

Sanctuaries between Materiality and Mentality

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1. Introduction

Sanctuaries have occupied a primary position in archaeological research from the beginning of systematic excavations in the late 19th century and have attracted the interest and the imagination of early travelers and antiquarians¹. It is not a coincidence that in the 19th century, all the major archaeological schools in Greece focused on the excavation of sanctuaries. The Athens Archaeological Society conducted excavations on the Acropolis, in Eleusis, and in Epidauros; the École Française in Delos and Delphi; the German Archaeological Institute in the Heraion of Samos and in Olympia; and their example was followed later by the American School of Classical Studies in Athens in Samothrace and the Italian Archaeological School in Lemnos, to mention a few examples. This tradition continues until today.

The study of sanctuaries moves between two poles: materiality and mentality. Materiality refers to aspects such as the architectural setting of sanctuaries (temples, altars, *thesauroi*, processional roads, porticos, houses of priests, facilities for the accommodation of pilgrims, incubation halls, storerooms for cult objects, etc.), the dedications, and the cult paraphernalia (libation vessels, *perirrhantaria*, sacrificial knives, etc.), and the material remains of ritual practices (bones, ashes, food remains). With mentality I mean all the immaterial, ideological and symbolic aspects in the life of sanctuaries: rituals, social relations and interactions, piety, emotions, values, identity, and acculturation. To connect these two poles is an important challenge. It means to associate the material evidence with ritual practices², beliefs, and feelings, and to interpret the material evidence using the methods of social anthropology, religious studies, and cognitive science by considering the role of emotions and the senses – such as sounds (see below) and smells.

When I am invited to deliver a keynote address or to summarize a conference, I have found that it is a useful intellectual exercise and an exercise in discipline to characterize a subject by using words that start with the same letter. In a recent conference on borders in Crete it was the letter C, in another one on polytheism the letter P. The suitable letter for a conference dedicated to sanctuaries is, obviously, the letter S. Although I admit that the complexity of the subject and the rich presentations make it impossible to present comprehensive conclusions and to offer suggestions only with words starting with this letter, I cannot resist the temptation to attempt it. After all, there are enough S-words that refer to important aspects that were discussed during this conference: space, setting, size, social interaction, symbolism, service, status, sex, specialization, stability, senses, sounds, and sentiments. Some of these notions will feature in the next pages, with an emphasis on the Greek world with which I am more familiar.

¹ See the chapters by Monica De Cesare, Massimo Limoncelli, Elisa Chiara Portale on the sanctuary of Zeus Olympios in Akragas, and Corentin Voisin on C. Haller von Hallerstein.

² See e.g. the chapters by Elvia Giudice, Giada Giudice, and Leonardo Fuduli (sanctuary in Toumballos/Nea Paphos), Clemente Marconi (Selinous), and Daniela Lefèvre-Novaro (Mt. Lykaion and Mt. Ithome).

2. Space and setting

Space and setting refer to the location and the architectural setting of sanctuaries, their proximity to a city, their location in the countryside, their position on political or cultural borders that enable contacts and interactions, and their relation to characteristics of the landscape. A striking feature of this conference was the importance that most presentations attributed to landscape and nature³, exploring the importance of mountains, rocks, and caves, of the aquatic element – rivers, lakes, the sea, and marshes –, of animals and vegetation, and of the emanation of gases⁴. The Greeks were aware of the importance of the landscape for spaces dedicated to cult, not only as regards the selection of sites for the foundation of sanctuaries but also with respect to the flora. A Hellenistic decree concerning the sanctuary of Apollo Koropaios in Korope (Thessaly, ca. 100 BCE) is an eloquent testimony⁵:

Because the trees that exist in the sanctuary of Apollo Koropaios are damaged and we regard it as necessary and advantageous that some attention is paid to them, so that when the precinct grows also the greatness of the place will become even more manifest (... ἐπει τὰ ὑπάρχοντα δένδρα ἐν τῷ ἱερῷ τοῦ Ἀπόλλωνος τοῦ Κοροπαίου εἰσὶν κατεφθαρμένα, ὑπολαμβάνομεν δὲ ἀναγκαῖον εἶναι καὶ συμφέρον γενέσθαι τινα περὶ τούτων ἐπιστροφήν, ὥ[στε] συναυξηθέντος τοῦ τεμένου ἐπιφανεστέραν γί[νεσθαι] τὴν τοῦ] τ[ό]που μεγαλομέρειαν).

