This book is a translation into English of *La Religion grecque* by Louise Bruit Zaidman and Pauline Schmitt Pantel, one of the liveliest and most original introductions to the subject in any language.

Classical Greek religion was an amalgam of ritual practices and religious beliefs. It acquired a definite structure at the moment when one of the typical forms of political organization in the Greek world, the *polis* or ‘city’, came into being towards the end of the eighth century BCE. This structure was based on habits of thought and intellectual categories that differed radically from our own. It is the purpose of this book to consider how religious beliefs and rituals were given expression in the world of the Greek citizen – the functions performed by the religious personnel, and the place that religion occupied in individual, social and political life. The chapters cover first ritual and then myth, rooting the account in the practices of the classical city while also taking seriously the world of the imagination. The book is enriched throughout by quotations from original sources.

Dr Cartledge’s translation amounts in many ways to a second edition of the work. He has restructured and redivided the contents of the volume, segregating some technical matter into two appendixes, and has substantially revised the bibliography to meet the needs of a mainly student, English-speaking readership.
Religion in the ancient Greek city
Religion in the ancient Greek city

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AUTHORS’ PREFACE TO THE ENGLISH TRANSLATION

The aim of this book

It may perhaps be useful for our English readers if we explain our initial motivation in writing this book. It was written under the influence of two principal and in our eyes complementary considerations, one methodological, the other pedagogical.

Pedagogically speaking, we noted that there was no recent textbook in France which dealt with ancient Greek religion. This meant that both students and anyone with a general interest in Greek antiquity had the greatest difficulty in acquiring the basic information and understanding that are indispensable for pursuing more detailed investigations within the area of religion. There was a need therefore to collect together and make generally available all such basic materials and to present them in an expository framework that raised the sorts of questions asked today by historians of religion: what is a ritual? a festival? a sanctuary? and so forth. Constant reference to different kinds of documentary evidence satisfied the need both to render the exposition more concrete and to make some fundamental texts accessible in translation to readers who might not always know Greek.

Methodologically speaking, we noted the growing gap between the textbooks that were available and the current state of scholarly research, for over the past thirty years the study of Greek religion, especially research on the myths and analysis of the pantheon, has been revitalized. Working as we were within the context of the Louis Gernet Centre for the Comparative Study of Ancient Societies, under the direction of first J.-P. Vernant and then P. Vidal-Naquet, we conceived our task as being to explain as simply as possible the chief lines of current research in the areas of rituals, myths, and polytheism. It was not at all our aim to write a grand synthesis on Greek religion – Walter Burkert’s recent book (1985 [17]) is a very useful example
Authors' preface

of that genre. Rather, we wished just to provide some introduct-
ory propositions that could serve as the basis for more sophisti-
cated readings in the above-mentioned areas. Our project, in
other words, was not encyclopaedic but partial, though not, we
believe, partial in the sense of biassed. Our aim was not to impose
unilaterally another possibly idiosyncratic interpretation of
religion in the Greek cities, but to inform non-specialists of the
directions being taken by research in progress.

These two considerations give our book its twofold character,
as both an introductory textbook and a pointer to new ways of
approaching Greek religion. Its aim will be achieved if it spurs
readers to discover for themselves all the ancient and modern
authors, especially the English historians of Greek religion, who
have guided us on our voyage among the rituals, myths and gods
of the ancient Greeks.

Acknowledgements

In spring 1990 Paul Cartledge made us an offer we could not
refuse: not only to recommend the translation of this book into
English but also to do the translation himself. We accepted with
enthusiasm. For in fact it is extremely rare to get the chance to
have one’s work translated by a colleague who is researching in
the same field and who has lived for so many years on terms of
intimacy with the ancient Greek world. What we did not yet
suspect then was that Paul Cartledge, a latter-day hero full of
mētis, would so feel his way into our alien prose that he would be
able to supply, with great delicacy, the thousand-and-one
improvements required to make it now more credible, now more
accessible, and always better adapted to the needs of English-
language readers. In this work of textual re-creation we admire
especially the translator’s precision, his conscientiousness, and,
not least, his generosity of spirit, since it is no small thing to
spend long months trying to get a book more widely known by
giving it life in another language, at the expense of time devoted
to his own research. So on the threshold of the publication of this
book, which is also his book, we wish to convey to Paul Cart-
ledge our most cordial gratitude.

