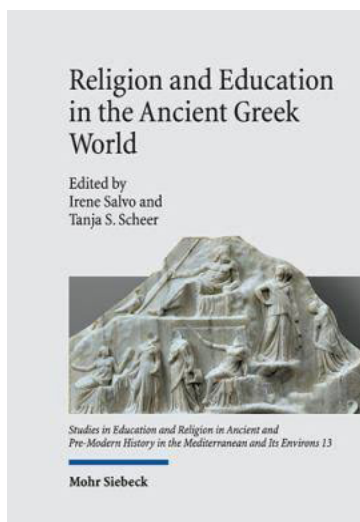


RELIGION AND EDUCATION IN THE ANCIENT GREEK WORLD



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THE COLLECTED SET OF ESSAYS PUBLISHED in this volume, *Religion and Education in the Ancient Greek World*, originated in a conference of the same name that took place at the University of Göttingen in 2017. The papers cover a wide range of topics on the general theme given in the title, and the material covered stretches in scope from the Archaic period to Late Antiquity.

Education and religion are rich areas of scholarly research, but the two have not been as often queried together as they have been explored along separate intellectual trajectories. The aim of this volume is to work towards filling that gap, and in thus doing to explore the intellectual nexus between religious practice and educational praxis in

Greek antiquity. The impetus for doing so arises in part from a growing recognition that participation in religious life and responsibility for sacred duties were central to community membership within Greek *poleis*. It also relates to new developments in the study of ancient religion that emphasize the lived, material, practical experience of ritual rather than attending to its normative or spiritual elements.¹ Bringing these two strands of research together, the volume queries processes and products that facilitated replication of knowledge about practical requirements, correct procedures, moral standards, and skills pertinent to the conduct of Greek religion.

Such matters are lucidly described in a brief introductory chapter by the volume's editors. Salvo and Scheer emphasize the extent to which basic principles of religious education in the ancient Greek world differed dramatically from the normal mechanisms common to modern religions such as Christianity and Islam as well as modern educational methods. Neither ancient Greek religion nor education relied on foundational texts or "textbooks", traditionally construed, as a core repository of and conduit for knowledge. In an environment wherein dogmatic texts were absent, but learning and orthodoxy in practice were strongly desired, communities faced a complex landscape of possibilities for religious education.

Some additional background and contextual information is provided in a second introductory chapter by Josine Blok, whose work on the role of religious life in the *polis* seems influential in the framing of the volume.² Blok's discussion in this context highlights one enduringly perplexing characteristic of democratic *poleis* – they were systemically reliant on competent citizens, yet possessed no systematic institutions for providing training in the necessary competencies.³ While the chapter does not establish a firm answer to how this all could have worked in the grand scheme of things, Blok highlights the reciprocal transactions that stood at the heart of participation in Greek religion as a key issue. She posits that reciprocity was the crucial competence required of citizens in the context of their religious practice, and that transmission of the elementary literacy required to engage in reciprocal systems could have occurred organically through participation across generations.

The questions at issue in the ten papers that follow likewise orbit around the operational nuts and bolts of Greek religious practice and belief. How did religious officials learn what to do, whether through words or deeds? How did children and younger members of the community internalize how to act, what to believe, and why it all mat-

1. E.g., McGuire, 2008; Brulé, 2009; Blakely, 2017.

2. Blok, 2017.

3. On women's competencies in the *polis*, see papers in Dillon, Eidinow & Maurizio, 2018.

tered? Did responsibility for this process fall to parents, priests, fellow citizens, or even the gods? Answering such questions requires authors to wrestle with the practicalities of knowledge transmission and the roles of various people and material objects in serving as conduits for knowledge in both its embodied and intellectual forms.

The papers in the volume are divided into four sections (II. Actors and Models, III. Performing Knowledge, IV. Skills and Media, and V. Astrology, Philosophy, and Religion). Readers will find many cross-cutting currents throughout these sections. I identified three alternative groupings that seemed meaningful outside of the structure decided upon by the editors: roles and role models, formal knowledge, and cultural transmission. I organize my discussion here accordingly, rather than according to the order in which the papers are presented in the volume. My hope is that this format will bring out with most impact the overall conclusions that I drew from the collection.

