

Sanctuaries and the Hellenistic polis: an architectural approach

Milena Melfi

In 1995 I was a student of Classics at the University of Pisa, just starting the study of Greek Art and Archaeology. When reading for a course on the religious festivals of the Athenians, I got in contact for the first time with the work of John Boardman through a series of essays, contained or discussed in a volume that I still treasure, *L'esperimento della perfezione*¹. These were the famous studies on Herakles, Theseus and the Amazons and on the Parthenon frieze published earlier in different editions and later translated into Italian². They represented for me a real milestone reading and undoubtedly helped me find my way through archaeology. Firstly, because of their methodology: the careful, sophisticated use of all types of evidence (images, buildings, texts) aimed at reconstructing a cultural context; and the empiricism and positivism of the argument, that proceeded from a complete command of the available evidence, always in line with the empirical roots of our discipline. Secondly, because of the intensely *polis*-centred image they offered of temples, treasuries, sanctuaries and sacred places in general. John Boardman's works of the 70s and 80s on the iconography and architectural narratives of the Athenian state demonstrated how sanctuaries and temples in Athens were deeply connected to the life and deeds of the local community; how civic community, contemporary history and religious rituals found their highest expression in sacred architecture and in the sculptural narrative that accompanied it.

The 1977 essay on the interpretation of the Parthenon frieze in relation to the Athenian Marathon-fighters is exemplary in this respect, not only for connecting the architectural narrative with the history of contemporary Athens, but also for ingraining it in the topography of the city, by stressing, for example, the presence of small outcrops of rock in the frieze. This, together with other elements, is taken as a possible indication of the location of the procession in the *dromos* connecting the Athenian agora and acropolis, a perfect setting for the idealized cavalcade. The obvious conclusion being that not only the procession represented in the frieze was Athenian, but it also took place in Athens. Similarly in the 1982 essay on Herakles, Theseus and the Amazons, the images chosen for the decoration of both religious monuments and high quality red-figure vases are viewed as representative of the values and history of the 5th century Athenian community both at home and abroad. Here John Boardman, through images on vases, wall-paintings and relief sculpture, skilfully

¹ La Rocca 1988.

² Boardman 1977 and 1982.

reconstructs a continuous history of Athenian identity—or of how the Athenians wanted to be perceived in the wider contemporary world—that ultimately finds its visual culmination in crucial cultic locations such as the sanctuary of Apollo at Delphi and the Athenian Acropolis.

These were the earliest works that used nearly exclusively archaeology and art to demonstrate the tight connection between religion and community in the Classical period, and that sanctuaries were actually the heightened mirror of the polis and its history. It was only later in the 80s and in the 90s that the theoretical aspects of the connection between polis and sanctuaries were explored, mostly in the field of ancient history, and applied to contexts other than Athens. The elaboration of the model by Francois De Polignac in his famous 1984 book, *La naissance de la cité grecque*, introduced the notion that sanctuaries had to be considered as born with the polis and from their very beginning physically woven into the fabric of the settlement they belonged to. Their placing in the landscape marked the territorial boundaries of the Archaic –and later Classical—polis and often matched the actual social divisions of the citizen body, ultimately reflecting mechanisms of civic participation³. A parallel argument developed by Christiane Sourvinou-Inwood in the field of Greek religious studies in the early 90s enforced the embeddedness of religion in the life of the polis (the model of ‘polis religion’) and extended the influence of the community of citizens well beyond the architectural and topographical aspects stressed by De Polignac. According to this model—heavily based on evidence from Classical Athens—the polis as an institution regulated, organised, and controlled most religious activities. Such control was maintained through the organisation of cults and festivals, the appointment of religious officers and the centrally regulated participation in regional and Panhellenic religious networks⁴. The conclusions drawn by these historians and many others after were ultimately the same that had been offered years before and in a more empirical way by John Boardman in his studies on Athenian art and culture, where the people, cults and institutions of the prime polis of Greece were made to live in the images adorning and furnishing temples and rituals.

In recent years the debate on the connection between the polis and its cultic buildings, so clearly illustrated by examples such as Boardman’s study of the Parthenon frieze, has taken many different and often controversial forms, especially when leaving the familiar and well

³ De Polignac 1984. English translation: De Polignac 1995.

