



# The Fault in our Stars

Aspects of Hephaistos and his use in literature

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05-08-2019

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## Introduction

1. claudus autem dicitur, quia per naturam numquam rectus est ignis.  
(Servius Honoratus, *In Vergilii Carmina Commentarii*, ad VIII.414.)

*But he is said to be lame, because, by nature, fire is never straight.*

*Ignipotens*, the one ruling the fire. Servius Honoratus comments on this word in Vergil's *Aeneid* to make clear what Hephaistos' epithet means, and why this god is limping. Fire moves in irregular ways, so the master of fire must too. It is a fact Hephaistos is the only lame god in the Greek pantheon, but the question arises how that could be and why that is the case. Is it just because of his association with fire, or could more be hiding in Hephaistos' figure? If the answer to the first question is a simple "yes", Hephaistos' imperfection remains an oddity in our view of godlike status and the blessedness they possess. If the answer proves to be "no", the underlying causes must be further examined and the figure of Hephaistos would be more interesting than previously thought. In this paper, I will discuss the being of Hephaistos and his status in Greek mythology, and through the analysis I will try to answer my main question: What is the role of Hephaistos in the Greek Pantheon, how does his limping foot fits in his persona and his divine nature, and how is he therefore used in Greek literature?

How a god is used tells us about the interpretation the ancient Greeks had of the god. The gods have their function in the daily life of the Greeks, and the stories that are told about Hephaistos can further explain how the Greeks perceived their gods. That will give us an insight in how the Greeks would see the gods in general.

This paper will be discussing Hephaistos' function in Greek mythology and his use in literature and rituals. Material culture, for the sake of the scope of this paper, will be left out, with the exception of one inscription about the Hephaistia. Although the vase paintings and iconography could tell us more about his perception, Hephaistos' role in literature could tell us more about the general concept of the smithing god.

On the subject of Hephaistos himself, not many papers and books have been written. Although this fits perfectly in the persona of Hephaistos, being neither a hero or a villain,<sup>1</sup> this would leave not many points of discussion. Fortunately, De Ciantis and Rinon both have written about Hephaistos specifically. De Ciantis, in her dissertation, discusses Hephaistos' physical appearance and his crafts, and compares it to other mythologies and folklore with similar occurrences.<sup>2</sup> Rinon wants to completely humanize Hephaistos in the Homeric poems, using the different ways he fell and how his role in the first book of the *Iliad* could be explained.<sup>3</sup> Thalmann sees Hephaistos, after he discovered his wife committed adultery, as a scapegoat for peace with the gods,<sup>4</sup> while Holmberg and Newton argue this myth is used as an example for Odysseus and compare Odysseus to Hephaistos himself.<sup>5</sup> Brown, however, sees the gods as more moral beings, and argues the gods use their laughter purely to shame Ares and Aphrodite, instead of laughing

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<sup>1</sup> Dolmage, 2006, p. 130.

<sup>2</sup> De Ciantis, 2005, pp. 148-149, 157-168.

<sup>3</sup> Rinon, 2006, pp. 4, 6, 8.

<sup>4</sup> Thalmann, 1988, p. 24.

<sup>5</sup> Holmberg, 2003, p. 2; Newton, 1987, pp. 18-19.

at Hephaistos.<sup>6</sup> All articles I could find regard Hephaistos as a lower god, so we will research if that is ratified.

As mentioned before, this paper will mainly discuss literary sources. First, I will review four mythological topics about Hephaistos: his birth and the two falls from Olympus; Hephaistos' binding of Hera and his eventual return to the gods; the adultery of his wife Aphrodite; and his mythical children, including Pandora, although she is not a true child. Then I will deliberate on the way Hephaistos is revered in Greek life through rituals of fire and the festival of Hephaistos, the Hephaistia. My second chapter will then combine the found similarities and patterns, and order them in five distinct categories, to explain his different functions in mythology: Hephaistos as an asexual being, Hephaistos as a protector, his trickster aspects and his own limitations, his role as peacemaker, Hephaistos as an intermediary, and finally, Hephaistos as the human creator. From that analysis I will draw a conclusion on how Hephaistos is used in the Greek literature and what that tells us about the god of smithing and fire.

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<sup>6</sup> Brown, 1989, p. 286.

## Chapter 1: All about Hephaistos

Hephaistos has appeared in many stories in ancient Greek mythology. Regarding Hephaistos' role as the smithing god, one of the most famous stories is the passage in the *Iliad*, where he crafts the new weapons of Achilles.<sup>7</sup> Here, we also come to know about the golden maidens he made himself, who assist him during the crafting process. Many more tales have been told about this god, and in this chapter, I will delve deeper in the subject of his being. To accomplish this goal, I will firstly discuss his role in three different mythological stories: the birth and crippling of Hephaistos, the binding of Hera and the return to Olympos, and the song of Ares and Aphrodite. In these myths, we could find some common elements and characteristics of Hephaistos that could tell us more about the god he was. Secondly, I will focus on the children Hephaistos begot, and what the implications are regarding their birth or persona. Thirdly, I will discuss the different kinds of reverence he enjoyed. What cults were celebrated in ancient Greece, and what kind of rituals were practiced to honour the god of fire? Finally, I will combine the found aspects and try to distil the main characteristics of Hephaistos. In this way I will try to answer how he became the god he came to be.

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<sup>7</sup> Homer, *Iliad*, 18.XVIII.417-418.

## Hephaistos in the Mythology

Among the surviving Greek stories there are many tales in which Hephaistos plays a significant role. To placate the scope of this paper, I will focus on three different kinds of myths containing something about Hephaistos: His birth and source of his handicap; the binding of Hera and his return to Olympos; and finally, the so-called Song of Ares and Aphrodite, where Hephaistos captures his wife and her lover in his strongest fetters yet. After that, I will discuss the children of Hephaistos.

### Hephaistos' Crippling Parents

According to most mythological stories, Hephaistos is born from Hera, and Zeus acts as a father figure to him. The following passage from the *Iliad*, where Hephaistos speaks during a fight between Hera and Zeus, lets Hephaistos introduce them both as his parents:

- μητρι δ' ἐγὼ παράφημι, καὶ αὐτῇ περ νοεούση  
πατρὶ φίλω ἐπὶ ἧρα φέρειν Δί, ὄφρα μὴ αὖτε  
νεικείησι πατήρ, σὺν δ' ἡμῖν δαῖτα ταράξῃ.  
(Homer, *Iliad*, vv. I.577-579.)

*I advise my mother, and she would certainly apprehend  
To act kindly to beloved father Zeus, so that father would  
not again scold, or disturb the meal with us.<sup>8</sup>*

Hephaistos clearly states he would advise his *μητρι*, Hera, to be submissive to *πατρὶ φίλω ... Δί*, his dear father Zeus. Given the fact that Zeus is usually addressed by the gods as their father, and is their actual father in most cases, this is not a weird statement. Another instance where Zeus would be the procreator of Hephaistos is seen in the *Odyssey*, in the second song of Demodocus:

- αὐτὰρ ἐγὼ  
γε ἠπεδανὸς γενόμην· ἀτὰρ οὐ τί μοι αἴτιος ἄλλος,  
ἀλλὰ τοκῆε δύω, τὼ μὴ γείνασθαι ὄφελλον.  
(Homer, *Odyssey*, vv. VIII.310-312.)

*But I was born crippled;  
But not another is guilty of this for me,  
But the two who bore me, they ought to have never conceived me.*

The dual forms of both *τοκῆε* and *δύω* strongly suggest Zeus and Hera had a part in his generation, and he wishes “they both hadn’t brought me forth.” These two notions prove Hephaistos is born with Zeus’ involvement: He calls Zeus his *πατήρ*, and explicitly states both of them had begotten him. This is explicitly supported by Plato in his *Kritias*:

- ἄλλοι μὲν οὖν κατ’ ἄλλους τόπους κληρουχῆσαντες θεῶν ἐκεῖνα ἐκόσμουν, Ἥφαιστος δὲ κοινὴν καὶ Ἀθηνᾶ φύσιν ἔχοντες, ἅμα μὲν ἀδελφὴν ἐκ ταύτου πατρός, ἅμα δὲ φιλοσοφία φιλοτεχνία τε ἐπὶ τὰ αὐτὰ ἐλθόντες, οὕτω μίαν ἄμφω λήξιν τήνδε τὴν χώραν εἰλήχατον ὡς οἰκείαν καὶ πρόσφορον ἀρετῇ καὶ φρονήσει πεφυκυῖαν, ἄνδρας δὲ ἀγαθοὺς ἐμποιήσαντες αὐτόχθονας ἐπὶ νοῦν ἔθεσαν τὴν τῆς πολιτείας τάξιν...

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<sup>8</sup> All translations are my own, unless otherwise stated.

(Plato, *Kritias*, 109c4-d2.)

*Others, then, of the gods divided places along the others and ordered these things, and Hephaistos and Athena, having a common nature, simultaneously being a sister from the same father and also coming to the same terms in their love of wisdom and art, both had received in that way one and this area by lot as one assignment, and after they had made good men, born from the same ground, they placed in their mind the way of ruling a city-state...*

However, other stories are known where Zeus plays no part in the conception of Hephaistos:

5. Ἥρη δ' Ἥφαιστον κλυτὸν οὐ φιλότῃτι μιγεῖσα  
γείνατο, καὶ ζαμένησε καὶ ἤρισεν ᾧ παρακοίτῃ,  
ἐκ πάντων παλάμησι κεκασμένον Οὐρανιῶνων.  
(Hesiod, *Theogony*, vv. 927-929.)

*But Hera bore renowned Hephaistos, not having been mingled in love,  
And she put forth all her fury and she argued with her husband,  
Hephaistos, the one surpassing all of Ouranos' offspring in handicraft.*

Here, Hephaistos is born without the seed of Zeus, conceived by Hera by herself οὐ φιλότῃτι μιγεῖσα. Roscher gives an explanation some scholia on the *Iliad* provide, that Hera must have been pregnant before she was married to Zeus, or that Hephaistos must have been conceived by Zeus before their official marriage.<sup>9</sup> Roscher, however, does not believe these statements to be valid,<sup>10</sup> since Hesiod wrote a few lines prior:

6. Αὐτὸς δ' ἐκ κεφαλῆς γλαυκώπιδα γείνατ' Ἀθήνην...  
(Hesiod, *Theogony*, v. 924.)

*But Zeus himself gave birth from his own head to bright-eyed Athena...*

The notion Hera bore Hephaistos without Zeus would then harshly contrast the birth of Athena, portrayed in this line. Hera's anger would then be illustrated by her conceiving Hephaistos on her own, instead of Zeus bearing Athena on his own. The idea of Hephaistos being born from parthenogenesis would be more likely in this case. This would imply a strong connection between Hera and Hephaistos, which would explain the fact he turns against Zeus to protect Hera.<sup>11</sup>

The commentator Servius further explains the parthenogenesis of Hephaistos. He states:

7. ...quam aerem esse constat, ex quo fulmina procreantur. ideo autem Vulcanus de femore Iunonis fingitur natus, quod fulmina de imo aere nascuntur...  
(Servius Honoratus, *In Vergilii Carmina Commentarii*, ad VIII.454.)

*...who [i.e. Iuno] corresponds to being the air, from which lightning is created. That is why Vulcan is told to be born from the thigh of Iuno, because lightning is born from the deepest of the air...*

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<sup>9</sup> Roscher, 1890, p. 2048.

<sup>10</sup> Ibid.

<sup>11</sup> Roscher, 1890, p. 2048.

In this passage, Servius describes the birth of Hephaistos as a natural phenomenon. The heavenly mother is portrayed as being heaven herself, and, since Vulcan/Hephaistos is being identified with the lightning bolts he creates for his father, Hephaistos is born from Hera's thigh, and, given this unusual natal exit, would have happened without any input of Zeus.<sup>12</sup>

To conclude this segment, in most myths Hephaistos is born solely from Hera, who begot him without having intercourse with Zeus.<sup>13</sup> To further address his crippled state, we'll look at the two mythic falls of Hephaistos. Firstly, the fall following the first discussed passage:

8. ἤδη γάρ με καὶ ἄλλοτ' ἀλεξέμεναι μεμαῶτα  
ῥῖψε ποδὸς τεταγῶν ἀπὸ βηλοῦ θεσπεσίῳ,  
πᾶν δ' ἤμαρ φερόμην, ἅμα δ' ἠελίῳ καταδύντι  
κάππεσον ἐν Λήμνῳ, ὀλίγος δ' ἔτι θυμὸς ἐνήεν·  
ἐνθά με Σίντιες ἄνδρες ἄφαρ κομίσαντο πεσόντα.”  
(Homer, *Iliad*, vv. I.590-594.)

*Because he also threw me off the divine threshold,  
while I wanted to help in another time, having seized me by the foot,  
and the whole day I fell, and simultaneously with the sun setting  
I fell down on Lemnos, and little heart was left;  
There the Sintian men swiftly took care of me, the fallen one.”*

As the fall that took the entire day came to an end, ὀλίγος δ' ἔτι θυμὸς ἐνήεν. This could mean he was utterly broken, and his crippled foot could originate from that fall. However, in this text, nothing is made clear about that particular subject.

Another fall of Hephaistos occurs in the *Iliad*. In the eighteenth book, Hephaistos rejoices when Thetis visits him and he tells about the time he was thrown from the Olympos by someone other than Zeus:

9. ἦ μ' ἐσάωσ' ὅτε μ' ἄλγος ἀφίκετο τῆλε πεσόντα  
μητρὸς ἐμῆς ἰότητι κυνώπιδος, ἦ μ' ἐθέλησε  
κρύψαι χωλὸν ἐόντα· τότε ἂν πάθον ἄλγεα θυμῶ,  
εἰ μή μ' Εὐρυνόμη τε Θέτις θ' ὑπεδέξατο κόλπῳ...  
(Homer, *Iliad*, vv. XVIII.395-398.)

*[Thetis], who saved me when great pain came to me, having fallen from afar,  
Through the desire of my dog-eyed mother, who wanted to hide me  
Because I am crippled; I would have suffered pains in my heart,  
If Eurynome and Thetis had not received me in their bosom...*

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<sup>12</sup> This, of course, makes way for a slight discourse on the relationship between Hephaistos and Dionysus, since Servius explicitly states Hephaistos is born from the *femur*. This is the only instance I could find that specifically connects the thigh of Hera to the birth of Hephaistos. Although I could not imagine Servius simply confusing both genealogies, this connection stays true, at least for our scholiast. I will further delve into the connection between Hephaistos and Dionysus in my description of Hephaistos' return.

<sup>13</sup> Delcourt, 1982, p. 32: Homer is the only author who gives Zeus agency in the birth of Hephaistos. Cf. Roscher, 1890, 2048: Roscher presents two alternate interpretations, to explain the birth without Zeus. The rationalist solution he calls the one where Hera would have been pregnant before she was married to Zeus, and another one, Roscher does not seem to support, would be that Zeus had conceived Hephaistos with Hera before they were married.



Hera, now, is the one who throws Hephaistos off the mountain, but not because of a fight. She was ashamed by the Hephaistos' repulsiveness and wanted to hide him, *χωλὸν ἐόντα*. This clearly states he was already crippled before this particular fall, and was even thrown off because he was crippled. Rinon tries to combine these two involuntary descents in the context of the *Iliad* by stating the fall by Zeus is the one that crippled Hephaistos, and the time Hera throws him off is a consequence of the first fall.<sup>14</sup> This, however, cannot be the truth.<sup>15</sup> Two citations will prove this point. If we will recall our second passage, Hephaistos states he is born weak and halting (*ἐγώγε ἠπεδανὸς γενόμεν*)<sup>16</sup>, so his crooked foot has been present since birth. The crippling must, therefore, have been induced during his creation and becoming. Although Homeric inconsistencies are common, nowhere in Homer it is stated Hephaistos was crippled by the fall. Therefore, this highly suggests Hephaistos' crooked state has nothing to do with Zeus' hurl. Other passages will further exemplify this statement:

10. αὐτὰρ ὃ γ' ἠπεδανὸς γέγονεν μετὰ πᾶσι θεοῖσι  
 παῖς ἐμὸς Ἥφαιστος ῥικνὸς πόδας ὄν τέκον αὐτή.  
 ῥῖψ' ἀνὰ χερσὶν ἐλοῦσα καὶ ἔμβalon εὐρέϊ πόντῳ...  
 (Homeric Hymn III: To Apollo, vv. 316-318.)

*But he was born limping, among all the gods,  
 My child Hephaistos, crooked in his feet, who I myself bore.  
 I threw him down, having him caught in my hands, and hurled him into the wide sea...*

In this Homeric hymn, Hera speaks about Zeus' misdemeanours, of which one is his sole birthing of Athena. She directly contrasts Hephaistos to Athena, by saying Athena is distinguished among the blessed gods<sup>17</sup>, and Hephaistos is *ἠπεδανὸς γέγονεν* and *ῥικνὸς πόδας*. Furthermore, Hera tries to pin our attention to the fact she bore Hephaistos, calling him *παῖς ἐμὸς* and *ὄν τέκον αὐτή*, further focussing on the contrast between Hephaistos and Athena. Zeus bore Athena, now Hera bears Hephaistos. Hephaistos has therefore been born from parthenogenesis.<sup>18</sup> The element of parthenogenesis and its implications will be discussed in chapter 2.

