

Ascending and Descending the Acropolis

Movement in Athenian Religion



Edited by Wiebke Friese, Søren Handberg and Troels Myrup Kristensen



Monographs of the Danish Institute at Athens
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Preface

The majority of the papers published here were first presented in preliminary form in the “Ascending and Descending the Acropolis: Sacred Travel in Attica and Its Borderlands” workshop held at the Danish Institute at Athens on 15 November 2014 and organized by Wiebke Friese and Søren Handberg. The workshop was organized under the auspices of “The Emergence of Sacred Travel: Experience, Economy and Connectivity in Ancient Mediterranean Pilgrimage” collaborative research project (www.sacredtravel.dk), generously funded by the

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Aarhus, Hamburg, and Oslo
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INTRODUCTION

New Approaches to Movement in Athenian Religion*

Troels Myrup Kristensen

The aim of this volume is to provide new perspectives on religious movement in the city of Athens and the broader region of Attica from the Late Bronze Age to the 2nd century AD.¹ Since the 1990s, work on the ancient Greek world has increasingly focused on different aspects of movement, such as processions and pilgrimages, and how they feed into the cultural, political, and religious imagination of cities and sanctuaries across the Mediterranean.² Athens and Attica are particularly fruitful places in the study of these phenomena, as the region provides rich evidence across a range of textual and material sources for a variety of different types of religious movement – both inside the city of Athens itself (such as to, on, and around the Acropolis) and from its centre to sanctuaries in the hinterland (such as those of Demeter and Kore at Eleusis and that of Artemis at Brauron), as well as to more distant sanctuaries, such as Delphi. The evidence for maenadism in both drama and vase-painting provides another

fascinating window into the role that specific kinds of ritualised movement could play within Athenian religious and social imaginary.

This brief introduction consists of three parts. The first outlines some key aspects of movement in Athenian (and more broadly, Greek) religion, and why they matter. The second suggests some ways through which archaeology may contribute to the study of Athenian religious movement by taking inspiration from the so-called “new mobilities paradigm”. The third presents a brief overview of the individual case studies presented in the following chapters.

Movement Matters

In spite of the obvious perils and dangers that faced ancient travellers, religious movement on a variety of different scales was integral to the development of Greek religion. From the Greek world at large, there is evidence for some 356 processions (*pompai*) in total, clocking in at varying lengths and durations, but each demonstrating how firmly embedded this form of communal and highly performative movement was in the religious life of cities and sanctuaries.³ The role of movement in enabling both religious and political constellations is central to François de Polignac’s influential study of extramural sanctuar-

* I thank Anna Collar and Søren Handberg for reading drafts of this introduction.

1 For scholarship on later periods, see Kaldellis 2009 and forthcoming work by Elizabeth Key Fowden.

2 Processions: Graf 1996; Agelidis 2017. Pilgrimage: Coleman & Elsner 1995; Dillon 1997; Elsner & Rutherford 2000; Rutherford 2013. For a useful historiography, see Elsner 2017. Outside of the present volume, other work by the *Emergence of Sacred Travel* project focuses on the Mediterranean as a whole; see Kristensen & Friese 2017; Collar & Kristensen forthcoming a and b; Kristensen forthcoming a.

3 True *et al.* 2004.

ies and their role in the rise of the Greek *polis* in the 8th and 7th centuries BC, where his focus is on their role as territorial demarcations of individual cities (see also Handberg, this volume).⁴ Processions often served to manifest links between a city and outlying sanctuaries, such as in the case of the procession from Athens to Eleusis that demonstrated Athenian control over the sanctuary of Demeter and Kore and its mystery cult (see Agelidis and Clinton, this volume).

