

VISUALIZED RITUALS AND DEDICATORY INSCRIPTIONS ON VOTIVE OFFERINGS TO THE NYMPHS

BY

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Abstract

This article explores the religious meaning of Archaic and Classical dedications with images of rituals (e.g. sacrificial procession, libation) and dedicatory inscriptions. I argue that these objects ought to be treated as meaningful expressions of individuals' piety rather than as reflections of actual cult practices. I adopt a holistic approach that considers the two components of dedications—images and texts—as inextricably intertwined in the creation of meaning. The argument is exemplified through the examination of dedications to the Nymphs: the so-called Pitsá tablet, Archandros' relief from the Athenian Asklepieion, and two reliefs from a cave at Penteli. The detailed analysis of images, inscriptions, and their juxtaposition reveals how these dedications made the devotion of named individuals perpetual at a specific site, and shaped the manner in which the sacred was to be envisioned. Art and text together marked the site of deposition as a place of worship of the Nymphs, articulated specific ideas regarding rituals, the nature of the goddesses and their companions Pan and Hermes, and the possibilities for human interaction with these divinities. In rendering individual devotion continuous, these dedications confirmed the inexistence of such visualized rituals in reality. They elided and asserted the divide between the real and the imaginary in Greek religion.¹

*Anigrian nymphs, daughters of the stream,
ambrosial beings that ever tread these depths with
your rosy feet, all hail, and cure Kleonymos, who set
up for you under the pines these fair images.*²

Νύμφαι Ἀνιγριάδες, ποταμοῦ κόραι, αἱ τάδε βένθη
ἀμβρόσια ῥοδέοις στείβετε ποσσὶν ἀεὶ,
χαίρετε καὶ σώζετε Κλεώνυμον, ὃς τάδε καλὰ
εἴσαθ' ὑπὸ πίτων ὕμμι, θεαί, ξόανα.

In this epigram, written by the Byzantine poetess Moero, probably around 300 BC,³ the speaker Kleonymos prays to the Nymphs and asks for their protection. The poem, which opens with the address to the Nymphs and closes with the word “images” (*xoana*), conveys a fundamental bond between ritual entreaty to the divinities and the dedicatory object.⁴ Kleonymos identifies himself as the giver of the “fair images” that are set up beneath the pines. The dedications are pointed to in the prayer and function as signs—types of *semata*—that attest the suppliant's devotion, facilitate the goddesses' recognition of his worthiness, and ultimately, provide a material validation to the prayer.

At the same time, the poetic entreaty defines the votives. The suppliant's prayer brings the dedications to life in the imagination of the poem's readers and listeners. The prayer effectively creates the images through ekphrasis—a verbal description of a work of art.⁵ Since the poem belongs to an epigrammatic tradition that plays up the tension between poetic fiction and realities, it is clearly impossible to assess the extent to which it relates to some actuality, possibly to existing monuments and an individual, or whether it is entirely fictional.⁶ Whatever the case may be, the surviving text, in the form of a prayer, is the sole context within which the votives can be said to exist. In this framework, despite their centrality and noted beauty, the actual form and appearance of the *xoana* remain unknown. They are said to be given to the Nymphs and set up by Kleonymos under the pine trees. The ritualized speech of the prayer articulates the essential characteristics of the dedications: beautiful images, given by a particular worshipper to specific divinities, and located at a particular place.

The epigram—a poetic form that relates directly to reli-

¹ My thanks to Jenny Wallensten for the opportunity to present this paper at the conference of the Swedish Institute in Athens in November 2006, and for her editorial work on the manuscript. I have benefited greatly from comments made by participants on that occasion and by Kate Holland, Ian Quinn, Corinne Pache, Melissa Mueller, and Verity Platt. In addition, I am grateful to the anonymous reader of the paper for the invaluable review. Finally, I am thankful to Jas' Elsner for his remarks on an earlier draft.

² *Anth.Pal.* 6.189; Gow & Page 1965, I, 145; (text and translation adapted from L. Paton, *Greek anthology*, vol. I, 396–397 (Loeb Classical Library, 1916)).

³ Gow & Page, II, 413–414.

⁴ I have used here Paton's edition and translation of the poem which adopts the emendation of the text's *Hamadryads*—tree-Nymphs—to *Anigriades*—Nymphs of a certain locality that presided over a spring. For further discussion, see Gow & Page 1965, II, 415.

⁵ Generally on ekphrasis, see Elsner 2002, with further bibliography.

⁶ See further examples, Elsner 2002, 9–13. Generally on ekphrastic epigrams, see Friedländer 1912, 55–60; Rossi 2001, 15–27; Gutzwiller 2002. Goldhill 1994; 2007.

gious practices⁷—encapsulates some of the fundamental characteristics of Greek votive religion.⁸ It conveys the implied exchange that is embedded in the act of giving gifts to divinities. It emphasizes not only the aesthetic character of the votive, but also its significance as a form of a *sema* of the giver, which in turn functions as a material testimony of the dedicator's devotion.⁹ And finally, the full significance of the votive is articulated in a specific context of an attempt to communicate with the divine through ritual.¹⁰

Just as this poem alludes to images in the context of communication between human and divine, many of the surviving Greek votives combine visual and textual elements as objects that attempt to bridge the gap between mortals and immortals.¹¹ Like Kleonimos' gifts, these are still admired for their aesthetic quality. Yet while the language of the epigram conveys a fundamental link between ritual behavior and the dedicated objects,¹² this link is not clearly apparent to a modern viewer of ancient dedications, particularly when they are viewed in a museum setting or otherwise out of their original site of deposition. The form of many votives, such as three-dimensional statues of young men and women, does not necessarily allude to any type of ritual.¹³ Furthermore, many of the dedicatory inscriptions are generic, and tend to be limited to the specifications of dedicator and dedicatee,¹⁴ without a *clearly discernible* reference to ritual.¹⁵

There are however, dedications that make explicit visual reference to ritual. These dedications, which are the subject of this paper, combine two-dimensional images of rituals such as sacrifice or libation with a dedicatory inscription specifying the name of the dedicator and intended recipient. I consider here a group of Archaic and Classical dedications that were made to the Nymphs—the female divinities, thought to inhabit different parts of nature (e.g. water sources, trees, and mountain-tops). Most of the votives discussed here were found in caves, the characteristic sites for the cults of the Nymphs.¹⁶ In what follows, I examine the relationship between the visual and the textual elements in such votives and consider the implications of this relationship for their religious significance.

My argument about the significance of such votives incorporates a methodological claim as well. These objects—which are familiar to students of Greek art, archaeology, epigraphy and religion—consist of both image and text. Typically in the literature, each element of the dedication is examined separately. The textual components are taken as evidence for arguments about the development of writing in general and dedicatory language in particular, or as sources for the classification of the entire object as a votive. By contrast, the iconography, artistic styles, and technique are usually examined in an art historical context. For historians of religion, visual elements are generally used for the reconstruction of religious practices, and depending on the spe-

cific case, despite obvious difficulties, both text and image are used as evidence for the identification of the site of deposition as a place of a particular cult. Even when all elements of a votive are taken into account as a whole, the *particular* relationship of words and images tends to be overlooked.¹⁷

I propose to take a further step and adopt a holistic approach to the study of dedications in order to gain a better understanding of their religious meaning. Given that dedications were set up as gifts to divinities, it is necessary to examine how ritual, worshippers, divinities and their relationships are characterized by the components of dedications—images and texts. Such an examination requires a close analysis not only of each of the elements separately, but must also take into account where these components appear to cohere and where there is an apparent disjuncture.¹⁸

The rationale for such an inquiry is that the specific link between images and texts points to the unique religious meaning of each particular dedication as the material expression of individual piety.¹⁹ Each element of these dedica-

⁷ On the relationship between epigrams, prayers, and dedicatory inscriptions, see Raubitschek 1967, 17–26; Day 1994; Depew 1997; Day 2000.

⁸ For general discussions, see Parker 2005b, 444; Keesling 2003, 3–21; Parker 2005a; van Straten 1981; Burkert 1987, 12–15. For discussions of archaeological evidence in particular, see, for example, Linders & Nordquist 1987; Baumbach 2004.

⁹ Similarly, note the observations of Keesling 2003, 23–26. On gifts as 'tie-signs', Komter 2005, 7, and on gifts as homonyms and synonyms of the giver, Mauss 1990, 46.

¹⁰ On ritual and communication, see Rappaport 1999, 50–52.

¹¹ Notably as asserted in Parker 2005a, millions of deposited objects that have been identified as 'dedications' are not inscribed. Thus writing was not deemed as a religious necessity for the dedicatory act, but was a choice that allowed dedicators to assert their identity.

