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Irene Polinskaya, *A local history of Greek polytheism: Gods, people and the land of Aigina 800–400 BC* (Religions in the Ancient Greek World, 178), Leiden, Brill 2013, xxviii + 690 pp. ISBN 978-90-04-23404-8.

The subject matter of this book is the pantheon of Aigina: its local particularities, the changes it underwent over a period of 400 years, its internal logic and coherence, and finally the insights it can give us for the society and identity of the inhabitants of the island.

Chapters 1–6 are general in scope, situating the book and its approach in the broader field of Greek religion. Polinskaya argues for the need to prioritize the local and idiosyncratic in the study of the gods, as well as the need to look at local pantheons as meaningful coherent systems. Chapter 7, which is the longest of the book (225 pages) reviews the evidence for the gods whose cult can be attested on Aigina within the period studied. The gods are organized alphabetically, and the main aim of the discussion, other than establishing the validity of different pieces of evidence, is to detect the functions of each god. Chapter 8 examines the internal logic and coherence of the Aiginetan pantheon. It looks at the interconnections between the various divine figures, articulated through mythical and cultic ties or through shared functions. One of its main arguments is that the pantheon of Aigina is actually less chaotic than Panhellenic studies of Greek gods might lead one to imagine. The evidence indicates there were 16 cults, with only some insignificant overlap of functions. Chapter 9 examines how this pantheon was put together through time. It argues that there was a significant increase in the number of gods worshipped and the functions they performed. In the Geometric period there were few cults (those of Aphaia, Zeus Hellanios, and a couple of cult places with unattested divinities), which dealt with the basic needs of a small, simple and introvert society. New gods, such as Heracles, Damia and Auxesia, and Aiakos, were introduced in the course of the Archaic period, as Aigina became a trading power and its role in the Saronic Gulf and the wider Greek world changed. The pantheon was further increased in the Classical period, with gods, such as Dionysus, Demeter, and Asclepius supplying the needs of an increasingly complex society. Chapter 10 looks at how some cults of Aigina (Damia and Auxesia, and the Aiakids) articulated the relationships between the island and the other states of the Saronic Gulf. Chapter 11 returns to the broader topic of the relationship between the local/regional and the Panhellenic dimensions of Greek religion. It argues that the answer to what made Aiginetan religion Aiginetan is to be found in the answer to the question of what made one Aiginetan. Aiginetan identity, Polinskaya argues, was based on a combination of various elements, such as the topography

of the place, its myths of origins, and its reputation for justice and hospitality.

This is a long book (690 pages), and this is largely because detailed presentation of the evidence has taken precedence over narrative (this reader also found that the more general discussion in the first six chapters of the book was unnecessarily long). Thanks to its emphasis on detail, however, as well as thanks to the various appendices, the book succeeds in giving to the reader a very clear overview of the evidence and the main debates around it. Polinskaya's extensive discussion of the evidence in Chapter 7 is in many instances solid, persuasive and occasionally innovative. Too frequently, however, conclusions are arrived at in haste and betray a lack of engagement with wider scholarship on Greek religion: Hecate's cult is connected with the afterlife and Orphism (p. 292), for example. But Hecate, although connected with ghosts, has no established connections with afterlife cults.<sup>1</sup> And Orphism was connected with itinerant practitioners, not with fixed cults. Elsewhere (p. 288) Polinskaya assures us that the cult of Demeter Thesmophoros was uniform all over the Greek world, it had to do with fertility and women, and therefore there is no reason to enquire into its local character. But the votives found in Demeter's sanctuaries in the various places of the Greek world show significant differences despite some broad similarities.<sup>2</sup> Fertility and women seem to be for Polinskaya immutable concepts, and the scholarly debate about Thesmophoria and women's citizen status does not enter her agenda.<sup>3</sup> On p. 260 a dedicated anchor makes Apollo not only a patron of sea-faring, a well-attested function of the god, but also of trade, a much less certain skill of Apollo and one that certainly is not to be inferred from an anchor.<sup>4</sup> The exchange of insults between women in the cult of Damia and Auxesia has to do, according to Polinskaya (pp. 273, 284), with fertility magic, an antiquated interpretation. Nothing is said about the effect of such rituals in subverting social hierarchies, a much more modern perspective.<sup>5</sup>

<sup>1</sup> For Hecate and ghosts see S.I. Johnston, *Restless dead: Encounters between the living and the dead in Ancient Greece*, Berkeley 1999, 203–249. For Hecate's problematic role at Eleusis see K. Clinton, *Myth and cult. The iconography of the Eleusinian mysteries* (ActaAth-8°, 11) Stockholm 1992, 116–120; A. Zografou, *Chemins d'Hécate: Portes, routes, carrefours et autres figures de l'entre-deux* (Kernos suppl., 24), Liège 2010, 71–83.

