



The Burning Saints: Cognition and Culture in the Fire-walking Rituals of the Anastenaria (Religion, Cognition and Culture)

Dimitris Xygalatas

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The Anastenaria are Orthodox Christians in Northern Greece who observe a unique annual ritual cycle focused on two festivals, dedicated to Saint Constantine and Saint Helen. The festivals involve processions, music, dancing, animal sacrifices, and culminate in an electrifying fire-walking ritual. Carrying their sacred icons, participants dance over hot coals as the saints move them.

The Burning Saints presents an analysis of these rituals and the psychology behind them. Based on long-term fieldwork, The Burning Saints traces the historical development and sociocultural context of the Greek fire-walking rituals. As a cognitive ethnography, the book aims to identify some of the social, psychological and neurobiological factors involved and to explore the role of emotional and physiological arousal in the performance of such rituals. A study of participation, experience and meaning, The Burning Saints presents a highly original analysis of how cognition and culture can shape social and religious behaviour.

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