

Along the Way to Arcadia

Encounters with the Great Goddess

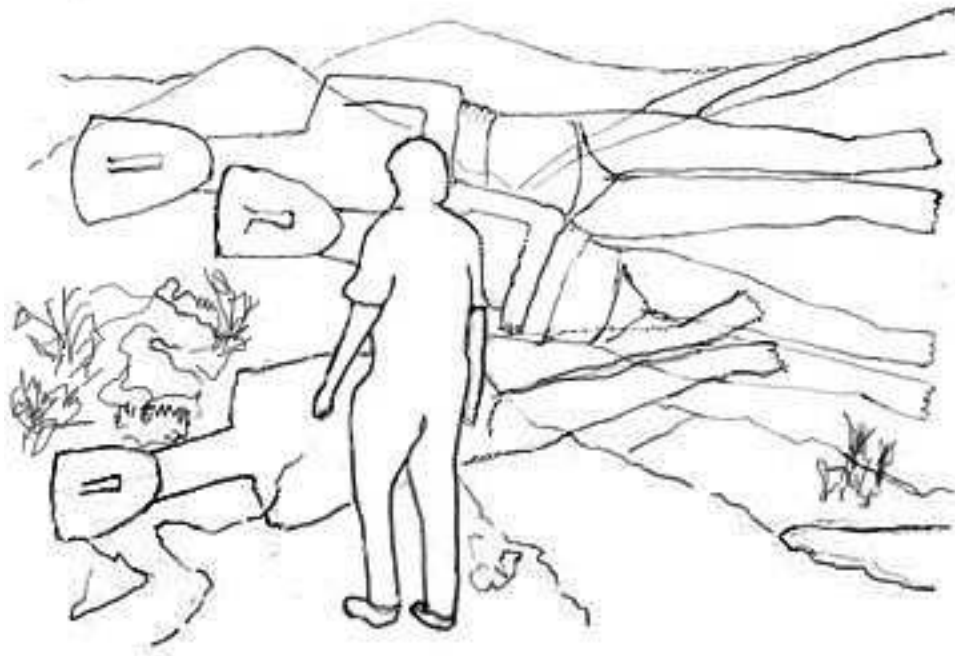
with Drawings by the Author

Rolf W. F. Gross

Pacific Palisades

2011

Cover image: "Cycladic Idol" attributed to the Schuster Master, 2400 BC,
photo from the Christie Catalog, where it sold in November 2010 for \$17 Mill into private
hands.



My path to Dokhathismata blocked by the Goddess

The Great Goddess

*To Marija Gimbutas,
hoping that she will allow
a man to pursue her Goddess*

On my 60th birthday Barbara, my wife, gave me a Cycladic Woman. A modern copy, which she had found in Athens, but an exceptionally beautiful one. She lies under the glass table in our living room. A year later we went to look for her on the island of Amorgos in the Aegean Sea. We never found the cemetery of Dokhathismata, where she had come from, an apparition of three goddesses blocked my way.

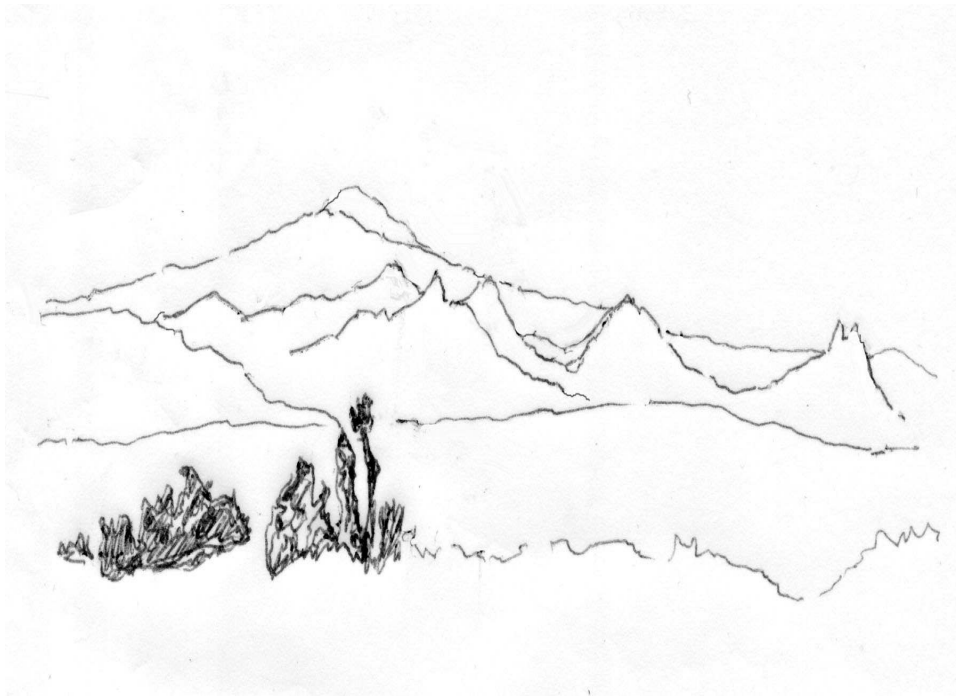
The "[Cycladic Idols](#)," as they are deprecatingly called, are almost 5000 years old marble representations of the Great Goddess, which accompanied the dead to the hereafter. Like Europa in the Greek myths, the Great Goddess arrived from Phoenicia in the Cycladic Islands 6000 years ago and became the focus of a sophisticated matriarchal civilization, until the eruption of the volcano in Thera-Santorini wiped it out in 1700 BC. The patriarchal Mycenaeans soon invaded the devastated Crete, and in another 1000 years Greece grew from this symbiosis. The Great Goddess in her many incarnations lived on. The battle between her and the male invaders of her domain filled the myths of the Greeks.

During the past eighty years archaeologists have dug up a veritable flood of objects from this "pre-European" period in the Ukraine, in the Balkans, in Northern Greece. These finds have turned out to be far older than once thought, they belong to the period between 7000 and 1500 BC. Thousands of richly decorated, anthropomorphic figures, some uncannily "modern" in their abstraction, allow us to draw a believable, if not unanimously accepted, picture of the religious beliefs of the agricultural, sedentary matriarchy of Old Europe.

[Marija Gimbuta's photographs](#) of these sculptures read like a catalogue of the images of our subconscious. They are representations of the Goddess in her varying manifestations. Filled

with an egg she appears as the pregnant Goddess. Her priestesses wore the masks of her sacred animals: bear, bird, dog, frog, or pig. As bee, as chrysalis, or with the Minoan butterfly-ax she pointed at her annual epiphany and rebirth.

The overwhelming majority of these figures is female, but there are also a few men. They show him representing phallic fertility- as year-god and already in the earliest times, as an immensely sad "thinker," who, his head cradled in his hands, bemoans his sad fate. During matriarchal times the life of a man must have been terrifying. As king of the seasons he was selected by the queen priestess to share her bed as her spoiled lover, only to be ripped, limb by limb, into bloody pieces by her priestesses at the full moon of the midsummer night. His blood was then poured over the fields to fertilize the new seed. It comes as no surprise that he drank, as a one version shows him. Later, in the third and second millennium, he invented music to console himself. He learned to play the melancholic harp or the lustful double flute. But of these most beautiful figures of Old Europe we own only six or eight pieces, and they were all found on the islands surrounding Amorgos.



The Teghea on Naxos. The topoi are the Goddess' breasts and head

The oldest manifestation of the Goddess was Gaia, the Earth from whose womb all life came and grew and to whose body it returned in order to be revived from the dying seed. She held out the promise of an eternal, cyclical life and, visible to all, Earth, her body-scape, showed all the threatening and gentle signs of her female nature. It was possible to touch her, dig in her, sow and reap her, man could wander across her body, and in the shelter between her breasts he could dwell, sleep, or dream.

A beautiful example of such a "topos", a sacred place, is the Teghea in the center of Naxos. At the southern end of its valley a sanctuary existed since before the 8th century BC. Later in the fifth century one of the first marble classical "temples" was erected on the site. It has recently been reassembled from spolia found among the houses in its vicinity. It turned out that it was a "telesterion" to Demeter, her greek successor. There, like in Eleusis in Attica Demeter's Mysteries were enacted every October. It was here that Theseus lost Ariadne, the Cretan priestess, on his return to Athens.

