), He knows what enters within the earth and what comes forth out of it, what comes down from heaven and what mounts up to it. And He is with you wheresoever we may be. And Allah sees well all that you do. To Him belongs the dominion of the heavens and the earth: And all affairs are referred back to Allah. (Sūrah 57:2–5)

In Islamic theological terms, we only know God to the degree permitted by his great grace and our limited scope; as Ibn ‘Arabī wrote, “no one can know God except in keeping with what his own essence provides.”<sup>111</sup> Many phrases in the Qur’an suggest the nonexistence of everything except God. Thus the human relationship to him, including how he can or should be worshiped, can only be one of submission and dependence. God does indeed provide for his own worship, giving to mortals above all the holy Qur’an, but also the model for the Ka’bah, the rules for sacrifice, and teaching Muḥammad the *ṣalāt*, just as YHWH taught Moses the order of prayer in *Rosh Hashanah*.



Yet God is also a “strange combination of anthropomorphics and metaphysics.” As in the case of Hebrew scripture, anthropomorphism (*taj̣sīm*, also *tashbīh*) is the legacy of the holy Qurʾān itself, referring as it does to God’s two hands,<sup>112</sup> his grasp,<sup>113</sup> his eyes,<sup>114</sup> his face,<sup>115</sup> and his settling himself on his throne.<sup>116</sup> Early Islamic philosophy began to wrestle almost immediately with the paradoxes that were its legacy: the problem of absolute predestination versus free will, and that of the inconceivability of God’s divine nature versus that of his apparent humanness, which seemed to make him resemble his creatures. The *ahl al-ḥadīth* (people of tradition) advocated a strict adherence to the recorded word, especially Qurʾānic-derived proofs (*adillah samʿīyah*), the *sunnah* (the usage of the Prophet, encoded in the *ḥadīths*) and *ijmāʿ* (the agreement of the Muslim people). Paradoxical statements should be taken as they stand; one should not criticize or expand upon scripture or traditional exegesis. For example, when in Sūrah 20:5, one reads that God has settled himself on his throne, one should not ask *how* he sits. Above all one should not compare his sitting to human sitting.

From this, the identity of God as an unconditioned Being, there developed the severe doctrine of *mukhālafa* (difference): “everything in Allah is different from similarly named thing in men; we must not think of it as like.”<sup>117</sup> Therefore it was incumbent to eliminate from him, so far as possible, the elements entailing relationship and all human attributes. From this strand came the idea that God could not pray. The rationalist Muʿtazilites in particular rejected mystery, especially the notion of God’s qualities as infringing on his unity. God was a pure and vague spiritual substance, not subject to dimension or locality.

In the fourth century of Islam, al-Ashʿarī and his followers established the necessity of dialectic, a middle path in response to the “unimaginable,” vague conception of the Muʿtazilites and to the obvious doctrinal dangers of *taj̣sīm*. The Ashʿarites held that the traditional names and thoughts of God provided a conception *not* essentially wrong: “We could not get from them what He was, but something like He was.” They upheld the idea of *tanzīh*, that is, “removing” God from any danger of confusion or association with his creatures. But they held that he still must be thinkable. Their solution to the paradoxes inaugurated by Muḥammad’s vision are summed up in the phrase *bi-lā kayf wa-lā tashbīh*, “without enquiring how and without claiming resemblance.”

The simultaneously developing sects of mystical Sufism, strongly affected by Neoplatonism, Christian mysticism, Buddhism, and Oriental monism, sought unity with God through hypnotic devotional techniques. Their theology ran close to pantheism: They stressed the idea that God was all, that there was nothing but him in the world, as, for example, was expressed in Qurʾān Sūrah 2:115: “To Allah belong the East and the West; whithersoever ye turn, there is Allah’s countenance.” This led, in the devotion of some individuals Sufis, to a negligence not only of the traditionally exalted or “special” role of the Prophet, but a transcendence of (or, in the eyes of the orthodox, an unholy transgression against) the enormous barrier separating God from perishable humanity. Al-Ḥallāj was stoned to death, in part, for the cry, “I am the Divine Truth!”

Al-Ghazālī (d. 505/1111) forged a compromise between the three strands that included the illimitability of God, the need to imagine his qualities and characteristics, and the mystical all-pervasive theology of Sufism. It was a theology that bordered internal contradiction, maintaining a delicate balance of compromise. Al-Ghazālī’s starting point was that since the soul of Adam was breathed into him by Allāh, and because the first human was created by God in his own form (e.g., Sūrah 38:72), human beings *are* therefore different from everything else in the world. God created Adam in his own form. In a gnostic vein, al-Ghazālī held that mortals are in exile here and yearn to return to their divine source.

Al-Ghazālī’s distinction of human beings from among other creatures thus separated him from the strictest construction of *tanzīh*. God is not utterly removed from association with his creatures. There is a likeness between the human spirit and that of God in its essence, quality, and actions; just as God rules the world, a person analogously rules his or her body. What then about the danger of *tashbīh*, claiming resemblance between God and humankind?

In the *Maḍnūn al-ṣaghīr*, al-Ghazālī takes up this very question.<sup>118</sup> *Tashbīh* applies only to God’s unique quality—that he is *qayyūm* (self-subsisting). He alone subsists in himself, while “things through their own essence have nothing but non-existence, and existence comes to them only from something else, by way of a loan. But the existence of Allāh is essential, unborrowed. This reality of self-subsistence belongs to Allāh alone”<sup>119</sup>—and would include, therefore, religion.

And yet, between the clashing rocks of *tanzīh* (the distancing of God, the insistence on what God is not), which can lead to atheism or nihilism, and *tashbīh*, which can lead to a kind of imagistic materialism, al-Ghazālī believes that the former is worse. According to him, people need a language that they can comprehend with which to speak about God.

### “My Religion”: God as the Source of Religious Worship in Islam

The history of Islamic theological philosophy reflects a struggle to resolve a conflict whose foundations were laid in the Qur’ān itself. Philosophical, if not popular, Islam found itself torn between an unwillingness to describe God, whereby one can only say what God is not, and the urge to compare him to our own perishable selves and world.

However, out of the dialectics of al-Ash’arī and the unified tension of al-Ghazālī emerge two basic tenets of Islamic self-understanding. These may help us to discern how and why God could “pray for” Muḥammad. The first is that everything that exists owes its existence to the preexistent One. The second is that human beings and their sphere have a special affinity to God. The “resemblance” conceded between God and human beings acknowledged that he was different, but still able to be conceived. His names and epithets as well as our own characteristics and actions help us to understand God and to get some

sense, albeit highly flawed, of what he is like. The implications of the first tenet is the *ṣalāt*, which, like all immanent things, owes its existence to God, and belongs to him. The second tenet implies that our prayer does reflect what God does, but not exactly. If he does in fact pray, then his prayer is still different from ours, and of different, unimaginably higher order.

There is nothing in the Islamic view of the origins of human religious worship that rules out the possibility of God's prayer; on the contrary, there is much that supports it. This is because, from the viewpoint of the *ummah*, the community of the faithful servants of God, religion has its source not in the intentions of humanity but in those of God. This distinction is crucial in that it allows God to *ṣallā ʿalā* Muḥammad in Sūrah 33:56. We are reminded of the Qurʾānic verse (Sūrah 57:1) considered in the previous section: "Whatever is in the heavens and the earth—Let it declare the Praises and Glory of Allah." In fact, according to the Qurʾān, the forms of Islamic observance are designed, commanded, and come directly from God. In Sūrah 22, for example, in God's own voice we hear how the great liturgy at Mecca is to be performed:

"Then let them complete the rites prescribed for them, perform their vows, and (again) circumambulate the Ancient House." (Sūrah 22:29)

"In them ye have benefits for a term appointed: In the end their place of sacrifice is near the Ancient House." (Sūrah 22:33)

"To every people did We appointed rites (of sacrifice), that they might celebrate the name of Allah over the sustenance He gave them from animals (fit for food). . . . The sacrificial camels we have made for you as also among the Symbols from Allah: in them is (much) good for you. . . . It is not their meat, nor their blood, that reaches Allah: it is your piety that reaches Him: He has thus made them subject to you, that ye may glorify Allah for his guidance to you." (Sūrah 22:35–38 *passim*)<sup>120</sup>

"He has thus made them subject to you, that ye may glorify Allah for his guidance to you": in this extraordinary statement we are aware of a circularity of the movement of prayer, sacrifice, and worship. God made the world in order to worship him. In fact, God makes explicit that his only motive in creating the universe is so that it could then reflect his own glory back to him: "I have only created jinns and men, that they may serve me. No sustenance do I require of them, nor do I require that they should feed me" (Sūrah 51:56–57). The Kaʿbah, containing the heavenly "black stone," is rebuilt by Ibrahim and Ismaʿīl after an heavenly archetype, much like the Solomonic temple. Around the heavenly Kaʿbah, the angels perform the ritual circumambulations, the *tawāf*.

Religion, which we may tend to think of as a sphere of human activity directed to God, is in fact God's sphere of activity and originating action. God refers to "My religion" in the writings of the fifteenth-century C.E. Egyptian writer Jalāluddīn as-Suyūṭī, where he says, "O Muhammad, I am taking you as

a friend, just as I spoke face to face with Moses. I am giving to you the Fatiha (Sūra 1) and the closing verse of al-Baqara (Sūra 2:24–6), both of which are from the treasuries of My throne and which I have given to no prophet before you. . . . I shall exalt your name for you, even to the extent of conjoining it with My name, so that none of the regulations of My religion will ever be mentioned without you being mentioned along with me.”<sup>121</sup>

In other words, God is giving Muḥammad the most important prayers in Islam. They will be the foundational intercessions of God’s religion, which are given by God and will be practiced by God’s people for God. Islamic worship as reflected here is thus reflexive in origin and also in practice. Along these lines, speaking of the Sufi mystic Rūmi, Schimmel writes that “Prayer, as the Koran states, is the prerogative of humans, who may call to God. But Maulana knows—again from the Koran—that the world was created to order to worship God and that everything praises the Creator in its mute eloquence.”<sup>122</sup>

God ordains prayer; prayer comes from him. In prayer, the heart is transformed, for “it is He who hears the unspoken prayer, and seen from this angle, every prayer is, in itself, its own answer. By praying, one acknowledges God’s greatness and at the same time offers gratitude toward Him who not only has granted life and material goods but, what is more important, has granted a heart than can seek and find Him.”<sup>123</sup> There is no better rite of worship; if there had been, al-Ghazālī says, God would have taught it to his angels, whom he identifies as the Qur’ān’s “those with him, strong against Unbelievers.” The messengers of God are engaged in the *ṣalāt*, bowing, prostrating themselves, and standing,<sup>124</sup> and “On their faces are their marks, (being) the traces of their prostration” (Sūrah 48:29).

God also participates responsively in human prayer. This is illustrated in the *ṣalāt*, where God’s participation in prayer is established by the Prophet in a *ḥadīth qudsī*. Muḥammad narrates God’s antiphonal response to the recitation of the *Fāṭihah*, the first Sūrah of the Qur’ān. Syed Ali Ashraf writes, “As the person stands before God, he should ‘lend his hearing’ to what God says in reply to his prayer . . . The servant says, ‘In the Name of God the Most Merciful (*al-Raḥmān*), the Most Compassionate (*al-Raḥīm*),’ and God says ‘My servant mentions Me.’ The servant then says, ‘The King of the Day of the Judgment,’ and God says, ‘My servant glorifies Me and submits himself to Me.’”<sup>125</sup>

Every verse of the *Fāṭihah* recited by the believer is answered by God. Whereas the first half of the prayer is oriented to God, the second half is oriented exclusively to the human community of the faithful. This is similar to the complementary contents of God’s and his people’s *tefillin* in the Talmud. After the invocation of God’s attributes in the first half of the chapter, the servant prays with humility: “‘It is Thee whom we adore, and it is of Thee that we beg for help,’ and God says, ‘This is shared between Me and My servant, and My servant will receive that which he asks.’ When the servant says, ‘Lead us upon the right path, the path of those to whom Thou hast been most gracious, not of those on whom Thy Wrath has descended, nor of those who have gone astray,’ God says, ‘All that comes back to My servant, and My servant will receive that for which he asks.’”<sup>126</sup>

This dialogue is crucial to the actualization of the prayer: "It is because of this mutual participation between God and man in this chapter, which is considered to be the heart of the Qurʾān, that the canonical prayer is regarded as not having been performed if this chapter is not recited."<sup>127</sup> Unless there is a mutual participation in prayer, there is no prayer. William Graham notes that the *Kitāb al-Mābāni* (425/1033 C.E.), a very early treatise on Qurʾānic usage in liturgy, stipulates the impermissibility of the recitation of non-Qurʾānic Divine Sayings in prayer. "[I]t is the Qurʾān's form as a text intended for recitation in the daily worship of ritual that distinguishes it."<sup>128</sup> Hence the need to hear the divine response to each line of the recited *Fāṭihah*, which in its turn represents God's own words whose original recitation is now reenacted by the believer. This is the subordination of the human performer to the ritual identified by Rappaport, as well as the interlocking world of divine reflexivity. But although God is the ultimate "performer" (reciter) of his own Qurʾān, and the speaker of his own responsive Divine Sayings, God is not subordinated to the *Fāṭihah* but rather, actualizes this presence through its human performance. As Henri Corbin writes of Ibn ʿArabī's conception of this in the *Fuṣūṣ*, "Prayer of God is the revelation, the epiphany of the human being as His mirror. Reciprocally, the Prayer of man is the 'creation,' that is, the reflection and manifestation of God, whom man contemplates in the mirror of his self, because he him-self is that mirror."<sup>129</sup>

After the adorer performs the prostrations (*rukūʿ*), the standings and repetitions of the *ṣalāt*, drawing ever closer to God, he or she "sits in the posture of a humble slave and bears witness to his vision of Unity and his consciousness of the prophethood of the Prophet. Thus he sends his prayers and blessings upon the Prophet and his family and descendants. Since the Prophet is a mercy to the entire creation (*raḥmah li ʿ-ālamīn*), to send blessings upon him means receiving in return from God blessings and mercy upon the entire creation."<sup>130</sup>

This communion of observance is exactly how the intercessory nature of the *taṣliyah*, based on God's *ṣalāt*, operates in Islamic piety. The Muslim understanding of the drawing down of blessings on the prophet is that of "an ongoing, celestial activity" in which both God and mortals participate.<sup>131</sup> Simply articulated, unless God prays for the Prophet, we cannot pray for him, and he cannot pray for us. God's action in Sūrah 33:56 is not "once and for all." Like God's prayer in *Berakhot*, which also uses the present tense, it is set in what we have called "cultic time": a sacred, parallel temporality whose only inhabitant is the divine.

Thus Sūrah 33:56 is best understood if the verbal phrase *ṣallā ʿalā* is not translated in a euphemistic fashion out of a desire to protect God from anthropomorphism, but is instead allowed to mean what it means for people: "pray for." God's prayer remains unique, hence incomparable to human prayer. But it is still prayer. When God prays for the Prophet, he intercedes, in a sense, with himself, and because of himself. In the words of al-Ghazālī, "the visible world was made to correspond to the world invisible and there is nothing in this world but is a symbol of something in that other world." God's action does serve as a paradigm for mortals, but it is more than that. It is a kind of theurgic activity in which people participate; it is something that they do not only be-

cause God does it; it is something that they do *together* with God. “The Koran itself says (Surah 33:56) that God and his angels ‘pray upon,’ that is, bless the Prophet. Could the believer do anything better than follow the example given by the Lord himself?”<sup>132</sup> Underscoring this notion of interpenetrating realms, Padwick argues that a sense of the sacramental in devotion exists (actions and especially words, which are outward signs of inward grace) despite Islam’s simplification of ritual acts and surroundings of worship. She maintains that the “*qibla*, the *mihrāb*, most of the gestures and words of the prayer-rite, the *bas-mala*, the *tahlīl*, and especially the calling down of blessing on the Prophet [*taṣliya*], have, for those with eyes to see, the quality of sacramentals. In his calling down of blessing on the Prophet the worshipper believes that he is, by the utterance of a few words, not only entering into communion with an activity of heaven but *setting in motion* a correspondent heavenly activity.”<sup>133</sup>

Muḥammad is “the beautiful model”; Sūrah 33:21 says that “You have indeed in the Messenger (*rasūl*) of Allah a beautiful pattern . . . , for anyone whose hope is in Allah and the Final Day, and who engages much in the praise of Allah.” Much of Muslim observance is *imitatio Muḥammadis*. In each of the five forms of devotion, the pillars of the faith—*shahādah*, the confession of faith; *ṣalāt*, the ritual prayer; *zakāt*, the giving of alms; *ṣawm*, the Ramadan fast; and *hajj*, the pilgrimage to Mecca—the religious practice of the Prophet forms the basis. But God is the model for Muḥammad.

From an important collection of *ḥadīths*, Baghawī’s *Maṣābīḥ as-sunnah* (the Lamps of the *Sunna*), among other sources, we learn that the requirement of the *ṣalāt* was given by God to Muḥammad during *al-miʿrāj*, the initiatory nighttime “ascension” taken through the heavens by the Prophet to meet God “without the veil” in Paradise. God commanded the Prophet to institute fifty daily prayers for his community. Descending to earth, he encountered Moses, who told him the grim reality that “his people will never be able to perform that many prayers and he should return to ask God that the number be reduced.”<sup>134</sup> Muḥammad did so; in repeated efforts he bargained God down to five required prayers. The gloomy Moses opined that even this was too much, but Muḥammad drew the line and insisted that his people could handle that requirement. And thus the five daily prayers were fixed.<sup>135</sup>

## Intercession

My prince will protect me—therefore I trust in God  
 The beloved will prostrate, will lament and cry—  
 therefore I trust in God.  
 Muhammad, the pure and innocent, will intercede there for  
 his people . . .  
 When the trumpet sounds, then all eyes will be opened.<sup>136</sup>

Muḥammad is the great intercessor for his people, sent by God, as Sūrah 21:107 tells us, “only as a mercy for the universe.” His celestial journey and dialogue

with Allāh is often seen in Islamic poetry as the source of his status to intercede for the *ummah*. But intercession (*shafā'ah*) is at best a problematic phenomenon for a religion that insists on uncompromised unity in the godhead (*tawhīd*) and direct prayer between God's people and him without a hierarchy of intermediaries: "A people whom He will love as they will love Him."<sup>137</sup> The love of God itself is manifest in divine Law, God's concrete will for Muslims; their love for Him is based in complete submission to that will as expressed in ritual, moral, and spiritual observance.

How is intercession even possible? Limited, like *ṣalāt*, to a very specific religiously determined usage, *shafā'ah* can be used only in the case of a mediator with the right to intercede. That right comes only from God and it comes only to Muḥammad; Islam is poor in formulaic intercessions by humans for fellow humans, although such prayers exist. Muḥammad's role as intercessor is a corollary of his mercifulness, arising early in Islamic history. It is difficult to derive this directly from the Qur'ān.<sup>138</sup> In the throne room, according to Sūrah 2:255, "God! There is no God but He, the Ever-Living, the Eternal. No slumber can seize Him, nor sleep. His are all things in the heavens and on earth. Who is he that can intercede in His presence, except as He permitteth?"

But Muḥammad's special intimacy with God, as evidenced by his *mīrāj* (ascension), indicates that the Prophet was indeed accorded this special permission, becoming one of those "around the Throne."<sup>139</sup> He is "intercessor for both worlds,"<sup>140</sup> *shāfi' man fī'd-dārayn* for saints as well as for sinners, but mainly for the community of his own people, his *ummah*.

The calling down of blessings on the Prophet is understood as having its source in God. So as-Suyūṭī explains, "our *ṣalāt* for the prophet is not intercession (*shafā'ah*) from us on his behalf, for such as we do not intercede for such as he." God must pray for Muḥammad since we cannot.

How should not men, angels, and djinn praise him  
Since God Most High Himself had praised him?<sup>141</sup>

"It is in fact exactly this formulation, that 'God Himself has praised him,' that has caused serious difficulties for poets and collectors of . . . poetry. One notable example is Yusuf an-Nabhani, [a pious lawyer from Beirut] . . . who spent a lifetime collecting devotional works about the Prophet."<sup>142</sup> He records the impossibility of praising Muḥammad in panegyrics in one of his own poems:

They say to me: "Did you not praise Muhammad,  
The Prophet of the God of everything created,  
The most worshipable among men?"  
I said to them: "What shall I say in his praise  
Since his Creator has praised him and has not left anything to say?"<sup>143</sup>

And just as the prerogative of praying (*ṣallā 'alā*) for Muḥammad does not confine itself to humankind, where one would expect it in the Qur'ān, but leaps disconcertingly into God's sphere of activity, so, too, we discover that there also exists a group of popular prayers, like the *taṣliyah*, with Qur'ānic basis, "which

claim *shafāʿah* as God’s own prerogative.”<sup>144</sup> God is the supreme intercessor, in other words; the source of all intercession.

(From ʿAlī Zain al-ʿAbidīn, *Duʿā fī ʿt-tawbah*):

If I remain silent no one will speak on my behalf and if I interceded for myself I am not worthy to be an intercessor. O God, Call down blessing on Muḥammad and his family, and make Thy generosity the intercessor on behalf of my errors.

O God I have no escort to Thee, therefore let Thy pardon be my escort. I have no mediator with Thee, therefore let Thy generosity be my mediator.

(From ash-Shādhilī, *Ḥizbu ʿt-tawassul*):

O God, as Thou wast my guide to Thyself be my Mediator with Thyself.

(From ʿAbd al-Qādir al-Jīlānī, *Duʿā munawwir abšāra l-ʿarīfīn*):

And Thyself plead for us with Thyself.

(From *Munājāt ʿazīmah*, in *Majmū ʿatu l-aḥzābin*):

My God I have sought Thy mediation with Thyself for me, and have asked Thy protection for me from Thyself.

Padwick remarks, “[T]hese are hard to reconcile with the development of the strictest doctrine of *tawḥīd* (strict monotheism, divine unity), but there may be penetrations of spirit where reason has not learnt to follow, and these prayers point to the mystery of the Divine life.”<sup>145</sup> We might phrase it in the terms of paradox: Muḥammad is empowered to pray for human beings because God prayed for Muḥammad. God interceded for Muḥammad because God alone has the ultimate power of intercession. And, as we have seen before, God performs and thus reinforces one of the central rituals of his religion.

## Conclusion

Even if the verb *ṣallā ʿalā* strictly means “to pray for publicly, to perform the *ṣalāt*,” God can indeed *ṣallā ʿalā* Muḥammad. This is because God requires the *ṣalāt* of his people. From Allāh comes the *ṣalāt*. He created human beings to perform the *ṣalāt* and to worship him. He is the One able to mediate with himself. Intercessory prayer, so different from other theological trends within the tradition, has in this way become a powerful Islamic devotional strand. God’s prayer for the Prophet carries with it all the force of ritual intercession. Because the immortal God ritually intercedes for the Prophet, mortals are empowered to call down blessing on the Prophet in God’s name, just as God did, and through it, can intercede. The *taṣliyah* was set into motion by a heavenly action (“God and his angels pray for the Prophet”). In the ancient Greek case, we introduced the idea of “cultic time” which is timeless like the gods, repetitive, and yet temporal



and linear like that of human beings. When human beings utter the *taṣliyah*, calling down blessing on the Prophet, the same heavenly activity is set into motion, recapitulating the original, foundational action, but extending from it in time up to the present time of individual and collective prayer.

Even if the Qur'ānic passages are translated as literally as possible, using the strictest (and in fact, the only) sense of *ṣallā 'alā*—God “prays for” the Prophet—Sūrah 33:43 and 33:56 are still very much consonant with Qur'ānic and later Islamic theology, and especially appropriate to formal Islamic ritualism. There is no need to explain away the sense of the verb with “bless,” which, as we have seen, remains an inadequate dodge, as there exists a distinct word for “bless” in Arabic, and it is specifically not chosen in these verses.

Like Muḥammad, the prayer for the Prophet itself, the *taṣliyah*, carries intercessory power with God. In other words, the effect of this circle of power in popular piety is that God intercedes with himself through Muḥammad. The dialectic created is thus utterly participatory, a dynamic communion between God and his creatures. God prays and thus we pray; we pray and thus God prays. The history of Sūrah 33:56 and the prayer based on it is a kaleidoscope of theological reciprocity. As Constance Padwick writes of the *taṣliyah*, “Here then is a universal communion in honouring Muhammad.”<sup>146</sup> It is “universal” in that it is ultimate; its source is God.

The internal logic of practiced religion is construed in the case of Sūrah 33:56 in the following way: Religious actions directed to God, whose purpose is to glorify God, are commanded by God, often in imitation of a heavenly plan or model. These actions therefore do not belong to the human sphere—they were never of human origin. According to Islam, their performance is not something Muslims can decide to do or not do. They are obligatory. Religious actions belong to God; they are his. He created worship; the human community did not. It is thus a short step to the idea that these actions are performed by God. Whether or not it seems to be a short step, it is a much more natural state of affairs if, once again, we will accept the premises of Islam itself. In Islam, God is self-subsisting; he is the source of all things, including religious worship.<sup>147</sup> His is that quality which al-Tijānī called “Ipseity.”

Islamic orthopraxy reveals itself as a complex system of paradigms, each dependent on the rest, and all dependent on the divine source. If the implications of that dependency are accepted as a starting premise, God's *ṣalāt* for Muḥammad does not need to be less radically understood. It is not a threat to God's unity, but rather is revealed as the basis for several key features of that praxis, especially the *taṣliyah* and the right of Muḥammad to intercede with God for his people. God's *ṣalāt* simultaneously endorses prayer, intercession, and the unique authority of Muḥammad, grounding these in his eternal being.

Jalāluddīn Rūmī has the last word. In commenting on Sūrah 33:56, this problematic passage, Rūmī explains that “these acts of service and worship and attention do not come from us and we are not free to perform them. . . . They belong to God; they are not ours, but His.”<sup>148</sup>

# Conclusion

## *“Religion of the Gods”*

Once more let it be your morning, Gods.  
We repeat. You alone are the primal source.  
With you the world arises, and a fresh start gleams  
On all the fragments of our failures . . .

—*Rainer Maria Rilke*

In ancient Greek vase-paintings, Olympian worship seems to re-round upon the gods who practice it. If there are no higher gods in sight or out of sight of the ones who are offering, what can be the religious idea behind such a phenomenon? Are the gods acting as human beings do? If so, do they do this to set an example? Or do the gods simply sacrifice to themselves? Does ritual, by dint of its performance, subordinate even the gods?

As the preceding studies have shown, the representation of gods engaged in the performance of ritual do not comprise an isolated phenomenon in the ancient Mediterranean, or even in the history of religion. The iconographic and literary evidence presented here depicts gods in highly diverse, if historically linked religious traditions, who themselves are the agents rather than the recipients of ritual. And there are others beyond the scope of this book. On classical Mayan vases, the gods perform ritual blood-letting on their own bodies, reiterating the royal—and universal—human obligation to recycle *ch'ul* and maintain the cosmos. In Buddhist texts, the Buddha circumambulates the reliquary stūpas of previous Buddhas. Egyptian murals of the goddess Isis show her playing the sistrum, the musical instrument of her own cult.

These anomalies—mind-bending “exceptions” to transparent ritual hierarchies—reimagine the relationship between gods, human

beings, and ritual. We need a new theoretical framework for making sense of ritualizing gods, one that is both historically and theologically intelligible within the traditions in which such gods originate. This emic intelligibility cannot be overstressed, for without it, etic interpretation is impoverished, and ultimately fails in its inability to exegete religious phenomena according to internal logical operations.

The myriad historical data of divine religious action that have emerged in this book show the inadequacy of projectionist theorizing. Anthropomorphism, what Goitein called in the case of the paradoxical prayer of God, "religious psychology . . . [since] Man has always seen God in his own image . . ." is not enough to interpret that prayer as a historical idea. For even if ancient Greek gods—or, *pace* Hegel and following Feuerbach and Durkheim, all gods—are ultimately understood as products of human consciousness or as hypostases of social values, a currently privileged but unproven assumption, I have tried to show that ritualizing gods are too complex for projectionist theory to illumine completely; there remains too much in their deep structures, their matrices, for which we must account.

For example, as we have seen, the gods' rituals are, ironically, often somewhat "unorthodox" (such as God's *mikveh* in fire, not water, in the Talmud) and thus dissimilar from orthodox human ritual prescriptions. This is because the nature and agency of the gods in ritual always changes the ritual situation, and thus the hermeneutical task. The representation of the goddess who pours libations—or the god who hangs himself as a sacrifice, or circumambulates, or purifies himself, or prays—should not be understood as a straightforward case of replacing the human agent of religious action with a divine one. The utter difference of the divine as a category affects not only the action but also the agency of the ritual.

Along the same lines, the didactic or mimetic function that is ascribed to pious deities fails to account for the elements of ipseity, noncontingency, and autonomy that chronically characterize the holy. Whereas, as Rappaport remarks, the performance of human ritual generally subordinates or binds the performer on a number of levels—that is, compromises her freedom and negates the possibility of randomness in her actions, at least temporarily—divine ritual does not have that effect on its also divine performer. Rather, ritual originates with the god's apparent urgency to self-manifest, and in some form to receive that self-manifestation reflected back in the human religious sphere. In the ancient Greek case, where mortals pour libations on the reverse of the vases that depict ritualizing gods, but also in the comparanda, the data show a pattern of symbiotic relationship between divine and human ritual, culminating in a kind of reciprocity that is enacted in cultic performance.

In the end, a god is supremely self-referential, and all religious observance must be understood as reflexively beginning with the god, not ending there. From an emic viewpoint, religion has its source, not only its object, in the gods. Furthermore, the goal of divine religious behavior is not so much paradigmatic instruction of mortals, or modeling devotional piety for them, as it is self-expression that, like a voice seeking an echo in a canyon, can only be realized

by the mirroring and corresponding syntax of human ritual. This bivalency in the religious imagination is apparently a rule, rather than an exception. Hence I have argued that, from the perspective of a given tradition, religious action ought to be understood as an *attribute and reflex of the divine*, not simply as the projection of human ritual obligation, or as paradigmatic showcase for right action.

The rest of this concluding chapter will explore these concepts more fully to show that the idea of divine reflexivity can encompass and illumine the interpretive dilemma of the god in ritual performance.

### Are the Ritualizing Gods Acting as Human Beings Do?

Any formulation of a god who worships, whether in art, text, or tradition, also challenges our formulation of the “direction” toward which religion is oriented, and our corollary identification of subject and object. We have seen that acts of worship or “religion” as practiced *by* rather than *for* the god cannot logically be interpreted as the hierarchical act of an inferior to a superior being in the same way as the same acts practiced by the gods’ devotees. There is nothing “superior” to the gods. Therefore they are not sacrificing, praying, self-purifying, or burning incense “to” a superior being. If we concede from an emic perspective the infinity and omnipotence of the gods, their sheer otherness, then when the gods worship, it is not the same act as when people worship, nor is it done for the same reason. The gods in ritual performance are not acting as mortals do.

### Do the Gods Practice Religion in Order to Set an Example for Human Beings?

The paradoxical portrayal of the gods as ritualizing priests serves to reinforce the importance of that ritual within a given religious culture by making even the divine its practioner. This is usually shown in reflexive and intensifying language. King Lear cries out, “Upon such sacrifices, my Cordelia, / the Gods themselves throw incense.”<sup>1</sup> When God or the gods are conceived of as themselves worshipping, the power of that form of worship is exponentially increased. That is, *even* the gods do this. It may be observed in other religious contexts in the use of reflexive pronouns “themselves”; “Himself”; and adverbs such as “so” or “even,” as in John 3:16, “For God so loved the world that He gave His only son.”

It must be argued that when, in the *Hymn to Demeter*, the great earth goddess establishes her temple and her mysteries upon the rocky outcropping at Eleusis, she prescribes the form in which she desires to be worshiped. But when she pours libations, is she simply “recommending” libation by her mortal worshippers? The didactic conferral of example may be the *result* of the libations of Zeus or the Torah study of God, but it cannot be the *cause*. Religious activity

emanates from the godhead; hence, religious worship is an extension of the divine sphere. It is the undifferentiated circle of who the god *is* (transcendent, unlimited power), of what *belongs* to the god (cultic accoutrements and cultic sites), and what the god *does* (the practice of devotional acts).

As we have seen, this often occurs during a historical period of crisis or threat to established forms. Divine reflexivity is thus not exactly "paradigmatic," because mimesis is not the apparent immediate goal, and the gods' relative dependence on the behavior of those who worship them is always ambiguous. It does, however, have the effect of a generative paradigm, which in turn theurgically summons corresponding human ritual response. In this way, divine reflexivity allows for religious systems to maintain and protect themselves, especially their central, defining actions.

### Do the Gods Simply Sacrifice to Themselves?

This is explicitly said in some cases, as in the *Poetic Edda* passage about Odin hanged on the windy tree ("I was offered to Odin, myself to myself"), or in the talmudic prayer-sessions of God. But it is said in jest by Poseidon in *The Birds*, when he ironically swears "by Poseidon," and in the *Amphitryon*, where Jupiter jokes that he will be offering libations to himself. This is perhaps too crude of a construct, more implicitly understood by each religion than explicitly stated, and then only as one aspect of what is truly taking place in a divine sacrifice, ritual, or prayer. The Christian case is a good example. If one logically lays out the doctrine of atonement in orthodox's own trinitarian terms, God sacrifices his own son—or allows his son to be sacrificed—through human agency and "for the sake of the whole world." To whom? To himself. And by himself. The theology of the crucifixion reveals a powerful sacrificial circularity.

The doctrine is seldom expressed in these terms, perhaps because a kind of cruelty and an uncomfortable autonomy of will must then be attributed to God's nature. This characterization also tends to obscure the voluntary nature of Christ's autosacrifice and loving-kindness of God, and perhaps even his grief at the loss of his son (represented so poignantly in El Greco's *Trinity*, no. O-4). And yet in the same painting, God wears a bishop's miter, sacerdotal headgear that points to his priestly role. In other words, it is not sufficient to say that the gods sacrifice "to themselves," since the theological mechanism seems to be more complex. Closer, perhaps, to the ideation would be to say that the gods sacrifice *about* themselves or *because of* themselves.

### Cultic Action as Divine Attribute

In the religious imagination, cultic objects and places clearly come from the other world. Holy text is often seen as having divine origin.<sup>2</sup> The ancient mirror enshrined and periodically reenshrined at Ise belongs to the sun goddess Amaterasu-omikami, and is identified with her. According to tradition, Christ

imprinted his face on a cloth to heal Abgar of Edessa; the Virgin Mary transferred her lunar image to Juan Diego's apron at Guadalupe Hidalgo. David explained the commands of God to Solomon concerning the dimensions of the temple in which he, God, would dwell, down to the dimensions of the golden table for the showbread and the placement of the seat of mercy (1 Chr. 28:11–19). “All this he made clear by the writing of the hand of the Lord concerning it, all the work to be done according to the plan.” Orthodox icons appear from the other world in the forks of tree branches, ἀχειροποίητος, “unmade by human hands.” The naga's cave bears the shadow left behind by the Tathāgata, sought in veneration centuries later by the pilgrim Hsüan-Tsang. The Rock beneath the Dome bears the foot print of the Prophet, left when he ascended into the seven heavens.

But what about *cultic action*, the set of sanctified behaviors that constitute the practiced religion? What about prayer, the study of scripture, the burning of incense, the slaughter of animals, or the pouring of libations? Eliade showed how God or the gods ordain or perhaps even perform a ritual *once* in aboriginal time, as a cosmogonic or foundational act for the religious tradition—reiterated, as Stanley Tambiah says, “in order to achieve the double feat of projecting concrete present time into mythical time (Eliade, 1959:20) and bringing the superior divine realm or moments of beginning into the present human world to achieve a cleansing and a charging with moral potency.”<sup>3</sup> If the gods continue to perform that ritual in cultural representations, and the ritual is not cosmogonic but quotidian, seeming to take place continually—on an ongoing basis, in the divine sphere, as often as it does in the human realm, and perhaps even signaling a relationship between the two—then the time in question is other than *illud tempus*. It is the hyper-present time of enacted ritual.

Greek gods are shown on classical vase-paintings holding libation bowls. In the previous instances, ritual objects often enter *into* the human realm *from* the very gods for whom the ritual is intended. In a sense, these cultic objects “belong” to the gods. But the idea does not stop at that point. In hundreds of these images, the high gods tip the bowl and pour out the wine. They worship just as humans do. Both the wine of the divine libation and its action are unmistakably represented. Crimson paint depicts the wine offered by the gods. It splashes onto the altar or onto the ground.

The Vedic deity Indra drinks soma while the gods eternally chant as they sacrifice. God reads the Torah daily and stands among his congregation in the synagogue, holy head covered with a prayer shawl. Together with his angels, Allāh performs ritual intercessory prayer. Ritual action *also* seems to come from, belong to, and even express the nature of the gods for whom it is intended.

Worship by the gods is a situation imagined as removed, sharply distinguished from the human realm. The assumption that it is in some way “about” human beings is misleading. As heirs to an intellectual tradition of humanism, we tend to analyze cult activity or worship as the exclusive province of mortals. In fact, we view worship as quintessentially human religious behavior: It is the appropriate activity of contingent beings toward noncontingent, infinitely

superior ones. This approach flourishes in structuralism; for example, in an essay on divine possession in Tamilnadu, Manuel Moreno describes this approach as it is applied to the Hindu gods, largely referencing the writings of Dumont:

From the structuralist point of view, gods are symbols of social realities, metaphors for human relationships. The divine attributes and the relationships of the gods vis-à-vis other gods are treated as sources of information about the social order, and religion is viewed as the privileged domain wherein men [sic] gain insights into this order by homological inferences. Gods reflect the structure of society, and for this reason they are useful to the sociologist. Stripped of their bodily personalities, gods become disembodied residents of the Hindu universe, fixed homologies vis-à-vis other humans.<sup>4</sup>

So therefore, so the thinking goes, the gods, when they worship, must be acting anthropomorphically.

We take for granted that humans originate worship; but from traditionalist perspectives, the gods, the recipients of religious activity, are its logical originators. This is "ideal worship," but it is more. It is the source of worship and the reason for worship. God or the gods are plainly portrayed as participating in ritual activity, in cult. This is because they are its source; practiced religion belongs to them. As John Carman observes, "It is a striking feature of sacrifice in many religious traditions that what is offered in sacrifice to a deity not only represents something vital to the sacrifice but something appropriate to, belonging to, and even part of the deity who receives the sacrifice."<sup>5</sup>

The evidence seems to show that the "sphere of sacrifice" (or "sphere of religion"), this circle belonging to the god of which the sacrificial victim is a natural part, can be enlarged to include religious action. Just as the gods receive sacrifices appropriate to them (fish from the sea, or bulls that shake the earth to Poseidon; sweet-smelling incense to Aphrodite, goddess of the boudoir), so they also enact religious gestures equally appropriate to them. Dionysos, the god of wine, pours only from a kantharos, his signature vessel. Apollo, the god of purification, washes his hands at a lustral basin. Odin, the god of the hanged, pierces and hangs himself from the tree at the center of the world.

The concept of divine reflexivity obviates the need for a lost myth or invisible recipient. In a sense, there is no remaining tension between theology and cult. This is a new category: "the religion of the gods."<sup>6</sup>

### The Ontic Autonomy of the Divine

The mirror-play between heaven and earth, mutual reflecting spheres, is one of the most ancient and fundamental religious ideas. Then why, when we consider it now, at this point in the history of religions, do we find it so problematic? And more important, why has the predominant response been to distort religious history by saying that mirror activity, such as gods performing ritual actions, is elevated anthropomorphism? This is not a new critique, but the descendant of clas-

sical skepticism; however, I maintain that its present form has led us significantly astray in understanding these images, and their comparanda in other traditions.

As William Paden puts it, “The world of the sacred shows itself reciprocally with the states of mind of its participants.”<sup>7</sup> There is no doubt that there is reciprocity between the two worlds, and “like knows like”: “[I]n the frame of religious interpretation, human consciousness is explicitly part of the frame. . . . The appearance of the sacred relates to the transformations of the religious participants’ own subjectivity. We human beings are part of the reality equation.”<sup>8</sup>

But we can easily forget that in the minds of ancient adherents that conceived these paradigms, God was *not* object, but supreme subject and agent. In fact, as Anne-Marie Schimmel writes of the Sufi understanding of God, “Only God has the right to say, ‘I,’ and the heart must be emptied to receive Him.”

A man knocked at the door of his beloved.  
 “Who are you, trusted one?” thus asked the friend.  
 He answered: “I!” The friend said: “Go away,  
 Here is no place for people raw and crude!”  
 What, then, could cook the raw and rescue him  
 But separation’s fire and exile’s flame?  
 The poor man went to travel for a whole year  
 And burned in separation from his friend,  
 And he matured, was cooked and burnt, returned  
 And carefully approached the friend’s abode.  
 He walked around it now in cautious fear  
 Lest from his lips unfitting words appear.  
 His friend called out: “Who is there at my door?”  
 The answer: “You, dear, *you* are at the door!”  
 He said: “Come in, now that you are all I—  
 There is no room in this house for two ‘I’s!’”

—Maulānā Jalāluddīn Rūmī,  
*Mathnawī-yi maʿnawī* I 3056–63

Schimmel comments, “Maulana never ceases to marvel at the fact that He who is not contained by heaven and earth can yet dwell within the tiny human heart, that he lovingly condescends into our hearts, which are broken for His sake, there to dwell like a treasure in the ruins.”<sup>9</sup>

The ontic autonomy—the perfect ipseity—of the gods is stressed in other traditions. God discloses himself to Moses as I AM (literally, in the Hebrew imperfect, “I will be who I will be.”) God is the source of all existence, hence the fount of subjectivity. The pre-Socratic philosophers came close to this concept in making Zeus First Cause. When the ancient Greek gods are represented as pouring out wine, they perform not a giant burlesque of human action but an original act that occurs not just once, but continually. Themselves the supreme ontic beings, the subjects of all verbs, the gods have the unique right and ability to perform ritual action, sacrifice being the most potent example. As Christopher Fry writes in his play *Thor with Angels*, “for sacrifice / Can only be perfectly made by God.”<sup>10</sup> W. Brede Kristensen ratifies such an idea when he says



that sacrifice is expressed most purely when the gods themselves perform the sacrifice by sacrificing themselves: "sacrificial death is the actualization of divine life. . . . God who sacrifices himself is the formulation of the thought behind every act of sacrifice. It is the actualizing of absolute life."<sup>11</sup>

Religious *subjects* are also only known in the context of religious *acts*. Paden says,

Religious interpretation . . . is the activity of seeing the world as sacred, rather than seeing the world as social forces or physical substances. The gods are not known independently of this active, experiential matrix. Without a religious subject, no religious objects, no religious data, come into view. . . . The concept of multiple data-creating frames and paradigms therefore means that we are no longer forced to choose between the objectivist, rationalist options that either the god exists or the god is an illusion—a dichotomy that has pervaded popular opinion just as much as it has philosophy and theology. *Gods are ways of seeing the world, and these ways exist.*<sup>12</sup>

How, Paden asks, does reciprocity work in a religious frame? "If we can say, 'as society, so the gods,' or 'as the psyche, so the gods,' then religion itself says, 'as religiousness, so the gods.'"<sup>13</sup> Religion also says, however, "as the gods, so religiousness."

### The Emergence of a Religious Category

A phenomenological category in the history of religions emerges, one that is not new but rather has been submerged as an anomaly in the classical record because of its isolation from the comparative context. It is a transcultural structure with both cultic and theological dimensions. While its emphases may be different in the traditions we have examined, I have argued that it nevertheless has essentially similar foundations. This category, "divine reflexivity" or the religion of the gods, actually allows the gods to be what religions imagine them to be, unique and all-powerful, their fallibility or lack thereof notwithstanding. Echoing Rilke, they "alone are the source," the perpetually original devotees of their own cult.

This category represents more than an attribute of the divine (that is, a god is omnipotent, a god regenerates himself, a god worships). It is a reformulation of "god" with respect to that which arguably constitutes him or her: practiced religion. "Gods crystallize how we address and are addressed by those agencies on which our world depends."<sup>14</sup> If religion maintains the god, why should the god not also maintain the religion? At the heart of this arrangement is reciprocity, built-in, perpetually effected, and eternally established.

Albert Moore asks a valuable question: "How does this experience transform the worshipper's understanding or reinforce his religious stance personally? How does his own body relate to the 'ideal body' of the god?"<sup>15</sup> The God

who prays, the gods who pour libations, are in each instance a presentation that reiterates divine experience. The believer becomes part of the sphere that is the goddess and all the cultic dimensions associated with her. We have also seen that the humanly expressed idea of gods practicing religion has the intention and effect of conferring authority and ultimacy onto the religious actions in question. In this ideation, the gods shift from recipient or object to originating subject. Those who view the vase or read the text can see the same source at work.

Attic vase-paintings did not exist in a self-contained universe. Rather, the viewer would be reciprocally drawn into their realm. Whether as sanctuary offerings or as decorative grave goods for the late archaic and early classical Etruscan dead, the vases “intended,” conveyed, or reflected something.<sup>16</sup> Writing about the Buddha-image, Titus Burckhardt says of the reciprocal relation between the worshiper and the icon: “The icon penetrates the bodily consciousness of the man and the man as it were projects himself into the image. Having found in himself that of which the image is an expression, he transmits back to it a subtle power which then shines forth on others.”<sup>17</sup> The message comes from the Buddha-image; the process begins there, not with the human being.

By no means do I wish to minimize the fact that human artists created these images to be seen and understood by other human members of the society. Rather, I would submit that human artists create on the basis of religious traditions and out of the vortices of religious thought. The question is: what explanation for the vase-paintings makes the most sense in terms of what we know about ancient Greek religion as it had evolved up to the time of the classical period? The “humanization” of the immortals by the attribution of human behavior to them, as if acts of offering were the same as romantic dalliances or tennis volleys? Or the deliberate portrayal of the omnipotent gods as ritually self-sufficient and paradigmatic? I would argue that it is the latter.

The phenomenon of divine reflexivity does not require human action. To the believer, the gods are sufficient unto themselves. But as a determinant of ritual, it does have the purpose and effect of sustaining religious worship. Why does this change anything? Is “the religion of the gods” at the apex of a blurry continuum of human-divine relations or is it something completely “other,” as God’s *tefellin* contain prayers that are entirely different from human Jewish prayers? Is the proposal an anthropology of divine sacrifice or a theology of human religious behavior?

### Modern Iconoclasm: An Answer to “Projection”

The postulation of the category of “divine reflexivity” in the history of religion is above all a rejection of a construct of human projection as being appropriate to the self-understanding of an artifact-producing religious society. It rejects the imputation of specific forms of human behavior to the constructed “divine.” Rather, it claims that divine worship was in fact a deliberately expressed theme,

not an accidental migration. In other words, the libation bowl did not simply jump from the hands of the devotee to that of the god. If anything, it was more than natural for the god to hold and pour from the bowl.

To summarize: "divine reflexivity" occurs as an organizing phenomenon in particular religious milieus in order to emphasize and perpetuate forms of religious action. It does so by envisioning the god as both natural object and as natural source of religion. And yet, invariably and no matter what our speculations about its meaning, it presents itself as something hard to grasp. The god who worships is a paradox that stretches and perhaps tears the fabric of rational analysis. But so does the religious imagination itself, its terms being ultimately its own, subordinate to no other, its deep structures transcendent and indiscernible.

"The invisible harmony is stronger than the visible one (ἄρμονίη ἀφανῆς φανερῆς κρείττων)," wrote Herakleitos toward the end of the archaic age.<sup>18</sup> Perhaps, as Hegel implied, reflexivity is a defining element of the divine—regardless of whether or not the divine is a human construct. Even if their purpose cannot be adequately described or even fully revealed, the high gods who pour out wine are no iconographic aberration. Gods in ritual performance do not belong at the periphery of the historical study of religion. Anomalous, self-transmuting, and utterly real, they bring rather an iconic challenge to our limited imaginations. As Rilke asks, "What would be a God without the cloud which preserves him? What would be a worn-out God?"

# Catalogue

N.B.: All vase-paintings are Attic unless otherwise noted

## Middle Archaic Period (600–510 B.C.E.)

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### *Votive Statues*

#### APOLLO

1. Delphi Museum. Chryselephantine statue.

Seated Apollo, reconstructed holding phiale (extant) by P. Amandry, *École Française d'Athènes*, 6th century B.C.E.

Ionian votive offering, gold and ivory. Found at Delphi. From the Halos deposit.

Companion chryselephantine female statue: Artemis?

Amandry, *Guides*, 191–226; Lapatin, *Chryselephantine Statuary*, pp. 147–148, no. 30; *LIMC* II, “Apollon,” no. 666.

2. Piraeus Museum P4645. Bronze statue.

Votive from Piraeus. Apollo with right hand extended; reconstructed with phiale (lost). Bowl

reconstructed in left hand.  
530–520 B.C.E.

Richter, *Kouroi* (3) 136–137, no. 159 (bis); 152 Ill. 478–480; Ridgway, *APL* 7 (1967) 54–55, Ill. 15–17; *LIMC* II, “Apollon,” no. 432.

#### ATHENA

3. Sparta Museum 2020. Bronze figurines.

Two archaic bronze statuettes of Athena, one of which extends a phiale with a central boss in a downward direction.

Rolley, *Actes*, fig. 8; *LIMC* II, “Athena,” no. 185.

## Middle to Late Archaic Period (510–500 B.C.E.)

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### *Vases*

#### ZEUS

4. Tarquinia, Museo Nazionale Tarquiniense RC 6848. RF cup.

Zeus, grasping thunderbolt, enthroned with phiale. Attended by Ganymede with oinochoe. Central scene framed by seated deities in Olympus.

Inscribed names, from left: Hebe, Hermes, Athena, Zeus, Ganymede, Hestia, Aphrodite, Ares. Oltos. 510 B.C.E.

ARV<sup>2</sup> 60, 66 and 1622; Pfuhl, *MuZ* III, Abb. 359–360; Schefold, *Götter*, Abb. 21.

LIMC II, "Aphrodite," no. 1298; II, "Ares," no. 112; II, "Athena," no. 449; III, "Dionysos," no. 449; III, "Dioskouroi/Tinas Cliniar," no. 597; IV, "Ganymedes," no. 60; IV, "Hebe I," no. 33; V, "Hermes," no. 777; V, "Hestia," no. 7; V, "Kallis II," no. 2; VII, "Terpes," no. 1; VII, "Terpon I," no. 1; VII, "Theos II," no. 1.

DEMETER, PERSEPHONE/KORE,

AND/OR TRIPTOLEMOS

5. Athens, National Museum (Acropolis Collection) 556. RF cup fr.

Apotheosis of Herakles. Zeus on a sphinx throne with scepter, Hera by his side; body of Ganymede visible. Herakles led by Dionysos. Kore with polos, grain ears, and phiale, near Demeter. Iris (wing visible) fills the libation bowl. Second phiale visible. The Sosias Painter. 500 B.C.E.

ARV<sup>2</sup> 21, 2; Graef-Langlotz II, pl. 42; LIMC II, "Artemis," no. 617.

ATHENA

6. London, British Museum 1902. 12–18.3. BF skyphos.

A satyr, Herakles enthroned. Athena pours into his extended phiale from an oinochoe. I include these as representative of Athena's participation in libation, whether she holds the phiale or oinochoe.

The Theseus Painter. 510–500 B.C.E.

Haspels, *ABL*, pl. 249, 9; Boardman, pl. 246; LIMC II, "Athena," no. 181; V, "Herakles," no. 3161.

7. Once Roman Art Market. BF kalpis.

Athena, seated, holding her helmet, extends her phiale toward a sanctuary with a flaming altar attended by a priestess. A bearded snake (perhaps linking the scene with the Acropolis cult) rears up from behind her throne; a bull is depicted at the right.

ABV, 393, 20; Gerhard, *AV*, IV, pl. 242; also Kroll, p. 66, pl. 11a, who writes, "there is no statue base beneath Athena's stool nor any other detail of style or iconography to suggest that the Athena is a statue. . . . On the contrary, the circumstances that she is seated at the altar outside the temple and on a portable stool rather than a throne imply that it is Athena in person who has come to partake of the offerings; and, as any banqueter would, she has sat down, removed her helmet, and extended her cup, the phiale, the normal drinking-cup of the gods."

8. Mykonos Museum 1919. BF hydria.

Athena, with high Corinthian helmet, pours a libation from a phiale onto a flaming altar.

LIMC II, "Athena," no. 154a.

DIONYSOS

9. Boston, Museum of Fine Arts 00.334. RF kantharos.

(Upper A: Dionysos reclining, with two satyrs.

Lower A: Herakles and the Nemean lion.)

Upper B: Dionysos pouring from kantharos onto altar, flanked by dancing maenads. Maenad with hands extended over altar, beneath wine and toward flames. Κανοῦν (sacrificial offering-basket) on ground.

Lower B: Herakles and the Cretan bull.

From Tarquinia. The Nikosthenes Painter. 520–510 B.C.E.

ARV<sup>2</sup> 126, 27; *Paralipomena* 333, 27; *Addenda* (2) 176; Pfuhl, *MuZ* III, Abb. 320; Himmelmann-Wildschütz, *Zur Eigenart*, pl. 30; Caskey-Beazley, *MFA* III, no. 118, pl. 68; *LIMC* III, “Dionysos,” nos. 363 and 859; V, “Herakles,” no. 1874 and 2345; V, “Ialaos,” *ad* no. 17.

## IRIS OR NIKE

10. Munich, Antikensammlungen 2304. RF amphora.

A: Deities in Olympus; Zeus, holding thunderbolt, and Hera enthroned.

Iris, with winged boots, attends the royal couple with phiale and sacrificial vessel. Poseidon, grasping dolphin, enthroned.

Athena and Hermes.

B: Apollo, with Dionysos and a maenad; Hermes and Maia(?).

The Nikoxenos Painter. Circa 500 B.C.E.

ARV<sup>2</sup> 220, 1; *Paralipomena* 346; *Addenda* (2) 198; pl. 188, 8.

A: Furtwängler-Reichhold, pl. 158; *LIMC* VI, “Hera,” no. 211.

11. Mykonos Museum 1928. BF hydria.

Iris, wings visible, pouring libations from a phiale onto a flaming altar.

## UNIDENTIFIED DEITIES

12. Athens, National Museum (Acropolis Collection) 9. RF cup fr.

Enthroned pair of gods with phiale and oinochoe.

The Pioneer Group. 510–500 B.C.E.

ARV<sup>2</sup> 35, 19; Graef-Langlotz II, pl. 1; *Ausonia* (1908), 38.

Late Archaic Period (500–490 B.C.E.)

## Vases

## ZEUS

13. Paris, Musée du Louvre G224. RF pelike.

A: Death of Actaeon

B: Zeus, with eagle-bearing thunderbolt scepter, extends phiale to be filled by Ganymede, who pours from an oinochoe.

The Geras Painter. Late archaic period. From Vulci.

ARV<sup>2</sup> 285, 1; CVA France 9 III Ic, pl. 43, 3; Arafat, *Classical Zeus*, pl. 30; *LIMC* I, “Aktaion,” no. 30; II, “Artemis,” no. 1397; IV, “Ganymedes,” no. 63.

## ATHENA

14. Athens, National Museum (Acropolis Collection) 208. RF cup fr.

I (Tondo): Athena pours for Herakles, who holds a kantharos.

A–B: Assembly of gods at a sacrifice.

Close to the Brygos Painter. Late archaic period.

ARV<sup>2</sup> 399,—and 1650; Graef-Langlotz II, pl. 11; *LIMC* IV, “Hera,” no. 245; V, “Herakles,” *ad* no. 3164.

15. Athens, National Museum (Acropolis Collection) 434. RF cup fr.

Inside: Standing Athena with spear pouring a libation from a lobed metal phiale.

Outside: A: Reclining man with naked torso and spear invoking Zeus.

B: Hand holding short-footed kantharos. Inscription, probably post-firing:

σπ|ένδω τῶ δαίμονι τῶ ἀγαθῶ|ῶι  
(I am making a drink-offering to the Good Daemon).

Manner of Onesimos, 500–490 B.C.E.

ARV<sup>2</sup> 330, 5; Graef-Langlotz II, pl. 35.

16. Athens, National Museum 1138. BF kalpis.

Seated Athena pours a libation; possibly a portrayal of the Athena Polias. Owl perched on shield to left; another owl on the altar.

The Athena Painter. 500–480 B.C.E.

AM 33(1908): figs. 3–4; Haspels, *ABL*, pl. 47, 2; *LIMC* II, “Athena,” no. 579.

#### APOLLO AND ARTEMIS AND/OR LETO

17. Vienna, Kunsthistorisches Museum 3739. RF hydria.

(Formerly Österreichisches Museum 331)

Apollo standing, pouring onto altar; Artemis present.

Early work of the Berlin Painter. Soon after 500 B.C.E. From Cerveteri.

Masner, *Die Slg.*, Abb. 28, pl. 7, S. 49; ARV<sup>2</sup> 210, 173.

#### HERMES

18. London, British Museum 1896.10–22.1. RF cup.

I (Tondo): Hermes, with hat, staff, and winged boots. The god walks forward, spilling wine (visible in added red) onto the ground from a libation bowl.

Hermaios Painter. 500–490 B.C.E.

ARV<sup>2</sup> 111 (a); Hoppin, *HBRF* II, 17; *Él.* III, pl. 73; *BSA* 14, 294, b; *AA* 1923–1924, 171; *LIMC* V, “Hermes,” no. 801.

#### IRIS OR NIKE

19. Cambridge, Massachusetts, Harvard University, Sackler Art Museum 4.1908. Loan from the Misses Upham. RF lekythos.

Nike with phiale and oinochoe.

The Berlin Painter. Circa 490 B.C.E.

ARV<sup>2</sup> 211, 189; Kurtz and Beazley, *The Berlin Painter*, no. 69, pl. 59 (b).

#### ASSEMBLY OF DEITIES

20. Berlin, West, Antikenmuseum 2278. RF cup.

I: Achilles binding the wound of Patroklos.

A–B: Entry of Herakles into Olympus; he is welcomed by the collective libations of the Olympian deities installed on leopardskin thrones. A, top, left: Zeus and Hera, with scepter, both with phialai extended, are attended by the winged Iris (?—identified as “Hebe” by Schefold); Poseidon and Amphitrite, the latter clutching a fish, both holding out phialai; Aphrodite (scene abraded, but arm visibly extended) and Ares; Ariadne and Dionysos (again, arm extended as if to pour). B, bottom, left (following Dionysos): the three goddesses of the seasons, standing, with fruited boughs; enthroned, Hestia (with head-veil) and an unidentified goddess, both with phialai; Hermes, Apollo, Herakles (with inscription in the vocative ZEY ΦΙΛΕ—“Beloved Zeus”) and Athena. Is Hermes’ ram for sacrifice?

The Sosias Painter. 500 B.C.E. From Vulci.

ARV<sup>2</sup> 21,—and 1620; I; Schefold, *Götter*, Abb. 42–43; *Mon.* I, pl. 24–25; LIMC IV, “Hera,” no. 212.

## UNIDENTIFIED DEITIES

21. Athens, National Museum (Acropolis Collection) 325. RF cup fr.

I: Herakles wrestling the Hydra.

A–B: Zeus, with scepter, brings infant Dionysos holding grapevine toward altar. Goddess holds oinochoe above altar, takes bough from  $\kappa\alpha\nu\omicron\upsilon\nu$ , while another goddess lays a bough on the altar. Athena, Poseidon, Hermes in attendance, all with attributes.

Makron. Circa 490 B.C.E.

ARV<sup>2</sup> 460, 20; Graef-Langlotz II, pl. 20–22; Hoppin, *HBRF* II, 17; *Él.* III, pl. 73; *BSA* 14, 294, b; *AA* 1923–1924, 171. 6, pl. 1, a–c; M. Pease, *Hesperia* 4(1935), 233; (“sacrifice in honour of the child Dionysos”); LIMC III, “Dionysos,” no. 706; V, “Herakles,” no. 2037; V, “Hermes,” no. 810; VIII, “Nysa I, Nysai,” no. 4.

Late Archaic Period (490–480 B.C.E.)

## Vases

## ZEUS AND/OR HERA

22. New York, Metropolitan Museum of Art 1988.40. RF stamnos.

(Ex-Castle Ashby 25).

A: Athena pours from an oinochoe for Zeus and Hera, who extend their phialai.

B: Libation at the departure of a warrior, made by a woman with oinochoe and phiale. Seated elder (father?).

The Berlin Painter. 490 B.C.E.

