

# ATHENA and HEPHAESTUS:

## ARTS and CRAFTS

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### Gods of Civilisation

*But Zeus himself produced, from his own head,  
Grey-eyed Athene, fearsome queen who brings  
The noise of war and, tireless, leads the host,  
She who loves shouts and battling and fights.  
Then Hera, angry, quarrelled with her mate  
And bore, without the act of love, a son  
Hephaistos, famous for his workmanship,  
More skilled in crafts than all the sons of Heaven.<sup>1</sup>*

-Hesiod

Athena, the favoured daughter of Zeus, is a triumphant goddess of war revered by her people while Hephaestus, rejected and expelled from Olympus, is a wounded and ridiculed god. Each appears the polar opposite of the other in the Olympian family. However myth draws them into a mysterious relationship in various ways. Athena values the beautiful craftsmanship of Hephaestus; he marvels at the goddess's competence in the world. Both are civilising gods who have created implements and tools for the human race, which have industrialised and promoted culture. As patrons of handicrafts both deities encouraged civilisation and city life. Both deities also share a similar birth motif. Athena's birth is parthenogenetic, born from the forehead of Zeus. In many vase paintings of Athena's birth it is actually Hephaestus who helps deliver Athena from Zeus's forehead by hammering it open with an axe. The smith-god acts as a midwife to the delivery of the daughter of Athens. Hesiod describes Hephaestus's birth to Hera as parthenogenetic, Hera singularly conceiving her fatherless son. In this mythic version revenge was Hera's motive for the solo conception. Furious at Zeus for having delivered Athena out of his body, Hera retaliated by conceiving a god of her own. Various versions add to the sequential complexity of the mythic story. However their birth myths are interconnected in varying traditions. Each was the child of a single parent and their myths reflected this.

Another mythic figure that unites Athena and Hephaestus is Erichthonius. He was abandoned by Gaia, but rescued by Athena and reared in her sacred precinct on the acropolis of Athens. Later Erichthonius became king of Athens and established her worship on the acropolis. He is credited with the institution of the great annual festival of Athena known as the Panathenaia. Part of his name *chthon* means 'of the earth' as he sprang up from the earth, out of the womb of Gaia. He is often depicted as being half human, half serpent with the lower half of his body a serpent's tail, like many of the other monstrous children of Gaia. Hephaestus fathered Erichthonius during the god's clumsy attempt to ravage Athena. Again there are varying mythic motives as to why Hephaestus desired the virgin goddess. However the theme is consistent: Hephaestus was consumed by lust for the goddess and in his attempt to seize her he prematurely ejaculated onto the earth. Another version suggests the sperm fell onto her thigh and in disgust Athena wiped it off with a piece of wool, throwing the sperm soaked wool onto the earth. Hephaestus's seed inseminated the fertile earth impregnating Gaia. Nine months later, on Athena's birthday, Erichthonius or Wool-Earth (*erion* – wool)<sup>2</sup> was born. Athena then took charge of the boy putting him in a chest and gave him to the daughters of Cecrops to raise, forbidding them to look into the chest. Cecrops was the first king of Athens who also sprang from the

earth. However his curious daughters did look into the basket and were driven mad by the sight of the half human, half serpent child. Therefore Athena raised him by herself in her sacred precinct.

Erichthonius was a king of Athens emblematic of the Athenian belief that their race sprang from the earth indigenous to Attica. Athenians boasted they were *autochthonous* or earth-sprung like their kings, Cecrops and Erichthonius. Erichthonius' grandson, Erechtheus also became a well-known king of Athens and his worship is still evident today in the temple on the Acropolis known as the Erechtheum. Underlying Erichthonius was the story of Athena and Hephaestus who were the gods of the *polis*, which helped to shape the great civilisation which flourished in Athens.

Yet Erichthonius was not the only living creation brought to life by this unusual parental pair. Hesiod in *Theogony* describes how the union of Athena and Hephaestus was responsible for animating the first mortal woman, Pandora. At Zeus' command woman as a lovely evil first embodied in Pandora, was to be sent into the world of men as a punishment for Prometheus' theft of fire from the gods. Hephaestus fashioned her out of the earth and Athena clothed her, giving form and life to the first mythic woman. Hesiod's misogynistic myth is reminiscent of the tradition of Eve and Lilith. Pandora means all gifts from *pan* meaning all and *dora* referring to the gifts she brought to mankind. Her gifts symbolised the suffering of mortals and drew a sharp distinction between the immortality of the gods and the terminal pain of being human. Yet Hesiod reminds us that it was Athena and Hephaestus who were the parents of the gift-bearing Pandora. And it was both these gods with their gifts of civilisation who led mankind out of a primal relationship with the old nature gods into an industrialised and technological culture. Fashioning life forms out of the earth they promoted the development of culture, leading mankind away from nature to the city.

## ATHENA

*When, by the craft of Hephaistos*

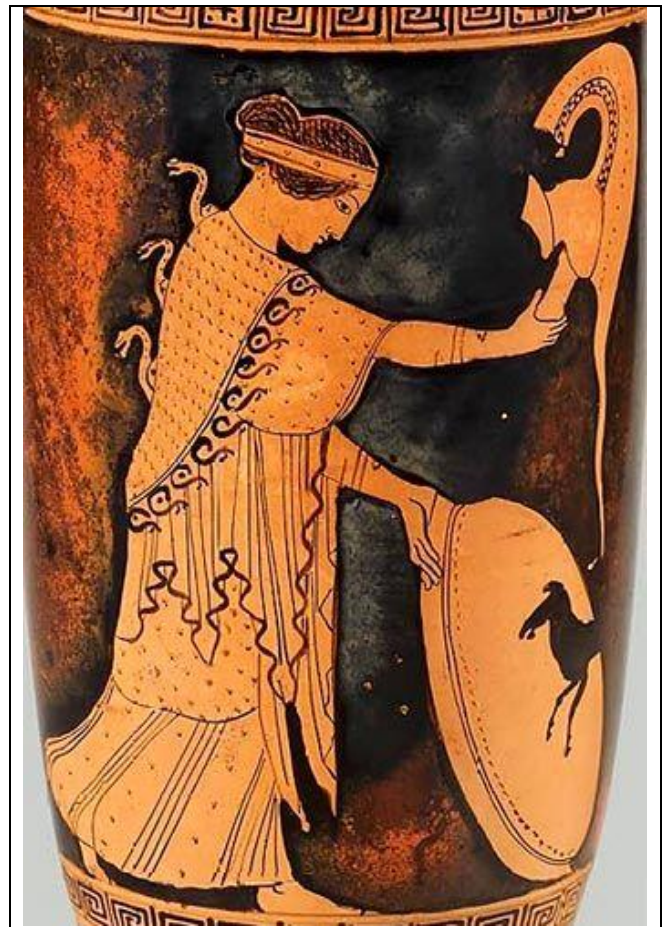
*And his bronze-beaten axe, from the top of  
her Father's head*

