

What We Didn't Know About the Greek Myths of Technology and Why it Matters

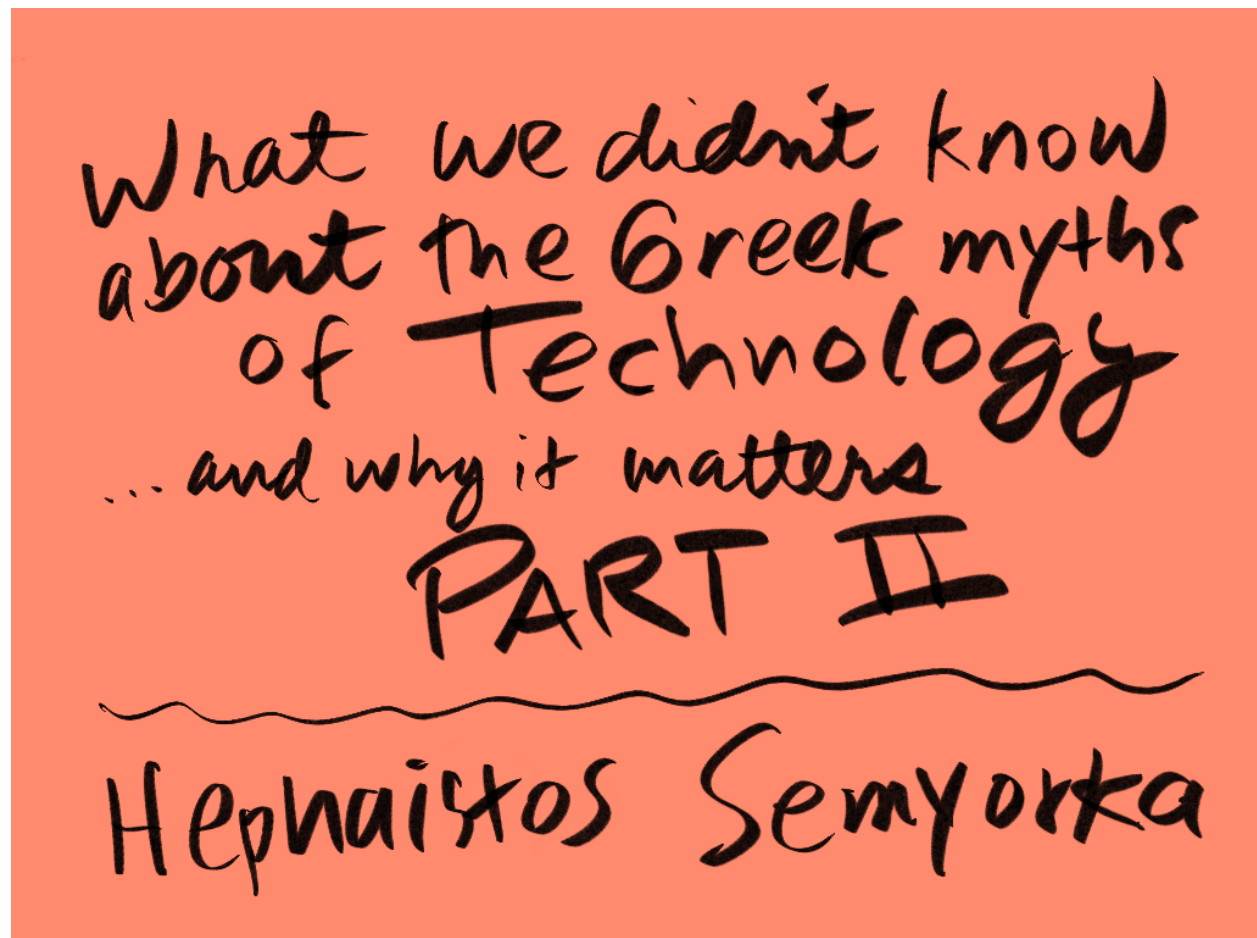
MYTHING LINKS 2

Presented by Hephaistos Semyorka (Cheryl De Ciantis) at Mythomorphosis in Second Life and via Zoom, June 14, 2020

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Contact: cdeciantis@kairios.com



[Slide 1]

Hello, Welcome back to MYTHING LINKS! I'm Hephaistos Semyorka. This is Part II of an ongoing series.

Last time, we got started talking about the Greek myths of technology and looking at the old stories in new ways.

We'll continue today...

Hi Everyone!

Were in both Zoom and SL
and trying something new:
a real-time comments, questions
and cross-talk page at:

<http://bit.ly-2YvZTR3> ^{starting:}
Now
!

[Slide 2]

And we have company again! Like last time, there are a number of people joining us live via Zoom.

This time we're going to try something different, a real time experiment, so I hope you will bear with us as we try this out:

Last time it was a challenge to blend the questions and comments of the SL and Zoom groups. This time, I've opened a public Google page just for us.

You can go there as soon as you like (even while I'm speaking), and type in comments, questions, even cross-talk with other chatters. Please put your name on comments (any way you prefer your name to appear)

And here's the url: <https://bit.ly/2YvZTR3> - copy and paste this into your browser and it should take you right there.

I will present and then we'll play with questions, but go ahead at any time and post to the Google page.