⁴ Sourvinou-Inwood 1990 and 2000.

investigated field of Classical Athens⁵. The paradigmatic relation between civic communities and religion has been put into question when tested against periods and regions that are said to escape traditional developments, such as the Hellenistic period—often understood as characterised by the growing importance of individual beliefs and by the decline the traditional values of the polis, when communities appear to be organised in alternative ways such as in tribes, leagues or federations⁶. On the other hand, such criticisms need to be weighed today against a recent reappraisal of the vitality of the polis institutions well beyond the fourth century BC. Plenty of recent works privilege, in fact, the perspective that the Greek polis continued to exist as a self-governing entity far into the Hellenistic and Roman periods, and have prompted a revision of the *communis opinio* on Hellenistic religion as pre-eminently characterised by the growing importance of individual beliefs and by the loosening of the ties between citizens and institutions⁷. Such studies have confirmed the validity of a civic perspective in the study of Hellenistic religion by showing that many poleis were the main religious agents in the life of Greek sanctuaries well into the first century AD. Poleis endorsed the promotion/adoption/introduction of certain cults, approved the construction of religious buildings, commissioned the making of cult statues, and prescribed the assignment of priesthoods⁸.

Therefore, as an archaeologist whose main research focus lies in post-classical sanctuaries, I would like to explore in this paper whether in the Hellenistic period the architecture and architectural narratives found in temples and cultic buildings confirm the uninterrupted relation between the polis and its cult places as recently highlighted by the historians, mostly on the basis of documentary sources.

One of the best case-studies is the sanctuary of Asklepios at Messene, in the Peloponnese (Fig. 1). The Asklepieion, with its complex statuary groups, is in fact a grandiose reconstruction of the history and rituals of the local community, through architecture and

⁵ For a discussion of this issue see Melfi 2016.

⁶ A summary on personal orientation of Hellenistic religion following the ‘decline of the *polis*’ in Deshours 2011: 23-24. Most recently on the need of taking into account ‘personal issues of belief and alternative worshipping communities’: Kindt 2009: 23-25 and Kindt 2012: 27-30.

⁷ On the vitality of the Hellenistic poleis: Will 1979; Gauthier 1985; Ma 2008. On the long life of the polis as a self-governing institution, see the recent work of by the scholars of the Copenhagen polis centre: Hansen and Nielsen 2004: 16-22; Hansen 2006: 48-50.

⁸ For example, Nadine Deshours, starting from a well-defined body of epigraphic evidence, proposes a complete rejection of the idea of decline of civic religion in the late Hellenistic period, in favour of a general reprisal of traditional cult places and rituals. Numerous inscriptions show that throughout the Hellenistic period, and in particular between the years 167 and 31 BC, ‘l’été indien de la religion civique’, reconstructions and restorations of buildings and religious practices were promoted by civic bodies in order to keep alive the most traditional rituals, and ultimately the religious identity of the polis (Deshours 2011).

sculptural narratives. This extraordinary complex, excavated first by Anastasios Orlandos, and up to the present days by Petros Themelis, consists of a large sacred precinct, surrounded by a double portico in the Corinthian order, with several rooms for cult and public functions at the back of its east, west and north wings, and a large peripteral doric temple in the centre⁹. According to Pausanias, the site was famous in antiquity because it hosted several statues of gods and heroes made by the famous sculptor Damophon of Messene¹⁰. The archaeological discoveries of the last 20 years confirmed the attribution of a number of statue bases to Damophon and his family, while the unusual shape of the western and part of the northern wing of the complex, consisting of a number of shrines with wide openings and low walls, in some cases incorporating statue bases, suggested that these buildings were purposefully made to accommodate sculptures and sculptural groups. In the view of Petros Themelis, that I today share together with most scholars, the construction of the complex is indissolubly linked to the life and work of Damophon and his family, that is to say the buildings were conceived from the very beginning as a monumental backdrop for his statues.

The complex is certainly Hellenistic and must have been constructed within the first half of the 2nd century BC, judging from the analysis of the buildings and the data from excavations, although its precise dating remains as controversial as that of the activity of the Messenian sculptor and his workshop¹¹. Whether the ideological background of this extraordinary project is to be found in the assertion of a new Messenian identity within or outside of the Achaean League, depending on the precise decade of its construction and/or on the allegiance of Damophon to the Achaean cause, it is evident that its spaces, buildings and statues conjure-up a majestic picture of the history of the city state. This focuses on a new divine figure, that of Asklepios, an Achaean god, not traditionally linked with Messene, if not by virtue of his sons worshipped in the region as heroes¹². Asklepios and his sons, in Hellenistic Messene, are made Messenian, and inserted in the genealogy of the mythical kings of Messenia through a Messenian-born mother, Arsinoe, probably following a version of the

⁹ For the history of excavations see the most recent summary in Ito 2013, pp. 1-2 and nos. 4-5. Most excavations reports were published by both excavators in the *Praktika tes en Athenais Archaologikes Etereias*.

