

Competing Ideologies in Greek Culture, Ancient and Modern

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By

Evvy Johanne Håland

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This book is dedicated to the memory of my Besta (“Granny”), who through her practical faith demonstrated that it is possible to believe in Huldra (a supernatural female creature or kind of Nymph) and Christ at one and the same time.

TABLE OF CONTENTS

List of Tables.....	ix
List of Figures.....	x
A Note on Transliteration.....	xix
Preface to the English Edition and Acknowledgements.....	xxi
Introduction.....	xxiv
Chapter One.....	1
Introduction: Greek Festivals, Modern and Ancient	
Modern Festivals	
15 August, the Dormition of the <i>Panagia</i> (the “All-Holy One”), the Virgin Mary, on the Aegean Island of Tinos	
The Babo Day in Monokklēsia, Greek Macedonia, 8 January	
Carnival (<i>Apokreos</i>) in Greek Macedonia:	
Kalogeros, The Rain Magician, <i>Deutera tēs Tyrinēs</i> —Cheese	
Monday in Melikē	
Mock Wedding, Clean Monday in Koimēsē	
The Easter Celebration in Olympos, Karpathos	
The Anastenaria Festival of Agia Elenē, Greek Macedonia, 21-23 May	
Summer Bull Sacrifice and Saint’s Feast in Agia Paraskeuē, Lesbos	
Ancient Festivals	
The Panathenaia	
Demeter Festivals:	
The Mysteries at Eleusis	
Ancient Women’s Festivals	
The Thesmophoria	
The Haloa Festival	
Dionysos Festivals:	
The Anthesteria Festival	
The City Dionysia	
The Adonis Festival: Adōnia	
Summary of the Festivals	

Chapter Two	49
Festival and Communication	
Communication with the Divinity	
What is a Festival, and Why and How do People Celebrate Festivals?	
Summary and Perspectives	
Chapter Three	90
Popular Cult and Official Ideology	
Dionysian Ceremonies and Paradoxes in Greek Culture	
From the Moderation Ideologists to the Adonis of the Popular	
Cult and Modern Parallels	
Chapter Four	171
Ideologies and Mentalities: Competing Values?	
Chthonian and Olympian	
Religion and Magic: “Our magic is stronger than theirs!”	
Summary and Perspectives	
Chapter Five	261
Nationalism? Ideological Use of the Popular Cult, or a Two-Way	
Contract?	
Place, Space, Time and Gender, the Nation and the Foreign:	
Different Perspectives	
The Emigrants Return Home	
“It has Always Been like That, and It is for the Good of It”	
Chapter Six	357
Conclusion: Continuity and Change in the Festivals	
Sources and Bibliography	367
Appendix	405
Overview of Festivals	
Table 2: Schematic Survey of Selected Modern Greek Festivals	
Table 3: Schematic Survey of Selected Festivals within the Attic	
Festival Calendar	
Index	413

LIST OF TABLES

1: Schematic Overview of Attic Months.....	ix
2: Schematic Survey of Selected Modern Greek Festivals	405
3: Schematic Survey of Selected Festivals within the Attic Festival Calendar.....	410

Table 1: Schematic Overview of Attic Months:

Hekatombaion	July-August
Metageitnion	August-September
Boedromion	September-October
Pyanepsion	October-November
Maimakterion	November-December
Poseideon	December-January
Gamelion	January-February
Anthesterion	February-March
Elaphebolion	March-April
Mounichion	April-May
Thargelion	May-June
Skirophorion	June-July

LIST OF FIGURES

All photographs are by the author unless otherwise stated.

For pictures taken at Greek museums, © Hellenic Ministry of Culture and Sports/Archaeological Receipts Fund.

Figure 1. During the festival dedicated to the Dormition (that is, “falling asleep”) of the <i>Panagia</i> (Virgin Mary) on the island of Tinos, her <i>icon</i> (image) is carried in procession, while the waiting pilgrims squeeze themselves underneath to be healed, 15 August 1993 (photograph by Hartmut Müller-Stauffenberg).....	2
Figure 2. The holy icon on Tinos: A worshipper wipes off the “sweat” from the icon with a wad of cotton wool, which becomes an amulet, August 1993.....	3
Figure 3. Kneeling, crawling female pilgrims and marching male soldiers: The relationship between female and male worlds, 15 August 1993	4
Figure 4. A mother crawling on her knees the kilometre-long way from the harbour to the Church of the Annunciation, in which the icon of the Annunciation is found, with a sick child on her back in the hope of healing, 14 August 2005	5
Figure 5. Women fetch holy, healing and fertility-ensuring water from the “Life-Giving Spring” (<i>Zōodochos Pēgē</i>), Tinos, August 2009	6
Figure 6. Dancing women at the Babo feast in the village of Monokklēsia, Greek Macedonia, 8 January 1992	8
Figure 7. The symbolic ploughing of the earth as they simultaneously sow a symbolic mixture of grains, “ <i>polysporia</i> ”, during the <i>Kalogeros</i> (monk) ritual in the village of Melikē, Greek Macedonia, Cheese Monday, 2 March 1992	11
Figure 8. Participants in the mock wedding during the carnival in the village of Koimēsē, Greek Macedonia, 9 March 1992.....	14
Figure 9. Lamenting women in front of the <i>Epitaphios</i> ; that is, Christ’s deathbed (funeral) or wooden representation of Christ’s tomb. Holy Friday in the church of the village of Olympos, Karpathos, 1992	16