*Athena jumped out, and cried with a  
monstrous shout,*

*And the sky shuddered at her, and Mother  
Earth.<sup>3</sup>*

- Pindar

Attic Red Figure Lekythos  
Attributed to the Nikon Painter  
ca 470 BC



## Father's Daughter: From the Head of Zeus

Athena was a motherless goddess born parthenogenetically from Zeus's head. Born fully matured and armed, her patriarchal birth symbolises a nodal point in human evolution. Athena reflects the shifting epoch from primitive culture to civilisation and the triumph of order over chaos through the ascendancy of father-right. This becomes apparent in Aeschylus's second play of the *Oresteian* trilogy, *The Eumenides*, when the motherless birth of Athena is used by Apollo to defend his argument that children are the creative progeny of their fathers, the mother being only a vessel for their birth. With Athena's birth father-right triumphs and the masculine becomes defined as the dominant paradigm.

The mother is no parent of that which is called  
her child, but only nurse of the new-planted seed  
that grows. The parent is he who mounts. A stranger she  
preserves a stranger's seed, if no god interfere.  
I will show you proof of what I have explained. **There can  
be a father without any mother.** There she stands,  
the living witness, daughter of the Olympian Zeus,  
yet who was never fostered in the dark of the womb,  
yet such a child as no goddess could bring to birth<sup>4</sup>

Athena's mother was Metis, an ancient goddess of wisdom, daughter of the Titans Oceanus and Tethys and the first consort of Zeus. She assisted Zeus's ascension to power by preparing the emetic that released his five siblings from the dungeon of their father's belly. The herbal tincture of mustard and salt mixed in a honey drink was given to Cronus in order to disgorge Zeus's sibs from internment in their father's prison. The reappearance of his missing brothers and sisters allowed the siblings to unite as allies against their father, preparing the way for Zeus to ascend to the Olympian throne and claim his supremacy.

Metis was the goddess known as Wise Counsel or Cunning Intelligence, epithets referring to her innate wisdom. Hesiod refers to her as the wisest of all, gods and men. Metis personified the feminine ways of wisdom, which included the knowledge of the mysteries of plants and herbs. In psychological terms Metis represents the feminine wisdom of being, intelligence articulated by the inner world of instinct and intuition. Her wisdom comes through not knowing, nor rushing into conclusions; she is the wisdom of bearing uncertainty and paradox. In actively waiting and being in touch with the deeper instinctual processes, the wisdom of Metis is constellated. *Metis* in the language of this time referred both to intelligence, as well as trickery, deceit or a weaving of the net. Athena's craft of weaving is an archaic remnant of this *metis*.<sup>5</sup> Like a powerful deity, Metis was a shape shifter, knowing the wisdom of changing images in order to meet her adversaries. However Metis was unable to escape Zeus by shape shifting and in the passion of their union conceived the daughter whose fate would change the course of feminine evolution, a goddess who would be personified as Victory.

Metis became a threat to Zeus when an oracle foretold that her second child would be a son destined to become greater than his father. For Zeus the oracle echoed the familial tension in the father-son dynamic. He had overthrown his father Cronus who in turn had dethroned his father Ouranus. As a potential mother to a rival son Metis reminded Zeus of his tenuous grasp on the sky throne. So when Metis fell pregnant with Zeus's first child he re-enacted the familial complex by swallowing the pregnant Metis whole. Ironically it was Metis who was responsible for the release of Zeus's siblings from the belly of their father. The inherited pattern repeats itself. Metis, now in the belly of Zeus,

became personified as Insight and Prudence. The instinct, which originates from the belly in the guise of gut feelings, hunches, feelings and intuition, is Metis, who now offers advice and potential guidance from the solar plexus.

Athena is the child in Metis's womb now interred in Zeus. When a splitting headache plagued Zeus, Hephaestus helped to split his head open with an axe to release the child. Out of his forehead emerged the goddess Athena, fully grown and fully armoured. Athena who inherits the role as the goddess of wisdom emerges out of Zeus's head and assumes her position as a favoured daughter of a sky god; her wisdom now completely within the jurisdiction of her sky father.

Athena's knowing is influenced by her father. Born of man, like Eve, this myth is often cited when tracing the emergence of 'father-right' from the long held tradition of 'mother-right'. As we saw in the *Oresteia*, Aeschylus scripts Apollo's argument for father right suggesting Athena is a child 'no goddess could bring to birth'. Athena agrees with Apollo and the new patriarchal order when she says: 'there is no mother anywhere who gave me birth, and for marriage, I am always for the male with all my heart, and strongly on my father's side'. The daughter is now aligned with the sky father who colludes in rejecting the earth mother. The tables have turned in the familial pattern as now it is father and daughter colluding against mother, no longer mother conspiring with her youngest son against the father.

However like Eve, Athena's feminine legacy is not so easily erased. Both their myths contain the image of the snake, a sacred symbol of feminine wisdom, healing and regeneration. Jungian author Erich Neumann suggests that the births of Athena from the forehead of Zeus or Eve from Adam's rib are 'unnatural symbols' and hostile to the natural course of nature, 'characteristic of the patriarchal spirit'. However as Neumann says, this 'attempt at revaluation usually fails, as an analysis of this symbolism might show, because the matriarchal character of the nature symbol asserts itself again and again.'<sup>6</sup> The feminine spirit pervades the cycles of nature and upholds the foundations of the earth hence she can never be fully obscured by the dominance of the patriarch.

Athena is the goddess of wisdom inheriting an ancient tradition of feminine wisdom from her mother Metis. However by the classical period Athena's wisdom became subjugated to Zeus. As a daughter of the patriarch her wisdom is shaped by the masculine becoming more linear, logical and rational. Her mother is no longer acknowledged as her parent, hence Metis as the internal wisdom of cycles, intuitive knowing and the complexity of intrapsychic understanding is concealed by Athena's armour. Wisdom no longer gestates in the womb of the goddess but in the head of Zeus. Athena's wisdom is also reflective and strategic, carrying the capacity to think things through. She is often depicted as reflective, meditative or pondering, and recognised as strategic and deliberate. In the Greek world this ability was highly valued. With the rise of rationalism, Athena was favoured and her way of knowing the world through intelligence became divine. Her deeper wisdom was known as *metis* after her mother, the valued intelligence that guides our instincts and plans strategically. Plato, in the *Symposium*, refers to Metis as Cleverness, the mother of Resourcefulness (*Poros*) who is the father to Eros in Plato's *Symposium*.

