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Mythical and ritual landscapes of Poseidon Hippios in Arcadia

Julie Balériaux

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It is the ancient belief that the Peloponnese was an habitation of Poseidon; and this country is regarded as sacred in a way to Poseidon, and, speaking generally, all the cities in the Peloponnese pay honour to this god more than to any other of the immortals.¹

- 1 According to Diodorus, the Peloponnesians particularly revered Poseidon. It is not surprising that this region of Greece, surrounded by the sea and shaken by regular earthquakes, was under the patronage of the god who controls both of them. However, this statement does not apply as readily to Arcadia. The land is far away from the coast, and few earthquakes comparable to those that shook Sparta and Olympia have been recorded there. And yet, the Arcadians seem to have celebrated the god with fervour, as the evidence from various sites dedicated to Poseidon shows.²
- 2 The majority of occurrences of Poseidon in Arcadia, be it in myth or cult, refer to the god under the epithet Hippios. This particular form of Poseidon, found throughout the Greek world, has long been the subject of scholarly attention. However, most interpretations, among which Farnell's³ is perhaps the most famous, have studied Poseidon Hippios in Arcadia from a symbolic point of view, focusing on the god's relationship with Demeter and attempting to draw parallels with similar myths circulating in Boeotia. Another somewhat related interpretation, notably adopted by

M. Jost⁴, was to see in him the remains of a Mycenaean horse-shaped old divinity “Hippos”, who was later anthropomorphised and associated with Poseidon.

- 3 These approaches have their limits. As John Scheid and François de Polignac rightly wrote, “*la notion de paysage religieux naît de la constatation que le culte et les rites n’existent qu’en tant qu’ils sont ancrés dans l’espace, que ce soit de manière stable ou provisoire*”⁵: a different perspective emerges when going back to the topographical evidence for the myths and rituals related to Poseidon Hippios. Following the archaeological evidence and Pausanias’ account, one can notice common trends in the spaces in which Poseidon, and especially Poseidon Hippios, is present in Arcadia. What seems to stand out is that these places are frequently subject to destructive floods, or are located in damp basins. Since we know that ancient Greek authors tended to understand and phrase natural phenomena through the framework of myths, the approach here will include a closer look at the blurred line between mythical discourses aiming to explain a natural occurrence, and the so-called scientific discourses aiming to describe and bring a rational explanation of the same natural phenomena.

Evidence of the Cult of Poseidon: Myth and Sites

- 4 Poseidon’s presence in Arcadia takes two forms. On the one hand, he is the protagonist of myths where he either abuses the grieving Demeter, or where his early childhood in the Arcadian mountains is recounted. These myths are not all directly related to a cult of Poseidon Hippios himself. On the other hand, the god has a material presence in several Arcadian poleis either through the shape of a statue or that of a religious space with a sanctuary, a temple, and/or an altar.

Mythical evidence

- 5 Pausanias’ account of Arcadia in the second century AD features relatively detailed accounts of two types of local myths told about Poseidon.
- 6 The first type of myth is found in Mantinike and has to do with the early days of Poseidon. Rhea, after giving birth to Poseidon, places him among a flock of lambs grazing near a spring called Arne. When Cronos appears and demands to eat the baby, Rhea pretends that she gave birth to a foal and gives it to the father instead of the newborn. The resemblance between this myth and the wider-spread version of Zeus’ avoidance of Cronos’ gluttony did not escape Pausanias.⁶ However, we shall not explore the rivalry between Mantinean myth and the Hesiodic version here, and will instead focus on where exactly Pausanias localizes this event.
- 7 Pausanias arrives in Mantinike from the east, crossing Mount Artemision and arriving by the ruins of Nestane. The hill of Nestane has been identified as being situated above the present village of Nestani.⁷ The village is located at the entrance of a basin that used to be frequently flooded when its natural sinkholes, located at the foot of the hills south of the basin near Nestani, were clogged.⁸ This basin has been identified as the so-called *Argon Pedion* or “Untilled Plain” mentioned by Pausanias.⁹ He then continued on his way, crossing the basin at the height of Nestane, going around the south of Mount Alesion (now Mount Barberi) that separates the Untilled Plain from the basin of Mantinea. The spring Arne was identified by G. Fougères¹⁰ as the second spring that one encounters there, c. 1.9 km southeast of Mantinea. Below Mount Alesion, Pausanias

reports the existence of a sanctuary of Poseidon Hippios rebuilt by Hadrian and a hippodrome, around 6 stadia away from the walls of Mantinea.¹¹ This zone was marked by aetiological narratives: not only is the name of the spring Arne explained by the myth, since it is said to originate from the lambs (ἄρνες) among which baby Poseidon was hidden by his mother, but the mountain itself is called Alesion because of Rhea's wanderings (ἄλη). As both places were located in the direct vicinity of the important sanctuary of Poseidon Hippios, it can be inferred that this area of landscape was marked by satellite aetiological discourses that may have originated thanks to the presence of the sanctuary.