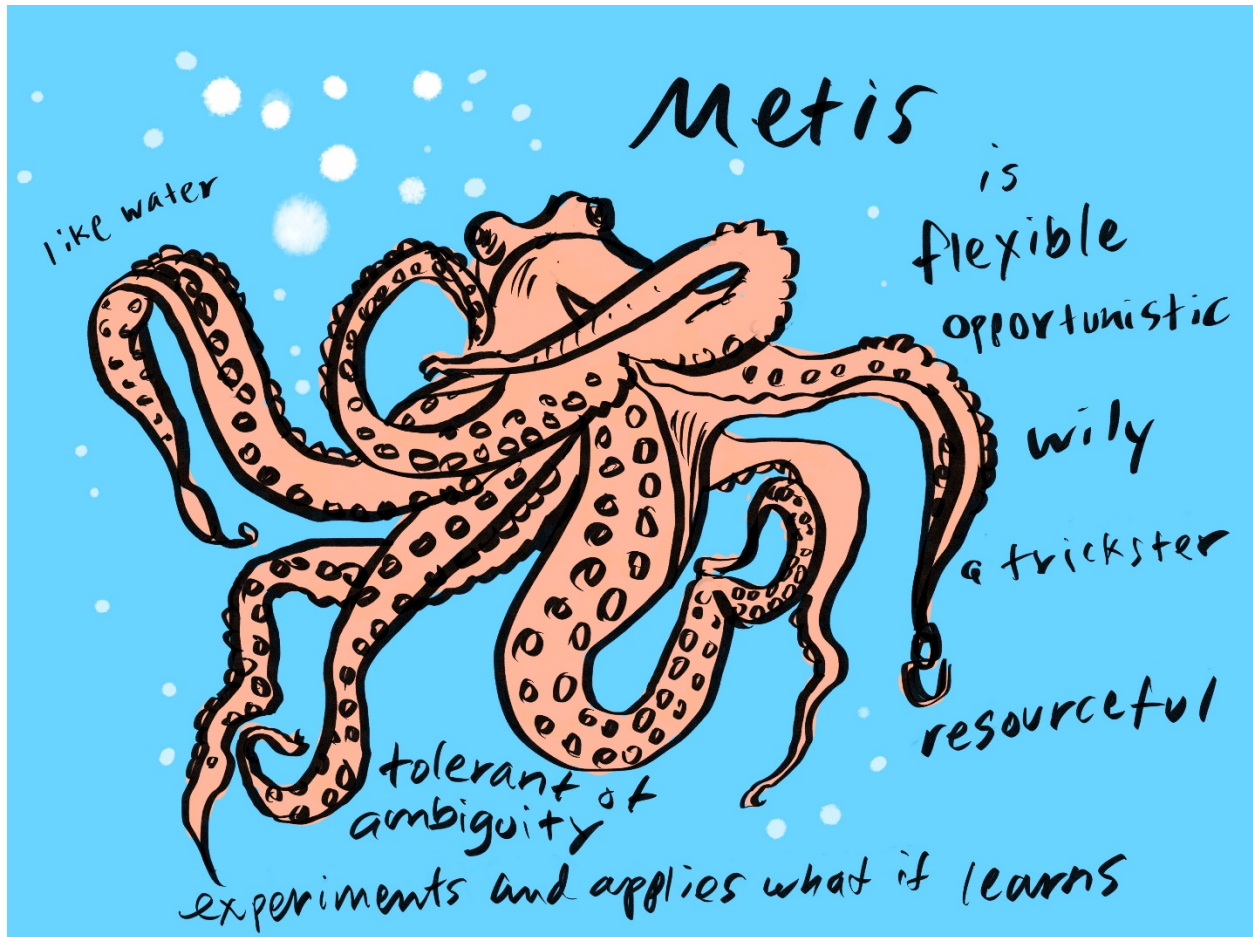
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Okay, here's something I want to put out there for you. Recently, linguistic researchers using the newest computer-modeling found what they call 'The Oldest Story.'

There has been speculation for a long time about that; "Cinderella" for example has been thought to be perhaps 5,000 years old.

We have a saying of course about "the oldest story," that's not what this is! Think fairy tale, moral tale--myth!

SO, I'll put it out there, and maybe you'll feel compelled to put out your guess, and if so, go on over to the Google page and try it out. I won't mind, I'll just keep talking!

