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The Communicative Aspect of Festival and Pilgrimage in Greece, Modern and Ancient

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Abstract: During modern and ancient religious festivals in Greece everyone offers what they wish to receive more of in return, based on a logic very similar to the one Hesiod (ca. 700–650 BCE) expresses in his poem "Work and Days" (349 ff.) when he recommends the giving of a large gift in order to get more in return. Today, the significance of gifts and counter-gifts is obvious within Orthodoxy since in Greek terminology *antidōro* signifies the blessed bread (literally, 'counter-gift'), that is, their bread offerings, or gifts, which have been blessed by the priest during the service: what people are preoccupied with during the liturgy is the blessed bread they will obtain when the liturgy is over. During the festival of Agios Nektarios, a piece of the blessed bread might, for instance, be used as a healing remedy.

In the Mediterranean *clientela* system, people employ strategies based upon gifts and benefits to gain return gifts. The gift makes the recipient morally obliged for return giving, a favour for a gift. All personal and social relations rest on expectations of reciprocity. This principle also pervades the relations between people and their saints. The religion reflects a culture in which reciprocity and feasts are important elements. As the British anthropologist Edmund Leach once stated in his book *Culture and Communication: The Logic by Which Symbols Are Connected. An Introduction to the Use of Structuralist Analysis in Social Anthropology* (1986), the logic of sacrifice illustrates how a religious ritual serves to express a relationship between the human world and the other world. By making a gift to the Gods, the Gods are compelled to give back benefits to man. This logic is also found elsewhere in the Mediterranean, and in the ancient Greek, Roman and Jewish worlds.

This article, therefore, has not dealt with commerce and traditions per se, but rather the economic foundation of modern and ancient Greek religion by discussing some topics related to the communicative aspect of Greek religious festivals.

Keywords: communication, economy, festival, modern and ancient Greece, religion, rituals, values

Introduction: Religious Communication

A prerequisite to understanding the phenomenon of the festival is the concept of religious communication – people's communication with supernatural powers.[1] People must influence the deities and supernatural powers in order to obtain a share in their power, and in the same way as one switches on the cooker to control the heat, one may influence the supernatural powers so that they act in a desired way. Influence, control and manipulation are performed by physical actions, words, signs, or unspoken requests (Blum, Blum 1970: 250; Spradley, McCurdy 1980: 259).

In antiquity, the daily life of human beings was inhabited by a host of holy mediators who stood between the individual person and the more powerful deities in Heaven or Hades. Every household had its own personal cult in which one sought to influence both the living and the spirits of the dead through rituals and offerings or sacrifices. The same is true of the saints and various spirits today. The methods one has available to influence these powers are prayer, offering or sacrifice, and magic.

The magic, or strategies, human beings use to control supernatural power, accessing the supernatural world for benefit, include the carrying of amulets. Using magic is an active process, whether one consults a magician, buys a charm and then chants it regularly, or drinks a magic potion. There are many ancient texts of charms for relief from illness or affliction.

There are two fundamental laws for the operation of magic: the law of similarity and the law of contamination.[2] The first law involves the manipulation of something corresponding to that which one wishes to invoke. This may be done by presenting large fertility symbols as part of a carnival procession. The second law implies that two items which have been in contact with one another retain some influence over each other after being separated. These two laws are known by the common term *sympathetic magic* and are a persistent characteristic of ancient as well as contemporary festivals.

Theoretically magical rituals can be divided into two types. The first has been characterised as 'operative' rituals, where the human beings serve the deities based upon the law of 'gift and counter-gift' ('*do ut des*'). This is the sacrifice. The other type consists of 'redemptive' and apotropaic rites. These are performed out of fear based on the rule, 'do and avoid' ('*do ut abeas*' – 'I give that you may keep away'), and presuppose the threat of fear, malevolence or infection which must be removed or warded off. This is purification or cleansing (cf. Blum, Blum 1965: 33 f. and Harrison 1977: 134 ff., 275 ff.). There is, nonetheless, the problem of theoretically separating sacrifice and purification. The reason for this is that what is identified as purification in practical terms often takes the form of a sacrifice, while the effect of divine wrath can often be washed away when it emerges in the form of an illness.[3] A sacrifice or other operating ritual, such as a festival, cannot take place

before the site or participating individuals have been purified, by means of fasting, sexual abstinence, cleaning, and so on. The two systems involve two kinds of power, the good and the evil.

For the individual, good and evil magic exist, and is employed according to the occasion. In the simplest form, a curse is the hope to do harm, while a blessing has the opposite aim. Direct magic implies that the magic found in the apotropaic function of symbols – such as amulets – is at work. Conversely, we have indirect magic, according to which deities, spirits and the like must be invoked in order to do their work. Both in modern and ancient Greece, magic is crucial in daily life and critical situations.

As regards healing and purification, there is a fundamental phenomenon which involves both apotropaic rites and symbols, not only with regard to the worldview in the Mediterranean region, but also to providing a better understanding of the ancient and modern festivals, namely the *Evil* (envious) *Eye*. The Evil Eye represents the belief that the power of the eye can cause sudden harm to another person or to this person's possessions. The guilty person, who is often an ecclesiastic or a witch, is not always conscious of their power.[4] People carry amulets to be protected against the Evil Eye.

