

Panthea, Initiations and Festivals of the Goddess **by Olivia Robertson**

5. Festival of the Hydrophoria **1st - 2nd February**

Oracle of the Goddess Derceto

Priestess: Most beautiful Goddess Derceto, Queen of the oceans, Whose fish's tail hath the stars of our galaxy for its shining scales, come to us with thy gifts of prophecy and love, vision and ecstasy.

Oracle: From the rushing waters of tempests, and through the still calms of tranquil seas come my gifts. For there is no joy without happy emotion, no vision and no heaven without love. The love I bring is the union of twin souls, for water joins with water in perfect harmony. Every soul thirsts for love. This secret longing is cunningly concealed under long words and the maze-like ploys of the intellect. It is masked by obsession for power and riches. Yet though great nations and empires pass, and worldly treasure is lost in the transient tides of life and death, there is no death for those who love. Oblivion comes when the soul is dried up with material cares. It can only be revived through love.

The love I bring is deep and true and is not the pretence of a premeditated emotion. It springs as easily in a deer seeking a mate, in a seal feeding her young, as it does in two human lovers finding ecstasy in union. The God Dagon hath his sea-tail coiled through the depths of ocean as mine coil about the Milky Way. Yet are we both in union. All goodness comes from harmony, and a joyful chorus of peace springs from love. Music is the utterance of the heart and colour is its aura. The greatest gift of the Goddess is love for another, and this love overwhelms the isolation of the separate self. In like manner when the soul returns to the everlasting Mother, it is as a river that finds its goal in the all embracing sea. For the Father orders and rules justly: it is the Mother to whom the soul turns for comfort. When all worldly ambitions fail, when striving for success falters, then the eternal bliss of true fulfilment is found in my starry arms. There you will enjoy contentment in your eternal haven. For when a soul hath bravely overcome the storms of unruly emotions, My sign, the rainbow of harmony, joins earth with heaven, and My love brings the olive branch of peace.

At the gates. Priestess and Priest in mitres and saffron coloured chasubles. Company in varied coloured silk surplices, girdles and yellow shoes. Aquarian Maiden and Youth in white with purple criss-cross stripes. Children in white tunics. Musicians use cymbals, tambourines and horns. Maiden carries pitcher of fresh water: Youth, honey: children, meal cakes.

Priest: Fellow Celebrants, we are assembled to enact the Hydrophoria, the Pouring of the Waters, in the constellation of Aquarius. This Rite was performed by the Babylonians, Assyrians and other ancient people to celebrate the preservation of life on earth during the Great Flood, and for protection from a like catastrophe. Let us make procession to the High Altar.

Procession to High Altar which is covered with saffron cloth. On it are 7 white candles and burning incense. Before it is a cauldron of salt water and by it is a gong and a table with feast.

Priestess: *(offers incense)* I offer incense to Thee, the Almighty Sea Goddess Derceto. Thou Who art Dea Syria, Atargatis, the All-Creative, Agne, Holy, Whose lovely Daughters are the Mermaids and Sirens, protect and bless us.

“When in the height the Heaven was not named
And the earth beneath did not yet bear a name;
And Apsu the primeval, Who begat them,
And Chaos, Tiamat, the Mother of Them both -
Their waters were mingled together, and
No field was formed, no marsh was to be seen
When of the Gods none had been called into being,
And none bore a name, and no destinies were ordained;
Then were formed the Deities,
And Derceto was called into Being.
Daughter of Tiamat, bright-breasted,
Fish-tailed Derceto, Thou then didst bring
Love and Generation upon earth.”

Priest: (*offers incense*) I offer incense to Thee, the Mighty Sea God Dagon. Presider over the dark ocean depths, mover of storms. Protect and bless us.

“Snowy-haired, white-bearded God of seas,
Whose fishtail coils through the deeps,
Thou shakest the oceans with tempests
In Thy just rage. Yet in Thy blue eyes
And still water is the calm of Heaven.”

Priestess: (*makes sign of Aquarius*) Let the Aquarian Maiden pour pure water from a spring into salt water.

