

2 / PURPOSES: HONORING THE GODS, FEASTING WITH FRIENDS

Introduction

The typology provided in the previous chapter sets the stage for a re-evaluation of the purposes that associations served. There has been a tendency among some scholars to downplay the “religious” purposes of many groups. Moreover, as I argue here, all types of associations served a variety of interdependent social, cultic, and funerary functions for their members. The evidence strongly suggests the importance of honoring gods and goddesses within associations of all types. Overall, these interconnected functions helped to provide members with a sense of belonging and identity.

The present chapter does not attempt to provide a comprehensive discussion of all activities. Nor does it claim that all associations served the same purposes in precisely the same way. Instead, acknowledging variety, I give a broad overview of the internal life of such groups so that we cannot be misled into believing that imperial dimensions of group-life (part two) stood in isolation or that they were the only important aspect of group-life. In fact, subsequent chapters show how imperial aspects were embedded within both the internal life and the external relations of associations. In this sense, the portrait of associations here, together with the following chapter on the civic environment, provides an essential framework within which we can begin to understand the place of such groups within society in Roman Asia Minor.

The discussion here also begins to sketch out, in broad strokes, similarities between the general functions of associations—social, ritual, funerary—and those of both Judean synagogues and Christian assemblies. It was for this reason, in part, that both synagogues and assemblies could be described by ancient observers (including certain Judeans and Jesus-followers) in terms drawn from the life of associations, despite the peculiarity of honoring only one God (“monotheism”) in a context where the existence of many gods (“polytheism”) was taken for granted.

Visualizing Association-Life

Monuments from north-western Asia Minor capture in visual form the central thesis of this chapter concerning the interconnected purposes of associations.¹ These reliefs depict something we rarely encounter in surviving evidence: an actual picture of the activities of associations and related scenes which may communicate to us something of how these groups understood themselves, or at least of how the artisans who designed the monuments pictured the activities of associations. The men and women belonging to a society (*thiasos*) in Triglia (west of Apamea in Bithynia) honored Stratonike, a priestess of Mother Cybele, by setting up the monument in the “synagogue of Zeus” (*IApamBith 35* [119 or 104 BCE]; see figure 10).² The relief consists of three parts which reveal the

1 For a discussion of Mysian and Bithynian reliefs with banquet scenes, see: Mitropoulou 1990; Mitropoulou 1996; Straten 1993.

2 For other publications of the inscription see: Perdrizet 1899, 593, no. 2 = Robert 1949a, 42, no. 1 = *CCCA I 252* = Pfuhl and Möbius 1977, vol. 2, Tafel 332 (with photo).

inter-related purposes of the association and the importance of the gods within the group. At the top are depicted in a preeminent manner the deities to whom this association granted particularly appropriate honors. On the same plane, the priestess Stratonike is pictured approaching an altar with upraised hands in adoration of both Apollo (who stands beside the altar) and Cybele (who remains seated to the right). This priestess is accompanied by a girl playing a double-flute and a boy bringing a sheep for sacrifice. Under the beneficent protection of the gods the monument pictures, on a smaller scale, ten members of the association reclining to share in a banquet, consuming food and drink while they are entertained by pipers, seen on the left (cf. *IMT 1980*). Beside the musicians is a youth carrying a basket towards two others who are managing the mixing bowls for the wine as some souvlaki roasts to the far right.



Figure 10: Relief of the priestess Stratonike approaching Cybele and Apollo with a banqueting scene, from Triglia (IApamBith 35).

A second monument erected by a society in Triglia similarly depicts a sacrificial scene, but without the members at meal (*IApamBith 33* [123 or 108 BCE]; see figure 11). On this relief, Zeus is pictured holding a libation bowl over an altar on the right as a member of the society and a child bring forward a sacrificial offering. The inscription reads: “The society-members (*thiasitai*) crowned for life Asklepiades son of Melidoros, who was priest in a good and worthy manner in the 174th year, with a monument and a crown of flowers with a ribbon.”

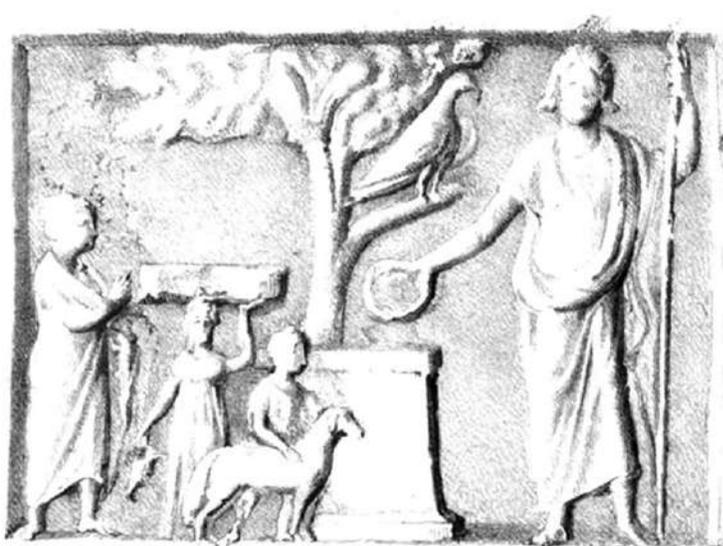


Figure 11: Relief of Asklepiades approaching Zeus (*IApamBith 33*).

Thirdly, a three-level relief from Parnormos near Kyzikos, which does not necessarily involve an association, similarly depicts in larger than life scale the gods Zeus, Artemis, and Apollo at the top. Six reclining banqueters are pictured below in the second panel, and the bottom panel shows a musician playing the double-flute, a nude female dancing, a nude dancing figure with a Phrygian cap and percussion instruments, and a man serving from a wine bowl (*GIBM IV 1007*; figure 12). These scenes are not unlike what we might imagine taking place within guilds and associations, for whom sacrifice (“religious life”) and the accompanying meal (“social life”) were intimately intertwined.

Questioning a Tradition in Scholarship

This picture of associations eating and drinking as they gather together under the protection or even in the presence of the deities whom they honor is further confirmed by archaeological and epigraphic evidence. One scholarly tradition, which is apparent in the works of M. P. Nilsson, Ramsay MacMullen and Nicholas R. E. Fisher, tends to separate the “social” from the “religious” in arguing that most associations were primarily concerned with conviviality and other social concerns, in some sense lacking genuinely “religious” dimensions. Similar views are evident among scholars who have considered imperial cults—rituals in honor of the emperors—in the past.



Figure 12: Relief of Zeus, Artemis and Apollo with a banqueting scene, from Panormos (GIBM IV 1007).

The gatherings of almost all associations in the Roman era are more an excuse to have a party than they are a genuine attempt to honor gods, according to Nilsson (1957, 64): “the Dionysiac mystery associations resemble the other very numerous associations of the Hellenistic and following age, which, under the pretext of honoring some god after whom the association was named, assembled in order to enjoy themselves and to feast.” For Nilsson, many mysteries performed by groups in the Roman era, including those associated with imperial cults, were merely “pseudo-mysteries.”³ Nilsson is right to compare groups devoted to Dionysos with other associations in that all of them certainly included conviviality among their purposes, but his tendency to downplay the significance of honoring the gods is unfounded. Further on, in connection with his upper-class characterization of most Dionysiac associations, Nilsson’s value judgements become even clearer: “These people were not in earnest about religion” (Nilsson 1957, 147). Scholars such as Nilsson do not fully consider that in antiquity even social aspects of life, such as banquets, could be infused with cultic significance for those who participated. We need not agree with such a view wherein enjoyment of participants is viewed as a tell-tale sign that they were not interested in genuinely honoring deities.

