

Hesiod's Pandora: A Demoted Earth Goddess? An Overview of the Scholarship

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Abstract

Pandora is well known for her role in Greek mythology, especially in the poems of Hesiod, as the first woman and the cause of human miseries. This paper surveys the scholarship concerning the view that Pandora was originally an earth goddess who was 'demoted' to her literary role as the first human woman. First, it summarizes the stories of Pandora in Hesiod's two main works, the Theogony and the Works and Days. This is followed by a historical survey of the major scholarship concerning whether Pandora was a demoted earth goddess, and concerning the correlations between the portrayals of the earth goddess Gaia and Pandora in the poems of Hesiod. It is concluded that the evidence for Pandora being a demoted earth goddess is too scant and obscure to be convincing, although the view remains plausible. Finally, it is suggested that a more fruitful approach would be to focus on the correlations between the portrayals of Gaia and Pandora within the Hesiodic narrative, on how they illuminate each other, and ultimately, on what they can further teach us about Hesiod's view of the human condition.

ギリシャ神話でのパンドラの役割はよく知られており、特にヘシオドスの詩において、世界で最初の女性で人類に苦難をもたらす役どころは有名である。この論文は、ヘシオドスの詩で人類の最初の女性としての描かれているパンドラが、大地の女神の地位から降格したと考える学説を研究したものである。まず、ヘシオドスの2つの詩、「神統記 (*Theogony*)」と「仕事と日 (*Works and Days*)」に出るパンドラの物語を要約し、次に、パンドラが元々大地の女神であったか否かについて説明している主要な説や、大地の女神であるガイヤとパンドラの相関関係を述べている学説を歴史的観点より調査した。結論として、パンドラを大地の女神が降格した姿であるとする説には、納得できる点があるものの、十分かつ明瞭な証明もなく、説得力に欠ける。したがって、より効果的なアプローチとして、ヘシオドスの物語に登場するこの2人の原型の女性（ガイヤとパンドラ）の性格の相関関係に焦点をあて、その関係を明確に説明することを提案する。そして、特に重要

なのは、その関連性がヘシオドスの人類観において何を明らかにしているのかに注目することである。

Key words: demoted earth goddess, misogyny, mother-right, chthonic, matriarchy, prototype, fertility goddess, anodos, iconographic, etymological synecdoche, pithos

1. Introduction

One of the most perplexing issues in the study of Hesiod's poems concerns the origin and development of the first human woman, Pandora. As the first female human, Pandora shares several important correlations with the first female deity, the earth goddess Gaia, including an important causal role in Hesiod's portrayal of the causes of 'the mixture of goods and evils' that characterize the human condition. Also, Hesiod's description of Pandora and her jar seems to tie her closely to the Underworld and suggest various other aspects of her personality which are considered characteristic of a typical earth goddess. These apparently earth goddess-like aspects of Pandora's nature seem to be further reinforced by her portrayal in both archeological and other non-Hesiodic literary sources. This evidence has led some scholars to view Pandora as originally being an earth goddess who was later demoted in mythology to become the prototype of human women. Other scholars have taken issue with this view and have succeeded in debunking at least some aspects of it. Yet, the issue of Pandora's relation to earth goddesses in general, and to Gaia specifically, still raises scholarly interest and debate, and has received renewed attention in structuralist and feminist interpretations of Hesiod's poems. After a summarization of Hesiod's presentations of Pandora in his *Theogony* and *Works and Days*, this paper will proceed to give a general overview of some of the main strands of scholarship on the 'Pandora as demoted earth goddess' problem and on the correlations between Pandora and Gaia in the Hesiodic text. It will also include brief assessments of these scholarly attempts and finally will suggest a more fruitful approach to interpreting the relationship between Hesiod's portrayal of the first human woman Pandora and his portrayal of the first female deity, the earth goddess Gaia.

