

WEAVING/REWEAVING:  
CLOSING ADDRESS  
STA ASSEMBLY 2015

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She dedicated  
her lecture to  
June Matthews,  
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introduced her to  
sandplay in 1983.*

*Closing Address  
from the Sandplay  
Therapists of  
America Assembly,  
Baltimore, Maryland,  
April 24-26, 2015.*

OPPOSITE:  
*Two women weaving.  
This domestic scene  
may also allude to  
the great weaving  
contest between  
Athena and Arachne.  
Terracotta lekythos  
(oil flask), attributed  
to the Amasis  
Painter, Greece,  
c. 550-530 BCE  
Fletcher Fund, 1931.  
metmuseum.org*

After Betty Jackson spoke to us about the symbolism associated with *threads* in her opening address of this Assembly, I imagined that each participant's movements left a trail, like a luminous thread of a unique color, creating a web of our movements and encounters. I brought with me a simple loom, the woof already in place, and recycled sari silk. I asked that each participant weave in a length of silk. Woven by all our hands, it is beautiful.

As you know, Jungians tend to prefer *questions* and *amplification* to *interpretation*. Amplification is like a circumambulation. We don't try to pin down the mystery but rather to walk around it, with the intention to enrich meaning rather than circumscribe it. This method does not reduce, concretize, literalize, or analyze. Amplification and reverie are what I offer you today. I'll cast out some threads that perhaps you'll pick up for further thought, and then I will share with you my own active imagination in response to the most famous western myth about weaving, the Greek story of the weaving contest between the goddess Athena and the mortal Arachne.

THREAD AND WEAVING

For me, there is something magical about weaving. It is no accident that we speak of the weaving of spells! The process of weaving is a tribute to human imagination and ingenuity. Wherever humans had lengths of a flexible material and wanted to create large, flat objects — for a roof, a windbreak, or a mat for a floor, they discovered that they could place lengths of a material in rows and then cross other lengths at a right angle, the trick being to cross over and under on alternate rows. They created shapes of woven fibers for containers, whether large and flat

for winnowing grain, as a strainer, a fruit basket, a hat, or even crude shoes. People weave their long hair.

We are here with the hope of weaving a community of sandplay therapists devoted to bringing to our patients the opportunity for “*the experience of a symbol in a free and sheltered space*” (Kalff, 1980, p.32, italics in original).

Perhaps some of you are weavers of cloth. Perhaps you weave narratives or ideas. In many languages, *to weave*, is used metaphorically for any creative act. The words *text* and *textile* have the same root, through Latin from Teckhne, the name of the Greek spirit or *daimona* of art, technical skill, and craft. She was associated with Hephaistos and the Muses.<sup>i</sup> The word, *Sutra*, which refers to a Hindu or Tibetan sacred esoteric text, is derived from the Pali word *sutta*, which means a thread that holds things together. According to Kruger (2002), the word *Tantra*,

“... derives from the weaving craft and denotes interpenetration ... inter relatedness.” A Tantra is not only a woven text, then, but is thought to have innate power to weave the reader into a more integrated understanding of the sacred and secular worlds. (p.100) <sup>ii</sup>

As sandplay therapists, all of you are holders of a *temenos*, a sacred witnessing that is silent yet inwardly active and engaged. You carefully prepare the space, as a weaver must prepare the woof with great precision. The woof can then hold the weft with its endless possibilities. Likewise, the individual entering this “silent workshop of the psyche” (Bradway and McCoard, 1997) can create something from the depths of her or his being.

When spinning came into use, very fine plant and animal fibers produced strong and flexible thread, which largely replaced bark, animal skins, and felted animal-fur fibers. Whatever fibers were at hand might be used: I witnessed villagers in Kovalam in the south of India beating coconuts husks to extract their strands that were then spun into the rope for their fishing nets.

Throughout the world, textile weaving became an art, with variation in techniques, the addition of patterns, and astonishing skill. Fabric could be loosely woven for coolness or effect or tightly woven and treated to create a nearly impenetrable barrier to keep out the cold and damp.

Weaving one’s own fabrics creates an intimate relationship to clothing. The feeling of the fabric on the skin, the way it moves and breathes, is constantly improved upon. Color conveys so much, and astonishingly complex procedures were developed to create dyes from earth pigments, plants, and animals.

How many human beings, most often women, spent days or evenings spinning or weaving? Imagine the texture of the material on the fingers, the rhythms of movement, the posture and the skill in moving hands and arms, and the satisfaction as fibers became thread and then fabric. The loom and tools were made by hand, also with skill, shaped and smoothed to fit the hand of the weaver.





