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Logistics in Greek Sanctuaries: Exploring the Human Experience of Visiting the Gods

Edited by Judith M. Barringer, Gunnel Ekroth, and David Scahill. *Monumenta Graeca et Romana*, New Directions in Mediterranean Archaeology 30. Leiden: Brill 2025. Pp. 263. ISBN 9789004720893 (hardcover) €199.47.

REVIEWED BY RAFAŁ MATUSZEWSKI

A sanctuary is a place of worship, of communication with the divine, of reflection removed from the ordinary. Or so we like to think. It is usually imagined as a space set apart from daily constraint (as suggested by the Greek term *temenos*, derived from *temnein*, “to cut off”), where ritual structures the interaction with the divine, and architecture, as well as the mass of dedications gathered there, directs attention toward the gods. And yet, visiting the gods has always required bodies as well as beliefs. One must arrive, wait, endure heat or cold, bear fatigue, eat, drink, sleep, and, sooner or later, find relief. Sanctuaries, especially Panhellenic ones, drew crowds. They gathered people with habits and needs, and they required personnel, sometimes living on the premises or nearby, to manage the sacred site but also to tend to the necessities of those who visited it. Sacred precincts were often full of people—and, by extension, noise, smells, litter, and pollution. But they were also crowded with things commissioned, bought, or made by worshipers and left in the sacred precincts to honor the gods and to display and remind other visitors of individual devotion. A sanctuary was not an abstract or static religious space but rather a lived, physical place that needed to be maintained, repaired, and cared for.

Yet Greek sanctuaries, as the editors of the volume under review remind us in their introduction, have usually been treated in scholarship as symbolic sacred spaces, defined by ritual and architecture. *Logistics in Greek Sanctuaries* proposes a different vantage point by asking how Greek cult places actually functioned in practice, thereby shedding light on the perhaps mundane but utterly fundamental pragmatic concerns: how were the sites organized and administered, crowds accommodated and their actions controlled, resources (such as food, money, and water) supplied and distributed, worshipers’ behavior regulated, and daily needs of visitors, cult personnel, or sacrificial animals met? What kinds of infrastructure were required to sustain sanctuaries as places

of periodic mass pilgrimage, recurrent markets, athletic competitions, and refuge, along with the continuous cult activity. By foregrounding these questions, the editors and contributors redirect attention from the symbolic meaning of sacred space toward the everyday practices, material arrangements, and lived experiences. The volume includes 15 chapters, preceded by an introduction by the editors and complemented by three helpful indices (an index of inscriptions, an *index locorum*, and a general index).

The opening four chapters focus on the governance of sacred space. Laura Gawlinski’s contribution offers insights into the lifecycle of sanctuaries. Noting that work, the seasons, the environment, and personal circumstances and needs affected visitation, she asks how fluctuations in visitor traffic altered the management of Greek sanctuaries, particularly whether they were used and administered differently during major festivals than on ordinary days. Jenny Wallensten reconstructs the visitor’s experience from the point of arrival, tracing their movement through the sacred precinct and the ways in which access to the *temenos*, the temple, or the cella might have been controlled. She shows that entry was rarely tightly restricted, that even access to the temple interior and the cult statue was fairly common, and that it could be mediated by personnel, architectural features, or symbolic substitutes, such as sculptures of priestesses placed at the temple’s entrance. Jan-Mathieu Carbon and Edward Harris provide a wide-ranging exploration of how order was maintained in sanctuaries, from exclusion rules (e.g., of foreigners, women, ritually polluted persons) and the control of worshipers’ conduct to the regulation of offerings and the accountability of religious personnel. They argue that “policing” sanctuaries and rule enforcement relied on a combination of active intervention by officials and passive deterrence through inscribed norms. The concern with management of sanctuaries continues in Christophe Chandezon’s detailed case study analysis

of the Tegean regulations for the festival of Alea Athena, which reveals how civic land in this Arkadian polis was transformed into and used as a temporary *Festwiese* for pilgrims and animals.

Questions pertaining to infrastructure—water use, sanitation, and accommodation—occupy a substantial portion of the book. Patrik Klingborg's chapter deals with water use in Greek sacred spaces and argues, after offering some quantitative estimates for water volumes required, that practical needs such as drinking, cooking, washing, cleaning, and gardening far exceeded ceremonial ones. Water also features prominently in the next chapter, by Monika Trümper, which addresses the often-neglected issue of sanitation, approached through the study of archaeological remains from major extra-urban sanctuaries. Trümper shows that purpose-built facilities appeared late and were preceded by more ad hoc solutions, with bathing facilities more common than latrines. Ekroth's contribution tackles the question of where visitors, personnel, or asylum seekers stayed. She shows that accommodation took many forms, ranging from temporary tents to sacred houses and hotels, often organized near—but beyond—the sacred precinct.

Food and drink form another thematic cluster in the volume. Scahill analyzes dining buildings and temporary structures, furniture, and other provisions to reconstruct how communal meals were organized at Greek sanctuaries. He distinguishes between different architectural types and asks what these imply about participants, timing, and ritual context. Floris van den Eijnde, in turn, examines wine consumption in Greek cult spaces, focusing specifically on the ritualized wine drinking in sanctuaries and on the questions of how, where, and under what conditions symposia were organized within Greek *temene*. The following chapter, by Michael MacKinnon, turns to the “menu” in Greek sanctuaries by analyzing zooarchaeological remains. He explores patterns of animal species selection, butchery practices, and the handling of sacrificial victims to provide broader insights into worshippers' food consumption. In the next chapter, Annalisa Lo Monaco approaches the subject of food from a different angle, discussing its supply, pricing, and regulation, as well as consumer behavior through an analysis of literary, epigraphic, and material evidence. Sacred precincts indeed were at times sites of periodic markets and commerce. In her chapter, Véronique Chankowski reassesses economic activity within sacred space through a close

reading of key inscriptions, including the Samian decree on *kapeloi*, and she demonstrates that Greek sanctuaries, far from excluding trade, not only tolerated it but carefully regulated and accommodated such activities.

The final section of the volume extends this economic perspective to finance, labor, and production. Jeremy McInerney analyzes Delian accounts to reveal the financial dimensions of sanctuary operations and, in doing so, sheds light on sanctuaries as active economic actors rather than merely passive treasuries. Barringer's contribution, in turn, shows sanctuaries as dynamic sites requiring constant care. Drawing on inscriptions and archaeological evidence, she investigates the workforce that maintained sanctuaries and reconstructs patterns of repair and labor organization. The volume closes with Petra Pakkanen's study of animal skins—their handling, regulation, and trade—as both a by-product of sacrifice and a source of revenue, thereby highlighting yet another dimension of Greek sacred spaces: sanctuaries as producers.

Were it not for its serious scholarly character, this book might well have borne the subtitle: “Everything You Always Wanted to Know About the Ins and Outs of Greek Sanctuaries (But Were Afraid to Ask).” Many aspects of the daily life of Greek sanctuaries, to be sure, remain to be explored, and the editors identify some of them in their thoughtful and helpful introduction. Fascinating throughout, this lavishly illustrated and beautifully produced volume offers a wealth of intriguing insights supported by meticulous argumentation. By systematically engaging with the practical realities of sanctuary life, its contributors compellingly demonstrate that attention to mundane practices and phenomena is essential. At the same time, they reveal how limited our current knowledge remains and how much interpretive potential a bottom-up approach, as advanced in this volume, still holds.

In sum, this highly valuable and stimulating volume opens new perspectives on ancient sanctuaries and is, therefore, a must-read for every student of Greek religion and of Greek culture, economy, and society in general.

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