The Beast Initiate:
The Lycanthropy of Heracles

The obscurantist Hellenistic poet Lycophron referenced the initiation of Heracles as a beast suckling the breast of the goddess Hera. This was the event that was the mythological origin of the Galaxy and of the lily flower that incarnated the same deifying essence as the celestial milk of the goddess and it was the etiology for the domestication of felines. As the Lion of Nemea, Heracles was the greatest of the wild cats. The event of the lactation of Heracles is depicted on four Etruscan mirrors and a Faliscan-Hellenic red-figure krater. The deifying milk-flower of the goddess was a ritual of adoption into the family of the celestial deities, that Hera performed also with two other bastard sons of Zeus, Hermes and Dionysus. As the beast being initiated, Heracles became a wolf. Like the motif of the domestication of the cat, the lycanthropy of Heracles involves the whole family of canines, from the domesticated dog to its wilder antecedents in the wolf and its analogue as the fox. The lycanthropy initiation is a motif of warrior brotherhood widespread among the Indo-European peoples. Both the suckling of Heracles and his lycanthropy implicate bacchanalian rites and the symbolism of the fox pelt headgear of the Thracian Bassarides maenads. The wolf represents the transitional figure in the redefining of Apollo from *lykos* to *lux*, and his relationship with his half-brother Dionysus as presiding over antithetical states of mentality or ecstatic communion with deity.

**Keywords:** lily, Galaxy, cat, lycanthropy, Heracles

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*Milk-flower.* The etiological myth for the domestication of the cat is the tale of the metamorphosis of the handmaiden Galanthis, named as ‘Milk-flower,’ extant in various degrees of completeness in three ancient literary sources and depicted on four Etruscan mirrors and a Faliscan-Hellenic red-figure krater, with significant variations that testify to an underlying theological complex implicating her in the celestial Galaxy, the deifying milk of the Goddess, a special psychoactive or divinatory plant, the netherworld, bacchanalian rituals, and ancient Mystery religions.

Ovid narrated the event in the *Metamorphoses.*[^1] Ovid’s context for the tale is typically playful and ironic, the womanly chat of Alcmeone with Iole, the pregnant wife of her grandson Hyllus. In the narration, Alcmeone recalls her own pregnancy with the infant Heracles and hopes that Iole has an easier delivery. In the *Heroides,* Ovid presented Iole as an analogue of the enthraling Omphale.[^2] Heracles had mandated that the unwilling Hyllus assume the burden of Iole as his bride as he

departed for his ordeal of fiery transfiguration on the mountaintop of Oeta. As the pyre was lit, he similarly transferred the burden of his bow to the hero Philoctetes. It was with the poison of its toxic arrows that Heracles’ wife Dejanira had smeared the shirt of Nessus that she sent to Heracles as a love potion, inadvertently repeating the motif of the hero’s enthrallment to Omphale and initiating the toxic burning affliction that is completed in the transfiguring flames of the hero’s transcendence to Olympus and divinity. The ultimate source of the burning agony of the poisoned robe was the toxin of the Lernan Hydra, with which he anointed his arrows. This is the common motif of the arrow toxin, in Greek the homonymous word (ios) for ‘arrow’ and ‘toxin,’ the latter being the etymology of ‘toxicology’ as the science of poisons from the toxon or archer’s ‘bow.’ The Hydra of Lerna was a toxic water serpent that lurked in what was once the supposedly bottomless Lake Halycon, sacred to Dionysus and the site of one of the most ancient Mystery religions, dating back to the transitional times between Minoan and Mycenaean traditions. It was from the depths of Lake Halycon that Dionysus resurrected his dead mother to the celestial realm. The context of the tale of the cat milk-flower Galanthis is thus a ritual of divinizing transcendence in which the hero is divested of his corporeal burden through an ordeal of fire.

When Alcmene was in labor, Hera (Juno), the wife of Zeus (Jupiter) had sent the goddess of childbirth to sit upon the altar beside the birthing chamber with her legs crossed and fingers interlocked to compress and seal the avenue of delivery. Galanthis, her slave girl of the common people (media de plebe), concerned for her mistress now suffering the seventh day of her agony played a trick. She rushed in and falsely proclaimed a successful delivery. Congratulate the mistress. Alcmene of Argos is delivered of her burden. She’s the mother of a boy, the answer to her prayers.

The startled goddess deceived unclasped her legs, and the infant passed through. Galanthis laughed at her clever trick and ridiculed the cheated goddess, angering her so that she grasped the poor maidservant by her blond-red hair and dragged her upon the ground, transforming her arms into forelegs. Ovid challenges his reader to know the manner of the metamorphosis, not naming the cat, but only

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2 Sophocles, *Trachiniae*, 1082 et seq.
saying that since she had aided the woman in parturition with her lying mouth, 
that’s how she would give birth, through the mouth, and just as before she had 
come and gone from the house, that’s how she would continue, indicating that she 
was henceforth a domesticated animal, a lowly commoner admitted into the house 
of her mistress.

Several centuries later, the Greek grammarian Antoninus Liberalis offered a 
prose summary of the tale of the maidservant’s metamorphosis. His version 
derived the tale from a lost verse epic, the Heteroeumena (‘Metamorphoses, 
Changes’) of the second-century BCE Hellenistic Greek Nicander, a hereditary 
priest of Apollo in the court of the kingdom of Pergamum, one of the inheritors of 
the conquest of Alexander the Great. Nicander’s extant poems, the Alexipharmaca 
and the Theriaca indicate his vast knowledge of toxins derived from plant and 
animal sources, probably an expertise acquired from his training in priestly lore. 
The version summarized by Antoninus Liberalis (Metamorphoses, 29) is probably 
closer to Nicander than Ovid. The name of the maiden is Galinthias, a variant of 
the same Milk-flow, and she is not a commoner or slave girl, but Alcmene’s 
childhood playmate and the daughter of the Theban Proetus, the legendary eponym 
of one of the city’s famed seven gates. The Fates or Moerae who attended the 
forestalled birthing changed the girl into the cat, an animal that was thought to 
conceive via the ear (a detail not mentioned by Ovid) and deliver via the mouth. 
The goddess Hecate took pity of her and made her one of her sacred animals. 
Heracles when he grew to manhood dedicated a sanctuary to her at Thebes.

The obscurantist Hellenistic poet Lycophron referenced the initiation of 
Heracles as a beast suckling the breast of the goddess Hera (ther mystes):² 

[Phemios’ son, i.e. Theseus] went with the beast initiate 
who sucked the ample breast of the hostile goddess Tropaia 
[terrible, who grants victory], [Theseus] who stole the 
menstrual belt....

Phemios as the father of Theseus is unattested elsewhere, but the twelfth-
century Byzantine grammarian who wrote the Suda records that Phemios was the 
father of Ægeus and hence the grandfather of Theseus. Such is the erudite riddling 
obscurity of Lycophron’s poem, which nevertheless was very popular to his 
readership, which included the Roman epic poet Virgil.

The first-second-century CE Greek Christian anti-Semitic epistle attributed to 
Barnabas, in listing animals taboo for eating, condemns the cat as hateful to the 
Lord for its manner of procreation, making the mouth, however, the organ of 
unlawful sexual congress, apparently a condemnation of oral sex.³ This confusion 
entered the medieval bestiary tradition, which makes either the ear or the mouth

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¹ Ovid, Metamorphoses, 9.322-323: quae quia mendaci parientem iuverat ore, ore parit nostrasque 
domos, ut et ante, frequentat.
² Lycophron, Alexandra, 1327-1328.
³ Epistle of Barnabas, 10.8.
the equivalent of the vulva. This perverts the obvious symbolism of the tale, that
the spoken word heard (ear) opens the way for delivery (mouth), the riddling
formula for a mystical revelation or Mystery initiation.

Pausanias mentioned the sanctuary that Heracles dedicated in his description
of the city in the second century CE. In view of the name of Milk-flower, it is
significant that the females who were impeding the opening of the birth channel
are not named as the goddess of birthing or her analogues, but, according to the
local Theban tradition reported by Pausanias, they were a sisterhood of
pharmaceutical sorceresses (Pharmacides) sent by Hera, and Galanthis/ Galinthias
may be one of them, since she is cited as a daughter of the legendary seer Tiresias,
perhaps the spiritual daughter as an initiate, since her name is not cited as the
Milk-flower Galanthis or Galinthias, but Historis, the ‘person who knows,’
cognate with ‘wisdom’ and hence ‘witch.’ In the Greek language, wisdom
etymologically results from the visionary experience of sight. Historis is the
equivalent of a Spanish sabia and curandera, a shaman. The Theban sanctuary had
a statue of her as Galanthis. Thus, the cat was personified as the sorceress Gale, a dealer in spells, whom
Hecate metamorphosed into a cat. The ‘cat’ (galée, galé) was named for its
fondness for ‘milk’ (gála, galaktos, cognate with Latin lac, lactis). The cat, even
in antiquity, was noted for the acuity of its vision, especially sight in the darkness
of night, and for its lustful estrus. ‘Cat’ was slang in Greek for a girl. As with the
canines (dog, fox, and wolf), the felines (panther, leopard, and lion), are all
versions of the various species of cat in mythical tradition, segregated merely into
stages in the evolution from wild to potentially domesticated home pets or
helpmates. Both the dog and the cat were less tamed in Classical antiquity and not
sentimentalized, but tolerated for their assistance, the dog as guardian and in
hunting, herding, and warfare, and the cat as a predator on rodents and snakes.
Isidore of Seville (seventh century CE) called it a ‘mouser’ (musio) and derived
‘cat’ from captus (‘caught’) or catus (‘acute’ sight). The cat was also called
ailouros in Greek, of uncertain etymology, but plausibly, at least as folk
etymology, derived from aiolos (‘fast-moving, nimble’) and oura (‘tail’).

The Greek cat was a Mustelidae (ferret, marten, or polecat, which includes
also skunk, mink, etc.). The modern domesticated cat (Felidae) evolved from a
Numidian breed, first appearing in the first century CE as catta and in Byzantine
Greek in the fourth century as katta, replacing Latin feles (of uncertain etymology)
in Europe by the eighth century, Modern Greek gata, derived from Berber
kaddiska. The domestication of the cat can be traced back to the eighth millennium
in Mesopotamia; and in Egypt, as animal incarnations of the goddess Bastet and

1 Thirteenth-century Aberdeen Bestiary, folio 23v.
2 Pausanias, 9.11.3.
4 Aelian (third century CE), On the Nature of Animals, 15.11.
5 Aristophanes, Wasps, 1185.
6 Isidore of Seville, Etymologies, 12.2.38.
her predecessor Mafdet, the cat was a beloved household pet and often afforded mummification or cremation, especially in the Temple complex of Bastet at Bubastis in the eastern Nile Delta. The cat was associated with fertility and motherhood. The Egyptian cat was the jungle cat (*Felis chaus*) and the African wild cat (*Felis silvestris libyca*), both of which bear resemblance to the modern domesticated felines. The Neolithic burial on Cyprus of a roughly eight-month-old cat (*Felis silvestris libyca*) with a human suggests a bonding, perhaps the sacrifice of the cat to accompany its human master in burial. The Egyptian cat was a prized item for smugglers, and whole armies were dispatched to repatriate them to Egypt.

