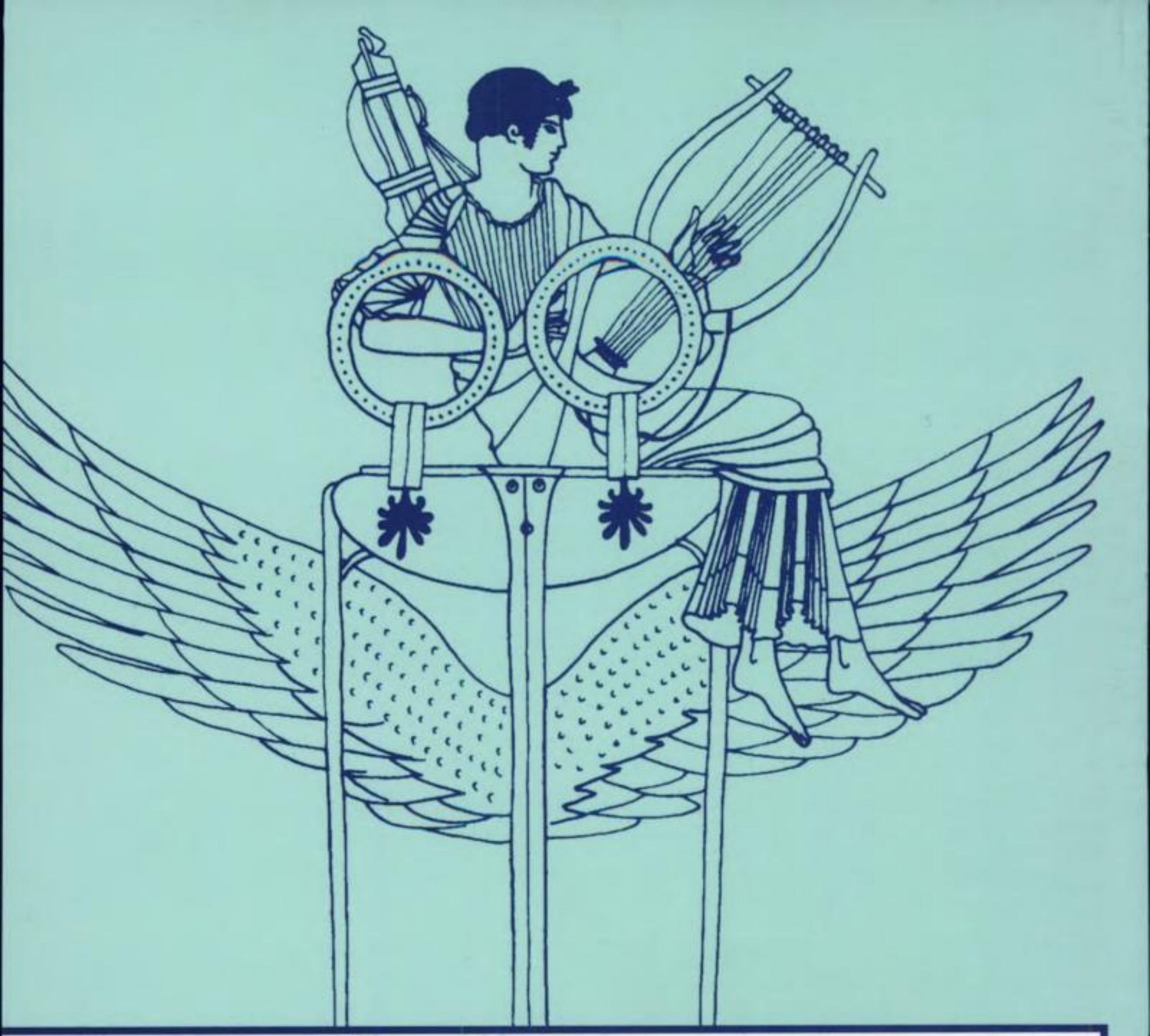

RELIGION IN THE ANCIENT GREEK CITY

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The 'right' answers?

Two main ways of explaining the beliefs and cults of the Classical era are available in principle. One approach concentrates on their origins, the other places the emphasis rather on the way in which they functioned within a cultural ensemble that is assumed to be relatively stable, the civic community. The two approaches are not irreconcilable, but they do give different highlights and tonalities to the study of Greek religion.

The classic evolutionary model of Greek religion is that proposed by, for example, M. P. Nilsson (1925 [28], 1940 [29], 1948 [30]). This envisages Greek religion as a successful marriage between the pre-Hellenic religion of the native populations and the cults and beliefs introduced by the Greek peoples when they arrived in Greece in the course of the second millennium. Those who employ this explanatory framework are required to distinguish within each fifth-century ritual that element which goes back to the pre-Hellenic rite and that part which is 'Greek'. Each of the respective 'original sources' serves the function of explaining the ritual in question.

For example, one might on this model interpret the Greeks' ritual of bloody animal-sacrifice by tracing its origins back to the hunting practices of the Stone Age (i.e., before the third millennium). Likewise, the image of a divinity might be seen as combining both pre-Greek and Greek traits. Artemis, for example, in her rôle of 'Mistress of Animals' suggests a pre-Hellenic mother-goddess; but as 'Huntress' she appears to be an unadulterated product of the Greek newcomers. According to this model, as we said, origins function as explanations; but that necessitates the establishment of a precise chronology for the history of cults and myths, and for the most remote epochs this is largely a matter of guesswork. 'Origins-theory' also advances highly controversial explanations, such as the alleged primacy of female deities in the pre-Hellenic world and of male deities among the Greeks.

The other, functionalist paradigm of explanation rejects the idea that the origins of a cult or ritual constitute a sufficient explanation of its functioning, significance and rôle at a given moment in history. On this view the importance of the ritual of animal-sacrifice, for instance, becomes clear above all by

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ing the *hiera*, the cult-acts, in accordance with the local or *ad hoc* prescriptions and prohibitions – was not for that reason in any way a holy man set apart on retreat from 'profane' life. He could continue to live within the city, in the midst of his *oikos* (household), so long as he fulfilled the obligations of his office on the appointed days.

Hosion was a term applied more especially to modes of behaviour or to actions that were in conformity with the norms governing relations between gods and men, or between men themselves. Everything that was prescribed or permitted by divine law was thus *hosion*, and the word *hosion* was often associated with *dikaion* ('just'). We might therefore be tempted to translate *hosion* as 'sanctified' or 'consecrated'. But the term could also derive its meaning from being opposed to *hieron*; in which case it signified a condition of being liberated from the sacred, desacralized, and therefore free, permitted, profane. So, for instance, *hē hosiē kre(a)ōn* meant the portion of a sacrificial victim that was regularly reserved for human consumption, the 'permitted' portion.

The third term, *hagion*, however, was applied rather to temples or sanctuaries, customs or rituals, offerings or cultic objects (whereas *hagnos* was used in this sense for human beings). It denoted a degree of ritual purity that implied withdrawal from the everyday world. It included the notion of a kind of negative respectfulness, an abstention from doing violence. It served to express an idea of prohibition.

So we must be on our guard against spurious and deceptive equivalences. Where the ancient Greek words seem to be conveying notions that are familiar to us, they may in fact be concealing quite different conceptions beneath merely apparent similarity.

