

## 10 | Between Local and Global? Religion in Late-Hellenistic Delos

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*Throughout antiquity the Aegean Sea has been a highway for the movement of people, goods, and ideas. Its core region, the Cycladic Islands world, was appreciated by the Greeks as prime mover of their cultural and religious development. The island of Delos, famed birthplace of Apollo, was one of the eminent hot-spots of global connectivity in the Hellenistic world; the island was so much reliant on its network connections that without them, food supplies were in seasonal jeopardy. Demography put Delos on a special footing. A true multi-ethnic melting pot, religious life as evidenced in the composition of priesthoods and accoutrement of sanctuaries has long been found a curious tapestry of cultural traditions. Amidst omnipresent entanglement, this paper undertakes the quest for local religious signatures. Navigating through the insular topography and revisiting its major sanctuaries, Julietta Steinhauer traces the translocal dynamics in the exercise of religion. She argues that the local population, among many foreigners and immigrants, shaped their lived environment through various processes of cultural brokerage: by developing genuinely local cults such as that of Apollo, Zeus, and Athena Kynthios; by introducing new cults, sometimes upon the initiative of individuals or associations from outside the island; and third, by locally appropriating global cults, for instance that of Isis and Serapis. Combining these dimensions, the Delians crafted a religious pluriverse that was moulded and tied to the local specificities of their island.*

What constitutes the local in a place like Delos, one of the best-connected poleis in the Aegean in the late Hellenistic period? What regional sphere might be considered local to an island as small as Delos if every journey departing the polis was necessarily by boat? Was Delos more local than the poleis of mainland Greece due to its 'insular' existence, and was it more global with regard to its status as a trans-Mediterranean marketplace? Two factors are crucial to any discussion of the local dimension of religion in relation to Delos: first, Delian 'insularity' and how this effects what we perceive as the local; second, what can an understanding of the local dimension of Greek religion on Delos tell us about Greek religion more generally? Using case studies, I will argue that by looking at the local dimension of Greek religion we can not only understand the dynamics

and shifting perceptions of the local but equally comprehend larger trends in Greek religion at the end of the Hellenistic period.

To fully comprehend local religion conceptually and factually, we need to understand not only what constitutes local, regional, and global spheres but also how they functioned and, perhaps most importantly, how they interacted. The Delian global ‘connectedness’, especially between the east and the west, was intrinsically linked to the ability to sail, which can be seen, for example, in the island’s grain prices, correlating with the shipping season.<sup>1</sup> This was a volatile factor that may have led to a state of isolation, especially during the closed sailing season in winter.<sup>2</sup> However, it does not mean that the island was cut off from regional traffic. In fact, most of the Aegean islands were connected by other means, namely through cabotage and *porthemeutikē* (ferrying), both dependent on the weather of the day of travel rather than the season.<sup>3</sup> Thinking of Delos as cut off during the winter might be true only for traffic from places that were too far to reach by such means, such as Egypt, Syria, or Rome but not the neighbouring islands. Gary Reger argued that Delos and its immediate Cycladic neighbours formed a sort of ‘regional market’ for grain, for instance.<sup>4</sup> I therefore contextualise the Delian local with the neighbouring islands that, despite being a boat-trip away, can be seen as the regional to the local and leaving the island only occasionally in a state of isolation, if at all.<sup>5</sup>

Having established the regional as a set of islands, what are the consequences for our understanding of the local on Delos? Delos has been traditionally seen as the centre of its ‘region’, the Cycladic Islands. This is partly due to its inclusion in mythology, providing a strong local (religious) identity as the birthplace of Apollo. This local identity led to the regional importance of Delos: the establishment of the Sanctuary of Apollo elevated the island to a regional centre of the Aegean, for example for banking, among other economic activities.<sup>6</sup> A third, ‘universal’ dimension was an equally important factor in defining the local on Delos as it connected the local with the global as well as the regional. Each dimension is intrinsically

<sup>1</sup> Reger 1993: 317, and on the Delian winter-isolation 328.

<sup>2</sup> The many votives at the sanctuaries of the Egyptian gods and especially those dedicated to Isis, goddess of seafaring, bear witness to the importance of the sailing season to Delians and visitors alike; see Bruneau 1963.

<sup>3</sup> Constantakopoulou 2007, on cabotage and *porthemeutikē* (ferrying): 176, 222–26. Evidence for Delos: 226.

<sup>4</sup> Reger 1993: 329–30.

<sup>5</sup> To what extent Rhenea would count as region in this model and to what extent as part of ‘Delos’ is debateable.

<sup>6</sup> Constantakopoulou 2017: 19.

linked with one another – on Delos and elsewhere. Yet the way in which these three dimensions are interconnected, strengthened and shaped are local and unique to each locale.

On Delos, one might argue, the local and global were particularly effectively intertwined. This is true for the interplay between local agriculture, textile industry (or at least local purple dye), and its role as marketplace for goods and enslaved individuals, shipped between east and west, which necessarily created a local entertainment industry. While other local resources such as *pōros* and marble were used in particular in the second century BCE to build the majority of the Hellenistic houses and new sanctuaries of the mushrooming city, here too, additional marble was imported to shape the ‘new local’ in the city centre by Naxians, Parians, and Athenians. At the same time, the exploitation of the local quarries completely changed the island’s natural landscape within a few decades.<sup>7</sup>

The interrelatedness of local and global elements equally characterises Delian local religion and Delian society of the second and first centuries BCE. The Sanctuary of Apollo and the festival of the Delia are powerful examples of the local in a physical and religious sense and at the same time prime examples of this binary character. As the *Hymn to Apollo* attests, the sanctuary provided essential support for the population of Delos and points at the same time to the barrenness of its soil.<sup>8</sup> It has been argued that the island, owing to its size and meagre natural resources, could only ever feed a handful of families at any given time.<sup>9</sup> Yet, the sanctuary and festival drew visitors on a global scale, creating networks that reached way beyond the physically local and, in fact, bound the local and the global together in interdependence.<sup>10</sup> The community of worshippers of Delian Apollo, often themselves locals elsewhere, clearly associated the god with Delos. They

<sup>7</sup> Hadjidakis, Matarangas and Varti-Matarangas 2009: 284–86.

