THE ATHENS GREEK RELIGION SEMINAR, Tuesday, June 11, 2024

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Divine and Human Authority in early Cretan law

ABSTRACT

From 650 BCE onwards, after at least a century of Greek alphabetic writing, texts began to appear in various Greek poleis, in particular on Crete, which differ markedly from the writing that came before: laws regulating civic groups appeared on a new medium, stone, with a monumental appearance, carrying out a new, public function. The role of religion in the emergence of these monumental texts in archaic Crete has long been recognised: elements such as invocations of the gods, and the inscribing of some of these laws on temple walls, are usually seen as innovations necessary to legitimate the innovation of writing laws down. This paper re-examines the archaic legal inscriptions from Crete to offer a different interpretation of the function and role of religion in the development of these inscribed texts. Rather than seeing divine authority as an element necessary to legitimate the innovation of writing laws down, it argues that it should be seen as a feature of continuation between pre-existing customs and unwritten rules, and the new rules inscribed in stone. This paper thus investigates the ways in which this new application of writing was anchored in existing practices: both in oral discourses of dispute-settlement and in the 'entangled' graffiti already widespread in the Greek world. It does so by examining the location and display of early Cretan laws, as well as the use of enactment formula and divine invocations, to argue that the religious dimensions of these texts helped connect this new writing practice of community regulation to existing ideas and practices of (divine) authority and communication.

The seminar takes place **Tuesday**, **June 11**, **2024**, **17.00 (Athens)**
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