Metis, now devoured, reminds us of the sky god's need for triumph and control when threatened by natural evolution. Zeus knowing is triumphant and conceptual; Athena's knowing becomes purposeful and strategic. However Metis is an instinctive, earthy way of knowing. She waits to be released from the sky god's belly-womb and integrated into the dominant paradigm of masculine intelligence.

Athena emerges out of the 'head' of Zeus fully armoured, grown and glorious. Because of this divine appearance out of the great father Zeus, she is seen as his favourite and his representative. From the

classical period forward she is the patriarchal daughter. Born out of the patriarch's head she carries his intelligence consciously; however the remnants of her mother's wisdom underlay her rationality. Her intellect approaches feelings rationally and logically, therefore she does not embody chaotic feminine qualities that were perceived as dangerous like Aphrodite, her Homeric half-sister.

Aphrodite also emerged from the body of her father; however she arose out of his severed genitalia, not his head. Homer clearly demarcates the boundary line between Athena and Aphrodite. In the *Iliad* Zeus rebukes Aphrodite's participation in the battle; this is Athena's domain, Aphrodite's sphere is love.

No, my child, not for you are the works of warfare. Rather  
concern yourself only with the lovely secrets of marriage,  
while all this shall be left to Athene and sudden Ares.<sup>7</sup>

The poet even allows the goddess Aphrodite to be wounded at the hands of Athena working through the hero Diomedes.

Pre-patriarchal images of Athena depict her as wilder and primal with a crown of snakes in her hair. Later the crown of snakes is replaced by her helmet and armour, which add to her severity. The snake motif is also used on the fringe of her robe, linking the classical goddess of civilisation to her earlier incarnation as a goddess of wisdom and healing. Her earlier roots have been suggested as Libya in North Africa, where she was known as the Libyan Triple Goddess Neith while scholars have also linked her to the African amazons. She also has earlier associations with the Minoan civilisation where she was associated with a bird goddess who later became her emblematic bird, the owl. Through the archaic period she became associated with the development of the *polis* and represented a protectress of the city, becoming associated with defence and war. The healing and snake heritage was amalgamated into the Greek stories of Medusa, one of the Gorgons whom Perseus slew with her help. Her images of the owl and the snake remind us of her ancient roots as a goddess of wisdom (owl) and regeneration (snake). The Greeks, in the story of Medusa, amalgamated the goddess's ancient links to the mystery of healing and her older representations as a snake goddess.

In classical times Athena is the daughter of the republic and continues throughout the centuries to be the representation of the daughter who supports the father and the masculine, heroic principle. She is the goddess caught in the webbing of a father complex. Under Athena's supremacy the ancient wise ways of the feminine must now be relegated to the past as civilisation progresses. She now presides over craftsmanship and handiwork, guiding women to master the handicrafts of the home. In a contemporary context Athena champions the head over the heart, knowing the path of progress and order, but remains fearful of the chaos and confusion of uncertainty.

## Demos & Polis

By the 5<sup>th</sup> Century Athens was the cultural centre of the known world. Still today Athenian innovations are the foundation stones of democracy, science, medicine, philosophy and architecture. The classical city's influence still underlies our contemporary lifestyle and has shaped our sense of aesthetics and values. Athens, like its eponymous goddess came to symbolise democracy and city-life.

The citizens of Athens chose Athena as their patron deity. Her gift of the olive tree to the Athenians was highly valued and regarded. Myth recounts the contest held on the acropolis between Athena and Poseidon, both of whom were vying to become the patron deity of Athens. Poseidon struck the ground with his trident and a spring of salt water gushed forth from the rock face. He proudly offered

the seawater as his gift to the people of Athens. The goddess planted an olive tree and demonstrated how to cultivate the olive. A vote was taken amongst the citizens to determine which was the most appropriate gift for the city. Athena won and Poseidon in his rage at losing flooded the plain of Attica. A folk version of the story suggests that this was the reason that the vote was taken away from women as a woman cast the decisive vote for Athena and this is what evoked Poseidon's rage. Hence the moral of the folk story was that women's discernment might not be adequate enough to resolve contentious confrontations. However it was also evident that the Athenians valued the gifts to cultivate nature more than nature herself. Under the *aegis* of Athena the city of Athens would be eternally known as the classical centre whose civilising gifts shaped the course of human history.

From now on the city flourished under the eponymous goddess who presided over city life. From the farms, pastures and villages the *polis* emerged. Athens grew in stature to become one of the most respected centres of the Western world. The Mycenaean acropolis was eventually transformed into the sanctuary of Athena where in the midst of the 5<sup>th</sup> C one of the finest buildings in Western history was erected to the goddess. The Parthenon eternally stands as a monument to their beloved virgin goddess who brought the city its glory, its victory and its superiority. Athens was her favoured city but many others also invoked her as the goddess of the citadel and in Troy the woman called her the guardian of cities<sup>8</sup>.

The brilliant political players in Athens guided democratic reform. Ironically the stage for both democratic reform and progress was set by the tyrants, who preceded the dawn of the 5<sup>th</sup> C reforms. Behind much of Athens progress and development at the close of the Archaic Age was the tyrant Pisistratus whose rise to power was blessed by the goddess. History and myth are interwoven in the historical legend when Pisistratus used an exceptionally tall, beautiful woman to masquerade as the goddess. Dressing the surrogate goddess in armour he accompanied her into the city proclaiming her as the goddess Athena whose wish it was that the Athenians restore him to power. The Athenians accepted the hoax and Pisistratus led them into cultural and social reforms. During his regime the great Panathenean festival honouring the birth of the goddess was reshaped into a national celebration.

Athena was also an advocate for merciful justice and the patron goddess of the law courts. After she cast her vote in favour of Orestes rather than the Erinyes, in the trial for his mother's murder, law, mercy and justice was legitimised in favour of vengeance and retaliation. The Areopagus where Orestes was tried became the site of the first Athenian law courts guided by the wisdom of Athena. As the goddess of arts and crafts she is also the patroness of artisans, artists and sculptors. In this role she is the inventor of important tools for the process of civilisation such as earthenware pots, the loom, the plough, the bridle for oxen and horses and in earlier prehistorical times she helped Jason build his glorious ship the *Argo*. She tames the instinctual, develops the primitive, industrialises the culture and civilises the society. In this way she initiates the formation of *polis*.

Athena is also associated with the arts of healing, health and regeneration. Contrary to this she is often depicted as an armoured goddess with shield, helmet and associated with the craft and strategy of war. As Athena *Nike* she was the goddess of Victory, first victorious in war and later a victor on the sports field. Athena signalled victory and as a patron of heroes she was also known as the goddess of the near, as she was always close to the hero and a staunch supporter of the heroic. Before she oversaw the rise of the cities and democratic reforms Athena was the champion of the heroes, always supporting and guiding them in their heroic labours. Whether it was Perseus, Heracles, Jason or Odysseus, Athena was the anima image that propelled them towards success.

