

HERA AS EARTH-GODDESS: A NEW PIECE OF EVIDENCE

I. *Present State of the Controversy*

It is generally agreed that behind the ritual and mythology of the major Greek goddesses there can often be detected clear traces of the old Mediterranean "earth-mother" fertility worship. Hera has been thought to be an exception; among those who deny that she was in origin an earth-goddess can be mentioned scholars of such eminence as Martin Nilsson and H. J. Rose. Thus in 1944 Bruno Snell could begin a brief paper entitled "*Hera als Erdgöttin*"¹⁾ with a quotation from Nilsson: "Die von Welcker verfochtene These, daß Hera eine Form der Erdgöttin war, und Roschers Ansicht, daß sie eine Mondgöttin war, hat man jetzt fallen lassen; sie entbehren in Wirklichkeit jeglicher Stütze und sind nur aus der Voreingenommenheit erklärlich, daß jeder Gott eine Naturbedeutung haben muß"²⁾. With this compare the observation made by H. J. Rose in 1946: "The proper and original consort of Zeus was pretty certainly an earth-goddess, *which there is no proof that Hera ever was* (my italics) ..."³⁾ Snell, by contrast, in his paper argued (as others before him) that in the disputed fragment 6 D-K of Empedocles the phrase "*Ἥρη ... φερέσβιος*" was to be equated with the element *earth*; he compares *γαῖα φερέσβιος* in Hesiod, *Theogony* 693 and the *Homeric Hymn to Apollo* 341. For full details the reader is referred to Snell's paper; I reproduce here only the one sentence most pertinent for our purpose: "... allerdings hat man ein sicheres Zeugnis des 5. Jahrhunderts dafür, daß Hera Erdgöttin ist, deswegen bisher nicht beachtet, weil die betreffende Stelle

1) *Philologus* 96. 1944. 159-160 = B. Snell, *Gesammelte Schriften* (Göttingen 1966), pp. 158-159.

2) M. P. Nilsson, *Geschichte der griechischen Religion* I. 1941. 401 [= I. 428 in the third edition (1968)].

3) H. J. Rose, *Ancient Greek Religion* (London 1946), pp. 50-51, reprinted in *Religion in Greece and Rome* (New York 1959), pp. 50-51.

[*νῆξ*. the Empedocles fragment] schon im Altertum umstritten war und bis heute noch keine Einigkeit über ihre Deutung besteht⁴). Snell goes on to cite in a footnote Alcaeus *frag.* 129. 6–7 where Hera seems to be referred to as *κνδαλίμων θεόν / πάντων γενέθλαν* (= "... origin of all")⁵). Also in 1946 Picard, starting from this fragment of Alcaeus, defended the view that Hera was an earth-goddess: "... il paraît bien qu'il ne peut être question de la déesse Héra que comme universelle *génératrice*: πάντων γενέθλα, dit le poème. Ce qualificatif de source préhellénique, appliqué à Héra, n'a plus rien d'exceptionnel ni d'insolite, aujourd'hui, si l'on songe à ce que nous avaient appris, loin de Lesbos, les récentes découvertes de l'Héraeon du Silaris. Une *favissa* d'offrandes, dans un *bothros*, qui a été ouverte là et exploitée soigneusement par les fouilleurs du sanctuaire, ne nous a-t-elle pas livré en quantité des images populaires de la déesse – ex-voto de terre-cuite – qui souvent présentaient Héra comme protectrice de la fertilité et de la fécondité? Divers symboles retrouvés aussi dans la *favissa* témoignent eux-mêmes en ce sens ... nous pouvons constater que l'Héra de Lesbos est aussi une grande déesse de la nature, donc de la reproduction des êtres"⁶). In 1950 Guthrie came out in support of Hera as an earth-deity: "If Hera was the goddess of marriage, it was because of a more fundamental character as a goddess of fecundity. To limit this fecundity to that of human beings is, I should say, to make an arbitrary and un-Greek distinction. Yet if it is not so limited it is difficult to resist the conclusion that in the dim past she had been worshipped as an embodiment of the fruitful earth ..." and later in the same section: "... the opinion here expressed that Hera was originally a local form of the Earth-mother promoting the fertility of all her creatures and identifying herself with their life..."⁷).

