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**Ambivalent Goddesses in Patriarchies:**

**A Comparative Study of Hekate in Ancient Greek and Roman  
Religion, and Kali in Contemporary Hinduism.**

**2011**

**University of KwaZulu-Natal**

**Pietermaritzburg**

**Declaration**

Submitted in fulfilment of the requirements for the degree of Master of Arts, in the Graduate Programme in Classics, University of KwaZulu-Natal, Pietermaritzburg, South Africa.

I declare that this dissertation is my own unaided work. All citations, references and borrowed ideas have been duly acknowledged. It is being submitted for the degree of Master of Arts in the Faculty of Humanities, Development and Social Sciences, Pietermaritzburg, South Africa. None of the present work has been submitted previously for any degree or examination in any other University.

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Name of Supervisor

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Signature

## **Acknowledgements**

I would like to acknowledge all those who assisted me and contributed to my dissertation in one way or another. I owe my deepest gratitude to my supervisor, Michael Lambert, for his patience, and his invaluable wisdom and guidance. I would also like to thank him for giving me the opportunity within the department to present a talk and to teach, which has served to reinforce why I love Classics, especially during these demanding postgraduate years.

I would like to express my appreciation to all my family and friends for their continuous encouragement and understanding. Thanks to Sandra Pitcher, for her assistance and encouragement. I owe a special thanks to my boyfriend, Kabir, for his support and patience through what has been a long process. I am extremely grateful to my parents for their endless assistance, for reading through my dissertation, for driving me around in search of source material, and for always pushing me to do my best. Thank you to my sister, Teelie, for being a constant source of emotional support, encouragement, and useful criticism.

## **Abstract**

The objective of this dissertation is to demonstrate that the ancient Greek and Roman goddess Hekate, and the goddess Kali in contemporary Hinduism, as revealed in literature from the respective cultures, removed from each other by time and geography, are constructs of the male imagination, resulting in the reinforcing of stereotypes about the dangers of women in power, and demonstrating that women are irrational, lustful, deceitful, close to nature, and inherently lawless. This dissertation aims to show that Hekate and Kali can be re-envisioned as challenging these stereotypes, and can be re-interpreted as positive role-models for women in their respective cultures.

To situate this research within a scholarly tradition, the dissertation begins with an overview of research into the supposed existence of prehistoric matriarchal cultures, where the supreme mother goddess who gave birth to the universe was apparently venerated. This is based largely on prehistoric art and interpretations of symbols with the help of secondary source material. Then this dissertation aims to trace the evolution of Hekate from her origins in Greek literature as a generous and benign, yet potent goddess to a dangerous, chthonic deity of the Roman world associated with black magic, the crossroads, demons and the restless dead. This will be done by a thorough examination of selected ancient Greek and Latin sources in chronological order.

Kali's character and function in Hinduism will be determined through an in-depth analysis of Hindu scriptures written in Sanskrit, as well as by investigating devotional hymns written to her by poets during the 18<sup>th</sup> and 19<sup>th</sup> centuries CE. These Sanskrit and Hindi sources highlight Kali as a terrible and unruly manifestation of Durga or Parvati's wrath while also emphasising her maternal qualities. Artistic representations of Hekate and Kali will also be examined. A comparison between the two goddesses and their roles within their respective cultural and religious systems will be undertaken in order to deduce why such goddesses were deemed necessary within patriarchal cultures. Special reference will be made to the reclamation of Hekate and Kali by feminists today as religious role-models for women over traditional role-models such as Sita, and the Virgin Mary. This dissertation seeks to show that whereas goddesses have been alive and well in Hinduism for thousands of years, Classical

deities are far from dead, and are at present experiencing a revival and reinterpretation so as to cater for new forms of spirituality. It seeks to examine whether goddesses who have been rebellious in their patriarchal cultural systems are stereotypic representations or whether they can actually empower and make a difference to women.

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## Chapter 1 – Introduction

### 1.1. Aims and Reasons

This comparative research project focuses on goddess worship in the ancient Greek, Roman and contemporary Hindu religious systems, concentrating on the goddesses Hekate and Kali respectively. Firstly, it aims to explore the mythology and ritual functions of Hekate, and determine the reason for her transformation from a benevolent, powerful deity to the menacing goddess of magic and the crossroads, with reference to ancient Greek and Roman source material. Secondly, the research aims to explore the mythology, evolution and enduring popularity of the Hindu goddess Kali, as well as to investigate her ambiguous nature as both creator and destroyer, and catalyst of order and chaos. Thereafter, the research aims to discuss the apparent need for the ‘dark’ goddesses’ existence in their respective pantheons, and to establish what can be discerned about the position of women within each culture in relation to the natures and representations of the goddesses, bearing in mind that ‘the study of goddesses concerns the relationship of goddess worship to the status of women’ (Kinsley 1989: xi). A comparative analysis will be undertaken to determine similarities and differences between the two cultural systems in order to explore the relationship between religious representation and gender identity.

The research arises from a desire to generate critical awareness of religion in relation to gender roles. I will attempt, as far as possible, to concentrate on contemporary Hinduism in South Africa since South Africa is home to the second largest number of Indians outside of India and Pakistan,<sup>1</sup> thus feeding into the concept of African Scholarship, as publicized in the mission statement of the University of KwaZulu-Natal.<sup>2</sup>

Comparative studies always present the researcher with problems: the problem of importing ideas from one culture into another or of imposing a pre-determined structure on to random data, in the hope of discerning patterns which may be of universal significance. This often

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<sup>1</sup> Diesel & Maxwell 1993: 1 – 2.

<sup>2</sup> Online Source: <http://www.ukzn.ac.za/AboutUs/ukznmission.aspx>



results in resorting to ‘grand narratives’, usually of a Jungian kind, which may be of dubious worth.<sup>3</sup> I shall make every effort not to import Classical Greek notions into Hindu culture and vice versa, even though I strongly believe that moving from the logic of one culture to the other often raises questions and provides insights into the cultures compared. I shall be aware of the argument, made by J.Z. Smith and others, that ‘comparison provides the means by which we revision phenomena as *our* data in order to solve *our* theoretical problems’.<sup>4</sup> Self-reflexivity is essential in comparative studies and I shall be constantly aware of the fact that I am a South African female researcher of Indian descent, who happens to be a Hindu as well, deeply interested in the role religion plays in both validating and interrogating the role of women in patriarchal societies. This project is part of a general comparative sociological and anthropological research interest in the study of classics, particularly in the ongoing desire to see the Classics in new ways.

## 1.2. Theoretical Framework and Methodology

The theoretical framework of this research project is a qualitative paradigm in which primary and secondary source material will be collected and interpreted to attain a conclusion. It does not require statistical analysis or quantitative methods. This research project on comparative religion involves a variety of research designs. It will analyse existing textual sources in ancient Greek, Latin, and Sanskrit, and translations of these languages into English. Authorship of all primary sources is ascribed to male writers working within patriarchal societies. Consequently, ancient material is subjected to bias, which this research project will confront and challenge from a feminist perspective. It will engage with relevant secondary source material. With regards to all textual sources, discourse analysis will be employed.

The construction of the goddesses by patriarchal societies, their impact on ancient Greek, and Hindu women, and reasons for the dominance of the two goddesses in New Age spirituality will be determined. In terms of feminist research, qualitative methods are favoured as these

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<sup>3</sup> Lambert 2007: 117.

<sup>4</sup> Ibid.

allow women's voices to be heard.<sup>5</sup> Qualitative research is viewed as more compatible with feminism's central tenets than quantitative research, which turns women into objects rather than subjects, ignoring their voices and submerging them in a torrent of facts and statistics.<sup>6</sup> This research project will engage in a comparative conceptual analysis.

### 1.3. Chapter Content

My aim in my literature review is to provide an overview of existing research on goddess worship as a whole, principally in the prehistoric age, before written records. I will attempt to relate this to the status of women during the prehistoric period in order to determine whether or not societies at the time were matriarchal in nature. Two authors whose works will be utilised in order to give this literature review a proper structure is Johann Jakob Bachofen,<sup>7</sup> and Marija Gimbutas.<sup>8</sup> Bachofen favours the idea that matriarchies were a fundamental step in the development towards more civilized patriarchal societies. Gimbutas sees prehistory as a time of dominance for women, wherein their capabilities as creators were idolised and worshipped. She believes that by interpreting symbols from the prehistoric age, the high status of women can be deduced. I will also be using the works of Davis (1971), Stone (1976), Lerner (1986), Ehrenberg (1989), Gross (1996), and Eller (2000), among others. I will then provide a survey of three supposed matriarchal, goddess-revering civilizations; the Palaeolithic "Old Europe", the Neolithic settlement of Çatal Hüyük, and the society discovered by Arthur Evans at Crete.

Thereafter an analysis of primary source material, written in ancient Greek,<sup>9</sup> will be conducted in chronological order so as to trace Hekate's transformation in ancient Greek religion and culture, and gain insight into why these changes may have occurred. I have

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<sup>5</sup> Bryman 2004: 288.

<sup>6</sup> Ibid.

<sup>7</sup> Manheim 1967.

<sup>8</sup> 1982, 1989, 1999.

<sup>9</sup> I shall use translations of ancient Greek source material.

chosen three main sources, Hesiod's *Theogony*, in which she is given exceptional influence over many spheres of human life and functions that are never associated with her in literature again, the *Homeric Hymn to Demeter* which establishes Hekate's relationship with the Underworld, and Apollonius Rhodius' *Argonautica*, which emphasises her patronage of Medea. Following Hekate's role in ancient Greek literature, I will trace her development through texts from the Roman world, focusing, again on three sources, the *Aeneid* by Vergil which stresses her responsibility as goddess of the crossroads and witchcraft, Seneca's *Medea*, wherein her associations with Medea are explored further, and Apuleius' *Metamorphoses*, in which she is noted as being an aspect of one great, ultimate goddess. The translations of Latin texts in this chapter are my own. Then, I shall analyse the *Greek Magical Papyri*, a set of texts dating between the 2<sup>nd</sup> century BCE and the 5<sup>th</sup> century CE, discovered in Egypt and elsewhere. The papyri include texts which have the intention of cursing, healing, and binding, as well as demonic adjuration through the use of spiritual forces. Hekate dominates in these texts, demonstrating that she was one of the central deities in ancient witchcraft. The *Greek Magical Papyri* differ from the other literary sources I have used because, while my other sources are largely works of the imagination by educated, male authors, the spells of the *Greek Magical Papyri* were performed by the average person. Thus, it is necessary in order to show where fiction and reality meet.

I will next provide an analysis of translations of ancient Sanskrit texts in order to explore the nature of the complex Hindu goddess, Kali. The sources I will be looking at are the *Devi-Māhātmya*, wherein Kali is shown as a bloodthirsty, barbaric, uncontrollable incarnation of Durga, the *Purāṇas*, namely the *Linga Purāṇa*, and the *Agni Purāṇa*, which stress her associations with Parvati, and expound on her ghastly appearance. I will also consider some prayers to Kali, and devotional hymns by poets and sages. These emphasise her qualities as a mother, despite her gruesome, cannibalistic nature and looks. Afterwards, I will compare Hekate and Kali, and the cultural systems in which they exist, looking for similarities and differences in order to determine why such goddesses exist in the patriarchal cultures in which they do.

## Chapter 2 - Literature Review

### 2.1. Introduction

Over the last forty years considerable academic attention within the fields of classical, religious and feminist studies has focused on the possible existence of ancient goddess-centric religions and the characteristics of societies in which such worship may have existed. Particularly vocal are feminist authors, believing in a utopian past wherein women were revered and enjoyed equal statuses as men, until a patriarchal revolution occurred.<sup>10</sup> Some argue that in prehistoric times matriarchies existed in which women dominated men and controlled society as a whole, quite the reverse of the patriarchal cultures of today.<sup>11</sup> According to these authors, at this time human consciousness perceived the creator and supreme deity as female, and more significantly, as a mother. While my area of research is primarily on goddesses and their impact on women in ancient Greek and Indian religion and culture, concentrating on Hekate and Kali respectively, I believe it irresponsible to plunge into my comparative study, with the purpose of submitting a thorough and fully developed thesis, without considering the prehistoric roots of goddess worship, and its evolution. I aim to examine ancient social structures, and the role of women in these societies, with this literature review serving as a springboard to introduce terminology and concepts which I will use throughout this dissertation.

I have found it valuable to tackle the literature by simultaneously undertaking a chronological summary of the evidence for alleged goddess worship, in order to provide a holistic overview, incorporating many viewpoints. Due to the scope of the topic and the quantity of scholarship, it is necessary to begin by tracing the first encounters humans seem to have had with goddesses in prehistory as conveyed by the literature. I have selected the literature itself for two reasons; firstly, for being in my opinion most influential and ground-breaking in the above-mentioned fields, and secondly, for being most relevant and beneficial to my endeavour.

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<sup>10</sup> See for instance Stone 1976; Christ & Plaskow 1979; King 1993; Gross 1996; Gimbutas 1989; 1999.

<sup>11</sup> See Daly 1978.

## 2.2. Sources and Themes

Fundamental to this literature review is the work of nineteenth century Swiss jurist, Johann Jakob Bachofen. Deeply influenced by his study of the classics, Bachofen published *Mother Right* in 1861,<sup>12</sup> proposing a primitive matriarchal and matrilineal hypothesis. No doubt this was a response to the advances in archaeology at the time, and the renewed interest in theorizing about the ancient world especially in the context of an evolutionary premise.<sup>13</sup> “Mother right”, postulates Bachofen, came into existence when the family was organized around a matriarchal structure, particularly because of the maternal transmission of inheritance, and the religious dominance and educational influence of women. The primary source and starting point for this theory, and, in Bachofen’s view, any examination into ancient history, is mythical tradition, arguably the oldest form of tradition:

Since the beginning of all development lies in myth, myth must form the starting point for any serious investigation of ancient history. Myth contains the origins, and myth alone can reveal them. It is the origins which determine the subsequent development, which define its character and direction. Without knowledge of the origins, the science of history can come to no conclusion.<sup>14</sup>

Many, including myself, are not inclined to trust myth as a valid historical source without proper interrogation, and this could therefore have been problematic to Bachofen’s study. However, Bachofen strives to demonstrate that ‘mythical tradition may be taken as a faithful reflection of the life of those times in which historical antiquity is rooted. It is the manifestation of primordial thinking, an immediate historical revelation, and consequently a highly reliable historical source.’<sup>15</sup> To illustrate how Bachofen employs mythical tradition to deduce a matriarchal past, I have selected an example from his work, concerning the Lycian

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<sup>12</sup> In the original German, *Das Mutterrecht*. For the purposes of my study I have used a translation by R. Manheim of selected works entitled *Myth, Religion and Mother Right: Selected Writings of J.J. Bachofen* (1967).

<sup>13</sup> Charles Darwin’s *The Origin of Species* had been first published in 1859.

<sup>14</sup> Manheim 1967: 75.

<sup>15</sup> *Ibid.*, 73.

people. Bachofen favours the Lycians as a clear and valuable model for a matriarchal culture because myth and history record that the Lycians transmitted inheritance to the daughters of the family.<sup>16</sup> Bachofen's source is Herodotus, who reports that in the myth, Sarpedon, King of the Lycians, leaves his heritage to his daughter Laodamia, rather than to his sons. This Bachofen takes as adequate proof that mother right prevailed in Lycia for the following reasons.<sup>17</sup> Firstly, both the mythical and historical traditions present similar evidence for this system. As Herodotus reports in Book 6 of his *Histories*, the Lycians named their children exclusively after the mothers, not the fathers:

The Lycians came originally from Crete, which in ancient times was occupied by non-Greek peoples. The two sons of Europa, Sarpedon and Minos, fought for the throne and the victorious Minos expelled Sarpedon and his party. The exiles sailed for Asia and landed on Milyan territory, Milyas being the ancient name for the country where the Lycians live today... In their manners they resembled in some ways the Cretans, in others the Carians, but in one of their customs, that of taking the mother's name instead of the father's they are unique. Ask a Lycian who he is, and he will tell you his own name and his mother's, then his grandmother's and his great grandmother's and so on. And if a free woman has a child by a slave, the child is considered legitimate whereas the children of a free man, however distinguished he may be, and a foreign wife or mistress have no citizen rights at all.<sup>18</sup>

Secondly, Bachofen believes that all ancients who wrote about earlier times sought to preserve and pass on tradition with meticulous fidelity so that the history of human ideas could be traced back to their beginnings.<sup>19</sup> Finally, he deems the old system, which allowed Laodamia the right of inheritance, too farfetched a phenomenon for the 'Hellenic mind'

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<sup>16</sup> *Ibid.*, 72.

<sup>17</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>18</sup> De Sélincourt 1954: 76.

<sup>19</sup> Manheim 1967: 73.

accustomed to patriarchal values, and therefore the ‘Hellenic mind’ could not have fabricated a concept so diametrically opposed to patriarchy.<sup>20</sup>

Many contemporary feminist authors find Bachofen’s hypothesis influential, which is ironic since, although he admits to a prehistoric cultural system in which women had considerable power, he himself undeniably writes from the point of view of an elite, white, nineteenth century male. This is perceptible in the way he rationalizes the three phases of civilization. The first stage, and as follows the lowest level of human development, is what he calls “unregulated hetaerism”.<sup>21</sup> This is characterised by a nomadic lifestyle, and sexual promiscuity before conception and paternity were fully understood. The term “hetaerism” was mistakenly chosen by Bachofen, reflecting his biased view of the independent, talented, female courtesans at ancient Greek dinner-parties. The middle stage is matriarchy, wherein women invented agriculture and influenced cultural advancement. Bachofen sees this as a phase required to facilitate the transition of humans from the lowest level of existence, hetaerism, into the highest, and most developed, patriarchy.<sup>22</sup> In *The Origin of the Family, Private Property and the State*, first published in 1884, concerning the developmental stages of human history, Friedrich Engels names Bachofen as the first to study the history of the family. Engels states that prior to Bachofen, patriarchy was considered the oldest form of family structure without question.<sup>23</sup> Engels sets out Bachofen’s propositions:

(1) That originally man lived in a state of sexual promiscuity, to describe which Bachofen uses the mistaken term “hetaerism”; (2) that such promiscuity excludes any certainty of paternity, that descent could therefore be reckoned only in the female line, according to mother right, and that this was originally the case amongst all the peoples of antiquity; (3) that since women, as mothers, were the only parents of the younger generation that were known with certainty, they held their position of such high respect and honour that it became the foundation, in Bachofen’s

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<sup>20</sup> Ibid.

<sup>21</sup> Ibid., 93.

<sup>22</sup> Ibid.

<sup>23</sup> 1972: 75.

conception, of a regular rule of women (gynaecocracy); (4) that the transition of monogamy, where the women belonged to one man exclusively, involved a violation of a primitive religious law (that is, actually a violation of the traditional right of the other men to this woman), and that in order to expiate this violation or to purchase indulgence for it the woman had to be surrendered for a limited period.<sup>24</sup>

Engels' main criticism of Bachofen's work is that the use of the term "mother right" to refer to matrilineal descent and inheritance is, in his opinion, ill-chosen owing to the lack of any legal system or sense of "right" at this stage in human society.<sup>25</sup> Of course, the gap in Bachofen's work is that he does not make use of archaeological material. Since a substantial portion of this literature review deals with prehistory, the period before written records,<sup>26</sup> art shall be my primary source material. Reference will be made to leading specialists in the field, namely the archaeologist Gimbutas, whose three major works *The Goddesses and Gods of Old Europe: Myths and Cult Images* (1982), *The Language of the Goddess* (1989), and *The Living Goddesses* (1999) I will draw on. Gimbutas' argument is that during the Palaeolithic and Neolithic eras, or "Old Europe" as she entitles it, cultures were egalitarian, harmonious, artistic, and above all, goddess-revering. The goddess was celebrated in art using symbols and signs which, according to Gimbutas, can be interpreted through the study of context and associations. Gimbutas sees these symbols as a pictorial "script", a symbolic language; the language of the goddess.<sup>27</sup> I will also refer to Buffie Johnson's *Lady of the Beasts* (1994). Johnson's research, interpretations and deductions are similar to those of Gimbutas, but focus specifically on the ancient goddess and sacred animals. Johnson was indeed influenced by Gimbutas whom she acknowledges in the Preface of her book as her 'generous friend...whose discoveries are changing the formerly accepted perceptions of ancient cultural history.'<sup>28</sup> Johnson argues that all images and symbols of prehistory present a worldwide, nonverbal language used in the worship of the divine.<sup>29</sup> For example, as both

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<sup>24</sup> Ibid., 75 -76.

<sup>25</sup> Ibid., 106.

<sup>26</sup> As prehistory is defined by Ehrenberg (1989: 21).

<sup>27</sup> 1989: xiii.

<sup>28</sup> 1994: xi.

<sup>29</sup> Ibid., 2.



Gimbutas and Johnson distinguish, the downwards painting of a triangle represents the vulva because of its resemblance to the female pubic region. According to Gimbutas, in Neolithic times, triangles epitomized the goddess' role in the cyclical process of death and rebirth; large stone triangles stand at the entrances of some Neolithic cave tombs. Gimbutas interprets this as follows: 'Just as the goddess' womb obviously gave us birth, it also took us back in death. Symbolically, the individual returned to the goddess' womb to be reborn.'<sup>30</sup> Since the readings of symbols in the collections of both these authors are too extensive to deal with in detail, I will discuss, and offer critiques from scholars as I outline goddess worship in prehistory.

While Gimbutas' opinions in particular will form the framework of my interpretation of much of the symbols in prehistoric art, I do not consider her interpretations, as well as those of Johnson, without some hesitation. Her ideas, although convincing and compelling, are not objective enough, but rather fed by her vision of, and desire to reclaim a utopian past. In my view, while the symbols may be significant in showing the goddess as the primary focus of prehistoric religious thought, there is no definite confirmation of this, as will be made evident during my examination of ancient culture. For example the symbols could simply serve a decorative purpose, although there is no conclusive evidence for this either. Cynthia Eller, in her critique of the existence of goddess worshipping prehistoric cultures,<sup>31</sup> questions the premise that every symbol and animal form found in prehistoric art represents the goddess, and her qualities. The symbols may be nothing more than prehistoric doodles. She argues that 'in the absence of a prehistoric Rosetta stone translating prehistoric symbols into some language we can understand today, we are of course welcome to pore over the art of prehistoric cultures looking for internal patterns, just as Gimbutas has done. We may find things of interest, but none that can stand as the conclusive interpretations of these images.'<sup>32</sup> Eller's view of the art of prehistory is constructive, and I shall use her opinions to balance those of scholars like Gimbutas, but as the title of her work suggests, she aims wholly to debunk the theory that matriarchies existed. All those in favour of the matriarchal hypothesis are collectively referred to by Eller as "feminist matriarchalists". By doing this, much of her

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<sup>30</sup> 1999: 5.

<sup>31</sup> *The Myth of a Matriarchal Prehistory: Why an Invented Past Won't Give Women A Future* (2000).

<sup>32</sup> *Ibid.*, 120.

commentary is, in my opinion, reduced to generalization. She insists that ‘feminist matriarchalists know how much they want their myth to be true – badly enough that they are willing to continue to believe it (or at least make use of it) even if the evidence does not really support it.’<sup>33</sup> It is true that there is a great deal of passionate emotional force behind the theory of a matriarchal prehistory, especially from feminists, and of course nothing can be conclusively deduced, but that is exactly the point. As Eller herself argues, ‘evidence does not *really* support it’; evidence *may* support it. Data can be interpreted in a number of ways, as I will show. Eller, a self-proclaimed feminist, does exactly what she accuses her feminist matriarchalists of doing; she is so concerned with challenging matriarchal prehistory and presenting a provocative argument that she either dismisses large amounts of evidence, or has to admit that there is no solid answer. At the core of her work is her attempt to save her fellow feminists from the fate of so many; looking into the past in order to provide women hope for the future. Eller believes feminist historians need to stop their ‘wishful thinking’ of a utopian past, and focus on the ‘necessary task’ of envisioning a feminist future.<sup>34</sup> Eller oversimplifies a complicated and controversial topic, claiming that the notion of matriarchy serves an entirely feminist function. As I have explained above in my critique of Bachofen, this is not true. Bachofen’s belief in the prehistoric mother right system did not serve a feminist function but intended to show patriarchy as the superior level of civilization. Eller’s approach is often harsh, narrow, and patronizing, unsympathetic to a cause that is so often handled with some sensitivity by feminist authors.

Margaret Ehrenberg’s earlier work on the role of women in prehistory is far more reasonable.<sup>35</sup> Like Eller, Ehrenberg is a self-proclaimed feminist yet her work remains unbiased, empathetic and informed, focusing on everything from the opinions of authors, to what can be deduced through the latest advances in archaeology. Ehrenberg seeks to contribute to the debate relying on contemporary archaeological and anthropological evidence to fill in the gaps in research into prehistory, especially when it comes to women. Ehrenberg’s account of women in prehistory extends from the Palaeolithic Age into the Celtic Iron Age, and she acknowledges that she has only just skimmed the surface of a

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<sup>33</sup> *Ibid.*, 13.

<sup>34</sup> *Ibid.*, 182.

<sup>35</sup> *Women in Prehistory* (1989).

complex topic. Ehrenberg questions the reliability and dangers of mythology as a source of information about prehistoric times, particularly those myths that seem to suggest that women once played important roles in societies.<sup>36</sup> The points she makes on this subject are eye-opening, bearing in mind that Bachofen's theory is founded on myth. She does not see the relation between myth and history as Bachofen does, stating that 'it is extremely dangerous to use mythology as a source of evidence for history.'<sup>37</sup> In Ehrenberg's view, a myth may explain such things as natural phenomena or other occurrences in the human world in an understandable way so that a society may make sense of the world. Ehrenberg argues as follows:

Every society asks how the world came about, and has a myth which explains this in terms understandable to the society. So just as everyone knows that women alone give birth to children, it is not surprising that many societies will also explain that the earth and crops are born from a supernatural female of some kind. This need not, however, have any implications for the roles of women, other than the obvious one of childbearing, and less for their status. It cannot even be taken as evidence that the society thought that giving birth to large numbers of children was particularly advantageous, but merely shows that the factual relationship has been observed!<sup>38</sup>

Furthermore, Ehrenberg believes that before written records, myths were orally transmitted and therefore susceptible to change. This has not encouraged Ehrenberg to dismiss Bachofen, but rather to re-examine his theory. Moreover, she explains that 'recent studies of women's history and of the origins of their present roles and status in the Western world begin with the consideration of the distant or prehistoric past, but all too often these authors lack specialised knowledge of the nature, limitations and potential use of archaeological evidence.'<sup>39</sup> I cannot help but sense that in this statement Ehrenberg is alluding to authors like Gimbutas, whom she conspicuously ignores in her work. It would appear that, due to the above mentioned

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<sup>36</sup> *Ibid.*, 23.

<sup>37</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>38</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>39</sup> *Ibid.*, 7.

deficiency, Ehrenberg undervalues and therefore deliberately neglects to mention these authors. I have grouped the next few authors together since they are largely compatible and share similar themes and approaches in their research.

The earliest of these writers is E. G. Davis,<sup>40</sup> an American librarian seeking to ‘repudiate two thousand years of propaganda concerning the inferiority of woman.’<sup>41</sup> Davis’ ideas have been largely debunked by anthropologists and archaeologists, no doubt in large part because she, picking up on Ehrenberg’s words, lacked specialised knowledge, and this is apparent in her work. Most of Davis’ ideas are simply not credible, and her work on the whole, although amusing and often tongue-in-cheek, is flawed. Take for example the dubious reasoning behind the title of her book. Davis claims that woman’s reproductive organs are older and more evolved than man’s, making her in actuality the first sex. According to Davis, woman produced asexually, creating life out of itself by a process called parthenogenesis.<sup>42</sup> Males, she states, came into being later since the Y chromosome needed to produce man is essentially a deformed and degenerate X chromosome that produces females: ‘For man is but an imperfect female.’<sup>43</sup> Another of Davis’ ridiculous speculations shows humans as peaceful vegetarians until man begins to eat meat, the consequence of which is the development of the penis since ‘meat-eaters have larger sexual organs than vegetarians.’<sup>44</sup> Davis then goes on to suggest that the first males ‘were mutants, freaks produced by some damage to the genes caused perhaps by disease or radiation bombardment by the sun.’<sup>45</sup>

To Davis it is a ‘fact’ that a matriarchal world once existed.<sup>46</sup> An important suggestion that she makes is that at this time in prehistory, queendoms existed. A man of rank married into

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<sup>40</sup> *The First Sex* (1971). Davis’ work is a rejoinder to *The Second Sex* by Simone de Beauvoir, first published in 1949.

<sup>41</sup> *Ibid.*, 18.

<sup>42</sup> *Ibid.*, 34.

<sup>43</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>44</sup> 1971: 96.

<sup>45</sup> *Ibid.*, 35.

<sup>46</sup> *Ibid.*, 16.

the royal family to become king, gain power and legalise his right to the throne. Davis' inspiration for this lies in fairy tales that tell of princes rescuing damsels:

The many myths and fairy tales of fair maidens who, like the Sleeping Beauty, are locked up in a tower or dungeons or guarded by fierce dragons have their basis in the universal institution of matriliney. The fair maiden is always the hereditary princess with whose hand in marriage will go the kingdom, to the deprivation of her male relatives, who therefore seek to keep her single. The equally prevalent fairy-tale theme of the landless prince who woos the princess and with her wins the kingdom is also a memorial to matriliney. The landless young prince is the disinherited scion of a matrilineal dynasty who must go and seek his fortune elsewhere through marriage to an heiress, while his sister stays at home upon the throne and chooses among competing suitors for her hand and for her land.<sup>47</sup>

The Lycian royal family is an example of matriliney in the Classical world, as previously mentioned. Matriliney, in which lineage is traced through maternal ancestors, should not be confused with matrilineal marriages, in which upon marriage the husband begins to reside with or near his wife's parents.<sup>48</sup> In Greek myth, Menelaus became king of Sparta upon marrying the hereditary queen Helen, and went to Sparta in order to reside with her. Aeneas would have ruled Carthage had he chosen to remain with Queen Dido. Historically, Caesar and Antony both sought Cleopatra's favour as a means to winning over Egypt.<sup>49</sup> Davis argues that at this time women had 'mystical powers', 'super intelligence' and were also 'physical equals to men' like the Greek Atalanta who challenged and defeated male competitors.<sup>50</sup> Hunting and fishing, the two consummate male activities, are rather amusingly disregarded

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<sup>47</sup> *Ibid.*, 123.

<sup>48</sup> Both matrilineal and matrilineal should not be confused with matriarchy, which Lisa Tuttle (1986: 199) defines as, 'a society governed by women...a system under which women dominate men... The rule of women is seen as being in harmony with nature, non-coercive, non-violent, valuing wholeness and the sense of connection between people.'

<sup>49</sup> Davis 1971: 122 – 125.

<sup>50</sup> *Ibid.*, 93.

by Davis as ‘hobbies’ in her idealistic, vegetarian, matriarchal civilization,<sup>51</sup> introducing the idea that once women were identical in strength to men was more plausible. At this time, according to Davis, one great goddess was venerated, and women alone held the secrets to nature. It was because of this knowledge that women were able to make discoveries, like fire and the wheel, and advancements, like clothing, ships, and cooking, without the aid of men.<sup>52</sup> Davis’ motivation for this hypothesis was the goddess Athena, ‘a later aspect of the great goddess’<sup>53</sup> who is credited for having invented, amongst other things, musical instruments, the wheel, the ship, the plough, the art of numbers, fire, and weaving. However, I am not convinced that, because the Greeks ascribed this inventiveness and ingenuity to the supernatural Athena, it should follow that women made such advances in reality, as we speculate that they did. Athena was born from the head of Zeus. The birth of a female goddess from a male god shows masculine energy as the prevailing force, and implies the co-option of reproduction by patriarchal religious systems. Athena herself is a masculine goddess. In this way, regarding Athena as the inventor inadvertently portrays man as the real civilizer, not women. Later Davis herself admits this stating that Athena’s birth from Zeus’ head ‘reflects the effort of patriarchal society to denigrate the importance of women even in the procreative role’<sup>54</sup> and gives precedence to her masculine over her feminine aspect.<sup>55</sup>

Davis audaciously declares that ‘the trouble with the world today is that for some two or three thousand years, and particularly in the past fifteen hundred years, mankind has been worshipping the wrong deity and pursuing the wrong ideals.’<sup>56</sup> This sentiment is shared by Merlin Stone.<sup>57</sup> Stone provides an organized investigation of the history of gender roles in order to understand how attitudes towards women developed. Stone is largely influenced by her own Christian upbringing, and the sway and effect Christian myths had over training her

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<sup>51</sup> Ibid., 41.

<sup>52</sup> Ibid.

<sup>53</sup> Ibid., 44.

<sup>54</sup> Ibid., 145.

<sup>55</sup> Ibid., 146.

<sup>56</sup> Ibid., 115.

<sup>57</sup> *When God was a Woman* (1976).

own perception, and shaping her own way of thought while still young and impressionable. Above all, Stone is haunted by the myth of the Garden of Eden, and all that she was taught Eve, the symbol of all women, represented: foolish, gullible, defiant, ruinous, tempting.<sup>58</sup> Stone sees Eve as representative of the prehistoric goddess, who has been translated by patriarchal Christian culture into a dangerous consort, who is subordinate and inferior to man in every way: ‘Not only was the blame for having eaten the fruit of sexuality, and for tempting Adam to do the same, laid heavily upon women, but the proof or admission of her guilt was supposedly made evident in the pain of childbirth, which women were assured was their eternal chastisement for teaching men such bad habits.’<sup>59</sup> Stone is largely concerned with clearing Eve’s name by cross-examining the very foundations of Christian religion.<sup>60</sup>

Following this general idea, Gerda Lerner<sup>61</sup> bases her treatise on how, why and when the subordination of women came into existence by posing the question, “Who creates life?” To answer this, she encourages the abandonment of and emancipation from the concepts of women as historical victims and a utopian matriarchy. She reproaches some authors for being so locked in the andocentric system that the only alternative model for patriarchy seems to be its antithesis, when in actuality there are many ways to organise a society.<sup>62</sup> Lerner draws attention to social changes like marriage, property ownership, prostitution, kingship and laws,

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<sup>58</sup> See Marina Warner’s *Alone of All Her Sex* (1976). Warner shows the stigma attached to women as a result of Eve’s actions. She notes that upon being questioned by God about eating the forbidden fruit, Adam blames Eve (52). Warner states that the early Church in particular saw Eve as responsible for the Fall. She was ‘the wicked temptress, the accomplice of Satan, and the destroyer of mankind’ (58). This bitterness for Eve translated into an anger directed at all who share her sex. On this Warner comments, ‘The fury unleashed against Eve and all her kind is almost flattering, so exaggerated is the picture of women’s fatal and all-powerful charm and men’s incapacity to resist’ (ibid.).

<sup>59</sup> 1976: 222.

<sup>60</sup> See also Lieberman’s *The Eve Motif in Ancient Near Eastern and Classical Greek Sources* (1991). Lieberman traces the development of Eve’s character from archetypal mother, to companion, to personification of evil, and finally to symbol of subordination. Eve shares elements of Classical figures, like the Greek Pandora in being the first woman created, and being disobedient and tempted; Persephone in experiencing a change of fate after eating a fruit; and Athena in being born fully grown as willed by a male God. Lieberman also likens Eve to the Semitic Tiamat and Ereshkigal; both of whom I will discuss at a later stage. Lieberman’s conclusion is that Eve is not to be viewed as a pathetic figure, but rather as an independent heroine: ‘Eve precipitates a change in God himself, causing him to rethink his position regarding the place of man in the universe. For man, the Garden story attests his maturation; for God, it reflects the refinement of his act of creation. For both, Eve is the dominant protagonist’ (227 – 228).

<sup>61</sup> *The Creation of Patriarchy* (1986).

<sup>62</sup> Ibid., 36.

as the catalyst for the patriarchal system. She believes women themselves have played a vital role in their own subjugation and exploitation, especially in allowing the regulation of their sexuality, and the authority of the father or husband over their own independence. Men and women, Lerner stresses, are equally responsible for the diminishing power of women:

The system of patriarchy can function only with the cooperation of women. The cooperation is secured by a variety of means: gender indoctrination; educational deprivation; the denial to women of knowledge of their history; the dividing of women, one from the other, by defining “respectability” and “deviance” according to women’s sexual activities; by restraints and outright coercion; by discrimination in access to economic resources and political power; and by awarding class privileges to conforming women.<sup>63</sup>

Lerner discusses major points in the debate concerning how and why patriarchy began. She compares the traditionalist view, which reinforces the ideas of male supremacy, with the feminist view. The monotheistic traditionalist believes that male dominance is not only universal, but also natural. Women have been sanctioned by God to be subordinate, and her purpose is to procreate. Men are the warriors, the providers and the protectors of the vulnerable women, and are therefore naturally superior. Feminist response, Lerner states, has argued there was once a complementary relationship between the sexes in which women were involved in small game hunting, as well as gathering which was the main food source.<sup>64</sup> Women were also thought to have invented pottery, and developed horticulture.<sup>65</sup> On this point, a number of things have been said by the authors I have already mentioned. Bachofen

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<sup>63</sup> Ibid., 217.

<sup>64</sup> See also Ehrenberg 1989: 42 -43. Ehrenberg names food collection as a key aspect of sex-role behaviour. She believes women were involved in, at least, small game hunting, but since women of child-bearing age were vital to the survival of the community, did not participate in the more dangerous hunting of big game. Mobility would not have been easy once a woman became pregnant or a mother. At this point her duty would be limited to gathering, which is easily combined with looking after children.

<sup>65</sup> Reed (1975: 109) credits women as being the first pottery-makers to produce vessels to store, cook, and carry food in, the first healers because of their knowledge of herbs from gathering, the first to domesticate animals, and the first to cultivate soil.



asserts that agriculture was first fostered by women,<sup>66</sup> even stating that the ‘transition from nomadism to domestic settlement is a necessary part of human development, but it is particularly in keeping with the feminine nature and occurs most quickly where the influence of women is paramount. The observation of still living peoples has shown that human societies are impelled toward agriculture chiefly by the efforts of women, while the men tend to resist this change.’<sup>67</sup> Ehrenberg theorizes that ‘the crucial steps in human development were predominantly inspired by females...This contrasts sharply with the traditional picture of the male as protector and hunter, bringing food back to the pair-bonding female.’<sup>68</sup> Those in favour of the matriarchal theory argue that since women had knowledge of horticulture from gathering, women were the first to introduce agriculture. Small scale farming then gave way to subsistence farming that required the physical strength of men, and thus began patriarchy. Eller dismisses this theory on the basis of no proof. Men on long hunting expeditions, she says, would have had to gather to feed themselves and in this way would have had to familiarise themselves with plant-life just as women did.<sup>69</sup>

Lerner touches on another reason why patriarchy arose in relation to the development of agriculture and cultural evolution. Until this point primitive people believed women alone were responsible for procreation.<sup>70</sup> In addition, women did not, at this time, mate for life with a single sexual partner. This is Bachofen’s period of ‘unregulated heterism’.<sup>71</sup> On this matter Bachofen stresses the material quality of the infant’s relationship with the mother; it is the perceivable, natural truth. The father, in contrast, is not visibly related to the infant, and is a

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<sup>66</sup> Manheim 1967: 92.

<sup>67</sup> Ibid., 107.

<sup>68</sup> 1989: 50.

<sup>69</sup> 2000: 111.

<sup>70</sup> Pregnancy was thought to occur through parthenogenesis or without the need of fertilization from a male. Parthenogenesis is the ability for a woman’s body to create life out of itself; this ability was celebrated as a religion, perhaps manifested in the Venus figurines (Gimbutas 1999: 112). See also Davis. Davis argues that woman’s body was not designed for male convenience, but the other-way-around. Woman’s reproductive organs are far older and more evolved than man’s. The penis and testicles are a later development that evolved to suit the vagina. Before this evolution, asexual parthenogenesis took place, which is not only possible, ‘but still occurs here and there in the modern world, perhaps as an atavistic survival of the once *only* means of reproduction in an all female world’ (1971: 34 – 35).

<sup>71</sup> Manheim 1967: 93.

sort of ‘fictive character’.<sup>72</sup> What Bachofen means by this is that the father’s body does not change to accommodate life as a woman’s does, the umbilical cord does not bind the child to the father, and he does not nourish the child in infancy. Lerner argues that paternity was irrelevant, and women were celebrated as being the creators, indispensable and vital. The male’s role in reproduction became apparent once animals were domesticated, and the concept of paternity could finally be understood from watching how the process of conception and gestation transpired in the animal world.<sup>73</sup> The result of this, according to Engels, was the overthrow of the mother right, and the beginning of civilization as we know it.<sup>74</sup> Engels argues that this marked the start of monogamous families based on the supremacy of man, ‘the express purpose being to produce children of undisputed paternity; such paternity is demanded because children are later to come into their father’s property as his natural heirs.’<sup>75</sup> Men were now able to exert their sexual power over women. As Eller, following Engels’ train of thought, puts it, ‘they wished to ensure that their property would go to their biological offspring. But in order to determine paternity with certainty, men had to restrict women’s sexual behaviour. Once a woman’s sexuality “belonged” to a man (or in the case of prostitutes, to whichever man purchased it for the moment), she became, in a real if limited sense, his property.’<sup>76</sup> Bachofen associates the male knowledge of conception with liberation from nature into higher consciousness.<sup>77</sup>

The issue of paternity is dealt with by my next noteworthy source, Rita Gross.<sup>78</sup> As a practising Buddhist with knowledge of eastern religions, Gross will no doubt be essential in my research on the Hindu goddess Kali. Gross surveys women’s roles in religion from prehistoric times to the present, making it clear that the androcentric outlook responsible for socialization has been implanted in contemporary generations through academic and cultural

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<sup>72</sup> *Ibid.*, 109.

<sup>73</sup> 1986: 149.

<sup>74</sup> 1972: 124 – 125.

<sup>75</sup> *Ibid.*, 125.

<sup>76</sup> 2000: 53.

<sup>77</sup> Manheim 1967: 109.

