

Introduction

In 1864 a piece of masonry half hidden in the soil attracted the attention of a scholar and member of the Institut de France who was visiting the island of Thasos. In one of his letters he mentions a 'funerary bas-relief' depicting a figure seated on a throne, next to another who is standing up.¹ There were several further mentions of this piece in the intervening years, but finally in 1911 Charles Picard began the excavation of the remains on the island under the auspices of the French Archaeological Institute, and he completely uncovered the piece of stone. When this was done, it turned out not to be a free-standing funeral stele but a monument which was built into one of the gates of the city. It shows a seated deity holding a sceptre, and next to it a winged figure who is about to leave. Picard thought that the seated figure was Zeus and the winged one Iris or Eileithyia, and the reason he gave for this attribution was that the full image shows a small building, perhaps a shrine, in which the bas-reliefs of the two figures are located; however, above the apex of the pediment of this building an eagle is clearly depicted. In addition, the seated figure seemed to him too masculine to be a goddess, as some of his predecessors had thought.² Several decades later, the column forming the other jamb of the gate was uncovered. It was more severely damaged than its counterpart, but its interpretation was beyond doubt: it showed a Zeus seated on a throne next to a standing Hermes, and the structure of the images was exactly parallel on both columns.³ It followed that the seated deity represented on the first piece of stone, holding a sceptre in her left hand, had to be the goddess Hera, the wife of the

¹ Miller 1864, p. 256 : 'Nous sommes allés dans la journée, avec Economidès, voir le bas-relief funéraire qui se trouve dans un champ de coton. Nous l'avons détéré de manière à découvrir le bas; il représente un personnage debout et un autre assis sur un fauteuil. Dans le vide de ce fauteuil se trouve sculpté un autre petit personnage qui paraît nu. Nous y retournerons demain pour voir s'il n'y aurait pas une inscription.' Miller does not refer to the relief elsewhere.

² Picard 1912, pp. 46–55. Cf. Bernard 1965, pp. 64–5.

³ Bernard 1965. See Grandjean and Salviat 2000, pp. 133–4.

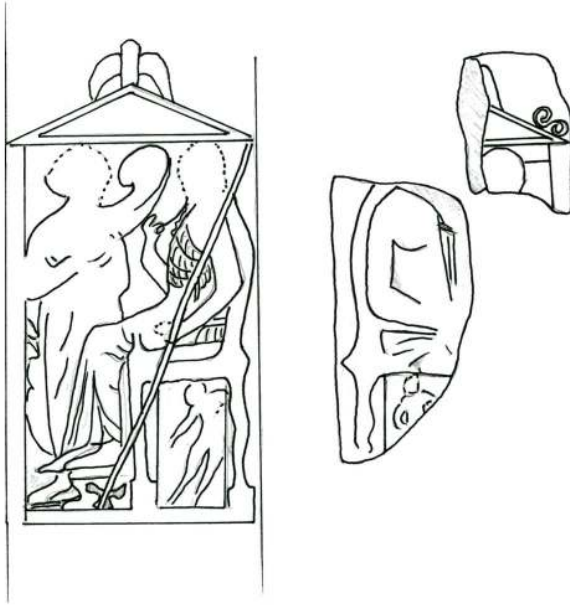


Fig. 0.1 Gate of Zeus and Hera in the city of Thasos.

divine master of Olympus. Careful visual scrutiny of the relief also allowed scholars to see that the fingers of her right hand were clasping the edge of a delicate piece of fabric. This gesture is typical of Hera in the most famous representations of the divine couple: it shows the moment when the bride drops her veil (Fig. 0.1).⁴

In the fourth century BC, then, one of the entrances into the city of Thasos was flanked by two figures representing the divine couple with striking effect: on the one side was the male deity who originally held a sceptre, which has, however, since been lost; on the other side, the goddess whose sceptre and veil indicate that she is both a sovereign and a spouse. Each of the two is accompanied by a divine messenger, Hermes for him and Iris for her. The pediment of the small structure, which houses the image of Zeus, is only partially preserved, but one can still make out the eagle which was carved over its apex, just as in the case of the corresponding

⁴ This gesture is depicted on the frieze of the Parthenon in Athens and on a metope of Temple E in Selinous: Simon 1969, pp. 52–3, figs. 44–5; *LIMC* Hera, 207–8.