The thinking behind the concept of the Evil Eye is the desire to keep potential powers of change in check, a kind of social control (Maloney 1976b: vi; Esler 1994: Ch. 2). In the Mediterranean world's patriarchal family ideology, women, gossip, and foreign magicians have potential subversive powers; therefore they are feared and must be kept in their place. The sexual division in the society is represented by the terms 'shame' and 'honour'.

The ancient version of the female genitals was described as "what is covered with shame" (Ancient Greek. *aidoion*/*aidoia*, private parts, pudenda; Modern Greek *aidoio*, pudenda, vulva), having the same meaning as the modern dropi, and thereby a label for woman. This is understandable given the background of the many cases of which we have testimony regarding the female sex's connection with important processes that keep society going, such as through 'shameful actions'. Several tales tell us about brave women exposing their private parts to ward off their enemies (Plut. *Mor*. 246a, 248b). Their genitals serve the same purpose as the gilt head of Medusa – the Gorgon – with its fringe of snakes; that is, its apotropaic function along with other genitalised amulets.

The desire to keep potential powers of change in check, however, is not restricted to the relationship between men and women. If someone tried to surpass a deity, they were forced back into their place by the deities using their knowledge of magic, because they were eager to retain their precedence. The Goddess and principal weaver Athena, with the help of her Evil Eye, for instance, took revenge on the weaver Arakhne by transforming the unfortunate girl into the first spider,

doomed to spin and weave forever (Ov. *Met*. 6.1–145). Accordingly, the Evil Eye can be a deity's avenging force, a continuous evil strength like a virus or a plague, which must be broken with the help of amulets.

Offerings or sacrifice as well as prayer, are means of obtaining something material or of purifying oneself for something immaterial. Since all beings are living and self-determined, and have energy and power in varying quantities, an intelligent person can ally her- or himself with friendly powers, and with their help manipulate and control less benevolent powers. The reason for this is that we produce effects on one another through physical actions or by means of symbols and signs. Upwards in the hierarchy, the communication takes place with the help of intermediaries or mediators, who may be minor deities or deceased or living persons.

The deceased mediators are ancestors, demi-Goddesses or demi-Gods, heroes or heroines. In Christian terminology the latter two are called saints. These belong to the death cult, which in Greece and the rest of the Mediterranean region may be considered from the perspective of mentality, as this cult is marked by continuity. This is expressed through the ancient ideological cult of heroes and the practice of sainthood within the Christian ideology, as well as the *marabouts* (holy men) in North Africa.[5] The principle behind the sacrifice is, as already mentioned, the law of 'gifts and counter-gifts'; in connection with the death cult one sees how sacrifice brings the living into contact with the world of the deceased, as Odysseus experienced when he needed help from the dead (*Od*. 11). But how do people obtain answers from the supernatural?

Communication with the Divinity

Since there are supernatural powers, humans must be able to communicate with them, and communication from deities to human beings occurs through divine epiphany or revelation, spirit possession, and prophecies with the help of religious specialists.

Myths constitute a kind of communication because they reveal religious knowledge. Spirit possession is a common and direct form of ritual communication wherein the deity enters into and controls a person's behaviour, as we find in connection with *Agios* (Saint) Kōnstantinos and the *Anastenarides* (those who celebrate the Anastenaria festival) or the ancient cult of Dionysos. A possessing spirit can speak to people, communicate messages, or reveal its presence in other ways. The meaning of the messages needs to be interpreted by a priesthood, religious specialists who act as prophets. So the deities foretell the fate of human beings, and this commonly occurs through other living beings (Spradley, McCurdy 1980: 265–271).

A portent reveals the unknown in the present or future. In the Greek cultural region, the portent is manifested through human beings, snakes, birds, animal

cries, reading the intestines of sacrificed animals, dreams, oracles spoken by people in contact with the supernatural, natural phenomena, and so on. Among the symbolic actions performed by animals, one may mention the ancient sacrificial ox which decided its own destiny by going to the altar and eating of the grain (Paus. 1.24,4).[6] A modern parallel is found in the sheep of the village of Agia Elenē, although the 1992 version of the sacrificial animal did not go as willingly to its death as one might have wished (Håland 2017: Ch. 4, esp. 235 and Fig. 73). In the world of Homer, the divine epiphany is often in the guise of individual persons, such as when the Goddess Athena approaches Telemakhos in the likeness of Mentes (*Od*. 1.102– 112, cf. 17.483–488). The remote Zeus usually portended his decisions through natural phenomena, such as lightning flashes and thunder (*Il.* 17.593–596), birds (*Od.* 2.146–156), the rainbow (*Il.* 17.547–552), or the wind's whistling in the holy oak trees by his oracle in Dodona (*Il.* 16.233239). The meanings of the different portents from the top of the religious hierarchy are interpreted by the institutionalised priesthood, such as the *hiereus* (priest/holy, term for magistrates) of Delphi. They interpreted the meaning of the messages from the earth (Diod. 16.26) and Apollo to the priestess Pythia. There were also itinerant diviners, an Assyrian magician for instance, who played an important role in establishing cultural contact (Burkert 1983: 116). Moreover, a society might have a famous seer in its midst, for exampleTeiresias in Thebes (Soph. *OT*. 297–463). Dreams, prophecies and oracles are also important today, such as the account of *Agia* (Saint) Pelagia's dreaming the *Panagia* (Virgin Mary), which led to the finding of the icon on the island of Tinos.[7] Divine epiphany also occurs through dance, as in the modern Anastenaria or the ancient mystery cults.

