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## COSMIC LIGHT AND NARRATIVE IN THE TRANSITION FROM GREEK HELEN TO UNIVERSAL HELENA

*Abstract:* The symposium 'Niš and Byzantium' commemorates Constantine the Great, born in the city of Naissos (Niš) in 272<sup>CE</sup>, and takes place annually on his joint feast day with his mother Helena, June 3 (May 21 old style). Was their progress to sainthood influenced by older impulses, including popular perceptions of Helena's namesake, the Greek Helen? Continuing to probe this question, a late antique reference to 'the star of Helen which is called Ourania' provides a starting point for exploring Ourania as a name for mythic characters, an epithet for major deities, the venerated Ourania, *Dea Caelestis* in her own right, and as adapted for political purposes, whether for an intended idealised city-state or by a queen divinised in her lifetime. In its context, a scholiast's commentary on a poetic description of the salvation of storm-wracked sailors by Helen's brothers, the Dioscuri, the reference to the star challenges any attempt to find classical Greek influences on Constantine's mother's posthumous rise to sainthood. The gulf seems wide between Helen Ourania's threatening aspect and Helena's assumed beneficence. Resolution may lie in understanding salvation as the desired outcome of a stormy passage, whether socially or at sea. Sailors who preserved the Dioscuri myth were well placed to understand risk, having lived to tell the tale. Whether they associated Helen with Helena remains open to question, though the legend of Helena calming a storm with a nail from the Cross may be a pointer, as firewalking ritual may point to survival in the cult of Constantine and Helena of Dionysiac elements evident in, even if not directly linked to the 'spiritualising' of Helen and the fourth-century movement to 'divinise Helen afresh'.

*Key words:* Constantine, Helena, Helen of Sparta, Ourania, Aphrodite, *Dea Syria*, Dioscuri, Dionysius, Hera, Byblos.

Did Helena Augusta and her son Constantine the Great become regarded as saints simply in response to *his* establishment of Christianity as a state-sponsored religion and *her* reported rediscovery of the Cross, or were other, older impulses in play, external to Christianity? As Constantine's ambiguous and syncretic approach to religion becomes more widely recognised, scrutiny

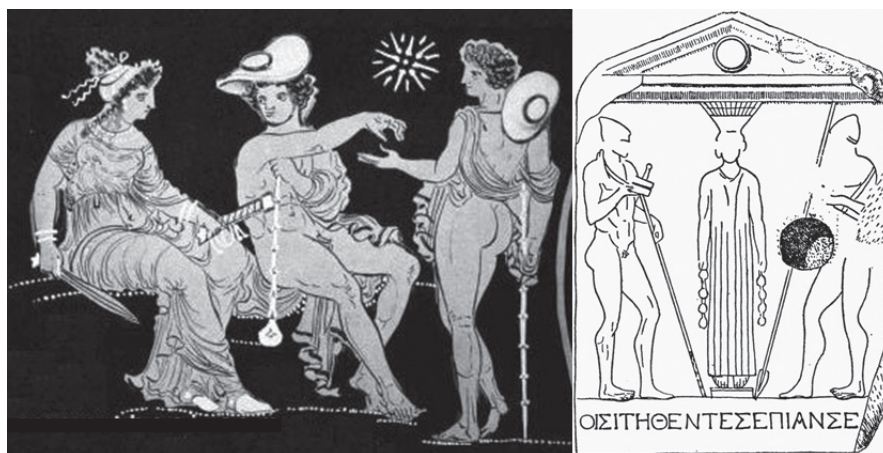


Fig. 1 The Dioscuri with (left) Nemesis, and (right) Helen. Left: Apulian red figure, volute krater, c. 330-10 BCE. In a scene of 'Orpheus in the Underworld', Nemesis wields sword and bridle, while the Dioscuri wear travellers' caps and are accompanied by a star (one of several around the upper edge of the painting). Staatliche Antikensammlungen, Munich (Cat. No. Munich 3297). Right: Helen with *kalathos* (basket) headwear and fillets (narrow strips of ribbon or similar material, often worn as a headband or in the hair) hanging from her wrists. Stele from Sparta (Lindsay, *Helen of Troy*, p. 215).

Сл. 1 Диоскури са Немезом (лево) и Хеленом (десно). Лево: кратер из Апулије, црвенофигурално сликарство око 330-10 пре н.е. У сцени „Орфеј у подземном свету“ приказана је Немеза док су Диоскури праћени звездом. Десно: Хелен са калатосом и повезима у коси. Стела из Спарте.

inevitably widens to include his mother's potential involvement, active or passive. In the civic statuary of his 'new' Byzantium, Constantine presented himself as Apollo, while his mother's statue kept company with the Tyche of the city and Rhea, mother of the gods.<sup>1</sup> After his death Constantine was proclaimed as divine, including by the Roman senate, whose lead is too often dismissed as peripheral; and apparently treated as such by those making offerings at his statue and tomb in hope of a cure. Might some similar popular attachment have attached to Helena? Given her son's assimilation to Apollo, with which divine figure might Helena have been associated?

Not necessarily an answer to that last question is the further matter, touched on in earlier papers, of whether, and to what extent, Helena's public perception, before and after her death, might have been influenced by understandings of her namesake, the Greek Helen. It may never be answered definitively since it concerns mental attitudes for which no proofs are available. Nevertheless, these matters invite discussion because the sainthood of Constantine and Helena is unlikely to have sprung into existence fully formed at some specific moment, any more than the concept of sainthood was invented out of thin air. Critical

<sup>1</sup> Graham Jones, 'Seeds of sanctity: Constantine's city and civic honouring of his mother Helena', in Miša Rakocija (ed.), *Niš and Byzantium. Fourteenth Symposium, Niš, 3-5 June 2015. The Collection of Scientific Works XIV* (Niš, University of Niš, 2016), pp. 617-36, hereafter Jones, 'Seeds'.

questions must be confronted, most beyond the scope of this paper. In regards to sainthood, how far by this stage had Jewish ideas about the status and treatment of the dead been assimilated into those of the Christians? Both traditions honoured patriarchs and prophets; tombs were visited and at least one synagogue boasted a collection of relics, including the cloak of Moses.<sup>2</sup> To these great figures the church added the apostles, to be joined by martyrs, confessors, and ascetics in the pantheon of the holy dead who were yet alive, and active with the angels in the courts of heaven. How did these categories of 'sainthood' and understandings of 'sanctity' coalesce with ideas of divinity and supernatural intervention in other religious traditions? What did the concept of sainthood mean to ordinary people, pious or pragmatic in their ideas about the supernatural and its interface with daily life? How did these ideas influence their thought and action? In the process of attracting sainthood, were Constantine and Helena represented by the church in a way which differed from how they were perceived in the minds of the people? If so, what were the drivers of the distinction?

With those minds accessible only through inference, we are forced back on to material evidence from inscriptions, coins, medallions, seals, images and monuments, as well as literary and other traditions of Late Antiquity and beyond. Their examination reaches back in time to the civilisations of the Fertile Crescent and Egypt, to ancient Byzantium and the maritime Greek diaspora, while casting forward towards the medieval Byzantine empire and its population, located in the wider worlds of Eurasia and the Mediterranean.

