



Greek «calendars» and symbolic representation of the cosmic order. Seasonal rites for Demeter

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Abstract

Ancient Greeks made no use of a liturgical text in order to prescribe their annual religious time, since it was marked by diversity in month names between different cities and communities, as well as by a great number of individual festivals imposed in different periodical cycles, that in addition were subject of continuous changes according to the city and historical period. Those parameters produce extra difficulties in any attempt to reconstruct the date of specific festivals. We will deal with this question through epigraphic evidence implying existence of festivals with movable dates, including seasonal rites celebrated in honor of Demeter and related deities. If some of these rites were actually mobiles, and the moment of their celebration was changing from year to year, there must be surely an impact of this eventual fact in the study of the orientation of temples and sanctuaries associated to those cults and their receivers.

Keywords: *Greek religion, festivals date, movable rites*

Introduction

The word “Calendar” and the Ancient Greek epigraphic evidence

Modern dictionary descriptions of the word *hemerologion* in Greek, or *Calendar / calendrier / Kalender* in other west european languages, refer to a written text, as well as to the act of calculating both days/months and years, which points out that the semantics of all these modern words contain not only circular, but also linear time (Kravaritou 2007). However, Ancient Greek written tradition used completely different terms, in order to describe the linear

-Historia (History), *Chronon anagraphe* (Register of the years), etc.- and the circular time - *periodos* (period), *kuklos* (circle), *hetos* (year), *eniautos* (repetitive period of time)- respectively (Darbo-Peschanski 2000, 89-114; Kravaritou 2006, 24-33). Furthermore, Ancient Greeks never used a specific term to describe their annual religious time, or the totality of their annual festivals (Kravaritou 2002; Kravaritou 2006, 39-44). We assume that they were never interested in doing so, since they made no use of a specific book or written text for this purpose. A detailed study of both the form and content of the

epigraphical documents, called by modern scholars «sacred laws» (Prott & Ziehen 1896-1906; Sokolowski 1969) or «Calendars» (Daux 1963; Pritchett 1963), attests diversity in both form and terminology, as well as diversified content. For example, the 4th cent. document from the ancient Attic deme of Erchia describes 5 sequences of religious rites sponsored by demes archon, the demarch (Daux 1963; Lambert 2000, 73-80). A contemporary text from Eleusis describes, in more details, festivals taking place in this sanctuary (Daux & Healey 1965; Whitehead 1986, 188-190). Another one describes a series of rites included in the oath taken between 2 groups of the same genos, for the purpose of determining the accomplishment of rites in two cult places in common use (Ferguson 1938). Likewise, we are not dealing with «Calendars» corresponding to our modern point of view, but with pure state administration documents that usually determined the religious duties of specific archons or social groups (Kravaritou 2007). We have also noticed that they almost never contain the totality of the annual festivals of a city or a community (Sokolowski 1969, *passim*; Kravaritou 2006, 235-242). Consequently, the time limit application of these texts should usually be restricted, since new rites and festivals were permanently introduced into the religious annual time of every city from the Archaic to the Hellenistic period, and old rites were continuously modified (Garland 1992; Sourvinou-Inwood 1997), while we have no signs that the content of those texts was renewed. Therefore it is obvious that steles carrying these particular texts were not erected in public places in order to serve as a way for the public to consult the year's festivals. Obviously, the main reason for not having a «Calendar» emerged from the nature of religious life itself. It is well known that the history of organization of circular time, including month names and festivals was a local affair of every single city and community (Trümper 1997; Knoepfler 1989-1990), which prevented the presence of a pan-Hellenic «Calendar». Finally, two more parameters played a significant role in the configuration of a written text: firstly, the

complex system of different periodical cycles (annual, biennial, triennial, penteteric, okteteric, etc rites) that in addition could change at any time (Roussel 1916; Price 1999; Kravaritou 2006, 186-196), resulting in extra difficulties in the registration of the annual festivals, since the sequence of annual festivals was differentiated from year to year. In a 4th cent. Attic text of the Marathonian Tetrapolis there is an effort to describe the periodicity of rituals, related actually to different state agents responsible for organizing and financing those rituals (Lambert 2000; Kravaritou 2007). In general, it can be concluded that when periodicity is described, we lose contact with an eventual image of an annual «Calendar», and when we have description of one year's rites according to month and date, we never have the totality of the rites of a city or community. At this point, we will introduce into our discussion a final issue that reveals a fact of fundamental importance to the understanding of Ancient Greek religious circular time: the question of the date of individual rites.