<sup>8</sup> *Hom. Hymn Apo.* 51–60: ‘Delos, if you would be willing to be the abode of my dear son / Phoibos Apollo, and here to establish for him a great sumptuous temple – / since no other will touch you; of that you will not be unmindful, / nor, I believe, will you be at all wealthy in cattle and sheep flocks, / nor will you bring forth grapes or produce an abundance of produce – / if you contain, however, the shrine of far-shooting Apollo, / people will all be bringing to you their hecatombs hither, / when they gather together; the measureless savor of fat will / always rise from the fires – your inhabitants you will be feeding / out of those foreigners’ hands, for in truth your soil is not fertile’ (transl. R. Merrill at <https://chs.harvard.edu/chapter/8-the-homeric-hymn-to-apollo-translated-by-rodney-merrill/>).

<sup>9</sup> Constantakopoulou 2017: 4. Reger is more careful and points to the excavated farms and local barley cultivation and argues that the island was perhaps more independent than previously suggested; Reger 1993: 330.

<sup>10</sup> In fact, Bruneau 1970: 79 argued that due to the changing demographics after 166 BCE, the Apollonia were transformed from a ‘fête Délienne’ to a festival that now reflected the

were, however, not necessarily bound to the physical level of the local but to a metaphorical one, by context: the Delian Apollo could be worshipped in Athens, Alexandria, or Syracuse and would still be associated with Delos.

On a practical level, we can observe a distinguishing feature of Delian local religion in the second century: unlike other islands with similar levels of connectivity such as Rhodes or Cos, where in the second century an exclusive local religious identity was created via measures such as restricted access to religious offices to citizens only, no such efforts were made here. In fact, Delian local religion was constantly negotiated and defined by its multi-ethnic inhabitants, who founded and maintained their own sanctuaries and served as priests, combining local, regional, and global dimensions, at least initially.<sup>11</sup> In the second half of the second century BCE, as a result of the second Athenian occupation, the majority of administrative and honorary offices in the Delian sanctuaries fell into Athenian hands.

In this chapter I explore the local dimension of Delian religion in a period where Delos itself was governed not by the Delians but by Athenians. Delian society as well as its religion was deeply transformed by its Athenian occupiers and large numbers of immigrants, many of whom now claimed Delos as their home, at least temporarily.<sup>12</sup> This influx of immigrants from places beyond the regional sphere had important consequences for the development of local religion on Delos: individuals that did not share the immediate regional pantheon set up cults to the gods of their hometowns and lands in relatively large numbers, a development not known from anywhere else in the Greek Hellenistic world. This dynamic, I suggest, can be best described with the term *translocal*, that is local cults linked to a place physically that were then transferred to Delos. I will use the term throughout this chapter. As a consequence, Delians, Athenians, and other immigrants alike shaped their new physical local in three dimensions: first, by supporting and developing local cults such as those of Apollo, Zeus, and Athena Kynthios; second, by introducing translocal cults, such as the cult of the gods of Ascalon, set up by an individual immigrant, or the Poseidoniastai of Berytos, an association of merchants from Berytos; and third, global cults such as that of Isis and

cosmopolitan character of the Delian population. Similarly, Christy Constantakopoulou (2017) in her analysis of the dedicants visiting the sanctuary of Apollo.

<sup>11</sup> The sanctuaries of the Egyptian and Syrian gods were both founded by immigrants, as were the thirteen translocal sanctuaries on Mount Kynthos. See Steinhauer 2014: 52–61; Steinhauer forthcoming.

<sup>12</sup> On the institutional takeover of the Delian sanctuaries by Athenians, see Steinhauer 2014: 66–68.

Serapis, which, at this point in time, had been de-rooted and globalised. By combining these three dimensions, the population of Delos created a new local religious dimension that helped individuals navigate their daily lives within the ‘triangle of place, knowledgeability, and communication’ which, according to Hans Beck is ‘a landmark trait of the local’.<sup>13</sup>

We see on Delos a dynamic yet ordered space with clear rules and old as well as new traditions, and individuals negotiating these within the physical and metaphysical local in a defined space in a time of change and disruption. Local religion, then, is best described as constantly shifting and dynamic, incorporating traditions and innovations shaped by locals for their individual needs, offering familiarity as well as the option to establish new traditions and practise old ones at any given time. This dynamic, and the binary dimension of local religion incorporating global and local aspects, may explain the locally unique religious practices that we encounter at the end of the Hellenistic period, reflective of an ever more ‘globalised’ Mediterranean at the beginning of a new political era.

## Local Religion

Crowning Mount Kynthos, just 112 m above sea level, lay the remains of the Kynthion, a hilltop sanctuary dedicated to Zeus Kynthios and Athena Kynthia (no. 105 on Fig. 10.1). This sanctuary, like that of Apollo, is necessarily connected to the place as it is built on and connects to a significant landmark, clearly linked to Delian topography. It hosted a pre-Hellenic settlement from the early Cycladic period and was possibly one of the earliest sanctuaries on the island.<sup>14</sup> It had been used as a cult site at least since the Archaic period, after an even earlier settlement had been abandoned.<sup>15</sup> If we look at the Kynthion from an anthropological perspective, that is, arguing that all religions were initially products of local self-contained and isolated groups with a strong sense of group solidarity, then the pre-Archaic and Archaic Kynthion might just fall into that category:

<sup>13</sup> The physical local according to Hans Beck: ‘the average city-state was experienceable. In other words, the knowledge of people about their local area was acquirable through first hand encounters with place, and it was communicated directly and between individuals who were, in principle, equally familiar with and knowledgeable about the quotidian horizon. This triangle of place, knowledgeability, and communication marks not only a landmark trait of the local, but also a decisive distinction between local and nonlocal realms.’ Beck 2020: 30–33.

<sup>14</sup> On the early Cycladic settlement, see MacGillivray 1980, and for the earliest sanctuary Plassart 1928: 11–50.

<sup>15</sup> Plassart 1928: 51–52.

