TECHNOLOGIES AND RITUAL EXPERIENCE

Certain rituals characterised what we today think of as 'Greek religion'.[1] These were numerous and varied in kind: sacrifice, prayer, dedication, cursing, libation, divination, procession, and healing, for example, all sought to connect with the divine in some way. This part of the book discusses how technologies were incorporated into Greek religious rituals in order to render supernatural presence tangible, and asks what this means for our understanding of these rituals. The three chapters that follow intentionally push to its limits the definition of the technological both chronologically and conceptually. This serves to unearth an archaeology of the phenomenon at hand to observe a prehistory of the relationship between technology and the sacred. From there, we will be in a better position to assess how much of an impact the Hellenistic 'invention' of mechanics as a discipline, and the interrelated issue of royal patronage, had on manufacturing the marvellous. Ultimately, in weaving together examples which vary in how they incorporate technical knowledge, and in the sophistication of the technical components on show, Part II aims to re-characterise ancient religion at its core by demonstrating that the ingenious was a more pervasive mode of ancient religious experience than has hitherto been acknowledged.

I focus my discussion broadly around three rituals – divination, dedication, and procession – with the obvious and welcome caveat that these ritual categories are by no means mutually exclusive. I begin in contexts where immediate answers were sought from the gods and look at how technical knowledge interacted with that goal (Chapter 4). This takes the form of an exploration of the knowledge and objects used in the category of 'technical' divination, as well as

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[1] On the uses and controversies of the word 'religion' in the ancient context, see especially Gould 1985; Humphreys 2004; Nongbri 2008, 2013. These are conversations that largely arose out of the conversations in anthropology, especially Asad 1983, 1993 in response to Geertz 1973. See too page 214n3 for the issue of 'belief'.

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thinking about how divinatory space was artificially created or enhanced. Chapter 5 moves to examining what was at stake when a worshipper dedicated an object of notable technological significance to the gods. The evidence for this section is highly varied – in genre, media, and chronology – in order both to show how widespread the phenomenon was and to put into conversation the different traces left in different sources. Taking as a case study the use of automata in festival processions, Chapter 6 looks at the incorporation of mechanics into public sacred occasion, exploring the theological and political implications of technologies of animation. One of the claims of this chapter is that it is too simplistic to see Hellenistic automata purely as advertisements of scientific achievement of Hellenistic kings. Instead, I suggest that if Hellenistic kings were successfully adopting technological media into religious displays, it is because of the inherent theological value that the mechanical miracle held as a cultural technique and which leaders thus had a political interest in propagating and developing.

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