

SKRIFTER UTGIVNA AV SVENSKA INSTITUTET I ATHEN, 4°, 59
ACTA INSTITUTI ATHENIENSIS REGNI SUECIAE, SERIES IN 4°, 59

The stuff of the gods

The material aspects of religion
in ancient Greece

Edited by Matthew Haysom,
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STOCKHOLM 2024

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Published with the aid of grants from Enboms donationsfond (Royal Swedish Academy of Letters, History and Antiquities), and Stiftelsen Långmanska kulturfonden

The English text was revised by Robert Spittlehouse

ISSN 0586-0539

ISBN 978-91-7916-068-5

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Printed by PrintBest (Viljandi, Estonia) via Italgraf Media AB (Stockholm Sweden) 2024

Dust jacket illustration: © Martin von Wagner Museum der Universität Würzburg, photograph: C. Kiefer.

ABSTRACT

The “material turn” in the humanities and social sciences has brought about an expanded understanding of the material dimension of all cultural and social phenomena. In the Classics it has resulted in the breaking down of boundaries within the discipline and a growing interest in materiality within literature. In the study of religion cross-culturally new perspectives are emphasising religion as a material phenomenon and belief as a practice founded in the material world. This volume brings together experts in all aspects of Greek religion to consider its material dimensions. Chapters cover both themes traditionally approached by archaeologists, such as dedications and sacred space, and themes traditionally approached by philologists, such as the role of objects in divine power. They include a wide variety of themes ranging from the imminent material experience of religion for ancient Greek worshippers to the role of material culture in change and continuity over the long term.

Keywords: Greek religion, Etruscan religion, Mycenaean religion, materiality, religious change, *temenos*, temples, offerings, cult statues, terracottas, *omphalos*, cauldrons, sacred laws, visuality, purity, pollution, gods’ identities, divine power, inscribed dedications

<https://doi.org/10.30549/actaath-4-59>

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I. Stuff and godsense

Seahorses are known to be very small creatures, certainly too small to transport a god, and yet story has it that your golden sea chariot was pulled by four giant hippocamps. In myths and legends, big and small have no meaning, and reality can be shrunk and expanded at will, this is the fabulator's privilege.

Cees Nooteboom, *Letters to Poseidon*, London 2014, 84.

Abstract

In the Greek world, as in the modern world objects were evidence not only for past people and events, they were also evidence for worlds distant not in time but in ontology—the world of the gods. This paper looks at the different ways in which both texts and objects formed a picture of the gods and at the ways in which that picture was changed both by deliberate intervention to control the gods' material environment on earth and by the consequences of independent changes to the material world. It argues that stuff with which they are encompassed in their earthly sanctuaries both enables gods to be measured in relation to humans and offers, as texts can never do, both a means for and a parallel to gods' independence of all human values.*

Keywords: materiality, sanctuaries, dedications, monumentality, miniaturisation, sacred laws, theology, gods, Plato, idealism

<https://doi.org/10.30549/actaath-4-59-01>

* I am grateful to the long-suffering editors of this volume for their initial invitation to give the keynote lecture, and for their help and encouragement. I am grateful to Caroline Vout for comments on an earlier draft, and to the anonymous readers. I have however resisted the pressure of the readers to remove the signs of the original oral delivery and turn this into more academic “stuff”.

We cannot resist jumping to conclusions on the basis of physical appearances. Against our better judgement we cling on to the sense that physical appearances are somehow natural. This is partly because others can choose whether they speak to us, but not whether we see them. They consciously choose what to say, knowing who will hear them; but although they consciously choose what they wear and how they appear, they cannot know who will see them like that. We believe that we can make a “third-party” assessment of physical appearance. This belief affects the whole way we live our lives. We assess what is happening in our verbal encounters, and in particular the sincerity of words spoken to us, by contextualizing those words on the basis of what we (have already) decide(d) about the speaker from their physical appearance.

It is not only from their physical appearance that we cannot resist drawing conclusions. We draw conclusions from a person's physical environment too. Film-makers and novelists exploit our propensity to draw conclusions about people from places. Novelists create a material world for their fictional characters to live in—or rather, they create their fictional characters by the material environments they describe. Only a man with more ambition than taste would have a living room like *that*. There is an environmental equivalent of power-dressing.

If this is the way in which we use stuff to help us negotiate a world full of people, real and fictional, what role did

stuff play in the way that the Greeks related to a world full of gods? Herodotos was happy to think of Homer and Hesiod having given the Greek their gods—their names, spheres, powers (“τὰς ἐπωνυμίας δόντες καὶ τιμὰς τε καὶ τέχνας” (Hdt. 2.53.2)—effectively happy to think that to relate to the gods was just like relating to Achilles or Agamemnon, to a fictional character. But Plato certainly was not happy that that should be how we related to the gods. The problem, as Plato saw it, was not that stories about the gods failed to give an impression of what gods were like, it was that, at best but also at worst, this was a partial impression. Homer and Hesiod give poor likenesses of the gods and that is as bad as a painter giving a poor likeness in a portrait (“ὅταν εἰκάξῃ τις κακῶς τῷ λόγῳ περὶ θεῶν τε καὶ ἡρώων οἱοί εἰσιν, ὥσπερ γραφεὺς μηδὲν ἑοικότα γράφων οἷς ἂν βουλευθῇ γράψαι” (*Resp.* 377e; cf. 600e–601a).