**Herbalism.** After Alcmene’s delivery, the Milk-flower cat maiden as one of the sorceress sisters took the infant Heracles to Mount Cithaeron outside of Thebes and tricked Hera into nursing him. The sisterhoods of pharmaceutical herbalist Pharmacides were not unique to Thebes. At Athens, the North Wind Boreas abducted the maiden Orithyia, the legendary daughter of the autochthonous serpent-king Cecrops from a sisterhood of the same name. Sometimes they were named after the flower involved in their herbalist sorcery, like the Hyacinthides, the daughters of Erechtheus, the legendary Athenian serpent king, who was largely interchangeable with Erechthonius, the serpent-child of Hephaestus that Athena entrusted to the three daughters of the king to nurse. The Erechthonius serpent as her foster child was an element in the iconography of Athena as an Olympian goddess, depicted as a giant snake lurking behind her shield in her colossal chryselephantine cult statue erected within the fifth-century Parthenon Temple. The abduction of the maiden daughter of the supposed serpent king was a ritual of human sacrifice, the theme presented in the Temple’s bas-relief frieze encircling the cela. The prototypic exemplar of the motif was the abduction of Persephone by Hades from a sisterhood of flower-gathering sea nymphs when she plucked the narcotic *nárkissos* bloom, the etiological myth for the Eleusinian Mystery religion. The *pharmakós* designates the pharmaceutical herb and the *pharmakós* the offered victim. These sorceress women were performing a Dionysian ritual. They were versions of the maenads or bacchants. Among the metaphors that describe their ritual, the bacchants impersonated wet nurses

2 Plato, *Phaedrus*, 229c. Orithyia’s companion is named Pharamacea, obviously one of the Pharmacides sisterhood.
5 Homeric *Hymn to Demeter* (2).
(tithénai) of the infant deity.¹ The milk from their breasts, however, was not ordinary milk, but a divinizing potion.²

These metaphors represent the fantasies or ritual impersonations of root-cutters (rhizótomoi) or herb-gatherers. Thus, the emblem of their bacchanalian ritual was the thyrsus, the stalk of the giant fennel (Ferula communis), which was the symbolic container for the herbs gathered.³ It was also called the narthex, which has the obvious etymology (narco-thex) of a ‘narcotic repository.’ Nártex was used as the title of various compendia of herbal medicines in antiquity.⁴ The thyrsus-narthex is depicted as the magical tree on a Minoan golden signet ring from Mycenae,⁵ and identifiable, from similar depictions on the coinage of Cyrene, as the magical African plant known as silphium.⁶ As the container for the gathered herbs, silphium was variously identifiable export and eventually became a culinary spice, and the plant itself was thought to have become extinct from overuse.

The thyrsus was a staff of altered mystical vision and emblematic of the psychoactive and magical herbs it contained. Prime among these were mushrooms, specifically, the psychoactive Amanita muscaria or fly agaric mushroom and related species so frequently involved in the folkloric traditions of later Europe. In common Latin culinary nomenclature, the stipe of the mushroom was called its thyrsus.⁷ Thus, the mushroom itself was the prototype of the herb gatherer’s narthex, since the psychoactive toxins of the Amanita species are confined mainly to the rind of its cap, which represents the magical plants gathered into its receptive stalk, botanically termed its stipe or trunk, hence metaphorically a tree. In depictions and literary descriptions of the narthex, these plucked herbs are represented as ivy, bryony (wild squirting cucumber), and smilax (bindweed, wild morning glory), all involved in traditions of mind-altering potential and as berried vines resembling the grapevine, but toxic in their natural state, whereas the leaves and berries of grapevine are edible, but through the controlled fungal growth of fermentation capable of yielding a cultivated intoxicant, opposed to the natural toxicity of the wild vines.⁸ A Roman period Greek mythographer attributed the madness to their ‘grazing like animals’ (nemonto, the equivalent of Latin pascuntur) on ivy, smilax, and laurel.⁹

¹ Homer, Iliad, 6.132.
² Nonnus, Dionysiaca, 45.298-303: the milk is described as an ‘unfamiliar dew’ (anéthes eérse), something a three-year-old had never tasted from his mother.
³ Theophrastus, Historia plantarum, 9.16.2.
⁴ Galen, 12.398, 959; Aëtius 8.45.
⁵ Late-Minoan gold signet ring from Mycenae, Archaeological Museum, Athens, 992.
⁷ Apicius, De re culinaria, third-fourth-century CE Latin cookbook, 7.15.6.
⁹ Antoninus Liberalis, Metamorphoses, 10, on the daughters of Minyas: enémonto kissous kai milaka kai dáphnen (‘they grazed on ivy, smilax, and laurel’), whereupon they metamorphosed into an owl and a bat.
The plants atop the thyrsus can be replaced by a pinecone, an emblem of the god, but also suggestive of altered vision, since the pineal gland was so named for its resemblance to the pinecone and commonly considered the visionary organ of mystical transcendence.1

**Origin of the Milky Way.** As Hera suckled Heracles, he drank so voraciously that some of the milk scattered to the heavens, becoming the Milky Way or Galaxy.2 What fell to the earth sprouted as the lily (leírion).3 ‘Lily’ (Latin lilium) is derived from Egyptian hereret for ‘flower, blossom,’ perhaps Sanskrit halini. It can designate any of several species of herbaceous flowers which may or may not resemble the genus Lilium and which are not closely related to it or each other. In heraldry, it became the fleur-de-lis. The plant was ritually interchangeable as sacred to Hera with a flower in the carnation family (Caryophyllaceae), called astérion (Silene linifolia, ‘lily moonflower’)4 in Greek for its ‘star-shaped’ blossom, commonly called catchfly for its attraction to flies caught in its sticky stems. Dioscorides equated astérion with cannabis (descriptive of its seven-leaved frond).5 This may indicate a tradition of psychoactive associations, since Pausanias identifies the plant sacred to Hera as a ‘grassy herb’ (póa) from whose ‘leaves’ (phylloi, not flowers) are woven the chaplets or wreathes for the goddess. Presumably, he has seen the plant. It grew on the banks of the River Asterion near Mycenae. The three daughters of the River Asterion served as wet nurses for the infant Hera.6 As daughters of the river, their grandmother was presumably the Titaness Tethys, who is also cited as the wet nurse of Hera.7 Tethys is named, like the bacchant tithénai for her role as universal wet nurse and ‘grandmother’ (têthe) of men and beasts,8 and was depicted in vase paintings accompanied by the goddess of birthing. She was imagined as the primordial source of all moisture falling from the clouds and nourishing the rivers of the earth. Eventually she became the personification of the sea. Her mate was Ocean, the river of fresh water encircling the land mass of earth, and the source of all the waters of the aquifer that surfaced as rivers.

A gold signet ring from Cretan Isopata depicts a sisterhood of bare-breasted priestesses with the heads of bees, with the milk of their breasts flowing to the Galaxy, in a ritual of plant gathering that accesses a visionary experience, as indicated by the single disembodied eye and the epiphany of a deity floating in the

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2 Manilius (first century CE), *Astronomica*, 1.750-754; Pseudo-Eratosthenes, *Catasterismi*, 43-44.
5 Dioscorides (3.165) identifies the plant as cannabis and schoenostrophon (for its use as a fiber in making rope).
6 Pausanias, 2.17.2.
8 Orphic *Hymn*, 22 (to Thalassa).
The bee was thought to derive both the inspiring drink of honey and the toxins of its sting from the nectar of the flowers it visited. The toxins of serpents and plants were similarly analogous, the serpent acquiring its poison by ingesting toxic plants, and plants becoming poisonous by growing in proximity to serpents. Bees themselves were thought to hatch by parthenogenesis directly from flowers; or alternatively from the carcass of bovines, the cow and bull. They were called bougèneis, ‘bovine-born.’ Bees fed the eponymous founder of the brotherhood of prophetic shamans at Olympia, according to the myth, with the psychoactive honey of their stings amid a profusion of ion flowers, a plant (viola, violet) involved in the motif of the homonymous ıos for ‘arrow’ and ‘toxin.’ Three aged prophetic women known as the ‘three bees’ administered the Corycian Cave at Delphi, which was filled with the glow of honey and the buzzing of the swarming maenads. It was the three bees who taught Apollo the art of divination. The Apollonian Delphic prophetess, named the Pythia after the Python / Delphyne of the Cave, was called the ‘Delphic bee.’ The first oracular Temple at the site, back in the legendary past, was itself no more than a beehive. In Euripides’ Bacchae (405 BCE, performed posthumously), the maenads scratch the earth with their fingertips and milk flowed like a swarm of bees, while from the ivy leaves of the thyrsus dripped down streams of honey.

Four flowers in the depiction on the signet ring sprout from the ground, perhaps single lily blossoms, with extended stamens and pistil, or the catchfly or the nárkissos (sea daffodil, Pancratium maritimum) of Persephone’s abduction. A wavy line separating the priestesses from the goddess terminates in a celestial ‘heart-shaped’ ampule or vessel, as container for the elixir of the gathered plants or the lactation from their breasts. This may the earliest proto-Greek depiction, dateable to the mid second millennium, of the conjunction of the lilies with the milk of the Galaxy. A second, shorter wavy line flows from the breast of the central female on the ring, who is dancing directly above the largest of the four lilies depicted, four being also the number of the females in the dancing group, apart from the epiphany of the much smaller female in the heavens, spatially balancing the disembodied eye.

Minoan pitchers in the shape of a female whose breasts form the pouring spouts clearly were not intended as ordinary tableware, but represent an anthropomorphized chalice for a sacred potion, either consisting of milk or gold.
containing it as an ingredient, or identifying whatever its contents as the milk from
the breast of the goddess or her priestesses. Milk was often included as an
ingredient in magical potions consisting of herbs and toxins for the same
symbolism.

As the nursing female, Hera is enacting her bovine manifestation, preserved in
her ancient Minoan-era epithet as ‘Cow-face,’ boópis. As such, her Egyptian
analogue was Hathor as the wet nurse of Osiris. Hathor was usually depicted with
the head of a cow, ears of a cow, or as the celestial cow, astride the heavens, from
her mouth in the west to her hind quarters in the east, rebirthing at dawn the solar
disk that she devoured at its setting upon the western horizon, her body strewn
with the stars of the Galaxy. She could also carry a tray of celestial food upon her
head, as her udders flow with milk. She was frequently depicted nursing the
pharaoh with her divinizing milk.

Hathor the cow was interchangeable with Sekhmet and Bastet, depicted as
females with a lioness head. The Greeks called Bastet Ailouros or ‘Cat.’ Hathor in
drunken ecstasy could become Sekhmet, as the destructive opposite of her
nurturing persona. The well-known mid-second-millennium figurine of the snake-
goddess or priestess from Knossos has a cat perched atop her head,¹ and Minoan
frescos depict cats stalking birds.

Another account of the origin of the Galaxy claimed that the milk was Rhea’s,
the mother of Zeus. It flowed when she pressed to her breast the ‘stone’ that she
gave Cronus to eat, disguised in swaddling as her infant son.² The flowing milk
that nursed the stone was Rhea’s ruse to prove the authenticity of the stone
wrapped in swaddling as indeed the divine infant in disguise. The mythical
tradition of the Cretan birth of Zeus and his deifying nurture by the goat maiden
Amalthea is obviously dateable to the mid-second millennium BCE, the period of
the assimilation of immigrant Indo-European motifs into Minoan and
Mediterranean area religion, the same period as the Isopata ring. Almalthea is
derived etymologically from amalthei-ein (‘to nourish’); or from amáltaktos
(‘indomitable virgin’); or from amálg-ein (‘to milk’) with theia (‘divine’).³ By
some accounts Amalthea used her goat horn as a rhyton drinking vessel to nurse
the infant Zeus, filling it with herbs, like a thyrsus.

The herder’s observation of the effect of the plants grazed upon by the
notoriously indiscriminate goats was an indication of psychoactive potency; and
goats as satyrs represent the intoxicating revel in the primordial landscape of the
wilderness, before the evolution of the civilizing art of agriculture. The milk from
animals that graze upon psychoactive plants is psychoactive, as commemorated in
the Nordic tradition of the goat Heiðrun, that feeds on the foliage of the tree
Yggdrasill and from whose udders flows the mead for the deities.⁴ A poem of the

¹ Snake-goddess, Knossos, ca. 1600 BCE, Iraklion Museum, Crete.
² Pseudo-Hyginus, Atronomica, 2.43.
³ Hesychius.
⁴ Piper, A. 2013. The milk of the goat Heiðrun: an investigation into the sacramental use of
psychoactive milk and meat. In Rush, J. A. Ed. Entheogens and the Development of Culture: The
Greek Anthology describes the transfer of a serpent’s venom into the breast milk.1 Others claimed that the infant Zeus was fed by bees.2 Melissa, the ‘bee’ (a feminine personification of ‘honey’ or méli) was a sister of Amalthea, and she or bees directly suckled the infant.

