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GREEK RELIGION

BY

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CONTENTS

ABBREVIATIONS

AION	*Annali, Istituto orientale di Napoli: Archeologia e storia antica*
Bruit/Schmitt, *Religion*	L. Bruit Zaidman and P. Schmitt Pantel, *Religion in the Ancient Greek City* (Cambridge, 1992)
Burkert, *GR*	W. Burkert, *Greek Religion* (Oxford, 1985)
DDD	K. van den Toorn, B. Becking, P.W. van der Horst (eds), *Dictionary of Deities and Demons in the Bible* (Leiden, 1994)
FGrH	F. Jacoby, *Die Fragmente der griechischen Historiker* (Berlin and Leiden, 1923–58)
Graf, *NK*	F. Graf, *Nordionische Kulte* (Rome, 1985)
GRBS	*Greek, Roman, and Byzantine Studies*
HSCP	*Harvard Studies in Classical Philology*
IC	*Inscriptiones Creticae*
IG	*Inscriptiones Graecae*
JDAI	*Jahrbuch des deutschen archäologischen Instituts*
JHS	*Journal of Hellenic Studies*
LIMC	*Lexicon Iconographicum Mythologiae Classicae* (Zurich, 1981–)
REG	*Revue des Études Grecques*
SEG	*Supplementum epigraphicum Graecum*
ZPE	*Zeitschrift für Papyrologie und Epigraphik*

For texts and fragments I have used the most recent standard editions.

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I. INTRODUCTION: GENERAL CHARACTERISTICS

Was there ever such a thing as 'Greek religion'? It may be an odd question to start this survey with, but it should be absolutely clear from the start that Greek religion as a monolithic entity never existed. When Greece emerged from the Dark Age around 800 B.C., different communities had developed in very different social, political, and economic ways, and this development was reflected also on the religious level. Every city had its own pantheon in which some gods were more important than others and some gods not even worshipped at all. Every city also had its own mythology, its own religious calendar and its own festivals (Ch. IV.3). No Greek city, then, was a religious clone.[1] Yet the various city-religions overlapped sufficiently to warrant the continued use of the term 'Greek religion'. The family resemblance (to borrow Wittgenstein's famous term) of these 'religions' was strengthened by poets like Homer and Hesiod (below), who from the eighth century onwards produced a kind of religious highest common factor by inventing, combining, and systematizing individual traditions, which they then spread via performances at aristocratic courts or local and pan-Hellenic festivals (§ 3).[2]

Greek religion received its characteristic form in the 700 or so big and small cities, the *poleis*, which spread Greek culture from Spain to the Black Sea. The independence of these cities gradually diminished through the development of larger powers, such as Sparta and Athens, and they eventually had to cede their independence to Philip and his Macedonians. These developments brought about rapid changes in the structure of Greek religion (Ch. VII). In this survey we will concentrate on the religious practices and beliefs during the 'glory that was Greece', namely the archaic and classical periods. Given its pre-eminence in the sources, Athens will often be our most important example, but I intend to show also something of the diversity of Greek religious culture.

Before we start looking in more detail at its different aspects, it may be helpful to sketch its main qualities in broad outlines. Greek religion, then, was 'embedded'; it was public and communal rather than private and individual, and it had no strict division between sacred and profane (§ 1). It was also polytheistic and 'interconnected'; it served to maintain order and produce meaning; it was concerned with the here and now and passed down by word of mouth not through written texts (§ 2). Finally, it was male dominated (Ch. VI) and lacked a religious establishment (§ 3).[3]

I would like to conclude this introduction with two more observations.

First, religious historians often give a relatively static picture of the archaic and classical age, as if during this period religion remained more or less unchanged until the Hellenistic period. Admittedly, it is not easy to keep a proper balance between a synchronic system and diachronic developments. Yet a modern history should at least try to stick to a minimal diachronic perspective. Second, the table of contents of this pamphlet may suggest to the reader that the following chapters are all independent subjects, which have little to do with one another. Nothing is further from the truth. Gods and sanctuaries, myths and rituals, gender – since they are mutually supportive, they should ideally all be treated together in one close-knit treatise.[4] This is hardly possible, but it will be one of our challenges to show the interdependent nature of Greek religion.