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TRANSLATOR’S INTRODUCTION

Matter


(i) is a strange tale of ecclesiastical decay and would-be restoration obstructed by intra-sectarian feuding. The mediaeval church of St Bartholomew at Covenham, Lincolnshire, England, was derelict. A group of American Anglicans from Corona del Mar, California, USA, wished to transport the church of St Bartholomew from eastern England stone by stone and resurrect it on the West Coast. Their desire had the initial approval of the Church (of England) Commissioners but hit against the stumbling-block of the disapproval of the (US) Episcopal Church, which successfully leaned on the Commissioners. The reason for the objection? The traditionalist American Anglicans, which included the relevant congregation of Corona del Mar, had recently decided to split from the parent Episcopal Church because the latter was proposing to ordain women priests (as it has since done, not to mention women bishops).

The phenomenon of itinerant temples was not unknown in ancient Greece; for example, the temple of Ares originally built in the fifth century in the deme of Akharnai to the north of the city of Athens was disassembled and relocated in the Athenian Agora some four centuries later. But the phenomenon was as rare in antiquity as it is today. On the other hand, the phenomenon of women priests, so massively controversial today within certain Christian communions, was vieux jeu in Classical Greece (below, chapter 5). But then the Classical Greeks lacked doctrinally authoritative sacred books which could be held to have set in
Translator’s introduction

tables of stone the non-eligibility of women for the priesthood, nor did they have a priesthood that was vocationally recruited and professionally trained, and that functioned within an independently institutionalized and hierarchically ordered Church.

(ii), coincidentally, also concerns Lincolnshire, although not some remote village this time but the county town of Lincoln, and more precisely its majestic Cathedral. In line with their policy of encouraging ‘spiritual’ art the Dean and Chapter authorized the exhibition in the Cathedral aisle – and other less conspicuous locations – of sculptor Leonard McComb’s life-size ‘Portrait of a Man Standing’, also known familiarly as the ‘Golden Man’ since the statue’s surface is of highly polished bronze and gold leaf. The problem (as it was soon perceived to be) was that the Golden Man is an unabashed nude. In response to public objections the Dean of Lincoln was moved to describe the statue as inappropriate for Lincoln (and presumably any) Cathedral, and the statue itself was moved to its current, almost entirely secular resting-place, London’s Tate Gallery.

Had a Classical Greek time-traveller been able to witness both the controversy (and I should add that at least one Roman Catholic nun staunchly defended the original decision to exhibit the statue in Lincoln Cathedral, seeing in it somehow a representation of mankind as a whole) and the statue, he or she would have been utterly perplexed and bewildered. For here is a figure of the kouros type (see chapter 14), and a rather splendid specimen at that, its surface materials somewhat reminiscent of the de luxe gold-and-ivory cult-statues erected at Delphi, Athens and elsewhere. Surely, our traveller might have mused, there could be no more appropriate space, mutatis mutandis, than an Anglican cathedral for the exhibition of a kouros statue, and how odd that there should have been felt to be a need to encourage ‘spiritual’ art.

(iii) concerns a draft Religious Education syllabus drawn up by the local council of Ealing, a London borough. This failed to mention either God or the Bible or Jesus Christ, for which sins of omission it drew the ire of at least 800 Ealing residents. Led by a parent-governor of one of the schools in the locality, they took the remarkable step of formally petitioning Parliament on the
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grounds that the syllabus did not reflect the borough’s mainly Christian religious traditions. Her Majesty’s Secretary of State for Education gave them his and his Department’s support; having taken legal advice, he declared himself unsatisfied that the proposed syllabus complied with the Education Reform Act 1988. Indeed, in a letter previously circulated to all chief education officers and containing the Secretary of State’s guidelines he had advised that in Great Britain the religious traditions were in the main Christian.

In Classical Greece education was (except at Sparta) not an affair of state, and so not subject to state regulation and prescription. On the other hand, the idea of an atheistic religious education syllabus would have been not merely anathema but intrinsically incomprehensible to all but the tiniest handful of highly untypical Classical Greeks. If the Classical Greeks were also to be told that in Great Britain there was an established (Christian) Church, their bafflement would only increase. For although there was no ‘Church’ in this sense in any Classical Greek state, Classical Greek religion was as ‘established’, as much part of the regular political apparatus of government and of the very identity of the Greek city, as it well could be.