ARV<sup>2</sup> 207, 141; CVA Castle Ashby pls. 46–47, no. 71. Kurtz and Beazley, *The Berlin Painter*, no. 52, pl. 56 (a); LIMC IV, “Hera,” no. 214.

23. Oxford, Ashmolean Museum 1924.3.

Neck amphora. Zeus and Nike at altar, standing.

A: Zeus extends phiale over flames to Nike, who pours with oinochoe.

Added red for wine. Flames added. Blood-marked altar.

B: Two athletes.

The Berlin Painter. Circa 490 B.C.E.

ARV<sup>2</sup> 200, 45; CVA Great Britain 3 III I pl. 15, 3–4; Kurtz and Beazley, *The Berlin Painter*, no. 13, pl. 42 (a).

## ELEUSINIAN TRIAD: DEMETER, PERSEPHONE, TRIPTOLEMOS

24. Berlin, 2171. RF pelike.

A: Triptolemos, on his winged throne, extending phiale.

Demeter, with polos, pours from oinochoe. Wine visible.

B: Man offers hare to boy.

The Geras Painter. Late archaic period.

ARV<sup>2</sup> 285, 5; Gargiulio, *Recueil* ii, pl. 66.

A: *Él.* III, pl. 47; *Addenda* (2) 154; LIMC IV, “Demeter,” no. 342; VIII, “Triptolemos,” no. 82.

## ATHENA

25. Athens, National Museum (Acropolis Collection) 328. RF cup fr.

I: Athena with oinochoe; Herakles with phiale.

A–B: Achilles brought to Chiron. Makron, late. 490–480 B.C.E.

ARV<sup>2</sup> 460, 19; Graef-Langlotz II, pl. 22; LIMC I, “Achilleus,” no. 38; II,



"Artemis," no. 1438; V, "Herakles," no. 3170; V, "Hermes," no. 386.

26. Oxford, Ashmolean Museum 1911.627. RF stamnos frs.

Herakles, seated on skin-covered stool, extends metallic phiale to Nike.

Nike pours with metallic oinochoe. Athena looks on.

490 B.C.E. From Cerveteri.

LIMC V, "Herakles," no. 3481.

#### ARTEMIS

27. St. Petersburg, The State Hermitage Museum 670. WG lekythos.

Artemis, with tiara and wearing quiver, feeding swan, holding phiale.

The Pan Painter. Circa 490 B.C.E.

ARV<sup>2</sup> 557, 121; Beazley, *PM*, pl. 14, 1; Gorbounova and Saverkina, no. 33; Mertens, no. 207; pl. 40, 1; LIMC II, "Artemis," no. 969.

#### APOLLO AND ARTEMIS AND/OR LETO

28. Berlin, West, Antikemuseum 2206. RF lekythos.

Apollo with kithara (lyre) and phiale; Artemis with bow, arrow, and oinochoe.

Brygos Painter. Late archaic period.

ARV<sup>2</sup> 383, 203; Gerhard, *Antike Bildwerke*, pl. 9; *Él.* II, pl. 10; *Addenda* (2) 228.

29. Italian Ministry of Culture (acquired 2006). Formerly Boston, Museum of Fine Arts 1978.45. RF kalpis-hydria.

Scene of divine libation at an altar. Apollo holding kithara and phiale perpendicular to the ground. A wreath has been laid on the altar.

Iris (or Nike) attends Apollo with tilted oinochoe. Leto and Artemis to right; Leto holds a flower bud. Athena and Hermes depicted on ei-

ther side, Athena advancing, Hermes in apparent flight. Leto, Artemis, Athena, and Hermes have name inscriptions.

The Berlin Painter. Circa 485 B.C.E.

*MuM* Auktion 51 (Basel, 1975), pp. 66–68, pls. 38–40; LIMC II, "Apollon," no. 860 and II, "Artemis," no. 1011A.

#### DIONYSOS

30. Paris, Bibliothèque Nationale, Cabinet des Médailles 391. RF pelike.

A: Dionysos dancing with satyr.

B: Dionysos with thyrsos and kantharos receives wine from an oinochoe poured by a maenad.

The Geras Painter. Late archaic period. From Vulci.

ARV<sup>2</sup> 286, 15; Fröhner, *Mus. de France*, pl. 8; LIMC III, "Dionysos," 609; VIII, "Silenoi," 131.

#### IRIS OR NIKE

31. London, British Museum E 513. RF oinochoe.

Nike flying, frontal view, with thymiaterion and phiale emptying onto altar.

The Berlin Painter, "early." 490–480 B.C.E.

ARV<sup>2</sup> 210, 184; Kurtz and Beazley, *The Berlin Painter*, no. 68, pl. 59 (a).

32. Oxford, Ashmolean Museum 1917. 58. RF lekythos.

Nike with phiale and oinochoe at an altar.

The Tithonos Painter. 490–480 B.C.E.

ARV<sup>2</sup> 309, 14; CVA Great Britain III I pl. 34, 2; Millingen-Coghill, pl. 22, 2; Tillyard, pl. 13, 106.

33. Oxford, Ashmolean Museum 1892.35 (V 291). RF calyx-krater.

A: Nike, flying with tripod and phiale.

B: Man, with outstretched hand. A victorious dithyramb?

The Berlin Painter. Circa 480 B.C.E. From Gela.

ARV<sup>2</sup> 205, no. 122; Kurtz and Beazley, *The Berlin Painter*, p. 46 (A) and p. 47 (B), pls. LIIIa and b.

34. St. Petersburg, The State Museum of the Hermitage, B 1584. RF column-krater.

A: Nike, with oinochoe and a stack of three (!) phialai.

B: Youth.

The Berlin Painter, "early." Late archaic period.

ARV<sup>2</sup> 207, 134; Kurtz and Beazley, *The Berlin Painter*, no. 48, pl. 52 (d).

#### ASSEMBLY OF DEITIES

35. London, British Museum E 444. RF stamnos.

Libation scene on Olympus.

A procession of eight gods circling the vase, culminating in the throne of Zeus, who holds up his phiale. Strong iconographic resemblance to Boston MFA 1978.45. Hermes; Demeter with torches; Dionysos with the sacrificial vessel characteristic of him—not the phiale, but the kantharos; at the handle, winged Iris or Nike; Apollo with lyre and tipped phiale; Artemis with oinochoe; Zeus, with scepter and libation bowl held up to eye-level, parallel to ground.

The Berlin Painter, middle to late. Circa 480 B.C.E. From Vulci.

ARV<sup>2</sup> 208, 149; CVA Great Britain 4 III Ic, pl. 21, 4c; Arafat, *Classical Zeus*, pl. 28b.

#### UNIDENTIFIED DEITIES

36. Athens, National Museum (Acropolis Collection) 563. RF pyxis fr.

God and goddess with phiale enthroned before a blood-sprinkled altar.

The description in Graef-Langlotz (I, p. 51) reads, "On this (vase) an enthroned goddess makes a drink-offering out of an omphalos-cup [a phiale]. That it is a goddess is proven in that seated libations are not appropriate for a mortal and in that the one who is enthroned has a stool under her feet as the Olympians do. The meaning is uncertain." Erika Simon, on the other hand, thinks the pair are Achilles and Thetis, and the extraordinary sanctuary with lion spout, a heröon—because of its bees, grass, and flowers. Circa 480 B.C.E.

Graef-Langlotz II, pl. 42.

37. Florence, Museo Archaeologico Etrusco 8 B7 and Naples, Collection (Mario) Astarita, 105. RF hydria frs.

Seated god (or goddess), with phiale and wine pouring onto altar. Woman attends with oinochoe.

The Berlin Painter. Late archaic period.

ARV<sup>2</sup> 210, 179.

38. New York, Metropolitan Museum of Art 28.57.12. RF lekythos.

Goddess (?) with phiale in right hand; scepter in left.

The Brygos Painter. 490–480 B.C.E.

ARV<sup>2</sup> 384, 205; LIMC IV, "Hera," no. 137.

Late Archaic to Early Classical Period (480–470 B.C.E.)

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#### Vases

#### ZEUS

39. Berlin, West, Antikenmuseum 2166. RF pelike fragment.

Zeus with phiale extended to Iris or Nike, with caduceus, who lifts up a metal oinochoe. Poseidon with phiale extended to right. All names inscribed: ΖΕΥΣ ΠΟΣΕΙΔΟΝ (reversed) ΙΠΙΣ or ΝΙΚΕ (ambiguous partial inscription).

The Argos Painter. Late archaic period.

ARV<sup>2</sup> 288, 5; *Archäologische Zeitung* (1875), p. 10; LIMC VI, "Nike," ad no. 202; VII, "Poseidon," no. 258a.

40. New York, Collection Leon Levy-Shelby White. RF calyx-krater.

A: Zeus, enthroned, with eagle seated on staff; Zeus extends phiale to Ganymede, who pours from an oinochoe.

B: Herakles arms himself.

Eucharides Painter. 480–470 B.C.E.

41. Malibu, J. Paul Getty Museum 84.AE.569. RF kylix.

Zeus, enthroned, extends kylix over altar. Ganymede pours for him with oinochoe; stream of wine in added red visible between oinochoe and kylix.

Douris. Circa 480 B.C.E.

*Greek and Roman Antiquities Getty*, p. 169, no. 23; LIMC III, "Eos," no. 48; IV, "Erechtheus," no. 56; VI, "Kekrops," no. 23.

42. Paris, Musée du Louvre G223. RF pelike.

A: Zeus with staff extends bowl to Nike, with oinochoe.

B: Saytr and maenad.

The Syleus Painter. Late archaic period.

ARV<sup>2</sup> 250, 16; CVA France 9 III Ic, pl. 43, 1–2 and 8; pl. 42, 8 and 10.

A: Pottier, pl. 130; Arafat, *Classical Zeus*, no. 4.33, pl. 30a; LIMC VI, "Nike," no. 202.

43. Paris, Musée du Louvre G225. RF pelike.

A: Zeus seated with scepter and phiale; Ganymede pouring from oinochoe. Added red for wine from oinochoe.

B: Men and boy.

The Syleus Painter. 480–470 B.C.E.

ARV<sup>2</sup> 250, 22; CVA France 9 III Ic, pl. 43, 6–7; LIMC IV, "Ganymedes," no. 64.

44. St. Petersburg, The State Hermitage Museum Π.1899.75. RF column-krater.

Zeus, standing, holding phiale which cascades wine. Grasps thunderbolt. Name inscribed. Athena, standing, with helmet, holds oinochoe.

The Diogenes Painter. Late archaic period.

ARV<sup>2</sup> 248, 1; *Otchët* 1899, p. 27, fig. 39; Beazley, *AV*, p. 53.

45. Warsaw Museum 142460 (Ex Cartoryski 160). RF hydria.

Zeus enthroned with phiale; Athena and Nike attend the libation.

The Providence Painter. 480–470 B.C.E. From Capua.

ARV<sup>2</sup> 639, 62; CVA Poland I III Ic, pl. 21, 1a–b; Fröhner, *Gol.* 87; Beazley, *V. Pol.* pl. 13, 1.

#### ZEUS AND HERA

46. London, British Museum E 67. RF kylix.

I (Tondo): Zeus, with phiale; Hebe (?) with oinochoe. Libation scene.

A: Achilles and Memnon.

B: Enthroned royal pair: Zeus, with phiale, attended by Ganymede with oinochoe; and Hera, with phiale attended by Iris with oinochoe in Olympus with Ares standing between.

Manner of the Brygos Painter. The Castelgiorgio Painter. Circa 480 B.C.E. From Vulci.

ARV<sup>2</sup> 386, 3; Gerhard, *Trinkschalen*, pl. D; LIMC IV, "Hera," no. 216.

47. New York, Private Collection. RF column-krater.

A: Zeus and Hera, seated, with Nike (Beazley: "or rather, Iris") and Hermes.

Nike grasps Hera's hand with one hand, and with the other pours into Zeus' phiale from an oinochoe.

B: Youths and warrior.

The Syriskos Painter. 480–470 B.C.E.

ARV<sup>2</sup> 260, 15; *Ars Ant. Auktion I*, pls. 56, 119.

48. Paris, Musée du Louvre G181. RF stamnos.

A: Zeus and Hera with Nike; libation visible from oinochoe and phiale.

Scratches: etching in paint (?)

B: Komos.

The Syleus Painter. 480–470 B.C.E. From Nola.

ARV<sup>2</sup> 252, 38; CVA France 2, pl. 13, 1, 4, and 7.

A: Philippaki, *Attic Stamnos*, pl. 26, 3; LIMC IV, "Hera," no. 228.

#### POSEIDON

49. London, British Museum E 445. RF stamnos.

A: Judgment of Paris

B: Nike, grasping phiale to her side, pouring oinochoe into phiale of Poseidon, holding a trident; Dionysos, with thyrsos and kantharos.

Late school of the Berlin Painter. The Group of London E 445. Circa 470. From Vulci.

ARV<sup>2</sup> 217, 1 (λ); CVA Great Britain 4 III 1c, pl. 21, 5c; Gerhard,

AV, pls. 174–175; LIMC III, "Dionysos," no. 605; V, "Hermes," no. 459; VI, "Nike," no. 213; VII, "Paridis iudicium," no. 21.

50. Oxford, Ashmolean Museum 1917.59. RF neck-amphora.

A: Poseidon, standing, with trident and phiale.

B: Woman.

The Providence Painter. 480–470 B.C.E.

ARV<sup>2</sup> 636, 8; Tillyard, pl. II, no. 89; LIMC VII, "Poseidon," no. 147.

#### DEMETER AND PERSEPHONE AND/OR TRIPTOLEμος

51. Palermo, Museo Nazionale V 779. RF bell-krater.

Persephone with phiale, Triptolemos on winged throne with phiale, Demeter with polos, grain, and oinochoe.

The Oreithya Painter. Circa 470 B.C.E.

ARV<sup>2</sup> 496, 5 and 1632; Pleschow-Bindoket, Abb. 17.

52. Paris, Musée du Louvre G187. RF stamnos.

A: Kore, left, with crown; Triptolemos, in winged chariot, with phiale. Demeter, right, with grain and oinochoe. Pours for Triptolemos. Wine visible.

B: Plouton with Demeter and Persephone.

The Triptolemos Painter (name-vase). Late archaic period. From Vulci.

ARV<sup>2</sup> 361, 2 and 1648; Inghirami pls. 36–37; *Él.* 3, pls. 59–60; LIMC IV, "Demeter," no. 343; IV, "Hades," no. 26; VIII, "Persephone," no. 135; VIII, "Triptolemos," no. 79.

A: Philippaki, *Attic Stamnos*, pl. 62, 1.

53. Paris, Musée du Louvre G209. RF neck-amphora.

A: Plouton, identified by inscription and carrying staff and horn of plenty, and Persephone with oinochoe and phiale.

B: Women.

The Oinokles Painter. Circa 470 B.C.E. From Nola.

ARV<sup>2</sup> 648, 25; CVA France 9 IIIc, pl. 38, 11, pl. 39.

A: *JDAI* 68, 41; Villard, *GV* pl. 26, 3; *LIMC* IV, "Hades," no. 20; VIII, "Persephone," no. 174.

#### ATHENA

54. Athens, National Museum (Acropolis Collection) 351. RF cup fr.

A: Athena, Herakles with phiale.

Inscription: HIEPA EIMI T[OY] ΔΙΟΝΥΣ[OY].

480–470 B.C.E.

Graef-Langlotz II, pl. 23; *LIMC* V, "Herakles," *ad* no. 3167.

55. Athens, National Museum (Acropolis Collection) 492. RF skyphos fr.

Athena, standing, holds oinochoe near phiale of Herakles.

Circa 470 B.C.E.

Graef-Langlotz II, pl. 40; *LIMC* V, "Herakles," no. 3166.

56. Athens, National Museum (Acropolis Collection), 806. RF krateriskos, two frs.

A: Athena and male at altar, with boughs visible. Interior column.

B: Athena seated with phiale extended. Worshiper brings boughs.

Myson. Signed by Myson as potter and painter. 480–470 B.C.E.

ARV<sup>2</sup> 240, 42; Graef-Langlotz II, pl. 72; *Mon. Piot.* 29, pl. 7, 5–6; *LIMC* II, "Athena," no. 578.

57. Munich, Antikensammlungen 2648. RF cup.

A–B: Peleus and Thetis.

I: Herakles, seated, extends a kantharos to Athena, who holds an owl and pours for him from an oinochoe.

Douris. 480–470 B.C.E. From Vulci.

ARV<sup>2</sup> 441, 185.

A–B: Arias-Hirmer, pl. 143, 2; I: Richter-Milne, 19; *JHS* 59, 109; Furtwängler-Reichhold, pl. 24; Simon, *Götter*, 192; *LIMC* II, "Athena," no. 187.

58. Paris, Musée du Louvre G203. RF neck-amphora.

A: Herakles with kantharos extended; Athena pours from oinochoe above.

B: Hermes.

The Dutuit Painter. 480–470 B.C.E. From Nola.

ARV<sup>2</sup> 306, 1; Millin, *PVA*, p. 2, pl. 41; *LIMC* II, "Athena," no. 184.

#### APOLLO

59. Delphi Museum 8140. WG kylix.

Apollo, seated, with lyre, extends phiale. Added white in the lobes of the phiale suggest that it is metallic (silver?) Wine, in added red, pours onto the ground. Raven watches from the rim of the tondo.

Onesimos? Circa 480 B.C.E.

Konstantinou; Mertens, 181, 64; 184–185; *LIMC* II, "Apollon," no. 455.

#### ARTEMIS

60. Madison, Wisconsin, Elvehjem Museum of Art. RF lekythos.

Artemis, crowned, holds a bow and pours from a phiale; wine is visible as it falls to the ground. Her fawn accompanies her.

The Oreithyia Painter. Circa 470 B.C.E.

*MuM* Auktion 40 (Basel, 1969), no. 99, Walter, *Götter*, 203 fig. 180; *LIMC* II, "Artemis," no. 970.

APOLLO AND ARTEMIS AND/OR LETO

61. Naples, Collection (Mario) As-tarita, 122. RF Lekythos, 2 fr.

Apollo, in left hand a kithara, wearing himation and holding phiale in right hand.

Artemis holding oinochoe in right hand, to pour for her brother.

The Eucharides Painter. Late archaic period.

ARV<sup>2</sup> 230, 53.

62. Paris, Collection (Stavros Spyros) Niarchos. RF pelike.

A: Apollo with kithara and plectrum.

B: Artemis holds phiale, extends oinochoe toward Apollo.

The Syleus Painter. Circa 480 B.C.E.

ARV<sup>2</sup> 250, 18; *MuM* Auktion 18 (Basel, 1958), pp. 39–40, no. 114, pl. 36; *LIMC* II, "Artemis," no. 995.

63. Paris, Musée du Louvre C10786. RF hydria.

Apollo with phiale; Artemis with oinochoe at altar.

The Eucharides Painter. 480–470 B.C.E.

ARV<sup>2</sup> 229, 42.

64. Richmond, Virginia Museum 82.204. RF amphora.

A: Apollo, holding kithara, pours from a phiale onto an altar. Liquid is visible.

B: Artemis, with quiver, extends oinochoe.

The Berlin Painter. Circa 470 B.C.E.

65. Warsaw Museum 142331 (Ex Cartoryski 161). RF hydria.

Hydria. Apollo, standing, with kithara and phiale.

Artemis, with oinochoe; Leto; no altar. Neither goddess has attributes; Beazley identifies them as "Muses."

Providence Painter. 480–470 B.C.E. From Capua.

ARV<sup>2</sup> 639, 63; CVA Poland I III Ic pl. 21, 2a–b; Beazley, *V. Pol.*, pl. 13, 2.

DIONYSOS

66. Boston, Museum of Fine Arts 00.499. Attic RF kylix.

I: Dionysos extends his kantharos over an altar.

A–B: Satyrs and maenads.

Signed by Douris as painter. Circa 480 B.C.E. From Orvieto.

ARV<sup>2</sup> 435, 89; *Paralipomena*, 375, 89; Caskey-Beazley, *MFA* III, no. 129, pp. 21–23, pl. 73; Vermeule, *AJA* 70 (1966): 10 n. 22; Fischer-Graf, p. 18; *LIMC* III, "Dionysos," no. 861; VIII, "Mainades," no. 65.

67. Lisbon, (Leland H.) Gilbert Collection. RF neck-amphora.

A: Dionysos extending kantharos over altar.

B: Satyr bringing oinochoe.

The Dutuit Painter. Late archaic period.

ARV<sup>2</sup> 307, 3 *bis*, and 1644; Rocha Pereira, *Notioícia*, p. 3, figs. 14–15; Rocha Pereira, *GVP*, pls. 22–23.

68. London, British Museum E 279. RF neck-amphora.

A: Dionysos dancing with staff, grape vine, and kantharos.

B: Ariadne follows with torch and oinochoe.

The Eucharides Painter. Late archaic period.

ARV<sup>2</sup> 226, 1; CVA Great Britain 4, III Ic, pl. 15, 2; *BSA* 18, pl. 11–12 and 220; *LIMC* III, "Dionysos," no. 478.

69. London, British Museum E 350. Attic RF amphora.

A: Dionysos (name inscribed) extending kantharos and pouring a libation onto an altar; Nymph with inscription *NYNΦAIA* across from him, extending oinochoe.

B: Two nymphs.

The Syriskos Group: The Copenhagen Painter. 480–460 B.C.E. From Vulci.

ARV<sup>2</sup> 256, 2; CVA Great Britain 3, III Ic, *Brit. Mus. Cat. Vases* III, pl. 13 and pl. 18, 1; LIMC III, “Dionysos,” no. 860.

70. London, British Museum E 511. RF oinochoe.

A: Dionysos with kantharos; satyr extending oinochoe.

The Dutuit Painter. Circa 480 B.C.E. From Vulci.

ARV<sup>2</sup> 307, 9; *JHS* 33, 107, and pl. 8.

71. Munich, Antikensammlungen 2343. RF amphora.

A: Maenad pours for Dionysos from oinochoe into kantharos.

B: Satyr pours for Dionysos from oinochoe into kantharos.

Alkimachos Painter. 480–470 B.C.E. From Vulci.

ARV<sup>2</sup> 531, 127 and 1658; pl. 216, 5 and 7.

72. Paris, Musée du Louvre G240. RF oinochoe.

Dionysos with kantharos; maenad with oinochoe.

The Dutuit Painter. 480–470 B.C.E. From Vulci.

ARV<sup>2</sup> 307, 10; *JHS* 33, pl. 10.

73. Würzburg, Würzburg University, Martin Von Wagner-Museum 533. RF hydria.

Dionysos extends kantharos to

Ariadne, who pours from oinochoe and holds phiale.

The Eucharides Painter. 480–470 B.C.E. From Vulci. ARV<sup>2</sup> 229, 43; Langlotz, *Griechische Vasen*, pls. 184 and 197.

#### IRIS OR NIKE

74. Athens, National Museum 1508. RF lekythos.

Nike with phiale pouring onto altar. Flames, liquid? visible.

The Bowdoin Painter. 480–470 B.C.E.

ARV<sup>2</sup> 678, 23, and 692.

75. Athens, National Museum 1621. RF lekythos.

Nike, flying with phiale tipped toward altar.

The Bowdoin Painter. 480–460 B.C.E. From Velanideza.

ARV<sup>2</sup> 678, 19.

76. London, British Museum E 179. RF hydria.

Nike with oinochoe (modern restoration).

The Dutuit Painter. Late archaic period.

ARV<sup>2</sup> 307, 7; *JHS* 33, pl. 12; CVA Great Britain 8 III Ic, pl. 81, 4; LIMC VI, “Nike,” no. 96.

77. London, British Museum E 287. RF Panathenaic-style amphora.

A: Nike with phiale and oinochoe. Thymiaterion standing in background.

B: Youth.

Manner of the Berlin Painter. Late archaic period.

ARV<sup>2</sup> 214, 1(α); CVA Great Britain 7 III Ic, pl. 47, 2a.

78. London, British Museum E 574. RF lekythos.

Nike holding phiale in her right

hand, and phiale in her left over flaming, blood-stained altar.

The manner of the Berlin Painter. Late archaic period. From Sicily.

ARV<sup>2</sup> 216, 19 ("Bad. Late.").

79. Munich, Antikensammlungen 2430. RF kalpis-hydria.

A: Iris or Nike with sacrificial vessel and caduceus.

The Oreithya Painter. 480–470 B.C.E.

ARV<sup>2</sup> 497, 9, and 1656; LIMC V, "Iris I," no. 26.

*Kunst der Schale*: "The duty of being constantly 'underway' in the service of gods and people belongs to her innate being" (438).

80. New York, Metropolitan Museum of Art 41.162.88. RF lekythos.

Nike flying to altar with oinochoe.

The Painter of Palermo 4. Late archaic period. From Sicily?

ARV<sup>2</sup> 310, 2.

81. Oxford, Ashmolean Museum 313. RF lekythos (on right in photo).

Lekythos. Nike with phiale, tipped, and thymiaterion.

Near the Pan Painter. 480–470 B.C.E.

ARV<sup>2</sup> 560, 7; CVA Great Britain 3 III Ic, pl. 33, 4.

82. Oxford, Ashmolean Museum 314. RF lekythos (on left in photo).

Lekythos. Nike flying with phiale, tipped, and thymiaterion.

Near the Pan Painter. 480–470 B.C.E.

ARV<sup>2</sup> 560, 6; CVA Great Britain 3 III Ic, pl. 33, 3.

83. Paris, Musée du Louvre G137. RF neck-amphora.

Nike flying with phiale and oinochoe.

The Dutuit Painter. Late archaic period.

ARV<sup>2</sup> 307, 6; CVA France 9 III Ic, pl. 33, 8–10 and pl. 34, 1–2.

A: Rumpf, pl. 24, 4 and pl. 34, 1–2; LIMC VI, "Nike," no. 14.

84. Paris, Musée du Louvre G198. RF neck-amphora.

A: Nike skimming the ground with phiale and thymiaterion.

B: Man with a staff.

The Berlin Painter. 480–470 B.C.E.

ARV<sup>2</sup> 199, 31.

A: Pottier, pl. 128; Kurtz and Beazley, *The Berlin Painter*, pp. 69–70; no. 10, pl. 40a; LIMC VI, "Nike," no. 12 and no. 97.

#### EROS

85. Munich, Antikensammlungen 2445. RF oinochoe.

Eros with oinochoe and phiale.

The Dutuit Painter. 470 B.C.E. From Vulci.

ARV<sup>2</sup> 307, 12; Lau, pl. 24, 3; Genick-Furtwängler, pl. 33, 2; LIMC III, "Eros," *ad* no. 458.

*Kunst der Schale*: "The love-god Eros can bring to one being—his mother Aphrodite—the sacrificial offering that is due her, or he himself can also pour from jug and bowl his gift to humans, that is, love" (438).

#### ASSEMBLY OF DEITIES

86. Athens, National Museum (Acropolis Collection) 352. RF cup frs.

Tondo: Apollo with phiale and lyre.

A–B: Herakles entering Olympus. Enthroned Zeus with phiale.

The Providence Painter. 480–470 B.C.E.

ARV<sup>2</sup> 643, 128; Graef-Langlotz I, pls. 27–28; LIMC II, "Apollon," no. 456 and no. 824; V, "Herakles," no. 2868.



87. Paris, Musée du Louvre CA1706. BF alabastron.

Four deities: Apollo, with lyre and accompanied by fawn, pours out phiale;

Artemis accompanied by lion; Dionysos, pouring out kantharos, Hermes with cap and ram.

The Diosphos Painter. Late archaic period.

Haspels, *ABL*, pl. 37, 4 a–d; *LIMC* II, “Apollon,” no. 781d; II, “Artemis,” no. 1100; V, “Hermes,” no. 707.

88. Paris, Musée du Louvre G346. RF column-krater.

A: Zeus, standing, receives phiale from an unidentified goddess; Poseidon, with trident, standing, receives phiale from Nike.

B: Komos.

The Mykonos Painter. Circa 470 B.C.E.

ARV<sup>2</sup> 515, 3; CVA France 5 III I d, pl. 29, 1 and 3.

### Reliefs

89. Reggio di Calabria, Museo Nazionale. Votive plaque.

Persephone and Hades enthroned; Persephone with pomegranate and shaft of wheat; Hades with asphodel (?) and phiale.

Early classical period. From Locri, south Italy.

Balme and Morwood, pl. 48.

Early Classical Period (470–460 B.C.E.)

### Vases

#### ZEUS

90. Athens, Agora Museum P 4841. RF lebes gamikos (stand) fr.

Zeus, standing, with staff, extends phiale to Athena, standing, holding out oinoche.

The Providence Painter. 470–460 B.C.E.

ARV<sup>2</sup> 639, 61; Arafat, *Classical Zeus*, no. 4.51, pl. 31.

91. Bologna 228. RF column-krater.

Athena ushers Herakles into Olympus, presents to Zeus enthroned with phiale extended. Apollo behind throne with kithara. Hermes brings up the rear.

The Painter of Bologna 228. Early classical period.

ARV<sup>2</sup> 511, 3; CVA Italy 5 III Ic, pl. 41; Arafat, *Classical Zeus*, no. 5.2, pl. 33a; *LIMC* II, “Apollon,” no. 826; II, “Athena,” no. 436; V, “Herakles,” no. 2869; V, “Hermes,” no. 563.

92. Munich, Antikensammlungen 2413. RF stamnos.

A: Birth of Erichthonios.

B: Zeus, enthroned, with phiale extended. Nike attends; no oinochoe. Eros with lyre to left. Eros at right.

The Painter of Munich 2413. Early classical period. From Vulci.

ARV<sup>2</sup> 495, 1; *Addenda* (2) 250; *Mon.* I, pls. 10–11; *LIMC* II, “Athena,” no. 476; IV, “Erechtheus,” no. 6; III, “Eros,” no. 98; IV, “Ge,” no. 16; IV, “Hephaistos,” no. 217.

A: Cook, *Zeus* III, pl. 23.

B: *JDAI* 56, 42; Furtwängler-Reichhold, pl. 137; Rumpf, pl. 30, 5.

93. Palermo, Museo Nazionale V 780. RF bell-krater.

Athena escorts Herakles before Zeus.

Zeus enthroned with phiale extended. Staff with perching eagle.

The Altamura Painter. 470–460 B.C.E.

ARV<sup>2</sup> 592, 32, and 1660; *Paralipomena* 394; CVA Italy 14 III Ic, pl. 37, 4; and pl. 38, 9. Arafat, *Classical Zeus*, no. 5.1=3.72, pl. 32 a–b.

94. Paris, Bibliothèque Nationale, Cabinet des Medailles 444. RF hydria.

Zeus, enthroned with scepter, extends a phiale while a miniature Athena is born from his head. Hephaistos looks on with his axe, recently swung.

Painter of Tarquinia 707. Circa 470–460 B.C.E.

ARV<sup>2</sup> III2, 3; Pfuhl, *MuZ*, Abb. 518; Arafat, *Classical Zeus*, no. 2.5, pl. 8a; LIMC II, “Athena,” no. 357; III, “Eileithyia,” no. 14; IV, “Hephaistos,” no. 200; V, “Iris I,” no 90.

95. Paris, Musée du Louvre G370. RF stamnos.

A: Zeus, extending phiale to Nike who fills it with an oinochoe; Apollo and Hera.

B: Athena, Poseidon, Hermes, Plouton and goddess (Persephone?)

The Providence Painter. Early classical period.

ARV<sup>2</sup> 639, 54; CVA France 4 III Id, pl. 10 (1, 4, 6, 8) and pl. 11, 4; *Mon.* 6–7, pl. 58, 2; Pottier, pl. 138; Cook, *Zeus* III, 1050, fig. 844; Arafat, *Classical Zeus*, no. 4. 9, pl. 28a; LIMC II, “Apollon,” no. 859; II, “Athena,” no 452; IV, “Hades,” no. 16; IV, “Hera,” no. 220; V, “Hermes,” no. 749; V, “Iris I,” no 52.

#### HERA

96. New York, Metropolitan Museum of Art 28.57.11. RF lekythos.

Woman (or priestess) striding with patera (phiale) in right hand, staff (or skeptron, wreathed in garlands) in left. Identified by Beazley as the goddess Hera.

The Oinokles Painter. Early classical period.

ARV<sup>2</sup> 649, 40; LIMC IV, “Hera,” no. 143.

#### ZEUS AND HERA

97. New York, Antiquarium, Ltd., RF kalpis.

Zeus and Hera, standing, holding scepters and extending phialai, stand on opposite sides of a standing winged goddess (Nike? Iris? Eos?), who holds her oinochoe to fill Zeus’s phiale.

The Niobid Painter. 470–460 B.C.E. Unpublished.

98. Munich, Antikensammlungen Slg. Loeb 480. RF stamnos fr.

A: Zeus, enthroned with scepter, extends metallic phiale to Nike pouring for him from phiale. Hera (knees only visible) seated across from Zeus.

The Tithonos Painter. Circa 470 B.C.E.

ARV<sup>2</sup> 310, 20.

#### DEMETER AND PERSEPHONE AND/OR TRIPTOLEMOS

99. Athens, National Museum 1754. WG lekythos.

Persephone, on left, with torch and pouring from phiale. Wine visible in red.

On right: Demeter with scepter, grain, and polos or crown.

Early classical period.

Pleschow-Bindoket, 93, Abb. 29, 30; LIMC IV, “Demeter,” no. 222; VIII, “Persephone,” no. 53.

100. Munich, Antikensammlungen 2383. RF calyx-krater.

A: The chariot of Triptolemos (empty); Demeter on left, crowned with staff or scepter and oinochoe; Kore with scepter, grain, holding phiale; consecration of a departure?

B: King (or deity?) seated with staff, and crowned woman proffering phiale.

The Altamura Painter. 470–460 B.C.E.

ARV<sup>2</sup> 591, 23; Lau, pl. 31, 1; von Lücken, *Griechische Vasenbilder*, 51; LIMC IV, “Demeter,” no. 351; VIII, “Persephone,” no. 100; VIII, “Triptolemos,” no. 23.

101. New York, Metropolitan Museum of Art 41.162.98. RF hydria.

Triptolemos in his chariot with phiale; Demeter on right with grain stalks and torch; Persephone with oinochoe and torch.

The Niobid Painter. 470–460 B.C.E.

ARV<sup>2</sup> 606, 80; Beazley, *Attische Vasenmaler*, no. 50; Richter, ARVS, fig. 75; LIMC VIII, “Persephone,” no. 112; VIII, “Triptolemos,” no. 111.

102. Oxford, Ashmolean Museum V 292. RF stamnos.

A: Demeter and three women. The goddess, with scepter and ears of grain, extends a phiale, tipped at an angle to pour, over an altar. One of the women proffers an oinochoe.

B: Persephone with scepter; two women and a man. One of the women, facing Persephone, extends both phiale and oinochoe to her.

The Painter of the Yale Oinochoe. 470–460 B.C.E.

ARV<sup>2</sup> 501, 1, and 1656; Gardner, *Greek Vases*, pl. 1, 16–17 and pl. 27; LIMC IV, “Demeter,” no. 219.

Detail, Jacobsthal, *O.*, pl. 98:b.

Side, Philippaki, *Attic Stamnos*, pl. 38, 2.

103. Oxford, Ashmolean Museum 1973.1. Attic WG cup.

Museum description: “In the tondo of this cup Kore pours a libation;

outside there are scenes of revelry.” Oinochoe held by female divinity.

Two flaming altars; both striped black-and-white, perhaps a very early example of a triglyph and metope composition.

104. Paris, Musée du Louvre G368. RF bell-krater.

A: Triptolemos on his winged throne and Demeter, who holds up a phiale.

B: Demeter and Persephone.

The Painter of the Yale Oinochoe. Early classical period.

ARV<sup>2</sup> 502, 10; LIMC IV, “Demeter,” no. 218 and no. 348; VIII, “Persephone,” no. 49; VIII, “Triptolemos,” no. 109.

#### ATHENA

105. Paris, Musée du Louvre L62. RF oinochoe.

Athena with oinochoe; Herakles, with animal skins, extends the phiale. Central altar with tree growing from or behind it.

The Niobid Painter. 470–460 B.C.E. From Athens.

ARV<sup>2</sup> 607, 87 and 1661; Farnakowski II, 326; Webster, pl. 22, c–d; ph. Gir. 34139, 1; *Ant. K.* 4 (1961): 58. LIMC V, “Herakles,” no. 3159.

#### APOLLO

106. London, British Museum E 80. RF cup.

I: Apollo alone, sitting by altar with staff and phiale.

A–B: Mortal libation scenes: man with scepter and phiale; interior column; woman with oinochoe; man with wreath-crown and staff extending phiale.

Followers of Makron: The Painter of London E 80. 470–460 B.C.E. From Chiusi.

ARV<sup>2</sup> 815, 1; Smith, *BMV* III, pl. 5; *BCH* 60 (1936): 64, fig.7; *LIMC* II, "Apollon," no. 457.

## ARTEMIS

107. Athens, National Museum 1626. RF lekythos.

Artemis with quiver, playing a lyre with her left hand and extending a phiale with her right. Small deer. Apollo, with bow. Hermes.

Shoulder: small Nikes, each with tripod, flanking an altar. Blood visible.

Neck: flying Nike with tortoise-shell lyre.

Mys (signed as painter). Early classical period. From Eretria.

ARV<sup>2</sup> 663,—; *LIMC* II, "Artemis," no. 1145; VI, "Nike," no. 106.

Part: Collignon-Couve, pl. 46, 1362

Part: Hoppin, *BF*, 468.

108. Berlin, West, Antikenmuseum 3312. WG lekythos.

Artemis at altar with oinochoe, held to pour, and flaming torch.

Shattered during shelling of storage bunker in WWII.

The Bowdoin Painter. Early classical period.

ARV<sup>2</sup> 687, 216; Fairbanks, (1907), p. 971, fig. 44, no. 11; *LIMC* II, "Artemis," no. 1022.

109. Paris, Musée du Louvre CA599. BF, WG lekythos.

Artemis running accompanied by bull. Carries flaming torch and overflowing phiale. Added red for wine streaming onto ground.

Manner of the Bowdoin Painter. Early classical period. From Eretria.

ARV<sup>2</sup> 691, 27; Fairbanks, (1907), p. 36, fig. 20; *LIMC* II, "Artemis," no. 971.

110. Würzburg, Martin von Wagner-Museum H4978. RF lekythos.

Artemis, in profile, holding in her left hand a branch which ends in volutes and with her right hand pouring from a phiale onto an altar on which is a fruit. A bird perches on the altar. A fawn, one of the animals sacred to the goddess, steps delicately behind her. Beazley, who originally called the female figure simply "a woman" later admitted the view of Möbius, that she may be Artemis, and that the bird might indeed be a raven (ARV<sup>2</sup>, 1665).

The Bowdoin Painter. Circa 460 B.C.E. From Spata.

ARV<sup>2</sup> 686, 204, and 1665; *LIMC* II, "Artemis," no. 972.

## APOLLO AND ARTEMIS AND/OR LETO

111. Athens, National Museum 1172. RF lebes gamikos.

Wedding. On lebes gamikos stand: Apollo with lyre; Artemis with phiale tipped toward ground, and deer nearby; Leto; Hermes.

The Earlier Mannerists: undetermined. Circa 470 B.C.E.

ARV<sup>2</sup> 585, 33; Collignon-Couve, pl. 1229; Bruckner, *AM* 32 (1907): 96; *Jh.* 31 (1939): 93; *LIMC* II, "Apollo," no. 850; "Artemis," nos. 1010 and 1161; V, "Hermes," no. 699; V, "Iris I," no. 101.

112. Athens, (Michael) Vlastos Collection. RF lekythos.

Apollo, with kithara, extends his phiale to a woman (Artemis?) who fills it (to overflowing?). The liquid is portrayed as flowing from the lip of her oinochoe past the phiale, or else in and out of it.

The Painter of Athens 12778. 470–460 B.C.E.

ARV<sup>2</sup> 663, 1.

113. Boston, Museum of Fine Arts 97.370. RF oinochoe.

Apollo and Artemis at an altar; Apollo with kithara tips his horizontally fluted phiale for his sister, wearing her bow and quiver. She pours from an oinochoe.

The Altamura Painter. Circa 465 B.C.E. From Sounion?

ARV<sup>2</sup> 594, 62; Fairbanks and Chase, *Greek Gods*, p. 26, fig. 16; Caskey-Beazley, *MFA II*, suppl., pl. 15 and p. 69.

114. Hamburg, Museum für Kunst und Gewerbe 1960.34. RF krater.

A: Apollo, with lyre, laurel branch, and phiale held parallel to altar.

Artemis and Leto, both with oinochoai.

B: Dionysos and maenad.

The Altamura Painter. 470–460 B.C.E.

ARV<sup>2</sup> 591, 22, and 1660; *LIMC II*, “Apollon,” no. 652.

115. London, British Museum E 177. RF hydria.

Apollo with phiale tipped toward ground; interior visible. Artemis with bow in left hand and oinochoe in right hand. Leto with phiale in same position as Apollo’s and bough. Wine visible in added red pouring from Leto’s phiale and from Artemis’s oinochoe. Can gods libate directly from oinochoai? This vase seems to indicate so. No altar.

The Altamura Painter. Circa 460 B.C.E. From Vulci.

ARV<sup>2</sup> 594, 56; CVA Great Britain 7 III 1c, pl. 81, 2; Beazley, *AV*, p. 141, fig. 86; *LIMC II*, “Artemis,” no. 1004.

116. London, British Museum E 252(4). RF hydria fr.

Artemis with tall trefoil oinochoe extended, presumably to pour for

Apollo. Laurel wreath on head of Apollo. Shoulders and back part of head of Leto.

The Perseus Painter. Early classical period. From Kamiros.

ARV<sup>2</sup> 582, 18; *EAA VI* 70, fig. 8; Smith, *BMV III*, 190; *LIMC II*, “Artemis,” no. 968.

117. London, British Museum E 262. RF amphora.

A: Artemis, driving a quadriga; Apollo, with lyre and phiale held up.

B: Herakles entering Olympus with Nike and Zeus.

The Earlier Mannerists: The Painter of Louvre G231. Early classical period. From Vulci.

ARV<sup>2</sup> 508, 3;

Gerhard, *AV*, pl. 76, 1 and pl. 143; *LIMC II*, “Artemis,” no. 1214; V, “Herakles,” nos. 2874 and 3460.

118. London, British Museum E 579. RF lekythos.

Apollo, standing, with phiale and tortoiseshell lyre; Artemis pouring from oinochoe.

The Pan Painter, later work. 475–450 B.C.E. From Gela.

ARV<sup>2</sup> 557, 117; Beazley, *PM*, no. 54; pl. 25, 1; Pfeiff, pl. 41, 9;

Farnell, *Cults IV*, 343; *JHS* 95 (1975), 119; *LIMC II*, “Apollon,” nos. 677 and 678c.

119. New York, Metropolitan Museum of Art 24.97.96. RF bell-krater.

A: Apollo with kithara and phiale standing between Leto on left with phiale; Artemis with oinochoe. No altar. Inscribed: ΛΕΤΩ ΑΠΟΛΛΟΝ ΑΡΤΕΜΙΣ.

B: Woman running; old man with scepter; woman with oinochoe and phiale.

The Villa Giulia Painter. Circa 460–450 B.C.E.

ARV<sup>2</sup> 619, 17; Richter-Hall, pls. 100, 101; Eckstein-Wolf, pl. 2, 1; LIMC II, "Apollon," no. 645a.

## APHRODITE

120. New York, Metropolitan Museum of Art 07.286.36. WG pyxis.

Judgment of Paris. Aphrodite, with phiale and Eros; Athena with helmet and spear; Hera with veil and staff; Hermes with winged boots and caduceus; Paris; man with staff.

The Penthesileia Painter. 465–460 B.C.E. From Cumae.

ARV<sup>2</sup> 890, 173, and 1673; AJA 1915 pls. 29–30; Beazley, AV, p. 128; Hambidge, pls. at pp. 50, 51; Hoppin, HBRF, no. 30; Diepolder, pls. 11, 2 and 12, 1; Richter-Hall, no. 73; Himmelmann-Wildschütz, *Zur Eigenart*, pl. 17; Roberts, fig. 20, 1; LIMC III, "Eros," no. 936; IV, "Hera," no. 433; V, "Hermes," no. 474; VII, "Paridis iudicium," no. 46; VII, "Priamos," no. 12.

## DIONYSOS

121. London, British Museum E 257. RF amphora.

A: Judgment of Paris.

B: Over an altar, Dionysos extends his kantharos into which a maenad pours with an oinochoe.

The Niobid Painter (middle). Early classical period.

ARV<sup>2</sup> 604, 50; CVA Great Britain 4 III I c, pl. 7, 2a.; AJA (1937), p. 603, fig. 3; LIMC IV, "Hera," no. 432.

122. New York, Metropolitan Museum of Art 99.13.2. RF neck-amphora.

A: Dionysos offering wine from kantharos onto altar; maenad attends with bough and oinochoe.

B: Mortal (Beazley: "king") in

libation scene; woman attends with bough and oinochoe.

The Niobid Painter. Circa 460 B.C.E. From Nola.

ARV<sup>2</sup> 605, 61; Hoppin, HBRF II, p. 241, no. 27; Webster, no. 37;

Richter-Hall, no. 97, pls. 100, 169.

## IRIS OR NIKE

123. Athens, National Museum 1690. RF lekythos.

A: Nike pouring onto small, low altar; flames and liquid libation visible.

B: Man with staff.

Related to the Charmides Painter. Early classical period.

ARV<sup>2</sup> 654, 2; Collignon-Couve, pl. 43.

124. Athens, National Museum 1192. RF lekythos.

Nike flying to altar with phiale. Flames, blood flecks visible.

The Bowdoin Painter. Early classical period.

ARV<sup>2</sup> 678, 24.

125. Athens, National Museum 1827. WG lekythos.

Nike, flying to an altar with a phiale in each hand.

The Bowdoin Painter. Early classical period. From Eretria.

ARV<sup>2</sup> 685, 181; CVA Greece I, pl. 1, 6.

126. Athens, National Museum 17295. RF lekythos.

Nike flying to altar with phiale.

The Bowdoin Painter. Early classical period.

ARV<sup>2</sup> 678, 20.

127. Boston, Museum of Fine Arts 95.20. RF neck-amphora.

A: Nike flying with oinochoe and phiale held perpendicular to altar.

- B: Woman with torch.  
 Recalls the Alkimachos Painter.  
 Early classical period. From Nola.  
 ARV<sup>2</sup> 535, 4; LIMC VI, "Nike,"  
 no. 107.
128. Brussels, Musées Royaux A  
 1579. Pelike.  
 Nike, standing, holding two  
 phialai.  
 Hermonax. Early classical pe-  
 riod.  
 ARV<sup>2</sup> 486, 4I; CVA Belgium 2  
 III Id, pl. 9, 2b; LIMC VI, "Nike," no.  
 99.
129. Copenhagen, National Mu-  
 seum Chr. VIII 83I. RF lekythos.  
 Nike pouring phiale onto altar.  
 CVA Denmark 4 III Ic, pl. 165, 3.
130. Copenhagen, National Museum  
 1989. RF lekythos.  
 Nike running to altar, with  
 phiale.  
 Manner of the Aischines Painter.  
 Early classical period. From Attica.  
 ARV<sup>2</sup> 72I, 2; CVA Denmark 4 III  
 Ic, pl. 165, 4.
131. Ferrara, Museo Archeologico  
 Nazionale T 740. RF krater.  
 A: Libation scene at departure.  
 Nike pours from an oinochoe for a  
 warrior.  
 A woman (his wife?) holds his  
 helmet and shield  
 B: "Goddess and two women."  
 The Niobid Painter. Circa 460  
 B.C.E.  
 ARV<sup>2</sup> 599, 6; *City of Images*, p.  
 46, fig. 66; LIMC III, "Eos," no. 29I;  
 VI, "Memnon," no. 3.
132. London, British Museum E 275.  
 RF neck-amphora.  
 A: Nike with caduceus pouring  
 from oinochoe; warrior.  
 B: Goddess, Nike.
- The Group of the Niobid Painter.  
 The Painter of the Berlin Hydria.  
 Early classical period. From Vulci.  
 ARV<sup>2</sup> 616, 6; CVA Great Britain  
 I III Ic, pl. 14, 1a.
133. London, British Museum E 283.  
 RF neck-amphora.  
 A: Nike extending phiale to  
 woman with alabastron.  
 B: Komos (youth with skyphos  
 and boy).  
 Alkimachos Painter. 470–450  
 B.C.E. From Vulci.  
 ARV<sup>2</sup> 53I, 28; CVA Great Britain  
 I III Ic, pl. 17, 2.
134. London, British Museum E 584.  
 RF lekythos.  
 Nike hovering at a flaming altar  
 with phiale and oinochoe. Blood or  
 fillets painted onto altar in added red.  
 The Bowdoin Painter. 480–460  
 B.C.E.  
 ARV<sup>2</sup> 679, 27.
135. London, British Museum E 643.  
 RF lekythos.  
 Nike tending a flaming altar with  
 phiale and oinochoe.  
 Painter of Palermo 4. 480–460  
 B.C.E.  
 ARV<sup>2</sup> 310, 8; AM 5, pl. 14, 1.
- EROS
136. Munich, Antikensammlungen  
 Slg. Loeb 478. RF askos.  
 A: Flying Eros with phiale.  
 The Painter of the Oxford Siren-  
 Askos. Early classical period.  
 ARV<sup>2</sup> 776, 1; CVA Deutschland  
 6, pls. 100, 4 and 101, 1.
137. Paris, Musée du Louvre G337.  
 RF amphora.  
 A: Eros pouring a libation onto  
 blood-sprinkled altar. He holds a  
 phiale in each hand. Red liquid liba-  
 tion visible.

B: Man.

The Charmides Painter. 470–460 B.C.E.

ARV<sup>2</sup> 654, 11; CVA France 9 III Ic, pl. 50, 6–7; Millingen, *AUM* I, pl. 31; Himmelmann-Wildschütz, *Zur Eigenart*, S. 38, pl. 29; *LIMC* III, “Eros,” no. 459.

#### ASSEMBLY OF DEITIES

138. Athens, National Museum 14908. RF pyxis.

The Judgment of Paris. Seated goddess, frontal, with distaff (or the young Paris?); enthroned Aphrodite, crowned, with scepter and swan, receives a flying Eros with oinochoe and phiale; enthroned Hera with phiale extended; enthroned Athena holds out phiale; interior visible.

The Wedding Painter. 480–460 B.C.E.

ARV<sup>2</sup> 924,—; Himmelmann-Wildschütz, *Zur Eigenart*, Abb. 16; Richter, *Ancient Furniture*, 38; *LIMC* II, “Aphrodite,” nos. 804 and 1427; II, “Athena,” no. 183; IV, “Hera,” no. 431; VII, “Paridis iudicium,” no. 45.

139. New York, Metropolitan Museum of Art 06.1021.151. RF amphora.

A: Dionysos with thyrsos and kantharos and satyr with amphora and shouldering a transport oinochoe hurry to right (toward a scene of libation?).

B: Poseidon, with trident, is proffered a phiale and oinochoe by Nike.

The Syracuse Painter. Early classical.

ARV<sup>2</sup> 519, 16; Beazley, *AV*, 132; Richter-Hall, no. 91, pls. 93, 169; *LIMC* VI, “Nike,” no. 211; VII, “Poseidon,” no. 258d.

140. Paris, Louvre C10564 (including S 1322). RF cup.

I: Theseus and the bull

A: Hera with scepter; Zeus standing with phiale and scepter; Nike with oinochoe, Hermes, and Poseidon.

B: Three females and two males.

The Penthesileia Painter. 460 B.C.E.

ARV<sup>2</sup> 880, 15; *LIMC* IV, “Hera,” no. 230; Arafat, *Classical Zeus*, no. 4.18.

#### UNIDENTIFIED DEITIES

141. Athens, National Museum 2187. WG kylix.

I: Libation scene. Seated deity with scepter, phiale outheld; standing deity with oinochoe.

A: Three draped figures.

470–460 B.C.E. From Athens.

Furtwängler, *AM* 6 (1881), pl. IV; Mertens, p. 182, no. IV.B.73; *LIMC*, “Demeter,” no. 261; “Persephone,” no. 76.

142. Brauron Museum. RF kylix fr. Enthroned god (Zeus?) with phiale extended; oinochoe held mid-air in pouring position by attendant.

Early classical period.

143. New York, Metropolitan Museum of Art 1979.11.15. WG kylix.

I: Goddess with scepter and phiale at an altar.

A–B: Eos pursuing Tithonos.

The Villa Giulia Painter. Circa 470 B.C.E.

MMA *Annual Report*, 1978–1979, p. 33, ill; *LIMC* “Eos,” no. 153; “Hera,” no. 145.

144. Paris, Musée du Louvre G188. RF stamnos.

A: Zeus entrusts the infant Dionysos to the care of the nymphs of Nysa; enthroned female figure with thyrsos (Semele?) extends phiale

B: Nymphs of Nysa.



Follower of the Aegisthus Painter. Painter of the Florence Stamnoi. Early classical period. From Vulci.

ARV<sup>2</sup> 508, 1 and 1657;

A and side: Philippaki, *Attic Stamnos*, pl. 29, 1–2.

Early Classical Period (460–450 B.C.E.)

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Vases

ZEUS

145. Berlin, West, Antikemuseum 3308. RF pyxis.

In sequence: A divinity, bearded, identified by Simon (*OG*, p. 65), Beazley, and Ursula Kästner as Zeus, crowned with laurel, with scepter, pouring a libation from a metallic gadrooned phiale at a flaming, blood-flecked altar in front of a column marked with stripes of red (blood?), perhaps representing the interior of a sanctuary. An offering-table (τράπεζα). A woman proceeding toward the libation with a sacrificial basket. Another offering table. Hera (same identification sources as above) running with scepter, hand outstretched. An omphalos or low rock altar with blood flecks. A sacrificial attendant (a wingless Nike?) bearing oinochoe and phiale hastens in the same direction. An alternative explanation, favored by Joan B. Connelly and others, is that the male figure may be a priest with a garlanded (filleted) skeptron.

The Agathon Painter. 460–450 B.C.E.

ARV<sup>2</sup> 977, 1; *Addenda* (2) 310; Furtwängler, *AA* 1895, 38; *EAA* I, 136–137; Roberts, p. 95, no. 1; *LIMC* IV, “Hera,” no. 231; V, “Iris I,” no. 56; “Nike,” no. 370.

146. Leipzig Museum T 638. RF skyphos.

A: Zeus standing up from his throne, holding his staff, extending a phiale.

B: Athena with spear, running, holding helmet before her.

The Lewis Painter. 460–450 B.C.E.

ARV<sup>2</sup> 973, 6; Smith, *Lewis Painter*, pl. 5, 31d; Arafat, *Classical Zeus*, no. 3.107=4.58, pl. 27 a–b; *LIMC* VIII, “Zeus,” no. 74.

147. Vienna, Kunsthistorisches Museum IV 3711. RF skyphos.

(Formerly Österreichisches Museum 329)

A: Zeus enthroned with scepter holding phiale tipped. Athena, with spear, pours from an oinochoe.

B: (Beazley: “Woman running to king.”)

The Lewis Painter. 470–450 B.C.E. From Cerveteri.

ARV<sup>2</sup> 973, 3; Smith, *Lewis Painter*, 13–14, pl. 3.

HERA

148. Berlin, West, Antikemuseum 2317. RF skyphos.

A: Hera, enthroned with scepter, extends a phiale to Nike, who pours from a vessel.

B: Three standing female figures, the two on the flanking sides much larger than the one in the center (a mortal?) Badly eroded.

The Lewis Painter. Early classical period. From Nola.

ARV<sup>2</sup> 972, 1; Gerhard, *AV*, pl. 50; Smith, *Lewis Painter*, pl. 1, 9; *LIMC* IV, “Hera,” no. 393; V, “Iris I,” no. 63.

ATHENA

149. New York, Metropolitan Museum of Art 12.236.1. RF Nolan amphora.

A: Athena extends her phiale, whose lobes are painted with added white, to a female figure who pours from an oinochoe directly into it; wine is shown spilling from Athena's phiale onto the ground.

B: Youth.

The Achilles Painter. 460–450 B.C.E.

ARV<sup>2</sup> 989, 24; Hambidge, p. 80, fig. 8; Beazley, *AV*, p. 373, no. 16; Richter-Hall, no. 121, p. 154, pls. 120, 121, 169.

APOLLO AND ARTEMIS AND/OR LETO

150. Athens, National Museum 1385. Boeotian RF calyx-krater.

Delphic scene: wreathed omphalos; tripod on a column. Apollo, in himation and chiton, with kithara, holds a phiale with embossed interior visible over the omphalos. Artemis, with quiver and torch held downward, pours from an oinochoe into her brother's bowl. To Apollo's left, Leto extends her phiale.

460–440 B.C.E.?

Lullies, *AM* 65, 1940, 13, pl. 9; *LIMC* II, "Apollon," no. 654.

151. Athens, National Museum 16348. RF Pelike.

A: Apollo, with long hair and lyre, and Artemis (?—without attributes) at altar; phiale held by Apollo, tipped toward flaming altar to receive liquid from oinochoe. Liquid visible. Flames in added red. Red paint added onto altar = blood?

B: Woman running with phiale.

The Sabouroff Painter. 460–450 B.C.E.

ARV<sup>2</sup> 843, 130.

152. Bologna, Museo Civico Palagied Universitaria 323. RF lekythos.

Apollo with laurel crown extends

metallic phiale; crowned woman (Artemis?) pours for him from metallic oinochoe.

The Heimarmene Painter. Classical period.

ARV<sup>2</sup> 1173, 2; Simon, *OG*, pl. 2; *LIMC* II, "Apollon," no. 692b; V, "Kallirrhoe II," no. 5; VI, "Mousa, Mousai," no. 65a.

153. Boston, Museum of Fine Arts 00.347. RF volute-krater.

A: Apollo crowned with laurel and holding bow and laurel bough extends phiale toward his sister Artemis, who holds a kithara and an oinochoe by her side. An interior column, representing a sanctuary. Leto, to the left of the column, crowned, fashions a wreath. No altar.

B: Mortal libation scene: Three women at an altar making a libation. Left: a woman holds oinochoe and laurel branch; central woman (with scepter; a priestess?) holds the phiale over an altar. A woman to the right holds up her hand.

School of the Niobid Painter; Painter of Berlin 2381. Circa 450 B.C.E. From near Licata.

ARV<sup>2</sup> 616, 1; *AJA* 26 (1922) 416, Abb. 2

Detail: Beazley, *AV*, p. 150, fig. 90; Caskey-Beazley *MFA* II, pl. 61; *LIMC* II, "Apollon," no. 651b.

154. Karlsruhe, Badisches Landesmuseum 205. RF pelike.

Apollo with kithara at altar holding phiale between Leto on left with flower branch or bough, Artemis on right with bow and oinochoe tipped for pouring.

From Orvieto. The Niobid Painter. 450 B.C.E.

ARV<sup>2</sup> 604, 49; Welter, pl. 9, 10; Webster, no. 20; Simon, *OG*, pl. 4, 1.

155. London, British Museum E 274. RF neck-amphora.

A: Apollo, with tortoiseshell lyre, laurel branch, and phiale; Artemis

B: Triptolemos and Demeter. (Only Apollo is depicted here.)

The Niobid Painter. 460–450 B.C.E. From Vulci.

ARV<sup>2</sup> 604, 53; Beazley, *AV*, p. 149, fig. 89; Jacobsthal, *O.*, pl. 65, c.; Webster, no. 32; *LIMC* II, “Apollon,” no. 679a; IV, “Demeter,” no. 353; VIII, “Triptolemos,” no 8.

156. London, British Museum E 323. Neck-amphora.

A: Apollo, seated with kithara, extends phiale to standing woman (Artemis?) who pours from oinochoe. Cascading liquid visible.

B: Youth.

The Sabouroff Painter. 460–450 B.C.E.

ARV<sup>2</sup> 842, 128; CVA Great Britain 7 III Ic, pl. 61, 2.

157. London, British Museum E 383. RF pelike.

A: Apollo with kithara and phiale; Artemis, with bow, turns toward him with an oinoche.

B: Two women.

Chicago Painter, School of the Villa Giulia Painter. Early classical period.

ARV<sup>2</sup> 630, 25; CVA Great Britain 7 III I c, pl. 61, 2a; Beazley, *AV*, p. 156, fig. 95; *LIMC* II, “Apollon,” *ad* no. 676a.

158. Oxford, Ashmolean Museum 535. RF lekythos.

Apollo with lyre extends a phiale to Artemis, with quiver, bow, and accompanied by a fawn. She holds an oinochoe.

