Review article

Revealing the mysteries of the Chora of Metaponto

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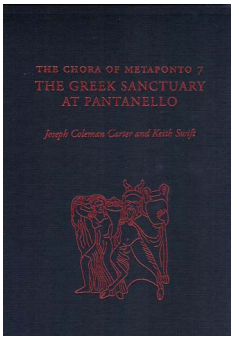
Joseph Coleman Carter & Keith Swift. 2018. *The Chora of Metaponto 7. The Greek sanctuary at Pantanello. Volumes I–III.* Austin: University of Texas Press; 978-1-4773-1243-4 $200.



The series of volumes edited by Joseph Carter on the rural landscape around the Greek colony of Metapontum in southern Italy represent a slow but steady revolution in the field of Classical studies. This latest addition to the series presents the results of excavations at the rural site of Pantanello, near modern Metaponto, first launched by the Institute of Classical Archaeology of the University of Austin in 1974. At that time, Classical archaeologists concentrated almost entirely on urban contexts, especially temples and public buildings. Rural sites were of interest only if they featured in the literary sources. To initiate fieldwork at an anonymous rural location such as Pantanello, where only some roof tiles and stone blocks were visible, was therefore a courageous undertaking for a young scholar such as Joe Carter at that time. That fieldwork, however, has proved to be seminal, not only because of the broad range of data that have been brought to light by Carter and his international team, but also because of the meticulous publication of the results in a series of high-quality volumes that have set a new benchmark. The volume under review, *The Greek sanctuary at Pantanello*, comprises three sub-volumes, totalling 1678 pages.

Pantanello is one of the few Greek rural cult sites in southern Italy to have been excavated fully and documented exhaustively. The authors reconstruct the history of the sanctuary in three main phases, from the Archaic to the Early Hellenistic periods. A few decades after the foundation of the nearby Greek colony of Metapontum *c.* 630 BC, a cult place developed around a spring at the foot of a small hill during the first half of the sixth century BC. Soon after, a collecting basin was added, as well as structures for ritual banquets and other cult activities, and, towards the end of the sixth century, a Doric temple was erected at the top of the hill above the spring (the 'Upper sanctuary'). Finally, during the fourth century BC, the sanctuary complex was destroyed and a farmhouse and a tile factory were built over the site. In addition to the various structures revealed over the 40 years of fieldwork, more than 30 000 artefacts and ecofacts have been documented and analysed.

Volume I begins with an exhaustive narrative of the annual excavations (1974–2013), which is followed by analyses of a broad range of data on the ancient environment: geology, depositional and post-depositional processes, archaeobotanical remains, pollen, faunal assemblage, insect remains and marine shells.

Volume II comprises the stratigraphy and phasing as well as the pottery and finds. The study of the ceramic assemblage is undertaken largely by Keith Swift and includes reports on Indigenous pottery, Archaic fine wares, Black gloss, Black-on-Buff, Plain and Banded pottery, cooking wares, *louteria*, Greek-type mortaria, Greek transport amphorae and *pithoi*. Additional ceramic reports include figured and Gnathian pottery and miniature vessels. Other small finds reports included in Volume II focus on lamps, metal objects, coins and lithics.

Volume III continues with reports on the architectural materials, stone sculptures, loom weights and terracottas. The remaining part of Volume III offers an

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overview of the main phases of the sanctuary followed by Carter's detailed interpretation of the cult, plus a final section that discusses the computer-based data management and analysis. The volume is completed with a bibliography and index.

It is impossible here to discuss adequately every contribution to such a substantial multi-authored volume, but what must be stressed is the breadth and detail of the reports. Many of these classes of material, such as the cooking and coarse wares from the Ionian coast, have never before been studied and published in such detail. These contributions provide a rare and valuable opportunity for the analysis of material culture of the seventh to third centuries BC, both in the *chora* of Metapontum and beyond. The methodological approach to the archaeobotanical remains also sets a new standard in the field of Classical archaeology.

The interpretation chapter will certainly stimulate much discussion, and here I briefly explore aspects that I find problematic regarding the ritual activities. According to Carter, the spring as a "source of life and fertility" (p. 1465) was linked to the nymphs and to rituals performed by young women. On the basis of pottery, clay figurines, animal bones and architectural features, Carter further argues that the sixth-century BC collecting basin, next to the sacred spring, served as a place for ritual bathing where water was central in the preparatory prenuptial rites of young women. He goes on to explore the idea of living water that purifies and acts as a force of fertility. Carter sees this as the key to the identification and interpretation of the cult: "The initiation of young women, for which purification was a required first step, was the purview of Artemis" (p. 1465). On these grounds, Carter concludes that the sanctuary was dedicated to Artemis. But he goes further still. Although the evidence is scarce and unclear, Carter suggests that the 'Oikos', a rectangular building with a votive deposit ('*bothros*') near the sacred spring, was a meeting place for initiates to the mysteries of Orphic Dionysos—"the first […] to have been discovered" (p. 16). Based on this interpretation, he argues that Artemis and Orphic Dionysus were both worshipped at Pantanello. This hypothesis, however, hinges on a small number of terracotta figurines of difficult interpretation. Systematic analysis of votive deposits in southern Italy, for example, has shown that the figurines found at a sanctuary may not represent the principal divinity of the site, and that the ritual use and meaning of terracotta votives may vary from one site to another (Lippolis 2001).

The pairing of Dionysos and Artemis at the same sanctuary, as hypothesised by Carter, is explained by the fact that "both were involved in initiation rites" (p. 19). It is at this point that the logic of the argument becomes problematic. In the ancient world 'initiation' may refer to two quite different phenomena. On the one hand, there are the 'initiates' (*mystai*) of Orpheus, