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War Gods in Archaic Greece and Rome

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I. Introduction

In *The Elementary Forms of Religious Life*, Emile Durkheim argues “Primitive peoples extrapolate their systems of classification from what they know best, their social structures.”¹ Although Durkheim primarily studied Amerindian and aboriginal tribes of Australia, classicists quickly connected his theory to both Greek and Roman religion. In both societies, the family structure organized around a strong male patriarch (or *pater familias* in Rome). As Durkheim would have theorized, both religious systems have a male patriarch deity.

The similarities between the two pantheons are not coincidental. The Greek pantheon directly influenced the Roman pantheon. Livy tells the story of the last *lectisternium* in Rome, 217 B.C.E., that used twelve couches for six pairs of Roman male and female deities with the same general form as their Greek predecessors albeit with different names.² Father Zeus, for example, became Jupiter or *Ju Piter* and the two gods share etymology.³ The deities also appropriated mythic background, ritual, and function.

It would be mistaken, however, to derive Roman from Greek religion. Although Roman religion grew within a shadow of Greek influence, it also has unique influences from Etruscans, Latin tribes, Phoenicians, and its own social foundations. Phrases such as the “Graeco-Roman pantheon”⁴ and “assimilated Greek

¹ Von Hendy (2002) 40

² Livy 22.10.9

³ Leeming (2005) 128

⁴ A quick Google search lends countless examples. The phrase also appears regularly in scholarly work— see Tenney and Dunnett (1985) 65 as a paradigm. By calling the Roman gods an “assimilated Greek Pantheon,” scholars ignore the multiple other

Pantheon”⁵ form the background for a common erroneous conceptualization of Roman religion as a dependent descendent of Greek religion. In making a statement such as “assimilated Greek Pantheon,” a scholar seems to argue that Roman religion is simply derived from its preeminent Greek predecessor. While the Roman pantheon resembles the Greek divinities in form, it is very far from having identical function and content.

One example of the distinction between Greek and Roman religions is their respective characterizations of their male war deities. The differences between Ares and Mars extend beyond their names alone and reflect deeper differences between each culture’s attitudes towards war itself. By differentiating the meaning of ‘god of war’ more fully as it relates to each respective culture, we potentially glimpse deeper social facts regarding cultural mores with respect to violence. For example, when is war sanctioned in each society? When is war moral? How do the cultures treat their war deities?

The differing social environments of Greece and Rome led to far different personifications of the male war deity. In Greece, Ares takes up residence in the cultural margins. He has only a few myths, few temple cults, and generally lacks esteem. In *The Cults of the Greek States*, Lewis Richard Farnell describes Ares’ persona as “of less value for the social and religious history of Greece than any of the divinities hitherto considered”⁶ such as Zeus, Athena, and Hera. Rather than taking a

forces shaping Roman religion such as Etruscan, Latin, Phoenician, and Indo European predecessors.

⁵ Rexroth (1986) 64

⁶ Farnell (1977) 396

prominent position in the Greek pantheon, Ares became⁷ a marginal figure for Greek religion.

In his fringe state, Ares also attracted distinctively negative characteristics. Walter Burkert writes that to the Greeks, “Ares embodies everything that is hateful in war.”⁸ In Homeric myth, Zeus addresses Ares as “most loathsome god on Olympus.”⁹ In ancient Greek religion, Ares represents the rage and tumult of war while the female Athena represents “the intelligent and orderly use of war to defend the polis.”¹⁰ The two gods fall into “rigorously antithetical”¹¹ positions representing an ambivalent Greek culture’s two viewpoints towards war.

In ancient Rome, Mars occupies almost the opposite side of the spectrum from Ares. He held an esteemed central position in Roman religion throughout the evolution of Roman society. From the early eighth century B.C.E. until Theodosius I decreed that Christianity would be the official state religion more than a millennium later, Mars was commonly worshiped and popularly revered. Livy credits Mars with fathering both Romulus and Remus with the first Vestal Virgin, Rhea Silvia.¹² At the dawn of the Empire, Augustus embraces Mars Ultor as his standard bearer. The female god for Rome, Bellona, did not emerge until much later than Mars and occupied a place of lesser importance. The gender divide for war gods in Rome

⁷ ‘Became’ suggests that Ares, at one time, occupied a more important position in Greek religion. For a more detailed discussion of the idea, please see p.38.

⁸ Burkert (1985) 169

⁹ Hom. *Il.* 5.949

¹⁰ Graf (1996) 152

¹¹ Darmon (1991) 114

¹² Livy 1.4

reverses Greek tradition: Mars generally represents Athena's function while the female Bellona represents the bloodlust typical of Ares.

The contrast between these two male war gods, in particular their relative importance, undermines on any claim of complete continuity between Greek and Roman religious thought. Instead, ancient Greece and Rome seem to articulate their very different concepts of war and violence with two very different deities. The Roman assimilation of Ares into Mars encompassed his image but not his function.

In order to explain the differences between Greek and Roman war gods, we turn to the Archaic period. The period offers a view of each culture at an early enough point that their religion remains a medium for articulating values still under the process of definition. Additionally, the Archaic period highlights a geographic climate where both cultures communicated but retained individuality. The two societies certainly were in contact through trade as early as the Bronze Age. During the Archaic period, Greece and Rome had heavy exposure to each other's culture and religion. Differences between martial deities during the Archaic period, therefore, indicate something inherently 'Greek' or 'Roman' about the religious idea as opposed to a difference existing only because of a lack of cultural communication.

II. Geography and Cultural Exchange

Where did Greeks and Romans come into serious contact? Religious syncretism implies much more than occasional economic exchanges between cultures. Without continuous contact between societies, it seems unlikely that religious ideas would have jumped the divide between Greek *xenophobia* and Roman patriotism. If Greece and Rome do not reach a level of communication that justifies the possibility of syncretism, then differences between their martial deities could simply be the result of a lack of cultural exchange.

In roughly 770 and 750 BCE, Euboean colonists built the settlements of Pithekoussai (Ischia) and Kyme (Cumae) respectively.¹³ These two settlements make up both the first Greek cities in Magna Graecia and the furthest north. Due to their geographic and temporal locations, these two points were probably the first stable trading centers with Latin tribes and Rome.

As Beard argues, “Recent work... has cast doubt on the idea of an early, uncontaminated, native strand of genuine Roman religion.”¹⁴ The archaeological work done at Pithekoussai directly supports her claim. Pithekoussai, the first Greek colony founded near Rome, presents an early example of a cosmopolitan city with a wide variety of cultural representation and influences. Ridgway points to a large group of Egyptian type paste scarabs,¹⁵ Late Geometric pottery influenced by Corinthian and Athenian styles,¹⁶ and Phoenician writing on pottery shards.¹⁷ In

¹³ Cerchiali et al. (2004) 13

¹⁴ Beard et. al. (1998) 12

¹⁵ Ridgway (1992) 65

¹⁶ Ridgway (1992) 97

¹⁷ Ridgway (1992) 118

light of the wide variety of evidence, Pithekoussai had a cosmopolitan population with influences or expatriate populations coming from a wide variety of sources around the Mediterranean.

The international composition of the new colonies, however, does not mean that Greek influence on the Italic communities fell in second place. The Euboean colonists moving to Cumae and Ischia certainly did not abandon their homeland culture. Excavations at Cumae reveal imported Greek cups from the first half of the eighth century in tomb burials.¹⁸ The settlers also did not quickly adopt native traditions. Even two hundred years later, the pottery record shows fine ware depicting Homeric episodes.¹⁹ The Magna Graecia colonies, therefore, delivered a cultural bundle, that combined Greek art and culture with pan-Mediterranean influence, to Rome through steady mercantile contact.