¹² On the role of objects in substantiating the non-material in ritual context, Rappaport 1999, 141–144.

¹³ This is exemplified in the question of the identity of the maidens from the Athenian Akropolis, which is one of the central subjects of Keesling 2003.

¹⁴ On dedicatory language and inscriptions, see Lazzarini 1976; Day 1994; Keesling 2003, 6–10, 22–35; Parker 2005a.

¹⁵ The reference to ritual becomes more apparent through contextualization of the objects (for example, dedications of objects that are used in cult). For discussion of the issue, see Day 1994.

¹⁶ On Nymphs in Greek religion, *GGR*³, 244–253; Larsson 2001; *LIMC* VIII (1997), 891–902, s.v. Nymphai (M. Halm-Tisserant); Conner 1988; Sourvino-Inwood 2005, 103–111.

¹⁷ An example of this division is apparent in the discussions of Boardman *et al.* 2005 and Parker 2005a, who divide the discussion of literary and epigraphic material from an account of the objects themselves including their iconography. Keesling 2003 is a study which takes a more synthetic approach to statues and their dedicatory inscriptions. For other areas of Greco-Roman antiquity, see, for example, Ma 2007 and Platt 2007.

¹⁸ For a general overview of the juxtaposition of images and inscriptions in Greco-Roman antiquity, see Newby 2007.

¹⁹ On votives as expressions of individual piety, see Burkert 1987, 13; Parker 2005a, 270.

tions may be said to belong to traditions of generic dedicatory imagery and language that were current in a particular geographical area at a particular time. Whether one assumes that the dedications discussed here were produced in workshops catering to a general clientele or that they are products of private commissions, (or some combination of both scenarios depending on the specific case), it cannot be denied that these votives acquired a specific meaning when the visual elements were combined with texts. The dedication acquired further specificity when it was set up at a particular location. And so an ideal interpretation would consider the relationship between the votive and its ultimate setting. The obvious difficulty in treating the question of location arises from the fact that in many cases it is difficult to reconstruct the exact placement of a votive in a given space and this specific location's particular original meaning.²⁰ However, when both image and inscription survive together, it is possible to examine the aspects in which the two main components of the dedication appear to agree and the ones in which there is an apparent gap.²¹

One of the difficulties in the study of dedications is the reconstruction of the occasion for which they were made; whether these artistic representations were meant to commemorate, supplement, or substitute actual rituals.²² These questions are all too often unanswerable. However, the religious meaning of these artifacts does not necessarily reside in the degree to which they are in fact authentic reflections of actual cult practices, even if they serve as valuable pieces of evidence for scholarly reconstruction of religious practices. Such meaning is to be found, rather, in their overall effect. Like Kleonimos' images that memorialize specific facets of his own piety, these dedications commemorate visually the devotion of individual worshippers, who associated their dedicatory act with a specific *idea* of ritual.²³ These are pieces of evidence for our modern understanding of how people chose to visually express and perpetuate their piety, and thus still convey religious ideologies that were current at the time in which they were set up.²⁴ As opposed to Kleonimos' prayer and gifts to the Nymphs that exist only in the realm of poetry, these votives that were found in archaeological excavation and were set up in sanctuaries are surviving *semata* of individuals' participation in Greek votive religion.

THE PITSÁ TABLET

The first dedication I wish to consider is the so-called Pitsá tablet (*Fig. 1*), which was found in 1934 in the cave of Saftulis near Sikyon, in the region of Korinthia.²⁵ The votive with the image of a sacrificial procession is the best-preserved of four painted wooden *pinakes* that have survived thanks to the particularly dry conditions within the

cave. Let us first take a close look at the depicted seven worshippers. The first figure on the left wears a blue *himation* and has a sprig on the left side, a bulge in the lower belly, close to the thighs, while the right hand appears to be under the fabric. Although the head of the figure has not survived, it is clearly the tallest participant in the procession. In his original publication Anastasios Orlandos identified this figure as female, possibly a mother,²⁶ and it has also been suggested that it may be a pregnant woman.²⁷ Others have identified it as a male figure whose beard is now missing.²⁸ The tablet's state of preservation makes an absolute identification quite difficult. Nonetheless, the examination of contemporary comparanda suggests that the figure is more likely to be male; the figure's flat upper body, the right hand hidden under the bulging drapery, and the offering held at the left resemble the iconography of bearded men in processions depicted on vase paintings of the Archaic period.²⁹

Further to the right, we see two women somewhat shorter, long-haired, and crowned with wreaths and fillets. Each is dressed in a blue *peplos* and a red *himation* and each carries two sprigs and a fillet in the right hand, while gesturing her veneration with the palm of the left. To the right of the women, there is an *aulos* player, whose musical instrument is held by a leather strap—the *phorbeia*,³⁰ and next to him a somewhat shorter lyre player. Still further to the right and set apart, we see a boy, who is shorter than the musicians. He tilts his body forward as he leads a sheep by a rope. Finally, closest to the altar on the far right, stands the bearer of ritual vessels—the *kanephoros*.³¹ She is short-haired, crowned with a wreath and dressed like the other women. She carries above her head a tray containing two

²⁰ On complexities of votive deposition, see van Straten 1981, 78–80; Salapata 2002; Parker 2005a, 280.

²¹ On difficulty of identity and apparent gaps between inscriptions and images see comment in Boardman *et al.* 2005, 285.

²² Boardman *et al.* 2005, 285; Parker 2005a, 279–280.

²³ Similarly, Parker 2005b, 41.

²⁴ Similarly, Tanner 2006, 85.

²⁵ The Pitsá tablet is dated 540–520 BC (Athens NM 16464, 15 × 30 cm); Orlandos 1935; Orlandos 1965; Muthmann 1975, 95–96; van Straten 1981, 84; van Straten 1995; Himmelmann 1997; Larson 2001, 232–233; Wachter 2001, 156–157; Dillon 2002, 228–229.

²⁶ Orlandos 1935; similarly, Himmelmann 1997, 20; Lorber 1979, 93; van Straten 1995, 57–58.

²⁷ Dillon 2002, 228–229.

²⁸ Wachter 2001, 156–157; Keesling 2003, 244 n. 92.

²⁹ See, for example, a black figure Attic cup, dated to 525 BC (Musée du Louvre, CA 2988), *CVA Paris, Musée du Louvre* 12, 140, pls. 193:1–4, 194:1–2 (France 19, pls. 866, 867). Here, a series of bearded men are draped, their left hand holds the offering, while the right hand is invisible. See also an Attic black figure siana cup, dated to 575–525 BC, *CVA Berkeley, University of California* 1, 25, pl. 14:1a–c (U.S.A. 5, pl. 195).

³⁰ On the *aulos* and the *phorbeia*, see Wilson 1999.

³¹ Roccas 1995; Connelly 2007, 170.

oinochoai and a box and in her right hand she holds a jug that touches the altar at the far right. The altar's rectangular structure, projecting base, and upper molding resemble altars of the period.³² There are four red brush strokes on the altar's face—the renderings of blood stains. Less clear is the burning flame at the top of the altar; as Orlandos notes, the flame is not visible in the reproductions of the panel, but can be seen in the original.³³

Although this is clearly an image of a sacrificial procession there is no ceremonial marching. The upright posture of all the participants with the exception of the boy leading the sheep, and the overall lack of movement convey a sense of fixity to the entire picture.³⁴ As if in permanence each of the worshippers is set in a place within a specific section of the procession that is arranged according to their role in the depicted occasion. The figures at the altar are engaged in the ritual, while the three bearers of gifts watch them. The two musicians in the middle accompany the rite, while watching from a slight distance. The descending height of the figures as well as a slight overlap between the musicians that creates some sense of depth on the two-dimensional surface, further underscore the distinctions in roles between ministrants and spectators. The ritual is characterized as a performance, whose audience comprises both the depicted figures and the tablet's potential viewers.³⁵

The arrangement of the figures conveys other distinctions and hierarchies both in the degree of ritual activity and in social status. The worshippers are ordered from the least to the most involved in the actual sacrifice: from the figure on the far left, who carries only one sprig, through the maidens each with two sprigs and a fillet, the musicians that accompany the event, and the boy with the sheep, to the *kanephoros* who touches the altar with the jug, indicating that she is making a libation. The gradation in height implies distinctions of age, particularly due to the presence of boys, thereby suggesting that the ordering of the participants in the procession is determined by seniority, from the oldest figure on the far left to the young boy with the sheep by the altar, who is preceded only the *kanephoros* the performer of the ritual. The maidens' greater height and more richly decorated clothes further imply a higher status than that of the boys.

