



# *Ombra mai fu* or **Hanging the Sun** **Solar Myths, Rituals and Language**

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**Indo-European Religion and Poetics –  
A Comparative Approach:  
Myth, Ritual and Language**

UNIVERSITY OF COPENHAGEN



*Frondi tenere e belle  
Del mio platano amato  
Per voi risplenda il fato  
Tuoni, lampi, e procelle  
Non v'oltraggino mai la cara pace  
Né giunga a profanarvi austro rapace*

*Ombra mai fu  
Di vegetabile  
Cara ed amabile  
Soave più*

*O leaves tender and beautiful  
of my beloved plane tree  
On you may fate shine resplendent  
May thunder, lighting, and storms*

*never intrude, ever, on your dear peace of mind,  
nor may there be any wind that comes to violate you  
—some violent wind from the west.*

*Shade there never was  
of any plant  
so dear and lovely  
or any more sweet.  
(Händel Xerxes, 1738)*

## Hdt. vii.31.9

ταύτην ἰὼν ὁ Ξέρξης τὴν ὁδὸν εὔρε πλατάνιστον, τὴν κάλλεος εἵνεκα δωρησάμενος κόσμῳ χρυσέῳ καὶ μελεδωνῶ ἀθανάτῳ ἀνδρὶ ἐπιτρέψας δευτέρῃ ἡμέρῃ ἀπίκετο ἐς τῶν Λυδῶν τὸ ἄστυ

...by this road went Xerxes, and found a **plane-tree**, to which for its beauty **he gave adornment of gold**, and charged one of his immortals to guard it; and on the next day he came to the chief city of the Lydians. (Godley 1922)



“One of them (inscribed with the name of Xerxes) shows a person dressed and coiffed like a Persian king about to place a crown in front of a stylized tree of life.” (Briant 2001:235)

Similar scenes also occur on Babylonian seals of the Achaemenid period (Legrain 1925:43, Delaporte 1909, nr. 633)

Perrot – Chipiez 1890: fig. 217

Menant 1878: 71 (ii fig. 150)

Briant 2001:235; Schmitt 1981:26–32

Cf. also

*Ael. Varia historia 2.1*

γελοῖος ἐκεῖνος ὁ Ξέρξης [...] ἔδεδούλωτο δὲ πλατάνω καὶ ἐθαύμαζε τὸ δένδρον [...] ἀλλὰ καὶ ἐξῆψεν αὐτῆς κόσμον πολυτελεῆ, στρεπτοῖς καὶ ψελίοις τιμῶν τοὺς κλάδους

The famous king Xerxes was ridiculous, [...] and yet was the devotee of a plane tree, which he admired. [...] and attached to it expensive ornaments, paying homage to the branches with necklaces and bracelets.



For Aelian and Händel cf. Ketterer 2015, Nagy 2017

Another version of the story

*Pl. NH xvii.242*

*Prodigio autem fiunt ex dulcibus acerba poma aut dulcia ex acerbis, e caprifico fici aut contra, gravi ostento cum in deteriora mutantur, [...] aut ut Laodiciae Xerxis adventu platano in oleam mutata.*

But it is a portent when sour fruits grow on sweet fruit-trees and sweet on sour, and figs on a wild fig-tree or the contrary, and it is a serious manifestation when trees turn into other trees of an inferior kind, [...] or as when a plane-tree at Laodicea changed into an olive on the arrival of Xerxes. (Rackham 1950)

- Herodotus on Persian religion

### Hdt. i.131.1-2

οἱ δὲ νομίζουσι Διὸς μὲν ἐπὶ τὰ ὑψηλότατα τῶν ὀρέων ἀναβαίνοντες  
 θυσίας ἔρδειν, τὸν κύκλον πάντα τοῦ οὐρανοῦ Δία καλέοντες·  
 θύουσι δὲ ἡλίῳ τε καὶ σελήνῃ καὶ γῆ καὶ πυρὶ καὶ ὕδατι καὶ  
 ἀνέμοισι.

...But they call the **whole circuit of heaven** Zeus, and to him they  
 sacrifice on the highest peaks of the mountains; **they sacrifice also to  
 the sun and moon and earth and fire and water and winds.**

(Godley 1922)

cf. Wolff 1934/1982: 406–7; Mikalson 1989:97–8, Burkert, 1990:21, Rudhart  
 1992:219–38; Bichler 2000:218–9; Harrison 2002:chpt. 8.

Further on Persian 'gods': The alleged denial of anthropomorphism has been  
 questioned (Jacobs, 2001; Schnapp 2000; Rollinger Hämeen-Anttila 2001: 93–4 (with  
 special focus on fem. Mitra); Corsten, 1991.

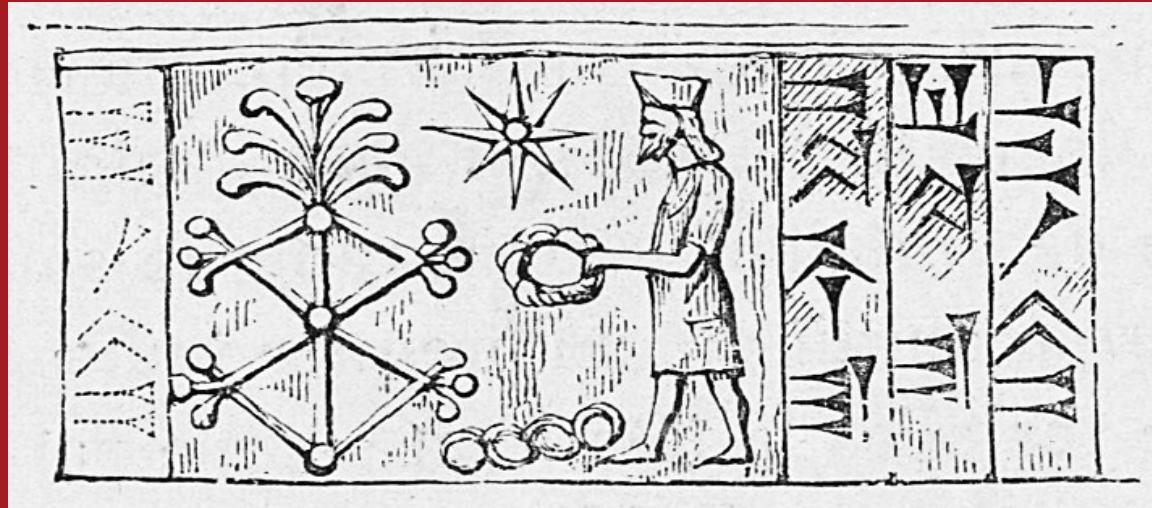
- Herodotus on Xerxes crossing the Hellespont – worship of Sun

