

Spring 5-16-2014

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The Neglected Heavens:

Gender and the Cults of Helios, Selene, and Eos in Bronze Age and Historical Greece

Among the great civilizations of the Aegean and the Near East from the Neolithic to the Hellenistic period and beyond, veneration and cultic worship of the sun, moon, and dawn is well-attested. The only major exception to this pattern are the Greeks, until the influences of a new wave of Near Eastern religious ideas brought by Alexander and the Romans inspired a trend towards solar monotheism. The famous statement in Aristophanes *Peace* 406-413 that “we humans always sacrifice to you [Olympians], whereas the barbarians always sacrifice to those two [sun and moon], has often been used by scholars to summarize the Greek people’s attitude towards the sun and moon, which is not without merit considering that when compared to other cultures such as Ugarit, the Hittites, Babylonians, Sumerians, Minoans, and Indo-Europeans, the Greeks’ enthusiasm for the heavenly lamps is nowhere near as high. The Greeks certainly considered the sun, moon, and dawn to be divine entities; the three appear in the works of Homer and Hesiod as the deities Helios, Selene, and Eos, and are the subjects of myth and poetry from time to time. In addition, contrary to what Aristophanes might imply, the three deities are also the recipients of a handful of cults scattered throughout Greece (though these are few in number and of the three, Helios is awarded the lion’s share). It is not until the 5th century BC with Euripides, Aeschylus, and the early Athenian philosophers that sun and moon worship begins to grow, resulting in Helios and Selene being identified with, and partly absorbed by, Apollo and Artemis. The Greek conceptions and personifications of the sun, moon, and dawn owe much to Near Eastern and Indo-European models; before the historical Greeks, the Bronze Age

Minoans and Mycenaeans were practitioners of their own solar cults, but for reasons unknown the historical Greeks did not count Helios, Selene, and Eos among the great Panhellenic deities. Scholarly focus on the Greek cults of Helios, Selene, and Eos has been regrettably slim, in part due to the scarcity of sources both literary and archeological. The majority of Greek and earlier Aegean evidence concerns Helios and other solar deities. This has led to many Classicists and Bronze Age historians to pass over the Greek celestial worship discrepancy or to leave it hanging in the background. However, the question of why the Greeks assigned only minor roles in cult and myth to Helios, Selene, and Eos, not to mention their possible historical predecessors which may have influenced their characters and worship, is one worth investigating. This paper will recount a (by no means complete) history of the mythic and cultic roles of Helios, Selene, and Eos from the Archaic age through the Hellenistic period in Greece. It will then compare the Greek deities to other solar and lunar deities among the Hittites, Babylonians, Sumerians, the city of Ugarit, the Minoans, and reconstructed Indo-European religion and discuss how their depictions could have influenced the Greek conceptions of the sun, moon, and dawn. It will also examine the gender construction of Helios, Selene, and Eos, and why the Greeks associated the sun with male gender roles, and the moon with female gender roles. Finally, an attempt will be made to provide an answer to the question of why the Greeks never considered Helios and Selene to be major Panhellenic deities.

Helios

The figure of Helios first appears, like that of many of the Greek divinities, in the works of Homer and Hesiod around the 8th/7th century BC. Hesiod describes Helios in

the *Theogony* as the child of the Titans Hyperion and Theia, while in the Homeric Hymn to Helios his parents are Hyperion and Euryphaessa, Hyperion's sister. Helios is the god of the sun who traverses the sky each day, rests during the night, and rises again the next morning. Helios is described in literature as having bright dazzling rays of light emanating from his head and flowing hair; he wears golden and purple robes and with blazing eyes and a firm hand he drives the chariot of the sun (Hymn to Helios; Apollonius Rhodius). In vase paintings, Helios is usually drawn with his horses and chariot, with either rays of light or a sun disk upon his head. During the 6th century BC he is given short curly locks and a beard, though by the middle of the 5th century his beard is lost as Helios begins to be identified with the younger, fairer Apollo (Hoffman 119-120).

Helios is first and foremost the god of the sun and the driver of the sun chariot. Though Helios appears in the *Theogony* and to a larger extent the *Iliad* and the *Odyssey*, his chariot is not mentioned in the epic poems as his mode of transport. It is not until the later Homeric Hymns to Demeter and Helios that we read about the chariot for the first time; the golden chariot pulled by four fiery horses then becomes Helios' main mode of transportation, a trait shared by his siblings Selene and Eos as well. In addition to his chariot, Helios is also sometimes said to travel in a golden cup forged for him by Hephaestus the Olympian smith. After he has crossed the sky and set in the west, Helios transfers himself to the golden cup and crosses Oceanus, resting through the voyage from his daily toils (Mimnermus frag. 12, Stesichorus frag. 517). The golden cup of Helios may precede his chariot in the myths and tales; the most famous mention

of it comes from the labors of Heracles, who threatened Helios in order to use it to help him steal the cattle of Geryon (Pseudo-Apollodorus, *Bibliotheca* 2. 107).