1. *Embeddedness*

Whereas most Western countries have gradually separated church and state, the example of other societies, such as Iran and Saudi-Arabia, shows that this is not so everywhere. In ancient Greece, too, religion was totally embedded in society – no sphere of life lacked a religious aspect.[5] Birth, maturity, and death, war and peace, agriculture, commerce, and politics – all these events and activities were accompanied by religious rituals or subject to religious rules; even making love was named after the goddess of love, *aphrodisiazein*. Sanctuaries dominated the skylines, statues of gods stood on the corners of the streets, and the smell of sacrifice was never far away. Indeed, religion was such an integrated part of Greek life that the Greeks lacked a separate word for 'religion'.[6] When Herodotus wants to describe religions of the neighbouring peoples of Greece, he uses the term 'to worship the gods', *sebesthai tous theous*, and when he wants to describe the Greek nation he speaks of 'the common blood, the common language and the common sanctuaries and sacrifices' (8.144.2). In other words, for Herodotus the problem of describing foreign religions could be reduced to the question 'which (other) gods do they worship and how'.[7] In such an environment atheism was simply unthinkable. The term *atheos* did not originate before the fifth century and even then indicated only a lack of relations with the gods.[8]

Embeddedness went together with the virtual absence of private religion, since in classical Greece the notion of a private sphere was still in an early state of development. There could be individual cult acts, such as sacrifice, the dedication of an *ex-voto* (Ch. III.3), or a silent prayer (Ch. IV.2), but cult was always a public, communal activity, and worship outside

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reverence had come to the fore and even extended to loving parents and patriotism.[20] The important quality of piety was to keep the ancestral customs. As Isocrates observed: 'piety consists not in expensive expenditures but in changing nothing of what our ancestors have handed down' (7.30). Impiety, or *asebeia*, came closer to our own ideas and included temple robbery, killing suppliants, entering certain temples when not permitted or holding the wrong ideas. Even though the evidence for many Athenian trials for impiety against famous philosophers is late, Socrates was executed on the charge of innovation in regard to the gods not for, say, religious theft.[21] Religious tolerance was not a great Greek virtue.[22]

Whereas the Christian world-view increasingly separates God from this world, the gods of the Greeks were not transcendent but directly involved in natural and social processes. Myths related divine visits on earth and in Homer's *Iliad* gods even participated in the fighting before Troy.[23] Gods also intervened in the human world in cases of moral transgressions: the myth of Oedipus relates the fatal consequences of incest, and the Spartans believed that their murder of helot suppliants in a sanctuary of Poseidon had caused the catastrophic earthquake of 462.[24] It is for such connections as between the human and divine spheres that a recent study has called the Greek world-view 'interconnected' against our own 'separative' cosmology.[25]

An important consequence of overstepping or breaking existing cosmological, social, and political boundaries was the incurring of pollution. The vocabulary of pollution and purity together with its concomitant practices was most frequently used in Greek religion to indicate proper boundaries or categories not to be mixed. Natural pollutions are to a certain extent understandable with the messiness accompanying birth and the smells arising from a decaying body. But we would not so readily use the vocabulary of pollution for the violation of temples, divine statues, and sacred equipment, which infringes the domain of the gods, or for murder, which infringes social relations, as does killing suppliants, whilst madness and other diseases infringe the wholeness of the physical person. On the other hand, incest and cannibalism were seen as monstrous polluting crimes, which confuse the boundaries between men and animals. Males who confused gender roles by practising passive homosexuality and women who transgressed boundaries of respectability by prostituting themselves were also considered to be polluted. The latter, though, were not seen as contagious or dangerous and the committers of these sexual activities did not need to purify themselves. The employment of this particular vocabulary with the corresponding rites of purification can, in one way, be

seen as an important Greek way of dealing with maintaining religious and social norms and values in times when the legal process was still underdeveloped.[26]