Effective religious education involves the establishment of appropriate roles and role models. Community members need to understand the correct role they ought to play within a religious community, and must learn how to conduct themselves accordingly. Role models help to demonstrate and propagate desired behaviors down the social hierarchy. Salvo's and Bocksberger's papers deal with former issue. Salvo's paper argues that local cult associations served as valuable (and heretofore overlooked) platforms for experiential learning, venues in which participants could interact with others of a range of ages, genders, and social roles. She defines cult associations (p. 37) as "all those private, voluntary groups, with mixed membership, whose main but not necessarily sole aim was the worship of a particular deity". The paper supports its argument with concrete pieces of evidence that provide oblique confirmation that cult associations were mechanisms for learning. For example, the families of *orgeones* (officials responsible for rites) assigned to the cult of Echelos and the Heroines in Attica likely participated in the distribution of meat at festivals, which also provided an opportunity for younger members to learn about the hero and related myths. Since group members were included on a hereditary basis, it is not difficult to envision a situation in which such festivals occurred regularly in a wide range of communities, offering a rich canvas for learning.⁴ Salvo also highlights the evidence of sanctions, effectively punishments for not participating.⁵ She argues that these demonstrate another layer of the importance of learning about gods – it enabled community members to avoid trouble by knowing when sacrificial fees were due and in what amount (p. 46). As do many of the papers in the volume, this discus-

4. Gabrielsen, 2016.

5. An issue also discussed in Kloppenborg and Ascough, 2011.

sion focuses attention on the role of women and children in duties associated with cult associations.⁶

Bocksberger's delightful paper on dancing little bears at Brauron likewise focuses on females and children, and also highlights the social and developmental importance of learning by doing. The fundamental importance of participation in choruses as a form of religious and civic education has long been apparent.⁷ Within this general context, Bocksberger focuses on the *arkteia* ritual enacted in honor of Artemis at Brauron and Mounychia. She is especially concerned with the logic according to which participants were described as "playing the bear", as well as its implications for understanding dance as a civically meaningful skill. Traditional interpretations of the "bearness" of the *arkteia* participants have relied on relatively obtuse assumptions about the need to prepare maidens for marriage by taming the wild animal within,⁸ or the maternal fierceness of bears,⁹ but Bocksberger convincingly dismisses these arguments. It is likely that the girls who celebrated the *arkteia* were very young, between 5 and 10 years old. Therefore, reconstructing a scenario in which the rites were preparatory for marriage leaps over the stage of maidenhood pertinent to the girls exiting the *arkteia*. Instead, Bocksberger argues, the bear analogy likely pertained to the resemblance between toddlers, who are characterized by awkward proportions and clumsy movements, and the offspring of wild bears. Maidens dancing are, instead, compared to more gracile animals, such as deer. The reference to bears in the *arkteia* likely pertains to the function of the rites: to train young girls, who would participate in choruses as maidens, to dance properly, taming the awkward movements of their youth so that they could achieve the lightness and elegance of a deer. This argument intersects nicely with a recent, equally compelling paper by Cullhed, which elucidates the relationship between the deer painted on the famous Dipylon *oinochoe* and the poem written on the vessel, which promises the jar as a reward to the young dancer who performs most gracefully (*atalotata*), a characteristic also associated with the graceful movement of young animals.¹⁰ All of the papers in the collection are excellent, but Bocksberger's contribution is a real highlight for its clarity and originality of argumentation, not to mention the wonderful photographs of "dancing" baby bears.

While the two papers discussed above concern embodied, physical learning, Stavrianopoulou and Horster focus on processes of learning by observation. In par-

6. See also Kierstead, 2018 on women's roles in associations more generally.

7. E.g., Ingalls, 2000.

8. Sourvinou-Inwood, 1988, p. 29.

9. Perlman, 1989.

10. Cullhed, 2021.

ticular, both deal with the importance of modeling behavior in ways that are visible and create an impression, as operative among two different groups. Stavrianopoulou considers elite women modeling purity and values in the Hellenistic period and Horster addresses the role of cult personnel along a similar line of thinking, but with quite different results.