2. Summarization of the accounts of Pandora in Hesiod's poems

2.1 The *Theogony* account

The story of Pandora is told twice by Hesiod, first in the *Theogony* (535-616), and again in the *Works and Days* (45-105). The *Theogony* account begins with the story of Prometheus' attempt to deceive Zeus with the sacrificial allotments. Zeus sees through the trick and in his anger plans evil for mortals and refuses to give them the power of fire. So Prometheus craftily steals fire by hiding it in a fennel stalk and gives it back to men. Further enraged by this, Zeus contrives another evil for men in return for their having fire. First, he commissions the craftsman god Hephaistos to form from earth the likeness of a modest maiden, who is then dressed and adorned by Athena with shining clothing, an embroidered veil, and an awesomely beautiful golden crown on which Hephaistos has intricately engraved numerous formidable creatures of the sea and land. Then Zeus leads the newly formed maiden out before the gods and mortals, all of whom are seized with awe at the beautiful appearance of this irresistible and precipitous "trap" for men. For, in stark contrast to her charming appearance, she turns out to be the source of the evil race of females who exist as a great affliction among men, "not helpmeets in accursed poverty but only in wealth" (*Th.*593). Like the lazy conspiring drones that stay in the hive and consume the hard toil of the bees, so women are a bane to men. If a man escapes this fate by avoiding marriage, he will not lack livelihood, but will still be lonely and uncared for in his old age, and at his death his goods will be divided and shared by distant relatives rather than by heirs. If a man is lucky enough to get a suitable wife, he will still experience alternating evil and good. If he gets a bad one, he will continually live with endless and incurable grief.

2.2 The *Works and Days* account

In the *Works and Days* account, the Prometheus and Pandora myth is introduced to explain why men's livelihood has been hidden by Zeus in the earth and why they must now work for it. In contrast to the *Theogony* account, it merely alludes to Prometheus' deceitful allotment of the sacrifice and begins with Zeus, already angered by the trick, hiding the fire. Prometheus then steals it back in a fennel stalk. Zeus, further angered by this deceitful theft, tells Prometheus that it will become a great bane for both him and for men as he (Zeus) will make an evil for men which they will embrace to their own ruin. Then he commissions Hephaistos

to mix earth with water and give it a human voice and strength, a maiden's lovely shape and a goddess-like face. He commissions Athena to teach her crafts and weaving, Aphrodite to shed charm, cruel desire and limb-gnawing cares on her, and Hermes to give her a dog-like mind and a deceitful character. Following these orders, Hephaistos molds the likeness of the maiden, Athena clothes and adorns her, the Graces and Lady Persuasion (Peitho) put golden necklaces on her, the Horai crown her with spring flowers, and Athena completes the adornment. Hermes puts in her lies, crafty words, a voice and a deceitful nature. He names her *Pandora* (*All-gifts*) "because all the gods who dwell on Olympus gave her as a gift—a bane for grain-eating men" (*WD* 81-2). Then Hermes presents her to the man Epimetheus. Forgetting Prometheus' warning to refuse any gift from Zeus, he receives her and understands her evil too late. Previous to this, men lived free from hard toil and deadly ills. But this all changes when the woman Pandora removes the lid of the jar and scatters all kinds of evils among men, and then closes the lid just in time to prevent hope from escaping. Consequently these evils wander everywhere among men and silently afflict them day and night.

3. Modern scholarship

Few topics in Greek mythology have received as much scholarly attention as this story. Yet there is still disagreement among scholars about the origin, nature and role of Hesiod's first woman, Pandora. On the one hand, there have been those who view her as derived from an earth goddess who was demoted to her lowly status as the baneful first woman but who still embodies many earth goddess-like characteristics. Others do not hold tightly to the demoted earth goddess view but still see her as closely related to Gaia by her characterization and role in the Hesiodic narrative. There are yet others who, on the contrary, believe that Hesiod is in fact dissociating his first woman Pandora from his earth goddess Gaia and maintain that she should primarily be seen as a symbol of Hesiodic misogyny. The remainder of this paper will survey these views and include some brief comments evaluating their viability.