Figure 10. White Tuesday or “New Tuesday” in the White Week after Easter. A housewife in front of her family tomb, on which she has placed different food offerings to be eaten after the blessing of the priest, Olympos cemetery, Karpathos, April 1992	17
Figure 11. On White Tuesday, the icons are carried in procession over the fields surrounding the village, and they have a special service at the small private chapels to ensure good crops, Olympos, April 1992 ...	18
Figure 12. White Tuesday terminates with a great dance which lasts all night in front of the church, Olympos, April 1992	19
Figure 13. The decorated lamb which is to be sacrificed during the Anastenaria festival in the village of Agia Elenē, Greek Macedonia, 21 May 1992.....	20
Figure 14. In the <i>konaki</i> (house), the <i>Anastenarides</i> (m.) and <i>Anastenarisses</i> (f.; that is, those who celebrate the Anastenaria festival) dance in a state of trance. Some of them carry the icons representing the two saints, Kōnstantinos the Great, <i>Agios</i> (m.; that is, Saint) Kōnstantinos and his mother, <i>Agia</i> (f.; that is, Saint) Elenē, Agia Elenē, May 1992.....	22
Figure 15. Outside the <i>konaki</i> , the <i>Anastenarides</i> and <i>Anastenarisses</i> dance barefoot over the glowing embers of the dying fire, Agia Elenē, 21 May 1992	23
Figure 16. The sacrificial bull is paraded through the streets of the village of Agia Paraskeuē on the first day of the festival of Agios Charalampos, Lesbos, 26 June 1992	24
Figure 17. The fertility-promoting bull sacrifice is performed on the summit of <i>Tauros</i> , the mountain of the Bull, 27 June 1992	25
Figure 18. The sacrificed bull is consumed as a great communal meal, <i>kesketsi</i> , 28 June 1992	26
Figures 19 a and b. Copies of the peplos ceremony from the Parthenon frieze (the originals, ca. 432 BCE are in the British Museum, London), central group showing the receiving of the peplos. From the building housing the First Ephorate of Prehistoric and Classical Antiquities, Akropolis area, Athens	29
Figure 20. Relief of Persephone purifying a young initiate, fourth century BCE, Archaeological Museum of Eleusis	31
Figure 21. Votive piglet, Roman period, Archaeological Museum of Eleusis.....	35
Figure 22: Ancient Attic red-figure classical vase (<i>pelike</i>) painting illustrating a woman planting phalluses, or rather the sprinkling of seeds or watering of already-planted phalluses (see Winkler 1990. Original: British Museum, E819).....	37

- Figure 23: *Stamnos* (mixing jar) by the Dionysos Painter: Women who are drawing wine, drinking and dancing in front of a bearded mask of Dionysos hanging on a column. A piece of clothing is arranged around the column to indicate the body (=ARV 1151,2, see ARVcl. 177) 40
- Figure 24. Present-day theatre of Dionysos Eleutheros, Athens 43
- Figure 25: A fragment of an Attic red-figure *lebes gamikos* (bowl to mix wine and water in connection with marriage, *gamein*, “to marry”), ca. 430-420 BCE, shows two seated women, one of whom seems to be beside herself with suffering, tearing her hair, while a third is busy carrying a dish of grapes up a ladder, which is propped up by a fourth woman. A fifth brings two chests, and two Erotes hover around (=ARV 1179,3. Downloaded 23.03.2018 from: https://upload.wikimedia.org/wikipedia/commons/7/7b/Women_Adonia_Louvre_CA1679.jpg) 45
- Figure 26. Amulets depicting the Eye (*to Mati*) sold as protection against the Evil Eye. (Downloaded 18.04.2018 from: https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Evil_eye#/media/File:Blue_eyes.JPG)...56
- Figure 27: Medusa with her hair of snakes and a snake under each cheek, Akropolis Museum, Athens..... 59
- Figure 28. The ritual blessing of the offerings of bread on the eve of the festival dedicated to Agios Nikolaos in the courtyard of the Byzantine Church dedicated to him in the Plaka district of Athens, 5 December 2011 62
- Figure 29. Red-figure *lēkythos* (high, narrow perfume/oil flask) showing a woman about to throw a dog in a pit, which might illustrate a dog sacrifice to Hekate (see Deubner 1932: pl. 2, who in line with most scholars interprets the painting as illustrating a piglet being thrown into a chasm in the ground during the Skira. Original: National Archaeological Museum Athens, fifth century BCE)..... 71
- Figure 30. Women are busy organising their offerings of bread, wine, olive oil and cakes before the start of the liturgy on the eve of the festival dedicated to the Panagia *Mesosporitissa* (*mesos*: middle, half; *sporos, spora*: seed, sowing, “Panagia Half-Way-Through-the-Sowing”); that is, the “Presentation of the Panagia in the Temple”, Eleusis, 20 November 2011 73
- Figure 31. The touring of the houses of the village during the second and third days of the Anastenaria festival, Agia Elenē, 22-23 May 1992 78

