

# **Hera and the Formation of Aristocratic Collective Identity: Evidence from the Argive Plain**

**Neta Aloni-Ronen**

The image of the Greek goddess Hera, with which we are familiar through archaeological evidence and literary sources, raises interesting questions. In Greek mythology, Hera is known primarily as the wife of Zeus. This status shaped Hera's image and influenced her role in Homeric poetry, which in turn left a permanent impression on classical studies. Scholars tend to pay insufficient regard to Hera's independent role in Greek religion and her autonomous cult in several areas in Greece, focusing instead on Hera as Zeus' wife, in fact viewing her exclusively in the context of this relationship. Yet Hera's prominent cult, the fact that her temples are among the most ancient and monumental in Greece, and the gap between her image in Homeric poetry and her independent role in Greek religion, tell against the prevailing views; a reevaluation of Hera's image is called for.

In the following discussion I will use archaeological evidence and literary sources found in the Argive plain, where Hera had an important cult, in an attempt to formulate a hypothesis that will account for the above-mentioned incongruity. I thus begin not by considering the Homeric literary evidence, but by reconstructing Hera's role in a relatively well-documented and important local cult.

## **Hera and the Argive Heraion**

The Argive Heraion, Hera's most important cult-center in the Greek world, was built between Argos and Mycenae during the 8th and 7th centuries BC on an ancient bronze-age settlement comprising many burial caves from the Mycenaean era. One of the most widely accepted theories attempting to account for the location of the Heraion posits Argive aggressive politics as the reason. It is argued that the site of the temple on the north eastern border of Argos, not far from Mycenaean territory, served not only to demonstrate Argive sovereignty in that area, but also to further the city's claim to control over neighboring lands.<sup>1</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> Schachter, 'Policy, Cult and the Placing of Sanctuaries', *Le sanctuaire Grec: Entre-tiens sur l'antiquité classique* (Vandoevres-Genève, 1990), 1-57, at pp. 12-13.

Supporters of this theory further assume that the building of the Heraion is closely related to Argos' demolition of Asine in the 8th century.<sup>2</sup>

Kelly views the construction of the ancient Heraion in proximity to Argos' border as a key element in the city's grand plan to control the whole area.<sup>3</sup> He dismisses Pausanias' account, according to which Argos destroyed Asine as revenge for Asine's support of a Spartan invasion,<sup>4</sup> and claims that Argos destroyed the city as part of its expansionist policy.<sup>5</sup> Morgan and Whitelaw follow Kelly's argument and maintain that independent Asine was the last obstacle in Argos' campaign to control the plain.<sup>6</sup> Is the construction of the Heraion actually related to the destruction of Asine? No good reasons for dismissing Pausanias' account have been put forward, nor has any viable explanation been offered for the inconsistency between Argos' policy toward Asine and her simultaneous peaceful relationship with Mycenae and Tiryns.

The tendency to connect the two events can itself be partly explained by the scarcity of evidence from the period, which induces scholars to make a link between the only two events known to us — the construction of the Heraion and the destruction of Asine. But the scarcity of evidence actually undermines any attempts to reconstruct an Argive grand plan to control the plain.<sup>7</sup> An important role might also have been played by Argos' image in the Classical period, when it was considered an aggressive and vengeful city; in 468 it demolished Tiryns and Mycenae and gained control over the whole plain. This image could thus have been projected back into the Archaic period to explain earlier events by means of a 'master plan'.

A survey of the archaeological and literary evidence suggests an utterly different explanation of the reasons for the choice of the Heraion site. The Heraion was not a strategic weapon serving Argos' expansionist policies but rather a site for encounter and cooperation between several neighbouring communities.<sup>8</sup> If

<sup>2</sup> C. Morgan and T. Whitelaw, 'Pots and Politics: Ceramic Evidence for the Rise of the Argive State', *AJA* 95 (1991), 79-108, at pp. 79, 83-84.

<sup>3</sup> Kelly, *History of Argos to 500 B.C.* (Minneapolis, 1976), p. 107.

