

Abstract

Textiles comprise a vast and wide category of material culture and constitute a crucial part of the ancient economy. Yet, studies of classical antiquity still often leave out this important category of material culture, partly due to the textiles themselves being only rarely preserved in the archaeological record. This neglect is also prevalent in scholarship on ancient Greek religion and ritual, although it is one of the most vibrant and rapidly developing branches of classical scholarship.

The aim of the present enquiry is, therefore, to introduce textiles into the study of ancient Greek religion and thereby illuminate the roles textiles played in the performance of Greek ritual and their wider consequences. Among the questions posed are how and where we can detect the use of textiles in the sanctuaries, and how they were used in rituals including their impact on the performance of these rituals and the people involved.

The dissertation adopts a broad, inclusive chronological scope to document the presence and ritual use of textiles in ancient Greek sanctuaries. The documentation includes source material primarily from the period from the 7th century until the end of the 1st millennium BC, with comparative archaeological evidence from other periods. Similarly, a broad geographical scope is adopted, thus providing useful comparanda. I do not confine myself to the area of modern Greece or the Aegean but, where relevant, include comparative material from a wider area across the Mediterranean from Southern Italy to the Near East, yet still with a primary focus on the Aegean.

The dissertation is centred on three major themes: first, the dedication of textiles and clothing accessories in Greek sanctuaries is investigated through a thorough examination of the temple inventories, primarily from the late 5th to the 1st century BC. Second, the use of textiles to dress ancient cult images is explored. The examination of Hellenistic and Roman copies of ancient cult images from Asia Minor as well as depictions of cult images in vase-painting in collocation with written sources illustrates the existence of this particular ritual custom in ancient Greece. Third, the existence of dress codes in the Greek sanctuaries is addressed through an investigation of the existence of particular attire for ritual personnel as well as visitors to the sanctuaries with the help of iconography, such as sculpture and vase-painting and written sources.

By merging the study of Greek religion and the study of textiles, the current dissertation illustrates how textiles are, indeed, central materialisations of Greek cult, by reason of their capacity to accentuate and epitomize aspects of identity, spirituality, position in the religious system, by their forms as links between the maker, user, wearer, but also as key material agents in the performance of rituals and communication with the divine. In sum, the present dissertation demonstrates the importance of taking textiles into account in the study of ancient Greek religion.