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SANCTUARIES AND THE RISE OF THE GREEK STATE

The eighth century marked the beginning of a long process of state formation in many regions of the Greek mainland. During this 'Greek Renaissance', major restructuring took place in most areas of cultural and political life.¹ Developments at sanctuaries are especially striking, and the appearance of monumental temple buildings and great investment in votive offerings stand in marked contrast to the paucity of evidence from earlier times. Changes in the material expression of religious belief are some of the most widespread and dramatic of all those which occurred during the eighth century, and their ideological impact during a period of state formation must have been considerable. Delphi and Olympia, along with several other sanctuaries which were later to serve inter-state functions, played a major role in these changes; yet the way in which their development during the eighth century may fit into general patterns of early state activity has not received adequate consideration, even though our models of state formation are becoming increasingly sophisticated.

Over one hundred years of research at Delphi and Olympia have produced many expert studies of Iron Age material culture, and we now have detailed catalogues of tripods, figurines and other classes of artefact, with full illustrations and extensive discussion. At both sites we are blessed with a material framework which is enviably well established by the standards of Greek sanctuaries, despite certain inevitable disputes over details of chronology and typology. Many important questions surround the development of these sanctuaries, and we are in the fortunate position of possessing material evidence with which to answer a great number of them. Unfortunately, recent scholarship has shown a marked reluctance to develop these assets. Apart from typological studies, the fundamental products of any archaeological investigation, discussion of material culture has

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rarely moved beyond a very general, and frequently naive, level. The framework within which we study sites like Delphi and Olympia is more usually derived from historical sources than from the material record, and although one should not ignore historical evidence, it is potentially misleading to concentrate upon it in a period such as the Early Iron Age, when material culture constitutes our only direct source of evidence.² No systematic consideration has been given to the social values underlying ritual behaviour at inter-state sanctuaries, and so our understanding of the manner in which material goods may be used in this kind of context remains vague. The fault lies with our methods of analysis, or lack of them, rather than with the material record as we know it. This book is therefore an attempt to relate Iron Age material evidence to models of social behaviour, and thus to examine questions of change and development through this period. Such an approach has already proved profitable in other areas of study (including that of mortuary practices), and sanctuary studies are lagging behind.³

One of the most fruitful approaches to all forms of early sanctuary activity has been that which seeks to relate it to state formation. In general terms, it is easy to see how equal but independent states within a given geographical region may develop not in isolation but in parallel, with a variety of contacts fostering the spread of similar institutions and cultural traits across a wide area. Such is the basis of the model of 'peer polity interaction' recently advanced by Colin Renfrew and John Cherry.⁴ Mechanisms of interchange may be many and varied, but competitive emulation is a striking feature of the early Greek world. This may be traced in numerous ways, via social and political phenomena such as the adoption of tyrannical government and the hoplite mode of warfare or, more tangibly, via architectural imitation. Sanctuaries of all sorts were central to this process, both as symbols of state achievement and identity to be noted and copied, and as contexts for the controlled expression of inter-state rivalries.

By the time of the Persian Wars, during the first quarter of the sixth century, it is possible to make a credible case for a system of

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emulation and information flow reflected in a variety of developments at sanctuaries. Anthony Snodgrass has recently emphasised the vital role of inter-state sanctuaries as neutral nodes of communication within such a system; in view of the political and physical fragmentation of the Greek states, direct communication between all of them would, he argues, simply have been impractical.⁵ In a context of inter-state competition, sites like Olympia, Delphi, Dodona or Delos, located in marginal areas and outside the direct control of any single major power, would have been inviting places for states to meet and exercise their rivalries without threat of interference. All the same, I find it hard to believe that inter-state relations had reached such a pitch during the eighth century. Since ritual at this time was more likely to have been a concern for the individual than for the state alone, similar rivalries may have operated at this lower level, with significant implications for early state formation. It is highly dangerous to infer the early history of a site simply by pushing back later concepts, however, and more detailed evaluation of this proposition is an important aim of this book.

