

Religion

The Homeric poems

Polytheism

Gods had to be appeased by sacrifice

Hesiod, *Theogony*

The gods in human mould but superior power and immortality:

Xenophanes fr. 170: But mortals consider that the gods are born, and that they have clothes and speech and bodies like their own.

Control of the cults

Cults controlled by the aristocracy, e.g. the Eumolpidae and Ceryces. Official expounders of ritual (*exegetai*).

Every *polis* a religious association, patron deity was often female (Athena at Athens, Sparta; Hera in Argos, Tiryns and Samos; probably Artemis at Smyrna), but Apollo at Corinth, Poseidon at Eretria.

Role of tyrants in cults: Peisistratus (cf. Great Panathenaia), Pheidon of Argos at Olympia, Cleisthenes of Sicyon at Delphi; worship of Dionysus encouraged; religion used as propaganda:

Herodotus 1.60.3-5: Peisistratus agreed to the terms which Megacles proposed and then, to bring about his return to power, they devised between them what seems to me the silliest trick which history has to record. The Greeks have never been simpletons; for centuries past they have been distinguished from other nations by superior wits; and of all Greeks the Athenians are allowed to be the most intelligent: yet it was at the Athenians' expense that this ridiculous trick was played. In the village of Paeania there was a handsome woman called Phye, nearly six feet tall, whom they fitted out in a suit of armour and mounted in a chariot; then, after getting her to pose in the most striking attitude, they drove into Athens, where messengers who had preceded them were already, according to their instructions, talking to the people and urging them to welcome Peisistratus back, because the goddess Athena herself had shown him extraordinary honour and was bringing him home to her own Acropolis. They spread this nonsense all over the town, and it was not long before rumour reached the outlying villages that Athena was bringing Peisistratus back, and both villagers and townsfolk, convinced that the woman Phye was indeed the goddess, offered her their prayers and received Peisistratus with open arms.

Other acts of Peisistratus:

central city sanctuary (homes for the gods on earth)

centralised cults: Eleusinian mysteries; Artemis at Brauron; Eurysakes, son of Ajax

Solon: Genesia (in honour of the dead)

State expenditure on temples and sacrifices
perhaps second to war (one-fifth of Athens' internal revenue in classical period)

The family and religion

All Greek social groups were religious unions

The *oikos*: Zeus Herkeios

The *gene*: Apollo Patroös

The phratries: Zeus Phratrios

Candidates for magistracies had preliminary scrutiny (*dokimasia*) and had to answer whether they had an Apollo Patroös and a Zeus Herkeios and where their shrines were:

Ps.-Aristotle, *Constitution of Athens* 55.3: When the archons are scrutinised, they are asked first, 'Who is your father, and from which deme? Who is your father's father? Who is your mother? Who is your mother's father, and from which deme?' Then the archons are asked whether they have a cult of Apollo of Ancestry and Zeus of the Courtyard, and where the sanctuaries of these are; whether they treat their parents well; whether they pay their taxes; whether they have performed their military service. After asking these questions, the presiding magistrate says, 'Call witnesses to these things'.

The family and religion 2

Amalgamation of private cults was a means of making a *polis* more democratic:

Aristotle, *Politics* 6.1319b19-26: There are other steps also which may be usefully taken in promoting this kind of democracy, such as those used by Cleisthenes when he wanted to strengthen the democracy at Athens, and by the promoters of democracy at Cyrene. I mean that new tribes and brotherhoods should be established, more numerous than the old, and ceremonies held at private shrines should be concentrated on a few public ones; and in general one must fix things so that there is as much social intercourse as possible and a break-up of the former associations.

Family cults side by side with state cults: shrines of Zeus Herkeios and Apollo Patroös

State concerned to prevent loss of family cults:

Isaeus 7.30: All men, when they are near their end, take measures of precaution on their own behalf to prevent their families from becoming extinct and to secure that there shall be someone to perform sacrifices and carry out the customary rites over them. And so, even if they die without issue, they at any rate adopt children and leave them behind. And there is not merely a personal feeling in favour of this course, but the state has taken public measures to secure that it shall be followed, since by law it entrusts the archon with the duty of preventing families from being extinguished.

