

The Festival of Hermes Kriophoros in Tanagra (Boeotia): an Anthropological Interpretation

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Abstract. *The subject to be considered is the festival of Hermes Kriophoros in Tanagra. A brief Pausanias' reference (9.22.1) contains very few but remarkable details of the celebration as it was held in Late Antiquity. All indications concerning the procedure and the content of the festival inferred from Pausanias's description are analyzed in combination with the attested characteristics and attributes of Hermes, as well as with the religious symbolism universally attached to the ram, the divine shepherd, and ritual circular movement. The ethnographic evidence for similar rituals is also adduced. It is concluded that the Tanagran festival originated in an ancestral communal ceremony of annual territorial lustration. That ceremony was linked to the increase of solar activity in mid-spring and therefore also included the parallel magical stimulation of the sun's course. Gradually, that primitive magic ritual would have been elaborated in a more complex seasonal ceremony of stimulation of the generative solar power of the Great Mother-Goddess with the help of a young male ram-god and was eventually transformed into a celebration of the sacred marriage between the Great Mother-Goddess and a young beautiful divine shepherd. In the process of the formation of polis, the festival became a more social celebration, which served to secure the city-state's secure existence under the protection of Hermes Kriophoros.*

Rezumat. *Subiectul luat în discuție face referire la festivalul lui Hermes Kriophoros din Tanagra. O scurtă indicație a lui Pausanias (9.22.1) conține foarte puține, dar remarcabile detalii ale sărbătorii așa cum a avut loc în Antichitatea târzie. Toate indicațiile privind procedura și conținutul festivalului deduse din descrierea lui Pausanias sunt analizate în combinație cu caracteristicile și atributele atestate ale lui Hermes, precum și cu simbolismul religios universal al Berbecului, păstorului divin și mișcării circulare rituale. Dovezile etnografice pentru ritualuri similare sunt, de asemenea, aduse în discuție. Se apreciază că Festivalul de la Tanagra își are originea într-o ceremonie comunală ancestrală privitoare la lustrația teritorială anuală. Această ceremonie a fost legată de creșterea activității solare la mijlocul primăverii și, prin urmare, a inclus și stimularea magică paralelă a cursului soarelui. Treptat, acel ritual magic primitiv ar fi fost elaborat într-o ceremonie sezonieră mai complexă de stimulare a puterii solare generative a Marii Zeițe-Mamă cu ajutorul unui tânăr zeu-berbec și a fost transformat în cele din urmă într-o sărbătoare a căsătoriei sacre dintre marea zeiță-mamă și un tânăr frumos păstor divin. În procesul de formare a polisului, festivalul a devenit o sărbătoare mai socială, care avea rolul de a asigura existența sigură a orașului-stat sub protecția lui Hermes Kriophoros.*

Keywords: Hermes, Hermes Kriophoros, Tanagra, divine shepherd, divine ram, ritual circular movement.

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Introduction

Ancient Greek religion of the historic period was the product of a durable process of adaptation, combination, and evolution of diverse religious traditions, originally associated with quite different cultures – non-Indo-European Minoan, Mycenaean Greek, which had Indo-European roots, but was heavily affected by the Minoan culture, and Indo-European, to which the Greeks belonged genetically. Ancient Greek religion also comprised some common religious ideas and practices determined by the universal patterns of religious perception and not specifically connected with certain cultures. Ancient Greek religious festivals offer remarkable examples of such a combination of specific and universal religious traditions. The subject of this paper is the Festival of Hermes *Kriophoros* held at Tanagra, a city in Ancient Boeotia, which seems to present a noteworthy case of evolution of universal primitive archetypal rites combined with certain Bronze Age religious concepts into a complex celebration.

The Festival of Hermes *Kriophoros* in Tanagra: the evidence

The Festival of Hermes *Kriophoros* in Tanagra, although it was not overlooked in studies on Hermes², was not properly considered yet, mostly because of insufficient information relating to it. Only a few attempts were made to interpret its meaning. Thus, L.R. Farnell in his fundamental work on the Greek cults identified this festival as a seasonal magic ceremony intended to exercise “a magical prophylactic effect”³. A. Schachter in the survey of the Boeotian cults presumed that the Tanagran *Kriophoria* “was an initiation rite meant to symbolize the *ephebes*’ readiness to defend their homeland”⁴.

The Tanagran Festival of Hermes *Kriophoros* is mainly known due to Pausanias who mentioned that in Tanagra there were two sanctuaries of this god: one was dedicated to Hermes *Kriophoros* – “Ram-bearer”, and the other – to Hermes *Promachos* – “Champion” (Pausanias, 9.22.1). Commenting on Hermes’ epithet *Kriophoros*, Pausanias referred to a local legend about how the god once averted a pestilence from the city by carrying a ram upon his shoulders round its walls (“περὶ τὸ τεῖχος κριὸν περιενεγκών... ἐπὶ τῶν ὤμων”). The Festival is securely attested from the beginning of the fifth century BC, when it seems to have obtained a remarkable significance, and the Archaic sculptor Kalamis from Aegina made for the Tanagraeans a statue of Hermes *Kriophoros*: “Κάλαμις ἐποίησεν ἄγαλμα Ἑρμοῦ φέροντα κριὸν

² As, for example, in the most recent study by ALLEN 2018, 61–62.

³ FARNELL 1909, 10–11.

⁴ SCHACHTER 1986, 48–49.

ἐπὶ τῶν ὤμων” (Pausanias, 9.22.1)⁵. As Pausanias wrote, “whichever of the youths is judged to be the most handsome goes round the walls at the feast of Hermes, carrying a lamb on his shoulders” / “ὅς δ' ἂν εἶναι τῶν ἐφήβων προκριθῇ τὸ εἶδος κάλλιστος, οὗτος ἐν τοῦ Ἑρμοῦ τῇ ἑορτῇ περίεισιν ἐν κύκλῳ τὸ τεῖχος ἔχων ἄρνα ἐπὶ τῶν ὤμων” (Pausanias, 9.22.1).

Perhaps, the most accurate replica of the statue of Tanagran Hermes *Kriophoros* by Kalamis is a bronze figurine – the so-called ‘*Criophore Sabouroff*’, dated to c. 480 BC, presumably from Aegina [Figure 1]⁶; the main features of that statue may also be recognized in a terracotta figurine of Hermes *Kriophoros* from Gela, now in the British Museum [Figure 2]⁷, and in a Hellenistic ivory figurine (height 7 cm) found in Amphipolis (Central Macedonia), representing a young *Kriophoros* — “*kouros criophore*”⁸. The statue of Hermes by Kalamis was reproduced on Roman Imperial bronze coins of Tanagra [Figure 3], on Roman Imperial coins of Aegina, as well as, with some modifications, in Roman sculpture which copied Greek originals [Figure 4]⁹. Overall, it appears that Kalamis represented Tanagran Hermes as a young man, beardless, nude, and hatless, possibly with a simple ribbon on his head; the god had short hair; he carried a ram, still alive, on his shoulders, making a step with his left leg¹⁰.



Figure 1. Bronze figurine – the so-called ‘*Criophore Sabouroff*’, c. 480 BC. Source: FURTWÄGLER 1883–1887, v. 2, Pl. 146.



Figure 2. Terracotta figurine from Gela, possibly representing Hermes *Kriophoros* by Kalamis, Late Classical. Source: KEKULÉ 1884, 59, Pl. 3, no. 3.