- Figure 32. Copy of the Great Eleusinian votive relief, fifth century BCE, representing the Eleusinian deities blessing and offering ears of wheat to Triptolemos in order for him to bestow it in turn on humankind. Archaeological Museum of Eleusis (Original: National Archaeological Museum Athens) 79
- Figure 33. A pilgrim has just arrived at the Church of the Annunciation on Tinos, bringing oil, bread, flowers and money, and her name is written into the liturgy book for the performance of a healing liturgy 81
- Figure 34. “The Olive Tree Pediment,” ca. 550 BCE. Athena Polias in her temple. The old Akropolis Museum, Athens (cat. no. 52) 87
- Figure 35. The Dionysos Cup, fifth-century-BCE *kylix* (wine-drinking cup), representing the arrival of Dionysos during the Anthesteria festival, with all sails set. He half-lies or sits within a ship shaped like a dolphin, vines growing out from the mast with clusters of grapes to the right and the left. (Downloaded 15.05.2018 from: https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Dionysus#/media/File:Exekias_DionysosStaatliche_Antikensammlungen_2044_n2.jpg) 107
- Figure 36. *Maenad* Kylix by the Chairias Painter, ca. 510-500 BCE. Agora Museum, Athens 111
- Figure 37. The Bear and its leader during the carnival in Koimēsē, Greek Macedonia, 9 March 1992 119
- Figure 38. The leather-clothed carnival figures known as “Kokkeri”, in the village of Flambouro, Greek Macedonia, Cheese Sunday, 8 March 1992 120
- Figure 39: Belly *amphora* (pot/pitcher for storage of wine, oil, etc.) showing Herakles wearing the hide of the Nemean Lion while fighting Geryon with a Medusa on his shield (=ABV 136,49, see ABV. 96) 121
- Figure 40. Baubo-figurine from Priene. (Downloaded 28.04.2018 from: https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Baubo#/media/File:Terracotta_Baubo_figurine.jpg) 124
- Figure 41. Personified snake, Akropolis Museum, Athens 125
- Figure 42. The remains of the oldest Byzantine church on Tinos is a most holy place for the many pilgrims who dedicate their pilgrimage clothes (penitential robes) here, August 2005 140
- Figure 43. Women prepare the mask of Dionysos in a *liknon* (winnowing basket or fan, in which the corn was placed after threshing and then thrown against the wind so as to winnow the grain from the chaff). *Liknon* also signifies cradle (=ARV 1249,13, see ARVcl. 233) 145

Figure 44. The cave dedicated to the Panagia <i>Chryso spēliōtissa</i> , or Chapel of Our Lady of the Cavern at Athens, 1992	150
Figures 45 a and b. The cave in the vicinity of the church dedicated to the Panagia <i>Gastriōtissa</i> (“Panagia who helps the women become pregnant/conceive”) and the church itself situated on Gastria Cape on Tinos, 2010	152-153
Figure 46. A pilgrim fetches some holy earth from the hole where the miraculous icon was found, Tinos, August 1993	159
Figure 47. The 2005 version of the same ritual: A pilgrim fetches some holy sand from the votive candle stand, the round, sand-filled container (“ <i>manouali</i> ”) in which lighted candles are usually placed in Orthodox churches, Tinos, August 2005	160
Figure 48. Worshipping the Panagia on her deathbed on the eve of the “Ninth Day’s ritual of the Panagia”, Tinos, 22 August 1993	161
Figures 49 a-c. Passing the clothes (inside a bundle) of a sick child over the figure and under the canopy three times, in a cyclical movement thus encircling it, Tinos, 22 August 1993	162
Figure 50. The water scoop is often used in the cave dedicated to the Panagia, the <i>Life-Giving Spring</i> , during the festival celebrated on “New/White” Friday after the Resurrection of Christ. Athens, 1 May 1992	165
Figure 51. The sanctuary of Agia Marina on the eastern slope of the Hill of the Nymphs in Athens.....	167
Figure 52. Women fetching and tasting the water in the cave dedicated to the Panagia, the <i>Life-Giving Spring</i> , during the festival celebrated on “New/White” Friday after the Resurrection of Christ. Athens, 2012	169
Figure 53. Ancient terracotta group of a woman giving birth, being helped by another woman (see van Straten 1981: Fig. 44=Nicosia, Cyprus Museum 1935/B. 56)	184
Figure 54. Woman cleaning the family tomb on the <i>psychosabbato</i> (<i>psychē</i> =soul, <i>sabbato</i> =Saturday; that is, Soul Saturday or All Souls’ Day) dedicated to <i>Thauma Kollybōn Ag. Theodorou</i> (“Agios Theodōros’ Miracle with the Kollybōn”); that is, the third psychosabbato during winter, 1 st Cemetery, Athens, 3 March 2012	185
Figure 55. The <i>Anodos</i> (“rising”) of Persephone (=ARV 1012,1, see ARVcl. 121)	198
Figure 56. The Epitaphios is carried into the sea, Spitalia beach, Holy Friday on Tinos, 2012	204

