

The background of the book cover is a classical Greek relief sculpture. It depicts the goddess Athena in profile, facing left. She has a stern expression and is wearing a helmet. An owl is perched on her right arm, which is extended forward. The sculpture is carved into a dark, textured stone.

# ATHENIAN MYTHS & FESTIVALS

AGLAÜROS, ERECHTHEUS, PLYNTERIA,  
PANATHENAIA, DIONYSIA

CHRISTIANE SOURVINOU-INWOOD

OXFORD

# Athenian Myths and Festivals

*Aglauros, Erechtheus, Plynteria,  
Panathenaia, Dionysia*

CHRISTIANE SOURVINOU-INWOOD

Edited by  
ROBERT PARKER



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# ATHENIAN MYTHS AND FESTIVALS

## *Author's Preface*

I am very grateful to Professor Robert Parker for discussing many of the issues involved in this book and especially for kindly reading, and commenting on, a draft of most chapters. I am also grateful to him for lending me his copy of Mansfield's unpublished dissertation. More generally, I am extremely grateful for his insightful and learned input and warm encouragement. I would also like to thank Professor Chris Pelling for encouraging me to produce this book.

## *Editor's Preface*

For several years before her sudden death aged 62, from an undiagnosed cancer, on 19 May 2007, Christiane Sourvinou-Inwood had been working on two books. One, provisionally entitled 'Reading in Close Focus: "Wild" Girls and Animals', was a study of the relation between girls and animals in Greek language and cult. It was a continuation of one of her earliest and most abiding academic interests, the attempt to understand the cult at Brauron where Artemis was served by young girls known as 'bears'. The other, the present book, had a later and, in some ways, contingent origin. In writing her *Tragedy and Athenian Religion* (2003) she was much preoccupied with the City Dionysia; so too in her posthumously published detective novel, *Murder at the City Dionysia* (Vanguard, 2008). A short article published in 1998, but coming to her attention only rather later (Lambert 1998), argued, contrary to the general assumption hitherto, that members of one of the restricted religious societies known as *genē* had an important role at that festival. The book started as an evaluation and rejection of that claim. From her negative conclusion about the role of a *genos* at the Dionysia, she moved to a broader consideration of the differential involvement of *genē* in different festivals; in attempting to explain that phenomenon she was led in turn to consider in detail the activities at certain festivals; from the festivals she was drawn back to the web of mythology underlying them. This movement is very characteristic of Sourvinou-Inwood's work. We think of her, rightly, as a scholar capable of powerful abstract thought (and abstract expression!); but she almost always moved out from, and back to, very specific problems.

Of the two projects, the one begun later overtook the first. 'Reading in Close Focus' never came near completion, though I hope that publication in some form will be possible. The present book, after many expansions and reshapings, had reached something close to a final form: the disks entrusted to me by her husband Michael Inwood contained an all but continuous text which faded away only at the very end, and footnotes that were about 95 per cent complete.

I offered to edit the work for publication, and my proposal was accepted by the Oxford University Press subject to the proviso that the typescript should be compressed by about a sixth. Some of the editorial changes I have made in consequence (far too numerous to list or indicate except in rare cases) would doubtless have been made by Sourvinou-Inwood herself had she lived to revise her text. I have abbreviated wherever I felt able to do so without cutting the sinews of the argument, excised subsidiary considerations that the author herself admitted provided only weak support for a major thesis, eliminated answers to anticipated objections, omitted some polemic, consigned detail in abbreviated form to footnotes. I have also engaged in some light stylistic retouching, tried to clarify some passages of detailed textual argument by quoting and translating the relevant Greek texts in full, and occasionally reorganized sections. The typescript contained abundant references to works published up to but not after 2005. I have not attempted a systematic updating, but have added in square brackets a few references to works known to me of central relevance to the argument. For advice and encouragement, I am most grateful to Emily Kearns.

