Rituals of Magical Rain-Making in Modern and Ancient Greece: A Comparative Approach

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INTRODUCTION

Rain-making rituals are important in all religious festivals in Greece, ancient and modern, because the religious rituals were and are performed by the farmers to ensure the forthcoming rain, so that the crops may grow and give a plentiful harvest. The early rains in autumn are of great importance as a preliminary to the sowing. From this perspective, rain-making rituals represent fertility cult.

The striking similarities that are found between the ancient and modern Greek rain-making rituals need to be accounted for. How and why are there such similarities? There are many other places in the world where the ecology is the same as it was in the past but the rituals and their meanings differ. How does the situation in Greece relate to la longue durée of the historian Fernand Braudel?

In earlier scholarship, history was considered to be synonymous with rapid changes, but now we realise that stability is no less historical than change and that it is as important to explain stability as change. According to Braudel, a single society may have different dimensions of time (Braudel 1969: 41-83), and it is particularly la longue durée, connected with his view of the ecological unity of the Mediterranean (Braudel 1990), that is relevant for the material which will be presented in this article. Since man is prisoner of the climate and the vegetation, it is difficult to escape certain geographical frames and limits of productivity as well as spiritual constraints or mentalities. Therefore, it is important to take account of the history of the infrastructure, the nearly “non-moving history”, which everything gravitates around (Braudel 1969: 51-4).

Braudel’s la longue durée corresponds to the second and third of Roth’s categories: linear time, cyclical time, and dreamtime or frozen time (cf. Roth 1994: 159-76). The cyclical perception of time is characterised by predictability and repetition, and is typical of peasant societies. Dreamtime or frozen time presupposes a static perception...
of time without movement and involves an orientation to the past; its vehicle is oral tradition. In Greece, a cyclical perception of time and the perspective of frozen time are still prominent. The two important factors in this connection are firstly that Greece is still an agricultural society and secondly that past stages in the development of Greek culture are unusually accessible. The Mediterranean area generally, and Greece particularly, offer a unique opportunity to follow questions of continuity and change over very long spans of time directly and not conjecturally, since we find a long literate – and archaeological – tradition which may be combined with the results of empirical fieldwork.

So, how and why are there such similarities between ancient and modern Greece? Why is it possible to make a comparison between rain-making rituals in modern and ancient Greece, despite a gap of two millennia between the two cultures? In Greece, the cyclical dimension of time is woven into la longue durée, and is connected with the mental outlook, the mentalité, of the farmer. Ancient and modern Greece represent two peasant communities inhabiting the same landscape, with the same climate and almost the same technological level. The two communities show strong similarities in culture, social organisation and folk religion which relate to the economic base of the community – agriculture. The basic crops are also almost the same, in a geographical area where the water supply always has been a great problem.

Space does not permit me to go into all the factors which should be examined in order to give an extensive account of all the historical circumstances which gave rise to the existence of cults connected with rain-making rituals in South-eastern Europe and Asia Minor, dating from antiquity and from Byzantine times up to the present day, since problems of such depth cannot be solved or contained within a few pages. The uniformity in the economic structure of several communities in the region that have an economy based on agriculture and sheep-raising has been due to the unchangeable geophysical and geographical factors.

Even if modern Greece is a country depending more and more on tourism, these factors are still important, because the mentality of the farmers does not change easily. Since the technological improvements have not given them control over the vicissitudes of nature, the survival of the community still depends upon natural
events beyond the farmers’ control. Most of my older informants who have passed, or still are in, their fifties remember the scarcity of their childhood, when famine was the result if the crop failed.² So, by way of rituals representing a world-view belonging to a traditional agricultural society, they try to influence the supernatural powers to ensure the rain, so that their crops may flourish. Ploughing and sowing are basic activities undertaken in order to earn a living, and the ceremonial portrayals of such activities are acts of mimed magic undertaken to ensure a rich harvest. Both ancient and modern people celebrate particularly before important passages of the agricultural year, in order to secure these passages. Today, they pray to their saints for plentiful rain, as the ancients prayed to their gods. The belief in the sanctity of water is present both in pre-Christian and Christian religion and, like his older and modern popular equivalents, the Orthodox priest is prophet, exorcist, healer and rainmaker. The magical immersion of the traditional carnival-figure, the rainmaker Kalogerōs in Northern Greece, “so the greenery can get rain”, thus parallels other magico-religious litanies in modern and ancient Greece, and the sacred immersion in water, mud or marshes is pure rain-magic. Even if many of the rituals as observed in modern Greece, may be traced back to the classical past through the post-Byzantine and Byzantine eras, they are not separate from Christianity.³

Many will argue that several of the carnivals and other festivals in modern Greece are the results of inventions of tradition,⁴ designed to make the claim to their classical heritage valid, as in the struggle against Turkey, especially in the beginning of last century, and in the Macedonian conflict which was particularly heated when I was carrying out my fieldwork twelve years ago in the Greek part of Macedonia. This dispute involving competing claims to a single identity may also be an instance of an outlook towards the dreamtime marking the significance of folklore for national identity, by bringing out the mythical past. Particularly during the carnival in the village of Koimēsē, I learned how it is possible to use the festival for political purposes. But still, the festival has a deeper connection with the agricultural factor, both because of the critical time of the agricultural year when it is celebrated, and because of the main source of income of the celebrants – farming. Thus, the festival both presents aspects
relating to the farmer’s cyclical dimension of time, and the
dreamtime, which, in this connection, may (paradoxically) also be
related to what Braudel would have called “political rapid changes”.
In fact, the festivals present layers of different meanings, the political
being the most susceptible to changes, while the deep-seated
meanings, the lasting mentalities, related to agriculture are less
vulnerable to changes and thus represent *la longue durée*.

It has been claimed that the Kalogeros ritual described below is a
product of the nineteenth century and is accordingly a new festival.
But, even if the festival may have been introduced in the nineteenth
century, the people introduced something that is of very deep concern
in Greek culture: rain magic and the wish for water. Another factor
that is also important is the fact that many of the participants are
migration workers or students coming home to the village during the
most important festival of the year. Rather than being an invention of
tradition, the festival thus becomes a “conservation” of tradition,
since coming home to the village is coming back home to security
and safety, carrying out the same rituals as their parents and
grandparents, themselves often being refugees from eastern Thrace
(the Anastenarides, see below) or Asia Minor, who in their turn were
carrying out the rituals connecting them to their own villages, which
were not very far away but still in another country after the exchange
of populations effected in 1923. The rituals they brought with them
when coming to Greece, such as the Kalogeros, had until then been
carried out in districts isolated for ages past in impregnable regions,
often called the “Blind Province”, as had nevertheless other similar
rituals in other areas of the Balkans and Greece, such as in the village
of Olympos on the island of Karpathos in Southern Greece, indicating
that the rituals must have been very widespread throughout Greece
and the rest of the Balkans in earlier years.

For the celebrants, however, “it has always been like this, and it is
to ensure the good,” a claim which in reality expresses their
mentality. So, owing to climatic, historical and social conditions, the
region has preserved, up to the present day, rain-making rituals within
the same geographical area as that in which the most ancient worship
of the god Dionysos flourished. The Kalogeros is perhaps his
 remotest ancestor, and his last descendant. The phenomenon of the
longevity of popular cults as well as the historical and socio-
economic conditions of this part of South-eastern Europe make such a claim possible.

In Greece, particularly in the rural parts, several values and beliefs seem to survive even though new normative religions have been introduced, and there is a very close relationship between the official Orthodox religion and popular religion. Since the priesthood was obliged to incorporate within the very ritual of formal worship, magic elements of popular worship, one may suggest that the fate of religion is determined by the masses. For thousands of years, the Greeks, as well as other people in the Balkans (such as in eastern Thrace or Bulgaria) and the Mediterranean, have carried out the same rituals and prayers in connection with the important passages of the agricultural year. Therefore, as a result of the “slowness or immobility of history”, the mentalities, they often continue to do things as they did them before. Thus, the analogy between the ancient and modern Greek farmers is not far-fetched, and it seems reasonable to conclude that the magical practices of modern farmers as they relate to agricultural fertility can illuminate the ancient peasants’ rain-making rituals and the way in which they tried to influence the gods to ensure their life-giving water.

The comparison will be based on modern Greek carnivals and other religious festivals, where I have conducted fieldwork. Since 1990, I have engaged in several periods of fieldwork involving research into the festival dedicated to the Dormition of the Panagia on 15 August on the Aegean island of Tinos. It may be noted that Saint in Greek is Agios (m.) or Agia (f.) and that the Panagia (which can be translated as “all holy one” and which signifies dominion over all the other saints) is the Virgin Mary. In 1991-92 I visited several other religious festivals, among them several in the Northern and most fertile part of Greece. They included: the female festival celebrating the midwife, Babo, Agia Domenika, celebrated in the village of Monokklēsia on 8 January; several carnivals in Greek Macedonia, attended in the beginning of March 1992, including the Kalogeros ritual celebrated in the village of Melikē and the mock-wedding performed in Koimēsē; the Orthodox Easter season celebrations in Olympos on Karpathos; the Anastenaria festival celebrated in May in the village of Agia Elenē (Greek Macedonia); and the festival dedicated to Agios Charalampos celebrated at the end of June in the
village of Agia Paraskeuē on the island of Mytilini/Lesbos. I have also visited several other annual festivals dedicated to different saints, such as Agia Barbara (4 December) as well as wine-festivals celebrated after vintage. Information about the festivals celebrated around sowing which I, unfortunately, have not been able to visit myself, is collected from the works of several Greek folklorists. The information has been verified through conversations with some of the actual authors and my own informants in the villages. These modern rituals will bring us back to ancient society, as presented in ancient sources combined with later studies, by means of bringing in the relevant points from festivals dedicated to the most important agricultural deities in connection with the modern festival activities.

Part 1 of the article explores seasonal festivals in modern Greece along with their parallels in ancient times. I look first at the year as a whole in terms of the agricultural cycle, and I then concentrate in turn on the celebration of the Presentation of the Panagia on 21 November; the pre-Lent festival of Kalogeros; and the post-Resurrection visits to the agiasma (sacred spring). Offerings are dedicated to the sacred spring in order to provide for the fertility of society through communication with stronger powers, first and foremost Mother Earth. The Greeks conceive of the Earth as a woman’s body and the agricultural year as a woman’s life. But, the Earth represents only one of the two parts of nature that have to be invoked to ensure the crop. Accordingly, rain magic dedicated to a heavenly god is a general theme in the festivals and from this fact follows the significance of the sacred marriage, hieros gamos, which is discussed in Part 2.