Figure 3. Imperial Roman bronze coin from Tanagra with the image of Hermes *Kriophoros* by Kalamis. Source: <https://procrastes.svbtile.com/hermes-kriophoros>

⁵ HEAD 1881, 274; BEULÉ 1862, 362.

⁶ FURTWÄGLER 1883–1887, v. 2, Pl. 146.

⁷ KEKULÉ 1884, 59, Pl. 3, no. 3.

⁸ TOUCHAIS 1980, 649–650, Fig. 144.

⁹ TAYLOR 2002, 48, Fig. 2.1.

¹⁰ HEAD 1881, 274, Pl. 13, no. 14; HEAD 1884, 64, no. 51, Pl. 10, no. 12; HIGGINS 1986, 35, Fig. 15-up; LACROIX 1949, 69–70, pl. 3, nos. 4–5; FREL 1974, 55–57.

Two Tanagran terracotta statuettes dated to the early fifth century BC and showing idealized youths with ram may also be associated with the Festival of Hermes *Kriophoros*: both the represented boys have long hair and wear a pointed cap or helmet on the head, but one wears simple rider's cloak and holds a small ram under his arm [Figure 5]¹¹, while the other wears what seems to be a double *chiton* and stands in front of the ram, resting his hand on the ram's head [Figure 6]¹². L.R. Farnell suggested to identify the represented youths with Hermes¹³, based on that the type employed in the second of the figurines was used from the fourth century BC to represent youthful Hermes with a ram standing behind or beside the god¹⁴, as, for example, in a terracotta figurine found in Tanagra [Figure 7]. However, it may also be assumed that the particular Tanagran statuettes reproduce certain phases of the *Kriophoria* ceremony, as the choice of the animal and/or offering it to the deity.

The details of the celebration can be summarized as follows:

- the Tanagran Festival of Hermes *Kriophoros* appears to have been a whole-city (or communal) celebration,
- an event, officially associated with the establishment of the festival, was the healing of the city from a disease by Hermes,
- the festival was most probably held in spring, when the lambs used in the ritual are born, but its exact time is not indicated in the sources,
- the festival was obviously supposed to guarantee the safety of the whole city (or of the collective of its population) for a certain period, perhaps for a year, within its boundaries, that is, the city walls,
- the central deity of the festival, Hermes *Kriophoros*, was imagined as a beautiful youth directly connected with shepherding,
- the festival must have included the young men's beauty contest in order to choose the "most handsome" – "κάλλιστος" *ephebe* who had to play the role of Hermes; however, it is not known whether the "most beautiful" young man chosen in the previous year could participate in the contest another time,
- a young man representing Hermes walked around the city with a lamb on his shoulders, perhaps half- or completely naked,
- it seems likely that the lamb while carried by a youth was alive and was possibly sacrificed to the god after the ceremony of walking around the city-walls. It may be assumed that the ram used in the ceremony was considered a kind of "sacred lamb" and that a special ceremony for choosing it was held before the main ritual of the festival was performed.

¹¹ ROSCHER 1886–1891, 2395.

¹² ROSCHER 1886–1891, 2431.

¹³ FARNELL 1909, 46–47.

¹⁴ DESPINIS 1981; LEBESSI 2002, 257, Fig. 168.



Figure 4. Roman copy of the statue of Hermes Kriophoros by Kalamis, Museo Barracco, Rome. Source: https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:Hermes_crioforo.jpg



Figure 5. Sketch of a terracotta figurine from Tanagra, representing a youth holding a lamb, fifth century BC. Source: ROSCHER 1886–1891, 2395.



Figure 6. Sketch of a terracotta figurine from Tanagra, representing a youth with a ram, fifth century BC. Source: ROSCHER 1886–1891, 2431.



Figure 7. Terracotta figurine from Tanagra, representing youthful Hermes with a ram, fourth century BC. Source: <https://www.rulit.me/books/v-sadu-vremen-read-26907-3.html>

The Festival details: consideration and cross-interpretation

First of all, the topography of the festival should be established. The site of Ancient Tanagra is located on the north-eastern slope of a ridge of Mt. Kerykion, now called Mt. Tanagra. The existence of the ancient city is traced from the Late Geometric–Early Archaic periods, around 700 BC¹⁵. The city walls of Ancient Tanagra seen by Pausanias and directly engaged in the Festival of Hermes *Kriophoros* are still visible: they form a circuit of approximately 3 km, with towers at regular intervals. These walls are dated to shortly after 386 BC; they were constructed to replace the Archaic walls destroyed in 457 BC by the Athenians. Within the city walls, the remains of the temple of Hermes *Kriophoros* tend to be identified with the foundations of a rectangular building 6 x 15 m, discovered on a ridge approximately at the middle of the city¹⁶. The temple of Hermes *Promachos* presumably stood in the southern part of the city, in the area between the Theatre and the *Agora*¹⁷. Unfortunately, Pausanias in his description of the Festival did not indicate the exact rout and direction of the procession of the *Kriophoria*, but it may be supposed that the procession began and finished at the temple of Hermes *Kriophoros*. Undoubtedly, crowds of people gathered near the walls outside the city to observe the boy's procession, while multitudes watched it from the towers. As for the young man's mission to walk about 3 km around the city walls on a sloping ground carrying a lamb on his shoulders, it certainly was magnificent, and also not easy.

The boy's *walking with a lamb around the city walls* certainly formed the central part of the festival; formally, it seems to resemble magic ceremonies aimed at exercising a certain effect. A ritual circular movement or movement *around* something is usually supposed either to create a protective line — the “sacred / magic circle” around a certain object (in our case, it is the city within the city walls) or to be a stimulating action intended to impart something with certain powers. Rituals of this kind are widely attested to occur in magical ceremonies intended for purification, protection, and/or stimulation. In order to understand correctly the precise meaning of the Tanagran ritual, all the elements, of which it was composed, must be considered: the use in the ritual circular movement of a lamb or ram, the performance of the ritual by a nice-looking boy, perhaps half- or completely naked, and the ceremony time, which was most probably early or mid spring.

The direct connection of the main deity of the festival with the ram and the imaginary appearance of that deity as a young and handsome ram-bearer reveal the perception of Tanagran Hermes *Kriophoros* as a youthful and beautiful shepherd-god. These features also imply the origins of the festival in the religious traditions of people occupied with shepherding.

¹⁵ BINTLIFF 2001, 36.

¹⁶ ROLLER 1974, 152–154, 153, Temple A on the Plan.

¹⁷ ROLLER 1974, 155–156; corrections to Roller's reconstruction of the city plan see in BINTLIFF 2000, 116, Fig. 18.