*I feel that nowadays our hands are under used and that they suffer for it. They want to move, to touch. Children suffer for want of touch and touching. So do adults. I believe that a primal longing can be awakened when we touch the sand. As the grains move across our fingertips, it can seem that the sand touches us back and in a completely non-threatening way. We move in our unique ways, reacting to the sand and the sand reacting to us. We see the patterns created by our ways of moving and can explore the effects of new ways of moving.*

#### WEAVING AS A UNION OF OPPOSITES

Though few of us weave today, and then not of necessity, weaving is a living metaphor of the joining of opposites to create something entirely new. Warp and weft are at right angles. Each time they cross, there is— a cross! Opposites remain opposites, but in that tension threads become cloth.

The weft thread travels above and below, over and under, the woof. Might we imagine ourselves traveling like that, moving beneath the surface of an idea or image, and then looking at it with perspective from above? A *symbol* includes the above and below, the conscious and the unconscious, spirit and matter. As long as it is a living symbol, its meaning is partly mysterious and unconscious. Although we may curiously look up a word or image in a symbol dictionary and get some clues, a symbol can never be defined in all its cultural and personal meanings.





#### WEAVING AND ITS SYMBOLS

In the world of nature, spiders are the great weavers. Spiders come in startling varieties and ways of life. They weave in many ways. Some build an oblong nest and live in large colonies.<sup>iii</sup> Others are solitary predators, whose physical appearance can evoke strong reactions in us! Did you know that there are spiders that fly, hatching and sending out their first strand of silk to be caught on the wind? Did you know that there are even vegan spiders?

Spiders are not an archetype with universal meaning. They evoke a variety of emotions, often conflicting ones. While their webs may be beautiful when seen in the morning mist, no one wants to walk into one! For some, the spider is a negative feminine figure: the black widow who devours her mate, the woman who ensnares someone in her net of lies and treachery.

For the Hopi Indians, the spider was the creator of the world (Mullett, 1979; Waters, 1963). As Grandmother Spider, Kokyanwuhti, she is as old as the Earth and as Kokyamana, she is a maiden as fresh as *this very moment that is becoming*. As the guide to the twin heroes of Hopi legend, she sat behind a hero's ear and instructed him in the making of medicine to pacify monsters or softly whispered guidance with regard to properly respectful behavior toward elders. Thus the twins were able to journey to the very bottom of the sacred Grand Canyon and journey to the Sky to meet their Father the Sun. We might recognize this symbolically as the need to listen and pay attention to the small, helpful voices from within, always but especially during a descent into the realm of the unconscious and during the ascent into a new way of living, of belonging, or a new guiding principle.

For the Lakota, the spider Iktomi is a *heyoka*, or contrary, one who does things backwards (Personal communication, Elder "Holy Woman" Pansy Hawk Wing).

For some Native American tribes a Spider Man is a trickster figure (Erdoes and Ortiz, 1998), the butt of many humorous stories that teach us

not to be too trusting but also how to watch out for oneself in the face of an adversary with greater power. For example, the Spider Man may play a trick on an Anglo trader who is getting rich by paying the Indians too little for their goods. He is a master at inflaming the greed or lust of his victim. The humor in these stories avoids a harsh righteousness. We laugh at Spider Man. We laugh at ourselves. And we remember the lessons.

The spider's web or silk can represent interconnectedness, for example, the internet is called the "world-wide web." A beautiful and recognizable form can be created, even though each location where the web is woven is unique. Spider webs are bridges that fill empty spaces, and they are signs that tell you that no one has passed there. In some stories, helpful spiders spin a web to create the illusion that no one has entered the secret hiding place of a fugitive, such as the legend of Robert the Bruce of Scotland. Spider webs were used in traditional medicine quite successfully to dress wounds, and spider silk is stronger and much more elastic than steel. Spider silk has so much potential as body armor and in medical applications, that, rather horrifically, goats have been genetically modified to produce spider silk proteins in their milk! (O'Brian and Walton, 2010).

#### WEAVING NARRATIVES

We speak of weaving stories. In them we create worlds, as the Hopi Spider Grandmother spun a new world (Bloomberg, 2001, p.3). Modern authors often weave stories in and out of present, past, and future; they weave from the point of view of one character to another; and they weave in and out of alternate worlds, as in Murakami's novels.

In fact, the use of a sand box and figures in depth therapy was originally called "The Lowenfeld World Technique" by its originator, Margaret Lowenfeld (1939) because of course each tray can be seen as a world. When we reflect on a sandplay process, we may *reweave* its story, which is not a typical narrative but one with layers and with past, present, and future all contained in a shallow wooden box. When we make this translation into a narrative, we are moving from the realm of implicit to explicit experience. In our publication, we still include images of the trays, since no words can replace them. Perhaps we might even want to call what we do *weaving reveries*, rather than weaving narratives.