PART 1
MODERN AND ANCIENT GREEK SEASONAL FESTIVALS THAT INCLUDE RITUALS DESIGNED TO WARD OFF DROUGHT AND ENSURE FERTILITY

The agricultural year

The conditions of both weather and soil were the same in ancient Greece as they are today. The techniques of dry farming practised in ancient and modern Greece are dictated by the occurrence of
sometimes torrential rains in the fall, which can wash away the soil, and by summer drought, which makes necessary the conservation of soil moisture by every possible means. The “trinity” of cereals, vines and olives forms the basis of all subsistence agriculture in the Mediterranean region.

The times of sowing and reaping, and the crops grown have hardly changed since antiquity. In ancient Attica (the Athenian area), the great majority of grain was sown in the fall, as in modern times, since spring sowing necessitated irrigation and was not practicable. Given the climate of Attica, with mild but wet winters and dry summers, the desirable cereal was barley, which needed much water in the early stages of growth, but which would ripen early enough to avoid the worst heat of the summer sun. The sowing of cereals today extends from the middle of October to the end of December, depending on the rains. The best guides for the farmer have always been the rain, the condition of the soil, and his own experience and weather-wisdom. The season of sowing was and is a time of great anxiety for the Greek farmer. Perhaps the rains will be delayed or will not come in the right amount at the right intervals. People feel a greater need for ritual and magic on occasions when their own technical skills are limited. That the ancient Greeks proliferated their rituals at the critical time of sowing is understandable. The insufficiency of mortal wisdom at this moment of crisis is all too evident; in other words the rainmaker is an important figure. Everything is felt to depend on the weather gods and, to propitiate them, rain-making rituals take place during the whole agricultural year.

Scholars in the past, most notably those residing in temperate climates, had the assumption, natural for Northern Europeans, that the grain harvest in Greece took and takes place in late summer. But generally May is the month for the barley harvest. Hesiod (Op. 571-75, cf. 383 f.) places the harvest at the time of the helical rising of the Pleiades, i.e. around 19 May. Today the rising of the Pleiades is attached to the Anastenaria on 21 May, while their setting is attached to Agios Philoppos’ day on 14 November, in sowing time, and this is one of the polarities that connect aspects of everyday life and cosmology. The wheat is harvested in June and July is the threshing month. The popular names for these months, Theristēs, i.e. reaper, harvester, and Alōnarēs, i.e. thresher, reflect these activities.
After harvest and the threshing of the grain, the dead period of the grains’ cycle (cf. Bourdieu 1980) starts in August. At the end of the dog days, roughly by the end of the month, the official ecclesiastical year closes and the summer half-year also closes at this time when the transitional period towards autumn starts (cf. Loukatos 1981). At the beginning of September, the official ecclesiastical year starts again, while the agricultural year begins later. By the end of September, the farmer anticipates the “first rains”, the early rains of autumn (cf. Hes. Op. 414-19), that fall from Zeus, so that Mother Earth conceives again. Afterwards, it is time for ploughing and sowing. November is the main sowing month. There is great danger that the tender young shoots will be harmed if the frost is strong or prolonged. If the cereals have not reached a certain height by the time the frost sets in by January, the farmer may lose the crop. The period after Easter is also precarious, since the crop may be lost if it starts to hail and in June the grain is about to be reaped. In fact, the farmer’s worries are not really over until the grain is in the granary.

The popular calendar was and is a social representation of the order of nature, that is, of the “natural” year: the perceived order of hot and cold, rain and drought, germination, fruiting, shedding of leaves, migrations of birds and so on. The annual production cycles of agricultural work (sowing, harvesting, pruning, vintage, gathering of fruits) and stockbreeding activities (shearing, breeding, milking, pasturing) composed an economic calendar developed from these perceptions of the natural order. This socio-economic content is integrated with the Christian saints and their narratives, as the ancients once integrated it with narratives of their gods and goddesses.

Agriculture was the key element in the ancient economy, and the Greeks believed that humans had to serve the gods “for the sake of the produce of the earth, both solid and liquid, and for the sake of their cattle, horses and sheep” (Xen. Oec. 5.19-20). All festivals were concerned with good offspring generally, animal, vegetable or human.

The economic basis of present-day Greece does not depend unilaterally on agriculture, since a great part of the income is derived from work migration and a constantly growing tourism. Nevertheless, all the modern festivals are seasonal festivals symbolising important
passages of the agricultural year, in the same way as all the ancient festivals, and all are connected with agricultural fecundity, with fertility and increase.

The festivals celebrate late summer, autumn, the middle of winter, the end of winter, spring, the end of spring and summer, or ploughing, sowing, “greening” of the fields, harvest, threshing, vintage and pressing, tasting of the wine, etc. Festivals celebrated at the end of winter and during spring symbolise the passage from winter to the part of the agricultural year when the food will ripen and be harvested.

In the rest of this part, I shall compare some important ancient festivals celebrated before critical periods during the agricultural year, particularly before sowing and during spring, to modern parallels celebrated “to let it rain” according to my informants.

The celebration of the Presentation of the Panagia (the Virgin Mary) on 21 November in relation to the ancient festivals of Demeter

Nowadays, 21 November marks an important point in the period of winter sowing, and even though the day is dedicated to the Presentation of the Panagia in the Temple all over Greece, the name of the patroness and her festival is specified according to the region. By that date the good farmer, especially in Northern Greece, must have sown at least half his land. Accordingly, this feast-day is known in some regions as Panagia Mesosporitissa (mesos: middle, half; sporos, spora: seed, sowing). In other regions, the festival is known as Panagia Archisporitissa (“Panagia the sowing begins”) or Panagia Aposporitissa (“Panagia the sowing is over”). The festival is also called Panagia Polysporitissa (poly: many, varied), because of the “offering” of the fruits of the latest harvest. It is the custom on this day to boil several varieties of corn in a large cauldron. This is to be the dish of the day. Plates of it are sent round to relatives and neighbours with good wishes for the crops. On Crete, they have a rain litany during this festival, if the rains have not started. The point is the Panagia’s importance in ensuring the food supply. The other dead may also be mediators between God and humans to get rain at this decisive period of the year’s passage. So, around the time of sowing,
they exhume a skull from a grave and put it into a basin with water, to
dissolve the ancestral sins. In this way, they bring the anger of God to
an end, “so he rains”.

The two most important moments in the agrarian cycle are sowing
and spring, both for the modern and ancient farmer. In ancient
Greece, the Eleusinian Mysteries and the Thesmophoria, both
dedicated to Demeter, were celebrated just before the sowing. The
Eleusinian Mysteries was celebrated at the village of Eleusis in Attica
around the first of October, to ensure rain to make the “Demetrian
corn” grow. Certain secret rituals commemorated the annual rebirth
of the grain and other fruits of the earth, and associated the annual
vegetation cycle with the myth of the rape of Persephone (or Kore,
“the daughter”) by Hades (or Pluton, “the wealthy one”) the King of
the Underworld, and the subsequent sorrow and anger of the girl’s
mother, Demeter, the goddess of the corn crop, and how she finally
became reconciled. The Eleusinian Mysteries was a fertility festival
designed to ensure the rebirth of the grain. The cult of the goddess of
vegetation was also linked with the fertility of animal and of man. At
Eleusis, the goddess was offered a mixture of the fruits of the earth:
different kinds of grain, peas and beans. The bearer tasted the
contents, thus partaking in ritual fashion in the goddess’s share. A
vast offering of meal was also made, and the Mystai (those about to
be initiated into the Mysteries) drank a special mixture known as the
kykeōn. Since the festival was dedicated to the Corn Mother,
Demeter, who also needs rain from the heavenly Zeus to make her
crops grow, the central acts, the culmination of the ritual at Eleusis,
were probably the ritual performance of a sacred marriage between
heaven and earth, followed by a sacred birth, i.e. the new grain. The
elements of the final ceremony are traditionally divided into “things
said”, “things done” and “things revealed”. “The things said”, may be
the mystic formula uttered by the initiates. With their eyes turned
towards the heaven they cried: “rain!” and with their eyes turned
towards the earth, they cried, “conceive!” The “things done” may
have included not merely ritual acts performed by the priests, but also
actual mimetic reproduction of some of the myths of Demeter.
According to some sources, mostly late, Christian and polemical
writings, they were connected with the performing of a hieros gamos.
But the climax of the initiation ceremony was the “things revealed”.
The sources do not agree whether the great mystery is a phallus kept in the sacred, secret chests, the *hiera*, the “Holy Things” of Demeter, or the showing of an ear of grain by the Hierophantes (priest). It seems plausible that a phallus was represented in connection with a fertility festival, and that an ear of cut wheat represented Demeter’s gift of corn to humanity.\(^{11}\)

That the Mysteries at Eleusis had connection with the time of sowing is indicated by the magical formula “rain, conceive” and a water-pouring ritual on the last day of the festival. The eighth day was called Plemochoai after a form of vessel used in its ritual: this was shaped like a spinning top, but with a firm base. The initiates took a pair of such vessels and filled them with water. Then they tipped one over to the east and the other towards the west, uttering a mystic formula.\(^{12}\) This magic rite meant to encourage rain suggests the purpose in the ceremonies of the goddess of corn.

The Thesmophoria was a festival reserved for women, and it was dedicated to the growing and the care of the grain. The festival was celebrated just before the rains have begun in earnest and the sowing starts. It was preceded by the festival of Proerosia (i.e. “before plowing-time”), dedicated to Demeter at Eleusis. The emphasis on sowing rather than on harvest makes it evident that, the more critical the occasion, the more elaborate and vital is the ritual. At no time of the year is the farmer less able to make an informed forecast about the coming crop than in the fall. In contrast, at harvest time, the outcome is known.

The ritual performed by the women during the Haloa festival of Demeter celebrated in ancient Eleusis in mid-winter, like the modern festival dedicated to the midwife, Babo, on 8 January, was important to secure the harvest, because January is the time when it becomes clear whether or not the year will be a good one. If the cereals have not grown to a certain height when the frost sets in, they will need a lot of rain in the spring to “catch up” and not be burned by the hot spring sun before they are ripe. If only a small percentage of the seeds have sprouted by January, it is unlikely that the crop will be a good one. The farmer knows that the seeds which germinate after the frost in the spring rains are likely to be blasted by the sun before they are ripe and fail to produce grain.
The importance of this stage in the grain’s growth explains why the Haloa festival of light, warmth, eating and drinking, ribaldry and fertility magic takes place at this time, and why it is dedicated to Demeter. At this period, the fields are “dead”. The growth of the shoots is at a temporary standstill. Likewise, the sun’s power has declined each day. This kind of magical rite, in which people attempt to warm up or wake up the earth to stimulate its fertility by the magical manipulation of sexual or agricultural symbols, by merry feasting and obscene behaviour, is paralleled in the modern celebrations and rituals which take place during the twelve-day period from Christmas to Epiphany and during the carnival season before the Lenten period and later during spring.