In addition to removing disorder, Greek religion also gave meaning and explanation to life. Dreams, waywardness of behaviour, unforeseen events such as shipwrecks, plagues and earthquakes – all could be traced to particular gods and in this way were given a recognizable and clear place in Greek world-view; if necessary, there were even anonymous gods to take the blame.[27] On the other hand, not everything became clear through the mediation of religion and some divine actions remained inexplicable. Tragedians explored these actions, but their juxtaposition of the human and the divine in such plays as Aeschylus' *Agamemnon* or Euripides' *Bacchae* shows something of the bafflement the gods' reactions on occasion could evoke.[28]

Most Greek religion, though, was directed at this life not the hereafter. In Homeric times, death was still more or less the end of life, although people believed in an underworld. In the course of the Archaic Age, life after death became an issue for reflection. Aristocratic circles, probably the more intellectual amongst them, began to reflect about their personal fate and crave for an existence prolonged beyond their allotted lifespan. Salvation through leading a model life or through initiation into mysteries gradually gained in popularity (Ch. VII.1), but belief in a life after death never flourished to the extent it did in the Christian Middle Ages. There if anywhere in Greek religion, it seems that opinions differed widely.[29]

Such a variety of opinion is hardly surprising in a society that was oral rather than literate. Books did not play a role in Greek religion except for a few 'sects', such as the Orphics (Ch. VII.1), and children were religiously socialized by attending and practising rituals.[30] This meant that religious ritual played a much larger role in Greek life than in modern society. Together with the absence of a Holy Book went the absence of a creed and, consequently, of heresy. In fact, religious authority was widely fragmented because there was no Greek equivalent to Christian ministers, Jewish rabbis or Islamic mullahs. Most citizens could sacrifice by themselves; indeed, Herodotus was amazed that the Persians had to call upon a Magus to perform their sacrifices (1.132).

3. *Religious specialists*

Outside their own home, though, the Greeks could meet certain religious specialists, in particular poets, priests, and seers. Poets were undoubtedly

the main religious 'inventors' and 'reproducers'. Even if he exaggerated slightly, Herodotus was not far wrong when he stated that Homer and Hesiod defined the theogony, gave the gods their epithets, assigned their functions, and described their forms (2.53.2). Poets could exert this influence because they were supported by the aristocrats who controlled life through their religious, political, social, and cultural hegemony.[31] Poets also enlarged their religious capital by claiming to be in close contact with the gods. Not only did they manage to make the Greeks believe, if not unconditionally, in the divine guarantee by the Muses of the information they supplied:[32] they also claimed a privileged knowledge about the gods which was denied to normal humans, as for instance when Homer tells us that an owl is called *chalkis* by the gods but *kumindis* by men (*Il.* 14. 290–1).[33]

Poets also regularly 'invented' religious traditions, if necessary by borrowing from neighbouring peoples. It was only realized in the 1950s that the myth of Kronos' castration of his father Ouranos derived from the Near East: the slow but steady decipherment of ever more clay tablets has now shown that this myth ultimately derived from the Hurrians having passed through Hittite and Phoenician intermediaries.[34] And less than a decade ago it became clear that the division of the world between Zeus, Poseidon, and Hades through the throwing of lots, as described in the *Iliad* (15.187–93), derives from the Akkadian epic *Atrahasis*. And when Hera, in a speech to deceive Zeus, says that she will go to Oceanus, 'origin of the gods', and Tethys, the 'mother' (*Il.* 14.201), she mentions a couple derived from the parental couple Apsu and Tiamat of the Babylonian creation epic *Enuma Elish*.[35]

