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Magical Ceremonies during the Ritual Year of the Greek Farmer

Abstract: In the wake of the British scholar, James G. Frazer's claim that Greek religion reflects peasants' concepts connected with fertility magic, the very term has been criticized by most humanists during the entire twentieth century, while it has been present in scholarly literature written by anthropologists. Through a comparison between modern and ancient Greek festivals and rituals taking place across the ritual year, the article illustrates the importance of fertility magic to ensure the food both for the modern and ancient farmers, since *sympathetic magic* is a persistent characteristic of ancient as well as contemporary festivals. While performing various fertility rituals, the farmer assists nature to pass the worst of the winter. The point is that the magic works, and an important magical means of communication is indeed the festival and all the factors that it consists of.

Key words: agriculture, ancestors, death cult and rituals, fertility cult and rituals, festivals, Greece, modern and ancient, healing/purification rituals, sympathetic magic

Introduction: Some Notes on Agriculture, Magic and Religion

In agricultural societies, several factors are important to secure the future crops, particularly fertility rituals and death rituals in which important factors are the dead ancestors and also water. Both in earlier times and now, and all over the world, we encounter peasant societies where the living are dependent on the deceased mediator's successful communication with the chthonic powers to assure the continuity of their own lives through the fertility of the earth. Furthermore, the farmer is dependent on sufficient water. Every aspect of human life and divine interferences on earth is possible to express with water symbolism, and religious rituals and beliefs in connection with water to secure the future crop are found cross-culturally, be that in Asia, such as in Japan (Inukai 2007), in the Middle East and Mediterranean areas, as well as in Africa

and Latin America. In other words, rituals in connection with the religious significance of water occur across several civilizations and religious groupings.

Around 8,500 BCE a cluster of domesticated crops and animals appeared and spread to the Balkans around 7,000 BCE (Noble 2001: 74). Generalized agriculture apparently first arose in the Fertile Crescent because of several factors. The Mediterranean climate has a long dry season with a short period of rain, which made it suitable for small plants with large seeds, like wheat and barley. The “trinity” of cereals, vines and olives forms the basis of all subsistence agriculture in the Mediterranean region. The following will focus on the Greek part of that region, and traditionally magical rituals have been important to secure the food.

Magic, however, is a relative concept. Officially, magic is illegal in the Greek Orthodox culture, paralleling pre-Christian circumstances. It nonetheless does take place in practice, both in everyday life and within the official Church, and in reality it is therefore very important in this culture, likewise paralleling pre-Christian circumstances. The distinction between magic and religion is fluid, and in all religious festivals magic is not only a persistent characteristic, but the festival itself can be considered a magical means of influencing both higher powers and other people in the same way as other sacrifices do. According to the British scholar, James G. Frazer (1922, 1987), fertility magic constituted the essence and origin for ancient religion. Accordingly, Greek religion reflects peasants’ concepts connected with fertility magic. Frazer regarded magic as a false form of science based on primitive man’s mystical and scientific universe. Magic was superseded by religion and when this proved inadequate, came the development of the scientific mode of thought when people began to employ the principle of causality and, instead of magical causality, took up experimental causality. This has been criticized by several scholars (e.g. Burkert 1985; Price 1990), and in the wake of Frazer the concept of fertility cult has been absent in dictionaries of religion during the twentieth century,¹ while it has been present in scholarly literature written by anthropologists working on e.g. the Kwaio people of Malaita on the Solomon Islands (Keesing 1981), African material (Jacobson-Widding/van Beek 1990), and also among historians (Håland 2005,