### Hephaistos, the Mad and the Drunk

Being thrown off by his own mother would not leave a good impression on the god of smithing. In the following myth, as summarised by the Greek rhetorician Libanius, Hephaistos takes his revenge:

11. Ῥίπτει τὸν Ἥφαιστον Ἥρα ἐξ οὐρανοῦ τῇ τοῦ παιδὸς αἰσχυνομένη χωλεία, ὃ δὲ τῇ τέχνῃ ἐχρήτο. Καὶ ἐν θαλάττῃ σεσωσμένος ὑπὸ δαιμόνων θαλαττίων πολλὰ μὲν καὶ ἄλλα ἐδημιούργει, τὰ μὲν Εὐρυνόμη, τὰ δὲ Θέτιδι, παρ' ὧν περισέσωστο, ποιεῖ δὲ καὶ θρόνον τῇ

<sup>14</sup> Rinon, 2006, p. 4.

<sup>15</sup> Barbanera, 2013, p. 63.

<sup>16</sup> Homer, *Odyssey*, vv. VIII.316.

<sup>17</sup> *Homeric Hymn III: To Apollo*, v. 315.

<sup>18</sup> Cf. Richardson, 2010, p. 128: On the basis of this being a Homeric hymn, and the fact that Hera also bears Typhon to get even with Zeus, Richardson concludes this particular instance would not refer to a parthenogenetical birth. The Hesiodic account would be illogical, since Homer attributes Hephaistos' becoming to both Zeus and Hera. He takes *αὐτή* as meaning Hephaistos is a child of Hera and Zeus, not of Zeus and another woman. I don't share this point of view. *αὐτή* is, in my opinion, an adjective with the hidden subject of *τέκον*, which would then have the meaning of one's *self*. This, together with the fact the hymn clearly states Athena is born without Hera (v. 314) and the contrast between Athena and Hephaistos, would mean it must have been just Hera who conceived and bore Hephaistos.

μητρὶ δῶρον ἀφανεῖς ἔχοντα δεσμούς καὶ πέμπει. Καὶ ἡ μάλα τε ἦσθη τῷ δῶρῳ καὶ καθιζάνει καὶ ἐδέθη καὶ ὁ λύσων οὐκ ἦν. 2. Βουλὴ δὲ γίνεται θεῶν περὶ τῆς εἰς οὐρανὸν ἀναβάσεως Ἡφαίστου. Μόνον γὰρ ἂν ἐκεῖνον καὶ λῦσαι. Σιγῶντων οὖν τῶν ἄλλων καὶ ἀπορούντων Ἄρης ὑπισχνεῖται καὶ ἐλθὼν πράττει μὲν οὐδέν, αἰσχρῶς δὲ ἀπαλλάττεται πυρσοῖς αὐτὸν δειματώσαντος Ἡφαίστου. Ταλαιπωρουμένης δὲ τῆς Ἥρας ἤρχετο μετὰ οἴνου Διόνυσος καὶ διὰ μέθης εἶχεν Ἡφαιστον ἐπόμενον. 3. ὁ δὲ ἐλθὼν καὶ τὴν μητέρα λύσας ποιεῖ τῆς Ἥρας εὐεργέτην τὸν Διόνυσον. ἡ δὲ αὐτὸν ἀμειβομένη πείθει τοὺς οὐρανίους θεοὺς ἓνα τῶν οὐρανίων θεῶν καὶ Διόνυσον εἶναι. (Libanius, *Narrationes*, III.7.1-3.)

1. Hera throws Hephaistos from the heaven, ashamed of the lameness of the child, and he used this scheme. And after he was saved by sea-gods he made many and other things too, some for Eurynome, some for Thetis, by whom he was saved, and he also makes a throne for his mother, disguising it as a gift, although it had chains, and he sends it to her. And she was very delighted by the gift and sits on it and was bound and the one to free her was not there. 2. A meeting of the gods happened about the return of Hephaistos to the heaven. For he alone could free her. While the others kept silent and did not know what to do, Ares takes it upon himself and after he came there, did nothing, and he was disgracefully warded off by the fires of Hephaistos, who frightened him. While Hera endured hardship, Dionysus came with wine and through inebriety had Hephaistos following. 3. After he arrived and freed his mother, he makes Dionysus a benefactor of Hera. And to repay him, she convinces the heavenly gods that Dionysus is also one of the heavenly gods.

This myth is commonly depicted on vase paintings, although his return is more common.<sup>19</sup> Hephaistos' lameness clearly comes before Hera throws him off the Olympos and he is hurled from the mountain because of Hera's shame of his crooked feet. Hephaistos *in absentia* binds Hera on a chair, to take his revenge on his mother. Ares is the first god who tries to bring back Hephaistos, but fails, because Hephaistos succeeds in driving him away with his fires. Clearly, this is an instance where the lame god is victorious over the god of war. It takes another god, specifically the god of wine and levity, to convince Hephaistos to come back to Olympos and *unbind* Hera. Dionysus, himself a weakling<sup>20</sup>, knows he cannot overcome Hephaistos by using sheer force, as Ares has tried, and has to persuade Hephaistos with cunning and trickery. Hephaistos' wits frequently come into play, and in the second chapter we will discuss this further. The antithesis between Dionysus and Hephaistos could also be elaborated on: Dionysus is commonly seen as a *loosener*<sup>21</sup>, while Hephaistos is the god who *binds*<sup>22</sup>. It will take someone who unbinds the mind to make the binder be loosener.

### The Song of Ares and Aphrodite

The next myth regarding Hephaistos is the second song of Alcinous' bard, Demodocus.<sup>23</sup> Aphrodite, Hephaistos' wife in this instance, is sleeping with Ares, and Hephaistos finds out

<sup>19</sup> Hedreen, 2004, pp. 39-40.

<sup>20</sup> Hedreen, 2004, p. 39.

<sup>21</sup> Hoffman, 1987, pp. 112, 114.

<sup>22</sup> Cf. Aeschylus, *Prometheus Bound*, vv. 1-81, where Hephaistos is the one who binds Prometheus, under orders of Zeus; cf. Libanius, *Narrationes*, III.7.1.8-9, where the chair Hephaistos sends Hera has been mechanized to bind Hera. See also Faraone, 1987, pp. 259-260.

<sup>23</sup> Homer, *Odyssey*, vv. VIII.266-366.

because the Sun tells him.<sup>24</sup> Hephaistos devises a plan to trap the extramarital lovers and to expose their deeds to the rest of the gods. He hopes to take revenge on Ares and Aphrodite, and sets himself against the god of war:

12. φιλέει δ' αἰδήλον Ἄρηα,  
οὐνεχ' ὁ μὲν καλός τε καὶ ἀρτίπος, αὐτὰρ ἐγὼ γε  
ἠπεδανὸς γενόμεν...  
(Homer, *Odyssey*, VIII.309-311.)

*... and she loves Ares who destroys,  
Because he is beautiful and swift of feet, but I  
Am born halting...*

The sharp contrast between Ares and Hephaistos is named: Ares is ἀρτίπος, and Hephaistos is ἠπεδανός. When the gods of love and war are caught in Hephaistos' chains, he invites the gods to indulge in his victory:

13. ἀλλ' ὄψεσθ', ἵνα τὼ γε καθεύδεται ἐν φιλότῃ,  
εἰς ἐμὰ δέμνια βάντες...  
(Homer, *Odyssey*, vv. VIII.313-314.)

*But you will see, where they both slept in sexual entanglement,  
after treading into my fetters...*

Hephaistos claims his superiority over Ares and wants his dowry back from Zeus. The gods arrive, and the following happens:

14. ἄσβεστος δ' ἄρ' ἐνώρτο γέλως μακάρεσσι θεοῖσι  
τέχνας εἰσορώσι πολύφρονος Ἡφαίστοιο.  
(Homer, *Odyssey*, vv. VIII.326-327.)

*And an inextinguishable laughter arose from the blessed gods,  
having seen the crafts of inventive Hephaistos.*

The gods keep laughing, and one of them exclaims:

15. “οὐκ ἀρετᾶ κακὰ ἔργα· κίχάνει τοι βραδὺς ὠκύν,  
ὡς καὶ νῦν Ἡφαιστος ἐὼν βραδὺς εἴλεν Ἄρηα,  
ὠκύτερόν περ ἐόντα θεῶν οἱ Ὀλυμπον ἔχουσιν,  
χωλὸς ἐὼν τέχνησι...  
(Homer, *Odyssey*, vv. VIII.329-332.)

*“Bad deeds don't thrive; slow overtakes fast,  
For Hephaistos, although he is slow, has captured Ares,  
Who is by far the fastest of the gods who live on Olympos,  
With his skills, because he is limping...*

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<sup>24</sup> Garvie, 1994, p. 296: Helios is presented here, because the god can see everything from his daily travels. It would also be fitting that a fire god like Hephaistos would be warned by another light bringer.

Not one god quits his<sup>25</sup> laughter, and Hephaistos would probably be happy at this outcome. However, a remark made by Hermes places the γέλως in a new light:

16. “αἶ γὰρ τοῦτο γένοιτο, ἄναξ ἑκατηβόλ’ Ἄπολλον.  
δεσμοὶ μὲν τρις τόσσοι ἀπείρονες ἀμφὶς ἔχοιεν,  
ὕμεῖς δ’ εἰσορόφτε θεοὶ πᾶσαί τε θέαιναί,  
αὐτὰρ ἐγὼν εὖδοιμι παρὰ χρυσέῃ Ἀφροδίτῃ.”  
(Homer, *Odyssey*, vv. VIII.339-342.)

*“For if this would happen, ruler Apollo, hitting from afar,  
Let thrice as many unending fetters have us both,  
And may you gods and all the goddesses witness  
As long as I could lie next to golden Aphrodite.”*

The gods have another good laugh, all but one of them; Poseidon, not laughing, urges Hephaistos to free Ares and says:

17. “Λῦσον· ἐγὼ δέ τοι αὐτὸν ὑπίσχομαι, ὡς σὺ κελεύεις,  
τίσειν αἴσιμα πάντα μετ’ ἀθανάτοισι θεοῖσιν...”  
(Homer, *Odyssey*, vv. VIII.347-349)

*“Let him loose; I promise he himself will pay, as you demand,  
all of what is rightful, in the presence of the immortal gods...”*

Hephaistos refuses, because what good would it do if:

18. εἴ κεν Ἄρης οἴχοιτο χρέος καὶ δεσμὸν ἀλύξας;  
(Homer, *Odyssey*, vv. VIII.353.)

*... if Ares escapes his obligations, after he also evades my bonding?”*

Only after Poseidon guarantees Hephaistos will get what he’s due, Hephaistos agrees to free the pair, after which they immediately flee to their own habitats: Ares to Thrace and Aphrodite to Cyprus. Aphrodite does not return to Hephaistos, as far as we are aware, and from this moment on, Hephaistos would probably be divorced from Aphrodite.<sup>26</sup>

This particular myth has some strong implications. Hephaistos is compared to Ares, and maybe a bit to Aphrodite. First of all, of course, Ares is ἀρτίπος, and Hephaistos is ἠπεδανός. Hephaistos also mentions two other qualities of the trapped god: he is αἰδηλος and καλός. Judging from the rest of the mythologies, physical beauty is indeed not one of Hephaistos traits.<sup>27</sup> Ares brings war, Hephaistos brings protection.<sup>28</sup> Yet, the weaker of the two is victorious over the stronger, which

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<sup>25</sup> Homer, *Odyssey*, vv. VIII.324: only the male gods are participating in this game of shame. Males are shaming, while females are ashamed to see this display of indecency.

<sup>26</sup> Cf. Homer, *Iliad*, vv. XVIII.382-383; Hesiod, *Theogony*, vv. 945-946. In these passages, Hephaistos is not married to Aphrodite, but to Aglaia, or Charis. Aglaia being one of the Graces, and Charis just being Grace.

<sup>27</sup> Cf. Herodotus, *Historiae*, III.37: Herodotus describes the deformity of Hephaistos, by comparing them to the Pathaikai.

<sup>28</sup> Faraone, 1987, pp. 259-260.

is emphasized by the laughing gods in passage 14. How he does it, is through his wits. He must use his cunning, for he cannot overcome Ares in any other way, and the gods agree. This would point to the direction of the *trickster* god: a god, weak in strength, but strong in mind.

Furthermore, Hephaistos seems to be the only male god to suffer a divorce.<sup>29</sup> This could tell us something about Hephaistos himself. To address his marriage to Aphrodite first: De Ciantis notes two different stories about how Hephaistos became married to the beautiful Aphrodite. In one instance, Hephaistos has begged for her hand in marriage, but in another, Aphrodite is given to Hephaistos by Hera, because Aphrodite and her way of living is detrimental to Hera's ideal of marriage and domestic peace.<sup>30</sup> Aphrodite's promiscuity would then be bound by Hephaistos to protect the institutionalized marriage. That, of course, does not seem to work out as well as both of them might have hoped. Hephaistos seems to be remarried to one of Aphrodite's Graces. Hephaistos would then always be married to one of the most beautiful wives anyone could wed, although he himself is the complete opposite of beautiful.<sup>31</sup>

ἄπαις, ὁ

In other early epics, Hephaistos also doesn't seem to produce any children in the "normal" way, and must get them through other means. A creating god unable to procreate might even hint at a decrease in Hephaistos' virility. Three "exceptions" are Palaimonios, Periphetes, and Erichthonios.<sup>32</sup> Apollonius Rhodius wrote about Palaimonios, one of the Argonauts:

19. σὺν δὲ Παλαιμόνιος Λέρνου πάϊς Ὀλενίοιο,  
Λέρνου ἐπὶ κλησιν, γενεὴν γε μὲν Ἡφαίστοιο·  
τούνεκ' ἔην πόδε σιφλός...  
(Apollonius Rhodius, *Argonautica*, I.202-205.)

*With them [i.e. the Argonauts] was Palaimonios, son of Lernos from Olenos,  
Called the son Lernos, his birth was in reality from Hephaistos;  
Because of him he was defective in his feet...*

Palaimonios does not appear in other texts. Valerius Flaccus doesn't mention him, although Apollodoros does include him in the list of Argonauts.<sup>33</sup> Hyginus also adds him to this list, but only mentions Lernos as the father.<sup>34</sup> A certain remark is interesting: Palaimonios is crippled, because he is the son of Hephaistos. A godly descent would certainly be fitting for an Argonaut, but how literally we should take this statement is unknown. No other traditions speak of this genealogy, so adding him to Hephaistos' lineage would mean lameness is an inherent quality of Hephaistos.

Another one of Hephaistos' children is Periphetes. Periphetes only appears in regards to Theseus, being one of the godly children Theseus slays:

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<sup>29</sup> De Ciantis, 2005, p. 90.

<sup>30</sup> De Ciantis, 2005, p. 116.

<sup>31</sup> Hard, 2004, p. 167.

<sup>32</sup> Cf. Hyginus, *Fabula CLVIII*: Hyginus lists the children of Vulcan, but, neither Palaimonios or Periphetes appear.

<sup>33</sup> Mooney, 1964, p. 83.

<sup>34</sup> Hyginus, *Fabula XIV*, ll. 19.106-107.

20. πρῶτον μὲν γὰρ Περιφήτην τὸν Ἥφαιστου καὶ Ἀντικλείας, ὃς ἀπὸ τῆς κορύνης ἦν ἐφόρει κορυνήτης ἐπεκαλεῖτο, ἔκτεινεν ἐν Ἐπιδαύρῳ. πόδας δὲ ἀσθενεῖς ἔχων οὗτος ἐφόρει κορύνην σιδηρᾶν, δι' ἧς τοὺς παριόντας ἔκτεινε.  
(Apollodoros, *Bibliotheca*, III.XVI.1.5-8.)

*First, Periphetes, son of Hephaistos and Antikleia, who was called club-carrier because of the club he carried, he [i.e. Theseus] killed in Epidauros. That Periphetes, having weak feet, bore an iron club, and with it, he killed people passing by.*

Periphetes is also afflicted with πόδας ... ἀσθενεῖς, and the club he bears could support him to walk upright.<sup>35</sup> No other information is known of this peculiar son. The final child of Hephaistos may be his most well known: Erichthonios.

21. τοῦτον οἱ μὲν Ἥφαιστου καὶ τῆς Κραναοῦ θυγατρὸς Ἀτθίδος εἶναι λέγουσιν, οἱ δὲ Ἥφαιστου καὶ Ἀθηνᾶς, οὕτως· Ἀθηνᾶ παρεγένετο πρὸς Ἥφαιστον, ὄπλα κατασκευάσαι θέλουσα. ὁ δὲ ἐγκαταλελειμμένος ὑπὸ Ἀφροδίτης εἰς ἐπιθυμίαν ὤλισθε τῆς Ἀθηνᾶς, καὶ διώκειν αὐτὴν ἤρξατο· ἡ δὲ ἔφευγεν. ὡς δὲ ἐγγὺς αὐτῆς ἐγένετο πολλῆ ἀνάγκῃ (ἦν γὰρ χωλός), ἐπειρᾶτο συνελθεῖν. ἡ δὲ ὡς σώφρων καὶ παρθένος οὔσα οὐκ ἠνέσχετο· ὁ δὲ ἀπεσπέρμηθεν εἰς τὸ σκέλος τῆς θεᾶς. ἐκείνη δὲ μυσσαχθεῖσα ἐρίῳ ἀπομάζασα τὸν γόνον εἰς γῆν ἔρριψε. φευγούσης δὲ αὐτῆς καὶ τῆς γονῆς εἰς γῆν πεσοῦσης Ἐριχθόνιος γίνεται.  
(Apollodoros, *Bibliotheca*, III.XIV.6.3-14.)