Ritual of Adoption. A similar tale of Hera’s nursing of Heracles was told about Dionysus3 and Hermes,4 both like Heracles, deified bastard sons of Zeus. The suckling of these sons of Zeus represents an acknowledged ritual of adoption in Greek and Roman culture. Plutarch described it, as prescribed by the Delphic oracle, as the procedure required to reintegrate among the living a man presumed dead: he must put himself in the women’s hands, be washed and wrapped in swaddling, and then suck the breast, in the same manner as when he was newly born.5 Thus, his identity among the living was reestablished by being born anew. Diodorus Siculus similarly described Hera’s nursing as a mimesis of birthing her adopted son as an adult:6

Hera lay upon a bed, and drawing Heracles close to her body then let him fall through her garments to the ground, imitating in this way the actual birth; and this ceremony is observed to this day by the barbarians whenever they wish to adopt a son.

It is still practiced today as validation of artificial kinship, with the adult nursed by the tribal matron as a baby.7

In Nonnus’ account of Hera suckling the full-grown Dionysus, she first anointed his unconscious body with divine drops from her ‘pain-healing teat’ (akessiponos thelé), curing him of his sacred frenzy, admiring the radiant beauty of his manhood, comparing him to the handsomeness of her own son Ares. Only now in very late antiquity, does a poet mischievously play with the eroticism of a grown man suckling. She obviously is sexually attracted to him, jealous that she cannot consummate a union with him herself, although she hid her face in modesty. Then she bared her full body. Her breasts are full of ambrosia (ambrósiás pl’thousa thelé), the divine drink of the gods, and she ‘massaged’ them, ‘spouting a stream poured from her jealous breasts’ (thlibómenen blúzousa chúsín zelémoni mázoi). Her breast does not contain milk in this narration, but ambrosia as a

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1 Greek Anthology, 9.1, Polyaenus of Sardis (probably Julius Polyaenus, the sophist contemporary with Julius Caesar, who wrote three books of Parthian Hymns to Bacchus.
2 Diodorus Siculus, Library of History, 5.70.1.
3 Nonnus, Dionysiaca, 35.319-335.
4 Pseudo-Hyginus, Astronomica, 2.43. Martianus Capella (fifth century CE), De nuptiis Philologiae et Mercurii, 1.34.
5 Plutarch, Quaestiones Romanae, 5.
6 Diodorus Siculus, 4.39.2.
‘medicinal drug’ or akéśima. Thus, ambrosia is also the liquid of the Milky Way and its earthly botanical analogue as the lily.

In suckling someone else’s nursling, Hera is enacting her ornithological analogue as the cuckoo bird, which she bore traditionally upon her scepter, or ornamenting her throne. The scepter could also have the lily flower as its finial, sometimes ornamented with a floral motif to indicate its botanical reference. The two emblems recall the episodes of Hera’s adoptive divinizing role as wet nurse with the milk of the Galaxy. Cuckoos were recognized in antiquity as brood parasites, laying their eggs in the nest of another species, leaving the foster parents to hatch their young, which is the etymology of ‘cuckoldry.’ The cuckoo on Hera’s scepter is emblematic of her marital subservience to her wedded husband. Similarly, she was patroness of matrimony, the rite that subjugated her sexuality under the control of her wedded husband. When Zeus first courted Hera, he disguised himself as her pet cuckoo on Mount Thornax in the Argolid, which subsequently changed its name to Coccyygion or Cuckoo. There was a temple of Zeus Coccygius on its summit. On the adjacent Mount Pron was an ancient temple of Hera. Aristophanes in the *Birds* (414 BCE) made ‘Cloud-cuckoo-land’ (Nephelokokkugia) the fantasy primordial city of phallic bird-men that the comic heroes founded in antithesis to the realm of the Olympians.

The Lily-stone. The so-called Suckling Painter depicted Hera with an ample exposed breast nursing Heracles as an episode of herbalism with the lily equated to a ‘stone.’ The artist is named for the fourth-century lekythos vase from southern Italy, now in the collection of the British Museum. Depictions of upper class women nursing are rare in Greek art and were apparently avoided out of decorum. Ordinarily, wealthy wives employed wet nurses and attempted to avoid the development of ample breasts, which were considered aesthetically unsightly,

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1 Pausanias, 2.17.4: chryselephantine statue of Hera, seated on a throne, by Polycleitus, Temple of Hera, outside Mycenae. Hera enthroned, with cuckoo bird and lily scepter, Attic red-figure lekythos, attributed to the Brygos Painter, ca. 500-475 BCE, Rhode Island School of Design Museum, Providence, RI, inv. no. RISD 25.078, Beazley Archive no. 204109.
2 Return of Hephaestus to Olympus: Hephaestus, Dionysus, Satyriscus, Hebe, approaching Hera, unveiling herself, seated upon her cuckoo throne, Attic red-figure skyphos, ca. 430-420 BCE, attributed to the Kelophon Painter, Toledo Museum of Art, Toledo, OH, inv. no. 1982-88, Beazley Archive no. 11777.
3 Hera enthroned and Prometheus, Attic red-figure kylix from Vulci, Etruria, ca. 490-480, Louvre Museum, Paris, inv. no. 542, Beazley Archive no. 438, 133.
4 A pre-Greek word, documented as the name of the mother of Prometheus.
5 Pausanias, 8.27.17.
6 Pausanias, 2.36.1.
7 Squat bellied (28 cm / 11 ins height; 12.6 cm / 5 ins width) red-figure lekythos, with accessories of white and yellow, lekythos (oil-bottle), from Apulia (Southern Italy), 365-350 BCE, attributed to the Suckling Painter, British Museum, London, inv. no. 1846.0925.13. The lekythos is usually narrow bodied.
and comically obscene like gross erections on a male. The vase probably survived intact because it was sequestered in a tomb, and it can be expected to represent a scene of cultic significance for the deceased.

Heracles is unmistakably not an infant, but an adolescent. This is true of all other surviving depictions of this episode. He is never an infant, but a pubescent youth. On the lekythos, Heracles is nude, except for bracelets, shoulder strap, and anklets. He is making direct eye contact with the goddess. In front of the nursing Hera stands Athena, identified by her aegis goatskin, which she is not wearing as usual as a shawl, but draped over her extended arm, holding in her hand a large flower that she has plucked. The aegis was the goatskin of the suckling goat-maiden Amalthea. Athena holds the flower next to the suckling Heracles, equating the flower with the milk of the goddess, from which it presumably has sprouted and which she now has picked. It resembles the single trumpet-shaped blossom of a lily (lirion, krínon), as depicted on Minoan vases and frescos and the Isopatra ring, or the catchfly asterion.

Behind the seated Hera is the winged Iris, standing, the messenger goddess of the Olympians, probably signifying that this event fulfills the intention of Zeus. As messenger, Iris fulfills the same office as Hermes, but in her materialization as the rainbow, she visually signifies the linkage of the celestial and terrestrial realms. She holds a knobby staff, not a customary item of her iconography, but probably a depiction of the pruned olive club that will serve as the badge of Heracles’ heroism, wielded in the labors that will win him admittance as a deity among the Olympian family. It is the traditional motif of the entheogen transmuted into the olive as the paramount triumph of cultivation. She is looking down at Heracles’ mother Alcmene, who is seated and holding a victor’s wreath. Above her is a window, recalling the deceptive visit to her bedchamber, in which Zeus had

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1 He is an adolescent or pubescent full-grown youth on a Faliscan red-figure krater, Villa Giulia Museum, Rome, inv. no. 25191. He is similarly a full-grown beardless youth on four Etruscan mirrors: 1) ca. 400-375 BCE, Bologna, Museo Civico, inv. no. 107124: a beardless and nude Hercle, identified only by lion headgear and slender club, where he is the same age as his Etruscan twin Vile behind Uni, watching intently, his hand on her shoulder, Uni’s legs are spread, but draped by her dress; 2) from Vulci, ca. 400-350 BCE, Berlin, Staatliche Museen, inv. no. 7769: a beardless and nude Hercle, identified by club, sits crosswise in the lap of Uni, his genitals shielded by the cape thrown behind his back and over his groin, with Mean seated opposite (without throne) offering an olive chaplet, Turan, Tinia standing in central position, with Menrva, identified by aegis shawl and Gorgon head, behind Uni; Uni holds a drinking rhyton, indicating the intoxicating nature of her milk, and a wavy stream behind the head of Tinia depicts the Galaxy; the lily is indicated by a four-petal floret behind Menrva, duplicated twice flanking the head in the lower exergue and as buds along the stylized vine motif encircling the whole scene; the vine motif occurs also right and left within the central scene; 3) from Volterra, late fourth century BCE, Museo Archeologico Nazionale, Florence, discussed infra; 4) from Traquinia, Museo Archeologico Nazionale, Florence, discussed infra.


3 Ruck, *The Son Conceived in Drunkenness,* 169 et seq.
impersonated her husband Amphitryon. On the other side, behind Athena, is Aphrodite, seated high upon a rock and identified by jewelry and the mirror she holds. Below her is a myrtle tree, which was emblematic of the vulva. On a higher level appears Eros, wings spread and looking down at his mother, a wreath over his right shoulder, holding another wreath in his right hand and an embroidered tainia fillet or headband in his left. Like wreaths, the headband was an award of victory. A tainia was meant to be tied, and especially when wielded in the hand of Eros, it had erotic connotation of union, not only sexual, but metaphysical with a spiritual lover in another trans-dimensional realm. The eternal love of Eros and Psyche transmuted sexual bonding into transcendent spiritual redemption.

In a scene depicted with such detail, with different types of footwear, jewelry and items of clothing distinguished by style and ornamented with fabric design, it would be remiss not to notice four round objects on the ground, which is where a plant, like the lily that Athena has picked, could be expected to appear. They are not lilies. They are spherical like stones.

Celestial Circlet. A late fourth-century BCE Etruscan mirror from Volterra depicts Uni (Hera / Juno, i.e. [Y]uni) suckling Hercle (Heracles). Like the lekythos vases, mirrors were tomb dedications. The Etruscan mirrors were expensive objects indicative of a woman’s status in life, and beyond their use while living, they were placed in the tomb to transfer that status to the afterworld and often had depictions relevant to the preparation for immortality. They were also scrying devices. An Etruscan mirror depicts the embrace of a male and female, attended by a maid servant looking into a mirror, whose prophetic message, according to the Etruscan inscription, is interpreted by another female (perhaps a deceased relative) as cathreptomancy (katoptromanteía, ‘reflection divination’) as the future of the couple. Meditation upon images mirrored in a reflecting surface (psychomanteum) was a mode of divination and spiritual séance in antiquity, practiced at sites like the Necromanteion at Ephyra in northwestern Greece, situated at the confluence of the Rivers Acheron and Cocytus, which flowed from an entrance to the netherworld.