Trade definitely took place between the Greek settlements and their Latin neighbors. Using modern roads, the distance between Rome and Naples (roughly the same geographic location as the most northern Greek settlements) is 150 miles. While estimates for trade ranges and movement speeds vary, a small trading caravan could dependably cover this distance in less than a week. In his estimates of Alexander's troop movements, Donald Engels writes that "small, light units of Alexander's army were capable of great speed, as much as forty or even fifty miles per day".²⁰ If traders could move that quickly, that would mean the distance could be traversed in three to four days.

¹⁸ Cerchiali et al. (2004) 46

¹⁹ Cerchiali et al. (2004) 47

²⁰ Engels (1978) 155

In order to move quantities of wares, however, they would most likely not have traveled with “small, light units” but instead used pack animals. The figures for that type of travel change slightly. Benjamin Wells estimates that the average trader could move about five miles per hour for six hours per day, and cites the ten day (480 km) journey from Rome to Brundisium as a “comfortable” trip.²¹ This places the trip from Cumae to Rome at roughly five days without accounting for road conditions.²²

Another option, albeit only feasible during sailing seasons, was naval-based trade. With sea trade as a viable choice for merchants, Cumae’s position allowed Euboeans to control the bay and the “sea route to the mouth of the Tiber, the island of Elba and the bay of Populonia opposite this.”²³ Not only did contact between Rome and Greek colonies in Magna Graecia occur regularly, but Euboean ships could sail along the Amalfi coast and up the Tiber directly into Rome. Sea travel would not have been as fast as Well’s numbers for land travel. Given favorable winds and coastline travel, Casson estimates that ships could travel between at three to four knots/hour.²⁴ By combining Casson’s and Well’s numbers, it seems that naval travel would be about 80% as fast as land travel per mile. The cost per mile, however, appears quite different. Mann estimates, based on Diocletian’s Price Edict, that land

²¹ Wells (1923) 14

²² The estimate does not factor in roads, and there may not have been any roads. Although Well’s figures for land travel do incorporate travel over unpaved terrain, for purely commercial travel the potential lack of roads could motivate ancient merchants to choose naval routes.

²³ Carratelli (1996) 145

²⁴ Casson (1951) 142

transport is 28 times as expensive using pack animals and 56 times as great using oxen as land travel.²⁵

With either estimation, traders could certainly travel back and forth with the potential for economic profit. The early Greek settlements and Rome grew into *poleis* within close geographic proximity. Combined with the ease of land and naval transport, we can safely assume that the Greek colonies did not exist in cultural isolation from their Roman counterparts.

Archaeological excavations in Magna Graecia and Rome show that the cultural interaction between the two settlements created material evidence. Shortly after the development of the first Greek settlements, Etruscan art dramatically changes. During the late eighth and early seventh centuries, “geometric vases in Etruria...whose shape and decoration are still Greek although they are clearly not imported from Greece or necessarily from Greek colonies”²⁶ start to dominate artistic taste. Bird decorations, typical of Euboean art, began to dominate Etruscan wall painting and pottery.²⁷ Finds in the Forum Boarium indicate heavy Greek artistic influence in Rome during the Late Geometric.²⁸ The sudden change in style indicates a high level of contact between Greek and Latin cities.

The new Greek colonies not only held onto their cultural heritage, but also spread their artistic taste and skill to their new Latin neighbors. J.L. Benson argues that early Republican art owes its form to the same late Bronze Age remnants

²⁵ Mann (1993) 279

²⁶ Boardman (2000) 201

²⁷ Giuliano (1996) 594

²⁸ Boardman (2000) 204

directing Greek development in the beginning of the Archaic period.²⁹ With stable Magna Graecia settlements, the Greek and Latin worlds began to seriously interact. Most notably for this paper, the material record shows indigenous cult sanctuaries created across central Italy in the Archaic period filled with votive offerings reflecting a strong Greek influence.³⁰ The Euboean colonists simultaneously produced mercantile goods and began to influence Italic religious expression.

While material evidence demonstrates an Italic artistic change following Greek colonization, it does not definitively indicate ideological change. A difficulty accompanies the material evidence. If archaeologists discover a statue or vase painting of an armed man, then how can we tell whether the man is a god, hero, or simple soldier? Material evidence also has the potential to disguise true ideological content. For example, the 'Mars' found at Todi (5/4th BCE) has military garb and the "inspiration is clearly Greek but the pose and the proportions and also the details of the face are conspicuously Etruscan".³¹ The statue resembles similar depictions of Ares. The bronze statue earned the name 'Mars' from the archaeologists excavating the site, but it could also represent Ares given its Greek inspiration.

Otto Brendel emphasizes this dilemma regarding Mars' identification in early Republican art while discussing fifth century Etruscan bronze elongated figures. He points out that "whether the far more numerous men— usually armed hoplites— were intended as images of the indigenous Mars or merely as human warriors

²⁹ Benson (1970) 234

³⁰ Giuliano (1996) 595

³¹ Strong (1988) 33

remains undecided.”³² The same difficulty emerged for Greek scholars when excavating archaic kouroi. While the kouros type evokes Apollo’s image, it “was not confined to Apollo but was a favourite expression of the early Greek sculptor with a variety of meanings.”³³ Because these figures lack identifying descriptions, or primary texts describing them, material representations of war gods in Magna Graecia from the Archaic period can rarely provide secure identification.

Without clear material evidence indicating the transmission of religious concepts about war gods between Rome and Greece, studying Mars and Ares in the late 9th to early 6th centuries requires a different approach. Because of the variety of parent poleis for the colonies of Magna Graecia, it is no stretch to assume that Rome met with a Pan-Hellenic conceptualization of Greek religion. Each colony no doubt brought its own regional conception of Greek religion. The geographic variety of their parent poleis, however, indicates that Rome received such a varied group of regional ideas that the common denominator of Pan-Hellenic religious conceptions would link them together in a patchwork cultural transmission.

Past scholarship has searched for direct material or literary evidence of Archaic Mars or early Archaic Ares to explain their conceptual divergence (or confluence) in later centuries. In both societies, the direct evidence for either deity is so sparse that scholarly discussion is extremely limited. In order to broaden the potential for meaningful discourse, the paper will use social facts regarding violence and war to incorporate a greater sphere of available evidence. By examining each deity in reverse using the Durkheimian cultural phenomenon that led to their

³² Brendel and Ridgway (1995) 311

³³ Richter (1970) 2

characterization, we can explain how two societies mapped such different attributes onto their respective war gods.

In the next several chapters, I will examine ways in which myth, ritual, and artistic representation of martial activity in both Greece and Rome reflected each culture's attitudes towards warfare from the late ninth to early sixth centuries. I then explore how each society articulated their ideas onto their martial deities. For Greek religion, I largely rely on Homeric texts but also refer to the Classical period's reflection of attitudes towards violence that began in the Archaic period. For Roman religion, I examine the Romulus myth, martial festival rituals and analyze sociological evidence from the Archaic period to develop a working theory of the function of martial deities in early Rome. In the last chapter, I offer discussion of possible reasons for differences and inversions between the Greek and Roman gendered martial deities.

