Competing Ideologies in Greek Culture, Ancient and Modern

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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.

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All photographs are by the author unless otherwise stated.

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

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.

Α	α	a
Β	β	b
Γ	γ	g
Δ	δ	d
Ε	ε	e
Ζ	ζ	z
Η	η	ē
Θ	θ	th
Ι	ι	i
Κ	κ	k
Λ	λ	l
Μ	μ	m
Ν	ν	n
Ξ	ξ	x
Ο	ο	o
Π	π	p
Ρ	ρ	r
Σ	σ ς	s
Τ	τ	t
Υ	υ	y
Φ	φ	ph
Χ	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 1974 (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

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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).