3.1 Pandora as demoted earth goddess view

3.1.1 Theoretical Background

While the demoted earth goddess view still has some proponents, it was especially prominent in the late 19th and early 20th centuries when it was championed by

Jane Harrison and her associates. It was based on the theory of *mother right* propounded by Bachofen in his book *Mutterrecht* in 1861. Bachofen viewed myth as a memory of earlier history from which social structures can be discerned. He saw prehistory as the childhood of humanity and maintained that the development of all early societies invariably included a progression of cultural stages from hetaerism to matriarchy to patriarchy. The cultural stage of matriarchy arose from the human mother-child bond and was characterized by female rule of the family and society. Additionally, it was closely linked to chthonic religion involving a universal chthonic goddess. Eventually it was inevitably conquered and overlaid by patriarchy and male deities associated with the sky.¹ This theory was further elaborated by Frazer in his recurring theme of the Great Goddess and dying god.² Frazer in turn strongly influenced how turn-of-the-century archeologists such as Harrison interpreted their evidence of early Greek religion and led them to emphasize strongly what they saw as the chthonic nature of pre-Greek religion and the central importance of the Earth Mother Gaia, whose power was eventually supplanted by male Olympian deities:³

Originally, as we have seen, Ge [Gaia] and her ghosts ruled over all things...But as the Olympians increased they decreased, and gradually they were excluded from all but malevolent functions, or at least functions of gloomy and austere association."⁴

More specifically, the impact of universal earth goddess theory on interpretations of the Pandora myth is illustrated by this quotation from Gardner:

It is a tempting view...to suspect that...the whole cycle of Prometheus and Pandora legends belonged originally to the pre-Aryan population of Greece, which may have been of Canaanite race. As early as 1888 it was maintained by Prof. Ramsey that, in Greece as in Asia Minor, the lower stratum of the population was formed of a pre-Greek race, devoted to the worship of great Earth-goddesses, while the upper stratum consisted of the conquering Aryan tribes, who brought in male deities, and the patriarchal as opposed to the matriarchal scheme of society.⁵

This theoretical background underlay the view that Pandora was originally a pre-

1 See Bachofen 1967, esp. 69-120 for his introduction to and general explanation of the features of his theory.

2 An underlying theme throughout his famous work *The Golden Bough*, first published in 1890 and later expanded.

3 Meskel 1998, 48-9. Meskel is somewhat uncertain about the precise origins of the theory and the lines of who influenced whom, but it seems certain that it was Frazer who really popularized the notion, and Harrison who applied it in the field of Classical Archeology. Goodison (1998, 113) notes that Arthur Evans, who excavated Knossos in the early 20th century, cited Frazer for his notion of a Minoan priest-king who was the adopted son of the Great Mother.

4 Harrison 1900, 114.

5 Gardner 1901, 8.

Greek manifestation of the great earth goddess who was drastically demoted to become Hesiod's first human woman.

However, both the classic theory of a universal Great Mother Earth and its newer variants have been shown to be based on dubious assumptions and methodologies and to lack specific evidence. For example, there are few who still share Bachofen's assumptions that myth is to be read as historical memory and that pre-history is the childhood of humanity. Bachofen's tendency to universalize all early cultures into a uniform matriarchal blueprint also lacks primary evidence and ignores geographic and cultural specificity.⁶ More recent archeologists who reject the universal Earth Mother-Goddess theory emphasize that the primary evidence, while supporting the importance of female deities and fertility in early societies, also indicates a plurality of goddesses with various kinds of functions depending on their historical and culturally specific contexts.⁷ Hence the universal Earth Mother-Goddess theory is no longer tenable. However, due to the archeological evidence supporting the general importance of fertility goddesses, it remains possible to argue that Hesiod's Pandora was derived from a fertility goddess of some sort.

3.1.2 Iconographic evidence

Based on the universal earth mother-goddess theoretical background, various kinds of evidence have also been used to support the demoted earth goddess view of Pandora, including iconographic evidence. One very commonly employed example is a white-ground cup of about 470 B.C.,⁸ which seems to depict something close to the *Theogony* version of the Pandora myth, as it shows Athena adorning and Epimetheus adjusting a headband on a young woman. Thus her identity as Hesiod's Pandora seems clear, but she is inscribed as *Anēsidōra* (she who sends up gifts), which is also a title of Gaia and Demeter.⁹ Another often-cited example is a scene on a volute crater of about 440 B.C. showing Zeus giving instructions to Hermes and also the *anodos*¹⁰ of a crowned and adorned

6 As he himself admits at the outset, "The most elementary spadework remains to be done, for the culture period to which mother right pertains has never been seriously studied." (Bachofen 1967, 69).