#### MISSING LINKS

An experience during sandplay can unearth an emotion that is the missing link needed to discover that formerly disconnected events are meaningfully connected to one another, which Wilfred Bion described in his classic paper, "Attacks on Linking" (1959). Affects that would have been overwhelming to a young or fragile ego, or a set of experiences that need to be revisited and reintegrated, can emerge.<sup>iv</sup> We might think of this as mending broken threads in the fabric that gives meaning and coherency to life. A story



can finally be told, a memory unearthed. Sometimes a new form of narrative unfolds, one that cannot be fully described in words but only through symbols, poetry, paradox, or creative expression. After such an integrating experience, there is a new quality of seeing and a freeing of mental and emotional capacities that leave one *able to more fully experience the present moment*.

#### SILENT WITNESSING

As sandplay therapists, we are most often silent witnesses, but we are also embodied witnesses with rich inner lives, *symbolic lives*, open to what may emerge within the sandtray and in the entire space of the therapeutic encounter, paying attention to what Kay Bradway called the *co-transference* (1991). Our body experience, observations, and associations weave together, sometimes loosely or awkwardly, as we witness. Our inner witness mirrors the patient's movements, deepening empathy and understanding. To many, it may seem paradoxical that saying nothing and not even actively *thinking*, our psyches weave together narratives with many subtexts.



#### ARACHNE AND ATHENA: GODS AND HUMANS, SYMBOLS AND REALITIES

I have become fascinated by the myth of Athena and Arachne, a tale about a great weaving contest between a young mortal woman living in Asia Minor and a goddess whose primary residence was on Mount Olympus in mainland Greece. As you know, in the mythology of Olympian Greece, the gods and goddesses were represented primarily in human form and were powerfully instinctual creatures: they were characterized by lust, envy, pride, selfishness, impulsivity, lack of remorse, and the need for vengeance.





Homer's gray eyed Athena is usually an exception to the rule. She is a friend to the Greek warriors and benevolent towards humans. She was always one of my favorites, a model of strength and independence. The story of her conception and birth is marvelously but tragically symbolic. Athena's father Zeus, ruler over the gods on Mount Olympus, impregnated the goddess Metis, whose wisdom was unsurpassed. Zeus worried that if she bore a son that this son would overthrow Zeus, which is what he'd done to his own father. So Zeus played a transformation game with Metis, tricking her into taking the form of a tiny fly and luring her with honey. When she became stuck in the honey, he swallowed her. Instead of destroying his own unborn offspring, the crafty ruler of Mt. Olympus became pregnant. But, no worry, he gave birth through the top of his head to the child of his dreams.



Born regaled in full armor, the girl child Athena was wise, noble, beautiful, and heroic. As Kerenyi (1951) points out, she is the ultimate father's daughter. We might even say that Athena was the answer to her father's prayers: Athena became the patriarchal daughter who was a stand in for the goddesses and their mysteries that the Greeks were suppressing in the peoples they were conquering.

On her shield, Athena carried the face of the Gorgon, the negative side of the primal feminine as guardian of the Earth's sanctity. The shield was a reminder to fear the Feminine, but I believe it lost its meaning as a symbol of nature's wrath when her sacredness was violated and came to symbolize fear of the suppressed and denied Feminine mysteries. The sanctity of a woman's body, under divine protection and essential to the well-being of families and





cultures, was also suppressed as it did not fit in with a culture of warriors who traveled for years away from their families, killed the males in conquered groups, and took the women as spoils of war for their own use. It was completely fitting in this situation, then, that the ideal of a noble and respected female, the goddess Athena, was not generative, not a sexual object nor a truly maternal one, neither mating nor bearing a child. She had no transmission of wisdom from the earth or from her mother, and what she offered came not through the mysteries but through intellect, order, and discipline— all noble qualities but too one-sided.

Now to our story: As told in Ovid's *Metamorphoses* (1 CE), Arachne was a young woman in Lydia in Asia Minor who became widely known for the beauty of her tapestries. Her fame reached Athena, who was honored by the Greeks as the bringer of weaving to humans. As a goddess, her skill by definition surpassed that of any human, and the order of things was challenged when human accomplishment appeared to rival her own. Athena decided to conduct an undercover investigation. She disguised herself as a harmless-looking old woman and visited Arachne. Athena brought the conversation around to herself, asking Arachne whether she owed her skill to the goddess Athena. According to Ovid, Arachne rather disrespectfully told the old woman that Athena should come and bring her own loom and they'd see who was the better weaver. Athena, then revealed her true identity and immediately took up the challenge.

The contest was a great event, attended by gods and mortals. Arachne wove a stunning tapestry, perhaps equal in quality to Athena's but with illustrations of the transgressions of the Olympian gods toward human women. Enraged, Athena tore up the tapestry, and Arachne hanged herself. Athena then turned Arachne into a spider so she could weave forever. (Athena hated spiders!)