Unlike many other gods who are not able to see or hear everything that goes on in the world, Helios is consistently described as all-seeing. This is a direct result of his position as sun god, not only due to his lofty perch in the sky but also because of his parentage (Theia being the Titan of Sight) and the Greek belief that the eye emits rays of light which enable humans to see (as opposed to the modern knowledge that the eye collects light and sees in that manner instead) (Atsma). Just as the sun metaphorically “sees” everything from the sky, so too does Helios keep watch over the earth and the activities of its inhabitants, mortals and immortals alike. In the Hymn to Demeter, it is Helios who tells Demeter and Hecate that Persephone has been abducted by Hades, and it is Helios who tells Hephaestus of Aphrodite’s affair with Ares (Homeric Hymn to Demeter; *Odyssey* 8.260). As a consequence of Helios’ omniscience, he is often invoked as a patron of oaths. In the *Iliad*, Agamemnon calls upon Helios twice: once when he makes his great oath to Achilles that he has not touched Briseis the slave girl, and again when he vows to uphold the outcome of the duel between Paris and Menelaus (19. 259, 3.104, 278). In the Hymn to Hermes 381, Hermes calls upon Helios to vouch for his telling the truth to Apollo, and in the *Argonautica* of Apollonius Medea swears by Helios as well (4. 1018). This role of guardian of oaths, truth, and sight makes Helios well disposed towards the processes of justice, though in cases where his wrath is aroused he defers to Zeus’s judgment.

Helios is also the owner of several flocks of sheep and cattle. In the *Odyssey* 12.261, Helios keeps herds on the island of Thrinakie which are tended by his nymph

daughters Phaethousa and Lampetie. These flocks are all pure white with golden horns, and are immortal and always healthy. Helios prizes them greatly; when Odysseus and his men come to the island and kill some of the flock for food, Helios is outraged and threatens to shine his light among the dead if Zeus does not rectify the damage. During the war against the Giants, one giant named Alkyoneus steals and drives off the cattle of Helios from the island of Erytheia, thus kicking off the war in the first place (Pseudo-Apollodorus, *Bibliotheca* 1. 34). No other god besides perhaps Apollo is associated with herds of sheep and cattle in this manner; this is perhaps due to the close association between cattle and the sun throughout Near Eastern and Indo-European cultures, a point which will be explored in more detail below.

Besides his siblings Selene and Eos, Helios is the head of a rather large family. As has been already mentioned, Phaethousa and Lampetie tend the flocks of their father in the *Odyssey*. Helios is also the father of the Heliades and the infamous Phaethon who tried and failed to drive his father's sun chariot (Pausanias 2.3.2). Pasiphae, the queen of Crete and the wife of King Minos is among Helios' offspring (Bacchylides frag. 17) as is Circe the enchantress and her brother Aeetes by the ocean nymph Perseis (*Theogony* 956; *Odyssey* 10.134 ff). Considering the role of the sun in regulating the passing of time, some consider Helios the father of the Horai, goddesses of the hours and seasons (Nonnus, *Dionysica* 11.486). Helios is the sire of many mortal offspring as well; it is interesting to note that while Helios does not have many public cults, the places in which he is honored typically claim mythological and genealogical descent from him.

The most famous of these cults is located on the island of Rhodes just off the coast of modern day Turkey. The Rhodians claimed Helios as their great patron from the time their city was founded; Pindar (*Olympian Ode* 7. 54) relates how at the beginning when the gods divided up the earth among themselves, Helios missed out on the drawing and claimed the new island of Rhodes for himself. Diodorus Siculus (*Library of History* 5.56.3) tells how the nymph Rhode (after whom the island was named) bore to Helios seven sons and a daughter who became the first kings of the island. The people of Rhodes were certainly devoted to their divine father; coins have been found there bearing images of Helios, and the celebration of the Halieia festival ranked among the great Panhellenic festivals of Greece (Farnell 419; Arnold 436). The festival was most likely established around the foundation of the city of Rhodes around 408 BC and was celebrated with chariot races, musical competitions, and the sacrifice of a chariot and white horses which were thrown into the sea (Rice 383, Arnold 435-436). The greatest expression of their devotion was the Colossus of Rhodes built around 280 BC to commemorate their victory over Antigonos after his siege of the city in 304 BC. The giant statue of Helios stood 'seven times ten cubits in height' and ranked among the great Wonders of the World until an earthquake toppled it from its foundations (Strabo, *Geography* 14.2.5).

Another cult center of Helios was located in the city of Corinth. Eumelos around the 8th century tells how Helios and Poseidon fought over the land of future Corinth, with Helios winning the mountain peak and Poseidon winning the isthmus. Helios' children Aloeus and Aeetes became the mythic founders of Corinth, while their father was honored throughout the city; Pausanias describes altars to Helios on the Acrocorinthos

and the isthmus, while carvings of Helios and Phaethon in their chariots appear on the Propylaea gates. For the Corinthians, Helios was important enough to assume control over thunder, usually the special domain of Zeus (Jessen, 66). Over time, his worship slowly faded in importance as other deities such as Aphrodite and Apollo came to the forefront of the city cults.

