

## Introduction

*Angelos Chaniotis*

The cover of this collective volume features Sebastiano Ricci's *Sacrifice to Silenus* (c. 1723), now in the Gemäldegalerie in Dresden. An ancient temple serves as the backdrop of the sacrifice; the architectural setting along with a bust of Silenus and metal vases placed in front of the altar inform the viewer that the scene takes place in Greco-Roman antiquity. The 'authenticity' of the image, enhanced by details inspired by ancient material culture, is however, undermined by the body language of the priest and the worshippers: the priest raises his right hand like an Old Testament figure or a Christian priest delivering a sermon; with his other hand he touches the marble head of Silenus, a gesture unknown from ancient images of sacrifice. The worshippers, both male and female, fall to their knees, as only Greek women did – then in prayer, not in sacrifice.<sup>1</sup> They cross their arms and bow their heads, performing gestures inspired by Christian ritual. The manner in which Ricci represented a pagan ritual depended on his experience with Christian rituals. Except for a piper in the background, the painting is void of any indication of sound: the mouths of all figures are closed; the victim lies dead. This absence of sound increases the distance between the ritual action and its viewer.

I have chosen Ricci's painting for this book's cover because it displays two of the challenges that face modern students of ancient rituals: to overcome the experiences and biases of their own time and culture, and to overcome the shortcomings of the source material. Written sources concerning rituals mostly refer to how actions were to be performed; they sometimes allude to the prescribed mood during the performance of rituals; yet they rarely describe how rituals were in fact performed on a specific occasion and what their emotional impact was. Similarly, representations of rituals in art reflect the norm – and some of its acceptable variations; for instance, they do not depict the ritual failure that undoubtedly occurred from time to time. Ricci's representation of body language leaves little doubt that he assumed that the sacrifice to Silenus was an emotional event, but the thoughts and feelings of the worshippers remain unknown to us. We can plausibly speculate that the painter assumes their awe towards the god and their hope for protection; but the feelings of real people during a sacrifice must have been more varied: fear, worry for the future, or grief for a past incident, even tensions among the participants.<sup>2</sup> The painting alludes to gender-differentiated responses to the ritual as well as to different types of agency – those of the priest, the piper, the

1 Van Straten 1974.

2 Chaniotis 2010.

worshippers, the victims, and of the god mediated through his marble bust. The *Sacrifice to Silenus* thus epitomizes the themes of the volume's essays: agency, emotion, gender, and representation.

This book assembles approaches to rituals in the Ancient Mediterranean. Although there is no such thing as 'Mediterranean rituals',<sup>3</sup> the significance and evolution of rituals in several cultures of the Mediterranean (Egyptian, Punic, Italian, Roman, Greek) from the second millennium BCE to Late Antiquity are suitable for comparison when studied from the perspective of 'ritual dynamics'. This term expresses the understanding of rituals as complex socio-cultural constructs that are connected with tensions: tensions within the cult community; tensions between norm and performance, expectation and reality, traditional significance and re-interpretation, stereotype and variability. Ritual studies, and more recently, the research connected with the Heidelberg research centre 'Ritual Dynamics',<sup>4</sup> have placed a lot of emphasis on change as an intrinsic characteristic of rituals in several ways:

- rituals are subject to change through human agency;
- rituals change for reasons beyond the control and intentions of human agents;
- rituals change those who perform them – takers of an oath, performers of a rite of passage or initiates in a mystery cult – or spectators.

In our world we continually encounter tensions and changes in rituals – from the Queen's deviation from tradition during the funeral of Princess Diana (bowing her head in front of the coffin) to the 'invention' of the 'time ceremony' at Merton College<sup>5</sup> and the continual evolution of the opening ceremony of the Olympic Games into a ritual with stereotypes and variations. In our time, the agents of changes, elaborations of traditions, and innovations are usually identifiable.

Intentional changes of rituals through human agents are well-attested also in the ancient Mediterranean, took various forms, and present instructive case studies.<sup>6</sup> Eftychia Stavrianopoulou (pp. 85–103) and Fritz Graf (pp. 105–117) study the initiatives of individuals, usually members of the elite of Greek cities to re-shape rituals: the augmentation of celebrations, the introduction of new celebrations, the manipulation of codifications in order to introduce changes, and the revival of old traditions, true or alleged. The intervention of human agents (ritual experts and statesmen) is evident even in a cult as conservative as the mystery cult of Demeter and Kore in Eleusis, as Ioanna Patera demonstrates (pp. 119–137). One of the clearest cases of interventions in rituals is Greek legislation concerning the control of funerals, which Flavia Frisone summarises (pp. 179–201). As innovations had to be justified and approved by representative bodies (assembly, council), recursion to tradition stereotypically served as a rhetorical device justifying change. Deliberations for ritual change included other considerations as well,