We are inclined, I think, to believe that Plato was unusual in his views, and that it is only his idealist epistemology and belief in the possibility of accessing the transcendent that gave him the confidence that he knew better about the gods than Homer and Hesiod. Certainly, in terms of banning poetry (*Resp.* 377d–403c, 595a–608b) Plato takes a step we know no city to have taken. But Plato was neither wrong nor alone in thinking that their theological baggage, the very fact that gods were gods, meant that the gods were not just like fictional characters. For the thought that stories about the gods might give a misleading image of the gods is closely related to the thought that the material environment into which the gods are placed might give a misleading impression of the gods. And here Greek cities were prepared to take action.

Why did the stuff of the material environment of the gods drag legislation out of Greek cities when stories about the gods did not? Our propensity to be suspicious about words spoken, but to trust appearances, is crucial here. When it comes to verbal messages knowledge derived from ordinary human informants is fallible. As Tom Harrison has observed in Herodotos “neither knowledge of the divine nor knowledge derived from the divine are envisaged as being in any way of a different order to what we might call ordinary human knowledge.”¹ Just as with information about people or things absent in time or space, so with information about beings who are ontologically different, part of the problem lies with the informant. The informant cannot help adjusting what they say to the circumstances in which they are delivering their message and to what they think their listeners want to hear. Nicias (Thuc. 7.8.2–3, 7.10–15) writes a letter to make sure that the message given is also the message received. But part of the problem lies not with the informant but with the recipient of the message. Listeners find it hard not to hear what they ex-

pect that informant to be saying, regardless of what he or she is saying.² And part of the problem lies with the message itself: words always need a context for their interpretation, and if one is uncertain of the context one will be uncertain of the interpretation.

But if the context in which the gods acted was uncertain, the context in which they were worshipped was not. The material environment of divine worship was itself shaped in part by stories about the particular god, and it proceeded to determine not just the view and the experience of what the particular god was like, but the knowledge that there are gods at all. The healing acts of Asklepios at Epidauros make this very clear: the sick person comes to the sanctuary, sees material evidence of healing, sleeps in the sanctuary, is healed, and knows that Asklepios really does exist and does heal. Among the acts of healing recorded on stone is the case of Ambrosia, who laughed at the records of healing (i.e., won’t believe the story), yet sleeps, dreams, is made well (she was, inevitably, blind in one eye) and has to dedicate a pig for her ignorant disbelief, so contributing to the material environment a token that itself encouraged belief in the stories.³

One of the most powerful ways in which the particularities of an environment are impressed upon people is through prescriptions and proscriptions. If you are asked “please take off your shoes” when you enter someone’s house, or given a hard hat to wear on a building site, or made to put on a white lab-coat on entering a medical establishment, you are being given a powerful message about the sort of place you are supposed to think this is. So, when Henry VI made Statutes for my own Cambridge college, King’s, in 1443 he proscribed certain items of dress:

All fellows and scholars are forbidden to wear red and green shoes, or secular ornaments or fancy hoods, either inside or outside the university, or swords or long knives, or any other weapons, offensive or defensive, or girdles and belts adorned with gold and silver, within the said King’s College, either inside or outside the university and town of Cambridge, either publicly or secretly, unless they are given special permission by the provost, vice-provost, deans and bursars. All the scholars and fellows are moreover forbidden to let their hair or beard grow; they must wear the crown and tonsure appropriate to their order, rank, and station, appropriately, honestly, and in due fashion, as they should.⁴

² And readers too—this is the regular experience of academic authors receiving feedback on submitted writings.

³ Rhodes & Osborne 2003, no. 102, lines 33–41.

⁴ Myers 1969, no. 533, ch. 23.

¹ Harrison 2000, 192–193.

He was trying to tell both the members of the college and those outside the college that the college was a particular sort of place in which personal display was out of place and which was set apart from the world of war and violence. But, as that example shows, receiving that message depends upon sharing the assumptions of its author about the material world and its significance.

Both proscriptions and prescriptions are prominent in so-called “Greek sacred laws”—the rules that sanctuaries set for themselves. These prohibitions have often been seen in the context of “ritual purity” and avoidance of pollution. But this is in many ways misleading. Take the opening of one of the more explicit laws, from Ialysos and dated to around 300 BC (*LSCG* 136 = *IG* XII.1 677). The reason for the law is stated (lines 3–4) as: “in order that the temple and the sanctuary of Alektrona might be holy in the ancestral fashion” (“ὅπως τὸ ἱερόν καὶ τὸ τέμενος | τᾶς Ἀλεκτρώνας εὐαγῆται καὶ τὰ τὰ πάτρια”). “Εὐαγῆται” here is a rare usage, but the verb in the active means to be holy, *εὐαγής*.⁵ Even *LSJ* are inclined to offer various forms of negation for *εὐαγής*—“free from pollution”, “guiltless”, “undefiled”—but it is clearly a form with a very strong positive force, the *εὐαγής* person or thing is in a good state, not just not a bad state. It indicates a person or thing that is suitable for an environment where the gods are and is applied to hymns and sacrifices. When Plato in *Laws* 956a wants to deny that ivory is a suitable material for dedications he does so by saying that it is an “οὐκ εὐαγὲς ἀνάθημα”, “not an undefiled offering”.

