discusses people, places, and individual texts. It is clear that Hajdu has a canon in mind and presents it in an assured and perceptive way.

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General

We start with two recent *Kernos Supplements* volumes, each based on the author's doctoral dissertation.

Sylvain Lebreton investigates the full spectrum of the cults of Zeus at Athens based on the study of Zeus' local cult epithets.[1] The sheer quantity of cult epithets associated with Zeus at Athens seems to defy any attempt to impose coherence on the general character of the god, as they indicate such a broad spectrum of his powers, competencies, and modes of intervention in human lives. As Lebreton notes, no other deity possesses such a wide range of cultic epithets. Lebreton investigates the individual epithets and cults in detail, but, besides seeking an understanding of the particular aspects of the god's powers that gave rise to them, he also discusses the general picture of Zeus arising from them cumulatively.

Lebreton perceives the epithets of the god as a complex semantic network. He identifies the main nodes of convergence within it and analyses the interconnections of its individual semantic fields. For instance, he notes that epithets that associate Zeus with social order are particularly numerous, whereas Zeus is rarely associated with agriculture. His observations on the specific semantic fields formed by the onomastic attributes structure the study into chapters on: the cults of Zeus 'from the peaks to the fields', which includes mountains, mastery over the weather, and finally vegetation and agriculture; 'Zeus presides over social relations'; 'Zeus from the oikos to the polis'; 'Zeus and power: politics, city, sovereignty'. Lebreton clearly and helpfully explains his methodology in the introduction and provides a summary of his conclusions at the end. Of some forty epithets he identifies, nine are related to Zeus' mountainous or elevated position, seven are meteorological, and about a dozen identify Zeus as presiding over various forms of social relations. Even though 'social' epithets are the most numerous, Lebreton sees the epithets signifying Zeus' exalted spatial position as primary and semantically most significant. He illustrates the semantic network, its spheres, and their interconnectedness with a helpful chart, which, for instance, derives the aspects of

[1] *Zeus d'Athènes: polythéisme et paysages onomastiques* (Kernos Supplément, 44). By Sylvain Lebreton. Liège, Presses universitaires de Liège, 2025. Pp. 480. Paperback €35, ISBN: 978-2-87562-439-0.

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'god giving signs' and 'atmospheric movements' from the semantic field 'summits'. Interesting diachronic observations are also made.

Already in the archaic period, Zeus is a complex god active in a variety of fields, predominantly as a divinity of weather, elevation, and social relationships. He becomes more associated with political life in the classical period, with the epithet Soter ('Saviour') gaining prominence in the Hellenistic period. Lebreton's observations on the gradual mollification of Zeus' character from the archaic period onwards are truly fascinating – it appears that Zeus, too, got milder with age! Lebreton notes that, in this respect, the onomastic evidence coheres with what the archaeologists have established regarding the iconographical representations of the god: from around 450 BCE, Zeus is no longer represented as actively chasing a foe or brandishing a thunderbolt (with the exception of gigantomachies), but rather features as a majestic spectator of events. These are just some aspects of this tremendously useful monograph that I found particularly interesting. Its remarkable clarity and comprehensiveness are truly impressive considering the complexity of the subject matter.

Zoé Pitz's monograph is another impressively useful book. Pitz presents a study of the sacrificial animals based on the corpus of ancient Greek ritual norms, inscriptional records about the rituals and sanctuaries also known as *leges sacrae* ('sacred laws').[2] The goal of the study is to provide a better understanding of the associations between specific animals and deities. As Pitz notes, questions about the motives governing the association of specific gods with specific types of sacrificial animals were already posed in antiquity. The type, age, and, occasionally, the colour of the sacrificial animal tended to be stipulated for each divinity and cult. Sacrificing the wrong type of animal could offend the god and render the worshipper or even the whole shrine ritually polluted. The book is exceptionally clear and well structured. The first part discusses the four main criteria for selection of sacrificial animals: species, sex, age, and colour (which is surprisingly rarely specified). The second part discusses the nature of the associations between deities and specific types of sacrificial animals, taking species, sex, and age into account. Some conclusions are unsurprising, such as that, in general, the sex of the sacrificial animals tends to align with the gender of the deity who was the recipient of the sacrifice. What is more noteworthy are some firm rules that emerge from the data: Kore never received female animals and Artemis, Aphrodite, Kourotrophos, Dionysus, Hermes, and Poseidon are never designated as recipients of animals of the opposite sex. Pregnant animals tend to be sacrificed to Demeter. The age of the animal is mostly dictated by financial considerations, but Pitz highlights the frequent association of Dionysus with the sacrifice of young animals and wonders whether the youthfulness of the god may have exerted an influence on the age of the sacrificial animals. The book contains a plethora of data organized into charts and graphs and will be a very useful port of call for anyone interested in Greek animal sacrifice.