The ritual of the Kalogeros discussed below is a typical example of fertility cult. The farmer assists nature to pass the worst of the winter through “sympathetic magic” (i.e. magic, that depends on a resemblance or perceived similarity between the object, substance, or action used in performing the magic and the desired effect). Perhaps this way of thinking is illustrated by all the ancient vase-paintings depicting the head of a woman, or a goddess of fertility, rising out of the earth struck by Satyrs armed with great hammers. It is interesting to note that it is always an Earth Mother who comes up and thus brings fertility. The depictions may be compared with Pausanias’ (8.15,1-3) story about the Arkadian version of the mystery cult, the great rituals dedicated to Kidarian Demeter. At the yearly rituals the priest puts on the mask of the goddess, and beats the earth with rods, to wake up the powers of the underworld and make the earth fertile.

Today, similar rituals are performed before sowing and during spring, because the earth has to be activated before sowing and after the worst of winter. Accordingly, the youths cut long branches from hazelnut trees and beat the earth around the time of the “first rains” (before sowing) “if she seems to be unresponsive to the heaven and does not receive the rain into her womb”. In other words, “God’s rain” is not enough, if the earth is not willing. In former years, gipsies taking part in the Kalogeros festival presented a parallel when they beat the ground to make the earth fertile.
Carnival and the festival of Kalogeros held on the Monday before Lent (Cheese Monday) in relation to the ancient Dionysian festival of Anthesteria

Carnival, Apokreos, takes place all over Greece, the Balkans and the rest of the Mediterranean every spring. According to the Greeks, “Carnival without masks is like bread without flour.” The carnival season lasts three weeks, and is a time of gaiety and merriment before entering the Lenten period, which lasts until Easter. The first week is known as the “Prophōnē” (from prophōnō, to address, to announce), because carnival is announced; the second week is the “Meat Week” and the last is the “Cheese Week”, which is an introduction to and preparation for the Lenten fast. Masquerading during carnival is a widespread custom. The goal of the masquerades is to drive the evil forces far away from the houses and cultivated areas, and ensure that the sowing will yield an abundant supply of food. The masqueraders often dress up as a nuptial group, including the Bride and Groom, the Old Match-maker, the Best Man, the Priest, etc. The nuptial procession ends up at the village square, where the parody of a wedding ceremony often takes place. After the wedding and the parody of its consummation and the subsequent child-birth, a procession walks through the streets and people sing and dance. Among several examples of rain magic is the Bear which is an important character in the carnival in Koimēsē, where the aforementioned mock-wedding also takes place. The Bear-leader cuts a few hairs off the Bear’s coat and offers them to the mothers of small children as an amulet. The Bear falls to the ground and sometimes he becomes surly and stubborn and demands gifts before he will get up. The playfulness of the Bear, its pretended tumbles and demands for gifts before it will get up, is a well-known rain-making ritual. Characters representing the “legless one” and the “armless one” may parallel certain fertility-bestowing spirits in Greek antiquity, which displayed physical disabilities. They figure in the myths as “enchanters”, rainmakers and regulators of the earth’s fecundity (Diod. 5.55; Nonn. 14.36-48).

In the 1990s, rain-making rituals flourished all over Greece during the carnival season simultaneously with the launching of a water-saving programme in Athens.15 Another example of rain-making
ritual was to be found in 1992 in the carnival at Horisti in the neighbourhood of Drama, in Northern Greece, where the weather was very dry. Three persons participated in the carnival procession. One character was dressed up as a green bush. The two other characters were decorated with green branches, and one of them walked along sprinkling the “bush” while the other carried a placard on which was written: “Let it rain.”

During carnival the farmer remains deeply aware that nature is undergoing a slow change. Thus, by means of various symbolic practices inherited from remote antiquity, he seeks to hasten the coming of spring and ensure the fertility of his land. So, in addition to the comic and satirical performances which take place on Cheese Monday in the village squares, we may also find other practices inspired by a very ancient sense of magic and usually people ring bells to wake up the sleeping earth and keep away evil spirits.

As an instance of a carnival festival, I shall present the ritual known as “Kalogeros”, celebrated on Cheese Monday in Melikē, in the neighbourhood of Vergina and Pella, in Western Greek Macedonia. The custom is celebrated around the spring equinox and, paradoxically, the ritual is known as “Kalogeros”, i.e. the monk. But, the protagonist is very far from being or behaving like a monk. He wears a sack and animal hides. Many bells are hung around his waist from a leather belt. They symbolise phalluses and each may weight about 4-5 kilos. He holds a phallic-shaped rod, his “sceptre”, actually a piece of wood about three metres in length, with a piece of cloth tied over one end.

The ceremony starts early in the morning when people gather in front of the church dedicated to Agios Athanasios which is situated close to the water tower of the village. A table is placed in front of the church. It is laid with ouzo, sausages, bread and slices of boiled egg. The musicians – a man with a large drum and another man with a Thracian lira (i.e. a small three-stringed wooden instrument played with a bow) – start to play. People eat, drink, dance and wish each other “Chronia Polla” (i.e. Many Years). After the Kalogeros, the King and the “Girl” for the year have been chosen, they are dressed in their costumes and then the Kalogeros is fed with ritual food in front of the church (Fig. 1).

A youth climbs the water tower, connects a pipe and opens the tap, so that the earth will be well-watered during the day. Another man, sitting on a tractor, ploughs a symbolic field underneath the tower.
This is where the King’s cart will be placed during the ritual, and the ground must be wet; there must be plenty of mud. This magical act, the watering of the earth, indicates the wish of the farmers for the season, particularly since it rarely rains in the area during spring, and the proverb says: “Two rains in March, and one in April, a joy to the man who has sown much.” The village’s schoolteacher arrives together with several children. He tells them about the carnival and emphasises the meaning of the ritual, and the importance of earth and water, rain for growth, and the fertility of the earth. He also emphasises the Dionysian element and the connections with antiquity. This is therefore a part of what Greeks learn in their childhood.

Fig 1. Before the ceremony starts on Cheese-Monday, the Kalogeros is fed in front of the church dedicated to Agios Athanasios in Melikē (Greek Macedonia). The ritual meal consists of three mouthfuls of each of the most important articles of food: bread, cheese and olives. 2 March 1992. (Author’s photograph)
Around eleven o’clock in the morning, the Kalogeros and his followers start their walk through the village. The King and the Kalogeros have their own separate spheres in the procession, a more formal and “Christian” one (the King) and a burlesque one where we find the pre-Christian rain-magician (the Kalogeros). The Christian part of the procession visit and bless the inner part of the household, since they enter the houses. When they arrive, the leader shakes hands with the housewife, who is waiting at the door. He wishes “Many Years”, good offspring and fertility. Inside the house, he blesses the holy corner of the house, i.e. the icon shelf with the family icons, the censer, etc. He is followed by the King with his sceptre, and two sons of the King. One of them carries a little bottle with red wine and a glass which he fills and offers to the housewife, and the other carries a basket, where the housewife puts one or more eggs. Next comes “the Girl”. “She” is a boy dressed up as a girl, carrying a purse in which “she” collects money from the houses. They are also given a container full of corn, wheat or maize. The corn is poured into sacks placed on a tractor driving along with the procession. In former times the Kalogeros was always a poor villager, and he was the recipient of this (harvested) crop, but today it is most often given to the church. This part of the procession may be treated inside the houses, but the other part is always treated outside. Kalogeros with his drunk and burlesque followers goes straight to the back yard of every house, i.e. to the barn, to see if the all the farming tools are in their proper places. If they find disorder or irregularities, they have the right to take the misplaced object away; they will return it only after the master of the house has treated them to a sufficient amount of wine, ouzo or metaxa. Until five o’clock in the afternoon, they pay visits to all the houses and are treated with wine, ouzo and food. In the back yard, the housewife sprinkles the Kalogeros with *polysporia*, a symbolic mixture of grains, through a sieve (Fig. 2). As a counter-gift, he swings the cloth tied over one end of his phallic-shaped “sceptre” in order to mix the grains with water and earth, while wishing a lot of rain and a plentiful harvest (Fig. 3). Then they move on to another house, are greeted and treated, and become more and more drunk. The Kalogeros plunges his “sceptre” with the cloth into puddles, soaks it with muddy water whenever he finds it and smears the celebrants with it. He soils everyone, and throws the other young men into the muddy water and the mud to the amusement of everyone. The aim of the procession is to assure the rain and a
plentiful harvest. When the group have made the round of the whole village, they end up in the square in front of the church where the entire village is awaiting them.

Back at the church and the water tower everything is ready. Since the water from the pipe has flowed since early in the morning, the soil is really well watered, wet and muddy. In other years, it had snowed during the ritual. This year (1992), the weather is too dry with no rain, according to my informants. Ideally, it should be raining during the ritual. According to the participants, they prefer to perform the ritual when it rains, because it gives favourable expectations for the rest of the year.

The custom of dramatising the act of ploughing is important, so the king’s cart and a plough are placed in front of the church and the play, a parody of ploughing and sowing, begins. “May the water-melons grow as big as the Queen’s breasts, may the maize grow as long as the King’s prick” – all the popular actors in the dramatised agricultural play join in the recitation. Simultaneously, they sow polysporia. Two young men take the place of a pair of oxen; they put their arms into the yoke and lift it up so that they are able to draw the plough. Nowadays the men representing the oxen wear ordinary clothes but formerly they dressed up in animal skins. Together with the other participants, they invoke the buried grain so that it may come back to life again during the sowing of polysporia. The ancient Greeks called this mixture panspermia (“all seeds”). At the time of sowing, a general mixture of the edible plants to be sown was boiled and offered to the Corn Goddess, and her worshippers also partook of it, while praying for a renewal of these different crops next year.

Panspermia was an important part of the offerings at most agricultural festivals celebrated after the autumn equinox and before the spring equinox. The rituals were dedicated to the chthonic fertility gods, Demeter and Dionysos. Both were powerful. The Corn Mother, Demeter (HHD. 4; Il. 13.322 and 21.76) and the wine god, Dionysos (Diod. 4.3,5) were the primary deities of the farmer. Both were celebrated during winter with licentious festivals, which were closely associated. Demeter was the goddess of the fruits of the civilised earth (HHD.; Hes. Op. 465-467). The fertile or cultured earth is central in her cult, since she is associated with the fields but, when associated with Mother Earth (Eur. Bacch. 275 f., Phoen. 683-689), she refers to the whole area of the nurturing and fertile earth, having traits from the “Lady of the Wild Things”.