PURITY AND POLLUTION

The related notions of purity and pollution also referred to religious categories that were not applied in precisely the same way as our own. At one level purity and physical cleanliness seem to be closely identified. That which is *katharon* or 'pure' is that which has been cleansed of all taint of dirt, and pollution likewise appears to have a strongly physical, material connotation.

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Greeks placed positively under the heading of piety, to understand, that is, what they counted as being a pious man (*eusebēs*) or judged to be a community that showed proper respect towards the gods. Speaking generally, though, piety was apparently that sentiment which the group or the individual entertained towards certain specified obligations.

The obligations of the *community* involved above all respect for ancestral tradition (*ta patria*). Antique rituals were performed without the citizens knowing precisely what they meant, whereas more recently introduced rites were sometimes decried as being less worthy of veneration, on the grounds, for instance, that they attributed too much importance to the banquets that followed the animal-sacrifice. The city considered it proper for the gods to receive their due portion, partly in material form (through scrupulous management of the gods' property, especially their sacred areas), partly in the form of cult-honours, for the proper conduct of which it could consult unofficial experts in ritual (*exēgētai*). Finally, the city considered itself to be, not a divinity, but a 'concrete and living entity under the sure protection of the gods, who would not abandon it as long as it did not abandon them' (L. Gernet in Gernet and Boulanger 1932[24]: 295). To the unity of the gods around a city at its moments of crisis there had to correspond a unity of men, and the force and symbolic efficacy of this human solidarity were expressed in collective manifestations like the Panathenaic festival or the Athenians' public civic funeral of their war dead.

As for the *individual*, his or her additional obligations were manifold and multivalent. Piety was judged to be displayed through participation in the city's cults, abundance of offerings in sanctuaries, devotion towards kindred dead and the family's guardian deities, financial generosity in enabling the most magnificent celebrations of public rituals (games, civic liturgies (see p. 95), sacrifices and public banquets), and a host of other practical activities. It is hard, though, to get at the underlying personal sentiment that animated the performance of these actions. Only very rarely have expressions of feeling been transmitted to us. From Euripidean tragedy we could cite Hippolytos, son of Theseus and an Amazon, whom the playwright presents (in the bitterly ironical words of his father) as one 'who lives in the

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are related the origins of the universe and of the gods, together with such crucial myths as those describing the introduction of bloody animal sacrifice and the creation of the first woman. The *Works and Days* is largely a farmer's almanac, but it also contains descriptions of rituals and other expressions of piety, and retails myths like the 'Myth of the Races (or Ages)' (to which we shall return in chapter 12). Of Homer and Hesiod, Herodotus (II.53) said succinctly that they 'were the first to compose theogonies, and to give the gods their epithets, to allocate them their several functions, and describe their forms'.

The *Homeric Hymns* are a collection of poems composed at various dates between the seventh and fourth centuries; they are called 'Homeric' because of their epic verse-form, and not because they are now attributed to the poet (or poets?) of the *Iliad* and *Odyssey*. Each hymn is devoted to a particular deity, Demeter, Apollo, Hermes and so forth, some of whom are honoured with more than one. The poems are of very unequal importance, in some cases providing the essence of what we know of a deity's history and myths, in others a bare summary account. Here, for instance, is the entirety of the *Homeric Hymn to the Son of Kronos Most High [Zeus]*:

> It is Zeus whom I shall sing,
> The most powerful and the greatest of the Gods,
> All-seeing, mighty, who in all things accomplishes his will.
> Oft-times he converses with Thetis by his side.
> Be gracious to us, o all-seeing son of Kronos,
> O most glorious and most great one!

In the work of all the so-called lyric poets of the archaic age (700–500) it is possible to find descriptions of rituals and accounts of myths. At the end of this age and the beginning of the Classical epoch Pindar, another Boiotian, composed among other things epinician or victory odes in honour of winners at the great Panhellenic Games. His *Olympian*, *Isthmian*, *Pythian* and *Nemean Odes* form an inexhaustible repository of myths, often recast in original or idiosyncratic form.

Rather than review every single text of the Classical era (500–330), we may single out for their contributions to the study of religious practices the *Histories* of Herodotus, the tragedies of

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systems cannot therefore free us in any way from subjectivity; all it can do, rather, is obviate the risk that we shall attribute our own subjectivity to other people, and help us to understand them in their own terms, not the terms that our doctrine may dictate. (Rudhardt 1981 [43]: 10)

HOW TO ACHIEVE EMPATHETIC UNDERSTANDING

On the subject of religion [the researcher] must turn him- or herself into a religious devotee and imaginatively conceptualize the religion under study in precisely the same way as the person who has practised it daily ever since learning in childhood the obligations it imposes. To achieve this empathetic identification there is no alternative to as it were becoming the pupils of those whom we wish to understand. We must watch them living and copy them in our imagination, because we cannot do otherwise. We must ape the evolutions of their thought, their affective responses, their outward behaviour. Their concepts are defined by a network of relationships – it is our task to reconstitute that network in our own consciousness. Their images owe their meaning to all the associations they conjure up – it is for us to re-establish within ourselves an analogous associational field. Their rituals are located within a complex of social behaviour – we, by taking thought, must re-create this social context in its entirety.

In sum, we must as far as possible forget our own peculiar habits of thinking in order to reconstruct – if it is Greek religion we are studying – a genuinely Hellenic mentality. The procedure may perhaps be illusory, and certainly it is always approximate, but there are no other ways of approach.

My own experience is that if we follow this path the fourth-century Athenian's religious behaviour can be made to seem intelligible. For within ancient beliefs there surges a current of meaning to which we too can open ourselves. A value is made manifest, to which – despite its alien expressions, despite everything which divides those expressions from our own concepts, habits of thought and images of reality – we may nevertheless give our adherence. However, neither this current of meaning nor this value can be defined in abstract terms without disfiguring them. For they are linked indissolubly to the lived experience through which they emerged into consciousness; and that experience can only be described in the ritual, mythic and conceptual languages that are at the same time both its expression and its instrumentality.

(Rudhardt 1981 [44]: 16)

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CHAPTER 4

Rituals

DEFINITION

A ritual is a complex of actions effected by, or in the name of, an individual or a community. These actions serve to organize space and time, to define relations between men and the gods, and to set in their proper place the different categories of mankind and the links which bind them together.

It has often been said that Greek religion was a 'ritualistic' religion, that epithet being understood in a restrictive and depreciatory sense in accordance with the hierarchy of values we have already discussed (chapter 1). If, by contrast, one starts from the definition of 'ritual' that we have just given, Greek religion may then fairly be said to be ritualistic in the sense that it was the opposite of dogmatic: it was not constructed around a unified corpus of doctrines, and it was above all the observance of rituals rather than fidelity to a dogma or belief that ensured the permanence of tradition and communal cohesiveness. However, this Greek ritualism did not exclude either religious 'thought' or religious 'beliefs' (see Part III, below); the formalism of ritual observance, moreover, depended on a comprehensive organizing framework that structured both human society internally and its relationships with the surrounding universe.

