Women, Pilgrimage, and Rituals of Healing in Modern and Ancient Greece

This is the third and concluding work of the author's analyses of women's rituals from festivals.

Previous publications:
1: *Greek Festivals, Modern and Ancient: A Comparison of Female and Male Values*. Newcastle upon Tyne: Cambridge Scholars Publishing, 2 vols, 2017 (a Norwegian version was published in 2007: Kristiansand: Norwegian Academic Press).

2: *Rituals of Death and Dying in Modern and Ancient Greece: Writing History from a Female Perspective*. Newcastle upon Tyne: Cambridge Scholars Publishing, 2014.

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A Comparison

By

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This book is dedicated to the memory of my Pappa,
Elling Johan Håland (1926-2019),
with thanks and love.

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All photographs are by the author unless otherwise stated.

Pictures taken at Greek museums © Hellenic Ministry of Culture and Sports/Hellenic Organization of Cultural Resources Development (H.O.C.RE.D.).

A Note on Transliteration

The present book deals with ancient and modern Greek culture, and therefore many Greek names and terms. It should be mentioned that there is no unified, universally accepted system for transliteration of written and spoken Greek. I have therefore devised my own, which, with a few exceptions, is identical to the system used by the Nordic Library, Athens. However, variations may occur when quoting from a published Greek text, since there are several possible methods of transliteration.

Α	α	a
Β	β	b
Γ	γ	g
Δ	δ	d
Ε	ε	e
Ζ	ζ	z
Η	η	ē
Θ	θ	th
Ι	ι	i
Κ	κ	k
Λ	λ	l
Μ	μ	m
Ν	ν	n
Ξ	ξ	x
Ο	ο	o
Π	π	p
Ρ	ρ	r
Σ	σ ς	s
Τ	τ	t
Υ	υ	y
Φ	φ	ph
Χ	χ	ch
Ψ	ψ	ps
Ω	ω	ō

Αυ	αυ	au
Ευ	ευ	eu

Ου	ου	ou
γ before γ		n
γ before κ		n
΄		h (in Ancient Greek)

Where an author's name can be spelt in more than one way, I have followed the author's own spelling; if they do not consistently use the same spelling, I have transcribed it according to the aforementioned system. Exceptions to this include personal and place names or terms that have well-established or standard Anglicised forms, such as Tinos, not Tēnos; Serres, not Serrōn; Anastenaris, not Anastenarēs. In general, though, Greek names are not Latinised with the letter c, which does not exist in the Greek alphabet. Sometimes I use *C*, as in Corfu and Cyprus, since those are the standard Anglicised forms. When a term or name can be rendered in several ways, I have employed my own system, such as Agia, not Hagia, Ayia, or Aghia. This mainly concerns Modern Greek, since Ancient Greek names and terms are more widely known in "European versions", such as Arrephoria. This is also the reason that I have marked the *spiritus asper* (΄) with h on transcriptions from the Ancient Greek, since, for example, *hiera* and *hieros gamos* are well established spellings within ancient scholarship. Thus, with one exception, I have used the same system for Ancient Greek (A.G.) and Modern Greek (M.G.), although anthropologists might be critical of this usage, claiming I am attempting to demonstrate that Modern Greek derives from Ancient Greek. My intention is purely pragmatic, however, given how closely related the two systems of orthography are. I have not used the Greek alphabet in the text, but only transliteration, hoping that this rule will be more appropriate for readers less accustomed to the Greek language. When a Greek term is first used, it is shown in italics.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

