A SUNNY (DIS)POSITION: THE SUN-GOD IN VEDIC AND GRECO-ROMAN MYTHOLOGY

by

AARON J. IVEY

(Under the Direction of Jared Klein)

Abstract

This thesis examines the sun-god's position in two of the earliest daughter mythologies of Indo-European culture: Vedic and Greek. My underlying question concerns whether or not the Indo-Europeans had ever viewed the sun-god as a major and, if so, why the sky-god instead became prominent. For Vedic mythology, my primary source is the *Ṛgveda*, in which numerous hymns are addressed to the sun-god Sūrya. The poems of Homer and Hesiod offer the most insight regarding Hēlios' place in archaic Greek religion, although later works provide additional information. By examining Vedic and Greco-Roman mythology, it becomes clear that the solar deity had already been relegated to a secondary position by late Indo-European culture. The daughter mythologies inherit the sky-god as supreme deity, but the sun-god remains a key figure, bringing light to mortals and gods.

INDEX WORDS: Surya, Helios, Sun-god, Vedic mythology, Greek mythology, Roman mythology

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DEDICATION

To my parents, who encouraged me to attend graduate school, and to Anna Conti, fellow mythology lover and best friend.

Semper cum amore!

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CHAPTER 1

INTRODUCTION

The sun-god was an important deity in numerous cultures across the ancient world, Indo-European or otherwise. The Sun—one of the most dependable natural phenomena and an object visible to all—represents the deity that brings light to the world. He drives away the dark things that inhabit the night and he illuminates enemies during the day. Since he possesses keen sight, he also watches all things that move across the earth's surface, and in some ancient religions, he is even king of the gods. In Egyptian tales, for instance, everything emerges from the original sun-god Rā. Concerning the cosmogeny of the Egyptian world, Charles Freeman writes, "Ra scattered his semen and out of it sprang Shu, the god of dryness, and Tefnut, the goddess of humidity. Shu and Tefnut produced a new generation of gods, the sky goddess Nut and the earth god Geb."[1] These later deities and their descendants begin to fight amongst themselves not unlike deities in Indo-European culture (e.g. the Vedic gods fighting with the Asuras, or the Greek gods fighting with the Titans).

Rā eventually entrusts the solar throne to his great-grandson Osiris. Thus, in Egyptian mythology, the sun-god peacefully retires, allowing new generations of gods to make their own pantheon. He continues to give his name to Pharaohs such as

[1] Charles Freeman, *Egypt, Greece, and Rome: Civilizations of the Ancient Mediterranean* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1996), 41.

Ramesses.[2] Conversely, the Indo-European sun-god always remains in the sky through every cycle of deities. He must stay in his lofty track to ensure the world's survival. Thus, he is unique, at once powerless to leave yet indispensable. Like the Indo-Europeans themselves, the sun-god labors during the day and rests at night, during which time he returns to the East. The Egyptians developed an early interpretation of the sun-god's daytime and nighttime journeys. In her article "The Cosmic Journey of Odysseus," Nanno Marinatos offers a basic outline of the Sun's journey in Egyptian mythology:

> The sun travels around the universe completing a full circle every day. Half of his path is in the light and half is in the darkness. There are several ways to render this image, but the predominant features are two: the circular path and the East-Western polarity. The fundament concepts are always the same. The sun goes through darkness in the underworld, but is regenerated every morning when he is born (as a child or scarab in the East).[3]

Rā's journey across the sky and his subsequent journey through the underworld to be reborn in the east likely influence the sun-god's journey in Indo-European culture. The greatest Mediterranean powers (including the Eyptians as well as the Minoans) were trading as early as the second millennium BCE; religious ideas were inevitably exchanged as well.[4] The Greeks were also in contact with the Egyptians during the Mycenaean period. The Greek sun-god Hēlios, like Rā, is furthermore portrayed as a shepherd, a description found in wider Indo-European religion as well and one that suggests a primordial association between the sun-god and cattle. The Greeks' other major contact, the Minoans, seem to have largely overlooked solar deities in their cults.[5]

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[2] *Ibid.*, 46.
[3] Nanno Marinatos, "The Cosmic Journey of Odysseus," *Numen* 48, No. 4 (2001): 383.
[4] Nicholas Kazanas, "Archaic Greece and the Veda," *Annals of the Bhandarkar Oriental Research Institute* 82, No. 1 (2001): 2.
[5] Martin P. Nilsson, *The Minoan-Mycenaean Religion and Its Survival in Greek Religion* (New York: Biblo and Tannen, 1971), 420.

Therefore, if the Greeks inherited non-Indo-European religious characteristics related to the sun-god, Egypt was the most likely source.

The Proto-Indo-European word for the Sun is **sH$_2$wel*, or **sH$_2$wen-* in the oblique cases.[6] It is naturally a core word of the language as supported by its retention in nine daughter branches of Proto-Indo-European. Anatolian, Classical Armenian, and Tocharian are the only daughter languages that have lost this word. A variety of forms—including as many as seven ablaut grades—are found even within Proto-Indo-European itself, resulting in the numerous derivatives found in the daughter languages.[7] For example, Old English shows at least three derivations: *swegl, sōl* (perhaps borrowed from Old Norse *sól*), and, of course, *sunne*. They all stem from different Proto-Germanic forms, but all of them ultimately derive from **sH$_2$wel*. Furthermore, this word also refers to the sun-god himself, indicating that the Indo-Europeans made no distinction between the Sun its corresponding solar deity. Conversely, they carefully distinguished **puH$_2$r* (Hittite *paḫḫur*, Greek *pyr*, English *fire*) from its divine counterpart **H$_1$ṇg^{w}nis* (Sanskrit *agnis*, Latin *ignis*, Old Church Slavic *ognĭ*).

Little may be said of the Sun's sex since the Proto-Indo-European word is neuter, but the word is feminine in many daughter branches including Germanic (although the Gothic *sauil* is neuter), Celtic, and Baltic. Sól, for instance, is the sun-goddess in Norse Mythology. Moreover, Martin Huld argues that the masculine sun-gods of Vedic and Greco-Roman mythology "probably reflect Mediterranean and Near Eastern mythic

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[6] Calvert Watkins, *The American Heritage Dictionary of Indo-European Roots* (Boston: Houghton Mifflin Company, 2000), 72.

[7] Martin E. Huld, "Proto- and post-Indo-European Designations for 'Sun'," *Zeitschrift für vergleichende Sprachforschung* 99 (1986): 195. Variations include **suH$_2$el* (Sanskrit *svar*), **seH$_2$wel* (Gothic *sauil*), **seH$_2$weliyos* (Greek *ἥλιος*), and **suH$_2$l-iyo-s* (Sanskrit *sūrya*).

associations with solar imagery, cf. Akkadian Šamaš, Sumerian Uttu, or Etruscan Usil."[8] However, other scholars such as Peter Jackson contend that the Indo-European sun-god was male. The sun-god's exact relationship with the other Indo-European deities is unknown since few of these gods remain in daughter mythologies and even fewer remain unchanged. Jackson—working with the earlier models of Wolfram Euler and George Dunkel—has attempted to connect the sun-god to the core Indo-European pantheon via the marriage of the sun-god's daughter.

Jackson's model of the Indo-European pantheon presupposes that the Indo-Europeans viewed their gods as a nuclear family.[9] These deities include:

> Father Heaven: *_dyēws pH$_2$tēr_ > _Dyauṣpitṛ_, _Zeus_ (_patēr_), _Iūpiter_
> Mother: *_diwōneH$_2$_ > _Diōnē_ (a feminized form of Zeus's name)
> Daughter, or the dawn goddess: *_H$_2$ewsōs_ > _Uṣās_, _Ēōs_, _Aurōra_
> Son, or the oak/thunder god: *_perk^{w}uH$_3$nos_ > the Slavic god _Perunъ_, _Quirīnus_ (?)
> Grandsons/sons: *_diwos nepotH$_1$e / suHnū_ > _Aśvins_, _Dioskouri_

The interrelated deities of Vedic and Greco-Roman culture support the model of Jackson, who furthermore argues that the grandsons/sons of the sky-god marry the*_seH$_2$weliyosyo dhugH$_2$tēr_, or the sun-god's daughter. Any original blood relation between the sun-god and this family of gods is unknown. The suggestion that he is another son of the sky god is tempting, but little evidence of such a relationship exists outside of Vedic mythology, in which Sūrya is the son of Dyauṣpitṛ; for comparison, Hēlios is not the son of Zeus but the son of the Titan Hyperiōn. On the other hand, both Vedic and Greek mythology support Jackson's notion that the sun-god is related by law to the core Indo-European pantheon. In the more conservative Vedic mythology, the twin horselords, the Aśvins, are jointly married to the sun-god's daughter, Sūryā, who often appears alongside them in

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[8] _Ibid._, 198.
[9] Peter Jackson, "Light from Distant Asterisks. Towards a Description of the Indo-European Religious Heritage," _Numen_ 49, No. 1 (2002): 66-67.

their chariot. We find a slightly different but similar arrangement in Greek mythology. The Dioskouri, who are the Greek Aśvins, always leave a seat in their chariot for their sister Helen.

Ultimately, the relationship between the Indo-European sun-god and the nuclear family of deities is bound by law rather than blood, given that the sun-god's daughter seems to have married into this celestial family. More important, however, is the sun-god's various functions among the other deities. The goal of this thesis is to examine these solar roles and to determine whether the Indo-Europeans ever considered the sun-god as a significant deity in their pantheon. He is undeniably a vital deity whose primary function is to bring light to mortals and gods. Another important characteristic is his relationship with cattle and herding. These herds are typically cattle, but they often represent the Vedic people themselves. Sūrya and Hēlios are both said to impel their respective people forward to their daily tasks. Thus, the sun-god acts as an overseer, guiding the people by his light.

The sun-god is furthermore associated with oaths. To quote David Sick: "the Sun is a keeper of contracts, and one of the most important forms of contract between immortals and gods is the ritual of sacrifice."[10] The sun not only ensures that oaths remain unbroken but he also establishes a link between mortals and their gods since he is a universal phenomenon. Nevertheless, neither the Vedic people nor the Greeks ever refer to the sun-god as the Father of Gods and Humans. They reserve this title for the sky-god alone, who is the supreme deity in late Indo-European culture; the sun-god is subordinate to the sky-god in most if not all daughter branches of Indo-European, suggesting a primordial position of subservience. We are left to wonder why the Indo-Europeans

[10] David H. Sick, "Mit(h)ra(s) and the Myths of the Sun," *Numen* 51, No. 4 (2004): 459.

decided to relegate the most visible deity in the sky to a secondary position. To answer this question, I will examine the Vedic and Greek sun-gods, specifically their divine roles, physical characteristics, lineage, and myths as preserved by the Vedic people and by the Greeks.

CHAPTER 2

SŪRYO VIŚVACAKṢĀS: THE SUN-GOD IN THE *ṚGVEDA*

Nothing in all mythology is more difficult than
the attempt to get a clear view of the gods of Vedic India
~ Andrew Lang *Mythology, Ritual, and Religion*

I. Introduction

For the Vedic people of Bronze-Age India, the most important solar deity was Sūrya, whose great eye shines upon everything. He is indispensable since the world relies upon his light to function. The Vedic poets apostrophize the Sun in countless hymns throughout the *Ṛgveda*, the vast collection of songs addressed to the Vedic gods. Furthermore, Sūrya himself is the subject of at least ten hymns spaced throughout the collection.[11] These stunningly evocative yet often opaque songs offer insight into the sun-god's multifaceted character and complex nature. His roles in the Vedic world are as numerous as his physical appearances; he variously materializes as an eye, an orb, a jewel, a weapon, a chariot, and even an eagle, among other things. As such, Sūrya is unique when compared to the Greco-Roman solar deities Hēlios and Sōl, who typically appear as great, golden gods. Although Sūrya occasionally appears in a similar guise, the sheer multitude of his manifestations distinguishes him from his Greco-Roman counterparts.

When compared to the Greco-Roman gods, the Vedic deities have more meaningful names (i.e. their names show a clearer Indo-European affinity).[12] Many of

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[11] A. A. Macdonell, *Vedic Mythology* (Delhi: Indological Book House, 1971), 30.
[12] Eric Csapo, *Theories of Mythology* (Malden, MA: Blackwell Publishing, 2005), 22.

them—including Sūrya—have been inherited directly from the Indo-European pantheon and have retained their divine roles. Whereas the Hittites, whose culture predates that of the Indo-Iranians, called their gods by Hurrian designations, the Vedic people better preserved Indo-European names.[13] Moreover, Macdonell notes:

> [The gods] are almost without exception the deified representatives of the phenomena or agencies of nature. The degree of anthropomorphism to which they have attained, however, varies considerably. When the name of the god is the same as that of his natural basis, the personification has not advanced beyond the rudimentary stage.[14]

The Vedic people made no distinction between the physical object of the Sun and its divine representation. Just as the word *agnis* may refer to the element of fire or to the fire-god Agni, *svar* or *sūrya* (both variants deriving from Proto-Indo-European *sH_2wel via *suH_2el and *suH_2l-*iyo-s*, respectively) may refer either to the deity or to the Sun itself.[15] In Greco-Roman terms, Sūrya is the equivalent of a Titan, a force of nature that had long ago been deified only to be supplanted by gods who are either more anthropomorphic (such as Agni) or more ethnocentric (such as Indra). Nevertheless, the fact that Sūrya is beholden to deities such as Indra, Mitra, or Varuṇa in no way diminishes his esteem. In fact, he is one of the most widely-honored deities in the Vedic pantheon.

Sūrya is the first god seen by the Vedic people when they wake up. Moreover, he is the eye by which they may see the world as shown in hymn X.158.4-5: *cákṣur no dhehi cákṣuṣe* | *cákṣur vikhyaí tanū́bh$_i$yaḥ* | *sáṃ cedáṃ ví ca paśyema* | *susaṃdŕ̥śaṃ t$_u$vā vayám* | *práti paśyema sūr$_i$ya* (For us, place the eye for [our] seeing, an eye to see for ourselves.

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[13] *Ibid.*, 70.
[14] Macdonell, *Vedic Mythology*, 2.
[15] Calvert Watkins, *The American Heritage Dictionary of Indo-European Roots* (Boston: Houghton Mifflin Company, 2000), 72.

May we observe this [earth] as a whole. May we look towards you, O Sūrya, of pleasing aspect). Regardless of the sun-god's revered state, there is no unambiguous mention of Sūrya as king of the gods even in the earliest hymns of the second millennium BCE. The national Vedic war-god, Indra, alone enjoys this status, and several hymns assert his power over Sūrya. However, the ancient Indian grammarian Yāska classified Sūrya, Indra, and Agni as the topmost gods of the heavenly, aerial, and terrestrial domain, respectively.[16] Such an arrangement recalls Zeus, Poseidōn, and Hadēs drawing lots for territory in Greek mythology.

Since Sūrya is one of the more plainly visible deities for the Vedic tribes, one wonders why he is subservient to younger gods. Divine usurpation is by no means unique to Vedic, Greco-Roman, or even Indo-European mythology. The Hurrians have a myth—preserved by the Hittites—in which the god Kumarbi orally castrates the elder sky-god Anu, thereby gaining power and becoming king of the gods. Older ways of life tend to make way for newer modes, or as K. M. Shembavnekar notes:

> For the loss of an old order or thing, if viewed in the scientific perspective, is brought about in two ways: either by metamorphosis, in which the old disappears only to emerge as new; or by supersession, in which the old is pushed aside by a stronger new rival.[17]

As with many solar deities, Sūrya belongs to the old order, i.e. the natural gods; he undergoes no metamorphosis but becomes overshadowed by newer deities, a process perhaps already underway in late Indo-European culture. For example, in the hierarchical model proposed by Peter Jackson, the Indo-European sun-god was related to the core pantheon of deities through marriage rather than blood. The sun-god's daughter is

[16] H. G. Renade, "Sun-God and his Associates in the Rigveda," *Bulletin of the Deccan College Research Institute* 34 (1974): 143.
[17] K. M. Shembavnekar, "The Metamorphosis of Uṣas," *Annals of the Bhandarkar Oriental Research Institute* 17, No. 4 (1935-36): 351.

married to the grandsons/sons of the sky-god.[18] Furthermore, since Vedic mythology is one of the most conservative daughter mythologies of Indo-European, this pantheon largely remains intact.[19] In light of this hierarchy, an important question to consider concerns whether or not Sūrya meets the criteria befitting an important deity. To answer this question, I will begin by examining a selection of Sūrya's numerous duties in the *Ṛgveda*.

II. The Role of the Sun-God in Vedic Mythology

Sūrya's primary function is no different from that of other solar deities. As the most manifestly visible god in the daytime sky, we may begin to understand the honor bestowed upon Sūrya by the Vedic people. He exists to measure time (specifically, the length of the day) and to bring light to both mortals and gods; his ascent wakens everything into life. For example, Sūrya is the subject of hymn X.37, which focuses upon his ascent into the sky. Sūrya's heavenly ascension is a major motif throughout the *Ṛgveda*, reflecting a primal connection between humans and nature. To quote Max Müller: "Was not the Sunrise the first wonder, the first beginning of all reflection, all thought, all philosophy?"[20] As such, the Vedic poets describe the sunrise using some of the most beautifully poetic lines in Sanskrit literature. Verse 4 of hymn X.37 reads, *yéna sūrya jyótiṣā bā́dhase támo | jágac ca víśvam udiyárṣi bhānúnā | ténāsmád víśvām ánirām ánāhutim | ápā́mīvām ápa duṣvápnᵢyaṃ suva* (By which light, O Sūrya, you drive away the darkness and [by which] splendor you raise everything that moves, by this impel every lack of nourishment, lack of sacrifice, disease, [and] nightmare from us). The

[18] Peter Jackson, "Light from Distant Asterisks. Towards a Description of the Indo-European Religious Heritage," *Numen* 49, No. 1 (2002): 67.
[19] Nicholas Kazanas, "Greece and the Veda," *Annals of the Bhandarkar Oriental Research Institute* 82 (2001): 7.
[20] F. M. Müller, *Selected Essays on Language, Mythology, and Religion* (London: Longsmans, Green, and Co., 1881), 599-600.

Sun's very beams—often personified as fiery horses—can both stir everything into movement and drive away life's undesirable aspects. Hymn I.50.4, on the other hand, highlights Sūrya's illumination: *taráṇir viśvádarśato | jyotiṣkṛ́d asi sūrᵢya | víśvam ā́ bhāsi rocanám* (Crossing, visible to all, you are the light-maker, O Sūrya. You illuminate every luminous sphere). As the bringer of light, all life depends upon Sūrya's passage. If he ceases to perform his duty, everything will perish, and the other gods will be left in darkness. In Greco-Roman mythology, the Olympians still rely upon the natural deities, although they have commandeered the primordial gods' positions. The other Vedic divinities look to the sun-god for their own various tasks as well, some of which I will discuss in the next part of this chapter. Besides his primary role as a solar deity, he is also a great spy among the gods and watches over mortal deeds, both good and bad.

One of Sūrya's most frequent epithets is *viśvácakṣās*, translated as "whose eye is upon all." Like Hēlios in Greek mythology, nothing escapes the Sun's vision, at least not during the day when he crosses the sky in his golden chariot (*haríto rátha*). Macdonell describes Sūrya as "the most concrete of the solar deities [in Vedic mythology]" since the sun's great wheel (*Sū́ryasya cákram*) is the most visible to the Vedic people.[21] In the first verse of hymn I.115, the poet describes the sun-god as *cákṣur mitrásya váruṇasya agnéḥ*, or "the eye of Mitra, Varuṇa, [and] Agni." Consequently, Sūrya appears as an instrument of these other deities (the gods of contracts, truth, and fire, respectively) so that they may look upon the world. Further into the poem, the poet sings, *tán mitrásya váruṇasyābhicákṣe | sū́ryo rūpáṃ kṛṇute dyór upásthe* (Sūrya creates his own form in heaven's lap for Mitra and Varuṇa to see). The sun-god is no metaphorical eye of the heavens here. The Vedic poet describes him as the literal eye of other gods, suggesting a

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[21] Macdonell, *Vedic Mythology*, 30.

codependency between the older, natural god and the younger divinities. Moreover, other deities use Sūrya to fulfill their own duties as well. VII.66.10, for example, describes various gods as *sū́racakṣaso*, or "having eyes like the Sun." A strange description, perhaps, but one begins to wonder if the other gods can truly look upon the world without Sūrya's aid. If not, then the sun-god is even more indispensable, particularly as an instrument.

Like Hēlios, Sūrya also acts as a spy, surveying all deeds. Since the god Mitra presides over oaths and contracts, it is fitting that the Sun works as his spy, given that Sūrya's eye shines upon everything. His great eye is significant. Wendy Doniger explains:

> The sun functions in these myths as a metaphor (for power, for mortality, for divinity, for a god or goddess, or truth) but also as a literal thing, the ball of fire in the sky. The idea that the sun itself is an eye, the eye of a god, looking at us, is implied by a funeral hymn in the *Rig Veda*, which says to the dead man: "May your eye go to the sun."[22]

No human may escape the sun-god's eye. For example, hymn VII.60.2 reads *eṣá syá mitrāvaruṇā nṛcákṣā | ubhé úd eti sū́rịyo abhí jmán | víśvasya sthātúr jágataś ca gopā́ | ṛjú márteṣu vṛjinā́ ca páśyan* (This very Sun, O Mitra and Varuṇa, having the gaze of men, rises up over both on the earth, the herdsman of every stayer and goer, beholding the straight and the wicked [acts]). Sūrya's description as a *gopā́*, or "shepherd," is significant, and I will return to this role towards the end of part I. Sūrya watches over everyone and everything, and the Vedic poet intimates that the sun-god then informs Mitra of what he sees. Hymn IV.13.3 is even more explicit: *táṃ sū́rịyaṃ harítaḥ saptá yahvī́ | spáśaṃ víśvasya jágato vahanti* (The seven swift, golden [mares] convey Sūrya

[22] Wendy Doniger, *Splitting the Difference: Gender and Myth in Ancient Greece and India* (Chicago: The Chicago University Press, 1999), 64.

himself, the spy of the entire world). The poet's use of *spáś*, or "spy," leaves little doubt regarding this particular function of the sun-god. The arrangement between Sūrya and Mitra differs slightly from Greek mythology since Hēlios himself is a god of contracts alongside Zeus.[23] Regardless, Mitra may, in fact, be an older solar deity in Vedic mythology, a position which, if correct, would tie him more closely to his Iranian counterpart, Mithra.[24] David Sick points out: "Iranian Mithra tends to fulfill his responsibilities in a manner comparable to and in association with the Sun, which is a distinct deity in Avestan and generally referred to as *Hwarəxšaēta*."[25] In verse 1.3 of the Avestan *Hymn to Mithra*, the poet explains that Mithra offers swift horses to those who keep their oaths.[26] We will soon see that to swear an oath before the Sun is no light matter.

