



THE BIENNIAL MARTIN P. NILSSON LECTURE ON ANCIENT GREEK RELIGION,
Tuesday, November 28, 2023

Professor Renaud Gagné, University of Cambridge

How to Write a Festival? The Ritual Archive of Ancient Greek Literature

Ancient Greek literature is filled with rituals and festivals that are described, named, referenced, evoked, embodied, and/or echoed. Much of what we know of the rituals and festivals of Greek polytheism is based on this material: passages of prose or poetry, often highly elaborate, that are mined for evidence of the events they reflect. While this textual material has hardly been neglected as an object in itself in the history of scholarship, more recent and older, it has mostly been studied as a source for historical realities beyond itself, from positivism to pragmatics and further afield. The division between the relatively marginal representational and the consistently dominant historicist approaches to cult in Greek polytheism is as strong now as it has ever been. This lecture will argue that such a division of approaches can and should be overcome, and that a more richly textured, granular and robust understanding of our fragments of evidence can be pursued by systematically looking at what our texts do with rituals and festivals, rather than just at what they represent or reflect. How do these texts solicit cultic practice, and why? What earlier models do they activate, and what competence do they in turn generate? How are festivals written through each other? And how does the modern writing of ritual in scholarship negotiate the ancient writing of ritual? The ritual archive of ancient Greek literature is a vast field for new research. Case studies will be pursued in some detail to illustrate that point.

The lecture takes place **Tuesday, November 28, 2023, at 19.00 (Athens)** with live presence at the Swedish Institute and online via Zoom.

To participate (in-person or via Zoom), please register at:

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