One common and insistent thread in traditions around the divine and holy is light, especially cosmic light, the first of God's creations. Familiar from biblical accounts like those of the burning bush and the tongues of fire at Pentecost, it is a theme and topos encountered with remarkable frequency when exploring the imagery and traditions surrounding both Helena and Helen in formal presentation or popular perception. Narratives and beliefs are shot through with light, as in the case of St Elmo's Fire, 'Feu d'Helene', explored in previous papers and



Fig. 2 St Elmo's Fire, with its single (Helen's) and double (her brothers') lights. Prayers from the Psalms for deliverance from shipwreck at top and bottom. Book illustration, 1601 (details, Footnote 47).

Сл. 2 Ватра Св. Елма, Уз молитве из Псалама. По: Book illustration, 1601 (деталји напомена 47).

<sup>2</sup> Elias Bickerman, *Studies in Jewish and Christian History* 2 (Leiden, 1980), 20 1,202; M. Simon, 'Les saints d'Israel dans la devotion de L'Eglise ancienne', *Revue d'histoire et de philosophie religieuses* 34 (1954), pp. 98ff.



Fig. 3 Urania with globe and pointer. Left: Restored Roman copy of Greek original, fourth century BCE to second century CE. Vatican Museums, Museo Pio-Clementine, Sala delle muse, 57. Right: Coin of moneyer Pomponius Musa. Urania wears long flowing tunic and peplum, holds wand over globe resting on tripod (numismatic detail, Footnote 28)

Сл. 3 Уранија са глобом, лево: рестаурирана римска копија грчког оригинала, IV век пре н.е. до II века н.е., по: Vatican Museums, Museo Pio-Clementine, Sala delle muse, 57. Десно: новчић Помпонијус Музе, Уранија носи дугу тунику и пеплум, држи глоб на трonoшцу (нумизматички детаљ, напомена 28)

about which there is now something more to said. That themes of light and divine intervention are shared by Helen, mythic wife of king Menelaus, and her namesake the Late Roman empress is of more than passing interest. We are reminded of a world that passed in the lifetimes of my grandparents, born in the 1880s, before the universal availability of electric light and its magical transformation of the ways of seeing and being seen, as well as of the diurnal round. The writer remembers the watery, variable quality of gaslight, which for the majority of British families was a half-way house. In the pre-electric world, light in the darkness could, and often did spell the difference between life and death. It was a comfort, too, and a revelation. Away from torch, candle, and camp-fire, one could marvel at the heavens, take bearings from the stars, and read into the movements of sun, moon, and planets great cosmic explanations for the

mysteries of life.

Constantine saw merit and profit from self-promotion in the classical guise of Sol, the Sun and its associated deity Apollo; a spectacle which could be complete only with the complementary presence of the other great heavenly lights, the Moon and Venus the Evening Star. (That the planet was also the Morning Star was for a later age to discover.) Sunburst complements moon-glow. That his mother was an actor to hand, especially after his wife's violent end, widely laid at his door, is a matter for another day. Nevertheless, it is a plausible suggestion that her cooption, materially evidenced by her statue in Constantinople, was a decision of state aided by the happy chance of her name. It opened up the possibility of allusions to moonglow and starshine, not least because the mythologised and venerated Greek Helen had aspects in common with both Venus and Luna in their various guises.

Conventional readings of Constantine and Helena are as first-fruits of a new age, characters in an exceptionalist Christian drama. However, the landscape looks rather different if they are viewed from the other end of the historical continuum, as figures in the 'old' world of polytheism and religious plurality. As always, reality lies in the overlap, taking account of the colliding and eliding traditions around treatment of the dead, the meaning of sanctity, and





Fig. 4 Aphrodite Urania seated on globe, wearing chiton and peplos and tiara surmounted by a star, and holding a sceptre ending in a loop from which hang two fillets (hair or wrist ribbons); star on left. Ouranopolis, silver stater (numismatic detail, Footnote 32)

Сл. 4 Афродита Уранија на глобу, носи хитон и пеплос, као и тијару састављену од звезда, држи скиптар са трацицама које излазе из њене косе; звездаста тијара је лево. Уранополис (нумизматички детаљ, напомена, 32)



Fig. 5 Hera Ourania riding her lion with Dioscuri in attendance. Nicolò seal gem, second to fourth century CE, North Africa. British Museum, 1899,0722.5 (reference, Footnote 33).

Сл. 5 Хера Уранија на лаву са Диоскурима. Од II до IV века н.е., Северна Африка, по:

British Museum, 1899,0722.5 (напомена 33)

popular belief. The new age can not be fully understood if divorced from the old. Change goes hand in hand with continuity, and also with diversity. For some societies, as Prince Fabrizio declares in *Il Gattopardo*, set in the Greco-Latin-Maghrebian cultural amalgam which is Sicily, everything must change for things to stay the same.<sup>3</sup>

*'The star Helen, which it is said is Ourania'*

Perhaps within a century of our protagonists' deaths, a grammarian scholiast Lactantius Placidus<sup>4</sup> is credited with composing a commentary on the *Thebaid*,<sup>5</sup> an epic poem by Publius Papinius Statius, who wrote in Latin in

<sup>3</sup> Giuseppe Tomasi di Lampedusa, *Il Gattopardo* (Milan, Feltrinelli, 1958).

<sup>4</sup> Lactantius Placidus's commentary (incorrectly attributed in the past to the Christian author Lucius Caelius Firmianus Lactantius) has been dated 'no later than the sixth or the late fifth century and perhaps earlier': Kathleen M. Coleman, 'Recent scholarship on the Thebaid and Achilleid: An overview', in D. R. Shackleton Bailey (ed. and trs.) *Statius, Thebaid: Books 1-7*, Loeb Classical Library [hereafter LCL] 207 (Cambridge, MA, Harvard University Press, 2003), hereafter 'Statius, ed. Shackleton Bailey', pp. 9-37 (hereafter 'Coleman, in Statius, ed. Shackleton Bailey'), p. 23.

<sup>5</sup> Ricardus Jahnke (ed.), P. Papinius Statius, Vol. 3, *Lactantii Placidi ui dicitur Commentarios in Statii Thebaida et Commentarium in Achilleida* (Leipzig, B. G. Teubner, 1898), *Commentarius in Librum VII*, hereafter Jahnke, 'Lactantius', p. 377. The most recent edition is Robert Dale Sweeney (ed.), *Lactantii Placidi in Statii Thebaida commentum*. Vol. 1:



Fig. 6 Altar from Qassouba, near Byblos, with dedication to Ourania. *Kalathos* flanked by sculptures of sphinx (references, Footnote 35)

Сл. 6 Олтар из Касубе, близу Библоса, са посветом Уранији. Уз калатос су скулптуре сфинги (напомена 35)

the final two decades of the first century CE but was raised in the Greek milieu of the Bay of Naples. Statius was born in Neapolis itself, a Greek colony which remained a centre of Hellenic culture after acquiring Roman citizenship. His father, a native of Velia, further down the coast, won prizes for poetry at the Neapolitan Augustalia and at games on the Greek mainland.<sup>6</sup> It may not be insignificant for an understanding of Helena's background that the bay's hinterland is the part of the Italian peninsula from which a concentration of statues of Helena are reported, suggesting that she had large landholdings there.