NATURE AND PERFORMANCE

Everyday private life, no less than public civic life, was rhythmically regulated by all kinds of rituals, so that every moment and

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more separate political communities of the Greek world. But whatever the precise occasion may have been, they all scrupulously followed a set pattern that we are able to reconstruct from a combination of literary sources, iconographic documents (scenes on vases, sculpted stone reliefs) and epigraphic texts. In fact, all the stages of the great animal sacrifices that were performed by the Greek cities can already be found prefigured in the following passage from Homer, which describes a sacrifice of welcome for Odysseus' son Telemakhos, performed by old Nestor in his palace at Pylos. Note in particular the sharing out of the grilled entrails around the altar, once the gods have received their due portion, and the subsequent feasting of the warriors on equal portions of the huge carcase which in this instance, it is worth remarking, had been spit-roasted and not boiled:

Nestor, Gerenian horseman, was himself the first to speak: 'Dear sons, lose no time in bringing my wishes to fulfilment; before any other divinity, I desire to propitiate Athene, because she came in visible presence to the sumptuous banquet of our god (Poseidon). Let one of you go down to the plain to fetch a heifer; make sure that she comes as soon as may be, with a cowherd driving her! Let another go to the black ship of Telemakhos and bring all his comrades except for two! Let a third order the goldsmith Laerkēs to come and gild the heifer's horns! The rest of you, stay together here, but tell the serving-women to prepare a banquet in these great halls, and to bring us seats and wood and sparkling water.'

So he spoke and all set about their tasks. Up from the plain came the heifer, and from the swift ship the comrades of stouthearted Telemakhos. The smith came too, holding in his hands the tools of his craft, the anvil and hammer and shapely tongs, to work the gold. And Athene came to receive the sacrifice. Aged horseman Nestor handed over the gold, and the smith deftly worked it and gilded the heifer's horns to delight the goddess when she should see an offering so lovely. Stratios and godly Ekhephron led the beast forward by the horns, and Aretos came to them bringing from the store-room a flowery-patterned vessel that held the lustral water; in his other hand he carried a basketful of barley-groats. Nearby stood warlike Thrasymedes, with a sharp axe in his hand to fell the heifer, while Perseus held the bowl for the blood. Aged horseman Nestor began the rite with the lustral water and the barley-groats, and then addressed to Athene a long prayer, throwing the few hairs cut from the victim's head into the flames.

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In a stage preceding the sacrificial ritual itself a victim was chosen by a procedure of variable length and complexity. At the very least the priest had to assure himself that the victim met the criteria of 'purity' laid down (for example, a blemish on the animal's coat might be considered a sign of impurity) and conformed in all other respects to the ritual regulations.

The *thusia* proper began with a procession (*pompē*) led by the priest and the sacrificers, whereby the victim was brought to the altar. In the case of a public festival the procession was headed by the civic officials (*prutaneis* at Athens) who were to offer the sacrifice in the name of the city. Around the altar stood all those who were to participate in the act of ritual slaughter: the woman who carried the lustral water, the woman who bore the basket of grain in which the sacrificial knife was concealed, the sacrificer and his assistants, and finally the ordinary citizens in whose name the sacrifice was being made.

The priest then pronounced the customary prayers, sprinkling the victim's head as he did so with the lustral water. This act of purification was designed also to elicit the victim's 'assent' to its slaughter, which it signified by nodding its head (*hupokuptein*). Next, the priest offered up the 'first-fruits' of the sacrifice by throwing onto the altar-fire some grains taken from the basket and some hairs cut from animal's head. Without this preliminary phase of consecration the sacrifice could not proceed. The slaughterer (*boutupos*, literally 'ox-striker') was now authorized to kill the victim, first smiting it on the forehead with an axe and then cutting its throat. For the latter the animal's head had to be turned up, so that the blood might spurt out skywards and fall in a stream upon the altar and the ground. Most often, a vase was positioned to catch the blood which would then be poured over the altar. At the moment of killing, the women present let out the indispensable ritual scream (*ololugē*).

The word *thuein* ('to slaughter ritually') embraced these two operations, both the initial consecration and the throat-cutting. The third act of the sacrificial drama was the butchering and sharing out of the carcase. The *mageiros* first opened the beast's thorax in order to remove the entrails (*splankhna*: lungs, heart, liver, spleen, kidneys) and digestive system (*entera*, eaten as sausages and black puddings). Then the victim was skinned. In

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eating and offering solely bloodless sacrifices on their altars. But another group, while they abstained from eating the flesh of sheep and cattle, were prepared to accommodate themselves to the humbler offerings of goat and pig. In this way they achieved a compromise between an oppositionist religious stance and participation in civic life, which they aimed to reform from within.

At the opposite extreme from vegetarianism and abstinence from meat-eating was the *omophagia* or eating of raw flesh practised by followers of Dionysos. This ritual took the form of hunting game, tearing the victim apart (*diasparagmos*, end of chapter 12), and devouring its limbs raw. Here we find the precise inversion of all the characteristics and values of the civic sacrifice, and a total confusion of the normal boundaries between the tame and the wild, and between men and the beasts. 'Going wild' was another way of escaping from the politico-religious order of society.

In all the above cases, it is precisely in respect of sacrifice and modes of eating that the sectaries chose to express their difference. That choice tends to corroborate the central position occupied by bloody animal-sacrifice of the alimentary type in the definition of the civic community.

LIBATIONS

An important element in sacrificial rituals was the pouring of a libation (*spondē*). This could be associated with animal sacrifice, as we have seen, but it might also occur as an autonomous ritual with a rationale of its own.

Libations regularly accompanied the rituals that punctuated daily life. Hesiod, for example (*Works and Days* 724–6), evokes those performed by the pious every morning and evening. Libations also served to start off meals, as a gesture of propitiation which fulfilled the same function as the 'first-fruits' offering in animal-sacrifice. They were used too to mark an arrival or a departure, placing familiar actions under the protection of the gods who were thereby invoked as witnesses or helpers. The formulaic scene of 'the departure of the hoplite' was depicted in numerous Attic vase-paintings of the Classical period, with an old man and woman shown grouped around the young, armed

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their prayers to those of the departing combatants. Once the paean had been sung and the libations completed, the fleet put out to sea, at first in line but then racing each other as far as Aigina.

The libation poured by the pious at the start of each day was accompanied by a prayer (again, see Hesiod, *Works and Days* 724–6), and in the same way every meal or banquet was initiated by a libation and a prayer addressed to the gods in accordance with the prescribed formulas. Every enterprise was thus placed under the protection of the gods invoked, especially Zeus, as when Hesiod recommends to the peasant about to commence his agricultural labours (*Works and Days* 465–8): 'Pray to Zeus of the Earth Below (*Khthonios*) and to pure Demeter to grant you the sacred wheat of Demeter heavy in its ripeness, at the very moment when, beginning your ploughing and taking the handles in your hand, you strike the oxen on the back as they strain at the yoke.'

Both in epic and in the theatre much space was devoted, not just to simple formulas, but to various complex forms of prayers, whether dedicatory, supplicatory, imprecatory, or votive. Even if the scenes conjured up in tragedy or epic cannot be read simply as carbon copies of the rituals and of the prayers that accompanied them, still they provide us with precious information, sometimes backed up by scenes on vases, so far as the accompanying actions are concerned. Examples include the prayer addressed to Apollo by his priest Khryses, requesting him to receive an expiatory sacrifice on behalf of the Akhaians, which preceded and ritually assured the efficacity of the sacrifice proper:

> Then hastening
> To give the god his hecatomb, they led
> bullocks to crowd round the compact altar,
> washed their hands and delved in barley-baskets,
> as open-armed to heaven Khryses prayed:
> 'Oh hear me, lord of the silver bow, . . .
> if while I prayed you listened once before
> and honoured me, and punished the Akhaians,
> now let my wish come true again. But turn
> your plague away this time from the Greeks.'
> And this petition too Apollo heard.
> When prayers were said and grains of barley strewn,

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(*temenos*). They organized the great religious festivals (*heortai*), in collaboration with other public officials and the relevant priests. They controlled religious finances, checking revenues and expenditure.