## Hdt. vii.54.2-3

ταύτην μὲν τὴν ἡμέρην παρεσκευάζοντο ἐς τὴν διάβασιν· τῇ δὲ ὑστεραίῃ ἀνέμενον τὸν ἥλιον ἐθέλοντες ἰδέσθαι ἀνίσχοντα, θυμῆματά τε παντοῖα ἐπὶ τῶν γεφυρέων καταγίζοντες καὶ μυρσίνησι στορνύντες τὴν ὁδόν. ὡς δ' ἐπανετέλλε ὁ ἥλιος, **σπένδων** ἐκ χρυσῆς φιάλης **Ξέρξης** ἐς τὴν θάλασσαν **εὔχετο πρὸς τὸν ἥλιον μηδεμίαν οἱ συντυχίηνοι αὐτὴν γενέσθαι**, ἢ μιν παύσει καταστρέψασθαι τὴν Εὐρώπην πρότερον ἢ ἐπὶ τέρμασι τοῖσι ἐκείνης γένηται. εὐξάμενος δὲ ἐσέβαλετὴν φιάλην ἐς τὸν Ἑλλήσποντον καὶ χρύσειον κρητῆρα καὶ Περσικὸν ξίφος, τὸν ἀκινάκην καλέουσι. ταῦτα οὐκ ἔχω ἀτρεκέως διακρίναι οὔτε εἰ τῷ ἡλίῳ ἀνατιθεὶς κατῆκε ἐς τὸ πέλαγος, οὔτε εἰ μετεμέλησέ οἱ τὸν Ἑλλήσποντον μαστιγώσαντι καὶ ἀντὶ τούτων τὴν θάλασσαν ἐδωρέετο.

All that day they made preparations for the crossing. On the next they waited until they could see the sun rise, burning all kinds of incense on the bridges and strewing the road with myrtle boughs. **At sunrise Xerxes poured a libation** from a golden phial into the sea, **praying to the sun that no accident might befall him**, which would keep him from subduing Europe before he reached its farthest borders. After the prayer, he cast the phial into the Hellespont, and along with it a golden bowl, and a Persian sword which they call “acinaces.” As for these, I cannot rightly determine whether he cast them into the sea for offerings to the sun, or repented having whipped the Hellespont and gave gifts to the sea as atonement. (Godley 1922)





## A solar cult?

δωρησάμενος κόσμῳ χρυσέῳ (Hdt.)

καὶ ἐξῆψεν αὐτῆς κόσμον πολυτελεῖ, στρεπτοῖς καὶ ψελίοις τιμῶν τοὺς κλάδους (Ael.)

- [sun] – [tree]
- [sun] – [hanging] – [(golden) object]
- [sun] – [swinging]

Mythological traditions

Rituals



# Saule's tree

*Noon, in summer*  
Marc Chagall

## Saule's tree

- **Different tree:** 'oak' (Latv. *ozols* 33885+), 'lime-tree' (Latv. *liepa* 33826+), 'willow' (Latv. *vītols*, 33942), 'hazel-tree' (Latv. *lazda*, 33951+), 'birch' (*bērzs* 33750+), 'apple-tree' (Latv. *ābols*, 33826-var. 1)
- **Close to Saule's path** (33750+) **[water]:** 'on the side of her path' (*Liela ceļa maliņa* 33750+)
- **Close to [WATER]:** 'behind the lake' (*Aiz ezera* 33743), a river (33770+), in the Daugava (*Ozols auga Daugava* 33885), on the sea (*Ozols auga jūrmalā* 33886+) in the sea (*Ozols auga jūriņā* 33827).
- **Saule and her daughter sit on the tree**
  - "Saule sits on the hazel-tree" (*Saule sēd lazdiņā*, 33951)
  - "Saule's daughter sits on the top (of the tree), Saule on the branches below" (*Galā sēd Saules meita, / Pate Saule pazaros*, 33826)

For [water] and color [red] in connection with the nocturnal journal of IE Sun-deities cf. Massetti 2019

## LD 33786

*Ik rītiņa Saule lēca  
Sarkanāi kociņā;  
Jauni kungi veci tapa,  
To kociņu meklēdami*

Every morning **Saule woke up in a red tree;** young men grew old while searching for this tree

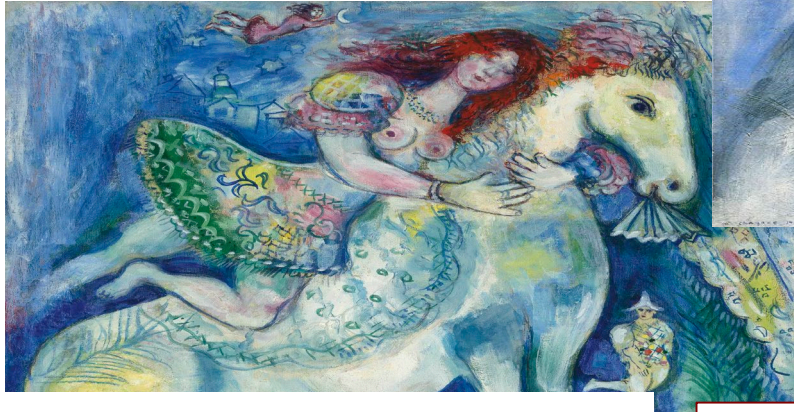
## Saule weaves a crown

LD 33942  
*Saulīt' pina vainadziņu,  
Vitolā sēdēdama.  
Pin, Saulīte, dod man vienu,  
Man jāiet tautiņās.*

