

**ARCHAEOLOGICAL IMAGINATIONS
OF RELIGION**

**Edited by
THOMAS MEIER and PETRA TILLESSEN**



BUDAPEST 2014

Front Cover Illustration

Our “cover girl” shows one of the most famous paintings of German romanticism: “Der Wanderer über dem Nebelmeer” (Wanderer above the Sea of Fog) painted by Caspar David Friedrich in 1818. We believe this painting to be an especially suitable cover because many of archaeologists’ convictions on prehistoric religion are deeply rooted in romanticism. To name only a few we want to point to frequent statements on religion as the irrational, i.e. non-functional, on natural sacredness of sites (“naturheilige Plätze”) and we point to emotional and experiential approaches to religion and especially to phenomenology. Friedrich’s painting includes many of these aspects, most obviously the emotionality of a magnificent landscape. Moreover the fog may be interpreted as a metaphor for the hidden religions of the past that some archaeologists seek to reveal (or revive?).

ISBN 978-963-9911-24-6

HU-ISSN 1216-6847

© by the authors and Archaeolingua Foundation

All rights reserved. No part of this publication may be reproduced, stored in a retrieval system, or transmitted in any form or by any means, electronic, mechanical, digitised, photocopying, recording or otherwise without the prior permission of the publisher.

2014

ARCHAEOLOGIA ALAPÍTVÁNY

H-1250 Budapest, Úri u. 49

Copyediting by Melanie Strub, Thomas Meier and Petra Tillessen

Desktop editing and layout by Rita Kovács

Printed by Prime Rate Kft

Table of Contents

Preface by the editors	7
THOMAS MEIER together with PETRA TILLESSEN	
Archaeological imaginations of religion: an introduction from an Anglo-German perspective	11
JOHN BINTLIFF	
Sacred worlds or sacred cows? Can we parameterize past rituals?	249
ERICA HILL	
Imagining animals in prehistoric religions	265
ROBERT J. WALLIS	
Animism, ancestors and adjusted styles of communication: Hidden art in Irish passage tombs	283
MIRANDA ALDHOUSE-GREEN	
Style over content	315
LIV NILSSON STUTZ	
Dialogues with the dead. Imagining mesolithic mortuary rituals	337
KATJA HROBAT VIRLOGET	
Conceptualization of space through folklore. On the mythical and ritual significance of community limits	359
TIINA ÄIKÄS	
The concept of liminality and Sámi sacred landscapes	383
About the authors	401

Preface by the editors

When we started the session on „Archaeological imaginations of religion“ at the 14th Annual Meeting of the European Association of Archaeologists in Valetta, the audience was filled with intrigued faces and, to our great joy, even more of them returned after the coffee-break. Fortunately the schedule left enough time for discussion, which was dynamic and sometimes emotional. Such an experience is great for session organizers – and to the audience as well, we hope – but we cannot take all of the credit. To be honest, topics of religion are very popular, provoking engaged discussions, quite often in an emotional way.

This volume presents some of the papers from the Valetta session. Unfortunately and for different reasons, it has not been possible to include all the contributions, which we greatly regret. On the other hand, the reader will find some additional papers, which were not delivered at Valetta. They have been offered by colleagues working on issues of prehistoric religions from very different points of view, but all of them tackle questions of underlying ideologies and imaginations.

We hope that this volume is “just in time,” as religious beliefs of prehistoric people are a rapidly growing archaeological interest. Underlying assumptions of archaeologists on the general nature and characteristics of religion, however, are less often objects of reflection. These assumptions influence the development of the archaeology of religions and, therefore, this volume sets out to reflect upon and explore how archaeologists think and argue about prehistoric religious beliefs.

Our most sincere thanks go to Erzsébet Jerem, who once again skilfully and with patience oversaw the development and production of this volume, which turned out to be much more time-consuming than expected. We are especially thankful for her help and advice in its preparation and for accepting this volume for the Series Minor of *Archaeolingua*. Moreover, we would like to gratefully acknowledge the dedication of our student assistant Melanie Strub and her quick and concise editorial work, as well as the enthusiasm of Rita Kovács, Dorottya Domanovszky and Emese Sarkadi Nagy from *Archaeolingua*, who did final edits and carefully supervised the production process. Our last “thank yous,” however, go to the authors for their valuable and thought-provoking papers – and for their kind and considerate cooperation in responding to all of our editorial requests. We are sure that readers will enjoy their work.

14th Annual Meeting of the European Association of Archaeologists, Valletta (Malta), 16–21 September 2008

Program of the session “Archaeological imaginations of religion”

Organized by

Thomas Meier, *University of Jena*

Petra Tillessen, *University of Munich*

Introduction

Petra Tillessen, *University of Munich, Germany*, and

Thomas Meier, *University of Jena, Germany*

Sacred worlds or sacred cows? Can we parameterize past rituals?

John Bintliff, *Leiden University, The Netherlands*

Sacred sites: A typology of factions

Thomas Meier, *University of Jena, Germany*, and

Petra Tillessen, *University of Munich, Germany*

History and phenomenology of religion

Ulla Odgaard, *Sila – The Greenland Research Centre at the National Museum of Denmark, Denmark*

The archaeological ‘evidence’ for Christianity in Roman Britain (cancelled)

Mike McCarthy, *University of Bradford, United Kingdom*

Religion and ritual practice in Neolithic Europe

Peter F. Biehl, *University of Buffalo, United States of America*

Topographic dimensions to the Sámi natural sacred places

Tiina Äikäs, *University of Oulu, Finland*

Imagining animals in prehistoric religion and the modern West

Erica Hill, *University of Alaska Southeast, United States of America*

“Sending off the animals”? Ethnography, animism and the ritual manipulations of animal bones:

Any relevance for Mesolithic hunter-gatherer?

Anja Mansrud, *University of Oslo, Norway*