

# PLACE AND MOTION IN THE STUDY OF ANCIENT MEDITERRANEAN PILGRIMAGE

ANNA COLLAR AND TROELS MYRUP KRISTENSEN

---

In the French-Moroccan director Ismaël Ferroukhi's prize-winning film *Le Grand Voyage* (2004), a devout father and his reluctant son set off on a pilgrimage driving by car from France all the way to Mecca. With the son at the steering wheel, the father asks, "Why are you driving so fast?", and at one point even pulls the handbrake on the motorway to force him to slow down. Not long after, he disposes of the son's mobile phone in a garbage can. In a later confrontation between the two, the son angrily asks, "Why didn't you fly to Mecca? It's much simpler!" His father replies, somewhat cryptically, "When the waters of the ocean rise to the heavens, they lose their bitterness to become pure again ..." Reda, his son, asks him to explain. His father says, "The ocean waters evaporate as they rise to the clouds. And as they evaporate they become fresh. That's why it's better to go on your pilgrimage on foot than on horseback, better on horseback than by car, better by car than by boat, better by boat than by plane." Slowness encourages reflection, so is cleansing, and results in spiritual purity. It is the journey to Mecca that offers these two men the space to talk, learn about each other's lives, get to know each other better, grow as people. The rejection of the speed of modern life that is implicit in the father's actions and his desire to drive rather than fly resonate with the contemporary appeal of the "slow" movement that responds to the effects of globalisation, capitalism and corporatisation on all aspects of our lives and minds.<sup>1</sup> Did the speed or mode of movement carry the same implications of reflection or spiritual preparedness in the ancient Mediterranean traditions of pilgrimage, such as those related to ancient Greek, Roman, and late antique Christian and Islamic travel? Essentially, if the option had been available to pilgrims in the ancient world, would they too have gone by plane?

In spite of its obviously anachronistic nature, this latter question takes us to the heart of the underlying tension implied by our book's title, specifically that between

---

1 See, amongst the vast literature of all stripes, Berg and Seeber 2013; Servon and Pink 2015.

place and motion in the study of the ancient Mediterranean pilgrimage.<sup>2</sup> “Place” in this context means the shrines, sanctuaries and other sacred places that were visited by ancient pilgrims and that are typically recognised as “sacred” in and of themselves.<sup>3</sup> In this sense, place has been the fundamental scale of research in many studies of ancient Mediterranean religion, not least in classical archaeology where excavations and scholarship since the 19<sup>th</sup> century have gravitated heavily towards sanctuaries, often those known from classical literature.<sup>4</sup> “Motion”, on the other hand, refers to the journeys (regardless of length) that pilgrims undertook and all of the places and landscapes that they passed through on their way to a sacred place, from the pilgrim’s home to their final destination and back again. While none of these are “sacred” in the traditional sense, they would all have played a fundamental role in how any pilgrimage was experienced, framed, and structured, not least by individual pilgrims. Pausanias, our “prototypical ancient pilgrim”, in fact dedicates substantial parts of his travel account to engagement with the natural features of the landscape (mountains, rivers, trees, animals) that he passed by on his journeys, predominantly by placing them within mythological, aetiological narratives.<sup>5</sup> The sacred is in that sense not only embedded everywhere; it is also in itself mobile. Think only of the sacred snakes that Pausanias tells us slithered across the Epidaurian landscape.<sup>6</sup>

The conversations from *Le Grand Voyage* that we referenced above are emblematic of this “motion” perspective in recognising the experience of travel, even by forcibly attempting to slow it down and prolong the journey. The father’s remarks are foreshadowed in interviews that the anthropologist Nancy Louise Frey carried out in Santiago de Compostela in the 1990s.<sup>7</sup> In these, most pilgrims told her that they preferred walking or cycling over any mode form of transportation on their journey. The role of the “road”, the means of transportation, and the broader landscape that pilgrims travel through have been highlighted in a range of other studies on pilgrimage, including titles such as *Sacred Journeys*, *On the Road to Being There* and *Journeying to the Sacred* that all urge us to consider pilgrimage as a process and a practice that extends beyond the final destination.<sup>8</sup> In some conceptions of pilgrimage, the journey even becomes entirely metaphorical, internalised, and thus entirely independent of the climactic arrival at a “shrine”. For example, the understanding of pilgrimage as a significant (and sometimes

---

2 “Sacred travel” is a close cognate of pilgrimage, and we use the two terms interchangeably in what follows. On the historiography of pilgrimage studies, see Coleman 2002; Bowie 2006, 237-66; Friese and Kristensen 2017; Bremmer 2017; Elsner 2017a; Graf 2020.

3 That (the meanings and identities of) these places can be also dynamic and even “in motion” is amply shown by Kinnard 2014. For similar contestations of ancient sanctuaries and their spatial politics, see Scott 2010.

4 See, for example, Alcock and Osborne 1994; Pedley 2006.

5 Hutton 2008; Stewart 2013, 236-38. On Pausanias as pilgrim, the classic piece is Elsner 1992.

6 Paus. 2.28.1.

7 Frey 1998.

8 Morinis 1992; Swatos 2006; Maddrell et al. 2015. On travel in the ancient world, see, for example, Adams and Laurence 2001; Niehoff 2017.

difficult or treacherous) journey is embodied in the medieval archetype of the labyrinth as both a physical and a metaphorical space through which to represent the journey of a pilgrim (Fig. 1).<sup>9</sup> According to the World-Wide Labyrinth Locator, more than 6,000 such pilgrims' labyrinths exist today.<sup>10</sup> Walking through a labyrinth (that only in a vague and abstract way represents the journey to a "true" pilgrimage destination, such as Jerusalem or Mecca) is obviously a central part of its appeal, whereas arrival at the "destination" in its centre constitutes little more than the beginning of the return journey. Guides to moving through such labyrinths furthermore emphasise that meeting other pilgrims on the way (either in or out) is an important part of the experience.<sup>11</sup> In a similar fashion, Sara Terreault has approached pilgrimage as constituting a particular state of exile and foreignness that stands in sharp contrast to what she calls "destinational pilgrimage" (*peregrinatio ad loca*).<sup>12</sup> Her work consequently focuses on motion away from (rather than to) a sacred centre. The ascetic practices of late antique Egyptian hermits and Syrian stylite saints can be understood alongside similar lines.<sup>13</sup>