**Saule tressait** une couronne / **Assise** dans un saule. / **Tresse, Saule,** donne-m'en une, / Je dois aller chez le prétendant. (Jonval 1929)



# Mythological [sun] - [tree]: Saule, Latvian Sun-goddess<sup>9</sup>



Saule travels with horses and wagon during the day



Saule in white/silver

Saule's or Saule's daughter wedding



Saule arrives to the tree



Saule wakes up on a red tree (?)



Saule becomes red



Saule sleeps/travels on water

UP

HORIZON

Saule in red

DOWN

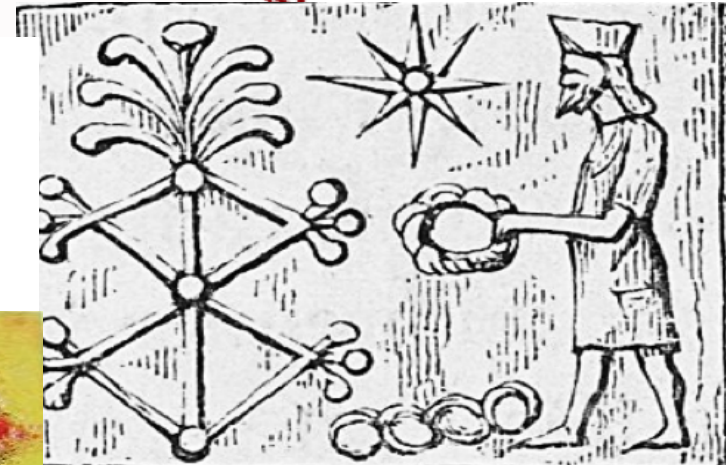
MIDNIGHT



Danish razors from Late Bronze Age  
Copenhagen – National Museum  
Flemming Kaul



Campanian red figured amphora,  
5th BCE, British Museum, London



## LD 33750

*Bērziņš* auga trim lapām  
 Liela ceļa maliņā,  
**Tur Saulīte jostu kāra,**  
**Saules meita vaiņadziņu**

Le bouleau croissait avec trois  
 feuilles / au bord du grand chemin;  
**C'est là que Saule suspendait sa ceinture,**  
**La Fille de Saule sa couronne.**

cf. also variant 2 to LD 33750

## LD 33742

*Aiz kalniņa ezeriņš*  
*aiz ezera ozoliņš,*  
**Dieva dēls jostu kāra**  
**Saules meita vaiņadziņu**

Derrière la colline il y a un lac,  
 Derrière le lac, un chêne;  
**Le Fils-de Dieu y pendait sa ceinture,**  
**La Fille de Saule sa couronne.**

cf. also variant 1

*Aiz kalniņa ezariņš*  
*aiz ezara ozoliņš,*  
**Saule kāra vaiņadziņu**  
**Pērkons savu zobentiņu**

Derrière la colline il y a un lac,  
 Derrière le lac, un chêne;  
**Saule y pendait sa couronne,**  
**Pērkons son épée**

## LD 28906

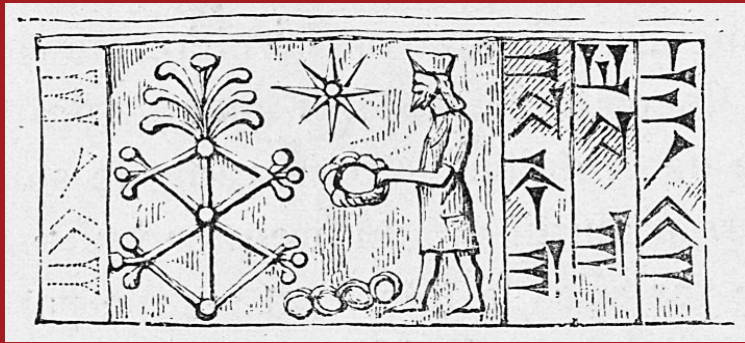
**Kupla liepa, zelta zari,**  
*Manā govu laiderē;*  
**Tur Saulīte jostu kāra,**  
**Saules meita vainaciņu**

**Un tilleul touffu aux branches d'or**  
 Dans la pâture de mes vaches.  
**C'est là que Saule suspendait sa ceinture,**  
**La Fille de Saule sa couronne.**

LD 33750

*Tur Saulite jostu k̄ara,  
Saules meita vaiņadziņu*

**C'est là que Saule suspendait sa ceinture,  
La Fille de Saule sa couronne.**



Detail from *L'adorazione dei Magi*, Gentile da Fabriano (1423)

- Christmas: celebrated in winter solstice cf. *Sol invictus* (syncretism with Mitraic cult)
- Christmas star : identified with star of the three μάγοι, cf. Mt. 2.1–2:  
Now after Jesus was born in Bethlehem of Judea in the days of Herod the king, behold, wise men (μάγοι) from the east came to Jerusalem, saying, “Where is he who has been born king of the Jews? For we saw his star when it rose (τὸν ἀστέρα ἐν τῇ ἀνατολῇ) and have come to worship him.
- OPers. *magu-*, Baby. *maguš*, Gk. *mágos* [μάγος], Lat. *magus*, the only recorded designation of priests of all western Iranians during the Median, Achaemenid, Parthian (*mgw*), and Sasanian periods.  
Cf. also Sasanian title *mowbed* (<\**magu-pati*- ‘chief of the Magi’; Arm. *magpet*)
- Cf. Bisotun inscription of Darius I the Great, according to which, in 522 BCE, a Magus (*magu-*) by the name Gaumāta claimed to be Bardiya, son of the predecessor king (cf. *EI* s.v. ‘MAGI’)