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1 Zeus with ladder as Amphitryon visiting Alcmene at window of her bedchamber, with burlesque Hermes carrying a lamp, bell-shaped krater from Paestum, Campania, ca. 360-330 BCE, attributed to Asteas, Vatican Museum, Gregorian Etruscan Museum, room 22, upper hemicycle.  
4 Etruscan mirror, from Volterra, late fourth century BCE, Uni (Hera) nursing the grown Heracle, Museo Archeologico Nazionale, Florence.  
On the mirror, Heracles is seen not as an infant nor an adolescent, but as a muscular and bearded adult man, leaning on his club as he suckles upon the teat that a very beautiful Uni has exposed and holds for him.\textsuperscript{1} Hercle was the first man to be elevated to divine status in Etruscan tradition and aristocratic males often identified with him. Uni sits on an elaborate throne, with footstool, suggesting that the locale is Olympus. The opulence of the accoutrements also indicates the wealthy status of Uni, and of the deceased lady in whose tomb the mirror was deposited. Marriage to a female of nobility and wealth in Etruscan society elevated her husband to her family’s aristocratic status. Etruscan women exercised considerable power and freedom, in contrast to the patriarchal customs of their Roman neighbors.\textsuperscript{2} The scene on the mirror is witnessed by Olympians (a nude Apollo / Apulu, identified by laurel chaplet and staff of branching laurel; two nude females, wearing elaborate necklaces; one, distinguished by the uncovered bridal veil, is probably Hebe (‘Eternal Youth’), who will become Heracles’ Olympian wife; and a very handsome and regally robed Zeus / Tinia (cognate with Zeus as Dios), identified by his scepter. It is a ritual of formal adoption into the celestial family, and labeled in Etruscan with a placard held by Tinia, that reads, perhaps: ‘This image shows how Hercle, Hera’s son, drank milk,’ or something similar, since Etruscan is only partially decipherable.\textsuperscript{3} Hebe, as the only legitimate daughter of Zeus, begotten from his lawful wife Hera, represents the Etruscan matriarchal tradition of inheritance through Uni as the female lineage. A bald and bearded satyr with a bizarrely disjointed neck reclines above them. The satyr appears to be drinking wine from a libation saucer as an analogue of the divine milk:\textsuperscript{4} or more probably he is using the saucer as a mirror for divination by lecanomancy (divination by inspection of a reflecting liquid in a ‘basin’ lekané), hence the presence of Apulu as prophetic deity, with the top of his psychoactive oracular laurel directly below the phiale libation saucer. A winged nude child on the handle of the mirror, wearing only a ring-circlet on a ribbon as necklace, is Epiur, holding an oval egg-like object in either hand as symbolic of rebirth or perhaps as sortes (lots) for divination. Epiur / Tages (Greek epiourou) was the guardian spirit of infants. As Tages, he was the little old baby-man who popped out of the ground in front of the plowman and taught the Etruscans the art of divination.\textsuperscript{5} Thus Epiur can be depicted with an adult face or indications of adult balding. He may be the son of Menrva (Minerva) and Hercle, hence an analogue of

\begin{flushleft}
\textsuperscript{3} \textit{Eca sren tva ichna hercle unial clan thra see.} The first word is cognate with Latin \textit{ecce} (‘behold’) and words five, six, and seven say ‘Hercle Uni’s son.’ Bonfante translates: ‘This image shows how Hercle, son of Uni, sucked milk.’
\textsuperscript{4} Compare the rhyton in Uni’s hand on the Etruscan mirror from Vulci, described \textit{supra.}
\textsuperscript{5} Ruck, C. A. P. 2017. \textit{The Great Gods of Samothrace and the Cult of the Little People.} Regent Press, Berkeley, 351 et seq.
\end{flushleft}
Erichthonios, Athena’s foster serpent child from the coitus interruptus with Hephaestus.

The figure of Tinia / Zeus on this mirror has sometimes been identified as Poseidon / Neptune based on his scepter, which could be interpreted as a trident, but the three tines of the fork are too small and the outer two are curled outward, making it not serviceable as a fishing prong. The central tine is flanked by two additional tines curled inward. The scepter’s finial is clearly a stylized lily, with central pistil and surrounding stamens. Thus, perhaps we should interpret the winged child as holding ‘stones’ instead of sortes and the circlet, worn as an ornament on his necklace, as emblematic of the circle formed by the Galaxy in the heavens.

_Lycanthropy._ A mirror from Tarquinia (ca. 300 BCE) depicts the scene of the suckling with the seated Uni attended by a woman standing behind and grasping her, who is perhaps supporting her as midwife, although Hercle is fully adult, but breadless, with a bizarrely drawn face, with what appears to be more like a snout than a nose, and supporting himself with his club. This is a scene of adoption through mimetic birthing. The lower drapery of Uni’s gown has been pulled up into her lap to suggest that Hercle has emerged from between her legs. Behind the midwife is a very tall flower, identifiable perhaps as the lily, complete with leaves, long stems, and two buds, very carefully drawn, although the figures of the personae are rather ineptly portrayed, especially the weird face of Hercle, who appears somewhat canine, making the presence of the carefully delineated lily more remarkable.

The winged female behind Hercle is perhaps Mean, Athena as the Victory goddess Nike, with proffered crown. Behind Hercle, directly beneath the proffered crown, is another circlet, much larger, like an oval shield, but it obvious belongs neither to Mean nor to Hercle, who traditionally doesn’t wield a shield in his feats of heroism. The circlet apparently is being carried in the talons of a small bird, perhaps a dove, above it. The dove may identify the winged goddess not as Mean, but Turan, the Etruscan equivalent of Venus. Her name is pre-Hellenic, cognate with tyrannos, as ‘mistress,’ and may be the Etruscan word for ‘dove’ or ‘swan.’ She was both mother and lover, and signified health and vitality, hence the equivalent of Hebe as Hercle’s bride on the mirror from Volterra. Turan, like Hebe, is the Etruscan empowering female for the male’s sovereignty.

The circlet, however, isn’t an empty ring; it is filled with three lateral wavy lines that identify it as the Milky Way. The circlet of the Milky Way carried in the talons of the dove on the left balances the lily on the right and is intended to equate the two items, in accordance with the description of the Galaxy as a somewhat

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1 Tarquinia, Museo Archeologico Nazionale, Florence.
circular figure or ‘ring’ among the constellations,¹ a ‘ring, although not perfect’
(deformatum, ‘deformed’),² or as depicted on the Etruscan mirror, oval shaped.

The weirdly lycanthropic snout of Hercle may have been the intention of the
artist. In the same manner, the uncharacteristic unmuscular body and arm of the
hero and the canine leg and foot were probably intentional. Etruscan artists
excelled in the depiction of humans, and mirrors were objects of considerable cost.
Herce, as the artist intended, is metamorphosing into a wolf, accessed via the
deifying milk from Uni’s breast and its equivalent, the oval circlet of the Galaxy
borne in the talons of the empowering dove. This is the significance of
Lycophron’s riddling bizarre reference to Hercules in this episode as a
theriomorphic ‘initiate beast’ (ther mystes).³

The lycanthropy of Heracles is the major motif in Euripides’ Heracles tragedy
(ca. 416 BCE).⁴ He has just fetched the infernal hound Cerberus from Hades. In
his absence, the ‘Wolf’ Lykos intends to kill Heracles’ family. Hercules intervenes
to rescue them, but at the critical moment, Lyssa, the goddess of madness,
commanded by Hera, drives her pack of hounds against him, infecting him with
the toxin of his own arrows, and he becomes mad. Thinking that he is performing
one more of his heroic labors, in a delusion of altered consciousness, he murders
his wife and children. He becomes the ‘Wolf.’ Lyssa, the agency for the delusion,
is named as the ‘She-wolf,’ the personification of rabidity, the madness that
regresses the domestication of the canines back to its lupine predecessor. She was
costumed with a wolf headgear, the fox pelt headdress of the Thracian maenads.
The toxin associated with Cerberus was Aconitum lycoctonum, commonly called
wolfs-bane, a plant of the Delphinium family, of which all species are toxic.
Heracles was costumed for the play with his traditional feline headgear, the
Nemean lion-skin, and a verse in the text suggests that Lykos, like Lyssa, had a
canine headdress. At the end of the tragedy, Heracles exits, not for his fiery
crascendence to Olympus, but for burial at Athens. Ovid associates wolf’s-bane
with a wife’s murder of her stepchildren.⁵

The Alexandra was ascribed to the third-century BCE tragedian Lycophron,⁶
although perhaps falsely. Lycophron was his adopted name. It means ‘with the
mind of a wolf,’ and it suggests that he had himself been a theriomorphic initiate
into the lycanthropic Mysteries in Southern Italy, the home of his so-called
adoptive father.

¹ Pseudo-Hyginus, Astronomica, 2.43: ostenditur circulus quidem in sideribus, candido colore,
 quem lacteum esse nonnulli dixerunt: ‘there is shown a certain ring amid the stars, white in color,
which everybody calls milky.’
² Pseudo-Hyginus, Astronomica, 2.43: circulum deformatum, quem supra demonstravimus: ‘a
deformed ring, as we mentioned above.’ Nos autem omnium corporum deformationem dicere
instituimus: ‘all of the stellar configurations, however, are deformations or approximations.’
³ Lycophron, Alexandra, 1327-1328.
⁵ Ovid, Metamorphoses, 1.147: lurida terribiles miscent aconita novercae.
⁶ The tenth-century Byzantine Suda encyclopedic lexicon (pseudonymously attributed to Suidas)
records the titles of twenty tragedies.
The lycanthropic metamorphosis would have special significance for the Etruscan / Romans. The mythical founders of Rome were sons of Mars, nursed as infants by a wolf, which suggests the cult of warrior lycanthropy, although some accounts rationalized her as a woman, ‘wolf’ (lupa) being slang for a prostitute. Her name was Acca Larentia or Larentina and by one account she was awarded as prize to the deified Heracles in a game of dice as a temple prostitute and locked in his temple. By this tradition, Heracles was the father of the twins. After he had slept with her, he advised her to marry the first man she met upon leaving the temple. This was a wealthy Etruscan, whose property she inherited and bequeathed to the Roman people.

Acca Larentia was the etiology for the Larentalia festival of the winter solstice, a celebration of the household lares, which is probably the etymology of Larentia’s name. It derives from Etruscan lar for ‘lord,’ cognate with Greek laos for ‘people, soldiery, folk.’ The lares were clad in a rustic dog-skin tunic, a garment that elicited antiquarian scholarly inquiry, and they were attended by dogs. The dog-skin implies the motif of werewolves and lycanthropy. The lares, probably influenced by Greek tradition, by the early Empire became paired as twins, like Romulus and Remus, and assimilated with the Dioskouroi twin sons of Zeus. The Dioskouroi could be represented by two posts, joined by one or two crossbeams, the ‘receptive’ dokana, which was carried into battle as the standard in front of the army, an iconic glyph of the household and equally receptive grave. It symbolized a brotherly love that spans this world and the other. The lares were always represented as small images, figurines, dancing like the Corybants, who attended Rhea’s birth of Zeus, on tiptoe, balanced on a single leg, with one arm raised holding a rhyton drinking horn, which suggests their involvement in the motif of psychoactive toxicity. Like the Dioskouroi, they were protectors of the household, and paired with the penates, who were similarly represented by figurines. The penates protected the innermost hidden parts of the household, the penetralia or pantry, where the figurines were stored in a cupboard, and this was given an occult significance as guardians of secret lore. Although later anthropomorphized as idealized young men, their earliest representations were ithyphallic, associating penetralia with ‘penetration.’

At the winter solstice celebration of the Larentia, the interdimensional barrier traditionally gapes open, allowing the little creatures from the other realm to roam

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1 The earliest account is Dionysius of Halicarnassus (first BCE), Roman Antiquities, 1.77-79, derived from the third-century BCE Quintus Fabius Pictor.
3 Livy, 1.4.7.
4 Plutarch, Questiones Romanae, 51; Ovid, Fasti, 5.129 et seq.
5 Ruck. The Great Gods of Samothrace, 30 et seq.
abroad. The Larentalia is comparable to the Balkan Greek *kallikanzaroi*, with the incursion of elfin figures, gremlins, fairies, and werewolves.⁴ The *kallikanzaroi* are cognate with the Turkish *karakondjolo*. For the Romans, the solstice gateway remained open until the February Lupercalia, the ‘Wolf’ Festival which was intended as the ritual purging of the incursion. February took its name as the month from the *februia*, thongs of goatskin wielded as whips in a revelry of mock flagellation around the Wolf Cave at the base of the Palatine Hill, commemorating the lupine breastfeeding of the founding brotherly twins and the goddess Rumina (a personification of the *rumis* or ‘breast’), who was patroness of nursing.

"Galaxy-stone." The word for ‘stone’ (*lás*, *láos*) offers a traditional pun with the word for ‘people’ (*laós*), documented as early as the Homeric tradition,² and demonstrated in the myth of Deucalion, who created people from the stones that were the bones of mother Earth.³ These are the primordial creatures, the ‘stones’ that sprouted as mushrooms after a fall of rain at Corinth.⁴

Here, tradition says, that in earliest times, human bodies sprang from fungi swollen with rain.