The author's working title for the book was *Festivals, Myths, and Genē: Plynteria, Kallynteria, Panathenaia, Dionysia*. I have ventured to change the title to that which the book now bears, partly from a fear that the unfamiliar term *Genē* in the title might act as a deterrent, but also from a feeling that, though the book started from the *genē*, it moved beyond them as it grew in the way described above.

The editorial interventions that I have listed mean that, at a local level, there is an element of hybridity about the work; there exists a weak possibility that a given phrase or formulation is mine, not Sourvinou-Inwood's. But I have striven conscientiously not to alter or abbreviate the essentials of her argument; and I do not doubt that those familiar with her previous work will hear her unmistakable voice on every page.

R.P.

## Abbreviations

Abbreviations of periodicals and works of reference aspire to be those recommended for use in the *American Journal of Archaeology* at <http://www.ajaonline.org>., with a few supplements listed below. For ancient authors, standard source collections, and works of reference not listed by *American Journal of Archaeology* the abbreviations in *OCD*<sup>3</sup> (see below), supplemented by those in Liddell, Scott, and Jones, *A Greek English Lexicon with a Revised supplement* (Oxford 1996), have been followed, with a few trivial divergences. Comic fragments are cited from R. Kassel and C. Austin, *Poetae Comici Graeci* (Berlin 1983–), tragic fragments from *TrGF* (see below).

EGF	M. Davies (ed.), <i>Epicorum Graecorum Fragmenta</i> (Göttingen, 1988)
Inscr. Dél.	P. Roussel and M. Launey, <i>Inscriptions de Délos</i> , vol. v.2 (Paris, 1937)
LSCG	F. Sokolowski, <i>Lois sacrées des cités grecques</i> (Paris, 1969)
LSS	F. Sokolowski, <i>Lois sacrées des cités grecques: Supplément</i> (Paris, 1962)
Neue Pauly	Hubert Cancik and Helmuth Schneider (eds.), <i>Der Neue Pauly: Enzyklopädie der Antike</i> (Stuttgart, 1996–2002); English edn. as <i>Brill's New Pauly</i> (Leiden, 2002–)
OCD <sup>3</sup>	S. Hornblower and A. Spawforth (eds.), <i>The Oxford Classical Dictionary</i> , 3rd edn. (1996)
RO	P. J. Rhodes and R. Osbrone, <i>Greek Historical Inscriptions, 403–323</i> (Oxford, 2003). Reference is to inscription number, not page
TrGF	B. Snell, S. Radt, and R. Kannicht, <i>Tragicorum Graecorum Fragmenta</i> (Göttingen, 1981–2004)

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## Festivals and *Genē*

### *Reconstructions, Problematik, Methodologies*

This book investigates in detail aspects of a few Athenian festivals and cults and their associated myths, the exploration of which also involves the wider mythology of early Athens.<sup>1</sup> It offers two major (and, in different ways, sustained) ritual reconstructions and also a set of associated explorations. One of these explorations pertains to the Panathenaia, especially, but not only, the *peplos* offering; it includes an attempt to read the *peplos* scene on the Parthenon in the context of the frieze as a whole, and, above all, in the context of the religious system of fifth-century Athens. Another exploration involves the investigation of an aspect of the City Dionysia, and of the cult of Dionysos Eleuthereus in general, that I had not discussed in my extended investigation of this festival and cult in *Tragedy and Athenian Religion*, the gentilicial involvement, if any, in this cult and festival.<sup>2</sup> Finally, a third exploration investigates the myths associated with the cult of Athena at the Palladion. The first of the two major reconstructions I set out is a reconstruction of a festival nexus that consisted of two associated festivals, the Plynteria and the Kallynteria; the second is a reconstruction of some general trends that, I will

<sup>1</sup> See the discussion of Athenian festivals, including the nature of our access, the ways in which modern studies have structured that evidence, and the important questions concerning these festivals (such as definitions, changes, celebrants) in Parker 2005a: 155–73.

