

12. SPACE AS IT WAS SEEN AND CONCEIVED BY THE ANCIENT GREEKS*

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Space as a cultural category, historically determined and resulting from a culture-specific negotiation of physical spatial realities and symbolical constructions, has become a major subject of interest in recent studies of both historical and contemporary societies. The 'Space as it was seen and conceived by the ancient Greeks' research group aims to approach some key aspects of that subject from a decidedly interdisciplinary perspective.

How did the Ancient Greeks conceive the organization of the territory, the articulation of the world? How did they perceive the space of the city, the space occupied by buildings as opposed to the open areas, the sanctuaries and the houses, the theatre and the graveyards, or the frontiers? Was there a space for the gods and a space for humans? A private space and a public space? What were the ideological mechanisms that made possible the setting up of fixed landmarks and pathways, or the definition of more or less organized and hierarchically structured relationships between the different constituent parts of inhabited space? Of course, we could hardly pretend to be the first to reflect on the organization of space in Greece; we declare ourselves followers of a long line of scholars who have opened up new perspectives by identifying and exploring the question of the perception and organization of space in ritual, town planning, myth, politics, images, colonization, literature, drama, etc.¹ All these big issues are subjects of interest to us because, although it is impossible to give a simple, definitive answer to all of them and they must be (and have been) addressed separately, each in its own specificity, it is nonetheless also necessary to view them in their interrelatedness, from a cross-disciplinary perspective. Archaeology and architecture, of course, but also iconography and textual analysis (including documentary, literary, historical, and philosophical sources), have a major point of convergence in the concept of space. The members of our group have different specialities, within which they have formerly studied issues related to space. The constitution of the group reflected a shared perception of the need to try a new, combined approach, without neglecting attention to the specificity of each methodology.

Our first objective was the creation of a common ground for meeting and debate among the different scientific disciplines studying the ancient Greek world. In the current panorama of research in our universities, it is not always easy to find a dynamic of constant and fluent communication between the working methods and scientific achievements of different fields of knowledge. As the refinement of tools, the complexity of new issues tackled, and the need for high-level specialization increase, as they have done steadily over recent decades, so does the tendency to restrict the focus to the limits of each discipline, in order to achieve greater analytical depth. This is perhaps unavoidable and even, to a certain extent, desirable. However, we feel that there is an urgent need to increase active collaboration across disciplines, to compare different, sometimes divergent, points of view and methodologies, especially regarding a major subject of cultural anthropology such as space. We should be able to discuss spatial issues from the combined study of heterogeneous documents and situations, which often require very different approaches, but are far from being unrelated. We should be able to incorporate into our discourse and arguments not only the information from disciplines other than our own, but also the main points of conflict, tension, or disagreement that raise problematic issues and will hopefully help us to formulate new questions that we would otherwise not even have been aware of.

It is, of course, of little use to restrict the achievement of this cross-disciplinary dialogue within the limits of our group. A very important part of the work of the group has been the organization of international and pluridisciplinary annual conferences, with the subsequent publication of collective volumes (of which this is the third) on a given aspect of the definition and organization of space in Ancient Greece.² We believe that this venture has generated a place for meeting and the exchange of knowledge about the work being carried out in this field by colleagues in archaeology, philology, and architecture – the disciplines to which the members of the group belong. Furthermore, by also inviting philosophers, historians, and iconographers, we hope to have broadened the scope

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1. Cf., among many others, the seminal works of Vernant 1965, Lévêque and Vidal-Naquet 1964, de Polignac 1995, Lissarrague 1987, Greco 1999, Taplin 1977.

2. For the references to the group's publications, cf. selected bibliography at the end of this paper.

of our respective studies and laid the foundations for a wider project that can approach the subject of space in Greece from a truly multidisciplinary perspective.

The second objective of our group is more concrete and specific, since it is more closely related to the work of its members. It consists of placing the particular research of each of the group members in a wider, common framework, which allows for an enriching discussion and the contrasting of methodological issues and achieved results in each respective case. On the other hand, this has amounted to the mapping out of a range of interrelated aspects concerning the organization of space in Greece, which jointly configure a solid basis for further exploration. A brief review of some of the topics dealt with so far will give an impression of the range of our interests.

One of the main tasks we have set ourselves is the study of the vocabulary most frequently used in Greek textual sources to describe and organize space. Among the terms that require special attention are *chôros*, *chôra*, *chorós*, *topos*, *tekmor*, *poros*, *oudos*, *mychos*, *temenos*, *omphalos*, and *eschatia*, as well as toponyms (e.g. Bosporos, Aigai, Lykosura), and verbs designating the actions that culturally define a place or a network of significant places (e.g. *ageiro*, *steicho*, *stropheo*).

