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From the Ritual Year of the Miraculous Icon on the Greek Island of Tinos to the Wider Mediterranean

Evy Johanne Håland
evyhaa@online.no

This article will detail the ritual year of “the miraculous icon on Tinos.” Thus it explores the relationship between official and popular religion. Since several of the rituals and symbols recur across many religious groupings in the Middle East and Mediterranean, they might be studied from a comparative perspective, thus transcending European heritages and liberating the ethnological imagination.¹

Introduction

In 1823, a pious nun from Tinos named Pelagia found, in a mystical vision, the miraculous holy icon (image) of the Annunciation (Euangelistrias) of the Virgin Mary (Megalochari, megalo: great, chara: grace, i.e., the Blessed Virgin on Tinos). According to the tradition, Pelagia repeatedly saw in her visions in 1822 the Panagia (i.e., the “All-Holy One”), who ordered her to inform the elders to start digging to find her icon, buried many years ago in an uncultivated field, and to build her “house” (i.e., her church) on that place. On January 30, 1823, the icon was unearthed in the field where it had remained for about 850 years, when the church built on the ruins of the pagan temple of Dionysus had been destroyed and burned down by the Saracens in the 10th century CE.

Two years before the icon was found, the Greek War of Independence (1821) broke out. Finding the icon, constructing the Church of the Annunciation (Euangelistrias), witnessing enormous crowds of pilgrims, and considering all the miracles attributed to the icon moved the government in 1971 to designate the island sacred. The Church then designated Pelagia a saint on September 11 of that year.

On Tinos we meet the coupling of “Greekness” and Orthodoxy and the development of the belief that the Greek War of Liberation had divine sanction. The locals noted that the Panagia appeared around the time of the outbreak of the war of liberation.

Within orthodox belief from its beginning to today, there are many instances of someone “seeing” a Saint in her or his sleep and demanding the faithful to do various things, such as finding a buried icon that wants to be liberated. There are also ancient pre-Christian and Jewish parallels to this phenomenon (cf. Håland 2007a and b).
The study of official vs. popular religious practices allows us to arrive at a fuller comprehension of religious life in the Mediterranean—and indeed of religious culture as a whole. Orthodoxy and official ideology have nowhere near the emotional response of folk religion.

In general, certain cultural patterns and social values are found in the same geographical area. There are, of course, numerous local differences within the Mediterranean itself, but certain cultural patterns such as death-cults (see infra) recur across the many nationalities, languages, and religious groups that live from Portugal in the west to Iraq in the east. Death-cults across ethnicities often have shared saints (cf. Cuffel 2005; Håland 2004) and shared symbols, including icons, earth, and water rituals, in connection with festivals and life-cycle passages (Håland 2005, 2007b).

This work then, has comparative parallels throughout the Mediterranean, and my particular study can become part of a larger study.

**January 30: Anniversary of the Finding of the Holy Icon**

All religious festivals within the Greek Orthodox liturgical year are celebrated on Tinos, but some festivals with historic antecedents are more important than others. The ritual year on Tinos follows the Greek agricultural calendar and begins in autumn, but by the end of the dead period of the grain cycle, as I have illustrated elsewhere (Håland 2005, 2006a, 2007a), the ritual year of the miraculous icon on Tinos starts: this happens on January 30, with the Anniversary of the Finding of the Holy Icon.

The festival is dedicated to *Eureses, i.e., The Finding (of the Holy Icon) and re-enacts the finding of the icon.* The festival starts in the afternoon on the eve of the anniversary, when the icon is carried from the main church to the minor church or chapel below, which is called *Zoodochos Pege, i.e., the “Life-giving Spring” or the “Life-giving Well.”* The inhabitants of Tinos however, call the chapel the “Finding” (*Eureses*). Here, the icon is placed at the site where it had been buried for hundreds of years. A special service is held, dedicated to the Finding of the Holy Icon.

On January 30th itself, an official liturgy is celebrated in the main church and the icon is carried in procession through the decorated streets of the town. After a ceremony in the harbour, the icon is carried back to the church, where a ceremony is held in memory of the builders of the church, whose tombs are at the east side of the building. After vespers, the president of the Church Committee both delivers the
panegyric of the day and provides a report of the activities of the holy foundation during the past year and those planned for the following year.