<sup>78</sup> *Feminism & Religion: An Introduction* (1996).

training. Gross substitutes what she calls an androcentric term, matriarchy, with the androgynous term, prepatriarchal. This is similar to Lerner's assertion that 'patriarchal mode of thought is so built into our mental processes that we cannot exclude it unless we first make ourselves consciously aware of it.'<sup>79</sup> I have singled out three central themes for discussion in Gross' work. These themes are possible reasons for the suppression of matriarchy, should it have existed, and explain how, along with the invention of agriculture and the knowledge of paternity that I have just commented on, patriarchy arose to be the dominant cultural system. The themes have been assessed by the aforementioned scholars but I have delayed until this point to scrutinize them myself so as to make reference to all applicable sources. I have arranged them in a chronological order, as they may have occurred.

The first theme raised by Gross is the arrival of patriarchal conquerors from the northeast into the Indus Valley. These invaders are commonly referred to as the "Indo-Europeans", or by the term coined by Gimbutas, "Kurgans". Gross, agreeing with Gimbutas, argues that it was the Indo-Europeans that brought warfare, and a male sky god to the peaceful, matriarchal civilizations of Gimbutas' "Old Europe".<sup>80</sup> As claimed by Gimbutas in her "Kurgan" hypothesis, nomadic, sky-god worshipping Indo-European tribes, originally from the Russian steppes encroached on the peaceful, egalitarian, mother goddess worshipping societies of "Old Europe" at sporadic intervals between 4400 – 2500 BCE. The warriors from the north east, who were the first to domesticate horses, caused disruptions and upheavals in cultural development and 'the Old European way of life rapidly deteriorated.'<sup>81</sup> A major motivator for this hypothesis is the 'striking absence of images of warfare and male dominance' prior to the Indo-European incursions.<sup>82</sup> The Palaeolithic and Neolithic goddess-worshippers did not depict scenes of war in cave paintings, did not forge weapons, and chose their sites depending on accessibility to water and soil, not for defensive purposes. M. L. Keller, in her paper on Gimbutas' theory, expounds on the cultural repercussions of Indo-European conquests as follows:

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<sup>79</sup> 1986: 36.

<sup>80</sup> Gross 1996: 151.

<sup>81</sup> 1999: 52.

<sup>82</sup> Gimbutas 1989: xx.

The clash between the two ideologies and social and economic structures led to the drastic transformation of Old Europe. These changes were expressed as the transition from matrilineal to patrilineal order, from a learned theocracy to a militant patriarchy, from a sexually balanced society to a male dominated hierarchy, and from a chthonic Goddess religion to the Indo-European sky-orientated pantheon of gods.<sup>83</sup>

The subject of the Indo-Europeans is complex. Their origins are hotly debated, and the amount of research on the subject is large and convoluted. I have relied on J. P. Mallory's thorough investigation into their language, culture and religion.<sup>84</sup> Mallory's study is extremely detailed and rigorous. For the sake of this literature review I will mention only points that apply to my argument. Firstly, Mallory identifies the Indo-Europeans as people from Eurasia, who migrated to parts of Asia and Europe beginning about 6000 years ago. The motive for such a migration is attributed to lack of grazing land. Like Gimbutas, Mallory speculates that the Indo-European invasion happened gradually, over a period of 3500 years, starting in Anatolia. He also clarifies that "Indo-European" is 'largely a linguistic concept'.<sup>85</sup> That is, their migration can be traced through the spread of their language. This was first suggested by Jones in 1796.<sup>86</sup> Jones observed similarities in languages like Sanskrit, Greek, Hebrew, Latin, German and Romanian, and thus proposed that they must all have a common linguistic ancestor. By tracing words from Indo-European languages pertaining to the environment, such as "plain" or "mountains", or types of trees, scholars have deduced that the Indo-Europeans probably came from a temperate climate with seasonally cold weather.<sup>87</sup>

Returning to Gross, she stresses that the existing religious system was hybridised and assimilated into the Indo-European religion. It has been suggested that when patriarchal groups took over they feared that the female deities of their conquests were the embodiments

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<sup>83</sup> 1996: 75.

<sup>84</sup> *In Search of the Indo-Europeans: Language, Archaeology and Myth* (1989).

<sup>85</sup> *Ibid.*, 8.

<sup>86</sup> *Ibid.*, 11.

<sup>87</sup> *Ibid.*, 114.

and symbols of female energy and subsequently demonized them by emphasising their dark, sexual aspects in order to discourage people from their worship. These are the ideological and philosophical differences Keller touches on. An example of a similar argument is demonstrated in Gimbutas' discussion of how the snake in ancient goddess-worshipping societies was a symbol of regeneration, benevolence and life. In her view, the Indo-Europeans transformed the snake into a symbol of evil. Black was the colour linked to fertility, rich soil, and the caves in which the first humans made their homes, while white was the colour of death, the colour of bones. In Indo-European tradition these became the colour of death and the Underworld, and the colour of life and the sun respectively.<sup>88</sup>

A consequence of these Indo-European invasions is that, as Gross puts it, goddesses once autonomous and supreme became consorts to the more recent, and more powerful male gods.<sup>89</sup> This is probably an extension and reversal of an earlier tradition. Lerner, as well as E. O. James<sup>90</sup> writing earlier than she, describe how after the birth of agriculture, domestication of animals and the subsequent realisation of the male's function in regeneration, the mother goddess was assigned a male partner to assist in fertility by playing his role in procreation. This is the second theme. The male partner was usually a divine son, or brother who was also her lover. The rites surrounding the goddess and her son/lover were linked to the cycle of the seasons and fertility. Lerner states that 'In myth and ritual the male god is young, and he may have to die in order for rebirth to take place. It is still the great goddess who creates life and governs death, but there is now a more pronounced recognition of the male part in procreation.'<sup>91</sup> This is demonstrated in the myths of Inanna and Dumuzi, Isis and Osiris, Cybele and Attis, and Aphrodite and Adonis, each of which I will discuss during the course of this dissertation. In his *magnum opus* on comparative mythology, James Frazer<sup>92</sup> considers the son/lover motif as the embodiment of the power of fertility and vegetation, signifying the changing of seasons.<sup>93</sup> Also stressed is the goddess's vigour and vitality over the god; she

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<sup>88</sup> Gimbutas 1989: xix.

<sup>89</sup> 1996: 172.

<sup>90</sup> 1960: 97.

<sup>91</sup> 1986:149.

<sup>92</sup> *The Golden Bough: A Study of Magic and Religion* (1922).

<sup>93</sup> *Ibid.*, 201.

outlives him.<sup>94</sup> This superiority, in Frazer's judgment, denotes that the social system of the time was more matriarchal than patriarchal. Influenced by Frazer, James imagines the mother goddess and son/lover concept as follows:

Thus, throughout western Asia the goddess cult in association with the young god has the same characteristic features, centred in the rhythm of the seasons in which she was the embodiment of generation and procreation in perpetuity, and her youthful male partner personified the transitory life of the ever changing sequence of the cosmic cycle, each taking on its own autonomous significance. Originally it was a nature cult, in the first instance derived from the productivity of the soil capable of self-reproduction as the Universal Mother. In due course it incorporated the young god as a satellite of the Goddess. From the fertile plains of Mesopotamia it was introduced into Asia Minor through the influence of Hittite peoples, the goddess appearing as Anat and Asherah in Syria, Hebat, Shaushka, the sun-goddess of Arinna, and Hannahanna in Anatolia, MA in Canaan, Artemis in Ephesus, and Kybele in Phrygia, in association with her youthful consort Baal, the weather-god of Hatti, Teshub, Adonis and Attis, whose virility was necessary to complete her maternity in its several aspects, and her other qualities.<sup>95</sup>

The final theme alluded to by Gross, and which will form the crux of my dissertation on the whole, is the use of representations of goddesses in mythology to reinforce stereotypes about women; devious, crafty, immoral, and concerned with pursuits that are not valuable to society. Gross states that after the Indo-European conquest the once omnipotent and autonomous goddesses were married to or made daughters of the new, patriarchal sky-gods.<sup>96</sup> Their power was curtailed and channelled into functions significantly beneath their original role as creator of all living things and the universe. Two myths in particular clearly depict the suppression of the goddess and the rise of the male god. The first is narrated in the Babylonian creation myth, the *Enûma Eliš*. It tells of how the old order of gods, governed by

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<sup>94</sup> Ibid.

<sup>95</sup> 1960: 97.

<sup>96</sup> 1996: 154.

the goddess Tiamat, is superseded by the new generation, with god Marduk at its head. Tiamat in the form of a giant serpent is slain by Marduk and from her carcass he creates the heavens and earth. A. Baring and J. Cashford state that ‘the defeat of the serpent goddess marks the end of a culture, and also the end of the Neolithic way of perceiving life, which very soon becomes inaccessible.’<sup>97</sup> I do not regard this suggestion that the snake may represent the goddess as a farfetched idea. The image of the serpent is often considered to be closely associated with the goddess, perhaps most evident in Minoan art and sculpture. The motif of a male god slaying a serpent is common in myths intending to show progression and development: Zeus and Typhon, Apollo and Python, Heracles and Ladon in the Garden of the Hesperides.

The second myth is the abduction of Persephone by Hades, which will form a portion of my examination of Hekate.<sup>98</sup> In the myth Demeter is forced into a compromise with the supreme male deity over her daughter. The authority of the once all-powerful goddess is concentrated into one specialty: fertility. A significant feature of the myths is that they were composed by male authors who imposed patriarchal values onto the goddess, and I will be looking at two specifically, Hekate and Kali. It is the masculine perspective that is responsible for the decline in the power of these goddesses, and for channelling this power into specific locations and functions. Like other female mythological figures, such as Pandora and Eve, Hekate and Kali were transformed into patriarchal symbols for the destructive consequences of unchecked female power that is considered to be dangerous and chaotic.

The process of research for this chapter has by no means been a straightforward, easy endeavour. Sorting through and creating a timeline of the multitude of myth, symbols, social, religious and cultural practices, rites and lifestyles of people who lived thousands of years before written records is as chaotic, frustrating, and confusing as trying to escape a maze. With the only evidence being figurines, paintings and other modes of art, often depicting symbols that could mean anything, or nothing, not much can be determined conclusively. What is more, because of the *furor* with which this area is approached time and again by

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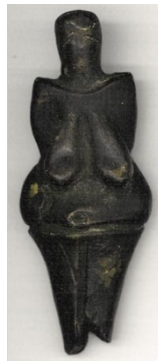
<sup>97</sup> 1991: 280.

<sup>98</sup> *The Homeric Hymn to Demeter* (Foley: 1994).

feminist writers, works by authors are often contaminated by bias.<sup>99</sup> All theories concerning prehistory rely heavily on guesswork. What I attempt to do now is examine the Palaeolithic and Neolithic Ages of Europe and interpret the evidence, or lack thereof, to determine the most suitable explanation of the nature of prehistoric societies. The next three sections serve as a survey of the evidence used by the above prehistoric civilizations, giving me the opportunity to test theories proposed by the aforementioned authors, such as Gimbutas' interpretation of symbols and Eller's many criticisms of the matriarchal hypothesis.

### 2.2.1. The Palaeolithic Age: Venus Figurines

The figurine below, Venus of Dolni Vestonice (**Image 1**), is the oldest of many found around Europe which date as far back as 25,000 BCE. These statues, made out of stone, bone and mammoth ivory, depict naked female forms, with sagging breasts, exaggerated buttocks, thick thighs, and pregnant bellies, and are, according to scholars like Gimbutas, the earliest evidence supporting the theory that at this early stage human consciousness perceived the primary deity and creator as female, and more significantly, as a mother.



**Image 1** (Venus of Dolni Vestonice)<sup>100</sup>

Some, like the Venus of Laussel (**Image 2**) and the Venus of Willendorf (**Image 4**), show traces of being painted with red ochre, which may be suggestive of the blood that gives life, and include symbols such as triangles, spirals and zig-zags, that may represent the mysterious

<sup>99</sup> For example, Davis states that it is a 'fact' that matriarchies once existed (1971: 16). This, we know, is untrue as without written records little can be certain.

<sup>100</sup> Online Source: [http://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:Venus\\_of\\_Dolni\\_Vestonice.png](http://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:Venus_of_Dolni_Vestonice.png).



cycle of the birth, death and rebirth of humans, and the entire cosmos.<sup>101</sup> Based on the elaborate symbolism and representation of the female body, conclusions have been made that the Venus sculptures are not simply depictions of prehistoric women, but divine women or goddesses, and more particularly, mother goddesses, or great goddesses, responsible for giving birth to the universe.<sup>102</sup>

The Palaeolithic statuettes are commonly labelled “Venus figurines” suggesting the Roman goddess of sexual love and beauty. Unsurprisingly, this name has been controversial and problematic, especially for feminist authors.<sup>103</sup> Some have rejected altogether the title “Venus”, simply recognizing the figurines as the goddess on the basis that the name “Venus” predetermines identification with fertility and equates the primary prehistoric deity with a later goddess who was one amongst many, ruled over by a male god.<sup>104</sup> The statuettes have also been interpreted as sex objects designed for a male audience: ‘This view assumes women were passive spectators of a creative mental life of prehistory, their bodies relevant only as representative of male concerns and interests.’<sup>105</sup> Gimbutas however believes the Palaeolithic statuettes represented ‘life giving creators, not Venuses or beauties, and most definitely not wives to male gods.’<sup>106</sup> Gimbutas judges their role as extending beyond the eroticism that defined the Roman Venus.<sup>107</sup> Instead, the female body is exaggerated or modified to emphasize its divine functions:

The human body constituted one of Old Europe’s most powerful symbols. As a result of modern cultural programming, we often associate nakedness with sexual enticement. The modern analyst naturally projects these attitudes back thousands of

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<sup>101</sup> Gimbutas 1989: xix.

<sup>102</sup> See Gimbutas (1989) and Johnson (1994).

<sup>103</sup> Baring & Cashford (1991).

<sup>104</sup> *Ibid.*, 8.

<sup>105</sup> McCoid and McDermott 1996: 319.

<sup>106</sup> 1989: 316.

<sup>107</sup> 1999: 5.

years and assumes that ancient depictions of the body served basically the same purpose.<sup>108</sup>

Developing on Gimbutas' consideration, I think it is not unlikely that to the eyes of the modern viewer the statuettes may appear sexually suggestive due to the exaggeration of erotic areas, but I consider the apparently ripe female form could be associated with the fecundity and abundance of the earth, since the body itself appears bountiful.<sup>109</sup> I use the example of the Venus of Laussel (**Image 2**) to better illustrate my point. The statuette was discovered in the South of France and dates between 25, 000 – 20,000 BCE.



**Image 2 (Venus of Laussel)**<sup>110</sup>

Visible are the goddess's large sagging breasts, which I interpret as highlighting the idea of fertility and nourishment; wide-set hips accommodate the heavy, fruitful belly; and an obviously marked triangular vulva, emphasising procreative faculties. The relief shows traces

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<sup>108</sup> Ibid.

<sup>109</sup> A modern study conducted between the UK and South Africa, entitled 'Changing Perspectives of Attractiveness as Observers are Exposed to a Different Culture', by Martin J Tovée, Viren Swami, Adrian Furnham, and Roshila Mangalparsad in 2006 shows that 'In the UK, a high body mass is correlated with low health and low fertility, and the converse is true in rural South Africa' (443), the reason being that South Africa has low resources and is economically deprived. It then follows that body fat is associated with wealth and prosperity, and obesity is 'a symbol of economic success, femininity, and sexual capacity...Only high-status individuals would have been able to put on body weight, which would explain why many of the world's cultures had or have ideals of female beauty that include plumpness, as it would have been advantageous for women to be able to store excess food as fat in times of food surplus' (450 -451).

<sup>110</sup> Online Source: <http://www.ritualgoddess.com/the2012vortex/?tag=goddess>.

of being painted with red ochre, which may be suggestive of blood. Although fat and naked, she is not shyly attempting to conceal her body, but draws attention to her life-giving qualities by placing her hand protectively over her belly in the fashion of a mother. In her right hand she holds a crescent horn with thirteen incisions, which she seems to be looking at. In order to interpret this, I refer to my two sources on ancient symbols. Gimbutas thinks this may be the time-reckoning waxing moon, emblematic of regeneration after death.<sup>111</sup> Johnson sees it as a bull's horn, and as the first documentation of the symbolic relationship between the goddess and the bull,<sup>112</sup> which I will explore further in the section relating to Cretan religion. I perceive the crescent object as the moon, linking the bountiful goddess of the earth with the heavens, and the natural cycles governed by the changing moon. That her featureless face is turned towards it, and that she holds it in her hand is indicative of her immense power over the earth and heavens. Putting this into more focus, Joseph Campbell says:

This little Venus of Laussel is holding in her right hand, elevated, a bison horn with thirteen vertical strokes. That is the number of nights between the first crescent and full moon. The other hand is on the belly. What is suggested – we don't have any words of writing from this period - is a recognition of the equivalence of the menstrual cycle and the lunar cycles. This would be the first inkling we have of a recognition of counterparts between the celestial and earthly rhythms of life.<sup>113</sup>

One outcome of my research into the Palaeolithic Venus figurines has been bewilderment that such representations, so conspicuously dissimilar to depictions of Venus of Classical times, should come to share the same label. I find the prehistoric artists' portrayal of women or goddesses as obese and nude to be in stark contrast to the Classical Greek ideal of a perfect woman, and indeed representations of other goddesses from the same period. In the case of Greek art from the Classical period, women, and female deities, even those associated with fertility, are often depicted in sculpture with a slim figure, serene face and naturalistic

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<sup>111</sup> 1989: 288.

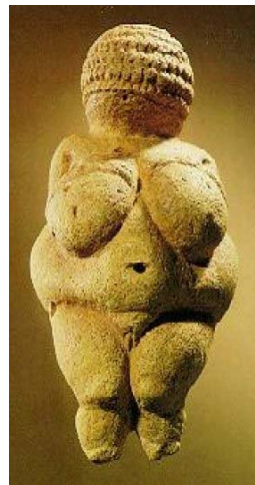
<sup>112</sup> 1994: 320.

<sup>113</sup> 1990: 12 – 13.

shape.<sup>114</sup> The name “Venus” results in the connection of the primal goddess with a Classical Venus, imposing those implications of sexuality and the Greco-Roman ideals of femininity onto a goddess to which those principles simply do not apply. To demonstrate this, I have juxtaposed the Palaeolithic Venus, in this case, the Venus of Willendorf (**Image 4**), dating between 20, 000 – 18, 000 BCE, with her namesake; the Capitoline Venus (**Image 3**), from the Hellenistic Period, although only a later copy survives today. The likenesses are each distinct. The only resemblances are, in my eyes, that both goddesses are associated with fertility at different times in human history, and both representations can be perceived as erotic. I am aware of the advances in artistic techniques made over the more than 15, 000 years that separate these two, but this is less an assessment of artistic technique and more a questioning of the characters that can be perceived by looking at the statues. Also significant is that while most Palaeolithic sculptures depict naked females, Kenneth Clark points out that, representations of nude women in ancient Greece are rare before the 4<sup>th</sup> century BCE.<sup>115</sup> Peter Stewart states that of all gods depicted in Roman sculpture, the Venus-types were most familiar and widespread, if not more various and more distinct.<sup>116</sup> My aim is merely to show that the name “Venus” for the Palaeolithic sculptures is incompatible with the Classical idea of Venus, and thus it is foolish to equate them to each other by name.



**Image 3** (Capitoline Venus)<sup>117</sup>



**Image 4** (Venus of Willendorf)<sup>118</sup>

<sup>114</sup> See for instance Wounded Amazon by Polyclitus (440 BCE) (Durando 1997: 144), Aphrodite of Cnidus (Durando 1997: 152) by Praxiteles (c. 350 BCE), and The Maenad of Skopas (c. 340 BCE) (Durando 1997: 148).

<sup>115</sup> 1956: 66.

<sup>116</sup> 2003: 51.

<sup>117</sup> Clark 1956: 81.

When studying these figurines side by side I am compelled to use contradictory adjectives. It needs to be said that the Capitoline Venus belongs to a category of sculpture known as the *Venus Pudica*, or Modest Venus, which depicts the nude goddess concealing herself as she steps into or out of her ritual bath.<sup>119</sup> These types of depiction of the Classical Venus evolved from Praxiteles' Aphrodite of Cnidus (c. 350 BCE), which shows the goddess attempting to hide her pubic region with her hand as if ashamed of her nudity. Likewise the Capitoline Venus gives the impression of being self-conscious that she may seem sexually appealing to her male viewers, and attempts to conceal herself in shame. This supports the argument that later representations of the goddess depict her as a coy beauty, conspicuously aware of the male gaze.<sup>120</sup> The Capitoline Venus with her naturalistic body, slim hips and smaller breasts avoids the gaze of her audience. She is shy and modest. Conversely, the Venus of Willendorf confronts her audience directly as she drapes her hands over her large breasts, almost inviting her viewers to focus on them. The Venus of Willendorf is exaggerated in the buttocks, hips, breasts, and thighs; she seems confident, and proudly bears her ample body. The Venus of Willendorf does not seem to have expectations or concerns about being viewed as erotic, but, to me, seems more like an object of reverence for her regenerative faculties. Without doubt, out of the two figures, it is clear that the Palaeolithic Venus, with her self-assured stance, and hefty body should be most connected to the earth and fertility, rather than sexual love as the Classical Venus is.

The Venus of Willendorf is an example of images Gimbutas describes as “fat ladies”. The stereotypical “fat lady” figurine depicts an earth goddess who is usually, although not necessarily pregnant, with the ample breasts and buttocks being the focus of the observer’s attention.<sup>121</sup> To my own knowledge, many cultures associate fuller figures with the reproductive merits of fertility, pregnancy, and birthing a healthy infant. This would tie in with the possible primary concern for people of the Neolithic Age, the continuation of their people through procreation. Ehrenberg points out that ‘fertility is much more important to small societies who are dependent on maintaining a constant birth-rate simply for their

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<sup>118</sup> Eller 2000: 135.

<sup>119</sup> See also Venus de Milo (130 – 100 BCE) (Durando 1997: 154).

<sup>120</sup> See Hilson 1991: 236.

<sup>121</sup> 1989:141.

survival.’<sup>122</sup> In this way these “fat ladies” may illustrate the primitive community’s idea of the ideal woman most suited for successful conception and birth. It is possible though that while this was a priority, childbirth could have been regarded by prehistoric people as entirely ordinary. Indeed, the interpretation I have just offered does depend on the figurines being connected in every respect to motherhood and fertility, but it cannot be determined if this really was their sole purpose. As Ehrenberg points out, the figurines may ‘simply depict women who to our eyes would be obese; yet this obesity may have been a highly desirable state to generally thinner, less well nourished women.’<sup>123</sup> Eller, attempting to disprove the matriarchal theory, suggests that the Venus figurines may be a straightforward representation of the women of prehistoric times, who, for some reason that Gimbutas herself does not clarify, just happened to be fat.<sup>124</sup>

Amid so many contradictory interpretations, what then was the function of the prehistoric “Venus” figurines? What ideas or opinions were they communicating? Whose ideas were they communicating? There is no tangible evidence but authors have speculated. I will discuss the theories of three scholars: Ehrenberg, Marshack and Eller. Firstly, Ehrenberg, with the understanding that the mother goddess interpretation of the sculptures is not the only possibility, offers other insights. Ehrenberg covers all bases. Firstly, the figurines may have been part of sympathetic magic rituals seeking to bring about pregnancy.<sup>125</sup> In such a situation, figurines would be made showing a particular woman as pregnant and might be carried around or used in rituals. Ehrenberg speculates that this would account for the dominance of the female figures. Another of Ehrenberg’s options sees the statues as representative of spirits rather than goddesses, with the intention of protecting the home.<sup>126</sup> The figurines narrow to a point without feet, indicating that they might have been fixed upright in the ground for a ritual purpose.<sup>127</sup> Ehrenberg also proposes that the figurines may

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<sup>122</sup> 1989: 73.

<sup>123</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>124</sup> 2000: 135.

<sup>125</sup> 1989: 73.

<sup>126</sup> *Ibid.*, 74.

<sup>127</sup> See also Baring & Cashford 1991: 6.

have been used as teaching aids to signify mythological characters or demonstrate proper behaviour. They could have been used to explain pregnancy to pubescent girls.<sup>128</sup> Finally, Ehrenberg does not dismiss commonplace explanations such as the figurines may have been dolls for children, although still of significant shape.<sup>129</sup>

According to Alexander Marshack, the images have been labelled “Goddess” based, firstly, on the visual evidence of the exaggerated breasts and pregnant bellies, and secondly on ‘what is known from the history of religion and from a study of historic primitive peoples who often have a goddess who is mother of the creatures, or mother of the earth, sky or waters, or mother of the tribe or gods, an ancient mother who may also be an intervening spirit in pregnancy and birth.’<sup>130</sup> Marshack devises his own theory on the subject of the figurines based on evidence from wall paintings which showed activities such as hunting mythologized into stories by prehistoric people. In the same way then, Palaeolithic people may have translated the processes and functions of the female body, including menstruation, pregnancy, and lactation, into stories, and captured in art in the form of the statues. Marshack considers that:

If we accept the validity of that level of cognition, culture, and use of symbol apparent in the notions and art, we can assume that the equally meaningful time-factored processes and sequences related to women would also be storied and symbolized and females would be prepared for these processes and would be given explanations at each stage. We would also assume a specialization in which there would be one set of stories for the child, one for the developing and one for the mature female, and a completely different set for the male, whose personality, role, sexual development, and processes are different.<sup>131</sup>

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<sup>128</sup> 1989: 74.

<sup>129</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>130</sup> 1991: 282.

<sup>131</sup> *Ibid.*, 283.

I find that this theory compares to Ehrenberg's interpretation of the statues as teaching aids used to demonstrate social behaviour codes. Similarly, Marshack offers other understandings of the figurines that are akin to Ehrenberg's, such as the suggestion that the figures were used for sympathetic magic for success in pregnancy, and dealt with initiatory rituals.<sup>132</sup>

Lastly, Eller argues that the figurines may have religious or magic functions for two main reasons. The most notable feature of the "Venuses" is the carefully worked torso, as compared to the unfinished or simply fashioned heads, arms and feet, apparent in the Venus of Willendorf. The focus and attention on the breasts, stomach, thighs and vagina may indicate that the sculptor wished to highlight those features since the figurine was to be used to stimulate fertility in women. Secondly, since the figurines appear not to have been completed, it can be speculated that their purpose and speedy production were more important than the actual appearance of the end result.<sup>133</sup> As my previous discussion of Eller demonstrates, it is not surprising that she does not see the above reasons as a sign that a goddess worshipping civilization existed in prehistory, or that the statues represent goddesses. She gives four reasons. Firstly, she states that symbolic images of women can occur without them depicting divinity. Secondly, disproportionate or exaggerated images can exist in male dominated societies. Thirdly, female images can be found in cultures dominated by male monotheistic religions. And lastly, deities need not always be represented, and sometimes, as in Mesopotamian culture, female deities are often depicted in art, while the invisible male deity is discussed in texts.<sup>134</sup> Eller highlights that some of the goddess statues do not show signs of pregnancy and if they were meant to suggest fertility, they would depict figures unquestionably pregnant, giving birth, or holding an infant.<sup>135</sup> However none of these activities is depicted. Eller concludes that, 'pregnant or not, the very size of some of the Palaeolithic Venuses is read by feminist matriarchalists as an expression of fertility. Gimbutas refers routinely to the goddess's "regenerative buttocks," as though buttocks were somehow actively involved in pregnancy.'<sup>136</sup> Yet, in Gimbutas' defence, she does explain

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<sup>132</sup> Ibid., 282.

<sup>133</sup> 2000: 136.

<sup>134</sup> Ibid., 141.

<sup>135</sup> Ibid., 134.

<sup>136</sup> Ibid.



that ‘fertility is only one among the goddess’s many functions. It is inaccurate to call Palaeolithic and Neolithic images “fertility goddesses”.’<sup>137</sup>

Nevertheless, the interpretation preferred by many feminist authors remains that the sculptures are representations of goddesses. It has been suggested that the statues are ‘not naturalistic’ enough to portray everyday women, unless it is assumed ‘that the Palaeolithic artist had no sense of proportion for human females while having exquisite artistry for animals.’<sup>138</sup> In addition, the female figure seems to have been valued over the male, with almost no depictions of men from the same period. This begs the questions: why sculpt the female form rather than the male? Does this suggest that women were honoured above men, or honoured less than men? In order to test the above hypothesis a matriarchal society needs to be examined. I have chosen to use Çatal Hüyük and Minoan Crete as two examples of possible matriarchal civilizations.

### **2.2.2. A Neolithic Civilization: Çatal Hüyük**

The Neolithic town of Çatal Hüyük in Anatolia, which was occupied between 7400 – 6000 BCE, was first excavated in the 1960s by James Mellaart, who observed the site to be a ‘spectacular addition to our knowledge of the earliest phases of human achievement in terms of urban settlement.’<sup>139</sup> Mellaart was sensitive to the theory of matriarchal civilizations, and to the idea that a great goddess was the primary and most important deity during prehistoric times. He strove to show this at the site of Çatal Hüyük. However, the evidence and this theory at times contradict each other, and deductions appear forced or tailored to suit his predetermined viewpoint. Mellaart’s speculations concerning the site will be discussed. I have left criticisms till the end of my survey.

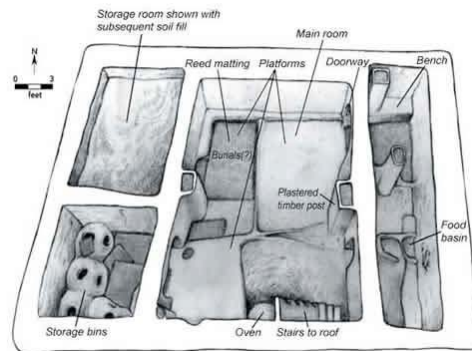
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<sup>137</sup> 1989: 316.

<sup>138</sup> See Baring & Cashford 1991: 6.

<sup>139</sup> 1967: 15.

Many features of day-to-day life in Çatal Hüyük would be deemed strange and extraordinary by twenty-first century standards. The first unusual characteristic is the house itself (**Image 5**) which has no windows, or doors. Entrance is gained via the roof. Ian Hodder, who has directed excavations at Çatal Hüyük since 1993, identifies the home as ‘the focus of all forms of social life at Çatal Hüyük. In the house symbolic and practical aspects of daily life are thoroughly integrated.’<sup>140</sup>



**Image 5** (Reconstruction of interior of house at Çatal Hüyük)<sup>141</sup>

Mellaart explains the setup of a house in Çatal Hüyük as follows:

Each house had a wooden ladder made of squared timber (10 – 12.5 cms thick), one side of which rested along the south wall...This ladder led to a hole in the roof and through this same hole the smoke from hearth, oven and lamps escaped. For this reason the kitchen end of the house, where hearth and oven are situated, is always placed along the south wall.<sup>142</sup>

Note how Mellaart stresses the hearth's importance. Naturally, the hearth is identified with women and the goddess; it is an emblem of the home, and women stay home to tend to meals

<sup>140</sup> 2006: 110.

<sup>141</sup> *Ibid.*, 111.

<sup>142</sup> 1967: 56.

and children. One with knowledge of ancient Greece is likely to think of the homely goddess Hestia upon hearing the word “hearth”, and this fuels the matriarchal hypothesis of Çatal Hüyük, since it follows that, if the hearth was the centre of the home and home was the centre of daily life, the women who controlled the hearth should be the centre of society. The purpose of this innovation of “no doors” may have been defensive protection against enemies, wild animals or floods. Raised platforms served as beds. Mellaart came up with the idea that ‘the small corner platform belonged to the male, the master, whereas the much larger and main platform belonged to the mistress of the house. The woman’s bed never changed its place, nor did the arrangement of the kitchen, but the man’s bed did. The sociological implications to be drawn from this are fairly obvious.’<sup>143</sup> This gives the impression that women were seen as more important than men, and were revered, even within their own homes. Mellaart discloses another peculiarity: ‘Below these platforms the dead lay buried.’<sup>144</sup> So, the home also served as the burial site for families. Upon death, the corpse was exposed on a platform outside the settlement, and stripped of soft tissue by vultures. Evidence for this is provided by a wall painting showing vultures feasting on the bodies of six humans. After this, great care was taken to preserve the skeleton intact in its anatomical position. Burial within the house coincided with the annual spring rite so it was possible that the skeleton was kept in a mortuary till the ceremony.<sup>145</sup> Mellaart discovered that out of four hundred skeletons, eleven had been painted with red ochre on the skull or on the body, and of these eleven all were female. This led Mellaart to deduce that women had a higher status in Çatal Hüyük than men. He associates the colour red with ritual, to protect against evil spirits, symbolic of life and blood.<sup>146</sup>

Mellaart comments that the art, wall-paintings and plaster reliefs of women, whom he considers as goddesses, and of animals did not have a decorative purpose, but a ritualistic one since ‘wall-paintings were covered by layers of whitewash after they had served their ritual function and the plaster-reliefs were made ritually harmless by the obliteration of the face,

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<sup>143</sup> Ibid., 60.

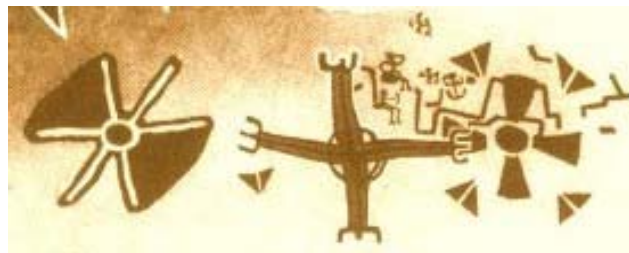
<sup>144</sup> Ibid.

<sup>145</sup> Ibid., 204.

<sup>146</sup> Ibid., 150.

hands and feet when the shrine was abandoned.’<sup>147</sup> At the lowest levels of the site there are no human representations, but depictions of bulls, rams or bull’s horns, which Mellaart interprets as zoomorphic depictions of male gods: ‘In plaster reliefs goddesses appear solely in anthropomorphic form and the place of the male is taken by bulls and rams, a more impressive exponent of male fertility.’<sup>148</sup> The goddess is depicted in wall-paintings and reliefs with arms raised and feet upturned which, according to Mellaart, is indicative of childbirth. In many shrines throughout Çatal Hüyük a ram or bull’s head with horns, fashioned from clay, is sometimes situated immediately below the goddess.

Mellaart states that this ‘representation is clear and shows the goddess having given birth to a bull.’<sup>149</sup> This goddess motif, with splayed appendages, can be seen in a panel of wall-painting that Mellaart believes may symbolize a Neolithic agrarian rite to the great goddesses (**Image 6**).



**Image 6** Panel from shrine VI.A.66<sup>150</sup>

The wall-painting shows three small goddess figures, and two bigger humans, one of whom is carrying a bow. Mellaart believes it is impossible to conclude with certainty that the humans depicted are paying homage to the goddesses, however, as always, he comes to this deduction by guessing at the symbols. The cross in the centre could be four additional people, standing in a circle with their hands raised in worship to the goddess. There is a double-axe-like symbol on the left, yet Mellaart points out that no double axes were discovered at the site of

<sup>147</sup> Ibid., 82.

<sup>148</sup> Ibid., 101.

<sup>149</sup> Ibid., 124.

<sup>150</sup> Online Source: <http://www.marlamallett.com/ch.htm>

Çatal Hüyük, and thus there are no grounds for interpreting this symbol literally. It could be a type of insect. The cross on the right has been interpreted as a flower, while the double triangles appear to Mellaart to be moths attracted to the flower, and thus suggest the theme of spring: ‘One of the most common moths round Çatal Hüyük is the hummingbird moth, which flies by day, and the “double axe” may represent some bright butterfly, of which there are plenty in the spring in the Konya Plain when the plain is studded with flowers.’<sup>151</sup>

In depictions of vultures, Mellaart sees the aspect of the goddess associated with death. From representations of floral and vegetation patterns he sees the goddess’s power over plant life and agriculture.<sup>152</sup> Mellaart is in favour of the theory that religious worship at Çatal Hüyük centred on the great goddess. The male deity, the son of the goddess rather than a powerful divinity in his own right, was not as prominent as the female, but he does mention that ‘if the goddess presided over all the various activities of the life and death of the Neolithic population of Çatal Hüyük, so in a way did her son. Even if his role is strictly subordinate to hers, the male’s role in life appears to have been fully realized.’<sup>153</sup> So, he describes an egalitarian community. Women in this Neolithic civilization had pre-eminence because they took over a great number of day-to-day tasks:

As the only source of life she became associated with the processes of agriculture, with the taming and nourishing of domesticated animals, with the ideas of increase, abundance and fertility. Hence a religion which aimed at exactly the same conservation of life in all forms, its propagation, and the mysteries of its rites connected with life and death, birth and resurrection, were evidently part of her sphere rather than that of man. It seems extremely likely that the cult of the goddess was administered mainly by women, even if the presence of male priests is by no means excluded.<sup>154</sup>

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<sup>151</sup> 1967: 161-162.

<sup>152</sup> *Ibid.*, 183.

<sup>153</sup> *Ibid.*, 184.

<sup>154</sup> *Ibid.*, 202

Mellaart states that figurines are the most important source for the reconstruction of Neolithic religion at Çatal Hüyük.<sup>155</sup> While wall-paintings were covered when their purpose was completed, statues, made of stone, were not discarded or destroyed but moved to other shrines or preserved in houses. Both males and females are depicted in statues; however the female outnumbers the male, as in Palaeolithic sculpture:

They are anything but uniform and one definitely has the impression that different aspects of the deities are stressed. Various ages, *hieros gamos* (ritual marriage) pregnancy, birds, command over wild animals, etc., are all clearly defined and many of the statuettes tell a story besides simply representing the goddess or the god; they refer to a certain episode in the life of the deities or they more clearly define a well-known association.<sup>156</sup>

Of the figurines discovered at the site, one in particular has captured the interest and imaginations of feminist matriarchalists, The Goddess of the Leopards (**Image 7**), which was found in a grain bin, and is thus linked to agriculture and produce.



**Image 7** (The Goddess of the Leopards)<sup>157</sup>

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<sup>155</sup> Ibid., 180.

<sup>156</sup> Ibid., 180-181.

<sup>157</sup> Hodder 2006: 160.

The goddess sits on a throne with leopards at each hand. Like the Palaeolithic Venuses, she is fat, with sagging breasts, large thighs, and a pregnant belly. Mellaart identifies the ball of stone between her legs as a male child appearing from her womb.<sup>158</sup> Gimbutas as well catalogues this statue as a birth-giving goddess, ‘a corpulent woman, the head of an infant emerging from between her ample thighs’.<sup>159</sup> Mellaart stresses that the goddess’s association with wild animals, and in particular, with leopards, the fiercest of animals in the region, reflects her role as provider of food and patroness of the hunt.<sup>160</sup>

With all their responsibilities, women, in Mellaart’s view, had a higher status at Çatal Hüyük than in later societies. However, Eller points out that in this society, hunting was continuously an important activity and strongly linked to men.<sup>161</sup> Building on this, Hodder also indicates that while there must have been different gender roles, there is too little evidence to suggest that one gender was honoured above another.<sup>162</sup> Eller notes that some feminists account for the inclusion of the masculine on the site as a balancing of the sexes in Neolithic time, or, as Mellaart has done, conceptualizing the bull as the son of the goddess, symbolizing the potency of female reproductive power.<sup>163</sup> Hodder dismisses this on account of ‘very little evidence that mothering was central to symbolic life, and there is really nothing in the lump of clay between the legs of the seated woman to suggest it is the head of a baby being born.’<sup>164</sup> Eller adds: ‘While women give birth in a variety of positions, this one is particularly odd, since the woman would either be lying down spread-eagled or standing upright, balanced on her heels.’<sup>165</sup>

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<sup>158</sup> 1967: 183.

<sup>159</sup> 1989: 107.

<sup>160</sup> 1967: 181 – 182. Campbell, in contrast, associates the presence of felines with the sun, which is symbolic of absolute life (1990: 20).

<sup>161</sup> 2000: 147.

<sup>162</sup> 2006: 218.

<sup>163</sup> 2000: 147.

<sup>164</sup> 2006: 218.

<sup>165</sup> 2000: 144.

In truth there is scant evidence for matriarchal rule at Çatal Hüyük. Lerner acknowledges Çatal Hüyük as offering hard substantiation of the existence of some kind of alternative to patriarchy, even though it provides no solid proof for the existence of a matriarchal society.<sup>166</sup> I agree with this. It appears that people in this prehistoric society each adapted to and carried out duties that best suited the community as a whole. Perhaps Mellaart was inspired and influenced by the wealth of goddess imagery interpreted by Sir Arthur Evans at Crete in 1900. Like Evans, Mellaart uncovered a lost civilization, and reconstructed much of the art based principally on instinct and his own imaginings. It is possible that Mellaart was hopeful of discovering a civilization equally as groundbreaking and controversial as that of Evans' Crete. Whatever his motives, Çatal Hüyük today is a popular pilgrimage site for feminists, and Eller marvels that 'not all women who embark on these adventures are committed matriarchalists, but few who return from their summer vacations are not as agnostic towards prehistoric matriarchies as they may have been when they left.'<sup>167</sup> Eller points out the need many women have to envisage a matriarchal society due to the overwhelming strength of patriarchy: 'Patriarchy is monolithic, it is universal, it permeates everything. Clearly, one needs to juxtapose something equally large and solid against it if there is to be any hope of dislodging it.'<sup>168</sup> This is the foremost reason why Çatal Hüyük may always be associated with goddess worship and the high status of women, even if the theory is disproven. It is difficult to sway the sympathy of people who are emotionally involved. Most refuse to acknowledge that Mellaart's "evidence" can be discredited. In an article for *Discover Magazine*, Hodder reveals that goddess adepts frequently tell him that they do not want his data disproving Mellaart's claims 'because it is already contaminated by his own white-male subjectivity.'<sup>169</sup> To this, Hodder responds, which I feel best encapsulates all that can be determined by Çatal Hüyük - 'there is no one objective reality at Çatal Hüyük, no single story - as Mellaart hoped - but many stories, all with a tentative connection to reality at best.'

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<sup>166</sup> 1986: 35.

<sup>167</sup> 2000: 23.

<sup>168</sup> *Ibid.*, 19.

<sup>169</sup> Online Source: *A Tale of Two Archaeologists* (Kunzig: 1999).



