

RELIGIOUS MOBILITY AND THE VISUALIZATION OF MYTH. MYSTERY CULTS, FESTIVALS AND *DRÓMENA* AS A MEANS OF RELIGIOUS DISSEMINATION

MOVILIDAD RELIGIOSA Y VISUALIZACIÓN DEL MITO.
CULTOS MISTÉRICOS, FESTIVALES Y *DRÓMENA*
COMO MEDIO DE DIFUSIÓN RELIGIOSA

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RESUMEN

La movilidad religiosa en el mundo antiguo era un fenómeno polifacético y complejo. Implicaba el desplazamiento físico de personas a áreas religiosas con fines de sacrificio, iniciación o participación en rituales para venerar a la divinidad a la que se rendía culto. Asimismo, podría acarrear la transferencia de una experiencia religiosa compartida de un culto a otro. El presente estudio pretende aportar otra perspectiva sobre el tema. Los festivales y rituales eran comunes en diversos cultos del mundo griego y constituían un medio para compartir ideas y experiencias religiosas. La visualización de los mitos a través de diversos símbolos, objetos de sacrificio y *drómēna* intensificaba la experiencia religiosa. El impacto de los símbolos en las sensaciones y el modo en que los objetos transmitían los mensajes constituían asuntos de importancia. A partir de estas consideraciones, se plantean algunas cuestiones relevantes sobre el papel, sustancial o simbólico, de la movilidad religiosa, se exploran el impacto sensorial del espacio y los símbolos y se rastrea el uso de objetos como medio para transmitir mensajes.

PALABRAS CLAVE

Mito; espacio de culto; Licosura; misterios cabíricos; Monte Lykaion; Movilidad religiosa; símbolos.

ABSTRACT

Religious mobility in the ancient world was a multifaceted and complex phenomenon. It involved the physical movement of people to religious regions for the purpose of sacrifice, initiation, or participation in rituals to venerate the deity being worshipped, as well as the transfer of a shared religious experience from one cult to another. This study aims to provide another perspective on the topic. Festivals and rituals were common in various cults of the ancient Greek world, providing a means to share ideas and religious experiences. The visualization of myths, through various symbols, sacrificial objects, and *drómēna*, intensified the religious experience. The impact of symbols on sensation and how objects conveyed messages were important considerations. This article raises significant questions about whether religious mobility is substantial or symbolic. It explores the impact of space and symbols on sensation and the use of objects as a means of conveying messages.

KEYWORDS

Cult space; Kabeirian *mysteria*; Lykosoura; Myth; Mount Lykaion; Religious mobility; Symbols.

THIS STUDY IS INSPIRED BY RESEARCH on the feelings and senses of initiates who visited cult places and participated in sacred rituals. This paper examines issues related to religious mobility in ancient Greek sanctuaries and ritual spaces, with a focus on mystery cults. It aims to investigate the combination of terms such as religious mobility, movement, common religious experience, and religious sense with specific characteristics in various cult spaces. The focus is not only on movement from one cult place to another, but also on the extent to which visualized religious mobility can be achieved. This research will concentrate on topics related to the optical senses and messages of an initiate, as well as the purpose of sharing religious experiences among members of a cult community.

Religious mobility is often studied as a social phenomenon, focusing on people who move from one place to another for various reasons, such as initiation in Mysteries, healing, or participation in festivals and competitions, etc.¹ However, this work takes a different perspective and explores the mental and visual transfer of ideas and senses through symbols and symbolization. Furthermore, it examines the relationship between this phenomenon and the cognitive process of religion. Not only do objects serve as attributes and symbols, but the architectural layout of a sacred space also contributes to the creation of a subconscious religious sense, which is then trans-

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1. See for example, Bremmer, 2014, pp. 21-54; Romano, 2019b, pp. 27-44; Chapinal-Heras, 2022, pp. 307-322.

ferred by the initiates. In addition, active participation in festivals, *drómēna*,² or ritual activities contributes to a psychic and mental connection among the participants who witness secret rites and disseminate them in similar cults.³

In the context of mystery cults and religious mobility, I will examine the interaction in the transfer of religious experiences and sensations in the case of Samothrace and the *mysteria* of the Great Gods, as well as Lykosoura and the mystery cult of the goddess Despoina in Arcadia. The relationship and possible influences between the festivals of the cult of Zeus *Lykaïos* on Mount Lykaion and the rites of Despoina in Lykosoura are also examined. To what extent was the subconsciousness of the initiates affected by seeing the attributes or by participating in the *myesis* procedure and following certain rules? Was it a mental, a psychic or a visual religious mobility?

1. LITERARY SOURCES AND RELIGIOUS MOBILITY IN MYSTERY CULTS

1.1. THE ISLAND OF SAMOTHRACE AND THE SANCTUARY OF THE GREAT GODS

Οὐδ' ἀλαοσκοπιὴν εἶχε κρείων ἐνοσίχθων ·
καὶ γὰρ ὁ θαυμάζων ἦστο πτόλεμόν τε μάχιν τε
ὑφοῦ ἐπ' ἀκροτάτης κορυφῆς Σάμου ὕληέσσης
Θρηϊκῆς · ἔνθεν γὰρ ἐφαίνετο πᾶσα μὲν Ἴδι,
φαίνετο δὲ Πριάμοιο πόλις καὶ νῆες Ἀχαιῶν.⁴

The island of Samothrace lies in the northeastern Aegean Sea and geographically belongs to the municipality of Thrace. Samothrace had been very famous in antiquity as a Panhellenic religious center since the 5th cent. BCE. Its geographical position was of strategic importance, and it had been considered a substan-

2. The term “*drómēna*”, derived from the Greek verb *δρῶ*, defines the ritual actions that took place during the mysteries.

3. The most representative example is the Eleusinian Mysteries and the process of initiation into these rites.

4. Hom., *Il.* XIII 10-13. “But the lord, the Shaker of Earth, kept no blind watch, for he sat marveling at the war and the battle, high on the topmost peak of wooded Samothrace, for from thence all Ida was plain to see; and plain to see were the city of Priam, and the ships of the Achaeans” (transl. Murray, 1928).

tial commercial station since the Bronze Age.⁵ Samothrace is mentioned for the first time in Homer's *Iliad* and as we can see from the above verses of rhapsody N, from the peak of the wooded Samothrace Poseidon was watching the war between the Trojans and the Achaeans.

The worship of the Great Gods on the island was widespread in antiquity, connected to *Kabeiroi*, whose presence is also testified in Lemnos Island and Thebes in Boeotia.⁶ It was a cult with mysterious character and secrecy, where a specific group of initiates – men and women – participated in the *mysteria*, meaning rituals that were accompanied by rules of discretion about their secret content.⁷ The initiation into the *mysteria* of Samothrace was for everyone. Women, men, prominent citizens, kings, slaves, free men, everyone had the right to participate in them.⁸

Scholarship on mystery cults has tended to focus especially on rites and their content, the initiation stages in cult practices and of course the role of the topographical and architectural framework of the *myesis* procedure. Samothracian *mysteria* have always been attractive not only to philological and archaeological but also to anthropological research.⁹ The sanctuary of the Great Gods and its sacred character offer rich fodder for further thought and research on the mobility of ideas of a religious nature, both substantive and cognitive. In this context, I will evaluate some philological sources that justify the existence of a religious mobility in various *mysteria* with common characteristics as an indication of the transfer of ideas between the initiates. The following literary source of Herodotus from the 5th cent. BCE testifies to the origin of the *mysteria*:

ὅστις δὲ τὰ Καβείρων ὄργια μεμύηται, τὰ Σαμοθρήικες ἐπιτελέουσι παραλαβόντες παρὰ Πελασγῶν, οὗτος ὡνὴρ οἶδε τὸ λέγω. τὴν γὰρ Σαμοθρηίκην οἶκεον πρότερον Πελασγοὶ οὗτοι οἱ περ Ἀθηναίοισι σύννοικοι ἐγένοντο, καὶ παρὰ τούτων Σαμοθρήικες τὰ ὄργια παραλαμβάνουσι. ὀρθὰ ὧν ἔχειν τὰ αἰδοῖα τὰγάλματα τοῦ Ἑρμέως Ἀθηναῖοι πρῶτοι Ἑλλήνων μαθόντες παρὰ Πελασγῶν ἐποιήσαντο. οἱ δὲ Πελασγοὶ ἱρόν τινα λόγον περὶ αὐτοῦ ἔλεξαν, τὰ ἐν τοῖσι ἐν Σαμοθρηίκῃ μυστηρίοισι δεδῆλωται.¹⁰

5. Burkert, 2002, p. 36; Kritikou, 2022, p. 18.

6. Stesimbr., FGtH 107 F 20; Hemberg, 1950; Burkert, 1993, p. 571; Beschi, 2000.

7. Clinton, 2021.

8. Bremmer, 2014, pp. 22-23.

9. See Blakely, 2012, pp. 49-71. For the Cosmos in Ancient Greek religious experience and the Samothracian Mysteries, see also Boutsikas, 2020, pp. 180-187.

