

examines the presence of Hades and Persephone in epitaphs from the fifth and fourth centuries BC.

The main aims and objectives described in the introduction are met. However, this volume only occasionally offers new interpretations or innovative lines of inquiry. The reason is that the selection of primary sources largely focuses on the most famous monuments and texts available, and from one region in particular, Attica. The book's main strength lies primarily in the fact that it examines a wide range of sources, and that it reaches a wide audience: teachers and students, but also scholars who wish to familiarize themselves with other areas of specialism. Although the archaeological and iconographic approaches remain largely superficial, archaeologists will find it valuable to be guided into a deeper understanding of the epigrams, and of their literary context. Philologists, on the other hand, will be able to grasp the social context in which the literary texts were produced, and for what purposes.

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Robert S. Wagman, *The Cave of the Nymphs at Pharsalus. Studies on a Thessalian Country Shrine*. Brill Studies in Greek and Roman Epigraphy vol. 6. pp. xvi + 164, b/w ill. Leiden and Boston: Brill, 2015. ISBN 978-90-04-29761-6, hardcover; ISBN 978-90-04-29762-3, E-book €112.

The book is a welcome addition to recent works on the cults of the area of Thessaly in anglophone scholarship.¹ Of the various sanctuaries excavated in Thessaly, we have very few systematic studies of sanctuary material. Beyond the Thessalian confines, this book is an important contribution to the topics of Nymph cults and nympholepsy, Greek sanctuaries and their natural environment and indeed cave cults.

The cave of the Nymphs on Mount Karapla close to Pharsalos has long been known in scholarship thanks to its rock inscriptions mentioning Pantalkes, a famous example, alongside Archedamus of Vari

and Onesagoras from Cyprus, of the picturesque fervent devotees of the Nymphs traditionally called nympholepts.² Wagman provides a detailed commentary of the two inscriptions from the cave with numerous new suggestions. The two inscriptions aside, the cave itself and its finds have not been hitherto much discussed. The cave was briefly excavated for a week by an Italian team in the 1920s, and the results of this excavation were summarily reported.³ The book contains a very valuable and extensive topographical analysis of the cave and the wider landscape based on Wagman's visits to the cave. It also contains a systematic presentation of those finds published by Levi, based on the reports and photographs available, because the finds from the cave have been lost.

Wagman tries to reconstruct the experience of visiting the cave. Although not directly acknowledged, the impact of sensory archaeology on the study of sacred spaces is obvious. Throughout the work Wagman also tries to understand the cult in its particular geographic and socio-economic setting. Unlike other studies that have discussed Pantalkes alongside other nympholepts from other places of the Greek world, Wagman's study tries to ground Pantalkes more tightly to the Thessalian social setting.

Indeed, one of the main interests of the book is that the overall picture that Wagman paints is at odds with some dominant trends in scholarship. His argument that the experience of a visit to the cave could hardly be described as a marginal transcendental experience opposes, as Wagman himself points out, 'classic interpretations of caves as places of mystic descent'.⁴ Similarly, one of Wagman's arguments is that Pantalkes was portrayed, in the fourth century at least, as a cult founder sharing in the culture and values of the Pharsalian civic elites and indeed the heroized war dead. This is a big hit to traditional visions of nympholepts as religious enthusiasts operating outside and perhaps even against the traditional civic norms.⁵ Let me review the merits

² Connor 1988; Larson 2001: 11-20; Pache 2011: 37-70; Ustinova 2018: 245-264.

³ Levi 1923-1924.

⁴ See for instance Ustinova 2009, whose work is often cited by Wagman, and more recently Katsarou and Nagel 2021; Papalexandrou 2021, who put forward an image of cave sanctuaries as 'powerful ritual heterotopias'.

⁵ Connor (1988), Larson (2001: 11-20), and Ustinova (2018: 245-264) all stress the marginal characteristics of nympholepts, although Connor and Larson acknowledge that the nympholept was partially reintegrated through cult and might have had an important social role. See also Connor 2012: 884 who writes: 'The historical nympholepts... may be best understood as part of a wider resistance to the domination of prestige and authority by aristocratic elites...'

¹ Graninger 2013; Mili 2015.

of these novel suggestions, by giving a more detailed account of the arguments as developed in the individual chapters of the book.