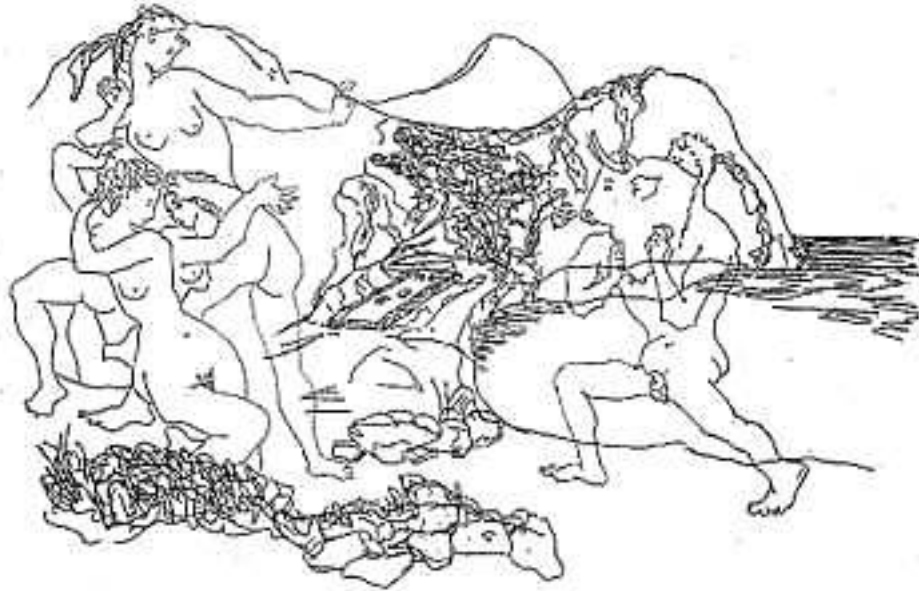
And thus already very early her sacred landscape, in the lap of a mountain-fringed megaron, at a spring between her breasts, at the mysterious opening of a dark gorge, or under her tree-

hair, man began to build sanctuaries where he venerated the presence of the Goddess. The oldest among these sites are unfortified. Never do they occupy the heights of mountains. Those belonged to her alone. Despite its many stones, the felicitous landscape of Greece is as female as few others on this earth, and across it are strewn innumerable power spots. Those who have a sense for such places, for the powers that dwell in them and for the forces that connect them with each another and the landscape, their powers can still be as tangible today as they were eight thousand years ago.

In the middle of the third millennium BC arrived the first Indo-Europeans on their horses from the Russian steppes. Swinging bronze lances and hatchets, they raided the defenseless villages of matriarchy. These were real men, handsome, blonde, strong heroes, who beguiled the Mediterranean women. One can follow their recurring waves by the circular graves which they dug for their dead among the rectangular shaft graves of the locals. Their royal graves were filled with weapons and precious gold jewelry. Not everywhere did they destroy the old villages and towns. They found the land fertile and to their liking and often stayed on, shaking the local men out of their resigned stupor, inciting them against the mother queen, and raping their priestesses. The rapes and the sheer endless bloodshed of those times live on in the Greek heroic myths to this day. Within the next two thousand years matriarchy found its end. But the women survived, seduced the Heroes with their sensual dark beauty, inherited their female consciousness to the children they bore them, and gave life to their art, their religion, and their fantasies. From this forced *hieros gamos* of opposites sprang the Greek miracle that still defines European life and thinking. In Greece the euphoria of this marriage lasted less than a thousand years before the genetic substance of the conquerors was spent. Greece sank back into nameless chaos. Other invaders of the once again defenseless land, Romans, Christians, and Turks carried away the last remains of classical culture.

The Great Goddess, however, lives on in our subconscious, in the new gods and even in some of their Christian descendants, in her sacred places and temples, but most of all in the mountains, valleys, springs, and fields of the Greece. And there she is still able to give happiness, peace, and insight to those, who try to understand her age-old being.

This is the story of my search for the female aspects in the ancient Greek paradigm, which lead me from the Aegean islands to Arcadia, the center of the Peloponnese. The landscape, the blue sea, the mountains, the uncompromising barrenness of this stony land and the light, the terrible light of the Greek sun forever altered the pictures of my imagination with their magical power. Since then I live with and of these pictures. Eventually I tried to make drawings of this Greek experience, to search for the transparent clarity in its landscapes and its dazzling light. But how to draw the dark "powers" lurking in and underneath the surface, how to show the age-old myths that give this land its numinosity? After several weeks of contemplating this question, I one day discovered another friend in spirit, Picasso. He has never been to Greece, but he knew exactly what I had perceived: the gentle, the erotic, and the barbaric aspects of these most human gods that man has ever conceived of. I am sure Picasso would have forgiven me my changing and manipulating his drawings in order to populate my Greek underworld with them. After all, he knew more about their chthonic aspects than I.



Heraion Akraia

Heraion Akraia

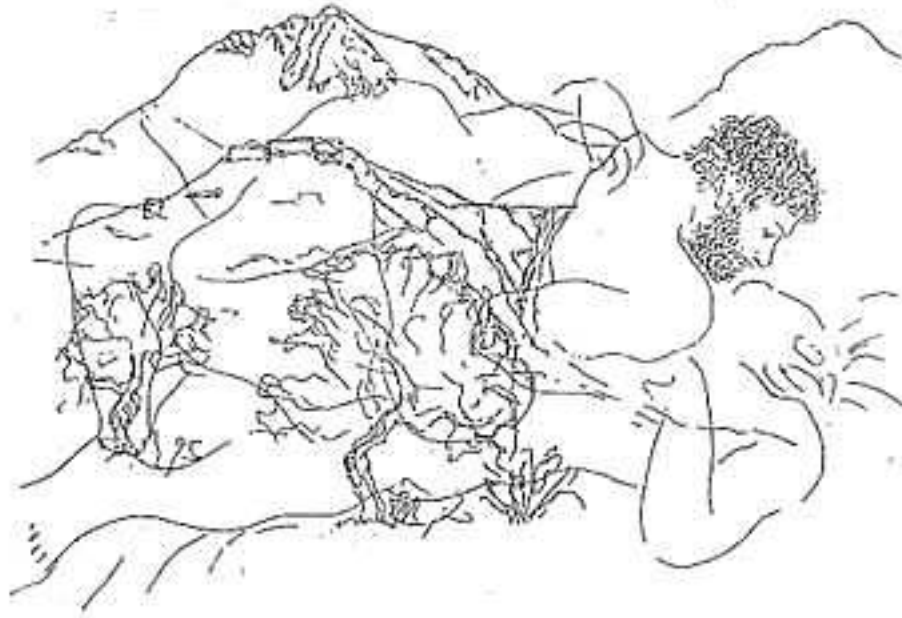
Few seem to know the temple of Hera at Cape Melangvi, the Heraion Akraia, "Hera of the Cliffs." It lies a few kilometers west of the village of Perachora, at the outermost tip of the peninsula extending from Mount Geraneia into the Gulf across from Corinth.

Together with the Heraion of the Argolid, Akraia is one of the oldest sites in Greece, dating back to the early sixth century BC. And nowhere is the presence of the Great Goddess more evident than here, yet it is a lovely place without the threatening aspects that often haunt her sanctuaries.

In former times the pilgrims came from Corinth by boat to land in the small, circular harbor. Today one has to climb down the precipitous cliffs from the road above, facing the blue sea and the few remnants of the sanctuary below at the water's edge.

However, the signs that show the presence of the Goddess can only be seen, when one finally stands on the foundations of the temple. And they are unmistakable. Two huge horns frame a small megaron with the head of the reclining Goddess marked by a triangular block between them, just as Mount Iouktas appears between the horns of Minos in Knossos, or like the horns and triangles that to this very day protect the churches and doors of the old houses in the Khora of Amorgos. Now, one realizes that the temple lies between the thighs of the Goddess, who is cooling her legs in the sea. Remains of a second temple can be found higher up in a small wood that modestly covers her crotch and the hole of an immense cistern.

We spent a very hot noon there. Trying to cool herself, Barbara swam in the warm, transparent sea. I, however, no friend of unknown waters, slept in the shade of the curly pubic hair of Mother Earth and dreamed of the bull that had one day come across the sea and had scared her maidens away forever.