The office of *hieropoioi* (literally 'those who make the *hiera*' – see chapter 2) is attested in numerous cities. At Athens, for instance, they were a board of ten chosen each year by the Council of 500, with responsibility for all the major quadrennial festivals except the Great Panathenaia which had its own special board. They thus oversaw the Brauronia (in honour of Artemis), the Herakleia, the Eleusinian Mysteries and Athens' official delegation (*theōria*) to the festival of Apollo and Artemis on Delos, as well as the annual Lesser Panathenaia. Their remit included the provision of animals for the sacrifices, and the administration and policing of the festivals as a whole. In return for this they were privileged to share in the honours accorded to other officials, in particular in the distribution of the hecatomb sacrificed during the Panathenaia.

At Athens *epimelētai* ('overseers') were appointed individually for particular festivals, among others the Great Dionysia and Panathenaia. Originally, those elected were expected to pay for the processions out of their own pocket, so that being an *epimelētēs* was akin to performing a 'liturgy' (chapter 9). But by the late 330s, probably as a result of the sweeping reform of Athenian public finances presided over by Lykourgos after 338, the cost was borne by state funds. For the Eleusinian Mysteries four *epimelētai* were appointed, two of them chosen from among all Athenians aged over thirty, the other two from the two priestly families who had hereditary prerogatives in the cult of Demeter and Persephone, the Eumolpidai ('descendants of Eumolpos') and Kērykes (literally 'Heralds'). The *epistatai*, however, attested for example in the accounts of Pheidias' statue of Athene Parthenos (M/L [60] 54, A1, lines 3–4) or in a contemporary decree of the Council of 500 pertaining to Eleusis (*SEG* [61] x.24.11–13), were more narrowly financial functionaries.

The three senior Arkhons of Athens also included religious affairs in their portfolios. The King (*basileus*), who legendarily had inherited the religious functions of the old kings of Athens, was the principal religious dignitary of the Athenian state. He

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of religious cults through the decrees it passed with the assistance of the Council.

Priestly revenues

A portion of all sacrificial animals belonged to the priest or priestess by right. Like all the participating magistrates, he or she was entitled to an honorific share in the distribution of the meat; but, additionally, specific parts of the victim – which ones depended on the sanctuary in question – were more particularly set aside for them, regularly including the flesh of the thighs but often also the beast's head. They also got their share of the *trapezōmata* (chapter 4) and *theomoria* ('god's portion'), which provoked some anticlerical sarcasm from comic poets like Aristophanes (e.g. *Wealth* 676–8, on the nocturnal larceny of the priest of Asklepios at Athens: 'Then, glancing upward, I [the slave Karion] beheld the priest/ Swiping the cheesecakes and the figs from off/ The holy table . . .').

Consequently the economic status of a priest or priestess varied greatly depending on the importance of the sanctuary, though on the whole remuneration seems to have been modest, except in cases like that of Erythrai in Asia Minor (above) where priesthoods were sold and purchased as a sound investment. At Miletos, for example, the priest was guaranteed a minimum salary by public decree, on the following conditions (*LSAM* [59] 52B.11–12): certain magistrates were required to make sacrifices to Asklepios on a fixed date, but should no one have sacrificed, the priest would receive a payment of twelve drachmas – by no means a fortune, since it represented little more than a week's wages for a skilled labourer. In another of Miletos's cultic regulations (*LSAM* [59]: 44.13–15) the conditions are different: 'those who have bought a priesthood shall receive all the parts of victims offered in private sacrifices, except the skin'. Here we see the origins of 'sacerdotal' meat, the meat from sacrifices that was sold in the market and provided certain priesthoods with a significant income (chapter 4).

As vicars mediating between the city and the gods, the priest and priestess were respected personages, and recognized as such by special public honours like a privileged portion of the

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CHAPTER 6

Places of cult

SPIRIT OF PLACE

For the Greeks any location might serve as a place of cult, a sacred space (*hieron*). It was enough for it to be perceived as having a sacred character, either because of some special geographical or numinous quality (the majesty of the terrain, as at Delphi; the presence of a revered tomb) or because it contained some particular manifestation of the divine – rocks, or a tree, or a spring, for instance. Terrain that was deemed to be sacred was delimited as a *temenos* or 'cut-off' space, separated, that is, from its non-sacred surroundings. Its boundaries could be marked by pillars (*horoi*) or by a continuous boundary wall (*peribolos*). Numerous Greek sanctuaries were just such simple enclosures, containing perhaps a sacred wood, a spring, a grotto, or some other natural feature, but no permanent man-made structures. A *temenos* could harbour the cults of several different gods or be devoted to just one divinity.

The Agora of Athens (see fig. 4) is a good, if unusually well attested and cluttered, example of a *temenos*. It was a large area to the north of the Akropolis, delimited by inscribed pillars that proclaimed 'I am a *horos* (boundary-marker) of the Agora'. Here were situated a host of religious cults, funerary, heroic and divine, each with its appropriate monuments (altars and small shrines for Demeter, Zeus Phratrios, Athene Phratria, and Apollo Patrōos, the enclosure of the Eponymous Heroes, and so on and so forth). The public political buildings such as the Council Chamber and the Tholos lay outside the sacred *temenos* in the

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Not all temples, however, were designed either solely or principally as the house of a god. Some 'sanctuary temples' (Roux 1984 [89]) were built to protect a holy place and the rituals attached to it. That of Pythian Apollo at Delphi, for example, contained the Pythian hearth, the altar of Poseidon and, in its holy-of-holies (*aduton*), the oracular seat of the Pythia (see further chapter 11).

Apart from altars and temples, a sanctuary included a diversity of other structures purpose-built for worship: the treasuries already mentioned, which received sacralized dedications and were themselves votive offerings; fountain-houses, which were necessary in particular for ritual ablutions; various functional buildings such as dining-rooms and dormitories for the use of priests and pilgrims; and finally stadia or other arenas for cults that involved athletic and other competitions, such as those of Olympia and Delphi.

OTHER ARTEFACTS TO BE FOUND IN SANCTUARIES

One of the most frequent of all cult-acts was to make a dedication, so that sanctuaries were bursting at the seams with offerings of all kinds. Anything in principle could serve as a dedication, from the humblest vase given by an individual to the booty amassed by a city from a military campaign. A victorious athlete might dedicate his victor's crown, someone recovered from illness might offer a simulacrum of that part of her body which had been cured, or a city might present a standing monument. All these required the keeping of written inventories by the sanctuary's accountants, and they also required space. Not infrequently buildings were constructed simply to accommodate offerings. Alternatively, the offerings might be periodically cleared out and buried in trenches, to the great delight and joy of the archaeologists who excavate them.