¹⁰ Pausanias 4.31.10.

¹¹ Themelis dates it around 190 BC and Luraghi 2008 to 170-160 BC, both on the basis of historical sources; Sioumpara 2011, Müth 2007 and Ito et al. 2013 prefer the first half of the 2nd century BC, after the architectural study of the main buildings and the associated stratigraphical finds.

¹² Machaon was buried in Gerenia, where his cult was established (Paus. III, 26,9); Machaon, Gorgasos and Nikomachos were worshipped in Pharai (Paus. 4. 3.10).

myth created at the time of the foundation of the Messenian state in the 4th century BC¹³. According to Pausanias, in fact, the Messenians ‘say that the sons of Asklepios who went to Troy were Messenians, Asklepios being the son of Arsinoe, daughter of Leukippos, not the son of (Epidaurian) Koronis’¹⁴.

The architecture of the Asklepieion reflects the central position given to Asklepios in Messenian history. The sanctuary of Asklepios is approached, from the agora, in the North, passing by the fountain Arsinoe, dedicated to the Messenian mother of Asklepios, and the Doric temple of Messene, mythical founder of the city. Here, according to Pausanias, the very myth of the Messenian descent of Asklepios was visually explained on the back wall by ‘paintings of the kings of Messene (...) There is Leucippus brother of Aphareus, Hilaeira and Phoebe, and with them Arsinoe. Asclepius too is represented, being according to the Messenian account a son of Arsinoe, also Machaon and Podaleirius, as they also took part in the affair at Troy’¹⁵.

The Doric temple and altar of Asklepios appear absolutely central within the sacred complex because of their precisely axial and frontal position, in line with the main propylon and the surrounding stoai¹⁶. The austere Doric order of temple and altar, perfectly suited for the worship of a god defined as Achaean from the Homeric epic onwards, was visually connected with the surrounding monumental stoai in the Corinthian order through the use of the identical ornamented sima with acanthus and lion-head spouts. It is clear today that temple, altar, stoai and all attached buildings were constructed at the same time on the same artificial purposely-built platform and responded to one another in the proportions and in the adoption of identical building techniques and architectural ornamentation¹⁷. This confirms that temple, characterised by an extraordinary ‘all-side axial symmetry’, and altar were from the very beginning planned as the centrepieces of the complex¹⁸. It is possible that the frieze of the stoai, consisting in alternating bukranioi and garlands, clearly referring to a ritual/sacrificial function, complemented the architectural symmetry in focusing the viewer’s attention on the temple/altar complex.

¹³ Torelli 1998, p. 475; Melfi 2007, 247. Such date is also supported by the chronology of the establishment of a healing cult (possibly in honour of Asklepios) in the area later occupied by the Hellenistic complex (Themelis 2000: 22-24).

¹⁴Paus. 4.3.2

¹⁵ Paus. 4.31.11-12

¹⁶ On the temple, most recently: Sioumpara 2011.

¹⁷ Ito et al. 2013: 93-96.

¹⁸ Sioumpara 2011: 216-218; Ito et al. 2013: 73-85. ‘All-side axial symmetry’: where the cella is absolutely symmetrical within the peristasis, pronaos and opisthodomos have exactly the same depth, and the front and back façades of the cella are identical (Sioumpara 2015: 218 and 2011: 245-253).

According to Pausanias' description: "The most numerous statues and the most worth seeing are to be found in the sanctuary of Asclepius. For besides statues of the god and his sons, and besides statues of Apollo, the Muses and Heracles, the city of Thebes is represented and Epaminondas the son of Cleommis, Fortune, and Artemis Bringer of Light. The stone statues are the work of Damophon"¹⁹. Various interpretations have been offered by different scholars on the arrangement of the statues and statue groups seen by Pausanias in the sanctuary, but none of them can be proved²⁰. It is almost certain that the statues of Asklepios and his sons were displayed inside the temple of the god, although the precise placement of the sculptural fragments so far identified has not yet been convincingly reconstructed²¹. What is evident is nevertheless the emphasis given, in the very centre of the sanctuary, to Asklepios and his male descendants, Machaon and Podaleirios, rather than the most commonly represented daughter Hygieia. These were both known as warriors and physicians among the Achaeans in the Trojan wars, and the appropriation of their Homeric past by the Messenians would no doubt have further secured their reputation²².

