PAPERS AND MONOGRAPHS OF THE FINNISH INSTITUTE AT ATHENS VOL. XXI

CULT MATERIAL
FROM ARCHAEOLOGICAL DEPOSITS TO INTERPRETATION OF EARLY GREEK RELIGION

Edited by Petra Pakkanen and Susanne Bocher

HELSINKI 2015

ISSN 1237-2684
ISBN 978-952-67211-9-4

Printed in Greece by Alphabet SA, Athens.

Cover: Votive figurines from Olympia (photo S. Bocher).

Layout: Vesa Vahtikari

Copy-editing: Jari Pakkanen

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Introduction

Petra Pakkanen and Susanne Bocher

Topic: Questions and Themes

This volume is based on the workshop *Defining and Interpreting Ancient Greek Cult Deposits* held 24–28 October 2008 at Ancient Olympia. A small group of specialists working on themes closely related to early Greek cult practices gathered for two and a half days to discuss the theory and practice of interpreting cult and religion and their archaeological context. We elaborated on the problem of defining a ritual or a cult deposit in general, and how it has been framed in the research tradition; we then targeted the discussion at locating these questions in relation to case studies and thematic approaches to early Greek religion. The geographical area and periods covered here are relatively broad encompassing Prehistoric, Protohistoric and early Archaic contexts.

The study of early Greek cult practice involves a number of important themes in the field of classical archaeology. They are centred round the questions of origins and specialisation of cult practice, locality and spatiality of sanctuary sites, and the social and cultural role of religion in the early Greek context as it is reflected in archaeological material. All these themes echo or imply problems of definition of the special nature of cultic and ritual activity as opposed to the secular sphere of life. Archaeological study of early cult is primarily based on material evidence without direct links to written testimonies of religion, and this naturally raises methodological issues that have to be addressed when studying the material: How do we define religion, cult and ritual, and more specifically, what actually constitutes an archaeological deposit which can be connected with past religious activities? Religious paraphernalia found at cult sites often have a depositional history which differs from other contexts; ritual and cultic objects may have been ritually buried or purified, and cult equipment and votives are often deposited in special pits, or *bothroi*, within a defined cult area, or at least separated from ordinary settlement debris. Elaborating this issue was the main incentive for the workshop. The discussion at the workshop and the articles presented in this book also reflect a wider field of questions in the study of early Greek religion on the basis of material evidence.

It is possible to discern trends in the study of early Greek cult practice. First, the archaeological study of early cult often operates within certain established terminological parameters. These include dividing cult, for example, into public and private, official and popular, communal and domestic, extra-urban and urban, intramural and extramural ritual practices. Whilst some of these divisions derive from topographical and contextual reasons, others lean more heavily towards interpretative presumptions. They work as interpretative tools which have become operational in discourses of the early cult practice. They can be, however, restrictive labels which might hinder our perspective to identify multiple, probably overlapping and criss-crossing functions of cult and ritual practice in the early societies. Distinguishing between private and public cult practice may prove unhelpful yet it often involves difficulties related to other definitional issues.

The earlier mentioned questions about the definition of ritual and cult on the basis of archaeological material almost inevitably involve a problem on how far the given data

can be used to interpret ritual action; can the specific case studies successfully address the more general questions about the nature of early Greek religion and cultic life? The imposition of the dichotomy between religious (cultic and ritualistic) and secular activities has resulted in particular interpretative difficulties for archaeologists. This reflects the issue of the dichotomy, or optimally dialogue, between particular and general. Any reconstruction of ritual depends heavily on the analysis of traces and patterns in the material remains which repeated rituals left in the archaeological record, and also on the interpretation of these data in their social context. Particular, i.e. contextual, case studies and the material they provide are placed in dialogue with general, i.e. the pre-existing interpretative views on the nature of early ritual and cult. Case studies inevitably reflect larger ideas and interpretative challenges when we try to understand Greek religion in general. We are left with the task of defining parameters which can be used to define early Greek religious ritual on the basis of mainly archaeological remains. This is crystallised in the elaborations of votive offerings, and of figurines in particular as an *a priori* religious nature of the these items is not fully clear even if they have almost exclusively been attributed religious roles and their presence in a context where they are discovered has become an indicator of the cultic nature of it. Melissa Vetter's article in this volume tackles these questions demonstrating that contextual analyses of distribution, use patterns, and display of the Mycenaean figurines enable us to trace shifts in structural patterns which reflect on ritual behaviour and social agency.