<sup>4</sup> Paus. 2.36.4, 3.7.4.

<sup>5</sup> Kelly, pp. 114-5.

<sup>6</sup> Morgan and Whitelaw, p. 82. A similar view is held by Antonaccio: C.M. Antonaccio, 'Terraces, Tombs and the Early Argive Heraion', *Hesperia* 61 (1992), 85-105, at pp. 103-4.

<sup>7</sup> Hall claims that the power of Mycenae and Tiryns in the Archaic period has been underestimated: J.M. Hall, 'How Argive was the "Argive" Heraion? the Political and Cultic Geography of the Argive Plain, 900-400 B.C.', *AJA* 99:4 (1995), 575-613, at p. 580.

<sup>8</sup> One should note that de Polignac himself acknowledged in a recent paper that his argument on territorial claims represented by the building of a rural sanctuary does not apply to the ancient Argive Heraion. De Polignac describes the Heraion at this period as a 'half way house': F. de Polignac, 'Mediation, Competition and

such an interpretation is accepted, Hera's cult in the Heraion assumes a different purpose: not representing Argos' exclusive claim to hegemony, but, as I shall argue, a means of integration promoted by aristocracies of the whole region.

It is often assumed that Argos played an exclusive role in initiating the building of the Heraion; but in fact, there is no evidence, either literary or archaeological, to that effect. On the contrary, participation by neighbouring communities in the cult at the Heraion suggests that the site may have been built as a joint project. Such participation is described by Strabo, who claims that the Heraion was actually located in the vicinity of Mycenae and served both communities jointly.<sup>9</sup> A bridge erected near the main route to Mycenae at the same time as the building of the terrace in the ancient Heraion points in the same direction,<sup>10</sup> for it could have been used by Mycenaeans to gain access to the Heraion. Moreover, pottery dedications made of clay characteristic of various regions of the Argive plain and not just of Argos itself were found in the Heraion.<sup>11</sup>

Hera's cult was in fact not exclusive to Argos; several settlements in the area used to worship her in the Archaic period. In Tiryns a temple was built to Hera on the ruins of a *megaron* from the Mycenaean period. It was from this temple that the Argives took Hera's image after the destruction of the city.<sup>12</sup> Mycenae was described by Homer as one of Hera's three favorite cities next to Argos and Sparta.<sup>13</sup> Hera probably also had a temple in Mycenae<sup>14</sup> as well as in Nauplia.<sup>15</sup> If Hera's cult was not identified exclusively with Argos, it could hardly have been used to support Argive claims vis-à-vis neighbouring communities. The existence of cults for Hera in various places in the Argive plain, and testimonies that the Heraion was not a well-guarded, exclusive Argive sanctuary but a center for people from the whole region, strengthen the thesis that the ancient temple in the Heraion site had originally been planned as a common cult center for several

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Sovereignty: the Evolution of Rural Sanctuaries in Geometric Greece', *Placing the Gods: Sanctuaries and Sacred Space in Ancient Greece*, eds. S.E. Alcock and R. Osborne (Oxford, 1994), 3-18, at pp. 4-5.

<sup>9</sup> Strabo 372c.

<sup>10</sup> C.W. Blegen, 'Prosymna, Remains of Post Mycenaean Date', *AJA* 43 (1939), 410-44, at p. 427.

<sup>11</sup> A. Foley, *The Argolid 800-600 B.C.: an Archaeological Survey* (Goteborg, 1988), p. 65.

<sup>12</sup> Paus. 2.17.5, 8.46.3; M.P. Nilsson, *The Minoan Mycenaean Religion and its Survival in Greek Religion* (Lund, 1950), pp. 475-8.

<sup>13</sup> II. 4.51-52.

<sup>14</sup> A.G. Woodhead, 'The Boundary Stone from The Perseia Fountain Mycenaean House', *ABSA* 48 (1953), 27-9, at p. 27.