My interest in healing rituals in general, and women's role in them in particular, started many years ago. To locate a specific point in time, my interest was awakened while doing fieldwork on religious saints' festivals and life-cycle passages in Italy in 1987 while a research fellow at the Norwegian Institute in Rome. Furthermore, women's role in these rituals came more and more to the forefront during an extended period of fieldwork in Greece between 1991 and 1992 while I was a research fellow at the Norwegian Institute at Athens and the Academy of Athens Hellenic Folklore Research Centre. These periods of research were funded by research and travel grants from the Research Council of Norway; Italian and Greek state scholarships; research and travel grants from the Faculty of Arts, University of Bergen; Nansen grants from The Norwegian Academy of Science and Letters; travel grants from the Norwegian Institute at Athens; and Inger R. Haldorsen's Grants for the promotion of scientific research. Later, my two-year research period as a Marie Curie Intra-European Fellow at the National and Kapodistrian University of Athens from 2011 to 2013 gave me the opportunity to conduct more fieldwork, which was later resumed as a result of travel grants from the Institute for Comparative Research in Human Culture, Norway and the Norwegian Non-Fiction Writers and Translators Association in 2019. Being appointed a Lifetime Government Grant Holder (Norwegian, *statsstipendiat*), by the Norwegian Government (Ministries of Culture and Education and Research) in the same year, gave me the financial resources to devote myself full-time to researching and writing. This included an excellent opportunity to conduct new and broader fieldwork on saints' festivals and women's healing rituals connected with them, while also allowing me to carry out new research in libraries and museums in Athens in order to continue the project and write this book. My warm thanks to the Norwegian Government and its Ministries, especially former Minister of Culture Trine Skei Grande, for making this possible.

I thank the staff at the Nordic Library in Athens for providing me with a wonderfully convenient office during my stays in the city in the very room that houses the Greek part of the Loeb Classical Library—even though for me, as for others, the Perseus Digital Library (https://www.perseus.tufts.edu/) is becoming more and more practical to use, as well as the searchable tool

for Greek inscriptions (https://epigraphy.packhum.org/inscriptions/main)—and assisting me in many practical matters. This especially regards their help during the years of the COVID-19 epidemic, by sending me digitally what I did not manage to locate at the University Library here in Bergen. My thanks are also extended to the staff at the Norwegian Institute at Athens. Additionally, a special word of thanks to several Greek museums for letting me consult material I needed when working on the project, especially the National Archaeological Museum, Athens; the Akropolis Museum; the Archaeological Museum of Piraeus; and the 16th Ephorate of Prehistoric and Classical Antiquities, Greece.

On Tinos, I am deeply indebted to the staff at the Church of the Annunciation and to the Mother Superior at the Monastery of Kekhrovouno for their cooperation concerning necessary practical arrangements during my fieldwork, particularly in allowing me access to different sites and giving me permission to walk around freely, converse with people, and take pictures during the festivals. I would also like to thank the nuns for their helpfulness. Special thanks are due to Elephteria Aphedaki and Georgos Bidalēs. On Aegina, I would particularly like to thank the Mother Superior of the Agios Nektarios monastery, Theodosia, for her help. Furthermore, a special note of thanks to her assistant, "Sister Maria". In Athens, I would also like to thank the various priests and churchwardens, including the female attendants who have served at the Church of Agia Marina, Theseiou over the years, and also those of the Byzantine Church of Agios Nikolaos on Plaka and the priest from the University of Piraeus who have been officiating during the rituals at the Akropolis Cave, and also my informants in the cave as specified in Chapter 2. A special thanks also to Dr Kōnstantinos Mpoletēs, the architect responsible for the restoration and research of the Thrasyllos Monument and Spēliōtissa Church.

Many people have commented on earlier drafts of parts of the present book or have provided invaluable help in other ways, drawing on their own expertise on women's rituals in Greece, whether ancient or modern; in this regard, I would particularly like to thank Professors Emerita Gail Holst-Warhaft (Cornell University, USA) and E. J. W. Barber (Occidental College, Los Angeles), respectively. Several researchers working on healing rituals at the Academy of Athens Hellenic Folklore Research Centre have been of invaluable help over the years, and I thank them all, especially Dr Eleutherios Alexakēs and Maria Androulaki. I am especially grateful to the folklorist Elenē Psychogiou, who for several years has been a most helpful guide, always ready to answer my many emails and questions about our common research interest: women and their rituals. I would particularly like to thank PhD student Anna Papavassiliou, from the University of Thessaloniki, for

all her help and willingness to discuss my various questions and answer my many emails. The following scholars also deserve thanks for supporting me in pursuing the topic: Professor Alexandra Cuffel (Ruhr-Universität Bochum, Germany); Professor Mojca Ramšak (University of Ljubljana, Slovenia); Provost and Dean of the Faculty Cynthia Kosso (Moravian College, Bethlehem, USA/former Professor at Northern Arizona University, USA); and Professor Emerita Roslyn M. Frank (University of Iowa, USA). Professor Diana Riboli (Panteion University of Social and Political Sciences, Athens) and Professor Taxiarchis Kolias (Institute of Historical Research and National and Kapodistrian University of Athens) also deserve thanks for believing in the project.