## Goddess of Heroes

As the goddess of war and defender of her father's realm Athena became aligned with the hero. In mythic portrayals of the hero, Athena stands behind or beside him in his quest to overwhelm and annihilate the monstrous. She helps guide him into the underworld, offer advice or gifts and is his staunch ally against the dark forces with which he must struggle. In the conflict between the giants and the gods Athena enlisted Heracles on the side of the gods, helping to administer the herbal potion, which would render him invulnerable to the weapons of the giants. This began their mythic relationship; Athena guided and protected Heracles through many of his labours.

The Trojan War was sparked by the abduction of Helen who was taken to Troy by Paris, under the guidance of Aphrodite. Paris had awarded the prize of beauty to Aphrodite not Athena who had offered the Trojan prince victory in all battles. However Paris had chosen Aphrodite over Athena therefore igniting the animosity between the two goddesses and stressing the tension between love and war. Aphrodite took the side of the Trojans and Athena supported the Greek army. It was the Greek warrior Diomedes whom she inspired. Imbued with the heroic spirit Diomedes wounded both Aphrodite and Ares in the battle and found his renewal of courage through the goddess. She also helped Achilles in the confrontation with the Trojan leader Hector. Mythic fragments also suggest Athena was the inspiration for the Trojan horse, the trick which allowed the Greeks access into Troy in order to destroy the city.

In the *Odyssey* the Olympians are remote except for Athena who is there to guide Odysseus home to Ithaca. Again the mythic struggle between Poseidon and Athena is evident as Poseidon is intent on destroying Odysseus in revenge for injuring and humiliating his Cyclops-son Polyphemus. But again Athena is victorious. The contrast between the two deities in Greek epic and myth highlights the stormy and irrational unconscious realms (Poseidon) with the clarity and heroism of consciousness (Athena), which is a recurrent theme in Athena's myth. Heroism is aligned with conscious development and as guide and benefactress of the hero she personifies this noble goal. And in the heroic round there are monsters to overcome, underworld journeys to be taken as well as evil to be vanquished. Athena will be the divine guide and focus in accomplishing these tasks.

When Perseus's task was to slay the Gorgon, Athena was guide and mentor facilitating his terrible task. When Jason took his night sea journey into the belly of the dragon, Athena was there as midwife when he re-emerged. When Heracles descended into the underworld, Athena was his guide. When Bellerophon needed to tame the winged horse Pegasus, Athena gave him the gift of a golden bridle. And Athena advised Cadmus how to slay the dragon of Thebes. Athena was a sister, foster mother, mentor, patron, protectress, friend, counsellor and guide to the heroes. Athena *Promachus* or Champion was the protector and defender of heroes. As a staunch ally of the masculine and the heroic pursuit of conscious development she was drawn into conflict with the feminine. Again her myth echoes the transitional epochal time between the matrilineal period which upheld the sacredness of nature, instinct, the dark and the emerging patrilineal period which valued culture, thinking and the light of consciousness.

## Athena's Sisters

Athena's relationship to her female peers was very different from the protective and supportive role she took with her male heroes. Through her interactions with other mythic women another side of Athena emerges. In reflecting on the myths of Athena with other women a competitive and vengeful pattern underlies their relationship.

This pattern is evident in the mythic interaction between Athena and Arachne. Ovid retells the story.<sup>9</sup> After hearing the Muses rebuke mortals for their impiety, Athena agrees that it is imperative that the gods be revered. Reflecting on this she thinks: "it is not enough to praise other people: what I want is to be praised myself, and not to have others scorn my divine powers with impunity." This reminded her of Arachne, a young woman whose skill at weaving was becoming renowned. Arachne's skill was so developed it was evident a divine hand guided her, yet the young girl was adamant that she had not been taught by any teacher or inspired by any god. In fact she openly challenged Athena to compete with her. Athena disguised as an old woman tried to influence Arachne into retracting her statement but the young woman was insistent, rejecting the old woman's pleas and reiterating her challenge to the goddess. Athena cast off her disguise and revealed herself to the young woman and accepted her challenge.

At the loom each wove their tapestries. Athena chose to weave the Areopagus and the Acropolis depicting her gift of the olive tree and the Olympian Gods, in their splendour, watching the miracle. Four other scenes were woven and the edges of the tapestry were embroidered with olives. Arachne wove the story of Europa and the bull into her tapestry, also adding other scenes of Zeus deceiving other women like Danae, Leda, and Mnemosyne. And Arachne did not stop there. She continued to weave scenes of the other male gods Poseidon, Apollo, Dionysus and Cronus and how they had all deceived their female counterparts. Flowers and ivy decorated the hem of the tapestry.

Athena could find no fault with the weaving. However the scenes depicted the transgressions of the male gods and in her fury Athena tore up the tapestry and raged at Arachne. In her fear the young woman put a noose around her neck to hang herself. In that moment Athena took her revenge, transforming her into a spider to spin thread eternally. Arachne's hubris had been punished.

Ovid retold the myth in the 1<sup>st</sup> Century BCE. However the motif of Athena as representative of the new order, not the matrilineal tradition, is evident. Arachne wove the images of the raping masculine and is punished for this. Athena guards the patriarchal position and defends her brothers; hence her sisters often become the sacrifice in Athena's support of the masculine.

The sacrificed feminine figure was always a product of Athena's competitive streak. Pallas was the daughter of the river god Triton and a childhood companion of Athena's. As best friends they would compete together in war games and contests. However tragedy separated the friends when Athena accidentally struck and killed her beloved friend. To commemorate her grief, Athena took her dear friend's name as her own, becoming known as Pallas Athena.

Another close companion of Athena was Chariclo. Tiresias was her son and at the age of seven he inadvertently saw the goddess bathing with her mother. The young boy had transgressed the privacy and sanctity of the goddess and Athena's punishment was to blind the boy. Chariclo was grief stricken and confronted her companion with her anger. But Athena could not restore the boy's sight, as the will of the gods cannot be retracted. Instead Athena offered Tiresias the gifts of prophecy and divination as well as a long life. Chariclo's relationship to her divine friend was not as competitive as Athena's other female companions; nonetheless tragedy was part of their interaction. Athena was divine and therefore would always be ruled by a different set of morals, moved by different feelings and motivated by different goals.