10. Hdt., II 51, 2-4.

“Whoever has been initiated in the rites of the *Kabeiroi* which the Samothracians celebrate, having received them from Pelasgians, knows what I mean. These Pelasgians who got to live together with the Athenians were previously living in Samothrace, and it is from them that the Samothracians inherit the rites. Thus, the Athenians, as the first Greeks to fashion ithyphallic statues of Hermes, learned this from Pelasgians. The Pelasgians told a certain sacred story about it, which has been revealed in the *mysteria* in Samothrace”.¹¹

According to this literary evidence the Athenians were obviously aware of the *mysteria* and their secret content. Herodotus was apparently also initiated,¹² as were many Athenians who also participated in the secret rites. Kevin Clinton, an eminent scholar of the Kabeirian *mysteria* in Samothrace, studies the relationship, the strong connection and interaction between Eleusinian and Samothracian *mysteria* and proves an indirect religious mobility.¹³ Besides that in Platon’s dialogue *Euthydemus*, Socrates indirectly uses the Samothracian Mysteries in a metaphorical way and says: “The Sophists are only playing with you Kleinias, and dancing round you like the *Korybantes* and initiating you by these preparatory rites into the Sophistic Mysteries”.¹⁴ In the first Book of *Argonautica* from Apollonius Rhodius, the poet informs that

“in the evening by the injunctions of Orpheus they touched at the island of Electra, daughter of Atlas, in order that by gentle initiation they might learn the rites that may not be uttered, and so with greater safety sail over the chilling sea. Of these I will make no further mention; but I did farewell to the island itself and the indwelling deities, to whom belong those Mysteries, which it is not lawful for me to sing”.¹⁵

Apollonius Rhodius is probably referring to the island of Samothrace and the Kabeirian *mysteria* in which he himself was initiated as we can conclude from the passage. The fact that he does not intend to reveal further details about the Mysteries because it was not “lawful” to him, confirms the secrecy of the initiation rites and the secret rules of silence imposed on the initiates.

11. Clinton, 2021, p. 18.

12. Hdt., III 37. Cf. Graham, 2002, p. 234.

13. Clinton, 2021, pp. 17-23.

14. Plat., *Euthyd.* 277c-d (transl. Gifford, 2013).

15. Apoll. Rhod., I 916 (transl. after Seaton, 1919). Cf. Koukouzika, 2008, pp. 138-140.

The study of the rich epigraphical record of Samothrace from Nora M. Dimitrova¹⁶ sheds light on this religious mobility. Through this work some important inscriptions inform about the ethnicity of the initiates in the Samothracian *mysteria* and prove the mental transfer of a secret procedure whose content was familiar only to them. The following grave epigram from the 2nd-1st cent. BCE for a Samothracian initiate from Athens is very interesting in context of religious mobility:¹⁷

ἦν δὲ φίλοις ἐρατός, δίκαιος, πρὸς πάντας ἀληθής,
εὐσεβὲς ἐν ψυχῇ κῶδος ἔχ[ων] ἀρετῆς·
μύστης μὲν Σαμόθραξι Καβίρου διχ' ἱερὸν φῶς,
ἀγνὰ δ' Ἐλευσίνος Διοῦς μεγάθυ[μο]ς ἶδεν·
οὐνεκεν εὐγῆρως [ὀκ]τῶ δεκάδας λυκαβάντων
[ἦ]γυς ἀπημάντως Ἰσιόδωρος [ἄ]νηι.

“He was loved by his friends, / a just man, truthful to all, / with reverent renown / for the virtue in his soul. / As an initiate, great-hearted, / he saw the doubly sacred light / of Kabiros in Samothrace / and the pure rites of Eleusinian Demeter. / Because of this, bearing his old age well, / Isidoros completed eighty years / without pain and trouble”.

It seems that Isidoros, who was already initiated in the Eleusinian Mysteries, travelled to Samothrace to complete his initiation as a deep religious person. Even though the content of the initiation stages was sacred, Isidoros was probably prepared for this new experience because of his previous participation in similar *mysteria*. The motive of this journey was obviously religious but also personal. Although the initiate could not know in advance what was to be seen and experienced, the soul and spirit were prepared for this. Happiness in life, and in the afterlife, was the main goal of every initiate (known in Eleusinian Mysteries) although there is no evidence that the Samothracian *mysteria* provided any such thing.¹⁸

The question that arises at this point is the following: How could the spread of religious experiences through mystery cults be mentally possible? How did the initiates know in advance what they were going to experience when they partici-

16. Dimitrova, 2008.

17. Dimitrova, 2008, pp. 83-90; Clinton, 2021, p. 19.

18. Dimitrova, 2008, p. 90. Sandra Blakely examines the Mysteries from an anthropological view. Through some inscriptions of the initiates dated from the 2nd cent. BCE to the late 3rd cent. CE the author remarks that the initiation in these Mysteries created a social prestige, since they were very widespread in the ancient world. See Blakely, 2012, p. 61.

pated in rituals unknown to them? The fact that the content of the initiation stages was *arrheton* (ἄρρητον), meaning sacred and unspoken, raises legitimate questions about the thinking of the person being initiated. All those who travelled to the island for this purpose were certainly predisposed to what they were about to experience, always bearing in mind other similar Mysteries. The parallel gathering of people from different places for the purpose of initiation, without knowing its rules, confirms the importance of the Mysteries, but also the individual perception that became common, that all were seeking their *soteria* (salvation), in this life and the afterlife *soteria* of the soul. In this way, personal needs were transformed into common ones, and in this way the transmission of experience took place. The presence of the initiates alone was enough to ensure *arrheton*. No one would reveal what the initiation contained, but all knew why they had travelled there and what united them spiritually and psychically.¹⁹

It is important to highlight that the religious practices observed in Samothrace can be situated within the broader framework of cognitive processes associated with religion. This approach enables a deeper understanding of the concept of mental religious mobility. The study of Jörg Rüpke about *Ritual Objects and Religious Communication in Lived Ancient Religion* contributes to a better understanding of this sensorial aspect. The author refers that “the classical semantic theory of communication starts from the relationship between sender and receiver. The addressing person acts as the source. A signal is transmitted to the addressee and received as information, command, or the like. Elaboration of the model have concentrated on either the processes of encoding and decoding the message intended or on the social context, the setting of the communicative act, conceived of as small or large”.²⁰ This perspective posits that the individuals involved in the rituals at the Mysteries of Samothrace were automatically imbued with a belief system that was integral to their participation in these rites. Consequently, they were able to decode the religious experience and interpret it as an interaction between the divine and the initiand. Therefore, they were progressing to a cognitive religious level, which unified them through a shared experience.

19. For more about physiological and sensorial experiences of the initiates in mystery cults, see Yodfat, 2021.

20. Rüpke, 2019, p. 1207. See also Rüpke, 2015.

1.2. LYKOSOURA AND THE TEMPLE OF DESPOINA IN ARCADIA. RELIGIOUS MOBILITY OF AN “ISOLATED” MYSTERY CULT

Lykosoura was a small *polis* in Arcadia in the central Peloponnese in the region of ancient Parrhasia, 7 km west of Megalopolis. The sanctuary of Despoina is located on a southeastern ridge of Mount Lykaion, on a hill to the north-east of the fortifications of the city of Lykosoura.²¹ Pausanias, in the 8th book of his *Periegesis*, describes a visit to the temple of Despoina at Lykosoura, where the perieget observed the marble statues of the cult group in the dark *cella*.