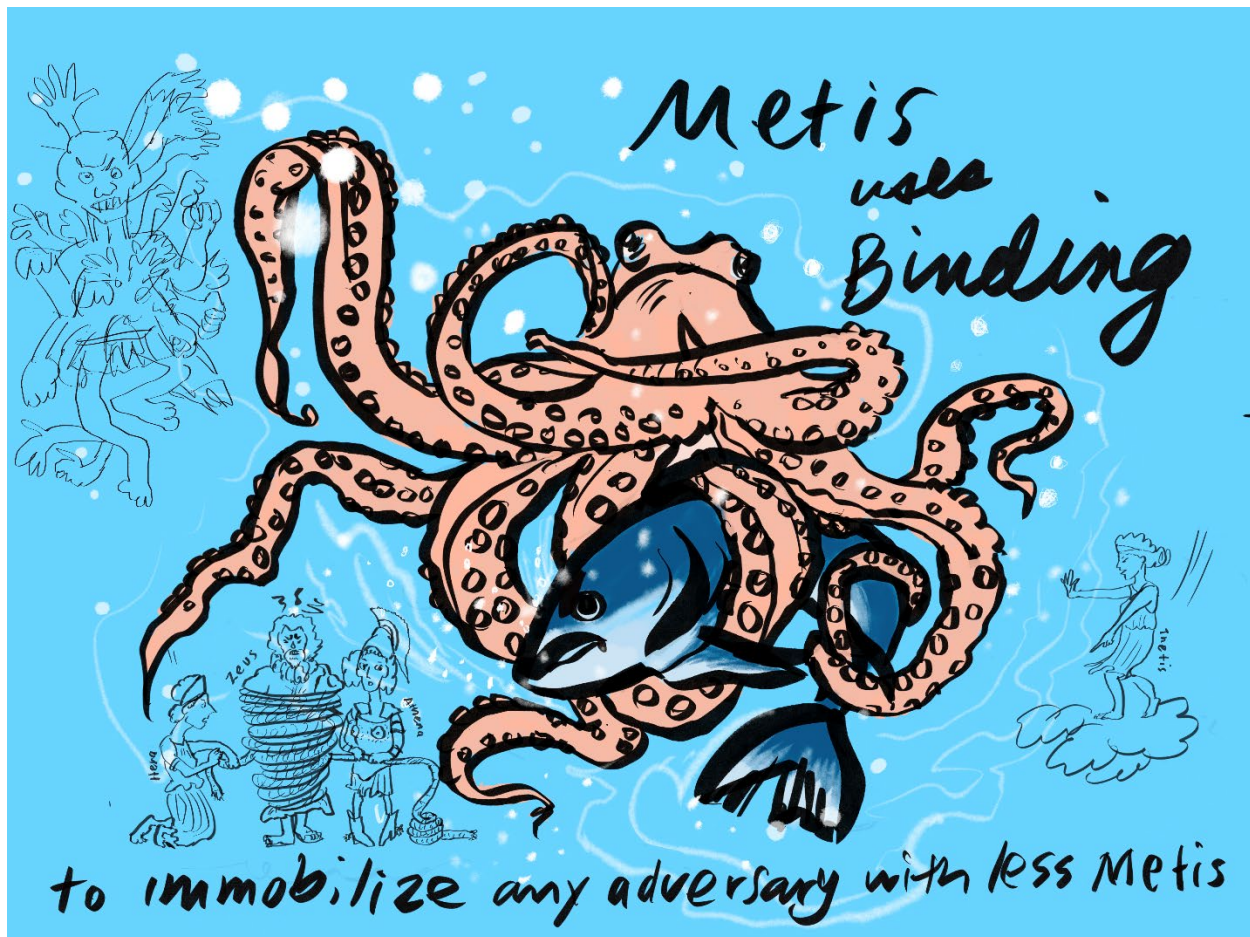


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Last time, you probably remember we talked about Metis, a well-known trait recognized by the Greeks but that they failed to name in their literature, it was not one of the "ways of knowing" that Aristotle called out, and its nature is inimical to the philosophy of Socrates and Plato, since it is seemingly irrational.

But the Greeks knew well heroes like Odysseus, who turned the tide of the Trojan War by trickery, and for them, Odysseus was for them the poster boy of Metis.

We also talked about the Oceanic origin of Metis, and that the primordial Oceanic deities are fundamentally Metistic, for example Thetis, Hepahistos' foster mother, who is a sea goddess and shapeshifter. The squid is her emblem.



[Slide 5]

We also talked about those who have Metis are capable of binding those who do not - gods can't be killed for example but they can be bound and immobilized.

So, I wanted to tell you some more about Hephaistos as a possessor of Metis - you'll remember that Homer calls him both Klutotechnen - famed for his techne or craft and also Klutometin, famed for his craftiness or cunning, his Metis.

Hephaistos is born lamed, let's say clubfooted. Hera, his mother, is so enraged by this that she throws the newborn from Olympus into the sea where he is rescued by Thetis and Eurynome, the sea goddesses, who train him. He does not quite forgive or forget...

And he plays a trick that gets him called to his rightful place on Olympus, to live among the family of "father" Zeus.

He bulids a golden throne, and sends it as a gift to his mother Hera. Homer tells us she loves luxury and trappings of power--so maybe that's why she does not hesitate to test it out.



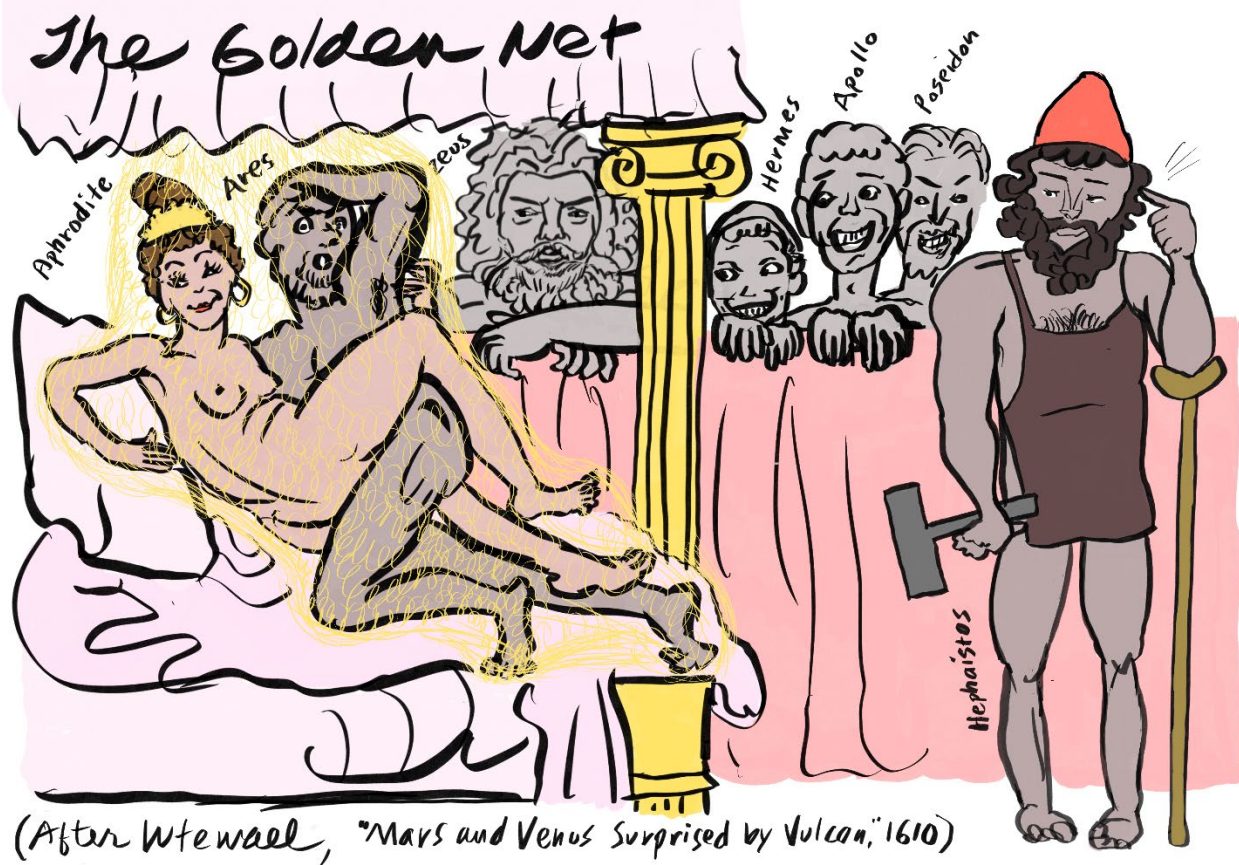
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And when she does, it automatically traps her wrists and ankles in manacles and flies to the ceiling of Zeus and Hera's palace, suspending her upside down, screaming. This is clearly a Metistic trick of binding.

