

# ASPECTS OF ANCIENT GREEK CULT

CONTEXT - RITUAL - ICONOGRAPHY



Edited by  
Jesper Tae Jensen, George Hinge, Peter Schultz  
and Bronwen Wickkiser

# Aspects of Ancient Greek Cult

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Context, Ritual and Iconography

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*This book is dedicated to all the wonderful people who have ever worked on*

*the Athenian Asklepieion on the South Slope of the Akropolis*

*– above all Alexandros Mantis, Petros Kalligas and Luigi Beschi.*

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# Preface

*Jesper Tae Jensen, George Hinge, Peter Schultz and Bronwen Wickkiser*

Near the end of this labor, only one final matter remains. It is the most pleasant of all tasks involved in producing this book. Namely, to thank the people involved. There have been many wonderful people committed to this project; without them this project – both the 2004 conference and the present book – could never have been completed.

First, for making the conference in Aarhus, *Aspects of Ancient Greek Cult*, such a great success, we would like to thank the hosts of the conference, the Centre for the Study of Antiquity and the Department of Classical Archaeology, University of Aarhus. We would like to express our deepest gratitude in particular to Lise and Niels Hannestad of the Department of Classical Archaeology, University of Aarhus, for all their support and for helping to make this conference possible. We also wish to express our deepest thanks to the Secretary of the Department of Classical Archaeology, Lilian Svenningsen, for her constant assistance with all practical matters, and to the technician at the Museum of Ancient Art, Steffen Ledet Christiansen, for his assistance in every circumstance imaginable. To Stine Birk Toft, who assisted everyone before and throughout the conference, we owe a special debt.

Thanks also go to the core of the conference, the speakers, for making the colloquium such great fun. Throughout the conference, their professionalism and good cheer made all the administrative duties much easier for Lilian, Stine, and Jesper Tae Jensen, the principal organizer of the conference. Finally, we are thankful to the participants and the attendees of the conference; without their fantastic questions, helpful comments, and suggestions our papers would not be what they are.

For financial support of the conference, we are grateful to the Danish Research Agency, Ministry of Science, to the Aarhus University Research Foundation and not least to the Elisabeth Munksgaard Foundation. Our gratitude also goes to the fantastic wine shop Viticole Den Blå Port and Café RIS RAS Filliongongong, both in Aarhus, for providing energy – coffee, wine, beer, and other delicious fuel – to our brains during the conference.

The completion of this book owes much to the talents and assistance of various individuals and organizations. Thanks to Benjamin Millis, Acquisitions at the Blegen Library, American School of Classical Studies at Athens, for assisting us in finding numerous articles and books.

We would also like to thank Craig A. Mauzy, Photographic Department, Agora Excavations, the American School of Classical Studies at Athens, for providing the photo used in Richard Hamilton's article; to Director, Dr. Nikolaos Kaltsas and Eleni Morati, both of the National Archaeological Museum at Athens for providing the photo used in Michaelis Lefantzis's and Jesper Tae Jensen's article; and to Director, Dr. Wolf-Dietrich Niemeier and Oliver Pilz (Fotoabteilung), both of the Deutsches Archäologisches Institut, Athens, for the permission to use the photo (Neg. Nr. : NM 642) for the cover of the book.

We are deeply grateful to the staff at the Aarhus University Press, especially Director Claes Hvidbak, Editor Sanne Lind Hansen, and English editor Mary Waters Lund for all their support in and commitment to producing this book. Thanks also go to Catharina Linneballe, Christina Videbech, and Jens Evald Vandel for bringing photos from Athens, and a special thanks to Amalie Skovmøller for providing much needed help with the photos in general.

For financial support of this book we would like to express our deepest gratitude to Concordia College Moorhead, MN, the Department of Classics at Gustavus Adolphus College, the College of Arts and Science at Vanderbilt University, the Danish Research Agency, Ministry of Science, Aarhus University Research Foundation, and the Centre for the Study of Antiquity, University of Aarhus.

Finally, regarding the technical details: We have used the abbreviations set forth by the Guidelines of *the American Journal of Archaeology* (with the exceptions of ARG = *Archiv für Religionsgeschichte*, ArchEph = *Archaiologiki Ephemeris*, and DNP = *Der Neue Pauly*). There is little consistency among scholars today in the spelling of Greek words and names in English. As a general principle, we, the editors of this volume, have opted for the Greek form (e.g. Apollon, Asklepios, and Strabon instead of Apollo, Asclepius, and Strabo). However, in certain familiar names (like Plato, Piraeus, and Delphi), we have followed the Latin tradition for the convenience of the reader.