The family and religion 3

Selling one's land ended family's hearth and led to loss of family tombs. Lack of proper burials caused distress during the plague:

Thucydides 2.52.3-4: The temples in which they took up their quarters were full of the dead bodies of people who had died inside them. For the catastrophe was so overwhelming that men, not knowing what would happen next to them, became indifferent to every rule of religion or of law. All the funeral ceremonies which used to be observed were now disorganised, and they buried the dead as best they could. Many people, lacking the necessary means of burial because so many deaths had already occurred in their households, adopted the most shameless methods. They would arrive first at a funeral pyre that had been made by someone else, put their own dead upon it and set it alight; or, finding another pyre burning, they would throw the corpse that they were carrying on top of the other one and go away.

Arginousae (e.g. Xen. *Hell.* 1.7.4ff.; Diod. 13.100)

Plutarch, *Nicias* 6.5: On this occasion it happened that when the Athenians took up their dead, two of their number were left behind unnoticed. Nicias, as soon as he learned this, halted the fleet and sent a herald to ask leave to take up the two bodies; and he did this, even though by unwritten law and custom the side which asked for a truce to recover its dead was regarded as having given up any claim to victory, and if this request was granted, it was no longer entitled to set up a trophy. The proof of victory consists in the final mastery of the field, and the side which asks leave evidently does not possess this, or else it would take what it wants. Nicias, however, preferred to renounce the victory and his personal triumph rather than allow two of his fellow-countrymen to lie unburied.

Thirty Tyrants disregarding proper burial of their victims:

Lysias 12.18: And when he was being brought away dead from the prison, although we had three houses amongst us, they did not permit his funeral to be conducted from any of them, but they hired a small hut in which to lay him out. We had plenty of cloaks, yet they refused our request of one for the funeral; but our friends gave either a cloak, or a pillow, or whatever each had to spare, for his interment.

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Slaves part of the family (A. Ag. 1035-8) and initiated into family cult, though not always:

Isaeus 8.16: And when he sacrificed to Zeus Ctesius – a festival to which he attached a special importance, to which he admitted neither slaves nor free men outside his own family, at which he personally performed all the rites – we participated in this celebration.

Bastards excluded from family cults after 403:

Demosthenes 43.51: But no illegitimate child of either sex shall have the right of succession either to religious rites or civic privileges, from the time of the archonship of Eucleides (403).

The family and religion 5

Solon

Plutarch, *Solon* 24.2: His law concerning naturalised citizens is a surprising one, because it granted naturalisation only to those who had been permanently exiled from their own country, or who had emigrated with their families to Athens to practise a trade.

Demes: fourth-century inscription (Greater Demarchia), deme Erchia sets out the deme's festivals month by month, and how the meat was to be disposed of.

Phratries: admission to the phratry at the Apatouria. The Demotionidae inscription details the procedures and the two sacrifices performed, the lesser (*meion*) and the youth's (*koureion*).

Classical Athens

Three kinds: those originating in fertility cults (the Haloa to Demeter and Kore, Rural Dionysia, Lenaia, Anthesteria, City Dionysia, with the competitions, Thargelia, Panathenaea, Greater Eleusinian Mysteries, Thesmophoria):

Aristophanes, *Acharnians* 237-52: Dicaeopolis: Peace; keep silence.

Chorus: Quiet all! Didn't you hear the invocation to silence? Here's the man we want. This way, out of the road, everyone. It looks as if he's coming out to sacrifice.

Dic.: Peace; keep silence. Basket-bearer, a little forward. Xanthus, set the phallus erect. Daughter, put the basket down and we'll begin.

Daughter: Mother, pass over the ladle. I must pour the sauce over the cake.

Dic.: Splendid! Lord Dionysus, let my celebration of this festival, my sacrifice, my honouring of the Country Dionysia, with all my household, be acceptable in your sight – and no military service. And may the Thirty Years' Peace turn out well for me.

Photius, *Lexicon s.v. miara hemera (Day of Pollution)*: In the Feast of the Cups in the month of Anthesterion (February), in which they believe that the souls of the dead arise. They used to chew buckthorn and anoint their doors with pitch.