Fig. 2. The housewife with the sieve drinks the mouthful of wine offered by the little Prince, before sprinkling the Kalogeros with *polysporia*, a symbolic mixture of grains. (Author’s photograph)

Fig. 3. In the mud in the back yard the Kalogeros swings the cloth tied over one end of his “sceptre” in order to mix the grains with water and earth. (Author’s photograph)
Fig. 4. A kneeling Babo holds the cup containing the “holy water” with which “she” is about to sprinkle the king’s oxen but “she” falls into a reverie in front of the “Life-renewing Lyre” which is played by “her” assistant. (Author’s photograph)

Fig. 5. The muddy Kalogeros is washed clean, “so it will rain during the summer”. 2 March 1992. (Photograph by Thomas Thomell)
Dionysos also had traits from wild nature. Like the goddess, he was uncontrollable and renewing, associated with the forests, trees, and fields. He may be linked to Demeter as the fruit of the tree with the fruit of the field, as wine with bread. Many supposed that Dionysos spent the winter months somewhere else. His “brotherhood” or retinue of animated dancers, thiasos, walked or rather danced in a wild, drunken and licentious procession, and with shameless actions they made comical gestures during the dances which were an important part of the Dionysian kōmos (i.e. revelling procession) that made its way through ancient Athens during the rural Dionysian festivals – the Choes (i.e. “Drinking Cups”), which were part of the Anthesteria festival, and the Lenaia. The satyrs, Pan and the nymphs also belonged to the ritual. Dancing “male goats” and female maenads, the obscene satyrs and the young girls carrying baskets, as well as the processions by themselves generated fertility. The dramatised acts were addressed to the life beneath the earth, and the fertility-making gestures were always parts of the Dionysian agricultural rituals celebrated during winter and early spring.

The dramatised modern ritual is also performed to invoke fertility. The Kalogeros is in fact the rain-magician, the rainmaker, who symbolises the forces of vegetation and the fertility of the earth. Babo also belongs to the ritual. This is a man dressed up as an old woman. Babo holds a cup with “holy water”, i.e. women’s spittle and a sprig of basil, in “her” hands and “she” sprinkles the holy contents on the male participants. Sometimes Babo and at other times “her” assistant holds “The Invincible Life’s Powers” in “her” or his hands (Fig. 4). This is the male sex organ, a phallus, in the form of a lyre, to be deposited on the earth when it has been “ploughed” and “sown”. Babo pretends to play, while “she” utters magical fertility formulas. In Byzantine and popular Greek, Babo or Baubō is a wet-nurse, and symbolises nourishment. According to the ancient legend this personification of fertility was associated with an episode in the Demeter myth as represented in Orphic versions of the myth (Orph. Fr. 52=Clem. Al. Protr. 2.16P-18P).

The theme for the dramatised representation concerns the struggle between the chthonic Good and Evil forces, or life and death. An important phase in the action is the ritual ploughing, the fertilisation of – or the ritual way of making love with – the earth; the young and vigorous men represent oxen yoked to the plough. Very often as a
result of clumsy movement, or because of the evil forces, they stumble and fall into the mud, but Babo plays the “Life-renewing Lyre” and, after some sprinkling with the “holy water” and some magical formulas uttered by Babo, the “oxen” get up again.

The king of fertility sits on the cart pulled by the young men representing oxen. Other men represent the evil forces (death). They hang on to the back of the cart and hold on, to prevent the king from moving ahead, but they are soon vanquished. The triumphant king sits enthroned in splendour because the vital forces of vegetation are invoked by Babo and “her” playing on the lyre. The contact of the royal vehicle with the watered earth constitutes a ritual which suggests the coming prosperity of the earth, of the fecund-making rain through the power incarnated in the rain-invoking King.

After the ploughing, starts the aforementioned ritual sowing. The king makes the sign of the cross three times, scatters the seed on the supposedly ploughed earth and utters a prayer to the most important saints of the villagers.

After the ceremony of ploughing and sowing, they sing obscene songs. The ceremony ends as it started: the Kalogeros is fed in front of the church (cf. Fig. 1). The ritual food is always their most important articles of food – blessed bread, cheese and olives, three mouthfuls of each. By giving this to the rainmaker, the villagers give what they wish to receive in abundance the following year. Afterwards, the Kalogeros is carried to the mud. Here, they immerse him three times. To do the ritual properly, he is laid on his back in the narrow trench or furrow, which they have ploughed in the field. It seems difficult to carry out the ritual properly in the mud, but the mud is in fact of the greatest importance. This act symbolises the death and resurrection of the Kalogeros, and is the most important and tragic of the play. When he has come back to life, he is washed with water from the village’s water-tank, “so it will rain during the summer”, everybody says while completing the ceremony (Fig. 5). The musicians start to play, and the whole village dance in front of the church, and the dance is led by the resurrected Kalogeros.

The “sceptre” which the Kalogeros plunges into puddles and the mud with which he sprinkles the other participants also announce fertility and abundance. To ensure the harvest, the ritual visits to all the houses of the village by the celebrants are important, and
particularly the offer of seed from every housewife. Holding a sieve, containing all the kinds of seed to be sown, every housewife in Melikē, awaits the company with _polysporia_. On his arrival, the Kalogeros mixes _polysporia_ into the earth with his “sceptre” while making the shape of a cross, and the little Prince offers “a mouthful” of wine, while the King makes the sign of the cross and wishes the occupants of the house fruitfulness. Again, we observe the thought behind the gift-giving and sympathetic magic, also recommended by Hesiod: give a large gift, so you’ll get more back (Op. 349 ff.). The little Prince with the wine may be a parallel to the Choes of the ancient Anthesteria, and may also be compared to the children carrying the _eiresione_, an olive-branch covered with small cakes, loaves of bread, figs, and other fruits of the season, during the festival of the Pyanepsia in ancient Athens. The children called at the doors of houses singing a begging song accompanied by an appeal for a gift to the singer. When they got the gift, the _eiresione_, decorated with the various fertility symbols, was placed in front of the house to symbolise blessings for the year. This is also a parallel to the food and money collected during today’s festivals. The kinds of food which are offered during the visits from house to house, “to ensure the good”, are the same as the three kinds of food which are offered to the Kalogeros, when he is given a seat in the middle of the “ploughed” space. These are the basic kinds of food common to the villagers, because it is the produce of the land and their labour in the field. Accordingly, it is important to get plenty of the same food in the next year. It is clearly illustrated when they throw the Kalogeros to the ground in a pretended act of murder as soon as he has eaten this “sacred meal”. He is in fact thrown into, and dragged over, the “sown” earth after his meal. Thus, there is a double sowing.

The purpose of the play which is performed during the Kalogeros is to bring nature back to life and to restore the fertility which the earth seems to have lost, in the same way as the cults of Demeter and Dionysos. This is concretised through the struggle where the young men who draw the cart of the king of fertility conquer the representatives of the evil forces, i.e. death, as well as through the death and resurrection of the Kalogeros.

We meet many parallels in the Dionysian Anthesteria festival, which was dedicated to the new wine, but the festival was also the
festival of the ancestors. During this festival the first shoots of blossom were celebrated at the end of February, but the temporary return of the spirits of dead was also necessary.

This festival presents a complex of different elements. Formally, all the rituals were dedicated to the return of Dionysos by sea to guard the yearly renewal of vegetation. The festival lasted three days. All the days were associated with the word pot or jar: Pithoigia “Jar-opening”, Choes “Drinking Cups”, and Chytroi “Pots”, named after the necessities for wine drinking and a meal of pottage.

On the first day the Pithoigia, the wine-jars, were opened, on the second the wine was solemnly drunk, and on the third a pot full of grain and seeds, a *pansepermia*, was solemnly offered.

This wine-growers’ festival was held amid the blossoms of spring with reference back to the grape harvest. The first day was dedicated to the god of wine, Dionysos. In honour of the gift of Dionysos and of the beginning of the new vintage, the first fruit offering, the first mixed wine and water, was offered to the god. The offerings were taken out and carried to the shrine of Dionysos in the Marshes, *en limnais*, where the main ceremonies of the Anthesteria were held. This sanctuary was the most ancient and most holy sanctuary of the god, and was opened only once a year especially for this festival.

The second day was dedicated to a *hieros gamos*, the wedding of the gods. They also had a drinking contest, to celebrate the arrival of the god.

These days were also polluted. It was supposed that the spirits of the dead returned to earth when the wine-jars were opened. They came from the temple in the Marshes, and it was opened to facilitate their arrival. Therefore, all the other sanctuaries were closed and people smeared their doorways with pitch and chewed buckthorn to keep away the ghosts. The third day was dedicated to the spirits of the dead. During a ritual which was the concern of the individual householder, the dead were offered a boiled mixture of all kinds of grains along with honey, *pansepermia*. The meal was cooked in Chytroi, from which the day took its name. The meal of pottage is linked to the myth of the flood. When the water had subsided, the survivors threw everything they could find into a pot and cooked it. When the day was over, people shouted: “Get out Keres (i.e. the spirits), the Anthesteria is over!”
During a special collective ritual the city made an offering to the dead in the underworld through a chasm in the ground about a cubit wide. This was said to be the gap through which the waters had drained away at the end of “Deucalion’s Flood” (cf. Noah’s). One of our ancient sources, Pausanias (1.18,7 f.), tells that once a year there was thrown into it “cakes of wheaten meal kneaded with honey”. Water was also poured into the gap, since libations of water are a usual offering to the dead.

The sanctuary in the Marshes is important when it comes to rain magic and has affinities with another ancient ritual dedicated to Demeter. The Mysteries at Eleusis were in fact celebrated on two occasions, since two moments in the year were emphasised by Demeter’s most prestigious cult centre, first and foremost before sowing, but seven months before the initiation at Eleusis some preliminary rituals, the “Lesser Mysteries”, were held in the month of Anthesterion at Agrai on the river Ilissos, inside Athens. Two other important rituals at the time of the “greening” of the fields, in this month were also dedicated to her.

The importance of early spring in the ancient world is manifested by the very name of the spring month, Anthesterion (approximately the last part of February/the first part of March), since its name is derived from the Greek word for flower, anthos. We meet parallels in modern Greece through the celebration of saints for the flowers and fertility, at the end of February, such as Agia Anthousa, the female saint for flowers, and Agios Polykarpos (i.e. “a lot of fruit”), the male saint for fertility.

*The Tuesday after Easter (White Tuesday) and the agiasma (sacred spring)*

The White Week after Easter and other rituals during spring, also present interesting parallels to the ancient rituals. During the Easter season in Olympos, the villagers conduct an important ritual of rain magic, manifested through a rain litany and a procession with their principal icons (images). Besides the death and Resurrection of Christ, this is the most important ritual during Easter. To honour the dead and celebrate the Resurrection of Christ, on “New” or “White”
Tuesday in the “White Week”, the people of Olympos carry icons of saints from the main church to the cemetery for services honouring the dead. The farmers believe that the icons can ward off drought. Thus, in addition to regular religious services at the graves, the priest says prayers for rain (Fig. 6).