Behind these offerings lay the labour of artists and craftsmen, some of whom had their workshops right by a sanctuary; in fact, the lion's share of the Greeks' artworks that have come down to us were once dedications consecrated to the gods. In order to market items for dedication and provide a variety of other goods

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CHAPTER 7

Rites of passage

INTRODUCTION

In this chapter we shall be discussing the rituals and beliefs relating to critical points in a person's life-cycle, that is, transitions from one life-status to another – birth, attainment of majority, marriage, death. 'Domestic (or family) religion' and 'popular religion', the labels usually employed to cover these, do not seem satisfactory to us. The former is inadequate, because the rituals in question are as much civic as domestic, and the cleavage familiar today between private and public life has hardly any meaning in a context where matrimonial and funerary rituals were a matter of concern to the community at large, not just the few individuals immediately involved. As for 'popular religion', despite its currency among historians of religion at the beginning of this century and its recent revival by English-speaking writers, the term both is excessively vague and corresponds to no ancient Greek notion. M. P. Nilsson, for example, lumped absolutely everything concerning religion under this rubric, while other exponents of the 'popular religion' category assert or assume an untenable contrast between the 'spontaneous' actions and rituals of the masses and the sophisticated religious thought of the élite.

It need hardly be added that such a conception of Greek religion is the end-product of centuries of 'Christianocentricity' and has nothing whatsoever in common with our outlook. We have adopted rather an anthropologically inspired approach that brings out the peculiar logic underlying irreducibly alien rituals and beliefs. Hence our choice of title for this chapter, which is

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than eleven deities: Tod 1948[63]: 204 = Harding 1985[65]: 109A) are exemplary proof of the fact that religion and civic life were mutually and inextricably implicated.

THE OTHER HALF: YOUNG GIRLS

A point-by-point comparison of the ritual treatment of boys and girls would be senseless, since no daughter of a (male) citizen became a (full) citizen, whereas, other things being equal, every son did. There were no collective rites of passage prescribed for the young girls of any city (with the possible exception of Sparta). Rather, what one does find is that a tiny and select handful were given the temporary privilege of being in the service of a deity. A famous and not in itself obviously funny passage of Aristophanes' sex-war comedy *Lysistrata* succinctly describes this privileged engagement. It is placed in the mouth of the leader of the chorus of Athenian wives who have gone on a sex-strike and occupied the Akropolis in an attempt to force their husbands to make peace with Sparta; she urges the audience of citizens to 'listen, all, for we have good advice for you':

> At the age of seven I served as one of the *arrhēphoroi*;
> at ten I pounded barley for Our Lady (Athene);
> then, shedding my dress of saffron, I served as a Bear
> for Artemis in the Brauronia festival;
> finally, having grown into a tall and comely young girl,
> I served as *kanēphoros* and wore a necklace of figs.
>
> (*Lysistrata* 642–7)

This is not, despite appearances, a description of a graded cycle of feminine initiation. Athenian girls never became full adult citizens. Most Athenian women will never even have served as 'Bears' (only a few were chosen for this honorific year of service to Artemis at Brauron), or *kanēphoroi* (basket-carriers in the great festival processions) or *arrhēphoroi* (small girls who helped to celebrate the Arrhephoria in honour of Athene). As the ritual civic functions enumerated in the Aristophanic passage did not mark the attainment of different stages in a girl's life-cycle, they are not a parallel to the male rites of passage. What really did count as a rite of passage for a girl was her marriage.

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with human marriage, but each of them had his or her precise function with its own underlying logic. Artemis, for example, was the goddess selected to receive the symbolic tokens surrendered by young brides as they left behind for good the 'savage' world of childhood and adolescence. Mythical narratives, such as that of Atalante and Melanion, made the point that it was as dangerous to refuse to leave the domain of Artemis as it was not to show one's gratitude towards her on departure: Atalante, an Arkadian mountain-girl and huntress, challenged all her suitors to a running-race on condition that only if she lost would she marry and surrender her virginity. For this she earned the hatred of Aphrodite, until Melanion finally beat her.

Aphrodite's function was to preside over the budding of sexual desire (*erōs*). Without her no matrimonial union could be deemed complete; on the other hand, an excess of sexual passion was thought to threaten the stability and decorum of a marriage from within, so Aphrodite had to be handled with care. Hera, frequently invoked as Teleia ('the Accomplished', 'the Achiever'), was the divine image of the maturity attained by the wife on marriage and of the legitimacy of the union; she stood for contractual reciprocity and protected the status of the lawfully wedded wife. Each of these divine powers was therefore in its own way indispensable and irreplaceable, one more proof of the logic that governed the constitution of the Greek pantheon (see further chapter 13).

In conclusion, it would be wrong to follow those modern interpreters who have seen marriage as an asymmetrical rite of passage into adulthood for the bride alone, a uniquely feminine affair. Rather, the institution of marriage was brilliantly contrived by Greek cities as a way of reproducing the citizen estate; it was a ritualized process in which both boys and girls were equally engaged. Refusal of marriage jeopardized not just the reproduction of the human species but the continuity of the civic community. That was why it was one of the favourite themes of Greek myth, involving boys such as Hippolytos (unreconstructed devotee of Artemis and recusant against Aphrodite in the play of Euripides named after him) no less than girls. In Crete, indeed, the civic embeddedness of marriage was communally and publicly demonstrated by making the initiatory cycle for boys

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by the phratry of the Labyadai at Delphi some two centuries later:

> No more than thirty-five drachmas' worth of grave-goods may be deposited in the tomb, whether of goods bought or of objects taken from the home. In case any of these regulations are broken, a fine of fifty drachmas shall be payable, unless one is prepared to swear an oath on the tomb [that the prescribed maximum has not been exceeded]. Beneath the corpse there may be placed only a single mattress and a single pillow. The corpse shall be transported enshrouded and in silence; there shall be no stopping on the way, and no lamentations outside the house, before reaching the cemetery. In the case of the older dead, there shall be no dirge or lamentations over their tombs; everyone shall go straight back home, excepting only those who live at the same hearth as the deceased, together with paternal uncles, parents-in-law, descendants and sons-in-law. Neither on the next day, nor on the tenth day after the burial, nor on the anniversaries of it shall there be moaning or lamentation. (Rougemont 1977[114], nos. 9 and 9 bis)

A third example, from another fourth-century Athenian inheritance suit, demonstrates how strong and close was the interaction between supposedly private, family matters and the interests of the state in a Greek city:

> All men, when they are approaching their end, take precautions on their own behalf to prevent their family-line from dying out [literally 'their *oikoi* from becoming deserted'] and to ensure there will be someone to perform sacrifices and all the other customary rituals over them. This is why, even if they die without natural issue, they at any rate adopt so as to leave children behind. Nor is this simply a matter of personal sentiment; the state also has taken public measures to see that adoption is practised, since it entrusts the (eponymous) Arkhon by law with the duty of preventing family-lines from dying out.
>
> (Isaios VII, *On the Estate of Apollodoros* 30)

To complement the schematic, mainly Athenian picture given above we should bear in mind the diversity of local burial customs, though there was thought to be a specifically 'Greek' way of death. This view transpires from literary descriptions of funerary rituals that were clearly considered not just different but alien and deviationist – for example, the burial of Patroklos in the twenty-third book of the *Iliad*, or the funerals of Spartan and Scythian kings in Herodotus (VI.58; IV.71).