2007, 2012a), ethnologists (Kyriakidou-Nestoros 1986; Psychogiou 2008) and classicists (Brumfield 1981; Robertson 1996) working on Greek material. One should not reject the concept around a peasant religion, since the value-system in the Greek area was and still is the one found among peasants, a view which is also found in other places in the Mediterranean area, e.g. among the Kabyles of North-Africa (Bourdieu 1980) or in Italy (Finrud Di Tota 1981). Although Frazer’s evolutionistic starting point was wrong, his analysis of the laws that govern magic remain a functional point of departure for analysis of religious agricultural festivals both in modern and ancient Greece.² Frazer’s two fundamental laws for how magic operates are the law of similarity and the law of contamination. The first law involves manipulation of something corresponding to what one wishes to invoke. This may be done by presenting large fertility symbols as part of a carnival procession around the spring equinox. 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 under the common term of *sympathetic magic* and are a persistent characteristic of ancient as well as contemporary festivals.³ The fact is that magic is employed today by people who are well educated and financially well off as well as by people who are marginal within society. Also, while performing various fertility rituals, the farmer assists nature to pass the worst of the winter through “sympathetic magic”. The point is that the magic works, and an important magical means of communication is in fact the festival and all the factors that it consists of (Håland 2007). The concept of sympathetic magic will therefore be employed in this study, but as a modified version of Frazer.

Agricultural Ceremonies in the Greek Context

In Greece, official religious festivals in general reflect the memorial rituals people perform for their own dead family members. It has been argued that the origin of the ancient hero cult was magic (Robertson 1992: Ch.11, cf. Håland 2014: Ch. 7), i.e. the magic that this deceased who is down in the underworld may ensure to the best for the living. This magic element is the point of the death cult. In the festivals, rain-making rituals are also important, because the

religious rituals were and are performed by the farmers to ensure the forthcoming rain, so that the crops may grow and give a plentiful harvest. The early rains in autumn are of great importance as a preliminary to the sowing. From this perspective, rain-making rituals represent fertility cult. In addition, several rituals are and were performed around harvest as a thank offering, sprouting is also important, but the most important period is around sowing, since the result is totally unknown.

The striking similarities that are found between the ancient and modern Greek agricultural festivals and rituals need to be accounted for. How and why are there such similarities? There are many other places in the world where the ecology is the same as it was in the past but the rituals and their meanings differ. How does the situation in Greece relate to *la longue durée* of the historian Fernand Braudel?

In earlier scholarship, history was considered to be synonymous with rapid changes, but now we realise that stability is no less historical than change and that it is as important to explain stability as change. According to Braudel, a single society may have different dimensions of time (1969), and it is particularly *la longue durée*, connected with his view of the ecological unity of the Mediterranean (Braudel 1990), that is relevant for the material we encounter in the Greek context in connection with the religious ceremonies of the agricultural calendar. Since man is prisoner of the climate and the vegetation, it is difficult to escape certain geographical frames and limits of productivity as well as spiritual constraints or mentalities. Therefore, it is important to take account of the history of the infrastructure, the nearly “non-moving history”, which everything gravitates around.

Braudel’s *la longue durée* corresponds to the second and third of Klaus Roth’s categories: linear time, cyclical time, and dreamtime or frozen time (cf. Roth 1994). The cyclical perception of time is characterised by predictability and repetition, and is typical of peasant societies. Dreamtime or frozen time presupposes a static perception of time without movement and involves an orientation to the past; its vehicle is oral tradition. In Greece, a cyclical perception of time and the perspective of frozen time are still prominent. The two important factors in this connection are firstly that Greece

is still an agricultural society and secondly that past stages in the development of Greek culture are unusually accessible. The Mediterranean area generally, and Greece particularly, offer a unique opportunity to follow questions of continuity and change over very long spans of time directly and not conjecturally, since we find a long literate – and archaeological – tradition which may be combined with the results of empirical fieldwork.

So, how and why are there such similarities between ancient and modern Greece? How and why is it possible to make a comparison between agricultural rituals in modern and ancient Greece, despite a gap of two millennia between the two cultures? In Greece, the cyclical dimension of time is woven into *la longue durée*, and is connected with the mental outlook, the *mentalité*, of the farmer. Ancient and modern rural Greece represents two peasant societies, inhabiting the same landscape, with the same climate and almost the same technological level. The two societies demonstrate strong similarities in culture, social organisation and folk religion which relate to the economic base of the community – agriculture. The basic crops are also almost the same, in a geographical area where the water supply always has been a great problem.