Such examples as these three could be multiplied with the greatest of ease. My purpose in beginning this introduction with them is to strike one of the keynotes of the book translated below. If the past as such and in general is a foreign country, and they do things differently there, this holds especially true of the Classical Greeks and their religious past. To put it another way, although Christianity developed within – and could not have developed without – the pagan Graeco-Roman empire, religion was emphatically not, in any straightforward sense, an ingredient in ‘the legacy of Greece’. It is a prime merit of Dr Louise Bruit (University of Paris) and Dr Pauline Schmitt (University of Amiens) that they introduce this theme of difference right at the start of La Religion grecque and play variations on it throughout. The mental world of polytheistic paganism and its peculiar civic context during the Classical fifth and fourth centuries BCE are phenomena that are remarkably hard to explain or even understand in our drastically different, ‘mainly Christian’ society.
Translator’s introduction

But that was by no means my only reason for wanting to make their book accessible to an English-language readership. Secondly, and to some most cogently, it fills a gap in the English and American market no less surely than the original did in the French market (see Authors’ preface). Greek religion and – or rather, including – mythology (see chapter 12) were once, in the later nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, central not only to the teaching and study of the Classics in this country but also to the teaching and study of Religion tout court. Since the heyday of Robertson Smith and J. G. Frazer, to name only two (see further chapters 1 and 12), Classical Greek religion has been progressively marginalized (though mythology has kept its place), until it is a sign of the times that the standard handbook or textbook on the subject was written in German in 1977 and only published in English translation eight years later (Burkert 1985 [17] – all such references by author, date and number are to the Bibliography, pp. 247–67). That book, moreover, is formidably long and densely written, a tome to be consulted rather than read through, more a work of reference than an interpretative monograph. Not that it does not contain interpretation, throughout, but its many learned theses tend to be obscured by the overlay of erudition documented in the 130 pages of endnotes.

‘Bruit/Schmitt’, by contrast, originally appeared in late 1989 under Armand Colin’s ‘Cursus’ imprint within the series ‘Histoire de l’Antiquité’ edited by François Hartog, Pauline Schmitt-Pantel and John Scheid. Attention to context being of the essence, we learn from its publication history alone that it is a ‘manuel’ or handbook. It was aimed, not at scholarly colleagues in the first instance, but rather at their pupils in the universities and (perhaps some) lycées, and at interested colleagues and students in other disciplines than ‘Classics’ (which in France is anyway not so rigidly departmentalized, but usually taught within some sort of ‘Sciences humaines’ framework at the school and undergraduate levels). This is the same kind of readership, mutatis mutandis, that I have in mind for this translation. At a rather paradoxical cultural moment, when Classics in the technical, philologically based sense is a shrinking asset in this country and yet interest in the Classical Graeco-Roman world has never been more intense or more widespread, there is an increasingly urgent need for the
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publication of books that broadcast and (in the nicest possible, French sense) vulgarize the Classical world in both exciting and critically informed ways. ‘Bruit/Schmitt’ seemed to me to meet all those criteria admirably.

A third reason for undertaking this translation was that the authors have a positive as well as a negative thesis to argue, and it seems to me that they argue both with equal conviction and persuasiveness. If one of the book’s two main aims is to rid us of what have been described elsewhere (Price 1984: [262]: 11–15) as ‘Christianizing assumptions’, the other is to convince us by constant demonstration and vehemently insistent repetition that the proper context for evaluating Classical Greek religion is not the individual immortal soul (itself a concept with a history – see chapter 15) but rather the city, the peculiar civic corporation that the Greeks labelled polis.

Hence the title chosen for this translation: not just ‘Greek Religion’ but ‘Religion in the Ancient Greek City’. This emphasis, too, accounts for certain deliberate exclusions from the book, most notably perhaps magic, precisely because magic is not a publicly sanctioned religious activity. However, it must at once be added that the term ‘city’ is or implies a theoretical abstraction (or model, or ideal type, to employ other special terminologies). For there were in empirical actuality more than a thousand separate and usually radically self-differentiated ‘cities’ in this sense in Classical Greece, and, traditionally but inevitably, it is the city of Athens that receives most space, since that is the source and reference-point of the great bulk of the surviving contemporary written and visual evidence. But Athens, as the authors are at pains to stress, was not in any sense a typical Classical Greek polis, being exceptionally large, exceptionally complex, and exceptionally democratic. Athenocentricity must therefore be resisted, but without falling into the opposite trap of excessive generalization about religion in ‘Greece’. This delicate balancing act is performed by the authors with great mental agility and expository skill.

