Chapter 1

Sovereignty and Divinity in Classical Greek Thought

In the study of classical Greek religion and its relationship to Greek society, there is no equivalent to Henri Frankfort’s *Kingship and the Gods: A Study of Ancient Near Eastern Religion as the Integration of Society and Nature* (1948).¹ The reason is not far to seek. By contrast to their neighbors in the Near East, Greeks of the classical era generally shunned the institution of kingship, and organized themselves according to various forms of collective government. The theme of kingship, therefore, has not seemed particularly appropriate for any study devoted to Greece of the classical era. Yet the imagery and the ideology of kingship were never far from the awareness of Greeks of the sixth, fifth, and fourth centuries B.C.E., particularly when they were assembled in political and religious gatherings. For the gods they honored on those occasions were conceived of as a community under the order of the divine kingship of Zeus, under whom, by extension, all mortal communities were also ordered. It stands to reason, therefore, that the ideological implications of kingship did have a bearing on classical Greek society, although the manner in which they may have done so is not immediately obvious.

Kingship and the gods has been a subject of study in Greek history for those looking outside the classical period, to the Mycenaean Bronze Age or to the era of Hellenistic monarchies.² In both of these chronological directions, scholars have looked to the institutions of kingship and religion in the

¹ Works that do take up the subject of divinity and kingship in classical Greek sources (Oliver 1960, Auffarth 1991, e.g.) demonstrate the cogency of this observation.
Near East and Egypt to discover parallels and influences that could account for the institutions of kingship and its religious dimensions in the pre- or postclassical Greek world. But why is there a hiatus in the classical interlude? Did a powerful wave of secular egalitarianism sweep away all such influences from the archaic and classical Greek world? Did rational, political thought banish ideologies of kingship and the gods to the realms of myth and vestigial cultic institutions? Do the trappings of divine kingship in the age of Alexander and his successors mark the arrival of foreign ideas, or a resurgence of ideologies that were always embedded in the matrix of Greek thought about humankind, the world, and the gods?

This book argues that concepts of divinity were never far removed from ideologies of sovereignty among the Greeks, even in those periods when kingship and ruler cult were suppressed. Contests for political power and struggles over constitutional questions, most often analyzed in secular terms, can be seen to be shaped also by religious ideologies, and those ideologies respond to a wider range of historical and cultural influences than is apparent when the focus is on purely secular issues. To build the case for the validity of this wider view, this chapter will examine, in purely Greek terms, the connections between the divine kingship of Zeus and the social and political organization of the archaic and classical Greek world. The chapters that follow will examine the cultural and historical context that shaped classical Greek concepts about the relationship between humanity and divinity. Here we will discover how closely bound to the thought and experience of their Eastern neighbors the Greeks were, throughout the archaic and classical eras.

THE STUDY OF RELIGION IN GREEK HISTORY

If the study of kingship seems out of place in the classical Greek world, then at least sovereignty, the abstraction of kingship, is a notion more congenial to discussions of Greek political history and ideology. Sovereign assemblies and sovereign laws are the stuff of Greek constitutional history. But even here, for a variety of reasons, scholars have been slow in seeking relationships between political ideology and the history of religious thought. In part this is because the historical developments of Greek political ideology are viewed in terms of progress and response to change, while religion is understood to be an inherently conservative expression of the influence of past tradition. Politics looks forward, to put the matter in simplistic terms, while religion looks backward. Modern interest in ancient religion, particularly in the classical world, has been profoundly influenced in this direction by the search for relics from the more distant past preserved in religious customs and institutions. This is the heritage especially of the quest for primitive beliefs by members of the Cambridge ritualist school of a century ago, James Frazer, Jane Harrison, and A. B. Cook chief among them. But it is an orientation
that has survived, in other forms, even longer than did the coherence of the Cambridge school. For all the merits of this approach in drawing attention to underlying continuities, it has generally retarded the search for progressive developments in the history of religion.

Some remedy to the extremes of the quest for origins has come from the structuralist approach to Greek myth and religion, chiefly represented in the works of Marcel Detienne, Jean-Pierre Vernant, Pierre Vidal-Naquet, Nicole Loraux, and Christiane Sourvinou-Inwood. This approach has had the virtue of insisting on discovering the direct relationship between myths and those who told them, particularly in terms of the structure of their social institutions. Myth and ritual here are principally seen no longer as vestiges of a prehistoric past, but as expressions of contemporary living systems. The limitation of this approach, however, is that the structures and relationships it has described are, for the most part, ahistorical. That is, they are presented as paradigms of social order belonging generally to archaic or classical Greece (or to “Grèce ancienne”), but with little indication of how these paradigms behaved and changed historically, when they were animated by the course of events.

In recent decades scholarship in this field has demonstrated an increasing interest in the correlation between religious custom and specific historical settings: religion and Greek colonization, and Peisistratid Athens, and the Persian Wars, for examples. Since the themes of these studies have been defined in historical terms, they signal the potential for the study of Greek religion to follow a narrative of historical development. A significant step in this direction is Robert Parker’s Athenian Religion: A History (1996).

In studies of this recent generation, the evidence of religious imagery or cult practice appears more often to be organized chronologically, according to historical events, rather than analyzed as integral to our understanding of historical events. Historians, ancient and modern, have a marked tendency to relegate religious issues to the background of politics, and students of religion have largely accepted this disassociation. The few episodes where religion and political history seem inextricable—the scandals surrounding the profanation of the Mysteries at Athens, for instance, or the trial of Socrates—are usually understood on a local scale, within the context of the practices of a single city-state (Athens naturally predominates) examined over a compara-

---


5. Examples cited elsewhere in the present work include Malkin 1987; Shapiro 1989; Mikalson 2003.
tively limited time span. As a result, the dividends of this recent interest in the historical basis of ancient religion have been modest.

The present chapter is an endeavor to initiate broader historical study of the relationship between notions of divinity and the forms of sovereignty articulated by the Greeks of the classical era. For religion was, arguably, the most essential medium through which the identity of each individual Greek city-state was expressed. To the widest audiences, both civic and Panhellenic, ideas of community and communal purpose were represented in terms of relationships between humanity and the gods. Notionally, these relationships had been established by ancestors and maintained ever since; in living practice, these relationships were constantly being shaped and renegotiated. The process, in effect, was an ongoing enactment of ideologies of sovereignty.

SOVEREIGNTY AND TYRANNY

Sovereignty is the principle of rulership; it is highest authority, or that which commands obeisance. Among Greeks of the classical era, highest authority was expressed chiefly as an abstraction, as the rule of *nomos*, “custom” or “law,” or as the collective rule of a sovereign people. Pindar gave famous expression to this principle in a statement quoted by Herodotus and Plato: “*Nomos* is king of all” (νόμος ὁ πάντων βασιλεύς).\(^6\) Herodotus elsewhere expresses the supremacy of *nomos* among the Spartans by the phrase “*nomos* is master” (δεσπότης νόμος), while Plato recasts the maxim of Pindar in the form “*nomos*, which is tyrant over men” (ὁ δὲ νόμος, τύραννος ὁν τῶν ἀνθρώπων).\(^7\) Among Athenians, the supremacy of *nomos* is equated with the verdicts of the demos, the assembled people, in various expressions of Pericles and his contemporaries.\(^8\)

This concept of law or custom as sovereign authority is expressed through the metaphor of kingship, where authority emanates from a monarch who is king (*basileus*), master (*despotēs*), or tyrant (*tyrannos*). It is reasonable to assume that the experience of actual monarchy, in some form, preceded or accompanied the abstraction of the concept of sovereign *nomos*. But evidence for the institution of actual kingship among the forebears of the Greeks of the classical era is slight and generally ambiguous at best. With the qualified exception of the Spartan dual kingship, the sovereignty of kings was experienced by Greeks chiefly in the form of the circumscribed duties of religious

---

\(^6\) Pindar fr. 169 (Sandys), cited by Herodotus 3.38.4 and Plato *Gorgias* 484b.

\(^7\) Herodotus 7.104.4, reporting the speech of Demaratus to Xerxes; cf. Xenophon *Lacedaemonian Constitution* 4.6, 8.1–5. Plato *Protagoras* 337d reports the expression of Hippias of Elis.

\(^8\) Thucydides 2.37.1 and 3, reporting Pericles’ funeral oration; Xenophon *Memorabilia* 1.2.41–42, reporting a conversation of Pericles and Alcibiades. Euripides *Suppliantes* 403–8 explicitly juxtaposes the authority of a tyrant with the authority of the demos. Martin Ostwald 1969 and 1986 examines Athenian notions of *nomos* and popular sovereignty.
officials, or apprehended from a distance as an ill-defined remembrance of the heroic past. Contemporary kingship was known to the Greeks as a feature of the barbarian (i.e., non-Greek, generally Asiatic) world. Barbarian kingship also went by the name of tyranny, and tyranny was a form of rulership that actually was experienced by many Greeks, both in its aboriginal, foreign form, and as a transplant onto Greek soil.

Tyranny had its earliest currency among the Greeks living near the coast of Asia, where it was preeminently identified with Lydian kingship. For more than a century before the coming of the Persians, the Mermnad tyrants of Lydia dazzled the Greeks with their power and wealth. By the middle of the sixth century, all peoples living in Asia Minor west of the Halys River, Greeks and non-Greeks alike, were subjects of Croesus, and he counted the kings of Media, Babylon, Egypt, and Sparta as his allies. Here was the chief experience of sovereignty to which the Greeks reacted, and from which they abstracted their ideals of political power. The impact of Lydian tyranny is clearly imprinted in the vocabulary of Greek political thought.

Tyranny, epitomized by the rulers of Lydia and adopted from them as a model of autocratic power by a number of rulers of Greek cities, was fraught with ambiguous associations. Tyranny, in theory, was irresistible. A tyrant came to power in a way that no man could stop, and in power a tyrant was accountable to no man. Popular approval and reverence accompanied the establishment of a tyrant who was a ruler both proud of and admired for his excellence. But the tyrant was also envied, feared, and detested for these very

9. Robert Drews 1983 has reviewed the evidence for kingship in Dark Age Greece, and has concluded that those who are called kings (basileis) in various sources, from Hesiod on, are no more than hightborn peers, or the holders of a magistracy. Drews thus dismisses the view (represented, e.g., by Andrewes 1956, 9–11) that a strong tradition of hereditary kingship generally devolved into an annual magistracy. This conclusion is largely supported by Walter Donlan’s analysis (1979) of the nature of leadership in the Iliad, where there is no strong institutional authority that could be recognized as kingship. For further discussions of Homeric kingship, see Taplin 1992: 47–58, McGlew 1993, 53–61; S. P. Morris 2003. On the possible origins of civic kingship at Sparta, see Oliver 1960, 3–46; for Athens, see R. Parker 1996, 10–28.

10. Archilochus fr. 19 (West; quoted and discussed further below, at note 116, and in chapter 3 at note 71), referring to the seventh-century tyranny of Gyges, is the earliest use of the word tyrannis, “tyranny.” Herodotus, who affirms that Archilochus was the contemporary of Gyges (1.12.2) also states that Gyges established a tyrannus among the Lydians (1.14.1). Suda s.v. τύραννος cites Hippias “the sophist” (i.e., Hippias of Elis, a contemporary of Herodotus) for the information that the word tyrannos, “tyrant,” not used by Homer, was adopted by the Greeks in the time of Archilochus. Jules Labarbe 1971 has collected the testimonia of Greek sources on the origin and meaning of tyranny. The origin of the word is discussed further in chapter 3 at notes 80–82.

11. Victor Parker 1998 reviews attitudes toward tyranny, as a concept and as a reality, attested by archaic and classical Greek sources. Volker Fadinger 1993, 263–93, reviews the evidence for the Near Eastern origin of the stereotypical aspects of tyranny as they are outlined by Aristotle Politics 1313a–1314b.
qualities. The negative connotation of tyranny came especially from the notion that an irreproachable ruler would, sooner or later, indulge in crimes of greed, passion, or sheer arrogance simply because he could do so with impunity. Exemplified by the reputation of notorious foreign monarchs and by the hateful memory of their own Greek tyrants, by Herodotus’ day tyranny was frequently associated with the highest forms of hybris. It was often seen as seductive, but containing the seeds of its own destruction. For by Herodotus’ day the view of tyrannical regimes was chiefly a catalogue of spectacular failures.

Despite its aspect of being above the law and its history of tragic failures, tyranny as irresistible power could still be regarded as something admirable to audiences of Herodotus’s day. If this power were wisely exercised, then tyranny could still describe the highest form of sovereign authority, whether it was exercised by a monarch or a collective body. In classical Athenian drama, the idealized kingdoms of the heroic age, even Athens itself, are often called tyrannies without implying any reproach. In contemporary politics we find that it was acceptable for Pericles and other Athenian statesmen, as well as comic poets, to speak to their Athenian audiences about the tyranny that they collectively wielded. The context always serves to indicate the high calling of tyranny, and to urge Athenians to take the implications of their power seriously: “Your empire is a tyranny,” Thucydides reports Pericles as

12. Herodotus often uses tyrannos, “tyrant,” as an alternative to basileus, “king,” in a generally neutral sense, although a negative impression more often emerges from the accounts of those he calls tyrants. The peculiarities of an important criticism of tyranny, in Herodotus 5.91, are discussed in chapter 4. For differing assessments of Herodotus’ usage of the word “tyrant,” see Ferrill 1978, who argues that the term always has a negative connotation in Herodotus, and V. Parker 1998, 161–64, who argues (more persuasively, in my view) that Herodotus can use the term with no sense of reproach. Carolyn Dewald 2003 strikes a judicious balance in her observation that Herodotus credits the “idiosyncratic personal achievement” of individual tyrants (26) within the larger, strongly negative evaluation of despotism conveyed by his Histories.