This volume consists of two thematic parts. The first, titled *Cult and Material: Tradition, Theory and Materiality*, presents articles with more theoretically oriented insights addressing the questions of the role of religion, cult and ritual in the tradition of archaeological investigations; it also intends to outline theoretical perspectives to the questions of how cultic or ritual deposits in archaeological record have been and could be defined. This section opens with Johannes Siapkas' overview of classical archaeology's standing within the academic field in relation to its neighbouring disciplines. He outlines a wider conceptual scheme which accommodates several of the research traditions in classical archaeology. With the focus on the study of religion, cult and ritual in archaeology he delineates a religious studies tradition in classical archaeology and relates it to his conceptual scheme. Continuing the theme of conceptual questions about ritual and cult in archaeology Petra Pakkanen explores culturally and religiously determined ways of conceptualising waste and refuse in order to further our understanding of deposits related to ritual practice. She argues that the relationship between ritual, cult and religion should be elaborated, and when interpreting these types of deposits larger ideological factors and aspects of past belief systems should be taken into consideration. The first part of this volume is concluded by Susanne Bocher who discusses the definition and interpretation of votive offerings in the context of the remnants of religious rituals and sacrifices. Focussing on the phenomenon of the so-called black layers in early Greek sanctuaries and especially in Olympia, she analyses how these layers can be interpreted and connected to offerings at altars and the deposition of altar debris within different investigative approaches and traditions.

The second part in this volume is titled *Time and Material: Perspectives of Early Cult* and presents articles which discuss issues relating to early Greek cult practice on the basis of archaeological material in contextual perspective. The point of view in these contributions is two-fold. First, the usual convention of dividing cult activities to polar opposites of private/domestic and communal/public has resulted in certain interpretative

problems. Melissa Vetters elaborates the question whether the material evidence allows a distinction between popular and official cults, and looks at how private and communal levels of ritual action are related to the former two concepts which are widely accepted in the scholarly discourse on Mycenaean religion. Secondly, the two concluding articles present case studies of archaeological material defined as votives with different cultic functions in well-defined contexts. Melissa Vetter's contextual insights derive from post-palatial Tiryns. Lena Sjögren looks at the material from various Cretan (800–500 BC) cult sites from a social perspective in interpreting archaeological material connected with ritual activity. She interprets votives as expressions of accessibility to a cult-site rather than emphasizing the notion of their display and, consequently, regards the space where votives where deposited as an indication of social interaction that could have taken place in cultic space. In her contribution Gudrun Klebinder-Gauß elaborates the role and nature of votive offerings on the basis of the finds from the Archaic Artemision of Ephesos. She outlines the reasons for treating this sanctuary as a special case in the light of the very rich votive material while at the same time locating it in the 'cultic climate' of the contemporary Ionian and West Anatolian sphere. She emphasises the fruitfulness of an analysis of the main focal points within the complete spectrum of votives in a deposit or sanctuary deriving a general idea of the cult's nature on this basis as having had a specific focus in the female sphere of life. The final article is based on the contribution which Berit Wells provided at the workshop. Our gathering together at Olympia was to remain her last academic conference. Berit brought to the event her rich and varied insights on early Greek cult presenting in her paper a comparison between the Geometric material from the two cult sites where she had carried out extensive archaeological work, namely Asine in the Argolid and the sanctuary of Poseidon at Kalaureia on Poros. Her presentation was titled *New beginnings? Preparations for Renewal of Cult at Kalaureia and Asine*. Its present form is based on Berit's own texts and material she produced for the event and the final text has been put together by Arto Penttinen, Petra Pakkanen and Jari Pakkanen.