<sup>15</sup> Paus. 2.38.3. According to Hall Hera Argeia was the goddess of a few cities in the eastern half of the Argive plain and not exclusively identified with Argos: Hall, pp. 596-606.

communities, and that Hera was not solely Argos' goddess but a prominent goddess for the entire district.<sup>16</sup>

### The Heraion as a Link with the Mycenaean Past

If it is true that the Heraion was a cult center common to a number of communities and that its location was not intended to promote Argive territorial claims, an alternative explanation must be found for the choice of the site.

One of the distinctive architectural elements of the Heraion is a terrace in Mycenaean style, situated in the ancient temple. Its dating is not secure but it is commonly supposed to have been built *not* in the Mycenaean era itself, but rather towards the end of the 8th century in deliberate imitation of Mycenaean architecture.<sup>17</sup> The choice of style seems significant and requires explanation. The builders of the Heraion were familiar with Mycenaean buildings and their peculiar characteristics, such as Atreus's *tholos*.<sup>18</sup> The very decision to use a Mycenaean architectural element seems to be an attempt to link the temple with the Mycenaean period and to imply that it was considered essential for an abode for Hera. An association between Hera and Mycenaean palaces and their use as ideal sites for Hera's temples can also be inferred from the location of the temple for Hera in Tiryns.<sup>19</sup>

Hera's sanctuary in Tiryns was built upon a Mycenaean king's *megaron*. Many of the elements of the Mycenaean palace were retained, including the division of its space.<sup>20</sup> Noting that Hera's temples in Tiryns and in Mycenae were both superimposed upon Mycenaean palaces, Nilsson concludes that Hera is 'a Greek goddess superimposed upon a Mycenaean one'.<sup>21</sup>

No monumental remnants from the Mycenaean epoch were found in the Heraion site itself, but not far from it, in Prosymna, many Mycenaean burial caves were unearthed. Thirteen of the fifty caves excavated contain dedications dating from the end of the 8th century; archaeologists believe that the caves

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<sup>16</sup> This notion is supported by Hall's claim that the Heraion became 'Argive' only in the fifth century; until that time the Heraion was 'something approaching a confederate sanctuary for all the communities of the Argive plain': Hall, pp. 612-3.

<sup>17</sup> J.C. Wright, 'The Old Temple Terrace at the Argive Heraeum and the Early Cult of Hera in the Argolid', *JHS* 102 (1982), 186-200, at pp. 192-193; E. Tilton, *The Argive Heraion* (New York, 1902).

<sup>18</sup> Wright, p. 193.

<sup>19</sup> Nilsson, p. 476.

<sup>20</sup> Nilsson, p. 476.

<sup>21</sup> Nilsson, p. 502. It must be added that the question whether the temple at Mycenae was devoted to Hera or Athena is in dispute. For a view supporting the identification of the local goddess with Hera, see Wright, p. 194.

were used for burial throughout the 8th century and even later.<sup>22</sup> Some interpret this as an expression of an Argive policy of expansion, burying their dead there in order to strengthen their control,<sup>23</sup> but to my mind, an entirely different interpretation is warranted. The Prosymna burial site never became the official burial place of Argos, and only a few people, whose origin remains unknown, were actually buried there. This implies that burial in Prosymna was not necessarily identified with any particular *polis*. The social exclusiveness of the buried, dedications of conspicuously aristocratic objects, together with the lack of any distinctive marks of affiliation to a specific *polis*, all suggest that burial in those caves was an exclusive mark of distinction of aristocratic families — perhaps not only of Argive descent — who wished to promote their affiliation with a site that symbolized the region's glorious past.