Before pursuing this question, further discussion of the issue of state definition is required, since the distinction between state and individual investment in religion may obscure the fact that probably well into the eighth century ruling aristocrats constituted *the state*. Clearly, there was no sharp transition between the state as a group of aristocrats maintaining their position on a basis of personal power, and the state as a decision-making system with institutionalised offices, rights and obligations. A brief survey of eighth-century and Archaic Athenian history reveals a long-term 'balancing act' between the interests of the emergent polis and those of great families, with only a gradual accretion of functions to the state. Perhaps inevitably, the creation of a monopoly of force was an early step in this direction (with the development of the hoplite phalanx), but further examples of spreading control include the adoption of lawcodes and Solon's institution of the festival of the *Genesia* in Athens, drawing as it did the celebration of death, previously a purely family matter, into the civic consciousness.⁶ The analytical

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distinction which I wish to draw is between individuals pursuing personal interests, even if these are connected with the acquisition or maintenance of power within the community, and the state acting as a collective entity.⁷

The polis is the most prominent form of state in the Greek historical record, and the one which has always attracted the greatest attention. The nature of the polis has been considered in detail by many scholars (notably Victor Ehrenberg and Anthony Snodgrass), but in essence it was a politically autonomous unit consisting of two elements, a civic centre and a defined territory, which were socially and politically indivisible, and which shared common cults as markers of identity. Yet concentration upon this somewhat narrow field of study gives rise to the danger that processes which are at present most clearly visible within poleis may come to be regarded, at least tacitly, as peculiar to them. Alternative state forms, conventionally grouped together as *ethne*, have received less attention, partly owing to the scarcity of references to their social and political organisation in ancient sources, and also because archaeological exploration in what tend to be peripheral regions has frequently been limited. Occasionally *ethne* have been treated as quarries for information about 'primitive' social structures and processes in order to fill out our picture of early polis development, but quite apart from the question of the theoretical validity of such social evolutionary models, the assumption that the *ethnos* was a primitive version of the polis hardly helps us to understand the development of individual *ethnos* states.⁸

A great variety of political forms have been subsumed under the term *ethnos* (indeed, the only strong connection between them is the fact that they are not poleis), but the nature of this variation remains to be explored.⁹ It is clear that certain social trends traceable in emergent poleis occur in other state forms also (below pp. 7–9, 118–26), and that we must think more generally, in 'state' rather than 'polis' terms, in order to establish a background against which to trace characteristics peculiar to each form. To avoid prejudging issues of development surrounding particular forms of state, I shall therefore use the term 'state' in its most general sense throughout this discussion.

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SANCTUARY AND STATE

Sanctuary and state

Despite the fact that many aspects of the early history of inter-state sanctuaries still remain to be studied, there is a striking discrepancy in the scale and chronology of investment at state and inter-state sites.¹⁰ At state sanctuaries, such as the Argive Heraion and Perachora, temple construction began during the eighth century, and the spectacular investment evident in monumental temples at Corinth, Isthmia and, slightly later, Thermon, dates to the seventh.¹¹ By contrast, no cult buildings or monuments yet discovered at Olympia (and probably Delphi also) are earlier than the late seventh century (and more probably the early sixth), and we have only pottery and metalwork at best with which to interpret the early history of these sites.

The appearance of large monuments such as temples or treasuries is a clear sign of institutionalisation, the harnessing of cult activity to the advantage of participant states, which often coincided with the formalisation of ritual into a state system. On this criterion, there is a clear chronological discrepancy between the institutionalisation of activity inside and outside the territory of individual states. Monuments and formalised festivals are especially good indicators of institutionalisation at Greek sanctuaries since, at least from Archaic times, they were almost invariably commissioned or administered by state authorities rather than by individuals: prominent families sometimes contributed to the cost of building projects, and even assisted in making practical arrangements for construction, but the right of commission remained a state prerogative.¹² From the seventh century onwards, poleis might be represented by tyrants, aristocrats (or the semi-aristocratic children of mixed marriages) who achieved positions of personal dominance within the emerging state. At least for the purposes of assessing sanctuary investment, however, tyrants are better regarded as representatives of a particular experiment in state ordering rather than as leading individuals, since their actions in promoting civic building schemes reveal a close practical identification with the poleis they ruled, whatever their underlying personal motives. Not until Hellenistic times did direct investment by eastern

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monarchs, combined with the influence of their highly personal rule upon Macedonian kings, result in a change in this pattern, and even then, the attitude of Greek cities to personal commissions remained variable. The Ephesians, for example, turned down Alexander's offer to finance the reconstruction of the Artemision after the fire of 356 on the grounds that he wished to have his name inscribed on the building, yet the citizens of Priene accepted a similar offer with no apparent compunction.¹³ Sanctuaries further removed from the immediate civic structure were generally more receptive to personal investment. Thus even though they were administered by states or leagues of states, inter-state sanctuaries did receive wider investment of all kinds, exemplified by monuments such as the Philippeion, the tholos constructed at Olympia *c.* 335 to house statues of the Macedonian royal family.¹⁴