Prophecies sent by the deities are commonly interpreted by religious specialists. These include the magician and the medicine man or woman who controls supernatural power on behalf of the people, often in order to cure them or influence the course of nature. Another specialist is the priest or priestess, who is a male or female mediator between the supernatural and human worlds because they have knowledge of the official symbolic system (Blum, Blum 1970: 287; Spradley, McCurdy 1980: 268, 385).

After having presented the way in which people invoke the powers and the latter's replies, the festival will now be considered. Since the festival is a unique means of communication at both the inter-human level and between humans and the stronger powers, it is important to discuss the communication aspect of festivals per se.

What is a Festival, and Why and How do People Celebrate Festivals?

According to Strabo (9.419), people came together to sacrifice and drink as a community, and in this way the *polis* (city-state) was created. Many sources emphasise the importance of citizens' participation in feasts.[8] In this context, the (festal) meal or *dais* (banquet) was also important. Ancient festivals can be considered as religious drinking sessions.[9] The significance of festivals is seen both in the ancient religious festival cycle and in the modern cycle where the church's calendar has been assimilated with seasonal festivals within the agricultural calendar, just as the ancient official ideological Athenian calendar was. The festivals were previously connected to a Goddess, such as Demeter or Athena, a God, such as Dionysos, or a deceased hero or heroine. Today they are connected with a deceased saint; in particular, we encounter the life cycles of the Panagia and Christ.

To be a Greek was and is characterised by a common language and religion (Hdt. 8.144,2). Ancient religion was not a holy text, but action: rituals, festivals, processions, athletic competitions, oracles, gifts and animal sacrifices. Many of these elements are also found in modern cult, where the importance of the everyday symbols of a popular cult recur in the official religion.

The festival therefore functions as a way to establish the connection between the individual and the supernatural on the one hand and between the individual and the greater society on the other. As with the modern festival dedicated to the Panagia on Tinos, the ancient Panathenaia festival served to renew and strengthen individual member's solidarity with wider society.

Festivals should be considered rituals performed at periodic recurring critical periods or at passages in the relationship between nature and human beings, and between people on the inter-human level. On the level of macro-society, rituals are also often performed in order to end crises which arise between members of society. Moreover, ritual ceremonies are performed during passages in the human life cycle. Accordingly, the festival celebrates passages pertaining to everything that exists in nature, both for the human being, society, and the cosmos in general.

It has been claimed that there is a difference between the ritual ceremonies performed during periods of crisis in human life, the "rites de passage" at birth, marriage and death, and the annual festivals as they often are celebrated in modern societies (Abrahams 1984: 167, but cf. 169). The difference has great implications for the ways in which celebration is launched, since in the first of these rituals the power of the celebration has already been activated, but in the annual festivals one must often initiate one's own energies, even when organising the ceremonies for mutual amusement and profit. This especially concerns festivals celebrated in societies that no longer depend unilaterally on agriculture for their economic base, such as

present-day Greece, where a great part of the income is derived from work migration and a constantly growing tourist industry. It also concerns festivals celebrated at some point during the year when nothing especially important occurs in the agricultural cycle – in a quiet period within the production and reproduction cycle of the resources upon which the ongoing condition and continuity characteristics of the society are built – when the festival must literally be activated with a bang.

I cannot say that this statement relates to the modern festivals I have worked on (Håland 2017, 2019, see also 2014, 2023), since all of them are seasonal festivals symbolising important passages in the agricultural year in the same way that all the ancient festivals are. Among the modern festivals we encounter midwinter, late winter, spring, and early and late summer festivals. Indeed, most of these are late winter or spring festivals that symbolise the passage from winter to the fertile part of the agricultural year, when the food will ripen and be harvested. People celebrate festivals before the passage of especially important periods within the agricultural year, and the two most important points in the agrarian cycle are sowing and spring, for both the modern and ancient farmer. Although modern people do not depend unilaterally on agriculture as the economic basis for their sustenance, human beings still make their living from the harvest of the soil, and nature can still be difficult to deal with. If the rains are not sufficient before the time of sowing in autumn, the farmer knows that it is unlikely that the crop will be a good one. Consequently, many festivals were dedicated to the grain mother, Demeter at this crucial time of the year in ancient Greece, just as people today celebrate the Panagia, the protectress of sowing, in Eleusis, for example, where she also has a church inside of the archaeological site where the Eleusinian Mysteries were celebrated in antiquity (Figure 1).



Fig. 1. Women are busy organising their offerings of bread, wine, olive oil and cakes before the start of the liturgy on the eve of the festival dedicated to the Panagia *Meso-sporitissa* (*mesos* middle, half; *sporos*, *spora* seed, sowing, "Panagia Half-Way-Through-the-Sowing") – the "Presentation of the Panagia in the Temple" – Eleusis, 20 November 2011. Photo: E. J. Håland.

