

Session 7H: Colloquium

The Archaeology of Traveling and Cult Practices in the Ancient Mediterranean

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Colloquium Overview Statement

In antiquity, the fantastic interplay of sea, land, large islands, small archipelagos, and coastal areas in the Mediterranean fostered complex interactions and gave rise to a rich variety of religious space, from easily accessible coastal sites to more secluded rural sanctuaries. Such interrelated cultic places served as cultural terrains for communication and interaction on a regional and supra-regional level. Central to some of them was the undertaking and completion of a journey. As residents and visitors moved through sea- and landscapes to reach these cult sites, they helped create networks and articulate social functions and meaning, from control over land to community identity and human connections. Although Mediterranean archaeology has dedicated a lot of attention to networks, trade and intercultural exchange maritime religion and travelling has been overlooked by scholars. The aims of this colloquium are to trace evidence (archaeological, literary, and epigraphical) of travel to cultic sites in the Mediterranean and investigate further the cultic structures used by the travelers. The first paper, therefore, discusses seawards sanctuaries of Aphrodite in the eastern and central Mediterranean and shows that most of these were established in contact zones of trade and travelling. The second paper shows how sailors carrying their patron deities by sea established a complex network of seaside cults, sanctuaries, and votives during the Classical era. The third paper examines select sites in the Adriatic during the Roman period in order to trace the development of the marine belief system. The fourth paper assesses the balance between international and local cults by examining archaeological assemblages deposited by those travelling to Yeronisos and to nearby Cape Drepanum. The fifth paper examines internal traces of travel at the Cycladic sanctuary of Kea, where a cult was established in an abandoned settlement and used by local and distant travelers. The final paper in this panel offers a fascinating glimpse of the experience of visitors engaged in sacred tourism in Egypt, where they visited the Memnon colossus. Collectively, the papers in this panel shed light on the underexplored topic of religion, travel, and cultic practice in the ancient Mediterranean by scrutinizing various issues such as the movement of people and its relation to the locations of cultic sites along sea routes, cultic installations that provided travelers with space for their religious practices, the topography of these sanctuaries and the gods worshiped in the context of seaborne travel, and the travelers themselves. The six papers presented here cover not only different areas of the Mediterranean (Adriatic, Cyclades, Cyprus, Egypt, the eastern and central Mediterranean) but also a vast span of time from the Bronze Age to the Roman period and Late Antiquity.

Sanctuaries of Aphrodite: Multicultural Contact Zones in the Context of International Seaborne Trade in the Late Bronze and Iron Age

Martin E. Eckert, Archaeological Museum Hamburg

Although the focus of Mediterranean archaeology is shifting towards maritime networks, seaborne trade, and intercultural exchange (A. G. and S. Sherratt, A. B. Knapp, E. H. Cline), far less attention has been paid to individual protagonists in these areas or the facilities and institutions used by them (e.g., shelter and supplies for seafarers and places that served their social and religious needs). This paper tries to cover this gap by examining seaward sanctuaries of Aphrodite based on excavation reports, monographs, personal visits and on-site examination, paleogeomorphological and nautical studies, as well as literary and epigraphic sources. It covers sanctuaries throughout the eastern and central Mediterranean (Kition, Palaepaphos, Polis, Milet, Thera, Kommos, Kenchreai, Locri, Gravisca) focusing on their topography, architectural settings, their body of finds (especially foreign votives and imports), and the presence of foreign deities and their adaptation by local populations. Its aim is to show that a significant number of seaward sanctuaries of Aphrodite and related Cypriot-Near Eastern goddesses were intercultural contact-zones for international seaborne trade. By contrast, some of the deity's cult sites, primarily those later established in the hinterland, served other functions and must therefore be methodically separated from the seaward sanctuaries. Moreover, seaward sanctuaries of other, primarily female deities (Hera, Artemis, Kybele, Hathor, and Astarte) but also of Apollo, the Great Gods, Herakles-Melqart, Baal, and Amun should be studied together within the context of international harbor- or contact-sanctuaries. The detailed study presented in this paper concludes that their rich material sheds light not only on the protagonists of international maritime trade as well as their seaways and modes of operation, but also on the processes of cultural transfer and the institutions introduced to provide solutions for various challenges confronting early societies that grew from the agglomeration of a broad array of foreigners in harbor cities and emporia throughout the Mediterranean.