The Villa Giulia Painter. Circa 450 B.C.E. Found at Gela.

ARV<sup>2</sup> 624, 76; CVA Oxford 1, pl. 35, 1–2; *JHS* 25, pl. 2, 1; *LIMC* II, “Apollon,” *ad* no. 676a.

159. Oxford, Ashmolean Museum 1879.170 (295). RF hydria.

Apollo, grasping a laurel branch, pouring from a phiale onto a horned altar. To the left: Artemis, with bow and arrows, holding oinochoe. To the right: Leto approaches the sacrifice with another phiale.

Near the Villa Giulia Painter. 460–450 B.C.E.

ARV<sup>2</sup> 627, 2; Gardner, *Greek Vases*, pl. 18, 2; Farnell, *Cults* IV 343, pl. 39; *LIMC* II, “Artemis,” no. 1006.

160. Paris, Bibliothèque Nationale, Cabinet des Médailles 443. RF Attic hydria.

Apollo seated, holds out phiale for Artemis, with bow and quiver, who pours. Hermes with traveler’s hat and caduceus looks on from the left; Leto, crowned, bearing another phiale parallel to the ground, approaches with laurel boughs and scepter.

The Niobid Painter. 460 B.C.E. From Nola.

ARV<sup>2</sup> 606, 71; Webster, no. 46; Gerhard, *AVI*, pl. 29; *LIMC* II, “Apollon,” no. 745a; V, “Hermes,” no. 812.

161. Rhodes Museum 12060. RF hydria.

Two female figures, probably Leto and Artemis, flank Apollo, who grasps a kithara and wears a laurel wreath, at an altar. Leto (on left), extends a phiale with decorated rim toward her son. Artemis (on right), wearing a diadem, carrying a torch and standing next to a throne, tips a phiale downward. No flames on altar. Blood stains visible on altar side.

The Niobid Painter. 450 B.C.E. From Ialysos.

ARV<sup>2</sup> 606, 66; Jacopi, *Ialisso*, p. 249; Webster, no. 50, pl. 21b; *Cl. Rhodos* 3 (1929), p. 249, fig. 246; LIMC II, "Artemis," no. 1005.

162. Würzburg, Martin von Wagner-Museum H 4533 (L 503). RF neck-amphora.

Apollo with laurel wreath and tortoiseshell lyre extends a phiale over an altar. Doric column behind the altar, perhaps indicating the interior of a sanctuary. Artemis to left with oinochoe; Leto to right with phiale.

The Niobid Painter. Circa 450 B.C.E.

ARV<sup>2</sup> 611, 32; Langlotz, *Griechische Vasen*, 503, pls. 170 and 172; Pfeiff, pl. 41, b; Webster, pl. 39; Simon, *OG*, pl. 3; LIMC II, "Apollon," no. 653.

#### DIONYSOS

163. London, British Museum E 359. RF pelike.

Maenad, holding a thyrsos, grasps an oinochoe. Dionysos extends his kantharos. 460–450 B.C.E. From Kamiros.

#### IRIS OR NIKE

164. Athens, National Museum 1717. RF calyx-krater.

A: Athena, with helmet in hand and leaning on spear, receives Nike, with oinochoe and phiale.

B: Man and woman.

The Achilles Painter. 460–440 B.C.E.

ARV<sup>2</sup> 991, 56; LIMC VI, "Nike," no. 182.

165. Athens, National Museum 12233. RF lekythos.

Nike, flying, with phiale in each hand.

Painter and date uncertain.

166. London, British Museum GR 1895.8–31.1. RF pelike.

Zeus, with white beard and holding scepter, gestures with outstretched palm above a flaming altar. Nike, with oinochoe and phiale held over the altar, faces him. Inscriptions: NIKE ZEYΣ (the latter name reversed).

The Villa Giulia Painter. 460–450 B.C.E.

LIMC IV, "Hebe I," no. 7; IV, "Hera," no. 413; VI, "Nike," no. 204.

167. Oxford, Ashmolean Museum 1947. 25. RF lekythos.

Nike displays an oinochoe and phiale at an altar. Woman reacts with gesture of awe, frequently seen in mortals on the occasion of divine epiphany. Flames in added red.

LIMC VI, "Nike," no. 356.

168. Paris, Musée du Louvre G444. RF lekythos.

Nike, with oinochoe and phiale, offers a libation at the departure of a warrior. The Achilles Painter. 460–440 B.C.E.

ARV<sup>2</sup> 993, 91; *JHS* 34, 190.

#### EROS

169. Paris, Musée du Louvre G435. RF amphora.

Eros, underway, with oinochoe in right hand and phiale in left. 460–450 B.C.E.

CVA France 12 III 1d, pl. 36, 9–11 (fr. 516); LIMC III, "Eros," no. 458.

#### Classical Period (450–430 B.C.E.)

##### Vases

#### ZEUS

170. Paris, Musée du Louvre G378. RF Nolan amphora.

A: Zeus extends his phiale to Nike, who pours from an oinochoe.

B: Youth.

The Dwarf Painter (follower of the Achilles Painter). 460–440 B.C.E.

ARV<sup>2</sup> 1011, 7; CVA Louvre III Id pl. 36, 6 and 8.

#### HERA

171. London, British Museum E 523. RF oinochoe.

Hera, with scepter, extends phiale to Iris or Nike with oinochoe. (Beazley: “goddess and winged goddess [Hera, and Iris or Nike].”)

The Achilles Painter. Circa 440 B.C.E. From Vulci.

ARV<sup>2</sup> 992, 76; LIMC IV, “Hera,” no. 406; V, “Iris I,” no. 65.

#### POSEIDON

172. Paris, Musée du Louvre G377. RF neck-amphora.

A: Poseidon, enthroned with trident, extends phiale (cult statue?)

B: Youth.

The Painter of the Louvre Symposium. Classical period, era of Polygnotos.

ARV<sup>2</sup> 1070, 5; CVA Louvre III Id pl. 36, 2, 7, and 4; LIMC VII, “Poseidon,” no. 150.

#### DEMETER AND PERSEPHONE AND/OR TRIPTOLEMOS

173. Athens, National Museum 1166. RF squat amphora.

A: Triptolemos on winged chariot, with phiale. Flanked by Persephone with torch and Demeter with scepter.

B: Persephone with torch, Hades, Demeter.

Near Polygnotos. 440 B.C.E.

ARV<sup>2</sup> 1059, 129; Collignon-Couve, no. 1220; LIMC VIII, “Perse-

phone,” no. 129; VIII, “Triptolemos,” no. 152.

174. Athens, National Museum 1545. RF chous.

Triptolemos, in winged chariot with scepter, extends phiale. Demeter, holding grain, looks on.

LIMC VIII, “Triptolemos,” no. 113.

175. Munich, Antikensammlungen 2432. RF kalpis-hydria.

Triptolemos on winged chariot with phiale.

Left: Demeter. Right: Persephone, with oinochoe.

The Chicago Painter. 450–440 B.C.E.

ARV<sup>2</sup> 630, 31 and 1663a.

176. Berlin, Staatliche Museen F4055.

RF trefoil oinochoe.

Demeter (with scepter, holding grain sheaves) and Kore (with phiale and oinochoe) at an altar.

177. London, British Museum E 183. RF hydria.

Departure of Triptolemos. Kore, with torch; seated Triptolemos on winged chariot with overflowing phiale extended; Demeter with crown and scepter, pouring from oinochoe. Name-inscriptions: ΤΡΙΠΤΟΛΕΜΟΣ ΔΕΜΗΤΗΡ.

The Painter of London 183. Classical period. From Nola.

ARV<sup>2</sup> 1191, 1; *Mon.* I, pl. 4 whence Nilsson GR, 1 pl. 42; LIMC IV, “Demeter,” no. 368; IV, “Hades,” no. 39; VI, “Hekate,” no. 21; VIII, “Persephone,” no. 126; VII, “Ploutos,” no. 36; VIII, “Triptolemos,” no. 133.

178. London, British Museum E 281. RF neck-amphora.

A: Triptolemos, in winged chariot, holds phiale. Kore and Demeter

flank him, Demeter holding oinochoe.

B: Three women.

Polygnotos. 440 B.C.E. From Nola.

ARV<sup>2</sup> 1030, 36.

A: Gerhard, *AV*, pl. 75, 1; *Él.* 3, pl. 52; *LIMC* VIII, "Persephone," no. 117; VIII, "Triptolemos," no. 117.

179. London, British Museum E 614. RF lekythos.

Triptolemos, in chariot, extends phiale.

The Group of London E 614. 450–440 B.C.E.

ARV<sup>2</sup> 1202, 1.

180. Naples, Museo Nazionale 3093.

A: Triptolemos on winged chariot with phiale.

B: Goddess with oinochoe (Demeter or Persephone).

The Achilles Painter. Circa 450 B.C.E.

ARV<sup>2</sup> 988, 17; Pleschow-Bindoket, p. 87, Abb. 20–21.

181. St. Louis, City Art Museum 40.21. RF column-krater.

A: Triptolemos, with phiale, on winged chariot.

B: Three youths.

The Late Mannerists: The Duomo Painter. Middle to third quarter of fifth century B.C.E.

ARV<sup>2</sup> 1117, 6.

A: *Bull. City Art Museum* 7, p. 11 fig. 4; Pleschow-Bindoket, p. 86, Abb. 19.

#### ATHENA

182. London, British Museum D 14. Attic WG lekythos.

Athena (with inscription: AΘE-NAIA, reversed) pours from an oinochoe for Herakles, who extends his kantharos.

The Painter of London D 14. Circa 430 B.C.E. From Vulci.

ARV<sup>2</sup> 1213, 2 and 1687; Mertens, no. III.C.4, p. 126; pl. 18, no. 2. Murray, *WAV*, pl. 21, b; Stella, *Mitologia greca*, p. 144, below; *Ant. K.* 4, 57–58; *LIMC* V, "Herakles," no. 3172.

183. Thebes Museum. RF lekythos.

Athena pours from an oinochoe into Herakles's phiale.

Boeotian, after the Achilles Painter. Classical period. Found in the *polyandron* (mass grave) in Thespiiai.

ARV<sup>2</sup> 1010, 2; New CVA (Thebes 1, Greece 6, pl. 19 [2001]); *AM* 65, pl. 6.

#### APOLLO

184. Athens, National Museum 12589. Boeotian RF skyphos.

A: Apollo holding lyre and maenad holding thyrsos, both with phialai. She pours into his bowl, from which liquid spills.

B: Mortal libation scene: Two women at an altar with animal remains visible. The woman on the left pours from an oinochoe into the phiale of the woman on the right, who is crowned.

Painter of the Argos Cup. Classical period.

Lullies, *AM* 65, 1940, 16, pl. 15, 1; *LIMC* II, "Apollon," no. 717.

185. London, British Museum E 516. RF oinochoe.

Apollo alone, standing, tipping his phiale slightly to altar.

The Alexandre Group. 440–425 B.C.E. From Eretria.

*Brit. Mus. Cat. Vases* III, pl. 18, 2. Lezzi-Hafter, pl. 147 c–d; *LIMC* II, "Apollon," no. 448.

186. Paris, Musée du Louvre G375. RF pelike.

A: Apollo and Tityos

B: Apollo, crowned, with a laurel staff, and two women (Artemis and Leto?), one of whom extends a phiale to him.

Polygnotos. Second half of fifth century B.C.E.

ARV<sup>2</sup> 1032, 54; *Mon.* 1856 pl. 10, 2; *LIMC* II, "Apollon," no. 173; II, "Artemis," no. 1009; VI, "Mousa, Mousai," no. 68a; VIII, "Tityos," no. 22.

#### ARTEMIS

187. Athens, Agora Museum, P 30126. RF frs (seven).

Artemis, at left accompanied by deer, with phiale. Draped figure with staff at right.

*LIMC* II, "Artemis," no. 1019.

#### APOLLO AND ARTEMIS AND/OR LETO

188. Athens, National Museum 12270. Boeotian RF bell-krater.

A: Apollo with tortoiseshell lyre, holds out phiale. Artemis, with quiver and bow, pours from oinochoe for him. No liquid visible.

B: Two Apollos, one seated, one standing, each with lyre and laurel wreaths. Priests? Music students? A round disc shaped like the interior of a phiale is centrally suspended above them.

Painter of the Argos Cup. Classical period.

Lullies, *AM* 65, 1940, 15, pl. 14, 1.

189. Berlin, West, Antikenmuseum 2407. RF oinochoe.

Apollo, with kithara, holding phiale in position perpendicular to ground.

Artemis and Leto flank with torches.

The Painter of Munich 2528. Classical period. From Vulci.

ARV<sup>2</sup> 1257, 3; Genick-Furtwängler, pl. 35, 2; *Addenda* (2) 355.

190. London, British Museum E 400. RF pelike.

A: Apollo standing with lyre at altar. He pours from his phiale onto the altar. The liquid is visible in added white. Artemis or Muse attends with oinochoe

B: Youth.

Aison. 430 B.C.E. Classical period.

ARV<sup>2</sup> 1176, 27; *LIMC* II, "Apollon," 678b.

191. Malibu, J. Paul Getty Museum 86.AE.236. RF Attic trefoil oinochoe.

Apollo, crowned with laurel and holding branch, extends large embossed phiale. Liquid pouring from phiale; flames visible on altar.

Artemis, no attributes, with oinochoe; wine in added red is pouring from the lip. Attributed to the Richmond Painter. Circa 440 B.C.E.

Bareiss, *MMA*, p. 5, no. 60.

192. New York, Metropolitan Museum of Art 12.229.12. RF cup fr.

I: Apollo, enthroned, with laurel branch and scepter, holds out phiale.

Muse (Kalliope?) standing, also holds phiale.

A: Woman

B: Woman.

The Calliope Painter. Classical period. From Orvieto.

ARV<sup>2</sup> 1259, 3; I: *Bull. Metr.* 8, 157; Beazley, *AV*, p. 180; Richter-Hall, pls. 145, 143; I: *EAA* ii, 227; *LIMC* II, "Apollon," no. 693; VI, "Mousa, Mousai," no. 66.

193. Syracuse, Museo Nazionale 45911. RF bell-krater.

Apollo, holding kithara in left hand and phiale in right, pours a libation; wine visible. Youth identified as Ganymede holds the oinochoe, wine

dripping from lip. Leto, with scepter, to the left. Artemis, to the right, with bow, crowns her brother. Hermes approaches on the far right.

The Group of Polygnotos. Circa 440 B.C.E. From Kamarina (?).

ARV<sup>2</sup> 1053, 32; A: *AM* 5, pl. 2, 2; Zanker, p. 74; *LIMC* II, "Apollon," no. 747.

#### DIONYSOS

**194.** Berlin, West, Antikenmuseum 2337. RF amphora.

A: Dionysos, with thyrsos and kantharos. Silenus with branch and oinochoe.

B: Two maenads.

The Persephone Painter. 440 B.C.E. From Nola.

#### SABAZIOS AND KYBELE

**195.** Ferrara, Museo Archeologico Nazionale T 128. Krater.

E. Simon has identified these deities on a pedestal, holding libation bowls in an interior or sanctuary scene, as Cybele and Sabazios; J. D. Beazley suggests Dionysos and Semele or Ariadne. Hades and Persephone have also been suggested. Added white delineates the libation spilling from the phialai of the deities. The god wears a snake headdress. The goddess has a lion on her shoulder, who helps her to grasp her scepter. An altar, piled with wood, stands before the pair. A priestess approaches with a covered basket on her head, as does a votary playing the double flute. A celebrant approaches with a tympanon. Around the register of the vase, an ecstatic dance explodes.

Claude Bérard and Jean-Louis Durand write, "This group [the two deities] cannot be separated from the right-hand section of the frieze. In

fact, the libation cups are not merely decorative accessories or attributes; they are functional: liquid flows and spreads to the foot of the altar in front of the pedestal. (This essential detail is scarcely visible in the photographs, since it is painted in added white, which is extremely fugitive.) Although static, this mysterious couple thus participates in the general action, carrying out a libation, as if in response to the musicians and dancers who frame them" ("Entering the Imagery," in *City of Images*, 25).

The Group of Polygnotos. Circa 440 B.C.E. From Spina.

ARV<sup>2</sup> 1052, 25 and 1680; Aurigemma (1) 181–185 = (2) 211–215; A *City of Images*, fig. 21a; *LIMC* III, "Dionysos," no. 869; VIII, "Kybele," no. 66; VIII, "Sabazios," no. 1.

#### IRIS OR NIKE

**196.** London, British Museum E 385. RF pelike.

A: Nike extends a phiale to a warrior at his departure.

B: Man.

The Achilles Painter. 440 B.C.E.

ARV<sup>2</sup> 990, 50; *JHS* 34, 188–189, and p. 184.

**197.** Munich, Antikensammlungen 7503 (ex-2364). RF pelike.

A: Youth, extending object (phiale?) to boy

B: Nike, flying with phiale.

The Owen Class. Classical period.

ARV<sup>2</sup> 1220, 1; *CVA Deutschland* 6, pl. 79, 1–2.

#### EROS

**198.** Athens, National Museum 1270. RF skyphos.

Eros flying with two phialai.

Classical period.



199. New York, Metropolitan Museum of Art 23.160.15. RF lekythos.

Eros with phiale and flower before an altar.

Classical period.

Mentioned in *Bull. Metr.* May 1925, p. 132, and Beazley, *Cyprus*, p. 40 n. 1; *LIMC* III, "Eros," no. 116.

### Bronzes

200. Munich, Antikensammlungen Schoen 228. Bronze statuette.

Deity (Zeus or Poseidon) with phiale tipped toward ground.

### Votive Reliefs

201. Palermo, Museo Civico, no. 768. Marble relief (not pictured).

Ares, with breastplate and shield, wears chiton. Aphrodite with chiton holds oinochoe in right hand, pours wine into a phiale in left. Small winged Nike flies above between them. Adult and child worshipers, both much smaller, approach from left.

Circa 440 B.C.E.

Lippold, *Die Griechische Plastik* II, 2; Mitropolou, no. 21.

### Terracottas

202. London, British Museum 223. Terracotta figurine.

Goddess, probably Athena, wearing polos, holds phiale.

Circa 450 B.C.E. From Kamiros, Rhodes.

### Classical Period (430–400 B.C.E.)

#### Vases

##### ATHENA

203. London, British Museum F 239. Italiot? RF lekythos.

Athena, with expressive face, shield on knee, seated on rocklike formation. Interior indicated by column at left. Holds spear; extends phiale, tipped slightly upward. Lion spout with perirhanterion (lustral basin) pours behind phiale. Horseman approaching on foot, leading horseman to goddess.

CVA Great Britain 2 IV Ea, pl. 9, 2; *LIMC* I, "Achilleus," no. 271; II, "Athena," no. 188.

##### APOLLO AND ARTEMIS AND/OR LETO

204. London, British Museum E 502. RF bell-krazer.

A: Apollo, with lyre, pours from phiale onto omphalos decorated with fillets. Artemis, with quiver and torch, holds an oinochoe. To the left: Hermes, approaching with caduceus and winged boots; to the right: Leto, crowned, with phiale held parallel to the ground.

B: Youths and a boy.

Manner of the Dinos Painter. 420–400 B.C.E. From Nola.

ARV<sup>2</sup> 1156, 10; *Él.* II, pl. 26; *LIMC* II, "Apollon," no. 745.

205. London, British Museum E 543. RF oinochoe.

Apollo riding on a griffin (perhaps returning from the Hyperboreans?), with Artemis, who extends a phiale, and Leto.

The Painter of London E 543, late fifth century B.C.E. From Vulci.

ARV<sup>2</sup> 1348, 1; Götze, *RM* 54 (1939), pl. 17; Metzger, pl. 24; *LIMC* II, "Apollon," no. 364; II, "Artemis," no. 1259.

206. Ferrara, Museo Archeologico Nazionale 12451 (T 27 CVP). RF pyxis.

Personification of Delos, seated, identified by inscription: ΔΗΛΟΣ,

sitting on omphalos with phiale extended. Hermes watches behind her on right, by tripod. In front of her, to the left, an olive tree; divine libation scene. Apollo, with lyre, extends phiale over filleted omphalos. Artemis, with quiver and torch, holds oinochoe. Palm tree, small deer. Leto approaches from the left with phiale.

The Marlay Painter. 425–400 B.C.E. From Spina.

ARV<sup>2</sup> 1277, 22; G. Riccioni; 173–181, pl. 70–72; Simon, *Festivals of Attica*, p. 85, fig. 11; Zanker, p. 73 n. 333; LIMC II, “Apollon,” no. 746; II, “Artemis,” no. 1015; III, “Delos I,” no. 1; V, “Hermes,” no. 703.

#### APHRODITE

207. Oxford, Ashmolean Museum 1966.714 RF squat lekythos.

A cult image of Aphrodite holding two phialai. Two erotes and two women flank her. Thymiaterion on either side. Ashmolean curatorial note: Perhaps depicts the visit of a bride-to-be with her mother to the sanctuary of Aphrodite and Eros on the north slope of the Athenian Acropolis?

Manner of the Meidias Painter. Circa 410 B.C.E. From Olympia?

ARV<sup>2</sup> 1325, 51; Bielefeld, pl. 27; Langlotz, *Aphrodite*, no. 277; LIMC II, “Aphrodite,” no. 44.

#### DIONYSOS

208. Paris, Musée du Louvre ED181 (N3382). RF calyx-krater.

Dionysos, running with thyrsos before a rider (Hephaistos?) with leaf crown and thyrsos, spills out wine from his kantharos.

#### EROS

209. Copenhagen, National Museum 731. RF pyxis-cover.

The judgment of Paris. Hermes, with caduceus, ushers in to Paris Hera driving a quadriga; Athens driving a snake chariot, and Aphrodite in a chariot pulled by two winged Erotes, one with two phialai, one with an oinochoe and a phiale.

Late fifth century B.C.E. From Piraeus.

CVA Denmark 4 I, pl. 163, 1; Conze, p. 102; JHS 1886, 200; Clairmont, pl. 35; Himmelmann-Wildschütz, *Zur Eigenart*, pl. 21.

#### ASSEMBLY OF DEITIES

210. Eichenzell/Fulda, Museum Schloss Fasanerie (Hessische Haussiftung) FAS AV 77. RF calyx-krater.

The divine inhabitants of the Erechtheion on the Acropolis: Athena and aging king Kekrops, with snake tail, bring liquid offerings at the birth of Erichthonios. Each holds a phiale. Nike hovers above them with oinochoe. Basket of Erichthonios stands closed, covered with a cult rug, next to sacred olive tree of Acropolis. Scene is superintended by a seated cult statue of Athena. Poseidon with trident stretched on couch (*klinē*); Zeus enthroned. Hephaistos, above the right handle, holds tongs. Above him an Eros hovers, pours wine into his phiale. Hermes arrives from the other side. E. Simon suggests the Deipnophoria, the “bringing of food” celebrated for the daughters of Kekrops (Philochoros 328. F. 183, in F. Jacoby, *Die Fragmente der griechischen Historiker*), in which Hephaistos takes part.

B: Herakles and the bull.

The Kekrops Painter. Late fifth century B.C.E.

ARV<sup>2</sup> 1346, 1.

A: Brommer, A.K. pl. 20; Simon,

*Festivals of Attica*, pp. 52–53 and pl. 14.2.

## UNIDENTIFIED DEITIES

211. London, British Museum E 224. RF hydria.

Two registers. Above: Rape of the daughter of Leukippos by the Dioskouroi.

Small cult statue with phiale. Below: Herakles in garden of Hesperides, other scenes.

The Meidias Painter. Late fifth century B.C.E.

ARV<sup>2</sup> 1313, 5; CVA Great Britain 8 III Ic, pls. 91–92; Furtwängler-Reichhold, pl. 8–9; LIMC II, “Aphrodite,” nos. 41 and 1536; V, “Herakles,” no. 2717.

*Votive Reliefs*

## ZEUS AND HERA

212. Paris, Musée du Louvre 753. Neo-Attic Pentelic marble relief.

Zeus seated, facing right, holds scepter and extends phiale to goddess (Hera), who holds oinochoe. Helmeted god (Hermes?). A small male worshiper to right. Fuchs identifies the gods as Asklepios, Hygieia, and the son of Asklepios; Charbonneaux, as Zeus, Aphrodite or Hera, and Ares.

Circa 400 B.C.E. From Gortyn, Crete.

W. Fuchs, *RM* 68 (1961) 175 n. 40, pl. 77; Charbonneaux, *Catalogue*, 122 with fig.; Mitropolou, no. 42.

213. Vatican Museum, Saletti degli Originali Greci, Rome 799. Neo-Attic Pentelic marble relief.

Enthroned Zeus (or Asklepios) extends a phiale toward Hera (or Hygieia) who approaches with an oinochoe. A small male worshiper approaches from the left.

Circa 350 B.C.E.

W. Fuchs, *RM* 68 (1961) 167, pls. 74, 76; Mitropolou, no. 40; LIMC II, “Asklepios,” no. 82; III, “Epione,” no. 14; IV, “Hebe I,” no. 22.

## ARES AND APHRODITE

214. Megara, Primary School. White marble relief.

Ares, wearing breastplate and helmet, extends a phiale to Aphrodite.

A worshiper, a much smaller male, approaches from the left.

Circa 425 B.C.E.

Mitropolou, no. 18.

215. Venice, M. Arch. in Palazzo Reale 126. Marble relief.

Ares, with chiton, chlamys, helmet, and shield, holds a mesomphalos phiale toward Aphrodite with oinochoe. She pours wine into his bowl held over an altar. Left: small male worshiper approaches.

*Dedalo* 7 (1926/27): 599–600 (fig.); Forlati-Tanaro, 12, pl. 53a; Mitropolou, no. 20; LIMC II, “Aphrodite,” nos. 142 and 1310; II, “Ares,” no. 57.

## ASKLEPIOS AND HYGIEIA

216. Corfu Museum 83. Marble relief.

Asklepios, leaning on staff extends phiale over altar to Hygieia, who pours from an oinochoe. A male worshiper approaches from the left.

Circa 400 B.C.E.

Hausmann, pl. 14a; *RM* 68 (1961), pl. 76; Mitropolou, no. 30.

217. Tegea Museum 29. White marble votive relief.

Asklepios, leaning on staff, on left with mesomphalos phiale; Hygieia, with oinochoe.

Non-Attic. 425–400 B.C.E.

G. Mendel, *BCH* 25 (1901): 264, no. 2 pl. III, 2; Mitropolou, no. 37; *LIMC* II, "Asklepios," no. 20; V, "Hygieia," no. 59.

Late Classical and Hellenistic  
Periods (400–100 B.C.E.)

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Vases

APOLLO

218. Amsterdam, Allard Pierson Museum 2579. Fragment of Apulian RF krater.

Gilded cult-statue of Apollo in Doric temple, holding bow and phiale.

The "living god" appears outside.

Painter of the Birth of Dionysos. 400–385 B.C.E. From Taranto.

*RVAp.* I 36, 10, pl. 9, 2; *LIMC* II, "Apollon," no. 428.

219. Paris, Musée du Louvre K300. Neck-amphora.

Medea killing one of her children; Apollo statue on a column with laurel and outstretched phiale.

Ixion Painter. 330–310 B.C.E. From Cumae.

Trendall, *LCS* 338, 786, pl. 131, 3; *LIMC* II, "Apollon," no. 450.

Votive Reliefs

ZEUS

220. Athens, National Museum 1408. Marble relief.

Seated Zeus Meilichios (or Asklepios) with phiale and kneeling worshippers.

Fourth century B.C.E. From Piraeus.

Svoronos, pp. 356–357, no. 106, pl. 65; van Straten, pl. 9; *Hiera Kala* R45, fig. 76.

221. Athens, National Museum 1431. Marble relief.

Zeus Meilichios (or Asklepios?) seated with staff and phiale at altar while worshippers approach.

Fourth century B.C.E. From Piraeus.

Svoronos, pp. 435–436, no. 130, pl. 70; van Straten, pl. 8.

222. Athens, National Museum 2390. Marble relief.

Enthroned Zeus (Asklepios?) with staff and phiale; on right, mortal with bull, altar.

Fourth century B.C.E.

Svoronos, p. 636, no. 357, pl. 140.

DEMETER

223. Athens, National Museum 3608. Marble relief.

Eleusinian Demeter, seated with phiale, and Hekate or Kore with two torches.

Mortals, adults and children, approach with sacrificial pig.

Fourth century B.C.E.

224. Paris, Musée du Louvre 752. Marble relief.

Demeter, with polos and phiale, greets her worshippers, who present her with a boar at an altar. Kore looks on, holding a torch.

Fourth century B.C.E.

van Straten, pl. 15; *Hiera Kala* R67, fig. 81.

ATHENA

225. Athens, Acropolis Museum 2556. Marble votive relief.

Athena, wearing polos and snaky aegis, is shown as a half-figure, holding a phiale downward to the ground, and a pomegranate. Three oversized phialai are suspended above her; one

to the left and two with omphalobosses to the right. The three Graces to the right, also shown as half-figures in polos and high-girt peplos, hold their hands to their chests. Possibly associated with the cult of the Graces “before the entrance to the Acropolis” by Pausanias (1.22.8), who says that the figures are “allegedly works of Socrates, son of Sophroniskos.” Second half of the fourth century B.C.E. From Attica.

Palagia, 350–351, pl. 14; *LIMC* III, “Charis, Charites,” no. 11; VI, “Nike,” *ad* no. 188.

#### APOLLO

226. Athens, National Museum 1486. Marble relief.

Beardless deity with himation (Apollo?) pours from phiale onto altar.

Bird (raven?) perches in tree behind the libation scene.

Small mortal worshipers approach from the left, with basket, small animal.

Fourth century C.E.

*LIMC* III, “Eos,” 78.

227. Athens, National Museum 3523. Pentelic marble relief.

Apollo, seated on the left, holds a palm branch in left hand, and extends a phiale in his right. A tiny girl stands before his throne, touching his leg with her right hand. Artemis, frontal view, faces Apollo, torch in each hand. Pan, with goat feet, holds oinochoe.

Attic. Beginning of the third century B.C.E.

Mitropolou, no. 54.

#### ARTEMIS

228. Brauron Museum 1151. Marble votive relief.

Artemis, standing with phiale, greets group of worshipers approaching her altar with a bull.

Circa 330 B.C.E. From Brauron.

*BCH* 83 (1959), chron. 589, fig. 26; *Ergon* (1958): 35, fig. 37; *LIMC* II, “Artemis,” no. 974; *Hiera Kala* R73, fig. 57.

#### APOLLO AND ARTEMIS AND/OR LETO

229. Athens, National Museum 1400. Marble relief.

Apollo with kithara; Leto with phiale. Small sheep. Artemis to right, with bow.

Second half of fourth century B.C.E. From Larissa.

Svoronos, p. 349, no. 97, pl. LX; von Graeve, p. 147, pls. 1–2; *LIMC* II, “Apollon,” no. 648; II, “Artemis,” no. 1008.

230. Athens, National Museum 1485. Marble relief.

Apollo, in a sanctuary with kithara, pouring libation onto altar. Boy, with ram?

Flute-player and priestess. Kybele, seated with polos, also holds phiale.

Circa 120 B.C.E. From Nikaeia (Bithynia).

Svoronos, p. 619, no. 258, pl. 112; Pfuhl-Möbius II, pl. 332; *LIMC* II, “Apollon,” no. 964.

231. Sparta Museum 468. Stone relief plaque.

Apollo as citharode, extends phiale over an omphalos between two doves.

Artemis attends with oinochoe.

Beginning of fourth century B.C.E. From Attica.

*AM* 12(1887) pl. 12; Roscher, *Omphalos*, pl. 7, 4; *LIMC* II, “Apollon,” no. 679b; VIII, “Themis,” no. 30.

## APHRODITE

232. Athens, National Museum 1601. Marble relief.

Aphrodite extends phiale while leaning on a tree. Small male worshiper raises hand in reverential gesture. Delivorrias suggests that it represents the original cult statue of Aphrodite from her sanctuary at Daphni.

Early fourth century B.C.E.

Simon, *Festivals of Attica*, p. 44, fig. 5; Delivorrias, 24, fig. 1.

## DIONYSOS

233. Treviso Museum. Parian marble votive relief.

Dionysos with long hair and wearing himation; holds thyrsos in left hand and kantharos in right toward small Pan. Pan holds oinochoe in right hand with which to fill the kantharos of Dionysos. Hermes stands next to Pan.

Non-Attic. Third quarter of the fourth century B.C.E.

M. Guarducci, *ASAtene* 30/32 (1952/54): 190, fig. 4; Mitropolou, no. 53 bis.

## KYBELE

234. Athens, National Museum 3942. Marble relief.

Kybele, seated, with phiale. Lion at her feet. A retinue of chthonian deities attend her, among them Dionysos with thyrsos and kantharos, Pan; Demeter, Hekate or Persephone with two torches, Asklepios with snake, the Kouretes with their shields. A number of much smaller mortal worshipers enter to the right of the offering-table with food gifts. Fourth century B.C.E.

Svoronos, *Das Athener National Museum*, pls. 116, 120, 198, 239, 240; *LIMC* II, "Artemis," no. 1186; III,

"Dioskouroi," no. 173; VI, "Hekate," no. 271; V, "Herkyna," no. 4; VIII, "Kouretes, Korybantes," no. 7; VIII, "Kybele," no. 125.

235. Berlin, Staatliche Museen K106. Pentelic marble relief.

"Mother of the Gods": Kybele enthroned, with lion at her feet holds out phiale. In left hand she holds a tympanon. A goddess with torch approaches, perhaps Hekate or Artemis. Male figure with oinochoe, presumably Hermes.

Attic. Circa 390 B.C.E.

Fuchs, *Skulptur*, 531, fig. 622; Simon, *Götter*, 69; Mitropolou, no. 52.

## BENDIS

236. Copenhagen, Ny Carlsberg Glyptothek 462. Marble relief.

Two small male worshipers approach the gods Deloptes or Asklepios and Bendis, wearing a Thracian cap. She carries her attribute of two spears and extends a phiale toward the worshipers, much like Artemis in the relief from Brauron. Her cult was introduced into the Piraeus in 430/429 B.C.E. for the benefit of resident Thracians. She had a procession with torches.

329/328 B.C.E. From Piraeus.

*LIMC* II, "Asklepios," no. 211; Meyer, no. A 107, pl. 32, 2.

## SERAPIS AND ISIS

237. Delos Museum A 3195. Marble votive relief.

Isis, holding an oinochoe, and Serapis, holding a phiale, flank a large coiled snake on a couch (Agathos Daimon?)

Beginning of the second century B.C.E.

Bruneau, *Récherches*, pp. 300, 462, 641; Mitropolou, no. 36; *LIMC*

I, "Agathodaimon," no. 3; VII, "Sara-pis," no. 123; VIII, "Tyche," no. 53.

## UNIDENTIFIED DEITIES

238. Athens, National Museum 1459. Marble plaque.

Seated goddess with phiale held downward toward ground.

Svoronos, pp. 460–461, no. 157, pl. 58.

239. Athens, National Museum 1390. Marble plaque.

Goddess, on throne decorated with a griffin, with phiale on her knee, gazes as a mortal approaches on an altar bearing a cake offering.

Inscription: TEΛETH. Initiation, mystery reference?

Fourth-second centuries B.C.E.

*Bronzes*

## ATHENA

240. Athens, Kanellopoulos Collec-tion 297.

Small helmeted Athena holding phiale at an angle.

Late classical period.

## HERMES

241. Athens, Kanellopoulos Collec-tion 276.

Hermes, with caduceus, pours from phiale.

Early Hellenistic period.

*Coins*

242. London, British Museum. Coin.

Nemesis, with phiale and branch, perhaps that of Rhamnous by Ago-rakritos (see discussion in chapter 3).

Fourth century B.C.E. From Pa-phos in Cyprus.

Six, *Numismatic Chronicle* (1882): 89–102, pl. v; Lacroix, pp. 287 ff., pl.

xxvi, 1; Richter, *Sculpture*, p. 185, no. 679.

Late Hellenistic and Early Imperial Period (100 B.C.E.–0 B.C.E.)

*Votive Reliefs*

## ZEUS

243. Istanbul, Museum Mendel 836. Stone relief in architectonic frame.

Boukranion in architrave.

Upper register: Standing Zeus, identified by scepter and eagle at feet; pours libation onto flaming altar. Lower register: Scene of mortal sacrifice, featuring heifer tied to ring at the base of a flaming altar. Devotees bring offerings.

First century B.C.E. From Kyzikos.

van Straten, pl. 17a–b.

## EROS

244. Athens, National Museum 1451–1452. Marble relief.

A procession of erotes carved in archaizing style, all with phialai. The erotes alternate also carrying oinochoai and lamps stands or thymiateria (incense burners).

Perhaps from the sanctuary of Aphrodite on the north slope of the Acropolis.

Second half of second century B.C.E.

Svoronos, pp. 452–454, no. 150, pl. CII; Pappaspyridi-Karouzou, *Arch. Eph.* (1956), p. 165, pls. 4–5.

Imperial Period (0 C.E.–300 C.E.)

*Votive Reliefs*

## ZEUS

245. Corinth Museum. Rectangular stone base.

Male figure representing Zeus Chthonios holds attributes of chthonian power: cornucopia in left hand and phiale in right. Female figure from same base represents Demeter carrying wheat or poppy-pods.

First century C.E.

#### MÊN

246. Izmit Museum. Lydian Votive Stele to Mên and His Mother.

Mên Tyrannos, holding a pine cone; Mother of Mên with phiale for libations. The goddess would be Kybele by iconography but is identified in the inscription as  $\tau\epsilon\kappa\omicron\upsilon\sigma\alpha$ , "the one having borne." The inscription tells how a Lydian village established Mên Tyrannos and his mother through the inspiration ( $\kappa\alpha\tau' \epsilon\pi\acute{\iota}\pi\upsilon\omicron\iota\omicron\nu$ ) of Zeus Kilameneos. Numerous reliefs of Mên show him pouring libations.

Second century C.E. Manisa?

Lane, *CMRDM*, II, p. 174, no. A8; III, pl. I, A8.

#### Mosaics

#### ASKLEPIOS

247. Palmyra Museum 1686. Floor mosaic.

Asklepios enthroned, with name and snake-entwined staff, pouring from a phiale. Wine visible as it spills onto flaming altar.

House east of the Temple of Bel at Palmyra. 160–260 C.E.

Colledge, p. 105, pl. 141.

#### Appendix

#### Phialai

P-1. London, British Museum

WA-124886-7. Stone wall relief (the Assyrian Lion Hunt).

The Assyrian king (Ashurbanipal?), standing before an offering-table, pours a wine libation from a phiale over dead lions.

645–635 B.C.E. From Nineveh, North Palace Room S(1).

P-2. Berlin. Bronze phialai.

Bronze phialai from the excavations at ancient Sam'al (Zincirli, Turkey).

Part of the sacrificial paraphernalia of the palace.

Ninth to seventh centuries B.C.E.

P-3. Berlin. Bronze phialai.

Libation bowls from ancient Karkemish (Djerablus, Turkey).

Eighth to sixth centuries B.C.E.

P-4. Boston, Museum of Fine Arts 21.1843. Gold phiale.

Deep libation bowl, fluted, with omphalos, dedicated at the sanctuary of Zeus at Olympia. An inscription on the rim in the early Corinthian alphabet indicates that the phiale was dedicated by the sons of Kypselos, tyrant of Corinth, from the spoils of Herakleia—an unknown battle.

Seventh century B.C.E. Electroplate reproduction.

P-5. Delphi Museum. Fragmentary phialai.

Archaic metal phialai dedicated at the sanctuary at Delphi, one worked in gold.

Part of the votive deposit which included the Ionian Apollo and Artemis chryselephantine statues (Catalogue, no. 2).

Mid-sixth century B.C.E.

P-6. London, British Museum D8. Athenian terracotta phiale.

Lip incised  $\Sigma\omicron\tau\alpha\Delta\epsilon\varsigma \epsilon\pi\omicron\iota\epsilon$ .



By the potter-painter Sotades, mid-fifth century B.C.E.

Hoffman, no. U2, fig. 102.

P-7. Athens, Kanellopoulos Collection. Ancient terracotta phiale.

### Comparanda

#### EPIPHANY

C-1. Uppsala, Gustavinum Museum 352. BF hydria.

Athena as an owl, perched on an altar. A sanctuary is indicated by a column, to the right of which is a sacrificial bull. A man, hand raised in a gesture of reverence or awe, approaches the epiphany with a sheep. Claude Bérard writes of this image, “[i]n the framework of the sanctuary, the symbolic efficacy of the rites reveals to the spectator a religious vision of epiphanic character. The enormous owl expresses the divine energies at work” (“Festivals and Mysteries,” in *The City of Images*, 110).

The Theseus Painter. 500–480 B.C.E. From Attica.

ABV 519, 15; LIMC II, “Athena,” no. 581; *The City of Images*, p. 110, fig. 154; *Hiera Kala* V50; fig. 5.

#### CANONICAL MORTAL LIBATION SCENES (NO DEITY PRESENT)

Pouring a wine libation into the ground

C-2. London, British Museum GR 1905.7–11.3. WG lekythos.

Man with *skeptron*, standing, pouring a libation from a phiale into the ground.

Probably a priest. Wine visible as it falls. Pipes-player accompanies.

The Aischines Painter. 470–460 B.C.E.

ARV<sup>2</sup> 715, 181.

Mortal mythical king enthroned, with phiale

C-3. London, British Museum G 152. RF kylix.

I: Phoinix served wine in a phiale by Briseis.

A–B: Iliupersis.

The Brygos Painter. 490–480 B.C.E. From Vulci.

ARV<sup>2</sup> 369, 2, and 1649; *Archaeologia* 32, pls. 8–9 and 11; WV 6 pl. 2; Arias-Hirmer, pls. 139–141.

Libations at an altar

C-4. Athens, National Museum 1666. RF Kylix.

I: Youth making an offering at an altar, holding oinochoe and kylix.

A: Herakles and Antaios

B: Theseus and Procrustes.

Douris; attributed by Beazley to Athenodotos. 500–480 B.C.E. From Athens.

ARV<sup>2</sup> 1567–1568, 13; Ragghianti, *Magnificent Heritage*, p. 121; LIMC I, “Antaios I,” no. 25; VII, “Theseus,” no. 133.

C-5. Boston, Museum of Fine Arts 01.16. RF amphora.

A: A man and a woman make a libation offering at a blood-stained altar, over which a *boukranion* (bovine skull) is suspended. A woman extends an oinochoe, with wine visible as it flows into the phiale of a man who holds it over the flames.

B: Woman in profile.

The Phiale Painter. Circa 430 B.C.E.

ARV<sup>2</sup> 1016, 36; Oakley, *The Phiale Painter*, pls. 20a, 35b.

C-6. London, British Museum GR 1978.1–6.1 (D 25). WG lekythos.

A garlanded man, holding a bough, extends a phiale over the flames of an altar. 470–460 B.C.E.

Smith, *BMV*, pl. 25.

C-7. Paris, Musée du Louvre G236. RF pelike.

A: Priest, with phiale held over a flaming altar. Woman pours from an oinochoe into his bowl. Wine visible as it streams from her vessel.

B: Jumper.

The Argos Painter. Late archaic period.

ARV<sup>2</sup> 288, 12; LIMC IV, "Hebe I," no 16.

C-8. Paris, Musée du Louvre G402. RF oinochoe.

Roasting viscera over a sacrificial fire on an altar.

A priest pours a libation to the gods onto the flames from a kylix.

The Kraipale Painter. 430 B.C.E.

ARV<sup>2</sup> 1214, 2; *City of Images*, p. 56, fig. 77; *Hiera Kala* V199, fig. 136.

Libation at the departure of a traveler

C-9. London, British Museum GR 1876.8-20.367 (E 276). RF amphora.

A: A young man with staff and traveler's pack, "perhaps Theseus," receives wine in a phiale from a woman pouring from an oinochoe.

B: "King and women."

The Phiale Painter. 440-430 B.C.E. From Capua.

ARV<sup>2</sup> 1016, 43.

Libation at the departure of a warrior

C-10. Munich, Antikensammlung 2305. RF amphora.

A: Warrior in armor leaving home. Libation scene: He extends his phiale to his wife, who raises her veil. She pours from an oinochoe.

B: Boxer and trainer.

The Kleophrades Painter. Late archaic period. From Vulci.

ARV<sup>2</sup> 182, 4; *Mon.* I pl. 26, 3

A: Langlotz, *Griechische Vasen*, pls. 17, 26.

C-11. New York, Metropolitan Museum of Art 56.171.144. RF pelike.

A woman pours from an oinochoe into a phiale, which she holds toward the ground. A warrior, in armor, extends a phiale.

The Altamura Painter. 470-460 B.C.E.

ARV<sup>2</sup> 594, 53; *Paralipomena* 394; Noble, *Technique*, fig. 42; Hooper, *Greek Realities*, p. 123, fig. 44.

Drinking from a phiale as part of libation

C-12. Oxford, Ashmolean Museum 1889.1014 (V 270). RF neck-amphora.

A: Man with a scepter drinks from a phiale. A woman attends with oinochoe.

B: Man.

The Telephos Painter. Circa 470 B.C.E. Found at Gela.

ARV<sup>2</sup> 820, 54; CVA Oxford 17, 3 and 18, 5.

#### DIVINE BANQUET SCENES

C-13. London, British Museum E 82. RF kylix.

Symposium of deities.

I: Pluton, on couch with phiale, and Persephone.

A: (From left): Poseidon, on couch with trident, and Amphitrite; Zeus on couch with phiale, and Hera (both with scepters) and Ganymede.

B: (From left): Dionysos, on couch with thyrsos, and Ariadne; Ares, on couch with spear, and Aphrodite.

The Kodros Painter. The classical period.

ARV<sup>2</sup> 1269, 3; *Addenda* (2) 356; *Mon.* 5, pl. 49; Farnell, *Cults*, 3 pl. 8a;

Arafat, *Classical Zeus*, no. 4.26, pl. 29a–b; *LIMC* I, “Amphitrite,” no. 52; II, “Aphrodite,” no. 1304; II, “Ares,” no. 114; III, “Dionysos,” no. 487; IV, “Ganymedes,” no. 69; IV, “Hades,” no. 44; IV, “Hera,” no. 250; VIII, “Persephone,” no. 334; VII, “Poseidon,” no. 230.

MORTAL LIBATION SCENES (LIVING DEITY OR CULT STATUE PRESENT; “RECEIVES” OR ACCEPTS LIBATION)

**C-14.** Athens, National Museum (Acropolis Collection) Fr. 1220. Attic BF vase.

Athena, standing with aegis and lion shield, receives a libation from the first of a procession of worshipers, poured onto her flaming altar, inscribed ΑΘΕΝΑΙΑΣ=“belonging to Athena.”

Graef-Langlotz II, no. 136, pl. 67; *LIMC* “Athena,” no. 577.

**C-15.** Boston, Museum of Fine Arts 13.67. RF kylix.

Dionysos holds a kantharos; a silen pours wine. This is one of many cases where it is difficult to determine whether the artist depicts the god as receiving the wine or as about to pour it out as a libation. It is a truism that Dionysos never drinks wine, the emblem of his cult.

Makron. 500–480 B.C.E.

ARV<sup>2</sup> 478, 309; Gerhard, *AV*, pl. 57, 3–4; Caskey-Beazley, *MFA* III, pl. 78, 139.

**C-16.** London, British Museum E 322. RF neck-amphora.

A: Poseidon, rising from his throne, holding a dolphin and trident.

B: A youth extends a phiale, apparently in the direction of the god on the other side.

Close to Painter of London E 342. Early classical period.

ARV<sup>2</sup> 669,—; *CVA* Great Britain 7 III c, pl. 6, 1; *Él.* III, pl. 6.

**C-17.** London, British Museum E 324. RF amphora.

A: Athena, helmet doffed, with spear, receives a libation from a woman who extends a phiale to her.

B: Woman.

Sabouloff Painter. Early classical period. From Nola.

ARV<sup>2</sup> 842, 127; *CVA* Great Britain 7 III Ic pl. 61, 3; *Él.* I, pl. 80.

**C-18.** London, British Museum E 415. RF pelike.

A: Apollo, seated with laurel crown and branch, receives a libation bowl from a woman or goddess (Artemis or Muse).

B: Youth with staff.

The Clio Painter. Second half of fifth century B.C.E. From Gela.

ARV<sup>2</sup> 1981, 14; *LIMC* VI, “Mousa, Mousai,” no. 67.

**C-19.** London, British Museum E 507. RF calyx-krater.

A: Dionysos, clutching his kantharos, is approached by a maenad with an oinochoe. Another maenad attends with a fennel-stalk or torch.

B: Satyr and maenads.

Manner of the Alkimachos Painter. 460 B.C.E. From Kamiros, Fikellura Tomb 121.

ARV<sup>2</sup> 535, 5.

**C-20.** London, British Museum GR 1866.4–12.6 (E 429). RF pelike.

Dionysos, crowned with ivy, riding a panther. A maenad greets him with phiale and oinochoe.

Fourth century B.C.E.

**C-21.** Munich, Antikensammlungen 1383. BF amphora.

A: Dionysos attended by ephebes with wine-skins, one of whom pours from an oinochoe into his kantharos.  
B: Helen.

The Amasis Painter. 550–540 B.C.E.

*Paralipomena* 63, 7; *CVA Deutschland* 3, pl. 21; *LIMC* I, “Aineias,” p. 394; I, “Aithra I,” no. 59; III, “Dionysos,” no. 807; IV, “Helene,” no. 157.

A: Buschor, fig. 30.

C-22. Munich, Antikensammlungen 2335. RF neck-amphora.

A: Dionysos, standing, crowned with ivy and holding thyrsos. A woman, either a maenad (Beazley) or Ariadne (F. Hamdorff) approaches with her veil raised, holding an oinochoe.

B: Man with a scepter.

The Painter of Munich 2335. Classical period. From south Italy.

ARV<sup>2</sup> 1161, 3; *LIMC* VIII, “Silenoi,” no. 56.

C-23. Munich, Antikensammlungen 2338. RF amphora.

A: Athena extends her open hand, palm held upward, to a woman who holds an oinochoe and offers the goddess a phiale.

B: Old man.

The Waterkeyn Painter. 460–450 B.C.E. From Nola.

ARV<sup>2</sup> 1005, 3; *CVA Deutschland* 6, München 2, pl. 57, 1–2 and pl. 56, 8.

C-24. Munich, Antikensammlungen 2431. RF kalpis-hydria.

A: Crowned Aphrodite, with scepter and swan, in epiphany before two women (Beazley: the Horai?). The left woman holds a phiale and an oinochoe. The right lifts her hand in a gesture of awe.

B: Blank.

The painter of Palermo 1108. Late archaic period. From Vulci.

ARV<sup>2</sup> 299, 3 and 1643; Gerhard, *AV*, pl. 300.

C-25. Paris, Musée du Louvre G407. RF stamnos.

A: The feast of the Lenaia: The cult image of Dionysos, standing on a dais, is worshiped by maenads. One is depicted with kantharos and thyrsos; the other brings a sacrificial basket and an oinochoe. This vase is especially important in that it shows that mortals offering libations to Dionysos utilized the kantharos as a pouring vessel rather than the normal phiale.

B: Man and woman.

The Eupolis Painter. 450–400 B.C.E. From Vulci.

ARV<sup>2</sup> 1073, 10; Jacobsthal, *O.*, pl. 99c; *LIMC* III, “Dionysos,” no. 43.

C-26. Paris, Musée du Louvre G486. RF bell-krater.

A: Dionysos, running with thyrsos, extends kantharos to a maenad with a torch, who follows him with an oinochoe. A satyr plays a lyre.

The Painter of Munich 2335. Classical period. From south Italy.

ARV<sup>2</sup> 1163, 34; Millin, *PVA* 1, pls. 30–31.

#### CANONICAL ANIMAL SACRIFICE (PERFORMED BY MORTALS)

Without presence of deity

C-27. Athens, National Museum 16464. Archaic wooden pinax.

Canonical scene of animal sacrifice. Woman bearing oinochoe and sacrificial basket (κavούv) approaches altar. Youth brings a sheep. Lyre- and flute-player.

Three women with boughs.

Sixth century B.C.E. Found in Saphtouli cave at Pitsá (near Sikyon).

EAA VI, s.v. "Pitsa"; *CVP* II, pp. 394–395, 604–605; *Hiera Kala*, p. 57 and n. 156; fig. 76.

C–28. Boston, Musuem of Fine arts 95.25. RF krater.

Priest about to sprinkle lustral water on the the sheep victim. An assistant secures the sheep with two hands.

Manner of the Kleophon Painter.

440 B.C.E.

ARV<sup>2</sup> 1149, 9; *City of Images*, p. 54, fig. 82; *Hiera Kala*, V 131; fig. 32.

Animal sacrifice received by deity or cult statue

C–29. Basel, Munzen und Medaillon *Auktion* 18, no. 85. BF cup.

A priestess, standing before the before cult-statue of Athena Promachos, receives a sacrificial procession at the altar of the goddess: Citizens bearing grains and the sacrificial basket, and leading a bull, a boar, and a ram; flute- and kithara-players and armed soldiers follow.

Circa 540 B.C.E.

*City of Images*, p. 108, fig. 152.

C–30. Berlin, West, Antikenmuseum 1686. BF belly-amphora.

Athena Promachos with shield and spear receives animal sacrifice at a stone altar. A priestess brandishes branches while three men approach with a bull.

The Painter of Berlin 1686. 540 B.C.E. From Vulci.

ABV<sup>2</sup> 96, 4; *City of Images*, p. 110, fig. 153; *Addenda* (2) 77; *LIMC* II, "Athena," no. 575; *Hiera Kala*, V21; fig. 4.

C–31. Berlin, West, Antikenmuseum 4280. BF oinochoe.

Sacrificial scene with flute-player,

man with basket, flaming altar. A Dionysiac herm presides.

Second half of the sixth century.

C–32. Frankfurt Museum  $\beta$  413. RF bell-krater.

A: A cult scene, as the god Apollo (present as a statue with bow and laurel bough) superintends the cooking of sacrificial meat.

The Hephaistos Painter.

440–430 B.C.E. From Nola?

ARV<sup>2</sup> 1115, 31 *bis* (added in 1683);

A: AA (1910), p. 461, 3; *LIMC* II, "Apollon," no. 272; *Hiera Kala*, VI178; fig. 126.

C–33. London, British Museum E 456. RF stamnos fr.

A: A male (Beazley: Diomedes) sacrificing; roasting meat on a spit and the ox-tail visible in the flames; Nike hovers with an oinochoe in her right hand to pour on the flames; she probably held a phiale in her left hand.

B: Three males.

The Group of Polygnotos. Circa 430 B.C.E.

ARV<sup>2</sup> 1051, 17; *CVA* Great Britain I III 1c, pl. 24, 3a–c; Gerhard, *AV*, pl. 155; *LIMC* I, "Aithra I," no. 66; III, "Diomedes I," no. 4; VI, "Nike," no. 299; *Hiera Kala*, VI179; fig. 132.

C–34. Paris, Bibliothèque Nationale 576. RF cup.

I: Dionysos and satyrs

A–B: Dionysos in thiasos with ecstatic maenads and satyrs. One maenad has torn a fawn in half in Dionysiac sacrifice.

The Brygos Painter. Late archaic period.

ARV<sup>2</sup> 371, 14; Hartwig, pl. 33, 1 and pl. 32; *LIMC* III, "Dionysos," no. 465; VIII, "Silenoi," nos. 70 and 104.

C–35. Paris, Musée du Louvre G496. RF bell-krater.

A: The "living god" Apollo, with crown and staff of laurel, superintends sacrifice; a youth roasts sacrificial meat over a flaming altar, while a priest receives his sacrificial portion; a youth holding a basket of grains pours from an oinochoe onto the flames.

B: Three youths.

The Pothos Painter. 450–400 B.C.E.

ARV<sup>2</sup> 1190, 24; CVA France 12 III I d, pl. 35, 2 and 4.

A: *Él.* II, pl. 108; *Münchener archäologische Studien* (1909): 85, 1; Pottier, pl. 152; LIMC II, "Apollon," no. 954.

Animal sacrifices, performed by deity

C-36. Boston, Museum of Fine Arts 95.30. RF kylix.

I (tondo): Dionysos, dancing, dressed in leopard skin and grasping thyrsos, holding a small panther or ocelot near an altar.

A–B: satyrs and maenads.

Attributed to the Telephoros Painter. 475–450 B.C.E.

ARV<sup>2</sup> 819, 44; Caskey-Beazley, *MFA* III, pl. 91; *Hiera Kala*, V200; fig. 152.

C-37. Ferrara, Museo Archeologico Nazionale 14939. BF olpe.

Athena (LIMC: "herself sacrificing"), with helmet, shield and aegis, holding two spits with her left hand on which are wrapped the entrails of a sacrificed animal. The goddess roasts the meat over a fire, probably flaming up from an altar beneath, although the altar is not visible; with her right hand, she pours a libation from a phiale onto the fire.

480–470 B.C.E. From Spina, Valle Pega.

CVA Ferrara 2, 27 pl. 36 (2161); LIMC II, "Athena," no. 588.

C-38. London, British Museum E 362. RF pelike.

Dionysos, tearing animal victim (hind) at a flaming altar. Fire in added red. Blood visible, depicted as spurting from severed halves of the hind, also in added red. Maenad dancing. Satyr playing pipes.

Earlier mannerists, undetermined. Early classical period. From Nola.

ARV<sup>2</sup> 585, 34 and 605, 65 *bis*; Panofka, *Blacas*, pls. 13–15; Simon, *OG*, pl. 3; LIMC III, "Dionysos," no. 472.

C-39. London, British Museum E 439. RF stamnos.

A: Dionysos *mainomenos*; tearing a hind in half.

B: Satyr playing flute.

The Hephaisteion Painter. 480–460 B.C.E.

ARV<sup>2</sup> 298,—; CVA Great Britain 4 III 1c, pl. 19, 3; Stella, *Mitologia greca*, 353; Smith, *BMV* III, pl. 15; Philippaki, *Attic Stamnos*, pl. 27, 3; LIMC III, "Dionysos," no. 151; VI, "Komos," no. 24.

C-40. London, British Museum E 518. RF oinochoe.

Eros carrying sacrificial meat on a spit (*splanchnoptes*).

The Carlsruhe Painter. 460 B.C.E.

ARV<sup>2</sup> 736, 117; *Addenda* (2) 283; I; LIMC III, "Eros," no. 430.

C-41. London, British Museum E 571. RF lekythos.

Eros, flying with a hare at an altar. Is the hare a courtship gift or a sacrifice?

Related to the Charmides Painter. 470–450 B.C.E.

ARV<sup>2</sup> 654, 4.

C-42. Paris, Musée du Louvre K238. RF bell-krater.

A: Hermes, wearing a cape, his winged boots, and holding a garlanded caduceus, festal wreaths, and a decorated phiale, leads a ram to sacrifice at a small altar.

B: Mortal woman at an altar.

"Python." Campanian. Third quarter of fourth century B.C.E.

LIMC V, "Hermes," no. 819 *bis*.

C-43. Paris, Musée du Louvre. Graeco-Roman silver carafe.

Winged Nike, with sacrificial knife, draws back the head of a bull at a decorated altar on which stands a small cult statue of Minerva (Athena Promachos).

From the hoard at Boscoreale.

Bianchi-Bandinelli, *Rome*, p. 204, ill. 220.

DIVINITIES DISPLAYING CULT ATTRIBUTES OR RITUAL GESTURES  
Deities with identifying attributes

C-44. Berlin, West, Antikenmuseum 1899. BF hydria.

Gathering of Olympians, each with unique identifying attribute. From left: Dionysos with kantharos; Hermes with caduceus; Hera, with spear; Zeus, with thunderbolt.

LIMC V, "Horai," no. 39.

C-45. London, British Museum E 140. RF skyphos.

I: Triptolemos. A-B: The seated king Eumolpos (with inscription) observes a procession of deities, each with individual attribute: Zeus, with scepter and thunderbolt; Dionysos with ivy crown and stalk with wild ivy; Amphitrite and seated Poseidon, both with dolphins.

Makron. 500-480 B.C.E. From Capua.

ARV<sup>2</sup> 459, 3; Pfuhl, *MuZ*, Abb.

437; LIMC I, "Amphitrite," no. 56; IV, "Demeter," no. 344; III, "Dionysos," no. 523; III, "Eleusis," no. 1; IV, "Eumolpos," no. 3; VIII, "Persephone," no. 103; VII, "Poseidon," no. 251; VIII, "Triptolemos," no. 87.

C-46. New York, Metropolitan Museum of Art 13.227.16. RF lekythos.