However, it is important not to approach Greek processions as a sort of black box, or indeed “as an empty container for social processes”,⁵ as this obscures much of their potential significance. The manner in which individual processions were staged and conducted is indeed of pivotal importance. In an important paper on Greek processions, Fritz Graf thus noted that a procession “is not just a journey from A to B: undoubtedly, it matters where A and B are, and who is doing the journey”.⁶ Graf presents two models of Greek processions, one in which they moved towards the city centre (so-called centripetal processions), and the other in which they moved away from the city to an extra-urban sanctuary (so-called centrifugal processions). This fundamental aspect of direction is one key factor in understanding the contexts and meanings of individual cases of religious movement in the broader religious landscape.

Other key features of Greek processions include the social make-up and structure of the procession itself and the ritual activities of the participants.⁷ Visual representations of processions show participants wearing garlands, special dress, and a rich

assortment of ritual paraphernalia.⁸ Processions were headed by a young man or a maiden, and the *pompe* could accordingly be personified as a young woman in Greek iconography.⁹ In this sense, religious movement was also a highly gendered practice (see Konstantinou, this volume). Characteristic forms of movement closely linked with processions included dancing and singing (both on the road and in sanctuaries), as well as the performance of other rituals along the way, contributing to a certain carnivalesque quality.¹⁰ Joan Connelly has, for example, described the spectacle of the Panathenaic procession as “the ultimate multi-media kinetic display” (see also Warford, this volume).¹¹

From the Archaic period onwards, religious movement on a more “international” scale was institutionalised through the journeys of civic officials as part of the phenomenon of *theoria* (sometimes glossed as “state pilgrimage”) that has received renewed scholarly interest in recent years.¹² Representatives from individual poleis, so-called *theoroi* (often translated as “state pilgrims” or “sacred observers”), travelled considerable distances to witness and participate in festivals held in extra-territorial sanctuaries. As with all other forms of Greek religious life, participation in *theoria* was a means of displaying power and performing civic identities, evident for example in the Athenian procession to Delphi that in the 2nd century BC included more than 500 delegates (see also Pirisino, this volume).¹³ This procession, known as the *Pythais*, has been described as the “travelling image of the Athenian state”.¹⁴ But this kind of movement

4 Polignac 1995.

5 Sheller 2014, 791, making this important point in relation to the study of movement more broadly.

6 Graf 1996, 64, thus foreshadowing key points in Cresswell 2006.

7 On gendered aspects of Greek mobility, see Konstantinou 2018.

8 Stavrianopoulou 2015.

9 LIMC VII, 435-6.

10 Kowalzig 2007.

11 Connelly 2011, 318. For a full account of the Panathenaic procession, see Shear 2001, 122-206.

12 The key study is now Rutherford 2013.

13 Rutherford 2013, 157 (on the number of *Pythaidēs*), 222-30 (for a broader discussion of the *Pythais*).

14 Rutherford 2013, 230.

was not only about external communication, as moving together in a group of *theoroi* undoubtedly contributed to a sense of community or belonging among the participants themselves.¹⁵

Influenced by these developments in religious movement, travel was increasingly seen as a method of acquiring knowledge, as the examples of Herodotus and Solon as well as the more extreme Roman example of Apuleius' *Golden Ass* all attest.¹⁶ Beginning with Plato and Aristotle, the model of *theoria* came to be understood as a metaphor for philosophical inquiry itself.¹⁷ The metaphorical sense of travel further developed during the Hellenistic period. In Stoic philosophy, wandering constituted a metaphor for life itself in which man (*homo viator*) sought moral firmness.¹⁸ These examples demonstrate how the study of movement offers a window into a whole range of different aspects of Greek society and culture. While by necessity highly impressionistic, this brief overview of why movement matters has highlighted the need to look at individual moments in which movement acquires meaning, as well as the shape, direction, and representation of movement in different contexts and media.