Greek  
Ηριγόνη

Red-figure  
skyphos, 375–  
350 BCE, British  
Museum, London  
“Phaedra” (?) –  
LM: Erigone



**(a) Daughter of Ikarios (man who welcomed Dionysus in Athens)**

Herod. *De pros.* 3.1, p.299 L ἀπὸ Ἰκαρίου τοῦ πατρὸς Ἠριγόνης

**(b) Daughter of Aegisthus (+ Clytemnestra)**

[Apoll.] *Bibl.* 6.25b.13 Ἠριγόνης τῆς Αἰγίσθου καὶ Κλυταιμνήστρας

Both Erigone (a) and (b) hang themselves

**(a) Daughter of Ikarios**

[Apoll.] *Bibl.* 3.14.7 Ἠριγόνη δὲ τῇ θυγατρὶ τὸν πατέρα μαστευούση κύων συνήθης ὄνομα Μαῖρα, ἣ τῷ Ἰκαρίῳ συνείπετο, τὸν νεκρὸν ἐμήνυσε· κάκεινῃ κατοδυναμένη τὸν πατέρα **ἑαυτὴν ἀνήρτησε.**

When **his daughter Erigone** was searching for her father, a domestic dog, named Maera, which had attended Icarius, discovered his dead body to her, and she bewailed her father and **hanged herself.**

*Hyg. Fab.* 130 *Icarium autem occisum canis ululans M<a>era **Erigonae** monstravit ubi pater insepultus iaceret. Quo cum uenisset, **super corpus parentis in arbore suspendio se necavit***

**(b) Daughter of Aegisthus (+ Clytemnestra)**

*EM* p. 42, 5 K Λέγεται γὰρ Ἠριγόνην τὴν Αἰγίσθου καὶ Κλυταιμνήστρας θυγατέρα σὺν Τυνδαρέῳ [τῷ πάππῳ] ἐλθεῖν Ἀθήναζε, κατηγορήσουσαν Ὀρέστου· ἀπολυθέντος δὲ, **ἀναρτήσασαν ἑαυτὴν**

It is said that Erigone, the daughter of Aegisthus and Klytaemnestra, came to Athens with her grandfather Tyndareus, in order to speak against Orestes. When he was found not guilty, **she hanged herself**

Ἠριγόνη : ‘morning-offspring’, ‘whose generation is early’  
Bechtel 1917:195

Cf. Ἠριγένεια ‘born in the morning’, epithet of the Dawn

Ἠρι° : \*h<sub>2</sub>user-i- cf. Ved. loc. *usrí*

(Peters 1980:32–3, Janda 2000:213–5)

°γένεια, °γόνη to γίγνομαι, PIE \*ǵenh<sub>1</sub>- ‘to generate’

Il. 1.477+

ἤμος δ’ ἠριγένεια φάνη ῥοδοδάκτυλος Ἠώς

Until rose-fingered **early-born Eos** appeared

Parallel: *Vita i Sanctae Brigitae* (Campanile 1990)

*Vita I Sanctae Brigitae* § 6.2–3

*Magus dixit: Si die crastino, orto sole nasceretur, neminem in terris haberet æqualem. [...] Mane autem facto, & orto sole, venit ancilla magi ad domum, portans vas plenum lacte nuper emulso: & cum posuisset vnum pedem trans limen domus, & alterum pedem foris, cecidit super limen sedens, & genuit filiam.*

The druid said, ‘Were it (: the child) **born** tomorrow **at daybreak**, it would have no equal on earth.’ [...] When **morning** came and **the sun had risen**, the druid’s bondmaid (: St. Birgit’s mother) came to the house carrying a vessel full of milk which had just been milked, and when she had put one foot across the threshold of the house and the other foot outside, she fell astride the threshold and gave birth to a daughter.

## Ἠριγόνη Ἀλῆτις or ἀλῆτις ὥδή?

(a) Athenaeus *Deipnosophistae* xiv.10.19 (= Arist. fr. 515) ἦν δὲ καὶ ἐπὶ ταῖς αἰώραις τις ἐπ' Ἠριγόνη, ἣν καὶ ἀλῆτιν λέγουσιν, ὥδή.

On occasion of the *aiōrai* (Swing-festival) there was an **song** about **Erigone**, which is called **Aletis** (LM: who is called Aletis? See below)

Cf. Poll. iv.55.4 ἦν δέ τι καὶ ἀλῆτις, ᾄσμα ταῖς αἰώραις προσαδόμενον  
There was also a certain **aletis**, a **song** sung in the *aiōrai* (-festivals)

(b) Hsch. α 2217 οἱ δὲ ἐπὶ Ἠριγόνη Ἀλήτιδι τῆ Ἰκαρίου  
Some (say that's) on **Erigone Aletis**, (daughter) of Icarius

(c) EG α 454 Ἀλῆτις· τινὲς τὴν Ἠριγόνην λέγουσι τὴν Ἰκαρίου θυγατέρα, ὅτι πανταχοῦ ζητοῦσα τὸν πατέρα ἤλατο  
**Aletis**: some (people) say **Erigone**, daughter of Icarius, because, while she was searching everywhere for her father, she roamed (around) (= EM, p. 62.5 K)

(d) Hsch. α 2953 L Ἀλῆτις· ἑορτὴ Ἀθήνησιν, ἣ νῦν Αἰώρα λεγομένη. καὶ ἡμέρας ὄνομα, ὡς Πλάτων ὁ Κωμικός  
**Aletis**: festival in Athens, now called Aiora. And **name of a day/the day** (?), according to Platon, the comic.