What is it that makes for a *εὐαγής* environment at Ialysos? The things οὐχ ὅσιον (“not holy”) to bring into the temple and sanctuary are horse, ass, mule, pony (γῖνος) or other pack animal, no sandals or anything made from pig, and no animals are to pasture.⁶ The sanctuary of Alektrona is to be kept apart from the world of work, and kept apart from anything that reminds of the animal world. Prohibitions on using a sanctuary for pasturing are not uncommon: the space of the god is to be treated differently from other agricultural spaces.⁷ Humans are to dispense with the necessary accoutrements of daily life—including sandals.

Sandals are similarly to be abandoned and pasturing animals similarly banned one or two centuries later at Eresos, but there prohibition extends to those who have been dealing with the dead, women who have given birth or aborted, those who haven’t washed after having sex with a woman, murder-

ers, iron and other weapons, and dead animals (*LSCG* 124 = *IG* XII Suppl. 126, translated in Kearns 2010, 5.1.4).⁸ This is as close as we get to real life proscription parallel to the proscriptions in Plato’s *Laws* book 10 (955e–956b), where Plato insists that the reasonable man should offer reasonable offerings, and objects to offerings of gold and silver because they encourage jealousy, ivory because it comes from a lifeless body, and iron and bronze because instruments of war.⁹ The rationale here and at Eresos seems to be that the proper environment for the gods should not evoke any life crises.

But Plato in *Laws* is also concerned to outlaw excessive dedications—objects made of more than one piece of wood or stone, textiles that it has taken a woman more than a month to make, or paintings that it has taken a painter more than a day to complete.¹⁰ Such prohibitions are also paralleled in the epigraphic sacred laws, which indicate further what stuff might be regarded as excessive. The earliest of these laws was found in north Arcadia (*LSS* 32) and relates to a shrine of Demeter Thesmophoros. It concerns itself solely with banning the wearing of a ζτεραῖον λῶπος, which commentators have variously interpreted as a garment made of leather or a brightly-coloured garment. Another law relating to Demeter and stemming from the Peloponnese is that from 3rd-century BC

⁸ *LSCG* 124.2–18: “ἀπὸ μὲν κάδεος ἰδίω | [περιμένν]αντας ἀμέραις εἴκοσι. ἀπὸ δὲ | [. . . 7–8 . . .]ω ἀμέραις τρεῖς λοεσσάμενον· | [ἀπὸ δὲ . . .]άτω ν ἀμέραις δέκα· ν αὐταν δὲ | [τὰν τετό]κοισαν ἀμέραις τεσσαράκοντα· | [ἀπὸ δὲ . . .]τω ἀμέραις τρεῖς· ν αὐταν δὲ τ[ᾶν] | [τε] τόκοισαν ν ἀμέραις δέκα· | [ἀπὸ δὲ γύ]ναικος αὐτάμερον λοεσσάμενον· | [. . . 6 . . .] δὲ μὴ εἰστέιχην ν μηδὲ προδόταις. | [μὴ εἰσ]τείχην δὲ μηδὲ γάλλοις ν μηδὲ | [γύ]ναικες γαλλάζην ἐν τῷ τεμένει· [μὴ εἰσ]φέρην δὲ μηδὲ ὅπλα πολεμιστήρι[α] | μηδὲ θνασίδιον· | [μὴ]δὲ εἰς τὸν ναῦον εἰσφέρην ν σῖδαρον | μηδὲ χάλκον πλὰν νομισματος | μηδὲ ὑπόδεσιν μηδὲ ἄλλο δέρμα | μὴδεν”.

⁹ *Pl. Leg.* 955e–956b: “θεοῖσι δὲ ἀναθήματα χρεῶν ἔμμετρα τὸν μέτριον ἄνδρα ἀνατιθέντα δωρεῖσθαι. γῆ μὲν οὖν ἐστία τε οἰκίσεως ἱερὰ πᾶσι πάντων θεῶν· μηδεὶς οὖν δευτέρως ἱερὰ καθιερούτω θεοῖς. χρυσὸς δὲ καὶ ἄργυρος ἐν ἄλλαις πόλεσιν ἰδίᾳ τε καὶ ἐν ἱεροῖς ἐστὶν ἐπιφθονον κτήμα, ἐλέφας δὲ ἀπολελοιπότης ψυχῇ σώματος οὐκ εὐαγὲς ἀνάθημα, σίδηρος δὲ καὶ χαλκὸς πολέμων ὄργανα· ξύλου δὲ μονόξυλον ὅτι ἂν ἐθέλῃ τις ἀνατίθῃ, καὶ λίθου ὥσαύτως πρὸς τὰ κοινὰ ἱερὰ, ὕφην δὲ μὴ πλέον ἔργον γυναικὸς μῆς ἔμμηνον. χρώματα δὲ λευκὰ πρέποντ’ ἂν θεοῖς εἶη καὶ ἄλλοθι καὶ ἐν ὕφῃ, βάρματα δὲ μὴ προσφέρειν ἄλλ’ ἢ πρὸς τὰ πολέμου κοσμήματα. θεϊότατα δὲ δῶρα ὀρνιθὲς τε καὶ ἀγάλλματα ὅσα περ ἂν ἐν μᾶ ζωγράφος ἡμέρα εἰς ἀποτελῇ· καὶ τᾶλλα ἔστω κατὰ τὰ τοιαῦτα ἀναθήματα μεμιμημένα”.