Figure 57. Statuette of a seated woman. A possible illustration of the cult object? Akropolis Museum, Athens	205
Figure 58. Venerating Agios Nektarios' holy head in his new church, Aegina, 8 November 2011	208
Figure 59. Birth of Erichthonios; Athena receives the baby Erichthonios from the hands of the Earth Mother, Gaia. Attic red-figure stamnos, 470-460 BCE (=ARV 495,1, see ARVarc. 350.1)	212
Figure 60. Hair offering dedicated on the remains of the oldest Byzantine church dedicated to the Panagia and John the Baptist on Tinos. August 2009	228
Figure 61. Mourning women surrounding the funeral bier. Fragment of plaques, ca. 530 BCE. National Archaeological Museum, Athens (inv. no. 12697)	229
Figure 62. Pilgrims arrive with a sheep offering to the Panagia. The sheep is put in a shopping trolley from the nearest supermarket, Tinos, August 2012	231
Figure 63. Woman (right/front) seeing the Panagia in a vision while crying out in fear and happiness simultaneously outside the Church of the Annunciation, Tinos, 14 August 1994 (photograph by Hartmut Müller-Stauffenberg)	232
Figure 64. Women making woven cloth. <i>Lekythos</i> (oil flask), ca. 550-530 BCE, Metropolitan Museum of Art, USA. (Downloaded 14.11.2018 from: https://www.metmuseum.org/toah/works-of-art/31.11.10/hb_31.11.10.jpg	234
Figure 65. Demeter, enthroned and extending her hand in benediction toward the kneeling Metaneira, who offers the <i>triune</i> wheat that is a recurring symbol of the mysteries. Varrese Painter, red-figure <i>hydria</i> (water jar), ca. 340 BCE, from Apulia. (Downloaded 22.11.2018 from: https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Eleusinian_Mysteries#/media/File:Eleusinian_hydria_Antikensammlung_Berlin_1984.46_n2.jpg)	236
Figure 66. Thracian king and queen. Reproduction of fresco from the Thracian Tomb of Kazanlak (central Bulgaria)	237
Figure 67. The holy icon of the Annunciation is carried in procession and passed over the waiting pilgrims, Tinos, 25 March 2012	241
Figure 68. Wreaths have been laid for the deceased heroes of the "Elli" before the festival day, Tinos, 14 August 2005	242
Figure 69. The priest on his knees in front of the icons, praying for rain in the cemetery in Olympos on White Tuesday 1992	249

Figure 70. The Varvakeion Athena, a Roman marble copy (ca. 130 CE) of the colossal gold and ivory statue of the Athena Parthenos by Phidias (438 BCE). National Archaeological Museum, Athens (inv. no. 129)	251
Figure 71. Synoptic Diagram of Pertinent Oppositions (see Bourdieu, 1980: 354)	255
Figure 72a. A Pontic orchestra at the annual memorial ritual for the Greek Pontic genocide at Syntagma Square in Athens, 19 May 2012	264
Figure 72b. The <i>kollyba</i> (a mixture of wheat, nuts, fruit, and honey), “for the victims of the genocide” at the annual memorial ritual for the Greek Pontic genocide at Syntagma Square in Athens, 19 May 2012	265
Figure 73. In the village of Olympos in 1992, many women prefer to make the Easter breads and cakes the old way, in the traditional common ovens outside, although they have electrical cookers	273
Figure 74. During the festival dedicated to Agios Gerasimos, his relics are carried in procession and passed over the sick, Kephallonia, 16 August 1992	278
Figure 75. Votive relief with nymphs (National Archaeological Museum, Athens 1966, see Travlos 1971: Fig. 193)	281
Figure 76. Copy of the votive plaque known as the Ninnion Tablet depicting elements of the Eleusinian Mysteries, found in the sanctuary at Eleusis (mid-fourth-century BCE). Archaeological Museum of Eleusis (Original: National Archaeological Museum, Athens)	283
Figure 77. Women venerating the right-hand tomb of Agios Nektarios, Aegina, 8 November 2011	286
Figure 78. A former version of the procession with the icon of the Panagia during the festival dedicated to the Dormition on Tinos. Pilgrims lie in the street named Euangelistrias, waiting for the icon to be passed over them. © Archive, Photogonia, Tinos	287
Figure 79. Demeter and Korē, marble relief, 500-474 BCE, Archaeological Museum of Eleusis. (Downloaded 23.03.2018 from: https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Archaeological_Museum_of_Eleusis#/media/File:Demeter_and_Kore_marble_relief_500-475_BC_AM_Eleusis_081135.jpg)	288
Figure 80. A clay model of the <i>ekphora</i> (that is, “carrying out of the corpse”). Over the bier is a shroud, beneath which lies the body, first part of the seventh century BCE. National Archaeological Museum, Athens (inv. no. 26747)	289