Priests conducted larger rituals and supervised sanctuaries (Ch. III.1), but never developed into a class of their own because of the lack of an institutional framework. Consequently, they were unable to monopolize access to the divine or to develop esoteric systems, as happened with the Brahmans in India or the Druids among the Celts. On the whole, priesthoods had no great influence except for those of certain important sanctuaries, such as the Eumolpides and Kerykes in Eleusis (Ch. VII.1) and the Branchidai at Apollo's oracle at Didyma (Ch. III.3). Despite their modest status, priests must have played an important role in the transmission of local rituals and myths, and Hellanicus, one of the earliest historians, used priestesses of Hera in Argos as his most trustworthy chronological source (*FGrH* 4 F 74–84).

In the case of problems or inexplicable events, it was a seer who could bring help. In the Archaic Age seers were still aristocrats, who participated

in every aspect of aristocratic life, including the battlefield. But despite their expertise, their words were not definitive. People were free to accept or reject their advice, and epic and tragedy supply various examples of seers whose word was wrongly neglected, such as that of Teiresias in Sophocles' *Oedipus Rex*.[36]

In the later classical age the position of poets and seers declined through various developments, such as the rise of literacy, increasing knowledge of the world, and growing self-reliance. Even though tragedians still held an important position in the adaptation and formation of religious traditions in the fifth century, they now had to share their one-time monopoly with historians and philosophers. After the fifth century the former took over to a large extent the task of preserving religious traditions and the latter became the main 'theologians'. Moreover, at the end of the Archaic period the most important religious authority had become the polis, which now mediated and articulated all religious discourse and controlled all cultic activity. There was no creed or divine revelation and so the polis, when challenged, appealed to the traditional nature of rites, *ta nomizomena*, and customs, *ta patria* (Ch. IV.1).[37] Such a stress on tradition could lead to rigidity, but possible tension between conservatism and innovation was resolved by introducing new cults, not abandoning old ones.[38]

NOTES

1. As was first argued, in an exemplary investigation of Aphrodite in Locri Epizephyrii, by C. Sourvinou-Inwood, '*Reading Greek Culture'. Texts and Images, Rituals and Myths* (Oxford, 1991), pp. 147–88 (= *JHS* 98, 1978, 101–21); note also S. Sherwin-White, *Ancient Cos* (Göttingen, 1978), pp. 290–373; A. Schachter, *Cults of Boiotia*, 3 vls (London, 1981–6); Graf, *NK*; M. Jost, *Sanctuaires et cultes d'Arcadie* (Paris, 1985); R. Parker, 'Spartan Religion', in A. Powell (ed), *Classical Sparta* (London, 1989), pp. 142–72.

2. For this influence see especially G. Nagy, *Pindar's Homer: The Lyric Possession of an Epic Past* (Baltimore, 1990) and *Greek Mythology and Poetics* (Ithaca, 1990), pp. 36–82.

3. I have profited from the stimulating short introductions to Greek religion by W. Burkert, in *Theologische Realenzyklopädie* 14 (Berlin and New York, 1985), pp. 235–53; R. Parker, in *The Oxford History of the Classical World* (Oxford, 1986), pp. 254–74, J.-P. Vernant, in M. Eliade (ed), *The Encyclopedia of Religion* 6 (New York and London, 1987), pp. 99–118; F. Graf, in H. Poser (ed), *Handbuch der Semiotik* (Berlin and New York, 1994), Ch. 42; C. Sourvinou-Inwood, in Bremmer (ed), *Encyclopedia of Ancient Religions* (London, 1995).

4. This is rightly stressed by Bruit/Schmitt, *Religion*, p. 228.

5. The terminology is from Parker (n. 3), p. 265.

6. In fact, our concept 'religion' only developed after the Reformation, cf. J. Bossy, *Christianity in the West 1400–1700* (Oxford, 1985), p. 170, overlooked by T. Asad, *Genealogies of Religion* (Baltimore and London, 1993), pp. 40–3.

