

In the Lap of the Goddesses

by Colleen Coffey



Many years ago, when my eldest daughter started her first job she made a simple statement that would prove in time to be extremely profound. She likened the need to learn the new and exciting skills within her new work situation, to the time when she was a small child in kindergarten with a piece of plain paper, a pot of paint and the simple directive to cover the entire page with colour. The desire to spread the paint to the edges as fast as she could meant that there always seemed to be scraps of paper showing through. To totally finish the task she had to go back and "paint in the triangles". Over the years this little story has become a special part of the language that exists between us. We have both learnt that in so many ways, for something to be totally complete, it will always be necessary to go back and "paint in the triangles".

My recent visit with the Asteroids, more precisely the "big Four" — the goddesses Ceres, Pallas Athene, Juno and Vesta — has been a mission to paint in the triangles. The completed picture before me now is vastly different from the sketchy picture I painted some twenty odd years ago. Yet I know this is not complete, I will once again revisit and again paint in the triangles. This is the never ending challenge that the study of astrology creates.

So what are the Asteroids and who are Goddesses?

The Astronomical History — A Short Version

The Asteroid belt lies between Mars and Jupiter. It is a collection of rocks that orbit the Sun in much the same way a planet does, in fact their orbit is similar to the planet Mercury. Theory has it that this collection of rocks, which vary greatly in size are actually the remains of a planet that imploded before it was completely formed around the time our universe was developing. This, it would appear to be substantiated by the fact that according to Bode's law, if another planet was going to exist within our solar system, then indeed, it would have been in this position.

It was long known that such a belt of debris existed, but it was not until January 1st 1801 that Giuseppe Piazzi discovered the largest of the asteroids. He named his newly discover object Ceres Ferdinanda. Ceres after the Roman Goddess of the Harvest and Ferdinanda after the then king of Naples and Sicily, Ferdinand IV. The second part of the name was dropped when it became "politically incorrect" for the times.

During a routine observation of Ceres in March 1802, one Heinrich Olbers accidentally discovered a second small body. This second small "planet" as it was then considered was

slightly smaller than Ceres — it was named Pallas Athene in honour of Jupiter's "warrior" daughter. The next to be discovered in 1804, it was given the name of the Olympian Goddess, Juno, who was Jupiter's sister and who ultimately was to become his wife. The quartet of the "Big Four" was complete when the brightest and most reflective of all the asteroids was discovered in 1807. She was named Vesta, in honour of the Goddess who was the keeper of the "sacred flame" and yet another sister of Jupiter.

All four Asteroids were added to the catalogue of planets. A fifth, and much smaller body, was catalogued in 1845 thirty eight year after Vesta, and just one year before the planet Neptune was added to the same catalogue. However by the time of Neptune's discovery there were rumblings in the fraternity of astronomers about the viability of these new baby planets. Not all regarded the new "bodies" as planets and it was the discoverer of the planet Uranus, Herschel, who actually named these bodies "Asteroids", and in so doing he reserved the right of changing that name, if another, more expressive of their nature should occur — he argued that Ceres and Pallas were not the same as the other planets.

By the turn of the century the roll of asteroids had swollen to hundreds but by then their "planet" status was almost totally abandoned and the baby planets silently slipped into the role of the Asteroids.

Some Minor Gritty detail

To this point in time (now) several hundred thousand asteroids have been discovered and given provisional designation, thousands more are discovered each. There are 26 known asteroids larger than 200 km in diameter, and it is thought that about 99% of those with a diameter larger than 100 km have been recorded. Of those in the 10–100 km range probably only about half have been recorded. There are undoubtedly hundreds of thousands more, too small to be seen from earth, and little is known about them — but it is thought that there could be as many as a million asteroids in the 1 km range. For all that, the total mass of all the asteroids is less than that of the Moon.

The naming of the Asteroids

In order to even the gender score, history tells us that these new Planets were named after the great goddesses of Antiquity because until that time the scales were tipped six-to-two in favour of the Gods over the Goddesses. Sun/Apollo, Mercury/Hermes, Mars/Ares, Jupiter/Zeus, Saturn/Cronos and the recently discovered Uranus named after the Great sky god Ouranos. Meanwhile the female deity was represented by only the Moon and Venus.

The desire for some form of celestial equality is undoubtedly true, it does however belie the great groundswell of social change that was gaining ever-increasing momentum at the time the Big 4 Asteroids were discovered. It is no coincidence that this change was largely spearheaded by women, a collective that would ultimately metamorphose into the feminist movement. While all humanity would eventually benefit, the initial social reforms were to affect the lives of women and children from that time on. The women whose dedication brought about these changes were born at the time of or shortly after the discovery and naming of the Asteroids. The index of reforms and those who spearheaded them is too long to list here but there can be no doubt the collective energy as reflected in the social changes was representative of the combined mythology of the

four Goddesses after whom the Asteroids were named.