Statius' *magnum opus* revisits the mythic story of the Seven against Thebes and in a passage describing a warrior's recognition of impending death, transferred to his chariot and team, Statius wrote:

*'Non aliter caeco nocturni  
turbine Cauri  
scit peritura ratis, cum iam  
damnata sororis  
igne Therapnaei fugerunt car-  
basa fratres.'*

'Just so [literally 'Not otherwise'] in a blind northwesterly hurricane at night  
a ship knows she will perish, when doomed by their sister's  
fire [are its] sails [and] from them the brothers of Therapnae have  
fled.'<sup>7</sup>

The brothers are the Dioscuri ('Sons of Zeus'), Castor and Pollux/Polydeuces, the heavenly twins who were Helen's mythic brothers (Fig. 1),<sup>8</sup> and

*Anonymi in Statii Achilleida commentum. Fulgentii ut fingitur Planciadis super Thebaiden commentariolum*, Bibliotheca scriptorum Graecorum et Romanorum Teubneriana (Stuttgart, Teubner, 1997), hereafter Sweeney, 'Lactantius'.

<sup>6</sup> 'Introduction', in 'Statius ed. Shackleton Bailey', pp. 1-2.

<sup>7</sup> Book 7, Lines 791-94. The ship knows she will perish 'when the brethren of Therapnae have fled sails doomed by their sister's fire': 'Statius, ed. Shackleton Bailey', pp. 456-57.

<sup>8</sup> Georgia S. Maas, 'Castor and Pollux' in Michael Gagarin (ed.), *The Oxford Encyclopedia of Ancient Greece and Rome* (Oxford, Oxford University Press, 2010). Jack Lindsay, *Helen of Troy, Woman and Goddess* (Totowa, New Jersey, Rowman and Littlefield,

it was at Therapne, their Spartan cult-centre in Laconia in the Peloponnese, that their sister, in her human form as the celebrated Queen of Sparta and (?mythical) bane of Troy, was buried and worshipped. In decorating the hippodrome of his new city, Constantine incorporated monuments from the twins' temple.<sup>9</sup> They were so widely popular, including among charioteers and horsemen, and politically important that it is hard to believe that their relationship to Helen had by then passed out beyond public consciousness - quite the contrary, as Lactantius' commentary (below) demonstrates.

Helen's fire and that of her brothers, implied but not specified in Statius' verse, constitute what became known as St Elmo's Fire, a glowing plasma on the edges of masts and sail-yards, and now also on aircraft and modern infrastructure, during storms. Mediterranean sailors believed Helen's *single* fire or glow presaged the wreck of their vessel, unless joined by the *double* glow attributed to her brothers (Fig. 2). This maritime aspect of Helen's 'light' topos, discussed in earlier papers, is important for my underlying theme because of the line of onomastic development from Helen's fire to St Elmo's Fire, the latter attribution in popular tradition referencing the martyr Erasmus (Erme/Elme) (d. c.303), bishop of Formia, a port-city half-way between Rome and Naples on the Appian Way.<sup>10</sup>



Fig. 7 Ourania as a deity: votive sculpture, late second or third century CE, perhaps from Asia Minor (Greek inscription). Madrid, Museo del Ejército, cabinet 6, no. 26 (references, Footnote 39)

Сл. 7 Уранија као божанство: вотивна скулптура, касни II или III век н.е., можда из Мале Азије (грчки натпис). Мадрид, Museo del Ejército, cabinet 6, no. 26 (напомена 39)

1974), hereafter Lindsay, 'Helen', pp. 240-56, 389-91. Fernand Chapouthier, *Les Dioscures au service d'une Déesse*, Bibliothèque des Écoles françaises d'Athènes et de Rome, Fascicule 137 (Paris, Editions de Boccard, 1935), hereafter Chapouthier, 'Dioscures'. Carl Robert, *Die griechische Heldensage* (3 vols, Berlin, Weidmannsche Buchhandlung, 1921-1926), 1, p. 322. Arthur Bernard Cook, *Zeus: A Study in Ancient Religion* (3 vols, Cambridge, Cambridge University Press, 1914, 1925, 1940), 1, pp. 772ff.

<sup>9</sup> Jones, 'Seeds'.

<sup>10</sup> Graham Jones, 'Aspects of Helen: Byzantine and other influences on the reading of Constantine's mother in the West', in Miša Rakocija (ed.), *Niš and Byzantium... Scientific Works II* (2004), pp. 13-27, pp. 25-26; 'The power of Helen's name: Heritage and legacy, myth and reality', in *Scientific Works VII* (2009), pp. 351-70; 'Seas, saints, and power-play:

The Homeric *Hymn to the Dioscuri*, ‘not later than the start of the fifth century BCE and may be earlier’ and based on (?)eighth-century materials, describes the seafarers’ terror and relief. Helen is not named here, but the Twins are

‘deliverers of men on earth and of swift-going ships when stormy gales rage over the ruthless sea. Then the shipmen call upon the sons of great Zeus with vows of white lambs, going to the forepart of the prow; but the strong wind and the waves of the sea lay the ship under water, until suddenly these two are seen darting through the air on tawny wings. Forthwith they allay the blasts of the cruel winds and still the waves upon the surface of the white sea: fair signs are they and deliverance from toil. And when the shipmen see them they are glad and have rest from their pain and labour.’<sup>11</sup>

The saving twins appear on their own in the poetry of Alcaeus;<sup>12</sup> mounted, on a fourth or third century BCE relief found at Piraeus showing a figure on a boat raising his hand to them;<sup>13</sup> on another perhaps from Pepinos, the dedicator beside his ship offering thanks to their statues;<sup>14</sup> in the decoration of ships;<sup>15</sup> and in the naming of the ship, the *Castor and Pollux*, in which the apostle Paul sailed *circa* 40 to 50CE (Acts 28:2); but together with Helen in the second book of Pliny’s *Natural History*, where Pliny (23-79CE), described how the lights, which he called ‘stars’, settled not only upon the masts and other parts of ships, but also on the spear-tips of soldiers standing guard on ramparts:

‘Two of these lights foretell good weather and a prosperous voyage, and extinguish *one* that appears single and with a threatening aspect – this the sailors call *Helen*, but the two they call *Castor and Pollux*, and invoke them as gods.’

The ‘fires’ are electrical discharges, flux without defined shape. Nevertheless, the ancients perceived them as celestial lights and classified them, as Pliny does, as best they could as stars. Several more centuries on, Lactantius, in his commentary on the *Thebaid*, followed suit, adding an important snippet of information (here in bold type):

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The role of the supernatural in state-building and culture-forging in the world of Stefan Nemanja’, in *Scientific Works XIII* (2015), pp. 87-104.