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image of a shrine to Hera on the other side of the entrance. The symmetry in the iconography is remarkable: the posture and the divine attributes of each of the two deities, Zeus and Hera, perfectly mirrors that of the other and thus puts both of them on an equal footing.

There is a further parallel to the representation of Hera as the partner of Zeus on the stone of this monument at Thasos. It is to be found in the portrait of the goddess given in the *Homeric Hymn to Hera*:⁵

I sing of Hera *chrysothronos* whom Rhea bore, immortal queen [ἀθανάτην βασίλειαν] of surpassing beauty, sister and spouse of Zeus the Thunderer, radiant one, whom all the blessed on vast Olympus fear and honour equally to Zeus, Lord of the Lightning.

This short poem's central concern is Hera's rank, the position she occupies in the 'society of the gods'⁶ by virtue of her birth and her twofold connection with Zeus, as both his sister and his wife. The respect mixed with fear which the other immortals have for Hera defines her specific standing on Olympus: above all else, Hera is 'the queen', the *basileia*. Her status as sovereign is rooted in the kingly lineage to which she belongs, and this means that she can lay claim to royal *timē* by virtue of her double link with Zeus as sibling and spouse. The poet chooses not to use epithets for Zeus which underline his status as king and makes a point of reserving the title *basileia* for the goddess whom he is specifically honouring in this poem. Obviously, however, he could not compose a hymn in praise of Hera as sovereign without also mentioning the couple which she forms with the lord of thunder and lightning, because this queen is also a wife: her appearance, her *eidos*, is exceptional. That is to say, her majestic beauty and the radiant glory that surrounds her express her precedence in social status, while also emphasising the matrimonial dimension of that position. Hera solidifies her role as sovereign by combining the roles of sister and spouse. Her status, however, is not absolute, but relative to that of the god who stands at her side. In the lines just cited, the attitude of the other gods to Hera is also assessed by comparing it to how they react to Zeus, king of the gods: they are said to fear and honour her 'equally to Zeus', her brother-husband. By sharing the conjugal bed with the goddess who is closest to him in royal descent, Zeus, to some extent, also shares with her his power and throne –

⁵ *Hom. Hymn* 12 (to Hera): "Ἥρην ἀείδω χρυσόθρονον ἦν τέκε Ῥεῖη, | ἀθανάτην βασίλειαν ὑπείροχον εἶδος ἔχουσαν | Ζητὸς ἐριγδούποιο κασιγνήτην ἄλοχόν τε | κυδρῆν, ἦν πάντες μάκαρες κατὰ μακρὸν Ὀλυμπον | ἀζόμενοι τίουσιν ὁμῶς Διὶ τερτικεραύνῳ.

⁶ This is the English translation of the title of a fundamental paper by J.-P. Vernant, to which we pay homage (first published in 1966 and reprinted in *Mythe et société en Grèce ancienne* in 1974).

although what exactly ‘to some extent’ means is always subject to negotiation between them. This short poem is focused on the goddess. In it she is exalted, and her perfect *isotimia* with Zeus is recognised: she is ‘equal in honours’ to him.

In their own way, the reliefs at Thasos express exactly the same thing. On each side of the entry gate, Zeus and Hera display exactly the same symbols of sovereignty. The goddess is shown here with the throne, the sceptre, and even the eagle with spread wings; these are the most distinctive signs of the highest deity. The herald standing next to Zeus, who is probably Hermes, is the messenger who brings and announces the commands of a king. This is a further respect in which the representations of Zeus and Hera are parallel here, and it reinforces the perfect *isotimia* of the two divine spouses: each is accompanied by a figure who evokes their power to issue authoritative commands.