Can (and should) the study of pilgrimage really span this all-encompassing spectrum between "place" and "motion"—and if so, how? Or, alternatively, will it need to focus its attention on one or the other of these two overarching categories? This debate is in fact pivotal to our understanding of ancient Mediterranean pilgrimage to the extent that it even defines the boundaries of the topic itself. For example, one of the objections that the classicist Scott Scullion has raised against the use of "pilgrimage" in the context of the ancient world is the emphasis on travel by many of its proponents.<sup>14</sup> He specifically criticises Matthew Dillon's *Pilgrims and Pilgrimage in Ancient Greece*, one of the first volumes to prominently and consistently use these terms specifically in relation to Delphi, Olympia, and other major Greek ("panhellenic") sanctuaries. Scullion notes, for example, that the reasons to undertake extra-territorial travel were more closely linked to politics and elite behaviour, even curiosity ("wider fame, greater prestige, bigger crowds, and better shows"), than they were religious by nature.<sup>15</sup> Many of his criticisms have usefully been refuted by Ian Rutherford, who notes that "there is every reason to believe that many sanctuaries were regarded as places where divine presence was more immediate",<sup>16</sup> citing, for example, the case of Hellenistic cities launching new

---

9 Beaman 2006.

10 <https://labyrinthlocator.com/> (accessed 7 February 2023).

11 <https://gracecathedral.org/our-labyrinths/> (accessed 7 February 2023).

12 Terreault 2019.

13 Brown 1971 is a classic study of these practices but makes a rather different argument. Places associated with these holy people could in turn evolve into sacred centres themselves, see Schachner 2010.

14 Scullion 2005, 128-29; discussing Dillon 1997. Another important "early mover" is Coleman and Elsner 1995. See also comments in Elsner and Rutherford 2005b; Rutherford 2013, 13n39.

15 Quote: Scullion 2005, 128.

16 Rutherford 2013, 13.





A pilgrimage labyrinth on the Stanford University campus (photo: Troels Myrup Kristensen).

**Fig. 1.**

festivals on the basis of very specific instances of epiphany.<sup>17</sup> Such manifestations of the divine—linked to specific places and moments in time—were thus fundamental to the appeal and ultimate success of any sanctuary (and their ability to attract pilgrims from near and far). In this sense, many cities invested heavily in both a theology and economy of not only “place”, but also “motion”.

We could go a step further and argue that “slow pilgrimages” (much like those of *Le Grand Voyage* and the walking and cycling crowds at Santiago de Compostela) not only existed in the ancient world, but were the standard mode of travelling to any sanctuary, both in their actual performance and also their conceptualisation. In addition to the previously discussed example of Pausanias, we can point to the two years that Aelius Aristides spent travelling in Asia Minor in search of Asklepios—even if it should be acknowledged, of course, that both works are narrated in a rhetorical and highly literary style that archaeologists in the past approached in too simplistic a fashion.<sup>18</sup> But “slow” extends beyond such individual cases, as evident from the staging of the processional schedule of the Olympic Games that began in the *agora* of Elis, some 60 km from Olympia itself, from where athletes and pilgrims walked in procession.<sup>19</sup> These “slow” elements in the configuration and conceptualisation of ancient pilgrimages were integral to the “total religious experience” that they offered, even if we rarely have the sources to shed light on all of them.<sup>20</sup>

To bridge the tension between “place” and “motion” that we have briefly outlined here in a more systematic fashion, this book (and the broader research project from which it represents one outcome) argues that the study of ancient Mediterranean pilgrimage ultimately needs more critical and more reflective comparative perspectives in order to move forward.<sup>21</sup> Back in 1995, the combined work of anthropologist Simon Coleman and classicist Jaś Elsner resulted in a global, interdisciplinary and long-term history of pilgrimage, from the classical world to contemporary world religions.<sup>22</sup> It follows on from an ambitious comparative history of (non-Christian) pilgrimage from the third millennium BCE onwards compiled by historian Jean Chélini and theologian Henry Branthomme in 1987.<sup>23</sup> Much of the subsequent scholarship on ancient Mediterranean pilgrimage has followed these productive paths of historical comparison, albeit most

---

17 Magnesia-on-the-Meander is an oft-cited case, see Jürgens 2017. On economic aspects of Hellenistic festivals, see Horster 2020.

18 On Aelius Aristides as pilgrim, see Rutherford 1999; Petsalis-Diomidis 2010.

19 On the procession to Olympia, see Paus. 5.16.8 and Sinn 2004, 128–130. On Elis, see Bourke 2018.

20 Quote: Petsalis-Diomidis 2010, 7, noting that “journey, arrival at the sanctuary, activities there, and onward journeys are seen as part of a continuous meaningful process, a total religious experience.” The increasing interest in understanding ancient experiences of landscapes is also useful to bridge the gap between “place” and “motion”. Important works here include Cole 2004; Spencer 2010; Gilhuly and Worman 2014; Worman 2015; König 2022.

21 See Gagné, Goldhill and Lloyd 2019 on “comparism” as reflexive comparison.

22 Coleman and Elsner 1995.

23 Chélini and Branthomme 1987. On the “long” history of pilgrimage, see also McCorriston 2011; 2017; and Rutherford, this volume.

often on a less ambitious scale, for example by comparing individual elements of contemporary “pilgrimage” to Graceland, the home of Elvis Presley, with Christian experiences of sacred travel during the late antique and Medieval periods.<sup>24</sup> We may simplistically characterise the perspective advanced in these works as “historical comparativism”, given that it is typically based on bringing together disparate chronologies and geographies within a single framework of analysis (or, at the very least, within a single frame). This approach has a very long history and recently experienced something of a renaissance in anthropology and art history, amongst other disciplines.<sup>25</sup> Yet what we are pursuing here and in other work is better described as “methodological comparativism”. It sets a new form of comparative agenda that sees pilgrimage as a method or unifying theory of religious movement, specifically to bring together different scales of analysis that are typically not discussed alongside each other, such as “place” and “motion”, “site” and “landscape”, “sanctuary” and “household”.<sup>26</sup>

Although we would also encourage the development of other such “methodological comparativisms”, one particular framework of comparison that we have found to be useful in studies of ancient Mediterranean pilgrimage is the so-called “New Mobilities Paradigm” or “mobilities turn” formulated by sociologists Mimi Sheller and John Urry, and further developed by a large interdisciplinary group of mobilities scholars.<sup>27</sup> Their work seeks to move beyond what they see as the “static” approaches that dominate the social sciences and encourages the rethinking of movement not only as a “cost”, but as important in its own right. The “New Mobilities Paradigm” does not simply *describe* a more mobile world, because mobility is us, mobility is how space is generated. As geographers Tim Cresswell and Peter Merriman remark: “Mobile, embodied practices are central to how we experience the world, from practices of writing and sensing, to walking and driving. Our mobilities create spaces and stories—spatial stories.”<sup>28</sup> These “spatial stories” allow us to bring together “place” and “motion” within a single interpretive framework. We contend that perspectives from the “New Mobilities Paradigm” help to take us beyond the discrete destinations of pilgrimage and incorporate the wider landscapes of which sanctuaries were part, their relationship with cities and infrastructural “moorings” that enabled movement (paths, roads, bridges and even the natural environment itself), and the role of the sacred in shaping those infrastructures. Here and elsewhere, we argue that theories, methods and terminologies inspired by the “New Mobilities Paradigm” are helpful in multiple ways to the study of ancient Mediterranean pilgrimage; in turn, such work on the ancient world will expand the

---

24 Vikan 2012, see also contributions to Kristensen and Friese 2017; Luig 2018.

25 Schnegg 2014; Elsner 2017b; Küchler 2017; Candea 2018.

26 For further work that pursues this agenda, see Collar forthcoming; Kristensen forthcoming. For comparable archaeologies of movement, see Connelly 2011; Newsome 2011; Aldred 2021.