II. Panhellenic Attitudes towards Violence and War

The social world described in Homer reflects the values of Archaic Greece. The aristocracy formed a zero-sum system, structured by competition for *kleos* and *time*.³⁴ Briefly, *time* is the social rank in the zero-sum system, concretely embodied by material wealth gained from fighting while *kleos* is the glory that lasted beyond death. War, therefore, is both a contest with allies and competition with enemies. By gaining *time* during one's lifetime, the epic hero earned *kleos* that outlives him. For a Greek soldier, the opportunity to earn "immortal *kleos* gives the hero cause to die young"³⁵ and therefore represents the ideological reason justifying the aristocratic agonistic system of exchange.

For example, Achilles' death is in some ways a choice influenced by anger and desire for revenge. In Book 9, Achilles reveals a prophecy told to him by Thetis. If he fights, he will die young but earn great *kleos*. If he returns home, he will live a long life but without *kleos*.³⁶ His return to battle, therefore, emphasizes that his desire to avenge Patroclus' death overrules his desire to live. As shown by Achilles' quarrel with Agamemnon over "fair-cheeked Briseis," the warriors considered the quest for both *kleos* and *time* so vitally important that they would refuse to fight if the opportunity to gain them disappeared. As a consequence, although the Greeks beg Achilles to return to battle, his decision to withdraw from the fighting appears to be a reasonable response to Agamemnon's decision to take Briseis. Moreover, as Donna

³⁴ Beidelman (1989) 231

³⁵ Morris (1989) 305

³⁶ *Il.* 9.410-16

Wilson has shown, Agamemnon poisons his offer of gifts in Book Nine.³⁷ As a result, he leaves Achilles with little choice outside of his refusal to reconcile.

Three principle fields of activity delineate the areas in which elites may win *kleos* and *time*. In the *Iliad*, Homer carefully delineates three hierarchies. Agamemnon is the leader of the troops, Achilles is the best fighter, and Nestor is the best in council. Homer frequently describes heroes, forces of nature, gods, and powerful non-human things such as the river Scamander as full of *arête*.³⁸ The word translates approximately as “excellence,” especially in martial valor where a man who is “*aristos*” is thus “best” at something. In their separate power hierarchies, Agamemnon, Achilles, and Nestor each demonstrate *arête*.

Arête can thus take the form of *bie* or *metis*. For example, Nestor and Odysseus both become emblematic examples of *metis* while Achilles is preeminent in *bie* during his *aristeia* in the second half of the *Iliad*. *Metis* and *bie*, however, can have positive and negative aspects. Although Achilles fights all the way to the gates of Troy, he ultimately ends up defiling the corpse of Hector in his rage. The *Odyssey*, on the other hand, celebrates the positive and negative aspects of Odysseus’ *metis*. In a developing culture looking outward at impressive natural forces such as the sea, it follows that Archaic Greeks would naturally understand power in both positive and negative forms.

In Archaic Greece, this dualism repeatedly maps out onto ritual. The Athenians comfortably worshiped Zeus in multiple guises, such as Zeus *Meilichios*,

³⁷ Wilson (2002) 74-75

³⁸ Jaeger and Highet (1986) 5

who had apotropaic functions and was worshiped in thanksgiving festivals³⁹ but who could also be understood to be the god of the dead. The sense of dualism was not restricted to Zeus. The Greeks commonly combined both the positive and negative sides of natural forces into the same deity.

In Greek martial religious activity, however, their dualistic sense of power was distributed into two gods. For the positive and negative sides of warfare, Archaic Greeks developed their deities to mirror a nuanced view of violence that encompasses both Ares and Athena. In light of the Greeks' conformity to Levi Straussian structuralism, their view of violence ends up unsurprisingly ambiguous between positive and negative.

The concept of generative violence, while strange to a modern society, would have felt quite natural to the Greeks. In the tradition of Homeric epic, "the tradition of the godlike man in mortal casing who learns to accept death both as a proper part of the natural cycle, and as a proper expression of his relation to the gods, is fundamental to Greek poetry."⁴⁰ Epic *kleos*, however, is a way of escaping death and a path into literary immortality. Achilles may be the victor in the *Iliad*, but Hektor, breaker of horses, is the subject of the epic poem's last sentence. The poem avoids the taboo subject of Achilles' death.⁴¹ As a result, although audiences would have known his death was imminent, the quintessential ephebe earns a legacy of eternal liminality without aging or death. Violence, therefore, both destroyed and preserved Achilles' corporeal and intangible legacy respectively.

³⁹ Simon (2002) 13

⁴⁰ Vermeule (1979) 120

⁴¹ Pache (2009) 106

The Greeks also conceived of violence in cyclical terms. The creation myth in Hesiod's *Theogony* begins with cyclical violence between generations of gods that both destroys and creates the Greek Pantheon until finally ending the cycle with the birth of Athena.⁴² The *Theogony* exemplifies a Greek acceptance of conflict as simultaneously positive and negative.

The Trojan War, and its reception in Greek thought, reflects and may help account for the Greek embrace of simultaneously contradicting values. For the Archaic Greeks, the war and its aftermath filled their collective memory. Given the absence of warfare in the Archaic Period, on the assumed scale of the Trojan War, the Homeric epics would have shaped society's opinions on warfare and violence while filling the void of personal experience.

At times, the message the epics deliver seems counterintuitive. For example, the success at Troy seems as if it should lead to a society that embraces war. The Greek victory at Troy was widely remembered as the greatest Greek military conquest for centuries to come. From the mid sixth century to the mid fifth century, the fall of Troy is one of the most common images in Attic vase painting.⁴³ Thucydides uses the Trojan War as comparanda to the Peloponnesian War in order to emphasize the superior scale of his own subject matter.⁴⁴ For the Greeks, the heroes of the Trojan War belonged to a semi-mythical Golden Age⁴⁵ of *arête*.

⁴² *Theog.* 924

⁴³ Anderson (1997) 192-207

⁴⁴ Thucydides *Hist.* 1-21

⁴⁵ Although, since Hesiod's heroic age is the only period not associated with any metal, perhaps 'epitomy of grandeur' would fit better.

Victory, however, came at such a monumental cost that the Homeric epics presume an audience that embraces war while understanding its tragedy. The act of conquering brings material wealth and potential property to the polis, but also introduces intra-polis competition inside the elite class as shown through the varied and extensive struggles the Greek heroes encountered during their returns. Archaic Greeks also heavily empathized with the defeated Trojans. In Archaic art, “treatment of the Trojan War reveals empathy for the bravery and suffering of both sides.”⁴⁶ Rather than reveling in victory, the Greeks seem to show sensitivity and a keen awareness on both an individual and collective level towards their newly defeated enemies.

The Greek awareness of the defeated’s suffering may stem in part from a feeling of remorse regarding their wartime transgressions. For example, during the burning of the city, Aias the Lesser supposedly raped Cassandra. In anger, Athena ultimately attempts to cause his death during his naval voyage home.⁴⁷ As Naiden discusses, there are actually several versions of the myth. In some, Aias rapes Cassandra while in others he defiles Athena’s temple, at which Cassandra is a priestess.⁴⁸ Both versions of the myth fit a formula of wartime transgression and divine retribution.

Although Aias acted as an individual, Athena punishes the entire fleet. In Book 3, angry Athena asks Zeus to scatter the Greek fleet and then personally

⁴⁶ Morris (1989) 460

⁴⁷ Hom. *Od.* 4.500-11. Aias survives Athena’s attempt, but his ensuing boast angers Poseidon enough to knock Aias back into the water where he drowned.