The goddesses worshipped at Lykosoura were Despoina, Demeter and Artemis, and they were worshipped as part of a mystery cult. According to Pausanias – the only literary source about this cult –, the sacrificial rituals of the mysteries in honour of the goddess Despoina were familiar to him, although this cult had a mainly local and panarcadian rather than a panhellenic character:

“Near the temple of Despoina, as you go up, on the right side is the so-called Megaron. The mysteries take place there and various animals are sacrificed to Despoina by the Arcadians, but their throats are not cut, as was customary in other rituals. Everyone cuts what he wants”.²²

The mere fact that Pausanias had knowledge of the Arcadian mysteries indirectly implies their dissemination, even at a local level. In addition, the perieget informs us of an inscription regarding the dress code for women who are to be initiated in the mysteries:

Ἐν δὲ τῇ στοᾷ τῇ παρὰ τῇ Δεσποίνῃ μεταξὺ τῶν τύπων τῶν κατειλεγμένων πινάκιόν ἐστι γεγραμμένον, ἔχον τὰ ἐς τὴν τελετήν.²³

21. Paus., VIII 38, 1.

22. Paus., VIII 37, 8 (transl. by the author). Παρὰ δὲ τὸν ναὸν τῆς Δεσποίνης ὀλίγον ἐπαναβάντι ἐν δεξιᾷ μέγαρόν ἐστι καλούμενον, καὶ τελετήν τε δρώσιν ἐνταῦθα καὶ τῇ Δεσποίνῃ θύουσιν ἱερεῖα οἱ ἀρκάδες πολλά τε καὶ ἄφθονα. Θύει μὲν δὴ αὐτῶν ἕκαστος ὃ τι κέκτηται· τῶν ἱερείων δὲ οὐ τὰς φάρυγγας ἀποτέμνει ὥσπερ ἐπὶ ταῖς ἄλλαις θυσίαις, κῶλον δὲ ὃ τι ἂν τύχη, τοῦτο ἕκαστος ἀπέκοψε τοῦ θύματος. About Pausanias’ visit in Lykosoura, see also Dimoropoulou, 2022a, pp. 13-19 and 2022b, pp. 178-184.

23. Paus., VIII 37, 2: “At the stoa of the sanctuary of Despoina, there is a tablet containing the precepts of the sacred law, located between the reliefs that are mentioned above” (transl. by the author).

This inscription from the 3rd cent. BCE suggests that women who sought initiation visited the sanctuary, although it does not clearly demonstrate religious activity in the mysteries of the goddess Despoina. The initiates were predisposed to conform to specific dress code regulations.²⁴

Unlike Samothrace and the sacred mysteries of Kabeiroi, there is no epigraphical evidence of *anathemata* (dedications) in honour of the goddess in Lykosoura, except for some inscriptions of the Roman period related to renovation works of the temple and the benefactions of well-known families in honour of Despoina. Therefore, based on the following inscriptions, it is possible to draw conclusions about the mobility of individuals in the sanctuary:

Μεγάλ]α πόλει εὐχαριστοῦντας ἐπαινῖν Ξέναρχον Ὀνασικ]ράτεος ἐπ]ὶ πᾶσι τοῖς προγεγραμμένοις, ποιῆσαι σὲ αὐτο[ῦ τε] καὶ Νικίππας τὰς γυναικὸς αὐτοῦ καὶ τὰν γενεάν ἀ[γάλ]ματα καὶ εἰκόνας ἐν ὀπλ]οῖς ἐπιχρύσοις καὶ ἀναθῆναι ἐν τῷ ἱερῷ τὰς Δεσποίνας ἐπιγραφάν ἔχούσας: ἡ πόλις τῶν Μεγαλοπολιτᾶν, Ξέναρχον καὶ Νικίππαν καὶ τὰς γενεάς αὐτῶν εὐεργετοῦντας τὴν πόλιν παρὰ πάντα τὸν βίον ὁμοίως τε καὶ ἐν τῷ ναῷ τῶν Σεβαστῶν ὃν κατασκευάσιν ἐπ'ἀνγέλται, ἐπιγραφάτω δὲ καὶ μετὰ τῶν ἰδίων ἐπὶ μὲν τὸν ν]αόν τὰς Δεσποίνας ἐπισκευακέναι, ἐπὶ δὲ τὸν τῶν Σεβαστῶν καθιδρυκέ]ναι...ἐπὶ δὲ τὸν τὰς Κόρας ὅτι ἐπεσκεύασε, ἔστω δὲ καὶ ἀρχιερεὺς τῶν Σεβαστῶν.²⁵

Δεῖνα καὶ] μοκράτεια Ἀγία ἐπε-] σκεύασαν τὸν ναὸν τὰς Δεσποίνας. καὶ τὸ προνάιον καὶ τὰ ἀναθήματα. παρέδ]ωκαν ἐπεσκευασ]μένα ὥσπερ ὑπέσχ]οντο.²⁶

According to the first inscription, the Megalopolitans were grateful to Xenarchos and his wife Nikippa for repairing both the temple of Despoina and the statues (Koras) and according to the second inscription: “Deina and Deimokrateia have repaired the Temple of Despoina, the Pronaos, and the dedications as promised”.²⁷

These inscriptions shed light on a form of religious mobility, revealing that both the sanctuary and the worship of the goddess Despoina were known in the Roman period. Dedications and benefactions were offered in her honour, which means that somehow the arcadian mystery cult of Despoina attracted mainly

24. *IG* V² 514; for the inscription, see Voutiras, 1999; Dimopoulou, 2022b, p. 179. See also the recent publication of Annalisa Lo Monaco: Lo Monaco, 2024, pp. 224-232.

25. *IG* V² 515.

26. *IG* V² 523.

27. Transl. by the author.

women for initiation and was known to them. Therefore, the religious mobility in Lykosoura is interpreted based on the literary and epigraphical evidence, primarily from the Roman Period. This evidence confirms the significance of the sanctuary and the preservation of the cult, which probably goes back to the Archaic Period.²⁸

1.3. ATHLETIC GAMES, FESTIVALS, CULT AND MOBILITY ON MOUNT LYKAION

Mount Lykaion is located in western Arcadia in the Peloponnese and has shown ritual and cultural activity since the Mycenaean period.²⁹ The sanctuary of Zeus Lykaios and his cult was the most significant site in the Arcadian Federation.³⁰ In his 8th book of *Hellados Periegesis* Pausanias states about Mount Lykaion:

ἐν ἀριστερᾷ δὲ τοῦ ἱεροῦ τῆς Δεσποίνης τὸ ὄρος ἐστὶ τὸ Λύκαιον.
καλοῦσι δὲ αὐτὸ καὶ Ὀλυμπον καὶ Ἱερὰν γε ἕτεροι τῶν ἀρκάδων κορυφῇν.
Τραφῆναι δὲ τὸν Δία φασὶν ἐν τῷ ὄρει τούτῳ.³¹

Pausanias' description of Mount Lykaion relates to the Arcadian tradition of Zeus' birth.³² Additionally, the *Perieget* informs us that the Lykaia, athletic games in honour of Zeus Lykaios, took place on Mount Lykaion.³³ Noteworthy is also the following account of Pausanias:

ἔστι δὲ ἐπὶ τῇ ἄκρᾳ τῇ ἀνωτάτῳ τοῦ ὄρους γῆς χώμα, Διὸς τοῦ λυκαίου βωμός,
καὶ ἡ Πελοπόννησος τὰ πολλὰ ἐστὶν ἀπ' αὐτοῦ σύνοπτος (...) ἐπὶ τούτου τοῦ
βωμοῦ τῷ λυκαίῳ Διὶ θύουσιν ἐν ἀπορρήτῳ. πολυπραγμονήσαι δὲ οὗ μοι τὰ ἐς τὴν
θυσίαν ἡδὺ ἦν, ἐχέτω δὲ ὡς ἔχει καὶ ὡς ἔσχεν ἐξ ἀρχῆς.³⁴

28. For the age of the cult and its interpretation, see Palamidis, 2018, pp. 127-152; Dimopoulou, 2022a, pp. 177-182. For the Arcadian cults, see Jost, 1985, 2003 and 2018.

29. Romano, 2019a, pp. 224-229, with further bibliography.

30. Jost, 1985, pp. 183-185; Romano & Voyatzis, 2015, pp. 216-217.

31. Paus., VIII 38, 2: "On the left of Despoinas' sanctuary is located Mount Lykaion. (The Arcadians) call it also Olympos and some of them call it sacred peak. (They say) It is said that Zeus was raised on this mountain" (transl. by the author).

32. Near Mount Lykaion and Zeus' sanctuary there are also other significant sanctuaries, like the one of Pan at Berekla, of Demeter and Despoina at Lykosoura and of Apollon *Parrhasios*: see Romano, 2019a, p. 220.