27 Sheller and Urry 2006; 2016; Sheller 2014; 2017; Urry 2007. For a recent rebuttal of this “paradigm”, see Randell 2020. For a more complete overview of current mobilities scholarship, refer to Adey et al. 2014.

28 Cresswell and Merriman 2011, 5.

temporal and disciplinary scope of this emerging and interdisciplinary paradigm that typically focuses on the modern world.<sup>29</sup> At this stage, it is useful to turn to a specific case of how this can be applied in practice in the interpretation of a specific destination (and landscape) of ancient Mediterranean pilgrimage.

### Place and Motion at the Asklepieion of Epidauros

In what follows, a small selection of concepts and methods developed by scholarship associated with the “New Mobilities Paradigm” will be applied to the interpretation of some individual archaeological spaces within the sanctuary of Asklepios in Epidauros, located on the Peloponnese in modern Greece (Fig. 2). The sanctuary’s appeal as a “place” was linked to the miraculous narratives of Asklepios’ healing abilities, although it is less clear at present how these had become tied to Epidauros, given that many ancient authors located his place of birth in Triikka in Thessaly. In contrast, Epidaurian myth located Asklepios’ birth and upbringing within the city’s own local landscape.<sup>30</sup> The Asklepieion is a staple in the study of ancient Greek religion and has been intensively investigated since its initial exploration by Panayiotis Kavvadias (1850–1928) and the Archaeological Society of Athens beginning in 1881.<sup>31</sup> Excavations are still ongoing and continue to shed new light on the sanctuary’s development, not least its early phases going back to the late seventh century BCE.<sup>32</sup> In the Late Classical period (400–323 BCE), the Asklepieion developed into one of the most important healing sanctuaries in the ancient world and was expanded through a large building programme that has left us with an important suite of temples and other monuments, many features and even costings of which are documented in extraordinary detail in inscriptions.<sup>33</sup>

While closely linked to the seaside town of Epidauros as an extra-urban sanctuary, the Asklepieion attracted pilgrims from many different parts of the Greek world and is as such a very good candidate for the label of an ancient pilgrimage destination.<sup>34</sup> Movement at several different scales was in fact integral to the design of the sanctuary and as such played a fundamental role in the religious experiences that it offered to pilgrims. Firstly, pilgrims travelled on a winding road from Epidauros before reaching their destination at the sanctuary, located in mountainous terrain some 7 km inland. Secondly, within the sanctuary itself, processions and other forms of ritual movement linked up individual parts of the sanctuary in complex ways, depending on the religious

---

29 For an application of methods from this field in the study of ancient Mediterranean pilgrimage, see Kristensen 2018; 2019; 2020; forthcoming; Collar 2020; forthcoming.

30 Dillon forthcoming.

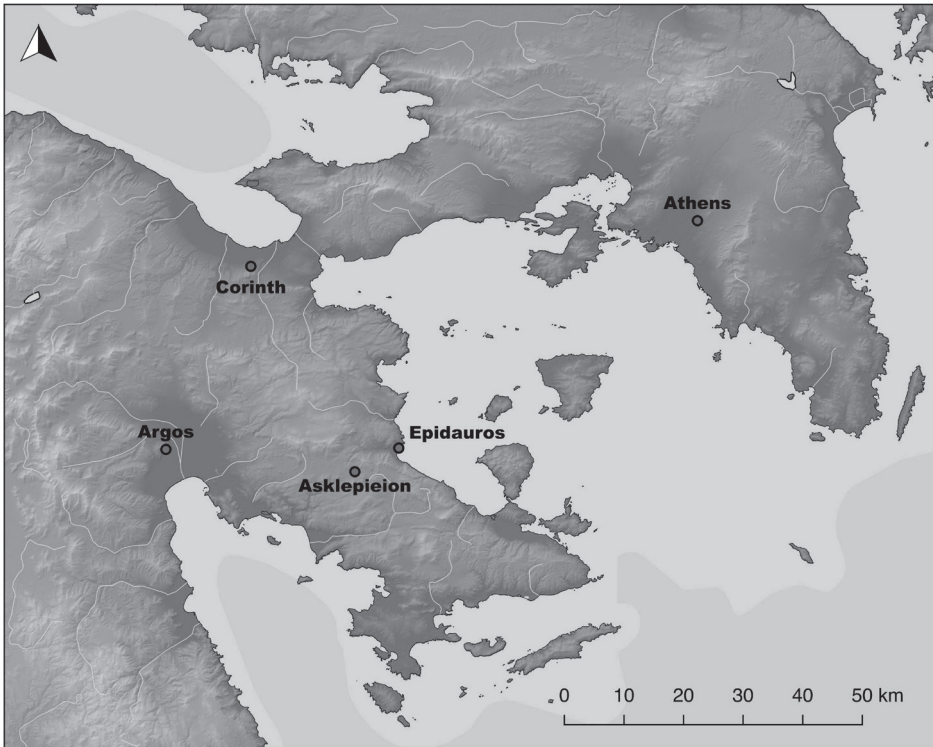
31 Riethmüller 2005, vol. 1, 162–74, 279–95; Melfi 2007, 17–209; Renberg 2017, 126–32.

32 Lambrinouidakis 2018.

33 Wickkiser 2008, 90–94; Prignitz 2014; Lambrinouidakis and Prignitz 2020.

34 On Epidauros as a place of pilgrimage, see Dillon 1997, 74–80. On the *theorodokoi* that hosted Epidaurian *theoroi* (festival announcers) in many Greek cities, see Perlman 2000, 67–98. On Greek extra-urban sanctuaries and their ties to the city-state, see the classic work by Polignac 1995.





