



## ASSOCIATIONS IN CONTEXT

Rethinking associations and religion  
in the post-classical *polis*

ABSTRACTS OF PAPERS



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**Ilias N. ARNAOUTOGLOU: 'Cult and craft. Variations on a (neglected) theme ...'**

The paper focuses on an investigation of the interaction between cult and craft in the context of craft associations in the Greco-Roman world. Starting off with a cursory reading of an inscription from Argos, the paper aims to shed light on the crucial, omnipresent but often presumed link between cultic activity and craft associations. Following few introductory remarks about the meaning of cult actions, the delineation and taxonomy of occupational associations as well as the degrees of corporateness, and some comparative data from Christian Mediterranean, it examines the different ways in which craft associations display cultic activity, be it honouring distinguished individuals who have exercised, among other, religious duties, financing building or repairs in sanctuaries or temples, dedicating statues, altars, etc., performing sacrifices or libations, participating in festivals, receiving a benefaction with a cult element, e.g. an altar, or a statue, administering a funerary endowment encumbered with the performance of rituals (such as *stephanotikon*, *kerioloï*, *rhodismos*, sacrifices or banquets), and finally being part of the "sacred economy". The spectrum of religious initiatives undertaken by occupational associations is neither original nor distinguished. It is to a large extent predictable, since occupational associations follow closely the cultic practices of individuals and other public bodies. The only discernible link between a local cult and craft is noticed in Delos, where groups of people involved in trade dedicate to the Apolline triad and later to Rome; in the remaining cases it seems that there was not a consistent pattern of preference to a local deity (save the single case of (Apollon) *Kendreisos* in Philippopolis, of *Zeus Bennios* in Phrygia and *Artemis* in Ephesos), instead occupational associations tend to honour panhellenic deities (like Artemis, Athena, Demeter, Hephaistos, Poseidon, Zeus). The religious manifestations of craftsmen associations seem to have been intertwined with the then current cult expressions of individuals or other corporate groups; in other words, they seem embedded into the dominant set of socio-religious relations.

**Annelies CAZEMIER: 'Group identity and the gods: theophoric names of associations'**

Religion can be found in the life of ancient associations in various ways. It is expressed, for example, in the activities they performed (e.g., celebrations and dedications), the personnel they appointed (e.g., priests), and the locations they used (e.g., shrines). This paper focuses on a specific religious aspect of associations: the practice of naming these groups after the gods.

From *Aphrodisiastai* and *Asklepiastai* to *Sarapiastai* and *Soteriastai*, the phenomenon of theophoric names is widespread. It is particularly common on Rhodes, where we find one association with as many as eight deities mentioned in its name (IG XII.1 162, ll. 5-7). Names of associations frequently consisted of various components, and references to the gods could be combined with other elements (e.g., references to persons, places, or professions);

in certain cases, different versions of a name existed and the theophoric element could be omitted.

Although the names of associations do not necessarily offer us a direct indication of their purpose or *raison d'être* (not all associations with theophoric names can be considered 'religious associations'), they offer important information about the way in which associations presented and saw themselves. Taking some informative case-studies from the vast body of evidence, this paper: 1) assesses the significance of theophoric names for creating and conveying a group identity; 2) contextualizes these names as part of the wider activities of the associations that carried them; and 3) investigates what parallels and differences there are in the use of theophoric names by associations in different periods and locations.

### **Michał GAWLIKOWSKI: 'The marzeḥa of the priests of Bel and other religious associations in Palmyra'**

A score of inscriptions from Palmyra allow a glimpse into the functioning of the *thiasoi*, associations devoted to the cult of several gods of the oasis. While their charts and rules are preserved only in fragments, we are better informed about the association of the priests of Bel, apparently the most important institution in the religious life of the city. The office of their president, elected for one year term, was apparently the highest distinction normally available to a citizen.

Many banqueting halls, some of which did or could have served such associations, were excavated in Palmyra and its neighbourhood. A corpus of over one thousand admission tokens, known as *tesserae*, provides illustration of these meetings. Although the main activity of members appears to have been wine drinking, there was certainly more to it than meets the eye of an archaeologist.