33. Paus., VIII 38, 5.

34. Paus., VIII 38, 7: "On the highest point of the mountain there is an altar consisting of a heap of earth. Most of Peloponnese can be seen from this point (...). On this altar take place secret

According to Pausanias, Lykaon, the son of Pelasgos, founded Lykosoura on Mount Lykaion, he named Zeus *Lykaios* and established *Lykaia*, the festivals and athletic competitions as well as the cult for Zeus *Lykaios*.³⁵ “τὰ δὲ Παρρασίῳ στρατῶ θαυμαστός ἐὼν φάνη Ζηνὸς ἀμφὶ πανάγουριν Λυκαίου” is also mentioned by Pindaros in his 9th Olympian, indicating that the festivals of *Lykaia* were well known in his time.³⁶

Besides that, and based on the literary sources, in the highest peak of the mountain there was an ash-altar of Zeus *Lykaios*, which was forbidden to enter and where those who entered would die within the year.³⁷ In his 8th book of the *Politeia*, where Socrates discusses political systems with Glaucon and Adeimantos, Plato mentions that:

Τίς ἀρχὴ οὖν μεταβολῆς ἐκ προστάτου ἐπὶ τύραννον; ἢ δῆλον ὅτι ἐπειδὴν ταῦτόν ἄρξεται δρᾶν ὁ προστάτης τῷ ἐν τῷ μύθῳ ὃς περὶ τὸ ἐν Ἀρκαδίᾳ τὸ τοῦ Διὸς τοῦ Λυκαίου ἱερὸν λέγεται;

Τίς; ἔφη. Ὡς ἄρα ὁ γευσάμενος τοῦ ἀνθρωπίνου σπλάγχχνου, ἐν ἄλλοις ἄλλων ἱερείων ἐνὸς ἐγκατατετμημένου, ἀνάγκη δὴ τοῦτω λύκῳ γενέσθαι. ἢ οὐκ ἀκήκοας τὸν λόγον; Ἐγώ γε

“So what is the principle of the change from protector to tyrant? Is it not when the protector begins to do the same thing that, according to myth, happens in the sanctuary of Lykaios Zeus in Arcadia? And what is that? That whoever tastes certain human entrails, cut up and mixed with the many other entrails of other victims, inevitably turns into a wolf. Or have you never heard of this myth? I have heard it”.³⁸

The fact that the myth of human sacrifices in honour of Zeus *Lykaios* is known in Athens in the 4th cent. BCE indicates that it was spread indirectly, even if it was a sacred and mystical cult. Moreover, the link between the *Lykaia* Games and the

sacrifices for Zeus Lykaios. It is unpleasant for me to talk about it. Let them be the way they used to be from the beginning” (transl. by the author). See also Romano, 2019a, pp. 219-222.

35. Paus., VIII 2, 1.

36. Pind., *Ol.* IX 95-97. Thucydides (V 16, 3) also mentions Lykaion in his 5th Book of History in the Peloponnesian War: “χρόνῳ δὲ προτρέφαι τοὺς Λακεδαιμονίους φεύγοντα αὐτὸν ἐς Λύκαιον”.

37. Paus., VIII 38, 6-7.

38. Pl., *Resp.* 565d (transl. Gryparis, 2015).

cult of Zeus proves that those who participated in these athletic games would have made dedications in honour of Zeus, which again indicates this religious mobility.³⁹

The recent publication of a bronze tablet from Arcadia, probably from Mount Lykaion, perhaps dating from the first half of the 5th cent. BCE, sheds light on the athletic and ritual activity in the area and provides an opportunity for a wider reflection on religious mobility in relation to the cult of Zeus.⁴⁰ The second study of the tablet by Carbon and Clackson suggests that it may be “a ritual calendar for a festival that united several Arcadian polities or communities”.⁴¹ This interpretation highlights its ritual character. The tablet also mentions various sacrificial offerings in sanctuaries, particularly in central and southwestern Arcadia, as well as prizes during athletic competitions. It is possible to discuss mobility in this location for both athletic and religious reasons. Mount Lykaion was known for festivals that included sacrifices in honour of Zeus, which attracted not only athletes but also worshippers and pilgrims from many places.⁴²

Finally, David Gilman Romano’s observation is remarkable:

“Mt. Lykaion was actually near a center of a communications and transportation network, and Arcadia was not such an isolated province after all. This would have meant that there were roads and paths that ran along each of these river valleys and these roads would have provided the shortest and fastest land routes across the Peloponnese. This may have resulted in people passing by Mt. Lykaion as they travelled through the area and some of them certainly would have made the effort to go towards the peaks”.⁴³

It suggests that there was mobility in the area, not only from neighboring cities but also from all over the Peloponnese and beyond.⁴⁴

39. During the excavations around the *temenos* by Konstantinos Kourouniotis, bronze figurines, fragments of terracotta human figures and tripods were found. See Kourouniotis, 1904. Recent excavations have found more miniature bronze tripods in the area of the altar. An early bronze dedication of a runner was also found, suggesting a mobility associated with the cult of Zeus. I would like to thank Prof. David Gilman Romano for this information. See also Romano, 2019a, pp. 224-231.

40. Heinrichs, 2015; Carbon & Clackson, 2016, pp. 1-37. The tablet appeared on the antiquities market in a private English ownership.

41. Carbon & Clackson, 2016, p. 26.

42. Carbon & Clackson, 2016, pp. 26-27.

43. Romano, 2019a, p. 233.

44. According to epigraphical evidence the games attracted athletes from all over Greece. See Bergeles, 2005, p. 97.

2. CULT SPACES, SYMBOLS AND MOBILITY. THE ROLE OF THE ARCHITECTURAL LANDSCAPE, SYMBOLS AND SYMBOLIZATION IN THE SUBCONSCIOUS OF THE INITIATES. A CASE STUDY OF SAMOTHRACE, LYKOSOURA AND MOUNT LYKAION

2.1. RITUAL SPACES AS A MEANS OF RELIGIOUS MOBILITY

Cult places and specific architectural forms that constituted the sanctuaries in which mystery cults were practiced, played a decisive role in the thought and consciousness, not only of the visitors but also of the initiates. From viewing a temple with a *cella*, *adyton*,⁴⁵ and cult statues, altars and *temenos* for sacrificing to the worshipped deities as well as constructions that included *drómena* and ritual ceremonies, it is clear that they played a significant role in the psyche and thought of those who chose to travel there with a specific purpose: to feel and experience the sacred and mystical.

The sanctuary of the Great Gods in Samothrace and the complex of buildings are related to the ritual ceremonies that took place there during the initiation process. The most impressive is the so-called “Theatrical Circle”, a circular structure which probably dates to the end of the 5th and the beginning of the 4th cent. BCE.⁴⁶ This structure probably served as the stage of the preliminary *myesis*. An altar in the middle was predisposed for a pre-*myesis* for the initiates before the significant stage of the initiation process, namely *thronosis*.⁴⁷ Its theatrical construction seems to suggest that the ceremonies were accompanied by song, dance and theatrical *drómena*.⁴⁸ Dimitris Matsas’ perspective on the psychology of initiation participants is intriguing. This prompts further reflection on the mobility of religious sentiment through shared experiences. The scholar points out that:

“This form of Theatrical Circle produced a very special effect by organizing the participants in a circular relationship with each other, an essential relationship that was reproduced at each initiation. The closed form stops the directed movement and focuses the participants inwardly on a shared experience with which their initiation began. Here the initiates watched not only the action in the orchestra, but beyond it also their fellow

45. *Adyton* was a cult room located within a temple. Access to the *adyton* was restricted to priests and initiates.

46. Matsas, 2017, p. 6.

47. Clinton, 2021, pp. 27-33. *Thronosis* was the ceremony of enthronement of the young initiates into the mysteries of Samothrace.

48. Matsas, 2017, p. 6.

initiates, in a space that dissolved the distinction between participants and spectators. It was the first time that strangers who had travelled a long way came together”.⁴⁹

Upon seeing this circular architectural form, the candidate for initiation could sense that the preparatory stage of the revelation of the mysteries began there, even without knowing its exact function. Matsas insightfully observes that the circular placement of individuals around the altar unites their desires and purpose for being there. The transfer of experience was apparently both mental and physical, achieved by living through the common *pre-myesis* experience (Fig. 1).

Among the other impressive buildings at the sanctuary of Samothrace, in addition to the Hall of Choral Dancers,⁵⁰ *Hieron* holds a significant position. Its construction began at the end of the 4th cent. BCE. It consisted of 14 Doric columns and a cella, with walls adorned by a series of marble seats perhaps for the initiates. An inscription found near this building and not *in situ* is likely related to its sacred nature: ἀμύητον μὴ εἰσιέναι εἰς τὸ ἱερόν, meaning “non-initiates are prohibited from entering the sanctuary”. *Hieron* was likely the place where the final stage of the initiation process occurred, *epopteia*. Only those who met the necessary requirements were permitted to participate (Fig. 2).⁵¹

At this point, the focus will be on visualizing the myth through the initiation process and individual participation. This is then transformed into group and common participation in the cult space. Upon entering a sacred place where the rule of silence is observed, potential initiates can perceive the sacredness of the area and the mystical atmosphere. This is evident from the sight of the seats lined up along the walls and the archway leading through the closed door into an *adyton*, a space forbidden to everyone. The *cella* predisposes the initiates to an experience they may have encountered before in similar initiation processes, establishing mental communication between them. This can be described as symbolic mobility through active participation in the mystical ritual, which is visualized and in the case of Samothrace and its mysteries is more than obvious.

