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MARITIME NETWORK MODELLING FOR THE ANALYSIS OF CULT TRANSMISSION IN THE SARONIKOS KOLPOS (6C-1C BCE)

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This paper examines the phenomenon of cult transmission in the Saronic Gulf during classical antiquity in specific relation to its maritime context and the utility of alternative methods of network analyses to illuminate the linkages between cult, economic relations and political instrumentality. Observations from the provisional application of proximal point analysis (PPA), social network analysis (SNA), and network optimization to a limited (but real-world) data set are discussed. The transportation of the healing cult of Asklepios (through its embodiment in the sacred snake) by Telemachos Acharneas in 419 BCE from the Asklepieion in Epidauros to the southern slopes of the Acropolis is the example par excellence during this period of the importation of an alien cult in order to secure both religious (as a palliative measure in the wake of plague) and geopolitical (to secure port access on the southern Peloponnese) objectives. Indeed, the locations at both Epidauros and Athens, their orientation, and visual affordance reflect an intertwined relationship between these sanctuaries and the broader environmental setting of the Saronic that in the early years of the Peloponnesian War would become a region of increasingly critical importance. The location of other sanctuaries throughout the Gulf islandscape, such as the Sanctuary of Dionysos on Salamis (which based on archaeological evidence appears to be linked to rites of fertility) or the Asklepieion at Troezen reveal a similar territorial consciousness encompassing both a sense of belonging and interconnectedness with the maritime communities around them. Likewise, the proximity of points-of-embarkation and loci of economic activity/production to these and other cult sites in the region indicate a close relationship between specific cult practices and the wider system of socio-economic relations. As a promising set of tools, the application of network modelling, including PPA, SNA, and flow/path optimization, can provide quantifiable affirmation of these relationships.

Keywords

Saronic Gulf, Ancient Greek Religion, Maritime Networks, Network Modelling, Landscape Archaeology, Sacred Landscapes

Note/comment