

Pilgrimage and Patronage: Differences in Participation at Oracular Shrines between the Sanctuary of Zeus at Dodona and the Sanctuary of Apollo at Delphi

The development of the Greek sanctuary echoes the concerns of local and regional Greek citizens seen through extant archaeological and architectural evidence. These sanctuaries saw their formal introductions as major movements of Greek religion and ritual – liminal spaces represented by physical structures as a boundary between gods and mortals, and solidified through mortals' participatory use of the site (Sourvinou-Inwood 1993). Additionally, these two sanctuaries featured oracular shrines that served the ethnos and the polis in varying measure from their definite introduction in the 7th century through the early common era. The variable patronage to these sanctuaries and their oracular shrines is a complex result of the cost of the pilgrimage, the role of the divinity in the community and to the individual, and the complex social pasts of the patrons. The goal of this paper is to examine these exterior, experiential factors in the patronage to the oracles of Dodona and Delphi, in order to delineate clear differences between the experiences of those in the security of a marginal sanctuary at Dodona versus the more centrally located, and centrally controlled, Delphi.

Oracular shrines are an intrinsic part of Greek religion, stemming from a mortal's wish to learn extra-somatic knowledge of the physical world. All those visiting the oracle were looking to resolve an issue in their lives that could have ranged from questions on state matters and politics, individuals' matters, and those concerning matters of health and healing (Curnow 2004). This trusted communication with the oracle between the divine and mortal was granted such value that those of varying background within Greece chose to pilgrim from polis or outer-lying areas to the sanctuary.

Within this paper, I will present Delphi and Dodona, summarizing their site history as displayed in archaeological material and focusing on the oracle and their divination. By analyzing patronage and pilgrimage, I hope to determine how complex social backgrounds affected the overall differential archaeological representation at the site through architecture and patron records. While these are not the only two oracular shrines with distinct presence and influence in the Greek world, they are considered the two of the most popular and prominent in the Greek world (Eidinow 2007) with other oracular shrines seen at Didyma and Ammon. The role of the oracle and divination in religious practice is highly significant to past individuals, reinforced by evidence of pilgrimage, representative architectural structures, and patron records at these sites. While Delphi is traditionally associated with wealthy patrons and political entities, Dodona – at a glance – appears quite the opposite, with questions to the oracle made on lead tablets not only by women, but also by slaves in some number (Eidinow 2007). Ultimately, this analysis will show how the varied individuals who participated in the use of the oracles at either Delphi or Dodona shaped their archaeological representation and their notoriety, and how this can show the overall trends of individuals who visited oracular shrines.

Bibliography

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