⁴⁸ Naiden (2006) 152

attacks Aias. Even though Aias' action was individual, Athena's punishment of the collective group seems to emphasize a sense of collective guilt.

Aias was not the only transgressor. Neoptolemus throws Astyanax (Hector's infant son) off the walls of Troy.⁴⁹ In an even more gruesome version, Neoptolemus uses the infant child to beat the elder Priam to death. The latter version appears frequently in Archaic art.⁵⁰ The myth acknowledges a concept of 'inappropriate' warfare. During the Greek's sack of Troy, at the very moment of their victory and the best possible outcome for the entire war, the army still observed distinctions between moral and immoral martial action. Although both iterations of the Neoptolemus myth primarily deal with his individual guilt, collective empathy towards the defeated enemy and guilt over the Aegean heroes actions during the sack of Troy were important themes in Archaic Greek art.

Another way of examining the Archaic Greek cultural concept of war's negative aspects is to look at the period's cultural legacy in the Classical period. The Homeric epics were written down in the middle of the sixth cent. B.C.E⁵¹ and their formation stand out as the largest cultural contribution of Archaic Greece to Greek culture. It logically follows, therefore, that both the celebration and misery of war that Homer describes would resonate strongly with both the Archaic and Classical Greeks. Accordingly, the Athenians, after Persian Wars, "seem to have identified more with the suffering of the Trojans than with the heroism of the Greeks."⁵² Faced

⁴⁹ Monro (1884) 23

⁵⁰ Hedreen (2001) 64

⁵¹ See Cook (2004) N. 53-54 for discussion regarding dating the change from oral to textual tradition.

⁵² Morris (1989) 460

with an aggressive superpower, Athens developed a cultural narrative in which they now represented their alleged past enemy in the present war. The Parthenon metopes, for example, show that “in the wake of the Persian sack of Athens in 480 the Athenians seem to have identified more with the Trojans than with the Achaeans.”⁵³ The rapidity at which the Athenians gravitated towards identifying with Trojans speaks volumes about the preexisting cultural climate of showing empathy and sympathy to the conquered.

The culture also represented this empathy in art. In Aeschylus’ *Persians*, the empathy for an enemy extends to an even further level. As Casey Dué succinctly argues, the play invokes compassion in the Greek audience for the Persians suffering from war in a play only ten years after their direct conflict threatened the very existence of everything Hellenic.⁵⁴ Even though the identity of the conquered changed, the audience wept for the Persians as they did for the Ionians fighting against the Persians during *The Fall of Miletus*.⁵⁵

With the Homeric epics imprinted on the culture of Archaic Greece, the society adopted a dualistic perspective on violence and war. Simultaneously, the Greeks saw themselves as both invading conquerors of Troy and invaded underdogs defending themselves against the Persians with their city sacked and in ruins. Although the Trojan War ended in Greek victory, the widespread suffering resonated deeply with the Greek consciousness alongside joy and celebration.

⁵³ Dué (2006) 96

⁵⁴ Dué (2006) 58-62

⁵⁵ Krentz (2010) 75

The Athenians' divided views toward war maps out onto their two war gods: Athena and Ares. In a broad sense, the female Athena represents the positive aspects of martial encounters while the male Ares represents the negative potential. Athena earns the epithet *Nike*, or victory, and three major temples atop the Acropolis. Pausanias describes the enormous bronze statue of Athena Promachos as tall enough that ships rounding the cape of Sounion could glimpse her head on top of the Acropolis.⁵⁶ If the statue's height alone did not awe visitors, its position on a direct sight line of the propylaeion would create an instant impression. Its height and placement combined to symbolize Athena's centrality to the *polis* and her martial function of defense and civil order.

Although Athena is a martial deity and therefore a goddess of conflict, she sometimes even stops violence. In Aeschylus' *Eumenides*, Athena persuades the Furies to enter a new order of government dispensation. By doing so, she stops the succession of retributive violence and substitutes a new system based on the jury and legal system.⁵⁷ The Furies in the poem represent an older form of conflict resolution and take on a function of elemental violence similar to Ares. Athena, rather than endorsing their method, Athena instead advocates a nonviolent resolution.

In the *Iliad*, Athena stops rash killing and preserves natural order on at least two instances. During the first council, she convinces Achilles to sheath his sword and prevents him from killing Agamemnon out of anger stemming from the conflict

⁵⁶ Paus. 1.28.2

⁵⁷ Winnington-Ingram (1954) 21

about Briseis.⁵⁸ In effect, she prevents Achilles from violating the separation of the fighting and leadership hierarchies and preserves the fractured balance between the two classes of heroes.⁵⁹

Athena also stops Ares from returning to battle. Ares hears about the death of his son Ascalaphus, arms himself, yokes the horses, and prepares to fight before Athena convinces him otherwise.⁶⁰ Since Zeus had forbidden Ares from returning to the battle at that time, he would have caused a significant affront to the Olympic order. Once again, Athena regulates inappropriate violence.

In each of these instances, Athena represents a powerful image of *metis* rather than *bie*. Although she is a war deity, she commonly acts as a voice of reason rather than a violent elemental force. As the patron god of Odysseus, she grants the Greeks victory at Troy through the trick of the Trojan Horse rather than Achilles' *bie* filled *aristeia*.

Ares represents the other side of martial activity and *bie* at its strongest. At a basic level, Ares and Athena form an opposition in the *Iliad* that would make Levi-Strauss sigh with satisfaction. Ares pushes the warrior into a fury that confuses human and god whereas Athena rebukes him as *alloprousallos*, or as changing sides at will during battle, and his *mainomenos*, or insane anger.⁶¹ Where Athena recommends reason, Ares demands rage.

⁵⁸ *Il.* 1.182-232

⁵⁹ Athena's actions here seem almost ironic—Agamemnon has already broken the balance between the two types of hero.

⁶⁰ *Il.* 15.113-120

⁶¹ Vernant (1991) 254-55

In the *Iliad*, Ares primarily receives the epithets “murderous,” “violent,” “brazen,” and “man-slaughtering.” In several cases, he takes the formulaic expression “Ares, manslaughtering, blood-stained, stormer of strong walls.”⁶² Although the author at times uses more positive adjectives such as “strong” or “rapid,” even those epithets emphasize his power rather than indicate an inherently positive association. The *Iliad* characterizes Ares as a negative symbol of *bie*, or physical might, in its worst manifestations.

In Hesiod’s *Theogony*, Ares also gets credit for fathering Deinos (Fear) and Phobos (Panic).⁶³ In the *Odyssey*, we learn of a lurid tale about Ares’ affair with Aphrodite and his public humiliation in front of the rest of the gods after Aphrodite’s reasonably jealous husband Hephaestus traps the adulterous couple *in flagrante delicto*.⁶⁴

With that sort of literary context, it should come as no surprise that Farnell considers Ares a marginal deity. Burkert characterizes Ares as a god with few *aitia* who is the embodiment of the total negative potential of war.⁶⁵ Both authors conceptualize Ares as a quasi-brute with only a few ritual traditions and a tenuous hold on his position in the Greek Pantheon.