- 8 The other type of myth, which spread with variations across the southwestern corner of Arcadia, tells of the violent encounter between Demeter and Poseidon Hippios. Variations on a similar narrative are told in Onkeion, Phigalia, and to some extent at Lykosoura. Onkeion and Phigalia are some 30 km apart on the western fringe of Arcadia, and Lykosoura is c. 20 km directly east of Phigalia.
- 9 Between Onkeion and Thelpousa lies a sanctuary dedicated to Demeter, which according to Pausanias features two wooden statues, both with Parian marble faces, hands and feet.¹² Each had a different epithet: *Erinys* for the taller one, which also held a chest and a torch, and *Lousia* for the smaller one. According to the myth, when Demeter was looking after her kidnapped daughter she was followed by Poseidon, who lusted after her. Realizing this, she turned into a mare and hid within the flock of Onkios in Onkeion. Poseidon then turned into a stallion and raped the goddess. Angry at what happened to her, she became called *Erinys*. She then washed in the Ladon and was placated by the bath: this is why, according to Pausanias, the Onkeians also call her *Lousia*. From the union of Poseidon and Demeter was born a daughter, whose name was kept a secret from the uninitiated, and the horse Arion. Pausanias claims that it is because of this myth that Poseidon was called Hippios.¹³
- 10 Almost exactly the same story is told at Phigalia, and Pausanias explicitly says that the Phigalians acknowledge that similarity.¹⁴ However, the consequences of Poseidon's act differ somewhat between the two places. At Phigalia, the furious goddess shut herself into a cave on Mount Elaion, which overlooks the Neda river, and dressed in black. Her apparel led her to be called *Melaina*. Because of her concealment, the fruits of the earth were perishing and the human race was dying. Pan accidentally found out where the goddess was, and Zeus sent the Fates to soothe her anger. This time, the product of Poseidon and Demeter's encounter was, according to the Phigalians, the goddess called Despoina by the Arcadians: she might be the same daughter as the one in the Onkeian myth, as in Arcadia Despoina is the subject of a mystery cult. In this case, the myth was supposed to have explained the cult of Demeter *Melaina*, whose cult statue took the form of a seated woman with a horse head. The Phigalians claimed that the cult antedated the Persian wars.¹⁵ Unfortunately, it is now impossible to locate the cave of Demeter *Melaina*, and there is no trace of her statue.
- 11 Finally, the mention of Despoina as being the daughter of Poseidon-horse and Demeter-mare points to Lykosoura, where an important sanctuary was devoted to Despoina from the fourth century BC at the earliest¹⁶, and where mystery rites were performed.¹⁷ Her cult statue, famously crafted by Damophon, sat next to that of her mother, framed by Anytos the Titan and Artemis holding a torch. Among the altars scattered on the site and mentioned by Pausanias was one dedicated to Poseidon Hippios as her father, but no archaeological evidence of this particular altar has yet been found.

- 12 Thus, there are two types of mythical evidence about Poseidon. The first one is in Mantinike (eastern Arcadia), where Poseidon Hippios' sanctuary is located in a zone where toponyms are explained by aetiological myths surrounding his birth. The second type stages intercourse between Demeter and Poseidon in western Arcadia, where both gods turn into horses. Only at Onkeion does Demeter give birth to a horse, but in the three aforementioned places the couple also give birth to Despoina. All of these myths are associated with religious buildings in the wider sense (monuments or statues), which they aim to explain, but in none of them is Poseidon Hippios the main divinity: Demeter and Despoina have the preponderance of the cult.

Material evidence

- 13 In addition to the instances of Poseidon Hippios mentioned above, the god is also worshipped in several Arcadian settlements. Let us now turn to the archaeological record, led by Pausanias' account.¹⁸
- 14 In Pheneos, a statue of Poseidon Hippios used to stand on the acropolis. Pausanias reports that a local legend attributed the statue to Odysseus, as an offering of thanks to Poseidon Hippios for having found his lost mares.¹⁹ The hero had also dedicated a sanctuary to Artemis *Eurhippa* ("Horse-finder") in the Pheneatan countryside, at the place where he had found the horses. As is often the case, no trace of the statue remains, and it is impossible at this point to attribute a date to it; the story of a dedication by Odysseus is certainly not a reliable indicator of its antiquity.
- 15 In Kaphyai, a flat settlement in a flat basin south of Pheneos, Pausanias mentions the existence of a sanctuary of Poseidon without going into further detail. However, the site has so far yielded little evidence.
- 16 Luckily, more evidence exists on the other sites. Orchomenos was a polis set on a steep mountain to the southeast of Kaphyai that controlled the passage between the Kaphyai plain, where the roads coming down from northern Arcadia led, and the Orchomenos plain, which led to Mantinea and Tegea. There, Pausanias records sanctuaries of Poseidon and Aphrodite with stone cult statues.²⁰ A possible candidate for the temple of Poseidon has been uncovered by the French excavations of the early twentieth century: it was a large Doric temple in the lower city, dating from around 530 BC, judging by its column capitals. Further evidence for sixth century BC activity had been found on the site in the shape of architectural fragments and offerings, which unfortunately went undocumented.²¹ However, no evidence seems to allow the firm attribution of the temple to Poseidon rather than Aphrodite. Another site has been excavated in the lower city, a peripteral monument with indistinct foundations inside a terrace of marble and limestone slabs. Geometric and later offerings were found nearby, but the monument is still unidentified.²²
- 17 In Mantinea, Poseidon Hippios was the main divinity. His sanctuary was located by Polybius seven stadia from Mantinea.²³ The old sanctuary was said to have been made of oak by the famous mythical architects Agamedes and Trophonios. It was subject to a religious ban forbidding any living being to enter it. The Arcadian king Aipyros, who disregarded the interdiction, was killed by a wave of salt water bursting from the sanctuary. Polybius, in his description of the battle of Mantinea in 207 BC, adds more to the picture by writing that the grounds near the sanctuary were flat and suitable for cavalry.²⁴ Later, under Hadrian, a new temple of Poseidon Hippios was built around the