Discussions: Questions and Answers

Discussions at the Olympia workshop played an almost equally important role as the read papers. They were lively and lasted almost as long, or even longer, than the presentations themselves. At times they evolved into an exchange of wider ideas in the scholarship of Greek religion and resulted in a debate and an exchange of views on the discussed issues, comparative examples in the archaeological study of Greek religion, and the elaboration of new questions in this field. That is why it is worthwhile to give the reader an idea of what was discussed around the table at the time of the workshop: provoking, unquestioned or unanswered themes were taken up on the basis of the talks. The presentation below is selective, and the intention is to provide the reader with a summary of the issues discussed by presenting the main themes and ideas that were exchanged around the table following each presentation.

Johannes Siapkas's paper raised the question on how the so-called 'popular archaeology turn' in the study of ancient Greek religion has affected our interpretations and how, for example, the German *Religionswissenschaft*-tradition has been reflected in the scholarship of ancient Greek religion. It was pointed out that the term 'anthropology of religion' can be slightly misleading since the study of religion involves national and

geographical differences which render the emphasis and points of view different in various traditions within the field of the study of religion. The Scandinavian tradition, for example, tends to build more heavily on folklore while in France philosophical underpinnings have been emphasised when religion is theoretically approached. This led to a discussion on the possibility of 'originality' in the archaeological study of religion. In Siapkas's view the richness of material in principle provides the possibility for originality and allows possible new interpretative frameworks to emerge. This was seen, for example, in the 70s' processual and consequent post-processual turns in archaeology which called for testing hypotheses and theories. Siapkas could not, however, identify a cutting edge of classical archaeology and general archaeology at the moment, but regarded the historical awareness of changing interpretative frameworks as important.

The tradition of publishing archaeological material in archaeological reports was discussed, and the current practice was defended against Siapkas's critical views: it was maintained that there is a need for primary publications of material, and that interpretations are the next step in the process, and that this step can only be achieved through these primary publications. However, it was acknowledged that the archaeologists should demonstrate rigour as even the first step of their work in the field includes interpretation; for example, defining certain material as coming from secondary depositions is quite often itself dependent on interpretation.

Petra Pakkanen's presentation provoked questions about ritual and its archaeological understanding in relation to anthropological approaches to interpreting the phenomenon of ritual. It was pointed out that 'ritualisation' as contrasted to 'ritual' – the concept which has been embraced particularly in archaeology of cult after Catherine Bell's study (1992) – is conceptually very different from mere ritual. Ritualisation is a more complex way of looking at the phenomenon as ritualisations are embedded in discourses following the theories of Foucault, Bourdieu, Geertz and others, and tend to reflect a more active view of culture than the earlier views of ritual which often regarded it as a more stable phenomenon. This equals in certain sense to the theories recently put forward by the scholars of the so-called 'ritual dynamics' -school.

The problem of where to draw a line between the sacred and profane was raised, and Pakkanen proposed that we should not (religiously) follow the minima criteria for identifying ritual as is suggested, for example, by Colin Renfrew's list (1985). When we work in a sanctuary setting, we have to start from the proposition that there was a difference between the sacred and the profane: religious activity took place particularly in these settings, and even the frame of mind of people acting in those spaces was regulated by rules embedded in a religious worldview. This does not mean that profane activity did not take place there as well, but when reoccurring practices detectable in depositions can be identified, we can start asking questions about possible ritual behaviour. The importance of being careful, therefore, should be stressed when defining ritual in an anthropological sense and not restricting it to a few named criteria: our concept of ritual should not exclude individual, one-time occurrence rituals and should not emphasise too much formality which according to Pakkanen is not a necessary condition for a ritual to happen. A possibility of profane ritual has been recently discussed in the anthropological study of ritual and in religious studies, and, therefore, mere repetitiveness does not make the practices sacred. Archaeological studies in sanctuary settings can, however, draw tentative conclusions about the dividing line between the sacred and the profane, because it can be argued that in prehistoric and protohistoric times, particularly, there was no