Fig. 6. The priest on his knees in front of the icons praying for rain at the cemetery in the village of Olympos on the island of Karpathos on “White Tuesday”, 28 April 1992. (Author’s photograph)

The priest says a prayer over each grave, where the housewives have placed dishes of different food as offerings to the dead, kollyba (a mixture of wheat, nuts and fruit), cakes, wine, orange-juice, cheese, sweets, fruits, etc. After the blessing of the priest, the food is finally passed round and eaten. In this way, they have a meal with the dead. Then they take the icons, which are wrapped in bright cloths, into the fields to pray at the small private chapels to ensure good crops. They carry the icons in procession over the fields in the neighbourhood of the village, and they have a special service at the river, which is almost dry (Fig. 7), during which the Panagia is immersed in the water in front of one of the many chapels.
According to one of my informants, “It is important to remember that the procession with the icons has nothing to do with Easter. The reason is a time of drought many years ago. Then, the priest prayed to the icons for rain. Afterwards, they have always carried the icons in procession on Tuesday after Easter.” The icons preside over everything: prosperity, fertility, plentiful rain, harmony between the members of society and protection against all aggression from outside. In addition, the prayer the priest says to the dead for rain, in several ways is a modern version of Pausanias’ (9.40,1 f., tr. Levi) story about when people sent ambassadors to Delphi: “for (nearly) two years the god had not rained. When they asked for a remedy for this drought the Pythian priestess commanded them to go to the oracle of Trophonios at Lebadeia and find a cure from him.”

The Greek Orthodox Church, since Byzantine times, has celebrated Easter on the first Sunday after the appearance of the spring full moon. This is a favourable time for fertility and the growth of the crops. As already mentioned, the first week after Easter is known as the “White Week”, another expression is the “Bright Week” (Lamprē, “bright”, another word for Easter). These expressions have given rise to various beliefs: no work is allowed in the
fields during this week for fear of hail, because hail is white. Further, women are not allowed to use a white distaff for their spinning, because the colour white brings hail (Megas 1982: 110; Loukatos 1985: 163-6). Instead of working, the celebrations during the “White Week” after Easter are important, since the whole crop may be lost if it starts to hail, and it is important to avoid this. Consequently, there are many rituals after Easter and around the first of May. Both hassili (the “gardens of Adonis”) in modern Serres (Northern Greece), the candles and flowers of the Good Friday service – known as “Christ-candles” and “Christ-flowers” – on the Epitaphios (“Christ’s funeral”) and other symbols are believed to become holy during the ceremony in connection with the spring festival. They are believed to have miraculous power and produce the same fertilising effect as the “gardens of Adonis” on the feast of the vegetation god, Adonis in antiquity. So, burying the hassili in the fields “is good for the crops”.

Some of the villagers who celebrate the Kalogeros, the Anastenarides (i.e. those who celebrate the Anastenaria), start their most important festival the Anastenaria, dedicated to Agios Constantine and Agia Helena and celebrated at the end of the spring, before harvest, by the blessing of the agiasma (“holy water”) when gathering at the “agiasma”, which also signifies the spring house, a small chapel-looking building at the edge of the village that consists of a door opening on a damp stairway that leads down to a well. The leader of the group of Anastenarides, the Archianastenaris, enters the agiasma and goes down to the well, because he is going to bless the participants and the fields with holy water. With the procession of Anastenarides arrayed up the steps behind him, the Archianastenaris draws a bucket of water and makes a sign of the cross over it with each of the two icons depicting Agios Constantine and Agia Helena. Each icon depicts the Saints dressed in blue and purple robes standing on either side of a silver crucifix, under its two arms. The halos of the Saints, like the edges and handles of the icons, are plated with silver. After pouring the bucket of water back into the well he orders everyone back outside and fills the bucket again.

Emerging from the agiasma, the Archianastenaris hurls the bucketful of water in all directions, towards the east, the west, the north and the south. Then he brings up another bucket of holy water, which he hurls over the hands of the twenty or thirty people who crowd around him. He does this three, or more times. He brings up more holy water so people can drink from it, sprinkle their heads, or
fill small bottles they have brought for just this purpose. He is the last one to be blessed. When the blessing of the waters is completed, the procession returns to their shrine, and performs the other central rituals of the festival.

But *agiasma*, or holy water, is very important in modern Greek religion, and a central feature in all churches, and this may give some indication of the importance of holy water in ancient times as well. We also meet the importance of water in the *agiasma*, the spring house, through the icons which are dedicated to the well, because the drinking water is always dedicated to a saint and it is for this reason that they are called Agios (Saint). The importance of water is also indicated through all the folksongs about water – drought and the finding of water, are well-known themes. And we have to keep in mind that the water supply is and has always been a great problem in Greece, as the area is characterised by heavy rains during the winter period, and nearly no rains during the summer months, i.e. from May until September or even until the end of October.

The significance of water is also demonstrated through the festival dedicated to the Panagia under her attribute of Zóodochos Pēgē, i.e. the Life-giving Spring, which is celebrated on “New” Friday in the “White Week”. On this festival Athenians come to her chapel inside a circular spring house hewn in the rock on the Southern slope of the Acropolis to fetch life-giving water in the cave which is dedicated to her (Fig. 8). Through antiquity it was dedicated to different deities. The Sacred Spring is situated inside a cave over which is constructed a church. The spring house and its surroundings were sacred to the Water-Nymphs from the sixth century BC. Later, the sanctuary of Asklepios was built here. The cave was later dedicated to Agios Anargyros, the patron saint of healing, and today it is dedicated to the Panagia.¹⁹

Cult in caves with holy water is of central importance in Greek religion (cf. Fig. 9). The holy water may be used to ensure health, good crops, or growing flocks. It may be sprinkled on, or drunk by, a sick person, and it may also be sprinkled on the animals or over the fields by the priest to bless them, purify them, or to produce rain.

In ancient times, springs were sacred, representing water-nymphs. The nymphs were worshipped as deities of water, of marriage and birth, because they were pre-eminently water deities (Callim. *Hymn.*
connected with every source of water, and water gives fertility and life itself to everything which grows. They were, therefore, naturally believed to give fertility to the soil and to assist growth not only of everything growing from the ground but also to man. The nymphs were rain deities (Paus. 8.38,3 f.), and were asked for rain and fertility of the soil.

It was from springs more than from any other source that the Greeks secured their water. They believed that the nymphs of these springs provided their water, and they honoured them especially as water deities (Od. 13.103-109, 350 f.). In times of drought the Greeks prayed to the divinities of the well-springs, fountains, and sources of streams, and of the streams themselves, rather than to Zeus, or any other god for rain; that is, they offered vows and prayers to the Nymphae and similar divinities, perhaps because people felt that the nymphs were closer than the heavenly, and far away, Zeus. Thus, the Nymphs were supposed to be mediators between heaven and earth.
Fig. 9. Below the main church on the Aegean island of Tinos called Evangelistrias (“the Annunciation”) are several minor churches or chapels formed as caves. In the first chapel dedicated to Zōodochos Pēgē (“the Life-giving Spring”) is a holy spring, where the pilgrims fetch water, which is believed to have fertile powers and to cure sickness. August 1994. (Author’s photograph)

As already mentioned, the significance of water is also demonstrated through the festival dedicated to the Panagia under her attribute of the “Life-giving Spring” in the “White Week”. In ancient times, the life-giving spring was also a female goddess, connected with Mother Earth, but she needed to be fertilised by a male god, as illustrated through the Mysteries at Eleusis.

The ancient Greeks worshipped Zeus of Rain (Paus. 2.19,8), and in colloquial speech one can say “Zeus is raining.” Children in
Ancient Greece sang: “Rain, rain, O dear Zeus, on the fields of the Athenians.” According to the tradition, Zeus (Hes. Op. 488), or God rains, so we get plenty of grain.

Fully-fledged rain magic is found in the cult of Zeus Lykaios in Arkadia, where nevertheless one of the Nymphs who reared him also has something to say: If a severe drought lasts a long time the priest of Zeus will go to the spring of the Nymph Hagno, make a sacrifice, and let the blood run into the spring. Then, after prayer, he dips a branch from an oak (the sacred tree of Zeus) into the water, and forthwith a vapour will rise up from the spring like a mist, “and a little way off the mist becomes a cloud, collects other clouds, and makes the rain drop on Arkadian land”, according to Pausanias (8.38.3 f., tr. Levi).

Among the ancient Greeks, a king is often a magician in the service of the gods. Part of his duty is to be a weather-king; he is “making the weather”, and this means that he is making rain, for example by shaking rattles or by other means trying to make thunder and lightning. In ancient Thessaly, when the land suffered from drought, they shook a bronze wagon by way of praying the god for rain, and it was said rain came. This was a traditional public ceremony for the making of rain. According to Pausanias (2.29.7 f., tr. Levi):

Greece had been withering under a drought: neither inside the isthmus (of Corinth) nor outside it would the god rain, until they sent to Delphi to discover the reasons and ask for relief. The Pythian priestess told them to placate Zeus, but, if he were to listen, it had to be Aiakos who made the ritual supplication. They sent men from every city to beseech Aiakos; he sacrificed and prayed to Panhellenic Zeus, and brought rain to Greece; so the Aiginetans made the(se) portraits of the ambassadors.

On the modern island of Aigina, after a long drought, people appeal to the Panagia, who has supplanted Zeus, for relief. Instead of going to the Mountain of Zeus Hellanios (the modern Oros), the modern Aiginetans go in a procession to her Monastery three miles north of the Mount in the centre of the island. They bring her icon to the town of Aigina and keep it in the local Metropolitan Church for a day, and bring it back to the monastery in a procession (Harland 1960). The
modern Aiginetan habit of predicting rain from the gathering of clouds upon the Oros has its ancient parallel: according to Theophrastos (Sign. 24): “If cloud settles on the temple (on the Mount) of Zeus Hellanios in Aegina, usually rain follows.”

Not only Zeus, but several of the ancient minor gods as well as the goddesses were also clever magicians. Their modern parallels are represented in the same way. In case of drought, the priest may be sent for to conduct a rain litany to break the drought, such as in Olympos or Melikē where he has to compete with the Archianastenaris or the Kalogeros, two recognised rain magicians.²¹

The Archianastenaris’ successfully entering into ecstasy is considered to be both an indication of the saint’s consenting to the performance of the ritual to ensure prosperity in the coming year, and also a means of securing fertility. The most important ritual during the Anastenaria, is the Anastenarides’ dancing over red-hot coals to ensure their own health, and secure the fertility of their land. They pray to their patron, Agios Constantine, and his mother for prosperity, for fertility, for plentiful rain, and the banishment of all evil spirits. The Anastenarides worship both fire and water, and on other occasions when it failed to rain, they would take the icons and go all round the village. The saint would seize them as his ancient counterpart, Dionysos, seized his maenads during the Lenaia and other Dionysian festivals, and they would begin to dance, and pray: “Agios Constantine, have pity on us, make it rain.”