old construction. Pausanias also records that the sanctuary was, at that time, at the edge of a thick forest called *Pelagos* (“the Sea”) — thus implying that the landscape had changed since Polybius’ account of 207.²⁵ Unfortunately, due to the prohibition, Pausanias apparently did not visit the sanctuary and therefore gives little information as to what it used to look like. The site has been identified by G. Fougères southeast of the polis, near the present village of Milea, at the foot of Mount Barberi (ancient Alesion). He discovered at that spot two massive limestone slabs (dimensions 3.5 × 1.0 × 0.5m) deeply embedded in the sandy ground, which he identified as parts of a threshold.²⁶ The potential position of the temple has been later confirmed by M. Jost and W.K. Pritchett.²⁷ Some of the earliest offerings found on site are eighth-century BC horse-headed bronze figures, recalling the epithet of the god, which were studied by M. Voyatzis.²⁸ Several inscriptions were also found on the site of the temple. An inscription with a list of names has been found in the area, dated from 425–385 BC.²⁹ Another pre-fourth-century BC inscription listing Mantinean tribes — including one named *Posoidaia* — was found nearby, suggesting the importance of the god.³⁰ Fourth-century Mantinea coins depicting a trident reinforce this idea³¹, as well as the presence of a trident on Mantinean shields according to Bacchylides.³² Hence, the evidence suggests that the cult place of Poseidon Hippios was important and old, in activity probably from the eighth century BC onwards, and important enough to justify both the attribution of the name of the god to a tribe and the reconstruction of the temple by Hadrian. The offerings and the proximity of the hippodrome indicate a cult of Poseidon “of horses”, as the god’s epithet indicates, which endured for some time.

- 18 Finally, a small temple excavated at Petrovouni, near ancient Methydrion, has been identified as the temple of Poseidon Hippios mentioned by Pausanias.³³ An early sixth-century temple was found under the foundations of a Hellenistic temple built in limestone. The earlier building was dated thanks to architectural terracottas, and the later building followed the plan of its predecessor.³⁴ Scholars have been led to identify it with that of Poseidon Hippios due to the votive offering of a group of bronze horse-headed dancers found west of the temple³⁵, which recall those found at Mantinea and the dancing animal-headed figures on Despoina’s veil at Lykosoura.³⁶

Landscapes of Poseidon Hippios

- 19 This survey of evidence concerning Poseidon Hippios in Arcadia points to three general observations. Firstly, as one would expect, there is a conspicuous link between Poseidon and horses, be it in votives or aetiological myths. Secondly, perhaps more surprisingly, there is scarcely an overlap between the places where Poseidon Hippios features in a myth and his places of worship. In fact, his adventures with Demeter are meant to explain cults of the goddess or of their daughter, not of Poseidon himself; the only cultic trace of Poseidon Hippios in these districts is his altar in the sanctuary of his daughter Despoina in Lykosoura. In the case of the god’s infancy on Mount Alesion in Mantinike, the myth gives an aetiological explanation of topographical features nearby and might hint at the epithet of the god in his sanctuary at the foot of the same mountain. But again, there seems to be no explicit link between the myth and the sanctuary itself. Thirdly, it appears that the topographical location of Poseidon’s sacred spaces is recurrently in zones affected by water issues and, more specifically, regular drainage problems. This third observation deserves more attention: in what measure is

there a correlation between Poseidon Hippios' cult locations and natural drainage issues, and if this is the case, how can we explain it?