Theophrastus records that certain mushrooms sprouting near the sea petrify to stones with the heat of the sun.⁵ ‘Stone’ is a metaphor for mushroom as a folkloric motif, documented by a Byzantine commentator on the second-century BCE Nicander.⁶

As something sacred, mushrooms have no name, only metaphors. The paucity of metaphors reflects a taboo against profane use, shrouding them with phobias of lethal toxicity. Thus, in English there are only four words for the mushroom. It can be called a fungus, which is safe because it is a foreign and quasi-scientific assimilation from Latin, but fungus itself is a metaphor, cognate with the Greek *spongos* for ‘sponge,’ descriptive of the mushroom’s rapid fruiting, expanding as it absorbs the moisture of a rainfall. Transculturally, the genesis of mushrooms is attributed to the thunderbolt, encapsulating its celestial fire in the expanding wetness of matter.⁷ The sponge itself is interchangeable with an aquatic rock. The

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² Hesiod, *Catalogue of Women*, frag. 82 (Strabo, 7.322): ‘So out of stones moral men were made, and they were called people.’ Homer, *Iliad*, 24.611.
³ Ovid, *Metamorphoses*, 1.393-394: *magna parens terra est: lapides in corpore terrae ossa reor dicci* (‘Earth is the great parent; stones in Earth’s body I think are called bones’).
⁴ Ovid, *Metamorphoses*, 7.392-393: *hic aevo veteris mortalium primo corpora vulgarunt pluvialibus fungis.*
⁶ Scholia to Nicander, *Alexipharmaca*, 526. The note comments on Nicander: ‘For to different kinds of mushrooms different names have been assigned.’
blood from the decapitated head of the Gorgon Medusa fell to the ground as coral,\(^1\) which was so named in Greek as the ‘little pubescent girl’ (korállion), equating the blood with menses. It was pliant, but changed to the hardness of rock when submerged in water. Ovid’s extended narration of the event indicates that his audience understood his mythological reference. Pliny called it the Gorgon-stone.\(^2\)

The Gorgon Medusa herself was a zoomorphism of the mushroom, as depicted on a fourth-century BCE Greek vase,\(^3\) and substantiated by the local mythological tradition that Pausanias records about Mycenae, whose name (Mykenai) was given the etymology of the ‘Mushroom-sisterhood’ of the Gorgons.\(^4\) This is probably a verbal punning corruption of its pre-Indo-European name as the Minoan sisterhood of the Mekonai, the sisterhood of the poppy flower.\(^5\) The earliest record of the city’s name as m-w-k-i-n-u (Mukina) occurs in an inscription from the mortuary tomb of Pharaoh Amenhotep III, the father of Akhenaten, at Kom el-Hettân (1349 BCE). The opium capsule is often depicted in Minoan iconography as a knob on a stem, resembling a mushroom. The capsule also resembles the pomegranate, which often has a prominent elongated calyx, and when inverted presents the likeness of a mushroom. The bloody matrix of the pomegranate (which was called rhoie or ‘flux’) would suggest the menses of the coral, as well as any knob-shaped item,\(^6\) like the mykos.

The mushroom in English can also be called champignon, which is similarly distanced as foreign, assimilated from the French and naming it simply as something native to the ‘fields’ (champs), technically specific for the button mushroom (Agaricus bisporus) native to the grasslands, the commonly cultivated mushroom.

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\(^1\) Ovid, *Metamorphoses*, 4.735-752.
\(^2\) Pliny, *Natural History*, 37.56: gorgia nihil aliud est quam curalium. nominis causa, quod in duritiam lapidis mutatur emollitum in mari (‘Gorgonia-stone is nothing other than coral. The reason for the name is because when softened [emphasis added] in the sea [like a sponge] it turns into the hardness of stone.’).
\(^4\) Pausanias, 2.16.3. (Perseus) founded Mycenae. For on its site the hilt (mykos) fell from his sword, and he regarded this as a sign to found a city. [It is implausible that the hilt could detach itself from the sword.] I have also heard the following account. He was thirsty, and the thought occurred to him to pick up a mushroom (mykos) from the ground. Drinking with joy the water that flowed from it, he gave the place the name of Mycenae.’ The hilt of a sword was called its mykos because of its design. The mykos that fell off the hilt to the ground involves the common metaphor of the erect penis as a mykos (Archilochus, frag. 34 Diehl; cf. Hesychius, Herodian). When on the ground, it was a phallic mushroom. The two accounts are analogous versions of the same event. The spring that flowed from the plucked mykos is the horse Pegasus that emerged from the severed neck of the Gordon Medusa, hence the episode is an analogue of the decapitation-harvest scenario.
\(^6\) Herodotus, 7.41.
The term ‘toadstool’ is a folkloric metaphor identifying it as a stool for a

1 toad,1 which is frequently associated with the mushroom because of its secretion of psychoactive bufotoxins like the psilocin of *Psilocybe* mushrooms. The toxin in the psychoactive Amanitas is primarily muscimol (a GABA$_A$ receptor), not the same as psilocybin (which is like LSD, mescaline, and DMT). The toadstool is specifically a toxic mushroom, but commonly applied to all fungi as loathsome and dangerous. In Elizabethan folklore, the toad absorbed its venom by lurking under so-called stones.2 This is analogous to the ancient tradition that the toxin of serpents and plants is reciprocal, each deriving the toxin from the other.3 In French, the *Amanita muscaria* is called *crapaudin*, from the ‘toad’ (*crapaud*). The mushroom as a stool is transcultural, occurring in the effigy of the Aztec analogue of Dionysus as Xochipilli, seated upon a stool ornamented with glyphs for the psychoactive mushroom.4

The scientific myco-prefix as in ‘mycology’ is a Greek metaphor designating the mushroom as something mucous, repulsively slimy with bodily effluents like semen and menses.5 The Greek *amanites*6 (Modern Greek *manitari*, botanical Latin *amanita*) probably derives from the Amanus Mountains of modern Lebanon as a source of the ancient mushrooms.

The only common term as a mushroom is similarly a folkloric metaphor designating it as an onomatopoeic bovine zoomorphism, assimilated from the French *mousseron*, derived from Late Latin *musare*, ‘to bellow or moo,’ cognate with Greek *muá-ein*. The same root is responsible for the Greek *muía* (diminutive *muíska*) and Latin *musca* for the fly as onomatopoeically ‘buzzing.’ Mushrooms bellowed as they fruited from the earth.7 In the myth of Zeus and his courtship of the cow-maiden Io, the bellowing was the mooing of the cow in estrus, stung with the toxin of the cow-fly (*Tabanus bovinus*), which was called *oistros*, assimilated into English as estrus, the entomological ghostly metamorphosis of her former tender Argos, who wielded the cow-prod and whip of sexual arousal.8 The Latin version of the cow-prod is the *stimulus*, which Virgil employs in his description of Amata, the ‘beloved,’ whipped into estrus by the Fury Alecto with the toxins of Mycenae.9 The multiple eyes of the Argos Panoptes were placed in the tail of the

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2 Shakespeare, *Macbeth*, act 4, scene 1, verse 6-8: ‘Toad that under cold stone days and nights has thirty-one sweltered venom sleeping got.’
3 Supra, footnote 6.
6 Nicander, frag. 79.
peacock, whose feathered sexual display is triggered by the pheromone of its peahen, the iconic bird of Hera as wife of Zeus.\(^1\) The multiple ‘eyes’ of the herdsman and the stinging fly suggest the scabby white remnants of the shattered universal veil that adhere to the cap of the *Amanita muscaria* and related psychoactive species, an ‘eye’ being an appropriate metaphor for a mushroom that affords access to visionary experience. The cow-maiden in estrus pursued by her herdsman fly is an expression of this mushroom’s common association with the fly; hence its specific nomenclature as *muscaria*. Flies are attracted to this mushroom to lay their eggs in its cap, and within a few days, the mushroom is loathsome, crawling with larvae, but also emblematic of rebirth, since souls were commonly depicted as entomological manifestations, like bees and butterflies. This is probably the reference in the tradition of bees bred from the carcass of bovines. Folkloric tradition equates all flying insects with the same symbolism.\(^2\) The fly-agaric mushroom is naturally programmed with a scenario for initiatory rituals. It was commonly mixed with milk and employed as an insecticide attracting flies, who drowned in the galactic potion.\(^3\) Hence its name in French as *tue-mouche*.

Perhaps no plant masquerades more easily as a stone than the fungi (which have no leaves, branches, roots, or flower), for which the name is ‘stone’ in Hebrew (PTR). The evangelist Matthew’s account of the ordination of Simon with the new name of Peter (Greek *pétros*, ‘stone,’ *pétra*, ‘topographical rock’) as the rock entrusted with the keys of heaven\(^4\) puns upon the mushroom. The ancient key key was a knobbed bolt, presenting a likeness of a mushroom, opening the door to mystical experience.\(^5\) The Jewish name Simon designates ‘someone who listens,’ a suspiciously too apt name for the first apostle. His role as ‘head,’ Cephas (Greek *képhas*, *kephalé*), further puns upon Aramaic *kepha* for ‘stone,’ and the anthropomorphism of the mushroom as a harvested head, like the Gorgon Medusa.\(^6\) It should be remembered that the Gorgon head had the efficacy of petrification. The German *Pilz* for mushroom is derived from *Btilz*, an assimilation of the Latin *boletus* (Latin for ‘mushroom,’ cognate with Greek *bolítos*, a metaphor as ‘clod of earth, stone’), one of which *Pilze* is called *Steinpilz*, ‘stone-mushroom.’ The tradition of the ‘stone’ as the substance from which the deifying elixir is prepared is the fundamental motif of alchemy, termed the philosophers’ stone (*lapis philosophorum*), first mentioned by Zozimos of Egyptian Panopolis.

\(^1\) Ruck, *The Great Gods of Samothrace*, 136 et seq.
\(^3\) Albertus Magnus (thirteenth century), *De vegetalibus*, 2.6.87: *Tuber enim quod vocatur muscarum, venenosum est; et si lacti immisceatur, et si lacti immisceatur et muscae cadant super lac illud, gustantes ipsum, inflantur et moriuntur* (‘The mushroom that is called fly is poisonous and if it is mixed with milk and flies fall on that milk, they swell up and die’). This is the first mention of the fly-agaric in Europe.
\(^4\) Matthew, 16.18.
The ‘stone’ was edible. Drinking the elixir accessed enlightenment, gnosis, and the transcendent metamorphosis of the leaden soul to golden perfection.

Stones were thought to have magical powers. Gemology in antiquity was a compendium of traditional accounts, passed on without verification by each new author, and it often includes garbled information which derived from mythologized stones, which were not actual stones. The anonymous *Orphic Lithica* is a work of the fourth century CE. The narrative scenario that serves as introduction indicates that the compendium is Orphic. It records a tradition about a galaxy-stone, whose antiquity goes back to before the time of Pliny. It dissolves in the mouth, tastes like milk, and affects the mind, depriving it of memory, and comes from Egypt. The *Orphic Lithica* lists the galaxy-stone as second in the hierarchy of magical gems, after only the crystal, which had pride of place for its ability to focus the rays of the sun and ignite fire. The galaxy-stone was filled with ‘divine milk’ (*thespésios gála*) and had the property to alter even the mind of deity and bend it to one’s will. Some people called it *lethaion*, because it induced amnesia in both men and gods. *Letheion* suggests the Fountain of Lethe or ‘Forgetfulness,’ a river in the netherworld, of which Orphic initiates were instructed not to drink, however burning the thirst of their soul for the wetness of incarnation. ‘Truth’ was *a-letheia* or the negation of forgetfulness, remembrance, recognition, recollection of previous incarnations, gnosis, knowledge. In Virgil’s description of the river Lethe, which the author of the *Lithica* would well have known, innumerable souls fly about like bees, filling the grove with buzzing, as they settle into white lilies, harvesting their nectar, waiting for reincarnation, drinking of the stream’s milky juice of oblivion. The juice-nectar of the lily is confounded with the waters of the river and the simile of the bees presents the souls as the prototypic root cutters.