### **Matt GIBBS: 'Artisans and their gods: cult, religion, and ritual in the trade associations of Roman Egypt'**

This paper will examine the trade associations of Egypt and the place of cult, religion, and ritual within them, primarily from the view of the Greek papyri, beginning in the reign of Augustus, and through to the fourth century AD.

As the Greek documentary record clearly attests, trade associations were hardly uncommon in Roman Egypt. But rarely have the religious and socio-religious activities of these collectives, in particular, been considered to any great extent; where these associations are examined in current research, it is their relationship to, and their role in, the economy of Roman Egypt that is usually considered. Typically, however, associations in Egypt appear to have offered their members more than the simple satisfaction of their primary interests, whether these were social, economic, or religious in nature. As I, and

several others, have argued elsewhere, the collectives in Egypt linked by common trades were certainly no different, and offered their members advantages and benefits in a variety of contexts.

Here, I intend to examine broadly – and briefly – the extent to which religion not only affected, but also informed, the behaviour of trade associations and the lives of their members by considering the religious and socio-religious activities in which the members of these groups took part. I will also explore the place of these associations in the social, political, cultural and economic life in the rural and urban communities of the Roman Egypt. Moreover, I will consider the socio-religious physical manifestations, the physical settings, and the relationship of these associations to ‘outsiders’: those who were not members of these associations.

**Philip A. HARLAND: ‘The economics of ritual in the associations’**

Based on analysis of epigraphic and archaeological evidence, this paper asks the question of how associations survived financially in order to pursue interconnected social and ritual aims. An evaluation of several sources of income along with consideration of expenses provides a basis for assessing the economic management of honours for the gods, which were so central to many groups. Some associations were more successful than others in gaining access to scarce resources in the larger competitive arena.

**Claire HASENOHR: ‘The Italian associations at Delos: cult, social integration and politics’**

From ca. 125 BC, the Italian settlers in Delos got organized in groups whose nature and function have been discussed at length. The numerous dedications of *Hermaistai*, *Apolloniastai*, *Poseidoniastai* and *Compataliastai*, as well as those of oil and wine Italian traders, and the liturgical paintings of *Compitalia* can give the impression of an intense religious activity. However a rigorous analysis of sources offers quite a different picture. We shall see that only one association existed, the *Italici*, from which stemmed various groups. The association of *Italici* was gathering people of different statutes and nationalities, which had only in common their Italian origin; they were claiming their links to Rome and appeared as a power of first rank within the foreign communities of Delos, so their role was mostly political, economic and social. The religion seems to have two functions within the association: first, it fostered the internal cohesion of the group, by integrating all the members whatever their geographical and social origin; but it also helped the promotion of the community, which developed its visibility through display of Roman sanctuaries in the best places of the island, and maybe participation in the Athenian cults.

**Barbara KOWALZIG: 'Religious associations in a world of interactive polytheisms'**

This paper explores the role of religious associations in the transcultural economic encounter. Examining evidence from different maritime regions of the Aegean, the Propontis and the Black Sea, the paper argues that such associations were fundamental in developing trusted and lasting relations between Greeks, Romans, Phoenicians and others engaged in economic activity through a set of interlocking religious and cultural practices that deploy different commercial and social networks in the fostering of an ethnically diversified, mobile economic elite. To understand this particular dynamic, we need to be fully aware of how associations operate within a world of interactive polytheisms in the ancient Mediterranean. For cult associations with their flexibility in membership, worship of multiple divinities in a cluster, and their ability to integrate different social groups in the same cult, seem to exploit a characteristic feature of polytheistic religions: as Jean-Pierre Vernant argued a long time ago, Greek polytheism operates a system of relations between different facets of the divine, a highly flexible, interactive network linking discrete social groups and cultural categories in ever-changing configurations. The phenomenon of cult associations suggests that, once 'liberated' from the strait jacket of polis-religion with its tight grip on social structure and exclusive group identities, certain features of polytheism can develop their full social potential. It is therefore no surprise to see polytheism thrive in a Hellenistic world of excessive dislocation and social mobility, where it can continually create its own permutations. The forging of religious ties and the ritualisation of economic relations through shared associative belonging forms a basic social mechanism inculcating trust, credibility and reliable social ties across time, space and culture in a precarious Mediterranean economy.