Recent studies of Ares have added depth to Burkert’s and Farnell’s original ideas. Tamara Neal points out that “Ares is an exception to the convention that the gods have no desire for ‘nourishment’”⁶⁶ because throughout the *Iliad* the god takes

⁶² See *Il.* 5.29, 5.356, 5.455

⁶³ Hes. *Theog.* 934

⁶⁴ *Od.* 8.267-366

⁶⁵ Burkert 1985 (169)

⁶⁶ Neal 2006 (28)

on adjectives such as “insatiable of fighting.”⁶⁷ Unlike the other gods on Olympus who feed on nectar, Homer conceptualizes Ares as desiring blood. At 5.288, Diomedes threatens to glut Ares with his opponent’s blood and at 20.77 Achilles plans to glut Ares with Hektor’s blood. In both passages, the poem blends Ares’ immortal nature with mortal, even animal, traits.

Neal also makes an interesting connection between Ares and Achilles. Both characters, as the epic progresses, stop eating and instead satisfy their carnal needs through battle. Neal writes, “Like Ares, Achilles would glut himself on blood and death, not as an animal feeding on prey, but driven by a nihilistic urge that is visited on his own kind.”⁶⁸ Achilles verbally emphasizes this need when he wishes he were able to eat raw flesh in order to do even more damage to Hektor.⁶⁹ Both the hero and the god exhibit war’s worst aspect and its potential for complete destruction.

⁶⁷ For a complete list, please refer to Appendix One.

⁶⁸ Neal 2006 (33)

⁶⁹ *Il.* 23.346-348

Appendix I: Ares' Epithets in the Iliad

Adjective/Epithet	Number of Uses	Places in Poem
Violent	11	5.29, 5.35, 5.355, 5.454, 5.506, 5.756, 5.829, 5.904, 15.123, 15.142, 24.497
Murderous	9	4.449, 5.909, 8.263, 8.348, 11.294, 12.130, 13.802, 20.45, 21.421
Manslaughtering	6	5.30, 5.455, 5.18, 5.846, 5.909, 13.298
Brazen	5	5.704, 5.859, 5.866, 7.147, 16.543
Running	4	13.328, 13.528, 16.784, 17.72
Bloodstained	3	5.30, 5.455, 5.844
Fights under the shield's guard	3	5.286, 20.77, 22.266
Insatiable of fighting	3	5.385, 5.863, 6.203
Huge	3	13.444, 13.522, 16.613
Stormer of strong walls	2	5.30, 5.455
Sacker of cities	2	5.333, 20.152
Stark	2	5.461, 5.845
Furious	2	5.716, 21.406
Double-faced liar	2	5.830, 5.889
Rapid	2	8.215, 13.295
Strong	1	2.515
Sudden	1	5.427
Cursed	1	5.716
Thing of fury	1	5.830
Evil wrought	1	5.830
Most hateful	1	5.889
Hateful	1	18.208
Madman	1	15.123
Dangerous	1	17.210
Who rallies men	1	17.398
Blood-dripping	1	21.402
Bellowing	1	13.522
Spear-shaking	1	15.605
Shield-stabber	1	21.391

III. Archaic Rome

Compared to Greece, Rome during the late ninth to early fifth centuries B.C.E seems to have a much more singular and positive attitude to warfare. At the outset, it should be noted that we must radically alter the approaches employed in analyzing the Greek material. We have virtually no textual evidence from Archaic Rome, let alone anything on the scale of the Homeric epics or even the *Theogony*. We also have no images of the gods “for more than one hundred and seventy years” after Rome’s founding.⁷⁰ Without contemporary evidence, attempts to reconstruct Archaic Rome rely on chronologically later evidence.

On such source is Livy’s story of Romulus and Remus and the twins’ famous quarrel. Romulus and a crew of workers begin to build a wall around the Palatine hill. Remus mocks his creation, pointing out that the trench is too small. In response, Romulus orders the workmen to kill anyone who trespasses the wall. Remus hops over the ditch, and he is “slain by Romulus in a passion.”⁷¹ In another version attributed to Diodorus, Romulus orders one of his workmen to kill Remus with the shovel he was using to build Rome .⁷²

The myth follows a well-attested pattern of world twin myths where one twin dies in some fashion. Unlike Cain and Abel, however, Romulus kills Remus without an ensuing punishment. God does not sentence Romulus to be “a fugitive and a wanderer on the earth,”⁷³ instead, Romulus becomes the first king of Rome

⁷⁰ Collins (1997) 212. The original quote comes from St. Augustine, who in turn quotes Varro.

⁷¹ Livy 1.7.3

⁷² Wiseman (1999) 9

⁷³ *Genesis* 4.12

and is eventually deified as Romulus Quirinus. Although Diodorus' version does not have Romulus directly killing Remus, the Roman audience would have attributed guilt from a wrongful killing to the commander giving the order and not the soldier executing it.⁷⁴

Without negative repercussion, the myth suggests that Romulus' killing is somehow just. The reasoning makes more sense in light of the Roman concept of the *pomerium*. While the emperors changed the boundaries of the *pomerium* multiple times, Romulus earns credit for being the first to create the imaginary delineation of Roman social space.⁷⁵ Crossing into, or invading, that space would result in justified military retaliation regardless of whether the transgressor was Remus or Julius Caesar.

The Romulus and Remus story also acts as a paradigmatic example of Archaic Roman attitudes towards violence. In a small society composed primarily of farmers in central Italy, violence and warfare were necessary for survival and condoned as long as the martial action benefited society as a whole. The mythology of early Rome is one of local regional struggle over "property" in the form of land or women. In the small geographic area of central Italy, Romans probably viewed their neighboring tribes as enemies, regardless of their probable kinship, as a response to economic pressure stemming from the lack of available land.⁷⁶ Early conflict, therefore, was much more similar to a survival instinct than a quest for imperialism even though the wars did often end in territorial gain.

⁷⁴ Rupke (1992) 59

⁷⁵ Platner and Ashby (1929) 'Pomerium' 392-396

⁷⁶ Frank (1921) 18

For most of the late ninth to early fifth centuries, seven kings ruled Rome. Although little direct evidence from this era remains, later Roman historians certainly believe the regal period took place. Recently, archaeological evidence has begun to support these dates and the idea of a kingship. For example, a bucchero cup dating to the late 6th century had the graffito REX on its side and was most likely “reserved for the use of a political or priestly king.” In 509 B.C.E., the Romans took power away from the Tarquin dynasty to create the republic. The stories detailing the warfare surrounding this event evoke a cultural memory reminiscent of Romulus defending the *pomerium* against Remus.⁷⁷ Horatius Cocles single handedly defends a bridge leading into Rome against an Etruscan army.⁷⁸ Once again, the Archaic Roman concept of hero was that of defender rather than aggressor. Killing, as a part of war, was sanctioned as long as the act benefited the city as a whole.⁷⁹ Horatius’ *aristeia* held off the enemy for the benefit of the city. As a contrast, Achilles’ *aristeia* benefited himself first and indirectly helped the Greeks by killing Trojan enemies. The goal for Horatius was based around his concern for the collective while Achilles acted in his self-interest.

Even in the Regal period, the Roman citizens were roughly divided into patricians and plebians by socioeconomic status. Since the Republic formed in the wake of political upheaval was an oligarchy, we can infer that the aristocratic class assuming control already had some measure of inherent power limited in the regal

⁷⁷ Holloway (1994) 62

⁷⁸ Livy 2.10

⁷⁹ Rupke (1992) 58

period by the monarchy's control of the plebians.⁸⁰ With the monarchs removed, Roman society's camouflaged preexisting social distinctions materialized. The social classes, of utmost importance in the Roman Republic, undoubtedly shaped Roman religion in the Regal period.