During today’s agricultural cycle, Anastenaria is a festival of renewal before the grain harvest. In the village of Agia Paraskeuē, harvest took place during the festival dedicated to Agios Charalampos around the summer solstice at the end of June in 1992. The two festivals are supplied with many rituals around sowing.

The modern offerings before the harvest and the sowing of the grain are equivalents to the festivals of Thargelia and Pyanepsia of the ancients. During those festivals, they carried the maypole, richly decorated with fertility symbols, in procession. The offering might also be manifested by the eiresione. Like the modern variant of the maypole, the May wreath, the olive-branch was placed at the door of the home and replaced each year, because, according to the laws of the ancestors, a human being should return to the gods a part of what they gave him. The ancestors, who were and are mediators between humans and the more powerful deities, get periodic offerings of
kollyba as the dead in Ancient Greece got appropriate offerings of food (cf. Fig. 10; ARV 1227,1; Aesch. Cho. 22 ff.).

Whether the souls of the dead are thought to be set free during the first week of carnival or to come up from the world below and breathe again, in the same way as the resurrected Christ, and wander among the living until they must go back to their place on Assumption Day or during Pentecost, there is a parallel to the customs of the ancient Greeks who celebrated the dead during the Anthesteria and the Rousalia. It is important to communicate with the dead during the yearly All Souls’ Days at the end of winter and at the end of spring, i.e. during the sprouting of the grains, when the flowers and the green grain stalks are proliferating and at harvest time. The wine-offering to the earth during the festival dedicated to Agios Charalampos and all the blood- and water-offerings to the earth remind us of the fact that it is not only important to treat the living participants during the ritual passages of the festivals connected with the seasonal calendar, with its emphasis on the cycle of natural increase.

Both the dead (Paus. 1.18,7 f.), the earth (Il. 3.103 f.), the spring (Il. 21.131 f., Od. 13.105, 350; AP. 9.329, 9.326 f.) and the tree get their share, today (Fig. 11) as in the ancient world when libations always were offered to the god before the worshippers could drink (Il. 1.470 f.). During drought, animals may still be sacrificed to the river, in such a way that the blood may run freely into the river (cf. Fig. 11). Another similar custom takes place on New Year’s Day, to ensure health, good crops or growing flocks. Then, they feed the spring or bring offerings to the Nereid dwelling in the well or fountain, to sweeten the water. As they throw sweetmeats into the fountain, they whisper: “May all good things flow into our house, as this water flows.”
After harvest and the threshing of the grain, when the fruit ripens and the farmers begin to receive the profits from their crops, once more the death cult is important, perhaps to secure the future “first rains”, when the transitional period towards the “productive part” of the year is about to begin again, when the Dormition of the Panagia is celebrated, marking a turning point towards autumn. Accordingly, there is a mutual adaptation in the fusion between earlier rituals and the Christian calendar. Offerings of the basic kinds of food derived from the subsistence agriculture in the region – oil, wine and grains (bread) – that are made during today’s festivals have an important place in the Orthodox liturgy. Even if the agricultural population who perform the rituals today have got modern technology and new ways to improve the agricultural productivity of their fields (machinery and chemical fertilisers), these improvements have not given them control over the vicissitudes of nature. The survival of the community still depends on natural events beyond the farmer’s control. Whether the
reason is that the ritual is a compensation for technology or that the people do not really trust the technology, the “home-made” sympathetic magic” which is so important in connection with fertility cult is still performed. In this way, they attempt to influence the fertility directly. Accordingly, the rituals of the festivals represent a world-view which belongs to a traditional agricultural society. This is not contradicted by the fact that the summer festivals of August are celebrated in a month of holiday and leisure. The ancients did the same, since the end of July and the first part of August, after the harvest and the threshing of the grain, was a period of leisure for Hesiod (Op. 607 f.) and Aristotle (Eth. Nic. 8.1160a19-20, 23-28).

Ultimately, festivals are celebrations of the capacity of increase of the earth, carried on as a way of maintaining that cycle of fertility by acknowledging the powers of nature and the place of humankind in enhancing that process, on seizing it and magnifying it. When natural “things” are enlarged or prolonged, magnified and amplified in the festival, or when they are miniaturised, made into toys and gifts, the community are honouring nature while giving humanity its place in the larger scheme of things. Fertility, in such a world, is a capacity of nature enhanced by humans acting together in serious play.

Most Greeks are agricultural people who live close to the process of nature and, as in antiquity, there is still a common-sense connection made between the fruitfulness of the earth and human sexuality. Fertility ceremonies maintain the connection with the year’s passage through festive engagements that still speak out on behalf of fertility.

The creative forces are located in different places, and fertility is derived from “gifts” coming from the below (earth) and from the above (rain). From this fact follows the importance of the fusion of the two elements in the union of marriage to stimulate the fertility of society.
Fig. 11. The lamb sacrifice during the Anastenaria festival, in the village of Agia Elenē (Greek Macedonia). The throat of the lamb is cut, so that the blood will flow into the freshly dug hole close to the tree and the agiasma (“holy water”). 21 May 1992. (Author’s photograph)
PART 2
THE SACRED MARRIAGE BETWEEN HEAVEN AND EARTH

The most important agricultural festivals in Ancient Greece, the Eleusinian Mysteries and the Thesmophoria, both celebrated before sowing, were dedicated to the earth. Therefore, the ancient periodic festivals encouraged the fertility of the earth. The eight months’ labour of Mother Earth from sowing to harvesting is important to produce Demeter’s grain. But, Mother Earth represents only one of the two parts of nature which it is important to communicate with through festivals to ensure the harvest.

Agricultural success in Greece depends largely upon water of sufficient quantity at the proper times, and it was Zeus who provided this essential rainwater. The god determined the times of rains as well as their quantity. Agrarian rituals were therefore performed for a purpose; they not only served as a reminder of natural events, but attempted to influence them, both magically and by the propitiation of the deities concerned. Accordingly, rain magic dedicated to a heavenly god is a general theme in the festivals. The Zeus festival (cf. Paus. 1.24,4) held in midsummer before the rising of Sirius was believed to summon the cooling north winds.

Zeus was responsible for the rain on which the crop depended, symbolised by the marriage between heaven and earth, and Pausanias tells about the “statue of Earth begging Zeus to rain on her, either because the Athenians needed rain or because there was a drought all over Greece” (1.24,3, tr. Levi). The statue was apparently the upper part of a naked woman, that was rattled about in a rumbling cart to produce thunder. But statues were not enough. Most of the other festivals were also celebrated to get rain.

On 26 Gamelion (“the month of marriage”) the ancient Athenians celebrated the Sacred Marriage of Zeus and Hera in the Theogamia (the wedding of the gods) festival towards the end of winter, approximately when the carnival season is celebrated today. This was an auspicious time for marriage, because life was about to come with the spring, and marriage and conception could suitably be linked to it. On the human level it was the favourite season for weddings, because the divine model secured a prosperous result for everyone. The divine archetype was the best guarantee that legitimate human unions in
each Greek generation would be fruitful. Behind this way of thinking is the belief we learn about in the *Odyssey* where the point is being made that the Sacred Marriages of the immortals are not infertile (11.249 ff.). In other words, it was “normal” to sow when the earth was watered.

In popular custom, marriages continue to take place by preference during a particular time of the year. According to Aristotle (*Pol. 7.1335a 36 ff.*), winter is the preferable season for marriages. Today, the weddings are also at appropriate seasons, such as after harvest or when they celebrate Panagia’s Birthday (8 September) and the new ecclesiastical year starts. The wedding season may also be around “first rains” or around sowing, when they also celebrate Panagia’s Presentation in the Temple.

The mock wedding in today’s carnival in the winter and at the beginning of Lent, discussed here in terms of the mock wedding in Koimēsē and the Kalogeros, presents many similarities to the ancient *hieros gamos*, aiming to promote a magical fertilisation of the earth. The ceremonies as a whole seek to achieve the same result. An important trait is the parody of the wedding ceremony, but the death and resurrection of the Kalogeros also symbolises the union between the grain and the earth or its vegetation powers. The ritual ploughing and sowing of the periphery of the village, when the oxen copulate with the earth, is a well-known hierogamic theme. It is the connections between rain magic and the ploughing and the sowing of the earth that are presented through carnival rituals and concretised through the mock wedding and, during a similar ritual in another village, the Kalogeros wishes people a lot of everything in the words: “Good crop with many bridegrooms and brides.” We find the belief that by such magical means it is possible to bind the invisible forces of nature and make them subject to humans, so that they provide the desired fertility. As already mentioned, similar rituals are performed before sowing and harvest, demonstrating that people try to influence the course of nature through agricultural magic at the most important periods during the year.

The ritual sowing and the wishes and magical incantations expressed by the chorus of the celebrants, or the prayers at the Kalogeros festival to ensure the harvest, is a magical ritual to make the crop grow. Therefore, the symbolic ploughing of the earth,
followed by the sowing of “polysporia”, an equivalent to the ancient “panspermia”, are important elements during the festival. In the ancient parallel, the Anthesteria festival both the offering of all kinds of grains and the sacred marriage were important rituals.

The union during the second day of the Anthesteria festival meant that the god was married to Basilinna (the wife of an important official, the Archōn Basileus) the day he came back from the underworld. In the wedding procession the priestess accompanied by the god, was escorted by satyrs to the civic centre where their marriage was celebrated (Arist. *Ath. Pol.* 3.5). Their union takes place to induce fertility in the vine. Since the union was performed during a spring- and flower-festival, the ritual was meant to make the earth fertile and bring back the fertility of the animals. By marrying Basilinna, the wife of the king, the god married the town and all its women. Their union was said to take place in the Boukoleion (the ox-herd’s house) in the Agora (the market place), at night. The Agora is also the place where the Athenian hero, Theseus, was buried, according to tradition (Plut. *Thes.* 36.2; Paus.1.17,2), and where they had a cemetery already in the Mycenaean period. This indicates the connection between birth and death; it is also symbolised through the annual death and resurrection of the lovers of the Mother Goddesses, such as the vegetation god, Adonis.

As the ploughing is about to begin, traditionally a ritualistic ploughing takes place accompanied or followed by a *hieros gamos*, the purpose of which is to re-enact the union of the Corn Mother or Mother Earth with her own son, the corn-seed, in order to make the ground fertile.