- 20 Looking back at the sites where we have evidence of the worship of Poseidon Hippios in Arcadia, there are striking similarities regarding their natural environment. Arcadia πολυπῖδαι³⁷ ("rich in springs") is known for its damp soil, but some districts are more affected than others by the unfortunate consequences of living in a karstic landscape. The characteristics of these basins are that water streams into them from the mountains at the end of the winter and saturates their natural sinkholes (or *katavothres*), leading to large-scale floods.³⁸ Pheneos, Mantinea, Methydrion, Kaphyai and Orchomenos were districts where such recurrent drainage problems occurred. In Pheneos, Poseidon Hippios' statue on the acropolis overlooked a basin frequently swallowed by floods. They were even so regular that their constant repetition left a permanent level mark on the mountain that struck Pausanias³⁹ and Eratosthenes⁴⁰, and that is still visible today. The water that drained from that same basin resurfaced as the sources of the river Ladon on Mount Oryxis, south of the district: Strabo and Pausanias' words on this have been confirmed by modern geological investigations.⁴¹ When the *katavothres* of Pheneos were saturated and the plain was entirely flooded, it increased the flow of the Ladon river so much that it even affected Olympia.
- 21 In eastern Arcadia, drainage problems were also common. Mantinea was one of the districts most likely to be hit by the waters, for the *katavothres* at the border with Tegea were susceptible to clog and thus compromise the drainage of the basin: Thucydides says that it could become a strategic device in wars between the two cities.⁴² In Mantinea, the sanctuary of Poseidon Hippios was at the intersection of the districts' two basins. To the east was the Untilled Plain, so named because it was made agriculturally useless by the rain and the vast amount of water that came from the mountains. Pausanias even says that if it were not for the chasm at the foot of the mountain, the whole basin would have been a lake.⁴³ The other basin west of Mount Alesion, where the god had his sanctuary, is surrounded by sinkholes.⁴⁴ Methydrion, in central Arcadia, was located 1000m above sea level, and according to Pausanias was named after the fact that it was built between the waters of the Mylaon and the Maloetas rivers, which suggests that it might have been periodically affected by flooding issues as well. Finally, in northeastern Arcadia, Orchomenos was set on a mountain in the middle of two basins. The basin to the south of the city was fertile and flat, but the northern one, shared with the flat territory of Kaphyai, was transformed into a lake every winter.⁴⁵ It therefore appears from this survey that the Arcadian districts most consistently impacted by floods due to drainage issues, characteristic of karstic landscapes, were located in the eastern half of the region. These coincide with where cults of Poseidon Hippios are reported.
- 22 On the other hand, this observation does not hold true for the three sites where the encounter of Poseidon and Demeter takes place. Onkeion, Phigalia and Lykosoura were set on higher mountains in western Arcadia, and no flooding issues seem to have been reported there. The divide between places where myths of Poseidon Hippios take place and places where he is worshipped thus correlates with different types of landscapes. As a result, the second and third observations outlined above coincide. In fact, on the one hand there is scarcely an overlap between the places where Poseidon Hippios is worshipped and where he takes part in a myth, and on the other hand the places where he has a cult are characterized by serious drainage issues. These observations

emphasize the need to try to shed light on the religious topography of Poseidon Hippios in Arcadia.

“Hippios”, Horses and Freshwater

- 23 But why “Hippios”? It is not a bold claim to state that Poseidon was the patron god of horses and charioteers, as this is already made very clear by numerous instances in Homer. Arcadia was even, according to Strabo, fit for horse breeding and husbandry since it had many lush pastures. Strabo adds that the Arcadian breed of horses is “most excellent”, at a level comparable to that of the Argive and Epidaurian breeds.⁴⁶ On top of this, Poseidon is also often considered the master and progenitor of famous mythical horses. For instance, the paternity of the Arcadian Arion in Onkeion is actually attributed to Poseidon by several authors.⁴⁷ In Boeotia, Pausanias says that there was a spring called Tilphossa where Poseidon became the father of the horse Arion.⁴⁸ He also sired the first horse Skyphius while asleep on a rock or, according to another version, by striking the earth with his trident.⁴⁹
- 24 This brings us to Poseidon’s link with spring water. One of the god’s functions was that he opened springs all over Greece. On the Athenian acropolis, in Boeotia, in Argolis, in Thessaly, in Arcadia, he would crack open rocks, allowing water to flow.⁵⁰ This role may go back to the Mycenaean Poseidon: in fact, parallel to the etymological theory bringing the roots of Poseidon to the pre-Indo European *da- “earth” there exists another trend of scholarship linking it to the Indo-European root *da- “running water”.⁵¹
- 25 Thus, if at first sight it may seem strange to associate Poseidon “of Horses” with water, the two realms actually seem to overlap. Recent work on Poseidonian landscapes, such as by François de Polignac⁵², has highlighted the connection between Poseidon, horses and particular wet landscapes: isthmus, lands bridged by the “yoke” of Poseidon, just like horses or oxen linked by a chariot’s yoke. But the link with horses also appears in another way. In myths, Poseidon can open springs in one of two ways: either he does it by himself, or through the mythological horses he sired. In any case, the link between Poseidon, springs and horses is very explicit in the case of his son Pegasus. Pegasus too opens springs in rocks. Since Hesiod⁵³, the winged horse’s etymology has been linked to the Greek πηγή ‘the spring’. This etymology has been challenged in the past years⁵⁴, but the debate does not question the image of Pegasus as an opener of springs, for the Hesiodic etymology seems to have predominated in Greece through the Corinthian deeds of Pegasus and Bellerophon.⁵⁵ In a more implicit way, the relationship between horses and springs is present in springs bearing horse-related names: not far from Hippokrene is the spring Aganippe.⁵⁶ In Troizen, Pausanias tells of another Hippokrene.⁵⁷ There was also a source Hippê or Hippeion near Argos.⁵⁸
- 26 However, until recently, a more problematic interpretation of the relationship between Poseidon and horses had been put forward and was used to interpret the myths of Poseidon Hippios and Demeter of western Arcadia. L.R. Farnell⁵⁹ argued at the turn of the twentieth century that Poseidon Hippios was actually the residual manifestation of an older horse-shaped god. He was followed in this interpretation by F. Schachermeyr in his influential work.⁶⁰ This argument held that the myths where Poseidon transforms into a horse to rape Demeter-mare and where Rhea hands over a foal instead of the baby Poseidon prove that Poseidon Hippios was in fact the relic of a very ancient,