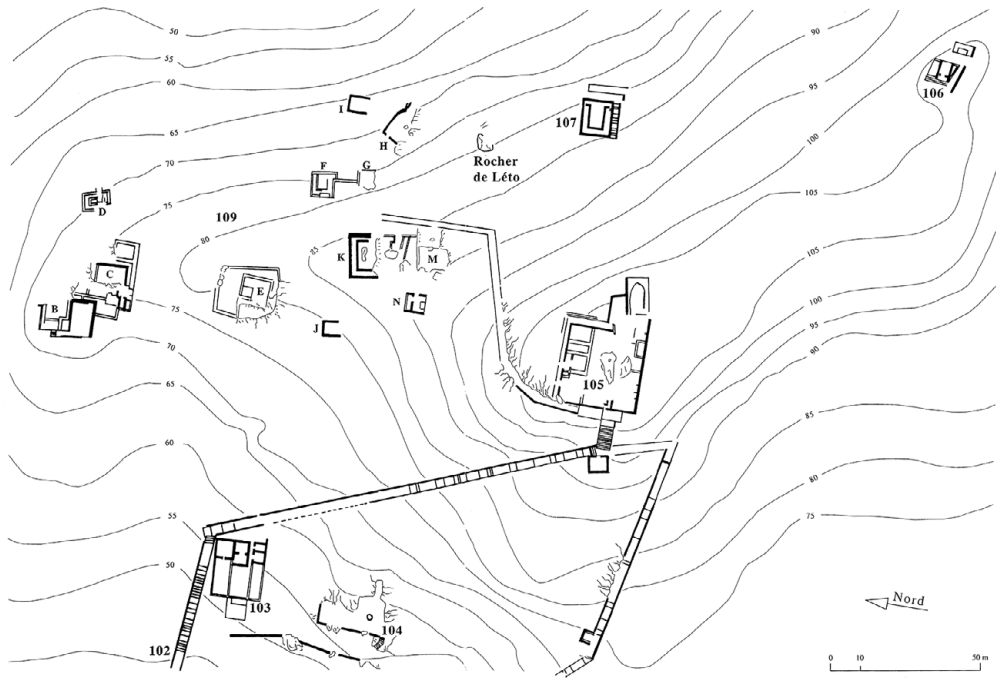


Figure 10.1 Sanctuaries on mount Kynthos, Delos (after Bruneau and Ducat 1983).

while Zeus and Athena were clearly not only local, their association with this particular place makes them locals.<sup>16</sup>

The remains of the sanctuary that are still visible today date to the period of Delian independence in the fourth century BCE and the sanctuary's heyday in the second period of occupation (166–88 BCE), when it was enlarged and dedications were more numerous and generous than before.<sup>17</sup> The sanctuary's main architectural features were two *oikoi*, probably one to Zeus and one to Athena with later additions of an exedra and a Doric *prostylos* at the entrance to the sanctuary. The magnification of the entrance area went hand in hand with the enlargement of the staircase.<sup>18</sup> Several terraces with mosaic floors as well as other, privately dedicated rooms, were added in the first century BCE.

The general increase in dedications is probably connected to the fact that more individuals than ever were now living on the island. Equally, Zeus and especially Athena were deities particularly dear to the Athenians who

<sup>16</sup> Eller 2015: 177.

<sup>17</sup> Bruneau 1970: 225 and the inventory list *ID* 1403, ll. 27–33, 165–157/156 BCE for the Kynthion.

<sup>18</sup> Bruneau 1970: 225.

had taken over the administration of the sanctuary and were now in charge of the priesthoods.<sup>19</sup> However, the sanctuary appealed not only to those familiar with these gods but also to non-Athenians and non-Delians such as Philostratos of Gaza, who became a *zakoros* at the Kynthion, or Apollonides of Laodikeia, who dedicated a mosaic pavement.<sup>20</sup> These two examples are representative of a shift in the expression and dimension of local religion on Delos. The humble hilltop Sanctuary of Zeus and Athena Kynthios, two gods initially worshipped probably by local inhabitants only, was now transformed into an impressive precinct with mosaic floors and a proper portico. The worshipping community of benefactors that enabled the development of the sanctuary was made up of individuals from places as far away as Gaza. Yet they wished to honour the very local gods and take part in shaping the physical dimension of the local in the form of the sanctuary, bound to the place, and giving it an individual 'touch' by dedicating features such as columns made out of local stone, mosaics, and exedras that were particularly common on Delos, therewith shaping the 'new' local.

The example of the Sanctuary of Zeus and Athena Kynthios has demonstrated the malleable and dynamic nature of local religion. It kept its prominent place within and connection to Delian local religion. At the same time its character changed and with this Delian local religion. It now mirrored the changing demographics of the locals and reflected the interconnections of the island which had become the 'new' local. Individuals such as Philostratos of Gaza were, by engaging with the oldest local sanctuary on the island, able to experience local religion while at the same time shaping this experience to suit their own ideas of the new local religion.

## Translocal Cults

As we have seen in the example of the worshippers at the Kynthion, local religion was as much shaped by local topography as it was by the

<sup>19</sup> Eighteen inscriptions were dedications made by Athenians. However, *ID* 1723 records an Ascalonite, *ID* 1893 a Romaios, *ID* 1869 a Gazaian, and *ID* 1532 an Alexandrian worshipper. Priestly offices such as the *zakoros* could be taken up by non-Athenians, as the example of Philostratos, a *zakoros* from Gaza (*ID* 1896) shows.