In the same context, Lykosoura and the enigmatic female cult of Despoina will be studied, along with Demeter and Artemis in the homonymous sanctuary

49. Matsas, 2017, p. 8 (transl. by the author).

50. The Hall of Choral Dancers, previously known as *temenos*, is the largest marble structure in the sanctuary. It dates to the middle of the 4th cent. BCE and is remarkable for its continuous frieze of female dancers that encircles the entire building. See Matsas, 2017, pp. 10-17.

51. Matsas, 2017, p. 21.

in Arcadia as well as the influence of architectural monuments on the psychology of the initiates and the religious mobility. Pausanias tells us that the sanctuary of Despoina was located in a *peribolos* and describes a *stoa*⁵² parallel to the *peribolos*.⁵³ The Doric temple of Despoina was located to the west of the *stoa* and was divided into a *cella* and a *pronaos*.⁵⁴ The interior of the *cella* was accessible through a threshold with a door from the *pronaos*. Additionally, there was a side door located on the south wall of the *cella*. Ten rows of limestone blocks were discovered along the entire length of the southern outer wall. The *cella* itself was divided into two areas, with one arranged behind the other. The eastern area contained the mosaic, while the western area housed the cult group. To the east and in front of the temple were three altars. To the south of the temple, traces of the so-called “*megaron*” were found on the hill of Tersis. This was probably the location where Despoina was worshipped and the sacrifices during the mysteries took place (Fig. 3).⁵⁵

Researching the nature of the Mysteries of Lykosoura is challenging due to the lack of literary sources, which is typical of mystery cults, whose content were forbidden to be revealed to the uninitiated. However, the sanctuary’s architecture, *drómena* and the sacrificial offerings, can be examined in connection to the initiates’ views and actions, which are linked to religious mobility. Upon arriving at the sanctuary of Despoina, which had pan-Arcadian recognition as previously mentioned, the initiates were faced with the *stoa*, temple, *megaron*, altars, and stone steps located south of the temple. First-time visitors to the sanctuary, including those being initiated into other mysteries like Pausanias⁵⁶, could discern from the architectural constructions what they were about to experience in the ritual process. The stone steps in theatrical form, which apparently served the function of allowing participants to take part in *drómena*, foreshadowed what was to follow.⁵⁷ In addition, the side door in the southern part of the temple, which served as an entrance to the *cella*, created a sense of distance between the deity and the worshippers, who were unable

52. In the context of ancient Greek architecture, the term “*stoa*” is used to describe a long, wide-fronted structure whose façade is open and covered with a colonnade, rather than a wall or other architectural feature.

53. *Peribolos* was a structure, typically constructed of stone, that surrounded a building or sanctuary.

54. *Pronaos* is the space located at the front of the temple.

55. Dimopoulou, 2022a, pp. 23-33 with further bibliography. From *megaron*, which was a big altar, unfortunately only remains were found.

56. Pausanias was already initiated into the Eleusinian Mysteries: Paus., I 38, 7.

57. It is likely that due to limited space in the south, *drómena* would take place in the eastern part of the temple.

to enter the temple. It should be noted that access to the temple, and therefore to the *cella*, was probably restricted to the local priesthood or perhaps a few prominent individuals. The temple's closed doors, theatrical space, altars, *stoa*, and *megaron* create an atmosphere that prepares visitors for *drómena*. Participants coexist and witness the ritual, which connects them to a spiritual, psychic, and mystical union. This allows them to visualize the myths they already know and become active bearers of the Mysteries, rather than passive recipients. In any case, the architecture of the space significantly contributed to the transfer of this experience from one person to another (Fig. 4).⁵⁸

“There is a further matter that relates to the likely diffusion of the cult of Zeus from Mt. Lykaion to the sanctuary of Zeus at Olympia only 35 km. to the northwest. The two Zeus sanctuaries share a number of common features including an ash altar, athletic contests, and major buildings of an athletic festival complex”.⁵⁹

Romano's observation regarding the common characteristics of the architectural spaces in the two renowned sanctuaries of Zeus in the Peloponnese, namely Olympia and Mount Lykaion, provides an opportunity for further reflection on the perception of space and religious mobility. The intense activity on Mount Lykaion during the Hellenistic Period⁶⁰ (although there is evidence of continuity of cult from the 16th cent. BCE according to the archaeological finds),⁶¹ which was associated with athletic competitions, festivals, and sacrifices in honour of Zeus, testifies to the sanctuary's reputation. Each athlete, spectator, and visitor knew what to expect. Although the ash altar of Zeus was not visible from the lower sanctuary, those who visited it were expected to observe a rule of silence and secrecy.⁶² The discovery of the ruins of the column bases in front of the *temenos* of Zeus suggests the existence of physical and imaginary boundaries between gods and humans.⁶³ The altar's visi-

58. See also Mylonopoulos, 2008, pp. 49-79.

59. Romano, 2019a, p. 235.

60. Bergeles, 2005, p. 96.

61. Romano & Voyatzis, 2014, pp. 614-615.

62. Romano, 2019a, fig. 3.

63. Romano, 2019a, fig. 4. Although there is not much architecture at the southern peak of Mt. Lykaion, there are however spaces: the altar, the *temenos* and the stadium. The altar is where the *θεσίσαι* (sacrifices) took place, the ritual burning of bone, with wrapped goat and sheep fat, so that the worshippers could make a connection with the deity. The *temenos* may have been the place where the sacrifice took place, and the stadium is where the first athletic contests were held.

bility from a distance alone inspired a sense of awe in all who saw it, which inevitably spread among worshippers (Fig. 5).

The ancient world was clearly aware of the dissemination of the cult of Zeus on Mount Lykaion, which was accompanied by secret rituals and sacrifices, as mentioned above. Pausanias' description alone confirms its mysterious nature:

“Miraculous things are said to happen on Mount Lykaion, especially the following: there is on the mountain a *temenos* of Zeus Lykaios, into which humans are not allowed to enter. If anyone disregards this rule, they are said not to live more than a year”.⁶⁴

In summary, this study suggests that the view of architectural monuments in sanctuaries with secret cults plays a decisive role in the dissemination of religious feeling. The communication among participants in rituals, festivals and *drómēna*, as well as the creation of a collective sense, were greatly influenced by the visual experience upon entering the sanctuary. Specific architectural structures influenced the goals of individuals, often subconsciously. The purpose was to gain the favor of the deity being worshipped and to become active members of a religious community sharing the same beliefs and experiences.

2.2. DECIPHERING THE RELIGIOUS SENSE OF THE INITIATES. OFFERINGS, ATTRIBUTES AND RITUAL OBJECTS AS A MEANS OF RELIGIOUS MOBILITY

Apart from the architectural structures, dedications in honour of the divine and various symbols reflecting religious mobility among initiates played a significant role in disseminating religious feeling. This chapter examines whether the attributes that accompany cult statues, or the sculptural decoration of a sanctuary, as well as the offerings made during sacred ceremonies, visualize the myth and create the religious consciousness of worshippers. This study will focus especially on the sanctuary of Despoina in Lykosoura, which offers rich archaeological finds from the cult statues for analysis as well as on the sanctuaries of the Great Gods in Samothrace and Zeus on Mount Lykaion, with a specific emphasis on the existing archaeological material.

The cult of the Great Gods in Samothrace was probably linked to that of the Kabeiroi, whose worship was also widespread in Anatolia, and they were identified

64. Paus., VIII 38, 6 (transl. by the author).

with Kouretes and Korybantes⁶⁵ as demons and followers of *Megale Meter* (Kybele or *Magna Mater*) and her strong connection with the island of Samothrace.⁶⁶ *Megale Meter*'s association with a ritual dance is evident from the instrument that accompanies her presence, namely cymbals.⁶⁷ The ritual dance was obviously part of the *mysteria* and *myesis* of the island, as the marble decoration of the Hall of Choral Dancers attests to. The frieze of the building was decorated with female dancers depicted in long ritual garments and *polos* over their heads. Some of them play the guitar, the double flute, and the tambourine (Fig. 6).⁶⁸

At this point I will link the visual contact of the initiate with the rituals and the effect of such a representation on his psyche. Seeing the ritual dance, even if it was only performed by women, automatically visualized the myth and prepared the visitor for a unique experience. Through this viewing, the dance and the musical instruments that accompanied it took on symbolic dimensions in their eyes, so that they identified themselves with the ritual part that was to follow. In this way, the experience was subconsciously transferred from one to the other, and since, as we shall see, the dance was an important part of the mystery cults, a shared religious experience of joy and euphoria was created.