Absolute beauty as a necessary condition in the choice of a youth intended to represent Hermes *Kriophoros* deserves special attention: it obliged the Tanagraeans to choose neither the strongest nor the fastest, but the most handsome young man for the *Kriophoria* ceremony. This detail seems to imply the presence of a female deity in the religious concept of the celebration. In relation to this, it has to be noted that in Ancient Greek tradition, the men's beauty contests — *kallisteia*, as well as non-athletic men's competitions of other kinds (for example, musical and poetic), were as a rule connected with honoring the female deities¹⁸. Among the cases that may be mentioned in this regard are: beauty contest between the old men in Athens for choosing the garland-bearers for Athena (Xenophon, *Symposium*, 4.17)¹⁹, musical (*μουσικός*) and hymn singing (*γυμνικός*) competitions of men in honor of Artemis *Leucophryene* in Magnesia-on-Maeandrus (*Sylloge Inscriptionum Graecarum*, v. 2, no. 559.34–35), and a beauty contest for men in Elis for choosing the three most beautiful men to serve a goddess (Hera (?), Athenaëus, *Deipnosophistae*, 13.20: "... at Elis there is a contest as to beauty, and the conqueror has the vessels of the goddess given to him to carry; and the next handsomest has the ox to lead, and the third places the sacrificial cakes on the head of the victim."). It is also noteworthy that in Rome, in the late third century BC, the arrival of the sacred symbol of the Idaean Mother, the goddess Cybela, was celebrated in a solemn ceremony performed on behalf of the city by the "best man" — "*vir optimus*", accompanied by all the Roman matrons — "*cum omnibus matronis*". The "best man" was chosen by the Roman Senate after a difficult examination of candidates; the choice was not based on the public merit of a person, and the winner was a young man — "*adulescens*" from a noble family (Livy, 29.11.8; 29.14.6, 11). These observations permit the assumption that the Tanagran Festival *Kriophoria* in its initial form comprised the worship of some female deity and that Hermes *Kriophoros* represented by the most beautiful youth was originally regarded as her servant and/or partner. It also appears that the duty supposed to be performed by a young man for a female deity during the *Kriophoria* celebration contained an erotic element, which had a kind of mysterious character and either should have been untold (as was usual in such cases) or was not more clearly understood by the time of Pausanias.

To support the presumption about a connection of Tanagran Hermes *Kriophoros* with a female deity, it should be mentioned that the city's Imperial coins, which bear on the reverse the representation of Hermes *Kriophoros* carrying a ram across his shoulders, have on the obverse the image of youthful Hermes or of a *kouros* who played his role in the Festival, supplemented with ear of corn²⁰. This tends to suggest that in Tanagra Hermes was paired with Demeter, the mistress-goddess of agriculture, harvest, and grain, and that she was revered at the *Kriophoria* Festival together with Hermes.

¹⁸ CROWTHER 1985, 285–286.

¹⁹ NEILS 1992, 13.

²⁰ HEAD 1881, 274; HEAD 1884, 64, no. 51, Pl. 10.12.

Furthermore, it should be emphasized the role of Tanagran Hermes as an averter of pestilence from the city. This action of the god, officially commemorated on his Festival, may be interpreted in a more general sense as symbolic of his victory over the dark powers embodied in disease and death and destroying the ordered existence of human society.

Thus, the Festival of Hermes *Kriophoros* in Tanagra appears to have been a periodical celebration, probably held in early or mid spring. It comprised some primitive magical elements of purifying or stimulating character and was purposed to ensure the safe existence of the city for a certain period of time, perhaps for a year. The main deity of the festival, Hermes *Kriophoros*, was imagined as a young and beautiful shepherd mysteriously associated with a female deity, possibly Demeter. He also appeared able to cope with the destructive antisocial powers. The whole celebration likely had enough early origins traced back to the religious customs of primitive shepherd community.

For the concept of Hermes in Tanagra, it is important that the god was also worshiped there as *Promachos* (Champion), owing that epithet to his role as a leader of Tanagran youths in their legendary victory over the Eretrians (Pausanias, 9.22.2). It may be noticed a sort of functional correspondence between the ability of Hermes *Kriophoros* to overcome a common disease and that of Hermes the Champion to overthrow a common enemy. In both cases, the god appeared as a protector of the city and, more generally, as a victor over the forces that could disorder the existence of the city.

The religious concept that underlay the worship of Hermes in Tanagra can be better understood with the help of the local traditions concerning the past of the city and the evidence contained in other available sources.

Pausanias mentioned the local belief that Hermes was born and nourished in the area of Tanagra, on Mount Kerykion (Pausanias, 9.20.3, 9.22.2). Such beliefs usually emerge in cases when a deity is worshipped in a given territory from the remote past so that the subsequent population considers it to be indigenous.

Two other traditions are worth of attention: the legend about the foundation of Tanagra by *Poimandros*, literally “shepherd-man”, tragically ended by the death (most probably — sacrifice in the earlier form of the myth) of his son *Leukippos*, literally “white horse” (Plutarch, *Quaestiones Graecae*, 37), and the story of two children sacrificed by the Tanagraeans to Hermes *Leukos* “White Hermes” (Tzetzes, *Scholia in Lykophronis Alexandram*, 679). These legends seem to imply that Hermes from the very beginning was the main tribal god of the herdsmen who occupied the territory of Tanagra and founded there a settlement, which eventually became a city. Consequently, Hermes was considered a protector of the settlement / city boundaries, and could even receive in the most critical cases human sacrifices as a heavy tribute, a feature that points to rather primitive backgrounds in the concept of Tanagran Hermes. Furthermore, the god’s epithet *Leukos* “White” and the allegory of sacrifice to him of a boy under the name, which actually means “white horse”, may indicate original

links of Tanagran Hermes with the notions of whiteness and radiance with an allusion to sunlight and sky²¹.

Tanagra or one of the settlements, which flourished on its territory during Mycenaean time, is accepted to have been mentioned by Homer in the *Iliad* under the name *Graia* / *Γραῖα* (Homer, *Iliad*, 2.498)²². According to a local legend, the name *Graia* / *Γραῖα*, which actually means “old woman” and metaphorically “senior goddess” (Hesiod, *Theogony*, 270–274), was given to the city because of its founder’s wife who reached a very old age (Pausanias, 9.20.1–2). Later literary sources preserved the form of the city’s name as *Tanagraia* / *Ταναγραῖα* (Pausanias, 9.20.1), which might actually be a derivative through extension from the name *Graia* / *Γραῖα*. In relation to this, it is significant that the Linear B (Mycenaean) tablet Fq 169 from Thebes mentions a female name *ΓραΨία*, which may be a female divine name *Γραῖα* implying the goddess Demeter, a form of the Earth-Mother goddess: “Δημήτηρ / Δωμάτηρ Γραῦς / Γραῖα” (*Der Kleine Pauly* 4, s.v. Persephone, 648)²³. All this information gives grounds for the conclusion that some senior goddess representing the Earth-Mother was associated with the city or with the territory, where the historic city was founded, from very early times, as was Hermes. It should be emphasized that the local tradition viewed the main old goddess of the territory in pair with a shepherd.

In relation to the origins of the local mythic tradition, it should be mentioned that the area of the ancient city of Tanagra and the adjacent territories were involved in the uninterrupted settlement and farming activity from Neolithic time until the beginning of the Mycenaean period: “it appears that the first settlement at the city site is a small Neolithic (early farmers) village, following by similar small settlements in all phases of the subsequent Early, Middle and Late Bronze Age”²⁴. As suggested by pottery finds, from Neolithic time to Late Bronze Age, the populated territory of Tanagra consisted of a core village situated on the place of the ancient city, surrounded by a zone of shifting prehistoric farms, which extends well into the countryside beyond the circuit walls²⁵. During the Mycenaean period, the territory of Tanagra must have belonged to the prehistoric Theban kingdom — legendary *Kadmeia*²⁶. According to the archaeological evidence, the major Mycenaean, Late Helladic III B, settlement of the Tanagra region was not on the ancient city site, but several kilometers to the west of it, near the modern village called Tanagra, where the famous large and rich Late Mycenaean cemeteries were discovered²⁷. The representations on the *sarcophagi* from those

²¹ For white horse as a universal solar symbol, see ANDREWS 1998, 93.