Nike flying, with thymiaterion.

The Dutuit Painter. 480-470

B.C.E.

ARV<sup>2</sup> 307, 17.

Richter-Hall, pl. 28 and pl. 175, 28.

C-47. Sparta Museum 505. Votive relief.

Male figure of an enthroned chthonian deity or heroized ancestor. He extends a kantharos. Included are a horse and a dog, like the kantharos, emblems of the underworld.

Late archaic period. From Sparta.

C-48. Sparta Museum 6517. Votive relief.

A pair of chthonian deities, enthroned. The male extends a kantharos. A snake curls upward.

Late archaic period. From Sparta.

C-49. Sparta Museum. Votive relief.

Chthonian deities enthroned with snake and kantharos. In this scene, two small mortals approach, one holding a cock.

Gods "tending" altars

C-50. Athens, National Museum (Acropolis Collection) 208. RF kylix fr.

A-B: Assembly of gods surrounding a bloodstained volute altar.

Visible are the inscribed name of Zeus, enthroned grasping thunderbolt, and part of that of Hera, enthroned with scepter. A goddess lifts a crown with both hands. Palm trunk

to left of the altar; likely the Delian palm.

I: Athena pours from an oinochoe into the kantharos of Herakles.

(J. D. Beazley writes of this and the other 'parade cups', so-called by Haspels: "Elaborate cups with something senile about them.")

The Manner of the Brygos Painter. Circa 500–490 B.C.E.

ARV<sup>2</sup> 399,—; Graef-Langlotz II, pl. 11, LIMC IV, "Hera," no. 245; V, "Herakles," *ad* no. 3164.

C–51. Athens, National Museum 1272. RF lekythos.

Artemis, drawing bow, gestures before flaming altar. Gerhard Neumann thinks Apollo's gesture relates to the altar of Artemis; he conjectures that "perhaps" Artemis makes the same gesture at her brother's precinct.

The Bowdoin Painter. Circa 460 B.C.E.

ARV<sup>2</sup> 678, 1; Himmelmann-Wildschütz, *Zur Eigenart*, no. 25; LIMC II, "Artemis," no. 1020.

C–52. Athens, National Museum 1313. RF lekythos.

Artemis with torches at altar (on right in photo).

The Bowdoin Painter. Early classical period. From Eretria.

ARV<sup>2</sup> 678, 11; LIMC II, "Artemis," no. 1021.

C–53. Athens, National Museum 18590. RF lekythos.

Artemis with torches at altar.

Early classical period.

LIMC II, "Artemis," no. 408.

C–54. Berlin, West, Antikemuseum 2169. RF Panathenaic-style amphora.

A: Athena at altar with kithara.

B: Citharode at altar.

The Nikoxenos Painter, 500–480 B.C.E. From Nola.

ARV<sup>2</sup> 221, 7; BSA 19, 232, pl. 17; LIMC II, "Athena," no. 585.

C–55. Hannover, Kestner Museum 753. Amphora from Tarquinia.

Apollo, Leto, Artemis at altar with Delphic palm.

After the Nikoxenos Painter. Circa 510 B.C.E.

LIMC II, "Apollon," no. 641.

C–56. New York, Metropolitan Museum of Art 07.286.78. RF Amphora.

A: Apollo with lyre; Artemis superintending an altar.

B: An athlete and his trainer.

The Eucharides Painter. Late archaic period.

ARV<sup>2</sup> 227, 9; Beazley, *AV*, p. 46, fig. 27; Hoppin, *HBRF*, p. 358, no. 13; LIMC II, "Apollon," no. 1037; II, "Artemis," no. 1310; V, "Herakles," no. 3034; V, "Iolaos," no. 42; VI, "Leto," no. 58; VI, "Lykomedes III," no. 1.

C–57. Oxford, Ashmolean Museum 1890.30 (V 274). RF neck-amphora.

A: Nike, flying with kithara, hovers above flaming altar.

B: Citharode.

Late work of the Berlin Painter. Circa 475 B.C.E. Found at Gela.

ARV<sup>2</sup> 203, 100; Gardner, *Greek Vases*, pl. 11; LIMC VI, "Nike," no. 104.

C–58. Paris, Musée du Louvre G60. RF Panathenaic-style amphora.

A: Athena bends over a flaming altar, extending her hand.

B: Priest, with phiale at an altar.

The Nikoxenos Painter. 500–480 B.C.E.

ARV<sup>2</sup> 221, 9; *Paralipomena*, 346; LIMC II, "Athena," no. 584.



C-59. Paris, Musée du Louvre G61. RF amphora.

A: Athena gestures at an altar.

B: Priestess.

The Nikoxenos Painter. 500-480 B.C.E.

ARV<sup>2</sup> 221, 10; LIMC II, "Athena," no. 583.

#### DEITIES PERFORMING RITUALS

##### OTHER THAN LIBATION

C-60. Athens, Agora Museum, P 15010. RF chous.

Goddess Nike (Victory), recognizable by her wings, sacrificing at an altar. Nike bends over an altar with ox tail. Holds small cup in left hand; sprinkles barley? water? incense? with right onto altar.

The Eucharides Painter. 480-470 B.C.E.

*Gods and Heroes, Agora*, pl. 43; *Hesperia* 27, p. 152.

C-61. Brussels, Bibliothèque Royale de Belgique 12. RF cup.

Demeter lays a wheat bunch on an altar. Genitive of name is inscribed: ΔΕΜΕΤΡΟΣ.

The followers of Douris: The Euaion Painter. Early classical period. From Capua.

ARV<sup>2</sup> 797, 134; Himmelmann-Wildschütz, *Zur Eigenart*, pl. 32; LIMC IV, "Demeter," no. 25.

C-62. Copenhagen, National Museum. Votive relief.

Artemis Eupraxia lights her altar with a torch, holds sacrificial basket aloft. Small mortal worshipers approach.

Fourth century B.C.E.

L. Deubner, "Hochzeit und Opferkorb," *JDAI* 40 (1925): 211, Abb. I.

C-63. New York, Metropolitan Museum of Art 26.60.75. RF hydria.

Aphrodite sprinkling incense at an altar. Thymiaterion nearby. Eros hovers.

The presence of a satyr on the left and a maenad at the right indicate a supernatural setting.

370-350 B.C.E. Himmelmann-Wildschütz, *Zur Eigenart*, pl. 27.

C-64. Munich, Antikensammlung 2412. RF hydria.

A: Nike watering a bull at a tripod, celebrating a victory in a dithyrambic contest.

B: Two women and a man with a staff.

The Hector Painter. Circa 440 B.C.E. From Vulci.

ARV<sup>2</sup> 1036, 5; Inghirami, pls. 359-360; Gerhard, *AV*, pl. 81; Lau, pl. 28; *Ant. K.* 23, 1980, 127; LIMC VI, "Nike," no. 337; VIII, "Phylai," no. 2.

C-65. New York, Metropolitan Museum of Art 24.97.99. Monumental relief fragment, Pentelic marble.

Roman version of an Eleusinian relief of two goddesses: Demeter and Persephone. The deities drop incense onto a small flaming altar (thymiaterion) standing between them with lion's-foot legs.

Imperial period. Copy of fourth-century B.C.E. Attic work.

Richter, *Sculpture*, p. 139, fig. 549.

C-66. Oxford, Ashmolean Museum 1885.671 (V 271). RF neck-amphora.

A: Apollo washing right hand at perirrhanterion (LIMC: "in seinem Heiligtum [in his sanctuary]"). Holds scepter in left hand.

B: Youth.

The Nikon Painter. 480-470 B.C.E. From Nola.

ARV<sup>2</sup> 651, 12; Gardner, *Greek Vases*, pl. 10, 2 and page 24, fig. 26; LIMC II, "Apollon," no. 469.

C-67. Oxford, Ashmolean Museum 1931.12. RF cup.

I: Nike adorns a bull with sacrificial fillets.

A-B: Komos.

The Penthesileia Painter. 440 B.C.E.

ARV<sup>2</sup> 884, 73; Diepolder, pl. 31, 2 and pl. 32; LIMC VI, "Nike," no. 168.

C-68. Tübingen, University E 177. RF calyx-krater.

Aphrodite, Eros with thymiatrion.

Fourth century B.C.E.

Himmelman-Wildschütz, *Zur Eigenart*, pl. 25.

#### Other Traditions

O-1. New York, Heeramaneek Collection. Portion of the bronze head of a pin in the shape of a disk.

Zurvān is represented on the outside register with the twins Ohrmazd and Ahriman.

From Luristan. Third to fifth centuries C.E.

Jean Varenne, "Pre-Islamic Iran," in Yves Bonnefoy, ed., *Mythologies* (Chicago, 1991), p. 886.

O-2. Stave Church at Hegge, Norway. Carved head.

A wooden carved head believed to represent the one-eyed god Odin.

With his strangling tongue, Odin is shown as "Lord of the Hanged."

H. R. Ellis Davidson, *Scandinavian Mythology*, (London, 1969), p. 29.

O-3. Stockholm, National Museum. Memorial stone.

Carved stone monument from Lärbro parish, Stora Hammars I, Gotland, Sweden.

The center panel depicts a warrior about to be hanged from a tree. The eagle and the twisted knot of triangles, sacred to Odin, confirm that the hanging is connected to the god's cult.

S. Lindquist, *Gotlands Bildsteine*, I-II (Stockholm, 1941-1942); H. R. Ellis Davidson, *Scandinavian Mythology*, p. 44.

O-4. Madrid, The Prado Museum. *The Trinity*.

The persons of the Trinity are represented at the deposition of Christ's body.

God the Father, grief-stricken, cradles the corpse of his Son. God wears an ecclesiastical hat like a bishop's miter, which has been thought to represent the crown of the high priest of the Jerusalem Temple. The Holy Spirit is represented as a dove flying above the scene. Hosts of angels frame the scene.

El Greco. 1577-1579 C.E.

O-5. Berlin, Kaiser Wilhelm Cathedral. Poster.

God's Spirit represented as a pitcher pouring itself out onto humanity.

"Gottes Geist weckt Freude und Hoffnung" (God's Spirit Awakens Joy and Hope). Contemporary (1991).

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# Abbreviations and References for Catalogue

AA ■ *Archäologischer Anzeiger*

ABV ■ J. D. Beazley, *Attic Black-Figure Vase-Painters*. Oxford, 1971.

*Addenda* (2) ■ T. H. Carpenter, *Beazley Addenda: Additional References to ABV, ARV<sup>2</sup>, & Paralipomena*, 2nd ed. Oxford, 1989.

AJA ■ *American Journal of Archaeology*

Amandry, *Guides* ■ Pierre Amandry, *Guides de Delphes: La Musée*.  
École Française, Sites et Monuments no. 6. Paris, 1991.

AM ■ *Athenische Mitteilungen: Mitteilungen des Deutschen Archäologischen Instituts, Athenische Abteilung*

*Ant. K.* ■ *Antike Kunst*

APl ■ *Antike Plastik*

ARV<sup>2</sup> ■ J. D. Beazley, *Attic Red-Figure Vase Painters*, 2nd ed. Oxford, 1963.

*Arch. Eph.* ■ *Archaiologike Ephemeris*

Arias-Hirmer ■ Paolo E. Arias and Max Hirmer, *Mille anni di Ceramica Greca*. Florence, 1960.

*Ars Ant. Auktion* ■ *Ars Antiqua Auktion*

ASAtene ■ *Annuario della Scuola Archeologica di Atene e delle Missioni Italiane in Oriente*

ASCSA ■ American School of Classical Studies at Athens

Aurigemma (1) and (2) ■ Salvatore Aurigemma, *Il R. Museo di Spina*, 1<sup>st</sup> ed. (Bologna, 1935) and 2nd ed. (Ferrara, 1936).

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- BSA ■ *Annual of the British School at Athens*
- Bull. City Art Museum* ■ *Bulletin of the [St. Louis] City Art Museum*
- Bull. Metr.* ■ *Bulletin of the Metropolitan Museum of Art, New York*
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*Jh.* ■ *Jahreshefte des Österreichischen Archäologischen Instituts*

*JHS* ■ *Journal of Hellenic Studies*

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- WV ■ *Wiener Vorgeblätter*. Vienna, 1869–1891.
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# Notes

## INTRODUCTION: THE PROBLEM OF SACRIFICING GODS

1. Henceforth in the text, vases or other artifacts that are part of the regular catalogue of libating deities will be designated by their catalogue number, in boldface (e.g., **no. 1**). Vases that are part of the “Comparanda” section will be designated with a C (e.g., **no. C-1**). “Comparanda” will be found in the Appendix to the catalogue along with a section entitled “Phialai” (with artifacts designated, e.g., **P-1**) and several illustrations of comparative evidence entitled “Other Traditions” (with artifacts designated, e.g., **O-1**). The Catalogue is prefaced by a section entitled “Abbreviations, and References.”

2. Gould, “On Making Sense of Greek Religion,” 16.

3. For the importance and civic and religious semantics of procession in classical Athens, see Kouvlaki, “Processional Performance and the Democratic Polis.”

4. Burkert, in his *Griechische Religion der archaischen und klassischen Epoche*, 290.

5. Plato *Euthyphro* 14C. Οὐκοῦν τὸ θύειν δωρεῖσθαι ἔστι τοῖς θεοῖς, τὸ δ' εὐχεσθαι αἰτεῖν τοὺς θεούς; See *Plato's Euthyphro, Apology of Socrates and Crito*, ed. John Burnet. All translations from Greek, Latin, and modern languages are mine except where I have noted otherwise.

6. Plato *Euthyphro* 14E.

7. Athena is a frequent solitary sacrificer, as a seated priestess holding a libation bowl, worshiper at and attendant of her own altar. But on more than one vase, she, rather than Iris or Nike, acts as sacrificial attendant, filling the phiale for her father Zeus; see *Lexicon Iconographicum Mythologiae Classicae*, ed. Hans Christoph Ackermann and Jean-Robert Gisler, s.v. “Athena,” no. 186.

8. Hesiod *Theogony* 613: οὐκ ἔστι Διὸς κλέψαι νόον οὐδὲ παρελθεῖν. See *Hesiod: The Homeric Hymns and Homeric*, ed. Hugh G. Evelyn-White.

9. Jaan Puhvel offers a resonant warning about the “seepage” of structuralist ideas “into the study of classical myth and ‘historical’ mythology in general. The obvious danger is that the approach is by nature generalist,

universalizing, and ahistorical, thus the very opposite of text oriented, philological, and time conscious. Overlaying known data with binaristic gimmickry in the name of greater ‘understanding’ is no substitute for a deeper probing of the records themselves as documents of a specific synchronic culture on the one hand and as outcomes of diachronic evolutionary processes on the other. In mythology, as in any other scholarly or scientific activity, it is important to recall that the datum itself is more important than any theory that may be applied to it.” See Puhvel, *Comparative Mythology*, 19.

10. *Ibid.*, 407.

11. Smith, *Imagining Religion; From Babylon to Jonestown*, 29.

12. Kristensen, *The Meaning of Religion: Lectures in the Phenomenology of Religion*, 5.

13. William Anderson writes in his study of the Green Man in European religious culture, “It is a sign of archetypal power in an image that it should be capable of transformation from one culture to another, from one set of beliefs to a fresh paradigm of faith. This means that it expresses something permanent in the human soul, however much one age may lay different stresses on it from a previous time” (Anderson, *The Green Man: Archetype of Our Oneness with the Earth*, 56).

14. Vernant, “Théorie générale du sacrifice et mise à mort dans la *Θυσία* grecque,” 12.

15. Traditional acceptance of the special case of the sacrifice of Jesus, as we will see, holds only on one level of theological understanding. When Christ’s death is viewed not only as a voluntary autosacrifice which is recapitulated in the Eucharist but also or rather as a sacrifice by God the Father—not only modeled after but utterly determined by the ancient Judaic type of the binding of Isaac—controversy again erupts.

16. One can observe this from the ancient scholion to Aristophanes’s *Peace* 433, which arbitrarily assigns Hermes’s libation and formulaic prayer to the mortal chorus (even though Hermes has said that he is holding the sacred bowl) to Martin Nilsson’s categorical comment in 1956 on the vase images in question, “They [the gods] cannot possibly be sacrificing or pouring out libations” (*The Dionysiac Mysteries of the Hellenistic and Roman Age*, 103).

17. Feuerbach, *The Essence of Religion*, 44. As Jack Verheyden, commenting on Van Harvey’s *Feuerbach and the Interpretation of Religion*, has described Feuerbach’s theory, “Religion is the imaginative objective of the consciousness of the human species and the individual *thou* so that God is felt and thought of as a spiritual, individual person” (Verheyden review in *Zygon*, 225).

18. Feuerbach, Twenty-Ninth Lecture, *Lectures on the Essence of Religion*, 270.

19. Goitein, *Studies in Islamic History and Institutions*, 78.

20. Elizabeth Pritchard, commenting on Henri H. Hubert and Marcel Mauss, *Sacrifice: Its Nature and Function* (1899). The most recent discussion of the social and theological dialectics resulting from Hubert and Mauss’s work is to be found in Ivan Strenski, *Theology and the First Theory of Sacrifice*.

21. Diels and Kranz, *Die Fragmente der Vorsokratiker*, B15, B16.

22. Barry Sandywell offers a useful analysis of the reflexive aspects of Xenophanes’s natural theology in his *Presocratic Reflexivity*, 291–295.

23. See the challenging discussion of “experiential anthropology” in Robert G. Wallis, “Waking ancestor spirits: Neo-shamanic engagements with archaeology.”

24. Hegel, “The Concept of Religion,” in *Lectures on the Philosophy of Religion*.

25. Schlitt, *Divine Subjectivity*, 43 *passim*.

26. B. ‘Abodah Zarah 3b.

27. B. *Berakhot* 7b. Italics added. Mishnaic and talmudic materials show how the traditional prayer began: “May it be Thy will . . .”.
28. Solomon Schechter, *Aspects of Rabbinic Theology*, 36. See Arafat, *Classical Zeus*.
29. Cohen, *Everyman’s Talmud*, 8.
30. Bell, *Ritual Theory, Ritual Practice*, 206. See also Bell, *Ritual: Perspectives and Dimensions*, and her chapter, “Performance,” in *Critical Terms for Religious Studies*.
31. Mircea Eliade, *The Myth of the Eternal Return or, Cosmos and History*, 35.
32. Burkert, *Greek Religion*, 184.
33. *Ibid.*
34. For this term to describe the time in which both the gods and mortals sacrifice, I am indebted to Albert Henrichs.
35. Gadamer, *Truth and Method (Wahrheit und Methode)*, summarized by Coenraad, “‘Effigies Dei’ and the Religious Imagination: A Psychological Perspective,” 161.
36. van Ouwerkerk, “‘Effigies Dei’ and the Religious Imagination: A Psychological Perspective,” 161.
37. *The American Heritage Dictionary*, s.v. “sacrifice.”
38. *Ibid.*, s.v. “worship.”
39. Das, “Language of Sacrifice,” 445.
40. Paden, *Religious Worlds*, 53.
41. *Ibid.*, 54.
42. Nancy Jay’s remarks were made in discussions in February and March of 1990 in her seminar on sacrifice taught at Harvard Divinity School. In her posthumously published *Throughout Your Generations Forever: Sacrifice, Religion and Paternity*, Jay examines, from an anthropological perspective, what she characterizes as the frequent dichotomy in sacrificial religions between the “polluting” blood of childbirth, spilled by females, and the “purifying” blood of patriarchal sacrifice, offered by males.
43. Kotwal and Boyd, “The Zoroastrian *paragnâ* Ritual.”
44. van Straten, *Hiera Kala*, 120. Emphases in original.
45. Lefkowitz, *Greek Gods, Human Lives*, 6.
46. *Ibid.*, p. 7. Emphasis added.
47. *Ibid.*, p. 12. Emphasis added.

#### I. IS LIBATION SACRIFICE?

1. Pfisterer-Haas, “Wein beim Opfer,” 432.
2. *Iliad* 4.48–49. Here I follow Richmond Lattimore’s translation and spelling in *The Iliad of Homer*.
3. Durand and Schnapp, “Sacrificial Slaughter and Initiatory Hunt,” in *A City of Images: Iconography and Society in Ancient Greece*, 53. Human beings offer the immortals smoke and libations, and divide the entrails and spitted, grilled meat among themselves according to a traditional hierarchy. The priests’ portion, the choicest portion of the meat, is called the γέρας. Hence Zeus’s mention of the libation and savor (sweet smoke) of the sacrifice as the gods’ γέρας is of interest; it is a specific cultic differentiation of what rightly belongs to whom.
4. Burkert, *Greek Religion*, 72.
5. See Graf, “Milch, Honig und Wein. Zum Verständnis der Libation im griechischen Ritual”; and Henrichs, “The ‘Sobriety’ of Oedipus: Sophocles OC 100 Misunderstood.”

6. Burkert, *Structure and History in Greek Mythology and Ritual*, 41 and n. 16. The “Hittite evidence” to which Burkert refers is presented by certain late reliefs from Malatya published by E. Akurgal and M. Hirmer, *Die Kunst der Hethiter* (Munich: 1961). Burkert remarks that in plate 104c “the libation is poured on the soil in the presence of the god, whereas in pls. 104ab and 105a the libation is poured into a vessel in front of the god.” See the brief discussion of the controversy surrounding Hittite libation texts below in the section of this chapter entitled “The Identification of the Drink-Offering with the God.”

7. However, this scene may also represent the ceremonial blessing of the wine by Dionysos on the twelfth of the month Anthesterion, the chief day of the Anthesteria, after which the wine was distributed to and consumed by human participants.

8. Other examples of this are found in the “Comparanda” section, nos. C–14 through C–26.

9. Burkert, *Homo Necans: The Anthropology of Ancient Greek Sacrificial Ritual and Myth*, 54.

10. Arrian *Anabasis* 6.26: ὅστε εἰκάσαι ἂν τινα ποτὸν γενέσθαι πᾶσιν ἐκεῖνο τὸ ὕδωρ τὸ πρὸς Ἀλεξάνδρου ἐκχυθέν (so one might have inferred that if there was to be any drink for all of them it was that water which had been poured out by Alexander). Burkert compares this to the story of the thirsty King David who, when three mighty men risked their lives to bring him water from the Philistine-controlled well of Bethlehem at the gate, forbore to drink and in tribute to their bravery, “poured out the water to the Lord” (2 Samuel 23:16) (Burkert, *Structure and History*, 55 and n. 12). The “ritual logic” here is that in the direst circumstances, no one can drink and the liquid is dedicated to a purpose higher than its usual one as a beverage.

11. Burkert, *Structure and History*, 50.

12. Betz, “Libation,” in *The Encyclopaedia of Religion*, 8:538.

13. παραπτόμενοι καὶ δευμαίνοντες ἔρδειν μὲν ἐκάλουν καὶ ῥέζειν, ὡς τι μέγα δρῶντες, τὸ θύειν ἔμψυχον. (Plutarch *Quaestiones convivales* 729).

14. Nilsson, “New Evidence for the Dionysiac Mysteries,” 34–35.

15. Stengel, *Opferbräuche der Griechen*.

16. Hanell, “Trankopfer, Spenden, Libationen.”

17. “Dans quel sens . . . sont-elles des offrandes et quelle en est pour les dieux la valeur ou l'utilité?” See Jean Rudhardt, *Notions fondamentales de la pensée religieuse et actes constitutifs du culte dans la Grèce classique*, 242.

18. Watkins, “Let us now praise famous grains.”

19. *Iliad* 8.188–189. Watkins compares Andromache’s horse-drink to the fortifying battle-potion that Indra consumes before entering into battle in *R̥gveda* hymn 4.24.7.

20. *Iliad* 11.624–641. Hekamede prepares a mixed potion of onion, honey, “holy barley,” Pramneian wine, and goat cheese, all of which is sprinkled with white barley. Watkins suggests that this reflects a sacred recipe.

21. Watkins, “Grains,” 10. The language of Circe’s instructions (*Odyssey* 10.1518–1520) is almost identical to that describing the actual libations poured by Odysseus at the infernal rivers’ junction (*Odyssey* 11.26–28: χοῖν ἡρόμην πᾶσιν νεκύεσσι, πρῶτα μελικρήτω, μετέπειτα δὲ ἡδέϊ οἴνω, τὸ τρίτον αὐθ’ ὕδατι · ἐπὶ δ’ ἄλφρα λευκὰ πάλυνον (pour a libation to all the dead first with honey-mixed [milk] and then with sweet wine, then third with water, and sprinkle thereon white barley). Watkins comments that the fact that the honey was mixed with milk is clear from Euripides *Orestes* 115 (μελίκρατ’ . . . γάλακτος). He compares this to the necromantic libation poured by Queen Atossa to call up the dead Darius from his grave, Aeschylus *Persians* 609–618.

22. Homeric *Hymn to Demeter* 206–210.

23. Identified by R. Gordon Wasson as the mushroom *Amanita muscaria*, an identification provisionally accepted by Watkins, who also asserts that “the soma ritual of Vedic and Indo-Iranian . . . the ritual act of communion of the Eleusinian mysteries . . . and a warrior ritual in archaic Greece . . . all of these must go back to a single common Indo-European liturgical cultic practice. The number and the precision of the agreements between Indo Iranian and Greek . . . are too striking for a fortuitous resemblance to be plausible” (Watkins, “Grains,” 17). Wasson argued for the identification of soma and Eleusinian hallucinogens in his *The Road to Eleusis* (1976); however, this idea has been rejected by Burkert and others.

24. It has been argued that in ancient Mesopotamia, where propitiation and magic were the governing principles of offering food and drink to the gods, and divination their usual goal, the term “sacrifice” should not be used at all. See Leichty, “Ritual, ‘Sacrifice,’ and Divination in Mesopotamia,” esp. 237.

25. For example, the Zakros Rhyton depicts in relief carving a fragile, long-lost mountaintop sanctuary, which we otherwise could never have imagined, surrounded by *agrimini*, the indigenous Cretan long-horned goat that still lives there.

26. See Long, *The Ayia Triadha Sarcophagus*.

27. For a discussion of the archaeological evidence for libation in classical antiquity, see Simon, “Archäologisches zu Spende und Gebet in Griechenland und Rom.”

28. Homeric libation involved rising (*Iliad* 16.231; *Odyssey* 3.341), taking the cup in hand (*Iliad* 11.774–775), looking to the sky (*Iliad* 16.232; 24.307), pouring the liquid, pronouncing a prayer, with one’s hands held toward the sky (*Iliad* 6.265; 24.285; then drinking (for example, Hekabe meeting Hektor on the walls of Troy in *Iliad* 6.258–260 gives him “honey-sweet wine to pour to father Zeus and the other immortals first, and afterwards if you will drink yourself, be strengthened”).

29. *Iliad* 24.283–286; *Odyssey* 13.50–52.

30. *Odyssey* 4.591–592.

31. *Iliad* 16.225–227.

32. Herodotus *Histories* 7.192; Xenophon *Anabasis* 4.3.13.

33. Burkert, “Opferritual bei Sophokles: Pragmatik—Symbolik—Theater,” 11; Betz, “Libation,” 537, and Hanell, “Trankopfer,” col. 2132.

34. Rudhardt, *Notions fondamentales*, 246.

35. For example, the Olympian god Zeus receives σπονδαί in *Odyssey* 7.164–165, as he does as Zeus Pater in *Iliad* 16.22 along with Athena in *Odyssey* 3.393–394, Apollo in *Odyssey* 7.136–138, and Poseidon και ἄλλοις ἀθανάτοισι (and the other immortals) in *Odyssey* 3.332–334. But as Rudhardt points out, σπονδαί can also be dedicated to powers other than the heavenly ones—to Ἀγαθὸς Δαίμων (Aristophanes *Equites* 105–106, to the winds (*Iliad* 23.195–197), to the Eumenides (Scholion to Sophocles *Oedipus at Colonus* 100), to the Chthonioi (Porphyry *De antro nympharum* 28), to the dead (Euripedes *Electra* 511–512; Porphyry *De antro nympharum* 28); see Rudhardt, *Notions fondamentales*, 241–242). Albert Henrichs observes, “That the term *spondai* rather than *khoai* is occasionally used for chthonian libations does not affect the nature of these libations, or their composition; they are still poured into the ground, and the ritual liquids used for them tend to be more complex than the *loibai* ordinarily used for Olympian gods. *Spondai* is the unmarked term, like *thysia* for animal sacrifice, whereas *khoai* is marked” (correspondence with author, March 28, 2004).

36. As in Aeschylus *Libation Bearers* 97, where Electra calls her libations at her dead father’s tomb γάπτονον χύσιν (a flood to be drunk by the earth); she uses the expression again at 164, where she says that Agamemnon has received the γαπότους



χοάς—it is the earth that is said to drink, and not her father. Atossa uses a similar locution in *Persians* 621.

37. Rudhardt, *Notions fondamentales*, 246.

38. Theophrastus *Περὶ εὐσεβείας* in Porphyry *De abstinence* 2.20. But σπονδαί were not limited to wine, as indicated by the use of the phrase ἐπισπένδειν μελίκρατον (to pour out a libation of honey and milk) in W. Dittenberger, *Sylloge Inscriptionum Graecarum*, 3rd ed. (3) 1025, 34–36. Empedokles is cited in Athenaeus 12.510d as speaking of ξανθῶν τε σπονδᾶς μελίτων (libations of golden honeys). Σπονδή is also used to designate wineless libation in Diodorus 5.62.5 and Pausanias 2.11.4.

39. See Ziehen, “*Νηφάλια*” in *Real-Encyclopädie der klassischen Altertumswissenschaft*; and Henrichs, “The ‘Sobriety’ of Oedipus.”

40. *Odyssey* 7.163–164.

41. As, for example, in the libation of Eumaeus in *Odyssey* 14.447.

42. Athenaeus 15.692; Diodorus 4.3.

43. This is the pattern referred to in Pindar *Isthmian Odes* 6.1–9. See also Xenophon *Cyropaedia* 2.3.1 and Hesychius s.v. “*τρίτος κρατήρ*.” Hanell (“Trankopfer,” col. 2136) points out that there were no hard and fast rules for the three drink-offerings; one could invoke the other gods as well with libations, such as Dionysos, Hygeia, or Zeus Philios.

44. Hoffman, *Sotades*, 5: “[The symposium] was essentially an élitist affair, restricted to those who could afford it, and took place on special occasions such as weddings, victories in athletic or literary contests, departures for abroad, or important arrivals.” Hoffman refers to Plato *Symposium* 176a and Xenophon *Symposium* 2, as well as the treatments of J. K. Davies, *Athenian Propertied Families* 600–300 B.C. (Oxford, 1971), and I. Scheibler, *Griechische Töpferkunst* (Munich, 1983).

45. Hoffman, *Sotades*, 5.

46. *Odyssey* 2.430–431; Thucydides 6.32.1–2, Pindar *Pythian Odes* 4.193–200.

47. Cf. the libations of Alkinöös for Odysseus, 13.39–55; Antiphon, in *Accusation of Poisoning* 18, mentions that two friends pour libations when one is at the point of departure.

48. Cf. *Iliad* 16.225–248, the libation and accompanying prayer of Achilles for the victory and safety of Patroklos.

49. Pfisterer-Haas, “Wein beim Opfer,” 435. For a thorough treatment of the iconography of the departing Triptolemus, see Pleschow-Bindoket, “Demeter und Persephone in der attischen Kunst des 6. bis 4. Jahrhunderts v. Chr.,” and the work by Tetsuhiro Hayashi, *Bedeutung und Wandel des Triptolemosbildes vom 6.–4. Jh. v. Chr.*

50. Xenophon *Cyropaedia* 4.1.6–7; Xenophon *Hellenica* 7.4.36.

51. Hesiod *Theogony* 793–806 (see discussion in chapter 3).

52. As Burkert has observed, *sphagia* (animal sacrifices) started wars; *spondai* (liquid libations) concluded them. An inscription from Arkades, Crete (discussed in *Zeitschrift für Papyrologie und Epigraphik* 13 [1974]: 265–274) simply says, “We, the polis, have made libation,” meaning, “We have concluded a peace treaty.”

53. “Ihre wirklich große Bedeutung für den griechischen Kult haben die Trankopfer als Begleiterscheinung anderer Opfer” (Hanell, “Trankopfer,” col. 2135).

54. Libations belonged not only to large animal sacrifices, but also to the gift offerings of cakes, fruits, and the like, for example, Philemon, fr. 70, “*Ἄρτεμι, φίλη δέσποινα, τοῦτόν σοι φέρω, ὦ πότνι, ἀμφιφῶντα καὶ σπονδήσιμα* (Artemis, dear lady, I bring you this cake offered by two lights, O mistress, and this libation), cited by Hanell, “Trankopfer,” col. 2134. Hanell speculates that the “two lights” could either refer to the sun and the moon, or to two burning candles.

55. See Albert Henrichs's discussion of these sacrifices in his essay, "The 'Sobriety' of Oedipus."

56. Stengel, *Die griechischen Kultusaltertümer*, 105.

57. For example, the bowls designated by the Eumenides for Oedipus's propriety  $\chi\omicron\omicron\iota$  at their grove at Colonus are  $\kappa\rho\alpha\tau\eta\rho\epsilon\varsigma$  (*Oedipus at Colonus* 72).

58. The scene is reduplicated on the outside of the vase with divine pairs: Zeus and Hera, Poseidon and Amphitrite, Dionysos and Ariadne, and Ares and Aphrodite. Of the first three pairs, the male deity in each case holds a phiale; Aphrodite brings Ares a skyphos. The divine symposium is observed and linked to themes of fertility by Ruth M. Gais, "Some Problems of River-God Iconography," 364–365. Gais compares the numerous representations of reclining banqueting deities to the anonymous banqueter on classical *Totenmahl* reliefs from Thasos and elsewhere. "As with representations of mortal banqueters, the representations of gods reclining at a feast can assume, in addition to a purely narrative purpose, a symbolic meaning which indicates the god's connection to fertility" (364). In the case of the vase London E 82, she points to the presence in the tondo of the cup of the king and queen of the underworld. "The cornucopia held by Pluto symbolizes the connection between life and death and fertility, as does Persephone herself. The image of Pluto reclining in the banqueting pose reinforces the connection between fertility, death, and feasting" (365). Gais says that the fertility theme is reinforced by the presence on the outside of Zeus, Dionysos, and Poseidon crowned with olive (Zeus and Poseidon) and ivy (Dionysos). Only the warlike Ares does not wear a leafy crown.

59. Hoffman, *Sotades*, 5.

60. Dionysos only pours libations from the *kantharos*, the two-handled vessel special to his cult in particular, and also preferred by the libating Herakles (see Fig. 1, "Chart of Vase Shapes"). See chapter 5 for the importance of this particularity.

61. Lushey, "φιάλη," col. 1030.

62. Hoffman, *Sotades*, 4–5.

63. Kroll, "The Ancient Image of Athena Polias," 66 and pl. 11A.

64. Pfisterer-Haas, "Wein beim Opfer," 430.

65. The definitive work on the phiale remains that of Lushey, *Die Phiale*.

66. Such assistants, called  $\sigma\pi\omicron\nu\delta\omicron\phi\omicron\rho\omicron\iota$ , achieved the status of cult officials at large sanctuaries such as Eleusis, Oropos, and Olympia.

67. See Amyx, "Phiale," in *Corinthian Vase-Paintings of the Archaic Period*, 464. Among the most important examples from the East are the over one hundred bronze phialai from Tumulus MM at Gordion; see R. S. Young et al., *Three Great Early Tumuli*, pp. 131–147 (MM 70–167), pls. 68–73b.

68. Hoffman, *Sotades*, 113.

69. *Ibid.*, 114; Lushey, *Die Phiale*.

70. von Bothmer, "A Gold Libation Bowl," 154.

71. Gadrooned libation bowl from Olympia, Museum of Fine Arts, Boston 21.1843, late seventh or early sixth century B.C.E. Around the rim runs an inscription in the early Corinthian alphabet that says that the bowl was dedicated by the sons of Kypselos (tyrant of Corinth), from the spoils of Herakleia (an unknown battle). See L. Jeffrey's reading in *Local Scripts of Archaic Greece*. As we have noted, the central boss renders the bowl easier to pour by using the middle finger. David Gordon Mitten notes that the MFA libation bowl is "an unusual early form. More like the ones held by these gods are the flatter gold ones from Panagurische and in the Metropolitan Museum [of Art in New York]" (communication with author, August 26, 1992). See Strong, *Greek and Roman Gold and Silver Plate*.

72. See in particular the work of Michael Vickers on this question, for example,

“Artful Crafts: The Influence of Metalwork on Athenian Painted Pottery”; “Demus’s Golden Phiale”; and, with David Gill, *Artful Crafts: Ancient Greek Silverware and Pottery*. See also his more recent *Ancient Greek Pottery*.

73. Γῆς τε καὶ Σκότου κόραι (*Oedipus at Colonus* 40).

74. *De Luctu* 19.

75. E.g., Demosthenes 19.260.

76. This idea was advanced by S. Eitrem in his *Opferritus und Voropfer der Griechen und Römer*, 455. Even in this “rule” (as in other aspects of Greek cult), there were exceptions: Plutarch reports in *Aristides* 21 that in the sacrifice for the slain heroes of Plataia, the wine was mixed. And the mystery regulations of Andania refer to the use of blood *and* wine at the swearing-in of the priest: ὁ γραμματεὺς . . . τοὺς γεν-ηθέντας ἱερούς ὀρκίζατω . . . αἷμα καὶ οἶνον σπένδοντας (*Sylloge Inscriptionum Graecarum*, 3rd ed., 736.1).

77. Aristophanes, *Peace* 433. Ironically, this is also the only literary instance of a libation made by a god: It is Hermes himself who says these words as he prepares to pour from his new golden bowl (see discussion in chapter 3).

78. Euripides *Ion* 1032–1033.

79. Burkert, *Greek Religion*, 71.

80. Burkert, *Homo Necans*, 3–7. van Straten, *Hiera Kala*.

81. *Odyssey* 4.759; Euripides *Electra* 791.

82. Xenophon *Anabasis* 7.1.40; Aeschines 3.77.

83. *Odyssey* 3.432–438.

84. In Aristophanes *Peace* 956–958 and Euripides *Iphigenia at Aulis* 1568, the basket and water are initially carried around in a circle, perhaps marking off the area of the sacrifice as sacred.

85. In the worship of Aphrodite, the burning of incense alone on altars and in *thymiateria* played a central role.

86. It was hoped that the animal would follow willingly (Burkert, *Homo Necans*, 4). Jonathan Z. Smith has speculated on the use of domestic animals by the ancient Greeks and other agrarian or pastoralist societies for sacrificial purposes in his essay, “The Domestication of Sacrifice” in Hamerton-Kelly, ed., *Violent Origins*; for example, “Sacrifice is an elaboration of the selective kill, in contradistinction to the fortuitous kill” (200); “Sacrifice . . . is the artificial (i.e., ritualized) killing of an artificial (i.e., domesticated) animal” (italics Smith’s). In reducing ritual sacrifice to a reflex of alimentary needs and rules, Smith completely overlooks Dionysiac sacrifice, which included, certainly in myth and possibly in cult, the rending of live wild animals—see no. C–34).

87. Durand and Schnapp, “Sacrificial Slaughter and Initiatory Hunt,” 54.

88. *Ibid.*

89. Burkert, *Homo Necans*, 4 n. 10, lists literary accounts of animals that voluntarily offer themselves to be sacrificed, among them the chorus’s expressed wonder at Cassandra’s calm courage in walking to her death θεηλάτου βοῦς δίκην πρὸς βομῖόν (like an ox destined by God for the altar) in Aeschylus’s *Agamemnon* 1297–1298. Willing human sacrificial victims are also known, such as Iphigenia in Euripides’s *Iphigenia at Aulis* and Messenia in Pausanias 4.9.4. As Albert Henrichs observes, “The voluntary participation of the animal victim was an ideological construct, of course. The reality was different; large animals (especially bovines) had to be constrained.” Henrichs, correspondence with author, July 10, 1992. See Henrichs, “Dromena und Legomena,” 59–60. See also the discussion of how this “assent to sacrifice” on the part of the animal victim was iconographically treated in van Straten, *Hiera Kala*, §2.3, “Images and Texts: The Assenting Animal?” 100–102.

90. Aristophanes, *Peace* 948; Euripides, *Electra* 810, *Iphigenia at Aulis* 1565; Philostratus *Vita Apollonii* 1.1.
91. Euripides *Alcestis* 74–76, *Electra* 811.
92. Burkert, *Homo Necans*, 5 and n. 18.
93. Ἑλληνικὸν νόμισμα θυσιάδος βοῆς (Aeschylus *Seven against Thebes* 269). Also *Odyssey* 3.450 and Aeschylus *Agamemnon* 595; Herodotus 4.189. Cited in Burkert, *Homo Necans*, 5 n. 18.
94. Pollux, *Onomasticon* 127. In chthonian sacrifice, the hearth (ἑσχάρα) or sacrificial pit (βόθρος) can receive blood.
95. Hesiod *Theogony* 541. In Homer, a piece of raw flesh from each limb was placed on each bone, in a sense reconstituting the animal (ἄμοθετησαν); *Iliad* 1.461, *Odyssey* 3.458. The skulls of oxen (βουκράνια) and other animals were often preserved and set up “in the sacred place as permanent evidence of the act of consecration” (Burkert, *Homo Necans*, 6). An example is shown in no. C–5.
96. See also *Iliad* 11.774–775.
97. Burkert, *Homo Necans*, 6–7.
98. Durand and Schnapp, “Sacrificial Slaughter and Initiatory Hunt,” 54.
99. *Ibid.*, 56.
100. This activity is shown on a black-figure olpe from around 520 B.C.E. in Heidelberg University Corpus Vasorum Antiquorum (CVA) Deutschland 10, pl. 39; (Durand and Schnapp, *City of Images*, 57, fig. 80).
101. *Odyssey* 3.341.
102. *Iliad* 1.462–463; *Odyssey* 3.342.
103. A great deal has been said about this reluctance. Karl Meuli’s theory posited a profound identification between Neolithic hunter and prey (such as earlier cave paintings seem to anticipate), which survived in a vestigial bond between sacrificer and victim (“Griechische Opferbräuche”). Meuli seeks to account for the ambivalence, guilt, and denial that seemed to surround the ancient Greek θυσία: the pseudo-order and calm of the ritual, the women’s cries to drown out any cries of the victim, and the frequent literary emphasis on the animal’s willingness to die for a sublime end. In an extreme case, the very old Athenian festival of Zeus called the Bouphonia (ox-slaying), all participants in the sacrifice from the water carrier to the priest were ceremonially tried each year for the murder of the animal. Each was absolved in a “comedy of innocence” until the axe itself was ultimately found guilty and flung into the sea (Pausanias 1.24.4 and 28; see Parke, *Festivals of the Athenians*, 162–167, and Simon, *Festivals of Attica*, 8–12).
- Vernant and others have instead emphasized the uncomfortable similarity—the literal consanguinity—sensed by the ancient Greeks between their constant sacrifice of animals and the taboo, unholy murder of human beings. This has supposedly led to the reluctance to recall, either verbally or visually, the moment when the animal was killed. See Vernant, “Théorie générale du sacrifice et mise à mort dans la θυσία grecque,” 1–21, esp. 4–9. For an important treatment of the Greeks’ alleged sacrificial guilt feelings and the reluctance of vase painters to depict the moment of the kill, see Henrichs, “Dromena und Legomena,” 61–63.
104. Durand, “Bêtes grecques,” 138. Durand later observes, in the structuralist approach not atypical of contemporary French classical scholarship, “The moment wherein the procession, *pompē*, results in the sacrifice, *thusia*, that in which the blood flows, belongs to the gods. . . . The altar and the earth receive it entirely. It rolls the length of the internal partitions of a human construction . . . in order to mix with the earth of a divine realm, the *hieron*, which supports it” (139). What Durand says about

the action of sacrificial blood may just as accurately be said about wine libations, which also spill from the human-built altar and into the divine realm of the earth.

105. As in Sophocles *Electra* 405–406; Aeschylus *Libation Bearers* 92, 164. Discussed by Stengel, *Opferbräuche*, 143.

106. Aeschylus *Eumenides* 107.

107. *Iliad* 23.220; *Odyssey* 11.27.

108. Euripides *Hecuba* 527.

109. Sophocles *Electra* 84, 430–434.

110. Rudhardt, *Notions fondamentales*, 248.

111. Sophocles *Oedipus at Colonus* 1599–1602, where the same waters fetched by Antigone and Ismene are used both for libations and to wash their father before his death. Purificatory *χοαί* can also be directed to deities; the three kraters of water that Oedipus is directed to empty into the earth of the grove at Colonus constitute a *καθαρισμός* to restore the purity of the Furies' sanctuary, which has been violated by the trespass of impure, troubled visitors. (*Oedipus at Colonus* 469–492).

112. *De Luctu* 9.

113. On Electra's *legomena* in *Libation Bearers* 87ff., which Albert Henrichs calls "the first ritual crisis in extant tragedy," see his "Namenlosigkeit und Euphemismus: Zur Ambivalenz der chthonischen Mächte im attischen Drama," at 168–169.

114. Hanell, "Trankopfer," col. 2136, citing the study done by P. G. Oeconomus, *De profusionum receptaculis sepulcralibus*, *Biblioth. Soc. Archaeol. Ath.* 21 (1921).

115. Stengel, *Opferbräuche*, p. 180.

116. For example, Euripides *Hecuba* 535–536: δέξαι χοάς μου τάσδε κηλητηρίους, νεκρῶν ἀγωγούς (receive from me these libations that are appealing and attractive to the dead).

117. To the father of my son I bring  
Propitious offerings, libations  
For the dead: a milk-sweet draught of sacred kine  
Unblemished; and resplendent liquors of the honey-  
Working bee, with liquid droplets of a maiden  
Stream are mingled; and this elixir  
Of an antique vine, whose mother is  
The wild fields; and golden-green the fruit  
Of fragrant olive trees, . . . always flourishing  
Their leafy age; and plaited flowers, children  
Of the fecund earth.

Here I follow the translation of S. G. Benardete.

118. Here I follow the translation of Herbert Weir Smyth (Loeb edition, 1983).

119. τί φῶ χέουσα τάσδε κηδείους χοάς (What shall I say as I pour out these offerings of sorrow?) *Libation Bearers* 87.

120. Betz, "Libation," 538.

121. See also Pindar, *Olympian Odes* 1.90, on the "bright blood rituals" at the tomb of Pelops; Plutarch, *Aristides*, 21.

122. See Meuli, "Griechische Opferbräuche."

123. See Herodotus's story about Melissa, the dead wife of Periander, tyrant of Corinth (Herodotus *Historiae* 5.92g). Periander's inquiry of the oracle of the dead among the Thesproti on the Acheron (the Nekyomanteion at Ephyra, the only known attestation of its use) concerning a lost object summoned forth instead his wife's ghost, who complained bitterly that she was "cold and naked, the clothes, which had

been buried with her, having been of no use at all, since they had not been burnt.” The sensitive widower Periander proclaimed that all the women of Corinth should attend the temple of Hera, where he had them stripped of their festival clothing. The clothing was gathered in a pit and burnt “while he prayed to the spirit of his wife Melissa.” Melissa’s ghost then told him where to find what he had lost.

124. See Camp, *The Archaeology of Athens*, 16, fig. 11, and 292, fig. 259.

125. Farnell went so far as to propose that the Greek gods once had a temporal past, with acquired biographies from heroes (see Farnell, *Greek Hero Cults and Ideas of Immortality*).

126. Burkert remarks, “The opposition between Olympian and Chthonic constitutes a polarity in which one pole cannot exist without the other and in which each pole only receives its full meaning from the other. Above and below, heaven and earth together form the universe” (Burkert, *Greek Religion*, 202).

127. Hesiod *Theogony* 712.

128. Translation of S. G. Benardete.

129. Rudhardt, *Notions fondamentales*, 247.

130. Burkert, “Opferritual,” 8–14. The uniqueness of this particular libation, according to Burkert, lies in its symbolism. He construes no other libation in this way.

131. Sophocles *Oedipus at Colonus* 1661–1662.

132. Burkert, “Opferritual,” 14: “Der Akt des ‘Gießens’ ist ein Paradigma der Unumkehrbarkeit.”

133. *Ibid.*, 11. Burkert points out that this association of libation with the sacerdotal power to sacrifice is not confined to Indo-European religions; in Akkadian, the word for “pour out,” *naqê*, is similarly the ending component for “sacrifice,” especially for animal sacrifice, where blood was “poured out.”

134. *Ibid.*

135. Michael Witzel comments of *hutáh*, “it is both the recipient in sacrifice and that which is poured out” (communication with author, April 21, 1988).

136. This argument is developed by Calvert Watkins, in his essay, “god,” in *Gedenkschrift für Herman Güntert*, 102 n. 5. Alternatively, Watkins notes that the Greek *χυτός* occurs in Homer only in the fixed formula *χυτή γαῖα* (heaped-up earth, burial mound); compare *τύμβον . . . χεύμενον* in *Iliad* 7.336, and that “it is possible that the collective neuter \*ghutóm of the Germanic word for ‘god’ could refer to the spirit immanent in the heaped-up hallowed ground of a tumulus—perhaps of a *kurgan*, the characteristic Eurasian burial mound associated by archaeologists with the Indo-Europeans.”

137. Melchert, “‘God-Drinking’: A Syntactic Transformation in Hittite,” 245–246. See Puhvel, “On an alleged eucharistic expression in Hittite rituals,” 31–33.

138. Harry E. Hoffner, correspondence with author, November 6, 1990.

139. Hans G. Güterbock, correspondence with author, November 6, 1990. He refers to another text, KUB 55.18, ii 6–11, published in his paper “To Drink a God” in the *Proceedings of the 34<sup>th</sup> Rencontre Assyriologique Internationale* in Istanbul, 1987, where it appears as sample 20.

140. Euripides *Bacchae* 284–285, ed. E. R. Dodds.

141. Dodds, commentary on *Bacchae* 284–285, pp. 105–106. The same drastic metaphor, but using a less ritually charged verb (*κενόω*) may be implied in Philippians 2:17, usually translated “he [i.e., Jesus Christ] did not count equality with God a thing to be grasped, but emptied himself.” The verb *κενόω* has the sense of

emptying a vessel of its liquid; this meaning is frequent in the Septuagint usage of the verb.

142. Sir Charles Eliot, *Hinduism and Buddhism*, 1.58. Cited in Dodds, *Bacchae*, 106.

143. See Farnell, *Cults of the Greek States*, 5.97 and 121. Cited in Dodds, *Bacchae*, 106.

144. Dodds dismisses Bruhn's suggestion of the thought as a sophism put into Teiresias's mouth to discredit him or Norwood's characterization of the lines as "the last word of scientific rationalism" (Dodds, *Bacchae*, 106). "The elementary jokes cracked by the Cyclops about a god choosing to live in a bottle (*Cyclops* 525–527) tell us that the god-wine equation was current in some sense at Athens, they do not tell us what the sense was, still less what Euripides thought about it."

145. "Die Weinspenden auf den Vasenbildern sind nie auf eine bestimmte Situation zu beziehen sondern geben jeweils exemplarisch wichtige Augenblicke im Leben eines Menschen wieder"; Pfisterer-Haas, "Wein beim Opfer," 432.

146. *Odyssey* 13.54–55. Examples of such pantheistic prayers at libation are also found in *Odyssey* 14.447, Euripides *Ion* 1032–1033, and Xenophon *Cyropaedia* 4.1.6.

147. Translation by Richmond Lattimore. Plato charged that the Greeks didn't know how to placate divine wrath, but that they conserved hopes of ameliorating their situation with the practice of libation and sacrifice (*Laws* 906d).

148. Hanell, "Trankopfer," col. 2133.

149. Pindar *Nemean Odes* 11, 6.

150. *The Shorter Oxford English Dictionary*, s.v. "sacrifice." Hereafter *SOED*.

151. However, Vedic texts stress the sacrificial nature of the process of manufacturing the liquid soma in the primary sense: the soma plant is crushed, brutally and redemptively "killed" for the goal of attaining the hallowed juice.

152. *SOED*, s.v. "sacrifice."

153. Burkert, *Structure and History*, 48 and n. 4. Burkert thus reiterates the analysis of Émile Durkheim, that religion's function is to "maintain and reaffirm, at regular intervals, the collective sentiments and the collective ideas which comprise its unity and its personality" (entretenir et raffirmer, à intervalles réguliers, les sentiments collectifs et les idées collectives qui font son unité et sa personnalité); (Durkheim, *Les formes élémentaires de la vie religieuse* [Paris, 1912], 610); translation mine. Burkert notes that this analysis influenced Cornford, Harrison, and especially Gruppe (*Geschichte der klassischen Mythologie und Religionsgeschichte* [Leipzig, 1921], 243). One might add that its influence has only gathered steam over the last several scholarly generations.

154. Burkert, *Structure and History*, 35.

155. For example, Plutarch *De Iside et Osiride* 352c and 378a; *Quaestiones Graecae* 293d; *Solon* 9.1; Pausanias 2.14.1; 2.37.6; 3.22.2. More extensive references to this usage in Pausanias and Plutarch are supplied by Burkert, *Structure and History*, 36 n. 14.

156. Burkert, *Structure and History*, 37.

157. *Ibid.*, 42–43. Burkert notes in n. 20 on p. 42 the ancient habit of pouring oil on special stones to mark them; he cites the stone relief in Sparta that features Artemis pouring libations on Apollo's omphalos (included in the Catalogue as no. 231). This evidentiary usage is itself disturbing; I have examined the relief and it is clear that Apollo, not Artemis, is the chief sacrificer. The relief obviously does not reveal what liquid Artemis pours into Apollo's phiale. Rather than oil, it is more likely wine or purificatory water, which would leave no permanent mark at all.

158. On the behavior in mammals, Burkert cites Kleiman, "Scent-Marking in the Canides," *Symp. Zool. Soc.* 18 (1966): 167–168 (cited in *Structure and History*, n. 27 on p. 43). We will not begin to approach the question of why Artemis would wish to mark

Apollo's stone in such a way as Burkert suggests—seeing that the goddess has left her sanctuary, perhaps at Brauron or Ephesus, and is visiting her brother's shrine at Delphi, would the omphalos qualify to her as “a familiar, conspicuous object” or as a “novel object”?

159. Burkert, *Structure and History*, 43.

160. *Ibid.*, 42.

161. *Ibid.*, 52.

162. Rudhardt, *Notions fondamentales*, 245.

163. *Ibid.*, 242 and nn. 12 and 13.

164. *Ibid.*, 242.

165. *Ibid.*, 245.

166. *Ibid.*

167. “La libation joue un rôle favorable aux événements qu'elle inaugure.”

168. Pausanias 8.42.11.

## 2. ICONOGRAPHIC EVIDENCE

1. The Berlin Painter, named after a superb amphora dated to around 490 B.C.E. in Berlin's Staatliche Museen (no. F 2160, in Beazley, *Attic Red-Figure Vase Painters*, [hereafter ARV<sup>2</sup>] 196, 1, which depicts Hermes with a wine-jug and kantharos, the silen Orimachos with his lyre, and a deer) had an influential career that spanned at least three decades (circa 500–470 B.C.E.). The hydria in Boston, as we have said, is dated to 485 B.C.E. The Berlin Painter's corpus of work is treated extensively in Donna C. Kurtz (text) and J. D. Beazley (drawings), *The Berlin Painter*. See also Beazley, “The Berlin Painter,” in Kurtz, ed., thus: Painter,” in Kurtz, ed., *Greek Vases: Lectures by J. D. Beazley*.

2. Cahn, *Münzen und Medaillen*, no. 155, p. 68. Translation mine. The important question of how the robust Etruscan art market of the sixth and fifth centuries influenced the iconographic choices of the Attic Kerameikos is treated by Nigel Spivey, “Greek Vases in Etruria.”

Coarse and black-glazed ware was the domestic pottery of the Athenians; the red-figure vases we see were special, dedicated in sanctuaries both in Greece and Etruria, given as athletic prizes, or drunk from at symposia. But 80 percent of the Greek vases now in museums and private collections were recovered from tombs, the vast majority of them Etruscan (although, as T. B. L. Webster argues, “the fact that 80 per cent were found in graves does not mean that 80 per cent were destined for graves”; cited in Spivey, “Greek Vases,” 149–150). Some were probably intended to be the tableware of an eschatological banquet; others held the ashes of their aristocratic owners, who were fabulously wealthy, according to Diodorus Siculus (5.40), writing in the first century B.C.E. The question posed by ethnoarchaeology is what “message” was intended by the artists who painted these vases, and what message was received by the Etruscans who bought them? Depictions of athletic events, equestrian pursuits, and musically accompanied feasts would have found resonance with Etruscan views of the afterlife, as we might infer from the subjects of their tomb wall-paintings.

But as Spivey rightly points out, “not all myths on Greek vases found in Etruscan tombs can be viewed as particularly appropriate for Etruscan funerary use” (Spivey, “Greek Vases,” 146), and the common presence of cult statues holding phialai in Greece or even the simple fact that a lekythos with a libating Athena was interred in the polyandron at Thespiiai in the classical period argues against an overly emphatic construction of the vases' religious imagery as “created for” or even “aimed at” their



Etruscan purchasers. The god with the phiale was “in the air” in Attica, so to speak—very much a Greek phenomenon.

3. Cahn, *Münzen und Medaillen*, no. 155, p. 68.

4. Typically on vase paintings mortal women hold the oinochoe for men, who libate from the phiale, and only hold the phiale themselves when alone. But goddesses are different, and can hold their own phiale in the company of a male phiale-bearing god: Hera and Zeus both extend phialai for Athena in **no. 22**; Cybele and Sabazioz each hold a phiale in **no. 195**. I am indebted to Margaret Miller for this observation.

5. See Blech, *Studien zum Kranz bei den Griechen*.

6. Identified and discussed at length by Gerhard Neumann, *Gesten und Gebärden in der griechischen Kunst*.

7. Like Iris/Nike, Hermes is a ubiquitous attendant to the sacrificing gods, but unlike her, he is often an observer at the scene of libation rather than an active participant with oinochoe.

But in **no. 18**, a cheerful cup in London from the late archaic period, he ambles along with his own phiale, spilling wine onto the ground as he goes.

8. The one exception is a coin from Paphos in Cyprus in the fourth century B.C.E. (**no. 242**), which I include as a paradigmatic illustration of a cult statue of Nemesis, with phiale and branch, perhaps that of Rhamnous by Agorakritos, discussed in chapter 3 (Lacroix, *Les reproductions de statues sur les monnaies grecques*, 287 ff., pl. xxvi, 1; Richter, *The Sculpture and Sculptors of the Greeks*, 185, no. 679. Analogous is the possible representation of the statue of Apollo by Bryaxis on the reverse of coins of Antiochos IV Epiphanes (Richter, *Sculpture and Sculptors*, 219, figs. 778–779). For the fifth-century coins of Selinus and Himera featuring local river deities holding phialai, see Jenkins, *Coins of Greek Sicily*, pl. 5, and Kraay and Hirmer, *Greek Coins*. There are good examples of the standing Mên (see **no. 246**) holding a libation bowl on the reverse of many second- and third-century C.E. Greek imperial coins from the provinces of Asia Minor.

9. See the original discussion of Pierre Amandry, reproduced in *Guides de Delphes: La Musée*, 191–226, and most recently, Kenneth Lapatin in his *Chryselephantine Statuary in the Ancient Mediterranean World*, 147–148; cat. no. 30.

10. See Dyer, “The Evidence for Apolline Purification Rituals at Delphi and Athens.”

11. Intensively analyzed by Henri Metzger, “ΑΠΟΛΛΩΝ ΣΠΕΝΔΩΝ: À propos d’une coupe attique à fond blanc trouvée à Delphes”; and Ioanna K. Konstantinou, “ΔΕΥΚΗ ΔΕΛΦΙΚΗ ΚΥΛΙΞ.”

12. ARV<sup>2</sup>, 1665.

13. Nike also lights on the hand of the chryselephantine Zeus by the same sculptor at Olympia. The question is an iconographic conundrum; I have discussed it at length with both Ursula Kästner at the Pergamon Museum in Berlin and Alain Pasquier at the Louvre. See the treatment of personifications such as Nike in Shapiro, *Personifications in Greek Art*, and the more recent iconographical monograph by Cornelia Thröne, *Ikongraphische Studien zu Nike im 5. Jahrhundert v. Chr.*

14. Cf. the sixth-century altar discovered beneath the classical temple of Athena Nike with the inscription, “I am the altar of Nike.”