7. Cf. W. Burkert, 'Herodot als Historiker fremder Religionen', *Entretiens Hardt* 35 (Vandoeuvres and Geneva, 1990), pp. 1–32, esp. p. 4; see also F. Mora, *Religione e religioni nelle storie di Erodoto* (Milano, 1986).

8. Cf. Bremmer, 'Literacy and the Origins and Limitations of Greek Atheism', in J. den Boeft and A. H. M. Kessels (eds), *Actus* . . . (Utrecht, 1982), pp. 43–55; the studies and bibliographical surveys by

M. Winiarczyk, *Philologus* 128 (1984), 157–83 and 136 (1992), 306–10; *Elenchos* 10 (1989), 103–92; *Rhein. Mus.* 133 (1990), 1–15 and 135 (1992), 216–25; Ch. VII.2.

9. For slaves and Greek religion, see F. Bömer, *Untersuchungen über die Religion der Sklaven in Griechenland und Rom* (Stuttgart, 1990²).

10. F. Jacoby on *FGrH* 596 F 46; Bremmer, 'The Skins of Pherekydes and Epimenides', *Mnemosyne* IV 46 (1993), 234–6.

11. Priesthoods: E. Kearns, 'Change and Continuity in Religious Structures after Cleisthenes', in P. A. Cartledge and F. D. Harvey (eds), *Crux. Essays . . . presented to G. E. M. de Ste. Croix* (London, 1985), pp. 188–207. Athena: B. Smarczyk, *Untersuchungen zur Religionspolitik und politischen Propaganda Athens im Delisch-Attischen Seebund* (Munich, 1990); I. Kasper-Butz, *Die Göttin Athena im klassischen Athen* (Frankfurt, 1990).

12. So, strikingly, Burkert, *GR*, p. 269; see also Parker, *Miasma*, pp. 151f.

13. Parker, *Miasma*, pp. 328–31.

14. For the vocabulary of the sacred, see Parker, *Miasma*, pp. 147–50; A. Dihle, *Jahrbuch f. Ant. und Christ.* Suppl. 11 (1985), 107–11 and *Reall. f. Ant. und Christ.* 14 (1988), 1–16; A. Motte, 'L'expression du sacré dans la religion grecque', in J. Ries (ed), *L'expression du sacré dans les grandes religions* 3 (Louvain-la-Neuve, 1986), pp. 109–256; J. Nuchelmans, 'A propos de *hagios* avant l'époque hellénistique', in A. Bastiaensen et al. (eds), *Fructus centesimus. Mélanges G. J. M. Bartelink* . . . (Steenbrugge and Dordrecht, 1989), pp. 239–58.

15. So Parker, *Miasma*, pp. 153 (also for garlands), 323, 330 (*hosios*); W. R. Connor, '"Sacred" and "Secular". *Hiera kai hosia* and the Classical Athenian Concept of the State', *Ancient Society* 19 (1988), 161–88.

16. Cf. B. Alroth, *Greek Gods and Figurines* (Uppsala, 1989), pp. 64–105, reviewed by F. T. van Straten, *Opusc. Athen.* 19 (1992), 194f.

17. *Pistis*: D. R. Lindsay, *Josephus and Faith* (Leiden, 1993). Conversion: R. MacMullen, *Changes in the Roman Empire* (Princeton, 1990), pp. 130–41, 322–7.

18. Cf. B. Gladigow, '*Chresthai theois*. Orientierungs- und Loyalitätskonflikte in der griechischen Religion', in C. Elsas and H. G. Kippenberg (eds), *Loyalitätskonflikte in der Religionsgeschichte* (Würzburg, 1990), pp. 237–51.

19. For a discussion of the notion 'loving god (God)', which ranges from classical times to the early Christian period, see T. Söding, 'Das Wortfeld der Liebe im paganen und biblischen Griechisch', *Ephemerides Theol. Lovanienses* 68 (1992), 284–330.