## *Erigone and Aletes*

Hyg. *Fab.* 122 *Mycenas uenerunt et Aleten Aegisthi filium Orestes interfecit et Erigonam ex Clyt<a>emnestra et Aegistho natam uoluit interficere, sed Diana eam rapuit et in terram Atticam sacerdotem fecit.*

They (Electra and Orestes) came to Mycenae and Orestes killed **Aletes**, son of Aegisthus. He also wanted to kill **Erigone**, daughter of Clytaemnestra and Aegisthus, but Diana took her off and made her priestess in Attica.

- **Popular etymology:** feminine form to ἀλήτης ‘wanderer, vagabond’ (cf. Gk. ἀλάομαι)
  - Fem. nomen agentis, like χερνήτις ‘a woman spinning’ to νέω ‘spin’  
νηλειτίδες ‘guiltless’ :: ἀλείτις ‘sinner’
  - Unclear connection in the myth (aetiological for *aletis*)
- **Alternative: connection with term ἀλήη ‘warmth, heat’ (Ion.): \*(she) of the heat’?**

*Od.* 17.23                    αὐτίκ’ ἐπεὶ κε πυρὸς θερέω ἀλήη τε γένηται  
As soon as I have warmed myself at the fire, and the sun has grown hot

### Family of words

Att. ἀλέα (Hppcr.), ἀλειίνος ‘warm, hot’ (Hdt.+), ἀλεαίνω ‘to make warm’ (Archel.+),  
Hsch. α 2811 L            **ἀλέα**: θερμη  
Hsch. α 2881 L            **ἀλεόν**: θερμόν. ἢ χλιαρόν  
Hsch. α 2882 L            **ἀλεός**: διάπυρος

### Etymology:

(a) Höfler 2020: derivative of PIE *\*suelh<sub>1</sub>-* ‘to glow with heat’, cf.

- OE *swelan* ‘burn, be burnt up’, erm . *schwelen* ‘smolder’, Lith. *svilti* ‘scorch,            singe’, k . ἔλένη  
‘torch’, k . εἴλη ‘warmth, heat of the sun’, k . ὕλη ‘fire wood’

- **ἀλήη**: *\*suelh<sub>1</sub>-os* n. ‘glowing heat’ (unattested) → *\*sulh<sub>1</sub>-s-ó-* ‘having glowing heat’ → *\*sulh<sub>1</sub>seh<sub>2</sub>*  
‘glowing heat’ (Ion. ἀλήη f. ‘heat (of the sun)’)

- “terme surtout ionien”, ἀλέα (firstly attested in *corpus hippocraticum*)

- Further congener: **Ἐλένη** : *\*sulh<sub>1</sub>neh<sub>2</sub>-* (*contra* Jamison 1994, 2001, Jackson [Rova] 2006, Pinault 2015) **(for Erigone and Helen see below)**

(b) Nikolaev 2018: derivative of PIE *\*h<sub>2</sub>leuh<sub>x</sub>-* ‘to burn’, cf.

Ved. *rūrā-* ‘deliriously hot’, Oss. *arawyn* ‘to scorch with fire’, OIr. *loscaid* ‘burn, consume’ (-*ske/o-*)

*Phaedra*: daughter of Pasiphae (:daughter of Helios): suicide by hanging

*Schol. in Stat. Theb. 4.225*

*cum luderent virgines, meditatus ruinam omnis chorus in arborem nucis fugit, et in ramo eius pependit*

Event: while dancing the maidens were scared by a menace and fled to a walnut-tree. Later they were reborn in the form of fruit hanging from the branches.

- Dionysian pattern: flee and death of a group of women (Faraone 2013)
- On the choruses see Paus. iii.10.7

**Paus. iii.19.10**

ταύτην τὴν Πολυξώ φασιν ἐπιθυμοῦσαν Ἑλένην τιμωρήσασθαι τελευτῆς τῆς Τληπολέμου τότε, ὡς ἔλαβεν αὐτὴν ὑποχείριον, ἐπιπέμψαι οἰλουμένην θεραπαίνας Ἑρινύσιν ἴσα ἐσκευασμένας: καὶ αὗται διαλαβοῦσαι δὴ τὴν Ἑλένην αἱ ἀπάγχουσιν ἐπὶ δένδρου, καὶ ἐπὶ τούτῳ Ῥοδίοις Ἑλένης ἱερὸν ἔστι Δενδρίτιδος.

They say that this Polyxo desired to avenge the death of Tlepolemus on Helen, now that she had her in her power. So she sent against her when she was bathing handmaidens dressed up as Furies, who seized **Helen and hanged her on a tree, and for this reason the Rhodians have a sanctuary of Helen of the Tree.**



## Paus. iii.19.10

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**- NB Rhodos and Sun-god cult:** cf. Pi. *O.* 7 (e.g. vv.55ff.: Helios is allotted "Helios, die Sonne, ist überall ein "ott" ; es war skandalös, dass Anaxagoras Helios nennen wagte. Einen bedeutenden Kult hat Helios aber fast nur an Athenen. Helios ist anthropomorph: Die größte griechische Bronzestatue, der "Koloss von Rhodos" (1977:270)

**- k . ἑλένη (homophonous as Helen's name)**

Hsch. ε 1995 L ἑλένη· λαμπάς, δετή

### Cf. also [MOON]

Lat. *luna* < \**leuk-sneh*<sub>2</sub>-

cf. k . λύχνος 'lamp' < \**luk-sno-*

Nartic 'Helen' Αψι-ρυχς 'this light'

Ved. *candrá-* < \*(s)*kṛd-ró-*,

cf. OE *candel* 'lamp'