**Stéphanie MAILLOT: 'Funerary aspects of religious associations in the Hellenistic period'**

Basing on the fundamental work by Th. Mommsen on the Roman *collegium funeraticum*, modern historiography has for long taken for granted that funerary associations were a typical feature for groups of lesser status in Roman society, *homines tenuiores*. For some time there was a convergence with a typically Christian, teleological perspective in which funerary associations were the predecessors of early Christian groupings.

Recent studies have shed light on the insufficiencies of such perspectives and undermined the multifunctional character of Roman associations. Parallel works on early Christian communities have shown that funerary themes and common cemeteries did not have the importance often attributed to them. But research on Greek and Hellenistic associations still underestimates or completely neglects the funerary dimensions.

This paper's aim is to show the fundamental funerary function of associations through some well-documented cases: Rhodes and Cos of course, but also other centres like Athens and Delos allow a precise analysis of this theme thanks to their abundant documentation.

This paper will consider the main ways for interpreting this phenomenon. The funerary dimension of associations is obviously linked to their religious and cultural nature and in some cases the divinities chosen by associations are related to the world of the dead. But it has as well other functions of social or practical nature. Typically associations are helping their poorer members and at the same time constructing and consolidating ties of clientelism, obligation and dependency towards their charismatic leaders. From the point of view of the city-state, associations are a mean to organize and regulate the life of urban masses and lessen sanitary problems of big cities. One could add other functions of symbolic or political type, intertwined to such a degree that it is difficult to estimate their exact role. It is nevertheless in this whole framework of the complex nature of associations that the funerary function is to be interpreted, and certainly not as a superficial feature.

**Paraskevi MARTZAVOU: 'I Beroia 27: a cultic group around Zeus Hypsistos in its socio-cultural and historical context'**

This paper focuses on an inscription from Beroia, a city of Western Macedonia. Its main theme is the cultic group around Zeus Hypsistos, constituted by 34 persons whose names are inscribed in different ways on the surface of a block of local marble. These names are often accompanied by a mention of profession. After a short introduction, which examines very briefly some questions concerning the phenomenon of the Hypsistos cults, the methodology adopted by various scholars so far and some questions on the geographical context of the study of the cult of Hypsistos, I examine the monument itself. I pay special attention to the visual aspect of the inscribed surface and the possible meaning of differentiations in the choice of the place for the inscription: where and how names are inscribed. This study allows us to assess the whole cultic group. Finally, I attempt to re-integrate this document into the general discussion about the Hypsistos cult, especially in Macedonia, including questions concerning other documents, other types of documentation and some possible models that could help understanding the Hypsistos cultic phenomenon in a broader region that includes ancient Macedonia and North-Western Anatolia.

**Emanuel MAYER: 'Pillars of Society: the public face of collegia in the Roman Empire'**

This paper charts the increasing socio-economic and political importance of professional associations during the Roman Imperial Period. Drawing from epigraphic and archaeological evidence, it provides two reasons for this development. First, significant economic growth from 100 B.C.E. to 200 C.E. meant newly affluent commercial classes had the means to engage in public life. Second, this socio-economic change was commonly supported by both the emperor and local governments.

In the course of the early first century B.C.E., professional associations began to assert their presence in public space. Cults founded by Roman collegia allowed for the

construction of shrines and temples, and for the institution of conspicuous public rituals like grand processions. In addition, Roman businesspeople left a mark on the urban space of their communities by constructing clubhouses (scholae) and elaborate mausolea. Furthermore, the statues for public officials erected by the collegia of the Imperial Period allowed professional associations to cast themselves as constituent parts of their civic communities, active in local politics. Evidence of the creation and acquisition of valuable commercial real estate shows that the professional associations of the Roman Imperial Period had considerable financial clout. This explains, at least in part, why they turned into a pillar of urban society.