²² For the identification of Homeric *Graia* / *Γραῖα* with the archaeological sites discovered on the territory of Tanagra, see SCHACHTER 2003a, 46–49.

²³ ARAVANTINOS, GODART and SACCONI 2001, 200–201; BERNABÉ 2012, 194.

²⁴ BINTLIFF 2001, 36; BINTLIFF 2003, 38–39.

²⁵ BINTLIFF 2000, 94–95.

²⁶ SCHACHTER 2003a, 46.

²⁷ BINTLIFF 2001, 36.

cemeteries indicate that the late prehistoric population of the Tanagra area worshiped a powerful goddess with chthonic qualities or a number of such goddesses and practiced a *sacred pillar* cult²⁸. It seems possible to presume that the main prehistoric goddess of the area was that occurring as *Graia* / *Γραῖα* in mythic tradition and possibly in the Theban Linear B tablet Fq 169; that goddess would have been connected with the concepts of earth, fertility, growth, and motherhood. It should also be emphasized that, despite the obvious importance of the cults of Hermes in historic Tanagra, the female divine concept seems to have been dominating in the area during historic time, as it may be inferred from the overwhelming majority of the female terracotta figurines found in the Tanagra region and dated from the Archaic period onwards; it is worth noting that the earliest of them were made in the technique directly derived from the Mycenaean one²⁹.

The worship of Hermes in Boeotia during Mycenaean time is definitely confirmed by the presence of his name in the Linear B tablet Of 31.3 from Thebes³⁰. Moreover, the Tanagran cult of Hermes *Promachos*, the war god who was worshipped in Tanagra in historic time, finds direct correspondence in the prehistoric cult of Hermes *Areias*, Warlike Hermes, attested in Mycenaean time in Pylos (PY Tn 316.7), in association with the cult of the old Greek goddess *Diwija*³¹. An obvious parallel seems to connect these two separate cases, which may be explained by their common origin in the prehistoric Greek perception of Hermes.

All the above give enough grounds for tracing the worship of Hermes practiced in Tanagra during historic time back to the prehistoric period and to the prehistoric Greek religious traditions. It also seems possible to connect the Tanagran cult (or cults) of Hermes in its (or their) initial form with the worship of a female deity of fertility and motherhood.

The Festival of Hermes *Kriophoros* in Tanagra: analogies and parallels

For a more precise definition of the Tanagran Festival of Hermes *Kriophoros* and its underlying concept, it would be useful to find its possible analogies in the available religious and ethnographical material. In search of similar ceremonies, the following must be taken into account: the figure of Hermes and especially that of Hermes *Kriophoros* in Greek religion and mythology, the religious and mythological concepts of a divine shepherd, the religious symbolism universally attached to the ram, and the traditional meanings of the ritual circular movement.

²⁸ MICHAUD 1972, 700, Figs. 265–266; SPYROPOULOS 1974, 15, 17, πιν. 10^α; RUTKOWSKI 1979; TOUCHAIS 1980, 631, 633, Fig. 111; HAMPE and SIMON 1981, 38, 43, pictures 57–61.

²⁹ HIGGINS 1986, 76–78; KLEINER 1984.

³⁰ SPYROPOULOS and CHADWICK 1975, 91, 105; BERNABÉ 2012, 183–184.

³¹ PALMER 1963, 264; VENTRIS and CHADWICK 1973, 286–289; PROBONAS 1980, 95; GULIZIO 2001; for other attested cults of warlike Hermes, see RE 8, 1913, 738–792, s.v. Hermes.

Hermes as Kriophoros and Divine Shepherd

In religion and mythology of historic time, the figure of Hermes was quite complex, and its prehistoric elements still need to be studied more thoroughly. However, the traditional designation of Hermes by his mother's name as "the son of Maia" / "Μαϊάδος υἱός" (*Homeric Hymn 4, To Hermes*, 73, 408, 424, and oth.) indicates the emergence of his religious concept at that stage when religion was determined by the maternal figure, that is, in the conditions of mother-focused society. The name of his mother *Maia* / *Μαῖα*, which is a shortened form of *μήτηρ* "mother" and could also be applied to the Earth-Goddess (note Aeschylus, *Libation Bearers*, 43: "γαῖα μαῖα" / "Earth-Mother"), combined with the belief that she conceived him in a cave (*Homeric Hymn 4, To Hermes*, 3–5; *Homeric Hymn 18, To Hermes*, 3–7), gives grounds for considering his mother *Maia* / *Μαῖα* a form of the primal Mother-Goddess, or Earth-Mother goddess³². The etymology of his name, possibly implying the notion of link or support³³, together with the two of his main aspects as a messenger of the gods and a conductor of the souls of the dead to the underworld (Homer, *Odyssey*, 24.1, 10), may indicate his original function to connect the upper sphere — the sky and the lower sphere — the earth and the underworld; to note, such a function would have derived from a universal perceptual pattern of the "world pillar" or "world tree" (Toporov 1994). Also, Hermes' mythological characteristic "the mighty slayer of the snake-like monster *Argous*" / "κρατὺς Ἀργεῖφόντης" (Homer, *Iliad*, 16.181; *Homeric Hymn 4, To Hermes*, 73: "watchful slayer of the snake-like monster *Argous*" / "εὐσκοπὸς Ἀργεῖφόντης")³⁴, which probably entered the mythology of historic time from a prehistoric tradition (note his Mycenaean cult-title *Areias* "warrior" = "fighter", see above), his close ties with warriors and young heroes as well as with athletic education of youth in historic time³⁵, the idea of his original connection with the *Muses* — goddesses of harmony and creativity (*Homeric Hymn 4, To Hermes*, 439–496; Pausanias, 8.32.2, 9.5.8, 9.30.1) — all these seem to indicate the origins of his concept in the universal archetypal figure of a younger god who brings order and harmony to the world and human society after his victory over the primary chaotic powers. Such a figure is identified in almost all ancient religions and mythologies in the images of dragon-fighting gods, and was also the main one in the Indo-European religions and mythologies³⁶. Therefore, it might be argued that Hermes, in some of his initial basic aspects, was perceived as a warrior-god and a leader of warriors, as a god-fighter with chaos, as a god who arranges the world or keeps it in order, as a god who

³² VERMASEREN 1977, 9.

³³ PUHVEL 1984, v. 1, 160–161; *Etymologicon Magnum* 375.43–50, s.v. "Ἑρμᾶ."

³⁴ WATKINS 1995, 383–384: *Argeiphontis* / Ἀργεῖφόντης < ἀργής / ἀργᾶς, "serpent"; DEE 2001, 40–41.

³⁵ RE 8, 1913, 738–792, s.v. Hermes.

³⁶ IVANOV and TOPOROV 1994, 530; GAMKRELIDZE and IVANOV 1995, v. 1, 694–695.

connects the parts of the world — the sky and the earth, being himself the child of the Earth-Mother Goddess.