<sup>20</sup> *ID* 2420. On the inscription and for the identification of *kataklyston* as a hitherto unknown word for 'pavement', see Bruneau 1967: 423–25 and 1970: 225. The 'locals', the Delians, are clearly underrepresented in the inscriptions of the second and first centuries, but this seems to be a trait of Delian epigraphy in the second and first centuries rather than an actual reflection of their existence and activities.

inhabitants of a place. The latter is particularly true for what I have coined ‘translocal’ cults, that is cults which have been taken or perhaps ‘copied’ from their original local topographical contexts and transported into a new environment, often far away from their original local spheres. Such trans-local cults held much importance for immigrants who through them were connected to their ‘original’ local religion and recreated a sense of belonging in their new environments. Such translocal cults, however, often only lasted for as long as the individual immigrant or group were actively worshipping and – in many cases – never became long-lasting pillars of local Greek religion. Take, for example, the sanctuary of the gods of Ascalon. The sanctuary was located approximately 20 metres below the peak of Mount Kynthos, in close proximity to thirteen partially identifiable sanctuaries of the same ‘oriental’ style that were scattered across the slopes of Mount Kynthos, all dating to the end of the second or beginning of the first century BCE. The open-courtyard sanctuary in question was equipped with a hearth and benches and could be identified via several inscriptions as a shrine dedicated to Poseidon of Ascalon and Palestinian Astarte Aphrodite Ourania. The dedications were inscribed on decorated altars that were found within and in the immediate surroundings of the precinct.<sup>21</sup> It was erected by Philostratos, a well-known banker originating from Ascalon with a business on Delos.<sup>22</sup> The dedication, inscribed on an altar, was made on behalf of his wife and children, as well as the city of the Ascalonites. Philostratos makes it clear in the inscription that he is a banker on the island (τραπ[εζιτεύων] / ἐν Δήλωι), and he and his family were probably all residents on Delos at the time when the sanctuary was built. Two further inscriptions were found in the precinct, each are dedications to Palestinian Astarte Aphrodite Ourania (*ID* 1719, ca. 100 BCE) and to Poseidon of Ascalon (*ID* 1721, 100 BCE), both in his wife’s and children’s names and of the city of the Ascalonites. The dedicatory inscription to Poseidon of Ascalon doubles as a sacrificial instruction and excludes the sacrifice of pigs and goats. The sanctuary was slightly larger than most of the neighbouring open-courtyard sanctuaries (8 × 4.60 m) and fitted snugly against the slope of the mountain. Reaching the sanctuary would

<sup>21</sup> Plassart 1928: 287.

<sup>22</sup> *ID* 1720 = *CGRN* 216, 100 BCE: Φιλόστρατος Φιλοστράτου/Ἀσκαλωνίτης τραπ[εζιτεύων]/ἐν Δήλωι, ὑπὲρ τ[ῆς Ἀσκαλ]ωνι-/τῶν πόλεως καὶ γυ-/ναικός/ (5) καὶ τέκν[ων]/Ποσειδῶνι Ἀσκαλ[ωνίτη]./Vocat/ύικά μή θύειν/μηδ[ε] ἀ[γ]ει[α], ‘Philostratos son of Philostratos, banker on Delos, on behalf of the city of the Ascalonites and (5) his wife and children, to Poseidon of Ascalon. Do not sacrifice any swine (products) or any goat (products)’ (transl. *CGRN*). On Philostratos and his business more generally see Leiwo 1989.



have taken some effort as it was not connected to the main staircase leading up to the Kynthion or by the path leading down to the other sanctuaries. It was used by the family and perhaps his acquaintances, resident on Delos. By introducing gods that originated in local religious structures elsewhere, Philostratos was able to bring a part of his local religion with him as he migrated and to create a point of connection for his fellow Ascalonites and himself on Delos, while evidently making a personal mark in the local religious landscape of the island.

Another 50 metres north-east of the Sanctuary of the gods of Ascalon, a group of three fellow citizens of Iamneia, modern Yavne on the Israeli coast and once a major Hellenistic trading port, dedicated a smaller ( $4 \times 3.5$  m) but otherwise very similar ‘oriental-style’ open-courtyard sanctuary (L, not indicated on Fig. 10.1 but located between K and M).<sup>23</sup> The dedication was inscribed on a small marble base and was made on behalf of the three men’s siblings, their families and people of their hometown, to Herakles and Horon, the gods who possessed Iamneia.<sup>24</sup> The inscription, simultaneously a sacred regulation, just like the dedication to Poseidon of Ascalon, prohibits the sacrifice of a goat. In both sanctuaries, those of the gods of Ascalon and of Iamneia, specific local customs were transferred to Delos, bringing a new element to local traditions and religious customs on the island, effectively shaping and widening the island’s local religious dimension in more than one way: the Sanctuary of the gods of Ascalon and of the gods of Iamneia, as well as the remaining shrines which were dedicated to other Levantine, mostly local gods by individuals just like Philostratos, were shaped as triclinia in which the sacrificial meal would have been consumed on benches.<sup>25</sup> This tradition was adopted from Marzēaḥ groups, religious ‘associations’ known from the Levant that translated into *thiasoi* on Delos.<sup>26</sup> The introduction of the Marzēaḥ to Delos from at least the early third century, closely linked to specific local deities, is a prime example of the mechanics of translocal cults and religion: such cults are

<sup>23</sup> Fischer 2003: 246.

<sup>24</sup> ID 2308. ID 2308: Ἡρακλῆ καὶ Αὐρώ- / να, θεοὶς Ἰάμνει- / αν κατέχουσιν, / Ζηνόδωρος, Πά- / (5) τρων, Διόδοτος, ‘To Heracles and Haurona, gods possessing Iamnia, Zenodoros, Patron, Diodotos, Iamnitans, on behalf of themselves and their siblings and their family and their fellow-citizens, as a thank-offering. One may sacrifice everything except (something) of the goat’ (transl. CGRN). Horon was also referred to as Horon of Iabne/Iamnia. For the inscription and the sanctuary see Plassart 1928: 278–79.

<sup>25</sup> A list of findings and dedications can be found in Bruneau 1970: 475–78.

<sup>26</sup> For example, in a bilingual (Phoenician and Greek) grave epitaph from Rhenea, we learn about the *synthiasitai* (fellow member of the *thiasos*) of a certain Dioskyrides, originating from Qedemot in Jordan; SEG LVII:760, ca. 300 BCE.

characterised by their voluntary nature and individuals' initiatives as opposed to cults and rituals established, regulated, and maintained by political bodies for entire communities and beyond.<sup>27</sup> While the cults of these deities were physically established on Delos, the ritual sacrifice performed within the contexts of these sanctuaries seems to have adhered to traditions that were local elsewhere and were never established as normative in the Greek and Roman world.