If the sprouting of the grain has not reached a certain stage by the time of the first frost in early January, the farmer may lose the entire crop. Thus follows the importance of the Babo festival and carnivals such as the Haloa festival in antiquity. The "White Week" after Easter is also crucial since the whole crop may be lost if it starts to hail, which is why one encounters all the rituals after Easter and around the first of May. This is not only due to the "Resurrection" on Easter Sunday and the subsequent week known as the "White Week" after Easter. This week is indeed "white", but hail is also white, and in June the grain is about to be reaped (Håland 2017: Ch. 4–6). Even if the agricultural population who perform the rituals today have modern technology and new ways to improve the agricultural productivity of their fields (machinery and chemical fertilisers), these improvements have not given them control over the vicissitudes of nature. The survival of the community still depends on natural events beyond the farmer's control. Whether the reason is that the ritual is a compensation for technology or that the people do not really trust the technology, 'homemade' sympathetic magic so important to the fertility cult is still performed. In this way, they attempt to influence fertility directly. Accordingly, the festival rituals represent a worldview belonging to a traditional agricultural society. This is not contradicted by the fact that the summer festivals of August are celebrated in a month of holidays and leisure. The

ancients did the same, since the end of July and the first part of August, which followed the harvest and the threshing of the grain, was a period of leisure as well (Hes. *Op*. 607 f.; Arist. *Eth. Nic*. 8.1160a19–30). We are dealing with cyclical festivals in which belief in transformation is immanent as long as both humans and the natural world of which they are part change (Håland 2005, 2017; Kyriakidou-Nestoros 1986; Hart 1992: 90 ff., 225 ff.), therefore the aforementioned rigid division between annual festivals and passage rites needs to be nuanced. The reason for this is that all of the aforementioned festivals essentially celebrate or praise the earth's capacities to grow.

Festivals are celebrated in order to maintain the cycle of fertility, by acknowledging the respective places of humankind and the powers of nature. The festival accomplishes this by seizing the process and reinforcing it based on the logic of sympathetic magic. In this way the community honours nature while giving humanity its place in the larger scheme of things. Fertility, in such a world, is understood as the capacities of nature enhanced by humans, acting together in serious play. Therefore the most powerful holiday symbols are expressed in a language that reflects the processes of life, marriage, death and regeneration, ripening, harvesting, and lying fallow.

In the festivals we often find that multiple meanings appear in symbols, costumes and masks in an extravagance of size and colour. A playful distortion of nature, the world, or society as well as overeating and a great consumption of alcohol are characteristic, especially for the carnival festivals (Abrahams 1984: 163 ff.). These motifs underscore the wish for growth and are therefore an example of sympathetic magic. This is clearly expressed by the symbols carried in procession through the streets of the town during the carnival season.

At this level, the festival is a ceremony performed between – and involving – people and the divine to renew their mutual contract. In all societies it is essential for life to maintain the food supply. To secure the crop in peasant society, the supernatural forces that govern weather and wind, the deities, must, with the help of sacrifices, be influenced to be kindly disposed. To this end, a festival is held in their honour (Harrison 1977: 138 ff., 275–294, cf. Wolf 1966: 97 ff.).

Both the modern and ancient Greeks live in the same geographical region and under the same climatic conditions. Now as then, Greek society is mainly agricultural, and the mentality of the farmers is still reflected in the festival cycle. Modern farmers perform the same ceremonies at the same time of year as their ancient equivalent: before the sowing they pray to ensure a good crop, and at the harvest they make a thanksgiving offering by celebrating a festival. In that way the ancient farmers secured their future relations with the divinities, as modern farmers do with the saints and other deceased.

The following account gives a good explanation of what a festival might also be, and why and how it takes place: in a bloody and prolonged dispute between two families, the village's representatives try to put matters right. A bull is slaughtered in front of the entire village. Next, people consume a traditional dish collectively as a communal meal. Another way to end a vendetta might be to organise a wedding in which bride and groom symbolise the reconciliation between the two parties involved (Bourdieu 1966: 236 f.).

A festival is therefore a ceremony performed between people in order to renew the rules of society or the social contract in potential periods of crisis. In this way the social order is maintained by purifying the community of disorder, and integrity is restored. The special function of the ceremony is to sanction the social units and the relationship between them.

Festivals are generally connected with eagerly-anticipated participatory cultural events. The critical transitional periods in the human experience are, as mentioned, marked by birth, puberty, marriage and death. As regards work, the planting, sowing and harvesting or gathering of crops are celebrated. The annual seasons and the deceased mediators, or intermediaries between humans and deities, are, for instance, marked by the Christmas celebrations and processions during saints' festivals. Improved social status might be obtained by celebrating *Potlatch festivals*. A potlatch is a feast celebrated with gift-giving and the destruction of articles of value, which demonstrates wealth and status. In this way people can move upwards or downwards within the social hierarchy. Thanksgiving festivals are generally also common within a society. Some of these events are linked to the life cycle of a particular person. Other events are celebrated within the family, the neighbourhood, village or greater community, such as an ancient *polis*, the modern nation-state, or the Orthodox Church. The different rituals, ceremonies or festivals are connected with special kinds of finery, decoration, music, dance, food and drink, performance or presentation, and physical and cultural surrounding. Sometimes masks are included, and the celebrations are usually carried out in connection with a specific altar, saint shrine or sanctuary (Turner 1984b: 12).

The religious ceremony is an official and formal performance of a ritual. Sometimes the participants only comprise the members of an individual family. Through the rituals people celebrate both themselves and the supernatural powers that are the source and origin of all phenomena (Turner, Turner 1984: 201, cf. Turner 1984b: 16).