The image of Hermes *Kriophoros* occupies a special place in the religious and mythological complex of this god. Hermes' connection with shepherding is attested from the Homeric period (Homer, *Iliad*, 14.490–491); later, in the *Fourth Homeric Hymn*, he was called “Hermes the shepherd” / “Ἑρμῆς... οἰοπόλος” (*Homeric Hymn 4, To Hermes*, 314). As a divine figure, Hermes carrying a ram or lamb appears during historic time not only in Tanagra, but also in a number of other cult-places associated with various deities: for example, in the Cretan sanctuary of Aphrodite and Hermes at Syme³⁷, in Athens where Aphrodite shared with him her marble altar³⁸, in the Karnassian grove in Messenia where he was associated with the Great Goddesses and where the Mysteries were held (Pausanias, 4.33.4–5: “Hermes carrying a ram...” / “... Ἑρμῆς φέρων κριόν...”), in the Theban *Kabeirion* where he could appear as the Lord *Kabeiros* paired with the Mother-Goddess – Demeter *Kabeiria*³⁹, and in Korinthia where Hermes *together with a ram* was involved in the Mysteries of the Mother of Gods (Pausanias, 2.3.4: “Proceeding on the direct road to Lechaëum we see a bronze image of a seated Hermes. By him stands a ram... [χαλκοῦς καθήμενός ἐστιν Ἑρμῆς, παρέστηκε δέ οἱ κριός]. The story told at the mysteries of the Mother about Hermes and the ram [τὸν... ἐν τελετῇ Μητρὸς ἐπὶ Ἑρμῇ λεγόμενον καὶ τῷ κριῷ λόγον]

I know but do not relate...”)⁴⁰. In a cult context, the image of Hermes *Kriophoros* is traced from approximately 600 BC, the earliest case being a votive lead figurine representing Hermes carrying a ram in front of him, in his left hand, dedicated to the sanctuary of Artemis *Orthia* in Sparta⁴¹. Hermes with ram was widely and variously represented in Ancient iconography of all kinds: the god was shown mature and young, dressed and naked, carrying a grown up ram or a lamb on his shoulders or under his arm⁴². It seems possible to suppose that some of these representations, as that of Tanagran Hermes *Kriophoros* by Kalamis, were inspired by the actual religious ceremonies, which could have had various forms and different content. Other representations may just have shown Hermes in his traditional aspects as the protector of flocks, the patron of shepherds (*Homeric Hymn 4, To Hermes*, 570–571; Pausanias, 2.3.4: “... Hermes is the god who is thought most to care for and to increase flocks...”), and the god who established the ram sacrifice, first to himself and then to other gods⁴³. It is worth noting that

³⁷ LEBESSI 2002, 239–240.

³⁸ SIEBERT 1990, 313, no. 289.

³⁹ Pausanias, 9.25.5; SZANTO 1890, 359; SCHACHTER 2003b, 121–125, 129, 135, Fig. 5.12.

⁴⁰ A reproduction of that statue may be seen on the coins of Korinth issued during the period of Antoninus Pius, GARDNER 1883, pl. 15, no. 24.

⁴¹ DAWKINS 1929, 275, fig. c.

⁴² LOGIOTATIDIS 1862; SIEBERT 1990, 311–314, s.v. Hermes Criophore; KARAGEORGHIS 1995, 51, Cat. no. 43, pl. 25.6; BENETT, PAUL and IOZZO 2002, Cat. no. 30.

⁴³ BEULÉ 1862, 364–365.

Hermes' connection with the ram was not limited to caring for herds and herdsmen, but was also a mysterious element in the cult of the Great Mother-Goddess (Pausanias, 2.3.4).

Among all the representations of Hermes with a ram, the type of youthful Hermes *Kriophoros* is of particular interest to our subject⁴⁴. Typologically, it belongs to a large group of representations of young male ram-bearers with uncertain identity, which are known from the seventh century BC and were found in various places of the Greek world; the following examples can be mentioned: terracotta statuette of a young and warlike ram-bearer dated to 650–600 BC, from Crete, now in the Cleveland Museum of Art, no. 1998.172 (<https://www.clevelandart.org/art/1998.172>) [Figure 8]; bronze statuette of a ram-bearer from Crete, possibly from the sanctuary of Aphrodite and Hermes at Syme, dated to the end of the seventh century BC, now in the Berlin Staatliche Museen⁴⁵ [Figure 9]; rude bronze statuette of



Figure 8. Terracotta figurine from Crete, representing youthful and warlike ram-bearer, seventh century BC.

Source: <https://www.clevelandart.org/art/1998.172>

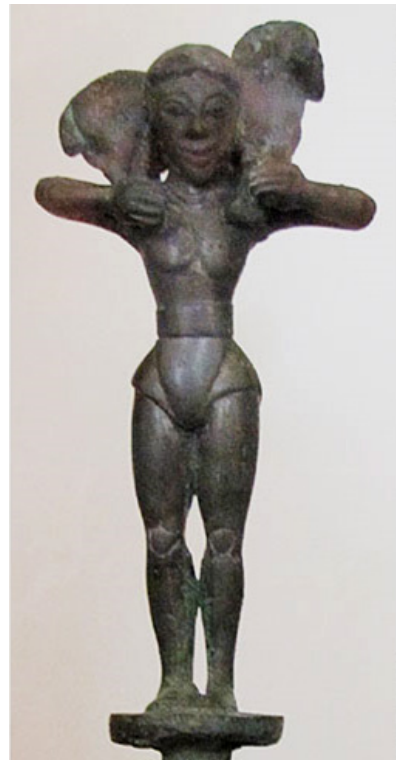


Figure 9. Bronze figurine from Crete, representing youthful ram-bearer, seventh century BC.

Source: <http://www.my-favourite-planet.de/english/people/h1/hermes.html>

⁴⁴ SIEBERT 1990, nos. 270, 271, 273, 275, 278, 279, 282–284, 290; FREL 1974; LEBESSI 2002, 257, Fig. 168.

⁴⁵ NEUGEBAUER 1924, 34; LEBESSI 2002, 126–127, 239–240.

a ram-bearer from Agia Triada in Crete, dated to the seventh century BC, now in the Heraklion Archaeological Museum, nos. 4783+4781⁴⁶; colossal unfinished *kouros* with a lamb from Thasos, dated to 615–590 BC⁴⁷; terracotta statuettes of youths carrying lamb in the right arm, dated to the seventh–sixth centuries BC, from the sanctuary at Agia Irini in Cyprus⁴⁸; also, a number of anonymous Archaic *Kriophoroi* from various places, listed by M. Veyries⁴⁹. It has been pointed out elsewhere that *Kriophoros* as an iconography theme was adopted by Greek art during the so-called *Daedalic* period (Early Archaic time) from the Near East, under the influence of Near-Eastern representations of votaries carrying sacrificial animals⁵⁰. Based on this, it was suggested to identify the earliest Greek *Kriophoroi* as representations of human offering-bearers⁵¹. However, it does not seem improbable that ram carrying rituals and corresponding to them religious ideas existed in Greek religion on their own, as a universal religious pattern, from an indefinite time and without any foreign influence. Therefore, one may argue that the Greek representations of young ram-bearers, whether identified with Hermes or anonymous, reflect more or less similar Greek cult ceremonies centered on a figure that appeared as a *young and beautiful shepherd*. It may also be supposed that the celebrations, which included those ceremonies, were based on a more or less common religious idea, in which the concept of a *young and beautiful divine shepherd* was given great importance.