In the evening, children holding multicoloured lighted lamps follow the church musicians through the streets of Tinos, singing various hymns commemorating the finding of the holy icon. Several pilgrims participate in the festival as well, although more visitors arrive to witness the next festival during the ritual year of the miraculous icon on Tinos.

March 25: The Annunciation of the Virgin Mary

The next festival is dedicated to the “Day of the Annunciation of the Virgin Mary” on March 25. This day has both a religious and a national (political) significance; March 25 is celebrated as Independence Day, marking Greece’s liberation from Turkish rule. In the 19th century this festival was the most important festival on Tinos, and in the beginning of the 20th Century many pilgrims came from Asia Minor, i.e., modern Turkey. Government officials always participate. The festival is particularly related to the important and dominant symbol of the island, “the miraculous icon of the Annunciation of the Virgin.”

The icon is attributed to the apostle and evangelist Luke. He is believed to have painted it during Mary’s lifetime, with her as a living model, thus tying it to the very origins of Christianity and the image directly to Mary herself. It shows Gabriel appearing to Mary with the announcement of Christ’s birth; thus, the icon announces fertility. Today, the icon is covered with offerings of gold and precious stones, and it is not possible to see what it portrays.

The miracles worked by the holy icon have made Tinos a centre of Pan-Orthodox worship. Some miracles are more famous than others, and several miracles are said to have happened during the olonymitia, “the all-night-service” or all night long prayers of March 25. As generally within the Orthodox Church, the festival starts on the eve of the celebration when vespers are celebrated. The church remains open all night, permitting people to stay for an all-night prayer vigil. On the day of the festival a liturgy is celebrated; afterwards the icon is carried in procession to the harbor and back to the church. The Annunciation is also the name of the church of Panagia and the street by which most of the pilgrims descend after completing their proskynema (i.e., the set of devotions a pilgrim performs upon entering the church).
July 23: Anniversary of the Vision of Agia Pelagia

The third important festival is dedicated to one of the most recent Orthodox saints, the aforementioned Saint Pelagia. “Her Vision” is celebrated on July 23. During the festival the ritual connection between the Monastery of Kekhrovouno, where she lived, and the church Euangelistrias in the city of Tinos is marked by way of a procession with the miraculous icon.

On the eve of the festival a liturgy is celebrated in the church, which is crowded with islanders, and all those coming home to Tinos for their summer holidays. The icon of Pelagia is decorated with flowers and burning candles, and it plays a main role during the liturgy together with the miraculous icon. Pelagia also has a chapel dedicated to her below the main church. Her icon is situated in front of the stones from earlier sanctuaries removed when the miraculous icon was unearthed. Although the church wanted to have her bones when they were disinterred three years after her death (as is the general rule within the Orthodox Church), her relics, *i.e.*, her head, is still in the Monastery of Kekhrovouno, where she had her visions in 1822 (Kardamitse 1992; Karita n.d.).

Early the next morning a procession, headed by the church musicians, carries the miraculous icon. Accompanying the procession are the nuns of the monastery and islanders. They walk to the harbor and are carried by taxi to the monastery of Kekhrovouno, dedicated to the “Dormition of the Panagia,” where the people remain all day. Mass is celebrated, followed by a lunch “served by the abbess” to all the participants, the most significant visitors receiving the most elaborate meals. Most people stay in the monastery all day, visiting the cell of Agia Pelagia, seeing her humble belongings and her ascetic bed.

When she was disinterred three years after her death, the nuns hid her remains since they did not want them to be buried outside of the monastery. Later, her head was found buried in a chapel dedicated to John the Baptist. After lunch several women perform their own liturgy in this church. Then, a group of women join in singing hymns to Pelagia in front of the iconostasis where they found her skull. Today, her holy head is seen in her church next to her cell where a liturgy is celebrated in the afternoon. Later, during a nine kilometer-long procession taking several hours and consisting of the clergy and many faithful, the holy icon is returned to the Church Euangelistrias in Tinos town. Arriving late at night, the icon and the whole procession are welcomed by fireworks, torches and beeping ships and buses. The miraculous
icon is returned to the church, after sermons and speeches on a podium by the waterfront, thus closing this very picturesque local festival.