Mykenai, The Ravished Goddess

Mykenai

In Mykenai one can still be overcome by dread. The first time Gerhard and I were there, we spent a full-moon night on the roof of the hut of the archaeologists. A warm wind blew from the Argolid plain below. One could almost touch the mountains of the inner Peloponnese across the valley in the silvery light. Late at night an Englishman joined us. None of us could sleep, and thus he began to recite the old stories of the end of the [Atrides](#) in the bloodbath at Mykenai. We all knew these myths: The tale of the homecoming of the victorious Agamemnon after the Trojan war to meet Clytemnestra, whom, in an earlier feud, he had raped and taken as his wife - after slaying her husband, his uncle.

Filled with the old hatred for the man who had ravished her, Clytemnestra together with her lover Aegisthos plotted her husband's murder. A bath was waiting for the tired victor. As the doomed man stepped from his bath, Clytemnestra threw a net over Agamemnon and helped Aegisthos to cut down the defenseless, naked hero. At the last moment Clytemnestra with the sacred ax of the Goddess castrates him and hacks off the head of the dying man, who has fallen into the bathtub. And all who have come with Agamemnon from Troia die at the hands of Aegisthos' men. Swearing the most terrible oaths, Cassandra, the unhappy Trojan prophetess, tries to defend the twins she bore Agamemnon. In vain, "men died like pigs at the feast of a king," the epic says. According to Pausanias, they were buried in the great circular grave outside the castle gate - where they were found by Schliemann, eighteen adults and two children. Clytemnestra, however, profaned the day with celebrations, the day of the full summer moon, on which the king must die.

The killing did not end here. Orestes, Agamemnon's and Clytemnestra only son, hidden by fate, had survived the slaughter, and seven years later returned to avenge his father. Thirsting for revenge, his sister Electra secretly brings him into his father's castle. No one recognizes him except his old nursemaid, who calls Aegisthos to greet the stranger. Orestes has no difficulty in killing the unarmed Aegisthos. Then he decapitates his mother who has by now recognized him and on her knees begs for her life.

The fate of the Atrides is fulfilled, Orestes has avenged the murder of his father. However the

Great Goddess is still alive: A matricide demands to be expiated. The [Erinyes](#), the terrifying executioners of the Goddess, pursue the matricide-guilty Orestes until he collapses in a deathlike coma. His life seems at an end.

Aischylos, however, wrote a remarkable sequel to this terrible story of fate and guilt, and for good reasons. Apollo appears, makes the Erinyes fall asleep, because not even he can kill them with his arrows. He shakes Orestes out of his dead faint and carries him before the court of the elders of Argos. With Apollo's help, the elders grant Orestes a reprieve of a year in exile. In search of release from his guilt, Orestes roams from sanctuary to sanctuary, followed by the reawakened, mightily furious Erinyes. Half crazed, towards the end of the year, he reaches enlightened Athens where Apollo convinces the council of the elders to retry his case. Apollo, now supported by Athena, argues, that to avenge his father's murder was a son's duty that prompted even the crime of matricide. With the vote of Athena, Orestes is acquitted and converted to the new gods, returns to Mykenai.

In the Aischylos tragedy the Erinyes circle the theater howling: "We, the conscience of the past, cast out like dirt by these new gods. Driven into the dark underground, weh, we shall breathe fury and utter hate into man's mind. Gaia, ah, ravished Earth!"

Of this end I had not known; only recently did I come across this final scene of [Aischylos's Oresteia](#).

Earth, ah, ravished Earth.

With new eyes, I see Mykenai: Two mountains, right and left, between them a deep ravine and a lower, third hill on which the castle of the Atrides stands. From the road below the two breasts and the cleft between them are so stark, that the castle is hardly recognizable - but it crowns the head of the Goddess. What sacrilege, her most sacred place usurped by the alien men from the far North, who dug up the earth with their swords and war axes.

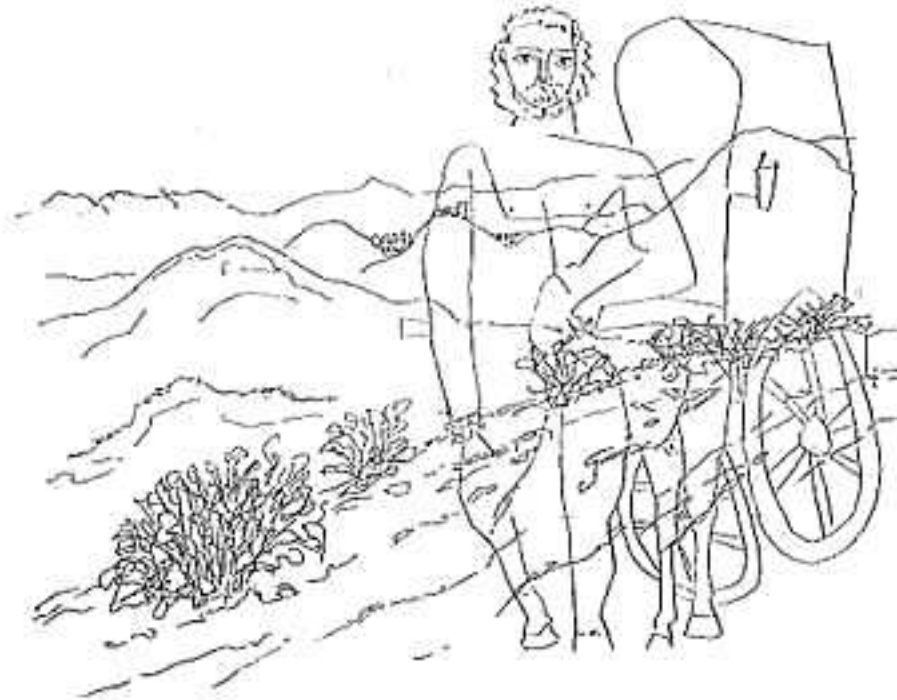
Gaia, raped Goddess.

For a millennium the horrified people of the Argolid watched the Goddess pursue the transgressors and witnessed the terrifying tragedy in Mykenai, until Aischylos's Apollo released Orestes and enlightened him:

The Goddess is dead!

Long live the King!

But we should not let ourselves be fooled, the original sin of modern man, the rape of Gaia has not been atoned for. The myths of Mykenai are still as horrifying as they were two millennia ago. The Erinyes still breathe hate and madness into our split mind.



Armin on the Road to Arcadia

Armin

I had spent half a day in Athens calling all kinds of places to find the cheapest rental car. Finally I had found what I had been looking for at Pappas Rental Car, at half the going price. I had ordered the car, and next morning we had gone to pick it up. It was just around the corner from our cheap hotel.

To our amazement we found that the little car was pulled by a centaur. I rubbed my eyes, but the centaur was still there. A handsome, strong centaur, with a broad chest and a good-natured face. Well, we told ourselves, why not travel to Arcadia with a centaur as guide? Nobody has done that in recent times.

Barbara steered the car and the big man-beast was happy to be reigned by such a gentle and considerate woman. He was easily satisfied and only needed a soft-boiled egg and two slices of bread with butter and honey for breakfast. Occasionally, he also liked to feed on the over-ripe figs that grew by the wayside.

We called him Armin in memory of the yak that carried Heinrich Harrer through Tibet and also because, with his shaggy hair and archaic nature, he did look startlingly like those equally ancient animals. He accepted his foreign name with equanimity. Above is a drawing of him on the road from Karytena to Andritsena in the Arcadian mountains. I tried to take a photo of him, but curiously Armin cannot be seen on any of these pictures. Always, there appeared only a shabby, little Honda.

It was Armin who took us to Ypsous and into its charmed inn. We found a room under the roof with a huge fireplace and slept under heavy, woolen sheep blankets. Ypsous is a flourishing village in the Arcadian mountains surrounded by half deserted ghost towns. I asked a young man, who had come from Athens with his girl friend, why he thought Ypsous to be so special. He laughed, "how can I say it in English? Ypsous is a proud village and that is, why we love it." For us the inn keeper became the main attraction of Ypsous. He had, in his youth, seen much

of the world traveling as a steward on a ship. I never quite rid myself of the feeling that Armin and he were conspiring in some way to lead romantic tourists to this enchanted place. I had asked the inn keeper why the village had two names. The locals call it, much less beguiling, Stenmitza. "Oh," he said, "when Pausanias traveled through here," - as if this had just happened last year - "he visited Gortys and the Gorge of the Lousios below, but he did not dare to come up here. The locals had told him that 'up high,' which in Greek is 'ypsous', there roamed wolves and man-eating mountain lions. And that is how the name Ypsous got on to your maps."