20. K. J. Dover, *Greek popular Morality in the Time of Plato and Aristotle* (Oxford, 1974), pp. 246–54; C. Watkins, in P. Baldi (ed), *Linguistic Change and Reconstruction Methodology* (Berlin and New York, 1990), p. 297 (etymology).

21. H. S. Versnel, *Inconsistencies in Greek and Roman Religion* 1: *Ter Unus* (Leiden, 1990), pp. 123–31; D. Cohen, *Law, Sexuality, and Society: The Enforcements of Morals in Classical Athens* (Cambridge, 1991), pp. 203–17. Trials: K. J. Dover, *The Greeks and Their Legacy* (Oxford, 1988), pp. 135–58; W. R. Connor, 'The Other 399: Religion and the Trial of Socrates', in M. A. Flower and M. Toher (eds), *Georgica. Greek Studies in Honour of George Cawkwell* (London, 1991), pp. 49–56.

22. Tolerance: P. Garnsey, 'Religious Toleration in Classical Antiquity', in W. J. Sheils (ed), *Persecution and Toleration* (Oxford, 1984), pp. 1–27.

23. Visits: D. Flückiger-Guggenheim, *Göttliche Gäste. Die Einkehr von Göttern und Heroen in der griechischen Mythologie* (Berne and Frankfurt, 1984).

24. Oedipus: Bremmer, 'Oedipus and the Greek Oedipus Complex', in Bremmer (ed), *Interpretations of Greek Mythology* (London, 1990³), pp. 41–59. Spartans: Hdt. 1.128, cf. Parker, *Miasma*, p. 184. In general: W. Speyer, *Frühes Christentum im antiken Strahlungsfeld* (Tübingen, 1989), pp. 254–63.

25. See the innovative study by Th. C. W. Oudemans and A. Lardinois, *Tragic Ambiguity* (Leiden, 1987), rev. by S. Goldhill, *CR* 38 (1988), 396f (too negative); R. Buxton, *JHS* 109 (1989), 216f; H. van Looy, *Ant. Class.* 58 (1989), 256–8; M. Fresco, *Mnemosyne* IV 47 (1994), 289–318.

26. Pollution: Parker, *Miasma*; add G. Neumann, '*Katharós* "rein" und seine Sippe in den ältesten griechischen Texten', in H. Froning et al. (eds), *Kotinos. Festschrift Erika Simon* (Mainz, 1992), pp. 71–5. Roman religion seems to use the idea of pollution to a much smaller extent.

27. H. S. Versnel, 'Self-sacrifice, Compensation and the Anonymous Gods', *Entretiens Hardt* 27 (Vandoeuvres and Geneva, 1981), pp. 135–95, esp. 171–9.

28. Cf. J. Gould, 'On making sense of Greek religion', in P. Easterling and J. Muir (eds), *Greek*

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Greek religion that it combined this polarization and radicalization of experiencing the divine.[4]

The gods' frivolous behaviour accentuates mortal plodding and is typical of their outspoken anthropomorphism, which is Homer's greatest contribution to Greek religion.[5] Even Greek onomastics shows its success: names indicating the gift of a specific deity, like Athenodorus or Apollodorus, appear only after Homer. However, the resemblance between gods and men is only relative. As the appearance of Demeter in her *Homeric Hymn* (275–80) illustrates, divine epiphanies show the gods as tall, beautiful, sweet-smelling, awe-inspiring, in short as 'superpersons'.[6] Precisely because of divine anthropomorphism it was necessary to stress the immortal–mortal boundary.[7] In several Greek myths gods are being tested: Ariadne challenging Athena's weaving skill or Marsyas questioning Apollo's flute-playing genius. The stories invariably end badly for mortals, as do love affairs with gods: Semele was burned to ashes, when she begged Zeus to appear in full glory. The message of these myths is clear: the gap between gods and humans is unbridgeable.[8]