During the eighth century, an increase in cult activity of all kinds occurred throughout Greece, and affected a range of sanctuaries with different social functions. Anthony Snodgrass has illustrated this at cult places ranging in location and function from Lindos to Philia, using different categories of votive object. As he notes, 'the rise in dedications is of an extraordinarily abrupt kind, far more so than any conceivable rise in population . . . an increasing *proportion* of the available wealth is being dedicated to the gods'.¹⁵ Although Snodgrass here implies a re-direction of existing wealth, it is equally likely (as he himself acknowledges) that the conspicuous consumption evident in a variety of contexts at this time was made possible by the generation of even greater resources. This may have been a result of the increasingly exploitative relations between the elite and lower social orders which culminated in the problems of debt addressed by Solon, a hypothesis similar to those which have been proposed for several regions of Iron Age western Europe. Yet whatever the origin and level of elite wealth during the eighth century, it is the development of sanctuaries as new contexts for investment, and their public rather than private role, which are most significant in this discussion.

Since this increase in investment was so widespread, and is reflected both in the quantity and variety of votives and in the

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ETHNOS AND POLIS

spread of construction projects, categorisation of sanctuaries according to their social function is an essential first step if we are to examine ways in which cult reflected the ordering of the social and political environment of emergent states. François de Polignac has produced just such an analysis of polis sanctuaries, in which he examines their role in defining the main stress areas in the social and political structure, namely the centre and boundaries.¹⁶ His analysis also accounts well for small rural shrines (often markers along routes of communication), but the focus of his study precludes full consideration of inter-state sites, such as Olympia and Delphi, located beyond polis boundaries. Although de Polignac concentrates upon the polis, the issues which he raises, especially the question of territoriality, have much wider relevance. Cult was used as a means of marking the socio-political layout of state territory, defining its extent not only culturally (splitting ‘wild’ from ‘civilised’ space), but also in political terms, since boundaries separate states and are thus prime points of definition of state membership.¹⁷ If, therefore, we advance as a general rule the idea that sanctuaries reflected contemporary perceptions of areas crucial to the orientation of settlement on a regional level, it becomes clear that they provide the earliest evidence for large-scale regional perceptions in certain *ethne* also.

Ethnos and polis

It is easy to document variation in the development of the many state forms which appeared in Greece from the eighth century onwards, yet there is no clear chronological discrepancy between the beginnings of sanctuary development in poleis and *ethne*. Whatever the social organisation of a region during the eighth century, the appearance of a state sanctuary serves as a general indicator of the beginning of regional perception and demarcation of social space. Before moving to examine the comparative development of sanctuaries located inside and outside state borders, I shall therefore pause to consider four case studies, two from *ethne* and two from poleis, which illustrate the role of cult in consolidating the political structure of individual states.

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Just as *ethne* show a very varied pattern of settlement and political organisation, so the locations of their sanctuaries differ. Two sites, Thermon in Aetolia and Aegira in Achaia, illustrate how the general relationship between cult and settlement orientation operates in contrasting situations. By Classical times, the Achaian *ethnos* consisted of a federation of twelve cities each with its own territory; apart from Pharai and Tritaea, all were located either on the coast or within easy reach of it.¹⁸ While each city had its own sanctuary, the *ethnos* also had a principal cult place, Aegira, which was situated not in a central location, but near the coast towards the east of Achaian territory. Coastal settlement was most prominent throughout the Iron Age also, but although there is some correlation between the locations of later cities and eighth-century settlement, several major sites do not appear in the archaeological record until some while later. It is hard to form an accurate impression of the chronology of state formation in this region since such Archaic evidence as we have has not been studied systematically, although it is clear that the final ordering was slow to emerge in comparison with certain poleis (such as those in the Argolid).¹⁹ Yet the foundation of a colony at Kroton (c. 708), by Achaian colonists under the leadership of Myskellos of Rypes, implies a considerable degree of community organisation, and also some underlying cause, perhaps land hunger or political dissatisfaction (below pp. 172–6). What may be the first cult building at Aegira (Building A) is probably also eighth century in date; this was a rectangular construction with a front porch and pitched roof, similar in appearance to models from the Argive Heraion.²⁰ Few other finds of this date survive, but the existence of a cult building indicates notable early investment at a location of great significance to the later Achaian *ethnos*. The importance of Aegira lies in its peripheral location, close to the neighbouring Corinthia and also mirroring Delphi across the Corinthian Gulf, a valuable site for the articulation of relations both within and outside the Achaian state. Its early development, at a time when settlement organisation was just beginning to form a pattern recognisable from the Classical model, reflects the emergence of the regional orientation evident in the later state.

