

Religious Practice and Local Identity within Pausanias' *Periegesis*  
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The *Periegesis* was composed through Pausanias' eyewitness experience traveling throughout Greece to both large cities and small villages. Descriptions of religious sanctuaries and temples seem to dominate his work, and perhaps provide a clue to Pausanias' own identity, interests, and goals. One theory that has gained many supporters and detractors is the idea that Pausanias was a pilgrim, traveling to the sacred sites of Greece. However, this debate has often devolved into an argument of semantics over the definition of the word "pilgrim." Yet, Pausanias devotes much of his work to art, history, myth and other topics. When describing sacred locales he often focuses on these aspects of the temples and rarely mentions the religious activity or ritual practice taking place at these locations. This paper analyzes the occurrences of religious practice within Pausanias' *Periegesis* in order to understand better the author's interests regarding Greek religion at his time.

For this study, over 300 occurrences of religious practice have been identified within the *Periegesis* and entered into a database categorizing, comparing, and contrasting them. This has proved beneficial since these mentions are scattered throughout his work and attached to various locales. Pausanias has recorded several different cultic practices including sacrifice, divination, and festivals, and even sheds light on various aspects of cultic management from religious rules to the selection of the priesthood or the location for temples.

Occasionally Pausanias offers a common lesson, applied to all of Greece, such as the general difference between sacrifice to a divinity or a hero. However, most often he is keen to focus on the local differences between the practice of religious cults including the unique or unusual aspects of practice. For example, regarding sacrifice Pausanias includes examples where heroes are sacrificed to in lieu of divinities, restrictions are placed on particular animals to be sacrificed, and even the practice of human sacrifice. He refuses to reveal anything regarding the Mysteries of Eleusis other than a strange prohibition on beans. Most often, Pausanias records unusual religious rituals and prohibitions rather than focusing on the commonplace aspects of religious practice.

Setting these unusual aspects of practice in a particular location not only enables Pausanias to reveal the rich variety of Greek religious practice but perhaps most importantly illuminates local identity. Greece in his time was a polytheist world but each deity manifested itself differently in each location. This enabled the religious participants not only to define but also to express their own identities through religious practice. Religious events, including feasts and festivals, each with their own quirks, helped strengthen local communities. Moreover various practices established local religious authority. These included local methods for selecting the priesthood, various religious prohibitions, and regional versions of popular mythic stories explaining local practice.

Pausanias' *Periegesis* was a guide to Greece and all its varied locations. Through his descriptions of each location, Pausanias was careful to select what he found interesting or what he thought others might find interesting. The same was true for Pausanias' descriptions of religious practice, since he focused on the unusual and interesting aspects. By recording local religious practice, Pausanias demonstrated how religious practice enabled a population to strengthen its sense of community and express its own identity.