sharp difference between the profane and religious, but instead there were special places where religious and cultic activity actualised. Furthermore, there are different types and levels of cults: domestic cults, community cults, regional cults etc., and they coexisted simultaneously. This was seen to rule out theories proposed by François de Polignac and Alexander Mazarakis-Ainian about the one-dimensional development of early Greek cult.

Part of the paper dealt with the identification of waste and pollution. Regarding the issue it was noted that pollution is very difficult to identify archaeologically since its identification often depends on the absence of it. Therefore, the concept of pollution works best when we are dealing with animal bones or sacrificial waste, and it should be remembered that ritual deposits often do not include ritual waste. It was pointed out that Greek sanctuaries were also places of hoarding. Bearing this in mind it is possible to proceed from the ideas of clearing off waste to gathering of things particularly in major Greek sanctuaries. Hoarding and clearing of waste were naturally part of the life cycles of the sanctuaries, but we should not mix these phenomena with pollution which was tied to religious ideology and belief systems.

Susanne Bocher's talk on the black strata stimulated the participants to bring forward parallels from other sites, including the material from Ephesos and Kalapodi. Bocher reminded us that our knowledge about the Olympian 'black layer' largely comes from the nineteenth-century reports and excavators' diaries and as such is often inconclusive in nature. Determining whether the bronze objects found in the black strata had been in contact with fire before their deposition may often be difficult because the early methods of conservation eliminated or minimised possible traces of burning.

The nature of votive objects was discussed on the basis of the examples in Bocher's talk. It was asked whether dedicating a non-functioning part of an object instead of a whole one was really a new phenomenon in Early Iron Age cult. This is linked to an observation which is sometimes characterised as 'killing an object', i.e. intentionally destroying or breaking objects in order to turn them into votive offerings. We were reminded that the intentionality of destroying an object before dedicating it has become one of the criteria for understanding a votive as such; figurines are usually seen as exception to the rule, and this merits reconsideration. Temple inventories often list broken objects in addition to the complete items, and this may tell us about different principles in valuing objects between the modern and ancient times: brokenness did not necessarily render certain objects less valuable. There may also have been a practical dimension to folding bronze objects in particular, namely saving space when they were cleared away. Bocher explained that this practice of folding bronze objects seems to have been rather common and wide-spread, and archaeological publications have only recently begun to pay attention to the issue.

Melissa Vetters' talk initiated a discussion about the validity of differentiations between official and popular religion on the one hand and between private, domestic and household rituals on the other. Vetters explained that when considering Mycenaean religion she wishes to replace the division popular/official religion with a dichotomy between communal and private rituals and cults due to the problematic implications of the older popular/official dichotomy. It presupposes a static and rather canonised view of religion that is usually seen only in 'book-religions' and does not as such work for Mycenaean religion. The analytical value of dismissing Robin Hägg's division was recognised, but it was asked whether we really need a distinction between private and communal cults as they may seem to fuse into one another. Vetters argued that it is possible to see clear distinctions in the figurine groups, and based on the differentiation in the material it is

analytically useful to operate with these distinctions. For example, on the basis of her material she explained that figurines tend to come from central rooms or rooms with hearths, not just from everywhere in households. This gives grounds for differentiating between private and domestic ritual, and, therefore, the use of the figurines in the post-palatial period seems to fall into the category of the household rituals. In Vetter's view domestic rituals involved much more than figurines, but these acts are very difficult to trace in the archaeological record. In private rituals the focus is not on performance and they reflect what was going on and acted out in communal rituals, but in much minor scale. Thus, domestic rituals are broader in their scope of activities than mere private rituals.