Most of the statues mentioned by Pausanias must have been placed in the widely opened, proportionally consistent and low walled six *oikoi* surrounding the complex to the west. Whatever the exact position of the statues was, the similarities in size, rhythm and decoration of the six *oikoi*, together with their symmetry and visual accessibility from the courtyard, suggests a sort of museum display²³. Here, in an exceptional fusion of sculpture and architecture, Asklepios and his family were visually encased in the mythical and actual history of Messene. For example, Apollo, father of Asklepios, was represented possibly in a group with the Muses, either in *oikos* E—where the presence of a semi-circular base suggested the arrangement of a compatible group—or in *oikos* H—where a head identified as that of Apollo was found²⁴. The group was closely related to a statue of Herakles, similarly related to the Messenian genealogy as being the great-great-grandfather of the Messenian king Kresphontes, who ruled after the Trojan wars. Next to them or in close relation, according to some in *oikos* M or N²⁵, were the statues of Epaminondas and Thebes, the 4th century founder of Messene and his motherland, a clear reference to the most recent history

¹⁹ Pausanias 4.31.10

²⁰ For a recent summary with updated bibliography see Ito et al. 2013: 4-8.

²¹ According to Sioumpara 2011: 224, not enough is left of the floor slabs to understand where the statue-base was placed, but it was certainly not attached to the back wall.

²² II. II. 729-33; Diod. IV, 71

²³ On the architecture of the *oikoi*: Chlepa 2001: 76-89.

²⁴ Melfi 2007: 278-279.

²⁵ Melfi 2007: 276.

of the city-state. These constituted a fitting counterpart to the honours paid in the agora to the other founding figure of the Messenian community, the mythical heroine Messene, whose statue in marble and gold, possibly placed in her very temple, is known from both Pausanias' description and from a statue base bearing a dedication by the sons of Damophon found in the excavations²⁶. Finally, the statue of Tyche, mentioned by Pausanias after that of Epaminondas would have provided a further key to reading the complex within a historical discourse: Tyche as the Tyche of Messene, personification of the city-state, or as the fate, the elemental force by which the events of history come about, very similar to that described by the contemporary historian Polybius in his works²⁷.

The only *oikos* securely identified in its function and furnishings, is *oikos* K dedicated to the cult of Artemis Orthia, judging from the many inscriptions found within. The cult is one of the oldest of the Messenian state, probably dates back to the period of Laconian control of the region and was here transferred from an older shrine in use until shortly after the construction of the Asklepieion²⁸. Here Damophon's *agalma* of Artemis Phosphoros, Bringer of Light, mentioned by Pausanias must have been placed on the large central base, built against the back wall of the room, enclosed by two rows of Ionic columns, and clearly visible from the shallow entrance²⁹. Fragments of a colossal female head and a hand holding a torch found in the excavations were attributed to the statue³⁰. This was the visual arriving point of a complex ritual, that took place in the outdoor space in front of the shrine, right next to the cult of Asklepios. The altar for Artemis is, in fact, located in the courtyard of the Asklepieion on the axis of the cult statue of the goddess and is flanked right and left by donaries and dedications. Among these were the statues and statue bases of priestesses and initiated of the cult of Artemis—most of which were later arranged in two semicircles inside the shrine—belonging to the most notable Messenian families of the 2nd cent. BC to 3rd cent. AD. The dedications and the statues visualised an ancient ritual where Messenian girls participated in a night procession carrying torches, and paraded the old *xoanon* of the goddess, with reference to Archaic Sparta³¹. The inscriptions on the statue bases suggest a link between cult and civic participation, where local families were clearly required to contribute to the celebration of

²⁶ Paus. 4.31.11; *IG* v.1 1443 and *SEG* 41.352A–B.

²⁷ As suggested by Torelli 1998: 481. To the statue of Tyche, Themelis attributes some fragments of foot, drapery and the torso of an infant (Themelis 1996: 164–165)

²⁸ Themelis 1994.

²⁹ Chlepa 2001, 15–69.

³⁰ Themelis 1996, 165–166.