The figure of the *divine shepherd* was a universal element in ancient religions and mythologies; its interpretation should be searched in the earliest religious conceptions going back to the Neolithic and Bronze Age. There is sufficient evidence that the *divine shepherd*, whose primal, early forms were the divine ram and ram-god⁵², was initially regarded as the son-lover of the Great Mother-Goddess (note the intimate scene depicted on a Late Minoan seal from Vapheio at Lakonia: divine ram stands on its hind legs, leaning on a goddess with its head⁵³) [Figure 10].



Figure 10. Carnelian seal with representation of a woman and a ram leaning on her with his head – “Goddess and her Divine Ram”; found at the Vapheio Tomb (Lakonia), Late Helladic II A period.
Source: Sakellariou 1964, no. 221.

⁴⁶ LEBESSI 2002, 10–11, Figs. 3–4.

⁴⁷ RICHTER 1970, 34, Figs. 84–86.

⁴⁸ KARAGEORGHIS 2003, 186, Fig. 377.

⁴⁹ VEYRIES 1884, nos. 6–8.

⁵⁰ LEBESSI 1985, 121–125, pl. 42, nos. A 35, Γ 14.

⁵¹ LEBESSI 2002, 239–240; KARAGEORGHIS 1995, 43–53.

⁵² MELLART 1967, 125, Fig. 38.

⁵³ SAKELLARIOU 1964, no. 221.

He personified the dynamic force of growth, and his main function was to fertilize (impregnate) periodically the Mother Goddess, to transmit his fertile energy to her, to reinforce her own fertility in order to ensure her ability to provide fertility and a permanent rebirth for nature⁵⁴.

In regard to the most basic characteristics of the divine shepherd's powerful female partner — the Great Mother-Goddess, it must be noted that the universal religious perception considered her as comprehensive and closely linked her not only to the earth, but also to the sun and heaven, and provided her with certain solar and celestial qualities⁵⁵.

Moreover, as a primal deity and the Mother of all, the Great Goddess was believed to give the order to nature and human society⁵⁶, and her shepherd-lover was supposed to be the custodian of it⁵⁷. In Ancient Greek religion, that society-ordering function of the old Great Goddess survived, for example, in the concept of Demeter *Thesmophoros* "Earth-Mother the Law-bearer", whose direct Roman counterpart was the goddess Ceres *Legifera* "Earth the Law-bearer"⁵⁸, while in Athens, it was the sanctuary of the Divine Mother in *Agora* — *Metroon*, where the state archives were stored⁵⁹.

The erotic union of the Mother-Goddess and her younger lover, so important for primitive humankind, was celebrated at special religious ceremonies with the necessary solemnity. Usually, it had a mysterious character in order to observe the privacy of the divine couple and to keep in secret the fundamental mystery of regeneration of nature⁶⁰.

Because of the direct genetic ties of the *divine shepherd* to the Great Goddess, his mother, the figures of divine shepherds developed in individual religious and mythological traditions were supplemented with many extraordinary characteristics, as leadership, bravery, wisdom, magic skills, male beauty, and outstanding sexual (i.e., fertilizing) abilities⁶¹. These characteristics may be recognized in the concept of Tanagran Hermes *Kriophoros* / *Promachos*.

Many divine couples identified in various ancient religions and mythologies seem to have derived from the universal religious pattern pairing the Great Goddess, associated both to the fertility of the earth and to the radiance of the sky, with her beautiful shepherd-lover. The following divine couples may be mentioned in this regard: Sumerian / Akkadian *Inanna* / *Ishtar* and *Dumuzi* / *Tammus*⁶², Phrygian *Cybele*, the "well-shining" / "εὐδία" Great Mother,

⁵⁴ BARING and CASHFORD 1993, 133.

⁵⁵ GOODISON 1989, 16–17, 20; BARING and CASHFORD 1993, 175–272; GOLAN 1993, 12–32; ZOLOTNIKOVA 2013, 9–10.

⁵⁶ BARING and CASHFORD 1993, 374.

⁵⁷ VERMASEREN 1977, 10, 33; BARING and CASHFORD 1993, 209.

⁵⁸ BARING and CASHFORD 1993, 374; SHTAERMAN 1987, 97.

⁵⁹ LIDDELL and SCOTT 1996, 1131; VERMASEREN 1977, 33; ROLLER 1996, 305–308, 313.

⁶⁰ FRANKFORT 1948, 295–299.

⁶¹ SOKOLOV 1994.

⁶² BARING and CASHFORD 1993, 207–215.

and *Attis*⁶³, and Ancient Greek Aphrodite and *Anchises* (*Homeric Hymn 5, To Aphrodite*, 53–200). For our subject, it is especially noteworthy that Phrygian Cybele was sometimes paired with Hermes⁶⁴ and that *Attis* not only often appeared as *Kriophoros*⁶⁵, but could also be linked with Hermes⁶⁶. Also, the Phrygians and Lydians could confuse Aphrodite with Cybele, perhaps perceiving her as the personification of the most beautiful side of the Great Mother (“... τὴν Ἀφροδίτην ὑπὸ Φρυγῶν καὶ Λυδῶν Κυβήβην λέγεσθαι...” / “... Aphrodite is called Cybele by the Phrygians and Lydians...”, Photis, *Lexicon*, “Κύβητος”); in the *Fifth Homeric Hymn*, Aphrodite appears on Ida, the sacred mountain of the Great Mother, for the erotic union with *Anchises*, “clad in a robe of out-standing brightness of fire”, escorted by wild animals, the Great Goddess’ entourage (*Homeric Hymn 5, To Aphrodite*, 68–74, 85–90). In historic time, Aphrodite used to be worshipped in association with Hermes the Shepherd, as, for example, in the Cretan sanctuary in Syme, where the cult activity is traced back to the Middle Minoan III B period⁶⁷, and in Athens, where she shared with him an altar⁶⁸. Some other cases may be noted, as that of Selene, the Moon-goddess, and her beloved *Endymion*, a beautiful young shepherd, to whom she bore fifty daughters (Pausanias, 5.1.5; *Scholia ad Apollonius Rhodius, Argonautica* 4.57; *Scholia ad Theocritus* 3.49), as well as that of the Idaean nymph *Oenona* who grew up Paris, initially a shepherd, and became his first wife (Apollodorus, *Bibliotheca*, 3.12.6; Ovidius, *Heroides* 5 “*Oenone Paridi*”). These cases give additional reasons to believe that Hermes in his hypostasis as a *young and beautiful shepherd*, as Tanagran Hermes *Kriophoros*, was also considered a mysterious lover of some senior female deity representing the old Great Mother-Goddess. In relation to this conclusion, it must be pointed out that the goddess Demeter–*Graia*, who seems to have been associated with the territory of Tanagra in prehistoric times and with Tanagran Hermes in the historic period (*see above*), was actually a hypostasis of the Great Mother-Goddess / Divine Mother⁶⁹. It may also be added that the sanctuary of the Divine Mother, dated to the fifth century BC, was discovered not far from the ancient city of Tanagra, at the place Soros, near the Moustafades village, present-day Kallithea⁷⁰.

⁶³ VERMASEREN 1977, 115–117.

⁶⁴ VERMASEREN 1977, 100, Pl. 71, Pl. 23; JOHNSTON 1996, 106.

⁶⁵ VERMASEREN and DE BOER 1986, nos. 142, 143.