Figure 81. The entrance to the Sacred Spring, the Akropolis Cave at Athens, 2006	290
Figures 82 a and b. Athena’s sacred olive tree in front of the Erekhtheion in the Pandrosion, Akropolis of Athens, August 2007 and 2005.....	293
Figure 83. Threshing floor on the island of Santorini, September 1992 ..	294
Figure 84. Concerning offerings, the Gerolanos amphora in the Piraeus Museum (cat. no. 7341) shows olive oil being poured in the presence of Athena. Courtesy Piraeus Museum.	296
Figure 85. A poster proclaiming 15 August as the “Day of the Armed Forces” and the symbols of the navy, the air force and the army are shown along with the Panagia and an illustration of an ancient hoplite helmet.....	297
Figure 86. In 2002, the heroes of the Elli also received a memorial in the harbour in front of which a cannon from the ship was placed, Tinos, 15 August 2012	298
Figure 87. A mother, who has crawled up wearing kneepads, lifts her daughter up to kiss the icon, Tinos, August 1994	300
Figure 88. “ <i>Boules</i> ” (janissaries) in Naoussa, Greek Macedonia, during the carnival on Meat Sunday, 1 March 1992	302
Figure 89. People venerating Agia Pelagia’s head in her church, Monastery of Kekhrovouno, Tinos, 23 July 2012	306
Figure 90. Agios Christopher Doghead (<i>Kynokephalos</i> ; that is, with a head of a dog). (Downloaded 28.11.2018 from: https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Cynocephaly#/media/File:Saint_christopher_cynocephalus.gif)	307
Figure 91. Performing a Pontic dance at the Dora Stratou Dance Theatre, Athens, August 2006	317
Figure 92. Various items have been put behind the holy icon on Tinos to absorb its sanctity. 14 August 2011.....	334
Figure 93. The Panagia <i>Galaktotrophousa</i> or “Breastfeeding” Panagia, Tinos, August 2011.....	338
Figure 94. Offerings of bread, wine and olive oil, neatly laid in huge baskets in front of the altar, Markopoulo, Kephallonia, August 1992	344
Figure 95. Death cult: Bones exhumed at the cemetery in Serres, northern Greece, on the second of the three <i>psychosabbata</i> (pl. of psychosabbato; that is, Soul Saturday or All Souls’ Day), during Carnival and Lent, at the end of winter. Serres, Greek Macedonia, 7 March 1992	348

Figure 96. The local priest blesses the bull in front of the saint's chapel on the summit of Tauros, Lesbos, 27 June 1992.....	356
Figure 97. Pitsa Panels, Archaic Greece, ca. 540-530 BCE. National Archaeological Museum, Athens (inv. no. 16,464) (photograph by Giannis Patrikianos)..	363
Figure 98. Women arrive with baskets filled with offerings of bread, wine, olive oil and cakes on the eve of the festival dedicated to the Panagia Mesosporitissa; that is, the "Presentation of the Panagia in the Temple", Eleusis, 20 November 2011	365

A NOTE ON TRANSLITERATION

The present book deals with ancient and modern Greek culture, and therefore many Greek names and terms. It should therefore be mentioned that there is no unified universally accepted system for transliteration of written and spoken Greek. I have therefore devised my own which, with a few exceptions, is identical to the system used by the Nordic Library, Athens. However, variations may occur when quoting from a published Greek text, since there are several possible ways of transliterating those.

A	α	a
B	β	b
Γ	γ	g
Δ	δ	d
E	ε	e
Z	ζ	z
H	η	ē
Θ	θ	th
I	ι	i
K	κ	k
Λ	λ	l
M	μ	m
N	ν	n
Ξ	ξ	x
O	ο	o
Π	π	p
P	ρ	r
Σ	σ ς	s
T	τ	t
Y	υ	y
Φ	φ	ph
X	χ	ch
Ψ	ψ	ps
Ω	ω	ō

Αυ αυ au

Ευ ευ eu

Ου ου ou

γ before γ n

γ before κ n

´ h (in Ancient Greek)

Where an author's name can be spelled in more than one way, I have followed the author's own spelling; if they do not consistently use the same spelling, I have transcribed it according to the aforementioned system. Exceptions to this include personal and place names or terms which have a well-established or standard Anglicised form, such as Tinos, not Tēnos; Serres, not Serrōn; Anastenaris, not Anastenarēs. In general, though, Greek names are not Latinised with the letter c, which does not exist in the Greek alphabet. Sometimes I use C, as in Corfu and Cyprus, since those are the standard Anglicised forms. When a term or name can be rendered in several ways, I have employed my own system, such as Agia, not Hagia, Ayia or Aghia. This mainly concerns Modern Greek, since Ancient Greek names and terms are more widely known in "European versions", such as Arrephoria. This is also the reason that I have marked the *spiritus asper* (´) with h on transcriptions from the Ancient Greek, since, for example, *hiera* and *hieros gamos* are well-established spellings within ancient scholarship. Thus, with one exception, I have used the same system for Ancient Greek (A.G.) and Modern Greek (M.G.), although anthropologists may be critical of this usage, claiming I am attempting to demonstrate that Modern Greek derives from Ancient Greek. My intention is purely pragmatic, however, given how closely related the two systems of orthography are. I have not used the Greek alphabet in the text, but only in transliteration, hoping that this rule will be more appropriate for readers less accustomed to the Greek language. When a Greek term is first used, it is shown in italics.

PREFACE TO THE ENGLISH EDITION AND ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

When completing my PhD dissertation in history, *Greek Festivals, Modern and Ancient: A Comparison of Female and Male Values* from 2004, I was left with much material which I could not include in the final version, because the dissertation would then be much too long. This was in fact a raw manuscript for a new book. I was, of course, interested in turning it into a book. In 2006, I received a project grant from the Norwegian Non-Fiction Writers and Translators Association (NFFO) to write the book, *Competing Ideologies in Greek Religion, Ancient and Modern*, and I would like to offer my thanks to NFFO for this.

Many people have commented on earlier drafts of the present book or have provided invaluable help in other ways, and many therefore deserve my warm thanks. Only a few of these can be mentioned here. I would like to direct a special word of thanks to the historian of religion Professor Dag Øistein Endsjø, University of Bergen/Oslo, who also encouraged me to submit a proposal for a project grant from NFFO so I could continue working on my manuscript and turn it into a new book. I would also like to mention the Greek folklorist Elenē Psychogiou, who has always been available for discussions around our common research interests, the relationship between ancient and modern popular cults in general, and particularly gender relations and power in Greece, both past and present.