In the 20th century, Georges Dumézil sought to establish religious commonalities between seemingly discrete cultures linked only by their common ancestor language. If religion in ancient Rome shares common traits with Norse and Hindu religions, then those traits likely came from their proto-Indo-European ancestors. Dumézil argues that the Hindu, Roman, and Norse pantheons reflect a tripartite division of the society's main occupations: sovereign, warrior, and farmer/herdsman.⁸¹ In archaic Roman religion, these three functions supposedly manifest themselves in the archaic triad of Jupiter (the sovereign), Mars (the warrior), and Quirinus (the farmer/fertility god). Assuming an early Roman society formed of the sovereign class, the patrician class, and the plebian farmer class, Dumézil's argument appears reasonable. It falls apart, however, when applied to Mars.

Of the three gods in the archaic triad, Mars attracts a great deal of attention from critical scholarship because of his etymology and probable slippage in function. Unlike other deities' names, "the name Mars has no Indo-European etymology" and therefore most likely has an indigenous Roman origin.⁸² More

⁸⁰ Frank (1921) 19

⁸¹ Mallory and Adams (1997) 232

⁸² Bonnefoy (1992) 134

importantly, a strong collection of evidence supports the idea that Mars was not solely a military deity in archaic Rome.

For example, the Arval brethren were a group associated with “mobilizing divine forces for the success of crops in the field”.⁸³ In a third century inscription, these brethren chant a prayer to Mars using a repetitive version of his name:

Marmar. The prayer is “probably the oldest extant Roman prayer, dating perhaps to the end of the regal period”.⁸⁴ While the prayer is cryptic, the text represents the earliest evidence for any function of Mars.

Another example of an agricultural/fertility function of Mars comes from early Roman calendary months. If we can trust Macrobius and Censorius⁸⁵, Numa added January and February to an even older ten month calendar that included the two months sacred to Mars: March and October.⁸⁶ March and October signify the opening and closing of both the military and agricultural seasons.

Mars had specific religious events in both of these months dating at least to the early Republic. The Quinquadratus was held on March 19, where Mars purified the arms at the beginning of the war/agricultural season. Four days later, the Salii sacrificed to Mars at the Tubilustrium in order to purify the war bugles. At the end of the war/agricultural season, the Tigillum Sororium on October 1 included a purification sacrifice to Mars. The October *equus* sacrificed a horse to Mars on

⁸³ Turcan (2000) 71

⁸⁴ Warrior (2002) 38

⁸⁵ Both sources require some caution, since they write about a semi-mythical king's actions occurring centuries earlier.

⁸⁶ Philip (1921) 9

October 15.⁸⁷ Each of these festivals combines a traditionally agricultural activity, purification, and martial elements.

The October *equus* offers an illustrative example of the dilemmas encountered when scholars attempt to funnel the god into a purely martial or agricultural role. Dumézil's supporters argue that Mars' only involvement in the festival comes from the military association. In the ritual's proceedings, however, the officiating priest placed loaves of bread onto the sacrificial horse's head in thanks to Mars.⁸⁸ A grain sacrifice is not what we would expect in a sacrifice to a war god. Once again, representations of both martial activity and agricultural success blend. Whether this offering correlates to Mars' military protection or his support for the harvest's success is almost impossible to distinguish.

Although Dumézil's effort to categorize Mars as a purely martial deity is understandable, there is important evidence directly linking him to agricultural functions. Several references to Mars and agricultural related offerings in Cato's *De Agri Cultura* probably represent a religious tradition dating to well before his description in the second century B.C.E. First, Cato describes a *lustratio agri*⁸⁹ in which the farmer supplicant sacrifices a *suovetaurilia* to Mars asking him to

Keep away, ward off, and avert diseases...barrenness, crop loses, disasters and unseasonable weather; and so that you will allow the harvests, the grain crops, the vineyards, and the orchards to flourish and achieve a productive maturity; and so that you will protect the shepherds and the flocks and bestow good health and strength upon me and my home and my family.⁹⁰

⁸⁷ Bonnefoy (1992) 134

⁸⁸ Turcan (2000) 79

⁸⁹ Cato *Agri*. 141

⁹⁰ Warrior (2002) 37

Instead of describing typical military functions, the farmer asks Mars to care for the crops, ‘avert diseases’ like the plague-controlling Apollo, and even ‘bestow good health’. Even the *suovetaurilia* itself invokes the three agricultural activities of grazing (sheep), pasturing (pig), and plowing (cow). The only military related image comes towards the end of the prayer when the farmer asks for protection. The request, however, is for a blanket form of protection. Instead of a request for the typical military protection against cattle-raids, the supplicant asks for a form of protection much more common of an agriculture/fertility deity. Instead of a sole military dimension, “Mars takes on the three functions...of Indo-European society”.⁹¹ The passage has come to symbolize the procrustean nature of Dumézil’s theory in the eyes of modern scholarship.

While most scholars stop after discussing Cato’s mention of Mars in 141, he makes another controversial reference to the deity in *De Agri*. 83. Depending on the translation chosen, Cato either writes “To keep oxen in good health, an offering must be made in daylight to Mars and Silvanus”⁹² or “Mars Silvanus”⁹³ with Silvanus demoted to the status of an epithet.⁹⁴ The two versions each have scholarly support their interpretations, and most scholars end up concluding “It is unclear whether Silvanus is an epithet for

⁹¹ Turcan (2000) 41

⁹² Turcan (2000) 38

⁹³ Burriss (1925) 221

⁹⁴ The original Latin for *De Agri* 83 reads “Marti Silvano in silva interdus in capita singula boum votum facito.” Translations arguing for Silvanus used as an epithet depend on inserting a connecting ‘and.’

Mars or a separate deity in his own right”.⁹⁵ Even if Mars and Silvanus are separate, the passage still makes another interesting connection between Mars and pastoral patronage that belongs outside of his role as war god in Dumézil’s tripartite system.

If Mars and Silvanus are connected, however, the passage then makes Silvanus, a known agricultural deity, a permanent aspect of the ‘war’ god even if the aspect is not felt in every cult. Evidence both from the phrase’s context in the passage and sources outside Cato corroborate the connection. First, the supplicant makes a singular ‘offering’ and would most likely need to make separate offerings if Cato did not use Silvanus as an epithet.⁹⁶

Second, several links between Mars and Silvanus exist outside Cato’s passage. An inscription from 39 BCE on an altar dedicated to Silvanus follows the woodland god’s name with the letters “MAR”.⁹⁷ Although somewhat speculative, some scholars make the case that the letters represent ‘Mars’.⁹⁸ The Mars-Silvanus connection also appears in Livy 2.72, when the Romans hear the voice of Silvanus in 503 BCE proclaiming their military victory.⁹⁹ At first glance, Silvanus seems to take on a military aspect. Alternately, Livy could have abbreviated Mars Silvanus to his epithet, Silvanus.¹⁰⁰ This interpretation conveniently explains the traditionally woodland god’s seemingly strange juxtaposition with military contexts.