Map showing location of Epidauros and the Asklepieion (courtesy of Niels Bargfeldt).

**Fig. 2.**

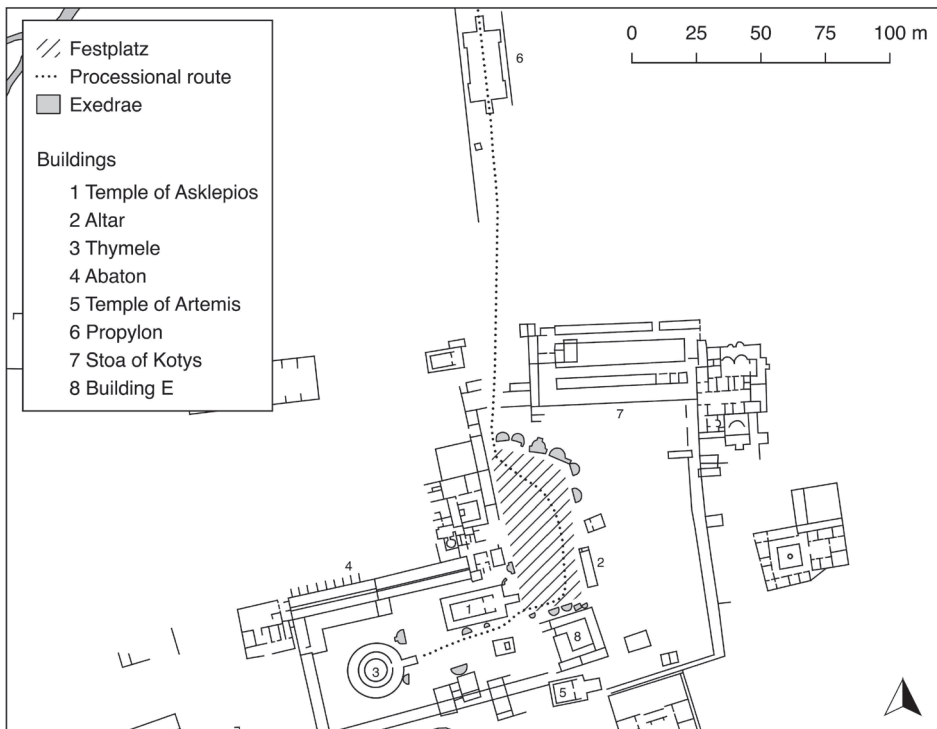
schedule of the sanctuary and the occasion of the pilgrims' visits (Fig. 3).<sup>35</sup> Thirdly, the construction of individual buildings in the sanctuary facilitated particular forms of movement through their incorporation of special architectural features, such as ramps and elaborate interior spaces, both over- and underground in the case of the circular, enigmatic Thymele that appears to have been designed with particular acoustic and performative affordances in mind (no. 3 in Fig. 3).<sup>36</sup>

It is clear that the fourth-century monumentalisation of the Asklepieion produced a complex range of immersive spaces and landscapes that cannot be discussed in detail here. Instead, we focus on a monument in the exact location where the perspectives of “place” and “motion” aligned, namely the northern propylon, through which many—if not all—pilgrims would have entered the sanctuary proper, at least from the Hellenistic period onwards (no. 6 in Fig. 3; Fig. 4).<sup>37</sup> The propylon marks a key juncture in the sense that different forms of movement converge in this particular place, addressing

35 Kristensen 2018. On similar complexities of movement inside sacred spaces at Olympia, see Hölscher 2018, 29-33.

36 Ramps: Sneed 2020. Thymele: Schultz et al. 2017.

37 Roux 1961, 253-74; Tomlinson 1983, 39-47.



**Fig. 3.** Map of the central part of the Asklepeion of Epidauros (courtesy of Niels Bargfeldt).

the liminality of the sanctuary's border that Pausanias tells us was clearly defined by *horos*-stones.<sup>38</sup> The building itself is elongated, *c.* 14 × 20 m with its exterior façade originally decorated with six Ionic columns (the remains of which are now reconstructed in the site museum). On the inside, there were Corinthian columns, but no fixtures for any doors or other closing devices have been identified. In this sense, the propylon functioned mainly as an architectural backdrop for pilgrims' movement rather than a barrier that potentially blocked their progress, even if only for a short moment. Sadly, none of the building accounts discovered so far give us details of the construction of the propylon, so we rely on stylistic criteria for the chronology of the propylon. The French architectural historian Georges Roux has proposed a date of construction in the early third century BCE and certainly before 250 BCE, whereas other scholars have preferred an earlier date to place the propylon as part of the larger building programme of the fourth century BCE.<sup>39</sup>

The propylon is located in the northern part of the sanctuary just after the processional way crosses a small stream. Its isolation from other monumental features in the

38 Paus. 2.27.1. On passageways as “moments of transition” and a means of constructing sightlines in late antique sanctuaries, see Yasin 2017.

39 Roux 1961, 274; Tomlinson 1983, 47. For the earlier date, see Burford 1969, 69.



The propylon of the Asklepieion of Epidauros, seen from the south (photo: Troels Myrup Kristensen).

**Fig. 4.**

sanctuary may be explained by the presence of a nearby well that appears to date from the fifth century BCE and thus predates the construction of the propylon itself.<sup>40</sup> This suggests that the location already had an established role as a place of purification before the construction of the propylon, constituting a formal and ritually obligatory entry point into the *temenos*.<sup>41</sup> Yet we may also consider what the natural landscape around the propylon offered in terms of its natural, material affordances. Most notably, the small stream that pilgrims crossed immediately before entering the Epidaurian propylon mirrors the location and design of the propylon of Ptolemy II at Samothrace, recently discussed by Bonna Wescoat.<sup>42</sup> The Samothrace propylon actually incorporated a natural stream into its design, making the most of its acoustic and sensory qualities. Wescoat interprets this as part of an effort to enhance the acoustic experience afforded by the natural landscape. The designers of the Epidaurian propylon may have had similar intentions in mind. Furthermore, the propylon is located at the lowest point in the sanctuary, ensuring that, upon exiting, pilgrims entered an open, slightly sloping forecourt from where they climbed further up, not unlike the experience provided by

---

40 Tomlinson 1983, 46.

41 On purification and the role of water in Greek sanctuaries more broadly, see Ehrenheim, Klingborg and Frejman 2019.

42 Wescoat 2012. Wescoat 2017 covers the onward passage through the sanctuary of the Great Gods. Roux 1961, 274, noting the similarities in the plan of these buildings at Epidauros and Samothrace.