### 2.2.3. The Aegean in Prehistory

Perhaps the above statement can be applied to Minoan Crete, the “reality” of much of which was crafted by Sir Arthur Evans, who discovered the civilization in 1900, and who then began excavations, and “reconstructions”. Evans even coined the term “Minoan” to describe the culture at Crete, inspired by the legendary king of Knossos, Minos, who ruled during the time of Theseus and the Minotaur, and Icarus and Daedalus. L. J. Fitton, blaming lack of caution in the face of excitement, remarks that Evans plucked the name of Minos from mythology and went on to speculate that “Minos”, like “Pharaoh” in Egypt, was the hereditary name belonging to rulers of Crete.<sup>170</sup> However, as Fitton reminds us, we do not know what the Minoans called themselves and there is ‘no real proof that Minoan society was ruled by a king, or that the concept of a “royal family” would have had any meaning.’<sup>171</sup> Evans’ excavations at Crete and deductions he has made concerning Minoan culture are controversial to say the least, urging Fitton to ask, ‘Did Arthur Evans simply discover the world of Minoan Crete, or did he to some degree invent it?’<sup>172</sup> In Fitton’s view, the site of Knossos with all its warm colours, decorations, postcard-worthy scenes, and memorable sights that leave visitors enchanted ‘is a beguiling mixture of the real and the restored. With the eye dazzled by the light and the shade of its courts and inner recesses, and the mind filled with the warm earth colours of the fading paintings, it is indeed difficult to keep a firm hold on where fact ends and fantasy begins.’<sup>173</sup> As A. Brown observes: ‘there is little doubt that, in order to create an impression, Evans in many instances overstepped the mark and some restoration is mere conjecture.’<sup>174</sup> More indignant is Furio Durando, who rather bitterly states:

During excavations in Knossos over a period of thirty years (1903 – 31), under the supervision of Arthur J. Evans, the palace-settlement underwent a disastrous “restoration.” The result may be to the liking of tourists in search of picturesque

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<sup>170</sup> 1996: 125.

<sup>171</sup> Ibid.

<sup>172</sup> Ibid., 115.

<sup>173</sup> Ibid., 115 -116.

<sup>174</sup> 1986: 13.

views, but absurd and anachronistic concessions to undiscerning “lovers of ruins” turned several pieces of the complex – “reconstructed” using painted reinforced concrete – into backdrops for picturesque postcards. Nevertheless, thanks to comparisons with the palace-settlements of Festos, which was excavated with far different scientific criteria and respect by the Italian School of Archaeology in Athens, it has been possible to determine the fundamental scheme and technical solutions used by Cretan architects.<sup>175</sup>

It is true that Minoan Crete, like Çatal Hüyük, shows traces of being a matriarchal society, which I will discuss in detail. But it would be imprudent to trust all the evidence provided by the site. The reason being, that a significant portion of the remains of the civilization was “reconstructed” by Evans according to his own whims and fancies. Thus, my answer to Fitton’s question above, is that I do believe that in some respects Evans did not merely discover the society, but created a large portion of Minoan culture. Take, for example, the frescoes. Evans, with the Swiss artist, Emile Gillieron, restored frescoes simply by assessing faded colours, and the jigsaw puzzle presented by various fragments.<sup>176</sup> Such rooms in the grand palace of Knossos like the famous Throne Room were simply dreamed up by Evans. The room, discovered without walls or colour, with only an alabaster throne and a surrounding bench was transformed into an elegant apartment showing attractive, wingless griffins in a field of lilies. Supporting columns in a deep red were also added, giving the impression of an affluent nation. In light of all this, little can be said with certainty about Minoan culture. In my opinion, Evans, no doubt passionate about his Minoans, had been swept away with imagining an ideal civilization at the very beginnings of the Greek world. Other writers like Gimbutas followed this train of thought without much questioning. Despite the tainted evidence, I will offer an analysis of Minoan art and culture.

In keeping with my area of interest, Evans’ excavations led him to believe that a type of monotheism, focused around a mother goddess was practised very early in Cretan history,

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<sup>175</sup> 1997: 240.

<sup>176</sup> See for instance the fresco of the “Ladies in Blue” (Durando 1997: 77). A large portion of this, including the three heads, was reconstructed.

before the introduction of her son/lover. He then assumes that ancient Crete was a goddess-revering matriarchal society, in which women were valued higher than men, as I will show. Gimbutas supports this theory stating that while the Indo-Europeans were invading and assimilating their sky god to the rest of “Old Europe”, the islands of the Aegean were left unaffected and overlooked due to their location. The islands were inaccessible to the Indo-Europeans who relied on horses, and were unfamiliar with sea navigation.<sup>177</sup> Consequently, according to Gimbutas, and in the same vein as Evans:

The Minoan culture, as a result of its geographical location, preserved matrilineal customs much later than its counterparts on the mainland. A vast amount of religious art, architecture and sepulchral evidence of Minoan culture attests to the importance of the female and the matrilineal inheritance patterns of the culture.<sup>178</sup>

Writing more recently, Nanno Marinato does not support this theory:

First, it is very unlikely that there was one goddess. All the ‘high-cultures’ of the eastern Mediterranean were polytheistic, and had Crete been different it would have been an anomaly. Second, Minoan/Mycenaean iconography does not support the monotheistic position, because several deities may appear on rings or seals simultaneously, most notably on some newly discovered gold rings from Poros, near Herakleion, Crete.<sup>179</sup>

The clearest indication of Minoan gender relations comes to us by way of frescoes, often portraying exuberant, celebratory scenes in which men and women appear to be interacting freely as equals. The women, who are distinguishable by having been painted in white, are depicted more frequently and with greater detail than the red-painted men. Eller offers some

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<sup>177</sup> 1999: 131.

<sup>178</sup> *Ibid.*, 121.

<sup>179</sup> 2000: 112.

insightful observations on the frescoes acknowledging that the relaxed interaction between men and women is ‘impressive’, if viewed in the context of what is known about gender relations in the classical Greek world. However, she does highlight that ‘art is art, and life is life’<sup>180</sup> and that these do not necessarily correlate. In addition she points out that ‘though the frescoes show an unprecedented intermingling of the sexes and significant freedoms for women, they are no more than what we are accustomed to in our own culture, one which, according to feminist matriarchalists, is patriarchal.’<sup>181</sup> I agree with Eller’s comments. If the frescoes are an accurate reconstruction, and do depict situations that occurred in Cretan reality, under what circumstances did men and women interact as is depicted? Was it everyday situations or festive occasions? Unless this can be answered it would be unwise to assume that such equality existed on a day-to-day basis. Supporting this, Ehrenberg states that pictures alone cannot be used as proof for the high status of women.<sup>182</sup>

Of the countless symbols prevalent in Minoan art, I find most fascinating the serpent, and the bull. The snake is one of the oldest and most ubiquitous symbols in art, and one that, like the goddesses at the heart of this dissertation, once had positive connotations that were altered into evil and deceptive characteristics. The ancient world connects the snake with the art of medicine and healing as is evident in the intertwining serpents present on Asclepius’ caduceus in many artistic representations. Snakes were representative of fertility, eternity and regeneration as they casts off their skins allowing for renewal. Gimbutas interprets the snake as a ‘transfunctional symbol’, ‘primordial and mysterious’, representative of ‘life force’, and goes on to add that ‘the Old European snake is clearly a benevolent creature...In this art we do not find anything that reflects the snake being evil.’<sup>183</sup>

In a repository in the Central Palace Sanctuary at Knossos,<sup>184</sup> Arthur Evans discovered two exquisite and mysterious figurines as seen in full-length **Image 8** and close-up **Image 9**,

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<sup>180</sup> 2000: 153.

<sup>181</sup> *Ibid.*, 155.

<sup>182</sup> 1989: 110.

<sup>183</sup> 1989: 121.

<sup>184</sup> Nilsson 1950: 84.

which have come to be known as Minoan snake goddesses. Both statuettes share similar features with statuettes already discussed, as well as with each other. The statuettes are regarded by many feminists as symbols of the goddess-worshipping matriarchy of Minoan Crete, but this is possibly far from accurate. A large portion of both statuettes has been reconstructed. **Image 8** was originally found without a neck, head, and headdress, all of which were reconstructed based on the head and headpiece of **Image 9**. The left arm and the snake were also reconstructed. **Image 9** was found with its head, headdress, right arm, and most of the torso intact. When considering this, the extent of the liberties taken by Evans during reconstruction becomes most apparent. While many are quick to label the statuettes “goddesses”, their divinity attested by the presence of the serpents, I am not entirely convinced that they are divine.

Marinatos has suggested a Near Eastern interpretation of the figurines, stating that they may depict magical snake handlers, rather than chthonic goddesses. Although snakes were associated with cults of the dead, and heroes in the Greek period, they are not handled by female divinities. Marinatos states that the ‘Near Eastern scheme, on the other hand, which involves throttling or handling snakes, has specific significance: the snake, although polyvalent, can be an enemy. It is fought by male gods or “tamed” (namely handled) by females.’<sup>185</sup> Marinatos goes on to state that statuettes do not depict goddesses but women or, more likely, priestesses.<sup>186</sup> I find this most credible since both were significantly reconstructed. In addition, M. P. Nilsson points out that votive robes and girdles were discovered with the statuettes, suggesting a religious function.<sup>187</sup> They are best examined side by side, considering their similarities first, and then their differences.

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<sup>185</sup> 2000: 112.

<sup>186</sup> *Ibid.*, 155.

<sup>187</sup> 1950: 86.



**Image 8**<sup>188</sup>



**Image 9**<sup>189</sup>

If they are goddesses, then like the Palaeolithic Venuses, and the Anatolian goddess of the Leopards, they would probably symbolize regeneration and fertility. Unlike the Palaeolithic “fat ladies” though, they are slender, slim-waisted, and clothed divinities. Open bodices reveal nourishing breasts, less substantial than those of the Palaeolithic Venuses but more ample than the Classical Aphrodite’s. If they are goddesses or depictions of a mother goddess, this no doubt would signal her power as a nurturer, provider and mother of all living things. Both statuettes are dressed in the similar fashion with long skirts that cover their feet; an attribute Johnson feels is a mark of their divinity.<sup>190</sup> I do not agree with this. It may have been nothing more than an artistic technique or convention not to sculpt feet, or it would be easier to stand the sculpture upright without depicting feet. It may have nothing to do with portraying the statuettes as goddesses. The women are wearing elaborate headdresses or tiaras. The headdress in **Image 8** is adorned by a feline not unlike that present with the goddess of the Leopards which, like the Anatolian goddess, shows her as Mistress of Animals, the epitome of strength and life. Yet, this headdress was constructed only after the statuettes’ discovery and may bear no similarity to what it originally looked like. In **Image 9**,

<sup>188</sup> Eller 2000:154.

<sup>189</sup> Online Source: <http://witcombe.sbc.edu/snakegoddess/evansgoddess.html>

<sup>190</sup> 1994: 143.

the triple-tiered tiara may indicate her supremacy and power.<sup>191</sup> Each has a distinct facial expression. If Gimbutas' interpretation of serpents should be used to assume the meaning of the presence of the snakes, and the statuettes are divinities, then it can be said that **Image 8**, the goddess with a snake in each hand, has power over life and death. By wielding the snakes she demonstrates her authority over the Underworld and the dead. **Image 9** with the serpents almost engulfing the goddess could possibly be showing her to be the ultimate life force. Johnson seems to believe the reconstruction of **Image 9** is accurate, as she describes the statuette as follows:

Three spotty snakes coil around the Goddess; one head is held in her hand. They undulate up her right arm, across the shoulders, and down her other arm. Two intertwine at her hips and form a girdle. One snake's head rests in the centre. Its body loops across the front of her apron and ascends the border of her bodice to wrap its tail around her ear. A third snake, intertwined with the one at the hip moves in the opposite direction. The tail end is woven in the girdle, and the snake edges up the bodice on the left, continuing up over the left ear to coil over the tiara to the crown of her head.<sup>192</sup>

Nilsson links the presence of the snakes with the Minoan house goddess, and in this way, she can be seen as the ancestor of Athena, who is associated with the snake.<sup>193</sup> He states that the goddess's most characteristic feature is 'that she is the goddess and the divine protectress of the town in general. All her functions can easily be deduced from this general function.'<sup>194</sup> As I stated before, it is difficult to trust the evidence provided by Evans on the grounds that so much has been reconstructed. I do not believe these figurines depict goddesses. They could represent a number of things, as is possible with the Palaeolithic sculptures. The statuettes do

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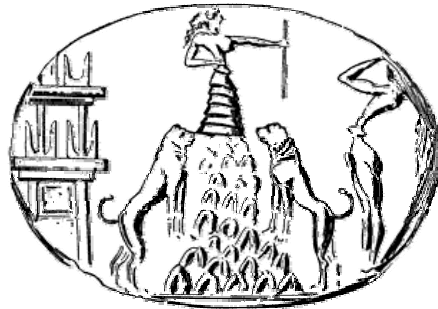
<sup>191</sup> Note that the Papal Tiara, worn by popes from 1314 till 1975, was three-tiered. The tiara was a symbol of power and the papacy. Perhaps Evans had this in mind when attributing power and status to the snake-goddess.

<sup>192</sup> 1994: 143.

<sup>193</sup> 1950: 498.

<sup>194</sup> *Ibid.*, 501.

however foreground the image of the snake, and all things considered, it is not surprising why the snake would be so closely identifiable with the ancient goddess in her chthonic aspects, and as overseer of the natural cycle of life, death and rebirth. Female figures, such as these statuettes and depictions on seal-stones, frescoes and so forth, are frequently shown in a natural setting, or linked with animals. One such example worth mentioning is known as the ‘Mother of the Mountains’ seal from Knossos.<sup>195</sup>



**Image 10**<sup>196</sup>

The seal shows a woman standing high up on a mountain, wearing a skirt not unlike those of the snake-goddesses, and wielding a staff. She is flanked by two lions, and is reminiscent of the Mistress of Animals from Çatal Hüyük. In her company is a male figure. Marinatos, assuming that she is a goddess, states: ‘to her left is a multi-storey structure which must be a palace, to her right is a man who greets her. He is most likely a king, if the structure on the left is a palace. The goddess here may be a patroness of the king, an interpretation which would fit well a society with a divine kingship.’<sup>197</sup> Fitton sees the male as an attendant in the conventional position of worship, and adds that ‘her identification as a goddess is widely accepted and seems fairly secure.’<sup>198</sup> Other representations of goddess-like figures depict the female with trees, birds, snakes, monkeys, and griffins. Marinatos argues that the representation of the goddess with animals ‘denotes power but not forceful dominance...she

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<sup>195</sup> Ibid., 353.

<sup>196</sup> Ibid., 353.

<sup>197</sup> 2000: 118.

<sup>198</sup> 2002: 175.



does not force [the animals] into submission. It is simply her companion.’<sup>199</sup> In this way, she can be seen as a benign creator, to whom the natural world is willing to submit.

The image of the bull is also conspicuous in Minoan culture, and is the focus of investigation for Michael Rice<sup>200</sup> who provides an accessible analysis of the cult of the bull from Anatolia, to Mesopotamia, Persia and Egypt. Rice gives a poetic description of how the bull was perceived by ancient people:

The bull is a chthonic creature and is, however mysteriously, associated with the forces which are found under the earth. The bull is identified with earthquake, with the roar of volcanoes and land-slip, and with flood. The gods who assume its form are often the gods of the underworld...the bull is a celestial creature as much as he is terrestrial; his presence amongst the stars has for a very long time been an element in magic and forecasting the future.<sup>201</sup>

Rice names Çatal Hüyük as one of the earliest centres of the bull cult. Bulls, he says, dominate the settlement, and bull-games were practised here hundreds of years before they appear in Crete.<sup>202</sup> But even Rice admits, that although the bull dominates the artistic vocabulary of so many landscapes, ‘of all the lands in which the bull is especially significant, as an object either of worship or of sacrifice (or of both, since neither was exclusive of the other), none more than Crete has been the subject of study and, equally often enough, of incomprehension.’<sup>203</sup> This is undeniably true. The bull is omnipresent in Minoan Crete, in frescoes, and other artefacts, and in association with the double-axe. There have been many attempts made to understand this. Authors like Rice, Gimbutas, and Stone believe that if a mother goddess was solely revered at Crete at one time, at some point, she acquired a

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<sup>199</sup> 2000: 117.

<sup>200</sup> 1998.

<sup>201</sup> *Ibid.*, 6.

<sup>202</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>203</sup> *Ibid.*, 198.

son/lover who dies and is resurrected every year according to the rhythms of the seasons. The bull is interpreted by these authors as a symbol of fertility and vitality, strongly connected with the goddess's son/lover. Rice articulates it thus: 'The goddess is essentially a regenerative divinity...this cycle of death and regeneration is most dramatically demonstrated in the birth of the goddess's own son, who grows to young manhood, becomes her lover and is then sacrificed to be born again.'<sup>204</sup> Rice names this son/lover as either Zeus, born in a cave in Crete to Rhea and who carried off Europa while in the guise of a bull, or Dionysus who is sometimes depicted as bull-headed.<sup>205</sup> Zeus himself belongs to the tradition of the dying god who is resurrected every year.

The motif of the dying god is one of the central themes in D. A. Richardson's work<sup>206</sup> in which she attempts to determine the impact of the mother goddess in Crete. Richardson stresses the importance of the goddess in Minoan culture. The goddess embodied the creative and destructive forces of nature that are essential for life. The dying god is the personification of vegetation, and every year he grows into manhood, dies and is mourned before he is resurrected. The motif is also discussed by B. C. Dietrich<sup>207</sup> who seeks to give a history of the development of Greek religion, beginning at ancient Crete. Dietrich traces the dying son/lover to Anatolian centres and names such examples as Cybele and Attis, Ishtar and Tammuz, and Isis and Osiris. He names the Cretan god as Zeus, and gives an account of a primitive version of Zeus' birth which shows the god as born anew every year:

According to this version Zeus was born in Crete in a cave which he shared with a swarm of bees and which neither god nor man was allowed to enter. Once each year a fire was seen to flash from the cave when the blood of Zeus' birth flowed forth. This annually reborn god of vegetation also experienced other parts of the vegetation cycle: holy marriage and annual death when he was thought to disappear from the earth. In these respects the young Zeus' fate did not essentially differ from those of,

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<sup>204</sup> 1998: 223.

<sup>205</sup> *Ibid.*, 227.

<sup>206</sup> 1991.

<sup>207</sup> 1974.

for example, the Babylonian Tammuz, the Egyptian Osiris, Adonis in Syria, and Attis in Asia Minor.<sup>208</sup>

Evidence linking Zeus to Cretan origins is the Palaikastro Inscription from 300 BCE called the *Hymn of the Curetes*. The hymn narrates Zeus' birth in Crete and associates Zeus with fertility and nature, strongly emphasising his pre-Hellenic functions. The *Curetes* or *Kouretes* were attendants of Rhea who performed a clashing of shields and swords so that the wailing of the new-born Zeus could be concealed from Kronos. Jane Harrison, as well, states that the hymn was 'chanted by armed dancers.'<sup>209</sup> Harrison points out that the youths refer to Zeus' presence for a year, further emphasising his character as the dying Minoan vegetation God. Harrison continues as follows: 'The armed dancers, it is clear, are in some sense *Kouretes* themselves and as such they invoke the *Kouros*.'<sup>210</sup> Walter Burkert, influenced by Harrison, states that Zeus was born every year in Crete as Kouros, in the glow of a great fire. Burkert calls the *Curetes* 'young warriors' and links the hymn to an initiation ritual for youths, at which time the hymn would be recited.<sup>211</sup> He argues that youths 'who sing the hymn take great leaps in which they summon the god for the year, with all the blessings he brings.'<sup>212</sup>

The similarities between the civilization of Çatal Hüyük and ancient Crete are striking; both are considered to be possible matriarchies, in which a female deity is prevalent; the double axe is a common symbol in both societies, although in Çatal Hüyük, it can be interpreted as a butterfly; and the bull is a feature of art in both religious systems, possibly representing the goddess's son or lover. In light of all that I have discussed concerning Minoan Crete, I do not believe a matriarchy existed. The evidence provided by the so-called snake 'goddesses' is enticing, and perhaps it is true to say that no other artefact from the Aegean world has captured the imaginations of feminists quite like these two statuettes have. Yet, it seems me that feminist writers either turn a blind eye to, or do not realise that these sculptures were

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<sup>208</sup> Ibid., 15.

<sup>209</sup> 1908: 308.

<sup>210</sup> Ibid., 308.

<sup>211</sup> 1985: 262.

<sup>212</sup> Ibid., 262.

largely reconstructed. Perhaps, as Gimbutas pointed out, the location of Crete allowed for the goddess to enjoy an extended period of reverence than would have been possible on the mainland, but would women then have enjoyed a higher status on ancient Crete? This cannot be deduced with absolute certainty on the grounds that so much of the culture has been tainted by Evans's own conjurings. Ehrenberg's observation holds true:

Even if we may hypothesise that women, or at least women of higher status, may have had a better deal in Minoan Crete than in many other later societies, it is impossible to argue that they actually held power. Equally, however, as in most other prehistoric societies, there is no evidence that men held power at the expense of women.<sup>213</sup>

### 1.3. Conclusion

As far as I can tell from my investigation, Ehrenberg's above statement, that little about gender relations and the status of women in prehistoric societies can be determined for certain, holds true. The question then remains; did matriarchies ever exist? Returning to my starting point, Bachofen believes that matriarchy is a necessary step in the social evolution of humanity. Matriarchy and maternal values must transcend to the higher consciousness of patriarchy. Bachofen argues that 'maternity pertains to the physical side of man, the only thing he shares with the animals. The paternal-spiritual principle belongs to him alone. Here he breaks through the bonds of tellurism and lifts his eyes to the higher regions of the cosmos.'<sup>214</sup> Relying on myth as an historical source, Bachofen interprets the myth of Orestes' act of matricide, with reference to plays by Aeschylus and Euripides, as 'a memory of real experiences of the human race,' and 'more than a poetic fiction.'<sup>215</sup> In the myth, Orestes kills his mother in order to avenge his father's death. Bachofen poses the question, 'Which of the two weighs heavier in the balance, father or mother? Which of the two stands closer to the

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<sup>213</sup> 1989: 118.

<sup>214</sup> Manheim 1967: 109 -110.

<sup>215</sup> Ibid., 110.

child?’<sup>216</sup> Bachofen sees this as the struggle between the two principles of maternity and paternity, in which paternity is eventually triumphant. The revelatory speech is given by Apollo in Aeschylus’ *Eumenides*:

Here is the truth, I tell you – see how right I am.  
 The woman you call the mother of the child  
 is not the parent, just a nurse to the seed,  
 the new-sown seed that grows and swells inside her.  
 The *man* is the source of life – the one who mounts.  
 She, like a stranger for a stranger, keeps  
 the shoot alive unless god hurts the roots.<sup>217</sup>

Apollo demonstrates that while the woman is needed as the vessel to bring forth a child, the father is ultimately the giver of life. In Bachofen’s view, this portrays that just as all bonds with the mother are thus relinquished, and the father takes preference, matriarchy must yield to the superiority of patriarchy.

I am not entirely convinced that matriarchies existed. Bachofen’s theory relies far too heavily on purely literary sources, not on archaeological data. The evidence from Çatal Hüyük and Minoan Crete are not solid enough to support this theory. I do, however, favour Lerner’s hypothesis that life in prehistory was more egalitarian, with everyone in a community required to contribute, or even that there was an alternative model to patriarchy that was not matriarchal in nature. This alternative model was eventually superseded by patriarchy when social changes such as marriage, property ownership, laws and kingship were introduced. As Engels argues:

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<sup>216</sup> *Ibid.*, 158.

<sup>217</sup> I have used a translation by Fagels 1977: 260.

The overthrow of mother right was the *world historical defeat of the female sex*. The man took command in the house also; the woman was degraded and reduced to servitude; she became the slave of his lust and a mere instrument for the production of children...The establishment of the exclusive supremacy of the man shows its effects first in the patriarchal family, which now emerges as an intermediate form...Its essential features are the incorporation of unfree persons and paternal power...In order to make certain of the wife's fidelity, and therefore of the paternity of the children, she is delivered over unconditionally into the power of the husband; if he kills her, he is only exercising his right.<sup>218</sup>

I do see reason to believe that a goddess or perhaps goddesses were the sole focus of religious worship in human prehistory. I base this primarily on the "Venus" figurines which, after taking into consideration all interpretations, I do believe may very well represent goddesses. It does not seem far-fetched that primitive man, out of respect for the life-giving capabilities of women and their necessity for the survival of a community, should interpret the female form as magical and worthy of reverence, and thus deify this. With this reasoning, it is not unbelievable that the chief deity should be related to the idea of 'mother'. Nevertheless, matriarchy and goddess worship do not need to go hand-in-hand. As Mary Warner eloquently puts it:

Although the absence of female symbols and a preponderance of male in a society frequently indicates a corresponding deprecation of women as a group and as individuals, the presence of the female symbolism does not guarantee the opposite as we can see from classical Athenian culture, with its subtly psychologised pantheon of goddesses and its secluded unfranchised women; or contemporary Catholic culture, with its pervasive and loving celebration of the Madonna coexisting alongside deep anxieties and disapproval of female emancipation.<sup>219</sup>

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<sup>218</sup> 1972: 120 - 122.

<sup>219</sup> 1976: xx.

Goddesses can be highly venerated within cultures that subordinate women, such as in ancient Greece and in Hinduism today. What is important is that these goddesses endure, and remain fierce individuals in the face of overwhelming patriarchy, just as it has been possible to trace the goddess' endurance from prehistory until the invasion of the Indo-Europeans, and the beginnings of patriarchy. Matriarchies are not essential for the presence and prevalence of powerful, female divinities. Take for instance Kali, who is a predominant goddess in Hinduism, which is decidedly patriarchal whether it be either in the practice of the devastating custom of *sati*, or subtly in the way of life that I witness in my own Hindu household. Kali can be described as savage, unbridled, female energy; characteristics that would seem unsettling to the traditional, patriarchal Hindu man. Yet she is one of the principal deities, worshipped by males and females as a mother, as a creator and as a destroyer. She is unlike the goddesses depicted in the "Venus" figurines in that she does not appear so pensive and serene, but rather is chaotic. Similarly, Hekate, existing in patriarchal Greek culture, is, in later literature, associated with the commotion of hellhounds, and even in earlier art, appears to be in motion with torches in her hands. Perhaps these rebellious goddesses offer a counterbalance to other patriarchal deities for the patriarchs of a society, and are thus welcome and revered. Whether this is true or not, it does beg the question of whether or not these goddesses would at all be necessary in a utopian matriarchy, should one have existed, or if radical feminist authors like Davis should be heeded, should we be on the cusp of a second wave of such a social structure. It remains to discover whether Hekate and Kali are evolutions of the prehistoric goddesses discussed in this chapter which have been tailored to exist within patriarchy, or if they, like the prehistoric goddesses, were goddesses in their own right.

## Chapter 3 - Hekate: Greek Primary Sources

### 3.1. Introduction to Greek Sources

For this study of the goddess Hekate in ancient Greek mythology, religion, and society, I have chosen three primary sources that best highlight her transformation from a benevolent, omnipotent divinity in her own right, as in Hesiod's *Theogony*, to a gracious yet ambiguous caregiver in *The Homeric Hymn to Demeter*, into the witch-goddess of Classical and Hellenistic Greece, associated with necromantic practices, black magic, and the restless dead. In this regard, I will primarily focus on the *Argonautica* by Apollonius of Rhodes, which best highlights Hekate's relationship with the witch, Medea. These sources are the most successful in illuminating why Hekate transforms from helpful to menacing, from one connected with light and the city-state to a nightwalker, who brings with her the darkness of the Underworld. Most importantly, these sources account for the diminishing of her power and reputation over time. References will be made to Homer's *Iliad* and *Odyssey*, Euripides' *Medea*, Aristophanes' *Wasps*, and Strabo's *Geography*.

### 3.2. Hesiod's *Theogony*

Given the scope and immensity of the power attributed to her by Hesiod, it is surprising that Hekate is unknown in Homer, who composed his *Iliad* and *Odyssey* roughly in the same century as Hesiod, albeit slightly earlier. Moreover, it is curious that Hekate should be neglected in Homer's works owing to the belief during the early Hellenistic period at least, that Hekate is the mother of one of the fearsome monsters in Homeric tradition, Scylla,<sup>220</sup> who shares many of her mother's later features, to be discussed at some point during this chapter. However, Hekate appears first in Hesiod's *Theogony*,<sup>221</sup> lines 411 – 452, dating to the 8<sup>th</sup> century BCE, in a passage that focuses on praise and admiration for the goddess and has been named by M. L. West as 'The Hymn to Hekate'.<sup>222</sup> It is the longest piece of the *Theogony* devoted to an individual deity other than Zeus. This is perhaps the most revelatory

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<sup>220</sup> See Apollonius Rhodius' *Argonautica* (Green 1997: 173, line 828).

<sup>221</sup> I have used G. W. Most's translation (2006).

<sup>222</sup> 1966: 276.



source for the study of Hekate's early character. I will provide an in-depth analysis of it, with the use of secondary sources.<sup>223</sup>

The *Theogony* of Hesiod, the shepherd-turned-poet from Boeotia and the son of an immigrant from Asia Minor,<sup>224</sup> is the creation story about the Greek Gods, and their interaction with one another. It tells of how, in a battle for supremacy, the older generation of Titan Gods are defeated and imprisoned in Tartaros by the younger generation, the Olympians. According to West, the *Theogony* is a 'Succession Myth', with separate episodes describing genealogies, and how each generation of gods arises.<sup>225</sup> West observes the parallels between Hesiod's *Theogony* and two Near Eastern myths: the Hittite saga featuring the god Kumarbi, and the Babylonian *Enûma Eliš*.<sup>226</sup> In Hittite myth, Alalu is the king of the heavens, until he is defeated by Anu, the sky-god. Anu in turn battles his son, Kumarbi, who castrates him, swallows his genitals and then spits out what he can. From this is born the god Tasmisu, the Tigris river, and a Weather-god who eventually defeats Kumarbi, and becomes his successor. The *Enûma Eliš* begins with Apsû and Tiâmat, male and female creative energies respectively, who mingle to produce their children. Apsû is slain by his grandson, Ea, and Tiâmat is slain by Ea's son, Marduk, who then divides her body into the earth and sky, and himself becomes king of the gods. West argues, and I agree, that Hesiod, composing soon after Greece emerged from her Dark Ages during a time of intense colonization and trade with the east that resulted in a period of orientalism, was influenced by these works, and that succession myths came to Greece from the Near East.<sup>227</sup>

In Hesiod's *Theogony*, at first Uranos reigns supreme, until he is castrated and overthrown by his son, the Titan Kronos (154 – 210). Kronos then rules until he too is deposed by his own son, Zeus (453 – 506), who with the aid of his siblings battles the Titan gods, incarcerates them in Tartaros, and becomes king of the gods (665 – 733). The poem traces the genealogy

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<sup>223</sup> West 1966, Marquardt 1981, Boedeker 1983, Griffith 1983; Von Rudloff 1999, Clay 2003.

<sup>224</sup> Most 2006: xii.

<sup>225</sup> 1966: 18.

<sup>226</sup> *Ibid.*, 20 – 24.

<sup>227</sup> *Ibid.*, 28.

of the Titan race, of whom Hekate is the last born before the Olympians. The poet describes her as the only child of Perses, son of Eurybia and Crius who was renowned for his intelligence (375 – 377), and the daughter of Coeus and Phoebe, Asteria (404 - 411).

Hesiod offers the earliest interpretation of Hekate, as benign, obliging, accommodating, and exceptionally powerful. Hekate is not imprisoned in Tartaros with her Titan kin, but is revered, and granted her shares of Earth, Sea and Sky by Zeus (412 – 415). Her honours are various and many: she is invoked before every sacrifice (416 – 418), she bestows success (429), blesses leaders (430), aids in warfare (431 – 433), ensures glory in athletics (435 – 438), provides a bountiful catch to fishermen (442 – 443), increases the flock (444), and serves as a nurse to all living creatures (452). Hekate is given, by Zeus, a share of the privileges held by the Olympians, and is allowed to retain the rights she held as a Titan (423 – 428). This description comes into great conflict with later accounts of her since no connection is made to the lunar and magical traits she is then synonymous with, nor is she associated in any way with the Underworld.

Zeus confers on Hekate immense power, and a dominant position amongst the deities. In Hesiod's words 'he gave her splendid gifts – to have a share of the earth and of the barren sea, and from the starry sky as well she has a share in honour, and is honoured most of all by the immortal gods' (412 – 415). She is able to wield her authority over the whole world, except strangely enough, the Underworld, with which she is later connected. In comparison to the other Olympians, who are known for specific duties and functions, Hekate's powers are extreme. She is respected and revered by her peers, including the king of the gods himself. In fact, in the *Theogony*, only Zeus seems to have more influence than she does. She is almost a female equivalent to Zeus, yet does not challenge his authority. Instead, her benevolent contributions to humans are vast, as Hesiod mentions a number of people that benefit from her good will: politicians (430), soldiers (431 - 433), athletes (435 - 438), fishermen (442 - 443), and herdsmen (444).

Most of these affairs, particularly politics, warfare and athletics, relate directly to the emergent city-state and its government. Hesiod portrays her as an architect of civilization. So

it follows that Hekate can be seen as a multi-functional *polis* goddess, similar to Athena, the patron goddess of Athens, recognized for its military ability, and refined regime. In fact, Hekate is no different from Athena *Nike*, ‘the bringer of victory’ in a military sense. Hekate may well be Athena’s predecessor, the original *polis* goddess. Evident is Hekate’s presence in a masculine world. She is a powerful female goddess, worshipped by men requesting aid for masculine affairs, from the most revered of men to the most common and humble. Hekate, like Athena, transcends gender boundaries entering arenas usually dominated by male gods like Apollo, and ambitious men. By linking her to masculine activities in a masculine environment, Hesiod associates her with the masculine traits of culture, reason, and maintaining order, whereas in later literature she is characterised by the untameable, wild, irrational feminine.

In Hesiod’s *Theogony* she works alongside two male gods. The first is Poseidon, with whom she provides a big haul of fish (440 – 441). Then, together with Hermes, she increases livestock (444). It is clear what Hesiod is attempting to illustrate here. He has already revealed that Zeus, the god of the sky, honours Hekate and gladly shares his realm with her. Now he shows that Poseidon, god of the sea, does the same. Similarly, Hermes, god of travellers, shepherds, and thieves, accepts that Hekate has influence over his domain. In Hesiod’s cosmos, Hekate does not appear to threaten these male deities, but rather maintains a comfortable working dynamic alongside them that is advantageous to humans. Lastly, exposing a softer side, Hekate is mentioned as a nurse to all children, the most feminine and nurturing of her functions (452). This calls to mind the goddess Artemis with whom Hekate is later sometimes identified, or even Demeter, who once served as a nurse.<sup>228</sup>

Although her subordination to Zeus is a given, a point made by D. Boedeker cannot be ignored. Boedeker argues that Hekate, with all the power bestowed on her, does not serve Zeus’ interests, but simply adds his honours to those she already held as a Titan.<sup>229</sup> Hesiod portrays her as a goddess with a volatile nature. Her motives are personal rather than influenced by any outside factor, for although she is generous, she does not hesitate to retract

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<sup>228</sup> See Foley 1994: 14, lines 233 – 235.

<sup>229</sup> 1983: 90.

her goodwill, nor does she seem keen to dispense it at all in some cases. This is demonstrated in the repetition of ‘whomever she wishes’ throughout the passage. For example, ‘She stands mightily at the side of whomever she wishes and helps him. In the assembly, whoever she wishes is conspicuous among the people; and when men arm themselves for man-destroying war, the goddess stands by the side of whomever she wishes’ (429 – 432). Furthermore, Hekate, without reason, may choose to renounce her gifts as easily as she confers them: ‘the illustrious goddess easily bestows a big haul of fish, and easily she takes it away once it has been seen, if so she wishes in her spirit’ (442 – 443). P. A. Marquardt too picks up on this, discussing that the ‘unpredictability of Hekate’s favour is a recurring theme in the Hymn’.<sup>230</sup>

The passage in the *Theogony* has stimulated a great deal of speculation and controversy, with suggestions that Hesiod himself did not write it, but rather that it was slotted in later as propaganda by the Hekate cult so as to boost her popularity.<sup>231</sup> Clay states that this theory is based on the ‘apparent lack of integration into [the *Theogony*’s] context,’ and the ‘peculiar terms of praise reserved for the goddess.’<sup>232</sup> West defends Hekate’s inclusion in the *Theogony*, stating that the peculiar praise mentioned above was inspired by Hesiod’s personal beliefs concerning the goddess.<sup>233</sup> West argues that Hekate came to Greece from Caria in Asia Minor, and was probably known in Greece by 700BCE. Caria was the home of the major sanctuary at Lagina where she was honoured according to Hesiodic tradition, free from her darker, unsavoury characteristics. Strabo (64 BCE – CE 19) in his *Geography* indicates that ‘There are two temples in the country of the Stratonician,<sup>234</sup> of which the most famous is that of Hekate at Lagina; and it draws great festal assemblies every year’ (14.2.25).<sup>235</sup> The festivities alluded to by Strabo are the “Procession of the Key”. Sarah Iles Johnston clarifies this as a mysterious, annual festival at Lagina in which the high priestess of Hekate carried a key throughout the city to the main gates.<sup>236</sup> She speculates that the key

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<sup>230</sup> 1981: 247.

<sup>231</sup> Von Rudloff 1999: 10.

<sup>232</sup> 2003: 130.

<sup>233</sup> 1966: 277.

<sup>234</sup> Referring here to Strato of the town of Lampsacus, in Asia Minor.

<sup>235</sup> Jones 1950: 297.

<sup>236</sup> 1999: 206.

would have been to the gates Hekate was to guard over, and that ‘the key signified Hekate’s ability to “close” the city against all dangers or “open” it to benign influences.’<sup>237</sup> This reflects Hekate’s role as protectress of thresholds and gateways. It is likely that Hesiod’s father, originally from Cyme in Asia Minor, came into contact with the Hekate cult through trading activities in Miletus, and thus became a Hekate-worshipper. He brought this practice to Boeotia, where Hesiod was born and raised. West states that he named one of his sons Perses, a name that Hesiod ascribes to Hekate’s father in the *Theogony*, ‘conspicuous amongst all for his intelligence.’<sup>238</sup> This West believes accounts for the wide range of functions attributed to Hekate by Hesiod. She was his patron deity. He explains: ‘A god’s functions are as wide as the needs of his worshippers.’<sup>239</sup> He identifies Hesiod as Hekate’s ‘evangelist’ claiming that ‘she is drawn to life because she is [his] chief goddess.’<sup>240</sup>

Robert Von Rudloff does not agree with West, and questions the validity of his points. He asks, ‘how likely would it have been that Hesiod’s father actually became a devoted follower of Hekate simply because he may have traded in a region where she may have been popular?’<sup>241</sup> Of the name Perses, Van Rudloff states that it could simply have been a popular name in pre-classical times, and that ‘given the obscure nature of this divine Perses, and the fact that other traditions present different fathers for Hekate, for example Helios or Zeus, one could alternatively suggest that Hesiod invented a new father for Hekate in honour of his brother.’<sup>242</sup> Lastly, Von Rudloff does not find West’s theory that Hesiod was a devotee of Hekate convincing for the reason that ‘it makes Hekate’s absence in the rest of the poem even more anomalous: in particular why did Hesiod not name her in the proemium (lines 11 – 21), where several other deities are given special mention? This absence strongly suggests that the poet did not have a personal attachment to her.’<sup>243</sup> Likewise, M. Griffith argues that

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<sup>237</sup> Ibid.

<sup>238</sup> Most 2006: 33.

<sup>239</sup> 1966: 277.

<sup>240</sup> Ibid.

<sup>241</sup> 1999: 13.

<sup>242</sup> Ibid.

<sup>243</sup> Ibid., 12.

if Hekate was so important to Hesiod, why did he not say so? He agrees that ‘it would not have been at all difficult to introduce her, if he had chosen, along with the Muses and Zeus in the Proem, which is specifically addressed to the glory of his patron- and local – deities.’<sup>244</sup>

I, too, find West’s argument without a proper basis, leaving far too much to coincidence. In addition, Hesiod portrays Hekate as a helpful goddess to a vast array of professions. Yet surely if Hekate had been important to Hesiod’s father as a trader, or Hesiod himself as a poet, these would have been included. However traders, as well as poets, are not listed. I favour another of Von Rudloff’s suggestions. He argues that Hekate was not Hesiod’s personal deity, but rather a literary tool.<sup>245</sup> Von Rudloff states that the *Theogony* is essentially about changes in genealogy, with the Hekate passage occurring at a pivotal moment in the poem. It marks the transition between the old generation of Titans, and the rise of Zeus and the new generation of Olympians. When the Olympians take over, humans no longer interact directly with the immortals. In the poem, however, Hekate regulates the relationship between human and the divine. Thus, she bridges transitions and plays the role of mediator between the gods and men.<sup>246</sup> This interpretation makes the most sense. Firstly in later literature, Hekate is the goddess of transitions, crossroads and liminal spaces,<sup>247</sup> and this understanding ties in effectively with that. Secondly, she is always considered a lesser deity in the Greek pantheon, despite her prominence in the *Theogony*, and she is not mentioned in such close relation to Zeus again. Hesiod, according to Von Rudloff, may have seen Hekate as useful because her obscure nature allowed her to be moulded into a functional figure.<sup>248</sup> As Griffith neatly puts it: ‘Her role in the *Theogony*, at least, is a poetic, not a personal, matter’.<sup>249</sup>

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<sup>244</sup> 1983: 52.

<sup>245</sup> 1999: 13 -14.

<sup>246</sup> See also Clay 2003: 138.

<sup>247</sup> Johnston 1991: 218.

<sup>248</sup> 1999: 14.

<sup>249</sup> 1983: 55.