13. As James McGlew observes: “It is a commonplace of scholarship on classical Greece that tyrannos is a neutral word in tragedy” (1993, 204). The neutral use of tyrannos as a synonym for basileus in Attic tragedy is surveyed by V. Parker 1998, 153 and 158–61. As in Herodotus, Attic tragedies often characterize tyrants and tyranny negatively, as Richard Seaford 2003 emphasizes, but it is remarkable how often tyrants and tyranny appear with no such negative characterization (a feature that Seaford neglects in his selective survey). To the examples discussed by V. Parker (above) we may add Euripides Hippolytus 843, where Theseus refers to his own palace as the “tyrant house”; Children of Heracles 111–13, where Demophon, son of Theseus and like him ruler of a “free land,” is called a tyrant; and Ion 235, 829, 1464, 1572, where Erechtheus and his descendants are called tyrants, occupy the halls of tyrants, and are seated, by the command of Athena, on tyrannical thrones. In Sophocles’ Oedipus Tyrannus, aside from the tragic effect of uncovering the secret of his birth, there is no hint that the tyranny of Oedipus was in any way displeasing to the people of Thebes. Aristotle’s categories of “lawful” tyranny, and tyranny that “acts the part of kingship,” Politics 1285a16–b26, 1314a33–1315b10, seem designed to rationalize the tradition of benevolent tyranny in tragedy.
saying, “and if you suppose it was unjust to take it up, know that it is dangerous to let it go.” History showed that tyranny was dangerous to those who held it; but whether, in this case, it was just or not depended on the collective wisdom of the Athenian demos.

Only when the Athenian empire failed, shortly before the end of the fifth century, did the notion of tyranny finally harden into its completely negative aspect. At about this time we find tyranny clearly defined, for the first time, as the rule of an unconstitutional monarch distinguished from the legitimate kingship of a basileus, “king,” whose rule was lawful and in accordance with the consent of his people. In the fourth century, with Plato and Aristotle, we find this distinction developing into the essentialist categorization of true kingship as absolutely good and tyranny as absolutely bad. The idea of tyranny that has thus come down to us is primarily a characterization of ruthless, lawless rule, and an unmitigated evil. It is important to realize, however, that before this meaning became fixed, tyranny simply represented the highest form of sovereignty.

But is high sovereignty desirable? This question was raised by Greeks as

---

14. Thucydides 2.63.2, a passage whose subtleties are well appreciated by Lisa Kallet 2003, 119–20. Likewise, in Thucydides 3.37.2, Cleon reminds that Athenians that their empire is a tyranny over unwilling subjects, and at 6.85.1 an Athenian speaker admits to a Sicilian audience that the rule of Athens is like a tyranny. Contemporary comedy is even more unapologetic about celebrating the Athenian demos as a man whom “all men fear like a tyrant” (Aristophanes Knights 1114). As Jeffrey Henderson 2003, 159, observes, “Old Comedy confirms that the status of absolute and unaccountable ruler was one that most Athenians were happy to apply to themselves.” With Kallet 2003 and Henderson 2003, I am persuaded by Connor 1977, who has argued that tyranny does not always convey a negative image when used by Athenians of the fifth century to characterize their own democracy and its empire. McGlew 1993, 183–90, suggests how democracy could embrace elements of tyranny. Against such appraisals, Kurt Raaflaub 1979 and 2003 argues that tyranny has an unambiguously negative meaning in all such self-descriptions, and could never have been embraced in any constructive sense. Raaflaub’s argument imposes the long retrospective verdict of history on what was still, in the later fifth century, a complex and evolving set of meanings.

15. V. Parker 1998, 164, identifies Thucydides as the first writer who “distinguished with absolute consistency between tyrants and kings.” The distinction is implicit in Thucydides, but it was explicitly defined soon after he wrote. So Xenophon Memorabilia 4.6.12 defines the difference between kingship and tyranny, attributing the distinction to Socrates. A similar definition of tyranny is found in Aristotle Politics 1295a, where it is identified as pambasileia, or absolute kingship.

16. Anthony Andrewes 1936, 20–30, traces the shifting meaning of “tyranny” in Greek sources, with conclusions similar to those outlined here. Plato Gorgias 466b–471a depicts a debate between Socrates and Polus about whether tyranny is desirable or not. By the arguments leading up to Republic 576d, Plato asserts that tyranny is opposed to kingship as evil is to good. Aristotle Politics 1310b–1311a attributes the distinction between the altruism of legitimate kings and the self-indulgence of tyrants to the inborn goodness of the former and the innate baseness of the latter.

17. Even in the age of Plato and Aristotle and afterward, tyranny was not always a term of reproach, as V. Parker 1998, 165–66, shows. In Hellenistic ideology, tyranny could still be a
soon as the word “tyranny” was used in their language. Even the most admirable examples of tyranny, as Herodotus’ historical lessons taught, were to be contemplated with the awareness that such unparalleled rulership would find its downfall, sooner or later. This was the lesson of the pride and the fall of Croesus, as Herodotus tells it, and Herodotus emphasizes that this outcome was a consequence of the effect on human affairs of τὸ θεῖον, “the divine” or “the divinity.”

The same lesson that pride and great power must eventually be undone was also conveyed when the Greeks contemplated the paradigms of sovereignty among the gods. Not only were the reigns of Uranus and Cronus each overthrown in turn, but even the reign of Zeus would be undone. In the Aeschylean Prometheus Bound, for example, the oppressed titan, Prometheus, refers to Zeus throughout the play as a tyrant, and he does so in the context of his own prophecy that Zeus, king of gods, will eventually be overthrown. Similarly, the comic enactment of the overthrow of Zeus, in the Birds of Aristophanes, is described as the surrender of Zeus’ tyranny to a new tyrant. Tyranny is supreme, but not everlasting sovereignty.

SOVEREIGNTY AND GREEK RELIGION

The spectacle of the overthrow of Zeus may seem an exceptional figment of the Greek imagination until we reflect that the stability of the divine order was regularly figured in Greek poetry and art as the outcome of battle and contest. The outcome of these cosmic struggles was not thought to be preordained by some higher power (not, at least, outside of Orphic, Ionian, and later Neoplatonic cosmologies). The battles of the gods were events that unfolded, like the course of history, to shape what came after. Zeus had won kingship of the gods by overthrowing the previous king, his father, Cronus. Thereafter, with the support of other gods, Zeus won victories over Titans,

positive quality when it was an attribute of divinity—e.g., of Mên Tyrannos, or of Isis; see Henrichs 1984, 351 and n. 76; Versnel 1990, 39–95.

18. See Herodotus 1.32.1 and 34.1. The nature and role of τὸ θεῖον in Herodotus’ thought is examined in chapter 8.

19. In Prometheus Bound, Zeus is called tyrant not only by the resentful Prometheus, but by such elemental forces as Kratos, “Power,” whose words open the play with an injunction to Prometheus to “learn to love the tyranny of Zeus” (10–11), and Oceanus, who refers to Zeus as “a new tyrant among gods” (310, where newness also hints at transience). Prometheus refers to Zeus’ inevitable fall from tyranny at 756, 907–96.

20. Aristophanes Birds 1605, 1643, 1706–65, where the new tyrant, the Athenian Peisetaerus, assumes cosmic supremacy by marrying Βασιλεία, Zeus’ own sovereignty personified. Similarly, Zeus, whose reign is denounced through the power of intellect in Aristophanes’ Clouds 365–82, 816–28, is called “the mighty tyrant of gods” in lines 563–65.
Giants, and monsters, and had finally secured his reign; but a new contest could conceivably undo it. The gods of the Greeks were created beings who had parents, who had experienced birth, and who, even though they were immortal, were not invulnerable.

Such anthropomorphism is a sign of how the gods of the Greeks were projections of human experience. The conceptual interaction between reality and divinity is especially vivid in the case of the gods of the Greeks, as they were depicted under the influence of Homer and Hesiod. Ever since Xenophanes at the end of the sixth century, commentators have used anthropomorphism as a way to explore, sometimes to criticize, how divinity was conceived by the Greeks. Here, however, I propose reversing the terms of this analogy in order to consider how stories of the gods and of the mortals closest to them reflect the Greek understanding of the dynamics of power and authority in this world. Hesiod’s observation “Kings are from Zeus,” for example, invites us to examine the attributes of Zeus’ kingship for clues about the principles of worldly sovereignty as it was understood by the Greeks in Hesiod’s day and after.

The dominion of Zeus, we have noted, was a dominion of vulnerable gods who existed in the presence of other, potentially hostile divine forces, and who endured by virtue of their mutual support of the leadership of Zeus. A world conceived in such terms paid heed to power in its elemental forms. For superior power was the key to sovereignty, and relations of power, among the gods as among communities of men, were established through victory in battle. For this reason, Zeus was not only the paramount signifier of sovereignty, but also the foremost patron of victory.

Zeus was victory accomplished. The fray of battle itself was the domain not of Zeus, but of other gods: Zeus’ children, siblings, and supporters. Zeus stood for the decisive outcome, when superior power had proven itself, and he stood for the order established by victory, and for the hope that it would endure as his rule endured. Men who reached for sovereignty invoked Zeus as a way of asserting their achievement, sometimes when it was secure, and sometimes when they only hoped it would be so. So we find that Cylon, an Olympic victor, attempted to seize the Acropolis and establish his tyranny at

21. Hesiod *Theogony* 96: ἐκ δὲ Δίος βασιλεῖς. (Cf. *Homeric Hymn* 25, To Apollo 4.) So also Terpander fr. 1 (Edmonds LG): Ζεῦ πάντων ἀρχα, πάντων ἄγιορ (”Zeus, the beginning of all, the leader of all”). Cf. *Iliad* 2.100–109, 203–6, where the kingship of Agamemnon is signified by his royal scepter, which came from Zeus. The consistent meaning of the depictions of Zeus in Greek literature and cult is summed up by Burkert 1985, 130: “All sovereignty among men proceeds from Zeus.” See also Oliver 1960, 37; Lloyd-Jones 1971, 6–7; Vernant 1988, 105–9.

22. Hesiod *Theogony* 383–403 indicates the proprietary right of Zeus to command *Niké* (Victory), *Zelos* (Rivalry), *Biē* (Force), and *Kratos* (Superiority; for this meaning, see Benveniste 1973: 357–67).
Athens during the “great festival of Zeus.” Peisistratus and his sons commenced construction on a monumental temple of Olympian Zeus at Athens. Later, Alexander signified his assumption of sovereignty in Asia by vowing to build a temple of Olympian Zeus on the site of the Lydian palace at Sardis and by sacrificing at the temple of Zeus the King on the site of the palace of Midas at Gordium.

As the example of Cylon illustrates, like a victorious warrior, a victorious athlete might lay claim to sovereignty. Zeus presided over the accomplishments of both warriors and athletes alike, especially at Olympia, where trophies won in war adorned the field where athletic victory was achieved. In a symbolic sense, the distinction between athletes and warriors effectively disappeared as they both partook of the status of victor. For a victorious athlete was potentially equivalent to an all-conquering tyrant. A crowned athlete could lead troops into battle, and strike terror into his foes. His power was greater than mere strength or speed; it was numinous, and commanded a special reverence even from his foes. Although it was presumptuous and dangerous to do so, for an indefinable moment a victorious athlete could even be regarded as Zeus incarnate. Pindar demonstrates this possibility by warning against it, when he tells victors, “Do not strive to become Zeus” and “Do not strive to become a god.”

Like a conqueror a victorious athlete sometimes had city walls thrown down to make way for his entry. Like a king he was crowned, paraded, feasted, and celebrated in monuments and songs. Like

---

23. Thucydides 1.126.3–6, explaining that Cylon took the “great festival” to be that of Olympian Zeus; cf. Herodotus 5.71.
25. Arrian Anabasis 1.17.5–6; 2.3.1–8. Other sources are cited in chapter 2 note 107.
26. Mallwitz and Herrmann 1980 publish a selection of the many dedications of arms and armor found at Olympia, dating from the end of the eighth century to the fifth. Some of these trophies are inscribed with the names of the victor (who dedicates the prize of war to Zeus) and the vanquished. Similar dedications are described by Pausanias 5.10.4–5, 6.19.
27. The example of Alcibiades serves to illustrate how athletic victory was readily converted into political prowess and to fears of tyranny; see Thucydides 6.15–16; Isocrates 16, On the Team of Horses, esp. 32–38; [Andocides] 4, Against Alcibiades 25–31; Plutarch Aleibiades 11–12. The case of Alcibiades is discussed in chapter 9.
28. See, e.g., the examples of Milo of Croton (Diodorus 12.9.5–6); Phaëllus of Croton (Herodotus 8.47; Plutarch Alexander 34.2); Eurybates of Argos (Herodotus 6.92). On the Spartan custom of arraying Olympic victors around the kings in battle, see Plutarch Lycurgus 22.2; Kurke 1993, 133.
29. See the reverent treatment of Philippus of Croton (Herodotus 5.47), Dorieus of Rhodes (Pausanias 6.7.4–5), and Larcates of Sparta (Xenophon Hellenica 2.4.33) by their enemies. Leslie Kurke 1993 has discussed the transcendent quality of a victor as “talismanic,” borrowing the term from Emile Benveniste’s definition of the *kudos*, “renown,” won by athletes (Benveniste 1973, 348).
30. Pindar Isthmian 5.14; Olympian 5.24; cf. Pythian 3.61–62. See also the dangerous example of Salmoneus, discussed below at note 38.
a king he could found colonies. And like a god after death his memory could be enshrined in cult as a divine and beneficent force.31

The assimilation of contest to conquest, linking victory to kingship, and linking kingship to divinity, all lie at the heart of the two most prevalent accounts of the origin of the Olympic Games, namely that they commemorated Zeus’ overthrow of Cronus to become king of the gods, and Pelops’ overthrow of Oenomaus to become king of Elis and the Peloponnese. The reenactment of victory through the athletic contests at Olympia, on the very spot of these great events of the past, seems to have been designed, in some sense, to recreate and participate in the effects of these archetypes of victory.