Another significant building as already mentioned is *hieron*, whose central acroteria on its roof were decorated with a floral motif, while the four corner acroteria featured sculpted *Nikai*. Additionally, both pediments displayed sculpted representations with figures.⁶⁹ This section will focus especially on the flying *Nikai* that decorated *hieron* and their symbolic significance for travellers and initiates. In ancient Greece, many philosophers, such as Plato and Aristoteles, were preoccupied with the immortality of the soul and the happiness that one experiences after death, having been absolved of their sins. *Nike* represents this liberation that is achieved through the initiatory process, leading to truth and enlightenment. As we will see below, *Nikai* are also present in Lykosoura, indicating that this is not a coincidence. Therefore, in the presence of the *Nikai* at the sanctuary of the Great Gods in Samo-

65. Diod. Sic., III 55, 9; Strabo, X 3, 19.

66. Kritikou, 2022, pp. 31-32.

67. Diodorus Siculus refers to cymbals and tambourines at the wedding of Kadmos and Armonia in Samothrace: Diod. Sic., V 49, 1. See also Bremmer, 2014, pp. 27-28.

68. The frieze perhaps depicts the mythical marriage between Kadmos and Armonia, or a ritual dance that took place during summer festivals on the island. See Lehmann, 1998, p. 86.

69. Matsas, 2017, p. 21, fig. 11.

thrace, visitors are filled with a sense of happiness and belief that they will achieve *soteria* and *katharsis* of their soul.

The temple of Despoina at Lykosoura housed a colossal cult group created by Damophon of Messene in the 2nd cent. BCE. The group consisted of Despoina, Demeter, Artemis, and Anytos. The cult group was supposedly sculpted behind bars, a kind of balustrade protection, with a mosaic decorated with wild animals and ornaments lying in front of it.⁷⁰ The statues were depicted wearing rich garments and accompanied by various attributes. During his visit to the sanctuary of Despoina, Pausanias is the only one who describes the group and provides details about the attributes of the divines.⁷¹ The excavations confirmed many of these attributes.⁷²

The enigmatic nature of Despoina's cult is evident not only through the architecture of the sanctuary but also from the marble objects depicted alongside the venerated goddesses. This is despite the lack of literary evidence, except for Pausanias' statement. It is unclear who was permitted to enter the dark *cella* and experience the mysterious atmosphere of the initiation. However, it is a fact that visitors and initiates participated in the ritual ceremony and were familiar with the myth of Despoina, who was believed to be another daughter of Demeter and Poseidon. It was also believed that Artemis was her sister and that Anytos raised Despoina.

First, through the eyes of Pausanias, who was probably allowed to enter the *cella* and view the statues,⁷³ I will attempt to interpret the experiences of an initiate into the Mysteries of Lykosoura through the symbols and the visualization of the local Arcadian myth. I will also attempt to interpret the attributes as a means of communication between human and divine, as well as between initiates. The *cella* in the temple of Despoina was relatively small compared to the cult statues, which were about 6 m. high. The statues were therefore visible from the front entrance in *pronaos* at foot level. This means that you would have to raise your head to see them more clearly. Torches were probably used to illuminate the cult room, creating a truly mysterious atmosphere which, combined with the attributes of the gods, would inspire a sense of awe in the worshipper. In addition, the mysterious atmo-

70. Salzmann, 1982, p. 65 and 123, fig. 80; Guimier-Sorbets, 2008, pp. 191-200.

71. Paus., VIII 37, 1-10

72. For the earliest publications about the temple and the statues, see Leonardos, 1896; Dickins, 1906-1907, pp. 357-404; Kourouniotis, 1911; Lévy & Marcadé, 1972; Themelis, 1993.

73. Whether Pausanias physically saw the statues, or whether the local priesthood gave him the information, will not be examined at this point, as this has already been studied. See Dimopoulou, 2022a, pp. 47-50; Dimopoulou, 2022b, pp. 178-184.

sphere of the *cella* was enhanced by some characteristic symbols and ornaments, probably made of bronze to the statues, such as the *stephane* of Demeter, the belt and the snakes of Artemis or the armament of Anytos. The reflection of the bronze in the darkness intensified the mystical atmosphere for anyone facing the figures.⁷⁴

On entering the temple, the initiate, familiar with the myth of the Arcadian Despoina, prepares himself or herself for what is about to be seen. The immenseness of the statues, occupying the entire western wall of the sanctuary, is most striking, with the goddesses Demeter and Despoina on their throne, flanked by the standing statues of Artemis and Anytos. The existence of a mirror on the eastern wall, according to Pausanias,⁷⁵ creates a reflection of the statues and allows the visitor not only to see the group, but also to experience the fear of the unknown Mysteries. Under this prism, the purpose of initiation is fully achieved: it intensifies the sense of religious feeling, so that it is subconsciously transferred from one to another (Fig. 7).

A decisive role in the visualization of the myth was, of course, played by the attributes/symbols of the goddesses, which not only confirmed the mystical character of the specific cult, but also brought to life in the eyes of the worshipers the purpose of their presence there. The lit torches carried by the figures of Artemis and Demeter direct the viewer's attention towards a journey to the underworld, referencing the myth of Demeter and *Kore* and her abduction. Artemis, like Hekate, assists Demeter in her search for Despoina, who holds the *mystiké kiste*⁷⁶ and the scepter. This serves as a reminder that Despoina is the Mistress of the sanctuary and that the Mysteries are performed in her honour. However, the only male presence is that of the armed Anytos. The depiction of the Kouretes and Korybantes at the base of the statues, which were in the visitor's direct field of view, embodies possible festivals associated with Mount Lykaion (Fig. 8). There may be a strong interaction between the two sanctuaries – as will be considered below – as they are in close proximity, and it is possible that there was a religious mobility between them.⁷⁷

The garments that covered the goddesses, and especially the decorated garment of Despoina, are the best examples of the visualization of the myth in

74. For the reconstruction of the Cult Group with the bronze additions, see Dimopoulou 2022a, pl. 45, fig. 45.

75. Paus., VIII 37, 7.

76. It was a small cylindrical box, a kind of basket which contained secret items (e.g., plant seeds or myrtle leaves) for ritual practices during – mainly – secret cult ceremonies.

77. “The Sanctuary of Demeter and Despoina at Lykosoura is located on a southern ridge of Mt. Lykaion 7 km to the southeast”: Romano, 2019a, p. 220.

Lykosoura, the mental initiation into the ritual *drómena* during the Mysteries and the active communication between initiate and divine. The marble fragment garment of Despoina, which was found in the *cella* of the temple, is rendered in relief and it is divided into zones illustrating various topics related to Despoina's cult and rituals.⁷⁸ The thematically diverse depictions with a mythological background reflect the local mythical tradition of Arcadia. For example, the eagles and thunderbolts are likely associated with Zeus *Lykaios*, while the Nereids and Tritons are associated with Poseidon, the father of Despoina. I consider that it was an indirect communication with the deities in Lykosoura, which took place at the sight of the depicted figures, whereupon the divine presence penetrated to some extent into the consciousness of the initiates. In this sense, it was possible to visualize the myth through the garment, and the cult function had a subconscious effect on those involved (Fig. 9).

However, the full embodiment of the ritual mysteries is depicted in the lower part of the garment, with the flying *Nikai* holding censers⁷⁹ and the dancing figures with animal masks,⁸⁰ some of whom play instruments such as the kithara or double flute. These two zones of the garment are likely connected to the initiation process. The flying *Nike*, as also seen in Samothrace, represents the liberation of the soul. The ritual dance and cult relationship with the euphoria of the earth and animals, introduce visitors and initiates to a celebration of union with the divine element. The zones on the garment depict various themes that reflect the process of initiation, from the sky (Zeus, eagles, and thunderbolts) to the sea (Tritons and Nereids) and the animal world, connecting the *mystai* with the gods. The divine presence is pervasive throughout the garment, and Arcadian myths are visualized through the various topics. The fact that the initiates probably did not have direct access to the *cella* does not mean that they could not have had indirect contact. It is very likely that the participants in the Mysteries were familiar with a real garment with mythological images, worn by a priestess, and were thus able to recognize and experience the myths and the strong presence of Despoina, Demeter and Artemis in Lykosoura.

The final section of this research will investigate Anytos as an armed figure and the connection between the Kouretes and Korybantes at the footstool and base

78. Athens, National Museum, Cat. no. 1737. About the garment see the recent publications: Morizot, 2008; Tzachili, 2016; Tsiolis, 2019; Dimopoulou, 2022a, pp. 96-107 and 192-198.

