

## Entangled Communities: Multidimensional Use of Nymph Shrines in Ancient Greece

Sanctuaries for the nymphs are often located in the countryside near topographic features such as prominent trees, caves, and springs. In fact, the landscape likely was the inspiration for their placement and arrangement which regularly exploited the inherent drama of the environment. In particular, sanctuaries at caves and springs make use of more than just that feature, expanding beyond the limits of the water or the rock. Additions of walls, niches, basins, fences, plantings, and even pergolas helped to articulate and differentiate the area. Such spaces offered cool respite from the summer heat and refreshing water to the thirsty visitors. While research has been done considering how humans have created, modified, and maintained these spaces for the gods, there has been less discussion on the pragmatic use and practical experience at a rural water source. This paper brings together the surviving material and addresses the evidence for the forgotten community at nymph shrines from the Archaic to Hellenistic period by considering the interactions of animals, the environment, and humans which took place there.

Although modified by human activity and construction, nymph sanctuaries still retained an element of the wilds, not fully under control. These spaces lacked constant guardians and were simply not monitored. While visitors may have observed proper religious etiquette, in times of need, access to the water or sacred areas likely was available beyond ritual requirements. If people or animals were thirsty and no other option was available, the spring had to be shared. References, though limited, show a respect for the sanctity of the nymphs' shrine, but also hint at practical usage of water for humans and animals (e.g. *Anth. Pal.* 6.43). Dedications, especially representations of the flora, fauna, and the environs reveal an appreciation for the environment. At Caruso Cave (Locri Epizephyrii), conceptual models of the spring fountain were offered at

the sanctuary. Votives at some shrines may also show an awareness of the whole ecosystem of the spring beyond just at the human interaction. Models of birds, dogs, mice, even bees and cicadas, have been dedicated at the sanctuaries of the nymphs at sites such as Kokkinovrysi as well as at Vari and Pitsa caves which may reflect an animal community sharing the water sources and spaces. Complementing the archaeological material, sacred laws, rupestral inscriptions, and literary references such as Greek dedicatory epigrams provide further insight into the diverse character and use of these rural sanctuaries which were so integral to the rural environment. Enjoyment of and concerns about the protection and purity of these shrines motivate much of the written material (e.g. *LSS 50*).

These shrines to the nymphs were more than just spaces for ritual, but rather were lively contact zones centered around the water, shade, and landscape. Compromises about their practical and ritual use had to be made. By analyzing the archaeological, epigraphic, literary, and iconographic evidence, these shrines to the nymphs can be re-animated with all the creatures, people, plants, which have been lost from the discussion. Once they have been returned to the space, the full community at the spring can be revealed and a possible ancient experience can be reconstructed.