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light on the precise functions fulfilled by the relevant deities and sometimes too on the system of representations that underlay belief in them. The citizen was a member of groups of different kinds, each of which managed its own relationship with the divine world, and within the bosom of which the citizen performed the daily round of sacrificing and praying. In the following chapter we shall be describing these different milieux of the religious life, beginning with the individual household and progressing by degrees to the level of the community as a whole.

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worth 30–40 drachmas, for Poseidon a sheep worth 10–20 drachmas. The sheer number of the sacrifices and the wide range of divinities to be honoured, including many local heroes and heroines, are striking enough. But no less remarkable is the document's allusive quality, enigmatic to anyone apart from a citizen of the deme Thorikos. For not a word is breathed about the cult-places, the sacrificial procedures, the priests (apart from a single mention), the financing of the sacrifices, and many other features.

The most exceptional deme-calendar, however, is that of Erkhia, also from the first half of the fourth century (*SEG* [61] XXI.541; Daux 1963 [121]). The precision of its detail is formidable: not only months, names of divinities and victims with their prices are listed, but also days of the month, places of cult, and ritual prescriptions (e.g. an interdiction on removing sacrificed meat). The text was inscribed in five columns, each of more than sixty lines, and enumerates forty-odd separate divinities (counting the different divine epithets separately), more than fifty kinds of animal victim, and almost a score of sacrificial locations mainly in the deme of Erkhia (about 20 km east of Athens). Yet despite all that, it is still not a complete list of the sacrifices offered by the deme, but only the 'principal list of the sacrifices to be celebrated under the authority of the *dēmarkheia*', i.e. of the demarkh or mayor. The original editor of this inscription (S. Dow) emphasized that there were sure to have been many other sacrifices offered in Erkhia, by households, by cult-associations and by other deme-officials or boards, both civilian and religious.

Thanks to such documents, the cultic existence of the demes comes to life for us and seems more accessible. But interpretative problems regarding the cults also multiply. It would appear that at one particular juncture, the start of the fourth century, all the Attic demes took it into their heads to reorganize or perhaps reduce to order for the first time a mass of cultic practices which had been accumulating steadily but shapelessly since the Archaic era. In order to be able to speak of the establishment of a coherent festival programme, we would need to know what the festival calendar had looked like beforehand; but what seems to have been happening was a publication rather than a genuine

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Of Zeus of the Phratry

The priest Theodoros had this stele inscribed and set up. The priest shall receive a tithe in levy: on every *meiōn* sacrifice, a thigh, a side-cut, an ear, plus three obols of silver; on every *koureion* sacrifice a thigh, a side-cut, an ear, *plus* one *khoinix* of bread, a half-*kotylē* of wine and a drachma of silver.

Decree of Hierokles

The following resolution was passed by the members of the phratry on the proposal of Hierokles, Phormion being Eponymous Arkhon at Athens [396/5] and Pantokles of the deme Oion being chief official of the phratry [*phratriarkhos*]: 'Whichever men have not yet been adjudicated upon in accordance with the law [*nomos*] of the Demotionidai shall be adjudicated upon by the members of the phratry. They shall swear an oath by Zeus Phratrios and take their voting ballot from the altar. If anyone appears not to have been entitled to membership of the phratry but to have been admitted to it improperly, his name shall be deleted by the priest and the phratriarkh from the register kept by the Demotionidai and from the copy of same. He who introduced the one who is rejected shall be fined 100 drachmas, dedicated to Zeus Phratrios. The priest and the phratriarkh shall exact this sum or else they shall themselves pay the fine. In future adjudication shall take place after the offering of the *koureion* sacrifice, at the Apatouria, on the day called Koureōtis, and the voting ballot shall be taken from the altar . . .

In future victims shall be brought, both *meia* and *koureia*, to the altar at Dekeleia. Whosoever does not sacrifice upon the altar shall be fined fifty drachmas, dedicated to Zeus Phratrios. The priest shall exact this sum or else he himself shall pay the fine, except in the event of plague or war. If there be impediment of this sort, the *meia* and *koureia* shall be brought to the place designated by the priest in a published notice. Said notice shall be inscribed three days before the feast, on a whitened board at least a span in width, at the spot where the demesmen of Dekeleia congregated in town [*sc.* in the centre of Athens]. The priest shall have this decree and his tithe-levies inscribed at his own expense on a marble stēlē which shall be erected in front of the altar at Dekeleia.' (*IG* [57] ii²:1237)

Every Athenian phratry, like that of the Demotionidai, would have had its 'Rule' (*nomos*) and its religious officials, especially a phratriarkh. In the Classical period, indeed, the phratry's rôle

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In the very process of its functioning the Greek city bore witness to the mutual implication of religion and politics, as it brought the citizens together to celebrate those great rituals, the religious festivals. Our task in the next two chapters will be to do justice to the complexity of the system within which those festivals were organized.

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resources contained in sanctuaries for any sort of purpose, for example to finance a war. In the fifth century, from 454 onwards, one-sixtieth of the money-tribute paid by Athens' allies was devoted to Athene. This tribute-surplus and other funds were used to finance the public building programme on the Akropolis, which included the construction of the Parthenon itself (see Appendix II).

LITURGIES (*LEITOURGIAI*)

A liturgy in the technical Athenian sense (not to be confused with its modern meaning of a form of religious worship) was a compulsory financial obligation imposed on the richest Athenians and resident foreigners, the ancient equivalent of super-tax but far more honorific. Liturgies were of two main kinds, military (for Athenian citizens only) and cultic. A man liable for the liturgy of *triērarkhia* was obliged to equip and, officially, captain a warship (*triērēs*, trireme) for a year. Festival liturgies involved the financing of some aspect of the great civic festivals, for example a chorus in the dramatic competitions of the Great or City Dionysia (hence *khorēgia*) or a banquet at the Panathenaia (*hestiasis*). There were over one hundred such liturgies to be performed every year, and some rich men were more enthusiastic than others in fulfilling – or exceeding – their legal obligations, prompted by narrowly political as well as broader religious considerations.

ORACLES AND OTHER PORTENTS

Religious activity was a constant factor, not only in the functioning of institutions but also in daily political life. The most spectacular illustration of this is doubtless the consultation of oracles such as that of Apollo at Delphi before a city took any important decision, whether narrowly religious or not. But at a more humble level the Greek city was always appealing to diviners (*manteis*) and oracle-mongers (*khrēsmologoi*) for a preview of the future, an interpretation of a sacred law, or a reminder of traditional custom (cf. chapter 5). Before every military campaign and engagement diviners were charged with

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festival, making it famous throughout the Hellenic world. In short, the glory of Athens from the middle of the sixth century onwards would seem to be inseparably linked to a programme of religious politics. Caution, however, is required, since the intentions attributed to the tyrants by much later historians smack more of ideological construction than historical authenticity. As for the modifications of the Akropolis effected under the democracy, their historicity is undeniable, but what were their meaning and consequences?