3 Chaniotis 2005.

4 For the most recent approaches to the subject see Michaels (ed.) 2007 and 2010.

5 See <http://www.mertonmcr.org/activities/time-ceremony/>.

6 On the concept of ritual agency see Krüger, Nijhawan, and Stavrianopoulou 2005; Sax 2006; cf. Emirbayer and Mische 1998.

such as the expected profit from the ‘proper’ performance of rituals and the expenses it entailed (pp. 91, 94–95, 105f., 124f.). The Greek source material thus offers rare insights into how ritual changes became subject to scrutiny and negotiation, even a matter for lawsuits (pp. 86–92).

A shared feature of such normative interventions in Greek rituals is their written fixation, ensuing permanency. In this sense, the written text, usually an inscription, acquired an agency of its own. As Stavrianopoulou writes (p. 92): ‘ritual behaviour is cemented and confirmed, further alterations are initially prevented, and recorded tradition becomes doctrine.’ The inscribed regulation became a point of reference which could even be incorporated into a ritual. The members of a cult association in Philadelphieia (p. 285) were asked to touch the stone on which the association’s purity regulation was inscribed, thus confirming time and again their allegiance to the cult’s rules.

Rituals’ negotiability can undermine their stability. The successful innovation introduced by one individual – a magistrate, a benefactor, a religious expert – might spur another individual to follow the same path. This problem exists particularly in cultures that promote individuality and permit the participation of large groups in decision-making; the world of the Greek city-states was such a culture, Pharaonic Egypt was not. How then was this problem resolved? What guaranteed the durability of ritual? In addition to the written fixation of tradition, one may observe two further responses to the danger of a continuous reformation of ritual. One is the creation of an illusion: the change is not a change but return to an (invented) ancestral tradition.<sup>7</sup> The second response is the canalization of innovation in a particular direction: towards staging, aesthetics, and size. The funerary ritual could remain unchanged, although its duration and the number of those allowed to attend was drastically limited; the sacrificial ritual could remain unchanged despite the innovations introduced by ritual enthusiasts with regard to staging directions, the number of victims and participants, the hymns, the decoration and so on. Upon scrutiny, ritual innovation through agents often reveals itself as innovation only of the staging of a ritual performance.<sup>8</sup> Changes in the Eleusinian mysteries (pp. 119–137) mainly concern the number and authority of officials and the augmentation of celebrations. The scale of existing rituals, also observed by Matthew McCarty in the ritual depositions at Hadrumetum in Tunisia (p. 215), can be regarded as a form of ritual variable. As R. Rappaport has observed, variables in the performance of a ritual are often connected with the particular social contexts of its enactment.<sup>9</sup> Many of the innovations in Greek rituals seem to be variables that left the canonical, essential form of a ritual unchanged.

Apart from change through conscious agency, another form of ritual change studied in this volume can be characterised as ‘ritual transfer’, that is, the conveyance of a ritual from one place, one religious context, one cult, one social group

7 On ‘invented traditions’ see Hobsbawm 1983. On negotiations in the assembly for the approval of ritual reforms see Chaniotis 2003a.

8 Chaniotis 2009b.

9 Rappaport 1999, 69–106.

and so on to another. Dionysiac rituals were transferred from Greece to Rome, the the Roman ritual of *Compitalia* came with Italian tradesmen to the island of Delos, Italian immigrants introduced to the Roman East the practice of decorating the graves with roses (*rosalia*, *rhodismos*), the rituals of the cult of the gods were transferred to the cult of mortals (kings, emperors, benefactors).<sup>10</sup> As Paraskevi Martzavou argues (pp. 73–77), the Eleusinian mysteries left their imprint on the mysteries of Egyptian gods in the Roman East in its symbols (cist, wheat sheaves) and practices (basket-bearers, hieronymy). The fusion of Egyptian Isis and Eleusinian Demeter may have taken place on Delos during its occupation by the Athenians.

Of course, as recent research has shown, ritual agency is not simply a matter of intentionality but encompasses aspects such as the temporary empowerment of individuals and the impact of non-human agents and the dead, particular objects, and the landscape.<sup>11</sup> The evolution of the dramatic festivals presents an interesting case of interaction between the agency of a community and individual dramatists. Drawing upon anthropological and sociological studies on the function of rituals, Synnøve des Bouvrie (pp. 139–177) interprets dramatic festivals as ‘public events’ whose shape was moulded by the community according to its collective needs and sensibilities. Responding to the expectations of their community, the dramatists became ‘instruments’ of its socio-cultural process.<sup>12</sup>

In a very different context and a very distant place, Hadrumetum in Tunisia, Matthew McCarty (pp. 203–234) studies the material remains and representation of a sacrificial ritual performed in the *tophet*, an open-air sanctuary. He demonstrates that the incorporation of Punic North Africa within the Roman Empire deeply altered the conception of ritual communication with the gods. This process of change did not merely involve the copying of a Roman model, but manifests as a complex re-conceptualization of traditional rituals.<sup>13</sup> An important component was a shift in meaning: from private sacrifice in fulfilment of a vow to communal sacrifice followed by sharing of food. Of note is the transformation of a liturgical variable (sacrifice of animal victims in addition to infant sacrifice) to a new canonical form (the sacrifice of animal victims alone; p. 215).