15. Graef and Langlotz, *Die Antiken Vasen von der Akropolis zu Athen*, 1: 51; 2: Taf. 42. **No. 36** shows an enthroned (apparently female) figure, extending a phiale with wine pouring from it before a blood-sprinkled altar. She sits opposite another figure on a folding camp stool on the fragment of a red figure pyxis from the Acropolis Collection

of the Athens National Museum. This is described in Graef and Langlotz; “On this (vase) an enthroned goddess makes a drink-offering out of an omphalos-cup [a phiale]. That it is a goddess is proven in that seated libations are not appropriate for a mortal and in that the one who is enthroned has a stool under her feet as the Olympians do. The meaning is uncertain” (translation mine). Erika Simon, on the other hand, thinks the pair are Achilles and Thetis, and the extraordinary sanctuary with lion spout, a herōon—because of its bees, grass, and flowers. This would be the only known example of a libating Thetis.

16. Caskey and Beazley, *Attic Vase-Painting in the Museum of Fine Arts, Boston*, 3: 11.

17. See Henrichs, “Between Country and City,” esp. 270–271.

18. For the possible identification of the figure as Semele, I am indebted to Albert Henrichs.

19. In **no. 84**, a late painting by the Berlin Painter on an amphora in the Louvre, Nike skims the ground, similarly holding a phiale and thymiaterion.

20. Claude Bérard, “Festivals and Mysteries,” in *A City of Images*, 114.

21. *Ibid.*, 119.

22. In chapter 5, I will elaborate upon this concept in the context provided by the interpretive efforts made to date, which are discussed in chapter 4, and show the ways in which I believe it addresses the theoretical difficulties they present.

23. The libating Eros will reach the height of his glory a few centuries later, in an archaizing marble relief from the second half of second century B.C.E., perhaps from the sanctuary of Aphrodite on the north slope of the Acropolis (**no. 244**). The relief has a procession of carved erotes, all with phialai in one hand. In their alternate hands, the erotes are carrying oinochoai and thymiateria.

24. Plutarch *Life of Kimon* 8; Pausanias *Guide to Greece* 1.17.6. These were probably prehistoric fossils, as Adrienne Mayor has argued in *The First Fossil Hunters*, 112.

25. Simon, *Opfernde Götter*, 65; ARV<sup>2</sup>, 977, no. 2; conversation with Dr. Ursula Kästner of the Pergamon Museen, July 1, 1991.

26. Same identification sources as in note 25, for Zeus.

27. In her book on Greek priestesses, (*Portrait of a Priestess*, Princeton University Press, 2007) Joan B. Connelly argues that these are instead priests and priestesses, and that this may be the case with a number of the vases in this corpus.

28. See the discussion in ARV<sup>2</sup>, 1052, no. 25, and Kapitel F in Simon, *Opfernde Götter*, 79–87.

29. Bérard and Durand, “Entering the Imagery,” in *City of Images*, 25.

30. Simon, *Festivals of Attica*, 52–53 and pl. 14, 2. The Deipnophoria is described by Philochoros (F. Jacoby, *Die Fragmente der griechischen Historiker* 328, no. F 183).

31. Palagia, “A New Relief of the Graces and the Charites of Socrates.”

32. Pausanias 1.22.8. Palagia wonders whether the Socrates who, according to tradition, carved the reliefs, might not be *the* Socrates who, according to tradition, was a sculptor by trade if not by vocation.

33. Delivorrias, “Die Kultstatue der Aphrodite von Daphni,” 24, fig. 1.

34. The inscription tells how a Lydian village installed Mén Tyrannos and his mother through the inspiration (κατ’ ἐπίπνοιαν) of Zeus Kilamenenos. See catalogue **no. 246** for bibliographical reference.

35. I have excluded semidivine and legendary heroes such as Erichthonios, Herakles, Triptolemos, and Paris as well as maenads, as the last so often appear with satyrs and other creatures of the Dionysiac *thiasos* in what are clearly mythical settings.

## I. ENTHRONED VERSUS STANDING, RUNNING, FLYING DIVINE LIBATIONS

	<i>Deity Enthroned</i>	<i>Standing/Running/Flying</i>
510-480 B.C.E.	15	23
480-450	28	103
450-400	17	31
400-100	10	15
100 B.C.E.-300 C.E.	1	4
Total	71	176

## 2. ANGLE OF THE PHIALE (MULTIPLE PHIALAI IN SOME IMAGES)

	<i>Phiale Tipped Down</i>	<i>Parallel to Ground</i>	<i>Perpendicular, with Interior visible</i>
510-480 B.C.E.	19	15	4
480-450	78	45	8
450-400	22	24	2
400-100	11	3	11
100 B.C.E.-300 C.E.	0	2	3
Total	130	89	28

## 3. DEPICTION OF THE LIBATION: IS THE LIQUID OFFERING VISIBLE?

	<i>Yes</i>	<i>No</i>
510-480 B.C.E.	11	27
480-450	21	110
450-400	9	39
400-100	0	25
100 B.C.E.-300 C.E.	0	5
Total	41	206

## 4. ALTARS AND OMPHALOI: IS THERE AN ALTAR OR OMPHALOS PRESENT AT THE LIBATION? IS THE ALTAR FLAMING, BLOOD-STAINED, OR GARLANDED?

510-480 B.C.E.	altar (plain) 3; flaming 2; bloody 2; flaming and bloody 2; garlanded 2=11 scenes with altar; 27 without.
480-450	altar (plain) 24; flaming 8; bloody 4; flaming and bloody 6=42 scenes with altar; 88 without. 1 omphalos.
450-400	altar (plain) 6; flaming 2; flaming and bloody 1;=9 scenes with altar; 37 without. 2 omphaloi (garlanded).
400-4100	altar (plain) 7 (all marble reliefs)=7 scenes with altar; 17 without. 1 omphalos.
100 B.C.E.-300 C.E.	altar, flaming 2=2 scenes with altar; 3 without.
Total	Divine libation scenes with altar 71; with omphaloi 4; without altar or omphalos 172.

plain altar: 40  
 flaming altar: 14  
 bloody altar: 6  
 flaming and bloody altar: 9  
 garlanded altar: 2

## 5. PRESENCE OF MORTALS AT THE LIBATION SCENE

	<i>Present</i>	<i>Not Present</i>
510–480 B.C.E.	1 (priestess)	37
480–450	8 warrior, with Nike: 3 women, with Nike: 2 woman, with Athena: 2 women, with Demeter: 1	123
450–400	10: warrior, with Nike: 1 orgiastic dancers: 1 horseman, with Athena: 1 bacchant on horseback: 1 worshippers: miniature, on 6 reliefs approaching larger deities	38
400–100	15 worshippers: miniature, approaching larger deities on 15 reliefs	10
100 B.C.E.–300 C.E.	1 with worshippers performing a sacrifice on lower register	4
Total	35	212

NOTE: Mortal libations are depicted on the reverse of the vase in nine cases.

## 3. “TERRIBLY STRANGE AND PARADOXICAL”: LITERARY EVIDENCE

1. Plutarch *De Daedalis Plataeensis*, *Moralia* 15. He lists it among the oldest cult statues in Greece, along with the original wooden image of Apollo on Delos given by Erysichthon, the wooden Hera of Samos (an “aniconic plank” [ἄξιοος σανίς], the wooden image of Athena at Lindos given by Danaos (a plain image [λιτὸν ἔδος]) and the original pearwood image of the Argive Hera. Philostratos *Vita Apollonii* 3.14.

2. Pausanias 1.26.6: “But the most holy object, that was so considered by all many years before the unification of the demes, is the image of Athena which is on what is now called the Acropolis, but in early days the Polias. A legend about it says that it fell from heaven (φήμη δὲ ἐξ αὐτὸ ἔχει πεσεῖν ἐκ τοῦ οὐρανοῦ) (trans. W. H. S. Jones, 137, but including John Kroll’s recent modifications and my own).

3. A. Frickenhaus, “Das Athenabild des alten Tempels in Athen,” *Athenische Mitteilungen* 33 (1908): 17–32.

4. Kroll, “The Ancient Image of Athena Polias.” Athenagoras (*Legatio* 17.3) attributed three cult statues to the sculptor Endoios: the Artemis at Ephesus, the old olive-wood image of Athena, and the Seated Athena. Kroll points out that these last two must therefore be two different statues, that is, that the ξόανον of Athena was not the same as the Athena Polias. He also finds it noteworthy that the Polias at Athens is omitted in Strabo’s list of seated wooden Athenas at Phokaia, Massilia, Rome, Chios, and Erythrai (Strabo, 8.601).

5. See Diane Harris, *The Treasures of the Parthenon and Erechtheion*.

6. *Inscriptiones Graecae* (hereafter *IG*) II<sup>2</sup> 1424a, 362–366. Here alone the text is preserved in full, as noted by Kroll, “The Ancient Image of Athena Polias,” 68 n. 18. Parts of this list are also given in *IG* II<sup>2</sup> 1424, 11–16; 1425, 307–312; 1426, 4–8; 1428, 142–146; and 1429, 42–47; the order of the statue’s ornaments is invariably the same.

7. Kroll, “The Ancient Image of Athena Polias,” 68, n. 19: “In the cella were four of these silver phialai and one made of gilded wood: *IG II<sup>2</sup> 1424a*, lines 354, 355, 356, 359, and 371.”

8. *Ibid.*, 73.

9. Evelyn Harrison also reconstructs the Athena in the pair of cult statues made by Alkamenes for the Hephaisteion in the years 421–415 B.C.E. as carrying a phiale; she apparently considers the motif so common in sculpture that she does so without special justification (“Alkamenes’ Sculptures for the Hephaisteion: Part I, the Cult Statues,” 147 and Ill. 2).

10. Pausanias 1.33.2.

11. Gisela M. A. Richter points out in *The Sculpture and Sculptors of the Greeks*, 184 and n. 73, that other writers (Strabo, Zenobios, Suidas, Photios, Tzetzes, Hesychios, Pomponius, and Solinus) also attribute the Nemesis of Rhamnous to Pheidias, in spite of the fact that the signature of his pupil Agorakritos appeared on a fold of the garment. In *Natural History* 36.17, Pliny says that Agorakritos lost a sculptural competition to sculpt Aphrodite to Pheidias’s other favorite, Alkamenes. Agorakritos then sold his statue “on the condition that it should not remain in Athens, and called it Nemesis; it was set up at Rhamnous, a deme of Attica, and was preferred by Varro to all other statues.” Richter discounts as problematic the reconstructions of the Rhamnous Nemesis based on the representations of a goddess holding a phiale and branch on fourth-century Cypriot coins (no. 242; see Richter, *Sculpture*, 185 no. 679 and n. 82; Six, “Aphrodite-Nemesis,” 89–102 pl. 5, and Lacroix, *Les reproductions de statues sur les monnaies grecques*,” 287 ff., pl. xxvi, 1).

12. Reconstructed by G. Despinois; see his *Symbolē stē meletē tou ergou tou Agorakritou* (Athens, 1971); the reconstruction (and summary of the argument) can be found in Andrew F. Stewart, *Greek Sculpture: An Exploration*, 165.

13. Pausanias 1.33.3.

14. Published by E. Simon, “Der Goldschatz von Panagjurište—eine Schöpfung der Alexanderzeit,” esp. pp. 7–9 pl. 3, no. 1–3.

15. The Apollo Patroos was published by H. A. Thompson in *Hesperia* (1937): 77 ff. Many of the statues of Euphranor were colossal.

16. Richter, *Sculpture*, 218–219, pls. 778–779. The Byzantine historian Cedrenus (Kedrenos) also mentions a statue of Apollo by Bryaxis (*Historiarum Compendium* 306 B).

17. Libanius *Orationes*, 60.7 and 11 passim. *Libanii Opera*, vol. 4, ed. R. Foerster, trans. Richter, *Sculpture*, 218, with my own modifications.

18. This tentative dating to just after the death of Commodus is offered by Walter Manoel Edwards, et al., “Athenaeus,” in *The Oxford Classical Dictionary*, 202.

19. F. Jacoby, *Die Fragmente der griechischen Historiker*, no. 627. Cf. E. E. Rice, *The Grand Procession of Ptolemy Philadelphus*.

20. Athenaeus *Deipnosophists* 5.198 C. The καρχήσιον was a drinking cup, narrower in the middle than at top and bottom.

21. Blanche Menadier, “Offerings at Archaic and Classical Hera Sanctuaries,” unpublished paper, American School of Classical Studies at Athens, 1991.

22. Publication by L’École Française d’Athènes of the two statues and their related ornaments is anticipated in either *Fouilles de Delphes* or *Études Delphiques*.

23. Aristophanes *Peace* 425.

24. Quotation from Rice, *The Grand Procession of Ptolemy Philadelphus*, p. 59.

25. On the socioreligious construction of ancient Greek priesthoods, see Robert Garland, “Religious Authority in Archaic and Classical Athens,” and Garland, “Priests and Power in Classical Athens.”

26. *Odyssey* 3.44–50, ed. T. W. Allen (Oxford: Clarendon, 1916). Translation by Lattimore, *The Odyssey of Homer*, 67.
27. *Odyssey* 3.51.
28. *Odyssey* 3.53.
29. *Odyssey* 3.54.
30. *Odyssey* 3.55–61.
31. Aristophanes *Peace* 416–424. Greek text of the edition of Maurice Platnauer and the English translation of Alan H. Sommerstein.
32. Aristophanes *Peace* 423–424.
33. Aristophanes *Peace* 425.
34. Aristophanes *Peace* 428–429. Sommerstein gives εὐχόμεσθα.
35. Here there is a pun on the noun φιάλη, “libation bowl,” and the verb ἐφιάλλειν, “to set about doing” (that is, “we can set about doing this job after praying to the gods.”)
36. Aristophanes *Peace* 433–438.
37. Aristophanes *Peace* 442–443.
38. Whitman, *Aristophanes and the Comic Hero*, 115.
39. Maurice Platnauer, commentary on Aristophanes *Peace*, 109.
40. *Scholia Vetera et Recentiora in Aristophanis Pacem. Scholia in Vespas; Pacem; Aves et Lysistratam*, fasc. II, ed. D. Holwerda, 71.
41. Alan Sommerstein gives this as a stage direction to 456.
42. Eckstein-Wolf, “Zur Darstellung spendender Götter,” 48.
43. Gerhard Neumann, *Gesten und Gebärden in der griechischen Kunst*, 193 n. 338.
44. In line 946, Jupiter refers to *vasa pura* (“uncontaminated” or “pure” vessels), which would suggest that he has pledged purificatory libations; but in 966 he says he will go inside to perform *rem divinam* “the sacred thing (offering),” a normal expression for animal sacrifice. Purifications normally preceded slaughter in animal sacrifice; line 983 indicates that he has accomplished both aspects of the ritual.
45. Plautus *Amphitryon* 966. Text: Titus Maccius Plautus *Amphitruo*, ed. W. M. Lindsay. Note that the grammatically superfluous presence of *ego* highlights the subject. Jupiter is calling attention to the fact that it is “I” who will do or perform the required sacrifices. Thanks to John Lanci for this observation.
46. Plautus *Amphitryon* 983.
47. Plutarch *De defectu oraculorum* 418B–C: παγγέλοιοι γάρ ἐστιν, ὧ ἑταῖρε, τὸν Απόλλω κτείναντα θηρίον φεύγειν ἐπὶ πέρατα τῆς Ἑλλάδος ἀγνισμοῦ δεόμενον, εἴτ’ ἐκεῖ χοάς τινας χεῖσθαι καὶ δρᾶν ἅ δρῶσιν ἄνθρωποι μνημίματα δαυμόνων ἀφοσιούμενοι καὶ πραῦνοντες, οὓς ἀλάστορας καὶ παλαμναίους ὀνομάζουσιν, ὡς ἀλήστων τινῶν καὶ παλαιῶν μιασμάτων μνημίαις ἐπεξιόντας. Text: *Moralia* V. 29, ed. W. R. Paton, M. Pohlenz, W. Sievking. The particular legend of Apollo’s pouring libations to appease the Erinyes and expiate the blood-guilt caused by his slaughter of the chthonian serpent (the Python) at Delphi has led several scholars to emphasize a mythical explanation for the frequency of his appearance in the ancient representations described in chapter 1. Noteworthy among these are Erika Simon, in her chapter B, “Der opfernde Apollon” in *Opfernde Götter*, 13–38 and catalogue; Konstantinou, “ΛΕΥΚΗ ΔΕΛΦΙΚΗ ΚΥΛΙΞ”; and Metzger, “ΑΠΟΛΛΩΝ ΣΠΕΝΔΩΝ.”
48. Plutarch *De defectu oraculorum* 418C: ὃν δ’ ἦκουσα λόγον ἦδη περὶ τῆς φυγῆς ταύτης καὶ τῆς μεταστάσεως, ἄτοπος μὲν ἐστὶ δεινῶς καὶ παράδοξος· εἰ δ’ ἀληθείας τι μετέχει, μὴ μικρὸν οἴωμεθα μηδὲ κοινὸν εἶναι τὸ πραχθὲν ἐν τοῖς τότε χρόνοις περὶ τὸ χρηστήριον.

49. The myth of Apollo killing the Pytho at Delphi long predated Plutarch; it is found in the Homeric *Hymn to Pythian Apollo* 355 ff., Scholion to Pindar *Pythian Odes* 4.11–14 (ed. Drachmann), and Euripides's *Iphigenia at Tauris* 1245 ff. These, in turn, probably bespeak an even more ancient tradition. Murders of supernatural or chthonian creatures by gods are not unheard-of; Hermes slew Argos. But far more than Apollo's deed, many other mythical or legendary events would seem to warrant blood-guiltiness and divine atonement: the murder of the hapless Niobids or the hunter Actaeon by Artemis, the slaughter of the Greeks encamped at Troy by Apollo's plague-bearing arrows, the burning of Semele, the mother of Dionysos by the thunderbolt of Zeus, and caused by Hera's jealousy, or even the destruction of Kronos himself by his own son.

50. Plutarch *De defectu oraculorum* 418A–B. The story has a source in Plutarch *Quaestiones Graecae* 293C: “Now the Seperion seems to be a *mimesis* of the god's battle with the Python and the flight and expulsion to Tempê after the battle: Some indeed say that he [Apollo] fled because he sought to be purified for the murder (οἱ μὲν γὰρ φυγεῖν ἐπὶ τῷ φόνῳ φασι χριζόντα καθαροῖων), others that he was following the wounded Python as it fled along the road, which we now call [the] sacred [way], and just missed its death.” Text: Plutarch *Moralia*, Loeb Classical Library, translation mine. See the discussion in Burkert, *Homo Necans*, 127–130. Burkert notes of the first version that, ironically, “the purificatory god was himself in need of purification, for he had killed” (*Homo Necans*, 130).

51. See Gibert, “Apollo's Sacrifice: The Limits of a Metaphor in Greek Tragedy,” which engages this argument in the form in which it appeared in my dissertation, *When the High Gods Pour Out Wine: The Paradox of Divine Reflexivity in Comparative Context*, Harvard University, 1992. See Gibert's discussion in the section “Gods Don't Sacrifice,” 172–181.

52. Hesiod *Theogony* 556–557.

53. Burkert, *Structure and History*, 157. For the connection of Hermes's cattle theft with shamanism and primitive hunting ritual, see 184 n. 29.

54. Susan C. Shelmerdine takes these details to refer to the “regular procedure for preparing a meal with meat in ancient Greece, and while the scene here is regularly referred to as a ‘sacrifice,’ we should remember that whenever an animal was killed for food, a portion was set aside for the gods. The focus in this scene is really on the meal.” Shelmerdine, *The Homeric Hymns*.

55. *Hymn to Hermes* 127–129. Greek text: *Hymn to Hermes*, in Hesiod, *The Homeric Hymns and Homeric*, Loeb Classical Library. Translation of this and the next passage by Susan C. Shelmerdine, who points out in her commentary to these lines that the “twelve portions” of the meat (δώδεκα μοίρας) each receive a γέρας, the choicest portion of meat that is normally laid onto the sacrificial meat reserved for the god himself or for the priest—that is, the γέρας would have gone to only one person at the meal (e.g., *Iliad* 7.321, *Odyssey* 8.479–481). Whereas at Mekone Prometheus provides such uneven portions that Zeus even complains, Hermes “takes special care that all 12 portions are equally honorable and perfect” (Shelmerdine, *The Homeric Hymns*).

56. *Hymn to Hermes*, 130–133. Shelmerdine believes that Hermes has not yet been accepted into the Olympic pantheon and is bidding for a place by preparing the feast: “No one can agree why Hermes refuses to eat the meat for which he has been longing for since line 64. If the food is intended to mark the *timê* of the recipient, however, Hermes would naturally not yet be entitled to a portion” (Shelmerdine, commentary on lines 131–133, in her edition of the *Homeric Hymns*).

57. The meaning of ὄσῳ in this context remains controversial. Liddell, Scott, and Jones in *A Greek-English Lexicon* give the meanings “divine law” and “the service owed

by man to God.” LSJ therefore renders this passage “the rite of the flesh-offering.” However, Shelmerdine argues on the basis of the work of H. Jeanmaire (“Le substantif ὄσια et sa signification comme terme technique dans le vocabulaire grecque,” *Revue des Études Grecques* 58 [1945]: 66–89), and M.H.A.L.H. van der Valk (“Quelques remarques sur le sens du nom ‘Hosia,’” *REG* 64 [1951]: 417–422) in seeing ὄσια as “a rite of desacralization.” She concludes in her note to *Hymn to Hermes* 130, “the passage therefore describes Hermes’ longing for the ‘desacralized portion of the meat.’”

58. Kerényi, *Prometheus: Archetypal Image of Human Existence*, Apostolos Athanassakis elaborates on this point. Hermes, in his crime, is quintessentially appropriate in his actions toward the powers that be: 54.

59. “He performs the feat of stealing them, he kills them, thereby receiving their *mana* and becoming a θεός βουκολίης, and then he performs a sacrifice to the Olympians and sets up the *corpus delicti* as a σῆμα φωρής, a *monument* of stealing. He is a thief but a pious thief. Indeed, when he pleads his case before Zeus he takes care to tell him that he reverences Helios, obviously not unaware that Helios has a special connection with cows. His pastoral care and power over cows and other herds is solemnized by Apollon, who gives him a three-forked golden staff and who places cattle of all sorts under his care.” Apostolos Athanassakis, “From the Phallic Cairn to Shepherd God and Divine Herald,” 37.

60. *Iliad* 5 and 22.

61. Euripides *Hippolytus* 1437.

62. Shelmerdine, *The Homeric Hymns, Hymn to Hermes*. She points out that Hermes’s actions do not recapitulate the normal sacrificial practices known from the Homeric poems. No preliminary rituals such as the scattering of the barley or the cutting of the cattle’s hair occur, “as the poet seems more interested in describing the disposition of the cooked meat than any preliminary ritual activities. While there are clearly sacrificial elements in the present scene, then, the central focus remains the meal (δαίς).”

63. Athanassakis, *The Homeric Hymns*, 90.

64. Aristophanes *Birds* 514–519. Greek text: *Birds*, ed. Alan H. Sommerstein.

65. Aristophanes *Birds* 518–519:

ἴν', ὅταν θύων τις ἔπειτ' αὐτοῖς εἰς τὴν χεῖρ', ὡς νόμος ἐστίν,  
τὰ σπλάγχνα διδῶ, τοῦ Διὸς αὐτοὶ πρότεροι τὰ σπλάγχνα λάβωσιν.

Most scholars understand the νόμος described in *Birds* 518–519 as that of an oath sacrifice in which the human participants touch the σπλάγχνα (see Stengel, *Die griechischen Kultusaltertümer*, 136 ff.); this is on the comparison to very solemn oath ceremonies in which the human participants take the σπλάγχνα into their hands, but these are the hands of gods. Nan Dunbar argues instead that “placing a share of the σπλάγχνα on the hands or knees of a cult-statue seems implied in a series of inscriptions, probably all 4<sup>th</sup> c. B.C., regulating the priest’s share of the sacrificed animals on the island of Chios” (Dunbar, trans. and ed., Aristophanes *Birds*, 356 on *Birds* 518–519).

66. Aristophanes *Ecclesiazusae* 777–783, ed. R. G. Ussher.

οὐ γὰρ πάτριον τοῦτ' ἐστίν, ἀλλὰ λαμβάνειν  
ἡμᾶς μόνον δεῖ νῆ Δία· καὶ γὰρ οἱ θεοί.  
γνώσει δ' ἀπὸ τῶν χειρῶν γε τῶν ἀγαλμάτων  
ὅταν γὰρ εὐχόμεσθα διδόναι τ' ἀγαθά,  
ἔστηκεν ἐκτείνοντα τὴν χεῖρ' ὑπίαν,  
οὐχ ὡς τι δώσοντ' ἀλλ' ὅπως τι λήψεται.



67. *Semele*, Aeschylus II, *Fragments*, ed. Hugh Lloyd-Jones, 566–571; see also E. R. Dodds, *Euripides Bacchae*, xxviii ff.; and Stefan Radt, *Tragicorum Graecorum Fragmenta*, vol. 3.

68. Lloyd-Jones, introduction to the *Semele* in Aeschylus, II, 568.

69. Aeschylus *Semele* (fr.) 16–17.

70. Euripides *Bacchae* 45. Translation by William Arrowsmith, *Euripides V*.

71. Eur. *Bacchae* 47.

72. Eur. *Bacchae* 53–54. Greek text: Dodds, *Euripides Bacchae*.

73. Albert Henrichs writes, “Dionysos in disguise makes excellent theater because he is an unfailing source of dramatic irony . . . [which is] . . . in the eyes of the audience, a deadly weapon which disintegrates the king’s identity long before the physical *sparagmos* occurs off stage” (“Male Intruders among the Maenads: The So-Called Male Celebrant,” 86). In this essay, Henrichs considers the persistent modern myth of the “male celebrant” in the maenadic rites as portrayed by Euripides in the *Bacchae*. This myth was propagated by E. R. Dodds, based on variant readings of lines 115 and 140 (Dodds, in “Maenadism in The Bacchae,” and in his first Oxford edition of the *Bacchae* [1944]). Rationalism’s disciples, among them A. W. Verrall, Gilbert Norwood, and Gilbert Murray, refused at the beginning of this century to allow the Dionysos Βρόμιος of *Bacchae* 115 to be the god himself—for example, Norwood’s characterization of him as a deceit on the part of Euripides, “a man masquerading as a god masquerading as man” (G. Norwood, *The Riddle of the Bacchae: The Last Stage of Euripides’ Religious Views*, 80–125), and Murray’s gently conspiratorial and unfounded remarks: “A number of difficult passages in Euripides’ *Bacchae* and other Dionysiac literature find their explanations when we realize how the god is in part merely identified with the inspired chief dancer, in part he is the intangible projected incarnation of the emotion of the dance” (G. Murray, *Four Stages of Greek Religion*, 43. See Henrichs’s discussion of these in “Male Intruders,” 87 nn. 75 and 76, and ff., where he demonstrates that there is no solid textual or religious basis for assuming that the celebrant or “stranger” in the *Bacchae* is any other than the god Dionysos (as the character himself announces in no uncertain terms). The lengths to which classical scholars will go, including textual distortion or emendation, to avoid confronting the god as worshiper are extraordinary. We encountered this already in the *Peace* and will encounter it again in chapter 4 and in exegesis of talmudic and Islamic sacred texts. One indication of what must be at its root theological discomfort with ritualizing gods is the use by scholars of phrases like “difficult passages,” as Murray calls them.

74. Callimachus *Hymn to Demeter* 24. Greek text: Callimachus *Hymn to Demeter*, ed. N. Hopkinson.

75. Callimachus *Hymn to Demeter* 37.

76. Callimachus *Hymn to Demeter* 42–44:

... τίς μοι καλὰ δένδρα κόπτει;  
αὐτίκα Νικίππᾳ, τάν οἱ πόλις ἀράτειρα  
δαμοσίαν ἔστασαν, εἰσατο, γέντο δὲ χειρὶ  
στέμματα καὶ μάκωνα, κατωμαδίαν δ’ ἔχε κλᾶδα.

In his commentary, Hopkinson notes that “lack of delay is a mark of the divine and of reaction to it” (118); this is certainly born out by other ancient Greek traditions of epiphany, especially those of Dionysos.

77. Callimachus *Hymn to Demeter* 54–55.

78. Callimachus *Hymn to Demeter* 57.

79. See Robert, “Les inscriptions grecques de Bulgarie.”

80. No. 22, *ibid.*, 200 and n. 4. Robert believes that the list indicates the establish-

ment of a series of annually appointed priests of Dionysos, replacing the priesthood for life. There are inscriptional analogues for appointed priests from the Rhodian *poleis*.

81. At Kallatis, Apollo Agyeus and Agathos Daimon held the office of king (*Hellenica* 2.58–60); at Olbia, Zeus was archon; Parthenos was ruler at Chersonesos; and at Byzantium, Zeus Serapis, Dionysos, Demeter, Hera, Nike, Nemesis, and Tyche Poleos were all *hieromniamones*, several of these multiple times. See Robert, “Inscriptions grecques,” 212 nn. 4–6.

82. *Ibid.*, 202. “Le dieu a donc été—en une année sans doute difficile—son propre prêtre.” Eponymous priests were apparently not easy to come by; a decree of one Akornion (no. 20) about a century later stated that he would assume the vacant priesthood, “since the eponym of the city of Dionysopolis did not have a priest for many years” (see Robert, “Inscriptions grecques,” 202 n. 2).

83. *Ibid.*, 203. Robert cites examples in which the names of eponymous gods on inscriptional lists are taken as Hellenistic mortal names (“Priapus” in a Lampsacan decree, for example, by R. Herter, “Priapus,” in Pauly-Wissowa *RE*, s.v. “Priapus” [1954]); in the same decree mentioning Aphrodite Epiphanes, the goddess is construed as a mortal woman (Robert, “Inscriptions grecques,” 202 n. 2).

84. Ὠς φάτο, χήρατο δ' Ὑπνος, ἀμειβόμενος δὲ προσήδα:  
 “ἀγρει νῦν μοι ὁμοσσον ἀάατον Στυγὸς ὕδωρ,  
 χειρὶ δὲ τῇ ἑτέρῃ μὲν ἔλε χθόνα πουλυβότειραν,  
 τῇ δ' ἑτέρῃ ἄλλα μαρμαρέην, ἵνα νῶϊν ἅπαντες  
 μάρτυροι ὡς οἱ ἔνερθε θεοὶ Κρόνον ἀμφὶς ἔοντες,  
 ἧ μὲν ἐμοὶ δώσειν Χάριτων μίαν ὀπλοτεράων,  
 Παισιθέην, ἧς τ' αὐτὸς ἐέλδομαι ἤματα πάντα.”  
 Ὠς ἐφάτ' οὐδ' ἀπίθησε θεὰ λευκώλενος Ἥρη,  
 ὄμνυε δ' ὡς ἐκέλευε, θεοὺς δ' ὀνόμηνεν ἅπαντας  
 τοὺς ὑποταρταρίους, οἳ Τιτῆνες καλέονται.

*Iliad* 14.271–279, ed. D. B. Monro. Translation by Richmond Lattimore, *The Iliad of Homer*.

85. *Homeric Hymn to Pythian Apollo* 340.

86. *Homeric Hymn to Pythian Apollo* 334–339:

αὐτικ' ἔπειτ' ἠρᾶτο βοῶπις πότνια Ἥρη,  
 χειρὶ καταπρηνεὶ δ' ἔλασε χθόνα καὶ φάτο μῦθον·  
 “κέκλυτε νῦν μοι γαῖα καὶ οὐρανὸς εὐρύς ὑπερθεν,  
 Τιτῆνές τε θεοὶ τοὶ ὑπὸ χθονὶ ναιετάοντες  
 Τάρταρον ἀμφὶ μέγαν, τῶν ἔξ ἄνδρες τε θεοὶ τε·  
 αὐτοὶ νῦν μευ πάντες ἀκούσατε καὶ δότε παῖδα  
 νόσφι Διός, μηδέν τι Βίην ἐπιδευέα κείνου·  
 ἀλλ' ὃ γε φέρτερος ἔστω ὅσον Κρόνου εὐρύοπα Ζεὺς.”

Greek text: “The Homeric Hymn to Apollo,” in *The Homeric Hymns*, ed. T. W. Allen and E. E. Sikes. Here I use the English translation of Hugh G. Evelyn-White, ed. *Hesiod, the Homeric Hymns and Homericica*.

87. *Iliad* 15.37–38. Burkert suggests that the gods' oath derives from an ancient Near Eastern tripartite formula (examples of which we find in Hittite, Ugaritic, and Aramaic) invoking “the sun and sky, the earth with its rivers, and the underworld—in other words, the entire cosmos.” The gods' oath by the Styx alone, then, “is a result of the last part of the cosmic formula being mistakenly separated from the rest” (Burkert, *Greek Religion*, 251 and nn. 8 and 9).

88. Hesiod *Theogony* 389, 397.

89. Hesiod *Theogony* 805.

90. Nagy, *The Best of the Achaeans*, 189. See his discussion of the cultic and cultural implications of Demeter's oath by the Styx when she attempts to render Demophon immortal (*Hymn to Demeter* 259) and the legend of Thetis's abortive immersion of the infant Achilles in the river (Statius *Achilleid* 1.269, etc.) on 187–189.

91. Hesiod *Theogony* 793–795. I use here Evelyn-White's translation.

92. Hesiod *Theogony* 805–806.

93. Aristophanes *Birds* 1613–1614, ed. Sommerstein.

94. See Nicholas Purcell, "Strabo," in *The Oxford Classical Dictionary*, 1447.

95. Strabo *Geography* 14.1.22 (C 641). Greek text: *The Geography of Strabo*, ed. Horace Leonard Jones.

τοὺς δὲ μὴ ἐθελῆσαι, πολὺ μᾶλλον οὐκ ἂν ἐθελήσαντες ἐξ ἱεροσυλίας καὶ ἀποστερήσεως φιλοδοξεῖν ἐπιναίει τε τὸν εἰπόντα τῶν Ἐφεσίων πρὸς τὸν βασιλέα, ὡς οὐ πρέπει θεῶ θεοῖς ἀναθήματα κατασκευάζειν.

96. The activity in which Alexander, as a god, should not participate (ἀναθήματα κατασκευάζειν) has no technical sacrificial overtones in Greek but participates in the wider semantic field of votive offerings to which sacrifices surely belong. Ἀναθήματα, a noun formed from ἀνατίθημι, "to set up," once having the sense of "delight" or "ornament," is used almost exclusively from the time of Herodotus (1.14.92) to mean "things which are set up (i.e., votive offerings) in a temple." It is like the word ἄγαλμα, which in Homeric usage meant "treasure" or "adornment," but could also be used of sacrificial victims or offerings—anything in which one "delighted" or "gloried," from its root verb—but by classical times meant "statue." Κατασκευάζειν has the sense of "to furnish or equip" a house or edifice.

97. According to Jones, the Loeb editor, probably Deinocrates, a Macedonian architect (cf. Vitruvius 1.1.4) (Jones, ed., *The Geography of Strabo*, 227 n. 4). See also Plutarch *Life of Alexander*.

98. Strabo *Geography* 14.1.23 (C 641). The verb ὑποσχέσθαι (ὑπισχνέομαι) can be used in the sense of promising or vowing something to a god (in the dative), perhaps again suggesting Alexander's divine status (as in *IG II<sup>2</sup>* 1126, 11 [Delph. Amphict.]). From the Geometric period on, we find votives to a deity of a statue or likeness of himself (as, for example, in the Athenian and Lindian Acropolis terracottas of Athena or the early seventh-century bronze statue of Apollo dedicated to Apollo by Mantiklos at the Boston Museum of Fine Arts). However, the grandiose scheme of rendering the likeness out of Mount Athos befitted the larger-than-life self-conception of Alexander.

99. See Barrett, *Caligula: The Corruption of Power*; also Balsdon and Levick, "Gaius," in *The Oxford Classical Dictionary*, 619–620.

100. Dio Cassius, *Roman History*, 59.6. ed. Herbert B. Foster.

101. Price, *Rituals and Power*, 185 and pl. 3b.

102. *Ibid.*, and see also nn. 76 and 77.

#### 4. "DIVINE LIBATION": A CENTURY OF DEBATE

1. William Paden, *Religious Worlds*, 16.

2. Theophrastus *Περὶ εὐσεβείας*, fr. 12.42–43, in *Philosophia Antiqua* XI, ed. Walter Pötscher.

3. The cult of Dionysos, with its extreme fluidity of ritual boundaries, provided the lone exception to this construction. Its vivid artistic images show the deity of wine

dancing with his followers—as, for example, on the calyx-krater in Würzburg by Myson (Wagner Museum no. 2256; ARV<sup>2</sup> 239, 19); the krater by the Triptolemus Painter at the Louvre (no. G 250, ARV<sup>2</sup> 365, 58); and the Kleophrades Painter's amphora in Munich's Antikensammlungen (no. 8732, ARV<sup>2</sup> 182, 6).

4. In *Mythe et société en Grèce ancienne*, 104. For a comparable examination of these “levels” and their reflection in ancient Indian religion, see Brian K. Smith, “Gods and Men in Vedic Ritualism.”

5. Martin P. Nilsson (*The Dionysiac Mysteries of the Hellenistic and Roman Age*, 101–103) and Giorgios Bakalakis (*Ἀνασκαφή Στρώμης*, 64) best exemplify this kind of unease.

6. Eugene Lane, *Corpus Monumentorum Religionis Dei Menis*, III, 104. Italics Lane's. Lane does not use the standard spelling of the god's name, “Mên.” He adds in an addendum the comment, “[T]he standard work on the subject of gods sacrificing is that of Erika Simon. . . . She is concerned with the theme in fifth-century vase-painting and concludes that the gods are primarily propitiating other gods, and only secondarily setting a model for humans. The relevance of her conclusions (she explicitly rejects the evidence of Plutarch) for beliefs of the Roman period is subject to doubt” (Lane, *Corpus*, 125). Lane's scholarly skepticism toward “a religion of the gods” is common. Typical is Platnauer's commentary on lines 435–438 of the *Peace* noted in chapter 3 (“Hermes himself can scarcely pray. The lines are best given to the coryphaeus”). Equally typical of this school of thought are adverbs such as “scarcely,” “hardly,” “cannot possibly” (all attested in the secondary literature) and dismissive adjectives such as “unthinkable”—always a risky starting premise in the interpretation of religions.

7. Paden, *Religious Worlds*, 16. This is especially true of the most recent commentary on these vases, namely, that of Walter Burkert, *Structure and History*, 41 and nn. 16 and 17, and K. W. Arafat, *Classical Zeus*, 90.

8. In my experience, the “obviousness” of this initial explanation has been borne out by its frequency in the minds of those presented with the images for the first time, both scholars and nonscholars. “They're just portrayed as acting like people” is often the first reaction, followed immediately by, “But to whom are they sacrificing? Zeus?” When told that Zeus himself is depicted on many vases pouring out wine onto an altar, most find that the mystery begins to deepen. These very questions have also been my starting point in the search to discover an explanation—or, more accurately, an understanding—that fits the iconographic evidence. I believe that what is needed is a broad phenomenological theory of this aspect of religious history that does not demand that we do violence to what we already know about ancient Greek religion, but instead will have room, like a spacious ceremonial tent, for the infinite permutations.

9. Furtwängler, “Zwei Thongefässe aus Athen.” Side A has the partial depictions of three draped figures. This particular kylix is now Athens National Museum no. 2187, and is briefly discussed by Joan R. Mertens in her dissertation *Attic White-Ground: Its Development on Shapes Other than Lekythoi*, 182, no. IV. B. 73, pl. XXXIV, 2.

10. Although consideration of the vase-paintings culminated in the work of Eckstein-Wolf and Simon in the early fifties, it was not until reviews of their work appeared in journals years later that other European as well as American scholars became publicly interested in the divine libation bearers. However, Germans such as Himmelman-Wildschütz, Fuchs, and Neumann continued to make the most important contributions to the literature. This dominance may have been due to the control of archaeological research in Greece by German scholars in the late nineteenth century, especially those who were deeply interested in the iconography and interpretation of vase-painting.

We might also wonder, however, whether the German cultural and religious milieu of the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries produced minds more oriented toward confronting the problem itself, which is paradoxical and slippery. It requires one to go beyond questions of cult practice and to traffic heavily in the question of relations between humanity and divinity in ancient Greece, as did Goethe, Nietzsche, and later, Freud, Rilke, and the Swiss psychiatrist Carl Jung. Perhaps it is no accident that Wagner's twenty-year struggle to produce *The Ring Cycle* had only recently ended when Furtwängler wrote of the "Vermenschlichung der Götter" that he perceived in his Athenian vase in 1881. Ending with the "Twilight of the Gods" (*Die Götterdämmerung*), this Teutonic saga chronicled the dissolution of an agonizingly permeable membrane between the worlds of the dying and undying, in which the trials of the human spirit mightily affect the divine ones who supposedly rule over them.

11. "Our klylix, on the contrary, where the mother is enthroned and is served by the daughter, belongs to a class in which the libation is typically shown as a mark of honor by the younger [gods] for the older [ones]; here the meaning of the [act of] pouring as service is naturally the most important thing, and the observer who inspects [this scene] should scarcely think about the ensuing religious act, [namely,] libations connected with prayer" (Furtwängler, "Zwei Thongefässe," 116–117, my translation).

12. *Ibid.*, 117.

13. *Ibid.*: "eine letzte Konsequenz der Vermenschlichung der Götter, die nun selbst als fromme und in gewissem Sinne bedingte Wesen erscheinen."

14. Karouzos, "Ein lakonischer Apollon"; Fuchs, "Ein attisches Weihrelief im Vatikan"; Luschey, *RE VII Suppl.*, "φιάλη," col. 1030.

15. Furtwängler, "Zwei Thongefässe," 117.

16. *Ibid.*, 118: "man jedoch auch sie selbst spendend sich denken mochte."

17. In "Ein Attisches Weihrelief im Vatikan," 176 n. 46. Werner Fuchs observes that Furtwängler later qualified his original view of the sacrificing gods as "the final result of a process of humanization" in Greek religion. Lacking corroboration in the seventeenth-century drawings of Carrey or in any other descriptive account, Furtwängler nevertheless reconstructed a phiale in the hand of Athena newly sprung from the head of Zeus in the sculptural group of the Parthenon's East pediment. Less important for our purposes is the accuracy of this reconstruction than Furtwängler's interpretation of it. For him, it signified that "the newborn goddess will immediately become part of her sacrificial cult; 'der Neugeborenen wird sofort Opferkult zu teil'" (*Intermezzi*, 27). Fuchs believes that this remark betrays Furtwängler's view of *statues* of the gods with phialai as "Opferempfänger," that is, as the recipients of offerings. One would be very hard-pressed to defend the tiny, vital Athena (even though we have it only on a secondhand basis) of the East pediment as a cult statue, however, or even as the depiction of one. This uncertainty leads to one of the main problems in the history of interpretation of the phiale-bearing gods, namely, the ill-advised attempt to distinguish between cult statues and "living gods" in art, and on the basis of that arbitrary distinction, to assign different meanings to the held phiale (see chapter 5 for more on this question).

18. Cf. Furtwängler's remarks cited on p. X, n. 15 of this chapter. I do not impute any psychiatric notions of "transference" to his use of the verb *übertragen*.

19. Hazel Barnes observes, "[T]he gods lived the life of mortals in two distinct ways. Totally anthropomorphic, they not only possessed human shape, somewhat glorified to be sure, but behaved in accordance with human needs and emotions. The compulsion to imagine realistically a corporeal body for an immortal being led to an occasional awkward naïveté, apparently even to the vague notion of a divine digestive system. . . . They lived the life of humans in another fashion; much as they might scorn the 'creatures of

day,' the gods were irresistibly drawn to meddle in mortal affairs, sometimes directly, but more often by pulling strings behind the scene" (*The Meddling Gods*, 97).

Barnes's diagnosis of "compulsion" and "awkward naïveté" to describe what amounts to the incarnation of the gods in the Greek religious imagination is typical of a school of discomfort whose first champion was Xenophanes, and whose most eloquent champion was Maimonides. It may be from this heritage that judgments such as Barnes's originate; however much it claims to appreciate, it is a school that condescends to the Greek pantheon, seeing it as an inferior form of spirituality, much as Protestant theology repudiates the material representation of the divine valued in Roman Catholic and Eastern Orthodox traditions. An outstanding exception was the German scholar Walter F. Otto, whose *Die Götter Griechenlands* (1934) passionately defended the gods as shining in a pure, corporeal, and emphatically natural reality as opposed to the interiorized, mystical, or redemptive spirituality valued (and often retroactively projected onto the Greek gods) by Judaism, Christianity, and, to a certain extent, psychiatry.

20. Nietzsche, *The Birth of Tragedy*, trans. Francis Golffing, 30. Thinkers such as Goethe and much later, Walter F. Otto, found in Greek mythology an elevation of the human condition, rather than the other way around. Goethe wrote, "The meaning and the struggle of the Greeks is to divinize humanity, not to humanize divinity. This is not anthropomorphism, but theomorphism!" ("Der Sinn und das Bestreben der Griechen ist, den Menschen zu vergöttern, nicht die Gottheit zu vermenscheln. Hier ist ein Theomorphism, kein Anthropomorphism!") From "Aufsatz über Myrons Kuh" (1818), cited by Otto, *Theophania: Der Geist der altgriechischen Religion*, 55–56.

21. Calvert Watkins and Emily Vermeule have been pioneers in suggesting that certain formulaic phrases and words used in the Homeric epics date back well before the eighth century, when they were "composed" (or "stitched together," to follow the proposed aetiology of Homer's name) by one or more rhapsodic minds, and perhaps even earlier than the canonical date of the Trojan War, 1260 B.C.E. See Emily D. T. Vermeule, "Priam's Castle Blazing," 85 and n. 28, where she elaborates on the dating of possibly "pre-Mycenean" hexameter verses in Homer. Watkins's main interest has been in remnants of an ancient epic from Asia Minor in a language known as Luvian, which might have produced a Trojan *Iliad*. Many earlier elements appear in the poems for which there has been recent archaeological corroboration with the discovery of weapons and armor dating no later than the fifteenth and fourteenth centuries B.C.E. This include artifacts such as several boar's-tusk helmets and a Mycenaean suit of armor from the "Armor Tomb" at Dendra, now in Nauplion; see Hector W. Catling, "Panzer," E 96–E 102 and pl. E VII.

22. Schefold, "Statuen auf Vasenbildern."

23. *Ibid.*, 58.

24. Warsaw Museum no. 142460, ex. Czartoryski inv. 160. ARV<sup>2</sup> 62, 639.

25. Schefold, "Statuen," 59. The idea that a profound silence attends the divine world has a long history, both ancient and modern; Karl Schneider expresses it gracefully: "Greek religion is therefore the devout glorification of Nature; holy and godly are Nature and those things in Nature's sway. . . . In opposition to [the human realm], the divine is elevated over everything earthly, and beyond fate, it is peaceful in an eternal silence; 'Still and effortless is that which is truly godly'" (Schneider, *Die schweigenden Götter*, Hildesheim: 12).

26. Arafat, *Classical Zeus*; see chapter 4, "Libations," 89–103.

27. In both cases, another god is usually present; he cites only the lekythos by the Ikaros Painter in which Zeus is alone (ARV<sup>2</sup>, 697, 13; Arafat's no. 4.45). As we will see, Erika Simon makes a case for the scenes involving Zeus and Hera pouring libations as

representing the sacred oath poured at their marriage, a *hieros gamos*. Although acknowledging Simon's work as "the most detailed treatment" of the theme, Arafat notes that she does not discuss the number of scenes in which Zeus makes a libation without Hera (Arafat, *Classical Zeus*, 89). He observes that "there are scenes of either god making libations without the other, although those involving Zeus alone are greater in number." Arafat rightly points out that this is more than just a deliberate "narrow focus" on Simon's part; it actually distorts our impression of the role of Zeus in these vase-paintings. "Zeus without Hera" is not just a truncated version of the alleged Zeus-with-Hera *hieros gamos* (Arafat, *Classical Zeus*, 90). Citing Simon's opinion on the sculptural representations of Hera from Selinus and the Parthenon frieze, and on the Athenian festival of the Theogamia, Arafat notes that of the vases, only one (no. C-13, Arafat no. 4.26, pl. 29a), a cup by the Codrus Painter in London, "shows Hera lifting a veil in the manner shown on those sculptures, and without an explicit reference such as this or an Eros (who would perhaps lower the tone), it is difficult to see these vases as alluding to the *hieros gamos*" (Arafat, *Classical Zeus*, 90).

28. Arafat, *Classical Zeus*, 90.

29. *Ibid.*

30. Luschej, "φιάλη," in *RE Suppl.* VII, 1026–1030. cols. 1026–1030; Luschej, *Die Phiale*.

31. Luschej, "φιάλη," in *RE VII Suppl.*, col. 1030. Since the possession of the phiale often characterizes the gods as gods, Luschej contributes the important observation that the vessel can legitimately be considered "the bowl of the gods." Phialai crop up in depictions of divine meals; outside of the emblematic kantharos of Dionysos, gods do not hold other types of vessels, such as footed cups (*ibid.*). There are exceptions to this, however, such as the footed Kylix held by Zeus in his libation scene with Ganymede on a vase at the Getty Museum in Malibu (see no. 41).

32. ἔνθα δὲ οἱ δέπας ἔσκε τετυγμένον, οὐδέ τις ἄλλος  
οὔτ' ἀνδρῶν πίνεσκε ἀπ' αὐτοῦ αἶθοπα οἶνον,  
οὔτε τέφ σπένδεσκε θεῶν, ὅτι μὴ Διὶ πατρί.

Within this [the chest given to him by Thetis] was a wrought goblet, nor did any other mortal drink (from it), nor did Achilles pour out the gleaming wine from it to any other god, save Zeus father.

33. Luschej, "φιάλη," in *RE Suppl.* VII, col. 1030.

34. Boston MFA 00.334, from Tarquinia, ARV<sup>2</sup> 126, 27. Angelika Schöne identifies this as the earliest such Dionysiac scene known in vase-painting in *Der Thiasos*, 162.

35. Luschej, "φιάλη," in *RE VII Suppl.*, col. 1030.

36. Eckstein-Wolf, "Zur Darstellung spendender Götter." The two projects were independently conceived, and crossed each other in publication. As *Opfernde Götter* went to press, Simon was able to read and to acknowledge summarily the contribution made by Eckstein-Wolf.

37. See Hans Möbius's summary of Eckstein-Wolf's article in his review of Simon in *Gnomon*, 61, in which he summarizes her position: "The phiale would be a visual expression of the relationship between the gods—raised to classical loftiness—and humanity, and through it a new dimension would be added to the various kinds of images."

38. Eckstein-Wolf, "Zur Darstellung," 53: "Aber dann entsteht gleich die Frage: wem spendet der Gott?"

39. *Ibid.*, 53.

40. *Ibid.*, 49.

41. *Ibid.*, 64.
42. *Ibid.*
43. *Ibid.*, 68.
44. F. Hölderlin, “Patmos” (1803), first stanza. Cited and translated by Albert Henrichs in “Myth Visualized: Dionysos and His Circle in Sixth-Century Attic Vase-Painting,” 111 and n. 99.
45. Quote from Henrichs, “Myth Visualized,” 68.
46. Neumann, *Gesten und Gebärden in der griechischen Kunst*.
47. *Ibid.*, 82.
48. Cup, Berlin F 2278; no. 20.
49. For example, nos. 54 and 55.
50. ARV<sup>2</sup> 690, 8; Naples Mus. Naz. Stg. 135.
51. Neumann, *Gesten und Gebärden*, 82–83.
52. *Ibid.*, 83.
53. Bakalakis, *Ἀνασκαφή Στρύμης*, 65.
54. Neumann, *Gesten und Gebärden*, 84.
55. Personal conversation with Walter Burkert at “Symposium on Symposia” at McMaster University, Hamilton, Ontario, September 23, 1988.
56. Burkert, *Greek Religion*, 71.
57. *Ibid.*, 72.
58. *Ibid.*, 71.
59. We might also recall the funny scene at the end of Aristophanes’s *Birds*; the new realm of the birds is blocking the sacrificial traffic, and the gods are near starvation. In a Hittite analogue, Ea wails to the diorite man who threatens to annihilate humanity, “[If] ye destroy mankind, no one will [care] for the gods anymore, no one will sacrifice to them loaves and libations anymore” (*Keilschrifturkunden aus Boghazköi* 33, 100).
60. Burkert, *Structure and History*, 41.
61. Erika Simon, *Opfernde Götter*. The book concentrates on early fifth-century vase-painting, cataloguing and analyzing types of sacrificing Athena, Apollo, Dionysos, Zeus and Hera, and the Eleusinian goddesses.
62. Schefold, “Statuen”; A. Furtwängler, “Intermezzi.”
63. Simon, *Opfernde Götter*, 8.
64. Simon holds to this belief to this day, despite a group of scholars, notably, Nikolaus Himmelmann-Wildschütz, who have revived the earlier connection (personal conversation with Erika Simon at “Symposium on Symposia” at McMaster University, Hamilton, Ontario, September 23, 1988), and Simon’s substantive entry, “Libation,” in the recent *Thesaurus Cultus et Rituum Antiquorum (ThesCRA)* I. 237–248.
65. Simon, *Opfernde Götter*, 7: “[I]m Sinne des Opferempfangs darf die Schale in der Hand von Kultbildern gedeutet werden.”
66. *Ibid.*
67. *Ibid.*, 8: “On the contrary, this work intends to show [the opposite]: The gods are actually sacrificing” (Diese Arbeit möchte dagegen zeigen: Die Götter opfern wirklich).
68. Krater by the Niobid Painter, Bologna Museum no. 269.
69. At the McMaster conference in September 1988, I reviewed with Professor Simon her perspectives on this problem after thirty-five years since her work on the subject. Numerous examples of *opfernde Götter* have come to light since her publication, and she seemed to welcome a renewed consideration of the evidence. We talked about the possible meaning of the overwhelming predominance of libation versus



animal sacrifice in the iconographic evidence as well as possible chthonian implications and archaic connections with ancestor worship. I also mentioned to her the resonances I had observed between the Greek sacrificing gods and the same theme in Vedic ritual literature, which interested her greatly. She mentioned her most recent thinking on the role of libations as ritual *spondai*, or talismans of treaties. This may be especially important in the case of the libation-pouring Eleusinian goddesses and Triptolemus, who were mythologically associated with travel and the creation of treaties worldwide. Erika Simon discusses the proposed concept of “divine reflexivity,” set forth in an earlier form of this book, in her “Libation/Libation/Libation/Libazione” in *TheSCRA* 242–3.

70. In this she differs strongly from her contemporary Himmelmann, who has suggested that the cult statues, reliefs, and vase-paintings be considered as a whole. See Himmelmann-Wildschütz, *Zur Eigenart des klassischen Götterbildes*.

71. However, she disassociates the vases, which she regards as almost decorative, from the rest of the iconographic evidence, which occurs, as we have said, over a much broader span in time, and is clearly votive.

72. See especially Nagy, *Pindar's Homer*.

73. Sappho, frs. 135 and 136D.

74. Simon, *Opfernde Götter*, 7.

75. Simon also cites Hesiod's *Theogony* 383–403: “Styx took the side of Zeus in the war with the Titans; as a reward for this action, Zeus made her the oath of the gods, and had her children Zelos, Nike, Kratos, and Bia dwell with him forever.”

76. John Boardman, review of Erika Simon, *Opfernde Götter*, 183.

77. Simon, *Opfernde Götter*, 9–12.

78. *Ibid.*, 13–38. At the time of the Severe Style, Apollo appears in black figure vases with Leto and Artemis playing the lyre between his mother and sister; the theme disappeared soon after 500 B.C.E.

79. After the middle of the fifth century, Simon asserts, Apollo is usually shown sitting, with the other details disappearing; but this is not true of later vases such as nos. 189 and 193.

80. *Opfernde Götter*, 51.

81. *Ibid.*, 55. She further comments, “The tearing apart of the sacrificial beast and the streaming out of the wine are cultic activities that are complete in and of themselves and that have made the transition from myth into ritual without any substantive change.” This, in her view, explains the lack of an altar in these scenes and the absence of “the social dimension of ritual.”

82. *Ibid.*, 55: “The Lord of Delphi has received the god of the maenads as a brother. In ceremonial silence they unite in the same holy action, which springs out of the same depth of being.”

83. *Ibid.*, 54.

84. *Ibid.*: “Ebensowenig gibt es außerhalb des dionysischen Bereiches, der etwas Totales, in sich Abgeschlossenes darstellt, einen Empfänger der Spende, die der Gott in trunkenem Tanz darbringt.”

85. *Ibid.*, 58–64.

86. *Ibid.*, 67–78.

87. As H. S. Versnel explains it, “fundamentally there are three ways to explain conspicuous similarities between myth and ritual: 1) the myth is an (aetiological) reflection of actual ritual; 2) the ritual imitates mythical processes; 3) both are parallel but more or less independent symbolic processes for dealing with the same type of situation in the same affective mode”; *Ter Unus: Isis Dionysos Hermes*, 136. Versnel points

out that the first has been traditionally expounded; the second has been put forth only rarely, but trenchantly, as in Albert Henrichs's "Greek Maenadism from Olympias to Messalina," *Harvard Studies in Classical Philology* 82 (1978): 144: "The Greeks understood maenadism as a re-enactment of myth and thus basically mimetic, or commemorative." The third explanation is exclusively that of Walter F. Otto; according to Versnel, "[F]or him, myth and ritual are both expressions of the experience of the god's existence, one in words and the other in action, both being essentially responses to the primordial existence of the god: 'Immer steht am Anfang der Gott'" (Versnel, *Ter Unis*, 137). What do we have in Simon? The basic belief that art offers images of ritual taking place in or attributable to mythical episodes.

88. Veyne, *Did the Greeks Believe in Their Myths?*, 17.

89. John Boardman in *Journal of Hellenic Studies*, Marjorie Milne in *American Journal of Archaeology*, Hans Möbius in *Gnomon*, and Charles Picard in *Révue Archéologique*.

90. On the question of whether or not libation should be considered a type of sacrifice, see chapter 1.

91. Although often cited in articles on the problem, the Freiburg dissertation of Brigitte Eckstein-Wolf (discussed earlier) that appeared almost simultaneously in article form in *Mitteilungen des Deutschen Archäologischen Instituts* has never received as much attention as Simon's published Heidelberg thesis. It is hard to determine why; but it may be because Eckstein-Wolf does not distinguish among the phiale scenes as each having its own separate meaning; nor, more importantly, does she assert that the gods are "really offering libations," as does Simon. In fact, she emphatically rejects that explanation, which she implies is nonscientific and "mystical," but which alone among the theories advanced has shown itself to be the most provocative. Scholars may cite Eckstein-Wolf; but they are still debating Simon: cf. John Gibert's recent "Apollo's Sacrifice: The Limits of a Metaphor in Greek Tragedy." In this essay, as the title implies, Gibert explores the "limits of the metaphor" of Apollo sacrificing, in the mouth of Electra in Euripides's *Orestes* 191–193: "Sacrificial victims Phoebus made of us (ἔξέθυσ' ὁ Φοῖβος ἡμᾶς), by assigning that piteous murder of father's murderer, mother!" Writes Gibert: "Commentators have noticed the extraordinary dictation: the god is made the agent of a human sacrifice, and the victims are still alive" (158). However, Gibert's investigation into ancient Greek religious thought as expressed in tragedy and the vase-paintings we consider here convinces him that the literary metaphor was not intended literally, in the section entitled "Gods Don't Sacrifice" (172–181).

92. Boardman, Review of *Opfernde Götter*, 182–83.

93. *Ibid.*, 183.

94. *Ibid.*

95. *Ibid.*

96. Marjorie A. Milne, review of Erika Simon, *Opfernde Götter*.

97. For example, "This is a book that must be read by everyone interested in Attic vase-painting and Greek mythology"; *ibid.*, 250.

98. *Ibid.* ARV<sup>2</sup> 254, 24.

99. Roulez, *Choix de vases*, 2 ff.

100. Milne, review of *Opfernde Götter*, 250. For example, in the prayer of Athena to Poseidon in *Odyssey* 3.55, cited by Simon, Milne points out that Athena knows that Poseidon cannot hear her; he is still in the land of the Ethiopians. Since Athena, in her guise as Mentor, is concerned with Nestor, his sons, and the Pylians, the phrase καὶ αὐτῇ πάντα τελεύτα seems to indicate that the god's absence does not deprive the community of a proper response.