Chapter 1 aims to establish the socio-geographic context within which the cult was established. The chapter includes a description of the natural terrain of the area, the possible economic activities within it, and the settlement pattern of the area. Some might object to the use of modern parallels to reconstruct the ancient landscape, but the author convincingly argues for his methodology and for a judicious use of modern evidence. The description in this chapter, though, is a bit technical and convoluted, and the chapter will be a hard read for those whose main interest is to get a general idea of how rustic, wild and cut off from the city of Pharsalos and other settlements the cave was. Wagman seems to paint an ambiguous picture: the cave is described as being in the *eschatiai*, but we are also told that the cave is only an hour's walk from the city of Pharsalos, visible from the main road passing through the city. And while the mountainous area of the cave might have been used for herding and hunting, the small nearby plateau of Rizi was used for crop cultivation.

There was scope for a more detailed discussion of how the countryside, its uses and its experience might have changed through the period that the cave was used. At nearby Rizi a Hellenistic inscription has been found, which records the award of plots of land, perhaps in that area, to a group of individuals whose status is not certain. They seem not to have been full citizens of Pharsalos, but they are described as having fought from old times in wars together with the Pharsalians.⁶ Leaving aside the question of whether any settlements existed near the cave, the inscription indicates that in the Hellenistic period the countryside around Pharsalos had been left uncultivated, perhaps depopulated and destroyed, not least because of war. There is further evidence that the Hellenistic period in Thessaly might have been a time of rapid urbanization, a time when the relationship between cities and their countryside might have changed.⁷

Chapter 2 which focusses on the landscape of the cave is one of the highlights of the book. The chapter starts with some balanced speculation regarding the possible vegetation of the cave. The author notes that the existence of a water spring in the cave means that there might have been trees growing around it. The presence of the trees, Wagman notes, would have marked the location of the cave,

even from a distance amidst the most arid treeless landscape of the Karapla mountain, which seems to have been covered with shrubs and bushes. The detailed description of the cave based on first-hand experience is extremely valuable given the succinct presentation of the site by Levi and other visitors to the cave. The presentation is well supported by numerous photos taken by the author, but, unfortunately, not all details are very clear in black and white. The cave consisted of a lower terrace, where a garden mentioned in the inscription might have been located, while a staircase formed by half worked boulders gave access to a higher level. At this higher level was a landing, and various niches where offerings might have been placed, as well as a bench-like stone and a pool of water formed by the spring that gushed out of the actual cave to the right. The presence of this spring meant that access to the actual cave might have been limited, a conclusion supported by the fact that no finds were recorded in the interior of the cave. Furthermore, the presence of tiles indicates the existence of some kind of roofed structure, perhaps over the pool on the upper landing, but there might have been another one also at the lower terrace.

Wagman tries to conjure up an image of the cult, engaging with questions of access and movement in the area.⁸ He suggests that more numerous groupings could have gathered at the lower terrace and there was more controlled movement to the upper level where only two or three individuals could fit and interact comfortably. Although not directly engaged with, the impact of various modern studies on sensory archaeology and in particular caves can also be felt here. Wagman throughout this chapter tries to evoke the importance of sounds, smells, and light for the religious experience of the worshipper. He particularly emphasizes the role of water, the ascent and stepping movement through the site, and the role of shade and light. He concludes that the experience of visiting the Karapla cave would have been a pleasant multisensory experience, very unlike what we might have expected following general descriptions of cave worship, which tend to emphasize the moment of descent into the gloomy interior of caves, sense deprivation and altered consciousness.⁹ For Wagman a visit to the Karapla cave offered not a deprivation of the senses but an accentuation of them.

This is a very interesting chapter, that adds to recent studies of cave worship and the different

⁶ Decourt 1990.

⁷ See for instance Surtees, Karapanou and Haagsma 2014.

⁸ Schörner and Goette's 2004 study of movement in the Vari cave is an important work often cited by Wagman.

⁹ Ustinova 2009.

ways in which the particular landscape, the features of the cave, but also human involvement in it (the artefactual as Papalexandrou calls it) shaped the religious experience of the visitors and engaged various senses.¹⁰ It has to be said though that Wagman has less to say about the artefactual here. Although he talks about the architectural features of the cave, the finds and the inscriptions are discussed separately in the two following chapters. This division of material is sensible, but Wagman never returns to incorporate in his analysis of the sensory experience of the cave the movable finds and the inscriptions. As we shall see, his approach to the movable finds is more traditional and that to the inscriptions mostly literary.