An analogous impact of Romanisation is discussed by Elisa Perego in another region, Veneto (pp. 17–42); but the main focus of her study is on a different aspect of agency: the ways in which women were capable of ritual action in pre-Roman Veneto. Exploiting the information provided by standardised iconography and inscriptions, she shows that individual agency can be identified in the archaeological record and that women fulfilled distinctive ritual roles connected with weaving and writing. She also argues that the remnants of rituals of com-

10 Dionysiac rituals in Rome: Pailler 1988. *Compitalia*: Hasenohr 2003. *Rosalia*: Kokkinia 1999. ‘Ritual transfer’ in the ruler cult: Habicht 1970, 195–200; Chaniotis 2003b. Further examples of ritual transfer in the Roman Empire: Chaniotis 2002 and 2009a.

11 E.g. Giddens 1984; Gell 1998; Meyer 2010; Weber 2010; cf. the remarks of Elisa Perego (pp. 24–26).

12 Cf. Humphreys 2004, 223–275, on the evolution of the Athenian festival of the *Anthesteria*.

13 Cf. Schörner 2006 and 2009.

memoration (e.g. tombstones) constructed a landscape imbued with meaning. The material remains of ritual mastery in another pre-Roman landscape – the Phoenician and Punic rural shrines of Eivissa (Balearic Islands) – are analysed by Mireia López-Bertran (pp. 43–60). In an area for which we lack written sources, a group of figurines from Illa Plana reveal a complex relation between specialists and non-specialists: despite differences in body decoration and some practices (e.g. touching the genitalia), all the participants shared the same gestures and had access to the same appeal to the senses and sensations (sounds, images, smells). The lack of significant differences in the finds in the cult cave at Es Culleram indicates that people would have been exposed to similar ritual experiences. A standardisation of iconography similar to those studied by Perego and López-Bertran is the basis for Martzavou's interpretation of a group of images from Athens representing women in 'Isis dress' (pp. 69–81). As Martzavou argues, these images commemorate women who fulfilled undetermined functions in rituals of the Egyptian mystery cults (possibly impersonating the goddess Isis). Pointing out a broad range of ritual agency, which goes beyond the part played by priests and exegetes, Martzavou proposes to designate the role played by these women as 'sacerdotisation'.

When modern studies of rituals do not take the senses into consideration, they resemble an attempt to enjoy an opera by watching it on a black-and-white TV-set whose speakers are not working, reading the subtitles. Several authors in the volume remind us that rituals appeal to and engage all the senses. López-Bertran observes that in the cave of Es Culleram the 'lack of light would have increased the appeal to the other senses, touching and hearing, especially in a cave that produced echoes' (p. 56); at Hadrumetum, McCarty cites the appearance of incense burners as evidence for the increasingly significant role of pleasant smells in the ritual (213f., 219, 222); and Connelly introduces her discussion of ritual movement in sacred space by highlighting the importance of visual sensation, sound, and smell in processions (pp. 313f.). The significance of the senses is closely related to another major theme of this volume: the corporeal aspect of ritual. Gestures, body language, and movement are not only treated by the authors who study the iconography of ritual (Connelly, López-Bertran, Martzavou, McCarty, Perego, Verbovsek); they also play a major part in the study of supplication, which is treated by Françoise Letoublon (pp. 291–311). Exactly as standardised iconography reveals the existence of ritual practices, so standardised linguistic expression shows the formalisation of the rite of supplication; what is more important, Letoublon shows how a gesture – the suppliant touching the knees of the supplicandus – is transformed into a speech act ('I touch your knees') that can take place without the actual gesture. Viewing prayer and supplication through the lens of linguistic theory, Letoublon discusses how speech acts and gestures co-exist in these rituals and mark the different hierarchical status of the persons involved.