Interestingly, the Vedic poets also describe the Sun as a weapon for other deities in Book V of the *Ṛgveda*. Macdonell contends that Sūrya's heat never brings destruction in the *Ṛgveda*, maintaining that this aspect of the Sun's power manifests more prominently in the other Vedic texts.[27] The *Atharvaveda*, for instance, focuses less upon the gods and more upon everyday Vedic life, and the poet of hymn II.32.1 calls upon Sūrya to protect his cattle: *udyánn ādityáḥ krímīn hantu | nimrócan hantu raśmíbhiḥ | yé antáḥ krímayo gávi* (May the rising Āditya kill the worms! May the setting [Āditya] with his rays kill the worms which are inside the cow). In this hymn, Sūrya bears the metronymic Āditya, which marks him as the son of the goddess Aditi. Additionally, some scholars argue that the phrase *krímīn hantu* ultimately derives from the Proto-Indo-

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[23] Jaan Puhvel, *Comparative Mythology* (Baltimore: The Johns Hopkins University Press, 1987), 129.
[24] Alfred Hillebrandt, *Vedic Mythology: Volume 2*, trans. Sreeramula Rajeswara Sarma (Delhi: Motilal Banarsidass, 1980), 72.
[25] David H. Sick, "Mit(h)ra(s) and the Myths of the Sun," *Numen* 51, No. 4 (2004): 448.
[26] Ilya Gershevitch, *The Avestan Hymn to Mithra* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1967), 74-75.
[27] Macdonell, *Vedic Mythology*, 31.

European poetic formula **eg^{wh}ent og^{wh}im*, meaning “he slew the serpent,” although the more direct Sanskrit derivation *áhann áhim* means the same thing and refers to one of Indra’s great deeds.[28] Regardless, the threat of devastation via solar rays lurks even within the *Ṛgveda*, particularly as a deterrent for those who would forswear their oaths.

Although Sūrya is responsible for informing Mitra of any perjury, it is Varuṇa who typically punishes the oath-breakers.[29] Furthermore, hymn V.63.4 indicates that Mitra and Varuṇa use the sun-god as a weapon. The poet explains that these deities control the heavens, which is unsurprising since Varuṇa—the god of truth—may correspond with Ouranos/Uranus. Mitra and Varuṇa even exert power over Sūrya himself: *sū́ryo jyótiś carati citrám ā́yudham | tám abhréṇa vṛṣṭiyā́ gūhatho diví* (The Sun, [your] light goes [as] a bright-colored weapon. With cloud and rain you conceal it in heaven [O Mitra and Varuṇa]). At its core, the hymn forms a request for rain.[30] Since summer represents the acme of Sūrya’ power, the Vedic people would naturally ask for respite from the parching heat.[31] Additionally, the concealment of the Sun behind a cloud marks a major myth in the *Ṛgveda*, which I will discuss in part IV of this chapter. What interests me here is that the poet refers to Sūrya as an *ā́yudham*, or “weapon,” which derives from the verbal root *yudh*, meaning “to fight.” Although Varuṇa punishes perjurers, it is Sūrya the informant who shines upon them, watching their every deed. The notion of Sūrya as a great weapon should not raise concerns that he is some wildly destructive deity. The poet is more likely accentuating the fact that other gods may use

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[28] Benjamin Slade, “How (exactly) to slay a dragon in Indo-European? PIE *bheid-{h$_3$ég^{wh}im, k^{w}ŕmi-},” *Historiche Sprachforschung* Bd. 121 (2008): 21. For a fuller account of this phrase and Indo-European poetics, see Calvert Watkins’ seminal work *How to Kill a Dragon*.
[29] Harmut Scharfe, “The Sacred Water of the Ganges and the Styx Water,” *Zeitschrift für vergleichende Sprachforschung* 86 (1972): 118.
[30] Stephanie W. Jamison and Joel P. Brereton, *The Rigveda* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2014), 744.
[31] Hillebrandt, *Vedic Mythology: Volume 2*, 126.

Sūrya's power for destructive purposes if they so intend. We may see comparable examples of younger gods using the powers of older deities in Greco-Roman mythology. For example, in Book1 of the *Metamorphoses*, Ovid recounts how Iūpiter floods the world with both his own rains and Gaia's waters.[32] Ovid also tells the story of Hēlios' son Phaethōn, who almost incinerates the world when he loses control of his father's chariot.[33] Ultimately, the other Vedic gods cannot banish the Sun altogether but can only hide his face with clouds and rain. Hymn V.63 is anomalous when it suggests that Sūrya's power is harmful to the world, yet a similar implication occurs in hymn I.191.

Hymn I.191 is one of the most unusual hymns in the entire *Ṛgveda*. Stephanie Jamison and Joel Brereton describe it as being more in tune with the *Atharvaveda* since it contains spells against evil beings.[34] In this hymn, the poet describes how Sūrya destroys poisonous beasts: *út purástāt sū́rya eti | viśvádr̥ṣṭo adr̥ṣṭahā́ | adŕ̥ṣṭān sárvāñ jambháyan | sárvāś ca yātudhānī́yaḥ || úd apaptad asaú sū́ryaḥ | purú víśvāni jū́ruvan | ādityáḥ párvatebhᵢyo | viśvádr̥ṣṭo adr̥ṣṭahā́* (The Sun arises from the East, the destroyer of all the unseen ones, seen by all, and crushing all the unseen ones and all the sorceries. That Sun has flown up, consuming all the many, the Āditya from the mountains, seen by all, the destroyer of all unseen ones).[35] Again, Sūrya is a weapon, but here he is the destroyer of evil things rather than a deterrent againist forswearing oaths. However unusual hymn I.191 is in the context of the *Ṛgveda*, it nevertheless recalls the sun-god's primary role as the dispeller of darkness. Sūrya illuminates hidden enemies, not only because he shines upon everything but also because he knows all deeds, good and bad. The sun-god's

[32] Ovid, *Metamorphoses*, 1.253-312.
[33] *Ibid.*, 1.746-2.400.
[34] Jamison and Brereton, *Rigveda*, 396.
[35] *Ṛgveda* I.191.8-9.

tendency to destroy monsters best manifests itself in hymn VII.104.24, in which the poet admonishes, *mā́ té dr̥śan sū́r$_i$yam uccárantam* (Let [the evil beings] not look upon the rising Sun). Nevertheless, the Vedic poets more often emphasize Sūrya's gentler aspects, especially his ascent into the daytime sky, after which he may look upon his people.

Most of Sūrya's hymns emphasize his early rising. As mentioned earlier, sunrise resonates deeply in the hearts of the Vedic people. It is the most consistent natural phenomenon as indicated by the maxim in hymn X.37.2: *víśvam anyán ní viśate yád éjati* | *viśvā́hā́po viśvā́hód eti sū́r$_i$yaḥ* (Everything else that stirs reposes. The waters always [run], the Sun always ascends). Numerous other hymns follow a similar pattern. Returning to hymn VII.60.1, for instance, the beginning describes Sūrya's ascension into the heaven so that he may inform Mitra and Varuṇa of people's good deeds: *yád adyá sūr$_i$ya brávo ánāgā | udyán mitrā́ya váruṇāya satyám | vayáṃ devatrā́ adite s$_i$yāma | táva priyā́so aryaman gr̥ṇántaḥ* (If today, O Sūrya, the guiltless one, rising up, speak the truth to Mitra and Varuṇa, that we are [guiltless] among the gods, O Aditi [and] your dear singers, O Aryaman). The rising of the Sun is clearly an auspicious event among the Vedic people; before sunrise, the world lies in a state of stupor, in which most things are at rest. The day begins when Sūrya flies above the horizon. Furthermore, the poet's request that Sūrya speak favorably to Mitra and Varuṇa concerning his devoted people (i.e. the ones who honor the gods with their songs) reflects Sūrya's role as a spy but also introduces the final role of the Vedic sun-god I wish to discuss: Sūrya as a shepherd.

The depiction of the sun-god as a shepherd is not limited to Vedic mythology. The Avestan deity Mithra shares the same role. David Sick notes, "[Mithra] is also the defender of the Cow and a guardian of safe havens, termed pastures, a duty attributed to

the Sun in Greece and India."[36] Hēlios of Greek mythology also takes great pleasure in his cattle on the island of Thrinakia, suggesting that the pastoral nature of solar deities descends from Indo-European culture. Sick additionally argues:

> Sūrya, the god whose name goes back to the Proto-Indo-European term for the sun (*sāu̯el), has several pastoral associations: he is referred to as a herdsman; his rays are called metaphorically his cows, and the dawn, from whom Sūrya is born, is theriomorphized as a cow, thus making Sūrya himself her calf.[37]

The makeup of Sūrya's herds may change from song to song. Some hymns such as V.45.9 connect him specifically with cattle: *ā́ sū́rᵢyo yãtu saptáaśvaḥ | kṣétraṃ yád asyorviyā́ dīrghayāthé | raghúḥ śyenáḥ patayad ándho áchā | yúvā kavír dīdayad góṣu gáchan* (Let Sūrya, having seven horses, come to the field which [stretches] broadly at [the end of] his long course. May the swift hawk fly towards the [*soma*] stalk. May the young poet shine, going among the cattle). Although the poet does not explicitly name the owner of the cattle, Sūrya is likely the shepherd here, given that other hymns refer to the sun-god's cattle as well as his association with poetic inspiration (see X.177 below).

On the other hand, hymns such as VII.60 paint Sūrya as the shepherd of the Vedic people themselves, a deity common to all their tribes.[38] Hymn VII.63.4-5 expounds upon this theme: *divó rukmá urucákṣā úd eti | dūréarthas taráṇir bhrā́jamānaḥ | nūnáṃ jánāḥ sū́rᵢyeṇa prásūtā | áyann árthāni kr̥ṇávann ápāṃsi || yátrā cakrúr amŕ̥tā gātúm asmai | śyenó ná dī́yann ánu eti pā́thaḥ* (Heaven's far-seeing ornament ascends, [he] whose goal is far away, crossing over as he shines. Now the people, driven forth by Sūrya, will [to] their purpose [and] will perform [their] tasks. Where the immortals made a path for him, flying like a hawk he follows the *pātha*). The meaning of *pātha* is obscure. Sir Monier-

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[36] Sick, "Mit(h)ra(s) and the Myths of the Sun," 461.
[37] *Ibid.*, 438.
[38] Jamison and Brereton, *Rigveda*, 966.

Williams equates it with the word *patha*, meaning “path.”[39] Conversely, Jamison and Brereton translate it as “herd [of other gods].”[40] Nevertheless, Sūrya not only wakens his people and drives them forth into the day’s events but also watches over them as they complete their daily tasks. As such, Sūrya is a shepherd of people, an aspect which portrays the deity at his most kingly and which has parallels in Greek literature. In Book 2 of the *Iliad*, for example, Homer refers to Agamemnōn as *ποιμὴν λαῶν*, meaning “shepherd of the people.”[41] As the commander of the Akhaian forces at Troy, Agamemnōn impels his soldiers to war just as Sūrya leads his own people in their daily tasks.

Throughout the *Ṛgveda*, Sūrya remains at the whim of younger gods, but his description as a *gopā́* may reflect some long-lost function as an overseer, although it is unclear if he ever oversaw other gods. In verse 13.54 of the Avestan *Hymn to Mithra*, Mithra describes himself in similar terms: *azəm vīspanąm dāmanąm | nipāta ahmi hvapō | azəm vīspanąm dāmanąm | nišharəta ahmi hvapō* (I am the beneficent protector of all creatures, I am the beneficent guardian of all creatures).[42] Something worthy of consideration is that Indra himself also acts as a shepherd. In hymn 2.24.3, for example, the poet sings, *úd gā́ ājad ábhinad bráhmaṇā valám | ágūhat támo ví acakṣayat sᵤvaḥ* ([Indra] drove out the oxen, he split Vala with a prayer. He concealed the darkness [and] made visible the Sun). Indra performs many great deeds, but two of them stand above the rest. The first is his battle against the dragon Vṛtra, whose death allows Indra to release the Waters of Life. The second great deed appears in hymn 2.24, which recalls how Indra

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[39] Sir Monier Monier-Williams, *A Sanskrit-English Dictionary* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1899), 617.
[40] Jamison and Brereton, *Rigveda*, 956.
[41] Homer, *Iliad*, 2.243.
[42] Gershevitch, *The Avestan Hymn to Mithra*, 100-101.

rescued the cattle from the demon Vala and thereby awoke the world into life. This hymn likely describes a cattle raid, a poetic motif appearing also in Greek (cf. Nestor's tales in the *Iliad*) and Celtic literature, among others.[43] Since both Sūrya and Indra act as shepherds of cattle and people, this pastoral role may belie some archaic shift in power whose vestiges appear throughout the hymns.

Ultimately, Sūrya's role as a spy, an instrument, a weapon, or a shepherd is secondary to his primary function as the dispeller of darkness. The Vedic world begins anew when Sūrya rises into the sky, bringing his light and driving away the dark aspects of the world. The priests and poets invoke his magnanimity by singing and praising his various life-giving aspects, yet Sūrya's mythological role is merely one aspect of the solar deity. As the most visible sun-god among the Vedic people, it is unsurprising that some hymns go to great lengths to describe Sūrya's actual appearance. These depictions range from commonplace (a golden god) to unusual (a tawny bird). Therefore, in the next part of this chapter, I hope to paint a picture of Sūrya as described by the poets of the *Ṛgveda*.

III. Sūrya's Appearance in the Vedic Eye

The physical appearance of Sūrya manifests itself in numerous ways among the Vedic people. He is, of course, the most readily apparent god in the Vedic pantheon, yet he does not always resemble other solar deities such as Hēlios or Sōl. However, given the Sun's dazzling radiance, it is unsurprising that the Vedic poets would describe Sūrya using various forms. For example, he sometimes appears as a great, golden god riding high in a flaming chariot. Sūrya's chariot is drawn by numerous horses, most commonly by seven mares, whom the poets call *Sapta*, or "the Seven." Furthermore, some scholars

[43] Slade, "How (exactly) to slay a dragon in Indo-European? PIE *bheid-{$h_3$ég^{w}him, k^{w}ŕmi-}," 6.

argue that the horses are merely extensions of Sūrya himself. As Ann Suter maintains: "In the Rig Veda, these horses are maintained as aspects of the sun itself, who as 'Sūrya the sun-god, is both the bridegroom and the horse of the dawn-goddess Uṣās'."[44] Some descriptions of Sūrya in the *Ṛgveda* transcend typical sun-god attire, leaving us to wonder why so many variant accounts of Sūrya's appearance exist within the Vedic hymns. In the following section, I will examine several depictions of Sūrya, beginning with the representation most consistent with other solar deities.

Hymn I.50 is one of the most important solar hymns in the *Ṛgveda*. Although the final three verses constitute a prayer for the warding against jaundice, the bulk of the poem narrates the Sun's arrival into the daytime sky.[45] As always, Sūrya's ascension is a favorable occasion, and the poem begins:

úd u tyáṃ jātávedasaṃ
deváṃ vahanti ketávaḥ
dr̥śé víśvāya sū́rᵢyam

ápa tyé tāyávo yathā
nákṣatrā yanti aktúbhiḥ
sū́rāya viśvácakṣase

ádr̥śram asya ketávo
ví raśmáyo jánām̐ ánu
bhrā́janto agnáyo yathā.

Upward do the beams
convey this heavenly Jātavedas,
Sūrya for all to see.

Like thieves, these stars
with the night depart
before Sūrya, he who sees all.

His beams have appeared,

[44] Ann Suter, "Aphrodite/Paris/Helen: A Vedic Myth in the Iliad," *Transactions of the American Philological Association* 117 (1987): 57.
[45] Jamison and Brereton, *Rigveda*, 162.

his rays broadly among the people,
shining like fires.

The hymn underscores the disparity between the nighttime and daytime skies. Sūrya is naturally a daytime god, having no control over the world at night, during which time he presumably resides in the ocean à la Hēlios or the archaic Egyptian god Rā. Night is the time for wicked things to creep back into the world, but they flee once more at the Sun's arrival. The poet further describes Sūrya's ascent in verses 7 and 8, singing, *ví dyā́m eṣi rájas pr̥thú | áhā mímāno aktúbhiḥ | páśyañ jánmāni sūr*$_i$*ya | saptá tvā haríto ráthe | váhanti deva sūr*$_i$*ya | śocíṣkeśaṃ vicakṣaṇa* (You traverse heaven, the broad sphere, measuring days with nights, watching the races, O Sūrya. The yellow Seven bay [steeds] draw you in [your] chariot, O heavenly Sūrya, [the] flaming-haired one, broadly seeing). In this poem, Sūrya most closely matches our preconceived image of a solar deity. Everything associated with the sun-god is golden in this hymn; Sūrya has fiery hair, and yellow horses draw his flaming chariot. This description of Sūrya corresponds to depictions of Hēlios and Sōl among the Greeks and Romans. All three deities drive across the sky in a flaming, golden chariot that is drawn by a team of horses. The poet again highlights Sūrya's role as the measurer of time as he both drives away the night only for it to inexorably follow behind him. Since Rātrī, the goddess of night, had nursed the Sun in some Vedic tales, she is said to encompass Sūrya at his journey's beginning and end.[46] Hymn I.50 depicts Sūrya at his most ideal, but poets more commonly describe his blinding radiance since it represents his core, divine essence.

Luminosity is the chief characteristic of Sūrya for the Vedic people since there is no more pervasive light anywhere. Therefore, many hymns focus upon the Sun's rays. In

[46] Puhvel, *Comparative Mythology*, 60.

hymn X.170, for example, the poet celebrates Sūrya’s radiance, sometimes using terminology more commonly associated with warrior-gods such as Indra.[47] Verses 2-4 read: *idáṃ śréṣṭhaṃ jyótiṣāṃ jyótir uttamáṃ | viśvajíd dhanajíd ucyate bṛhát | viśvabhrā́ḍ bhrājó máhi sū́r*$_{i}$*yo dṛśá | urú paprathe sáha ójo ácyutam | vibhrā́jañ jyótiṣā s*$_{\acute{u}}$*var | ágacho rocanáṃ diváḥ* (This, the most beautiful, highest light of lights. The lofty light is called all-conquering, wealth-winning. The all-illuminating, exceedingly bright Sun has broadly spread his great [light], mighty [and] imperishable for being seen. Blazing forth with your light, O Sun, you have approached heaven’s luminous sphere). The word *jyótiṣ*, meaning “light,” appears three times in this excerpt, underscoring just how omnipresent Sūrya’s rays are. In fact, the Sun’s radiance is often invoked by the name of Savitṛ, who seems to represent the life-giving characteristic of the Sun and whose name may derive from an archaic epithet for Sūrya.[48] Numerous poems adhere to this motif of light. Returning to hymn I.50, in verse 10 the poet sings, *deváṃ devatrā́ sū́r*$_{i}$*yam | áganma jyótir uttamám* (we have approached Sūrya, god among gods, the highest light). The poet clarifies that the sun-god shines even among the gods themselves just as he does among mortals below, a poetic motif also present in Greco-Roman mythology. Regardless, even Sūrya’s incandescence does not represent his most recurring description in the *Ṛgveda*. The sun-god most frequently appears as a part of other gods, especially as a great eye. This aspect, of course, reflects the interconnectivity of Indian thought still present in modern Hinduism.

I have already briefly discussed Sūrya’s broad gaze, but now I want to focus more upon the sun-god’s manifestation as a great eye. In their attempts to rationalize the forces

[47] Jamison and Brereton, *Rigveda*, 1650.
[48] Macdonell, *Vedic Mythology*, 34.

of nature, it is easy to see why the Vedic people personify Sūrya as a great eye that looks upon the entire world. Gods typically do not blink in Vedic mythology, so the fact that the Sun's eye to remains open only highlights his divine nature and even recalls his status as the *gopā́* of the people. However, one should consider that Sūrya's fiery eye does not always belong autonomously to himself; in fact, his eye often constitutes a part of another god. For example, hymn VI.51 addresses various gods, but the poet first describes Sūrya's rising into the heavens: *úd u tyác cákṣur máhi mitráyor ā́m̐ | éti priyáṃ váruṇayor ádabdham | ṛtásya śúci darśatám ánīkaṃ | rukmó ná divá úditā ví adyaut* (That great eye of Mitra and Varuṇa goes up, dear and undeceivable. The radiant face of divine truth, worthy of being seen, has shown forth like the ornament of heaven at its ascension). Once again, Sūrya is bound to Mitra and Varuṇa and provides a window by which these two gods may look upon the deeds of humans. Here we see a codependency between the three deities. Furthermore, Sūrya's shared existence does not diminish the beauty of his own form as he ascends into the sky. The poet metaphorically describes the Sun as a *rakmó diváḥ*, or "heaven's ornament." Regardless of his conjoined nature in this hymn, Sūrya is nonetheless a beautiful instrument to be enjoyed by all who look upon him. Other hymns connect the sun-god not only to Mitra and Varuṇa but also to Agni, the god of fire himself.

Agni is one of the most esteemed divinities in the Vedic pantheon and foremost among the terrestrial gods. In the *Ṛgveda*, he is second only to Indra in terms of importance and is honored in over 200 hymns.[49] Like Hermēs in Greek mythology, Agni is the link between mortals and immortals, a role which he performs via the sacrificial fire. Since Agni represents fire at its most elemental level, his relationship with Sūrya

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[49] *Ibid*., 88.

proves interesting and complex. In some hymns, Sūrya is merely part of Agni, just as he is the eye of Mitra and Varuṇa. In hymn X.7.3, for instance, the poet sings, *agnér ánīkam bṛhatáḥ saparyaṃ | diví śukráṃ yajatáṃ sū́r*$_i$*yasya* (I adore the face of lofty Agni, worthy of worship, gleaming in heaven, the [face] of Sūrya). The sun-god serves as an eye for the fire-god to look upon the world; since Agni connects the people with the gods above, the Sun acts as an intermediary figure, providing easy access to Agni. Furthermore, Agni's appearance is like that of Sūrya, although the poet of hymn X.7 is unclear about the exact similarity. In some hymns, we also see conflation between the two deities not unlike Apollō's conflation with Hēlios in Greek mythology or Ra's merging with Horus in the later Egyptian dynasties.

