Greek Religion

Ancient and Modern
Introduction

- The study of ancient Greek religion is a broad topic that encompasses a multitude of approaches and perspectives.
- Historical vs. Social
- Religion for the Greeks is something eminently social.
- Religion = *Koinonia* (society) Fellowship
  - Orthodox Christianity - *Koinonia* = Communion
Polytheism

- Monotheism vs. Polytheism
- No Greek god was all powerful, but each controlled a certain sphere on interest.
- The Greek gods never imposed codes of behavior.
- Greeks often criticized their gods and a small minority even questioned their existence and sought other causes behind the phenomena
Epicurus on the problem of evil

- "Is [God] willing to prevent evil, but not able? then is he impotent. Is he able, but not willing? then is he malevolent. Is he both able and willing? whence then is evil?"
Syncretism

- Religious tolerance and syncretism
- **Syncretism** = the merging of different traditions
- Herodotus in Egypt.
- “Everyone without exception believes his own native customs, and the **religion** he was brought up in, to be the best; and that being so, it is unlikely that anyone but a madman would mock at such things. There is abundant evidence that this is the universal feeling about the ancient customs of one's country.”
- Herodotus, Histories 3, 38
Sacrifice

- The central focus of Greek religion was the sacrifice.
- In order to gain the God’s will you must destroy what you value most. (cf. Abraham)
- Greek religious rituals were performed outside the temple in public view, since Greek religion had a very significant social aspect.
- Notions of guilt or sin, which arise from disobeying God’s rule, were unknown to the Greeks.
A Different View

- Greek intellectuals believed that gods do not fashion human misery or happiness, success in war or love, or anything else.
- Humans make their own world, a fundamental principle of what we think of as Western civilization.
Other Approaches

- A magical principle underlines the natural world.
- A man can manipulate the outside world by means of rituals and spells.
- Spirits of the dead
- **Miasma** => was thought to afflict a murderer because he was pursued by the spirit that lived in the blood he spilled.
- Dreams and visions.
The Arrival of Christianity

- **St Paul** was the first who came in the Greek world to preach Christianity in 49 AD.
- He visited and preached in Thessaloniki, Athens and Corinth among other cities.
- After his visit the first Greek Christian communities were created.
- St Paul wrote letters to these first Christian Greek communities. (*1st/2nd Corinthians, 1st/2nd Thessalonians, Ephesians, Philippians*)
Constantine the first Christian Emperor

- In 312 AD the Roman Emperor Constantine was about to lead his army in a battle against his enemy Maxentius at the Milvian Bridge outside Rome. The winner would gain control of the late Roman Empire.
- According to the tradition a sign appeared in the sky "above the sun" and with it the words "conquer by this". That night also he said that he saw Jesus Christ telling him to use the sign "as a safeguard in all battles". Constantine ordered the sign to be put on his soldier's shields - and won the battle.
- In Hoc Signo Vinces
Constantine the first Christian Emperor

- Constantine’s mother, Helena, had become a Christian, and along with her son she began to spend large sums of money building new churches and visiting the Holy Land.
- Finally Constantine was baptized close to the end of his life.
Constantine the first Christian Emperor

• In 330 Constantine dedicates the city of Constantinople (in Greek "the city of Constantine"), established on the site of the Greek city Byzantium, as the new capital of the Roman Empire.
• In 410 Rome is sacked by the Visigoths.
• In 527 Constantinople covers eight square miles (Manhattan covers twenty-two square miles) with at least 500,000 inhabitants.
The Schism of the Church

Although initially the Eastern and Western Christians shared the same faith, the two traditions began to divide after the seventh Ecumenical Council in 787 CE were finally split over the conflict with Rome in the so called Great Schism in 1054. The major conflict was over the papal claim to supreme authority and the doctrine of the Holy Spirit. The break became final in the fifteenth century.
The Schism of the Church

- A decisive aspect of the Schism was the sack of Constantinople in 1204 during the (Western Christian) Fourth Crusade. The sacking of Constantinople by the Crusaders eventually led to the loss of this Byzantine capital to the Muslim Ottomans in 1453.
- The Greeks have never forgotten this event. Even today it serves as a warning that a Greek can never trust the Westerners.
The Fourth Crusade (1202-4)

- Route of fourth crusade
- Route of later crusades

Crusaders assemble in Venice, which promises transportation in exchange for their help in reconquering Zara, a mission accomplished in 1202. Venice also gains many important strongpoints in the Aegean.