According to Stavrianopoulou, a prominent, public, and even political role for women resided in their position as exemplars of religious knowledge, defined (p. 57) with Theodor Jennings as “knowing how to act” and “knowledge of the fitting action”.¹¹ The author reconstructs a scenario in which the rise of politically and socio-economically important women, e.g., as queens, during the Hellenistic period triggered a societal increase in the extent to which women’s actions were regulated (p. 66). This is demonstrated through examples of laws governing aspects of ritual purity, to which women were especially beholden. Such examples primarily concern prohibition of entry to sacred precincts, e.g., that of Isis and Serapis at Megalopolis (ca. 200 BCE) or Artemis, Zeus *Hikesios* and the *Theoi Patrooi* at Kos (ca. 200-150 BCE), for women who had recently given birth, had an abortion, menstruated, or engaged in intercourse. The broader scope of controls on women’s behavior is also evident from rules surrounding activities and attire during mandatory periods of mourning.¹² These examples are helpful for demonstrating the author’s point, because adherence to such roles must have been difficult to enforce precisely, so it seems likely that only strong, invisible social pressures could truly effect widespread compliance. Anecdotal evidence mustered by Stavrianopoulou about the behavior of high-profile, elite Hellenistic women supports the fact that they did strive to model piety and ritual purity. This certainly could have been conducive to encouraging adherence amongst members of less-visible communities who were probably less subject to surveillance on a regular basis.

While we might intuitively expect cult personnel to likewise have served as important societal paragons of proper religious behavior, inculcating knowledge about the correct ways to act in a wider population, Horster’s paper argues that the evidence does not strongly support this conclusion. It is true that some literature discusses pious and exemplary religious personnel, but just as common are stories of priestesses behaving badly. Examples given in the paper include the corrupt behavior of priestesses at Delphi who invented a prophecy according to which the Spartan Cleomemes might overcome the sitting king Damaratos and the priestess of Artemis, Komaitho, who had forbidden sex in the *temenos* of the sanctuary. As Horster points

11. Jennings, 1982.

12. See also Stavrianopoulou, 2005.

out, the fact that all such stories involve women may arise primarily from the general misogyny of Greco-Roman society (or just Pausanias, the author from whom most such stories derive). However, the overall point of the paper, that *all* people and communities were expected to act in an appropriately pious manner in order to ensure the prosperity of their towns urges caution against overestimating the importance of specific cult personnel as teachers of virtue.

It is clear from the papers discussed above that transmission of religious knowledge often occurred through *doing* and *seeing*, rather than reading or memorization. Despite the lack of a foundational book, Greek religious life was also full of diverse texts, including but not limited to dedicatory inscriptions, funerary inscriptions, sacrificial calendars, cult regulations, temple or treasury inventories, contracts, statutes, oracular texts, curse tablets, and amulets. Thus, it is not possible to truly understand Greek religious knowledge systems, including likely processes of knowledge transmission, without considering the role of information “technologies”. Three papers in the volume discuss topics along these lines.

Wolicki’s discussion of literacy among female priests raises compelling conundra regarding the apparent gap between some duties and skills required for serving as cult personnel or participant and the social personae of the relevant individuals. As discussed above, sacred laws are sometimes addressed specifically to women, though it is doubtful that the general population of women was literate.¹³ If they were not, we must reconstruct some other mechanism for their “education” as to the relevant rules; perhaps here the role models discussed above could have played an especially crucial role. Moreover, some religious texts involve contracts and agreements that concern women as transacting parties. If we assume that such interested parties were largely illiterate, how would they have managed to access this information? How would women have known to what their contract bound them if they were unable to read the texts? Wolicki makes the reasonable suggestion that a male interlocutor, such as a *kyrios*, could have mediated contractual agreements involving women (p. 189). Another possibility is that laws and texts were read aloud to illiterate people by other ritual officials, and that the formal skill of memorization was more fundamental to religious learning than was reading.

