

# Exploring the Sacred Landscape of the Ancient Peloponnese





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Cults and sacred places

Eleni Marantou



ARCHAEOPRESS PUBLISHING LTD  
Summertown Pavilion  
18-24 Middle Way  
Summertown  
Oxford OX2 7LG  
[www.archaeopress.com](http://www.archaeopress.com)

ISBN 978-1-80327-771-4  
ISBN 978-1-80327-772-1 (e-Pdf)

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*To my family  
My parents, Lilika and Stathis,  
and my little sister, Eleftheria.*



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# Preface

This book stems from my doctoral thesis *Deities, Worship, and Siting of Cult Places in Central and Southern Peloponnese: Geometric – Archaic – Classical Periods*, which was accepted for the degree of PhD at the University of Corfu in 2013. The research concerns cults and sacred places in the Peloponnese, more specifically in the geographical regions of Arcadia, Elis, Messenia, and Laconia, from the Geometric to the Classical periods, with shorter references to Hellenistic and Roman sites.

This present work is an enhanced version of my thesis in terms of structure and content. The first part is presented as a full list of the sacred places and the second focuses more effectively on religious characteristics, with a particular interest in the chthonian nature of the deities. Over the last decade, new research and results have appeared that had to be included to present a contemporary picture of religious landscapes in the Peloponnese. For this reason, descriptions have been enriched or adapted to the new research findings. An updated bibliography has also been added, making the book a reference point for future researchers.

For the completion of my research I am particularly grateful to my supervisor, Professor Emerita Eugenia Vikela, for her guidance and her valuable help throughout the years of my research. Another precious advisor and friend has been Professor Emeritus Petros Themelis<sup>†</sup>, who generously shared his knowledge with me and provided bibliographical and other material about different cult places; our many conversations have helped me move my thoughts forward. Furthermore, I would like to express my sincere thanks to Pavlina Karanastasi, as it was our discussions that provided the starting point for a decision on the exact content of my thesis.

Friends and colleagues have supported my work over the years with talks and helpful comments. I particularly want to thank Birgitta Eder, Alikí Moustaka, Xení Arapojanni, Georgios Korres, Panos Valavanis, Nikos Zarifis, Antonio Corso, Gina Salapata, Georgia Kokkorou-Alevras, and P. Faklaris. Also, I owe a considerable debt of gratitude to Yannis Pikoulas and Argyris Petronotis who, very sadly, are no longer with us.

My participation in the ‘Peloponneskurs’ of the German Archaeological Institute at Athens in 2014 has given to me the opportunity to revisit some of the sacred places that formed part of my research, as well as to discuss and exchange views and ideas with researchers from different faculties. For this I would like to express my gratitude to the German Archaeological Institute at Athens, more specifically to the director, Katja Sporn, and the scientific director, Reinhard Senff. Furthermore, I offer my deepest thanks to my close friend, Annarita Doronzio, whose supportive collaboration has been invaluable.

The first steps of my bibliographic research were made in the Blegen Library of the American School of Classical Studies at Athens, but the greatest part of my research over the last fifteen years was undertaken in the library of the German Archaeological Institute at Athens. There, I owe great thanks to Christina and Catharina, and I will never forget the precious help offered in everyday matters by Mirca, who is no longer among us.

This book would never have materialised without the full support and encouragement of my family – my parents, Stathis and Lilika, and my sister, Eleftheria – to whom I am so grateful for their understanding and support, in every way, over the years. I must also thank my friend Frank for his patience and all the time we spent together visiting ancient sacred places, participating in conferences, and, additionally, all our constructive discussions. My good friends Vanessa, Makis, and Panos must also be acknowledged for their wonderful support.

This book is dedicated to my family, for giving me the principles and values to become the person I am, and the strength needed to overcome all the difficulties and challenges faced along the way to completing my goals.

# Introduction

The primary idea for this research was to trace the origins of the religious system in the Peloponnese and identify the reasons why it evolved in a specific way. The Peloponnese is an independent geographical unity, but each of its regions holds different characteristics. This fact, in relation to the particularly large number of cult places known in the Peloponnese, led to the decision to limit the research to four of the geographical regions, detaching the north and north-eastern parts of the Peloponnese, as this would not directly affect the results of the research. Consequently, the study was limited to Arcadia, Elis, Messenia, and Laconia.

The initial thought was to create a topographical 'religious' map, where all the cult places of the four regions would be presented. The primary question involved the reasons why some deities were preferred in specific regions and not others. A necessary first step was to compile a list of all the cult places. The identification of the reasons that led to the establishment of cult places, compared with information on the environment and special historical conditions of each region, enlightened aspects of the purpose of selecting specific deities, their epithets, and their precise nature in the cult, and made clear the correlations of the religion to the political and social physiognomy of the regions explored. The observation of the topographical spread of the sacred places became the tool for interpretations and conclusions. To assist the reader visualise the locations of sacred places, several maps are provided. The main map (Map 1) shows all the sacred places for which we know the exact location; four others (1A, 1B, 1C, 1D) complete the areas where sacred places are too many to display in the main map. The spread of sacred monuments during the first three chronological periods is shown on Maps 2, 3, and 4. Here are mentioned the names of the locations where new sacred places were established in each chronological period (Geometric, Archaic, and Classical respectively).

The chronological period under study had its starting point at the beginning of the Historical period, where great changes took place in the Greek world, i.e. as the Prehistorical period was coming to an end and the beginning of a new era emerged. The Geometric period is considered as the beginning of the Historical period, however, if evidence of Mycenaean cults pre-exists it is mentioned, so that a link to the past can be shown and connections for a possible continuation of the cult provided. The chronological span of the research and analysis of cult places begins from the Geometric and continues until the Roman period, with the main interest directed to the first three phases. Additionally, ancient temples transformed into Christian churches are also assessed.