No one on Olympus can fix the problem and get her down--Hephaistos is the only one with the *techne* to do it. So, Zeus calls him back, Hera is released, and Hephaistos is given his rightful place at the table of the 12 Olympians and he is given Aphrodite as his wife in reward.

This does not actually turn out to be a very happy thing, since Aphrodite is in love with Ares, the god of war, who is also Hera's son.

One day the Sun god Helios comes to the workshop of Hephaistos to tell him he has seen them together, and that they jump into Hephaistos' own bed every time he leaves. So Hephaistos gets tricky. He pretends to leave on a trip to the island of Lemnos, where he was rescued by the mortals when Zeus threw him from Olympus a second time (after he took Hera's part in a quarrel between them, and Zeus did not take it kindly at all). He rides away on his donkey and Aphrodite calls up Ares pronto and they jump into bed together, only to be surprised...



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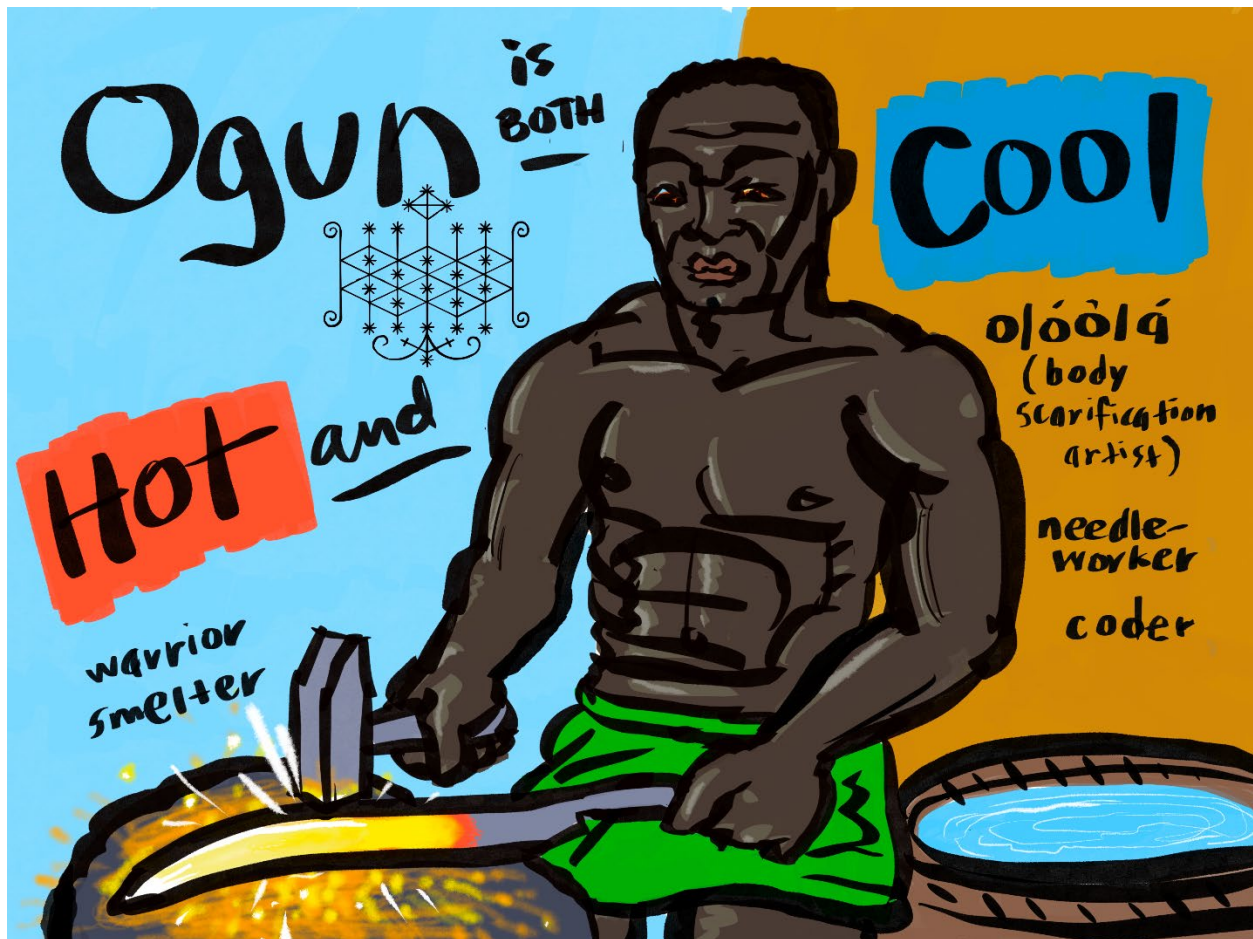
when they are trapped in flagrante by an invisible golden net, the links so fine that not even a god could see them (and Aphrodite is one of the gods with metis--Heph just has more of it). Hephaistos had rigged the net and of course turned his donkey right around as soon as he heard Aphrodite squealing.

He calls out the rest of the gods to witness--you might think it odd he would call witnesses to his own cuckholding and there is a lot of sniggering, particularly between Hermes and Apollo, both of whom would gladly take Ares' place under that net.

But Hephaistos demands Aphrodite's bride price back from Zeus, who agrees; and Poseidon offers to cover the fine that Ares has to pay, whereupon Hephaistos releases them. This is the only instance of divorce among the Olympians that I'm aware of. Abandonment, murder (Dionysos may or may not have gotten Artemis to kill his wife Ariadne with her bow and arrow) but no instance of divorce other than this. Hephaistos does marry again, and lives happily with Aglaia, one of the Graces (ironically, the Graces are Aphrodite's handmaidens).

I wanted to take us to these stories to show more of Hephaistos' metistic, trickster nature, because he has not been known for that; for some reason it has been invisible to mythologists for centuries. We're definitely getting a different view here.

Now I want to take us somewhere else, to think about some of the things I think it's most important to know about the blacksmith gods and the Maker archetype.



[Slide 8]

Ogun is the West African god of metallurgy; of metal generally. We'll talk more in a minute about what else he represents, but I think he helps us to see more about the Metistic nature of the blacksmith gods.

I don't know how old Ogun is as an idea, though he's an old god. What's especially interesting is that he is a god who is extremely important to millions of people now, today. Not just in Africa, but across the entire African diaspora, in the orisha-worship traditions of the Caribbean, and North and South America.