Although more balanced in his views, it is more than a coincidence that MacMullen’s book on *Roman Social Relations* (1974a) discusses guilds extensively while his book on *Paganism in the Roman Empire* (1981) gives far less attention to them. In the former he discusses the purposes of occupational associations, including their civic role. But he stresses that it was their social function above all else—“pure comradeship” and feasting—that were important: “if piety counted for much, conviviality counted for more” (MacMullen 1974a, 71-87, esp. pp. 77, 80). It is only when he turns to what he labels “cult associations” and groups of foreigners that he considers the gods to be a significant factor within group activities. Yet even his discussion of associations devoted to Mithras (in the book from 1981) is revealing of these tendencies to downplay cultic dimensions of group-life. MacMullen emphasizes the down-to-earth aspects of feasting and friendship as the main objectives of such groups to the neglect of the cosmological significance of their communal meals. He does not deal with the material evidence that suggests that these meals could replicate “in the life of the Mithraic community something originally enacted on the divine plane by the cult’s gods,” as Roger Beck (1992, 4-5) demonstrates. A similar tradition of scholarship to that of Nilsson and MacMullen is echoed in Fisher’s (1988b, 1222-23) statement that “although the *collegia* had religious functions, they were above all concerned with status, solidarity, sociability, and aspects of social security.”

These scholars are correct in acknowledging the social side of the associations. But their corresponding neglect of the importance of the gods and rituals for them, which were often intertwined with what we might call “social,” is problematic. Often it seems that such scholars are working with an unstated definition of religion which distinguishes it rather sharply from feasting and other aspects of life. Modern, western definitions of religion along the lines of those offered by William James (1963 [1902]) and Rudolf Otto (1923) focus on the feelings and personal experiences

3 Nilsson stresses that a Dionysiac group at Smyrna (*ISmyrna* 728) was an exception in maintaining the truly “sacral” character of its meals and activities. The prescriptions in this inscription, he asserts, were designed to combat the widespread “desacralization” of the Dionysiac mysteries which he otherwise assumes (Nilsson 1957, 133-43, esp. 135, 139).

of the individual in relation to the divine as the most important indicators of “genuine” or “true” religion. Some scholars have approached the study of antiquity with similar, problematic conceptions. Within this framework, religion is more concerned with solemnity, asceticism, and mysticism, rather than conviviality and enjoyment, and the focus is on the individual rather than the group or community, on feelings and attitudes rather than activities and rituals.

The present study takes a more open-ended and cross-culturally sensitive approach to the subject. We need to realize that in employing terms such as “religious” and “religion” we are dealing with abstractions that allow us to conceptualize our subject. We are not dealing with objective realities which the groups and persons we are studying would necessarily isolate from other aspects of life. The modern compartmentalization of life into the political, economic, social, and religious would not be recognizable to people in the ancient context, where honoring deities was very much embedded within the daily life of individuals, whose identities were inextricably bound up within social groupings or communities. Within the ancient Mediterranean, we are dealing with a world view and way of life centered on the maintenance of fitting relations among human groups, benefactors, and deities within the webs of connections which constituted society and the cosmos. Cultic life in antiquity had to do with appropriately honoring gods and goddesses through rituals of various kinds, especially sacrificial offerings, in ways that ensured the safety and protection of human groups and their members. Moreover, the forms which such honors could take do not necessarily coincide with modern or western preconceptions of what being “religious” means.

Intertwined Social, Cultic, and Funerary Activities

This understanding of Greco-Roman culture—encompassing notions of the gods and honors for them—will become clearer as we proceed throughout this study. As I argue here, associations served interconnected social, cultic, and funerary purposes for their members.⁴ There is no reason to question the genuineness of their “religious” dimensions in the sense that appropriately honoring deities was a real concern of virtually all types of groups and their members.

1. Honoring Deities

We have already encountered gods and goddesses—and honors for them—in the discussion of numerous types of associations. The household association at Philadelphia performed purifications and mysteries in honor of Zeus, Agdistis, and other deities. Phrygians living at Pompeii honored the Great Mother, and groups of immigrants from Asia Minor living in Moesia and Macedonia often chose Dionysos as patron. The Roman businessmen settled at Assos were engaging in typical activities for such groups when they dedicated monuments both to god Augustus’ wife, Livia, the “new Hera” (*IAssos* 19), and to the goddess Roma, “the benefactor of the cosmos” (*IAssos* 20; early-1 CE). So was the neighborhood association at Prusias who dedicated monuments to Savior Zeus (*IPrusiasHyp* 63–64).

4 Now see also Matthew Gibb’s (2011) study of the purposes of associations in Egypt.

Epigraphic evidence, by its very nature, limits the degree to which we should even expect to find rituals and honors for the gods regularly revealed to us in any detail, if mentioned at all (with the exception of cult regulations, of course). Many inscriptions rarely state what was taken for granted as customary practice. Most monuments pertaining to associations are gravestones (epitaphs) or honorary inscriptions for benefactors (including deities), not cultic guidelines or prescriptions for group life. Nonetheless, it seems that most, if not all, associations chose particular deities as patrons and included rituals in honor of gods or goddesses among their regular activities. Quite often it is not possible to measure the degree to which honors for deities were important for a particular group in comparison with other groups. What is clear is that such practices were significant to virtually all associations. I begin with occupational associations since scholars such as MacMullen tend to downplay the importance of the gods within these groups.

The dream books of Artemidoros of Daldis (who resided in Ephesos in the second century) supply the social historian with indispensable information regarding daily life, especially revealing the significance of goddesses or gods for members of guilds.⁵ It is significant that throughout his guide-book on interpreting dreams he so frequently associates workers and craftsmen with the deities whom they worshiped (esp. *Dream Interpretations* 2.33–44). He states the following with respect to artisans who appear in dreams: “People who have professions that are associated with particular gods signify the gods who are the patrons of the professions in question” (2.44; trans. by White 1975). It was common knowledge—not only to Artemidoros but also to the social spectrum of persons for whom his dream interpretations were supposed to work—that those of a common occupation frequently devoted themselves to honoring particular deities.

Yet even for artisans themselves, Artemidoros states, “it is more auspicious to see gods who are compatible with the professions of the dreamers than to see gods who are incompatible. For gods who do not assist men in their work are inauspicious” (4.74). This and other common sense (at least to Artemidoros) statements are particularly significant since, especially in this case, he is actually revealing what he perceives to be the self-understanding of the artisans themselves (i.e. artisans are the dreamers). The gods were a regular part of the landscape of the populace’s dream life as well as waking life, and for workers of many trades appropriately honoring the gods was important. The silversmiths of Ephesos who, according to the author of Acts (19:23–41), gathered together a crowd of craftsmen and others in defence of the reputation of Artemis, patron deity of their hometown, would not be exceptional in this regard: “Great is Artemis of the Ephesians!,” they shouted.