This current work is divided into two parts. The first part provides in effect a database of all the cult places of the regions studied; its chapters present the cult places of each geographical region. Each chapter begins with a brief mythological and historical outline to provide the reader with a picture of social conditions and indicate the religious framework within the geographical region presented. The cult places are then listed, with basic information on their location, descriptions of the site and any structures, and the more significant findings.

The cult places are divided into categories, i.e. according to whether evidence on them is available (foundations or walls of a temple/altar, movable finds) that might refer to a cult in

a sanctuary or sacred space, open-air or roofed, or attested exclusively by written sources (ancient or modern). All the sacred places are divided into those that can be dated according to their finds, or those for which the dating is insecure. For each of these categories the following three sub-divisions are made: a) sanctuaries found (regardless of whether they have been excavated or not) with or without temples; b) related movable surface finds; and c) sacred places only known from written sources.

Ancient sources, especially the writings of Pausanias, have been considered as the main 'guide' covering sacred places through antiquity. Additionally for this present study, detailed bibliographical research was carried out to record any evidence in publications, from the end of the 18th century until the present, on finds coming to light from surface surveys and systematic excavations, as well as random findings.

Information on each sacred place includes the related ancient sources, if available, bibliographical references about the excavation and related research, plus additional bibliography. The aim is to give an overview of the religious landscape with the main characteristics of each site, with an in-depth bibliography, and not to present them in detail. Only the important finds and site information that might help us ascertain religious conclusions are mentioned.

Each cult place is presented as follows:

- *Temple/sanctuary* [name and epithet of god/deities + period classification code, i.e. GEOMETRIC/ARCHAIC/CLASSICAL/HELLENISTIC/ROMAN (referring to the chronological period(s) in which the cult was active, whether or not there was a cult building or an open-space cult)]
- *Source* (if applicable)
- *References* (publication of excavation/survey, mention of modern research, further bibliography on the site, etc.)

When more information on the exact siting of a cult place is given in the description it is underscored in the main text. The description includes main information about the cult place and the most important findings only; it is not intended as a complete description of the excavation or the finds. The descriptions function as a means of giving first impression of the site and major references for further reading; they also provide an overview, so that the site can be contextualised and help in terms of drawing conclusions about those cults functioning within the given timeframe.

A different numbering system has been allocated for those cult places found or known from movable finds, and those sites mentioned only in the sources. The first category uses the first letter of the geographical region (i.e. Arcadia = A, Elis = E, Messenia = M, Laconia = L). The second category (cult places only known from sources) is indicated by the letter S after the letter of the geographical region, i.e. AS = Arcadia only known from sources (and thus ES for Elis, MS for Messenia, and LS for Laconia).

The numbering follows the order of the research and is not intended as a geographical sequence. Different tables have been made for each geographical region to provide an



overview of the sacred places. For each region there is a table giving sacred places found, or indicated by movable finds, and another listing sacred places known from the sources. All the tables have information on the deity worshipped (name/epithet where available), location, chronological periods when in use, and source citation (if applicable).

The chronological time periods referred to in the title of each place are based on the following divisions: **Geometric**: 1000/900-700 BC; **Archaic**: 700-480 BC; **Classical**: 480-330 BC; **Hellenistic**: 330-146 BC; **Roman**: 146 BC-AD 31.

The second part of this book includes the analysis of the data recorded. First the special characteristics of the cult places are presented, in terms of the cult buildings, rituals, and the special functions they had. The next chapter includes a catalogue of the deities worshipped in the examined regions. These deities are divided into chthonian, secondary and local, personifications of the elements of nature, heroic and mythological figures, chthonian deities that evolved into Olympian ones, older deities assimilated into the later Olympian pantheon, and the Olympian deities. All deities presented have been summarised with all their epithets and the characteristics of their cult within each region. Primarily, the main or most known deities and then the less known are presented in alphabetical order; epithets are also given within the description of a deity in alphabetical order.

The main goal here is to provide a picture of: the cult practices dominant in the central, western, and southern Peloponnese; the main characteristics of the deities worshipped; and the ways cults might have combined early chthonian deities, that were never forgotten, and the Olympian gods, who were the leading figures in the religious system of the historical period.

Finally, in the last chapter, a synthesis of the data is attempted to extract conclusions on religious, historical, and social levels. Religious remarks centre on facts extracted from the preferred deities and the forms of the cult. The economic findings derive from studies of the chronological and economic development of the cult places for each geographical area, and, additionally, there are general conclusions that define the development of cities and their communication to other regions. The social framework includes analysis of the differentiation of the sanctuaries found in the countryside and the city sanctuaries. Special mention is made of the link between the religious and political life of the cities, but also among the regions, on the basis of the use of the religious sites for political procedures. Finally, there is a presentation of the main cult places of the rest of the Peloponnese (north and north-east) so as to clarify whether there are similar characteristics, or whether each region chose a completely different route in the expression of its religious consciousness.

During this journey into the past, interesting conclusions have been arrived at in terms of sacred sites, the deities who accompanied people in their everyday lives, and the political use of religious feeling for gaining power and recognition, as political balances were always fragile and the dangers were apparent throughout history. From the deep connection of man to nature, and the local correlations to the organised religious system of classical antiquity, a complex system has been shaped, one that affected specific means of religious expression over the centuries and which will be presented in the pages that follow.