The device under his name is his vodun veve, his magical summoning symbol. Ogun is both revered and feared, as many of the blacksmith deities are, for his control over the huge forces of fire and the magic of metalsmithing. A smith can make white hot iron flow like water; and when he shapes and cools it, can make incredibly strong and rigid. That's flat out scary shit.

Ogun's praise songs, which are still being composed and sung in ritual, call him the god who is both hot and cool; He can be unpredictable and dangerous--he is a warlike god, and as god of metal is in charge of all its manifestations: tools, weapons, even cars and computers. He loves mortals--like Hephaistos, he gives technae to the people to enable them to live good lives.

But he also likes palm wine, and when drunk is unpredictable. Once when drunk he killed one of his followers, for which he remains full of remorse (and here it seems to me that he too partakes of the "mortal pain" that we know from Homer that Hephaistos and Thetis alone among the Greek gods who suffer it). But he still drinks! So it's well to propitiate him, and ask to be shown his peaceful side.

One thing that is interesting is that the people who revere him celebrate his two-sidedness. They do not attempt to push him to be hot or cold. They do not need him to be a one-sided god. He is the god of metalworkers and smelters, whose work is dangerous, and the god of fighters, and his furious side is valued for its power to move what needs moving.

He is also the patron of skin-artists and healers, the people who draw tattoos, incise clan and identity scars, and medicinal incisions. These people call upon his coolness. The scar is a "road of Ogun" and like cold iron, cannot be changed.

Homer calls Hephaistos "amphigeeis," which can mean lamed, or ambidextrous. To me, it signifies the ability of the Metistic Maker deities to hold seeming opposites in tension.



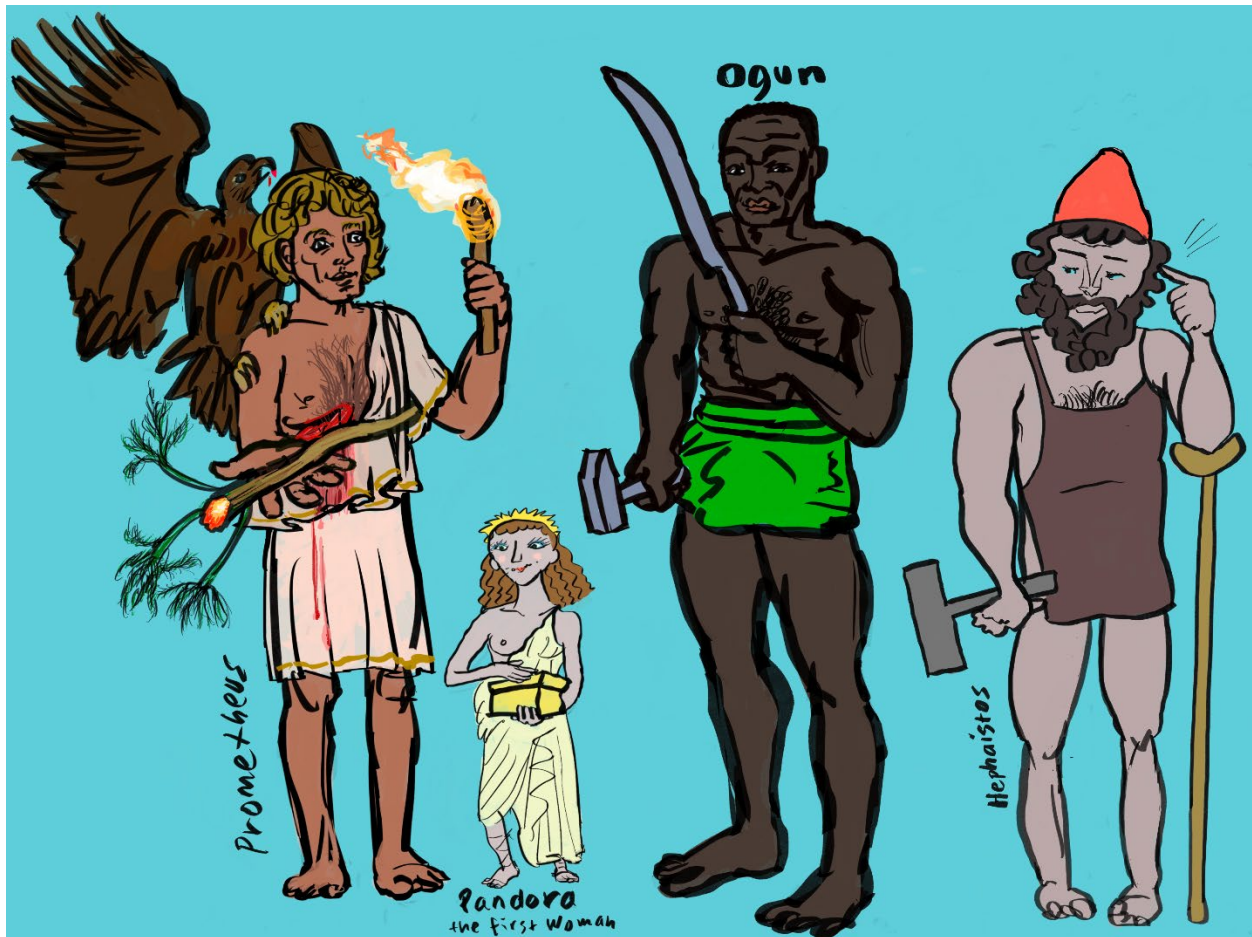
[Slide 9]

The blacksmith in many cultures occupies a sort of crossroads position in society. Blacksmiths serve clients from all walks of life. Some of the people who praise Ogun for example are seamstresses who use needles and sewing machines, hunters who need weapons but also need the fine tools to sew the wounds they and their hunting dogs receive. Farmers need plows and cutting implements and implements to care for their animals. Soldiers need swords and guns. These are typical clients of the blacksmith who might not be inclined to regard each other with trust, to say the least.

One of the most important clients of the blacksmith are rulers who need the visible regalia of office. Think about it! It's vital: badges, sceptres, medals...Hephaistos makes the thunderbolts of Zeus but also his scepter.