Beyond Rhodes and Corinth, Helios does not receive many temples and festivals elsewhere in Greece; his altars and shrines are scattered mostly throughout the Peloponnesus and northwest Greece. Interestingly, Helios worship is mainly confined to regions where Doric dialects were spoken, including Rhodes and Corinth. This could indicate that Helios and his cult were introduced a little later to Greece and were not originally part of the Mycenaean pantheon. Altars to Helios are described by Pausanias in the towns of Mykenai, Sikyon and Mantinea. A temple of Helios existed in Hermione; stone images of Helios and Selene were carved in the marketplace of the town of Elis, and Helios with his chariot is carved on the great throne of Zeus at Olympia. Pausanias speaks of the sacrifice of white horses to Helios on the mountain of Taleton above the town of Brysiai (3.20.4). In addition to the sacred flocks on Thrinakie and Erytheia, Helios also had sheep dedicated to him at Tainaron and at Apollonia (Homeric Hymn to Apollo; Herodotus 9.93.1). Even at Athens, despite the claims of Aristophanes and others that no Athenian would worship the celestial bodies, there was an altar and priestess of Helios present in the 3rd century BC, while inscriptions honoring him date back to at least the 5th century BC. Athenians also honored Helios in the Thargelia harvest festival held in late spring with sacrifices to him and the Hours. Though not a

part of formal cult, Plato in his *Laws* describes the Greek custom of prostrations and kissing the hand to the rising and setting sun and moon (887e, West 215).

Selene

Selene, the goddess of the moon and the sister of Helios, also has roles in Greek myth and cult, though not nearly to the same extent as her brother. As noted above, Selene is the daughter of Hyperion and Theia in Hesiod, and of Hyperion and Euryphaessa in the Homeric Hymn to Helios. Oddly, the Hymn to Hermes makes Selene the daughter of the Titan Pallas, while Euripides makes Helios her father instead of brother in his play *The Phoenicians*. On vase paintings and bas-reliefs dating back to at least the 5th century BC, Selene is painted as a woman in flowing robes, either on horseback or riding in a chariot with two or four horses. She wears most often a crescent moon upon her head just as Helios is crowned with rays of light or a sun disk. Occasionally, her chariot is said to be drawn by a team of oxen instead of horses, and in these cases her lunar crescent can be related to the horns of her yoke (Atsma; Savignoni 271).

Like her brother, Selene first appears in Hesiod's familial list and again in Homer as the moon personified (Gantz 34). In the *Iliad* and the *Odyssey*, Selene has no steeds or chariot but is given a chariot in her own Homeric Hymn. As the goddess of the moon and the night sky, Selene is mentioned in the works of a vast number of Greek poets from Homer and Hesiod to Sappho, Aeschylus and Euripides, all the way to the Latin writers Vergil and Seneca, among others. Most of these references are brief, however, and only describe her as the moon in the sky. Since the Greeks kept a lunar calendar, Selene is occasionally mentioned in reference to the months of the year,

as well as in reference to childbirth due to the close connection between pregnancy and the lunar months (Homeric Hymn to Selene; Sappho frag. 154; Timotheus frag. 803). Selene has few other roles in myth besides these mentions of her as the driver of the moon chariot. One story in which she figures prominently involves her love affair with Endymion, a handsome shepherd; in some versions of the myth, particularly as told by Virgil, Endymion is replaced by Pan the god of shepherds. Selene becomes enamored with his beauty and Endymion begs Zeus to put him into an eternal sleep which will preserve his youth and age. (Sappho frag. 199; Apollonius Rhodius, *Argonautica* 4.55; Pausanias 5.1. 4-5). In other stories, Selene is associated with witchcraft and sorcery. Plato references in his *Gorgias* the tradition of Thettaliades, women of Thessaly who pull the moon chariot down from the sky, while later Roman sources such as Ovid and Seneca tell how Medea used her power to obscure Selene and Helios with dense clouds and fog (*Metamorphoses* 7.179, *Medea* 672). Selene is the mother of many children; Pausanias tells that Selene eventually bore to Endymion 50 daughters, but it is unclear exactly who these daughters are. Through Zeus, Selene is the mother of Pandeia and Ersa (who may be the same goddess), and of Mosaeos, one of the most famed poets in Greece second only Orpheus himself (Plato, *The Republic* 364d).

Although Helios has a scattering of temples throughout Greece, hardly any temples are dedicated to Selene at all. Pausanias mentions a statue in Thalamai bearing the title of Pasiphae, or “shining one”, and implies that the goddess depicted is Selene. Besides this, the only other place where Selene may have been worshipped is the town of Elis in southern Greece. A stone image of her was described by Pausanias by the marketplace alongside one of Helios, but there is no mention in Pausanias of a

temple to her. However, despite the lack of documentation, it would not be unreasonable for Selene to have been venerated in Elis. Some myths of Endymion make him a king of Thessalia who founded the town of Elis and instituted a race course at Olympia. Here again we see an example of a minor cult founded on genealogical and mythological claims (Pseudo-Apollodorus, *Bibliotheca* 1.56).

Eos

Eos, the goddess of the dawn, stands out when compared with her divine brother and sister. Daughter of Hyperion and Theia/Euryphaessa, Eos announces the coming light of Helios and accompanies him throughout the day. Dressed in saffron robes, she sometimes travels in her own golden chariot but other times travels with her own set of wings shown on vase paintings throughout the Archaic and Classical periods. She appears as the goddess of the dawn throughout all of Greek poetry and tales; “rosy-fingered Dawn” is an extremely common phrase in Homeric literature. No cults, temples, or altars dedicated to Eos are known anywhere in Greece, but she has many appearances in myth beyond descriptions of her day job. Hesiod and Pseudo-Apollodorus reveal that Eos is the mother of the Winds, Stars, and Eosphorus, or the planet Venus (*Theogony* 378; *Bibliotheca* 1.9). By her husband Tithonos, she is also the mother of the hero Memnon who was killed by Achilles in the Trojan War; Eos pleaded with Zeus to spare him, but his scales of fate weighed in favor of Achilles instead (Pindar, *Nemean Ode* 650).