This book is dedicated to all the wonderful people who have ever worked on the Athenian Asklepieion on the South Slope of the Akropolis – above all Alexandros Mantis, Petros Kalligas and Luigi Beschi.

# Introduction

*Jesper Tae Jensen*

The articles in this volume are based on an international conference entitled *Aspects of Ancient Greek Cult*, which took place 9-10 January 2004 at the Centre for the Study of Antiquity and the Department of Classical Archaeology, University of Aarhus, Denmark. The conference was organized as part of my Ph.D. program in the Department of Classical Archaeology at the University of Aarhus. Nine scholars working within the fields of architecture, classical archaeology, classical philology, history, musicology, and religion participated. The broad title for this conference reflects my intention to bring together innovative and diverse approaches to the study of ancient Greek cult, particularly those that combine the study of material culture with both textual and epigraphical evidence.

The purpose of the conference was two-fold. First to establish a network among young scholars who deal with ancient Greek cult from different disciplines and countries. Second, to let these young scholars discuss their ideas under the guidance of Professor Richard Hamilton, and then develop these discussions as articles.

The present volume contains revised versions of seven of the papers given at the conference. The paper by Hedvig von Ehrenheim, "Incubation Areas in Pagan and Early Christian Times," will be published in the Proceedings of the Danish Institute at Athens, volume 6. The addition of the article by Vanda Papaefthymiou, archaeologist of the Athenian Asklepieion, was an obvious one since her work encompasses material discussed in several of the conference papers.

Each participant was given free rein regarding the length of their papers, and the editors have not altered their arguments. It is, of course, the editors' hope that these eight articles will offer a fresh look at various aspects of ancient Greek cult.

This book begins, as did the conference, with Lisbeth Bredholt Christensen's penetrating article, "'Cult' in the Study of Religion and Archaeology." Since cult was to be the focal point of the conference, I asked assistant professor Christensen to explore the definition and use of this term within various branches of scholarship. Whereas 'Cult' is not a term widely used in the field of Religion, it is popular and proliferate in the disciplines of Ancient History and Classical and Prehistoric Archaeology. Christensen

suggests that the divergence in its use is due largely to the social focus of ancient history and archaeology in contrast to a focus on texts and literature in the study of religion.

The article by Richard Hamilton, "Basket Case: Altars, Animals and Baskets on Classical Attic Votive Reliefs," uses a statistical approach to analyze the relationship between altars, animals and baskets together with worshippers and deities. He demonstrates that groups of worshippers can be found in two-thirds of all the votive reliefs, and altars in almost half, while animals on votive reliefs can be found in only a quarter, and baskets in only an eighth. Hamilton concludes innovatively that the basket is an attractive visual complement to the animal but in no way essential to the offering represented by the votive.

The next four articles present new material and ideas about individual sanctuaries. The first three investigate the Greek healing god Asklepios and his sanctuary on the South Slope of the Athenian Akropolis, followed by a detailed study of the Philippeion at Olympia.

Bronwen Wickkiser's article, "Banishing Plague: Asklepios, Athens, and the Great Plague Reconsidered," questions long-held assumptions about why Athens imported the cult of Asklepios from Epidaurus in 420 B.C. Although ancient sources are silent about the cause, scholars have long argued that plague in the years 430-426 B.C. was the most immediate factor prompting the importation. Wickkiser points out, however, that the lag between these events renders a direct cause-and-effect relationship dubious at best, and goes on to argue that the nature of ailments Asklepios is known to have treated – chronic ailments, not fatal ones like plague – also makes the god an unlikely candidate to have cured Athenians of this epidemic. These observations open the door to the possibility, if not the likelihood, that in the context of the Peloponnesian War, factors unrelated to physical health alone prompted the importation.

In "Der Altar des Asklepieions von Athen," Vanda Papaefthymiou gives a brief overview of the Asklepieion and a history of its investigation. Her focus, however, is the results of new excavations conducted during summer 2001 in and around the so-called altar. Papaefthymiou presents the pottery from nine small pits and suggests that some of these pits were used for planting.