Chapter 3 contains a catalogue of the finds from the cave in the order presented by Levi. While this facilitates cross referencing, the order can be confusing as it does not follow either chronology or typology. On a couple of occasions Wagman suggests new identifications, or dates, he also provides relative sizes whenever an indication on the photographs were available, and he also gives comparanda of similar finds excavated in other Thessalian sanctuaries since Levi. An appendix includes 7 unpublished objects from the photographs in the SAIA archive and a couple of objects which were found by Wagman himself during one of his visits to the cave. The catalogue obviously is very valuable and will become the standard work of reference.

The majority of the finds consist of terracotta figurines. The pottery from the cave has, unfortunately, been lost. This means that any reconstruction of the cult is bound to emphasize the private aspect, as evinced in the practice of dedication, rather than more communal dining practices that might have taken place.¹¹ The majority of the figurines are female, standing or seated, but as Wagman notes in the Hellenistic period the proportion of male and female figurines becomes more balanced. Characteristic amongst the male figurines are some figurines of naked youths.

Most of these finds can be described as rather humble and inexpensive. For a few finds, however, namely a fragment of a female protome, the rim of a bronze vase, and the fragment of a stone statue, there is some uncertainty regarding their value. For Wagman these more valuable offerings might indicate the presence of more well-off worshippers in the cult. Plausible though this suggestion is, some

reservations could be voiced. The stone statue could have dedicated by Pantalkes, or of a similar figure, just as Archedamus was responsible for the various stone statues at the Vari Cave. And as for the bronze vase, whose date is unfortunately unknown, one could think of it as a communal offering, serving as cult equipment. Let me mention again here that the loss of the pottery found at the cave means that one can only speculate about the more communal ritual uses of the cave.

Wagman stresses the similarities between the finds from the cave to those from other Thessalian city or rural sanctuaries that have been associated with Demeter, namely the sanctuaries on the slopes of the Acropolis of Pharsalos, in the city of Proerna and at the rural site of Ambelia. He argues that these similarities challenge any strict opposition between rural and city cults. The humble character of the finds, he argues, is mostly indicative of the character and requirements of the cult, rather than of the actual status of the worshippers. Few would disagree with that statement. Wagman, though, contradicts this earlier statement when he perplexingly goes on to argue that the socio-economic profile of some of the cave's worshippers was not very different from those worshipping on the Pharsalian acropolis. Surely all we can say from the evidence is that the socio-economic profile of the worshippers at all these sanctuaries is similarly constructed, as rather modest and humble, not that it actually was similar. It may have been, or it may not.

There was scope for exploring further not only the similarities to finds from other cults of the area, but also the possible differences. One such possible difference, which we can notice at least from the surviving material, is the absence from the cave material of any animal figurines associated with the productive landscape, pigs, bulls or horses, which are very prominent at the sanctuaries at Proerna and Ambelia. Only 3 dove figurines have been recorded. Given the discussion about pastoral or hunting economy prominently in Wagman's description of the cave's natural environment in the first chapter, it is noteworthy that these activities are not reflected in the material finds from the cave, although they are in other Thessalian 'rural sanctuaries'. It could be suggested that while the landscape surrounding the cave might indeed have been home to these activities, the immediate area of the sanctuary with its trees, source of water, steep access, and material culture distanced itself from it. Figurines of horses, bulls and pigs, are of course evocative of a particular form of wealth, the Thessalian image of wealth par excellence. Their

¹⁰ See for instance Laferrière 2019; Papalexandrou 2021.

¹¹ Morgan 2021: 76.

absence from the cave, then, raises the question of how prosperity and wealth were evoked in this cult, a question that becomes important in the light of references to the *aphthonos* and *esthlos bios* in the second inscription from the cave.

Finally, the chronological development of the finds and the more balanced distribution between male and female representations from the fourth century onwards merited some more discussion. The male world is also extremely prominent in the second inscription from the cave, which is also dated to the 4th or 3rd century BC. The inclusive character of the cult, open to men and women, boys and girls, noted by others, is stressed by Wagman too. But it has also to be acknowledged that the remaining part of the epigram is very male oriented. Other than the nymphs and a reference to Hygeia, the long list of gods mentioned are all male gods, and some of them, like Heracles and Hermes, had close connections with the world of men. And although laughter, and health are apposite gifts for both sexes others, like physical strength or just excess, are not. One is left to wonder whether the character of the cult had changed through time, in the light of the fact that the experience of the Thessalian countryside might also have changed at that time, as discussed further above.