Similar questions surface in Cuomo’s paper, which builds upon her previous work on ancient mathematics and numeracy¹⁴ in emphasizing the frequency of mathematical activity in temples and sanctuaries. In doing so, it pushes back on a

13. Cole, 1981.

14. Cuomo, 2001.

historical tendency to distinguish Greek from non-Greek cultures insofar as the latter are seen as keeping science and religion separate while the latter, characterized by so-called temple economies, are not. Jettisoning such a distinction is salutary in part because it is not consistent with the evidence, as Cuomo shows, but also because it opens up the possibility of comparative analysis between Greek and other Mediterranean communities. I might add that it is also helpful in further eroding notional distinction between Bronze Age Aegean states and historical Greek states, since both preserve evidence for complex quantitative activity occurring in relation to sacred institutions.¹⁵ If we accept that complex “temple numeracy” was required for the administration of religious affairs in Greek sanctuaries, the pertinent questions that needs addressing in the context of religious education concern who and how. Who would have conducted the transactions required, which demanded skills ranging from basic addition and subtraction to understanding fractions and calculating exchange rates? How could such skills have been taught across generations, and through what mechanisms? Cuomo envisions a situation in which such matters varied greatly from place to place, so that there can be no one-sized solution, but posits that enslaved specialists may have played an important role.

Moving from math to science, Bultrighini’s paper sets out the evidence for an astronomically informed “cult of the seven planets” and its emergence during the Hellenistic period. The paper discusses presumed processes of knowledge diffusion concerning astronomical principles, seen as occurring in an east to west direction alongside well-known eastern Mediterranean religions, such as the worship of Egyptian Isis and Sarapis or the Indo-Iranian Mithras. As astronomical knowledge was always connected to religious belief in antiquity, these two developments have often been thought of as one and the same.¹⁶ However, Bultrighini argues that evidence for such an east-west transmission for a specific cult associating the days of the week with particular gods is entirely lacking. This set of ideas, it seems, arose in Rome or Italy, rather than emanating from east to west. While the mechanisms involved and the nature of the cult’s eventual transmission around the Mediterranean during the Roman imperial period and Late Antiquity are not the focus of discussion, the practice of such a cult certainly speaks to some degree of education regarding the heavenly bodies and abstruse ideas about the nature of the universe amongst a wide slice of the populace.

15. Lupack, 2008.

16. Cumont, 1912; Hübner, 1983.

A third group of papers deals with the intersection of religious education and cultural products, specifically theatrical performances, painted pottery, and statuary. Presumably practitioners of Greek religion were eager to understand the stories and myths associated with the supernatural beings that governed their fates, and it is clear that culture – stories, literature, and imagery – played a part in disseminating this knowledge. The details of such interplay between cultural products and religious understanding are queried in papers by Gödde, Scheer, and Tanaseanu-Döbler.

Gödde asks what theater may have taught Greek people about their religion. While scholars of Greek theater do not always consider their subject to be inherently religious,¹⁷ Gödde contests this. Tragedies were of course shot through with mythological depth. Gödde emphasizes that the mythological content of plots would have consistently poured information about religious traditions down the gullets of audience members, and that the context of performance embedded within elaborate festivals of Dionysos make these cultural products essentially and deeply religious. Participation in or consumption of theatrical products played an explicitly didactic role in Greek culture, from the education of young adults in choral performance to the collective engagement with moral and ethical lessons amongst the audience. But what was their true religious function in the context of educating the community about something beyond the details of mythological stories? Gödde positions this as primarily cognitive and rather pessimistic: an understanding that life is inevitably full of “intense pain, grief, and hopelessness” and that the gods are not here to help (p. 115).

One way to assuage the perpetual unpleasantness of human suffering is, of course, getting drunk. Greeks clearly availed themselves of this panacea on a regular basis, and the cups which they emptied provided another cultural canvas wherein religious knowledge could be operationalized. Certainly a great deal of scholarship concerns the intersection between material things on cognitive understanding of complex aspects of human life.¹⁸ Scheer’s fascinating paper concerns the role of figure-decorated pottery depicting mythological representations in transmitting religious knowledge. Reaching a satisfactory conclusion is challenging, because we cannot be entirely sure of the range of consumers who would have seen such pottery, nor the mechanisms through or agency behind the selection of images and themes depicted. It is commonly assumed that the symposium would have provided the primary venue for consumption and discussion of images on Athenian pottery, but Scheer goes beyond this. If *komasts* really wandered around drunkenly with their