*Some say he [i.e. Erichthonios] is the son of Hephaistos and Kranaos' daughter Atthis, others say of Hephaistos and Athena, which goes as follows: Athena came by Hephaistos, wanting him to prepare some arms. He, being abandoned by Aphrodite, slipped into desire for Athena, and began pursuing her; but she fled. As he got close to her with much difficulty (for he was crippled), he tried to come with her. But she, being that prude and virgin, didn't hold herself to him; and he unloaded his semen on the leg of the goddess. She, disgusted, wiped the seed with wool and threw it on the earth. She herself fled, and from the seed that fell on earth, Erichthonios was born.*

The mythical king of Athens, Erichthonios, is a child of Hephaistos, born after an attempted rape of Athena. Special attention is given to his lameness (ἦν γὰρ χωλός), and Hephaistos begets his son, although he did not have sexual relations with Athena. The only influence she had was wiping his semen off her leg and throwing it on the earth. However, Erichthonios is many a time associated with an animal without any legs at all: the snake.<sup>36</sup> According to Hyginus, he actually is a snake from the bottom half down:

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<sup>35</sup> This suggestion is indicated by the participle ἔχων, and it could imply the club is because of his weak feet.

<sup>36</sup> Cf. Apollodoros, *Bibliotheca*, III.14.6.20; Pausanias, *Graeciae Descriptio*, I.24.76-7; Ovid, *Metamorphoses*, II.561: Apollodoros says a snake had curled around Erichthonios in the box where Athena hid him, but Ovid describes a snake *adporrectum* besides the child. Finally, Pausanias, in his description of a statue of Athena, writes about a snake nearby her spear, and specifically tells us the snake is Erichthonios. This motif of the snake is not very common in regard to Hephaistos. The only other instance where a snake is concerned with the god of smithing is a cult on Lemnos, where Hephaistos was found and housed by the Sintians. The priests of this cult were famous for their ability to heal snake bites. See Farnell, 1909, 386.

22. ... ex semine eius quod in terram decidit natus est puer, qui inferiorem partem draconis habuit...  
(Hyginus, *Fabula CLXVI*, 3.5-7.)

... from his (i.e. Hephaistos) seed, that fell on the earth, a boy was born, who had the bottom part of a snake...

It would be quite difficult to walk with the legs of a snake, for a snake has no legs. This connotation with the snake would also imply weak legs, and the god Hephaistos, who is the sole generator<sup>37</sup> of Erichthonios, has caused this deformity.

Whether or not the lame feet of Hephaistos were believed to be genetic, is not a topic fit for this paper. The fact remains his crookedness is passed on to his children, for all of them have something wrong with their most nether regions. His paternity could, however, be questioned. Erichthonios must be his son, since it is just his semen that brings him forth. Palaimonios and Periphetes, however, have no other records of being conceived by Hephaistos, except for the passages cited. Their crippled state might just be the only relation they have to Hephaistos, with Hephaistos passing the crooked quality on to his children. This is strengthened by the thought that being handicapped in ancient Greece was seen as a punishment of the gods: good parents would not beget a handicapped child.<sup>38</sup> De Ciantis also states that there seems to be no evidence of Hephaistos having children through regular intercourse.<sup>39</sup>

Another instance of irregular procreation is the origin of Pandora.<sup>40</sup> As punishment for stealing Hephaistos' fire, Zeus commands the gods to create the most evil thing on earth: womankind. The one then to create Pandora, is none other than Hephaistos:

23. Ἥφαιστον δ' ἐκέλευσε περικλυτὸν ὅττι τάχιστα  
γαῖαν ὕδει φύρειν, ἐν δ' ἀνθρώπου θέμεν αὐδὴν  
καὶ σθένος, ἀθανάτης δὲ θεῆς εἰς ὅπᾳ εἴσκειν,  
παρθενικῆς καλὸν εἶδος ἐπήρατον...  
(Hesiod, *Works and Days*, vv. 60-63.)

*And he ordered famed Hephaistos to mix earth with water,  
as quickly as possible, and to place there the voice and*

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<sup>37</sup> Hephaistos would be solely responsible for Erichthonios' birth, if we ignore the generative powers of the earth for the moment. Here, it is unclear whether or not the goddess Gaia is meant by "earth", or just the earthly ground. The two are difficult to distinguish, but I am more inclined to say earth is not personified in this instance. The primordial goddess lies dormant in the mythical world of the Olympians, last appearing in the battle against the Titans. Giving her such a role in bringing forth a mythical king would be unusual. Many authors say different things: Ovid, *Metamorphoses*, II.553 says: *prolem sine matrem creatam*, which would certainly exclude the possibility of a divine Earth. Hyginus, *Fabula CLXVI*, 4.1-3 also gives a common (false) etymology of Erichthonios, explaining *chthon autem terra dicitur*. Using terra instead of the more personified *tellus* would imply a general mention of the ground. However, Pausanias, *Graeciae Descriptio*, I.2.6.14-15 tells: *πατέρα δὲ Ἐριχθονίωι λέγουσιν ἀνθρώπων μὲν οὐδένα εἶναι, γονέας δὲ Ἥφαιστον καὶ Γῆν*. Saying Hephaistos and the earth are both the parents of Erichthonios, implied by *γονέας*, does mean the goddess Gè must be meant, instead of just some dirt.

<sup>38</sup> Garland, 1992, p. 39.

<sup>39</sup> De Ciantis, 2005, p. 120.

<sup>40</sup> Hesiod, *Theogony*, vv. 570-602 & *Works and Days*, vv. 57-95.

*strength of men, to liken her to the sight of immortal goddesses,  
her lovely, beautiful appearance of a maiden...*

Hephaistos is the creator of the evils of mankind, and it could only have been Hephaistos, because he is the only one able to create a living being out of nothing.<sup>41</sup> After Pandora was created, she:

24. ἀνθρώποισι δ' ἐμήσατο κήδεα λυγρά.  
(Hesiod, *Works and Days*, v. 95.)

*Invented horrible griefs for men.*

Humankind has been cursed by the gift of Pandora, and Hephaistos is her originator. He, by contrivance of Zeus,<sup>42</sup> has instigated pain and suffering for mankind, of which terrible toil is one.<sup>43</sup> These sufferings of men could be compared to Hesiod's iron race of men:

25. οὐδέ ποτ' ἦμαρ  
παύσονται καμάτου καὶ οἰζύος οὐδέ τι νύκτωρ  
τειρόμενοι...  
(Hesiod, *Works and Days*, vv. 176-178.)

*And never will they  
Be free of weariness and hardship by day, nor from being  
Distressed at night at all...*

*Κάματος* is commonly used as weariness, specifically from work and toil.<sup>44</sup> It is clear then, that Hephaistos has brought upon the race of men the pressure of work, which would instigate the descent into the iron race.

## Cults and Reverence

Hephaistos' cults may be the most elusive of all the Olympian cults. Not much is known about any form of regular cultism and honouring of Hephaistos. The only cult we know anything about is a priests cult on Lemnos, the island Hephaistos landed after his mythological fall. These priests were known for their excellent treatment of snake bites, but, unfortunately, that is where our knowledge ends.<sup>45</sup> We also know of a temple on the Etna, where Hephaistos' workshop is said to be,<sup>46</sup> through Aelianus:

26. Ἐν Αἴτνῃ δὲ ἄρα τῆ Σικελικῇ Ἡφαίστου τιμᾶται νεώς, καὶ ἔστι περίβολος καὶ δένδρα ἱερὰ  
καὶ πῦρ ἄσβεστόν τε καὶ τὸ ἀκοίμητον. εἰσὶ δε κύνες περὶ τε τὸν νεῶν καὶ τὸ ἄλσος ἱεροί...  
(Aelianus, *De Natura Animalium*, XI.3.1-3.)<sup>47</sup>

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<sup>41</sup> De Ciantis, 2005, p. 20.

<sup>42</sup> Hesiod, *Works and Days*, vv. 69, 71.

<sup>43</sup> Hesiod, *Works and Days*, vv. 90-91.

<sup>44</sup> LSJ, entry on *Κάματος*.

<sup>45</sup> Farnell, 1909, p. 386.

<sup>46</sup> Aeschylus, *Prometheus Bound*, vv. 366-367.

<sup>47</sup> Farnell, 1909, p. 395 has lead me tot his passage.



*On the Sicilian Etna, there is a temple honouring Hephaistos, and there is a precinct and holy trees and an inextinguishable fire and unresting too. There are dogs around the temple and the grove, holy dogs...*

This temple has some notable features: first of all, the location may be an odd place to build a temple, but the connection to Hephaistos is evident. The objects around and in the temple are of greater interest. The holy trees are surprising. On top of a volcano you would not expect trees, let alone trees dedicated to Hephaistos, for Hephaistos does not seem to have a connection with trees. The fire that is kept alive on top will spark some curiosity. This fire, comparable to the Vestal flame, must be guarded and must always burn, but what happens when the inextinguishable fire extinguishes, is not known, nor is the fire mentioned in any other known literary source.<sup>48</sup> Finally, the dogs that are kept in the precinct must also have some connection to Hephaistos, but, again, the reasoning is unknown.<sup>49</sup> A well-known passage from the *Odyssey* might hint at a connection:

27. χρύσειοι δ' ἑκάτερθε καὶ ἀργύρεοι κύνες ἦσαν,  
οὓς Ἥφαιστος ἔτευξεν ἰδυίησι πραπίδεσσι  
δῶμα φυλασσέμεναι μεγαλήτορος Ἄλκινόοιο...  
(Homer, *Odyssey*, VII.91-93.)

*On both sides there were golden and silver dogs,  
That Hephaistos fashioned with cunning mind,  
guarding the house of greathearted Alcinous...*

These dogs, created by Hephaistos, guard Alcinous, king of the Phaeacians. Although guard dogs are nothing special, the fact that Hephaistos himself made these dogs, and apparently has dogs in his own temple precinct, might give a clue what these dogs add to the perception of Hephaistos.

### Hellfire, Dark Fire

The next two subjects have everything to do with fire: torch races and sacrificial pyres or holy fires. Torch races are commonly held in honour of Hephaistos, as Herodotus tells us, with regards to how Persian messengers disclose signs to each other:

28. ...κατὰ περ Ἑλλησι ἡ λαμπαδηφορὴ τὴν τῷ Ἥφαιστῷ ἐπιτελέουσι.  
(Herodotus, *Historiae*, VIII.98.12-13.)

*Just like the torch race in Greece, that they hold in honour of Hephaistos.*

The torch race is such a common occurrence, Herodotus feels comfortable to refer to it to sketch an image of the messengers of Persia. People who listen to Herodotus' stories could then immediately understand what he is talking about. This torch race was commonly held on the *Hephaistia* and during wedding processions. This race would then start at the altar to Prometheus in the *Academy* and would probably end at the temple of Athena, although the

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<sup>48</sup> Farnell, 1909, p. 386.

<sup>49</sup> Ibidem.

endpoint is unclear.<sup>50</sup> The *Hephaistia* will be discussed later in this chapter. For the wedding processions, an interesting invocation appears in Euripides' *Troades*:

29. ΕΚ. Ἥφαιστε, δαδουχεῖς μὲν ἐν γάμοις βροτῶν,  
ἀτὰρ λυγρὰν γε τήνδ' ἀναιθύσσεις φλόγα  
ἔξω τε μεγάλων ἐλπίδων.  
(Euripides, *Troades*, vv. 343-345.)

*Hecuba: "Hephaistos, you carry a torch in marriages of mortals,  
But now you rouse this baneful flame  
Apart from great hope.*

The wedding torch is a sacred fire to sanctify the marriage of the mortals. Being the son of Hera, a connection to marriage would not be a strange one. Also being married at one point to the goddess of love sparks some connotations of eroticism in the person of Hephaistos. Servius comments on an embrace of Venus on Vulcan, and why Vulcan feels a *solitam flammam*:

30. *vel quasi maritus; vel adludit ad rem naturalem: namque ideo Vulcanus maritus fingitur Veneris, quod Venerium officium non nisi calore consistit...*  
(Servius Honoratus, *In Vergilii Carmina Commentarii*, ad VIII.389.)

*Either as if he was married, or he alludes to a natural case: because that is why Vulcan is made to be husband of Venus, because the service of Venus cannot be without some heat...*

The fiery spark must, according to Servius, be taken quite literally, if we add Hephaistos to the wedding. The heat Hephaistos' fire provides, is the same heat that lovers feel while they are in love. That would also mean, of course, that Hephaistos himself is being identified with the fire *itself*. Hephaistos not only is in perfect control of the fire,<sup>51</sup> he is fire.<sup>52</sup>

However, Hephaistos is only attributed with certain kinds of fire, in particular ritual fires, or great destructive fires. As we have seen in passage 11 and 29 the fires that can hold off Ares and the fires that destroy Troy are both identified with the work of Hephaistos. Another destructive fire appears in book 21 of the *Iliad*, when the river Xanthos (or Scamander) has had enough of Achilles' tendency to pile up bodies in his riverbank. Xanthos races towards Achilles, and Hera fears for his life:

31. Ἥρη δὲ μέγ' ἄυσε περιδδείσασ' Ἀχιλῆϊ,  
μὴ μιν ἀποέρσειε μέγας ποταμὸς βαθυδίνης,  
αὐτίκα δ' Ἥφαιστον προσεφώνεεν, ὃν φίλον υἷόν·  
"ὄρσεο, κυλλοπόδιον, ἐμὸν τέκος· ἄντα σέθεν γὰρ  
Ξάνθον δινήεντα μάχῃ ἤισκομεν εἶναι.  
ἀλλ' ἐπάμυνε τάχιστα, πιφάυσκεο δὲ φλόγα πολλήν.  
(Homer, *Iliad*, vv. XXI.328-333.)

<sup>50</sup> Farnell, 1909, pp. 380-381.

<sup>51</sup> De Ciantis, 2005, p. 180.

<sup>52</sup> Farnell, 1909, p. 374.

*And Hera screamed loudly, fearing greatly for Achilles,  
That the great, deep-eddying river would sweep him away,  
And immediately called forth Hephaistos, that beloved son:  
“Rise, club-footed, my child; for we made you to be alike  
To whirling Xanthos, face-to-face in battle.  
But hold him off, very fast, and manifest your much flame.*

Hera, then, gives some instructions to Hephaistos and explains her scheme. She finishes her speech and:

32. ... Ἥφαιστος δὲ τιτύσκειτο θεσπιδᾶες πῦρ.  
πρῶτα μὲν ἐν πεδίῳ πῦρ δαίετο, καίῃ δὲ νεκροὺς  
πολλοὺς, οἳ ῥα κατ’ αὐτὸν ἄλις ἔσαν, οὓς κτάν’ Ἀχιλλεύς...  
(Homer, *Iliad*, vv. XXI.343-345.)

*... And Hephaistos prepared a by the god kindled fire.  
First a fire burned in the area, and it devoured many bodies,  
That were a plenty, there and there, spread on the field, those who Achilles has slain...*

Xanthus suffers through the pyres caused by the god of smithing. Xanthus begs for mercy, but Hephaistos does not restrain his flames. Then the river god begs Hera to let him be and to make Hephaistos stop his attacks. Hera, having heard the river’s pleas, commands Hephaistos to stop.

33. “Ἥφαιστε, σχέο, τέκνον ἀγακλεές· οὐ γὰρ ἔοικεν  
ἀθάνατον θεὸν ὧδε βροτῶν ἔνεκα στυφελίζειν.”  
᾽Ως ἔφαθ’ Ἥφαιστος δὲ κατέσβεσε θεσπιδᾶες πῦρ,  
ἄψορρον δ’ ἄρα κῦμα κατέσσυτο καλὰ ῥέεθρα.  
(Homer, *Iliad*, vv. XI.379-382.)

*“Hephaistos, hold up, famed child: for it is not appropriate  
To strike an immortal god so hard, on behalf of mortals.”  
As such, she spoke, and Hephaistos quenched his god-kindled flame,  
And a wave, going backwards, rushed down the beautiful streams.*

Xanthus is not being spared because Hephaistos has mercy. Only the order of Hera is able to stop the flaming god. The context of this scene is of great importance. Hephaistos does not want to destroy Xanthus just to destroy. He acts under orders of Hera, to protect Achilles. His terrible flames, then, serve as protection, not destruction. This would fit with the idea that Hephaistos is usually a protector instead of an aggressor. The fight against the river Xanthus is also one of the few known instances where Hephaistos is indeed fighting.

Another comparison between Hephaistos and fire appears with sacrificial and, naturally, smithing fire. Passage 32 may contain an indication of what Hephaistos’ fire could do. Homer specifically states that the bodies of the men who were killed by Achilles, were now completely engulfed by the flames and completely burned. Since cremation was the most common form of burial in archaic times, and most certainly in the poems of Homer,<sup>53</sup> this parallel, where Hephaistos burns

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<sup>53</sup> Mirto, 2012, pp. 84-85.

the Trojan bodies lying there, may have some ritual connotation, and Hephaistos' fire is the intermediary between the world of the living and the world of the dead. Another instance of this case happens in the final book of the *Odyssey*, where Agamemnon speaks to Achilles:

34. αὐτὰρ ἐπεὶ δὴ σε φλόξ ἤνυσεν Ἥφαιστοιο,  
ἠῶθεν δὴ τοὶ λέγομεν λεύκ' ὅστέ', Ἀχιλλεῦ...  
(Homer, *Odyssey*, vv. XXIV.71-72.)