Perhaps within this framework of translocal religion also fit the associations of merchants and shipowners on Delos, not dissimilar to the individuals setting up the small shrines on Mount Kynthos, at least at an initial stage. These associations worshipped the local gods of their hometowns, the most famous of which are the Poseidoniastai of Berytos and the Herakleistai of Tyre, both eponymous of their respective local deity.<sup>28</sup> The Herakleistai were planning to erect a building that served the purpose of worship, as well as creating space for socio-economic gatherings, just as the Posidoniastai had done earlier. Their establishment was a splendid multi-purpose building erected in the religious and commercial centre of Delos in close proximity to the sacred lake and the Agora of the Italians.<sup>29</sup> The architecture and furnishings of the building have been thoroughly discussed, so for the purposes of this paper, I will focus only on several aspects highlighting the religious dynamics of the group.<sup>30</sup> One of the main activities of the group was the communal meal that was taken in the second largest room of the building (211 m<sup>2</sup>). The room was decorated with exquisite wall-paintings and stuccoed walls and ceilings. It was equipped with 19–20 dining couches.<sup>31</sup> We cannot state with certainty the exact date of the founding of the association. The building itself was erected in the middle of the second century BCE and the earliest inscription dates to 153/152 BCE.<sup>32</sup> What we can say, however, is that the translocal element of the group that was probably the catalyst for its foundation was kept throughout, both in name and practice. We have two *naioi* dedicated to Poseidon of Berytos and Astarte and one *naos* to an unknown deity. Slightly later, a fourth *naos* shows that the repertoire was enlarged to include other, translocal gods: now, the goddess Roma, introduced by the Roman

<sup>27</sup> 'Translocal religions tend to be voluntary movements or associations, which individuals can join by intentional decision . . . they tend to be "individualistic" in a critical sense' (Eller 2015: 178).

<sup>28</sup> On the *poseidoniastai* and their precinct see Picard 1920; 1921; Trümper 2002. For the Herakleistai worshipping the Tyrian Herakles (Melqart), who apply in Athens for the right to buy a plot of land to build a *temenos* to their god, see *ID* 1519.

<sup>29</sup> No. 57 in the *Guide de Delos* (Bruneau and Ducat 1983). <sup>30</sup> See note 28.

<sup>31</sup> Nielsen 2015: 148. <sup>32</sup> *ID* 1520.

merchants on Delos, became one of the gods worshipped in this establishment. While there are many dedications by the association to Apollo, the sanctuary itself stayed true to its original purpose, the worship of gods that were local, but local elsewhere, such as Roma and Poseidon of Berytos.

While there may have been other reasons too, the most probable motivation for an individual to worship the gods of their hometown in a fixed establishment, thousands of miles away across the Mediterranean, was surely for that individual to keep in touch with their origins. On Delos in particular, where we find groups of individuals from the same city, many of whom will have had familial and ongoing economic connections to their hometowns, this makes good sense. At the same time, surely, this was as much about traditional bonds with the *Heimat* and origins as it was about creating a new local. This new local was necessarily shaped by the old local that had now become translocal and thereby contributed to the Delian 'new local'. However, unlike the global cults discussed in the next section, translocal cults had no impact on the broader context of Greek religion. Most of the translocal cults were in many ways only ever functioning in a first phase in the new local, for a few generations only. Rarely did they become global phenomena. In most cases, they fell victim to the religious competition of the second century BCE.<sup>33</sup>

## Global Cults in Delian Local Religion

The important role Delos and the nature of Delian local religion played in the processes of the 'globalisation' and spread of the cult of the goddess Isis to Greece and the West has been highlighted since the earliest studies of 'Isiac religion' in the 1970s.<sup>34</sup> This section will look closely at the role that Delian local religion played in the making of Isis and the extent to which Isis made Delian local religion what it became in the second and first centuries BCE by focusing on the internal developments of the sanctuaries of the Egyptian gods on the island. To start with, it is perhaps necessary to say a few words about the global character of Isis as proposed in scholarship. After several centuries of appropriation and inter-cultural exchange, including in the Egyptian sanctuaries of Delos, Isis had become what one

<sup>33</sup> For a general analysis of the evolution of ancient religions, see Woolf 2017, and for religious competition see p. 32 of the same work.

<sup>34</sup> Malaise 1972; Dunand 1973.

might call a global deity.<sup>35</sup> The mechanics that elevated an initially Egyptian goddess to a global goddess can be explained to an extent by the system of the Hellenistic *koine* that facilitated the goddess' 'globalisation' and her ability to change and innovate while keeping 'traditional' features.<sup>36</sup> Isis' global character and the phenomenon of her widespread worship have been studied in depth.<sup>37</sup> In addition, this section shows that on Delos we can not only trace the practical processes behind the cult's globalisation, but equally see that these dynamics were facilitated by the demographically diverse Delian locals and Delian local religion itself.

Serapeion C on Delos is a case in point. For the purposes of this chapter, I will only touch upon the composition of the multi-ethnic community of worshippers as such – that in itself arguably represents the global aspect of the island as well. I will focus on the agency of the community itself, which resulted in practical developments within the sanctuary and its ritual functions over a period of approximately 100 years.<sup>38</sup> These processes illustrate the way in which a global cult is locally embedded and moulded to provide the stability needed in people's everyday lives and representing the immediacy of the local aspect of religion. The sanctuary (Fig. 10.2) was probably erected as the third of three Serapeia on the island at the end of the third or beginning of the second century BCE, and it became a 'public' sanctuary from around 180 BCE onwards.<sup>39</sup> Its main architectural features included two courts, a quadrangular court (G) and a slightly smaller trapezoidal court (E), leading to a 'dromos' or alleyway perhaps reminiscent of Egyptian sanctuaries in shape and lined with sixteen Sphinxes.<sup>40</sup> Within the precinct, four *naoi* were located. As most houses and sanctuaries on the island – with the exception of the Agora of the Italians that boasted marble columns from as far away as Attica – the sanctuary was mostly constructed from local stone.<sup>41</sup>

The Egyptian gods, and in particular the god Serapis, were allegedly introduced on Delos as early as the first quarter of the third century BCE by

<sup>35</sup> For a definition of 'global deities' and Isis' place among these, see Woolf 2018–19: 113.

<sup>36</sup> For a comprehensive overview of the development of Isis' cult from an Egyptian to a global cult, see Woolf 2014: 74–80 and Versluys 2015: 148–50.