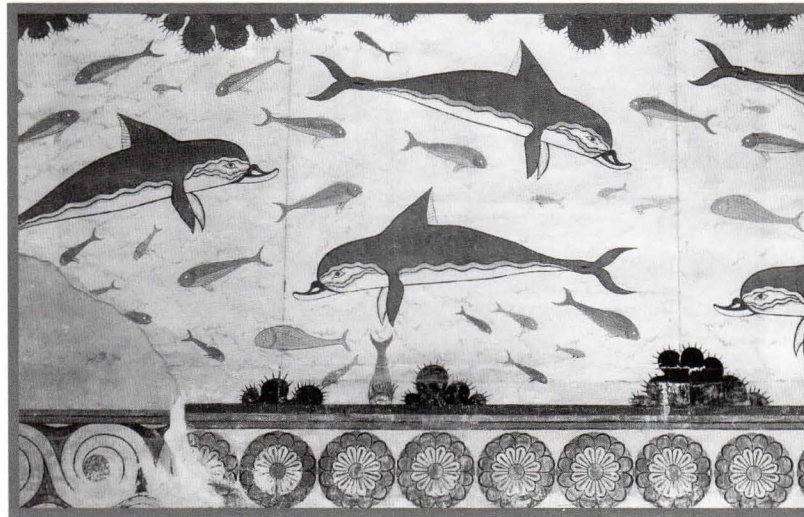
It would be easy to view this story as typifying the themes of classical Greek literature, which often explored the difficult relationship between gods and mortals and the problems of *hubris* and *nemesis*. Arachne's story is at first glance a lesson in *hubris*, or in contemporary terms, a warning about the dangers of an inflated ego. In this light, it is a life lesson: a lack of awareness of one's limitations leaves one open to errors in judgment, causing harm to oneself and to others. *Hubris* is the hallmark of the *uninitiated hero* (Henderson, 1967/2005), who must experience and learn from failure in order to develop maturity of judgment. We might also say that Athena was Arachne's *nemesis*, the one who gave Arachne what she was due, in other words the appropriate consequence of her attitudes and deeds.

Yet Ovid's version of the myth contains odd details, such as the name of Arachne's father, that may give us clues to the moment in actual history from which the myth arose. The story, we shall see, can even be viewed in large part as a piece of propaganda and a rationalization with a "blame the victim" strategy that may have been exaggerated by its English translators, from Pope on. Classics scholar Julia Dyson Hejduk (2012) has suggested that the wording in Latin of Arachne's reply to Athena can be read as her saying that she *cannot refuse* the challenge of a god. This is not *hubris*. So for English readers, Arachne may have appeared more arrogant and more ignorant than Ovid intended, robbing the poem of its ambiguity of language and nuances of character portrayal.



Robert Graves (1955/1992) recounts several versions of the Athena myth that predate the tale passed down to Ovid. They have nothing to do with those infamous patriarchs, the Olympians. Plato in the *Timaeus* 5 identifies Athena with the Libyan-Egyptian goddess Neith, whose temple was at Sais.<sup>v</sup> She was one of the most ancient Egyptian deities, the virgin creator of the world and mother of the sun god, Ra and of his nemesis, a great serpent. Depicted with a snake in front of her third eye, she ruled over both weaving and skill with weapons. Plutarch translated the inscription on her statue at Sais: “I am everything that has been, and that is, and that shall be, and no one has ever lifted my garment (*peplos*).”<sup>vi</sup> (Quoted in Rigoglioso, 2010). According to Herodotus, “Athene’s garments and ægis were borrowed by





the Greeks from the Libyan women, who are dressed in exactly the same way, except that their leather garments are fringed with thongs, not serpents.” Graves cites archeological evidence from pottery analysis that there was a migration of Libyan goddess worshippers to Crete in about 4000 BCE, preceding the high period of Minoan civilization (Graves, 1955/1992, p.45).<sup>vii</sup> The Minoan culture, centered in Crete, became one of the most graceful and naturalistic cultures in the ancient world. The Minoans were great potters, weavers, and traders. Their arts were in demand, and trade flourished throughout the Aegean and in the Middle East.

ABOVE: *Ladies in Blue* fresco, Palace of Knossos, Crete, Greece © Vicspacewalker | Dreamstime.com  
*Dolphins* fresco, Palace of Knossos, Crete, Greece © Deniskelly | Dreamstime.com



Interestingly, the Arachne myth is situated in a community in Asia Minor founded by migrants from Minoan Crete. They brought with them skilled weavers and a very complex and secret technique for making a purple dye that did not fade in the sun. According to Robert Graves, Athena's wrath toward Arachne

may be more than just a pretty fable, if it records an early commercial rivalry between the Athenians and the Lydio-Carian thalassocrats, or sea rulers, who were of Cretan origin. Numerous seals with a spider emblem ... have been found at Cretan Miletus— the mother city of Carian Miletus, the largest exporter of dyed woolens in the ancient world— suggest a public textile industry operated there at the beginning of the second millennium BC. For a while the Milesians controlled the profitable Black Sea trade and had an enterprise at Naucratis in Egypt. Athene had good reason to be jealous of the spider. (Graves, 1955/1992, p.62)

#### ARACHNE ENDS HER LONG SILENCE

By transforming Arachne into a spider who would weave forever, Athena silenced her but, (might we imagine?) unwittingly, cursed her with immortality. Weaving together details from Ovid's vivid poetry with archaeological research, I have imagined that Arachne wove her own symbolic Cretan hieroglyphs into her webs, filling cave after cave, and that these have been discovered. I present here a preliminary translation:

I am a creature of silence, yet I have a tale to tell.