101. Ibid. Milne believes that Simon makes far too much of the mention, such as in Pindar's *Tenth Paean* 4, of the (underworld river) Styx. She asserts that the oaths of the gods which are sworn by the Styx "do not necessarily involve propitiation of or *rapprochement* with Kronos and the Titans." Hera's oath in *Iliad* 14.271–279 is the only instance in Homer where a god calls Kronos and the Titans to witness. It is echoed in Hera's prayer to the Titans in the *Hymn to Apollo* 335 ff. Milne believes that it was exceptional. She points out that Pindar in the *Fourth Pythian Ode* 291 relates how Zeus released the Titans from Tartaros and settled Kronos in the Isles of the Blessed. Simon thinks this was original with Pindar, but Milne suggests that it might be earlier. The ancient Greeks believed that Kronos was king of the Isles of the Blessed, which developed from his role as ruler of the gods during the golden age. There would thus be no mythologically based need for détente.

102. Ibid., 250–251. This isolation of Aeschylus from any prior tradition of conflict between the older, chthonian powers and the new Olympian order is a minimalist view. It can surely be challenged; the problem is very similar in certain respects to the question of the extent to which Euripides's *Bacchae* reflected actual Dionysiac tradition or cult, and how much originated with him. Milne overlooks the real problem with Simon's interpretation of lines 1006–1009 of the *Eumenides*, in which Athena speaks of τῶν σφαγιῶν (1006) that will accompany the escorting of the chorus of Eumenides to their new underground home as benefactors of Athens. But these are not libations; they are holocausts; nor are they to be performed by Athena—she is referring to the sacrifices that will be made by the citizens of Athens.

103. M. P. Nilsson's first remarks were made in "New Evidence for the Dionysiac Mysteries." He later repeated his refutation of Simon's theory in *Dionysiac Mysteries*, 101–103.

104. Skepticism along similar lines appears in remarks by the archaeologist Christos Karouzos in 1957 in a short piece on a late archaic bronze Laconian Apollo in the Athens National Museum ("Ein lakonischer Apollon"). The youthful god strides forward, a figure of vibrant and intentional movement, on his (left) foot. The gestures of both hands are subject to interpretation, as all attributes are lost. The left hand is bent at the elbow, with clenched fist and two extended middle fingers. According to Karouzos, its function is clear: The hole in the middle of the clenched fist held a bow, and the fingers, two arrows. "The gesture of the right hand is harder to understand." It is raised at chest level, palm facing outward, fingers pointing upward with the tips bent slightly back toward the nipples. David Gordon Mitten suggests that the fingers of the right hand may have been bent backward at some point in the statue's history after its creation. According to Karouzos, an unbiased examination gives the impression of a gesture of prayer. His discussion includes an awareness of the interpretations, as well as the recently preceding work of Eckstein-Wolf and Simon. He writes, "But what is a praying Apollo supposed to mean? One may not appeal, without further ado, to the appearance of a sacrificing Apollo as a parallel representation, especially [when] one has only a short while ago abandoned the previous explanation deriving from the 'humanization of the gods,' and tried to interpret the representations of sacrificing gods as mythologically meaningful scenes. To trouble mythology in order to explain the sculptural representation of a supposedly 'praying Apollo,' would certainly be rash" (Karouzos, "Ein lakonischer Apollon," 35).

105. Ibid.

106. Ibid.

107. Ibid., 34–35. A form of this designation, relying on the verb *spenden* to describe these scenes and avoiding the term *opfern*, is used by Eckstein-Wolf and Metzger. Neither of these scholars believes in a divine recipient of divine libation.

108. Ibid., 36; see *Arch. Jahrb.*, xl, 1925, 211, fig. 1.

109. See Brunn-Bruckmann, *Denkmäler*, pl. 621.

110. Nilsson, *Dionysiac Mysteries*, 102.

111. Ibid. Nilsson cites V. Ehrenberg, *Die Rechtsidee im frühen Griechentum*, 1921; pl. to 32, and C. Watzinger, *Griech. Vasen in Tübingen*, 1924, plate 40. See Nilsson, *Geschichte der griechischen Religion*, 1:71 n. 1; 2nd ed., 80 n. 6.

112. Ibid., Nilsson, *Dionysiac Mysteries*, 102-103.

113. Ibid., 103.

114. Ibid., 103 n. 11.

115. As we will see in chapter 5, the starting interpretive premise may be the problem.

116. Nilsson, *Dionysiac Mysteries*, 103 n. 11.

117. Nilsson, "New Evidence for the Dionysiac Mysteries," 37. Also repeated word for word in *Dionysiac Mysteries*, 103.

118. This really constitutes a version of the "projection" school of thought: not that gods are imagined to be lowered to the human level but that human activity is projected onto them. One could argue that the same effect is achieved in each of the two explanations, but that the influence is conceived of as flowing in diametrically opposite directions.

119. Nilsson, *Dionysiac Mysteries*, 103.

120. The hypothesis that the sacrificing gods are not gods at all but people dressed like them in a priestly role would be reasonable except for the fact that they are almost always identifiable by their attributes, and are sometimes even named by the artist with inscriptions (as on the vase in Boston): Zeus, Hera, Athena, Leto, and so on.

121. On this fundamental but often dishonored precept, Richard M. Carp has written of his decade of experience in teaching the iconography of religion, "Students may find the encounter with other worlds of meaning, expressed in unfamiliar media, to be unsettling. When they realize that the facts about the construction of experience that apply to other people apply to themselves, they may be disturbed. When they understand that every sort of knowledge is a kind of map, and that no map is adequate to the territory, they may be troubled. These insights make us aware of the delicate, ambiguous character of human existence. It is these delicate, ambiguous, troubling, disturbing and unsettling questions that I have come to love about the academic study of religion." In "Better Questions: 'Introduction to the History of Religion and Art,'" 299.

122. Möbius, review of *Opfernde Götter*, 61.

123. Ibid., 62.

124. Ibid.

125. Ibid. Möbius notes that the warrior on the Psiak amphora in Madrid seems to be Ares.

126. Ibid. See discussion in chapter 3.

127. Ibid.

128. Ibid.

129. Ibid., 63.

130. Ibid.

131. Charles Picard, Review of *Opfernde Götter*. It must be said that much of Picard's review is not only derivative from previous scholarship, particularly Boardman's and Milne's, but seems to repeat entire sections of these two reviews wholesale.

132. Ibid., 115: "L'auteur . . . ne pouvait pretendre nous offrir une solution partout valable."

133. Ibid. He seconds Nilsson's bid to retitle the book *Spendende Götter in der attischen Vasenmalerei*, but circumscribes it further: *des V<sup>en</sup> Jahr* [sic: *des 5. Jhs.*].

134. Ibid. "Est-ce qu'un dieu grec pouvait faire un sacrifice à un autre dieu?"

135. Ibid. "La libation de la phiale tendue n'est destinée qu'au vide."

136. Ibid., 116. He therefore disagrees with Lushey, stating that one cannot conveniently point to the canonical function of all cult statues as simply receiving offerings in bowls. In each case discussed by Simon, there is a specialized adaptation of the theme.

137. Picard accepts Simon's explanation for the earlier groups of libating Apollo with Leto and Artemis as derivative from a monumental group with Apollo as citharode. The representations of the second half of the century, therefore, with Apollo often alone and seated as he pours, are thus allegedly based on the Septerion ritual, and are to be iconographically distinguished from the original theme.

138. Ibid. "The ritual vase of the god, inexhaustible, has a special character: Its capacity, its efficacy as an inexhaustible source, renders useless in the majority of cases the use of the *oinochos*, handled elsewhere [i.e., in scenes of other gods pouring] by the supernumerary of the divine spirit."

139. Ibid., 117. Here, Picard is mistaken; it is the libation offered by a departing warrior or householder that the Triptolemus scenes most resemble.

140. Ibid., 118 n. 2.

141. Ibid. Picard's final verdict: "What we have is the difference between two temperaments and two schools."

142. Ibid.

143. Ibid., 118. Like some other reviewers, he complains that the number of plates (four) is insufficient for a work of this scope.

144. Walter Otto, *Die Götter Griechenlands*, translated by Moses Hadas as *The Homeric Gods*.

145. Otto, *The Homeric Gods*, 3.

146. Ibid. Otto also condemned depth psychology, with its theory of the gods as psychological archetypes, for the same crime of interiorization. Greek gods belonged, he believed, to the external, ideal world of nature.

147. Ibid. Otto continues, "ancient Greek religion comprehended things of this world with a powerful sense of reality, and recognized in them the marvelous delineations of the divine."

148. Ibid.

149. Otto, *Theophania*, 82. Otto expanded on his printed opinions in a private conversation reported by Werner Fuchs (see below, n. 159).

150. See Otto, *The Homeric Gods*, 102.

151. Fuchs, "Ein attisches Weihrelief im Vatikan."

152. Catalogue no. 213; Vatican Museum no. 799, Sala degli Originali Greci. Fuchs, "Ein attisches Weihrelief im Vatikan," pls. 74; 76, 2.

153. He cites R. Kekulé (1867); Beyen-Volgraff (1947); Arias (1949).

154. Catalogue no. 216; Corfu Museum no. 83. Fuchs, "Ein attisches Weihrelief im Vatikan," pl. 76, 1. Hygieia pours from her oinochoe into the phiale that Asklepios holds over the altar.

155. Fragment with Asklepeios, Hygieia, and worshipers; Hygieia holds the oinochoe, Asklepios, a damaged object presumed by Fuchs to be a phiale (Ulrich Hausmann, *Kunst und Heilium* [1948], 77, 97 ff.; Kat. no. 3, Abb. 13.).

156. Among them a relief from Chios, *Arch Eph.* (1898) pl. 14, 2, and Athens Nat.

Mus. no. 1388, which lack references to libation, but in which Hygieia is shown with Asklepios as she lifts her veil in a manner very similar to Vatican no. 799.

157. “. . . es gibt keine Kult- und Opferhandlung ohne Mythos” (Fuchs, “Ein attisches Weihrelief im Vatikan,” 178). Note the absolute contradiction by later positions such as Paul Veyne’s.

158. *Ibid.*, 179. Italics added.

159. *Ibid.* “Otto fragte zurück, wohin denn die Spende ginge. ‘Auf die Erde,’ antwortete ich. ‘Sehen Sie, ihr, der Mutter Erde, spenden die Götter, wenn sie spenden.’ ‘Um sich des gemeinsamen Ursprungs mit den Menschen zu erinnern?’ fragte ich. Der verehrungswürdige Mann sagte nach langer Pause: ‘Vielleicht. Ja. So mag es sein.’”

160. *Ibid.*, 179 n. 59. “Even the libation which is poured on the altar flows ultimately onto the earth. On the other hand, it is quite possible that the libations of the gods poured onto the altar could be intended for Ouranos.” But what of all the arguments for Gaia as an appropriate recipient? At this point, swamped with apparently interchangeable possibilities and unfettered by the facts, Fuchs seems to have lost control.

161. *Ibid.*, 181.

162. Conversation with Erika Simon at “Symposium on Symposia,” McMaster University, September 23, 1988. Himmelmann-Wildschütz, *Zur Eigenart*. He has for many years referred to himself simply as Himmelmann.

163. Himmelmann, *Zur Eigenart*, 31: “The question of the physiognomical portrait of the divine in classical times should not be separated from the question of the so-called ‘image of being,’ especially with respect to the most significant religious phenomenon of all of classical art, the libating gods.” What Himmelmann calls “image of being” (Daseinsbild) was a kind of archetype, a “portrayal of existence” which could be expressed either through cult statue or vase-painting.

164. *Ibid.*, 23 n. 54. “The more the manifest gods live their own lives, experience themselves, the more they isolate themselves, remove themselves from the sphere of earthly reality, and become the revelation, toward which the world, of the gods as of humans, can only react by observing.”

165. *Ibid.* In this he refutes the assertions of Rodenwaldt, who in *θεοὶ ῥεῖα ζῶοντες*, 5, asserts that gestures such as the lowering of the head and gesture of the right hand of the Ludovisi Hermes were intended to be gestures directed toward the viewer.

166. Himmelmann, *Zur Eigenart*, 24–25. As proof of this consensus, he cites Luschej, “φιάλη,” col. 1030; Simon, *Opfernde Götter*, 7 and 31; and Eckstein-Wolf, “Zur Darstellung,” 64 and 67 n. 56.

167. Himmelmann, *Zur Eigenart*, 25.

168. *Ibid.*, 23 n. 52.

169. *Ibid.*, 25 n. 58. Himmelmann cites Eckstein-Wolf, “Zur Darstellung,” 64, who writes, “with phiale and libation, the human world penetrates the divine; in the picture of the libating gods both spheres fuse in logically inseparable visionary unity.” However, he points out that Eckstein-Wolf’s use of white-ground lekythoi as an example of the fusion of this world and the world beyond fails to hold water, insofar as during the earliest period when sacrificing gods were depicted such lekythoi had not yet begun to transfer their living scenes to an otherworldly atmosphere by including graves, death escorts, and symbols. Cf. Eckstein-Wolf, “Zur Darstellung,” 40, 55, and 67.

170. The one exception is the repeated scene of Athena with Herakles. Himmelmann seems to call for the pictures to be understood in the sense of Goethe's "theomorphism" (see Webster, *Der Niobidenmaler*, pls. 22 c, d). Sounding like Eckstein-Wolf, Himmelmann states that these "show the participation of heroes in the divine, arranged for him [Herakles] by his protectress, who later leads him into Olympus. Simon requires for these as well an unspecified recipient (*Opfernde Götter*, p. 12)."

171. Himmelmann, *Zur Eigenart*, 26.

172. *Ibid.*, 24. Himmelmann's Abb. 16.

173. *Ibid.*, 29.

174. *Ibid.*, 31 n. 98.

175. A controversy erupted over the classical white-ground kylix of Apollo pouring a libation (Catalogue no. 59): does it belong to the larger genre of sacrificing gods, or is it a special Delphic type? See Konstantinou, "ΛΕΥΚΗ ΔΕΛΦΙΚΗ ΚΥΛΙΞ," and Metzger, "ΑΠΟΛΛΩΝ ΣΠΕΝΔΩΝ."

176. Simon, *Opfernde Götter*, 31–38.

177. Himmelmann's Abb. 28.

178. Himmelmann, *Zur Eigenart*, 27. He notes on 27 n. 71 that from the *Argonautica* of Apollonios Rhodios IV. 712 ff., Rohde distinguishes between the terms καθαρός (704 ff.), a purificatory sacrifice, and ἱλασμός (710 ff.), with altar and victim (E. Rohde, *Psyche*, I. 248).

179. Himmelmann, *Zur Eigenart*, 27 nn. 72 and 73. The preeminence of the kithara figure remains unexplained. L. Stephani proved that the libating Apollo usually appears with a kithara. Both Eckstein-Wolf ("Zur Darstellung," 53) and Simon (*Opfernde Götter*, 17 ff.) think that Apollo with bowl was derived from the Severe Style, late archaic musical trio, with the phiale appearing as a later attribute.

180. Himmelmann, *Zur Eigenart*, 27.

181. *Ibid.*, 28.

182. *Ibid.*, 30.

183. Simon, *Opfernde Götter*, 7. She seconds Lushey in this.

184. L. Ghali-Kahil, *Les enlèvements et le retour d'Hélène*, Taf. 62, 3; 63, 2.3; cited in Himmelmann, *Zur Eigenart*, 28 n. 79.

185. Himmelmann's Abb. 29.

186. Himmelmann, *Zur Eigenart*, 28, citing Ghali-Kahil, *Hélène*, 67, pl. 57, 2.

187. Aphrodite is thus "mistress of the golden cup" on a lekythos in Oxford; E. Bielefeld, *Zur griechischen Vasenmalerei des 6. bis 4. Jahrhunderts*, Abb. 39 A, B.

188. Himmelmann notes that the flight of Paris and Helen on a lekthyos in Leningrad includes an appearance of the naked Aphrodite, who holds in her left hand a bowl, in her right, a thymiaterion (Himmelmann's Abb. 24). The bowl can have no meaning different from the incense burner, which was to the worship of Aphrodite a ubiquitous sacrificial instrument almost unique to her cult. In an amphora at the Louvre (Himmelmann's Abb. 29), Eros storms ahead of his mother with a thymiaterion as she goes forth in glorious epiphany over the sea. In a lekythos in Berlin (Himmelmann's Abb. 10) she rides a swan while he precedes her with the incense burner that is her cultic signifier.

189. Himmelmann, *Zur Eigenart*, 29. Such an Aphrodite is preserved on a krater cup of the fourth century in Tübingen (Catalogue no. C–68, Himmelmann's Abb. 25). She holds the thymiaterion with her left hand on her knee, while Eros ministers with incense. Both the nakedness of her upper torso and her posture indicate that this is a goddess, not a mortal woman, who would be unlikely to execute the rite sitting down. Both Graef and Langlotz (*Die antiken Vasen von der Akropolis zu Athen*, 2: 563) and Simon

(*Opfernde Götter*, 22 n. 67) note that only gods appear sitting for libation; for mortals, there is no certain example. Himmelmann notes one possible exception to the rule: In an image by the Kleophrades Painter, Achilles is sitting as he pours a libation; see K. F. Johansen, *Iliad* (Abb. 32). In a terracotta group in Berlin, Aphrodite herself places the incense into the open mouth of a thymiaterion (AA 1938, 347, Abb. 5. 29; cited by Himmelmann on p. 29 and n. 89). On a New York hydria (Catalogue no. C-63, Himmelmann's Abb. 27), we see Aphrodite, again with naked torso, sitting on an altar by a smoke offering. That the realm is mythical is also indicated by the satyrs and maenads. A companion falls back with open hands in reaction to the epiphany.

190. Himmelmann, *Zur Eigenart*, 29–30.

191. *Ibid.*, 30. Neither, according to Himmelmann, should one rely for explanation (as does Picard) on the “wine miracles” which envisioned the kantharos overflowing by itself. The same Dionysiac sacrifice, featuring kantharos and drinking bowl, is celebrated on a vase in Würzburg (Himmelmann's Abb. 31), but by the human worshipers of the god. There is a description of a depiction of the offering Dionysos in a fourth-century inscription of Artemis Brauronia: Κλεοβούλη· ἐπιβλήμα ποικίλον· καινόν, σημεῖον ἔχει ἐν μέσῳ Διόνυσος σπένδων καὶ γυνὴ οἰνοχοοῦσα. Michaelis, *Parthenon* 310, 62 (350–340 B.C.E.).

192. On this point, Himmelmann directly critiques Eckstein-Wolf's use of the term *Seinsbild*, which signaled her important insight that the meaning of the image was itself. Himmelmann feels that she misses the point by assuming that the libation bowl draws its meaning from the human realm. Thus rendered, she says it is an attribute “which does not express a quality of the god like a normal attribute, but represents something originating out of another conceptual or existential sphere” (Eckstein-Wolf, “Zur Darstellungen,” 55). He continues: “So interpreted, the sacrificing gods would then certainly bear the name ‘Seinsbild’ wrongly” (Himmelmann, *Zur Eigenart*, 27 n. 73).

193. Himmelmann, *Zur Eigenart*, 31.

194. *Ibid.*

195. W. F. Otto, *Die Gestalt und das Sein*, 13. Cited by Himmelmann, *Zur Eigenart*, 30 n. 92.

196. Himmelmann, *Zur Eigenart*, 31.

197. *Ibid.* “Darin sind sie den ewig sich selbst gleichbleibenden Ideen Platons verwandt, und ihre Macht ist von gleicher Art wie bei diesen, nämlich wirkende Urbilder zu sein.”

198. Himmelmann expanded on this aspect of his approach in “Die Gotterversammlung des Sosias-Schale,” 41ff.: “The libation as an action, which is directed to the outside no more, but in which the gods manifest themselves, bestows on the divine image a hitherto unknown distance.”

199. Werner Fuchs, who calls the terminology of Himmelmann “highly unfortunate,” asks rhetorically, “Was it necessary for the gods of Aeschylus and Sophocles to appear in the ‘self-portrayal of their own holiness’? I think not. A fundamental fact of Greek, and not only of Greek, religion, is overlooked by Himmelmann-Wildschütz in this explanation: There is no cult and sacrificial action without myth, just as there is no true myth without cult” (Fuchs, “Ein attisches Weihrelief im Vatikan,” 178).

200. *Taittirīya Brāhmaṇa I*, 5.9.4. Mircea Eliade, *The Myth of the Eternal Return* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1954), 21.

201. Burkert, *Greek Religion*, 98. See Kahil, “Mythological Repertoire of Brauron.”

202. Bakalakis, *Ἀνασκαφή Σπάρτης*, 67 and ill.

203. *Ibid.*, 65.



204. Ibid: “Ο Ἑρμῆς μπορεῖ νὰ σπένδη στὴ Γῆ . . . ὄχι ὁμως οἱ κύριες ὀλυμπιακὲς θεότητες, γιατί τότε κατὰ κάποιο τρόπο αὐτοκαταργοῦνται.” Bakalakis is referring to a Hellenistic relief in the Museo Maffeiano in Verona cited by Fuchs (“Ein attisches Weihrelief im Vatikan,” 180 n. 60), which depicts Hermes making libations to the Earth, with corroborating inscription.

205. Picard, “Les ‘agoras des dieux’ en Grèce.”

206. Ibid., 132 n. 2. Picard cites the Homeric *ὁμήγηυρις*, which connoted both the assembly of the immortals and the place of assembly: *Iliad* 20.142; *Hymn to Demeter* 92; *Hymn to Apollo (To Pythian Apollo)* 187; *Hymn to Hermes* 332. The term is etymologically related to *ἀγορεύω* and to *ἀγορά* (see Michel Breal, “Pour mieux connaître Homère”). Interestingly, the verb *ὁμηγηυρίσασθαι* is used in *Odyssey* 16.376 to designate the convocation of the *people* of Ithaka.

207. Picard, “Agoras,” 132.

208. Ibid.

209. The places Picard cites are the sacred groves at Argos (Aeschylus *Suppliants* 508) tells us that the place of the gods at Argos is near the human ceremonial space, and accessible for ceremonies, but is in a reserved enclosure) and Capua, Cyrene, Cyzicus, Delos, Eleusis, Gortyn, Lesbos, the Altis at Olympia, the (Roman-period) Metroön at Ostia, and Pharai in Achaia; the graduated steps at the sanctuary of Demeter at Pergamon with small consecrated altars to Zeus Ktesios, Hermes, Helios, Nyx, Selene, and Telete; the Hellenistic sanctuary of the gods at Tanagra; Thasos, the inscribed rocky outcropping at Thera across from the human colony, and the stele of Harpagides at Xanthos in Lycia situated, the inscription tells us, on *δώδεκα θεοῖς ἀγορᾶς ἐν καθαρῷ τεμένει*. Of Tanagra, Pausanias remarks that “[A]mong the Greeks, there are the Tanagreans, who seem to me to have best rendered honours to the gods; they placed their own dwellings in one corner, and in the other, the temples, which are thus in a space that is free and apart from people (*χωρὶς δὲ τὰ ἱερά ὑπὲρ αὐτὰς ἐν καθαρῷ τε ἐστίν, καὶ ἐκτὸς ἀνθρώπων*)” (Pausanias 9.22). Picard exegetes, “One deemed it proper that the gods be *chez eux* not so much for their comfort, or to avoid the indiscretion, perhaps, of mortal sight, but above all, in any case, so that one could establish around their reunion a sacred barrier, the religious obstacle against human impurity” (Picard, “Agoras,” 136).

210. Reconstructed from fragments and identified by M. J. Marcadé; dated 520–510 B.C.E. In light of the Greeks’ tendency to honor the twelve gods (in the inventories, the edifice is referred to as *τὰ δώδεκα*), Picard also suggests two other triads, perhaps Demeter-Zeus Eubouleus-Kore and Poseidon-Amphitrite-Hermes.

211. Picard, “Agoras,” 142.

212. The excavation of the Delian “agora of the gods” side-by-side with the people’s agora indicates that with the statues of the “Delian triad” of Apollo, Artemis, and Leto is preserved the trunk of the kitharode Apollo. Thus, Bakalakis speculates that the “musical” Delian triad (to which sacrificial equipment was later added) might have emerged separately during the last quarter of the sixth and the turn of the fifth centuries B.C.E. On a red-figure pyxis in Ferrara from the end of the fifth century, the musical Delian triad and the inscribed (ΔΗΛΟΣ) personification of Delos is depicted with Hermes (no. 206). He agrees with preceding scholarship (e.g., Simon, *Opfernde Götter*, 19) that the vase-paintings of the triad of deities “mean” the same thing whether or not altar and phiale are depicted, as it is on the amphora in the manner of the Niobid Painter in Würzburg (no. 503 [Graef and Langlotz, *Die antiken Vasen*, pls. 170, 172, 184; Himmelmann, *Zur Eigenart*, Taf. 28; ARV<sup>2</sup> 611, 32; 1661). The theme of the “musical” Delphic triad stopped suddenly and for good at

the beginning of the fifth century, which leads Bakalakis to date the bronze Piraeus Apollo holding a libation bowl (no. 2) from the middle of the last quarter of the sixth century B.C.E. He thinks that it actually belonged to a Delian triad (Bakalakis, Ἐνασκαφή Στρώμης 67; see Brunilde S. Ridgway on the Piraeus bronzes in *The Arabic Style in Greek Sculpture*.

213. Bakalakis, Ἐνασκαφή Στρώμης, 67.

214. Mitropolou, *Libation Scenes with Oinochoe in Votive Reliefs*, 11.

215. *Ibid.*

216. *Ibid.* She also supports Neumann's and Bakalakis's critique that the notion of a departure or arrival, while it may "seem" to work for Persephone and Plouton in Hades, or that of a *hieros gamos* in the case of Zeus and Hera, breaks down "especially on some occasions when a deity holds a phiale and he or she is represented alone" (Mitropolou, *Libation Scenes*, 88).

217. *Ibid.*, 90.

218. *Ibid.*

219. *Ibid.*

220. Plutarch *Moralia* I. *Septem Sapientum Convivium* 150.5. Mitropolou, *Libation Scenes*, 90.

221. Pfisterer-Haas, "Spendende Götter," 436–438.

222. *Ibid.*, 436.

223. Munich no. 2403, our catalogue no. 10.

224. Pfisterer-Haas, "Spendende Götter," 436.

225. Munich no. 2413, our catalogue no. 92. Pfisterer-Haas remarks that Zeus, the father of gods and men, is always extended the instrument of sacrifice by a servant goddess like Nike, Hebe the cupbearer or the messenger goddess Iris, never by his equal-ranking sister spouse Hera. She neglects to mention, however, that Athena and Ganymede serve this function, and that Zeus himself is pouring the libation.

226. Munich no. 2338, catalogue no. C-23.

227. Pfisterer-Haas, "Spendende Götter," 437.

228. *Ibid.*: "Für den antiken Menschen war die opfernde Göttin identisch mit der Göttin, die Opfer empfängt."

229. *Ibid.*, 437–438. Munich no. 2416; ARV<sup>2</sup> 385, 228; 1649.

230. Pfisterer-Haas, "Spendende Götter," 438: "So it remains an open question in the case of many of these images of how Dionysos pleases himself in his gifts, in that he solemnly pours them or takes them to himself."

231. Paul Veyne, "Images de divinités tenant une phiale ou patère."

232. *Ibid.*, 18.

233. *Ibid.*, 27.

234. *Ibid.*, 26.

235. *Ibid.*, 27–28.

236. As thoroughly treated by Margaret C. Miller in her *Athens and Persia in the Fifth Century B.C.*

237. Hoffman, *Sotades*, 113–114.

## 5. THE PROBLEM DEFINED AND A PROPOSED SOLUTION: DIVINE REFLEXIVITY IN RITUAL REPRESENTATION

1. Hubert and Mauss, *Sacrifice: Its Nature and Functions*.

2. Paden, *Religious Worlds*, 178–179 n. 7.

3. Clay, *The Wrath of Athena*, 65–66. Clay continues, “In the *Hymn to Aphrodite*, the goddess warns the mortal Anchises to respect the *menis* of Zeus, who will strike him down with the thunderbolt if ever Anchises reveals that Aphrodite lay with him and bore his child, Aeneas (281–290). With the same words (5.146), Hermes warns Calypso to send off Odysseus rather than to keep him as her consort and make him immortal. In every case, *menis* arises from an attempt to blur or overstep the lines of demarcation separating gods from men.”

4. *Iliad* 5.440–442, trans. Richmond Lattimore.

5. See Hiller, “Mycenean Traditions in Early Greek Cult Images,” 91–99: “A Mycenean tradition lives on in early Greek cult images of the enthroned type . . . the throne was an integral part of cult images from Mycenean times onwards” (95). One might also cite the Egyptian tradition of Isis as an enthroned goddess.

6. See Winter, “The King and the Cup: Iconography of the Royal Presentation Scene on Ur III Seals.” Winter notes that the seated king “regularly holds some kind of cup, goblet, or vase in his extended right hand” (255). She later observes, “the function of the ‘cup’ remains elusive. But its use as an emblem of the powers of the king in his well-attested role combining divine sanction and access to divine order with the exercise of office, seems to make considerable sense, particularly as this is the very gift given by Ur-Nammu in the underworld to Gilgamesh, the ‘ideal king’ in the Ur III period. Evidence from later periods that bowls were associated with the sun-god on the one hand and with divination on the other hand would serve to further support our association” (265).

7. *Homeric Hymn to (Pythian) Apollo* 247–249, trans. Athanassakis.

8. *Homeric Hymn to Demeter* 270–274, trans. Athanassakis.

9. Plato *Laws* 653 C7–D5, trans. R. G. Bury. Text: Plato *Laws*, ed. E. B. England: τούτων γὰρ δὴ τῶν ὀρθῶς τετραμμένων ἡδονῶν καὶ λυπῶν παιδείων οὐσῶν χαλᾶται τοῖς ἀνθρώποις καὶ διαφθείρεται κατὰ πολλὰ ἐν τῶν βίῳ, θεοὶ δὲ οἰκτίραντες τὸ τῶν ἀνθρώπων ἐπίπλον πεφυκὸς γένος, ἀναπαύλας τε αὐτοῖς τῶν μόνων ἐτάξαντο τὰς τῶν ἑορτῶν ἀμοιβὰς τοῖς θεοῖς, καὶ Μούσας Ἀπόλλωνα τε μουσικήτην καὶ Διόνυσον ξυνεορταστὰς ἔδωσαν, ἵν’ ἐπανορθῶνται, τὰς τε προφάσας γενομένας ἐν ταῖς ἑορταῖς μετὰ θεῶν.

10. This is articulated in later neo-Platonic thought by Iamblichus, who writes: “Is not every sacred ritual legislated intellectually from first principles according to the laws of the Gods? For each rite imitates the order of the Gods, both the intelligible and the celestial, and each possesses the eternal measures of beings and the wondrous symbols which have been sent here by the Demiurge, the Father of all things.” Iamblichus, *De Mysteriis* 65.3–7, trans. Olivier Clément.

11. Himmelmann, *Zur Eigenart*.

12. For a discussion of Apollo’s status as a god particularly concerned with purity, see Robert Parker, *Miasma: Pollution and Purification in Early Greek Religion*, esp. Appendix 8, p. 393. Parker speculates that Apollo’s cathartic role, which Artemis sometimes shared, may have had its genesis in his role as sender and healer of disease (cf. *Iliad* I); this is supported by the law of Cyrene (*Supplementum Epigraphicum Graecum* [SEG] ix 72) and the history of Delos.

13. The conceptual and ritual force of this notion is hard to convey. As in many languages, Greek verbs have a middle or “reflexive” mood that conveys the concept of doing something “for oneself,” “to oneself,” “for one’s own benefit,” and both θύεσθαι and σπένδεσθαι are attested in the middle (*LSJ*). However, these have a specialized meaning in each case, and never with a divinity as subject. θύεσθαι means to “cause a victim to be offered,” as in *Inscriptiones Graecae* (IG) 5 (1) 1390.65,

Andania, 1; hence, frequently, “consult the gods”; σπένδεσθαι means “pour libations with one another, make a treaty, make peace,” as in Herodotus 3.133, Xenophon *Anabasis* 1.9.7.

14. *OED*, s.v. “reflexive.”

15. Babcock, “Reflexivity,” 235. Following a similar statement in her introduction to the issue of the journal *Semiotica* that was the result of the the symposium organized by Victor Turner in 1976 entitled “Rituals and Myths of Self: Uses of and Occasions for Reflexivity,” Babcock writes, “If not since Epimenides, then at least since Russell and Whitehead, we have realized that statements by a member of a class about its own class tend to paradox. By confounding subject and object, seer and seen, self and other, art and life—in short, by playing back and forth across terminal and categorical boundaries and playing with the very nature of human understanding—reflexive processes redirect thoughtful attention to the faulty or limited structures of thought, language and society.” Babcock, “Reflexivity: Definitions and Discriminations,” 5.

Sacrificing gods, supposedly objects of ritual, by becoming its subjects describe their own divine natures, their scope and limitless differentiated potential, as well as their high degree of specificity through the “statement” of rituals that are particular to them: This paradoxical reversal reveals the fault lines in a limited view of ritual as an arbitrary action that can only be directed from an inferior to a superior power.

16. Babcock, “Reflexivity,” 235.

17. Hegel, “The Concept of Religion,” in *Lectures*, 117. I am grateful to David Lamberth of Harvard Divinity School for his discussion of this material with me.

18. *Ibid.*, Part I: 278 (129–130).

19. *Ibid.*, Part II: 549–550 (345–346).

20. Rappaport, “Concluding Comments on Ritual and Reflexivity,” 181–193.

21. Sandywell, *Reflexivity and the Crisis of Western Reason*, 143. See also Lawson, *Reflexivity: The Post-Modern Predicament*.

22. “[R]eflexivity is not a consequence of social complexity or the degree of religious articulateness; it is an essential and inevitable dimension of all religious experience. The power of religious consciousness that we keep trying to explain is probably not its prescriptive, descriptive, or explanatory force but its reflexiveness—religion offers a system of interpretation of existence that is itself subject to interpretation, and that is infinitely compelling.” Babcock, “Reflexivity,” 237.

23. Paden, *Religious Worlds*, 124.

24. See the exposition of Kleisthenic reforms and their impact on religious history in Parker, *Athenian Religion: A History*, esp. chapter 7: “Before and after Clisthenes,” 102–121.

25. Margaret C. Miller, personal communication, April 2003. For the full exposition of Miller’s analysis of Athenian civic self-representation in the history of “orientalizing” and in the context of interactions with Persia, see her *Athens and Persia in the Fifth Century B.C.*

26. Gregory Nagy, *Pindar’s Homer*, 373. Nagy defines *mīmēsis*: “[i]n general the noun *mīmēsis*, as well as the corresponding verb *mīmēisthai*, designates the reenactment, through ritual, of the events of myth” (42).

27. M. Miller, personal communication, April 2003.

28. The “Mantiklos Apollo,” Daedalic bronze figurine, c. 700 B.C.E. Francis Bartlett Collection, Museum of Fine Arts, Boston 03.997. Comstock and Vermeule, *Greek, Etruscan and Roman Bronzes*, no. 15. See Biers, *The Archaeology of Greece: An Introduction*, 142–143, fig. 6.12.

## INTRODUCTION, PART II: RITUALIZING GODS IN INDO-EUROPEAN RELIGIOUS TRADITIONS

1. See Colin Renfrew, *Archaeology and Language*, and his *The Roots of Ethnicity*. Renfrew has rejected the historical pessimism of much postmodern archaeological theory, theorizing the possibility of what he calls “cognitive archaeology,” which allows for the validity of the recovery and reconstruction of thought-worlds. Renfrew argues that we can begin to answer the question, “What did they think?” by extrapolating from patterns in the material evidence from ancient cultures—even where textual evidence is absent. See also *The Ancient Mind*, ed. Colin Renfrew and Ezra B. W. Zubrow.

2. See the discussion in Walter Burkert, *Greek Religion*, 16.

3. One late example is the Hellenistic mystery religion of Mithraism, in which the heroic god Mithras—who seems to have developed in the incubator of Iranian religion from the sun god Mītra of the ancient Indian *Ṛgveda*—slays a bull in a cosmogonic act that is central in surviving Mithraic iconography. See David Ulansey’s *The Origins of the Mithraic Mysteries*, which posits Mithras as a *kosmokrator*. Ulansey interprets the slaughter of the bull as an act of cosmological significance, interpreted by Stoicizing intellectuals from Tarsus as their hero Perseus overcoming the constellation Taurus the Bull in the procession of the equinoxes.

4. See Jan Gonda, “Vedic Gods and the Sacrifice.” Gonda pursues issues beyond the *sūktavāka* formula expressed in *Taittirīya Brāhmaṇa* 3.5.10 and elsewhere (“in which the deity declares that he accepts the offering, has become strengthened by it, has acquired greater might . . . and the wish is expressed that the sacrificer may prosper accordingly”), issues such as “whether or not the sacrificial ritual was believed to be based on divine will, initiative, or authority, and that of whether divine power is inherent or effective in the rites . . . [and] whether the great gods are equally and in the same manner supposed to be concerned with the establishment and operation of the ritual” (1).

5. Proto-Vedic features, including funerary mounds and horsehead assemblages, have been discovered within the past decade in archaeological excavations in the Ural mountains. The “cultural transformation thesis,” as it called by Gavin Flood and others, is a relatively recent theory challenging the traditional view of Aryan (exterior) invasion or migration into India by posting Aryan culture as an indigenous development of an ancient, even Neolithic culture whose Indo-European language and culture coexisted with Dravidian counterparts in the region. See Flood, *An Introduction to Hinduism*, 30–34. For the most recent assembled scholarship on this subject, see *The Indo-Aryan Controversy: Evidence and Inference in Indian History*, eds. Bryant and Patton.

6. Lincoln, *Myth, Cosmos, and Society*.

7. Other myths tell the complex tale of the forcible possession of Soma, a denizen of the celestial world, by the gods—who wanted him to dwell among them on earth so that they could offer him in sacrifice (e.g., *Taittirīya Saṃhita* 6.1.6.1; *Aitareya Brāhmaṇa* 3.25; *Śatapatha Brāhmaṇa* 3.6.2.2).

8. *Chāndogya Upaniṣad* 5.4.106. Translation by Stephanie Jamison, unpublished.

9. Minkowski, *Priesthood in Ancient India*, 20.

10. *Bhagavad Gītā* 4.24, trans. Franklin Edgerton.

11. See Wendy Doniger O’Flaherty’s translation of hymns 10.90.16 and 1.164.50 in *The Rig Veda*, 31 and 81.

12. *Kāthaka Saṃhita* 23.8 (83.12). The name of the Sādhyas means “those who are yet to be fulfilled”; O’Flaherty, n. 10 to *Ṛgveda* 10.90.16, in *The Rig Veda*, 32.

13. In the Vedic system of classification, they are always at the zenith, beyond the top of the world axis. See Kuiper, *Varuṇa and Vidūṣaka*.

14. *Ibid.*, 243.

15. *Ibid.*

16. Renou, *Vedic India*, 84.

17. As R. C. Zaehner comments, “The sacrifice represented the creative process—in a sense it *was* the creative process—and were it to cease the world itself would come to an end, for the sacrifice and the world are one” (*Hindu Scriptures*, Introduction, vii).

18. Hopkins, *The Hindu Religious Tradition*, 17.

19. Smith, *Reflections on Resemblance, Ritual, and Religion*, 67.

20. See Levenson, *Creation and the Persistence of Evil*.

21. Smith, *Reflections on Resemblance, Ritual, and Religion*, 67.

22. *Aitareya Brāhmaṇa* 3.45, trans. A. B. Keith. Compare other passages such as are found at 1.18 of the same text: “The sacrifice went away from the gods (saying), ‘I shall not be your food.’ ‘No,’ replied the gods, ‘Verily thou shalt be our food.’ The gods crushed it; it being taken apart was not sufficient for them. The gods said ‘It will not be sufficient for us, being taken apart; come, let us gather the sacrifice.’ (They replied) ‘Be it so.’ They gathered it together; having gathered it together they said to the Aṅvins, ‘Do ye two heal it’, the Aṅvins are the physicians of the gods, the Aṅvins the Adhvaryus; therefore the two Adhvaryus gather together the cauldron. Having gathered it together, they say, ‘O Brahman, we shall proceed with the Pravargya offering [the preliminary to the Soma sacrifice]; O Hotṛ, do thou recite.” Again, after the flight of the sacrifice and its capture, consecrated destruction, and “healing” (re-assembly) by the divine twins, the Aśvins, the mythical description (or report?) invokes the ritual authority of the human *hotṛ*, the “pouder of libations” to inaugurate the sacrifice and “get things started” once more.

23. I am indebted to Anne Monius for her illumination of ritual anxiety.

## 6. ZOROASTRIAN HERESY: ZURVĀN’S THOUSAND-YEAR SACRIFICE

1. Zaehner, *Zurvan: A Zoroastrian Dilemma*.

2. Marijan Molé, *Culte, mythe, et cosmologie dans l’Iran ancien*, 132.

3. See the discussion of Mary Boyce, “Some Further Reflections on Zurvanism.”

4. This continues to be warmly contested. Christensen, in *L’Iran sous les Sassanides*, 144, declared that Zurvanism was the normative form of Zoroastrianism at that time; Bidez and Cumont in *Les mages hellénisés* I: 63 n. 3 regarded this idea as indefensible. Zaehner advocates the approach of O. G. von Wesendonk, who in his *Das Wesen der Lehre Zarthusṭrōs*, 19–20, advanced the view that Mazdaism and Zurvanism alternated, depending on the affinities of the particular ruler (Zaehner, *Zurvan*, p. 35 and n. 3). However, categorical statements continue on both sides; see, for example, the assertions of Jacques Duchesne-Guilleman: “Zurvanism was widely accepted . . . perhaps even prevalent, in Sāsānian times” (“Zoroastrianism and Parsiism,” 1081), and Jean Varenne: “There is . . . no formal proof that the cult of Zurvān ever had a significant existence in Iran” (“Pre-Islamic Iran,” 886). Varenne concedes that “it is troubling to note that Mani chose to call by this name the great god of the religion that he founded in the third century A.D.” (*ibid.*). On Mani and Zurvān, see Skjaervø, *Manichaia* I.

5. Spenta Manyu may be another name for Ahura Mazdā in the Avestas. In a popular strand of the tradition, Spenta Manyu refers as well to the Wise Lord, a rendering of Ahura Mazdā.

6. Eznik of Kolb’s version of the Zurvanite creation myth is contained with commentary in Text F1 of Zaehner’s *Zurvan*, 419–428. Zaehner uses the Venice edition of Eznik’s work (1926, pp. 125–138) and the translations of Schmid and Langlois. I have

translated this passage from the French of Langlois given in Zaehner's Text F1. The grounds for the authenticity of the Zurvanite cosmogonic myth as Eznik represents it are accepted by, among others, Marijan Molé, in *Culte, mythe, et cosmologie dans l'Iran ancien*, 130–132, and P. Oktor Skjærvø, in "Iranian Elements in Manicheism," 269.

7. Eznik of Kolb, §§ 15–19. Zaehner's translation from the French of Langlois, cited in *Zurvan*, 60.

8. All found in Zaehner's Text F1. Zaehner uses for the text of Elišē the edition of Yohannisean (Moscow, 1892) and the translation of Langlois; for that of bar Kônai, the edition of Pognon in his *Inscriptions mandaites des coupes de Khouabir*, 111 ff. (translation, 162 ff.); and for that of bar Penkayê, the text and translation of P. de Menasce, "Autour d'un texte syriaque inédit," *Bulletin of the School of Oriental (and African) Studies*, London, 9: 587–601 (see Zaehner, *Zurvan*, 419).

9. Eznik and bar Penkayê mention the conception of Ahriman as deriving from Zurvân's "pondering"; bar Kônai says explicitly that the cause was the fact that the god "doubted." Zaehner (60–61) claims that Zurvanites would have chosen "ponder" or "doubt" depending on which theology they wanted to emphasize. The translation "ponder" "at least draws a veil over the essential imperfection of Zurvan, and does not allow the basic inconsistency in the divine nature to come to light." "Doubt," on the other hand, "advertises this imperfection and elevates this unsureness in the godhead into the distinctive mark of the system"; this imperfection was exploited by Eznik in his refutation.

10. A "mother" is mentioned by the Syriac writers, but not by Eznik, who complains, "When nothing at all existed, neither heaven nor earth, Zurvân alone existed. Now this is really highly ridiculous that he himself should be both father and mother, and that the same person should have emitted the seed and received it" (Eznik, Venice edition, 149, cited in Zaehner, *Zurvan*, 63 n. 4). In fact, later both realities seem to have been true: Zurvân was accepted as hermaphrodite in the Acts of Anāhīd, and also had a female consort with whom Ohrmazd had intercourse to conceive the sun in a fable preserved by Eznik, a Manichaean fragment (Zaehner, *Zurvan*, Text F7) and the Syriac *Acts of the Martyrs* (Zaehner, *Zurvan*, Text F5).

11. The others have lacunae at this point in the story.

12. Elišē Vardapet, in Zaehner, *Zurvan*, Text F1, §§ 44–51.

13. Eznik of Kolb, in Zaehner, *Zurvan*, Text F1, §59.

14. *Ibid.*, §§ 61–65.

15. Bar Penkayê, in Zaehner, *Zurvan*, Text F1, §29. The "rings" may or may not have been correctly identified by Bar Penkayê with the *barsom*.

16. *Dēnkart*, Book IV, edition Madan, pp. 412.3–415.3. Translation by Zaehner, *Zurvan*, 8–9.

17. See Calvert Watkins, *How to Kill a Dragon: Aspects of Indo-European Poetics*.

18. Varenne, "Pre-Islamic Iran," 882. He writes on p. 878, "the parallelism must have been even closer than we can imagine, and the evolution of both religions would probably have taken very similar paths if a major event had not totally upset the situation in Iran—the preaching of Zarathustra amid the gradual conversion of the Iranians to the teachings of the Reformer."

19. For a thorough review of the scholarly controversy over the historicity of Zoroaster, and an indictment of the failure of contemporary scholarship to offer premises for its assumption of his historicity, see P. Oktor Skjærvø, "The State of Old Avestan Scholarship," esp. 105–106; and his "Zarathustra—Historical Prophet or Ritual Archetype? Approaches to Old Iranian Religion," unpublished. I am indebted to Prof. Skjærvø for his comments on this chapter and his support throughout the years; all errors are mine.

20. Skjærvø comments on this: “Personally, I am convinced that the Old Avestan texts seem obscure mainly because content and meaning are presupposed. Once the postulates of Zarathustra’s historicity, etc., are dropped and the texts are approached as ritual texts from the second millennium B.C.E., reflecting the myths of the people who composed them, it will be possible for scholars in the twenty-first century to read and understand them” (in “Zarathustra—Historical Prophet or Ritual Archetype?”). The question for the historian of religion remains why a historical founder-prophet (sacrificer) is ascribed to, and whose inspiration is apparently necessary in, the (originally oral) reception and transmission of sacred, foundational texts.

21. Varenne, “Pre-Islamic Iran,” 878.

22. P. Oktor Skjærvø, “Zarathustra.”

23. For example, Zoroaster refers to himself as a composer of sacred words, *manthras*, and as “one who knows” (*vīdva*).

24. See Kellens, “Characters of Ancient Mazdaism (1987),” in his *Essays on Zarathustra and Zoroastrianism*, 15. See also the overview and discussion of the work of Kellens, Boyce, and others on the ancient ritual elements of Zoroastrianism in Michael Stausberg, “Contextualizing the Contexts: On the Study of Zoroastrian Rituals.”

25. The *Visperad* (*Calling All the Divine Powers*) is part of the *Yasna* expanded by alternative invocations and offerings to *ratus* (lords of beings); the *Videvdāt* (*Law Exposed to the Daēvas; Against Demons*) consists of two introductory sections recounting how the law was given to man, followed by eighteen sections of purity rules. The *Hādhoxt Nask* (meaning uncertain), is an eschatological description of the fate of the soul after death. The *Xorda Avesta*, “*Small Avesta*,” collects together minor texts.

26. Varenne, “Pre-Islamic Iran,” 879.

27. Varenne remarks, “However these problems are to be solved, Zoroastrianism remains a religion marked more than many others by the belief that Evil is powerful, that it is a Spirit (that is, a cosmic energy, a divine power), and that the dynamism of his actions makes necessary a struggle to contain him” (“Pre-Islamic Iran,” 886).

28. *Yasna* 30:3–4.

29. “Historical” conversion (including that of the “Magi”) is contested.

30. Herodotus, *The Histories* 1.122; 1.142, etc. Herodotus also mentions their customs of killing evil animals with their bare hands and exposing their dead.

31. “Thou shalt not worship the *daivas*. Where before the *daivas* were worshiped, there did I worship Ahura Mazda in accordance with the law [*aša*] with the proper rite” Herzfeld, *Archäologische Mitteilungen aus Iran* (1936), 8:56–77. Cited and translated by Zaehner, *Zurvan*, 16–17 and n. 6. The identity of the *daēva*-worshippers remains unknown; they will later resurface in documents bearing on heretical movements during the Sasanian period.

32. *Ibid.*, 877.

33. Herodotus, *The Histories* 1.133–34. Translated by Aubrey de Selincourt, revised by A. R. Burn. 96–97: “The erection of statues, temples, and altars is not an accepted practice amongst them, and anyone who does such a thing is considered a fool because, presumably, the Persian religion is not anthropomorphic like the Greek. Zeus, in their system, is the whole circle of the heavens, and they sacrifice to him from the tops of mountains. They also worship the sun, moon, and earth, fire, water, and winds, which are their only original deities. . . . As for the ceremonial, when they offer sacrifice to the deities I mentioned, they erect no altar and kindle no fire; the libation, the flute-music, the sprinkled meal—all these things, familiar to us, they have no use for;



but before a ceremony a man sticks a spray of leaves, usually myrtle leaves, into his headdress, takes his victim to some open place and invokes the deity to whom he wishes to sacrifice. . . . When he has cut up the animal and cooked it, he makes a little heap of the softest green-stuff he can find, preferably clover, and lays all the meat upon it. This done, a Magus (a member of this caste is always present at sacrifices) utters an incantation over it in a form of words which is supposed to recount the Birth of the Gods. Then after a short interval the worshipper removes all the flesh and does what he pleases with it.”

34. Cited in Diogenes Laertes 1.8.

35. In *I Alcibiades* 122A, Plato says that *μαργεία* means “service of the gods.”

36. *Ibid.*

37. Zaehner, *Zurvan*, 20 and n. 2. Zaehner does concede that the name *Za-ar-wa-an* and other forms similar to it appear on the Nuzi tablets, dating from the twelfth century B.C.E. (cf. Windengren, *Hochgottglaube im alten Iran*, 310), but Duchesne-Guilleman does not feel that these necessarily refer to the later Iranian deity. Zaehner’s important but flawed treatment of *Zurvān* has been severely criticized as obsessive, starting with Ugo Bianchi in his *Zaman i Ohrmazd* (Torino, 1958).

38. Tacitus *Annales* 3.62 attributes the foundation of the Hierocaesarea temple to Cyrus.

39. Cumont, *Les religions orientales*, 135, fig. 10.

40. Cumont, *Textes et monuments figurés relatifs aux mystères de Mithra*, I:78. Cited and translated in Zaehner, *Zurvan*, 19 and n. 8.

41. Clement of Alexandria, *Stromata* 3.6.48.

42. See, for example, Smith, “Isaiah and the Persians,” and Hinnells, “Zoroastrian Saviour Imagery and Its Influence on the New Testament.”

43. Hinnells, “Zoroastrian Saviour Imagery.”

44. Duchesne-Guillemin, “Zoroastrianism and Parsiism,” 1078.

45. Kreyenbroek, “Cosmogony and Cosmology in Zoroastrianism/Mazdaism,” 303.

46. Texts of the *Bundahišn* are found in *The Teachings of the Magi*, trans. R. C. Zaehner, and in Behramgore Tahmuras Anklesaria, ed., *Zand-Ākāsīh: Iranian or Greater Bundahišn*; of the *Zatsparam*, in Anklesaria, ed., *Vichitakiha-i Zatsparam* and most recently, *Anthologie de Zādspram: édition critique du texte pehlevi*, trans. and commentary by Ph. Gignoux and A. Tafazzoli (Paris: Association pour l’avancement des études iraniennes, 1993).

47. It has been observed that elements of Zurvanite speculative cosmogony, with its preoccupations with “gestation and emanation,” astronomy, and astrology, are found in these later orthodox works, however, signaling their apparent acceptance and assimilation (see Kreyenbroek, “Cosmogony and Cosmology,” 304).

48. See the summary and discussion of the orthodox cosmogony in Philip Kreyenbroek, “On Spenta Mainyu’s Role in the Zoroastrian Cosmogony,” 97.

49. *Bundahišn* I:11, 12, in *The Teachings of the Magi*, trans. Zaehner.

50. One of the most extraordinary things about Zoroastrianism was its repeated effort to recast the innumerable divine and semidivine beings of its old Indian heritage. *Ohrmazd* and his divine entourage are arranged in a hierarchy of power. They are “values,” not gods. They have no mythology. The *Yašts* invoke the sun, the moon, the goddess of horses, *Anāhitā*, *Mithra*, *Vayu*, *Verethraghna*, *Fortune*, the *Daena*, and the *Fravashis*. In the *Yašts*, the Prophet is often presented as questioning *Ahura Mazda* to inquire about the identity of *Mithra* or *Hoama*. An archaic litany of divine names, as in the Vedas, is often the answer. These reformulations may have been

added later, as late as the third century C.E., to attract holdouts for the old religion for whom multiple spirits were a way of life; the *yazatas* do not appear in the *Gāthās* attributed to Zoroaster himself.

51. For this summary I adapt that of Zaleski and Zaleski, “Bridge of Fire, An Interview with Dastur Dr. Firoze M. Kotwal,” 59–60. Kotwal is the high priest of the Wadia Atash Bahram (the temple of the highest grade of fire) for the Parsi community in Bombay.

52. Varenne, “Pre-Islamic Iran,” 885: “What is new here is the affirmation of the existence of two Spirits (*Manyu*), placed on the same level of existence, and what is more, twins. Are they from the same mother? Do they become enemy brothers in a rivalry for the inheritance of the sovereignty over the universe? Or do they co-exist for all eternity? It can be said, without fear of exaggeration, that all of Zoroastrian theology is one long dispute over these questions.”

53. *Ibid.*, 880.

54. W. W. Tarn, “Parthia,” *The Oxford Classical Dictionary*, 2nd ed., 786.

55. See Theresa Goell, “The Excavations of the ‘Hierotherion’ of Antiochus I of Commagene on Nemrud Dagh (1953–1956).”

56. Varenne, “Pre-Islamic Iran,” 885–886.

57. Duchesne-Guillemin, “Zoroastrianism and Parsiism,” 1081. Zaehner comments, “If they are twins, then it is only logical to assume that they had a common father. If they had such a father, it would be reasonable to suppose that that father is the Infinite, since the twins, limiting each other as they do, can neither of them be infinite. The Infinite appeared most frequently in the Zoroastrian writings as Infinite Time (*zrvān akarana*, or in Pahlavī, *zurvān i akanārak*). Hence Ohrmazd and Ahriman came to be regarded as the twin sons of the Infinite”; Zaehner, *Zurvan*, 5.

58. Zaehner, *Zurvan*, 5.

59. See figure on p. 885 of Varenne, “Pre-Islamic Iran.” Controversy regarding the authenticity of this bronze remains unresolved. Varenne remarks on the choice of “Time,” “An original solution to the problem of the ‘paternity’ of these twin spirits is said to have been proposed by certain Iranian theologians, at least if Greek evidence can be believed on this subject (Eudemus of Rhodes, cited by the neo-Platonist Damascius). In the beginning, said these priests, there was nothing but infinite Time (*Zurvān akarana*), from which came Light and Darkness, Ohrmazd and Ahriman, and eventually, all living beings. An odd doctrine, at first view, but one recalls the Greek traditions about Kronos and Vedic traditions that exalt Kāla (time) and Prajāpati, the first god, in whom the Great Year becomes incarnate” (“Pre-Islamic Iran,” 885).

60. *Ibid.*

61. *Ibid.*

62. *Ibid.*

63. Jon Levenson suggests that the “mercy/wrath” dichotomy in God’s nature in many talmudic passages, especially B.T. *Berakhot* 7b dating from the time of Rav, may have been heavily influenced by the “Zervanic dualist monotheism” prevalent at the time; “Cataclysm, Survival, and Regeneration in the Hebrew Bible,” n. 27 to p. 59.

64. *Dēnkart*.

65. *Ibid.*

66. Flügel, *Mani*, pp. 51, 84; cited in Zaehner, *Zurvan*, 36 n. 7.

67. Polotsky, *Kephalaia*, 15; cited in Zaehner, *Zurvan*, 36 n. 8.

68. Puech, *Le Manichéisme*, 47 and nn. 188 and 189. The name *Zurvān* is found for the supreme god in the Turfan Manichaean texts which are in Persian; in Parthian and in other Manichaean texts in other languages he is *bay-*“God.” Skjaervo remarks in

correspondence 1/6/07, “There is Mpers by *zrw’n* (*bay zarwān*), but no Parthian by *zrw’n*. It makes me think: He is never spelled *zwrw’n*, only *zrw’n*, which is also the word for ‘old age.’ I think it is quite possible that, by Sasanian times, they no longer knew the Avestan word meant “time” and thought of him as *on old man*.”

69. Zaehner, *Zurvan*, 22.

70. *Dēnkart*; translation by Zaehner, *Zurvan*, 8.

71. *Ibid*.

72. *Ibid*.

73. Zaehner, *Zurvan*, 38.

74. Ed. Gottwaldt, 50., cited in Zaehner, *Zurvan*, 38 n. 3.

75. At the death of Kartīr, Narses (293–302 C.E.), who succeeded Vahram III, recovered the title of chief of the temple at Staḡr near Naqš-i Rostam.

76. Zaehner, *Zurvan*, 25. The most recent edition of the inscriptions is D. N. Mackenzie, “Kerdīr’s inscription,” in *The Sasanian Rock Reliefs at Naqshi Rostam*, *Iranische Denkmäler*. Lief 13, Reihe II: Iranische Felsreliefs, I (Berlin, 1989), 35–72.

77. Cited in Zaehner, *Zurvan*, 23.

78. Zaehner, *Zurvan*, 39. He continues, “The achievement of Ādurbād was built on the foundation laid by Kartīr: and it is perhaps part of that notable achievement that the very name of Kartīr has been expunged from the Zoroastrian tradition. Had the latter’s great insurrection never been found, posterity would still be ignorant of the signal part he played in the long, sad history of religious bigotry.”

79. al-Mas’ūdī, *Murūj adh-dhahab*, trans. Barbier de Meynard, II: 160.

80. *Mātiyān i hazār Dātastān*; the most recent edition is by Maria Macuch.

81. Ed. Yohannisean, 27; cited in Zaehner, *Zurvan*, 42.

82. In fact, it was rejected by Cumont as genuine because of the parallels it bears to the other three.

83. Zaehner, *Zurvan*, 42.

84. *Ibid*. In addition, one of the sons of the prime minister was a priest named Zurvāndād. He was made *hērbādān-hērbād* by Bahram V, the same title held by the priest Tansar, a post which seem to have exercised doctrinal authority (*ibid.*, 44).

85. Duchesne-Guillemin, “Zoroastrianism and Parsiism,” 1080.

86. *Ibid*.

87. With the closing of the philosophical schools in Athens, Xusrau also allowed seven Greek philosophers to take refuge at Ctesiphon. One was Damsascius, who left a Zervanite account of Persian religion, which he says is derived from the writings of Eudemus of Rhodes. After the peace of 562, Xusrau allowed Christians religious freedom.

88. From *Dēnkart*, 412.3–415.3; translation by Zaehner, 9. Italics added.

89. See *Bundahišn* 4.25 for the shot life in time (*zaman*), 30 years of Gayōmart, the Primal Man, *after the coming of Ahriman*.

90. *Dēnkart*, 893.10; translation by Zaehner, 15–16.

91. Plutarch, *De latenter vivendo*, 1130A: τὸν δε τῆς ἐναντίας κύριον μοίρας, εἶτε θεός εἶτε δαίμων ἐστίν, Ἄδην ὀνομάζουσιν.

92. See Zaehner, *Zurvan*, 51. Xusrau II (ruled 590/591–638) married a Christian woman, Šīrēn, and dabbled in astrology. He both paid homage to the Christian martyr Sergius and erected 353 fire-temples.

