

## BOOK REVIEW

*The Hera of Zeus. Intimate Enemy, Ultimate Spouse.* By VINCIANE PIRENNE-DEL-FORGE AND GABRIELLE PIRONTI. Trans. by RAYMOND GEUSS. Cambridge, UK; New York, NY: Cambridge University Press, 2022. Pp. 348. Hardback, \$120.00. ISBN: 9781108888479.

This book is an English translation of the 2016 French original *L'Hera de Zeus: Ennemie Intime, Epouse Definitive*. It is the first product of a new CUP series dedicated to translating key works in other languages into English. If this is the standard adhered to, the series will be a great addition to Classical scholarship. This is an essential book for anyone interested in researching and *understanding* (if partially) the multifaceted nature of Greek polytheism.

Rather than providing a general overview or deciphering the teleological development of Hera, the authors stress her versatile character. At the same time, they successfully incorporate the many local characteristics of her cult. They avoid the straight jacket of a “uniform” goddess approach, yet demonstrate how her essential characteristics, such as maintaining sovereignty and organizing the hierarchy of the (divine) household or marriage, emerge at the cult sites from Sybaris to Samos. In the process, they traverse numerous mythological stories to argue that Hera cannot be captured by the monolithic “jealous wife” trope widespread among scholars. In fact, she is the rightful, powerful counterbalance to Zeus in her own right. She does not just exist as Zeus’ foil. She is a divine queen atop the pecking order of Olympus by her own right.

The first chapter sets out the premise of her role in the divine order. Contrary to earlier scholarship that saw Hera as the remnant of a matriarchal society or the final development of a primordial vegetation goddess descended from the Mycenaean period, the authors show that Hera took on many roles. Besides being the daughter of Kronos and thus divine royalty on her own account, she plays the role of spouse. As Zeus’ sister, she is on equal terms with him. As his lover, she is unsurpassed in beauty in Zeus’ eyes – despite his misgivings – and his desire for her stands on a different level. It is that attraction she uses to negotiate with him.

She is the guardian of marriage and safeguarded childbirth, especially the legitimacy of children, as evidenced by her behaviour vis-à-vis Dionysos and Herakles, who need to earn their right to Olympus. It is her close acquaintance with her brother that makes her his most dangerous enemy and equal: she knows exactly what triggers him and how to outsmart the thundering god, as evidenced in the story of Herakles and Eurystheus' birth.

The second, much bigger chapter, traces Hera in her various cult guises across the Greek world. The cults in question are that of Stymphalos, Plataia, Argos, Samos and Olympia. The chapter ends with an overview and analysis of her roles. Despite the local differences, in each cult it is clear that she acts in her capacity as Queen of the Gods and Olympus. Her role as the consort of Zeus is everywhere engrained in the cultic roots across Greece in various shapes and sizes. In Plataia she protects and solidifies unions and marriages; at Samos she takes on the form of Zeus' young bride that inspired such desires in him. These roles are not mutually exclusive. She can perform various duties within these cults. What their geographic dissemination and local idiosyncrasies show, however, is that despite epichoric differences, the goddess is always venerated in her role as the Hera of Zeus, an equal partner that rightly deserves worship. These investigations of cult are not just worthwhile because of the breadth of their analysis and scholarship; they also provide a *Sitz im Leben* for understanding how Greek worshippers themselves saw Hera in all her roles and attributes.

The third and final chapter traces one of Hera's most lasting legacies: that of her *cholos*. This archaic, Homeric term for anger was always misused by previous scholarship. Rather than analyze the context of Hera's wrath more closely, her actions inspired by this emotion were always viewed through the prism of jealousy at Zeus' amorous escapades. Hence, she reserved the worst punishments for Dionysos and Herakles, the "love fruits" of his affairs. The authors, however, by reviewing the stories related to their birth and eventual entry into Olympus, show that Hera was not exacting jealous revenge. What she aimed to do instead was to establish the right parameters for their inclusion into this exclusive group. This is one of her duties as sovereign queen, to ensure the sanctity of Olympus as the prerogative of those deserving and of the right pedigree. Preserving the integrity of the divine household is key: this is demonstrated through her disinterest in other illegitimate offspring that never had a chance of "enshrinement." What emerges is a wonderful investigation of how Hera maintains the delicate balance. Her actions and character shine through in all their complexity. Helping this notion further is the analysis of material culture to lift the hypotheses of her role

from the “intellectual domain” of poets and playwrights to the real, lived world of quotidian worship.

This is a rewarding book and should be read by anyone interested in researching and understanding (if only a little bit more) the world of Greek polytheism. Therefore, the title can be “misleading.” Far from just providing a wonderful exposition of Hera as the intimate enemy and ultimate spouse of Zeus, this book lifts the veil on a whole range of themes that bring us just that much closer to the lived reality of Ancient Greece.

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