79. On a different interpretation of what *Nikai* are probably carrying, see Gasparini, 2008.

80. Terracotta statuettes found in *megaron* as offerings to Despoina also show figures wearing animal masks, as well as the lower part of the garment. See Kourouniotis, 1912, pp. 156-159, figs. 23-35; Dimopoulou, 2022a, pl. 37, figs. 37d-e.

of the statues in Lykosoura in relation to the Hoplodmia festival as indicated in the bronze tablet from Arcadia. It will also explore the potential religious mobility and interaction between the two cults of Despoina and Zeus *Lykaios*. Jan-Mathieu Carbon and James P.T. Clackson suggest that the bronze tablet indicates a festival with ritualistic characteristics: “The festival occurring every eight years is here explicitly tied to the occurrence of a celebration called Hoplodmia, perhaps meaning ‘Arming’ or ‘Armouring’”. According to the scholars, during the festival the boys in *ephebea*⁸¹ carried a panoply in a ritual dance procession.⁸² Hoplodmia is related to the myth of Hoplodamos, a giant who assisted Rhea before the birth of Zeus at Mount Thaumasion in the Methydrion region⁸³ in case she was attacked by Kronos. This myth is similar to that of Zeus’ birth in Crete, where Kouretes and Korybantes protected the newborn god from his father Kronos by drowning out his cries with a frenzied dance of clashing spear and shield.

Based on Pausanias’ description of the cult group at Lykosoura, Anytos was a figure standing next to Despoina and serving as her protector. Although the excavations did not uncover Anytos’ armament, it is likely that he was wearing a cuirass and helmet and carrying a spear and shield (Fig. 10).⁸⁴ The base of the throne and the footstool of the throned goddesses Demeter and Despoina are depicted in the same frame as Kouretes and Korybantes. They are shown as armed figures carrying shields and spears in a ritual dance.⁸⁵ Anytos’ presence in the Lykosoura group is not coincidental. The myth surrounding his name is limited to local arcadian tradition and is probably linked to the celebration of the Hoplodmia referred to in the bronze tablet. It is possible that a similar celebration to the Hoplodmia took place at the sanctuary of Lykosoura, possibly alongside the mysteries of Despoina. The mobility between the cult places is apparent not only due to their proximity, but also because many of the characteristics of the worshipped figures reflect similar myths about the afterlife and the euphoria of the earth, which were familiar to initiates, visitors, travellers, and

81. *Ephebea* (= adolescence) had two meanings in ancient Greece: one referring to the age of 14 and the other to the age of 18 to 20, which was the preparatory stage before enlistment in the army and training in arms.

82. Carbon & Clackson, 2016, pp. 8-9.

83. Paus., VIII 36, 2-3.

84. Paus., VIII 37, 5. For the reconstruction of Anytos, see Dimopoulou, 2022a, pp. 84-89 and Dimopoulou, 2024, pp. 323-331.

85. Dimopoulou, 2022a, pp. 107-110, pl. 42, fig. 42.

pilgrims. The interaction between them is evident, allowing for the mobility of ideas, cultic perceptions, and mythological elements to be discussed.

Finally, it is worth mentioning here the work of Jennifer Larson on *Nature Gods, Nymphs and the Cognitive Science of Religion*, which focuses on the “dual-process model of cognition”.⁸⁶ The researcher examines this model of thought in relation to the perception of the divine element. Consequently, the author differentiates between the intuitive and reflexive aspects of the mind. In the former, actions are performed instinctively without the involvement of conscious thought, whereas in the latter, the thought process is deliberate and requires effort.⁸⁷ Furthermore, she posits that the intuitive nature of religious beliefs often renders them unspoken, as they appear self-evident, and they don’t need to be taught.⁸⁸ The present study of mystery cults reflects the intuitive nature of religious beliefs, as evidenced by the case of the perception of worshippers towards the occult and the unspoken. Those who were initiated into the mysteries and those who participated in the rituals instinctively shared their religious beliefs within the group, eschewing any attempt to explain the inexplicable. It was evident that this process occurred within the confines of the group, which allowed for the subconscious sharing of religious experiences, without the need for further interpretation of the experiential element. It was a kind of mental and sensorial religious mobility that automatically facilitated a transition from intuitive and subconscious engagement to active participation in *drómēna*.

3. CONCLUSIONS

This study of the three cult places of the Great Gods of Samothrace, Zeus *Lykaios* and Despoina at Lykosoura aims to highlight, as far as possible in a short article, elements common to religious mobility in the ancient world. The aim of the study was to determine whether the transfer of ideas, mainly associated with mystery cults and ritual ceremonies, resulted from shared experiences between initiates. After studying specific literary and epigraphic material, architectural spaces and structures related to cultic function, as well as sculptural decoration and the representation of symbols and offerings, I believe it has become reasonably clear how the mobility of the religious feeling was only enabled through seeing, hearing and

86. Larson, 2019, pp. 71-85.

87. Larson, 2019, p. 80

88. Larson, 2019, p. 80.

smelling. Cults linked to common mythological elements and secret rituals united the wills and beliefs of those who visited the sanctuaries towards a common goal: happiness in this life and in the afterlife. In other words, through seeing, hearing, and experiencing, they shared common secrets, experiences, and goals.

The initiation process involved ritual ceremonies, the teaching of specific rules, dance, music and sacrifice. This allowed the initiates to play an active role, without which the practice of the cult would be impossible. Visitors who wished to participate in initiations, athletic games, festivals, sacrifices, or simply to watch, “knew” what to expect in all three sanctuaries. This shared knowledge facilitated the subconscious transfer of religious feeling and subconscious fear from the individual to the collective. The myths surrounding the worshipped deities were familiar and visualized through symbols and offerings that were also familiar to visitors and worshippers.

Seeing and hearing were associated not only with the space, the cult statue, or the initiation process, but also with the individuals who participated in *drómena* and rituals, and the psychic connection between them. The rules of silence and the mystical atmosphere that prevailed fascinated the participants, who in many cases had been initiated into various mysteries with a predetermined experiential and emotional experience that contributed to their spiritual transmission. The concealment of sacred practices in sanctuaries created an imaginary boundary between the human and the divine. This fact is supported, for example, by Pausanias’ visit to the sanctuary of Kabeiroi in Thebes, when he mentions: “Who are the *Kabeiroi* and what kind of secret rituals are there for them and Demeter, I will silence them by apologizing to the listeners”.⁸⁹

89. Paus., IX 25, 5-6 (transl. by the author).

IMAGES



Fig. 1. Theatrical Circle in the Temple of the Great Gods in Samothrace (© Hellenic Ministry of Culture and Sports / Hellenic Organization of Cultural Resources Development, Ephorate of Antiquities of Rodopi. Photo: N. Stournaras).

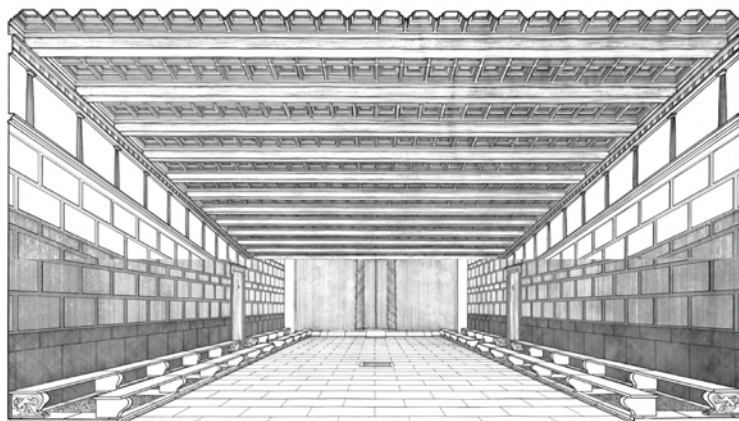


Fig. 2. *Hieron* in the Temple of the Great Gods in Samothrace. The interior of the *cella*. Reconstruction (adapted from Matsas, 2017, fig. 12).

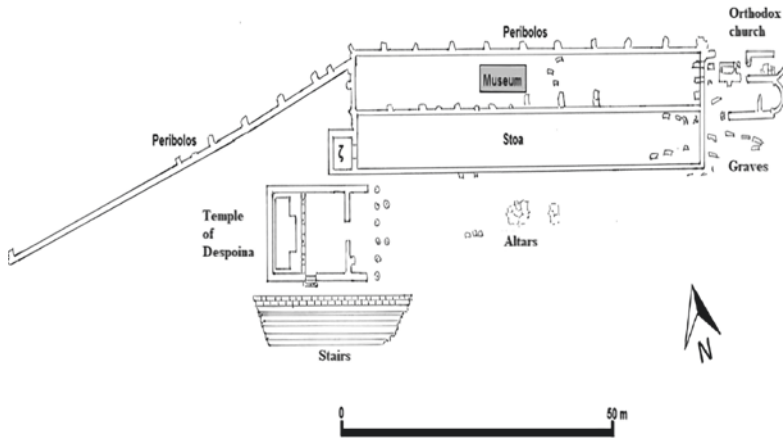


Fig. 3. Drawing reconstruction of Despoina's sanctuary
(drawing: I. Georgiadis after A. Lykakis, in Leonardos, 1896).