As the god of fire, Agni invariably has a bright appearance, depicted with a burning head and fiery hair, yet Sūrya also shares these features. For example, hymn X.38 describes the sun-god as *haríkeśa*, or "golden-haired." Furthermore, Hēlios and Sōl typically have golden hair, suggesting a characteristic common to the sun-god in Vedic and Greco-Roman. Additionally, just as those solar deities become interchangeable with Apollō, some hymns in the *Ṛgveda* show a conflation of Sūrya and Agni. Hymn X.88 mentions Sūrya and a figure by the name of Vaiśvānara, meaning "belonging to all men," an epithet of Agni since he represents the fire common to all humans.[50] The hymn begins with the creation of the world:

> *havíṣ pā́ntam ajáraṃ s*$_u$*varvídi*
> *divispṛ́śi ā́hutaṃ júṣṭam agnaú*
> *tásya bhármaṇe bhúvanāya devā́*
> *dhármaṇe káṃ svadháyā paprathanta*
> *gīrṇám bhúvanaṃ támasā́pagūḷham*
> *āvíḥ s*$_ú$*var abhavaj jāté agnaú*
> *tásya devā́ḥ pṛthivī́ dyaúr utā́po*

[50] Jamison and Brereton, *Rig Veda*, 1532.

áraṇayann óṣadhīḥ sakhyé asya.

The oblation, the drink, ageless [and] propitious,
has been poured into Agni, the sun-finder, the heaven-toucher.
For his bearing [and] support for the world,
the gods by their power extended [the world].
The earth [was] swallowed and concealed by darkness
[but] the Sun became visible when Agni was born.
The gods, the earth, the sky, and the waters,
the herbs rejoiced in his fellowship.

This hymn links the births of the two gods, and if Agni represents the cosmic fire, then the relationship between him and Sūrya becomes clearer. The gods create both simultaneously. On the other hand, Hillebrandt argues that Agni Vaiśvānara and Sūrya are often the same deity:

> It was established long ago by other scholars that in the Veda, Agni is a designation for the sun also and that Agni Vaiśvānara in particular makes his appearance in this capacity…The identification of Vaiśvānara with Sūrya is continued in the ritual literature. Although the lines of demarcation between the individual often shift, the main area of each individual god remains untouched…[51]

Ultimately, Agni Vaiśvānara symbolizes the Sun's cosmic aspect, a fire that is sacred for the Vedic people. The cosmic fire shows Sūrya at his most symbolic, and although other deities such as Agni and Savitṛ share characteristics with the sun-god, Sūrya is the only one among them to rise in the East every day.[52] Furthermore, the dawn-goddess Uṣās is one of Sūrya's closest companions, but she has nothing to do with Agni Vaiśvānara.[53] One final aspect of the sun-god's depiction remains for discussion: Sūrya as a bird.

One of the most unusual manifestations of the Vedic Sun-god occurs in hymn X.177.1, which involves poetic *enthousiasmos*. The poet calls upon Sūrya for inspiration,

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[51] Alfred Hillebrandt, *Vedic Mythology*: *Volume 1*, Translated by Sreeramula Rajeswara Sarma (Delhi: Motilal Banarsidass, 1980), 78.
[52] Ranade, "Sun-God and His Associations in the Rigveda," 144.
[53] Hillebrandt, *Vedic Mythology: Volume 1*, 81.

and the sun-god arrives as a great bird in flight. The hymn begins *pataṃgám aktám ásurasya māyáyā | hṛdā́ paśyanti mánasā vipaścítaḥ | samudré antáḥ kaváyo ví cakṣate | márīcīnām padám ichanti vedhásaḥ* (With their heart and mind, the inspired see the bird anointed with the magic of the Asura. The poets observe [it] in the sea. The wise men seek the footprint of the light beams). The adjective *pataṃgá* literally translates as "one who goes by flight" and may refer to a bird or to the Sun, among other things. Thus, Sūrya, the deity who flies highest and farthest, inspires the lofty language of the poet.

Despite the conflicting accounts of Sūrya's physical characteristics, his juxtaposition with other deities such as Indra, Mitra, Varuṇa, and Agni proves to be the most predominant. The fact that Sūrya more often appears as part of another deity rather than vice versa is indicative of his position within the Vedic pantheon. As one of the primal gods, he is older than most of the other divinities. Furthermore, just as he is common to all the Vedic tribes, he is part of all the other Vedic gods as well. Besides the deities already mentioned, Sūrya interacts with numerous other gods, some of whom (such as Uṣās, the dawn-goddess) enable him to complete his daily journey. In the next section of this chapter, I will concentrate on Sūrya's lineage as well as the gods with whom he most often associates.

IV. An Old God among Young Gods

Due to the multifaceted nature of Vedic mythology, conflicting stories concerning Sūrya's origin abound, an inconsistency not uncommon in archaic mythologies. Tales about Aphroditē show a similar disparity in Greco-Roman mythology. In Homer, she is the daughter of Zeus and Diōnē and sometimes bears the name of Olympian Aphroditē, but Hesiod tells us that she emerged from the sea after the castration of Ouranos by

Kronos. This lineage makes her a Titan rather than the daughter of Zeus and so she receives the title of Uranian Aphroditē. In historical terms, she is a Greek analogue of the Semitic goddess Ishtar; compared to other gods, she seems to be a latecomer into the Greek pantheon as suggested by the fact that her name does not appear on any Linear B tablet.[54] Regardless, this discrepancy seems not to have bothered the Greeks, who always honor their goddess of love. Likewise, the Vedic people are unconcerned about Sūrya's complex origin story. Various gods are said to have created the Sun, ranging from Uṣās to Indra to the personified drink Soma. However, Sūrya's original parents are likely Dyauṣpitṛ and Pṛthivī, the sky-god and earth-goddess.

In Peter Jackson's model of the Indo-European pantheon, the central figure is **dyēws pH*$_2$*tēr*, or Father Heaven. He furthermore describes this deity as "dwelling in the background" while younger gods are in the forefront.[55] The Greeks and Romans, of course, inherit this deity as Zeus (*patēr*) and Iūpiter, respectively. Yet in Vedic mythology, we also find Dyauṣpitṛ and his wife Pṛthivī; although the names differ, these are analogous to Ouranos and Gaia. Dyauṣpitṛ is likely the original head of the Vedic pantheon, although his role is purely mythological in the *Ṛgveda*. Jackson argues: "In his role as a distant father and creator, recalling the typical features of a *deus otiosus*, Vedic Dyaus may in fact exhibit older characteristics than those of Greek Zeus or Roman Jupiter."[56] This old sky-god almost always appears alongside Pṛthivī, and Jaan Puhvel explains that the marriage to the earth-goddess is Dyauṣpitṛ's "only mythic function."[57] While Puhvel's statement is hyperbolic, the Vedic poets rarely call upon their first sky-

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[54] Walter Burkert, *Greek Religion* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1985), 153.
[55] Jackson, "Light from Distant Asterisks. Towards a Description of the Indo-European Religious Heritage," 71.
[56] *Ibid.*, 72.
[57] Puhvel, *Comparative Mythology*, 59.

god, yet Dyauṣpitṛ is said to be the parent of Sūrya. Hymn X.37, for instance, names Sūrya as the *divás putrá*, or the "son of heaven." Uṣās, the dawn-goddess and variously the wife, sister, or mother of Sūrya, is also the daughter of Dyauṣpitṛ. The goddess Aditi occasionally appears as the sun-god's mother, yielding Sūrya's metronymic, Āditya. The *Ṛgveda* also lists numerous other gods who supposedly raised Sūrya into the sky, chief of whom is Indra.

As the national war-god of the Vedic people, Indra is the most highly honored divinity in the *Ṛgveda*, hailed in over 250 hymns.[58] Primarily an Indic god rather than one inherited from the Indo-European pantheon, Indra at some point in the mythic past usurped his position at the head of the Vedic pantheon. Unfortunately, this myth has not survived, and it is unclear who the original Vedic king of the gods was. Dyauṣpitṛ is the most likely candidate, but I believe that Sūrya is also a possible contender. Although no hymn explicitly states that Indra usurped the Sun's position, several hymns retell the myth of Indra overpowering Sūrya, the significance of which I will discuss shortly. For now, I am interested in the idea that Indra infuses Sūrya with his divine, radiating power. Hymn III.44.2 describes how Indra causes both Uṣās and Sūrya to shine forth: *haryánn uṣásam arcayaḥ | sū́ryaṃ haryánn arocayaḥ* (Delighting, you made Dawn shine, delighting you made Sūrya shine). The implication that Indra imbues Sūrya with his divine energy is interesting since it presupposes that Indra is, in fact, original to the Vedic pantheon or is at least older than the Sun. However, Indra—in terms of his identity—does not correspond with any Indo-European god while Sūrya has a well-preserved Indo-European heritage. A still more curious origin of Sūrya involves Soma, the personified deity of the mysterious *soma* drink sacred to the Vedic people.

[58] Macdonell, *Vedic Mythology*, 54.

Although its properties are unknown, the drink called *soma* is in some ways like the *nektar* found in Greco-Roman mythology. Whereas *nektar* (meaning "that which transcends death") is the preferred drink of the gods, *soma* imbues the Vedic deities with enhanced power, allowing them to perform mighty deeds. The drink is also personified in the *Ṛgveda* and is even the subject of numerous hymns. One such song is IX.96.5, in which the poet sings: *sómaḥ pavate janitā́ matīnā́m | janitā́ divó janitā́ pṛthivyā́ḥ | janitā́gnér janitā́ sū́riyasya | janiténdrasya janitótá víṣṇoḥ* (Soma is purified, the producer of understanding, producer of heaven, producer of earth, producer of Agni, producer of Sūrya, producer of Indra, [and] producer of Viṣnu). Not only does Soma beget Sūrya in this hymn but the entire cosmos along with its foremost gods. It is unlikely that Soma actually gives birth to the gods but rather enhances their divinity, joining them together in the divine harmony so ubiquitous in Hinduism. This hymn furthermore suggests that these deities are of equal prominence and that no one god rules over the others. Nevertheless, we will soon see that Indra does indeed have the power to overcome the Sun if he wishes.

There are clearly numerous tales among the Vedic people involving Sūrya's origin. Dyauṣpitṛ and Pṛthivī are likely his original parents since they often appear as the precursors of everything. Sūrya's affiliation with other deities is equally contradictory, best evidenced by his relationship with the dawn-goddess, Uṣās. Corresponding to Ēōs and Aurōra, Uṣās is one of Sūrya's closest companions. Just as the sun-god exists to drive away the darkness and bring light to gods and humans, Uṣās leads Sūrya into the sky. Hymn VII.63.3 describes this auspicious event: *vibhrā́jamāna uṣásām upásthād | rebhaír úd eti anumadyámānaḥ* (Shining forth from the lap of the Dawns, he rises up while being

praised by the singers). Csapo notes the dearth of words such as "dawn" and "sunset" in Proto-Indic, indicating that the Vedic poets created this tale—and numerous others—in order to explain Sūrya's ascent.[59] On the other hand, the dawn-goddess enjoys a pristine Indo-European descent: Sanskrit *Uṣās*, Greek *Ēōs*, and Latin *Aurōra* all derive from Proto-Indo-European *H_2*eusōs*.[60]

The exact relationship between Uṣās and Sūrya is unclear. She appears as his wife, sister, or even his mother since she produces the Sun's light.[61] Hymn VII.78.3 presents Uṣās as Sūrya's mother: *etā́ u tyā́ḥ práty adr̥śran purástāj | jyótir yáchantīr uṣáso vibhātī́ḥ | ájījanan sū́r*$_i$*yaṃ yajñám agním | apācī́naṃ támo agād ájuṣṭam* (These radiant Dawns have been spotted in the East, extending [their] light. They have begotten Sūrya, the sacrifice, Agni. The unenjoyable darkness has gone behind). In Jackson's model of the Indo-European pantheon, the dawn-goddess appears as the daughter of Father Heaven.[62] Hymn I.164 retains this lineage, but it reimagines Uṣās as a heifer who becomes impregnated by her father and then gives birth to Sūrya.[63]

Other poets present Sūrya and Uṣās as husband and wife. Hymn X.3 invokes Agni, whose sacrificial fire has driven away the darkness, allowing Uṣās to kindle herself. It also describes the union of Sūrya and Uṣās: *bhadró bhadráyā sácamāna ā́gāt* | *svásāraṃ jāró abhí eti paścā́* (The blessed [Sun], together with the blessed [Dawn], has come hither. The lover approaches his sister from behind). Sūrya and Uṣās are at the same time siblings and lovers in this hymn. Moreover, Uṣās as an erotic goddess has parallels in Greco-Roman mythology, in which characteristics of Aphroditē/Venus have

[59] Csapo, *Theories of Mythology*, 25.
[60] Watkins, *The American Heritage Dictionary of Indo-European Roots*, 6.
[61] Suter, "Aphrodite/Paris/Helen: A Vedic Myth in the Iliad," 52.
[62] Jackson, "Light from Distant Asterisks. Toward a Decription of the Indo-European Religious Heritage," 66.
[63] Sick, "Mit(h)ra(s) and the Myths of the sun," 439.

been conflated with those of Ēōs/Aurōra.[64] Irrespective of the exact relationship between them, Uṣās leads Sūrya into the daytime sky, reflecting a dependency already seen between Sūrya and other deities. Uṣās is aided in her task by Savitṛ, a curious figure worthy of brief discussion.

Savitṛ is a mysterious entity in Vedic mythology. As mentioned in part II of this chapter, Savitṛ may represent the very manifestation of Sūrya's light. The medieval Indian commentator Sāyaṇa argues that Savitṛ is merely the sun-god's name before dawn.[65] Hillebrandt, on the other hand, follows Hermann Oldenberg's opinion, arguing that Sūrya and Savitṛ are two separate deities.[66] If we accept Oldenberg's hypothesis, Savitṛ acts as an intermediate figure between the morning and midday Sun. Like Sūrya, Savitṛ is wreathed in flame and is described as *hiraṇyākṣá* (golden-eyed) and *híraṇyajihva* (golden-tongued). Savitṛ's importance has been immortalized in one of the most famous stanzas of the *Ṛgveda*, a verse still sacred to the modern practitioner of Hinduism. The tenth verse of hymn III.62 reads: *tát savitúr váreṇ$_i$yam | bhárgo devásya dhīmahi | dhíyo yó naḥ pracodáyāt* (Might we obtain that desirable radiance of the god Savitṛ, who will inspire our thoughts). Further discussion of Savitṛ's character is beyond the scope of this thesis, but he is analogous to Hyperiōn in Greco-Roman mythology, who is either Hēlios' father or is simply another name for the sun-god himself.

One final associate of Sūrya is another deity who appears as either his wife or his daughter: Sūryā. Etymologically speaking, her name derives from the sun-god's own name (cf. Diōnē, Zeus' wife and the mother of Aphroditē in Homer). In Jackson's model,

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[64] Jackson, "Light from Distant Asterisks. Toward a Description of the Indo-European Religious Heritage," 79.
[65] Macdonell, *Vedic Mythology*, 33.
[66] Hillebrandt, *Vedic Mythology: Volume 2*, 72.

Sūryā connects the Indo-European pantheon with Sūrya since she marries the sons/grandsons of Father Heaven. Hymn X.85 beautifully recounts the marriage of Sūryā to the twin horse-lords, the Aśvinau, who correspond to the Dioskouri in Greco-Roman mythology. These Indo-Greek deities share several characteristics, the most salient of which involves marriage. Henry John Walker writes:

> The ancient myths tell us that the Dioscuri marry the two Leukippides (the White-Horse Girls), and that the Aśvins are the husbands of Sūryā (the Daughter of the Sun); this was explained by pointing out that the morning star appears just before the run rises, so the morning gods will naturally marry the sun-girls.[67]

Additionally, some have attempted to etymologically link the names of Sūryā and Helen of Troy.[68] A more likely connection involves Saraṇyū, goddess of clouds and sometimes the wife of Sūrya; she is also the mother of the Aśvinau. Walker even contends that the names *Ἑλένη* and *Saraṇyū* both derive from Proto-Indo-European **Selenā*, meaning "swift goddess."[69] Nonetheless, Hymn.85 depicts an ideal Vedic marriage and lists the numerous deities involved in the ceremony.[70] For example, in verses eight and nine, the poet sings, *stómā āsan pratidháyaḥ | kurī́raṃ chánda opaśáḥ | sūryā́yā aśvínā varā́ | agnír āsīt purogaváḥ | sómo vadhūyúr abhavad | aśvínāstām ubhā́ varā́ | sūryā́ṃ yát pátye śáṃsantīm | mánasā savitā́dadāt* (The hymns were the crossbars, the meter [was] the headdress [and] plume. The Aśvinau [were] the suitors of Sūryā, Agni was the leader, Soma was the lover. The Aśvinau were both the suitors when Savitṛ gave Sūryā to her husband, vowing with her mind). If Sūrya and Savitṛ are, in fact, distinct deities, Sūrya's absence from his daughter's wedding is unusual. Furthermore, verse 13 begins: *sūryā́yā*

[67] Henry John Walker, "The Greek Aśvins." *Annals of the Bhandarkar Oriental Research Institute* 88 (2007): 99.
[68] Puhvel, *Comparative Mythology*, 143.
[69] Walker, "The Greek Aśvins," 112-13.
[70] Jamison and Brereton, *Rig Veda*, 1517.

vahatúḥ prā́gāt | savitā́ yám avā́sr̥jat (For Sūryā, the marriage has proceeded, which Savitr̥ has set in motion). Nevertheless, the other gods assent to the marriage, and a new connection is forged between Sūrya and the other deities. The chariot of the Aśvinau even has a third seat for Sūryā, an arrangement also found Greek mythology with the Dioskouri, who always save a seat for Helen in their own chariot.[71] The Vedic sun-god interacts with numerous other deities, but, unfortunately, the *R̥gveda* offers scant myths regarding Sūrya. Although the Vedic people revere Sūrya, they tell few tales about him. However, the one myth that does appear implies an ancient power struggle in the Vedic pantheon.

V. Breaking the Sun-Wheel

In his book *Vedic Mythology*, Macdonell argues that there is only one true myth about Sūrya in the *R̥gveda*, a story which suggests divine usurpation.[72] This story simply tells how Indra overcame the sun-god. Multiple versions exist, but most of them involve Indra either breaking Sūrya's chariot or stealing one of its wheels. This myth may represent an eclipse or perhaps a storm cloud controlled by Indra that obscured the Sun.[73] It is a deceptively simple story, and the implication is that the damage done to the solar chariot prevents—albeit briefly—Sūrya from completing his course. Hymn IV.28.2 describes how Indra accomplished this great deed: *t*$_{u}$*vā́ yujā́ ní khidat sū́r*$_{i}$*yasya | índraś cakrám̐ sáhasā sadyá indo | ádhi ṣṇúnā br̥hatā́ vártamānam* (With you as his companion, o drop [of Soma], Indra in a single day tore down with his strength the wheel of Sūrya, revolving along the lofty back [of heaven]). Not unlike how Zeus and his Olympians overcame the Titans, Indra (with help from Soma as his metaphorical charioteer) has

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[71] Walker, "Greek Aśvins," 102.
[72] Macdonell, *Vedic Mythology*, 31.
[73] *Ibid.*

exerted power over the older, natural god.[74] Indra wisely leaves the Sun in his lofty track; to do otherwise would invite disaster.

The Vedic poets even bid Indra to overcome Sūrya again from time to time. For example, in hymn I.176.4, the poet sings, *muṣāyá sū́rᵢyaṃ kave | cakrám ī́śāna ójasā* (Showing mastery with your power, steal the sun-wheel, O poet). This hymn may constitute a prayer for rain since one of Indra's great feats is releasing the waters by defeating the great dragon Vṛtra. These hymns reaffirm the central myth about Sūrya in the *Ṛgveda*, which involves the sun-god being overpowered by Indra. Therefore, we may conclude that Indra's power over Sūrya is complete. Yet one final wrinkle remains that undermines their relationship.

H. G. Ranade explains that "in some classifications [Sūrya] has been taken as the head of the heavenly gods whereas in others he has been completely relegated to background and brought on line with the nature-elements such as water, mountains etc."[75] Ranade has based this argument on the sole hymn in the *Ṛgveda* that describes Sūrya as head of the pantheon. Hymn VII.66 is a complex song unified by the motif of the rising sun, which, as Jamison and Brereton argue, represent the dominion of the Ādityas, or the descendants of Aditi.[76] Recall that Sūrya himself is one of Aditi's children. Verse 15 reads: *śīrṣṇáḥ-śīrṣṇo jágatas tasthúṣas pátiṃ | samáyā víśvam ā́ rájaḥ | saptá svásāraḥ suvitā́ya sū́rᵢyaṃ | váhanti haríto ráthe* (For his prosperous course, the Seven Yellow Sisters convey Sūrya on the chariot, master of the moving, head-by-head, and the standing, entirely throughout the firmament). By referring to Sūrya as the master of everything that moves and stands, this hymn hints that at one point in the mythic past,

[74] Jamison and Brereton, *Rig Veda*, 602.
[75] Ranade, "Sun-God and His Associates in the Rigveda," 143.
[76] Jamison and Brereton, *The Rigveda*, 963.

Sūrya did indeed enjoy a higher—if not the highest—position among the gods. As in hymn VII.60, Sūrya is the lord of everything that moves and everything that is at rest, a title more befitting a divine king than a lesser deity.

VI. Conclusion

Ultimately, I believe that in addition to the myriad descriptions of Sūrya as a herdsman of everyone and as the deity that impels his people forward, hymns VII.60 and VII.66 hint that Sūrya enjoyed a lofty position in the Vedic pantheon at some point in the mythic past. However, in terms of Vedic mythology, no true divine hierarchy exists. Although Indra, Varuṇa, Sūrya, and even Dyauṣpitṛ could each be named king of the gods, the divine harmony and collectiveness so intrinsic to Vedic belief renders this position meaningless. No one god has complete control over any other. Therefore, we have an incomplete depiction of the Indo-European sun-god and must look towards his treatment in Greek mythology, in which exists a more rigorous hierarchy of deities.