Space does not permit me to go into all the factors which should be examined in order to give an extensive account of all the historical circumstances which gave rise to the existence of cults connected with agricultural ceremonies in general, and rain-making rituals in particular, in South-eastern Europe and Asia Minor, dating from Antiquity and from Byzantine times up to the present day, since problems of such depth cannot be solved or contained within a few pages. The uniformity in the economic structure of several communities in the region that have an economy based on agriculture and sheep-raising has been due to the unchangeable geophysical and geographical factors.

Although modern Greece depends ever more on tourism, these factors remain important, because the mentality of the farmers does not change easily, illustrated for example by the agricultural calendar today which is also synonymous with the ritual calendar, since the church calendar is added to or built upon the first, i.e. the order of nature. Since technological improvements have not given them control over the vicissitudes of nature, the survival of the

community still depends upon natural events beyond the farmers' control. Most of my older informants who have passed, or still are in, their seventies remember the scarcity of their childhood, when famine was the result, if the crop failed. So, by way of rituals representing a world-view belonging to a traditional agricultural society, people try to influence the supernatural powers to ensure the rain, so that their crops may flourish. Ploughing and sowing are basic activities undertaken in order to earn a living, and the ceremonial portrayals of such activities are acts of mimed magic undertaken to ensure a rich harvest. Both ancient and modern people celebrate particularly before important passages of the agricultural year, in order to secure these passages, i.e. sowing, sprouting and harvest. Today, they pray to their saints for plentiful rain, as the ancients prayed to their Gods. The belief in the sanctity of water is present both in pre-Christian and Christian religion and, like his older and modern popular equivalents, the Orthodox priest is prophet, exorcist, healer and rainmaker. The magical immersion of the traditional carnival-figure, the rainmaker *Kalogeros* (i.e. the monk) in Northern Greece, "so the greenery can get rain", thus parallels other magico-religious litanies in modern and ancient Greece, and the sacred immersion in water, mud or marshes is pure rain-magic. Even if many of the rituals as observed in modern Greece may be traced back to the classical past through the post-Byzantine and Byzantine eras, they are not separate from Christianity.

The Agricultural Year of the Ancient and Modern Greeks

In ancient and modern Greek religious festivals many symbols and rites are shared, indicating a common understanding of agriculture, fertility and women. Considered as a whole, the ritual year is produced by the conjunction of a multifaceted ritual history, a popular social and economic calendar, with a great interest in the fertility of crops, animals and women, plus a close attachment to periods of time related to agricultural work and divinities.

The conditions of both weather and soil were the same in ancient Greece as they are today. The techniques of dry farming practised in ancient and modern Greece are dictated by the occurrence of sometimes torrential rains in the fall, which can wash away the soil,

and by summer drought, which makes necessary the conservation of soil moisture by every possible means.

The times of sowing and reaping, and the crops grown have hardly changed since Antiquity. In ancient Attica (the Athenian area), the great majority of grain was sown in the fall, as in modern times, since spring sowing necessitated irrigation and was not practicable. Given the climate of Attica, with mild but wet winters and dry summers, the desirable cereal was barley, which needed much water in the early stages of growth, but which would ripen early enough to avoid the worst heat of the summer sun. The sowing of cereals today extends from the middle of October to the end of December, depending on the rains. The best guides for the farmer have always been the rain, the condition of the soil, and his own experience and weather-wisdom. The season of sowing was and is a time of great anxiety for the Greek farmer. Perhaps the rains will be delayed or will not come in the right amount at the right intervals. People feel a greater need for ritual and magic on occasions when their own technical skills are limited. That the ancient Greeks proliferated their rituals at the critical time of sowing is understandable. The insufficiency of mortal wisdom at this seasonal moment of crisis is all too evident; in other words, the rainmaker is an important figure. Everything is felt to depend on the weather Gods and, to propitiate them, rain-making rituals take place during the whole agricultural year.