*But after the flame of Hephaistos had finished you,  
We collected, early in the morning, your white bones, Achilles...*

Here, specifically Hephaistos' flame is used to burn the body, and it is, without a shadow of a doubt, intentional of Hephaistos' fire to have this intermediary role.

This may be a short-sighted conclusion, but Hephaistos' fires are frequently used in another intermediary context. During the ending lines of the *Iphigeneia in Aulis* by Euripides, a messenger reports to Clytaemnestra what had transpired during the sacrifice of Iphigeneia. Iphigeneia, just before being sacrificed, has disappeared because of Artemis, and a deer is sacrificed instead. To conclude the sacrifice Calchas finishes the ritual:

35. ἐπεὶ δ' ἅπαν  
κατηνθρακώθη θῦμ' ἐν Ἥφαιστου φλογί,  
τὰ πρόσφορ' ἠῶξαθ' ...  
(Euripides, *Iphigeneia in Aulis*, vv. 1601-1603.)

*And after the victim  
was completely burned in the flame of Hephaistos,  
he prayed the suitable prayers...*

Hephaistos burns the body, making it suitable to present to the gods. Through the use of Hephaistos, the gods can receive their sacrifices in the first place. The fire god is, again, an intermediary between the world of the living and another world. Aristophanes' *Plouton* has just such a connotation:

36. ἐπεὶ δὲ βωμῶ πόπανα καὶ προθύματα  
καθωσιώθη, πελανὸς Ἥφαιστου φλογί...  
(Aristophanes, *Plouton*, vv. 660-661.)

*And when the round cakes and the prepatory offerings  
were dedicated on the altar, sacrificial food for the flame of Hephaistos...*

The specific sacrificial menu is devoured by Hephaistos' flame, although the temple they are visiting is Asclepius'.<sup>54</sup> Hephaistos' fire will transfer the offerings to the correct god, and therefore stands between the human and divine nature.

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<sup>54</sup> Aristophanes, *Plouton*, v. 621.

## The Hephaistia

The final way of respecting the gods is through a festival. Hephaistos has a festival, called the Hephaistia. Not much is known about the Hephaistia, except for one inscription that institutes the festival in Athens, dated at 421-420 BCE.<sup>55</sup>

37. δοῦναι δὲ [κ]αὶ τοῖς μετοίκοις τρεῖς] βοῦς, τούτων τ[ὸν τριῶν δὲ ἡοι ἡ]-  
ιεροποιοὶ [νε]μόντων [α]ὐτοῖς ὀμὰ τὰ κρέα. τεῖς δὲ πονπεῖς ἡόπος [ἄν ἡος κάλλιστα]  
πενφθεῖ ἡο[ι ἡ]εροπ[οι]οὶ ἐπιμελόσθον, καὶ ἂν τις τι ἀκοσμεῖ[ι, κύριοι ὄντων αὐ]- 25  
τοὶ μὲν ζεμ[ιοῦν μέ]χρ[ι πε]ντέκοντα δραχμῶν καὶ ἐκγράφεν ἐς [. . . . . 12 . . . . . ἐὰ]-  
[ν] δέ τις ἄχσ[ιος ἦ]ι<sup>56</sup> μέζον[ος] ζεμίας, τὰς ἐπιβολὰς ποιό[ν]τον [ἡοπόσας ἂν δοκεῖ κ]-  
[α]ὶ ἐσαγόν[τον ἐς τὸ δικασ]τέρι[ο]ν τὸ τῷ ἄρχοντος. τὸς δὲ βοῦ[ς] . . . . . 11 . . . . . σάλλ]-  
πινγος [προσαγαγῆν πρὸς τ]ὸν βομόν· ἡοίτιν[ε]ς δὲ ἄρῶνται Ε[. . . . . 12 . . . . . ἡοι]  
ἡεροποιο[ι] . . . . . 9 . . . . .] διακοσῖος ἐχς Ἀθε[ν]αίων. τὲν δὲ λ[ανπάδα] . . . 5 . . . τεῖ πε]- 30  
[ν]τετερίδι [. . . 7 . . . ἡεφ]αιστίοις. ποιόντο[ν δ]ὲ [ἡ]οι ἡεροπ[οι]οὶ . . . . . 11 . . . . .]  
[τὲ]ν λανπάδ[α] τιθέναι καὶ τὸν ἄλλον ἀγῶνα γίγνεσθαι καθά[περ] . . . . . 12 . . . . .]  
[. . . .]ν θέας [ἡοι γυμνασίαρχ?]οι ποιόσι...  
(IG I<sup>3</sup> 82, ll. 23-33.)

*...and they shall give three oxen to the metics; of these three the  
religious officials shall distribute the meat to them raw; and the religious officials shall take  
care of the procession,  
so that it is conducted in the most beautiful way possible, and if anyone behaves at all  
disorderly, they shall have the authority 25  
to impose fines of up to fifty drachmas and communicate it in writing to the -;  
and if anyone deserves a higher punishment, they shall set the fine as high as they think right  
and introduce the case to the law court of the archon; and the oxen . . .  
shall be lead to the altar to the sound of the trumpet; and the religious officials  
shall - two hundred Athenians to lift them . . . ; and the torch- . . . at the quadrennial 30  
festival . . . the Hephaistia; and the religious officials . . . shall make the . . .  
lay on the torch-race and the rest of the competitions just as the . . .  
[gymnasiarchs?] make the spectacle (?)..<sup>57</sup>*

In this decree, a few things are notable: first of all, the metics play a part in this festival. Many scholars thought this inclusion on the Hephaistia was based solely on the connection between Hephaistos, the god of handiwork, and the metics, who mainly worked as workmen.<sup>58</sup> It is unlikely, however, this was the only reason the metics were included, as Wijma argues. The metics were becoming a greater part of Athens, and the Athenians wanted to give them more recognition and inclusion in Athenian society. It seems then that the Hephaistia was the only festival where the metics could explicitly participate in the most sacred part of the offerings too.<sup>59</sup> The Hephaistia fitted the metics the most for two important reasons, as described by Wijma.

<sup>55</sup> For a further examination of this inscription, see Deubner, 1966, He also states this festival must have been held before, since Herodotus also mentions festivals in honour of Hephaistos, although Herodotus does not specifically name the Hephaistia.

<sup>56</sup> The original text has an epsilon instead of the eta in this place, but I could not figure out how to get an epsilon with a tilde. Therefore I have made this minuscule emendation.

<sup>57</sup> Translation by Lambert, S., Schuddeboom, F.

<sup>58</sup> Cf. Wijma, 2010, pp. 129, 143, who noted this remark.

<sup>59</sup> Wijma, 2010, p. 136.

On the Hephaistia, one of the themes was unity<sup>60</sup>, so next to the Athenians and the metics, were the *demotai*, a group of Attic demes outside of Athens. This triad of people important for Athens, signifies a union of three different groups, all living in “equal” unison in Athens.<sup>61</sup> This unity may be best shown by the distribution of meat to the metics. In line 23 it is mentioned that the metics should receive the raw meat of three oxen. This distribution seems unfair, for the Athenians get the meat of ten oxen. Estimates of population distribution in Athens of the fifth century, however, suggests that these ratios are in accordance with the proportion of metics to Athenians.<sup>62</sup> Metics were becoming a greater part of Athens, as previously mentioned, because their role in the public life had extended to the army and the reconstruction of Athens. After the destructive wars, Perikles instigated building projects to rebuild the city, and metics made a great contribution of the work force.<sup>63</sup> The popularity of Hephaistos also greatly increased after 420 BCE.<sup>64</sup> These reasons, namely that metics already were artisans, metics became a greater part of Athenian public life, and their contributions to the restoration of Athenian buildings, would mean the festival of choice to greatly include the metics were the Hephaistia.<sup>65</sup>

The second point of interest is that the inscription mentions an impossible fine, as adjudicated by the *ἱεροποιοί*, which they can charge upon people displaying disorderly behaviour. As far as I could find, this is the only inscription or law, even, mentioning this right of the *ἱεροποιοί* and limit it by a specific amount.<sup>66</sup> The fines are variable, however, and could be changed in case the *ἱεροποιοί* sees fit. Then the magistrates would have to introduce the case to a court.

Finally, the torch race is mentioned. It is unknown whether or not the race was already being held on the Hephaistia, or if it was instituted in 421 BCE.<sup>67</sup> The torch race was an important part of the Hephaistia, which must be as elaborate as the one held on the Promethia, which is stated in line 35. This torch race has some more important implications. Just the ritual of the torch race is thought to be the fast transferral of fire; the quicker the torchbearer runs, the faster the fire travels from one sanctuary to another, and the less contaminated the holy fire could become by mortal

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<sup>60</sup> Greatly corresponding with the peace treaty by Nikias of 421 BCE.

<sup>61</sup> Wijma, 2010, p. 138.

<sup>62</sup> Wijma, 2010, p. 139.

<sup>63</sup> Wijma, 2010, p. 143-144.

<sup>64</sup> Wijma, 2010, p. 135.

<sup>65</sup> However, Wijma and Takahiro also note a reasoning of distinction behind the inclusion of the metics. Cf. Wijma, 2010, pp. 141, 150-151; Takahiro, 1999, p. 3. Their reasoning is mainly based on the distribution of raw meat. The sacred procession was accessible for all people, and the meat that was sacrificed would also be equally shared between everyone. However, it has been suggested that the raw meat is in clear contrast to cooked meat for the Athenians. The metics would receive raw meat to consume it elsewhere, outside of the Athenian sacrifice, while the Athenians themselves would have dined on the location of sacrifice. This would be to have a clear distinction between the official citizens and the metics. Metics were becoming a greater group, so the line between a regular metic and citizen was fading. From 431 and onward, laws were introduced, specifically for metics. The dining on the festival ground would then be exclusive to Athenian citizens, to further their own bond and become a stronger unity, to make it clear they are still not metics, and vice versa.

<sup>66</sup> Cf. Harrison, 1968, p. 4-6; Parker, 2006, p. 76: Fines could be imposed by many magistrates, but only of the *ἱεροποιοί* on the Hephaistia we know an exact amount, namely these 50 drachmas. These fines then were offered to the sacred treasures, for the Ancient Greeks had no national or political treasury, so relied on piling their wealth in temples.

<sup>67</sup> Takahiro, 1999, p. 2. In the rest of the passage, it is also mentioned that this torch race should be organised in the way of the Promethia.

disruptions.<sup>68</sup> The fastest torchbearer then must also have been the best torchbearer, which must have been of some importance to the institution of this ritual.<sup>69</sup>

In summary, Hephaistos has everything to do with creation. He is a cripple, attributed with the fire, handicraft and cunning. His children all have something wrong with their feet. He is married to the antithesis of his own pulchritude, be it Aphrodite or a Grace. He obeys his orders and follows his mother, maybe because his mother is the only factor of his conception. He works and creates for the gods, and has built most of the divine habitats.<sup>70</sup> All of his creations, be it inanimate or even animate, have supreme beauty, although he himself would never take part in that beauty.<sup>71</sup> He is associated with weddings, metics and bonding, but his destructive prowess is also greatly known. Now we just want to ask the question: What does this mean for our perception of Hephaistos and his use in Ancient Greece?

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<sup>68</sup> Deubner, 1966, p. 211.

<sup>69</sup> Ibidem.

<sup>70</sup> Apollonius Rhodius, *Argonautica*, 3.40, 233, 229 are just examples of the many homes Hephaistos built.

<sup>71</sup> De Ciantis, 2005, p. 9.

## Chapter 2: Hephaistos in the Pantheon: His Roles and Uses

In the previous chapter, we have seen in what kind of contexts our smithing god appears. This chapter will use the points discussed there to formulate an answer to the main question. I will take seven different interpretations of Hephaistos, regarding the passages and ideas already discussed and some new texts, and try to combine everything in my conclusion so we could know: Who is Hephaistos, and what could his role in the Greek mythology and Greek rituals tell us about Greek society?

### Hephaistos the Asexual

As already mentioned, Hephaistos does not seem to produce any children by sexual intercourse, or his fatherhood may be disputable.<sup>72</sup> Since the children he would have begotten with a woman, or, as is the case with Erichthonios, with no one else, all have a defect to their feet, which would lead me to the conclusion his lameness is an inherent condition of Hephaistos. Not only that, but the other way around would be just as well the case. Being a hero in ancient times, while being crippled, could not be as easily explained, for a handicap was seen as a curse of the gods.<sup>73</sup> Heroes, as defined by Hesiod in his *Works and Days* are:

38. ἀνδρῶν ἡρώων θεῖον γένος, οἱ καλέονται  
ἡμίθεοι...  
(Hesiod, *Works and Days*, vv. 159-160.)

*The divine race of human heroes, who are called  
Demigods...*

These heroes are divine, and must then have a divine ancestry. Those are then called demigods.<sup>74</sup> To explain the heroes having a limping foot, without putting a curse beforehand onto the parents, would be a difficult chore. In my opinion, then, these heroes, supposedly descending for Hephaistos, are tools to introduce a hero with human faults. As far as I could find, these heroes, Periphetes and Palaimonios, do not appear in other mythologies, and in the stories they do appear in, their descentance from Hephaistos is not even always mentioned, if it is there at all. Therefore, the attribution of Hephaistos' seed to these children might just have been a literary tool, to add these fantastical men to the demigods, and give more divinity to their stature.

In other instances, it is much clearer Hephaistos is not a father in biological sense: Erichthonios and Pandora both are undoubtably born asexually, although a sexual connotation is added to both of them. Erichthonios came into being after Hephaistos εἰς ἐπιθυμίαν ὄλισθε (Passage 21). First he was left by Aphrodite, the goddess of love, lust, and sex, then he ὄλισθε into a desire for his sister/cousin. The verb "ὄλισθάνω", to slip, usually has a connotation of an unintentional, accidental fall, with some negative consequences.<sup>75</sup> Although accidental desire certainly does not excuse the behaviour of a rapist, Hephaistos pursues Athena in an attempt to heal his by Aphrodite broken heart. Athena can evade his attack, but receives his semen on her leg. This could hardly be called sexual intercourse, but the attempted rape does leave some sexual aspects

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<sup>72</sup> De Ciantis, 2005, p. 120.

<sup>73</sup> Garland, 1992

<sup>74</sup> West, 1978, p. 191: West, in his commentary, comments on both θεῖον γένος and ἡμίθεοι, saying both must be about their lineage, not their status.

<sup>75</sup> LSJ, entry in ὄλισθάνω.



to this myth of the single father.<sup>76</sup> Added to that, Hephaistos tries to rape a goddess, but evidently fails. This failure might even put him in the light of a sexual dork.<sup>77</sup>

Pandora, then, has only one function: to release evils on humankind, by being wed to Epimetheus.<sup>78</sup> Her appearance must then be deceptively alluring. Hephaistos moulds the earth and water into a beautiful shape, resembling a modest maiden.<sup>79</sup> Aphrodite's Graces add her charm to the woman, and when she passes by:

39. θαῦμα δ' ἔχ' ἀθανάτους τε θεοὺς θνητούς τ' ἀνθρώπους,  
ὡς εἶδον δόλον αἰπὺν, ἀμήχανον ἀνθρώποισιν.  
(Hesiod, *Theogony*, vv. 588-589.)

*And amazement holds the immortal gods and mortal humans alike,  
As such they saw the sheer deception, irresistible for men.*

Her allure cannot be resisted by men, and would therefore create an irresistible attraction for the human race. Pandora is a beautiful woman, created out of earth by Hephaistos. This is another instance where the ugliest god creates the most beautiful woman; a beauty he could never partake in.<sup>80</sup>

Two other instances of Hephaistos being slightly asexual, appear in Diodorus Siculus, describing a ritual for Apis, son of Ptah, and in Plato's *Symposion*, where Hephaistos would be imagined to ask about sexual love.

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<sup>76</sup> Cf. Kerényi, 1966, p. 197; De Ciantis, 2005, p. 159; Park, 2014, pp. 273, 275. This idea of single-fatherhood may also be an influence of primordial powers, argues Kerényi, together with the fact that Hephaistos has a repulsive appearance. Primordial powers are spontaneously generating forces, like Ouranos' phallus, spewing Ouranos' blood on the earth and creating all sorts of deities, and from the seafoam his member creates, Aphrodite originates (Hesiod, *Theogony*, vv. 183-200.). These forces create sexually, but asexually too. Hephaistos' role as an asexual god could then be linked to these primal forces. Hephaistos can create everything, and Erichthonios even sprouts from the earth after his seed had fertilized it. Hephaistos' own birth, of course, is specifically mentioned to be while Hera was *οὐ φιλότητι μιγεῖσα* (see passage 5). Park discusses the parthenogenesis. She explains that parthenogenesis in Hesiod is purely used by the primordial creating forces of nature, like Night and Day, where the *perfect* creations that become will become the current formation of nature. Hera's self-conceptions are the only exceptions to this rule: Hephaistos she bore first without the help of a male, and Typhoion the second. Typhoion is the terrible monster that has been laid to rest beneath the Etna by Zeus, after he was defeated by the same god. The Etna, of course, being the workplace of Hephaistos. Hera only practices parthenogenesis to avenge Zeus, and her children then do not become a part of nature. These influences of the parthenogenetical creation would then mean Hephaistos is the most Titanical of the Olympians, and might explain his generative force and asexual nature. The fact Zeus (or Hera) lobs Hephaistos from the godly habitat also points to a primordial nature of Hephaistos. Cf. Delcourt, 1982, p.41. Gods throwing each other off the Olympos has not been recorded for any other of the Olympian gods or "younger" gods. The only other relevant instance happens when Zeus throws Atè from the mountain. The final hint at a Titan's influence is verse 14 of the *Prometheus Bound* by Aeschylus. In this scene, Hephaistos mentions he cannot bring himself to bind a *συγγενῆ θεόν*, a god of the same descent. He compares himself to Prometheus, most certainly a Titan, being the son of Iapetus, and not a part of the Olympian gods. Cf. Griffith, 1983, p. 85, Groeneboom, 1928, p. 81, Podlecki, 2005, p. 161. They all argue on this wording by explaining they are kindred not by parentage, but by their functions, both having to do with culture and fire. The literal meaning of the word has, of course, to do with birth and familiarity.

