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**The (Ancient Greek) Subject Supposed to Believe
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Abstract: This article discusses the challenges facing scholars exploring the nature of belief in ancient Greek religion. While recent scholarship has raised questions about individual religious activities, and work on ritual, the body, and the senses has broadened our methodological palette, the nature and dynamics of generally held “low intensity” beliefs still tend to be described simply as “unquestioned” or “embedded” in society. But examining scholarship on divine personifications suggests that ancient beliefs were — and our perceptions of them are — more complex. This article first explores the example of Tyche (“Chance”), in order to highlight some of the problems that surround the use of the term “belief.” It then turns to the theories of “ideology” of Slavoj Žižek and Robert Pfaller and argues that these can offer provocative insights into the nature and dynamics of ritual and belief in ancient Greek culture.

1 Introduction: Tyche — Concept or Goddess?

We are in ancient Athens, settling into our seats in the Theater of Dionysos, looking forward to the latest clever new play by Menander. *Aspis* (The Shield) promises the usual sparkling mix of comedy, coincidence, and sharp characterization — and the first scene does not disappoint. We meet Daos, slave to the mercenary soldier Kleostratos, grief-stricken at the apparent loss of his master in battle, and Smikrines, Kleostratos’ acquisitive uncle, positively drooling at the thought of all the booty that Kleostratos managed to collect before he died. When they leave the stage, a woman takes their place: it is time for the prologue. Step-by-step, she relates what will happen, introducing us to the characters, their flaws and virtues; revealing the discoveries they will make; disclosing their punishments and rewards. Her remarkably detailed knowledge of events to come makes it clear that she is a goddess, but which one? It is only when she comes to the end of her speech that she finally lets us know: “I’ve still to tell you who I am, the steward and judge controlling all this. Tyche.” (*Aspis*, ll. 147–148, adapted from Arnott 1979). We are face to face with the goddess of chance: Lady Luck herself.

Aspis was probably written in the last quarter of the fourth century BCE, although the exact date is unknown. Tyche’s appearance in the play suggests that this goddess was already well known, and certainly she is the dominant divinity of new comedy: a fragment of Menander calls her the only divinity (Men. fr. 681 K-A; on Tyche/tyche in new comedy, see Vogt-Spira 1992). But both literary references and material evidence indicate that she was regarded as a goddess within and outside Athens before this time (see Hamdorf 1964 s.v. “Tyche”; Matheson 1994b: 18–22). In the centuries to come, her cult burgeoned, and she received an extensive, organized cult that spread across the Mediterranean, with numerous cities setting up a statue of Tyche in a prominent position and imprinting her image on the local currency (Dohrn 1960: 26–28; Broucke 1994: 40). Her popularity also seems to have extended beyond this civic level: evidence suggests that individuals wore her image on jewelry and collected figurines made in her shape (see Stansbury-O’Donnell 1994: 54, fig. 31, 115, nos. 46 and 47). The image of Tyche was everywhere, revealing the extent of her influence across the Mediterranean — and something, I think, of the development of a shared understanding of, and approach to, the uncertain future, albeit through a range

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of cultural models (see Eidinow 2011).

In the face of such ancient popularity, our modern attitude to Tyche is complex and ambivalent. To modern minds, the deification of abstract concepts remains a fascinating puzzle. Intrigued by their apparent parallel existence as both abstract concepts and divinities, scholars have been reluctant to credit these entities with real religious significance, even when there is evidence for widespread cult. Tyche may be seen as “die Signatur des beginnenden Hellenismus” (Nilsson 1967: 301), but what kind of signature remains unclear: should her burgeoning deification be understood to mark the contemptible disintegration of traditional religion, or to indicate laudable progress towards a more modern rationality? The tendency has been to describe her/it as an expression of a sense of vulnerability among the populations that worshipped her (see below, “Tyche as a Problem of Belief”). Although no doubt this may have been a part of what Tyche represented, as a summary of her cultural role, it seems very limited. It suggests that as scholars we view her in terms of an absence (of cultural confidence or tradition) rather than as a (divine) presence; we doubt that her worshippers saw her as an authentic goddess. There is room for such doubt, of course, when we turn to ancient texts. For example, the word would not have been capitalized in those sources, making it more difficult for us to understand whether or not it indicated a god, a personified force, or simply an abstract concept (Eidinow 2011).¹ But, as I argue below, there are also indications that the questions arise not from our ancient evidence so much as from our own attitudes to and understandings of what factors should be seen to be present in that evidence, in order for us to accept the idea of belief in an ancient divinity.

The difficulties that arise when we investigate the phenomenon of Tyche draw into useful relief some of the questions we face more generally when we investigate ancient attitudes and attachments to the supernatural (I use this term to indicate my intention to include not only those practices traditionally described as “religious” but also those designated as “magical”) and the difficulties of considering the mental processes of our historical subjects. Henk Versnel has provided a persuasive argument for the use of the term “belief” by modern scholars to describe such phenomena in the ancient world. Stating that “the pantheon of the polis was as self-evident and unquestioned as the polis and her socio-cultural codes” (2011: 292), he proposes that modern scholars accept the undeniable pervasive presence of low-intensity beliefs in ancient society.²

But there are difficulties with this on two related fronts: first, that it did not work so completely as Versnel suggests has been argued by, for example, recent work on atheism in the ancient world (Whitmarsh 2016). Second, modern scholars remain uncertain about the nature and operations of such widespread belief anyway. As this article argues, analysis of studies of Tyche indicate that not only are scholars uncertain about the utility of the idea of belief, per se, but there are also differences in scholars’ perceptions of the quality or authenticity of “belief,” according to the nature, context, and target of a religious practice. While Versnel lucidly shows how literary evidence demonstrates the role of divinity in providing multiple (and often mutually contradictory) explanations of events, his discussion does not probe how, beyond this intellectual attachment, such an apparent low-intensity belief in a divinity may have

¹ In this article, where Tyche is intended to be understood as personified and deified, she will appear with a capital letter.

² Van Baal 1976 for the original formulation of “high-” and “low-” intensity rites; see Ekroth 2002 and 2008. The phrase is adopted by Versnel to describe belief (2011: 548, 558).

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worked — at either the individual or the broader social and cultural levels.

Thus, this article suggests that alongside investigations of the presence, or not, of individual “belief” (or atheism), it may be helpful to those endeavors to address the question of belief from another direction, that is, by exploring the processes (conceptual and embodied) that may have comprised low-intensity rituals and associated beliefs, the underpinnings of the relationships of ancient Greek men and women with supernatural entities, within their social groupings and wider culture. To do this, I turn to the concept of “ideology” and draw on some of the insights to which this then leads, in particular in the writings of Slavoj Žižek and Robert Pfaller, building on Jacques Lacan’s work and that of Louis Althusser. Their ideas, although relating to another time and place in their formulation, may yet provide historians of ancient (Greek) religion with a provocative model for comprehending how sets of ideas, emerging from social and political structures, could interrelate to create, as it were, maps of meaning, in which individuals became enmeshed or embedded — and, thus, how such a figure as Tyche could become the recipient of religious “belief”.