Scholars in the past, most notably those residing in temperate climates, had the assumption, natural for Northern Europeans, that the grain harvest in Greece took and takes place in late summer. But generally May is the month for the barley harvest. Hesiod (*Op.* 571–575, cf. 383 f.) places the harvest at the time of the helical rising of the Pleiades, i.e. around 19 May. Today the rising of the Pleiades is attached to the *Anastenaria* festival dedicated to the dead saints, *Agios* (Saint) *Kōnstantinos* and *Agia* *Elenē* on 21 May, while their setting is attached to *Agios* *Philoppos*' day on 14 November, in sowing time, and this is one of the polarities that connect aspects of everyday life and cosmology (cf. Hart 1992: Ch. 8). The wheat is harvested in June, and July is the threshing month. The popular names for these months, *Theristēs*, i.e. reaper, harvester, and *Alōnarēs*, i.e. thresher, reflect these activities.

After harvest and the threshing of the grain, the dead period of the grains' cycle (cf. Bourdieu 1980) starts. At the end of the dog days, roughly by the end of August, the official ecclesiastical year closes and the summer half-year also closes at this time when the transitional period towards autumn starts (cf. Loukatos 1981). At the beginning of September, the official ecclesiastical year starts again, while the agricultural year begins later. By the end of September, the farmer anticipates the "first rains", the early rains of autumn (cf. Hes. *Op.* 414–419), that fall from Zeus, so that Mother Earth conceives again. Afterwards, it is time for ploughing and sowing. November is the main sowing month. There is great danger that the tender young shoots will be harmed if the frost is strong or prolonged. If the cereals have not reached a certain height by the time the frost sets in by January, the farmer may lose the crop. The period after Easter is also precarious, since the crop may be lost if it starts to hail. Therefore the White Week after Easter is celebrated, paralleling and thus warding off the white hail, to secure the period until the grain is about to be reaped in June. In fact, the farmer's worries are not really over until the grain is in the granary.

The popular calendar was and is a social representation of the order of nature, that is, of the "natural" year: the perceived order of hot and cold, rain and drought, germination, fruiting, shedding of leaves, migrations of birds and so on. The annual production cycles of agricultural work (sowing, harvesting, pruning, vintage, gathering of fruits) and stockbreeding activities (shearing, breeding, milking, pasturing) composed an economic calendar developed from these perceptions of the natural order. This socio-economic content is integrated with the Christian saints and their narratives, as the ancients once integrated it with narratives of their Goddesses and Gods.

Agriculture was the key element in the ancient economy, and the Greeks believed that humans had to serve the Gods "for the sake of the produce of the earth, both solid and liquid, and for the sake of their cattle, horses and sheep" (Xen. *Oec.* 5.19–20). All festivals were concerned with good offspring generally, animal, vegetable or human.

The economic basis of present-day Greece does not depend unilaterally on agriculture, since a great part of the income is derived from

work migration and a constantly growing tourism. Nevertheless, all the modern festivals are seasonal festivals symbolising important passages of the agricultural year, in the same way as all the ancient festivals, and all are connected with agricultural fecundity, with fertility and increase.

People celebrate particularly before important passages of the agricultural year, in order to secure these passages. The festivals celebrate late summer, autumn, the middle of winter, the end of winter, spring, the end of spring and summer, or ploughing, sowing, "greening" of the fields, harvest, threshing, vintage and pressing, tasting of the wine, etc. Festivals are celebrated before critical periods during the agricultural year, particularly before sowing and during spring, the most decisive periods of the year's passage. Festivals celebrated at the end of winter and during spring symbolise the passage from winter to the part of the agricultural year when food will ripen and be harvested. This scheme relates to the grain- and wine-festivals, but festivals are also of importance for another essential crop, the olive. The olive and its oil are still staples of the Greek diet and the major source of fat.

The Cyclical Festivals of the Agricultural Calendar and Fertility Magic

The modern liturgical year follows the seasonal rituals of the agricultural calendar. This is a legacy from the pre-Christian cult, since prehistoric agricultural rituals also permeated the official Athenian calendar in the ancient world. The modern farmer performs the same ceremonies at the same time of the year as his ancient equivalent: before the sowing he prays to ensure a good crop and at the harvest he offers a thank offering by celebrating a festival. In that way the ancient farmer secured the future relations with his divinities, as the modern farmer does with the saints and other deceased.