Thus the *opinio communis* is seen to be undergoing a gradual

4) W. K. C. Guthrie, *A History of Greek Philosophy* II. 145–146 (Cambridge 1969), considers the identification of the elements in the Empedocles fragment still uncertain.

5) That Hera is the goddess meant in this poem is very probable, but not certain. For details see Denys Page, *Sappho and Alcaeus* (Oxford 1955), pp. 60 and 167–169. For the meaning of *γενέθλα* see *LSJ Suppl. s. v.* and Page, *op. cit.* p. 168; cf. *γένεσις* in *Il.* 14. 201, 246.

6) Ch. Picard, *Bull. Corr. Hell.* 70. 1946. 460–461; Snell added a reference to this paper when his own paper was reprinted (*supra*, n. 1).

7) W. K. C. Guthrie, *The Greeks and their Gods* (Boston 1954), pp. 69 and 72 (see the whole section on Hera, pp. 66–73); also p. 55.

change. The process continues. In 1966 Snell's paper was reprinted in his *Gesammelte Schriften* (*supra*, n. 1). At that time he added a reference to the papyrus 'Orphiker-Kommentar' from Dervéni near Saloniki (dated by the editor Kapsomenos to the fourth century B.C.)⁸⁾ in which one reads (col. 18) *Γῆ δὲ καὶ Μήτηρ καὶ Πέα καὶ Ἥρα ἢ αὐτή*. In 1969 Guthrie repeated his view: "It is ... likely that Hera was, at least in origin, an earth-goddess..."⁹⁾. Finally, in 1970 Cedric Whitman published "*Hera's Awfuls*"¹⁰⁾, an interpretation of *Iliad* 15. 16-28 (= the so-called *κόλασις Ἥρας*), in which he points out that behind this curious passage there may lie a "disintegrated myth", a myth of Heaven and Earth. If this is correct, the implication is that Hera is here identical with Earth - an implication which did not escape Whitman: "But all this implies that Hera is an earth-goddess, which is not generally agreed"¹¹⁾.

Whitman is quite correct in pointing out the lack of general agreement at the present time. Indeed, the most recent statement is that in the Second Edition of the *Oxford Classical Dictionary* (1970) *s.v. Hera*; there one may still read "... the natural suggestion that [Hera] is the earth, a common consort of the sky-god, lacks cogent evidence..."¹²⁾ It will, therefore, perhaps serve a useful purpose to call attention at this time to a hitherto neglected piece of evidence, whose importance is twofold: 1) the evidence in question is a genuine cult-document, not a literary or philosophical reminiscence; 2) the document is relatively old (probably sixth century B.C.).

II. *The Evidence of the Cumae Disk*

Eduard Schwyzer in his *Dialectorum Graecarum Exempla Epigraphica Potiora* prints the following inscription (No. 789):

Ἡέρε οὐκ εἰ̄(ι) ἔρι μαντεύεσθαι

8) *Agχ. Δελτ.* 19. 1964. 17-25; see also Kapsomenos' notice in *Gnomon* 35. 1963. 222-223. For an interpretation of the papyrus see W. Burkert in *Antike und Abendland* 14. 1968. 93-114. For the dating of the papyrus see R. Pfeiffer, *History of Classical Scholarship* (Oxford 1968) p. 103, n. 1.

9) W. K. C. Guthrie, *A History of Greek Philosophy* (Cambridge 1969) II. 145.

10) *HSCP* 74. 1970. 37-42.

11) *loc. cit.*, p. 41.

12) This is repeated from H. J. Rose's article *Hera* in the first edition of the *Oxford Classical Dictionary* (1948).