The various orderings of the figures indicate that age and social status do not coincide with the degree of involvement in the actual sacrifice; the ritual is performed by the youngest boy and most notably the young woman making the libation, on the far right. Within the social ladder however, the most distinguished figure in the entire group is the figure in the blue *himation* on the far left, marked apart by greatest height, unique dress and gesture. This figure set among the spectators has the fewest of offerings, and is most remote from the ritual.

The participants attend the bringing of the victim to an al-

tar already flaming and bloodstained. The flames imply that the fire has already been prepared and are suggestive of a fundamental religious notion: the smoking fragrant altar as pleasing to the gods.³⁶ The blood, on the other hand, refers to a different stage of the sacrificial ritual: the pouring of the victim's blood on the altar. The red stains recall the function of the altar as the recipient of blood.³⁷ They imply that a previous sacrifice in which the altar was already stained has already been performed and at the same time, they signal the results of the ritual that is about to take place. The depicted altar makes a reference to different moments in the sacrificial ritual, prior to the sacrifice and after its completion. The moment that is missing, left to the viewer's imagination, is the actual killing of the animal. Past and future moments of the ritual are set together so that the depicted worshippers, constantly attend a sacrifice that is forthcoming and completed at the same time.

Altogether, the image is not an attempt to translate the realities of a sacrificial procession onto a panel, even if every element—from the figures' dress through the appearance of the victim, to the ritual implements—has direct relationship to the reality of cult practice. It is a visual presentation of selected aspects of a ritual that relates to a known reality and can conform to attested ideas about the nature of this ritual; the sacrifice is characterized as a performance, seen both by depicted spectators and the tablet's viewers.³⁸ In this event, the participants are ordered according to social hierarchies that do not correlate with the degree of participation and execution of the rite, which is allotted to a separate social group.³⁹ This sacrifice is shown as a continuous event, constantly completed and about to be performed.

This visualized idea of a sacrificial procession, which conforms to a familiar contemporary pictorial tradition,⁴⁰ and therefore may appear as generic, becomes individualized when considered with the accompanying text. The dedicatory inscription in Archaic Korinthian script is written at the top of the tablet, in the same direction as the de-

³² Compare with archaeologically attested altars of this period, Yavis 1949, 95–107.

³³ Orlandos, 1965, 201.

³⁴ Compare with examples mentioned above in n. 29 as well as the procession depicted on a black figure hydria dated to 575–525 BC, Paris, Musée du Louvre: F10, or black figure *oinochoe* of 575–525 BC, Paris, Musée Auguste Rodin: 232.247; all convey a strong sense of movement of the striding worshippers.

³⁵ On sacrifice as performance, see Jameson 1999.

³⁶ Burkert 1985, 87–88; van Straten 1995, 167.

³⁷ van Straten 1995, 104–105; Ekroth 2002, 242–247.

³⁸ Jameson 1999.

³⁹ van Straten 1995, 168–170. The distinctions between social orderings and hierarchies in the performance of religious ritual are particularly notable in the case of women; see in particular, Sourvinou-Inwood 1995.

⁴⁰ Lehnstaedt 1970; van Straten 1995, 13–24.



Fig. 1. The Pitsá tablet, ca. 540 BC. Painted wooden votive tablet. National Archaeological Museum, Athens, NM 16464. Photo Credit: Scala/Art Resource, NY.

picted ritual from left to right. Despite some damage, enough of the text survived to allow us to make sense of it: [ἀ]νέθεκε ταῖς νύμφαις ('Dedicated to the Nymphs'). The text following the dedicatory formula is more difficult: ἐθέλον (?) χε. This section is written above the procession, so that part of the word is set above the figure of the *kanephoros* at the head of the procession. This part has been originally read by Orlandos as 'Ethelonxe', the name of the figure of the young woman by the altar.⁴¹ This interpretation has been rejected because of the difficult legibility and the uncertainty whether the text was intended as a label of the figure.⁴² This part of the text is ambiguous and problematic to the extent that some commentators chose to ignore it altogether;⁴³ unfortunately the interpretation of this part remains unsolved.⁴⁴ Below the top inscription, next to the head of each of the two long-haired maidens there is a name written horizontally. The first, written next to the figure further to the left is Εὐθυδικα ('Euthydika') and the second is Εὐκολίς. ('Eukolis'). Finally, the remains of the text that is written vertically on the right edge of the tablet are still visible: ---]ο φορν...θιος ('the Korinthian').⁴⁵

The horizontal text that frames the upper part of the tablet has a dual function: it identifies both the wooden *pinax* and the depicted ritual as dedicated to the Nymphs. Similarly, the inscribed names have a double role; they relate the names 'Euthydika', and 'Eukolis' presumably referring to some young women, to the votive object in general, while the particular positioning of these inscriptions suggests that the inscriptions identify the depicted maidens. One can fur-

ther postulate that following the conventions of dedicatory formulae, the verb *anetheke* was preceded by the name of the dedicator, which is now missing but for which there is sufficient space.⁴⁶ This name was presumably written next to the head of the figure on the far left, directly aligned with the inscription at the top of the tablet. According to this reconstruction, the name that was the subject of the verb in the singular, written in this particular position at the top of the tablet, had a dual meaning similar to that of the dedicatory inscription in general: it identified the actual dedicator of the votive as well as the depicted figure in the blue *himation* on the far left of the tablet.

According to the reconstruction offered here, the inscription was aligned with the figure, whose head is missing, similarly to the way in which the names 'Euthydika' and 'Eukolis' relate to the depicted heads of the maidens. If one assumes that the missing head was originally in profile, similar to all the other figures in the image, then the entire dedicatory inscription resembled so-called 'bubble' inscriptions, reminiscent of modern visual conventions of comic strips in

⁴¹ Orlandos 1965, 202; similarly, Lorber 1979, 93.

⁴² Wachter 2001, 156–157, with further references.

⁴³ For example, Lazzarini 1976, 188, no. 57, and Guarducci 1987, 266 choose not to address this part the inscription in their discussions.

⁴⁴ This is the conclusion reached by Rudolf Wachter (2001, 156–157).

⁴⁵ Orlandos 1965.

⁴⁶ Similarly, Wachter 2001, 156.

which texts written next to heads of figures indicate speech or thought.⁴⁷ Given the performative nature of dedicatory texts in this period,⁴⁸ the direct association between the inscription and the figure, would have evoked the recitation in ritual. When recited, the reader would be pronouncing the words that are visually associated with the figure in the blue *himation*, the grand orchestrator of the event.⁴⁹ The initial dedicatory act, indicated by the text, would be re-associated with the depicted ritual and its commissioner. Rudolf Wachter's suggestion that the entire inscription was originally written in iambic meter is particularly appealing even if hypothetical, because it would further underscore the performative nature of the tablet. Given the state of preservation of the *pinax* it is impossible to reconstruct the *precise* relationship between the entire dedicatory inscription and the figure on the far right. Still, the recitation of the text by any reader and viewer of the tablet would create a kind of re-announcement of the dedicatory act as well as its particular association with the depicted ritual.

As has often been assumed, the named maidens could also be related to the offering of the dedication,⁵⁰ but to a lesser degree. The reconstruction offered here suggests that the straightforward subject of the verb *anetheke* was not the names of the maidens, but the name that is presumably missing now. Nonetheless, the surviving names could be assumed to be part of the subject of the verb, if one takes the singular form of the verb as corresponding to the last and closest in a list of names that in its entirety was to be understood as the subject. Furthermore, the positioning of the names in close proximity to the verb suggests such a reading, particularly in the case of 'Euthydika' that is written right below the verb. This ambiguity with regard to the subject of the verb *anetheke*, whether it is to be understood as a single name or as belonging to a group, points to hierarchies that are already observable here. It suggests a distinction between a primary and secondary dedicator, implying that the main person behind the dedicatory act is the one whose name is now missing and that the named maidens are also to be associated with the offering but to a lesser degree.

The adjective 'the Korinthian', which is written vertically on the far right, was originally interpreted by Orlandos as describing a presumably missing artist's name. Alternatively, if the tablet was dedicated by a man, then the adjective could be a modifier of the dedicator's name.⁵¹ Whatever the case may be, this part of the inscription is in a strikingly conspicuous position. The vertical text formed a continuous line with the inscription at the top of the tablet so that the reader's eye was led from the dedicatory formula to the adjective right above the altar. This positioning of the word 'the Korinthian' creates a strong link between the inscription and the focal point of the depicted event. The name of the maker of the offering whether the actual painter of the *pinax*,⁵² the dedicator who commissioned the tablet, or poss-

ibly both is associated with and directed toward the blazing sacrificial platform. In this position the inscription asserts the individual's central role as an artist and/or as commissioner in the creation of the image and directly relates his identity to the offering.