This parity, which is visually expressed in such a striking way in the reliefs on Thasos, is explicitly formulated in the Homeric hymn devoted to exalting the goddess. Nevertheless, it is important not to forget that the author of this hymn is addressing a well-informed audience, whose members are fully capable of integrating the synthetic image of the goddess which he creates with other traditional material about her; if he fails to mention some elements of this traditional material explicitly, that does not mean that they would have had no effect on the audience when they think about how the goddess is represented. In many of the traditional narratives, the *isotimia* at the core of this hymn is not an unquestioned fact which is simply to be taken for granted, but rather it is something Hera is having constantly to demand; equality, then, is something she is unceasingly struggling to establish and have recognised. At the heart of the various disputes that divide the divine couple, then, there is not merely simple sexual jealousy but a number of further tensions that are inherent in the Greek conception of sovereignty. Despite this, it is true that the fundamental mode of representing the sovereign couple is the ‘conjugal’ one. Thus, the poet of the Homeric hymn exalts the supreme beauty of the queen, and the sculptor on Thasos depicts her as a bride who is loosening her veil. In her, the figure of the radiantly beautiful spouse is indissociably conjoined with that of the *basileia* in her glory. She is the Hera of Zeus.

This book is not a monograph on Hera, in that it does not propose to present a global portrait of the Greek goddess. Both of the authors of this book, each in our own way, have reacted, in our respective previous publications on the goddess Aphrodite, against attempts to draw a ‘canonical portrait’ of this type and have called into question the legitimacy of the

attempts to do this for Aphrodite.⁷ In our previous work, we found that it was necessary to extract Aphrodite from the dictionaries of mythology in order to give her back to the real people in the ancient world who worshipped her. Then we needed to try to restore to the goddess her actual complexity, some echoes of which can be heard in our evidence about her cult practices as well as in the traditional narratives about her. In the present case, we try to bring these two procedures together and make them converge to yield what we hope is a novel way of looking at the goddess Hera. She is the Hera of Zeus.

Traditional narrative and cult practices certainly represent two different languages, which thematise the gods in different ways. A poet does not use the same terms for invoking a god in a hymn that the participant in the ritual sacrifice of an animal to that same god would use. But both of these modes of expression are rooted in a common culture, which means that one ought not to imagine that there was a completely unbridgeable gap between them. We need to try to let these two languages enter into dialogue with each other, while at the same time recognising the differences between their distinctive features and the distance between them. One can hope that a dialogue like this might allow us to take account of the different strategies at work in representing the divine in a polytheistic context, while respecting the fact that each deity exhibited many different aspects and had many dimensions. Selecting one divinity in particular, such as Hera, to serve as the single guiding thread of our investigation will have the advantage, we hope, of allowing us to reflect on the plurality and complexity of modes of representation of the divine and of religious practices in a way that will permit us to see how they fit together to form a whole.⁸ Because we no longer form part of the culture which sustained those representations and practices, we would otherwise find it very difficult even to get a preliminary cognitive grip on them and see how they are interconnected. This choice of one divinity, Hera, as a focus of study may seem to isolate a single element from a larger whole, the 'society of the gods' to which she belongs, but it might nevertheless be a good way to come to understand and describe that society, and thus also to understand the network of meaning which surrounds it.

The characteristic ways in which a god (or in this case a goddess) tends to act, the different spheres in which she intervenes, the varying visible

⁷ Pirenne-Delforge 1994a; Pironti 2007.

⁸ See Vernant 1990, pp. 10–33; Detienne 1997. Already expressed in another way by Gernet in Gernet and Boulanger 1932, pp. 222–30.

forms she can take on, and the various different (cultural, narrative, and iconographic) representations of her and of her activities form a single whole, a dynamic multiform network which is associated with the god's name. The name of a deity is not an empty shell which poets or worshippers can fill with more or less any content they happen to choose depending on the context; rather, this name refers back to a distinctively articulated network of meaning which is associated with that god or goddess. This network, in turn, is not simply a product of a series of historical accidents, but rather something that expresses the way in which the ancient Greeks thought about the world and the powers that inhabited the world. There was a particular Greek way of perceiving reality and its complex structure which expressed itself in the way the Greeks addressed the multitude of deities and of relations between them. Discourse about the gods, whether it be narrative discourse or ritual discourse, was always a matter of speaking about society and the world.