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By contrast, the symbolic centre of the Aetolian state, Thermon, lies inland, some distance from the main centres of habitation which were located near the coast (probably to maximise access to the Corinthian Gulf). The Classical Aetolian state consisted of a confederation of perpetually warring tribes which acted together only over such matters as external relations and state warfare, but which shared a cult centre at Thermon and a civic centre at Kalydon/Pleuron.²¹ Strabo (10.2.6) also records the existence of an earlier city at Pyllini. Since the Aetolians were renowned for living in villages, with few urban centres, the lack of surviving settlement remains of all periods is perhaps predictable. Nevertheless, there is evidence of Iron Age settlement at both Kalydon and Pleuron, and also of cult activity at Thermon (where the construction of Megaron B probably dates to the late eighth century).²² Here, too, we can trace the early emergence of cult at a crucial location in state territory, the centre, which served to balance, and perhaps to counteract, the centrifugal pull of the Gulf coast.

Poleis form a more coherent and readily definable class of state, but even so, one can still trace variation, especially in the early development of the older poleis on the Greek mainland. Argos existed in close proximity to other poleis on the Argive plain which remained at least nominally independent (into the fifth century in the cases of Mycenae and Tiryns) (fig. 2). During the Iron Age, she therefore faced problems of defining her territory in the limited area of the plain, whilst asserting her identity and integrity in the face of competition from these neighbours. By contrast, Athens, one of the largest poleis in the Greek world, had to contend with difficulties of consolidating an exceptionally extensive territory (including a number of relatively large, peripheral settlements which may be regarded as second-order sites), relating centre to boundaries and focussing the loyalty of citizens on the emerging state. These two cases illustrate well how study of sanctuaries can highlight variation in polis development.

By the last quarter of the eighth century it is possible that Argos perceived threats to her hegemony from two main directions.²³ The more immediate threat came from Asine, a

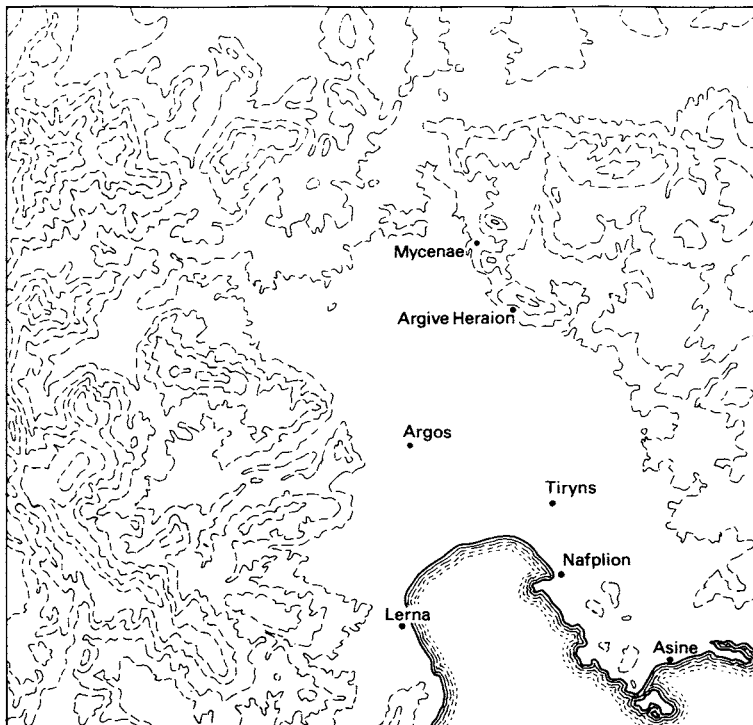
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2 Iron Age settlement on the Argive Plain.

settlement of comparable size to Argos located on the coast to the south-east, with a small harbour and plain which must have allowed effective independence from the resources of the Argive plain proper.²⁴ Asine's external connections appear extensive in comparison with those of other Argive sites, especially during the eighth century, with a strong maritime focus unmatched elsewhere in the region. Analysis of ceramic decoration has shown, however, that during the latter part of the century, Asine was also establishing increasingly close connections with the plain proper, and especially with Mycenae, located at the foot of the main passes north towards the Corinthia. Shared cult traits such as funerary dining reinforce this connection.²⁵ Such rivalry from an increasingly prosperous and powerful southern neighbour must have contributed greatly to Argive insecurity.