<sup>2</sup> See for instance U. Kron, 'Frauenfeste in Demeterheiligtümern: das Thesmophorion von Bitalemi', *AA* 1992, 623 ff.

<sup>3</sup> M. Detienne, 'The violence of wellborn ladies: Women in the Thesmophoria', in *The cuisine of sacrifice among the Greeks*, eds. M. Detienne & J.-P. Vernant, transl. P. Wissing, Chicago 1989, 129–147.

<sup>4</sup> For the problem of Apollo's association with trade see M. Mili, 'Apollo Kerdoos: A conniving Apollo in Thessaly?', in *Current approaches to religion in Ancient Greece* (ActaAth-8°, 21), eds. M. Haysom & J. Wallensten, Stockholm 2011, 42–43.

<sup>5</sup> R. Parker, *Polytheism and society at Athens*, Oxford 2005, 349–350.

An important methodological problem for the particular questions this book asks has to do with the evaluation of the evidence available, its interpretive potential and its limitations. It is striking, but nowhere emphasized in the book, that the evidence available is very little in comparison with other parts of the Greek world. Leaving aside the testimonies of Pindar and Herodotus, there are only four excavated sanctuaries, nine dedicatory inscriptions, two inventories and a few *horoi*. It is not only the quantity of the evidence that should give pause. One has to enquire into the formation processes of the various bodies of evidence. Polinskaya does not engage with these issues and consistently undervalues the limitations of the bodies of evidence for the particular arguments she puts forward. As a result the question is not even raised, in Chapter 8, why certain gods and certain functions that we would expect in a society of the time are not present in the record, as for instance Hestia, Hermes, or any god relevant to politics, trade, pastoralism, conviviality, and merriment (Dionysus becomes for Polinskaya a god of fertility). It is thus that she can argue that the pantheon of Aigina was manageable and coherent, with little overlap of functions and argue for an evolutionary development of Greek polytheism though time.

The book certainly stands out from other regional studies of religion in its attempt to pinpoint more precisely the local character of Aiginetan religion. This attempt, however, is compromised by an exclusive emphasis on the gods. Polinskaya's confident dismissal, in a single sentence (p. 46), of the importance of looking at the worshippers in a study of religion in a particular society as a "simplification of Durkheim" is rather unfortunate. The book ends up continuing a long tradition of scholarship that thinks, as Polinskaya puts it (p. 71), that no religion can exist without gods, but it can apparently exist, so the implication seems to be, without the worshippers. As a result, and rather frustratingly, the answer to the question of what it was like to be an Aiginetan in the 5th century is only searched for in the imaginary universe of the gods, and not in the realities of what it was like to live and grow up in this small island in these turbulent times.

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Paola Ceccarelli, *Ancient Greek letter writing: A cultural history (600 BC–150 BC)*, Oxford, Oxford University Press 2013, xviii + 435 pp. ISBN 978-0-19-967559-3.

Ancient epistolography has been a focus of intense scholarly interest during the last decades, and Ceccarelli's study is a fine and solid contribution to the discussion. The project began in Ceccarelli's desire to understand the letter as a medium of communication in the correspondence of the Seleucid kings, as stated in the very first sentences of the preface (p. v); this particular issue is focused also in the epilogue, where Ceccarelli states that her goal has been to "explore both the development of letter writing until it became the instrument of royal communication and the connotations acquired by official correspondence" (p. 331). The study is thus framed by questions concerning the letter as a means of official communication. Between the prologue and the epilogue, however, a huge amount of ground is covered and many contexts for letter writing are explored in detail. Thus, not only official letters but also letters between individuals and on private matters are brought into the picture. There are real letters and fictional letters, letters embedded in literary and historical works, letters preserved in inscriptions, on lead, and on papyrus, as well as myths and aetiologies concerning the invention of epistolary writing and of writing in general. A wide range of material is thus covered and discussed from a variety of angles. The over-arching question is never lost, however, and in spite of its richness and chronological leaps the book is lucid and well organized.

The preface begins by lucidly sketching out the positions in epistolary scholarship as well as the purpose and structure of the book, which is divided into an introduction followed by two parts: the first part concerns the background and beginnings of letter writing, while the second part deals with letter writing in the context of the polis.

In the Introduction (Chapter 1) Ceccarelli presents a survey of different kinds of letters together with a terminology for referring to them. She also discusses the practicalities involved in writing and sending letters. Ceccarelli accounts for the sometimes contradictory ways in which the Greek letter manuals categorized letters and for their modern scholarly counterparts. Her own conclusion, however, is that categories based on textual criteria (rather than function) can be more problematic than useful. In her own definition of what a "letter" is, though not neglecting formal elements, she underlines the importance of a spatiotemporal distance as the conceptual foundation for a letter. This distance is textually carried out by deictic markers, but its presuppositions are specifically historical circumstances.

After the Introduction the first part of the book begins, comprising Chapters 2–4. In this part Ceccarelli sets out to