The discussion evolved to how we observe traces of elite ritual behaviour in the material: can we recognise a possible difference between communal shrines and elite shrines, and what do we actually mean when we talk about 'elite behaviour'? Was it part of 'official cultic behaviour'? Vetters pointed out that a proportionally very high number of figurines from the core sites of the Argolid compared to any other area makes it possible to link them to some kind of elite traces in the post-palatial ideology and religious usage: figurines were effective means of transporting ideas and bringing new connotations into a belief system. She noted that even though elite probably influenced the rest of the community by its behaviour and manners of social and ritual interaction, tracing this in the material is virtually impossible. Yet we should not say that communal ritual behaviour is simply elite ritual behaviour and that private should be characterised exclusively as domestic.

The nature, uses and meaning of the figurines themselves were discussed. Vetters noted that the distinction between animal and anthropomorphic figurines in terms of their use only starts in the post-palatial period. This distinction is a result of the historiographical process in the study of Mycenaean religion. As to the meaning and the role of the animal figurines protective magic could be one explanation, their fertility aspect another. However, due to the lack of contextual evidence for many of these figurines in her material Vetters could not give a conclusive answer to the question whether the bovines, for example, were substitutes for animal sacrifice or whether they stood as protectors of the households; she pointed out that it is possible to draw conclusions on this issue only by observing possible structural patterns in the material.

Lena Sjögren's presentation led to a discussion about the nature of communal acts particularly in contrast to private ones. The participants asked what the variables for determining and differentiating the communal aspect of dedicating from the private ones are. For example, as figurines could often be regarded as personal objects, what makes the act of dedicating them especially communal? Sjögren explained that the accessibility of certain spaces which could be seen as communal meeting places for many persons at once could determine the communal aspect of this ritual activity. A communal feast, for example, can be regarded as a communal act of this type, and there did not need to be elite display of dedicatory items. The problem remains, however, for example, as to the necessity of social interaction in these places. It was agreed that both private and communal aspects of dedicating could have been simultaneously present in places and locations which can be defined as communal spaces: private and communal natures of leaving dedications co-existed since dedicating could have been a personal act, but at a location where people gathered together it also had communal aspect and could have, therefore, facilitated social interaction. It was reminded that we should be careful,

however, not to mix dedicating *per se* and the motivation behind it since the motivation for dedicating an item for deities was most often personal in nature. Votive offerings could have created social cohesion as agents of meanings at certain places, but there must have been a driving body or organisation behind this kind of communal behaviour to materialise.

Gudrun Klebinder-Gauß's talk provoked questions about the element of display and displaying of votives, which in this case also reflect the idea of the Greek term *anathema*, something which is raised. Could there have been an aspect of elitist display regarding the votives and votival practices from Ephesos? Klebinder-Gauß acknowledged the expense and labour-intenseness in the production of certain items regarded as votives (griffin protons, for example), but was hesitant to regard them as tokens of displaying elitist wealth at Ephesos.

Problems in identifying the limits and borders of the *temenos* at Ephesos, like at many other sanctuaries, were discussed. It was acknowledged that the ways archaeological excavations themselves may change the picture we get on the cults depends on where within a sanctuary or its vicinity trenches are opened. Particularly in the earlier studies even the roles attributed to deities was affected by this, and Athena, for example, was perceived as a more central figure than Artemis. This led to a discussion of possible other cults and deities worshipped at the sanctuary of Ephesos in addition to Artemis herself. Klebinder-Gauß noted that in its character Ephesos was more oriented towards inland, for example Lydia, whereas other Ionian sanctuaries were more inclined towards Near-Eastern and/or Egyptian influences. Ephesos portrays, however, also its local originality, and this comes clearly across in the material found at the sanctuary.