The Hekate we see in Hesiod's *Theogony* is generous yet volatile, independent yet willing to collaborate, powerful yet respectful of her superior. Although she has yet to acquire her darker characteristics, and truly become a rebellious goddess in a patriarchal religious system, I see her as somewhat rebellious even now. She may be compliant to Zeus' authority, and aid men in their endeavours, but she is still a female goddess concerning herself with affairs that are usually the domain of male gods. This is unconventional. Once more I compare her to Athena, a strong goddess also obedient to Zeus, and interested in the affairs of heroes, men, and the city. But Athena was born from the head of Zeus. Masculine creative energy is thus the predominant force and this demonstrates the co-option of reproduction by patriarchal religious systems. It is then not surprising that Athena herself is a decidedly masculine goddess who busies herself with the pursuits of men and the exploits of heroes. Greek goddesses are always dominated by Zeus, and defined by their relationship to him: his wife, sister, lover, or daughter. For instance, Demeter was probably one of the most independent Greek goddesses, but even she was forced to compromise with patriarchal gods when it was decided by Zeus that Persephone was to spend one-third of the year with Hades, and two-thirds with her mother.<sup>250</sup> Hekate's original power as a Titan goddess put her in a position of supreme authority, on the same level as Zeus. She could challenge him, and she was not his sister, or his lover, or his daughter, or his wife. Zeus grants her clemency out of all Titans, and she becomes involved in activities that see to the most advantageous and optimal operation of society. Yet she still acts on her own whim. Hesiod never shows her taking Zeus' will into consideration. Her role as nurse, the most feminine of her functions, is mentioned last, briefly. Perhaps Hesiod is uneasy with attributing her excessively to nature and the cycles of the earth, which would reinforce her femaleness. Rather he shows her potency used in favour of men, instead of against them, thus leaving them nothing to fear from her, and with no reason to feel uneasy at her power. However the passage in the *Theogony* is the only instance where Hekate is associated with the plight of men, culture, order, and the realms of sky and sea. Bearing all this in mind, West's analysis of Hekate's character in the *Theogony* is relevant:

She is a healthy, independent and open-minded goddess, ready to help different kinds of men in different situations: a universal goddess in the sense that she

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<sup>250</sup> Foley 1994:26, lines 463 – 464.

encroaches upon the provinces of all the other gods (with their entire approval), yet working with them, not displacing them, and always subordinate to Zeus.<sup>251</sup>

### 3.3. The *Homeric Hymn to Demeter*

Hekate's association with the Underworld begins with her minor role in the *Homeric Hymn to Demeter*, composed between 650 – 550 BCE.<sup>252</sup> In the poem she bears a slight resemblance to the Hesiodic Hekate in that she is supportive, kind, and identified from the onset as a caregiver. However, she is more distant and inaccessible, lacking her Hesiodic honour and powers. I will argue that in the *Homeric Hymn to Demeter*, Hekate becomes the goddess of transitions while experiencing her own transition from a major goddess of earth and sky in the *Theogony*, to a minor goddess of the Underworld. Foley defines a hymn as a prayer sung in celebration of a particular deity as preludes to epic poetry, usually at festivals or contests. Foley adds that 'the hymns describe the acquisition of distinctive powers and honours (including major cults and sanctuaries) by gods or goddesses.'<sup>253</sup>

The *Homeric Hymn to Demeter* narrates the myth of the powerful earth-goddess, Demeter. Her daughter, Kore, or Persephone, is seized by Hades, and a distraught Demeter searches the world for her abducted daughter (15 – 21). The earth is left unproductive and infertile by her disregard for her agrarian duties (305 – 313). Demeter, in the guise of an old woman, approaches Eleusis where she is appointed nurse to Demophon, the child of King Keleos and his queen Metaneira (219 – 223). Demeter holds the child in a purging fire in order to extract his mortality and make him ageless. Metaneira discovers this, causing Demeter to reveal her true identity, and she orders that rites be performed in her honour (237 -274). This is the origin, according to the author of the hymn, of the Eleusinian Mysteries. Meanwhile, the barren earth threatens the extinction of the human race, and Zeus implores Demeter and Hades to reach a compromise: since Persephone has eaten the food of the Underworld,

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<sup>251</sup> 1966: 277.

<sup>252</sup> Foley 1994: 29. I have used Foley's translation of the poem.

<sup>253</sup> *Ibid.*, 28.



pomegranate seeds, she must remain for a third of the year with Hades, and may return for two thirds to her mother (395 – 403).

Hekate's appearances in the *Homeric Hymn to Demeter* are short and sudden (24-25; 52 - 61; 438 – 440). Hekate is introduced in the poem when she alone hears the commotion of Persephone's kidnap from her cave - 'tender of heart/ she heard it from her cave, Hekate of the delicate veil' (24 – 25). Hekate, torches in hand (52), approaches Demeter with the little helpful information she has (51 – 59). She admits that she 'heard a voice but did not see with [her] eyes' (57). Still, she feels obligated to disclose this to Demeter, whom she addresses in a wholly respectful and obliging manner saying, 'Divine Demeter, giver of seasons and glorious gifts' (54). Hekate then accompanies Demeter as she confronts the Titan, Helios, for more information (60 – 62). After this, Hekate does not appear again till the end of the *Homeric Hymn to Demeter*, when mother and daughter are at last reconciled (438 – 440). It is a scene of warmth as Hekate embraces Persephone repeatedly (439), and from this time on, served as her chief attendant (440).

Hekate's role in the *Homeric Hymn to Demeter* immediately identifies her with a compassionate chthonic goddess in stark contrast to her role in Hesiod where she is devoid of any chthonic functions. She lives in a cave (25), and the connotations are obvious: liminal spaces, and gateways to the Underworld. If we were to follow Gimbutas' train of thought, Hekate's dwelling within a cave is perhaps revelatory of her Palaeolithic *persona* of ancient mother goddess. It was the pre-patriarchal Venus figurines, symbolic of the bountiful, life-giving mother, that were housed in caves because caves 'are natural manifestations of the primordial womb of the Mother.'<sup>254</sup> I am not convinced by this on the subject of Hekate within this poem. It is more likely that she is being transformed from the accessible, universal goddess of the *Theogony* into a darker, mysterious, chthonic deity who lives alone in a cave. She is gradually being made to switch spheres, from the Earth, Sea and Sky, to the Underworld. While she is described as 'tender of heart' (24), and her behaviour is gracious (54), from this point on she is unable to shake the connotations of the cave: primordial, obscure, shadowy, distant, and linked to death and the Underworld. Thus this hymn

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<sup>254</sup> 1989: 151.

establishes Hekate's link with the Underworld. She makes the transition from goddess of the people and the city, to goddess of the dead by aiding Persephone in her transition from maiden to bride.

Her desire to lend a hand, and her genuine concern, and sympathy for the yearning mother is a display of female solidarity at its best, and is indicative of a marked shift in Hekate's loyalties: from a male-orientated goddess in the *Theogony* to a female-orientated goddess. She is not an architect of civilization who has power over various situations, and may change a man's fortune at her will. She is a woman who simply understands the plight of another woman. She does not have the authority to resolve or manipulate the situation in any way as she would have in Hesiod. Accordingly, I am in agreement with Foley's assessment that even though the *Homeric Hymn to Demeter* was composed by an anonymous male author (or authors), it is a text that best puts the experience of ancient women into perspective.<sup>255</sup> For both the goddesses, Demeter and Hekate, are entirely helpless. Neither has the authority to remedy what has been imposed on them by the patriarchs. The goddesses approach the Titan, Helios, together, who explains that Zeus gave Persephone, his daughter, to Hades as a wife (82 – 84). This further emphasises the lack of power of Demeter, who was not involved in arranging the marriage of her own daughter, and of Persephone, who was snatched away suddenly into marriage. Marilyn Arthur<sup>256</sup> states that the male patriarchal order 'carelessly and brutally disregards women's feelings and imposes helplessness upon them.' Tension is conspicuous amongst the three female players, Demeter, Persephone and Hekate, subject to the wills of three males, Zeus, Hades, and Helios, who are the catalysts and effect a resolution. Mary Daly presents a radical feminist interpretation of this:

The myth expresses the essential tragedy of women after the patriarchal conquest. The male myth-makers presented an illusion of reunion between Demeter and Persephone-Kore. The compromise can be seen as forced upon Demeter, but it was fatal for her to undervalue the power of her own position and set aside her anger, just as it was fatal that she taught the kings of the earth her divine science and initiated

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<sup>255</sup> 1994: xi.

<sup>256</sup> 1977: 222.

them into her divine mysteries. The patriarchal Greek myth-makers (re-makers) constructed a typical phallocratic plot when they (through Zeus) seduced her into the apparently satisfactory – even triumphant – compromise.<sup>257</sup>

I am of the opinion that Demeter, as the primitive earth mother, revered in a prepatriarchal age as a symbol of fertility, and the abundant, life-giving earth, has been re-tailored by a Greek male author in support of patriarchal beliefs. Demeter is assigned weaknesses and limits, becoming answerable to Zeus. She is also shown as emotional, and dangerous, making the earth barren, and inadvertently threatening all human life. Pro-patriarchal authors are responsible for curtailing Demeter's power, and dispensing supreme authority to the rational, sensible Zeus. Similarly, Hekate, another once-great goddess who predated Olympian rule, is transformed into a minor figure in the *Homeric Hymn to Demeter*, retaining none of her previous admirable honours that put her on an equal footing with the king of the gods himself.

Female solidarity notwithstanding, it is necessary to search for explicit reasons why Hekate, out of all female deities, should be present in the *Homeric Hymn to Demeter*, particularly when her functions in this poem are juxtaposed with her magnanimous role in the *Theogony*. In contrast to her universal influence in Hesiod, Hekate is now a humble and helpful messenger, relaying information to a goddess more powerful than herself. At the end of the poem, she becomes companion to Persephone in the Underworld (438 – 440). In this way, she assumes the position of nurse indicated by Hesiod. The *Homeric Hymn to Demeter* differs from the *Theogony* in that, while Hesiod shows Hekate as a male-orientated goddess, involving herself in the plight of men, in the *Homeric Hymn to Demeter*, she concerns herself with female issues, namely the relationship between mother and daughter. In the *Theogony*, Hekate helps men. In the *Homeric Hymn to Demeter*, Hekate helps women, and women's solidarity is a threat to patriarchy. At the end she aids Persephone in her transition from maiden to bride. She embodies the last function attributed to her by Hesiod: a nurse. Von Rudloff connects this with Hekate's possible function in the Eleusinian Mysteries and

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<sup>257</sup> 1978: 40 - 41.

argues that ‘perhaps Hekate was for the initiates in ritual what she was for Persephone in myth: a caring, personal guide.’<sup>258</sup>

The *Homeric Hymn to Demeter* relates the introduction of the rites of Demeter, after Demeter, posing as a nurse to Demophon, son of King Keleos of Eleusis and his queen Metaneira, is discovered holding the child in a sacred fire that would make him immortal (239 – 250). The goddess reveals her true identity, and commands that ‘all the people build me a great temple/ with an altar beneath, under the sheer wall/ of the city on the rising hill above Kallichoron./ I myself will lay down the rites so that hereafter/ performing due rites you may propitiate my spirit’ (270 – 274). The rites refer to the Eleusinian Mysteries which took place annually over nine days for at least two thousand years, starting around 760 BCE.<sup>259</sup> G. E. Mylonas articulates that so strict was the enforcement of secrecy on the initiates that even today, there is little information regarding this celebration. He states that ‘it is amazing indeed that the basic and important substance of the secret rites was never disclosed, when these Mysteries were held at Eleusis annually for some two thousand years, when a multitude of people from all over the civilized world was initiated, and when their content was transmitted orally from Hierophant to Hierophant over so many generations.’<sup>260</sup> Mylonas charts the sequence of events at an initiation, stating that once initiates had undergone purification, sacrifices and fasting, they were then ready for the great revelation. This included three elements: something was enacted, possibly the myth of Demeter and Persephone, sacred objects were shown, and words were spoken.<sup>261</sup> Burkert suggests that, as in the myth, in which a child is bestowed immortality by fire, perhaps such a ritual, apotheosis by fire, was conducted before initiates, using ritual animals that were killed and burned.<sup>262</sup> Whatever the ritual, the outcome seems to have been the full realisation of life, and death, and a blissful afterlife. Burkert acknowledges this by stating that, while dreadful

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<sup>258</sup> 1999: 64.

<sup>259</sup> Mylonas 1961: 7.

<sup>260</sup> *Ibid.*, 226.

<sup>261</sup> *Ibid.*, 261.

<sup>262</sup> 1985: 288.

and terrifying things were shown to initiates in the darkness, ‘it was not terror, but the assurance of blessings that had to prevail.’<sup>263</sup> Mylonas too expresses that,

the cult of Eleusis satisfied the most sincere yearnings and deepest longings of the human heart. The initiates returned from their pilgrimage to Eleusis full of joy and happiness, with the fear of death diminished and the strengthened hope of a better life in the world of shadows: “Thrice happy are those of mortals, who have seen those rites depart for Hades; for to them alone is it granted to have true life there; to the rest all there is evil,” Sophokles cries out exultantly. And to this Pindar with equal exultation answers: “Happy is he who, having seen these rites goes below the hollow earth; for he knows the end of life and he knows its god-sent beginning.”<sup>264</sup>

Keller adopts a feminist stance suggesting that the rites of Demeter and Persephone celebrated birth, sexuality, death and enduring love, chiefly between a mother and a daughter.<sup>265</sup>

Hekate does feature in the Mysteries of Eleusis, evidence for which can be attested in the representations found at Eleusis, and on vase paintings depicting the abduction of Persephone. Hekate is easily identifiable by the torches in her hands, corresponding to the description of her in the *Homeric Hymn to Demeter*, which does develop into her standard iconography. I shall discuss three artistic representations of Hekate linking her to the Mysteries, two of which come from Eleusis. The earliest is from Eleusis, the statue of the “Fleeing Maiden” (reconstructed as **Image 11**), dating from 490 – 480 BCE, originally a figure in a pedimental group depicting the Rape of Persephone.<sup>266</sup>

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<sup>263</sup> Ibid.

<sup>264</sup> 1961: 284 – 285.

<sup>265</sup> 1988: 27.

<sup>266</sup> Von Rudloff 1999: 38.



**Image 11**<sup>267</sup>

There has been considerable debate as to whether this is a depiction of an initiate, or Hekate herself. C. M. Edwards examines the representation of Hekate throughout antiquity, beginning with the “Fleeing Maiden”, ‘one of the most important works of the Early Classical period,’<sup>268</sup> to the triple-bodied Hekate of Alkamenes featured on the Athenian Acropolis, which later became the norm for the depiction of the goddess. Edwards argues that the “Fleeing Maiden” representation could have been identified as Persephone herself, or any of her attendants, but was recognized as Hekate by her billowing dress, and the torches, which she carries at different angles.<sup>269</sup> A difficulty was why the “Fleeing maiden”, unlike other running women in sculpture, did not turn her head back violently from the main action, and why her gaze was directed below eye level. Edwards answers this by turning to another interpretation of the Rape of Persephone on a vase painting by the Persephone Painter (**Image 12**) from c. 440 BCE.<sup>270</sup>

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<sup>267</sup> *Ibid.*, 39.

<sup>268</sup> 1986: 307.

<sup>269</sup> *Ibid.*, 307.

<sup>270</sup> *Ibid.*, 308.



**Image 12**<sup>271</sup>

On the left is Persephone, wearing a crown and emerging from the Underworld. Standing next to her is the psychopomp Hermes, identifiable by his caduceus. On the far right is Demeter who carries a staff. Hekate is at the heart of the action, lighting the way with her torches as Persephone rejoins her mother. Her stance mirrors that of the “Fleeing Maiden”. Following her gaze it can be deduced that she vigilantly watches Persephone as she ascends from the ground.

Finally, the following stele from Eleusis is the oldest extant representation of Demeter in sculpture dating c. 480 – 475 BCE<sup>272</sup>, portrayed sitting down, carrying a sceptre in her left hand, and a stalk in her right.<sup>273</sup>



**Image 13**<sup>274</sup>

<sup>271</sup> Von Rudloff 1999: 25.

<sup>272</sup> Mylonas 1961: 192.

<sup>273</sup> Ibid., 191.

The maiden in the humble chiton, with her hair bound, and carrying torches may be Kore at a reunion with her mother. However, Mylonas negates this theory on the grounds that ‘the solemnity of the occasion is reflected in the attitude of both figures... We fail, however, to find the joyful air such a reunion would produce. The seated mother seems aloof and still under the spell of her grief.’<sup>275</sup> The demeanour, dress, and torches, evocative of the previous images, suggest that the figure is Hekate, perhaps approaching the sorrowful Demeter to tell her what she knows of Persephone’s abduction. Mylonas agrees, by stating that ‘Hekate, who is often represented holding lighted torches, is approaching the Mother in a worshipful attitude and, in a respectful gesture of greeting to a superior goddess, she has lowered one of her torches.’<sup>276</sup>

Hekate’s essential responsibility in the Mysteries is as a protectress and guardian, just as she is in the *Homeric Hymn to Demeter*. She cares deeply for the mother and daughter, even embracing Persephone numerous times on her return (439). Her relationship with Demeter and Persephone is complex too. The three goddesses, Hekate, Demeter and Persephone, may have been the earliest form of the triple aspect of Hekate, who is largely connected with the number three and is in later art and literature, portrayed as triple-headed or triple-bodied.<sup>277</sup> Her affiliation with Demeter and Persephone launches her association with the phases of womanhood, where Hekate, according to later tradition, is always celebrated as the crone. However there is a startling difference in that when featured in the rape of Persephone, Hekate is not the crone. Hesiod has already made her a contemporary of Artemis and Apollo, although she is a Titan, and there is nothing to suggest she is an old woman in the *Homeric Hymn to Demeter*. Rather the three form a different triad: the maiden (Hekate), who is companion to the bride (Persephone), and the mother (Demeter). Keller disagrees, arguing that Hekate is an ‘elder’, and symbolises the grandmother, while Persephone and Demeter are daughter and mother respectively.<sup>278</sup> The youthful disposition of Hekate in the *Homeric*

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<sup>274</sup> Ibid., Illustration 67.

<sup>275</sup> Ibid., 191

<sup>276</sup> Ibid., 192.

<sup>277</sup> Von Rudloff 1999: 65.

<sup>278</sup> 1988: 38 -39.



*Hymn to Demeter*, and artistic interpretations do not correspond with Keller's view. Edwards expands on this with specific reference to the vase painting by the Persephone Painter:

Persephone is represented as a bride, richly crowned and draped, a young woman at the height of her beauty and sexuality. Hekate is characterised as the younger girl by her open *peplos*. Demeter is a matron, the archetypal mother. The three together constitute the three ages of woman, a notion that connotes not only fertility but also the order of life as established by Zeus.<sup>279</sup>

In this way, the *Homeric Hymn to Demeter* is an important source in understanding the transitory nature of Hekate's character: just as she is the goddess of transitions in the poem, she is undergoing her own transformation from a dominant and omnipotent deity of the Earth, Sea and Sky, to a minor goddess living between the earth and Underworld. The *Homeric Hymn to Demeter* establishes her as a chthonic deity when she chooses of her own will to remain with Persephone in the Underworld, and introduces the elements for her inevitable change into a dark and terrifying goddess. Perhaps the male author of the *Homeric Hymn to Demeter* attempted to restrict the universal power of Hekate as suggested in the *Theogony*, and thus transformed her into a marginal figure, an attendant rather than a goddess in her own right, and a woman's deity. These traits come to be exaggerated in later literature.

### 3.4. The *Argonautica* by Apollonius Rhodius

Two texts in particular explore Hekate's relationship with the witch Medea, according to the Classical Greek tradition: Euripides' *Medea* first performed c. 431 BCE, and the *Argonautica* by Apollonius Rhodius from the third century BCE. I have decided to focus on Apollonius' work for, since he was influenced by Euripides, this is the sensible option, and allows for a more thorough examination of the character and development of Medea. I also consider the *Argonautica* to be the better text in which to examine the transformation of Hekate from the *Homeric Hymn to Demeter*, and more information about Hekate, her rituals,

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<sup>279</sup> 1986: 314.

and how she was experienced and received by the ancient Greeks can be discerned from it than from Euripides' *Medea*. I shall pay particular attention to Book 3 of the *Argonautica*,<sup>280</sup> relating the beginning of the love-affair between the Greek hero Jason, on his quest for the Golden Fleece, and Medea, the daughter of King Aeetes of Colchis and priestess of Hekate. Book 3 begins with Hera and Athena conspiring to aid Jason in carrying off the Golden Fleece from Colchis (7 – 166). To achieve this they approach Aphrodite to send an arrow to pierce Medea, thereby consuming her with love for Jason (24 – 76). King Aeetes tasks Jason with yoking bronze-footed, fire-breathing bulls on the plain of Ares, and ploughing the field with dragon's teeth. From each tooth would spring up a fierce warrior that Jason must overcome in order to complete this test (401 – 420). In accordance with the scheme of the goddesses, Medea fears for Jason, and the two meet at the Temple of Hekate, where she provides Jason with instructions on how to defeat the warriors, and magic drugs to help him accomplish his feat (975 – 1066). Jason sacrifices to Hekate (1194 – 1224) and following Medea's advice conquers the warriors (1363 – 1395).

Medea herself was a popular and controversial figure in Greek mythology, infamous for crimes against her own blood: the murder of her own brother whom she dismembered (4. 465 – 467), and for the slaughter of her own children to spite her cheating husband, Jason, depicted in Euripides' *Medea* (1275 – 1280). In the *Argonautica* of Apollonius Rhodius, she is the daughter of King Aeetes, son of Helios. On this fascinating figure Johnston states that 'from at least the early fifth century B.C., Medea was represented by the Greeks as a complex figure, fraught with conflicting desires and exhibiting an extraordinary range of behaviour.'<sup>281</sup> It is hard not to see the Medea in Book 3 of the *Argonautica* as a victim of sorts: as a woman whose emotions are manipulated by the goddesses, Hera, Athena and Aphrodite, compelled to help the man she loves to whatever limits. In this way Medea is a helper-maiden, similar to Ariadne, also eventually abandoned by her hero, Theseus, and both are victims of patriarchy. Indeed, if one at this point were unaware of the ultimate outcome of Medea's character, a destiny as an ominous murderess would seem unlikely. She is a helpful princess, dedicated to her goddess Hekate. Yet herein lies the ambiguity, for although she appears as an innocent maiden, her powers are far from trivial. She is called, 'Aeetes' drug-

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<sup>280</sup> I have used Peter Green's translation (1997).

<sup>281</sup> 1997: 6.

wise daughter' (27) by the goddess Hera, and Argus communicates her exceptional power to Jason and his companions:

There is a certain girl, brought up in Aetes' household,  
 to whom the goddess Hekate granted preeminent skill  
 in the lore of all drugs that Earth or Ocean breeds:  
 with these she can quench the hot blasts of unwearying fire,  
 halt rivers dead when they're roaring down in spate,  
 control the stars and the Moon's own sacred orbits (528 – 533).

It can be discerned from the above passage that Medea's power threatens the natural order, and this speech hints at her destructive potential. She has the makings of a very dangerous woman with excessive power, and a mighty goddess as her patroness. Moreover, Medea was of marriageable age and could not have been very much older than a teenager, making her proficiency as a sorceress outstanding for her age, as is her confidence in her own skill and ability. She is depicted as a serious practitioner of witchcraft and magic, learned in the properties of herbs and drugs. This is made most evident when Medea prepares an ointment to give a man strength and daring:

Its blackish sap, like the ooze from a mountain oak,  
 she'd gathered, to make her drug with, in a Kaspian seashell,  
 after bathing first in the seven perennial freshets,  
 and seven times calling on Brimo – roarer and rearer,  
 Brimo, night-wanderer, chthonian sovereign over  
 The dead – on a moonless night, wrapped in a black mantle (858 – 863).

The wearing of black, performing spells at night, and ritualistic associations with numbers are generally linked with witchcraft, possibly for instinctive reasons. Black and night are both mysterious, in the same way that Hekate herself is mysterious. It contributes to the eerie and

strange quality of the goddess, while building on the stereotypes about witches and dark magic. Hekate's epithet, 'Brimo', meaning 'Roarer' is used here, suggesting a furious, disorderly goddess from the depths of the earth.<sup>282</sup> She is also referred to as 'sovereign over the dead'. Usually this denotes Persephone, but here, I believe rather than implying the Queen of Hades, it stands for one who can control spirits of the dead, or one whom the dead fear. Hekate is more fearsome than Persephone, and by the time of Apollonius, and certainly after, was traditionally known for roaming graveyards with her band of restless ghosts and demons.

The danger in invoking the 'daughter of Perses' (3. 467) is obvious when Medea instructs Jason on how he should go about his sacrifice to the goddess (1194 – 1211). After bathing himself, Jason must perform the ritual alone at night, wearing black. He is to dig a pit in which he must sacrifice a ewe and then burn the carcass. A libation is then to be offered. Her elaborate directions end in a warning to do everything specifically as she has stated, and then to withdraw quickly after the ritual without looking back: to do so would result in death. The ritual and sacrifice is typical of those carried out in worship of chthonic deities, the pit signifying the Underworld, the home of the goddess. It is fitting that Jason must invoke the goddess at night, since Hekate wanders the earth by night, and alone. The solitary nature of his ritual reinforces its magical purpose. Hekate is the goddess of magic, and Medea is a witch. Burkert notes that 'magic is a matter for individuals'<sup>283</sup> performed by a solitary practitioner. Burkert also mentions purification by water as 'fundamental' to ritual, linked to a primitive form of disinfecting,<sup>284</sup> and 'libations which the earth drinks are destined for the dead and for the gods who dwell in the earth.'<sup>285</sup> If the ritual is done correctly, the outcome would be strength that matches the gods themselves. A goddess that is capable of bestowing such extreme power on her worshipper must indeed be overwhelmingly potent, and in keeping with her attitude in the *Theogony* she can be either benefactress or malefactor. Just

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<sup>282</sup> According to the Christian writer Hippolytos (2<sup>nd</sup>/3<sup>rd</sup> c. CE) in *Refutation of all Heresies* (5.8.39), the name 'Brimo' was uttered by the hierophant at the Eleusinian Mysteries conducted by Athenians. This may refer to Persephone, or Hekate, and is thus most certainly connected to the Underworld.

<sup>283</sup> 1985: 55.

<sup>284</sup> *Ibid.*, 76.

<sup>285</sup> *Ibid.*, 71.

as she is readily prepared to renounce her favour in Hesiod, here, if she is not appeased in the proper manner, she would be angered. To offend Hekate provokes harsh consequences.

Apollonius offers an almost demonic depiction of Hekate:

[A]ppealing for aid in his struggle to Hekate the Roarer.  
 Then, his invocation made, he stepped back; from the uttermost  
 depths the dread goddess heard him, and approached the  
 sacrifice Jason had offered. Her whole person was entwined  
 with terrible serpents and oak-saplings, countless  
 torches dazzled and flared, while all around her  
 a pack of clamorous hellhounds bayed shrilly. All the meadows  
 shook at her footfall, and awestruck wailing arose  
 from the nymphs of the marshland and river, all those that hold  
 their dances along the meadows of Amarantian Phasis (1211 – 1220).

Here Hekate does not resemble Hesiod's glorious goddess. Firstly, she emerges from the depths, signalling her new domain, the Underworld. She does not live on the fringes between two worlds as in the *Homeric Hymn to Demeter*. She has become entrenched as a chthonic deity. Even the earth trembles in fear before her: a sign of her awesome strength. The sacrifice offered here is a sheep; however black puppies were most commonly sacrificed to Hekate.<sup>286</sup> Her presence is usually preceded by the barking of dogs, and she is often depicted in art accompanied by dogs. Of course, it can be said that Hekate is identifiable with dogs because, as we have seen in early literature, Hekate is a guardian and a goddess of liminal spaces. Similarly, the dog is a guardian of thresholds, namely the doorways and entrances of homes. This motif is suitable to Hekate since her statues were erected outside doorways to guard against evil. In the passage she is entwined with snakes which emphasise the ferocity

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<sup>286</sup> Pausanias (3. 14.9) states that in Colophon, a city in Lydia, people 'sacrifice a puppy, a black bitch, to the wayside Goddess [Hekate]' (Jones 1926: 89).

of Hekate, and liken her appearance to a Gorgon. Snakes are also associated with the underworld and the earth, and can be seen as mysterious and threatening. This emphasises Hekate's chthonic functions. It does not need to be said that her appearance is uncannily similar to that of the snake goddesses from Crete, and perhaps Hekate is meant to be associated with an ancient, primitive goddess.

It is important to question why and how Hekate became connected to Medea in the first place. Prior to her connections with the sorceress, she was a protectress, not the goddess of witchcraft. It is clear that by the time of the *Argonautica*, Hekate, although retaining great power, has become completely alienated from her original authority and role as seen in the *Theogony*. Comparatively she has recovered more power than she was allowed in the *Homeric Hymn to Demeter*, but this at the expense of her reputation. The answer to the above question can be found in the way in which Hekate is perceived in the *Argonautica*. Firstly, it is significant that Medea is not Greek. She is from Colchis and is essentially a barbarian woman: this instantly marginalizes her, and her favoured goddess, who becomes "un-Greek" by association. Hekate is therefore in effect segregated from the Greek pantheon in which she is already a minor goddess, or at least a very inconsistent one whose functions and character were constantly changing. This is highlighted in Book 3 when the three mighty goddesses of Olympus scheme against Medea, and Hekate is not only excluded from the proceedings, but she is completely unaware of the conspiracy. She seems to belong to a different pantheon entirely. In addition, while the three Olympian goddesses are given scenes and direct speech within the poem, Hekate is mysterious and inaccessible, usually only spoken of rather than seen, and when she does appear, she is distant, otherworldly and terrifying.

Her extreme power and wild appearance would no doubt have made the typical Greek apprehensive. She is now the unruly, insubordinate, untameable goddess that characterises her throughout the rest of antiquity. Where once she was tender-hearted with a delicate veil, she is now garlanded with snakes. I therefore find the turning point of Hekate's development her relationship with Medea. She is adapted to be compatible with the barbarian murderess, and to reinforce stereotypes about what kind of behaviour makes a foreign woman dangerous. It may be that in emphasising the artificial love Medea possesses for Jason, Apollonius is

attempting to stress that she was an irrational woman. This reflects on Hekate who by association with Medea loses the reputation and honours she once was assigned and becomes entrenched as a chthonic, ‘dread goddess’ who is invoked only by the brave at night.

### 3.5. Conclusion

Hekate’s transformation is most successfully traced by these three sources. Once a multifaceted, omnipotent goddess of the *Theogony* of Hesiod, wielding authority over a variety of spheres and men, she is then changed into a humble attendant of Persephone in the *Homeric Hymn to Demeter*, in which she is not even formally acknowledged as a goddess. I say ‘she is changed’ because I see this alteration in her personality as deliberate. It must constantly be reinforced that the literature used was composed by elite, male authors of a privileged, educated class who obviously sought to communicate their ideals of Greek women through their writings. Hekate’s earliest literary image conformed to these male ideals of order, culture, and reason. But this original power and status was seen as a threat by patriarchal Greek culture because she was not entirely subordinate to Zeus. Since she was neither his sister, nor wife, nor daughter, nor mistress, she was far too self-reliant and self-determining a goddess for the patriarchal regime. This posed a challenge for Zeus. I believe this is why her powers were restricted and focused in one specific sphere. She becomes a marginal figure with a limited range of possibilities in order to curb her influence. Finally, Hekate is made to be a volatile, demonic goddess with unlimited power. She comes to embody those things which were seen as sinister, dangerous and potentially chaotic. Take for example, Scylla, the fearsome monster from the *Odyssey* who lived in the straits between Italy and Sicily and who often ate passing sailors. In the *Odyssey* Scylla’s parentage is ascribed to Phorcys and Crataeis (158). In the *Argonautica*, Apollonius makes Hekate the mother of Scylla, ‘deadly Ausonian Scylla, whom Hekate, that night-wanderer... once bore to Phorkys’ (828 – 829). Scylla’s parentage may have been changed to discourage the worship of Hekate by demonstrating the violent, uncontrollable, and savage product of creative feminine energy. As a result, the goddess is manipulated to reinforce stereotypes about women: that they are devious, that they are crafty, immoral, and concerned with pursuits that are not valuable to society. Hekate’s character is made over to emphasise the “negative” qualities, conflicting with the commendable values of a respectable ancient Greek woman: submissive, humble, pious and moral. The *Argonautica* is the start of the long-living tradition

that associates Hekate with dark magic. In this way, Hekate seems to have come full circle in that she was never of Greek origin, but is from the Near East, in Caria, in Asia Minor.

I have already discussed that shrines to Hekate were erected outside houses to ward off evil spirits. Her three-formed statue was also erected at crossroads for the protection of travellers, the three faces looking towards different directions. Here she was venerated as Hekate *Trivia*. This trimorphic representation of Hekate corresponds with the usual descriptions of her as “trifomed” or “triple-headed”. Dinners were left at crossroads by her worshippers, usually at the new moon. Spawforth notes that ‘So-called “suppers for Hekate” – consisting of various breadstuff, eggs, cheese, and dog-meat – were put out for her at crossroads each month to mark the rising of the moon.’<sup>287</sup> It is an old concept that crossroads are supernatural places where magic can be easily worked, and spirits usually encountered, making the traveller vulnerable. Both the statues at crossroads and the shrines before homes were called *Hekataia*. Aristophanes mentions this practice in *Wasps* as early as 442 BCE: ‘I have heard that one day the Athenians would judge their cases at their homes, and every man would build in front of his door a tiny law court for himself, like a shrine to Hekate’ (800 – 803).<sup>288</sup> This insight into everyday Athenian life signifies that Hekate was, in Athens, a goddess that matters. One has only to look at the Acropolis to recognize this, where, according to Pausanias writing in the second century CE, a statue of Hekate stood beside the Propylaia:

Alkamenes as it seems to me was the first who made the statue of Hekate with three heads and three bodies which the Athenians call Hekate Epipurgidia: it stands near the temple of Wingless Victory.<sup>289</sup>

This depiction of Hekate as triple-bodied became the standard by the fourth century BCE. Hekate’s presence at the religious centre of such a grand city as Athens attests to her significance as a powerful protectress. It is reminiscent of her status and honours in the

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<sup>287</sup> 1996: 671.

<sup>288</sup> Sommerstein 1983: 79.

<sup>289</sup> Shilleto 1905: ii. 30.



*Theogony* in which she is so largely involved in the affairs of the *polis*, and with interacting with so many types of men.

Hekate in Greek thought seems to be embedded in ambiguity. Her nature is never constant, but she seems always to be necessary within religion, whether it is to communicate that she should be revered, or that she, and those that behave like her, should be feared and avoided. By the time of Apollonius, however, Hekate's character as a chthonic goddess is entrenched, and she maintains this *persona* well into Roman times. It is the male perspective that is responsible for the decline in her power, and for channelling this power into specific locations and functions. Like other female mythological figures, such as Pandora, Hekate was transformed into a patriarchal symbol of the destructive consequences of unchecked female power that can be dangerous and unpredictable.

## Chapter 4 - Hekate: Roman Primary Sources

### 4.1. Introduction to Roman Sources

As seen in the previous chapter, the Greeks had ever-changing attitudes towards Hekate. However, by the time she is incorporated into the Roman pantheon, the traditional view of Hekate is as a moon goddess of liminal spaces and witchcraft. Her affiliation with Medea, depicted in Euripides' *Medea*, and entrenched in the *Argonautica* of Apollonius Rhodius, is the long accepted norm. Hekate lives up to the darker version of herself, attested in later ancient Greek literature, and her personality in the Roman world is well-established and stable. For my study of Hekate in Roman mythology, religion, and society, I have chosen to focus on three authors that continue the tradition as seen in Apollonius Rhodius' *Argonautica*; Hekate as the foreboding and mysterious goddess of magic, the Underworld, and crossroads. The reason for this is, unlike in Greek literature in which we may find extensive passages either in praise of the goddess, or describing her, Roman authors mostly mention her in connection with the moon, the number three, the Underworld, magic, liminal spaces, or mystery cults. Her chthonic functions are emphasised, as is her function as a goddess of the crossroads, as can be discerned from her name in the Roman pantheon which is Trivia, *tri*, derived from the Latin for three, and *via* meaning road. I will focus on Vergil's *Aeneid*, in which Hekate is invoked by Dido in Book 4, and the Sibyl in Book 6, Seneca's *Medea*, and the *Metamorphoses* by Apuleius. References will be made to Valerius Flaccus' *Argonautica*, and Ovid's *Fasti* and *Metamorphoses*.

### 4.2. The *Aeneid* by Vergil

R. D. Williams states that for the last two thousand years, Publius Vergilius Maro's (70 BCE – 19 BCE) *Aeneid* has been the most read, the most studied, and the most imitated of all the poetry of antiquity, that Vergil himself has been universally regarded as the greatest Roman poet since Roman times, and that the *Aeneid* has remained beloved well into present times.<sup>290</sup>

W. F. Jackson Knight stresses the lessons in morality that Vergil imparts to his readers: 'Avoid excess', 'Be true'.<sup>291</sup> He also states that Vergil was considered to be a magician or

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<sup>290</sup> 1972: ix.

<sup>291</sup> 1956: 14.

prophet and was worshipped as a divinity upon his death.<sup>292</sup> Thus it is inevitable that the written words of the highly esteemed and respected Vergil have held much power and sway, influencing the thoughts and ideas of authors that came after him. In his incomplete masterpiece, the *Aeneid*, wherein the Trojan hero, Aeneas, is implored by the gods to found a new city in Italy, Hekate is mentioned at various instances in Book 4 and Book 6.<sup>293</sup> In both Books she is noted for her relationship to Diana and Apollo, the moon, the number three, crossroads and thresholds, witchcraft, and the Underworld. She is summoned during chthonic rituals, and at times of great, dramatic tension. With an understanding of the popularity of Vergil, and the continuous admiration of his *magnum opus*, especially in the earlier centuries prior to the Middle Ages,<sup>294</sup> and his influence on other writers such as Ovid as will be made evident in this chapter, it is understandable why this representation of Hekate also persists throughout history, from the time of Vergil well into the twenty-first century.

#### 4.2.1. Book 4

Book 4 of the *Aeneid* focuses on the tragic figure of Dido, Queen of Carthage, as she burns with love for Aeneas. Her obsession with the Trojan hero culminates in her false belief that they are married, and that he will remain in Africa to rule by her side (169 – 172). But when Aeneas is reprimanded by the gods for lingering in Carthage, and prepares to set sail once again for Italian shores (265 - 295), Dido is overcome with fury (305 – 330). After failed attempts at prevailing upon him to stay, she resolves that she must kill herself (450 – 451). So as to throw off her sister and attendants from her true purpose, she stages a magical rite, feigning that it will either win Aeneas back, or release her from the bonds of love (478 – 497). The priestess tasked with performing the ritual is of Massylian origin, the protector of the Temple of the Hesperides. Dido reveals to Anna that the priestess is responsible for guarding the holy tree of the Hesperides, and for feeding the dragon that guards it. Her skill in witchcraft is impressive:

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<sup>292</sup> Ibid., 23.

<sup>293</sup> For the Latin text I have used the OCT of Mynors (1976). Translations of the Latin texts in this chapter are my own.

<sup>294</sup> See Innes 1955: 19.

haec se carminibus promittit solvere mentes  
 quas velit, ast aliis duras immitere curas,  
 sistere aquam fluviis et vertere sidera retro,  
 nocturnosque movet manis: mugire videbis  
 sub pedibus terram et descendere montibus ornos (4. 487 – 491).

She promises with her spells to release the hearts of whoever she wants, but to cause severe troubles to others, to halt the water in rivers, to turn the stars backwards, and she rouses the spirits of the night: you will see the earth bellow underfoot and the ash-trees descend the mountains.

These feats that subvert the natural order of the world are identical to those that Medea can accomplish in Apollonius Rhodius' *Argonautica*, discussed previously. Like Medea, the priestess defies nature and reason, posing a threat to the normal workings of the patriarchal world, as the gods intended it. Her power is extraordinary and, like Medea, she is mighty and dangerous, for should the priestess succeed, Aeneas will stay on as consort to the woman in command of an African kingdom, and not realize his own destiny of establishing the glorious city of Rome. This would have been an appalling choice of lifestyle for the martial, learned men of Rome, and indeed would call to mind Mark Antony's frivolities in Egypt with Queen Cleopatra, which took place in Vergil's own lifetime.<sup>295</sup> In the same vein as Medea, the priestess is guardian of a sacred tree that is protected by a formidable serpentine creature. She is also not of Greek or Roman descent, but a dissimilar, foreign culture. This brings into question the identity of those who would pray to Hekate, and the motive of such prayers; is it a distinguished Roman male begging for success in the senate, or a matronly woman requesting the safe return of her male kin from warfare? Indeed, here we see, as a continuation from the *Argonautica*, that it is two foreign women, wrought with passion, who seek to prevent a hero from fulfilling his mission. The ritual itself is of a particularly gruesome nature, requiring, for example, poisonous milk, and a love-charm torn from the

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<sup>295</sup> Dido, like Cleopatra, is frequently associated with promoting decadence and extravagance associated with the East. See 4: 136 – 139 of the *Aeneid* as an example.

brow of a foal before it can be born (512 – 516). Thus, Hekate is still “othered” by association, as she is in the *Argonautica*.

The magical rite involves the invocation of a vast number of chthonic deities. The priestess calls upon three-hundred gods, explicitly Erebus, the darkness of the Underworld, Chaos, the chasm from which the Universe was created, and threefold Hekate, who is the three faces of Diana (509 – 511). According to Hesiodic tradition, Chaos and Erebus were present at the very beginning of all things.<sup>296</sup> They are primordial beings, and by connecting Hekate with these very ancient deities, Vergil acknowledges her as a primitive goddess. The connotations with Erebus are easily justified: in Roman mythology, Hekate is the Queen of the Underworld and restless spirits. Vergil portrays her as a dread goddess of dark magic and the Underworld. In Roman mythology, Diana and Hekate are one and the same.<sup>297</sup> Vergil’s reference to Hekate as the three faces of Diana could pertain to the three phases of the moon: waxing, full, and waning. At this point in history, both Diana and Hekate have evolved into moon goddesses. For Hekate the progression was obvious: a goddess who haunts the world, and emerges from the depths at night, just as the moon appears at night. In this way, Hekate’s development into the goddess of the moon is also understandable: she has long been the goddess of transitions and changing states. It is fitting then that she should become synonymous with the cycles of the moon, the orb that is always in Greek and Roman culture identifiable with the feminine, unlike the sun which is specific to the masculine, associated with such deities as Apollo, the brother of Diana. We have seen Hekate serve as a goddess who aids in transitions in the *Homeric Hymn to Demeter*, where she aided in Persephone’s shift from a maiden to a bride. She formed her first triad with Demeter and Persephone. Now, in Roman times, it can be seen that she is still part of a triad, most commonly with Diana and Persephone. The three are aspects of the same goddess: Diana on earth, Persephone in the

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<sup>296</sup> See the *Theogony* 137 – 142. (Most 2006: 13)

<sup>297</sup> This is most prominent in Valerius Flaccus’ *Argonautica*, a Latin version of Apollonius’ work, most likely composed c. CE 70. In it, Hekate is called ‘inferna Diana.’