The present book was published in Norwegian in 2011 by Licentia Publishers (Bodø). When the book manuscript was completed, however, the Scandinavian publishers who were most interested in publishing a topic dealing with both ancient and modern Greek culture, encouraged me to translate the manuscript into English, since the topic deserves an international readership. Professor Svein Mønnesland (University of Oslo), who along with Professor Sverre Bagge (University of Bergen) gave my manuscript a generous reading, especially encouraged me to translate it into English due to its value within comparative Balkan studies. Over the years since finishing the Norwegian version I have myself felt the need to translate the present book and make it available to a wider international readership than the original Norwegian version. This is especially due to the many young scholars today who across disciplinary

borders feel the need to draw on modern as well as cross-period material in their studies of both ancient and modern Greek and Mediterranean cultures. In connection with the present translation, I particularly want to thank my colleague from the SIEF (Société Internationale d'Ethnologie et de Folklore) Working Group on The Ritual Year, Dr/PhD Molly Carter (Santa Rosa, California, USA/University of Sheffield, UK), for having proofread the manuscript.

Ancient culture is a popular topic, as illustrated by both contemporary films and books. One may also mention the interest resulting from northern European tourism in Greece and immigrant groups in northern Europe, who by reading the book find parallels with their own cultural heritage. These people often come from the Middle Eastern, Mediterranean, Balkan and other eastern European regions. The topic of the book is also important in other geographic contexts around the world. This study provides new perspectives on the process around cultural changes and transitions in Europe and the rest of the world. The book has great importance in the present age of globalisation, because it discusses the relationship between the official and popular forms of the cult, seen from the grassroots of society; that is, women and the general populace, with whom I have talked during my fieldwork.

The material in this book comes from the southeastern corner of Europe; that is, a region where through the ages there has been a constant interaction and discourse between a variety of people, often with different ethnic backgrounds. The study also demonstrates how many parallels there are between the various societies and religious groupings in the Mediterranean region in spite of many differences, both in time and space.

This book has important ramifications for current research surrounding the shaping of a "European identity", "heritage studies", including the marketing of regional and national heritages, and associated activities. In connection with the present-day aim of connecting the various and quite different European heritages, and developing a vision of Europe and its constituent elements that is at once global and rooted, the work has great relevance. One may also mention the new international initiative on intangible heritage, in addition to the material one, spearheaded by UNESCO.

Religious ideologies are flowering in modern Middle Eastern, Mediterranean, Balkan and Russian societies, and comparative cultural studies will become more and more important. The results are also exciting reading for a non-academic readership interested in other countries and cultures.

Modern and ancient Greek culture may not be studied together at Norwegian universities, where one may study only ancient language and culture. Only recently has it become possible to study Modern Greek at a Norwegian university. Nonetheless, elsewhere in Europe it has become apparent that the comparative perspective is in fact of great relevance to understanding the European Union with its continuing eastern expansion as well as the modern global situation. Accordingly, around the time of publishing the Norwegian version of this book, I received a two-year Marie Curie Intra-European Fellowship, hosted by the Department of Archaeology and History of Art at the National and Kapodistrian University of Athens via the European Commission's Seventh Framework Programme (FP7-PEOPLE) in 2010, to continue my comparative studies of modern and ancient Greek culture. My studies of modern Greece illustrate a society that has its own types of logic, a topic which is also relevant to the contemporary "crisis", as people say in an economically impoverished Greece. That a society has its own logic is of great immediate interest to contemporary research and the process of communication in general, in which globalisation and internationalisation are two significant themes. This internal logic has relevance for northwestern European ethnocentrism contra extensive parts of the remaining world as well. In addition, this becomes highly significant when studying ancient Greece, a world very different from the modern northern European one.

INTRODUCTION: COMPETING IDEOLOGIES IN GREEK CULTURE, ANCIENT AND MODERN

This study's untraditional methodological approach to researching ritual activities in modern Greece, in connection with religious festivals and life-cycle passages and their relationship to ancient Greek ritual behaviour, aims to reinterpret our ancient sources in order to arrive at a more comprehensive view of both ancient and modern Greek culture and religion. This particular method is unusual since researchers who work on ancient sources generally do not carry out fieldwork themselves, but rely on results from other researchers, mostly from ethnographers.

Nonetheless, very few have really used the enormous wealth of comparative material available in the region where ancient cultures flourished. In general, the coupling of modern and ancient for many researchers means the increasingly popular area of reception studies; that is, the reception of antiquity *in the West*, or in other words, a northwestern European perspective and research. This is a serious drawback, and after having experienced the “cultural, affective, and material turns” within the humanities and social sciences, I would eagerly argue that the time is overripe to take a serious step towards the *comparative turn*, a topic I have myself researched for several decades. I know it is not an easy task to ask scholars of antiquity, who like to sit in their library with their Homer—to paraphrase one of the leading Norwegian scholars of antiquity—to start doing fieldwork. By comparing all the findings in northern European museums with the living traditions—the lived religions—in the Mediterranean region where the actual archaeological artefacts were originally found, I am convinced scholars will obtain new and interesting knowledge of these objects, more so than if they continue to study them in a northern European context in which they are foreign and have therefore been so misunderstood over the years.¹ This also pertains to the rituals in which the very artefacts were used.