¹⁰ We should not, I think, regard these as particularly carefully calibrated limitations. Weaving was an extremely time-consuming occupation (“A master weaver usually takes 20–25 days to complete weaving of a Baluchuri sari” [https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Handloom_sari consulted 22/12/20]) and so the month limit on textiles would effectively rule out anything very fancy—so too the restriction of a statue to a single piece of wood or stone is a restriction to statues that are simple standing figures. Plato is effectively curbing the competitiveness between commensurate objects. He cannot prevent a large stone statue being more impressive than an ordinary garment, but he can act to prevent one garment putting another into the shade, and most sanctuaries attracted a particular and limited range of dedications (see p. 19 below).

⁵ Hence my translation “might be holy”; Kearns 2010, 5.1.3 translates “is kept pure”.

⁶ *LSCG* 136.19–27: “νόμος ᾧ οὐχ ὅσιον εἰσμεῖν οὐδὲ | ἐσφέρειν ἐς τὸ ἱερόν καὶ τὸ τέμενος τᾶς Ἀλεκτρώνας· μὴ εἰσ|τω ἵππος ὄνος ἡμίονος γῖνος | μηδὲ ἄλλο λόφουρον μηθὲν μη|δὲ ἐσαγέτω ἐς τὸ τέμενος μη|θεῖς τούτων μηθὲν μηδὲ ὑποδή|ματα ἐσφερεῖτω μηδὲ ὕειον μη|θέν”.

⁷ cf. *LSCG* 116 from Chios and Sokolowski *ad loc.*

Patras (*LSS* 33) banning gold weighing more than an obol, along with decorated (ποικίλον) clothing, purple, make-up, and playing the *aulos*. Similar in date and area of provenance is the 3rd-century BC regulation from Lykosoura (*LSCG* 68) relating to the sanctuary of Despoina, which bans gold (unless a dedication), purple clothing, flowery clothing, black clothing, sandals and rings along with braided hair, covered hair, and wearing flowers.

Robert Parker, in collecting this material, and more, in a footnote in *Miasma* observes that “such garb denotes the prostitute” citing the Syracusan law attributed to Zaleukos of Lokris who, according to Phylarchos, quoted by Athenaios *Deipnosophistai* 521b, is supposed to have devised laws that a woman “may not wear gold jewellery or a garment with a purple border, unless she is a prostitute”.¹¹ But Parker moves too fast here. These laws are notable because they are unusual. The laws have effectiveness not because they show up the prostitute but because in normal circumstances women who are not prostitutes would wear purple when they wanted to make an impression. It is that “making an impression” that is at issue here, not dressing like a prostitute. Indeed Athenaios himself indicates something of this when he turns from summarizing to quoting Phylarchos, not on Syracuse but on Sybaris where “they passed a law to the effect that they would invite their wives to their festivals, and that anyone who issued invitations to a sacrificial feast was to make the arrangements at least a year in advance, so that the guests could take full advantage of the time needed to prepare their clothing and everything else they were intended to wear, and could then respond to the summons” (transl. Olson).¹² The problem was not that gold and purple might be worn by prostitutes, but that they were part of the competitive display of any woman of means.

The insistence on modest display is treated by Plato (*Leg.* 955e5, note 9 above) as needed in order to be commensurate with the “reasonable” (μέτριος) dedicator, but while at the moment of dedication what is dedicated reflects back most powerfully on the dedicator, it is part of what it is to be a material dedication that it has an on-going existence—an existence during which the dedicator may completely vanish from the story, as they do from Athenian lists of dedications.¹³ What dedications never stop doing, until finally melted down or discarded, is what Walter Pater would call “exercise an aesthetic influence on character”, creating the environment in which worshippers come in contact with and (re)form their

view of the god or goddess worshipped.¹⁴ The “modesty” of any offerings comes to reflect modesty upon the god or goddess involved.¹⁵ The dedications become things of the god or goddess in a strong sense—his or her crown, or belt, or jewellery.¹⁶

What is true of dedications is true also of the comportment of worshippers. Individual worshippers who stand out from the crowd may attract attention to themselves, and away from the god or goddess, but the appearance of the crowd of worshippers produces an image not of many modest (or immodest) individuals but of a god who expects modest (or extravagant) display. Worshippers at Patras, with hardly any gold jewellery, plain and not brightly-coloured clothes, no make-up, and no *aulos*-playing, offered a very staid image of what the world of Demeter was like. So too the banning not simply of gold and decorated or strongly-coloured clothes, but also of footwear, dressed hair and rings, from the sanctuary of Despoina cannot but have projected a very “plain Jane” persona for Despoina herself.