93. Duchesne-Guillemin, “Zoroastrianism and Parsiism,” 1081.

94. Zaehner, *Zurvan*, 5. This is in keeping with Zaehner’s stance, typical of much of Western scholarship on Zoroastrianism, that “Zoroastrianism was uncompromisingly dualist.” Zaehner concedes that this was not a “classical dualism between spirit

and matter which would have provided a common meeting-ground with the Indian Jains and the Sāṃkhyā to the East, with the Gnostics to the West, and with the Manichaeans in Iran itself. It was a dualism of spirit, postulating two principles at the origin of the Universe—the Spirit of Good or Ohrmazd, and the Spirit of Evil or Ahri-man. This radically original idea dates back to Zoroaster himself, and it is his basic contribution to the philosophy of religion” (Zaehner, *Zurvan*, 3–4). Zaehner is correct that the Gnostics and the Manichaeans did indeed appropriate the apparent dualism of Zoroastrianism and identified the Evil Spirit with the Christian Satan, who held dominion over the world, a theodicy hard to refute. But orthodox Zoroastrianism was relentlessly optimistic, devoted to Ahura Mazdā, willing to help him in his struggle in the material world (where he is by no means completely powerless) and trusting in his eventual triumph—despite the unsympathetic charge that he remains “as mythologically colorless as God the Father for the Christians, majestic, sovereign, creative, intrinsically good, but distant and ‘without a story’” (Varenne, “Ahura Mazdā,” 891).

95. Varenne, “Pre-Islamic Iran,” 885.

96. *Ibid.*

97. Cited by Duchesne-Guillemin, “Zoroastrianism and Parsiism,” 1081.

98. Opinions vary on the date of the battle of al-Qādisīyah.

99. Kreyenbroek, “Cosmogony and Cosmology I,” 305.

100. Boyce, *A History of Zoroastrianism*, 1: 170.

101. Duchesne-Guillemin, “Zoroastrianism and Parsiism,” 1082.

102. Herodotus, *The Histories* I.133.

103. Duchesne-Guillemin, “Zoroastrianism and Parsiism,” 1078.

104. See Knipe, *In the Image of Fire: The Vedic Experiences of Heat*.

105. Dastur Firoze M. Kotwal, mentioned above (see n. 51). The *ehrpāt*, a religious teacher, was traditionally entrusted with the care of the fire; the modern *ervad* acts only as an assistant priest. Above him is the *mobed*. Above all of them is the *dastur*, director of an important temple. Although priesthood can only be inherited, all priests must be ceremonially invested.

106. Kotwal, in Zaleski and Zaleski, “Bridge of Fire,” 63.

107. For a thorough analysis of the terms used in the context of the *yasna*, see Benveniste, “Sur la terminologie iranienne du sacrifice.” The dichotomous ritual typology of the *yasna*’s emphasis on burning fire and flowing water is treated in William R. Darrow, “Keeping the Waters Dry.” Duchesne-Guillemin, Boyce, and Stausberg have all also analyzed the ritual vocabulary of the *yasna*.

108. The overwhelming importance of ritual in Zoroastrianism, and the associated issues of purity and purification no matter how spiritualized, is noted by Duchesne-Guillemin, whose life’s work, culminating in his 1962 work *La religion de l’Iran ancien* (Paris: Presses Universitaires de France), was the translation and interpretation of the *Gāthās*: “Zoroastrianism is not the purely ethical religion it may at first seem. In practice, despite the doctrine of free will, a Zoroastrian is so constantly involved in a meticulous struggle against the contamination of death and the thousand causes of defilement, and against the threat, even in his sleep, of ever-present demons, that he does not often believe that he is leading his life freely and morally” (“Zoroastrianism and Parsiism,” 1083). See especially Jamsheed Choksy, “Purity and Pollution in Zoroastrianism,” for the contemporary implications.

109. See photographs in Duchesne-Guillemin, “Zoroastrianism and Parsiism,” 1082.

110. Kotwal, in Zaleski and Zaleski, “Bridge of Fire,” 65.

111. Varenne, “Pre-Islamic Iran,” 880.

112. Kotwal, in Zaleski and Zaleski, “Bridge of Fire,” 63–64. *Hoama* (Vedic soma), the sacred intoxicating liquor of Indo-European cult, called the “drink of immortality,” was stolen from the gods. In a profound illustration of the power of sacrifice over divine recipient, it was even believed that their immortality depended on continuing to drink it. Without mortals’ willingness to “press out the *haoma*” for the gods, the once-Immortal ones would perish. After pouring the part owed to the gods into the fire, *haoma* was consumed by worshipers at a sacrifice. By the tenth century B.C.E., the floruit of classical Vedic and Iranian religion, every important ritual included the pressing out and drinking of *haoma*. Speculative research into its composition suggests that it was an hallucinogen. Hashish is ruled out by a helpful passage in the *Dēnkart* in which Zoroaster’s patron-king Vištāsp drinks *haoma* mixed with *bhanga*; therefore they were clearly not the same thing. As mentioned in chapter 1, pharmacoreligionist Gordon Wasson claims it was the *Amanita muscaria*, the fly-killing or false orange mushroom. The latest on the issue is *Haoma and Harmaline: The Botanical Identity of the Indo-Iranian Sacred Hallucinogen “Soma” and its Legacy in Religion, Language, and Middle-Eastern Folklore*, by David Stophlet Flattery and Martin Schwartz (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1989).

In one of the *Gāthās*, *Yasna* 48 (strophes 10–12), Zoroaster calls *haoma* “filth.” He accuses it of causing lying and hubristic violence in warriors, to whose gods and customs, as we have seen, he already bore marked hostility. In the same passage, he associates *haoma* with blood sacrifice, which he denounces. *Haoma* was reintegrated into the fire-ceremony, but in extremely modified form: it is called *parā-hōm*, “preparation for *haoma*.” It is made of ground sprigs of the *Ephedra vulgaris*—still, interestingly, an intoxicant if consumed in extract (ephedrin)—and is heavily diluted with holy water. Animal oblation is only represented by a small quantity of fat. However, the latter concession may be a recent adaptation of the Parsis to the sensibilities of their Hindu host country; opinions differ on this. That these liquid and animal oblations exist at all—even in symbolic form—in the *yasna* ceremony is yet another testimony to the persistence of ancient ritual and its resistance to the “purified,” bloodless rituals demanded by “ethical” protestant reforms.

113. Zaehner’s Text Z 37. Henning (author of *Zoroaster, Politician or Witch-Doctor?*, 51) considers that all principal anti-Zurvanite writings are derived from a common written source that dates no later than the fourth century C.E., including a Persian Manichaean fragment: “They say that Ohrmazd and Ahriman are brothers: in consequence of this doctrine they will meet with their destruction. They lie against Ohrmazd and slander him, (saying) that the demon Māhmī taught him to make the world light.”

114. Zaehner’s Text G2 in *Zurvan*, 447. Theodore of Mopsuestia *apud* Photius, *Bibliotheca* 81. Migne PG 53, col. 281: My translation from the Greek. ἄνεγνώσθη βιβλιδάριον θεοδώρου Περι τῆς ἐν Περσίδι μαγικῆς, καὶ τίς ἢ τῆς εὐσεβείας διαφορά, ἐν λόγοις τρισί. . . . καὶ ἐν μὲν τῷ πρώτῳ λόγῳ προστίθεται τὸ μιὰρὸν Περσῶν δόγμα, ὃ Ζαρὰδης εἰσηγήσατο, ἦτοι τοῦ Ζουρουάμ, ὃν ἀρχηγὸν πάντων εισάγει, ὃν καὶ Τύχην καλεῖ· καὶ ὅτι σπένδων, ἵνα τέκη τὸν Ὁρμίσαν, ἔτεκεν ἐκεῖνον καὶ τὸν Σατανᾶν· καὶ περὶ τῆς αὐτῶν αἰμομιξίας. καὶ ἀπλῶς τὸ δυσσεβὲς καὶ τὸν ὑπέραισχρον δόγμα κατὰ λέξιν ἐκθεῖς ἀνασκευάζει ἐν τῷ πρώτῳ λόγῳ.

115. Zaehner’s Text Z 37 §8; italics Zaehner’s.

116. Zaehner, *Zurvan*, 60.

117. Šahristāni, *Kitābu l-milal wa n-niḥal*, in Cureton (Leipzig, 1923) 183–185, and in the edition of Gimaret and Monnot.

118. *Ibid.*

119. Zaehner comments that Zurvān's " 'Marcionite' justice has room for both" (*Zurvan*, 61).
120. *Ibid.*, §3.
121. Greater *Bundahišn*, §3. Edition of Anklesaria, p. 30 line 10–p. 39, line 11 in Zaehner's Text Z 2, §20.
122. Theodore Abū Qurran, *On the True Religion*, in the edition of Chiekhō (Beyrouth, 1912), 12–13, translation by Zaehner from George Graf (*Beiträge zur Geschichte der Philosophie des Mittelalters*, xiv, Heft I; 24–25); Zaehner's Text F2.
123. Zaehner, *Zurvan*, 62. "Greek and Syriac writers": for example, Strabo 15.3.14, and Šahristānī, cited above.
124. Šahristānī, *Kitābu l-milal wa ḥ-niḥal*, Gimaret and Mohot; Zaehner's Text F4, §1.
125. al-Mas'ūdī, Murūj adh-dhahab, trans. Barbier de Meynard, II: 124.
126. *Dēnkart*, Book IV; translation by Zaehner, *Zurvan*, 9.
127. Zaehner, *Zurvan*, 62.
128. Eznik, Venice edition, 131, cited in Zaehner, *Zurvan*, p. x.
129. Cited in Duchesne-Guillemin, "Zoroastrianism and Parsiism," 1083.
130. Zaehner's Text F5 in *Zurvan*, 434–437; S7 in Bidez and Cumont, *Mages*, II (107–111). German translation by Nöldeke; my English translation from the German: "Thus, according to your words, it appears as if there was perhaps yet another god to whom Zurvān sacrificed, and which, without his will, created the sun. Or perhaps it [the sacrifice] was [rightfully] due to the natural elements?"
131. Zaehner, *Zurvan*, 62.
132. Eznik, Venice edition, 130, cited in Zaehner, *Zurvan*, p. x.
133. Zaehner, *Zurvan*, 62–63.
134. Eznik, Elišē, and bar Kōnai, Zaehner's Text F1, §§ 64–65.
135. *Bundahišn*, §4; Zaehner's Text Z2. The *Dēnkart* offers a parallel.
136. Zaehner, *Zurvan*, 63.
137. De Menasce claims that the role of the *barsom* in the myth is that of royalty, and is due to Mazdean influence "qui revendique l'usage religieux, sacrificiel des barsūm"; de Menasce, "Autour d'un texte syriaque inédit," 590. "Are we not rather to understand, then, that Zurvan promises to give his first-born the kingship and his second-born the office of high priest?" (cited in Zaehner, *Zurvan*, 66). In Sasanian rock reliefs, Ohrmazd is shown conferring on the new king not the *barsom* but a diadem; Sarre, *Die Kunst des alten Persiens*, 44, cited in Zaehner, *Zurvan*, 66 n. 7. Therefore the two emblems are separate. The diadem (and its conferral) signify royalty; the *barsom*, priesthood. The king was not, in fact, high priest of the religion; Ohrmazd was. In a Mithraic monument at Neuenheim, Cumont illustrates Saturn (Zurvān), his head veiled holding a sickle in left hand, handing a thunderbolt to Jupiter (Ohrmazd); (Cumont, *Textes et monuments*, ii, no. 245, ill. facing p. 346). Zaehner notes that the thunderbolt "would naturally succeed the Persian *barsōm* which would not have been understood in the West" (*Zurvan*, 67). This is a typical iconographic restatement of Iranian myths in Occidental terms.
138. As opposed to Ohrmazd, radiant and sweet-smelling; Zaehner's Text F1, §49.
139. Šahristānī, §1. Zaehner's Text F4.
140. By now this postulation of an "invisible recipient" in the work of Simon and other interpreters of the ancient Greek libating deities is familiar; for its conceptual flaws, see chapter 5.
141. Eznik, Venice edition, 126, cited in Zaehner, *Zurvan*, 51.
142. Eznik, Venice edition, 139, cited in Zaehner, *Zurvan*, 78.

143. Compare the writings of Alexander of Lycopolis and especially Augustine, *Against the Manichaeans*, which were proved through the independent discovery of Coptic and Iranian Manichaean texts in this century to contain far fewer doctrinal distortions than had been previously ascribed to them on the basis of their Christian polemical stance. Especially striking was the degree to which Manichaean dualism regarded matter itself as the imprisoned domain and imprisoning principle of darkness, just as Augustine had claimed. See Allberry, *A Manichaean Psalm Book*, 54.17, 108.24, 221.5. See the discussion in Kurt Rudolph's work.

144. So among Zurvanites, the Manichaeans and the more pessimistic Gnostic sects, we do not live in a "mixed" world where both good and evil are at war, as the *Bundahišn* describes. Instead, the diabolical one is the unchallenged ruler of earth. A passage in Psellus (*De Operatione Daemonum*, Boissonade, 3; Zaehner's Text G7) confirms this. Psellus describes a sect as Euchite, but which must have had strong Zurvanite tendencies: It acknowledged a father and two sons, the younger of whom controls heavens. The older son's authority only extends to what is within the cosmos. Zurvān, the father, controls only those things which are above the cosmos. It is hard to know if as a result of this doctrine, the Zurvanites, like the Manichaeans but unlike orthodox Mazdaeans, viewed matter as demonic.

145. Zaehner, *Zurvan*, 68–69.

146. Greater *Bundahišn*, 34.30. Translation from the Pahlavi by Zaehner, except for the corrected last sentence by P. Oktor Skjaervø.

147. Zaehner, *Zurvan*, 69. Italics Zaehner's.

#### 7. "MYSELF TO MYSELF": THE NORSE ODIN AND DIVINE AUTOSACRIFICE

1. Boyer, "Elements of the Sacred among the Germanic and Norse Peoples," 287.

2. Odin had to give up one of his eyes in order to drink from the well of wisdom belonging to the giant Mímir at the roots of the World Tree (*Gylfaginning* ch. 8; *Völuspá* 28). As Stephen Mitchell observes, "nearly all of Óðinn's activities revolve around his search for wisdom." Mitchell, "Óðinn," 444. He is tortured between two fires in *Grímnismál*, and hangs himself on Yggdrasil, the World Tree that unites the three realms, where he is also impaled in *Hávamál*, the subject of this chapter. "The result of both experiences is an ecstatic state in which Óðinn spouts forth numinous knowledge. . . . He is often found on journeys, the sole purpose of which is to grow in wisdom from knowledge gained through confrontations with otherworldly beings" (*ibid.*). For a thorough treatment of the account of "Odin between the fires" in *Grímnismál*, and a rejection of its allegedly "shamanistic" elements in favor of a parallel to the ancient Indian *dikṣā* tradition, whereby the ordeal should be interpreted instead as an Old Norse form of *tapas*, "intended to amass spiritual power by means of numinous knowledge," see Fleck, "The 'Knowledge-Criterion' in the *Grímnismál*," esp. 58.

3. The approach is ubiquitous. For example, Germanic religion scholar Edgar Polomé calls Odin "the Germanic representative of the Indo-European divine 'king-magician' analyzed by Georges Dumézil"; see Polomé, "Óðinn (Odin)," 58. E.O.G. Turville-Petre writes, "It is said widely today that Óðinn, the priest magician, is a god of the first class, corresponding with the Indian Varuṇa, while Thór, the warrior god, belongs to the second class, and corresponds with Indra" (*Myth and Religion of the North*, 41). However, Odin's oscillating nature and, as Mitchell notes, the lack of Odinic place-names in the West Norse area has caused some to question his Indo-European antiquity and to call for his later advent from the south to replace the indigenous Týr (Mitchell, "Óðinn," 445). In the light of comparative research, Dumézil's schema is

largely adhered to: Óðinn “belongs,” although as priest-magician he manifests superbly strange, amoral, chthonic, and undeniably shamanic characteristics.

4. The ancestry of Odin and his two brothers Vili and Vé is as follows: Bestla, the frost-daughter of the giant Bölthór was their mother; their father was Borr, son of Búri. In Snorri Sturluson’s well-known creation story, Búri had no parents, but was revealed by the primeval cow Auðumla as she licked salty rocks into the shape of a man (*The Prose Edda*, *Gylfaginning* ch. 6).

5. According to *The Poetic Edda’s Völuspá* (The Wise Woman’s Prophecy), 17–18, Odin and two divine companions made the first human couple from two logs, or branches, Ask and Embla.

6. *The Prose Edda* consists of *Gylfaginning*, the journey of King Gylfi to the hall of the Æsir, where he asks them questions about the gods and is answered in encyclopaedic fashion; *Skáldskaparmál* (The Diction of Poetry); and *Háttatal* (The List of Verse Forms). Snorri also composed *Heimskringla* (Circle of the World), which contains biographies of the Norwegian kings. *Heimskringla* includes *Ynglingasaga*, which is the History of the Kings of the Yngling Dynasty, and rich tales of legendary kings and some of the gods, including Odin. Snorri Sturluson (1178–1241 C.E.) was a Christian who was concerned that poets of his day were not familiar enough with the old heathen religion to be able to properly use “kennings,” that is, mythical, often cryptic phrases in their compositions. For example, kennings for poetry itself, such as “the seed of Odin’s breast,” “the seed of the eagle’s bill,” “Kvasir’s blood,” and so forth, existed orally for at least two centuries before Snorri wrote them down; they all referred to the theft of the mead of poetry, the blood of Kvasir, from the dwarves by the shape-shifter Odin.

7. Snorri Sturluson, *Prose Edda*, *Gylfaginning* ch. 4; translated by Turville-Petre, 35.

8. For example, Odin kills his beloved protégé, Harald Wartooth (Saxo Grammaticus, *Gesta Danorum* 8.220).

9. See the analysis of Neil Price, *The Viking Way*, 93–94.

10. Georges Dumézil, *Gods of the Ancient Northmen*, 26. The sorceress of *Völuspá* 28 says, “I know, Odin (*Alt veit ek, Óðinn*), exactly where your eye was hidden, in the famous fountain of Mímir. Mímir drinks mead each morning from the pledge of Valfather (Odin)” (cited by Dumézil, *Gods*, 27). She uses the same phrase that Odin will later use in describing his autosacrifice in *Hávamál* 138, “I know that I hung (*Veit ek, at ek hekk*) / on the wind-swept tree / For nine whole nights.” In the Scandinavian religious universe, mantic wisdom was the invaluable resource: The one who “knows” is the one with true power; that is why Odin goes to such great lengths to “know.”

11. Cited by Turville-Petre, *Myth and Religion*, 252.

12. Albert Henrichs comments, “The language of *giving* is of course extremely common in many cultures, including the Greek, for ‘exchanges’ between gods and mortals the gods are δωτήρες ἐάων (*Odyssey* 8.325), ‘givers of good things,’ as long as mortals ‘give’ in return — ἢ ῥ’ ἀγαθὸν καὶ ἐναΐσιμα δῶρα διδοῦναι ἀθανάτοις, ‘it is good to give proper gifts to the immortals’ (*Iliad* 24.425–6)” (correspondence with author, August 1992).

13. Citation, orthography, and translation by Turville-Petre, *Myth and Religion*, 42. Here I follow Turville-Petre’s version in all aspects.

14. Icelandic tradition erroneously pointed to Sæmundr Sigfússon (1056–1133) as the author of the poems of the *Poetic Edda*. In fact, they were part of an oral tradition transmitted by bards much like the Homeric rhapsodes; and like the Homeric lays, they were only written down centuries after their composition. Some seem to date back



to the ninth century or earlier, although this remains a point of much debate; see the discussions by Joseph Harris (in §“Eddic Poetry”) in Clover and Lindow, eds., *Old Norse-Icelandic Literature: A Critical Guide*.

15. See discussions of *Hávamál* by Joseph Harris (in §“Eddic Poetry”) and John Lindow (in §“Mythology and Mythography”) in Clover and Lindow, eds. *Old Norse-Icelandic Literature: A Critical Guide*. It has been accepted that Scandinavia was religiously isolated until the Viking era exposed the northern lands to the cultural influences of Britain, Ireland, Normandy, Russia, and Byzantium. Recently, however, Thomas DuBois has forcefully made the case for the deep influences of Sámi/Finnish practices, which he argues persisted in Norse religion in relationship to foreign cultural factors (see his *Nordic Religions in the Viking Age*). Iceland was settled in 874. In 830 c.e., St. Ansgar undertook a mission to convert Sweden to Christianity. In 985, Haraldr Bluetooth of Denmark was converted to Christianity; Iceland followed by vote of the Great Assembly in 1000 c.e. St. Olaf established Christianity in Norway in 1015. But the Germanic gods died hard: In 1070 Adam of Bremen still reported animal and human sacrifices at Uppsala in Sweden.

Iceland in that period “saw a flowering of antiquarian culture” (Puhvel, *Comparative Mythology*, 190), including the *Eddas*, sagas, and skaldic poetry. Around the same time, Saxo Grammaticus in Denmark wrote the *Gesta Danorum*, a history of the Danes “from the beginning” to 1185. The first nine books consist of epic prose with a strong mythical overlay. As Puhvel puts it (190), these works are “the basic fund of German mythic tradition.” Despite the lateness and antiquarianism of the Icelandic material, and the lack of primary sources, reconstructed Germanic myth ranks with Vedic and Roman “as the third mainstay for triangulated Indo-European reconstruction” (Puhvel, *Comparative Mythology*, 191).

16. Bölthórr was a giant, father of Bestla, Odin’s giantess mother. So the “son of Bölthórr” was Odin’s uncle. Giants were thought to be very wise and very old, just as Odin is said to be in *Baldur’s Draumar* 2. *Völuspá* 2 asserts that giants were born ages ago, and that like the dead, they live in hills and rocks. Giants (*jötnar*) are in fact closely identified with the dead.

17. See the discussion of research on the *Hávamál* in Rudolf Simek, *Dictionary of Northern Mythology*, s.v. “Odin’s (self-)sacrifice,” 249: “The motifs in this myth reminiscent of Christ’s crucifixion have led to a theory that this is merely an adaptation of Christ’s Sacrifice on the Cross by the ancient Scandinavians who, having heard of Christ’s sacrifice on their travels to the British Isles, subsequently transferred it to their chief god, Odin (Bugge). However, this form of sacrifice is also well-known from initiation rites in archaic cultures, and has sufficient parallels in Indian (Prajāpati, Kṛṣṇa) and in Greek mythology (Dionysius) to warrant its acceptance as an Indo-Germanic motif. Consequently, the origin of Odin’s self-sacrifice should be seen as one of the shamanistic initiation rites into the knowledge of poetry and magic (connected with the knowledge of runes).”

18. Turville-Petre, *Myth and Religion*, 42.

19. Bugge, *Studier over de nordiske Gude- og Heltesagns Oprindelse*, 291.

20. For example, Kaarle Krohn, *Skandinavisk mytologi*, 105 ff.

21. *Grímnismál* 31, translated by Lee M. Hollander in *The Poetic Edda*, 59.

22. *Disputatio inter Mariam et Crucem*, ed. R. Morris, *Legends of the Holy Rood* (1871), 134, 200; cited in Turville-Petre, *Myth and Religion*, 43 n. 5.

23. Bugge records a nineteenth-century folksong from Shetland which shows the conflation of the two: “Nine days he hang / for ill was da folk, / A blüdy mael / made wī a lance— / Nine lang nichts, hang he dare / pa de rütless tree; in güd wis he”

(Bugge, *Studier over de nordiske Gude- og Heltesagns Oprindelse*, 309, cited in Turville-Petre, *Myth and Religion*, 43 n. 6).

24. Or as R. I. Page asks, “The tale shows disturbing similarities to the Christian Christ hanging on the cross-beam, pierced by a spear, tormented by thirst, achieving the fullness of his Godhead by his willing self-sacrifice. Were there two myths here, perhaps ultimately related? Or did one invade the world of the other?” Page, *Norse Myths*, 15.

25. Odin’s symbol was a triangular knot, representing the knot with which human sacrifices to him were hanged.

26. As Munch remarks, “the scholars who derive the myth of Odin on the gallows from the story of Christ on the cross, and Yggdrasil’s ash from the cross as the tree of life, have at the same time maintained that ancient pagan faith and cult had become more ingrained in Norse myth” (*Norse Mythology*, 289).

27. Page, *Norse Myths*, 15. This idea has been best developed by Rolf Pipping (“Oden i Galgen,” 1–13.) A. G. van Hamel offers an animistic explanation, citing Irish parallels (“Óðinn Hanging on the Tree,” 260–288). This school of thought is urgently refuted by Jere Fleck, in favor of the sexual symbolism of the cosmic tree and Odin’s dripping wound—as well as possible parallels to the Soma sacrifice—in his “Óðinn’s Self-Sacrifice: A New Interpretation.”

28. For this view see Folke Ström, *Den döendes makt och Odin i trädet*.

29. Boyer, “Elements of the Sacred,” 287.

30. Puhvel, *Comparative Mythology*, 193.

31. Boyer, “Elements of the Sacred,” 287.

32. Munch, *Norse Mythology*, 7.

33. See the discussion and bibliography on ravens’ association throughout Eurasia with mediation, prophecy, and magical flight in Holliman, “The gendered peopling of North America: Addressing the antiquity of systems of multiple genders,” 127–128; and Mortenson, “Raven Augury in Tibet, Northwest Yunnan, Inner Asia, and Circumpolar Regions: A Study in Comparative Folklore and Religion.”

34. Polomé, *Essays on Germanic Religion*, 103.

35. *The Prose Edda of Snorri Sturluson: Tales from Norse Mythology*, trans. Jean I. Young, “The Deluding of Gylfi,” *Gylfaginning*, 43.

36. S. Lindqvist, *Gotlands Bildsteine*, 1: 95–96, 99–101, figs. 86, 89, 137–140, 166; 2: 15–25, 92–96; discussed in Price, *The Viking Way*, 320–321; fig. 5.16. Price observes that the generic identification of these eight-legged horse images as “either Óðinn riding to Valholl, or perhaps the dead man himself for whom Óðinn has sent his horse” is challenged by the multiplicity of “similar creatures,” up to four eight-legged horses per panel, alongside six-legged elk and reindeer, in the woven hangings radiocarbon-dated to Viking times found in the church of Överhogdal in Härjedalen, Sweden; A. M. Frantzén and M. Nockert, *Bonaderna från Skog och Överhogdal* (Stockholm: KVHAA, 1992); discussed in Price, *The Viking Way*, figs. 5.17–19. “These [multi-legged] animals are recorded as the mounts of shamans all across Siberia, for example among the Buryat, and even as far afield as Japan and India, leading some historians of religion to call this the shamanic horse *par excellence*. . . . In some parts of Siberia, the beats of the drum during a shamanic performance are actually intended to represent the pounding of his horse’s hooves, increasing in tempo when the creature and its rider gain speed as they journey to other worlds (Stephen O. Glosecki, *Shamanism and Old English Poetry* [New York: Garland, 1989], 10) . . . It may have been that the supernatural steeds of Viking trance-sorcerers were eight-legged horses, and that Óðinn’s one of these was called Sleipnir: this is a crucial difference, I feel, because it takes these creatures and

these images out the realm of the gods and into the realm of human beings” (Price, *The Viking Way*, 322). Or, as one might put it differently, the mounts of human sorcerers mirror the supernatural mount of the god, the supreme sorcerer; both realms, human and divine, reflexively refract and interpenetrate one another through theurgic activity and transgressive travel, for which the magical animal is a vehicle.

37. *The Prose Edda*, “The Deluding of Gylfi” (*Gylfaginning*), trans. Young, 83.

38. Adam of Bremen, *Gesta Hammaburgensis* 4.26.

39. The divine name formed with the augmentative suffix \*-no from the adjective *wātós*.

40. Dumézil (*Gods*, 36–37) claims an Odin-Tyr duality similar to the antithesis between the Indic gods Varuṇa and Miṭra. In the realm of Varuṇa belongs that which is invisible, mythical forms of fire and soma, and improper sacrifice, especially intoxication by soma. To Miṭra belongs that which is visible, ordinary forms of fire and sacrifice, and whatever is properly sacrificed.

41. Cited and translated by Puhvel, *Comparative Mythology*, 196. *Berserkr*, whence comes our word “berserk,” originally meant “bear-shirted” (see Klaus von See, “Berserker”). Although they are distinct phenomena, the mania of the *berserkr* has been compared to that of the mythical maenads in the *Bacchae* of Euripides. To Otto Höfler, the common aspect linking them is the interpretation that such “ecstatic happenings,” even when triggered by chemical means, are caused by the influence of a higher being—that is, a god, Höfler, *Verwandlungskulte, Volkssagen und Mythen*, 169, 187. In the worship of Odin, Höfler claimed the interpenetration of myth and cult. He sees the “mythicization” of cult as a basic religio-historic category; see Brod, “On Germanic Myth and Cult.”

42. William Anderson compares Odin as leader of the Wild Hunt with his host of dead warriors to the Celtic God Cerunnos, the spectral horseman who galloped through the deer park of Peterborough woods up to Stamford, recorded in the Anglo-Saxon Chronicle in 1127. “It is a hunt of unbaptized souls riding through woods or across the sky recorded in many parts of Europe. In Scandinavia and Germany the leader of the hunt was Odin or Wotan.” Anderson, *The Green Man: Archetype of Our Oneness with the Earth*, 55.

43. This view is upheld by Jan de Vries, *Altgermanische Religionsgeschichte*, 46–48 and 89–106.

44. For example, Chadwick, *The Cult of Othin*, 49.

45. In his *Om Nordboernes Gudedyrkelse og Gudreto i Hedenold* (Copenhagen, 1876).

46. Jan de Vries disagrees, seeing the myth more euhemeristically as mirroring the struggle of the pre-Indo-European agricultural population of northwestern Europe and Indo-European invaders (de Vries, *Altgermanische Religionsgeschichte*, 210–211). Dumézil sees the Vanir as fertility gods, and the Æsir as gods of dominance and warfare. Their truce under the dominance of Odin, concluded by spitting into a jar, is to him an illustration of the tripartite social contract whereby the farmers cultivate soil, the warriors protect people, and one monarch rules them all.

47. Karl Helm, *Wodan, Ausbreitung und Wanderung seines Kultes* (Giessener Beiträge zur deutschen Philologie, 1946), 85; cited in Polomé, *Essays on Germanic Religion*, 78.

48. Dumézil, *Gods*, 32. It is interesting that even Dumézil admits that Odin is a type sui generis, a sorcerer-king.

49. See Philipson, *Die Genealogie der Götter in germanischer Religion, Mythologie, und Theologie*, who also argues for a late arrival of Odin; Wessén, “Schwedische Ortsnamen

und altnordische Mythologie”; Turville-Petre, “The Cult of Óðinn in Iceland,” in *Nine Norse Studies*.

50. Turville-Petre, *Myth and Religion*, 65–70.

51. *Ibid.*, 66.

52. Dumézil, *Gods*, p. 48.

53. The main forms of Old Norse sacrifice are treated in DeVries, *Altgermanische Religionsgeschichte*, 406 ff.; for the most recent comprehensive work on ancient Scandinavian sacrifice, see Näsström, *Blot: Tro och offer i det förkristna Norden*.

54. Strabo (*Geography* 7.294) writes of the Cimbri that they collected human sacrificial blood in special kettles: “Grey-haired women in white garments . . . crowned the prisoners with wreaths and led them to a bronze mixing cauldron of a capacity of about ninety pails. Climbing the step-ladder resting against it and bowing over the kettle, they slit the throat of each prisoner that was raised to them. From the blood that flooded into the cauldron, they would read oracles” (translation by Jan Puhvel). A similar scene is portrayed on the Gundestrup Cauldron, a Celtic work of the early Iron Age from Gundestrup, Jutland (National Museum, Denmark). Although the cauldron was found in Denmark, it is regarded as a Celtic work. Further commentary on the cauldron may be found in *The Celts*, ed. Salatino Moscati, et al., trans. Andrew Ellis, et al. (New York: Rizzoli, 1991), and Olmsted, *The Gundestrup Cauldron: Its Archaeological Context*. However, Norse priests also practiced oracular divination using blood (*Hymiskviða* I, cited in Turville-Petre, *Myth and Religion*, 252 n. 9).

55. Written and iconographic sources and the archaeological evidence of sacrificial remains in Scandinavia show the sacrality of the horse; hence the church’s ban on eating its meat.

56. Polomé, *Essays*, p. 83.

57. Cited in Turville-Petre, *Myth and Religion*, 251. Three great sacrifices were held yearly: “at winter-day . . . for a good year; at mid-winter . . . for a good harvest, and at summer-day . . . for victory” (*Ynglingasaga* 8).

58. Among the tribes in England, the Germanic ritual sprinkling of blood affected religious language. The term “to bless” derives from OE *blædsian*, meaning “to hallow with blood.”

59. Accounts of Icelandic temples such as those given in the *Heimskringla’s Saga of Hákon the Good* thus far lack archaeological corroboration. See Olsen, “Vorchristliche Heiligtümer in Nordeuropa.”

60. Turville-Petre, *Myth and Religion*, 49. For example, *Völuspá* str. 2 and the *Vafthrúðnismál* mention nine worlds in the universe; it was said of Heimdallr that he was the son of nine mothers; we remember that Odin learned nine mighty songs from the son of Þóthórr in *Hávamál*, 140.

61. Munch, *Norse Mythology*, 277.

62. Price, *The Viking Way*, 293. Price characterizes Viking sacred geography as an “ensouled world,” participating of indigenous circumpolar traditions extending to Siberia and Alaska and to Greenland and Canada: All things are in fact animate and autonomous, and their respective essences can be identified and controlled by the shaman (or in the Old Norse case by Odin, the shaman par excellence). These ideas emerge in a famous statement by a Chukchi shaman, recorded by the Russian Vladimir Bogoraz Tan while in exile in Siberia in the late nineteenth century: “On the steep bank of a river there exists life. A voice is there, and speaks aloud. I saw the ‘master’ of the voice and spoke with him. He subjected himself to me and sacrificed to me. He came yesterday and answered my questions. The small grey bird with the blue breast sings shaman-songs in the hollow of the bough, calls her spirits, and practices

shamanism. The wood-pecker strikes his drum in the tree with his drumming nose. Under the axe the tree trembles and wails as a drum under the baton. All these came at my call. . . . All that exists lives. The lamp walks around. The walls of the house have voices of their own. Even the chamber-vessel has a separate land and house. The skins sleeping in the bags talk at night. The antlers lying on the tombs arise at night and walk in procession round the mounds, while the deceased get up and visit the living"; Tan, *The Chukchee*, 281.

63. Turville-Petre, *Myth and Religion*, 252.

64. Puhvel, *Comparative Mythology*, 198.

65. Tacitus (*Germania* ch. 9) says that the Germanic people would not confine their gods within walls (*nec cohibere parietibus deos*) but rather they would consecrate woods and groves to them. There they would mark an altar with a heap of stones, a practice confirmed by archaeological finds; Jankuhn, archaeological notes in Munch, *Die Germania des Tacitus erläutert*, 185–187.

66. DeVries, *Altgermanische Religionsgeschichte*, 322.

67. *Poetic Edda, Helgaqviða Hundingsbana* 2.24. Citation and observation by Puhvel, *Comparative Mythology*, 198.

68. Cited in Turville-Petre, *Myth and Religion*, 252 n. 10.

69. *Ibid.*, 252.

70. Among other Germanic scholars, Jan de Vries, E.O.G. Turville-Petre, and especially Heinrich Beck ("Germanische Menschen opfer in der literarischen Überlieferung," in *Vorgeschichtlicher Heiligtümer und Opferplätze*, ed. H. Jankuhn) have taken up the issue of the authenticity of this tradition in the sagas, many with skepticism. It is Mitchell's contention that archaeological evidence like the Northern European bog bodies and the Lärbro Stora Hammers stone in Gotland, Sweden (no. O-3; Fig. 68) provide a challenge to the dismissal of the historicity of the sagic insistence upon Odinic human sacrifice (see Mitchell, *Heroic Sagas and Ballads*, 64 and n. 42). James Sauvé treats its Indo-European ancestry in "The Divine Victim: Aspects of Human Sacrifice in Viking Scandinavia and Vedic India."

71. *Ynglingasaga* II, 14–15. A different version of the death of Dómaldi appears in the *Monumenta Historica Norvegiae*, which says that the king was hanged as a sacrifice to Ceres (Frejya). Although this may indicate that other gods besides Odin received sacrifice by hanging, this is a unique instance.

72. *Guta Lag och Guta Saga*, ed. H. Pipping (1907), 63; cited in Turville-Petre, *Myth and Religion*, 253 n. 11.

73. One of the more evocative, if controversial sources for pre-Christian Scandinavian religion is the description offered by Adam of Bremen around 1070 C.E. in his *Gesta Hammaburgensis Ecclesiae Pontificum* (*History of the Bishops of Hamburg*) 4.26–27. It seems to have been based on the description of Sveinn II Estridsen. Adam famously describes a temple at Uppsala that he says included a sceptered Thor, an armed Wodan, "the raging one . . . (who) . . . makes war and gives men courage in the face of the enemy," and an ithyphallic Fricco (Frey). "The common sacrificial festival of all the Swedes together is held each ninth year in Uppsala. . . . Nine heads are offered from every kind of living creature of the male sex, and the custom is to appease the gods with their blood. But the decapitated bodies are hung in a grove near the temple. The grove was so sacred for pagans that they held each of the trees as divine because of the victims' death. Dogs were hung with horses and men, and a Christian told me that he had seen as many as seventy-two corpses hanging in rows" (cited and translated by Puhvel, *Comparative Mythology*, 192). Adam also mentions at Uppsala the drowning of victims in a well, perhaps recreating on a mundane level the well of wisdom at the

roots of the world tree. The existence of such a temple is now gravely doubted, although many of its ritual elements seem to have some roots in authenticity. As Price remarks, “new studies of sources for the Gamla Uppsala ‘temple’ have suggested that it may have been a very large feasting hall in which pagan festivals took place at certain times, rather than a dedicated religious building in its own right. . . . The notion of prominent buildings taking on a temporary role as ‘temples’ for *blót* ceremonies is now generally accepted”; Price, *The Viking Way*, 61, citing the papers presented in the symposium publication *Uppsalakulten och Adam av Bremen*, ed. A. Hultgård (Nora: Nya Doxa, 1997).

74. Hans Dedekam demonstrated the presence of a sacrificial grove with human figures hanging from trees in the Oseberg tapestry in his “Odins Træ: Et Stykke Billed væv fra Osebergfundet,” 56 ff. For the Frösö church excavation, see Hildebrandt, “Frösö kyrka på hednisk grund.” Radiocarbon dating offered the terminus ad quem for the bones and for the tree’s felling.

75. See Turville-Petre, *Religion and Mythology*, 253–254.

76. This has been viewed by some as *interpretatio Christiana* and not a genuine Old Norse pagan practice. Others uphold its authenticity.

77. *Kristni saga* 12; cited in Turville-Petre, *Myth and Religion*, 254 n. 19.

78. P. V. Glob, *The Bog People: Iron Age Man Preserved*, trans. Rupert Bruce (New York: Ballantine Books, 1971), 101; cited in Polomé, *Essays*, 72.

79. Mary Susan Neff, “Germanic Sacrifice: An Analytical Study Using Linguistic, Archaeological, and Literary Data,” chapter 3, Ph.D. dissertation, University of Texas at Austin, 1980; cited in Polomé, *Essays*, 72.

80. F. Ström denies any connection between religious sacrifice and the death penalty (*On the Sacral Origin of the Germanic Death Penalties*, 1942). D. Strömbäck contradicts Ström, on the strength of a number of Old Norse texts suggesting that the purpose of the death penalty was to appease the gods (“Hade de germanska dödstraffen sakralt ursprung?” *Saga och Sed*, 1942, 51–69). Discussing both, Turville-Petre believes that if this was true, the law itself was divine (*Myth and Religion*, 328).

81. These questions are raised by Polomé, *Essays*, p. 72.

82. *Den norsk-islandske Skjaldedigtning*, ed. Finnur Jónsson, A I–II, B I–II, 1912–1915; cited in Turville-Petre, *Myth and Religion*, 43 n. 8.

83. In *Eyrbyggja saga*, ch. 44, we learn that before a battle started, one of the chiefs hurled a spear over the enemy “following an ancient custom” (*at fornum sið*), and thus dedicated them to the battle-god. Stephen Mitchell remarks, “The use of a phrase like *at fornum sið* should be understood to be highly unreliable (or questionable at any rate) in a culture as ‘antiquarianizing’ as that of the Icelandic 13th or 14th centuries” (personal correspondence, June 27, 1995).

84. Dumézil, *Gods*, 30. *Gefa* (give), which we identified earlier as the verb used by Odin on the tree to describe his offering of himself to himself, is used in many different sacrificial contexts. The most ghastly one may be the habit of “cutting the blood-eagle” on one’s enemy by slitting open his back and drawing out the lung, thus explicitly consecrating the victim to Odin. For example, the *Orkneyinga saga* says that when Tork-Einar defeated Hálfdan Highleg, he cut the blood-eagle on his back and “gave him to Odin” (*gaf hann Óðni*). (*Orkneyinga saga*, ed. S. Nordal, 1916, 12; cited in Turville-Petre, *Myth and Religion*, 254 n. 21). However, as is the case with the other medieval Iceland sagas that treat archaic (Viking) topics, doubt has been raised about whether the practice ever existed, as argued by Roberta Frank, “Viking Atrocity and Skaldic Verse: The Rite of the Blood-Eagle.”

85. Turville-Petre, *Myth and Religion*, 43.

86. Ibid.
87. *Den norsk-islandske Skjaldedigtning*, 94; cited in Turville-Petre, *Myth and Religion*, 43 n. 11.
88. *Den norsk-islandske Skjaldedigtning*, 114 and 182; cited in Turville-Petre, *Myth and Religion*, 43 n. 12.
89. *Den norsk-islandske Skjaldedigtning*, 136, 1; cited in Turville-Petre, *Myth and Religion*, 44 n. 13.
90. Eyvind the Plagiarist in *Den norsk-islandske Skjaldedigtning*, 60, 1; cited in Turville-Petre, *Myth and Religion*, 44 n. 14.
91. The story of the preordination of Víkarr's sacrifice is found in *Hálfs saga ok Hálfsrekka*, and the sacrifice of Víkarr is told in a slightly different form in Saxo Grammaticus. *Hálfs saga* recounts that Víkarr's doom was prefigured: Víkarr's father Alrekr had two wives who couldn't get along; he promised he would keep whichever wife brewed the best beer for his homecoming. Signý called on Freyja for aid; Geirhildr on Odin, who spat in the vat, but demanded in recompense what was between her and the vat . . . her unborn child. The ale was good and the king kept Geirhildr but said, "I see hanging / on high gallows / your son, woman, / sold to Odin." Geirhildr gave birth to Víkarr. On *Hálfs saga*, see the translation of Bachman and Erlingsson, *The Sagas of King Half and King Hrolf*; and the commentaries of Stephen Mitchell in his *Heroic Sagas and Ballads* and his essay, "The Sagaman and Oral Literature." On the issue of human sacrifice in medieval Icelandic contexts, see Tulinius, *The Matter of the North*.
92. *Gautreks saga*, in *Seven Viking Romances*, trans. Pálsson and Edwards, 155.
93. Summary adapted from the account in Turville-Petre, *Myth and Religion*, 45.
94. *Gautreks saga*, in *Seven Viking Romances*, trans. Pálsson and Edwards, 156–157.
95. Turville-Petre, *Myth and Religion*, 45.
96. Ibid.
97. Hultkranz, "A New Look at the World Pillar in Arctic and Sub-Arctic Religions."
98. Polomé, *Essays*, 93.
99. *Gylfaginning* ch. 8; *Grímnismál* 29.
100. Turville-Petre suggests that Snorri may be too systematic, and that "probably the three names all apply to one well, which was basically the well of fate, and hence the source of wisdom. This well would thus correspond with the one beneath the holy tree at Uppsala, in which sacrifices were immersed and auguries were read" (*Myth and Religion*, 279).
101. *Gylfaginning* ch. 16.
102. Munch, *Norse Mythology*, 289.
103. *Den norsk-islandske Skjaldedigtning* B, I, 239, 1; cited in Turville-Petre, *Myth and Religion*, 48 n. 38.
104. Price, *The Viking Way*, 290.
105. Ibid., 291.
106. *Hávamál* 157, trans. Lee M. Hollander in *The Poetic Edda*, 39.
107. *The Proposed Book of Common Prayer*, "The Holy Eucharist: Rite Two," 362.
108. Dumézil, *Gods*, p. 27.
109. From the *Heimskringla* (*Ynglingasaga* 6); chapter 7 confirms Odin's role as a shape-shifter: "Odin could shift his appearance. When he did so his body would lie there as if he were asleep or dead; but he himself, in an instant, in the shape of a bird or an animal, a fish or a serpent, went to distant countries on his or other men's errands"; trans. Lee Hollander, in Snorri Sturluson, *Heimskringla: History of the Kings of Norway*.

110. *Ynglingasaga* 7, trans. Hollander, *Heimskringla*, 10–11. Anne Ross, in *Pagan Celtic Britain*, observes a strong Celtic confluence in this story, as the Celts venerated the prophetic powers of the head.

111. *Ynglingasaga* 7. See Strömbäck, *Sejd: Textstudier i nordisk religionshistoria*.

112. *Ynglingasaga* 4, trans. Neil Price, *The Viking Way*, 70.

113. *Ynglingasaga* 7, trans. Price, *The Viking Way*, 70.

114. *Ibid.*

115. In chapters 4–6 of the *Skáldskaparmál*, Snorri Sturluson relates the Promethean theft of the elixir of poetry in the response of Bragi to the question, “Whence come the art called poetry?” (there is also a version in *Hávamál* 104–110): “Kvasir was a being who was so wise that he could answer any question put to him. He was fashioned by the gods from their truce-spittle at the conclusion of the hostilities between the Æsir and the Vanir. The two dwarves Fjalar and Galar murdered him when he wandered in to their house. They ran off with his blood in three vessels. Mixing the blood with honey, the dwarves brewed mead that made anyone who drank of it a poet or soothsayer. Later, the hospitable dwarves murdered another guest, a giant named Gilling, by drowning him in a rowboat. His wife’s loud lamentations disturbed them so much that they dropped a millstone on her head. When Suttung, the son or nephew of Gilling, learned of the dwarves’ perfidy, he marooned them on a reef. They gave him the mead as weregild. Odin, travelling abroad as Bolverk (Evil-doer), took service with Baugi, the brother of Suttung, and demanded a drink of mead as wages. When Suttung refused, the god bored a hole into the rock of Suttung’s castle with a supernatural auger called Rati, changed into a serpent, and crawled into the hole. There he encountered and seduced the daughter of Suttung, Gunnlōð, who guarded the mead. She offered him three sips of the mead; he emptied all three vessels. Odin changed into an eagle and flew away with Suttung in hot pursuit. When the gods saw the eagle approaching the walls of Ásgarðr, they set out crocks in the courtyard. With Suttung literally at his tail, Odin spewed out the mead into these jars; but some spilt outside the wall. Anyone can drink this; it is called ‘the foolpoet’s portion’ (*skáldfíflahlutr*).”

As Turville-Petre notes, the story of the theft of the sacred liquor of inspiration is not unique to Norse mythology; it may have an ancient Indo-European genesis: “the closest parallel to the story of Óðinn is to be found in Indian myths about the rape of soma, the half-personified, intoxicating sacrificial liquor. . . . Soma is said to stimulate the voice, and to be the leader of poets. Those who drink it become immortal and know the gods. . . . Soma gives strength to gods and men, but especially to Indra. Indra, filled with soma, conquered the monster Vritra, and fortified with it he performed many a mighty feat. The soma was brought from heaven to Indra; as is frequently told in the *Rigveda*, it was brought by an eagle. The eagle, according to one passage, broke into a fortress of iron to seize the soma. Although Indra is occasionally called, or likened to, an eagle, he does not, in the *Rigveda*, appear to be identified with the eagle who raped the soma. It has, however, been remarked that, in one later passage, it is Indra himself, in the form of an eagle, who carried off the soma” (*Myth and Religion*, 41 and n. 43).

Régis Boyer comments on the meaning of this episode, “At the price of a series of animal metamorphoses, Óðinn managed to swallow the liquid in order to return it to Ásgarðr. This role of ‘savior’ or, more exactly, of inventor of poetic inspiration, seems primeval if we do not forget that poetry is a matter of penetrating the arcana of wisdom or, once again, of controlling furor, in this case poetic furor, the creative power of speech, its ability to found the world. It seems that we are here at the heart of an extremely important complex in which the magical shout and the measured and



sonorous cry are expressions of the supreme force . . . the force of magical speech composes the world . . . in giving the word all its primary force, speech is a spell” (“Elements of the Sacred,” 287).

116. Polomé, *Essays*, 57.

117. Dumézil, *Gods*, 34. The Gothic *runa* simply meant “secret,” like the Old Irish *rūn* meaning secret or mystery; *runo* in Finnish referred only to epic and magic chants. The more technical sense adhering to the Old Norse *rúnar* was unique, although it carried with it the original, larger sense of the root.

118. Morris, *Runic and Mediterranean Epigraphy*.

119. Klaus Düwel, *Runenkunde*, 2nd ed. (Stuttgart: J. B. Metzler, 1983), 94, 144; cited in Polomé, *Essays*, 84.

120. For an overview and bibliography, see Morris, *Runic and Mediterranean Epigraphy*. Some, such as Carl Marstrander, have argued for an Italo-Celtic origin; one version of this theory holds that they are ultimately derived from the archaic Euboean script, diffused northward into Italy (Latium, Etruria, and beyond) from Cumae.

121. Dumézil, *Gods*, p. 34.

122. *Baldrs Draumar* 4–5, trans. Lee M. Hollander in *The Poetic Edda*, 117–118.

123. *Ynglingasaga* 7.

124. *Den norsk-islandske Skjaldedigtning* B, I, 199; cited in Turville-Petre, *Myth and Religion*, 44 n. 15.

125. Davidson, *Scandinavian Mythology*, 86. Medieval illustrations of the disputed temple at Uppsala closely resemble these royal tombs.

126. *Ibid.*, 86–87.

127. *Den norsk-islandske Skjaldedigtning* B: II: 1, 2; cited in Turville-Petre, *Myth and Religion*, 46 n. 21.

128. Cited in Turville-Petre, *Myth and Religion*, 49.

129. Kristensen, *The Meaning of Religion*, 496.

130. *Sólarljóð* 51, translated by Neil Price, after the Danish version of Finnur Jónsson, *Den norsk-islandske Skjaldedigtning* B:I: 635–648, in Price, *The Viking Way*, 208.

131. Pipping, “Oden i Galgen.”

132. Van Hamel points out the importance in Irish legend of fasting, through which one gains mystical power over one’s antagonists (“Óðinn Hanging on the Tree,” 260 ff.).

133. Turville-Petre observes, “The myth of Óðinn seems to represent a real rather than a symbolic death. There is no way to master all the wisdom of the dead but to die. Óðinn died, and like Christ he rose up and came back. We may remember a story quoted by J. G. Frazer about an Eskimo shaman of the Bering Strait, who burned himself alive, expecting to return with greater wisdom” (*Myth and Religion*, 50). Contradicting this, Neil Price remarks, “One obvious aspect of Óðinn’s self-sacrifice is surprisingly seldom remarked upon: he does not die (contra Turville-Petre 1964: 49f.);” *The Viking Way*, 95.

134. Mitchell, “Óðinn,” 444. For the material evidence of the practices of traditional Siberian and Central Asian shamanism, see the essays in *The Archaeology of Shamanism*, ed. Price, esp. Part Two: “Siberia and Central Asia: The ‘Cradle of Shamanism,’” 43–119.

135. See Rydving, “Scandinavian-Saami Religious Connections in the History of Research”; and Hultkrantz, “Introductory Remarks on the Study of Shamanism.” Hultkrantz (“Lapp Shamanism from a Comparative Point of View”) is joined by Motz (“The Northern Heritage of Germanic Religion”) and Neil Price (*The Viking Way*, 235) in arguing for the parallel, but independent development of such features in Sámi and

Old Norse traditions as circumpolar (“northern”) indigenous traditions. The important difference between the two is that the latter is *also* an Indo-European tradition.

136. “Truly, truly, I say to you, unless a grain of wheat falls into the earth and dies, it remains alone; but if it dies, it bears much fruit.”

137. Puhvel, *Comparative Mythology*, 194.

138. *Ibid.* Puhvel’s insightful summary says it all, and the myths speak for themselves; I make no claims to originality in this interpretation of the *Hávamál* passage. In this chapter, I have attempted to show exactly *how* Odin reflects his own cult in the myth, and to suggest that this phenomenon is not unique, but is perhaps a common reflex in many religious traditions, one which I hope will now be considered in the case of the libating gods on the Greek vases as well. The effort to tie the autosacrifice of Odin to the crucifixion of Christ is, in my opinion, another version of the inability to cope with divine reflexivity as a recurrent indigenous category.

139. Turville-Petre, *Myth and Religion*, 48.

140. This ultimacy is clearly felt and expressed by Kristensen, who writes about Odin’s “death,” “In this case the idea of sacrifice is, as it were, expressed quite purely: sacrificial death is the actualization of divine life. *God who sacrifices himself is the formulation of the thought behind every act of sacrifice.* It is the absolutizing of absolute life, which can only take place in death”; *The Meaning of Religion*, 495–496 (italics added).

141. Kristensen, *The Meaning of Religion*, 496. In analyzing Bugge’s position, Kristensen concedes, “this story is entirely in the spirit of the Germanic belief in Odin. Odin was actually the god of Yggdrasil, and the tree of life was actually the tree of knowledge which is first attained in death—the runes come from the underworld.”

#### INTRODUCTION, PART III: THE SPECIAL INTERPRETIVE CHALLENGE OF DIVINE RITUAL IN MONOTHEISM

1. Kristensen, *The Meaning of Religion*, 246.

2. See Brown, *Jung’s Hermeneutic of Doctrine*.

3. Rahner, “Theology and Anthropology,” in 1–2.

4. Matthew 26: 26–28; italics added.

5. The “liquid” theme is also central in Hebrews, which continually dwells on the redemptive power of the “sprinkling” of Christ’s blood, offered in atonement; see Hebrews 9:11–14, “Now if the blood of goats and bulls and the ash of a heifer sprinkled on those who have been defiled sanctifies for the purification of the flesh, how much more does the blood of Christ, who through eternal spirit offered himself blameless to God, cleanse our conscience from dead works so that we might serve the living God!” In later Christian tradition, both the water of baptism and the blood of Christ, offered by him to God as atonement for collective guilt, are represented as purifying, absolving agents.

6. In practice, the Last Supper is transformed into a daily rite after all, with the officiating priest assuming the role of Christ as high priest. For a discussion of the Eucharist as antisacrifice, see Roger Béraudy, *Sacrifice et eucharistie*, ch. 3, “L’abolition des sacrifices en Jésus Christ,” 63–82. It might be argued just as strongly, however, that the Eucharistic rite represents not an abolition of the quotidian sacrifices of the Jerusalem Temple but, rather, their sublimation (see the text of the Orthodox *Liturgikon* in n. 9 below).

7. Hebrews 6:20. George MacRae has suggested that the Epistle to the Hebrews was written to the Christian community in Rome. On the basis of the Epistle to the Romans 9–11, it is speculated that this was a mixed group of Gentile and Jewish followers

of Christ. The dating of Hebrews to 80–100 C.E. may testify that it was written to comfort Jewish Christians distraught because of the loss of the Temple.

8. Kristensen, *The Meaning of Religion*, 494.

9. *The Liturgikon*, trans. Contos, 58. The relevant liturgical portion is as follows:

DEACON: Master, offer the sacrifice.

*Cutting partially through, crosswise:*

PRIEST: The Lamb of God is sacrificed, Who takes away the sin of the world, for the life and redemption of the world.

DEACON: Master, cruciate.

*Cutting partially through, horizontally, so as to form a cross:*

PRIEST: When you were crucified, O Christ, tyranny was abolished, the enemy's power made null: for it was neither man nor angel, but You the Lord Who saved us. Glory to You.

DEACON: Pierce, Master.

*Turning the Amnos face up, and piercing with the lance that portion of the seal bearing the NI:*

PRIEST: One of the soldiers pierced his side with a spear, and at once there came out blood and water. He who saw it has borne witness, his testimony is true (John 19:34).

10. Kalokyris, *The Essence of Orthodox Iconography*, 83.

11. St. John Chrysostom, *The Divine Liturgy* (H ΘΕΙΑ ΛΕΙΤΟΥΡΓΙΑ), 52. Italics added.

12. Dionysos the Areopagite *On the Divine Names* 4.13, Migne PG 3:712AB, translated by Eric J. D. Perl in "Symbol, Sacrament, and Hierarchy in Saint Dionysios the Areopagite," 314 and n. 8. Perl comments on this passage, "This erotic ecstasy of God is his creative gift of himself to the world" (314). See also Shaw, "Neoplatonic Theurgy and Dionysius the Areopagite."

13. See Perry, *The Paradox of Worship*, 40: "Christian worship is a paradox. . . . God's initiative does not make human effort unnecessary; man's effort does not imply that God has nothing to do but sit back and accept our offering. Worship is an encounter between man and God in which any attempt to make a rigid separation between the two parties and their contribution to the total act is fatal."

14. As John B. Carman observes in *Majesty and Meekness*, 419: "Since Abraham was carrying out a direct divine command, there is a divine presence in his sacrifice—uttering the word demanding the sacrifice, staying the hand with the knife about to kill the beloved son, and providing the substitute victim, the ram."

15. Levenson, *The Death and Resurrection of the Beloved Son*.

16. Vermès, "Redemption and Genesis xxii—the Binding of Isaac and the Sacrifice of Jesus." The Palestinian Targums on Leviticus 22:27 (1TJ and 2TJ) reveal an explicit relationship between the aqedah and the temple sacrifices; for example, "The lamb was chosen to recall the merit of the lamb of Abraham [Isaac], who bound himself upon the altar and stretched out his neck for Your Name's sake. Heaven was let down and descended and Isaac saw its perfection and his eyes were weakened by the highplaces. For this reason he acquired merit and a merit was provided there, in his stead, for the burnt offering" (cited in Vermès, "Redemption and Genesis xxi," 211 and n. 1).

17. For example, Epistle of Barnabas 7.3.

18. In ancient Greek tragedy, Artemis substitutes a mountain hind for Iphigenia in the apocryphal messenger's speech grafted onto Euripides's *Iphigenia at Aulis*; we hear Calchas announce:

O commanders of the allied  
 Armies, behold this victim which the goddess  
 Has laid upon the altar, a mountain hind  
 Rather than the maid; this victim she receives  
 With joy. By this no noble blood  
 Stains her altar. Gladly she accepts  
 This offering and grants a fair voyage  
 For the attack on Troy.

Euripides *Iphigenia at Aulis* 1581–1589 (translated by Charles R. Walker; italics added). The substitution myth is common; see also the *Kypria*, *Epicorum Graecarum Fragmenta* 19, ed. G. Kinkel; Euripides, *Iphigenia at Tauris* 27–30; Ovid's *Metamorphoses* 12.27–34. Iphigenia actually dies in Pindar's *Eleventh Pythian Ode*; Aeschylus's *Agamemnon* 141; and the work of Lucretius I (101).

Artemis does not perform the sacrifice herself. However, the victim is to be offered back to *her*; she who requested the human victim also provides the animal substitute, and she will receive it in substitution. Like Artemis, the god of the Genesis story does not himself perform the sacrifice; Abraham, like Calchas in the Iphigenia story, becomes the agent of the deity.

Later, in the *haggadot* of the talmudic period, perhaps in response to the heuristic power of the Christian sacrificial story, Isaac actually dies; see Spiegel, *The Last Trial*, especially ch. 8. For a discussion of the implications of this transformation from metaphorical or averted human sacrifice to a tradition of realized sacrifice, see Henrichs, "Human Sacrifice in Greek Religion."

The idea of this "autosacrifice" by God of his son, a "successful" *aqedah* with no animal substitution, with Christ as both agent of sacrifice and victim, is presented within a context of theological necessity as early the first epistle of John and the Gospel of John 12:27–34 (e.g., Christ's words in John 12:27, "For this purpose I have come to this hour"). Interestingly, it is with the same colors of necessity (*ανάγκη*) that Iphigenia paints her coming death; of many examples in the play, see *Iphigenia at Aulis* 1482, εἰ χρεῶν (if it must be); and 1556, εἴπερ ἐστὶ θεόσφατον τόδε (if this is what the god has said). In submitting to what she perceives to be divine necessity, the victim ennoble the sordid machinations that have brought her to the altar.