Selene has her love affair with Endymion, but Eos is notorious for taking mortal lovers. Pseudo-Apollodorus says that Eos and Ares slept together one night which caused Aphrodite to curse Eos to always chase after men after she discovered the affair

(*Bibliotheca* 1.9). Eos' main love was Tithonos, who sadly did not prosper from her love. Eos asked Zeus to grant him immortality but forgot to throw eternal youth into the bargain. Zeus granted her wish and for a time they lived happily, but Tithonos eventually grew so old he couldn't move or speak, so Eos left him alone in a room of her palace (*Hymn to Aphrodite* 218). The hunter-giant Orion was another of her loves, but the gods strongly objected to the match and Artemis killed Orion with an arrow. He became the constellation Orion in the sky upon his death (*Odyssey* 5.118). Eos loved another mortal, Kletos, whom she carried off on behalf of his exquisite beauty (*Odyssey* 15.220). Finally, Eos fell in love with the mortal Kephalos with whom she had a son, Phaethon. Phaethon's beauty drew the attention of Aphrodite who carried him off to serve her in one of her temples (*Theogony* 984).

Though the cult sites at which Helios, Selene, and Eos are honored are scattered throughout Greece, the honors themselves are for the most part small ones, at least in comparison to the Olympian deities such as Zeus, Athena, and Apollo. It is important to remember that while the literary sources describing cultic activities and worship may be of relatively late date, the activities and worship themselves may be of considerable antiquity. However, this dating quirk can also work in reverse. The wave of solar enthusiasm from the Near East during the later Roman Empire brought a new fervor for the cosmic deities of the sun and moon; it is entirely possible that some cults of Helios could have been instituted after this wave had swept through the Mediterranean (Notopoulos 267, Farnell 420).

* * *

It is also important to remember that Greek religion and culture did not develop in a vacuum. The Greeks were only one culture and people in the Mediterranean basin and would have had contact through trade, warfare, and travelers with the peoples of the Near East from at least the early Bronze Age, if not even earlier. These different methods of cultural transmission would have an impact on Greek religion; just as Near Eastern gods and cults began to be imported into Greek cities (most notably Bendis and Cybele) during the Classical period, Bronze Age Mycenaeans would have been exposed to foreign religious cults, even if only in the form of distant traveler's tales. The Babylonians and Sumerians, being civilizations significantly older than the Greeks, would have generally influenced their art and religion, but due to distances both geographical and chronological, this influence would have been indirect and transmitted through other sources. The Hittites and the city of Ugarit were geographically closer to the early Greeks, and thus were in a better position to facilitate trade (and to clash over territory). These cultures could therefore presumably exert more influence on evolving Greek religion than the more distant Fertile Crescent. Beyond the great civilization centers of the Near East, the civilizations who left the greatest impact on Greek religion as a whole were the Minoans and Indo-Europeans. The people who would eventually become the historical Greeks were culturally Indo-European in origin. They migrated in waves of small bands of people from the steppes north of the Black Sea beginning somewhere between 4500-2000 BC, taking small towns and villages for their own and establishing themselves as local kings. Those who would become the Mycenaean Greeks probably reached Greece around 1600 BC and mingled with the already present Minoans of Crete, possibly by force judging from the destruction of the great Minoan

palaces beginning in 1450 BC (Drews 194, 198). It is not unreasonable to suppose that, in addition to other cultural aspects the Greeks acquired and adapted from other peoples, that their religion and mythology was also affected. We know that sun, moon, and dawn worship was prevalent throughout the Near East and Mediterranean basin during the Bronze Age and beyond; it possible that Helios, Selene, and Eos absorbed some traits from foreign celestial deities.

The civilizations of the Mesopotamian Fertile Crescent, the Sumerians and Babylonians, set precedents in art, technology, and religion that shaped a wide array of people and created stylistic themes that can be seen in the religions of later cultures. Among these is the concept of the sun and moon as divine beings. Sun and moon worship has been attested in the Fertile Crescent since the dawn of history. The Sumerians personified them as the sun god Utu and the moon god Nanna, but they are better known as their Babylonian forms Shamash and Sin. Sumerian records list Nanna as the husband of Ningal and the father of Utu, which reflects the Sumerian belief that the night gives birth to the new day. Nanna is described in myth as the “luminous one”, the “heavenly boat”, and the “young calf”; he oversees the fertility and well-being of cattle and illuminates the night sky. One popular myth, entitled *The Voyage of Nanna-Sin To Nippur*, dates back to around the end of the 3rd millennium BC and recounts how Nanna-Sin sailed to Nippur loaded with presents and offerings in order to visit his father and mother, Enlil and Ninlil (Bottero,133-4). His son Utu is the overseer of justice, a protector of travelers, and a bringer of aid to those in trouble. Both Utu and Nanna were considered to be deciders of fate, which fits not only their role as the all-seeing sun and moon gods from their perches in the sky but also their status as father and son, as

Nanna also decides the fates with Ninlil. Compare this to the role of Helios in Homer, who also oversees justice from his lofty chariot (Leick 126, 161-162). Nanna can thus be considered the father of truth and justice through Utu. In terms of transport, Nanna is given a chariot in Sumerian myth, but it is not mentioned how Utu travels through the sky (Holland 115).