the combination of the Propylaia and the so-called “Periklean entrance court” on the Athenian Acropolis after its fifth-century-BCE building programme (Fig. 5).<sup>43</sup> In this configuration, the Epidaurian propylon presented the sanctuary and its visiting pilgrims with an almost “acropolis-like” pattern and experience of movement.<sup>44</sup>

In previous scholarship, however, the Epidauros propylon has typically been approached as an “island” within the sanctuary of Asklepios that is studied with a particular view towards the reconstruction of its architecture. R.A. Tomlinson even referred to the propylon in a somewhat derogatory way as the Asklepieion’s “formal decorative entrance”,<sup>45</sup> but it is worthwhile to think more about how the monument affects movement in different ways and explicitly draw on concepts from the “New Mobilities Paradigm.” The propylon in fact embodies many key observations made by Sheller and Urry. For example, they argue “that all places are tied into at least thin networks of connections that stretch beyond each such place”.<sup>46</sup> They are also narrative connections, whose coming together enables the telling of particular stories at particular places and times: “places are about relationships, about the placing of peoples, materials, images, and the systems of difference that they perform”.<sup>47</sup> It follows that the propylon is not an “island”, but rather was rather designed to play an important role in the larger network of movement through which pilgrims circulated to and within the sanctuary of Asklepios, located precisely at an important juncture in their pilgrimage to a healing divinity and an important chapter in the “story” that this particular material assemblage constructed for pilgrims.

The “New Mobilities Paradigm” provides us with some further helpful terms and methods to understand the uses of sacred space and its constitution in both “place” and “motion”, specifically in the context of the Asklepieion and its propylon. Explicitly drawing on Sheller and Urry, the Danish urban theorist Ole B. Jensen’s work on contemporary contexts of mobility is particularly helpful to understand what he terms “mobile situations” within the sanctuary.<sup>48</sup> In Jensen’s terms, the open spaces of the sanctuary of Asklepios effectively worked as stages for being “mobile with”.<sup>49</sup> Pilgrims moved occasionally as individuals, but more often as members of groups, organised by kin, class or gender. In carefully choreographed processions, groups moved together, sang and watched or performed a range of rituals. While their goal would have been one of the altars in the heart of the sanctuary of Asklepios (and in some cases ultimately the Abaton where incubation took place), they passed through a variety of other locales

---

43 Stevens 1936; more broadly on the Athenian acropolis as “processional architecture”, see Rhodes 1995, 28–41; Paga 2017; Valavanis et al. 2022.

44 For a similar interpretation of the Argive Heraion as a man-made acropolis, see Hollinshead 2015, 44–45.

45 Tomlinson 1983, 41.

46 Sheller and Urry 2006, 209.

47 Sheller and Urry 2006, 214.

48 Jensen 2013; 2014.

49 Jensen 2014, 46.

that were given meaning through their actions, including the propylon. Through their movements, the pilgrims thus participated in different mobile situations within well-defined in-groups as well as temporarily staged congregations.<sup>50</sup> The spaces that the pilgrims moved through can be defined as having at least two different effects on them. Jensen defines these as sociofugal; that is, a space that forces people apart and thus to a certain degree dissolves groups or at least separates them spatially. Jensen contrasts this with a sociopetal space that draws people together, such as in cases where a path becomes more narrow and confined.<sup>51</sup> The effect of the propylon was sociopetal, as it required the members of a procession to navigate its architecture and consequently draw together in tight lines that allowed them to pass unhindered through the building's columns. In addition, other studies of movement have noted how the most complex and most meaningful spaces are those in which people stop and where they have to negotiate their role in a new place.<sup>52</sup> Here, it is worth noting some of the other formal qualities of the propylon: for example, its raised base forced anyone approaching to stop and ascend either by means of the steps or the ramps located at both the northern and southern façade of the building. These perspectives offer one set of comparative framework rooted in the "New Mobilities Paradigm" that can be applied in the study of ancient Mediterranean pilgrimage.

Propylaia and other entrances and gateways to sanctuaries are typically interpreted as monuments of spatial control, separating the (profane and ritually polluted) outside from the (sacred and ritually purified) inside.<sup>53</sup> In a recent study, Christina Williamson has also interpreted temple doors as places of epiphany.<sup>54</sup> But in another, more basic fashion their function was to orchestrate and structure movement in a way that was considered to be fit for purpose. In the case of the Epidaurian propylon, while certainly functioning as a monumental demarcation of sacred space (and control thereof), it also represents a considerable contrast to the seemingly unrestricted spaces around it.<sup>55</sup> While the sanctuary certainly had a clearly defined boundary, it is unlikely to have been monumentalised. It is also worth mentioning again that the propylon does not seem to have been furnished with any doorways that effectively restricted access. Yet the propylon profoundly affected the movement of pilgrims as they came to a pivotal point in the procession to the Asklepion. It raised expectations for what was about to come, both through use of the natural landscape and through the material environment of the propylon itself. We would therefore argue that the purpose of the Epidaurian propylon was primarily to demarcate transition in terms of movement and only secondarily to restrict movement in and out of the sanctuary. In this sense, it can be interpreted through

---

50 Jensen 2014, 81.

51 Jensen 2013, 152; 2014, 46.

52 Laurence 2011, 394-97.

53 See Rhodes 1995, 53ff.

54 Williamson 2018.

55 While Pausanias (2.27.1) tells us that the boundary was marked by *horoi*, no material remains have been identified.



**Fig. 5.** Looking from the Asklepieion propylon towards the open area to the south, showing the ascent to the main area of the sanctuary (photo: Troels Myrup Kristensen).

the lenses of both “place” (as a monument that pilgrims formally had to pass through and whose materiality they were required to negotiate) and “motion” (as a monument that led pilgrims from one crucial part of the experience of going to “see” Asklepios to another, and in creating a particular moment in the spatial story of their journey from Epidauros town to the sanctuary).

When exiting the propylon, Epidaurian pilgrims arrived at a more open area that would have been an appropriate location for groups to congregate, perhaps in relation to the rituals that took place in the vicinity of the well (Fig. 5). The architects of the sanctuary invested in this area by constructing walls on either side of the pathway, thus restricting movement to a particular direction in a way that is characteristic of sociopetal space. As the pilgrims proceeded to the centre of the sanctuary of Asklepios, spaces and patterns of movement became yet more complicated, as one would expect at a major pilgrimage site.<sup>56</sup> In accounts of these spaces, scholars have placed their emphasis on what Jensen would call “staging from above”, that is from the perspective of the architects, priests and benefactors of the sanctuary (from the *polis* in the fifth and fourth centuries BCE to individual patrons in the second century CE). But there remains much work to be done in terms of understanding how pilgrims themselves in turn responded to this staging of the rhythms and structures of movement architecture. For example, it is clear

---

<sup>56</sup> On the configuration of this ritual space in the Roman and late antique periods, see Melfi 2010 and Pfaff 2018.



