1 What is Greek religion?

Scholars of a relatively new discipline, the cognitive science of religion (CSR), are proposing new approaches to religion which challenge long-standing methodologies in anthropology and sociology as well as Classics. In their view, the human mind is supplied with an array of mental tools which give rise to religious beliefs and practices as by-products of normal cognition. After surveying the geographical and chronological boundaries of our investigation, we turn to the dual-process model, a fundamental cognitive principle which helps to explain why the Greeks were not distressed by what we often perceive as logical inconsistencies in their religion (e.g. between the local and Panhellenic personas of the gods). We then consider the dual-process model in the context of appropriate materials and methods for studying Greek religion, and conclude with the “minimally counterintuitive concept,” another key idea in CSR. The illustrative essays examine strategies for conceptualizing the unlimited Greek pantheon, the interaction between Homer’s Hera and the Hera(s) of cult, and the nature of reciprocity, an adaptive feature of human social behavior which is also fundamental to Greek religion.

What is religion? A debate in progress

To most people, the proposition that “religion” is mainly about worshiping God or gods is not particularly controversial. They may stipulate in addition that religion is a source of moral instruction, afterlife hopes or emotional support, but higher power(s), however defined, remain at the center of popular perceptions of religion. In the academy, however, a very different attitude has long prevailed, particularly in the social sciences. Definitions of religion have mostly avoided superhuman beings, as if they were an embarrassment. Philosophers of religion have denied that the metaphysical truth claims of religion (“God exists”) can be judged as such.¹ Pointing to religious traditions that are supposedly non-theist, scholars of religion have struggled to agree on what constitutes a “religion,” and they have favored broadly inclusive definitions.

Anthropologist Clifford Geertz asserted that religions are symbolic systems which people employ both to invest their world with meaning and to operate within that world. Robert N. Bellah, a sociologist, similarly defined religion as “a set of symbolic forms and acts that relate man to the ultimate conditions of his
existence.” Rather than acknowledging the role of deities, these definitions focus on how people use symbols to answer the big unknowns about life, death and the cosmos, and on how the answers shape their behavior in everyday life.

A very different approach, that of phenomenology, finds the core of religion in the experience of the “sacred” as opposed to the profane; or in the “numinous,” that which is wholly alien and therefore frightening, but also possesses a strong power of fascination. From this fundamental experience of something transcendent and unknowable flow our varied cultural understandings of life, death and the cosmos. The phenomenologists include Rudolf Otto and Mircea Eliade. In spite of their mystical bent, they are reluctant to frame religion in terms of gods, preferring impersonal formulations such as “the holy” or “the sacred.”

Very few thinkers have concluded that religion is primarily about human relationships with God or gods, and some have denied that gods have anything to do with religion. Émile Durkheim, the father of sociology, defined religion as an “eminently collective thing,” a system of beliefs and practices that unites people in a moral community. Sigmund Freud asserted that religion was “an illusion,” noted similarities between religion and mental disorders, and traced the roots of religion to childhood fears and desires. Karl Marx described religion as “the sigh of the oppressed creature . . . the opiate of the people,” a soothing fantasy which functioned to reconcile the poor to their wretched condition.

More recently, some scholars have concluded that “religion” is not a useful conceptual category for comparative study because the widely varying phenomena we refer to as religions do not have enough in common to justify grouping them together. Jonathan Z. Smith wrote in *Imagining Religion* that religion cannot be distinguished from culture:

> While there is a staggering amount of data, phenomena, of human experiences and expressions that might be characterized in one culture or another, by one criterion or another, as religion – there is no data for religion. It is created for the scholar’s analytic purposes by his imaginative acts of comparison and generalization. Religion has no existence apart from the academy.

The theorists of a relatively new discipline, the cognitive science of religion (CSR), are offering surprising new definitions which refocus attention on the role of gods and other superhuman beings in world religions. Already in 1966, Melford Spiro defined religion as “an institution consisting of culturally patterned interaction with culturally postulated super-human beings.” Cognitivist scholars such as Todd Tremlin likewise consider superhuman agents, whether they are gods, demons, angels, spirits, ghosts or ancestors, central to the phenomenon of religion:

> While the history of religious studies is marked by an inability to yield a working definition of “religion” – to say nothing of universal agreement that gods are even a necessary component of such a definition – focus on human cognition makes the troublesome task of defining religion easier by showing,
in an empirically testable fashion, that the common variable in discussions of religion at any level – from its slate of beliefs to its system of rituals to its organizational principles – is indeed commitment to superhuman agents. (Tremlin 2006.164)

Not all cognitivists would agree with Tremlin’s absolute formulation, yet a focus on human perceptions of superhuman agency is distinctive of their work. Ilkka Pyysiäinen offers a less restrictive definition: “Religion is a phenomenon based on the human ability to form counterintuitive ideas, metarepresent them, and treat them symbolically.”8 In this and the following chapters, I will explain the terminology used by Pyysiäinen in more detail. For now it is sufficient to note that the most common “counterintuitive idea” in world religions is an anthropomorphic being with nonhuman superpowers, like invisibility, flight or mind-reading.9 Dan Sperber, whose ideas have been foundational to CSR, prefers to think of religion as a polythetic or “family resemblance” category under which we can classify a number of related phenomena.10 This is the best approach for Greek religion, because even if gods or heroes or the dead are central to most of its strands, they cannot account for all.

CSR posits that humans think by applying a variety of mental tools to representational structures (concepts and beliefs). At birth, the mind-brain is not a blank slate, but possesses blueprints for discrete, interlocking systems which govern perception, learning and memory. These systems constrain and shape our perceptions and thoughts to a far greater extent than we realize. A fundamental insight of the cognitive approach to religion is that our mental architecture creates a susceptibility to representations of superhuman agents, a tendency to find them memorable, compelling and plausible.11 The same is true for magical beliefs, pollution/purity beliefs and certain other widely distributed subsets of religious thought. Together, these beliefs form the bedrock on which ritual, doctrinal and social outcomes are constructed. Religious thought, the cognitivists say, is nowhere near as variable among cultures as social scientists and historians have claimed, but instead manifests itself according to highly predictable patterns. Nor do truly non-theistic religions exist, although religious traditions may develop non-theistic doctrines. Theravada Buddhism is often cited as a non-theistic religion, but interaction with superhuman agents is typical of Theravada traditions in practice.12 Such contradictions between doctrine and practice often reflect an important distinction between two forms of processing used by the human brain, which I will discuss below: intuitive and reflective cognition.

CSR faces an uphill battle in several sectors of the academy, where it will inevitably be criticized for reducing religion in all its complexity to a set of cognitive biases, and giving short shrift to social dimensions, cultural specificity and complex doctrines.13 Because it echoes certain Tyloorean and Frazerian ideas, it is vulnerable to caricature as “animism plus experiments.”14 Yet a central principle of CSR, that the same cognitive mechanisms underlie all religious experience, refutes the persistent nineteenth-century paradigm of primitivism, of “lower” forms of religion succeeded by “higher” ones. A cognitivist perspective has the
potential to enrich our understanding of the role of religion in human experience. It asserts that religion is more than the sum of its political and social functions, a conclusion which challenges common theoretical assumptions in some fields (particularly Classical archaeology and ancient history). Among other things, CSR convincingly explains why religious and paranormal beliefs have not faded away in the modern West for lack of empirical evidence to support them. Instead, such beliefs still thrive because humans continue to possess the same mental architecture that gave rise to religion in the first place. Religious thinking, it would seem, is natural.

Past experience shows that a single theoretical stance or method will never tell us all we wish to know about religions. They must be studied from many disciplinary perspectives, including those of the social sciences and humanities. While CSR may have much to tell us about cross-cultural patterns in religion, it becomes more challenging to apply cognitivist methods as we focus in more detail on specific cultures and traditions. Exactly where the limits lie remains to be seen. In this book, I will show that many aspects of Greek religion (e.g. the anthropomorphism of its gods, its methods of divination and its conceptions of pollution and purity) have a basis in human cognitive architecture. Current cognitive models attempting to map the relations between ritual and society, discussed in Chapter 4, yield mixed results when applied to Greek religion, and yet these models are useful heuristic tools, pointing the way to further research.

Scholars of Greek religion have long focused primarily on its social aspects. By now it is a commonplace to observe that ancient Greek religion was embedded in social and political institutions. We are accustomed to “explaining” religious phenomena in functionalist terms, describing how religious beliefs and behaviors strengthened social cohesion and constructed identity. But heightened group identification and the other social “functions” of religion may be effects rather than causes. That they account for the genesis and transmission of religious ideas and behaviors is more often assumed than demonstrated. Then too, we seldom consider the possibility that religious beliefs and behaviors may have been neutral or even harmful in their effects on the long-term survival of a group. It is difficult to identify a benefit, for example, in the arbitrary Spartan refusal to fight during the festival of Karneia, which caused them to arrive too late at Marathon, and to send a reduced contingent to Thermopylae.

The social aspects of Greek religion are apparent to every student, but religion does not exist solely by virtue of the group. Instead, it exists by virtue of the properties of individual minds. There are no private religions, yet every religious idea begins with an individual mind shaped by human cognitive constraints. Such ideas are then elaborated and transmitted through social interaction to become part of a “religion.” In order to understand Greek religion, we need to begin with the mind. The Greeks were confident that their gods and goddesses existed and intervened in the world. For the most part, they gave credence to the content of their myths. They believed that some people were powerful after their deaths, able to affect the world of the living. They thought that oracles revealed the will of
the gods. These individual and cultural beliefs had important social consequences. But why would anyone believe these things in the first place?

Classicists who study the Greeks and their gods often observe that the English word “religion” has no equivalent in Greek. That the Greeks lacked an equivalent word or concept does not mean that they lacked religion, but it does present us with a preliminary challenge: we need to identify which aspects of Greek culture are under study in this book, and just what it is that we are attempting to understand. Definitions of religion drawn from sociology and anthropology tend to reflect the distinctive concerns of those disciplines. For our purposes, therefore, I prefer to begin by considering how the word “religion” has typically been used in written English. Fortunately, the lexicographers of the Oxford English Dictionary have already performed this descriptive work:

Religion: Belief in or acknowledgement of some superhuman power or powers (esp. a god or gods) which is typically manifested in obedience, reverence, and worship; such a belief as part of a system defining a code of living, esp. as a means of achieving spiritual or material improvement.

The lexicographical definition, with its heavy emphasis on superhuman powers, overlaps with concepts which were native to Greek culture, such as eusebeia, “reverence [toward the gods]” or ta theia, “divine matters.” The second part, however, is more difficult to align with Greek religion: “such a belief as part of a system defining a code of living, esp. as a means of achieving spiritual or material improvement.” This part of the definition has been influenced by the Jewish and Christian traditions, which include detailed codes of personal conduct ordained by a deity. The role of the Greek gods was typically to guarantee and enforce moral conduct rather than to define it. Greek culture, however, had no lack of systems defining a code of living; these were formulated by the poets and philosophers, many of whom were interested in the relationship between the individual and the gods, as well as the relationship between justice and the eschatological fate of the individual. Poets and philosophers also offered alternative answers to another dimension of religion which is omitted from the OED definition, but present in other dictionary definitions: explanation of the origin, nature and purpose of human beings, and of the universe.

Surveys of Greek religion often treat mythology, morality, cosmology and eschatology as marginal to the subject, but these are all pertinent to the modern conceptual category of “religion.” In worship contexts, Greek religion dealt selectively and sporadically with morality and eschatology, and scarcely at all with cosmology; these matters were instead taken up by the poets and philosophers. The overlap between mythology and worship has been a subject of historical debate and will be treated in Chapter 2. A principal goal of this book is to work toward an understanding of Greek religion in daily practice, with a focus on its ritual component, but reflection on and speculation about the gods, their history and their relationship to humanity are also an important part of what we understand by “religion.”
Everything is full of gods

Every culture produces one or more sets of beliefs about what the world around us is and how it works. Like virtually every other people in the ancient Mediterranean and Near East, the Greeks were polytheists who assumed that the world was full of gods. But the distinction between polytheism, likely the most ancient form of religion, and monotheism, a newer form which defined itself against polytheism, is not necessarily as clear as it seems at first glance. In spite of their claim to exclude all but one god, monotheistic traditions typically posit the existence of multiple superhuman beings (angels, jinn, saints, demons). Polytheistic traditions, for their part, may possess concepts of divine unity. This is the result of theological speculation, but it is not necessarily “late.” The Rig Veda, one of the oldest canonical texts of Hinduism, describes an original “One” deity who may have been the creator of the cosmos. Later Vedic literature elaborated the concept of the Absolute (Brahman) as the highest reality. The Hellenistic Greek Isis cult developed a theology according to which the goddess encompassed all divine sovereignty within herself. On a far simpler level, a Greek could speak of “the god” or “the divine” rather than a specific deity. Herodotus demonstrated this usage in his account of the Athenian sage Solon’s conversation with Kroisos, king of Lydia:

Kroisos, you ask me about human affairs, I who know that the divine (to theion) is utterly grudging and troublesome.

(Hdt. 1.32.1)

Artabanos similarly says to the Persian king Xerxes:

Life is so wretched that death has become the most elect place of refuge for the human being; the god (ho theos) is found to be grudging in this, giving us a mere taste of life’s sweetness.

(Hdt. 7.46.4)

In these cases, the speaker is not claiming that only one god exists, but is temporarily conceptualizing the divine as a unity. Herodotus’ usage was common among the Greeks. Although the apparent contradiction with “polytheism” in these cases has puzzled scholars, such logical inconsistencies are typical of polytheism and, it should be stated, of religious thought in general. A cognitivist perspective will allow us to understand why. Similarly, polytheists use a variety of strategies to conceptually manage the large number of gods, goddesses, heroes, heroines and other superhuman beings in their cosmologies (Essay 1.1).

During the period we are studying, “belief” and “faith” were not part of the standard discourse about the gods. This was not because the Greeks lacked religious beliefs or were preoccupied with ritual at the expense of belief. That the gods existed and intervened in human affairs was a widely shared inference rather than an article of faith. Confessions of faith happen when adherents to a sect or tradition feel the need to define themselves against others who hold incompatible
beliefs. Early Christians, for example, defined themselves against non-Christian Jews by affirming that Jesus was the long-awaited Messiah. In the Gospel of Matthew (16:15–16), Jesus asks Peter, “But who do you say that I am?” and Peter replies, “You are the Christ, the son of the living God.” This affirmation of belief in a proposition not accepted by others is a litmus test for membership in the group. Ancient polytheistic religions, and more particularly Greek religion, rarely involved such tests. It was the normal practice in hymns and prayers to affirm the powers, titles and territorial possessions of a particular deity, but the purpose of these affirmations was praise, not confession of belief:

Oh Lord, you possess both Lykia and lovely Meonia,
As well as Miletos, a delightful city beside the sea.
But over sea-girt Delos you mightily rule in person.


Generally, the Greeks viewed their myths as accounts of real events in the distant past, but whether one believed a particular story about Apollo among the many told by the poets was a matter of individual opinion, and did not necessarily reflect on one’s overall level of piety. Nor was there a competitive marketplace of religions of the kind we observe in the modern West, where individuals choose, maintain and discard religious traditions and beliefs based on personal inclination. Instead, one inherited a set of gods, heroes and rituals belonging to one’s family and place of birth. Unless an individual emigrated or lived in a multicultural setting, there was no need to choose a personal pantheon, even if a few cults (notably those involving mysteries) were elective. Nor did the Greeks share the modern perception that there exist distinct religions with more or less incompatible doctrines and customs. Instead of viewing the Egyptian or Babylonian systems as competing or erroneous religions, they typically assumed that these peoples were worshiping the same gods under different names. A Greek who worshiped the Egyptian god Ammon was not an apostate from the cult of Zeus. In fact, he likely assumed that Zeus was Ammon. Where there was no clear equivalent, moreover, new and foreign deities could be absorbed into existing local pantheons.