Yet anthropomorphism made the gods highly vulnerable to criticism, which Xenophanes (*ca.* 500 B.C.) was the first to state publicly. Subsequent generations of intellectuals took these criticisms seriously and tried to counter them through the strategies of allegory and rationalization. Others would be more daring, and Herodotus' allusion to Protagoras' famous statement 'Concerning the gods I am unable to discover whether they exist or not, or what they are like in form' (2.53.1) shows to what extent fifth-century intellectuals were already questioning the traditional picture of the gods (Ch. VII.2).[9]

If the gods differed from humans, they also differed from another category of supernatural beings: the heroes, who, as Vernant has emphasized, occupied an intermediate position between gods and men.[10] The origin of this group is still puzzling. Since Homer presents heroic tombs and heroic cult from the narrator's point as cultic institutions in the making, the hero must already have been a well-established category in his time, but the archaeological evidence suggests that it is not much older.[11] In the end, it seems to have been a kind of lowest common denominator for mythological grandees like Heracles, faded divinities like Helen (Ch. V.2, VI.1), mythological culture heroes like Prometheus, and important historical figures like Brasidas, a Spartan general who was killed in action in 422 (Ch. VII.3).[12] Usually, heroes were benevolent and played an important role in guarding oaths and protecting cities, but they could also be malicious and send all kinds of diseases. In a fragment published in 1967, the chorus of

Aristophanes' *Heroes* says: 'we are the guardians of good things and ill; we watch out for the unjust, for robbers and footpads, and send them diseases – spleen, coughs, dropsy, catarrh, scab, gout, madness, lichens, swellings, ague, fever. That's what we give to thieves.'[13] Even though gods and heroes regularly overlapped in function and heroes were sometimes called 'gods', the heroes' radius was usually more limited and their cult concentrated on a tomb. Yet the boundaries between gods and heroes were often fluid and conceptions of the hero varied widely in the Greek world.[14]

What established the identity of an individual god? The question may surprise, since the possibility of finding a unity beneath the multifarious aspects of the deities has recently been strongly denied. And indeed, local manifestations of gods could vary widely even within a single city. Yet a number of factors contributed to a recognizable core. Most important was the name of the divinity, which was often further specified by an epithet denoting function or origin, like Hermes Agoraios, 'Of the market', or Demeter Eleusinia, 'From Eleusis' (Ch. VII.1).[15] However, few divine names were immediately transparent and even originally clear names, like Apellon or the birth-goddess Eleuthyia, 'She who comes', were soon obscured to Apollon (§ 3) and Eileithyia (Ch. III.2). The awesomeness of the gods forbade a straightforward approach.[16]

A god's name was given content by myth (Ch. V), which related his family and deeds. Family ties were means of establishing connections or indicating related functions among divinities: we cannot separate Leto's motherhood of Apollo and Artemis from the connection of all three divinities with initiation.[17] Deeds helped to define and reflect on divine functions. The *Homeric Hymns*, for example, show Hermes as thief, Aphrodite as seductress, and Demeter as founder of the Eleusinian Mysteries. The *Hymns* also relate divine appearances: Dionysus looked 'like a young man on the brink of adolescence' and Apollo like a 'vigorous youth on the brink of manhood'. Art equally reflected on and contributed to the mental image that the Greeks made of their gods. Vases and mirrors frequently display gods with fixed attributes: Poseidon with a trident, Athena with an owl (fig. 1), Zeus with a thunderbolt, Aphrodite with doves (fig. 2).[18] These attributes must have helped to identify individual gods, just as in dreams gods appeared in a shape familiar from the, often local, painted and sculptured representations.[19] A final determining factor was cult. The place in the calendar, prominent or not (Ch. IV.3); the location of sanctuary, be it in town or country (Ch. III.2); the nature of the sacrificial victim, normal or 'abnormal' (Ch. IV.2); the mode of ritual, supportive of or undermining the social order (Ch. IV.3): all these elements contributed to a specific percep-