A sociopetal space where access to the “Festplatz” of Epidauros was restricted by the construction of an exedra, seen to the left (photo: Troels Myrup Kristensen).

**Fig. 6.**

that the construction of *exedrae* over several hundred years severely restricted access to the central “Festplatz” in front of the main temples and altars of the sanctuary (Fig. 6).<sup>57</sup> Different tensions between “place” and “motion” thus continued to be fundamental to the experience of visiting the Asklepieion, even after leaving the propylon.

### **Perspectives on Place and Motion**

It is now time to leave Epidauros and return to the contribution of this volume as a whole. The central tension between “place” and “motion” in studies of ancient Mediterranean pilgrimage is explored and challenged in the chapters gathered together in this book. Some offer us clear position pieces, others articulate a new perspective on place or mobility in pilgrimage studies. Other chapters use comparative angles to draw conclusions through time or across geographical space. We view such methodological diversity as a marker of maturity in the study of past pilgrimage, and indeed, bringing ancient, medieval and modern subjects into the same volume means we create something truly interdisciplinary. We hope that the result is a volume that offers the reader the space to recognise both differences and points of connection between approaches, traditions, religions, times and practices, in terms of both their juxtaposition and the ways we categorise and discuss our subjects.

---

57 Kristensen 2018.

Instead of dichotomising “place” and “motion”, we have instead chosen to frame the diverse discussions of this volume through three methodological chapters that make up its first part (“Methodological Dialogues on Pilgrimage”), comprising David Frankfurter’s “Getting There: Reframing Pilgrimage from Process to Site”, Ian Rutherford’s “The Uses of Comparison in Studies of Pilgrimage”, and our own present introduction. Each of these chapters has a clear methodological agenda: our own, to ensure the mobility inherent in pilgrimage is tied in with contemporary discussions in theory and is not overlooked in studies of past pilgrimage because it is difficult to access. David Frankfurter has a very different perspective on pilgrimage in the past, instead arguing that recent scholarship on ancient pilgrimage has over-emphasised the significance of the journey. In his view, the “process” of pilgrimage is never, and was never, the meaningful element of pilgrimage in the past, and that we should instead return to the sites that pilgrims visited.

Rutherford’s chapter, the third methodological contribution framing the volume, offers another stance, that of comparative work. He highlights three important perspectives that a comparative approach can bring to study of pilgrimage in the ancient world: firstly, the heightening of awareness of pilgrimage traditions across a global framework, both for direct comparison of practices observed and for the theoretical models which are used, and which offer the student of past pilgrimage new ways of thinking about their topic. Secondly, he advocates a closer relationship between study of the “classical” world and that of the contemporary or near-contemporary Near East, meaning Anatolia, the Levant, Egypt and Mesopotamia. Although the barriers between study of these different geographical zones are being surmounted more often, they still represent borders in linguistic knowledge—both ancient and modern—as well in archaeological, historical and cultural spheres. The mobility and exchange of goods and, more importantly, ideas between these different cultural milieux is well known,<sup>58</sup> but perhaps there is scope for greater awareness of the contemporary methods of study and findings across these borders. The final area with which he contends comparativism helps is that of mapping cultural differences in traditions, thinking, for example, of the work of Joy McCorriston on the pastoralist pilgrimages of the Saudi Arabian peninsula and their role as a method of communication across space and time. Although not entirely in agreement with her suggestion that sedentary populations did not therefore engage in pilgrimage practices, he further develops the suggestion that different kinds of pilgrimage might be usefully correlated with different kinds of society—where different kinds of pilgrimage come to symbolise different qualities: elite power, for example, in the Mesopotamian world

---

58 Study of the so-called “Orientalising” phenomenon in the archaic Greek world comes to mind here, but also more recent work such as that of Rutherford himself on the relationships between the Hittite and Greek worlds in terms of the transfer of myth cycles (e.g., Rutherford 2001; 2020). This has been taken up by Robin Lane Fox in *Travelling Heroes* (Lane Fox 2009), and a recent volume explicitly examining the spread of ideas through social networks, in which some contributions explore the relationships between the Near East and the Greek world (Daniels 2022; Mooring 2022).



of royal pilgrimage, or an imagined community, in situations such as McCorriston's Arabian example, or Greek city-states engaging in *theoria*.

The second part of the volume, "Pilgrims, Place and Motion: Case Studies", brings the reader on a journey through chronological time and different elements of focus. We begin with the chapter by Matthew Dillon, which, although he assumes that motivations for going on pilgrimage were pious, discusses the many differing kinds of misbehaviour of pilgrims on display once in the sanctuary, and their punishments: in this case, at the classical Greek oracular sanctuary of Apollo Koropaios in northern Greece. We then move through chapters that look at different elements of pilgrimage in the Roman world. Panayiotis Christoforou examines the role of the emperor as possessing *numen*, and thus places associated with him, or images of him, having the capacity to become a place of pilgrimage themselves, both in terms of offering sanctuary and as enabling contestation between individuals and authorities. The lens of pilgrimage is extremely valuable here in that it allows us to frame all the different motivations for travel to the place of the emperor together.

Taking an explicitly theoretical standpoint and drawing on ideas expressed in the literature of the "New Mobilities Paradigm" (here referred to as the mobilities turn), Anna Collar explores religious responses to a lack of choice in mobility, through the examples of the enforced, unchosen migration undertaken by Roman soldiers. Through acts of religious place-making—the setting up of communal altars on Hadrian's Wall or on the Euphrates frontier—soldiers made themselves and their identities visible. This took different forms: both proclaiming their belonging to a universal "Roman" identity in places of anxiety (as in the example of Silvanus), and engaging in what is here termed "virtual pilgrimage" to distant, remembered places and homelands (in the case of Jupiter Dolichenus or the Dea Syria). By these acts, these men were able to establish themselves as migrant communities, reclaiming some of the agency that was lost in the act of moving with the army across the Roman world.

The next chapter takes the reader deeper into the pilgrim's experiences: Isabel Köster explores the multiple motivations for visiting sanctuaries, including those which were not fully pious. She examines what happens when pilgrims are also thieves—framing this discussion with examples from the later Roman period and the Middle Ages—and, much as *evocatio* or 'god-napping' conferred divine sanction on the victorious city in the Roman world or in Bronze Age Mesopotamia, considers how the thieving pilgrim can be re-written as pious through the trope of the saint themselves being desirous of a change of scene.