The analysis of the fertility cult demonstrates how fertility is connected to the deceased and the powers in the subterranean world where life begins, according to the cyclical symbolism, which is central in Greek culture. The central act of the festival is the blood sacrifice or a bloodless offering, for example corn cakes, the gift to

the Goddesses, Gods or the dead, to assure that they will be generous and return the gift in the future. So the deceased mediator often receives a blood sacrifice, the ritual slaughter of an animal, for example an ox or a lamb, which afterwards is consumed as a communal meal by the participants of the festival. The communication is presented on several levels. The dead receives the offering in order to provide for the fertility of the society through the communication with stronger powers, first and foremost, Mother Earth. Her importance parallels the woman's who is the central performer of the cults, which are important in the festivals, because they are connected to the female sphere. The Greeks conceive the Earth as a woman's body and the agricultural year as a woman's life. The Earth is also seen as the female sex organ. The close connection between women and the earth is illustrated by the custom that has taken place on 1st May, when childless women used to roll in the grass to become fertile. The point was to transfer the reproductive power of the earth to women through the grass. The custom originated from the identification of the fecundity of the earth with that of women in popular thought since Antiquity (Papamichael 1975). During the ancient *Thesmophoria* festival, women lay on beds of branches directly on the earth to make the earth grow and for procreation. Women are also the most important performers of the rituals that take place during mid-winter when they, with singing and obscenities, drinking and feasting help the earth "to wake up from the death's embrace".⁴ Merry feasting and obscene behaviour, is a ritual way to do this. The fertility of the earth is stimulated by the magical manipulation of sexual or agricultural symbols. These rituals are not only performed as a reminder of natural events, but attempt to influence them, both magically and by propitiation of the relevant supernatural forces. But, the Earth represents only one of the two parts of the nature that has to be invoked to ensure the harvest. Accordingly, rain-magic dedicated to a heavenly God is a generally theme in the festivals, particularly around the most important periods during the agricultural year: sowing (autumn) and sprouting (spring). From this fact follows the significance of the Sacred Wedding, *hieros gamos*, also illustrated by the union of Mother Earth with her son, the corn-seed, to make the ground fertile.

Religious festivals reinforce the bonds between members of a community and their supernatural patrons, celebrating the exchange of gifts that seal their relationship: the devotees bestow honours and offerings to their patrons who in their turn are expected to renew the protection they provide to the community. This means that the festival in general is an important means of communication, an offering or a gift, most often dedicated to a deceased guardian of society, either alone or together with a Goddess or God – for instance, to the modern *Panagia* (i.e. The All-Holy One, the Virgin Mary) or to the ancient Goddesses Demeter and Athena or the God Dionysos. The festivals illustrate the importance of popular beliefs connected with fertility cult, death cult and healing or purification for the preservation of society (cf. also Håland 2005, 2007, 2010).

The fertility cult is connected with important life-cycle passages, since the festivals are celebrated at important passages of the agricultural cycle, and the agricultural year is represented in terms of the life of a Mother Goddess. All the religious festivals are connected with an important passage in the cycle of nature and a passage in the life-cycle of a divine person. Today, the *Panagia* is important. In ancient Greece it was particularly manifested through the *Homeric Hymn* dedicated to the Corn Mother, Demeter (*HHD*).

The cyclical perspective is central in connection with the festivals of the agricultural year, and the official ideological rituals are adapted to the agricultural calendar. Thus, the orthodox liturgical year is in fact established through the *Panagia's* biography. It begins around autumn, and several important moments in the life of the *Panagia* are celebrated during this period of the year, i.e. before and around sowing and during the germination and growth of the corn crops, when the "female", wet and fertile period in the agricultural year's cycle replaces the "male" and dry period, because the woman is looked upon as the productive partner in a relationship in the Mediterranean area (cf. Bourdieu 1980; Håland 2007, 2010).

After harvest and the threshing of the grain, the dead period of the grains' cycle (cf. Bourdieu 1980) starts in August. By the end of the dog days, in mid-August, the modern festival dedicated to the Dormition of the *Panagia* marks a turning point towards autumn, when the transitional period towards the "productive part" of the agricultural year is about to begin again.