Another important part of the project is devoted to studies of iconographic representations, both as sources documenting different kinds of real spaces and as a symbolic language generating a specific space, the space of the image.³ In this latter respect, we can mention a comparative analysis of the iconographic mechanisms representing the religious space of the epiphany and the elements used in dramatic texts to show the apparition of a divinity or a supernatural reality in the space of the theatre. The issue of the dramatic space in its physical, dramaturgical and performative aspects has been addressed by several scholars since Taplin's seminal 1977 work on Aeschylus.⁴ However, iconography has usually been used in these studies as an illustration of the stagecraft or as a source for reconstructing lost plays, without taking account of its specificity. We are more interested in establishing parallels between the two languages in order to recreate a dramatic space. Since the figure of the god, whether through the cult statue or through religious epiphany, constitutes a key element of the mimesis present in both arts, we have selected it as a starting point for our research in this field.

With regard to the study of iconography as a documentary source, several studies have been carried out on the representation of women in pottery and small-scale sculpture and on the spaces, both real

and symbolic, that these women inhabited in ancient Greek culture, especially in the Classical and Hellenistic periods. Thus, for instance, we have analyzed the representations of different pieces of furniture on Attic vases, particularly the *hedna*, which were presented to brides as marriage gifts, in their function as indicators of interior domestic space. Since the materials of which these objects were made are not easily preserved, archaeology is usually of little help, except for rare instances in funerary contexts. Therefore, the study of the images on vases is of particular importance in order to obtain an approximate notion of what this kind of furniture looked like and what its uses were in the configuration of space.

The pieces of furniture represented on Attic vases usually function as markers of domestic interiors, a kind of space that, in the urban Athenian mind, was controlled by women. While men and women slept under the same roof, it was women who really inhabited the house, and even worked in it. It is hardly surprising then that some of those pieces of furniture were almost exclusively used by women. These include storage devices or the type of chair called the *klismos*, which were closely associated in the iconography with the housewife as a place from which she controlled the domestic and family order.

Another area of research concerns certain aspects of the clothing and hairstyles of women in Greek iconography. As in the case of furniture representations, these elements are often indicators of the social space these women come within, although caution must also be applied here. In this respect, a careful study of the representations of topknots undermines the widespread contention linking them to prostitutes. We must always bear in mind, moreover, that these images do not necessarily correspond to specific situations, at least not in a straightforward manner, as they are rather idealized images created by the minds of the painters. To that extent, although they may reflect real cultural perceptions, they also partially mask – and occasionally hint at – a much more complex and varied reality.

Hairstyles can also carry political meaning. A study of the diadem as a symbol of power has shown that in official iconography this device was originally used by male rulers and later adopted by the women of the Ptolemaic dynasty. The origins of the use of the diadem as a royal symbol are to be found in the Argead dynasty, particularly with Alexander the Great and his coin iconography of the Zeus-Ammon type. After his reign, in Egypt we can follow the consolidation of a process that had begun in Macedonia, namely, the

3. Among many other references in a rich bibliography, particularly worth mentioning is a monographic dossier in the 2009 issue of the review *Métis* (*Métis* N.S. 7, 2009, 7-134), which, under the generic title "Images mises en forme", brings together contributions from M.-Ch. Villanueva-Puig, F. Lissarrage, I. Manfrini, A. Kardianou, C. Isler-Kerényi, A. Tsingarida, S. Schmidt, and M. Denoyelle. For our own research on Greek chorality, which includes a study of the multiple levels of iconographic space generated by the chorus, cf. *infra*.

4. Cf. especially Rehm 2002.

growing importance of the royal women in political as well as religious functions. Correspondingly, the iconography shows how the use of the diadem extends to the queens and becomes also for them a distinctive emblem that indicates their sovereignty. At the same time, the diadem was a reminder of the Greek origin of the dynasty, and this accounts for its importance in the numismatic iconography, since coins were, as they had been with Alexander, a privileged vehicle of political propaganda.