The seventh-century Spartan poet Tyrtaeus could name no higher example of kingliness among men than Pelops son of Tantalus.32 In the fifth century, Pindar evoked the same archetype of kingship in his first Olympian Ode in praise of an equestrian victory of Hieron, tyrant of Syracuse. Pindar’s song made the story of Pelops an explicit link in the chain of divine communion that began with Tantalus feasting the gods in Lydia, that came with his son, Pelops, to the kingship won at Olympia, and that finally arrived with Pindar’s own song “at the rich and happy hearth of Hieron, who wields the scepter of justice in Sicily, rich in flocks.”33 Pindar’s ode thus provides both a picture and a pedigree for sovereignty, designed to please the tyrant Hieron by depicting him as the living heir of the heritage of Pelops and ultimately of Olympian Zeus.

The kingliness of Pelops, and hence the legitimacy of his legacy, was based on more than just victory celebrated on the spot where Zeus had won kingship. The link between Pelops and the gods, as Pindar reminds his listeners, was as intimate as it could be: he had been rapt away by Poseidon to be his lover, as Pindar tells it; or as others say, he had been offered to the gods as a meal, and had been partially consumed by them before he was saved. In either case, Pelops had been presented to the gods by his father, Tantalus, king of Lydia (or Phrygia, in some versions), as a token of gratitude for the

31. Kurke 1993 discusses examples of all such honors associated with athletic victors. Further examples of men and women bearing the attributes of divinity and receiving reverent honors are noted by Connor 1987, 43–46. See also F. M. Cornford, following A. B. Cook: “In many cases [the victor] was worshipped after his death, as a hero; not because he was a successful athlete, but because he had been a god incarnate” (Cornford in J. E. Harrison 1927, 221). Fontenrose 1968 gathers testimony to the heroic status achieved by many victorious athletes; Bohringer 1979 suggests some of the political considerations that led to the heroization of athletes.

32. The praise of Pelops is conveyed in a negative conditional phrase: Tyrtaeus fr. 12.7 (Edmonds EI), “I would not give favorable mention to a man, not even if he were kinglier than Tantalid Pelops.”

33. Pindar Olympian 1.10–13 and ff. Pindar’s ode thus provides both a picture and a pedigree for sovereign tyranny. (Cf. Euripides Orestes 4–21.) On Hieron in Pindar’s poetry, see further in note 44 below.
favors that the gods had shown him. But the offering of Pelops was said to be an abomination to the gods, and showed that Tantalus had gone too far, a transgression for which he was punished.\footnote{Pindar Olympian 1; cf. Euripides Orestes 4–21. Apollodorus Epitome 2.1 refers to a version of the story of Tantalus in which he was punished because “he told Mysteries of the gods to men, and shared ambrosia with his age mates.” The earliest allusions to the punishment of Tantalus include Odyssey 11.582–92, and Archilochus fr. 53 (Edmonds EI). The variation in Tantalus’ home, in Lydia or Phrygia, is discussed in chapter 2 note 44.} Despite, or because of, the outrage for which his father was eternally damned, Pelops had achieved an intimacy with divinity that assured his rise to sovereignty over the land that would bear his name, the Peloponnesse. Vestiges of the kingship of Pelops were sufficiently potent, it was believed, that they could give power to those who possessed them. So, Pausanias tells us, possession of the shoulder blade of Pelops was a talisman that eventually enabled the Achaeans to capture Troy, and the very same bone was said to have been buried in the hero shrine of Pelops at Olympia.\footnote{Pausanias 5.13.4–6 (cf. 6.22.1); Pliny Historia Naturalis 28.34. Pindar Olympian 1.26–27 evidently refers to this talisman when he mentions the “revered shoulder [of Pelops] gleaming with ivory” in the hands of the gods. Clement Protrepticus 4.42, claims that the bones of Pelops were used to make the Palladium, an image of Athena from Troy.} Those who paid reverence to Pelops at Olympia might expect to share in the power of his talismanic presence, which probably explains why, according to Pausanias, the Eleans favored Pelops above other heroes with their honors just as they favored Zeus above other gods.\footnote{Pausanias 5.13.1.} Pausanias also tells us that a ritual law firmly separated devotees of Pelops from devotees of Zeus. Those who partook of offerings made in the shrine of Pelops, he states, were forbidden from “entering the company of Zeus,” which probably meant that they were forbidden from partaking also in sacrifices to Zeus until they had ritually purified themselves from their association with Pelops.\footnote{Pausanias 5.13.3 specifies that “anyone, whether Elean or foreign, who eats the meat of victims sacrificed to Pelops is not allowed to enter the company of Zeus.” Pausanias then compares this injunction to the terms imposed upon those who sacrifice to Telephus at Pergamum, where “they are forbidden from going up into the company of Asclepius until they have bathed.”} This ritual injunction appears to be intended to prevent the sort of transgression that Tantalus had committed, mixing human and divine elements in a common meal. If this understanding is correct, then the injunction served to reinforce the delicate boundary between mortal and divine kingship, lest a victor at Olympia arrogate to himself the attributes of both and, in violation of Pindar’s warning, deem himself a kingly god.

Ritual prohibitions and poetic warnings should encourage us to consider what danger was foreseen when injunctions were transgressed and wise maxims ignored. In this instance, the danger was that of claiming a status that was too great, that was constrained by no man, and that rivaled even Zeus.
This was precisely the folly committed by Salmoneus, the proud king who founded a city in the region of Olympia and who declared himself to be greater than Zeus. After appropriating to himself the offerings that were due to Zeus, he attracted the jealous eye of the god, who destroyed him and his city with a thunderbolt. Here was the extreme to be avoided; but where in the quest for greatness was the recommended moderation of this extreme? For that there was no prescription. The sages’ famous inscription at Delphi, Μη δὲν ἄγαν, “Nothing in excess,” warns against only the extreme.

Greatness was to be won at Olympia; it went by the name of kudos, “renown,” and it was a quality endowed by Zeus. Kudos was a quality sought by victors, by kings, and by the assemblies that wielded collective sovereignty among the Greeks. So, for example, among the verses attributed to Solon we have the following invocation: “Let us first pray to King Zeus son of Cronus to bestow good fortune and kudos on these ordinances.” Because it was divine in nature, this greatness was a power that had the potential to overwhelm mundane conditions. But among those Greeks who abhorred the overwhelming power of tyranny, this power had to be controlled. So, although kudos was much sought after and universally admired, we find that myth, history, and ritual contain multiple warnings and guidelines for how to avert the dangerous consequences of producing and handling kudos.

Pindar’s victory odes, as Leslie Kurke has demonstrated, served in one respect to civilize the godlike victor, making his numinous state safe to deal with, and enabling his reintegration into his civic community. Many of the odes were composed to accompany the public homecoming of a champion, and the elevated status that he enjoyed on that occasion was often perpetuated through lifetime honors. So Xenophanes describes the customary honors awarded to Olympic victors by their fellow citizens: “Such a man will obtain renown in the citizens’ sight [ἀστιασίαν κ’ εἶη κυδρότερος προσοφύ], and be given a front seat and be on display at all civic occasions, and he would be

38. Apollodorus Library 1.9.7; Diodorus 4.68.1–2, 6.6.4–7.3; Strabo 8.3.31–33, who cites Euripides and Ephorus for elements of the traditions about Salmoneus; Pindar Pythian 4.143, notices Salmoneus “of bold intentions” (θανατωτομενος).
40. Plutarch Solon 3.4 (= Solon fr. 31 [Edmonds EI]). On the primacy of Zeus among the patron deities of deliberative bodies, note that Zeus Boulaios (“Counselor”) and Athena Boulaia had a shrine in the Athenian Council House where the presidents of the council made offerings on behalf the democracy, according to Antiphon 6, On the Choreutes 45; Pausanias 1.3.5 mentions a wooden statue of Zeus Boulaios in the Council House. The foundation of a shrine of Zeus Syllanios and Athena Syllania is the first item named in the constitution of Sparta’s deliberative body, according to the oracular rhêra cited by Plutarch Lycurgus 6.1; on Sparta see further below, with note 51.
given his meals all at the public expense, and be given a gift from the city to take and store for safekeeping.\footnote{Xenophanes DK 21 B 2, modified translation of B. Knox. This passage is discussed further below at note 147. Documents attesting the Athenian custom of entertaining victors in the Panhellenic games with public meals at the Prytaneum include IG I3 131.11–17; Plato \textit{Apology} 36d.} By these means, a quality that was essentially individual in nature, the supremacy of a victor, became distributed over his entire community. The ceremonial and institutional forms for distributing such honors, like the sharing of political power, are among the most distinctive characteristics of classical Hellenism.

These characteristics of classical Hellenism represent a self-conscious opposition to a different set of customs, where the glorification of the supreme individual, as victor, as king, possibly as a god, had no constraints. The characteristics of Hellenism were usually set in opposition to those of barbarism, meaning the customs of non-Greeks chiefly of Asia, a distinction that became sharply drawn only by the time of the Persian Wars, at the beginning of the classical era.\footnote{This is the central argument of Edith Hall’s \textit{Inventing the Barbarian} (1989); see also Lévy 1984 and Hartog 1988.} Were the Greeks developing their distinctive customs at a distance from the models that they opposed, or were they rather developing them as part of the process of differentiating themselves from institutions and customs in which the Greeks themselves were participants? I suggest the latter. As with the metaphoric kingship of \textit{nomos} (law, custom) considered above, in \textit{kudos} we see another example of the Greek endeavor to abstract a singular quality inherent to an ideal monarch into a collective quality that can be borne by an entire political community. And as with the concept of sovereignty and its relationship to tyranny discussed above, the abstraction of \textit{kudos} suggests that the Greeks had some experience of, or belief in, the reality of sovereign, champion monarchs.

Were there instances of victors who were, by that very fact, kings, and possibly even divine? In Pindar’s day, anyone who openly displayed and claimed these qualities would be violating the norms of Panhellenism. But the example of Hieron, the tyrant of Syracuse who was praised in Pindar’s first \textit{Olympian Ode}, shows how close below the surface of public display such claims could be. By Herodotus’ account, Hieron’s family held political power by virtue of their tenure of a hereditary priesthood of the Chthonian Goddesses, a privilege that assured them divine favor.\footnote{Herodotus 7.153, quoted in chapter 2 at note 128. On Hieron in Pindar’s poetry, see McGlew 1993, 32–33, who observes that Pindar “comes very close to putting Hieron on a level with the gods.”} Homeric poetry presented examples of many champions who were kings by virtue of their excellence in war—by definition, as victors—and who were close to the gods, who in some cases were sons of gods, and who were looked upon by their
people as gods.\footnote{The speech of Sarpedon to Glaucus in \textit{Iliad} 12.310–28 describes the privileges of kingship over the Lycians in terms comparable to the privileges accorded athletes, according to Xenophanes, and includes the observation that “all look upon us as gods” (312).}

The historical example of Cylon’s attempted tyranny at Athens exemplifies sovereignty claimed by virtue of a victor’s status, we have noted, and the claim involved the appropriation of sacred ground, the Acropolis of Athens. At the end of the archaic era, King Alexander I of Macedon asserted his Hellenic identity, as Herodotus reports, by proving his Argive (i.e., Heraclid) ancestry and then by competing in the stadium race at Olympia, where he won “an equal first.” The victor’s prize, in other words, appears to have been awarded to him by the judges in deference to his royal standing.\footnote{Herodotus 5.22. On the award of “an equal first” to Alexander by a decision of the judges, see How and Wells 1912, vol. 2, 8. The unrivaled championships in Panhellenic games won by the emperor Nero may be compared.}

At the end of the classical era, Alexander III of Macedon made a similar display. Among the many ceremonies that attended his crossing into Asia, Alexander is said to have run a race with his companions at the tomb of Achilles by Troy.\footnote{Plutarch \textit{Alexander} 15.4.}

That Alexander won the race is not stated, but by virtue of his unmatched kingship and eventual divine honors, it is self-evident that he must have done so.

Such examples of godlike kingly victors represent either the glorification of the heroic past or aberrations (tyranny, Macedonian kingship) from classical norms. They demonstrate nonetheless that such examples were never far from the awareness of the Greeks. A more mainstream example of the close conjunction of kingship, victory, and divinity can be found at Sparta, where political institutions preserved a distinctive balance between the ideals of collective excellence and their highest embodiment in the person of a king.

At Sparta, the institution of kingship had a prominence that was unique in Greece. True to the ideal type of traditional kingship, Spartan kings inherited their office and held it for life. The fact that there were two royal dynasties seems designed to assure that no individual king attained the unchallenged sway of a tyrant.\footnote{Our sources usually specify that either the Council of Elders (the Gerusia) or the ephors were established by Lycurgus to check the tyrannical tendencies of the kings. (So Plutarch \textit{Lycurgus} 5.6–7, 7.2–3; cf. Thucydides 1.18.1.) Drews 1983, 78–85, has argued that the dual kingship itself was instituted along with the ephorate, probably in the eighth century; Cartledge 1987, 102–4, 338–39, similarly argues that the customs of the dual kingship became established between the early eighth and mid-seventh centuries.}

Both royal families claimed descent from Heracles, and through Heracles from Zeus. Heraclid lineage was a particularly potent link to divine kingship, since Heracles, besides being an unparalleled champion, was also a mortal who was taken by Zeus to live among
the gods.\textsuperscript{49} The care with which the Spartans endeavored to assure the legitimacy of the heirs to their kingship came from the desire to keep this bloodline intact.\textsuperscript{50} Spartan kings in office served as chief priests, above all to Zeus, and as war leaders.\textsuperscript{51}

Many Spartan institutions were devoted to the production of victories.\textsuperscript{52} Such was the case both in the custom of ambushing helots, against whom the Spartans were in a perpetual state of war, and in the vaunted prowess of Spartans in pitched battle, where yielding to the enemy was far worse than death.\textsuperscript{53} Spartan prowess in Olympic competition was not far behind Spartan prowess in war. The lawgiver Lycurgus, credited with founding most of the institutions of the Spartan warrior state, was also credited with cosponsoring, along with Iphitus of Elis, the original Olympic truce.\textsuperscript{54} Over half of the Olympic victors known by name from the late eighth until the early sixth century were Spartans, while from the mid-sixth until the early fourth cen-

\textsuperscript{49} Tyrtaeus fr. 2 and 3 (Edmonds \textit{EI}) expresses the privileged link between the Heraclids of Sparta and Zeus. Herodotus 7.204 recites the lineage of King Leonidas back to Heracles; cf. 6.52.1. See also the Heraclid lineages of Sparta given by Apollodorus \textit{Library} 2.8.1–5 and by Pausanias 3.1.5–10.5.