The galaxy-stone was filled with ichor, the fluid that flowed instead of blood in the veins of the immortal deities, which you could milk from it, as if it had udders, yielding a fluid just like milk in every respect. The white scabs of the *Amanita muscaria* are fantasied as udders of a cow. The galaxy-stone is a version of the Zoroastrian Persian *haoma* sacrament, which the Greeks knew as *[h]ómomi*, and it was associated with lycanthropy. Zoroaster was cited as the author of a

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2 Pliny, *Natural History*, 37.56.
3 *Orphic Lithica*, 191-203.
4 Vergil, *Aeneid*, 6.705-715: *floribus insidunt variis, et candida circum lilias funduntur* (‘they settle into various flowers and swarm around white lilies’). *Lethaei ad fluminis undam secures latices et longa oblivia potant* (‘at the water of the Lethe River, they drink its care-expelling fluid/ juice/ milk and long-lasting oblivion’). In the *Georgics* (4.387 et seq.), Lethe’s water is identified as the opium poppy.
5 Wilson, P. W. 1999. *Ploughing the Clouds: The Search for Irish Soma*. City Lights, San Francisco, 31: “*Púca* as a mushroom name also means “heifer’s pouch,” i.e., the udder of a young cow, perhaps a metaphor for the ruddy *Amanita* cap with its white ‘teats.’”
6 Plutarch, *De Iside et Osiride*, 46 (369d-f).
A compendium of gemology; several of the stones may masquerade as *haoma*. Pliny records one of these as much prized by the Magi, the *astriótes* [like the *astérian* catch-fly lily of Hera], so named as a ‘star’ apparently fallen from the Galaxy.\(^1\) The Avestan *haoma* is cognate with the Vedic Soma potion which was considered milk from the udders of the Celestial Cow of the Galaxy,\(^2\) and it is always concocted with cow milk, to implant this metaphor of lactation. It was churned into existence from a cosmic ocean of milk.\(^3\) In the hagiographic biography of Zoroaster, his father mixed the *haoma* with milk and shared the drink with his wife to conceive the legendary eponymous founder of the lineage of astrological priestly prophets who perpetuated the title of Zoroaster or ‘star-gazer’ and Magi.

The probable date of Zoroaster is the mid second millennium BCE, but since it was a priestly title, he often is placed in the eighth century. Among the ethnically marginalized Yezidi, the *Amanita muscaria* is still employed today as *haoma* in the cult of Mithras.\(^4\) The Hindu dietary prohibition against mushrooms was probably extended to include all bovines as taboo. The Buddha broke the taboo by consuming mushrooms in his last meal, prepared for him by a blacksmith, as he journeyed to the pre-appointed site of his Great Demise with his entourage of monks, who were forbidden to partake of the tabooed meal.\(^5\) Surely, a blacksmith as implausible chef implies an alchemical diet.

Toxins in the fodder upon which bovine animals graze could be expected to pass into the milk.\(^6\) The rhyme of *Hey Diddle Diddle* may have an antiquity of thousands of years going back to the cow maiden Io and before, telling the tale of the cow that jumped over the moon, while the feline cat fiddled and the little canine dog laughed.\(^7\) Cows don’t ordinarily dance. Cows avoid grazing around their cow-pies, hence precluding an inadvertent involvement with the common psilocybin mushrooms, but they seek out locoweed, which is so named for its toxic result upon them. Similarly, other toxic plants like nightshade are fodder for bovines and horses. Although *Amanita muscaria* is not common in fields, it does...

\(^{1}\) Pliny, *Natural History*, 37.45: *mirasque laudes eius in magicis artibus Zoroastren cecinisse produnt* (‘they cite that Zoroaster has sung miraculous praise of this stone for the arts of the Magi’). In this context, the ‘magicians’ can only refer to the Zoroastrian priesthood.


\(^{6}\) Piper, A. 2013. The milk of the goat Hei∂run.

\(^{7}\) Bois, G. J. C. 2010. *Jersey Folklore and Superstitions, Volume One: A Comparative Study with the Traditions of the Gulf of St. Malo (the Channel Islands, Normandy, and Brittany) with reference to World Mythologies*. AuthorHouse, Central Milton Keyes, 369 et seq.
grow on the fringes, bordered by suitable host trees. Cattle and horses, of course, once grazed in the forests.\textsuperscript{1}

The human breast itself could be likened to a spoked wheel, with the nipple as the felloe or central hub.\textsuperscript{2} The episode is a hallucinatory account of Zeus’s insemination of Semele as a serpent. The spoked wheel (Greek [w]ítus) is a glyph for the mushroom, depicting the radiating underside of its gilled cap. It is the etymology for the ‘vine’ (Latin vitis, as in ‘viticulture’) and of ‘wine’ (Greek [w]oínos).\textsuperscript{3} As an Indo-European word imported into vine-growing regions from their original northern homeland, where the climate is not suitable for the growing of grapes for fermentation, it must have been a word for their original ‘intoxicant,’ which was later applied for the intoxicant of wine as found in their new Mediterranean environment. This is an apt assimilation since the mushroom was termed a fermentation of earth,\textsuperscript{4} and the fungal yeasts manipulated in the process of fermentation were a civilizing taming of the wild, uncultivable mushroom. A circle with a central dot is a glyph for the mushroom in indigenous Mesoamerican cultures, as is the ‘wheel,’ as a means of shamanic, whirling, dizzying transcendence or transport. The seer Ezekiel received his call to prophecy amid a thunderstorm with the mushrooms fruiting as the wheels of the mekabah chariot throne of Yahweh.\textsuperscript{5}

Soma/\textit{haoma} is related etymologically to the Greek hú-ein, ‘rain,’ with the connotations of ‘squeezing’ out the water or juice, cognate in English with ‘suck’, as in suckling or the manipulation of the elongated teats of the udder of the celestial cow, analogous to the masturbation of the bull, with the male’s seminal ejaculate analogous to milk.\textsuperscript{6} The nymphs of Nysa nursed the infant Dionysus with the ‘milky juice’ (glagóessan...ikmáda) of their breasts,\textsuperscript{7} and they were transformed into the constellation of the Hyades,\textsuperscript{8} not pressing their nipples to his mouth, but as droplets of rain falling from the Galaxy as the baby lay supine upon his back gazing up upon the stars. The Hyades were supposedly named for the ‘rain’ (hú-ein), by the traditional etymology. By some accounts, the nursing occurred underground, with the infant hidden in a cave, a murky chamber, or a

\begin{thebibliography}{9}
\bibitem{2} Nonnus, \textit{Dionysiaca}, 7.331: ‘Then going under her bosom, it [Zeus courting Semele as a serpent] cinctured the spoked wheel’s felloe of her breasts.’
\bibitem{4} Nicander, \textit{Alexipharmaca}, 521; cf. 525 with scholia.
\bibitem{5} Ezekiel, 1.11-28. Ruck et al. \textit{The Apples of Apollo}, 210-211.
\bibitem{7} Nonnus, \textit{Dionysiaca}, 9.31.
\bibitem{8} Pseudo-Apollodorus, \textit{Bibliotheke}, 3.4.3; Pherecydes, scholia to Homer, \textit{Iliad}, 18.486; Pseudo-Hyginus, \textit{Astronomica}, 2.21; Scholia to Germanicus, \textit{Aratea}.
\end{thebibliography}
cellar. This suggests the metaphor of a spongy fungus awaiting the rainfall for the incarnation of the celestial fiery spirit from the lightning’s bolt that traditionally is the generative cause for the fruiting of the mushroom. It was this incarnation that allowed the bacchants to draw milk from clods of earth or from rock as from living breasts. There was, however, another meaning to the name of the Hyades. The Hyades were also called Suculae or ‘suckling piglets’ in Latin, which is the more plausible etymology for their Greek name, from hys for ‘pig.’ The significance of the pig is its association with the Goddess, being an obscene metaphor for the female genitals, suggested by the boar’s arousal by the pheromone of a woman in estrus. Thus, the Gorgon Medusa had porcine attributes—the nose, ears, and tusks of a sow, and the sorceress Circe turned men into boars, for which the antidote was moly, or ἱόμομι. As the délphax, the pig is named like the dolphin for the ‘womb,’ cognate with French Dauphin. Another account of the origin of the Galaxy claimed that the milk was Rhea’s (Latin Ops), the mother of Zeus. She is named, like the rhoie pomegranate, for the menstrual flux. The milk flowed to the Galaxy as she pressed to her breast the ‘stone’ that she gave Cronus to eat, disguised in swaddling as her infant in a mimesis of nursing. The flowing milk that nursed the stone was Rhea’s ruse to prove the authenticity of the stone as indeed the divine infant in disguise. Some claimed that the deception took place on the Arcadian Wolf Mountain Lykaios. Apart from the ruse of the stone, she didn’t nurse the infant herself, but entrusted him to the ‘Nurturing Goddess’ Amalthea, who was either a goat-herder or herself a goat. Amalthea’s goatskin became the aegis, hence connecting her to the goat-goddess Pallas and the former displaced persona of Athena. By one account, Zeus was fed on ambrosia that doves brought him in the Cave on Crete and on nectar delivered by an eagle.

Doves were primarily associated with Aphrodite, who was born, in the Hesiodic tradition, the generation before Zeus. The bird designated as a dove, however, was more like the carrier pigeon (Columba livia domestica), an angel.

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1 Homeric Hymn to Dionysus (26), 6: in a fragrant cave. Nonnus, Dionysiaca, 9.65: in a gloomy house. Nonnus, Dionysiaca, 14.151: in a dark cellar as the baby called daddy to the skies. Greek houses did not ordinarily have cellars.
2 Euripides, Bacchae, 708-710; Philostratus, Elder, Imagines, 1.14; Nonnus, Dionysiaca, 45.309-310.
3 This etymology accounts for the quantity of the upsilon as long, as in ‘pig.’ Ruck, The Great Gods of Samothrace, 394-395.
5 Ruck, Dionysius in Thrace, 140-141.
6 Pseudo-Hyginus, Astronomica, 2.43.
7 Pausanias, 8.36.3.
8 From amaltheinein, ‘to nourish’ (Hesychius); or amálthaktos, ‘hard, indomitable’; alternative name as Adamantheia, ‘indomitable virgin’; or amél-g-ein, ‘to milk, suck,’ with theia, ‘divine.’
9 Moero (or Myro, Muró), Hellenistic female epic poet from Byzantium, Mnemosyne (telling the story of the childhood of Zeus), frag 1.3-6, Powel, Collectanea Alexandrina, Oxford, 1925, preserved in Athenaeus.
entrusted with delivering messages across the inter-dimensional barrier.\textsuperscript{1} The doves were anthropomorphized as the sisterhood of the Pleiades, cited as wet nurses of the god Dionysus. They are named for their ‘filled breasts’ (\textit{plé-ein}, ‘fill’) but given a new etymology for their celestial function as guides for ‘sailing’ (\textit{plé-ein}, ‘sail’). It is such a dove bearing the circlet filled with the Milky Way, the ambrosial milk that flowed to the Galaxy from the breast of Rhea-Ops in her ruse with the ‘stone,’ that is depicted on the Etruscan mirror, and its earthy equivalent as the lily. Doves delivered ambrosia daily to the Olympians through the dangerous narrow passageway of the Symplegades; in this version of the motif, the ambrosia was identified as the Golden Apple of the tree in the Garden of the Hesperides.\textsuperscript{2} When Perseus, harvested the head of the Gorgon Medusa there, the apple that he picked from the tree was identified as a mushroom.\textsuperscript{3} The \textit{kibisis} that Perseus traditionally employs slung across his arm to receive the harvested Medusa head is still used today as the receptacle for plucked fruits like the apple.\textsuperscript{4} As such, it has the same significance as the thyrsus-narthex. The Apple of Discord that led to the Judgment of Paris came from this same tree in the Hesperides garden.\textsuperscript{5} This is not a trivial coincidence, but identifies the \textit{casus belli} as the motif of the transmutation of the primordial entheogen. The War at Troy was the final attempt to subjugate the female into the male dominance of matrimony and to incorporate Apollo into the evolving realm of Zeus.\textsuperscript{6} Since the mushroom is named as a mooing-bellowing bovine zoomorphism, its association with the divine milk of celestial cows was inevitable.