2 Tyche as a Problem of Belief

In contrast to ancient attitudes, much modern scholarship on divine personifications focuses on explaining their origins (cf. Borg 2005, esp. 201; but see also Stafford 2001: 19–23 on some discussions of this question by Roman writers). Some scholars seek general trends: for example, they argue that recognition of personifications as divinities is symptomatic of larger historical changes, with personifications appearing in clusters at particular times.³ These explanations range from the establishment of the characters of the Olympians to a process of general cultural rationalization, in which these entities bridged the gap between traditional religious cult and developing secularization. Some suggest the development of more personalized and popular gods (e.g., Sobel 1990: 10) and increasing (divine) specialization, found also in secular contexts (e.g., Stafford 2001: 231); some explore how a cult and its culture have interacted, perhaps during a period of change — either consolidation (Richer 2005: 121) or crisis (Stafford 2001: 229). Alan Shapiro (1993: 269) suggests that the representation, in vase painting of the late fifth century, of personifications associated with local cults may indicate “a distinct strain of Athenian patriotism;” and an argument for the political aspect of Athenian representations of personification is made by Amy Smith (2011). Acknowledgement and exploration of such specific dimensions of religious activity can only enhance our understanding of ancient daily life (see Thériault 1996: 187). The argument that there may have been a variety of ways in which such entities developed and were expressed (for example, that mythic status may not reflect cult status, and vice versa) has brought with it a growing acceptance of the perceived divinity of personifications. But while the tenet that a divine personification was no more than a symbol (Nilsson 1952: 38 and Burkert 1985: 38, but cf. Burkert 2006: 14, 18–20) has largely been left behind (e.g., Thériault 1996: 184–188; Stafford 2001: 228) some significant hesitations seem to remain concerning what this means for the idea of belief in these entities. For example, Stafford draws a qualified parallel with myth:

Veyne’s question, “Did the Greeks believe in their myths?” has basically to be answered “Yes,” with due allowance for different modes of belief, and I would argue that personifications were “believed in” in just the same

³ On Homeric examples, see Burkert 1985: 184–187; on the mid-sixth century, Humphreys 1986: 92–110; on the mid-fifth century, Nilsson 1952: 31–40 and 1967[1950]: 812; and on the fourth century, Parker 1996: 235–236

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way as the rest of the Greek pantheon — rationally by the analytically inclined, perhaps, but respected as powerful by the vast majority. (Stafford 2001: 230)

Later (232) she raises the possibility that these entities would have “appealed particularly to the more intellectually minded.” Indeed, as described below, the sense that these personifications indicate a more secular mind-set still lingers, more or less explicitly, for many scholars. There seems to be considerable doubt that the nature of “belief” in personifications can have been the same as for the traditional gods.

In Tyche’s case, theories of origin are related to ontological questions: scholarship on Tyche has tended to focus on the question of status, of both the entity itself (was Tyche a divinity or just a personified abstract concept — or, perhaps, not even that?) and those who worshipped her/it. Thus, as Kenneth Dover succinctly put it, “personification of *tykhe* can be treated more as a grammatical than as a theological phenomenon” (1974: 140); while Frank Walbank vividly called her/it an “inchoate area of popular thought” (2007: 354). An older stream of scholarship saw Tyche as the instigator of cultural deterioration. For example, Buriks described Tyche as a “phenomenon of disintegration ... a symptom of a diminished energy and unhinged morals by the side of a decreasing political power” (1948: 128–129); while Dodds described how “the progressive decay of tradition set the religious man free to choose his own gods” and compared the cult of Tyche to ruler-cults, which, he observed, were “primarily ... expressions of helpless dependence” (1951: 242–243). In contrast, later scholars have examined Tyche’s appearances in historical and philosophical texts as “a topic of intellectual inquiry” (cf. Shipley 2000: 174–175). These approaches find in her/its development an indication of the intellectual development of personal responsibility and the complex question of free will. For example, Burkert (1985: 186) argued that the rise of such personifications filled the vacuum left by the growing skepticism about the Homeric gods and were a gift for “the man of intelligence” who could not “dispute the importance of the phenomena and situations designated by abstract terms.” But across all these interpretations, scholars still tend to reject the notion that Tyche was an object of (authentic) religious belief.

Instead, scholars offer a variety of explanations of Tyche’s ambiguous status. For example, both Jon Mikalson (1983) and Gunther Martin (2009) discuss references to fortune dating to the fourth century BCE. Mikalson argues that literary references to Tyche were intended primarily to explain episodes of misfortune that could not (ideologically) be attributed to the gods; he equates Tyche, in this sense, with a *daimon* (see Mikalson 1983: 19, 50, 59–62). Episodes where Tyche is clearly cast as responsible for more complex events or for good fortune do not complicate or nuance this analysis: they are explained as “harbingers of the future development and importance of a cult of Fortune” (61). And perhaps it is in order to strengthen this argument that he tends to describe these statements about Tyche’s activities in the passive voice (see esp. 19), noting how responsibility for an event was “diverted” or “attributed” to Tyche, a turn of phrase that scarcely communicates the agency attributed to Tyche’s active interventions in daily life. As a result, he concludes that in ancient Greek society there existed an antithesis between Tyche (here cast as “misfortune”) and the gods, which was “simplistic and na.ve, but ... clearly acceptable at the popular level,” while noting that there is “no indication in our sources of any theological or philosophical basis to this antithesis” (60).

As well as reducing the complexity of Tyche’s perceived arena of activity, Mikalson provides a somewhat limited impression of the richness of ancient attitudes to Tyche, by concentrating on only the evidence for civic cult activity. For example,

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he mentions only briefly the evidence that suggests Tyche (or Agathe Tyche) may have received worship from individuals as early as the first half of the fourth century, and only as a sign of the development of later cult (60).⁴ He denies that the ancient audience of Demosthenes' *On the Crown* would have heard mention of the city's Tyche as references to a supernatural power, on the grounds that they were not overtly concerned with the cult of Agathe Tyche. Other scholars have interpreted this material very differently; for example, Giannopoulou notes how the evidence for the goddess on a private monument in the first half of the fourth century (*IG II2 4564* and *LIMC* s.v. Tyche 2) is an example of how "state cults lag behind individual and popular beliefs" (2001: 2). Overall, Mikalson's approach can be summed up by the entry in his index (169), "Fortune, as quasi-religious figure," a sub-category that is not explained in terms of its implications for either the status of this entity or the contemporary attitudes of the Greeks.

Where Mikalson's argument suggests that the status of, and nature of belief in, Tyche was weak and restricted, Gunther Martin's analysis of the religious discourse of fourth-century Athenian orators opts for a more clear-cut division of both aspects. In his discussion of Aeschines' *Against Ctesiphon* and Demosthenes' *answering On the Crown*, he argues that, whereas Aeschines may refer to a religious sense of Tyche, in contrast, Demosthenes uses Tyche with a "non-religious" sense (2009: 97). And yet, it seems unlikely that the jurors, having just listened to Aeschines' speech with its emphasis on the religious meaning of Tyche, would not have been looking for more of the same, rather than accepting an implicit recasting of the term. As already noted, there is some evidence to suggest that the idea of Tyche as a divinity was not alien to them, and it seems likely that the discussion of the Tyche of the city may have reminded them of Athens' own cult of Agathe Tyche. Moreover, Demosthenes' own language also challenges Martin's interpretation: he describes the Tyche of cities and individuals in terms that suggest divine involvement, including the idea of allocation (§§254–255), and being blessed (*eudaimonia* and *eudaimonizō* §§254 and 260; as Martin notes, 2009: 110, n. 69). Demosthenes has also made explicit connections between how events have turned out and divine involvement, which are scarcely trivial parts of his argument, bearing in mind what he is setting out to disprove.⁵

It seems likely that Aeschines is anxious to use Tyche (or whatever other evidence he can) in a particular sense to bolster his argument that Demosthenes betrayed Athens. Similarly, Demosthenes is anxious to refute Aeschines' accusations that his own personal Tyche can be blamed for Athens' suffering. But to do this it would surely be important that he not deny its religious aspects, that he stay within the idiom that Aeschines had chosen (which was widely understood), in order to prove him wrong. In this way he would (and I believe does) demonstrate how Aeschines (already established as having a religiously dubious religious background) has misunderstood and misinterpreted the role of Tyche. Rather than denying Tyche a religious role, Demosthenes sets out to explain the limits of the influence that an individual person can exercise: this is neither a new religious topic nor one that is limited, in the divine sphere, to Tyche.