My fourth and final principal reason for translating ‘Bruit/Schmitt’ is a matter of what the Germans call Wissenschaft, but one with cultural and indeed political ramifications beyond the confines of the academy. In terms of intellectual vitality and
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influence there is only one possible rival within the domain of the ‘Sciences humaines’ in France to the so-called ‘Annales School’ of sociologically minded historians inspired by Marc Bloch and Lucien Febvre, and that is the ‘Paris School’ of cultural historians of ancient Greece and especially ancient Greek religion and mythology dominated for the past three decades by J.-P. Vernant. It is no accident (as they say) that both ‘Schools’ were crucially influenced in their origins by the work of the sociohistorical psychologist Emile Durkheim. And it is the social, or in this case specifically the civic, approach to Greek religion, originally formulated in rejection of nineteenth-century individualizing notions, that informs the present book (though not to the exclusion of other approaches: as the authors say in their Preface, they are not seeking dogmatically to impose a single line of interpretation).

English readers have increasingly of late been given versions of the work of members of the Paris School; the translations by Janet Lloyd are particularly highly recommended (e.g. Detienne 1977 [220]; Vernant 1980 [39]; Vernant and Vidal-Naquet 1988 [149]). One such, also published by the Cambridge University Press (Gordon 1981 [186]), came equipped with a helpful introduction by Richard Buxton to the School’s leading ideas (which need not therefore be rehearsed here; they emerge, in any case, explicitly or implicitly, throughout the present work). But the essays collected and translated by Richard Gordon all quite clearly fell within the ‘scholarly’ bracket, not being aimed at an undergraduate, let alone a sixth-form or high school, audience. It is a particular virtue of ‘Bruit/Schmitt’ in this regard that without unduly sacrificing subtlety and complexity (or eschewing the School’s coded language – see below) it has made available those leading ideas in a more popularly digestible form.

Form

All translation, it is a commonplace, is interpretation, even perhaps misinterpretation; at any rate, according to an Italian adage, every translator is a traducer (traduttore traditore). Presumably this is never more so than when, as here, translation is a threefold process: straightforwardly (relatively, anyway – see
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below) from the elegant French of Mesdames Bruit and Schmitt into my less than poetic but more or less accurate English version; not at all straightforwardly from the alien conceptual world of classical Greek paganism into the post-Enlightenment vocabularies of two modern European languages. The classical Greeks did not, for example, ‘have a word for’ religion ... But at least Greek, French and English all belong to the Indo-European family of languages (unless that should turn out to be yet another nineteenth-century myth!)

The main point at issue here is that it is not at all clear whether it is possible to be true to the spirit and flavour of the original Classical Greek in which the literary texts and documentary inscriptions on which the present book is largely based were written. (Visual images raise their own, peculiar problems of ‘translation’: see briefly chapter 14.) Perhaps the best that any translator/interpreter of Classical Greek religion can hope to achieve is the literate equivalent of a theatrically Brechtian alienation effect. If Bruit, Schmitt and I have between us managed to get across the idea that Classical Greek religion is ‘other’, desperately foreign to (in particular) post-Christian, monotheistic ways of conceptualizing the divine, then perhaps we should be well enough satisfied. We may of course also congratulate ourselves on the fact that the Classical Greeks had no uniquely authoritative sacred books or texts, so that we are not confronted by the doctrinal problems faced by translators of, say, the Hebrew Bible, the New Testament or the Koran.

But the English translator of ‘Bruit/Schmitt’ is faced with a further problem. These authors, as we have seen, have been formed within a very specific ‘school’ of French scholarship. As tends to happen with such original and powerfully influential schools of thought, it has over the past forty years or so formulated, honed and refined a specialized technical vocabulary, a jargon if you like, which in addition to its overt denotational meaning carries subtle undertones and overtones of connotation for the initiated. If my translation, therefore, reads more than usually like stilted translationese, this is not solely due to my incompetence but also to my striving to do justice to the flavour and nuance of the original. Let me give just a single, apparently simple illustration.