I perked my ears. In all my travels in Greece, no one had ever mentioned Pausanias, the famous traveler of the second century AD, who had written the first guide book to the sights of Greece. I eagerly continued to listen to our host, and he told me that down in the gorge, below the monastery of Aghios Ioannis Prodromos, was a very old nymphaion, which had been dedicated to the nymph Leda. "You know the story of Leda and the swan, don't you? Well, Leda was very attractive, and Zeus promptly fell in love with her. But she resisted his advances. So he changed into a swan, surprised her while she was bathing in the Lousios, and made love to her. Later Leda delivered a golden egg from which hatched Artemis and Apollo. As we all know, to escape Hera's terrible jealousy, Leda was forced to deliver the twins on the far away island of Delos."

This was fantastic, Pausanias, the bard still roaming Arcadia, Leda as local nymph, and Artemis and Apollo jumping not from Leto's, the Night's, Golden Egg, but from Leda's, which had actually contained Helena. What charming confusion of the old myths! But then again, there are deeper connections between Leda and Leto, both were aspects of the Goddess of the Underworld. Incredible, in this enlightened century, the ancient myths retold to beguile the gullible tourists in the best oral transmission.

But there was more to come. When he saw my fascination with his stories, he told me in confidence: "Only a few people know that Pausanias, when he was an old man, was exiled and spent the end of his days on a farm not far from here." He described a vague route to the place on a map... The source of this tale I have not discovered yet, could it have been Hesiod's "Days and Works"? But Hesiod had not been banned to Arcadia.

In the meantime a few young Athenians had gathered around us to listen to these stories. Faithfully, our host repeated everything once more in Greek. Overcome by doubt one of the girls asked him, where from he knew all these stories, she had never heard of one Pausanias nor of Leda and the Swan. "Oh," he said full of admiration, "the German tourists taught me all this, they know so much more about our ancient history than we do."

Next morning we made our way down into the Lousios Gorge. Part of the way Armin led us down a terrifying road to just above the monastery, from where we had to hike on a donkey path. The monastery of Aghios Ioannis Prodromos, the "First on the Way", my favorite Greek saint, clings precariously to an almost vertical rock face. Karl, a friend from Göttingen, had accidentally stumbled on to the place in 1954 and had described it as "mythical." It had been renovated, since and the monks were not particularly enthused to see us, they had other worries. But they let us rest on their flying balcony and admire the wild setting.

We scrambled down the old monopati to the rushing river, for a real river it was in this dry country, worth its own nymph. The nymphaion was there as promised. Leda or not, it had certainly been in use for thousands of years: a moss-covered cave with a karst spring from which the water gushed with great force. All around it were niches in the rock that must have once held votive statues.

Barbara decided to take a bath. Naked she waded into the rushing water, shouting of it coldness. And I sat in the dark hole of the nymphaion, jealously watching for the swan that surely would come swooping down on her at any moment.

Much later, at home, I reread my Pausanias. Too bad, he does not mention a nymphaion, nor about Leda and the Swan in the Lousios Gorge. He has not heard anything of Ypsous, and most certainly he has never been banned to a farm in Arcadia. But Pausanias assures his readers that the Lousios was the coldest river in the world, "at least in countries where it does not snow," and there he may be right.

But does truth really matter? Pausanias says: "When I started to write, I always thought that the old Greek tales were often silly. Now, that I have been to Arcadia, I have understood that the old myths have to be considered in the way the great wise men did, to them these stories contained riddles rather than foolishness."

On that evening the moon was full. During the past few days I had bothered Armin with the question of what female centaurs were like. He was embarrassed by my question and mumbled crossly, "Nobody has ever seen a female centaur. For Hera's sake, we get so old, we do not need children." His answer had not satisfied me, and I asked our sagacious host.

"I have never seen one," said he, " but the locals claim that they sometimes appear during full moon when Pan plays his flute. Go to the Heroon on the hill tonight, and maybe, if you are lucky... But be careful, don't talk to them, centaurs are exceedingly jealous." - Heroon is the old Greek name for a temple to the fallen heroes.

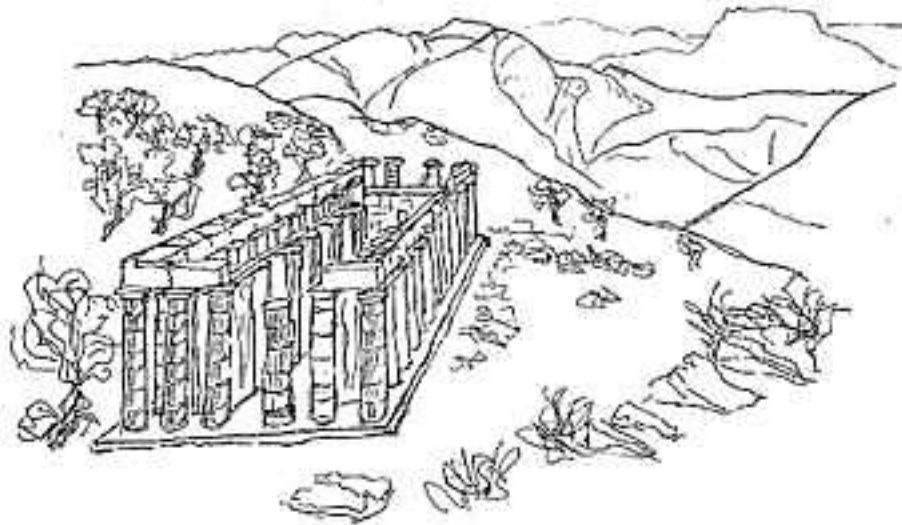
So, when the sun set we went in search of the heroon - of course, without Armin. It turned out to be an ordinary war memorial to the fallen sons of the village since the War of Independence. But when we scared up a pair of lovers, we knew that we had come to the right place.



Arcadia, The Centaur Maiden

It took a while until the moon rose behind the mountains, but even before it appeared we could already hear a Pan blow his flute. Arcadia is the home of Pan, and to this day its mountains are full of his descendants. This Pan played especially well. When finally the moon cast the valley below us into its magical light, he blew ever higher, louder, and more seductively, and all of a sudden, there we saw this lovely centaur maiden only a few hundred feet away from us. A rather lecherous Pan, looking at us for approval, held a mirror in his hands to direct the moon's rays at the shy girl. As vain as any young girl, she looked at herself in the mirror and rearranged the necklace she wore. She appeared so innocent and lovely.

We never told Armin of this encounter, and thus, we may be the only people - besides Picasso - who ever saw a centaur maiden.



Bassai, The Temple of Apollo Epikouros

Bassai

*To Vincent Scully,
who taught me to see Greece with new eyes.*

Bassai is one of the most isolated and beautiful of the "Jewel Boxes of the Gods," as [Vincent Scully](#) calls the Greek temples so aptly. Surrounded by wild, stone-strewn mountains it lies five hours on foot from the nearest village. In its loneliness the temple of Apollo Epikouros, built from local gray limestone, grows out of a mountain side entirely at one with the landscape. In 1953 it took my brother Gerhard and me an entire day to walk there through oak woods and across rocky mountains, following a hand-sketch of the path that a student of architecture from Bielefeld had drawn for us. Bassai became the great experience of that long summer, so full of beauty.

We slept in the southern antis of the temple, because it had been warmed by the sun during the day, and in the mountains the nights had turned cold in that late September. All day long we saw nobody, except a shepherd girl, who suddenly in the early morning appeared from nowhere with a bowl of goat milk for us, and who disappeared as traceless as she had come.

The temple is unusually well preserved and full of puzzles. Pausanias tells us that the temple was built by Iktinos around 420 BC. One has to know that Iktinos was the most famous architect of classical Greece, who had built the Parthenon in Athens and the Hall of Mysteries at the sanctuary of Eleusis. At once one asks in surprise, why should such a great architect have taken on a commission for a building in this, according to Pausanias, most barbarous part of Greece? And why should anyone have wanted to build a temple on this rugged mountain ledge,

hours from any inhabited place?

