

place in the Aegean during the early modern era. This book will be useful to every scholar of Hellenic studies.

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## Multiperiod

**Giorgos Vavouranakis, Konstantinos Kopanias and Chrysanthos Kanellopoulos (eds). *Popular Religion and Ritual in Prehistoric and Ancient Greece and the Eastern Mediterranean*. pp. xviii + 170, with col. and b/w ill. 2018. Oxford: Archaeopress. ISBN 978-1-78969-045-3, paperback £32.**

Popular religion falls under the wider field of popular culture, and has only recently been recognised as an independent subject for historical investigation.<sup>1</sup> This volume concerns popular religion and ritual in prehistoric and ancient Greece and the eastern Mediterranean, and is the result of a conference held in December 2012 at the National Kapodistrian University of Athens.

In the introductory chapter, Vavouranakis (pp. vii-xiii) offers a brief historiography of the theme, outlining also the content of the volume. This is a significant contribution introducing the theoretical and methodological issues around the subject. As the author manifests, popular religion refers to the aspects of religion and ritual, beliefs and practices shared by a large group of people, and usually by the lower tiers of society, but there is a lack of developed theoretical frameworks in Mediterranean archaeology for understanding its material expression. A clear boundary between 'official' or 'institutionalised' and 'popular' religion should be avoided. I also share the view that binary oppositions are not helpful when studying the Humanities. Thus, the term 'popular religion' may include traditional and changing beliefs and ritual practices of all social classes that relate to a world beyond the straightforwardly pragmatic, as well as personal, private, domestic, folk religion, and 'magic'; in other words, popular religion existed both independently of official (usually state-sponsored) religion and in symbiosis with it.<sup>2</sup> Ordinary people usually follow official cult, but, at the same time, they tend to produce their own versions of it, other types of ritual activity, or even their own systems of belief and practice, maintaining them outside of elite control. Thus, building on a Marxist perspective, popular religion may have a twin contradictory role: the securing of social subordination and at the same time the potential for comforting people,

<sup>1</sup> Briggs 2011.

<sup>2</sup> Baines and Waraksa 2017.

allowing them to overcome everyday struggles and empowering them for social action.

Vavouranakis (pp. 1-10) is dealing with the spread of popular ritual in early second millennium BC Crete. Following a review of the evidence from peak sanctuaries, sacred caves, cemeteries, and public gathering areas, he manifests how several of the extant interpretations presented popular ritual as an elite ideological instrument, disconnecting elite and non-elite altogether. Western models concerning the relation between political authority and society have usually regarded commoners as passive recipients of power, usually manifested via ritual and ideology. As the author suggests, the concept that may prove helpful to the adequate understanding of the above contexts related to popular rituals is the 'multitude', rendering a network of inclusion rather than exclusion, and being opposite to centralised authority. The multitude may have incorporated the elites (as well as other types of social distinction) within a network of societal regional integrations.

Galoi (pp. 11-18) focuses on the ceramic evidence from Phaistos and its region during the Protopalatial (early second millennium BC) period. The aim is to analyse the relation between the palace of Phaistos and the mortuary landscape in the Western Mesara plain, concentrating on the ritual practices attested in the *tholos* tomb cemeteries of Kamilari and Ayia Triada. The functional and stratigraphic analysis of pottery suggests that ritual behaviours attested both at Kamilari and Ayia Triada in the Middle Minoan IB period may relate to more 'popular rites' shared at the local level and contrasting distinctly with the elite ceremonies of the communal areas in the Phaistos palace, performed by local and/or regional elites. From the Middle Minoan IIA period changes are visible in both necropoleis: Ayia Triada begins its decline as a funerary area and probably transforms into a cult place, while at Kamilari the funerary area displays an increase in its use and reveals changes in material culture. It seems that the 'popular rites' performed at Kamilari gave way to new rituals imitating the forms of consumption performed at Phaistos by the palatial elites. According to the author, we may regard these changes in relation to socio-political developments taking place throughout the Protopalatial period.