It has been argued that the social organisation of a meal is also a ritual ceremony (Wuthnow 1986: 112). The united family is equivalent to any society which comes together periodically in order to confirm group affiliation, and the organising of the meal or daily dining customs have their ritual aspects in memorised and restricted codes, such as the organisation of a speech. The communal meal and

particular foods have a special function in all celebrations. Today one encounters the Anastenarides' communal meal of the sacrificial lamb, and in the village of Agia Paraskeuē people boil the traditional dish *kesketsi*, while the festival terminates with a vast communal meal, the Charlamelia. Festival participants 'offer' the food to themselves and the saints by providing for the banquets. The meal is important both in the modern and ancient festivals – the core of the festival is indeed a communal meal which the community members offer to themselves and their deities. Prior to the feast, a fixed period is often marked with sexual abstinence and fasting. Concerning the organisation of the festival, the community may establish a special surplus stock in order to procure the provisions for it. In modern society the villagers most often take charge of the economic organisation of the festival for the local patron saint. The official ideology, represented by the Orthodox Church, often opposes these popular festivals or has an ambivalent relationship to them. This is because many within the Church, such as the local priest in Agia Elenē, think they represent "pagan traditions", despite the fact that they are officially accepted (Håland 2017: Ch. 4).[10]

In the organising of ancient festivals, the wealthy gained prestige by giving rich gifts, that is, by fulfilling various *leitourgiai* (liturgies) or "services for the people", for example as a *chorēgos* ('sponsor', the leader of a dramatic chorus), the person appointed to train and equip one of the choruses in the Dionysos festivals' tragedies. To be appointed a *chorēgos* was considered a burden for those appointed to this duty, but at the same time it was a source of political and social credit, as when for the purpose of propaganda the orator Demosthenes directs his audience's attention towards his patriotism in serving as *chorēgos* for the boys' dithyrambic chorus around 351/350 BCE, even ordering golden crowns for the entire chorus while he wore a gold-embroidered robe (Dem. 21.16 ff.). This organising is a parallel to the arranging of contemporary festivals, such as regards the sacrificial bull in Agia Paraskeuē, which is dedicated by a wealthy emigrant, the money collected during today's festivals in the villages of Koimēsē, Agia Elenē and Agia Paraskeuē, and the auctions in the villages of Olympos and Agia Paraskeuē. The same regards the dishes of food offered at the graves during the ritual on "White Tuesday" following Easter Sunday in Olympos, the food collected as well as the surplus given "to the bags" in Agia Elenē and the village of Melikē, that is, what is collected during "the circuit of the houses" carried out by the "Thracians" or Kōstilides, in a context in which it carries prestige to give as much as possible. Therefore people pay close attention to what different people give, and it is greatly lamented if any household fails to put offerings into the bags of the three women who bring up the rear of the procession of the Anastenarides in Agia Elenē. In former times a poor villager was always chosen to be the Kalogeros (monk) during carnival, thus providing him with food. Therefore the touring of the houses functioned as a kind of social security in which they collected grain, eggs and money.

So the communication between humans and deities has two aspects: material and immaterial. The immaterial aspect is the prayer, and a festival held in honour of the supernatural might generally be seen as a rite accompanying a prayer for collaboration or help. However, I argue that it is the material part of the festival, the sacrifice or offering (cf. Leach 1986: Ch. 18), that is the most important aspect. In the Mediterranean region this is usually labelled as a votive offering (van Straten 1981: 65–151). The central act in the ancient festivals is the blood sacrifice or a bloodless offering, such as corn cakes. Sacrifices and offerings are also common in the modern festivals.



Fig. 2. Copy of the Great Eleusinian votive relief, fifth century BCE, representing the Eleusinian deities blessing and offering ears of wheat to Triptolemos in order for him to bestow the blessing in turn on humankind. Archaeological Museum of Eleusis (Original: National Archaeological Museum Athens). Photo: E. J. Håland.

The Ancient Greek terminology for the festival consists of *panēgyris* (public festival) and *panēgyrisō* (to hold or be present at a festival). In Modern Greek, *panēgyri* signifies a festival on the day of the patron saint, but it also signifies something more, specifically, a fair. The fair was important in antiquity as well, typically the main attraction. In ancient Athens, a fair took place on the first day of the month, which was the holiest.[11] Scholarship has also drawn attention to how the *Homeric Hymn to Demeter* (*HHD*) describes the initiates' wish to purchase or acquire an afterlife through the Eleusinian Mysteries. A relevant illustration might be an Eleusinian

classical relief dedicated by a wealthy *mystēs* (one initiated) which depicts Demeter and Korē with Triptolemos standing between them when he receives his mission (Figure 2).[12] The fair is also important in relation to the modern festivals, where one encounters numerous booths, both permanent and movable (Håland 2017: Ch. 4; Hart 1992: 228). Concerning the function of the transaction in the context of religion, one can mention the original Greek significance of the Latin term *basilica* (Ancient Greek: *basilikē stoa*, a hall divided into aisles by columns), literally a 'royal stoa', serving as the tribunal chamber of a king. Later, it came to signify a Roman public building where courts were held or town halls usually adjacent to the main *forum*, or marketplace. We are in other words dealing with a commercial building. In contemporary Greek Orthodox and Catholic villages the marketplace is also commonly located next to the church.[13] The commercial connection is likewise indicated in the cleansing of the temple narrative, which tells of Jesus expelling the merchants and money changers from the temple (Matt. 21:12–14). Here we see how a new ideology takes issue with the usual activity taking place in a basilica. But through the religious communication in this as well as in other examples we also see that the economy is religious, and that the offering is the means of communication. This is clearly illustrated by the rituals that commonly take place in the Church of the Annunciation on Tinos, where, for instance, a female pilgrim arrives bringing oil, bread, flowers and 5,000 drachmae (ca. 35 Euros); her name is written into the liturgy book for the performance of a healing liturgy at 7 am the next morning (Figure 3).