The metaphor of the 'network' is a highly useful descriptive tool for understanding the nature of deities in the ancient world, because a network is potentially polycentric. In addition, in a network, meaning is always positional or relational. There are obviously limits to the explanatory value that any metaphor can have; nevertheless, this one can be extremely helpful in allowing us to take account of the fact that the world of the ancient Greek gods had two equally important properties. First, it was a highly complex world in which each god or goddess had multiple overlapping relations with all the others. Second, each of the divinities was an internally multifaceted network which put together diverse semantic elements along a number of different dimensions. Using the metaphor is a way of introducing more flexibility and dynamism into the description of polytheism in general and of the Greek pantheon in particular. An analysis of this type is also particularly suited to accommodating the phenomenon of historical change, because it is so explicitly context-sensitive; it focuses attention precisely on the documentary, geographic, and chronological contexts, with respect to which the different elements in the network may come to be reconfigured.

We hope that this way of looking at the Greek gods will allow us to avoid some of the impasses which other approaches have in the past sometimes encountered. We here have in mind particularly some very rigid, exclusively synchronic accounts of Greek polytheism but also some purported attempts at reconstructing the history of the system as a whole and of the individual gods and goddesses which make it up. The synchronic perspective had the signal merit of emphasising the specificity of

the gods: they are not interchangeable, and they are active powers who acquire contour and definition in their relation to other gods and goddesses. However, the attempt to identify a god by a unique mode of action has sometimes led scholars to the mistake of positing invariant models of a particular god that seriously underestimate the polyvalence which is an essential characteristic of deities. These synchronic accounts also tend to fail adequately to recognise the specificity of the contexts in which a god is envisaged as acting and the effects of history.⁹ As far as the diachronic perspective is concerned, it is important to recognise that, while claiming to operate under the banner of ‘history’, this approach often has embedded in it assumptions that are actually no more than postulates whose validity has never been demonstrated. History of religions – and the history of Greek religion is no exception – is still clogged with aboriginal mother-goddesses, mistresses of animals, and other archetypes that also derive from assuming the existence of invariable models. Equal caution must be observed vis-à-vis claims about certain purported forms of ‘historical evolution’, for instance, the claim that the gods were originally polyfunctional in the archaic period, but then came to have their particular competences specified in the classical period. Another story which is often told, but which also must be treated with caution, is that of the transformation, in Greek religion, which putatively took place when the mature *polis-religion* entered into a period of ‘crisis’ during the Hellenistic period, as the relation of the city to its gods became problematic. This story is often continued with an account of the return of ‘polyfunctional’ divinities (often called ‘Oriental gods’) at the end of the Hellenistic period, before the curtain finally falls on polytheism.

In both kinds of account, the synchronic and the diachronic, the figure of Hera has generally been made to conform to the stereotypes of the jealous wife or the evil stepmother. In the first case, Hera’s jealousy and rage has been thought to flow from her position as guardian of lawful marriage, and angry defence of the sanctity of the marriage bond has been taken to be her unique mode of operation.¹⁰ As we shall see, Hera certainly is herself a legitimate wife and a powerful defender of legitimacy in general, but restricting her to this role would not do justice to the fact that by virtue of being the wife of Zeus, she is also a sovereign. In diachronic analyses, the jealousy and anger of Hera is often taken to reveal that she was originally a formidable goddess in her own right who had difficulty fitting in with

⁹ This is the strongest criticism levelled at proponents of structuralism. It can be found in an indirect way in Burkert 1985, pp. 119–20, and subtly in Parker 2011, pp. 84–98. Cf. Versnel 2011, pp. 23–149, for a complete overview of this issue, already raised by Detienne 1997.