“Hera does not permit oracular consultation in the morning.”

This inscription is incised on a small bronze disk, most probably from Cumae and thought to date from the early sixth century B.C. (the date is not absolutely certain)¹³. Both the reading and the interpretation of the inscription are disputed and will be discussed in detail below. For our present purposes it is sufficient to point out that neither the mention of Hera nor the reference to oracular consultation is in doubt; it is this association of Hera with oracles that provides a possible clue to her nature.

Erwin Rohde wrote in *Psyche* “... [chthonic deities] are the gods of a settled, agricultural, inland population. Dwelling beneath the soil they guarantee two things to their worshippers: they bless the cultivation of the ground and ensure the increase of the fruits of the soil to the living; they receive the souls of the dead into their underworld. *In certain places they also send up from the spirit-world revelations of future events* (my italics)”¹⁴. Rohde’s opinion has not been superseded. For the close connection between chthonic fertility deities and subterranean oracles (such was the *ψυχομαντεῖον* at Cumae), I can here refer only to one of the most famous oracular shrines in Greece, that of Trophonios, whose very name is probably cognate with *τρέφω*. If so, it shows that this oracular spirit was originally an earth-god of fertility: Trophonios may mean “the nourisher”¹⁵. Now, on our inscription we can discern an undoubted connection of Hera with oracles. This evidence is not unique; see, from a later period, the testimony of Strabo p. 380: *ἐν δὲ τῷ μεταξὺ τοῦ Δελφίου καὶ Παγῶν τὸ τῆς Ἀρκαίας μαντεῖον Ἡρας ὑπήρχε τὸ*

13) Schwyzer’s text is based on the readings of F. Halbherr and A. Maiuri; for full particulars on the disk and its probable provenance see the latter’s article “*Arcana Cumana*” in *Ausonia* 6. 1911. 1–11. Earlier (and fantastic) readings of the inscription are adequately refuted by Maiuri, *loc. cit.*; for the more recent literature see *infra* notes 21 and 23.

14) *Psyche*, English translation p. 159.

15) For Trophonios, in addition to the standard reference works, see Rohde, *Psyche* index *s.v.* Trophonios. For the meaning of the name see Radke in *RE s.v.* Trophonios, col. 693. Compare also Guthrie, *The Greeks and their Gods*, p. 229: “The underground sanctuary of Trophonios was a *manteion*, and where this sort of prophecy is practised, it will usually be found that an earth-spirit is at the bottom of it.” It is perhaps worth mentioning that, in Pausanias’ famous description of the manner of consultation at the oracle of Trophonios, Hera is mentioned among the deities to whom sacrifice is made (Paus. 9. 39. 5).

παλαιόν¹⁶). It would be rash to dismiss this combined evidence lightly. The sequence which it implies is clear: *If Hera is an oracular deity she is probably chthonic; if she is chthonic, she is probably an earth-goddess*¹⁷).

I am not so bold as to pretend that a few words on a bronze disk can provide the final solution to a question so complex as this. I do maintain that this inscription is an additional piece of evidence in support of the view that Hera once was an earth-goddess. We ought not explain it away as a piece of secondary syncretism; it has rather every appearance of being a genuine vestige of old cult-belief. That such vestiges can survive in isolation for many centuries has been documented often enough. (Plato was already quite familiar with this phenomenon; in the *Politicus*¹⁸), as he prepares to introduce one of his *μῦθοι* he refers to τὰ πάλαι λεχθέντα thus: διὰ ... χρόνον πλῆθος τὰ μὲν αὐτῶν ἀπέσβηκε, τὰ δὲ διεσπαρμένα εἴρηται χωρὶς ἕκαστα ἀπ' ἀλλήλων). Finally, I may point out why Hera probably did not preserve clearer traces of her origin as an earth-goddess. Once a local earth-mother became the wife of Zeus, the invading Indo-European πατήρ ἀνδρῶν τε θεῶν τε, it was inevitable that she should relinquish a very fair portion of her original controlling functions and prerogatives: Zeus would not brook an equal. It is no accident that the goddess whose origin as an earth-mother is perhaps clearest--Artemis--appears in Greek tradition as a virgin¹⁹).