**August 15: The Dormition of the Virgin Mary**

The most important festival on modern Tinos is also the most important Pan-Hellenic festival. This festival is dedicated to the “Dormition” of the Panagia, the Bearer (or Mother of God). It is celebrated on August 15, marking the end of the 15-day fast in honour of the Panagia. The feast of the Dormition began in the seventh century, and in Greek Orthodoxy it still retains this name.

All year pilgrims visit Tinos, but the most enormous crowd of devotees visits during the August festival. The Dormition of the Panagia is also an important ideological festival, combining the celebration of the Dormition with Armed Forces Day. The service is followed by a procession at 11 a.m. of government top cabinet members, the head of the Greek Orthodox Church. clergy, and other notables. A detachment of sailors marches at the end of the procession. The national Hellenic Navy always sends warships to Tinos on August 15, because the Panagia represents the intimate and hazardous relations of the Greeks towards the sea.

Nationalism is manifest in the speeches and posters around the town. The Navy is honored because it is “under the protection of the Virgin.” Posters depict a mixture of modern and ancient symbols. The message is always the same: August 15 is proclaimed as the Day of Military Strength, and the symbols of the navy, the air force and the army are illustrated.

Several hours before the service is finished, a long queue of pilgrims lines up in the street waiting for the icon, and as the icon is carried down the street, people bow in its path so that the icon may pass over them. In addition to the crowd of followers, thousands of onlookers watch the procession, many on their knees, some holding incense burners or lighted candles. Sick pilgrims lie down, risking trampling. Overhead jet planes fly, accompanied by the salutes of warships and cannon at the memorial in the harbor inaugurated in 2002.

The ceremony officially ends when the clergy and the officials board a warship carrying them to where the Greek destroyer Elli was sunk by an Italian submarine as it was anchored off the Tinos harbour on August 15, 1940. A service is held, and the priest and the president throw laurel crowns on the watery tomb of the ship and its
crew. “We came to pay honor to Panagia, who helped us to beat the fascists,” said one of the survivors of the Elli crew in 1993.

Panagia’s death or “Dormition” is followed by her burial or the “Ninth Day’s ritual of Panagia” on August 23, thus reflecting ordinary death-rituals and the following memorial service. The August 15 cycle ends in this memorial service nine days after her death.

The Miraculous Icon and Other Important Symbols and Rituals

The important symbol of the island, “The Miraculous Icon of the Annunciation of the Virgin,” belongs to all the festivals. In addition, there are popular customs related to the significance of fetching holy water and earth as well as other symbols that have had a very long tradition within Greek religion, modern and ancient.

Holy water, agiasma, is found in most Greek sanctuaries, and some sanctuaries offer particularly miracle-working water with its own legend attached to it. The sanctuary on Tinos has a chapel dedicated to the “Life-giving Spring” and rituals connected with water are important in all Greek churches. Below the main church at Tinos are several minor churches or chapels within ancient caves, such as the aforementioned chapel dedicated to Pelagia. In the first chapel is a holy spring where the pilgrims fetch water; this is thought to promote fertility and to cure sickness.

According to tradition, the well was found in 1823 during the first excavations made in search of the holy icon, when the ruins of the foundations of the Byzantine Church were brought to light. The well was deep, but completely dry. On the day they laid the corner-stone of the church, the bishop sent a little boy to bring some water from the town for the celebration of the hallowing of the waters. Shortly afterward, the child was back and told the bishop that the well next to the foundations was full of water. Having heard this, the bishop, accompanied by the notables went to the actual site and they saw with great surprise that the dry well was now filled up to the brink with water.

From that time, the water of the well, now called Zeodochos Pege, the “Life-giving Spring,” has been used by the pilgrims as sacred water and everybody takes it along in a special vial to keep at home as a talisman.

The pilgrims arrive at Tinos after August first, the day on which the 15-day fast starts. People, mostly women, make their way to the church barefoot, on their knees, or on
their stomachs, bringing with them various offerings, sometimes tied on their backs: candles as tall as the donor, icons, or wax. They may also bring incense, silver candlesticks, censers, bread, wine, or sheep (favored by the Gypsies). The most common offering is a silver- or gold-plated ex-voto (tama/ta) representing a person who has been miraculously cured by the icon, or the cured limb itself.