¹ Here I am especially thinking of the work of Payne Knight 1794 (or.1786); see also articles in Draycott/Graham eds. 2017. The first director of the Norwegian Institute at Athens, made this comment when he was unable to understand the

The research on which this study is built has also taken on board a vast subject of major importance for understanding the culture of Europe as a whole. The lack of attention to the oral culture of Europe is indeed a major barrier to inter-cultural understanding. There has been a strong tendency to set Europe apart from the rest of the world and equate it with the literate stream, but if we bring into consciousness the latent part of the European heritage, international communication with people from those parts of the world that have a stronger oral base will be much improved, and this is of the greatest social importance. Part of the neglected latent European heritage is the female component, which this study is concerned with bringing into fuller awareness.

Since this study explores how the study of oral culture can help flesh out our knowledge and redress an imbalance in our view of the past, it can shed new light on both modern and ancient Greece, and enable us to see them from a fresh perspective. Multidisciplinary research is what is needed when we are dealing with such complex subjects as ritual behaviour, and this work is a contribution to the studies of Greek history, religion and ethnography.

This work tries to rethink the history of Europe, also encompassing its Mediterranean and eastern peripheries, and incorporates innovative historiographical and methodological practices. By examining both ancient and modern material, the research demonstrates a transnational, comparative and Braudelian *longue durée* approach to Europe's history. It has relevance for several areas along the European peripheries. Since many of the values in Greece have parallels with those found in the eastern part of Europe, there is no doubt that this comparative approach will be greatly useful in future research, in particular concerning the contemporary situation of the expansion of the European Union. One may also mention immigration to Europe from non-European countries, since people from these areas share many cultural traits with Greece and the eastern European regions, such as in connection with popular religious festivals, often encompassing both death, fertility and healing rituals, which might be foreign to people from the northern/western parts of Europe and the USA and therefore difficult to understand. This research, then, has relevance for comparisons on a broader civilisational level.

In short, it is important to look seriously to the rest of the world and see what those people think about many of the rituals taking place amongst themselves—such as those in the Mediterranean region—that are similar

point of doing fieldwork in Greece in order to do research on antiquity, comparative approaches evidently being something unknown.

to the ancient ones and compare them in the present era of globalisation to gain new perspectives on the ancient context, thus becoming more open-minded to obtaining a greater understanding of the rest of the non-western world, where one can often find communities that have more in common with both the Mediterranean and ancient worlds.²

The present book thus follows up the comparative approach employed in my earlier monographs on *Greek Festivals, Modern and Ancient: A Comparison of Female and Male Values* (2007/2017) and *Rituals of Death and Dying in Modern and Ancient Greece: Writing History from a Female Perspective* (2014). By drawing on the same methodology—that is, using modern sources in conjunction with ancient ones—the book further explores the relationship between official religion and popular belief, as illustrated by the relations between competing ideologies or the relationship between ideology and mentality.

This book is the cross-period, multidisciplinary or post-disciplinary product of studies in ancient history combined with extensive periods of fieldwork conducted primarily on religious festivals in modern Greece from 1990 to 2018 and anthropological analysis of present-day Mediterranean societies. Central themes encountered in all the festivals are the relationships between official versus popular cults, ideologies versus mentalities, and religion contra magic. These key topics are discussed in depth in the present study.

Modern and ancient religious festivals comprise different spheres. These spheres are linked with gender, but they are also connected partly with the official religion and partly with the popular cult. From a traditional male perspective, the former (that is, the official religion) is associated with men, while the latter, the popular cult, is associated with women. Furthermore, the relationship between official religion and popular religion also reflects the relationship between the great and little society. The concepts associated with “*honour and shame*”; that is, cultural concepts of gender and sexuality, which one encounters among men in the Mediterranean region, bear witness to an ambivalent relationship both to women’s cults and to women in general. While women’s cults are important to the official society, features of these cults have also been condemned as “barbarian” both by the ancient male writers and their later counterparts, the official spokesmen. Simultaneously, we encounter

² The importance of seeing Europe from the south to complement the northern perspective is also emphasised, *inter alia*, by conferences and cooperation among Mediterranean countries. One may mention the Fifth International Congress on Language, Culture & Media in the Mediterranean: *Genres, Taste, Scents and Colours*, which took place in Fez, Morocco, in October 2018.

something else among women themselves, for whom a “*chthonic*” (subterranean) perspective, or the perspective of “*a poetics of womanhood*”, is an important counterweight to the male perspective of “honour and shame”, because the perspective reveals what it means to be “*good at being a woman*” in Greece.

Seen from the women’s perspective, one gains a different view of the relationship between the official cult and the popular cult, because their performance of public rituals to ensure the fertility of society bears witness to what it means to be good at being a woman. In this way, male ideologies are deconstructed. The performance of fertility rituals is important, and the fertility cult which permeates the agricultural festivals also underlies and permeates the official ideology. The fertility cult is the foundation on which the ideology is built, and most of the festivals are particularly important to the official ideology. Belief and practice are experienced differently by the performers, but even so, it is not a matter of completely separated spheres, although they compete with one another. Nothing indicates that the popular cult is dependent on a particular “oriental” influence, in contrast to a more “Western” official cult, as some scholars have assumed. Important parts of the popular cult are integrated and overlapping with the official religion. The two cults depend on and complement one another, because they belong to the same religious and cosmological whole. We are dealing with a mutual contract between the two religious layers, in which phenomena such as fertility, healing and death cults from the popular religion are included in the ideological festivals of the greater society, which has adapted to the conception or worldview of the local society.