At this crossroads, you meet all kinds. And it is symbolic of the Metis of the blacksmith that in many cultures, binding oaths are taken on a blacksmith's anvil.

Like the symbolism of ores and of metals the mythic significance of the anvil is deep.



[Slide 10]

And, using the lens of Metis shows us that the fraternity of smiths is larger than we might think. Although we don't ordinarily think of Prometheus as wielding a hammer or even a sword, he is the fire-bringer.

We learned early from Hesiod, who along with Homer was one of the first writers of Greek, that Hephaistos made Pandora from clay. She is the "first" woman, a creation that was intended by Zeus to bedevil men as a punishment for receiving the fire of the gods from Prometheus. Each of the gods gave her a gift. Aphrodite gave her seductive beauty and the sexual appetite of a beast (Aphrodite is the goddess of sex as well as of love and beauty). Hermes gave her cunning and the ability to confound and confuse men with her words. (Greek culture was misogynistic, much?) And she is one of the first biotech creations in history. In other versions of the story, it's Prometheus who sculpts her, like an artist.

Prometheus is also known as a "son" of Hephaistos, which has a lot of potential meanings, but for sure it means he is part of the same archetype. Hephaistos and Prometheus were together honored in the largest ancient Athenian festival, the Panathenaia, which is the original Olympic Games. The torch lit in Athens today still symbolizes the fire that was taken from the altar of Hephaistos and Prometheus, symbolic of the magical fire of Hephaistos's forge. Ogun too is a god of fire and sacrifice. And like Prometheus and Hephaistos, he is revered as a friend and benefactor to mortals, whose techne brings good things to human life.

While Hephaistos is famous for robots--and one, Talos, even bleeds ichor and can be killed if it is drained, it is significant that it is Zeus who breathes life into Pandora.

Ogun, Prometheus and Hephaistos are emblematic of the Maker archetype in that they are not the primary creator gods. Nor is Zeus for that matter, but he is the supreme god of the Olympians and stands for the Greeks in place of the older gods who emerged from Chaos, especially since the original eminence from Chaos and creator from herself is Gaia, the feminine principle of Earth. And as the Greeks developed an ordered philosophy, the mess of creation became something to master and overcome--to the point where eventually, Man (with a capital M) is responsible for giving order to it, not Zeus or any of the other gods.

But the creation of all by gods who remain at a remove from the mortal worlds they have created, is a very common mythic and theological idea. One name for it is *deus absconditus*, the god who has created and departed from our mortal world and remains somewhere, invisible and untouchable. The Maker gods and the blacksmiths are the gods who remain connected to humans and mortality. And while other gods, also children of the oldest and most primordial creators, can be appealed to, it is the Maker gods who contribute to the good of material life on earth.

In African mythologies, Ogun and other makers actually complete the work of creation of humanity. They break the clay beings at the knees with their hammers so they will bend. They give them markings, like the tattoos and scarifications that are sacred to Ogun, to make them recognizable to each other as belonging to the race, to the tribe, to humanity. Ogun is worshipped by millions today;

Hephaistos is little known though the Greeks prayed to him for a good material life, and for the *techne* to build houses and make tools (and his temple in Athens by the way is the best preserved of all Greek temples, the least marred by time), but we has receded for us into unfamiliarity. Not so for Prometheus, whom we see all the time. If you think about it, you know that his myth is very alive. He's a creator, an inventor, the spirit of innovation.

And, like Ogun and Hephaistos, though not lamed, he is not a stranger to suffering and pain. He keeps a secret, which is another reason why Zeus punishes him.

The Makers, the Smiths (which is another word for making of course) are the closest of all gods to human life--with some help from another group of deities we'll come to in a moment.



[Slide 11]

Just so you can see, the Smith gods are myriad, and many cultures contain more than one divine smith. This should not be surprising since smiths and possessors of techne generally (like shipbuilders, masons and architects) could travel widely, and kings competed for their services, which lent luster to their own reputations and legacies.

Ptah is one of the oldest, the Egyptian god of craft. Hephaistos by the way was the special patron of the Athenian craft guilds, the groups who kept the economy afloat through high-quality production of goods and who funded in large part the ceremonial life of Athens. Their quarter, the Keramikos of Athens, lies just below the Acropolis, and looked across at the Temple of Hephaistos at the side of the Athenian Agoura, the place of marketing and exchange and the craft guilds would have largely funded its construction.

Some of you will know a lot more about Ptah than I, but one interesting thing is that small images of him were anciently carried in trading boats in the Mediterranean this may be what gave him the reputation of dwarfishness, which we'll get more into later since the connection of the fairytale Dwarf to magic and the mysteries of Earth is vast. These Ptah figures were apotropaic--meant to warn off danger and protect the carriers. They are examples of what you will see in many smithys today, a forge-bogey. Potters make and keep them them, to help control kiln firing. You may know someone who does.

Fire is deadly, scary; it's also mischievous, unpredictable, alive. We need all the help we can get in both getting its benefits and to avoid being burned. Fire is never our friend. But the Smiths are, in their usually gruff way.

Which is also why you see a dwarf. Rumpelstilzchen is standing in for the rest of his brethren. And showing us their usual attitude, though they do us great favors on the sly, and being older than dirt-- they show up in many mythologies, but especially in Norse myth are among the oldest entities of creation who are spirits of magic and making.

Wayland Smith is the Anglo-Germanic representative, and if you leave something for him to repair, he or his Dwarf cohort will cause it to reappear where you left it, in perfect condition.