Then, women cross various amulets three times over the silver figure of the dead *Panagia* to make them powerful in a magical way (Figure 1). Roughly at the same time, the ancient *Panathenaia* dedicated to Athena, the Goddess of the olive crop, was celebrated by the end of the first month of the official Athenian year (Håland 2012b and c). The other festivals deal with other important passages



Figure 1. Women cross various amulets three times over the silver figure of the dead *Panagia* (the Virgin Mary) to make them powerful in a magical way, on the “9th day’s ritual of the *Panagia*” which starts on the eve of 23 August, Tinos, 1993. Photo by the author.

of the agricultural year, as the sowing when the Presentation of the *Panagia* in the Temple is celebrated, and marks the beginning of the winter-period. The Presentation of the *Panagia* in the Temple on 21 November marks an important point in the period of winter sowing, and the festival celebrates the *Panagia*, as the patroness of the sowing, by offering her *polysporia*, a boiled mixture of all kinds of crop and several varieties of corn and so all kinds of the fruits of the earth. The ingredients are the same as in *kollyba*, a mixture of wheat, nuts and fruit that is usually offered at harvest to various other saints and to the dead during the memorial services at the tombs as in the ancient world. Although 21 November is dedicated to the Presentation of the *Panagia* in the Temple all over Greece, the name of the patroness and her festival varies with the region. By that date, the good farmer, especially in Northern Greece, will have sown at least half of his land. Accordingly, this feast day is known in some regions as *Panagia* “Half-Way-Through-the-Sowing” (*Mesosporitissa*: *mesos*: middle, half; *sporos*, *spora*: seed, sowing). In other regions, the festival is known as *Panagia* “the sowing begins” (*Archisporitissa*) or *Panagia* “the sowing is over” (*Aposporitissa*).

Also in ancient Greece during Demeter’s festival at the time of sowing, the Mysteries at Eleusis followed by the women’s *Thesmophoria* festival, a general mixture of the edible plants to be sown was boiled and offered to the Goddess, and her worshipers also partook of it, while praying for a renewal of the various crops the next year. The ritual was repeated around sprouting in January and before the harvest in May-June.

The mid-winter-festivals are celebrated around the solstice and the first sprouting of the grains. The end of winter or the birth of spring is celebrated around the spring equinox, following are the summer solstice, the “first-fruit”.

At the festivals which are celebrated after harvest, in September, people take some of their crop to the church, and put it near the entrance to the sanctuary or *iconostasis* which separates the congregation from the Holy of Holies, to be blessed by the priest. Next, they take the blessed crop home, so the house will be protected towards the time of sowing in October-November. Then a handful of this consecrated crop is mixed with the seed corn, while the rest is buried in the field to ensure an abundant crop next year. This is

a parallel to the ancient women's *Thesmophoria* festival when the decayed remains of the offerings (piglets and objects made from wheat into representations of snakes and male shapes) to Demeter were fetched up from underground "rooms", i.e. caves, the entrances to the womb of the earth, and mixed with the seed corn.⁵

In the ancient world the link between the ideological festivals and the agricultural calendar is also particularly illustrated by the ancient Athenian festivals dedicated to the Goddess Athena that were celebrated in connection with important phases during the ritual year of the olive (Håland 2012c also for the following). All the festivals dedicated to Athena were related to the olive, the third main crop of the Athenians and protected by her, since her festivals were celebrated in the crucial period for the olive crop, from the flowering of the olive tree (*Thargelion*, i.e. May-June), through the growing period of the fruit, until the harvest in *Pyanepsion* (i.e. October-November), when the *Chalkeia* was celebrated. The festivals celebrated during the month *Skrophorion* (i.e. June-July) were particularly important, because of the summer heat and dryness. Furthermore, the most important crops, grain, vines and olives were associated with female divinities (the ancient chthonic wine God, Dionysos also has female traits, Håland 2007), thus, paralleling women's nurturing role. Today the grain and olive are associated with the *Panagia* while wine celebrations are associated with male saints or the *Kalogeros*. On the Dodecanese and Cyprus, for example, they have a local festival dedicated to *Agios Giörgēs* (Georg) on 3 November, when they celebrate the "laying down of the corps of *Agios Giörgēs*, the great martyr". The festival is also dedicated to *Agios Giörgēs*, *o Sporiarēs*, i.e. the "rich in seed" or "seedy", i.e. on the island of Rhodes. On the same day they celebrate *Agios Giörgēs*, "the Drunk", on Karpathos. These festivals are not included in the official calendar of the church (Tsotakou-Karbelē 1991: 223 f.). Other places, and in general the new wine is opened in February such as when celebrating the *Kalogeros* in Northern Greece, paralleling the ancient Dionysian *Anthesteria* festival dedicated to the new wine. Today, the importance of the grain, wine and olives are illustrated by the most common gifts women bring to the church both during saints' festivals and memorial rituals for their own dead: one or more loaves of bread, a bottle of wine and a bottle of olive oil. The two first, i.e. bread and wine, are for the blessed bread distributed