CHAPTER 3

ΠΑΝΟΠΤΗΣ ΗΛΙΟΣ: THE SUN-GOD IN ARCHAIC GREEK POETRY

The Titans, often called the Elder gods,
were for untold ages supreme in the universe
~ Edith Hamilton *Mythology*

I. Introduction

Like his Vedic counterpart Sūrya, the Greek sun-god Hēlios originates from the Indo-European solar deity and performs the same function. Both the word *ἥλιος* and the god himself derive from Proto-Indo-European **suH₂el*, specifically its suffixed derivative **seH₂weliyos*.[77] The presumed Proto-Greek form is **sāwelios*, best retained by the Doric Greeks as *ἀ(ϝ)έλιος*.[78] The name appears as *ἠέλιος* in Homer and Hesiod, but the *eta*—perhaps due to influence from Attic Greek—eventually aspirates, becoming *ἥλιος*. Few divine names in Greek mythology show such an unambiguous etymology. In fact, Zeus (from Proto-Indo-European **dyēws*, meaning "heaven") is one of the few major deities whose name shows such a clear derivation.[79] Hēlios is a vital god for the Greek people, but he does not enjoy the same honors as Sūrya or other solar deities. Some argue that the sun-god is too far away from the Greeks for them to appropriately esteem him. To quote James Notopoulos:

> Wandering regularly all day in the sky did not give Helios any opportunity to dwell in any earthly cult place or appear in festivals; his habitation is in the

[77] Calvert Watkins, *The American Heritage Dictionary of Indo-European Roots* (Boston: Houghton Mifflin Company, 2000), 72.
[78] Martin E. Huld, "Proto- and post-Indo-European Designations for 'Sun'," *Zeitschrift für vergleichende Sprachforschung* 99 (1986): 198.
[79] Jaan Puhvel, *Comparative Mythology* (Baltimore: The Johns Hopkins University Press, 1987), 129.

> mountain tops. He therefore sinks into the background of Greek religion, which was anthropomorphic, and remains prominent in the nature worship of the East.[80]

In his *Histories*, Herodotus explains the Sun's eminence among the Persians: *οἳ δὲ νομίζουσι Διὶ μὲν ἐπὶ τὰ ὑψηλότατα τῶν ὀρέων ἀναβαίνοντες θυσίας ἔρδειν, τὸν κύκλον πάντα τοῦ οὐρανοῦ Δία καλέοντες: θύουσι δὲ ἡλίῳ τε καὶ σελήνῃ καὶ γῇ καὶ πυρὶ καὶ ὕδατι καὶ ἀνέμοισι. τούτοισι μὲν δὴ θύουσι μούνοισι ἀρχῆθεν…* (They are accustomed to ascend and making sacrifices to Zeus upon the loftiest [peaks] of the mountains, calling the entire circle of heaven Zeus. They sacrifice to the Sun, the Moon, the Earth, fire, water, and the winds. To such deities alone do they sacrifice from the beginning…).[81] Other scholars such as Walter Burkert assert that Olympians simply overshadow all other gods in the pantheon, rendering the earlier deities trivial.[82] Whatever the reason, by the time of Sōkratēs' trial in 399 BCE, the solar cult has become so diminished in Athens that Sōkratēs is accused of impiety for worshiping the Sun, among other things.

According to Plato, Sōkratēs considered Hēlios to be an important deity. The young statesman Alkibiadēs describes how he once witnessed Sōkratēs offering a prayer to the Sun: *ὁ δὲ εἱστήκει μέχρι ἕως ἐγένετο καὶ ἥλιος ἀνέσχεν: ἔπειτα ᾤχετ᾽ ἀπιὼν προσευξάμενος τῷ ἡλίῳ* (He stood [there] until it was dawn and the Sun rose. Then he left and was gone after praying to the Sun).[83] Conversely, in the *Apology*, Sōkratēs refutes charges of impiety and corrupting the Athenian youth:

> *…καὶ τοῦτ᾽ ἔστιν ὅ μοι ἐγκαλεῖς, ὅτι ἑτέρους, ἢ παντάπασί με φῂς οὔτε αὐτὸν νομίζειν θεοὺς τούς τε ἄλλους ταῦτα διδάσκειν. ταῦτα λέγω, ὡς τὸ παράπαν οὐ νομίζεις θεούς. ὦ θαυμάσιε Μέλητε, ἵνα τί ταῦτα λέγεις; οὐδὲ ἥλιον οὐδὲ σελήνην ἄρα νομίζω θεοὺς εἶναι, ὥσπερ οἱ ἄλλοι ἄνθρωποι;*[84]

[80] James A. Notopoulos, "Socrates and the Sun," *The Classical Journal* 37, No. 5 (1942): 266.
[81] Herodotus, *Histories*, 1.131.2-3.
[82] Walter Burkert, *Greek Religion* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1985), 17.
[83] Plato, *Symposium*, 220d.
[84] Plato, *Apology*, 26c-d.

> …and this is the thing with which you charge me: that [I worship] other [gods], or you say that I myself do not believe in gods altogether or that I do teach others in this way. "I say this: that you do not believe in the gods at all!" O excellent Melētos, why do you say these things? Do I believe that the neither the Sun nor the Moon are gods, just as other people [believe]?

Sōkratēs' defense recalls the trial of Anaxagoras that occurred circa 450 BCE, in which the philosopher argued that the Sun was merely a stone. His argument seems to have shocked the Athenians.[85] Conversely, Sōkratēs' testimony indicates that by the time of his trial, Hēlios' cult has become a relic in Athens. However, in other places such as Rhodes and the Peloponnese, vestiges of the solar cult remained strong. The lost Colossus of Rhodes (built in 305 BCE after Antigonos Monophthalmos attempted to capture the city) that once greeted sailors as they sailed into port was a massive statue of Hēlios himself.[86] The city-state had been a cultural *locus* even during the Mycenean and Minoan periods, which may account for the sun-god's continued importance in that region.[87] Thus, by the classical period, we have a deity who is honored in some places but neglected in others. Hēlios' conflation with Apollō during this era likely contributed to his diminished status, yet if we return to the archaic period of Greece, Hēlios is more prominent, particularly among the early poets, intimating that the sun-god plays a greater role in Greek life.

Hēlios appears as early as Homer's *Iliad*, and we may therefore say that he appears at the very outset of the Western Canon. The Greek sun-god is one of the Titans, deified forces of nature often depicted as great monsters (e.g. Typhoeus). Although a Titan, Hēlios does not oppose Zeus and his Olympians, so after the younger gods

[85] Notopoulos, "Socrates and the Sun," 261.
[86] Timothy Gantz, *Early Greek Myth* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1993), 158.
[87] Notopoulos, "Socrates and the Sun," 265-66.

overcome the older deities in the *titanomakhia*, Hēlios remains in the sky while many of his brethren are thrown into Tartaros, where the Sun's rays cannot reach. In the epics of Homer, the sun-god not only marks the passage of time (especially periods of warfare in the *Iliad*) but he even becomes involved in the narrative. In Book 12 of the *Odyssey*, for instance, Hēlios curses Odysseus' men for slaughtering his sacred cattle on the island of Thrinakia; he then threatens to leave the world to perish in darkness if Zeus does not avenge the sun-god's cattle. Zeus quickly mollifies the Titan by promising that Odysseus' comrades will perish, but Odysseus, who ate no part of the sun-god's cattle, escapes unharmed. Hēlios' threat and Zeus' immediate acquiescence emphasizes the world's reliance on the sun-god. If he leaves his lofty track, the world dies. In some ways, the world becomes lifeless once the Sun has set. Gregory Nagy remarks:

> In the diction of Greek Epic, [Hēlios] is counted among the ranks of the immortal gods. Yet the movements of the sun suggest the theme of death and rebirth. With the waning of the day, the old sun submerges beyond the horizon into the west Okeanos; then, after night has passed, a new sun emerges from the east Okeanos with the waxing of another day.[88]

Hēlios represents life itself, serving as its guardian and overseer. Like Sūrya in Vedic mythology, he performs other functions as well.

The Greek solar deity is a spy as well as a god of contracts. Peter Jackson explains that "a famous Graeco-Vedic equation describes [the sun-god] as 'spy (**spoḱos*) of all beings'."[89] Furthermore, whenever the Greeks swear oaths, they often swear by Hēlios since he oversees (*ἐποράω*) and overhears (*ἐπακούω*) all things. He is also a herdsman, typically of cattle and sheep, in whom he greatly delights. Concerning his

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[88] Gregory Nagy, "Phaethon, Sappho's Phaon, and the White Rock of Leukas," *Harvard Studies in Classical Philology* 77 (1973): 156.
[89] Peter Jackson, "Light from Distant Asterisks. Towards a Description of the Indo-European Religious Heritage," *Numen* 49, No. 1 (2002): 79.

physical characteristics, Hēlios appears as a great, golden god more often than Sūrya does in the *Ṛgveda*. Additionally, a team of horses pull his flaming chariot across the sky. Hēlios' four-horse team distinguishes him from the dawn-goddess Ēōs, whose chariot is drawn by two horses.[90] Interestingly, neither Homer nor Hesiod clarifies how Hēlios flies across the sky.[91] Nevertheless, the image of the sun-god's chariot becomes so pervasive that the Rhodians make sacrifices to Hēlios by driving a horse-drawn chariot into the sea.[92] Lastly, the *Homeric Hymn to Helios* offers a vivid description of the sun-god as a more bellicose deity than Sūrya in Vedic mythology.

Although Homer establishes the sun-god's role early in Greek literature, it is Hesiod who offers more insight into Hēlios' character and lineage. In the *Theogony*, he discusses Hēlios' lineage. Unlike Sūrya, Hēlios is not the son of the sky-god—Zeus, in this case—but of Hyperiōn, a figure akin to the mysterious Savitṛ in Vedic mythology. In the proem of the *Odyssey*, Homer refers to the sun-god as *Ὑπερίων Ἠέλιος*, or "Hēlios Hyperiōn."[93] However, other authors sometimes refer to him solely as Hyperiōn, suggesting that the name was originally an epithet meaning "higher" or "very high." Nevertheless, Hesiod establishes a clear genealogy in his *Theogony*: Hyperiōn is Hēlios' father, Theia is his mother, his sisters are the dawn-goddess Ēōs and the moon-goddess Sēlēnē, and his descendants include Kirkē, Phaethōn, and Latinos. Thus, like his Vedic counterpart, Hēlios has an elaborate family tree, yet it is more difficult to align him with the original Indo-European pantheon.

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[90] Arthur Cotterell, *Dictionary of World Mythology* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1979), 156.
[91] Gantz, *Early Greek Myth*, 30.
[92] Burkert, *Greek Religion*, 175.
[93] Homer, *Odyssey*, 1.8.

As mentioned above, Hēlios is a Titan, meaning that he belongs to the older order of natural gods. C. Kerényi writes, "the name of Titan has, since the most ancient times, been deeply associated with the divinity of the Sun, and seems to have originally been the supreme title of beings who were, indeed, celestial gods, but gods of very long ago, still savage and subject to no laws."[94] Hesiod's *Theogony* recalls how Zeus and his Olympians overcome these ancient, more volatile deities to create a more stable universe. Zeus leaves Hēlios in the sky to carry out his duty, and the other gods rely upon Hēlios to gather information. For example, the *Homeric Hymn to Demeter* narrates how the eponymous goddess learns from Hēlios that her daughter Persephonē has been kidnapped by Hadēs. Ultimately, a codependency exists between the sun-god and the younger deities, but it is unclear if Hēlios had ever been king of the gods in Greek mythology. Zeus becomes king by overthrowing his father Kronos, who had overthrown his own father, Ouranos; Hēlios, on the other hand, remains unchanged in the background throughout all three regimes, leaving us to wonder whether the Greeks ever depicted him as a god-king. To answer this question, I will begin this chapter by examining the role of the sun-god in Greek mythology, mostly limiting myself to the archaic period since it offers a more unadulterated image of Hēlios' Indo-European roots.

II. The Position of the Sun-God in Greek Mythology

Compared to the Vedic sun-god Sūrya, Hēlios' daily functions are straightforward: his prime directive is to bring light to gods and mortals. To do so, he drives his golden chariot high across the sky, driving the darkness before him every day. The *Homeric Hymn to Helios* describes his daily journey: *ὃς φαίνει θνητοῖσι καὶ ἀθανάτοισι θεοῖσιν | ἵπποις ἐμβεβαώς: σμερδνὸν δ' ὅ γε δέρκεται ὄσσοις χρυσέης ἐκ*

[94] C. Kerényi, *The Gods of the Greeks* (Guildford, Great Britain: Biddles Ltd., 1951), 20.

κόρυθος ([Hēlios], who shines for mortals and the deathless gods, having come with horses. With his eyes, he gazes terribly from his golden helmet).[95] Although his rays are beneficial, the Greeks seem to look upon their sun-god with a modicum of caution, something not found in Vedic mythology. Furthermore, the poet fittingly describes Hēlios as *ἀκάμας*, or "untiring", reminding us that the Sun's journey is not always easy. Unlike the other gods, Hēlios cannot fly to another country without calamity befalling the Greek world.

The seventh-century poet Mimnermus also underscores the difficulty of Hēlios' task. One fragment reads:

> *Ἠέλιος μὲν γὰρ ἔλλαχεν πόνον ἤματα πάντα*
> *οὐδέ κοτ' ἄμπαυσις γίγνεται οὐδεμία*
> *ἵπποισίν τε καὶ αὐτῷ, ἐπὴν ῥοδοδάκτυλος Ἠώς*
> *Ὠκεανὸν προλιποῦσ' οὐρανὸν εἰσαναβῇ:*
> *τὸν μὲν γὰρ διὰ κῦμα φέρει πολυήρατος εὐνή*
> *κοιίλη Ἡφαίστου χερσὶν ἐληλαμένη*
> *χρυσοῦ τιμήεντος, ὑπόπτερος, ἄκρον ἐφ' ὕδωρ*
> *εὕδονθ' ἁρπαλέως χώρου ἀφ' Ἑσπερίδων*
> *γαῖαν ἐς Αἰθιόπων, ἵνα δὴ θοὸν ἅρμα καὶ ἵπποι*
> *ἑστᾶσ', ὄφρ' Ἠὼς ἠριγένεια μόλῃ.*
> *ἐνθ' ἐπέβη ἑτέρων ὀχέων Ὑπερίονος υἱός.*[96]
>
> For Hēlios received labor for all his days.
> No respite occurs for his horses
> or even himself when rosy-fingered Dawn leaves
> the ocean behind and climbs into the sky.
> For an exceedingly lovely, hollow bed,
> by Hēphaistos' hands wrought
> of prized gold, winged, it carries him
> sleeping pleasurably across the swell, over the top of the water
> from the land of the Hesperides to the land of the Ethiopians, where his swift
> chariot and horses stand until early-born Ēōs arrives.
> There Hyperiōn's son stepped onto other chariots.

[95] *Homeric Hymn to Helios*, 8-10.
[96] Archibald Allen, *The Fragments of Mimnermus* (Stuttgart: Franz Steiner, 1993), Fr. 12.

Mimnermus provides an early mention of the sun-god's toils, yet Archibald Allen clarifies that "Mimnermus means that Helios' toil is in fact never-ending, even though he sleeps in his golden bed at night. Strictly speaking, the toil is continual, not continuous."[97] Hēlios often appears in Mimnermus' poetry. In 648 or 647 BCE, a solar eclipse occurred, which might have delighted the poet.[98] I will discuss more thoroughly the relationship between Hēlios and Ēōs in part III of this chapter, but it is important that the sun-god waits for Dawn's arrival before beginning his daily journey. Unlike Uṣās in Vedic mythology, the Greek dawn-goddess does not raise Hēlios into the sky, but she is nonetheless present for his ascent and perhaps even symbolizes the Sun's rebirth.[99] Moreover, the *πόνος* of Hēlios reflects a poetic motif that also appears in later Greco-Roman literature. Vergil, for example, alludes to this theme in the *Aeneid* 1.742 when Dido says, *hic canit errantem lunam solisque labores* (This [poet] sings about wandering Luna and the labors of Sōl). As the most hard-working deity in the Greek pantheon, Hēlios' ability to unfailingly complete his daily journey attests to his divinity and strength, yet even a god must occasionally rest.

Although Hēlios is manifestly visible while crossing the daytime sky, his nighttime whereabouts are less clear. In Vedic mythology, Sūrya remains in the ocean once he has set before rising again in the East. However, Hēlios returns from the west to the east overnight in a great cup, which recalls the boat of Rā in Egyptian mythology. The seventh-century BCE Rhodian poet Peisander also mentions Hēlios' cup. The sun-god will eventually lend this vehicle to Hēraklēs (although Peisander attributes the gift to Okeanos rather than Hēlios) so that the hero may sail to Erytheia to capture Gēryōn's

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[97] *Ibid.*, 100.
[98] *Ibid.*, 12-13.
[99] Nagy, "Phaethon, Sappho's Phaon, and the White Rock of Leukas," 162.

cattle.[100] Hēlios' curious cup also appears in one of the poems of Stesichorus, who is writing in the late seventh and early sixth centuries BCE. The fragment reads: † *ἅλιος δ' Ὑπεριονίδας*† | *δέπας* †*ἐσκατέβαινε*† *χρύσεον ὄφ-* | *ρα δι' Ὠκεανοῖο περάσας* | *ἀφίκοιθ' ἱαρᾶς ποτὶ βένθεα νυκ-* | *τὸς ἐρεμνᾶς* | *ποτὶ ματέρα κουριδίαν τ' ἄλοχον* | *παίδας τε φίλους* (Hēlios, Hyperiōn's son, descended into the golden cup so that, having driven through across the ocean, he might come to the depths of holy, dark night, to his mother, wedded wife, and beloved children).[101] While the world sleeps, Hēlios crosses the dark ocean and returns to the East so that he may rise again each morning. Both gods and humans rely upon him to preserve the natural order of things.

Hēlios not only brings light to the world but also measures time. He impels the Greeks forward to their daily tasks, and they work until the Sun sets. Thus, the sun-god acts as a shepherd of the Greek people. As Alice Radin has indicated:

> In a world without clocks, time is marked by natural phenomena of a regularly occurring character: dawn, sunset, movement of the stars. In such a world, the lives of men assume patterns as predictable as the path of the sun. Thus a farmer unyokes his oxen each day when the sun is in a certain position; this position can then be described as 'ox-unyoking': βουλυτός.[102]

Since the sundials of classical Greece have yet to be invented, Hēlios is, in fact, a massive clock, by whose light the Greeks keep track of time. Homer continuously marks the passage of time in this way. In the *Iliad*, for example, the major battles occur only during the day when foes and allies are unmistakable beneath the walls of Troy. In Book 16, Homer sings, *ὄφρα μὲν Ἠέλιος μέσον οὐρανὸν ἀμφιβεβήκει,* | *τόφρα μάλ' ἀμφοτέρων βέλε' ἥπτετο, πῖπτε δὲ λαός* (For as long as Hēlios had reached the middle [of] heaven, so

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[100] Gantz, *Early Greek Myth*, 404.

[101] M. Davies and P. J. Finglass, *Stesichorus: The Poems* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2014,) Fr. 8a.

[102] Alice P. Radin, "Sunrise, Sunset: hmos in Homeric Epic," *The American Journal of Philology* 109, No. 3 (1988): 298.

long the shafts of both sides were especially hitting their mark, and people were falling).[103] The day represents a time of war and death, which may explain the sun-god's warlike appearance in works such as the *Homeric Hymn to Helios*. Moreover, Hēlios serves to dichotomize the lives of suffering mortals and blissful gods. While the Akhaians and Trojans slaughter one another below, the gods feast above:

> *ὣς τότε μὲν πρόπαν ἦμαρ ἐς ἠέλιον καταδύντα*
> *δαίνυντ', οὐδέ τι θυμὸς ἐδεύετο δαιτὸς ἐΐσης,*
> *οὐ μὲν φόρμιγγος περικαλλέος ἣν ἔχ' Ἀπόλλων,*
> *Μουσάων θ' αἳ ἄειδον ἀμειβόμεναι ὀπὶ καλῇ.*
> *αὐτὰρ ἐπεὶ κατέδυ λαμπρὸν φάος ἠελίοιο,*
> *οἳ μὲν κακκείοντες ἔβαν οἶκον δὲ ἕκαστος…*[104]
>
> Thus, for the entire day until Hēlios set,
> they were feasting, and in no way did any heart lack the equal feast
> or the beautiful lyre, which Apollō had
> or the Muses, who were singing and answering with a beautiful voice.
> But when the shining light of Hēlios went down,
> each went to their house to lie down…

Hēlios delineates the boundary between mortals and immortals, thereby preserving their proper division.[105] The acts of fighting and feasting are not isolated events but are happening simultaneously: while Hēlios flies across the sky, the Akhaians fight the Trojans, and the gods, carefree, watch a battle that is sharply illuminated by the sun-god's light. We also see Apollō as the god of music in this passage. In the works of Homer and the other archaic poets, Hēlios and Apollō are distinct deities, but they become increasingly conflated during the classical era.[106] Regardless, it is worth noting that both mortals and gods seek repose once the Sun has set. In Vedic mythology, Sūrya is powerless at night, which allows monsters to creep from the world's dark recesses; the

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[103] Homer, *Iliad*, 16.777-78.
[104] *Ibid.*, 1.600-05.
[105] Charles Segal, *Singers, Heroes, and Gods in the Odyssey* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1994), 219.
[106] Gantz, *Early Greek Myth*, 87.

Vedic people eagerly await the Sun's rising every day. The Greek gods are more anthropomorphic than the Vedic divinities, therefore it is fitting that the gods rest like the Greeks themselves do. When Hēlios descends into the sea, the day's business is concluded, and Hēlios returns to the East in his cup. Like his Vedic analogue, Hēlios' power diminishes during his nightly journey, but nothing escapes the sun-god during the day.