The direct link between names and figures endows the *pinax* with a generic and individualized character simultaneously. The named figures cannot be said to be portraits—their standardized features exclude the possibility of some physical resemblance to some young individuals named 'Eukolis' and 'Euthydika'.⁵³ Rather, these maidens linked their inscribed names with staple images of worshippers. In doing so, they represented themselves as canonical 'iconic' figures of social and religious attitude. In this process, they further validated these modes of behavior, which in turn reinforced their own social standing as well as their own piety. The juxtaposition of images and texts emerges as a sophisticated visual tactic with a unique religious and social force; it situates the worshippers' individual piety within an existing tradition and at the same time strengthens the object's efficacy as the material testament of the piety of named individuals.

There are also gaps between text and image. First, some of the figures are not labeled. The musicians and the boy with the sheep and probably the *kanephoros* are not identified by name although their role in the ritual is central. The lack of a label for these figures reinforces the implied hierarchies that are already present in the image, so that the boys' anonymity further asserts the rank of the named participants. The inclusion of the unnamed worshippers aggrandizes the entire depicted event; it is not only a sacrificial procession of some named individuals but an occasion that included the contributions of anonymous participants, whether in music or in handling the sacrifice. The dedicator emerges as the orchestrator of a collective veneration—someone who has given the Nymphs the image of a great spectacle.

The more striking gap between text and image is the lack of visual representation of the recipients of the dedication

⁴⁷ On these types of inscriptions, see Osborne & Pappas 2007, 153 with further references.

⁴⁸ Day 1994; 2000.

⁴⁹ On the role of reading aloud, see Svenbro 1993, 44–63.

⁵⁰ For example, van Straten 1995, 57.

⁵¹ Similarly, Guarducci 1987, 266.

⁵² If, as Orlandos originally assumed, the adjective was related to the artist's name, it recalls the signature of Kleitias on the so-called François Vase (Museo Archeologico di Firenze, 4209) that is similarly written in the direction of the altar. This would show at the very least that the association between the artist's signature and the image of an altar is not unique to this tablet and has iconographic parallels. For discussion of the inscriptions on the François vase see in particular Immerwahr 1990, 24–26 with further bibliography.

⁵³ For discussion of the question of portraiture in this period, see Keesling 2003.

and the ritual. The Nymphs are named only in the inscription. The image alone does not convey their identity. They are neither represented nor referred to visually either through elements in the ritual or attributes in the picture. The identity of the divine recipients is indicated by the words: ταῖς νύμφαις that are written at a central position at the top of the panel, above the name 'Eukolis' and the two musicians. Here, the depicted idea of worship does not entail a face to face encounter with the goddesses or a viewing of their artistic representations. The appearance of the Nymphs remains completely open. The *pinax* conveys a fundamental religious attitude that centers on ritual; divine presence is implied by a set of religiously meaningful actions.

Both text and image include an action; the depicted figures are engaged in worship, while the inscription includes the active verb *anetheke*, which is usually translated as 'dedicated' and literally means 'set up', referring specifically to the deposition of the object.⁵⁴ The text indicates that the now-anonymous dedicator set up the *pinax* as a votive, yet the picture does not show a worshipper placing the tablet in a cave, or handing it to the Nymphs. Image and text inscribe an act of piety performed by individuals, but do not describe the character of the activity in the same degree of precision. When set together inscription and picture link the generic dedicatory act to the Nymphs to a *specific* idea of a sacrificial procession.

In this grand event, the most distinguished figure, which is shown as the least active in the ritual, and was presumably associated with the named dedicator, emerges as the one to have commissioned both the tablet and the depicted worship. The votive has often been interpreted as an image of a head of a family or a mother, with the named figures of Euthydika and Eukolis as some form of relations of a lesser social status.⁵⁵ While these hypotheses cannot be fully proven or refuted, their existence in the literature further shows the extent to which the tablet as a whole visually conveys the relative social status of each of the worshippers and some form of ties among the participants whose exact nature cannot be established. Obviously, it is impossible to reconstruct the occasion in which the tablet was dedicated, whether it was meant to commemorate, or replace a real sacrifice. Whatever the case may be, with the deposition of *pinax* the visualized procession for the Nymphs became part of the cave of Saftulis, and rendered the particular idea of worship continuously present at the site.

DEDICATIONS TO THE NYMPHS IN CLASSICAL ATTICA

As in the Pitsá tablet, the Classical votive reliefs to the Nymphs that I discuss here, link a named dedicator with a

depicted scene of worship through the juxtaposition of text and image.⁵⁶ These reliefs do not belong to the Corinthian visual tradition of the Archaic *pinax* that combined writings with images extensively.⁵⁷ Made in Attica in the 5th and 4th centuries BC, they are of larger size than the Corinthian *pinax*, and are carved out of marble. Despite obvious differences in location, time period, scale, medium, iconography, and forms of writing, the Pitsá tablet and the Attic reliefs share the incorporation of images of worship with dedicatory texts in order to memorialize individuals' veneration.

The three reliefs examined here with images of worshippers venerating the Nymphs are a minority within the large corpus of surviving Classical votive reliefs dedicated to these goddesses that mostly display the divinities with no mortals approaching them.⁵⁸ Since they agree with general iconographic and stylistic conventions of dedicatory reliefs in Attica of this period and can be attributed to the same workshops and possibly craftsmen that produced other types of reliefs dedicated to the Nymphs,⁵⁹ these dedications should not be dismissed as unrepresentative or as mere exceptions. Their general degree of conformity together with their remarkableness among the dedications to the Nymphs, reveal the available options in the making of a dedication to these goddesses and show the importance of individuals' specific choices. These reliefs are visual religious statements on the nature of their dedicators' particular relationship with the Nymphs.

The first Attic votive I consider here was found in the Asklepieion, south of the Athenian Akropolis (*Fig. 2*).⁶⁰ Dated to the last quarter of the 5th c. BC, it is the earliest known Attic relief dedicated to the Nymphs. The badly damaged dedication is of rectangular form, and is made of five adjoining pieces. Let us begin the examination from the left where we see a bearded man. He is dressed in a

⁵⁴ Parker 2005a, 270.

⁵⁵ See, for example, Orlandos 1965, Himmelmann 1997, 20; Wachter 2001, 156–157.

⁵⁶ For votive reliefs to the Nymphs, see Feubel 1935; Edwards 1985; Fuchs 1962; Güntner 1994, 10–25; *LIMC VIII* (1997), 891–902, s.v. Nymphai (M. Halm-Tisserant); Amandry 1981; Larson 2001, 258–267.

⁵⁷ Osborne & Pappas 2007, 142.

⁵⁸ Parker 2005b, 47. See general collections of votive reliefs to the Nymphs, Feubel 1935; Edwards 1985; Fuchs 1962.

⁵⁹ See Edwards 1985 297–299, and in particular 486, where he asserts that the two reliefs from the cave at Penteli (Athens NM 4466 and 4465) that are discussed further below were probably produced in the same workshop and possibly by the same carver who made the relief from the Vari Cave (Athens NM 2008) that has the image of the Nymphs and other divinities with no worshippers.

⁶⁰ Athens NM 1392; 66 × 68.5 cm; 430–420 BC. Mitropoulou 1977, 54–55, no. 93; Edwards 1985, 293–300; Günter 1994, 118; Edelmann 1999, 192; Kaltsas 2002, 135, no. 260; Larson 2001, 130. For the site, see Aleshire 1989, 21–36.



Fig. 2. Votive relief from the Asklepieion in Athens. National Archaeological Museum, Athens, NM 1392. Photo Credit: Foto Marburg/Art Resource, NY.

himation and stands in profile, as he faces right and gestures reverence with his right hand. The man's height is less than half of the relief's. Right above him, an irregular oval carving in the stone's surface, reminiscent of an entrance to a cave, frames a fully frontal goat horned and bearded figure of Pan. Only the upper body of the god is visible as he rests his hands on the frame's borders.

The worshipper's left leg is set against a small rudimentary altar formed of a heap of stones that reaches the height of his knee.⁶¹ Further to the right there are standing female figures whose heads touch the upper frame of the relief. The one closest to the worshipper stands frontal turning her head downward to the left and facing the wor-

shipper. Dressed in a *chiton* and a *himation*, she rests her left arm on the right shoulder of the figure that stands next to her, who wears a *peplos*, and stands frontal with her gaze turned downward to the right. Most of the third figure on the far right is lost. The surviving thigh with folding drapery suggests that this figure wears a *himation* and turns to the left.⁶² The relative great sizes of the triad, indi-

⁶¹ On heaps of stones as rudimentary altars, see Yavis 1949, 214–215.