Fig. 3. A pilgrim has just arrived at the Church of the Annunciation on Tinos, bringing gifts, and her name is written into the liturgy book for the performance of a healing liturgy.
Photo: E. J. Håland.

The same is experienced in the rituals taking place at the cemetery, which also indicates the important function of gift exchange in communication with the supernatural.

For a sick woman and her family magico-religious healing was a more accessible and less expensive alternative than physicians both earlier and today (Håland 2023, esp. Ch. 4 also for the following). People consider actions to express their piety effectively, and expect some kind of practical this-world benefit such as healing as a reward; the religious actions of one person can facilitate the healing of another, such as when a pilgrimage mother crawls on her knees to the church on Tinos with a sick child on her back in the hope of healing the child. Otherwise mothers may come as pilgrims on behalf of their children, as did the ancient Arata's mother when making her pilgrimage from Lacedaimon to the healing God Asklepios' temple in Epidauros on behalf of her daughter who suffered from dropsy (oedema). She carried out a type of ritual action, known as incubation, at healing sites that is part of a pilgrimage process. People travel to a sacred site, purify themselves, offer sacrifices and prayers, and then sleep there. They hope to have a dream or vision, in which the healing deity will appear and give advice or perform a miracle. In antiquity the dream advice was often a complicated set of actions to be performed, or a prescription to be taken. People most often incubate for their own healing, and there is epigraphic evidence of women incubating at temples and being cured. Inscriptions from the Asklepios shrine record several instances, such as cures of problematically extended periods of pregnancy, infertility, blindness, and tapeworm. People had to offer something to be cured, such as when the God said he would cure a woman, "but she" had "to pay a fee…dedicating a silver pig" (*IG* 4^2, 1, 121, 33–41=LiDonnici 1995: 88–89 (no. A4)). The various parts of the church buildings and furnishings, such as those of the sanctuary on Tinos today, very often consist of gifts such as doors and benches. These are offerings from people who have been healed, and the names of the donors are written on nameplates affixed to the dedications. Among the famous gifts is a marble fountain donated by a Muslim official who was cured of syphilis. Elsewhere, such as in Olympos, the dedicators are often emigrants, and since their names also are written on nameplates, they are remembered.

Another type of ritual action related to religious healing is ex-voto offerings. These objects are and were deposited at temples and shrines. They serve as a potent promissory note, a working spiritual gift in hope of a future benefit, or a thanksgiving offering given in gratitude for a received benefit. A variety of things might serve this function. Many of these objects are realistic renditions of body parts. Some apply to either gender, such as stylised versions of ears or eyes, and in these cases we cannot determine whether a man or woman gave the objects. Other objects are gender-specific: small representations of a uterus or rounded breast demonstrate women's needs and involvement in ex-votos. Still other ex-votos are plaques with inscriptions or illustrations of scenes of offerings, dreams, or miraculous healings.

At times, these objects appear to be stock and mass-produced, while others clearly were commissioned specifically by the donor. A vase painting shows a woman carrying a jug in one hand and an offering plate of fruit, cakes and a lighted candle in the other. She approaches a seated Goddess depicted in larger scale (Figure 4). From above hang two votive legs and a votive hand as well as three wreaths. In the centre of the image there is a convergence of hands as the worshipper holds up the offerings, the Goddess stretches out her right hand to receive them, and the votive hand hangs above almost touching the Goddess's hand, emphasising the aspect of gift exchange in the scene.

A third sort of religious action is an appeal to a holy man or woman for a cure, such as the pilgrims coming to the sanctuaries of Agios Nektarios on the island of Aegina or the Panagia of Tinos to be healed for an illness. These pilgrimage sites are visited by sick people in a similar way to the Asklepios shrines in antiquity. A few examples from the accounts of Jesus' healing ministry provide data on the issue of women's health. The episode of the woman with the flow of blood illustrates the active role of a patient seeking healing. In Mark's Gospel, we learn about a woman who had heard of Jesus and then deliberately sought him out, confident he would heal her. She reached out and touched Jesus's robe and was healed. Jesus commended her initiative, saying, "Your faith has saved you". The account stresses the active role she has played in her healing (Mark 5: 25–34).



Fig. 4. Boeotian red-figured krater, ca. 400 BCE,
National Archaeological Museum Athens, 1393.
Photo: Irini Miari.

Like the ex-votos, at times the charms in the *Magical Papyri* are gender-neutral, relating to fever, headache, or eye and ear problems. A few deals with women's issues, hardening of the breasts, pregnancy and birth, or problematic menstrual flow. Amulets were also used in gynecological contexts. Objects associated with holy people in a Christian context function similarly to amulets in a pagan context. Today, people are healed by touching various saints' relics, such as Agios Gerasimos', and his coffin is coated with ex-votos. Holy water or oil that has been consecrated on Tinos or Aegina is kept in homes and is used to effect cures.