In Vedic mythology, Sūrya is often described as *viśvácakṣās*, meaning "whose eye is upon all." Hēlios too possesses an all-seeing gaze, suggesting that both deities retained this ability from their Indo-European ancestor. Hēlios' tremendous sight is most potent in the Homeric poems. For instance, in Book 12 of the *Odyssey*, the titular hero fears the sun-god's gaze: *ὦ φίλοι, ἐν γὰρ νηὶ θοῇ βρῶσίς τε πόσις τε | ἔστιν, τῶν δὲ βοῶν ἀπεχώμεθα, μή τι πάθωμεν: | δεινοῦ γὰρ θεοῦ αἵδε βόες καὶ ἴφια μῆλα, | Ἠελίου, ὃς πάντ' ἐφορᾷ καὶ πάντ' ἐπακούει* (Friends, there is food and drink in the swift ship, but let us keep away from the oxen lest we suffer in some way. For these are the oxen and fat sheep of Hēlios, the terrible god, who gazes upon everything and overhears everything).[107] Odysseus knows that it is impossible to escape the sun-god's sight and hearing, and he is right to fear Hēlios' wrath, as we will soon see. Zeus, however, proves in the *Iliad* that it is not impossible to briefly escape the sun-god's gaze.

When Zeus persuades Hēra to lie with him in Book 14 of the *Iliad*, he assures her that they will remain unseen: *Ἥρη μήτε θεῶν τό γε δείδιθι μήτέ τιν' ἀνδρῶν | ὄψεσθαι: τοῖόν τοι ἐγὼ νέφος ἀμφικαλύψω | χρύσεον: οὐδ' ἂν νῶϊ διαδράκοι Ἠέλιός περ, | οὗ τε καὶ ὀξύτατον πέλεται φάος εἰσοράασθαι* (Hēra, be not afraid that any man or god will see it. I shall enwrap such a golden cloud around you. Not even Hēlios may pierce through to us,

[107] Homer, *Odyssey*, 12.320-23.

he whose light is keenest to behold).[108] Zeus' ability to deceive the sun-god is significant, belying the divine hierarchy of Greek mythology. Whereas Hēlios is one of the old natural gods, Zeus is the king of Olympos and can therefore assert power over all other deities, if only briefly. The relationship between Zeus and Hēlios shows a greater complexity, which I will discuss later in this chapter. Although Zeus may escape the sun-god's gaze, no other mortal or immortal can elude Hēlios' eye, the most enduring feature of the Indo-European sun-god.

The Vedic poets frequently allude to the *Sū́ryasya cákram*, or the Wheel of Sūrya. Remarkably, we see a parallel of this phrase in Sophocles' *Antigone* when the guard describes his watch over Polyneikēs' unburied corpse: *χρόνον τάδ' ἦν τοσοῦτον, ἔστ' ἐν αἰθέρι | μέσῳ κατέστη λαμπρὸς ἡλίου κύκλος | καὶ καῦμ' ἔθαλπε* (These things were in such a state for a long time until the bright wheel of the Sun stood in the middle [of] heaven and was heating its burning heat).[109] The Indo-Greek phrase *sū́ryasya cákram*/*ἡλίου κύκλος* is exactly cognate, suggesting an Indo-European poetic formula. Peter Jackson notes:

> The metaphorical characterization of the sun-disk as his 'wheel' ($*k^{w}ek^{w}l\acute{o}s$) in Vedic, Greek and Germanic should perhaps be understood as a reference to the wheel of his chariot, in which he crossed the sky. A Graeco-Vedic match meaning "great path" (tentatively $*h_{2}o\acute{g}mos$ $*me\acute{g}\acute{o}h_{2}s$) may originally have denoted the path of the horses of his chariot.[110]

The sun-god's wheel also represents the eye by which he looks upon the deeds of humans and gods. Intriguingly, the Hellenistic philosopher-poet Philodemus claims in his *De pietate* that Euripides had once referred to Hēlios as the eye of Zeus, but the fragment is

[108] Homer, *Iliad*, 14.342-45.
[109] Sophocles, *Antigone*, 415-17.
[110] Jackson, "Light from Distant Asterisks. Towards a Description of the Indo-European Religious Heritage," 79.

too damaged to draw any conclusions.[111] Nevertheless, Aristophanes seems to parody this description of Hëlios in *Clouds*:

> *ὑψιμέδοντα μὲν θεῶν*
> *Ζῆνα τύραννον ἐς χορὸν*
> *πρῶτα μέγαν κικλήσκω:*
> *τόν τε μεγασθενῆ τριαίνης ταμίαν,*
> *γῆς τε καὶ ἁλμυρᾶς θαλάσσης ἄγριον μοχλευτήν:*
> *καὶ μεγαλώνυμον ἡμέτερον πατέρ'*
> *Αἰθέρα σεμνότατον βιοθρέμμονα πάντων:*
> *τόν θ' ἱππονώμαν, ὃς ὑπερλάμπροις*
> *ἀκτῖσιν κατέχει*
> *γῆς πέδον μέγας ἐν θεοῖς*
> *ἐν θνητοῖσί τε δαίμων.*[112]
>
> I summon great Zeus
> first into the chorus,
> ruling on high, king of the gods.
> Mighty in his strength, master of the trident,
> the fierce shaker of the earth and salty sea.
> Our great-named father,
> the holiest heaven, the life-giver of all.
> The horseman, who with his
> exceedingly bright rays
> holds the plain of the earth, a great deity
> among gods and mortals.

Aristophanes merges Zeus with several gods in this passage, but his description of Zeus as a *ἱππονώμας* evokes Hēlios' flaming chariot; the *ἀκτῖνες* also match the Sanskrit *aktúva*, both of which translate as "rays" or "beams." Euripides' fragmented quote and Aristophanes' possible response mark the only description of Hēlios as a part of Zeus in Classical Greek literature. Macrobius, who composes his *Saturnalia* in the fifth century CE, perhaps alludes to these earlier works when he writes:

> *Hunc Osirin Aegyptii ut solem esse adserant, quotiens hieroglyphicis litteris suis exprimere volunt, insculpunt sceptron inque eo speciem oculi exprimunt, et hoc signo Osirin monstrant, significantes hunc deum solem esse regalique potestate sublimem cuncta despicere, quia solem Iovis oculum appellat antiquitas. Apud*

[111] Augustus Nauck, *Euripidis Perditarum Tragoediarum Fragmenta* (Leipzig: Teubner, 1885), Fr. 543.
[112] Aristophanes, *Clouds*, 563-74.

eosdem Apollo, qui est sol, Horus vocatur: ex quo et horae viginti quattuor quibus dies noxque conficitur nomen acceperunt et quattuor tempora quibus annuus orbis impletur ὧραι vocantur.[113]

To assert that this Osiris is the Sun, the Egyptians—as many times as they want to portray [him] in their own hieroglyphics—sculpt a scepter and on it they place an image of his eye. By this sign, they show Osiris, signifying this god to be the Sun and that on high he gazes down on everything with his regal power since antiquity names the Sun as the eye of Jupiter. By the same people, Apollo, who is the Sun, is called Horus, from whom the twenty-four *Horae* (by whom day and night are made) received their name and from whom the four seasons (by whom the annual world is filled) are called the *Hōrai*.

By Macrobius' time, Hēlios has long been conflated with Apollō, but more important is his claim that ancient peoples had referred to the sun-god as the eye of Zeus/Iūpiter. If his assertion is accurate, this relationship between Hēlios and Zeus recalls the *Ṛgveda*, in which Sūrya appears as the eye of Mitra and Varuṇa, among others. Furthermore, both solar deities act as spies for other gods.

Since he sees all things, Hēlios is said to be a great spy among the Olympians, enabling the other deities to keep an eye on their own affairs. In Book 8 of the *Odyssey*, Hēphaistos learns of the latest romantic tryst between his wife Aphroditē and Arēs via Hēlios' information, and Homer clarifies that the sun-god had not merely happened upon the two lovers: *Ἠέλιος γάρ οἱ σκοπιὴν ἔχεν εἶπέ τε μῦθον* (For Hēlios kept watch for him and told him the tale). Since Hēphaistos had known beforehand about the affair between Aphroditē and Arēs, he sought the sun-god's aid in catching them. Aphroditē neither forgets nor forgives the sun-god for his betrayal. In Book 4 of the *Metamorphoses*, Ovid recounts of Hēlios' disastrous affair with Leucothea:

Exigit indicii memorem Cythereia poenam,
inque vices illum, tectos qui laesit amores,
laedit amore pari.
Quid nunc, Hyperione nate,

[113] Macrobius, *Saturnalia*, 1.21.12-13.

forma colorque tibi radiataque lumina prosunt?
Nempe tuis omnes qui terras ignibus uris,
ureris igne novo; quique omnia cernere debes,
Leucothoen spectas, et virgine figis in una,
quos mundo debes oculos. Modo surgis Eoo
temperius caelo, modo serius incidis undis,
spectandique mora brumales porrigis horas...[114]

Cytherea exacts a penalty mindful of [the sun-god's] information
and with desire she in turn equally wounds he who wounded
her hidden desires.
How do beauty and heat and radiant eyes benefit you now, son of Hyperiōn?
Certainly you, who burns all the lands with your fires,
are burning with a new fire; you, who ought to see everything,
you watch Leucothea, and on one maiden you fix eyes
that you owe to the world. Now you rise too early
from the eastern sky, now you fall too late in the waves,
and you prolong the wintry hours by the delay of your watching [her]...

As punishment for betraying Aphroditē's tryst with Arēs, Hēlios becomes so smitten by Leucothea that he ceases to function properly. Instead of watching over the world, he looks towards Leucothea; his careful measurement of time also begins to degrade. Ironically, the sun-god is restored to his natural state when Leucothea's sister Clytia betrays the lovers, resulting in Leuocthea's death, after which Hēlios transforms the two sisters into plants. Aphroditē's power over the Titan is significant, proving that no god is safe from the love-goddess' charms. Moreover, a deeper connection also manifests between Aphroditē and the sun-god, which I will discuss in part IV of this chapter. Ultimately, Hēlios' betrayal of Aphroditē and its unforeseen consequences highlight an adverse aspect of the sun-god's power. On the other hand, Hēlios sometimes offers his unique services *pro bono*, thereby providing a vital service.

The *Homeric Hymn to Demeter* recounts how Dēmēter establishes the Eleusinian Mysteries but it also tells how she almost destroys the world in her grief after Hadēs

[114] Ovid, *Metamorphoses*, 4.190-99.

kidnaps her daughter, Persephonē. Panic-stricken, the grain-goddess calls upon Zeus to help find her daughter, but only Hekatē and Hēlios hear her laments. The poet of this hymn intriguingly names the sun-god as an *ἄναξ* in line 26. This ancient word appears on Linear B tablets as *wa-na-ka*, meaning "king" in Mycenean Greek. Although Homer uses it when referring to powerful kings such as Agamemnōn, he also applies it to gods, namely Zeus. Since Hēlios rarely receives this title, it is difficult to draw any conclusions regarding the sun-god's significance among the other gods. Nevertheless, Dēmēter and Hekatē approach the sun-god in lines 62-63: *Ἠέλιον δ' ἵκοντο, θεῶν σκοπὸν ἠδὲ καὶ ἀνδρῶν, | στὰν δ' ἵππων προπάροιθε…* (They came to Hēlios, watchman of both gods and men, and they stood before his horses). This passage contains one of the earliest mentions of Hēlios' horses, but, more importantly, the poet describes the sun-god as a *σκοπός*, meaning "watchman" or "spy." The word is, in fact, related to the Sanskrit *spaś* used to describe Sūrya in Hymn IV.13.3 of the *Ṛgveda* as well as the English word *spy*. The Greek word has no negative connotations in this passage but emphasizes Hēlios' role as an overseer.

Having come to the sun-god's domain, Dēmētēr asks him for aid: *ἀλλά, σὺ γὰρ δὴ πᾶσαν ἐπὶ χθόνα καὶ κατὰ πόντον | αἰθέρος ἐκ δίης καταδέρκεαι ἀκτίνεσσι*, | *νημερτέως μοι ἔνισπε φίλον τέκος, εἴ που ὄπωπας*, | *ὅστις νόσφιν ἐμεῖο λαβὼν ἀέκουσαν ἀνάγκῃ* | *οἴχεται ἠὲ θεῶν ἢ καὶ θνητῶν ἀνθρώπων* (But you with your rays, you indeed look upon the entire earth and along the sea from shining heaven. Truly, tell me about my dear child, if you have seen [her] anywhere, who of the gods or of mortal humans, having seized her against her will by force, departs away from me).[115] Stopping briefly in his track, Hēlios then relates the abduction of Persephonē, revealing a more positive use of his sight since

[115] *Homeric Hymn to Demeter*, 69-73.

he is able to help the panicking Dēmēter. Nevertheless, the poet is careful to illustrate Hēlios' immediate departure: *ὣς εἰπὼν ἵπποισιν ἐκέκλετο: τοὶ δ' ὑπ' ὀμοκλῆς | ῥίμφα φέρον θοὸν ἅρμα τανύπτεροι ὥστ' οἰωνοί* (After speaking thus, he called to his horses. Under his command, they began to hastily bear the swift chariot like wide-winged birds).[116] Hēlios steps down from his lofty track to help Dēmētēr, but he must complete his journey. In this regard, the sun-god is powerless, always forced to drive onwards for the earth's benefit. Additionally, the poet's comparison of Hēlios' horses with swift birds may recall Sūrya's depiction as a great bird in hymn X.177 of the *Ṛgveda*. It is appropriate that both the sun-god and his horses are akin to birds since Hēlios always flies across the sky during the day. As such, he (like Sūrya) makes a suitable witness to oaths.

The sun-god's role in contracts is not limited to Indo-European culture. The Akkadian sun-god Šamaš is also an arbitrator and judge. Laura Steele explains that "Helios is likewise associated with light, truth, judgment, and straightforward enquiry…"[117] In Vedic mythology, Sūrya's great eye aids Mitra, who presides over the contracts sworn by the Vedic people. In Greek mythology, however, Hēlios himself is the god of contracts, although Zeus is the ultimate authority. This arrangement is reminiscent of the codependency between Sūrya, Mitra, and Varuṇa. Numerous works depict Hēlios performing this role. When Menelaos and Paris are about to duel in Book 3 of the *Iliad*, Agamemnōn invokes Hēlios and Zeus to insure a proper fight: *Ζεῦ πάτερ Ἴδηθεν μεδέων κύδιστε μέγιστε, | Ἠέλιός θ', ὃς πάντ' ἐφορᾷς καὶ πάντ' ἐπακούεις, | καὶ ποταμοὶ καὶ γαῖα, καὶ οἳ ὑπένερθε καμόντας | ἀνθρώπους τίνυσθον ὅτις κ' ἐπίορκον ὀμόσσῃ, | ὑμεῖς μάρτυροι*

[116] *Ibid.*, 88-89.
[117] Laura D. Steele, "Mesopotamian Elements in the Proem of Parmenides? Correspondences between the Sun-Gods Helios and Shamash," *The Classical Quarterly* 52, No. 2 (2002): 586.

ἔστε, φυλάσσετε δ᾽ ὅρκια πιστά (Father Zeus of Ida, guardian most honored and greatest, and Hēlios, you who look upon everything and hear everything, and the rivers and the earth, and those who take vengeance on dead men below, whoever swears a false oath. You are witnesses. Keep watch over faithful oaths).[118] Not only does Agamemnōn swear before Hēlios and Zeus but also the rivers, the earth, and the infernal gods, all of them bearing witness to the high-king's oath. The irony, of course, is that Aphroditē intervenes and sweeps Paris away just as he is about to be slain by Menelaos, thus violating the oath and leaving the Akhaians and the Trojans to pay the penalty.

Agamemnōn swears a similar—even formulaic—oath in Book 19 when he attempts to reconcile with a blood-thirsty Akhillēs:

> *εὐξάμενος δ᾽ ἄρα εἶπεν ἰδὼν εἰς οὐρανὸν εὐρύν:*
> *ἴστω νῦν Ζεὺς πρῶτα θεῶν ὕπατος καὶ ἄριστος*
> *Γῆ τε καὶ Ἠέλιος καὶ Ἐρινύες, αἵ θ᾽ ὑπὸ γαῖαν*
> *ἀνθρώπους τίνυνται, ὅτις κ᾽ ἐπίορκον ὀμόσσῃ,*
> *μὴ μὲν ἐγὼ κούρῃ Βρισηΐδι χεῖρ᾽ ἐπένεικα,*
> *οὔτ᾽ εὐνῆς πρόφασιν κεχρημένος οὔτέ τευ ἄλλου.*
> *ἀλλ᾽ ἔμεν᾽ ἀπροτίμαστος ἐνὶ κλισίῃσιν ἐμῇσιν.*
> *εἰ δέ τι τῶνδ᾽ ἐπίορκον ἐμοὶ θεοὶ ἄλγεα δοῖεν*
> *πολλὰ μάλ᾽, ὅσσα διδοῦσιν ὅτίς σφ᾽ ἀλίτηται ὀμόσσας.*[119]
>
> Then [Agamemnōn] prayed and spoke after looking towards the wide sky:
> "May Zeus, the highest and best of gods, know first—
> and also Gaia, Hēlios, and the Furies, who punish men
> under the earth, whoever swears a false oath—
> that I did not lay a hand upon Brisēis,
> having used the pretense of neither bed nor anything else.
> But she remained untouched in my huts.
> If there is any false oath of these things, may the gods give me a great many pains,
> as many as they give, whoever sins against them by foreswearing.

Again, Agamemnōn calls upon multiple deities, thus adding credibility to his claim that he has not touched Brisēis while she remained with him. In Aeschylus' *Prometheus*

[118] Homer, *Iliad*, 3.276-80.
[119] *Ibid.*, 19.257-65

Bound, the titular Titan swears a comparable oath: *ὦ δῖος αἰθὴρ καὶ ταχύπτεροι πνοαί, | ποταμῶν τε πηγαί, ποντίων τε κυμάτων | ἀνήριθμον γέλασμα, παμμῆτόρ τε γῆ, | καὶ τὸν πανόπτην κύκλον ἡλίου καλῶ. | ἴδεσθέ μ' οἷα πρὸς θεῶν πάσχω θεός* (O shining heaven and swift-winged breezes and streams of the rivers and the measureless smile of the sea waves and the all-mothering earth, I call upon [you] and the all-seeing wheel of the Sun. See me [and] such things that I, a god, suffer from [other] gods).[120] Hēlios' role as a witness (for another Titan, no less) stands in the forefront as does the phrase *κύκλον ἡλίου*. The fact that Zeus is Prometheus' punisher underscores the sky-god's connection with Hēlios. Ultimately, in the world of Homer and Aeschylus, Zeus and Hēlios are the foremost gods of contracts, but their exact relationship remains unclear. Whereas Mitra uses both Sūrya and Varuṇa to insure adherence to a contract, Zeus needs the aid of no other god to punish wrongdoers. As the most visible deity, Hēlios' role in contracts likely stems from Indo-European culture. He is usually the informant, leaving retribution to the other deities, yet Book 12 of the *Odyssey* demonstrates that one should never cross the Greek sun-god, especially when it comes to his beloved cattle.

David Sick argues, "…one of the most prominent roles of the solar deity in Greece and India is that of pastor, that is, pastor in its most basic sense of 'guardian of the flocks'. In the Indic and Greek examples these flocks or herds are generally made up of cattle…"[121] Like Sūrya, Hēlios takes great pleasure in his divine cattle, although he remains passive in their pasturage, relying upon his daughters Lampetia and Phaethousa to oversee them. However, in Book 12 of the *Odyssey*, Hēlios becomes directly involved in the poem's narrative with severe consequences for Odysseus and his men. Homer

[120] Aeschylus, *Prometheus Bound*, 88-92.
[121] David H. Sick, "Mit(h)ra(s) and the Myths of the Sun," *Numen* 51, No. 4 (2004): 437.

foreshadows this event in the proem: *αὐτῶν γὰρ σφετέρῃσιν ἀτασθαλίῃσιν ὄλοντο*, | *νήπιοι, οἳ κατὰ βοῦς Ὑπερίονος Ἠελίοιο | ἤσθιον: αὐτὰρ ὁ τοῖσιν ἀφείλετο νόστιμον ἦμαρ* (For they perished by their own wickedness, the fools who devoured the oxen of Hēlios Hyperiōn, but he snatched away their day of homecoming).[122] Even at the poem's outset, we know that Odysseus must contend with the sun-god's wrath before returning to Ithaka, but we finally learn the offense in Book 12.

Hēlios' primary herd of sacred cattle grazes upon the island of Thrinakia. The sun-god also gives a herd to his son Augeias—whose filthy stables Hēraklēs must clean—so that he would be famous among mortals for his cattle, who are not only great in number but are also immortal.[123] Regardless, both Kirkē (another of Hēlios' daughters) and the prophet Teiresias recommend that Odysseus avoid Thrinakia. During the *nekyia* scene in Book 11, the seer Teiresias warns the hero about the island, saying that if Odysseus or his men harm Hēlios' cattle, they will incur the sun-god's wrath.[124] In book 12, Kirkē speaks a similar warning, offering more information about the sun-god's cattle:

> *Θρινακίην δ' ἐς νῆσον ἀφίξεαι: ἔνθα δὲ πολλαὶ*
> *βόσκοντ' Ἠελίοιο βόες καὶ ἴφια μῆλα,*
> *ἑπτὰ βοῶν ἀγέλαι, τόσα δ' οἰῶν πώεα καλά,*
> *πεντήκοντα δ' ἕκαστα. γόνος δ' οὐ γίγνεται αὐτῶν,*
> *οὐδέ ποτε φθινύθουσι. θεαὶ δ' ἐπιποιμένες εἰσίν,*
> *νύμφαι ἐυπλόκαμοι, Φαέθουσά τε Λαμπετίη τε,*
> *ἃς τέκεν Ἠελίῳ Ὑπερίονι δῖα Νέαιρα.*
> *τὰς μὲν ἄρα θρέψασα τεκοῦσά τε πότνια μήτηρ*
> *Θρινακίην ἐς νῆσον ἀπῴκισε τηλόθι ναίειν,*
> *μῆλα φυλασσέμεναι πατρώια καὶ ἕλικας βοῦς.*
> *τὰς εἰ μέν κ' ἀσινέας ἐάᾳς νόστου τε μέδηαι,*
> *ἦ τ' ἂν ἔτ' εἰς Ἰθάκην κακά περ πάσχοντες ἵκοισθε:*
> *εἰ δέ κε σίνηαι, τότε τοι τεκμαίρομ' ὄλεθρον,*
> *νηί τε καὶ ἑτάροις: αὐτὸς δ' εἴ πέρ κεν ἀλύξῃς,*

[122] Homer, *Odyssey*, 1.7-9.
[123] Sick, "Mit(h)ra(s) and the Myths of the Sun," 454-55.
[124] Homer, *Odyssey*, 11.106 ff.