Already in the second century AD, when Pausanias visited the site, the temple was neglected and its four meter-high, precious wood and ivory image of Apollo had been moved to the market of the newly rich city of Megalopolis. Pausanias offers an explanation for Apollo in this temple that one finds repeated in all text books: The good people of Phigalia, a marketplace six hours further down, had had it built to commemorate their rescue from the plague, and dedicated it to Apollo Epikouros, Apollo the Savior. However, historical investigations have shown that the plague of 420 BC never reached Phigalia, and that the only epidemic that could have devastated the area occurred much later. Since then the archaeologists have been arguing the date of the building, and some even dismiss the whole story including the authorship of Iktinos.

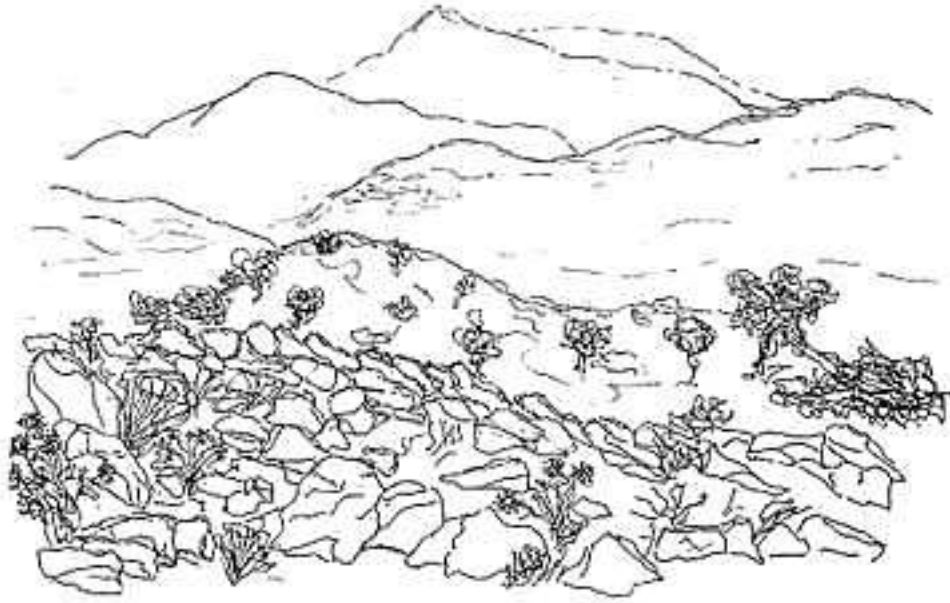
I believe, Pausanias told the story of the plague to explain Apollo's epithet Epikouros. However this may be, Iktinos appears to be the only architect, who could have designed such an unusual building.

Among the visible inconsistencies is the fact that the building is oriented not toward the East, as is the normal convention, but towards the South. Equally unusual and obviously related to this orientation, is a door in the eastern wall of the cella, which, say the archaeologists, had the purpose of allowing the morning sun to fall on to the image of the Apollo. But then one discovers the pediment of the statue not in the center of the cella, its usual place, but near the wall opposite the door. It appears that the god had been made to look East over the mountains of Arcadia, somehow as the resolution of the entire "wrong" orientation of the building. Certainly a puzzling, seemingly arbitrary design for a great architect.

The unusual position of the image has a simpler explanation. We know from the sketches of a 19th-century visitor to the site, that a five meter high column stood at the end in the center of the cella, precisely, where the great images were normally placed, and this column was crowned by a Corinthian capital, the earliest such capital in Greek history. The column seems to have had no supporting function in the building.

For a detailed discussion of the architecture of Bassai see: [The Stones of Greece: Bassai](#) (in German).

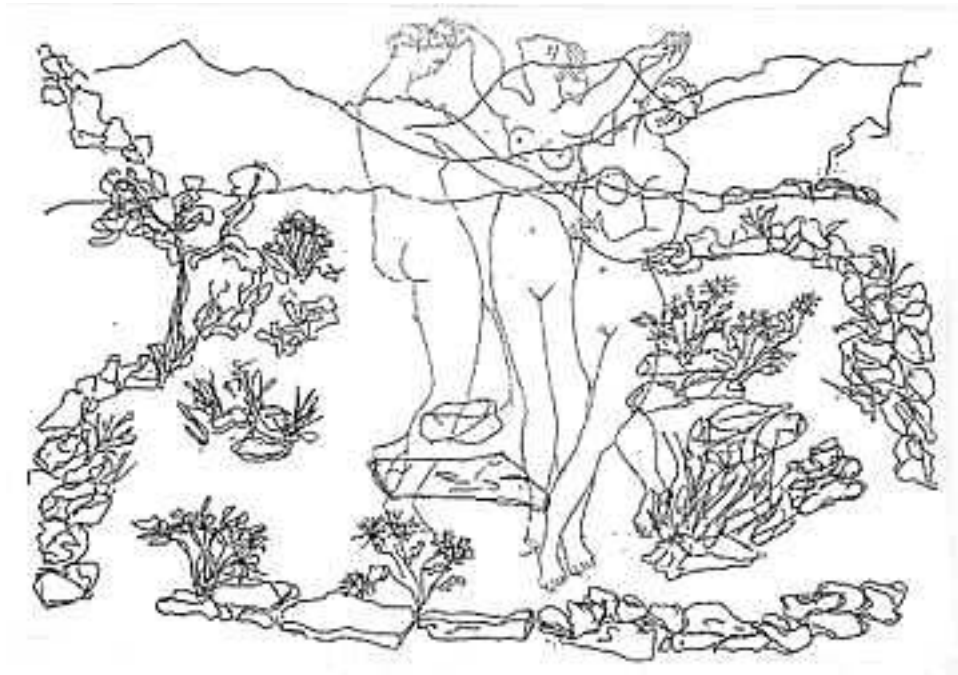
It appears that Apollo had to make way for an otherwise architecturally useless column. The first puzzle has been replaced by a second, even more enigmatic one, - or, strange thought, could this column have been the object of veneration?



Bassai, View East: Mt. Lykaios from Mt. Kotilon

Behind the temple of Apollo rises, moderately high, Mount Kotilon, which can be climbed in fifteen minutes. From its top one has a far reaching view of the mountains of Arcadia. In the East the view is bounded by Mount Lykaios, where Zeus had an altar as Zeus Lykaios, "Zeus of the Wolves" - of which, according to Pausanias, there were many in the area. To the West one overlooks the mountains of the Mynthias and senses the plain where Phygalia is located, and on a clear evening, the Kyparissian Sea glistens in the setting sun. The South, across several mountain ranges, is controlled by the threatening block of Mount Ithome, which dominates the almost one hundred kilometer distant plain of Messenia. At the horizon behind Ithome, one discovers on a clear day, the Messenian Sea: One can see the "two seas" from the center of the only land in Greece that had no access to the Mediterranean.

A close reading of Pausanias reveals the existence of another, older sanctuary on Mt. Kotilon, dedicated to Aphrodite and Artemis. After a little search we found the site. There only remnants of the foundations of the small temple and perhaps the altar plate have survived - but it too is directed *to the South*.



Bassai, Foundations of the Aphrodite-Artemis Temple

A natural megaron cradles the temple. If one now takes a careful look at the orientation of the Apollo temple below, one discovers that the axis of both temples meet on Mount Ithome! Ithome, however, carried several very archaic sanctuaries, where until classical times human sacrifices were offered to Zeus and Artemis - naturally young men. The same seems to have been the practice at the altar of Zeus Lykaios. There we have even archaeological evidence for this. Pausanias reports with horror that to his time (2nd cent. AC) at many places in these wild mountains sacrifices were offered, about which he would prefer not to speak. "It gives me no pleasure," he writes, "to inquire after these old rites. Maybe, they have to remain the way they have always been since time immemorial."

The human sacrifices practiced on Mounts Ithome and Lykaios show, that there, Zeus and Artemis were the patriarchal, Hellenic caretakers of sanctuaries that had once belonged to the Great Goddess in one of her terrible incarnations.

It becomes apparent that the location of the temple of Apollo in this lonely wilderness had a deeper reason: The place was a sacred site long before the temple's construction, and it lay at the intersection of several "force lines" that connected it with a number of other old power spots. In their "wrong" direction, both the sanctuary of Artemis-Aphrodite and the Apollo temple follow the forces that gave them power, the earth-bound signs of the Great Goddess. And now, we recognize the column in the temple. It is the Column of the Goddess, the symbol of her Sacred Tree that one finds above the Lion Gate in Mycenae and on innumerable seal rings.