III. *Text and Interpretation of the Cumae Disk*

Apart from its significance for the problem of Hera's origins, the inscription on the Cumae disk is sufficiently interesting and problematic in itself to merit a re-examination. To begin with, the reading of the inscription is disputed. Halbherr, Mai-

16) Cited by Maiuri, *loc. cit.*, p. 8, n. 5. He also points out (p. 9) that 'Ἡροφίλη' is found in various ancient sources as the name of a sibyl; this is further evidence of Hera's connection with oracles.

17) For the apparent exception in the case of the Delphic Apollo, compare below (on the origins of the oracle at Delphi).

18) 269b.

19) Note also that Aphrodite, certainly a Semitic fertility goddess in origin, has scarcely any real marital life to speak of (Hephaestus, Ares -- both curious partners for the goddess of love). The same may be said of Demeter (in some ways an even clearer example than Artemis).

uri, and Schwyzer seemed to have established that the text (in standard script) ran "Ἡρῆ οὐκ ἐᾷ ἤρῃ μαντεύεσθαι"²⁰). However, more recently a new reading and interpretation was proposed by Guarducci²¹) and accepted by L.H. Jeffrey, who writes the following in her *Local Scripts of Archaic Greece*: "A small bronze disk of unknown provenance, now in Naples, is generally agreed to be almost certainly from Kyme. The incised inscription reads in a spiral retrograde round the edge, and has been convincingly interpreted by Guarducci as a *sors* from the oracular precinct, written in the Ionic dialect of Kyme: / *Ἡρῆ οὐκ ἐαι(ι) ἐπιμαντεύεσθαι*: 'Hera does not allow further prophecy.' For Hera at Kyme Guarducci cites the inscription *τες / Ἡρῆ-* ... on a sherd now lost, found at Kyme and published in 1860²²) ..."²³).

I am reluctant to differ with authorities of such eminence in these matters; nevertheless this interpretation seems unsatisfactory to me. It is still not certain that the crucial letter is a pi and not a rho (i.e. *ἐπι* versus *ἐρι*); Professor Sterling Dow, who courteously examined the photographic reproductions both in Miss Guarducci's first article and in her *Epigrafia Greca* states the following: "Whether there is a pi or a rho depends entirely upon whether there is a stroke that completes the loop. In the earlier photograph the stroke seems clear; in the later one it appears somewhat obscure. The evidence of the earlier photograph can hardly be gotten around. Miss Guarducci does not discuss this point." To prefer a photograph to an *αὐτόπτις* (Miss Guarducci has examined the actual disk) is normally a venture-some business; I do so here because of another – and it seems to me decisive – consideration. Miss Guarducci, with her reading, translates the inscription as follows: "*Era non permette che si torni a consultare l'oraculo.*" Here is her explanation: "*Era non permette che si consulti nuovamente l'oraculo, cioè – se non erro – che si chieda un oraculo supplementare. Così infatti dobbiamo intendere la preposizione ἐπί davanti al verbo μαντεύεσθαι, anche se il composto ἐπιμαντεύεσθαι in questo preciso valore compare qui per la prima volta. Lo scopo dell' oracolo è*

20) For earlier attempts at decipherment see the reference *supra* in note 13.

21) *Bull. Comm. Arch. di Roma* 72. 1946–8. 129ff.; *Arch. Class.* 16. 1964. 136–8; *Epigrafia Greca* (Rome 1967) I. 229–30.

22) The sherd was published in *Bull. Arch. Nap.* 8. 25 ff. by Minervini.