When and where

The ancient Greeks ranged far beyond Greece. As the Mycenaean civilization was collapsing at the end of the Bronze Age, Greeks of varying ethnicity – Achaians, Aiolians, Darians – emigrated to Cyprus and Asia Minor. Trade emporia and colonies were established overseas even as a new kind of state, the Greek polis, began to emerge during the eighth century. A map of selected Greek-speaking cities in the Mediterranean and the Black Sea during the Archaic period (ca. 550) reveals how these people blanketed the coastlines and the islands, reaching Phasis (modern Poti, Georgia) in the east, Naukratis on the Egyptian delta and Emporion (Empúries, Spain) in the west. Only in Greece itself did Greeks penetrate and occupy the hinterlands.
Map 1.1 Greek-speaking populations in the Mediterranean and Black Sea during the Archaic period.
Given their far-flung settlements, it is no surprise that the Greeks lacked any form of national or political unity before the short-lived empire of Alexander the Great. They often regarded one another with suspicion, as enemies and foreigners. They spread across the Mediterranean and the Black Sea, yet all traced their traditions to ancestral homelands in what we now call Greece. Their poets sang the struggles of great men and women who had lived in the distant but glorious past: battles to the death before seven-gated Thebes, or on the windy plain at Troy. They spoke a common language, albeit in multiple dialects. Many of their gods and rituals too were shared, but (to use the metaphor of language) the morphology and syntax of Greek religion varied from one place to the next. Although its variations were seemingly limitless, they were mutually intelligible, and Greek people shared a remarkably consistent set of inferences about the gods, and how to worship them, over the course of several centuries. This is what allows us to speak of “Greek religion” as a unity, rather than attempting to address a bewildering number of distinct “Greek religions.”

Of which centuries are we speaking? Temporally, our investigation will encompass a lengthy period, beginning with the “Greek Renaissance,” when the Greek polis first appeared and the Homeric and Hesiodic oral traditions, with their accounts of the gods, were first committed to writing (i.e. the eighth century). The Archaic period, which saw the consolidation of Greek political systems and a growing awareness of Panhellenic culture, is conventionally dated from 800 to 480, the year the Persian king Xerxes invaded Greece. The subsequent Classical period was characterized by a great flowering of Greek poetry, art, philosophy and historiography. These cultural productions brought religion to new heights (as in the refinement of techniques for temple architecture and sculpture), but they also involved critiques of traditional religion (as in the dialogues of Plato and the plays of Euripides). Greek philosophers defined the divine in new ways, and a new culture of philosophical rationalism took root among the educated minority. Political instability in the wake of the Peloponnesian War, and the exigencies of the war itself, damaged the prestige of venerable religious institutions, such as the Delphic oracle.

The dominant political structure, the independent Greek city-state or polis with its priests and festivals of the civic gods, was profoundly changed when the Macedonian Alexander brought a great swath of the ancient Mediterranean and Near East under his sole dominion. Alexander’s death in 323 ended the Classical period and ushered in the Hellenistic, a time of ongoing political upheavals, widening disparities between the privileged and the poor, transformative encounters with non-Greek peoples, and new intellectual currents. During this period, the civic structures of many Greek poleis remained in place and the apparatus of traditional religion continued to function, but in a changed environment which inevitably affected its practice and interpretation. Therefore, our discussion will focus on the Archaic and Classical periods, but with glances back to the prehistoric substrate of Greek religion, and forward to the Hellenistic period, particularly the century after Alexander’s death.
What is Greek religion?

Local and Panhellenic religion

In spite of their political fragmentation and their constant wars with one another, the Greeks possessed a shared cultural heritage, and recognized that this was so. Besides their common language, three pillars of this heritage were participation in athletic contests we call “Panhellenic” (most conspicuously those for Zeus at Olympia), consultation of Apollo’s oracle at Delphi, and familiarity with the legend of the Trojan War as it was handed down in epic poetry under the name of Homer. Each of these cultural phenomena was in place by the end of the eighth century, and while not every city in the far-flung Greek world could send athletes to Olympia or set its weightiest questions before Apollo at Delphi, all acknowledged the prestige of these institutions. Implicit in these phenomena was a set of theological beliefs: the cosmos was inhabited by a great many gods, of whom the most important lived in a heavenly place, Olympos, in a blessed society of immortals; Zeus was the most powerful of these gods; the gods intervened in human affairs; mortals learned the will of the gods through Apollo’s oracular pronouncements.

Beginning in early Archaic times, if not earlier, a constant and dynamic tension existed between Panhellenic (“pertaining to all the Greeks”) and distinctively local components of Greek culture. Nowhere was this more true than in respect to the gods. Were a modern student, familiar with the gods as they appear in the *Iliad*, to travel back in time to Classical Sparta, she might be surprised to find that one of the most honored deities there was Orthia, a unique goddess absent from epic poetry. At some point, Spartan Orthia was assimilated to Artemis, but even then, she had little in common with Homer’s girlish huntress. Likewise a visitor to ancient Athens would learn that Dionysos and Demeter, two deities barely mentioned in Homer, were central to that city’s religious life. The depiction of Hera in the *Iliad* as a shrewish, scheming wife disciplined by her patriarchal husband Zeus is a theological and poetic construct, quite different from the persona of Hera revealed in regional worship (Essay 1.2). This state of affairs resulted from the fact that local pantheons and rituals evolved over centuries with no common yardstick by which to measure their own degree of adherence to or deviation from a cultural norm.

Because epic poetry enjoyed a broad cultural circulation, and was carried far and wide by traveling singers, it formed a counterweight to this particularism. Consider the challenges facing the epic poet whose task was to spin a story about the heroes of old, their interactions with the gods, and deeds of valor enacted in war. Whose gods should be depicted? Zeus as he was worshiped and visualized in Ionian Miletos, or in Dorian Sparta? Over the course of centuries, poets created a synthetic picture of gods and rituals from the mass of local particulars. This synthesis favored elements familiar to all, and avoided those easily recognized as regional and local. Cognitively speaking, local religion was characterized by a heavy reliance on intuitive religious concepts (see the section “Intuitive and reflective cognition”), while Panhellenic religion resulted from attempts to systematize and harmonize this mass of conflicting information. As in the Near Eastern epics that influenced Greek oral poets, the gods of the *Iliad* formed a supra-local pantheon, and were lifted from their earthly abodes in temples (local perspective) to the heavenly city of Olympos (Panhellenic perspective). In Greek cities, relationships among the gods were primarily conceptualized in spatial and
functional terms, whereas in the epic, they were familial and hierarchical. Thus in the polis of Athens (local perspective), Athena Polias resided in a fine temple at the city center and concerned herself with civic industries and activities, while Zeus Herkeios, worshiped at individual domestic altars throughout the city, protected the boundaries of each man’s home against intruders. Though the father-daughter relationship of Zeus and Athena was not ignored at Athens, it was for the most part irrelevant to these two cults.\(^3\)

In epic poetry (Panhellenic perspective) Zeus’ relations with other gods, including Athena, are defined by his status as the head of a divine family, and as the supreme ruler of the cosmos.

But if the epic depiction of gods common to all the Greeks is a poetic construct, can we speak of “Panhellenic religion”? We can, because the prestige of epic, and its wide dissemination, also had an impact on ritual practice and material culture. For example, the sons of the tyrant Peisistratos unsuccessfully attempted to build a grandiose Athenian temple to Olympian Zeus, no doubt with the Panhellenic concept of Zeus ruling from Mt. Olympos in mind.\(^3\)

Similarly, the sculptor Pheidias was reportedly inspired by lines from Homer when he created the colossal gold and ivory statue of Zeus at Olympia:

> The son of Kronos nodded his dark brow in assent,
> And ambrosial locks flowed in waves from the Lord’s
> Immortal head, and he shook great Olympos.
> (Hom. \(I\). 1.528–30)\(^3\)

Even though Panhellenic and local conceptions of a particular deity might vary dramatically in the eyes of moderns, they coexisted in the minds of worshipers, who switched between concepts as needed in different contexts.

**Intuitive and reflective cognition**

In order to understand why and how the Greeks so often held contradictory notions about the gods in their minds, we need to return to cognitive science. Concepts and beliefs are processed in the mind through two cognitively distinct pathways. The intuitive pathway is fast, effortless and implicit; the reflective pathway is relatively slow, effortful and explicit. People do not need to expend mental effort learning concepts and beliefs of the first type; they arise naturally from a set of “first-order” mental tools and categories, many of which are established in early childhood as we interact with the environment. Intuitive inferences and the resulting beliefs seem self-evident. Consider the following examples (with the caveat that as intuitive inferences, they would not normally be represented explicitly):

- When I am hungry, I should eat.
- What I throw in the air will come back down.
- Animals move about, but plants do not.

Cognition processed through this first pathway is automatic, experiential, closely tied to the emotions and “inherently highly compelling.”\(^3\) It allows us to
function in daily life without consciously calculating how to execute every movement and decision.

Concepts and beliefs processed via the reflective pathway include these:

- Eating green vegetables makes me healthy.
- Throwing rocks at other people is against the law.
- Even though barnacles stay put, they are animals.

The second pathway is characterized by analysis, logical connections, abstractions and propositions that do not seem self-evident. It is highly likely to operate through the medium of language. Beliefs processed through this pathway are more easily changed when evidence contradicting them is recognized; indeed, doubting and disbelieving belong to this category of cognition.

Concepts and beliefs processed at these two levels may be held in the mind simultaneously, and they may conflict. For example, most people know that the earth revolves around the sun. But when watching a beautiful sunset, even scientists may remark on the sun’s “movement.” That the sun moves is understood intuitively; that it is stationary is a conclusion resulting from a more complex process of learning and reflection. Even though we have been taught that the earth is not flat, we tend to visualize the path of an airplane crossing the Atlantic as a straight line rather than an arc. We use “tree” as a taxonomic category, even if we know that an oak is more closely related to a daisy than to a conifer. Dual-process theorists have not settled on a consistent terminology for these two categories or modes of cognition, but Sperber has described the two resulting kinds of beliefs as “intuitive” and “reflective,” and this is the terminology I use. Sperber points out that the boundary between intuitive and reflective beliefs is not impermeable. For example, initially reflective beliefs (four is an even number) may enter the intuitive repertoire through repetition and reinforcement, while intuitive beliefs (the earth is flat) may be “unlearned” through reflection.

With respect to religious thought, we can draw a distinction between (1) intuitive mental representations and inferences, particularly as experienced through religion in practice; and (2) reflective propositions, particularly as experienced through myths and other forms of explicit discourse about the gods. Examples of intuitive religious beliefs include these:

- When I pray, Allah understands the language I speak.
- God feels emotions (e.g. anger or gladness).
- Apollo occupies physical space and moves from one location to another.

People are not necessarily conscious of these inferences; they remain unspoken because they seem so obvious. Reflective religious beliefs, on the other hand, are conscious thoughts which we formulate explicitly:

- Allah understands all languages because he knows everything.
- When people have sex outside marriage, God is angry.
- Apollo often carries a bow and arrows.
To a great degree, interactions with superhuman agents are predicated on intuitive cognition. Stanley Stowers refers to this as “the religion of everyday social exchange,” by which people interact with gods in ways that reflect very basic human inferences about how other minds work.\textsuperscript{40} One such inference is that gods are capable of perceiving what we do. Another is that a god can feel pleasure or displeasure and take action as a result. Thus, intuitive religious thought involves an implicit theology, an unspoken set of assumptions about the properties of gods. People do not need to reason about such matters; intuitive beliefs are the products of our cognitive architecture, which has evolved to help us navigate the physical and social world. In this type of religious thought, a god is perceived as a nearby “interested party” who can enter into a reciprocal relationship with worshipers, interacting with them at a specific time and place (for reciprocity, see Essay 1.3). Another characteristic of the religion of everyday social exchange is “epistemological uncertainty” and an imbalance of knowledge between god and worshiper. That is, the god is presumed to know everything important, but the worshiper has few if any clues to the god’s state of mind, or whether the interaction will be successful. This knowledge imbalance distinguishes religious interactions from social interactions.\textsuperscript{41}

Reflective cognition produces accounts of the gods and of human interactions with them. These are forms of explicit theology, not necessarily in the sense of systematic study of the divine, but in its original Greek sense of \textit{logoi} (stories, arguments, rationalizations, accountings) concerning the \textit{theoi}, the gods.\textsuperscript{42} Religious thought of the reflective type can be expressed orally, visually through painting and sculpture, or in writing.\textsuperscript{43} Mythmaking belongs to the reflective form of cognition, as does philosophical speculation concerning the nature of gods and their role in the cosmos. Mythmaking, however, embraces and incorporates intuitive inferences (e.g. the gods’ anthropomorphism), while Greek philosophy tends to critique and reject them. Mythmaking also relies far more than philosophy on symbolic thought, which is a special form of reflective cognition (see Chapter 2).

The concept of “superstition” is a product of the reflective religious modality, which may seek to marginalize intuitive beliefs and behaviors as naïve or doctrinally incorrect. But the usefulness of the distinction between reflective and intuitive cognition is not limited to explaining why world religions so consistently exhibit a gap between “theologically correct” doctrine, which is highly reflective, and real-world practice, which favors the intuitive.\textsuperscript{44} It also pinpoints, for example, the cognitive mechanism which allowed the Greeks simultaneously to hold mental representations of the gods both as occupants of Olympos and as residents of nearby temples. As students of Greek religion, we too often attempt to explain away such logical inconsistencies, rather than simply allowing them to stand. For example, the Athenians seem to have been quite capable of regarding Zeus Hypatos, Zeus Olympios and Zeus Herkeios as distinct deities. Intuitively, this makes sense, because they were worshiped in separate locations and had differing spheres of interest. Whenever they wished, however, the Athenians could shift to a reflective, mythological mode according to which Zeus was one god who appeared in various places under different cult titles. They generally felt no need to reconcile these contradictory views.\textsuperscript{45}
With its temples, festival calendars and mass animal sacrifices, Greek civic religion was a special case of the religion of everyday social exchange, a reciprocal relationship with the local gods writ large and conducted on behalf of the state. It too was primarily predicated on shared intuitive inferences about the gods and their behavior, but it also involved a strong admixture of reflection on religion: priests devised explanations for ritual traditions, the assembly debated how to interact with the gods in crisis situations, poets meditated on the inscrutability of the gods and so on. Additionally, it required a great investment in the cura- tion and oversight of large sanctuaries and their festivals, activities we might call infra-religion. The official who organized a procession, kept temple accounts or purchased a hundred sheep was not directly interacting with a god, but his activities supported the religious life of the city.46

Using the evidence

Because we are studying antiquity, we cannot directly observe a Greek woman praying, or interview a Greek man about his perceptions of what takes place during a sacrifice. We find evidence of historical interactions with the gods in material culture. Sanctuaries, altars and temples formed the physical environment for many interactions. Gifts were left in sanctuaries, sometimes with messages inscribed for the gods. Animal bones and pottery were deposited around altars after ritual feasts. Material culture has the advantage of being firmly moored to historical acts of worship in a specific place and time. Archaeological evidence for religion, however, is difficult to interpret. Even when we can draw firm conclusions about what the worshipers did, what they were thinking is a different matter.47 A few, precious inscribed texts record prayers, dedications, hymns, curses and other specific instances of interaction with the divine. For example, two hexameters inscribed on an eight-inch bronze statue (Figure 1.1) read:

Mantiklos dedicated me to the Far-Shooter of the Silver Bow
From his tithe. You, Phoibos, give something pleasing in return.

(CEG 326)

This is a record of a message from Mantiklos to (Phoibos) Apollo in the city of Thebes during the first quarter of the seventh century.

Texts like this raise methodological questions of their own. Was this inscription meant for Apollo to “read,” or was it intended primarily to impress other people? To what degree does this conventional formula reflect what Mantiklos was thinking when he made the dedication? Did Mantiklos have in mind the local Apollo, Homer’s Apollo (who is called “Far-Shooter” and has a silver bow) or both?48 Still, this type of evidence is the closest we can come to direct observation of ancient religion in practice. It expresses typically intuitive religious beliefs: Apollo is a person with whom Mantiklos can interact; Apollo understands the Greek language; Apollo is pleased by gifts. It also expresses reflective religious
What is Greek religion?

beliefs: Apollo is an archer with a silver bow; when people obtain goods, they ought to share with the gods through the custom of tithing.