### [SUN] : [LAMP (of god/sky)]

Hitt. Arinna Sun-goddess: *zupparu* (torch) of Hatti's land

Gk. εὐαγέος ἡελίοιο || λαμπάδος (Parm. fr. 11.10-1+)

OE *rodore* *candel* 'heaven's candle' (Beow. 1572), *woruld candel* 'world's candel' (Beow. 1965), *heofoncandel* (Andreas 243), *wedercandel* (ibid. 372), *Godes candel* (Battle of Brunanburh 15, Phoenix 91)

*Aiōrai**Aiōra* cf. also *EM* p. 42, 5 (above)

Diog. Laert. 6.2.52 **ιδών** ποτε **γυναῖκας** ἀπ' ἐλαίας **ἀπηγχονισμένας**, “εἴθε γάρ,” ἔφη,  
 “πάντα τὰ δένδρα τοιοῦτον καρπὸν ἤνεγκεν

**Seeing** some **women hanged** from an olive-tree, he said, “Would that every tree bore similar fruit.

Call. *Aetia* 178.3–5 Ἰκαρίου καὶ παιδὸς ἄγων ἐπέτειον ἀγιστύν,  
**Ἄτθίσιν οἰκτίστη, σὸν φάος, Ἠριγόνη,**  
 ἐς δαίτην ἐκάλεσεν ὀμηθέας ...

And when he kept the yearly ceremony of Icarus' child, **your day, Erigone, lady most lamented by Attic women**, he invited to a banquet his friends

Hyg. *Fab.* 130 *et Erigonae diem festum oscillationis pestilentiae causa instituerunt*

Hyg. *Astr.* 2.4.5 *Quid quod ea se suspenderit, instituerunt uti tabula interposita pendentes funibus se iactarent, ut qui pendens uento mouetur. Quod sacrificium sollemne instituerunt. Itaque et priuatim et publice faciunt, et id Aletidas appellant*

In later times: hanging of **pictures**

Mannhardt 1905:156 (cf. white-dressed dolls on Maypole-trees)

## *Aiōra*



Black-figure amphora, Painter of the Swings. Boston, Museum of Fine Arts



Black-figure amphora, Painter of the Swings. Paris, Louvre



Red-figure skyphos, F2589, Berlin, Antikensammlung



Red-figure hydria, F2394, Washing Painter Berlin, Antikensammlung



Red-figure hydria, Washing Painter, Paris, Louvre



*Aiōra*



Red-figure skyphos, F2589, Berlin, Antikensammlung

Invisible on the photo: but under the swing we should read <AAH>

*Aiōra*

Chous of Meidias Painter, 420–410 B.C.E.,  
New York, Metropolitan Museum of Art.  
Two women are pouring substances on the  
fire in order to perfume some clothes on a  
richly decorated swing (part of the Aiora  
ritual)

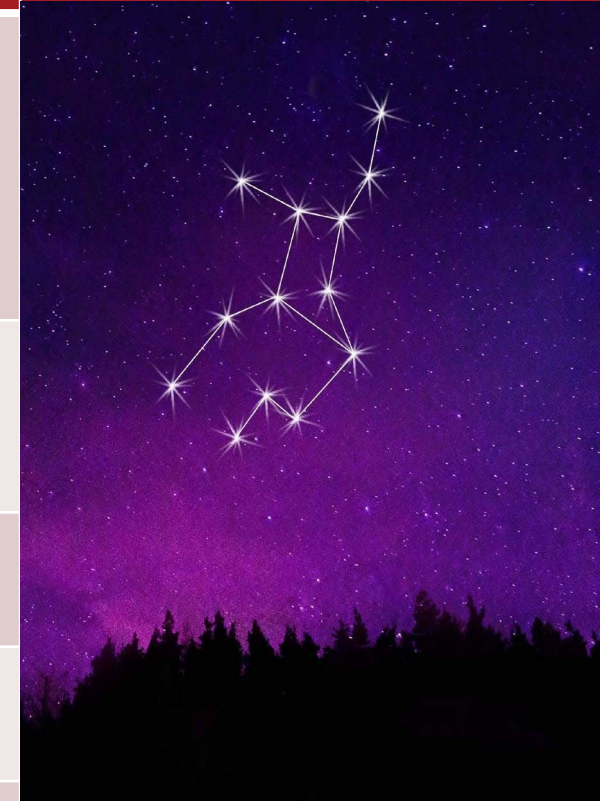


*Aiōrai*

Cf. Körte 1919; Immerwahr 1946:254–60; Dietrich 1961; Hani 1978; Cantarella 1985; Shapiro 2004; Castoldi 2012; Doria – Giuman 2016.

### Possible meaning and explanation

- Supposedly celebrated on the third day of the Anthesteriae: **purification after first two days (funerary character)**
- **Purification** (Frazer 1911:282) quoting Servius (*Georg.*ii.389): *oscilla* [...] *genus purgationis*  
cf. Immerwahr 1946:254–60, Castoldi 2012:40
- Presence of Eros on vase-paintings + pairing with other ‘young’ gods, such as Hermes – **celebration for youth**  
cf. Castoldi 2012:43
- **Fertility** (Picard 1928:17) / cyclical **spring rebirth**  
cf. Doria – Giuman 2016:7)
- Rite of **passage**  
cf. Cantarella 1985: metamorphosis = change of status
- **Katasterismós/apotheosis** cf.  
Festus 194 *vide[n]tur caelum posse adiri per oscillationem*



Constellation 'Virgo'

Cf. Godden 1893, who compares the story to Zeus and Daedala (Hera substituted with a laurel-tree!)