Albert Henrichs observes that "no Greek divinity ever *performs* human sacrifice, even though Electra in Euripides *Orestes* 191 charges Apollo with doing her and her brother in—ἐξέθυσεν φοῖβος ἡμᾶς—'a sacrificing god' in a violently metaphorical sense" (correspondence with author, October 1991).

19. 1 John 2:2 also identifies Jesus as the expiation (*ἰλασμός*) for our sins, but does not explicitly connect this with the Father.

20. Levenson, *The Death and Resurrection of the Beloved Son*, 225.

21. *Homilies on Hebrews* 16 and 29.

22. *Commentary on John 2.4*, 21.

23. See Troutman, *El Greco*, 28 and pl. 9.

24. This iconography is not unique to El Greco; Jan van Eyck also shows "God in regal and priestly splendor as a dignified man with a papal crown" (Moore, *Iconography*

of Religions, 32). Close examination of the El Greco “mitre of God” in *The Trinity* reveals that its two halves are divided so that the split between them is visible from the front, rather than from the side. Eugène Roulin claims a genealogy for this ecclesiastical headgear directly from that worn by the high priest of the temple, which represented the two “horns” of light from the head of Moses as he descended from the Sinai after the Giving of the Law (in *Vestments and Vesture*).

25. See Carman, *Majesty and Meekness*, 419: “Even if there is no suggestion of evil in God’s treatment of Abraham and Isaac, there is more here than the suffering of the Son; there is the suffering of the Father.”

## 8. THE OBSERVANT GOD OF THE TALMUD

1. Babylonian Talmud *Sanhedrin* 39a, trans. Jacob Shachter.

2. The Talmud itself distinguishes between two genres: Halakhah, the expanded exposition of the Law, and Haggadah, the vast body of digressions and lore. Within the Talmud, the two are interwoven and in fact, often hard to tell apart.

3. The discussants were the *amoraim*, “those who explain,” from the Aramaic ‘mr, “say, discuss.”

4. Babylonia was a center of autonomous Judaism that lasted from the year 586 B.C.E. (the reign of Cyrus) to the year 1040 C.E. (the invasion of the Mongols). Hillel was Babylonian by birth. Rav and Mar Samuel, the founders of the Babylonian academies, were born in Babylonia but went to sit at the feet of the Palestinian Judah the Prince, also known as Rabbi. The first rabbinic academy rose to eminence under Samuel (d. 254 C.E.) at Nehardea; the second academy in Sura under Rav (d. 247 C.E.), and the third, that of Judah Bar Ezekial (d. 299 C.E.), the pupil of Samuel and Rav, at Pum Beditha. Ravina II bar Huna (d. 499 C.E.) was the last of the *amoraim*.

5. The Sasanian kings Yazdegird II (438–457) and Peroz (459–484) tried to compel Jewish conversions to Zoroastrianism (see Hermann Strack, *Introduction to the Talmud and Midrash*, 71).

6. Tradition holds that Ashi and Ravina completed the redaction (*Gemara*) of *Talmud Bavli*, but this is now thought to be the legacy of the *savoraim* (from the Aramaic *sbr*, “consider, hold an opinion”), who thrived for several generations after the academies disappeared. They not only introduced a consistent, complex technical terminology for introducing source materials into the tractates of the Talmud; they also composed entire sections. It is to them that we owe the size and completeness of the Babylonian Talmud, which comments on thirty-six of the sixty-three Mishnaic tractates and is four times as long as the Palestinian or “Jerusalem” Talmud.

In addition to its scope, the “canonicity” of the Babylonian Talmud (abbreviated as B.T.: generally, the term “Talmud” is taken to imply the *Bavli*) may be attributable to the propaganda of the Babylonian *geonim* of the last centuries and to the declining influence of the rabbis of the Land of Israel under successive waves of invasions, especially the destruction wrought by the Crusades (see Goldenberg, “Talmud,” 257). Goldenberg also points to the stronger ties of the ascendant communities of North African and Spanish Jewry to the Jews of Babylon than to those of Palestine. The Palestinian schools closed in 425 C.E. under the persecution of the Christian emperors.

7. Y. H. Hertz, Foreword to *Hebrew-English Edition of the Babylonian Talmud*.

8. B. *ʿAvodah Zarah* 3b; *Lamentations Rabbah* 1:1. Believers in many traditions, but especially monotheistic ones, customarily capitalize the pronouns referring to the

supreme deity (“He,” “His,” “Him”). For the sake of consistency, I have chosen to use the lower case except when quoting another source or scriptural translation.

9. *Genesis Rabbah* 27:4 says that “God mourned for seven days over the fate of His Universe before bringing the flood.” Arthur Cohen reminds us that seven days is the prescribed length of time for mourning a death in Jewish tradition (*Everyman’s Talmud*, 8).

10. Cohen, *Everyman’s Talmud*, 8. See *Genesis Rabbah* 8:13.

11. The mystical teacher the Maggid Dov Baer of Mezhirech embraces this charge not as a divine liability but as an asset, through God’s service to himself: “‘Your God is a priest’: *That is to say, that he serves himself*. It is because of the power that is put into thought from the world of thought, and into speech from the world of speech, that man thinks and speaks” (italics added); (*Maggid Devarav le-Ya’akov of the Maggid Dov Baer of Mezhirech*, 186).

12. *B. ’Avodah Zarah* 3b.

13. *B. Berakhot* 7b. Italics added. The traditional introduction of a prayer began, “May it be Thy will . . .”

14. For an analysis of the earlier biblical metaphor of sacrifice by God in the arena of war-making, see the work of Henrietta Wiley, “Gather to My Feast.”

15. Schechter, *Aspects of Rabbinic Theology*, 36; Cohen, *Everyman’s Talmud*, 8.

16. Stern and Mirsky, eds., *Rabbinic Fantasies*, Introduction.

17. *Mekhilta According to Rabbi Ishmael*, ch. 33; *Shirata* 8:5–8:15, 214–216. I am indebted to Marc Hirshman of Hebrew University for drawing this passage to my attention and for his kind willingness to comment both on this chapter and the overall manuscript.

18. *Shirata* 8:5–8:6.

19. One is reminded of the supernatural-seeming ability of individual Tibetan monks to intone a chord of multiple notes simultaneously.

20. *Shirata* 8:8–8:13 passim.

21. Rawidowicz, *Studies in Jewish Thought*, 281.

22. *Avot de Rabbi Natan* 6, trans. Jacob Neusner.

23. Some Hellenistic Jewish sects such as the apocalyptic community whose texts were discovered at Qumran spurned “Herod’s Temple”—not its building or sacrality, but its priesthood and calendar.

24. By A. F. Y. Klijn, following general scholarly consensus, in his translation and edition, “(Syriac Apocalypse of ) Baruch (early Second Century CE).”

25. *Ibid.*

26. In *b. Berakhot* 3a God laments, “Woe to the children, on account of whose sins I destroyed My house and burnt My temple and exiled them among the nations of the world” (trans. Maurice Simon).

27. *Lamentations Rabbah*, *Petihta* 25, translated by David Stern in *Parables in Midrash*. This passage, which Stern notes is the locus classicus for the *histalkut hashkehinah* (the departure of the Shekhinah) (128), earlier says that the Shekhinah left the Temple in ten stages. This rabbinic story was based on an exegesis of Ezek. 8–10 and other lists such as those in *m. Kelim* 1:6–9 of the ten degrees of holiness, with the most holy being the Holy of Holies (Stern, *Parables*, 128–129), and the corresponding ten degrees of impurity. Stern notes that the destination of the Shekhinah was debated by the rabbis; some believed that “the Shekhinah went into exile with the people of Israel, accompanying them throughout the Diaspora.” Others maintained that “the Shekhinah did not actually accompany the Jews into exile but ascended from earth to heaven to await the restoration of the Temple at the time of the final redemption” (128).

28. Stern, *Parables in Midrash*, 127. Italics added. Stern notes that such *haggadot* may have “ancestors in ancient Near Eastern laments which describe in detail the pathos of city-gods over the destruction of their city-states” (125–126 and n. 51).

29. For a thorough review of the source and scholarly discussion of the two groups, see Gary Porton, “Sadducees,” in *The Anchor Bible Dictionary*, vol. 5, 892–895.

30. Neusner, “Judaism in a Time of Crisis,” 325.

31. Hertz, Foreword to *The Babylonian Talmud*.

32. *Ibid.*

33. Neusner, “Judaism in a Time of Crisis,” 324. Neusner clarifies: “We should add, Torah as taught by the Pharisees and, later on, by the rabbis, their continuators.” A different “spin” on how ben Zacchai sought to replace the sacrificial cult is given by Chief Rabbi Hertz: “Judaism, he held, could outlive its political organism; and charity and love of men replaced the Sacrificial Service” (Hertz, Introduction to *The Babylonian Talmud*).

34. See Attridge, *The Epistle to the Hebrews*, on Heb. 7: 26–28 (212–215).

35. Goldenberg, “Talmud,” 258.

36. See chapter iv, “Contents of the 63 tractates of the Mishna according to the order of Moses Maimonides,” 29–64 in Strack, *Introduction to the Talmud and Midrash*. Also see Geoffrey Wigoder, ed., *The Encyclopedia of Judaism*, s.v. “Talmud.”

37. *B. Berakhot* 6a. *Berakhot* belongs to the First Order: *Zera'im*, which are largely discussions of the religious and social aspects of the agricultural laws of the Torah as it applies in Palestine only, “in which Jewish tenancy of the land is . . . derived directly from its divine Owner” (I. Epstein, Introduction to *Seder Zera'im* in *Berakhot*). All talmudic arguments, no matter how digressive, are scripturally based.

A congregation, the number required for a public service, consists of not less than ten adult males. Later in *b. Berakhot* 6b, concerning the Lord’s attending the synagogue, we find this account: “R. Johanan says: Whenever the Holy One, blessed be He, comes into a Synagogue and does not find ten persons there, He becomes angry at once. For it is said: Wherefore, when I came, was there no man? When I called, was there no answer? [Isa. 50, 2].” In the absence of a minyan, a quorum of ten, a number of features in the service are omitted (recitation of *Barekhu*, *Kaddish*, public recitation of the *Amidah*, and other statutory prayers).

38. In *b. Berakhot* 6a, which continues: “And how do you know that if three are sitting as a court of judges the Divine Presence is with them? For it is said: *In the midst of the judges He judgeth* [Sanh. 2b].” The dispensing of justice is seen as a holy activity: “I might think [the dispensing of] justice is only for making peace, and the Divine Presence does not come [to participate]. Therefore he teaches us that justice also is Torah.”

The interpretation of the noun “judges” (*ēlohim*, “gods”) is normal for the rabbis in this context, but problematic in the greater realm of biblical interpretation. The term is found in Exod. 21:22: “When men strive together, and hurt a woman with child, so that there is a miscarriage, and yet no harm follows, the one who hurt her shall be fined, according as the woman’s husband shall lay upon him; and he shall pay as ‘the judges’ determine.” The rabbis read the plural *ēlohim* as “judges” here as well, but extrapolated it into polytheistic texts such as Ps. 82:1, “God has taken his place in the divine council; in the midst of the gods he holds judgement.” See Mullen, *The Assembly of the Gods*.

39. *B. Berakhot* 6a: “And how do you know that if two are sitting and studying the Torah together the Divine Presence is with them? For it is said: *Then they that feared the*

*Lord spoke with one another; and the Lord hearkened and heard, and a book of remembrance was written before Him, for them that feared the Lord and that thought upon His name* [Mal. 3, 16] . . . And how do you know that even if one man sits and studies the Torah the Divine Presence is with him? For it is said: In every place where I cause my name to be mentioned I will come unto thee and bless thee [Ex. 20, 21].”

40. Translation by A. Cohen.

41. *B. Berakhot* 6a. Simon notes that the *tefillin* of the arm are covered by the sleeves.

42. Exodus 13:1–10 highlights Moses’s admonition to Israel to “Remember this day, in which you came out from Egypt, out of the house of bondage, for by strength of hand the Lord brought you out from this place” (13:3) as well as the prohibition against leavened bread and the other ceremonial requirements of Passover. Israel is enjoined to recall her chosen status: “And it shall be as a memorial between your eyes, that the law of the Lord may be in your mouth; for with a strong hand the Lord has brought you out of Egypt” (13:9).

43. Exodus 13:11–16 deals specifically with the consecration of firstborn animals to God, as well as the redemption of firstborn sons with an animal sacrifice. A response to a son who asks the meaning of this is given, and again the remembrance is to be made on the hand or between the eyes: “‘For when Pharaoh stubbornly refused to let us go, the Lord slew all the firstborn in the land of Egypt, both the firstborn of man and the firstborn of cattle. Therefore I sacrifice to the Lord all the males that first open the womb; but the firstborn of my sons I redeem.’ It shall be as a mark on your hand or frontlets between your eyes; for by a strong hand the Lord brought us out of Egypt” (13:15–16).

44. Deuteronomy 6:4–9 contains the great exhortation to hear and affirm the oneness and uniqueness of God, and the importance of complete dedication of one’s being to his service: “You shall love the Lord your God with all your heart, and with all your soul, and with all your might” (6:5). It too refers to the transmission of these commandments, giving the scriptural basis for the wearing of *tefillin* and the placing of *mezuzot* on doorways: “And you shall bind them as a sign upon your hand, and they shall be as frontlets between your eyes, And you shall write them on the doorposts of your house and on your gates” (6:8–9).

45. Deuteronomy 11:13–21 is an injunction to “fear the Lord your God,” to “serve him,” and to “swear by his name.” It inveighs against worship of other neighboring gods, and warns of God’s jealousy.

46. May and Metzger, eds., *The Oxford Annotated Bible* (RSV), 223. *Shema*, “Hear,” was the first word of the Deuteronomy passage. The rest of the passages in the *Shema*, which was to be recited upon arising and retiring according to the practice of Moses, are Deuteronomy 11:13–21 and Numbers 15:37–41; “Jews have always regarded it as divinely prescribed.”

47. *B. Berakhot* 6a. Simon notes that although the Aruch, the medieval talmudic lexicon of Asher ben Jehiel, gives “a unique entity” as the translation, Jastrow of the last century translates this phrase as “the only object of your love”; both translations capture the idea of a marriage covenant.

48. The RSV corrects the objective pronoun “her” from earlier translations to “him,” thus characterizing Israel as a male. “Her,” however, would best seem to honor the text’s analogy of Hosea’s remarriage with Gomer to God’s reconciliation and vow to wayward Israel.

49. Exodus 34:15–16; Leviticus 17:7, 20:5–6; Deuteronomy 32:16, 21; Isaiah 54:5. Moshe Halbertal and Avishai Margalit offer a poignant discussion of the interwoven



relationship between this marital metaphor for the covenant and the biblical theme of idolatry in chapter 1 of *Idolatry*.

50. See below for the text of these *tefillin* cases.

51. *Encyclopedia of Judaism*, s.v. “*tefillin*,” 691.

52. *B. Berakhot* 6a-b. Hence the final arrangement of the contents of God’s *tefillin* is as follows:

#### FIRST CASE

Deuteronomy 4:7: “For what great nation is there that has a god so near to it as the Lord our God is to us, wherever we call upon him?”

Deuteronomy 4:8: “And what great nation is there, that has statutes and ordinances so righteous as all this law which I set before you this day?”

#### SECOND CASE

Deuteronomy 33:29: “Happy are you, O Israel! Who is like you, a people saved by the Lord, the shield of your help, and the sword of your triumph! Your enemies shall come fawning to you; and you shall tread upon their high places.”

1 Chronicles 17:21: “What other nation on earth is like Thy people, whom God went to redeem to be His people, making for Thyself a name for great and terrible things, in driving out nations before Thy people whom Thou didst redeem from Egypt?”

#### THIRD CASE

Deuteronomy 4: 34: “Or has any god ever attempted to go and take a nation for himself from the midst of another nation, by trials, by signs, by wonders, and by war, by a mighty hand and an outstretched arm, and by great terrors, according to all that the Lord your God did for you in Egypt before your eyes?”

#### FOURTH CASE

Deuteronomy 26:19: “that He will set you high above all nations that he has made, in praise and in fame and in honor, and that you shall be a people holy to the Lord your God, as He has spoken.”

53. Mann, *The Jews in Egypt and Palestine under the Fātimid Caliphs*, 1:223.

54. Vermès, “Pre-Mishnaic Jewish Worship and the Phylacteries from the Dead Sea,” 69 n. 4.

55. G. F. Moore, cited by Vermès, “Pre-Mishnaic Jewish Worship,” 69 n. 4.

56. Barthélmy and Milik, *Qumran Cave I*, 72–76 and pl. xiii; Kuhn, *Phylakterien aus Höhle 4 von Qumran*.

57. Discussed by Géza Vermès, “Pre-Mishnaic Jewish Worship” and “The Decalogue and the Minim.”

58. de Vaux, “Les grottes de *Murabba’at* et leurs documents,” 263, 269 and pl. xiib.

59. *Rosh Hashanah*, a tractate of the Second Order: *Mo’ed*, means “an appointed time” or “festival.”

60. *B. Rosh Hashanah* 17b, trans. Maurice Simon (in *Hebrew-English Edition of the Babylonian Talmud*). Maurice Simon notes that the Hebrew term used in the text literally means “emissary”; that is, “the one appointed to lead the congregational prayers” (Simon, on *b. Rosh Hashanah* 17b n. 7).

61. For example, “Speak to the people of Israel, and bid them to make tassels on the corners of their garments throughout their generations, and to put upon the tassel of each corner a cord of blue; and it shall be to you a tassel to look upon and remember all the commandments of the Lord” (Numbers 15:38–39).

62. The *ṭallit gatan*, “little ṭallit,” is worn all the time, not just at prayer.

63. *Encyclopedia Judaica*, s.v. “ṭallit,” vol. 15, cols. 743–744.

64. *Ibid.*

65. *Ibid.*, col. 744.

66. Ismar Elbogen writes, “The leader of the congregation in prayer . . . is their speaker, not their representative, and is chosen from among them as a spokesman, not as intercessor. Thus the activity of the precentor was understood in antiquity: ‘The eyes of the community are raised to him, and his eyes are raised to God,’ as it says in a midrash and in an ancient prayer.” Elbogen, *Jewish Liturgy*, 376.

67. *Ibid.*, 379.

68. In the sayings of Bar Nahmani reported from the third century C.E., the divine robe became the focus of a quasi-gnostic mysticism, with heretical potential.

69. Metzger and Murphy (eds. *New Oxford Annotated Bible*, 3rd ed.) note that this summary is echoed in other places in Hebrew Scripture (Numbers 14:18; Nehemiah 9:17, 31; Psalms 103:8, Jeremiah 32:18, and Jonah 4:2) and remark that it “is probably an old cultic confession” (NOAB, 115). Simon notes that the thirteen attributes are enumerated as follows: “According to one reckoning, ‘The Lord, the Lord’ count as two, according to another reckoning only the second of these counts as an attribute, and the expressions ‘keeping mercy’ and ‘unto the thousandth generation’ count as two attributes. According to Rashi, the Divine Name YHWH designated the divine attribute of mercy—a very old idea” (Simon, *Rosh Hashanah*, nn. 9 and 10).

70. We might compare Jesus’s instructions on how to pray in the Sermon on the Mount (Matthew 6:9–14), which seems to fall squarely between the two genres.

71. Halbertal, “If The Text Had Not Been Written, It Could Not Be Said,” Neis translation, 1–4 passim.

72. *Ibid.*, 17.

73. *Ibid.*, 25.

74. *B. Berakhot* 7a, translated by A. Cohen. Cohen adds a footnote, “Lit., in the house of My prayer.” In fact the original Hebrew, *bebet tefillati*, ascribes God’s possessive to the house rather than to the prayer, since in Hebrew one cannot put the suffix on the first noun in the construct, even if semantically it is the first noun that it governs. That is, “the house of my prayer” is the biblical way of saying “My house of prayer.” However, the Septuagint translates the passage too literally: ἔν τῷ οἴκῳ τῆς προσευχῆς μου (LXX *Isaiah* 56:7) and, interestingly for this discussion, the rabbis exploit the idiom for their own purposes.

75. *Isaiah* 56:6–7.

76. Cohen, *Everyman’s Talmud*, 87.

77. God’s direct response is guaranteed in times of peril, without the need to go through intercessory functionaries; for example, *y. Ber.* 9:1, 13a: “When a man is in trouble, do not cry out to the angel Michael or to the angel Gabriel but to Me and I will answer immediately.” As with all prohibitions, this must signal a widespread belief in angelic intercessors and a common practice of importuning them. However, in *b. Ber.* 32b and at other points in the Talmud, expectation of an answer to prayers was discouraged. As with miracles, as we will discuss below, rabbinic Judaism did not endorse claims to ongoing divine revelation on the part of particular individuals; these were in some way perceived as detrimental to the adherence to statutory devotions and to the maintenance of halakhic authority.

78. Numbers 12:13: “Heal her, O God, I beseech Thee.”

79. *The Encyclopedia of Judaism*, s.v. “prayer,” 560.

80. The *Encyclopedia Judaica* comments on Eliezer's statement: "Though hyperbolic, it may nonetheless be intended to express the real superiority of prayer."

81. *B. Ber.* 26b records the talmudic debate over the origin of the three daily prayer services.

82. *Encyclopedia of Judaism*, s.v. "prayer," 560.

83. For these important observations I am indebted to Jon Levenson.

84. *Encyclopedia of Judaism*, s.v. "prayer," 560.

85. Goldenberg, "Talmud," 258.

86. *B. Berakhot* 7a. "Akathriel Jah," meaning "crown of God," was a synecdoche for God and thus one of His names.

87. *B. Berakhot* 30a. The orientation of the ark that held the Torah scrolls in early synagogues was toward Jerusalem. This was copied by early Christian churches, and Muḥammad originally chose Jerusalem as the Muslim *qiblah*, the direction of prayer. In eastern and southeastern Europe, and in North Africa, synagogues to this day face toward Jerusalem.

88. *B. Berakhot* 7a.

89. A play on words: the Hebrew word for shovel, *ʿetēr*, has a root similar to that of the feminine noun *ʿatirah*, meaning "a plea or request."

90. John Carman notes that "the Divine will is represented here by the rabbi, not as a wise merger of the different Divine virtues, but as God's own prayer that his mercy may prevail over his anger and all his other attributes. . . . It might seem as though that quality furthest away from the regal or lordly character of the 'King of the Universe' is the one for whose triumph the Lord himself prays . . . but the delineation of distinct qualities is even sharper, qualities that seem to be in conflict" (John Carman, draft ms. of *Contrast and Harmony: A Comparative Study of Polar Attributes in the Concept of God*, quoted here with permission of the author from the draft of chapter 19, "Justice and Mercy in the Experience of Israel." This passage was later published in substantially changed form in *Majesty and Meekness*, p. 255).

91. *Pesiqta de-Rav Kahana*, translated by Max Arzt in *Justice and Mercy*, quotation facing title page.

92. *The Poem of Erra*, translated by Luigi Cagni in *Sources from the Ancient Near East*; cited by Jon Levenson in his essay, "Cataclysm, Survival, and Regeneration in the Hebrew Bible," n. 5 to p. 42.

93. Levenson, "Cataclysm, Survival, and Regeneration," 42.

94. Levenson points out that the demonic, rageful side of God far exceeds moral provocation in some biblical stories. He also suggests that Rav's image of the two sides of God contesting with each other may be attributable to the atmosphere of Zoroastrian dualism in which it was written: "Since Babylonia in Rav's time was in the control of a zealous Zoroastrian dynasty, the resemblance of this prayer to the Zervanic dualistic monotheism already mentioned . . . is unlikely to be coincidence" (*ibid.*, n. 27 to p. 59).

95. *Ibid.*, 54–55. Italics in original.

96. "God says to Moses: Wait till my countenance of wrath shall have passed away and then I shall give thee rest. Is God angry every day? 'Yes. For it has been taught: [*Abodah Zarah* 4a] A God that hath indignation every day. [Ps. VII, 12]' " *Berakhot* asserts that God's anger lasts one moment, which is defined as one fifty-eight thousand eight hundred and eighty-eighth part of an hour; "no one can precisely fix this moment except the wicked Balaam, of whom it is written: *He knoweth the knowledge of the Most High* [Num. XXIV, 16]."

97. "I will not violate my covenant, or alter the word that went forth from my lips.

Once for all I have sworn by my holiness; I will not lie to David. His line shall endure forever, his throne as long as the sun before me.”

98. This prayer is still part of the ritual of Orthodox synagogues, although it has been omitted from the Conservative and Reform orders of prayer.

99. In Braude and Kapstein, *Pesikta de Rab Kahana*, 297. The text dates from the eighth or ninth century c.e.

100. *Pisqah* 16:9. Braude and Kapstein, *Pesikta*, 298.

101. Translation by David Stern. Stern notes that the altar is a synecdoche for the whole Temple and then further hypothesizes that “God’s own altar here is transformed into a substitute for the people of Israel.” In Lamentations Rabbah 4.11, Asaph praises God for destroying the Temple rather than the people of Israel, but, Stern says, this goes even further: “It is also a transformation of the conventional image for the Jewish victims of the war as sacrifices of atonement upon the altar of punishment for Israel’s sins. In this *mashal*, the altar literally atones for their sins in place of the victims” (Stern, *Parables in Midrash*, 114). In other words, God’s wrathful justice was so great that he could have justifiably destroyed his people.

102. Mitchell, *The Meaning of Brk “To Bless” in the Old Testament*.

103. *Ibid.*, 35–36. Mitchell also notes that the passive participles of the formula in Genesis 27:29 and Numbers 24:9 (“a blessing formula which declared the dominion of the addressee over his adversaries”) are “forms which only imply God or the gods as agent have been replaced by finite verbs with God as the subject to emphasize that it is God who effects blessing and curse, rather than some magical or mechanical process.”

104. Cf. the remark of Cohen, *Everyman’s Talmud*, 3: “Creation is not an act in the past which continues automatically. The processes of Nature represent the unceasing functioning of the divine creative power.”

105. ‘*Avodah Zarah*, a tractate of the Fourth Order: *Neziḳin* (Damages), means “Foreign Worship”; “Idolatry.”

106. *B. ‘Avodah Zarah* 17b. ‘*Abodah Zarah* [traditional spelling], trans. A. Mishcon and A. Cohen.

107. ‘*Avodah Zarah* 17b.

108. Sokoloff, *A Dictionary of Jewish Palestinian Aramaic*, s.v. “*ôseq*,” 414. Sokoloff is referring to mishnaic and talmudic Hebrew usages of the verb.

109. *Thesaurus Mishnae*, s.v. forms of *ôseq*, 1390.

110. *Thesaurus Talmudis*, s.v. forms of *osēk*, 899.

111. *Ibid.*, 899.

112. Sokoloff, *A Dictionary of Jewish Palestinian Aramaic*, 414.

113. *B. Berakhot* 3b tells us that these were David’s habits: “R. Zera says: Till midnight he used to slumber like a horse [i.e., lightly, Suk. 26a], from thence on he rose with the energy of a lion. R. Ashi says: Till midnight he studied the Torah, from thence on he recited songs and praises.” Later in the same passage, R. Aḥa b. Bizana says in the name of R. Simeon the Pious: “A harp was hanging above David’s bed. As soon as midnight arrived, a North wind came and blew upon it and it played of itself. He arose immediately and studied the Torah until the break of dawn.”

114. For a full discussion of the epithet of Akiva, who like Shaphan and Ezra, was credited with snatching the Torah from oblivion, see Guttman, “Akiba, ‘Rescuer of the Torah,’” in *Studies in Rabbinic Judaism*, 20–46. “He organized the people and organized the Torah” (46).

115. Hertz, Foreword to *The Babylonian Talmud*.

116. Philo, *On the Creation of the World* IV.

117. According to *b. Shabbat* 88a, God made the people of Israel an offer they

couldn't refuse: "The Holy One, blessed be He, inverted Mount Sinai over them like a huge vessel and declared, 'If you accept the Torah, well and good; if not, here shall be your sepulchre.'"

118. Cohen, *Everyman's Talmud*, 66.

119. *Ibid.*, 67.

120. *Baba Meẓī'a* 59b.

121. Goldenberg, "Talmud," 259.

122. *Ibid.*

123. *Baba Meẓī'a*, a tractate of *Neziḳin*, means "middle gate" (*Baba Meẓī'a*, trans. under the editorship of I. Epstein).

124. R. Joshua ingeniously quotes Deuteronomy 30:11–14: "For this commandment which I command you this day is not too hard for you, neither is it far off. It is not in heaven, that you should say, 'Who will go up for us to heaven, and bring it to us, that we may hear it and do it?' Neither is it beyond the sea, that you should say, 'Who will go up for us to heaven, and bring it to us, that we may hear it and do it?' but the word is very near you; it is in your mouth and in your heart, so that you can do it."

125. Rabbi Jeremiah is here interpreting Exodus 23:2: "You shall not follow a multitude to do evil; nor shall you bear witness in a suit, turning aside after a multitude, so as to pervert justice."

126. *B. Baba Meẓī'a* 59b.

127. Laytner, *Arguing with God*, 99–100.

128. Jon Levenson comments, "Rabbinic authority is 'bureaucratic' rather than 'charismatic,' in Weber's terminology. It is collegial and learned, rather than individual. Similar attitudes toward miracle-workers and prophets developed in Christianity and Islam. It would seem to be a problem endemic to book-religions" (correspondence with author, April 1992).

129. Guttman, "The Significance of Miracles for Talmudic Judaism," in *Studies in Rabbinic Judaism*, 89–90.

130. Goldenberg, "Talmud," 259.

131. Arthur Cohen, *Every Man's Talmud*, 8.

132. Hertz, in his foreword to *The Babylonian Talmud*, comments that any given bit of haggadah may be "meant simply as a piece of humorous by-play, calculated to enliven the interest of a languid audience. In spite of the fact that the Haggadah contains parables of infinite beauty and enshrines sayings of eternal worth, it must be remembered that the Haggadah consist of mere individual utterances that possess no general or binding authority." One can appreciate the halakhic concerns of Chief Rabbi Hertz. Yet the talmudic episodes and images considered in this chapter, however fantastic, are not in fact divorced from normative concerns or halakhic force.

133. During a time when Purim was in danger of being wiped out, Maimonides tells us that the saying arose, "in the end of time all the holidays will disappear except Purim."

134. Hertz, Foreword to *The Babylonian Talmud*.

## 9. "GOD AND HIS ANGELS PRAY FOR THE PROPHET":

### A QUR'ĀNIC PARADIGM.

1. In the prayer-manual *aṣ-Ṣalātu l-ghaibiyya*, cited in Padwick, *Muslim Devotions*, 157.

2. Schimmel, *And Muhammad Is His Messenger*, 92.

3. Compare Arabic phrases *ta'alā* and 'azza wa-jalla. Who blesses God in this tal-

mudic formula, if not God Himself? Divine reflexivity is knit into many prayer shawls. An ancient variant of this prayer is “O God, bless Muḥammad and his family as You have blessed Abraham and his family.” (Abraham erected the Ka’bah in Mecca, and is the father of Ishmael, ancestor of the Arab peoples. )

4. Translation by ‘Abdullah Yūsuf ‘Alī, *The Meaning of the Holy Qur’ān*. Padwick gives: “Verily God and his angels call down blessing on the Prophet. O Ye who have believed, call down blessing on him and greet him with peace” (*Muslim Devotions*, 156). Arthur J. Arberry gives: “God and His angels bless the Prophet. O believers, do you also bless him, and pray him peace” (*The Koran Interpreted*). Schimmel gives “pray upon, that is, bless” for *yushallūna ‘alā*—perhaps because, due to her understanding of the multivalent aetiology of Islamic ritual and Jalāluddīn Rūmī’s commentary on Sūrah 33:56 (see “Conclusion,” below), she is unperturbed by, and in fact affirms, the theological and ritual implications of a literal translation of *ṣalla ‘alā* (Schimmel, *Muhammad*, 92). N.B.: Qur’ānic translations in secondary sources are preserved in this section as the quoted scholar or interpreter renders them. Otherwise, unless noted to the contrary, all translated excerpts from the Qur’ān are ‘Alī’s.

5. Jalāl ad-Dīn ‘Abd ar-Raḥmān as-Suyūṭī, *al Ḥirzu l-manā’i fi fī ṣ-ṣalāti ‘alā l-ḥabībī sh-shaḥī*, 16; cited in Padwick, *Muslim Devotions*, 154. Bracketted addition Padwick’s; emphasis mine.

6. See Goitein, “Prayer in Islam,” in his *Studies in Islamic History and Institutions*, 73–89.

7. Throughout the Qur’ān.

8. Qur’ān 2:255; 3:2, etc.

9. Qur’ān 13:9.

10. Definition from the Glossary to *Islamic Spirituality: Foundations*, ed. Seyyed Hossein Nasr, s.v. “*tashbīh*,” 426. Related to *tashbīh* is *ta’īl*, “refusing to the human intellect the power to understand the meaning of God’s Names and Qualities for fear of anthropomorphizing the Divinity” (*ibid.*, s.v. “*ta’īl*”) and *tanzīh*, the doctrine of “distancing” which emphasizes the extreme otherness, inconceivability, and limitlessness of God. For a history of theological debate on these terms, see the section on Allāh, below.

11. *Ibid.*, s.v. “*tashbīh*,” 426.

12. Ibn al-‘Arabī, *Fuṣūṣ al-ḥikam*, 2 vols., ed. A. A. Afifi (Cairo, 1946), 1:225, and 2:n. 344; *Bālī Effendī* (Commentary on the *Fuṣūṣ*) (Constantinople, 1892), 439, cited in Corbin, *Alone with the Alone: Creative Imagination in the Sūfism of Ibn ‘Arabī*, 375 n. 33. Henri Corbin comments: “if a mental theophany is attached to the practice of Prayer, it is because Prayer is first of all “prayer of God” (it is God who prays and shows himself to Himself )” (264).

13. Hirschfeld, “New Researches into the Composition and Exegesis of the Qoran.”

14. Robson, “Blessings on the Prophet.”

15. *Ibid.*, 365.

16. Qur’ān 2:247, etc.

17. Throughout the Qur’ān.

18. Qur’ān 2:117; 6:101.

19. See Frank, *The Metaphysics of Created Being According to Abū l-Hudhayl al-‘Allāf*.

20. Qur’ān 2:255; 3:2.

21. Qur’ān 2:263, etc.

22. See *Shorter Encyclopaedia of Islam*, s.v. “*ṣalāt*,” 491–499. Hereafter *SEI*.

23. Schimmel, *And Muhammad Is His Messenger*.

24. As-Suyūṭī, *al-ḥirzu l-manī*, 12; cited in Padwick, *Muslim Devotions*, 156. Padwick calls this a “universal communion in honouring Muḥammad.” Note that as-Suyūṭī, unlike at-Tījanī, seems to avoid the direct association of God with the performance of *ṣalāt*.

25. *SEI*, s.v. “*ṣalāt*,” 491. It is possible but less likely that the word came into Arabic from its related Syriac form.

26. E. Mittwoch, “Zur Entstehungsgeschichte des islamischen Gebets und Kultus,” *Abhandlungen der Preussischen Akademie der Wissenschaften* (Berlin, 1913), no.2; cited in Padwick, *Muslim Devotions*, 7. Similarly the word *namāz*, which is used by Iranian, Indian, and Turkish Muslims for the prayer rite, has the original sense of bowing.

27. According to Wolfhart Heinrichs, in an analogous phenomenon in reciprocal piety, the Arabic verb *barra*, when it has human beings as its subject, means “to have filial piety toward God, angels, or other people.” When it has God as its subject, it means “to have compassion on” (conversation with the author, February 7, 1992).

28. Translation by ‘Abdullah Yūsuf ‘Alī, with bracketed alternative by William A. Graham. Robson concedes that *ṣallā*, when followed by *‘alā*, does indeed sometimes mean “to pray over”: “It is used thus in funerals when prayers are said over the bier.” Robson, “Blessings on the Prophet,” 355–356.

29. Fritz Meier, “Die segensprechung über Mohammed im bittgebet und in der bitte,” *Zeitschrift der Deutschen Morgenländischen Gesellschaft* 136 (1986): 364. (The original displays the idiosyncratic lower-case German nouns). Christian tradition also can distinguish, using the normal Islamic distinction in Arabic, but this is occasional, for example, “Hear my *ṣalāh* and grant my *du‘ā*” (see *Ibid.*, 364 and n. 6, which cites H. A. Winkler).

30. Attested by Pedro de Alcalá [1505 C.E.], *Petri Hispani de lingua Arabica libri duo*, ed. Paul de Lagarde (Gottingen, 1883), 312, 79; cited in Meier, “Die segensprechung,” 365 n. 7.

31. Padwick notes that *ṣallā ‘alā* is used in both modern versions of James 5:14 and the ninth- or tenth-century manuscript in the monastery of St. Catherine on Mt. Sinai (*Muslim Devotions*, 155 n. 1).

32. Severus ibn al Muqaffā’, *Alexandrische Patriarchengeschichte*, ed. Chr. F. Seybold (Hamburg, 1912); cited in Meier, “Die segensprechung,” 364 n. 1.

33. Conversation with Wolfhart Heinrichs, March, 1992.

34. Muḥammad ‘Uthmān al-Mirghanī, *Fathu al-Rasūl*, 3; cited in Padwick, *Muslim Devotions*, 155.

35. Goitein, “Prayer in Islam,” in his *Studies in Islamic History and Institutions*, 73–89.

36. Al-Bukhārī, *Ṣaḥīḥ* I:3.

37. Or, “What shall I recite?” See Theodor Nöldeke and Freidrich Schwally, *Geschichte des Qurāns* I. The tradition of the Prophet’s response to the divine command *Iqrā’* (“Recite!” “Read!” or “Proclaim aloud!”) is problematic, as is the one that Sūrah 96:1 records his first prophetic call; see the commentary of Watt and McDonald on the ninth-century *History of al-Ṭabarī* (vol. 6: *Muḥammad at Mecca*), xxxvi–xl.

38. *SEI*, s.v. “*ṣalāt*,” 491.

39. Padwick, *Muslim Devotions*, 7.

40. *Awṛād Aḥmad al-Tījanī*, 51; cited in Padwick, *Muslim Devotions*, 7.

41. Padwick, *Muslim Devotions*, 6 n. 2. The Qur’anic phrase is *aqāma ṣ-ṣalāt*. Today *qāma bi l-ṣalāt* is used of others (he rose up to pray). In Judaism, the saying thrice daily of the Eighteen Benedictions, obligatory since the destruction of Jerusalem, is called the *amidah* or “standing.”

42. Qur’an Sūrah 4:103: “When ye are free from danger, set up regular Prayers,

for such prayers are enjoined on believers at stated times”; 17:78: “Establish regular prayers—at the Sun’s decline till the darkness of the night, and the morning prayer and reading: for the prayer and reading in the morning carry their testimony”; 11:114: “And establish regular prayers at the two ends of the day and at the approaches of the night.”

43. Brohi, “The Spiritual Dimension of Prayer,” 140. The contributors to the volume *Islamic Spirituality* endorse their use of “man” as a gender-inclusive term which they assert “possesses no sexist connotations” and corresponds to the Arabic *insān*, “human” (Nasr, Introduction to *Islamic Spirituality*, xxix n. 1).

44. After putting on ritually clean dress and performing his ablutions, the believer responds to the call to prayers by standing “either by himself or in congregation behind an imam in the Divine Presence in all humility after he has pronounced the *takbīr* (God is most great). He recites the *Sūrat al-fātiḥah*, supplements it with a portion of the Qur’ān, goes into *rukū* by kneeling down, and says, ‘Praise be to God the most exalted.’ Then he bows down and prostrates himself by putting his forehead on the ground and says, ‘Praise be to God the most high.’ Thereafter he sits in a reverential position to recite prescribed words called the *tashahhud* and declares that God is one and Muḥammad is His slave and Messenger. He also invokes peace and prayers upon the Prophet of Islam and also upon the prophet Abraham. He finishes the prayer by saying *as-salāmu ‘alaykum wa raḥmat Allāh* (Peace be upon you and the mercy of God), turning his face to the right and then to the left”; Brohi, “The Spiritual Dimension of Prayer,” 140.

45. Padwick quotes *The Light*, a devotional periodical published in Lahore, as saying that “the various postures of humility in *ṣalāt* indicate complete external or bodily submission to God which conforms with the spiritual submission, and this is a necessity since man has a body as well as a soul . . . the submissive movements of the body in this prayer produce equivalent submissive movements in the soul”; *Muslim Devotions*, 8.

46. *Durūsu ‘d-dīni wa ‘l-akhlāq*, I, 12, cited in Padwick, *Muslim Devotions*, 6.

47. Muḥammad Zafrulla Khan, introduction to *The Quran*, xxxi.

48. Padwick, *Muslim Devotions*, 8.

49. Nasr, Introduction to *Islamic Spirituality*, xvii.

50. One of al-Shādhilī’s prayer-phrases when he rose up for the daily prayers was: “Make this prayer-rite a link between me and Thee, let it not be a commercial transaction of mine with Thee.” See *al-Mafākhir ‘l-aliyya*, cited in Padwick, *Muslim Devotions*, 9.

‘Abd al-Qādir Jīlanī speaks of the “internal prayer” (*ṣalāt al-ṭarīqah*) that renders the external *ṣalāt* meaningful. But strikingly, he uses the language of the traditional *ṣalāt* to describe it: “Its mosque is the *qalb* [heart]. Its congregation is the conglomeration of all internal forces in man. It recites with spiritual tongues the Names of God’s Unity (*tawḥīd*). Its *imām* is a deep spiritual urge of the heart (*al-shawq fi ‘l-fu‘ād*). Its *qiblah* (direction of prayer) is the Unity of Godhead (*aḥādīyyah*). The *qalb* (heart) and *rūḥ* (spirit) are constantly engaged in this prayer. They neither sleep, nor do they die” (‘Abd al-Qādir Jīlanī, *Sirr al-asrār* [Lahore, n.d.], 158, cited in Ashraf, “The Inner Meaning of the Islamic Rites,” 114 n. 2).

51. Brohi, “The Spiritual Dimension of Prayer,” 141.

52. *Sūrah* 2:157 offers yet another puzzle, when the faithful are to receive God’s *ṣalāt*: “They are those on whom (descend) blessings (*ṣalawāt*) from the Lord and Mercy (*rahma*), and it is these who receive guidance.”

53. Arberry, *The Koran Interpreted*. The Penguin edition, by a Western translator, has the same translation, “God and his angels bless the prophet.”

54. Khan, *The Quran*.



55. As-Suyūṭī, *Al-ḥirzu l-manīʿ*, 12; cited in Padwick, *Muslim Devotions*, 156.

56. Cited in Robson, “Blessings on the Prophet,” 366.

57. Murata, “The Angels,” 343.

58. For example, in the first chapter of the *Fuṣūṣ al-ḥikam*, Ibn ‘Arabī writes, “The angels do not grasp that which is supplied by the ontological plane of the viceregent (i.e., man), nor do they grasp the worship of the Essence that is demanded by the ontological level of God. For no one can know God except in keeping with what his own essence provides, and the angels do not possess Adam’s all-comprehensiveness (since only mankind manifests the name ‘Allāh,’ which comprehends all other Names). They do not grasp the Divine Names pertaining only to Adam’s all-comprehensive level. They glorify God and call Him holy (Quran, II, 30) but they do not know that He has Names which their knowledge does not embrace. Thus they do not glorify Him by these Names, nor do they call Him holy in the same way that Adam does” (Ibn ‘Arabī, *Fuṣūṣ al-ḥikam*, ed. A. A. Afifi [Beirut, 1966], 50–51; cited in Murata, “The Angels,” 341–342 and n. 24. Translation and parenthetical insertions Murata’s.).

59. Cited in Robson, “Blessings on the Prophet,” 366.

60. Ibid.

61. Ibid.

62. *Al-Futūḥāt al-makkīya*, I:431, cited in Robson, “Blessings on the Prophet,” 366.

63. He maintains that this is appropriate since in Sūrah 49:2 people are commanded not to address Muḥammad as they address one another. “Oh ye who believe, do not raise your voices above the voice of the Prophet, and speak not aloud to him, as you speak aloud to one another, lest your works become vain without your knowing it.” Thus it is “natural that their prayer for Muhammad” should be different from their prayer for others. See the discussion in Robson, “Blessings on the Prophet,” 366–367.

64. ‘Alī al-Makkī, *Faḥḥu l-karīmi l-khāliq identical (sharḥu ṣ-ṣalawāti l-bakriyya)*, 15; cited in Padwick, *Muslim Devotions*, 156–157.

65. Ibid., 157. Padwick concurs with the necessity of finding “one translation” for the one verb: “Perhaps the happiest English translation that can be used alike of God, angels, and men, is “to call down blessing upon.”

66. Aḥmad al-Tījānī, *Al-Ṣalāt al-ghaybiyya*; cited in Padwick, *Muslim Devotions*, 157.

67. ‘Alī al-Makkī, *Faḥḥu l-karīm l-khāliq*; cited in Padwick, *Muslim Devotions*, 157.

68. Padwick, *Muslim Devotions*, 157.

69. Ibid., 152. As mentioned at the beginning of this section, common short forms of the *taṣliya* when the name of Muḥammad is mentioned are *ṣallā llāhu ‘alayhi wa-sallama* (“Allah bless him and grant him peace”) or *ṣallā ‘alā n-nabi* (“Allāh bless the prophet”).

70. Muḥyī ‘d-dīn an-Nawawī, *Adhkār*, 56; cited in Padwick, *Muslim Devotions*, 152.

71. Padwick, *Muslim Devotions*, 154.

72. Schimmel, *Muhammad*, 92.

73. Paraphrase of Meier, “Die segensprechung,” 375. Meier notes that in his *Magie et religion dans l’Afrique du Nord* (Algiers, 1908, 453, 1–2), Edmond Doutté held that the origins of the Arabic *taṣliyah* lay in the idea of burnt-offering (e.g., Sūrah 56:94, *wa-taṣliyat jahīm*: “and roast in a hell-fire”). If it does have some connection to sacrifice, this might shed some light on the reason for the magical potency and self-sufficiency of the prayer.

74. Meier’s article traces the ancient habit and frequent later practice of adding personal demands to the *taṣliyah*. Since Abū d-Dardā’ (d. 653 C.E.) was supposed to have said the plea for the divine benediction is itself a personal prayer which God does not

fail to grant, Ja'far aṣ-Ṣādiq and Abū Sulaymān ad-Dāranī concluded that God is too generous to grant only the blessing of the prophet without taking into account also the personal wishes added by the author of the prayer.

75. Ibn al-Qayyim, *Jalāl* 239; Kulīnī, *Uṣūl* 2, 493, nr. 9; cited in Meier, “Die segensprechung,” 375 n. 61. Similarly, “When you hear the call to prayer, say after him what the *mu'adhḥin* says, then call down blessing on me, for whosoever calls down one's blessing on me, God shall call down on him ten blessings” (Abdullah b. Umar, cited in Padwick, *Muslim Devotions*, 152–153). 'Alī al-Makkī comments that “there is no doubt that to bless the Prophet is one of the most important of good deeds” (*Faṭḥu l-karīmi l-khāliq*; cited in Padwick, *Muslim Devotions*, 153). Traditionally, the tenfold reward of the *ṣalāt 'alā ḥ-nabī* is based on Sūrah 6:160, “He that doeth good shall have ten times as much to his credit.”

Anne Marie Schimmel notes that according to al-Ghazālī, God himself addressed the Prophet with the words, “Do you approve, O Muhammad, that nobody from your community utters the formula of blessing for you [even] once but I bless him ten times, and nobody from your community greets you [even] once but I greet him ten times?” (*Iḥyā' ulūm 'id-dīn*, 1:278–289, cited in Schimmel, *Muhammad*, 92 n. 54). According to the same *ḥadīth*, the Prophet says, “Whosoever utters the blessing for me, he is blessed by the angels as often as he utters the blessing, be it often or rarely.”

76. Muḥammad Uthmān al-Mirghanī, *Faṭḥu r-Rasūl*; cited in Padwick, *Muslim Devotions*, 154.

77. As-Suyūṭī, *Al-ḥirzu l-manīf*, 23; cited in Padwick *Muslim Devotions*, 155.

78. Muḥammad Uthmān al-Mirghanī, *Faṭḥu r-Rasūl*, 13; cited in Padwick, *Muslim Devotions*, 155.

79. Cf. the discussion in Padwick, *Muslim Devotions*, 152.

80. Al-Sha'rānī, *Laṭa'ifu l-minan*, 127; cited in Padwick, *Muslim Devotions*, 153.

81. Homerin, “A Bird Ascends the Night,” 250.

82. Al-Fāsi, *Muṭālī' a l-musarrāt li sharḥ dalā' ilī l-khayrāt*; cited in Padwick, *Muslim Devotions*, 153.

83. Palmer, cited in Robson, “Blessings on the Prophet,” 365.

84. Robson, “Blessings on the Prophet,” 365.

85. *Ibid.*

86. In “Ueber die Eulogien der Muhammedaner” (*Zeitschrift der Deutschen Morgenländischen Gesellschaft*, 1896), 99ff; cited in Robson, “Blessings on the Prophet,” 368 n. 10.

87. Robson, “Blessings on the Prophet,” 367.

88. *Ibid.*

89. *Oxford English Dictionary*, s.v. “bless.”

90. *Ibid.*

91. Mitchell, *The Meaning of Brk “To Bless” in the Old Testament*, 15–16. Mitchell goes on to observe an evolution of the idea of blessing which may well have been recapitulated in Islam: “The frequency of the different meanings of *brk* changes with time. Twelve of the thirteen occurrences of *brk* in Ugaritic denote gods blessing men, with one occurrence denoting a human benediction. The frequency of human blessings increases in later NW Semitic texts (35–36). See also Greenberg, *Biblical Prose Prayer*.

92. Robson, “Blessings on the Prophet,” 367.

93. *Ibid.*

94. *Ibid.*, 368.

95. *Ibid.*, 369.

96. *Ibid.*

97. Robson offers many examples to show how these words were not used exclusively of Muḥammad; among them is a poem attributed to Kuthaiyir (d. 105/723) where *ṣallā ʿalā* is used in a grave elegy (*Kitāb al-aghānī*, VI, p. 25 (Cairo, 1935), cited in Robson, “Blessings on the Prophet,” 370 n. 13. From a narration from Ibn Harma, dated to the second century of Islam, he cites a prayer that Allah’s *ṣalawāt* may rest on Ali and his descendants (*Kitāb al-aghānī*, VI, 105), cited in Robson, 370 n. 14. In the *dīwān* of Hassan b. Thabit, Muḥammad’s court poet, we find a dirge on the death of Hamza that includes “Allah ‘bless you’ (*ṣallā ʿalayka*) in a high garden whose entrant is honorable” (ed. Hirschfeld, 72 n. 15; cited in Robson, 370 n. 15). In the *Qūt al-qulūb*, a history of religion of Islam written by Abu Ṭalib al-Makkī (d. 386/996), we learn that the angels “bless” him (*tuṣallī ʿalayhi*) who recites the whole Qurʾān in a week (Cairo, 1932), I, 68; and they also do so to a man whose table is spread with food to entertain guests (IV, 68); birds, beasts and fish bless the learned man who shares his learning (II, 4); all cited in Robson, 370 nn. 16, 17, and 18. However, especially the last example, which clearly shows that the birds, etc., in order to “bless” *must* invoke the power of God, show that the translation of “bless” has just as much problem as “pray for” as a translation of *ṣallā ʿalā* for God’s action in Sūrah 33:56.

98. Cited in Robson, “Blessings on the Prophet,” 369–370.

99. *Ibid.*, 370.

100. *Ibid.*, 370–371.

101. *Ibid.*, 371.

102. *Ibid.* Emphasis added.

103. *Ibid.*

104. Schimmel, *Muhammad*, 92.

105. Padwick, *Muslim Devotions*, 156.

106. *SEI*, s.v. “Allāh,” 34. The article’s author goes on to insist, “We are not to regard that as due to an anthropomorphic theology but rather as the still plastic metaphor of a poet.”

107. Other striking polarities exist in traditional Islamic theology: God is the Exalter (*al-rafiʿ*) but also the Abaser (*al-mudhill*); He is the Advantager (*al-muqaddim*) and yet the Withholder (*al-māni*). His epithet of Distresser (*al-dārr*) is also used of Satan in Sūrah 58.10. In Sūrahs 4:169 and 175 we find a word-for-word reprise of God’s prayer in *Berakhot*: “May my mercy overcome My wrath!” For a discussion of these issues of polarity in Islam and in the context of comparative religions, see John Carman’s *Majesty and Meekness*.

108. Qurʾān 69:24, etc.

109. Qurʾān 29:19; 85.13.

110. *SEI*, “Allāh,” 34.

111. Ibn ʿArabī, *Fuṣūṣ al-ḥikam*.

112. Qurʾān 5:64; 38.75.

113. Qurʾān 34:67.

114. Qurʾān 54:14.

115. Qurʾān 2:115, 278; 6:52; 28:28, etc.

116. Qurʾān 20:5, etc.

117. *SEI*, “Allāh,” 37. In Cairo, a version of this is popularly expressed as “Everything that comes into your mind is perishing and Allāh is different from that.”

118. *Maḍnūn al-ṣaghīr*, 9; cited in *SEI*, “Allāh,” 41.

119. *SEI*, “Allāh,” 41.

120. William Graham notes, “The ‘Symbols’ refers to the Arabic plural of *shāʿira*, a ‘sign’ or ‘mark’ whose base meaning refers to army colors, banner, marker, or flag. It

most often refers to the rites of pilgrimage in the plural like this” (correspondence with author, April 7, 2004). Graham suggests the translation, “The sacrificial camels we have made for you to be the markers/cultic signs of God.”

121. Jalāluddīn as-Suyūṭī, *Al-la ʿāli al-masnūʿa*.

122. Annemarie Schimmel, *I Am Wind, You Are Fire*, 169. Schimmel points out that many verses in Rūmī’s *Mathnawī* emphasize that God “lights the candle of prayer in the darkness. . . . As all activity come from God and begins with Him, and as His address precedes every human word, thus it is He who teaches man to pray: ‘Otherwise, how could a rose grow out of an ash pit?’” (*Mathnawī* II 2443 ff., cited in Schimmel, *I Am Wind*, 171).

123. Schimmel, *I Am Wind*, 171.

124. Al-Ghazālī, *Ihyāʾ*, cited in Padwick, *Muslim Devotions*, 8.

125. Syed Ali Ashraf, “The Inner Meaning of the Islamic Rites,” 115.

126. *Ibid.*

127. *Ibid.*, 116.

128. William Graham, *Beyond the Written Word*, 103. See also Graham, *Divine Word and Prophetic Word in Early Islam*.

129. Corbin, *Alone with the Alone*, 375 n. 34.

130. Ashraf, “The Inner Meaning of the Islamic Rites,” 116.

131. Padwick, *Muslim Devotions*.

132. Schimmel, *Muhammad*, 92.

133. Padwick, *Muslim Devotions*, xxv; emphasis added.

134. Schimmel, *Muhammad*, 160.

135. *Ibid.* Schimmel also cites Bukhārī Muslim b. al-Hajjaj, *Kitāb jamīʿ as-ṣaḥīḥ* 8:1:1. Another *ḥadīth* likens ritual prayer to the *mīrāj*, “ladder,” and more specifically, “heavenly journey.” Rūmī takes up this saying; the Prophet experienced God’s immediate Presence and he alluded to this moment with the words *lī maʿa Allāh waqt*, “I have a time with God.” “So too the heart of one who prays ‘has a time with God’ when nothing stands between the heart and God” (Schimmel, *I Am Wind*, 171).

136. Sur Sārang, in one of the chapters in the *Risalo* of the Sindhi poet Shah Abdul Latif (d. 1752), cited in Schimmel, *Muhammad*, 83.

137. Qurʾān 5:54.

138. Schimmel, *Muhammad*, 83 and n. 10. She cites Andrae, *Die Person Muhammads*, 234–244; and Huitema, *De voorsprak* (shafāʿa) *in den Islam*.

139. For example, Sūrah 40:7: “Those who uphold the Throne and those who are around it, glorify their Lord with His praise, believing fully in Him, and pray for forgiveness to those who believe in the Lord, Thou dost comprehend all things in Thy mercy and knowledge, so grant Thy forgiveness to those who repent and follow Thy way and safeguard them against the punishment of hell.”

140. Padwick, *Muslim Devotions*, 42. Muḥammad has far greater intercessory standing than the prophets; one source calls him “the *wasīla* of Adam and Abraham, the means of access of Moses and of Noah the illustrious, the succourer of ʿIsā (Jesus) and of David thy *Khalīfa*.” Muḥammad ʿUthmān al-Mighanī, *Faṭḥu ʿr-rasūl*, cited in Padwick, *Muslim Devotions*, 43.

141. The Hindu poet Shivprasad Dohi, in Sajīd Šiddīqī and Walī Āsī, *Armaghān-i naʿt* (Lucknow: Maktaba-i dīn u adab, 1962), 127; cited in Schimmel, *Muhammad*, 176 n. 3.

142. Schimmel, *Muhammad*, 176.

143. Yusuf ibn Ismail an-Nabhani, *Al-majmūʿa an-nabhāniyya fī l-madāʾ ih an-nabawiyya* (Beirut: Al-maṭbaʿa al-adabiyya, 1903), 1:4; cited in Schimmel, *Muhammad*,

177 n. 5. Schimmel comments, “In other words, the very fact that Muhammad is mentioned in the Koran with words of praise and that God Himself utters blessings upon him renders human beings incapable of praising him as he deserves to be” (Schimmel, *Muhammad*, 177). She cites the Spanish author Lisauddin ibn al-Khatib, who asks:

The verses of the Holy Book have praised you—so how  
Could the poem of my eulogy possibly praise your greatness?

(In Yusuf ibn Ismail an-Nabhani, *Al-majmū'a 'an-nabhāniyya* 1:8; cited in Schimmel, *Muhammad*, 177 n. 6).

144. Padwick collects these in *Muslim Devotions*, 46. She notes that the preoccupation with the *shafā'ah* of Muḥammad is largely Sunni and is not so dominant in Shī'a devotion because “the same honorable office [i.e., as Muḥammad the intercessor] is shared by the Shī'a Imāms.” These receive their own direct pleas for direct intercession in popular devotion.

145. Padwick, *Muslim Devotions*, 45. She continues, “To the Christian they are suggestive of the truth by which he lives, of an act of mediation that took place in history, proffered by God and accepted by God for the bankrupt soul of man.”

146. Padwick, *Muslim Devotions*, 156.

147. Or, as Sufi scholar Mehmet Yalçın expressed it to me, “God is prayer.”

148. Arberry, *Discourses of Rumi*, 79; cited in Schimmel, *Muhammad*, 92.

#### CONCLUSION: “RELIGION OF THE GODS”

1. William Shakespeare, *King Lear*, Act V, Scene 3, 19–20.

2. Graham, “Scripture.”

3. Tambiah, *Culture, Thought, and Social Action*, 135. The referene is to Eliade's *The Myth of the Eternal Return*.

4. Moreno, “God's Forceful Call,” 103.

5. Carman, *Contrast and Harmony*, ms., chapter 7, p. 10.

6. For the term “religion of the gods,” I am indebted to Gabriel Palmer-Fernandez.

7. Paden, *Interpreting the Sacred*, 106. Paden continues, “For rationalists . . . the main issues about religious views is their truth. How, it is asked, can their claims be verified? Are the gods really there independent of our frames? Do religions refer to realities that are agencies in their own right? . . . The questions . . . presuppose a space in which they can be objectively or neutrally answered. But is there any? There does not seem to be such a mediating arena or world unconnected to someone's assumptions about it, where the matter could be evidentially determined. . . . Religious truths cannot be substantiated in any other framework than their own, though many philosophers have laboriously tried to create arguments for or against their objective validity. . . . The objects of religion, like God or Buddhahood, are only ‘known’ in the context of religious acts” (107–108).

8. *Ibid.*, 107.

9. Schimmel, *I Am Wind, You are Fire*, 112.

10. Fry, *Three Plays. Thor with Angels*, which treats Christian conversion in Saxon England, then continues: “And sacrifice has so been made, by God / To God in the body of God with man . . .”.

11. Kristensen, *The Meaning of Religion*, 496.

12. Paden, *Interpreting the Sacred*, 108. Emphasis added.

13. Ibid., 109.
14. Paden, *Religious Worlds*, 164.
15. Moore, *Iconography of Religions*, 37.
16. Margaret Miles has eloquently raised these questions in her *Image as Insight*.
17. Burckhardt, *Sacred Art in East and West*, 131.
18. Herakleitos frag. B 54, Diehl-Kranz, *Die Fragmente der Vorsokratiker*.

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