by the end of the liturgy, and wine for the communion, the third, i.e. oil, mostly for the ever-burning oil lamp in the church, oil is also brought for anointments during baptisms, illustrating the importance of the staple food within the Orthodox liturgy.

Food is important within all festivals. The *Kalogeros* ritual, for instance, is celebrated around the spring equinox. During the main ritual of the festival farmers sow *polysporia*, while invoking the buried grain so that it may come back to life again. The ceremony ends as it started: the *Kalogeros* is fed in front of the church. The ritual meal always consists of three mouthfuls of each of their most important articles of food: blessed bread, cheese, and olives. The villagers thereby give what they wish to receive in abundance the following year. During the carnival procession the celebrants pay visits to all the houses in the village and are treated to wine, ouzo, and food – most often bread and cheese or the staple food – "to ensure the good", i.e. the future crop. Likewise every housewife is offered a mouthful of wine by one of the visitors before sprinkling the *Kalogeros* with *polysporia*, from her sieve, as a return-gift.

In addition to the memorial services performed within the family sphere for people's own dead, there are annual collective festivals dedicated to the dead. Particular days are dedicated to the dead, as at the ancient Dionysian *Anthesteria*, which was also the festival of the ancestors, but today these festivals are called *psychosabbata*, i.e. Soul Saturdays or All Souls' Days. They are celebrated at the end of winter and at the end of spring, i.e. during the sprouting of the grains and at harvest time. In this period, the souls of the dead are thought to wander among the living. During the ancient *Anthesteria*, the spirits of the dead were thought to visit their former homes and roam around the living for three days around spring germination. At the modern "Soul Saturdays", women bring food to the cemetery. After the blessing by the priest, it is eaten, so the souls of the dead may be forgiven and be able to assist the growing seed.

Since these feasts are dedicated to the dead, many people assume that they have a magical meaning. The tombs are sprinkled with water, and many scatter the rest of the *kollyba* over the tomb. In some places, people assume that the souls of the dead are set free on the Sunday prior to Lent, by sacrificing hens' blood on the grave. During a ritual that takes place on "Meat Saturday" in the

second week of the carnival season, people daub blood on the ears and foreheads of all the family members. This is reminiscent of the blood ritual during the festival dedicated to *Agios Charalampos*, just before the grain harvest. Then, the living can fetch some of the life-giving blood from the bull at *Tauros* (i.e. Bull) mountain, when they immerse their hands in the blood, and daub a cross on their foreheads or palms with the blood, for the good of it. At the ancient animal sacrifices, paralleling the modern animal sacrifice, the victim was also killed so that the blood would flow into the earth and appease the souls of the dead. But it is also a sacrifice to the underworld accompanied with a prayer for a bountiful harvest. Blood sacrifice can generally be understood as “killing as a source to fertility”, from the logic behind “sympathetic magic”. It is important that the blood from the sacrificial animal will flow into the earth, through the freshly dug hole close to the sacrificial tree and its roots, to ensure the continuity of the vegetable life, to secure the grain harvest.