To fully understand what the introduction of these female archetypes meant to the social order of the day, and ultimately understand how their symbology can best be read within the astrological birth chart, is necessary to revisit the myths and stories of antiquity.

♀ The Myth of Ceres

To the ancient Greeks she was known as Demetra — Demetra derived from the ancient form *Da Mater* Meaning Earth Mother. To the Romans she was Ceres, the Daughter of Saturn and Rhea, her domain was all green and growing things and she is often depicted holding a sheaf of wheat. Although Ceres was an immortal Goddess she chose to live on earth among the mortals. She was the overseer of cultivation and harvest and through her guardianship the earth prospered and was bountiful. Her devotion to the nurture of the land was equalled only by her devotion to her Maiden daughter Kore, more often referred to as Persephone. But this state of abundance was to change when Persephone was abducted, dragged off and imprisoned in the underworld by the great god Pluto. Ceres grieved the loss of her daughter, she neglected her duties, and the earth's bounty withered and died. Finally when the situation became dire Zeus/Jupiter intervened. It was decided that since she had been in the underworld Persephone had not partaken of the "food of the dead" therefore, it was possible for her to return to her mother. However before her return eventuated, it was discovered, that she had in fact eaten six pomegranate seeds. A compromise was reached. Persephone could return to the world above the ground, but only for six months of the year, she must return to the underworld for the other six months, a month for each pomegranate seed she had eaten.



During the six months that Persephone lived above the ground, the earth flourished and there was the abundance of spring and summer but when she returned to Pluto in the underworld the earth again withered into autumn and winter.

Ceres symbolizes the Mother

♀ The Myth of Pallas Athena

As with all the Goddesses there is more than one myth attributed to Pallas Athene, but it is surely the story of her conception and birth that is the most noteworthy. It is said that Jupiter had an liaison with a "Titaness" called Metis, the Titan, who was known to be the guardian of the planet Mercury. The liaison between Metis and Jupiter resulted in Metis falling pregnant. But Gaia — mother earth, the Mother of Saturn, therefore the grandmother to Jupiter — warned Jupiter that while this child would be a girl child, a subsequent boy child would be born to the same union. This boy child would ultimately supplant Jupiter in much the same way that Jupiter had supplanted his father Saturn. To divert destiny, Jupiter swallowed the pregnant Metis — it is said that she continued to

give him good counsel from within his belly (one can only wonder if this was the origin of a "gut feeling").



One day, while walking along the shores of a lake Jupiter was overcome by a blinding head ache. His son Hephaestus who was walking with him is said to have split Jupiter's head open in order to relieve his fathers' pain. Pallas Athene, the "grey eyed" daughter of Jupiter and Metis sprung from the cleft in her father's head, fully clad in armour and shouting.

In other myths Pallas Athene is often connected with Medusa the Lady of snakes — in fact Medusa's image was emblazoned on Pallas Athene's shield. Snakes represented secret teachings and the mysteries of life and death. To the Greeks she was the Goddess of wisdom and accredited with instinctual feminine sagacity. She was know for her strategic skills on the battle field, described as a thinker rather than a butcher preferring negotiation and diplomacy to outright conflict. Her Latin name was Minerva.

Birthing from the head brings the inevitable connections to the mind and the intellect, the full amour links her to the warrior. This duality is reinforced by other myths of Pallas, usually emphasizing the polarity of Masculine

and Feminine which can be expressed as either asexual or androgynous.

Pallas Athena in the birth chart signifies creative problem solving either between another and ourselves, as an intermediary between other parties, or in resolving the conflict with in our personal make up. The Myth of Pallas Athene symbolizes the "warrior for a cause" and one would expect her to be highlighted in the charts of those who are on a mission, dedicated to fighting for something they truly believe in.

While there can be little doubt that the warrior Goddess is the strongest archetype symbolized by Pallas, it must not be forgotten that she was also a artisan and an inventor. The patroness of wisdom and culture, skilled in arts and crafts such as pottery sculpture and weaving, she was the champion of Animal husbandry. Astrologically Pallas is an indicator of artistic and creative persuasions and one who strives to break new ground.

Pallas Athena symbolizes the Daughter



The Myth of Juno

It is in the role as Jupiter's wife that affords the greatest myth of the goddess Juno.

Juno and Jupiter were siblings, children of Saturn and Rhea, each were rulers in their own right, each wielding immense power in both territory and eminence. By combining Juno's dominion and glory with his own, Jupiter was able to create a deity that would never be equaled. This was a marriage of strategy and political advancement, there was no question of their combined power. However that power came at a price.



Juno, a Goddess who had ruled in her own right during the golden age, did not relate well to being supportive and subservient to the needs of her "Great God" mate. Especially as Jupiter, like his father before him did not readily abide by the rules of fidelity and faithfulness.