⁶² The figure's size, the presence of Pan and the inscription suggest that the figure can be safely identified as the third female in the triad of the Nymphs.

cate that they are a female plurality.⁶³ The presence of the pastoral figure of Pan confirms their identification as the Nymphs.⁶⁴

The moment of veneration takes place in a rustic setting, as suggested by Pan, his cave, and the rudimentary altar, which in turn marks the location as a site of worship. The man's veneration is of a small-scale; he does not use any ritual accoutrements such as a libation bowl or a musical instrument, and leaves the altar unused. Only his gesture, which expresses some form of ritual behavior, possibly a prayer, suggests his reverence.⁶⁵ He faces the goddesses and at least one of them turns her gaze back to him.⁶⁶ The man experiences an epiphany.⁶⁷ In this intimate moment he does not see the figure of Pan above him who appears as if peeping out of the cave.

The epiphany is witnessed not only by the relief's viewer, but also by the god of the shepherds. The goat-horned god is the only character in the relief that is frontal in its entirety, contrasting with the man's profile, and the Nymphs' complex poses. Pan's gaze faces the viewer. Two visions of the divine are contrasted: the worshipper's eye contact with at least one of the Nymphs and the relief's viewer confrontation with Pan. The depicted worshipper stands right next to the goddesses and can see them in their full glory, while the relief's viewer is removed from the god, whose body is obstructed by the walls of the cave. Pan, like the relief's viewer whose gaze he mirrors, sees the man's veneration of the Nymphs. The god, as opposed to the viewer, is an inside spectator, constantly on the watch.

Despite the worshipper's eye contact and physical proximity with the divine, differences in scale, attitude, and spatial positioning convey the fundamental divide between human and divine. The man is significantly smaller than the goddesses.⁶⁸ They are a triad and he is all alone. He is a man while their femininity is accentuated by their garments. The man's pose in full profile indicates that he pays his full attention to the goddesses. By contrast, the goddesses are frontal and relaxed. They do not necessarily take note of the worshipper, while the one that clearly acknowledges him by the turn of her gaze, keeps her body frontal. The divide between the worshipper and the goddess is further marked by the stone-heap altar that functions as a boundary between them, physically denoting the border between their respective realms.⁶⁹

Similarly, scale and composition convey Pan's proximity, distance, and ultimate superiority in relation to the worshipper. Pan is much smaller than the man. The god's cave appears to be in a separate plane located in the depths of the relief that is neither visible nor accessible to the relief's viewer. The god has a full view of the worshipper. His superior position allows him to watch the worshipper without being noticed. At the same time, Pan takes a secondary position in comparison to the Nymphs. Altogether, the god-

desses who are the largest in the relief and are the object of the man's veneration are shown as the primary divinities, while the smaller god of the shepherds in the depths of the cave witnesses the man's worship.

The scene of personal worship is accompanied by the inscription on the upper frame.⁷⁰ The part which is fully preserved reads: Ἀρχανδρος Νύμφαις ('Archandros to the Nymphs'). The text is aligned with the image, so that the name 'Archandros' is written in the part of the frame above the male worshipper and Pan in the cave, and the word 'Nymphs' begins right above the head of the left most Nymph. The text has a similar dual role that we saw in the case of the of the Korinthian *pinax*. 'Archandros' in the nominative case names the dedicator, and functions as the label of the depicted worshipper as well. 'Nymphs' in the dative case designates the recipients of the dedication, and at the same time identifies the female figures. This positioning of the names one next to the other further correlates with the image, it resonates with the portrayed closeness of the worshipper to the goddesses.

Since most of the rest of the inscription has not survived, it is harder to establish the precise relationship between the inscription and the image as a whole. According to the most repeated restoration of the inscription, the missing part read: καὶ Πάνι ('and to Pan').⁷¹ If this interpretation is correct, then the name 'Pan' did not function as a direct label of the figure, as it was not positioned above the divinity. Pan's secondary position in the inscription would have correlated with his secondary position in

⁶³ Larson 2001, 259–264.

⁶⁴ See, for example, *Homeric Hymn to Pan* 1–20. For Pan and the Nymphs particularly in Attica following the battle of Marathon in 490 BC, see Larson 2001, 97–98; Parker 1996, 163–168; Borgeaud, 133–162.

⁶⁵ van Straten, 82–83.

⁶⁶ I stress here that at least one goddess faces him, because the direction of the gaze of the third Nymph cannot be established beyond doubt.

⁶⁷ Generally on epiphanies and their significance in Greek religion, *RE* suppl. 4 (1924), 277–323, s.v. Epiphany (F. Pfister); *OCD*³ (1996), 546, s.v. Epiphany (A. Henrichs); *GGR*³ 1974, 225–227; Versnel 1990, 190–193; Burkert 1985, 186–188; Sourvinou-Inwood 2003, 460; Platt forthcoming.

⁶⁸ On great size as means to indicate divine power, see Gordon 1979; Tam Steiner 2001, 99.

⁶⁹ The potential dual function of standing monuments as boundary markers as well as altars can be seen in stelae depicted on south Italian vases, see Cassimatis 1991.

⁷⁰ *IG* II–III² 4545; *IG* I³ 955.

⁷¹ However, Mitropoulou 1977, 54, suggests: A[NEΘEKEN], which appears as possible as well. If one accepts Mitropoulou's restoration then the inscription included the verb and completely excluded Pan. The writing asserted the nature of the object as a votive, and linked Archandros' veneration with his dedicatory act. The exclusion of Pan from the inscription would correlate with his secondary position in the relief as a spectator rather than an object of veneration.

the relief. At the same time, according to this reading, he was a designated dedicatee even though he is not shown to be venerated in the image.

In making this dedication, Archandros associated himself with an image of a solitary man, who not only worships the Nymphs, but also experiences an epiphany as he sees the feminine goddesses. As ancient narratives of epiphanies show, the portrayed experience of a mortal seeing the divinity is charged with possible grave consequences.⁷² In this specific context, seeing the Nymphs *may* mean that the worshipper is a *Nympholeptos*, that he is seized by the Nymphs.⁷³ In setting up the votive, Archandros rendered this solitary intimate experience public; an image to be viewed both by divine dedicatees and by fellow mortals. In associating his dedicatory act with the image of someone who venerates and sees the Nymphs he asserted a particularly close affinity with the goddesses, and made the portrayed veneration and vision a testimony of his piety. Pan's watch further asserts the significance of the depicted moment. The man's intimate reverence is not without witnesses, it is constantly being watched by the god who is the companion of the Nymphs *par excellence*.

The next two reliefs I examine here were found in the same small natural cave on south slopes of Mt. Penteli.⁷⁴ They are both dated to the 4th c. BC and possibly produced in the same workshop.⁷⁵ The earlier of the two, dated to ca. 360 BC (Fig. 3) shows three men in veneration.⁷⁶ The pictorial field of the relief is set within an architectural frame. On the far left there are three female figures that have the same dress: a *chiton* and a *himation* pulled over the head. The one on the far left and the one on the right have an almost identical posture; their right arm holds the drapery across their waist and the left hand pulls the mantle away from their faces that are turned in three quarter view to the left. The middle figure stands slightly behind the other two; she places her hand on the right shoulder of the figure on the far left, her left arm is wrapped in her *himation*, and her head turns slightly to the left.

Further to the right and slightly in front of the triad, stands in *contraposto* stance a slightly taller nude youthful male figure dressed in a *chlamys*. His head, seen in three quarter view, slightly turns downward to the right. Pan stands next to him in full profile, facing right; he holds a *syrix*, the god's musical instrument in his right hand, and a *lagobolon*—a crooked staff—from which hangs a hare over his left shoulder. Pan's presence in the group helps identify the figures. The three female figures are Nymphs, and the youth in the *chlamys* can be identified as Hermes, Pan's mythological father, who is also strongly associated with the Nymphs.⁷⁷ Next, further to the right, three male figures whose heads reach the height of Pan's chest stand in profile looking to the left directly at Pan. All three are crowned with wreaths around their bearded heads. They wear *hima-*

tia over both shoulders, and gesture their reverence with their right hand.