Underworld, and Hekate as the changing moon.<sup>298</sup> Sometimes the goddess is Diana on earth, Selene as the moon, and Hekate as goddess of the Underworld.<sup>299</sup>

For the ritual to take place, hair is unfastened (509), robes are left flowing (518), and shoes are untied (518). Nothing is bound or restricted, exhibiting religious liberation. The performance of the magic rite is neither stiff nor formal, but uninhibited and natural. Perhaps two ideas are being communicated by Vergil. Firstly, since all that is required are the basics (the voice, the body), the primitive nature of Hekate is strongly suggested. Next, it demonstrates the unstately, unordered, “barbaric” character of rituals prepared and practised by women alone. In comparison to public Roman rituals which follow an organised and routine procedure, this ritual executed by two foreign women for an emotional reason, rather than a rational one, shows a complete lack of propriety.<sup>300</sup> After the staged rite, the grief-stricken Dido, out of her mind, and determined to die, calls upon the avenging spirits to curse Aeneas and his descendants. Included is Hekate, who is worshipped in every city at three cross-ways by ululations in the night (612 – 620). These cries at night, wild and chaotic, serve an apotropaic purpose.<sup>301</sup> Hekate protects her devotees, as evident in ancient Greek literature, especially when she is at the height of her power, at night. Dido beseeches from

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<sup>298</sup> This is very much like the goddess Kali, whom I will examine later in this dissertation. Kali is the violent aspect of the docile Parvati, Shiva’s consort. Durga, who is the warrior goddess, completes the triad.

<sup>299</sup> See Valerius Flaccus 5. 239 (Mozley 1934).

<sup>300</sup> This is not the case for the popular festival of merry-making, the Saturnalia, which took place from the 17 – 23 December. According to Scullard, during the festival, the Statue of Saturn, housed at the temple of Saturn in the Forum, was bound by woollen fillets which were untied at the feast. In view of the Saturnalia being a fertility festival, Scullard states that this symbolizes the seed, which has been sown into the womb bursting into existence in the tenth month, or that the unbinding of the statue can be seen in an agricultural sense as well (1981: 205 – 206). This festival of disorder mirrors the magic practices seen above.

<sup>301</sup> In Ovid’s *Metamorphoses* one scene is no doubt modelled on the above passage from Vergil. The witch Circe falls hopelessly in love with the married, Picus, son of Saturn, but when he spurns her advances, the love-crazed witch turns him into a woodpecker, as is her custom of turning men into animals. She then turns his courtiers into beasts. For the Latin text I have used the Teubner text of Anderson (1985):

illa nocens spargit virus sucosque veneni  
 et Noctem Noctisque deos Ereboque Chaoque  
 convocat et longis Hecaten ululatibus orat. (14.403 – 405)

She sprinkles noxious liquids and poisonous drugs. She calls out together Night and the gods of the Night from Erebos and Chaos, and pray to Hekate with long, drawn-out wails.

The elements are the same: the frenzied woman using magic as revenge on a man who has jilted her, the poison, Erebos, Chaos, and Hekate. Ovid’s description of the ritual is certainly inspired by Vergil.

these dread entities that Aeneas suffer defeat in war, be banished from his own land, and torn apart from his son, that he see his friends slaughtered, die before his time, and remain unburied. She also asks that there never be peace between Carthage and Italy. Williams comments on the prophetic nature of Dido's request:

These curses upon Aeneas...in one way or another all came true. He was harassed in warfare by Turnus and his Rutulians; he left the Trojan camp and the embrace of Iulus to seek help from Evander; he saw the death of many of his men.; he accepted peace terms more favourable to the Italians than the Trojans; and he did not rule his people for long (three years), but (according to one version of the legend) was drowned in the Numicus or (according to another) killed in battle and his body not recovered.<sup>302</sup>

One must be careful in judging Hekate's role as an assailant in the eventual ruin of a Roman heroic figure. By associating her with the foreign queen who meant to keep Aeneas from Italy, and who damns the entire nation, one might think that Vergil is trying to "other" the goddess. Yet, it is known that Hekate was worshipped extensively in the Roman world as goddess of the crossroads. This is mentioned by Ovid in the *Fasti*:

omnis habet geminas, hinc atque hinc, ianua frontes,  
 e quibus haec populum spectat, at illa Larem,  
 utque sedens primi vester prope limina tecti  
 ianitor egressus introitusque videt,  
 sic ego perspicio caelestis ianitor aulae  
 Eoas partes Hesperiasque simul.  
 ora vides Hecates in tres vertentia partes,  
 servet ut in ternas compita secta vias (l. 135 – 142)<sup>303</sup>

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<sup>302</sup> 1972: 388.

<sup>303</sup> I have used the Latin text edited by Frazer (1989).

Every door has twin fronts, this way and that, out of which this one looks at the people, and the other looks at the Lares. Just as a doorkeeper sitting near the threshold of the house first sees those leaving and entering, thus I, the doorkeeper of the courtyard of heaven, observe Dawn and Evening completely at the same time. You see Hekate's face turned in three directions so that she may watch over three roads at a time when they are arranged in a split way.

Therefore we know that Hekate was significant enough a deity that her statue appeared in every household. Later, Ovid mentions Hekate in her triple-form once more in connection with her sacred animal, the hound, at crossroads, saying 'exta canum vidi Triviae libare Sapaeos' (1. 389) ('I have seen the dogs' entrails offered to Trivia by the Sapaean'). Bearing this in mind, perhaps Vergil's intention is to portray Hekate as a goddess of women and their concerns rather than a deity who stands in the way of the existence of Rome. This would tie in with her lunar qualities, and would be further emphasised by Hekate's presence in Book 6 of the *Aeneid*, in which she is the patron goddess of the Cumaean Sibyl.

#### **4.2.2. Book 6**

In Book 6, Aeneas and his companions finally drop anchor on Italian shores, at Cumae where he consults the Sibyl, a prophetess of Apollo, who has been placed in this region by Hekate so that she may guard the gateway to the Underworld in the Forest of Avernus. The Sibyl, like the Pythia at Delphi, foretells the future by entering a frenzied state in which the god speaks through her (45 – 51). She predicts many trials for Aeneas in Italy, and later leads the hero into the Underworld so that he may speak with his father, Anchises. Several points can be made regarding Hekate in Book 6. The first is her affiliation with the Sibyl. Aeneas divulges that the Sibyl was appointed guardian of the Forest of Avernus by Hekate herself (18), and the Sibyl later discloses that it was Hekate who gave her authority, and conducted her through the Underworld (164). Highlighted is Hekate as Queen of the Underworld, with the power to grant as protector of her domain whomever she wants.



The Sibyl performs a rite and sacrifice to Hekate before she leads Aeneas into the Underworld. Like the sacrifice performed by Jason in the *Argonautica*, the Sibyl's ritual is conducted at night (255), cleansing by water occurs (229 – 231), animals are slaughtered and libations are offered (243 – 247), and the goddess is invoked - 'voce vocans Hekaten caeloque Ereboque potentem' (247) ('calling Hekate in a loud voice, powerful in the heavens and in Erebos'). Hekate is linked to the sky and the Underworld in this instance, and for a brief moment we see the Hesiodic Hekate: a goddess of many realms. Striking is the location in which the rite is carried out. In the *Homeric Hymn to Demeter*, Hekate lived in a cave, and it is from here that she witnessed the abduction of Persephone. Now, according to this tradition, Hekate once more haunts caves (237). The cave denotes that Hekate is a shady character, mysterious, linked to the earth and those that dwell in the darkness below its surface. The cave itself is a liminal space; a gateway between worlds, and thus it is appropriate that such a place should be sacred to Hekate. One more echo from Greek literature is the advance of Hekate at the end of the ritual, which is not unlike her approach in the *Argonautica*:

ecce autem primi sub lumina solis et ortus  
 sub pedibus mugire solum et iuga coepta moveri  
 silvarum, visaeque canes ululare per umbram  
 adventante dea (6. 255 – 258).

Look! However under the first light of the rising sun, the ground began to bellow under their feet, the mountain heights of the woods began to move and dogs seemed to howl through the shadow at the advancing goddess.

Once more the whole earth trembles before the awesome goddess, and she is announced by the barking of dogs. The atmosphere is eerie. She most certainly is a goddess to fear and admire, as Vergil describes the realm which she governs:

Vestibulum ante ipsum primis in faucibus Orci

Luctus et ultrices posuere cubilia Curae,  
 pallentesque habitant Morbi tristisque Senectus,  
 et Metus et malesuada Fames ac turpis Egestas,  
 terribiles visu formae, Letumque Labosque;  
 tum consanguineus Leti Sopor et mala mentis  
 Gaudia, mortiferumque adverso in lumine Bellum,  
 ferreique Eumenidum thalami et Discordia demens  
 vipereum crinem vittis innexa cruentis (6. 273 – 281).

Before the entrance itself in the very gullet of Orcus, Sorrow and avenging Cares have placed their beds. Pale Diseases, sad Old Age, Fear, seductive Hunger, disgraceful Poverty, the terrible forms to see, Death and Toil, lived there. There is Sleep, related by blood to Death and Joy of evil intention, and in the opposite threshold, War, causing death, and the iron bed chambers of the Furies and insane Discord, her snaky hair fastened with blood-red ribbons.

This is a land of nightmares and gloom. It speaks volumes of Hekate's darker qualities that she should find her home here among such companions as Death, Grief, and the dreaded Furies. Yet, why did Hekate choose Apollo's priestess as protectress of the Forest of Avernus, and why are the two deities mentioned in conjunction with each other at two instances in Book 6? First, Aeneas travels to the golden temple of Apollo, housed in the woods of Trivia (13). Then, he pledges to inaugurate a temple in honour of Apollo and Trivia, once the Sibyl has prophesied for him (69). Naturally, being an aspect of Diana, it figures that Hekate should be mentioned side-by-side with her brother, Apollo. Moreover, the shared forest, housing both Apollo's shrine, and Hekate's cave-entrance to the Underworld in her own sacred woods, may signify the holistic, peaceful co-existence of the two heavenly bodies, the sun and the moon, and correspondingly masculine and feminine. It serves well to remember that the deities have already shared sacred place, worshipped alongside each other at Apollo's temple at Miletus, as discussed in the Greek portion of my study. But I believe the root of the relationship goes deeper. The sibling deities, Apollo and Diana, are frequently related to Hekate in varying respects, as can be discerned throughout my study thus far. I see many of the traits that they share with Hekate in accordance with the prehistoric mother

goddess, such as their associations with animals, the processes of life, light, the moon, and death. In the case of Apollo's association with Hekate here, Burkert states that oracles from frenzied females were of non-Greek origins, most likely the Middle East.<sup>304</sup> This feeds into the notion that Hekate is a descendant of the prehistoric mother goddess discussed in my literature review.

Book 4 and Book 6 of the *Aeneid* depict Hekate as a goddess on the borders; of Roman and barbarian, of helpful and harmful, and of life and death. In Book 4, even if it is a facade, she is invoked by a foreign priestess in conjunction with primordial, chthonic deities, in the aid of a distraught, love-sick woman. She is shown to be worshipped at a liminal space: the crossroads, with guttural wails that reverberate through the night, and specifically by women. In Book 6 she is an enigmatic, cave-dwelling, chthonic goddess who has bestowed her hand-picked prophetess with the secrets of the Underworld. Once more, her main follower is a woman, and like the instance before when she is called upon to help a passionate woman, in Book 6 she is called upon for another emotional motive: for a son to be reunited with his dear father, if only briefly (108 – 109). Johnston observes that liminal points, since they are transitory gaps belonging to neither extreme, are in a state of 'permanent chaos'.<sup>305</sup> Hekate, according to Johnston, directs people through these transitory points and offers her protective presence.<sup>306</sup> She is the guide during confusion, disorder and turmoil. This is important in that it shows that Hekate is not worshipped in strict fashion by those of rational mind. She is usually invoked when passions and tensions are high, in order to bring some sense of peace and relief, as can also be seen in Seneca's *Medea*.

### 4.3. Seneca's *Medea*

The *Medea*<sup>307</sup> of Lucius Annaeus Seneca (4 BCE – 65 CE), the Stoic philosopher, and once tutor and advisor of the emperor Nero, is deeply influenced by two previous plays of the same name, that of Euripides, and that of Ovid which does not survive, as well as by the

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<sup>304</sup> 1985: 116.

<sup>305</sup> 1991: 217 – 218.

<sup>306</sup> *Ibid.*, 219.

<sup>307</sup> I have used the Latin text edited by Fitch (2002).

*Argonautica* of Apollonius Rhodius.<sup>308</sup> In Seneca's play, based on the mythological events that take place after those of the *Argonautica*, Medea has learnt that her husband Jason has taken a new bride, Creusa, daughter of Creon, the king of Corinth, Abandoned in a foreign country by the man who fathered her two sons, the 'Colchi noxium Aetæe genus' (179) ('the lethal child of Colchian Aetes') is decreed by Creon to leave Corinth or be punished by death (297 – 299). In profound bitterness Medea contemplates revenge on all three (16 – 18). Medea sends clothing to Creusa, imbued with poison that will burn deep into her bones when she puts it on (817 – 819). This kills both Creusa and Creon (880). Then, in anger at Jason, Medea slaughters both her sons in front of him, despite his pleading (970 – 1018), and escapes on a chariot drawn by snakes (1022 – 1025).

The play begins with the distraught Medea entreating the deities of marriage (1 – 4), and those from the realm of the dead who more rightly deserve her prayers (8 – 9) to bear witness to her rituals, and bring about vengeance on Jason, Creusa and Creon (1- 18). Hekate is invoked in line 7, no doubt to stress Medea's allegiance to the goddess, which will be emphasised later in the action of the play. Hekate is called 'Hekate triformis' (7) ('tri-formed Hekate') an allusion, as in Virgil's *Aeneid* (4. 509 – 511), to the three phases of the moon, and her many, varying names such as Diana, Phoebe, Dictynna and Trivia. This is reinforced later when Medea calls upon the moon (751). The reference to Hekate at this point in the play does not only set up the identity of Medea, as a witch who summons the dread goddess and the restless spirits of the dead for her own schemes, but also of Hekate. The goddess is invoked by the notorious, foreign woman, Medea, in conjunction with other fearsome deities, like the Furies (13), for the purpose of retribution, and Medea's own brand of justice. Throughout the play, Medea is passionate, uncontrollable, and dangerous. These characteristics no doubt reflect on her patron goddess, who supports Medea, and approves of actions, which seem to the audience to be evil, despite her reasoning.

This is most clear in Act Four, in which Medea prepares the clothing that will kill Creusa and Creon. The Nurse outlines the extreme lengths Medea goes to in order to prepare such a poison: calling on spirits she herself fears, pouring out all her resources, and deploying a host

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<sup>308</sup> Cleasby 1907: 40 – 42.

of unearthly evils (675 – 679). She mixes deadly herbs, the venom of snakes, entrails of unwholesome birds, and fearful words with the aim of producing her poison (731 – 738). She is determined in her plot for revenge, obsessed with mixing together a sinister concoction, wholly focused on her evil intentions and ingredients. Next, chanting, Medea invokes formidable entities to aid her in her revenge; the silent dead, gods of graves, Chaos, ghosts, and the Danaids, infamous for murdering their own husbands on their wedding night (740 – 749). In the same breath, she addresses Hekate as the ‘noctium sidus.../ fronte non una minax’ (750 – 751) (‘star of the nights...threatening not with one face’), once more concentrating on the lunar aspect of Hekate, and indicating that it is night, the time in which Hekate is most powerful and attentive. The ritual performed is like those seen previously. Medea loosens her hair (752), is bare-footed (753), and she makes sacrifices of body parts from various notorious mythological characters: wreaths tied with serpents woven by blood-stained hands, the serpentine limbs of monster Typhon, the blood of the centaur Nessos responsible for the demise of Heracles, ash from Heracles’ funeral pyre, the brand of Althaea who caused the death of her own son Meleager, plumage of a half-bird, half-woman Harpy, and a feather from a man-eating the Stymphalian bird killed by Heracles (771 – 784). Last she distinguishes a sign from Hekate: ‘...tripodas agnosco meos/ favente commotos dea’ (785 – 786) (‘I recognize that my tripods have been violently shaken by my favouring goddess’). The string of nasty mythological characters, who have each brought about destruction, devastation and death, relates directly to Medea, who has an unsavoury reputation herself, and is seeking to bring about similar results. These monstrosities emphasise Medea’s own villainy, since she is as wicked as any of them. That Hekate would respond favourably to such sacrifices would also highlight her own sinister personality. It is also important to bear in mind that since Medea was a well known figure in the ancient world, those reading Seneca’s version of the story would know that, prior to this, Medea murdered her own brother, and that, as well as the patriarch of Corinth and his daughter, she will shortly afterwards murder her own children.

Medea observes the moon, which she calls ‘Triviae carrus agiles’ (‘the swift chariot of Trivia’) looking gloomy and terrifying (787 – 796). The moon may be in an eclipse, suggested by Medea, who explains that it is tormented by Thessalian threats (791). Fitch

notes that witches from Thessaly were believed to be capable of causing eclipses.<sup>309</sup> To this moon, which provides a dismal light, Medea makes her offerings in a frenzy, like a maenad with bare breasts (806), even shedding her own blood on the altar (807 – 811), further highlighting her determination, and her dedication to her cause. Medea ends her sacrifice by begging forgiveness from Hekate for her constant entreaties, admitting her motive, ‘Causa vocandi,/ Persei, tuos saepius arcus/ una atque eadem est semper, Iason’ (814 – 816) (‘The reason I so frequently call upon your arches, daughter of Perses, is always one and the same, Jason’). As Dido’s spell was for the love of a man, so is Medea’s. Here, Hekate is once more identified as a lunar goddess, when the moon is in crescent shape (the “arch”), again hinting at an eclipse. She is also, as she was in Hesiod, the daughter of Perses.

Medea then gives the contaminated clothing to the Nurse, to bring to Creusa, at the same time praying to her favourite deity to support her in her violent act:

Adde venenis stimulus, Hekate,  
 donisque meis  
 semina flammae condita serva:  
 fallant visus tactusque ferant,  
 meet in pectus venasque calor,  
 stillent artus ossaque fument  
 vincetaque suas flagrante coma  
 nova nupta faces.  
 Vota tenentur:  
 ter latratus audax Hekate  
 dedit, et sacros edidit ignes  
 face lucifera (833 – 842).<sup>310</sup>

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<sup>309</sup> 2002: 412.

<sup>310</sup> Fitch 2002.

Add a spur to my poison, Hekate, and to my gifts guard the seed of the flames. Let them deceive the sight and let them endure the touch. Let heat flow into her heart and veins. Let her limbs drip with blood, and let her bones smoke, the marriage torches of the new bride consumed by her burning hair. My offerings have been accepted: bold Hekate barked three times, and emitted sacred fires from the light-bearing torch.

Prominent is the brutality of Medea's plot. The death she has in store for Jason's new bride is vicious, and excruciating; she is eaten away by an all-consuming blaze. Medea asks that the bride, on a day that is supposed to be joyous, burns brighter than her own wedding torches (838 – 839). Hekate blesses Medea's malevolent act, responding in a manner that by now is typical of her: her sacred animal, the dog, barks three times in accordance with the number frequently associated with Hekate, and her torch, which she is so often represented carrying in art, is set alight.

Act Four of Seneca's *Medea* is wrought with tension, fierce passion, and malicious intent. In H. L. Cleasby's words, 'Medea, granddaughter of the all-seeing Sun and favoured priestess of the dread Hekate of Triple Form, is the typical sorceress of antiquity. To this phase of her character Seneca has chosen to devote a whole act.'<sup>311</sup> This is the crux of Seneca's version of Medea's personality, especially within Act Four. She is a woman who is utterly consumed by her personal feelings, her patron deity, and her own capabilities as a practitioner of witchcraft. She boasts of her black arts:

et evocavi nubibus siccis aquas  
 egique ad imum maria, et Oceanus graves  
 interius undas aestibus victis dedit;  
 pariterque mundus lege confusa aetheris  
 et solem et astra vidit, et vetitum mare

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<sup>311</sup> 1907: 57.

tetigistis, Ursae. Temporum flexi vices:  
 aestiva tellus horruit cantu meo,  
 coacta messem vidit hibernam Ceres. (756 – 761).

I have called out water from dry clouds, I have compelled seas to flee to the lower world, and Oceanus gave his heavy waves to the depths when his tide was overwhelmed. The law of heaven in confusion, the earth sees equally the sun and the stars, and, you, the constellations of the Bears, you have touched the forbidden sea. I have altered the cycles of time: the summery earth shuddered with dread at my incantation, and Ceres, being forced, has seen the winter harvest.

Medea can prevent and subvert the natural order, causing even gods to work in compliance with her will. Such immense power, combined with rage and irrationality makes her all the more lethal. Throughout Seneca's *Medea* the title character is in a wild, frantic state of mind, frequently compared to a maenad (383; 806; 849). Medea's Nurse implores her to curb her passions and regain her sanity (381; 425 – 426). The witch raves, lacking self-restraint. Moreover, her anger blinds her reason when Jason approaches to justify his marriage to Creusa. Unlike in Euripides' play, where Jason is portrayed as egotistical, selfish, and cold, Seneca's version shows him as a sensitive, moral, and loyal father. His motive in marrying the princess of Corinth is not love, but to provide political safety for his sons (544 – 549). He is torn between fatherly duty and his affection for Medea, who is more visibly deranged, morally degenerate, and ruinous, in comparison to her Euripidean counterpart. Jason repeatedly begs her to leave Corinth for her own safety (493 – 494; 513 – 514), and urges her to control her angry heart (506), and begin thinking sensibly, and speaking calmly (537 – 538).

Seneca's vivid depiction of Medea as a psychologically deteriorating maenad, whose self-control and rationality is utterly destroyed by her *furor*, and the underlying theme of reason versus passion, is an expression of his own Stoic perspective on the world. N. T. Pratt argues that 'Stoic ideas conditioned the nature of these plays right from the primary point where Seneca, consciously or unconsciously, adopted an attitude towards the treatment of tragic



subjects.’<sup>312</sup> Stoicism, a philosophical school of thought named after the *stoa* or colonnade in which the group originally congregated, founded by the Greek Zeno, upheld that the best way to live was simply: free of fear, virtuously, and in accordance with nature. Seneca himself outlines the Stoic view on excessive passion in his *De Ira*, in which he states that anger is ‘maxime ex omnibus taetrum ac rabidum’ (I.1)<sup>313</sup> (‘of all [anger] is especially mad and destructive’). Seneca views this passion as ‘effrenata indomita’ (I. 9). He explains the nature of anger:

Et in totum inaequalis est; modo ultra quam oportet excurrit, modo ceterius debito resistit; sibi enim indulget et ex libidine iudicat et audire non vult et patrocinio non relinquit locum et ea tenet quae invasit et eripi sibi iudicium suum, etiam si primum est, non sinit (I. 17).

And on the whole anger is unbalanced; on the one hand it runs out further than it should, on the other it resists quicker than it ought to; for it indulges itself and it judges out of its own appetite and it does not want to hear and it does not leave a place for defence in a court of law and it holds whatever it has seized and it does not allow its own judgement to be snatched away from it, even if it is wrong.

The above passage echoes the erratic behaviour of Medea in the play itself, when the Nurse describes Medea’s disturbing behaviour to the audience:

Incerta qualis entheos gressus tulit  
cum iam receptor maenas insanit deo  
Pindi nivalis vertice aut Nysae iugis,  
talis recursat huc et huc motu effero,  
furoris ore signa lymphati gerens.

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<sup>312</sup> 1948: 2.

<sup>313</sup> I have used the OCT Latin Text by Reynolds (1977).

fammata facies, spiritum ex alto citat,  
 proclamat, oculos uberi fletu rigat,  
 renidet; omnis specimen affectus capit  
 haeret minatur aestuat queritur gemit (382 – 390).

Just like a possessed maenad taking uncertain steps when taken in the rage of the god, on the snowy peaks of Pindus or the ridges of Nysa, in such a way she hastens with wild movement here and there, the signs of frantic passion displayed on her expression. Her face burns. She summons up deep breaths from her depths; she cries out, her eyes wet from abundant tears, she laughs. All feelings visibly seize her. She cleaves, threatens, burns, laments, and she groans.

Thus, Seneca uses the figure of Medea to display the evils and the devastation that can be caused by anger. By association, Hekate is marginalised and associated with irrationality, extreme passion, and revenge.

Medea is, akin to Dido, an autonomous woman, since Jason has negated her as his wife. She makes her own decisions, answers to no one, and behaves rebelliously. It can be said that Seneca's version of *Medea*, in the vein of the others, shows the disastrous consequences of a woman left to her own devices. Medea's resolve to plot, murder, and practise her sinister arts has led not only to the ruin of a family, but to a *polis* as well. What then can be said about Hekate, the enigmatic, triple-formed benefactor of such an emotional, powerful barbarian witch? Hekate's reputation cannot be improved by her association with Medea, and it is not surprising then that she comes up so often in Greco-Roman magical enchantments, which will be discussed later.

#### 4.4. *Metamorphoses* ('*The Golden Ass*') by Lucius Apuleius

It is strikingly apparent that Hekate is firmly entrenched as a witch-goddess in the Roman world. This can be discerned from Lucius Apuleius' work *Metamorphoses*.<sup>314</sup> Apuleius (c. CE 120 – 180) was born into a privileged and well-connected family in Madaura, a Roman colony near Morocco, and studied rhetoric and philosophy in Carthage and Athens before arriving in Rome.<sup>315</sup> He travelled extensively throughout Asia Minor and Egypt, learning what he could of religion and philosophy, and was inducted into the Mysteries of Isis.<sup>316</sup> In c. CE 155, Apuleius was charged with having used magic to charm the affections of a rich widow, and mother of his friend, named Pudentilla. He defended himself, and the charges were eventually dropped.<sup>317</sup> Apuleius continued to practice as a barrister, and became a priest of Isis and Osiris, as well as Aesculapius.<sup>318</sup> Robert Graves stresses that Apuleius has first-hand knowledge of witchcraft and magic, and wrote his work in gratitude to the goddess whom he adored, Isis.<sup>319</sup> Both these points are made obvious in the *Metamorphoses*. Apuleius makes mention of Hekate only once in his whole work, but his treatment of magic, and his attitude towards Goddesses and mystery religions is worthy of a closer look.

The plot of the *Metamorphoses* is based on two works called *The Ass*, the first by Lucius of Patra, now lost, and another by a contemporary of Apuleius, Lucian of Samosata, which has survived.<sup>320</sup> The story begins in Thessaly, an area noted for witches. The theme of magic is set up immediately when the narrator, Lucius, meets two travellers (1.3), one of whom named Aristomenes claims to have had a recent encounter with a witch, Meroe, in Hypata with the ability to transform men into animals (1.9 - 10), and has witnessed his friend Socrates' murder by the same witch (1.19). Lucius himself is travelling to Hypata, where, on his arrival, he stays with Milo, a cruel money-lender (1.21). Lucius meets his aunt, Byrrhaena, in

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<sup>314</sup> I have used the Budé Latin text by Robertson (1965).

<sup>315</sup> Graves 1950: 12.

<sup>316</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>317</sup> *Ibid.*, 12 – 13.

<sup>318</sup> *Ibid.*, 17.

<sup>319</sup> *Ibid.*, 16.

<sup>320</sup> *Ibid.*, 13.

the market (2.2) who warns him that Milo's wife, Pamphilē is a witch in the habit of changing handsome, young men into wild beasts (2.5). Being naturally adventurous and secretly ambitious to study magic, Lucius is determined to learn the arts from Pamphilē, rather than be wary of her (2.6). He decides the way to achieve his means is to seduce Pamphilē's slave-girl, Fotis (2.7 – 10), which he successfully does (2.16 - 17). The next night, Lucius has dinner at his aunt's house, where one guest relates a tale of how his nose and ears were cut off and stolen by a witch (2.22 - 31). Fotis then arranges for Lucius to watch Pamphilē transform herself into a bird (3.21), and once he sees the magic work, he begs Fotis to administer the same formula to him so that he too can be a bird (3.23). Fotis accidentally dispenses the wrong potion, turning Lucius into an ass (3.24). The antidote is to eat a rose (3.25), however, before Lucius can accomplish this, he is seized by robbers (3.28). From here, Lucius is passed on to a variety of masters, including a trainer who makes him perform (10.7) where a noblewoman becomes enraptured by him and beds him as an ass (10.19 - 22). At last, Lucius escapes all his captors, and finds himself on a secluded beach where he cleanses himself, dipping his head seven times under the waves in a prayer to the goddess, whom he invokes by all her many names (11.2). The goddess, Isis, appears to him (11.3), asks that he join her procession the next day so that he may pluck a rose from the High Priest's garland that will make him a man once more, and afterwards, he becomes an initiate in her cult (11.5 – 6). Following her instructions, Lucius is transformed back into a man (11.13), and becomes a High Priest himself (11.26).

The *Metamorphoses*, while not mentioning Hekate explicitly, except for once at the end of the novel, does recall stereotypical characteristics of witches, which have become synonymous with her in the Roman world. D. W. Leinweber states that The *Metamorphoses* is one of the finest sources for witchcraft and magic as it was perceived and practised in late antiquity, with three major enchantresses; Meroe, her sister Panthia, and Pamphilē.<sup>321</sup> It is said of Meroe, the witch who had a love affair with Aristomenes' friend Socrates, that besides being able to transform men into animals, she is able to 'caelum deponere, terram suspendere, fonte durare, montes diluere, manes sublimare, deos infirmare, sidera exstingere, Tartarum ipsum illuminare' (1.8) ('bring down the sky, to suspend the earth, to make fountains hard, to dissolve mountains, to raise spirits of the dead, to weaken the gods, to

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<sup>321</sup> 1994: 77.

extinguish the stars and to illuminate Tartarus itself'). This is similar to the feats that Dido's priestess and Medea perform. The witch may reverse the natural order and defy reason. These are traditional claims of witchcraft. The raising of the dead would imply the power of Hekate as she is the goddess most associated with the spirits of the dead. Aristomenes intends to restore Socrates to his former life, and get him as far away from Meroe as possible (1.7). They spend a night at an inn, where Meroe and Panthia, eager to avenge being abandoned by Socrates and insulted, find them (1.12). Aristomenes witnesses the witches drive a sword through the neck of Socrates. Panthia then takes a sponge, and plugs the wound, uttering a spell, 'spongia, cave in mari nata per fluvium transeas' (1.13) ('Sponge, born in the sea, beware crossing a river'). Aristomenes is surprised to learn that Socrates is still alive the next day, despite what he saw (1.17). The two men go for a walk and finally, as Socrates takes a drink of water from a brook, his throat opens up, the sponge falls into the stream, and he dies (1.19). Leinweber finds Meroe and Panthia's nocturnal attack similar to that of modern superstitions concerning vampires. He states that in many eastern European cultures, it is said that vampires cannot cross running water, possibly because of the purifying effects of water.<sup>322</sup> Also a threat to men is Pamphilē who is skilled in necromancy, and changes the shapes of men at her pleasure (2.5). This once more links the witches of Thessaly with Hekate. Pamphilē turns herself into an owl, an animal of ill-omen, and a creature of the night. Pamphilē practises her arts at night, which Leinweber picks up on, and associates with Hekate, who had strong nocturnal qualities herself.

When Hekate is named in the *Metamorphoses*, it is not her malevolent qualities that are stressed, but her connection to the all-powerful, universal great goddess of many forms, many faces, and many natures. Lucius, the ass, finds himself on a beach, and purifies himself by dipping his head seven times in the sea (11.1). He offers a prayer to the supreme goddess to end his perils and make him human once more. He calls this goddess 'Regina caeli' (11.2), acknowledging her many names such as Ceres, Venus, Artemis, Proserpine (11.2). Lucius' invocation to Proserpine, the Roman equivalent of Persephone, is striking because he names her 'nocturnis ululatibus horrenda Proserpina, triformi facie' (11.2) ('frightful Proserpina of howls in the night-time, with three faces'). This, in essence is Hekate, the triple goddess of

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<sup>322</sup> Ibid., 80.

ghosts and the Underworld, invoked by one of her many names, in this case Proserpine, or Persephone, with whom she is so closely associated in Greek mythology and religion.

This universal goddess does respond to Lucius' prayer. She appears before him, emerging from the sea, wearing a chaplet woven with flowers of every kind, a round disc on her brow, a many-coloured robe (11.3). In her right hand she carries a bronze rattle, in her left, a gold dish with an asp coiled around (11.4). She addresses Lucius as follows:

En adsum tuis commota, Luci, precibus, rerum naturae parens, elementorum omnium domina, saeculorum progenies initialis, summa numinum, regina manium, prima caelitem, deorum dearumque facies uniformis, quae caeli luminosa culmina, maris salubria flamina, inferum deplorata silentia nutibus meis dispenso: cuius numen unicum multiformi specie, ritu vario, nomine multiiugo totus veneratus orbis. Inde primigenii Phryges Pessinuntiam deum matrem, hinc autochthones Attici Cecropeiam Minervam, illinc fluctuantes Cyprii Paphiam Venerem, Cretes sagittiferi Dictynniam Dianam, Siculi trilingues Stygiam Proserpinam, Eleusinii vetusti Actaeam Cererem, Iunonem alii, Bellonam alii, Hecatam isti, Rhamnusiam illi, et qui nascentis dei Solis incohantibus inlustrantur radiis Aethiopes utrique priscaque doctrina pollentes Aegyptii caerimoniis me propriis percolentes appellant vero nomine reginam Isidem (11.5).

Behold, Lucius, I am here, moved by your prayers, the mother of nature, the mistress of all the elements, the first child of the ages, the greatest of the powers, the queen of the dead, ruler of the heavens, the singular form of all the gods and goddesses. Who, with my nod, arranges the gleaming summit of the heavens, the wholesome blasts of sea-wind and the bitter silences of the Underworld. Whose command the whole earth venerates, unparalleled, in many forms, a variety of rituals, and in multiple names. On this side, the first born Phrygians call me Pessinuntica, mother the of gods, on that the Athenians born of the earth call me Cecropian Minerva, there the stormy Cyprians call me Paphian Venus, the archers of Crete call me Dictynna Diana, the trilingual Sicilians call me Stygian Proserpina, the ancient Eleusinians

call me sea-girt Ceres. Others call me Juno, Bellona, Hekate, Rhamnusia, and to both Aethiopians, who are lit by the first rays of the rising sun, and the Egyptians who are powerful in ancient learning worship me with their own ceremonies and call me by my true name, Queen Isis.

From this passage it can be discerned that Hekate is considered by Apuleius as one aspect of a larger, grander entity. All these goddesses are one and the same, the variety of aspects of one original, ultimate deity. This is identical to the Hindu rationalisation of their deities, and of the goddess as mother, which is why I have chosen to mention it. The goddess in the *Metamorphoses* does, however, mention that her true name is Isis, the ancient Egyptian goddess of the Nile, fertility, motherhood and magic. The mystery cult of Isis became popular in the Roman Empire, and Apuleius himself became a priest of her cult. It is unsurprising that she is named supreme deity in the *Metamorphoses*, showing that the work is fundamentally a religious text glorifying Apuleius' favourite goddess.

Thus, in the *Metamorphoses*, Apuleius exposes many concerns about witches at the time, emphasising the connection between lust and witchcraft. His witches, Meroe and Pamphilē, a nymphomaniac (2.5), transform the men who jilt them into various wild beasts. They are presented as sex-crazed, powerful women who do evil to men. Lucius himself is a victim of this. He has chosen to dabble in the arts of these women, and instead of being led astray by a witch, he seduces an amateur practitioner and undergoes a metamorphosis into an ass, having to endure many trials and perils as a result of this. Apuleius also draws a clear distinction between the solitary rituals of witches in the night-time worshipping Hekate (1.10, 2.22, 3.21), and public religions practised in the daytime by the masses, such as the festival in honour of Isis (1.8 - 13). Yet Hekate and Isis, the darkness and the light, the Underworld and the Sky, are part of one whole. They are the same goddess in different forms, and this is the heart of Apuleius' work. Graves argues that Apuleius was knowledgeable of the 'tradition of a "left-hand", or destructive magic performed in honour of the Triple Moon-goddess in her character of Hekate', and 'the "right-hand", or benevolent, magic performed in honour of the same goddess concentrated in the pure mysteries of Isis and Demeter.'<sup>323</sup> Lucius, at the start

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<sup>323</sup> Graves 1950: 17.

of *The Golden Ass* displays a fascination with the uncanny, the bizarre, and with witchcraft, which does not turn out well for him. At the end however he separates himself from magic, joining a formalised group religion, and thus his life improves. Apuleius is therefore implying that while the ‘left-wing’ Hekate may be appealing, she is also dangerous, and one is better off celebrating and venerating the ‘right-wing’ Isis.

#### 4.5. Conclusion

The salient feature of Hekate’s presence in Roman literature is her role in magic and witchcraft. In the three works I have examined, the *Aeneid*, *Medea*, and *Metamorphoses*, Hekate is invoked by women who have been emotionally and physically abandoned by men. In Book 4 of the *Aeneid*, the goddess is invoked by foreign women, the insane Dido and her priestess, because Dido has been jilted in love. Similarly, Medea, emotional and raging, calls on Hekate to bring about her evil schemes. In *Metamorphoses*, scheming women practise their skills at night to ensure the suffering of men who have wronged them. These are determined women who depend on magic to bring about a means to an end. All of them take matters into their own hands, in order to bring about their own justice. Her priestess in Book 6 of the *Aeneid* is a learned and pious woman, knowledgeable about the dark recesses of the Underworld and its occupants. It can therefore be said that Hekate is first and foremost a woman’s deity as far as the Roman world is concerned. Additionally, she is always associated with the moon, the number three, the Underworld and the dead.

All these features can be observed in action in *Bellum Civile* by Marcus Annaeus Lucanus (CE 39 – 65), the nephew of Seneca.<sup>324</sup> Lucan’s work depicts the civil war between Julius Caesar and the Senate, led by Pompey. In Book 6 of *Bellum Civile*, Pompey’s son is in Thessaly, an area synonymous with the work of witches, ‘that ill-omened race’ (443), who are deemed to achieve all the horrors that are thought impossible (436 – 437). These witches can stop natural changes, making daylight linger, rule the weather and tides, stop the Nile from rising, control animals, draw down the stars, and dim the moon (461 - 506). Of these witches, the most fierce is the necromantic Erictho, who conversed with the dead, and knew

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<sup>324</sup> J. D. Duff 1969: ix. I have used this Latin text for Lucan’s *Bellum Civile*.



all the secrets of the Underworld (507 – 515). Lucan describes her as haggard and aged, of hellish pallor, with uncombed hair (515 – 518). The son of Pompey asks Erictho to reveal the future to him (589 – 603). She replies that the easiest way to learn the future is to raise a freshly slain corpse from the battlefield who will serve as a prophet (619 – 623). Erictho begins the ritual by piercing the body with fresh wounds, cleaning it, and pouring in poisons provided by the moon (667 – 669). She sends the spell down to Tartarus, invoking, among others, ‘the third incarnation of our patron, Hekate, who permits the dead and me to converse together without speech’ (700 – 701). Thus, Hekate is portrayed as a triple-formed deity, the benefactor of witches, who rules over the dead and is responsible for the connection between witches and spirits. Erictho herself is a terrifying figure, concerned with performing horrifying and unnatural acts. Displayed as physically repulsive, morally corrupt, and altogether perverse, she is the opposite of the ideal Roman matron, who is obedient to patriarchal demands. This reflects on her patron deity, Hekate.

It is evident from the Roman material, that Hekate has been wholly transformed into a ferocious night-wanderer from the Underworld. She is the patroness of witches, deemed evil by patriarchy, who practise their black arts in a frenzy at night. Hekate’s personality in the Roman sources is much more stable than in Greek sources, in which the goddess transforms from Hesiod’s champion of humanity, to a harsh chthonic deity. By the time Hekate is assimilated into Roman religion and culture, her connection to the dead, the triple goddess, magic, Medea, dogs and the crossroads has been well established, and, in the eyes of patriarchal society, her almost demonic divinity has already been firmly entrenched.

### 3.6. Hekate in the *Greek Magical Papyri*

All the above characteristics of Hekate can be seen in the *Greek Magical Papyri*, a set of texts that date between the second century BCE and the fifth century CE from Greco-Roman Egypt. The *Greek Magical Papyri* include texts with the intention of cursing, healing and binding through the use of spiritual force. Hekate features prominently in these texts along with other Underworld deities, local and foreign, like Hermes, Selene, the Babylonian Ereshkigal, Osiris, and Isis.<sup>325</sup> The text is made up of charms, curses, and invocation. The

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<sup>325</sup> Betz 1992: xlvi,

spirits of the dead are constantly called upon as a means to achieving wealth, knowledge of the future, love, fame, and so on.<sup>326</sup> Hekate is usually invoked in conjunction with Persephone, Ereshkigal, Selene, or Artemis, who are each connected either to the Underworld or to the moon. I have selected three spells that demonstrate how Hekate is addressed, and viewed by the people who require her assistance.

The first invocation is to attract a female lover using the aid of those who died a violent death, like gladiators or heroes, in other words, the restless dead (*PGM IV*. 1390 – 1495).<sup>327</sup> Before the spell can be cast, a piece of bread is broken into seven bites. The spell is then performed at a space where violent deaths have occurred, while the pieces of bread are offered as food. Dirt is collected from the site, and thrown into the desired woman's house. The spell itself begins by calling on those who died untimely deaths, and by addressing the three-headed goddess, Lady of the Night, and Lady who feeds on filth: Hekate. Persephone and Ereshkigal are also mentioned. The aim is this:

Give heed to me and rouse / her, NN,<sup>328</sup> on  
 This night and from her eyes remove sweet sleep.  
 And cause her wretched care and fearful pain,  
 And/ for my will give her willingness  
 Until she does what I command of her.  
 O mistress Hekate...  
 O Lady of the Crossroads, O Black Bitch.