Such an interpretation is further strengthened by excavations carried out in Argos itself, pointing to alterations in burial customs during the 8th century and to an intensified social and economic differentiation in the *polis*. The Argive aristocracy was apparently beginning to bury members of the same family in one cave, along with expensive dedications typical of their social standing including armour, weapons and images of warriors.<sup>24</sup>

Were the cults in the Heraion related to those performed in the burial caves? Did the caves affect the choice of the Heraion's site? Kelly and Foley claim that the burial caves were unknown to the builders of the Heraion and therefore dismiss the possibility that the caves influenced the location of the temple. Wright, on the other hand, concludes that the caves did affect the location of the ancient temple.<sup>25</sup>

In addition to the hero-cult performed in the caves, evidence of an 8th-century precinct consecrated to Hera was found in the heart of the Prosymna site, one kilometer away from the Heraion.<sup>26</sup> This find together with the location of the Heraion in the vicinity of the caves suggests a close connection between Hera's cult and the hero-cult in the Mycenaean burial caves. One conceivable reason for locating the Heraion near the caves is that Argos was interested in building a cult-center close to a place that symbolized an exclusive, non-communal cult of the heroes. This step would have strengthened the *polis'* control

<sup>22</sup> C.W. Blegen, 'Post-Mycenaean Deposits in Chamber tombs', *AE* (1937), 377-90, at p. 377; J.N. Coldstream, 'Hero Cults in the Age of Homer', *JHS* 96 (1976), 8-17, at p. 9.

<sup>23</sup> Antonaccio, p. 99 n. 47.

<sup>24</sup> R. Hägg, 'Burial Customs and Social Differentiation in 8th century Argos', *The Greek Renaissance of the eighth century B.C.: Tradition and Innovation*, ed. by R. Hägg (Stockholm, 1983), 27-31.

<sup>25</sup> Wright, p. 200; Kelly, p. 62; Foley, p. 162.

<sup>26</sup> Blegen, *AJA* 43 (1939), pp. 412-420. According to Blegen the dating of the building in the precinct may be even earlier than the 8th century.

over the temple and the caves and weakened particularistic tendencies in Argive society. Though such a conjecture could account for the proximity of the Heraion to the burial caves, it cannot deal adequately with the evidences indicating that the Heraion was a *common* cult site. Since the temple served several communities, it is hard to see how Argos was to benefit from building it if its purpose had been to solve problems internal to the *polis*. Therefore, an alternative explanation for the Heraion's location must be found.

The lack of conclusive evidence dating the cult in the caves prior to that in the Heraion does not pose an insurmountable obstacle for the hypothesis that there was a close connection between the two: if the Heraion was constructed while the cult in the Mycenaean caves was flourishing, that would only strengthen the notion that the two cults were manifestations of the same process, the center of which was the inhabitants' attempt to strengthen their affiliation with the area's magnificent history, symbolized both by Hera and by the heroes worshipped in the caves. My suggestion is that the Heraion site was chosen for two related reasons: its location between Argos and Mycenae was well-suited for establishing a common cult for various communities of the region, and its surroundings were associated with Hera and the glorious Mycenaean past through the ancient cult for Hera in Prosymna and the neighbouring Mycenaean burial caves. In order to further the site's status and to complete the necessary *mise-en-scène*, Mycenaean-like architectural elements were used.

### **Hera and the Heroes**

Hera's association with heroes and with Mycenaean palaces has further implications regarding the goddess's image and her political role in the Argive plain. Evidence for the close connection between Hera and the heroes can be found in the proximity of their cult centers in the Heraion site. As mentioned above, when the Heraion was built near Mycenaean burial caves, a cult of the heroes began to gain popularity, as evidenced by many dedications discovered in the caves. Hera's sacred precinct in Prosymna shows that she had been worshipped there, not far from the burial caves, long before the Heraion was built. An examination of the dedications from the Heraion and from Prosymna shows a similarity between the cults to Hera and to the heroes. According to Whitley, the bronze dedications from Prosymna are remarkably similar to those from the Heraion, an observation which leads him to conclude that, in the vicinity of the Argive Heraion at least, there was no significant difference between the two cults and that the appearance of offerings in the tombs must be related to the construction of the Heraion.<sup>27</sup>

<sup>27</sup> J. Whitley, 'Early States and Hero Cult, a Re-Appraisal', *JHS* 108 (1988), 173-182, at p. 179.