It could be argued that the evidence here depends, at least in part, on interpretation of literary passages, but looking to scholarship on slightly later periods,

⁴ He cites evidence for "fortune in New Comedy" (130, n. 22). For epigraphic evidence, cf. Hamdorf 1964: 97–100; Tracy 1994: 244; Parker 1996: 231, n. 49.

⁵ Martin notes these passages (95 and 100) but regards them as unimportant: the various roles of "a god" (*theos*) §§193, 195, 200; a daimon, §192; associated with Tyche, §194.

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the problems with allowing the possibility that there was belief in a divine Tyche do not end as evidence for cult develops. For example, Graham Shipley, acknowledges Tyche's role in public cult but questions what this means for personal belief in Tyche. He states that, on the one hand, "She had an official city cult in many places," but, on the other, "There seems to be little or no evidence for widespread participation in cult ritual for the goddess Tyche, as seems to be the case for the new universal goddesses" (2000: 174). His explanation for this apparent contradiction lies in the observation that "the personified goddess always seems to shade off into the city's own Tyche or good fortune" (174). Implicit in this statement is a division between, on the one hand, an official, public cult entity (Tyche as the city's good fortune) and, on the other, the possibility of authentic individual religious feeling. To his credit, Shipley argues against the idea that the prominence of Tyche is a sign of "instability and socio-cultural breakdown" (175), but this appears to be based on the argument that Tyche was simply not that important, a conclusion perhaps belied by his own summary of her appearance across literary sources and in cult.

These modern scholarly approaches to the question of Tyche's ontology are interesting not only because of their insights into this ancient concept — as Kenneth Dover observed, how we deliberate on this question of divine status has profound implications for our understanding of ancient Greek morality (Dover 1974: 141) — but also because of the light they shed, inadvertently, on our own ideas about belief, what it is and how it works, both in the ancient world and, perhaps implicitly, in our own. They show, for example, particular concern with the perceived status and nature of the entity in which "belief" may or may not be invested. We might see this as illustrating a problem with an entity that has no mythic content, and which often seems to play a particular intellectual role, providing an explanation for events. In addition, it also suggests we need to examine our assumptions about the meaning of "belief" and the part we expect it to play for our subjects. What is intended by "belief" when we try to describe it in terms of public and private or civic and individual? Related to this is a question about the kind of evidence that demonstrates belief. Both scholars discussed above turn to ritual — apparently seeing it as a corollary of belief — but they do so in different ways. Mikalson appears to argue that civic rather than individual cult is important, but discounts it as evidence for individual belief; Shipley is similarly uncertain about the significance of public cult, seeing individual activity as demonstrating meaningful participation.

The next sections of the article turn to these questions in reverse order: first, the relationship between belief and ritual (3); then, some of the difficulties scholars face when using the term "belief" (4). The sections that follow then offer an alternative analytical approach to belief, based on a modern formulation of "ideology" (5–9); and argue for its relevance to the ancient world and to Tyche in particular (10 and 11).

3 Belief and Ritual

The focus by Mikalson and Martin on orthopraxy and the concomitant relative unimportance or inaccessibility of "belief" occurs more broadly in scholarship on ancient religions.⁶ This is understandable: when we turn to the ancient world with its polytheistic, non-dogmatic religions there are obvious difficulties in locating individual statements of belief. This is one of the factors that has led to what Henk Versnel has identified as our "modern notion [that] 'belief' did not and could not

⁶ Cf. for example, Rüpke 2016: esp. 3–4, where the concept of "belief" is elided in favor of a discussion of individual appropriation, which focuses on "individual, everyday action."

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'exist' in Greek (or any other traditional non-Christian) religion" (2011: 539). He provides a detailed discussion of the recent history of what he sees as "a vexing and ... sorely misguided recent campaign against the legitimacy of using the terms 'belief/believe' in the study of Greek religion" (App. 4). The response — to focus on ritual — receives short shrift: Versnel has argued that "Stating that Greek religion is ritualist and at the same time that 'the Athenians did not believe in their gods' is either nonsense or a kind of sophistry run wild, which should be banished from scholarly discourse" (567). But this apparent opposition of ritual and belief may be mutually destructive: Humphrey and Laidlaw trace (in their discipline of anthropology) the influence of post-Reformation Protestantism and how "the efficacy of ritual has been terminally undermined by understanding ritualization as a modality for communicating or expressing the religious beliefs and moral ideas of the participants" (1994: 8). As they summarize: "so pervasive is this idea that ritual on its own, without subjective convictions, comes, for many, to seem mere mumbo-jumbo" (8).

Perhaps it is in response to such a dynamic that the field of ancient Greek religion has burgeoned with studies of ritual. This is a bigger area of study than can be summarized here, but a few examples can illustrate the point. In the introduction to a collection of papers on ritual, Eftychia Stavrianopoulou emphasizes, very successfully, ritual's performative and communicative modalities, drawing attention to it as a "part of public life" (2006: 8). While her introduction does not address the question of the subjective convictions of those participating in the ritual (and the term "belief" is not listed in the index of the volume, nor investigated in its introduction), nevertheless, it still asks the reader to consider the mental activities of the historical subjects. The focus is placed on the "communicative tasks" a ritual may fulfill, including "the transmission of norms of behavior, the demonstration of intentions, the assignment of tasks and roles, the inclusion or exclusion of individuals" (9). A similar approach is found in other chapters in the collection. For example, Frederick Naerebout suggests that dance relates to belief insofar as dance is "a vehicle, which effectively carries whatever meaning it is made to carry in a given context" (2006: 63). Walter Burkert's reflections further reinforce this contrast between mental activity and embodied, communicative expression, when he argues that making an "oath and belief in a divinity are directly connected" (2006: 24), but then denies the idea that ancient rituals surrounding the dead "require a special, personal belief, which is why one cannot conclude anything about belief from ritual" (35). Instead, he explains such rituals as offering "a tracery, formation, stylization of that which is necessary, in order to overcome individual aimlessness and depression" (35).

Elsewhere, other scholars also seek generalized causes — emotional or intellectual — to help explain common ritual activities. For example, in discussion of first offerings, Theodora Jim notes the widespread acceptance of "low intensity beliefs" (2014: 59–60; see also, for example, Yunis 1988; King 2003). In order to explore these further, she turns her attention specifically to the identification of the potential motivations of individual ancient Greek worshippers in performing such cult acts.⁷ This provides a useful insight into the intellectual justification that an ancient individual might have made for embarking on a particular ritual of some kind. A different kind of insight is provided by the recent burgeoning interest in the senses (Betts 2017).⁸ The employment of such heuristic tools to explore ancient ritual (see,

⁷ Cf. Robert Parker who states that the Greeks worshipped the gods because "experience shows, benefit derives from doing so" (2011: 32).