The worshippers' gesture and wreaths indicate that the ritual is of small scale, while the architectural frame *may* suggest that the setting is a stoa.⁷⁸ The overall homogeneity of the worshippers suggests equal status, with the degree of physical proximity to the gods as the only criterion that may imply hierarchical distinctions. The men's group resembles the triad of the Nymphs; both are three in number, stand closely together, share dress and are nearly if not entirely identical in pose and gesture.⁷⁹ The men's visible piety and maturity are paralleled by the goddesses' moderation that is conveyed specifically by their veils that characterize them as respectable, as having *aidos*.⁸⁰ At the same time the two groups contrast in gender (male vs. female), size (small vs. large), and view point (profile vs. three quarter view).

The men and the Nymphs do not interact directly; Hermes and Pan stand between them. The messenger god's stance and turn of the head, as well as his slightly taller height, and position right in front of the goddesses, convey his role as the Nymphs' leader. Hermes and the Nymphs turn their gazes to the worshippers, but do not face them directly. In contrast, Pan is the only divinity in full profile, the only one to face the worshippers. The male worshippers are noted by all divinities, yet the only one with whom they have direct eye contact is Pan. The primacy of the shepherds' god is further emphasized by the hare on his back, an animal known as his typical booty as a victim offered to him in cult. The worshippers see Pan in a position of power carrying his plunder.

The relief is accompanied by a dedicatory inscription that is written across on the lower frame in two lines.⁸¹ The first

⁷² This is illustrated, for example, in Anchises' anxious response to the epiphany of Aphrodite in *The Homeric Hymn to Aphrodite* (91–105). Upon seeing the goddess at his footstep, Anchises recognizes that he is confronted by a divinity, but does not know which one. His response to this extraordinary event is a marveling address in which he names all possible female divinities, vows to make an altar and worship the goddess, and requests his own prosperity in return. See discussion in Platt 2002.

⁷³ Notably, *Nympholeptoi* are known to have heightened awareness, and often able to prophecy. On Nympholepsy, see Connor 1988, Sourvinou-Inwood 2005, 109–111; Larson 2001, 13–20; Pache forthcoming.

⁷⁴ Cook 1952, 112; Zorides 1977; Vikela 1997, 217–218.

⁷⁵ Edwards 1985, 486.

⁷⁶ Athens NM 4465, 53 × 75 cm, marble. Fuchs 1962, 246–247; Edwards 1985, 467–475; *LIMC* VIII. 1 (1997), 936, s.v. Pan (J. Boardman); Kaltsas 2002, 212, no. 433; Günther 1994, 120; Edelmann 1999, 132–133, 221.

⁷⁷ See, for example, the *Homeric Hymn to Pan*.

⁷⁸ As suggested in Neumann 1979, 50–51, 78–79; see further discussion in Ridgway 1997, 195–197.

⁷⁹ Similarly, Fuchs 1962, 247.

⁸⁰ Llewellyn-Jones 2003, see in particular 155–188.

⁸¹ *SEG* 12:166.



Fig. 3. Votive relief from Penteli—Athens. National Archaeological Museum, Athens, NM 4465. Photo Credit: Hans Rupprecht Goette, DAI Athen, Neg. 2001/1135.

line has a list of male names: Τηλεφάνης, Νικήρατος, Δημόφιλος ('Telephanes', 'Nikeratos', 'Demophilos'). The second line, written in letters of equal size reads: ταῖς Νύμφαις ἀνέθεσαν ('Dedicated to the Nymphs'). As before, the inscription identifies the entire image as a dedication to the Nymphs. Here, the link between names and depicted figures is less direct than in the previous cases, for the names do not align with the figures of each of the worshippers, nor do they function as labels for each one of the three. Only the correlation in number and gender implies a link between the individuals who made the dedication and the figures.

One may entertain the possibility that the order of names was meant to relate to the sequence figures, so that, for example, the middle name 'Nikeratos' is to be understood as the middle worshipper. However, the direction of reading of the names from left to right does not agree with the direction of the worshippers' gaze and gesture from right to left. Here, despite correlation in gender and number between names and figures the inscriptions do not function as labels. Rather, all three names are to be associated with the three depicted worshippers. The inscription 'to the Nymphs' is

more closely linked to the three female figures, for although it is on the second line, further removed from the figures, it is set in the space right below the image of the goddesses. Further correlation between text and image is suggested by the overall division between worshippers and divinities that is suggested in both. In the inscription, the names of the dedicators are written separately from the designation of the dedicatee, while in the image the two groups are separated by visual means such as size, behavior, and positioning.

There are also disjunctures between image and inscriptions. The status of the dedicators' names in the inscription is markedly different from the position of the worshippers in the relief. The names take first place in the inscription; together they occupy the entire first line on the lower frame of the relief, and assert the dedicators' primacy.⁸² By contrast, the portrayed worshippers are the smallest figures, occupying the least space in the relief, displaying their reverence and subordinate status in relation to the divinities. The votive as a whole both emphasizes the dominance of the dedi-

⁸² On primacy of proper names, see Keesling 2003, 32.

cators as men who are able to give it as a gift, and at the same time present an idea of subservience in relation to the divine.

The more striking discrepancy is the absence of Pan and Hermes from the inscription. These male divinities are not the designated recipients of the votive, although they are centrally placed within the composition. This gap further reinforces the tension between the two triads of male worshippers and female divinities that we have already seen. The men in veneration do not have direct access to the designated recipients of the dedication, because Hermes and Pan stand between them and the goddesses whose veils further mark their separation.⁸³ At the same time, although Pan and Hermes are not mentioned in the text, these gods elicit the men's reverence. The votive as a whole expresses a fundamental problem with respect to male worshippers' veneration of Nymphs; the goddesses are the designated recipients yet they are not immediately accessible to the venerators in the image. Hermes and Pan are characterized as divine mediators between the honourable and desirable Nymphs and mature male worshippers. This role is particularly appropriate for Hermes, the messenger god. The men's direct confrontation with Pan alludes to the god's visibility and accessibility to male venerators, which coincides with his overall image as a god that is particularly associated with epiphany in the context of Classical Attica.⁸⁴

In this votive, the place of the goddesses resembles the position of women in Athenian society that were always under male guardianship.⁸⁵ The male divinities are portrayed as the guardians of the veiled goddesses who resemble brides.⁸⁶ The gift that Telephanes, Nikeratos and Demophilos have chosen to give to the goddesses expresses a visual idea of a specific relationship between male worshippers and the Nymphs, in which there is no direct confrontation between mature men and young respectable and desirable goddesses; the men's reverence is mediated by male divinities. In associating their names with an image of men revering a masculine Pan who is leading Hermes and the Nymphs they asserted their own piety and *aidos* to the goddesses.⁸⁷

Let us turn to my final example, the second votive found at the cave of Penteli that dates to *ca.* 300 BC (*Fig. 4*).⁸⁸ Within a rendition of a rocky cave we see seven figures. On the far left there are three female figures who share the same dress and hairstyle but differ in their poses. They are dressed in a *chiton* and a *himation* and have their hair pulled up together. The one on the far left is seated facing right. She turns her gaze to the right, slightly upward to the female figure next to her. The middle figure stands entirely frontal, looking directly at the viewer. Her head reaches the top of the frame, as she leans with her stretched right arm against the edge of the rock on the left. Standing behind her is a third figure, who is of the same height, and whose gaze is turned to the left, looking toward the seated figure.

Standing next to the triad, is the figure of Hermes, who is identifiable by the *kerykeion* in his left. The beardless messenger god wears a *chlamys*, revealing his otherwise nude and youthful body. He is of the same height as the female figures and stands in *contraposto* stance as he turns his head downward in three quarter view, to the right. Next to him, seated on a large rock, is a figure of Pan, who together with Hermes, serve to identify the female figures as the Nymphs. Pan's body is in three quarter view turning toward the right, while his gaze is frontal, facing the viewer. In his hands he holds a *syrix*.

Further to the right, a fully frontal nude youth, who is significantly shorter than Hermes, stands behind the extension of Pan's rock. The boy holds an *oinochoe*, and pours a liquid into the *kantharos*, held by the bearded man on the far right. The rendition of pouring a liquid above a rock specifically into a *kantharos*—a vessel associated with Dionysos and wine—suggests that the youth is making a wine libation over an altar.⁸⁹ The boy's gaze is focused on the ritual. Finally, on the far right, a mature bearded man, who is somewhat taller than the youth, but significantly shorter than Hermes, extends the *kantharos* in his right hand and holds out a bunch of grapes in his left. Dressed in *himation*, he is seen in three quarter view, as his gaze turns toward the left.

The rocky frame and Pan's boulder locate the scene in a cave, the natural rustic habitat of Pan and the Nymphs.⁹⁰ The bearded man and the boy stand on the side of relief as they turn toward the divinities. The man is portrayed as having a higher social status in relation to the boy. He is of greater height and age, the bearer of the gift of the vine and the *kantharos*, which is attended by the boy. As in the Pitsá tablet, the younger figure that is of lesser social status is closest to the altar and is the most involved in the execution of the rite.