The fullest picture we get, epigraphically, of how the worshippers in a sanctuary presented themselves to the eye comes from Andania and the regulations for the mysteries there dating either to 92/1 BC or AD 24 (*LSCG* 65 = *IG* V.1 1390; Deshours 2006; Gawlinski 2012; long excerpts translated in Kearns 2010, 6.4.7). The 194 very long lines of this inscription offer a detailed description of what the men and women involved wear. Men wear wreaths, women white felt hats, except that those being initiated for the first time wear tiara (στλεγγίς). Initiates go barefoot and wear white; women initiates are not to wear clothing that is diaphanous or has stripes wider than half a finger. Non-initiate women wear a linen *chiton* and cloak worth no more than 100 drachmas, girls a *kalaseris* or *sinonitas* and cloak worth not more than 60 drachmas (and so on with slightly different rules for different categories of participant). No one is to wear gold, make-up, a hairband, or have plaited hair, or wear shoes except of felt or the skins of sacrificed animals. The cushions on the wicker seats on which the consecrated women sit are to be white with no border and no purple.

The regulations go on to detail the order of the procession—with consecrated girls in pride of place behind the main officials, and consecrated women in front of consecrated men. Of interest is that the order of consecrated men is determined

¹¹ Parker 1983, 83 n. 36. For the Syracusan law cf. Diod. Sic. 12.21.1 who goes on, with more detail than in Athenaios, that “a man may not wear a gold-studded ring or Milesian-style cloak unless engaged in prostitution or adultery”, and similarly Clem. Al. *Paedagogus* 2.10 p. 220 6–6 St.

¹² Phylarchos *FGH* 81 F 45; Plut. *Mor.* 147c has the same story.

¹³ Osborne & Rhodes 2017, no. 169, see below pp. 20–21.

¹⁴ Pater 1902, 209–210: “Plato, as you remember, gives a hint that, like all other visible things, the very trees—how they grow—exercise an aesthetic influence on character. The diligent legislator therefore would have his preferences even in this matter of the trees under which the citizens of the Perfect City might sit down to rest.”

¹⁵ For recent insistence that modest dedications are not necessarily dedications made by the poor see Salapata 2018.

¹⁶ For discussions of dedications in and beyond the Greek world see Weinryb 2016; 2018. I am grateful to an anonymous reader for these references to material published since this paper was written.

by a set of magistrates, but the order of consecrated women by lot—as if state-organised competition is acceptable, establishing your place by competing informally unacceptable. The regulations then deal with tents, limiting the size of the tents that anyone can have to *c.* 2.8 m² and putting the consecrated men in charge of where the tents can be put. There are to be no couches in the tents and silver vessels in the tents are to be limited to a value of 300 drachmas. Twenty of the consecrated men are given rods in order to ensure that the rules are obeyed.

We have no archaeology from Andania to set against these prescriptions, and need to be careful about translating prescription into description. Nevertheless, we can derive from this text a fair idea of what was in the mind of Mnasistratos, who seems to have been the architect of the reorganization that led to this set of regulations. He is endeavouring to produce a high degree of uniformity that enables participants to identify easily who of those taking part is taking which role. He is also endeavouring to make that uniformity a uniformity of an “unvarnished” kind. One major effect of that is to present the gods at the centre of this cult (Demeter, Hagna, Apollo Karneios and co.) as gods who deal with people at the fundamental level, not as whatever they otherwise might dress themselves up to be. Life and death are the things at issue here, not the promotion of a particular kind of life.

We should not take the picture that we can derive from the various prohibitions that I have discussed to be the total picture of the gods. We need to take seriously the bias in the material I have presented towards the Peloponnese and cults in which Demeter is involved, and the bias in regulations that concern themselves with the personal history of the would-be worshipper towards texts of the Hellenistic period. Arguably the very reason for banning the *zteraion lopus* in some sanctuary in North Arcadia at the end of the 6th century BC was that in other sanctuaries at that time that was a favoured festal dress.

While the images on painted pottery are not snapshots, and may lean as heavily away from the plain as the regulations of those Peloponnesian sanctuaries lean towards it, they offer at least a glimpse of the alternative festal appearance against which the cults of Demeter are setting themselves. Black-figure pottery regularly makes much of the highly elaborate garments of those engaged in sacrificial processions. We see this on pots that were themselves dedicated on the Athenian Acropolis or at Eleusis and on pots that ended up in Italy.¹⁷ Red-figure pots tend to show less generalised elaboration, but the principal actors are similarly elaborately kitted out, some-

times in the context of the Mysteries themselves.¹⁸ Items of dress that were identifiably Persian played an important role here, as Margaret Miller has made clear.¹⁹

Enter a sanctuary during a festival and you would very quickly get a sense of the god or goddess being celebrated. The contrasts between festivals where plainness was at a premium and festivals where fancy dress was expected would be marked. And the aural experience would vary along with the visual. The presence or absence of the music of the *aulos* would fundamentally change the mood of the festival, even before the possible variations in musical experience according to the type of music played are taken into account.²⁰ Ancient writers suggest that music played a part in arousing the initiate to divine communion (Proclus, *In Alc.* 198) and that the musical signature of the Dionysiac was more or less distinctive.²¹