The Babylonian deities Sin and Shamash retained many of the characteristics of Nanna and Utu, respectively; Sin was never of widespread cultic importance but was popular with the people because of his gentle and reliable demeanor, while Shamash as the god of justice quickly rose in importance as a national Babylonian god. Shamash had no major mythic role to play but had a large cult center in the town of Sippar during the 2nd-1st millenniums BC (Leick 148, 152-153). Both gods appear frequently as the subjects of personal hymns of praise and gratitude; in texts from the 2nd millennium through to the Assyrian period in the 5th century BC, Sin and Shamash are hailed as the shepherds of mankind and as patrons of justice (Bottero, 32-33). While the Sumerians gave Nanna and Utu roles as deciders of fate and justice, the Babylonians took that association to an entirely new level. Ever the consummate astrologers, the Babylonians used the positions of the sun, moon, and stars extensively in their predictions and interpreted their movements as divine omens of varying fortune. Eclipses of the sun and moon in particular were considered momentous events and were described in anthropomorphic terms such as "Sin mourns" and "the god disappears in distress" (Noegel 174). Because of this, Sin and Shamash were the deciders of outcome and fate and were invoked in rituals designed to counteract bad omens and readings. Shamash in particular was hailed as the patron of divination; fragments from an

extispicy ritual designed to determine a medical diagnosis invokes all-seeing Shamash, asking him for a clear and swift answer (Botteros, 84). The Sumerians and Babylonians held the belief that the universe worked with regularity and could be consistently predicted – a belief that the later Greek philosophers picked up and expanded, and which helped to bring Helios and Selene into later prominence (Noegel 183-185).

The Sumerians and Babylonians certainly influenced the Greek conceptions of the sun and moon; however, these civilizations were somewhat removed from the Greeks both temporally and geographically. On the other hand, the Hittite influence on the Greek people is easier to decipher, as Anatolia lies just across the Aegean Sea from Greece and contact between the two existed throughout the Bronze Age. The worship of the sun and moon in Anatolia goes back as far as our records allow, but what is interesting about the Hittites is that their main sun deity was a goddess, and their moon god was adapted into some Greek tales as the goddess Selene. The Sun-Goddess of Arinna rose to prominence as the national deity of the Hittite people; she was the wife of the Storm-God of Hatti and of the Sun-God of Heaven Istanu, and was often identified with the Hurrian goddess Hebat. She was the mother of the storm gods of Nerik and Zippalanda, as well as of the goddess Mezulla, who was closely identified to her mother to the point where they may have been the same goddess (Collins, 175, Gurney, 12). The Hittite king Hattusili I provides the first textual evidence of her cult and was especially devoted to her, calling her his “beloved” and offering a great deal of spoils taken in war to her at her temple. In return, the goddess acted as the special protector of the king in battle, running before him to ensure that he survived and conquered his enemies (Gurney,12). She was also identified with the king in terms of legitimatizing his

power; the Hittite kings were closely associated with the sun in religious ritual and formulaic literature, so in order to solidify their grip on the throne they took part in a ritual marriage with the Sun-Goddess (Kristiansen 293). Prayers to the Sun-Goddess of Arinna often address the goddess as “the land of Hatti’s torch” (West 194). The Hittites had other solar deities as well – the Sun-Goddess of Arinna was accompanied by the Sun-God of Heaven and the Sun-Goddess of the Earth who presided over the underworld (who may be the same as Arinna, since she was sometimes thought to rule the underworld because of her light-giving properties), though it is unclear if the names of these deities are simply epithets of the Sun-Goddess (in the same manner as Athena Polias or Helios Soter) or are divinities in their own right (Leick 59, 155).

The primary moon deity of Anatolia was Men, worshipped throughout Asia Minor in Hellenistic and Roman time periods though he was especially popular in the city of Antioch. Men was primarily a patron of healers and a giver of fertility, although he was also a god of soldiers who protected tombs and avenged injustice. He was commonly depicted on vase paintings and coins with a high pointed cap and lunar horns on his shoulders; sometimes he held a pine cone shaped object which was possibly a votive offering or a fertility symbol. He also appears as a horseman on vases either riding or standing alongside one, but his main animal association was with the bull whose crescent horns appears on his shoulders and was the chief sacrificial animal of his cult (Hiesinger, McMinn). It is through the bull that Men and Selene were linked in some Greek stories – the Orphic hymn to Selene calls her “bull-horned”, and it may be no coincidence that Selene’s chariot is sometimes pulled by oxen (McMinn 206).