Concerning the complex functions of the landscape both in religious practice and in religious imagination, the mountains, as places of divine revelation, epiphanies, intervisibility, pilgrimage, and interaction, are a case in point⁶. Mountains separate and unite communities. As natural borders they separate, as places of pilgrimage and shared cults they unite⁷. Because of the importance of transhumance and the periodic movement of shepherds to mountainous pastures, often close to the borders of several neighboring communities, the mountains bring people of different origins into contact – and sometimes into conflict, for the delimitation of pastures or because of animal theft⁸. Because of their height and visibility from afar, they are the ideal location for the lighting of fires during the night. Their blaze can be seen from far away, as Pausanias reports with regard to the Boiotian festival of the Daidala⁹. Mountains are also places that invite movement; they connect ritual practice with the physical engagement of the body. From Antimacheia in Kos we know of an association of « those who walk together » to the sanctuary of Zeus Hyetios (κοινὸν τῶν συμπορευομένων παρὰ Δία Ἰέτιον)¹⁰, and an unpublished Hellenistic inscription from the sanctuary of Hermes Kedrites in Simi Viannou, on the Sacred Mountain (ἱερὸν ὄρος) of Crete, refers to an association of συνοδοιποροῦντες, « those who marched together »¹¹. In antiquity and beyond,

3 See the chapters by Marina Albertocchi (Bitalemi in Gela), Gregorio Aversa (Hera Lacinia), Olivier de Cazanove (Palikoi and Mefitis), Anne Jacquemin and Didier Laroche (Delphi), and Corentin Voisin. On symbolic landscapes see the chapter by Jean-Marie Husser. See also the studies assembled by KATSAROU and NAGEL (eds.) 2020.

4 See the chapter by Olivier de Cazanove.

5 SOKOŁOWSKI, *LSCG* 84.

6 See the chapters by Giorgio Camassa, François de Polignac, Florence Gaignerot-Driessen (Anavlochos), and Daniela Lefèvre-Novaro (Mt. Lykaion and Mt. Ithome).

7 Mountains as frontiers: DAVERIO ROCCHI 1988, p. 49-50; ROUSSET 1994, p. 117-119; CHANIOTIS 1996, p. 155. Pilgrimage to mountains on Crete: CHANIOTIS 1991, p. 102 and 104. On mountains in Greek imagination: BUXTON 1992; KÖNIGS 2022.

8 On these issues see GEORGOUDI 1974; GARNSEY 1988; HODKINSON 1988; CHANIOTIS 1995.

9 Pausanias IX, 2, 7-3, 8; KNOEPFLER 2001; CHANIOTIS 2002; PIRENNE-DELFORGE 2008, p. 223-226.

10 *IG* XII.4.121 (ca. 200 BCE).

11 LEBESSI 1981, p. 4.

mountains stoke the imagination of people and were a source of literary inspiration; they were an important setting of myths, from Zeus' birth and nourishment to the judgment of Paris. Even their shape could be associated with religious ideas. The profile of Mt. Juktas (ancient Ἰυτὸς) near Knossos resembles the profile of a bearded man, and in early modern times this led to its identification with the tomb of Zeus¹², which in antiquity was located in the Idaean Cave¹³. The cave on Mt. Ida is a good example of how mountains could become meeting places of worshippers from different Cretan cities, located both in its vicinity (e.g. Axos, Gortyn, Rhizenia) and in western Crete (e.g. Eleutherna, Kydonia, Polyrhenia)¹⁴. Zeus Idatas was invoked in the oaths of many cities (Arkades, Eleutherna, Gortyn, Hierapytna, Knossos, Lyttos, Olous, Priansos, and Sybrita)¹⁵.