primitive horse-god named Hippos. This horse-god was subsequently anthropomorphised and assimilated with Poseidon. The hypothesis was taken further by a trend of scholarship influenced by structuralist theories and the study of primitive societies in anthropology, which was particularly popular in the 1960s-1970s. The argument put forward by the supporters of the primitive Poseidon horse-god is that one can read *i-qo* in Mycenaean tablets PY Fa 16 and PY Eq 59, perhaps indicating the existence of a divinity called “Hippos”.⁶¹ This is problematic for several reasons. First of all, it is not clear at all whether *i-qo* refers to a divinity or an animal.⁶² There is no further evidence to support this theory, and there is even less evidence of an Arcadian horse-god. Secondly, although it is true that mixanthropic representations have been found in the context of the sanctuary of Poseidon Hippios in Mantinea and dated to the eighth century BC⁶³, they alone cannot be taken as proof for the existence of a horse-god. Besides, the other animal-headed statuettes found in Arcadia were not directly linked to Poseidon, are not restricted to horse-heads, and have been so far dated to a later period.⁶⁴ Furthermore, the attribution of an evolutionist timeline to Greek religion, suggesting that it developed from the worship of primitive animal divinities to anthropomorphic gods, has now been generally rejected. In fact, the only evidence for ancient animal-gods resides in the existence of classical and later hybrid divinities, whose existence was in turn explained by putative ancient animal divinities. The argument is therefore circular.⁶⁵

- 27 The reason why horses and water were connected in myth therefore might arise from the fact that both were placed under the patronage of the same god. While we surely cannot assert that Poseidon Hippios originated from a primitive horse-god, there is evidence in the literary sources and Greek topographical names that a relationship existed between horses and springs on the one hand, and between Poseidon Hippios and horses on the other.

Aetiological Discourses

- 28 In Orchomenos, Kaphyai, Mantinike and Pheneos, there is evidence for regular natural catastrophes due to the overwhelming amount of water that came down into the basins. If the sinkholes located at the foot of the mountains did not do their job, the water level started to increase dangerously, eventually forming a lake that swallowed crops and pastures. This phenomenon was a genuine concern for the Arcadians, both because of its effect and because of its frequency. The impact of this constant issue is visible throughout Antiquity. It was discussed and alluded to in literature, and it also left archaeological traces. In fact, the reaction of the ancient Arcadians to drainage problems can be roughly grouped into two stages, which shed light on the relatively thin line between aetiological narratives and rationalising discourses.
- 29 The first stage in the aetiological explanation of natural problems comes from Homeric poetry.⁶⁶ There, earthquakes were attributed to the Shaker of the Earth, Poseidon. The Homeric epithet survived for centuries, and destructive earthquakes shaking the Peloponnese were often attributed to Poseidon’s wrath. A few examples of those were the earthquake that shook Sparta at the time of the Helots’ revolt, and the one that shook Olympia in the sixth century AD.⁶⁷ There was a high frequency of particularly high-impact earthquakes in the Peloponnese peninsula compared to the rest of Greece,

which probably led Poseidon to become one of its most worshipped gods. Diodorus makes this connection explicit.⁶⁸

- 30 The type of reasoning that explained earthquakes through myth was, between Homer and Herodotus, extended to another natural phenomenon: floods. Herodotus' description of the mouth of the Peneus river in Thessaly gives a good idea of the connection that was made between earthquakes and the consequent opening of outlets for water, which was again attributed to Poseidon.⁶⁹ Indeed, Herodotus eloquently states that:

This is reasonable, for whoever believes that Poseidon is the shaker of the earth and that rifts made by earthquakes are the work of that god will conclude, upon seeing that passage, that it is of Poseidon's making. It was manifest to me that it must have been an earthquake which forced the mountains apart.⁷⁰

- 31 Whether an earthquake really did cause the Peneus delta to look like a rock torn in two matters little: what is important is that Herodotus, Xerxes, and probably the Thessalians believed that it had been opened by Poseidon, he who shakes the earth. This statement was based on observation, since earthquakes can in fact have direct effects on watercourses: they can create, modify or close down water outlets. Nearly a millennium after Herodotus, Nonnus, in his *Dionysiaca*, attributes the draining of the great flood provoked by Zeus to Poseidon, who split the Thessalian mountains and dug a channel for water to escape towards the sea at the mouth of the Peneus, thus allowing the earth to dry.⁷¹ The mythical narrative explaining the shape that the landscape took thus survived.
- 32 On the other hand, earthquakes can have the opposite effect and can clog water outlets. This phenomenon is still observable today: in Italy for instance, excavators sometimes struggle to identify sites described by ancient sources as close to a spring or stream, because the outlet has been closed and then reopened several hundred meters away in the centuries that have elapsed since their locations were first recorded.⁷² However, a clogged water outlet may result in more serious problems, such as severe drainage issues. Thus, Poseidon's anger can manifest itself in earthquakes that subsequently provoke floods. The connection between Poseidon, earthquakes and floods is asserted very clearly by Diodorus.⁷³ He reports that, after the Achaeans refused to acknowledge the request of the ambassadors from the Panionion, Poseidon shook and flooded their land as a punishment.⁷⁴ Since Poseidon was connected to ground water and earthquakes, these ascriptions probably also led to attribute him control over floods.
- 33 The mention of Diodorus brings us to the second stage of the explanations of natural phenomena, which moves away from myth to provide more rational elucidations. Rationalizing authors of the first century BC and the first century AD connect earthquakes, ground water and floods as a chain reaction without mentioning Poseidon. Seneca⁷⁵ and Strabo⁷⁶ pictured the space underground, where earthquakes originate, as pierced by deep cavities in which underground water flowed before being dispatched into rivers. The cavities could collapse, which would cause disasters on the surface such as earthquakes, followed by floods if the caves were filled with water. Diodorus, who does not move away altogether from involving Poseidon's anger as the cause for floods and earthquakes, points out that since rivers plunge underground near Pheneos and Stymphalos, they must be swallowed by underground caves, and that this observation therefore proves the latter's existence.⁷⁷ In fact, this model was not so far from the reality, as two thirds of modern Greece mainly rest on karsified limestone.⁷⁸