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In the penultimate sentence of the last paragraph but one I wrote ‘conceptualizing the divine’. This does not, I think, read absolutely ‘naturally’ to a native English speaker, even to one who is inured to the esoteric vagaries of academic linguistic codes. But it does, I hope, adequately represent, that is, convey the general sense and main purport of, a French phrase much used by ‘Bruit/Schmitt’, namely ‘penser le divin’. Their ‘penser’, however, is more than just ‘to conceptualize’: it connotes (to spell it out inelegantly) entering sympathetically, as far as someone reared in our culture (or cultures) is able, into a categorically different and conceptually alien thought-world articulated by an underlying logic of representation (see esp. Part III).

So much for the as it were ‘higher-order’ problems of this translation. On a more mundanely practical level the English reader should be informed – or warned – that my text is not only, or not just, an Englishing of the French original, but in some ways and to some extent more of a second edition. This is chiefly because from the very inception of the project (which was unwittingly inspired by our mutual friend and colleague Dr Annie Schnapp) I have had the enormous privilege and pleasure of working in close collaboration with the two French authors. They have not merely checked my translation for literal fidelity but also sanctioned a considerable reshaping of their original text – redvision of the whole into three, not two, parts, partial redvision and wholesale renumbering of the chapters, some reordering of sections, subsections and sentences, segregation of some matter originally in the main text into two Appendixes, amalgamation of their Glossary and Lexicon into a consolidated Index, and revamping of the Bibliography to make it answer more to the needs of a mainly undergraduate and English-speaking readership. They have also allowed me to exercise my judgement in the matter of the translations of ancient Greek texts quoted in extenso throughout the book – one of its most attractive features. (It should, however, be stressed that ‘Bruit/Schmitt’ is not a ‘sourcebook’ like Crahay 1966 [5] or Rice and Stambaugh 1979 [12].) These translations are sometimes more or less modified versions of what I consider to be the best or the most easily available (where available at all) published translations, duly acknowledged; otherwise they are my own.

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Perhaps even more remarkably, the authors have permitted me not just to correct the few errors in the original text but also to introduce some new (usually purely illustrative) material, in cases where we all thought the additions improved either the clarity of the exposition or the force of the argument or both. The book, however, despite what they may say, remains very much the work of the original (in more than one sense) authors. Indeed, besides overseeing my labours generally, they have themselves made some specific additions to the French version, which I have silently incorporated in the translation. Anglo-French—or Gallo-English—co-operation could surely go no further than this. May it be as an omen for the success of ‘1992’.

It remains only to thank François Lissarrague (of the Centre Louis Gernet) for generously making available again his remarkably delicate line-drawings, Janet Lloyd and David Harvey for kindly vetting samples of the translation and reassuring me that there was a rough equivalence between it and the original, the two anonymous readers for their helpfully astringent comments on my original proposal, and, above all, the Syndics and officers of the Cambridge University Press for agreeing so readily to buy the translation rights from Armand Colin and taking care of the necessary trans-Channel negotiations.

July 1991

Paul Cartledge
LIST OF SOURCES

The following is a list of the main ancient sources on Greek religion, which are quoted at length in the course of the book. Translations are cited where used; all others are by PC.

Aeschylus *Libation-Bearers* 458 BCE

*Seven Against Thebes*, 467 BCE 42

Andokides *Oration 1, On the Mysteries*, 400 BCE 133–4

Aristophanes *Lysistrata*, 411 BCE 67

*Thesemophoriazousai*, 411 BCE 42

Callimachus *Hymn to Delos*, 3rd century BCE 193–4

Epikharms *Festival-Goers*, c. 500–475 BCE 61


Herodas *Mimes*, 3rd century BCE 62, 132


Homerian Hymns, c. 7th–6th century BCE 17, 134–6, 187, 192–3

Inscriptions 75, 76, 82, 87, 88–9, 110–11

 Isaiahs *Oration*, 4th century BCE 74, 75


Philostatos *The Imaginary Picture-Gallery* 3rd century CE 171–2


Plutarch *Life of Perikles*, c. 100 CE 12, 246

Porphyry *On Abstinence*, 3rd century CE 169–71

Thucydides *History*, c. 400 BCE 42–3

Xenophon *Anabasis*, 4th century BCE 61–2
1b  Greece and the Aegean islands