3. Status and social interaction

Usually we study the function of sanctuaries as meeting places of people of different origins in connection with the great Panhellenic sanctuaries of Greece. However, sanctuaries with a suitable location near cultural or political borders could also play an important role as places of political and intercultural contacts¹⁶. As spaces with a symbolical significance, sanctuaries were also places where legal and social statuses were shaped, performed, and enhanced. Sanctuaries were places of inclusion and exclusion, as we know from prohibitory inscriptions – for example, the exclusion of men from Demeter sanctuaries during the Thesmophoria or of Dorians from a sanctuary in Paros (ca. 450 BCE)¹⁷. There were many ways in which status became visible in a sanctuary: for instance, through transition rites reserved for the two genders or for citizens alone; through the elevated position of the members of the elite, who occupied priesthoods by means of heredity, purchase, or wealth, or impressed the worshippers with extravagant dedications or sumptuous celebrations; or through the subordinate roles reserved for slaves.

Thus, sanctuaries were important places of social interaction, both harmonious and discordant. For instance, women deposited « prayers for justice » written on lead tablets in the sanctuary of Demeter in Knidos, in order to reject accusations, save face, and request the punishment of those who slandered them.¹⁸ The victims of wrong-doing and the parties to legal conflicts turned to sanctuaries to seek divine assistance against those who had harmed them. This is illustrated by the Dodona tablets (see below) and a story in Babrius¹⁹:

« A farmer, who was digging ditches in a vineyard and lost his mattock, investigated whether one of the rustics who were there had stolen it. But each and every one denied this. Having no other resort, he took everyone down to the town to have them take an (exculpatory) oath... »

12 VERBRUGGEN 1981, p. 63-67. This association is not attested in ancient sources.

13 E.g. Porphyry, *Life of Pythagoras* 17.

14 For the evidence see CHANIOTIS 2009a, p. 62-63. See also SPORN 2002, p. 218-223; PRENT 2005, p. 158-160, 314-318, 560, 565-571, 591-604.

15 CHANIOTIS 1996, p. 70 with note 371.

16 See e.g. the remarks of Maria Cecilia Parra on the sanctuary of Kaulonia and of Sveva Savelli on the sanctuary at Incononata « greca ».

17 *IG XII.5.225*; SOKOŁOWSKI, *LSCG* 110; BUTZ 1996; SAMMARTANO 2019.

18 SALVO 2012; on this phenomenon and similar evidence from Macedonia see also CHANIOTIS 2009b.

19 Babrius, *Fables* 2.

The exculpatory oath of the suspects in the sanctuary would free them of the charge and the farmer of his suspicions; thus concord would be re-established in their small community. Too bad that on his way to the sanctuary the farmer heard that sacred money had been stolen from it and a reward was being offered for information concerning the thieves. The farmer realized with resignation that the god could not even find the thieves of his property. Nonetheless, sanctuaries remained an ideal place to attract the gods' attention to human disputes.

4. Specialization

Exactly as special properties could be attributed to divinities, without limiting their powers, sanctuaries could acquire fame as places with special functions, which did not limit their broader significance as places of worship. Sanctuaries that hosted mystery cults – e.g. the sanctuaries of Demeter and Kore in Eleusis, the Great Gods in Andania and Samothrace, later those of the Egyptian deities –, sanctuaries that promised healing from disease, and oracular sanctuaries are good examples of such a 'specialization'. Although any god was expected to offer protection and rescue a mortal, from the 5th century BCE at the latest and especially in the Hellenistic and imperial periods sanctuaries of Asklepios fulfilled a special function as places where sick people came, performed purification, spent the night in specially constructed incubation halls, and hoped that the god would visit them in a dream and heal them or reveal the method of healing²⁰. The material evidence for these practices is impressive: inscribed healing miracles, anatomical votives²¹, and architectural remains.