The spell includes a backup spell, should the original prove unsuccessful. The backup spell includes an offering of dung from a black cow, and an invocation to Underworld gods. The speaker must call on 'Chthonic Hermes and chthonic Hekate and chthonic Acheron and

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<sup>326</sup> *Ibid.*, xlvii.

<sup>327</sup> *Ibid.*, 64 – 66.

<sup>328</sup> A magical formula for the name of the person against or for whom the spell is cast.

chthonic flesh-eaters, and chthonic gods,' as well as Charon, primal Chaos, Erebus, Lethe, Kore, and Anubis. The phantoms of the restless dead are asked to perform the deed.

The second invocation is a spell to send foreknowledge or dream revelations (*PGM* IV. 2441 – 2621).<sup>329</sup> It is preceded by a warning not to perform the rite rashly but only out of dire necessity. The instructions also state, the spell 'possesses a charm against you falling, for the goddess is accustomed to make airborne those who perform this rite unprotected by a charm and hurl them from aloft down to the ground'. Thus, there is always the element of danger in performing magic, and this also illustrates the erratic nature of Hekate. In the spell, a sacrifice is made, and Hekate is addressed as:

Triple-voiced, triple-headed Selene,  
 Three-pointed, triple-faced, triple-necked,  
 And Goddess of triple ways, who hold  
 Untiring, flaming fire in triple baskets,  
 And you who oft frequent the triple way  
 And rule the triple decades with three forms  
 /And flames and dogs.

The final enchantment (*PGM* IV. 2708 – 84)<sup>330</sup> is a love spell that requires Ethiopian cumin and the fat of a virgin goat. This must be offered to Selene, the moon goddess, on the 13<sup>th</sup> or 14<sup>th</sup> of the month, on a rooftop. Here, apart from Selene, Hekate is called on in conjunction to Artemis, Kore, and Ereshkigal. The spell says,

Mistress, who burst forth from the earth, dog-leader  
 All-tamer, crossroads goddess, triple-headed,

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<sup>329</sup> Betz 1992: 84 – 86.

<sup>330</sup> *Ibid.*, 88 – 90.

Bringer of light, august/ virgin, I call you  
 Fawn-slayer, craft, O infernal one,  
 And many-formed. Come, Hekate, goddess  
 Of three ways, who with your fire-breathing phantoms  
 Have been allotted dread roads and harsh/  
 Enchantments. Hekate I call you with  
 Those who untimely passed away...  
 But you, O Hekate, of many names,  
 O Virgin, Kore, Goddess, come, I ask,  
 O guard and shelter of the threshing floor,  
 Persephone, O triple-headed goddess.

From all three of these enchantments, it can be gathered that Hekate is an aspect of many goddesses, namely Artemis, Kore, or Persephone, Selene, and the Babylonian Ereshkigal. She is linked to other chthonic deities, and spirits of the Underworld, particularly those who died violently before their time, as well as the moon, dogs, the crossroads, and the number three, frequently envisioned as we see her in later Greek and Roman art, with three heads.

Unlike the daytime religious festival depicted at the end of the *Metamorphoses* in celebration of Isis, which was practised collectively by a community of supplicants who followed a strict moral code, so as to secure long term goals from the goddess using humble requests, praise, and thanks, I have shown that magic is always perceived as a solitary, nocturnal practice with immediate results. As Fritz Graf states, ‘Only the sorcerer performs the rite, alone, and there is never a group...the message of the communal ritual concerns everyone, agents and onlookers, whereas the message of the magic ritual concerns only the isolated agent who is the sorcerer.’<sup>331</sup> The motive is always personal, and deities are instructed, even threatened rather than unassumingly beseeched. Morality is secondary; the curses are used at crucial moments to help cope with pain, rejection, and anxiety. Correspondingly, the love spells from the *Greek Magical Papyri* are desperate appeals by desperate people.

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<sup>331</sup> 1997: 210.

These enchantments remind one of Hekate's function in the *Aeneid*, *Medea*, and the *Metamorphoses*, where she is habitually invoked by women who have been slighted in love, and who are irrational, and desperate. This shows that those in an altered state of mind, such as Dido and Medea, are most likely to call upon the goddess, rather than rational, morally upstanding people. Hekate's function in the literature I have looked at, particularly in the Roman world wherein she is predominantly associated with magic, vengeance and the moon, is compatible with the view of her in reality as seen in the *Greek Magical Papyri*, where the common people invoke her to bring about vengeance, or love, as Dido did, and the magic ritual is usually performed in accordance with lunar patterns, and involves sacrifices. The aim of the magic is to cause rational people to feel or experience or behave in a way that is unnatural to them, provoked by dark arts rather than free will.

Thus it is that in investigating the *Greek Magical Papyri*, it is evident that the literature, written by the upper-class, educated male, to be read by other literate and fortunate citizens, does correlate with reality, as the ordinary, possibly illiterate person would resort to magic arts, and call upon Hekate with the same characteristics as in the Roman literary sources. J. J. Winkler cites an incident from Apuleius' *Metamorphoses* to illustrate this.<sup>332</sup> Winkler argues that in Apuleius' work (2.32 and 3. 15 – 8), Pamphilē instructs Fotis to steal locks of hair from a handsome Boeotian, whom she wishes to lure into her bed, while he is at the barber. Fotis is prevented from doing this, and brings back hairs of the same colour from goatskins instead. Pamphilē, using the hairs, performs her magic at night, on her rooftop, with fires and an incantation. She burns the hairs which causes not the Boeotian youth to come knocking at her door as she wanted, but the inflated goatskins.<sup>333</sup> Winkler states that before the discovery of the *Greek Magical Papyri*, the ritual of Pamphilē may have been disregarded as mere fantasy, but that everything it describes does belong in the regular procedures for drawing a person helplessly into one's bed.<sup>334</sup> Thus, it can be seen that Hekate's personality within the Roman world was fixed as a sorceress goddess of the graveyard and underworld.

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<sup>332</sup> 1990: 85.

<sup>333</sup> Ibid.

<sup>334</sup> Ibid.

## Chapter 5 - Kali in Hinduism

### 5.1. Introduction

For my study of the goddess Kali in Hinduism, I will focus on ancient Hindu scriptures written in Sanskrit. The first text for study is the *Devi-Māhātmya*, which David Kinsley considers as Kali's 'debut, her official entrance into the Great Tradition of Hinduism.'<sup>335</sup> In the *Devi-Māhātmya* Kali appears as the bloodthirsty and unruly avatar of an angered Durga, and is set on slaying demons that threaten the rule of the Hindu gods. Thereafter, I will focus on two books of the *Purāṇas*, in which Kali is the consort of Shiva, the Hindu god of destruction. I will offer an analysis of a selection of hymns, or *mantras* to the goddess from Tantric scriptures and by the devotional poets Ramprasad and Swami Vivekananda, and since worship in Hinduism takes place in front of artistic representations of the deities, I will incorporate into my discussions various paintings, and statues of Kali, in which she is most frequently shown as dancing riotously on Shiva's corpse. Traditional images of Kali show her as dark in complexion, naked with an extended tongue, and her body decorated by a necklace of skulls and a belt of severed arms. Although ferocious in appearance, Kali is a mother goddess with transformative powers. My aim is to show, and account for, the duality in Kali's nature as both benevolent mother, and vampiric destructive force, and to show that within the patriarchal confines of Hinduism where other goddesses are significant only in relation to their husbands, Kali is able to be independent and self-determining.

### 5.2. The *Devi-Māhātmya*

The *Devi-Māhātmya*,<sup>336</sup> meaning 'the specific greatness of the goddess' is described by T.B. Coburn as 'one of the major verbal artefacts that has been left in the Indian subcontinent.'<sup>337</sup> It was passed down and embellished during a long oral tradition until finally written down c. CE 500 - 600, and is said to have been authored by a sage named Markandeya.<sup>338</sup> While the *Devi-Māhātmya* forms part of the *Markandeya-Purana*, Kinsley observes that it is treated as

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<sup>335</sup> Kinsley 1975: 90.

<sup>336</sup> I have used Coburn's translation (1991).

<sup>337</sup> *Ibid.*, 1.

<sup>338</sup> *Ibid.*

a separate scripture by followers of the great goddess, and is thus printed as an independent scripture throughout India.<sup>339</sup> As such, I will treat it as an independent text. The *Devi-Māhātmya* is central in the celebration of *Shakti*, meaning female energy, and in the worship of the Hindu great mother goddess, or Devi, who is the embodiment of *Shakti*.<sup>340</sup> It is still read aloud during the Hindu festival of *Navratri*, held in honour of the nine forms of the Devi, particularly in her aspect of Durga, the warrior goddess who alleviates adversities.

The *Devi-Māhātmya* begins with the story of Suratha, a conquered king who has lost his kingdom to the Kolavidhvamsins. In order to reflect on his life, he goes to live with sages in the forest (1. 3 – 15). During his hermitage, a seer teaches Suratha about the supreme goddess, explaining that she is eternal, and born in many forms. The supreme goddess, called Mahamaya, is the imperishable one, the creator of the primordial material that made the world, and the protectress of the world who will consume it at the end of time (1: 47 – 67). The seer tells Suratha of the battle between the gods and demons called the Asuras, the chief of whom is named Mahisaura, in which the gods are defeated and must wander the earth like mortals (2. 1 – 6). The three male gods, Vishnu, Brahma, and Shiva, create the great goddess, Mahamaya, or the Devi, bestowing powers and weapons on her so that she may fight and destroy the Asuras (2. 10 – 30). She may be called Candika, ‘the fierce and impetuous one’,<sup>341</sup> or Durga, ‘the inaccessible one’, or Ambika, ‘Mother’.<sup>342</sup> The Devi rides out to meet her enemies on a lion, carrying a trident, club and spears in her many hands (2.50 - 54). Her power is devastating (2.57 – 3. 39), and after destroying her enemies, she is praised by the other gods (4. 1 – 36).

The seer continues his stories of the goddess by telling the king of a time when two demons, Sumbha and Nisumbha, took away the powers of the sun and moon, as well as the gods’ share in sacrifices, leaving them powerless (5. 1 – 4). The gods remember Mahamaya’s

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<sup>339</sup> 1975: 90.

<sup>340</sup> As Diesel and Maxwell point out, ‘The terms *Shakti* and *Devi* are sometimes used for one or other of the individual manifestations, and sometimes for the goddess herself in a generic sense’ (1993: 19).

<sup>341</sup> Coburn 1991: 41.

<sup>342</sup> *Ibid.*, 42.

valour in conquering the Asuras and approach her home in the Himalayas to ask for her help in defeating the demons, entreating her by her many names (5. 6 – 36). The goddess as Durga, with three eyes, mounted on her lion, goes into battle. Sumbha, enraged, orders his slaves Canda and Munda to seize Durga by her hair and bring her to him (6. 18 – 20). As they try to abduct her, Durga's face turns black as ink in anger, and from her third-eye emerges Kali (7.3). Kali's appearance is gruesome, and immediately she begins to slay Sumbha's army, and devour the enemies of the gods (7. 7 – 14). Canda and Munda rush at her, and she slays them both (7. 15 – 20). Kali offers the heads of Canda and Munda to Durga, who teases Kali by calling her 'Camunda', a name by which she is henceforth known (7.25). Kali continues to rip her enemies open, and roam about on the battlefield (8. 31 – 36). Eventually Sumbha and Nisumbha send into battle the fearsome Raktabija. Every drop of blood shed by him turns into a great demon (8. 40 – 49). Kali consumes all the drops of blood, and then roams the battlefield to devour the demons. Thus Raktabija, his blood dried up, is defeated (8. 52 – 55). Durga and Kali then destroy Nisumbha (9. 1 – 39). At this point, Mahamaya, as Durga, absorbs all manifestations of goddesses back into herself, and stands alone (10. 3 – 5). Subsequently, Sumbha falls to her (10. 1 – 28). Mahamaya is once again praised by the gods in her many names and forms (11. 1 – 51). Hearing of the powers and glory of the goddess, Suratha then worships her with incense, flowers, fire and water, restricting his diet by fasting, and composing his thoughts (12. 8 – 9). The supportress of the universe, Durga, much pleased by his efforts, addresses Suratha stating that he may receive from her anything that he desires (13. 10 – 11). Suratha regains his kingdom, and will be a sage in his next life (13. 13 – 17).

Much can be discerned about Kali from her 'official appearance on the Hindu scene.'<sup>343</sup> She is a wild, ferocious killing-machine, a manifestation of the wrath of the Devi, born out of a violent bellowing of frustration, fury, and a need for vengeance:

Ambika then uttered a great wrathful cry against them,

And her face became black as ink in anger.

From her knitted brows of her forehead's surface immediately

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<sup>343</sup> Kinsley 1975: 92.



Came forth Kali with her dreadful face, carrying sword and noose.

She carried a strange skull-topped staff, and wore a garland of human heads;

She was shrouded in a tiger skin, and looked utterly gruesome with her emaciated skin,

Her widely gaping mouth terrifying lolling tongue,

With sunken, reddened eyes and a mouth that filled the directions with roars.

She fell upon the great Asuras in that army, slaying them immediately.

She then devoured the forces of the enemies of the gods (7. 4 – 9).

The Sanskrit adjective '*kali*' itself means 'black.'<sup>344</sup> Accordingly, Ambika's face turns black as Kali emanates from her third eye on her forehead. In this respect, Kali's ghastly, demonic form is appropriate; she is unadulterated, murderous rage and anarchy. She looks the part of a harbinger of mayhem and death, and is called 'fearsome Kali' (7. 15), the 'dread-eyed female' (7. 16), and the 'black cloud' (7. 17). In addition, she is depicted as having claws which she uses to tear apart those who oppose her (8. 36). Her appearance corresponds with her purpose, to fill her enemies with fear and dread as she destroys them. Kali is almost barbaric in nature, a primeval, uncivilized, raw force of energy. The sounds she makes are enough to instil terror: she 'angrily cackled with terrible sounds' (7. 18), 'snarls' (8. 9), and 'snorts' (8. 36). She roars and attacks, consuming the flesh of her enemies. She hurls her opponents into her mouth to be pulverized with her teeth: riders and their elephants (7. 9), cavalry with horses, chariots and charioteers (7. 10). Others are crushed against her breast (7. 11), sliced by her sword, pounded by her skull-topped staff (7. 14), or shattered with the sound of her laughter (8. 37). After she is dubbed Camunda by Durga (7. 25), Kali plays a critical role in killing the demon Raktabija, whose shed blood sprouts new demons (8. 40), quite like the Hydra in Greek myth, the terrible monster that grows two new heads for every one that is cut off. The great goddess urges Kali to open her mouth wide so that the drops of blood produced fall into her mouth, thus ensuring no more demons are born (8. 53). She is also told to roam about the battlefield and consume all the demons already in existence. In this way, Raktabija's blood will dry up and he will meet his destruction (8. 54). Kali chews up the demons, and drinks Raktabija's blood, until the great demons fall to the earth,

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<sup>344</sup> Hawley 1996: 77.

bloodless (8. 59 – 61), at which point ‘the band of Mothers danced about, intoxicated by his blood’ (8. 62).

By slaughtering the demons, Kali fulfils her role in the *Devi-Māhātmya*, which is fundamentally functional. She manifests for the purpose of aiding the seething Durga when she is at her most irate, and, as Kinsley points out, she saves the day: ‘She singlehandedly slays Canda and Munda and virtually saves the situation when she kills Raktabija by sucking the blood from him.’<sup>345</sup> In this way, Kali is further shown as an extension of Durga, as she readily adopts the duty assigned to the Devi by the male gods. Kinsley however sees Kali as subservient to Durga, ‘a slave to Durga’,<sup>346</sup> yet I am not completely in agreement with this sentiment. Kali is a manifestation of Durga, and as such they both strive for the same goal, the destruction of the enemy and Kali does what the goddess bids when asked to drink the blood of Raktabija. But Kali also asserts herself at moments within the narrative, which reveal that she is not entirely subordinate or inferior to Durga. For instance, when she has succeeded in slaying Canda and Munda, Kali directly approaches Durga, as an equal, offering the heads not as a responsibility carried out by a slave for a master, but as a ‘present’ (7.23), and she promptly instructs Durga, ‘Now you yourself can slay Sumbha and Nisumbha!’ (7. 23 – 24). Durga playfully responds to Kali when she receives the heads of Canda and Munda, nicknaming her Camunda, almost as if teasing her. Being the uncultivated, raw aspect of the great goddess, Kali appears to behave autonomously on the battlefield itself. Her brutal method of devouring her foes differs from Durga’s heavy weaponry which she uses on approaching enemies from atop her regal lion. Kali is much more chaotic and hands-on in battle. Rather than allow her opponent to come to her, and clash with arms, she roams the battlefield in search of demons to eat, and blood to drink. At one point, it is stated that Durga’s lion chewed up demons, and that Kali did likewise (9. 35). It is explicitly stated that Durga herself does not eat flesh, but that Kali does. A distinction is made between the great goddess and her avatar. Kali is equated with an animal, the lion, and a feral, savage beast. It is significant that she is linked with a fierce, female cat, one of the most protective, and beautiful, of mothers. For these reasons, I see Kali as more of an independent force in the

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<sup>345</sup> 1978: 493.

<sup>346</sup> 1975: 92.

*Devi-Māhātmya* than Kinsley gives her credit, behaving more as a companion and a respectful equal to Durga than as her subordinate.

These above features highlight that Kali is the chthonic aspect of the great goddess, linked to death, and destruction. Her nature is cannibalistic, and vampire-like. She is so bloodthirsty and horrific in behaviour and appearance that it is easy to forget that she herself is not a demon but an emanation of the great goddess, on the side of good. Kali is a prime example of the dual nature of Hindu goddesses who can at the same time be benign, peaceful mothers, and overwhelming forces of violence and destruction. This is seen at various instances throughout the *Devi-Māhātmya* on the whole. The great goddess is called Ambika which translates as ‘Mother’,<sup>347</sup> but she is also known as Candika, ‘the fierce and impetuous one.’<sup>348</sup> Ambika, being the nurturing mother, dons her armour and wields her weapons as Durga for the purpose of viciously annihilating those who threaten her loved ones. Yet, Harding points out that as *Shakti*, the creative and governing force in the Universe, ‘she is killing the demons, who are also her children.’<sup>349</sup> Thus there is the ever-present ambivalence of the mother goddess in Hindu Tradition, who as T. B. Coburn states has ‘the potential both to protect and to kill.’<sup>350</sup>

The Kali worshipped today worldwide is the same goddess born in the *Devi-Māhātmya*, as Kinsley points out. He argues that she has changed little.<sup>351</sup> Kali herself is venerated as a mother goddess, even though she is of an unruly and murderous character, as in the *Devi-Māhātmya*. This is one facet of her complex nature. E. U. Harding focuses on the worship of Kali at her most famous sanctuary in the world, the Dakshineswar Kali Temple in Calcutta, where the goddess is worshipped daily by her followers as ‘Ma Kali’.<sup>352</sup> With reference to

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<sup>347</sup> Kinsley 1975: 42.

<sup>348</sup> Coburn 1991: 41.

<sup>349</sup> 1993: xxxi.

<sup>350</sup> 1991: 21.

<sup>351</sup> 1975: 93.

<sup>352</sup> 1993: 107.

how Hindus view the Universe and the divine, Harding explains that Kali, who is worshipped at cremation grounds, is an often misunderstood form of divinity:

Kali is the full picture of the Universal Power. She is Mother, the Benign, and Mother, the Terrible. She creates and nourishes and she kills and destroys. By Her magic we see good and bad, but in reality there is neither. This whole world and all we see is the play of Maya,<sup>353</sup> the veiling power of the Divine Mother. God is neither good nor bad, nor both. God is beyond the pair of opposites which constitute this relative experience.<sup>354</sup>

I find it most remarkable that the *Devi-Māhātmya* successfully illustrates and explains the monotheism camouflaged as polytheism that is characteristic of Hinduism, and crucial to understanding the religion. When first the seer describes the might of the great goddess, he also states that ‘her birth is in many forms’ (1. 48). This is the essence of Hinduism: there is one omnipotent, ubiquitous, eternal supreme divinity which, being various and overwhelming, manifests itself as the many gods and goddesses of the Hindu pantheon, each with their distinct attributes and iconography. In terms of goddesses, these manifestations can, amongst others, be as Lakshmi, who is symbolized by a lotus, or as Sarasvati, the goddess of wisdom who is depicted with a stringed instrument, as Durga on her lion, the remover of obstacles, as Shiva’s principal wife, Parvati, or as Kali, the dark one, associated with destruction, death and transformation. The *Devi-Māhātmya*, to me, makes the complicated and difficult concept of many goddesses being one goddess much easier to understand since we see such a concept embodied in the narrative. The Devi, alone and whole, is referred to by some of her many names; Candika (2. 48), Ambika (2. 51), Durga (4.10), Badhrakali (4. 3), Lakshmi (5. 9), and Parvati (5. 37). She is capable of producing incarnations of herself who, although being an aspect of her, are also independent and powerful as Kali is in Chapters 7 – 9, before being absorbed back into the great goddess in Chapter 10.

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<sup>353</sup> Harding defines *Maya* as Ignorance that obscures the vision of God (1993: 304).

<sup>354</sup> *Ibid.*, 39.

As follows, the great goddess, the embodiment of *Shakti*, can be represented in idols and art in a number of manifestations. First, for example, the benign four-armed Lakshmi, the goddess of light and prosperity, fair in complexion, gentle in demeanour, modestly clad in a sari, with a beautiful face as she stands on a lotus flower. The Devi may also be shown as the ferocious slayer of demons, Durga, with a knowing smile on her face and extravagant sari and headdress, riding her mighty lion, and carrying in her ten hands a collection of weapons. The Devi, or great goddess, can be shown as Kali, the embodiment of disorder, destruction and transformation, with dark blue skin, wide eyes, extended tongue, long, messy, unbound hair, carrying weapons in four arms, exposed breasts, a necklace of skulls around her neck and a belt of severed heads, as she stands on her husband Shiva's body.<sup>355</sup> E. A. Payne comments on the dual nature of the great goddess arguing that 'she should strike terror and awe in the minds of her worshippers, and these feelings have not been wholly absent even from those who regard her with trust and affection.'<sup>356</sup> This applies to Kali within the *Devi-Māhātmya*. The great goddess in the *Devi-Māhātmya* is primarily envisioned in her aspect as the ten-armed Durga, the warrior goddess. The gods Vishnu, Shiva, Brahma and Indra, angered by the Asuras emit a 'great fiery splendour' (2. 10), and this mass, 'born from the bodies of all the gods...became a woman' (2. 12). Durga's body parts are produced from various parts of the gods: Shiva provides her mouth (2. 13), Soma makes her breasts (2. 14), her three eyes are created by Agni (2. 16). She is given weapons: a trident from Shiva, and a discus from Krishna (2. 19), a spear from Agni (2. 20), a thunderbolt from Indra (2. 21), a staff of death from Yama (2.22). She is also presented with necklaces, bracelets, and rings to adorn her beautiful form (2. 24 – 26), and lotuses for her head, breast and to carry in her hand (2. 27 – 28). All this, the lotuses and weapons, make up the standard iconography of the Devi in Hinduism, who, in whatever aspect, is seen carrying such objects in one of her four or more hands.<sup>357</sup> T. Pintchman observes that the goddess is originally the ultimate highest reality, higher than the three gods who create the goddess in the *Devi-Māhātmya*. She is a primal material rather than a female deity. Therefore 'it only appears as if she is born, but in fact she is eternal. She is therefore never really born, and she never really dies.' Pintchman clarifies that the gods essentially shape this highest reality into the form of the goddess to be the

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<sup>355</sup> Kali's relationship with Shiva will be examined later.

<sup>356</sup> 1979: 22.

<sup>357</sup> Hawley 1996: 7.

protectress of the gods.<sup>358</sup> As protectress of the gods in the *Devi-Māhātmya*, Durga rides into battle on a noble lion (2. 33) which is her sacred animal. Although unnamed in the *Devi-Māhātmya*, the ferocious beast is known in Hindu mythology as Simha, as T.K. Mukundan elaborates:

Durga represents creative energy, knowledge and action. All these combine to form intellect and the power to discriminate between right and wrong. Simha on the other hand symbolizes the mind, roaming untamed in the forest of sensual desires. Durga's discriminating intellect is needed to control Simha, so that the two can vanquish the demons of evil desire.<sup>359</sup>

This is exactly what occurs in the *Devi-Māhātmya*, as the goddess and her lion wreak havoc on their enemies: she binds some of the enemy with her noose and drags them after (2.56), she crushes others with her mace (2. 57), she cuts most of the Asuras in half, others are decapitated, and some cry out for her to stop (2. 60 – 63).

Another epithet of the Devi is Bhadrakali, 'the auspicious black one'<sup>360</sup> as she defeats the army of the Asuras (3.8). This in effect refers to her aspect as Kali, who is also responsible for destroying demons. As seen later when she emerges, Kali is an avatar of Durga, and although not made explicit in this narrative, the two are also associated with Parvati, as the triad of consorts of Shiva. Shortly, when the goddess is asked to battle Sumbha and Nisumbha, she is entreated as Parvati (5.37), who as the wife of Shiva is the embodiment of *Shakti*. Parvati is the benign and tender aspect of *Shakti*. She is described as exceptionally beautiful in the text (5.37), and likewise, her idols are depicted as such.<sup>361</sup> In the *Devi-Māhātmya*, it states that when she is angered, Parvati becomes black and is known as 'Kalika' (5. 41). This is best illustrated in my next Sanskrit source, the *Purāṇas*. The *Devi-*

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<sup>358</sup> 1994: 119.

<sup>359</sup> 1992: 377.

<sup>360</sup> *Ibid.*, 41.

<sup>361</sup> Mukundan 1992: 329.

*Māhātmya* is a text dominated by the power of the Devi, and her rescue of male gods who cannot destroy their enemies without her help. The Devi is not a consort to any male god but is independent. This trend does not continue in the rest of my sources.

### 5.3. The Purāṇas

The *Purāṇas* are made up of eighteen books, each with its own name, of legends, history and teachings that have become the foundation of Hinduism as a religion, internationally. What is narrated in the *Purāṇas* is still regarded as fact by Hindus today, as B. Debroy & D. Debroy confirm. They maintain that the Sanskrit word ‘*purāṇa*’ itself means ‘old’ or ‘ancient’, and along with the two Hindu epics, the *Ramayana* and the *Mahabharata*, is referred to as the ‘*itihasa*’ meaning ‘that is what happened’.<sup>362</sup> Mukundan, from the point of view of a devout Hindu, states that ‘the *Purāṇas* deal with the creation, destruction, and renewal of the Universe, the genealogy of the Gods and Manus and with the solar and lunar race of kings.’<sup>363</sup> Thus in many ways, it is as Hesiod’s *Theogony* was to the Greeks: a story of how the cosmos came into existence, the birth of the gods and their interaction with one another. The *Purāṇas* and the *Mahabharata* are thought to share a composer, Vedavyasa, which is a title referring to the one who divided the Vedic texts. However, Debroy & Debroy argue that while the early parts of the *Purāṇas* were composed before 500 BCE, the final forms were collected between 300 – 1000 CE by several authors who added stories and embellished existing texts through the ages.<sup>364</sup> I will focus on two books of the *Purāṇas*; the *Linga Purāṇa*, and the *Agni Purāṇa*.

#### 5.3.1. *Linga Purāṇa*

The *Linga Purāṇa* is named after the *lingam*, a phallic-shaped stone pillar that symbolizes male creative energy and represents Shiva, the powerful god of creation and destruction. Thus the *Linga Purāṇa* centres around and at times is narrated by Shiva, describing ways in which he is to be worshipped, myths about him and the origin and significance of the *lingam*.

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<sup>362</sup> Debroy & Debroy 1994: v.

<sup>363</sup> 1992: 122.

<sup>364</sup> 1994: viii – ix.

In the *Linga Purāṇa*, the glory of Shiva is expounded on, and he is called ‘the all-knowing Shiva of unmeasured splendour’ (7. 1),<sup>365</sup> ‘the protector, the destroyer, the perpetual maker and the Death’ (18. 11), and ‘one who is above and greater than the universe, and is the universe itself’ (28. 10). In keeping with his symbol of the *lingam* he is also acknowledged as the god of sexuality (29. 2). In the *Linga Purāṇa*, Shiva is regularly referred to by his epithet Rudra.

The *Linga Purāṇa* tells of the demon Daruka that was born into the family of Asuras, who killed every male god who fought him (106. 2). It was known that only a woman could kill Daruka, and so Vishnu and other male gods attacked him in the guise of women but were still overwhelmed by him (106. 3 – 7). Eventually, they appeal to the mountain-goddess Parvati, the wife of Shiva, to aid them (106. 8). On hearing of the dilemma of the gods, Parvati enters the body of Shiva, desiring to take birth from him (106. 10). She then remakes herself out of poison in the neck of Shiva and is created as Kali who emerges from his third eye (106. 13 – 14). She was so terrifying, with a blue neck, and matted hair, resembling fire and embellished with poison, that even the gods fled from her in fright (106. 16). At Parvati’s request, Kali slays Daruka (106. 19). The goddess is frenzied after her battle and in order to curb her fury, Bhava, another epithet of Shiva, assumes the form of a baby boy and stations himself in a cremation ground full of corpses and ghosts. He cries out in order to stop the fire of her anger. She is deluded by this illusion, takes the baby boy, kisses his head and suckles him at her breasts (106. 21 – 22). The gods then perform a dance to her in thanks along with ghosts and goblins (106. 25). The gods then eulogise Kali, and pray to Parvati so that she may regain her form (106. 27).

The *Linga Purāṇa* is like the *Devi-Māhātmya* in that it demonstrates the changing forms of the Devi, particularly when angered. It also affirms Kali’s association with Parvati and as the wife of Shiva, having been created from poisonous material in his throat. Parvati, a mountain goddess of the Himalayas, is a benign and peaceful aspect of *Shakti*, who, as demonstrated in the *Linga Purāṇa*, expresses herself as Kali in her terrible aspect. Mukundan correctly states that Parvati may be considered the original form of *Shakti*, as goddesses like Sarasvati and

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<sup>365</sup> I have used a translation of the *Linga Purāṇa* by a board of scholars and edited by J. L Shastri (1973).



Lakshmi pray to her and are seen as her daughters. He also states that her idols are attractive, she is depicted with a noose to symbolise attachment to the world, and prayer to her will result in fortune and wisdom.<sup>366</sup> So it is that the gentle Parvati must reconstitute herself as Kali in order to cause destruction and death. She is born again out of Shiva, the male creative force, from his third eye, a mark of wisdom, to do what the male gods could not.

That Kali is born from poison shows that she is dangerous and malevolent to her enemies. This is supported by her dreadful appearance. In the text she is depicted similar to her appearance in the *Devi-Māhātmya*, as follows:

Kali the blue-necked goddess with matted hair...who resembled fire and whose black neck was embellished with poison...an eye manifested itself in the forehead, the exalted contour of the crescent moon on the head, the terrible poison in the neck, the sharp and the terrible trident in the arm and the ornaments in their respective places (106. 14 – 17).

She is so frightening that the gods flee, and this is the standard appearance of the horrific Kali. Yet she is redeemed in that she is on the side of good, and despite her chilling looks, she is a nurturing mother. As in the *Devi-Māhātmya*, where Kali becomes drunk with the blood of her enemies, she works herself into a passion after killing them and cannot cease to destroy. Her husband, however, knows that she has a compassionate nature and transforms himself into a baby. The goddess is won over and cannot help but nurse the child. This is Kali as a powerful, attentive and nurturing mother, who has inspired countless hymns and songs through the ages by poets and sages like Ramprasad and Swami Vivekananda.

In the myth of the *Linga Purāṇa*, Kali is praised by all the gods for her feat and is given a special dance that is attended by ghosts and goblins, creatures whose appearances are equally as foul as hers and who also inspire terror in humans. Kali's association with ghosts, corpses

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<sup>366</sup> 1992: 329.

and cremation grounds will be examined in the next section, when I investigate the *Agni Purāṇa*. However, in considering the *Linga Purāṇa*, much has been learnt about Kali. Her association with Parvati and Shiva has been made clear, and a more tender relationship with Shiva has been hinted at. He appears to understand her nature, and a motherly side of her complex character has been revealed. She is once more linked with the slaying of demons, and is noted for walking cremation grounds and keeping company with corpses, ghosts and goblins.

### 5.3.2. *Agni Purāṇa*

Debroy & Debroy argue that the *Agni Purāṇa* is an exception to the *Purāṇas* because it uniquely explains how one should go about rituals, rather than narrating stories. In this way the *Agni Purāṇa* is a supplement to the other books and was probably composed last.<sup>367</sup> It is titled after its narrator, Agni, the god of fire, as he instructs the sage Vashishtha on forms of worship, images, funeral ceremonies, places of pilgrimage, medicine, omens, astronomy, incarnations, and grammar.<sup>368</sup> In it, Kali is first mentioned by her epithet Cāmuṇḍā when Agni expounds on the characteristics of each form of the Devi and her relationship with Shiva. She appears as menacing, as in the *Devi-Māhātmya*:

Camunda may have three eyes deeply sunken, a skeleton form devoid of flesh, erectly standing hair, emaciated belly, clad in tiger skin and holding a skull and spear in her left hand and a trident and scissor in the right standing on the dead body of a man and wearing a garland of bones (50. 21 – 25).<sup>369</sup>

The *Agni Purāṇa* includes a bloodcurdling *mantra* addressed to Cāmuṇḍā, which includes the different names for the goddess Kali in all her incarnations, but especially as she relates to her husband Shiva. The *mantra* calls for bowing before the goddess Cāmuṇḍā, and to Rudra,

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<sup>367</sup> Ibid., XII.

<sup>368</sup> Ibid.

<sup>369</sup> I have used Gangadharan's translation (1987).

an epithet of Shiva, with the phrase ‘Oblations. *Om* obeisance. O Cāmuṇḍā!’ repeated frequently throughout the *mantra* (146. 1). The goddess is described as the divine mother of all materials, who has unobstructed movement throughout the Universe, who can transform her forms, and is responsible for pacification, attraction, destruction and eradication. Cāmuṇḍā is called on as Durga’s terrific form, a consort of Shiva, and as one having a maiden-form (146. 1). The heart of the *mantra* however, lies in a ghoulish description of the powerful Kali:

*Om* obeisance. O Cāmuṇḍā! One who has erect hairs (on the head)! One who has flames on her head! One whose tongue is like lightning! One whose eyes are sparkling like stars! One who has tawny brows! One who has uneven teeth! The angry one! *Om*, One who is fond of flesh, blood, wine and spirituous liquor! (You) laugh, laugh. *Om*, dance, dance. *Om*, yawn, yawn. *Om*, bind, bind. *Om*, to all those thousands of sorcerers who change the form of three worlds by their incarnations! *Om*, thrash, thrash. *Om cirri cirri. Om hiri hiri. Om bhiri bhiri.* One who frightens and frightens. One who whirls round and whirls round. One who makes (something else) melt and melt. One who agitates and agitates. One who kills and kills. One who revives and revives. *Heri heri geri geri gheri gheri om muri muri om* obeisance to the mothers. Obeisance. Obeisance (146. 2).

The first striking common feature of the above passage is the link between Kali and Shiva. She is mentioned as a wife to Shiva. Kinsley comments that the wild and disorderly Kali is often softened or tamed by Shiva, but at times she may influence him to dangerous behaviour.<sup>370</sup> This is not surprising given the next common feature in both passages, the macabre and terrifying appearance of Kali: three eyes, dishevelled hair, dark skin, tigerskin dress, and carrying dangerous weapons. These are standard descriptions of this dread goddess. Besides these fearful features, Kali is associated in the *mantra* with sorcerers and magic, and with vampire-like qualities. Harding attempts to account for Kali’s spine-chilling

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<sup>370</sup> 1996: 79.

appearance, by use of the popular image below, known as Smashan Kali, which translates as Fearful Kali of the cremation grounds.<sup>371</sup>



**Image 14 (Smashan Kali)**<sup>372</sup>

The portrait shows Kali, her appearance in keeping with her descriptions in the *Agni Purāṇa*, partaking in a dance of destruction, with her left foot forward over the prostrate body of her husband Shiva. Harding notes that Smashan Kali stands in a challenging posture over Shiva, yet ‘Kali cannot exist without him, and Shiva cannot reveal himself without her. She is the manifestation of Shiva’s power, energy.’<sup>373</sup> Kali’s complexion is black because she is a limitless void, swallowing up everything without a trace, and her wild hair shows her boundless freedom, but Harding acknowledges that Kali’s hair may represent individual souls since all souls have their roots in Kali.<sup>374</sup> Her third eye stands for wisdom, while her four arms represent her capacity to work, and her girdle of heads shows the results and potential of her work.<sup>375</sup> The fifty skulls of her garland are symbolic of the fifty letters of the Sanskrit

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<sup>371</sup> 1993: 306.

<sup>372</sup> *Ibid.*, 42.

<sup>373</sup> *Ibid.*, 41.

<sup>374</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>375</sup> *Ibid.*, 43.

alphabet, the collective sound of which gave birth to all creation.<sup>376</sup> Building on this, A. Mookerjee states that her primordial nakedness shows that she is free from the covering of illusions, while her full breasts suggest that she is motherhood and ceaseless creation, having giving birth to the Universe parthenogenically as she contains the male principle within herself.<sup>377</sup> This is reminiscent of a very maternal Kali suckling the baby Shiva in the cremation grounds in the *Linga Purāna*. Of her four arms, Mookerjee adds:

One left hand holds a severed head, indicating the annihilation of ego-bound evil force, and the other carries the sword of physical extermination with which she cuts the thread of bondage. One right hand gestures to dispel fear and the other exhorts to spiritual strength. In this form she is changeless, limitless primordial power, acting in the great drama, awakening the unmanifest Shiva beneath her feet.<sup>378</sup>

Worship still takes place before this very depiction in the Holy Mother's shrine at Kali's temple in Dakshineswar, Calcutta,<sup>379</sup> and Harding admits that the notion of praying to such a being may seem odd to the Western mind, which may find this hideous and absurd.<sup>380</sup> In the smoke-laden cremation grounds behind Kali is a scene of absolute anarchy and devastation. The representation itself of Kali dancing on Shiva's corpse is part of a myth passed down as temple lore, and has many variations. Seema Mohanty elaborates on the myth stating that after killing demons, Kali continues killing and destroys everything in her path, driven mad by bloodlust. In order to stop her, Shiva challenges her to a dance contest, and Kali redirects her rage and passion from war into dance. This fits in with the chaotic representation of Kali in the *mantra* of the *Agni Purāna*, which depicts her angry, constantly thrashing, whirling around, and killing. The dance of the two gods goes on for eons and causes the earth to tremble, and the sun and moon to hide. Neither can dominate the other. Eventually, Shiva takes the form of a handsome man and lies down on the earth in Kali's path, and as the

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<sup>376</sup> Ibid.

<sup>377</sup> 1988: 62.

<sup>378</sup> Ibid.

<sup>379</sup> Ibid., 42.

<sup>380</sup> 1993: 39.

goddess steps on him she bites her tongue in embarrassment for she is ashamed that her frenzy has prevented her from recognising her husband.<sup>381</sup> The above image shows Kali stepping on her husband's body, and biting her tongue. This story calls to mind Shiva's successful attempt in calming Kali down after her battle in the *Linga Purāṇa*, where he transforms into a baby and she channels her rage into maternal feelings. It appears that Shiva knows how to handle and subdue Kali's wild ways. Kinsley argues that, although in the myth of the dance contest, it seems Shiva has tamed Kali, it is obvious he never finally subdues her: 'She is most popularly represented as a being who is uncontrollable and is more apt to provoke Shiva to dangerous activity than to submit to his control.'<sup>382</sup>

The setting is a cremation ground, a place in which Shiva and Kali, deities of destruction, are worshipped. In the *Linga Purāṇa*, Shiva stations himself in a cremation ground as a baby so as to divert Kali. I see Kali's fiery appearance in the Kali *mantra* of the *Agni Purāṇa* as relating to the cremation ground. Her flaming hair, lightning tongue, and burning eyes relate to the fires of the cremation grounds, which purify, and send the soul from one state to another. Harding sees it as a place in which to burn away all worldly desires and commit to a union with the goddess,<sup>383</sup> while Mookerjee links the eerie atmosphere to Kali's role as goddess of death. It is from here that she guides souls: 'Death is looked upon as her transforming touch that removes pain, anxiety, and gives freedom and peace. The flickering flames of the pyre are full of compassion.'<sup>384</sup> Kinsley believes that corpses and cremation grounds serve as reminders of the transient nature of life and the futility of physical desires.<sup>385</sup> He notes that the cremation ground is a "terminal" between the physical and spiritual worlds, a place to make contact with spirits as they pass from life to death. It is a place of transitions since, in Hinduism, a spirit is thought to linger around until the proper rites have been done. Thus cremation grounds are liminal spaces for liminal beings.<sup>386</sup> Kali is

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<sup>381</sup> Mohanty 2004: 59 – 61.

<sup>382</sup> 1996: 80.

<sup>383</sup> 1993: 37.

<sup>384</sup> 1988: 83.

<sup>385</sup> 1997: 235.

<sup>386</sup> *Ibid.*, 237 – 238.

also the goddess of liminal things, of transformation and transition, and of the destruction of a life, and a creation of a new one, since out of death comes new life. This is probably a reason why she is called both a maiden and a mother in the *mantra* of the *Agni Purāṇa*. She is associated with all transformative stages of life until death, and beyond.