Thus the main "image" in the temple of Bassai was an anamorphic symbol of the Goddess, and Apollo was relegated to watch from the side.

Pausanias has more to say that helps to illuminate this mystery. He writes that his reason for visiting this remote part of Greece had been his intention to search for the dark Arcadian cult of "Demeter Erinyes." Eventually he found remnants of the cult in a cave in the mountains between Phygalia and Bassai. The cave has not been identified, but Pausanias gives a description of the Arcadian myth underlying the cult.

During the time of her desperate and confused wanderings in search of her abducted daughter Kore-Persephone, Demeter was raped in an Arcadian meadow by Poseidon in the shape of a stallion. From this forced coupling sprang a daughter Despina and a mysterious stallion named Asterion. Because of this rape and her great confusion, Demeter temporarily lost her mind and turned into a raving Erinye.

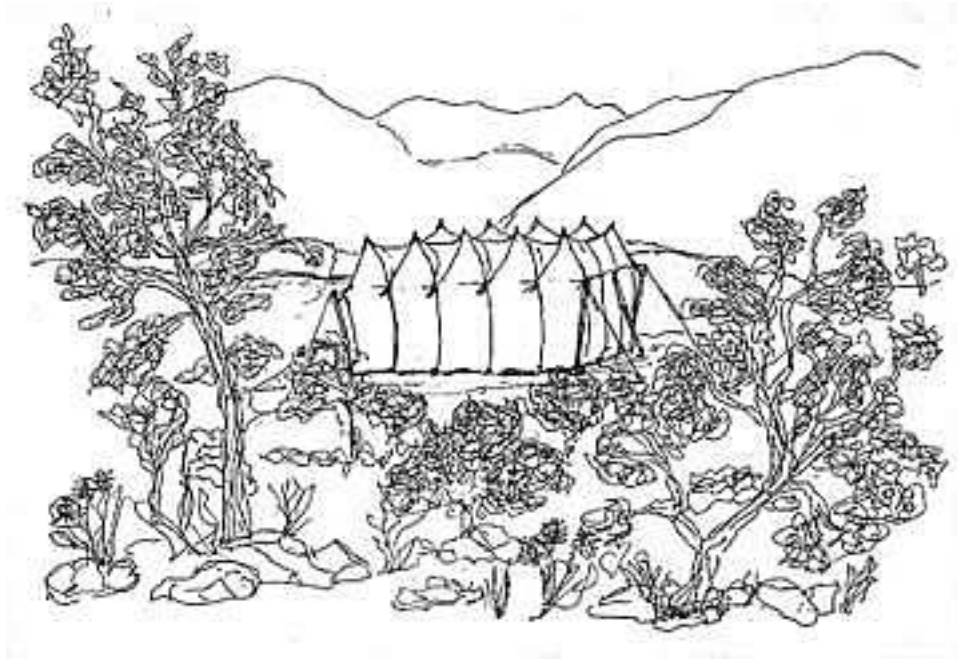
Thus in Arcadia a cult of a terrifying version of the Goddess's triad was celebrated: Despina, the Mistress, as maid, Demeter Erinyes as mother, and a third aspect "about whom," according to Pausanias, "one could not speak." Possibly it was a horse-headed Hekate as old woman. But there are also indications that Despina had a horse head. This terrible, revengeful trio, demanding atonement from the men who had violated them, haunted the mountains of Arcadia: In Arcadia the Goddess devoured men.

Pausanias also mentions a cult of Despina Epikouraiia, a "helpful mistress" in temples in Megalopolis and Lykosoura, where during his time "the Mysteries were celebrated according to the Attic Rites," by priests from Eleusis. Today we know that these were rather late sites. Was Bassai the first attempt to reform the terrible powers of the ancient Arcadian Triad with the help of Apollo?

I believe that this was the case, and that such a reading of the architecture and the myth is the simplest explanation of Apollo's epithet Epikouros, the temple's architectural peculiarities and its location far from town.

The nature of the Arcadian Goddess was terrible, her power so pervasive that Apollo could only stand aside in Bassai, looking East through the side door seeking the help of Zeus Lykaios. The dread of and reverence for the Arcadian Goddess lay so deep, that nobody was willing to face the consequences of removing her presence completely from the sanctuary. Thus, in a sanctuary that may have originally been dedicated to Despina, the good people of Phigalia called on Apollo for help to appease these ur-forces of Arcadia with his clarity, to break the female magic and to rescue man from the sensual arbitrariness of the virgin Goddess.

If one now looks at the architecture of the temple with this knowledge in mind, one gains a new respect for the genius of Iktinos, who dared to face these dangerous forces and cast their complex symbolism into a rational architectural form. The clarity of his temple design reflects that of Apollo.



Bassai, The Tent Covering the Temple of Apollo

The Great Wrapping or Christo in Arcadia

Today one can drive one's car to Bassai. All the way on the long serpentine road, I tried to guess behind which hill the temple would first appear. But the road engineers have been unusually discrete, the parking lot is out of sight, and the temple remains hidden to the very end.

All the greater was our surprise, when a gigantic tent appeared looming over the last ridge: Ten steep, Gothic spires held by masts and cables, an Olympic sail ship run aground in the Arcadian mountains. For a second I thought it was the latest outrage of an ultramodern Hilton, but no, hidden under the white canvas lay the temple.

After the first shock we began to appreciate the surreal beauty of this construction. Christo would have been proud to have invented the wrapping. I cannot imagine a more fitting architectural sculpture for this sacred place of the Goddess, or a more beautiful invocation of her best aspects. With its sails humming in the wind, the huge Thing, defying gravity, floats south across the rocks. The broken noon light under its wings lets the gray stone of the temple appear new and different from past memories.

An earthquake four years ago had brought the building to the brink of collapse. The columns have shifted, the lintels are crooked and out of line, and at the moment the temple is held together by a corset of iron pipes from a gigantic erector set. A group of European sponsors is now in the process of taking the building apart, stone by stone, drum for drum, a thirteenth labor of Herakles. All around, among the bushes lie its pieces carefully numbered and stacked in long rows.

We spend a whole day there. Barbara hides somewhere and writes poetry. I wander through the noon light, eat the small, golden fruits of a wild plum tree - were the apples of the Hesperides as bitter as these? Finally I find sleep in the shade of an oak tree.

Now that the goat herds, these scourges of the Mediterranean landscape, have all but

vanished, the land begins to recover from centuries of exploitation. The mythical Arcadian oak groves are increasing again, and Gaia, what irony of our progress, appears new and lovely, dressed like a young bride - even in late September



Bassai, The Death of Orpheus

The Death of the Brother

Once, I had a brother, his name was Orpheus. When he was a child, I disliked him, because he was always well behaved and praised by everybody. He was musical, and father bought him a violin.

But he was often unhappy, because he could not understand himself. Instead of writing poems, he gave away his violin, destroyed his music, and studied physics to follow his older brother. We lived together for many years. In these years I learned to love him, which was often embarrassing to him. Perhaps he felt pitied by me, he could never see his limitations or the strengths of his gifts.

I persuaded him to travel together with me to southern Germany, to Italy, and finally to Greece, in the hope that he would find himself. But he could not see the things that meant so much to me and gave me strength. Often he was pursued by the Erinyes, and then he blindly

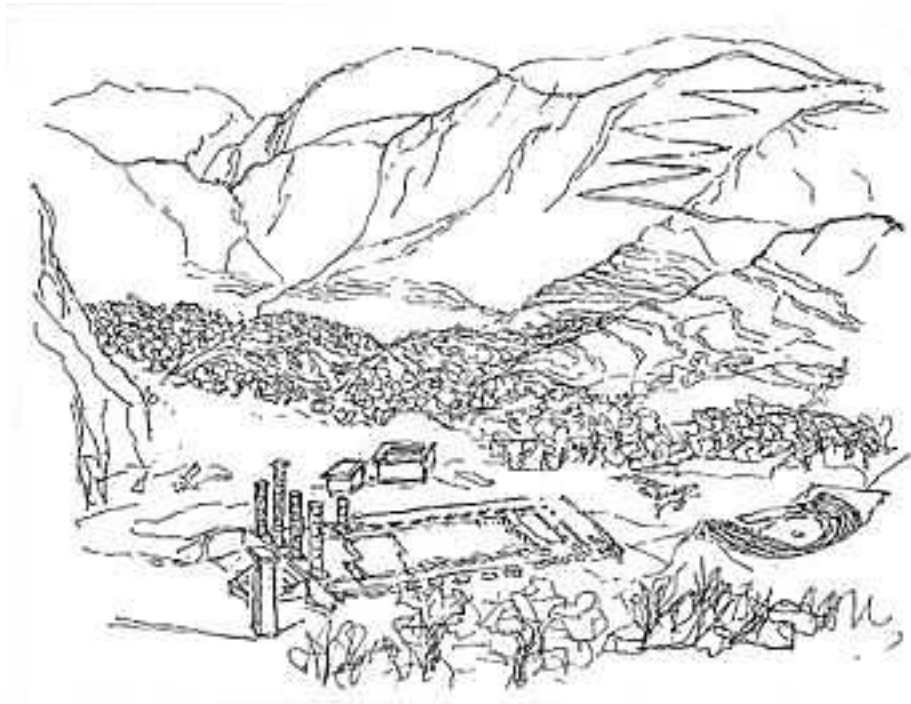
ran straight ahead through the country side until he collapsed.

