

Discuss the significance of the Thorikos calendar in our understanding of Athenian religion

The Thorikos calendar was an extremely important discovery that shaped the way in which our understanding of Athenian religion grew. There is much that is unknown about the ancient world and as such, any discovery is extremely significant- this one especially so since it gave insight into previously unheard-of details that are seemingly unique to Athens itself¹. A calendar discovery is a very useful tool in order to understand how a specific polis practiced religion and as such, the Thorikos calendar is an artifact of extreme significance for someone attempting to understand Athenian religion².

The Thorikos calendar was created around the 440-420 BCE³ and as such, is a great artifact in which to garner information about Athenian religious customs straight from the time itself. This is because Thorikos was a southeastern deme of Attica⁴ and therefore would encapsulate the religious traditions which were specific to Athens itself. This is especially significant because each polis in the ancient Greek world had its own specific traditions and ways in which religion was celebrated⁵. They even had different gods in which their primary focus lay⁶. Thereby meaning that finding a calendar is extremely significant for the way in which Athenian religion could be studied as what may be celebrated in one polis would not necessarily line up to another. The Greeks practiced through actions rather than a singular belief- orthopraxy rather than orthodoxy⁷ and as such, for those studying them a calendar which detailed the actions that should be taken is a much-valued artifact to find.

In fact, the calendar is especially significant because it not only details the actions that needed to be taken, but the times in which they should be completed also⁸. This helps our understanding of Athenian religion a lot because due to the ancient Greek world being agricultural-based, the calendar helps further demonstrate how the agricultural seasons helped shape the religious ones⁹. It's significance to Athenian religion is not only important to us, but was extremely important at the time too- the calendar being a very important tool which the Athenians used to plan their years and ensure their worship of the gods was enough to appease them¹⁰. The calendar also further demonstrates how unique Athens was as a polis because they had at least 60 days devoted to festivals per year¹¹- this was more than any other Greek state is known to have had, which is impressive considering festivals occurred all year-round¹². This is extremely significant because although it is not all-encompassing knowledge of religion in Athens as a whole. It doesn't, for example, include information on the mystery cults of the time and how those could be much more equal in terms of religious opportunity and celebration than the public ones¹³. It does however,

¹ Lambert and Schuddeboom and Osborne, 2018, Lupu, NGSL 1

² Mikalson, 2012a

³ Lambert and Schuddeboom and Osborne, 2018, Lupu, NGSL 1

⁴ Jones, 2012; Hdt. 4,99

⁵ Mikalson, 2012a

⁶ Parker, 2005

⁷ Webster, 1973, p.79

⁸ Lambert and Schuddeboom and Osborne, 2018, Lupu, NGSL 1

⁹ Osborne, 1987, p.174

¹⁰ Mikalson, 2012a

¹¹ Mikalson, 2012b

¹² Parker, 2005; Thuc. 2,38

¹³ Pope, 1976, p.34; Lambert and Schuddeboom and Osborne, 2018, Lupu, NGSL 1

remain significant because of the information we can glean from it, including details of local deities that we would have otherwise never likely heard of¹⁴.

This calendar allows us to access information that before had been lost to time and thus its extreme significance as a source of information must not be understated. It is further important because it was the first calendar ever found for Athens¹⁵. This resultantly gives us a unique insight into local religions and by being in relatively good shape (with only the edges really being damaged) is an almost intact and untainted view into the time itself¹⁶. Being in such a good shape makes it a very useful artifact to discover because it allows the information contained within it to be read more easily- thereby increasing the significance it holds even further. This is because although it would still hold major significance if even half of the information was legible, the fact that most of it remains intact boosts its importance to even greater levels as it just deepens the extent in which our understanding of Athenian religion can grow.

Furthermore, due to religion as a whole being integrated into everything that someone did in the ancient Greek world, the calendar is not only invaluable to our understanding of Athenian religion, but also our understanding of Athenian life¹⁷. There was no separation between religion in life in the Greek world and as such, the calendar was essential to the people at the time in such a way that they were required to plan their life around the events within¹⁸. This is because if an action which was considered essential to the gods were forgotten, the wrath of said gods would be brought down upon not only that person, but everyone around them too¹⁹. This calendar therefore is highly significant in the way in which it allows us to study the events in which the people of the time would consider the most important- the events which they believed could very well be the difference between life and death. It demonstrates what the Athenians believed were required to appease the gods, and as such is a tool that we can use to see what the Athenians practiced as their specific polis religion²⁰.

In conclusion, although the Thorikos calendar does not hold an encyclopedia of information about the Greek religion as a whole, it is a very significant find for our understanding of Athenian religion specifically. It is a unique insight into the lives of the Athenian's as religion and state laws were not separate²¹, and thusly builds upon the standard information that was already known to give a more detailed view about Athens. It is an invaluable source of information and as such is of great significance to our understanding of Athenian religion.

¹⁴ Lambert and Schuddeboom and Osborne, 2018, Lupu, NGSL 1

¹⁵ Lambert and Schuddeboom and Osborne, 2018, Lupu, NGSL 1

¹⁶ Lambert and Schuddeboom and Osborne, 2018, Lupu, NGSL 1

¹⁷ Webster, 1969, p.74

¹⁸ Mikalson, 2012a

¹⁹ Gargarin, 2013, p.62

²⁰ Mikalson, 2012a

²¹ Gargarin, 2013, p.66

Bibliography

- Gargarin, M. (2013) 'Law and Religion in Early Greece', in Hagedorn, A. and Kratz, R. (ed.) *Law and Religion in the Eastern Mediterranean: From Antiquity to Early Islam*.
- Herodotus, *The Persian Wars, Volume II: Books 3-4*, A. D. Godley (trans.). 1921. Loeb Classical Library 118. Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press.
- Jones, J. (2012) 'Thoricus' *The Oxford Classical Dictionary*, Oxford: Oxford University Press
- Lambert, S. and Schuddeboom, F. and Osborne, R. 2018. *Sacrificial calendar of Thorikos*, Attic Inscriptions Online, Lupu, NGSL 1
- Mikalson, J. (2012a) 'calendar, Greek' *The Oxford Classical Dictionary*, Oxford: Oxford University Press
- Mikalson, J. (2012b) 'Festivals' *The Oxford Classical Dictionary*, Oxford: Oxford University Press
- Osborne, R. (1987) *Classical landscape with figures : the ancient Greek city and its countryside*, London: George Philip
- Parker, R. (2005) 'Attic cults and myths' *The Oxford Classical Dictionary*, Oxford: Oxford University Press
- Pope, M. (1976) *The Ancient Greeks. How They Lived and Worked*. Devon: David & Charles (Publishers) Limited
- Thucydides, *History of the Peloponnesian War, Volume I: Books 1-2*. C. F. Smith (trans.). 1919. Loeb Classical Library 108. Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press
- Webster, T. (1973) *Athenian Culture and Society*. London: Batsford
- Webster, T. (1969) *Life in Classical Athens*. London: Batsford