Medusa also received the wrath of Athena. The goddess became enraged when she discovered the maiden with Poseidon in one of her temples. Poseidon had abducted Medusa and made love to her in the temple violating the sacred precinct of the goddess. Athena cursed the maiden, her beautiful face becoming transformed into a sight that was so terrifying whoever was to see it would turn to stone. Her hair became writhing and hissing serpents and Medusa, once a beautiful and attractive maiden,



was now condemned to live as a hideous and despised creature. Medusa was now a Gorgon, one of a trinity of terrifying and grotesque monsters. When Perseus boasted that he could deliver the head of the Gorgon to the king Polydectes, Athena was there to guide and help him on his quest. With her help Perseus was able to slay Medusa by severing her terrifying head from the rest of her body. Eventually Athena used the image of the Medusa's head on her aegis, incorporating Medusa into her armour. She also took vials of blood which gushed from the severed body of the Gorgon. The blood which flowed from the right side of her body brought life, while the blood from the left side of the Gorgon's body brought death. Athena then gave the vials to the healer Asclepius who was now able to use the Gorgon's blood to restore life.

Again the polarity of Athena and Medusa reflect the dynamic changes from the previous epoch. Medusa is a demonised figure in a patriarchal context and Athena must destroy her. However her legacy is not completely obliterated for Athena takes her image to be part of her armour. Medusa is an ancient aspect of the goddess, most likely from older healing aspect of the goddess who now must be subordinated to the prevailing patriarchal paradigm. Hence it is to Asclepius, Apollo's son and Hippocrates's mentor that Athena delivers the ancient potions now mythologised as the Gorgon's blood. The times have changed and the old healing ways once linked to Athena are placed under the jurisdiction of her father's realm and split off from her warrior aspect. In the prehistorical period the hero was also a healer. Athena is the ancient link.

Athena was also drawn into competition with other Olympian goddesses, mainly Aphrodite and Hera. As we have previously discussed this trinity of goddesses was engaged in a competition to be the fairest. Against Aphrodite in a beauty contest Athena had no chance. However on the battlefield the outcome was different. Here Athena triumphed over Aphrodite and through her heroic surrogate Diomedes, Athena was able to injure Aphrodite. Epic continuously links Athena with Hera and Aphrodite. In the *Iliad* Athena and Hera are on the side of the Greeks and scheme and fight together. Aphrodite supports the Trojans and is drawn into conflict with the other two goddesses, except when Hera needs to borrow Aphrodite's magic girdle! In the *Argonautica* Hera and Athena scheme once again and enlist Aphrodite to erotically draw Medea and Jason together. In epic Hera and Athena are often united in their goals. Both are social goddesses and by the classical period are portrayed weaving the social fabric of the new order.

## The Wisdom of Athena

On the Acropolis of Athens the Parthenon stands as a monument to the goddess whom the classical Athenians cherished. She was their advocate for law and order, the teacher of household arts such as spinning, weaving, and cooking, as well as their protector and defender. As their goddess of war she helped the Greeks defeat Troy and the Athenians repel the Persians; as their goddess of useful and decorative arts she inspired the building of exceptional monuments and temples. As their goddess of merciful justice she helped transform the law courts and at the dawn of the 5<sup>th</sup> C inspired the democratic shift in Athenian politics. Athena was their goddess, whom they revered, celebrating her birthday each year with a great festival and procession through the Agora up to the Acropolis.

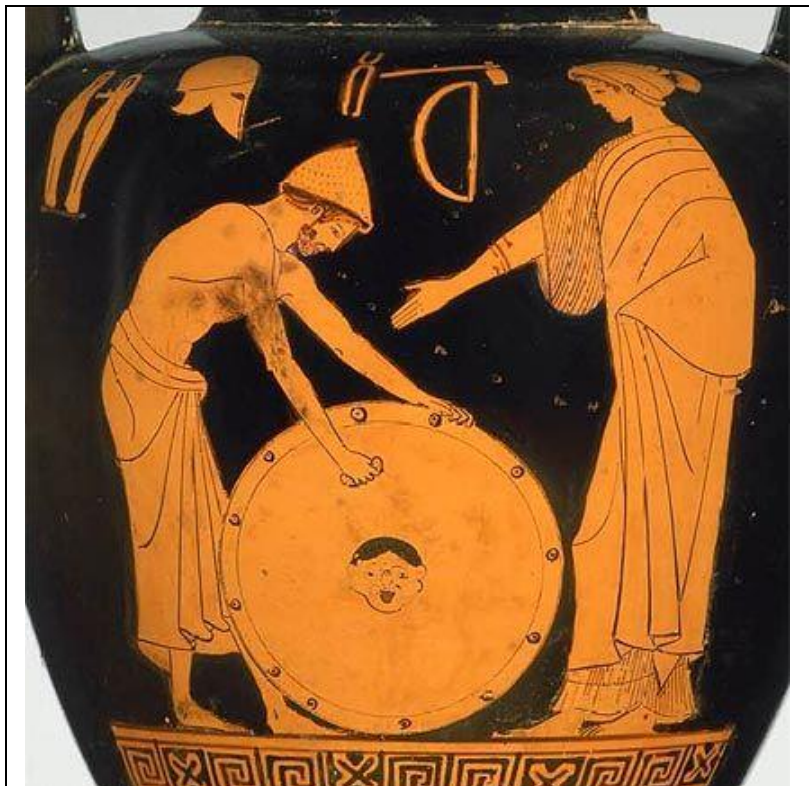
As a multi-tasked goddess there are many images associated with the goddess. However it is the owl that reminds us of her wisdom and *metis*: the wise owl. *The Homeric Hymn to Athena* praises the goddess as *polymetis*, or 'of many counsels'. Her intelligence is 'bright-eyed' and sharp, focused on the immediate, located in the present.

Athena's classical wisdom was also indicative of an epochal shift from instinct to intelligence. Her wisdom now suggested controlling the instincts, learning to direct them into heroic pursuits, which would help eradicate the dark and primitive aspects of the prehistorical period. It was a heroic

wisdom that was motivated by the need to triumph over nature. Hence Athena's wisdom becomes civilising and organising, bringing culture and cultivation to mankind. Justice and law are part of this new order. Mercy and justice replace retaliation and revenge. When Athena casts her vote for Apollo and Orestes the Erinyes or *fury* become replaced by the Eumenides or *kindliness*.