Грозанка: то грозз 'grape', cf. грозно 'hugly'

vv. 45–54, 64–6

ста́рице, ма́йко слѣ́нчова,  
 бѣва се и прилѣ́га се;  
 да спу́снем зла́ти лю́лчици  
 на грозда́нкини дворо́ве  
 на ли́чен ден на герге́в ден,  
 да вѣрви́ ма́ло голѣ́мо  
 за здра́вѣ да се люлѣ́ѣ,  
 на́й-поди́р та́ иде Грозда́нка  
 на лю́лки ще си посѣ́дне,  
 ни́й щѣм лю́лки-те да дрѣ́пнем. —

Vieille, mère du soleil,  
 Cela se peut et cela convient  
**Faisons descendre une escarpolette d'or**  
**Dans la maison de Grozdanka**  
En un jour solennel, au jour de St. Georges,  
 Afin que petits et grands (y) aillent  
**Se balancer pour la santé**  
**à la fin ira Grozdanka**  
**sur l'escarpolette elle s'asseoira,**  
 et nous tirerons à nous l'escarpolette d'or

Ка́то ѣ сѣднѣ́ла на лю́лки  
 тѣ́мни се мѣ́гли спу́снѣ́ли  
 и се лю́лки-те ди́гнѣ́ли.

[...] Dès qu'elle s'assit sur l'escarpolette,  
 des nuages épais s'abattirent  
 et l'escarpolette d'éleva.  
 (Dozon 1875)

vv.86-9; 106-10

Паче си свѣтба дигнѣли,  
и ѡз Гроздѣнка забѣли,  
как ѡз Гроздѣнка прибѣли  
самѡ ю бѣло пламнѣло,

Как ю зачѣло слѣнце-то  
и на слѣнце-то маѣнка му,  
че сѣ бѣлка-та върнѣли  
че сѣ Гроздѣнка вѣнчѣли  
за яснѡ слѣнце.

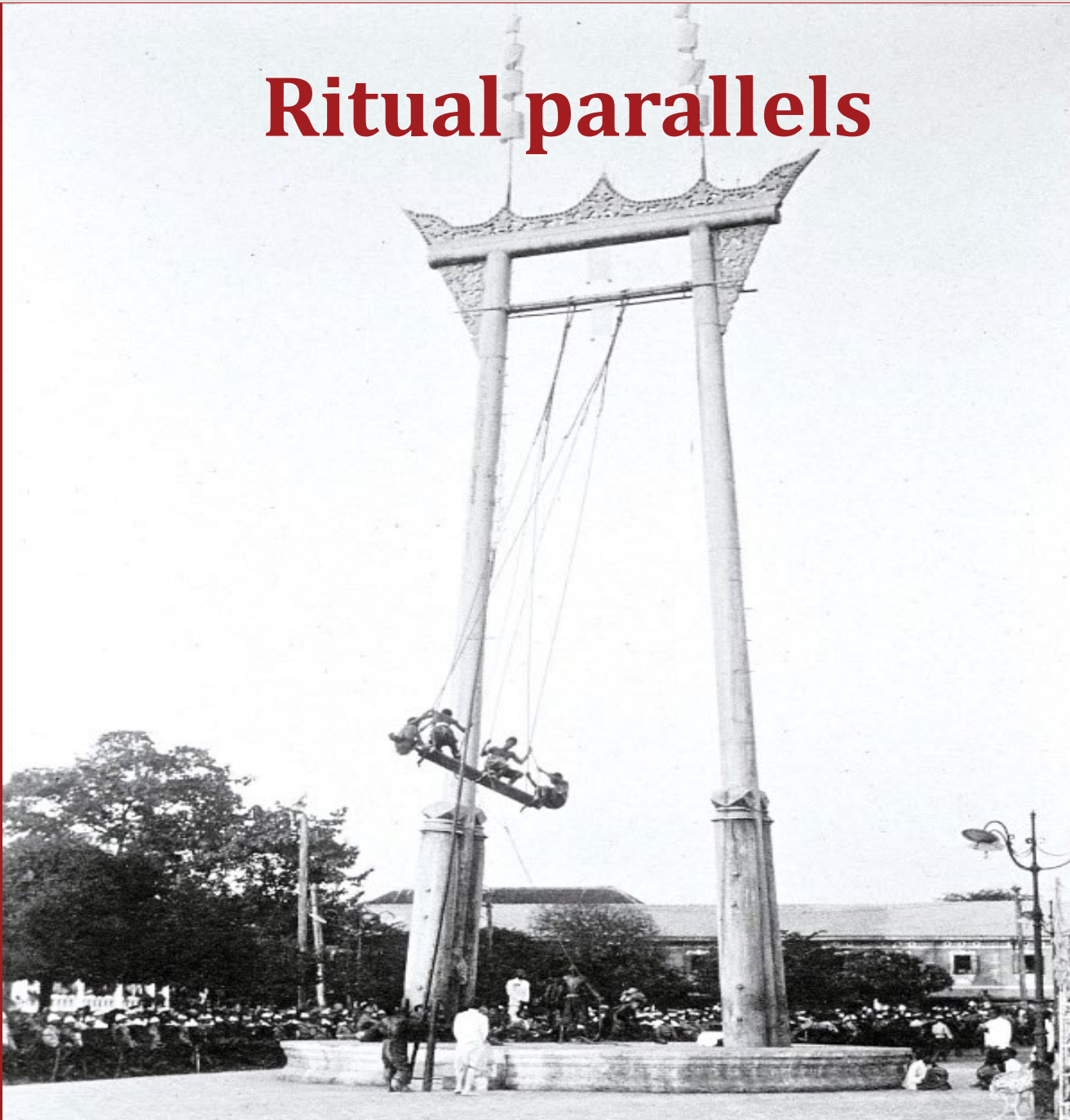
On alla donc chercher la fiancée,  
Grozdanka lui posa le voile.  
À peine Grozdanka l'eut posé,  
**que le voile prit feu de lui-même.**

[...]