In their history of European paganisms since antiquity, Robin Douglas and Francis Young are primarily interested in excavating the precise ways in which the religious ideas that Christians associated with 'paganism' resurfaced at various points and

[2] *Le Bestiaire sacrificiel dans les normes rituelles grecques* (Kernos Supplément 43). By Zoé Pitz. Liège, Presses universitaires de Liège, 2024. Pp. 322. Illustrations. Paperback €35, ISBN: 978-2-87562-414-7.

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places in Europe.[3] They challenge the idea that paganism could somehow survive or was sporadically concocted as a new kind of religion and instead argue for the notion of the 'persisting' of ancient, pre-Christian religious traditions. Greco-Roman cultural products were the primary vehicle for paganism's persistence. The authors eschew the employment of critical language to define what they call the 'hermeneutic of persistence' and instead opt for comparing the persistence model to 'a set of ancient, desiccated seeds which can be watered periodically so as to bloom afresh', or 'an organism preserved in ice which exists in deep metabolic sleep until someone thaws it out', or a 'temperamental artist who produces nothing for years but is capable of periodic bursts of astonishing work' (p. 3). While acknowledging that the employment of the term 'paganism' for all European adherents of non-Abrahamic polytheistic religions carries with it many risks, such as othering and creating a uniform conglomerate out of what were very diverse religious communities, the authors nevertheless opt for using it for the sake of convenience and (what they see as) the lack of a better alternative. After a decidedly old-fashioned outline of the basic characteristics of Greek and Roman religion, which the authors see as essentially based in orthopraxy (with an approving quote of de Fontenelle's famous quip 'Do what the others do, and believe what you wish', a full passage by William Robertson Smith on the importance of 'things done at a temple', and the almost total lack of creed of the 'antique religions'), the authors address 'the world of pagan esotericism and mystery cults' as fonts of personal and devotional religious experience. It is understandable that the authors are primarily interested in those aspects of ancient religious life and thought which have exercised the most fascination and have occasionally proven irresistibly attractive to European Christians: Pythagoreanism, Orphism, Platonism (and especially Neoplatonism), and Hermeticism. It is nevertheless regrettable that the authors are so resolutely old fashioned in their assessment of the general characteristics of Greek and Roman religions. While their discussion of the issues of methodology and terminology is lengthy and extensive, the rest of the book is a veritable whistle-stop tour of various instances of resurgence of interest in, and occasionally full-blown practice of, paganism. This is a dense, fast-paced, and fact-filled overview and I wish the authors had taken more time and space to discuss the principal characters and phenomena in more depth.

We start with the brief reign of emperor Julian (361–3 CE), a Neoplatonist theurgist who famously proclaimed religious freedom for the subjects of his empire and tried to restore ancestral polytheism, but had also planned to strengthen and reform it to represent a more attractive rival to Christianity, even devising ways for Greek and Roman priests to engage in charitable works. As the authors describe him, he 'acted as a pagan pope, sitting at the apex of a polytheistic clerical hierarchy, embracing an ascetic celibate lifestyle, sending out encyclicals, and preaching a gospel of adapted Neoplatonism'. (p. 42) The second chapter charts the manifold ways in which various European nations adopted and occasionally resisted Christianity, a process important for the authors' concept of 'pagan persistence' because they argue that Christianity, due to the importance of belief, is so fundamentally different from paganism as a mode of

[3] *Paganism Persisting: A History of European Paganisms since Antiquity.* By Robin Douglas and Francis Young. Exeter, Exeter University Press, 2024. Pp. 228. Hardback, £90, ISBN: 978-1-80413-123-7.