Haysom (pp. 19-28) explores the presence and role of mass and elite in Minoan peak sanctuaries. Peak sanctuaries have traditionally been viewed as either rustic popular cult places frequented by pastoralists and farmers, as important nodes within elite structures where power or control were

cemented through ideology, or as places where the two above interpretations are merged at different timescales. The author first presents briefly the historiography of research on these sanctuaries, summarising the prevailing interpretations, diachronically. According to the author, the state of both the preserved and the published evidence is not enough to base interpretations on chronological patterning. Both a synchronic assessment of the character of assemblages and distribution patterns remain the basis of our interpretation and can find a better place in the debate which has been driven by topographic considerations and statements about the chronological evolution of the sanctuaries. Such an approach considering intra-site distribution of finds, performative aspects, participation and experience has been taken and published by Peatfield and Morris in a number of instances.<sup>3</sup> By considering the symbolic resonances that the elite images seek to build, the author is shifting the discussion back to the elites. By putting the emphasis on dialogues and competition, he attempts to resolve the dichotomies which connect Minoan peak sanctuaries with one group or another. The answer may lie in the diversity of functions that sanctuaries may have fulfilled, considering that not all the extra-urban ones had the same and unchanging function or functions. A comparative approach which considers methodological analogies between Minoan Bronze Age and Cypriot Iron Age sanctuaries may be beneficial for the archaeologies of both islands.<sup>4</sup>

Privitera (pp. 29-37) explores the phenomenon of inverting vases in Bronze Age Crete. The author, before focusing on the historiography of research behind this complex phenomenon, gives the methodological background behind the distinction between religious and non-religious ritual. Then, he documents (also in the form of detailed tables) the findspots (in cemeteries, non-domestic and domestic buildings), contexts and chronology of ritually inverted vessels across the island, before proceeding to the question of function(s). From a contextual perspective, the evolution of the ritual (or most probably rituals) of inverting vases over time favours the suggestion of a gradual transfer of this practice from funerary to domestic spheres of life. This may relate to veneration rites in memory of house ancestors.

Platon (pp. 39-45) discusses a peculiar Minoan clay vessel found in Zakros. The vessel features a

<sup>3</sup> Peatfield and Morris 2019, with references to previous work.

<sup>4</sup> Cf. Papantoniou and Kyriakou 2018: 570-572; Papantoniou 2019, with references to previous work.

series of miniature cupules on its upper body. The excavation context reveals little about its meaning, but its characteristics point towards its function as a ceremonial object, the form of which is defined by a religious symbolism: the boiling of water or food. Based on later textual evidence, the author connects the Zakrian vessel with the *chytroi* used in the much later Anthesteria, an annual Athenian festival with a chthonic character related to the fertility of the earth. Based on this comparison, he provisionally identifies it as a vessel used for the ritual preparation of first fruits offerings into a sacred mash. The excavation context may suggest that the vessel was probably stored in a specific house of a town's quarter, to be used once during the year in a popular festival of symbolic purification and invocation of the fertility of the earth. While I fully support the idea of varying levels of continuity (mainly symbolic) in ritual practice and iconography, as the author himself notices, one should at the same time consider the risks of transporting religious beliefs and ceremonies of classical antiquity to the Bronze Age and vice versa.

Sørensen, Friedrich, and Søholm (pp. 47-54) shift the enquiry from Minoan Crete to the Cyclades, looking for modes of *metamorphosis* (transformation) and hybridity in the wall-paintings at Akrotiri of Thera. After an introduction to the theme, the authors turn to the social dimension of religion and ritual and the concepts of *metamorphosis* and hybridity. *Metamorphosis* has no room for contradictions or binary oppositions, as it relates to the ways in which new forms emerged continuously through osmosis. According to the authors, *metamorphosis* entails a stage of hybridity related to heterogeneity and cultural encounter. Focusing on the iconography related to the flora, fauna, the mythological creature of the griffin, the element of water, the human sphere, and abstract representations, the chapter attempts to show how transformation and cyclical renewal were important principles represented in the world of the Thera frescoes. These principles are also evoked through religious feasts and rituals expressing both elite and communal identities and values.