Festivals, Rituals, Gifts and Counter-Gifts

During modern and ancient festivals in Greece everyone offers what they wish to receive more of in return, based on a logic very similar to the one Hesiod (ca. 700–650 BCE) expresses in his poem "Work and Days" (*Op.* 349 ff.) when he recommends the giving of a large gift in order to receive more in return. Today, the significance of gifts and counter-gifts is obvious within Orthodoxy, since in Greek terminology *antidōro* signifies the blessed bread (literally, 'counter-gift'), peoples' bread offerings, or gifts that have been blessed by the priest during the service; what people are preoccupied with during the liturgy is the blessed bread they will obtain when the liturgy is over. During the festival of Agios Nektarios, a piece of blessed bread might, for instance, be used as a healing remedy.

As mentioned above, by means of prayers and sacrifices the human being acquires a share in the benefits of nature administered by the deities. These are gifts that are implemented by mediators. In the *clientela* system found in the Mediterranean world, people employ strategies based upon gifts and favours in order to obtain services or gifts in return. The gift makes the recipient morally obliged to reciprocate: receiving evokes obligations for return giving, a favour for a gift. All personal and social relations rest on expectations of reciprocity. This principle lies behind both the relationships between people and those between them and the saints. The religion therefore reflects a culture in which reciprocity or return gifts and festivals are important factors. It is crucial to understand these key cultural conceptions in order to comprehend the worldview in the region (Di Tota 1981). The logic behind the sacrifice demonstrates how a religious ritual serves to express a connection between the human and divine worlds. By making an offering or giving a gift to the deities, they are, due to the idea of reciprocity, obliged to give the people benefits in return, according to the anthropologist Edmund Leach (1986: Ch. 18). This logic is found all over the Mediterranean. Leach provides an important interpretation of Judeo-Christian sacrifice, in which he indicates that "the principle of reciprocity pervades all social behaviour" (Leach 1986: 6). Therefore, from an ideological perspective, God gave Jesus to humankind and Abraham almost

sacrificed Isaac. In Christianity the sacrifice only emerges as a symbolic substitution 'as a reference to mythology', according to which the 'God-man', Christ, was killed by evil people. But with the help of a complicated transformation, this has become a sacrifice for posterity because it was wanted by God. The sacrifice is now an incessant channel through which the grace of God flows to the believers. Seen ideologically, the donor of the sacrifice is Christ himself, and the priest who offers bread and wine to the believers as the body and blood of Christ repeats the sacrifice by order of the divine donor. The Christian Mass is a transformation of the Jewish exodus from Egypt, and the crucified Christ is the Easter Lamb. The bread and the wine are associated with the sacrificial meat, metaphorically and metonymically.[14]

In modern Greece, many people, especially men, only go to church during the most important festivals, and for many Easter is the most important of these. Eucharist is the central ceremony and is understood as the sacrifice of Christ's blood. This sacrifice traverses the barrier between God and humankind which was created by the Sin of the ancestor, Adam. At Christ's death his blood became a symbol of the connection between God and humanity, traversing the barrier between them; every Easter when the priest proclaims that "Christ is Risen" (resurrected), people know that his redemptive blood saves them from being handed over to the Devil (Campbell 1966: 152 f., 158 f.).

One is reminded of a people's ability to transform a new ideology so that it becomes adjusted to their deeper rules, or mentality, and the various levels of meaning within their worldview. It has been argued that the Greeks took over Jewish sacrificial customs, but this is not necessarily entirely correct.[15] The reason for this is that their pre-existing customs with regard to the mentioned logic behind the sacrifice are the same as they were in Homeric times. The animal or object that is sacrificed can be seen as a symbol for the donor of the sacrifice. When a mediator, the priest, performs the sacrifice, it takes place in a liminal zone (by the altar) which is a taboo area for the common people, but with this act the donor of the sacrifice provides a bridge between the world of the deities and the human world, across which strength flows from the deities to the self-same donor. During initiation the person is divided into two, a pure and an impure part, and the latter part is left behind while the pure becomes the new status. During sacrifices, the sacrificial animal plays the part of the initiated. Likewise, the donor of the sacrifice is purified (Leach 1986: 84).

The festival symbolises the connection between this world and the supernatural. It is a votive gift, because it represents an offering and consequently functions as a gift exchange between the two parties. I consider the festival as a ceremony or ritual, an offering or a gift which the community – and the individual – gives themselves and the deities in order to renew the contract between them.

That the festival matters to everybody is demonstrated by the enormous crowds of pilgrims who arrive on Tinos today, including many youths and young couples,

and 'crawl up to the Panagia', with everyone kissing the icon piously before dedicating their votive gift and fetching holy earth and water in exchange for a cure. The festival is also an occasion to meet people, with emigrants and students returning home to attend the most important festival in their village, just as many probably 'came home', for instance, to the Panathenaia in ancient Athens.

Conclusion

This article dealing with festivals and communication can be summarised by emphasising that in modern society magic is employed by people who are well-educated and financially affluent as well as by people who are marginal within society. The point is that the magic works, and an important magical means of communication is in fact the festival and all the factors of which it consists. So, although this article, therefore, has not dealt with commerce and traditions per se, it has rather focussed on the economic foundation of modern and ancient Greek religion by discussing some topics related to the communicative aspect of Greek religious festivals, thus examining the material at a deeper level.