Dès que le soleil l'eut entendue,  
le soleil et sa mère,  
ils renvoyèrent la fiancée,  
et on maria Grozdanka  
avec le brillant soleil

\*As a bridesmaid Grozdanka should give a crown to the bride

# Ritual parallels



'Giant Swing', Phra Nakhon, Bangkok

*Rigveda 7.87.5*

*tisró dyāvo níhitā antár asmin  
tisró bhūmīr úparāḥ śádvidhānāḥ  
gṛtso rájā váruṇas cakra etám*

Three heavens are hidden within him, and below are three earths, arranged in sixes. The clever King Varuṇa created this, **the golden swing in heaven** [=the sun], for the sake of beauty. (Jamison – Brereton 2014)

**Further comparandum in RV 7.88 (cf. Lüders 1951:315–21, Jamison 2007:103–8, Jamison – Brereton 2014:994–5)**

RV 7.88.3

*ā yád ruhāva váruṇas ca nāvam  
prá yát samudrám īráyāva yam  
ádhi yád apām s<sub>a</sub>núbhis cárāva  
prá preñkhá iñkhayāvahai śubhé kám*

When we two, Varuṇa and (I), will board the boat, when we two will raise the middle of the sea, when we two will voyage through the crests of the waters, **we will swing on the swing for beauty.** (Jamison – Brereton 2014)



Oldenberg 1917: 85–6, 443–4; von Schroeder 1914–6: ii.137-40; Oberlies 1998:395

*Śāṅkhāyana Śrauta-sūtra* 17.1–2

1. Now the rite of the mahāvrata (day) 2. Some days before it the hotr orders to pull out the plank for the swing [... (: preparation of the plank from the Umbara-tree)]
2. Then they cause to prepare two ropes of muñja grass, they must be strong, of three strands, more than two fathoms long.

17.3: preparation of musical accompanying: flute, lute; 17.4: drum; 17.5 arrows are thrown; 17.6: mimetic part (fight between ārya and śudra; sexual union of man and woman, quarrel between crippled and bald one[?]); 17.7: morning litany and sacrifice; 17.8: other mantras (Caland, trans. Lokesh 1953)

*Aitareya Araṇyaka* 5.1.4

***niṣṭhite preṅkhe hotā vāṇam audumbaram śatatantum ubhābhyām pariḡ hyottarata upohate, yathā viṇām saptabhiś chandobhiś caturuttaraiḥ sthānāny asyordhvam udgrḥṇīyād daśabhir vā***

**“When the swing has been put in position, the Hotr taking a lute of udumbara wood, with a hundred strings, in both hands strikes it, beginning from the lower side, as one does with an ordinary lute. The different notes of the lute he should produce in turn by the seven metres, each with four (syllables) over, or with ten”** (Keith 1909)

*Śāṅkhāyana Araṇyaka* 1.6

Then (the Hotr), after gathering to himself **the plank of the swing**, draws in his breath thrice, after thrice breathing out. The (plank of the swing) is of Udumbara wood. Strength and proper food are the Udumbara, so that strength and proper food are won. Then, after touching it with his breast, **putting his right side over it, he mutters, ‘Thou art the sun. the Vasus mount thee with the Gayatrī metre. They are thy mounters.’** So he says, and ‘After them I mount for royal sway.’ (Keith 1908)

## Ex. (von Schroeder 1916)

Hauet, Brüder,  
 Birkenstangen, /  
 Laßt sie an der Sonne welk  
 werden / kommt das große  
 Osterfest / **können** die  
 Schwesterchen **sich**  
**schaukeln**

Zu Fastnacht fuhr ich im  
 Schlittchen vom  
 Bergabhang, damit meine  
 lieben Flachspflanzen lang  
 wachsen; **zu Ostern**  
**schaukle ich mich**  
 damit die lieben Kühe sich  
 nähren

LD 32295

*Spīdi nu, saulite,  
 Ābeļu dārzā,  
 Tur mūsu bāliņi  
 Šupoles kāra*

Pastor Dr. August Bielenstein (18/31-03-1902 to von Schroeder 1916:130-1)  
 „Die allgemeine lettische Sitte, die ich übrigens in der Nachbarschaft von Dorpat gefunden habe, baut am Sonnabend vor Ostern Schaukeln. Das Sitz- oder vielmehr Stehbrett ist in der Regel an zwei jungen Birkenstämmchen unten befestigt, deren obere dünne Wipfelenden in zwei Ringe (wiederum in Birkenzweigen geflochten) eingeflochten sind. Die beiden Birkenringe hängen auf einem Querbaum. Die Osterschaukel wird merkwürdigerweise nur an den drei Osterfesttagen zur Volkbelustigung gebraucht, vor Ostern gar nicht und nach Ostern ebensowenig“



## Personal communication by Milena Anfosso

- *Naca* 'cradle' cf. Gk. νάκη 'woolly or hairy skin': festivity involving swinging procession
- Good Friday: **funerary procession for dead Christ – swinging litter** (: *naca*)
- **Fir-trees with lights** (*lampiuni*)
- In the past: *varvasche* (plants) directly lightened up

Call. *Aetia* 178.4 Ἀτθίσιν οἰκτίστη, σὸν φάος, Ἐριγόνη,  
your day, Erigone, **lady most lamented by Attic women,**

## *Ombra mai fu*

- Xerxes and plane-tree as reflex of a solar cult cf.
- Baltic tradition: Saule and Saules meita hang golden object to Saule's tree

## Hanging the Sun

- Ἠριγόνη (Dawn-avatar) cf. Sun-maiden (Helen)
- ἀλῆτις 'burning'
- Cf. Bulgarian **Grozdanka** (Grape-girl) who puts the bride's veil on fire

Solar Myths  
Language

## Swinging

- Gk. αἰώρα-festival
- Vedic Mahāvrata
- Baltic Easter swing-songs
- *Naca* in Davoli

Solar Ritual





THANK YOU!