5 On the use of Artemidoros’ work for social history, see Pomeroy 1991.

Sometimes we catch glimpses of these concerns to honor the gods working themselves out in the corporate lives of occupational associations in Asia Minor and elsewhere, despite the limitations of archaeological evidence. Imogen Dittmann-Schöne's recent work likewise points to the place of the gods within guilds of workers involved in metal-working, fishing, gardening, and trade in Asia Minor.⁶ Cases of guilds honoring the gods by dedicating altars or other monuments are numerous. In the Aezanatis valley, for instance, two men dedicated a column to Zeus Bennios on behalf of a guild of farmers devoted to the Mother goddess Steuene (*MAMA IX 49*) and another guild dedicated a monument to Mother Kouaene (*MAMA IX 66*). Leather-workers on the island of Lesbos dedicated a statue of Aphrodite (*IG XII,2 109 = AGRW 259*). Similarly, a guild of silversmiths and goldsmiths at Smyrna restored a statue of Athena for the homeland (*ISmyrna 721 = AGRW 186; 14-37 CE*). There were also cases when guilds expressed their piety by honoring a priest or other functionary of a god, as was the case with both the fleet (*stolos*) of fishermen and the guild (*station*) of gardeners that honored Ulpus Karpos of Miletos, who was prophet and priest of "the most holy and most high god" (*OGIS 755, 756 = AGRW 182a-b; 140s CE*).



Figure 13: Meeting-hall of the grain-measurers at Ostia.

6 Dittmann-Schöne 2000, 94-108 = Dittmann-Schöne 2002.

Building remains also clearly communicate the importance of deities in the activities of occupational associations.⁷ Though we lack excavated guild-halls in Asia specifically, several halls (*scholae*) used by guilds of builders, shippers, ship-builders, grain-measurers and others have been excavated at Ostia (a port city of Rome) in Italy. Both Russell Meiggs (1960, 324-330) and Gustav Hermansen (1981, 55-89) suggest that the remains of these buildings, which often included both sanctuaries and banqueting facilities, disclose the intertwined purposes of the guilds. Ulrike Egelhaaf-Gaiser's recent work (2002) analyzes three of these guild-halls at Ostia with conceptions of space in mind and shows the place of honoring the gods within these buildings, although he does maintain a problematic distinction between occupational associations and "religious" associations. The building of the grain-measurers' guild included a general meeting room, a courtyard with a well, a latrine, and a temple dedicated to the patron deity, Ceres Augusta (see the photo of the main meeting room in figure 13; II-III CE). The meeting-hall was decorated with a mosaic floor that proudly depicts members of the guild engaging in their profession (see figure 14).



Figure 14: Mosaic of a grain-measurer from the meeting-hall at Ostia.

7 On the meeting-places of associations, now see Beate Bollmann 1998. However, Bollmann still tends towards problematic categories and, like MacMullen and others, asserts that associations were more concerned with "social" than with "religious" functions.



Figure 15: Banqueting room (*triclinium*) in the builders' meeting-place at Ostia.

Built in the time of Hadrian, the builders' meeting-place at Ostia consisted of a central courtyard surrounded by several rooms on all sides. Most conspicuous was the central room encountered immediately on entering the building, which was the sanctuary where rituals were performed regularly in honor of the guild's patron deities. In the south-western corner was the kitchen and four other rooms on the east were dining-rooms with built in couches (*triclinia*) for reclining to eat (see figure 15).

The meeting-place of an occupational association on the Greek island of Delos in an earlier era will also illustrate the importance of cultic purposes for such guilds. The buildings of associations of various types have been excavated on Delos, including those of the comedian actors, the Israelites (Samaritans), the Judeans and the devotees of Sarapis.⁸ There is also inscriptional evidence for many other associations of immigrants on the island, including the Tyrian merchants and shippers devoted to Herakles, who was likely identified with the Tyrian god Melqart (*IDelos 1519 = AGRW 223*), and there were numerous groups of Italian or Roman merchants. The group which concerns us here is an association that drew its membership from social networks arising from common ethnic identity and, secondarily, common occupation: the Poseidoniasts from Berytos in Phoenicia, consisting of a mixture of merchants, shippers, and traders (*to koinon berytiōn Poseidōniastōn emporōn kai nauklērōn kai egdocheōn*).⁹ This guild met in a residential style building that had been constructed or adapted sometime before 152 BCE and was used by the guild until the building's destruction in 69 BCE.

8 See Bruneau 1983, 179–185, 206–208, building nos. 76 and 80; Bruneau 1982; White 1997, 1.37–40, 2.332–42, nos. 70–71. Cf. Rauh 1993.

9 Cf. *IDelos 1520*, 1772–1796; Bruneau 1983, 174–79, no. 57.



Figure 16: Statue group of Aphrodite and Pan from the meeting-place of the Berytians at Delos.

The concern to honor gods and goddesses alongside other activities is clearly communicated by the remains that have been unearthed. The building consisted of a large courtyard in the style of a household (F), which the guild dedicated to “the ancestral gods” of the homeland (*theois patriois*; *IDelos* 1774; see figure 16). Statues and other honorary monuments for benefactors and deities were placed within this courtyard. A well-preserved statue of Aphrodite and Pan (god of the wild, half man and half goat) was also found within the building (see figure 17). Another courtyard (E) may have been used for commercial activities, and there were several other smaller rooms, some of which were probably used for storage (G–T). One of these rooms (G) may have been used for banquets. An honorary inscription erected by the guild for a Roman benefactor and banker, Marcus Minatius, happens to describe one of the guild’s festivals in honor of Poseidon (*IDelos* 1520 = *AGRW* 224). This festal gathering under the leadership of the chief of the society (*archithiasitēs*) involved a sacrificial procession, offering of an ox, and accompanying meals.

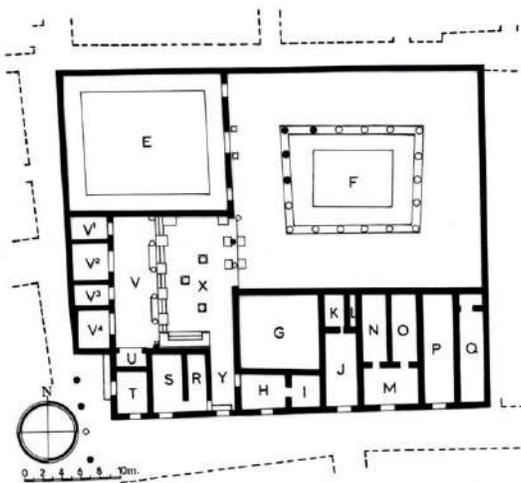


Figure 17: Plan of the meeting-place of the Berytians at Delos.

The meeting-place also had a sanctuary area in the south-western section, which consisted of a foyer (pronaos V) along with several shrines.¹⁰ Although there is some debate concerning their building-history, there were at least three (perhaps four) shrines. By the early first century (88 BCE at the latest) one of these shrines (V¹) contained a statue with an inscribed base for Roma, the guild’s “benefactor” (*IDelos* 1778 = *AGRW* 226). Another shrine (V²) was devoted to the patron deity, Poseidon (*IDelos* 2325). A third (and perhaps fourth) was likely dedicated to the other “ancestral gods” so often mentioned in the inscriptions, probably including Astarte and perhaps Herakles-Melqart.¹¹ Here the members of the guild could regularly honor the deities who

protected them on a daily basis, ensured their success in business, and contributed to the well-being of their distant homeland. We can imagine similar rituals in honor of the gods taking place within other occupational and ethnic associations about whom we happen to know far less.