I am also thankful for having been invited to various conferences, all of which gave me the opportunity to present parts of this research to numerous scholarly audiences, thereby receiving invaluable feedback as well as gaining the chance to learn more specifically about healing rituals in the wider world, especially those of Eastern Europe. In particular, Dr Tatiana Minniyakhmetova (Udmurtia/Russia/Austria), Associate Professor Emerita Katya Mihailova (Bulgaria), and PhD student Irina Stahl (Romania), all of whom participate in the SIEF (*Société Internationale d'Ethnologie et de Folklore*) Working Group on The Ritual Year, deserve very warm thanks for their input. I am also grateful for being invited to conferences arranged by the ERC-funded "East-West" (*Vernacular religion on the boundary of Eastern and Western Christianity: continuity, changes and interactions*) project, headed by Professor Éva Pócs (Pécs University, Hungary), where several participants work on folk medicine and healers. A special thanks to Professor Mare Kõiva at the Centre of Excellence in Estonian Studies, Tartu University, for inviting me to give an online lecture on the project in December 2020. Professor Ecaterina Lung, who participates in the *International Society for Cultural History*, also deserves thanks for inviting me to give a lecture on my comparative theoretical and methodological approach to ancient Greek history at the Faculty of History, University of Bucharest, Romania, in October 2016. The members of the *Sacred Journeys* research group also deserve thanks for commenting on my online presentations during our Zoom meetings in the era of COVID-19. A special note of thanks to Christy Morgan who has proofread the manuscript. A special word of thanks to my UK-based nephew, Llewellyn Brunsdon-Håland, who, was ever ready to help when I had technical problems with my laptop.

Last, but not least, I wish to express my gratitude to my informants: all those—particularly women, but also men—who over the years have shared their stories about miraculous healings with me, and all those who have

invited me to participate in healing rituals they performed for the recovery of their own ill loved ones. Healing rituals are by their very nature extremely emotional, coping with illness being a very difficult part of the life crises;[1] although I have done fieldwork both on Tinos, Aegina and in Athens for many years, the topic of this research has not become any easier with the passage of time, despite my familiarity with it or the fact that my research is long-standing. Therefore, I extend my most heartfelt thanks to all those who let me in; without their openness and kindness, I could not have written this book.

[1] Life crises are illness and death, both of which affect us all.

INTRODUCTION

Many years of reading ethnographic material from various parts of the world, but in particular from the Mediterranean, where I have also carried out extended periods of fieldwork, especially in Greece and Italy, have inspired many thoughts and ideas concerning the varied and complex significances of the ancient religious rituals and festivals, gender relations, and so on, that are encountered in the sources. The sources, however, tell us nothing about how we should understand what we read. How can this problem be tackled?

"Mediterranean anthropology" combined with first-hand fieldwork equip us with a set of models for social comparisons and analysis which have close parallels with the ancient sources that will be examined. This material offers us new questions with which we can interrogate the ancient sources through a comparison between modern and ancient conditions. The idea is that certain deep premises about social life, widely shared in the Mediterranean region, can be used to frame and illuminate ancient texts, bringing out their unspoken assumptions.

When doing research on modern religious festivals, I learnt that death cult, fertility cult, and healing play key roles in the festivals, and that these cults are associated with women. From this, it became possible to see a select number of ancient sources from a new angle. It also became possible to try to say something about the practical role of the cults—and therefore women—in certain festivals of the ancient *polis* (city state), and thus gain a new perspective on the ancient context. A prerequisite for doing this is a conscious choice to examine society from such a perspective, thus employing a different value system from that which is usual in modern western European societies. Doing so may perhaps reveal that women exercised more power in ancient society than has generally been assumed.

In two of my earlier books, *Rituals of Death and Dying in Modern and Ancient Greece: Writing History from a Female Perspective* from 2014 and *Greek Festivals, Modern and Ancient: A Comparison of Female and Male Values* from 2017 (originally published in Norwegian, 2007), I have focused on death cult and fertility cult respectively. This new research draws on the same methodology—using modern in conjunction with ancient sources—while focusing on healing.

When coupled with cultural ethnohistory, the field of medical anthropology certainly is—and will become more—crucial. Thus, the relevant ancient sources, including the Hippocratic writings, and important later material on folk medicine and healers, will be analysed in conjunction with the data from my fieldwork, from a gyno-inclusive perspective, where an appreciation of the "*poetics of womanhood*" is central.

