



THE ATHENS GREEK RELIGION SEMINAR, Tuesday, December 10, 2024

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Co-Living with the Gods on Hellenistic Delos Domestic Religion and Home-Making in a Multicultural Port City

ABSTRACT

This talk examines the entanglement of maritime mobility (of people, goods, and ideas), domestic space, and religion on the port island of Delos at its height under the Second Athenian Domination (167 BCE - 69 CE). The analysis is framed within an integrated theoretical approach that combines a 'material religion' perspective on domestic cultic practices with 'home-making' theory from Migration Studies. Following new materialist theories, I consider built environments and portable objects, with their affordances and interrelations, as central actants in integrating divine presence and enabling ritual communication with it within the multifunctional, fluid, and dynamic space of domestic settings. Through their sensory affordances, material things transform sensescapes and thus play a crucial role in setting apart the space and time of the sacred within domestic contexts. Domestic material culture mediates religious experience, thereby shaping perceptions and understandings of the divine. In migration processes, domestic and ritual (or domestic-ritual) objects and religious practices serve as a cornerstone in establishing a sense of home in new dwellings. These elements cultivate a feeling of continuity with cherished traditions, lifestyles, places, and relationships from the past, fostering familiarity, security, and a sense of control in new environments. Building on certain objects and uses of the domestic space, migrants appropriate both religion and domestic settings as tools to negotiate their adjustment to the host culture while simultaneously maintaining and recreating connections to their homelands. Drawing upon this framework, I aim to shed light on two interrelated sets of questions concerning the religious life of Delos:

- How was religion spatially, materially, and temporarily emplaced within houses? How permanent or ephemeral and central or peripheral were the religious locations in these settings? To what extent, and in what ways, were these locations visually and functionally connected to other rooms and to the building entrances? How did the material culture of domestic religious practices shape experiences and conceptions of the divine?
- Delos was a religious melting pot, where immigrants cultivated and publicly displayed connections to their homelands through ethnic cults within associations and private sanctuaries. It was also a place where foreign gods, such as the Syrian Goddess and Hadad, and Isis and Sarapis, were worshipped by people from across the Mediterranean. In this context, how did migrants appropriate religious customs from their homelands to turn their new houses into meaningful homes? What role did objects play in this process? Did migrants engage with religious practices of their host city in their domestic life? To what extent, and in what ways, were migrant and local forms of religion transformed through their appropriation in home-making processes and adaptation to the Delian domestic and social environments?

The seminar takes place Tuesday, December 10, 2024, at 17.00 (Athens) in a hybrid format with live presence at the Swedish Institute at Athens and online via Zoom.

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