Returning to guilds in the Roman province of Asia, there are momentary glimpses into common, ongoing internal practices in honor of gods and goddesses. So on one epitaph from Teira, near Ephesos, a grain-measurer (*prometrēs*) by profession makes provisions for a guild of workers (*ergatai*) to hold a yearly wine-banquet in connection with celebrations in honor of Poseidon, apparently their patron deity (*IEph* 3216). The well-attested “sanhedrin” (*synedrion*) of physicians at Ephesos incidentally reveals in only one of its surviving inscriptions what was central to its ongoing internal life—namely, sacrifice and accompanying feasts—in referring to itself as the “physicians who sacrifice to ancestor Asklepios and to the revered ones (*Sebastoi*),” members of the

10 Cf. Picard 1920; Bruneau 1978; Meyer 1988; Bruneau 1991.

11 Cf. *IDelos* 1774, 1776, 1781, 1783, 1785, 1789.

imperial family as gods (*IEph* 719 = *AGRW* 165; early II CE).

The importance of the gods can be assumed for other occupational associations as well. An association of fishermen at Kyzikos dedicated a monument to Poseidon and Aphrodite Pontia with a relief depicting a sacrificial scene so familiar to them in their group-life (*IMT* 1539; I BCE). There were two altars in a special shrine dedicated to the “Great Gods” of Samothrace in the fishery toll-office at Ephesos (*IEph* 20 = *AGRW* 162, lines 70–71; 54–59 CE). These divine protectors of those at sea were evidently the patron deities of the fishermen and fish-dealers who made donations to build the structure; some members may well have been initiates in the mysteries of these gods. When a guild of builders had doubts about whether they should engage in certain construction work on the theater at Miletos, they turned to the god Apollo at Didyma for advice (*IMilet* 935 = *AGRW* 179; ca. 120 CE):

Should the builders (*oikodomoí*) associated with . . . Epigonos — that is, the contractors for the section of the theater in which the prophet of the god, the late Ulpianus, was superintendent of works and the architect, Menophilos, assigns the work — fashion and construct the arches and the vaults over the columns or should they consider other work? The god answered: For good uses of wise building techniques, it is expedient to consult a skillful man for the best suggestions, performing sacrifices to thrice-born Pallas (i.e. the goddess Athena) and strong Herakles.

Apollo’s rather vague response regarding their architectural work (suggesting that they consult an expert) is accompanied by a very clear prescription that these craftsmen perform sacrifices to Athena and Herakles and continue working.¹² Offerings of sacrificial victims, other foods, and libations with accompanying banquets were the touchstone of corporate piety in the Greco-Roman world and we can assume that they were a regular part of the lives of most associations.

Regular festivals, sacrifices, and other rituals in honor of the gods were a common feature in other types of associations beyond the guilds. Some groups engaged in mysteries, for instance. As Walter Burkert (1987) emphasizes, mysteries were not a separate religion to be defined over against the cultic life of the city. Rather, mysteries could be incorporated within various settings, including associations. Mysteries were integral for entry into some groups, especially those devoted to Dionysos, Demeter and Kore, Isis and Sarapis or others who called themselves “initiates” (*mystai*). Partially because of the element of secrecy, very little is known concerning these rites, but these rituals often involved the revelation of the deity or of sacred objects. Numerous inscriptions pertaining to Dionysiac associations attest to the functionary responsible for revealing the sacred objects, the hierophant: see, for instance, *Jaccottet*, vol. 2, no. 114, from Philadelphia; *IPergamonSupp* AM 37, 1912, Nr. 13; *TAM* V 744, from Julia Gordos; *SEG* 28 (1978), no. 1187, from Nakoleia; *SEG* 41 (1991), no. 1202 = *AGRW* 148, from Hierapolis; *IEph* 275 = *AGRW* 168; and, *IMagnMai* 117 = *AGRW* 203.

For other groups, such as the association meeting in the house of Dionysios at Philadelphia, certain states of purity could be required before participating in ritual activities. In this case members were not to deceive one another or use contraceptives fatal to children, and the statutes

12 W. H. Buckler (1923, 34–36, no. 3) may be going to far in calling this a “strike” though (cf. Ste. Croix 1981, 273; MacMullen 1966, 176).

also outline some guidelines as to acceptable sexual relations. The list of requirements concludes with a call for obedience to the gods, stating that the “gods will be merciful to those who obey and will always give them all good things, whatever things gods give to people whom they love. But if any transgress, the gods will hate such people and inflict upon them great punishments.” (*LSAM* 20 = *AGRW* 121, lines 46–51; cf. Barton and Horsley 1981). The Christ-devotees brought before Pliny in Pontus apparently had similar expectations for those participating in their rituals: they “bind themselves by oath, not for any criminal purpose, but to abstain from theft, robbery, and adultery, to commit no breach of trust and not to deny a deposit when called upon to restore it” (*Epistles* 10.96.7 [LCL]).

Appropriately honoring the gods by way of rituals was taken very seriously by both individuals and groups. In one of the so-called “confession inscriptions” (*Beichtinschriften*) of Asia Minor, a man from Blaundos (east of Philadelphia) lamentingly tells of frequent and enduring punishment from the god “because, although he had been called, he did not want to come and be present at the mysteries” (*MAMA IV* 281; I–II CE). Although not widely attested, there are a few cases that I explore elsewhere (Harland 2009, 159–160) in which some degree of exclusivity accompanied participation in certain rites, as with the servants (therapeutists) of Zeus at Sardis who were “not to participate in the mysteries of Sabazios . . . and of Agdistis and Ma” (*Herrmann* 1996, 329–335 [no. 4] = *AGRW* 126; II CE).

Other practices associated with the gods were ongoing features of life within associations. Myths or stories about deities could be an important component within rituals. At Smyrna, for instance, the initiates of Dionysos Bromios (“Thunderer”) included among their activities an exposition of the story of the Titans (who in some versions of mythology tore apart the child Dionysos), probably done by the functionary called the revealer of the god (*theophantēs*; *ISmyrna* 728 = *AGRW* 195; II–III CE). Initiates at the same locale thanked two female “theologians” (*theologoi*) who gave expositions or recited hymns on the greatness of the goddesses in question (*ISmyrna* 653, 654; I–II CE; cf. *ISmyrna* 697 = *AGRW* 194). A theologian is also attested among the hymn-singers of god Augustus at Pergamon (*IPergamon* 374 = *AGRW* 117). Among the activities of the Bacchic devotees (*Iobacchoi*) at Athens was the priest’s “discourse about the god (*theologia*)” (*IG II²* 1368 = *AGRW* 7). This same group also engaged in some sort of sacred drama in which members were assigned roles as Dionysos (the patron deity), Kore, Aphrodite, and others, re-enacting stories of the gods (esp. lines 44–46, 64–67, 121–27). Here we are dealing with more than simply a group of “drinking-buddies” (*Zechkumpane*), as Engelbert Drerup (1899, 357) misleadingly calls them.