The connections and contestations between established Jewish and emerging Christian communities in an increasingly volatile mid-first century Jerusalem are explored by Matthew Anderson. Towards the end of his life, Paul took a journey there to deliver money to the Temple in exchange for a blessing, a journey he made in the company of a new, weird band of believers: not full proselytes to Judaism, but devotees of the God of Israel through the figure of Christ. The innovation of this journey by a new group of worshippers is underscored by Anderson, emphasising the lack of clarity about whether the offering taken to Jerusalem is the cash collected, or the gentile community

itself. The repercussions of it, this first “failed” pilgrimage, are felt in the immediate aftermath and the Jewish rebellion against Rome and the destruction of the place itself, and through later Christian pilgrims’ desire to follow in Paul’s charismatic but confrontational footprints.

Rebecca Sweetman returns to a question we have explored in earlier work<sup>59</sup> and to which we briefly explore further below, that of the pilgrim’s intentionality to go “on pilgrimage” in a world of intermingling rationales for travel. In her discussion of the changing religious emphases of the late antique period in the Cyclades, she considers the topographical settings of sanctuaries on these islands and how these places shift through the transition from polytheism to Christianity—and the role of these places as ways to bridge these two religious traditions, as well as the practical elements involved in sanctifying place within a new religious world order.

Turning from the sanctuaries on land to those at sea, Amelia Brown’s chapter looks at the changing ritual practices performed by sailors in this same period of transition, responding to two powerful new factors in the seascapes of the east Mediterranean: the new position of Constantinople at the heart of the world, and the growth of Jerusalem and the Holy Land as a pilgrimage destination. It is the requirements and rituals of sailors themselves, Brown argues, that connected the gods and heroes of the polytheist world and the saints of Late Antiquity, and it is this fundamentally mobile community of seafarers who were responsible for the wide dispersal of these cults across the Mediterranean and Black Sea.

From here, we move on to think specifically about Jerusalem’s role as a pilgrimage destination for medieval Muslims as well as Christians of different denominations. Naomi Koltun-Fromm’s chapter continues the focus on Jerusalem, but moves beyond the Jewish-Christian contestation into the early Islamic period—and to the deep mythological and theological gravitational pull that the holy city continued to exert. The place itself is what is important for Naser-e Khosraw, a deeply pious Persian Isma’ili Muslim pilgrim, who spent seven years travelling the Muslim world to visit shrines. Despite being sceptical about some of Jerusalem’s mythologies, the city is, nonetheless, seen as a place with a profound divine presence. Because of its deep Jewish history and location as the place where David and Solomon first interacted with God, Jerusalem also possessed a latent power to provide personal forgiveness—and this was the central reason for pilgrims to visit.

Where Naser-e Khosraw’s visit to the Holy Land is documented in formal written texts (albeit composed after the fact), the only records of pilgrims from the Caucasus are found in much more informal contexts: graffiti. Yana Tchevkanovets examines these personal prayers and messages by Armenian and Georgian visitors to Jerusalem, Nazareth, and the Sinai Peninsula. Dating from the fifth century through to the eleventh, these individual records represent some of the earliest documents in the scripts of Georgia and Armenia, and represent the powerful gravitational pull the Holy Land exerted across different Christian denominations. The power of the Holy City is em-

---

59 Collar and Kristensen 2020a.

phased by the imitation of Palestinian architectural elements in the construction of churches and monuments in the Caucasus—embodying through these new places and the objects brought back from the Holy Land the relations established through the act of pilgrimage itself.

This central part of the book finishes with a chapter that ties together place through time: Sarah Midford’s long-term perspective on pilgrimage traditions in a specific part of western Turkey, in which she considers the emotional timbre and enduring meaning of both ancient and modern pilgrimages to the Dardanelles and the site of two famous battles—the WWI slaughter at Gallipoli, and the plains where the Trojan War was fought.

The final section of the volume encompasses two responses by Simon Coleman and Elisa Uusimäki to the chapters presented here. Coleman places our approach to pilgrimage within anthropological discussions, whereas Uusimäki brings in perspectives from theology.

### Where Do We Go From Here?

The dialogue between the perspective on mobility articulated in this opening chapter and that on the site or sanctuary outlined by Frankfurter reminds us of the vagueness that can mark the use of the term “pilgrimage” and the value of comparativism in thinking through the way we categorise elements of the process. In his chapter, Frankfurter scrutinises the concept of pilgrimage as one that is marked by the journey, because as he sees it, the journey is not *the point*. Unlike Reda’s father, with whom we opened this introduction, in Frankfurter’s view, “when air travel is available, people take airplanes”.<sup>60</sup> He notes the common emphasis of the journey undertaken in the definitions of pilgrimage in the ancient world developing since the early 1990s, and the attendant transformation of the pilgrim that is implied or even required in order for an experience to constitute “pilgrimage”. He contests this structuralist vision of pilgrimage, drawing as it does on the Turners’ conception of the pilgrimage journey as enabling a “rite of passage” and the building of a new *communitas* of spiritually transformed pilgrims,<sup>61</sup> making the point that in today’s world, the liminal state of being between identities is more usually occupied by the refugee. He wonders, then, if we fall into the habit of romanticising the pilgrim’s journey as the all-important liminal, transformative element of pilgrimage, we do a disservice to the terrifying and open-ended journeys made by refugees today, and also by those subaltern figures of the past: the refugees, the enslaved people, the people without choice.

Choice concerning mobility in the past is a pressing issue and one we return to in this volume (Collar); and we recognise of course that the challenge to the emphasis on the journey is an important one. We have argued elsewhere that pilgrimage in the ancient world was in many instances contingent, drawing on the observation made by

---

60 Frankfurter, this volume.

61 Turner and Turner 1978.

Horden and Purcell that the spiritual or sacred element of a journey may have operated simultaneously alongside a more prosaic economic purpose.<sup>62</sup> Likewise, the emphasis in pilgrimage studies on the transformational quality of pilgrimage may owe too much to a protestant Christian tradition<sup>63</sup>—although “rites of passage” do continue to feature strongly in the way we discuss behaviours and rituals in certain sanctuaries in the ancient world, think, for example of young Athenian girls making the journey to Brauron in rural Attica to engage in the “playing the bear” ritual of puberty at Artemis’ sanctuary.<sup>64</sup> But not all pilgrimage was necessarily transformational, and the diversity of experience—on the road, at the site, and on the way home again—is critical to recognising that “pilgrimage” was never just *one thing*, or even many things neatly categorised into a typology.<sup>65</sup> How could it be? Engaging with the mobilities involved in pilgrimage and what the journey or the movements afforded the pilgrim along the way, we see how the rituals and behaviours at the sanctuary destination built a community of pilgrims (or not—see for example the chapters by Dillon and Köster, this volume).