In Bassai he found peace and, sitting on a fallen lintel, painted the mountains towards the South, the row of teeth of the Taygetos and the block of Mount Ithome with the sea beyond. It was the only time that he took his watercolors from his backpack. I cannot find his painting any longer.

He was very shy with girls and only noticed, when they became offensive, that he attracted certain men, in Greece, in France. His first love was Barbara at a time when our first child was a year old.

Eventually the Erinyes hounded him to death. In great pain, in his last days, he told me that he had finally understood the meaning of his life and the message of Bassai.

I believe that one never loses people who one has loved, not even through death. Often I talk to this brother, telling him of the things I see, as if we were still walking together. Did he hear me in Bassai?



Delphi, Ruins of the Apollo Sanctuary

Delphi

Delphi, Mykenai, and the Acropolis have turned into a sort of Greek Disneyland. Un-ending streams of foreign tourists - very few Greeks - throng the ruins, tired, bored, and uncomprehending. The entry prices to these famous places have escalated into ransoms, eight dollars, and if one wants to visit the museum, once more the same. If the authorities would only use the money for improvements, but the archaeological museums in Greece have turned into some of the saddest in the world.

One has to visit the sites late in the afternoon, when the dead-tired tourists seek peace and forgetfulness in the bars of their hotels. Then the light is softer, and one has the place almost to oneself.



Delphi, The Pleistos Valley, Itea and the Sea

I had kept the ticket to the precinct of Delphi, but when at five o'clock I stood before the entrance, I could not find it anywhere. I searched my pockets, the stub was lost. To buy a new one would have been extravagant. A sign of the Gods? Instead like goats we scrambled up the steep hill outside the fence of the sanctuary - and discovered the most beautiful spot in Delphi, high in the mountain, hundreds of feet above the stadium, with a view reaching from Itea by the sea to Arakhova at the pass to the East.

Delphi has the most dramatic location of all Greek sites. A steep valley climbs from the sea and the bay of Itea through a wild mountain scenery to finally broaden into a huge megaron. The floor of the valley is covered by a two-thousand-year old olive grove that like an immense, scaled dragon claws its way uphill. The wind passes in silvery waves through the gray leaves of the gnarled trees. The old pilgrim path followed the dry bed of the river Pleistos that meanders downhill through the grove to the sea.

The sanctuary of the Pythian Apollo does not lie in the bowl of this megaron, as one would have expected, but is hidden from the eyes of the approaching pilgrim behind a mountain ridge, on the northern shoulder of the valley. Now that the gleaming white temples have been reduced to a field of rubble, the ruins have become quite unimpressive. The sanctuary of Apollo has been completely overwhelmed by the surrounding landscape. The garish additions by the "new" gods, which Pausanias described, have vanished, and Delphi has returned to Gaia, whose sanctuary it once was.

Only when one searches the mountain slopes carefully, does one discover the signs in the landscape that bestowed their numinosity to this place: Two rugged cliffs fall vertically into the valley, between them a deep, dark ravine with a strong spring of clear, cold water at its lower

opening.

These sinister formations are laced with numerous old tales. Men, pursued by guilt, have jumped to their death from the Phaidriades, and from the Kastalian spring expiatory cures were expected by the faithful.

Apparently the Pythian Sibyl did not reside in Kastalian gorge, at least not since the time that Apollo slew the sacred snake of the Goddess. He must have dragged the oracle from of its old location into the daylight very early, Pausanias knows nothing of an older place of veneration in the gorge. The spring had its nymph, Kastalia, however, the suspiciously young ancestry given her by the Greek myths, betrays her to be a late invention

However, the chthonic powers of the Goddess, her dark manifestations, which Apollo could not touch, lay below the conscious order of the new gods. He could not even usurp the power of the oracle, despite all attempts at reform it remained to its end the unmistakable voice of the Goddess of the Earth. Henceforth the Pythia haunted the world, according to Pausanias, from an underground chamber beneath Apollo's temple. The archaeologists have never found its location. They believe that the chamber and the cleft, over which the later Sibyl sat in trance, have been buried by a mud slide or an earthquake. Only a rock near the temple, from which the Apollonian Pythia is said to have "sung her hexameters," is still being shown today.



Delphi, The Tholos, the Phaidriades, and the Sanctuary in the distance

By slaying the sacred snake, Apollo may have rescued mankind from the Pythian powers of the Great Goddess, but she revenged herself by bestowing an archetypal, chthonic aspect on him, which forever cast a dark shadow over his youthful, clear beauty: Apollo became the protector of the most sought after, most feared, irrational, and sinister oracle of the Old World.



The Great Stele from Eleusis

The Great Stele from Eleusis

Of all the objects in the Archaeological Museum in Athens I love the great votive stele from Eleusis. It shows the Goddesses, Demeter to the left and Kore-Persephone to the right of the young Triptolemos, into whose hand Demeter is laying a grain of corn. Above his head Persephone holds the pomegranate. In her left Demeter carries a "column", her Sacred Tree, and Kore holds the Torch of Light. The stele radiates a serenity that few other Greek images possess.

I always thought that the numinosity of the number Three was a patriarchal Indo-European invention, a symbol for the male sex. It now turns out that the Trinity was originally female, and that it is much older than the Indo-European migrations. It stood for the Triad of the Great Goddess, the three transformational aspects of Woman: virgin, mother, and old crone. The differentiation of the Goddess into the three anthropomorphic aspects of Kore, Demeter, and Hecate is surely a male translation of the later Hellenic era. Before that no systematic religion existed, there was only one Great Goddess, with many animal manifestations. Even in classical representations of the fifth century BC Demeter and Kore, mother and daughter, often look so much alike, that they can only be distinguished by their attributes. Demeter holds an ear of grain and Kore a pomegranate, symbols of maturity and budding fertility. But at the same time, the red pomegranate was a symbol of death: those who eat of it, who love and produce seed will die, are claimed by Hades. Just as Kore, having eaten of the pomegranate

and been loved by Hades, had turned into Persephone, the queen of the dead, and had disappeared in the underworld.

The story of Demeter and Kore-Persephone is found in the 6th-century-BC [Hymn to Demeter](#). When Demeter was still young, gay, and innocent, she bore Zeus a daughter Kore. She loved Kore beyond measure, and was inconsolable, when, one day, Kore disappeared without a trace. Kore had gone to gather red poppies in an Arcadian meadow, and not returned. Desperate, Demeter asked everywhere for her daughter. The only one who had been near, had been a swine herd, who had tended his animals in an oak grove not far from the meadow. He told Demeter how suddenly a great crack had opened in the earth, and a carriage drawn by black horses had vanished in it with great noise. He had not seen Kore, but had heard cries of "Help! A Rape!" from the carriage. His pigs had run after the carriage, and they too had disappeared underground.

For months Demeter wandered across the land, refused to eat or drink, and daily became more dispirited. One evening she knocked on the door of Kelaïos, the king of Eleusis, asking for shelter for the night. Because she had disguised herself, the good king did not recognize her, and offered her to stay and to be a wet nurse to his youngest son Daimophoon. Demeter accepted and during the following night, grateful for the king's hospitality, decided to bestow immortality on Daimophoon.