The figures in the relief are arranged in two groups—male and female. The goddesses, on the left, do not engage with the other figures of the relief; they form a closed

⁸³ Cairns 2002, 81.

⁸⁴ Borgeaud 1988, 243 n. 3.

⁸⁵ *OCD*³ (1996), 1623–1624, s.v. Women (H. King).

⁸⁶ For discussion of veiling and brides, see Llewellyn-Jones 2003, 215–258.

⁸⁷ On the reciprocity of the concept of *aidos*, see Llewellyn-Jones 2003, 245.

⁸⁸ Athens, NM 4466. Marble relief, Penteli, *ca.* 300 BC, 70 × 110 cm, height of stele 104 cm. Fuchs 1962, 248; Kaltsas 2002, 221; Edwards 1985, 478–488; Ridgway 1997, 198–199; Mitropoulou 1975, 83–84; Klöckner 2001, 123–130; Edelmann 1999, 79, 178, 193; Günther 1994, 120.

⁸⁹ van Straten 1981, 86; Klöckner 2001, 125. On libation in general and wine libations specifically, see Graf 1980; Simon 2005, Henrichs 1983.

⁹⁰ On caves as the habitat of the Pan and the Nymphs, see Larson 2001, 14–20; Amandry 1984. On cave frames, see Ridgway 1997, 197–199.



Fig. 4. Votive relief from Penteli—Athens. National Archaeological Museum, Athens, NM 4466. Photo Credit: Eva-Maria Czako, DAI Athen, Neg. NM 4756.

group; the Nymphs on the sides look at each other, while the central goddess faces the relief's viewer directly, and displays her figure, whose femininity is accentuated by the drapery. Overall, the Nymphs, who resemble each other in appearance but vary in pose and attitude, emerge as a closely knit yet varied triad.

The male figures on right form a coherent group of two worshippers and two divinities that is framed by Hermes and the bearded man. The goat-horned god and the youth form the center of the group; both are at the rock and are close in height as Pan's head reaches the boy's shoulder. Resemblance in external features further emphasizes the proximity between the different male figures and draws parallels between the worshippers and the divinities. Hermes and the youth look alike; both reveal their exposed youthful bodies in *contraposto* stance, while Pan and the older man share similar facial features; both have a full beard, deep set eyes, and furrowed forehead, although the god's facial hair is significantly shaggier and longer. Furthermore, as Anja Klöckner has observed, the older man's affinity with the divine is further suggested by the *kantharos*—a vessel that is usually held by gods, typically by Dionysos.⁹¹ While in great proximity to Hermes and Pan, the older man and the boy perform the libation. The rock under the *kantharos* forms an altar and at the same time is the lower extension of

Pan's seat.⁹² The immediate recipient of the ritual is the god of the shepherds.

Overall, the relief makes a visual comment on spatial divisions between divinities and their relationship to cult practice; shared space does not *necessarily* imply shared offering. Pan and Hermes and the Nymphs are shown within the same cave, yet this divine cohabitation does not entail the same interaction with worshippers. Within their visualized world, the divinities are divided according to gender, while the venerators are shown as active participants only among the male divinities. Pan's display of the musical instrument along with the libation into the *kantharos*, the characteristic vessel of Dionysos, a god who is associated with Pan as well,⁹³ make strong visual allusions to the male

⁹¹ Klöckner 2001, 126–127. Overall these observations correlate and support Anja Klockner's interpretation. Nonetheless, I would not go quite as far as to interpret the relief as a reference to Nympholepsy *specifically*, particularly since the proximity is to the male divinities, not the Nymphs.

⁹² This seemingly minor detail is ignored in most accounts of the relief, (for example, Edwards 1985, 480). However, the god's relaxed pose, and the place of his hoof at the base of the rock, which is immediately under the boy's libation, indicate that the same rock-formation function as the god's seat and as an altar simultaneously.

⁹³ See, for example, the *Homeric Hymn to Pan* 4–47; Borgeaud 1988, 54, 100.

world of banqueting.⁹⁴ The division of the depicted cave along gender lines correlates with the perception of the partition of the Greek house into male and female areas. The bearded men and his assistant take part in an offering that is located in its appropriate space according to this social norm.

This visual comment on the placement of the divinities and their relation to cult practice had immediate relevance in its original setting—the cave framed relief was set up in a cave, the place where the portrayed divinities were worshipped. We cannot assert whether the image replicated the type of cult practices that took place at the small cave of Mt. Penteli. However, the votive offered specific ideas regarding the nature of its immediate surroundings—the home of Pan, Hermes, and the Nymphs—and the manner in which male worshippers' interaction with these divinities was to be envisioned.

The relief is accompanied by a text, which is inscribed on its supporting stele.⁹⁵ The impressive inscription that is easily readable even in photographed reproductions is written in three lines. The first line reads: Ἀγαθήμερος ('Agathemeros'), the second: Νύμφαις ('to the Nymphs) and the third: ἀνέθηκε ('dedicated'). The inscription identifies the entire relief as a dedication made by a man named Agathemeros to the Nymphs, and sets the named dedicator and dedicatees one after the other. The same visual tactics observed in the other reliefs exist here as well; the older man, who is shown in a higher status, is to be understood as the dedicator of the relief. As in the previous dedications the generic verb *anetheke* is not accompanied by the image of a man setting up the relief; it is linked in this case with the portrayal of libation and gift bearing. The anonymity of the youth further asserts the dedicator's elevated social status, similar to the youths of the Archaic *pinax*. Like the other relief from Penteli, the impressive letters of the inscription: 'Agathemeros' occupying the entire first line declare the dedicator's authorship in relation to the dedicatory act. The inscribed name complies with the prominence of the bearded figure in relation to the boy as well as its proximity to the god, yet does not agree with the figure's lesser status in relation to the gods.

As in the other relief from the cave of Penteli, the positioning of the names in the inscription one above the other, suggests a direct connection between giver and recipient, whereas in the image they are far apart and there is no interaction between them. Furthermore, Pan and Hermes are not mentioned in the inscription in this case either. Here, the gap between text and image is even more striking; there is no sense of connection between the Nymphs in the image and the worshippers. The goddesses in this relief do not even turn their gaze in the direction of the worshippers. While the ritual is directly associated with Pan and Hermes these two male divinities are absent from the text, and the

Nymphs, who are inscribed as the main recipients of the dedication, are not shown as the direct recipients of the ritual. The discrepancy is twofold: the depicted recipients of the libation are not mentioned in the text, while the named dedicatees are portrayed as a group set apart from the ritual.

This incongruity between image and text is of relevance to an apparent problem faced by commentators on Agathemeros' dedication who noted a comment made by the Hellenistic scholiast Polemon of Ilium that Athenians did not offer wine libations to the Nymphs, whereas the image is dedicated to these goddesses.⁹⁶ The relief has been taken as evidence that contradicts ancient textual testimony.⁹⁷ Yet the image on its own is not at odds with the scholiast's assertion; the depicted offering of wine is directed to Pan; only the votive in its entirety, which includes the portrayal of the Nymphs, is given to the goddesses.

Agathemeros' gift to the Nymphs reveals a complex perception of modes of communication with the divine and different strata of Greek votive praxis that are not always apparent; the dedicatory act does not necessarily correlate with the ritual associated with it. Here, the votive as a whole is a gift to the Nymphs; the inscription as well as the image of the goddesses with the central female figure facing the viewer, emphasize their overall predominance. Within their visualized realm, the goddesses are not alone; they share the space with their male companions, and the depicted worshippers are placed in their appropriate part of the cave, according to social norms, paying reverence to the deities within this area. In making the dedication Agathemeros associated himself with the idea of high social status, reverence, and close affinity to the divinities while respecting the envisioned gender divisions in the realm of the divine. In doing so, he has shown his piety to the Nymphs, the ultimate objects of his devotion.

This final example reveals the possibilities enabled by a sophisticated tradition that deployed and explored the juxtaposition of image and text, their congruities and incongrui-

⁹⁴ Compare, for example, with an image of a red-figure *pelike* of 450 BC (New York, Metropolitan Museum, 75.2.27) with Dionysos leaning holding a *kanatharos*, a nude youth, and a servant bringing grapes. For further discussion of imagery of the male banquet, see Lissarrague 1987, particularly 94–96 on this vase.