Whittaker (pp. 55-61) is concerned with the definition and identification of popular religion in mainland Greece during the Mycenaean period. After presenting briefly the historiography of research on the topic, she turns towards methodological issues related to the identification of popular cult in the archaeological record. The deposition patterns of figurines, as well as other archaeological evidence, play a significant role in the discussion. As the author makes manifest

the distinction between popular and official cult is difficult to make, both in the case of open-air sanctuaries and in cult buildings. She is sceptical of the distinction between official and popular cult and, as she suggests, we may better distinguish between formal or public and informal or private rites. Formal or public rites took place during major public events and included elites and non-elites, while informal rites perhaps involved mainly family members and were restricted to the household or the funerary sphere of life. According to the author, the existing evidence does not confirm that non-elites did not make use of specific cult equipment; it is possible that these items did not survive because of the different (and less expensive and durable) materials of which they were made.

Polychronakou Sgouritsa (pp. 63-71) aims at presenting and examining recent evidence that may support new theories and confirming earlier ones concerning Mycenaean figurines. After citing briefly the historiography of research on Helladic figurines, she examines the specific contexts in which they were found in Attica, Aegina and Keos. According to the author, a few specific types, such as the triple groups which were discovered mostly in burial contexts, probably expressed local, extremely limited beliefs, and she tentatively connects them to later groups of divine figures, such as the Fates, the Graces and the Hours. She, however, remains cautious on our understanding of the meaning of Mycenaean figurines, especially as the same types are usually found in many differing contexts, such as burials, households, workshops, sanctuaries etc. A turn towards context remains imperative, but the function of figurines as objects related primarily either to official, or to popular cults continues to remain in a frame of doubt.

Salavoura (pp. 73-83) examines two Late Bronze Age sacred 'high places', i.e. Mount Lykaion in Arkadia and Mount Oros on Aegina. After presenting the archaeological context and evidence from each site, the author proceeds to a discussion on similarities and differences. As she suggests, in contrast to the Minoan peak sanctuaries we are not yet in a position to understand the existence or extent of cult on high peaks on the mainland. Even if so, the communal consumption of food and drink seems to be a way through which people approached the divine. In contrast to elitist palatial contexts, peak cults such those on Lykaion and Oros seem to have been of regional and much more spontaneous nature, expressing popular religion and communal identities rather than the display of power, and serving the needs of commoners in relation to controlling nature and its forces.

Eliopoulos (pp. 85-95) attempts a reappraisal of the 12th and 11th centuries BC 'Minoan Goddesses with Upraised Arms' (MGUA). After providing a theoretical framework on approaching 'popular' elements of religion, considering also Christianity and other living contemporary religions, he turns towards a historiography of research concerning the iconography, chronology and the meaning of MGUA. Then, he turns to contexts, focusing in particular on a unique enthroned MGUA from Kephala Vasilikis. He argues that these figures represent elements of past palatial ritual practices of the Late Bronze Age that survived in a popularised form in the Early Iron Age settlements. Discussing morphological issues of the Kephala Vasilikis MGUA, possible reconstructions and context, the author proceeds to an elaborate analogy with popular religious practices, particularly the cult of *litanies* (religious processions).<sup>5</sup> In addition, he suggests that MGUA had a role in the early stages of the development of free-standing cult buildings in the Early Iron Age settlements on Crete.

Leriu (pp. 97-104) attempts a reconsideration of 'rural' sanctuaries within Cypro-Archaic societies. The objective of the chapter is the discussion of the role of Cypro-Archaic sanctuaries in the process of identity construction, maintenance and demonstration. As the author emphasises in her introductory section, she believes that Cypro-Archaic cult contexts have yet to be examined through this analytical lens. Thus, she proceeds to a discussion of research trends and omissions in relation to the study of Cypriot sacred landscapes. I am in total agreement with the argument regarding a tension in scholarship towards the identification of bipolar lenses of urban versus rural and folk or (popular) versus official, while in reality these categories overlap. Nevertheless, I believe that previous scholarship (published before the present volume, even if we may consider that this chapter may have been submitted much earlier than 2018) has also emphasised and addressed issues relating to the dichotomies between official and popular cult and the homogeneity of material culture both between the various polities and between the urban and extra-urban space.<sup>6</sup> Such homogeneous ritual practices throughout the island, as Leriu suggests, may point to uninterrupted ritual traditions from the Late Bronze Age, as manifested in ritual architecture, iconography and cult.