Athena's wisdom is strategic, reflective and controlled. However, it is also wisdom of craft and skill, mirrored in the multiplicity of devices she offered man, the fertility of her ideas and the usefulness of her inventions and techniques. As *Pronoi* she is before knowing, forethought, a knowing. Born from the forehead of Zeus the classical myth of Athena begins to place the wisdom of Athena in the masculine court of Zeus. As father's special daughter she must mirror the image of Zeus, praised for his intelligence and counsel. However we should always remember Metis as the mother of Athena. From her the goddess inherited another kind of wisdom, the wisdom of knowing which arises from an innate and intimate connection with nature and spirit experienced in the body, mainly the belly. It is a knowledge which sometimes may speak through symptoms or disease, through creativity or craft, or radiate through stillness and tranquillity or even erupt in anger or hostility. It is a wisdom born out of an intimate connection between mind and matter, a fluid way of being the ancient Greeks knew as *sophia*.

Athena is a proud daughter born from a power struggle between her powerfully dominant father and her intuitively wise mother. Consciously Athena only knows her father's way and the new order. However Athena has inherited her mother's way of knowing which awaits its recognition under her armour.



## HEPHAESTUS

See, the slow one has  
overtaken  
the swift, as now slow  
Hephaistos has overtaken  
Ares, swiftest of all the Gods  
on Olympos, by artifice,  
though he was lame

Homer,  
*The Odyssey*

Attic Red Figure  
Amphora  
ca 480 BC

Hephaestus delivering the shield of  
Achilles to Thetis

Hephaestus is the god of fire and his name is synonymous with fire. But Hephaestian fire is neither wild nor untamed. His are the fires of the forge or the fires at the heart of the kiln that enable products to be shaped out of raw materials. He fires pottery into its useful shapes and moulds metals

into instruments and tools, transforming what is primitive into what is refined. These are the fires simmering beneath the earth, in caves and under volcanoes, the places where Hephaestus forges his works of art. Unlike the fire of Zeus that is intuitive and prophetic or the liquid fire of Dionysus that entrances us into an altered state, Hephaestus' fire is alchemical, changing elements into another state, refining and industrialising. Like his son, Erichthonius, Hephaestus is also chthonic; earth is his element but fire is his mate.

Fire enters Hephaestus' myth in many different ways. When Hephaestus is summoned by Zeus to help punish mankind for the possession of fire, the illegitimate gift to man from the freedom fighter Prometheus. In giving mankind the gift of fire the human race is now capable of alchemy by transforming raw and primitive elements into refined and useful ones rendering the gods less powerful. Hephaestus is called upon by Zeus to fashion Pandora as revenge for man's acquisition of fire. Hephaestus fashions her out of clay. Her name means 'all gifts' yet her jar is full of plagues and disease, which is the punishment to mankind for knowing the secrets of fire and cultural progress. Another myth connecting Hephaestus to fire occurs during the Trojan War when the Scamander River overflows with dead bodies. The god sets the river on fire to burn away the pollution. Again Hephaestus' fire is the fire of transformation.

At least two versions exist as to his parentage. One is that Hera gave birth to Hephaestus parthenogenetically with the help of herbs. She was compelled to do this out of anger, in one case as an act of revenge because of Zeus' fathering of Athena, or in another version, after one of their many quarrels. Generally in this mythic variation he is born lame and ugly which was a great disappointment to Hera since her newborn did not mirror the perfected spirit of Olympus. Ironically while he has an obvious wound to his feet, his hands are skilled at fashioning and shaping beautiful objects. This dichotomy is reflected in his epithet *Amphigoueis*. While it is uncertain as to what Homer and Hesiod may have meant by the epithet it is frequently taken to mean either 'lame or hobbling in both legs' or 'skilled with both hands'<sup>10</sup>

The other version of his parentage has Hera as his mother and Zeus his father. Homer implies this in both his epics. Therefore both versions of the birth myth are referred to in various sources and they too have variations. For instance in the *Homeric Hymn to Apollo* the child conceived by Hera without Zeus is not Hephaestus but the monster, Typhoeus. However his mother is definitely Hera, and whether or not his father is Zeus, one pattern is consistent. He is a rejected son of both deities and he shares this fate with his brother Ares. Both are ignored, rejected and often despised by the divine couple, yet while these two Olympian brothers have a similar familial experience, it impacts them very differently. The power struggles in the classical descriptions of the Olympian family created an atmosphere where some siblings were favoured and others were rejected. Two brothers, Ares and Hephaestus, represent the rejected gods.

## Ares and Hephaestus: Rejected Sons

Dependent on the source of the myth, Ares and Hephaestus are either brothers or half brothers. They have gestated in the same womb and are born through the same mother, Hera. But whether they are seminal to Zeus is the debate. Ares and Hephaestus do not share the same superior attributes as their father or the favoured brother, Apollo. There are no other contenders for their fatherhood in any other myths. All myths agree Hera is their only mother; the debate is whether they are parthenogenetic or not. The variants are part of the mythic process but it is the similarities, which are striking. Both gods are despised by their parents and rejected. Hence they each are wounded in their own experience of belonging to a secure system, which affects their ability to be able to be close to each other as brothers. Unlike Hermes and Apollo their father Zeus does not offer them his love and guidance or

his authority to work through their sibling rivalry. Instead he abandons them, fuelling their competition for him.

Ares and Hephaestus are archetypal representatives of how siblings may react in a familial atmosphere of rejection and ridicule. Parental indifference can either contribute to fracturing the sibling system or bringing the siblings into a closer alignment with one another in order to replace the love and affection not experienced from the parents. The wounds of the rejection either bring siblings together through their shared pain or further fester and fragment their relationship. Within the vacuum of parental rejection siblings can often form an unholy alliance with each other forging bonds of love to numb the pain of parental isolation. Love is forged out of a mutual sense of abandonment and rejection but cannot be transferred onto another without risking abandonment and rejection all over again. Loving someone could reawaken the trauma of earlier feelings. Parental rejection drives a wedge between siblings, polarising each one into their own estranged world. Similarly, Hephaestus and Ares deal with their feelings of rejection by retreating into their own world. Their wounds armour them in different ways. Rejection by the opposite sex parent could also contribute to the feelings of being unlovable. Without the experience of feeling loved and desired by their mother the brothers may have carried a deep sense of not being worthy of love. This lack of feeling loved drives each brother into relationship with the same anima figure, Aphrodite. Each brother may expect their wound of rejection to be healed in the arms of the goddess of love.

Ares and Hephaestus share the same mother and a rejecting father, creating a triangular pattern which forces the brothers to compete for their mother's love. Mother may collude in the rivalry, enjoying the battle for her affections. In this scenario mother may contribute to keeping the brothers locked into a rivalry pattern or unable to separate. The triangle could be later enacted with the brothers and a sister or one of their lovers.