Although this article has focused on the Greek and thereby pagan and Christian ceremonies within the agricultural year, similar rituals and gifts are also found within other cultures all over the world, both in connection with peoples’ Goddesses and Gods, saints and dead ancestors: gifts are dedicated to have return-gifts, i.e. food. As in Greece, also in several other places, the festivals are often annual memorials and celebrations, and thereby annual festivals, dedicated to a deceased guardian of society, a saint, hero or heroine (Håland 2008, 2014). In Greece, this idealized guardian is a mediator between human beings and the supernatural within the hierarchical structure that constitute the polytheistic-polydaimonistic society, in the same way as he or she often functioned when still alive, within the human society. In ancient Greece, a putative tomb was a prerequisite for the festival site, and blood-offerings were made in honour of the heroes at the altar that was of central importance in the cult of the hero. This dead person was the wielder of a magical influence. Like the dead heroines, he was also a mediator between even stronger powers in the underworld, who were responsible for the fruits of the earth. It was of great importance to manipulate these powers for the benefit of the living world, i.e. to secure the next harvest. The dead mediator ensures the communication with stronger powers, to ensure fertility in a magical, healing or purify-

ing way. Therefore blood-offerings are still made to the earth via the dead saints, *Agios Kōnstantinos* and *Agia Elenē*, just before the grain harvest. New ideologies are assimilated with deep-seated values, consciously or unconsciously, because all new ideologies must adjust to the old magical agricultural rituals to ensure the food.

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Notes

¹ See Eliade 1987. In vol. 5 (treating e-g) no entry is found for fertility, while the opposite is the case for Keesing 1981 see *infra*. See Håland 2007: Ch. 3 and 6 for a comprehensive discussion.

² Frazer 1987: 11–48, based on Mannhardt 1963. See Finrud Di Tota 1981: 91–93 for critique and modification of Frazer on which the following draws. Cf. also Keesing 1981: 519. See however Neusner 1989, who distinguishes between miracle and religion vs. magic. Cf. Dowden 1989: 6 f.

³ The same way of thinking is found in the concepts of metonym, wherein a part is representative of the whole, and metaphor, which is based on the striving for likeness, Leach 1986: Ch. 2.

⁴ Cf. Schol. Luc. *DMeretr.* 7.4, see Rabe 1906: 279.24–281.3, this and other sources are discussed in Håland 2007: Ch. 4–6, 2010.

⁵ Schol. Luc. *DMeretr.* 2.1, Rabe 1906: 275.23–276.28.

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The Fortune-Telling Customs of *Andrzejki* and *Katarzynki* in the Polish Ritual Year

Abstract: The paper deals with the different magic practices of fortune-telling about marriage which take place on the eve of St Andrew's and St Catherine of Alexandria's day, known as *Andrzejki* and *Katarzynki* in the Polish ritual year. The author aims to explain why these ritual practices are carried out on these days in particular, basing her argument on certain moments in the *vitae* of the two saints and on the fact that these saints' days mark the beginning of a new period in the calendar year, namely the beginning of winter and the beginning of the Christmas Fast (Advent). In their contemporary form the fortune-telling customs of the *Andrzejki* and *Katarzynki* festivals have evolved into a popular children's entertainment.

Key words: fortune-telling about marriage, St Andrew, St Catherine of Alexandria, *Andrzejki*, *Katarzynki*, Polish ritual year

The current paper deals with the different magic practices of fortune-telling about marriage during the festivals of *Andrzejki* and *Katarzynki* in the Polish ritual year. On the eve of St Andrew's Day (30 November), unmarried girls meet together and tell fortunes about marriage, while on the eve of St Catherine of Alexandria (25 November), boys gather and perform similar magic practices, although this latter tradition was much less widespread and died out relatively early. These ritual fortune-telling practices were characteristic not only for the Polish ritual year but were known to a whole range of other peoples too.

Why are such magical fortune-telling practices relating to marriage carried out namely on the eve of St Andrew's Day or St Catherine's Day?

St Andrew was an apostle and martyr, born in Bethsaida, Galilee. He preached in the lands near the Black Sea, in Greece, Scythia (present-day Russia), Asia Minor, Armenia and Georgia. In the end he settled in Patras, Greece, where he died as a martyr. His relics

THE RITUAL YEAR 10

MAGIC IN RITUALS AND RITUALS IN MAGIC

Edited by
Tatiana Minniyakhmetova and Kamila Velkoborská

INNSBRUCK – TARTU 2015

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