I am a weaver, a listener. I am sensitive to the smallest vibrations, to the sound made by a graceful gesture or by the tiniest insect creeping along a leaf.

I was taught at a very young age to observe how things are done. I watched not just once, but many times in different contexts. I learned what was essential and what was incidental. I see from many perspectives, and I notice the way muscles are tight or relaxed, how the trajectory of a movement is related to the whole body, and how movements can create images without the mover being aware of it. Those images remain invisible without a medium but I have the gift of sight.

Images created by unselfconscious movement remind me of playing in the sand by the river, very long ago, when I was a young girl.

Sometimes I would dance and twirl and then see the pattern my feet had made on the sand: circles and spirals, wild and messy ones! I would draw in the sand, letting my arms and fingers move where they chose rather than with a pattern in mind. I would decorate them with small stones and flowers, with ribbons my mother had woven in my hair— whatever



caught my eye. At other times, I gathered twigs and crisscrossed them or stood them up, taking a spider's web and stretching it between.

My grandmother laughed as she shared my joy at play, and though she said nothing to me, she saw that I had the family gift as a weaver. It wasn't long before she had me sit with her and help her in small ways as she spun and carded the wool.

Our family belonged to a guild of weavers renowned for the fine quality of our cloth. The merchant guild traded our textiles throughout the Aegean and the Mediterranean. We took pride in the care, focus, and integrity that we brought to our work.

In those days, work was sacred, and each guild had prayers and ceremonies known only to its members. We prayed to the goddess Cybele at dawn, and we danced and made offerings to her at sunset. The repetition of weaving was powerful, taking us into a state of awareness larger than what was in front of our eyes. It was Cybele who guided our movements, and weaving was like a prayer to her.

All this may seem strange to you, but long ago this is the way things were and had been, for as long as our story keepers could tell. Our people had migrated to the coast of Asia Minor from Crete, Ariadne's home, and we brought with us the love of dance and games, and of music that stirs the heart and beckons the body to move.

You have not heard our stories nor of the poets of ancient Lydia. They did not sing only of war but also of the beauty in nature, in praise of the mystery of life, of gods and goddesses who were a part of life, of earth and sky, and the stories of ancestors. We listened to the plants and animals, we observed and learned from their ways. We placed our ears against the earth to hear the beat of her heart. Our priests and priestesses journeyed in trance to the world below and to the world of the stars above to bring back wisdom, healing, and portents of the future.

Idmon, my father, was not of noble birth but he was the guardian of our people's secret method for making purple dye. Our fine purple cloth was greatly valued, for it did not fade in the sun, and in some lands it could be worn only by royalty.

Ovid pointed out that I was of lowly and what he called "vulgar" birth and that I had become famous entirely because of my skill. His tone was one of derision. In this, the poet himself identified with me, for he too was of lowly birth and a great weaver, that is, of tales.

I became a weaver of tapestries, creating whole scenes that seemed to flow from my fingers and yet took infinite care. Just to see my artistry, the nymphs would leave their usual haunts in the hills or near gurgling brooks. They would come down from the vineyards and from the River Pactolus, with its golden rocks and cooling water. The Water Nymphs, the Naiads, came to watch with fascination the movement of my hands.

No doubt you have heard of the great poet Homer, who sang of the Aegean heroes from the city states on the mainland of Greece. It was not long before my birth, when, as Homer tells, they looked across the sea with envy toward the flourishing towns of Asia Minor. When they banded together and attacked the city of Troy, our sister city, our warriors left to go to Troy's aid.

You have heard of the siege of Troy and of the great victory claimed by the Greeks, a victory won by the trickery of the Trojan horse rather than by honorable combat. The Greeks, always with their eye on the spoils, raided our defenseless cities and villages. We became slaves of the Greeks. Such is the way of the world, from time before memory and up to the present time and into the future. The Greeks took our wealth, killed our brothers and sons and grandfathers, and they took the girls and women as slaves and concubines. When we wove cloth for the Greeks, we no longer asked Cybele for her blessings, and thus the quality of the purple cloth declined.