Both Ares and Hephaestus are in a sense betrayed by their father who does not see these sons in the same loving light that he views his other sons Apollo and Hermes. Ares and Hephaestus are the shadow pair to his other two bright sons. The poets and playwrights do not remember Ares and Hephaestus like the bright pair of brothers Apollo and Hermes.<sup>11</sup>

Hephaestus is the imperfect god in a perfect realm. Unlike Athena who arrived out of Zeus's forehead fully grown and armoured, the dutiful and proud daughter of her father, Hephaestus is born lame. Ashamed of her son whose feet are twisted back to front, Hera tosses him aside casting him out of Olympus into the sea. Interesting that Hephaestus born as revenge for head-born Athena is wounded in the feet. Hephaestus is not part of the sky world of Olympus. He is of the earth, a chthonian deity and as such bears the wound of being a god of the earth and wounded through touching it. He embodies the wound of incarnation in a world of spirit, demonstrating the imperfection of the earthy realm from the perfected view of the spiritual realm. He also serves the role of the -identified one in the family, born out of revenge in a dysfunctional marriage and as such carries the overt wounds of his parents, mirroring what is wounded between them. For this both parents also reject him. Another mythic version of Hephaestus's birth suggests that he was born during the time of Zeus and Hera's secret marriage when the young brother and sister kept their love and marriage hidden from their parents and the other gods. In this variation Hephaestus is the son of a secret relationship and carries the shameful scar of being illegitimate. In the various versions of his birth he appears as the sib who is wounded through the power struggles that dominate the parental marriage.

Hephaestus is the -identified patient or the -wounded one in the family system carrying the inferior earthy function of the Olympian dynasty, which permits the rest of the members to feel free of it. His siblings mock his presence. With his deformity he walks with a rolling gait, which his siblings find

humorous. As they laugh at his expense the conflict between them is diffused, as if the overt wound of Hephaestus was a tonic to take away the fears of their imperfections. The family atmosphere perpetuated by Hera and Zeus contributes to Hephaestus being locked into this role. In a family where one of the children is handicapped, it is the parental attitudes and family atmosphere that help the child be as equal as possible within the sibling system.

Hephaestus is rescued by two sets of sisters in the depths of the sea into which he was cast. Thetis and her sister Nereids and Eurynome and her sister Oceanids provided a safe place for Hephaestus for the following nine years. It is the collective or archetypal feminine, carried by these sister sea nymphs, that protects, nurtures and supports Hephaestus. Here he is fostered in this secret place, which is reminiscent of the other version of Hephaestus's birth to Hera during the time of her secret marriage to Zeus before their parents knew. There is no personal mother, only a collective great mother to which he is bound. With no personal mother he cannot be heroic and leave her and therefore Hephaestus becomes bound to serving the mother through his search for her. Murray Stein suggests this:

It is not hard to see that a man whose ego-consciousness is strongly influenced by the Hephaistian pattern will experience certain characteristic problems and proclivities. He will presumably find himself rather an outcast from a conventional world that requires ready adaptation to patriarchal and masculine dominants; he will be moody and given to swinging between inflation and depression; he will appear both to himself and to others, especially to the analyst, rather unheroic and uninterested in overcoming his close attachment to the world of women and mothers; indeed, he will cling to feminine circles and company, fascinated by the world of creativity and often lost in a world of inner images and fantasy, bound hand, foot, and soul to the excitement and anguish of tending the ðunderground forges.ö<sup>12</sup>

During the years with his surrogate mothers, he discovered his creative gifts of working in metallurgy to produce glorious works of art; jewellery, cups, armour. Deep in a hollow cave removed from the politics of Olympus, nurtured by Thetis and Eurynome, Hephaestus forged his place by bringing out of himself a creativity no other god had accomplished; a creativity that would reinstate him back to Olympus and his parents's domain.

Ares is Hera's only other son. While he is not physically deformed he is often portrayed as clumsy, brutal and even maniacal. We get a glimpse of how Zeus sees him in this exchange from the *Iliad*:

-Do not sit beside me and whine, you double-faced liar.  
To me you are most hateful of all gods who hold Olympos.  
Forever quarrelling is dear to your heart, wars and battles,  
Truly the anger of Hera your mother is grown out of all hand  
nor gives ground; and try as I may I am broken by her arguments,  
and it is by her impulse, I think, you are suffering all this.  
And yet I will not long endure to see you in pain, since  
you are my child, and it was to me your mother bore you.  
But were you born of some other god and proved so ruinous  
long since you would have been dropped beneath the gods of the bright sky<sup>13</sup>

Hera asks Zeus to remove Ares from the war as he is behaving not as a god but as a human, caught up in the conflict and doing battle in the realm of the mortals. His mother's request leads to his humiliating defeat by Diomedes and his being wounded by his half sister, Athena. He has little

parental support or comfort from Olympus. Even his father suggests that Ares's rages may be connected to his mother's fury; hence Ares is an image of his mother's ferocious, battle-crazy animus.<sup>14</sup> He is tied, like Hephaestus, to his mother by his feelings of rejection.

Ares and Hephaestus share a similar fate of parental rejection but polarise the complex. Hephaestus' masculinity is internalised, his fires are focused on the transmutation of the earth into objects of art, an alchemist working from his internal forge. His rage is withheld, channelled into his craft. This rage only knows how to bind the feminine or be bound by it. Hephaestus snares his mother in the beautiful throne that he has created for her. He also trapped his wife in a net spun with fine golden filament. Both wife and mother are bound by his rage born of the lack of attachment to mother and her abandonment of him. Ares' masculinity is overt; he is the god of war, the lustful battler, and the brutal competitor. His rage pours out of him on the battleground. Ares is the lover; his aggression quelled by his sexual conquests, the brother who sexually satisfies the goddess of love. He is a virile warrior-lover. Ares is what Hephaestus is not. As brothers they share the same familial atmosphere and the same sense of rejection by both parents. They are grouped together in an unfavourable comparison against the other, more lovable sons of their father. The familial atmosphere encourages them to be estranged while their mutual lack of mothering keeps them bound to her. As shadow doubles they find their common ground through the love-goddess Aphrodite who has a penchant for triangles.

Myth aligns these two brothers, Ares and Hephaestus with their sister Aphrodite in a curious way; Hephaestus is her husband, Ares is her lover. Myth also suggests Ares and Aphrodite were later married. It seems unusual that these two fatherless brothers, strongly rejected by their mother, would end in a triangle with the great Goddess of Love herself. But perhaps it is she who is the common anima figure who tends to the mother rejection and the common bond to Hera's denial of them. While the brothers appear to be complete opposites, their internalised feminine image has been moulded by a common experience of mother and her rejection. Both brothers seek the same woman to repair this internal feminine. Aphrodite is their Homeric sister. When mother is unavailable, the anima may become fixated on sister. Sister must now love and admire brother the way mother never did. However Aphrodite, too, gets caught in the triangle rejecting one and favouring the other. Could two men appear more differently? Hephaestus with his rolling gait, filthy from the forge, a diminutive man linked with the dwarf traditions of the Great Mother; Ares with his warrior physique and overabundance of testosterone.