³¹ On the possible reconstruction of the ritual on the basis of the inscriptions and sculptural remains, see Themelis 1994.

the cult by providing either priestesses or young female initiates and were in turn honoured by the civic community with statues and dedications³².

In this extraordinary complex of architecture and sculpture the origins of Asklepios and his cult were retraced and evoked from his mythical birth from Apollo and Arsinoe, to his participation in the Trojan war with his physician sons, and finally his incorporation in Messenian royalty. Such a reconstruction was at the same time placed in the larger historical frame of contemporary Messenia and connected to a traditional religious network. On the one hand it was anchored to main historical figures and political developments, such as Epaminondas' foundation and the role of Thebe, in order to give a sense of real and uninterrupted history from the mythical past to the tangible present; on the other hand it preserved the oldest religious traditions by making reference to the many heroic cults for the children of Asklepios sparse in the region and to the important role of the cult of Artemis Orthia. The latter, in particular, by offering a high degree of civic participation, contributed a very local dimension, where votive and honorary inscriptions highlighted the action of local notables. With their one-directional reference to Messenian civic and cultural sphere only, the buildings and sculptures of the Asklepieion of Messene can therefore be considered as the Hellenistic counterpart of the representation of the civic body, its history and traditions found in the architectural sculpture of Classical temples. At Messene, this innovative architectural project de-structures the traditional narratives based on relief and pedimental sculpture, by providing single, freestanding units, in the form of the *oikoi*, each telling a different and complementary story and framing the main central building. The result is that the religious space becomes a sort of museum of local history that represents and glorifies the Messenian community, while offering them a way of preserving their identity and local history at times of disruption and changes.

Other two examples that I find enlightening to illustrate how the architecture of Hellenistic sanctuaries reflects the history and political order of the city they belong to are those of the sanctuaries of Rhodes at Lindos and Kamiros. In both these cases, it is the organisation of spaces and buildings alone, without the support of sculptural programmes, that enforces the connection between sanctuary and polis.

³² See for example the inscription in honour of young Mego, whose parents had both served as priest and priestess of the god (*SEG* 23.220), or the many dedications of the Roman period offered in honour of well-serving priestesses by the civic body in the form of the *Gerousia* of (Artemis) Oupesia.

In Lindos, the sanctuary of the traditional patron goddess Athana had a long history, but in 392/1 BC, the temple was destroyed by a fire together with most of its dedications. It was only rebuilt from around the 290s BC, after the siege by Demetrius, thanks to private donors and a large civic subscription of around 260 individuals. Members of the local elite took mostly upon themselves the expenses of rebuilding the sanctuary and of replacing its furnishings³³. The architectural shape taken by the sanctuary, after an innovative project, probably completed in successive stages, was new and impressive. It occupied the whole acropolis of Lindos, inverted the traditional, relatively indirect, access to the Archaic temple and provided a well-defined route where the architecture seems to have offered different levels of access and participation to the citizen body. The sacred space was articulated in three terraces with a clear central ascending axis leading to the highest and most sacred building of the complex, the temple of Athana—located in the very place of the Archaic cult place (Fig. 2).

The lowest level was entirely occupied by a large two-winged Doric stoa with *paraskenia*, constituting the first access point to the sacred complex by incorporating the monumental staircase leading up to the acropolis. The monumental, accessible architecture of this stoa, with free-standing colonnade and no attached rooms, and its commanding position are indicative of religious processions, communal rituals and celebrations open to the whole population of the island. Here a plethora of statue dedications of members of the local elite set up by Lindian magistrates, officials and colleges of magistrates would have offered visitors and worshippers a clear idea of the civic community that owned the place as much as a guarantee of continuity of Lindian agency and identity in the sanctuary³⁴.

On the contrary, the divisive architectural layout of the upper stoa limited and regulated the access to the highest and most sacred part of the sanctuary. This second, much smaller, stoa, although architecturally similar to the lower one in the use of Doric order and *paraskenia*, was clearly accessible to a much-reduced number of visitors. It constituted the monumental entrance, through a series of relatively narrow doors and indirect passages, to an enclosed courtyard with the temple and its altar, on one side, and a series of rooms on the other side. These rooms have been interpreted by Enzo Lippolis as *hestiatoria* for ritual banqueting, on the basis of one inscription from the area relating to the maintenance of an *andron* or dining room³⁵. Here the sacred banquets decreed by the community for benefactors and members of

³³The chronological and architectural reconstruction here offered is mostly based on Lippolis 1989.