⁸ See also the volumes in the series *The Senses in Antiquity*, published by Routledge.

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for example, Weddell 2017) offer great potential for comprehending more fully the experience of an individual engaged in the process of a (commonplace) ritual. Indeed these studies of ancient rituals, while, in general, not delving into the problem of subjective convictions, do offer a variety of rich and rewarding techniques for interrogating the inner experiences of individuals. What may seem like an omission or elision of “belief” may simply be the result of implicit acknowledgement of the idea that (as studies from anthropology and the field of the study of religions demonstrate) we can no longer assume that a ritual act is directly connected to belief in a divinity. As, for example, Humphrey and Laidlaw (1994) have shown in the context of the Jain puja ritual, for those enacting ritual activities, such a connection may be far from direct, if, indeed, it exists at all.⁹

4 The Meanings of Belief

In making such an analysis, we must recognize that part of the problem lies with the difficulties of using the term “belief.” This is not the place for a history of the term, but suffice it to say that both diachronic and synchronic studies of the idea of “belief” and the process of “believing” have suggested that the central role that we perceive these to play in religion, in particular with regard to the individual, may be a modern, Western creation. This has been posited by the anthropologist Rodney Needham, who famously argued that in many other cultures mortal relationships with metaphysical powers do not seem to involve “believing” as we describe it (Needham 1972: esp. 32–39). He went on to suggest that in fact it is impossible even in our own culture to define “belief” — and this is because “the phenomenon of belief consists in no more than the custom of making statements about belief” (131). In order to demonstrate why this is, Needham distinguishes between the lexical and ideational histories of the word (41) and traces both, demonstrating how and why “belief” and “believing” possess myriad senses — a result of their long development and “continual elaboration” across time and cultures. In particular, he highlights the ways in which the idea of belief was formed in and between Jewish and Christian religious discourse (50); and he notes how it moved from a meaning of “loyalty,” emphasized in the Hebrew of the Old Testament (48), to individual “acceptance of the message of Christ” — a meaning that was “only perpetuated and multiplied through centuries of dogmatic strife, theological explication, and the arduous ingenuities of translators” (59).

That the idea of “belief” originally indicated “loyalty” is also part of the argument of Wilfred Cantwell Smith, who explores how, in pre-Enlightenment literature the verb “believing” meant “to hold dear” or “to prize” and was used primarily in personal or second-person statements of other people, to mark a personal pledge, a deliberate act, of allegiance and commitment (1998 esp. 41–44). He states that “Belief in the modern meaning of the word has had no place in the history of Christian thought” (78). It is perhaps, as modern translations of the Bible suggest, closer in meaning to our modern concept “faith,” and supporting this he notes how belief is to hold an opinion “whether it be right or wrong,” whereas faith is “the capacity to see” the presence of the divine (79). Moreover, well into the Enlightenment, the meaning of belief was closely related to the idea of truth: indeed,

⁹ Indeed, a similar bias away from the “study of belief as a religious experience” has been noted in the discipline of anthropology, despite “interesting analyses of ritual symbolism and of its various ways of generating meaning and effectiveness” (Severi 2007: 22).

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it was a step beyond knowledge, such that Francis Bacon could describe it as “the enjoyment of truth” following two previous stages of “wooing of truth” and “the presence of it” (1853[1625]: 11) — not the same, as Smith (1998: 61) observes, as opining that “God is”. Since then, as Smith shows (1977: 47–48), it is possible to chart the gradual move of this term toward a meaning of propositional belief. It has undergone a gradual severing of its original link with the truth, become increasingly abstract and impersonal, and is used now to describe “the mental state of having some attitude, stance, take, or opinion about a proposition or about the potential state of affairs in which that proposition is true” (Schwitzgebel 2008).

Indeed, this term, and the mental state it describes, as Michel de Certeau (1985b: esp. 153) has suggested, may now also be used to denote doubt. He emphasizes the way in which the meaning of this term interacts with other material developments: whereas we were once obliged to believe what we could not see, nowadays, surrounded by information, we expect to know because we see instantly — you have to see it to believe it. Belief is not just a finite, transferable quantity that can be redirected; now it is being exhausted, “an object captured and dealt with by advertising, business and fashion” (148), desperately recreated through “simulacra of credibility” (154), such as corporate mission statements and marketing blurbs, and disturbingly self-referential, as opinion polls reveal to us what it is we all believe. Belief is becoming increasingly individualized — and increasingly fragmented, a “multiplication of convictions” (151) replacing traditional faith. In our complex society, belief and practice can combine in many different ways — and even not combine at all. Believing is now an intellectual exercise, and “practice no longer the transparent objectivity of a belief” (196–197). In this modern world, superstitions survive as traces of notions that have somehow (shamefully?) escaped modern methods of investigation (de Certeau 1985a: 197). Thus, the idea of belief still, importantly, maintains a sense of non-propositional truth, a sense of conviction, while at the same time it indicates doubt, a set of “representations” to which we no longer feel allegiance (196). It is “the object of wordplay, an equivocal site” (197) — and this is the paradoxical term that acts as the lens of our inquiry into humankind’s relationship with the supernatural.

5 From “Belief” to “Ideology”

Even if we do not subscribe to the arguments of Needham, Smith, and de Certeau, this brief overview of the difficulties associated with establishing the meaning of “belief” and “believing” suggests that some of the challenges that historians of ancient religion confront, as they try to use the language of belief, may lie in the terminology itself, and the implicit as well as explicit meanings that it evokes. It is unsurprising that, as we have seen above, scholars are trying to find other avenues to describe or explore an individual, group, or society’s attachment to the divine. And, in the attempt to understand the nature of the inner mental world of our historical subjects and their underlying attitudes to/relationships with (a particular) divinity, these explorations are extremely fruitful: they highlight the crucial importance of encompassing not only the minds of our subjects, but also their bodies, their senses, and the materiality of their worlds.¹⁰ They may illuminate the more remarkable instances of individual interactions with the gods, but they also add some further dimensions to our analysis of everyday, low-intensity ritual activities and associated beliefs. By this, I am referring to the kind of total social reality of Greek religion that scholars have tried to

¹⁰ Cf. also, focusing on much later, or modern, examples: Meyer 2009; Morgan 2010: 1; Vésquez 2011; Promey 2014.

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invoke in descriptions of it as a phenomenon that “penetrated and was penetrated by almost every aspect of Greek life” (Parker 1995: 134). Nevertheless, while the involvement of the body, senses, and materiality are all crucial aspects of such analyses, the accompanying mental activity, the ways in which individual and wider culture interacted at this level, remains opaque.

In order to explore this aspect further, rather than trying to wring some further meaning from the term “belief,” I turn instead to a different etic concept: ideology. This may seem an odd suggestion, especially in light of the common understanding that an “ideology” is often related to a political or economic setting.¹¹ To clarify (or perhaps complicate) that impression, I draw on the work of Slavoj Žižek, which provides a very broad, indeed critical, definition of the term:

“Ideology” can designate anything from a contemplative attitude that misrecognises its dependence on social reality to an action-orientated set of beliefs, from the indispensable medium through which individuals live out their relations to a social structure to false ideas which legitimate a dominant political power.