A sacred ploughing was performed in autumn before the sowing, roughly at the beginning of October, to ensure a rich yield of the fruits of the earth. This is the time of the first autumnal rains, which fertilise the earth, and make it possible for the ploughman to till the ground. It is the time to offer to the Corn Mother, who is another version of Mother Earth herself, the fruits of the latest harvest, not only in gratitude for the old crop but also in propitiation for a new and even better one. The Kalogeros festival, where the salient features are a phallic rod, a parody of a wedding ceremony, a death and resurrection sequence, and a ritual ploughing and sowing, is probably not very different from what took place at ancient Eleusis,
where people gathered with offers of corn, and acknowledged the recent rains and their beneficent role. Demeter, goddess of vegetation, united with the Cretan hero Jasion in a thrice-ploughed corn field (*Od. 5.125-27; Hes. *Th. 969-71*), and thereafter gave birth to Plutos, “wealth in corn”. The myth may be compared to the aim of the union during the Kalogeros ceremony. Here, we find the ancient association between ploughing/sowing and procreation, and between harvest and birth.

The annual celebrations of the *hieros gamos* proclaimed the divinity of sexuality through the marriage between Heaven and Earth, which symbolised the primordial union, which was the basis for the generations of the gods. The first union presented by Hesiod (*Th. 45 f.*) was the archetype of all life, because it promoted the creation of the world. Thus, the annual ceremonial recurrence of the event was the direct renewal of the order of nature, and it aimed to produce the same prosperous results as the annual birth- or death-festivals, both for the polis (city-state) and its inhabitants. The sexual union, the sacred marriage, of various divine couples illustrates the meaning. The theme of the sacred marriage belongs to the identity between the earth and the woman, but she needs a partner; accordingly Gaia, the Earth, is married with Uranos, the Heaven (*Hes. Th. 45 f., [116 ff.], 126 ff., 176-85*). The marriage of the Sky Father with the Earth Mother also takes place in the thunderstorm; it was as a thunderbolt that Zeus laid his fatal embrace on the Earth Goddess, Semele, Dionysos’ mother. Zeus impregnating Danae when coming to her in a shower of gold is another example of the marriage of Heaven with Earth. A passage in Aeschylus’s Danaid trilogy (*Aesch. Fr. 25 [44]*) describes the union:

> The holy heaven yearns to wound the earth, and yearning layeth hold on the earth to join in wedlock; the rain, fallen from the amorous heaven, impregnates the earth, and it bringeth forth for mankind the food of flocks and herds and Demeter’s gifts; and from that moist marriage-rite the woods put on their bloom. Of all these things I am the cause.
These lines were spoken by Aphrodite herself in defence of Hypermestra at her trial for disobedience to her father’s command to kill her husband. Aphrodite invokes this divine marriage between heaven and earth, and according to her, she is its cause. She also had something to say in other marriages: Zeus and Hera uniting at the summit of Mount Ida are veiled in a golden cloud from which glistening drops fall to earth. Their marriage is so fertile that underneath them the divine earth broke into young, fresh grass, and into dewy clover, crocus and hyacinth so thick and soft it held the hard ground far away from them (Il. 14.346 ff.). Divine sexual union is associated with the productivity of the earth. When Hera, with the help of Aphrodite (Il. 14.197-223) who lends her the zōnē (i.e. belt, girdle, “belt of seduction”) she needs, seduces Zeus their intercourse causes a flowering of the earth. The scene presents the fertile marriage of Heaven with Earth represented as a flowery meadow, the divine and Flowering Hera (cf. Paus. 2.22,1). The conception of the flowery meadow presents the lap of the Earth which collects the seeds of the Heaven, but this lap is also the place where the marriage-bed of Zeus the cloud gatherer and his Flowering wife Hera is situated (Eur. Hipp. 748-51). We find the connection with Zeus Sophitos, i.e. “who gives life to the plants”, and thus is synonymous with fertiliser.

The marriage of Hades and Kore was so important that it was situated several places, in the meadow at Nysa (HHD. 7, 15-21; Strab. 14.649-50), at Eleusis (Hymn. Orp. 18.12-15), and at Sicily (Diod. 5.3,2, 5.4,1 f.). This cosmic significance of the sacred marriage is also present in the ritual at Eleusis. When the initiates invoke the heaven to let it rain, they also pray the earth to be swollen, i.e. fertile.

The purpose of the modern ritual ploughings in the fall and the spring is the same as their ancient parallels: to ensure the growth of vegetation and a good crop. By the end of October nature enters the winter season. And as the seed is buried in the earth, the animals are shut into the folds, sheds and barns and the humans into their houses. Since humans are the children of the earth, they are also part of the order of nature. Thus, marriages or sexual unions of the female and male are important in the way of thinking of agricultural people, such as are symbolised through the Basilinna and the Basileus, Demeter and Jasion or Kore and Hades. Accordingly, Plutarch (Mor. 144b42)
claims that the most sacred of all the sowings is the marital sowing
and ploughing for the procreation of children.

The *hieros gamos* in the ritual life of ancient Athens indicates the
connection between human and agricultural fertility that was and is
characteristic of Greek thinking and that allowed for the metaphorical
connection to be made between women’s bodies and the body of the
earth.

The location of the sanctuary of the Anthesteria in the Dionysian
“*limnais*” is important, because marshes, according to Greek thinking,
are associated with a border, the underworld and death, but also with
the female sex organ and birth. Accordingly, death cult and the
marriage aspect are both present in this ancient festival for renewal in
the spring month. The main ceremonies were held in a humid place
with flowers, suitable for the arrival of the god and his infernal
followers. Once a year, Dionysos descends into the underworld
through a lake in a swampy area to bring back his mother, the
goddess Semele (Paus. 2.37.5), i.e. fertility. The sanctuary in the
Marshes was opened only once a year. Through the ceremony in the
marsh the opening of the “Pithoigia”, the jars, signifies the opening-
up of the underworld, and the opening of the virgin’s body. As the
female body is opened up through the first intercourse, the earth is
opened up when it is ploughed, and the Anthesteria, when the new
wine was opened, was also dedicated to the souls of the dead
returning from the underworld. All these ritual openings are liminal
events. Accordingly, all these ceremonies are associated with the
dangers of opening up, and were therefore associated with ritual
precaution, because of the potential danger involved for man (cf.
duBois 1988). The way of thinking is made more explicit through the
sacred marriage in the Boukoleion

Both the modern Kalogeros and the ancient Anthesteria festival
demonstrate that in connection with rain-magic a *hieros gamos*
followed by a death and resurrection ritual, and a symbolic ploughing
are important elements. As a ritual supplement to the magical cries
“rain, conceive”, these ceremonies probably also took place at
Eleusis. In Greek culture there is a close connection between
traditional marriages and certain sacred marriages, where sexual
organs have a focal symbolic role when demonstrating the importance
of uniting the two sexes to ensure a fertile result. Therefore, it is
important to stress the positive role of a *hieros gamos* to promote fertility in the Eleusinian Mysteries as well. Sexual elements play an important part in ritual initiation into mystery cults, and in ancient Eleusis as in traditional marriages and popular customs at the present day, there are many parallels, which are of focal importance within all agricultural societies. Aristophanes’ comedy, *The Frogs*, celebrates the Eleusinian Mysteries, and partly takes place in a marsh (Ar. *Ran.* 181, 209-20) and presents an important element from the mysteries and a double example of the female genitals through marsh and frog. Important also are plants (Papamichael 1975), general agricultural terminology (Henderson 1991) and the shape of traditional musical instruments at Eleusis. According to the Greek scholar Apostolos N. Athanassakis (1976), the flute and the drumstick illustrate the penis, while the drum, the fiddle and the harp illustrate the vulva. The drum is associated with the hollow vessel where the sacred meal was served, i.e. the mixture of grain offered at Eleusis. The symbolic identification of such a vessel-drum with the female pudenda is found in many cultures. The corn to be sown was represented by everyone’s corn offerings, which were placed inside a drum. The custom of filling drums with grain may be connected with the ritual pounding of grain in drums, which in its turn refers to the manipulation of female and male genitals. The shapes and nature of the ingredients, which are mixed in the so-called *kistē* (“round box”) – also a symbol of the female pudendum – at Eleusis, represent the female and male genitals (Clem. Al. *Protr.* 2.18P f.). They also illustrate the cultivated crop both sexes live on and want more of at harvest time. Consequently, the pounding of the grain symbolises the sexual act, according to the logic of sympathetic magic.

Music also has connections with the pounding of corn and sexuality, as seen in customs related to the traditional wedding meal and other customs pertaining to the threshing and pounding of corn among people close to the soil. Important, therefore, are the customary meals of corn of all sorts and other crops, which are boiled together during important moments of the agricultural year. At Eleusis the cracked grain was also made into a sacramental meal. Some of the cracked barley with water and mint added to it was used in the sacramental potion, the *kykeōn*. The drink was of a nature calculated to increase fertility. The ingredients of the potion may be
symbolically significant. It is natural that the drink of the goddess who has the power over growth and fertility should contain water. The idea that the Sky God impregnates the Earth Goddess through rain is expressed in several sources (cf. Aesch. Fr. 25[44]) and in the ceremonial formula, “rain, conceive”. In addition to the importance of the flute and the drum, which are present in all agricultural popular festivals, the phallic fertility-symbol, “The Invincible Life’s Powers” has an important role during the ploughing at Melikē, when the fertility-ensuring character, Babo, pulls it out from “her” sack and plays while uttering magical fertility-formulas. At some point of time during the Eleusinian cult, musical instruments were employed, and their important roles are personified through many of the names in the cult, also having agrarian functions, since the drum is used in threshing the sacred grain. The point is that the female and male genitals, the phallus and the vulva, are personified through a hieros gamos to ensure a plentiful crop.

Perhaps, as the wheat was being cracked, a ritual marriage, complete with copulatory simulation, took place on the freshly ploughed land. A relevant parallel is represented by the damalakia, the young men or “oxen”, who fall to the ground on their knees at Melikē, and thus make a ritual copulation upon ploughed and sown land. Certainly, most often they fall into the mud since this ritual contact with Mother Earth symbolises a ritual sexual intercourse with the earth. The sinking of the Kalogeros three times in the mud to ensure the crop, followed by the washing, which is ritually performed, “so as to have rain in summer”, is also an important ceremony. In earlier times, four men would lift the body and go across the square to the village water-tank which had been filled and throw him in, to secure the rain during summer. When he was lying inside the water-tank, they might also pull him up onto his knees three times, so that the waters were blessed for the sowing. They might also dip him in a tank in one of the villager’s yards, so that the sowing might be blessed. The magical immersion of the Kalogeros signifies magical strengthening and renewal. The ritual may be compared with the ancient evidence of sacred immersion of the god Dionysos, which is given by Homer (Il. 6.132-137), and the annual ceremonial immersion in the Dionysian Marshes (cf. Paus. 2.37.5-6). Immersion in water is an ancient and very widely distributed rite
performed to ensure prosperity. Earth and water both represent elements of fertility, and the one who comes into contact with them is affected by their power. The watering of the earth is universally known as a magic rite. Similarly, the daubing with mud – containing as it does the power of the earth – constitutes a universal magic with properties relating to fertility or rain-making.