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religiosity that the two are essentially incompatible and cannot co-exist. They reject the possibility of any kind of semi-paganism. Whereas their discussion of paganism in chapter one is restricted to Greek and Roman religions, it becomes evident in chapter two that they perceive all pagan religions as essentially different from Christianity in the same way that Greek and Roman religions were (in their view). Since they see pagan religions as fundamental orthopraxes sustained through ancestral custom, they argue that 'once a *society* became Christian, even if it openly tolerated the persistence of certain pagan practices, then paganism as a coherent mode of religio-cultural life became difficult or impossible to sustain' (p. 47). Accordingly, phenomena such as the fairies of northern Europe and the Mediterranean nereïda should be subsumed under 'folklore', rather than 'pagan survival'. The problem they do not address is that one of the most influential ancient Greek religious movements in terms of pagan revival was Neoplatonism, which both had doctrinal corpus and was not dependent on ancestral tradition, but on highly specialized education.

Chapter three provides the first examples of pagan revival: the crypto-Neoplatonist Michael Psellus, active in the Byzantine Empire in the eleventh century, who collected and commented on the fragments of the Chaldaean Oracles, and the fourteenth–fifteenth-century, more open devotee of Plato, Georgios Gemistos 'Plethon', whose work the *Laws,* an updated take on Plato's constitution of the polytheistic state, was unfortunately burned and survives only in fragments. Plethon apparently stripped Platonism of its later association with theurgy, but was nevertheless also fascinated by the Chaldaean Oracles, on which he also penned a commentary. Plethon's ideas about theology were to exercise a great influence for centuries: he associated the works of Plato, Zoroaster, and Pythagoras with the supposed tradition of profound and ancient theological wisdom of which they were all prophets. A whole society of pagans gathered around Plethon in Mistras. The impact of his thought transcended national borders when his pupils fled to Italy after the capture of Constantinople in 1453.

The rest of the book provides an overview of the individuals and, occasionally, movements that either incorporated elements of (initially mostly ancient Greek) religion in their version of Christianity, or practised some form of paganism, or were accused of practising, as were Catholics on the whole, what was supposedly a form of paganism. The most fascinating aspect of the book is the way it reveals the sheer variety of interpretations and hopes imposed on the religions of the Greeks and Romans: some individuals, such as Ficino and Plethon, embraced them because they thought that they could unlock a profound and mystical ancient wisdom; the French revolutionaries saw in them an opportunity to deify and worship reason; the romantics embraced what they saw as libertarianism and nature-worship.

It is with the nationalist movements that paganism starts to break free of its associations with Greco-Roman culture. Now revivals of what were perceived as the original, pre-Christian, national religions, be it druidism, Latvian Dievturi, or Estonian Taarausk, start to exercise greater fascination than the Neoplatonic promise of the union with the One or a more concrete promise of a sexual union with a random fellow-participant in Pan worship. The authors argue that the success of the Wicca is best understood when seen from the perspective of the national pagan revivals: since Wicca was based on Margaret Murray's book *The Witch-Cult in Western Europe* (1921), which did not associate witchcraft with a specific nation, but claimed that it was an old pagan religion that predates Christianity, it exercised a supranational appeal. Gerald Gardner

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combined Murray's work with what he claimed was an anthropological study of practising witches who preserved their traditions from Neolithic times. He claimed that the rituals of the witches he allegedly observed were also influenced by the Celtic, Egyptian, and Greco-Roman mystery cults. In this manner, Gardner re-introduced ancient Greek and Roman religions into modern paganism, and even associated it with Plato and Neoplatonism. (It is quite amusing to imagine what Plato would say to that!)

Even though the representation of Ancient Greek and Roman religions in this book is almost a caricature, its rich overview of various flirtations with paganism and fully-fledged pagan revivals is rewarding and illuminating. Its epilogue, 'Pagan Pasts, Pagan Futures?' presents some intriguing ideas about the future forms paganism might take as 'Europe advances into its post-Christian and post-secular future' (p. 158).

The final book under discussion also looks into the future by asking twenty distinguished scholars representing a range of disciplines, from archaeology to reception studies, to consider 'Why Classical Studies Still Matter.'[4] Obviously, the answers are very different, and one can either look for kindred spirits or read the volume as a whole. It provides much food for thought and occasionally even reasons for optimism.

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[4] *The Future of the Past: Why Classical Studies Still Matter. Athenian Dialogues IV*. Trends in classics – supplementary volumes, 173. By Georgios K. Giannakis, Theodore D. Papanghelis, Antonios Rengakos. Berlin, De Gruyter, 2024. Pp. xiii + 355. Illustrations. Hardback $142.99, ISBN: 978-3-11-133714-2.

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