⁶⁶ VERMASEREN 1977, 101, Pl. 23; BARING and CASHFORD 1993, 408.

⁶⁷ LEBESSI 1985; LEBESSI 2000; LEBESSI 2002.

⁶⁸ SIEBERT 1990, 313, no. 289; for common worship of Aphrodite and Hermes, see also *RE* 8, 1913, 760–761.

⁶⁹ BARING and CASHFORD 1993, 364–374; BURKERT 1997, 283; ROLLER 1999, 167, 169, 174.

⁷⁰ KORTE 1878, 388–397; HIGGINS 1986, 35, 40.

The religious symbolism of the ram

The universal religious symbolism of the ram contains other important indications for the interpretation of the Tanagran festival *Kriophoria*. The ram was an extremely widespread and very old religious symbol, traced among the religious ideas from the Neolithic period, when he seems to have been linked to the primary female deity – the solar-celestial *Divine Mother* – as her direct offspring⁷¹. Perhaps because of this, solar symbolism was universally attached to the ram⁷². The symbolic linking of the ram to the sun had various forms and is commonly attested in ancient cultures, including the religion and mythology of the Ancient Greeks; indicatively, the following evidence may be referred to here: worship of the gods of sun and sky in association with the ram or under the guise of ram, as, for example, Zeus – the sky god⁷³ and especially sun-linked Zeus *Laphystius* in Boeotia and Thessalia⁷⁴; the folklore-mythological pattern of the “flocks of the sun”, or Helios’ “fair flocks of sheep” (Homer, *Odyssey*, 12.127–136)⁷⁵; the belief in the ram’s special connection with the increase of solar activity in spring, as can be seen, for example, in the Greek name of the constellation *Krios* “the Ram”, Latin *Aries*, which marks the coming of spring, and in the conventional representation of spring as a youth with a lamb on his shoulders⁷⁶; finally, a very ancient pattern of the “golden lamb” – a symbol of the sun and fertility⁷⁷.

The original connection of the ram with the all-generating power of the sun⁷⁸ caused a symbolic association of this animal with several other important notions. One of them was that of the *male fertilizing force*⁷⁹, which impregnates the female reproducing element – the Mother-Goddess⁸⁰. In Ancient Greek mythology, the most obvious example of the idea of a sexual relationship between the female divinity and the ram can be seen in the myth about Zeus and Demeter, precisely in the episode when the god threw the genitals of a ram onto the lap of the goddess⁸¹. It should also be noted the myth, certainly based on some older religious idea, about the demand of the goddess Artemis to sacrifice the fabulous *golden lamb* to her (*Scholia in Euripidem, Orestes*, 811)⁸². Representation of the sacrifice of two sheep for the

⁷¹ MELLART 1967, 125, Fig. 38.

⁷² COOK 1914, 346–430; GOLAN 1991, 79–92.

⁷³ COOK 1914, 422.

⁷⁴ COOK 1914, 430; ZOLOTNIKOVA 2013, 75.

⁷⁵ COOK 1914, 409–412.

⁷⁶ BARING and CASHFORD 1993, 404, Fig. 10.

⁷⁷ COOK 1914, 407.

⁷⁸ COOK 1914, 429–430.

⁷⁹ COOK 1914, 429 with note 4; GOLAN 1991, 79–92.

⁸⁰ FRANKFORT 1948, 384, note 46; see also Fig. 10.

⁸¹ VERMASEREN 1977, 105; for the connection of Demeter with the ram, see also BURKERT 1997, 268, 283,

⁸² COOK 1914, 405.

goddess *Meter* on a votive relief from Kyzikus, dated to the second century BC⁸³, and Pausanias' short remark about the mysterious role of the ram in the cult of the Divine Mother in Ancient Korinthia (Pausanias, 2.3.4) can also be adduced. Perhaps, this original notion was eventually transformed into the idea about the sacred marriage of the Mother-Goddess and a beautiful shepherd, her son-and-lover.

Other notions universally linked to the ram were those of *healing and protection*, which is especially evident in the belief in the healing and protective qualities of the ram's fleece⁸⁴.

Thus, the ram was basically a universal solar symbol provided with the notion of male fertilizing power. Because of this, he was involved together with the Mother-Goddess in the conception about the mysterious process of procreation of nature; this animal was also endowed with protective qualities.

Ritual circular movement

Finally, the meaning of the ritual circular movement should be indicated. Ethnographical parallels offer innumerable examples of ceremonies of *walking around* something and *carrying a symbolic object around* something. Such ceremonies have their origin in the technique of primitive magic and, as noted above, are intended either to create a protective line, the *magic circle*, around something or to *transmit power* to something. Despite the variety of forms and particular purposes, all these ceremonies are united by one common element — a *symbolic circular line*.

Circle belongs to the earliest signs used by people to express their religious ideas. It occurs universally as a symbol of the sun⁸⁵ and is also commonly connected with the notion of femininity⁸⁶. Therefore, it seems very likely that the circle as a symbol originally conveyed or expressed the earliest perception of the primeval female deity — the Great Goddess linked by some of her qualities to the sun and sky⁸⁷. The creation of symbolic circular line in primitive magical rituals may be considered an action, presumably establishing communication with that goddess or causing her presence.

Hence, in primitive purifying ceremonies, a ritual circular movement would be a kind of call to that goddess for protection. In this regard, it may especially be noted the Ancient Roman custom of ritual walking, running or dancing around the city walls and the boundaries of rural settlements with purification purposes — *Lustratio*: a procession of people leading sacrificial animals (a ram, a pig, and a bull) traced a magical protective boundary around the

⁸³ ROLLER 1999, 204–205, Fig. 54.

⁸⁴ LORDKIPANIDZE 2001, 3.

⁸⁵ SHTAERMAN 1987, 32–33; GOODISON 1989, 140.

⁸⁶ ZOLOTNIKOVA 2002, 125.

⁸⁷ GOODISON 1989, 16, 17, 20; BARING and CASHFORD 1993, 175–272; ZOLOTNIKOVA 2013, 9–10.

territory to be purified. The fact that the term *lustratio* is derived from the Latin word *lux* “light” indicates that the rite was originally connected with the concept of light and the cult of the Sun⁸⁸. In some special cases, *Lustratio* could be included in the ceremonial veneration of female deities, as *Juno Febru(a)lis* / *Februata* during the festival *Lupercalia*⁸⁹ and *Dea Dia* during the festival *Ambarvalia*⁹⁰. The ritual procession around Rome, performed in honor of *Juno Regina* after the victory over Gasdrubal, may also be mentioned here⁹¹. It is important that those Roman goddesses were originally connected with the notion of light and shine: their names — *Juno* < **diou-n-a* / *Dia* < **div-i-a* are derived from the Indo-European root **t'y*-/ **t'ei*-/ **t'iu*- “to shine”, “to be shining white”⁹², which indicates their descent from the primeval celestial goddess. As for the *Lupercalia*, the feast took place in February and virtually served to purify the entire community and to promote fertility in the coming New Year; two young men clad in goat skin and thus imitating male goats performed its central ceremony, running around the ancient sacred boundary of Rome⁹³. The *Ambarvalia*, an agricultural purifying festival, which was celebrated at the end of May, included a procession of sacrificial animals (sheep, pigs, and oxen) around the field boundaries and the old boundaries of Rome⁹⁴. A parallel to the Tanagran ceremony of *Kriophoria* may also be found in another Roman purificatory ritual known as *Amburbium* “walking around the city”: it was usually carried out in cases of common danger and consisted of a procession around the city, during which prayers and sacrifices were performed⁹⁵. Perhaps, it would be appropriate to mention here the Ancient Egyptian festival *Sed*, which in its developed form celebrated the annual renewal of the king’s rule and health and comprised the ceremony of the king’s running or dance eight times around a certain sacred territory. The festival is traced back to the Predynastic times and emerged from the tradition of the ruler’s symbolic running alongside with a bull, which was Egyptian solar and fertile symbol, around the frontiers of his domain in order to renew the security of its boundaries and to re-ensure the harmony between him, his realm, and the universe. During the royal run ceremony, various deities could be honoured, but in many cases it was specifically dedicated to female deities⁹⁶.