Michaelis Lefantzis and I re-study the architectural history of the Asklepieion in "The Athenian Asklepieion on the South Slope of the Akropolis: Early Development, ca. 420-360 B.C." We argue that the original Asklepieion of Telemachos was founded on the east terrace and was designed around a central monument that scholars today identify as an altar. We, unconvinced that this monument is indeed an altar, date the earliest phase of this structure to 418/7-416/5 B.C., and identify at least four distinctive phases of construction. In this article the first two construction phases

are investigated in depth after a careful description of the foundations belonging to Phases I-IV.

In "Divine Images and Royal Ideology in the Philippeion at Olympia" Peter Schultz re-examines Leochares' famous portraits of Philip II and his family that were installed in Olympia after the Macedonian triumph at Chaironeia. Three primary questions sustain the paper. First, what is the chronological relationship between the portraits and the architecture of the Philippeion itself? Second, how were the images arranged and what did they look like? And finally, what can the answers to these questions tell us about the function of the Philippeion and role the building played in Philip's pan-Hellenic agenda. Schultz's analysis reveals a number of startling conclusions.

The final two articles move beyond specific sanctuaries to focus on broader contextual issues such as music and ritual. Tore Tvarnø Lind's contribution, "Music and Cult in Ancient Greece: Ethnomusicological Perspectives," investigates the limits of our historical and musical imagination. The article touches upon theoretical, socio-cultural and historical issues, and argues for interdisciplinary and creative approaches to the study of ancient Greek music, including recorded musical reconstructions. Lind sketches how the field of ethnomusicology is valuable to the study of music in ancient Greek culture and cult; he considers the impact of cultural understanding, identity processes and postcolonialism on modern perceptions of ancient music and ritual.

In the final article of the book, "Cultic Persona and the Transmission of the Partheneions," George Hinge argues that the partheneions of Alkman and Pindar were not written for single occasions. Rather, the personal names occurring in these songs were generic role names, or "cultic personae." Both internal and external evidence indicate that the girls were cast for these roles through the kinship structure. Combining literary testimonies and linguistic data, Hinge demonstrates that Alkman's partheneions were part of a living cultic tradition, and that most of the poems were not written down until the Hellenistic age, presumably during the "Spartan Renaissance" under King Agis and King Kleomenes.



# “Cult” in the Study of Religion and Archaeology

*Lisbeth Bredholt Christensen*

Scholars of religion currently study “religion,” “ritual,” “ritual practice,” “myth,” and “narrative” in different forms, both theoretical and empirical. “Cult,” however, is rarely studied nor is it used as a descriptive term as an object of study. Of the few scholars who do use the word, most are educated theologians. They apply the term to Israelite, early Christian or Hellenistic or Old Norse contexts—in other words, contexts related to the Near Eastern worlds.<sup>1</sup> Among sociologists, the term has acquired its own meaning (see below), not related to a traditional definition but linked to the classification of religious communities. In other academic disciplines such as archaeology (prehistorical and classical) or ancient history, scholars are less reticent when speaking about “cult.” In fact, it is more common to refer to “cult” (or “rituals” or “religious practice”) than to “religion.” In what follows, I will examine how “cult” is used in the disciplines mentioned above. Where, exactly, between “religion” and “ritual,” is “cult” to be found?

## **What is studied as religion?**

In the study of religion, “religion” is usually defined as people’s relation to transcendent or supernatural powers.<sup>2</sup> This concept of religion mirrors the method by which religion is studied—that is, via texts. Supernatural or transcendent beings are only recognizable in language or text. The only reason we know a statue represents Zeus rather than any other older man is because the texts tell us that Zeus’ attribute is a thunderbolt. Using the same logic, however, we cannot know whether the Venus of Willendorf represents a goddess or a “normal” woman because we have no linguistic context. Prehistoric archaeology is thus cut off from working with religion the same way text-based disciplines are.

Like “ritual,” “cult” forms a pair with “myth” in what could be called a binary opposition. Traditionally, religion is characterized as consisting of myths and rituals. Which of the two came first and which of the two is the most important has been the subject of innumerable discussions. Fundamental positions are represented by two of the “founding fathers” of the academic study of religion: Edward Burnett Tylor and William Robertson Smith.