More precisely, it means that the bedrock is progressively weathered by acidic water from the surface, which then sinks away through the rock.⁷⁹ The acidic water can carve underground caves in the bedrock below the sinkholes, causing a cave system. The water then circulates underground until it finds a way out, draining back to the surface further away in the shape of a natural spring. Due to the underground caves, this geomorphological layout can pose various threats. Caves caused by water are, for instance, susceptible to collapse and can cause earthquakes.⁸⁰ The natural drainage system can also become clogged or saturated and provoke floods, a phenomenon frequently experienced by the Arcadians.⁸¹

- 34 After reviewing various explanations in different non-Arcadian authors, it is time to explore what was the Arcadians' specific response to these natural threats. Pausanias alludes to it when visiting the Pheneatan countryside.⁸² He writes that the locals attribute the construction of a long diversion canal that led water to a sinkhole and the enlargement of that same outlet to Heracles. This statement should not be dismissed too readily as a local myth, since in the 1980s a team of German engineers found evidence of these works.⁸³ The constructions were estimated to date from a similar period to the Mycenaean water management works at Tiryns. This has several consequences. On the one hand, these old water management works show that the drainage issues reported by Pausanias in most of the places where Poseidon Hippios was worshipped had already existed for centuries before his visit. On the other hand, the fact that these works were attributed to the hero Heracles demonstrates that the memory of the construction work has been lost along with the technology that allowed its making. Thus, the massive works were logically attributed to the hero who solves mankind's problems provoked by nature. Remarkably, similar works have been excavated and analysed by the same team in the Orchomenos and the Kaphyai basin as well as in Tegeatike, in the south of Mantinea. The memory of these latter instances, however, seems to have fallen into oblivion.
- 35 Thus, there is an intricate network of aetiological narratives aiming to give an explanation as to how and why the Arcadians were cursed with floodable basins, either by appealing to mythical geography or by rationalizing discourses. It also appears that attempts to combat this unfortunate natural predisposition had been devised by the locals from the Mycenaean period onwards. Although there is no evidence directly attributing the cause of floods in Arcadia to Poseidon Hippios, the fact that the places where early drainage works were discovered overlap with places where Poseidon Hippios is worshipped suggests that there is a relationship between the two, particularly given that the god's relationship with earthquakes and water is well-known.

Some conclusions

- 36 By looking at cults of Poseidon Hippios in Arcadia from the point of view of religious topography, namely by looking at common trends in their natural environment and how these could indicate a preferred location to place the god, two distinct trends emerge. On the one hand, he was present in myths with Demeter in western Arcadia where he metamorphoses, but does not appear to have been worshipped on his own. On the other hand, Poseidon Hippios was worshipped in sanctuaries in eastern Arcadia while scarcely being featured in myths. The only case where the two somewhat overlap

is in Mantinea, where local myths about Poseidon's early life provided aetiological etymologies for toponyms around the sanctuary of Poseidon Hippios, without however relating directly to his cult. Certainly, the main limit to this distinction is that, as is often the case in Arcadia, most of our evidence for local myths comes from Pausanias. He can thus only provide a snapshot of the myths that were told in the second century AD, which invariably introduces a bias in the investigation. However, by moving away from the "strange" myths of western Arcadia and looking at archaeological evidence for the cults in eastern Arcadia, it appears that Poseidon Hippios was worshipped outside cities but not too far from their walls, and that the earliest certain evidence for a cult is at Mantinea can be dated to the geometric period.

- 37 The evidence is scarce and the identification of sites arduous, yet there is an overlap observable between the districts where Poseidon Hippios is worshipped and the basins regularly plagued by floods to a more significant degree than the rest of Arcadia, as the excavated Mycenaean water management works demonstrate. The literary evidence shows various connections between Poseidon and horses, Poseidon and springs, horses and springs, and Poseidon, earthquakes and floods. The reason why all of these were reassembled under the patronage of Poseidon might result from a broad interpretation of the god's sphere of action, which included water and earthquakes as well as horses.⁸⁴
- 38 Hence, moving away from a symbolic interpretation aiming to explain similar myths in different regions, namely Arcadia and Boeotia, and proposing a landscape-oriented approach on a regional scale can offer a different perspective on Greek religion and raise different issues that deserve to be considered. Departing from the Arcadian case, two points are particularly worthy of further consideration. First of all, the discrepancy between places where cults of Poseidon Hippios exist and places where he acts in myth is quite interesting and suggests that different aspects of the god were put forward in different places according to what was required of him. Secondly, the apparent preference for placing Poseidon in very wet landscapes is not, as far as we know, articulated in Arcadian myth, but rather results from empirical observation.