Construction of the religious year

It is well known that the Ancient Greeks adopted the luni-solar Calendar and that they made use of extra months according to several intercalating systems, in order to gain permanent correlation between the 12 lunar mansions and the annual solar course, or in other words between months and seasons (Pritchett 1999; Hannah 2005, 29-41). Plato (*Laws*, VI, 809d) refers to the discipline –*taxis*– that was characterized the Greek arrangement of «days into periods of months, and of months into years». However, this ideal image does not agree with a famous passage of Aristophane's (*Clouds*, 615-619), where the goddess Selene and the other divinities show their displeasure at the irregularity in the celebration of festivals that prevents them from having their regular meals. This passage has been actually associated by modern scholars: 1. with the calendaric rearrangements conducted by Meton during Aristophane's time (Hannah 2005, 52-70), 2. with the researches of Meritt and Pritchett

clearly demonstrating the practice of intercalating days according to archons' decisions, which was interpreted by modern scholars as "tampering with the Calendar" (Meritt 1961; Pritchett 1999), and 3. with the disagreement in the counting of days observed between the religious and the political year in Athens (Hannah 2005, 42-47), similar to what is observed between different cities (Thucydide, 2, 19, 1).

The question of festivals date

Modern historians of Greek religion kept arguing for years that the annual celebration of Greek festivals was strongly marked by disorder and discontinuity troubling their relation to the seasons (Cartledge 1985, 101). However, B. Meritt (1969, 108) taking as a basis a 4th cent. B.C. text attesting the intercalation of 4 extra days in the normal annual course that took place after the 9th of month Elapheboliōn, and just before the celebration of the City Dionysia, has shown that these 4 extra days bear the name of the previous days followed by the quantitative numeral that corresponds to the intercalation number (9th of Elapheboliōn 1st intercalated day, 9th of Elapheboliōn 2nd intercalated day, etc.; cf. Kravaritou 2007). After the end of this 4 intercalated days period, the following day was named 10th of Elapheboliōn, and the festival that was traditionally celebrated during this day was held in the canonical way. So, the remarkable Greek ingenuity managed to create time into time, since -on the one hand- the date of the performance of festivals was astronomically postponed, but on the other hand was not changed, keeping a close connection to what inscriptions usually refer to as "ancestral customs" (*kata ta patria*). Normally, those extra days ought to be omitted before the end of the month, otherwise they created differentiation of the beginning of the month (*nounenia*) of the political and religious Calendar in comparison with lunar mansions (Pritchett 1999), which perfectly explains the displeasure of Selene mentioned by Aristophanes (*Clouds*, 615-619). Pritchett (1999, 81) made use of Meritt's conclusions in order to claim that Greek religious rites were

carried out on their predetermined days, and used as an example many Apollo's festivals celebrated on the 7th of the month. We think that even if specific dates are sometimes dedicated to certain gods, this phenomenon cannot be applied to the total of festivals and rites of the Greek cities.

Movable rites?

Fragments of a 5th cent. B.C. state law document found in the Athenian Agora were attributed to Nikomakhos, the 5th century reviser of the systematic program of the State religion established firstly by Solon (Dow 1961; Lambert 2002). This fragmentary epigraphic document describes amongst others a total of rituals: each entry or group of entries is accompanied by a rubric, an explanation of the title by which a given sacrifice earns its place in the revised code. There are 4 rubrics, which were interpreted by Robertson (1990). Robert Parker (1996, 44-46) interpreting the "month by month" rubric and the "no fixed date", claimed that the first one refers to the month by month Calendars of the demes, and he suggested that the second indicates the eventual presence of movable festivals, although he notes the lack of further evidence. Movable feasts are a common element of many contemporary and ancient Calendars. The annual religious life of Rome had a main group of fixed festivals (*feriae statae*), accompanied by a smaller group of *feriae conceptivae*, festivals of varying date, which were mainly agricultural festivals, and their date was announced annually by the pontiffs (Scheid 1990, 457). Therefore, it would come as no surprise, if we discovered such festivals in Greece, since we have first of all some elements of festival proclamation, an act taking part before their celebration. R. Parker draws attention to the proclamation of Proerosia -the "pre-ploughing" festival- by the herald, attested to a 4th century epigraphic document from Eleusis, and confirms this hypothesis by observing of fluctuation in the date of Proerosia in different demes (Parker 1987; Parker 1996: 47).