⁹⁵ *SEG* 29:195. The fact the inscription is inscribed on a separate stele and not directly on the relief, raises the question whether the text and the image belong together. Given that the stele fits as a proper support for the relief, that the lettering and the relief's style would indicate a similar date independently, and that the two were found together in the cave, there is little reason to doubt the scholarly *communis opinio* that the two were set up together originally. See, for example, Kaltsas 2002, 221.

⁹⁶ Schol. Soph. *O.C.* 100; discussed in van Straten 1981, 86; Edelmann 1999, 178; Klöckner 2001, 124–126. On wine-less libations—νηφάλια—see, Henrichs 1983; Simon 2005.

⁹⁷ van Straten 1981, 86; Klöckner 2001, 124–126.

ties. Such a tradition allows worshippers to express not only their piety in general, but to articulate to a high degree of specificity the character of their relationship with a variety of divinities. Taken together the three Attic reliefs reveal more than the well known association of the Nymphs with Pan in Attica following the battle of Marathon, which accords with Herodotos' account of the god's arrival to Attica.⁹⁸ They display specific relationship among these divinities, and specific manners in which the interaction between worshippers and these gods was to be envisioned. Hermes unsurprisingly, is shown as an intermediary, literally forming a boundary between female and male realms. The figure of Pan however, is more complex; he emerges as the watcher, guardian, as well as mediator whose epiphanic nature, already noted in Herodotos' account of his apparition,⁹⁹ is suggested through his frontal face that confronts either viewers or depicted worshippers. At the same time, he is in a secondary position in relation to the Nymphs. In all three reliefs the goddesses are the designated recipients. The female deities are characterized as feminine, respectable, objects of male devotion and desire. At the same time, they are not immediately available to their male worshippers. Their problematic and charged accessibility to their venerated further reinforces their unquestionable primacy.¹⁰⁰

CONCLUSIONS

Each of the votives I have analyzed here was produced under different circumstances, yet they all share the effect they had at their site of deposition. Once deposited, they marked the space as a site of worship of specific divinities, provided worshippers with models for rituals, ideas about the appearance and relationships of these divinities amongst themselves, and conveyed available possibilities for the encounter with the deities. When these dedications were set up, modes of behavior, notions regarding the nature of the divine, and forms of interactions between mortals and immortals that were articulated visually, became localized and were perpetuated at the site of deposition.

These visualized rituals share some of the characteristics of real rituals, not only in the depicted details, but also in their constitutive impact. Jonathan Z. Smith observed that ritual makes someone or something sacred.¹⁰¹ The dedications analyzed here had an agency in the making of a sanctuary as well. The manner, however, in which these objects participated in the creation of the sacred was markedly different from real rituals. First, to state the obvious, they are material objects, made of painted wood in the first case, and carved out of marble in the Attic instances. As such they are imbued with the social values assigned to the materials and the craftsmanship involved in their making, such as possible esteem attributed to marble. Such notions reflect back on

the social standing of these objects' commissioners. At the same time, the act of setting up dedications transformed the site of deposition; a space such as a cave became a place for the display of aesthetically remarkable objects, as one deposited dedication prompted other worshippers to participate in the dedicatory act and set up their own votives.

Second, all these dedications are visual constructs that are related to cultic realities, but are not direct reflections of actual rituals. Their making involves the selection of elements that can be recognized from reality (e.g. shapes of implements, types of offering), as well as imaginable modes of interactions between human and divine (e.g. epiphany). At the same time, the mechanism of their construction entails the exclusion of other aspects of practiced religion (e.g. the actual killing of the animal), possibly because they are deemed less significant and/or inappropriate for depiction. The combined selected details construct a religious ideology visually.

All the cases discussed here are concerned with the worship of the Nymphs. Given that the title 'Nymphs' can denote a wide-range of divine beings,¹⁰² the dedications analyzed here illustrate well the manner in which such objects can participate in the definition of the sacred. Each of these dedications designated the presence of the goddesses at a specific site of deposition, and turned the allusive notion of the existence of the Nymphs at a site such as the cave of Saftulis or the Athenian Asklepieion into an experienced reality. The votives markedly vary in the manner in which they defined and characterized the Nymphs. In the case of the Pitsá tablet, the absence of images of the Nymphs sets the emphasis on the depicted actions, and leaves some basic questions such as the goddesses' number and appearance, completely unanswered so that the divinities' character remains undefined. By contrast, all Attic reliefs portray the Nymphs as a group of three youthful females, providing worshippers (along with modern viewers) with concrete ideas regarding the manner in which the goddesses are to be envisioned. At the same time the reliefs vary in detail. The marked differences in the rendition of the goddesses with respect to aspects such as their homogeneity as a group, the degree of their sensuality, or their social respectability should not be regarded merely as issues of stylistic and iconographic choices, for they have immediate religious implications. Each portrayal of the goddesses visually defines

⁹⁸ Hdt. 6.105. Larson 2001, 97–98; Parker 1996, 163–168; Borgeaud 1988, 133–162.

⁹⁹ Borgeaud 1988, 243 n. 3.

¹⁰⁰ This characterization of Pan as secondary to the Nymphs is compatible with other representations of Pan. As noted by Robert Parker, in Menander's *Dyskolos* the god refers to his cave as a *Nymphaion* (Parker 1996, 165).

¹⁰¹ Smith 1987, 105.

¹⁰² Sourvinou-Inwood 2005, 104–105.

and propagates a *specific* vision and characterization of the Nymphs.¹⁰³

The reliefs' portrayal of the goddesses within the same visual field as the worshippers and other divinities articulates the Nymphs' particular relations to other gods and modes of interactions between human and divine. Whereas generally Pan and Hermes are shown as the goddesses' companions, in each case a different emphasis is set on the nature of this male companionship. All Attic reliefs convey the problematic nature of male worshippers' interaction with these female divinities, but each provides a different solution to the question of accessibility of Nymphs to their venerators. In the earliest example the depicted epiphany asserts the possibility of such an encounter, both as an actual event in the past, or in the future. Similarly, in the other reliefs the proximity between male venerators and male divinities is presented as possible, either as a face to face encounter, or in a ritual context related to a banquet. In these cases, the tension between image and text further confirms the desirability and the limited accessibility of the Nymphs to these venerators.

While these dedications had an agency in the construction of the sacred, the dedicatory texts suggest that they were primarily conceived as gifts. As such, they raise the fundamental question regarding the motivation behind their deposition: "What were the Nymphs in the caves of Saftulils, Penteli, and the Athenian Asklepieion supposed to think when they saw these votives?" This question, which pertains to the very essence of their intended religious role, is not easily answerable. The degree of specificity and attention in the rendering of the rituals as well as the sophisticated juxtaposition of dedicatory texts with the images, suggest that these were meant to be more than beautiful pieces of art made for the goddesses' delectation as tokens of devotions in return of and/or hope for good fortune. They formed material visualizations of specific ritualized connections between the goddesses and the imaged venerators who were directly associated with dedicators such as Euthydika, Archandros, Telephanes or Agathemeros. These votives formed material assertions that promulgated in perpetuity these individuals' specific relationship to the Nymphs visually.

The desired effect of these votives may have been similar to that of the bronzes dedicated at Delphi by the men of Orneae in Argos, who according to Pausanias vowed to make a daily sacrifice to Apollo, should they defeat the Sikyonians in battle, but upon their victory could not afford to fulfill their vow and found a solution to their dilemma by setting up images representing a sacrifice and a procession.¹⁰⁴ Similarly, dedicators of these votives may have hoped that upon seeing these votives the Nymphs would think that they are constantly being honored in a sacrificial procession, gestures of veneration and prayer, or in a liba-

tion offered to their male counterparts that respects their female space. But surely, ancient worshippers were not so naïve. Indeed, the Nymphs should be able to recognize that the music is not really being played and the sacrifice is not being offered; that it is not really them and their companions in these Attic reliefs, only their images. The goddesses should be able to make the distinction between representation and reality. The answer to this quandary is probably that yes, ancient worshippers would probably think so; and at the same time, perhaps no. And in the paradoxical relation of these artifacts to reality lies their power as religious objects. Through art and text they allowed worshippers' devotion to be visibly permanent and continuous at a certain site independent of the venerators' own physical presence. At the same time, these objects asserted the impossibility to perform such rituals constantly and in perpetuity. These votives both elide and confirm the fundamental divide between the real and the imaginary in Greek religion.

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¹⁰³ Notably, this should not imply that different forms of representations could not coexist. As in the case of the cave of Penteli, different representation of the Nymphs were displayed at the same place; the goddesses were shown both as a group of homogenous young veiled brides and as a triad distinctly feminine figures.

¹⁰⁴ Paus. 10.18.5. See discussion in Elsner 2007, 42–44.

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