7 The introduction to Goodison and Morris 1998, 6-21, is a good historical discussion and critique of the 'universal mother goddess' notion, its positive contributions and its weak points (esp. 13-18). They argue specifically against the more recent resurgence of Universal Earth Goddess theory that was initiated by Marija Gimbutas in the 1970s, but their objections are also applicable to the more classical version first espoused in the latter part of the 19th century.

8 Beazley 1963, 869 no. 55.

9 West 1978, 164.

10 That is, a goddess arising out of the earth, normally a convention associated with earth goddesses often identified as Gaia, Aphrodite, or Kore.

female figure inscribed as Pandora being watched by Epimetheus who is holding a mallet.¹¹ These elements led early modern scholars such as Harrison, Gardner, and Robert¹² to compare it to other *anodos* scenes (where an emerging earth goddess is greeted by satyrs or men with hammers or picks) and to conclude that it reflects pre-Hesiodic agricultural religious beliefs, whereby the earth goddess or spirit of vegetation was summoned or released in the Spring by striking the earth with mallets. Thus it was concluded that Hesiod's Pandora is derived from such an ascending earth goddess or vegetation spirit and that "it is Hesiod or the religious tale which he adopted that degrades the all-bestowing Earth into a deceitful spirit."¹³

This Attic iconographic evidence adduced in favor of Pandora as an Earth goddess has also been criticized. In addition to the problem of positively identifying the figures in many of the examples, it is argued for example, that the Attic artists themselves were working with a tradition that had already been corrupted due to the ambiguity of the name *Pandora* as used by Hesiod, and that they further incorporated telluric elements due to the lack of other symbols in their repertoire.¹⁴

3.1.3 Non-Hesiodic literary and etymological evidence

In addition to the iconographic evidence, there are non-Hesiodic literary references that appear to link the name *Pandora* to an earth goddess. The most common example is Aristophanes' *Birds*, 971 which gives the instruction, "First to Pandora offer a white-fleeced lamb," to which the scholiast adds, "to Pandora, the earth, because she bestows all things necessary to life." Several other such references have been noted.¹⁵

Unfortunately these literary references to an earth goddess Pandora are later than Hesiod and in many cases obscure. Hence, like the iconography, although they do establish that in later antiquity the name Pandora was associated with an earth goddess, they are of very limited value in determining Hesiod's intent for

11 Beazley 1963, 1562 no. 4.

12 Robert 1914, 18f.

13 Gardner 1901, 6.

14 Bérard 1974, 161-4. Also Loraux 1993, 84: "Would anyone deny that in the *Works and Days* Hesiod made this range of readings possible—despite himself, of course—by giving the woman the name Pandora? Lost in this "onomastic ambiguity," the Athenian vase painters anticipated Carl Robert by representing Pandora in the *anodos* position and by giving Hesiod's automaton the name Anēsídōra, which is another name for the earth."

15 West, although not a proponent of the demoted earth goddess theory, enumerates several more such references demonstrating that *Pandora* was at least known in antiquity as the name of a chthonic goddess who was also sometimes identified with *Gaia*. Specifically Hippon. 104.48; Philoch. *FGH* 328F 10 v.1; Diod. 3.57.2; Philo. *de opif. mundi*, 133; *de aetern. mundi* 63; Philostr. *VA* 6.39; Orph. *Arg.* 974f.; Homer *epig.* 7.1 (West 1978, 164).

his first woman. West acknowledges and enumerates the various types of literary and iconographic evidence used to support the demoted earth goddess theory, only to reject the view that this was Hesiod's intent on the grounds that the nature and actions of his Pandora are not chthonic and can be "fully accounted for in terms of pure myth."¹⁶ And, like Bérard, he sees her association by the later Greeks with the earth goddess as a post-Hesiodic development due to her name.¹⁷

There is also the view that the very name Pandora (literally *All-gifts*) suggests that she is essentially an earth goddess because it resembles similar epithets of Gaia and other earth goddesses. Some have boldly suggested parallels between the name *Pandora* and the first biblical woman *Eve*, claiming that both names were originally epithets of an all-giving earth goddess:

Eve, the first woman of the biblical myth, also seems to have been a later variant, a successor of an earlier earth-mother concept that became humanized with time. The name Eva (Havva), at the side of the too obvious term of *Išah* (išah=woman. Gen. II. 23), denoted *the mother of all the living* according to biblical interpretation (Gen. III. 20); the name thus recalls the similar attributes of Ge with Hesiod (*pantôn mētēr*, *Erga* 563) and with Aeschylus (*pammētôr*, *Prom.* 88).¹⁸

It has more specifically been argued that there is a parallel between the meaning of *Pandora* and Eve's epithet in Genesis as well as a plausible link between Eve and demoted Mesopotamian creation goddesses, and that this link indicates a Near Eastern pattern of demoting mother goddesses similar to that which is supposedly evident in the demotion of Pandora:

Like Eve's name, Pandora's appears to be an onomastic form of earth. It appears to have been severed as...the others were from an earth goddess to which it had early been attached. But, Pandora, like Eve, has been transformed into the name of the first woman of her race...The all-nurturing creatress has been transmogrified into a seductive subhuman creature, the ultimate demotion.¹⁹

These attempts to find etymological evidence linking the name Pandora to epithets of ancient earth goddesses and to the name Eve do appear to be plausible. But such etymological evidence given by itself is just too thin to be conclusive.

¹⁶ I am not certain precisely what West means by the ill-defined expression "pure myth," but his point that the Hesiodic myth of Pandora can be accounted for independently of a demoted earth goddess, in spite of the apparent evidence to the contrary, is clear enough.

¹⁷ West 1978, 165.

¹⁸ Trensčényi-Waldapfel 1955, 107.

¹⁹ O'Brien 1983, 39-40.

3.1.4 Chthonic associations of Pandora's jar (*pithos*)

The uses and chthonic symbolism of the *pithos* (jar) have also been employed to emphasize Pandora's fundamental earth goddess nature. It has often been noted that *pithoi* either stood on or were partly sunk into the ground²⁰ and were frequently used for human burial.²¹ Inspired by a *lekythos* portraying Hermes conducting winged ghosts out of and back into a large open *pithos*, Harrison attempted to link it with the chthonic element of the Pithoigia, a part of the Anthesteria Festival. She speculated that this festival involved an opening of grave *pithoi* from which the dead souls were released for a time and afterwards were sent back to the Underworld.²² She could not provide evidence of an actual grave-*pithos* opening ceremony at the Anthesteria, but did find a Roman analogue where a round pit was opened for three days, during which Underworld deities could come forth.²³ Consequently, she attempted to explain the opening of Pandora's *pithos* as an etiological myth that provides an origin for the Pithoigia,²⁴ and she viewed the Anthesteria as originating from a primitive chthonic "Ge (Gaia)-Pandora and ghost cult" which gradually became overlaid with Olympian elements as the universal power of the Earth goddess decreased.²⁵

But Harrison's attempts to establish the chthonic symbolism of the *pithos* and its links to the *pithoi* opened at the Pithoigia also fall short. It has been pointed out that there is no actual attestation of such a rite of the opening of the grave *pithoi* at the Pithoigia, that the *pithos* in the representation on the *lekythos* has no lid, and that the presence of Hermes forbids its association with a cultic scene. Hence it is to be viewed not as a grave *pithos* but rather a libation vessel. In other words, there is absolutely no indication that this representation has anything to do with the opening of jars at the Pithoigia.²⁶

3.1.5 Earth goddess associations of Pandora's crown

Some earth goddess proponents who view the *potnia thêrôn* (*mistress of the beasts*) as a manifestation of the Great Earth Goddess argue that the golden crown, intricately engraved with numerous wild beasts and given to Pandora in the *Theogony* account, further links her to the earth goddess:

20 Harrison 1900, 100.

21 Harrison 1900, 101. A much more detailed and balanced discussion of the widespread practice and possible symbolism of jar burials is that of Goodison 1989, which I will deal with in more detail in Chapter 3.