**Andrew MONSON: 'Political and sacred animals: religious associations in Greco-Roman Egypt'**

Egyptian religious associations are a well-documented but understudied phenomenon in relation to the associations of the post-classical polis. Because they emerged quasi-independently in a different cultural context, they potentially shed light on what is unique and what is general about associational behavior in the ancient world. Aristotle famously conceived of human beings as political animals whose instinct for cooperation led them to establish an integrated set of associations, culminating in the polis, in order to fulfill their collective needs. Egyptian religious associations stand in contrast both to the vertically integrated associations of Aristotle's ideal polis and to post-classical religious associations that fostered socially diverse and sometimes trans-political networks with weaker social-ties. They were founded on an annual private contract between the members to provide mutual assistance (burial, welfare, legal help, etc.), to prohibit anti-social behavior (calumniation, violence, adultery, etc.), and to perform communal activities (banquets, offerings, etc.). The coupling of economic, social, and religious elements was in my view instrumental for creating strong-ties of trust and the capacity for collective action. Some rules even sought to prevent the state from interfering in disputes between members. Purely "religious" associations hardly differ from professional ones in Egypt because the rules were similar and employed the same legal formula. In both cases, religion can be seen partly as an aspect of self-representation, which ensured cooperation with the local temples. The associations used contributions for religious purposes such as the burial of sacred animals and occasionally to dedicate temple monuments. They met in the proximity of temples and high-ranking priests sometimes acted as association magistrates, who contributed larger member dues.

**Mario C.D. PAGANINI: "So that, after building a gymnasium and a hall, we may perform sacrifices on behalf of the Kings..." Religion and leisure: a gentry association of Hellenistic Egypt'**

Basing myself on I.Prose 40, this paper intends to investigate and reassess the role, importance, and dynamics of religious practices in the life of an association of landowners

active in a village in the neighbourhood of Alexandria in the II-I century BC. Moving from some remarks about the sacrifices to the Royal House as being presented as pivotal reason for the existence of the association, I intend to show how and why religion was very much embedded in the leisurely activities of this association. Religious practices were invested with socio-political relevance and represented a means to strengthen social bonds, sanctify associative meetings, solemnise members' support, widen social networks, and assert aspects of group identity. Religion was often one of the various strategies by which the association would pursue its different aims at local and wider level.

At the same time, I intend to show how the gymnasium, typical Greek institution, occupied a particular position in the life and self-presentation of the association and to what extent it was made the centre of their activities. I shall show how associative life represented an aspect of paramount importance in life of the gymnasia institution. This shaped its characteristics in a way which is not often seen in the sources from other areas of the Hellenistic World.

With this paper I hope to provide a good example of how, despite the role of religion in their associative life, many associations remain 'non-religious' and it would be imprecise and too simplistic to label them otherwise.

#### **Paschalis PASCHIDIS: 'Civic cults and (other) religious associations: in search of collective identities in Roman Macedonia'**

In this paper, I propose to examine the different forms of religious organization in Roman Macedonia –civic cults (old and new) and 'private' associations– with particular emphasis on the evidence pertaining to collective identity building. The old cliché of voluntary religious associations filling the religious and social void left by the waning cults of the declining *polis* has long been shown to be an oversimplification: all cults more or less operated within the framework of the *polis*, in most cases with minimal institutional intervention, while the differences in organization, practice and religious character between civic cults and (other) religious associations appear far from fundamental. Therefore, a more fruitful approach would have been to view religion in Roman Macedonia not in terms of old versus new or civic versus private and associative, but in terms of diverging paths to achieving a sense of communal belonging. Two such religious strands stand out in the available evidence. One involves a perception of strong local identity and manifests itself primarily in the lands west of the Axios, in the old Macedonian homeland, and in civic cults with an actual or perceived long history. The other strand focuses more on the mythical and ritual narratives *per se*; it manifests itself primarily in large cosmopolitan cities, in Roman colonies and in the east, often in the context of a voluntary association. In other words, in the world of religion as a formative factor of collective identities, traditions built upon histories competed with traditions built upon stories.