1. Athena with her owl

2. Greek bronze mirror with Aphrodite and doves, which in Greece were a typical lovers' gift

tion of individual gods and helped to reinforce the image their worshippers had of them.[20]

2. *The pantheon*

Before we discuss individual gods, we must first look at the Greek pantheon as a whole. The main gods were a group of twelve Olympioi who resided on Mt Olympos and this number goes back at least to the sixth century, since the younger Pisistratus dedicated an altar to the Twelve Gods in the agora (*ca.* 520 B.C.), which served as the focal point for reckoning distances to places outside Athens.[21] How do we find order in this ragbag of gods, which also comprised many minor divinities, such as Pan

and the Nymphs (Ch. VII.2)? A popular approach has long been, and still is,[22] to distinguish between Olympian and Chthonian (viz. of the earth and underworld) gods. This view originated during the Romantic period and was already considered canonical in the early 1800s. Following a notice in Porphyry's *The Grotto of the Nymphs* (6), Olympians were claimed to have temples and high, square altars for food sacrifices but Chthonians and heroes (Ch. III.1) only low, circular altars for burnt offerings. In fact, modern archaeology has proved that for the classical period this distinction has no general validity. Chthonian gods like Zeus Meilichios can have a high or a low altar.[23]

More recently, Jean-Pierre Vernant and his school have stressed that the pantheon is a system, of which we should study the structures instead of concentrating on divinities as individuals. Which gods are paired and which are opposed to each other? What is the precise mode of intervention? What logic governs their being? In addition to these questions, we should also try to search for the, often hidden, hierarchies within the pantheon. Here new possibilities have been opened up by a study of divine representations. A fine example is a black-figured vase of the painter Sophilos (*c.* 580 B.C.) with the wedding procession of Thetis and Peleus moving towards the house of Peleus: we see Hestia and Demeter, Chariclo and Leto, Dionysus, Hebe, Cheiron, Themis, three Nymphs; Hera and Zeus on a cart followed by three females (the accompanying inscription has been lost); Amphitrite and Poseidon on a cart followed by three Charites; Aphrodite and Ares on a cart followed by five Muses; Apollo and Hermes on a cart followed by three Muses; Athena and Artemis on a cart followed by three Moirai, Oceanus, and two Eileithyiai (Ch. III.2). The procession is concluded by Hephaestus on the back of a donkey; naturally, Hades had no place in this festive happening. The procession shows not only the pairing of certain gods but also a clear hierarchy: some gods go by cart, others on foot. Taking these new approaches into account we will now discuss the major gods and conclude by analysing the structures and hierarchies within the Greek pantheon, and the problem whether the Greek gods were persons or powers – or perhaps both.[24]

3. *Gods orderly and 'disorderly'*

The main divinity of the Greek pantheon was Zeus, whose development from a weather-god worshipped on mountaintops to the supreme god shows influences from Anatolia, which was also the source of the succession myths relating his coming to power. However, Zeus never reached

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In this brief but highly informative book Jan Bremmer presents an outline of Greek religion in the classical period. After a survey of its main characteristics, he offers a clear and innovative view of the great gods and heroes as well as their sanctuaries and also the main myths, rituals and mysteries: from Athena to Zeus, from sacrifice to the puritan Orphics, from the Indo-European roots to the influence of the ancient Near East. The approach pays attention to the sociological, anthropological and psychological aspects of Greek religion and also to the gender roles. By analyzing the often modern origin of many of the notions employed in the analysis of Greek religion, it also shows the difference between the polytheism of the Greeks and the place of religion in modern Western society. Its excellent bibliography makes this book a very useful tool for students and teachers alike.

Cover illustration: Sacrificing Nike, tondo of Attic red-figure cup, Sabouroff Painter (*c*. 460 B.C.) APM inv. no. 8210.

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