Chapter 4 presents the two rock inscriptions and contains numerous novel suggestions. The detailed discussion of the inscriptions will be very valuable for all further research. Regarding inscription 1, Wagman suggests that the sequence of incoherent letters in the last lines were a form of musical notation, and that the inscription thus invited the worshippers to chant a specific tune while moving up the stairs. While the suggestion might resonate with recent interest in the role of music and sound in the experience of cave sanctuaries,¹² all examples of musical notations on inscriptions which Wagman cites are much later in date. Wagman argues that experienced readers of inscriptions would be able to understand the notation. But could one really describe the Thessalians of this period, let alone the visitors of the Karapla cave, as experienced readers? This is one of very few fifth century inscriptions from Thessaly, and indeed one of the earliest inscriptions from the area of Pharsalos.¹³

One could rather think in terms of the symbolic use of writing in this context. Indeed, carrying on the discussion of Chapter 2, one may wonder how the presence of the writing in this rural setting

would have affected the experience of the visitors. Wagman suggests that the workmanship (τόδ' ἔργον) mentioned in line 2 of the inscription as the dedication of Pantalkes refers to the steps that he had painstakingly shaped, and above which the inscription was located. While this might well be true, it might also proudly refer to the inscription itself that Pantalkes was able to carve on the same rock.¹⁴ Could the random letters at the last line be seen as a sample of writing offered to the deity? In any case both the stairs and the inscription are gifts to the deity; signs of Pantalkes' special ability to shape the rock into an offering, reach out and communicate with the gods.

Wagman's discussion, particularly of the longer inscription 2, raises several very interesting points. The second longer epigram can be dated at any time in the 4th or even the early 3rd century BC. The chronological gap between the two inscriptions raises the question of who was the author of inscription 2 and whether it should still be considered a work of Pantalkes. Wagman argues that Pantalkes was by then long dead and we should see the inscription then not as evidence of the real Pantalkes, but as evidence of how Pantalkes was constructed as a figure by others in the 4th or even 3rd century. Although not everyone will agree with his suggestion,¹⁵ Wagman's suggestion has to be seriously entertained. Who might have inscribed the epigram remains tantalizingly unknown, but what can be discussed in detail is how Pantalkes' portrait was grafted in the epigram.

Wagman makes a series of interesting observations in this respect. He points out that the language used throughout the epigram, as indeed its form and meter, has elite and heroizing connotations. The characterization of Pantalkes as an *aner agathos*, the reference to wealth and most importantly, for Wagman, his association with the concept of just excess (ὑβριν δικάϊαν), are evocative of elite values and the world of the symposium. Wagman is right to note the resonances. But his overall interpretation can be contested. In my view any 'elite resonances' of the epigram are also subtly subverted. Ustinova, for instance, is right to emphasize the transformative effect of the cult.¹⁶ It is the Nymphs and devotion to them that made Pantalkes an *aner agathos*, not birth. The references to forgetfulness of misfortunes (l.21) not only further emphasize the transformative effect of cult, but also distances Pantalkes from images of blessed Thessalian aristocrats. The

¹² Yioutsos 2014; Lafférière 2019.

¹³ Decourt 1995: 59-132 for an overview of inscriptions from this area.

¹⁴ The suggestion is also made by Pache (2011: 52-53).

¹⁵ Ustinova 2018: 258 n. 51.

¹⁶ Ustinova 2018: 249-250.

references to the hard work and manual labour of Pantalkes (l. 12, 15) are also difficult to square with Wagman's interpretation. The epigram, it is true, refers to a life of plenty but again there might be evidence that this life of plentifulness is rather differently evoked in this cult than in the poems of Pindar or Simonides for the Thessalian noblemen. Pantalkes' *aphthonos bios* is tied in the epigram with his service and labour for the Nymphs. And we also have to consider the humble setting of the cult, and the absence of any references, in the form, for instance, of animal figurines, to the pastoral wealth of Thessaly, with which notions of blessed Thessaly and its nobility were inseparably linked.¹⁷

Wagman further compares the epigram to funerary epigrams and argues that Pantalkes was commemorated here similarly to the heroized war dead of the city of Pharsalos. While it is true that both the Karapla epigram and the funerary epigrams of the period construct notions of *arete*, the difference between them in how *arete* is perceived, should also be noticed. To start with, the stress in the epigram is not on Pantalkes' death, but rather on his life. It is Pantalkes' devotion to the Nymphs that makes him an *agathos aner*, not a premature death in war. And this emphasis on life rather than on a patriotic death might be further stressed, were we to take πολέμοιο νίκη in the last line of the epigram as meaning 'a halt to war', rather than 'victory in war'. Piety is indeed singled out in some other funerary epigrams of the period as a characteristic of the *agathos aner*, which might secure for him a better afterlife.¹⁸ But it should again be pointed out that the emphasis on the Karapla epigram remains on the transformative effect of Pantalkes' reverence for the goddesses in this life and not in death. It is joy, health, longevity and prosperity that is the reward, not a better afterlife. Indeed, this life-loving quality seems to be reasserted by the very setting of the cult, which Wagman himself described as a celebration of the senses, rather than as a gloomy encounter with subterranean forces.