Thetis and the Nereids as Patrons of Ancient Greek Mariners

Amelia B. Brown, Queensland University

Archaeological evidence shows ancient Greek sailors carried their patron deities by sea as images and ideas, establishing a complex network of seaside cults, sanctuaries, and votives by the Classical era. Aphrodite, Artemis, and Hera are prominent at coastal locations, yet most studies of the Nereids treat them as figures of mythology and literature rather than cult. Yet Herodotus (7.191) credits Magi with the Persian navy at Cape Sepias ("Cuttlefish") as sacrificing to Thetis and the Nereids to end a storm, advised by Ionians that the Cape was sacred to Thetis, as she was carried off by Peleus there. Magnesian mariners probably first named the Cape after its resemblance to a cuttlefish viewed from the sea, but it was Ionian sailors with the Persian fleet who advised the Magi, and made the connection between myth, place, and ritual. While not every literary toponym can be connected with real cult topography, Classical worship of Thetis, the Nereids and Artemis by

mariners does help explain commonalities at sanctuaries in coastal Thessaly and Euboea, to the east and up into the Black Sea. Sea routes, epigraphy, and common coastal cults link Thessaly to Skyros, Lemnos, the Hieron at the mouth of the Black Sea, and even the far northern island of Leuke, granted to mariners by Thetis to ensure a safe haven there (Philostratus Heroicus). Devotion to her accompanied her son Achilles at ports around the Black Sea. Archaeology and epigraphy thus provide another perspective on the textual tradition, and help explain common place-names, sanctuaries and cult practices related to the Nereids.

Island Pilgrimage: Aphrodite, Apollo, and Sacred Travel in Western Cyprus

Joan C. Connley, New York University

The Panhellenic sanctuary of Aphrodite at Palaepaphos drew pilgrims from across the Mediterranean from the Bronze Age through Roman times. The shrine is 23 km, a day's walk, from Nea Paphos and its great port. In contrast, the pilgrimage destination of Yeronisos ("Holy Island") sits 18 km to the north of Paphos. In the first century B.C.E., the islet became a setting for local worship of Apollo. This paper examines the pilgrimage tradition of the Paphos region and contrasts sacred travel to the great Panhellenic sanctuary of Aphrodite with the short sail to the small, remote shrine of Apollo at Yeronisos. It explores larger themes of international and local cult, periphery and center, traditional Cypriot worship and its fusion with Ptolemaic Egyptian cult interests. We discuss the rich archaeological assemblage evidence of those who traveled out to worship on "Sacred Island": (e.g., Ptolemaic *ostraka*; limestone stamp seal amulets showing both indigenous Cypriot and Ptolemaic Egyptian motifs; a circular platform that appears to be a dance floor; *pinakes*). In the sixth century C.E., three Christian basilicas were erected on the mainland just opposite Yeronisos at Cape Drepanum. Known today as Agios Georgios tis Peyias, the place name suggests St. George was sacred here from at least the Justinianic period on. Recent excavations at the small harbor of Maniki that serviced this site reveal vast dumps of Roman amphorae at shoreline. These "Gaza jars" (fourth–sixth centuries C.E.) and quantities of Palestinian "bag-shaped" amphorae (fifth–sixth centuries C.E.) attest to pilgrimage movement between Agios Georgios and the famous monastic centers of south Palestine during late Roman/Early Byzantine times. Thus, across the centuries, Yeronisos and Cape Drepanum remained an important destination for sacred travel, just as the process of crossing the water remained a dynamic act of purification in approaching the divine.

Pathways to the Past: Travelling to Cult Places of Abandoned Settlements in the Cyclades in the Late Bronze Age and Early Iron Age; A Case Study of Ayia Irini in Kea