The majority of our written evidence for Greek religion comes in the form of texts whose authors are reflecting on religion outside of a ritual context. For example, depictions of gods and/or worshipers in epic poetry form a major

*Figure 1.1* Bronze votive statuette dedicated to Apollo by Mantiklos, ca. 700–675. From Thebes. Photo © 2016 Museum of Fine Arts, Boston
What is Greek religion?

category of evidence. Consider the following account of a sacrifice of one hundred cattle in Book 1 of the *Iliad*:

So he spoke, praying; and Phoibos Apollo heard him.
But when they had prayed and thrown the barley grains,
They first drew back the heads of the cattle, cutting their throats, and skinned them;
They removed the thigh-bones, then enveloped them in fat,
Making two layers, and placed raw meat on top.
And the old man burned this on firewood, and over it poured
Bright wine, and the youths with him held five-pronged forks.
Through the whole day they kept appeasing the god with song,
The sons of the Achaians, singing the lovely paean,
And dancing in praise of the Far-Worker, who heard and was glad.

(Hom. *Il*. 1. 457–63, 472–4)

Although the sacrifice is described with a level of detail which makes it seem realistic, this is not a record of a historical interaction with Apollo, but a fictional description of one, which operates according to somewhat different rules. Notice, for example, that the epic poet suffers from no epistemological uncertainty: he knows what Apollo was thinking and can share this information with his audience. Cognitively speaking, composing a poetic description of a sacrifice is a radically different act from performing the ritual itself. Here, the poet is operating from many of the same inferences as a worshiper, but he is also a creative artist working reflectively within the Panhellenic conventions and traditions of epic.50

The distinction between reflective and intuitive cognition is also useful in the analysis of visual culture. Consider a sacrificial scene on a Classical Athenian votive relief (Figure 1.2), a sculpture set up by worshipers in a sanctuary in order to honor a god or hero. Such reliefs commemorate a specific sacrificial occasion, which is represented in a schematized format: the dedicators of the relief (here Panis and Aigirios with their child) approach the deity with hands raised in greeting. They are about to sacrifice to Herakles, who is represented on a larger scale than his worshipers. The god faces them and watches as a slave or a junior member of the family leads forward the animal destined for sacrifice; a female attendant carries a basket with the equipment for the ritual. An inscription identifying both the dedicators and the deity is carved onto the frame.51

Compare a Classical Athenian vase painting depicting a sacrificial scene (Figure 1.3): an anonymous adult man, the officiant at a sacrifice, stands at an altar as a younger assistant roasts the viscera of the butchered animal on spits. Because the scene is “post-kill,” the species of the sacrificial animal is unclear. The officiant holds a bundle of meat or bones over the altar, as another assistant pours from a jug. To the right, Apollo (represented on the same scale as the humans) observes the activity, apparently unseen by the worshipers. There is a distinct sense of male camaraderie, especially in the eye contact between the older man and his young acolyte.52
Figure 1.2 Herakles leans on his club as a family approaches with a sacrificial ox. Marble votive relief to Herakles, Athens, first half of the fourth century. National Archaeological Museum, Athens, Greece. Photo © Vanni Archive/Art Resource, NY

Figure 1.3 An adult man and two youths perform a sacrifice to Apollo, who stands on the right. One of the boys holds meat on a spit over the fire while another pours a libation. Attic red figure bell krater by the Pothos painter, ca. 430. Photo: Erich Lessing/Art Resource
Folkert van Straten’s study of sacrificial iconography has revealed that almost all Classical Greek votive reliefs with sacrificial scenes show the “pre-kill” phase, while only slightly more than half of vase paintings do. (Of the remaining vase paintings, most, like Figure 1.2, show the handling of meat.) This divergence results from the differing uses of the objects: the votive relief was a memorial of a specific interaction with a god, in which inferences of the intuitive type were dominant. From the perspective of the dedicator, it was important to show the species and age of the sacrificed animal, and thus the value of the gift he was presenting to the god. It was also important that the god be portrayed in the relief, identified by the appropriate attributes and depicted as receptive to the greetings of the worshipers. In artistic contexts that commemorated real-life cult activity or emphasized religious emotion, it was standard to show the god’s large size relative to the worshipers, conveying their pious sense of awe before a divine being who was quite literally “superhuman.” Once commissioned and completed, the sculpture was set up in the sanctuary as a memorial of a successful sacrifice.53

The vase painting, on the other hand, was not a memorial of a specific interaction with a god, but a generic scene designed to attract buyers who would use the vases as household items. On vase paintings of sacrificial scenes, the figures are rarely named, and in scenes of procession to the altar, expensive animals are overrepresented. The recipient deity might or might not be depicted nearby; this was by no means an essential element of the scene, as it was on votive reliefs. In Figure 1.3, Apollo is present, yet the painter does not attempt to represent a direct interaction between god and worshipers, and convention does not require that the god (recognizable by his long hair and laurel staff) be differentiated from the worshipers by size. The two most prevalent “post-kill” scenes on vases show the viscera of the animal roasting on spits, as in this example, or the sacrum and tail burning on the altar.54 In the standard Classical Athenian procedure for alimentary sacrifice, the main participants tasted the roasted viscera while they burned a variable portion of the animal for the god (the muscle meat was afterwards roasted or boiled, and distributed to guests for feasting). Thus the scenes of roasting innards evoke the fellowship created among the participants as the first taste of meat was consumed. The sacrum and tail were often burned as the god’s portion, and the curling of the tail in the fire was considered a favorable sign: the sacrifice had been successful. Such vases offered reflections on the concept of sacrifice – especially its social, devotional and culinary pleasures.55

The Sanskrit Vedas and the Homeric epics, originally oral compositions, show that explicit theology can thrive in the absence of writing. Systematic theology, however, cannot. Reflection on the gods becomes substantially more complex and sophisticated with the arrival of advanced literacy. Plato’s philosophical works, which alternately embraced and critiqued traditional religious beliefs, could not have been composed without the technology of writing. Athenian tragedians problematized the gods as cruel and selfish (Euripides’ Hippolytus) or explored the ethics of human sacrifice (Aeschylus’ Agamemnon), even though such sacrifices were not, and likely had never been, a part of the religion of everyday social exchange in their culture.56
Although the reflective form of religious cognition typically takes intuitive religious thought as its starting point and either elaborates upon it or reacts against it, we must avoid characterizing the former as “advanced” and the latter as “primitive.” The two are parallel cognitive phenomena. Neither cultures nor individuals evolve their way out of the intuitive modality. This explains the substantial gap between the “theologically correct” doctrines of Christianity, Buddhism, Islam and so forth and the actual practices and beliefs of most adherents in their everyday lives. As the product of natural cognition, the religion of everyday social exchange is with us today, in every world tradition, and will likely always be with us. By the same token, theological religion is a product of our human faculties of reason and imagination, which have been with us as long as the gods themselves.

The Greeks and the counterintuitive

The complex interrelation of intuitive and reflective beliefs in religion is illustrated by the prevalence of minimally counterintuitive concepts (MCIs) in religious thought. To create an MCI, begin with a familiar concept like “pencil,” “mountain” or “cat.” Each of these belongs to an intuitive ontological category which is established in early childhood. A pencil is an artifact, a mountain is a natural non-living object and a cat is an animal. Now endow each concept with at least one property that violates the intuitive assumptions we hold about its category. Let the pencil grow (a biological property), the mountain listen to what you say (a psychological property) and the cat become invisible (a physical property). Growth in a pencil is counterintuitive, whereas growth in a cat is ordinary. Should a cat grow to weigh forty pounds, this would be bizarre, but not counterintuitive. The counterintuitive need not be impossible or unnatural: tiny, invisible creatures which cause illness are MCIs, yet they exist.57

Table 1.1 Examples of counterintuitive concepts: each concept violates an ontological category by attributing to it contradictory properties from a domain of intuitive knowledge. Adapted from Barrett 2008.410.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Ontological Category</th>
<th>Folk Psychology</th>
<th>Folk Biology</th>
<th>Folk Physics</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Person</td>
<td>A person who knows the future</td>
<td>A person born from a tree</td>
<td>A person who exists in two places at once</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Animal</td>
<td>A horse that talks</td>
<td>A bird with bronze feathers</td>
<td>An invisible cat</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Plant</td>
<td>A tree that answers questions</td>
<td>A flower that bleeds</td>
<td>An herb that grows in the air</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Artifact</td>
<td>A ship’s prow that gives advice</td>
<td>A statue that walks</td>
<td>A bag that encloses the winds</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Non-living natural object</td>
<td>An angry mountain</td>
<td>A stone that sheds tears</td>
<td>A spring that is solid in warm weather</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
In order to be remembered well and orally transmitted without special memory aids, a concept should be minimally counterintuitive. Too many category violations (a pencil that grows, flies, moves through solid objects and solves algebraic equations) will make the concept more difficult to remember. Transferred properties yield good MCIs: the mountain has hearing, a property we intuitively attribute to animals and people, but not to natural objects. If, however, we also stipulate that the mountain hears everything being said anywhere in the world, we have violated our intuitive beliefs about how hearing works. A pan-auditory mountain is a more difficult concept than a simple hearing one, and less readily transmitted.

Greek mythology is full of MCIs: a lion whose hide cannot be pierced; a flying, immortal horse; men with goat’s legs and ears; birds who shoot bronze feathers like arrows; a bag that can hold the winds. The metamorphoses so characteristic of Greek myth are counterintuitive because they violate our intuitive inferences that membership in a species and individual personhood are permanent. In 1985, Michael Kelly and Frank Keil tabulated all the transformations in Ovid’s *Metamorphoses* and Grimm’s *Fairy Tales*. They discovered that metamorphosis follows predictable patterns based on intuitive category assumptions. For example, in the *Metamorphoses*, a conscious being (mortal or god) is much more likely to be transformed into another conscious being (20%) or an animal (51%) than into a plant (10%) or a solid inanimate object (12%). Likewise, an inanimate object is more likely to be transformed into another inanimate object than into a conscious being. Although some transformations may be determined by narrative considerations, these broad patterns reveal cognitive constraints on the concept of metamorphosis. Kelly and Keil recorded zero instances of conscious beings transformed into abstract ideas; such a metamorphosis would be excessively counterintuitive.

Not all MCIs are equally likely to end up as religious concepts. In fact, MCIs are abundant in popular culture: animals talk, crimefighters have super strength and young women start fires with the power of thought alone. These are all examples of MCIs with good inferential potential: they generate stories. Inferentially impoverished MCIs, by contrast, lead nowhere. Which is more interesting, a person who disappears when you speak to him, or a person who grants wishes? Consider an invisible tree. Clearly it is an MCI, but it is far less interesting than a talking or listening tree. This is because having the ability to talk or listen makes the tree an agent. Agentive MCIs are more likely than others to be transmitted as religious concepts. But what distinguishes Superman the comic-book hero from Herakles the god? Why are some MCIs viewed as real-world agents in spite of their counterintuitive properties, while others are just as clearly understood to be fictional?

The answers are contextual. Our ability to mentally represent MCIs may manifest itself reflectively and consciously in creative contexts (as when we read or write fiction), but it may also function in connection with the suite of mental tools we use to recognize and interact with agents in our immediate environment (Chapter 2). For example, suppose that the sound “meow” is heard whenever I visit a certain park. Intuitively, I infer that some agent is making the sound, and that the
What is Greek religion?

21

agent is a cat. If the cat continues to vocalize, yet mysteriously cannot be located, I may reflectively conclude that contrary to my normal expectations, this cat is invisible. When they possess explanatory power and are emotionally compelling, MCIs generated this way may be perceived as “real” rather than fictional, transmitted to other people who find them plausible, and culturally elaborated. For example, many people in the United States interpret coins found in unexpected places as messages (usually of comfort or moral admonition) from deceased loved ones. This concept of “pennies from heaven” explains a minor mystery of everyday life and appeals to deep emotions. It has been disseminated through testimonial letters sent to a widely syndicated newspaper column. According to Pascal Boyer, religious MCIs matter to us in ways that Superman cannot. In cognitive terms, they activate multiple mental systems, “those that govern our most intense emotions, shape our interaction with other people, give us moral feelings, and organize social groups.”

In cultures with established traditions of superhuman beings, plausibility is easily achieved, especially if the agent is identified or its existence confirmed by authority figures. The proliferation of cults in Greek polytheism can be attributed in part to intuitive inferences that some superhuman agent needs to be addressed in response to virtually any misfortune, success or unusual event. Consider, for example, the following oracle given to the people of Miletos, who consulted Apollo at Didyma after an earthquake:

As regards this sign (sēmeion), propitiate Steadfast (Asphaleos) Poseidon with sacrifices and ask him to come propitiously and to preserve the order of your city unshaken, apart from danger. For he is coming very near you. Him you must guard against and pray to, so that henceforth you may reach old age undaunted by evils.

(DI 132.2–7; Fontenrose 1988.190; late second century)

Apollo’s oracle advised the citizens to establish a new cult to Poseidon under the name Asphaleos in order to ward off future disasters. The Milesians already worshiped Poseidon, but the earthquake caused them to infer that some dangerous new agency was at work. Was Poseidon Asphaleos a different god from the other Poseidons at Miletos? Yes and no. Together with a set of new sacrifices, the use of a new cult title satisfied the need to address this unknown power, while the identification of the dangerous god as Poseidon, a deity “known” to cause earthquakes, situated the new cult within the familiar context of a shared theology.

**Emic and etic approaches**

Anthropologists speak of “emic” and “etic” approaches to culture. These terms are derived from the adjectives phonemic (referring to the way the sounds of speech are perceived by the speaker) and phonetic (referring to the physical production and acoustic properties of the sounds as objects of scientific study). An emic approach to culture, then, represents an insider’s point of view or (for
What is Greek religion?

ancient historians) an attempt to fully empathize with and grasp that point of view. It reflects the judgments, mental categories and assumptions characteristic of a given culture. An etic approach reflects the broader contextual knowledge of an outsider who is measuring, comparing and analyzing his observations with an entirely different, universalizing frame of reference.

As a practical matter, it is questionable whether moderns have the ability to achieve a truly emic perspective on an ancient culture, yet the emic/etic distinction is useful in thinking through our approaches to the evidence. For example, etic methodology often requires the assumption that those who practice a religion do not understand their own beliefs and behaviors. To see what I mean, imagine that Jack, a modern Classicist, attends a symposium in 425 and has a conversation with an Athenian citizen:

Jack: You’re from the village of Thorikos, aren’t you, Stephanos? Why do you sacrifice twice a year to the hero Thorikos?
Stephanos: Thorikos founded the village, and he watches over our affairs.
Jack: No, I don’t think so. The real reason you sacrifice to Thorikos is because the ritual activity allows you to construct a group identity.
Stephanos: No, that’s not it. It is ancestral custom to sacrifice to Thorikos at his tomb. My father did so and his father before him.
Jack: Yes, your ancestors used that tomb to articulate their territorial claims. And by the way, it’s not even a real tomb.
Stephanos: (discreetly, to a slave) When you mix the next round, Lydos, more water.

Jack’s approach to the ritual is wholly etic; he adopts a functionalist theoretical stance which draws on Émile Durkheim’s ideas about religion. Durkheim thought that religion had little to do with gods or the supernatural. Instead, religion was society’s way of perpetuating and strengthening itself: God and society were one and the same thing. An emic stance, by contrast, insists on the value of Stephanos’ perception that he is dealing with a superhuman being, and that the relationship with this being is important to Stephanos, his family and his village. One of the benefits of a cognitive approach is that it allows us to consider Greek religion etically as an expression of universal human patterns of thought (of which the thinkers themselves may be quite unaware), yet it simultaneously yields insight into emic perspectives. While observing that Stephanos’ worship of the hero Thorikos has social consequences, we can also acknowledge and explain his strong intuition that Thorikos is real.

It used to be an axiom of the discipline that Greek religion was about rituals rather than beliefs, and that it was experienced collectively rather than individually. Indeed, rituals and collective experience must dominate any account of Greek religion, because they loom very large in our evidence. Yet Greek religion can be reduced neither to practice nor to group rituals. Epiphanies of the gods in dreaming and waking visions, for example, were not confined to ritual contexts,
and gods usually appeared to individuals rather than groups. During the latter half of the twentieth century, the dominance of ritual in scholarly discourse resulted in a marginalization of superhuman powers. Again, etic approaches conflicted with what the Greeks themselves tell us about the importance of the gods and heroes. The first decade of the twenty-first century has seen a resurgence of interest in individual experience, and the gods have been brought back into the equation.