The Hittite Sun-Goddess of Arinna was not the only powerful solar goddess in the Near East. The city of Ugarit in northern Syria, with whom the Mycenaeans also traded and occasionally served as mercenaries, also honored a sun goddess named Shapash, although elsewhere in the Syro-Canaanite region the sun was male (Salzmann 134). Like the Sun-Goddess of Arinna, Shapash deals with divine justice and acts as the messenger of El and Baal, the storm god, while remaining free to act on behalf of other parties. When Baal and Mot fight, Shapash both answers the summons of Mot when he needs her help and decides the outcome of the conflict in Baal's favor (Lete 52-3). Shapash argues in Baal's favor when he requests that a palace be built for him from his father El (De Moor 37). She has firsthand knowledge of the underworld due to her nightly crossings (and also presents an interesting parallel to the Hittite connection of the sun to the underworld), and advises Baal on how to travel through it safely; when he does not return, Shapash travels with his sister Anat down to find him, casting her light in the darkness. Upon finding Baal dead, she helps Anat carry him back and bury him. These myths show her relationship to the fertility of the crops; the dead god represents the seed going into the earth, while the heat of the sun represents the growth and life of the seed (Caquot 8-9). Shapash also resembles the Sun-Goddess of Arinna in that she has particular connections to the birth of the king; the mother of the queen of Ugarit in correspondence letters shares the epithet "Great Lady" with Shapash, and in the myth *The Gracious Gods*, Shapash, separated into two goddesses Athirat and Rahmay, gives birth to the morning and evening stars Shahr and Shalem after spending the night with El, her father/husband (Caquot 8). The counterpart of the sun-goddess Shapash was the moon-god Yarikh. He occupied a

minor place in the Ugaritic pantheon; Yarikh has connections to fertility through the myth of his wedding to his wife Nikkal. The people of Ugarit believed that the moon regenerates itself and has no need of a sexual partner, so this myth splits the moon into a couple to show his power to ensure a fertile marriage (Caquot pg. 11).

All of these different cultures – the Sumerians, Babylonians, Hittites, and the people of Ugarit – left their mark on Greek culture and religion. All of the different sun and moon deities we have just discussed share different traits with Helios and Selene; common themes include overseeing justice and oaths, a connection with cattle and their fertility, knowledge and aid open to all due to their skyward vantage points, and close connections with horses (either as a symbol or as a mode of transportation). These similarities seem to suggest a common tradition of sun deity worship throughout the Aegean and Near East during the Bronze Age, or at least that all these different cultures broadly agreed on what duties a sun deity should exhibit, although they did not extend this agreement to the genders of said deities. However, the Near Eastern civilizations' influence are not as distinct as that of the Minoans and the Indo-Europeans, from whom the Greeks were culturally descended. Before entering into a discussion of their religion, it is important to keep in mind a few caveats. The details of Minoan and Indo-European religion are far more elusive than their Near Eastern neighbors owing to the lack of textual evidence; the Minoan script Linear A has not yet been translated, so we must rely on archeological and pictographic evidence when talking about Minoan religious rituals. The Indo-European evidence is yet more scarce; the “original” Indo-European religion and culture has been reconstructed from what archeological evidence has been recovered, in addition to linguistic analysis and cross-cultural comparisons.

With that having been said, it appears that the Indo-Europeans had a relatively small pantheon of gods, but the sun and dawn figured prominently among them. The sun was almost always conceived of as male and was honored as untiring and never needing rest. He was the god of heaven, king of the lands, and the shepherd of mankind (West 128, 134). The Indo-Europeans also associated the sun with all-seeing eyes and wheels, since the sun everything from his perch in the sky and revolves across the sky. Like Helios, the Indo-European sun god was invoked in oaths but had much stronger connections with justice and overseeing its processes, although he himself was also subject to justice and not allowed to transgress its laws (West 196-201). The sun god was typically calm and collected and was not prone to angry outbursts, unlike other deities such as the Greek Olympians who behaved much like humans (West 212-213).

The Indo-Europeans also held the goddess of the dawn in high esteem. Though she did not have any cults attributed to her, she was a prominent figure in myth, and indeed the Homeric phrase “rosy-fingered Dawn” may have roots in an Indo-European model. She was most often described as the daughter of heaven or of the sun. The dawn goddess, though widely admired, was only really associated with dawn as the time of the day, though she was celebrated at harvest festivals in the late spring and early summer (West 217-226). The dawn was not the only solar Indo-European goddess – she was also accompanied by the Daughter of the Sun, who was worshipped alongside her father and sister. In Indo-European myth, this goddess is not given a name, but remnants of her may be found in the figures of Pasiphae the queen of Crete, Circe the enchantress, the nymphs who herd the flocks of Helios, and Helen of Sparta whose abduction sparked the Trojan War. Pasiphae’s name means “shining one”, and

Crete had a history of sun worship through the Minoans. Helen of Sparta had strong ties to the dawn; she was reportedly worshipped along with Helios at Rhodes and one of her titles was “mistress of the sunlight”. Some myths recount her birth from a goose egg (a potent sun symbol and a sign of divinity), and her abduction by Paris mirrors the abduction of the sun maiden motif found all throughout Indo-European cultures (West 229-237).

Besides the strong vein of sun and dawn worship, the Indo-Europeans were most noted for their use of the horse and chariot. It was most likely the Indo-Europeans who first domesticated the horse sometime around 2000 BC; before that, the horse had only been used as a game animal to be hunted. With their domestication, the horse could then be exploited for faster transport, and the invention of the light chariot with spoked wheels followed soon afterwards (Drews 159; West 468). This new technology exploded across the world from India to Ireland during the early Bronze Age, revolutionizing warfare and giving vastly increased mobility to every society that encountered its use, as well as quickly becoming the prestige vehicle of choice for the wealthy elite (Drews 84, 159, 172). Those Indo-Europeans who eventually became the Greeks would have made use of the chariot without question in order to get to Greece – chariots were used by the Greek heroes in Homer on the battlefield, but only as transport. As the chariot was so important, it makes sense that its use would have been incorporated into mythic tales of the gods. Thus, Helios, Selene, and Eos all are given splendidly decorated chariots and horses with which to travel the sky. As a prestige vehicle it would have been a fitting tribute for the gods, not to mention the fact that the heavenly lights would have needed some kind of fast transport. The accounts of Helios

traveling in a golden cup may predate the arrival of the chariot; naval technology had been around for thousands of years before the horse and chariot, and the image of the sun traveling through the underworld by means of a boat are well documented throughout the Bronze Age. However, the golden chariot of the sun is a distinctly Indo-European idea that spread along with the technology (West 208-211).