This volume is framed through this ongoing conversation about the twin poles of pilgrimage—“place” and “motion”—that we hope will set up a valuable discussion. Although Frankfurter demands we ditch the term pilgrimage completely, and instead use “shrine visitation”, we contend there is no need to see these twin poles of “place” and “motion” in opposition; rather, like the gravitational push and pull between a planet and its moon, or the journey of a swallow between Africa and Britain, both elements are required to make pilgrimage meaningful.<sup>66</sup> As will be obvious from this introduction and our emphasis on the role and importance of mobility in thinking about pilgrimage, we beg to differ with Frankfurter about the modernity of pilgrimage and whether the mode of mobility is insignificant in the past. We leave the debate for the reader to pursue.

Another observation that is apparent from the contributions is that different disciplines have different concerns and aims in relation to the study of ancient Mediterranean pilgrimage. As a historian of religion, Frankfurter wants to get back to the “site” as the main scale of study. For archaeologists—traditionally deeply invested in the study of individual sites and their material assemblages—the term “pilgrimage” has a particular traction as an (almost liberating) method of going beyond the “site” and the individual “monument”. This perspective also informs a recent contribution by archaeologist B. Jacob Skousen arguing that “archaeologists are uniquely situated to investigate the connections between non-human phenomena involved in pilgrimage (e.g., landscapes, places, shrines, tokens, deities, myths, memories) and, because of this, archaeologists can and should push pilgrimage studies in new and productive

---

62 Collar and Kristensen 2020a; engaging with Horden and Purcell 2000. See also Whiting 2020; Sweetman, this volume.

63 Cf. Nongbri 2015.

64 See here the important contribution by Sourvinou-Inwood 1990.

65 Cf. Elsner and Rutherford 2005b, 12–30.

66 Cf. Coleman and Eade 2004.

directions”.<sup>67</sup> We agree and propose that material culture continues to have an important and often-untapped contribution to make in the comparative history of ancient Mediterranean pilgrimage.

## Bibliography

- Adams, C. and R. Laurence (eds.) 2001. *Travel and Geography in the Roman Empire*. London: Routledge.
- Adey, P. et al. (eds.) 2014. *The Routledge Handbook of Mobilities*. London: Routledge.
- Alcock, S. and R. Osborne (eds.) 1994. *Placing the Gods. Sanctuaries and Sacred Space in Ancient Greece*. Oxford: Clarendon Press.
- Aldred, O. 2021. *The Archaeology of Movement*. London: Routledge.
- Beaman, L.G. 2006. “Labyrinth as Heterotopia: The Pilgrim’s Creation of Space,” in Swatos 2006, 83-103.
- Berg, M. and B. Seeber. 2013. *The Slow Professor: Challenging the Culture of Speed in the Academy*. Toronto: University of Toronto Press.
- Bourke, G. 2018. *Elis. Internal Politics and External Policy in Ancient Greece*. London: Routledge.
- Bowie, F. 2006. *The Anthropology of Religion. An Introduction*. Second edition. Malden: Blackwell.
- Bremmer, J. 2017. “Pilgrimage Progress?,” in Kristensen and Friese 2017, 275-84.
- Brown, P. 1971. “The Rise and Function of the Holy Man in Late Antiquity.” *JRS* 61, 80-101.
- Burford, A. 1969. *The Greek Temple Builders of Epidaurous*. Liverpool: Liverpool University Press.
- Candea, M. 2018. *Comparison in Anthropology. The Impossible Method*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
- Chélini, J. and H. Branthomme (eds.) 1987. *Histoire des pèlerinages non chrétiens. Entre magique et sacré: le chemin des dieux*. Paris: Hachette.
- Cole, S.G. 2004. *Landscapes, Gender, and Ritual Space. The Ancient Greek Experience*. Berkeley: University of California Press.
- Coleman, S. 2002. “Do you believe in pilgrimage? *Communitas*, contestation and beyond.” *Anthropological Theory* 2.3, 355-68.
- Coleman, S. and J. Eade (eds.) 2004. *Reframing Pilgrimage. Cultures in Motion*. London: Routledge.
- Coleman, S. and J. Elsner. 1995. *Pilgrimage. Past and Present in the World Religions*. London: British Museum Press.
- Collar, A. 2020. “Movement, Labour and Devotion: A Virtual Walk to the Sanctuary at Mount Kasios,” in Collar and Kristensen 2020b, 33-61.
- Collar, A. (ed.) 2022. *Networks and the Spread of Ideas in the Past. Strong Ties, Innovation and Knowledge Exchange*. London: Routledge.
- Collar, A. Forthcoming. *Mobility / Place. Archaeology and religion in the Roman Mediterranean*. London: Bloomsbury.
- Collar, A. and T.M. Kristensen. 2020a. “Embedded Economies of Ancient Mediterranean Pilgrimage,” in Collar and Kristensen 2020b, 1-30.
- Collar, A. and T.M. Kristensen (eds.) 2020b. *Pilgrimage and Economy in the Ancient Mediterranean*. Leiden: Brill.
- Connelly, J.B. 2011. “Ritual Movement through Greek Sacred Space. Towards an Archaeology of Performance,” in A. Chaniotis (ed.) *Ritual Dynamics in the Ancient Mediterranean: Agency, Emotion, Gender, Reception*, 313-46. Stuttgart: Franz Steiner.
- Cresswell, T. and P. Merriman. 2011. “Introduction: Geographies of Mobilities—Practices, Spaces, Subjects,” in T. Cresswell and P. Merriman (eds.) *Geographies of Mobilities: Practices, Spaces, Subjects*, 1-15. Farnham: Ashgate.
- Daniels, M. 2022. “‘Orientalising’ Networks and the Nude Standing Female: Synchronic and Diachronic Dimensions of Ideology Transfer,” in Collar 2022, 31-78.
- Dillon, M. 1997. *Pilgrims and Pilgrimage in Ancient Greece*. London: Routledge.
- Dillon, M. Forthcoming. *Asklepios*. London: Routledge.
- Ehrenheim, H. von, P. Klingborg and A. Frejman. 2019. “Water at Ancient Greek Sanctuaries: Medium of Divine Presence or Commodity for Mortal Visitors?” *Journal of Archaeology and Ancient History* 26, 3-31.
- Elsner, J. 1992. “Pausanias: A Greek Pilgrim in the Roman World.” *Past and Present* 135.1, 3-29.
- Elsner, J. 2017a. “Excavating Pilgrimage,” in Kristensen and Friese 2017, 265-74.

---

67 Skousen 2018, 262.