Žižek 1994: 3–4

As he indicates, one common approach to ideology is to regard it as a set of understandings and attitudes imposed by one group upon another for a specific reason: “Ideology is a systematically distorted communication: a text in which, under the influence of unavowed social interests (of domination, etc.), a gap separates its ‘official’, public meaning from its actual intention” (1994: 10). He describes this phenomenon of ideology in psychoanalytical terms as the “big Other” — a shared illusion that comprises a symbolic order.¹² This can be reified or personified, as he observes, in a single agent or concept (such as God or Nation): its “complex network of rules and other kinds of presuppositions” structure our subjectivization and dictate all aspects of our lives (Žižek 2006:9).¹³

However, Žižek’s critique of ideology consists not only in explaining how what seems to be the result of an external necessity is in fact a discursive construction, but also how and why that construction becomes so persuasive and pervasive. This article suggests that this analysis is helpful for exploring the embodied, pervasive nature of low-intensity ritual activities and associated beliefs — the everyday ancient experience of attachment to the divine — in ancient Greek culture. In what follows, I will lay out, as I understand them, some of the social and psychological processes by which, according to Žižek, an ideology takes hold, drawing attention to the ways in which they may provide insight into the nature of ancient Greek religious structures, practices — and beliefs.

I make this suggestion aware of the difficulties that scholars have expressed concerning the application of theories relating to the modern mind to historical

¹¹ The two concepts are commonly opposed in analyses of either “temporal” ideologies or “spiritual” religious beliefs; see for this distinction, Aaron 2008: 73; Froese and Bader 2008; Gries, Su, and Schak 2012. In his discussion of ideology, Terry Eagleton notes that “ideology” can mean a set of beliefs about something (so a religious ideology concerns a set of religious beliefs); and/or an ideology can significantly influence a set of beliefs and attitudes (Eagleton 1999: 263–264). Both these meanings are found in sociological analyses of modern religious practice (e.g., Richards 1991). This article does not set out to analyze this linguistic relationship, but to bring to bear a specific analysis of how ideology functions on the evidence for ancient Greek religion, in order to suggest a new approach to the current examination of low-intensity ritual activities and associated beliefs.

¹² On the difference between the “Other” and the “big Other,” see Zeiher 2014.

¹³ While Žižek has also written *On Belief* (2001), I am not concerned with his arguments there. In that book he also establishes the existence of an all-encompassing symbolic order. In it he argues that “belief” provides an intervention in the symbolic order such that it allows an individual to contemplate acts of intervention in the public sphere. However, in the end, the argument is unsatisfying; see Tell 2004

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subjects. Briefly I note that while it is not possible to enter the minds of others,¹⁴ nevertheless, in the field of ancient history, investigations regularly attribute mental processes to individuals and groups in order to explain, or in the course of describing, historical events. Such incidental explanations appear to be grounded in an implicit set of assumptions about the nature of human knowledge, behavior, and reality — and seldom include information about the basis for these unvoiced presuppositions. More recently, detailed scholarly work on the emotions and research that draws on a variety of cognitive approaches suggest that the internal mental worlds of our historical subjects need not be assumed to be impenetrable.¹⁵ In terms of applying the theories from Žižek's work, his examples range across histories and cultures, and I take this as an indication that he sees utility in diachronic and historical reflections on his theories.¹⁶ More specifically, in a critique of cultural studies, he contrasts historicism and historicity, noting how adherence to the former leads only to an “endless play of substitutions ... within the same fundamental mental field,” and “the abandonment of the very question of the inherent ‘truth-value’ of a theory under consideration” (Žižek 2000a: 112); while the latter allows the exploration of “the dialectical tension between the domain of historical changes itself and its traumatic ‘ahistorical’ kernel qua its condition of (im)possibility” (111–112). Elsewhere, in a discussion of the analysis of film, he suggests instead an interpretative approach by which “a set of traces without meaning” becomes “open to later reappropriations” (2000b: 246). To this end, the arguments below are intended to suggest possibilities, not by ignoring historical context and details, but specifically by observing how these may be viewed under a different interpretative lens. In this sense, this approach is intended not to be limited only to ancient Greek culture. It may be, indeed it is to be hoped, that scholars of ritual activities in other historical cultures will find aspects that are relevant and useful to their investigations.

Thus, in this article, I start with an overview of the individual psychological drive (the desire of the Other) that forms the basis for Žižek's approach to ideology; this is not in order to argue that ancient Greek men or women experienced this sense of self but to provide a complete interpretative lens through which to view the evidence for ancient Greek ritual and belief and attachments to the divine. However, I will observe the ways in which evidence for culturally specific emotional responses to the demands of the divine can be argued to align with these insights. Then I turn to the idea of interpellation, including Žižek's criticism of it, and the way he embraces these questions in order to further his argument. This will introduce the idea of objective belief, which will be further explored through discussion of the processes of interactivity and interpassivity and their implications for ancient Greek ritual practice.

¹⁴ The problem is not simply historical, but also recognized in, for example, anthropology: a good overview of this aspect is found in Robbins and Rumsey 2008, and the associated papers in the “Social Thought and Commentary” that this introduces.

¹⁵ Recent examples of emotional studies include Cairns and Nelis 2017; Eidinow 2016; Konstan 2006; a range of cognitive approaches are employed in the articles in the *Journal of Cognitive Historiography*.

¹⁶ I also note the debate that surrounds the historicity of Lacanian theories, including Lacan's own rejection of the idea that his theories were “ahistorical;” along with commentators who have located particular historical frameworks within his writing (e.g., Brennan 1993). It is not possible to resolve this debate here, but I take some comfort in applying his theories (via Žižek) from Lacan's own acknowledgment that while psychoanalysis could not claim to provide “the entirety of causes currently operating in our society. Even so, in its treatment of the individual psychoanalysis has discovered relational tensions that appear to play a fundamental role in all societies, as if the discontent in civilisation went so far as to reveal the very joint of nature to culture” (Lacan 1996 [1966]: 14).

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In conclusion, returning to the questions posed at the beginning of this article, I will summarize this analysis with a final reflection on how these ideas from Žižek's analysis of ideology can inform our analysis of "belief" in the context of the cult of Tyche and more broadly in the field of ancient Greek religion.

6 Desire of the Other: the Possibility of Enculturation

Drawing on the psychoanalytical theories of Jacques Lacan, and specifically the notion of *objet petit a*, Žižek argues that ideologies provide or comprise fantasies that fulfill our most human desire for desire of the Other. Importantly, this formulation can be understood at three levels that describe our individual psychological interactions with an ideology and which I briefly summarize here (Žižek 1996: 167–168, reflecting Lacan's framework). At the "imaginary" level, this desire of the Other manifests most simply as the desire for what another man has, the "day-to-day rivalry between me and my double-competitor" (Žižek 1996: 167). This, in turn, is connected to the next level, the "symbolic," where "desire of the Other" has two different, interrelated meanings. First, the desire of the Other indicates the subject's desire always to be desired/ recognized by the Other. But this leads to the second meaning: in order to be recognized — to gain the desire of the Other — the subject will desire what the Other seems to desire. This is, itself, desire of the Other, because the "big Other" (the symbolic order) "prescribes to the subject the matrix of his or her desiring" (167). The things we desire — from the latest technical gadget to the living of a righteous life — are "predetermined and decided ... by the symbolic network of the cultural tradition to which I belong" (167). However, this is not to say that the subject is merely filling in a preordained position; rather, it is her act of subjectivity that itself establishes the big Other (136). The process of that subjectivization is discussed in the next section of this article, but here I want to emphasize the way in which the symbolic order remains a fiction, a "presupposition by each of the individuals, of the already-existing co-ordination of all other individuals" (140). While a Master-Signifier (such as "Nation" or "Democracy") becomes the "something" with which we identify and around which we rally, the true meaning of this Master-Signifier remains open or empty (142).