To understand the experience of ritual we have to go beyond the static representation of bodies in iconography and study moving bodies in sacred space: humans, sacrificial animals, images of gods, pilgrims, participants in processions, dancers. From the procession towards the cave of Es Culleram (pp. 55f.) to the pilgrimage to Apollo's sanctuary in Yeronisos (pp. 334–338), the study of move-

ment in and to sacred space permits us to understand the corporeality of ritual experience. Joan Connelly's innovative approach to kinesis in Greek sacred space (pp. 313–346) calls for a re-evaluation of monuments and images. Connelly argues that ancient sacred landscape acquired meaning through movement and through memories of ritual performances. Sanctuaries were experiential zones full of energy and feeling. The impact of an ephemeral ritual event – such as a procession or a dance performed by boys and girls just before coming of age – was lasting, because such rituals were continually remembered.

Although norms prescribe the arousal of specific emotions in ritual, the affective response to a ritual performance remains one of the least controllable and thus most dynamic aspects of ritual. Almost all contributions in this volume address aspects of the relation between ritual and emotion, from the emotional impact of landscape (López-Bertran), initiation (Martzavou, Chaniotis), and funeral (Perego, Frisone, McCarty) to the arousal of emotion through movement (Connelly), prayer (Letoublon), and drama (des Bouvrie). Three contributions more specifically treat facets of this subject. Synnøve des Bouvrie argues that the programme of the dramatic festivals in Classical and Hellenistic Athens was punctuated by shifts in emotional quality, creating successive phases of 'prescribed sentiments' which constituted an important part of the meaning of the various genres (tragedy, comedy, satyr play) and were intricately interwoven with the social processes that gave rise to the festival (pp. 139–178).

My own contribution (pp. 263–290) discusses how certain acts of worship in the Roman East – initiation into mystery cults, pilgrimage to an extra-urban sanctuary in Macedonia, and worship of the divine patron of a civic community (Artemis of Ephesos) – transformed the cult communities into 'emotional communities', that is, communities of people who were expected to feel the same emotions (hope, fear, anger, affection, pride, etc.) in the worship of a deity. Exploiting visual and textual evidence but also modern literary theory, Alexandra Verbovsek (pp. 235–262) illuminates the emotional background and emotional impact of funerary ritual and enthronement in Pharaonic Egypt. The formalisation, stylisation, or simply 'ritualisation' of emotions, she argues, directed negative feelings and gave them meaning. In this way the ritual provided relief from emotional suffering. The uncontrollable event of death was replaced by clear structures that limited pressure, tension, and fear.

Finally, representation of ritual is another common theme of the volume. Visual representations, studied in numerous contributions (Perego, López-Bertran, Martzavou, McCarty) are important as evidence both of norms and of variation. As Matthew McCarty explains, iconography also helps us to understand the relationship between ritual action and its reception (pp. 214–217).

The representation of ritual is more than just a commemoration of the fact that it has been performed. It is polyvalent, and one of its functions is to serve as a visual or textual sign for the viewer or reader, who is expected to perceive a meaning beyond the ritual itself. Instructive examples are provided by Egyptian literature, Homeric poetry, and the historiography of the Roman Imperial period. Alexandra Verbovsek discusses how literature uses ritualised emotions as a

marker of normativity (pp. 248–257). The literary narrative known as ‘The Contendings Horus and Seth’ helped the readers overcome the insecurity and aggression resulting from the death of a king and the following combat for the throne; it healed feelings of antagonism and frustration. In the case of Greek epic poetry, Françoise Letoublon (p. 297) argues that the description of rituals of prayer and supplication play an important part in the structure of Homer’s *Iliad*, serving as tools that enhance the understanding of individual figures (Achilles) and the course of events. Martijn Icks demonstrates (pp. 346–374) that Roman historians chose to include detailed descriptions of the investiture of a Roman emperor as ‘failed rituals’, selecting, exaggerating, or distorting the facts. This narrative device aimed to make certain aspiring rulers look unworthy and to prepare the reader for the negative outcome of their rule. An attentive reader could observe divergence from tradition; even the implicit omission of certain ritual elements from the account (e.g. an acclamation by the soldiers) could be read as a tacit comment on deviation from a tradition. Unworthy emperors could be identified as such, exactly because they had not been properly invested.

To investigate aspects of the volume’s central themes – agency, change, emotion, gender, and representation – its contributors have exploited a variety of sources: archaeological remains and iconography in the Egyptian, Punic, Greek, and Roman world; Egyptian, Greek, and Latin literature; Greek, Venetic, Latin, and Punic inscriptions. The discussion of selected case studies did not primarily aim at illuminating these cases but at pointing to problems of method in the interpretation of a very diverse and complex source material, and at exploring the possibilities offered by linguistic, religious, historical, literary, anthropological, and sociological theory. It remains to express the hope that the case studies discussed in this volume will inspire more work in the study of the dynamics of rituals in the world of the ancient Mediterranean and beyond.

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