⁹⁵ Dorcey (1992) 9

⁹⁶ Palmer (1978) 242

⁹⁷ Burriss (1925) 221

⁹⁸ For a deeper investigation, see Taylor (1923) 121

⁹⁹ Dorcey (1992) 153

¹⁰⁰ Dorcey (1992) 154

While at first the epithet may seem incongruous, the practice of assigning epithets to Mars has contemporary parallels with his possible epithet as Silvanus. Mars in the Augustan and Imperial periods takes on several foreign epithets, but the archaic Mars also has several epithets indigenous to Roman culture. Before recent intensification of scholarly interest on archaic Mars, Smith presented a quite simple version of Mars' roles: "The warlike Mars was called Gradivus, as the rustic god was called Silvanus, while, in his relation to the state, he bore the name of Quirinus".¹⁰¹ While he certainly oversimplifies the case (see the previous paragraphs on the Silvanus epithet), the ancient commentator Servius corroborates the epithets of Gradivus and Quirinus in his commentary on the *Aeneid*.¹⁰² Although the practice of assimilating Mars with an agricultural god¹⁰³ seems uncommon outside of Silvanus, Mars did obtain epithets to describe his different functions.

A Silvanus or Quirinus epithet attached to Mars would provide evidence for functional slippage and overlap inside Dumézil's tripartite conception. Instead of imagining Mars as a purely military deity, the evidence discussed above supports an opposing theory in which the archaic Mars represents an agricultural-military hybrid that extends beyond Dumézil's exclusive martial function. Dumézil to the end argued that "Mars was

¹⁰¹ Smith (1864) 'Mars'

¹⁰² Servius (1881) 1.292, 6.859

¹⁰³ While Mars has little evidence for Archaic epithets expressing varied function, the practice in general is common enough. For example, the Greeks comfortably assigned Athene the epithets *Nike* and *Hygeia*.

essentially military and all possible agricultural elements were exposed as military or as the result of an evolution.” Other Roman scholars accepted the potential for Mars’ extended function. Georg Wissowa “differentiated between a Roman military Mars and an Italic Mars with primitive agricultural features”.¹⁰⁴

Romans also had a female war god, Bellona, but her relation to Mars inverts the relation between Athena and Ares while maintaining the gender pairing. While Ares was full of rage, Mars was a hybrid military/agriculture/fertility deity more similar to Athena. Likewise, Bellona was a female deity who had more in common with Ares than Athena. Specifically, Romans compared her to both Enyo, companion of Ares,¹⁰⁵ and to the Cappadocian goddess Ma.¹⁰⁶ Each of these three female goddesses are almost equivalent to personified battle-rage. Bellona, however, did not emerge into any sort of prominence until the late republic, largely under Sulla. She appears rarely in myth, but Vergil does mention her at 7.319 and 8.703.¹⁰⁷ In the latter description, she carries a bloody whip. Plutarch, Juvenal, Tibullus, and Horace each provide support for an early Augustan frenzied Bellona but there is scant evidence before that for the goddess.¹⁰⁸

The archaic Roman, therefore, worshiped a male martial deity with dual functions and possibly did not recognize his counterpart female deity

¹⁰⁴ Versnel (1985) 137

¹⁰⁵ Palmer (1975) 655

¹⁰⁶ Plut. *Sulla* 9.4

¹⁰⁷ Lake (2008)

¹⁰⁸ Bailey (1932) 313 n. 35

until much later. Although absence of evidence is not evidence of absence, the lack of earlier evidence for Bellona combined with her foreign *aitia* seem to indicate at least a possibility of a later incorporation in Roman religious life. An acceptance of the hybrid Mars confirms and refutes alternate parts of Dumézil's theory. An agricultural Mars means that Dumézil's trifunctional archaic triad of sovereign/warrior/farmer possibly did not exist in Archaic Rome. As Arnaldo Momigliano points out in his critique of Dumézil, "that specialization could hardly have existed in a city where the peasants were soldiers, and the soldiers filled the priesthoods".¹⁰⁹

A basic problem in debating Dumézil's theory emerges here. Without more evidence of Mars in his earliest formation, neither Dumézil nor I can securely argue how the god began. Mars could have primarily been a hybrid deity, a war deity that picked up agricultural adaptations, or a fundamentally agricultural deity that absorbed martial aspects. Dumézil justifies arguing for a primary martial focus in a remarkably circular fashion. Mars, in a sense, must be martial because Dumézil's Indo-European social superstructure suggests that he was. Mars' "proven" martial beginnings then validate the same superstructure that originally supported a definition of Mars as martial.

Rather than having the caste social organization Dumézil saw in Hindu or Norse civilizations, archaic Rome was a collection of farmers defending their fields from attack and filling administrative positions as the city demanded. Unlike Greece, where the elite had a monopoly on war, the

¹⁰⁹ Momigliano (1984) 322

plebians of early Rome appear to claim martial activity as their provenance. Instead of Dumézil's tripartite system, early Rome much more closely resembled a bipartite social structure formed by patricians (with the patron god Jupiter) and plebeians (with their patron god Mars).¹¹⁰ Reflecting the soldier-farmers worshipping him, Mars both protected and promoted agriculture in early Roman religion.

¹¹⁰ Momigliano (1984) 329

IV. Conclusion: Chiastic Inversions

From the late ninth century to the early fifth century B.C.E., both the Greeks and the Romans worshipped martial deities. The Greeks worshipped a male and female deity, whereas the Romans worshipped a male deity first and a female deity later on. In each case, the cultural values and views towards warfare heavily influenced the characterizations of their deities.

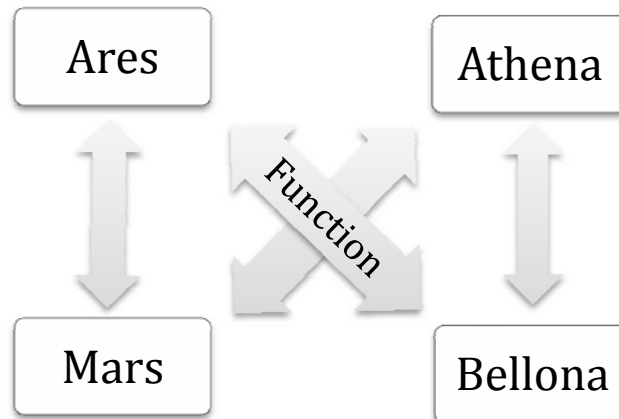
In Greece, the Trojan War left an enormous cultural imprint. As described through Homeric epic, the victory left the Greeks with both a positive and negative view of warfare. Although the Greeks defeated the Trojans, the aftermath severely lessened any original euphoria. Left with dueling concepts of warfare, Greek religion mapped out these ideas onto Ares and Athena. Ares represented *bie*, elemental force, and rage wrapped into an almost bestial characterization. Athena represented *metis*, civil discourse, and the state's military strategy.

In Rome, warfare was a defensive necessity for state survival. The pressure from finite resources around the young city of Rome led to increased competition with surrounding Latin tribes beginning in the Regal period. Although Roman territory expanded, the growth was a result of defensive martial action instead of imperialistic aggression. Early Roman society took a bipartite form divided into an aristocratic class and a larger farmer/warrior plebian group.

Accordingly, Roman religion recognized a male warrior god with both agricultural/fertility and martial aspects. Roman religion attributed a much more defensive mentality to Mars than the Greeks attributed to Ares. With no push for

imperialism in early Rome, the female goddess associated with rage (Bellona) did not emerge into prominence until Sulla.