<sup>11</sup> Hugh G. Evelyn-White (trs. and ed.), *Hesiod, the Homeric Hymns and Homeric* (London, William Heinemann, 1914), hereafter Evelyn-White, ‘Hesiod’, 33.6-8. J. Humbert, *Hymnes homériques* (Paris, Société d’édition ‘Les Belles Lettres’, 1959), 249-51, dates the poetry to before the third century CE. and ‘sans doute’ before the sixth. The twins also appear as sea saviours in, e.g. *Theocritus*, trs. C. S. Calverley (2nd edn rev., London, George Bell and Sons, 1883), Idyll 22, ‘The Sons of Leda’, pp. 119ff.

<sup>12</sup> D. L. Page, *Sappho and Alcaeus* (Oxford, Clarendon Press, 1955, repr. 1979), pp. 265-68.

<sup>13</sup> F. T. Van Straten, ‘Gifts for the Gods’, in H. S. Versnel (ed.), *Faith, Hope and Worship: Aspects of Religious Mentality in the Ancient World* (Leiden, Brill, 1981), pp. 65-104, p. 97 and Fig. 39; H. C. Ackermann and J.-R. Gisler (eds), *Lexicon Iconographicum Mythologiae Classicae* (Zurich, 1981-), hereafter LIMC, 3.1: ‘Dioskouroi’, no. 121.

<sup>14</sup> LIMC 3.2: Dioskouroi, 122.

<sup>15</sup> For archaeological wreck discoveries, Amber Gartrell, ‘Caesar’s Castor: The cult of the Dioscuri in Rome from the mid-Republic to the early Principate’, unpub. DPhil. thesis, Oxford University, 2015, pp. 201-02.



...quia nautae, cum stellam Helenae viderint – quae Urania dicitur, cuius tanta est vis incendii, ut malum cauet et navis ima pertundat, ut etiam si aes fuerit, hoc calore solvatur – ergo si haec stella navi insederit, sciunt se nautae sine dubio perituros. [Small space] et contra Castorum sidera sunt navigantibus salutaria.

‘when they saw the star Helen - **which it is said is Urania** – such is the power of the fire that... if this star was rooted in the ship, the sailors knew they should fall... [but they] are saved by the beneficial twin stars.’

So for Lactantius, focused on matters ‘that late antiquity considered interesting,’<sup>16</sup> Helen is manifest as a star, with a name carrying cosmic significance.

#### *Helen Ourania: the name*

From the Greek word for the sky and heaven, ‘*ouranos*’, proceeded names for mythic characters, epithets for deities, and political adaptations. The sky-god **Ouran(i)os** (Latin *Uranus*) and Gaia, Earth, begat the Titans and Olympian gods.<sup>17</sup> Roman art shows him as Aeon, god of eternal time, with the Zodiac wheel.

One Ourania is a nymph born to Ocean and the Titan daughter of Ouranos, Tethys.<sup>18</sup> Better known is the **Muse** Ourania, ‘heavenly bright’<sup>19</sup> inspirer of astronomy, described in one mythic tradition (the Latin ‘Birth of Venus’, Aphrodite Ourania) as daughter of Ouranos conceived without a mother and emerging from the sea-foam.<sup>20</sup> Elsewhere, Ourania the Muse is a child of Zeus by the goddess of memory, Mnemosyne,<sup>21</sup> a recognition perhaps of the need for

<sup>16</sup> Coleman, in ‘Statius, ed. Shackleton Bailey’, p. 23.

<sup>17</sup> Hesiod’s synthesis of the genealogy of the gods, c.750-650BCE, *Theogony*, trs. Norman O. Brown (Indianapolis, Bobbs-Merrill, 1953), hereafter Hesiod, ‘Theogony’; ‘The Orphic Cosmogony according to Athenagoras’, Greek text of the fourth century CE from Greco-Roman Orphic sources probably dating to the sixth century BCE, in Otto Kern, *Orphicorum Fragmenta* (Berlin, Weidmann, 1922), repr. Harris Leonwicz and Charles Doria (eds), *Origins: Creation texts from the ancient Mediterranean: a chrestomathy* (New York, Garden Press, 1976).

<sup>18</sup> Hesiod, ‘Theogony’, p. 63 (v, lines 346-370).

<sup>19</sup> *The Hymns of Orpheus* (London, T. Payne, 1792), Hymn 75 ‘To the Muses’; new trs. Apostolos N. Athanassakis, *The Homeric Hymns* (2nd edn, Baltimore, Johns Hopkins University Press, c.2004) (third century BCE to the second CE).

<sup>20</sup> Hesiod, ‘Theogony’, pp. 31, 55 [i, lines 1-115], 85.

<sup>21</sup> Hesiod, ‘Theogony’; Apollodorus (born c.180BCE). *The Library, Volume I: Books 1-3.9*, trs. James G. Frazer, LCL 121 (Cambridge, MA, Harvard University Press, 1921), pp. 16-17. Pausanias (*fl.* 150-175), trs. W[illiam] H[enry] S[amuel] Jones, *Description of Greece*, LCL 93 (4 vols, Cambridge MA, Harvard University Press, 1918, repr. 2014) (now retranslated by Gregory Nagy, ‘A Pausanias Reader’, on-line at <<https://chs.harvard.edu/CHS/article/display/6768>>, accessed December 14, 2020), hereafter Pausanias, ‘Greece’, 4, Bk 9 (Boeotia), 29.4-6 (pp. 295): ‘Mimnermus [the poet]... says... that the elder Muses are daughters of Uranus... younger Muses, children of Zeus.’

incessant observation and oral record to chart the cyclical patterns of the cosmos. The bard Linus, patron of singers and harpers, is called her son,<sup>22</sup> fathered variously by Apollo,<sup>23</sup> Amphimarus son of Poseidon as on Mount Helicon on the north coast of the Gulf of Corinth, site of the most famous of the Muses' temples,<sup>24</sup> and Hermes;<sup>25</sup> while Hymenaeus, god of marriages, also is described as a son of Ourania and Apollo.<sup>26</sup> Ourania was also acclaimed a Muse of verse, song and verse being auxiliary to memory, it might be remarked, not to mention the arithmetic aesthetics of astronomy.<sup>27</sup>

Canonically, as on coins of the moneyer Quintus Pomponius Musa,<sup>28</sup> proud of his cognomen and inspired by a Greek sculptor (Fig. 3),<sup>29</sup> Ourania appears with a globe to which she points with a little staff, and/or compass. Equally important is her halo, a single large star or circlet of smaller stars, symbolising the cosmos and also science. She often gestures towards the heavens, appearing too with a mortal, 'a source of inspiration to yearn for higher things'.<sup>30</sup> Presiding over astrology, she could foretell the future 'from the position of the stars'.<sup>31</sup>

<sup>22</sup> 'So Urania bare Linus, a very lovely son': Diogenes Laertius, 8. 1. 26, printed as 'Hesiod, Fragments of Unknown Position 1', in Evelyn-White, 'Hesiod'; Folk Songs Fragment 880 (from Scholiast B on Homer's *Iliad*) (Greek lyric BCE) in D[avid] A. Campbell (trs.), *Greek Lyric V. New School of Poetry and Anonymous Songs*, LCL 144 (Cambridge MA, Harvard University Press, 2014).