Megalochares Street leads directly from the harbor to the church. It is a wide avenue about a kilometer in length, lined with shops and booths, particularly at its lower end. As soon as pilgrims disembark from the ships and make their way up the hill, they are assailed with the cries of the shopkeepers who stand outside their stores, hawking the items necessary for a successful pilgrimage: "Lampades! Tamata! Mpoukalakia gia agiasma! Edo Lampades!" ("Large candles! Tamata! Little bottles for holy water! Here [are] large candles!").

At the top of the hill, when arriving at the doorway of the church, the pilgrims offer their large candles. Afterwards, they are lining up on the steps at the Church of the Annunciation, waiting their turn to enter the main chapel. Of particular importance are their devotions in front of the miraculous icon. It is especially important to kiss the icon itself. One might also touch the icon with ex-votos to make them holy, or cotton wool, which afterwards is considered as an important amulet. Most of the pilgrims stay for a service, but even during services many pilgrims continue to move around, engaging in their own rituals.

Afterwards they descend to the chapel of holy water and earth beneath the church, since most pilgrims confine their attentions to the main sanctuary and to the chapel of holy water below the church: "Where do we go for holy water?" pilgrims ask each other, and other more knowledgeable pilgrims direct them downstairs, to the chapel beneath the main church where they will find the holy water front. The pilgrims drop some money in a carved wooden counter with a slot, pick up candles to be lighted, and inside the first chapel they kiss the icons before they take some earth from the hole where the miraculous icon was found. Afterwards, they queue up to obtain holy water in small bottles or they drink directly from the tap. Many pilgrims only carry out the most important rituals and obtain the holy symbols before they return to the harbor.

During the festivals earth and water are considered to be particularly holy. On the eve of her panegyrikos, the Dormition of the Panagia, many children are baptised in the chapel of holy water, in the "Life-giving Spring" (Håland 2007a: Fig. 15).
Marriageable girls or newly married girls fetch earth and holy water to assure their own fertility and health.

From Tinos to the Wider Mediterranean and Beyond

Many of the actual rituals and symbols, particularly the importance of fetching water and earth as well as the pilgrimages and processions connected with holy persons who are dead, recur across several civilizations and religious groupings in the Middle East and Mediterranean areas. They might therefore be studied from a comparative civilizational perspective, thus transcending European heritages and liberating the ethnological imagination of Europe.

Death-cult

The Orthodox Easter festival, dedicated to the “Death and Resurrection of Christ,” and the Dormition of the Panagia, are the most important Pan-Hellenic death-festivals. The Greek name of the Virgin, i.e., the “All-Holy one,” reminds us that she is considered the most important intercessor and saint in the Greek tradition. The tradition emphasizes her maternal role as the Mother of God rather than her Virginity. Please note: in the Orthodox Church, Mary is not seen as immaculately conceived and bodily assumed into heaven. Thus, the Orthodox Church celebrates her Dormition, rather than her Assumption, and she is not a semi-deified human as in Catholicism (cf. Dubisch 1995; Economides 1986).

The festivals dedicated to the Christian saints address dead persons who have the same mystical powers as the ancient mediators, the heroes and heroines. In Greek culture the death-cult, a cult of dead family-members and “great persons,” involves offerings and prayers on their tombs. The cult of newly deceased persons and the cult of long dead heroes or heroines both bear witness to a death-cult tradition in both ancient and modern Greece.

The cult honouring dead holy men and women is parallel to the ancient cult of the heroes and the medieval practice of sainthood in Christianity. Ancestor worship is the worship or propitiation of the ancestors. Hero- and heroine worship, and later the cult of the saints, is the worship of a deceased important man or woman. The phenomenon called death-cult is an important key in connection with most of the religious festivals. These festivals very often are yearly memorials and celebrations dedicated to a deceased guardian of society. This guardian has always been a mediator between human beings and the supernatural within the hierarchical building that constitutes
the polytheistic-polydaimonistic society, in the same way as he or she often functioned when still alive and within human society.