<sup>77</sup> De Ciantis, 2017, p. 142.

<sup>78</sup> Hesiod, *Works and Days*, vv. 84-89; *Theogony*, v. 592.

<sup>79</sup> Hesiod, *Works and Days*, vv. 62-63, 70-71.

<sup>80</sup> De Ciantis, 2005, p. 9.

To start with Apis:

40. ... ὡς θεὸν ἀνάγουσιν εἰς Μέμφιν εἰς τὸ τοῦ Ἥφαιστου τέμενος. ἐν δὲ ταῖς προειρημέναις τετταράκονθ' ἡμέραις μόνον ὀρῶσιν αὐτὸν αἱ γυναῖκες κατὰ πρόσωπον ἰστάμεναι καὶ δεικνύουσιν ἀνασυράμεναι τὰ ἑαυτῶν γεννητικὰ μόρια, τὸν δ' ἄλλον χρόνον ἅπαντα κεκωλυμένον ἐστὶν εἰς ὄψιν αὐτὰς ἔρχεσθαι τούτῳ τῷ θεῷ.  
(Diodorus Siculus, *Bibliotheca Historica*, I.85.2.6-3.6.)

*They brought him (i.e. the Apis bull) as a god to Memphis, to the sanctuary of Hephaistos. In these prescribed forty days, only women could see him, standing in front of him and after they pulled up their clothes, they showed their procreative parts, and for the entire rest of the time it was forbidden that they went in sight of this god.*

To firstly understand this passage in full, we need to discuss Ptah and Apis. The temple of Hephaistos mentioned in this passage is not a temple for Hephaistos in literal Greek sense. The Egyptian crafting god Ptah was identified with Hephaistos, and both being gods of fire.<sup>81</sup> Burton goes as far as claiming Hephaistos is a direct continuation of Ptah.<sup>82</sup> Apis, or the Apis bull, is sometimes seen as the son of Ptah, and in this ritual that connotation of the creator Ptah is further shown.<sup>83</sup> In the temple of Hephaistos in Memphis, women show their *γεννητικὰ μόρια* to Apis, and are afterwards forbidden to come near the god. Their pubic display strengthens the fertility of the god,<sup>84</sup> but it is noteworthy that this procreative power is “transferred” to the god without contact, keeping Apis, and maybe Hephaistos, away from female genitals. As such, the god can keep his generating force, without engaging in sexuality.

The next passage is about Hephaistos, inquiring about the act of love.

41. καὶ εἰ αὐτοῖς ἐν τῷ αὐτῷ κατακειμένοις ἐπιστὰς ὁ Ἥφαιστος, ἔχων τὰ ὄργανα, ἔροιτο· “Τί ἔσθ' ὃ βούλεσθε, ὧ ἄνθρωποι, ὑμῖν παρ' ἀλλήλων γενέσθαι;” καὶ εἰ ἀποροῦντας αὐτοῦς πάλιν ἔροιτο· “Ἄρά γε τοῦδε ἐπιθυμεῖτε, ἐν τῷ αὐτῷ γενέσθαι ὅτι μάλιστα ἀλλήλοις, ὥστε καὶ νύκτα καὶ ἡμέραν μὴ ἀπολείπεσθαι ἀλλήλων; εἰ γὰρ τούτου ἐπιθυμεῖτε, ἐθέλω ὑμᾶς συντῆξαι καὶ συμφυσεῖν εἰς τὸ αὐτό, ὥστε δύο ὄντας ἕνα γεγονέναι καὶ ἕως τ' ἂν ζητε, ὡς ἕνα ὄντα, κοινῇ ἀμφοτέρους ζῆν, καὶ ἐπειδὴν ἀποθάνητε, ἐκεῖ αὖ ἐν Ἄιδου ἀντὶ δυοῖν ἕνα εἶναι κοινῇ τεθνεῶτε...  
(Plato, *Symposion*, 192d.2-e.4.)

*And if Hephaistos, carrying his tools and standing there, would ask them [i.e. lovers], lying together: “What is it you want, humans, for you to be become with each other?” And he would ask them again, because they have no clue: “Do you desire this, to be together with each other as much as possible, in the way night and day never leave each other? Because if you desire this, I am prepared to put you together and blow you into one, so that, being two, you would become one until you live as such, as being one, to live together in union, and when you die, then to be dead again in union, to be one in Hades instead of two...*

<sup>81</sup> Burton, 1972, p. 71.

<sup>82</sup> Burton, 1972, p. 85.

<sup>83</sup> Burton, 1972, pp. 244-245 explains the ritual in depth.

<sup>84</sup> Burton, 1972, p. 245.

This myth portrays Aristophanes' speech in the *Symposium*, where he believes Eros and true desire is the need to find your literal "other half". The inclusion of Hephaistos is peculiar. Dover thinks his appearance is solely based on the fact he is the metal worker, and his symbols of the bellows are used solely as the way of melting the lovers into one.<sup>85</sup> However, it seems Hephaistos, looking upon two lovers entangled, does not seem to realize the act of sex. This would be true, for Plato himself says in his *Politeia* gods must not be portrayed in a false way.<sup>86</sup> This would mean, according to Hunter, this depiction of Hephaistos would probably not be written by Plato, if he did not think some semblance of the truth was present.<sup>87</sup> But if we take a look at the surface level analysis, Hephaistos is added to a hypothetical situation, two soulmates are lying together in bed, and Hephaistos wants to take their sexual union, and turn it into a literal one, to firmly mould them into their original, perfect form, interpreting the act of sex as a connection of the body, and nothing more. Hephaistos would not be all too familiar with sexual intercourse, so it would only be more fitting to place him in the context Socrates provides.

A final remark on Hephaistos' asexuality is the remark made by Teffeteller. She argues that the limpness of Hephaistos stretches further than just his feet. His halting foot would be symbolic for impotence, adding another layer of contrast between the Lame god and Aphrodite.<sup>88</sup> In multiple myths, feet are associated with the genitals and creative powers in general, so this connection is most certainly a plausible one.<sup>89</sup>

### Hephaistos the Protector

We have seen the terrific powers Hephaistos possesses in his fight against the river Xanthus. The river even declares no god is equal in power.<sup>90</sup> But the context this battle takes place in is of key importance. Hephaistos is not the aggressor in this case. As seen in passage 31, he spreads his fires to defeat Xanthus, in order to save Achilles.<sup>91</sup> Hephaistos is ordered by Hera to save the hero, and he obeys.<sup>92</sup> This theme of protection is a regular occurrence in Greek mythology. Alcinous' watchdogs, made by Hephaistos, only have the function to protect the palace (passage 27). About Crete, records exist of a bronze man or bull, also made by Hephaistos, roaming the coast to ward off intruders.<sup>93</sup>

Another form of protection Hephaistos provides is the alternate version of Thetis' attempt at making Achilles immortal. Apollodorus writes the following:

42. Ὡς δὲ ἐγέννησε Θέτις ἐκ Πηλέως βρέφος, ἀθάνατον θέλουσα ποιῆσαι τοῦτο, κρύφα Πηλέως εἰς τὸ πῦρ ἐγκρύβουσα τῆς νυκτὸς ἔφθειρεν ὃ ἦν αὐτῷ θνητὸν πατρῶον, μεθ' ἡμέραν δὲ ἔχριεν ἀμβροσίᾳ.  
(Apollodorus, *Bibliotheca*, III.13.6.1-4.)

<sup>85</sup> Dover, 1980, p. 119.

<sup>86</sup> Cf. Plato, *Politeia*, 377e.1-378a.6, 378b.8-c.d.6, 381e.3-6.

<sup>87</sup> Hunter, 2004, p. 69.

<sup>88</sup> Teffeteller, 2010, pp. 143-144.

<sup>89</sup> Teffeteller, 2010, p. 144; cf. Jung, 1976, p. 126, where creating gods mostly have limped feet.

<sup>90</sup> Homer, *Iliad*, vv. XXI.357-358.

<sup>91</sup> Davies, 2007, p. 152: Hephaistos truly is the sole factor of protection in this case.

<sup>92</sup> De Ciantis, 2005, pp. 8, 128-129. In these instances, Hephaistos is always ordered to do things. Hephaistos does obey, although he does not always agree with what he has to do.

<sup>93</sup> Faraone, 1987, pp. 259-260. Cf. Delcourt, 1982, pp. 48-63.

*When Thetis had given birth to an infant from Peleus, she wanted to make is immortal, and unbeknownst to Peleus she hid it in the fire at night, and tried to destroy that which was his father's mortal part for him, and then, during the day, she anointed it with ambrosia.*

In this version of the myth, Thetis uses the fire to burn Peleus' mortal parts in Achilles, and leave her own immortal half, therefore leaving Achilles to be immortal. The fire, as discussed in chapter 1, has most of the time to do with our smithing god. Even though it is Thetis in this case protecting her child, we can still link this myth to Hephaistos in more than just the fire aspect. Thetis and Hephaistos are closely linked in the Greek mythology. First of all, she, together with Eurynome, saved Hephaistos after Hera threw him off the Olympos, and with her he stayed for nine years.<sup>94</sup> Both divinities also are strongly connected to emotional suffering. Hephaistos will be mocked for his halting foot and has suffered a rejection from his mother, and Thetis has been wed against her will to a mortal and has given birth to a son who is destined to die.<sup>95</sup> Both can stand up against Zeus and make him amend his will: Hephaistos can diffuse his anger during the divine banquet in the first book of the *Iliad*;<sup>96</sup> Thetis, just beforehand, lets Zeus promise to make Achilles indispensable in the siege of Troy, to make sure her son gets the right amount of honour.<sup>97</sup> Both of these scenes are in order to protect someone they love: Hera in Hephaistos' case, and Thetis wishes to protect Achilles. Just like with the river Xanthus, Hephaistos destroys, to protect the other, protecting Achilles in both cases.<sup>98</sup> A final comparison can be made in an obscure myth about Hephaistos' pursuit of Thetis, where he unfortunately wounds Thetis in the foot, thus connecting them once more through a wounded foot.<sup>99</sup>

His connection to protection could be further exemplified by the *Kabeiroi*. These minor deities are sometimes told to be children of Hephaistos, he begot with one of Proteus' daughters: Kabeiro. These Kabeiroi were often invoked by seamen when they were in grave danger to protect them from nautical dangers. They were also highly celebrated on Lemnos, the island Hephaistos landed after his one day fall.<sup>100</sup> This protective nature fits with Hephaistos' job of preserving the well-being of the human race.<sup>101</sup> An extra connection to Hephaistos adds the 6<sup>th</sup> century grammarian Hesychius of Alexandria. In the lemma on the *Kabeiroi* he says:

43. *Κάβειροι*: καρκίνοι, πάνυ δὲ τιμῶνται οὗτοι ἐν Λήμνῳ ὡς θεοί· λέγονται δὲ εἶναι Ἡφαίστου παῖδες.  
(Hesychius of Alexandria, *Lexicon*, p. 787: lemma on *Kabeiroi*.)

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<sup>94</sup> Homer, *Iliad*, v. XVIII.400.

<sup>95</sup> De Ciantis, 2017, p. 138.

<sup>96</sup> De Ciantis, 2017, p. 140: Hephaistos is also the only god who has stood up against Zeus with any success.

<sup>97</sup> Homer, *Iliad*, vv. I.505-510.

<sup>98</sup> Something interesting could be noted about this passage. If we take the text as literally as possible, Thetis destroys the human part of Achilles, to leave her own divine part. The human part being his father's, of course. To keep an immortal son, the father must be eliminated. The resemblance to Hephaistos is striking. Hephaistos has been born from just a female, and in order to make Achilles immortal, the mother's genetical contribution must remain the only part of him. And to make matters worse, the only vulnerability Achilles has, is his foot, the same weakness as Hephaistos.

<sup>99</sup> Detienne, 1987, p. 164 n.26.

<sup>100</sup> De Ciantis, 2005, pp. 148-149.

<sup>101</sup> De Ciantis, 2005, p. 137.

*Kabeiroi: crabs, and they are mostly honoured on Lemnos as gods; they are said to be children of Hephaistos.*

They are not necessarily children of Hephaistos, as Hesychius says “they are told to be”. But now other connections appear. Looking through the same Lexicon by Hesychius, a lemma on *καρκίνοι* tells us this word is also used as “*πυράγρα*”.<sup>102</sup> Since the *πυράγρα* are frequently used by Hephaistos<sup>103</sup>, being the tongs he uses to pick up malleable metal and protect his hands, the connection to the *Kabeiroi* could be no coincidence.

Hephaistos appears in another fashion too, as protecting oaths and their sanctity. A proverb in Greek times was the *Hephaistean bond*, to which Apostolius comments:<sup>104</sup>

44. Ἡφαίστειος δεσμός· ἐπὶ τῶν ἀφύκτων.  
(Apostolius, *Paroemiae*, l. 8.76, p. 452 in Leutsch.)

*Bond of Hephaistos: by which things are inescapable.*

This proverb suggests Hephaistos binds people to keep themselves to oaths and promises.<sup>105</sup> Except for this proverb, this function of Hephaistos appears in the *Odyssey* too:

45. πῶς ἂν ἐγὼ σε δέοιμι μετ’ ἀθανάτοισι θεοῖσιν,  
εἴ κεν Ἄρης οἴχοιτο χρέος καὶ δεσμὸν ἀλύξας;  
(Homer, *Odyssey*, vv. VIII.352-353.)

*How could I bind you in the presence of the immortal gods,  
If Ares would run and escapes the bond and the debt?”*

Poseidon wants Hephaistos to free the two trapped gods, but Hephaistos refuses on the ground of retribution and debt. Poseidon promises that Ares will pay for his deed, and Hephaistos is not willing to believe that Ares would do that, escaping a literal bonding, and refuses it for that reason. Only after Poseidon promises that he himself will compensate Hephaistos if Ares gets away, Hephaistos lets them both free, knowing this is an oath Poseidon can keep, and saying it would be not right to refuse this.<sup>106</sup>

The final protective function Hephaistos seems to have, is the protector of marriage. Being a son from Hera, the goddess of marriage, the connection is made easily. He also was frequently invoked during wedding ceremonies, as discussed with passage 29. This aspect is best illustrated by the use of his persona by the Homeric poet in the *Odyssey*. Although the song of Ares and Aphrodite has a lot of connotations, the fact that Hephaistos is the one to be at the centre of a broken marriage, capturing the prime instigator of adultery who is not Zeus,

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<sup>102</sup> Hesychius, *Lexicon*, p. 814, lemma on *καρκίνοι*.

<sup>103</sup> Homer, *Iliad*, v. XVIII.477.

<sup>104</sup> Found through Detienne, 1978, p. 284.

<sup>105</sup> We can compare this point to the way Thetis asks for favours from Zeus and Hephaistos in the *Iliad*. Cf. Slatkin, 2011, p. 47: Thetis asks Zeus for his divine mercy, giving the scene a connotation of prayer. Hephaistos on the other hand, gladly helps Thetis, because she saved him in his direst moment. Hephaistos works to repay a favour, and brings the idea of reciprocity to the divine realm.

<sup>106</sup> Homer, *Odyssey*, vv. VIII.344-358.

Aphrodite, and the killer of men, Ares, and laying them out for all the gods to see,<sup>107</sup> does leave some questions about Hephaistos' role in this case. Two solutions come to mind: 1) Hephaistos' role in the *Odyssey* is just the song of Demodocus, and a reflection of Odysseus and his fight against the suitors; 2) Hephaistos is the protector of all marriages and takes on after his mother.

To start with the second song of Demodocus as a *mise en abyme* for the entire *Odyssey*: this interpretation puts the capture of the adulterers as an instigator of tension for Odysseus: Odysseus, between recollections of his own adventures in Troy, hears about divine adultery, while he still doesn't know whether or not Penelope is still waiting for him at home.<sup>108</sup> A point of interest is the use of spiderwebs, as discussed by Holmberg: the spiderwebs will catch infidelity, both through their presence.<sup>109</sup> When Homer describes the fetters Hephaistos catches Ares and Aphrodite with, they are

46. ... ἡύτ' ἀράχνια λεπτά...  
(Homer, *Odyssey*, v. VII.280.)

... like slender spiders' webs...

And the way Telemachos inquires about his mother's fidelity is<sup>110</sup>:

47. ... Ὀδυσσεῖος δέ που εὐνή  
χίται ἐνευναίων κάκ' ἀράχνια κεῖται ἔχουσα."  
(Homer, *Odyssey*, vv. XVI.34-35.)

... and maybe Odysseus' bed lies, with a lack of sleepers, having dreadful spiders' webs."