³⁴Lippolis 1989: 155-156. Of the same opinion Ma 2013: 223.

³⁵Blinkenberg 1941, inscription no.290.

the elite, who were awarded the honour ‘dining in the *hierothyteion*’—probably the altar enclosure of the goddess where the sacrifice took place—were likely held³⁶. The importance of such practice is highlighted by the fact that the first large subscription ever associated with an intervention in the sanctuary after the fire relates to the purchase of drinking vessels³⁷. The incorporation of dining rooms in the most exclusive and controlled part of the sanctuary reflected the participation of only certain parts of the citizen body in certain rituals. These were the *herothytai* – religious officers belonging to the local elite—and those who received from them the privilege of banqueting close to the goddess. Ultimately the architecture of the Hellenistic sanctuary of Athana at Lindos was conceived with the Hellenistic civic community in mind, in particular the Rhodian community, where a strict *cursus honorum* regulated magistracies and priesthoods, and public offices were exclusively in the hands of a few local wealthy families³⁸. The incorporation of the mechanisms of participation of the civic body in the architecture of the sanctuary through varying degrees of access, has been aptly compared by Lippolis with Hellenistic palatial architecture. In Lippolis’ view, the succession of antechambers and peristyle courts, known from the *basileia* of Alexandria, Pella and Ai-Kanhom, would ultimately regulate access to the rooms directly used by the king, in a relation similar to that of the two Lindian stoai with the temple of the goddess³⁹.

Even clearer is the example of the cult places of the city of Kamiros, in the same island of Rhodes, well studied by Luigi Calio⁴⁰. Here the reconstruction of the city after the earthquake of 228 BC triggered the promotion of the main civic sanctuaries where major local families engaged in benefactions and dedications. The sanctuary of the patron gods of the city, Athana and Zeus Polieus, was on the top of the hill of Kamiros, and visually dominated the whole settlement (Fig. 3). It was directly accessed through a main street cutting across the city, tortuous but clearly defined. This route seems to mark the ascension to the culminating point of the whole urban topography, the highest and probably the most sacred. The sanctuary was built on three terraces and occupied the whole acropolis. The lowest terrace hosted a single altar placed at the end of the main street leading up to the acropolis; the middle one consisted in a grandiose Doric *stoa* more than two hundred metres

³⁶ Lippolis 1989: 135-137. Evidence of such meals in *IG* xii.1. 846; 847; 848; 849; 853.

³⁷ This is the subscription of 260 private individuals mentioned above (Blinkenberg 1941, inscription no. 51)

³⁸ The synthesis of Morricone’s and Pugliese Carratelli’s studies is to be found in Lippolis 1989: 118-123.

³⁹ Lippolis 1989: 148-152. Although, I would not rule out an inverse relation, where the architecture devised by the Hellenistic elite for their self-representation in civic and religious complexes rather influenced that of the residences of the kings.

⁴⁰ Most of the following is based on Calio 2016.

long, built on a five-meters high terracing wall in ashlar masonry, and intersected by a monumental staircase on an axis with the temple; finally, on the upper terrace was the temple, the ultimate focus of the ascending route crossing the city.

Behind the two wings of the Doric stoa, on both sides of the monumental staircase, there were complex suites of rooms, at least seven on each side, consisting of a central larger room, directly accessible from the colonnade, and two smaller ones, only accessible from the former through off-side entrances. On the basis of the epigraphical evidence, Luigi Calìò has been able to interpret these suites of rooms as *hestiatoria* where both the meetings of the *mastroi* (local magistrates who represented territorial or demographic units of the city) and official banquets of the *polis*, possibly during the festivals of Athana, took place. The architectural shape of the suites of rooms also suggests that each of them could have been reserved for members of the same territorial or political unit, according to the specifics of the meeting, and could have accommodated up to nine *klinai*⁴¹. Such large numbers of *hestiatoria*—especially if compared to Lindos—implies a greater participation in the sacred functions of the sanctuary. The involvement of larger parts of the *demos*, of the population, in the sanctuary, seems also to be confirmed by a subscription from the first half of the second century BC that raised funds for public banquets celebrated during the local Panathenaic festivals⁴². The sanctuary was therefore made to be used as a place of social participation for different sectors of the civic community, all of which would have found a place in the architectural units that composed the sanctuary. It was no coincidence that such a communal and highly political space was placed in the most topographically prominent site of the city, widely accessible from city and territory, and firmly under the protection of the patron gods of all Rhodian communities.