The Matter of Movement

Movement is, by its very nature, an elusive and ephemeral topic that has often been exclusively studied through the singular lenses of texts and inscriptions.¹⁹ An alternative approach to religious movement is to take inspiration from methods and theories developed in studies of contemporary mobilities and apply them to the ancient world, espe-

cially those that pay close attention to their materiality.²⁰

Since the turn of the millennium, a wave of new and important work on mobility has appeared,²¹ occasionally under the banner of the so-called “new mobilities paradigm” or “mobile turn”, mainly developed within sociology and geography, but often of a highly interdisciplinary character. Scholarship under this broad banner has repeatedly argued that the study of movement must develop new methods and approaches that are able to study an increasingly mobile world.²² In a programmatic paper published in 2006, Mimi Sheller and John Urry thus point out how the immense growth in contemporary mobility is rapidly transforming scholarly terminologies and methodologies across a broad range of disciplines (note, for example, the rise of network metaphors in historical studies).²³ Sheller and Urry propose that “mobilities need to be examined in their fluid interdependence and not in their separate spheres”.²⁴

Observers of contemporary mobility have indeed shown how the ways and means by which people move create new social and cultural practices. The automobile is a classic case that has received considerable attention in scholarship,²⁵ but even seemingly basic forms of movement, such as walking, can offer insights into a broad range of phenomena, shown, for example, in the extensive literature on the

15 Cf. Adey 2009, 172.

16 Montiglio 2005, 147-79; Pretzler 2007, 48.

17 Rutherford 2013, 325-32.

18 Montiglio 2005, 42-61.

19 See also Kristensen & Friese 2017.

20 This is attempted more comprehensively than is possible here in Kristensen forthcoming a. Kristensen forthcoming b applies a “new mobilities paradigm” perspective to the sanctuary of Asklepios at Epidauros.

21 The geographer Tim Cresswell makes a distinction between movement and mobility (Cresswell 2006, 2-3). In his view, movement is in itself abstract and meaningless, whereas mobility is meaningful and socially produced. However, the two are used interchangeably in the present context.

22 Sheller & Urry 2006; see also Büscher *et al.* 2011; Adey *et al.* 2014.

23 For recent applications of network models in history and archaeology, see Brughmans *et al.* 2016.

24 Sheller & Urry 2006, 212.

25 See, for example, Inglis 2004.



Fig. 1. The “staging mobilities” framework (from Jensen 2013, fig. 1.1, reproduced by permission of Taylor & Francis Books UK).

flâneur.²⁶ This has profound methodological implications that have been addressed by a number of scholars across a range of disciplines.²⁷

In his work on contemporary mobilities, the urban theorist Ole B. Jensen has developed what he calls the “staging mobilities” framework that brings together the study of physical settings (i.e. the material world in which mobility happens), embodied performances (by people), and social interactions (within groups) (Fig. 1).²⁸ Jensen’s framework emphasises how mobilities are always staged, either from above (through careful architectural design or other forms of supervision within a given space) or from below (through the embodied actions and performances of groups and individuals).²⁹ Jensen furthermore develops the notion of a “mobile situ-

ation”, defined as “an assemblage of human subjects, physical design and material infrastructures of the built environment” to describe his object of study, thus enabling a study of urban life in motion.³⁰ Although Jensen’s study is limited to contemporary urban spaces, his observations have more general application for two reasons. Firstly, they provide useful terminology for studying movement in both the present and the past, and secondly, they are firmly anchored in material aspects of mobility.

For example, a striking aspect of contemporary mobilities is their dependence on immobile, material infrastructures. Cars need roads, mobile phones need antennae, and so on. Many studies have thus frequently emphasized how different aspects of materiality fundamentally shape movement in the contemporary world.³¹ This is particularly helpful for an archaeological approach to past mobility, as many forms of religious movement in the ancient

²⁶ Benjamin 1999.

²⁷ On *flânerie* as a method in ethnography, see Soukop 2013 and Coates 2017.

²⁸ Jensen 2013, 5–10.

²⁹ Jensen 2013.

³⁰ Jensen 2013, 10.

³¹ Jensen 2013; 2014.