Prayers, singing, music and dancing were also among the means by which the membership in associations fittingly honored deities. Communities, groups, and individuals sought concrete favors, guidance or protection from goddesses through prayers or by making vows. An association that met in a sanctuary of Zeus at Philadelphia in Egypt, for instance, regularly included in its practices a prayer, along with libations and “other customary rites on behalf of the god and lord, the king” (*PLond VII* 2193 = *AGRW* 295; I BCE). Although the nature of our sources means that we rarely have record of an association actually praying corporately (but see Apuleius, *Metamorphoses* 11.17, cited in chapter eight), we do have monuments that were set up in connection with a group’s earlier

prayer-request for a favor from a god and the accompanying vow.¹³

One example of an association's vow from Maionia (near Saittai) in Lydia involved two stages, and we happen to have both monuments in our possession, each of which involves the Phrygian deity Men (see figures 5 and 6 in the previous chapter). The first monument states that "the sacred association (*doumos*) orders that a vow to Zeus Masphalatenos, Men Tiamou, and Men Tyrannos ("the Ruler") be observed after nine days" (*TAM V 536* = *CMRDM II 53*; 171 CE). Above the inscription is a relief of two gods, one depicted as a sun god (likely Men Tiamou) and the other as a moon god (likely Men Tyrannos). The second monument appears to be the fulfillment of the vow "according the command of the ruling lord Zeus Masphalatenos and Men," and it lists the 18 contributing members' names, all male (*TAM V 537* = *CMRDM I 54*). The relief on the second monument shows the god Men in Phrygian garb with his left foot on the head of a prostrate bull on the left and Zeus holding an eagle on the right.

Singing and music could be important within associations.¹⁴ Hymns were an elaborated, sung *prayer* which also honored the deities whose help was requested, as J. M. Bremer (1981) points out. Quite common in Asia Minor were official organizations of boys, girls or youths who regularly sang in the context of civic cults and festivals.¹⁵ There were also functionaries associated with the composition or performance of hymns in honor of the gods in connection with both the mysteries of Demeter and of Dionysos at Pergamon, for instance.¹⁶ The so-called Orphic hymns, which likely come from western Asia Minor (probably Pergamon), make frequent reference to the Dionysiac initiates and cowherds who sang them (Athanasakis 1977). There were other associations who called themselves "hymn-singers" (*hymnōdoi*), like those devoted to Cybele near Thyatira and to Dionysos at Histria in Moesia (*TAM V 955*, = *AGRW 142*; *IHistria 167* = *AGRW 72*).

It is worth noting here the similar importance attached to singing within congregations and synagogues as well. After questioning the Christ-devotees brought before him in Pontus, Pliny characterizes their gatherings in terms familiar from the activities of associations: they "met regularly before dawn on a fixed day to chant verses alternately amongst themselves in honor of Christ as if to a god" (*Epistles* 10.96.7). Philo's discussion of the "contemplative life" of the Judean therapeutists (servants of the God) in Egypt likewise provides a similar picture concerning the prominence of singing (alongside prayer, meals, and other activities):

After the dinner (deipnon) they celebrate the sacred festival through the whole night . . . [T]hey sing hymns which have been composed in honor of God in many metres and tunes, sometimes singing together and at other times moving their hands and dancing in corresponding harmony. . . . Then, when each chorus of the men and each chorus of the women has feasted separately by itself, like persons in the Bacchic festivities, drinking the

13 Cf. *MAMA IV 230* (Tymandos); *IGR IV 548* (Orkistos); *IPhrygDB III 1* (Dorylaion); *SEG 41* (1991), no. 1329 (Karain, Pamphylia). On votive offerings (i.e. gifts for the gods in return for answered prayer), see van Straten 1981.

14 Cf. Poland 1926; Quasten 1983.

15 See, for example, *LSAM 69* (Stratonikea); *ICarie 132-39, 192-96* (Heraklea-Salbake); *IEph 18d* (lines 4-24); *IEph 1145*.

16 See Hepding 1910, 457-59 (no. 40); Ippel 1912, 287 (no. 16); *IPergamon 485*. Cf. *IEph 275, 973-974*; *ISmyrna 758*.

pure wine of the love of God, they join together and the two become one chorus in imitation of that chorus that was established in ancient times by the Red Sea, on account of the wondrous works which were displayed there. . . (*On the Contemplative Life* 83–89 = *AGRW* L9).

Philo's description alludes to the analogy of Bacchic mysteries. His mention of ritual dancing in honor of God brings us to another activity within associations.

We have already encountered musicians and dancers in the earlier discussion of reliefs depicting the meetings of associations. Lucian's discourse *On the Dance* – set in the form of a dialogue in which a Cynic, Crato, is convinced of the value of pantomimic dancing by Lycinus – emphasizes the close connection between dancing and honoring deities, even suggesting that “not a single ancient rite (*teletēn*) can be found that is without dancing” (*On the Dance* 15). Along with the discussion of dances associated with cults in honor of Zeus, Aphrodite, Orpheus, and others, Lucian has Lycinus note the following in connection with Dionysiac mysteries in Asia Minor:

Bacchic dancing is particularly popular in Ionia and Pontus. It has taken such possession of people there, that, when the season comes around in each city, they leave everything else and sit for days watching Titans and Corybantes, satyrs and cowherds (*boukoloi*). Those of noble birth and the highest positions are not ashamed to take part in these performances (*On the Dance* 79 = *AGRW* L16; cf. Artemidoros, *Dream Interpretations* 4.39).

The association of “dancing cowherds” at Pergamon was not the only group that honored the gods and portrayed their myths by way of dance, and we know that dancing could also play a role in the rituals of other associations, such as those devoted to Sarapis.

So honoring gods and goddesses in a variety of ways was a common concern for virtually all types of associations and their members. By participating in such activities, the members of associations were helping to maintain appropriate relations between human communities and the deities who protected and provided benefactions for people in their everyday lives. Sacrifices or offerings of animals, foods, and drink were often at the focal point of these honors, and these offerings were almost always accompanied by a meal among the participants.

2. Social and Feasting Activities

An element of group-life that is often discussed in connection with social purposes pertains to the eating and drinking that went on at associations' festivals and banquets.¹⁷ However, we should be wary of accepting too whole-heartedly the opinions of Judean or Christian apologists, such as Philo or Tertullian, for instance. Philo spends a good part of his discourse on the Judean therapeutists near Alexandria contrasting the “mysteries” of their sanctified, ascetic life to the “frenzy and madness” of Greco-Roman banquets and associations (*On the Contemplative Life*, esp. 40ff; cf. Seland 1996). According to him, most associations, in contrast to Judean gatherings, of course, were “founded on no sound principle but on strong liquor, drunkenness, intoxicated violence and their offspring, wantonness” (*Against Flaccus* 136–37 = *AGRW* L10; cf. *Embassy to Gaius* 312–13 = *AGRW* L37). Writing a couple of centuries after Philo, Tertullian clearly has in mind “pagan”

17 For a recent survey of associations at meal, see Ascough 2008.

associations when, in defending and promoting the virtues of the Christian association (*factio, corpus*), he states that the financial contributions of Christians “are not spent on banquets, drinking, or ungracious eating-houses,” but on helping the poor and ensuring their burial (*Apology* 39.5–6 and 38–39 generally = *AGRW* L18). Of course, Philo and Tertullian were not alone in describing meetings of *others* in such negative terms for apologetic or entertainment purposes. The fact that they chose associations as the object of their rather one-sided comparison, however, shows how both Judeans and Christians (as well as outsiders) could express their identities in terms drawn from the common life of associations.