Not only were gods conjured up by the appearance and actions of their worshippers; the material objects that those worshippers left behind gave no less distinct an impression of the god. As scholars have pointed out, the dedicatory repertory of different gods, or better of different sanctuaries, was distinct, and indeed differently distinct over time.²² Worshipers both literally and metaphorically changed the face of the god by the objects they gave. And the giving of a particular selection of objects puts pressure on other worshippers to give similar objects. Think only of the Athenian Acropolis and the contrast between the Archaic Acropolis, as reconstructed from the pits in which debris from the Persian sack was buried, and the Acropolis to which Pausanias bears witness in the 2nd century AD.²³ The Archaic Acropolis was a sanctuary where no visitor could be in doubt that this precinct belonged to a goddess whose delight was in nubile women making offerings. So strong was this perceived prejudice that more or less uniquely we have a male figure making an offering just like a *kore* (Fig. 1).²⁴ But Pausanias' Acropolis was not like that. Even

¹⁷ Athenian Acropolis: Athens National Archaeological Museum Akr. 2298; van Straten 1995, fig. 3. Eleusis: Athens National Archaeological Museum 493; van Straten 1995, fig. 12. Pots that ended up in Italy: Berlin Antikensammlung F1686, 1690; van Straten 1995, figs. 4, 11.

¹⁸ Ferrara Museo Archeologico Nazionale T 57 c VP; van Straten 1995, fig. 13; Palermo Museo Archeologico V 661a; van Straten 1995, fig. 133; Kiel, Antikensammlung Kunsthalle B 55; van Straten 1995, fig. 168; in the context of the Mysteries themselves, Paris, Louvre G343; Bérard *et al.* 1989, fig. 163.

¹⁹ Miller 1997, 159, 161–163, 175, 181–182, 185, 194–195, 256.

²⁰ Wilson 1999; Csapo 2004, 216–221.

²¹ Arist. Quint. 3.25; Arist. *Pol.* 1342b3–12; see generally Strabo 10.3.9–17 and Hardie 2004.

²² Pioneering work was done by C. Simon 1986; see Morgan 1990, 229–233. For variation between sanctuaries of the same deity see Baumbach 2004. The most sophisticated discussion of this complex issue is Parikh 2020.

²³ The Athenian Acropolis was no doubt, as one anonymous reader complained, atypical, but if changes were less dramatic elsewhere the existence of change over time cannot be denied, and, as often, it is helpful to illustrate this by a particularly graphic example.

²⁴ Athens Acropolis Museum 633, Payne & Mackworth Young 1936, fig. 102. There were, of course, other male figures (Rampin horseman,



Fig. 1. Statue of a beardless male from the late Archaic Athenian Acropolis, Athens Acropolis Museum 633. © Acropolis Museum, photograph: Socratis Mavrommatis.

allowing for the selectivity of a visitor obsessed with the Classical past, Pausanias' catalogue of votive monuments is revealing. Take just the statues that he records between the entrance and the Parthenon (1.22.8–24.4): Hermes and the Graces (by Socrates), lioness commemorating Leaina, Aphrodite (by Kalamis), Dieitrephe pierced with arrows, Hygieia, Athena Hygieia, bronze boy holding sprinkler (by Lykios son of Myron), Perseus (by Myron), Brauronian Artemis (by Praxiteles), bronze Wooden Horse with Menestheus and Teuker peeping out, Epicharinos (by Kritias), Oinobios, Hermolykos, Phormio, Athena and Marsyas, Theseus and bull, Phrixos, Herakles strangling serpents, Athena being born, bull, man wearing helmet (by Kleoitias), Earth praying to Zeus for rain, Timotheos

Moschophoros, Kritios Boy), my point here is that we even have a male figure assimilated to the type of female figures.

son of Konon, Konon, Prokne and Itys, Athena and olive, Poseidon and wave, Zeus (by Leochares), another Zeus.

It is not simply the gender imbalance that has changed here; so has the whole sense of what votive statues are doing. Where the Archaic statues offer themselves in return for services rendered by Athena, as their inscriptions make clear, these Classical statues are much more straightforwardly commemorative, re-presenting individuals from myth and history who have done great things (by implication, under Athena's *aegis*) and re-presenting Athena herself. Athena re-emerges here not simply as a bountiful goddess to whom pleasing gifts should be given in turn, but as a hyperactive patron of literally and figuratively heroic enterprises. Closer to the Athena of epic, or perhaps just closer to the hyperactive imperialist Athenians themselves.²⁵

Statues were not, of course the only stuff on the Athenian Acropolis, either in the Archaic or the Classical periods. We might similarly ask how the impression of the goddess changed from the 6th to the 5th and 4th centuries BC in terms of smaller votives. Unfortunately, here we are hampered by the changing nature of the evidence that we have. The rich and under-studied body of pottery from the Acropolis gives us opportunities to see some of the imagery which faced the Archaic visitor who got beyond the forest of *korai* to look at the pots scattered or stacked in the 6th-century-BC temples.²⁶ The very quality of much of the material certainly encourages the belief that these were vessels that were on display, for all that some of what they display causes surprise. Most notably, the chaste goddess nevertheless attracts painted pots and a votive plaque that show sexual intercourse.²⁷ But for the Classical period our evidence for the votives comes primarily from the epigraphic lists which the Athenians produced annually.²⁸ These lists have the advantage of making clear exactly what was stored where, but the descriptions of the objects are normally minimal and more concerned with what gives it monetary value than anything else:

In the temple, the Hekatompedon: 3 gold bowls, weight of these 2,544; a golden maiden on a stele, not weighed;

²⁵ That not all the statues were votive, and that from the 4th century BC onwards some of them were honorific, does not affect the point being made here—which is precisely that the changing nature of what was displayed on the Acropolis changed how Athena and her relationship to Athenians was presented.