<sup>2</sup> Sourvinou-Inwood 2003a. On the City Dionysia, see now also Parker 2005a: 316–18.

try to show, governed the association between polis festivals<sup>3</sup> and the hereditary religious societies known as *genē*, a reconstruction of some of the parameters that helped determine the extent and nature of gentilicial participation in the different Athenian festivals, parameters that may be conducive to a greater or lesser gentilicial participation.

After the discussion by Parker there is little more to be said about the nature of the Athenian *genē* and their origin.<sup>4</sup> But given my subject, and since the issue has been raised again recently,<sup>5</sup> I should perhaps nevertheless say something about my own perception of their nature and set out some of the parameters within which I believe the Athenian *genē* are to be perceptually located.

On my understanding, whether or not the *genē* were the structure through which, during the emergence and crystallization of the polis, a Eupatrid aristocracy was defined<sup>6</sup> from out of the leading families of (at least some of) the communities that went into the making of Athens, as I believe they were, there can be no doubt that, as Parker put it,<sup>7</sup> the system of *genē* was the structure through which the

<sup>3</sup> Specifically whole polis festivals, as opposed to festivals celebrated by polis subdivisions such as demes; on cults and festivals of the polis subdivisions, see Sourvinou-Inwood 1990a: 310–12 = 2000: 27–9. On whole/central polis festivals, see Sourvinou-Inwood 1990a: 310 = 2000: 27. In these places I used the term central, but ‘whole polis’ carries less baggage and may be less misleading.

<sup>4</sup> Parker 1996: 56–66. For earlier discussions, see Roussel 1976: pt. 1, esp. 65–78; Bourriot 1976 *passim*; Humphreys 1983: 35–44. [In very brief summary, the *genē* were, in the classical period, ‘hereditary groups based on descent in the male line, all legitimate children (or perhaps all sons) of a father who belonged to a *genos* being in principle admitted shortly after birth’ (Parker 1996: 560). (But Blok and Lambert 2009 argue strongly that a priesthood could pass in the female line where the male line failed to provide a candidate.) Only a minority of Athenians were *gennetai*, members of a *genos*. Though one meaning of *genos* is family, clan, most *gennetai* will not have been able to trace kinship ties with one another, because the supposed point of contact lay in the very distant past (for the connection between *genos* membership and ‘straight descent’ from way back, and so with autochthony, see Blok 2009a and 2009b). In the classical period *genē* are defined, above all, by religious functions, their association with a particular polis cult or cults. R.P.]

<sup>5</sup> Lambert 1999a: 484–9. [On the uneven prestige of different *genē* and *gennetai* see Lambert forthcoming c.]

<sup>6</sup> See esp. Humphreys 1983: 42; Parker 1996: 63–5.

<sup>7</sup> Parker 1996: 65.

allocation of priesthoods and responsibilities for the organization and conduct of public festivals were organized in archaic Attica.

Polis religion was created as the religion of the Athenian polis, when that polis emerged and crystallized, out of the religious systems of the local communities which had undoubtedly interacted with each other in varying degrees depending on proximity, the prestige of each cult, and probably also other factors; these religious systems had themselves developed as a result of the (to a greater or lesser extent) disintegration of the religious system of the Mycenaean kingdom of Athens, above all the collapse of the framework for administering cult controlled by the palace. These local communities, especially the more substantial ones, had more than one cult, but clearly only some of those local communities' cults became whole polis cults of the Athenian polis, while others remained local community (eventually deme) polis cults. This process of the creation of the religion of the Athenian polis also encompassed the creation of the *genē* since, obviously, whatever they may have been before, it was their becoming part of the polis that transformed them into (the earliest forms of) *genē*; no institution can remain 'the same' when it becomes part of a different system—let alone a radically different one, as in this case.

I believe that the hypothesis that best fits the data known to us concerning the Athenian *genē* is that when polis religion was created, responsibility for the different cults (and the privilege of holding their priesthoods) was shared between the leading families of (at least some of) the different local communities that crystallized into Athens and defined themselves as the *genē* that constituted the Eupatrids. The allocation of the different cults to the different *genē* was presumably based mostly, but not necessarily exclusively, on a pre-existing association.