If the webs appear, adulterers are caught. If Hephaistos' webs appear around his marital bed, Ares and Aphrodite are bound by the thin bindings, and if spiderwebs appear on Odysseus' bed, Penelope is not sleeping in his bed, and has therefore left the house of Odysseus and married another man. Since Hephaistos is the one who creates the webs, he can catch the ones who try to break a marriage. This is strengthened by the comparisons between Hephaistos and Odysseus himself. Both of them are known for their *mêtis*, and have a subpar physique, by heroic standards.<sup>111</sup> Furthermore, when Odysseus arrives at Ithaka in disguise of a beggar, he mimics limping, just like Hephaistos is limping.<sup>112</sup> Odysseus and Hephaistos, mostly through their cunning, are said to be excellent craftsmen.<sup>113</sup> Odysseus is also frequently threatened to be dragged away by his foot.<sup>114</sup> The Song of Ares and Aphrodite could then be read as a preliminary to the eventual defeat of the suitors, and therefore protecting the marriage of Odysseus. Hephaistos captures Ares the competitive and Aphrodite the desiring and desirable, like Odysseus will also defeat the dangers to his marriage, and erases everything that has to do with

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<sup>107</sup> Holmberg, 2003, pp. 9-11.

<sup>108</sup> Newton, 1987, pp. 18-19.

<sup>109</sup> Holmberg, 2003, p. 12.

<sup>110</sup> Note that Odysseus is present, when Telemachos asks the question.

<sup>111</sup> Holmberg, 2003, pp. 6-7.

<sup>112</sup> Ibidem.

<sup>113</sup> Holmberg, 2003, p. 8.

<sup>114</sup> Newton, 1987, p. 15.

the suitors and the threat of a broken home.<sup>115</sup> Hephaistos' victory symbolizes, then, Odysseus' return to his own, intact *oikos*, and his conquering of the suitors.<sup>116</sup> He also must act differently from Hephaistos, as also shown in the outcome of Demodocus' second song: Aphrodite does not return to Hephaistos and they are presumably divorced as of her departure to Cyprus, as discussed below passage 18, and Hephaistos will get compensation, but not necessarily from Ares. Ares escapes, and we never know if the fine is indeed payed by Ares, or Poseidon. Furthermore, the gods around the scene of adultery do not stop laughing, and Hephaistos releases the two destroyers of marriage, allowing them to escape in the first place. Odysseus could therefore learn the right way to deal with the suitors: if he allows them to get off with financial compensation, which is offered to him by the suitors<sup>117</sup>, they will escape, and Penelope might not necessarily return to Odysseus' *oikos*; Hephaistos is portrayed in a tainted victory, to make Odysseus' victory even more triumphant.<sup>118</sup>

We have seen Hephaistos symbolizes the restoration of Odysseus' household and marriage. However, this scene can be further generalized to make Hephaistos a protector of all marriages. Records exist of rituals on Naxos and Samos, celebrating the conception of Hephaistos, as a way to bless and justify their marriage.<sup>119</sup> This would strengthen his relationship to Hera, and may even give him a more feminine nature. In the Homeric poems, weaving is used in a literal and figurative sense, both ways being attributed to one sex or the other. Women weave garments and spreads, and only weave in the literal way.<sup>120</sup> There are only two exceptions: Penelope, whose weaving of Laërtes' shroud is intertwined with devising a plan to get rid of the suitors,<sup>121</sup> and Athena, goddess of wisdom and female crafts, who, together with Odysseus, thinks of a way for Odysseus to return to Ithaka.<sup>122</sup> This division is strict in all the other cases. Slaves, rich women, and even female deities only weave fabrics.<sup>123</sup> Men, on the other hand, only weave words together, and therefore use the metaphor of the maid to construct stories, speeches or strategies.<sup>124</sup> This gender distinction, however, only has one exception in the Homeric poems, in the form of Hephaistos. Hephaistos, although the literal verb of weaving is not used, does partake in the feminine concept of weaving the net, by creating the thinnest strands, which not even the gods could see, and gives a effeminate side of Hephaistos.<sup>125</sup>

This feminine nature provides stability in his own house, for women are required to stay at home and take care of the household.<sup>126</sup> Hephaistos, being born from parthenogenesis, would then symbolize the abstract concept of marital stability, abstract concepts being primarily born from

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<sup>115</sup> Holmberg, 2003, pp. 12-13; Newton, 1987, p. 12.

<sup>116</sup> Braswell, 1982, p. 135.

<sup>117</sup> Homer, *Odyssey*, vv. XXII.54-59.

<sup>118</sup> Alden, 1997, pp. 517-518.

<sup>119</sup> Delcourt, 1982, p. 34.

<sup>120</sup> Holmberg, 2003, pp. 9-10.

<sup>121</sup> Holmberg, 2003, p. 10: Although her plan is also woven in thoughts, the texts constantly links the literal and figurative sense together.

<sup>122</sup> Ibidem. Cf. Homer, *Odyssey*, v. XIII.303: the literal words Athena uses are "to weave a plan" (*μητιν ὑφηνω*).

<sup>123</sup> Holmberg, 2003, p. 9.

<sup>124</sup> Holmberg, 2003, p. 10.

<sup>125</sup> Holmberg, 2003, pp. 10-11. She also adds more references to Hephaistos' representation being somewhat female.

<sup>126</sup> Slater, 2014, p. 202.

primordial parthenogenesis.<sup>127</sup> By capturing the two gods in his webs, he binds together the concepts that are the greatest dangers to marriage: female sexuality and male warfare. Promiscuity and the killing of husbands during the war could both have been prevented by Hephaistos, making him the ultimate protector of marriage and helping his mother even more. Under pressure he ultimately releases them both, explaining the continuing existence of these concepts. This protection of a marriage can also be seen in the first book of the Iliad, when a domestic dispute arises between Zeus and Hera.<sup>128</sup> Hephaistos is the only one of the gods daring to stand up against Zeus, to save his mother. The following passage precedes passage 8:

48. “τέτλαθι, μήτηρ ἐμή, καὶ ἀνάσχεο κηδομένη περ,  
μή σε φίλην περ ἐοῦσαν ἐν ὀφθαλμοῖσιν ἴδωμαι  
θεινομένην, τότε δ’ οὐ τι δυνήσομαι ἀχνύμενός περ  
χραιομεῖν· ἀργαλέος γὰρ Ὀλύμπιος ἀντιφέρεσθαι.  
ἦδη γὰρ με καὶ ἄλλοτ’ ἀλεξέμεναι μεμαῶτα,  
ῥῖψε ποδὸς τεταγῶν ἀπὸ βηλοῦ θεσπεσίωιο...  
(Homer, *Iliad*, vv. I.586-591.)

*“Endure it, my mother, and lift your spirits, while troubled,  
So that I would not see you, because you are very dear to me,  
Struck, in my eyes, when I am not able to ward it off,  
while grieving; for the Olympian is difficult to be set up against.  
Because he also threw me off the divine threshold,  
while I wanted to help in another time, having seized me by the foot...”*

Hephaistos not only wishes to protect his mother, the goddess of marriage, he wants to protect her at all times from her husband. Hephaistos tries to calm his mother to not let the situation escalate, and therefore saving his mother from grief. He therefore not only protects marriage in general, he protects the divine concept of marriage.

### Hephaistos the Limited Trickster

Hephaistos has one important limitation the other Olympians do not share: his crooked foot. This characteristic is shared with other creating gods from other mythologies, like Wieland and Agni, and, of course, Ptah.<sup>129</sup> Furthermore, this handicap might even be a representation of magical, creating powers.<sup>130</sup> An explanation would be that his handicap would let him go both ways, as his feet are turned away from each other.<sup>131</sup> Being able to turn both ways, and therefore move in every direction, allowing him to form metal, as the fire going all ways, and can bend everything, as he can bend himself.<sup>132</sup> Smithies, due to their ability to create something out of “nothing”, are also commonly viewed as magicians.<sup>133</sup> The fire, with which Hephaistos is often associated, is volatile and cannot be easily contained, just as Hephaistos. The limping foot, the cause of the god’s irregular movement, could therefore also be ascribed to the nature of fire.<sup>134</sup>

<sup>127</sup> Park, 2014, pp. 267-268.

<sup>128</sup> Homer, *Iliad*, vv. I.545-569.

<sup>129</sup> Cf. Roscher, 1890, pp. 2038, 2047; Larsen, 2007, p. 159.

<sup>130</sup> Jung, 1976, p. 126.

<sup>131</sup> Green, 1982, p. X.

<sup>132</sup> Dolmage, 2006, pp. 120-122.

<sup>133</sup> De Ciantis, 2017, pp. 144-145; De Ciantis, 2005, pp. 157-158.

<sup>134</sup> Farnell, 1909, p. 375.



Since Hephaistos is limited in his movement, he is forced to rely on cunning and *mètis*, and he is fully aware he can.<sup>135</sup> He knows he cannot best Ares in combat, so has to use his *technè* to equalize the difference, and through his cunning, he can control Ares.<sup>136</sup> Hephaistos himself also completely attributes his victory to his trickery, and blames his foot for creating such a difference between him and Ares.<sup>137</sup>

Another peculiar comparison appears in the Homeric hymn to Hermes:

49. ὄφρα δὲ πῦρ ἀνέκαιε βίη κλυτοῦ Ἥφαιστοιο...  
(*Homeric Hymn to Hermes*, v. 115.)

*So long as the power of famed Hephaistos kept the fire burning...*

This is Hephaistos' only mention in the entire hymn, and it appears after Hermes has made a fire. Hephaistos' connotation with divine fire is not a new one, but the fact this specific case appears in an ode to Hermes is distinct. Hermes, god of thievery and merchants, is one of the most devious and cunning of the gods, and would then fit perfectly in the archetype of the trickster. What culminated in this reference to Hephaistos, however, is a slew of words commonly ascribed to Hephaistos, that are now associated with Hermes, while constructing a lyre and a fire.<sup>138</sup> Vergados, in his commentary, stops here and compares Hermes to Hephaistos, Hermes being the subject of his hymn. The comparison could also be taken the other way around. The entire fact Hermes is compared to the smithing god at all means Hephaistos has qualities Hermes also possesses, which is a particular display of his *mètis*.<sup>139</sup> Hermes is a master of deceptive language<sup>140</sup> and uses his mental prowess to devise deceptions. And in the *Odyssey*, Hephaistos is able to do the same, when Helios tells him about his wife:

50. ... κακὰ φρεσὶ βυσσοδομῶν...  
(Homer, *Odyssey*, v. VIII.273.)

*... while, with his mind, he thinks deep about harmful things...*

The verb *βυσσοδομῶ* does appear multiple times in the *Odyssey*, always connoting harmful or evil things, and never used for something innocuous.<sup>141</sup> The comparisons between Hermes and Hephaistos become more clear. While both excelling far above the other in his own craft, Hermes has the ability to create, and create even fire, while Hephaistos uses his cunning to even lay traps and therefore can use trickery to accomplish his goal.<sup>142</sup>

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<sup>135</sup> Kerényi, 1962, p. 157; Rinon, 2006, p. 14.

<sup>136</sup> Zeitlin, 1996, p. 33.

<sup>137</sup> Braswell, 1982, p. 132.

<sup>138</sup> Vergados, 2013, pp. 268, 272, 330.

<sup>139</sup> Vergados, 2013, p. 272.

<sup>140</sup> Vergados, 2013, p. 23, 25.

<sup>141</sup> Cf. Garvie, 1994, p.296; LSJ, entry on *βυσσοδομῶ*.

<sup>142</sup> Homer, *Odyssey*, v. VIII.333.

## Hephaistos the Peacemaker

The trickery discussed in the last sub-chapter is also applicable to positive behaviour. If we again take a look at the Song of Ares and Aphrodite, the words Hephaistos uses when he wants to show the trapped lovers to the immortals:

51. δεῦθ', ἵνα ἔργα γελαστά καὶ οὐκ ἐπιεικτὰ ἴδησθε...  
(Homer, *Odyssey*, v. VIII.307.)

*Come here, so you can see some laughable and dauntless matters...*

Hephaistos invites everyone to see the adulterers, calling the deed simultaneously laughable and intolerable. Hephaistos would then presume the gods would agree Ares and Aphrodite have done something wrong and shame their bad behaviour by laughing with Hephaistos at the captured gods.<sup>143</sup> However, the critical apparatus Allen's edition provides points to another reading of the laughable matters present in the manuscripts, being: *ἔργ' ἀγέλαστα*. This version has my own preference, for two reasons: Hephaistos is being wronged and explains his life of misery up until this point. To add to this, he calls his discovery unbearable (*οὐκ ἐπιεικτὰ*), which implies he thinks these deeds are to be enjoyed by no one. Why would Hephaistos then describe the adultery as a laughable matter? Then, the matters Hephaistos discusses are tragic: Aphrodite's adultery; the difference between him and Ares; his birth defect; the dowry he wants returned from Zeus; all are not matters he finds enjoyable.<sup>144</sup> To further exemplify this point, the other gods are the ones specifically noting the hilarity of the situation, as the lame Hephaistos could catch swift Ares. The regular emendation of *ἔργα γελαστά*, then, is in my opinion the lesser defensible of the two, and I would opt for the *ἔργ' ἀγέλαστα*.

Both of these interpretations could then be used to explain Hephaistos' role as pacifier.<sup>145</sup> He summons the gods to him and brings unity to all the gods, because all the gods who are present are laughing. If the deeds are laughable, as most modern editions suggest, Hephaistos himself instigates the laughter and allows everyone present to indulge themselves in merriment. If *ἔργ' ἀγέλαστα* are written, the remark of Hephaistos becomes a case of dramatic irony, where the gods do the opposite of what Hephaistos wants, although the audience is activated to expect laughter by the use of its negation. Hephaistos is used as a unifying scapegoat to provide levity for all the gods through laughter.<sup>146</sup>

Just as Hephaistos provides levity for the gods, this entire story is a lighter tale between the other songs of Demodocus, portraying the toils of the Trojan war and specifically of Odysseus himself.<sup>147</sup> After the first song, about the strife between Achilles and himself, and the third song, singing of the Trojan horse, Odysseus wants to hide his tears,<sup>148</sup> but the Song of Ares and

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<sup>143</sup> Brown, 1989, p. 286 discusses this point of the gods having the primary function of laughing and therefore supporting Hephaistos. In the same article on pp. 286-288 he explains that laughter is often used as the pure shaming of the guilty, to punish the wrongdoer in that way.

<sup>144</sup> Homer, *Odyssey*, vv. VIII.308-320. Cf. Garland, 1992, p. 40: Garland proposes the laughter of the gods and Hermes' notion of suffering three times the punishment Ares received, just to be with Aphrodite, shows the normative society of Homer's time. Hephaistos can be made fun of, because he is crippled, and does not conform to the Greek values.

<sup>145</sup> Cf. Larsen, 2007, p. 159: She discusses Hephaistos often has this role of peacemaker.

<sup>146</sup> Cf. Garland, 1992, p. 40; Thalmann, 1988, p. 24.

<sup>147</sup> Zeitlin, 1996, p. 35.

<sup>148</sup> Homer, *Odyssey*, v. VIII.86; v. VIII.531.

Aphrodite brings joy to Odysseus' heart.<sup>149</sup> Odysseus, troubled by the toils of his journey, the prospect of a difficult return, and the insecurity about the state of his *oikos*, is able to forget his pains for a moment through Hephaistos, even though the themes of the song are the same as one of his problems: the broken household. Hephaistos, acting as a scapegoat, brings peace to Odysseus' mind.

Although this myth about Hephaistos is used as an amusing story to lighten up the mood of Odysseus' situation, Hephaistos himself is not the one intentionally making everything laughable. There are also records of comedies and satyr plays about Hephaistos, putting him in more absurd situations.<sup>150</sup> However, in the *Iliad*, we can see an example of Hephaistos himself intentionally taking up the role of scapegoat. As discussed with passage 48, Hephaistos wants to protect Hera, and does so by trying to calm Hera first.<sup>151</sup> After Hera can smile again, Hephaistos does the following:

52. αὐτὰρ ὁ τοῖς ἄλλοισι θεοῖς ἐνδέξια πᾶσιν  
οἰνοχόει γλυκὸν νέκταρ ἀπὸ κρητῆρος ἀφύσσων·  
ἄσβεστος δ' ἄρ' ἐνῶρτο γέλωσ μακάρεσσι θεοῖσιν,  
ὡς ἴδον Ἥφαιστον διὰ δώματα ποιπνύοντα.  
(Homer, *Iliad*, I.597-600.)

*But he poured sweet nectar for all the other gods  
From left to right, drawing it from the krater;  
An unquenchable laughter arose for the blessed gods,  
As they saw Hephaistos bustle through the houses.*

Hephaistos makes clever use of his own handicap, of which he is clearly fully aware. Using his own limitations to compare himself to Ganymede, or Thersites, and ensuing hilarity, provides a moment of unity for all the gods, where the fight is no longer relevant.<sup>152</sup> He, therefore, creates peace between the gods.

Having seen these concrete examples of peace, Hephaistos can also be seen as an antithesis to Ares in the way of peacemaker. As discussed in the second sub-chapter in this chapter, Hephaistos' capture of the god of war could be seen as a protection of marriage. But the way he does that is the binding of war itself, and preventing war from happening: Ares has been bound. This is not the only way Hephaistos defeats Ares. After he bound Hera (passage 11), Ares is the first to retrieve Hephaistos, but Hephaistos is able to drive off the war-loving god. Warfare and brute force are obviously not enough to defeat Hephaistos, as also shown in the Song of Ares and Aphrodite. It should be noted that the epithets used for Ares and Hephaistos contrast in their use of *kleos*: This powerful and important word is usually used something exclusively gained in war (Ares' terrain), but Hephaistos is often accompanied by an adjective as

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<sup>149</sup> Homer, *Odyssey*, vv. VIII.367-368.