Not only did the chariot improve warfare tactics and mobility, but it also aided the acquisition of wealth, namely herds of cattle. Cattle were the main form of wealth and prestige for the Indo-Europeans; they required huge tracts of land and resources to raise, which meant that the larger and healthier the herd, the more wealth the owner gained. As a consequence of their importance, cattle were often associated with the divine realm. Dawn in particular was associated with cattle; Indo-European myth gave her a red cow as a steed before the domestication of the horse and sometimes depicted her in the form of a red cow (West 222-224, 451). In Greek myth, Helios is still the owner of flocks and herds of sheep and cattle - even in the Homeric Hymn to Hermes, some scholars think that Helios was the original owner of the cattle which Hermes stole and not Apollo (Solomon 44) - , while Selene is sometimes drawn by oxen and associated with cattle via the connection between cow horns and the crescent moon. Cattle as divine symbols is an extremely old motif and it is not surprising that, given their importance to the historical Greeks as wealth and sacrificial victims in religious rites, the old celestial associations would be preserved by them.

Of course, the Indo-Europeans were by no means the first people to enter Greece; mainland Greece and the islands of the Aegean had been inhabited for thousands and thousands of years prior to their arrival. The Minoan civilization located

mainly on the island of Crete was the most advanced culture of the Aegean during the Bronze Age. After the arrival of the Indo-Europeans Crete was conquered by the new invaders around 1400 BC and the two people fused into the Minoan-Mycenaean culture which laid the foundations for the emergence of the historical Greeks (Taylor 155-157). We know that Crete and the Minoans played a major role as a center of commerce and exchange in the Bronze Age from the number of correspondences between the Minoan palace centers and major Hittite cities in Asia Minor. Crete's vantage point in the Aegean Sea made it a perfect zone of cultural convergence; the island was and is serves as a crossroads between Egypt, Syria, Anatolia, and mainland Greece, and absorbed much from its neighbors over the centuries while putting a unique Minoan spin on what they borrowed (Dietrich). Their influence on the Greeks was enormous, but their religion was quite different from the sky and sun worship of the Indo-Europeans.

For instance, the Minoan pantheon of gods was orientated around a set of goddesses rather than male gods. The iconography of these goddesses and a tendency on Crete towards putting women in positions of status and power has led some scholars to claim that the Minoans had a sort of monotheism centered upon a Great Mother Goddess who focused on the earth and fertility. However, this view is simplistic and ignores the variety of goddesses the Minoans honored (Olsen 390, Downing 21-22). The Minoans were nature and sea worshippers; they practiced a tree cult, a pillar cult, venerated goddesses of the sea and naval technology, and placed an emphasis on the processes of death and rebirth, particularly with regards to vegetation (Al). The Minoans also venerated the sun in terms of death and rebirth; the shape and orientation of their circular "tholos" tombs pointed the doorways east towards the rising

sun and aligned with the sun perfectly at the solstices, equinoxes, and during early April and late August, while the throne room at Knossos was orientated so that separate doorways caught the sunlight at different points in the year to indicate periods of ritual importance (Goodison "Tholos" 79-80). This association was also reflected in both grave goods with solar symbols inscribed upon them and the later Greek tradition of chariot races in funeral games and horse burials along with their owners in graves (Goodison "Death" 155-157). Besides the rebirth of the dead, the sun was honored for its role in causing the crops to grow; compare this to the historical period, when Helios was honored at harvest festivals in Athens and the Peloponnesus, and was said by some to have helped create animals out of primeval mud (Apollonius Rhodius, *Argonautica* 4.673).

Considering the Minoan predilection towards goddess worship, their sun deity was probably a goddess as well. Images on seals show women with raised arms running or dancing with a solar symbol (typically a circle of some kind with a cross or spokes, sometimes with rays emanating from it) above or between them. Other seals depict what appears to be a goddess of some kind with a sun disk or a split rosette, another solar symbol (Marinatos 160-162; Goodison *Ancient Goddesses* 12-15). The Minoan sun goddess could have survived in the figures of Pasiphae, Ariadne, and Circe. Pasiphae's solar affiliations have already been noted above, but it is not outrageous to suggest that her myth could be a composite of Indo-European and Minoan traits. Ariadne, of Theseus and the Minotaur fame, is shown on vases from the 7th century BC holding a crown of light to illuminate the labyrinth of Knossos, which could potentially be a reference to the old solar goddess. Finally, Circe the enchantress

is the daughter of Helios in Greek myth and rides in her own chariot. She is on par with a minor goddess in terms of powers, and her island home is set in the furthest east in the Odyssey where Eos is said to have her house and dancing grounds (Goodison 126-130, 134-135).