Scholars working on the ancient period may prefer to argue that the economic aspect was embedded within society (cf. Finley 1975), since economy as well as commerce are modern analytic categories not used by the ancients, although they were very aware of its importance as illustrated by Hesiod's advice concerning gifts. The same regards the economic aspect being embedded within religion (Håland 2017: Ch. 6, see now also, inter alia, Collar and Kristensen eds. 2020) as illustrated by the importance of exchange within practical religion which the ancients were very aware of, as indicated by Hesiod. Plato (*Euthphr*. 14c–15b on), who lived several centuries later, is more straightforward on the topic claiming that piety is a trading skill (*emporike techne*). However, this may also be the reality in the modern Greek world, since one may find a sign on a special offering box inside an Athenian church announcing *louloudia gia ton stolismo* (flowers for decoration). The word money is not mentioned, but the slot in the offering box clearly means that visitors may put money here for flowers for decoration in connection with the upcoming festival (Håland 2023: 93). This is indeed the way religious festivals are financed in Greece, specifically, by gifts – often monetary, but also others, a sacrificial animal, for instance – given by the participants in expectation of a favour in return, or as a thanksgiving offering for a favour already received. Of course, gift exchange with the deities emphasising the reciprocal, obligatory aspect of the gift may also be seen as including a commercial aspect, especially from a modernistic perspective (see Håland 2017: Ch. 2 on the modernist-primitivist debate). After all, Strabo not only claimed that *polis* was a product of festivals. He also stated that

a panegyris, or general festival, is a kind of commercial affair (10.5,4), as we have also seen in this article.

Notes

[1] Spradley/McCurdy 1980: 386 provide a definition of the supernatural. Cf. 252 and, e.g., Thuc. 1.123, 1.128, 1.134 for ancient Greece. Martin 2004, however, argues that the concept of the supernatural did not exist in antiquity, but is of a more recent (18th cent.) date. See, nonetheless, Stewart 1991: e.g., 128; Psychogiou 2008, cf. Håland 2017: Ch. 3. Håland 2019: Ch. 2 provides a more comprehensive argument of the following.

[2] Håland 2017: Ch. 3 discusses Frazer 1987: 11–48.

[3] Parker 1985: 10 and Ch. 7. Cf. Hdt. 6.91; Soph. OC. 466–492; Eur. HF. 922 ff.: for antiquity and Aikaterinidēs 1979; Blum/Blum 1970: 137 modern circumstances. Jim 2014 argues for challenging the "do ut des" perspective, by focusing on notions such as gratitude and thanksgiving. As I have shown in several contexts (for instance, Håland 2017 vol 2: 7), gift exchange does not exclude thanksgiving offerings, rather the opposite.

[4] See Håland 2017: Ch. 3, 2023: Ch. 8 for discussion. Cf., e.g., Maloney 1976b: vi. The eye kills: Ap. Rhod. 4.1669 ff.; HHD. 227: the threatening gaze of witchcraft.

[5] Håland 2014 examines the death cult in Greece. The topic is also discussed in Håland 2017: Ch. 6.

[6] See also Gernet 1981: 328–331; van Straten 1995.

[7] In 2007, one of my informants, an Athenian woman in her fifties, told me that she was healed in her left leg on 7 August 2000, after a dream in which the Panagia had demanded that she go to Tinos and light a candle. Since then, she has gone to Tinos annually during the Dormition festival of the Panagia.

[8] Pl. Leg. The first book highlights the importance of social gatherings in which drinking is included, e.g., 640-641b. See also 771d, Symp. 174a ff. Cf. Arist. Pol. 8.1338a24–31, see Eth. Nic. 8.1160a19-30 i.a. for "religious guilds and dining-clubs, which are unions for sacrifice and social intercourse".

[9] Cf. n.8 supra. On the importance of wine, see also Joh. 15:1 f. The importance of the banquet is also seen, e.g., in Paus. 1.2,5. On the feast/meal, Gernet 1981: Ch. 2; Harrison 1977: 140 ff.

[10] Cf. Di Tota 1981: 318 ff. for the circumstances in southern Italy, where many local priests participate in the organising of the festivals, and in so doing earn money unlawfully. The communists also participate. Consequently, the trading mentality wins against the Catholic ideology.

[11] Cf. Ar. Eq. 43 f., Vesp. 169–172; Plut. Mor. 828a2; Strabo. 10.5,4; Mikalson 1975: 14; Nilsson 1961: 100. Cf. the "Panegyrico" (profuse speech of praise) of the outdoor Mass, which is performed during the contemporary saint's feast in southern Italy.

[12] Cf. HHD. 473-479; Apollod. 1.5,2; Callim. Hymn. 6.19–21. See also Rehm 1994 on HHD. 401–403.

[13] Cf. Wolf 1966: 100 vs. Brown 1982: re the late antique basilica. See also Sahlins 1987: 89 for an interesting comment re the system in Fiji, which in Europe has been split into religion and business.

[14] Leach 1986: 92 f., cf. 14–16 and the Son of man (my emphasis). In the Greek Orthodox Church people still consume the body of Christ through the bread and wine, as opposed to the Catholic Church, in which people only receive the body, Economides 1986: 13.

[15] See Håland 2017: Ch. 3 for discussion of Georgoudi 1979: 271–307 vs. Moss/Cappannari 1976: 5 f. See also Håland 2019: Ch. 3 for an elaboration of the following argument.

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