ὀψὲ κακῶς νεῖαι, ὀλέσας ἄπο πάντας ἑταίρους.[125]

You shall arrive at the island Thrinakia. There graze
the many oxen and goodly sheep of Hēlios,
seven herds of oxen and as many beautiful flocks of sheep,
each fifty [in number]. There is no child for them
nor do they ever perish. Gods are their shepherdesses,
the fair-haired nymphs Phaethousa and Lampetia,
whom shining Neaira bore to Hēlios Hyperiōn.
After she reared and gave birth to them, the queen mother
sent them far away to dwell on the island Thrinakia
to guard the paternal sheep and the oxen with twisted [horns].
If you leave them unharmed and are mindful of your homecoming,
truly you may still reach Ithaka, although suffering badly.
But if you harm [them], then I predict destruction
for your ship and comrades. Even if you yourself escape,
too late and in a bad state you return [home] after losing all your comrades.

As one of Hēlios' children, Kirkē is privy to information regarding her father's flocks. The sun-god's cattle are immortal, yet his daughters Lampetia and Phaethousa—whose names derive respectively from *λαμπρός* (bright) and from the old verb *φαέθω* (to shine) and recall Hēlios himself—tend to the flocks. Kirkē herself lives on the island Aiaiē, which Homer describes as *ὅθι τ' Ἠοῦς ἠριγενείης | οἰκία καὶ χοροί εἰσι καὶ ἀντολαὶ Ἠελίοιο* (where are the houses and choruses of early-born Dawn and the risings of Hēlios).[126] By this point in the poem, Odysseus is in the realm of the sun-god, stuck between two islands sacred to the solar deity. Sick contends:

> If the movements of the sun are viewed as designating the boundaries of the land of Aryans [i.e., the Indo-Iranians], the sun god too could lay claim to the title "possessing wide pastures," especially since the Sun in Greek culture provides a similar protective aspect, particularly where cattle are concerned.[127]

Thus, Kirkē gives Odysseus the same admonition: if he or his men disturb the cattle, Hēlios will know and will punish accordingly.

[125] *Ibid.*, 12.127-41.
[126] *Ibid.*, 12.3-4.
[127] Sick, "Mit(h)ra(s) and the Myths of the Sun," 455.

Having been advised by Teiresias and Kirkē, Odysseus is mindful of the sun-god's sacred cattle and hesitantly lands at Thrinakia. In some ways, the island of the Sun represents the end of Odysseus' journey since he has already transcended death by sailing out of the Underworld unharmed.[128] The island is therefore a test of his resolve. He warns his comrades not to touch the flocks of the sun-god, whom he describes in line 12.274 as *τερψίμβροτος*, meaning "he who gladdens the heart of man." Nonetheless, his men, out of hunger, slay the cattle while Odysseus is asleep. In the poem's proem, Homer had decribed this act as an *ἀτασθαλίη*, or "recklessness," whereas a Greek orator would call it an *ἀκολασία*, meaning "imtemperance." Waking to the smell of cooking meat, Odysseus realizes what has happened; the slabs of meat even low like cattle, a portent both comic and terrifying. His men have not only slain the Hēlios' beloved cattle but have also broken their oath to Odysseus that they would spare the animals.[129] Lampetia has already flown up to her father Hēlios, who, ironically, has not witnessed the transgression. Enraged, he halts his journey across the sky and swears before the other gods:

> *Ζεῦ πάτερ ἠδ' ἄλλοι μάκαρες θεοὶ αἰὲν ἐόντες,*
> *τῖσαι δὴ ἑτάρους Λαερτιάδεω Ὀδυσῆος,*
> *οἵ μευ βοῦς ἔκτειναν ὑπέρβιον, ᾗσιν ἐγώ γε*
> *χαίρεσκον μὲν ἰὼν εἰς οὐρανὸν ἀστερόεντα,*
> *ἠδ' ὁπότ' ἂψ ἐπὶ γαῖαν ἀπ' οὐρανόθεν προτραποίμην.*
> *εἰ δέ μοι οὐ τίσουσι βοῶν ἐπιεικέ' ἀμοιβήν,*
> *δύσομαι εἰς Ἀίδαο καὶ ἐν νεκύεσσι φαείνω.*[130]
>
> Father Zeus and you other blessed gods who always are,
> take vengeance upon the companions of Odysseus, son of Laertēs,
> who insolently slew my cattle, in whom
> I used to rejoice when I was going to starry heaven
> and whenever I turned back towards the earth from heaven.
> If they do not pay a fitting punishment for my oxen,
> I shall descend into Hades' house and shine among the dead.

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[128] Nanno Marinatos, "The Cosmic Journey of Odysseus," *Numen* 48, No. 4 (2001): 401.
[129] Sick, "Mit(h)ra(s) and the Myths of the Sun," 436.
[130] Homer, *Odyssey*, 12.377-83.

Hēlios' threat reveals several aspects of his role in Greek-mythology. We have already seen that the Indo-European sun-god acted as a herdsman, yet Hēlios relies upon other gods to accomplish tasks that he cannot complete. Like Sūrya, Hēlios must remain in his lofty track lest the world face dire consequences.

Furthermore, Hēlios' threat to shine among the dead is troublesome. Several locations in Greek mythology remain untouched by the Sun's rays. The Underworld is one such place. When Zeus quarrels with Hēra in Book 8 of the *Iliad*, he describes how the Underworld knows no light: *σέθεν δ' ἐγὼ οὐκ ἀλεγίζω | χωομένης, οὐδ' εἴ κε τὰ νείατα πείραθ' ἵκηαι | γαίης καὶ πόντοιο, ἵν' Ἰάπετός τε Κρόνος τε | ἥμενοι οὔτ' αὐγῇς Ὑπερίονος Ἠελίοιο | τέρποντ' οὔτ' ἀνέμοισι, βαθὺς δέ τε Τάρταρος ἀμφίς* (I do not heed you when you are angry, not even if you should come to the uttermost ends of the earth and sea where Iapetos and Kronos stay and do not rejoice in the light of Hēlios, Hyperiōn's son, nor the winds, but deep Tartaros [is] on both sides).[131] Zeus hints that the basest beings—such as the Titans who opposed the Olympians in the *titanomakhia*—do not deserve to gaze upon the Sun. A comparable sentiment exists in Vedic mythology.

If Hēlios were to shine in the Underworld rather than in heaven, everything would perish. Therefore, Zeus hastily assuages the sun-god: *Ἠέλι', ἦ τοι μὲν σὺ μετ' ἀθανάτοισι φάεινε | καὶ θνητοῖσι βροτοῖσιν ἐπὶ ζείδωρον ἄρουραν: | τῶν δέ κ' ἐγὼ τάχα νῆα θοὴν ἀργῆτι κεραυνῷ | τυτθὰ βαλὼν κεάσαιμι μέσῳ ἐνὶ οἴνοπι πόντῳ* (Shine, Hēlios, among the immortals and mortal men on the grain-giving earth. Having struck with my bright lightning bolt, I would quickly cleave their swift ship to pieces in the middle [of] the

[131] Homer, *Iliad*, 8.477-81.

sea).[132] Thus, when Odysseus at last returns to Ithaka, he arrives alone and (as Kirkē predicted) *κακὰ πάσχων*. Hēlios has affected the narrative of Homer's poem, although he requires the aid of Zeus to accomplish such a deed, which hints at a lack of personal power. Although the world's existence rests upon the sun-god's shoulders, Hēlios remains beholden to stronger gods such as Zeus. Regarding his appearance, the Greeks often portray Hēlios as a deity that is quite formidable.

III. Hēlios in the Guise of a War-God

Whereas the Vedic people represent Sūrya in various ways, the Greeks are less nebulous in their depictions of Hēlios. He typically appears as a great, golden god, his head crowned by solar rays. These beams also mark the sun-god's descendants. In Book 12 of the *Aeneid*, for instance, Vergil writes: *Interea reges, ingenti mole Latinus* | *quadriiugo vehitur curru, cui tempora circum* | *aurati bis sex radii fulgentia cingunt,* | *Solis avi specimen* (Meanwhile, the kings [come forth], in a huge mass Latinus is conveyed by a four-horsed chariot, around whose gleaming temples crown twelve golden rays, a mark of his ancestor, Sōl).[133] As the son of Kirkē and Odysseus, it is fitting that Latinos appears in the solar guise of his grandfather, and that by defeating Latinos, Aenēas becomes a pivotal figure in Roman mythology. G. K. Galinsky contends: "The Lavinian *Sol Indiges* is likely to have been identified with the Latin *pater indiges* if not from the very beginning, at least long before the Romans tried to replace the Latin ancestral god with their own ancestor, *Aeneas Indiges*." [134] By overcoming Hēlios' grandson, Aenēas overcomes the sun-god himself. Regardless, the sun-god's crown remains a poetic motif into later Latin literature. For example, Ovid describes in the

[132] Homer, *Odyssey*, 12.385-88.
[133] Vergil, *Aeneid*, 12.161-64.
[134] G. Karl Galinsky, "Sol and the 'Carmen Saeculare'." *Latomus* 26, Fasc. 3 (1967): 628.

Metamorphoses how the sun-god must set aside his crown of beams so that his son Phaethōn may safely approach.[135] Since Hēlios mostly interacts with gods rather than his semi-divine children or any other mortal in Greek mythology, he is never required to lessen his intensity. Thus, Hēlios' beams frequently represent the sun-god throughout Greek mythology.

Whenever Homer describes Hēlios, he focuses on the Sun's light. In Book 13 of the *Odyssey*, the poet sings, *αὐτὰρ Ὀδυσσεὺς | πολλὰ πρὸς ἠέλιον κεφαλὴν τρέπε παμφανόωντα*, | *δῦναι ἐπειγόμενος: δὴ γὰρ μενέαινε νέεσθαι* (But Odysseus often turned his head towards the all-shining Sun, wanting [it] to set, for he greatly desired to go [home]).[136] Since Ithaka is located off the western coast of Greece, Odysseus naturally associates the setting Sun with his homeland and is reminded how far away he is. On the other hand, Hesiod emphasizes Hēlios' parching heat in the *Works and Days*: *ἦμος δὴ λήγει μένος ὀξέος ἠελίοιο | καύματος ἰδαλίμου…* (When the strength of the keen Sun's parching heat abates…).[137] Other tales mention Hēlios' burning heat as well. When Hēraklēs becomes worn out by the Sun's rays, he shoots an arrow at the sun-god; amused at the hero's boldness, Hēlios offers his cup so that Hēraklēs may continue his journey. However, the most vivid description of the Greek sun-god's physique occurs in the *Homeric Hymn to Helios*.

While less sacred than the Vedic hymns, the Homeric Hymns address the Greek gods and are recited at various festivals. Hēlios' own particular festival is the Halieia that

[135] Ovid, *Metamorphoses*, 2.40 ff.
[136] Homer, *Odyssey*, 13.28-30.
[137] Hesiod, *Works and Days*, 414-415.

takes place in Rhodes and is known for its opulence and games.[138] Notopoulos notes that the Greeks also honor Hēlios alongside other deities such as Dēmētēr during the Skira and Thargelia festivals, both of which celebrate the earth's fertility.[139] The Avestan deity Mithra also has agricultural connotations. Ilya Gershevitch writes, "in the Avesta Mithra is defined as a life-giver by his epithets *puθrō . dā-* 'bestower of sons'…, *uxšyaṯ . urvara-* 'making plants grow'…, and *gayō . dā-* 'bestower of life'…"[140] The Greek sun-god's agricultural role is evidenced in Aeschylus' *Agamemnon* when the herald is asked about Agamemnon's whereabouts: *οὐκ οἶδεν οὐδεὶς ὥστ' ἀπαγγεῖλαι τορῶς, | πλὴν τοῦ τρέφοντος Ἡλίου χθονὸς φύσιν* (No one knows so as to report clearly except Hēlios, who nourishes the earth's growth).[141] As such, a poet, when honoring the Sun's role in agriculture, might recite the *Homeric Hymn to Helios*, although the sun-god more closely resembles Arēs in this poem.

The poet depicts Hēlios as a war-god, armed and ready for battle. After mentioning Hēlios' golden helmet, he then describes the sun-god's raiment:

λαμπραὶ δ' ἀκτῖνες ἀπ' αὐτοῦ
αἰγλῆεν στίλβουσι παρὰ κροτάφων δέ τ' ἔθειραι
λαμπραὶ ἀπὸ κρατὸς χαρίεν κατέχουσι πρόσωπον
τηλαυγές: καλὸν δὲ περὶ χροῒ λάμπεται ἔσθος
λεπτουργές, πνοιῇ ἀνέμων: ὕπο δ' ἄρσενες ἵπποι…[142]

From him, bright rays
gleam dazzlingly, and beside his temples
the bright locks from his head gracefully surround
his far-shining face. His beautiful, finely-wrought clothing
glimmers around his shine by blowing of the winds. Stallions under…

[138] Simon Hornblower and Anthony Spawforth, *The Oxford Classical Dictionary* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1999), 676.
[139] Notopoulos, "Socrates and the Sun," 267.
[140] Ilya Gershevitch, *The Avestan Hymn to Mithra* (Cambridge: The Cambridge University Press, 1967), 32.
[141] Aeschylus, *Agamemnon*, 633.
[142] *Homeric Hymn to Helios*, 10-15.

Although the final line of this excerpt is corrupt, a complete picture of the Greek sun-god emerges. A golden sheen surrounds Hēlios, and his golden hair recalls Sūrya, sometimes called *harikeśa*, or "golden-haired." The sun-god is also beautiful, adorned in well-made clothing; this image of Hēlios may contribute to his later conflation with Apollō, whose depiction is comparable. The final line indicates that male horses draw Hēlios' chariot, an aspect that distinguishes the Greek sun-god from his Vedic analogue, whose horses are usually female. This eponymous hymn to Hēlios shows a deity arrayed for war, but it is difficult say how commonly such an interpretation appears. Even in the *Iliad*, the most violent poem in Greek literature, Homer highlight Hēlios' radiance more than his other attributes. Other archaic poets emphasize the sun-god's life-giving aspects. Mimnermus, for instance, complains about encroaching old age: *ἐπεὶ δ' ὀδυνηρὸν ἐπέλθῃ̃ | γῆρας, ὅ τ'αἰσχρὸν ὅμως καὶ καλὸν ἄνδρα τιθεῖ, | αἰεί μιν φρένας ἀμφὶ κακαὶ τείρουσι μέριμναι | οὐ δ' αὐγὰς προσορέων τέρπεται ἠελίου* (When painful old age approaches, which makes even a beautiful man ugly, bad cares always weaken his thoughts, and he does not enjoy looking upon the Sun's rays).[143] Hēlios' light is supposed to wake all things into life, but Mimnermus suggests that old age deprives us of the basic ability to enjoy the Sun's beams.

Ultimately, the *Homeric Hymn to Helios* offers a fitting if unusual depiction of the Greek sun-god, but other Greek gods often appear similarly bellicose, particularly in the *Iliad*. When Apollō first appears in Book 1, he is not the god of music and poetry but a god of death as he spreads a plague among the Akhaians. Although he and Hēlios are distinct figures during the archaic period, they already share similar features, a trait comparable to how Sūrya, Savitṛ, and Agni share attributes in Vedic mythology. Hēlios'

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[143] Allen, *The Fragments of Mimnermus*, Fr. 1.

interaction with the other gods is also important, and in the following section, I will discuss the complex relationship between the sun-god and various other deities.

IV. The Titanic Family of Hēlios

Unlike Sūrya, Hēlios' lineage is relatively unambiguous. Whereas the Vedic sun-god is the son of the old sky-god Dyauṣpitṛ, Zeus is not Hēlios' father, although they are distantly related. Hēlios is, in fact, an older deity that descends from a long line of Titans. As I mentioned earlier in the chapter, Homer names the sun-god *Ὑπερίων Ἠέλιος* in the proem of the *Odyssey*, yet he never explains this name, leaving us to wonder if Hyperiōn is a patronymic or if it carries some other meaning. The name translates as "very high" and might have originally been an epithet of the sun-god. The same question arises regarding Hēlios' son Phaethōn. Nagy remarks:

> In the commentary to his edition of the *Hesiodic Theogony*, West observes that *Φαέθων* (line 987), like *Ὑπερίων*, is a hypostasis of the sun-god *Ἥλιος*. The original thematic identity of *Ἥλιος* with *Ὑπερίων* and *Φαέθων* is apparent in Epic diction, where *ὑπερίων*… and *φαέθων*…are fixed epithets of *Ἥλιος*. The mythological separation of identities is symbolized in genealogical terms.[144]

Recall that one of Hēlios' other children bears the name Phaethousa, the feminine equivalent of the name Phaethōn. Such transferals of epithets are common in early Greek poetry.[145] Homer almost always places the names Hēlios and Hyperiōn in proximity, although he occasionally uses the name Hyperiōn alone. In *Iliad* 19.398, for example, Homer describes Akhillēs as *τεύχεσι παμφαίνων ὥς τ' ἠλέκτωρ Ὑπερίων* (shining in his armor like beaming Hyperiōn). He does not mention Hēlios' name here, but he undoubtedly means the sun-god, which suggests that his audience would recognize the name as well.

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[144] Nagy, "Phaethon, Sappho's Phaon, and the White Rock of Leukas," 148.
[145] Grace Harriet MacUrdy, "Myths and Resurrection Myths," *The Journal of Hellenic Studies* 37 (1917): 161.

The poet of the *Homeric Hymn to Delian Apollo* also refers to the sun-god as Hyperiōn. Apollō, boasting over the python, says, *οὐδέ τί τοι θάνατόν γε δυσηλεγέ' οὔτε Τυφωεὺς | ἀρκέσει οὔτε Χίμαιρα δυσώνυμος, ἀλλά σέ γ' αὐτοῦ | πύσει Γαῖα μέλαινα καὶ ἠλέκτωρ Ὑπερίων* (Neither Typhōeus nor the hated Khimaira shall in any way ward off painful death from you, but black Gaia and beaming Hyperiōn shall make you rot here).[146] Since the phrase *ἠλέκτωρ Ὑπερίων* provides three *metra* in the hexametric line, it is likely a poetic formula; otherwise, the hymn's poet has borrowed the phrase from Homer. Hēlios' lineage remains undefined in the Homeric Epics, but Hesiod clarifies that Hyperiōn is not an epithet of Hēlios but is actually the sun-god's father.

At its core, Hesiod's *Theogony* narrates how Zeus and his Olympians rise to power to smooth out the world's monstrous wrinkles. However, before the Olympians establish themselves by defeating the Titans, the Titans themselves—the children of Gaia and Ouranos—rule over the earth. Two of these archaic deities are Hyperiōn and Theia, whom Hesiod briefly describes: *θεία δ' Ἠέλιόν τε μέγαν λαμπράν τε Σελήνην | Ἠῶ θ', ἣ πάντεσσιν ἐπιχθονίοισι φαείνει | ἀθανάτοις τε θεοῖσι, τοὶ οὐρανὸν εὐρὺν ἔχουσι, | γείναθ' ὑποδμηθεῖσ' Ὑπερίονος ἐν φιλότητι* (Theia, overcome in love by Hyperiōn, bore great Hēlios and bright Selēnē and Ēōs, who shines upon all earthly beings and the deathless gods, the ones who hold wide heaven).[147] Hyperiōn's relationship with Hēlios remains ambiguous in Homer's poems, yet Hesiod firmly establishes their familial relationship, and uses the patronymic *Ὑπεριονίδης*, or the "son of Hyperiōn," in line 1011.

We know little about the sun-god's mother, Theia. Even her name is generic, simply meaning "divine," although she seems to have enjoyed multiple names. In the

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[146] *Homeric Hymn to Delian Apollo*, 367-69.
[147] Hesiod, *Theogony*, 371-74.

opening lines of the *Homeric Hymn to Helios*, for example, the poet refers to the goddess by the name Euryphaessa:

> *Ἥλιον ὑμνεῖν αὖτε Διὸς τέκος ἄρχεο Μοῦσα,*
> *Καλλιόπη, φαέθοντα, τὸν Εὐρυφάεσσα βοῶπις*
> *γείνατο Γαίης παιδὶ καὶ Οὐρανοῦ ἀστερόεντος:*
> *γῆμε γὰρ Εὐρυφάεσσαν ἀγακλειτὴν Ὑπερίων,*
> *αὐτοκασιγνήτην, ἥ οἱ τέκε κάλλιμα τέκνα,*
> *Ἠῶ τε ῥοδόπηχυν ἐυπλόκαμόν τε Σελήνην*
> *Ἠέλιόν τ' ἀκάμαντ', ἐπιείκελον ἀθανάτοισιν.*[148]
>
> Begin, O Muse Kalliopē, child of Zeus, to sing again
> of shining Hēlios, whom ox-eyed Euryphaessa bore
> to the son of Gaia and starry Ouranos.
> For Hyperiōn married renowned Euryphaessa,
> his own sister, who bore beautiful children to him:
> rosy-armed Ēōs, fair-haired Selēnē,
> and tireless Hēlios, alike to the immortals.

Euryphaessa means "widely-shining," a name that better befits the sun-god's mother while also recalling Hēlios' far-shining gaze. Additionally, Pindar—whom Notopoulos names as "the poet *par excellence* of the sun and its light"—indicates that Euryphaessa has other names as well.[149] In the fifth Isthmian ode, he begins his invocation:, *μᾶτερ Ἀλίου πολυώνυμε Θεία*, | *σέο ἕκατι καὶ μεγασθενῆ νόμισαν* | *χρυσὸν ἄνθρωποι περιώσιον ἄλλων* (O mother of Hēlios, many-named Theia, on your account do people consider gold [to be] of great strength far beyond other [things]).[150] As such, Theia seems to have had many names, a characteristic common to many Greek deities.