<sup>37</sup> On the role of Delos in the diffusion of the cult, see e.g. Dunand 1973; Baslez 1977; Malaise 1984; Bricault 2004; and more generally on the spread of the cult Bricault 2013; Bricault, Versluys and Meyboom 2007; Malaise 2000; 2007; Matricon-Thomas 2012.

<sup>38</sup> For the community of worshippers see Steinhauer 2014: 82–86; 2019: 231–34; Steinhauer forthcoming.

<sup>39</sup> Or at least a Serapeion with a *dromos* appears in the inventories of that year (*ID* 2041); Bruneau 1970: 462; 1980: 161; Brun and Leguilloux 2013: 168.

<sup>40</sup> Bruneau 1980: 187. <sup>41</sup> Hadjidakis, Matarangas and Varti-Matarangas 2009: 284–85.

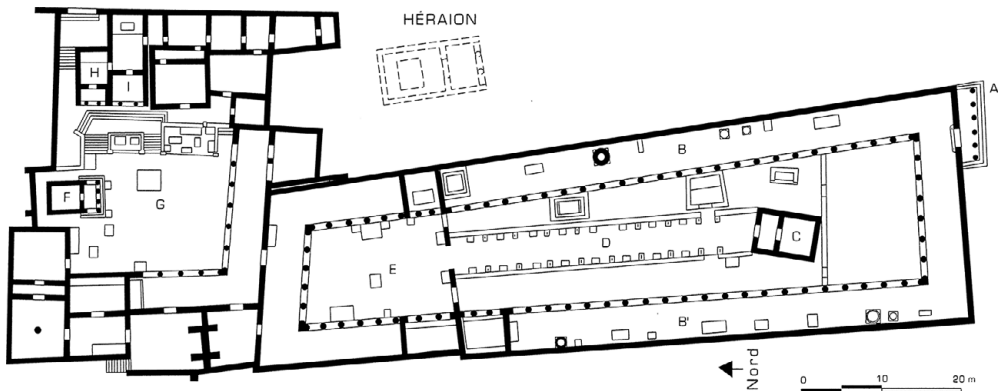


Figure 10.2 Serapeion C, Delos (after Bruneau 1980: 162).

an individual priest from Memphis.<sup>42</sup> The worship of Serapis went hand in hand with that of his consort Isis, as documented in the epigraphic and archaeological evidence.<sup>43</sup> In fact, most inscriptions found within the vicinity of any of the three Serapeia were dedicated to the Delian triad Serapis, Isis and Anubis.<sup>44</sup> This combination of gods, in itself a local feature of Delos that differed from the more common triad of Isis, Serapis/Osiris and Harpokrates/Horus, was the most common way of addressing the Egyptian gods in votive inscriptions on the island. We do not know why it was Anubis in particular who joined Isis and Serapis or precisely what made the cult of the Egyptian gods so successful an enterprise, but it seems to have been a combination of the global aspect of the cult and the local dynamic on Delos.<sup>45</sup> This local dynamic allowed a diverse and vibrant religious 'landscape' to flourish, leaving us with deities and their epithets attested here only.<sup>46</sup>

The sanctuary's four *naoi* were erected for the various gods worshipped in the precinct at different periods in time.<sup>47</sup> At the centre of the main court in the north of the sanctuary stood a temple, F, identified as dedicated

<sup>42</sup> IG XI4 1299 = RICIS 202/0101 ll. 2–11 and note 43.

<sup>43</sup> The establishment of the 'first' Serapeion on Delos by the Memphite priest Apollonius II's grandfather as well as the sanctuary itself are discussed in detail in Engelmann 1975; Siard 1998; Dignas 2008: 75–82; Moyer 2011: 142–207.

<sup>44</sup> Bruneau 1970: 463.

<sup>45</sup> Anubis' connection to the Greek Hermes and Roman Mercury, god of travel and merchants, might have been an important aspect as the sanctuary served merchants and travellers alike.

<sup>46</sup> Bruneau 1970: 475–78.

<sup>47</sup> Besides these deities, a large number of other named gods, such as Asklepios and unnamed gods that dwelled in the temple, *theoi synnaioi*, were also worshipped here.

to Serapis and dating back to the beginning of the second century BCE.<sup>48</sup> Ten metres eastwards and on a slightly higher level stood temple H, probably dedicated to Isis, Serapis and Anubis, although the evidence is inconclusive.<sup>49</sup> Immediately next to it, to the south, stood temple I, dedicated to Isis by the Athenians at around 150 BCE.<sup>50</sup> The fact that the Athenians dedicated the temple is no surprise, since the sanctuary, the second wealthiest on the island, became popular with the Athenian occupiers. The temple was administered by Athenians soon after the occupation in 166, and all priestly offices were taken over by them. Athenians were also involved in grassroots support for the sanctuary.<sup>51</sup> Leaving the political dimension of the Athenian actions aside, there is a further point to be considered here. The temple was dedicated as a votive offering, but at the same time it was a clear effort to shape the local religious landscape in the way that the Athenians saw fit. This was perhaps because Isis had not previously had an individual temple within the Serapeion C and it was seen as a necessary addition to honour the goddess more prominently. It could also have been due to the prevalence of the Athenians to worship Isis, known to them locally since the fourth century BCE, or, most likely, both.<sup>52</sup> The fact that the sanctuary (Serapeion) and its priests were officially named after the god Serapis rather than Isis highlights the Athenian effort to include the global goddess visibly and effectively in the local cult of the Egyptian gods on Delos.<sup>53</sup> At this point in time, Serapis had already been worshipped for more than 150 years locally, and the focus on Isis rather than Serapis by the Athenian dedication connected the Delian local cult more strongly to the global sphere. The example of the fourth *naos*, C, illustrates the creative character of local religion and the interplay of global and local. The *naos* is situated in the back of the southern side of the *dromos*, visually creating the focal point of the *dromos* of the sphinxes (see Fig. 10.3).

The building was identified initially by René Vallois as a Metroon that was known from inscriptions found in the vicinity.<sup>54</sup> His thesis was refuted

<sup>48</sup> Siard 2008: 27.