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NOTES

1. Diodorus, 15.49.4 (tr. Sherman, 1952).
2. JOST (1985), p. 280f; MYLONOPOULOS (2003), p. 98–133 and 271f. See also below.
3. FARNELL (1907), p. 14–26.
4. JOST (1985), p. 283–284. She later abandoned this interpretation: JOST (2007), p. 276–277.
5. SCHEID – DE POLIGNAC (2010), p. 431.
6. Pausanias, 8.8.2.
7. HANSEN – NIELSEN (2004), n. 281 and 284.
8. PRITCHETT (1969), p. 54–55, fig. 8.
9. Pausanias, 8.8.1.
10. FOUGÈRES (1898), p. 94.
11. Pausanias, 8.10.2f; FOUGÈRES (1898), p. 99 and 104. The temple and the hippodrome mentioned by Pausanias remain so far unfound.
12. Pausanias, 8.25.4–7.
13. Onkeion itself might have been found 2 km south of Thelpousa, see MEYER (1957), p. 13f for traces of a settlement with a classical temple. Some unidentified building remains found outside of Onkeion might include the temple of Demeter, based on Pausanias' indications, but it is doubtful: HANSEN – NIELSEN (2004), n. 300; JOST (1985), p. 66–67.
14. Pausanias, 8.42.1f.
15. Pausanias, 8.42.4–7.
16. See also PALAMIDIS (2018).
17. Pausanias 8.37.8–9; *IG V 2*, 514–516; *IG V 2*, 543; JOST (2003).
18. Other sites where cults of Poseidon are attested in Arcadia: Pallantion (Pausanias, 8.44.4), Megalopolis (*IG V 2*, 454 [second century BC]; Pausanias, 8.30.1), Trikolonoi (Pausanias, 8.35.6), and perhaps Tegea (*IG V 2*, 94 [third-century BC Herm]; *IG V 2*, 97 [third-century BC stele]; *IG V 2*, 73 [third-century BC triple Herm with Poseidon, Zeus, Demeter]; *IG V 2*, 95 [Archaic inscription with Poseidon, Hermes, Heracles]; *IG V 2*, 96 [perhaps second-century inscription to Poseidon Kuretiōs]).
19. Pausanias, 8.14.5.
20. Pausanias, 8.13.2.
21. OSTBY (1990–91), p. 327–337.
22. BLUM – PLASSART (1914), p. 81–88; VOYATZIS (1999), p. 135.
23. Polybius, 9.8; 11.14.
24. Polybius, 11.12.
25. Pausanias, 8.2.3f.

26. FOUGÈRES *BCH* (14) 1890, p. 80–82 ; JOST (1999), p. 207.
27. JOST (1985), p. 132; PRITCHETT (1969), p. 50–51.
28. VOYATZIS (1992), p. 278.
29. *IG V 2*, 323.
30. *IG V 2*, 271.
31. BMC Peloponnesus 186. A fourth-century coin depicting a horse might allude to Poseidon Hippios, too — BABELON (1914), p. 639.
32. Bacchylides, fr. *Epin.* 1 *apud schol.* Pind. *O.* 10, 83a.
33. Pausanias, 8.36.2.
34. See studies by KÄSTNER (1990); p. 256; VOYATZIS (1999); p. 140; MYLONOPOULOS (2003), p. 116–118.
35. VOYATZIS (1992), p. 276–78.
36. JOST (2003), p. 157–162.
37. *Hom. Hymn Pan* 19.30.
38. HIGGINS – HIGGINS (1996), p. 13 and 70f.
39. Pausanias, 8.14.1.
40. Eratosthenes in Strabo, 8.8.4.
41. HIGGINS – HIGGINS (1996), p. 70.
42. Thucydides, 5.65.4.
43. Pausanias, 8.7.1.
44. PRITCHETT (1969), p. 55 and fig. 7 and 8.
45. Pausanias, 8.13.4; PIKOULAS (1999), p. 268 n. 14.
46. Strabo, 8.8.1.
47. Among others: Callimachus, *Ia.* fr. 11, from Stephanus Byzantium s.v. *Apesas*; Apollodorus, 3.77; Lycophron, *Alex.* 153; schol. *Il.* 23.347; Quintus Smyrnaeus, 4.570.
48. Pausanias, 9.33.
49. Schol. Pindar, *Pyth.* 4.246, schol. Lycophron, *Alex.* 766.
50. See NILSSON (1963), p. 121; DE POLIGNAC (2017).
51. BURKERT (1990), p. 138; MILIĆEVIĆ BRADAČ (2003), p. 380.
52. DE POLIGNAC (2017).
53. Hesiod, *Th.* 273–286.
54. DEBORD (2010), p. 241.
55. See Stephanus Byzantium, s.v. *Pegasa*.
56. Hesiod, *Th.* 6; DOYEN (2011), p. 298.
57. Pausanias, 2.31.9.
58. Callimachus, fr. 66.8.
59. FARNELL (1907), p. 14–26.
60. SCHACHERMEYR (1950), p. 50–60.
61. GALLAVOTTI – SACCONI (1961), p. 124 and 148; PALMER (1966), p. 277–278, and (1969), p. 219–277; VENTRIS – CHADWICK (1973), p. 259–261.
62. GÉRARD-ROUSSEAU (1968), p. 120–122 ; CHIRASSI (1968), p. 945–991.
63. See above.
64. Near the megaron of Despoina in Lykosoura, 140 small terracotta votive offerings representing human silhouettes with donkey-like or ram-like heads dated between the fourth century BCE (for the few oldest ones) and the second to first century BCE (for most of them) were found, with a more recent series dated from the first century CE (see JOST [2003], p. 149–157). An archaic bronze group of four dancing figure with animal heads was found near Methydrion at Petrovouni. VOYATZIS (1990), p. 45, interprets their heads as horse head, while HILLER VON GAERTRINGEN – LATTERMANN (1911), p. 41, rather saw ram heads. The attribution of the sacred site to Poseidon is mostly based on the presence of these statuettes — see above. Both groups find a