Papanastasiopoulou (pp. 105-111) studies popular religion in ancient Judah during the 8th and 7th centuries BC, via the medium of terracotta figurines. Popular religion in ancient monotheistic Israel is regarded as heterodox or heretical. Focusing on Judean Pillar Figurines (JPFs) the author attempts to examine their relation with popular religion. Following an examination of the typology of the JPFs, she examines their archaeological contexts and date. There is a range of interpretations regarding JPFs: they have been regarded as human females connected with fertility cults, as goddesses, or as toys. Looking closely at contexts and textual evidence, the author favours the possibility of the JPFs representing Asherah, a goddess worshiped in popular religion but not in the context of the kingdom's monotheistic state cult. JPFs were used in domestic or private cults but, in the post-exile period, when Jews return from Babylon to Palestine, the figurines are completely absent. This may relate to the death of syncretistic religious practices and the prevalence of pure monotheism.

Apostola (pp. 113-124) examines the representations of the demon-god Bes in Rhodes and Samos during the 7th and 6th centuries BC, and their influence on popular religious beliefs. After citing the multiple connotations of the deity in ancient Egypt diachronically, the author moves to its representations in Archaic Rhodes and Samos. She argues that Rhodes served as an ideal redistribution centre of this figure in the Mediterranean. Bes seems to have been adopted in popular religion due to his magical powers, apotropaic functions, and his relation to motherhood and infants. The funerary connotations of the demon-god seem to have been less popular in the Aegean. The complex nature of commercial and cultural networks in the eastern Mediterranean leave the identity of the owners and dedicators of these figures open to discussion even if, most probably, according to the author, these were Greek traders and mercenaries familiar with the religious concepts of Egypt. As indicated by the strong similarities between Bes figures and the 'fat-bellied demons' that emerged in the Aegean in the early 6th century BC, the first seem to have had an impact on the latter who were incorporated in local popular beliefs. 'Fat bellied demons' were found both in sanctuaries of kourotropic deities and in funerary contexts.

Lamont and Boundouraki (pp. 125-135) review the textual and material evidence on ritual cursing in Attica, with a focus on the rites that accompanied written binding spells. Then, they proceed with the examination of a relatively new set consisting of five Classical curse tablets found *in situ* during

<sup>5</sup> Cf. Zeman-Wisniewska 2015.

<sup>6</sup> Cf. Papanastasiopoulou 2016; Papanastasiopoulou 2019 with references to previous scholarship.



rescue excavations in 2003 in a cemetery of New Phaleron (greater Athens) and currently in Piraeus Archaeological Museum. This area most probably belonged to the deme of Xypete in antiquity. The authors transcribe one of the tablets, while the others are of very similar nature. The final part of this chapter focuses on situating the private act of cursing alongside public rites in the deme of Xypete. According to the authors, lead tablets and binding should be viewed as dynamic processes within the networks of local communities and their ritual landscapes.

Chairetakis (pp. 137-142), focusing on a 4th century BC inscribed bowl from the island of Salamis, discusses again cursing rituals. The archaeological contexts of the Salaminian bowl (a place associated with residential structures) may define the target of the writers, i.e. an adjacent family. The author connects this bowl to popular religion practices related to magic as part of household worship, common in the broader area of Classical Athens. The reasons that forced one family to bind another remain unknown, even if it is possible that they related to financial terms.

Spathi (pp. 143-155) attempts a comparative study and an interpretive approach to the cult use and meaning of representations of masked figures of the Classical period. The author first examines such figurines from the cave sanctuary to the Nymphs at Lechova in Corinthia. After a typological study and comparisons with masked figurines and masks from other cult sites, she proceeds towards an examination of literary sources on the use of masks in cult rituals. Based on this comparative and holistic approach, the author concludes that these figurines were used during initiation or maturation rites involving music and dance. Such rituals were important channels of communication and active participation in Greek religion, forming thus a significant aspect of social life in ancient Greece (and beyond).

Koursoumis (pp. 157-164) detects the cult of a border sanctuary on the Messenian slopes of Mount Taygetos, at the ancient *kome* of Kalamai in the Peloponnese. He focuses on a group of 17 Classical and early Hellenistic terracotta's currently in the Archaeological Museum of Messenia, depicting females found in a cave. After presenting the iconographic types, the author detects a cult at Kalamai, even if the exact location of the cave cannot be identified today. The location of the sanctuary in an extra-urban mountainous environment, at the intersection of the regional road network and in-between different cities, suggest that this rural cult

was quite popular. The figurines seem to relate to the cult of a female deity, probably Orthia, patron of Sparta and associated with wild nature, childbirth and motherhood.