The primitive belief in obtaining the protection of the primeval solar / celestial female deity by creating a sacred circle can be recognized in the use of the symbols of the sun and

⁸⁸ SHTAERMAN 1987, 32–33.

⁸⁹ *Oxford Latin Dictionary* 1968–1973, v. 1, 683.

⁹⁰ SHTAERMAN 1987, 43.

⁹¹ SHTAERMAN 1987, 110.

⁹² GAMKRELIDZE and IVANOV 1995, v. 1, 196.

⁹³ *Columbia Encyclopaedia* 2001–2004, s.v. *Lupercalia*; VUKOVIĆ 2018.

⁹⁴ ADKINS and ROY 1996, s.v. *Ambarvalia*.

⁹⁵ ADKINS and ROY 1996, s.v. *Amburbium*; RÜPKE 2012, 38.

⁹⁶ FRANKFORT 1948, 85–87.

the sun's circular course as protective signs, which is attested, for example, among the Ancient Slavs⁹⁷.

Concerning the magical ceremonies of stimulating character, the ritual circular movement was supposed to impart more energy to the solar nature of the primeval goddess so that she could continue to reproduce life. Noteworthy ceremonies of this kind are identified in the Ancient Egyptian tradition: "the king, as the representative of the sun, walked solemnly round the walls of a temple in order to ensure that the sun should perform his daily journey round the sky without the interruption of an eclipse or other mishap"⁹⁸; at the time of the winter solstice, a cow was led seven times around the temple of the sun (Plutarch, *De Iside et Osiride*, 52). Similar ceremony was observed among the Canadian Indians during the eclipse of the sun: "men and women tucked up their robes... and then leaning on staves... they continued to walk in a circle till the eclipse of the sun was over"⁹⁹. In Ancient Rome, at the beginning of the New Year in March, the vernal feast *Ignes Vestarum* was held: it was aimed at the annual rekindling of the sacred fire of the goddess *Vesta* with the help of the concentrated sunlight, and while the festival lasted, twelve patrician youths danced around Rome¹⁰⁰. It has been assumed that the tradition of Greek circular dances also arose from primitive magical practices supposed to stimulate the movement of the sun or other heavenly bodies¹⁰¹.

An attempted explanation of the meaning of the Festival of Hermes *Kriophoros* in Tanagra

Based on the foregoing and in an attempt to explain the Tanagran festival *Kriophoria*, the following details should be considered together: firstly, the festival officially celebrated the healing or purification of the whole city from a pestilence; secondly, its main ritual was performed by the most beautiful young man who made a symbolic circle around the city walls, carrying a lamb on his shoulders; thirdly, the boy's appearance and role could have implied those of the Great Goddess's divine shepherd, and, finally, as a religious symbol, the lamb / ram traditionally embodied solar qualities and was endowed with the notion of male fertility. These details, associated with all the above evidence, give reason to conclude that the Tanagran celebration originally emerged as a combination of two primitive magical ceremonies: the establishment of the protective sacred circle around the settlement by appealing to the solar powers of a primeval female deity and the simultaneous stimulation of the vital solar energy of that goddess, supposedly protecting the settlement and nature in

⁹⁷ RYBAKOV 1987, 480.

⁹⁸ FRAZER 1922, v. 1, 312.

⁹⁹ FRAZER 1922, v. 1, 312.

¹⁰⁰ SHTAERMAN 1987, 58.

¹⁰¹ GOODISON 1989, 140.

general. It seems likely that the community, which observed those rituals, from the very beginning considered them inseparable and dependent on each other, believing that the primeval goddess linked to the sun could protect the boundary of their settlement if she herself was supported by magical means.

Thus, based on the evidence presented, the following interpretation of the Festival can be suggested.

The Tanagran Festival of Hermes *Kriophoros* seems to have originated from a primitive communal custom of seasonal lustration of the territory occupied or controlled by a pastoral tribe of the distant ancestors of the historic Tanagraeans. That ceremony was linked to an increase in solar activity in mid-spring and also included the parallel stimulation of the sun's course through sympathetic magic.

Gradually, that primitive magical ritual would have been elaborated in a more complex seasonal ceremony of stimulation of the generative solar power of the Great Mother-Goddess with the help of a young ram-god (note Figure 10). The purpose of the action was to promote, with old magical means, the periodical re-creation of nature — the macrocosm, in order to ensure the existence in it of the shepherd community or settlement — the microcosm for a certain period of time.

During the Bronze Age, or rather, its final phase, the feast was transformed into a celebration of the sacred marriage between the Great Mother-Goddess and a young beautiful divine shepherd (the human form of the ram-god) — her hero and son-lover. The existence of the Bronze Age shepherd community / settlement became considered dependent on the periodic re-birth of the world by the Mother-Goddess, fertilized by her young heroic shepherd, who also established order in the newborn world by overcoming the anti-cosmic powers. It is quite possible that in that time the Great Mother-Goddess was worshiped on the territory of Tanagra as Demeter under the alternative name *Graia*, while the image of the divine shepherd and Goddess' hero was associated with Hermes.

The prehistoric festival and its underlying concept would have been radically changed since the Iron Age, in the process of the formation of the city-state — *polis*, when the heroic male figure acquired greater significance and began to shadow the image of the old female deity. Hence, the festival was transformed into a more social celebration with a more urban character and served to secure the city-state's secure existence. The role of the divine guardian of the city was confirmed for Hermes *Kriophoros* and *Promachos* who, nevertheless, retained the features of the prehistoric young and beautiful shepherd of the Great Goddess and a hero struggling with anti-cosmic powers (personified in decease, military offence, etc.) that threaten the city. It is not certain whether the sacred marriage between Hermes and the old Mother-Goddess was actually celebrated in later historic time, but it was still echoed in the choice of the most handsome young man to represent Hermes and in the local legends about *Graia* and a shepherd-man.

The festival would have received a new impulse and, perhaps, more ideological colors in the fourth century BC, when the walls of the city, destroyed by the Athenians, were built again. It seems to have become a sort of declaration of the city's safety under the official protection by Hermes. However, the primitive rituals of purification and sympathetic magic, as well as the sacred marriage element, were still implied in the whole structure of the celebration, even if its original meaning was no longer clearly understood.

Undoubtedly, Ancient Greek religious festivals provide scholars with highly interesting anthropological material, while anthropological and comparative approaches to the Ancient Greek festivals would in many cases make it possible to identify the deeper concepts and customs underlying the celebrations known in their later forms.

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