**Stella SKAL TSA: 'The religious and social landscape of private associations in Hellenistic Thera'**

The paper examines the physical remains and epigraphic evidence of private associations at Thera. It attempts to assess the range of the associations' activities within the social and cultural milieu of the polis in the Hellenistic period. Thera was the seat of the Ptolemaic fleet in the Aegean for most of the 3rd and 2nd century BC. Whereas a number of Theraan inscriptions document the presence of the garrison on the island, a few of them shed light into the organization of those affiliated to the garrison and the Ptolemaic royal house in private associations. Associations of 'foreigners' co-exist with those of 'locals' bringing to light a thriving associative life on the island. The paper offers insights into the self-fashioning of these associations, the ways in which they appropriated the sacred and public space and the mechanisms they employed to stress political affiliations and forge their identity.

**Hanna STÖGER: 'Ostia's guild seats - fact or fiction?'**

About 60 different guilds and their activities have been identified for Ostia through inscriptions. Information about their social, religious and economic activities (in practice mostly overlapping) comes almost entirely from dedicatory inscriptions, alba, decrees conferring offices, and legal codes. These commemorated activities were often attached to particular and identifiable locations, the so-called scholae (guild buildings). Out of a larger number of Ostia's possible guild buildings only 18 have been archaeologically identified as scholae, with recent studies raising doubts about already identified guild buildings. Can we securely identify guild buildings and in what way would they function differently from purely domestic buildings? What role did Ostia's guild buildings play within the urban landscape? How did the buildings balance their religious and economic functions? How did the guild buildings respond to infrastructural demands from the city? The proposed paper will address these questions by combining archaeological and epigraphic evidence, and provide insights from a formal spatial analysis (Space Syntax) carried out on a larger sample set from Ostia.

**Christian A. THOMSEN: 'Before Gods and Men – the public relations of private associations'**

The sanctuary, whether private or public, was the gravitational centre of the cultic and social life of many private associations. The importance of sanctuaries to associations is underlined by the fact that many associations acquired sanctuaries of their own. The sanctuary was also the preferred place for publication of association inscriptions which included a variety of genres (dedications, decrees, accounts, etc.). A recent trend in the study of (mostly public) epigraphy investigates the 'symbolic value' of inscribed monuments and their function in shaping perceptions of the bodies that issued them. This paper takes a similar view of the inscriptions set up by private associations and the

sanctuaries and burial grounds in which they once stood, and attempts to shed further light on the relationship between the associations and the societies which they inhabited; for who exactly was the supposed audience for these inscriptions, and what attitudes and behaviour towards the association were they meant to inspire?

**Monika TRÜMPER: 'The role of religion in Delian associations: sacred space in meeting places of associations'**

Delos has yielded rich epigraphic evidence of about 30 different associations and groups that issued inscriptions from the third century B.C. to the second century A.D., most of which are attested from the heyday of the free port from 167/6 to 88 BC. From the find spots of the inscriptions it can be concluded that these groups and associations met and performed collective activities in a variety of urban contexts, namely in public squares, various sanctuaries, and multifunctional separate buildings ("clubhouses"). This paper focuses on "clubhouses," examining the existence, design, use, and significance of sacred space in these buildings. While only one single building is securely identified as the "clubhouse" of an association by inscriptions found in situ, notably the *Établissement des Poseidoniastes de Bérytos*, typological comparisons suggest that several other buildings in Delos could have served a similar purpose, among these most prominently the "Perfumery" in the Quartier du stade, the *Maison du Diadumène* in the Quartier de Skardhana, and possibly also the *Maison de Fourni* in the south of Delos. After a brief assessment of the sacred space in the *Établissement des Poseidoniastes*, the other potential "clubhouses" will be comparatively analyzed for the following questions: identification of sacred space, based on architecture, decoration, and finds; its location, accessibility, and visibility; its significance for assessing the religious practices and self-representation of the respective owners ("associations"); and ultimately, its importance for confirming the identification of the respective buildings as "clubhouses" and for possibly even reconstructing the main purpose and interests of the respective "associations." The argumentation is substantiated by a brief comparative assessment of sacred space in the local context, namely in domestic and commercial architecture. A particular focus will be on an intriguing, little studied phenomenon: the incorporation and artificial configuration of natural rock-formations, identified here as "*nymphaia*," which are found in three Delian buildings, among them two potential "clubhouses."