So, the understanding of the character of such

rites must be related to the way that an eventual movable feast could be attested to a written document. We note that many rites are attested with no indication of date. A 4th century text of the Delphic phratry of Labyades (Sokolowski 1969, no 77D; Rougement 1977, 57-85) mentions (ll. 2-11) such a series of festivals entitled "obligatory sacrifices (*thoinai nomimoi*)" that bear no date, but among them there are two more rites (ll. 6-7) with indication of month and date. This fact emphasizes the difficulty to distinguish eventual movable feasts by simple lack of written date. The Delphic inscription indicates further (ll. 43-51) a second series of rites, with only relative reference to the moment of celebration, which are entitled "these are the sacrifices of the Labyades (*taide thusiai Labyadan*)". Finally, enumeration of rites ends (ll. 49-51) by prescribing that "the other sacrifices (*tas de allas thunais*) must be accomplished (*agesthai*) *kata tan horan*, "according to the right season" as interpreted by G. Roux (1973, 60-78), or "on the right date" as interpreted by the first commentator, Th. Homolle (1895, 63). Maybe following Roux's interpretation- the phrase refers to rites whose date was mobile, configured within the limits of the right season. The Greek word *hora* as "season" should not be taken strictly as meaning one of the four seasons, but also as meaning the right period of time corresponding to time of the practice of one of the agricultural works, since Greeks visualized the cycle of seasons mostly in correspondence to repeated rhythm of agricultural works (Chantraine 1968: 1303-1304; Sokolowski 1969, no 92; Rudhardt 1999). Possible relation of those last category of Delphic festivals to limits of seasons is indicated also by the fact that most of the festivals mentioned into the previous lines of the inscription -consequently those who must not be celebrated *kata tan horan*- are festivals that are homonymous to Delphic months (Rougement 1977, 82-85). This means that they were fixed festivals originally attached to specific months, contrary to those mentioned to lines 49-51, that should normally correlate with the seasons. Relationship between periodicity of specific festival's and agricultural works has been discussed by M.

Nilsson (1920), E. Simon (1983), Isager and Skydgaard (1992: 159-202), while the relationship between agricultural works related to cereal culture and rites performed in honor of Demeter in Attica was developed by M. Brumfield (1985). Nevertheless, nobody between these scholars relates this issue to an eventual existence of mobile rites.

Seasonal rites for Demeter

A further study of epigraphic and literary elements indicating the celebration moment of Demeter's rites testifies on one hand that they occupy all the duration of a year's time (Brumfield 1985; Georgoudi 1994; Kravaritou 2006, 293-337). On the other hand, it is clear that judging by proportion most of them occupy the period from early autumn to summer (Kravaritou 2006, 320-321), period whose two limits are marked by ploughing/sowing and harvest respectively (Hesiod, *Works and Days*, 383-384; Amouretti 1986; Kravaritou 2002, 32-34). More specifically, epigraphical study of the Antheia, Chloia, Calamaea, Halôa gives us no specific date for their celebration (*Inscriptiones Graecae* II², no 949; Kravaritou 2006, 297-301). Moreover, modern scholars, following late Greek authors and a long Byzantine lexicographic tradition try to locate those dates by simple observation of their syntax position into the available texts. This method sometimes reserves surprises, especially when there is attempt to generalize those conclusions. Chloia, for example, was considered a spring cult dedicated to the germination (Parker 1987, 141-143). Nevertheless, a 3rd cent. B.C. inscription from Mykonos (Sokolowski 1969, no 96, l. 5-12) testifies performance of Demeter Chloë's cult during winter and a 4th cent. B.C. inscription from Marathon places an homonymous cult in summer (month Thargeliôn) (*Inscriptiones Graecae* II², no 1358, l. 27). Therefore, differentiations in dates of homonymous rituals must be taken seriously into consideration when trying to reconstruct possible local festival dates. Proerosia, the pre-ploughing festival is attested in 4 Attic demes: in Paiania, for Demeter, with unspecified day; in Thoricos,