parallel in the representations of dancing characters on the veil of Damophon's statue of Despoina (JOST [2008], p. 105–107; ASTON [2011], p. 300f). Aston argues that these figures are not characteristic of Arcadia but are often found near the region's boundaries, perhaps to underline the uniqueness and antiquity of the region in the eyes of its neighbours (ASTON [2011], p. 235–251). Pausanias also reports that Demeter *Melaina* had been represented as a goddess with a horse head near Phigalia (Pausanias 8.42.4): he is the only testimony of this occurrence, and did not see the statue for himself. The closest possible link to Poseidon would be through the myth where Poseidon and Demeter change into horses, but here the shape-shifting is limited to Demeter and Despoina's cultic realm.

65. See also FORBES IRVING (1990), p. 38–55.

66. *Hom. Hymn Pos.* 22; *Il.* 20.23, 34, 57, 67, 21.436f.

67. Pausanias 7.25.3; CARTLEDGE (2002), p. 183–184.

68. Diodorus, 15.49.3–4.

69. On this topic, see DE POLIGNAC (2017), p. 67–83.

70. Herodotus, 7.129.4 (tr. Godley 1920).

71. Nonnus, *Dionysiaca* 6.371f.

72. Personal communication with Francesca Diosono about excavations at the sanctuary of Diana at Nemi (2014).

73. Diodorus, 15.49.3–5.

74. See also Pausanias 7.24.5.

75. Seneca, *Quaestiones Naturales*, 3.8–9.

76. Strabo, 9.2.16.

77. Diodorus, 15.49.5.

78. CLENDENON (2009), p. 146.

79. HIGGINS – HIGGINS (1996), p. 13.

80. WHITE *et al.* (1995), p. 459.

81. See Pausanias, 8.14.2, 8.15.5; Plutarch, *De sera numinis vindicta*, 12; CHURCHILL-SEMPLE (1929), p. 121 and 126; PRITCHETT (1965), p. 123; CORVISIER (1994), p. 315.

82. Pausanias, 8.14.1–3.

83. See J. KNAUSS' works in the bibliography.

84. See also de Polignac's demonstration that Poseidon was the god of “*tenir ensemble*”, as well by bridging isthmus as by holding horses and oxen under the yoke: DE POLIGNAC (2017), p. 77–81.

ABSTRACTS

Poseidon has recently benefited from renewed scholarly attention, contributing to re-evaluate his role in ancient Greek imaginary. By opening the research previously limited to literary evidence to the archaeological and topographical evidence, new perspectives on “Poseidonian landscapes” have emerged. Arcadia, a land-locked region where Poseidon Hippios is celebrated with fervour, is here taken as a case study to try and go further in identifying the god's realm of action. Areas with floods seem to be his preferred worship places, while in other areas he plays a crucial part in myths but is hardly worshipped alone. There also seems to be a connection between his patronage over freshwater and horses. Overall, natural observation seems to have been instrumental in choosing the location of his worship places.

Poséidon a récemment bénéficié d'un regain d'attention, ce qui a contribué à réévaluer son rôle dans l'imaginaire grec : de nouvelles perspectives sur le « paysage poséidonien » émergent lorsque l'on inclut les sources archéologiques et topographiques à l'étude documentaire. L'Arcadie, région sans accès à la mer où le dieu est célébré avec ferveur, est ici prise comme cas d'étude afin d'affiner l'identification de la sphère d'influence du dieu. Les régions sous le coup d'inondations récurrentes semblent faire partie de ses lieux de culte favoris, alors que dans d'autres régions il occupe un rôle crucial dans les mythes sans y être honoré seul. Un lien apparaît aussi entre son patronage de l'eau douce et des chevaux. Globalement, l'observation de phénomènes naturels semble avoir joué un rôle-clé dans le choix de ses lieux de culte.

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