The Akropolis was destroyed by the invading Persians in 480, and again in 479. The buildings of the Archaic era were not restored, and what survives to this day are the ruins of the Classical age, the Parthenon, the Propylaia, the temple of Athene Nikē and the Erekhtheion, which were all conceived and constructed during the second half of the fifth century (see Appendix II). But how did the Athenians themselves see the new buildings? The long description of the Parthenon sculptures in Appendix II may make it possible to grasp precisely how their iconographic programme expressed the mentality of the Athenians of the Periklean age (for once, 'Periklean' does seem to be exactly the right epithet, since he was so closely involved in the Akropolis building project). From the pediment to the metopes and frieze, themes peculiar to the mythical and real history of the Athenians were interlaced with traditional themes of mythology common to all Greeks. There are other cities for which we possess comparable sculptural complexes, but their historical context is less well known to us. Here in the Parthenon sculptures we can see better than in any other city the imprint of a civic ideology, that same ideology which was in play in the tragedies and comedies staged during the Dionysia festival (chapter 10).

Plutarch later commented in his *Life of Perikles* (12.1): 'What caused the greatest pleasure to the Athenians and contributed most to adorning their city, what most forcibly struck the imagination of foreign visitors, what alone proves that the ancient reports of Athenian power and prosperity are not lies, are the monuments that Perikles had constructed.' Should we say, then, that the Parthenon was essentially a monument to the glory of Athenian imperialism? That in our view would be to go a step too far. Caution dictates restraint. It is wise not to overinterpret

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Table 1. *Principal Athenian festivals*

Festival	Month and day	Divinity
Kronia	Hekatombaion 12	Kronos
Synoikia	Hekatombaion 15–16	Athene
Panathenaia	Hekatombaion 21–9 (?)	Athene
Eleusinia	Metageitnion (?) [4 days]	Demeter
Niketeria	Boedromion 2	
Plataia	Boedromion 3	
Genesia	Boedromion 5	Gē
Artemis Agrotera	Boedromion 6	Artemis
Demokratia	Boedromion 12	
Eleusinia	Boedromion 15–17, 19–21	Demeter
Pyanopsia	Pyanopsion 7	Apollo
Theseia	Pyanopsion 8	Theseus
Stenia	Pyanopsion 9	Demeter
Thesmophoria	Pyanopsion 11–13	Demeter
Khalkeia	Pyanopsion 30	Athene
Apatouria	Pyanopsion (?)	
Oskhophoria	Pyanopsion (?) [Maimakterion]	Athene
Haloa	Poseideion 26	Demeter
Theogamia	Gamelion 2	Hera
Lenaia	Gamelion 12–15	
Anthesteria	Anthesterion 11–13	Dionysos
Diasia	Anthesterion 23	Zeus
Asklepieia	Elaphebolion 8	Asklepios
City Dionysia	Elaphebolion 10–14	Dionysos
Delphinia	Mounikhion 6	Apollo
Mounikhia	Mounikhion 16	Artemis
Olympieia	Mounikhion 19	Zeus
Thargelia	Thargelion 6–7	Apollo
Bendideia	Thargelion 19	Bendis
Plynteria	Thargelion 25	Athene
Kallynteria	Thargelion (?)	
Arrhetophoria	Skirophorion 3	Athene
Skira	Skirophorion 12	Demeter
Dipolieia/Bouphonia	Skirophorion 14	Zeus

calation, to reconcile the disparate solar and lunar years, and to keep the calendar in step with the seasons. (If Aristophanic humour is to be taken seriously, the King Arkhons did not always do the most efficient job in this respect: see *Clouds* 619–23, dated 423.) The twelve lunar months were named after various divini-

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reminded finally, was a complex system of rituals that cannot be reduced to a single interpretation.

THE SACRIFICE

Without rehearsing everything we have said earlier about the details and meanings of sacrifice in general (chapter 4), it will bear restating here that the sacrifice was a powerful ritual moment, present in every festival of the Athenian calendar. The number of the sacrificial victims, known to us through the accounts of the Treasurers of Athene, gives us a material measure of the importance of the post-sacrificial feasts. The sacrifice of a hecatomb (one hundred beasts, hence the month-name Hekatombaion) was frequent, and the figure could rise to over two hundred victims for a single festival. The city bore the cost of these sacrifices, either directly or, as is attested for the Panathenaia and Dionysia, by imposing the liturgy of *hestiasis* on rich men (chapter 9). At the Panathenaia the distribution of the sacrificial meat was made in the Kerameikos among those demesmen who had participated in the procession and sacrifice.

A look down the Athenian monthly calendar (Table 1) shows that, with the apparent exception of Maimakterion, not a month passed without a massive slaughtering of beasts. A city at festival time was thus also a city that reeked with the smells of spilt animal blood and roasted or boiled animal meat, and resounded with the noise of a community eating meat, drinking wine, and making merry.

COMPETITIONS (*AGŌNES*)

Not every festival had a competition attached to it, but every competition was part of a religious festival. It is worth remembering that the Greeks invented the ideas of both competitive athletic games and the theatre within the (to us) alien context of religion. We shall take as our illustration of the former the Panathenaic Games, of the latter the Great Dionysia.

The Panathenaia festival had long been celebrated when, in 566, an attempt was made by Athens to produce a rival to the great Panhellenic festivals of the Olympic, Pythian, Nemean and

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Goddess; that they shall get the procession underway at sunrise, punishing in conformity with the laws those who do not obey orders . . .

(*IG* [57] ii²: 334)

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between the Eleians and Arkadians over Olympia, Argos and Sparta over the Isthmian Games, and several states on several occasions over Delphi; once, indeed, in 364, fighting actually spilled into the sacred precinct at Olympia (Xenophon, *Hellenica* VII.4.28–32).

The *panēguris* was first and foremost a religious assembly, placed under the sign of the god or gods who controlled the sanctuary. The festival period was inaugurated by a solemn procession and one or more sacrifices to bind the participants together in communion; it was punctuated and closed by further rituals and sacrifices. The smooth functioning of the whole affair was assured by boards of priests assisted by numerous staff specially recruited for the occasion. Often these priests enjoyed a hereditary, aristocratic privilege. Delphi was unique in that its management was in the hands of a permanent religious league of states in central Greece, called the Amphiktiony because the states were located 'around the sanctuary'. Despite the struggles for control already mentioned, which are somewhat misleadingly known as 'sacred wars', the Delphic Amphiktiony for centuries ensured the continuous celebration of the Pythian Games every four years.

COMPETITIVE GAMES (*AGŌNES*)

The games which pitched Greek competitors against each other at regular intervals on the running track (*stadion*, whence our 'stadium') or racecourse (*hippodromos*) have often been regarded as a legacy from Homeric times; consider the funeral games of Patroklos at Troy described in *Iliad* XXIII (which had a real counterpart in those of Amphidamas on Euboia in which Hesiod competed: *Works and Days* 654–7), or those held in honour of Odysseus on Phaiakia in *Odyssey* VIII. They did, undoubtedly, encapsulate aristocratic values, but it was the whole city, not just aristocrats, which identified itself with the victory of one of its citizens at the Panhellenic games. From the beginning of the sixth century cities began to build special exercise-grounds (*gumnasia*) to encourage local athletes, and the honours they showered on home-town victors (at Athens, for example, not just a one-off 'civic reception' but lifetime dining-rights in the *prutaneion* both

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overall responsibility for enforcing the rules. The sacred truce was announced throughout the Greek world by the *spondophoroi* (see above), so that competitors and other intending participants (official and unofficial visitors were alike called *thēoroi*), free or slave, Greek or non-Greek, might take advantage of the temporary *asulia* (freedom from reprisals: see chapter 6).