#### 5.4. *Mantras* and Devotional Songs to Kali

Mother Kali's influence and power over the many stages of life, death, and recreation have led to her being venerated in *mantras* and poems throughout the centuries. Hindus use prayers, spoken out loud and *en masse* to praise creative powers, and to end all diseases of the mind and body.<sup>387</sup> This is considered vital in experiencing the Divine. Mukundan justifies the wonders that prayers offer to a Hindu, likening it to sublime music that profoundly influences the human soul and revitalises body and mind leaving one feeling deeply refreshed and happy.<sup>388</sup> Thus I have chosen to use *mantras* to Kali as a source. I shall examine two Tantric *mantras*, the *Adyakali Mantra*, and the *Karpuradi-strota*. I shall also look at devotional poems to Kali, namely the works of Ramprasad, and a hymn by Swami Vivekananda. I have chosen to study these poems to the goddess because, as Mukundan elaborates, devotional songs are a path to the ultimate harmony. He states that Saint-singers, by singing songs in praise of the Divine, 'did so under inspiration and created masterpieces of songs that have the power to elevate those who hear to regions of high Godly perception.'<sup>389</sup>

##### 5.4.1. Tantric *mantras* to Kali

Before I examine the *mantras* themselves, it is essential that Tantra itself be understood. P. Rawson describes Tantra as an Indian cult that has been developing continually since antiquity, and is considered as a branch of Hinduism and Buddhism, which emphasises the individual and uses the pleasures of life as a stimulus towards enlightenment.<sup>390</sup> The Hindu and Buddhist strands of Tantra are quite distinct from each other, as H. V. Guenther points

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<sup>387</sup> Mukundan 1992: 155.

<sup>388</sup> Ibid.

<sup>389</sup> Ibid., 161

<sup>390</sup> 1973: 7 – 9.

out. Buddhist Tantra deals with the individual Being, growth and realization, while Hindu Tantra, which I will focus on, is interested in infusing the human with the divine and *vice versa*, is largely concerned with the power of *Shakti* as creative energy,<sup>391</sup> and being completely individualistic, is also opposed to Vedic and Purāṇic tradition.<sup>392</sup> There are many goddesses in Tantra, who, as in orthodox Hinduism, are fundamentally many facets of the same goddess. It is however, typical for the Tantric practitioner to focus on one aspect of the goddess and to find in her the satisfaction of his worldly and spiritual needs, and this goddess becomes his individual great goddess.<sup>393</sup> Guenther argues that Tantra is not about ‘man’s essence or nature, but what man can make of his life in this world so as to realise the supreme values that life affords.’<sup>394</sup> Rawson adds that the Tantric saint immerses himself in the world, rousing his body, emotions and mind so that they may carry him to enlightenment: his eyes reddened by wine, lounging on silk cushions in the company of a woman skilled in the art of love, while around them are works of art, and meat to eat. These are his rituals as he makes a physical, sexual, mental, and moral effort towards knowledge and the truth.<sup>395</sup> Rawson develops this further:

Tantra calls on energies in the human body and its world which most people usually dissipate in their ultimately pointless exertions and ‘recreations’. But, most important of all, Tantra positively cultivates and bases itself on what most people dismiss as the pleasures of life. It does not say solemnly ‘You must abstain from all enjoyment, mortify your flesh, and obey the commands of a jealous Father-God.’ Instead, it says ‘Raise your enjoyment to its highest power, and use it as a spiritual rocket-fuel.’ This, of course seems a dangerous revolutionary doctrine to the orthodox of any religion. And to the orthodox the Tantrika is a scandal.<sup>396</sup>

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<sup>391</sup> 1972: 2.

<sup>392</sup> Kinsley 1997: 3.

<sup>393</sup> *Ibid.*, 4.

<sup>394</sup> 1972: 5.

<sup>395</sup> 1973: 8 – 9.

<sup>396</sup> *Ibid.*



I am inclined to agree with Rawson that Tantra is considered radical by traditionalists, since, in searching for the Tantras myself at *ashrams* in Pietermaritzburg, Hindu priests attempted to dissuade me from utilizing and exposing myself to texts so far removed from the sacred Vedas that they are more like ‘black magic’ and ‘voodoo’.

Only adding to the negative perception of Tantra by conservatives is its view on sex, which Tantra sees as a powerful means to bringing one to self-realization. Rawson states that Tantra uses symbols or *yantras* to express cosmic truths, because words cannot express the extraordinary facts of Tantra, and that the chief symbol is sex.<sup>397</sup> Thus the great goddess is involved in Tantra as sex is the act of continuous creation, and the existence of the world is thought as being continuously birthed by the vulva, or *yoni*, of the female principle, which is continuously infused by the seed of the male principle, in sexual delight.<sup>398</sup> Rawson asserts that Tantra sees human beings as closest to the female aspect of creation, who is continually producing through us and for us.<sup>399</sup> Thus the creative female force, supreme and unimaginable, is adoringly worshipped in the form of the *yantra* of the Divine *Yoni*, or in statue-form as a beautiful girl, who ‘as she dances crazy with love, lets down her hair, spreading out the worlds, and binds it up again, bringing them to an end.’<sup>400</sup> Seen below is the image of the Divine *Yoni*, which has been stained by colourful powders during worship. It is almost triangular in shape, similar to the shapes on the Venus figurines discussed in my literature review.

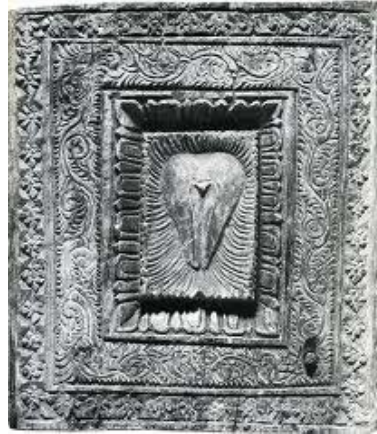
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<sup>397</sup> Ibid., 14.

<sup>398</sup> Ibid.

<sup>399</sup> Ibid., 15.

<sup>400</sup> Ibid., 17.



**Image 15** (Divine Vulva, South India, 19<sup>th</sup> century)<sup>401</sup>

But Rawson maintains that the great goddess has another face:

As she brings man into time and his worlds, she also removes him from it. So she is his destroyer as well. All those things which cripple and kill – disease, famine, violence and war – are an inevitable part of her activity, seen from the viewpoint of man as victim. No-one can be a successful Tantrika unless he has faced up to this reality, and assimilated it into his image of the nature of the goddess. Many Tantric icons therefore show her as the black-faced and terrible Kali, her tongue lolling and her fanged mouth dribbling blood. She may be hideous, but she must be no less loved.<sup>402</sup>

It is unsurprising then that many Tantric rituals take place among corpses in real, or symbolic cremation-grounds. Kali, the Tantric goddess of time, is represented in Tantric art with familiar iconography, as seen below.

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<sup>401</sup> Ibid., 38.

<sup>402</sup> Ibid.



**Image 16** (Kali standing on corpses. Himachal Pradesh. C. 1800)<sup>403</sup>

The *mantras* to Kali in Tantric texts, the *Adyakali Mantra*, and the *Karpuradi-strota*, show her as a terrible, but loving mother goddess, and consort of Shiva, the male creative aspect. Kinsley states that in tantric worship, *mantras* to the goddess are the building blocks of a relationship between the goddess and the practitioner which is deeply personal, and individual.<sup>404</sup>

#### 5.4.1.1. The *Adyakali Mantra*

This *mantra* is found in the *Mahanirvana Tantra*,<sup>405</sup> the most authoritative, and oldest of the Tantric texts,<sup>406</sup> which largely venerates the female creative force. It is set out as a conversation between Shiva and Parvati, the embodiment of *Shakti*, as he explains to her how to go about Tantric rituals and the importance of such things. Chapter 7 of the *Mahanirvana Tantra* is dedicated to a praise hymn to Kali called the *Adyakali Mantra*. In the *mantra*, Kali is addressed as ‘O, Destroyer of Time... O terrific One... Thou who art beneficent... Possessor of all the Arts’ (7. 11), and ‘Mother of Time’ (7. 12). She is called the wife of Shiva, compassionate and her merciful nature is ‘without limit’ (7. 13) as she is the image of all tenderness (7. 21). She is at once the ‘Image of desire’, and ‘Liberator from bonds of desire’

<sup>403</sup> Rawson 1973: 108.

<sup>404</sup> 1997: 4.

<sup>405</sup> I have used a translation by Avalon (1972).

<sup>406</sup> Bharati 1965: 194.

(7. 14). At times she is described as gentle; wearing a garland of flowers (7. 17), youthful, with a sweet voice (7.18), seated in a Lotus (7. 19), beautiful, and in possession of beautiful ornaments (7. 20), with a tender body, a slender waist (7. 21), luminous (7. 23), and ‘like a Moon-beam on the mountain of gold’ (7. 30). Other times she has a ‘formidable countenance’ (7. 12); she is tawny, made of fire (7. 13), and as black as rain clouds (7. 14), with a skull cup and a garland of bones (7. 18). She is a Destroyer of pride (7.11), and fear (7. 19), a Liberator (7. 14), a Destructress of sin (7. 14), all evil incarnations (7. 30), and the fear of Death (7. 31), a Giver of success (7. 21), a Protectress (7. 22), a Benefactress (7. 26), a Revealer of paths (7. 23), an Allayer of sufferings (7. 27), and a Giver of blessings and pleasures (7. 28). The *mantra* ends with instructions when it should be recited, and what the results will be. Kali herself will be pleased with the performer if this *mantra* is chanted during a new moon when it falls on a Tuesday, and the worshipper will acquire intelligence, wealth, knowledge, fame, compassion, a happy life, and children and grandchildren (7. 34 – 38).

The *Adyakali Mantra* highlights Kali’s immense power in Tantric tradition, particularly with reference to the passing of time, being called simultaneously the ‘Destroyer of Time’ (7. 11), and the ‘Mother of Time’ (7. 12). Rawson observes that Tantra believes that humankind’s failure to grasp the nature of time, and subsequently the process of genesis and the stages of evolution of the cosmos, lies at the root of all other human failures. It is through Tantra that one can reach the summit of intuition and understand this concept.<sup>407</sup> This begins with an understanding of the personification of Time, Kali. Why should Kali then be worshipped as Destroyer and Mother of Time? I would suppose, that as she is thought to favour rituals taking place in cremation-grounds for the sake of reminding her followers of the transient nature of life, Kali forces her worshippers to face realities and come to terms with their own mortality. Time is an ever-present factor in this respect, and she is responsible for keeping us, in our human state, under the confines of time and death, but once enlightenment is achieved, one is elevated beyond the bonds of time into a different state of being. She represents the unending continuous cycle of birth, life, death, and rebirth of humans and nature. Mookerjee suggests that:

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<sup>407</sup> 1973: 9 – 10.

She is constantly reminding us that we cannot attain liberation so long as we remain within the relative space and time of our planet, in our universe with its billions of stars, galaxies, and nebulae, in our existence for one second of world-time compared with the absolute and eternal.<sup>408</sup>

Just as time has no beginning and end, neither does Kali. Kinsley comments on Kali's appearance, and relates it to time, stating that her mass of black hair drifting in the wind symbolizes the passage of time, her lolling tongue stuck out dramatically indicates that she consumes all things, and her appetite is unquenchable. Thus, all things must yield to the goddess who relentlessly and pitilessly grinds down everything. He continues that she is indiscriminating in distinctions like class, caste, wealth, and success, since all these end and are consumed by her: 'As eternal, remorseless time she confronts man with the pitiful finite nature of meaning and attachments based on an individual biography.'<sup>409</sup> The paradox in her character as Destroyer and Mother, as Destructress and Protectress, as Mother and virgin, beautiful and terrible, tender and formidable, is prevalent throughout the *Adyakali Mantra*, and indeed in her role in Hinduism as a whole. This reinforces that nothing is beyond the powers of Kali, and she herself is the beginning and end of all things. Kinsley states that some Tantric sources describe Kali as the essence of everything, and thus neither male nor female, and indeed completely attributeless.<sup>410</sup> She may be all things at the same time.

In the *Mahanirvana Tantra*, and indeed throughout Tantra overall, Kali, or Kalika as she is sometimes called (4. 31; 5. 35; 5. 140), is worshipped as Creatrix, Mother and the ultimate form of *Shakti*. Shiva himself praises her as such:

Thou art Kali, the original form of all things, and because Thou art the Origin of and devourest all things Thou art called the Adya Kali. Resuming after Dissolution Thine own form, dark and formless, Thou alone remainest as One ineffable and

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<sup>408</sup> 1988: 69.

<sup>409</sup> 1975: 141.

<sup>410</sup> 2003:29

inconceivable. Though having a form, yet art Thou formless; though Thyself without beginning, multiform by the power of Maya, Thou art the Beginning of all, Creatrix, Protectress, and Destructress that Thou art (4. 32 - 34).

Her relationship with Shiva is foregrounded in the *Adyakali Mantra*, as well. Kali is called ‘kind to him of matted hair, Devourer of Him who devours... Wife of him of the matted hair’ (7. 12), who increases the joy of the Lord of Creation (7. 13), and as Shiva’s beloved, who gives him blessings and pleasure’ (7. 28). The *Adyakali Mantra* only emphasises Kali’s pre-eminence and importance in the Tantric branch of Hinduism.

#### 5.4.1.2. The *Karpuradi-strota*

The *Karpuradi-strota*<sup>411</sup> is a song of praise to Kali intended to be performed in her favourite haunt, a cremation ground. A Bharati dates this famous *mantra* to the 9<sup>th</sup> – 11<sup>th</sup> centuries CE. Bharati goes on to state that because of the dark nature of this Tantric work, many orthodox Hindus consider it radical.<sup>412</sup> In this *mantra* Kali is once more labelled the Spouse of the Destroyer, Shiva (43; 56; 64; 70; 72), and is called Mother or Mahakali at many instances throughout the text, with full, nourishing breasts (59), who gave birth to and protects the world, and will withdraw from the earth at the end of all things (72). She is Destructress of sins (53), and Creatrix (61).

Her appearance is petrifying and she is called the ‘dark Devi’ (66). She is ‘formidable’ (44), with a crescent moon on her hair, as befitting one of her immense power (44). Her hair is dishevelled, and blood drips from the corners of her gaping mouth (50, 53). She holds in her upper left hand a sword, in her lower left a severed head, with her upper right she dispels fear, and with her lower right she grants blessings (53), around her throat is a garland of heads (59), and she wears a garland made up of dead men’s arms (61). She is depicted sitting on a corpse in a cremation ground surrounded by funeral pyres, corpses, skulls, bones, and

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<sup>411</sup> I have used Avalon’s translation (1922).

<sup>412</sup> 1965: 72.

female jackals that howl fearfully (61). She is as beautiful as a dark raincloud (43), and although she is so ferocious in looks, her moon-like face (59) is gentle and smiling (86). A ritual to the goddess is described within the *Karpuradi-strota* that seems macabre and eerie. The text states that those who truly worship Kali do so in a cremation ground (64), where the devotee meditates naked with dishevelled hair (68), and recites her *mantra* every day for the space of one year (70), but of all days Tuesdays at midnight are most important (80). Offerings should be made of flesh, hair, bone, cats, camels, sheep, buffaloes, goats, and of men (89). The *mantra* deduces that even a dullard who meditates on the power of Kali, can become a poet (61), and he will have every pleasure on earth, will himself hold great powers and after death, will be taken to her supreme abode (70).

Kinsley observes that in the *Karpuradi-strota*, Kali dissociates herself from the terrible slayer of Demons who serves Durga on the battlefield, and altogether sheds her associations with the battlefield.<sup>413</sup> Indeed she is now a goddess in her own right and seen as the supreme cosmic force, linked with creation, destruction, the five elements, earth, water, fire, air and ether (76), and is considered the Primordial Power (74). Kinsley comments on the slight yet conspicuous modification in her appearance, which struck me as well.<sup>414</sup> She maintains her terrible aspects, but there are now hints of a benign dimension, suggested by her smiling, moonlit face. She is not explicitly described as ugly, but rather beautiful as a dark raincloud (43), which implies her dark skin, and a stormy, tempestuous personality, but also the cleansing and purifying qualities of water. Kinsley states that in the *Devi-Māhātmya*, Kali was the symbol of death, but in Tantra, Kali is not only a symbol of death, but a symbol of triumph over death.<sup>415</sup> This is evident in the *Karpuradi-strota* as well as in the *Adyakali Mantra*.

The ritual of Kali's devotee in the cremation ground at midnight is very revelatory of this goddess' nature. I have already highlighted the prominence of the cremation ground in Kali worship in my discussion of the *Agni Purāṇa*, stating that it is a place in which the goddess

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<sup>413</sup> 1975: 113.

<sup>414</sup> *Ibid.*, 113 – 114.

<sup>415</sup> *Ibid.*, 114.

may exert her transformative powers over death, and that it is a liminal space for a liminal goddess. Kinsley believes that the cremation ground is a place in which the five elements are dissolved, and Kali dwells in any place dissolution takes place. Thus the cremation ground is the perfect scene for a devotee to worship:

In terms of devotion...this denotes dissolving of attachments, anger, lust, and other binding emotions, feelings, and ideas. The heart of the devotee is where this burning away takes place, and it is in the heart that Kali dwells. The devotee makes her image in his heart and under her influence burns away all limitations and ignorance in the cremation fires. This inner cremation fire in the heart is the fire of knowledge, *jnanagni*, which Kali bestows.<sup>416</sup>

The cremation ground is also the appropriate site for meditation on the goddess because the images of death, and the meditation on death in such an environment, reinforce the devotee's decision to pursue a spiritual path by placing worldly pleasures into perspective in the face of mortality.<sup>417</sup> Kinsley argues that to meditate in a cremation ground functions as a spiritual test, not only allowing the disciple to see beyond the lures of worldly pleasures to the spiritual truth, but also challenging him to perceive the presence of Kali even in the most terrible, polluting places.<sup>418</sup>

The devotees *mantra* is uttered at night, the time of Kali, who is associated with death, darkness, and transcendence. The night is dark, as she is, and black is an all-embracing colour that absorbs and transforms all other colours. Thus it is that the black night is a time befitting the worship of Kali. The devotee appears looking like the goddess with dishevelled hair, and unclothed. The dishevelled hair is a tribute to the worshipper's goddess, and Kinsley suggests that the nudity symbolizes being beyond name and form, and being unaffected by and clear of

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<sup>416</sup> 1997: 88.

<sup>417</sup> *Ibid.*, 234.

<sup>418</sup> *Ibid.*, 234 – 235.



illusionary effects. It shows complete transcendence.<sup>419</sup> In the *Karpuradi-strota*, the list of sacrificial victims is most revealing; flesh, hair, bone, cats, camels, sheep, buffaloes, goats, and of men - all are living creatures and generally meat and blood are considered polluting in Hindu tradition.<sup>420</sup> Kali is often connected with blood, and is notorious for drinking the blood of her enemies in a cannibalistic fashion. It is thus unsurprising that she demands blood sacrifices as a means to gain her favour; however the inclusion of men is startling. Harding makes no mention of it, but does include a section on animal sacrifices at the Dakshineswar Kali Temple, stating that two old swords hang on the northern wall of the temple used on designated days of the year to decapitate animals.<sup>421</sup>

Mohanty comments that until two hundred years ago, human sacrifices were common in the shrines of Kali, until a law was passed prohibiting this practice.<sup>422</sup> However, although human sacrifices to Kali are now banned, they still occur from time to time. In 2002, it was reported in *Time Magazine*, in an article entitled, “Killing for ‘Mother’ Kali”, that ritual killings to the goddess still take place in secret ceremonies throughout India, exposing the sacrifice of a 15 year old virgin girl to the goddess, as well as many boys.<sup>423</sup> The same article, states that 200 years ago a boy was killed every day at a Kali temple in Calcutta. There is a section of the *Bhagavata Purāṇa* (5. 9. 12 – 20) that indicates that human sacrifice to Kali was a regular occurrence. The story goes that a holy man, Jada Bharata, was kidnapped by a band of the thuggies to serve as a sacrifice to Kali.<sup>424</sup> Jada Bharata is dressed in new clothes, decorated in ornaments, scented with oils, and garlanded. He is brought before the idol of the goddess and makes offerings of incense, fruit and flowers. Drums are played as the human sacrifice is made to sit before the idol of Kali but the goddess herself appears, infuriated because the thugs have no reason to sacrifice Jada Bharata, a man who had no enemies, and as he is a holy man, it is forbidden to kill him. Her anger is devastating:

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<sup>419</sup> Ibid., 88.

<sup>420</sup> Kinsley 1997: 5.

<sup>421</sup> 1993: 61.

<sup>422</sup> 2004: 82.

<sup>423</sup> Online Source: <http://www.time.com/time/magazine/article/0,9171,322673,00.html>. Atapur: 2002.

<sup>424</sup> I have used Bhaktivedanta Swami Prabhupada’s translation (1987).

Kali flashed her eyes and displayed her fierce, curved teeth. Her reddish eyes glowed, and she displayed her fearsome features. She assumed a frightening body, as if she were prepared to destroy the entire creation. Leaping violently from the altar, she immediately decapitated all the rogues and thieves with the very sword with which they had intended to kill Jada Bharata. She then began to drink the hot blood that flowed from the necks of the beheaded rogues and thieves, as if this blood were liquor. Indeed, she drank this intoxicant with her associates, who were witches and female demons. Becoming intoxicated with this blood, they all began to sing very loudly and dance as though prepared to annihilate the entire universe. At the same time, they began to play with the heads of the rogues and thieves, tossing them about as if they were balls (5. 9. 18)

It is not only holy men that are exempt from being offered as sacrifice. Mohanty observes that sacrificial beasts to Kali are all, almost without exception, male. Likewise, the heads on her garland are those belonging to men. Mohanty states that this is because new life is created from the female form, and killing one would block the cycle of life, which would be unacceptable to Kali.<sup>425</sup>

The *Karpuradi-strota* also speaks of the goddess relating to sexual intercourse with her spouse, Shiva, stating that she enjoys great bliss from these unions (74). Similarly, the devotee is instructed to join with his *Shakti* and meditate at the same time on Kali's amorous play with the corpse-like Shiva (86). As discussed earlier, Tantra uses sex as a symbol of creation, and Kali and Shiva, representing the female creative aspect and the male creative seed respectively, are the ultimate symbols of the continuous creation of the Universe. The two deities are frequently represented in art engaged in intercourse, with Kali always in the dominant position as she straddles Shiva, as in the representation below, which refers to a Tantric version of the myth of the dance contest between Shiva and Kali. In the myth, Kali kills fearsome demons and is in an excited state, her tongue outstretched so as to lap up blood, as she goes about killing at random. Shiva is asked to stop her. He takes the form of a handsome man and lies in her path. Kali sees this man in corpse-form, and overwhelmed by

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<sup>425</sup> 2004: 83.

desire, sits on Shiva and begins making love to him, thus turning her violent energy into erotic energy, and her destructive energy into creative energy.<sup>426</sup>



**Image 17** (Kali seated in intercourse with Shiva in corpse-form. Rajasthan, 18<sup>th</sup> century)<sup>427</sup>

Kinsley points out that in iconographic representations of the pair, Kali nearly always dominates Shiva,<sup>428</sup> as evident in the above statuette in which she is not in a position of submission, but rather control. The image is evocative of Lilith, the first wife of Adam, who according to Rabbinical tradition, was cast out of the Garden of Eden because she refused to be submissive during intercourse. The *Karpuradi-strota* reveals different dimensions of Kali, who is perceived of as more than just a ferocious incarnation of Durga, whose only purpose is to slay demons. She is now the supreme deity of the universe, who is merciful and beneficent to her followers. This is the essence of Kali's character in Tantra in which she is considered the ultimate form of *Shakti*.

#### 5.4.2. Kali in the works of the poet Ramprasad

Ramprasad (1718 – 1775)<sup>429</sup> was a mystic poet and ardent devotee of Kali, whom he envisioned as the ultimate mother. He was born near Calcutta to a father who was a physician

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<sup>426</sup> Mohanty 2004: 61 – 62.

<sup>427</sup> Rawson 1973:46

<sup>428</sup> 1996: 80.

<sup>429</sup> Kinsley 2003: 31.

and a Sanskrit scholar, and thus was himself well educated.<sup>430</sup> On his wedding day at the age of twenty two, Ramprasad and his new wife were initiated by the family's spiritual teacher. The guru whispered Kali's *mantra* into Ramprasad's ear and, as Harding explains, something profound was stirred within the young man, who suddenly painfully longed for Kali, and this attraction distracted him from his worldly duties such as a finding a job, and family responsibilities.<sup>431</sup> Ramprasad followed his new spiritual path, and focused his energy on meditation and prayer to the goddess, sometimes so overwhelmed by her that he poured his heart out by writing passionate songs to Kali.<sup>432</sup> One poem shows his fervour and commitment to the goddess:

I drink no ordinary wine,  
But wine of Everlasting Bliss,  
As I repeat my Mother Kali's name;  
It so intoxicates my mind that people take me to be drunk!<sup>433</sup>

Indeed Ramprasad did engage in unusual practices such as standing neck deep in the Ganges, deep in thought about Mother Kali, and singing his songs as tears streamed down his face.<sup>434</sup> Eventually Ramprasad began getting visions of the powerful goddess. In one poem he bemoans his bad luck after misidentifying the goddess as his daughter:

So bad is your luck that though having eyes,  
You did not see that the Mother came as your daughter  
And tied the fence with the devotee.<sup>435</sup>

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<sup>430</sup> Harding 1993: 215 – 216.

<sup>431</sup> *Ibid.*, 216.

<sup>432</sup> *Ibid.*, 217.

<sup>433</sup> *Ibid.*, 221.

<sup>434</sup> *Ibid.*, 219.

<sup>435</sup> *Ibid.*, 225.

The story goes that Ramprasad needed to repair a fence and asked his daughter to help him by passing the cord back and forth. His daughter explained that she was busy and would help him later, but as Ramprasad sat down to his work, his daughter appeared and passed the cord to him with such precision and skill that the work was duly finished. Ramprasad returned home where his daughter then came to him and said she was ready to help him with the fence. Surprised, Ramprasad explained that she had already helped him but she responded that she had been at home the whole time. Ramprasad then realised it was his Divine Mother who had helped him.<sup>436</sup> His devotion intensifies and eventually his poems become even more mystical. In another he pronounces that he will besmear his whole body with a black mixture so as to be like his great goddess, and that he shall eat her up but not digest her, so that he can keep her in his heart and make offerings with his mind.<sup>437</sup>

Kali is shown in the devotional poems of Ramprasad in familiar appearance and habit. She is red-eyed,<sup>438</sup> associated with devouring her victims, with the colour black and death,<sup>439</sup> and wears a necklace of human heads.<sup>440</sup> The methods of worship are recognizable as well. Ramprasad was known to spend nights in cremation grounds and sat on corpses while meditating.<sup>441</sup> He makes his extreme dedication known in this hymn and describes the shocking nature of his Divine Mother:

O Kali! why dost Thou roam about nude?  
 Art Thou not ashamed, Mother!  
 Garb and ornaments Thou hast none, yet Thou  
     pridest in being King's daughter.  
 O Mother! is it a virtue of Thy family that

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<sup>436</sup> Ibid., 224 – 225.

<sup>437</sup> Ibid., 227.

<sup>438</sup> Ibid., 223.

<sup>439</sup> Ibid., 227.

<sup>440</sup> Ibid., 228.

<sup>441</sup> Ibid.

Thou placest thy feet on Thy Husband?  
 Thou are nude; Thy Husband is nude; you both  
 roam cremation grounds.  
 O Mother! we are all ashamed of you; do put on  
 Thy garb.  
 Thou hast cast away Thy necklace of jewels,  
 Mother, and worn a garland of human heads,  
 Prasada says, “Mother! Thy fierce beauty has  
 frightened Thy nude Consort.”<sup>442</sup>

The poem implies that Ramprasad is afraid of Kali’s appearance, and sexual power. The poem itself does have sexual undertones, depicting Kali and her consort, Shiva, both naked in a cremation ground, the location in which the Tantric myth of Kali copulating unashamedly in the open with the corpse-formed Shiva takes place. Another poem displays the restless and relentless character of Kali:

All creation is the sport of my mad Mother Kali;  
 By Her *myay* the three worlds are bewitched.  
 Mad is She and mad is Her Husband...  
 None can describe Her loveliness,  
 Her glories, gestures, moods;  
 Shiva with the agony of the poison in His throat,  
 Chants Her name again and again...  
 Where duties are concerned She will not yield.<sup>443</sup>

Here Ramprasad shows a soft side of Mother Kali, as she is merciful and kind to her followers, and the world she has created, stopping at nothing to nurture, comfort and protect.

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<sup>442</sup> Kinsley 2003: 31.

<sup>443</sup> Harding 1993: 231.

She is called lovely, despite her ferocious appearance, but she is also recognized as ‘mad’. Shiva himself chants her name when the poison in his throat aches, from which she is born in the *Linga Purāṇa*. In all probability, this poem borrows from the mythological episode from Purāṇic tradition, as the educated and holy Ramprasad would have read the *Purāṇas*. He views Kali as the Mother of all things who makes sport of the world and all living things in it. This ties in with another of his poems which envisions the goddess sitting in the market place, flying hundreds of thousands of kites, and cutting the strings, letting the kites soar into the Infinite while she laughs and claps her hands.<sup>444</sup> This represents Kali as the ultimate creator in charge of fate and death, and her approach is joyful and childlike rather than motherly. The kites represent souls and she is responsible for ending life and sending souls into the afterlife. The image is evocative of the three Fates, or *Moirae*, of Greek mythology, Clotho who spins the thread of life, Lachesis who measures it and determines how long a person shall live, and Atropos, who cuts the thread and thus ends the individual’s life, sending one into the Underworld.<sup>445</sup>

Ramprasad’s deeply personal relationship with Kali has a profound effect on the course of his life, and is an example of the influence of this powerful, terrible, generous goddess of many complexities.

### 5.4.3. Kali and Swami Vivekananda

Swami Vivekananda (1863 – 1902) was born Narendranath Datta in Calcutta to free-thinking, educated parents, who raised him to be equally open-minded, learned and kind.<sup>446</sup> Mookerjee notes that he was a graduate of a Christian missionary college, and was of a sceptical cast of mind.<sup>447</sup> He has left a legacy behind him as a great and inspiring spiritual teacher and one of India’s national heroes for introducing Hindu teachings to the Western world.<sup>448</sup> Swami

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<sup>444</sup> Mookerjee 1988: 103.

<sup>445</sup> Houtzager 2003: 169.

<sup>446</sup> Harding 1993: 287 – 290.

<sup>447</sup> 1988: 78.

<sup>448</sup> Ibid.

Vivekananda was introduced to Kali in his youth by Sri Ramakrishna, a famous Kali priest who lived at the Dakshineswar Kali Temple, had visions of the goddess, and had a deep love for her. Swami Vivekananda had just lost his father, and sought advice from Sri Ramakrishna on behalf of his starving family. Ramakrishna told Vivekananda to go to the Kali Temple and prostrate himself before the mother and ask her any boon he would like, since she is Knowledge Absolute, and everything is in her power to give.<sup>449</sup> Doing as he was told, Vivekananda had a profound experience in the temple, believing he could see and hear the goddess. He forgot the world, and serene peace entered his soul. This was the turning point in his life.<sup>450</sup>

It is known that Swami Vivekananda kept his feelings for Kali to himself for most of his life, but did, on a few occasions, bare his soul in his writings.<sup>451</sup> In a letter<sup>452</sup> he explains that Kali worship is not necessary in any religion, but that it is his ‘special *fad*.’ He insists that no one will hear him preach it or read him preaching it because he only preaches what is good for universal humanity. He maintains: ‘I keep it secret and there it ends. I must not explain to you what Kali worship is, as I have never taught it to anybody.’<sup>453</sup> In a poem entitled ‘To a friend’, he calls Kali the ‘all-powerful, all-destroyer’, and ‘the kindest mother’.<sup>454</sup> In another poem entitled ‘And Let the Shyama Dance There’,<sup>455</sup> he portrays the goddess as a fearsome, terrible form of the ultimate mother, referring to her once again as the ‘all-destroyer’ and ‘dreaded Kali’, who makes everyone fear since she reeks with blood, is garlanded with skulls, has thunderous laughter, is nude, and looks more like the demons the mother kills than the mother herself. He calls her ‘Elokeshi’, meaning the one with hair

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<sup>449</sup> Harding 1993: 291.

<sup>450</sup> *Ibid.*, 291 – 292.

<sup>451</sup> *Ibid.*, 292.

<sup>452</sup> Swami Vivekananda 1985: 522 – 523.

<sup>453</sup> *Ibid.*, 523.

<sup>454</sup> Swami Vivekananda 1989: 495.

<sup>455</sup> *Ibid.*, 509 – 510.



untied, an epithet of Kali.<sup>456</sup> He states that she alone is true, and she dispels illusions and brings happiness. Although terrible in looks, she is loving in nature.

Swami Vivekananda did compose one poem dedicated entirely to Kali as the supreme mother, which is entitled, 'Kali the Mother':

The stars are blotted out,  
     The clouds are covering clouds,  
 It is darkness vibrant, sonant.  
     In the roaring, whirling wind  
 Are the souls of a million lunatics  
     Just loose from the prison-house,  
 Wrenching trees by the roots,  
     Sweeping all from the path.  
 The sea has joined the fray,  
     And swirls up mountain-waves,  
 To reach the pitchy sky.  
     The flash of lurid light  
 Reveals on every side  
     A thousand, thousand shades  
 Of Death begrimed and black –  
     Scattering plagues and sorrows,  
 Dancing mad with joy,  
     Come, Mother, come!  
 For Terror is Thy name,  
     Death is in Thy breath,  
 And every shaking step

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<sup>456</sup> Ibid.

Destroys a world for e'er.  
 Thou "Time", the All-Destroyer!  
 Come, O Mother, come!  
 Who dares misery love,  
 And hug the form of Death,  
 Dance in Destruction's dance,  
 To him the Mother comes.<sup>457</sup>

This is a clear depiction of the "dark" aspect of Kali, personified as both Mother Nature, beautiful and terrifying, and as creation and destruction. The poem depicts a desolate, completely dark landscape, in which lunatics prevail and destruction reigns. It is a scene of sorrows and blackness, and in this context, Kali thrives and dances madly because she is misery, terror, and death. Swami Vivekananda associates Kali with Time, and advises that whoever loves misery and welcomes death dances along with Mother Kali. Though the poem seems depressing and bleak, the heart of what Swami Vivekananda means is that time erodes everything, and death will come to everyone. The only constant is Kali, who brings about this death and destruction, and, through her, creation can begin anew.

The poem implies Swami Vivekananda's complete faith and commitment to Kali. This, however, was not always his feelings towards the goddess, as is revealed by Sister Nivedita who recorded a rare conversation she had with Swami Vivekananda about Kali.<sup>458</sup> The Swami exclaims that he used to hate Kali and her ways before he finally accepted her. He goes on to say that he was dedicated to her by Ramakrishna and 'now I believe that She guides me in everything I do, and does with me what She will... Sex-love and creation! These are the root of most religions... How few of us have dared to worship Kali! Let us worship Death! Let us embrace the Terrible, because it is terrible, not asking that it be toned down. Let us take misery for misery's own sake.'" These are the same sentiments expressed in the above poem. In looking at the devotional hymns of Ramprasad and Swami Vivekananda, it is clear that the worship of Kali is a very personal thing for her devotees, and to love her is to be

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<sup>457</sup> Ibid., 384.

<sup>458</sup> Swami Vivekananda 1985: 263 – 265.

consumed by love from her in return. To worship Kali truly is to understand the processes of life, death, and rebirth, and to understand that what is created must be destroyed in order for creation to commence again.

### 5.5. Conclusion

In looking at Kali from Vedic and Purāṇic tradition, into Tantric, and then as a creative inspiration to poets and holy men well into the 19<sup>th</sup> century, it is evident that her character and appearance change little over the centuries, and that her power and influence is relative and indeed a personal issue between the goddess and her follower. In orthodox Hindu texts like the *Devi-Māhātmya*, the *Agni Purāṇa*, and the *Linga Purāṇa*, she is to a large extent defined by her relationship to other deities; Durga and Parvati, from whom she is incarnated as an expression of primal energy and rage, and Shiva, to whom she is a wife, who although, ferocious in appearance, is a mother goddess with transformative powers. But she is also restless and unruly, fighting battles as she sees fit, and is often difficult to control. This changes in the later Tantric tradition, in which she is the pervading force in the universe, all-powerful, and all-consuming. Shiva, the male aspect, is necessary only in relation to her. In neither tradition is Kali a subservient, submissive, benign goddess such as Parvati. She is always riotous, barbaric and often shocking. Her complete independence is shocking in Hindu culture, which although it ascribes so much power and authority to its goddesses, is profoundly patriarchal in its values and daily lifestyle. It is therefore appropriate that she has become the patron goddess of many feminists, for, among other things, defying and acting independently of the male divinities, and not assuming a form that is pleasing to the male eye.<sup>459</sup> However, Kali's self-determination has not yet been translated into social reality as a model for the empowerment of women within the Indian cultural system.

Kali is unlike the ideal Indian woman as represented by Sita in Hindu tradition; docile, suffering, selfless and obedient. In the Sanskrit epic, the *Ramayana*, composed around the 5<sup>th</sup> century BCE by Valmiki,<sup>460</sup> Sita forsakes the luxuries of palace life, choosing to follow her

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<sup>459</sup> Mohanty 2004: 118.

<sup>460</sup> Mukundan 1992: 140.

husband Rama into exile for fourteen years. Sita is one of many ‘consort goddesses who are largely dependent on males for their identity (such as Sarasvati, wife of Brahma, and Lakshmi, wife of Vishnu) and are generally benign and subservient’, unlike Kali who are ‘free of all male control and characterised by their autonomous strength and challenge to patriarchal norms.’<sup>461</sup>

Concerning Kali’s dominant role in Tantra, her dark, unusual personality, and her associations with pollution, marginality, death, and inauspicious qualities, she is labelled by Kinsley as an ‘antimodel’ for women meaning that her role ‘violates approved social values, customs, norms, or paradigms.’<sup>462</sup> Kinsley compares her to Sita, the approved model for Hindu women, whom Hindu women have been socialised for generations to view as an ideal to emulate in their own lives. He states that ‘Sita’s husband is the be-all and end-all of her existence. Her thoughts and actions, wishes and dreams, all focus on him; her life only has meaning in relation to him.’<sup>463</sup> Kali, on the other hand, is the exact opposite, dominating, if sometimes humiliating, Shiva, often served by him, in Tantric tradition, and mocking the ideal that is Sita. Kali’s iconography and personality are full of symbols deemed polluting according to Hindu tradition; death, corpses, the cremation ground, male severed heads, nudity, and blood sacrifices. Kinsley points out that sexual fluid is deemed as polluting in Hindu culture and Kali herself is notoriously sexually aggressive, suggesting that she is in a polluted state.<sup>464</sup> She is also never in a submissive position during intercourse. During Kali prayers, women sacrifice male animals symbolic of their husbands or male opponents, as A. Diesel states, after witnessing a Kali prayer in Pietermaritzburg in 1993: ‘The climax of the prayer was the sacrificing of seven male goats and 24 roosters, as offerings to Kali. They were quickly beheaded with a large scythe-like knife, to the accompaniment of very loud drumming and chanting.’<sup>465</sup> It is not unusual for women who experience possession trances

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<sup>461</sup> Diesel & Lambert 2005: 58

<sup>462</sup> 1997: 6.

<sup>463</sup> Ibid.

<sup>464</sup> Ibid., 7.

<sup>465</sup> Diesel 1998: 203.

from Kali to drink the blood of sacrificial animals, just as the goddess 'gets herself intoxicated by drinking the blood of demons.'<sup>466</sup>

R. F. McDermott suggests that when patriarchal groups took over in India, they feared that the female deities of their conquests were the embodiments and symbols of female energy and subsequently demonized them by emphasising their dark, sexual aspects in order to discourage people from their worship.<sup>467</sup> As seen in art, Kali is represented as dancing riotously on Shiva's corpse; an image that, according to J. S. Hawley, was shaped by men. She appears dangerous, not serving within the structures provided by her consort. Kali represents what can happen when natural forces and energy exist in a pure form, beyond the control of governing, restraining patriarchal structure.<sup>468</sup> I have also shown that in her relationship with Shiva she is wild and unruly, and although sometimes tamed by him, she provokes Shiva himself to dangerous behaviour as is evident in the myth of the dance contest between Kali and Shiva. The dance is so chaotic that it threatens the world. In this myth, Kali symbolizes a threat to the masculine ideals of stability, and order. Shiva's victory symbolizes the triumph of culture and male ideology, and the triumph of patriarchy over matriarchal culture. However, I have also shown, as Kinsley points out, that images of this myth very rarely depict a tamed, submissive Kali, as she is usually shown dancing on Shiva's prone body or straddling him during sexual intercourse.<sup>469</sup> Kinsley also notes that although 'in the myth of the dance contest, Shiva is said to have tamed Kali, it seems clear that he never finally subdues her.'<sup>470</sup> He argues that the representation of Kali in art and literature shows her liberating potential as an 'antimodel', for 'Kali insults, subverts, and mocks the status quo, particularly as it defines proper behaviour for women.'<sup>471</sup> Thus it is that Kali is a

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<sup>466</sup> Harding 1993: 64.

<sup>467</sup> 1996: 287.

<sup>468</sup> Hawley 1996: 11.

<sup>469</sup> 1996: 80

<sup>470</sup> Ibid.

<sup>471</sup> 1997: 7.

rebellious goddess in her patriarchy, grotesque yet motherly. As Kinsley states, 'She is growth, decay, death, and rebirth completely unrefined.'<sup>472</sup>

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<sup>472</sup>1996: 82.

## Chapter 6 - Comparison

Hekate in ancient Greek and Roman culture, and Kali in ancient and contemporary Hinduism share a rebellious and self-determining nature within the patriarchal systems to which they each belong, where ‘it is assumed or implied that [the goddess] is associated with motherhood, fertility, and the earth.....however, the diversity of characteristics and roles played by goddesses goes far beyond such simplification.’<sup>473</sup> Both these goddesses challenge the stereotypical male construct of the ideal woman: docile, suffering, selfless and obedient, as represented for example by Penelope, the virtuous wife of Odysseus, in Homer’s *Odyssey*, by the Virgin Mary within Christian tradition, and by Sita in the Hindu tradition. Before I carry out a comparison of the two goddesses, a comparative analysis will be undertaken to determine similarities and differences between the cultural systems in which each goddess functions, in order to explore the relationship between religious representation and gender identity. It is by looking at the patriarchal value systems of the Greeks, Romans, and Hindus that I can fulfil the aim of my research, discussing the apparent need for the existence of these ‘dark’ goddesses in their respective pantheons, and to establish what can be discerned from the position of women bearing in mind that ‘the study of goddesses concerns the relationship of worship to the status of women.’<sup>474</sup> I shall offer a brief assessment of women in the Greco-Roman world, and women in Hindu culture.