Harpocration, *Lexicon s.v. Panathenaea*: Two Panathenaic festivals are held at Athens, one annually and one, called the Great Panathenaea, every four years. Isocrates in *Panathenaicus*. Erichthonius the son of Hephaestus was the first to celebrate the festival (so Hellanicus and Androtion, both in *Atthis* book 1). Before that it was called the Athenaea (by Istrus in *History of Attica* book 3).

those to win the help of powerful spirits – hero cults and those of patrons (Chalkeia, Hephaistia, Promethia, Hermaia, Elaphebolia to Artemis)

those concerned with important stages in human life (Apatouria, Brauronia for marriage, Genesia, Diasia – treat the dead kindly and blessings to the living: Zeus Melichios)

Classical Athens 2

Festival liturgies

Importance of correct performance of festivals to be of great importance. Attendance at rites by those unqualified (outsiders or impure) could incur the gods' anger:

Antiphon 5.82: Many, too, have been proved to be defiled as they stood beside a sacrifice, because they prevented the proper performance of the rites.

Rare meal of meat:

Scholiast to Aristophanes, *Clouds* 386: *Sauce for the Panathenaea*...Since all the Athenian colonies sent an ox for sacrifice at the Panathenaic festival there was no shortage of meat, everyone had their fill and ate more than they needed owing to the quantity of meat.

Correct performance and wide participation (Theoric Fund from the mid-fourth century)

Conservatism and change

Traditional beliefs challenged in fifth century: trials of Anaxagoras , Protagoras and Socrates; association with Pericles

Homer and Hesiod; identification of natural phenomena with a god (fire – Hephaestus) but also multivalent gods

More and more attributed to natural causes

Conception of a just god (esp. Zeus and Apollo): Pindar refuses to believe certain myths (e.g. *Nemean* 5.14)

Xenophanes (6th century) blames Homer and Hesiod:

Xenophanes fr. 169: Homer and Hesiod have attributed to the gods everything that is a shame and reproach among men, stealing and committing adultery and deceiving each other.

Blame for unacceptable myths falls on the poets and tragedians in Plato, *Rep.* 2 and 3

Conservatism and change 2

Xenophanes' supreme god:

Xenophanes fr. 173: One god, greatest among gods and men, in no way similar to mortals either in body or in thought.

Anaximenes' Air; Anaxagoras' Mind; Protagoras and Forethought of the divine; Diogenes of Apollonia equated god, mind and air. Xenophanes argued that different peoples made their gods in their own image:

Xenophanes fr. 171: The Ethiopians say that their gods are snub-nosed and black, the Thracians that theirs have light blue eyes and red hair.

Xenophanes fr. 172: But if cattle and horses or lions had hands, or were able to draw with their hands and do the works that men can do, horses would draw the forms of the gods like horses, and cattle like cattle, and they would make their bodies such as they each had themselves.

Nomos ('custom') and *physis* ('nature'): Critias (leader of 30): gods were invented by wise and cunning statesmen to frighten men, higher politics to be conducted by the law of the jungle.. Prodicus: things in nature wholesome and nutritive for mankind were looked on as gods and honoured accordingly. Protagoras and Democritus: origin of religion in a natural early human reaction, religion is man-made and belongs to *nomos*.

The Hellenistic period

Role of *polis* declined, also commitment to Olympian gods and cult of ancestors in the male line

Kings made gods (ruler-cult)

Mystery cults (e.g. Eleusis) and growth of scepticism among many with increased poverty: acceptance of Fate (*Tyche*), widely worshipped in the Hellenistic world (role in Polybius' *History*)

Immigration: inhabitants of new Greek cities of the Seleucid Empire and Alexandria established new, collective religious systems. Voluntary associations (burial clubs), providing for feasts.

Cults of local native communities persisted

Rich clung to Olympian gods, bidding for priesthoods

Growth of new mysterious and ecstatic cults, especially Isis (organised by voluntary associations); syncretism (all goddesses are one goddess with different names, leading to monotheism)

Oriental cults (especially of Egypt), e.g. Sarapis, Isis and Cybele), cults promising personal survival after death (Zeus Soter)