

The Power of Procession: The Internal Reconstitution of Athenian Public Spaces

An ancient Greek participating in any of the numerous Athenian processions would have traversed through a built sacred landscape, one thoroughly saturated with symbolic meaning and cultural significance attained by the complete immersion of myth and history experienced throughout the course of the route. The routes and experiences of processions were pre-determined with the all-encompassing goal to promote the cultural memory and collective identity of the Athenians. Processions in Classical Athens occurred frequently throughout the year and took on a wide array of functions, purposes, and activities, ranging from those of religious significance, to those held in remembrance and commemoration of the dead. Though the motivation for each procession may differ in execution, the creation of a useable space in which to conduct a procession remains pertinent for its successful completion. When not occupied by a procession, these spaces served other functions, specifically those pertaining to the daily lives of the citizens of Athens and their subsequent activities. Thus, the creation of such a working space is centered on the transformation of a civic space utilized in the conduction of various Athenian exploits, to one that could sufficiently hold the orchestration and organization of a procession.

Previous discussions surrounding processions have placed an emphasis on the importance of Athenian processions with regards to their participants and route (Shear, 2001; Arrington, 2010), without fully undertaking the analysis of the logistics involved in incorporating the route into space previously occurring with a different function and association. However, these aforementioned studies focused on outlining the routes for each individual procession will be instrumental in determining the process of transformation which will be discussed in this paper.

Therefore, this paper aims to study the logistics behind the transformation of space in order to accommodate an Athenian procession by looking at how empty space becomes full, how processions move through the city, and the use of temporary and permanent architectural structures to host spectators or other elements of the procession. As there are many different types of processions that occurred in Classical Athens (Connelly, 2011), this paper will focus on processions dealing with festivals, funerals, and pilgrimages using archaeological, textual, and iconographic evidence.

As a brief introduction, for many processions the main space was located in the street, as in the Panathenaic Way, which was wide enough to accommodate a large number of people (Warford, 2015). The monuments and buildings surrounding the street would have taken on new meanings in addition to highlighting their significance on the day of the procession. For those in the procession, the monuments they passed and space they inhabited would have acquired a more sacred meaning than when they experienced them the day before. Those watching would have created spaces for spectatorship, climbing upon their houses, sitting on the nearest set of stairs, jostling their way to a spot closer to the street, or finding a spot on the *ikria*, wooden structures built for spectators. Local vendors may have moved their goods to a place more easily accessible to the crowds, transforming the space into an area of business that had not been there previously. On the day of a procession, all typical uses of the space vanished and were replaced by an area entirely dominated by the spectacle of the procession. People experienced different things and walked along new paths. As such, processions were deliberately placed outside of everyday experience (Warford, 2015), a result from this transformation of space.

The significance of this study rests in its ability to provide more information on the overall importance of processions in Athenian life, and the way in which the city utterly

transformed on the day of celebration. In addition to providing opportunities for deeper understanding, it will also provide a framework for discussing the transformation of space in other processions in not only Athens, but throughout the ancient Mediterranean world.

Bibliography

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