<sup>150</sup> Gantz, 1993, p. 76.

<sup>151</sup> Homer, *Iliad*, vv. I.571-572.

<sup>152</sup> Cf. Kerényi, 1962, p. 197; Thalmann, 1988, p. 24.

κλυτοτέχνης<sup>153</sup> or κλυτόμητις.<sup>154</sup> He is “famed for his crafts” or “famed for his cunning”, in contexts where he is creating, not destroying.<sup>155</sup>

Hephaistos symbolizes peace too through the reorganization of the Hephaistia in 420<sup>156</sup>, as Burkert states that “craftmanship seemed to balance warlike prowess”<sup>157</sup>, because the Hephaistia seems to be reorganized after a war that destroyed parts of Athens, ended by the peace treaty signed by Nikias.<sup>158</sup> The rebuilding of Athens was combined with the Hephaistia in a time of peace, and Hephaistos was part of greater reverence than before, seeing that the Hephaistion was also built around this period.<sup>159</sup>

A final point could be made with Hephaistos’ alliance with Zeus. As seen in passage 5, Hephaistos is born because of anger towards Zeus. Hera wanted to take revenge on Zeus for bearing Athena without her,<sup>160</sup> so Hephaistos’ very existence is a consequence of strife. Another parthenogenetical birth by Hera is seen in Typhon,<sup>161</sup> who, also born out of anger, becomes one of the greatest foes of Zeus. Hephaistos on the other hand, having the same origin, does not try to overtake Zeus at all. To strengthen this fact, Hephaistos even works together with the dreadful Typhon, as the fires that power the Etna, workshop of the smithy, are blown by Typhon.<sup>162</sup> Hephaistos would then be a factor of peace between Zeus and Hera, although his whole conception is because of an argument.<sup>163</sup>

### Hephaistos the Intermediator

Hephaistos, being a pacifying link between Hera and Zeus, could be described as intermediating the relationship of the two greatest Olympians. His role of intermediary can be seen quite frequently in Greek mythology. As seen in passages 34-36, Hephaistos’ fire is used as a link between the human world and others. His sacrificial fires can burn the dead, to properly take them to Hades, and sacrifices are burned to send them to the gods.

The other link Hephaistos provides between the human and divine worlds, can be seen in his return to Olympus, as discussed with passage 11. Hephaistos himself is removed from the divine habitat, and lives with Eurynome and Thetis on Lemnos, therefore, in the human world. Only Dionysus can bring him back, eventually, by giving him wine and inebriating him. And then, Hephaistos makes Dionysus a benefactor to Hera, after which Hera makes him one of the Olympians. This sudden shift in focus suggests this story is not about Hephaistos primarily, but about Dionysus’ apotheosis. Hephaistos, in the entire surviving mythology, is not a main character; not being a true protagonist, or true antagonist. He always fits between these two categories.<sup>164</sup> The entire myth does, however, have many aspects of a Dionysiac procession.<sup>165</sup>

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<sup>153</sup> Homer, *Iliad*, v. 1.571.

<sup>154</sup> *Homeric Hymn to Hephaistos*, v. 1.

<sup>155</sup> De Ciantis, 2017, p. 139.

<sup>156</sup> Wijma, 2010, p. 130.

<sup>157</sup> Burkert, 1992, p. 260.

<sup>158</sup> Wijma, 2010, pp. 147-148.

<sup>159</sup> Dolmage, 2006, p. 134.

<sup>160</sup> *Homeric Hymn to Apollo*, v. 324.

<sup>161</sup> According to the *Homeric Hymn to Apollo*, vv. 306-307. In Hesiod, *Theogony*, vv 820-822 Typhon is the son of Gaia and Tartarus.

<sup>162</sup> Aeschylus, *Prometheus Bound*, vv. 366-367.

<sup>163</sup> Park, 2014, p. 274.

<sup>164</sup> Dolmage, 2006, p. 130.

<sup>165</sup> Hedreen, 2004, pp. 41-43.

Hephaistos is projected as being an outsider being introduced into the Olympus,<sup>166</sup> but the myth portrays the initiation of Dionysus, a foreign god. Through Hephaistos, Dionysus is accepted.

His birth from only Hera also conveys him as an intermediary: in the early epics, parthenogenesis is only used to create natural phenomena, and the birth of Typhon as terrible monster still falls under this category. Hephaistos is the only exception to this rule.<sup>167</sup> The fact then, that Hephaistos is the only imperfect one of the other divinities, would then imply the ultimate proof of parthenogenetical birth being inferior to normal conception or Zeus' power.<sup>168</sup> As a factor in birth, his role extends further, for he often helps with the birth of other gods, placing himself between the stage of living and still being unborn.<sup>169</sup>

To add to this, Hephaistos stands between humans and the divine nature. He is the magic craftsman who can create something living out of nothing,<sup>170</sup> and must therefore have the ability to inanimate. We see this in the golden maidens he made, who have in them understanding, heart and voice,<sup>171</sup> and the creation of Pandora, who receives these abilities from Hephaistos too.<sup>172</sup> Again, we see a connection through Hephaistos being between lifeless to animated.<sup>173</sup> Furthermore, we can see his role in the dehumanization of Achilles. Achilles is torn, after Hektor killed Patroclus, and stops at nothing short of destruction and revenge. Hephaistos then is the one who enables him to return to the battlefield with his armour, and through that armour, we see his human nature disappearing, only being controlled by grief and anger.<sup>174</sup>

Another interpretation of the intermediary is him standing between the masculine and feminine. As discussed with his protection of marriage, Hephaistos has a feminine nature attributed to him, using more of his mind than he would his strength.<sup>175</sup> He is connected to the Apis bull and the showing of genitals by visiting females. Only women (passage 40) are allowed to visit the bull in the temple of Ptah/Hephaistos, and afterwards, only women are barred. In many myths, Hephaistos is also associated with women, without a sexual sense like other gods.<sup>176</sup> He creates the first woman, Pandora,<sup>177</sup> and the golden automata he created for his workplace are also alike living girls.<sup>178</sup> Hephaistos, not fitting the role of the traditional manly warrior man, partakes in femininity through all these means.

Concerning the metics and the Hephaistia, as earlier discussed, Hephaistos also seems to stand between the Athenian society and the outsiders. The Hephaistia were probably the first festival to fully incorporate metics in their rituals, for they were usually barred from performing in the

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<sup>166</sup> Ibidem.

<sup>167</sup> Park, 2014, pp. 267-268.

<sup>168</sup> Cf. Park, 2014, p. 273; Slater, 2014, p. 198: The birth from just a female is always used as a way to assert dominance over the male, to prove she can create without a man. Hera is the final one in that respect, and transitions from the equality, or even superiority of female deities, to a subordinate one.

<sup>169</sup> Green, 1982, pp. ix-x.

<sup>170</sup> De Ciantis, 2005, p. 20.

<sup>171</sup> Homer, *Iliad*, vv. XVIII.419-420.

<sup>172</sup> See passage 23.

<sup>173</sup> Cf. Faraone, 1987, pp. 266ff.: Faraone compares the statues Hephaistos brings to life to Eastern magic, importing Eastern culture through this god.

<sup>174</sup> Fineberg, 1999., p. 36.

<sup>175</sup> Homberg, 2003, pp. 7-8.

<sup>176</sup> Green, 1982, p. x.

<sup>177</sup> See passage 23.

<sup>178</sup> Homer, *Iliad*, XVIII.418.

sacred rites, except for the procession.<sup>179</sup> Seeing as metics could now perform in the most sacrilegious matters, Hephaistos could mix the metics with the Athenian society, again, incorporating them in Athens.<sup>180</sup> For the Athenians, it would have been important to reinstitute the idea of citizenship in a period after war, when life had begun to form again. The Athenians needed a festival to bring in memory their autochthonic ancestry, and Hephaistos and Athena being responsible for the chthonic birth of Erichthonios on Attic soil, the Hephaistia would have been perfect to strengthen the Athenian solidarity.<sup>181</sup>

The metics, however, were still not fully integrated, as discussed in chapter 1, and remained a lower class of citizens. The relationship between Hephaistos and the metics would then imply that Hephaistos still is less than the other divinities. This image complies with the general portrayal of Hephaistos. Heraclitus, in his *Homeric Problems*, summarizes two criticism commenters had on Homer's version of Hephaistos:

53. Ἐγκαλοῦσι δ' Ὀμήρῳ περὶ τῆς Ἥφαιστου ρίψεως τὸ μὲν πρῶτον ὅτι χωλὸν αὐτὸν ὑφίσταται, τὴν θεῖαν ἀκρωτηριάζων φύσιν, εἴθ' ὅτι καὶ παρὰ μικρὸν ἦκε κινδύνου.  
(Heraclitus, *Homeric Problems*, 26.1.1-3.)

*People said against Homer about the throwing of Hephaistos, in the first place that he portrayed him as crippled, mutilating his divine nature, and that came also very close to danger.*

Heraclitus explicitly says Hephaistos' divinity is corrupted because of his lame foot, and it is not right that a god could come in such grave danger.<sup>182</sup> But Heraclitus has an elegant solution:

54. 26.6 Ἄλλ' ἐπεὶ ἡ πυρὸς οὐσία διπλῆ, καὶ τὸ μὲν αἰθέριον, ὡς ἔναγχος εἰρήκαμεν, ἐπὶ τῆς ἀνωτάτω τοῦ παντὸς αἰωρούμενον χώρᾳ οὐδὲν ὑστεροῦν ἔχει πρὸς τελειότητα, τοῦ δὲ παρ' ἡμῖν πυρὸς ἡ ὕλη, πρόσγειος οὐσα, φθαρτὴ καὶ διὰ τῆς ὑποτρεφούσης παρ' ἕκαστα ζωπυρουμένη, 26.7 διὰ τοῦτο τὴν ὀξυτάτην φλόγα συνεχῶς Ἥλιόν τε καὶ Δία προσαγορεύει, τὸ δ' ἐπὶ γῆς πῦρ Ἥφαιστον, ἐτοιμῶς ἀπτόμενόν τε καὶ σβεννύμενον· 26.8 ὅθεν εἰκότως κατὰ σύγκρισιν ἐκείνου τοῦ ὀλοκλήρου τοῦτο νενόμισται χωλὸν εἶναι τὸ πῦρ. 26.9 Ἄλλως τε καὶ πᾶσα ποδῶν πήρωσις ἀεὶ τοῦ διαστηρίζοντος ἐπιδειῖται βάκτρον· 26.10 τὸ δὲ παρ' ἡμῖν πῦρ, ἄνευ τῆς τῶν ζύλων παραθέσεως οὐ δυνηθὲν ἂν ἐπὶ πλεῖον παραμεῖναι, συμβολικῶς χωλὸν εἴρηται.  
(Heraclitus, *Homeric Problems*, 26.6.1-10.3.)

*26.6 But then the fire being twofold, and on the one hand the ethereal one, as we have said just now, floating at the highest plain of the universe has nothing short of perfection, and of the fire with us, the matter, being near the earth, is perishable and is being rekindled by other things through the feeding matter of which it consists; 26.7 because of that, he [i.e. Homer] usually addresses the upmost flame as Helios or Zeus, and the one on earth Hephaistos, readily to be touched and extinguished; 26.8 when the latter is compared in a comparison to that perfect one, this fire would be regarded as lame. 26.9 above all, every disabling of feet*

<sup>179</sup> Wijma, 2010, pp. 129, 143.

<sup>180</sup> Wijma, 2010, pp. 138, 143-144.

<sup>181</sup> Takahiro, 1999, pp. 4-6.

<sup>182</sup> As stated in passage 8, which Heraclitus quotes.

*always needs a securing stick; the fire that's with us, that would not be able to last any longer without a deposit of wood, is said to be lame, symbolically.*

A clear distinction is made between heavenly and terrestrial fire. Ethereal flames are named Sun and Zeus by Homer, and the flame that lives in the human realm is called Hephaistos. He also explains how a god could be described as crippled, through the simile of earthly fire. Hephaistos resides in the human realm, he is perishable and limited. His own fall takes a whole day<sup>183</sup>, signifying a limit in Hephaistos' abilities: other gods can travel instantaneously between the realms, but Hephaistos cannot.<sup>184</sup> This restriction in space points to a human character of Hephaistos.<sup>185</sup>

### Hephaistos the Human Creator

Hephaistos is most basically known as a creator. He creates weapons, defences, houses, jewellery. Finally, we will discuss the most important aspect of Hephaistos' creations: human nature and life. Hephaistos can create life out of nothing, as discussed earlier. Another connection could then be made to Dionysus. Dionysus connects himself to Hephaistos, by bringing him back to Olympus after he had bound Hera.<sup>186</sup> Through the wine, the divine fire returns to the divine mountain and Hera, a mother goddess, so that the two aspects join together in bringing fertility.<sup>187</sup> Roscher further explains that the connection between Hephaistos and Dionysus is strengthened through volcanic ashes, for volcanic soil is fertile and apt soil for cultivation of wine.<sup>188</sup> This aspect is also portrayed in the iconography of Hephaistos' return to Olympus. Contrary to expectations, in most of the vase paintings the return itself is pictured, instead of any other aspect of the myth.<sup>189</sup> Hephaistos rides a donkey, often ithyphallic, to symbolize the fertility being brought.<sup>190</sup> This entire picture adds to the interpretation of Hephaistos' return as a Dionysiac procession, to bring fertility back into the divine estates.<sup>191</sup>

Being fertile means being creating. We have seen Erichthonios being born from Hephaistos' fallen seed, making him the forefather of all autochthonic Athenians.<sup>192</sup> In this way, he is put at the beginning of the entire Athenian society. The Hephaistia further exemplifies this, by excluding the metics from cooking their meat in Hephaistos' flame.<sup>193</sup> This signifies that the citizens could sear their meat, and through their dinner live in unison. Zooming out, we also see Hephaistos in the creation of the working man. As seen in passages 24 and 25, the creation of Pandora instigates the age of work, toil and hardship. The one tasked with her creation is Hephaistos, and he delivers the pains of men. However, this is not always seen as a negative aspect of Hephaistos, as seen in the Homeric Hymn to Hephaistos:

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<sup>183</sup> Cf. Heraclitus, *Homeric Problems*, 27: He compares the fall to the cycle of the sun, saying that Hephaistos' fire and Helios' flame are synchronized to take one day.

<sup>184</sup> Rinon, 2006, p. 6.

<sup>185</sup> Rinon, 2006, p. 8.

<sup>186</sup> Passage 11.

<sup>187</sup> Roscher, 1890, p. 2056.

<sup>188</sup> *Ibidem*.

<sup>189</sup> Hedreen, 2004, pp. 39-40.

<sup>190</sup> Cf. Hedreen, 2004, p. 51; Roscher, 1890, p. 2060: The painter directs the viewer to the phallus of the donkey by decorating it with a wine-vessel, connecting Hephaistos with fertility in this way too.

<sup>191</sup> Hedreen, 2004, pp. 41-43.

<sup>192</sup> Takahiro, 1999, pp. 4-5.

<sup>193</sup> Takahiro, 1999, pp. 3.

55. Ἦφαιστον κλυτόμητιν αἰίδεο Μοῦσα λίγεια,  
 ὃς μετ' Ἀθηναίης γλαυκώπιδος ἀγλαὰ ἔργα  
 ἀνθρώπους ἐδίδαξεν ἐπὶ χθονός, οἱ τὸ πάρος περ  
 ἄντροις ναιετάασκον ἐν οὐρεσιν ἠΰτε θῆρες.  
 νῦν δὲ δι' Ἦφαιστον κλυτοτέχνην ἔργα δαέντες  
 ῥηϊδίως αἰῶνα τελεσφόρον εἰς ἐνιαυτὸν  
 εὐκῆλοι διάγουσιν ἐνὶ σφετέροισι δόμοισιν.  
 Ἄλλ' ἴληθ' Ἦφαιστε· δίδου δὲ ἀρετὴν τε καὶ ὄλβον.  
 (Homeric Hymn XX: To Hephaistos, vv. 1-8.)

*Sing of Hephaistos, famed for his wit, clear-voiced Muze,  
 Who taught together with owl-eyed Athena splendid crafts  
 To humans on the ground, who formerly lived in caves in  
 The mountains, like animals. But now, through Hephaistos,  
 Famous for his skill, while they learn the crafts,  
 They easily live a fulfilling life to each anniversary,  
 Free from care in their homes.  
 But be gracious, Hephaistos: provide virtue and happiness.*

Hephaistos stands at the beginning of humanity. His crafts and tools are the signifying difference between humans and animals, and provide mankind with pleasure and a peaceful way of life. Passage 4 places Hephaistos in the same context, and Diodorus Siculus says the same:

56. τὸ δὲ πῦρ μεθερμηνευόμενον Ἦφαιστον ὀνομάσαι, νομίσαντας μέγαν εἶναι θεὸν καὶ πολλὰ συμβάλλεσθαι πᾶσιν εἰς γένεσιν τε καὶ τελείαν αὐξήσιν.  
 (Diodorus Siculus, *Bibliotheca*, I.12.3.1-3.)