And this perhaps helps to clarify the reading of desire of the Other at the third and final level, the Real. This concerns what "resists symbolization," that is, "the enigma of the Other's desire" (168). Because the big Other is incomplete, because it is up to the subject to create the big Other, this means that the subject is never certain what the Other wants from her — and because the "desire of the subject is the desire of the other ... I, the subject, never know what I really want, since the Other's desire remains forever an enigma to me" (164). This uncertainty has further implications: first, it means that desire of the Other can never actually be satisfied; second, and importantly, it generates the subject's desire always to try to "ascertain her status as object of the Other's desire" (164). Thus, we can see how these different readings of the "desire of the other" convey the mental processes (conscious and unconscious) of the subject of ideology. These structures of desire (the conscious desire for those things that the symbolic order prescribes based on the unconscious drive for the "unobtainable object of desire"), together create "the condition of possibility for enculturation" (see Haley 2014: 202–203, italics in original).

7 Interpellation: Illusions without Owners

Thus, in Žižek's approach, ideology is "the exact opposite of internalization of external contingency: it resides in externalization of the result of an inner necessity"

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(1994: 4). While the above insights about desire of the Other may, at first sight, be difficult to apply in the context of ancient history (as noted above in consideration of the mental realm of the historical subject), I will return to them at the end of this article in the context of the spread of the cult of Tyche.

In the meantime, the process of the externalization of ideology, described by Žižek, offers some intriguing insights. This process begins with interpellation, which, according to its originator, Althusser, creates the subject of ideology. In his descriptions of it, Althusser describes it as a discourse, noting how “it can be imagined along the lines of the most commonplace everyday police (or other) hailing: ‘Hey, you there!’” (1971: 162–163, italics in original) But in addition to this abstract process, Althusser also stresses the materialist aspect of what he calls the “subtle everyday domination” of ideologies (133). As he states, the concept of the material existence of an ideology and its practices needs to take account of “different modalities,” which, although all rooted in “physical matter,” are part of a larger nexus of apparatus, action, and practices. For the complicit subject, as Althusser puts it, “the ideas of his belief are material in that his ideas are his material actions inserted into material practices governed by material rituals which are themselves defined by the material ideological apparatus from which derive the ideas of the subject” (158–159).

But while ritual can be understood to reinforce an ideology in a subject, that still leaves open the question of what the subject is expressing in the first place when taking part in a ritual. Indeed, as Žižek (and others, for example, see Dolar 1993) have observed, this analysis leaves unanswered the problem of the origin of the ideology. It does not explain how the hailing process actually works, since individuals must have some sense of identity as subjects before they can recognize themselves as objects of interpellation. Žižek offers this approach: for him, the emphasis lies instead on precisely the experience of this process as a “senseless, traumatic injunction” that is necessarily incomplete; this, he goes on, “far from hindering the full submission of the subject to the ideological command, is the very condition of it” (Žižek 1989: 43). This failed interpellation means that ideological identification also fails; that it is always “an identification with its fingers crossed” (1996: 166). The only way to reconcile this failure of interpellation is for the individual to take on this symbolic mandate. Žižek emphasizes both the curious “enjoyment” or *jouissance* that the subject can achieve by submitting to the imaginary identification, and, simultaneously, the sense of unbearable anxiety that the gap between the imaginary and symbolic identification creates (1989: 111). As we have seen above, it is this experience of “the kernel of my Self as something which preexists the process of interpellation” (1996: 166) that also results from, as well as maintains and indeed comprises, desire for desire of the Other.¹⁷

I would like to suggest that this description includes a number of factors that are, at least, provocative as we attempt to gain a better understanding of the nature and functioning of low-intensity ancient Greek ritual activities and associated beliefs. To begin with, the process of interpellation — or rather the metaphor that it provides — gives some insight into the possible process of the transmission of beliefs and, more importantly, its implications.¹⁸ More concretely, the role of the material, as envisaged by this process, can be aligned with the role of ritual in ancient Greek religion — and not just religious rituals per se, but the web of embodied activities and

¹⁷ But see Žižek’s acknowledgment of Pfaller’s approach, that this apparent “failure of interpellation” in fact demonstrates the success of ideological interpellation (Žižek’s 2000a: 134 n48, drawing on Pfaller 1998: 240–241).

¹⁸ I hope it is unnecessary to observe that I am referring to the metaphor provided by Althusser, rather than arguing for a literal process of “hailing.”

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social institutions that supported them. For the ancient Greeks, as for Althusser's modern subjects, the social and corporeal institutionalization of rituals embedded ideologies in the practices, desires and thoughts of everyday life. In addition, they were inextricably linked, according to this argument, with the constitution of subjects, and the associated idea that submitting to this symbolic order could prompt a sense of anxiety, a constant desire for desire of the Other, fits well with an ancient religious culture in which such anxiety seems to have been common. We can trace it, for example, in the uncertainty frequently expressed in a range of evidence as to which of the many gods or heroes a person should pray. That this aspect may have been a source of anxiety is suggested not only by, for example, the explicit questions on this topic posed to oracles by individuals facing a range of problems (see Eidinow 2013: 136–141), but also by the sheer range not only of everyday ritual activities, but also of more specific initiations and personalized ritual services, intended not only to create new relationships, but also to maintain existing ones, with the gods.

These aspects concern the ways in which an individual may interact directly with the wider religious culture in order to engage meaningfully with low-intensity rituals and associated beliefs. But this article is also concerned with exploring the nature and operations of such widespread belief in the context of ancient Greek ritual activity and associated beliefs. In that context, the idea of an individual's distance from their ideology is intriguing. It raises the possibility of viewing "belief" as functioning not only subjectively but also, as it has been termed, objectively. By this I mean that it suggests that, as Robert Pfaller has argued, an individual can be committed to beliefs not as if they were her own illusion or even "other people's" illusion but as if they were "illusions without owners" (2003). To illustrate what this means for the argument of this article, we can turn to an example that is used by Žižek across a number of his publications: the story of the Emperor's New Clothes.

8 The Subject Supposed to Believe: Emperors and Subjects

This well-known tale illustrates a number of aspects of ways that the symbolic order of an ideology exerts its power. The story is familiar: a common reading focuses on the role of the little boy who sees through the emperor's claims, seeing it as a symbolic (and actual) undressing of power. However, if instead of focusing on the perspicacious little boy, we ask why did no one else raise the same questions, then it becomes illustrative of another facet of ideology, which I want to explore here, namely, the "subject supposed to believe" (cf. Bjerre and Laustsen 2010: 47–48).

In Žižek's formulation, the subject supposed to believe is "a constitutive feature of the symbolic order" (Žižek 2006: 29);¹⁹ that is, it is a crucial element of the cultural structures within which we live, one that enables us to take as having a real material existence phenomena that actually exist only in thought or imagination. He gives as an example the ways in which we might treat a king as having powers inherent in his position rather than his person (2006: 35), or how, nowadays, in commercial transactions, we treat as magical those object that in fact play an instrumental role within a symbolic system of exchange (94–95). Importantly, this is not a discussion of a "reified form of direct human belief" — far from it, there is no immediate self-present living subjectivity to whom the belief can be attributed. Rather, these beliefs are displaced onto the "big Other" — that is, the symbolic order within

¹⁹ It appears to emerge from his dissatisfaction with "the subject supposed to know" of Lacanian psychoanalytical theory, which the patient transfers onto the analyst so that "he embodies the absolute certainty (which Lacan compares with the certainty of Descartes' cogito ergo sum) of the patient's unconscious desire" (Žižek 2006: 28).