Maiden: (*pours water from pitcher into cauldron saying*) As the daughter river pours into our Mother the sea, so may we be purified in heart as we return to the Mother of All.

Youth offers honey, and children, cakes.

Priest: That we may comprehend this ancient Rite, let the Mystery of the Mermaid and the Dove be enacted!

Gong is struck twice.

Mystery of the Mermaid and the Dove

Players: Semiramis in jewelled tiara and royal robes. Oracle seated in blue and green robes, face veiled. Ishtar and Ea in mitres and saffron robes. Ishtar wears blue pectoral. Tsit-napishtim and Gilgamesh in tunics. Doves in white. Music. Mendelssohn's "Hebrides" and Debussy's "La Mer" are suitable.

Semiramis: What a wet and gloomy place is this sea cave where I seek the Oracle!

Oracle: Lady, who art thou that doth disturb my contemplation, lulled by the ocean waves?

Sem: Know that I am Semiramis, Queen of Queens. Men marvel at my works and tremble!

Oracle: And who is this Semiramis? What are her works?

Sem: All the world knows of me! I am the Empress of Assyria. Egypt, Libya and Ethiopia have I conquered as Warrior Queen. I am Builder of Babylon the Magnificent. I caused its walls to girdle my city for sixty miles, and her walls are so thick that many chariots may be driven with galloping horses

coursing abreast! And these walls are higher than any tree, and gardens hang therefrom that are the Wonder of the World.

Oracle: There seems little left for thee to ask for! What wouldst thou of the Sea Goddess?

Sem: I know that it is given to the Oracle of the Sea Goddess to foretell the future, through visions reflected in water. I have one weakness - yet it poisons all good. I am mortal. My question is, what shall befall my Empire and my Babylon?

Oracle: What offering dost thou make to the Goddess in return for this knowledge?

Sem: In Her Holy Name I shall hollow mountains and fill up valleys with water, which shall be conveyed through great labour and gold to mighty aqueducts. Thus barren deserts and plains shall be made fruitful and bear rich harvests! So shall I honour the Goddess by making wise use of Her own element.

Oracle: Your promise is accepted. Gaze now into the depths of this cave and thou shall see a vision. For the past brings a warning of what may come to pass. Behold the fate of the glorious city Shuruppak, pride of a past age. The Hero Gilgamesh tells the tale.

Music.

Gilgamesh: Alas! Because of the sins of the people upon the wide earth, the Deities in solemn council have determined to send a deluge to destroy them all. In compassion, the God Ea revealed the secret to a virtuous man, Tsit-napishtim, a dweller in the city of Shuruppak.

Ea: O reed-hut, reed-hut! O wall, wall! O reed-hut, hear. O wall, understand. Thou man of Shuruppak, son of Ubara-Tutu, pull down thy house, build a ship, forsake thy possessions, take heed for thy life! And bring up living seed of every kind into the ship. And thou shalt launch it in the ocean.

Tsit-napishtim: Thy command, O my Lord, which Thou hast given, I will honour and fulfil.

Gil: And Tsit-napishtim obeyed the God Ea, and he built the ship.

Tis: With all living seed of every kind I filled it. I brought up into the family and household, the cattle and the beasts of the field.

Ea: A fixed time the God Shamash hath appointed, and the God of Darkness at eventide shall send a heavy rain. Then go into the ship and shut the door.

Tis: The God of Darkness sent at eventide a heavy rain. Of the storm I saw the beginning; to look upon the storm I was afraid. I entered into the ship and shut the door. When the early dawn appeared, there came up from the horizon a black cloud. And there were thunders and lightning and flames and the brightness thereof lit up the earth. The whirlwind of the God of Darkness mounted up into the heaven, and all light was turned into darkness.

Gil: The Deities grieved at the fate of all upon the earth. And the Goddess Ishtar cried aloud like a woman in travail. The Lady of the Gods lamented with a loud voice.

Ishtar: The old race of man hath been turned back into the clay, because I assented to the judgment of the Council of the Gods. Alas, for the suffering brought about by Divine Justice! This storm hath destroyed My people. Those whom I brought forth - where are they? Like the spawn of fish they filleth the sea.