The cult of the bones of dead mediators also has a long tradition in Greek culture, such as in the case of the ancient heroes Orestes or Theseus (Hdt. 1.67 f.; Plut. Thes. 35 f., cf. also Paus. 3.3, 7), or the modern Agios Nektarios, whose body - especially his head - is particularly venerated on the island of Aegina on November 9.

On Tinos we see the death-cult in connection with the holy head of Pelagia, which resides in an ornate case near the main entrance of her church, and through the glass her skull can be seen. Pilgrims pay the same devotion to her head as to the miraculous icon, touching the glass top with similar votive offerings or objects they want to make holy, such as cotton, flowers, wreaths, candles, bread, or cloth. Flower buds from the wreath of flowers decorating the case are considered effective amulets after being crossed three times over the saint’s head. The same procedure is carried out in front of the figure depicting Panagia on her deathbed (epitaphios) during the “Ninth Day’s ritual of Panagia” (Håland 2007a: Fig. 26).

We see the death-cult in non-Christian areas as well, for example in connection with the Turkish Mevlana, and the marabouts (holy men) in North-Africa (Eickelman 1981), an indication of the continuity of these customs throughout the Mediterranean.

In the Holy Land one might mention the continuous quarrels over the tombs of Abraham, Sarah, Isaac, Rebecca, Jacob, and Leah in the Cave of Machpelah in Hebron, the resting place of the Judaism’s patriarchs and matriarchs. Rachel’s tomb and the Milk Grotto of Mary, formerly dedicated to the vegetation god, Adonis (Håland 2007a: ch. 5), illustrate two women’s shrines in Bethlehem. There are several shared saints and festivals in the area (Cuffel 2005, 2009). The most important festival of Shi’a Islam is centered on the death of Hussein, grandson of the Prophet Mohammad. During this festival believers must make a pilgrimage to Hussein’s tomb in Kerbela, Iraq (Grunebaum 1981). This is a very bloody and passionate pilgrimage that has long worried secular rulers such as Saddam Hussein and the late Shah of Iran. As early as 850, the Caliph found it politically necessary to level Hussein’s tomb and to prohibit pilgrimages to Kerbela.

But government intervention proved of little effect and the rebuilt grave has remained to this day the devotional center for pilgrims from all over the Shi’a world. It is especially popular to be buried by the sanctuary. In Iran, the anniversary of
Khomeini’s death still draws huge crowds. After the fall of Saddam Hussein, the Shi’a were permitted to make pilgrimages to Kerbela again (Håland 2004). When watching the pilgrims crawling and rolling up to the sanctuary of Kerbela, I started to think about my own fieldwork experiences on Tinos, where the pilgrims arrive in the same way (Håland 2007a: Figs. 18 f.) and where the builders of the church have their tombs in the church’s courtyard. In many such places—the ancient and modern—religion and national identity coincide.

**Water and Earth**

The cultic importance of water and earth has an honoured place in Greek tradition and religion going back as far as antiquity. Purification by earth was usual in certain ancient mystery cults. Ancient stories tell of ceremonies exclusively performed by women when celebrating their goddesses, such as the _pannychis_, all-night festival and clay-daubing of marriageable girls at the Artemis shrine at Ledrinoi (Paus. 6.22.8 f.). From ancient Greece (Paus. 9.17, 4-6), we also learn about the importance of taking earth from a particular grave before the grain harvest and laying it on the tumulus of the heroine Antiope to ensure the crop. In modern Greece holy earth from graves at the cemetery is also important, thus paralleling the holy earth from Panagia’s sanctuary on Tinos; both are seen as powerful fertility- and healing-remedies — along with the holy water.

The clear bubbling water of a spring rising out of the earth, habitually regarded as a powerful Water-Nymph, was, in the imagination of the ancient Greeks, a gift of the water deities, the goddesses by whom all life on earth was fed. Water was considered to have therapeutic and purifying properties. Near the city at Odysseus’ island was a

(...) fair-flowing fountain, wherefrom the townsfolk drew water (...), and around was a grove of poplars, that grow by the waters, circling it on all sides, and down the cold water flowed from the rock above, and on the top was built an altar to the nymphs where all passers-by made offerings (_Od._ 17.208-212, cf. 240).^5

When Poseidon violated Demeter, coupling with her in the form of a stallion, she became angry. Later she got over her wrath and she fancied a wash in the river Ladon. According to Pausanias (8.25,6), this is how the goddess got her titles, the Fury because of her wrath, and Washing Demeter because she washed in the Ladon.
Strabo (8.6, 8) describes expiatory purifications that were performed at the lake of Lerna, near which was the spring of Amymone. This is also where the heads of the murdered husbands of the Danaids were buried, according to tradition. In other words, they were buried in one of the Demetrian fruitful marshes, and thus married to the earth.