Finally, an emic perspective is that of an insider, but which insider? Cultures are not homogeneous. A well-educated Greek and an illiterate one, a Spartan and an Athenian, a master and a slave, a man and a woman, might have divergent and conflicting ideas about various aspects of religion. Much of the source material for our study of religion consists of writings by intellectuals, highly literate individuals (almost all male) who offered a great many reflections concerning the gods and human relations with them, but whose ideas were not necessarily representative of the population as a whole.

ESSAY 1.1: TWELVE GODS, AND OTHER WAYS TO LIMIT A PANTHEON

If we counted them all, the total number of Greek gods worshiped in all places and times would reach into the tens if not hundreds of thousands. The Greek cosmos was, as Thales observed, “full of gods.” Therefore people needed strategies for limiting this unwieldy, unbounded set of superhuman beings. While nobody attempted to seek out and recognize every god by name, inclusive expressions like “to Athena and the other gods and goddesses” were common in prayers as a means of avoiding offense. Generally, it was understood that an individual honored the deities and heroes whose altars were established in his or her home, neighborhood and state. But not everyone attended to every god. For example, some deities were worshiped electively (Adonis or Sabazios in Classical Athens) or according to one’s gender (Herakles often excluded women from his cults). The aggregate of superhuman beings with personal significance and salience for an individual has been called a “meaningful god set.” Individuals seem to have intuitively maintained their meaningful god sets without the need to explicitly enumerate them.

If we wish to identify a meaningful god set at the group level, we must first define the group. Is it composed of all the inhabitants of a region, a polis, a village? Male citizens? Their female kin? Aristocratic citizens? The meaningful god set for a given group consists of the superhuman agents who are “significant and salient” for most of its members. When dealing with ancients who are no longer around to be interviewed, we must roughly approximate the criterion of “significant and salient” by equating it to “superhuman agents who were regularly the objects of prayer or other rituals.” Beginning in the sixth century, communities sometimes inscribed sacrificial calendars on stone, listing the gods who received
What is Greek religion?

One of the most complete of these calendars comes from late Classical Erchia, a deme (township) in Attica. It includes sacrifices for eleven (or perhaps twelve) major deities, most of whom had shrines in the deme: Zeus, Hera, Poseidon, Demeter, Leto, Apollo, Artemis (and/or Artemis-Hekate), Athena, Hermes, Dionysos and Ge. If gods with cult titles are counted as separate deities (Apollo Lykeios, Apollo Delphinios, etc.), the number rises to twenty-six. In addition to these, the calendar provides sacrifices for at least fourteen minor figures or collectivities (nymphs, heroines, Herakleidai, Acheloös, Aglauros, etc.), whose offerings are not necessarily lesser in value than those of the “major” gods. Given that the demesmen and women would also have participated in at least some of the cults in the urban center, the number appears astonishingly high, yet people did not hold all of these superhuman figures in their minds at once, nor did everyone attend to every cult. Instead, they focused on different members of the set during each month of the year, and different individuals or families assumed the priestly duties for each god or hero, so that the cognitive burden was spread among many people. Whether at the individual or group level, meaningful god sets were the product of cognitive constraints (the number of significant gods individuals and groups can reasonably attend to), practical constraints (the amount of resources available to devote to them) and contingencies of time, place and culture.

A “local pantheon” consists of the total number of superhuman agents tied to a given geographical area by altars, sanctuaries or other landmarks. Local pantheons were inevitably larger than most individuals’ meaningful god sets (i.e. no man or woman of Attica had all the superhuman agents of Attica in his or her meaningful god set). On the other hand, the Greeks had a mental category which corresponds to the local pantheon. They often used expressions like “all the gods, goddesses and heroes who dwell in our city (polis) and land (chōra)” or “the local gods and heroes” (theoi kai hērōes enchōrioi). Local pantheons varied, most obviously in their heroes, river gods and other such figures who were unique to the place. Occasionally they included major deities who were unique, such as the goddess Aphaia on Aigina. In an important sense, deities such as Athena Parthenos in Athens, Artemis Orthia in Sparta and Zeus Ammon in Kyrene were also unique. A deity’s cult title or epiclēsis (“surname”) expressed this individuality. Whether an Athenian citizen thought of Athena as residing on the Athenian Akropolis, its counterpart at Sparta or the heavenly Olympos was a contextual matter. Intuitively speaking, Athena Polias (“of the city”) lived in Athens and possessed a unique identity, as did Athena Chalkioikos (“of the Bronze House”) at Sparta. Reflectively speaking, Athena was a goddess who lived on Olympos and was worshiped by many cities and peoples.

Certain gods and goddesses, then, were familiar by name and general persona to all the Greeks, even as their functions, titles, rituals, iconography and relative importance varied from one location to the next. Robert Parker proposes (with certain caveats), that from 700 onward virtually all Greek communities worshiped a core group of twelve to thirteen deities: Zeus, Hera, Poseidon, Athena, Apollo,
Artemis, Dionysos, Hermes, Aphrodite, Demeter (normally with Persephone/Kore) and Herakles, as well as Hestia at the level of domestic cult. This assemblage probably matched no one’s meaningful god set, yet it reveals a common cultural heritage.

In order to create a narrative or an image representing the concept “all the gods,” poets and artists had to be selective. Let us define a “limited pantheon” as any such selection of gods that serves in place of the unbounded, unmanageable whole. In the Homeric poems we observe a limited pantheon which corresponds roughly to Parker’s list of gods recognized in cult. But Homer’s pantheon is shaped by factors specific to the epic genre and the subject matter of the poems. Zeus, who guides the course of history, and Athena, who watches over Greek heroes, are all-pervasive in the Panhellenic epic. Of sixty-seven deities mentioned in Homer, the most frequently named after Zeus and Athena are Apollo, Ares, Hera, Poseidon, Hephaistos and Aphrodite, in that order. The less commonly worshiped gods Hephaistos, Ares and Hades are significant in the epic, while the universally worshiped Dionysos and Demeter appear but are given short shrift, and Hestia is completely ignored. Homer has many collective expressions for all the gods (the athanatoi theoi, “immortal gods”; the theoi aien eontes, “gods who are forever”). The Homeric poems refer to a subset of gods who “possess Olympian abodes” (Olympia dōmat’ echontes), an emic category which was to have a long history.

It is worth pausing to see how Homer handles an episode where most gods are notionally present, but only a selection can be mentioned. For example, begins with a divine assembly summoned by Zeus. Homer uses this opportunity to acknowledge the existence of many local gods:

But Zeus bade Themis call the gods to the meeting place
From the peak of many-valleyed Olympos, and she journeyed
Everywhere, calling them to the house of Zeus.
Not a river was absent, except for Okeanos,
Nor any nymph, of all that dwell in the fair groves,
In the sources of the rivers, and the grassy meadows.

(Hom. Il. 20.4–9)

Once the gods are assembled, Zeus instructs them to choose sides in the Trojan War and to descend to the battlefield while he himself observes the action from Olympos (22–5). The din of battle disturbs even Aidoneus (61–5), the lord of the dead beneath the earth, who fears that the violence may expose his realm. The fighting gods are arranged in five pairs:

For there stood opposite Lord Poseidon
Phoibos Apollo with his winged arrows,
Against Enyalios [Ares], the goddess grey-eyed Athena;
Against Hera, Artemis of the golden distaff was pitted,
The loud-voiced archer, sister of the Far-Shooter;
What is Greek religion?

Against Leto stood the strong, swift runner Hermes
And opposite Hephaistos, the great, deep-eddying river
Whom the gods name Xanthos, and men Skamandros.

(Hom. **Il.** 20.67–74)\(^8\)

Taken as a whole, the episode constructs a theologically coherent pantheon organized by spatial location, with representatives from the earth (rivers and nymphs), the heavens (gods who inhabit Olympos) and the underworld (Aidoneus and the dead). The selection of combatants, on the other hand, is dictated by the requirements of the narrative. Hephaistos, for example, takes the field specifically in order to counter the onslaughts of the river Skamandros with fire.\(^8\) Conspicuously absent from the assembly and the battle are Demeter, Hestia and Dionysos.

Hesiod’s *Theogony* (ca. 700) daringly attempted to account for all the gods, organizing them by genealogy. This was a remarkable feat of theological classification, and it radically departed from the religion of everyday social exchange, with its sanctuary-based local gods.\(^\) Like Homer, Hesiod worked within a Panhellenic tradition which stripped most local gods of their individuality and cult titles, replacing them with descriptive epithets suited to the epic meter. In Hesiod’s cosmos, as in that of Homer, there was one Zeus, one Athena, one Apollo. The Muses of his local Mt. Helikon were identical to the Muses of Olympos (although it is telling that he allows them both epithets, “Helikonian” and “Olympian”).\(^3\)

In the proem to the *Theogony*, the Muses hymn (1–21) nineteen members of a limited pantheon:

1. Zeus, who holds the aegis
2. Queenly Argive Hera, who walks on golden sandals
3. Grey-eyed Athena, the daughter of aegis-holding Zeus
4. Phoibos Apollo
5. Artemis, who delights in arrows
6. Poseidon the earth-holder, who shakes the earth
7. Reverend Themis
8. Quick-glancing Aphrodite
9. Gold-crowned Hebe
10. Lovely Dione
11. Leto

Hesiod’s theological project is an account of cosmic history and its culmination in Zeus’ Olympian regime. This “Olympian” theme reveals that his plan is Panhellenic in scope: it acknowledges geographically unique deities like the rivers and nymphs, but pays them scant attention. The Muses’ hymn therefore focuses first and foremost on Zeus’ consorts and offspring; only Poseidon falls outside this circle. Hera, whose affiliation with the Argive peninsula ran very deep, is the only major deity to receive a geographical epithet (just as she does in Homer). The absent Demeter and Dionysos, meanwhile, may have been conceptualized as earthly, un-Olympian gods because of their agricultural interests.\(^\) With the
remaining eight deities, Hesiod expands our temporal and physical conception of the cosmos far beyond Homer’s tripartite division of earth/sky/underworld:

12 Iapetos
13 Kronos of crooked counsel
14 Eos (Dawn)
15 Great Helios (Sun)
16 Bright Selene (Moon)
17 Gaia (Earth)
18 Great Okeanos
19 Black Night

These are primordial gods, who belong to the generations before Zeus. The Titans Iapetos and Kronos allude to Zeus’ struggle for power, and the creation of men through the actions of Iapetos’ son Prometheus. Except for Ge and Helios, these divine beings rarely received formal cultic attentions. Yet they were not therefore irrelevant to Greek religion. Okeanos, for example, was an important figure in popular cosmology, while Kronos came to play a significant role in Greek ideas of the afterlife. The Muses’ hymn concludes in a prayer-like fashion with the inclusive formula “and the holy race of the other deathless gods.”

Next we turn to a limited pantheon in visual form. During the early sixth century, Athenian vase painters grew interested in depicting divine assemblies. The Sophilos dinos (Figures 1.4 and 1.5; ca. 580), for example, illustrates the wedding of Peleus and Thetis, an event attended by “all the gods.” Like the Battle of the Gods in Iliad 20 and the proem to Hesiod’s Theogony, it depicted a limited pantheon requiring a process of planning and selection: which gods would be included, and how would they be arranged? Sophilos decided to structure the scene as a real-life wedding procession. He gave Demeter, Hestia and Dionysos important places at the head of the group, in positions which would normally be taken by the bride’s relatives. Also on foot in the first cohort are the Olympian goddesses Leto and Hebe, as well as Peleus’ friends, the centaur Cheiron and his wife, Chariklo; they are followed by the Olympian Themis with a group of nymphs. The second stage of the procession comprises pairs of deities whose importance is signaled by their mode of travel in chariots. Each is accompanied by an attendant group of minor goddesses:

Zeus and Hera with the Horai (Seasons)
Poseidon and Amphitrite with the Charites (Graces)
Ares and Aphrodite with a group of Muses
Hermes and Apollo with another group of Muses
Athena and Artemis with the Moirai (Fates)

Sophilos’ theme is not war but love. Assembling as many erotic and nuptial pairs as possible, he follows Hesiod in pairing Poseidon with Amphitrite, and Ares with Aphrodite. The Seasons, Graces, Muses and Fates, all Olympian daughters
Figure 1.4 The Sophilos dinos, procession of the gods for the wedding of Peleus and Thetis. From right, Poseidon and Amphitrite in chariot, Ares and Aphrodite in chariot accompanied by the Muses. Lower register: stag and lions. Photo © Trustees of The British Museum

Figure 1.5 The Sophilos dinos, detail. From right, Athena and Artemis in chariot, Okeanos, Tethys and Eileithyia, Hephaistos. Photo © Trustees of The British Museum
of Zeus, are appropriate to a wedding with its joyful celebration and promise of offspring. At the end of the procession walk Thetis’ grandparents, Okeanos (portrayed as a river god) followed by his wife, Tethys, with the Olympian birth goddess Eileithyia, and last of all, Hephaistos on a donkey. Sophilos’ limited pantheon is consistent with the Athenian cultic environment, where Demeter, Dionysos and Hephaistos were important, yet it is more attuned to Panhellenic myth than to local cult. He expresses the concept of “all the gods” by uniting a host of Olympian deities with the earth-dwelling guests (Okeanos, Cheiron, Chariklo, nymphs) of Peleus and Thetis. The underworld is ignored, for Hades and the dead would be unwelcome at a wedding.

So far, we have explored the “meaningful god set,” which is defined cognitively, and the “local pantheon,” which is defined geographically. We compared these with examples of “limited pantheons” in poetry and art, which result from the interaction of local and Panhellenic traditions with narrative and visual constraints. A different way of representing “all the gods,” used primarily in cultic contexts, was the “condensed pantheon,” an explicitly limited selection of gods which could stand for the whole. So far as we know, condensed pantheons did not begin to appear until the late sixth century (522/1), when according to Thucydides (6.54.6), the younger Peisistratos founded an altar dedicated to “The Twelve Gods.” The exact composition of these twelve is not known; the site of the altar in the NW agora has been excavated, but no trace of divine iconography from the earliest period was uncovered. Around this time, Athenian vase painters developed an interest in assemblies constructed around the new myth of Herakles’ apotheosis and reception on Olympos. Although very few painters aimed for a set of exactly twelve gods, both the “assembly” vases and the altar in the agora suggest new currents of thought about which gods had a claim to a special, exclusive status, whether as “Olympians” or as members of a numerically restricted group.

That the Panhellenic sanctuary of Olympia also organized a condensed pantheon around the number twelve, and did so as early as the sixth century, is suggested by the Homeric Hymn to Hermes, which describes Hermes preparing a sacrificial meal with twelve equal portions beside the banks of the Alpheios river. Although the name “Twelve Gods” is not used, Pindar speaks of “six twin altars” at Olympia, and from a fragment of the Greek historian Herodorus, we learn that these were dedicated respectively to Zeus Olympios and Poseidon, Hera and Athena, Hermes and Apollo, the Charites (who apparently counted as one) and Dionysos, Artemis and Alpheios, and Kronos and Rhea. This group is distinctive, reflecting local traditions, such as the myth of Artemis’ pursuit by the river god Alpheios, and the rare worship of the Titans Kronos and Rhea. Several “major” gods, including Demeter and Aphrodite, are missing. The three same-sex pairs are complemented by three opposite-sex pairs with erotic or nuptial connotations. Yet in spite of the evident “local” character of this condensed pantheon, only Zeus is supplied with an epiclesis (“Olympios”). The other members of the group are all of Panhellenic renown, and even the local river Alpheios is mentioned by both Homer and Hesiod.

During the sixth century, then, Greek communities began to favor the number twelve as a limiting criterion for condensation of their local pantheons. As noted
earlier, Parker’s count of indispensable gods also amounts to twelve or thirteen. Thus, the number twelve is large enough to allow coverage of the key gods in the pantheon of a typical Greek city, even as it exerts pressure toward generalization (e.g. the stripping of the epiclesis) and Panhellenization along epic lines. Mesopotamian, Egyptian and Hittite parallels for groups of twelve deities have been suggested, and these may have played a role, yet the number twelve recurs in many Greek cultural contexts. Beyond this, it has the conceptual and iconographic advantage of being divisible by two, three, four and six, so that gods can be broken down into pairs or other combinations; the extant archaeological evidence bears witness to a fascination with these possibilities, and structuralist studies have fruitfully interpreted the resonances thus created. Plato was sensitive to the number twelve, and attracted to the potential for systematization it presented; in the Laws, he organized the tribes and monthly festival calendar of his ideal city around the Twelve Gods, but idiosyncratically included Plouton without specifying the composition of the members.