History and anthropology are two disciplines that are closely related, particularly when working with ancient culture. The same combination is relevant for global studies. This work tries to rethink the history of Europe, encompassing also its Mediterranean and eastern peripheries. By its ancient and modern material, the research demonstrates a transnational, comparative, and *longue durée* approach to Europe's history. It has relevance for several areas of the European peripheries. Since many of the values in Greece—and especially so in relation to healing rituals—have parallels with the values in the eastern part of Europe, there is no doubt that this comparative approach will be of great value in future research, in particular concerning the continuing expansion of the European Union, encompassing people who often think very differently from those in its western parts. The field of southeastern European studies will be of major importance in future Europe (one may just mention the immigration crisis that has haunted Europe for several years now). Regarding immigration to Europe from non-European countries, it is a fact that people from these areas share many cultural traits with Greece and the eastern European regions, such as in connection with religious popular festivals and healing rituals, which might be foreign to people from the northern and western parts of Europe and the USA and therefore difficult to understand. This research, then, has relevance for comparisons on a broader civilisational scale.

All over the Balkans and eastern parts of Europe, we meet similar rituals to the Greek healing rituals. From a comparative perspective, this research is relevant in several contexts. Particularly the parallel circumstances illustrated by the importance of worshipping miracle-working dead people in both a public and domestic context in eastern and central Europe, in the Balkans, and in the Mediterranean, clearly show the importance of taking into account both the domestic and public, female and male views in order to enhance our knowledge of European history, seen "from the grassroots". The importance of conducting research on healing rituals in contemporary Greece—at the crossroads of cultures in the margins of Europe—by comparing them with ancient sources, also means that the book contributes to enhancing European and Mediterranean research in the era of globalisation. The field of comparative cultural research should particularly be enhanced

by this study, especially as religious ideologies are flowering in modern Middle Eastern, Mediterranean, Balkan, and Russian societies.

Greece and particularly Athens has for some centuries been seen as a region of knowledge within classical studies by several foreign countries by setting up their own research institutes there. Athens and Greece, however, also have their own important centres of learning, and is further a region of knowledge within post-classical studies. It can by its rich resources provide important material for comparative studies, although this fact has not been so easily acknowledged in the north of Europe where interpretation in practice often neglects knowledge of the culture that exists in Greece as an important comparative tool to contextualise ancient sources. Doing research in a genuine Greek environment for many years now has taught me to provide a broader eastern European and Mediterranean approach, complementing the northwestern European filter through which much of the variety of European experience tends to be interpreted. By focusing on "the margins of Europe" both from a gendered (that is, Greek women) and spatial (including "grassroots") perspective, this book also seeks to challenge the tendency to define a clear-cut "European identity" with reference to an imagined "civilised European centre" contra various peasant cultures, such as those of southeastern Europe. In the contemporary situation it might be more fruitful to ask the question—what is and was Europe at its margins?

To compare ancient and modern healing rituals, and women's role in these, multidisciplinary research is required. This book therefore interrelates history, anthropology/ethnography, archaeology, ethnology/folklore, gender studies, and religious studies. Accordingly, the book offers a willingness to employ multiple, differing approaches towards the topic under investigation, and aims to bridge the distances to other academic disciplines. Consequently, it allows both for a contextualisation of prior research and a synthesis of multiple academic areas, and so intends to pave the way for future studies. This also relates to the fact that I have experienced how many young scholars across the disciplinary borders feel the need to draw on modern as well as cross-period material in their studies of both ancient and modern Greek and Mediterranean cultures. Unfortunately, there is still a gap in scholarly opportunities in this area, so those who venture into comparative approaches still work independently in what could be a dynamic new field if given sufficient focus. The present study intends to contribute towards that goal.

By working in the field and setting the findings in a broad framework of history and prehistory, and so offering a sustained cross-period examination of the subject of healing and gender, exploring continuities between historical periods as well as the ways in which the texts and traditions diverge, the

study reveals how interdisciplinary and cross-period studies can illuminate otherwise-overlooked points and lead to reconsiderations of the subject of "gender and healing", which scholarship has historically believed to be well understood. Consequently, the book challenges long-established theories on women and gender relations in modern and ancient Greece, but also beyond.