17. Discussion in Heath, 1987, p. 48.

18. Boivin, 2008; Elsner, 2012.

cups, as they are depicted doing in some representational contexts, anyone in the street may have had an opportunity to view and consider the images thereon. Furthermore, sympotic vessels were probably not locked away secretly in cabinets when not in use during drinking parties. Scheer envisions a range of scenarios for consumption of imagery within a household, for example, when children wandered through the kitchen or *andron* during the day, or (with Martin Langner) in decorative display contexts for magnificent kraters.¹⁹ Painted pottery may have also been seen in non-domestic contexts, e.g., within collections of dedications in sanctuaries or when pots served as libation vessels at funerals.

Whoever, the consumer, it seems a safe assumption that stories told on painted pottery were meant to be seen and understood, and it does not seem unreasonable to reconstruct a role for such vessels in shaping knowledge. Focusing on the Berlin Painter's output, Scheer considers this artist's fondness for scenes showing libation, which Herodotus identified as a quintessentially Greek type of religious behavior. Could the Berlin Painter's iconographic choices signal an interest in demonstrating how to pour libations properly, or how to "evoke the benevolent attention of the gods", or even to help people imagine "what happens (hopefully) if one sacrifices" (p. 172)? Such questions are difficult to answer, but lead Scheer to some compelling ideas about what might be happening behind-the-scenes in Greek pottery workshops. These include the beguiling supposition that Greek vase painters were aware of their subtle, yet material, role in shaping elite ideas about their relationships to the divine, although the author stops, rightly, short of positioning these artisans as "teachers of religion" (p. 175).

In the final, and by far the longest, paper in the volume, Tanaseanu-Döbler provides a thorough treatment of the theological status of statues in Porphyry's *Peri agalmatōn*. This paper takes us into the realm of Late Antique philosophy, a world that feels far from the Berlin Painter's symposiastic libations, and in which the creator is very much endowed with deep religious, even theological knowledge. In Tanaseanu-Döbler's reading, Porphyry viewed statues as the creations of "an anonymous group of creators" – perhaps Hellenic sages or Egyptians – who may be thought of as "visual theologians". The sculptors use materials to bear out divine analogies through their representations – "bright materials such as marble, crystal, and ivory... indicate luminosity... and fiery character" while "gold indicates purity" (p. 247). People viewing the statues, in turn, are seen as readers of visual 'texts' that contain a repository of human knowledge about the gods, making statues very important, indeed fundamental, conduits for religious education. The artists are

19. Langner, 2014.

not merely prophetic transmitters of divine revelation, but themselves “actively create the gods they represent” (p. 253). Tanaseanu-Döbler goes on to position this view within Roman imperial discourse about statues; unsurprisingly, this content is very rich in enlightening the range of conversations about statuary apparent in discussions between Imperial and Early Christian thinkers. However, it could have been edited down for concision so that the points came across more powerfully, especially concerning how exactly all of the detailed discussion might speak to the questions of religion and education at the center of the volume.

Overall, the papers in this volume are of high quality. They are clearly written, deeply researched, well argued, and thoughtful in connecting concrete evidence to broader points. Readers may be surprised to find a volume on Greek education containing so little about many major topics usually encountered in the subfield, such as the role of the *gymnasium*, various youth institutions (the *krypteia*, the *ephebeia*, etc.), and the extensive philosophical discussions of education by authors such as Plato and Xenophon. Scholars of Greek religion, in turn, may wonder how a full volume on the topic could proceed with little mention of Hesiod, animal sacrifice, mortuary ritual, or the canonical Greek deities. The alternative tack taken here is part of what makes the volume refreshingly original. It also lays bare how much is missed when education is lodged in a secularist world and religion in a spiritual one. Combining the two is conducive to insights about previously neglected ritual aspects of education, and vice versa, which seems appropriate for analysis of a world in which the notional separation of the religious from other realms of society (scientific, secular) does not really apply. It also places at the center of discussion a diverse range of persons – especially women, children, and artists – that do not always come to the fore in discourse within ancient history. The book is well worth reading for these reasons, and one can see it launching many new directions of research along the diverse, productive lines of argumentation it contains.

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