*The fire in translation, they call Hephaistos, regarding him to be a great god and to unite many things to the creation and perfection of all growths.*

And in the fifth book as well:

57. 2. Ἦφαιστον δὲ λέγουσιν εὐρετὴν γενέσθαι τῆς περὶ τὸν σίδηρον ἐργασίας ἀπάσης καὶ τῆς περὶ τὸν χαλκὸν καὶ χρυσὸν καὶ ἄργυρον καὶ τῶν ἄλλων ὅσα τὴν ἐκ τοῦ πυρὸς ἐργασίαν ἐπιδέχεται, καὶ τὰς ἄλλας δὲ χρεῖας τὰς τοῦ πυρὸς ἀπάσας προσεξευρεῖν καὶ παραδοῦναι τοῖς τε τὰς τέχνας ἐργαζομένοις καὶ τοῖς ἄλλοις ἅπασιν ἀνθρώποις· 3. διόπερ οἱ τῶν τεχνῶν τούτων δημιουργοὶ τὰς εὐχὰς καὶ θυσίας τούτῳ τῷ θεῷ μάλιστα ποιοῦσι, καὶ τὸ πῦρ οὕτοί τε καὶ πάντες ἄνθρωποι προσαγορεύουσιν Ἦφαιστον, εἰς μνήμην καὶ τιμὴν ἀθάνατον τιθέμενοι τὴν ἐξ ἀρχῆς τῷ κοινῷ βίῳ δεδομένην εὐεργεσίαν.  
 (Diodorus Siculus, *Bibliotheca*, V.74.2.1-3.6.)

*2. They say Hephaistos became the discoverer of every craft regarding iron and regarding bronze and gold and silver and of all other things that contain the works of the fire, and that he discovered all the other uses of the fire and imparted the skills to the working men and all other humans; 3. On which account the demiurges of these crafts make prayers and sacrifices to this god the most, and these and all the people address the fire as Hephaistos,*



*placing the service, being given to societal life from the beginning, to undying memory and honour.*

Rites to Hephaistos are meant as remembrance of his role in humanity. He stands between the world of humans and animals as he stands between the human and divine realm. This notion must be added to the idea of Hephaistos being the lesser god in the Greek Pantheon, as discussed on pages 37 and 38. Less divine means then less perfect and blessed, and lower in the order of gods. I suggest this would mean Hephaistos is not the least divine god, but the god most associated with humans. He is limited in form, space, time, and is able to feel pain.<sup>194</sup> He even sweats and heaves.<sup>195</sup> Therefore Hephaistos must be regarded as the most human god.

To conclude with a side note: Pandora's creation was an order by Zeus, but her creation could have been instigated by no other god than Hephaistos: since he is able to animate from nothing and intermediates between the humans and everything else, he had to be the divinity to create Pandora, the beginning of the working men. Hephaistos is the creator of mankind.

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<sup>194</sup> Rinon, 2006, p. 8.

<sup>195</sup> Dolmage, 2006, p. 128.

## Conclusion

Through mythology, we can get a greater understanding of the role Hephaistos has in Greek society. He has asexual tendencies, although frequently surrounded by and associated with women. This means the children he produces all had something special, often regarding their feet; they must have been born with regards to Hephaistos, and therefore lame. Hephaistos' lameness also puts him between gods and men, being too human for a true god, but too divine for a human. He then perfectly fits as an intermediary between the two realms, as seen through the use of sacrificial fire and frequent allusions to Hephaistos in mythology. He makes sure the dead can be burned and brought to Hades, and the sacrifices can reach the gods. Hephaistos stands between war and peace, providing protection of all kinds, being warlike, or domestically. His persona is also used as the link between citizenship and the Other. He provides unity inside of the city, sometimes by excluding the ones who don't belong.

Hephaistos is love, Hephaistos is life. He protects the sanctity of marriage, and he creates asexually. Hephaistos, with his fire, is the beginning of humankind. The intermediary becomes the true human creator.

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# THE DECREE OF THE HEPHAISTIA IN 421 B. C. AND THE ATHENIAN DEMOS

By Saitō Takahiro 齋藤貴弘

Translated by Tineke Dijkstra

## Whereabouts of the problem

As described in Homeros' epic poems and sketches, Hephaestus is an atypical god with an imbalanced appearance. Originally said to be of non-Greek origin and worshiped mainly on Lemnos, on the mainland of Greece he was hardly worshiped except in Athens. However, in Athens, he was worshiped together with Athena as a guardian god of blacksmithing and handicrafts.

In response to this god, who is said to be following Ares in being the 'least respected among the 12 gods', a resolution with the purpose of establishing or redeveloping the Hephaistia festival was adopted by the Ecclesia in Athens directly after the Nicias peace settlement in 421 B.C. (*JG* I<sup>3</sup> 82). At the same time, the construction of Hephaestion, which had been suspended, was resumed, and the production of the statues of Hephaestus and Athena that were to be dedicated to at [the Hephaestion] had begun.

In this period, in relation to the resumption of the construction of Hephaestion on top of the hill of Kronos, the rituals of Hephaestus, which seems to suddenly have begun to draw a lot of attention, have only been considered something to give praise to the guardian god of blacksmithing and handicrafts. It cannot be denied that the Hephaistia festival had such an aspect, but welcoming the end of a war that extended to 10 years with this alone, I cannot sufficiently explain why this inconspicuous divinity was implemented for state rituals.

Hereafter, in this article, while adding a view of the societal situation of Athens in that time, I want to discuss the total of historical records in relation to the ritual provisions as well as Hephaestus, and I want to focus on and review again today why the resolution in relation to the Hephaistia festival was carried out immediately following peace in 421 B.C.

## 2. Provisions of the Hephaistia festival

First, I would like to confirm the main contents of the ritual provisions based on historical inscription materials (*JG* I<sup>3</sup> 82). 1) The decision of the jury and council that all 10 pairs of *hieropoioi* each performed the rituals (a ritual?) (lines 17 – 18, 21 – 23). 2) A musical competition (line 14). 3) the unified rituals of Hephaestus and Athena (line 15). 4) The distribution of three cows from the animals to be sacrificed, to the *metoikoi* (lines 23 – 24). 5) The bringing up of cattle by citizens (lines 28 – 30). 6) The torch race (lines 30 – 33). 7) Reduction of the preparatory phase of the feasts.

About the Hephaistia festival, which contains the above-mentioned features, the opinion is presented that recognizes the relation between the distribution of the sacrificial beasts to the *metoikoi*, of whom many engaged in handicraft, and the handicraft based on the holding of the torch race linked to the deep fire related to blacksmithing and handicrafts. Let me give you some criticism against this opinion hereafter.

First, the very contents of the festival had become centered around events of tribal units and oppositions, such as torch races, in which all citizens could participate, and it didn't demonstrate a relation to handicraft in particular. In addition, the torch race had also already been held at the Prometheia, Panathenaia, and Bread festivals during the classic period. Furthermore, since the 3rd century BC, the torch race is held by *epeboi* at many festivals other than the above-mentioned.

Because of this, one cannot speak of the torch race as being particularly relevant to the handicrafts industry.

I will discuss the distribution of the sacrificial beasts to the *metoikoi* later (paragraph 3), and next [I will discuss] the state of affairs concerning Athens' handicraft industry. Solon is said to have 'gotten the citizens to learn the technology', but at the end of the 5th century B.C. it became clear through the vision of a.o. Xenophon and Plato, that citizens disliked being engaged in handicrafts themselves and that disdain towards handcrafters spread. However, it is undeniable that the Sophist idea is strong within the disdain towards handicrafts, and it doesn't mean that handcrafters themselves felt ashamed about their work. In reality, Athens took pride in being the city of technology and handicraft, and also held a festival for handicrafts called the Chalkeia festival. However, it should be noted that, the Athenians generally did not pay particular attention to the promotion of the dealers or the industry and did not implement any special policies for this particular purpose. In addition, it didn't mean that the handcrafters themselves limited their faith in Hephaestus, who was in particular strongly related on a professional level.

Based on the above-mentioned situation, it is not adequate to assume at least as a primary purpose, the reconstruction policy aspect of handicrafts at the Hephaistia Festival, which was resolved shortly after the war. In other words, or rather, if it is aimed at turning the enshrinement of Hephaestus and Athena into a symbol of the craft and culture of the city in a more general sense, the question remains why the hosting was hurried in this period to the extent where the preparation time was shortened.

### 3. Distribution of sacrificial animals for the *metoikoi*

What kind of meaning should we consider the distribution of the sacrificial animals to *metoikoi* to have? First, *metoikoi* were given the opportunity to participate in other national festivities such as the Panathenaia Festival. Incidentally, in this *IG* I<sup>3</sup> 82 about distribution of sacrificial animals to *metoikoi*, written down in lines 23 – 24, is prescribed: 'hand out these (cow that will be sacrificed) [as] three pieces of raw beef (*ὡμὰ τὰ κρέα*) to them (*metoikoi*)'. It is observed that the condition of it being 'raw meat' is written on purpose, not simply distribution of meat.

The prescription in the state rituals on distributing meat by sacrifice to citizens is also confirmed by other historical records, but it is generally thought not to be prescribed in particular as 'raw meat'. In reality, the inscriptions of Asotica only mention 'raw meat' in three cases, in four passages. It is interesting to note that these three cases are concerned with the ritual prescriptions of two groups of a different nature.

Based on the special usage of the word "raw meat", would there be any specific meaning to the condition in the Hephaistia festival prescription? It is thought that clues can be obtained by assuming the progress of the festival in accordance with the ritual regulations. Namely, due to the carrying up of cow for the animal sacrifice for 200 citizens, it is presumed that, as told in line 36 and below, the sacrifice is taken to the altar [made] for Hephaestus, the fire brought there by the torch race will light up the altar and the fire will burn the sacrifice. When considering such a ritual prescription, the distribution of three pieces of raw meat to the *metoikoi* may have been conducted in a different manner. In other words, this 'distribution of raw meat' may mean that the *Metoikoi* do not participate in the lines of citizens carrying cattle, and the cattle given to them will not be burned on the altar of the Hephaestion, but [instead] shall be distributed to them separately as 'raw meat'. A guess is considered on whether there were two different processes in treatment of the sacrificial animal, that in contrast to the *Hieropoioi*, who were repeatedly composed of ten people elected by the council, in this [*Metoikoi*?] prescription an exceptional procedure seems to be suggested that two pairs of 10 persons are selected from the jury and the council as separate groups, that are responsible for the distribution of the beasts and the supervision of the lines [of citizens].

So why was this procedural difference necessary? Its meaning is thought to be to procedurally distinguish by etiquette, the *Metoikoi* from de Athenai citizens that are the core participants to the

festival, and to demonstrate that the non-citizen *Metoikoi* cannot be essential participants to the festival. Therefore, it can be said that the essence of this Hephaistia Festival was a feast for the Athenians. In such a case, although one can appreciate the value of the prosperous Athenians carrying the many *Metoikoi* in their arms and intentionally deciding to give them animal sacrifices, it is regarded as secondary to the ritual, and this cannot be recognized as the main focus of the Hephaistia Festival.

#### 4. Hephaestus as mythical founder

At Athens, Hephaestus had another principal aspect, being the duty of father of *Erichthonios*, as mythical founder of the Athenian people. Especially upon entering the 5<sup>th</sup> century B.C., together with the rise of the concept of autochthony, the mythology of *Erichthonios* was also shaped and promoted through a.o. paintings, tragedy and sophist works. However, so far, Hephaestus's role as a mythical father has not been given much praise.

By the way, in the actual rituals and courtesies, to what extent will this character of Hephaestus be recognized? It can be confirmed that the historical material which positions Hephaestus as an Athenian mythical father in various rituals and courtesies, appears, however in fragments, for a period of an unusual extent since the 5<sup>th</sup> century B.C. Here, I would like to pay special attention to the relation between Apaturia Festival, the main festival of Fratria, and Hephaestus.

Halfway the 3<sup>rd</sup> century B.C., Istros reported that at the Apaturia Festival people devoted through song of praise to Hephaistos. He explained that the reason for this was "to teach others the memory of those who had learned how to use fire". Based on this article, we can point out the following questions and criticisms on the assumption that the connection between Hephaestus and the Apaturia Festival is very old. Namely, 1) including the myth of origin, the relationship between the Apaturia Festival and Hephaestus is not seen at all except in this historical source. 2) On the one hand the unusually old origin of the Apaturia Festival is considered, on the other hand the thought that the introduction of the Hephaestus rituals of the Athenians was after the 6<sup>th</sup> century B.C., and that the relation between Hephaestus and the Apaturia festival is also after this period, is more consistent. 3) The role of initiator of fire in Athens was at first carried by Prometheus.

Based on above-mentioned points, I wonder if, derived from the circumstances in the historical data, it may be more adequate to consider that, rather, the rites to Hephaestus at the Apaturia Festival were relatively late, probably taken from the 5<sup>th</sup> century BC on the background of the spread of the Erichthonios mythology. Although the inaction of historical material in the period before Istros and the construction of the temple of Apollo Patroös and the small temples of Zeus • Fratrios, and Atena • Fratria in the *agora* at the base of the Hephaestion in the 4<sup>th</sup> century B.C., and especially the reform of the Apaturia festival in the period of Lycurgus can be included, upon considering that the temple of Apollo Patroös in Agora was also expended, it is thought more adequate to consider that the relationship between the Apaturia festival and Hephaestus was first established around this time. Also, it should be observed what Istros' explanation is for [the fact that] the ceremonies were added for Hephaestus, who wasn't related to the aboriginal bloodline, the 'original fratria', and what also should be observed is Hephaestus positioned as a mythical father.

#### 5. The principle of Autochthony and the Athenian citizenship

The Hephaistia Festival of 421 B.C. is also a celebration of the mythical origins. Certainly, some views have been presented that highlight this character of Hephaestus, but they do not consider why such aspects had to be emphasized at this time.

The autochthony philosophy positions the Athenians in a direct line with the legendary King Erichthonios, who is believed to have been born from the dirt. In the ancestral era, as people who continued to live in the same land, they claim superiority over Greeks who migrated from other areas, and although the Athenian empire alone justifies superiority towards the other Greek people, within the country all citizens will be straight lines from one and only one parent, and their



superiority will be homogenized. It had become an ideal democratic advocacy philosophy. In that sense, the promotion of the autochthony philosophy was in line with the situation of the Athens society at the time.

In the year 451 BC, almost at the same time as the promotion of the autochthony principle, the law of citizenship of Perikles was enacted. Since then, the principle of autochthony and the legal system of the citizenship law of Pericles, came to play a decisive role in the self-definition of the Athenians as a group of citizens. But there was a certain conflict between the two old systems. While the autochthony principle was born locally and, so to speak, celebrated “unisexual (especially maternal) reproduction,” the citizenship law made the existence of ‘fathers and mothers’ of the Athenians themselves legally indispensable based on lawful marriage. In this respect, it can be said that the promotion of the autochthony philosophy did not necessarily lead the citizens to comply with Pericles' citizenship law.

## 6. Significance of the establishment of the Hephaestus festival

During the Archidamus war, 212 Plataea together were granted citizenship per exception. In addition, there was no confirmed evidence that the framework of citizenship was loosened up during the Archidamus war, but there was some evidence from during the Peloponnesian war. Taking into consideration circumstances like [people] crowding together in urban cities over an extent of ten years, and dramatic decrease in population due to the plague, Pericles' citizenship law already had the likelihood to cause some slack in the first ten years. It can be said that the Athenians thought it necessary to tighten and reintegrate the framework of citizenship at the time that a form of life was reinstated in a time of peace after the war.

It may have been the Hephaestia festival, which enshrined Hephaestus and Athena together, as a means for that purpose. In other words, it seems to have been implied that, by clearly positioning both gods as mythical parents – father god and mother god – of the local native-born Athenians, the citizens who attended were reaffirmed that their identity could also be obtained through historical parents under the Citizenship law. Simultaneously, the members of the civil society were to identify each other and reunify through participation in various ceremonies consisting of tribal units and rivals, but on the other hand, it was also designed to clarify the boundaries with non-citizens and re-establish the blockade of civil society.

Therefore, the establishment of Hephaestia Festival can be said to be a religious policy for the Athenians. In this respect, this festival contrasted with, for example, the big bread festival, that approved of not only *metoikoi*, but also of non-Greek attendance and was even used as an external religious policy that enforced participation in various cities of the Delian league, and the rituals of Eleusis, which encouraged the offering of the first harvest of the season by all Greek.

## 7. Conclusion

The above-mentioned conclusion may also be supported by the fact that the connection between Hephaestus and the Apaturia Festival deepened in the 4th century BC. However, despite being given such an important role, only a few historical documents positioned Hephaestus as a mystical father. Its biggest cause may be that Hephaestus' nature of a cripple blacksmithing god would be a completely unsuitable being as founder of the Athenians. After the 5<sup>th</sup> century BC, merely a figure in which Hephaestus' being cripple barely stood out was left in representation, whereas Hephaestus' humorous image, which still causes Homeros-like "unbearable laughter", seems to have remained strong in the people. Nevertheless, at times the image of Hephaestus as a mythical father appeared as something emphasized in judicial and authoritarian administration in relation to citizenship in response to problems. Because of the scarceness of historical material, rather than considering the personality of Hephaestus as mythical father as being dismissed, we should observe the accepting and faltering attitude of the Athenians to the image of Hephaestus with such contradictions – the use of religious policies and the equivalent on an individual level.