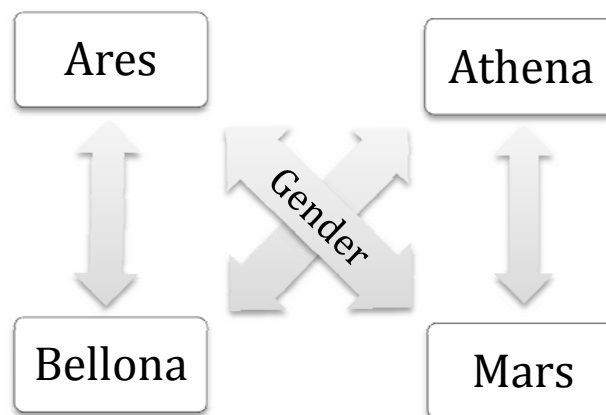
In the observations made up to this point, a chiasmic inversion occurs



between Greek and Roman religions. The inversion can take two different forms.

First, the Roman gods have switched genders from their earlier Greek counterparts.

In the diagram above, the Greek gods retained their functions but switched genders. The inversion can also prioritize gender over function as illustrated in the diagram below.



The inversion, while interesting, does not have clear causes. Durkheim predicted that society creates religion as a reflection of its own image. As a result, it

makes logical sense for two patriarchal societies to have similarly gendered deities. Greece and Rome share many of what Durkheim would term 'social facts', or broad social characteristics. The reversal of roles or genders (depending on which characteristic changed between Greece and Rome) has several possible explanations.

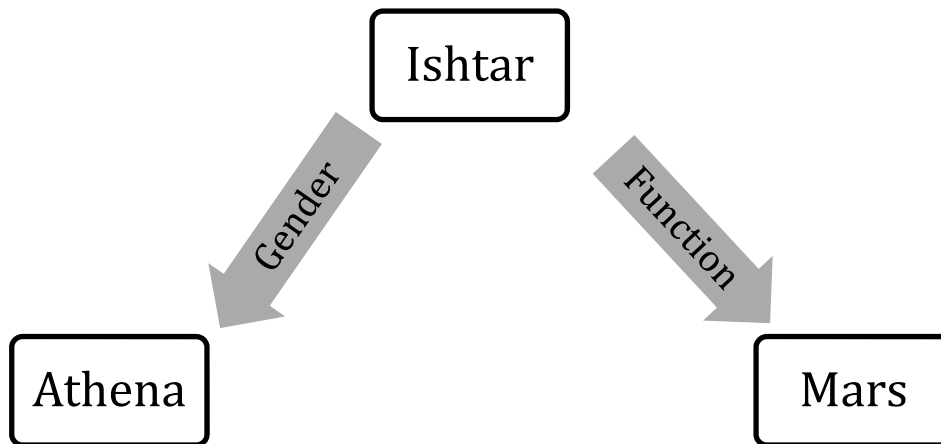
First, Archaic Greek religion does not necessarily resemble Bronze Age Greek religion and therefore the gender change may be a temporally later cultural accretion occurring sometime in the Dark Age. The *Iliad* is a war epic that finds its sources in the Bronze Age. One example of a formula that also appears in Linear B tablets from the Bronze Age is the phrase '*potnia Athena*' or 'Athena goddess of the city'.¹¹¹ Based on the translation, Athena could have been merely a goddess of Athens rather than a Pan-Hellenic deity. Ares' origin, however, has not been linked to a single city. Linear B tablets show several mentions of Ares and *Enyalios* at Knossos.¹¹² Therefore, while Ares and Athena both exist in the Bronze Age, Athena conceivably had a much smaller role than she does in the *Iliad*. In this scenario, Ares then acts as the sole war god in the Bronze Age, possibly combining both his and Athena's archaic functions. The reversal of roles between Greek and Roman religions becomes a later Greek adaptation occurring in the Bronze Age rather than a fundamental difference in religious beginnings. Until evidence that is more conclusive emerges, however, the idea must remain in the realm of hypothesis.

¹¹¹ Cook (conversation). See Burkert (1987) 44 for a slightly opposing view: he translates *potnia* as 'mistress'.

¹¹² Larson (2007) 244

Second, the Mesopotamian goddess Ishtar bears a remarkable resemblance to a ‘female Mars’ or an ‘agricultural/war Athena’. The goddess has a striking similarity to “Aegean nature deities of the Bronze Age.”¹¹³ Ishtar embodies paradox by uniting fertility, love, and war under a single visage. She also combines opposites in a social system that requires a female deity for the antinomies to coexist under a single divinity.¹¹⁴ Mesopotamian society grouped warfare and strife with love and fertility and then assigned these two extremes to a female deity¹¹⁵ who predates both Roman and Greek deities.

The Mesopotamian female goddess of fertility and war hybridizes both Mars’ function and Athena’s gender. The combination leads us to a third diagram of hereditary syncretism. In this configuration, Athena inherits Ishtar’s gender and Mars inherits her function.



On the Greek side, Athena’s gender fits with larger social perceptions of the female. In the same fashion as Mesopotamian society, Greeks comfortably placed

¹¹³ O’Brien (1985) 60

¹¹⁴ Harris (1991) 263

¹¹⁵ Ortner (1974) 85

paradox within female deities. As Marylin Arthur argues, the females in the *Theogony* simultaneously bear the next generation and inherently bring about another instance of generational conflict. Mortal women, as a result, are the recipients of a downward mediation of “all the ambiguities which mark the human condition.”¹¹⁶ In terms of Greek goddesses, Athena represents both conflict in war and its seeming antonym, the *polis*. As a result, Greek society must characterize the goddess as female.

A secondary cause, however, could explain Athena’s gender other than a cultural inheritance from Mesopotamia. Given the pre-existing cultural similarities between Greece and Mesopotamia, Athena could have become female without necessarily ‘inheriting’ that trait from Ishtar. The lack of religious inheritance could add evidence to the idea that Greece does not fit Dumézil’s Indo-European conceptualization.

Another option exists. If Ishtar did in fact become syncretic with a Greek god, the most common goddess scholars argue for is Aphrodite and not Athena.¹¹⁷ As Stephanie Budin points out, the link to Aphrodite leads to an Astarte-Aphrodite syncretism in the East and an Astarte-Juno syncretism in the West. As a solution, she demonstrates that syncretism between Astarte and Aphrodite took place in a different manner on Cyprus, where both goddesses were conceptualized as queens, than elsewhere in the Mediterranean where Hera is the queen.¹¹⁸ If Budin is correct, then Ishtar’s traits could have split into the separate female goddesses of Hera and

¹¹⁶ Arthur (1983) 111-12

¹¹⁷ Budin (2004) 96

¹¹⁸ Budin (2004) 120

Aphrodite on mainland Greece. While her approach rehabilitates the connection between Greece and Mesopotamia, it remains a tenuous connection at best and no true mirror image of Astarte/Ishtar's functions exists in Greek religion.

On the other hand, Roman religion potentially adopts Ishtar's function but not her gender. Mars acts as a god of fertility and warfare simultaneously in early Rome in a similar manner to Ishtar in Mesopotamia. If Rome did inherit Mars' function from a broader Indo European source of female hybrid deities, then the inheritance validates some of Dumézil's and Durkheim's theories. In this scenario, Rome inherited Mars' function but culturally mediated his gender into a male image that fit better with the patriarchal society of early Rome.

With either scenario, the differences between Mars and Ares become significant under Durkheim's microscope. The two male war deities share a remarkably analogous underlying social taxonomy but their societies developed vastly different views towards warfare unexplained by social structure alone and largely expressed through myth. Because of each society's beliefs about warfare, their male and female war gods underwent a chiastic inversion.

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