Berit Wells's paper was followed by a discussion of the continuity of cultic activity over periods of time. Feelings of uneasiness were expressed about building a picture of the continuity of cult on the basis of the remains of some Late Helladic III sherds associated with the Geometric objects. Wells pointed out the continuity of activities, but not necessarily continuity of cult. She explained that on the basis of the eighth-century material from Kalaureia it is possible to say that cultic activity existed there during that time. The usual increase of cultic material at that period and the often occurring use of previous habitation sites for new cultic activities were agreed upon, but caution was also urged for drawing a line in the continuity of cult too easily. In the case of the Kalaureian Attic amphorae it should be remembered that these were movable objects, a fact which obviously could point to ritual banqueting, yet banqueting does not always indicate a cultic function of an area.

The possibility of the Kalaureian pits having served a role in a foundation sacrifice was discussed. Wells regarded this as possible, but the fragmentary nature of the Kalaureian vessels renders their role as foundation depositions suspect: one would expect broken but in principle complete vessels to be dumped for such a sacrifice, not just fragments of them. Wells explained that large Attic amphorae are often seen as grave markers though the same type of amphorae are found at quite a few sanctuaries, on the Athenian Acropolis, the Acropolis of Asine, at Tegea, for example. Therefore, we should overlook the interpretation that they were always grave markers and see them, for example, also as markers of space and status of wealth at the sanctuaries. Wells thinks that at Kalaureia there must have in any case been a strong motivation for rearranging the area around these deposits; this is indicated by the obvious interconnectedness of the vessels, and the fact that they were not randomly scattered around at the site.

Berit Wells passed away less than ten months after the workshop at Olympia, but her thoughts and ideas remain with us, and her contribution in this volume represents one of her much-valued insights to cult archaeology. Berit clearly enjoyed the Olympia workshop and we can still hear her lively and enthusiastic voice during the long discussions. Berit's title for her talk reminds us about new beginnings and renewals, and we dedicate this book to her memory.

List of Participants and Papers at the Workshop

Participants:

Rebecca Ammerman (US)
Susanne Bocher (Germany)
Walter Gauß (Austria)
Gudrun Klebinder-Gauß (Austria)
Christos Liangouras (Greece)
Alexander Nagel (Michigan, US)
Wolf-Dietrich Niemeier (Germany)
Petra Pakkanen (Finland)
Oliver Pilz (Germany)
Reinhard Senff (Germany)
Johannes Siapkas (Sweden)
Lena Sjögren (Sweden)
Melissa Vetters (Germany)
Berit Wells (Sweden)

Papers:

Susanne **Bocher**: Ash, Bones, Votives – What Do We Know about the '*Black Strata*' in Early Greek sanctuaries?
Gudrun **Klebinder-Gauß**: The Interpretation of Votives from Cult Deposits in the Archaic Artemision of Ephesos
Christos **Liangouras**: A First Approach on the Cult of Demeter Chamyne in Olympia and Its Cult Deposits
Alexander **Nagel**: Interpreting the Cult Deposit in the Text-Free Zone. The Rhyakos-Plain Deposit from Ancient Stratos
Wolf-Dietrich **Niemeier**: New Excavations in the Sanctuary at Kalapodi (Ancient Phokis)
Oliver **Pilz**: Terracotta and Bronze Figurines from Geometric and Archaic Dwellings: Domestic Cult or Personal Belongings?
Petra **Pakkanen**: Depositing Cult. Considerations on What Makes a Cult Deposit
Johannes **Siapkas**: Worshiping Archaeologies – Approaches to Votive Cult Deposits
Lena **Sjögren**: Cretan Cult Practices: Social Aspects of Iron Age and Archaic Votive Deposits
Melissa **Vetters**: Private and Communal Ritual in the Mycenaean Post-Palatial Period – a Case Study from Tiryns
Berit **Wells**: New Beginnings? Preparations of Renewal of Cult at Kalaureia and Asine.