Irene S. Sanches, EPHE – Paris

This presentation explores long-forgotten traces of travel in the Cyclades. Certain cult practices were established and conducted in long-abandoned settlements in the archipelago in the Late Bronze and Early Iron Age. One can infer from the

archaeological evidence that locals as well as long-distance travelers were involved. The settings of these cult sites, seemingly remote from settlements, signified a distance that had to be covered by occasional or regular visitors. The island of Kea is an inspiring case study. The Temple at Ayia Irini remained a cult site after the settlement stopped serving a residential function. Some still partly unexplored sites on the island have yielded traces of human activity from the twelfth century B.C.E. to the Late Geometric Period. Combining a wide range of evidence, including shifting settlement patterns and navigation routes, I retrace a dense network of ancient footpaths including that of *kalderimi*, the modern road network. With the help of geological and geomorphological maps, I draw one of the Late Bronze and Early Iron Age routes in Kea. I also estimate the distance and time needed to travel from potential sites to Ayia Irini and back. Long distance travelers may also have participated in the rites performed at the abandoned settlement—a seaside location and one of the island’s safest natural harbors. Finally, I show that measuring the distances traveled by worshipers offers insight into how communities and individuals viewed the abandoned site and why shifts in cult practices were recorded. In sum, my paper examines how travel distances were perceived by ancient communities in Kea and within the Cycladic context as a whole.

Sacred Tourism in Egyptian Thebes: The Vocal Miracle of Memnon

Patricia R. Rosenmeyer, University of North Carolina, Chapel Hill

In 130 C.E., Hadrian and Sabina sailed up the Nile to visit the Memnon colossus in Egyptian Thebes. A century earlier, an earthquake had damaged the monolith: its head fell off and the base began to emit a high-pitched noise at dawn. Scholars now think the sound originated from the cracked base expanding at sunrise, but in Hadrian’s time, the statue was honored as the Homeric hero Memnon, lamenting his fate each morning to his mother, Eos. Hearing Memnon’s voice was a mark of divine favor, and visitors from diverse backgrounds (e.g., emperors, soldiers, poets) traveled to this desert site to experience the vocal miracle, leaving behind elaborate *proskynemata* on the statue’s surface.

A total of 107 inscriptions (Greek and Latin, prose and verse) exist in situ, spanning two centuries: the earliest documented visitor was Strabo in 24 B.C.E.; the latest inscription dates to 205 C.E. Most express religious awe mixed with a kind of “worship” of Homer and the Greek past; in addition, they reveal names (including four women), dates, occupations, details of the journey (overland or by boat) and even a kind of “postcard mentality” (“wish you were here!”).

The Memnon inscriptions offer a fascinating glimpse into the expectations and experiences of visitors engaged in sacred tourism in Egypt during the first two centuries C.E. Some inscribers went on to leave their names at neighboring sanctuaries; but unlike other sacred sites, the cult of Memnon was based on aural, not visual, evidence. This paper highlights those inscriptions that clearly describe both travel to and behavior at the sacred site, emphasizing the sonic and ephemeral nature of the Memnon statue’s “epiphany.”

The Maritime Belief System in the Adriatic during the Roman Era (Third Century B.C.E. – Second Century C.E.)

Federico Ugolini, Torino University

During the Roman era, Adriatic port cities hosted a complex web of sanctuaries and coastal shrines, the remains of which offer unique evidence of religious practices involving sailors, seafaring, and maritime trade. Although some scholarship has looked at isolated examples of religious practices at such sights (Alfieri 1938; Brusin 1938; Maioli 1980; Bertacchi 1990), little attention has been paid to the network of maritime sanctuaries in the Adriatic, even though this large sea lay at the heart of the Roman Empire. This paper is the first to examine the maritime sanctuaries of Roman Adriatic centers (e.g., Aquileia, Ancona, Brindisi, Iader, Salona). Drawing on literary, geographic, and archaeological sources, it traces the development, operation, and relevance of the maritime belief system in the Adriatic. The first part focuses on the archaeological evidence of travel and its relation to religious, devotional, and ceremonial activities, as well as on social and commercial routes and connectivity. The second part considers the historical background of the aforementioned selected sites, examining their construction, scale and layout, and assessing their settings. Topographic and excavation data are combined to determine the characteristic features of these sanctuaries. Likewise examined are the arrangements of the sanctuaries' facilities within their urban contexts as well as the relationship between them and travel to port and city as revealed in inscriptions, ceramics, itineraries, and sanctuaries, as well as social and commercial interactions between sanctuaries and ports. The paper then gauges the maritime belief system's role as a vital interface between the Adriatic and the Roman world. In doing so, it draws conclusions on the relevance of the maritime belief system in fostering travel and movement in the Adriatic region in the Roman era.