As I argue at length elsewhere (Harland 2009, 161–181), stories of secretive, nocturnal, and uncontrolled banquets involving drunkenness and, at times, somewhat extreme rituals – incestuous sex, ritual murder, and cannibalism among them – were the mainstay of mud-slinging and a source of novelistic shock-value among upper-class authors in antiquity, particularly in dealing with foreigners and cultural minorities. A novel by Lollianos (of which only fragments survive), for example, depicts an association engaging in ritual infanticide followed by a cannibalistic communal meal and promiscuous sexual activity.¹⁸ Challenging Henrich’s views of Lollianos’ novel (which suggests that the story derives from knowledge of actual rituals as practiced by some ethnic groups), Jack Winkler (1980) convincingly argues that it is precisely in *inverting* what was commonly assumed to be normal or acceptable cultic practice within associations that these episodes found their shock and entertainment value. One wonders how much of Livy’s description of the subversive and secretive meetings of Dionysiac groups (Bacchanalia) in republican Rome, involving sexual excesses, murder, and other crimes, corresponds more with such novelistic stereotypes and elite pretensions (in the age of Augustus) than with the reality of what happened in 186 BCE (Livy, *History of Rome* 39.8–19; cf. Gruen 1990).

Some outsiders’ accusations against Christian groups – Thyestean feasts (cannibalism) and Oedipian unions (incest), for instance – drew on the same stock-pile of fantastic popular lore, as did many “orthodox” attacks against “heretics.”¹⁹ Yet the reasons for such accusations could be quite different in the case of Christians and Judeans, pertaining to their failure to fully participate in local cultic life, especially sacrifices for the deities of other peoples. Moreover, we must refrain from accepting descriptions of wild “impious” meetings of associations, whether Judean, Christian or other, at face value, as though they realistically describe actual practices among a significant number of the groups in question.

Though there is truth in the observation that eating and drinking were important activities, and sometimes this might be interpreted as disorderly behavior in the eyes of some (cf. Paul’s comments on Christian assemblies in 1 Cor 11:17–34), we should not reduce the purposes of associations to mere conviviality or exaggerate the uncontrolled nature of meetings (now see Harland 2012). First of all, there was a set of expectations and values concerning behavior, sometimes set in stone as statutes, which helped to maintain order during the meetings and banquets of associations. The regulations of the association devoted to Zeus Hypsistos in Egypt and the Bacchic devotees (Iobacchoi) at Athens, for instance, both included rules (with

18 Henrichs 1970; Henrichs 1972.

19 Cf. Eusebius, *HE*. 5.1.14; Tertullian, *Apology* 9.9; Benko 1980, 1081–89; Edwards 1992.

accompanying punishments) regarding obedience to the leaders, as well as proscriptions against members causing disturbances or attempting to take the seat of other members during gatherings (*PLond VII 2193* = *AGRW 295*; *IG II² 1368* = *AGRW 7*).

Behavioral norms could be upheld in more subtle ways than this. A dream retold by Artemidoros reflects a member's feelings of falling short of the expectations of other fellow-members of an association. His dream involves a radical violation of unstated rules: "Someone who belonged to an association (*sympiōsis*) and brotherhood (*phratría*) dreamt he lifted up his clothes in front of his fellow association members (*sympiōtai*) and urinated upon each of them. He was expelled from the brotherhood as dishonorable. For it is understandable that those who engage in such drunken behavior would be hated and expelled" (*Dream Interpretations* 4.44). Apparently his dream reflected his failure to live up to other standards of the group (that resulted in his actual expulsion); his violation of standards was probably less drastic than the one he dreamt (one would hope).

The fact that banqueting activities could be viewed as a means of honoring or communing with deities further suggests caution in reducing the purposes of associations to the social in the way that Nilsson and others do. The inseparable character of feasting and honoring the gods is illustrated in Dio of Prusa's remarks: "What festivity could delight without the presence of the most important thing of all [friendship]? What symposium could please without the good cheer of the guests? What sacrifice is acceptable to the gods without those celebrating the feast?" (*Orations* 3.97).²⁰ It is important to note that, for virtually all associations and guilds, sacrifice or libations accompanied or preceded the banquet. Judean synagogues (at least in the diaspora, it seems) and Christian assemblies did *not* engage in actual sacrifice, however; though the Christian concept of the Lord's supper was certainly expressed in sacrificial terms (cf. Mark 14:12-25; 1 Cor 11:23-26).

For some groups food and drink or the meal itself could be an essential element in the myth and ritual of the deity in question. How could a worshiper of Dionysos, for example, appropriately honor or identify with the god of wine without drinking as a central practice? Gods such as Sarapis could also be considered present with the association in its festal gatherings, as a passage in Aelius Aristides of Smyrna shows:

People make this god [Sarapis] alone a full partner in sacrifices, inviting him to the meal (*hestia*) and making him both chief guest and host. So while different gods contribute to different club-feasts (*eranoi*), he is the one who completes all feasts and has the rank of leader of the banquet (*symposiarchēs*) for those who assemble at times . . . He is a participant in the libations and the one who receives the libations. He comes to the celebration and invites those celebrating, who perform a dance under his direction (*Orations* 45.27-28 = *AGRW L13*).

In one of several invitations to such banquets found in Egypt, Sarapis himself is the host who bids his guests to attend (*PKöln 57*; cf. *NewDocs I 1*). Conviviality was not the antithesis of fittingly honoring the gods in antiquity, and we need to set aside restrictive conceptions of "religion" which would suggest otherwise. A brief look at some architectural remains will further illustrate the interweaving of feasting and honoring the gods.

20 Trans. by Stowers 1995, 298-99.

The earlier discussion of buildings at Ostia and Delos suggested that the remains of buildings could bring to life the purposes of associations. Rarely have the remains of actual buildings or banqueting-halls of associations been discovered or identified in Asia Minor, so it is worth giving some attention to one that has: the meeting-hall of the cowherds devoted to the god Dionysos at Pergamon, the so-called “*Podiensaal*” or “Hall of Benches” (see figure 18).²¹ This building, which was excavated and restored in 1978 with results published by Wolfgang Radt (1979) and now more extensively by Holger Schwarzer (2002, 2008), lies in a residential area on the southern slope of the acropolis, almost directly north from the sanctuary of Demeter. Also nearby was a sanctuary with a cult-hall and small odeion which was dedicated to a hero named Diodoros Paspáros of Pergamon. This “Heroon” building was most likely used as the meeting-place of another cult-association in the Roman period (Radt 1999, 249–54). The identification of the hall of benches as the cowherds’ meeting-place is virtually certain. The building was set back from the street behind a row of shops with an alley leading to the hall’s courtyard on the south side. At the west end of the courtyard were two running fountains and a small vestibule entering into two small rooms, perhaps small service-rooms or storage areas.



Figure 18: Hall of Benches (*Podiensaal*) of the cowherds at Pergamon.

21 For the following building description, see Radt 1979, 321–23; Radt 1988, 224–28; Radt 1999, 196–99; Schwarzer 2006; and, most extensively, Schwarzer 2008.