<sup>23</sup> Pseudo-Hyginus (Roman mythographer of the second century CE), *Fabulae*, Peter K. Marshall (ed.), *Bibliotheca scriptorum Graecorum et Romanorum Teubneriana* (Munich and Leipzig, De Gruyter, 2002), 161, p. 136.

<sup>24</sup> Pausanias, 'Greece', 4 (Boeotia), 29.5, p. 297. See also Suda (Byzantine Greek lexicon, tenth century CE), *Suidae Lexicon*, trs. Ada Adler (5 vols, Leipzig, Teubner, 1928-1938, repr. 1971) and Suda On Line, <<https://www.cs.uky.edu/~raphael/sol/sol-html/>>, hereafter 'Suda', s.v. 'Linos', lambda 568.

<sup>25</sup> Suda, s.v. 'Linos', lambda 568.

<sup>26</sup> *Catullus*, ed. D. F. S. Thomson, Phoenix Supplementary Volumes 34 (Toronto, University of Toronto Press, 1997), 61, line 2..

<sup>27</sup> D[avid] A. Campbell (trs.), *Greek Lyric IV*, LCL 461 (Cambridge MA, Harvard University Press, 2014), pp. 155 (Fragment 6), 139 (5), 137 (4), 213 (16), respectively. See also *Ovid's Fasti*, trs. James George Frazer (London, William Heinemann, 1959), v. 55 (pp. 254-55).

<sup>28</sup> David R. Sear, *Roman Coins and their Values* (London, Spink, 2000), #359, Pomponia 22.

<sup>29</sup> Classical Numismatic Group, *Triton XVII Virtual Catalog* (Lancaster PA, 2013), p. 171, citing Pliny the Elder, *Natural History* 35.66. *Ovid, Fasti*, trs. James G. Frazer, rev. G. P. Goold, LCL 253 (Cambridge MA, Harvard University Press, 1931), 6.812.

<sup>30</sup> Clifford J. Cunningham, Brian G. Marsden, and Wayne Orchiston, 'The attribution of Classical deities in the iconography of Giuseppe Piazzi', *Journal of Astronomical History and Heritage* 14(2) (2011), pp. 129-35. *Diodorus of Sicily in Twelve Volumes* [first century BCE], trs. C. H. Oldfather (London, William Heinemann, 1933), Bk 4.7.1 (pp. 360-65).

<sup>31</sup> Statius, *Thebaid* [Bk] 8, lines 548 ff, ed. Antony Augoustakis (Oxford, Oxford University Press, 2016), lines 548-53 (p. 41).

*Ourania on the Phoenician coast*

In religion, Ourania was generally venerated as assimilated to a major deity, most notably Aphrodite Ourania, patron of spiritual love (Fig. 432), as opposed to Aphrodite Pandemos, representing 'earthly' appetites, literally 'of all the people', but also Hera Ourania, wife of Zeus (Fig. 533). She is evidenced as a deity in her own right by the dedication on a second/third-century CE altar from Qassouba, port area of Byblos (Fig. 6). It appears to show, sitting on a plinth, a head-covering like a *kalathos*, the women's basket also called, suggestively for the purposes of this article, *helene* when referring to the wicker-basket used to carry sacred vessels at a feast of Artemis Brauronia: a cult attractive to young girls which recalled the goddess' intervention in the Trojan war. The feast itself was known as the *'ελένηφόρια*.<sup>34</sup> Ceramic depiction of a *kalathos* on a chair has been associated with marriage and the domestic sphere.<sup>35</sup> The plinth is flanked by Egyptian sphinxes, Astarte's animal.<sup>36</sup> The altar's location is noteworthy, for as late as the fifth century CE it was reported by Zosimus (c.400-c.450) that Aphrodite had a sanctuary at Aphaca, inland of Byblos in the hills below Mount Lebanon, with a grotto and sources of the river Nahr Ibrahim, anciently the Adonis. Sozomen reported that here

'it was believed that on a certain prayer being uttered on a given day, a fire like a star descended from the top of [Mount] Lebanon and sank into the neighbouring river. This phenomenon they sometimes called Urania and sometimes Venus [i.e. Aphrodite].'<sup>37</sup>

Zosimus does not state explicitly that the locals called the deity at Aphaca 'Ourania', but he does report that close to the temple was a pool like an artificial tank where a 'fire like a lamp or a sphere' would, to his own day, hover over the water [a case of *ignis fatuus*?] on 'certain days' (presumably festivals) and people would cast gifts of gold, silver, and clothing of linen, silk, and other precious material into the water. Items which sank showed 'the regard of heaven'; absence of the deity's goodwill was a warning.<sup>38</sup>

<sup>32</sup> e.g. Standard coin design of Ouranopolis, silver stater circa 300BCE, Nikola Moushmov, *Ancient Coins of the Balkan Peninsula and the Coins of the Bulgarian Monarchs* (Sofia, G. I. Gavazov, 1912), 6906.

<sup>33</sup> Nicolo gem, H. B. Walters, *Catalogue of Engraved Gems and Cameos, Greek, Etruscan and Roman in the British Museum* (London, British Museum, 1926), 1288.

<sup>34</sup> Henry George Liddell and Robert Scott, *A Greek-English Lexicon* (rev. edn, Oxford, Clarendon Press, 1940, repr. 1960), citing the (?fifth-century CE) lexicographer Hesychius.

<sup>35</sup> Christiane Sourvinou-Inwood 'Altars with palm-trees, palm-trees and *Parthenoi*', *Bulletin of the Institute of Classical Studies* 32 (1985), pp. 132-33 and fn. 99.

<sup>36</sup> Ernest Renan, *Mission de Phénicie* (Paris, Imprimerie impériale, 1864), pp. 161-62, pl. 22.8, calls her Thea Ourania and also Dea Cælestis; Brigitte Servais-Soyez, *Byblos et la fête des Adonies* (Leiden, E. J. Brill, 1977), pp. 79-80, 83-84 and pl. xiii, from *Antiquités syriennes* 6 (1965), p. 12.

<sup>37</sup> Sozomen, *The Ecclesiastical History*, trs. Edward Walford (London, Henry G. Bohn, 1855), 2.5, p. 59.

<sup>38</sup> Zosimus, *The New History*, 1.58: Greek with Latin trs by Immanuel Bekker (Bonn, Weber, 1837), pp. 51-52; English trs. Ronald T. Ridley (Canberra, Australian Association for Byzantine Studies, 1982), pp. 18, 146..

Brigitte Servais-Soyez has suggested these were assemblies of Byblians at Alphaca, where tradition situated the death of their god, the Syrian Adonis, Tammuz, to observe the heliacal rising over Mount Lebanon of the star Sirius. This would have happened (for example in 150CE on July 14) at the time of year of the strong, dry, north-westerly Etesian winds and, in Egypt, the Nile flood between May and August. Noting the close ties between Byblos and Egypt, she proposes that Alphaca saw a coming together of Greek and Egyptian traditions, so that on the one hand the 'fire' stands for Sirius, which in Egypt was consecrated to Isis, and the Adonis/Nahr Ibrahim for the Nile, associated with Osiris, and on the other the phenomenon represents Aphrodite Ourania's rediscovery of Adonis.<sup>39</sup> She also notes an inscription recording Aspasios, 'high priest of Dionysius', so close in nature to Adonis.