The stone of Rhea-Ops’ deception was preserved at Delphi as the sacred omphalos,\textsuperscript{7} and its fungal implication is suggested by the tradition that Metis conspired with Rhea in concocting the ‘drug’ (\textit{phármakon}) that was the emetic potion that the adult Zeus gave to Cronus to cause the regurgitation first of the stone and then of his ingested children.\textsuperscript{8} When they emerged in the vomit of the emetic potion, they had been alchemically digested along with the ingested stone and had been transcended to their new personae as the nuclear brothers and sisters of the Olympian family (Hera, Demeter, Hestia, Poseidon), and their netherworld brother Hades. Zeus swallowed Metis when she metamorphosed into the cow-fly

\textsuperscript{1} Blechman, A. 2007. \textit{Pigeons: The Fascinating Saga of the World’s Most Revered and Reviled Species}. University of Queensland Press, Saint Lucia, Queensland; Levi, W. 1977. \textit{The Pigeon}. Levi Publishing Co., Inc., Sumter, SC. Carrier pigeons occur in the third-millennium BCE Mesopotamian epic of \textit{Gilgamesh}. In the sixth century BCE, the Persian Cyrus employed them as war pigeons. The Greeks used the pigeons to convey the results of the Olympic Games between cities; and Julius Caesar employed them in his conquest of Gaul.

\textsuperscript{2} Homer, \textit{Odyssey}, 12.63-64.

\textsuperscript{3} Fourth-century BCE amphora, Berlin, inv. no. F. 3022, discussed \textit{supra}.

\textsuperscript{4} Alcaeus (ca. 600 BCE), frag. 255 Campbell; Ruck. \textit{Dionysus in Thrace}, 151-152.

\textsuperscript{5} Coluthus of Egyptian Lycopolis (fifth century CE), \textit{Rape of Helen}, 59.


\textsuperscript{7} Hesiod, \textit{Theogony}, 498-500.

\textsuperscript{8} Pseudo-Apollodorus, \textit{Bibliotheke}, 1.2.1. Hesiod, \textit{Theogony}, 493 et seq., attributes the stratagem only to Gaia.
as they were engaged in sexual concourse to beget his motherless daughter Athena.¹

Metis was equated with the primordial deity Phanes or ‘Revelation’ in Orphic theology.² Phanes was depicted emerging from the cosmic egg or stone, pushing apart the two halves of the broken shell. He was equated with the Zoroastrian Mithras, who was born from a rock.³ The configuration of the split eggshell-stone with the intervening stipe is dumbbell-shaped. It encodes the fungal identity of the twin Dioskouroi, the antithetical sons of Zeus. In the riddling language of the Mystery tradition, it was the plant that Medea harvested to prepare Jason (Iason) for the anointment that rarified the significance of his name as the man of the ἴος arrow-toxin motif. The plant sprouted from the ichor of the liver of the tormented Prometheus, upon which the eagle daily fed. It was a cubit tall, like the crocus of the Corycian wolf-cave on Mount Parnassos, the same crocus that was the botanical manifestation of Apollo when he begot the Athenian hero Ion, the eponymous founder of the Ionian tribal group of the Greeks. Ion’s name is another exemplar of the arrow-toxin motif. The plant grew from the earth with a twin stem, descriptive of no plant other than the Amanitas and similar mushrooms, with the lengthening stipe-stem pushing apart, in both directions, splitting the stone ovum into the opposing globular base and cap.⁴ The Dioskouroi wore the split red half eggshells as their iconographic caps. They were similarly depicted as such a dumbbell configuration in their aniconic representation as the δόκανα posts.⁵ The liver was considered the microcosmic analogue of the cosmos in hepatoscopy (divination of a haruspex by inspection of the liver). It is also the organ of the human physiology that filters toxins and contained the highest concentration of ingested poisons. The eagle of Prometheus that feasted daily upon its ichor identifies it as eagle fare, food of the thunderbird, a metaphor like raven’s bread,⁶ identifying the psychoactive Amanitas. Thus, the tradition of the eagle that fed nectar to the infant Zeus, comparable to the doves that delivered ambrosia.

Rhea’s allies in protecting the infant Zeus were the Curetes, who were ‘sowed’ like mushrooms from a heavy fall of rain.⁷ They were analogues of the Dioskouroi, the Corybants, and the dactyls. The Idaean dactyl (tiny ithyphallic creature) named Celmis was a little devoted playmate of the infant Zeus and was

¹ Hesiod, Theogony, 886, with scholiast; Ruck, The Great Gods of Samothrace, 149; Ruck. Dionysus in Thrace, 156 et seq.
³ Ruck et al. Mushrooms, Myth, and Mithras, 52 et seq.
⁴ Ruck: The Great Gods of Samothrace, 367 et seq.
⁵ Ruck et al. The Apples of Apollo, 122 et seq.
⁷ Ovid, Metamorphoses, 4.282: largoque satus Curetes ab imbri (‘or the Curetes sown by a great rainfall’).
turned into adamant,¹ often taken to be a diamond as the hardest rock, but here a lump of iron. Kelmis is named as the ‘driver’ (kèle-sthai) of the castling, liquid metal poured into a mold, the job of a technician in metallurgy, indicating his identity as one of the tiny creatures like the Kabeiroi who assisted Hephaestus in the alchemical forge. His brothers were Damnameneus (the ‘hammer’) and Acmon (the ‘anvil’).² Kelmis allegedly offended the great Mother in some never specified way, and his brothers confined him deep within Mount Ida, where he metamorphosed into iron. Kelmis figured in the proverb: ‘Kelmis in iron’ for an obdurate person.

Ovid mentions Celmis (Kelmis) very briefly in a rhetorical praeteritio (occultatio) or catalogue of topics to be omitted from discussion, along with the rainfall-sown Curetes (and the ‘small’ (parvo) botanical metamorphoses of Crocus and Smilax), challenging his reader to know the forbidden Mystery tradition of the little people. These creatures are fungal anthropomorphisms.³ They materialized as Rhea or her analogues dug her fingers into the ground in travail for the parturition of Zeus. Thus, they occur in multiples of five for her dactyls, or three for the trinity of her divine sisterhoods. The pose digging into the earth as root cutter suggests their botanical personae. As a gemstone, the adamant protected against all toxins. It was the castling metal of which the pruning hook of Perseus was constructed for the decapitation of the Gorgon head,⁴ and the sickle that castrated Ouranos.⁵ Only something of the same efficacy as the Gorgon head or the celestial genitals would have the power to counter the nature of the pruned head or the harvested celestial mycological phallus, as antitoxin counters toxin. It was also the metal of the chains that bound Prometheus.⁶

It became associated with the lodestone, the mineral magnetite. Iron rings were souvenirs of initiation into the Mystery of Samothrace, as commemoration of the links broken from the chains of the prisoners released from the Cave of Plato’s delusional reality, like iron rings bound to the adamantine force of the magnet.⁷ The magnet was analogous to the electrostatic attraction of amber,⁸ a stone which is the petrified exudation of trees. All mushrooms were such petrified arboreal exudations.⁹

According to the Orphic Lithica, the galaxy-stone could rouse the herd to estrus and assured a copious lactation for the animal’s nurslings. It could also be

¹ Ovid, Metamorphoses, 4.281-282: te quoque, nunc adamas, quondam fidissime parvo, Celmi, Iovi (‘and you [I won’t mention], now adamant, O Celmis, formerly most devoted to little Jove’).
² Homer, The Idaean Dactyls, frag 1. (from Clement, Stromateis, 1.16.75); anonymous Phoronis (early Greek epic), frag. 2 (cited in Zenobius, 4.80); Sophocles, frag. 335 Nauck⁶, from the satyr play Knops.
³ Ruck. The Great Gods of Samothrace.
⁴ Pseudo-Apollodorus, Bibliotheca, 2.4.2.
⁵ Hesiod, Theogony, 161.
⁶ Aeschylus, Prometheus, 6.
⁷ Ruck. The Great Gods of Samothrace, 61-69, 255 et seq.
⁸ Ruck. The Great Gods of Samothrace, 60 et seq.
⁹ Pliny, Natural History, 22.96.1: origo non nisi ex pituita arborum (‘no source except from the pitch of trees’).
mixed with honey and administered as a potion to a human mother, affording a milk that would ‘intoxicate’ (*methúonta*) the suckling child.\(^1\) Women customarily hung talismanic engraved stones between their breasts to assure a plentiful supply of milk.

*The lily-mushroom of Ixion’s torment.* An Etruscan mirror explicitly depicts the lily as an analogue of the mushroom. It portrays Ixion bound to the spoked solar wheel, flying in shamanic torment, with a bizarrely-drawn ‘flower’ at his feet.\(^2\) Again, in view of the beautifully exact engraving of the mirror’s subject, the ineptness of the flower’s depiction would have displeased the artist’s patron, were it not intentional, like the lupine snout on the suckling Hercle. Cook, in his discussion of the mirror, dismissed the ‘flower’ as a meaningless design.\(^3\) The left bottom of the mirror is lost, but presumably it would have had another version of the ‘flower,’ either identical or perhaps as a clue or comment on the extant ‘meaningless design.’

Ixion at a banquet with the Olympians upon their magical foods of ambrosia and nectar\(^4\) tried to rape Hera, but was misled by a hallucinatory look-alike in the persona of the lady Cloud (*Nephéle*).\(^5\) Hallucinatory erotic-ecstatic experience at a a divine dinner upon ambrosia and nectar surely implicates the role of an entheogen. In a comparable tradition, Hera created a Cloud version of Helen,\(^6\) who who was the delusory image for whom the Greeks fought at Troy, while the real Helen spent the interim of the war in Egypt learning the lore of drugs.\(^7\) The union of Ixion with Cloud resulted in the tribe of centaurs, who sprouted from a rainfall upon the slopes of Mount Pelion,\(^8\) the mountain ridge that borders the northern edge of the plain of Thessaly, claimed in antiquity along with the Peloponnesus, as one of the original homelands of the Etruscan people.\(^9\) Aristophanes staged a chorus of *Clouds* in his parody of Socratic teaching (423 BCE), identifying the phallus that was their obligatory costuming for the comic stage as their noses, as they inhaled the nebulous smoke of cannabis that allowed them to get high.\(^10\) Aeschylus may have staged the Cloud ladies in his *Prometheus* tragedy (ca. 480s

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\(^1\) *Orphic Lithica*, 197-203.
\(^2\) Ixion, bound to the spoked wheel, *ca. 460-450 BCE*, British Museum, inv. no. GR 1900 6-11.3.
\(^6\) Euripides, *Helen*, 34: ‘synthesizing a breathing image copy of me out of the sky.’
\(^7\) Homer, *Odyssey*, 4.226-232.
\(^8\) Diodorus Siculus, 4.12.5.
\(^9\) Hellanicus of Lesbos (fifth century BCE), *Phoronis* (genealogical notices of events from the times of Phoroneus, primordial king of the Peloponnesus), frag. 76.
to 430 BCE, perhaps pseudo-Aeschylus) as a chorus of air-borne Oceanids weeping for the tormented Titan.