1203/4
- Crusaders sack Constantinople
- Recaptured 1261
Reconciliation?

- 05/11/2001
- Pope John Paul II, in a sweeping statement of regret aimed at healing Christianity's east-west divide, begged God's forgiveness Friday for sins committed by Roman Catholics "against their Orthodox brothers and sisters," including the plunder of the Byzantine capital by 13th century Crusaders
- "It is tragic that the assailants, who set out to secure free access for Christians to the Holy Land, turned against their brothers in the faith. The fact that they were Latin Christians fills Catholics with deep regret."
Similarities between Orthodox and Catholic Churches

- They are both liturgical churches—teaching is conveyed by both rite and ritual.
- Eucharist is the supreme ritual.
- They both recognize the Holy Mysteries—The Sacraments
- They both celebrate the saints as living icons of God's redemptive power and Virgin Mary as the Mother of God.
Differences between Orthodox and Catholic Churches

- Orthodox Church does not accept the universal jurisdiction claimed by the Pope over the whole of Christendom.
- Orthodox Church rejects the dyarchy of origin, (however qualified), for the Holy Spirit (proceeding from the Father and Son).
- Orthodox priests are getting married
Spread of Orthodox Tradition

- The two most widely known Orthodox traditions are the **Greek** and **Russian Orthodox**. Along with Greece and Russia, however there are other communities around the world, principally in Australia, Serbia, Bulgaria, Romania, Albania and Cyprus and the UK. There are also Orthodox communities in the Far East, notably Japan and Korea.
OFFICIAL FUNERAL SERVICE

FOR THE

HON. ROBERT NESTA MARLEY O.M.
(ROB MARLEY - BERSHANE SELASSIE)
(Light of the Trinity)

AT

THE ETHIOPIAN ORTHODOX CHURCH
HOLY TRINITY
39 MAXFIELD AVENUE, KINGSTON, JAMAICA
8.00 — 9.00 a.m.

AND

THE NATIONAL ARENA
11.00 a.m.

THURSDAY MAY 21, 1981.
Welcome to the website of Panagia Vlahemon
Greek Orthodox Monastery
Greek State and the Church

- The first article of the first constitutional text of modern Greece, the “Constitution of Epidaurus” of 1822, classifies as Greeks “all natives [autochthonous] who believe in Christ”.
- “The nation and Orthodoxy...have become in the Greek conscience virtually synonymous concepts, which together constitute our Helleno-Christian civilization.”
- Former Prime Minister Constantinos Karamanlis in a speech (1981)
Greek State and the Church

- The Greek constitution is not written in the name of the people or of the state like many of the western liberal constitutions.
- It is written:
  - “In the name of the Holy and Consustantial and Indivisible Trinity”
The Oath of the President of the Republic

- **Religious connotations**
- Article 2. Before assuming the exercise of his duties, the President of the Republic shall take the following oath before Parliament:
  
  "I do swear in the name of the Holy and Consubstantial and Indivisible Trinity to safeguard the Constitution and the laws, to care for the faithful observance thereof, to defend the national independence and territorial integrity of the Country, to protect the rights and liberties of the Greeks and to serve the general interest and the progress of the Greek People”

- However **there are provisions in the constitution in case a person with different religion takes the oath**
Greek State and the Church

- Greek students are taught a **divinity lesson** in school for many years, which propagandizes the ideas of the Orthodox Church against other religions.
- In 2008, under pressure from the EU, every student has the choice to skip the course if he brings a note signed by his parents.
- Orthodox priests are considered **civil servants** and are **officially paid** by the Greek government.
Greek State and the Church

In order for a temple of another religion to be built in Greece, authorities seek the advice (apart from the usual permission of the local city-planning office) of the local Orthodox bishop, and the police.
The Church and the People

- **Omnipresence** of Religion.
- On Serifos (island in the Cyclades), which has a population of about 1,000 habitants, there are 117 churches.
- “The Greek Orthodox Church *influences* people very much," says writer Nikos Dimou, "not on religious matters, but on political ones."
- "The church is against change," says Dimou, "and it is against anything that will make Greeks look more like Europeans."
The Church and the People

- How is Orthodox religion being perceived by the majority of the Greeks?
- Mostly as a “way of life” and less as a system of metaphysical beliefs.
- Part of Greek Identity
- “Personally I am an atheist; but because I am Greek, I am of course a member of the Orthodox Church”.
The Church and the People

