

## Recognizing Shrines in the Landscapes of Classical Corinth and Modern Knoxville

In every polis, divinities were worshipped in great public sanctuaries and small shrines. Supplementing the large-scale sanctuaries to Olympian gods in the polis, small shrines, usually to minor gods or heroes, offer an alternative avenue to create beneficial relationships with deities. Since shrines are such common features in the Greek landscape, the ability to identify and analyze these sacred spaces is an important skill for archaeologists, but how to do this when there is such variety in the archaeological record. I argue that a comparison between an ancient Classical Shrine, the Kokkinovrysi stele shrine at Corinth, and a modern parallel, the Pat Summitt Plaza in Knoxville, offer an approachable way to explain sacred space.

Renfrew (1985, 18-20; 1994, 51-52) has suggested that sacred space can be recognized by specific indicators in the archaeological record—attention-focusing, special aspects associated with liminal zones, invocation of the divine, and participation and offering. While Renfrew's criteria act as a starting point, sacred space has great variety. Practically speaking, votive offerings, a focal point (statue, altar, stele, or even a naiskos), a temenos, cultic paraphernalia, and possible graffiti are the key factors for recognizing small Classical shrines. All of these qualities are not required for a space to be sacred, but it certainly helps confirm the identification.

Applying these criteria at Corinth, at least ten Archaic-Classical small shrines have been found which serviced the local community. Of special interest is the Kokkinovrysi shrine just outside the city walls of Corinth, which has been identified solely by the archaeological material remains as dedicated to the nymphs. A stele shrine next to a major road and close to a spring, the Kokkinovrysi shrine fits the established characteristics and yet it also is perplexing with its non-traditional pillar stele, lack of graffiti, and separation from its water source. Moreover, like many shrines, the choice of location and reason behind its foundation is less clear. We can speculate

for the reason for this and other shrines based on the archaeological and, if we are lucky, literary evidence. In many cases though, we will never know.

Uncertainty is to be expected in any discussion of ancient ritual space and practice, but an additional problem arises when attempting to explain and teach about such small shrines to those less familiar, especially students. For this reason, I turn to a modern parallel to illustrate the importance of a “shrine” to a local community, the variable forms, function, and use. While it might not outwardly appear to be pertinent, the Pat Summitt Plaza at the University of Tennessee, Knoxville demonstrates many of the same characteristics seen at the Kokkinovrysi shrine, and sacred spaces, generally. Conceived and constructed in 2013 to honor the winningest women’s basketball coach, the monument sits across the street from the arena where she coached. The reasons for the foundation and placement of this modern memorial are well-documented so it can act as an example for how shrines develop. Although, none who stop at the plaza might identify it as a sacred space, all the elements are there identify it as such. Moreover, the behavior of individuals is altered there. People walk around not through the space, if they are not visiting the memorial. By utilizing a modern parallel, the elements of what makes a shrine become much more concrete. We can trace how hero shrines develop and become part of the fabric of ritual life. Through this modern example, we can see the behaviors that are exhibited which denote that a space is special. From Classical Corinth to Knoxville, shrines remain an integral part of the community and, with a little bit of outreach, we can help others recognize an aspect of the ancient world in the modern era.

## Bibliography

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