Famous oracular sanctuaries, such as the sanctuaries of Apollo in Delphi and Klaros or of Zeus and Dione in Dodona, fulfilled a variety of cultic functions; but their fame relied on the advice that their gods gave to worshippers. The oracular methods differed. No other sanctuary has left us as abundant material evidence for the oracular consultation as Dodona, thanks to the discovery of lead tablets that contain more than 4,000 inquiries and responses – the texts are more numerous than the tablets, since some of the tablets are opisthographic or contain more than one text on the same face²². Cleromancy was the most common way to solicit the gods' response, when a question could be answered with « yes » or « no »²³. The visitors prepared two versions of their question, usually on two separate tablets – one in an affirmative, the other in a negative form. Then someone, probably a priest, drew one of the folded tablets to determine the god's response. A small number of tablets explicitly invite the god(s) to choose the tablet that contained the desired answer, e.g. « pick up this one! »²⁴. In many cases we see people not asking the gods to predict the future or to provide guidance or help, but seeking answers for acts of injustice committed in the past: theft, unpaid debts, poisoning, and homicide. The tablets either identify a suspect by name or through the demonstrative pronoun 'this one' (οὗτος), thus showing that the suspect was present²⁵. By formulating

20 On incubation sanctuaries see EHRENHEIM 2015; RENBERG 2017.

21 On anatomical votives see FORSÉN 1996.

22 Editions: DAKARIS, VOKOTOPOULOU, and CHRISTIDIS 2013 (abbreviated *I.Dodone DVC*); LHÔTE 2006. Various aspects are discussed by the authors of a collective volume edited by SOUEREFF 2017.

23 PARKER 2015; CHANIOTIS 2018. On answers in the tablets see MARTÍN GONZÁLEZ 2021.

24 CHANIOTIS 2017, p. 56; 2018, p. 331.

25 E.g. *I.Dodone DVC* 2222A: αἱ δὲ μηδεὶς τούτων κέκλοβε, τουτονί ("if none of these [people] has stolen, [pick up] this one").

the questions in a way that could be answered with a « yes » or a « no », the worshippers attributed to the divinity the authority to declare someone guilty or innocent. An example²⁶:

« Were Mirion and Euthydamos and [- -]kios and Melissa privy to the theft of the pigs committed by Charinos? » ([ῥ] σύννοιδε Μιρίων και Εὐθύδ[αμος και - - -κιο] και Μέλισσα τᾶν ὑῶν τᾶν X[αρί?]νος [- -] ἀνέκλεψε).

« Neither Miron nor Euthydamos nor [- -]kios nor Melissa received the pigs that Charinos stole nor did they jointly eat them » ([- - οὐκ ἐ]δέξατο Μίρων οὐδ' Εὐθύδαμος [οὐδὲ - -]κι[ο]ς οὐδὲ Μέλισσα τὰς ὕας τὰς [Χαρίνος? ἀνέκλεψε] οὐδὲ συγκατέφαγον).

As I have argued in a study on legal disputes in the Dodona tablets²⁷, the oracular practice was closer to conflict resolution than to verdict. The fact that the suspect agreed to be present during the inquiry resembled an exculpatory oath. If he feared the god(s), he would dare to appear together with the accuser, only if he was innocent; if he did not fear god, there was no way to force him to admit guilt. The Dodona priests did not have the possibility to identify the guilty party – or to punish it. If they confirmed the guilt of an individual and delivered him to his accuser, they would instigate violence. But by choosing the tablet that freed the suspect from the accusation, they removed the cause of discord and violent conflict. The victims did not get justice, but at least they could save face and go on with their lives without suspecting that a neighbor felt *Schadenfreude* at their misfortune. Those who were rightfully accused would live with the fear of divine punishment, since the procedure had attracted the attention of the gods to the affair.

5. Senses, sounds, and sentiment

One cannot underscore enough the importance of emotions in the study of religious worship. Sanctuaries appealed to the senses in many ways and triggered feelings of fear, hope, and gratitude through their location, their imposing architecture, the divine images, the thanks-giving dedications of worshippers, and the inscribed records of miracles. Therefore, the « cognitive turn » that can be observed in the study of antiquity can also be fruitful in the study of sanctuaries²⁸.