References to heroes may be found even at the Heraion site itself. Statues of various heroes among whom was Orestes, stood by its entrance.<sup>28</sup> Many images of warriors, battle scenes painted on the jars and abundant images of mounted heroes painted on dedications,<sup>29</sup> all found in the Heraion, show that in the Argive plain Hera was perceived as a war-goddess, a protector of the heroes. One can reasonably assume that these heroes were believed to have lived in the Mycenaean palaces and to have been buried in the Mycenaean burial caves, where they were worshipped together with their patroness, Hera.

The argument finds further support in the etymological associations of Hera's name. Many attempts have been made to determine the etymological origin of the name 'Hera'. In the present context I shall content myself with some basic points. It is commonly believed that Ἥρα is related to ἥρως (the common root being '\*ier'). The proponents of this interpretation regard Heros as Hera's ancient companion, or at least as a male correlate of the name 'Hera'. It is assumed that 'Hera' means 'a mature woman, ready for marriage'.<sup>30</sup> However, scholars disagree on the identity of Hera's mate. Though many would agree that the belief that Hera was Zeus' wife arose only at a later date,<sup>31</sup> some think the goddess's original spouse was Heros and others believe him to have been Heracles.<sup>32</sup> In her recently published book J.V. O'Brien deals thoroughly with the etymological linkage between 'Hera' and 'Heros'. O'Brien argues that in Homeric Greek one can establish a link between the words 'Hera', 'Heros', 'Heracles' and ὥρη (season). O'Brien views one of Hera's roles in the Argolid as that of the goddess of the seasons, and concludes that Heros is 'he who belonged to the goddess of the seasons'. According to O'Brien, Hera, as a goddess of the seasons, is responsible for heroes' birth and early death; Hera is the one who gives the heroes their energy and therefore their glory.<sup>33</sup> I should accept, without committing myself to O'Brien's specific conclusions in this respect, the general association of Hera with heroes, for this ties in with my hypothesis that for people in the Archaic period Hera represented the continuity with the Mycenaean past and mediated between them and their heroes.

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28 Paus. 2.17.3.

29 Foley, pp. 137-8.

30 F.R. Schröder, 'Hera', *Gymnasium* 63 (1956), 57-78; H. Frisk, *Griechisches Etymologisches Wörterbuch*, Band 1 (Heidelberg, 1960); W. Pötscher, 'Hera und Heros', *RTTM* (1961), 303-55, at p. 304.

31 According to Pötscher, the belief that Hera was married to Zeus developed early enough to leave its mark on the epic tradition, the texts written in Linear B and on Hera's cult; Pötscher, p. 302.

32 A.B. Cook, 'Who was the Wife of Zeus?', *Class. Rev.* 20 (1906), 365-78, 416-9, at pp. 365-9.

33 J.V. O'Brien, *The Transformation of Hera* (Boston, 1993), pp. 113-8.

### Heroic Elements in Hera's Cult

Hera's image in the Argive plain as a war-goddess, the patroness of the heroes and a privileged mediator with the Mycenaean past gains further corroboration from her cult centered in the Heraion. The main festival celebrated in the Heraion was the Heraia. A few details of the festival, and perhaps also of Hera's political role in the plain, can be adduced from Herodotos' tale of Kleobis and Biton.<sup>34</sup> Kleobis and Biton were two Argive youths of exceptional wealth and strength, by virtue of which they won prizes in competitions. On the day of the Heraia festival, their mother was supposed to arrive at the shrine in a oxen-led carriage. Unfortunately the oxen had not returned from the fields on time, so the two sons, worrying that their mother would be late, harnessed themselves to the carriage and pulled their mother all the way to the temple. When she arrived at the site all men praised the sons, while the women eulogized the mother. The elated mother entered the temple and prayed to Hera, asking that her sons, who had bestowed such honor on the goddess, receive the greatest gift a person can wish for. Thereafter the sons sacrificed to the goddess, ate, lay down for a rest in the temple, and never woke up. The Argives erected statues in their honor and put them in Delphi for everybody to acknowledge their excellence. Herodotos concludes the story by saying that in this way Hera showed that for human beings death is much better than life.