23) *The Local Scripts of Archaic Greece* (Oxford 1961), p. 238.

manifesto: eludere una domanda imbarazzante del consultatore insoddisfatto”²⁴). I know of no evidence supporting such a prohibition of repeated oracular consultation; the reverse seems to have been the usual practice (see, for example, Herodotus 1. 158–9). But even if we grant such a situation, would ἐπιμαντεύεσθαι be the correct verb? According to *LSJ*, ἐπί in composition can signify “Accumulation of one thing *over* or *besides* another, as in ἐπαγείρω, ἐπιμανθάνω, ἐπανξάνω, ἐπιβάλλω, ἐπίκτητος”; Miss Guarducci compares ἐπιδοροπίζεσθαι, ἐπιθύνειν, ἐπιπᾶσθαι. (Note that these are transitive verbs; an absolute usage, without further context, such as ἐπιμαντεύεσθαι is less easy.) What is wanted on Miss Guarducci’s interpretation is not a verb of *accumulation* meaning “make one consultation *upon* another” (ἐπιμαντεύεσθαι) but rather a verb of *repetition* meaning “consult the oracle *anew* or *a second time*” – and that verb is ἀναμαντεύεσθαι. (Compare *LSJ s.v. ἀνά* F. 3.) *It is surely no accident that ἀναμαντεύεσθαι, unlike ἐπιμαντεύεσθαι, is attested in exactly the sense required.* The Guarducci-Jeffery interpretation must be rejected because it introduces an unlikely linguistic usage²⁵).

If ἐπιμαντεύεσθαι be abandoned, there is no apparent alternative but to return to the reading ἤρι μαντεύεσθαι. This presents a further difficulty; even those who accept ερι = ἤρι here are not agreed among themselves as to the meaning of ἤρι. Maiuri interpreted it to mean “*di mattino*”²⁶) and Schwyzler agreed (“*mane*”). *LSJ s.v.* give the following: “Ep. Adv. (Boeot. acc. to *AB* 1095) *early*, ἤ. μάλ’ Il. 9. 360; μάλ’ ἤ. Od. 20. 156: ἠῶθεν δὲ μάλ’ ἤ. 19. 320; *in the morning*, μαντεύεσθαι *Schwyzler* 789 (Cumae).” (The three Homeric examples cited here are the only ones in Homer; in Hesiod ἤρι does not occur.) Latte disagreed: “So wird man auch ερι auf der unteritalischen Inschrift

24) pp. 131, 133 of the first article cited in note 21.

25) I may remind the reader here that my main thesis is not affected whether one reads ἐπιμαντεύεσθαι or ἤρι μαντεύεσθαι, for both readings demonstrate that Hera had oracular connections. In fact, in her learned paper Miss Guarducci is primarily concerned with a) demonstrating that at the time of the inscription Hera, not Apollo, presided over the oracle at Cumae and with b) tracing the implications of this for the religious contacts between Cumae and Rome. She does not allude directly to the controversy over the disputed status of Hera as an earth-deity, but comes out in passing clearly in support of such a position, e.g. “... Era come dea delle messi e dei fiori, come grande nume della natura feconda...” (p. 136). I am happy to acknowledge this support for my position.

26) *loc. cit.*, p. 6: “Era non permette di trarre oracoli di mattino.”

Cauer-Schwyzler 789 mit 'im Frühling' übersetzen müssen, statt mit Maiuri mit "morgens".²⁷⁾ In 1968 the *Supplement to LSJ* appeared with the following entry: "ἤρι, fin., for '(Cumae)' read '(Cumae), vii/vi B. C.), but perh. here ἤρι is dat. of ἔαρ (A)'.²⁸⁾ Thus doubts exist as to whether in the inscription Hera forbade oracular consultation "in the morning" or "in the spring". The former interpretation is to be preferred.