The season, the sowing and the “first rains”, are important factors in this connection. In Greece today, the earth is ready to be sown after two or three rains. The farmer is also ready, and he starts the sowing with or without litanies, accompanied by a basket from the housewife containing the three most important or basic elements in the life of the household: flour, salt and candles. They are parallels to the ingredients which are offered during the visits to all the houses in Melikē, and which are offered to the Kalogeros. The farmer brings these along, and when he takes up the seed, he sprinkles it with water, and wishes: “As the water runs, may the life run.”

The connection between the earth and the woman is manifested by the cult dedicated to various Mother Goddesses in certain watery, humid, swampy and fertile areas, such as Gaia in Olympia (Paus. 5.14,10) and on the banks of the river Ilissos where the plain was abounding in water (Thuc. 2.15,4), and Demeter on the fertile Eleusinian plain, beside the river Kephisos (Paus. 1.38,5). In Arkadia, Pausanias speaks of “the temple and the sacred grove of Demeter in the Marsh as they call her” (Paus. 8.36,6). The sanctuaries dedicated both to the Mother Goddess Demeter and the other goddesses are always situated in a place where spring-water rises abundantly (Paus. 7.27,9 f., cf. 1.14,1). The agricultural festivals are therefore performed in important areas where fertility bursts into leaf, such as in swampy marshes around fertile plains. Demeter was worshipped in the Eleusinian marsh and in the marshes at Lerna (Paus. 2.37,1-3, cf. 8.36,6). A modern parallel to the ancient festivals dedicated to a Mother Goddess in the Marsh, is the festival dedicated to the Panagia’s Birthday on 8 September in the island of Euboias at the village Limnē (i.e. marsh), where she is the patron saint. Further, on the festival dedicated to her mother Agia Anna, on 9 December, i.e. the conception of the Panagia, a sacred marriage “the marriage in the ditch” is celebrated. An important ritual with the same goal is presented in traditional descriptions of the Kalogeros festival, when
they take some earth from where the women are sitting to draw the sign of the cross on the foreheads of the young men, the *damalakia*. They always stumble near groups of women spectators; further they roll in the mud, without restraint. The peasants say they fall “to put earth on their noses”. In fact, the contact with Mother Earth perpetuates a most ancient rite of fertility magic. It demonstrates the importance of earth, mud, the lumps of clay that are moulded into pitchers, pots and jars, and the connection with women, birth and fertility (Hes. *Th.* 570-91, *Op.* 60 ff.). The association of clay and clay pots with female fertility is important in several agricultural societies. The purifying and fertility-ensuring function of mud in connection with rituals of passage in the cycle of nature and the life of humans is demonstrated by the mud-bath of the uninitiated at Eleusis. The use of mud was important also in ancient Dionysian rites. Rolling in mud and smearing with mud are well-known features of the customs of today and their use in ensuring fertility also belonged to ancient rituals. The life-giving mud helps both people and their animals. Accordingly, the participants at the Kalogeros are soon as daubed as were the ancient participants in the procession celebrating Dionysos in the Marshes during the Anthesteria.

Today, the waters are blessed and made holy for sea-farers on the eve of Epiphany, the Baptism of Christ. After the service the fields are sprinkled with holy water to protect them from disease. Newly married girls are sprinkled to make them fertile. This is a parallel to the ceremonial bathing of women annually or in times of drought with the express purpose of bringing fruitfulness on man, beast and crop. Of great importance is the ceremony of the throwing of the cross into the sea on 6 January. Panagia and the saints are invoked to make the ritual successful. As soon as the priest throws the cross into the water, several young men dive into the water to find the cross and bring it to the surface. The one who finds it has the privilege of carrying it round the town and is loaded with gifts from everybody. Interesting parallels are the immersion of the Panagia icon in the brook during the procession over the fields of Olympos and the ancient myth about the ring of Polykrates (Hdt. 3.40-3). These are examples of the union of the female and male principles, according to an analysis based upon the association between the ring and the vulva
and the cross and the phallus, which are thrown into the chthonic symbol, the sea.

According to Homer, Okeanos is the river encircling the world, conceived as the great cosmic power (Il. 14.201, 245 f., 302, 21.195 f.), the water, through which all life grows. He is one of the various husbands of the Earth (Ar. Nub. 271, cf. 571 f.), and thus a parallel to Zeus, “the Bringer of showers” (Ar. Av. 1749-60), so the Earth may conceive. Accordingly, in ancient as in modern agricultural contexts, the weather magician wields the fertilising influences of Heaven and the powers of the Earth and brings into being the vegetation which springs up when the thunder shower has burst and Heaven and Earth are married in the life-giving rain.

CONCLUSION

Since there are important characteristics connected with the rain-making rituals in Greece, ancient and modern, and despite many changes in the dynamics of history, it can be claimed that modern rituals as observed in rural Greece can throw new light upon ancient Greek rain-making rituals, and give a clearer picture of the way ancient people perceived the way they could influence the gods to ensure their life-giving water.

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I am grateful to the editor for useful recommendations on conveying my thoughts and helping to clarify my English. Any remaining errors are of course my own.

Notes

1 The article is based on a paper (with slides) presented at the International Water History Association (IWHA) 2nd conference. The
abstract is published in the Abstract collection: “The Role of Water in History and Development”, IWHA 2nd conference 2001, University of Bergen, Norway, pp. 43-4 (cf. also www.iwha.net. IWHA conference). The paper was presented in the conference’s “Theme B, Images of water in religion, myths, literature and art”. A similar paper was presented at the PECSRL Conference (Permanent European Committee for the Study of the Rural Landscape), Limnos/Mytilini/Lesbos, 15th-21st September 2004 (theme: One Region, Many Stories: Mediterranean Landscapes in a Changing Europe). Since 1985, I have had several periods of fieldwork in the Mediterranean, mainly in Greece where I have also been conducting research on religious festivals since 1990, cf. Håland 2004. There, the topics discussed in the following article also are examined further. The problems and fruitfulness of working with anthropological comparative approaches (such as using material from Modern Greek civilisation as models) to Ancient Society are also discussed in my dissertation; cf. further Winkler 1990.

2 Even if the elements of risk today are different than before, when famine was the result if the crop was destroyed, this was the reality until quite recently. Only very lately has Greece been able to turn the provisions of the European Union to practical use, and even with these provisions in reserve it is an important emotional experience for the peasant to see his crop being lost.

3 The ritual and cosmological vocabulary of Greek religion is broader than that of a strictly biblical or doctrinal religion, and the sustaining vehicles (e.g. the calendar) of popular religious activity have pre-Christian as well as Christian sources, since the same socio-economic content is integrated with the Christian pantheon and narratives, as those which the ancients once integrated with narratives of their gods and goddesses, Håland 2004: ch. 3 and 6. See also Stewart 1991; Kyriakidou-Nestoros 1986; Hart 1992: ch. 8.


6 For a selection of works on ancient festivals, see for example Deubner 1932; Brumfield 1981; Parke 1986. See also Nilsson 1961; Gernet 1981; Daraki 1985; Burkert 1983 and 1985; Parker 1996. Håland 2004 presents also several ancient festivals.
7 Cf. also n. 10 below. For the agricultural calendar, see also Nilsson 1961; Brumfield 1981; Petropoulos 1994. See also Bourdieu 1980.

8 An alternative explanation of “Panagia Mesosporitissa” is to be in the earth, i.e. the grains, Loukatos 1982: 132 f., 198.


11 A barley ear represented the bounty of Demeter on coins minted at Metapontum in Southern Italy, one of which is reproduced on the front cover of this issue; for details see inside back cover.

12 Cf. the modern ritual performed by the Archianastenaris discussed below, when hurling the bucketful of water in all directions.

13 Cf. ARV 1472,4 “the Anodos (rising) of Aphrodite”, cf. 888,155, see also 1012,1 the Anodos of Persephone. Cf. Paus. 2.37,5, Semele, and Ap. Rhod. 3.1210 ff. Hekate. See also Harrison 1977: 416 ff.


15 In present-day Romania unemployed youths in the towns are sent to the rural areas to earn their living. But, they do not know the earth or the weather, and have to learn traditional rain-magic. The same happens in Greece when rain fails to come. The point is that the magic is understood to work.

16 Ar. Eq. 729 and Schol., Ar. Plut. 1054 and Schol.; Suda. s.v. εἰρεσιώνη the different significations/uses of the eiresiōnē are collected. See also Ar. Vesp. 398 f. and Schol. to 398. Cf. Plut. Thes. 22.4 f.; Rice and Stambaugh 1979: 136 f. See also Deubner 1932: Pl. 35 (2); Parke 1986: 76, 189, Pl. 32; Harrison 1977: 320 f., Fig. 93.

17 In February the fermentation of the grape-juice has reached completion, and the new wines are opened, cf. Kakouri 1965: 41. The wine-drinking during the Kalogerōs thus becomes a parallel to the drinking contest during the Anthesteria.

18 The Greeks include the First Week after Easter/the White Week in the Easter cycle. The Easter celebrations last throughout the week that follows Easter Sunday, in accordance with a popular proverb determining the duration of the three great festivals dedicated to Christ
During the year: “Three (days) for His Birth, three for Epiphany – and six for Easter.”

19 Cf. Håland 2003 also for the following.

20 An inscription from the sixth century BC marks the Hill of the Nymphs at Athens as belonging to the Nymphs. Zeus also had his place on this hill about thirty paces lower than the modern church of Agia Marina. Today people fetch holy water from the spring connected to the church sacred to Agia Marina, particularly during her festival on 17 July. According to some villagers Agia Katerina lends them water during her festival on 25 November.

21 One may also mention a modern parallel from Italy: Late in the winter of 1989, after three months of drought in the South of Italy, the sea had sunk 60 cm., the rivers were almost dried up and water was rationed. During Sunday’s Mass, the priests prayed for water in the churches. In the village of Avellino maghi with prestige were sent for by the farmers. They conducted rituals of rain-magic, and the press was very satisfied.


23 Clem. Al. Protr. 2.16P-18P, cf. 2.14P f., see also Paus. 1.14,2 f.

24 The 1992 variant of this ritual is Babo’s cup with “holy water”, i.e. women’s fertility-ensuring spittle.

25 For woman and earth, see also Triomphe 1992; Jacobson-Widding and van Beek 1990.

References and Abbreviations


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