

THE ARCHAEOLOGY OF CULT AND RELIGION

Edited by

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with **HARALD MELLER**



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Series Editor's Preface

The articles in this volume generated from talks given in Ravenna in 1997 and Göteborg in 1998 during conferences of the European Association of Archaeologists. I attended the conferences and witnessed the lively debates that dominated the two academic sessions organised by the editors. Although I had hoped the papers would be published quickly, financial constraints led to what has become a long and unfortunate delay. ARCHAEOLOGIA agreed to publish them in its Main Series because the subjects they cover and the methodological questions they address perfectly fit our profile and objectives.

The publication of this book has been done in close co-operation with ARCHAEOLOGIA's Budapest-based editorial staff and the editors of the volume, both of whom are in Halle, Germany. The Internet facilitated our work greatly, allowing the editorial staff to work on authors' manuscripts electronically and to exchange proofs of the revised manuscripts as PDF (*Portable Document Format*) files. Especially thanks to the outstanding and highly-efficient work style of Peter Biehl we have been able to produce the book in a mere five months. Throughout this process, we allowed the authors to revise and update their articles. I want to thank the ARCHAEOLOGIA team and especially András Kardos who was responsible for the typography and the image processing. I also want to thank the Archaeological Heritage Service Sachsen-Anhalt for the financial support that enabled us to finally publish this important book.

The publication of this volume is a major step in the study of the archaeology of religion and will undoubtedly provide a solid basis for future research. The book makes it clear that religion and cult haven't been studied thoroughly by archaeologists and that the development of an adequate and unbiased methodology is desperately needed. Without one, we can neither move forward nor even begin to grasp the true complexity of this fascinating and under-explored aspect of prehistoric life. The ideas presented in this book hint at the exciting potential this field holds. It is our hope that the volume will not only stir debate, but will also serve as a catalyst for fresh new ideas and research.

Erzsébet Jerem
ARCHAEOLOGIA Foundation

Preface

Collaborations between the Martin-Luther-University Halle-Wittenberg and the Archaeological Heritage Service Sachsen-Anhalt are hardly unique and we are proud to continue this tradition by supporting this book project. In fact, it is the second time we have worked with the Institute of Prehistoric Archaeology on a project involving cult and religion in pre- and protohistory. The first project, a 1985 conference and accompanying volume, contained articles that focused on this topic. I see the present compilation of papers – which hone in on essential questions about cult and religion, provide background of what has been accomplished and offer insight on what can be done in this field – as a continuation of our work together in 1985.

The volume contains the work of authors from a variety of backgrounds and institutions both in West- and Eastern Europe and places a clear emphasis on the Neolithic of Southeast Europe. The co-operation of the archaeologists from East and West and the publication of their work in English is highly significant and presents new trajectories for the study of prehistoric religious practices and actions. For those of us involved in archaeological heritage management, the study of religion in prehistory, which unfortunately has been neglected for so long, is of tremendous import.

During the last ten years, archaeologists in Sachsen-Anhalt have discovered new evidence – mainly documented through aerial photography – that points to the religious life of prehistoric peoples. These finds merit critical evaluation and study and it is my hope that serious work will be done on them in the near future. Some of the most spectacular finds include: the enclosures at Goseck (Weißenfels), Kötschlitz (Merseburg-Querfurt) and Quedlinburg, which are documented only through aerial photography and most likely stem from the period of Linear Stroke Pottery. There are also a dozen other enclosures probably dating into the Bronze or Early Iron Ages. These enclosures are always connected to cemeteries and consequently can likely be linked to ancestor cults. Numerous bog and water findings, which may also have had a cultic context, have also been discovered. Recently, unearthed hoards, such as one found deposited at the foot of a megalithic tomb in the Haldenslebener Forest, are also of great significance for Sachsen-Anhalt. Finally, I want to mention artifacts, such as the mace from the “dance site of witches” at Thale, which even today puzzles us by its unique form. Finally, there are the so-called “Miracle Castles (*Wunderburgen*)” of Sachsen-Anhalt, a dozen of which were visible around 1900, but all of which have since disappeared. These labyrinths, which are marked in the grass, were maintained over centuries and date back further than previously believed. Unfortunately, only the one at Steigra has survived the negligence of the mostly-secular world of the last century. All of these sites and artifacts deserve careful study, with special attention to the religious and cultic roles they may have played. We stand at the beginning of this process.

The present volume contributes a great deal to bring us onto the road we need to travel to unravel these and many other archaeological uncertainties. The Archaeological Heritage Service is proud to play a role in furthering this sort of study. I see this volume as a continuation of our long-standing commitment to the university and to this important research field. I look forward with great excitement to future projects and opportunities for collaboration.

Harald Meller
Landesamt für Archäologie Sachsen-Anhalt