One of the most distinct components of this story is the aristocratic *ethos*: Kleobis and Biton were not ordinary men, but sons of a wealthy, respectable Argive family, whose mother was the high priestess to Hera in the Heraion.<sup>35</sup> Both of them were blessed with exceptional physical strength, participated in many contests, maybe even in those conducted during the Heraia, and won prizes of glory. But their greatest prize was that given by Hera for their virtue, resolution and firmness. Kleobis and Biton died young and heroic in Hera's shrine and thus gained eternal glory.<sup>36</sup> They won their glory and fame by dying a beautiful and memorable death. Kleobis and Biton represent the basic elements of the Greek aristocratic *ethos*, beauty, bravery, fame and an honorable death. The story exemplifies the connection between the aristocratic *ethos* and Hera, for it is Hera who enables the *ethos* to manifest itself, in her own shrine, where Kleobis and

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<sup>34</sup> Herod. 1.31.

<sup>35</sup> Plut. *Consol. ad Apoll.* 14, Lucian, *Charon* 10.

<sup>36</sup> Finkelberg points out that contrary to common assumptions, many important heroes in Greek tradition did not die on the battlefield and win the title 'hero' on account of the suffering they went through; M. Finkelberg, 'Odysseus and the Genus "hero"', *Greece and Rome* 42:1 (1995), 1-14, at pp. 5, 9.



Biton eventually have the privilege to die.<sup>37</sup> The three combined elements, heroes, Hera and glorious death, which form the core of Herodotos' tale, are further evidence for Hera's role as the heroes' goddess.

The Heraia was characterized primarily by competitions, such as chariot races, wrestling, boxing, and races. According to de Polignac, participation in the competitions re-enacted and ritualized two kinds of aristocratic rivalries — those between aristocracies of various small towns, and those within each aristocratic community, particularly Argos. He suggests a connection between the competition in the Heraion and the appearance of the claim to heroic status at Argos in the 8th century. The appearance of tripod cauldrons that were piled up in the Heraion in the 8th century may thus indicate an increasing desire to compete and to show off on the part of certain aristocracies.<sup>38</sup>

The armed race was probably the main attraction in the festival, and the winner was presented with a bronze shield, perhaps symbolizing the shield used by young Danaos.<sup>39</sup> This bronze shield was the main theme of many laudatory songs composed for the winners in Hera's festival. According to Arnold the shield was holy to Hera, a local war-goddess, and played an important role in her cult in some regions in Greece. Arnold claims that the origin of the armed race was in Hera's cult in the Argolid, and that it spread from there to other cult centers of the goddess in Greece, like Plataia, and became part of the Panhellenic games.<sup>40</sup> Arnold points out that the first winner in the armed race in Olympia was Damaratos from Heraia in Arcadia, where Hera Argeia had an important cult. More evidence for Hera's association with war can be found in other areas of the Greek world: in Samos the Heraia festival opened with an armed procession,<sup>41</sup> in Plataia an armed race was organized and in Elis Hera's epithet was *Oplosmia*.<sup>42</sup>

## Conclusion

The military and competitive aspects of Hera's cult in the Heraion, focussed on winning the bronze shield, support the view that in the Argive plain Hera featured as a battle and warrior goddess. It seems to me that the cult in the Heraion preserves ancient components of Hera's image as a Mycenaean heroes' patroness, and the goddess of glory and war. This fits well her role as mother to a

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<sup>37</sup> O'Brien understands this story as part of Hera's role in the Argolid as goddess of the seasons. Her claim is that this death was the ultimate gift the goddess of the seasons gives her worshippers; O'Brien, p. 148.

<sup>38</sup> De Polignac, p. 13.

<sup>39</sup> Hyg. *Fab.* 170.273.

<sup>40</sup> I.R. Arnold, 'The Shield of Argos', *AJA* 41 (1937), 436-40, at pp. 438-9.

<sup>41</sup> Athen. 12.525 e-f.