¹⁰ See already Roscher 1875, pp. 69–87, and then Burkert 1985, pp. 131–5.

the Olympian order.¹¹ This attempt to trace the figure of Hera back into the depths of the past has produced what one can only call a series of modern myths about origins.¹² Some have tried to project all the most striking oppositions in the history of Greek religion – great Aegean goddesses versus male Indo-European gods, matriarchy versus patriarchy, chthonian gods versus Olympian deities, local cults versus the panhellenic pantheon of epic poetry – onto the conflict between Hera and Zeus in an attempt to understand it.¹³ Certain of these reconstructions are recognised as being out of date, but they continue to pop up here and there in bibliographies. Even as late as 1993 it was possible to claim that the figure of Hera in Homer preserved certain features of a savage and bloodthirsty goddess who had originally been a kind of primordial viper. She still bore traces of her origin in aboriginal matriarchal chaos and constituted a threat to the Olympian order from the inside.¹⁴

One can find such modern myths in *Zeus and Hera* by Karóly Kerényi (1975), a work in which the author has recourse, among other things, to the archetypes of Carl Jung to buttress his case. Still, Kerényi's work has the great merit of focusing attention on the importance of seeing Zeus and Hera precisely as a divine *couple*.¹⁵ Equally importantly, Walter Pötscher's comparative treatment of Hera and Athena in their relation to Zeus (1987) deconstructed the interpretation of Hera as a goddess of the earth and of fertility and substituted for it the model of Hera as quintessentially a spouse in the anthropological and sociological sense of the term. Although Pötscher's complex account dispenses completely with the paradigm of Hera as a chthonian deity, it fails to take account of a whole range of traditional features of Hera in her active role as sovereign and antagonist of Zeus.

¹¹ For example, O'Brien 1993. In 2002, the author of an excellent study on the Argive cult of Hera could still write: 'In an epoch prior to Hera's union with Zeus (with whom she was never to sit entirely comfortably), the coupling of Hera and Zeus thus represented a sociological archetype for the institution of marriage' (Hall 2002, p. 95).

¹² For example Cook 1906. Concerning the relations between Hera and Herakles, N. Loraux pertinently described the 'forgotten prehistory', which 'eliminates all the tensions that clearly constitute Greek mythic thought in the historic period, when we can observe it in action. The historian of the imaginary is concerned with the lived experience of the Greeks, not with the mirage of a past that seems all the more precious for being irretrievably lost' (Loraux 1995, p. 133).

¹³ For example Simon 1969, p. 50 and 1997, pp. 84–5; Lévêque 1997, and, in minor mode, Aloni-Ronen 1998. However, in 1896, L. R. Farnell was already writing: 'The antiquity of the *hieros gamos* in many parts of Greece would by itself be sufficient proof of the very primitive conjunction of the two divinities' (p. 180), criticising the theories of J. E. Harrison. The sobriety and quality of the article on the goddess published by S. Eitrem in the *Real-Encyclopädie* is also to be commended (VIII [1912], cols. 369–403).

¹⁴ O'Brien 1993, pp. 173–4 *et passim*.

¹⁵ A recent synthesis of Greek religion (from a cognitivist perspective) once more considers Hera as a powerful ancient goddess whose vocation was to be a regional deity, and her marriage with Zeus as a secondary evolution promoted by epic poetry: Larson 2016, pp. 31–40.

Two important works on Greek deities, *Les grandes divinités de la Grèce* (by Louis Séchan and Pierre Lévêque, 1966) and *Die Götter der Griechen* (by Erika Simon, 1969) use a schema of interpretation which recognises three slightly different versions of Hera: the Aegean goddess intimately connected with the land, the Mycenaean goddess of the palace, and the spouse of Zeus and defender of lawful marriage.¹⁶ Forty years later, in his study of offerings in major sanctuaries dedicated to Hera, Jens David Baumbach decided to focus essentially on the *realia* found in the excavations. However, in his functional classification of offerings one can still hear the faint echo of the cognitive structures used in the 1960s to describe the goddess.¹⁷ That is to say, the clichés of past historiography still weigh heavily on our conception of the Greek gods.