Problems such as the fact that one encounters several groupings of people within the same village that might be in conflict with each other are central to religious festivals in Greece. One learns how and why cultural collisions take place, because many different groups arrive in the village, not only those who have moved out; that is, the emigrants who “return home” during the most important village festivals. The celebration of a feast is most often connected with peace and contentment, and has also been a common way of settling conflicts between two opposing parties, both in Homer and in modern Mediterranean societies, often manifested through a bull sacrifice, common meal and/or a wedding where the couple comes from each of the two antagonistic groups. Still, one also sees how the festivals are generally good examples of how conflicts arise, are exaggerated, and come to the surface. One also encounters antagonisms at the local level between different ethnic groups, but also within the group of Anastenarides and Anastenarisses in northern Greece, and between

official religion and popular religion. Similar examples can be found in the ancient context, during the celebration of the most important festival of the Athenian city-state, the Panathenaia festival, for instance, but also in connection with the women's Thesmophoria festival in the same city-state. In both contexts it was the woman's chastity that was at stake.

Much of what one encounters between the different village population groups are important themes that are generally linked with a term such as ethnicity. The modern festivals take place within, and thus are part of, the modern Greek nation-state. In this context, the relationship between the festivals and the emigrants who return home is, of course, an important factor. The various groups who celebrate the festival within a particular village might be descendants of Greeks who have immigrated to modern Greece through various migrations, but also the great population exchanges that have taken place between the new nation-states in the region. The "newcomers" might also be opposed to other groups who lived in the region before those migrations and especially the exchange of populations in the 1920s. The relationship between female and male value systems reflects the relationship between official and popular value systems, and cannot be isolated from the respective population groups of which an individual village is usually composed. Much in the festivals might change from one year to the next, but the central factor is constituted by the overlapping value systems, and they do not depend on whether the festivals take place within the context of a nation-state with emigrants who return home. Although the political systems were different in the ancient Greek world, the different spheres one encounters in the festivals are crucial. Irrespective of which political system is prevalent in the actual society, we encounter the overlapping measures of value linked with the different spheres, illustrated through the relationship between popular cult and official ideology.

CHAPTER ONE

INTRODUCTION: GREEK FESTIVALS, MODERN AND ANCIENT

Modern Festivals: 15 August, the Dormition of the *Panagia* (the “All-Holy One”), the Virgin Mary, on the Aegean Island of Tinos

The religious festival dedicated to the “Dormition of the *Panagia*” (*Ē Koimēsis tēs Theotokou*, the Falling Asleep of the Mother of God), is celebrated on 15 August on Tinos, the holy island of the Greeks, in the island group of the Cyclades in the Aegean Sea (Figure 1).¹

There are many aspects of the great 15 August celebration on Tinos which are significant for a comparative analysis with relevant ancient festivals. This Orthodox festival dedicated to the *Panagia* is important for several reasons. The festival is dedicated to the Dormition of the nurturing and healing Mother Goddess, the *Panagia*. In calendrical terms, the festival marks a turning point toward autumn, and thereby announces the transition from summer to autumn and winter. When considering the additional rituals and symbols attached to the same festival, it becomes clear that this is in several ways the Greeks’ most important fertility and healing festival.

It was in fact the fertility and healing aspects of the festival on Tinos that first brought me to the island in 1990. This approach to the Tinos festival, however, has not been particularly common. How important is the popular aspect of the festival to the manifestation of the national ideology, and who depends upon whom?

The year after the Greek War of Liberation against the Turks broke out in 1821, the nun Pelagia dreamt repeatedly that the Virgin showed her the

¹ The present chapter is a summary of parts of my fieldwork on modern Greek festivals and equivalent ancient festivals. These are given a comprehensive examination in Håland 2017: Ch. 4-5, while Ch. 6 discusses the fertility aspect of the festivals. With the exception of the first festival, which was attended seventeen times in the period 1990-2013, the other modern festivals were attended in 1992.

place on Tinos where her holy *icon* (image) of the Annunciation (*Euangelismos*) was buried (Figure 2). They dug for it and found it in a field on 30 January 1823. Since then the icon has worked numerous miracles. The crowd of pilgrims therefore increases dramatically and reaches its pinnacle during the celebration of the “Dormition of the Panagia” on 15 August. During the ritual chaos, which is particularly apparent in the procession with the miraculous and healing icon, the culmination of the festival, we encounter a female world contrasted with a male, official world represented by the Church and the police (Figure 3).



Figure 1. During the festival dedicated to the Dormition (that is, “falling asleep”) of the *Panagia* (Virgin Mary) on the island of Tinos, her *icon* (image) is carried in procession, while the waiting pilgrims squeeze themselves underneath to be healed, 15 August 1993 (photograph by Hartmut Müller-Stauffenberg).

Not only is the festival dedicated to a Mother Goddess, but it is the individual family’s mother who is the central performer of the ritual actions intended to secure the family’s life and health:

Women are also the most frequent pilgrims arriving at the island, and it is predominantly women who crawl the kilometre-long way from the harbour to the Church of the Annunciation where the icon is housed (Figure 4).