Now, in those old times gods and goddesses lived in certain places and belonged with the people who lived there. When people moved their gods went with them, at least for a time. So it was that the mainland Greeks brought the gods and goddesses who lived on Mt. Olympus to my home in far away Lydian Colophon. The ways of these gods were shocking to us because the goddess of the Earth had been overthrown, and the balance between the gods and goddesses no longer restored harmony in people's lives and hearts. A great male god Zeus ruled over all the gods and goddesses on Mt. Olympus and indulged his lust and aggression with impunity. Olympus was a chaotic and unhappy place, a place without honor, order, delicacy, or reflection. Marriage, the great union of opposites to create new life, was no longer sacred.

It was not until many generations later that the story of my remarkable transformation was written down by the Roman poet Ovid in his great poem *Metamorphoses*, in which he speaks of the Olympian gods and their shape-shifting and their power to change the shapes of mortals.

According to Ovid, the virgin goddess Athena, daughter of Zeus, heard the singing of the Muses when they were complaining that mortals did not honor the gods. Athena, a warrior, felt ashamed to have neglected her duty to keep humans in line. Her vengeful mind turned to me, because even Athena had heard of my skill.

As Ovid told it, Athena's influence could be seen in every thread, and yet I scornfully denied this. I was accused of disowning "my heavenly mistress," never asking for her help. Ovid also noted that my mother had recently died, which is true. I had just returned to weaving, having completed a time in the temple of the goddess Cybele where I prayed and performed rituals dedicated to my mother and the mothers who came before her.

Ovid claimed that Athena disguised herself as an old woman and approached me, and to her face I denied that I owed my skill to the Greek goddess. It is true! I would not falsely humble myself. I laughed and gently told the old woman that her mind had become confused in her old age, that my weaving was an ancient art passed down through hundreds of generations. I did not speak of Cybele, for we did not speak of her to outsiders. When the old woman pressed me, I teased her that Athena should come and weave next to me, and we could see the result. Thus it was that I, maid of lowly birth, was tricked by Athena into challenging her.

Athena and I were to weave side-by-side so that our tapestries would bear witness to whether goddess or mortal be the victor.

Ovid did not understand the rhythms of weaving, so he did not recreate its cadences in his poetry. He described our contest like the caller at a chariot race!

Straight to their posts appointed both repair,  
And fix their threaded looms with equal care:  
Around the solid beam the web is tied,  
While hollow canes the parting warp divide;  
Thro' which with nimble flight the shuttles play,  
And for the woof prepare a ready way;  
The woof and warp unite, pressed by the toothy slay.  
Thus both, their mantles buttoned to their breast,  
Their skillful fingers ply with willing haste,  
And work with pleasure, while they cheer the eye  
With glowing purple of the Tyrian dye: (Dryden)

Athena wove a most beautiful tapestry, in praise of the gods of Olympus and in praise of herself, showing that she was chosen over Poseidon, god of the sea, to be the patron of the great city of Athens. Her tapestry was balanced and formal, according to some even reflecting a sanctimonious calm (Martin, 2009). Other great feats of power she did show, as well as the way gods punish humans who challenge their beauty or power.

Yet I was unimpressed with what she had chosen to portray. The Olympian gods seemed to me imposters, concerned with their own desires and importance. Was I to honor such gods? They were neither wise nor just. They lived in the sky and knew nothing of the spirit that lives in the earth. Was I to kneel before them, make sacrifice, pray to them for guidance? No, let Athena take her vengeance upon me!

It is not for me to praise my own skill. I leave that to Ovid, who wrote that my tapestry was perfect in every technical respect, woven of many colors and threads of gold. I illustrated the way Zeus, Neptune, Apollo, Bacchus, and Saturn tricked and violated maidens in order to satisfy their lust. I confronted the virgin goddess with her father's acts, his transformation of himself into animals— a bull, a swan, a snake— to violate innocent maidens. As gold he entered Danae's heart. The fair Mnemosyne thought her lover was a shepherd. As I wove my tapestry, I was praying to Cybele, and her compassion guided me to omit the story of Athena's own mother, who had been her father's victim.





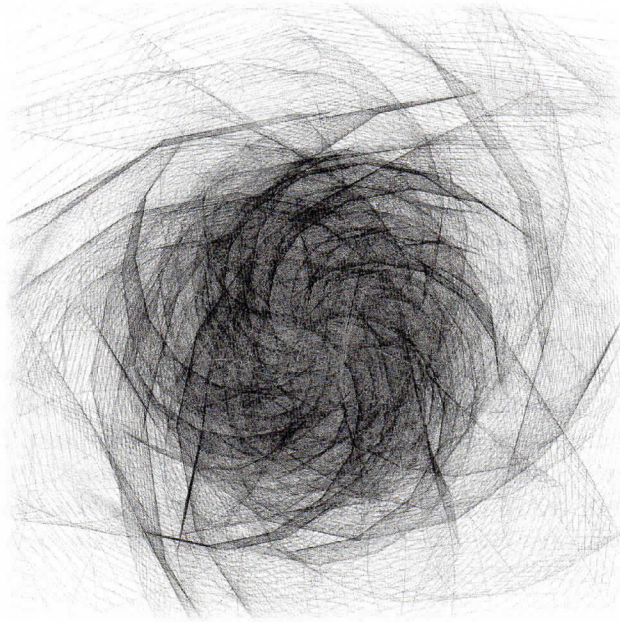
When Athena saw my tapestry, she was filled with envy and rage. She grabbed her shuttle and beat me on the forehead, that place of my third eye that saw the truth of things that she would deny.