She used a puzzling magic, she roasted the infant over the open fire in the hearth, as one roasts grain. An older son of the king surprised her during her work, and Demeter shot him an angry look. He changed into a lizard on the spot. The spell was broken, and Daimophoon died in the fire. Demeter was heart broken and to console the despaired Kelaïos, she promised to introduce his remaining son into her Mysteries and to teach him the secrets of the grain. This child was Triptolemos. Triptolemos became the first hierophant of the Goddess's Mysteries at Eleusis.

After the mishap in King Kelaïos's house and not without great reluctance, Demeter asked Helios, the Sun God, for the whereabouts of her daughter. Helios, who saw everything, knew what had happened. Hades, the King of the Underworld, had fallen in love with Kore, and had obtained the halfhearted consent of her father Zeus to make her his queen. Hades had surprised the sleeping Kore in the meadow among the red poppies, had raped her right then and there, and had abducted her into the underworld in his carriage. There Kore made a deadly error. Hungry as she was after this excitement, she ate the seven love seeds of a pomegranate offered her by sly Hades, who knew only too well, that one who made love and ate of the pomegranate, could be claimed by the underworld.

After this revelation, Demeter, half deranged, blindly erring through the land, swore that she was going to halt all growth on earth until Zeus would bring her daughter back from Hades. Zeus did have a bad conscience, and when the people on earth began to die of hunger, he arranged for a compromise arrangement between Hades and Demeter. In the future, Kore would spend nine months with her mother on earth and three underground as Persephone, the Queen of the Dead.

We know that a symbolic re-enactment of this myth was at the core of the rites at Eleusis, which took place in October, at the end of Persephone's stay on earth. In the older mysteries women had undoubtedly celebrated the transmission of the female knowledge about birth and death from mother to daughter: Originally, the Mysteries of the Great Goddess were female initiation rites, from which men were excluded. In the remote parts of the country this did not change until late Hellenistic times. In Arcadia men had no access to the Mysteries of the Three Goddesses. However, since Triptolemos's initiation into the Attic Mysteries men were admitted to the Eleusian celebrations. Demeter and Kore had taught Triptolemos more than the ancient knowledge of the lunar cycles of female nature.

The Eleusian Mysteries became famous and survived until late Roman times. What was their secret? A fertility magic or the tenets of agriculture could hardly have held kings, emperors, poets, philosophers, and simple men in their spell for over a thousand years.

Our knowledge of the rites in Eleusis are limited. Not only were the participants forbidden to talk of their experiences, the greatest insights could simple "not be said", they were a verbal. In the ritual the Last Things were shown without words, in symbols, just as the Christian priest demonstrates the Host before the faithful.

The symbol, which the hierophant held up for all to see, was an ear of corn, a sign of maturity, Demeter's attribute. At the same time the grain was also a symbol of Kore. Because as the seed of grain dies in the earth, it germinates and initiates a new cycle of growth, ripening, and dying, just as Kore returns from the underworld in the spring, grows, makes love, dies, and disappears again in the earth.

There are indications that the transformations of Kore from virgin, through her rape, to her death and her return were also enacted in Eleusis. But it is hard to imagine that this should have been a sacred theater performance, in which the hierophant reenacted the rape with a priestess, as some investigators of the Mysteries want us to believe. It was much more likely a demonstration of abstract symbols kept in the sacred "Kiste" at Eleusis.

We know more about the climax of the rites. It took place at midnight. The mystagogues stood tightly packed in the great hall of the sanctuary. Each carried a candle, as yet unlit. The hall was in complete darkness. All knew Kore to be in the underworld. At this breathless moment, pregnant with anticipation, the hierophant appeared, holding up the ear of corn, and calling Kore by her ritual name Brimo, he shouted: "It is a boy! Brimo has born Brimos! Brimos anesti!" And from the depth of the altar appeared the Light that was now handed from pilgrim to pilgrim. Everyone lit his candle from it, until finally the room was filled with light. A wild euphoria overcame all and with shouts of "Brimos anesti" the people fell into each others arms and kissed each other in great joy without regard of their station in life: women and men, poor and rich, friends and strangers, kings and beggars.

She has born a son!

Brimos anesti! Brimos has risen!

And all saw the miracles of the Ear of Corn and the Light.

Where do I know these details from? The words of the hierophant, the ear of corn, the darkness at midnight, the emergence of the light, and the excitement of the pilgrims are all known from classical drama and leaked late Roman reports. But an almost identical ritual is still performed to this day: Determined by the lunar calendar, Orthodox Christianity celebrates Easter; the same pregnant darkness at midnight, the candles, the sudden light that wanders from hand to hand are all there. Only, the priest shouts "Christos anesti!" and all hug and kiss each other in great joy. It would not surprise me, if the Greek Easter colors, the red of death and the underworld and the white of light, existed already at Eleusis. And both rituals have the same meaning: The Promise of the Resurrection of Man.

But here end the parallels. From here the Christian and the Eleusian path run apart. In the Greek myth the ear of corn showed the cyclical nature of life on earth, including that of man. In the Christian myth the risen God leaves earth in a straight, tangential line. The Christian myth promises man's resurrection through Christ at the end of our time. In the Greek myth Kore testified, that "resurrection" can be found in the age-old mystery of woman, here and now. And through love, Woman does not only reproduce herself, but, the greatest of all miracles, she bears her opposite, a Son, Brimos!

As a man, uninitiated in the mysteries of woman, Christ knows nothing of these eternally female mysteries. He knows nothing of the sacrament of birth. He never loved a woman, how can he have know that the act of love and death are one? He taught the way of negating death

through suffering and the centrifugal flight from the wheel of life to heaven. The deep, joyful knowledge of woman about birth and death was buried forever by the Church's adoption of the Augustinian Dogma of Original Sin. The murder of the Goddess was complete. - This is not intended as a polemic on Christian dogma. The parallels between Orthodox Easter and Eleusis are merely used to illuminate the happenings at Eleusis.

The adoption of Triptolemos by Demeter can now be seen as the mythological expression of the modifications the Hellenes made to the initiation rites of matriarchy, with the intention of making them accessible and meaningful to men and women alike without destroying the fundamental substance of female insight. The symbolic reference to the cyclic character of the grain elevated the myth above the lunar, gender-bound cycles of woman that reigned matriarchy. The yearly rhythm of sowing, growing, and decay depends on the cycles of the male sun not that of the female moon. The same is meant by the appearance of the light at the Mysteries, it was a spiritual demonstration of the fertilization of the creative darkness of woman by the rational male principle.

However, the final act of the drama at Eleusis was the miracle of the birth of Brimos. This demonstration of the unity of male and female in woman points to her role in the understanding of life and death. The birth of Brimos completes the archetype of Demeter and Persephone which shows the oneness of life and death and thus solves the ultimate question of the meaning of life.

Many years ago, long before I knew little more of Eleusis than its name, I had a conversation with a young woman at an otherwise forgotten house party. I had just returned from a visit to Mount Athos - the holy mountain of Orthodox Christianity in Northern Greece - and had described to her, how the monks exercised themselves in learning to conquer death without female help. "You know," said this woman, "I often feel really sorry for men. They know nothing. All their life they attempt to devise philosophies and religions, which they hope would take away their fear of dying." She smiled, however, became serious again at once. "While listening to you, I just understood for the first time, why I have born four children in very close succession. At each birth I went through such a great euphoria, that I longed to repeat the experience. Every time, quite without pain, smiling to myself, I floated outside and above my body and watched the birth of the child take place. I just realized that this was a death experience. It is given to woman to experience the unity of birth and death directly." Later she added: "I believe, that this experience could also be accessible to a man who truly loves a woman. I assure you, like making love, death is a sensual experience full of surprises."

The ecstatic reports of men who took part in the Eleusian Mysteries indicate, that the images shown in Eleusis did conveyed a similar insight. Sophokles says: "Thrice happy is the man who has reached the goal (telos) in Eleusis. He alone will find life in death."

The tradition that gave power to the rites of the Mysteries is dead. The details of the sacred drama of Eleusis have been almost completely obscured. The ability, however, to reach the same insight still lies deep within ourselves, equally, in man and woman.

And if one day our subconscious reveals to us our death, when it presents us with the euphoric experience of wandering through its land with a clear mind, and we suddenly see the beauty of life in dying, then a knowledge of Eleusis may help to dispel all doubts and fears.

The Gestalt of a man's death is surely female. Happy is the man who knows the woman, who will lead him through his Arcadia.