22 See Simon 1983, 93 for a more recent and reliable explanation of this.

23 Harrison 1900, 102-3.

24 Harrison 1900, 101.

25 Harrison 1900, 109, 113-14.

26 Deubner 1969, 95-6.

This gold crown or chaplet or tiara, how did it come to adorn the head of the first woman if she was nothing else but the first mother (*Urmutter*) of mortal women and their prototype? ... [It must have been] a distinctive emblem of a goddess who most likely stood in close relation to the animal kingdom. All this recalls some variant of Mother Earth, akin to the Cybele surrounded by animals, the more so since the totality of the animal kingdom was particularly emphasized by Hesiod (*Th.* 582) when he wrote that on the head-dress there were represented all the animals 'that are fed by the land and by the sea'. That feeding all animals, not only those of land but also of the sea, fell within the province of Mother Earth, the nourisher of all living beings, can be seen from the *Orphic Hymn* 27.5-8."²⁷

The absence of the crown in the *Works* account is also viewed as indicating a further demotion of Pandora from the divine to the human.²⁸

That the crown is significant is indicated by the detailed explanation of its making and contents. However, it is less than certain exactly what its exact significance is, much less that it has earth goddess connotations. The view that the *potnia therôn* is a variant of mother earth could also be questioned. It could perhaps be claimed with more certainty that the crown at least connotes some divine significance and reinforces Pandora's association with Hecate and Aphrodite who were often depicted with crowns.

It must be concluded from the above objections that while the notion of Hesiod's Pandora being derived from an earth goddess remains alluring and, I believe, even plausible, the particular evidence that has been commonly advanced for it is inconclusive at best. While this evidence indicates that there was an earth goddess (or goddesses) named *Pandora*, at least after Hesiod's time, by itself it hardly tells us anything concrete about the nature of the woman who is called *Pandora* in Hesiod's poems.

27 Trensényi-Waldapfel 1955, 106. The relevant part of the Hymn is as follows: "Divine are your honors, O mother of the gods and nurturer of all...for in the cosmos yours is the throne in the middle because the earth is yours and you give gentle nourishment to mortals. Gods and men were born of you, and you hold sway over the rivers and all the sea." (Athanasakis 1977, 39). For an interesting but inconclusive discussion on the crown and its possible relations to Aphrodite, Hecate or some other universal goddess, and its use as a symbol of the fostering and destructive aspects of the old nature goddess who is supposedly behind Pandora, see Marquardt 1982, 286-7.

28 Trensényi-Waldapfel 1955, 107: "Pandora's headdress with the animals, still pointing to divine origin in the *Theogony*, was entirely suppressed since this omission would deprive her of divine attributes making her at the same stroke human and mortal."

3.2 Pandora not demoted goddess, yet closely correlated to Gaia view

3.2.1 Vernant's structural analysis

A somewhat different view of Hesiod's Pandora that sees her not necessarily as a demoted earth goddess but as closely associated nevertheless with Gaia is found in the structuralist analysis of the Prometheus myth by Vernant²⁹ who identifies a network of correlations in the text between the various elements and entities in the myth. Pandora is correlated, for example, with the themes of deceptive giving, the shares of the sacrificed ox, the belly of the ox, the Promethean fire and the livelihood hidden by Zeus in the earth. Vernant is especially concerned to demonstrate how the network of correlations in the myth serves to define the human condition and culture as based on the triad of sacrifice, marriage and agriculture. The affinities between marriage and agriculture and the widespread metaphor of woman as the earth also lead him to associate the first woman closely with the Earth.³⁰ While Vernant relies on textual evidence within the Hesiodic narrative more than proponents of the *Pandora as earth goddess* view, like them he also uses considerable external evidence to apply the *woman as earth* metaphor to Pandora.