The research into architectural space has focused on the most famous space in the Greek world, the Athenian Acropolis. The first step was to study how this symbolically charged space has been understood in different periods, from the drawings by Ciriacus of Ancona and the great 18th c. renditions by Le Roy or Stuart and Revett, to Tschumi's recent depictions with his new Acropolis Museum. Among other results, the research has revealed that Doxiadis and Martienssen were the first to approach the Acropolis as a spatial construct in the late 1930s.⁵

Doxiadis tried to define the space from the geometric relationships that, from the point of view of a spectator standing at the Propylaia, are established between the relative positions of the eye and the temple. Martienssen defined the space of the Athenian Acropolis and other sanctuaries (*temenos*) from the movement of a spectator taking part in a sacred festival. In both cases, the logical conclusion is that space cannot be properly understood unless it is related to the spectator. For both Martienssen and Doxiadis, the spectator is the main actor for comprehending the notion of space. From this assumption, further research will focus on the specific ways in which the spectator relates to a range of elements or parts of the temple, and on the particular nature of his role in the configuration of space, which must therefore not be approached exclusively from the construction perspective, as is often the case in the literature on the subject.

Apart from the *temenos* and its relation to movement, the space generated by the different construction elements that define the temple is another subject of our research. One of the issues to be explored is the way in which the relationship between temple and altar constructs an interior space that is both penetrable and with defined limits. A second item is the *krepidoma* as a fundamental element for the placing of the temple on the irregular ground; how the setting of a base constitutes a spatial reality, or how both the height of the *krepidoma* and its evolution from flight of stairs to a stepped platform have a spatial motivation. Thirdly, we propose to study the peristyle as a spatial element: how the illusion of a space lying be-

hind and perceived through the half-light lends added depth to the building, and how this promised space invites one to walk around the building in an attempt to perceive its internal spatiality. For these studies, again, the analysis of the successive representations is an important starting point for the research; from Shinkel or Podocke's ideal reconstructions to the current three-dimensional, computer-generated renderings.

As a cultural category, space in ancient Greece is best approached from the perspective of cultural anthropology, which combines insights from different disciplinary fields in order to identify, for instance, which are the symbolic vehicles privileged by a certain culture to convey and interrelate the different levels of space that must be defined and articulated. In this respect, we have focused our attention on the chorus. It is our contention that the chorus constitutes a cultural paradigm which, from the outset of the Archaic period, is central to the definition and articulation of space on all its levels. On the one hand, there is the physical space of the city and the territory – be it the agora, the streets, the city walls, the sanctuaries, or the roads and all significant ways of communication, including across the sea –, which is defined and organized either by actual choral practice (e.g. processions) or through the use of choral vocabulary and notions. On the other hand, the chorus also gives sense and authority to all the non-physical spaces in and through which the community defines itself: the poetic voice, the political discourse and the image as an iconographic language to be displayed and 'read' in public contexts. In that sense, it is perhaps more advisable to speak of the concept of 'chorality', encompassing much more than the choruses of choral lyric or drama, or for that matter any particular ritual chorus. 'Chorality' designates a symbolic construction, which finds various expressions in actual performances – with different combinations of dance, music and song, eventually crystallizing into specific genres or subgenres of choral lyric or in the chorus of theatre –, but which also exists as a cultural paradigm that informs different fields of the community's experience, such as agonistic or juridical procedures, or other artistic discourses, such as epic poetry or pictorial art.⁶

The relationship of chorus and space is fundamental: chorus as a practice generates chorus as a space. In its static form, for instance, it can be the square in front of a sanctuary, the orchestra of the theatre, or the agora itself, as in *Odyssey* 8, where the agora of the Phaeacians is the *chorós* in which the dance of the Phaeacian youth takes place, or in Sparta, where Pausanias informs us that the agora is simply called

5. Doxiadis 1937, Martienssen 1952.

6. Cf. Lonsdale 1993, Calame 2001, Kowalzig 2007.



FIGURE 1. Argive crater (Late Geometric), from grave T45 in Argos. Archaeological Museum, Argos (C229). [Source: Whitley, J., *Style and society in Dark Age Greece. The changing face of a pre-literate society 1100-700 BC*, Cambridge 1991, Plate 39.]

the *chorós*. In its processional form, the chorus defines the streets and roads within and outside the city, as in the Panathenaean Street of Athens, or the road from Amyclai to Sparta, in the Hyacinthia, or from the harbour of Delphi, Crisa, to the sanctuary, in the foundation myth as related in the *Homeric Hymn to Apollo*.