²⁶ Graef & Langlotz 1925–1933.

²⁷ Graef & Langlotz 1925–1933, no. 1040.

²⁸ Scott 2011. Graef and Langlotz (1925–1933) do publish a certain quantity of pottery from the Acropolis from after the Persian wars, but the numbers involved are much smaller; even in the case of Panathenaic amphoras, the fragments from the 1st century of Panathenaic amphoras (560s–460s BC) outnumber fragments from later Panathenaics by a factor of five.

a silver holy-water sprinkler, not weighed; 2 gold wreaths, weight of these 80; a gold wreath which Victory has, weight of this 60; 8 silver bowls; weight of these 800; silver goblet, weight of this 200; silver goblet of Zeus Polieus, weight of this 200; golden wreath, weight of this –3 2 obols; gold circlet, weight of this 63; 4 gold wreaths, weight of these 135 2 obols; gold wreath, weight of this 18 3 obols; two gold pieces, weight of these 293 3 obols; gold piece, weight of this 138 2 obols; gold piece, weight of this 119; gold wreath, weight of this 26 3 obols; silver piece, weight of this 192; silver incense burner, weight of this 1000.

Osborne & Rhodes 2017, no. 169.

The contrast with the impression given by the Archaic pottery is marked, but how far this is a contrast of time and how far of evidence is harder to determine.

One further Athenian contrast in stuff deserves to be emphasized: the stuff of Athena herself. Penetrate the temple of Athena Polias in the 6th century BC and what you found was a wooden statue, clearly old and plain (albeit in receipt of a fancy *peplos*). Penetrate the Parthenon in the 5th or subsequent centuries and what you found was the great gold and ivory statue. Each no doubt had a wow factor, but a very different wow factor. Customarily we think of the chryselephantine statue as a product of Athenian wealth and desire to show off that wealth. But we might wonder whether the goddess in the city's major temple did not have to change her appearance because she had come to be differently conceived. That is, the old wooden statue might suit the goddess who was pleased with *korai*, but could Athena really be like that when she supported the hyperactivity urged by even those dedications we can assign to the period between 480 and 450 BC?

Raising the question in that form draws attention to the capacity of stuff continuously to present the same appearance over an extended period of time. What would have happened to Athena if the Persians had not sacked the Acropolis? Could one have had a chryselephantine Athena in a sanctuary dominated by *korai*? The fruits they offer in their outstretched hands would come to look pretty mean offerings by comparison with the Victory she extends in hers. But equally, once Athena was gold and ivory, she had to live up to it. That statue, like all statues, froze time around it: it required the moment at which *this* had been the Athena Athens delighted in to be stretched out into the future, required Athens, and what Athens could dedicate and celebrate in dedication, to carry on being what this Athena delighted in. What would it be to have a goddess like that but no on-going stream of gold crowns being dedicated, generals being celebrated? We might think that the Athenians had no choice but to allow whichever Attalos to erect his extravagant dedi-

cation of the Lesser Barbarians.²⁹ How else could they satisfy the goddess who was patiently handing out Victory?

The conservatism of stuff is important here. As with the rituals at Andania, human actions can be reformed. The music and the clothes can be changed. Even the varieties of incense, like the varieties of manure from the sacrificial beasts, are subject to some potential for change, so that the olfactory experience can be altered. But although small votives can be removed from display, temporarily or permanently, statues and buildings are a lot harder to alter significantly—both because of the cost and because of the emotional investment they attract. Certainly, the accumulation of further statues and further buildings may revise initial impressions by putting the older presentation into a new framework, but except when there had been a major event wiping the slate clean or almost clean, as the Persians had at Athens and as fire may have done periodically elsewhere, that older impression nevertheless remained. In an absolutely literal sense, and in sense only marginally removed from the literal, statues and temples managed how a worshipper got to see god, as churches, stained glass, statues and icons still do.

There are many ways in which the sculptures on, in and around temples construct a view of the gods, but most directly through their representations of the gods themselves.³⁰ For all that classical archaeologists have a mania for classing objects, the idea that there are certain “types” among statues of gods is not without basis. After the Classical era, indeed making the Classical era classical, enthusiasm to conform to an existing pattern is found very widely distributed (think of the Herculaneum women, large and small). But it is far less clear that reproduction was, in general, a feature of sculpture in the Archaic period or in the 5th or 4th centuries BC. Certainly, *kouroi* and *korai* replicate an idea, but what is striking about the great assemblages of *kouroi* at the Ptoon sanctuary or of *korai* on the Athenian Acropolis is their insistent variety. These are not reproductions of each other in the way that the Herculaneum women are reproductions of each other. Jennifer Trimble has noted that the “mass production of nearly exact replicas is a striking characteristic of much Roman statue production; it differs markedly from anything seen in earlier times, including the Hellenistic period.”³¹ Yet when it comes to the gods, reproduction seems already alive and well in the 5th and 4th centuries BC. The recently vastly popular image from a 4th-century BC Italian pot of Apollo seated outside a temple in which is a cult statue of Apollo that reproduces the

²⁹ Stewart 2004.