“Twelve Gods” cults came to be associated with the concept of foundation (as at Olympia) and with the heroic expeditions to the boundaries of the known world that established a Hellenic presence overseas. Agamemnon is supposed to have founded an altar to the Twelve at Cape Lekton in the Troad, and Jason at the “Sanctuary” (Hieron), a landmark location on the Bosporos. In contrast to Archaic condensed pantheons occurring in the Greek homeland, such as those of Olympia and Athens, these later references to groups of Twelve express an overtly Panhellenic perspective, where the exact composition of the Twelve is less relevant than the fact that they are a distinctively Greek group of gods. At the height of its empire, Athens promoted the ideology of Panhellenism, presenting itself as an exemplar of what it meant to be a Greek city. Perikles is said to have proposed a Panhellenic congress and spearheaded a Panhellenic colony at Thourioi, while foreigners were encouraged to honor Demeter and Kore at Eleusis, as though the Attic goddesses were universal Greek deities. The east frieze of the Parthenon (completed in 438/7) includes twelve gods seated in two groups of six to witness the Panathenaic procession. Zeus, Hera, Ares, Demeter, Dionysos and Hermes are on the left side of the frieze, and on the right, Athena, Hephaistos, Poseidon, Apollo, Artemis and Aphrodite. The frieze melds a Homeric and Panhellenizing vision of the major gods in the pantheon (Hera and Ares) with the realities of cult and worship (Demeter and Dionysos).

The Hellenistic period saw the spread of the Twelve Gods cult to many Greek cities, where they became guardians of civic harmony and prosperity. Cults of the Twelve resisted standardization and manifested themselves in ways that reflected local priorities. The cult at Delos, for example, is thought to have been organized with four altars of three gods each, an arrangement which would have accommodated the distinctive Delian triad of Apollo, Artemis and Leto. At Magnesia on the Maiandros, a Hellenistic decree (197/6) concerning the cult of Zeus Sosipolis (“Savior of the City”) prescribed a procession with individual wooden images of the Twelve Gods, which were brought to a circular area (tholos) in the agora near their altar. Three couches (presumably to hold four gods each) and musicians were to be provided. The procession took place in conjunction with
separate observances for the key civic deities Zeus Sosipolis, Artemis Leukophryene and Apollo Pythios. In spite of the fact that most localities were able to list “their” Twelve, the lack of specificity in the very concept of “the Twelve” must have facilitated the transmission of the cult from one local context to another. Moreover, the Twelve Gods could be worshiped as a plurality alongside one or more of its individual members.106

Given the significant role of Twelve Gods cults in civic ideology, and their relationship to mental representations of the pantheon, it is not surprising that when rulers began to be deified, they attempted to associate themselves with Twelve Gods cults. Beginning in the mid-fourth century, Philip II, Alexander and their successors found alternative solutions to the predicament faced by Herakles, who was said to have refused membership in the Twelve on the grounds that one of the existing members would have to be expelled to make way for him. In a procession at Aigai where images of the Twelve were carried into the theater, Philip had his own statue displayed in such a way that it would be difficult to see him as anything other than the Thirteenth God.107 At Athens the orator Demades later proposed that Alexander be enrolled as the Thirteenth God, a suggestion which was soundly rejected, although we also hear that Alexander succeeded in having many Greek cities add him to the Twelve. Subsequent rulers attempted to achieve membership by proximity: on Delos, the temple to the Twelve has produced the remains of two colossal statues of Hellenistic kings.108

The Twelve Gods were a group of variable composition, and this potential for variation allowed the Twelve to express either a local or Panhellenic identity, depending on the context. The Twelve Gods are therefore to be distinguished from the familiar “Twelve Olympians” of mythology textbooks, a group whose membership seems to have become canonical only in 217, when the Roman Dii Consentes were syncretized with a selection of gods from the Greek pantheon. (The occasion was an attempt to appease the gods after Hannibal’s victory at Lake Trasimene.) The Romans held a banquet with food placed before twelve statues, arranged in male-female pairs on six couches.109 This Graeco-Roman condensed pantheon corresponded to the Parthenon Twelve, but excluded Dionysos/Liber in favor of Hestia/Vesta, presumably because of Vesta’s greater importance for the Romans. It still serves us today as a conceptual filter, a Panhellenizing first approach to the Greek gods in all their unmanageable multiplicity.

ESSAY 1.2: HOMER’S HERA AND THE HERA(S) OF CULT

Next we turn to the dynamic relationship between Panhellenic and local concepts of Hera. The differences outweigh the similarities, yet the portrait of Hera in the Iliad reveals knowledge of the Argolic goddess, while local worship of Hera often reflected the influence of epic. Epic poetry aimed to present a coherent picture of Hera by locating her on Olympos and shaping the Olympian pantheon as a patriarchal family ruled by Zeus. Yet epic Hera’s special characteristics of partisanship and ferocity reflect her cultic history as the preeminent goddess of the Argolid and
the nurturer of its warriors. It is likely that the prestige of the *Iliad* affected the subsequent development of Hera’s worship, especially with regard to her role in colonization and perceptions of “Achaian” ethnicity.

In the assembly of gods at the beginning of *Iliad* Book 4, Zeus declares his wish to bring about peace between the warring Achaians and Trojans, and Hera angrily protests. Zeus reproaches Hera for her implacable anger against the Trojans, warning that someday he may see fit to destroy a city dear to her, just as she longs for the ruin of Troy, one of his own favorite cities. Hera replies:

> Indeed three cities are dearest to my heart,  
> Argos and Sparta and the broad ways of Mycenae.  
> Destroy these, if your heart grows to hate them;  
> I neither defend them nor deem them beyond your reach.  
> Though I resent and forbid such destruction,  
> Resentment is useless against your greater might.  

*(Hom. II. 4.51–6)*

The idea that a goddess favors certain cities is not a fanciful creation of the poets, but reflects the real-world tendency for each city or region to worship one or more tutelary deities, who overshadowed the other local gods. The same pattern was characteristic of Near Eastern city-states (e.g. Marduk was the patron god of Babylon). Despite the Panhellenizing tendencies of epic, the *Iliad* does not elide the evidence that Hera was a regional goddess, but instead acknowledges it:

> At once the son of Kronos tried to provoke Hera,  
> Speaking mockery with malign intent:  
> “Twin goddesses are Menelaos’ helpers,  
> Hera Argeia and Athena Alalkomene.”  

*(Hom. II. 4.5–8)*

The reference to Hera Argeia in this passage clearly alludes to her connection with a city or district called “Argos,” just as the epithet Alalkomene is specific to an ancient center of Athena’s worship in Boiotia. In the *Iliad*, Hera and Athena are united in their hostility toward the Trojans, yet at the local level, conflicts between individual Greek cities can be expressed in terms of opposition between the two goddesses as civic deities. The idea occurs in a passage from Euripides’ *Heracleidae*, when the supplicant Iolaos says to his Athenian host Demophon:

> Gods no lesser  
> Than those of the Argives are our allies, my lord.  
> For Hera, the wife of Zeus, is their champion,  
> But Athena is ours. And I deem this too to be  
> Good practice, that we have better gods.  
> For Pallas will not suffer herself to be defeated.  

*(Eur. Heracl. 347–52)*
What is Greek religion?

Although he is speaking of the gods in their roles as local deities, Iolaos subtly disparages Hera by invoking the Panhellenic idea that she is the wife of Zeus. The term for “wife” here is *damar*, which is etymologically related to the verb *damazō*, “I overpower, tame, subdue.” As a *damar*, Hera was physically and legally subject to her husband, while Athena, famous for her virgin status, was independent and not to be overcome.

Historically, Hera was linked with Zeus as early as the Mycenaean period, when a scribe using Linear B listed “Zeus, Hera, and Drimios” as a cult group in the area of Pylos. The same tablet, however, also mentions the goddesses *Di-wi-ja* and *Po-si-da-e-ja*, whose names are feminine versions of “Zeus” and “Poseidon.” They may have been consorts or wives of these gods. The Bronze Age pantheon at Pylos is full of puzzles, and the tablet does not prove that Hera was Zeus’ “wife,” though it strongly suggests that the pair produced a son called Drimios, whose name was forgotten by the Archaic period. Interestingly, the diction of Homeric Greek preserves the unexpected formula *posis Hērēs* (“husband of Hera”) for Zeus, which leaves the impression that Hera is the more important of the two partners. With respect to the religion of everyday social exchange, she was undoubtedly more important to the people in the Argolid peninsula. It was Hera, not Zeus, with whom they interacted most, and on whom they depended for prosperity and victory.

Homer repeatedly makes Hera and the other gods acknowledge the overwhelming power of Zeus, yet cultic arrangements in Greek cities did not reflect his supreme status in myth. Instead, nearly the opposite was the case: although all honored him, relatively few poleis made Zeus their patron deity. His early cults were typically situated in remote rural mountaintops and valleys, and he was also worshiped in domestic contexts. The supreme power of Zeus was recognized at Olympia and Nemea, two Peloponnesian sanctuaries which served during the Geometric period as regional gathering places. In the Argolid itself, however, there is little early evidence for the worship of Zeus in his own right. Instead, he seems to have been regarded as the “husband of Hera”: lead plaques depicting Hera and Zeus as a divine couple have been found in three of her eastern Peloponnesian sanctuaries. This state of affairs created a logical conflict between the mythic, Panhellenic understanding of Zeus as ruler of all the gods and the cultic situation in the Argolid, where the preeminent deity was Hera.

Homer and his predecessors were not men of Argos or Mycenae, and they were more concerned with the narrative than the devotional impact of epic song. They responded to the discrepancy between myth and cult by fashioning a theology: Hera, the ferocious partisan of the invading Greeks, comes into constant conflict with Zeus, who sees the bigger picture because he is responsible for the cosmos as a whole. Time and time again, Zeus must bully his deceitful, headstrong wife into submission. He threatens to flog her (Hom. *Il.* 15.16–33), and reminds her how he once hung her from the sky, her feet weighted with anvils, as punishment for her persecution of Herakles. Homer’s portrait of Hera as a disobedient, shrewish wife is a poetic construct fashioned in the service of Panhellenic epic, which insists on the primacy of Zeus. Epic depicts the gods as members of an Olympian...
family with Zeus as a patriarchal husband, a narrative strategy which requires that Hera, like Shakespeare’s formidable Katharina, be tamed. The Zeus of the *Iliad*, however, meets with considerably less success than Petruchio in subduing his wife. Even after the death of Hektor, her anger against the Trojans remains undiminished. The unyielding character of Hera in epic is a product of Homeric artistry, but it also reflects certain characteristics of regional “great goddesses,” such as Argive Hera and Spartan Orthia, who were by turns nurturing and blood-thirsty. Behind the epic narrative lies an awareness of the power wielded by these preeminent goddesses.

The comic elements in Homer’s portrait of Hera do not obscure her special relationship to the Greeks at Troy, and especially to Achilles. The goddess’s divine anger seems to fuel the corresponding mortal wrath of Achilles. At Patroklos’ funeral, Zeus comments:

> You got your way, ox-eyed Lady Hera;  
> You have provoked swift-footed Achilles.  
> Truly, the long-haired Achaians sprang from you.  
> (Hom. *II.* 357–9)

Homer’s portrait of Hera as a fierce patroness, even a foremother, of Achaian warriors has its origins in her most important regional cult. In the Argolid, Hera seems to have been associated from very early times with the concept of the hero, etymologically, in myth and in worship. A famous and puzzling example is her intimate yet antagonistic relationship with Herakles, the demigod of Tiryns who undertook his labors as a result of her machinations. Hera and Herakles entertained a mutual hostility, yet the name of this native son of Argolis seems to mean “Glory of Hera.” On the Tiryns akropolis, where a Bronze Age megaron and altar had fallen to ruins, Hera began to receive archaeologically visible offerings in the eighth century. The Argive Heraion itself was deliberately juxtaposed to prehistoric ruins, in this case the cemetery of Prosymna, where numerous Geometric offerings were left in Mycenaean tombs. These gifts to the ancient dead were initially interpreted by archaeologists as signs of “hero cult,” and later as “tomb cult,” the sporadic worship of putative ancestors (Chapter 5). Many of the same gifts (bronze fibulae, pins and rings; bronze offering bowls; terracotta spools and other specific ceramic types) were deposited in both the tombs and the Heraion. The possible role of Prosymna’s Mycenaean tombs in the origins of the cult at the Heraion remains the subject of debate. So does the relationship between the Hera cults of the Argolid, which left durable traces by ca. 800, and the *Iliad*, which was first disseminated in writing ca. 750–700, but must have circulated in various oral versions during previous centuries. Did the nobles of Argolis respond to the emergent epic tradition by proudly insisting on their own ties to the goddess, and investing more heavily in her cults?

The *Iliad* indisputably left its mark on Hera’s worshipers. One of Homer’s epithets for the goddess, leukōlenos (“white-armed”), appears on an inscribed gold ring (Figure 1.6; ca. 560), which was probably dedicated in the Argive Heraion: “Ariknidas dedicated it to the goddess, white-armed Hera.”

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What is Greek religion?

The use of Homeric epithets as cult titles was unusual, yet early Archaic inscriptions from Hera’s shrine at Perachora also call her “white-armed,” suggesting that worshipers in the region were identifying Homeric Hera with the goddess they knew locally.123

A similar phenomenon is observable in a fragmentary hymn to Hera by Sappho:

Close by me as I [pray, please show,]
Lady Hera, your [lovely form]
Which Atreus’ sons, [the famous] kings
Saw in their prayers.

Having completed [numerous toils,]
First at Troy [then on the sea,]
What is Greek religion?

Setting sail to this place, they were unable
[To reach their destination]

Before they prayed to you and Zeus
And the desirable [son] of Thyone.
So now [have mercy and bring aid]
As you did of old . . .

[Two additional stanzas are mostly lost.]
(Fr. 17 LP)\textsuperscript{124}

Writing in the early sixth century, Sappho was keenly aware of Hera’s identity as
the goddess of the “famous kings” Agamemnon and Menelaos, “the sons of Atreus,”
as they are so often called in the \textit{Iliad}.\textsuperscript{125} She also alluded to a tradition that the victorious Greeks stopped at her own island, Lesbos, and prayed to Hera for assistance in reaching home. Sappho had in mind a specific sanctuary at Lesbos, where the goddess was worshiped together with Zeus and Dionysos, “the desirable son of Thyone.” Hera was the principal deity here; as in Argolis, Zeus was her spouse but played a secondary role.\textsuperscript{126} Sappho blurred the distinction between the epic Hera and the local goddess, using the precedent of help given to Agamemnon and Menelaos as the context for her own, more personal request, which was stated in the lost section of the poem.

Alcaeus, Sappho’s contemporary and countryman, took a very different approach in his own hymn to Hera, of which I quote the first three stanzas:

[O Mistress] Hera, to whom the people of Lesbos,
On a conspicuous [mountain], once set up
A large precinct, to be shared by all,
And placed therein altars for the immortals,

Giving Zeus the title “God of Suppliants”
And naming you “Famous goddess of the Aiolians,
Mother of all”; as for the third one here,
They called him “God of the deer;”

“Dionysos who devours them raw.” We call on you:
Listen benevolently to our prayers.
Save us from present hardship
And from the sadness of exile.

(Fl. 129 LP)\textsuperscript{127}

Alcaeus completely ignores the Panhellenic and epic aspects of Hera in order to focus on her local persona. He emphasizes her importance to Lesbos and its people. She is “Mother of all,” a title quite foreign to the Homeric conception of Hera. We may interpret it as an indication that Hera of Lesbos was a successor to one of the powerful Bronze Age goddesses who dominated Greek and Anatolian religion. Additionally, she was regarded as a patroness of the Aiolian Greeks on

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What is Greek religion?

the island. The succeeding sections of the poem deal with Lesbian politics, and Alcaeus prays that Hera and her two divine companions will favor his cause.128

Next we turn to Hera’s annual festival at the Argive Heraion. The Heraion was a regional cult center, in Classical times under the control of Argos (its earlier status is debated). Although most literary sources on the festival are late, they mention a procession led by shield-bearing youths, girls in white dresses, women’s dances, a ritual involving the presentation of a robe to the goddess, and a footrace, again by young men in arms. A shield was the prize in Hera’s games.129 The legend of Kleobis and Biton illustrates Argive piety toward the goddess:

There was a festival of Hera among the Argives, and it was absolutely necessary for their mother to be brought to the temple by a team of oxen. But the oxen had not returned from the fields, and because they were out of time, the youths took the yoke upon their own shoulders. They drew the wagon, with their mother riding on it, and covered forty-five stades to reach the temple.