One example of this choral reading of space in Greek culture is provided by the analysis of the relationship between descriptions of choral practice in epic poetry and geometric patterns in iconography. In the paradigmatic description of the shield of Achilles in the *Iliad*, no less than three choral scenes are detailed. The last of them gives us precious clues to the understanding of the visual perception and reading of the dance by the community watching it. This operates on three levels: the beauty of the young boys and girls dancing and of their attire, weapons and jewels; the images evoked by the dance and the song accompanying it; and, last but not least, the abstract patterns of the dancers' evolutions, such as the circle, the line, the grid, the labyrinth or the vortex. This, alongside comparable descriptions of choral performances, provides us with a clue to the reading of contemporary iconography on vases, i.e. Geometric pottery. Thus, for instance, on a Late Geometric Argive crater in the Archaeological Museum at Argos (Fig. 1) the choral pattern informs and interrelates: 1) the level of the figurative or narrative representation, a dance of girls or nymphs; 2) the level of emblematic representations, such as the rows of waterbirds below the dancers, a common choral image (as in the *geranos* dance, the dance of the crane); and 3) the level of Geometric patterns, which in their repetition and movement around the vase generate an ordered space that projects itself onto the outside space around it, e.g. the people taking part in the symposium or the funeral, if we take into account the most common collective functions of the vases. As this example suggests, a fundamental

function of chorality, through actual choral practice, as well as through the use of chorus as a paradigm, as in the instances mentioned, in epic poetry or in images on vases, is the ability to project symbolic images of order or disorder evoked by the words or the images of the chorus upon the physical and social space of the city, which is thus informed and articulated by them, a function that we could define with several Greek terms, one of which is *mimesis*.

Other chorality-related topics that have been explored can be summarized as follows.

1) The catalogues in epic poetry, whether the geographical one of the Greek world in the Catalogue of the Ships in the *Iliad* or the genealogical one of the gods in Hesiod's *Theogony*; in both cases, the choral paradigm is present from the beginning through the mythical model of the choir of the Muses speaking through the poet and through the metaphoric image of the catalogue itself as a chorus of places or gods.

2) The theatre as a complex space generating and projecting powerful symbolic images upon the space of the democratic city, defining and in a way reconciling fundamental underlying tensions, such as the conflict between *oikos* and *polis*, between male and female, love and strife (*eros/eris*), as structural elements of the democratic institutions. The studies of the space of the theatre are an important part of our research, and in this respect we interact very closely with a research group on Attic drama at the University of Barcelona.⁷

3) The garden as a choral space, both in the sense of it being a common scene for choral practice and, more fundamentally, in its essential status as a place of *mimesis*. This can be established from the study of texts, such as in Athenian theatre or in the Greek novel, although this mimetic function of the garden, inscribing a space of alterity and pre-civic natural order at the centre of the city, is also to be found in real gardens. Examples of this are the two Athenian sanctuaries of Aphrodite in the Gardens, one located at the foot of the Acropolis and the other outside the walls, next to the Ilissos, or the gardens of philosophy in and around the city (those of Plato, Aristotle and Epicurus), as spaces generating ideal images of the city or the human condition that aspire to be projected onto the space of reality. Furthermore, in the cultural *koine* of the Roman Empire, a comparison can be drawn between the descriptions of gardens in the Greek novel and the representation of gardens in Roman domestic painting. As this example shows, the cultural interaction between Greek and non-Greek contexts in relation to the concept of space also constitutes a subject of interest to our group.

The work on the chorus from a spatial perspective is also articulated with the previously mentioned lines of research within the group, such as the space of women, as choruses are especially associated with

7. «Los contextos del drama ático: de la inserción en la *polis* a la teorización filosófica» Research Group (FFI2009-13747, PI: Jaume Pòrtulas).

maidens in Archaic Greece.⁸ Likewise, chorality is also important in our analysis of architectural space, which is mainly focused on the temple, at different levels: choral practice often takes place in front of or around the temple, which in turn often constitutes the material support of choral representations that mirror the real choruses performing during festivals, as on the frieze of the Parthenon, the balcony of the Caryatids, or the metopes of the Heraion at Foce del Sele. Last but not least, the temple as a whole or in its constitutive parts lends itself to an abstract choral reading, as in the peristyle structure or in the rhythmic disposition of metopes and triglyphs.

Both the research work carried out within the group as summarized here and the three annual colloquia we have organized, which have brought together specialists of different interests and methodologies, scientific disciplines, and geographic and academic provenance, have been a first step towards establishing a platform that, on the international level, can contribute to the definition of a network of relationships between researchers and groups working on the concept of space in Greek culture from a variety of points of view. At any rate, an already tangible result of those meetings is to be found in the three volumes that appear listed in the bibliography of the group. As for the continuation of the research, in the near future we will be focusing our attention on the two aspects in which the convergence of our particular interests in these last years has been most intense: the studies of iconographic sources and of space articulation through literary agonistic performances, particularly those involving the chorus.

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8. This is the focus of Calame 2001.

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