Aphrodite certainly does not find Hephaestus appealing, at least not physically. It is Homer who links these two mismatched deities together in an amusing tale that comes out of the *Odyssey*. That tale tells of his wife, Aphrodite who has an affair with his brother Ares. All the gods (except Poseidon who is not amused) find the scene a great joke. Hephaestus knowing of the affair and constant sexual tension between Aphrodite and Ares constructed a fine golden net above his own bed to trap the lovers. And he does. His wife and his brother are caught naked in the fine invisible web dropped from above the bed Ares and Aphrodite have rushed to once Hephaestus was out of the way. For a moment the Gods agree that Hephaestus has gotten the better of his brother:

-See, the slow one has overtaken  
the swift, as now slow Hephaistos has overtaken  
Ares, swiftest of all the Gods on Olympos, by artifice,  
though he was lame<sup>15</sup>

It is the cunning invention of Hephaestus that defeats his brother in this moment. It is a comic tale for the gods, and the audience in the middle of Odysseus's travels, but not for Hephaestus. He is the beast to her beauty and while their external marriage may be a farce it would seem they are bound together

now, forever in myth, to offer each other something. Aphrodite offers Hephaestus the reflection of his creative passion at the forge of his internal self. She is the external projection of his internal creative process, the feminine he has not yet learned to trust. It is through her that the brothers relate to each other. The brothers do share something similar and it is through the shared anima figure that there is a possibility of reconciliation.

Another story illustrates how these two brothers have difficulty relating directly to each other. Hera had discovered Hephaestus' creative skill and therefore it was time to reinstate him back into the Olympian fold. Perhaps the family would be able to overlook his deformity especially when he had such a talent! But to get him back to Olympus after he had been rejected was the difficult part. Ares was sent down to Hephaestus' forge on a mission to bring him back to Olympus. But with all his strength, will and determination Ares could not convince his brother to return. But where Ares failed the youngest god on Olympus succeeded. Dionysus is sent on the same mission but he has a gift that Ares does not possess and that is the power of the intoxicant. Dionysus the god of the vine, gets his half brother drunk, throws him over the back of an ass and triumphantly brings the rejected son back to Olympus. Dionysus has found a way to relate to his brother where Ares has not. Dionysus has brought with him the power of loosening the complexes that bound his brother. Unlike Ares who approaches with aggression and determination, Dionysus approaches the situation with abandon.

Reinstated as an Olympian meant Hephaestus was able to fashion works of beauty for the other gods. The rejected son came to be worshipped as the god of smiths, metal workers and craftsmen.

## The Craftsman

While growing up in the caverns below the sea Hephaestus fashioned a beautiful golden throne for his mother Hera. It was crafted with invisible chains so that when Hera came to sit in the beautiful throne she was bound up and unable to escape. This was Hephaestus' punishment for his ill treatment. Another version tells us of a fight between Hera and Zeus because Hera has caused harm to Heracles, Zeus' favourite heroic child. In his anger Zeus chains Hera upside down in heaven. This time Hephaestus takes his mother's side and rebukes Zeus only to be tossed out of heaven one more time, this time landing on the island of Lemnos.

The Hephaestian archetype is akin to the alchemist who works with the *prima materia*. However, rather than extracting gold, Hephaestus fashions works of art and beauty out of the raw materials. As the handicapped and disabled god he is also the creative genius who masters works of beauty. He is the god of utility and the engineer who is able to craft the armour of Achilles and the Shield of Heracles.

Lemnos became the island associated with Hephaestus. Here the smith god is associated with the Kouretes (or the Cabiri) of Lemnos, the dwarf-like craftsman who attended the great mother Rhea. These creatures are often interpreted as representatives of the incestuous relationship with the great mother, bound to the endless cycle of serving the goddess. However in Hephaestus' case the incest may refer to his relationship with the rejecting aspect of the Mother and the continuous cycle of being rejected by women especially Athena and Aphrodite. Rejected by both parents, expelled from his Olympian home and ridiculed by his wife, Hephaestus sublimated rage fires the internal kiln where his creativity is shaped.

## ENDNOTES

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<sup>1</sup> Hesiod, *Theogony*, lines 924 f.

<sup>2</sup> Ann Shearer in *Athene Image and Energy*, Penguin Arkana (London: 1998), 33 imaginatively discusses this mythic incident. Carl Kerényi in *Gods of the Greeks*, 123-4 also suggests that there was strife (Eris) between the two gods hence the *Eri* in Erichthonius.

<sup>3</sup> Pindar, *The Odes*, translated by C. M. Bowra, Penguin (London: 1969), Olympian VII: 34 ff.

<sup>4</sup> Aeschylus, *The Eumenides*, translated by Philip Vellacott, Penguin Books (London: 1959), lines 658-666.

<sup>5</sup> Athena as the goddess of war and the goddess of weaving combines these two motifs. Under Athena these were divided by gender; men went to war and women wove. Odysseus was protected by Athena as he went off to war and his wife Penelope spent the next twenty years weaving at her loom. Penelope's weaving helps her bear her terrible unknowing of her husband's fate. In their story the motif of war and weaving and linked together.

<sup>6</sup> Erich Neumann, *The Great Mother*, translated by Ralph Manheim, Routledge and Kegan Paul Ltd. (London:1955).page 50

<sup>7</sup> Homer, *The Iliad*. 5.428-430.

<sup>8</sup> Walter F. Otto, *The Homeric Gods*, translated by Moses Hadas, Thames and Hudson (London: 1954). page 46.

<sup>9</sup> Ovid, *Metamorphoses*, translated by Mary M. Innes, Penguin (London: 1955). Book VI: 1 ff.

<sup>10</sup> Timothy Gantz, *Early Greek Myth, Volume I*, The Johns Hopkins University Press (Baltimore, MD: 1993), p. 78.

<sup>11</sup> Ironically the Temple to Hephaestus which still stands today in the *agora* in Athens is the best preserved ancient temple from Greek antiquity so the Hephaestian edifice is a reminder of the power of the rejected son and brother!

<sup>12</sup> Stein, Murray. "Hephaistos: A Pattern of Introversion" from *Facing the Gods*, edited by James Hillman, Spring Publications (Irving, TX: 1980). p. 74.

<sup>13</sup> *The Iliad of Homer*, Book 5: 889-898.

<sup>14</sup> Stein, Murray. "Hephaistos: A Pattern of Introversion." p.76.

<sup>15</sup> *The Odyssey of Homer*, translated by Richmond Lattimore, Harper Perennial (New York, NY: 1991). 8: 329-32.