The Parthenon probably is the most iconic monument of ancient Greece. It is a place of memory and commemoration, a sacred building in a sanctuary, but also a building that aroused emotions: pride among the Athenians, who built it; envy among their enemies; hatred among their subjects, whose tribute was possibly used for its construction. It was expected to arouse delight and joy in Athena, Athens' patron, and to express gratitude for past protection and hope for future assistance. The sculptural decoration of the Parthenon is an assemblage of visual emotive signals, that is, of images that were expected to arouse emotions: fear for the enemies of established order – the Centaurs and the Amazons; pride for victory over them. The private dedications that surrounded the temple were also triggers of emotions. When they were made in fulfilment of a vow, they alluded to the original anxiety of the worshipper, the hope for the divine assistance and the gratitude for its fulfilment, but also the fear of divine punishment in case the deity

26 *I.Dodone DVC 2005A and 2006A.*

27 CHANIOTIS 2017.

28 See the chapter by Giovanni Mastronuzzi and Giacomo Vizzino on visual sensation in the sacred landscape of Southern Apulia. See also, e.g., PAPALEXANDROU 2020 on sensory and cognitive enhancement in the Idaean Cave.

was deprived of the promised dedication. Dedications in sanctuaries both displayed emotions and aimed at arousing emotions in the viewer. We know that some visitors of sanctuaries did not take such votives seriously. An inscription in the sanctuary of Asklepios in Epidauros, set up by the priests for educational purposes, narrates the story of such a man of limited faith²⁹:

« A man who was paralyzed in all his fingers except one came as a suppliant to the god. When he was looking at the plaques in the sanctuary, he didn't believe in the cures and was somewhat disparaging of the inscriptions. Sleeping in the shrine, he saw a vision. It seemed he was playing the knucklebones below the temple, and as he was about to throw them, the god appeared, sprang on his hand and stretched out his fingers one by one. When he had straightened them all, the god asked him if he would still not believe the inscriptions on the plaques around the sanctuary and he answered no. "Therefore, since you doubted them before, though they were not unbelievable, from now on," he said, "your name shall be Unbeliever". When day came he left well. »

Various agents – priests, worshippers, dream-interpreters, diviners, purifiers, collectors of miracles, poets of hymns, authors of *aretologies*, exegetes, authors of sacred regulations and so on –, have left in sanctuaries texts and images that triggered specific emotional responses: cult regulations, collections of miracles, records of divine punishment, praises, hymns, and dedications, often decorated with suggestive images. The 'emotive agency' of the material objects of sanctuaries was activated during rituals³⁰.

Sanctuaries are soundscapes³¹. Visitors performed acclamations, raised their hands in prayer and made vows³²; dedicants presented their offerings loudly thanking the gods, making requests, or asking for forgiveness³³. Heralds made announcements, choruses of boys and girls sung hymns; celebrations were opened with priestly proclamations, calling the impious to stay away because of fear of god³⁴. Exegetes explained cult regulations, and tourist guides provided information about monuments and works of art. Parties to contracts and opponents in legal disputes took oaths. The sounds of Greek religion go beyond the articulate language. They include the sound of the leaves of an oak tree at Dodona³⁵, in which the priests recognized the oracular proclamations of Zeus. They include the blow of the trumpet that signals the beginning of a celebration and the inarticulate cries of the worshippers in certain cults (e.g. *Io Paieon* in the cult of Apollo, or *eui euan* in the cult of Dionysos). They include the making of noise on certain occasions, such as the one described in an oration from Sidyma in Lykia that narrates a miracle³⁶:

« In a place near the sea, at Lopta, in a secret cavern, hard to approach, having a small opening on the top which lets some light inside, some woman, who tried to spy on the god from above, unexpectedly and without making noise (ἀψοφητι),

29 LiDONICCI 1995, no. A4.

30 See my remarks on how inscriptions generated the fear of god and religion was an emotional experience: CHANIOTIS 2012 and 2023a.