**Onno M. VAN NIJF: 'Staying Roman – becoming Greek: associations of Romaioi in Greek cities'**

In this paper I'll present a rough sketch of the changing nature of Roman presence in the Greek city in a period of a crucial transformation of the Imperium Romanum in the East. I shall argue that we conceive of this contact zone best in terms of a Middle Ground - a space

of negotiation and improvisation between Greek elites and city authorities, and associations of Romans.

There are various way in which these Romaioi engaged with the cities in which they settled. At the early stages Roman negotiatores settled in Greek cities in the slipstream of Roman diplomatic moves and of the army. Initially they seem to have settled as individual expats, who showed considerable sign of adaptation and acculturation to their new environments. Greek cities responded by granting these newcomers a kind of collective status, that found expression i.e. in their collective participation in growing numbers of community rituals, and in particular public banquets, with which the cities celebrated their collective identity. In the imperial period these Romans started to organise themselves more formally. Roman identity was the basis of increasingly formally structured associations that seem to have acquired a fixed place in the social and political hierarchies of the cities. In this context it turned out that the association of Romans began to play the role as a kind of symbolic or ideological intermediaries. They had a key role in the spread of the imperial cult and in the representation of Roman imperial power in the city.

**Philip F. VENTICINQUE: 'The economics of association funerals and commemoration'**

Religion and religious activities, in particular funerals and commemoration, have been at the heart of scholarly debate about ancient associations since the initial studies of the topic. As a good deal of the evidence for associations comes from commemorative epitaphs and association charters that highlight funeral activities and provisions for burial this is not surprising. Funerals and commemoration were an important part of association activities. Burial privileges were sought after and associations did care for funerary monuments. Egyptian association charters make clear the expectations that members would mourn the death of a member and mourn with colleagues who experienced loss in their families. Interpretations of this evidence have focused on the social and religious importance of burial and commemoration provided by associations for those perceived to be downtrodden and disadvantaged members of society. The need for such support to compensate for lack and deficiency in the lives of association members has been accepted as self-evident. This obscures, however, an understanding of the more complicated place of funerals and commemoration within a larger set of association activities and rituals. This paper will reconsider the economics of association funerals beyond costs, mutual aid, and providing a decent burial for members. Attendance at funerals and the long term connections signaled by an individual who has chosen to be commemorated in this manner have larger implications within the group. As such, I intend to examine the way in which funerals and rituals surrounding them outlined in charters help foster the creation and maintenance of bonds of trust between members, how funerals fit into the larger system of economic and behavioral norms focused on reputation and esteem, and what this can tell us

about the way in which associations approached and understood the economic activities that supported membership in such groups.

**Sara M. WIJMA: 'The Thracian managers of Bendis' cult in Piraeus: *orgeones* as official mediators in Athenian polis religion'**

When considering the role of the Thracian *orgeones* of Bendis in Athenian polis religion and in Athenian society at large, it is generally agreed that this group constituted a special category to be considered strictly separate from the Athenian *orgeones* who since time immemorial had honoured certain local heroes with their *orgia*. Although the Athenians never made such a strict distinction, referring to a law mentioned in Philochoros (FGrH 328 F35), which states that "it is compulsory for the *phratores* to admit both *orgeones* and *homogalaktes*, whom we call *gennetai*", modern scholars stress the fact that the Thracian *orgeones* were "aliens" and could as such impossibly be accepted by the phratries, who even far beyond the archaic period acted as the doorway to the citizen community by checking descent. Following the hesitant lead in Robert Parker's *Athenian religion* (1996, pp), I will reconsider this modern distinction and emphasise that *all* groups of *orgeones* seem to have privately worshipped a hero or deity with rites (*orgia*) in a privately established shrine, while also performing a mediating role in the official religious structures of the polis at large. It was probably because of this role, also performed by the Thracian *orgeones* of Bendis - first attested shortly after 350 and the group of *orgeones* for which we have by far the most (epigraphic) evidence - that *orgeones* were officially accepted as members of the phratries and in that way came a long way in becoming members of the Athenian polis community at large, which was, up to an important degree, defined in cultic terms.