for Daira, in Hekatombaeon (Jul./Aug.) and for Zeus Polieus, in Boedromiôn (sept./oct.); in Myrrhinous and Eleusis with unspecified date (Parker 1987, 141-143; Robertson 1996). Furthermore, the Demetria, the Sicilian festival held in honor of Demeter sowing time correlate with the Thasian Damatria, the Boeotian month Damatrios (Salviat 1958, 197; Knoepfler 1989-1990, 43-44), and also bring in mind the Thesmophoria rituals held for example in Attica during the same period (Deubner 1966, 316-317; Clinton 1996). However, various different dates are attested for the Thesmophoria festival (Nilsson 1906, 313; Kravaritou 2006, 306-308): in Attica during Pyanepsiôn (oct./nov.); at Rhodes, one month later (sept./oct.) as indicated by the homonymous local month name (Trümpy 1997, 167); in Delos during local Metageitniôn (aug./sept.) (*Inscriptiones Graecae* XI, no 290; Bruneau and Ducat 1983, 48); in Euboea during summer time (Plutarchus, *Moralia*, 298B) fact that correlates with the celebration of Theban Thesmophoria (Xenophon, *Hellenica*, 5, 2, 29); finally, a date between summer and autumn was given for the homonymous Syracusan festival (White 1964, 265). In addition, fluctuation in festivals date according to local parameters is observed in the case of the Megalartia (Nilsson 1906, 235; Kravaritou 2006, 309-310), festival held in honor of Demeter that "brings loafs of bread": beginning of autumn in Delos (Nilsson 1906: 316-317), and spring celebration in Delphi (Rougement 1977, 58-60).

Conclusion

The diversity observed in dates of Demeter's festivals in connection with the rest of the above mentioned evidence that indicates celebration of seasonal rituals with unspecified date can drive us into the conclusion that Greek movable festivals did actually exist. But, this fact can be demonstrated only if we consider the annual cycle of religious celebrations of every Greek city as a unit, as a Greek "Calendar". Otherwise, apart from scanty information about proclamation of certain festivals and the Delphic inscription indicating probably movable annual rites

(Rougement 1977, 57-85: cf. supra, p. 6), we have no further evidence that the date of certain festivals can change from year to year in one single place. Maybe this absence is due to the fact that such eventual year to year changes were not annually recorded by written documents, and so we are not aware of them. Or, maybe diversity in festivals dates between cities is due to local parameters -for example, different climatic conditions- that impose local configuration of the farming year (Amouretti 1986, 70-144; Kravaritou 2006, 314-328) whose stages were annually commemorated by the local communities.

In general, it is evident that celebration of Greek festivals was purely a local affair, and therefore study of the Greek Religion must always be based on a microanalysis -term introduced in the study of the Ancient Greek Religion by M. Detienne (1997)-, deriving from careful examination of evidence related to both spatial and historical parameters (Calame 1996). Furthermore, it seems that related sciences using scanty information concerning the configuration of the Greek annual religious time should be aware of those problems related mainly to Greek polytheism and the individual religious life of the local communities. For example, every attempt to relate measurement of temples orientation to cultic episodes of the Greek religious life must rely only to local archaeological evidence, as well as to epigraphic and literary evidence concerning the particular temple. Any use of evidence concerning another temple dedicated to the same deity, or any attempt to generalize conclusions coming from another case study, can easily lead to misjudgment of the date of the local festivals and therefore mislead the modern reconstruction of the relationship between astronomical phenomena and orientation of specific ancient monuments.

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