

Leukothea, Helen, and Pasiphaë: Female Heroes and Their Cults

Worship of heroes was common in the Ancient Greek world with cities having specific heroes who served as a protector, and many ancient writers like Pausanias discuss these cults in detail, providing locations, rituals, and local beliefs; for example, describing Ino-Leukothea's oracular cult at Thalamai (3.26.1-3). While cults of male heroes have been studied in depth on how they should be considered in Ancient Greek religion, the cults dedicated to female heroes have received less attention (Bremmer, 2006; Antonaccio, 1994). Some heroines became full goddesses, others were worshiped only as heroes, and others were a mixture. Regardless, heroines are frequently associated with some aspect of nature, a feature male heroes often lack.

This project focuses on three heroines: Leukothea as a full goddess, Helen of Sparta as a heroine, and Pasiphaë as a mixture. Each of these heroines and their cults are described by ancient authors. Ino-Leukothea has her apotheosis into a sea goddess described by Apollodorus in *Bibliotheca* 3.28-29, Helen's cults are described by Pausanias in *Guide to Greece* 3.19.9-10, and Pasiphaë has her status as a goddess argued by Cicero in *The Nature of the Gods* 3.48. Through a comparison of these cults, I argue that the connection between such heroines and nature gives them a significance unlike that of heroes. All three have an association to some aspect of nature that gives them importance in regards to Ancient Greek society. Leukothea becomes a protector of sailors, a common occupation at the time, Helen becomes a fertility goddess, important for resources, and Pasiphaë has associations with the moon and oracles, functions that would have been useful for the Greeks for understanding the world and making decisions. Male heroes were important for protection and prosperity, but they lack the

resourcefulness of female heroes. For the layout, I will have four sections, three of evidence and one conclusion.

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