Paralleling the healing pools in modern Lourdes in Southern France — where Bernadette Soubirous (1844-1879) had several mystical visions from 1858 of the Virgin Mary appearing to her in a cave — is the Tinos-legend (cf. Håland 2007b), with its six water reservoirs in the Asklepieion, or sanctuary of Asklepios of ancient Corinth. Their dimensions suggest that they were used to store water in summer when the springs ran low, and that the water was recycled for repeated use.

It is also possible that water from the thermal springs at Therma (Loutraki, cf. loutro or bath) was transported to the Asklepieion in Corinth. Thus the Asklepieion at Therma (Loutraki) could have been a branch of the Corinthian Asklepieion. Six thermal springs bubble from the ground at Loutraki, and even in ancient times they were considered to be something special. Balneological (science of baths) analysis has shown that their water has a very high mineral content and is slightly radioactive. Rainwater was collected in one of the cisterns. The total capacity of the water basins and reservoirs was about 341,406 cubic meters.

In ancient times the water of the Fountain of Lerna was considered particularly wholesome and good, and its quality is comparable to that of the water from the Peirene Fountain (Ath. 4.156e).

Springs are often connected to healing and purification in the ancient Greek world, in the Graeco-Roman world, and in the modern Mediterranean. In both ancient Greek writings and in the modern Greek belief, water is regarded highly, mentioned with great frequency in connection with exceptional powers. Water is also often dangerous, because it is around sources that the Nereids may gather (cf. Blum/Blum 1970; Håland 2005, 2007b).

The Greek ritual carried out on “New” Friday, or the Friday after Easter, which is dedicated to the Panagia under her attribute of the “Life-giving Spring” (Håland 2007b), is a part of the spring festivals, and it may also be regarded as a purification ritual before the new season, which starts with the Resurrection of Christ. In this connection it may be compared to other purification rituals, such as rituals carried out...
in Persia, and under Persian influence in Iraq, Syria and Egypt, where New Year was (and is) celebrated in spring.7

In Persia, around 1008 CE, people went to the water of the aqueducts and wells. Frequently, they drew running water in a vase, and poured it over themselves, considering this a good omen and a means to keep off harm. People also sprinkled water on each other, of which the cause was said to be the same as that of washing. According to another report of the same custom, once after a long drought, rain fell on New Year’s Day. People considered the rain a good omen, and poured it over each other. Afterwards the ritual remained among them as a custom that was carried out annually. The water-sprinkling may, of cause, also simply have held the place of a purification by which people cleansed their bodies from the smoke of fire and from the dirt connected with attending the fires in winter.

Water has fertility-enhancing, healing, purifying and protecting powers. In the form of Holy Water, it is central to many rituals designed to ward off evil and to ensure blessings. It is also used in conjunction with different magical remedies. In an account from modern Greece it is said that the spring at the Church of Christ at Spate lends power to stones gathered there; these, added to holy water and passion flowers, make a charm which protects a house from illness.

An earlier account of sainthood in Islam gives interesting parallels to ancient and modern Greek customs in connection with death-cults.8 The British archaeologist Sir Arthur Evans described a cult of a minor Muslim saint’s sanctuary in the southern Balkans (i.e., Albania), approximately a hundred years ago. The worshipper who would conform to the full ritual filled a keg of water from a spring that rises near the shrine. In the centre of the grave is a hole, into which the water from the holy spring was poured and thus mixed with the holy earth. Of this the votary would drink three times, and he thrice anointed his forehead with it. Following were other rituals to shape the dreams of the faithful.