It is, to be sure, not without precedent for oracular shrines to be seasonal; the reason is that oracles could only be given when the deity was believed to be present at the shrine. However, it seems inherently improbable that, of all the seasons, spring would be singled out as the time when oracles failed. It is well known that at Delphi Apollo was believed to relinquish the shrine to Dionysus during the *winter* months, at which time, strictly, no oracles could be given and that, originally, oracles were given there *only* in the *spring*²⁸⁾. Since (as the Greeks knew) the original occupant at Delphi was not Apollo, but Gaia (i. e. a form of the earth mother), the relevance of early Delphic oracular practices for Hera at Cumae may be closer than is at first apparent²⁹⁾. In any event, whatever one believes of Hera's origins, her association with *flowers* is undoubted³⁰⁾; to remove her from her oracular site in the spring, when her potency is most manifest, seems particularly inappropriate³¹⁾.

It is far more satisfactory to interpret ἤρι as "in the morning". Oracles are regularly associated with *chthonic* deities; that such deities are approached *at night* is well-known³²⁾. "Hera forbids oracular consultations in the morning" may sound cryptic to us; to a Greek it would have been perfectly intelligible, for he would have readily supplied its opposite: "Hera orders oracular consultations *in the evening*." What we have in

27) *RE s.v. Orakel*, col. 848.

28) Cf. E. Rohde, *Psyche* (English translation) p. 313, n. 55; Plutarch, *Quaestiones Graecae* 292 D-F.

29) I am aware that, formally at least, that statement comes dangerously close to a *petitio principii*; I do not stress the point.

30) Guthrie, *The Greeks and their Gods*, pp. 70-71.

31) I trust that it is unnecessary to refute the naive and ridiculous objection made privately to me that "because Hera was a fertility goddess she was too busy in the spring to be bothered with oracles and could attend to them only in the other seasons"!

32) Compare, *ex. gr.*, Herodotus 1. 182. 2; Pausanias 9. 39. 7. Rohde, *op. cit.* p. 311, n. 46, maintains that all earth-deity oracles were in origin incubation oracles; this alone would explain nocturnal consultation.

this inscription is an embryonic example of those “polar expressions” of which the Greek were so fond³³). In fact, though *LSJ* has missed them, there are still extant several examples of this very polarity:

ἐσπέριος κεῖνός γε τελεῖ τά κεν ἦροι νοήση
(Callimachus, *Hymn to Zeus* v. 87)

ἦροι καὶ ἐσπέρια, Ζεὺς δ' αἴτιος, εἰλίσσονται
(Aratus, v. 265)

The same contrast is found also in Latin; Horace, *Ep.* 1. 6. 20 *navis mane forum et vespertinus pete tectum* and *Odes* 4. 5. 38–40 ... *dicimus integro| sicci mane die, dicimus uvidi, cum sol Oceano subest.*

With ἦροι so understood, the inscription makes excellent sense; it is in perfect agreement with what we actually know of Greek oracular practices. To paraphrase in modern “business” parlance, the disk may be regarded as a kind of sign announcing “Oracle open evenings only”. It is, in short, a minor piece of local “canon law”³⁴).

In the optimistic hope that the reasons set forth above will appear to support the reading ἦροι, I may close with an additional, if less tangible, argument in defence of ἦροι *versus* ἐπι -. Professor John Shea of the University of Massachusetts has pointed out to me that each “half” of this inscription may begin with an intentional rhyme: Ἡορη – ἦροι. In support of this I note that each half seems also to end in a rhyme: ἐᾶι – εσθαι.

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33) The *locus classicus* for polar expressions is Wilamowitz’s note on Euripides, *Herakles* v. 1106; full-length study by E. Kemmer, *Die polare Ausdrucksweise in der griechischen Literatur* (Würzburg 1903).

34) I think it unlikely that Maiuri, Guarducci and Jeffery are correct in thinking that this inscription is an actual *sors* or oracular response; the absence of *metre* should have been considered. The precise function of this curious disk is still to be determined.

I should like to thank Professors Sterling Dow and Zeph Stewart for their helpful advice.