31 See the chapter by Sylvain Perrot. See also POWER 2018.

32 E.g. Herodas, *Mimiamb* 4, LL. 1-18.

33 CHANIOTIS 2009b with examples.

34 DICKIE 2004.

35 See the chapter by Sylvain Perrot.

36 TAM II 174; MERKELBACH 2000.

fell and now she lies there as a fallen stone, as fearful warning for those who try to look inside. For this reason, when we enter the cave we make noise in our greeting (Apollo), shouting 'hail, Apollo, the one from Lopta' » (διὸ καὶ κροτεῖν ἀσπάσματος «χαίρει Ἄπολλον {ὄ} ἐγ Λόπτων», εἰσερχόμενοι φωνοῦμεν).

But apart from the prescribed sounds, in incubation halls the worshippers complained about their pains, exclaimed with amazement when someone claimed that they had been cured, or commented on the dedications. Traders advertised their wares. Run-away slaves, seeking supplication at the altars, brought accusations against their masters, requesting to be resold. People gossiped, quarreled for a good place in the procession, shouted as they noticed that their money or jewelry had been stolen, shouted in admiration for an impressive bull with gilded horns, murmured with anxiety at a negative sign, laughed at the mishap of a performer. The sound of religion is an essential part of the study of Greek sanctuaries, as the locus of a dynamic interplay of emotional experience, beliefs, and rituals that were subject to changes.

Seeing – or not seeing – is as important in sanctuaries as listening. I only mention the importance of darkness and light. Because of the impact of darkness on the senses, the cognitive abilities, and, consequently, the feelings of people, both nocturnal celebration in torch-light and rituals in dark, subterranean chambers lit with lamps and torches, were important aspects of religious experience³⁷.

The Idaean Cave, Crete's most important sacred place, is an example of this³⁸. The largest group of finds excavated there in 1982–1986 consists of clay lamps of the Imperial period; only seven are intact. Because of their small dimensions, lamps can easily be preserved; if something is broken off, it is the handle or the nozzle. The fact that hundreds of lamps have been found broken into small pieces cannot be attributed simply to destruction inflicted by time. The lamps were most likely broken on purpose during a ritual. According to Antoninus Liberalis (ca. 2nd cent. CE), a big light was seen during a celebration that commemorated Zeus' birth³⁹: « At a designated time, every year, one sees a great blaze glowing from inside the cave. According to the myth, this occurs when the blood from Zeus' birth boils out ». The author explicitly refers to a fire or blaze (πῦρ). We can imagine that the lamps, brought by the worshippers – their iconography is rarely connected with the cult of Zeus – or bought at the site, were filled with oil, set alight, and thrown into the cave during that ceremony.

6. Synergies

My final S-word is the word « synergy », which refers to the need for a holistic approach in the systematic study of sanctuaries. As demonstrated by many contributions to this volume, such an approach requires the application of a variety of methods, from the traditional philological analysis of the literary evidence to the zoo-archaeological examination of the remains of fauna, and from the use of insights from cognitive sciences to understand the impact of landscape, architecture, and votives to archaeological analysis of pottery and architecture in order to understand changes in the life of sanctuaries. In this way

37 See e.g. Pausanias I, 39, 21-40, 2 on the oracular consultation of Trophonios; see also USTINOVA 2009. On the role of artificial light in Greek religion see PARISINOY 2000; PODVIN 2011 and 2014; CHANIOTIS 2023b. See also the report of Elvia Giudice, Giada Giudice, and Leonardo Fuduli on the hypogeic chambers in Toumballos/Nea Paphos.

38 See also PAPAEXANDROU 2020. On the following, see CHANIOTIS 2023b, p. 306-309.

39 Antoninus Liberalis, *Metamorphoses* 19.2: ἐν δὲ χρόνῳ ἀφωρισμένῳ ὁρᾶται καθ' ἕκαστον ἔτος πλεῖστον ἐκλάμπων ἐκ τοῦ σπηλαίου πῦρ. Τοῦτο δὲ γίνεσθαι μυθολογοῦσιν, ὅταν ἐκζέῃ τὸ τοῦ Διὸς ἐκ τῆς γενέσεως αἶμα.

we can approach sanctuaries as places of human experiences and make small steps towards bridging the gap between what they experienced and thought and what time has left for modern archaeologists to find, that is, the gap between materiality and mentality.

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