(Hdt. 1.31.2)

At the peak of their youth and strength, the brothers lay down in the sanctuary and never woke again, this glorious end being recognized as the reward of Hera. Characteristic is the test of strength which exacts a cruel price from the goddess’s male worshipers. In this story, the two strong youths are assimilated to the fine, unblemished cattle, who became pleasing gifts to the goddess in the festival’s climactic sacrifice. Hera governed the welfare of cattle herds, the most important index of wealth, as well as the maturation of adolescent boys into warriors, and girls into wives and mothers. Terracotta figurines from the Heraion show the goddess in her maternal role as nurturer of youths (kourotrophos), holding a child in her lap. The prominence of cattle in the Argive Hera cult is reflected in a Homeric epithet for the goddess, “ox-eyed” (boōpis). Although surprising to modern sensibilities, this title reflects the beauty attributed by pastoral cultures to the animals on which they are economically dependent. In the Argive peninsula, then, Hera gave prosperity, progeny and military victory, each equally crucial to the welfare of the community.

This picture of a goddess who oversaw the most fundamental needs of her people contrasts with that in most other parts of the Greek world, where Hera received far less attention. Homer’s testimony of her three favored cities suggests an early cult at Sparta, but she was not a major goddess in the Classical city.130 Again, if our data were confined strictly to evidence from Athens, we would conclude that Hera was a minor goddess, significant mainly for her role as Zeus’ bride, which was celebrated in a festival known as the Hieros Gamos (Sacred Marriage), an auspicious time for weddings.131 The nuptial aspect of Hera’s worship is reflected in the most famous Homeric episode involving the goddess, the “Deception of Zeus,” in which Hera (after elaborate preparations) uses her sex appeal to distract Zeus while Poseidon helps the Greeks get the upper hand against the Trojans.132

Then the ox-eyed Lady Hera considered
How to deceive the aegis-bearer Zeus.
And in her heart this counsel seemed the best,
What is Greek religion?

To adorn herself well and visit the peak of Ida;
If he wished to lie with her, loving her body,
She could shed a harmless, gentle sleep
Over his eyelids and his cunning mind.

(Hom. Il. 14.159–65)

In cult, the union of Zeus and Hera was a model for marital sexuality leading to procreation. In the *Iliad*, Zeus lays eyes on Hera and immediately thinks of the first time they made love, not as bride and groom, but in a premarital dalliance, “without the knowledge of their dear parents” (14.296). There follows a negotiation between the amorous husband and his coyly seductive wife about whether to have intercourse outdoors. In the epic context, the Sacred Marriage has been transformed into a titillating narrative device, condemned by Plato because it set a bad example for young people.133

Hera appeared as Zeus’ consort in many minor cults around the Greek world, but she was worshiped as a preeminent deity in only a few places other than Argolis. According to Furley and Bremer, “There is a remarkable dearth of hymns and prayers to Hera.” The only extant examples are the two Lesbian hymns we have examined, and a “very unimaginative” and brief Homeric hymn, which reveals its epic bias by locating the goddess on Olympos and defining her in terms of her relationship to Zeus:134

I sing golden-throned Hera whom Rhea bore,
Queen of immortals, of surpassing beauty,
Sister and spouse of loud-resounding Zeus,
Glorious lady, whom all gods on high Olympos
Revere, just as they honor thunder-loving Zeus.

(Hymn. Hom. 12)

Second to the Argive Heraion in fame was the goddess’s sanctuary on the Ionian island of Samos, founded in the early Geometric period (but not mentioned in the *Iliad*). Conflicting traditions at Samos held on the one hand that the goddess was indigenous, and on the other that her cult was imported from Argos.135 As in Argolis, Hera was dominant here, a “great goddess.” Situated on a well-traveled maritime route, the Heraion at Samos attracted an international clientele of travelers and traders who dedicated rich gifts: Egyptian ivories and scarabs, Phoenician and Babylonian bronzes, and gold jewelry. The luxury of this period is evoked by the epic poet Asius, who described the Ionian men assembling on Samos:

And they used to go with their combed locks
To the precinct of Hera, clad in lovely robes,
Their snow-white tunics skimming the broad earth,
With golden clips like cicadas on them,
And their flowing hair, in gold bands, the breeze lifted,
And they wore intricate ornaments upon their arms

(Asius in Ath. 12.30 [525f])
As in Argolis and Lesbos, Hera’s Samian cult helped to shape her people’s ethnic and civic identity. Colonists in sixth-century Naukratis, a trading emporium in Egypt, established a sanctuary of Hera, because worship of this goddess was a distinctive sign of their Samian origins.136

Unlike Zeus, Archaic Hera was very much a temple deity whose cults used statues as the focus of worship. The Geometric temple at Samos was highly influential, one of the first hekatompeda or “hundred-footers,” while its Archaic successors were among the largest Greek temples ever built.137 Another early and extremely rich sanctuary was constructed at Perachora, in the territory of Corinth. Like the Samians, the Corinthians were traders, and Corinth was an important Mediterranean port. Hera’s major Aegean sanctuaries (Argos, Samos, Perachora) are notable for Geometric dedications of miniature houses, which have been variously interpreted as models of her earliest temples, or of domestic dwellings. More recently, de Polignac contrasted the house models with a similar series of ship models and actual ships dedicated in Hera sanctuaries (Samos as well as Kroton and Gravisca in Italy), proposing that the houses could have been dedicated by women, and the ships by men. Several other distinctive votive types recur in Hera’s Archaic sanctuaries, suggesting consistent themes in her worship. These include metal and terracotta shields, which refer to her ancient role in nurturing warriors.138

The ship models in Samos and Italy were probably connected with Hera’s sponsorship of maritime trade ventures and colonization, a theme with affinities to her Iliadic role as a patroness of the Greek expedition to Troy. During the eighth and seventh centuries, Greeks emigrated to Italy and Sicily in large numbers. Many were from the northern coast of the Peloponnese, an area which would later be known as Achaia. At the time these colonists left their homeland, the Greek poleis were still in their infancy, and Achaia especially was far from becoming urbanized.139 There were no major temples or sanctuaries of Hera on the north coast of the Peloponnese to compare with the Argive Heraion. Yet the colonists established important Hera cults at Sybaris, Poseidonia, Kroton and Metapontum and defined themselves as “Achaians.” The people of Poseidonia especially seem to have regarded Hera as preeminent, given that two of the city’s major sanctuaries were devoted to her, one in the city and one at the extraurban site of Foce del Sele. Like the Hera cult at Samos and numerous others, the sanctuary at Foce del Sele claimed to be an offshoot of the Argive Heraion.140 Why did the colonists choose Hera as their patron goddess? Homer’s catalogue of ships (Il. 2.569–80) states that the towns of the northeastern coast (Pellene, Hyperesia, Helike and Aigion) belonged in the holdings of Agamemnon, king of Mycenae. Colonists from this area drew on the epic tradition and expressed a claim to be descendants of Homer’s “Achaians” when they installed Hera, protectress of Greek warriors abroad, in the new sanctuaries of the West.141

As the case of Hera demonstrates, the relative importance of deities within a local pantheon varied widely, and one god or (more often) goddess might outshine the others in the eyes of a given population. Such preeminent deities helped to shape ethnic, civic and personal identity. The Geometric and early Archaic periods were to some degree an “Age of Hera.” Through the medium of Homeric poetry,
the whole Greek world heard of Hera’s ancient and continuing ties to Argos and Mycenae, and knowledge of her Panhellenic persona stimulated the propagation of her worship in Greek colonies. Yet devotion to Hera was distinctive precisely because it was not universal. The regional and ethnic character of Hera’s worship ensured that her fortunes rose and fell with those of the peoples who made her their preeminent goddess. Though the prestige of the Mycenaean past clung to her, after the sixth century Hera never again enjoyed the same prominence in the religious landscape of the Greeks.

ESSAY 1.3: RECIPROcity IN GREEK RELIGION

Most religions envision superhuman agents who act intentionally in the physical world, and whose actions affect human lives. This in turn opens the way for a human response. When divine actions are beneficial, there may be praise, gifts of thanksgiving and requests for additional blessings. In response to harmful actions, there may be attempts to appease what is felt to be the anger of the deity. When such ongoing relationships are perceived as mutually beneficial, they may be described as reciprocal. Greek religion was predicated on the intuitive inference that the gods were humanlike, in the sense that they were capable of maintaining reciprocal relationships analogous to those cultivated among humans.142 During the Mycenaean period, for example, rulers and aristocrats maintained relationships of reciprocity with one another by exchanging precious gifts. At the sanctuaries of Olympia, Delphi, Delos and Samos, the aristocrats of the Early Iron Age extended the practice of luxury gift-giving to include the gods.143

The nature of this divine-human reciprocity, however, requires further exploration. Traditionally, the Christian West has looked back upon interactions with “pagan” gods as examples of an inferior kind of relationship with the divine. From the viewpoint of Christian theologians, the very nature of pagan worship was suspect because it involved an exchange of one grace or favor (charis) for another, whereas the apostle Paul had taught that charis was unidirectional rather than reciprocal.144 This value judgment about the relative inferiority of pagan piety is alive and well in modern scholarship conducted from a Christian perspective. Consider this remark in a 2003 monograph on Paul: “The do ut des (“I give that you may give”) mentality of Graeco-Roman religion reduced human piety to a mere business transaction.”145

Even Classicists have maintained that Greek religion was dependent upon a mentality of commercial exchange, citing the Latin formula do ut des (which derives not from religion but from Roman contract law) and the supposedly contractual or mechanical nature of the relationship.146 Indeed, certain practices of Greek religion, such as the vow to provide a gift to a deity should one’s goals be achieved, appear at first sight to approximate a commercial transaction. More recent studies of reciprocity influenced by anthropology, however, have drawn a clear distinction between the mentalities of commercial exchange and reciprocity, showing that they are in fact diametrically opposed. Furthermore, while
What is Greek religion?

Commercial exchange is a relatively recent development in human history, reciprocity is a far more ancient form of human behavior, rooted in moral intuitions which evolved to facilitate social interaction among primates.147

Reciprocity and gift exchange

In gift exchange, which is a form of reciprocity, the presentation of gifts or favors is expected but (crucially) not required. As social relationships shift, there is always the possibility that next time, the giver will find a different, more desirable recipient for his or her largesse. The situation is quite unlike a contractual or commercial one, where it is understood that an agreement can be enforced. If I fail to pay for the earrings I remove from a shop, I engage in theft, just as the shopkeeper commits fraud if she retains my money and fails to produce the goods. Commercial exchanges, moreover, are typically subject to the legal principle of “consideration.” That is, they must meet minimum standards of just exchange in order to be valid. According to Roman jurists, a purchase was potentially invalid if the price paid was not at least half the actual value. The presentation of a gift, however, could not be invalidated in this way, because it was not conceptualized as an equitable exchange of goods or services.148

In a commercial transaction, then, the value of the goods or services exchanged is ostensibly equal, whereas in gift exchange this is not necessarily the case, especially in the short term. Equivalence is sometimes actively avoided in favor of attempts to place the recipient in one’s debt, or for reasons of display, again with no guarantee that the benefit will be returned. Even though they are well aware of the social realities involved, people deliberately “misrecognize” the economic value of gifts in order to emphasize that gifts are not commercial transactions (“It’s the thought that counts.”)149 People are expected to give according to their means, not necessarily according to what they receive. Furthermore, whereas a commercial transaction does not have the direct goal of maintaining and strengthening the relationship between the parties, this is a key function of gift exchange. Commercial transactions do not depend on trust, and may even erode it, for each party has an inherent interest in taking advantage of the other. In systems of gift exchange, on the other hand, people attempt to build trust by reinforcing a reciprocal relationship over a long period. Commerce can function efficiently even if the parties never expect to meet again, but gift exchange cannot.150

Thus a common component in Greek prayer was the reminder to the deity that he or she had been helpful before, or conversely, that the worshiper had a long history of presenting gifts. In Book 1 of the Iliad, the priest Chryses prays to Apollo for vengeance against the Greeks. Chryses reminds the god of his previous service in building a “gracious” temple, one that expressed the charis (favor or grace) of their reciprocal relationship.151

Hear me, you of the silver bow who guard Chryse,
Mighty ruler of sacred Killa and of Tenedos,
If ever I roofed a gracious (charient’) temple for you, Smintheus,
Or if ever I burned for you the fat thigh bones
Of bulls and goats, accomplish my desire:
Let the Danaoi pay for (tiseian) my tears with your arrows.

(Hom. Il. 1.37–42)

Chryses’ prayer is sometimes described as a bald assertion that Apollo “owes” him something, but this is a mischaracterization. Chryses does not believe that any gift in particular has bought him an answered prayer, nor is his mentality that of a purchaser who now expects the merchandise to be handed over. It is the history of reciprocity between himself and Apollo to which he appeals, as though asking for a favor from a friend. From his perspective, it is not Apollo who has incurred a debt but the Greeks, who must now make “payment” for the wrongs they have committed.

As in human gift exchange, which also worked on the principles of charis rather than those of commerce, relationships with the gods did not always turn out as the worshiper hoped, and the omens from sacrifice were not always favorable. Often the gods’ rejection of an offering can be traced to moral (or more rarely, ritual) violations by the gift-giver, but other times the reason for the rejection is less clear. Xenophon tells of the Theban Koiratadas, who contracted with a group of mercenaries to become their general, on condition that he supply them with rations. He duly arrived with animals for sacrifice and other supplies, but then things began to go wrong:

On the first day, Koiratadas did not receive good omens from the sacrifice, nor did he measure out rations to the troops. On the next day, the victims were standing by the altar and Koiratadas, wearing his garland, was about to sacrifice, but Timasion the Dardanian, Neon of Asine, and Kleanor of Orchomenos told him not to sacrifice, for he would not be leading the army unless he gave them what was needed. So he ordered the supplies served out, but when he fell short of supplying each soldier with enough food for a day, he took his victims and left, renouncing his generalship.

(Xen. An. 7.1.40–1)

Xenophon refrains from proposing an explicit reason for the rejected sacrifice, but the verdict of the gods seems to have coincided with that of the men, who found Koiratadas unfit to lead the army.

The limits of the gift exchange model

The form of exchange found in Greek religion more closely approximates gift exchange than commerce, since the parties have no guarantee that past benefits will be rewarded, the value of the exchange is rarely perceived as equivalent, and the goal is to develop long-term amicable relationships which are mutually valued. On the other hand, some aspects of Greek religion fit less comfortably into the model of gift exchange. Although gift exchange systems tend to favor
a certain inequality in any given exchange, there is often an expectation that the
benefits to parties of similar social standing will, over time, be roughly equivalent.
The relationship between humans and gods, however, was highly asymmetrical.
Not only were the gods more far more powerful and knowledgeable than human
beings, but also the benefits sought from and given by the gods ensured humans’
very survival. Even the most elaborate of gifts, the annual sacrifice of hundreds
of animals at a time, or the construction of magnificent temples, could scarcely be
perceived as equivalent in value.153

In order to sustain the analogy with reciprocity in human societies, we must
turn to social relations between people of unequal status, where anthropologists
have identified reciprocity as a key source of stability. In traditional societies,
powerful elites are expected to ensure a minimum standard of living and other
periodic benefits in return for the deference they are accorded from the lower
social ranks. The leitourgia of democratic Athens, a system of redistribution by
which wealthy citizens were expected to pay for public benefits enjoyed by all,
is an example, but philanthropy by the wealthy was (and is) hardly limited to
democracies.154 Relationships between patrons and clients or landholders and ten-
ants may also involve reciprocity, whereby each side has obligations to the other,
though the benefits in each direction are different in kind and in scope.