The hall proper was largely symmetrical, measuring 24 meters from west to east and 10 meters from north to south, and it was ideal for the cultic and banqueting activities of the cowherds. There was a large bench (1 meter high and 2 meters deep), seen in the photo, running alongside all four walls, except at the central entrance on the south and the cult-niche opposite it on the north. Members of the association reclined on the benches with their feet towards the wall and their heads towards the centre of the room, where an altar for sacrifices stood. A small marble slab or shelf ran along the length of the benches, serving as a place for banqueters to set down their food and drinks. Excavators found bone-remnants of beef, swine, and poultry ground into the floor, some of them the remains of sacrificial victims offered to the god. Under the benches, at regular intervals, are found niches, which probably served as storage areas for cultic implements, as Radt suggests.

The entire hall was plastered and painted. The decoration and other objects found there attest to the importance of the patron deity and his myths for the association. Dionysiac scenes—only a small portion of which were still visible when excavated—were painted on the main walls, one section depicting an altar with fire and a *thyrsos*, the holy reed or wand of the god. A painting with Dionysiac connections was also still visible on the western wall of the cult-niche. This depicted wine leaves and grapes against a red background, along with a man dressed in sacrificial garb as Silenos. There were members with the title “Silenos” in other inscriptions pertaining to the cowherds at Pergamon (*IPergamon* 485). Though the mythology varies, this Silenos (sometimes described as chief of the satyrs who accompanied Dionysos and who could also be called “*silenoi*”) was often viewed as an old and cheerful drunkard and foster-father of the child Dionysos (see figure 19). Finally, two altars were found in or near the building, one of which depicts a wine cup and garland. These had evidently been damaged in an earlier meeting-place, perhaps by an earthquake, and subsequently reused in this building. Both were set up by Herodes, a chief-cowherd (*archiboukolos*) during the reign of Augustus; one was dedicated to Caesar Augustus and the other to Dionysos Kathegemon (*SEG* 40 [1990], no. 1136; *SEG* 29 [1979], no. 1264; Radt 1999, 199).



Figure 19: Bronze statuette of Silenos from the Villa of the Papyri at Herculaneum, now in the Naples Archaeological Museum.

Before going on to the funerary purposes of associations, it is worth saying a few words about another building which has been unearthed, this one at Athens in Attica, Greece. Wilhelm Dörpfeld's excavations of the late 1880s in an area west of the Athenian acropolis, between the Pnyx and the Areopagos, uncovered the site of an ancient triangular precinct which, although not necessarily the famous Dionysion in the Marshes, as originally thought, was probably dedicated to Dionysos.²² Some time before the mid-second century the devotees of Dionysos Bacchus (Iobacchoi) decided to construct a meeting-place within this ancient sacred space. The building or Baccheion,²³ as it is called, measured about 11 meters wide by 18 meters long, consisting of a large hall with two rows of columns, which divided the structure into a central nave and two aisles (see figure 20). It was here that they gathered for their festivals and meetings including a sacred play re-enacting stories of the gods and the priest's sacred discourse. Alfred Schäfer (2002) also recently argues for the multi-functional nature of this building.

Several artifacts found within the structure point to the importance of goddesses and gods for those who used the building. At the eastern end of the building, within an apse, was found an altar decorated with Dionysiac motifs, including a sacrificial goat, a satyr (horned male attendant of the god) and a maenad (female attendant of the god). A small shrine devoted to Artemis appears to have been located in a room just north of this apse. Also near the altar were sculptural objects including a head of Dionysos, a statue of Pan, several reliefs depicting Cybele, and statuettes of Aphrodite and of Hekate.²⁴

An inscribed column was found alongside the altar, including a Dionysiac scene depicting the head of a bull above two panthers on either side of a large drinking vessel (see figure 21). This column identifies the building as the meeting-place (Baccheion) of the association. The inscription on it (*IG II² 1368 = AGRW 7*)—one of the lengthiest texts about an association in the Roman era—relates the minutes of a meeting in which the leaders and members of the association decided to have their rules more permanently inscribed in stone. The members' pride and sense of belonging becomes quite evident when they shout: "Long life to the most excellent priest, Herodes! Now you have good fortune! Now we are the best of all Bacchic societies!" Their recently appointed priest, Claudius Herodes, can be identified with the extremely wealthy and influential Claudius Herodes Attikos, and the events recorded in the inscription pertain to a time shortly before 164 CE (not the third century, as originally thought). The inscription provides information concerning the meetings and rituals of the group and the roles and responsibilities of members and leaders (priest, vice-priest, and chief-bacchant). The group gathered quite frequently, "on the ninth of each

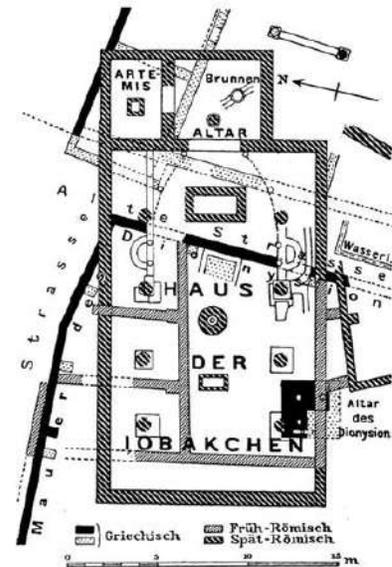


Figure 20: Plan of the meeting-place of the Iobacchoi at Athens.

22 Dörpfeld 1894, 1895; Hooker 1960.

23 For other uses of "Baccheion" for a meeting-place, see *IDidyma* 502; *ISmyrna* 733; *IEph* 434; *IPerinthos* 56 = *AGRW* 64; *SEG* 53 (2003), no 726 = *AGRW* 78 (Nikopolis ad Istrum, Moesia)

24 Dörpfeld 1894, 148; Schäfer 2002, 175-177, 189-205.

month, on the annual festival, on Bacchic holidays and if there is any occasional feast of the god.” When they did, participants were expected to “speak, act or do some honorable deed” (lines 42-46). The group also performed customary libations and sacrifices along with accompanying feasts in honor of Dionysos. They held wine-feasts at the death of a member (lines 159-63), which brings us to another important purpose of associations.



Figure 21: Drawing of the inscribed column containing the rules of the Iobacchoi at Athens.

3. Funerary Activities

The connection between feasting functions and funerary ones could be quite direct. A passage from Artemidoros illustrates this well:

A man dreamt that his fellow association members (*symbiōtai*) and brothers (*phratores*) suddenly appeared and said to him, “Receive us as guests and provide us dinner.” He replied, “I do not have the money nor the means to receive you.” Then he sent them away. On the next day, he was in a shipwreck, facing extreme danger and barely escaping with his life . . . For it is customary for members of an association (*symbiōtai*) to go to the house of the deceased and to dine there, and it is said that the reception is given by the deceased in return for honors paid to him by the members of the association . . . It was a shipwreck because he sent them away due to a lack of funds. (*Dream Interpretations* 5.82 = *AGRW* L14).

It was common practice for associations of all kinds in Asia Minor to hold similar funerary feasts or wine-banquets in memory of deceased members, including customary burial rituals.