<sup>49</sup> *ID* 2042 (135/134 BCE) mentions a dedication of a monument to Serapis, Isis, and Anubis and was engraved on a slab with an Ionian frieze, probably an architrave, but whether it actually referred to this *naos* is unclear.

<sup>50</sup> Siard 2008: 28 and *ID* 2044.

<sup>51</sup> For a list of the known priests see Bricault 2013: appendix. For the involvement of Athenians in the subscriptions supporting the erection of a Hydreion, see Steinhauer 2019: 230–31.

<sup>52</sup> *IG* II3 1 337, 333/332 BCE. <sup>53</sup> Bruneau 1970: 563–64.

<sup>54</sup> *Ibid.*: 462; R. Vallois, *AHD*, I: 86–92.



Figure 10.3 Dromos and Naos C in Serapeion C, Delos. Drawing by Frédéric Siard (in Brun Kyriakidis 2021: plate 25, printed with permission).

by Philippe Bruneau in 1980 who instead suggested that the building had served as a temple of Isis.<sup>55</sup> Most recently, H el ene Siard argued that the building was erected as a temple to a hitherto unknown deity, Hydreios.<sup>56</sup> During her excavation that focused on temple C, Siard discovered the hydraulic function of the *naos* which constituted of a square well as its cella.<sup>57</sup> Her findings also showed that the structure was built much later than previously suggested, namely after 130 BCE, together with the *dromos* of the sphinxes, and was therefore a later addition to the sanctuary.<sup>58</sup> An inscription dating to the beginning of the first century BCE informs us about the individual responsible for the paving of the *dromos*, the dedication of the sphinxes, and several altars: a certain Demetrios of Alexandria.<sup>59</sup> The dedication was made to Isis, Serapis, Anubis Harpokrates, and Hydreios. This dedication and two further texts mentioning Hydreios were found in Serapeion C.<sup>60</sup> We have epigraphic evidence dating from the same

<sup>55</sup> Bruneau 1980: 169–75. <sup>56</sup> Siard 2007. <sup>57</sup> *Ibid.*: 418–20. <sup>58</sup> *Ibid.*: 418.

<sup>59</sup> *ID* 2087 and *ID* 2088 = *RICIS* 202/0342–343; on the reconstruction of the name see commentary *RICIS* (I) 288.

<sup>60</sup> *RICIS* 202/0323 = *ID* 2155; *RICIS* 202/0344 = *ID* 2160 (95/94 BCE).



time which confirms payments for the restoration of a 'Hydreion' (and other facilities) made possible by the donations of the multi-ethnic associations that worshipped together at the Serapeion.<sup>61</sup> These subscription lists contained up to over 100 names, signifying the importance of the sacred space and the communal aspect of taking part in creating it.<sup>62</sup> Yet another inscription mentions the gift or dedication of a building stone of the 'Hydreion', followed by a list of *therapeutai* paying for the expenses.<sup>63</sup>

The architectural and epigraphic evidence taken together suggests that the sanctuary included/featured a 'Hydreion', an architectural structure that probably served as a reservoir or water crypt, as known from other sanctuaries. In fact, each of the Serapeia on Delos was equipped with a water crypt, as water, and more precisely water representing the Nile, played an important part in the cult of the Egyptian gods.<sup>64</sup> An autonomous deity whose sole function was to represent the Nile water, if that is what we have here, would be a unique case. We know of Osiris-Canopus/Osiris-Hydreios, a form of Osiris linking the god's body with Nile water, underlining its life-giving properties.<sup>65</sup> This specific form of Osiris goes back to the Pharaonic period, but the image, the representation of the god, namely in the form of a (non-functional, solid) Hydria topped with the god's head and a decorated body with deities and scenes alluding to the myth of Osiris, was probably invented in the first century BCE.<sup>66</sup> Other, similar objects representing the Nile water from the Roman period make it evident that the worship of the Nile water in some form or another was not unusual.<sup>67</sup> In contrast to these epithets and objects, the unique development on Delos is an actual deification and personification or embodiment of the Nile water in the form of a new deity, Hydreios. This deity in this form is only ever worshipped here and only appears as an entity in the aforementioned four inscriptions (one of which is a double).<sup>68</sup> What makes

<sup>61</sup> *RICIS* 202/0206; 0207; 0209 = *ID* 2617; 2618; 2619 (all dated to 95/94 BCE).

<sup>62</sup> On the composition of the associations who dedicated the moneys, and the socio-religious implications, see Steinhauer 2019: 231–34.

<sup>63</sup> *RICIS* 202/0210 = *ID* 2620–4 (95/96 BCE?) and Siard 2007: 430.

<sup>64</sup> On the water crypts in the Delian Serapeia, see Wild 1981: 34–39 as well as Siard 1998; Kleibl 2013.

<sup>65</sup> On Osiris-Canopus, see Kettel 1994. <sup>66</sup> Wild 1981: 113–23; Liptay 2019: 2.

<sup>67</sup> Siard collects the evidence for the Greek and Roman world and argues for an Egyptian origin of the god and his 'theology'; Siard 2007: 440–46. Martzavou follows the spread of the worshippers and the cult of the Egyptian gods from Delos to Thessalonica and Euboia, even including allusions to the Nile water, but admits that the god Hydreios is as such only worshipped in Delos; Martzavou 2010: 200.

<sup>68</sup> While all dedications were made in the dative, as is usual for votive inscriptions, and therefore a neutral ending (Hydreion) is theoretically possible, the fact that Hydreios is addressed as



Siard's argument for a distinct deity particularly convincing is the fact that Hydreios is addressed as *epikoos*, listening, making it difficult to imagine that the dedications were made to the building as such rather than a divine entity with agency and power.<sup>69</sup> The concept of the god who listens was initially transferred to Greece from Egyptian cult practices but becomes a staple formula in dedications of the Hellenistic period in Greece and fits well within this specific context.<sup>70</sup> The concept highlights a personal and immanent relationship between worshipper and deity without intermediaries. This personal relationship is nicely illustrated by the thanks-offering dedicated to Hydreios by Spurius Stertinius, a resident Romaios.<sup>71</sup> Thanking the god for having granted whatever the worshipper had asked for, be it cure from illness as often associated with the Egyptian gods and water, the fertile or life-giving powers of the Nile water, or otherwise, demonstrates the relationship between worshipper and deity here on Delos.<sup>72</sup> Within the Sanctuary of Serapis and Isis, global gods by now well-known to both Greeks and Romans, the multi-ethnic community of worshippers assembled to create or perhaps conceptualise a 'new' deity that they felt they needed. What this communal effort created in fact was a unique and local deity that served the needs of all worshippers: an Egyptian man dedicated the pavement of the alleyway leading up to the *naos*, while the restoration of the building works was paid for by a hugely diverse group of worshippers assembled by an Athenian priest.