As punishment for his misled delusional rape of Hera, Ixion was bound spread-eagled (or in running-man position1) to a whirling wheel of fire. Ixion was named as the ‘mistletoe’ (Viscum album2), which in English is derived as the ‘urine-twig,’3 cognate with ‘micturition.’ He is depicted on an Apulian amphora, bound to his fiery wheel, while Hephaestus with hammer on one side leans upon a tree sprouting the twigs of mistletoe and an Erinyes on the other sets the wheel whirling.4 Erinyes traditionally afflicted their victims with maddening toxins.5 The scene is witnessed by an enthroned Zeus and the rainbow Iris, who is a thematic doublet for the rainy lady Cloud. The botanical persona of Ixion as the urine-twig mistletoe refers to the sanctity of the Amanita muscaria and its potentiated metabolite in urine among the Druids. The motif extends even to the supposedly poisonous urine of toads.6 The toad’s lascivious eroticism made it a common metaphor for the vulva.7 It was often represented with its hind legs spread wide apart to expose its genitals. Exemplars of the goddess from early Europe depict her as a toad, painted red, with scabby toxin-secreting warts on her skin,8 the total configuration identifiable as the distinctive cap of the Amanita muscaria. As the toad Phryne, it was an epithet of Aphrodite.9

The mistletoe and the mushroom are similar parasitic dependents upon the oak as its fruit, both engendered supposedly by the fall of the thunderbolt. They thus both represent the incarnation of celestial fire, fittingly so in the persona of Ixion since he was a son of the ‘flaming’ Phlegyas, a primordial pre-Olympian manifestation of the solar Apollo.10 The whirling wheel of fire represents the Druidic rite of human immolation in a large cage of wickerwork.11 It was a rite that Ixion had first inaugurated himself, pushing his father-in-law, a dinner guest, into a bed of burning wooden coals.

The spoked wheel of Ixion’s torment is a demonstrable image of the gilled underside of the mushroom’s cap as a spoked wheel. From Ixion was descended

1 Kylix, ca. 500 BCE: Ixion, bound to his wheel in running position, Museum of the History of Art, Geneva, inv. no. 5728.
2 Greek ὑσία, ὕξος.
4 Saint Petersburg, Hermitage Museum, printed as fig. 146 in Cook, Zeus.
5 Vergil, Aeneid, 7.346 et seq.
7 Hieronymus Bosch, Seven Deadly Sins, Prado, Madrid: superbia with toad over vulva. Wasson. The Wondrous Mushroom, 184 et seq.
10 Ruck et al. The Apples of Apollo, 15-16. Phlegyas was a primordial king of Thessaly and father of Apollo’s lover Coronis, the mother of Asclepius.
11 Caesar, Gallic Wars, 6.16.
the race of centaurs, whose leader Cheiron possessed vast herbal knowledge, which he taught traditionally to the heroes entrusted to his tutelage as the poison-arrow motif of toxic archery. The list of known students of the great centaur suggests that the basic toxin of his herbal lore was fungal, like the tradition of the origin of the whole race of centaurs. The Gorgon Medusa, among her other zoomorphic materializations, was a centaur. By his wife Dia, Ixion was the father of Peirithoös (Pirithous), sometimes depicted as a centaur. Dia has a name that designates her as a homonymous bride of Zeus-Dios, and hence she is a mythical doublet of the married Hera as the deceptive lady Cloud. Peirithoös was the bridegroom at the marriage feast of Hippodameia, the ‘horse-dominant’ female who is a doublet of the Gorgon Medusa. It was for a projected marriage to a Hippodameia that Perseus was sent to harvest the Gorgon head. A third Hippodameia was the abducted bride of Pelops in the foundation myth of the sanctuary of Olympia.

The centaurs, as a race of creatures that sprouted from a mountain rainfall and as a tribe of primordial men known as the Lapiths are an equine zoomorphism of the same mushroom motif that yielded the Gorgon Medusa and the bovine anthropomorphism of the cow maiden Io. Io was cited as the sister of the mushroom maiden Mykene, after which the citadel was renamed Mycenae. The Lapiths are named as a primordial race of stones, ‘sons of the rock.’ It is perhaps significant that if Hephaestus is not the deity who provides the wheel for Ixion’s torment, the spoked wheel is presented by Athena in her role of Metis-Medusa analogue.

The curiously ineptly depicted ‘flower’ on the Etruscan Ixion mirror was identified by Robert Graves as a mushroom. He suggested that it was the food of

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1 Ruck et al. The Apples of Apollo: 89-92.
2 The following are cited as students of Cheiron: Achilles and his cousin Patroclus, Actaeon, Ajax, Aristeus, Asclepius, Caeneus, Heracles, Jason, Medus (Medea’s son), Oileus (an Argonaut), Phoenix, Peleus, Perseus, Telamon, and Theseus. A didactic compendium titled The Precepts of Cheiron was attributed to Hesiod.
3 The earliest depiction of the Medusa: large relief pithos from Thebes, ca. 670 BCE, Musée du Louvre, Paris, inv. no. CA 795.
4 Peirithoös as a centaur kissing the hand of his bride Hippodameia, Roman wall fresco, Pompeii, Naples Museum, inv. no. 9044.
5 Ruck. The Son Conceived in Drunkenness, 28 et seq.
6 Latin lapis, ‘stone,’ cognate with Greek lepas, ‘topographical rock,’ like petra. The patronymic – id suffix in Greek designates ‘child of.’ In Michelangelo’s Battle of the Centaurs (ca. 1492), the centaurs fight with stones, reflecting the artist’s etymology of the Lapiths. Scigliano, E. 2005. Michelangelo’s Mountain: The Quest for Perfection in the Marble Quarries of Carrara. Simon and Schuster, New York, 43. The opponents of Theseus traditionally fight with stones against him as the antithetical motif of his name, as either under or bound to a stone or placing a stone as burial marker.
7 Ares and Hermes apprehend Ixion, before an enthroned Hera, with Athena providing the wheel, Attic red-figure kantharos (Dionysian drinking cup), attributed to the Amphitrite painter, British Museum, London, inv. no. London E155, Beazley archive no. 212127.
centaurs, that they embodied the animism of the psychoactive mushroom.\(^1\) Wasson had earlier accepted ("he is surely right") and presented Graves' identification in *Mushrooms, Russia, and History.*\(^2\) The bizarreness of the depiction, as Wasson reasoned, was its likeness to the fire-drill, the stipe representing the penis, called 'mushroom' in Greek, as a stick, drilling into the cap as vulva, with the crosshatching lines on the underside of the cap designating the radiating gills as the teeth of the 'comb' of the loom, the vulva as a sacred image, comparable to the male member as phallus. Mushrooms were employed as tinder for the generation of fire as a sexual union. The 'female agaricke' was the white shelf-fungus *Fomes officinalis* (sweet to the taste at first, but then bitter, a cynical condemnation of womanhood), supposedly veined like a comb, representing the white underside of the Amanita; and the 'male agaricke' was the *Fomes fomentarius* or *Fomes ignarius*, long, brown-reddish, sticky (with semen), hard, and heavy. The fire-drill makes Ixion an analogous tradition to Prometheus' theft of fire. Prometheus stole it as a 'flower' (*ánthos*) from Hephaestus, and that deity is also the one who chained the Titan to the rock of his torment.\(^3\) The fire-drill was invented by Hermes.\(^4\)

The *Fomes fomentarius* has a long history back into Paleolithic times as the tinder for the spark engendered by the fire-drill. It is a shelf fungus growing like steps upward on the trunk of the cosmic tree, resembling the hooves of the magical steed that would afford the mystical transport of transcendence, like Pegasus, the horse of Perseus. Significantly, Prometheus hid his stolen fire in the narthex or bacchant wand, that served as receptacle for the plants gathered in the Dionysian ritual. Other fungi like the puffballs were used to shelter the smoldering embers for transport from hearth to hearth. The explosive fruiting of the puffballs, releasing their storehouse of spores, was suggestive of spiritual release. A tenth-century Byzantine codex of Dioscorides illustrates the agaric with an image that bears no resemblance to the *Fomes officinalis*, apparently by an illustrator with no knowledge of the mushroom, but learned in the tradition of the supposed male and female kinds of agaric, or perhaps merely copying a more ancient manuscript. In 1491, the earliest printed book with a delineation of the agaric depicts it with roots, branches, and a foliaged cap.

The depiction of the 'flower' on the Etruscan mirror has not only deformed the mushroom to illustrate its sexual imagery as a fire-drill, but it has endowed it with an anomalous stem supporting a calyx widening into a trumpet-shaped blossom. The mushroom is morphing into a lily. One such lily is notoriously psychoactive, the Datura, and like the mushroom that was food for centaurs, it bore the folkloric name in Greek as 'horse-mad' (*hippománes*). Ajax 'harvested' it as the cause of the delusionary madness that led him to slaughter herds, thinking

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2. Wasson and Wasson. *Mushrooms, Russia, and History,* 116 et seq.
that they were men. This lily with the name as dirkaion / kirkaiion was also involved in the motif of lycanthropy and with the sorceress Circe as perhaps an analogue of moly, the [h]ómomi or haoma of the Zoroastrian magi priests.

The Ixion mirror surrounds the central episode with a border of trailing wild ivy vine, suggesting that the morphing lily is an analogue to the Dionysian ivy, the prototypic toxic antecedent to the grapevine as the product of human intervention in hybridizing the intoxicating cultivated transmutations of primitive and toxic natural growths. Frequently the vase depictions of the lily from Southern Italy show the blossom as the apparently toxic bindweed wild morning glory (smilax), with an anomalous head raising from within its funnel and wearing the red Phrygian cap. The cap derives from the pointed fox snout and the pelt worn by the Bassarides Thracian bacchants, and implies the motif of lycanthropy. This identifies the lily’s flower as the little red-cap, the anthropomorphism of the European folkloric tale of Rotkäppchen and her adventure of initiatory lycanthropy. A very broad red-figure fourth-century BCE terracotta patera platter from a grave in Apulia depicts the return of Persephone with four mushroom-shaped knobs around its rim. These are clearly not intended as handles since the platter has explicit handles on either side. The central scene is surrounded by a bindweed morning glory vine blossoming with lilies. Two on opposite sides, rising amid the tendrils, are the capped heads of a female. Pliny noted the extraordinary similarity of the morning glory’s flower to the lily.

A second-century CE mosaic from a villa north of Rome depicts the winged Gorgon head at its center. Such Gorgon heads (gorgóneia) were often used as an apotropaic emblem to decorate the entrance hall of houses. The delicate tracery of stems with occasional stylized leaves and flowers filling the area surrounding the

1 Sophocles, Ajax, 143; Ruck et al. The Apples of Apollo, 24 et seq.; Ruck. The Son Conceived in Drunkenness, 111, 197.
2 Dirke was the wife of the ‘wolf’ Lykos of Thebes. She was a bacchant: Ruck. The Son Conceived in Drunkenness, 129 et seq.
3 Ruck, Dionysus in Thrace, 83: the Grimm fairytale of our lady’s little drinking glass identifies the bindweed morning glory as the flower of the Virgin and suggests folkloric knowledge of its intoxicating potential.
4 Red-figure krater, fourth century BCE, Etruscan.
5 Ruck, Dionysus in Thrace, 111 et seq.
7 Attributed to the Baltimore painter, Art Institute of Chicago. Ruck (ed.), Dionysus in Thrace, 97-99, fig. 6.2 and 6.2a.
8 Pliny, Natural History, 21.11
9 Now installed in the central garden courtyard of the Gardner Museum, Boston. The mosaic was discovered in 1892 in the remains of an ancient villa north of Rome, near the villa of Augustus’ wife Livia. It probably was the floor of a bath. The delicate tracery of the interlocking design of stems, flowers, and leaves resembles those of Pompeii around 25 CE, but brick stamps indicate that it was laid a century later during the reign of the Emperor Hadrian. I am indebted to Joe Ledoux, a professional magician with an interest in depictions of psychoactive plants in European art, for calling this mosaic to my attention.
Gordon head sprout from bases midpoint in each quadrant of the central square. Here at the base as if sprouting directly from the ground as well as from the branching and encircling stems are more elaborate and much larger flowers, four of them, arrayed cruciform with the Medusa at its center. They are lilies, complete with three leaves of their calyx. However, the top of each blossom is a red rim, spotted with white, and each has a bird anomalously alighting or apparently dancing upon it, as if it were a solid cap, rather than the opened space of the funnel of the lily’s trumpet. The birds perhaps identify the flower as their fare, each bird a different species. The lilies appear to be morphing into red mushrooms. A chain-link design frames the square, with another tracery of interlocking stems as a border beyond it.