This lends additional interest to a further dedication to Ourania in her own right, found on a votive sculpture of the late second or first half of the third century CE. Now in Madrid, brought from Italy as part of a papal gift to a Spanish nobleman in the sixteenth or seventeenth century, it is possibly from a workshop in Asia Minor. It shows a goddess dressed in *chiton* (long tunic) with veil and plain *polos* (tall, cylindrical headdress) whose hands cover her breasts. It is labelled THN OYPANIAN / BOYKOΛOC ('Boukolos [i.e. The Herdsman, literally 'cowherd'] [offers] the Urania [i.e. Urania's image]') (Fig. 7). Sabino Perea Yébenes has situated her worship within imperial Orphic spiritualising, making the case for the Boukoloi as a Bacchic guild (*thiasos*), and suggesting that the offered image may have stood against a wall of a Dionysian chapel or grotto.<sup>40</sup> Were there similarities, he asks, between the priests of *dea Caelestis* and those of the Dionysian *thiasoi*? Did the name Boukolos, whose instances he carefully details, resonate with the incarnation of Dionysos as a bull?

It is worth noting the political use made of the epithet Ourania elsewhere in Syria and more widely in the Fertile Crescent, the geographer Pausanias (*circa* 150CE) tracing adoption of celestial Aphrodite from Assyria to Phoenicia and thence to Cyprus and Kythera off the tip of the Peloponnese.<sup>41</sup> She was an aspect of *Dea Syria* (Atargatis),<sup>42</sup> worshipped at Heirapolis (Bambyce, now Manbij in northern Syria near the Euphrates) in the kingdom of Cyrrhastica, whose king Abdahad, *circa* 342-331bce, was also her priest. Further east, while coins of the Parthian Phraates V proclaim him 'King of Kings', his mother Musa in their joint reign, 2bce-4ce,<sup>43</sup> is 'Thea ['Divine'] Ourania Mousa, Queen'.

<sup>39</sup> Servais-Soyez, pp. 63-64.

<sup>40</sup> Sabino Perea Yébenes, 'Escultura de la diosa Urania en el Museo del Ejército de Madrid [Sala Medinaceli, cabinet 6, no. 26]', *Militaria* 3 (Madrid, 1991), pp. 101-12; 'Escultura epigrafia de Urania, un testimonio de culto dionisiaco en época imperial', *Hispania Antiqua* 15 (1991), pp. 169-91. For outlaw herdsmen of the Nile Delta with this name, see Ian Rutherford, 'The genealogy of the Boukoloi: How Greek literature appropriated an Egyptian narrative-motif', *Journal of Hellenic Studies* 120 (2000), pp. 106-20.

<sup>41</sup> Pausanias, 'Greece', 1, I [Attica], 14.7 (pp. 75-77), III.23.1.

<sup>42</sup> Lucian, *De dea Syria: The Syrian Goddess*, 32, trs. Harold W. Attridge and Robert A. Oden (Missoula, MT, Scholars Press, 1976), hereafter Lucian, 'Dea Syria', 32.

<sup>43</sup> Joan M. Bigwood, 'Queen Mousa, mother and wife(?) of King Phraatakes of Parthia. A re-evaluation of the evidence', *Journal of the Classical Association of Canada* 4.1



Her assumed divinity, playing on her birth-name, was sufficiently important to state policy and identity crossing cultural boundaries for the pair to be dressed in Hellenic costume on Assyrian coins, as Persian on coins from what is now Iran.<sup>44</sup>

Elsewhere in the Greek world we should note 'the heavenly city' of Ouranopolis on the Halkidian peninsula,<sup>45</sup> whose coin depictions of Ourania parallel those from Cimmerian Bosphorus under its king Sauromates II (174-210ce), including the *kalathos*.<sup>46</sup>

### *The star of Helen Ourania and ideas around salvation*

This explanatory excursion from the single known mention of the 'star of Helen which they call Ourania' is necessary to understand Robert Meagher's conclusion that Ourania's name offers 'a heuristic clue to the meaning of Aphrodite, Pandora [another source of fateful trauma], and Helen, the meaning of Woman', pointing towards Gaia, 'the mother of all'.<sup>47</sup> It also helps in contextualising Jack Lindsay's description of the transition from the mythic to the 'spiritualising' account of Helen (in which bacchic influences have a role); a transition paralleled by the emergence of 'religion' as represented by Dionysian and other salvific 'mystery' religions, including Christianity. However, it also accentuates the gulf between the positive and negative aspects of the thus deified Helen as represented by the star Ourania. On her own as a fiery presence atop a storm-tossed ship, Helen is threatening, but joined by her brothers the threat is neutralised. She stands for anger, they for resolution. This is a serious point, and a potential stumbling block in the way of tracing understandings of Helen as an influence on the emergence of Helena as a beneficent Christian saint. It is not easy to reconcile this angry, destructive Helen with the virtues of healing and peace associated with Christian sainthood and by implication conferred on Helena. Admittedly, inclusion in the *Thebaid* necessarily sweeps up Helen and her brothers into that epic's 'marked imbalance, war and violence far outweighing forgiveness and peace', perhaps reflecting, as has been thought, the cruelties of the reign of Domitian (81-96).<sup>48</sup> However, as we have seen, its description of destructive Helen stood in a long tradition.

The distinction between threatening Helen and her rescuing brothers lasted through to the end of the middle ages. Thus Erasmus of Rotterdam (1523)

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(2004), pp. 35-70, hereafter Bigwood, 'Mousa'.

<sup>44</sup> David Sellwood, *An Introduction to the Coinage of Parthia* (2nd edn, London, Spink, 1985), 58.6, 9.

<sup>45</sup> Athenaeus (1st century CE), *Deipnosophistae: The Learned Banqueters*, ed. S. Douglas Olson, Vol. 1, LCL 204 (London, Heinemann, 1927, repr. 1951), 3.98, citing Heracleides Lembus (2nd century BCE); Pliny, 'Natural History', 4.10.17.

<sup>46</sup> Yulia Ustinova, *The Supreme Gods of the Bosporan Kingdom: Celestial Aphrodite and the Most High God* (Leiden, Brill, 1998), p. 27.

<sup>47</sup> Robert Emmet Meagher, *The Meaning of Helen: In search of an ancient icon* (Wauconda, Bolchazy-Carducci, 2002), p. 68.

