

Do Satyrs Wear Sneakers?

Hellenic Polytheism and the Reception of Antiquity in Contemporary Greece –
a study in serious play

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Abstract:

Why do thousands of modern Greeks worship ancient Greek gods, adopt principles from Greek ethics, structure their religious lives according to ancient calendars and meet at public and private rituals, where they wear ancient Greek inspired clothes and play ancient Greek inspired music? How does the surrounding Greek society react? And how did this begin? This dissertation investigates the reception of ancient Greek religion among contemporary Pagans in Greece - a phenomenon the author refers to as contemporary Hellenic polytheism. The study looks at how and why historical narratives and notions of Hellenicity are constructed by contemporary Hellenic polytheists. Furthermore it describes the contemporary Hellenic landscape, introducing more than ten religious communities in Greece, which have not been studied previously, and provides an overview of the most central ideas and practices of contemporary Hellenic polytheists. The author describes contemporary Hellenic polytheist rituals and discusses how, and why, they are designed and performed. Throughout the discussion of groups and practices, the author analyses how contemporary Hellenic polytheist identities are balanced against the practical circumstances of (urban) life in the 21st century. The author underlines the importance of understanding ritual as play, but often serious play, and emphasises the importance of religious musicality and improvisation as a key to understanding the dynamics of ritual and ritual change. In a discussion of cases the author shows how particular rituals selectively forget and remember elements of their ancient Greek “counterparts” and discusses why.