\textsuperscript{50} Xenophon \textit{Lacedaemonian Constitution} 15.2 specifies that descent “from the god” justified the kings’ roles in offering sacrifices and leading the army; cf. the ritualized reinstatement of Pleistoanax as king, in response to a Delphic oracle bidding Spartans to bring back “the seed of the demigod son of Zeus” (\textit{Δῶς νῦν ἕμαθέω τὸ σπέρμα}), reported by Thucydides 5.16.2–3. The history of Spartan kingship is replete with examples of controversial successions. See, e.g., the accounts of the accession of the sons of Aristodemus (Herodotus 6.52); of Charilaus (Plutarch \textit{Lycurgus} 3.1–5); of the sons of Anaxandridas (Herodotus 5.39–41); of the sons of Ariston (Herodotus 6.61–70); of Agesilaus (Xenophon \textit{Hellenica} 3.3.1–4; Plutarch \textit{Agesilaus} 3.1–5; \textit{Lysander} 22.3–6; Pausanias 3.8.8–10). See Cartledge 1987, 99–115, for a discussion of the exceptional nature of Spartan kingship.

\textsuperscript{51} The two priesthoods reserved for Spartan kings were of Zeus Lakedaimonios and Zeus Ouranios, according to Herodotus 6.56; the Spartan king offers sacrifice to Zeus Agetor (Leader) as his first duty in leading the Spartan army, according to Xenophon \textit{Lacedaemonian Constitution} 13.2, 11; cf. 15.2–6.

\textsuperscript{52} Note that Xenophon \textit{Lacedaemonian Constitution} 4.5 identifies competition, or “strife” (\textit{eris}) among young Spartans as “dearest to the gods and to the highest degree political [\textit{πόλεις-πωλωτάτη}], through which what is necessary to achieve—excellence—is revealed.” The competitive aspect of the chief rituals of the rearing (\textit{agóger}) of Spartan warriors is clear from Burkert’s summary (1985, 262–63).

\textsuperscript{53} Formal warfare against helots, and ambushes by young Spartan warriors, are described by Plutarch \textit{Lycurgus} 28.1–4, citing Aristotle and Thucydides. The Spartan murder of some two thousand helots who had been crowned for their prowess in war on behalf of Sparta (Thucydides 4.80.3–4) may be understood to have had a ritual as well as a ruthlessly political purpose. Coming, as Thucydides reports, in the aftermath of the alarming defeat of Spartans at Pylos, this slaughter of crowned warriors was probably considered to be a mass sacrifice for the sake of restoring the Spartan claim to supremacy.

\textsuperscript{54} Plutarch \textit{Lycurgus} 1.1 and 23.2, citing Aristotle’s account of the inscribed discus at Olympia; cf. Pausanias 5.4.5.
tury Spartans dominated the prestigious four-horse chariot races.\textsuperscript{55} Olympic victors enjoyed the honor of entering battle in the immediate company of the king, signifying the close conceptual bond between athletic victory, prowess in war, and the honors of kingship.\textsuperscript{56} Even non-Spartan victors of great renown could be honored and courted by the Spartans as bearers of divine favor. Teisamenus of Elis, an Olympic champion who was foreordained to achieve victory, was on that account embraced by the Spartans as a naturalized citizen and war leader.\textsuperscript{57}

The talismanic power of victors was thus placed at the service of the kings of Sparta. By virtue of their leadership of a society devoted to victory, and by virtue of their own divinely endowed Heraclid lineage, the kings of Sparta stood at the threshold of divinity. Scrupulous attention to ritual and to the laws of Lycurgus enabled the Spartans to live with such sovereigns without descending into the more heinous forms of tyranny. The only unrestrained display allowed to Spartan kings was after death, when Spartan custom required the entire Laconian community, from Spartiates to helots, to participate in mass lamentations at their funerals.\textsuperscript{58} Xenophon observes that the customs of Spartan royal funerals “show that the Lacedaemonians have honored [their kings] not as men, but as heroes.”\textsuperscript{59} Herodotus observes that the Spartans had this form of royal funeral in common with the barbarians of Asia.\textsuperscript{60}

As we will see, the most impressive examples of royal Asiatic funerary custom were provided by the Lydians.\textsuperscript{61} Likewise, Pelops, who was honored for
his kingship at his funerary mound at Olympia, was believed to have brought his distinctive amalgamation of kingship and divinity with him from Asia, specifically from Lydia. As with the form of supremacy known as tyranny, here are reasons for suspecting that the chief models of sovereignty known to the Greeks were reflections of Asiatic kingship.

Did the Greeks have their own paradigms of sovereignty, independent of traditions that refer us to the royal courts of Asia? The oldest traditions available to the classical Greeks are represented in the poetry of Hesiod and Homer. There, besides the representation of kingship among men as the rivalry of heroic champions, we find a tradition of strong kingship depicted among the gods. In the following section, we will examine the conditions that generated and sustained divine sovereignty, according to Hesiod and Homer. We will then be better able to weigh the evidence for the historical development of worldly sovereignty and its ideological underpinnings among the Greeks. Eventually, we will return to the proposition that the Greeks, from the beginnings of their archaic literature, were tutored in the ways of kingship and the gods in the royal courts of Asia.

THEOGONY; OR, THE CONDITIONS OF SOVEREIGNTY

The god-supported strength of a community, we have seen, was affirmed and reinforced by rituals and ceremonies that repeatedly brought it into contact with the archetypes of power. Living enactments of victory and heroic honors to the dead were reminders of, perhaps even direct links to, celebrated victors and kings of the past, both legendary and foreign. All of these, ultimately, referred in one way or another to the power of Zeus, and to the cosmic triumphs of the gods that secured his sovereignty.

But what could it mean to this symbolic system when one could envision a time before, and a time after, the reign of Zeus? What power might constrain Zeus himself? Here we reach ground less often trodden in Greek myth. The overthrow of Zeus is turned into a comic celebration in Aristophanes’ Birds, is foretold in Prometheus Bound, and is even distantly hinted at in the Iliad, most clearly perhaps when Zeus acknowledges that even he cannot overturn the dictates of fate.⁶² The cosmic conditions that might bring about Zeus’ downfall are more directly brought before our mind’s eye by Hesiod, who depicts the passage of aeons and the perilous course by which Zeus gained

---

¹⁸⁷, 333, following Hartog, draws attention to certain resemblances between Spartan and Scythian royal funerals, but this cannot be the comparison Herodotus had in mind; Scythians were not Asiatic according to Herodotus’ geography, but inhabited the unexplored vastness of Europe west of the Tanais River and the boundary of Asia. (See Herodotus 4.1, 21, 44–45.)  
⁶². This constraint is dramatized in the anxiety of Zeus witnessing the death of his son Sarpedon: Iliad 16.431–61; cf. Odyssey 3.236–38.
his sovereignty, and who also depicts, more clearly than Homer, abstract principles such as strife and justice that govern life in this world under Zeus. Could Zeus be constrained by the conditions of his own realm?

The question directs our attention again to the implications of the anthropomorphic paradigm that made Zeus such a compelling archetype for earthly sovereignty. Zeus, like every living king, rose to power by a combination of birthright and force, and secured his reign against rivals through wise rulership that gained the willing obedience of gods closest to him. But because he was not autonomous, because he relied on other deities to begin his rise to power, his reign was contingent, and open to challenge. Every manifestation of his sovereign power could, conceivably, be appropriated by others and used against him. Even mortals, from time to time, attempted to arrogate his privileges, although their stories were told to illustrate the disastrous consequences of such vainglory and high folly. But Prometheus’ theft of fire from Zeus, and gift of it to mankind, was a sign that not even Zeus himself could guard his own powers forever.

Sovereigns prior to Zeus, Uranus, or Heaven, and Cronus, father of Zeus, had been overthrown. Uranus, whose embrace once smothered his mate, Gaea, Earth, had been emasculated by his son, Cronus, and had withdrawn to his place high above the earth. The only remnants of Uranus’ original dominion were the offspring of that bloody separation, chief among whom was Aphrodite who was called Urania, the Heavenly One. Cronus too had been overthrown by his son Zeus, and was either imprisoned beneath the earth in Tartarus, or removed to the ends of the earth, reigning in exile over the Isles of the Blessed. From his reign only lesser daemons remained on earth as guardian spirits, helpful to mankind. But once a year, in the festival called Kronia, the customary order of things was inverted, and slaves were free to scoff work and mock their masters—the polarity of sovereignty was reversed, and for a day Cronus reigned again. With this single exception, Zeus’ sovereignty prevailed; it did so in the negation of the powers of Uranus and Cronus.

It was otherwise, however, with the mates of Uranus and Cronus, who were Gaea, Earth herself, and Rhea. Both were very much present and honored within the dominion of Zeus. In concept, only Zeus could hold paramount sovereignty, but the very foundations of his sovereignty were his maternal

63. Tantalus (above, note 34) was said by some to have revealed secrets of the gods to mankind (Diodorus 4.74.2). Niobe daughter of Tantalus dared to boast of her children to Leto (Homer Iliad 24.602–17; Apollodorus Library 3.5.6). Ixion dared to seduce Hera (Pindar Pythian 2.40–89; Diodorus 4.69.3–5). Salmoneus dared to imitate Zeus and appropriate his offerings. (See note 38 above.)

64. Testimony to the Kronia in various cities, and to the month name Kronion, is gathered by Nilsson 1906, 37–39; Burkert 1985, 231–32; Trümpy 1997, 14 n. 55: 293, 295.
nurturers, Gaea and Rhea. They were responsible for bringing Zeus to power, in Hesiod’s account, and we find that they were therefore given honors in cult, especially where Zeus’ sovereignty was also celebrated. At Athens, the close relationship between Gaea, Rhea, Cronus, and Zeus was reflected by the clustering of their sanctuaries beside the Ilissus River at the edge of the city. At Olympia too, Gaea enjoyed cult honors beside Zeus at the foot of the Hill of Cronus. Likewise at Sparta, Gaea and Zeus shared a shrine in the agora. According to the Homeric Hymn to Demeter, Rhea played a decisive role in reconciling her daughter Demeter to her place in the regime of Zeus. It was probably in connection with this role that Rhea received honors, as the Mother at Agrae, in the Lesser Mysteries at Athens. Otherwise, Rhea was chiefly honored in cult at places associated with the deception of Cronus and the birth of Zeus.

Gaea and her daughter Rhea are the center of a group of divinities, in the pantheon common to Homer and Hesiod, who did much more than nurture Zeus and raise him to power. These divinities, all of them goddesses, relate to Zeus as the sources and the personifications of qualities that Zeus must control in order for his sovereignty to endure. They include Rhea’s sisters, Themis and Mnemosyne, her nieces, Metis, Eurynome, and Leto, and her daughters, Demeter and Hera. All of these goddesses coupled with Zeus to bring significant forces into the world. Beyond these goddesses were divinities who held powers that Zeus did not control, and who were capable of striking awe or fear into Zeus: Nyx, Night, and her children, and Aphrodite, and Gaea herself.

Gaea, “universal mother, eldest of all beings,” was more manifest in this world even than Zeus. As the Homeric Hymn to Earth, Mother of All begins: “She...”

65. Thucydides 2.15.4 notes that the sanctuary of Earth was located close to the temple of Olympian Zeus at Athens; Pausanias 1.18.7 calls her “Olympian Earth” and says that her shrine was within the precinct of Zeus. Close by was also a temple of Cronus and Rhea (also within the precinct of Zeus: Pausanias 1.18.7). On the cult of Cronus and Rhea here, see Robertson 1992, 27–29; and see note 68 below.

66. There was an altar of Earth atop a monument called the Gaion at Olympia (Pausanias 5.14.10), near which Cronus received offerings and Rhea may have been honored (Pausanias 6.20.1; cf. 5.7.6).


68. Homeric Hymn 2, To Demeter 441–70. Simon 1983, 26–27, citing relevant vase paintings, identifies Rhea with the Mother at Agrae, whose cult place was beside the Ilissus near the Olympieum. Robertson 1992, 27–29, argues plausibly that Cronus too enjoyed cult here; R. Parker 1996, 188 n. 129, points out that this does not dissociate this shrine from the Lesser Mysteries, as Robertson argues.

69. Rhea is honored in the vicinity of Mount Lycaeus in Arcadia (Strabo 8.3.22; Pausanias 8.36.2–3, 41.2, 47.3); at Chaeronea in Boeotia (Pausanias 9.41.6); at Delphi (Pausanias 10.24.6). Strabo 10.3.12–14 and 19–20 testifies to a literary debate over the competing claims of Mount Ida on Crete and Mount Ida in the Troad as Rhea’s hiding place for the infant Zeus.
feeds all creatures that are in the world; and all that go upon the bright land, all that go in the ways of the sea, and all that fly, these are fed from her bounty." Because she is omnipresent to all living things, and because all depend on her, Gaea is often named first of all deities as witness and as enforcer of oaths. She is rarely depicted as an active personality among deities. Impregnated by various forces, she gives birth to Titans, to lesser daemons, ultimately to humankind, and also to monsters that challenge Zeus. Among communities of mortal men, Gaea gave birth to several lines of legendary kings, including Erechtheus or Erichthonius at Athens. Autochthony, or birth from the earth, was a warrant of local legitimacy and localized sovereignty for these ancestral kings and their descendants.