<sup>48</sup> 'Coleman in Statius, ed. Shackleton Bailey', p. 11.

reported it was ‘the worst sign in the world to sailors, if [the ball of light] be single; but a very good one, if double. The ancients believed these to be Castor and Pollux.’<sup>49</sup> Both fires, single and double, are shown in an engraving accompanying the account of a storm-tossed voyage from Alexandria to Rhodes in October 1582. The Latin phrase heard as the plasma appeared towards the end of the storm was *Sancti Germani sidus*, understood by the hearer, the Lithuanian duke Mikołaj Radziwiłł as ‘the fire of St Germanus’, but surely meant as ‘the fire of the Holy Brothers’. The single fire is not named.<sup>50</sup> The distinction between the threatening and saving fires may well explain the absence of ‘*Ste*’ for ‘Saint’ in the first of two French terms for St Elmo’s Fire, *Feu d’Helene* and *Feu S. Herme*, reported in the French-English dictionary of 1611 compiled by Randle Cotgrave, secretary to William Cecil, Queen Elizabeth I’s chief adviser, though he appears to have ‘corrected’ the attribution as he perceived it by inserting ‘*Saint*’ in his translation:<sup>51</sup>

‘Feu d’Helene. as Feu S.Herme.

Feu S. Herme. *Saint Helens, or S. Hermes fire; a Meteor that often appeares as sea; Looke [i.e. see] Furole...*

Furole : f. *A little blaze of fire appearing by night on the tops of souldieers launces, or at sea on the sayle-yards, where it whirles, and leapes in a moment from one place to another; some Mariners call it S. Hermes fire; if it come double tis held a signe of good luck, if single, otherwise.’*

Cotgrave offered no source for the French phrases, perhaps leading to David Farmer’s dismissal of the reference to ‘*Feu d’Helene*’ (in the entry for St Helen in his *Dictionary of Saints*), as ‘less correct’, though without offering explaining his conclusion.<sup>52</sup> It is possible, of course, that Cotgrave mistranscribed ‘d’Helme’ as ‘d’Helene’. However, it is equally possible, a point absent from my 2008 paper, that the term *Feu d’Helene* was a late- or post-medieval harkening back to Antiquity, resulting from neo-Classical familiarity with Greek and Latin literature, rather than being based on contemporary practice among seafarers. Such an explanation receives *prima facie* support from lines written by Thomas Heyrick (1649-1694), an English clergyman and schoolmaster.

<sup>49</sup> Erasmus, ‘The Shipwreck’. *Colloquies of Erasmus*, trs. N. Bailey (London, Reeves and Turner, 1878).

<sup>50</sup> [Mikołaj Krzysztof ‘The Orphan’ Radziwiłł] Nicholaus Christophorus Radzivilus, *Hierosolymitana Peregrinatio* (Braniewo/Brunsbarga, Georgius Schonfels, 1601), pp. 216-23.

<sup>51</sup> Randle Cotgrave, *A Dictionarie of the French and English Tongues* (London, Adam Islip, 1611), s.v. Feu d’Helene, and Feu S.Hermes and Furole [work unpaginated].

<sup>52</sup> David Hugh Farmer, *The Oxford Dictionary of Saints* (5th edn, Oxford, Oxford University Press, 2002), hereafter ‘*Saints*’, pp. 173-4. See also John Brand, ‘Of the phenomenon vulgarly called Will or Kitty with a Wisp, or Jack with a Lanthorn’, in *Observations on Popular Antiquities: Including the Whole of Mr Bourne’s Antiquitates Vulgares* [Newcastle, privately published, 1725] ([1777] London, Vernor, Hood. and Sharpe, 1810), with rev. edn, ed. W. Carew Hazlitt (1888).

The second section of his verse-manifesto on wreck salvage, 'The Submarine Voyage',<sup>53</sup> describes the sinking of a ship in a tempest [Heyrick employs the conventional use of italics for proper names]:

'For lo! a suddain Storm did rend the Air:  
The summen Heaven, curling in frowns its brow,  
Did dire presaging Omens show:  
Ill-boding *Helena* alone was there.'

Heyrick, a Cambridge graduate, taught Latin and Greek to the grammar school pupils of Market Harborough in the English county of Leicestershire, where he was curate and lecturer. The quality of his verse has been routinely dismissed by literary critics. Nevertheless, one modern commentator, Joseph Hall, acknowledges Heyrick's knowledge of geography and maritime exploration and commerce.<sup>54</sup> It is difficult to believe that with that background he was ignorant that 70 years earlier fellow Leicestrian Robert Burton's *Anatomy of Melancholy* had noted Radziwiłł's account and that the lights, whether 'they signify some mischief' or 'pretend good', were 'commonly' called 'St. Elmo's fires'.<sup>55</sup>

It is difficult to pin down when Helen and her brothers were assigned their oppositional roles, but the distinction sits at odds with earlier references which appear to extend salvific power to all three, the phenomenon being mentioned first in the voyage of the Argonauts and then only in attribution to the twins. For example, after the Greeks' naval victory over the Persian king Xerxes at Salamis in 480BCE, the people of the island state of Aiginea dedicated at the temple of Delphi an offering of three golden stars set on a bronze mast □ the Twins and Helen.<sup>56</sup> In his play *Orestes*, Euripides, who was born around that year and died *circa* 406BCE, has Apollo declare

'The daughter of Zeus [Helen] must not perish.  
She's to have her throne by Castor and Polydeukes  
in the heavens, and bring salvation to sailors.'<sup>57</sup>

The importance of putting 'the star of Helen which they call Ourania' into context alongside those other Ouranias, Aphrodite and Hera, becomes further clear by reference to a message of Horace (65-8BCE), wishing a friend a safe voyage and commending them to the protection of the Dioscuri: 'Thus may Cyprus' heavenly queen [Aphrodite]/ Thus Helen's brethren, stars of brightest sheen/ Guide thee!'<sup>58</sup>

<sup>53</sup> Thomas Heyrick, 'The Submarine Voyage. A Pindarique Ode', published in *Miscellany Poems by Tho. Heyrick* (Cambridge, John Hayes for the Author, 1691), pp. 2-3.

<sup>54</sup> Joseph Hall, 'Sea-floor property and imperial future in Thomas Heyrick's "The Submarine Voyage"' (1691), *Eighteenth-Century Fiction* 31.4 (Summer 2019), pp. 639-57.

<sup>55</sup> Robert Burton, *Anatomy of Melancholy* (Oxford, Henry Cripps, 1621; repr. London, Chatto & Windus, 1924), p. 123.

<sup>56</sup> Herodotus 'History, trs. Rawlinson', p. 293.

<sup>57</sup> Euripides. *Orestes*, trs. John Peck and Frank Nisetich (Oxford, Oxford University Press, 1995), p. 87, lines 1709-1711.

<sup>58</sup> Horace. *The Odes and Carmen Saeculare of Horace*, trs. John Conington (London,

There may be a hint here that Helen's involvement in what we call St Elmo's Fire might have developed in parallel to, or later than a similar involvement of Aphrodite. In a similar message, the poet Propertius (c.50-c.15BCE) included with the twins the Rhodian nymph or sea deity Leucothoë, 'White Goddess', daughter in one tradition of Uranos and personification of the foam; an obvious parallel to Aphrodite Ourania in the 'birth of Venus'.<sup>59</sup> Alternatively, Helen's threat might be read as running counter to, or perhaps complementary with Aphrodite's protection. More concretely, Helen's assimilation to Ourania suggests that perceptions of her and of her manifestation as a star are likely to have shared something of the understandings of Aphrodite, whose place in the heavens was that of Venus, the evening and morning star. Horace was well-placed to be sensitive to such understandings, brought up as he was at Venusia, a Roman colony originally Aphrodisia, a city on the Appian Way linking Rome with Brindisi, the major port of embarkation for Greece. Himself Roman, he received his higher education in Athens.