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which we all live — and it is this attribution, this dispossession that is original and constitutive. Thus, no proofs are needed to support belief, only the assertion of belief within the symbolic order, a role that de Certeau has depicted, relationally, as comprising an endless network of sureties always sought “further on” (1985a: 200; italics in original).

Turning to ancient Greek (religious) culture, it can be argued that the etiological narratives of ancient rituals would have provided an endless set of mythological “sureties” for their audiences, by demonstrating that someone, somewhere once performed the particular ritual for a specific reason. But we can also see a ritual itself as providing such a surety; by its very form — its apparently continuous transmission, its constant practice — it can be described as embodying “the subject supposed to believe.” This underlying understanding may have informed many cults, but perhaps especially the spread of the cult of Tyche, for which, incidentally, there is no etiological narrative of which we are aware. However, we can highlight other aspects that indicate the presence of a “network of sureties” in this case. These occur not in traces of stories told, but in the circulation of material evidence: for example, the image of the Tyche of Antioch became the model for the Tyche of other cities, reproduced throughout the Mediterranean (Stansbury-O'Donnell 1994); in turn, as Yost (2008) has argued, Tyche's mural crown offered a recognizable visual detail to inhabitants of Syria, who adopted her cult. This replication of particular imagery suggests an awareness of the attachment to Tyche of others — and/or her attachment to them; it reifies the presence of the subject supposed to believe.

9 Interactivity and Interpassivity: Objective Belief

Introduction of the material evidence of cult raises another aspect of the relevance of the idea of an individual's distance from their ideology, and the way that we can observe Greek religion functioning objectively. This introduces the concepts of interactivity and interpassivity. The usual meaning of interactivity is to indicate a dialogic relationship, but Žižek draws our attention to a different meaning, one in which we find an object acting for us, that is, “I achieve my goal by way of interposing between me and the object on which I work another natural object” (2006: 25).²⁰ In the realm of ancient Greek religion, this brings to mind certain magical activities such as inscribed “prayers for justice” (see Versnel 2010), in which a person would scratch their prayer on, for example, a lead tablet, and thus dedicate their enemy to a divinity. In this, the ritual meant that the god was expected to “take on” this hostile activity on behalf of the writer, and, in turn, it can also be argued that the inscribed tablet itself “took on” the action of the writer.

While this is one perspective on such a process, in which the protagonist is “active” through these other interceding objects, another perspective views the protagonist as being passive through the object. Returning to the example of the prayer for justice, above, this would mean that we view the text not only as interactively taking on the action of the writer, but also as carrying out the writer's emotional work. As Robert Pfaller has put it in his explanation of the process, “The interpassive person delegates her pleasure/consumption [or belief] to a medium by ritually causing this medium to perform a figurative representation of consumption” (2003). The emotions are extrajected as appropriate responses, and in this way, an

²⁰ And it need not be an object: the same process also can take place in interpersonal relations, such that instead of directly attacking my enemy, I start a fight between him and someone else — and watch the two of them attacking each other.

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individual's "most intimate feelings can be radically externalized" and projected into the symbolic realm. The symbolic efficiency of this activity is exactly the same as if the individual had done the action themselves, but in this process the object "feels" it for them: this is interpassivity, in which another (living or inanimate) object deprives me of my own passivity.

The object enjoys or consumes or believes for me: all these activities seem to be included in this idea; indeed, interpassivity has been described as the delegation of the "labour of emotional life."²¹ As Pfaller (2014a: 15–16) notes, Žižek draws for this idea on observations of Jacques Lacan, who explained the role of the Greek chorus in the economy of enjoyment:

When you go to the theatre in the evening, you are preoccupied by the affairs of the day, by the pen that you lost, by the check that you will have to sign the next day. You shouldn't give yourselves too much credit. Your emotions are taken charge of by the healthy order displayed on the stage. The Chorus takes care of them. The emotional commentary is done for you.... Therefore, you don't have to worry; even if you don't feel anything, the Chorus will feel in your stead.

Lacan 1992: 252

Lacan is describing a displacement of subjectivity in which the chorus takes the role of feeling the audience's emotions. As Lacan puts it, we are there "in the form of a material to be made use of; on the other hand, that material is also completely indifferent" (Lacan 1992: 247).

We can conceive of ritual activities as functioning in a similar way. Žižek offers a first example, albeit non-Greek (1989: 34): in the case of a Tibetan prayer wheel, paper is attached to the wheel, it is turned by wind or water, or mechanically, and the ritual object prays for me, taking on the activity that an individual would otherwise perform. To rid us of the idea that this is something purely pre-modern, Žižek also provides the example of canned laughter on TV programs, in which the soundtrack is active for me (1989: 35). But while we may recognize this as a diachronological phenomenon, if we remain with the pre-modern and turn to ancient Greek ritual activity, we can perhaps see that votive offerings can be argued to be playing a similar role to either the prayer wheel or, indeed, the canned laughter. A votive offering, through its ongoing presence, continues to attest to the relationship of *charis* that is sought between dedicator and god even after the individual who dedicated it has left the sanctuary. The inscription may, as scholars have argued (e.g., Day 2010), preserve the prayer pronounced when the votive was offered — especially if, as some have argued, it would have been read aloud by other sanctuary visitors — and thus it continues to obtain "a permanent effectiveness." Finally, there was also the opportunity with some of these offerings to "recharge" them (as van Straten has described [1981: 74]) by inserting a burning lamp or making a small offering, perhaps a couple of coins.

The affective agency of the individual in these contexts is remarkably, even deliberately, limited by the form and structure of both the object and the ritual activity in which it features. To make this observation, I am admittedly drawing on the ways in which this concept has been used to critique digital media, but the observation seems still to be valid. It has been noted that while digital media are often praised as

²¹ Sekimoto and Yajima discuss how "the notion of interpassivity illuminates the 'outsourcing' of emotional engagement and affective labor that otherwise requires a considerable amount of energy and attention in one's everyday life" (2017: 29–30); they go on to discuss "affective labor."

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offering ways in which new forms of agency may emerge (digital citizenship, etc.), in fact they are “necessarily pre-inscribed with systemic qualities,” a situation that “automatically circumscribes and undermines the extent to which they can be substantively reappropriated for authentically transformative purposes” (Payne 2014: 33, citing Taylor 2009: 102). As Pfaller notes, this delegation of feeling means that we need not feel so strongly — and this may have a pleasure of its own: “Can an absence of pleasure sometimes be identical with the pleasure of absence?” (2008: 13).

These observations can be illustrated by consideration of the spread of ancient Greek divine cults, including spread of the city cults of Tyche: like other divinities, her ongoing material presence in the city offered not only a network of sureties of others' beliefs but also the reassurance of interpassivity — her presence in the city took care of that city's future. As with other gods, the appeal of such a phenomenon would lie both in the delegation of feelings it offered and also in the notion that what it required of worshippers was circumscribed by the form associated with its function. Worshippers would, thus, displace their most intimate feelings and attitudes onto a symbolic structure; but this sense of distance did not necessarily negate the authenticity of the felt attachment. Indeed, such an experience may be in some ways coercive,²² creating the requirement to respond in line with the expectations of the form.²³ Moreover, as Žižek puts it, although a passive feeling may have “started as a fake, we may end up ‘really feeling it’” (1999: 106).