But this suggestion of a pre-existing association must not be confused with the notion that the cults had 'belonged' to those leading families, that they had been their private family cults. There is no shred of evidence to support the theory that the families which (on this reading) developed into *genē* had ever owned the cults with which they were involved in the historical period; on the contrary, what evidence there is suggests that they had been the cults of the whole community, in which those leading families may have had a *de facto* leading role,

and with which they may or may not have constructed a mythological connection before the emergence of the polis.

The absurdity of imagining that the cult of Athena Polias had ever been the private cult of a family group has been pointed out by Parker.<sup>8</sup> Then, as I hope to have shown elsewhere, the notion that in the 'Dark Ages' communal cult was not practised in separate ritual spaces, that it was domestic and associated with the chieftains' houses, is mistaken; public cult was indeed practised in set aside spaces before the eighth century.<sup>9</sup> In addition, it is clear that the fact that more than one *genos* is involved in some very important cults, such as the poliadic cult of Athena Polias and the Eleusinian cult of Demeter and Kore, is not consistent with the notion that cults had previously been owned by a family, but is consistent with the reconstruction involving allocation; that is, that during the process through which the polis emerged, responsibilities for, together with the priesthoods of, particular cults were shared among different *genē*.

To put it crudely, using a metaphor derived from modern cultural assumptions: on my reading, the organization of the newly crystallized polis religion and the allocation of particular cults to particular *genē* was 'centrally' planned and decided, in the sense that the decisions would have been taken by whatever body was acting as a 'central' (in the sense of whole polis) authority while the polis was being created—for example, a council which, like a modern Parliament, reflected local units, such as one consisting of the leaders of each local leading family that was to become one of the *genē* that made up the Eupatrids; but those decisions about such organization largely, albeit not wholly, refracted, or at least took account of, earlier local circumstances.

Before the emergence of the polis different local cults are likely to have had different visibilities and prestige, reflecting, among other things, mythological associations. Whether or not this was the case, some of the local communities' cults became whole polis cults, while others remained local community, eventually deme, polis cults. On my understanding, it was the priesthoods of whole polis cults that were assigned to *genē* along with the associated responsibilities. The

<sup>8</sup> Parker 1996: 24, 61.

<sup>9</sup> Sourvinou-Inwood 1993.

cults that remained local community polis cults would have been managed at the local level—which, at that time at least, would have entailed that the leading families played a dominant role.

The various communities that went into the making of the Athenian polis were often very different from each other at the most basic level, such as, for example, in the differences between very small and larger communities, poor insignificant communities and wealthy and powerful communities with wealthy and powerful leading families; or in the differences between communities that may have been near, and closely interacted with, other communities and more isolated villages; or the community or communities that were located at the centre of what was to become the *asty*, and communities in the periphery of what was to become the polis. These circumstances would be conducive to significant diversities in the allocation of cultic roles to the different *genē* in the different whole polis cults. Clearly, then, one parameter shaping the creation of these earliest *genē* would have been the diverse circumstances, which were conducive to non-uniformity and even messiness; but another parameter would have been the desire to systematize and create some relative homogeneity, though not necessarily equality, since powerful families in powerful communities may have made claims to greater power and influence—also in the religious sphere.

The Athenian *genē* can be said to have participated in cults and festivals in two main ways: first, ritually (the *gennetai*, or some of them, performed ritual roles in the cult); and second, managerially (the *genos* participated in the administration (a concept which includes the financing) of the festivals and cults). This distinction is heuristic, since the two aspects sometimes merge (as, for example, when sending and taking part in a procession), and both functions were performed by the gentilicially appointed priests and priestesses. These gentilicial priests and priestesses provided an irreducible minimum *genos* involvement in the cults which were served by such priesthoods.<sup>10</sup>

One of the themes of the book, then, is the exploration of the extent and the nature of gentilicial participation in different

<sup>10</sup> [On the mode of appointment to such priesthoods, see Blok and Lambert 2009.]