Gantz notes that no stories involving Hyperiōn or Theia/Euryphaessa remain except their relationship with their children, yet this solar lineage is important in determining Hēlios' position in the Greek pantheon.[151] As the son of Titans, Hēlios'

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[148] *Homeric Hymn to Helios*, 1-7.
[149] Notopoulos, "Socrates and the Sun," 273.
[150] Pindar, *Isthmian Ode 5*, 1-3.
[151] Gantz, *Early Greek Myth*, 30.

connection to the Olympians is more tenuous than Sūrya's relationship with the Vedic gods. In Indo-European terms, the sun-god's daughter marries the sons/grandsons of the sky-god, thereby creating a bond between them.[152] While Sūrya's daughter Sūryā marries the Aśvins—the twin horselords who correspond to the Indo-European sky-god's sons/grandsons—in Vedic mythology, no child of Hēlios marries the Dioskouri, the Greek counterparts of the Aśvins. In Greek mythology, Helen roughly corresponds to Sūryā since the Dioskouri reserve a seat for Helen in their chariot just as the Aśvins keep a seat for Sūryā in Vedic mythology.[153] Puhvel even attempts to etymologically link Sūryā with Helen, whose theoretical pre-Greek name is **Sāwelēna* (cf. Hēlios < **Sāwelios*).[154] However, I agree with Jackson that Helen's name more closely matches that of the Vedic goddess Saraṇyū, the mother of the Aśvins. Regardless, Hēlios and the Dioskouri are unrelated in Greek mythology, but the sun-god is still related to the dawn-goddess, who always accompanies her brother's ascent into the sky.

Like Hēlios, the dawn-goddess has a well-preserved Indo-European etymology. The word*H_2usōs* yields Sanskrit *Uṣās*, whereas Greek *Ēōs* (better preserved in Aeolic Greek as *Auōs*) and Latin *Aurōra* (from Old Latin **Ausōsa*) derive from its full-grade form **H_2eu̯sōs*.[155] In Jackson's model of the Indo-European pantheon, he argues that the dawn-goddess is the daughter of the sky-god.[156] I believe his analysis is accurate since Vedic mythology (the most conservative daughter mythology of Indo-European) reflects this relationship. The sky-god Dyauṣpitṛ even impregnates the dawn-goddess in hymn

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[152] Jackson, "Light from Distant Asterisks. Towards a Description of the Indo-European Religious Heritage," 78.
[153] Henry John Walker, "The Greek Aśvins," *Annals of the Bhandarkar Oriental Research Institute* 88 (2007): 102.
[154] Puhvel, *Comparative Mythology*, 143.
[155] Watkins, *The American Heritage Dictionary of Indo-European Roots*, 6-7.
[156] Jackson, "Light from Distant Asterisks. Towards a Description of the Indo-European Religious Heritage," 66.

I.164 of the *Ṛgveda*, after which she gives birth to the sun-god.[157] Ēōs, on the other hand, is not Zeus' daughter but the child of Hyperiōn and Theia as well as Hēlios' sister. Unlike her brother, Ēōs is a purely mythological goddess.[158] The dawn-goddess is the subject of Homer's most famous poetic formula: *ῥοδοδάκτυλος Ἠώς*, or "rosy-fingered Dawn." She nonetheless holds an interesting position in Greek mythology, one worthy of some discussion. Whereas Uṣās' primary function entails leading Sūrya into the daytime sky, Ēōs is more of a romantic goddess who prefers mortal lovers.[159]

In Greek mythology, the relationship between Hēlios and Ēōs is strictly that of brother and sister. Unlike Vedic mythology, no alternate tales of a romance between the two deities exist, but Ēōs has several human lovers elsewhere. Homer mentions Ōriōn in Book 5 of the *Odyssey*: *ὣς μὲν ὅτ' Ὠρίων' ἕλετο ῥοδοδάκτυλος Ἠώς, | τόφρα οἱ ἠγάασθε θεοὶ ῥεῖα ζώοντες, | ἧος ἐν Ὀρτυγίῃ χρυσόθρονος Ἄρτεμις ἁγνὴ | οἷς ἀγανοῖς βελέεσσιν ἐποιχομένη κατέπεφνεν* (Thus, when rosy-fingered Ēōs chose Ōriōn, you gods, living easily, were indignant at her until golden-throned Artemis, chaste, slew [him] on Ortygia, attacking him with her gentle arrows).[160] The fact that Artemis, who typically bestows a painless death to women, slays Ēōs' mortal lover encapsulates the dawn-goddess' star-crossed relationships. Her more famous lover is Tithōnos, from whose bed Ēōs rises every morning: *Ἠὼς δ' ἐκ λεχέων παρ' ἀγαυοῦ Τιθωνοῖο | ὤρνυθ'*, *ἵν' ἀθανάτοισι φόως φέροι ἠδὲ βροτοῖσιν* (Ēōs arose from the bed of illustrious Tithōnos so that she might bring light to immortals and mortals).[161] In this scene, Ēōs seems to have usurped Hēlios' role as the light-bringer, but a more likely scenario is that *φόως* refers to Hēlios himself.

[157] Sick, "Mit(h)ra(s) and the Myths of the Sun," 439.
[158] Hornblower and Spawforth, *The Oxford Classical Dictionary*, 526.
[159] Gantz, *Early Greek Myth*, 36.
[160] Homer, *Odyssey*, 5.121-24.
[161] *Ibid.*, 5.1-2.

The Greek dawn-goddess leads the sun-god into the sky just as Uṣās dispels the darkness when she heralds Sūrya's ascent.[162] Sappho also depicts Ēōs in such a light: *Ἔσπερε πάντα φέρων ὄσα φαίνολις ἐσκέδασ' αὔως | †φέρεις ὄιν, φέρεις† αἶγα, φέρεις ἄπυ μάτερι παῖδα* (Bringing everything, o Hesperos, which the light-bringing dawn scattered, you bring the sheep, you bring the goat, [and] you bring the child back to its mother).[163] The adjective *φαίνολις* is rare, appearing also in the *Homeric Hymn to Demeter*, where it again describes Ēōs. Ultimately, one may wonder why Ēōs chooses mortal lovers, especially given that all her romantic relationships are doomed to fail. A possible answer suggests a connection between the dawn-goddess and the love-goddess Aphroditē.

In Book 1 of the *Bibliotheca* by pseudo-Apollodorus, the author proposes a curious etiology for Ēōs' predilection towards mortal lovers: *Ὠρίωνος δ' Ἠὼς ἐρασθεῖσα ἥρπασε καὶ ἐκόμισεν εἰς Δῆλον: ἐποίει γὰρ αὐτὴν Ἀφροδίτη συνεχῶς ἐρᾶν, ὅτι Ἄρει συνευνάσθη* (Ēōs, having fallen in love with Ōriōn, snatched him away and brought him to Dēlos, for Aphroditē made it so that [Ēōs] was constantly in love since she shared a bed with Arēs).[164] This story occurs only in the *Bibliotheca*, yet scholars have noticed patterns that suggest a merging between Ēōs and Aphroditē in Greek mythology.[165] This conflation between the two goddesses may also account for the platonic relationship between Hēlios and Ēōs. Ann Suter argues:

> The myth is that of the Dawn goddess who mates with the Sun god, with whom she produces the next day's light. The light is in face the sun, so that Dawn is both lover and mother of the Sun god. In Greek epic the pattern has undergone some changes: the Dawn goddess' function as lover/mother has been maintained, but the Sun god is now a beautiful youth. In the Greek tradition, Eos (and Aphrodite)

[162] Nagy, "Phaethon, Sappho's Phaon, and the White Rock of Leukas," 166.
[163] David Campbell, *Greek Lyric: Volume I* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1982), 104a.
[164] Pseudo-Apollodorus, *Bibliotheca*, 1.4.4.
[165] Gantz, *Early Greek Myth*, 37.

> abduct youths in order to mate with them, and this relationship renders them immortal.[166]

In Indo-European terms, Ēōs is clearly the elder goddess whereas Aphroditē derives more from near-Eastern love-goddesses. She is a latecomer to the Greek pantheon, evidenced by the fact that no Linear B tablet bears her name.[167] She has also assumed some of the dawn-goddess' traditional Indo-European characteristics such as preceding the sun-god into the ocean.

In his fragmentary play *The Lady of Leukas*, Menander writes, *οὗ δὴ λέγεται πρώτη Σαπφὼ | τὸν ὑπέρκομπον θηρῶσα Φάων' | οἰστρῶντι πόθῳ ῥῖψαι πέτρας | ἀπὸ τηλεφανοῦς* (Of course, Sappho is said to have thrown [herself] from the conspicuous rock, chasing arrogant Phaōn because of stinging desire).[168] In one of Sappho's lost poems, she loves the ferryman Phaōn, whose name and whose plunge from the White Rock of Leukas recalls Hēlios' son Phaethōn. Phaōn had once driven Aphroditē from Lesbos to Asia Minor, for which deed the goddess gifted him with a potion that would enhance his beauty.[169] Other tales suggest that Aphroditē had planned Phaethōn's destruction to punish Hēlios for betraying her tryst with Arēs. In the *Theogony*, Hesiod tells how Aphroditē had kidnapped Phaethōn, but here he is the son of Ēōs and her mortal lover Kephalos,[170] Considering such stories and Sappho's love of Aphroditē, Nagy makes an interesting proposal:

> Sappho is vicariously projecting her identity into the goddess Aphrodite herself. By loving Phaon, she becomes parallel with Aphrodite, who loves the native Lesbian hypostasis of the Sun-God himself. By diving from the White Rock, she

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[166] Ann Suter, "Aphrodite/Paris/Helen: A Vedic Myth in the Iliad," *Transactions of the American Philological Association* 117 (1987): 52.
[167] Burkert, *Greek Religion*, 153.
[168] W. G. Arnott, *Menander: Volume 2* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1996), 230.
[169] *Ibid.*
[170] Gantz, *Early Greek Myth*, 31.

> does what Aphrodite does in the form of the Evening Star, diving after the sunken Sun in order to retrieve him the next morning in the form of the Morning Star.[171]

If Nagy is correct, Aphroditē has effectively usurped the role of Ēōs by accompanying a solar figure down into the ocean. We see an even deeper connection between the two goddesses in Greco-Vedic poetics.

In his article "Πότνια Αὔως: The Greek Dawn-Goddess and Her Antecedent," Peter Jackson states:

> By means of two cognate epithets, both Aphrodite and the Vedic Dawn-goddess Uṣās are characterized as daughters of the Sky-god (PIE *di̯éu̯s*), i.e. as Διός θυγάτηρ and *diva(s) duhitár* (PIE **diu̯ós dhugh₂tér*). While Eos is never explicitly referred to as the daughter of Zeus, but rather as daughter of Theia and Hyperion, a faint echo of this designation (*θυγάτηρ Διός Ἠώς) Is still discerned in the metrical shape of the fixed epithet frequently preceding her name in epic diction, ῥοδοδάκτυλος.[172]

According to Jackson, Homer's most famous formula *ῥοδοδάκτυλος Ἠώς* seems to substitute for the older *θυγάτηρ Διὸς Ἠώς*, a phrase which Homer applies more to Aphroditē. Jackson furthermore asserts that the act of smiling refers to both Uṣās (cf., the poet's use of the participle *saṃsmáyānā*, or "smiling," in hymn I.123.10 of the *Ṛgveda*) and Aphroditē, whom Hesiod describes as *φιλομμειδής* in line 200 of the *Theogony*.[173] Conversely, Ēōs has lost her distinctive smile in Greek mythology, but she remains the sister of Hēlios nonetheless. The sun-god's other sister is Selēnē, the moon-goddess, whose aspects are also romantic.

The Vedic lunar deities are not related to Sūrya, but Selēnē is the sister of Hēlios and Ēōs. Although she later becomes conflated with Artemis and even Hekatē, Selēnē plays a minor role in Greek mythology. Like her sister Ēōs, Selēnē is polyamorous. For

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[171] Nagy, "Phaethon, Sappho's Phaon, and the White Rock of Leukas," 175.
[172] Peter Jackson, "Πότνια Αὔως: The Greek Dawn-Goddess and Her Antecedent," *Glotta* Bd. 81 (2005): 116-117.
[173] *Ibid.*, 117.

example, in Book 8 of the *Argonautica*, Apollonius of Rhodes names Endymion as the moon-goddess' lover; the scholiast for this section of the poem reports that the tale had also appeared in Sappho's poetry.[174] The earlier *Homeric Hymn to Selene* tells of Selēnē's daughter with Zeus: *τῇ ῥά ποτε Κρονίδης ἐμίγη φιλότητι καὶ εὐνῇ: | ἣ δ' ὑποκυσαμένη Πανδείην γείνατο κούρην*, *| ἐκπρεπὲς εἶδος ἔχουσαν ἐν ἀθανάτοισι θεοῖσι* (With [Selēnē], the son of Kronos once mingled in love and bed. Having become pregnant, she bore a daughter, Pandeia, having a splendid form among the immortals).[175] As mentioned above, this myth is perhaps paralleled in hymn I.164 of the *Ṛgveda*, in which the sky-god Dyauṣpitṛ impregnates Uṣās, who afterwards gives birth to the Sun. If so, the Greek tradition has swapped Selēnē for Ēōs, who naturally precedes the sun-god into the sky.

Although Selēnē rarely appears beside Hēlios, the archaic Greek poets sometimes describe her in similar terms. Sappho, for example, highlights the Moon's splendor: *ἄστερες μὲν ἀμφὶ κάλαν σελάνναν | ἂψ ἀπυκρύπτοισι φάεννον εἶδος | ὄπποτα πλήθοισα μάλιστα λάμπῃ | γᾶν* (Around the beautiful Moon, the stars again conceal their radiant beauty whenever [the Moon], especially full, illuminates the earth).[176] Furthermore, in the moon-goddess' eponymous Homeric hymn, the poet sings:

> *ἧς ἄπο αἴγλη γαῖαν ἑλίσσεται οὐρανόδεικτος*
> *κρατὸς ἀπ' ἀθανάτοιο, πολὺς δ' ὑπὸ κόσμος ὄρωρεν*
> *αἴγλης λαμπούσης: στίλβει δέ τ' ἀλάμπετος ἀὴρ*
> *χρυσέου ἀπὸ στεφάνου, ἀκτῖνες δ' ἐνδιάονται,*
> *εὖτ' ἂν ἀπ' Ὠκεανοῖο λοεσσαμένη χρόα καλόν,*
> *εἵματα ἑσσαμένη τηλαυγέα δῖα Σελήνη,*
> *ζευξαμένη πώλους ἐριαύχενας, αἰγλήεντας,*
> *ἐσσυμένως προτέρωσ' ἐλάσῃ καλλίτριχας ἵππους…*[177]

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[174] Campbell, *Greek Lyric: Volume I*, Fr. 199.
[175] *Homeric Hymn to Selene*, 14-16.
[176] Campbell, *Greek Lyric: Volume I*, 34.
[177] *Homeric Hymn to Selene*, 3-10.

> From her immortal head, the radiance showing itself in heaven
> embraces the Earth, and much beauty has arisen
> from her shining radiance. The lightless air gleams
> from her golden crown, and her beams are bright as day
> whenever bright Selēnē, after bathing her beautiful skin
> in Okeanos' [waters], after clothing herself in far-beaming garments,
> [and] after yoking her radiant horses with arching necks,
> hastily drives her beautiful-haired horses forward.

Like that of her brother, Selēnē's light shines upon the world; she also drives a team of horses, typically fewer in number than the sun-god. Some authors even change the familial relationship between the two deities. In the *Phoenissae* of Euripides, for example, Antigonē refers to Selēnē as Hēlios' daughter: *ὦ λιπαροζώνου θύγατερ Ἀελίου* | *Σελαναία, χρυσεόκυκλον φέγγος* (O Selēnē, daughter of bright-girdled Hēlios, [you] light with a golden disk).[178] Moreover, the adjective *χρυσεόκυκλος*—while a particularly fitting term for solar deities—is a *hapax legomenon*, occurring only in this passage. Although Ēōs and Selēnē share characteristics with Hēlios, they have no prominent part in their brother's ascension into the heavens since the Greeks have relegated the goddesses to more amatory roles. However, Hēlios has other relatives, including numerous children, both mortal and immortal.

Like his Vedic counterpart, Hēlios consorts with many minor goddesses, most of whom are either nymphs such as Neaira (the mother of Phaethousa and Lampetia) or Oceanids such as Klymenē. The latter is the mother of the Hēliades and the sun-god's most well-known child, Phaethōn, who asks to drive his father's chariot with catastrophic results. Of the Greek sources that mention the myth of Phaethōn, Aeschylus' lost *Heliades* is the most well-developed.[179] The chorus of this play is comprised of

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[178] Euripides, *Phoenissae*, 175-76.
[179] Gantz, *Early Greek Myth*, 31.

Phaethōn's grieving sisters. William Hansen notes, "in a motif attested as early as Hesiod, Phaethon's mourning sisters, the Heliades, were transformed into trees and continued to shed tears, which exude from the trees as fluid, which the sun in turn changes into amber."[180] Aside from Hesiod's *Theogony*, Aeschylus' lost *Heliades*, and Euripides' lost *Phaethon*, the story of Hēlios' destroyed son remains largely underdeveloped until Ovid writes his *Metamorphoses*.

By the late first-century BCE, Apollō has overtaken Hēlios' place as the Greco-Roman sun-god. Gantz argues that this conflation cannot have occurred before the fifth-century BCE and that Euripides' *Phaethon* is one of the first Greek works to equate the two gods.[181] The fragment in question reads: *ὦ καλλιφεγγὲς Ἥλι΄, ὥς μ΄ ἀπώλεσας | καὶ τόνδ΄ · Ἀπόλλων δ΄ ἐν βροτοῖς ὀρθῶς καλεῖ | ὅστις τὰ σιγῶντ΄ ὀνόματ΄ οἶδε δαιμόνων* (O beautiful-shining Hēlios, how you destroyed me and this man. But Apollō calls well among mortals, whoever knows the silent names of the gods). [182] Joseph Fontenrose explains that Euripides uses such an ambiguous syncretism between Hēlios and Apollō only here; the two deities remain distinct in the poet's other works.[183] Further into the Hellenistic period, Hēlios fades into the background as Apollō becomes the *de facto* sun-god, although Galinksy argues that during the first century BCE, the Roman poets still distinguish Sōl—the true Roman sun-god—from Apollō.[184] Horace's *Carmen saeculare* supports this claim. Composed in 17 BCE to commemorate Augustus' reinstatement of

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[180] William Hansen, "Foam-Born Aphrodite and the Mythology of Transformation," *The American Journal of Philology* 121, No. 1 (2000): 11.
[181] Gantz, *Early Greek Myth*, 87.
[182] Nauck, *Euripidis Perditarum Tragoediarum Fragmenta*, Fr. 781.
[183] Joseph E. Fontenrose, "Apollo and the Sun-God in Ovid, *The American Journal of Philology* 61, No. 4 (1940): 441.
[184] Galinsky, "Sol and the 'Carmen Saeculare'," 620.

the Ludi Saeculari, the poem symbolizes Rome’s glory during the *pax Romana*. Horace opens the poem:

> *Phoebe silvarumque potens Diana,*
> *lucidum caeli decus, o colendi*
> *semper et culti, date quae precamur*
> *tempore sacro,*
>
> *quo Sibyllini monuere versus*
> *virgines lectas puerosque castos*
> *dis quibus septem placuere colles*
> *dicere carmen.*
>
> *Alme Sol, curru nitido diem qui*
> *promis et celas aliusque et idem*
> *nasceris, possis nihil urbe Roma*
> *visere maius!*[185]
>
> O Phoebus and Diana, queen of the forests,
> the bright beauty of the sky, you who must be worshipped
> always and who have been worshipped, give what I ask
> at [this] sacred time,
>
> in which the Sibylline verses have advised
> the chosen maidens and chaste boys
> to sing a song to the gods, to whom the Seven Hills
> were pleasing.
>
> Nourishing Sōl, you who bring forth and conceal
> the day in your shining chariot and are born
> one and the same, may you see nothing greater
> than the city of Rome!

Although Horace initially addresses Apollō and Diana, he then invokes Sōl Indigēs in the third stanza. Concerning the phrase *Alme Sol*, Richard Thomas explains, “the epithet…used only here of the sun as god, never of Apollo, would have led the Roman audience away from a close identification of the two.”[186] Horace also alludes both to the sun-god’s role in measuring time and his far-reaching sight, perhaps suggesting that

[185] Horace, *Carmen saeculare*, 1-12.
[186] Richard F. Thomas, *Horace: Odes Book IV and Carmen Saeculare* (Cambridge: The Cambridge University Press, 2011), 65.

while the Rome changes and grows, the sun-god is constant. In Greek mythology, Hēlios sees Ouranos deposed by Kronos, who is then overthrown by Zeus; despite the shift in power, Hēlios remains the same. Sōl likewise remains unchanged as the republic becomes an empire. Since some old traditions are reborn during the Augustan period, it is difficult to say whether or not the Romans of the first century BCE still viewed Sōl as the proper sun-god. Moreover, other poets present Apollō as the only Roman sun-god. To quote Joseph Fontenrose: "Of the Latin poets, Ovid in particular, who has so much to say about Apollo, is all but universally supposed to have treated Apollo and the sun as one and the same god."[187] It is Ovid who finally writes a full account of Phaethōn's fall.

Desperate to prove his semi-divine lineage, Phaethōn decides to visit Hēlios' golden palace and ask to drive the golden chariot. Peter Knox indicates that Hēlios reluctantly agrees to his son's request only after trying to dissuade him.[188] The sun-god is, in fact, tricked by his son, which is ironic given Hēlios' role as a god of oaths. In Book 2, Hēlios says, *Utinam promissa liceret | non dare! confiteor, solum hoc tibi, nate, negarem. | Dissuadere licet. Non est tua tuta voluntas. | Magna petis, Phaethon, et quae nec viribus istis | munera conveniant nec tam puerilibus annis. | Sors tua mortalis, non est mortale quod optas* (Were it permitted not to give promises! I confess, son, that I should deny you only this. It is permitted to dissuade [you]. Your desire is not safe. You seek great gifts, Phaethōn, gifts which suit neither that strength [of yours] nor your years, so boyish. Mortal is your lot, [but] that which you desire is not mortal).[189] By referring to Phaethōn's *sors mortalis*, Ovid cleverly underscores the character's semi-divine lineage. Nagy writes:

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[187] Fontenrose, "Apollo and the Sun-God of Ovid," 430.
[188] Peter E. Knox, "Phaethon in Ovid and Nonnus," *The Classical Quarterly* 38, No. 2 (1988): 543.
[189] Ovid, *Metamorphoses*, 2.51-56.