The myth tell us that in the beginning Jupiter was passionate and caring. Juno and Jupiter spent their wedding night on the Aegean island of Samos — a night that was to last three hundred years. But ultimately this union, which truly was "made in heaven," did not meet the expected perfection in the eyes of either party. Jupiter, a God whose lordly statue placed him in a position to command, even demand the hand of any beauty, mortal or immortal, found himself locked in a union with an uncompromising feisty equal who did not buckle under his stormy and temperamental tantrums.

To Juno this was a union of commitment, dedication and compromise but not necessarily one of compliance. She constantly retaliated against Jupiter's appalling lack of fidelity, in fact it is said that she tied him up while he slept, and her jealous and vindictive raging reverberated throughout the kingdom.

However, in spite of the constraints this marriage was a regarded as a success. Not just because of their celestial acquisition, but because together they reached omnipotence that they would not have reached alone or with another partner. This was a union of constancy, ultimate prosperity, through their commitment to a mutual ideal.

Juno symbolizes the Wife



The Myth of Vesta

Vesta was the first born child of Saturn and Rhea, and a sibling to Jupiter, Juno and Ceres. Being the first born she was also the first to be "swallowed" by Saturn, consequently the last child to be degorged when Jupiter freed his siblings from his father's belly. For this reason Vesta is the personification of "Alpha - Omega" — the first and last — the beginning and the end.



Unlike her siblings, Vesta — or Hestia as the Greeks knew her — had an "indwelling" spirit, she kept herself separate from the pageantry (and one might say nonsense) of Mount Olympus.

An avowed virgin, she became the keeper of the "home fire," in fact Hestia literally means "hearth". Remembering of course that the eternal flame represented life, of the family, the village, the empire, the responsibility of its care demanded total focus and an almost spiritual dedication.

During the power struggle between Juno and Jupiter it was only Hestia (Vesta) who kept herself separate, and neutral. She played no part in the continual struggle for supremacy yet she was able to continue to conduct fair and equal dealings with both siblings — they both had her loyalty and her trust.

The myth of the Greek Hestia merges into the Myth of the Roman goddess Vesta. To the Romans Vesta was a priestess — the founder of the sacred order of the Vestal Virgins. The Vestal Virgins held a unique position of power — power unequalled in the ancient world — their power reached as high as being able to pardon the condemned. Again the vestal Virgins' vow was one of chastity — and the punishment for breaking this vow was to be buried alive.

The Vestal virgins became the "keepers" and were entrusted with secrets and the most sacred documents in the land. It was to the Vestal Virgins that Mark Anthony went to retrieve the will of Caesar before he could read it to the people of Rome.

The Christian church felt threatened by the enormous political power of the Vestals but the fathers of the church were unable to close down the order until the 4th century — in fact the vestal virgins were among the last pagans to give way to Christianity. The legacy they left behind was the many orders of Nuns within the Christian church — virgins consecrated in a marriage with God, dedicated to a life of service to mankind.

Vesta symbolises the Sister

And so it is from the lofty heights of the gods and goddesses, and the myths of antiquity that we return to the astrology of today to examine what relevance the asteroids may or may not have.

It would be hard to determine exactly when the Asteroids first appeared in the astrological birth chart. Eleanor Bach and Zipporah Dobbins worked with them in the 60s, with Eleanor Bach completing the first ephemeris in the early 70s. She gave a copy to Demetra George. Demetra's Book the *Asteroid Goddesses* published in 1984, was certainly the Asteroids final midwife from an astrological perspective. Since the *Asteroid Goddesses* was first published 1984, Astrology and astrological learning has gone through major change and adjustment. We have witnessed a recurrence of the ancient

wisdom and returned to the rules of the old Masters. For Astrology as a craft this can only be seen as a positive move, every discipline needs to go back to its roots periodically just as it must grow, develop and adapt to the social order of the day.

As it stands now I see two distinct branches, pure astrology or as it has been so aptly named "Real astrology", and the psychological or the humanistic school. Each has its place, and as long as neither jeopardizes the value of the other, and as long as the new does not compromise the fundamental rules on which astrology was built, each is a tool in its own right with its own application.

Perhaps the Asteroids, rich in Mythology represent one end of the spectrum. Their meaning is symbolic more than literal, but I have been amazed at the rich tapestry and insight they can weave into the birth chart. No, they may not be part of the ancient wisdom, but when used within a defined framework they certainly add a colour and perception that I feel would be sad to dismiss just because they are "modern" and not part of the original framework.

There was a time within every old discipline when every new thought was regarded as new and innovative. Who knows, in 4000 years the Asteroids may gain the status of being traditional. Between then and now much that is old will be new again, and there will be much revisiting, but in meantime I personally am enjoying revisiting and painting in the triangles.

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. . . to be continued. In the next journal Colleen looks at the Asteroids in the context of the natal chart with examples of how they can support influences already shown by more traditional methods.

Illustrations added to this article for publication on the web

1. Statue of Ceres (Demeter) in the Blookerpark in Huis ter Heide, the Netherlands

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