### 6.1. Women in the Greco-Roman world

The distinction between the male-dominated, public *polis* and, the private female-centred *oikos* in ancient Greece is dramatic, and the misogyny that exists in the texts of the Classical period is explicit. Most of what is known about the social and legal lives of women, notably upper class women, and the environments in which they functioned in the Classical world, is contained in male-authored texts. Lefkowitz and Fant argue that the lives of women in ancient Greece were set, from birth till death, by their male relatives, and it is men too who selectively relate women’s achievements.<sup>475</sup> According to the Athenian legal system, women

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<sup>473</sup> Kinsley 1989: x.

<sup>474</sup> *Ibid.*, xi.

<sup>475</sup> 1982: 3.

were not citizens, had no right to vote, and, as perpetual minors, could not make a will.<sup>476</sup> A young woman was married by fourteen years of age to a man much older than herself, as Hesiod advises in his *Work and Days*:

You are at the right age to bring a wife to your house when you are not much less than thirty, and not much more. This is the right time for marriage. Your wife should be four years past puberty and be married to you in the fifth. Marry a virgin so you can teach her good habits...For a man can win nothing better than a good wife, and nothing more painful than a bad one (695 – 705).<sup>477</sup>

Hesiod demonstrates that the purpose of taking a wife is procreation, since she is a young and fertile bride.<sup>478</sup> S. B. Pomeroy comments on the distinctive male and female spheres of the Classical Greek household as evident in the existence of two rooms, the *gynaikonitis*, the women's quarters at the back of the house in which women and slaves slept and produced their textiles, and the *andron*, the men's room at the front of the house where men entertained male guests.<sup>479</sup> This highlights the division in gender roles and the seclusion of women in Classical Athens. However, married women did have an outlet at certain public festivals such as the *Thesmophoria*, held outdoors in honour of Demeter, which took place in October over three days during the autumn planting.<sup>480</sup>

Women in ancient Greece were largely marginalised and controlled, in part due to male-perceptions of them. In the Classical period, women were stereotyped as emotional, irrational, devious, immoral, always sexually charged, and close to nature, while men were connected with order, culture, honour, and taming the wild. Myths often contain morals and

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<sup>476</sup> Ibid., 38.

<sup>477</sup> Ibid., 14.

<sup>478</sup> See also Pomeroy (1975). Pomeroy stresses that the purpose of marriage was procreation, 'within the limits of the economic resources of the family' (64).

<sup>479</sup> Pomeroy 1997: 30.

<sup>480</sup> Pomeroy 1975: 77.



values, imbued with symbolic meanings and explanations of how the world works, and what one's role should be. The perceptions of women were transmitted through various myths which show the dangers of women with too much authority and reinforce misogynistic notions. These are evident in mythological "bad women" such as Pandora, Medea, Clytemnestra, and Helen. The threat of women in power is prevalent in the myth of the Amazons, a group of women who live outside civilized society and do not participate in the designated activities of women such as child-birth and weaving, but, rather perversely in the eyes of an Athenian man, live as men do in their own system of government, with their own army of female warriors. The Amazons have been used by ancient Greek males to suggest the social, cultural and political dangers of women who dominate.<sup>481</sup> They are wild, close to nature, threaten culture and reason, and live contradictory to the ideal conduct of a proper woman. The ideal ancient Greek woman, the opposite of the Amazons and kin, is portrayed in myth by Penelope, the grieving, patient, chaste wife of Odysseus and the embodiment of the perfect, caring, faithful, intelligent female. During her husband's long absence she spends her time indoors at her loom rather than entertaining flatteries from other men.<sup>482</sup> She is the role-model for little girls; suffering, wise, subservient and moral.

Although the Romans would have found Greek myths of this nature influential, it seems Roman women in the Augustan era (27 BCE – 14 CE) had more freedom than their Greek counterparts. Upper class women were not confined to their separate quarters in a house, they received visitors, conversed with people, went shopping, to the games, to religious festivals, and even out to dinner parties, although G. Clarke argues that decorum would have required she be chaperoned and veiled.<sup>483</sup> Women had no political right to vote or to hold office; however, some ambitious mothers worked behind the scenes to influence the political careers of sons, such as Atia, the mother of Augustus, whom Clarke states took unusual pains in supervising her son's education.<sup>484</sup> In the Augustan era, there was an ideal role-model for all Roman women, Livia, the third wife of Augustus. She was dutiful, submissive, religious, and domestic. As Clarke points out:

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<sup>481</sup> Stone 1976: 46.

<sup>482</sup> Rieu 1972: 2.116 – 122.

<sup>483</sup> 1981: 44.

<sup>484</sup> *Ibid.*, 48.

She never had lovers; she went amiably along with what Augustus wanted; she never interfered; and she pretended not to notice his mistresses...She made her husband's clothes; she combined traditional chastity with modern charm; and she was, within the limits she herself accepted, a woman of great power.<sup>485</sup>

In the Greco-Roman world, women were segregated and dominated by males within their patriarchal system. Men defined the ideal woman as one who is fertile, faithful, submissive, intelligent, and pious, and by placing her quietly within the walls of the house, dictated how a woman should behave, and where a woman should operate.

## 6.2. Women in Hinduism

Hindu culture, like ancient Greco-Roman culture, is extremely patriarchal in nature, despite the universal power ascribed to goddesses. While goddesses are praised for their creative sexuality, Hindu women are chastised and monitored so as not to appear as seductresses. S. C. Crawford argues that from very early in the Vedic period (1500 – 1000 BCE), the Hindu family was patriarchal and patrilineal, while the matriarchal family was nonexistent. The patriarch was in complete control over property, and the male had an elevated role over the female.<sup>486</sup> Women were allowed some freedom of movement, and social and religious rights, but this did not take away from the authority of the male, who always took precedence over the female. A woman's main purpose in life was to produce sons.<sup>487</sup> In the period of the Brahmans (1000 – 700 BCE), women were further marginalised and suppressed, since men began to regard them as full of weaknesses, and as temptresses. In this period, women dined after their husbands, had no right to own property, and were encouraged to be subservient.<sup>488</sup>

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<sup>485</sup> Ibid., 52.

<sup>486</sup> 1982: 12.

<sup>487</sup> Ibid., 29.

<sup>488</sup> Ibid., 30.

This is evident in the Sanskrit text, dated to early in the Common Era, called *The Law of Manu*, which is a set of moral judgements by which a Hindu man should live his life. The work is attributed to Manu, but it is unclear as to who he was, although it has been suggested he was a sage or a king.<sup>489</sup> It encompasses rules for life from duty, law, and religion to concepts of the body, and attitudes to money. In the text, the corrupting nature of women is expounded on. Women are seen as they are in ancient Greece and Rome, as tempting, immoral, unclean, devious, and close to nature. *The Law of Manu*<sup>490</sup> states that women are responsible for diverting the attentions of men away from what is important towards frivolous things. It is made explicit that ‘It is the very nature of women to corrupt men here on earth’ (2. 213). It is made apparent that men saw women as undignified, ignorant, lusty and prone to addictions (9. 5). For these reasons, women were made dependent on men. This is expanded on when the role of the ideal woman is explained:

In childhood a woman should be under her father’s control, in youth under her husband’s, and when her husband is dead, under her sons’. She should not have independence... She should always be cheerful, and clever at household affairs; she should keep her utensils well polished and not have too free a hand in spending... A virtuous wife should constantly serve her husband like a god, even if he behaves badly, freely indulges his lust, and is devoid of any good qualities... She should be long-suffering until death, self-restrained, and chaste, striving (to fulfil) the unsurpassed duty of women who have one husband (5. 147 – 158).

In view of those characteristics dictated by *The Law of Manu*, role-models like Sita were created. Sita, in the epic the *Ramayana*,<sup>491</sup> is subjected to humiliation, indignity, and obedience at the hands of her husband, and it is these qualities that are admired. She is willing to renounce her upper class lifestyle to follow her husband, Rama, into exile in the forests of Dandaka. During this period of exile, Sita is abducted by the ten-headed demon Ravana, and is kept captive in his kingdom of Lanka for many years. During this time, Sita is

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<sup>489</sup> Doniger and Smith 1991: xviii.

<sup>490</sup> I have used a translation by Doniger and Smith (1991).

<sup>491</sup> I have used a translation by the Gita Press (1968).

sexually vulnerable and is steadfast in guarding her chastity when Ravana approaches, even when he threatens to behead her (5. 11). When Rama does vanquish the demon, and is reunited with Sita, he fears her reputation, and she is made to undergo a trial by fire to prove that she was not raped by Ravana. Sita is subjected to humiliation when her chastity is brought into question before the gods themselves. She accepts this, and does not rebel against it or question it. Her faithfulness to her husband is proven when she plunges into the flames and is not burnt (6. 107). This is the role-model for Hindu women worldwide, even today. The ideals women were, and to some extent still are, forced to emulate in Hinduism are stifling and unrealistic, especially when faced with the powerful, dynamic goddesses of the Hindu pantheon. This is a major contradiction and inconsistency within the religion. The expectation to be virtuous, even when faced with a husband of bad quality, is absurd and is used to snatch away any kind of power that a Hindu woman might have, by causing her to fear for her reputation. *The Law of Manu* is thus a literary tool for segregating and isolating women, and transmitting damaging stereotypes. As K. Rajaratnam accurately surmises: ‘Manu seals the fate of women, forever.’<sup>492</sup>

Even today, particularly in India, Hindu women are exposed to extreme patriarchal suppression and violence, including numerous recent incidents of *sati*. E. Hellman makes the startling statistics known:

During the last decade, scholars and journalists have given a depressing picture of the situation for Indian women. They have brought to our attention dowry deaths, female foeticide, the higher death rates of girls/women than of boys/men and a sex ratio that is heavily tilted against women – in 1991 there were 927 women for every 1,000 men; in districts with high levels of infanticide less than 700 girls below five years old to 1,000 boys.<sup>493</sup>

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<sup>492</sup> 1999: 12.

<sup>493</sup> 2008: 1.

Yet Hellman does state positive facts as well, namely that Hindu women all over the world are now starting to use their traditional goddesses to break out of the shackles of patriarchy by seeing them as symbols of strength and power.<sup>494</sup> Diesel too has expressed that goddesses can be used to bring about social change and empowerment for women, and has investigated this occurring close to home, in KwaZulu-Natal itself. Diesel states that traditionally and understandably, Sita is regarded as the usual role-model for obedient wives, and now there is more of a break in tradition that allows Kali, and other strong, assertive goddesses to be consciously appropriated as role-models.<sup>495</sup> She argues that South African Hindu women, who are less bound by caste requirements and other traditional expectations, are now questioning their positions in religion, and are open to change in social roles.<sup>496</sup>

### **6.3. Hekate and Kali in their respective cultural, religious and social systems**

In looking at women in the Greco-Roman world, and in ancient and modern Hinduism, it is apparent that these patriarchal cultures are very similar in the subjugation of women. Role-models are, however, not strong and self-determining goddesses such as Artemis in the Greek world, or Durga in Hinduism, but the representations of the ideal wife like Penelope, and Sita; virtuous, pious, subservient women who do not challenge the status quo. In view of everything discussed, the personalities of Hekate and Kali do not correspond with the values propagated by their respective patriarchally dominated cultural, religious and social systems, which although so far removed in time and space, are remarkably similar. Both Hekate and Kali are dark goddesses who challenge the rule of the male gods, who decide on their own actions, who are overtly passionate, and close to nature, and embody elements that are traditionally regarded as unsavoury. It is necessary to look at their similarities and differences in order to determine why such goddesses exist in patriarchal cultures. I shall undertake to compare the similar characteristics, associations and appearances of Hekate and Kali.

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<sup>494</sup> *Ibid.*, 13.

<sup>495</sup> 1998: 235.

<sup>496</sup> *Ibid.*, 236.

### 6.3.1. Appearance and dual natures

Hekate and Kali share many common features in terms of appearance. While Hekate gradually progresses to a more terrifying goddess, Kali is always depicted in a frightening manner. Hekate is depicted in Classical art most frequently in accordance with her role in the *Homeric Hymn to Demeter*, as discussed in Chapter 3 of this dissertation. She is shown in an Underworld context, wearing a loose garment, carrying torches, youthful and benign. She is often turned slightly as if about to run, or in the process of running.<sup>497</sup> She is sometimes accompanied by a dog, and is seen approaching Demeter or attending to Persephone.<sup>498</sup> She is usually barefooted which does link with Pindar's description of her as 'the maiden with ruddy feet' (fr. *Paeon* 2. 78).<sup>499</sup> In my opinion she almost always looks almost like a night-watchman, making a round with her torches to light her way, and her ferocious dog. This solidifies her role as a protectress.

The most apparent feature in Hekate's appearance in all three of my Greek sources is that she is depicted as single-formed, rather than triple-bodied as she is so often shown in art, and in later literature. When Hekate does eventually become associated with the crossroads and magic, she is shown with three heads and six arms bearing torches, not unlike standard representations of Kali with many heads and many arms, each carrying a symbolic object. This is most evident in Roman sources which, for the most part, show Hekate in accordance with this depiction, as witnessed in Ovid's *Fasti*. This is also noted in a magical tablet found in the Agora at Athens, showing an illustration of what looks like a bat with wings spread out. It has been interpreted as a six-armed Hekate.<sup>500</sup> If one is to believe that this figure is Hekate, it is possible to see the three sets of arms, the first held high above her heads, the second represented by a thin line, and the third more decorated. On her heads are headdresses, and there are magical symbols around her body.

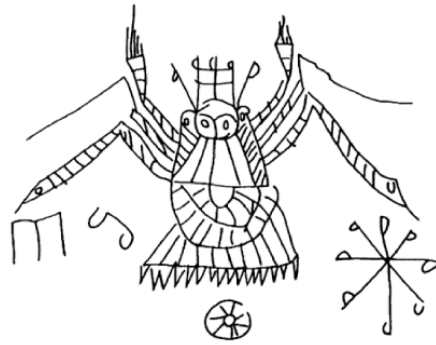
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<sup>497</sup> See **Image 11** on page 78 and **Image 12** on page 79 of this dissertation.

<sup>498</sup> See **Image 13** on page 79.

<sup>499</sup> Race 1997.

<sup>500</sup> Gager 1992: 180 – 181.



**Image 18**<sup>501</sup>

The spell is for the purpose of revenge over stolen goods, and J. G. Gager finds it most revelatory that the person performing the ritual does not ask for his goods back, but rather that Hekate cuts out the hearts of the thieves.<sup>502</sup>

The development of Hekate's appearance from kindly to menacing corresponds with her personal development from benevolent goddess to mysterious goddess of the crossroads and Underworld to ferocious, vengeful goddess of magic. Kali on the other hand does not undergo a devastating change of character. She is constantly an untameable force that cannot be controlled by anyone, especially once she has unleashed her violent side, threatening order and universal stability. But she is simultaneously a refuge of solace for her millions of devotees around the world. Harding assures us of Kali's nurturing qualities in spite of her brutal looks by pointing out the statue of Dakshinakali (**Image 19**), the Divine Mother, from the Dakshineswar Temple, where people make offerings to it on a daily basis. Kali's scary exterior is matched by a compassionate interior, and her stance is majestic. She is not seen simply as frightening, but rather as a danger to her enemies and evils that want to harm her devotees.

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<sup>501</sup> *Ibid.*, 181.

<sup>502</sup> *Ibid.*, 182.



**Image 19**<sup>503</sup>

Although unusual and disconcerting for the Western eye, Kali truly promises protection. As Harding states: ‘Her posture strangely combines the terror of destruction with the reassurance of motherly love.’<sup>504</sup>

Both Hekate and Kali bear objects in their hands that benefit humanity. Kali holds a severed head, bowl, and sword and is often gesturing so as to dispel evil forces. She seeks to emancipate humanity from the confines of ignorance and materialism, as well as to protect. Hekate bears torches, bringing light which illuminates paths, literal and figurative, and can also be seen to bring wisdom. Even once she is firmly entrenched as a ghoulish goddess, Hekate is a benefactress of her devotees, providing vengeance, love, and guidance in times of need, as witnessed not only in literature, but in the magical spells. This can be seen as a motherly function. Where Kali is dark skinned, Hekate dwells in the darkness of the Underworld, and although not shown as explicitly sexually active, violent, or naked as Kali is, Hekate does come across as earthy, always barefooted, and linked with the changing cycles of womanhood, witnessed predominantly in her relationship with Persephone. Both goddesses are associated with fierce, predatory four-legged animals; Hekate the dog, and Kali the tiger. Both animals are protectors, and feared by enemies. Thus, Hekate and Kali share

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<sup>503</sup> Harding 1993: front cover.

<sup>504</sup> *Ibid.*, 52.



many features in appearance. Important is the dual natures of the goddesses; terrible in appearance, yet munificent and maternal to devotees.

### **6.3.2. Dark qualities: associations with witchcraft, the moon, the dead, and blood sacrifices**

Hekate and Kali are symbols of the darker aspects of life. The moon and lunar cycles are important in the worship of both. Hekate is herself a moon goddess, and it has been noted that “Hekate Suppers” were left at the crossroads as offerings to her during the new moon.<sup>505</sup> The lunar cycles are important in Hekate’s role as goddess of witchcraft, and she is usually invoked when the moon is full, as in Theocritus’ *Idyll* 2. In *Idyll* 2, Hekate is addressed by the witch, Simaetha, for the purpose of making her lover more attentive and binding him with magic (4 – 9).<sup>506</sup> Simaetha calls upon the bright-shining Moon, or Hekate, whom she calls the ‘queen of terrors’, for assistance in making her magical brews (14 – 15). Later, Simaetha repeatedly calls Hekate ‘Lady Moon’ (68, 74, 80), and ‘remote bright Goddess’ (165). Sarah Iles Johnston attempts to determine why Hekate comes to be associated with the moon, and uses what is known of Hekate in Hesiod to establish this. Johnston states that men have often seen the moon as a star-like Earth, or an earth-like star, and as a half-way point between the earth and the heavens, or as a half-way between humans and the divine.<sup>507</sup> This she perceptively links to Hekate’s role in the *Theogony* wherein she mediates between the gods and humans, and thus her relationship with the moon is based on the same idea. Hekate can be seen as an intermediary between earth and the heavens.

The moon is also linked with the night, a time when witches lurk and perform their dangerous magic, as seen in the *Aeneid*, in Apuleius’ *Metamorphoses*, and in Theocritus’ *Idyll* 2. It is when phantoms roam the earth, and when Hekate, the goddess of restless spirits, roams graveyards with her hellhounds. As seen in *PGM* IV. 1390 – 1495, the spell involving the aid of those who died a violent death, Hekate is closely linked to the recently deceased.

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<sup>505</sup> Spawforth 1996: 671.

<sup>506</sup> I have used Wells’ translation (1988).

<sup>507</sup> Johnston 1990: 33.

Theocritus mentions in his *Idyll* 2 that Hekate is the goddess ‘from whom dogs cower as she wanders among graves’ (13). Johnston comments that Hekate is regarded as the mistress of phantoms from Classical times, again due to her role as intermediary, in this instance between the living and the dead. Johnston rightly connects Hekate specifically with those souls who died untimely, violent, or unnatural deaths, and those who were denied proper burial rites, arguing that it is natural that these souls should gather to Hekate as she is a goddess of both birth and death, and accompanies souls across the greatest boundaries and transitions.<sup>508</sup> Moreover, Johnston convincingly argues that since Hekate is a goddess of liminal spaces and crossroads, she is most likely to come in contact with ghosts, who traditionally dwell in such places. Johnston correctly maintains that ‘she was the goddess who protected the living against potentially harmful spirits, but by the same token, she was also the goddess who could lead them on.’<sup>509</sup>

Kali too is connected with lunar cycles, cremation grounds, and magic in her own culture. Harding relates that special worship to Kali takes place on the darkest night of the moon, the night before the new moon, and that a male goat is sacrificed to the goddess.<sup>510</sup> Mohanty adds that:

Typically, Kali is worshipped on *amavasya* or the new moon night at midnight. New moon nights that fall on Tuesdays are especially auspicious. The most important and elaborate *amavasya puja* falls in the lunar month corresponding to October or November in the Western calendar. This Night of Kali, more popularly known as Diwali, when most Hindus light lamps while others make blood sacrifices... The choice of this night to worship Kali is appropriate since Kali is, among many things, the goddess of death.<sup>511</sup>

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<sup>508</sup> 1990: 34 – 35. See Kali’s link to cremation grounds on page 134 of this dissertation.

<sup>509</sup> *Ibid.*, 35.

<sup>510</sup> 1993: 117.

<sup>511</sup> 2004: 81 – 82.

As the goddess of death, Kali roams battlefields, considered fields of death, and cremation grounds with a band of jackals and female ghouls.<sup>512</sup> Kinsley notes that on public worship days in Bengal her image is set up in cremation grounds, which, along with her mythology and iconography, highlight her identification with death.<sup>513</sup> I have already pointed out that devotees of Kali worship her in cremation grounds at night, sometimes sitting on a corpse, a liminal space in which souls linger until they are able to move on, or be reincarnated. It is a transitory place, and Kali oversees transitions from life to death and from death to life. Kinsley adds:

To worship the dark goddess, to meditate upon her terrifying presence, to invoke her name in the cremation ground is, it seems clear, to confront the painful, sorrowful dimensions of the world that are summed up in death...To the man who has discovered his eternal destiny, the cremation ground represents the gateway to complete liberation, the final episode in a journey that has, perhaps, encompassed thousands of lives. For the freed man the cremation ground marks the end of a cycle of bondage to grasping and becoming, the gateway to the final transcendence of a way of knowing that is limited and grounded in not-knowing.<sup>514</sup>

Mohanty expands on this by stating that the use of corpses for meditation is reserved only for those who have achieved a high level of consciousness and are therefore able to participate in the ritual without a sense of morbid titillation.<sup>515</sup> The corpse chosen is usually newly deceased, preferably one that has been killed in battle, or in an act of violence. The corpse is placed face down and his back is used as an altar.<sup>516</sup> Mohanty states that in some instances,

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<sup>512</sup> Kinsley 1975: 142.

<sup>513</sup> Ibid.

<sup>514</sup> Kinsley 1975: 142 – 143.

<sup>515</sup> Mohanty 2004: 84.

<sup>516</sup> Ibid., 84 – 85.

devotees that have broken all ties with convention and society would eat the flesh of the corpse, much like Kali displays cannibalistic qualities.<sup>517</sup>

These cannibalistic characteristics are displayed when devotees are possessed by Kali, and undergo a trance. During such possessions, individuals take on characteristics of the deity, speak as the deity, usually in tongues, and are able to predict the future. Diesel states that it is usually women who are possessed by fierce goddesses like Kali, and then display characteristics that are not normally expected of a respectable Hindu woman.<sup>518</sup> Diesel, investigating several individuals who experience possession by Kali, notes one woman, Pat Pillay from KwaZulu-Natal, who once drank the sacrificial blood of goats and chickens while in a trance.<sup>519</sup> This is reminiscent of Kali in the *Devi-Māhātmya*, where her thirst for blood is insatiable, and feeds into Harding's observation that the goddess 'gets herself intoxicated by drinking the blood of demons.'<sup>520</sup> Hekate too demands a blood sacrifice, and this is usually in the form of dogs at the crossroads. Von Rudloff states that, quite like the corpses in Kali's cremation ground, dogs were seen in ancient Greece as having a negative reputation, due to their shameless behaviour, and were deemed impure. He adds that dogs were used then, as now, in a derogatory sense to refer to women, and that unburied souls were said to appear as dogs.<sup>521</sup> This impure, polluted animal, the favourite of Hekate who barks as they do, and whose child, Scylla, barks as they do, is also seen as unclean.

The dark qualities shared by Hekate and Kali are conspicuous. Both are considered goddesses of pollution, death, the night, and are found where the newly deceased wander. Yet despite these sinister connotations, both goddesses are found in such instances because they bring a

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<sup>517</sup> Ibid., 85.

<sup>518</sup> 1998: 193.

<sup>519</sup> Ibid., 205.

<sup>520</sup> 1993: 64. Blood sacrifice is a common feature of Kali worship. Diesel mentions animal sacrifice that takes place to Kali in KwaZulu-Natal itself. At a Kali prayer in Northdale, Pietermaritzburg in 1998, the prayer climaxed in the sacrifice of seven male goats and twenty four roosters, which were each beheaded by a long scythe-like knife, and the heads were then placed in the shrine before the image of Kali, while the rest of the carcasses were prepared as meals (Diesel 1998: 203).

<sup>521</sup> 1999: 120.

deeper sense of meaning to the negative aspects of life. They both offer wisdom and understanding during transitory phases.

### 6.3.3. Links with the primitive mother goddess

Hekate and Kali share features with the variety of primitive mother goddesses I have assessed in my literature review. I have stressed Hekate and Kali's relationship with the moon, and the power of the lunar cycles over the processes of life. This can be related to the Venus of Laussel<sup>522</sup> who holds in her hand a crescent moon, showing her power over the earth and heavens.

Hekate, when first she is introduced in literature in the *Theogony*, is a universal, powerful goddess. She rules over the earth, sea and sky. Perhaps this is residue from an age when goddesses were supreme, given that the amount of influence she has is astonishing, comparable to that of the ultimate male god, Zeus. She is thereafter limited to the Underworld, and takes on a sinister role and dark characteristics. These dark characteristics do, however, also remind one of the primitive mother goddess who embraced death, and rebirth. In Apollonius Rhodius' *Argonautica*, when Hekate emerges from the ground covered in oak-saplings and snakes,<sup>523</sup> she is undeniably linked to the earth, and the secrets of the inner-workings of the earth, which snakes are privy to. The snake, which I have previously shown to be a ubiquitous symbol in primitive art connected to mother goddesses, is closely identifiable with the ancient goddess in her chthonic aspects and as overseer of the natural cycle of life, death and rebirth.

Hekate, though mother to Scylla, is never described as nurturing to her horrific daughter, and is usually depicted as a maiden rather than a mother. She is always shown fully clothed. Kali, on the other hand, is depicted naked, with sagging breasts, and is known to be overwhelmed by maternal instincts. Kali is therefore more explicitly linked to the pregnant Venus figurines

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<sup>522</sup> See **Image 2** (Venus of Laussel) on page 34 of this dissertation.

<sup>523</sup> See page 83 of this dissertation.

and the Mistress of Animals from Çatal Hüyük than Hekate. Akin to the Mistress of Animals from Çatal Hüyük, Kali is identified with a feline animal, the tiger, which symbolises her splendour and strength. Hekate, on the other hand, is also identified with a four-legged animal, a dog. Like the Mistress of Animals who is supreme but also has a male partner, Kali is the consort of a male god, whom she, at times, overpowers. Hekate does not have a husband but lovers, and it is assumed that Scylla was fathered by Phorkys, to whom Hekate is not subsequently linked. The primitive mother goddess is thought to have created the universe and everything within it, just as Kali in Tantric tradition is said to be the ultimate creator. The potency and necessity of the male principle in Tantra is not denied, and Kali is thought to have an egalitarian relationship with Shiva.

Common to the primal Mother deities is the emphasis on the processes of life, death, and regeneration or rebirth. I have shown this to be a major characteristic of both Hekate and Kali. As Bachofen states:

[Goddesses] disappear or take on other names, and the ideas and customs of the primordial age die with them. Only here and there do we recognise vestiges of the once universal system based on the pre-eminence of the feminine nature principle, a system that was particularly preserved largely because of this religious foundation. But which we can reconstitute as a whole only by noting and comparing the elements that survived in a number of different places.<sup>524</sup>

I believe Hekate and Kali to be extensions and developments of the primitive mother goddess, displaying the vestiges which Bachofen believes are left over from a supposed matriarchal era.

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<sup>524</sup> Manheim 1967: 171 – 172.

#### 6.4. Conclusion of Comparison

The features discussed show the striking similarities between Hekate and Kali, and both goddesses and the ancient mother goddess discussed in my literature review. Hekate and Kali are nurturing and terrible, frightening and benevolent. Hekate and Kali are not conventional goddesses in each of their cultures. They are the opposite of the ideal role-models, and live up to stereotypes of women as wild, irrational, sexually charged, and close to nature. Of Kali, Harding states that she is ‘not what one imagines a typical Hindu woman to be. She is neither gentle, bashful, nor subservient.’<sup>525</sup> The same can be said of Hekate who, in literature, answers to no man. Similarly, Kali is said to be a goddess ‘who fights alone. And if she wants help, she accepts it from other females but does not seek it from men.’<sup>526</sup> The same has been seen of Hekate.

I believe that these dark goddesses are necessary in their respective religious systems because they embrace processes of life that are difficult and painful for humans to comprehend and that humans have questioned from the dawn of time as evident in the primordial mother goddess. Fundamentally, this question is what happens after death, and by surrounding themselves with the dead and liminal spaces, Hekate and Kali show that there is no need to fear, because, as caring, nurturing goddesses, they provide comfort, hope and understanding, for what can be more reassuring and consoling than a mother during a time of panic and uncertainty? Hekate and Kali can be found on the margins within their respective cultures, associated with the darker aspects of life, such as death, rebirth, nature, and transitions, not conforming to the ancient masculine ideals of culture, order, and reason, but representing the idea of the wild, irrational, untameable feminine.

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<sup>525</sup> 1993: 64.

<sup>526</sup> Ibid.

## 7. Final Conclusion

In the twenty-first century, there is a search for new forms of spirituality in which divinity is perceived as a woman.<sup>527</sup> The reason for this is well argued by Diesel, that while many feminists believe that ultimately the divine is beyond gender, it is necessary to create an image of powerful female divinity to correct the imbalance in the past by the exclusive image of a male god, and to validate the close connection women have to the natural world, restoring a sense of authority to the female body.<sup>528</sup> Hekate and Kali, along with other powerful and autonomous goddesses like the Egyptian Isis, Babylonian Ishtar, and the Sumerian Inanna, have been appropriated by feminists to cater for the “sacred feminine”, an ideal that suggests that the divine has a female face.<sup>529</sup> These goddesses, autonomous, rebellious, and in tune with nature, and in charge of their own sexuality, provide positive role-models for women today, and by this I mean Hekate to women in the western world, and Kali mainly to women in the east, and in the diaspora.

While the Virgin Mary is honoured, and, in some cases, worshipped in Catholicism, she is not entirely representative of the “sacred feminine” because her worship is managed by the patriarchy of the Church. A. Diesel and M. Lambert elaborate on the message sent by the Virgin Mary:

For the female viewer, the Virgins seem exemplars of motherhood – suffering, passive, submissive and beautiful... ‘Women, this is who you are; this is your place in the world; this is your role in life – Yes! That’s me, I too can be a silent mother, revered and acquiescent’, could be the moment of interpellation and recognition for the female viewer.<sup>530</sup>

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<sup>527</sup> Diesel 1998: 23

<sup>528</sup> *Ibid.*, 29.

<sup>529</sup> *Ibid.*, 27.

<sup>530</sup> 2005: 68.



The Virgin Mary, like Penelope and Sita, is a male construct of the perfect woman, and is an impossible and unrealistic role-model for women. Therefore, new role-models are required, and there is a need for the “sacred feminine” independent of patriarchy. This feminine power can, for instance, be detected in the South Indian goddess, Draupadi, for, ‘while the Virgins seem only to have meaning *in relation to*, Draupadi, by contrast, stands alone.’<sup>531</sup> Draupadi is a Hindu earth mother, a creator, and a destroyer. Her mythology is detailed in *Mahabharata*, in which she is the daughter of King Draupada, and is born of sacrificial fire. Draupadi is subjected to insult and humiliation by the rival family, the Kauravas, when the eldest Kaurava drags her by her long hair and attempts to strip her of her sari. Draupadi appeals to the god Krishna, and miraculously, her sari becomes endless, and cannot be removed. She makes a vengeful promise never to retie her hair until she has washed it in the blood of the Kaurava family. She is eventually successful in this. Subsequently, Draupadi can be seen as a role-model for females:

For the woman (especially the abused woman) familiar with the mythology, she could be a powerful symbol of resistance and strength against the very male surveyor she has internalized. She is neither passive, nor submissive; she triumphs in adversity with reactive anger. Draupadi could become a source of empowerment (that is, liberation from patriarchal discourses) for the many women who see her and are seen by her. ‘That’s me! I too can resist abuse!’ would be a striking moment of recognition for a female gazer and would undermine the construct of the feminine as the powerless object which is viewed.<sup>532</sup>

Both Hekate and Kali are examples of this in their own way, since in their respective religious contexts they are free of male control, challenge the norms, and are authoritative and independent. Hekate developed from an extraordinarily powerful goddess to a shadowy lesser-deity summoned when retribution is needed. She roams graveyards with her hellhounds, lives in the Underworld, and is even the patron of one of Greek mythology’s most infamous character, Medea. Yet in early literature Hekate is portrayed as benevolent,

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<sup>531</sup> Diesel & Lambert 2005: 68.

<sup>532</sup> Ibid.

and rules over many spheres of influence, as seen in two valuable sources, Hesiod's *Theogony*, and the *Homeric Hymn to Demeter*. She transforms from helpful to menacing, from one who is connected with light, to one who comes out at night bringing with her the darkness of the Underworld. From the incantations I have analysed it is not surprising that Hekate's legacy as goddess of witchcraft has prevailed. With the re-emergence of goddess-centred religions, or faiths that are rooted in ancient times, and are connected to nature, Hekate has resurfaced in the modern world as one of the dominant deities in New Age religions. She has been established as a major deity in Paganism today, with a personality no less ambiguous than it was in the ancient world.<sup>533</sup> Today Hekate is still very much a dark goddess associated with the night, the Underworld, and the dead. But she has also been reclaimed as a creative force with divination powers, a healer, an illuminator, a bringer of truth, the slayer of evil, and a liberator. She is the champion of the oppressed, especially of women who suffer emotional or mental distress. She is strongly connected to the cycle of life, death and rebirth. Hekate is seen as a universal deity, with limitless power, and boundless domains. She represents the darker aspects of being, and because of this is mysterious and a curiosity. She is, even today, linked with features of existence humans generally fear: the night, darkness, change, death. However, she demonstrates that those need not be negative. Her function as goddess of transformation and rebirth also served in helping her endure. She is symbolic of the transitory nature of life, but also shows that it is endless and eternal.

Hekate has probably prevailed and re-emerged in the modern world because she is the ideal role-model: strong, independent, wise, powerful. As one who has undergone so many transformations she has finally been translated into a balanced, autonomous female deity who knows the secrets of nature, magic and the universe. Time has shaped Hekate into one who is in between the benevolent Hekate of Hesiod's *Theogony* and the malevolent, dark goddess. After the *Homeric Hymn to Demeter*, when Hekate first acquires her underworld associations and subsequently her connections to the night, magic, and the moon, she becomes somewhat distant and inaccessible. However today Hekate has returned to her role

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<sup>533</sup> Conway 1994.

as goddess of the People, much as in Hesiod, but has retained some of her lunar and magical functions conferred on her in later antiquity.<sup>534</sup>

The worship of Kali has never been discontinued as the worship of Hekate was. Kali has endured for thousands of years, and it is only recently that her full potential as a role-model, particularly to Hindu women, is being realised. Diesel reminds us that Hinduism is unique among world religions due to its rich, continuous tradition of goddess worship in the past and present, whereas in other cultures in Europe and the Mediterranean, the goddess disappeared shortly after the advent of Christianity.<sup>535</sup> She continues that, although goddess worship in India can be traced back to the pre-Aryan Indus Valley Civilization (c. 2500 – 1500), a time in which the goddess was dominant, the goddess features minimally in early Vedic literature, and is significantly less important than male gods, and that the earliest representation of Durga does not occur until the first century BCE.<sup>536</sup> What gave the goddess a context in which to be venerated was the Shiva cult, which was popular in the third century BCE onwards, and stories of Shiva's marriage to Parvati can be traced back to the Gupta Dynasty (CE 320 – 499).<sup>537</sup> Diesel explains that it was not till the fifth and sixth centuries CE that the goddess became part of written record, at which time she was elevated from the divine consort of Shiva to a great goddess, and enjoyed a position of independent, supreme Being, in her own right. This elevation of the status of the goddess, as a dynamic creator, preserver, and destroyer of the universe resulted in the demotion of male gods, rendering them superfluous,<sup>538</sup> as is demonstrated in the *Linga Purāṇa*, and mainly in the *Devi-Māhātmya*, in which Kali is born from Durga's head, fully-grown and wearing a tiger skin, after Durga becomes enraged during a battle. However, the birth of the female goddess from a male god shows masculine energy as the prevailing force, and implies the co-option of reproduction by patriarchal religious systems. It is not surprising that the Greek goddess, Athena, is a decidedly masculine goddess who busies herself with the pursuits of men, such as war, city-

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<sup>534</sup> See, for instance, Conway 1994, and Luna 2008.

<sup>535</sup> 1998: 52 – 56.

<sup>536</sup> *Ibid.*, 53 – 54.

<sup>537</sup> *Ibid.*, 54.

<sup>538</sup> *Ibid.*, 55.

life and the exploits of heroes, and has no sexual life. Kali, on the other hand, in the *Devi-Māhātmya*, is the savage product of creative feminine energy, violent and uncontrollable.

Diesel affirms that worldwide *Shakti* worship today is predominantly centred on the veneration of Parvati and all her forms as benign, mild, and auspicious, and also as wild, fierce, punishing and destructive. Shiva is more passive in his relationship with Parvati, but he himself shares something of her complex nature in that he is a symbol of fertility, a protector and saviour, but also a destroyer with an unkempt appearance.<sup>539</sup> Diesel clarifies that:

The popularity and widespread nature of Goddess worship is almost certainly attributable to the powerful, clearly observable, and much revered role of the human mother who bears new offspring from her body, and nourishes and nurtures these; and to the transference of this imagery to the fertile earth (Mother) who also produces and nourishes life, and finally, at death, takes it back into her dark womb...The Mother Goddess represents both the life-giving, nurturing processes of nature, and the related processes of disintegration, death and decay. Life and death are inextricably linked, and both are essential for the continuation of existence.<sup>540</sup>

Of all the forms of Parvati, Diesel points to Kali in particular as a saviour who is worshipped as an independent deity, indicating that there are far more temples dedicated to the dark goddess than the light.<sup>541</sup> Kali provides a liberating, “post-patriarchal” model for women and men, challenging the unequal union between men and women that the Laws of Manu require by tradition.<sup>542</sup> She is a motivator for social change, and psychological strength, by defying and reversing patriarchal stereotypes.

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<sup>539</sup> Ibid., 57 – 58.

<sup>540</sup> Ibid., 59.

<sup>541</sup> Ibid., 58.

<sup>542</sup> 1998: 312.

By placing the two goddesses alongside one another, and comparing them within their different cultural and religious systems, which are separated not only geographically but also by time, their great commonality is apparent. I believe part of the reason for this may be that Hekate and Kali share the same origin, historically rooted before the time of the Indo-European invasion which I have mentioned in my literature review.<sup>543</sup> On this subject, Gross stresses that the strategy of the Indo-Europeans was not to fight against the existing worship of the goddesses but either to marry or mate the ancient goddesses in male dominated marriages with the Indo-European male gods, or to transform the goddesses into daughters of male gods.<sup>544</sup> Hekate and Kali may both be forms of the prehistoric Indo-European goddess, and may retain the primal functions of this ancient deity.

Another reason for their commonality may be the psychological need for goddesses of this nature within a social context. Diesel states that Kali is a ‘constant reminder of the dark side of life: of fear, destruction, death and decay’<sup>545</sup> and this statement can be applied to Hekate as well. This is perhaps why dark goddesses are necessary in each religious system. By incorporating goddesses that embrace the frightening stages of life that cannot be ignored and denied, one may begin to understand the processes of life and see them as liberating rather than as terrifying. Moreover, this would account for demonized goddesses in other religious systems far removed from the Greeks, Romans and Hindus, such as Coatlicue, the Aztec mother goddess, represented as part human, part snake. She has a thirst for blood, and her breasts are exposed under a necklace of human hands, hearts and skulls.<sup>546</sup> The Jungian archetype theory could possibly account for the psychological need for such rebellious goddesses. B. B. Powell offers a summary of Jung’s theory, stating that Jung, exploring the unconscious part of human nature, discerned complex symbols that are innate to human nature, and that this theory resembles Eastern religious teachings.<sup>547</sup> Powell surmises that for Jung, consciousness is like the bay of an ocean, while the ocean itself is the rest of the

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<sup>543</sup> See page 27 of this dissertation.

<sup>544</sup> 1996: 187 – 188.

<sup>545</sup> 1998: 219.

<sup>546</sup> Rostas 1992: 371.

<sup>547</sup> 2004: 653 – 654.

psychological activity that takes place which he calls the collective unconscious. From time to time great beings that live in the deep vast ocean swim into the bay, and these are called archetypes, like the Wise Old Man, the Divine Child, and the Earth Mother, which are ‘timeless recurrent images on which our emotional world and our myths are built. Certain groups of archetypes may dominate the consciousness of entire cultures for periods of time.’<sup>548</sup> Powell explains that the collective unconscious is also represented by the Great Mother goddess, who is the mother of the universe. She is a source of individual consciousness and of life itself, yet she threatens to swallow her own offspring.<sup>549</sup>

Hekate and Kali are needed worldwide today to foster tolerance between the sexes. As E. Kearns correctly articulates: ‘the characterization of women as worthless, lustful beings, unable to control themselves, is well documented from *puranic* discourses to tea-stall talk of the present day, and no doubt springs from causes similar to those found elsewhere among men: anxiety about paternity, the reification of women as the inevitably evil objects of men’s sexual desire, the gap between reality and an ideal of impossibly chaste womanhood.’<sup>550</sup> In addition to this, in contemporary South Africa, with its many languages, cultures, beliefs, and gender problems, goddesses like Hekate and Kali are needed to promote religious open-mindedness and bring eastern and western ideas together to be discussed, understood, and translated into effective social practices.

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<sup>548</sup> *Ibid.*, 654.

<sup>549</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>550</sup> 1992: 223.

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