Sovereignty among the gods too came from birth out of the earth. But among the gods, where sovereignty was universal and sovereigns were immortal, succession implied a rupture of legitimacy. Hesiod describes the succession of Cronus over Uranus, and of Zeus over Cronus, as just retribution carried out by the son for the outrageous behavior of his father. Gaea is the one who knows when retribution is due, and can offer counsel to secure its effect or can warn and avert, or postpone, its effect. Gaea secures Zeus’ rise to power and warns him of several threats to his sovereignty. Gaea is thus aware of forces that have the capacity to overthrow even a divine and immortal sovereign. This awareness makes Gaea the original source of prophecy, and she is so represented at Delphi, as Aeschylus describes her at the opening of the *Eumenides*. Gaea is also the mother of Prometheus, according to Aeschylus, and she is the source of his knowledge that Zeus himself will fall one day.

Nyx, Night, is the one divinity in the *Iliad* said to make even Zeus recoil in awe. Like Gaea, Nyx was a primal being who came into existence after primordial Chaos. Among her many children are the various personifications of fate and death, forces affecting mortal beings in ways that Zeus might influence, but cannot control. Nemesis, Retribution herself, was a child of Nyx.

---

70. *Homer* *Iliad* 3.103, 15.36; Zeus is invoked first in 3.274, 19.258; cf. Aeschylus *Seven against Thebes* 5–19, 69–77; Euripides *Orestes* 1.495. In some oath formulas, Gaea is replaced by representatives of her attributes—Demeter, Thallo, Auxo, etc.; see Burkert 1985, 250–51.

71. *Homer* *Iliad* 3.103, 15.36; Zeus is invoked first in 3.274, 19.258; cf. Aeschylus *Seven against Thebes* 5–19, 69–77; Euripides *Orestes* 1.495. In some oath formulas, Gaea is replaced by representatives of her attributes—Demeter, Thallo, Auxo, etc.; see Burkert 1985, 250–51.

72. Earth bore, e.g., Erechtheus at Athens (*Iliad* 2.548; Herodotus 8.55); Erichthonius at Athens (Pausanias 1.2.6); Anax at Miletus (Pausanias 1.35.6); Hyllus in Lydia (Pausanias 1.35.8); Triptolemus at Eleusis, according to Musaeus (Pausanias 1.14.3). Nicole Loraux 1993 and 2000 has studied aspects of the theme of autochthony and its relationship to the concept of citizenship at Athens and elsewhere.

73. Uranus is born from Gaea before becoming her mate, according to Hesiod *Theogony* 126–27. Before overthrowing Uranus, Cronus is hidden within the body of Gaea (*Theogony* 157–59), much as the infant Zeus, borne by Rhea, was hidden by Gaea within herself (*Theogony* 482–83) before overthrowing Cronus.

who could conceivably mark the moment when the divine sovereign himself overstepped the bounds of rightful behavior. She certainly had the capacity of overturning the excessive pride of men, and was chief among the children of Nyx to receive reverential honors of cult worship among the Greeks, particularly in Attica and in Asia Minor. Nemesis gave birth to Eris, Strife, who pitched the Apple of Discord into the banquet of the gods, resulting in the most famous conflict between Europe and Asia, if we grant the Trojan War pride of place over the historical conflict of Greeks and Persians. At Rhamnus in Attica, Nemesis was honored as the mate of Zeus who had given birth to the incomparable Helen, fated to be at the center of the Trojan War.

Aphrodite, born at sea out of the severed genitals of Uranus, had the power to beguile Zeus. Zeus could sometimes induce her to do his bidding, but their tit-for-tat was more often presented as the interplay of equals than the wrangling of a father and his sometimes obstreperous daughter. Aphrodite played a decisive role in stimulating Zeus’ involvement with mortal women, and thus was a key element in defining the relationship between gods and mortals in genealogical terms. Aphrodite also played the decisive role in setting Greeks and Trojans at war with each other by offering Helen to Paris.

Aphrodite, as the power impelling sexual procreation, also underlay the generation of the divine offspring of Zeus who together formed the pantheon over which Zeus reigned. The very notion that Zeus participated in sexual and procreative unions was an essential condition of his sovereignty. For from these unions Zeus acquired most of the qualities that defined and sustained his sovereignty, qualities that in turn were the most important blessings that rightful sovereignty could bring to humankind. But they were not qualities of Zeus himself, his only by affiliation. So Themis, who was Rightful Order personified, bore Euonmia (Good Customs), Dike (Justice), and Eirene (Peace) among other daughters to Zeus; Mnemosyne (Memory) bore the Muses, to impart inspired words to kings and poets; Eurynome (Wide Dominion) bore the Charites (Graces); Leto bore Apollo and Artemis; Deme-teter bore Persephone to be bride of Zeus’ brother and counterpart Hades; Hera bore Ares, Hebe (Youth), and Eileithyia, goddess of childbirth. The most remarkable offspring of Zeus, however, was Athena. The story of her birth signifies vulnerabilities that were rarely spoken of in myth or cult, but were always latent in Zeus’ condition.

75. References to the cult of Nemesis at Smyrna are given by Nilsson 1906, 441, and by Santoro 1973, 200–201, who also cites testimony to her cult at Nicæa; Head 1911, 952, indexes numerous late Hellenistic and imperial cults of Nemesis attested by numismatic evidence. Her cult at Rhamnus in Attica is discussed in chapter 9.

76. Aphrodite is sometimes called the daughter of Zeus and Dione (e.g., *Iliad* 5.311–430).


Athena was the product of the union of Zeus and Metis, his first wife, whose name means Cunning Intellect. In Hesiod’s words, Metis was “wisest of the gods and of mortal men.” Zeus was warned by Gaea and Uranus that she was capable of bearing a child of great wisdom, who could wield a force more powerful than even Zeus’ own thunderbolts and who could thus overmaster Zeus himself. Therefore, “so that no other one of the eternal gods should hold royal honor in place of Zeus,” Zeus swallowed Metis. From this remarkable union, in due course a daughter was born out of Zeus’ head: Athena, “equal to her father in strength and wise understanding.” Thus in Hesiod’s narrative we learn explicitly that Zeus was aware of the danger of being overthrown by his own offspring. He contained the threat by making his firstborn his own in a unique way, and by preventing Metis from bearing the child who could turn against him.

Yet even Athena herself, with powers equal to her father’s, could have overthrown Zeus. Hesiod’s text is curiously vague about how Athena was from the first completely loyal to him. We infer what Aeschylus in the *Eumenides* later makes explicit, in the words of Athena herself: “Because no mother gave birth to me, I honor the male in all ways . . . and am with all my heart strongly on my father’s side.” At the moment of her birth, however, her paternal allegiance was yet to be demonstrated. For after Zeus had labored in supreme discomfort, Athena appeared suddenly out of his head, brandishing her spear and in full armor, and might have struck down her father then and there, effecting another cosmic revolution, if she had been so minded. The fearful uncertainties around which the fate of the cosmic order revolved at the moment of her birth are clearly described in *Homeric Hymn* 28, *To Athena.*

---

81. Hesiod *Theogony* 896.
82. The duplication of the account of Athena’s birth, with variations, in a Hesiodic passage quoted by Chrysippus (lines 929a–t in the Loeb edition; see the commentary by M. L. West 1966, 401–2) perhaps indicates that this story was told in more detail in other renditions of the *Theogony.*
84. *Homeric Hymn* 28, *To Athena.* In the sentence “Then wise Zeus heaved a great sigh of relief” (γηθήσε ἐν μεγιστα Ζεὺς), I translate γηθήσε (commonly “to rejoice”) by the more descriptive “to breath a sigh of relief.” This is justified by Philostratus *Eikones* 2.27, who attests to the disorientation, fright, and resourcelessness of the gods at the first sight of Athena (οἱ μὲν ἐκπλητμένοι θεοὶ καὶ θεαὶ . . . φρίττοντας . . . καὶ ὁ Ἡρακλείος ἀποφείν ἐκκεν), followed by a great breath of pleasure, “like those who have accomplished a great struggle for a great reward,” breathed by Zeus (ὁ δὲ Ζεῦς ἀσθμαίνει σὺν ἤδωρη, καθάπερ οἱ μέγαν ἐπὶ μεγάλῳ καρπῷ διαπο- γάντες ἄθλοι) when he realized that the event, which could have turned out badly, had turned out well.
I begin to sing of Pallas Athena, glorious goddess, shining-eyed, of great cunning, with a relentless heart, discreet maiden, savior of the city, courageous, Tritogeneia, whom wise Zeus himself, from his revered head, bore wearing warlike armor, golden, resplendent.

Awe seized all the immortals who beheld her. But she sprang quickly from the immortal head of aegis-bearing Zeus, brandishing her sharp spear. Great Olympus began to reel terribly at the mighty roar of the shining-eyed one; all around, the earth shrieked fearfully. Even the sea was moved, heaving with dark waves and bursting whitecaps. The gleaming son of Hyperion stayed his swift-footed horses for what seemed like an eternity—until the girl removed the godlike armor from her immortal shoulders.

Then wise Zeus heaved a great sigh of relief.

And so hail to you, child of aegis-bearing Zeus! Now I will remember you and another song as well.

This was the drama depicted in the east pedimental sculpture of the Parthenon: it was the moment when Athena’s powers were first manifest, when she might have overthrown Zeus, just before she signaled her allegiance. Athena’s loyalty, once declared by her disarmament, was made steadfast to Zeus in a manner that, again, Hesiod does not explain. Her “affection for the male in all ways,” in Aeschylus’ formulation, had but one exception: sexual union. Athena would remain ever her father’s unmarried daughter, always a parthenos. This meant that she would never bear the offspring that might yet fulfill the warning of Gaea and Uranus to Zeus.

The transcendent forever-after nature of the immortal gods thus fused two opposing qualities into the undying nature of Athena. She embodied both the threat of the offspring who could overthrow Zeus, and the promise that no such threat will be fulfilled (by a child of Metis, at any rate). Through the paradoxes of Athena, we gain our most direct view of the precarious condition of Zeus’ sovereignty. As much as Zeus’ powers were augmented through procreation, so too were they threatened by his unions. In this respect, Zeus is analogous to every earthly monarch who forms alliances through marriage, but who must confront his own eventual downfall and displacement, most likely by his own offspring aided by her who gave him birth. In the paradigm of immortal Olympians, Athena stood for procreation arrested, and sovereignty preserved.

In Hesiod’s theogonic mythology, Zeus’ sovereignty emerges from, is manifested through, and is defended by goddesses who bear him and raise him to kingship, who mate with him, and who are his offspring. Divine sovereignty therefore rests on a balance of sexual relationships, as it is depicted in the foundational texts of Greek theogony. Earthly sovereignty among Greek communities of the classical era invoked various forms of communion with this paradigm of divine sovereignty, but did not seek to replicate it. Tyranny among the Greeks and among the tyrants of Asia themselves, on the other
hand, did tend to construct power through the manipulation of sexual relationships, and did attempt to replicate aspects of the Hesiodic paradigm. The contrast is illustrated when the role of Athena is compared to that of other goddesses, whose sexuality is dynamic.

Athena, innocent of sex and therefore the unchanging guardian of an immortal sovereign, was well suited to defend the collective and self-regenerating sovereignty of an assembled demos, as she did for both the Spartans and the Athenians. Athena was not, however, the ideal divine champion of a mortal monarch or tyrant, who required the powers of procreation to be at his personal service in order to perpetuate his sovereignty. Either Hera, the chief consort of Zeus, or Aphrodite, the agent of procreation, was a much more suitable divine champion for kings and tyrants. This may account for the prominence of Hera at Argos, where Pheidon provided a strong example of early archaic kingship, and the prominence of Aphrodite at Corinth, where sovereignty early on was embodied in Bacchiad kingship and Cypselid tyranny. Sovereignty among tyrants, as we will see, was signified by sexual relationships, where the forces that generated, sustained, and perpetuated divine kingship were embodied in persons of the royal court. In such cases, the distinction between mortals and immortals is deliberately confused. We will see that this, too, is a feature of tyranny.

HUMANITY AND DIVINE SOVEREIGNTY

Sexual generation, in the Hesiodic theogony, is the agency that produces sovereignty among the gods. The foregoing discussion also suggests that the sexual activity of some divinities and the asexuality of others defined significant conditions of the relationships between gods and mortals, particularly affecting those mortals who assume the trappings of sovereign power. In the popular understanding of Hesiod’s day and after, the sexual unions of gods and mortals were accepted features of the heroic age, when Heracles was fathered by Zeus, for example, or Achilles was borne by Thetis. Hesiod’s picture of the passing of the age of heroes encourages the view that such things had ceased to be by his day. But it would be a mistake to take this impression as an absolute rule, as scholars sometimes do, and to assume that, after Hesiod, Greeks did not believe that gods could ever interact with humanity in the same way. There was no discontinuity between present re-

85. Athena’s patronage by Peisistratus at Athens is a sign of the atypical quality of his tyranny, which came late in the historical development of tyranny and was a bridge to popular sovereignty. It is no accident that Herodotus accompanies his story of Peisistratus and Athena with an account of procreation arrested. See Herodotus 1.60–61, discussed below at notes 97–101.

86. Paul Veyne, in his *Did the Greeks Believe in Their Myths?* (translated in 1988), insists that Greeks of the historical era judged tales of the past “by means of what we would call the doc-
ality and the marvelous past; marvels could happen. As with the repudiation of tyranny, and the restraint imposed upon the quest for kudos, divine generation became a rare commodity among men in the classical world, but it was not extinguished.