3.2.2 Arthur's rhetorical analysis

Another important recent scholar who views Pandora as closely linked to the Earth is Marilyn Arthur.³¹ Even more than Vernant, Arthur's rhetorical analysis of the narrative strategy of the *Theogony* focuses primarily on the evidence within the Hesiodic text itself. And in contrast to most Pandora scholarship, she does not treat the Pandora myth in isolation but rather stresses its role in the larger Hesiodic narrative. Specifically she sees a strategy throughout the narrative of the *Theogony* of dealing with the threatening aspects of the primal female power embodied in Gaia by reconstituting them synecdochically in subsequent female figures (Aphrodite, Styx, Hecate and Pandora) who are then subordinated to the rule of Zeus.³² Arthur makes no reference to historical mother earth goddess theory, and seems rather concerned with how the subjugation of female power to male power in Hesiod's *Theogony* relates to the social and legal position of the female in Greek society. As regards Pandora, Arthur concludes that by embodying the female sexuality associated with Aphrodite and the fecundity associated with

29 Vernant 1980, 168-185.

30 Vernant 1980, 180.

31 Arthur 1982, 63-82.

32 Arthur 1982, 65.

Gaia, she “emerges as a kind of Gaia reborn, a symbol of the primal power of the female displaced from the divine onto the human realm.”³³

3.3 Pandora disassociated from Gaia view

A few recent studies of the Pandora myth, while incorporating and building on the analyses of Vernant and Arthur, disagree with their close association of Pandora with Gaia and argue on the contrary that Hesiod is in fact dissociating them from each other. For example, Loraux rejects attempts to associate Hesiod’s first woman with the fertility of Gaia, claiming that her fertility aspect is hidden and outweighed by her destructive aspect, and hence she in no way is intended to “imitate the earth.”³⁴ Loraux further distinguishes Pandora from the fecundity of the Earth on the grounds that she is an artificial technical product made from “clayey earth” in contrast to the fertile loam that gave birth to the autochthonous Athenians.³⁵ Zeitlin seconds Loraux’s objections and further argues that Hesiod intentionally inverts the usual etymology of the name *Pandora* from an active to a passive sense to emphasize that she is a taker rather than a giver of gifts, and in this way explicitly separates her from Gaia.³⁶

I do not find this view persuasive as it is based on an over-emphasis on Gaia’s positive fertility aspect and does not take sufficient account of the negative destructive aspect of her nature, an aspect which, in fact, strongly links her character to that of Pandora. Hence, I believe that the textual evidence presented by scholars such as Vernant and Arthur that the characters of Pandora and Gaia in Hesiod’s poems are closely correlated remains very convincing. Unfortunately, the evidence for Pandora being a demoted earth goddess is less so.

Conclusions

From the above survey of the scholarship, it is clear that issues concerning the origin of Hesiod’s Pandora, the apparently earth goddess-like aspects of her nature, and more specifically, her relation to Hesiod’s portrayal of Gaia are still points of controversy in Hesiodic scholarship. It has also become clear that the external evidence (i.e. iconographic evidence and non-Hesiodic literary references) about the existence and nature of an earth goddess Pandora, while not completely lacking, is sparse, at times obscure, and hence itself open to widely varying

33 Arthur 1982, 75.

34 Loraux 1993, 83-4.

35 Loraux 1993, 78-9.

36 Zeitlin 1995, 59-60.

interpretations. Furthermore, the internal textual evidence, such as the existence of various correlations between the portrayal of Pandora and the portrayal of Gaia within the Hesiodic narrative, seems to support the plausibility of the view of Pandora as a demoted earth goddess, but does not offer conclusive evidence that this is in fact the case. Hence, fascinating and suggestive though the notion may be, it cannot be demonstrated persuasively, and we must rather conclude that, while 'Pandora as a demoted earth goddess' theories remain plausible, they are speculative nevertheless.

I believe these results suggest that the most fruitful approach to interpreting Hesiod's first human woman Pandora and her relation to the first goddess Gaia would be to focus more exclusively on the correlations between the portrayals of these two prototypical females within the narratives of the *Theogony* and the *Works and Days*, using the external literary and iconic evidence only in a very limited and secondary way. The structuralist analysis by Vernant and the rhetorical analysis by Arthur, both of which were briefly summarized above, provide good models and departure points for such a study due to their rigorous investigations of the structure and narrative strategies of these Hesiodic works. Such a study would be unlikely to add conclusive evidence to the 'Pandora as demoted earth goddess' controversy, but it could be expected to shed more light on the connections between Pandora and Gaia, on how the portrayals of these two prototypical female figures in the Hesiodic narrative can be used to mutually illuminate each other, and even more importantly, on Hesiod's view of the human condition with its 'mixture of goods and evils'.

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