The cult at the Karapla cave clearly was not a world apart: the landscape around the cave, its material culture, the gods worshipped therein, and the values evoked in the epigram, all resonated with other Thessalian cults. Still, the cult also had its own distinctive character. And while Wagman chooses to emphasize the resonances of the cult with the mainstream aristocratic Thessalian world view, I

would argue that the visitor to the cave also found a momentary respite from it.¹⁹

Despite my reservations about individual arguments, this is an inspiring monograph that encourages the reader to look at all aspects of the cult and to attempt to understand it also in its own historical setting. This is surely something that needs to appear more frequently in the study of Greek cult places.

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¹⁷ Mili 2015: 259-262.

¹⁸ See Mili 2015: 275-276.

¹⁹ See also Connor (1988: 186) who talks about the interplay between personal and civic elements in the religious symbolism of the cave of Archedamus at Vari and on p. 189 he writes '... personal religiosity and elements from public, often aristocratic, cults are brought together...'

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Natascha Sojc (ed.), *Akragas. Current Issues in the Archaeology of a Sicilian Polis*. Archaeological Studies Leiden University 38. pp. 174, with 110 b/w and col. ill., incl. maps. Leiden: Leiden University Press, 2017. ISBN 978-9-087-28298-1, paperback €46.

In recent years research regarding Agrigento was the most intensive of all the ancient places in Sicily.¹ This resulted from the stimulating charisma of the Archaeological Park and its administration, as well as the *Soprintendenza*. Italian and international teams examined the architecture, urban planning, the newly found theatre, and the Roman and late

antique city. The Park and the Archaeological Museum have exhibited the results in museums for the public. In addition, archaeological surveys examined the ancient city² and its hinterland.³ Natascha Sojc, first affiliated to Leiden University and now to the University of Augsburg, carried out archaeological and geophysical surveys in the suburban sanctuary of S. Anna. This collaborative effort resulted in the present volume that is based on a colloquium.

Of the 12 contributions, 5 deal with the work from 2013 in the suburban sanctuary of S. Anna. They appear modestly at the end of the volume.

Sojc (pp. 129 – 137) reports on the 2013 survey, which uncovered rich ceramics on the plateau next to the excavation of the S. Anna sanctuary from the 1960s. Probably the sanctuary extended into this area. It existed from the end of the 6th and during the 5th century BC. Kenneth L. Kvamme (pp. 139-149) reports on an electromagnetic and georadar survey of the same area, in which architectural structures as well as metal objects, pits or small fireplaces are probable. However, the results of the two geophysical methods do not always completely overlap. Johanna Stöger (p. 151-157) describes the establishment of a georeferenced network in the study area by the Leiden 'ArcLand field school' for the surface survey and subsequent excavations. Finally, Linda Adorno gives an overview of the survey findings (pp. 159 – 170), reporting that 9600 finds were picked up on 2000m² (corresponding to 480 finds per 100m²!). The findings include Corinthian and especially Attic imported ceramics (see p. 133: 813 diagnostic Attic fragments), indigenous ceramics, terracotta figurines, loom weights and glass pearls. The quantitative composition confirms the statistical composition of the presumed sacred sites during our surveys in the surrounding areas of Gela, Camarina and the Monti Sicani.⁴ Fine and glazed ceramics clearly predominate after amphorae, coarse wares and roof tiles. The following excavations were able to explain this extreme concentration by dense votive depots. Sojc (p. 134 s.) explores the presence of indigenous ceramics through a differentiated interpretation of the evidence from the following excavations for the interaction between Greek and native peoples.

Caterina Trombi (pp. 95-107) contributes important finds from the older excavations in the sanctuary of S. Anna, which she considers as a *thesmophorion* with

² Belvedere and Burgio 2012.

³ Bergemann 2020.

⁴ Bergemann 2020: 108-110, 133 s.; Bergemann 2010: 101 s., 136, 140-144.

¹ Lepore and Calio 2021.