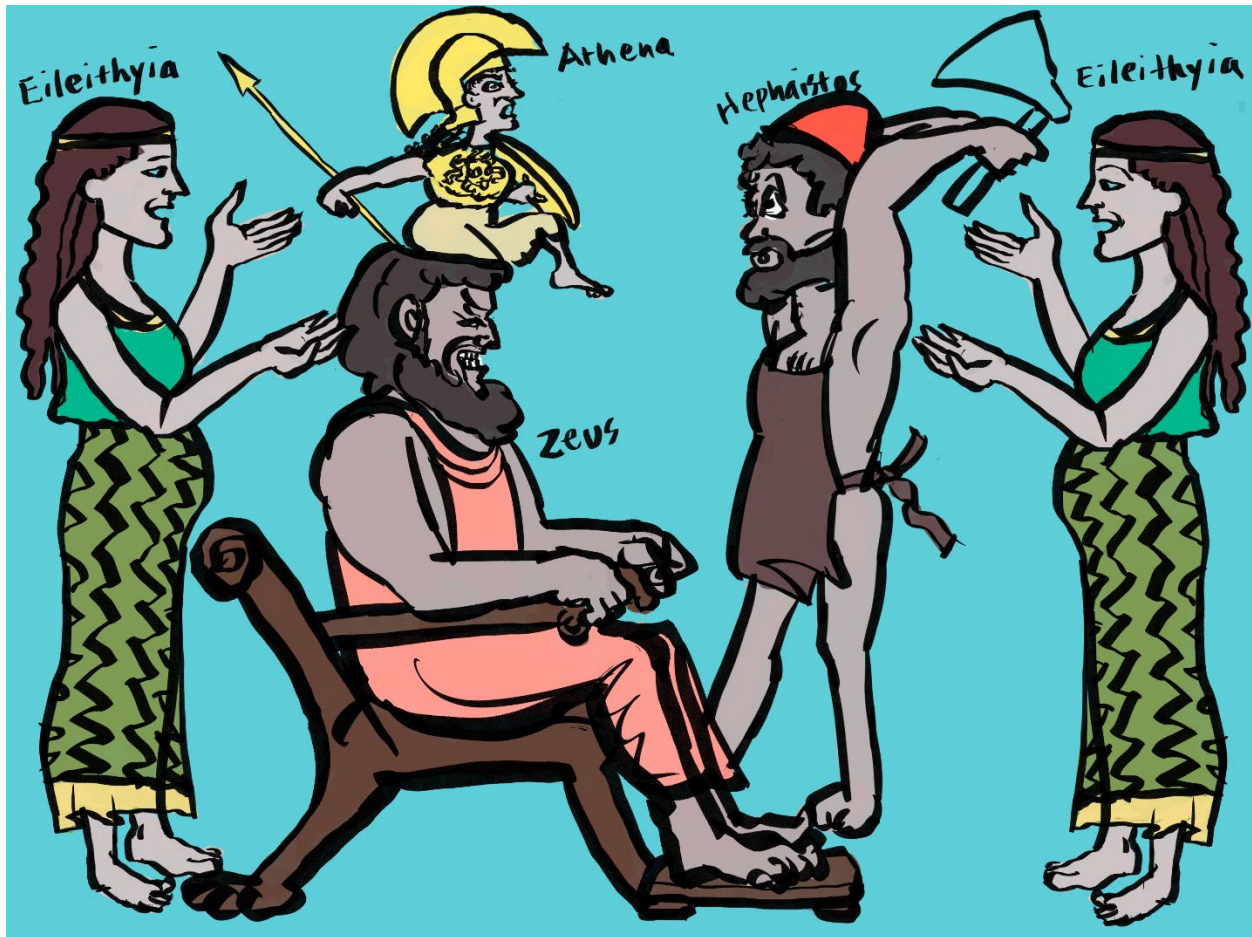
Ilmarinen is famous for his importance in the Finnish epic of the Kalevala, and he too is associated with magical making, crafting tools for the other gods out of things that don't exist, like bird spit or the sound of a cat's tread.

Tvastar is the Hindu Smith, maker of weapons but also a world-maker. The Creator god Brahma is a Smith, who dreams our reality. Tvastar helps us shape it.

And Kothar-wa-Khasis, one of the older of the brethren, a Ugaritic (Canaan) god, the architect and smith of Baal and his pantheon. Scholars have long looked for the cultural origins of the Greek gods, and Hephaistos has remained a mystery, but I think that we will find out much more as we learn more from the archeology of the lands east of the Greeks, the eastern Mediterranean, Asia Minor and eastern Europe--where by the way, archaeological study was suppressed because the Soviets feared its potential to stoke cultural pride and nationalism. We have a lot to learn. The Ba'al Cycle, in which Kothar-wa-Khasis plays a large part, was discovered in the last century and the texts are dated currently to between the 14th and 12th century bce.

I have to wrap my head around that!

One reason I think we have some justification to think that Heph is possibly an avatar of Kothar is that the scene in the Iliad when Thetis comes to the Olympic workshop of Hephaistos, the greeting scene is described almost to the last detail as a scene of Kothar greeting Lady Athirat of the Sea, a sister-goddess.



[Slide 12]

Pretty much everyone knows the story of Athena being birthed fully-grown from the head of Zeus. What you may or may not also know is that Hephaistos midwifed her with a blow to the head of Zeus with an axe. And by the way, Zeus is pregnant with her because he swallowed her mother--wait for it--the sea-goddess Metis. This is why Athena is the superb strategist. She has Metis to spare. If you remember she is also a shapehifter, and her disguise to guide Telemachus, son of Odysseus, in recovering his kingdom, is where we meet Mentor, in character and concept.

But the two figures flanking this event become very important. Indeed in some vase paintings of this scene, it is they who clearly midwife the birth--Heph is almost an afterthought. These are the Eileithyia--sometimes a single goddess, sometimes paired. They are birth goddesses.

But I also think they have a much wider significance than what we understand from the Greeks, who became rather goddess-averse.

Kothar, pretty much our oldest Smith in in the bunch (possibly, but not necessarily, excepting Ptah and Tvastar) is associated with a complex known as The Wise Ones.



