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EARLY GREEK SANCTUARIES


These recently published volumes on Greek sanctuaries are worth the attention of the historian of religions. They reveal a new approach, different from most of the earlier books about Greek temples: not the isolated temple or altar, not the aesthetic of architecture or morphological comparison, but sanctuaries as a whole in context with settlements, their function for cultic activities and socially differentiated groups.

An Entretien between Classical Archaeologists and Philologists is first an encounter of different sources about the same subject. There are enormous differences between the written sources on one hand, and the reconstruction of the excavated stones, vessels or votives on the other. Walter Burkert: concordia discors: The literary and archaeological evidence on the sanctuary of Samothrace (in Marinatos & Hägg [M&H] 178-191) shows, how literary sources on Greek religion are interested in exciting stories, in sex and crime, in ranking lists, which sanctuaries is the oldest, who introduced mysteries
for the first time, and so on. Excavators on the other hand (as positivists) use only the isolated bits of information in the literary source, they are not interested in context and intention, why one author ascribes an absurdity to, say, Samothrace and her mysteries. Another problem of sources can be seen, whenever an excavator has to determine the function of a building or its interior without the help of a guide like that of Pausanias for mainland Greece, as Birgitta Bergqvist: The Archaic Temenos in Western Greece (in: Le sanctuaire grec [LSG] 109-152) deplores.

The second encounter is that of methods. According to Richard Tomlinson: Perachora (LSG 321-346) the sanctuary of Hera Akraia in the town of Corinth is founded as a counterpart to the sanctuary of Hera Akraia on the other shore of the gulf. The epithet cannot be derived from locality. But T. does not understand the question of Fritz Graf, wether not only the name but also the ritual (initiation of boys) has been transferred (p. 347 sq.). In all contributions there are examples of a new understanding for the secondary buildings of the sanctuaries. The sanctuaries were not only places for offerings to the god, but also places for feasts, meetings, sports, dancing, theatre, and concerts. Ulrich Sinn adds another function (not valid for every sanctuary): Greek sanctuaries as places of refuge (M&H 88-109). But it is not satisfactory just to see in the sanctuaries combinations of sacred and secular purposes, of votives and utensils, of installations for gods vs. installations for men (Tomlinson, e.g. 346). That does not meet the Greek distinctions, rightly shown by Graf and Schachter (LSG 350 sq.). The case of the sanctuary of Demeter and Kore at Corinth with a series of banquet-rooms, a little theatre, but no temple, no altar, is revealing: Nancy Bookidis: Ritual dining at Corinth (M&H 45-61). Folkert van Straten gives a continuation of his comprehensive studies on votives: Votives and votaries in Greek sanctuaries (LSG 247-284); Roland Etienne exposes a typology on altars: Autels et sacrifices (LSG 291-312). Briefly, this seems to me the first achievement in current scholarship on Greek sanctuaries: The myopic view on temple and altar has been widen to the sanctuary as a whole. It has many functions; our distinction between sacred and profane does not work.

A second achievement is to recognize the enormous differences between (1) the local displays of sanctuaries and (2) the differences between geometric/archaic and the classical sanctuaries. The later the less important the differences become. So sanctuaries, before "houses for the gods" (i.e. gods' images) had been built, and their early development contradict our image