Gil: On the seventh day the Deities took pity on the earth and They caused the tempest to cease. And all mankind was turned into clay, save for those within the ship of Tsit-napishtim.

Tis: I opened the window of my ship and the light fell upon my cheek; I bowed myself down, I sat down, I wept; over my cheek flowed my tears. I looked upon the world, and behold, all was sea. After twelve days the land appeared, to the land Nitsir the ship took its course. The mountain of Nitsir held the ship fast. When the seventh day drew nigh, I sent out a dove, and let her go forth. And there was no resting place. I sent forth a swallow, and she returned. I sent forth a raven, and she did not return! She had found a resting-place.

Gil: Then Tsit-napishtim and all his family and household and the cattle and beasts left the ship. And upon the peak of the mountain Nitsir Tsit-napishtim made libation to the Deities. By sevens he set up vessels. And behold, the Lady of the Gods Ishtar drew nigh. And She beheld Tsit-napishtim and his family and his cattle and the beasts. And She lifted up Her great pectoral.

Ishtar: By these sacred jewels of lapis lazuli which are upon My neck, I declare that I shall not forget these few who have survived the deluge, nor their offspring. I have set them in My Memory. Never will I forget them, while they remember Me. Purity and goodness return to earth.

Dance of Doves. Gluck's "Dance of the Blessed Spirits" is suitable.

Oracle: The vision fades. Learn from it.

Sem: What may I do to prevent such dire catastrophe from destroying the earth and all the works of man? Who can assuage the righteous wrath of Dagon? I will undertake any task, however dangerous...

Oracle: It is simple. Honour thy mother.

Sem: Simple, but for me, impossible. Though now I am a great Queen, I was born of unknown stock. I was deserted when a helpless baby, exposed in the desert. A shepherd, Simmas, found me and took pity on me and brought me to his hut, there to care for me. How can I honour the mother who abandoned me?

Music. Oracle slowly rises. She unveils and reveals a Goddess in jewelled mitre. Sem falls to her knees.

Oracle: Semiramis, I am the Sea Goddess Derceto. My black hair spreads through the far reaches of space, and my breasts give nourishment to circling planets. My forked fish's tail is the Milky Way whose starry coils girdle the earth. My eyes are the green of the sea and from My mystical body cometh all creatures. About my head fly the doves of highest Spirit, that which is the Light of Truth. Semiramis, Dove of Light, I am thy Mother! Bring the people to honour Me through purity, joy and love. Though Babylon the Great shall fall, as shall all cities and empires, yet the Heavens of the Deities are everlasting. Their magnificence is reflected as in still waters through the works of artists. Thy body is mortal. Thy Spirit is eternal. Acknowledge the White Dove in every creature, and in honouring these My children, thou dost honour Me.

Sem: *(rises)* My body is filled with heavenly Light, and divine rapture warms my heart! I adore Thee, My Divine Mother Derceto, and through Thee shall honour all. I shall build a Temple to Thee in this holy place, and it shall be named Hieropolis. From henceforth a Maiden shall pour spring water into the sea at Thy yearly Festival, signifying the return of the Dove, the Daughter of Light, to Her Mother, Goddess of the Sea of Space.

Gong is struck once. End of Mystery.

Priestess: Fellow Celebrants, the worship of Derceto brought love, ecstasy and vision to her votaries of yore. Let us contemplate Her Mystery.

Contemplation: Rays of love, ecstasy and vision are sent out. Reports are shared.

Priestess and Priest give thanks to Derceto and Dagon. Feast is enjoyed.

End of Rite.

SOURCES: Books on Egypt and Chaldea. "Babylonian Religion & Mythology", W. King. Kegan Paul, 1899. "Lucian, Volume IV". Trans. A.M. Harmon. Heinemann, Harvard. "Goddesses of Chaldea, Syria & Egypt." Durdin-Robertson, Cesara. "Metamorphoses," Ovid, trans. Davidson, 1754. "New Larousse Encyclopedia of Mythology." Hamlyn.

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