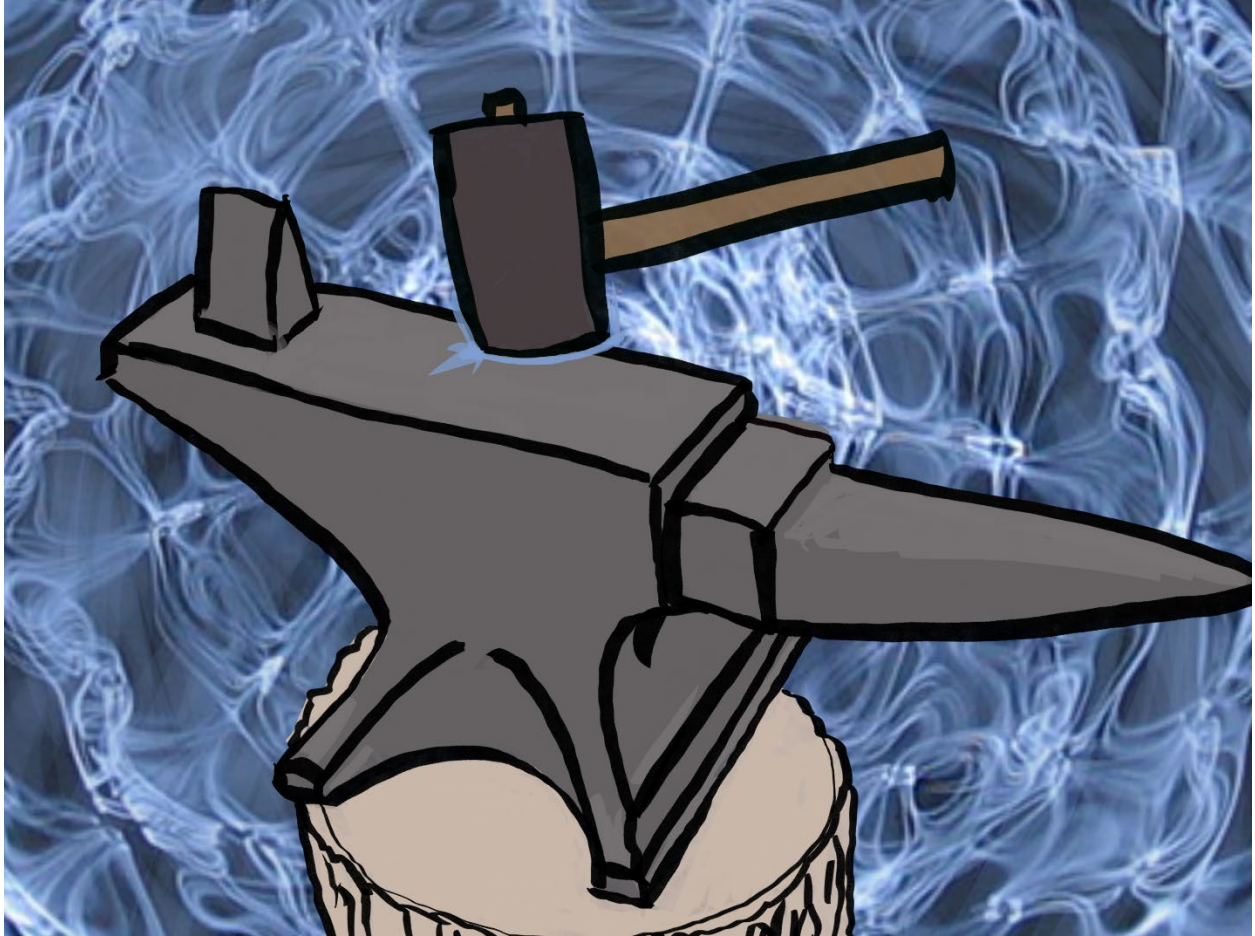
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We've focused today largely on the masculine aspect, but there is so much more to all of this mythology, it's marvelous.

The Wise Ones I believe, are collectively responsible for manifest human life and welfare. They are magical, and one thing they have in common with their cohort, which includes the deepest aspects of the Maker archetype, is that they sing, they chant, they effect magic through vibration, through song and meter.

I love this image of the Meso American birth goddess, and I want for us to spend more time looking at the fundamental relationship of feminine and masculine energies at the core of the archetype. I think this has been ignored simply because of misogyny; and the Goddess movement itself has been a start on a needed correction.

A challenge: how are we to understand this collaboration? And translate it into the future of technology for us all?



[Slide 14]

There is a mytheme that appears virtually in every metalworking mythic culture; and earlier than metalworking itself as well, we find this image: the blow of the hammer on the anvil is the origin of poetic meter, of powerful song. As we learn more about the cosmos, we are beginning to understand the physics of sound and vibration. It's not for nothing that in many mythologies, creation begins with sound "the Word."

Poeisis is the root word for Poetry. Etymologies and the myths tell us Its fundamental meaning is "making." The Wise Ones make this world with powerful song--powerful magic. Let's all put that in our pipes and smoke it!

SO what do you think: what is the "oldest story in the world?"



[Slide 14]

This is it: to the best determination of current linguistic modeling, a story the researchers who published on this finding a couple of years ago, named "The Blacksmith and the Devil."

This image is taken from an illustration of it in the earliest editions of Grimm's Tales, but you have to imagine this, the researchers tell us, that this is a Bronze Age tale. I think it's earlier.

The gist is that a mortal Maker (and this can be female, like the girl who with her Metis outsmarts Rumpelstilzchen) who is offered a trade by the Devil (or a djinn or evil spirit): I will give you the ability you most covet, in exchange for your soul (or something of equal worth and mortal danger).

The Blacksmith agrees. In the Grimm version, it's the ability to bond any substance to any other. The smith promptly uses it to bind the Devil to a huge tree. Like gods, this spirit may be immortal, and perhaps not killed, but it can be immobilized by binding. We know that at the essence of Metis is the concept of binding. Our tricky old Smith is metistic.

The mytheme of binding, the essence of Metis, the very deepest nature of the primordial Ocean gods, the lineage that springs from very the first children of Gaia, is what makes me buy that this is a very old story indeed.

In a moment I will open the floor.

Ground rules -- I will try to follow what you have said in the Google doc. I won't have easy access otherwise to our Zoom fellows.

So I ask you to use Google if you can: <https://bit.ly/2YvZTR3>

If you can't we'll be as Metistic as we can, and with your cooperation muddle through. I will try to voice questions in the order they appear in the Google doc, and I'll give a shot at answering, but your thoughts on a question we have on the table too are valuable. If you see someone else's comment that you're also interested in, call it out.

And if we miss, skip or overlook, we'll still have a document that we can play with afterwards. And remember we'll schedule a Talk-Talk for July. That will be an open dialogue, in Zoom.

Okay let's try this: the floor is open.

WHAT DO YOU THINK?