Not even the remarkable *Héra: Images, espaces, cultes* published in 1997, which collected the papers given at a conference held a few years earlier, is an exception to this judgement in every respect. In view of its composite character, it is not surprising that some of the interpretative pieces in it are dated, but it also contains some highly useful archaeologically focused descriptions of some of the sanctuaries of Hera.¹⁸ Two essays in this volume call for special attention: the very suggestive reflections by Madeleine Jost on the cycle of rituals involving Hera in Arcadia and Boeotia and the study by François de Polignac of small models of boats and houses dedicated to the goddess.¹⁹ Starting from a consideration of these offerings, de Polignac is able to argue for a parallelism between Hera as the goddess who goes with colonists departing for their new homes and Hera the goddess who accompanies the bride to her new *oikos*. De Polignac's comparative analysis reveals one of Hera's areas of special responsibility which it is important not to overlook: she watches over processes in which 'exogenous' elements, whatever their exact nature, are integrated. In addition to these two essays, some brief reflections which Jean-Pierre Vernant published as early as 1974 are also particularly relevant for our topic. In a study on marriage in the archaic period, he makes the judicious suggestion that we should expand our conception of

¹⁶ Séchan and Lévêque 1990, pp. 175–90 (first edition 1966); Simon 1969, pp. 35–65. Cf. the review of the latter by M. Detienne in *RHR* 182 (1972), pp. 198–9. Earlier, Nilsson (1955, pp. 427–33) had emphasised the close link between Zeus and Hera.

¹⁷ Baumbach 2004 and 2009.

¹⁸ La Genière 1997. The respective papers of E. Simon (pp. 83–6) and P. Lévêque (pp. 267–70) are still rooted in a questionable vision of the goddess's profile. Cf. also the papers collected by Johnston and Mastrocinque 2017, some of which offer useful insights for a comparison between the Greek Hera and the Roman Juno.

¹⁹ Cf. La Genière 1997, respectively, on pp. 87–92 and pp. 113–22.

Hera's responsibilities beyond the domain of conjugal legitimacy: because she shares Zeus's bed, her competencies should be seen to extend to questions of sovereignty.²⁰ The theoretical conceptions developed in the handful of works cited here have been crucial in mapping out the direction which this study took, which led to the interpretation of 'the Hera of Zeus' we shall present.

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This book is very explicitly not a monograph on Hera. We do not intend in this work to try to give an encyclopaedic treatment of all aspects of the goddess. The reader will not find here an exhaustive list of all the local cults of Hera or of all literary references to her. Great as the potential interest of such a large-scale project of documentation might be, we have decided to adopt a different and more 'qualitative' approach, which is more selective in what it chooses to treat. However, our choices are not arbitrary, because they are based on a preliminary analysis of the whole of the material and the data sets which seemed to us to be most reliable and theoretically relevant. Following the theoretical path suggested by this data allows us to deal with a number of issues which previous research on Hera has left untreated or on which it has been able to come to only partial and insufficient conclusions, as we have seen above.

The *Homeric Hymn to Hera* and the masonry door jamb discovered on Thasos already attested to the close connection that exists between the image of Hera as wife and that of her as a sovereign. This same feature reappears on the level of divine nomenclature: feminine cult titles *Teleia* ('She who is perfect' [through marriage]) and *Basileia* ('the Queen') are used exclusively of Hera in Greek cities, and this is the case for a very long stretch of historical time. The god who for the whole extent of Greek history is called par excellence *Teleios* and *Basileus*, of course, is Zeus. This means that it is right to focus attention on the relation of Hera to the king of the gods, her husband, and to the divine sovereignty which he represents. Since the publication of the works of Georges Dumézil, it has been clear that no individual god in the ancient world can be studied in isolation from the rest. The way in which Hera fits into the pantheon is a clear case in point: in studying her, the ancient evidence requires us to take as our point of departure her relationship to Zeus, which is an essential component of her profile. Certain scholars, to be sure, have made great efforts to dissociate Hera and Zeus, although the connection between them can be documented even as far back as the Mycenaean

²⁰ Vernant 1974, pp. 77–8.