> Whatever its message, the Phaethon myth operates on a code of solar behavior combined with human behavior. For example, the motif of riding across the sky counts as a solar *function* for Helios but as a human *deed* for Phaethon. Phaethon may re-enact what Helios does because his father is the Sun, but he fails in his solar role because his mother is human.[190]

Phaethōn's request to drive his father's chariot is no light matter. The sun-god's vehicle fits only one driver: Hēlios himself. As such, even its appearance is imposing: *Aureus axis erat, temo aureus, aurea summae | curvatura rotae, radiorum argenteus ordo*; | *per iuga chrysolithi positaeque ex ordine gemmae | clara repercusso reddebant lumina Phoebo* (Gilded was its axle, gilded its beam, gilded [were] the bends of the highest wheel, [and] silver [was] its series of spokes).[191] Having failed to dissuade his son, Hēlios instead attempts to instruct him how to properly drive the flaming chariot. Unfortunately, Phaethōn, a mere mortal, is doomed to fail.

Plato's *Timaeus* is one of the few Greek sources to mention Phaethōn's failure to drive his father's chariot. Sōkratēs narrates:

> *πολλαὶ κατὰ πολλὰ φθοραὶ γεγόνασιν ἀνθρώπων καὶ ἔσονται, πυρὶ μὲν καὶ ὕδατι μέγισται, μυρίοις δὲ ἄλλοις ἕτεραι βραχύτεραι. τὸ γὰρ οὖν καὶ παρ' ὑμῖν λεγόμενον, ὥς ποτε Φαέθων Ἡλίου παῖς τὸ τοῦ πατρὸς ἅρμα ζεύξας διὰ τὸ μὴ δυνατὸς εἶναι κατὰ τὴν τοῦ πατρὸς ὁδὸν ἐλαύνειν τά τ' ἐπὶ γῆς συνέκαυσεν καὶ αὐτὸς κεραυνωθεὶς διεφθάρη.*[192]
>
> For humans, there have been and will be many destructions according to many [methods], the greatest [of which are] by fire and water, and the lesser others by countless other [methods]. For it is also said among you that at one time, Phaethōn, the son of Hēlios, after yoking his father's chariot, because he was unable to drive along his father's track, burned up the things upon the earth and himself was destroyed, having been struck by lightning.

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[190] Nagy, "Phaethon, Sappho's Phaon, and the White Rock of Leukas," 153-54.
[191] Ovid, *Metamorphoses*, 2.105-10.
[192] Plato, *Timaeus*, 22c.

Because he is human, Phaethōn quickly loses control of his father's chariot and endangers everything, which prompts Zeus to kill him. Ovid tells a similar story, but Lucretius provides an early (if contemptuous) Latin account:

> *At pater omnipotens ira tum percitus acri*
> *magnanimum Phaethonta repenti fulminis ictu*
> *deturbavit equis in terram, Solque cadenti*
> *obvius aeternam succepit lampada mundi*
> *disiectosque redegit equos iunxitque trementis,*
> *inde suum per iter recreavit cuncta gubernans,*
> *scilicet ut veteres Graium cecinere poëtae.*[193]
>
> But the all-powerful father, then roused by consuming wrath,
> struck down with the strike of sudden lightning great-hearted Phaethōn
> from his horses to the earth, and Sōl,
> meeting his falling [son], took up the world's eternal torch
> and brought back the scattered, trembling horses and yoked [them],
> then, guiding [them] along their own path, he restored the other things,
> as the old poets of the Greeks, of course, sung.

The sun-god's actions in this passage are significant. His priority is not to catch his son's smoking body but to regain control of the flaming chariot before it destroys the world; with no charioteer to harness them, the sun-god's horses drive too close to the earth. One may also read the sun-god's actions as retribution for his son's deceit. As always, Zeus is quick to punish those who violate the sanctity of the oath, and Hēlios refuses to intervene on his son's behalf Nevertheless, only the sun-god can control the *aeterna lampas mundi*, making him even more vital for the world's wellbeing.

Unlike his father Hēlios, who successfully crosses the sky before descending into the ocean every day, Phaethōn does not survive his own descent. The story of Phaethōn is a cautionary tale against the *hybris* of humans; the young man not only dares to drive Hēlios' chariot but also ignores his father's warnings. Interestingly, we see a parallel in Latin literature of the early empire. The first-century CE poet Lucan mentions the sun-

[193] Lucretius, *De rerum natura*, 5.399-405.

god almost 100 times in his *Bellum civile*, a famously godless poem.[194] The imperial poet has a complicated relationship with Emperor Nero, who also envisions himself as a poet. As Robert Tucker notes, "…when he began writing the *Bellum Civile*, Lucan wanted to please his imperial friend and fellow-poet. He attempted to accomplish this by predicting that after death Nero would take over as driver of the grandest chariot of all, namely the chariot of the sun…"[195] Since the deification of emperors is already a custom in Rome during the early empire, it is fitting that Nero, as a poet, would aspire to the position of the sun-god. It is unclear whether Nero envisioned himself as Sōl or as Apollō, but his Domus Aurea is replete with solar imagery, including a statue of the sun-god. Like Phaethōn, however, Nero proves unworthy of the sun-god's chariot and bans Lucan's poetry out of envy before having the poet executed in 65 CE.

Phaethōn is Hēlios' most well-known child, but the sun-god has other famous descendants as well, including Kirkē, Persēs, and the Cretan queen Pasiphaē. One of the sun-god's most infamous descendants is Mēdeia, the sorceress of Kolkhis. Her father is Aiētēs, the son of Hēlios, and Kirkē is her aunt, from whom Mēdeia might have learned her magic. She mostly appears as a mortal woman, but Pindar writes: *Αἰήτα τό ποτε ζαμενὴς* | παῖς *ἀπέπνευσ' ἀθανάτου στόματος, δέσποινα Κόλχων* ([The word] which Aiētēs' mighty daughter, the queen of the Colchians, breathed out from her deathless mouth).[196] The idea of Mēdeia as a goddess is interesting, but Pindar is one of the few writers to make her immortal. Hēlios clearly favors his granddaughter and even loans his chariot to her after she dispenses divine (if terrible) justice on her faithless husband, Iasōn.

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[194] Robert A. Tucker, "Lucan and Phoebus," *Latomus* 42, No. 1 (1983): 147.
[195] *Ibid.*, 150.
[196] Pindar, *Pythian 4*, 10-11.

Mēdeia's relationship with Hēlios becomes clearer in Euripides' *Medea*. After helping the Greeks steal the Golden Fleece from her father Aiētēs, Mēdeia and Iasōn marry soon afterwards, yet by the opening of Euripides' play, Iasōn plans to marry the Corinthian princess Glaukē. Hurt by her husband's infidelity, Mēdeia decides to remove all traces of her marriage; she plots to kill not only Iasōn and Glaukē but even her own children with Iasōn. Knowing that the Corinthians will pursue, Medea bids the Athenian king Aigeus to swear an oath to protect her after the deed is done: *ὄμνυ πέδον Γῆς πατέρα θ' Ἥλιον πατρὸς | τοὐμοῦ θεῶν τε συντιθεὶς ἅπαν γένος* (Swear by Earth's plain and my father's father Hēlios, placing the entire race of gods together).[197] Mēdeia's reference to the sun-god is significant on multiple levels. Hēlios is not only her grandfather but also the god of contracts. Marriage involves an oath of fealty, and since Iasōn has broken his oath with Mēdeia, she assumes the sun-god's role as an avenger. Hēlios himself acts as the *deux ex machina* at the end of the play. After Medea has slain her children and is confronted by her husband, she says, *εἰ δ' ἐμοῦ χρείαν ἔχεις, | λέγ' εἴ τι βούλῃ, χειρὶ δ' οὐ ψαύσεις ποτέ: | τοιόνδ' ὄχημα πατρὸς Ἥλιος πατὴρ | δίδωσιν ἡμῖν, ἔρυμα πολεμίας χερός* (If you have need of me, speak if you wish, but you shall never touch [me] with your hand. My father's father Hēlios gives such a chariot to me, a defense against a hostile hand).[198] Although Mēdeia has murdered her children, she has also punished Iasōn for perjury, thereby assuming the sun-god's role. She naturally escapes from Corinth in one of Hēlios' flaming chariots.

Ultimately, Hēlios has an extensive family as opposed to Sūrya's smaller circle of relatives in Vedic mythology. However, Sūrya's family more often appears alongside the

[197] Euripides, *Medea*, 746-47.
[198] *Ibid.*, 1319-22

sun-god while Hēlios is an independent god in Greek mythology, frequently left alone in his lofty track. The reasons for the sun-god's autonomy in Greek mythology remain unclear. Self-sufficiency is a common trait of Greek gods; whereas the Vedic deities rely upon one another to accomplish their divine functions, the Greek gods often act alone, especially Zeus. The sky-god typically does whatever he wishes, needing no aid from the other deities, and Hēlios displays a comparable autonomy. Nevertheless, he occasionally interacts with other gods and even heroes, some of whom I will address in this chapter's final section

V. A Titan among the Olympians

As a god mostly removed from the Greek people, Hēlios rarely appears in their heroic myths. He is simply too far away for the Greeks to appropriately recognize him. Nevertheless, we have already seen how he affects Odysseus' journey and how he helped Dēmētēr; he furthermore loans his cup to Hēraklēs, thereby enabling the hero to complete his labor. The sun-god also appears in a handful of other myths, many of which feature an aberration from his usual track. Just as Hēlios deviates from his lofty path in the *Odyssey*, he also halts his chariot in the *Homeric Hymn 28 to Athena*, which narrates the birth of Athēna. Born in full war regalia, the world trembles at her shining eyes:

> *ἣ δὲ πρόσθεν Διὸς αἰγιόχοιο*
> *ἐσσυμένως ὤρουσεν ἀπ᾽ ἀθανάτοιο καρήνου,*
> *σείσασ᾽ ὀξὺν ἄκοντα: μέγας δ᾽ ἐλελίζετ᾽ Ὄλυμπος*
> *δεινὸν ὑπὸ βρίμης γλαυκώπιδος: ἀμφὶ δὲ γαῖα*
> *σμερδαλέον ἰάχησεν: ἐκινήθη δ᾽ ἄρα πόντος,*
> *κύμασι πορφυρέοισι κυκώμενος: ἔκχυτο δ᾽ ἅλμη*
> *ἐξαπίνης: στῆσεν δ᾽ Ὑπερίονος ἀγλαὸς υἱὸς*
> *ἵππους ὠκύποδας δηρὸν χρόνον, εἰσότε κούρη*
> *εἵλετ᾽ ἀπ᾽ ἀθανάτων ὤμων θεοείκελα τεύχη*
> *Παλλὰς Ἀθηναίη.*[199]

[199] *Homeric Hymn 28 to Athena*, 7-16.

She eagerly sprang
before aegis-holding Zeus from his immortal head,
having shaken her sharp spear. Great Olympos was trembling
terribly from her bright-eyed might. All around, the earth
cried out fearfully. Then the sea was moved,
stirring with its dark waves, and foam
poured out. The gleaming son of Hyperiōn stayed
his swift-footed horses for a long time until the girl,
Pallas Athēna, removed her godlike arms
from her immortal shoulders.

Hēlios is so stricken by Athēna's terrible glory that he forgets to function until she removes her armor. Remember that in the *Homeric Hymn to Helios*, the poet describes the sun-god as a great, armored deity, so it is significant that another god in a similar guise should make him stop in his tracks; he certainly shows no hesitation towards exposing Arēs' affair with Aphroditē to Hēphaistos. Regardless, Hēlios rarely stops his horses, at least not for long, but he is sometimes forced to veer from his customary journey by other gods such as Hēra and Zeus.

After the Akhaians recover Patroklos' body in Book 18 of the *Iliad*, Hēra honors Akhillēs' fallen comrade by bringing an early nightfall. Homer sings: *Ἠέλιον δ' ἀκάμαντα βοῶπις πότνια Ἥρη | πέμψεν ἐπ' Ὠκεανοῖο ῥοὰς ἀέκοντα νέεσθαι* (Hēra, the ox-eyed queen, sent tireless Hēlios, unwilling, into the streams of Okeanos).[200] This premature sunset has no adverse consequences for mortals since Hēlios remains in the world; he has simply descended earlier than usual. A more curious solar deviation occurs in the myth about the birth of Greece's most famous hero, Hēraklēs. The fifth-century BCE mythographer Pherecydes tells that when Zeus wishes to lie with Alkmēnē, he convinces Hēlios not to rise for three days lest Alkmēnē realize that the sky-god is not her

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[200] Homer, *Iliad*, 18.239-42.

husband, Amphitryōn.[201] Again, Hēlios' absence does not endanger the world, suggesting that the sun-god would have to truly leave—as he threatens to do in the *Odyssey*—for the world to perish.

The early Roman playwright Plautus offers a humorous rendition of Zeus' trickery in the *Amphitryon*. Sosia, the clever slave, ponders an exceptionally long night: *Neque ego hac nocte longiorem me vidisse censeo, | nisi item unam, verberatus quam pependi perpetem; | eam quoque edepol etiam multo haec vicit longitudine. | credo edepol equidem dormire Solem, atque adpotum probe; | mira sunt nisi invitavit sese in cena plusculum* (I do not think I have seen a longer [night] than this night except one in like manner, during which eternal [night] I hung after being whipped. Even so, by Pollux, this one has surpassed that one in length. By Pollux, I think the Sun truly sleeps and [is] thoroughly drunk. It is amazing if he has not treated himself somewhat more [than he should]).[202] By persuading the sun-god to stay hidden for three days, Zeus is able to lie with Alkmēnē, whose soon gives birth to Hēraklēs. Hēlios is clearly at the whim of younger gods, but it is interesting that Zeus uses persuasion with Hēlios rather than force. He is often forceful with other deities, but he seems to respect the sun-god. Although Hēlios is a Titan, Zeus greatly esteems the elder god, and Pindar best represents this relationship in *Olympian Ode 7*.

When Odysseus' men slay the cattle of Hēlios in the *Odyssey*, Zeus quickly pacifies the Titan with promises of punishment. The fact that the king of the gods is so quick to honor the older god's demands accentuates Hēlios' place among the Olympians. However, there may be more to this tale. In Book 15 of the *Iliad*, Poseidōn grows angry

[201] Gantz, *Early Greek Myth*, 375.
[202] Plautus, *Amphitryon*, 277-81.

when Zeus commands him to leave the battlefield and reminds him (via the messenger-goddess Iris) how they came to power:

> *τρεῖς γάρ τ᾽ ἐκ Κρόνου εἰμὲν ἀδελφεοὶ οὓς τέκετο Ῥέα*
> *Ζεὺς καὶ ἐγώ, τρίτατος δ᾽ Ἀΐδης ἐνέροισιν ἀνάσσων.*
> *τριχθὰ δὲ πάντα δέδασται, ἕκαστος δ᾽ ἔμμορε τιμῆς:*
> *ἤτοι ἐγὼν ἔλαχον πολιὴν ἅλα ναιέμεν αἰεὶ*
> *παλλομένων, Ἀΐδης δ᾽ ἔλαχε ζόφον ἠερόεντα,*
> *Ζεὺς δ᾽ ἔλαχ᾽ οὐρανὸν εὐρὺν ἐν αἰθέρι καὶ νεφέλῃσι:*
> *γαῖα δ᾽ ἔτι ξυνὴ πάντων καὶ μακρὸς Ὄλυμπος.*[203]
>
> For we, whom Rhea bore, are three brothers from Kronos:
> Zeus and I, and the third is Hadēs, ruling those below.
> Everything has been divided into thirds, and each [of us] drew their lot of honor.
> Truly, I received the grey sea to always live [there]
> of those casting lots, and Hadēs received the murky darkness,
> and Zeus received the broad sky in heaven and in the clouds.
> But earth [is] common to all as is great Olympos.

In Poseidon's view, he and his brothers have no authority over one another but instead govern their respective domains. This arrangement recalls the divine unity found in Vedic mythology, in which no god—not even Indra—truly controls another. In the *Theogony*, Hesiod, who greatly honors Zeus, changes the story so that the sky-god has a greater role in the drawing of lots, suggesting Zeus' elevated status among the gods, yet Pindar tells a slightly different tale in his *Olympian Ode 7*:

> *φαντὶ δ᾽ ἀνθρώπων παλαιαὶ*
> *ῥήσιες, οὔπω, ὅτε χθό-*
> *να δατέοντο Ζεύς τε καὶ ἀθάνατοι,*
> *φανερὰν ἐν πελάγει Ῥόδον ἔμμεν ποντίῳ,*
> *ἁλμυροῖς δ᾽ ἐν βένθεσιν νᾶσον κεκρύφθαι.*
>
> *ἀπεόντος δ᾽ οὔτις ἔνδειξεν λάχος Ἀελίου:*
> *καί ῥά μιν χώρας ἀκλάρωτον λίπον,*
> *ἁγνὸν θεόν.*
> *μνασθέντι δὲ Ζεὺς ἄμπαλον μέλ-*
> *λεν θέμεν. ἀλλά νιν οὐκ εἴασεν: ἐπεὶ πολιᾶς*
> *εἶπέ τιν᾽ αὐτὸς ὁρᾶν ἔν-*
> *δον θαλάσσας αὐξομέναν πεδόθεν*

[203] Homer, *Iliad*, 15.187-93.

πολύβοσκον γαῖαν ἀνθρώποισι καὶ εὔφρονα μήλοις.[204]

The ancient sayings of people
say that when Zeus and the immortals
were dividing the earth,
Rhodes was not yet visible in the sea plain,
but the island was hidden in salty depths.

Since Hēlios was absent, no one marked a lot [for him],
and they left him, a holy god,
with no lot of land.
For [Hēlios] recalling [this], Zeus was about to establish
a recasting of lots, but [Hēlios] did not allow him since
he said that he himself saw
a land greatly nourishing for people and favorable for flocks
growing within out of the plain of the grey sea.

There are several points of interest here. Hēlios misses the original casting of lots, but his absence is unsurprising since he is flying across the sky. Pindar moreover explains the genesis of Rhodes, home to Greece's most prominent solar cult. Pindar—who might have invented this story—also illustrates Hēlios' continued importance among the younger gods.[205] Zeus tries to correct the mistake, but Hēlios forbids him to do so, choosing the newly-arisen Rhodes instead. Thus, Pindar proposes an etiology for Hēlios' association with Rhodes since the sun-god recognized the island's fruitfulness. Ultimately, Hēlios—like Sūrya—is beholden to newer deities, but Zeus clearly esteems the old god, which may indicate an ancient tale of kinship that became lost in the corners of Greek mythology.

VI. Conclusion

By the classical era, Hēlios has become a vestige of archaic religious ideas due to the Greeks' uncertainty regarding the Sun's involvement in their daily lives. However, even the archaic Greeks are unsure about his place among the Olympians. On the one

[204] Pindar, *Olympian Ode 7*, 54-63.
[205] Gantz, *Early Greek Myth*, 48.

hand, Hēlios is the supreme deity since he makes life possible, but on the other, his heavenly track stretches far from the Greeks. Whereas the Vedic people consider Sūrya to be a communal deity and an intermediary figure between themselves and the gods, the Greeks feel little kinship with their own solar deity. They see him as an important deity, but Zeus, as always, suffers no competitor to his throne, yet hints of an older divine hierarchy remain even in the classical era. Sophocles, for instance, refers to the sun-god as *τὸν πάντων θεῶν θεὸν πρόμον | Ἅλιον*, or "Hēlios, the chief god of gods."[206] This statement recalls hymns VII.60 and VII.66 of the *Ṛgveda*, in which the poet describes Sūrya as chief among the Vedic gods. Nevertheless, since Zeus is king even during the Mycenean period, it is likely that the Greeks inherited such a divine hierarchy directly from Indo-European culture.

[206] Sophocles, *Oedipus the King*, 660-61.

CHAPTER 4

CONCLUSION

By examining the sun-god in Vedic and Greco-Roman mythology, a comprehensive picture of the Indo-European sun-god emerges in two of his earliest incarnations. In both daughter cultures, his three primary functions are to illuminate the earth, to oversee oaths, and to herd his flocks. These roles suggest a god of great importance for the Indo-European people. His significance notwithstanding, the sun-god is always subordinate to the sky-god in Indo-European culture. Although some Vedic and Greek stories tell of a more powerful solar deity, a great number of tales in which the sky-god is king counteract them. The sun-god was undoubtedly a vital deity, but he was simply too far away, too fixed in his celestial position for the Indo-Europeans to feel an especial kinship with him. Furthermore, Gods often mingle with humans—especially heroes—in Vedic and Greek mythology. Since the human body cannot withstand a deity's true form, the gods usually assume a lesser guise but their true essence is usually betrayed by the gods' unblinking eyes in Vedic mythology or by their great stature as in Greek mythology. Conversely, the sun-god can never walk among humans; his power is simply too great.

We must also consider how the Indo-Europeans viewed their deities. If Jackson is accurate in his depiction of the Indo-European pantheon, these deities comprised a nuclear family, the roots of which predate Indo-European and other cultures by untold millennia. The Indo-European people also saw their gods through anthropomorphic lenses. Most gods appear analogous to humans but greater in size. Even the sun-god

appears human. For instance, Sūrya has golden hair while Hēlios dresses himself in Greek armor, and both gods fly across the sky in a horse-drawn chariot. Regardless, the Sun might have been too abstract to hold a reliable position in the Indo-European pantheon. Or perhaps the Indo-European people saw how the Sun was encompassed by the sky and conceptualized this phenomenon in their religious hierarchy, making the sun-god subservient to the sky-god. While we may never know the true position of the Indo-European sun-god, he was already in a secondary position by the time the Indo-European tribes began to scatter across Europe and Asia. If he ever held a position as king of the gods, this status long predated the beginnings of the Indo-European migrations. Nevertheless, the Indo-European sun-god remained an indispensable deity for his wandering people, impelling them forward to find new lands while he crossed the sky in his flaming chariot.

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