Fig. 4. Temple of Despoina at Lykosoura. South door with the step-stones (© Hellenic Ministry of Culture and Sports / Hellenic Organization of Cultural Resources Development, Ephorate of Antiquities of Arcadia. Photo: I. Georgiadis).



Fig. 5. The southern peak of Mt. Lykaion with the *temenos* (after D.G. Romano, in Romano, 2019a, fig. 4).



Fig. 6. Hall of Choral Dancers from the sanctuary of the Great Gods in Samothrace. Fragment of the frieze with the female dancers (© Hellenic Ministry of Culture and Sports / Hellenic Organization of Cultural Resources Development. Ephorate of Antiquities of Rodopi. Photo: S. Mavrommatis).

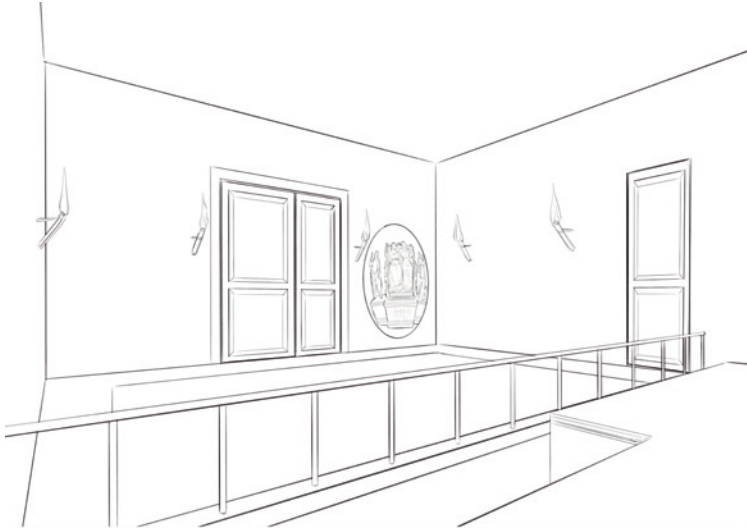


Fig. 7. Drawing reconstruction of the interior of the *cella* with the hypothetical mirror in the Temple of Despoina at Lykosoura (© S. Dimopoulou).

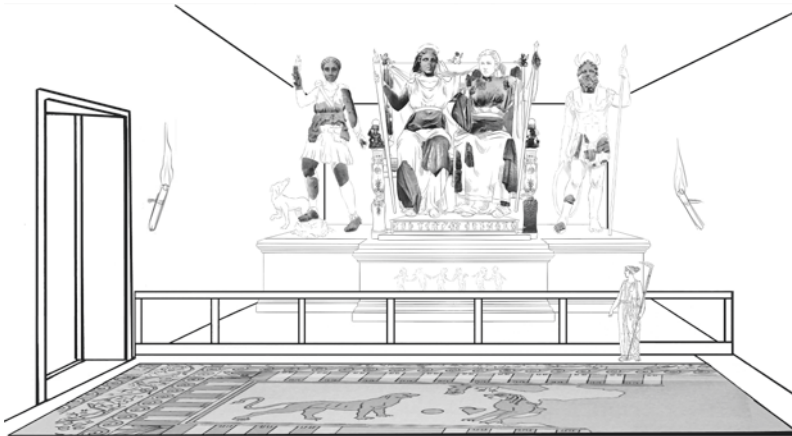


Fig. 8. The cult group of Lykosoura. Drawing reconstruction with the preserved fragments and attributes in the *cella* of the temple of Despoina at Lykosoura (mosaic adapted from Leonardos 1896, after A. Lykakis. © S. Dimopoulou).

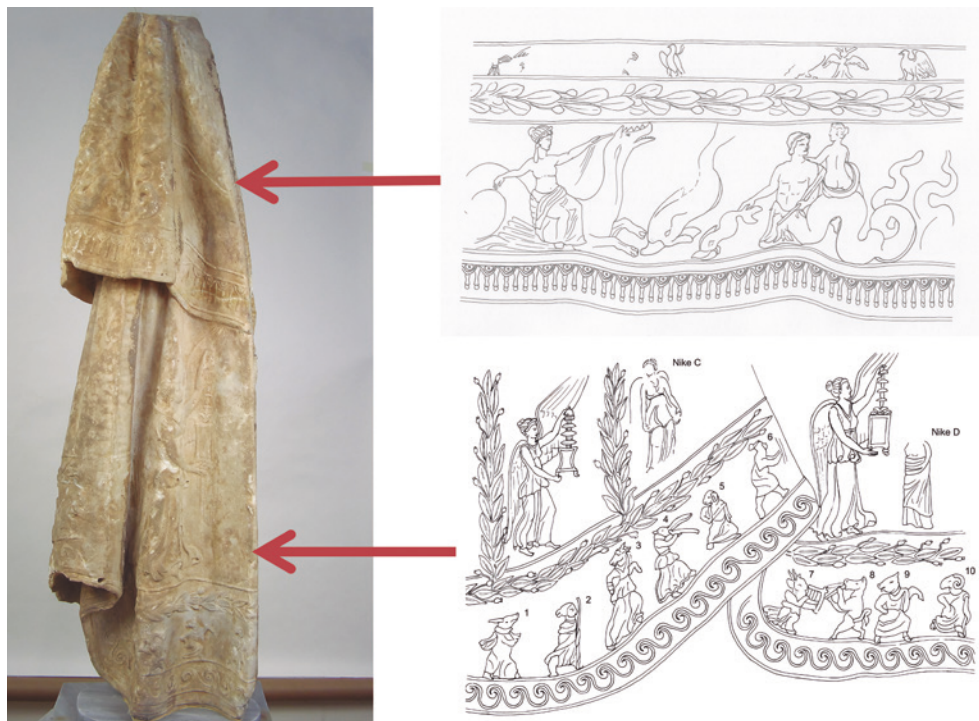


Fig. 9. Marble garment of Despoina (© Hellenic Ministry of Culture and Sports / Hellenic Organization of Cultural Resources Development, Hellenic National Archaeological Museum of Athens. Photo: National Museum. Drawing reconstruction of the zones of the garment of Despoina. © S. Dimopoulou).

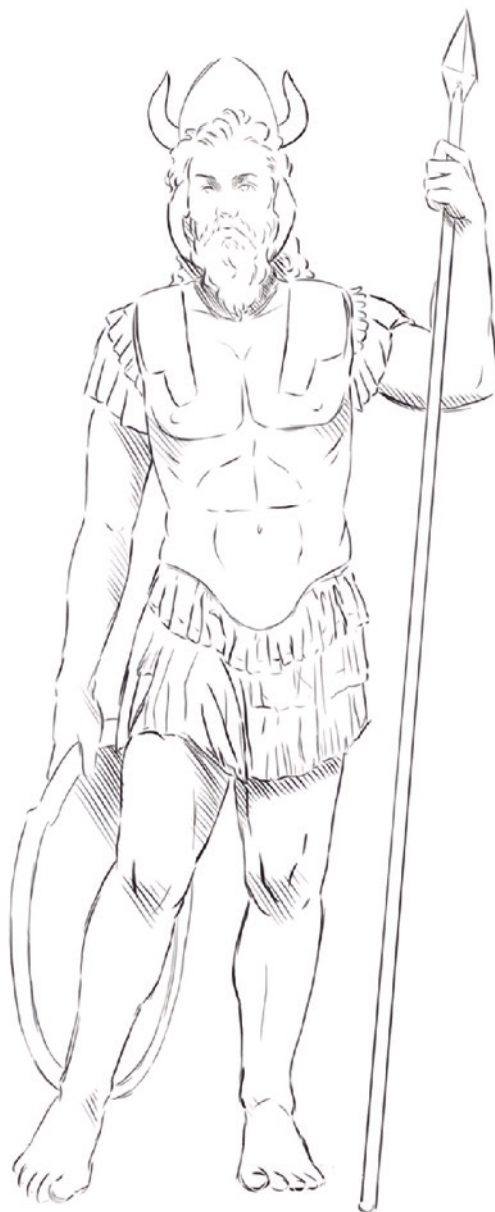


Fig. 10. Drawing reconstruction of Anytos from the Cult Group at Lykosoura (© S. Dimopoulou).

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