As already mentioned, springs are important in connection with the sanctuaries of Asklepios, the Greek god of medicine. But, long before he became famous, healing springs sacred to the Water-Nymphs and Artemis were widespread. Springs were also connected with caves. According to Pausanias, a ritual performed in a Nymphs’ cave containing sulphur springs cured leprosy.9

Today, people from all over the world come to Lourdes and Tinos, famous for their healing capacities because of their holy healing and purifying waters, which the
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pilgrims takes home. It is also important to note that modern sanctuaries often are situated at places where ancient pre-Christian people also made pilgrimages to holy springs. This is seen, for example in Greece, where Agia Marina of the Holy Springs has her church next to the ancient site of a temple holy to the goddess Themis (Blum/Blum 1970: 324) and Pangia has replaced the Water-Nymphs in the Acropolis cave at Athens (Håland 2007b, cf. 2005).

In Pamukkale in Turkey, the excellent curative properties of the waters, known from ancient times in nearby Hierapolis, where the Great Goddess was worshipped (Luc. Syr. D. 45-48), have permitted the construction in modern times of spas, generally annexed to the hotels in the area. The ancient Romans especially appreciated this place.

Water and earth also played a role in a famous ancient war. In the 5th century BCE, the king of Persia set out to conquer all the Greek communities that refused to give him earth and water (a tribute) (Hdt. 6.94). The Greeks refused because these symbols were reserved for eternal divinities, not a living person.

On the other hand, the story illustrates that they shared a fundamental value-system, despite their differing official political or religious ideologies. Today, the custom is a central element both in the church on Tinos and among Muslims in Istanbul where people offer the religious leader water and earth, thus showing their submission. Afterwards, the same symbols are redistributed, thus paralleling the ritual surrounding bread within the Greek Orthodox Church, where the faithful also fetch water and earth.

In Istanbul, many of the fountains with holy water (agiasma), formerly associated with Greek Orthodox saints, have been adapted by Muslim believers (Sezim and Darnault 2005). Springs are also of fundamental importance in general within the Islamic rituals, since prayer is valid only when performed in a state of ritual purity and therefore has to be preceded by ablation, wudū'. The duty of ablation accounts for the presence of fountains in the mosque courts, thus paralleling the Asklebian demand for ritual purity in ancient Greek culture, also seen in the modern importance of agiasma, for example in connection with the ritual year of the icon on Tinos.

Thus, my fieldwork experiences from Greece, coupled with this short review of the beliefs and practices of the wider Mediterranean world, might suggest a way to do similar analysis in other regions and cultures. In the Mediterranean world particular
cults such as death-cult and symbols such as water and earth have shaped religious beliefs and practices.

Notes:


2 See Meraklès 1986: 178n.14 for the Euresës-festival on January 30 and the relationship with invention of tradition, the customs, etc. and his citation from Phlōrakē 1973. See also Håland 2007a: ch. 4 and 6 and particularly my forthcoming book for extensive discussions of older customs in new settings or the modern recycling of ancient customs. The survival of values and beliefs, even though new normative religions have been introduced, and the close relationship between the official Orthodox religion and popular religion, particularly in the rural parts of Greece, is further discussed in Håland 2005, 2007a: ch. 3. I disagree, therefore, with Meraklès’ assertion that the customs during the festival are new inventions. Although the Euresës-festival is new, several of the customs in connection with this and other festivals (such as the importance of fetching holy water and earth), have very long traditions within Greek culture, a fact which is also evident for Meraklès as illustrated in his later reference to Katerina Kakouri (cf. Håland 2007a: 134), see also infra.

3 Bent 1965 gives a vivid description of the festival in the 19th century comparing it with ancient pilgrimages to the neighbouring sacred island of Delos; see also Håland 2007a: 113 f. for discussion.

4Abbreviations for ancient authors and titles are listed with the respective references, infra.

5 This aspect and the following topics from ancient Greek myths and culture are further discussed in Håland 2009.
The following is mainly based on Kasas and Struckmann 1990.

The following draws on Grunebaum 1981: 54 f. quoted from al-Bèrûnî, who wrote ca. 1008. Cf. Håland 2005, for similar New Year rituals in Greece, i.e., in the beginning of January, but also the rituals after the Resurrection, Håland 2007b.


Paus. 5.5,11, cf. 9.40,1 f., cf. Håland 2009, see also 2005.

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