An important element in reciprocity between humans of different ranks is the
deferece or respect paid to the powerful. This deference may translate into con-
crete benefits (as when a Roman patron gathered votes), or the benefit conferred
by inferiors may consist of intangible honor and acknowledgment. One of the
most consistent themes in Greek myth is the anger of gods when their power is
not properly acknowledged, and the consequent application of coercion. Myth
offers many examples of “failure to sacrifice” or “failure to tithe” as the reason for
the anger of a god or goddess.155 In Sophocles’ Ajax, the chorus wonders whether
Ajax’s madness has come about because he failed to give Artemis her due:

Was it because of some victory that yielded her no fruit,
Whether she was cheated of brilliant war spoils,
Or offered no gifts when a deer was shot?

(Soph. Aj. 176–8)

In myth, the most coercive of gods was Dionysos. In Euripides’ Bacchae (and
other “myths of resistance”), he visits madness and gruesome punishments on
those who foolishly refuse to acknowledge his divinity. This pattern is related to
the special nature of Dionysos as a god who possessed his worshipers; he was not,
by and large, an angry god. In worship contexts, however, certain deities were per-
ceived as angry by nature and in need of regular appeasement. Because coercion
is inconsistent with reciprocity, a cult based purely on appeasement could not be
considered reciprocal. In practice, however, there was always the hope that such
gods, once properly provided with honors, would reciprocate by conferring ben-
efits. Angry Poseidon could be transformed into the “steadfast” god who warded
off earthquakes, Apollo the plague god could become an averter of plague, and
What is Greek religion?

Ares the war god could give victory. In Aeschylus’ *Eumenides* (1006–9), the terrifying Erinyes, who once threatened to blast Athens with plague, are persuaded to “hold back what is baneful to the land, and send what is profitable for the victory of the city.” Cult heroes too often began their careers as angry powers in need of appeasement.156

Greek deities occasionally solicited worship from humans, in effect asking to begin a reciprocal relationship. As the herald Pheidippides crossed the Arkadian mountains, Pan appeared to him and made his wishes known, using the familiar language of reciprocity: “Crying the name of Pheidippides aloud, Pan bade him ask the Athenians why they paid him no attention, even though he was well disposed toward the Athenians, had often assisted them, and would do so again in the future” (Hdt. 6.105.2).

Whereas the friendly, unassuming Pan presented himself as a gift-giver wondering why he had never received a thank-you note, other gods could be more peremptory. According to the Homeric *Hymn* in her honor, Demeter more or less commanded that the people of Eleusis build a temple for her, and dictated the terms of the reciprocal arrangement:

> But come now, let all the people build me a great temple
> And an altar beneath, below the city and its steep wall
> Upon a rising hill above the Place of Lovely Dances.
> And I myself will instruct you in my mystic rites, that hereafter
> You may perform them in purity and so conciliate me.
> *(Hom. Hymn Dem. 270–74)*

In the Homeric *Hymn to Apollo*, the god similarly commanded worship from the bewildered Cretans whom he hijacked and brought to the future sanctuary of Delphi, promising benefits in return:

> I am the son of Zeus, and Apollo is my name;
> I brought you here over the great depth of the sea,
> Meaning you no harm, but here you shall keep my rich temple
> Which is much honored among humans.
> You shall know the plans of the immortals, and by their will
> You shall be honored unceasingly every day, forever.

Apollo then instructed the Cretans as to the proper forms of his worship, concluding with a dire warning (540–3) that if they were disobedient or unrighteous, he would cause them to be enslaved to other men. Because of myths like these, Greek religion was subject to the charge that its hold over the human mind was predicated on fear of vastly powerful beings and their punishments. This was precisely the criticism of Epicurus. Unlike tyrannical mortals, the gods could not be dislodged from their positions of privilege, except by demolishing a fundamental assumption of Greek religion, that gods acted in the world. Epicurus seems to
What is Greek religion?

have been particularly concerned with debunking this notion, as well as the idea of afterlife punishments.\(^{157}\)

The reciprocal arrangements dictated by Demeter and Apollo resemble the relationship between Yahweh and the Israelites. In Egypt, Yahweh announced to Moses: “I will take you as my own people, and I will be your God. Then you will know that I am the Lord your God, who brought you out from under the yoke of the Egyptians” (Exod. 6:7).

Yahweh later informed Moses (Lev. 1:1–17) of his requirements for the sacrifice of cattle, sheep, goats and birds. He further established a “covenant” with the Israelites, whereby he made certain specific promises (e.g. freeing them from Egyptian slavery), and in return they were held to a detailed list of specific ritual and ethical requirements. This reciprocal arrangement differs from the Greek examples of Demeter and Apollo in the explicit use of the legalistic, treaty-like format of the covenant.

Each of these narratives is an etiological myth created to explain how an existing relationship with a god began, rather than a description of the relationship in practice. The epistemological uncertainty characteristic of worship contexts is here replaced by a god’s unequivocal statement of his or her wishes. The degree of fusion between a theological concept, such as “Apollo brought our ancestors here to tend his sanctuary” or “Yahweh made a detailed covenant with us,” and real-time interactions with the deities in question will vary according to the cultural and historical context. In the case of Judaism, the covenantal concept was regularly reinforced through the canonization of the Pentateuch as scripture, encouraging a close correspondence between theology and practice. In the Greek case, it is far less clear what impact the coercive scenarios narrated by the poets of the Homeric Hymns had on actual practice and the perceptions of worshipers at Eleusis and Delphi. On the other hand, the widespread practice of tithing in response to the receipt of benefits suggests that certain deities were believed to possess a “right” to material honors in fixed amounts, in return for the good things they gave.\(^{158}\)

The theological rejection of reciprocity

In antiquity, reflective critiques of traditional Greek religion questioned the intuitive inference that reciprocity with divine agents was possible. The gods were known to live a blessed life, free of the needs to which humans are subject; therefore, how could they possibly benefit from anything humans had to offer?\(^{159}\) In Plato’s Euthyphro, a discussion of piety, Socrates maneuvers his hapless interlocutor into a series of untenable positions:

*Socrates:* Would not the correct way of asking be to ask [the gods] for what we need from them?

*Euthyphro:* What else?

*Socrates:* And would not the correct way of giving be to present them in return with what they need from us? For it would not be skilled giving, to present what someone does not need.
What is Greek religion?

Euthyphro: You're right, Socrates.
Socrates: Then for humans and gods, piety would be a skill of commercial exchange (emporikē technē) with one another?
Euthyphro: Yes, commercial, if it pleases you to call it that.
Socrates: But it doesn’t please me, if it is not true. Tell me, what aid (ophelia) do the gods obtain, from the gifts they get from us? What they give is clear to all, for we have no good which they do not give. But how are they aided, by what they get from us? Or do we get the better of them, in our commerce, to such an extent that we get everything good from them, and they get nothing from us?
Euthyphro: But Socrates, you don’t suppose, do you, that the gods are aided by the things they get from us?
Socrates: But then, Euthyphro, what then would our gifts to the gods be?
Euthyphro: Why, what else but honor (timē) and perquisites (gera) and, as I said before, gratitude (charis)?

(Pl. Euthphr. 14d-e)

Notice that Socrates deftly blurs the distinction between gifts and commerce, and then suggests that the offering of gifts, in and of itself, impiously implies needs on the part of the gods that can be satisfied with human assistance and resources. Euthyphro rejects Socrates’ leading question, because it does not square with his intuitive understanding of worship. For gods as for humans, the getting of timē was a matter not of meeting needs but of receiving that which is appropriate to one’s status. Surely no worshiper supposed that a god or goddess had need of a piece of armor, or yet another clay figurine. Instead, these gifts demonstrated that the deity was held in honor by the worshiper.

In the religion of everyday social exchange, worshipers saw the gods as desirous of honors (timai) and believed that they took pleasure in gifts, prayers, dances and sacrifice. Thus a reciprocal relationship was indeed possible, since humans had something of value to offer. Whereas humans expected charis from the gods so that they could survive, reproduce and avoid pain and danger, the charis expected by the gods was neither solely nor fundamentally predicated on material gifts. Above all, the gods desired honor and pleasure. Honor was satisfied through material gifts, such as first-fruit offerings and tithes from battle spoils, and through nonmaterial ones, such as hymns. The role of aesthetic pleasure in reciprocal relationships with the Greek gods is often overlooked, but the vocabulary of worship constantly alludes to the pleasure gods experienced from both material (beautiful objects) and nonmaterial forms of worship (dances, athletics). Another passage of the Homeric Hymn to Apollo aptly illustrates how the same sights bring pleasure to both humans and gods:

But you, Phoibos, rejoice most in Delos.
Where gather the long-robed Ionians
With their children and modest wives,
They are minded, whenever they set up the contest,
What is Greek religion?

To delight you with boxing and dance and song.
Whoever met them, the Ionians assembled,
Would call them deathless and unaging,
For he would see the grace (charis) of all,
And the sight of the men, and the women
With lovely belts, and the swift ships,
And their great wealth would delight his heart.


Just as we approach powerful people with tokens of respect, requests for favors and thanks for benefits received, the Greeks offered gifts to the gods for the sake of timē (honor), charis (gratitude) and chreia (need), the three reasons for sacrifice suggested by Theophrastus. The view that offerings to the gods were bribes or commercial exchanges is a reflective critique of intuitive belief and practice. Although regularly renewed since ancient times, this critique misrepresents the actual dynamics of worship.

Narratives about the establishment of Greek cults tended to feature a god’s outright demand for timē. This initial coercion was transformed into a relationship characterized by respectful awe rather than abject fear. Whereas myths often warned of the gods’ coercive powers, cult practice almost always attempted to establish or maintain reciprocity. In cases where deities were not perceived as amenable to reciprocity, people dealt with them using magic, a topic to which we will return in Chapter 3.

Notes

1 Philosophers: this line of reasoning follows Wittgenstein in shifting focus away from truth claims to “forms of life.” That is, the significance of religious beliefs lies in how people live, not whether gods exist. See Kishik 2008.113–16.
2 Geertz 1968.4; Bellah 1991.21.
3 Otto 1924 [1917]; Eliade 1959.
4 In this book, I sometimes use “gods” as shorthand for the wide variety of culturally postulated superhuman beings found in polytheistic traditions. With respect to Greek religion, this category includes gods and goddesses; heroes, heroines and other powerful dead; nymphs and other nature spirits; and assorted daimones.
5 Marx 1970 [1844].131; Durkheim 1915.47; Freud 1928.39.
6 Smith 1982.xi. For refutation of anthropologists’ doubts about the value of “religion” as an etic category see Boyer 1994.29–60, and for the historical use of the term “religion” within the discipline of Classics, see Bremmer 1998b.10–14.
9 Counterintuitive: Atran (2002.13–14), who has proposed a synthesis of cognitive theory with “commitment theory” (focusing on the dynamics of costs and benefits to the
group and individual), defines religion as the “passionate communal display of costly commitment to counterintuitive worlds governed by supernatural agents.”


11 Mental tools: also referred to in the literature as modules (e.g. Sperber 1994) or systems (e.g. Boyer 2001). Sperber and Hirschfeld 2004.41 give a summary of the best-documented mental tools, which include theory of mind, folk biology and face recognition. Susceptibilities: for dispositions (effects which have been positively selected for in biological evolution) versus susceptibilities (side effects of dispositions) see Sperber 1996.67.

12 On the alleged non-theism of Theravada Buddhism, see Spiro 1987.189–97. In my view, Theravada Buddhism is either a religion which includes a set of non-theistic doctrines of varying relevance for practitioners or a non-theistic philosophy which has become (for most practitioners) a religion.

13 See the critique by anthropologist James Laidlaw (2007.213), a specialist in Buddhism and Jainism, who suggests that cognitive scientists successfully explain “what the Enlightenment called ‘Natural Religion’ and ‘superstition,’” but not religion or the specifics of religious traditions.

14 Vulnerable to caricature: as Parker (2014) observes.

15 Political and social: for religion as political ideology see e.g. Knapp 1996. For a history of theoretical perspectives in Greek religion see Morris 1998.

16 Boyer 1994.3: “The content and organization of religious ideas depend, in important ways, on noncultural properties of the human mind-brain.” Barrett 2004.21: “Belief in gods arises because of the natural functioning of completely normal mental tools working in common natural and social contexts.” It should be noted that scholars sympathetic to theism (e.g. Visala 2011) have been attracted to CSR for this very reason. On the analogy of natural language acquisition see Whitehouse 2004.29.

17 Specifics: For this problem see Whitehouse 2007 (calling for an integration of causal explanation and interpretive methodologies). Compare the caveats of Kindt 2012.44 and Day 2005.86–88 (e.g. the suggestion that the conceptual toolbox of cognitive theory is “infinitely removed from the facts that most scholars of religion want to understand”). Cross-cultural: while I avoid the term “human universal,” the evidence suggests that every individual is born with a susceptibility to religion. Furthermore religious beliefs and behaviors are found in every (or nearly every) culture. Whether religion is truly “universal” is a red herring; what requires explanation is its near-ubiquity across cultures. On human universals and cultural relativism see Brown 1991.

18 Embedded: e.g. Price 1999.3: “There is no religious sphere separate from politics and warfare or private life; instead, religion is embedded in all aspects of life, public and private.” In spite of this embeddedness, a cognitivist approach suggests that the causal factors producing religious beliefs and practices can be distinguished from those driving other aspects of culture.


20 No private religions: Gould 1985.4. Compare Pyysiäinen 2003.233. Most if not all cognitivists would agree with Sørensen (2007.47) that cognitive constraints on the mind are not sufficient to explain cultural phenomena. They are, however, necessary to explain them.

21 Credence: the most educated and skeptical thinkers “purified myth of the marvelous” but did not question the historicity of heroes, the Trojan War and so forth. See Veyne 1988.41–57.

22 No word for religion: the lack of an explicit category of “the religious” in a given culture need not mean that people lack an implicit concept, nor that the category is not useful from an etic perspective. Boyer (1994.31) gives the example of the distinction between an ungrammatical sentence and a meaningless one – everyone intuitively recognizes the difference without having a word for it.
What is Greek religion?

23 Renfrew (2007.113) also discusses this definition.
24 For the categories “religion,” “mythology” and “ritual,” including the relationship between Greek myth and religion, see Bremmer 1998b.10–24.
25 “One”: Rig Veda 10.129. For the parallelism between concepts of unity in the Rig Veda and the pre-Socratic philosophers, see Mendoza 2011.29–30; Bernabé and Mendoza 2013.
28 Some historians (e.g. Price 1984.10–11, citing Needham 1972) have denied that “belief as a religious term” was operative in ancient Greek religion, arguing instead that it is a Christian construct. “Belief” was not often articulated as a central component of piety, because assent to the existence of gods who intervene in human affairs was a shared but largely intuitive and tacit inference. See also Price 1999.126–7 and Versnel 2011.292, 539–59 (esp. 540n.6, citing cognitive approaches which affirm, contra Needham, that belief is a natural capacity shared by all human beings). Compare Barrett 2004.1–19 on what cognitivists mean by “belief.” For interdependency of belief and ritual see Yunis 1988.38–58; Kowalzig 2007.2.
29 For our purposes this reduces the usefulness of rational choice theory, another relatively new approach to religion pioneered by Rodney Stark. For an introduction see the essays in Young 1997.
30 For colonization from pre- and non-polis communities during the eighth century, see Antonaccio 1999.112–13.
31 Unity: Burkert 1985.8. For “Greek religions” see Price 1999.ix, 1–10. As he points out, this terminology usefully foregrounds regional variation. For caveats about “shared” gods and rituals see Polinskaya 2010.48–54.
33 Shared: there is debate over exactly when the majority of Greeks began to think of themselves explicitly as “Hellenes.” The current tendency is to place this development quite late and to assign a weightier role in the early Archaic period to family and civic identity: see Konstan 2001.31–6; Hall 2002a.168–220, 2004.50.
34 This is not to suggest that epic poetry utterly neglects cultic understandings of the gods in favor of mythic ones. Homer does in fact mention the cult of Zeus Herkeios (Od. 22.333–6), and we know from other sources that this title and function of Zeus were widespread.
36 Pheidias: compare Polyb. 30.10.6, Strabo 8.3.30.
37 Compelling: Epstein and Pacini 1999.463. (Although they refer to the two processes as “experiential” and “rational,” intuitive beliefs are not to be regarded as “irrational” but instead merely nonreflective. Most intuitive beliefs are for all practical purposes correct; otherwise we would not be able to function in daily life). For overviews of dual-process approaches, see Chaiken and Trope 1999; Tremlin 2005, 2006.172–182; Evans and Frankish eds. 2009.
38 The sun’s movement: Barrett 1999.324.
39 Terminology: Sperber 1997, esp. 78–9, describing how reflective concepts and beliefs arise from the human capacity for metarepresentation (for which see Chapter 2 and the glossary in this volume). See also Mercier and Sperber 2009, reconciling the dual-process model with the cognitivist theory of mental modules specialized for various tasks. Some aspects of the intuitive/reflective distinction were anticipated by Lucien Lévy-Bruhl and Vilfredo Pareto (for a summary see Evans-Pritchard 1965.78–99).
I have borrowed Stowers’s phrase “the religion of everyday social exchange” and elements of his description (Stowers 2011.37–9) but I differ with his views in other respects.