The readiness of a wide public to accept the possibility of intercourse between a god and a human is attested in a story told by Plutarch, on the authority of an earlier source, who was probably the fourth-century historian Ephorus.\footnote{Plutarch Lysander 26 tells the story of the boy called Seilenus “following the account of a historian and philosopher” (25.4). Immediately before this reference, and twice elsewhere, Plutarch cites Ephorus as his authority for details of Lysander’s conspiracy and use of oracles (Lysander 20.6, 25.3, 30.3).} Lysander the Spartan, the man responsible for destroying the Athenian empire, conspired by various means to secure divine authorization for his revolutionary goal of transforming Spartan kingship. Lysander learned of a woman from Pontus, in Asia Minor, who claimed to be bearing Apollo’s child. Her claim had wide popularity, and when a son was born to her, he attracted much attention. Lysander devised ways to spread her story through reputable sources, involving even the Delphic Oracle, so that not even Spartan authorities could discount it out of hand. Lysander’s scheme, once this child was grown, was to have the boy summoned to Delphi in order that priests there (who were conspirators with Lysander) could test his claim to be the son of Apollo. For Lysander had prepared secret oracles in writing at Delphi, pertaining to the kings of Sparta, and these oracles were to be read only by a son of Apollo. Lysander died before the plot could be accomplished, and the conspiracy was revealed by one of Lysander’s collaborators. But the fact that such a plot could be carried so far reveals just how strong conventional piety could be as a force in public opinion, having the potential of shaping official action regardless of the presence, as Plutarch notes, of skeptics, doubters, and calculating manipulators.

The marvelous possibility of a divine birth may have been given credence on this occasion in part because its premise, that gods could mate with mortals, was regularly enacted in ritual contexts. Ritualized intercourse of gods and mortals was not populating the world with demigods, however, but was
legitimizing civic institutions. Like other divine endowments still recognized in the classical era, the benefits of sexual communion with gods were disbursed over a community at large through rituals ministered by public and priestly officials. At Athens this was done in the Anthesteria festival, when the union of Dionysus with the “queen” of Athens (Basilinna, actually the wife of the archon basileus, “king archon”) was celebrated in a Sacred Marriage (hieros gamos) on behalf of the city. The Athenians also celebrated a Sacred Marriage in honor of Zeus and Hera in a festival called Theogamia, “Divine Marriage,” and the union of Zeus and Demeter was said to play a part in the Greater Mysteries performed in the Anaktoron, or “House of the Anax [Sovereign Lord],” at Eleusis. We have no clear indication how the significant act may have been represented in each of these ritual events (a mystery in the truest sense), but it is clear that, in all of them, sexual intercourse was accepted as the basis of communion between humanity and the divine. When a human participated in that intercourse, as the Basilinna did with Dionysus, he or she played the role of royalty.

The comedies of Aristophanes often portray Athenian rituals in farcical contexts, with specific ritual acts and choral songs that parody those of festival occasions. More than once he depicts a comic triumph as the marriage of a man and a divine being, and in one instance he appears to mimic the Sacred Marriage of Zeus and Hera in the Theogamia. In Aristophanes’ Birds, an Athenian man, Peisetaerus, replaces Zeus as ruler of the universe. The revolution is consummated at the end of the play in the marriage of Peisetaerus to the divine Basileia, the personification of Sovereignty. She is

88. [Demosthenes] 59, Against Neaera 73–79, provides a detailed if elliptically discreet description of the consummation of the hieros gamos of the wife of the archon basileus and Dionysus. Further testimonia, including vase paintings, are discussed by Deubner 1932, 100–110, emended by Simon 1983, 96–99; also Parke 1977, 110–13.

89. The hieros gamos of Zeus and Hera celebrated in the Theogamia festival made the winter month Gamelion the most propitious for marriages; for Athens, see Deubner 1932, 177; Parke 1977, 104; Simon 1983, 16; Clark 1998, 17–20. For the same month in other Greek calendars, see Trümpy 1997, 132–34. For discussion of the hieros gamos of Zeus and Demeter in the Eleusinian Mysteries, see Deubner 1932, 84–87; Mylonas 1961, 311–16; Brumfield 1981, 202–7.

90. Strabo 14.1.3, citing Pherecydes, reports that descendants of Androclus, founder of Ephesus, who was “the legitimate son of Codrus, king of Athens,” maintained the honorary title basileis at Ephesus, and enjoyed symbolic royal privileges, including conduct of the rites of Eleusinian Demeter. At Athens, Codrus and his son, Neleus, shared a shrine with a divinity named Basilé (“Queen,” or perhaps “Royalty” or “Kingship” personified); see Shapiro 1986; Kearns 1989, 151, 178, 188. This shrine contained a grove, and probably the grave of Codrus, but the nature of its cult is virtually unknown; see Travlos 1971, 322–23. (R. Parker 1996 makes no mention of this cult.)

91. Aristophanes’ Acharnians, e.g., depicts the rural Dionysia (Deubner 1932, 135–37; Cole 1993); his Frogs depicts processional songs of the Eleusinian Mysteries (Mylonas 1961, 250–55); his Clouds even parodies Eleusinian mystic rites (Burkert 1983, 268–69).
described as a “the most beautiful girl, guardian of Zeus’ thunderbolts, and everything” and the “enthroned partner” of Zeus.\textsuperscript{92} In the finale, a wedding procession commences when a messenger announces the splendid arrival of Peisetaerus with the words: “Welcome your tyrant to his happy halls!”\textsuperscript{93} As Peisetaerus and his bride enter, probably on a chariot, the chorus sings his praises, sings of the blessings to come to their community, and sings: “You have made a most blessed marriage for this city!”\textsuperscript{94} The chorus compares the occasion to the wedding of Zeus and Hera as they drove to their wedding in a chariot guided by Eros. As Peisetaerus and his bride approach the very marriage bed of Zeus, the chorus hails him, “O highest of gods!”\textsuperscript{95} Whatever connection this scene may have had with the actual rites of the Theogamia at Athens, it represented sovereign power as the outcome of a relationship between a human being and a divinity. Similar enactments elsewhere are associated with real tyranny, and real kingship.\textsuperscript{96}

A possible antecedent to the scene in Aristophanes’ \textit{Birds} is found in Herodotus’ account of the installation of Peisistratus in his second tyranny at Athens. The event marked the resolution (for a time) of civil strife at Athens, and took place with popular approval and with the support of Peisistratus’ most powerful rival, Megacles son of Alcmeon. Herodotus describes the occasion as follows:\textsuperscript{97}

In the village Paeania there was a woman name Phye, who was nearly six feet tall, and quite beautiful as well. They fitted this woman out in full armor and had her mount a chariot and pose in a most striking attitude, and then drove into the city, preceded by messengers who said, as they had been instructed, when they reached the city, “Athenians! Receive and welcome Peisistratus, since Athena herself has honored him especially of all men, and is bringing him to her own acropolis.” They spread this account throughout the city, and soon word had reached the villages that Athena was bringing Peisistratus back, and

\textsuperscript{92} Aristophanes \textit{Birds} 1537–39: τις ἣν τὴν Ἑασάδειαν/ καλλιτεχνή κόρη, ἤτερ ταμείες τὸν κεραυνὸν τοῦ Δίας καὶ τὸλια ἀπαξίναις. 1753: καὶ πάρεδρος Βασίλεια έχει Δίας.

\textsuperscript{93} \textit{Birds} 1708: δέχεσθε τὸν τύραννον ὀλίβων δόμως.

\textsuperscript{94} \textit{Birds} 1725: ὃ μακαριστόν αὐ γάμον τῆς πάλης γήμαω.

\textsuperscript{95} \textit{Birds} 1732–43; 1757–58: ἐπὶ πέδιον Δίας καὶ λέχος γαμήλιων. 1764–65: ὃ δαμάσων ἑπόργατε. Lines 1737–40 refer to Eros as the charioteer of Zeus and Hera.

\textsuperscript{96} Clark 1998, 20, observes that this scene “could be the dramatisation of the myth of the divine gamos.” Chapter 4 will discuss elements of Sacred Marriage texts from Mesopotamia that parallel certain elements of this scene. Chapter 9, at note 23, discusses the historical context of this play. Cf. also the Sacred Marriage rituals noted by Herodotus 1.181–82 as contemporary practice in Babylon, Egypt, and Lycia.

\textsuperscript{97} Herodotus 1.60.4–5, translated by Sinos (1993), with modifications. The story is repeated by Aristotle \textit{Athenian Constitution} 14.4, who cites Herodotus and reports variant details, “as some say.” The fourth-century Athidigrapher Cleidemus \textit{FGHist} 323 F 15 also reported the story. This vignette is the centerpiece of Connor’s study of the political role of processions and ceremonies (1987); see also Sinos 1993.
the city’s inhabitants, convinced that the woman was the goddess herself, offered prayers to this mortal woman and welcomed Peisistratus back.

The creation of sovereignty through the communion of a divinity and a man was never more open and explicit than this. The drama was so simple, yet its premise—that a mortal man and an immortal divinity could be seen together in this manner—is so completely contrary to everyday experience that Herodotus cannot tell the story without pausing to tell his audience how remarkable he finds it. Yet he affirms without qualification that the Athenians on that occasion were convinced that the woman was the goddess herself.98

The event may have been believable because its conventions were familiar at the time, although they had become much less so to audiences of Herodotus’ day. When we look for parallels to this story, we find suggestive echoes, but no perfect match. Chariot processions involving gods and heroes were relatively common in late sixth-century black-figure vase painting. John Boardman has drawn attention to chariot scenes depicting Athena escorting Heracles into the company of the gods of Olympus, and has suggested that the procession of Peisistratus and Athena was meant to connect Peisistratus with Heracles in the eyes of the Athenians.99 Peisistratus is never explicitly compared to Heracles in any of our sources, however, and so Boardman’s interpretation has not been accepted without reservations by scholars. Other vase paintings depict weddings where a couple rides a chariot with gods attending their progress.100 As noted above, a chariot carried Zeus and Hera to their wedding, as the event was recalled by the Athenians, in song if not in ritual. In the procession of Athena and Peisistratus, however, the goddess was surely not accompanying Peisistratus to their wedding on the Acropolis. Yet, as Louis Gernet has pointed out, the occasion of Peisistratus’ assumption of tyranny was also the occasion of his marriage. For he had arranged to marry the daughter of Megacles “for the tyranny,” and, in a literal and possibly also symbolic sense, it was this marriage that made Peisistratus tyrant.101 Similarly, Athena’s escort of Heracles to Olympus culminated in a marriage—not to Athena, but to Hebe, daughter of Zeus and Hera—which effectively also signified the immortal status of Heracles.102

98. Herodotus’ personal comments are discussed below. Among the strongest of modern skeptics, K. J. Beloch considered the entire story a fiction elaborated by popular imagination, perhaps aided by some commemorative monument depicting Athena and Peisistratus together. See the summary of scholarship by How and Wells 1912, vol. 1, 83; and more recently Connor 1987, and Sinos 1993, reflecting a current trend toward accepting Herodotus’ account.


102. Odyssey 11.602–4. Oakley and Sinos 1993, 35 and figures 100–104, discuss and illustrate a black-figure vase depicting Athena conducting Heracles to a marriage bed, where Hebe is his bride.
From among these examples, processions leading to tyranny or deification consistently involve a marriage. In this case, it seems most likely that Peisistratus’ procession to the Acropolis culminated in the marriage of Peisistratus and the daughter of Megacles, and that the marriage was seen as a living enactment of heroic weddings like that of Peleus and Thetis, or Heracles and Hebe. In the process, the actors assumed the status of heroes and gods. Sacred Marriage ceremonies, wherein mortals consorted with or even played the role of divinities, were certainly known to Athenians of Herodotus’ day, as they are attested by Aristotle and mimicked by Aristophanes. What had become unfamiliar to Athenians of Herodotus’ day was the notion that the public would join in the celebration of a divine marriage that actually elevated a man to sovereign power. But Aristophanes shows that even this was not completely unfamiliar. It was ludicrous, perhaps, but it was not inconceivable.108 Such things had been within the ken of Greeks, and Athenians among them, in the not so distant past.

103. The procession of a king to the Acropolis, where he enjoyed the intimacy of one or more women within the privacy of Athena’s Parthenon, is attested at the end of the fourth century for Demetrius Poliorcetes, who was also honored as a god by the Athenians. See Plutarch Demetrius 10.3–13.2, 23.3, 24.1, 26.3; Comparison of Demetrius and Antony 4.2–3; Habicht 1970, 44–55.

104. Herodotus 1.60.3.
marks: “One could point to many other old-fashioned Hellenic habits that are similar to those still maintained by the barbarians.”

The tendency to be easily awed by pageantry and by symbols of sovereign power is one that classical writers readily associate with Lydians and Phrygians. In the *Birds*, for example, Aristophanes has Iris deliver an ultimatum to mortals from Zeus himself, with emphatic gestures to demonstrate the effects of fiery destruction by lightning bolts if it goes unheeded. Peisetaerus, the sophisticated Athenian, brushes off this warning with the words: “Do you think you’re spooking some Lydian or Phrygian with talk like that?”

The same assumptions about barbarian nature are displayed by Euripides, in the *Orestes*, when he depicts at length the craven cowardice of a Phrygian who displays his obeisance to Orestes with the words: “I offer you reverence, my lord [anax], prostrating myself in barbarian manner!” Such displays of reverential prostration (*proskynēsis*) were the customary gestures of obeisance to the Persian king, but Greeks had come to regard them as unbecoming for any free Greek, except in reverence to a god. After Alexander’s defeat of Darius III, when the propriety of such gestures became the subject of controversy among Alexander’s courtiers, we find obeisance linked not only to the idea of divinity, but also to the idea of tyranny.

Classical Greek thought associated the idea of a man as supreme sovereign with the distasteful memory of tyranny and with the unacceptable confusion of man and god. Such concepts and confusions were regarded as customary among the barbarians of Asia, particularly among Lydians and Phrygians, but alien to Greeks. In the scene from Euripides’ play mentioned above, when the Phrygian falls at the feet of the Greek hero, Orestes replies: “This is not Ilium, but Argive land!” The Phrygian’s gesture is at home in

---

105. Thucydides 1.6.6. At 1.3.2–3, Thucydides describes the distinction between Hellenes and barbarians as a slow process that had not even been completed by the time of Homer. Cf. Herodotus 1.53–57 for indications that the inclusion of Athenians among Hellenes did not take place in the most distant past.

106. Aristophanes *Birds* 1243–45 (quoted in chapter 8, at note 58).

107. Euripides *Orestes* 1507, from the extended scene of the agitated Phrygian slave (1369–1526). Cf. the similar scene of supplication of a Phrygian depicted by Timotheus *Persians* 151–73 (Edmonds LG).