Now, Ovid claims that I hanged myself on a beam and that Athena took pity on me. But I ask you, does this fit the tale? No, it shall not stand! In truth I did throw a rope over a beam, but only to escape her blows. Her heavy armor prevented her from following me, as her powers seemed to dwindle before my eyes. The many onlookers, both gods and humans, gasped. She destroyed my tapestry but, I wonder, could she forget it?

She raged on and not able to reach me, she threw a poison over me. To paraphrase Ovid,

It covered my flowing hair, which  
 Fell to the ground, and left my temples bare;  
 My usual features vanished from their place,  
 My body lessened all, but most my face.  
 My slender fingers, hanging on each side  
 With many joints became my legs.  
 My body became a spider's bag the rest, from which I spun  
 A thread, and still by constant weaving do I live. (After Dryden)

And so it was that I was turned into a spider fated to weave forever. And so it is that I have lived over these many centuries, a silent observer, traveling from place to place, on the wind, on sailing ships, in the hair of slaves, and in the silks of royalty.



#### REFLECTIONS

One can view Arachne's myth as a story about envy and envious competition. Arachne and Athena are a complementary pair. Their competition, as Ovid tells it, has them working passionately at their looms. They are spurred on to surpass themselves as well as one another. Their tapestries were much more, though. Each weaver was speaking to the other through the scenes on her tapestry. Athena's tapestry reflected her pride and love of order imposed by power from above, while Arachne showed the abuses that such power condones. Both Athena and Arachne depicted myths on their tapestries, so we have myths within myth.

Is it possible that this pair, Athena and Arachne, constitute a psychological complex, a pair of polar opposites? As such, they both repel each other and long for integration.<sup>viii</sup> Might Athena have envied Arachne? Arachne had lost her mother, but only as an adult. Athena was born with armor, was never held or nurtured. Her mother's wisdom and identity were swallowed by her father, symbolic of the plight of too many women. What, then, can they offer their daughters? Athena offers much to be admired! Do certain girls who have not been nurtured by their mothers or fear living lives like those of their mothers, become Athenas? They may gain confidence through their father's approval and through a meeting of minds. They have positive qualities needed to become individuals in their own right within a patriarchal world. However, they have to figure out how to weave on their own, using their minds.

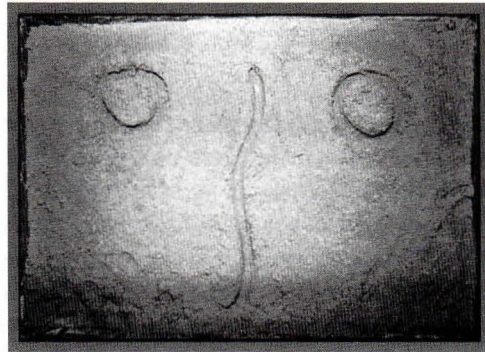


Arachne was guided by women and by nature and by sacred practices. With the coming of a different order, represented by Athena, she must have realized her world could not last. She was brave, a truth-teller to power.

If we can recognize the Athena and the Arachne within ourselves, then we have identified a dilemma. Are they irreconcilable? Might they begin to recognize value in the other, perhaps through the wisdom of the body?

The myths of Olympian gods reflect a profoundly different ethos from the Greece of the Mysteries, of dream incubation, of the wounded healer Chiron. The Olympian myths teach us about the shadow qualities of power, envy, and lust. They captivate us because they are part of the fabric of western attitudes and culture.

In more than one sandplay process, I have observed a transformation of Olympian attitudes and the redemption of feminine qualities and value. New myths, new deep structures of psyche, emerge during treatment. To give you one example, this is a tray done by a young woman of 18, her 12<sup>th</sup> tray created two-and-a-half years into a twice weekly therapy process. What do you make of it? You will notice the symmetry, the hint of eyes, looking, perhaps a nose. But this isn't a child's picture.



My patient quietly and meditatively prepared the sand, working water into it for much of the hour. Then she carefully flattened the sand and with the tip of her finger drew two circles, next to the curved line extending from the top to bottom vertically. She retraced the lines making them wider and more distinct.