The architecture and the architectural narratives found at Messene and Rhodes are only a few among the many examples that confirm the uninterrupted relation between the polis and its cult places, throughout the Hellenistic period. This situation was not different from the eminent paradigm of Classical Athens where civic community and rituals found their highest expression in the architectural form of sacred buildings and their decoration.

Does this mean that no change or break with tradition can be seen in hundreds of years of history, and successive political changes? Certainly not. If the relation between the polis and

⁴¹ Calìò 2011 and 2011a: 351-352.

⁴² Segre and Pugliese Carratelli 1951, inscription no. 159.

its sanctuaries did not change, the means and idioms used to maintain this relation underwent profound changes. These changes were born out of the tension between the conservatism of the religious establishment and the rapid development of Hellenistic society. They involved the traditional relationship between community and gods, albeit through the insertion of untraditional elements—private benefactors, kings and Romans—and applied not only to architecture and sculpture, but also to ritual and votive-giving practices. New architectural forms and relations were experimented with, and introduced new requirements and forms of representation. New systems of sculptural narratives were applied to untraditional complexes. A new relation with landscape, territory and community was sought. The concept of the citizen body also changed, to give way to new agents operating on behalf of the community: the local notables, who provided most financial means for the building, maintaining and functioning of sanctuaries and became, as suggested by Lafond, “the fundamental unit of polis religion”⁴³.

The paradox lies in the fact that all these new elements had the final aim of keeping the traditional relation between communities and sanctuaries unchanged: “Bisogna cambiare tutto per non cambiare niente (everything must change if everything is to stay as it is)” as Tomasi di Lampedusa in his novel, 'The Leopard', has Tancredi tell his uncle, Prince of Salina, regarding the annexation of Sicily to the newly formed Italian Kingdom. Since the paradox by definition defies theories and a priori mental constructions, us archaeologists, in order to understand these endless historical cycles, are left to return to the evidence, to the empirical roots of our discipline, to the humble work collecting materials, sites, images, texts, and assembling them together to reconstruct the larger picture, the way of working and thinking that John Boardman has taught us.

⁴³ Lafonde 2016: 26.

Bibliography

- Birtacha, P. 2008, Μεσσήνη. Τό ωδείο καί τό ανατολικό πρόπυλο τού Ασκληπιείου. Athens.**
- Boardman J. 1977. The Parthenon frieze—Another view. In U. Höckmann and A. Krug (eds.), *Festschrift für Frank Brommer*; 39-49. Mainz/Rhein: Von Zabern**
- Blinkenberg, C. 1941. *Lindos. Fouilles de l'Acropole 1902-1914*. Vol. 2, Inscriptions. Berlin: W. de Gruyter.
- Boardman, J. 1982. Herakles, Theseus and the Amazons, in D.C. Kurtz and Sparkes, B. (eds) *The Eye of Greece: studies in the Art of Athens*: 1-28. Cambridge: CUP.**
- Caliò, L. 2016. Traditionalism in cult practice in Hellenistic and Roman Kamiros in O. Bobou and M. Melfi (eds.) *Hellenistic Sanctuaries. Between Greece and Rome*: 63-81. Oxford: OUP.
- Caliò, L. 2011. Il pasto collettivo nei santuari dell'Egeo meridionale: struttura e forme di partecipazione, in *Thiasos*, <http://www.thiasos.eu/wp-content/uploads/2012/03/04-Cali%C3%B2-Pasto-collettivo.pdf> : 38-40.
- Caliò, L. 2011a. The agora of Kamiros. A hypothesis. In A. Giannikouri (ed.), *The agora in the Mediterranean from Homeric to Roman times*: 343–55. Athens: Archaeological Institute for Aegean Studies.
- Chlepa, E.A. 2001. *Μεσσήνη. Τό Αρτεμίσιο καί οί οίκοι τής δυτικής περύγας τού Ασκληπιείου* Athens: The Archaeological Society.
- Deshours, N. 2011. *L'éte indien de la religion civique*. Bordeaux: De Boccard
- Gauthier, P. (1985), *Les cités grecques et leurs bienfaiteurs : (IVe-Ier siècle av. J.-C.). Contribution à l'histoire des institutions*. Paris: BCH Suppl. 12.
- Hansen, M.H. (2006), *Polis. An introduction to the Greek city-state*. Oxford: OUP.
- Hansen M.H. and T.H. Nielsen (2004), *An Inventory of Archaic and Classical Poleis*. Oxford: OUP.
- Ito, J. and Hayashida, Y. and Yoshitake, R. 2013. *Architectural Study of the Stoas of the Asklepieion at Ancient Messene*. Fukuoka : Kyūshū University Press.
- Kindt, J. 2009. Polis religion- A Critical Appreciation, *Kernos* 22: 9-34.
- Kindt, J. 2012. *Rethinking Greek Religion*. Cambridge: CUP.
- Lafond, Y. 2016. Euergetism and religion in the cities in the Peloponnese (first century BC to first century AD). In O. Bobou and M. Melfi (eds.) *Hellenistic Sanctuaries. Between Greece and Rome*:18-26. Oxford: OUP.**