108. This is most explicitly stated in the speech of Xenophon in *Anabasis* 3.2.13, and at length in the speech of Callisthenes in Arrian *Anabasis* 4.4. Cf. Herodotus 7.136; Isocrates 4, *Panegyricus* 151. The meaning of *proskynēsis* performed before the Persian king is so thoroughly imbued with Greek ideology that it is difficult to assess, from Greek sources, its nature and significance in a Persian context; see T. Harrison 2000a, 87–89; and Briant 2002, 222–23.

109. Plutarch *Alexander* 55.1; Arrian *Anabasis* 4.10.3–4. Note that where Herodotus 1.60.5 says that the Athenians “offered prayers” (*prosēvkonto*) in reverence to Phye as Athena, Aristotle *Athenian Constitution* 14.4 says “they performed gestures of obeisance” (*proskunontes*).

110. Euripides *Orestes* 1508.
Asia, in other words, and does not belong in Hellas. This is why Herodotus felt the need to distance himself from the implications of the story of Phye and Peisistratus at Athens. It violated the strong conceptual boundaries that Greeks had erected between themselves and attitudes that they considered characteristic of the barbarians of Asia.

When was this boundary erected? When were Greeks less ashamed of participating in the ceremonies that they later claimed were unbecoming of free men? Between the time of Peisistratus and the time of Herodotus, the conflict with Persia marked a cultural horizon that was capable of defining major currents in Greek thought. As Kurt Raaflaub has shown, this was the experience that led to the identification of freedom as a fundamental quality of Hellenic identity. This was also the experience, as Edith Hall has shown, that crystallized the distinction between Hellenes and barbarians in Greek thought. Central to the present book is the identification of this same episode, the Greek conflict with Persia, as a watershed in Greek thought about the relationship between humanity and divinity.

But the confrontation between Greeks and Persians did not define the Greek experience of tyranny, nor did it focus attention on the issue of divine kingship. Other factors must have contributed to the consciousness that Hellenes did not revere the same symbols of power that the barbarians of Asia did. Although the details are scattered in clues that still need to be pieced together, the larger issues pertaining to the rejection of tyranny and the emergence of a distinctive Hellenic identity are set forth by Herodotus and Thucydides. Thucydides recognized that the Greeks did not yet distinguish themselves collectively from barbarians in Homer’s day. The circumstances that we seek, then, are to be found after the composition of the Homeric poems and before the great battles between Greeks and Persians of the early fifth century. If we rephrase the present question and ask what made the Greeks become ashamed of participating in the pageantry of tyranny, then we need to look for the most impressive failure of tyranny known to the Greeks. In his own terms, Herodotus has anticipated this line of inquiry and has arrived at the answer, which he sets forth in the first 94 chapters of his Histories. The unexpected fall of the greatest tyranny of its day, the rule of Croesus, was the event that encouraged the Greeks, collectively, to distance themselves from the veneration of sovereign monarchs, and to insist that the line between a man and a god should not be crossed.

112. E. Hall 1989; see also Lévy 1984.
113. Thucydides 1.3.3, where Thucydides indicates his awareness that Homer “was born a long time after the Trojan War.” Herodotus 2.53 similarly identifies Homer (and Hesiod) as defining the beginnings of a distinctively Hellenic self-awareness, in terms of their own pantheon, and places this awareness “not more than four hundred years ago.”
Before the foundation of the Persian empire and the arrival of Cyrus at Sardis, the Mermnad dynasty of Lydia and the Phrygian kingdom of Midas gave the Greeks their most intimate experience of the power of a true sovereign monarch. Starting with Midas, these kings of Asia were the first barbarians to make dedications to Apollo at Delphi, Herodotus tells us.\textsuperscript{114} Tyrtaeus, in the middle of the seventh century, names Midas as a paragon of wealth in the same sentence in which he names Tantalid Pelops as a paragon of kingliness.\textsuperscript{115} As we have already observed, Tantalus, legendary king of Lydia or Phrygia, was closer to the gods than any man ever was, or ever should be, in Greek memory. At about the same time that Tyrtaeus was comparing the qualities of Asiatic kings and princes to the virtues of Spartan warriors, Archilochus was memorializing the splendor of Gyges, forebear of Croesus and founder of the Mermnad dynasty. In the verses that later Greek sources cite as the earliest use of the word “tyranny,” Archilochus has a carpenter avert his eyes from such magnificence: “I am not interested in the wealth of golden Gyges, nor have I ever envied him, nor am I jealous of the doings of gods, nor do I desire great tyranny, for such things are far from my eyes.”\textsuperscript{116} Great wealth, great tyranny, and the doings of gods are listed as qualities that distinguish Gyges, the king of Lydia, from ordinary men. The disdain that Archilochus expresses for the power, splendor, and pretense of Lydian royalty made his verses especially memorable to Greeks centuries later, when the kingdom of Gyges was gone. But Archilochus’ disdain did not define the prevailing view among his contemporaries. As Victor Parker has observed: “The point of these four lines is quite clearly that Archilochus expects that others will desire Gyges’ wealth very much, will be duly impressed by great deeds, and will most certainly desire power such as that of the Lydian king.”\textsuperscript{117}

Before the middle of the sixth century, Phrygia and Lydia together were the immediate source of all that was magnificent and impressive to the Greeks. The most essential among many tokens of material prosperity, coinage, was an invention of the Lydians, or, some said, of the wife of Midas.\textsuperscript{118} The most emotionally powerful music of ecstasy and of lamentation was taught to the

\textsuperscript{114} Herodotus 1.14.
\textsuperscript{115} Tyrtaeus 12.6 (Edmonds EI), cited above at note 32. The reputation of Midas is discussed further in chapter 2 at note 47.
\textsuperscript{116} Archilochus fr. 19 (West = [fr. 25 Edmonds EI]; quoted by Aristotle Rhetoric 3.17.16, where the character of Charon, a πέτρων, is named as the speaker). On the occurrence of τουαντανις in this passage, see above, note 10. For further discussion of the “doings of gods” (θεών ἐργά), see chapter 3 at notes 71–74.
\textsuperscript{117} V. Parker 1998, 151.
\textsuperscript{118} Xenophanes (DK 21 B 4) and Herodotus 1.94.1 attribute the invention of coinage to the Lydians; Pollux Onomasticon 9.85 adds Pheidon of Argos, Demodice of Cyme (the wife of Midas), and Erichthonius of Athens to the list of reputed inventors of coinage.
Greeks by Phrygians and Lydians. The most impressive spectacles of massed military might were provided by the Phrygians and the Lydians. The Cypselids of Corinth were ready custodians, and perhaps also the bearers, of Phrygian and Lydian dedications at Delphi. The Spartans welcomed the poet Alcman as a man of Sparta and of Sardis, and were pleased to exchange gifts and pledges of friendship with Croesus. A wealthy Athenian family named a son Croesus, and a wealthy Sicilian family named a son Midas.

Only after the sudden collapse of the Mermnad dynasty in 547, when Cyrus overthrew Croesus and when the greatest monarch known to the Greeks was shown to be fallible, could the Greeks begin to describe the symbols and ceremonies of tyranny as fatuous. The foolish simplicity that Greeks now ascribed to Lydians and Phrygians lay not in the reverence of sovereignty, but in the idea that any living man could be its perfect embodiment. Phrygians and Lydians, as we will see, had revered their kings for their intimacies with gods, and had celebrated kingship as the highest medium of communion with the gods. The rites of kingship remained at the center of Lydian and Phrygian ritual forms, even after their own living kings were no more. They remained, after all, under the dominion of the Persian King of Kings. The Greeks were more used to envisioning perfect sovereignty from a distance, and were better able to separate their beliefs and their ritual forms from the persons of living rulers, and to attach them to the unseen Olympian immortals. In time, as the Greeks became more resentful and more fearful of the power of Persian kings, they also became more derisive of those who lived in Asia and who respected the sovereignty of its monarchs. The collapse of the Lydian tyranny, therefore, marked the decisive parting of the ways between those who called themselves Hellenes and those whom they called barbarians. With the fall of Croesus, the Greeks began to come of age.

THE QUEST FOR TRANSCENDENT DIVINITY

Contemporaneously with the revolution in world sovereignty represented by the fall of the Mermnad dynasty, skepticism begins to color religious at-

120. In Iliad 3.182–90, Priam describes the mass of Phrygian warriors as second only to the mass of Achaeans led by Agamemnon. Sappho 38.17–20 (Edmonds LG) describes “all the chariots and armored footsoldiers of the Lydians” as second only to the sight of her own beloved.
121. See Herodotus 1.14. 3.49.
122. On Alcman as both a Sardian and a Spartan, see Palatine Anthology 7.18 and 709 (cited in Edmonds LG, vol. 1, 44–46; see the comments of Page 1962, 29; and Lesky 1966, 149). On Spartan relations with Croesus, see Herodotus 1.69–70.
123. The statue of the Athenian Croesus, the Anavysos Kouros, with its inscribed base, is in the National Museum of Athens (no. 3851); see Boardman 1978, figure 107. Midas of Acragas was a victorious aulete for whom Pindar’s Pythian 12 was composed.
Attitudes among the Greeks. Evidence of this skepticism is immediately at hand in the theological philosophies propounded by the Ionians Pherecydes, Pythagoras, and Xenophanes, all of whom lived in the generation that witnessed the fall of Sardis. Founded on a tradition of speculative thought that is more commonly referred to as the beginning of Ionian science, their writings represent a radical challenge to established religious traditions. The theological concepts of these Ionians were aimed precisely at the manner in which the link between humanity and divinity should be conceived. Their challenge did not displace customary practices, however. We have already encountered enough examples of reverence for the heroism of victorious athletes, the divinity of Spartan kings, and the mystic powers of Sicilian tyrants to recognize that many customary expressions of the relationship between gods and men current in the seventh and early sixth century still had a long life ahead of them. But these Ionian theorists mark the beginning of the critical tradition within which Herodotus, among others, could later observe a pronounced difference in outlook between Greeks and barbarians.

The beginnings of the literary tradition of speculative thought among Ionian Greeks about the nature of divinity and its relationship to the tribes of humanity can be traced to the heyday of Lydian tyranny. The Lydian context is significant, because the ideas of the origin and nature of the physical world as understood by Thales and Anaximander were related to the ideological justification for Lydian kingship. (See chapter 5.) With the fall of Croesus, the king who had been the living embodiment of all such ideology was gone; no Persian king would fill this ideological role, for the Persian kingship did not directly participate in the same symbolic system as the Lydian. One consequence, within the former Lydian dominion of Asia now held by the Persians, was to abstract the sacramental role that kings had once played, and to invest this ideological system completely in the divinities with whom the king had formerly interacted. Evidence for this development will be found in the cult of the goddess Kybebe at Sardis as it was maintained under Persian suzerainty. (See chapter 6.) From the Greek perspective, however, and particularly from the perspective of those Greeks who did not live under Persian rule, the premises that had once provided a unified understanding of the world, of the world ruler, and of the gods, were completely overthrown. Now it was possible, and even necessary, for speculative thought to define the unity of humanity and divinity at a higher level, without the intermediation of living kings.

The first such theology to be based on a more abstract notion of sover-
eighty was that expounded by Phercydes of Syros.\textsuperscript{125} Phercydes is said to have been born in the reign of King Alyattes of Lydia (ca. 610–560), and his writings were probably produced after the midpoint of the reign of Darius (522–486).\textsuperscript{126} Anecdotes of unknown reliability place Phercydes on the island of Samos, in the Peloponnese, and at Ephesus in Asia Minor, where he is said to have been buried; another tradition claims that he was buried on Delos.\textsuperscript{127} According to a more remarkable tradition, reported by Plutarch, Phercydes was put to death by the Spartans, and his skin was preserved by their kings. However bizarre the story seems, it was told as a mark of highest respect on the part of the Spartans for the wisdom that Phercydes embodied.\textsuperscript{128} Influences on his writings are said to include “secret books of the Phoenicians” and “the prophecy of Ham,” which, whatever they may refer to, should at least be taken as an indication that the cosmopolitan scope of Phercydes’ theological thought was recognized in antiquity.\textsuperscript{129} Aside from his writings, Phercydes is known for having made a sundial on the island of Syros.\textsuperscript{130}
Theopompus named Pherecydes as “the first to write on nature and the gods,” thus associating his work simultaneously with those many early philosophers who wrote works entitled On Nature, and with those later prose authors who wrote genealogies linking men with the gods.\(^{131}\) The opening of Pherecydes’ book is quoted for us by Diogenes, and it reveals the essential premise by which Pherecydes cut the conceptual ties with Hesiod and with living embodiments of divine sovereignty: “Zas and Chronus always existed, and Chthonië; and Chthonië got the name Ge [Earth] because Zas gave her earth as her prerogative.”\(^{132}\) Zas, or Zeus, was not a created being, and had no battles to win, according to Pherecydes, because he was one of three essential and eternal principles: Zas (the divine sovereign), Chronus (Time), and Chthonië (the fundament of Earth). The relationship between Chthonië and Ge is clarified in another fragment, where Pherecydes describes the marriage of Zas and Chthonië, and the gift of a decorated robe (\textit{pharos}) that Zas presents to Chthonië. The robe, which becomes the bridal veil of Chthonië, is “decorated with Ge and Ogenos [Earth and Ocean],” and this endowment of Chthonië by Zas not only becomes the creation of Earth and Ocean, but also gives occasion for “the first unveiling [\textit{anakalyptēria}] of the bride; and from this the custom was established for gods and for men.”\(^{133}\)

Pherecydes has deftly presented divine entities with names that are familiar yet different from those in Hesiod, participating in significantly different primal acts. At the center of creation is an archetypal Sacred Marriage, but one that establishes radically different relationships between the divine couple, Zas/Zeus and Chthonië/Ge, Sovereign and Earth, on the one hand, and all other gods and humanity. The generation of gods and men is not described in any surviving fragment, but it may in some sense be the fruit of this sin-

\(^{131}\) Diogenes 1.116, citing Theopompus (\textit{FGrHist} 115 F 71), whose report is closely echoed by Josephus \textit{Against Apion} 1.2. The unusual scope of Pherecydes’ work has certainly contributed to the controversy, ancient as well as modern, over whether the fragments attributed to Pherecydes were the work of one or two individuals of that name.