<sup>42</sup> Arnold, p. 440.

god of warfare, Ares, to which too little attention has been paid.<sup>43</sup> Such an understanding of Hera's role may help to explain why Hera's cult flourished in the Argive plain in the Archaic period.

O'Brien deals extensively with Hera's role in the Argolid. Many of her conclusions seem to support the thesis developed here. She claims that Hera's sanctuary represented the Dorian-Argive desire for heroic ancestry,<sup>44</sup> but adds that ironically, while the Argives were building the Heraion, Hera's status as the patroness of heroes was actually in decline due to the penetration of the Homeric epic tradition, which represented Hera as part of the 'Panhellenic family' and as a less than sovereign 'wife and sister'.<sup>45</sup> To my mind the main question which emerges from this important discussion is why the Argives chose to build such a grand temple to Hera. Why dedicate a magnificent temple to a weak goddess whose status is in decline?

A tentative answer emerges from the approach developed here: the aristocrats in the Argive plain shaped Hera's cult and temple *in opposition to* the supposed Panhellenic wave that swept through many areas in Greece. For them, Hera was not only a mediator with the past, but a symbol of their exclusive past, and thereby of their identity. Devotion to Hera enabled them to distinguish themselves from the rest of the *polis* and to align themselves *vis-à-vis* the changes occurring in the Greek world. On this interpretation, there is nothing ironic in the building of the Heraion: it was part of an effort to construct and preserve an aristocratic identity and *ethos* that would help aristocrats distinguish themselves from the rest of local society. Hera was given an important role in this effort. Her cult was the aristocratic alternative, the *answer* to the emerging Panhellenic tradition.

Important elements of the aristocratic *ethos*, such as contests, bodily beauty, fame and virtue are conspicuous in Hera's cult in the Argive plain. From the evidence regarding Hera's image there one can infer that the active forces which shaped the goddess's cult were aristocratic families, not a specific polis. I would suggest that the common cult in the Heraion was created through *cooperation* between several aristocratic families from different communities of the region, who would meet in the Heraion site, worship Hera and the heroes, bury their dead there, and hold contests with each other in Hera's festivals. Hera's figure, closely associated with Mycenaean palaces and the heroes and an ideal mediator between past and present, played an essential role in a cult which allied Archaic Greeks with the plain's magnificent past and with its ancient heroes. The local aristocracy of the Argive plain, attempting to distinguish itself, was thus in-

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<sup>43</sup> Il. 5.890-893; some traditions insist that Ares was not Zeus' son; Ovid. *Fast.* 5.228-258.

<sup>44</sup> O'Brien, p. 130.

<sup>45</sup> O'Brien, p. 172.

volved in creating an aristocratic ethos. Hera was a key character in this major cultural project.

Such an interpretation of Hera's image in the Argive plain can shed further light on her image and role in other areas of Archaic Greece. It is well known that during the Archaic period many splendid and central temples were built for Hera in several areas in Greece: in Samos the first *Hekatompedon* was erected in her honour; in Perachora two temples were built for Hera in the 8th century; in Olympia Hera had a temple long before one was built for Zeus and even in a colony like Poseidonia, two of the most important and monumental temples belonged to Hera. This is rather surprising, especially in view of Hera's image in the Homeric *epos*, in which her main role is to be Zeus' betrayed and vengeful wife.<sup>46</sup> Why then did Hera's cult gain such popularity in the Archaic period? In my opinion, an enquiry along the lines suggested above might prove fruitful; it would focus on Hera's role in the life of Greek aristocracies of the Archaic period. Hera became the predominant object of worship in a number of city-states not *because* she was Zeus' wife, although the marriage of the royal couple was acknowledged in many communities; she was worshipped with such devotion as the goddess of war and warriors, a function that was prominent in Greek aristocracies' attempts to underline their own glory and ancestry. How this image interacted with that of Hera as Zeus' wife is a topic worthy of separate consideration.

Tel Aviv University

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<sup>46</sup> A re-reading of the Homeric *epos* in the light of Hera's alternative image as a war goddess might yield a more complex picture of Hera's characterization.