- La Rocca E. (ed.) 1988. *L' esperimento della perfezione. Arte e società nell'Atene di Pericle.* Milan: Electa.
- Lippolis, E. 1989**, Il santuario di Athana a **Lindo**. *ASAtene* 66–7: 97–157.
- Luraghi, N. 2008. *The ancient Messenians : constructions of ethnicity and memory.* Cambridge: CUP.
- Ma, J. 2008. Paradigms and Paradoxes in the Hellenistic world. *Studi Ellenistici* 20: 371-386.
- Melfi, M. 2007. *I Santuari di Asclepio in Grecia.* Roma: Bretschneider.
- Ma, J. 2013. *Statues and cities : honorific portraits and civic identity in the Hellenistic world.* Oxford: OUP.
- Melfi, M. 2016. Introduction. In M. Melfi and O. Bobou (eds.) *Hellenistic Sanctuaries. Between Greece and Rome:* 1-17. Oxford: OUP.
- Müth, S. 2007. *Eigene Wege. Topographie und Stadtplan von Messene in spätklassisch-hellenistischer Zeit.* Verlag Marie Leidorf: Rahden/Westf.
- Polignac, F. de 1984.** *La naissance de la cité grecque. Cultes, espace, et société, VI Ile-V Ile siècles avant J.-C.* Paris: Editions de la Découverte.
- Polignac, F. de 1995. *Cults, territory, and the origins of the Greek city-state.* Chicago: University of Chicago Press.
- Segre M. and Pugliese Carratelli G. 1951. Tituli Camirenses. In *ASAtene* 27-29: 141-318.
- Sioumpara E. 2011. *Der Asklepios-Tempel von Messene auf der Peloponnese.* Munich: DAI.
- Sioumpara E. 2015. Doric innovations on the conservative landscape of Peloponnese during the Hellenistic period. In J. des Courtils ed. *L'Architecture monumentale grecque au IIIe siècle a.C.:* 197-221. Bourdeaux: Ausonius.
- Sourvinou-Inwood, C. 1990. What is polis religion? in O. Murray and S. Price (eds.), *The Greek City: from Homer to Alexander:* 195-222. Oxford: OUP.
- Sourvinou-Inwood, C. 2000. What is polis religion?, in R.G.A. Buxton (ed.) *Oxford Readings in Greek Religion:* 13-37. Oxford: OUP.
- Themelis P. 1994. Artemis Ortheia at Messene. The Epigraphical and Archaeological Evidence. In R. Hägg (ed.), *Ancient Greek Cult Practice from the Epigraphical Evidence.* Proceedings of the 2nd International Seminar at the Swedish Institute at Athens, 22-24 Novembre 1991:101-122. Stockholm: Jonsered
- Themelis P. 1996. Damophon. In O. Palagia and J.J. Pollitt (eds.) **Personal Styles in Greek Sculpture:** 154-185. Cambridge: CUP.

- Themelis, P. 2000. *Ηρώες και ηρώα στη Μεσσήνη*. Athens: The Archaeological Society.
- Torelli, M. 1998. L'Asklepieion di Messene, lo scultore Damofonte e Pausania in G. Capecchi et al. (eds.) *Studi in memoria di Enrico Paribeni*: 465-489. Rome: Bretschneider.
- Will, E. 1979. Le monde hellenistique et nous. *AncSoc* 10: 79-95.

List of Figures

- Fig. 1 : Messene: the sanctuary of Asklepios @ The Archaeological Society, Athens
- Fig. 2: Kamiros: the city and the sanctuary of Athana and Zeus @ Scuola Archeologica Italiana di Atene
- Fig. 3: Lindos: the sanctuary of Athana@ Blinkenberg 1941.