There were several other practices associated with death and burial which can be mentioned here.²⁵ First of all, associations could provide burial for their members, often collecting contributions or fees which went towards the cost of the funerary rituals or the actual burial of members. There were numerous epitaphs set up for the deceased by the association he or she belonged to, and at Saittai alone, for instance, there were dozens of epitaphs erected by occupational associations or groups of “friends” (→ *Saittai*). Christian congregations, too, could serve a similar purpose, providing burial and related funerary honors for their members, especially the less-fortunate (cf. Tertullian, *Apology* 39.5-6 = *AGRW* L18).

Ensuring burial could be of greater or lesser importance depending on the economic circumstances of the members. The regulations of the association (*collegium*) devoted to Diana and Antinoos at Lanuvium in Italy, for example, devote extensive attention to the burial of a member, presumably because proper burial was something which the lower-class members might not otherwise have been able to afford (*CIL XIV 2112* = *AGRW* 310; 136 CE). Among them are rules regarding procedures for burial if a member happens to die further than twenty miles away from town, as well as a stipulation that if a member commits suicide the right to burial by the association would be forfeited. On the other hand, the rules of the Iobacchoi at Athens—a group consisting of a notable number of wealthier members—say little of the procedures for ensuring actual burial, mentioning only the funerary wine-banquet: “If an Iobacchos dies, let there be a wreath up to the cost of 5 drachmai and let a single jar of wine be set before those who attend the funeral. But do not let anyone who was absent from the funeral itself have any of the wine” (*IG II² 1368*, lines 159-163). Although from an earlier era in Egypt, it is worth mentioning two papyri in which family members (a sister in one, a brother in another) register a complaint with the king regarding the failure of a society (*thiasos*) to abide by its own rules in paying for the burial of a member (*PEnteuxis 20* = *AGRW* 293; *PEnteuxis 21* = *AGRW* 292; ca. 220 BCE). A similar expectation that members of a guild should give attention to burying a fellow-worker seems to lie behind a curse in an epigram from the island of Kos: “Farewell, good Damas! May my fellow-workers (*homotechnoi*)

25 On funerary functions, see Fraser 1977, 58-70; Nijf 1997, 31-69.

who took no notice of me encounter the same fate from you, father (i.e. the god), but may those who placed me under the earth enjoy life” (*IKosPH 324*; see figure 22).

Δ Α Μ Α
 Χ Ρ Η Σ Τ Ε
 Χ Α Ι Ρ Ε
 Ο Ι Μ Ε Υ Ρ Ε Ρ Ι Δ Ο Ν Τ Ε Σ
 Ο Μ Ο Τ Ε Χ Ν Ο Ι Τ Ω Ν Α Υ Τ Ω Ν
 Σ Ε Υ Ρ Α Τ Ε Ρ Α Ν Τ Ι Τ Υ Χ Ο Ι Σ Α Ν
 Ο Ι Δ Υ Ρ Ο Γ Η Ν Θ Ε Ν Τ Ε Σ
 Ο Ν Α Ι Ν Τ Ο Β Ι Ο Υ

Figure 22: Facsimile of *IKosPH 324*.

A second funerary function of associations is attested with groups that had a communal cemetery or collective tomb. This was the case with the guild of flax-workers at Smyrna who received a vault as a donation (*ISmyrna 218* = *AGRW 201*; cf. *IEph 2213*). The Selgian craftsmen living at Lamos in Cilicia likewise had their own collective tomb, with each member owning a share which could not be sold to non-members (*IKilikiaBM II 201* = *AGRW 215*). P. M. Fraser (1977, 58-70) discusses the extensive evidence for communal burial plots among associations on the island Rhodes, where burial boundary markers for the collective cemeteries have been found.

A third funerary-related activity involves the deceased arranging some financial benefit or potential benefit for an association. First of all, it was common in certain regions of Asia Minor (particularly Ionia, Phrygia, and Lydia) for associations of various kinds to receive financial foundations from a wealthy individual, provided that the members took care of the grave regularly or commemorated the patron’s death-day. Associations of Judeans, silversmiths, physicians, and hemp-workers at Ephesos were assigned responsibility for the upkeep of graves (*IEph 1677* = *AGRW 174*; *IEph 2212* = *AGRW 161*; *IEph 2304* = *AGRW 175*; *SEG 43 [1993]*, no. 812). In an epitaph of a devotee of the Judean God from Hierapolis, the owners follow local custom in making provisions for the guilds of purple-dyers and carpet-weavers to crown the grave on certain Roman and Judean festivals, commemorating the death of the deceased (*IJO II 196* = *AGRW 152*). The Christian tradition of gathering at the grave of a well-respected member or “witness” (martyr) on the anniversary of his or her death, which became increasingly important, is closely related to this commemorative funerary custom. The case of Polycarp at Smyrna in Ionia is an early example (cf. *Mart. Poly.* 18.1-3).

Frequently, associations (along with other groups and civic institutions) were made the recipients of any potential fines for violation of the grave. At Kyzikos and the nearby island of Prokonessos, for example, guilds of marble workers, clothing-cleaners, fishermen, and porters were named in epitaphs as recipients of any fines incurred for violation of the grave (*IKyzikos I 97*; *IKyzikos I 211*; *IKyzikos I 260*; *IKyzikos I 291* = *AGRW 111*). When Rufina, the head of the synagogue at Smyrna, prepared a common tomb for her household, she made the fines for violation payable to the Judean association (*ethnos*), and a copy of the inscription was put into the civic archives (*ISmyrna 295* = *AGRW 196*; III CE). Many Judeans and Christians in these same cities followed suit in adopting similar funerary-related customs, as J. H. M. Strubbe (1997) demonstrates.

These funerary functions could be an integral part of group life which helped to provide members with a sense of belonging and community. A poetic memorial from the vicinity of Magnesia Sipylus illustrates how feelings of allegiance might continue to the grave among fellow-

members of associations: “. . . Now, I, who first displayed zeal and trust for the society (*thiasos*), lie here. My name was Menophilos. For the sake of honor, men set up this monument. . .” (*IManisa* 354; 180 or 234 CE).

Conclusion

The purposes of associations outlined here are by no means exhaustive, but they begin to give a general picture of associative life which we will need to keep in mind as we turn to other dimensions of associations. The gatherings of such groups were occasions for ongoing social interaction and conviviality. Inseparable from this, they were also a place where members could fittingly honor the goddesses and gods (including emperors) who protected the group and the members' families in daily life, at work, and at home. The association's role continued to the grave and beyond as associations honored members on an epitaph or regularly gathered at the grave of a benefactor or member. If one were to inquire what it was that such groups offered their members, then, the answer would be manifold. Certainly, however, through a combination of purposes, associations could offer their members a sense of belonging and identity.²⁶ When we turn to the external relations of these groups, we will begin to see how group-identity could be expressed within a broader civic and imperial context, less in terms of conflict or opposition than in terms of integration and participation.

Associations did provide their members with a sense of belonging, but this does not necessarily mean, as many scholars assume, that such groups were therefore principally a compensation for decline in other social or cultural structures of belonging within the city. Joining and feeling at home within the association was not necessarily a response to deficiencies elsewhere. Nor was this belonging incompatible with a continuing sense of having a place within the structures of the city, which was part of the larger world of province and empire.

26 Contrast the assertions of Burkert (1987, 43-53) regarding societies devoted to the mysteries.