Ultimately, we know that the Greeks rejected other gender pairings in favor of a male sun and female moon. What can we say about Mycenaean culture that would make it favor a male sun over the female sun of its neighbors? The answer may lie in how the Mycenaeans constructed gender roles in their society. We know from the Linear B tablets found at Knossos and Pylos that their society was rigidly separated by gender; women and men were separated in their work, and the only occupations held in common were religious functionary and slave (Olsen, pg 383). We also know that women were linked with child-rearing; children are recorded with their mothers in working groups and lists of family units, while men do not appear with children at all with the exception of older boys who are acting as professional apprentices. Mycenaean art hardly ever depicts women; Mycenaean kourtophobic figures of women cradling young infants have been found at different sites on the Greek mainland, but these only number around 70 in total. Although the Mycenaeans worshipped a handful of goddesses and employed priestesses as religious officials, their pantheon placed a much greater emphasis on male gods (Olsen, pg. 384). Finally, the Mycenaeans were notoriously warlike and fond of mercenary work. In such a militarized, male oriented culture, it is no surprise that women and their roles were downplayed.

Compare this construction to their closest neighbors, the Minoans, who emphasized women in their art. Unlike the Mycenaeans, the Minoans do not appear to

have made the same connection between women and childrearing; individual figures of children have been found at Palaikastro and Psychro, and there are many votive figures of Minoan women found on Crete, but women and children do not appear together in Minoan art. Nurturing scenes between mothers and children do appear, but in the context of animals taking care of their young rather than human mothers. Similarly, only a very small number of kourotrophic figures have been found on Crete; it is not until the emergence of the 8th century B.C. that art depicting child-rearing with human subjects begins to appear on Crete (Olsen, pg 388). Instead, Minoan art in general depicts women in scenes outside the house, taking part in processions and religious rituals as officials and priestesses instead of being located in domestic settings. When combined with the already mentioned Minoan preference for goddesses, this suggests that Minoan women held a high place in society.

It is clear that the Mycenaean and historical Greeks retained the IE gender pairing of sun/male, moon/female, despite the influence of other gender categorizations. While Helios and Selene share many characteristics with other solar gods of neighboring cultures, like overseeing oaths, protecting crop fertility, and watching over the earth from lofty perches in the sky, their gender is not among them. Gender itself is a social construction; societies will have different ways of creating, valuing, and expressing gender depending on their environmental and historical circumstances. The Greeks, from the Bronze Age to the Roman era, generally valued and emphasized men more than women. Only men were allowed to fight, hold office, hold public discourse, or move freely in public at all, while women were mostly confined to the house and domestic work. When combined with the already existing Indo-European idea of a male

sun god, it makes sense for the Greeks to have continued that association with the brightest, most visible light in the sky.

* * *

After considering the different forms sun, moon, and dawn worship assumed in the Bronze Age Near East and Mediterranean, and after examining how these forms may have influenced the Greek Helios, Selene, and Eos, we now return to the question of why these deities were only minor ones in the Greek religious system. One answer could be that even though the Greeks considered natural features like rivers, winds, and the sun and moon to be divine figures, they preferred to seek help and protection from gods who were personally relatable. The Greeks (as well as our other Near Eastern civilizations) historically imagined their gods in terms of human relationships: they bickered back and forth like humans, their family structures resembled those of humans, and their morality was strikingly human in that it was all over the board. In contrast, the sun, moon, and dawn were too impersonal for the Greeks to connect with in cultic contexts. It would have been easier for a Greek to make sacrifices, ask favors, and relate in general to gods like Hermes and Apollo rather than Helios and Selene, if for no other reason than Hermes and Apollo could respond to concerns in a more human way (Parker 95). Helios and Selene rise and set – they provide light for the world and cannot cease their motion to intervene in human affairs. Another answer could lie in the fact that the sheer variety of regional differences of religion in the Greek world might render the question itself pointless. Not all of the gods in Greek myth receive equal cult; the Olympians Ares and Hephaestus have almost no cult at all while some local gods overtake the Panhellenic deities in popularity. The worship of Helios at Rhodes is a

prime example of this pattern. Even though the Olympians overtake the local gods across all of Greece, the variations in local worship means that almost every Greek deity receives at least some honor (Parker 72-73).

Yet another answer may lie in the differences in political structure between the Greeks and the Near East. All of the Near Eastern civilizations discussed in this paper were organized around an all-powerful ruler identified with the gods. In these cultures, the sun had intimate connections with royalty, either by representing the power of the throne or by being identified with the actual living ruler. The Greeks themselves never organized into a widespread, agricultural empire run by kings in the same way the Near East did, nor did they associate the sun with kingship, preferring instead to equate rulership with Zeus. This may be because either the Mycenaeans adapted the Minoan and Near Eastern sun ruler into their own preexisting conceptions of Zeus, or because the Mycenaeans consciously chose to differentiate themselves from the sun/ruler paradigm as a point of pride. Finally, it could be argued that the Greeks just simply had other religious priorities than the sun and moon. Whatever impulse drove other people to worship the lights of heaven simply wasn't present in the Greeks due to their particular historical circumstances and mindset. Ultimately, we will never be able to arrive at a definite answer; trying to answer why anybody decides to worship one god over another is not only extremely subjective, but a futile chase in the end. However, futile chases have never stopped attempts at historical and religious reconstruction before, and by piecing together evidence from literary and archeological sources, perhaps one day a more complete answer may be found.

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