- BBC news 11 April, 2002
- Athens running out of space to bury the dead
- But the government's attempts to solve the problem have sparked a row with the Orthodox Church.
- A religious burial service - conducted by a Greek Orthodox priest - has been the only legitimate way for Greeks to dispose of their dead.
- Greece is one of the few countries in Europe that does not have a crematorium
The Church and the People

- 96.7% of Greeks considered themselves as members of the [Greek Orthodox Church](#).
- According to the last official census of 1951.
- In 1991, a Eurobarometer survey showed that 98.2% of the Greeks declared to be members of the [Orthodox Church](#).
- A 2002 Eurobarometer survey showed that the Greek youth (15-24 year-olds) is the most religious youth in Europe after the Irish one.
Mount Athos-The center of Greek Orthodox Christianity

- There are twenty monasteries together with a number of smaller communities known as sketae.
- The Mount Athos has independent administration and sovereignty. It is considered semi-autonomous.
- The Greek State is represented by the Governor of Mount Athos, who answers to the Ministry of Foreign Affairs and who, together with the deputy governor, resides in Karyes the capital of the community.
Mount Athos - The center of Greek Orthodox Christianity

- Any Greek or foreign Orthodox Christian who wishes to visit Mount Athos must first get in touch with the Pilgrim Bureau in Thessaloniki or Ouranoupolis, Chalkidiki (in order to obtain the Diamonitirion (visitation permit) which is valid for four calendar days.

- Foreigners of other religious affiliations must apply to the Ministry of Foreign Affairs.
Mount Athos-The center of Greek Orthodox Christianity

- A maximum of 120 Orthodox Christian visitors are allowed per day, whereas foreigners of other religious affiliations are limited to 14 per day. These limits do not include persons that have explicit invitations from the monasteries.
- **No women are allowed.**
Ban on Women’s Access

The issue of Mount Athos’ ban was raised in European parliament on 14 January 2003 when a slim majority voted a non-binding ‘resolution on the situation concerning basic rights in the European Union’. Article 98 of the resolution, which was approved by 277 votes to 255, ‘requests the lifting of the ban on women entering Mount Athos in Greece,'
Ban on Women’s Access

- Greek Minister of Culture explained the legal status of the 20 monastery strong community that enjoys special status established in the Accession Treaty of Greece to the EEC, which was reaffirmed in Amsterdam.

- He also stressed that the peninsula is self-governed and all the land there belongs to the monasteries and is therefore private, without exception and without any of it belonging to the public or the central Greek state.
Ban on Women’s Access

- "The ban on women at Mt. Athos and the regulations of administration of the Catholic Church, as well as that of other churches and all similar issues, are elements of a tradition which the EU should confront with tolerance and a pluralistic attitude which characterizes European civilization," Minister of Culture Venizelos said.

- No objections were raised by the Eurodeputies or Rocard.
Reasons for the Powerful Role of the Church

- Ottoman religious tolerance
- Sanction of the Church during the years of Ottoman Occupation
- The Orthodox church is the only ideological system that retained its strength during those years
Reasons for the Powerful Role of the Church

- After the revolution of 1821 and during the years of the formation of Greek national identity (1830-1864), the Greek Church was nationalized and came under the direct control of the state.
- **State controls the Church controls the People**
- The Greek state used the authority of the church and its popularity among the people in order to legitimize its policies.
Politics and Culture


Diamandouros perceives Greek society as an arena where two political cultures are at conflict with each other:
- the first one, “the underdog culture”, is anti-western, parochial, clientist, and statist in outlook (religious nationalism has sprang from this culture)
- the other one is the culture of the “modernizers”, inspired by the Enlightenment and its liberal ideals
The Orthodox Church regards itself as the repository of Hellenism during the 400 years of Ottoman rule and the first 150 years of the struggle to establish the Modern Greek state. The church argues that over the past 20 years the Socialists have adopted an increasingly secular stance in order to achieve European and international acceptance. This, according to Archbishop Christodoulou, has undermined the unique Greek cultural heritage of which the church considers itself the guardian (The identification of the church with a Hellenistic state was best embodied in Cyprus, where the first head of state at independence was Archbishop Makarios, who was also known to the Greek Cypriots as the Ethnarch, essentially the embodiment of the state in the person of the cleric).

Archbishop Christodoulou has repeatedly spoken out in public against what he considers the corrosive influence of the EU on the spiritual and nationalist character of Hellenism. He has likened the EU to a grinder making mincemeat of the national identities of member states and refers disparagingly to the "Euro-craving" of Greek politicians.