These observations shift or nuance the meaning of the term “belief” as it is commonly used: instead of thinking of it as subjective, that is, as an “intimate,” purely mental state, Žižek positions it as “embodied, materialized in the effective functioning of the social field” (1989: 36), as “a-subjective” (1997: 107). As Pfaller has put it “belief can exist in the subjects' actions, it need not necessarily reside in their consciousness” (2014b: 144). But, importantly, it does not deny a sense of attachment, returning us to a distinction raised earlier: that is, the idea of belief as faith, where by faith we mean “a binding engagement.” As Žižek observes, it is of course possible to believe in something without having faith in it (e.g., as he puts it, one can believe in ghosts but not feel bound to them by any pact or commitment), and (more to the point of the argument of this article) one can have faith in something without believing in it (2001: 109–110). As Žižek observes, the big Other or symbolic order is a shared fiction: nevertheless, even if we do not believe in it, or even really know it, it is still possible to feel a sense of shared commitment to it (cf. 2001: 199); in such a situation there is “always the need for the fiction of the ‘subject supposed to believe’” (109–110). I want to suggest that this notion of the symbolic order, and especially the shared fiction that it entails, is an important factor in understanding the experience of our historical subjects in their engagement with low-intensity ritual activities and associated beliefs. And, returning to the question of the cult of Tyche, while we may not wish to understand the circulation of images of Tyche as indicating (a propositional) belief held by our historical subjects, nevertheless, in this context it may still be a significant indication that individuals felt a sense of “binding engagement” to this divine figure.²⁴

²² As others have pointed out with regard to digital media; see Sterne 2012.

²³ This is, as Žižek notes, what Freud called the “fetishist disavowal,” that is, that functioning of the symbolic order in which the social mask matters more than the direct reality of the individual who wears it (2006: 33).

²⁴ Indeed, in her analysis of the attitudes of the ancient Greeks to personifications as portrayed in poetry and literature, Barbara Borg has argued something similar: that it was not so important for the significance of these

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10 Belief and ... Relief?

We return to where we started, the Theater of Dionysos in Athens in the last quarter of the fourth century. What did Menander's audience think they were looking at as Tyche stood before them, laying out the plot of *Aspis*? Can we describe this character as the representation of a goddess, or simply a personification?

Do we think the audience understood her to play the same role in their lives that she claims for herself in the prologue? What may we mean by saying that the audience "believed" in Tyche? On the one hand, in terms of the experience of our historical subjects, a range of different answers is possible, reflecting the range of individuals who would have been present in the theatre. On the other hand, in terms of what we may mean when we describe their approach, we can draw on the analysis above to argue for a commonly held "belief" in the figure of Tyche as a goddess.

This "belief" emerged for these individuals from their engagement in an ideology to whose symbolic mandate they had submitted. As I have argued above, this engagement would have turned on the network of sureties offered by other religious phenomena, both within the city and beyond (sanctuary, statues, votives, ritual activity, etc.), and it would have been reinforced by the commonly held experience of "the subject supposed to believe." Indeed, the representation of Tyche on the stage was a reinforcement of this aspect of the symbolic order, but it also emphasizes the role of individuals (audience members or not) in promulgating and maintaining this wider ideology. Just as the emperor with no clothes depended on no one asking the same question as the little boy, so did the presence of the divine. Worshippers delegated their emotions to the figure of Tyche, and that displacement itself became original and constitutive, ensuring the continued significance of the god within their cultural structures.

In that context, and as a final observation, I want to draw attention to two ways that such an experience of externalization may have played a key role for our ancient subjects. First, it created a symbolic order, and daily lived experience, of which Tyche was an essential part. Second, it may have enabled individuals to cope with the anxiety created by their perception of, and concern about, divine involvement in their lives. As Žižek puts it:

You find your belief too oppressive in its raw immediacy? Then kneel down, act as if you believed, and you will get rid of your belief — you will no longer have to believe yourself, your belief will already exist objectified in your act of praying. That is to say, what if one kneels down and prays not so much to regain one's own belief but, on the opposite, to get rid of one's belief, of its over-proximity, to acquire a breathing space of a minimal distance towards it? To believe — to believe directly, without the externalising mediation of ritual — is a heavy, oppressive traumatic burden. (Žižek 2005: 237)

If, indeed, ritual activities may be described as an expression of that externalization — and Žižek's suggestion finds support from recent experimental work on the links between anxiety and ritualized behaviors (Lang et al. 2015) — it suggests a relationship between ritual and belief that is not often considered. It raises the possibility that ritual, rather than expressing the presence of the divine or communication with it, instead distanced the gods, and the anxiety that their presence

works that the figures portrayed in them should be understood as actually existing, but rather that the characteristics and concepts that they embodied should seem both relevant and morally instructive (Borg 2002: 232–233).

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evoked. In turn, it also suggests that theories about the development of the personification of Tyche and the spread of her cult, as a symptom of a burgeoning sense of vulnerability to external sociopolitical forces (e.g., Pollitt 1986: esp. 2–3), can be extended to include the idea that the spread of her cult was also, in part, a response to the anxiety that her own presence generated. With this insight, we return, as promised, to Žižek's description of the desire of the Other, and the way in which the anxiety created by the opacity of the Other's desire maintains the desire of the Other. Mapped on to ancient Greek ritual activity, it suggests that the presence of the divine created among its subjects an anxiety to please; this was ameliorated, at least in part, by the rituals they enacted; but it was also exacerbated, because these rituals actually helped to maintain the sense of the presence of the divine.

11 Conclusion

As others have observed, in the field of ancient Greek religion, there has been a period of scholarship in which the possibility of attributing belief to historical subjects has, at least, been seen to be highly problematic, and even, at its most extreme, denied. Investigations of the nature of ancient "belief" have been hampered not only by assumptions about the composition, meaning, and expression of "belief" but also, I have argued here, by implicit concern about the appropriate nature or not of its objects. While recent interest in individual religious activities has grown (partly as a reaction to "polis religion," but also stimulated by investigations of the role of ritual, the body, and the mind), questions about the nature and transmission of low-intensity ritual activities and associated beliefs remain.

In this context, I have suggested that we might draw on Žižek's notion of "ideology" in order to broaden the scope of discussions of ancient Greek religious "belief," and in particular to allow a fuller exploration of widespread, "low-intensity" ritual activities and associated beliefs in ancient Greek culture. By discussing Greek religion in terms of a symbolic order, by introducing these ideas of the big Other and the range of ways in which "belief" may be generated and maintained, this approach is intended to encourage a focus on the evidence for interactions with the divine and their implications, rather than (implicit) judgments about either the status of a divinity or the mindset of her worshipper. With reference to Tyche specifically, as I hope I have shown, it suggests that, in the sense that she occupied a key role in the shared symbolic order, this goddess was as much a recipient of low-intensity ritual activities and beliefs as any other in the pantheon.

In making this argument, this article has not aimed to deny the importance of examining the experience of the individual. Rather it aims to prompt discussion of how individual and wider culture were related. Indeed, it has tried to show how, by implicating individuals in their (historical) social and cultural context, we may begin to see how maps of meaning could be shared, developed, and inculcated, not only at the level of abstracted symbolic meaning, but expressed in and by external material things, including bodily experiences, activities, and practices. Such an approach may help us to understand different ways of nuancing the meaning of the term "belief" by (at least) considering the range of ways in which a set of ideas may be transmitted, received, and internalized, and exploring the relationship between an individual or group and the wider culture they shape and that shapes them.

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