The festival lasted six days. The first was devoted to a variety of religious rituals including sacrifices at the great ash-altar of Zeus (which was composed of a mixture of sacrificial débris and water from the Alpheios, and had reached a height of seven metres by the time Pausanias saw it in the late second century CE) and other altars in the Altis. The athletes swore an oath to conduct themselves honourably, and the Hellanodikai declared the Games officially open.

The following days were given over to the several events, thirteen in all. Ten were for adults only (all competitors had to be male; women, apart from the priestess of Hera, were not even permitted to watch): *stadion* (192.27 metres = one stade), *diaulos* (two stades), *dolikhos* (long-distance, twenty-four stades), *hoplitodromos* (race in heavy armour), *pentathlon* (discus, standing jump, javelin, *stadion*, wrestling), wrestling, boxing, chariot-race, horse-race, and *pankration* (boxing, wrestling and judo combined, and almost no holds barred). Boys competed in the junior *stadion*, wrestling and boxing. The *stadion* was the senior race in two senses, being both the oldest and the most prestigious of the unaided, individual events: the winner of this received the title *Olympionikēs* and the whole Olympiad was known thenceforth as 'So-and-so's Olympiad'. The judgement of the Hellanodikai was considered sacred and therefore unquestionably final; no one, not even a distinguished Spartan like Likhas (Thucydides v.50), was immune from disqualification and a humiliating whipping at their hands.

On the sixth and last day the victors received their prize, a crown of wild olive leaves picked from trees growing in the Altis and decorated with ribbons. Victors and priests processed before the altars, sang and sacrificed. A great banquet was then served to them in the *prutaneion*.

That was the official end of the festival but further honours and ceremonies were in store for the victors. At Olympia itself

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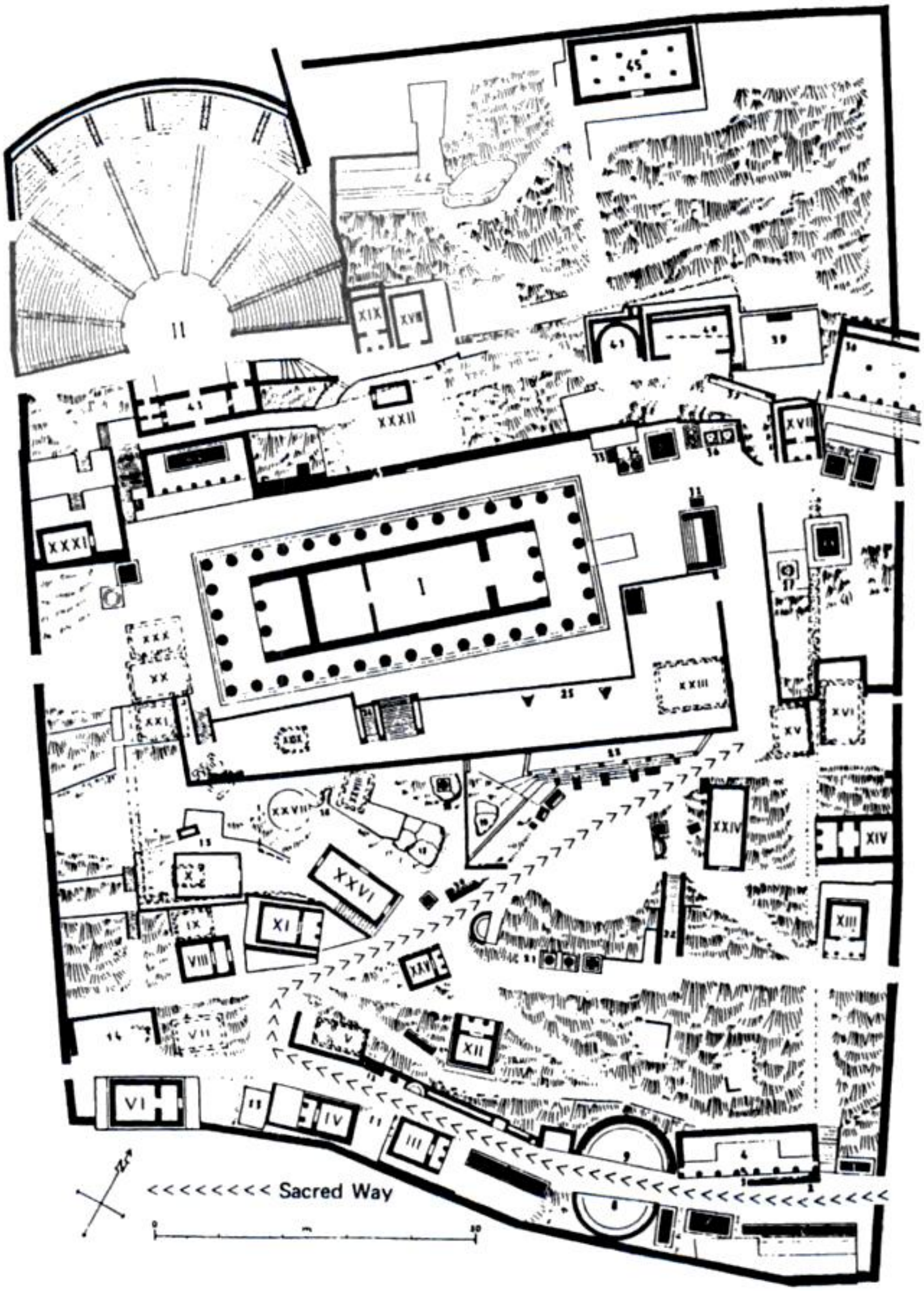

7 Delphi: the sanctuary of Apollo. I Temple of Apollo; II Theatre; III–XXXI Treasuries; 1–45 dedications of statues and other offerings by various states and individuals, Greek, Macedonian and Roman

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This book is a translation into English of *La Religion grecque* by Louise Bruit Zaidman and Pauline Schmitt Pantel, one of the liveliest and most original introductions to the subject in any language.

Classical Greek religion was an amalgam of ritual practices and religious beliefs. It acquired a definite structure at the moment when one of the typical forms of political organisation in the Greek world, the *polis* or 'city', came into being, towards the end of the eighth century BCE. This structure was based on habits of thought and intellectual categories that differed radically from our own. It is the purpose of this book to consider how religious beliefs and rituals were given expression in the world of the Greek citizen – the functions performed by the religious personnel, and the place that religion occupied in individual, social and political life. The chapters cover first ritual and then myth, rooting the account in the practices of the Classical city while also taking seriously the world of the imagination. The book is enriched throughout by quotations from original sources.

Dr Cartledge's translation amounts in many ways to a second edition of the work. He has restructured and redivided the contents of the volume, segregating some technical matter to two appendixes, and has substantially revised the bibliography to meet the needs of a mainly student, English-speaking readership.

'There was a clear need for a straightforward introduction to Greek religion. This is such an introduction and the English translation deserves a welcome . . . The greatest merit of the work is clarity of organisation and of expression . . . Highly recommended . . . to students and to the general reader.'

The Times Higher Education Supplement

'This is a challenging, absorbing study, to be recommended to anyone with an interest in the history of religion.' *The Times Literary Supplement*

Cover illustration: Apollo on an Attic red-figure hydria, *c.* 490/480 BCE, Rome, Vatican Museums. Drawing: F. Lissarrague.

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