I draw the term “epistemological uncertainty” from Stowers 2011.39. Cf. Burkert 1996.6 on the “knowledge barrier” (adēlotēs). For interaction with gods as a fundamentally social activity, but with the difference that unlike human agents, gods always possess “strategic information,” see Boyer 2002.77; Tremlin 2006.113–121. On “strategic information” see further Chapter 2.


Epstein and Pacini’s model stresses that the “rational” (i.e. reflective) mode is highly verbal and mediated by language. They write (1999.463) that the intuitive/experiential system can be a source of creativity “at its higher reaches, and particularly in interaction with the rational [i.e. reflective] system.” For our purposes, I have included the visual arts within the category of “reflection” on religion because they involve metarepresentation. For “visual theology” see Elsner 1996.518.


Inconsistency: Versnel 2011.60–87, 83–6, 517–25. The example of the Zeuses comes from Mikalson 1989.70–3 (cf. Mikalson 1991.3–5), who discusses the paradox that these and several other Zeuses were “treated, particularly in cult, as different, independent, deities.” On this topic in relation to cult titles, see Parker 2003.182. As Boyer (1994.41) notes, it is fallacious to assume that the religious representations in a given culture are integrated and logically consistent.

On interpreting material culture in terms of specific beliefs see Morris 1998.34–5.


Outside a ritual context: for this key distinction see Price 1984.115; Ullucci 2011.60.


Hermes relief: Robinson 1948; van Straten 1995 fig. 93 (R90). The figure of Hermes on the relief imitates a lost statue sculpted by Lysippus.

Vase: Louvre G 496; van Straten 1995 fig. 152 (V200).

For the god’s portion, see Ekroth 2007. For bovids and caprids, the femora (sometimes wrapped in fat) and/or the sacrum and tail were the preferred portion. For adult pigs, different procedures obtained, possibly the burning of bits of meat as in Hom. Od. 14.419–38. Preferences of vase buyers: van Straten 1995.24.


Bizarreness is culturally relative; counterintuitiveness is not. A plant that eats people is counterintuitive because it violates a fundamental inference about the category “plant”; a plant named George is merely strange. Plants that eat people occur regularly
What is Greek religion?  51

in fantasy books and films precisely because they are minimally counterintuitive. It is unlikely that plants with funny names will ever have the same appeal.


59 Kelly and Keil 1985.408, 413–15 (additionally, conscious beings were more likely to be transformed into mammals or birds than into reptiles, amphibians, fish or insects).

60 The Greeks had a tendency to endow abstract concepts with agency, but not in narratives of metamorphosis. Personifications such as “Justice” and “Grace” seem to arise instead from strongly anthropomorphizing (Chapter 2) habits of thought and corresponding narrative traditions.

61 Barrett 2004.26–7, citing “Chivo Man,” a man-goat hybrid believed by some to haunt a citrus ranch in modern-day California. Chivo Man is derived from Mexican folklore.


63 Truly emic: Evans-Pritchard (1965.24, 43, 47) memorably argued that many scholarly attempts to think emically amount to the “If I were a horse” fallacy. For emic vs. etic approaches to Greek culture see Versnel 1991.184–5; Bremmer 2007.139–43.

64 Durkheim 1915.206. For the need to avoid labeling phenomena as exclusively “social” or “religious” see Morris 1998.32–7. For a critique of Durkheim from a cognitive perspective see Bloch 1989.1–18, 106–36 (against Durkheim’s claim that cognitive categories are entirely social in origin); Pyysiäinen 2003.55–75.

65 For a recent formulation of the long-standing scholarly dogma that practice (i.e. ritual) trumps belief in Greek religion see e.g. Price 1999.3. Cf. the statements to this effect by Burkert, Cartledge, Osborne and others, collected in Versnel 2011.544–5.

66 While some Classicists (e.g. van Straten and Versnel) have never lost sight of the gods, increased disciplinary focus on the gods and Greek theology is evident in Bremmer and Erskine eds. 2010 and Naiden 2013. For critique of the view that ritual is primary and fixed while the gods are fluid and variable see Scullion 1994.76–7.


69 Meaningful god set: Polinskaya (2013.92; cf. Levy 1990.273–4) defines a “meaningful god set” as the set of deities that “have common significance and salience for a local community.” The scientists (Roberts, Chiao and Pandey 1975) who coined the term, however, were working with individuals. Their Chinese and Hindu informants had meaningful god sets of about fifteen, in spite of their knowledge of 60–100 gods.

70 Agents: but note that a superhuman agent may be salient for an individual or group even if that agent is not, or not regularly, the object of cult (Roberts, Chiao and Pandey 1975.123); the Christian Satan is a good example.


72 The Erchia calendar is divided into five sections labeled alpha through epsilon, each of which represents equal expenses. Most such calendars were inscribed less as ritual aides-mémoires than as financial records. The five sections were probably assigned to five “liturgists” or wealthy community members expected to fund the sacrifices. For religion in the Attic demes see Mikalson 1977; Parker 1987, 2005.50–78.

73 Who dwell: SEG 19.698 (Kolophon; late fourth century). Local: Thuc. 2.74. For these and other such expressions as a way of ordering the pantheon see Versnel 2011.88–119.


75 Parker 2011.71.


77 Homeric expressions: e.g. Hom. Il. 1.494 (gods who are forever), 2.30 (Olympian abodes), 3.298 (immortal gods). As for the heroes, there is debate over when their worship originated; see Chapter 5.
What is Greek religion?

“Homer” is to be understood as shorthand for the collective oral tradition plus one or more individuals who ultimately committed the *Iliad* and *Odyssey* to writing.

The name of the Titaness Themis means “divine law.” Such personified abstracts were characteristic of Greek theology as far back as we can trace it, and they often appeared in cult. See Stafford 2000.1–44.

Aphrodite, we later learn (Hom. *Il*. 21.416–33), attempts to help Ares but is wounded by Athena.

Tripartite system: Homer (*Il*. 15.186–93) offers a different tripartite arrangement in the myth of the division of the cosmos between Zeus, Poseidon and Hades. The inclusion of Leto, the mother of Artemis and Apollo, is surprising, yet epic tradition makes her a resident of Olympos, and she is more plausible as a partisan of the Trojans than any of the other major deities.

Hesiod’s one major concession to cultic matters in the *Theogony* is an embedded “hymn” to the goddess Hekate (*Theog*. 411–52) describing the extensive benefits she confers on mortals.


For Hera, see Essay 1.2. On the un-Olympian character of Demeter see Shapiro 1989.139. As agricultural deities both she and Dionysos are in some sense earthbound. Hesiod’s main narrative describes Aphrodite (*Theog*. 190–8) as an elder goddess born from the severed genitals of Ouranos; however, the appearance of Dione in these lines appears to follow the Homeric tradition (Hom. *Il*. 5.370–84) in which Aphrodite is Zeus’ daughter by that goddess. Such inconsistencies result from the techniques of oral composition.


For our immediate purposes, the “Olympian” gods are not “the major gods” but those regularly described as dwelling on Olympos. By this criterion, Themis, Leto and Hebe are quintessential Olympians, as are the Muses.


Williams (1983.30) interprets the collocation of Demeter and Dionysos in Eleusinian terms.

I draw the term “condensed pantheon” from Georgoudi 1998.76: “un mini-panthéon grec, une sorte de panthéon condensé.”

Altar in Athens: Hdt. 6.108.4; Long 1987.62–6, 159–66; Shapiro 1989.133–41; Georgoudi 1996.43–50. A damaged relief cylinder of unknown function, dating no earlier than the second half of the fourth century, was found near the site (Long 1987.6–7). Of the gods depicted, Poseidon, Demeter with Athena, Zeus with Hera, and Apollo are securely identified.


The exact location of Hermes’ banquet has been debated and it is not certain that the etiology refers to Olympia. For recent treatments see Georgoudi 1996.66–70; Johnston and Mulroy 2009.8–11; Versnel 2011.309–77.
What is Greek religion?


97 Near Eastern parallels: Long 1987.139–52; Rutherford 2010. Number twelve: Weiser 1986. 149–52. Herakles: *FGrH* 31 F 34a-b (ca. 400). Among a profusion of altars in the Altis, Pausanias (5.14.4–10) mentions double altars for Artemis with Alpheios, Apollo with Hermes, and Dionysos with the Charites, as well as an altar of Zeus Laoitas and Poseidon Laoitas, but the theme of twelve gods had been lost by this period.


99 Plato: *Leg.* 745de, 828b-d. Compare Plat. *Phaedr.* 246e-247a, where eleven gods, who are not fully enumerated, drive chariots through the sky, ensuring the order of the cosmos, while Hestia remains “alone in the house of the gods.”

100 Agamemnon: Strab. 13.1.48. Jason: Ap. Rhod. *Arg.* 2. 531–4 with scholia; Polyb. 4.39.5–6. The scholiasts supply lists of the twelve at the Bosporos site, where Hades seems to have been included.

101 Foundation and Hellenism: Georgoudi 1996.74–5, 1998.73–7; Rutherford 2010.53–4. A Twelve Gods cult was also attributed to Deukalion, the Greek counterpart of Noah, who founded an altar to the Twelve after the flood. One of Deukalion’s sons was Hellen, ancestor of the Hellenes (Hellanicus *FGrH* 4 F 6).


103 All the gods of the frieze can be linked to Athenian cults in one way or another (for examples see Long 1987.169–73). Viewers may have perceived them on either the local or the Panhellenic levels, but the presence of Hera and Ares (both relatively insignificant in Attic cult) and the absence of Herakles show that this is not a “meaningful god set” for most Athenians.


111 Current scholarly consensus holds that in the Archaic period, Hera was more closely associated with Mycenae and the eastern Argive plain than with Argos itself. Thus the Homeric epithet may refer to the “Argeia” or Argive plain and environs. Discussion: Hall 1995; Auffarth 2006.78–81; Kowalzig 2007.167.

112 Compare the opposing prayers to Hera and Athena in Eur. *Phoen.* 1364–76.

113 Linear B: both goddesses are mentioned in Pylos tablet Tn316. For text and translation see Palaima 2004.120–1.


115 On Zeus see Cook 1914–40 and Farnell 1896–1909, Vol. 1.35–178 (both methodologically out of date but still useful for the collected information); Dowden 2006; Larson 2007.15–28. Linke (2006) suggests that Zeus was avoided as a polis deity precisely because his supremacy was problematic in the context of intra-polis competition, whereas he could safely oversee competition at Panhellenic sanctuaries.
What is Greek religion?


For Orthia see Paus. 3.16.9–11; Larson 2007.104–6 with bibliography.


Tombs and Heraion: Wright 1982.192–4; Antonaccio 1992.99–100; Pfaff 2013.282–7. As Hall notes (2002b.95–7) there appears to be a strong geographic correlation between Archaic Hera cults in the Argolid (e.g. at Prosymna, Mycenae, Argos, Tiryns) and offerings to the powerful dead, regardless of whether we call them “heroes.”


Ring: Tracy 1986.

White-armed: Baumbach 2004.11–49. Compare the Homeric epithet “Far-Shooter” (wekabolos in the Boiotian dialect) inscribed on the Mantiklos Apollo, discussed in the introduction to this chapter.

Translation adapted from Furley and Bremer 2001.1, no. 4.2.

Sons of Atreus: Hom. Il. 1.375, 2.249 and so forth.

Homer (Il. 9.128–30) mentions a raid on Lesbos by Achilles, from which Agamemnon received seven surpassingly beautiful women. The scholiast on these lines says that a women’s beauty contest was held in the sanctuary of Hera. Discussion: Furley and Bremer 2001.2.121.

Translation adapted from Furley and Bremer 2001.1. no. 4.4.


Pausanias (3.13.8) mentions a temple of Hera Argeia (said to have been founded by the Argive queen Eurydike) and a sanctuary of Hera Hypercheiria at Sparta. For Hera’s major cults see Larson 2007.29–40 with bibliography, and for detailed analysis of votives, Baumbach 2004.

Parker 2005.441: in Attica Hera “is reduced to her smallest possible extent” due to the preeminence of Athena. On the sacred marriage in cults of Hera see Jost 1997; Chaniotis 2002.


Pl. Resp. 3.390c. The union of Zeus and Hera on Mt. Ida (Hom. Il. 14.346–51) causes lush blooms to spring up and cushion them, but is this a hint of the sacred marriage or merely a charming narrative detail, like the golden cloud Zeus spreads about them for privacy?


Samos: Kyrieleis 1993; Baumbach 2004.147–74. Image brought from Argos; goddess born on the island: Paus. 7.4.4. Indigenous worship and Argive influence combine in a legend attached to the principal festival: Menodotus FGrH 541 F 1 (cited in Ath. 15.12–15 [671e-74a]). Though they were of varying origin, the Ionians as a group claimed to be “Achaians” (Vanschoonwinkel 2006.115–22, 125) as did later colonists in southern Italy.

Naukratis: Hdt 2.178.3.

Hera temples: Snodgrass 2006.251–3 (measurements of the first and fourth Samian temples compared with other early temples).
What is Greek religion?


Achaians: Morgan and Hall 1996.213; Osanna 2002.277; Greco 2006.173. The actual ethnic composition of the colonists in South Italy has been disputed, but they clearly thought of themselves as “Achaians.” Giangiulio 2002.294–8 sees ties to the northern Peloponnesse more generally, as well as to Achilles. For the impact of other Hera cults (esp. those at Perachora and on Mt. Kithairon) on Western colonies see Parisi Presicce 1985.

Reciprocal: Parker 1998.120. For the cognitivist view of reciprocity as a feature of all religions see Barrett 2007.193–4.


*Do ut des* and Roman contract law: de Villiers 1924.121. Burkert 1979.54 contrasts the mentality of *do ut des* with a “more advanced morality” that attempts to “overcome or sublimate the unabashed selfishness of this act of piety.” For Roman religion see Rüpke (2007.148–50), who allows a contractual or judicial component, but with caveats. Critiques of *do ut des* as applied to Greek religion: Patera 2012.57–71; Suk Fong Jim 2014.22–3, 277–9.

Reciprocity: van Baal 1976.165–7 (contrasting it with trade); Seaford 1994; van Wees 1998; the classic study is Mauss 1990 [1925]. For Greek religion see Burkert 1987; Yunis 1988.101–10; Parker 1998.118–4; Ullucci 2011.62–4. For reciprocity as an evolutionary adaptation shared with other primates see Flack and de Waal 2000, and for moral intuitions see Chapter 3.


On rejected sacrifice see Naiden 2013.131–82.


Fear: Epicurus’ ideas are echoed in Lucr. 3.1018–22, 978–1023. For his views on the gods see also Philodemus’ fragmentary work *On Piety* (Oebink 1996).

Right to honors: Suk Fong Jim 2014.68–75.

Blessed gods: e.g. Xenophanes 21 A32.23–5 *DK*.

Moderns (e.g. Vlastos 1991.174) often suppose that this passage demonstrates the “commercial” character of Greek religion in practice.

Status: Ullucci 2011.63–4 (the traditional gift of an apple for a teacher does not imply the student’s belief that the teacher is hungry). Compare Hom. *Hymn Dem.* 310–13 where the gods fear the loss not of sacrifices but of *timē*.

What is Greek religion?

References


What is Greek religion?


What is Greek religion?


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What is Greek religion?


What is Greek religion?  


What is Greek religion?


What is Greek religion?


What is Greek religion?