The dynamic character of the sanctuary allowed not only for gender-mixed and ethnically diverse associations of worshippers, but also for a wide variety of sacrificial practices: in her study of the sacrificial pits and altars of Serapeion C, Siard demonstrated that the worshippers were adhering to a variety of animal sacrifices, including the sacrifice of pork associated with Greek sacrifice and rather uncommon in an Egyptian context.<sup>73</sup>

*epikoos* (listening) in two different individual dedications, makes it difficult to imagine that the dedications were made to the building as such: *RICIS* 202/0323 = *ID* 2155 (105–103 BCE) ll. 1–3: [Σπύρ]ιου Στερτίνιου / Σπυρίου Ῥωμαῖος Ὑδρέω / ἐπηκόωι χαριστήριον; *RICIS* 202/0344 = *ID* 2160 (95/94 BCE) Ὑ[δ]ρέω / ἐπηκόω, / ἐφ' ἱερέ[ω]ς Ἀρτεμ[ιδώ]- / ρου, ζακορεύοντος / (5) Εὐόδου.

<sup>69</sup> Six dedications on Delos were made to Isis *epikoos* (*RICIS* 202/0197 together with Serapis and Anubis and 0198 together with Serapis, Anubis and Harpocrates, 0262, 0361, 0363, 0365).

<sup>70</sup> On the transmission of this practice to Greece from Egypt, see Stavrianopoulou 2016: 83–84.

<sup>71</sup> On Spurius and his many dedications on Delos, see Steinhauer 2020.

<sup>72</sup> On the life-giving quality of Osiris-Hydreios, see Wild 1981: 125.

<sup>73</sup> Brun and Leguilloux 2013: 171–72.

Equally, the existence of a large number of holocaust or semi-holocaustic sacrifices in the vicinity of the unidentified southern altar (near *naos* C), especially of fowl, seems to be a practice that goes further back than the Egyptian tradition to the Levant and was uncommon in Greece.<sup>74</sup> The worshippers here were able to hold all kinds of sacrifices in a truly global fashion. Perhaps even more striking is the discovery of burned seal prints, displaying a wide variety of symbols, some of which were still attached to the papyri they once protected, a discovery without parallel so far.<sup>75</sup> The lack of comparable finds means that it is impossible to say whether the papyri were burned on the altar to fuel the fire or whether they served actual ritual purposes, such as oracular consultations or medical ritual practice associated with the Egyptian deities.<sup>76</sup> The excavator argues that it is most likely that the findings point to local healing rituals and dream interpretation in accordance with the remaining evidence from the sanctuary.<sup>77</sup> If this is the case, we can trace yet another local development that was, as far as we know, only ever practised in this particular way on Delos.

The example of Serapeion C demonstrates that, over a period of about 100 years, the character of the sanctuary and the rituals performed evolved significantly. The global aspect that was represented right from the beginning by the introduction of Serapis and Isis was supplemented with several local anchors that were created and defined by the local communities. One of these anchors was the creation of the god Hydreios, a new deity that offered an immediacy by physically appearing as water, locally. Even more so, it offered immediate help by listening, therewith becoming a stabilising force for the local population in their every-day-lives. A further anchor can be seen in the eclectic assemblage of sacrificial practices going beyond local and Greek sacrificial norms that I have described above. Lastly, the development of divinatory practices that may have included the burning of papyri as a way of communicating with the divine offers a source of reassurance and guidance on a local level that was managed by the sanctuary's administrative authorities.

<sup>74</sup> Ekroth 2018: 315, n. 51.      <sup>75</sup> Siard 2010; 2010: 214.

<sup>76</sup> For an analysis of the options, see Siard 2010: 218–20.

<sup>77</sup> A dream interpreter (*oneirokritos*) is listed several times in the inscriptions of Serapeion C: *ID* 2071, *ID* 2120; *ID* 2105 (and the double *ID* 2106); *ID* 2151 and a female dream interpreter in *ID* 2619, b, 10. For the healing deities and consultations documented in the sanctuary see Siard 2010: 220.

## Conclusions

Local religion as defined by Jack Eller for anthropological studies may only ever have existed in the pre-Homeric Mediterranean, before the notion of what constitutes the Greeks (Hellenes) was defined.<sup>78</sup> Yet local religion in a more direct, physical sense, in which the location drove and sustained religious developments, was an important aspect of Greek religion from the Archaic period until the rise of Christianity (and possibly beyond).

The example of Delos has shown that Greek religion was mediated between what I have called local, translocal, and global cults, each of which could shape any given local religious 'landscape', when seen synchronically. From a diachronic perspective, unlike local and global cults, however, translocal cults were doomed to die out in the long run and did not outlast their local and global counterparts, as we can see in the example of the small 'oriental'-style sanctuaries and the associations of the Berytian merchants. This is due to the way in which local cults were able to be adapted to cultural changes, as seen in the example of the Kynthion. Global cults, on the other hand, could be anchored in local traditions or simply adapted to local demographics in a creative way, merging with new and traditional practices, as seen with the example of Serapeion C, while keeping signature characteristics.

Local and 'global' aspects went hand in hand in shaping Greek religion. This combination was crucial for the survival of individual cults within the system in an ever more connected world as it came to face Roman supremacy. No traditional Greek cult was truly global in the sense of a goddess such as Isis. This might be the reason why her local worship outlasted that of all other 'pagan' cults and may be seen as the most potent obstacle to Christian efforts.

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<sup>78</sup> Eller 2015.

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