\(^{133}\) Pherecydes DK 7 B 2, col 1. This passage encourages the speculation that the \textit{anakalyptēria}, the ceremonial unveiling, was the definitive act in every ritual Sacred Marriage. On this passage in its entirety, and the \textit{pharos} (which has been likened to the Panathenaic peplos presented to Athena), see Kirk et al. 1983, 60–66; M. L. West 1971, 15–20, 52–55, who seeks Near Eastern parallels; also Edwards 1993, 65–72, who examines numerous points of contact between myths of Cybele and Pherecydes’ theology. Schibli 1990, 50–77, draws limited conclusions (chiefly that the marriage ritual is the divine prototype for human marriage ceremonies; so also Oakley and Sinos 1993, 25–26) from an extended discussion.
gle, archetypal union of Zas and Chthonië.\textsuperscript{134} Battles of gods and monsters take place in Pherecydes’ scheme, but these belong to the history of those generated after Zas and Chthonië. Thus strife, victory and defeat, and the procreation of diverse lineages all take place in Pherecydes’ theogony, but Zas and Chthonië appear to remain above and uninvolved in these events. The eternal and timeless existence of Zas and Chthonië suggests that they are eternally monogamous, and not promiscuous with lesser divinities or with humankind. It appears that in Pherecydes’ cosmos, all mortals stand in the same relationship to the divine sovereign and the earth. No mortal champion, king, or tyrant could ever claim a privileged link to divine sovereignty in this theological system.

Pythagoras of Samos is said in some sources to have been a student of Pherecydes, although the reliability of this tradition is unknown.\textsuperscript{135} Pythagoras’ teachings are generally connected with his residency at Croton and Metapontium in southern Italy, where he ended his life. The influences that shaped his thought, however, must have originated from his earlier years on Samos and abroad, for which Herodotus offers testimony.\textsuperscript{136} Other sources report that Pythagoras was on Samos during the tyranny of Polycrates (ca. 535–522), that he traveled widely, particularly to Egypt (which Herodotus also supports), and that he handled correspondence between Polycrates and Amasis, king of Egypt (a correspondence that Herodotus attests, without mentioning Pythagoras).\textsuperscript{137} All sources affirm that Pythagoras sought knowledge from rites of initiation wherever he might encounter them.

Out of his experience, Pythagoras distilled a profoundly unitarian philosophy based on number, and specifically on the potential of unity itself, oneness, to generate all relationships subject to quantity or measure of any sort. All is abstracted into number and numeric ratios, in the Pythagorean system, and ratios define all sensible features, such as music, and heavenly bodies, and significant relationships, such as justice and marriage. This system included the gods honored in conventional piety, but only as manifestations themselves of the higher, universal order of number. Mortals are an-

\textsuperscript{134} Chronus, coeval of Zas and Chthonië, plays a role in creating “fire, wind, and water,” and “numerous other offspring of gods” (παλλήν ἄλλην γενεὰν...θεῶν) out of his own semen, “in five hollows” (ἐν πέντε μουραῖς: in Earth?), according to DK 7 A 8, discussed by Kirk et al. 1983, 56–60; M. L. West 1971, 12–15, 36–40; and Schibli 1990, 14–49. But the nature and consequences of this generative act are far from clear.

\textsuperscript{135} Diogenes 1.119, 8.2; see also note 127 above.

\textsuperscript{136} Herodotus 4.95–96 describes the distinctive belief in immortality among the Thracians, and its connection with Salmoxis, whom some identify as a slave of Pythagoras on Samos.

\textsuperscript{137} See the sources collected in DK 14, and in particular Diogenes 8.2–3, and Porphyry, citing the fourth-century Aristoxenus (DK 14.8), cited by Kirk et al. 1983, 222–24. On Pythagoras and Egypt, see also Herodotus 2.81 (cf. 2.123.2); Isocrates 11, Busiris 28–29. On the correspondence of Amasis and Polycrates, see Herodotus 3.39–43; cf. Diogenes 8.3.
imated by immortal souls and thereby participate, through the cycles of life, death, and rebirth again, in the universal order of unity and proportion in which the gods also participate; but no god, in this system, has achieved supremacy by birth, strife, or violence, and no human stands, by birth, in a uniquely privileged relationship to the gods.

The object of Pythagorean understanding was to conduct one’s life according to the principles of this higher order so as to purify one’s soul, rendering it closer to the essence of the universal, sovereign unity. In practical terms, this meant avoidance of features and practices deemed to partake of lesser or impure customs, such as animal sacrifice. The ideal sacramental community engendered by Pythagoras therefore became constrained by practices that tended to divide it sharply from those participating in traditional rites. Devoted to political organization according to these principles, in the short term the strictures of diet, dress, and behavior generated a hostile reaction that proved fatal to the new order in Croton. But the ideas shared by Pythagoras and his followers, even when not put into rigorous practice, provided an abiding foundation for skepticism about the basis of conventional notions of piety.  

Even more radically than Pherecydes, then, Pythagoras rejected the structure of relationships between divinity and humanity that had been represented in the pantheon of Hesiod and Homer. His motives for doing so, however, we can deduce only from the time in which he lived and the circumstances of his travels. By the present line of argument, we may suggest that Pythagoras was working to fill an ideological void created after an older order of sovereignty had collapsed, and no new order, neither the Persian kingship that Darius was struggling to define, nor the likes of the lesser tyrannies of Peisistratus or Polycrates, had succeeded in replacing.

The evidence for such an explanation is somewhat better in the case of another contemporary, Xenophanes of Colophon. We know that Xenophanes despised the transformation of his own native Colophon by the habits of Lydian luxury, and that later in life, like Pythagoras, he moved to Italy and Sicily. We also learn that he considered a fireside conversation over food and drink with a new acquaintance to begin most appropriately with the questions: “Who are you, sir, and where in the world of men do you come from? What is your age? And, pray, how old were you when the Mede arrived?”


139. Testimonia for Xenophanes’ biography and philosophy are collected in DK 21: see esp. B 3, 8; see also Hack 1931, 59–68; Kirk et al. 1983, 163–80.

140. Xenophanes DK 21 B 22. See also DK 21 B 3; Diogenes 9.18 (DK 21 A 1).
“The Mede” was Harpagus, the Median general of Cyrus who finally subdued Ionia in 545, decisively settling the unrest that came after the fall of Sardis over a year earlier.\textsuperscript{141} His campaign was clearly the seminal moment of Xenophanes’ life and times, and Xenophanes expected that the event would likewise shape the outlook of every thoughtful man.

In the words of Xenophanes we find the first explicit criticism of Homeric and Hesiodic notions of divinity, and the first explicit rejection of the physical, emotional, violent, and procreative acts that had traditionally bound divinity to humankind.\textsuperscript{142}

Homer and Hesiod attributed to the gods everything that is disgraceful and objectionable among men, thievery, adultery, and deceiving each other.

The basis of this criticism is the anthropomorphic conception of divinity, which, as we have observed, was the very foundation of the rites of communion between gods and men that were widely established in civic cults:\textsuperscript{143}

Mortals consider that the gods are born, and that they have clothes and speech and bodies like their own. . . . But if cattle and horses or lions had hands, or were able to draw with their hands and do the works that men can do, horses would draw the forms of the gods like horses, and cattle like cattle, and they would make their bodies such as they each had themselves.

By implication, the common conceptions of divinity are truly ridiculous, and must therefore be wrong. There is, according to Xenophanes:\textsuperscript{144}

One god, greatest among gods and men, similar to mortals neither in body nor in thought. . . . He is all sight, all thought, all hearing. . . . He always remains in the same place, moving not at all. . . . But with no effort at all he incites all things by thought of mind.

Such a transcendent divinity may be honored by libations, lustrations, incense, garlanded altars, offerings of bread, cheese, and honey, and by hymns and prayers, Xenophanes says, but such rites should avoid inauspicious speech, and should make no mention of\textsuperscript{145}

battles of Titans, Giants, and Centaurs—the fictions created by previous generations—or of violent factions, in which there is nothing honorable. One should always adhere to what is good, mindful of the gods.

\textsuperscript{141} On the Persian conquest of Ionia, see Herodotus 1.141–69.
\textsuperscript{142} Xenophanes DK 21 B 11.
\textsuperscript{144} Xenophanes DK 21 B 23–26. See Versnel 2000, 91–112, for an appraisal of the tendency toward monotheism evident in Xenophanes’ thought, and a review of scholarship on this subject.
\textsuperscript{145} Xenophanes DK 21 B 1.
By his standards of propriety and ritual purity, and above all by his efforts to define the transcendence of all being, Xenophanes had much in common with his contemporary and fellow Ionian and wanderer Pythagoras. Both spoke as men of the world, more concerned with its overall coherence and the rightful place of humanity in it than they were with the privileges of a native city. They had broken that tie with the past, and were not bound by parochial loyalties to celebrate mythic deeds of violence, blood sacrifice, or divine procreation that traditionally endowed this or that community with a sense of exalted purpose. Nor were they bound to celebrate ritualized violence, the feats of strength by which athletes inspired their fellow citizens to believe that Zeus was among them. Xenophanes is famous as the first who leveled a well-aimed critique at this custom:

Now, supposing a man were to win the prize for the foot race at Olympia, there where the precinct of Zeus stands beside the river, at Pisa: or if he wins the five-contests, or the wrestling, or if he endures the pain of boxing and wins, or that new and terrible game they call the pankration, contest of all holds: why, such a man will obtain honor, in the citizens’ sight, and be given a front seat and be on display at all civic occasions, and he would be given his meals all at the public expense, and be given a gift from the city to take and store for safekeeping. If he won with the chariot, too, all this would be granted to him, and yet he would not deserve it, as I do.

Better than brute strength of men, or horses either, is the wisdom that is mine. But custom is careless in these matters, and there is no justice in putting strength on a level above wisdom which is sound. For if among the people there is one who is a good boxer, or one who excels in wrestling or in the five-contests, or else for speed of his feet, and this is prized beyond other feats of strength that men display in athletic games, the city will not, on account of this man, have better government. Small is the pleasure the city derives from one of its men if he happens to come in first in the games by the banks of Pisa. This does not make rich the treasure house of the state.

Cogent though this argument is, it flew in the face not only of Greek custom generally, but of the deep and emotional bond between patriotism and the unquestionable merit of victory that had been given a grounding in cult, ritual, theogonic myth, and civic identity over more than two centuries before Xenophanes. Thinking men, men with a wider vision of the world, might be convinced by this argument to temper their enthusiasm for the victorious athlete, but it could never have shaped popular ideology. The ideas of

---

146. Pythagoras and Xenophanes also differed in their views, as Diogenes 9.18 reports, and as comparisons of their cosmologies and theologies bear out. See Hack 1931, 47–68; Kirk et al. 1983, 216–38 (on Pythagoras); Burkert 1985, 296–311 (on Pythagoras and early Presocratics generally).

Xenophanes, like those of Pythagoras and Pherecydes, flowed largely outside of the mainstream of Greek civic history.

Nevertheless, the impact on later Greek philosophy of this generation of Ionian thought is a marker of the extraordinary in historical experience. Diverse as their ideas were, their visions were linked at their inception by revolutionary events that had transformed both civic identities and the nature of world sovereignty in their day. By the late sixth century, the sovereign lord of Asia was the Persian King of Kings, and he did not represent Greek ideals. This was new. In earlier generations, poetic expression had often allowed Greek identity to blend imperceptibly into Asiatic. No language barrier separated Homer’s Achaians from his Trojans. Hesiod’s theogonic poetry bears the imprint of Asiatic mythology. Before “the Mede arrived,” Alcman was at home at Sardis as much as at Sparta. Eros, for Sappho, drew all eyes toward Sardis, and all the great sophists of Greece, Herodotus tells us, paid court to its kings. But with the fall of Lydia to Persian rule, the separation of Greek from barbarian that Herodotus and Thucydides later spoke of was under way. By the end of the sixth century, there was as yet no strong center to Greek identity that could replace the dominating pull formerly exerted by the tyranny of Asia. In a new world of political pluralism among the Greeks, the writings of Pherecydes, Pythagoras, and Xenophanes reflect a new diversity in metaphysical ideology. Their quest for the universal nature of divinity, and scorn for the parochial, would gather adherents especially where their teachings found a community that was more ambitious than most, that possessed the resources to transform the balance of sovereign power in the world, and that was seeking to enlarge its ideological capital in the process of doing so, not merely to conserve it. Such a city was Athens in the fifth century, not Sparta.

Later chapters in this book examine the Athenian encounter with the transformative events of the sixth and fifth centuries, and consider how Athenians, bound by patriotism and emotion to their traditional and parochial symbols of divinity and sovereign independence, nevertheless struggled by public consensus to enlarge their ideological capital to suit an expanding vision of their place in the world. While philosophers grappled with questions about the transcendent nature of the world in increasingly abstract terms, the public constructed its understanding in terms of heroes and deities. By the end of the fifth century, as we will see, the Athenian public had embraced a universalizing deity, the Mother of the Gods, who seemed both familiar and eternal, and therefore a secure custodian of Athenian sovereignty. But gods have their myths, their personal histories, and the Mother of the Gods was widely acknowledged to be a deity whose earliest home was in Phrygia or Lydia. Like tyranny among the Greeks, she was a
vestige of an archaic past when Greek identity was not sharply differentiated from the Asiatic. And like the concept of absolute sovereignty embodied in Asiatic tyranny, the Mother of the Gods was an idea that the Greeks, especially the Athenians, had had to dissociate themselves from before they could approach it in their own terms. In the next chapter, we begin tracing the evidence for the history of the Mother of the Gods among the Greeks of the classical era.