The last chapter by Valavanis (pp. 165-168) is concerned with popular religion and the beginnings of the Olympic Games. I believe that this article brings very well into discussion the importance of folklore and ethnographic analogies for studying past ritual activity. The author favours the interpretations that relate the establishment of Olympic Games with religious (magical or worshipping) pretexts, rather than with theories advocating a more pragmatic approach. As he argues, all religious manifestations started as simple expressions of popular practices before being incorporated into the auspices of authority structures. He draws on analogies from modern Greece and the broader Christian Orthodox tradition, arguing that games in a religious context constitute ritual activities and popular attempts to reinforce nature's power in order to have a fruitful and productive year. Since the foot race constitutes an essential part of the Olympic ritual, it should have been part of the Games since their inception.

I believe that the volume is a rather welcome addition to the study of Greek and eastern Mediterranean religion, emphasising how we should start de-emphasising the institutionalised, formal, faith-based aspect of religion and reflect a broader focus on the plurality of popular religion. If we wish to understand how ancient ritual may have functioned in a holistic way, we need to focus on the concept of *popular religion* itself. As shown in the acknowledgements of some authors, the present volume should not be seen as the overdue publication of the conference proceedings; this is clearly a collection of peer-reviewed studies that can be used as a starting point for the discussion of issues of cross-cultural importance, and using a variety of approaches and methodologies for the study of popular religion and ritual in ancient Mediterranean. Some more images in specific chapters may have been useful for the non-specialists in specific regions and their material culture, but this is not to detract the importance and quality of the volume.

In conclusion, I would like to emphasise that in all parts of the world contemporary popular religion forms a continuum with both ancient religions and folk cultures. The materiality of popular religion is usually difficult to identify, as it can also be a very personal spiritual matter and thus highly elusive and intangible. Archaeological approaches to the study of ancient Mediterranean (and European in

general) religion have been highly influenced by western religious paradigms and Judaeo-Christian monotheistic frameworks.<sup>7</sup> Thus, we need to reflect on how these approaches have usually framed and constrained our research questions, methodologies and interpretations. Meanwhile, the study of past religiosity often tends to neglect the human experience of the numinous (i.e. religion's embodied dimension). Exceptions can be found in phenomenological approaches (usually outside the discipline of Mediterranean archaeology), which have, however, tended to over-intellectualise experience rather than truly explore embodiment. A turn towards the archaeology of spiritualities acknowledges the importance of understanding sacred places for human communities in a holistic way. This approach investigates embodiment and necessitates engaging with living religious communities, whose expert knowledge, practices and religious beliefs can assist scientific enquiry.<sup>8</sup>

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**Guy D. R. Sanders, Jennifer Palinkas, Ioulia Tzonou-Herbst, with James Herbst. *Ancient Corinth: Site Guide, 7th Edition*. pp. 208, with col. plates. 2018. Princeton NJ: The American School of Classical Studies at Athens. ISBN 978-0-87661-661-1, hardcover \$19.95.**

Since the beginning of the excavations in Ancient Corinth by the American School of Classical Studies at Athens in 1896, a multi-period, intricate stratigraphy of the urban landscape of this site has been unravelled. This century-long history of excavations in Ancient Corinth has been previously disseminated by six editions of the site guide published by the American School of Classical Studies at Athens. Previous editions were curated by the ASCSA director Rhys Carpenter in 1928 and in 1933; the scholar Charles Morgan in 1936; Oscar Broneer in 1947 and 1951, whose 1951 edition was revisited by Robert Scranton in 1954; and, finally, Corinth director Henry Robinson in 1960.

The authors of this new 7th edition, therefore, have provided an up-to-date summary of the archaeological research carried out over the last 58 years by the American School of Classical Studies in Ancient Corinth, further set within the context

<sup>7</sup> Korte and van Liere 2017: 2-3.

<sup>8</sup> cf. Rountree, Morris and Peatfield 2012; Fuchs and Rüpke 2015.