In Helen's marital city of Sparta, at least, she assumed 'prerogatives which are in general attributed to Aphrodite'. For example, the deified Helen endowed young girls with their beauty, sign of their sexual maturity and aptitude for marriage. This local peculiarity has been held to explain why, in the divine interventions in the life of young girls of which we have notice, the sole clear invocation of Aphrodite was in a matrimonial context shared with Hera. Moreover, it was the mothers of the young Spartan brides who offered a sacrifice to Aphrodite, unlike the Argolid cults where the young women themselves honoured the goddess.<sup>60</sup>

If we were to assign the epithet Pandemos to the earthly queen of Sparta to complement the celestial Helen Ourania, perhaps the complex character of Aphrodite Ourania/Pandemos could help explain the discordance between Helen's positive and negative aspects. It might also help towards resolving the difficulty of pinning down a plausible channel of resonance between popular understandings of the deified Helen and her imperial counterpart, the sainted mother of Constantine. In every society, individuals seek salvation, escape, vindication, solutions, a cure, or simply happiness. Since human nature changes little over time, such desires and needs must have been much the same in 400BCE as they were in 400CE. The adoption of imperial divinity in Rome marks an important shift in religious externals, but is only that, since the practice existed in other places much earlier, and the concept of priest-king, linked with ideas of divine immanence and human apotheosis, must be almost as old as society itself. Similar caution may be prudent in approaching the subsequent shift with adoption of Christianity as Rome's state religion. Constantine's closure of the Aphaca sanctuary was represented by later Christian writers as a cleansing, but in reality there may have been more prosaic factors, not least, perhaps, the ag-

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George Bell and Sons, 1882), 1.3.

<sup>59</sup> H. E. Butler and E. A. Barber (eds), *The Elegies of Propertius* (Oxford, Clarendon Press, 1933), p. 62 (Bk 2, 26, ll. 7-10).

<sup>60</sup> Pirenne, 'L'Aphrodite', p. 200. For Helen's role in these ceremonies, see Claude Calame, *Choruses of Young Women in Ancient Greece: Their morphology, religious role, and social function* ([1979] 2nd edn rev., Lanham, Rowman & Littlefield, 1997).



gressive competition between similar but rival ideas of pilgrimage, ritual, and salvation. Other grottoes, other stars came into play under new ownership, and new branding.

Of the conflicted character of Helen, Lindsay wrote 'She is the exalted nurse-mother presiding over [Aphrodite's] dances and games; she is also the hanged heroine (in Rhodes). She is the pure emblem of daimonic beauty... an aspect of the fertility principle... which finds its natural end in delighted marriage; she is also the fatality disrupting marriage and provoking murder... In the mystery religions the dual aspects can be taken in and the conflicts resolved. Dionysos torn to pieces by his bulls, is perpetually reborn as the child nursed by the nymphs. In the rituals of the sacrificed son, Attis, Adonis, Christ, the terrible death is salved by the resurrection.'<sup>61</sup>

When mariners of Rhodes in the second century CE dedicated an offering at Tenos after a successful voyage 'To the Dioskouroi and Helen',<sup>62</sup> perhaps they were accepting that enterprise entails risk and that salvation and resolution are only experienced as the desired and desirable end to a stormy passage, whether through human relationships or a high wind at sea. Christian ideas of redemption say much the same.

The sailors most exposed to destructive storms were not the coastal navigators, but those who took to the deep waters to cross from one side of the Mediterranean to another. They included shipmen from Byblos, who doubtless knew of Ourania and, having lived to tell the tale, perhaps linked her star with Helen's fire, continuing to do so after the shift to Christianity. To what extent they associated Helen with her imperial namesake remains open to question, though the legend of Helena calming a storm with a nail from the cross may be a significant pointer,<sup>63</sup> as the firewalking of Thrace<sup>64</sup> may point to survival in the cult of Constantine and Helena of Dionysiac elements evident in, even if not directly linked to what Lindsay called the 'spiritualising' of Helen and the fourth-century movement to 'divinise Helen afresh'.<sup>65</sup>

<sup>61</sup> Lindsay, 'Helen', pp. 237-38.

<sup>62</sup> Paul Graindor, 'Fouilles et recherches a Tenos (1909)', *La Musée Belge* 14 (1910), pp. 1-53, pp. 19-24, no 2. For the cult of Helen *Dendritis* at Rhodes see Hendrik Van Gelder, *Geschichte der alten Rhodier* (Haag, M. Nijhoff, 1900), p. 364; Lindsay, 'Helen', pp. 212.

<sup>63</sup> Graham Jones, 'Seas, saints, and power-play: The role of the supernatural in state-building and culture-forging in the world of Stefan Nemanja', in Miša Rakocija (ed.), *Niš and Byzantium... Scientific Works XIII* (2015), pp. 87-104.

<sup>64</sup> Graham Jones, 'Earth, fire, and water: Constantine and Helena in the ritual heritage of Europe and its neighbourhood', in Miša Rakocija (ed.), *Niš and Byzantium... Scientific Works XI* (Niš, 2013), pp. 385-408.

<sup>65</sup> Lindsay, 'Helen', p. 173. Robert Parker doubts that Helen was treated as divine anywhere other than Sparta and Rhodes: 'The cult of Helen and Menelaos in the Spartan Menelaion', chapter prepared for the delayed publication of 'Menelaion II' by the late Hector Catling and published on-line at <[https://www.academia.edu/22684765/The\\_Cult\\_of\\_Helen\\_and\\_Menelaos\\_in\\_the\\_Spartan\\_Menelaion](https://www.academia.edu/22684765/The_Cult_of_Helen_and_Menelaos_in_the_Spartan_Menelaion)>. accessed March 2021.

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КОСМИЧКО СВЕТЛО И НАРАТИВ ПРЕЛАЗА СА ГРЧКОГ ХЕЛЕНА НА  
УНИВЕРЗАЛАН НАЗИВ ХЕЛЕНА

Да ли је настанак светости Константина и Јелене био под утицајем других импулса или је реч о утицају Јелениног имена које поседује грчке корене? У настојању да се одговори на ово питање битно је поменути референцу на „звезду Хелен која се зове и Уранија“. То је почетак тумачења овог имена које потиче од музе Ураније, по којој се назива и Уранополис. Опис спасавања Диоскура, представља веома важну везу у настанку и јачању култа. Легенда о Хелени која смирује олују клином са Светог Крста може бити озбиљан показатељ, као што и ритуал преласка преко ватре може бити део култа Константина и Јелене и везе тог култа са дионизијским елементима, чак уколико нема најдиректнијих веза са култом царице који познајемо већ од IV века.