³⁰ For other aspects of the theology of temple sculpture see Osborne 2000; 2009.

³¹ Trimble 2011, 106.

bronze Apollo from the Piraeus harbour shows that clearly.³² But it is not an isolated case. Apollo, Artemis, Athena, Aphrodite, all get stuck in particular types, and with the exception of Aphrodite, whose type was created in the late 5th century BC and revised by Praxiteles, one of the types they get stuck in is, or pretends to be, late Archaic in style.

Reproduction, as Trimble writes, paraphrasing Walter Benjamin, “has its own conceptual momentum”; she goes on to quote Benjamin’s own words: “the work of art reproduced becomes the work of art designed for reproducibility.”³³ The freezing of Greek temple architecture into a limited range of models, and the freezing of the gods into a limited range of types represents a freezing of what it is to be a god or a goddess. Pliny’s story (Plin. *HN* 36.20) of the people of Kos refusing Praxiteles’ naked Aphrodite is not so much a story about the inappropriateness of nudity for a goddess and more about their wanting the Aphrodite they knew and loved. The more a particular “type” of statue was adopted for a divinity, the more that divinity became that type of statue. As indeed Socrates has become his portrait type, for all that that type was created long after his execution and by sculptors with no hope of knowing what he looked like in life. We are back to Plato and his bad portraits.

My story about stuff and godsense, about how the gods are made to be in the world by the materials with which their worshippers surround and encompass them, has been a story about relativism. Stuff, on my account, has no meaning in its own right, but only by comparison with other stuff—clothing with the clothing worn outside the sanctuary or by other worshippers in this sanctuary at other times or in other sanctuaries, dedications with the dedications made here in the past or made elsewhere now, and so on. Stuff is made to signify by comparison with and contrast to other stuff. The stuff of the gods signifies by the way it relates to the stuff of humans (or of animals). We see the particular modalities of the operation of material in a particular culture at particular times, in relation to the particular modalities of that material in that culture at different times.

But we need to pause before making the immediate leap from the material to the abstract that this relativism encourages. For unlike words, to pick up again the contrast I drew earlier, stuff is more than a signifier. Stuff has absolute properties, not only in itself but in relation to human beings. Some smells make you sick, make anyone sick. Other smells transport you to a high, transport anyone to a high. Some sounds set your teeth on edge, set anyone’s teeth on edge. Yet some music can

calm the most frayed nerves, anyone’s nerves. Being touched can make the hairs on anyone’s back stand on end. But touching certain textures can produce very physical delight. Some sights make the heart soar; others produce physical revulsion. Such “absolute” qualities, and other absolute qualities of particular stuffs, do not stand apart from signification—substances acquire significance in part in relation to those absolute qualities (arguably gold would be special because it does not tarnish even if it were found in inexhaustible quantities).

That stuff has absolute properties in relation to humans is both why Greek gods need stuff, and why Greeks need gods. Ironically perhaps, it is stuff that offers a model for Platonic idealism, a reason to think that there might be “the beautiful itself”, not just what you or I think is beautiful. The fixed properties of stuff mark the limits of representation, the point where representation and reality cannot be separated, where representation becomes reality. That there is such a place encourages the thought that that is where god ought to be—the thought that has Plato banish the poets.

The Greeks explored these absolutes in their stories about the gods. Think of Semele being persuaded by Hera to ask Zeus to come to her as he really was, and being burnt to a crisp as a result. Or think of the unbearable power of objects made by the gods, as in the story about the image of Dionysos made by Hephaistos that was given by Zeus to Dardanos in a chest and was taken as part of the spoils from Troy by Eurypylos son of Euaimon. According to Pausanias, who tells us about this chest and its image “Eurypylos opened the chest and saw the image, and no sooner did he see it than he went out of his mind, and mad he continued, with a few lucid moments ...” (7.19.7). Hephaistos is presumably the only craftsman who would satisfy Plato—the craftsman whose image is not a representation of a representation but a direct likeness of the original.

I began with the way in which imagined environments create fictional characters. These stories about Zeus and Semele, Eurypylos and Dionysos have minimal environmental data (we have to conjure up a context for the devious exchange between wronged wife Hera and Zeus’ latest lover, for the acquisition by a Greek of an object in a chest without the original warning label attached). They do not need environmental data precisely because they are about what will happen in *any* environment. But, in T.S. Eliot’s phrase, “humankind cannot bear very much reality” and many stories about the gods are rich in environmental detail (think the Homeric Hymns—to Aphrodite, to Hermes, to Dionysos, to Demeter). Gods have to be kept in a box, as Eurypylos learned.

Unlike the fictional characters generated by the boxes into which their creators put them, gods have a life outside the box. Unlike real people, gods have absolute qualities—they do not exist only in relationships. Gods are quite like stuff. In fact,

³² The pot fragment (Amsterdam, Allard Pierson Museum, 2579) was brought to general attention by Spivey 1995; it has recently figured on the cover of Osborne 2011 and Eidinow & Kindt 2015.

³³ Trimble 2011, 105.

they are stuff. For all that Greek gods are anthropomorphic, they only have the shape of humans. Unlike humans, gods can bear any amount of reality; in the end they are only stuff. It is stuff that gives them sense, and as stuff that they have being in the world—a world full of stuff and godsense.

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