Her careful moistening of the dry sand felt like an essential foundation for the emergence of the transforming symbol. The feeling in the room was simultaneously objectless, purposeful, profoundly calm, and full of potential energy.

Do you perhaps recognize a symbol? The design is nearly identical to the ancient Tantric symbol of the goddess as protector. The very same configuration is the symbol of Kama, the god of phallic love (Jayakar, 1980, p.15). They need not be at odds.

## ENDNOTES:

- i (<http://www.theoi.com/Daimon/Tekhne.html>)
- ii I refer the reader to this text for an excellent discussion of metaphors derived from yarn, spinning, and weaving.
- iii In deference to the attendees of the Baltimore conference, I refrained from showing them a photograph of the waste water treatment facility in Baltimore, which was discovered to harbor 107 *million* spiders, primarily orb weavers, covering an area of four acres! (<http://inhabitat.com/107-million-spiders-found-in-4-acre-nest-at-baltimore-wastewater-plant/>)
- iv The psychoanalyst Lichtenberg (2001) has written a very helpful article on this process: Motivational systems and model scenes with special reference to the bodily experience. *Psychoanalytic Inquiry* 21: 430-47.
- v “In the Egyptian Delta, at the head of which the river Nile divides, there is a certain district which is called the district of Sais, and the great city of the district is also called Sais, and is the city from which King Amasis came. The citizens have a deity for their foundress; she is called in the Egyptian tongue Neith, and is asserted by them to be the same whom the Hellenes call Athene; they are great lovers of the Athenians, and say that they are in some way related to them. To this city came Solon [a wise Greek of a previous generation], and was received there with great honour; he asked the priests who were most skilful in such matters, about antiquity, and made the discovery that *neither he nor any other Hellene knew anything worth mentioning about the times of old.*” (Timaeus 5, italics mine) This statement is consistent with my thesis that the myth of Arachne and Athena is a myth of partial forgetting or erasure of the past, as the Greeks were prone to do.
- vi In other words, she has never had sexual intercourse.
- vii Recent DNA analysis of ancient skeletal remains shows that Minoan civilization was comprised of descendents of the earliest humans who arrived there about 9000 years ago and who were primarily of European origin (Hughey et al., 2013). However, this does not preclude a powerful cultural influence by Libyan settlers.
- viii Recall the first line of Jung’s *Mysterium Coniunctionis* (1963/1970): “The factors which come together in the coniunctio are conceived as opposites, either confronting one another in enmity or attracting one another in love.”



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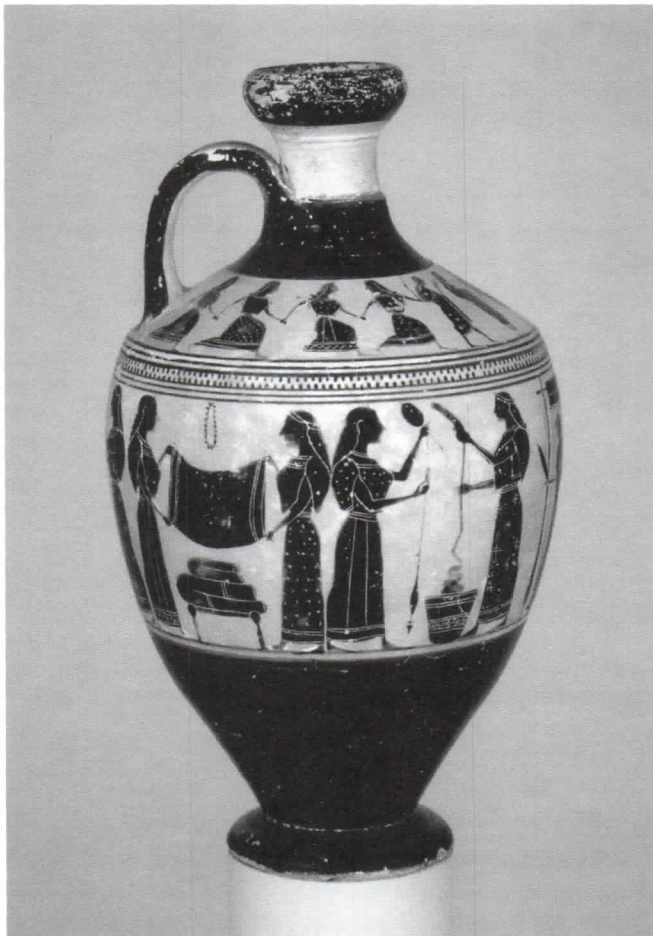
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Another view of the vase shown on p.20. On the right two women spin wool into yarn while on the left women fold the finished woven cloth. Terracotta lekythos (oil flask) attributed to the Amasis painter, Greece, c.550-530 BCE. [www.metmuseum.org](http://www.metmuseum.org)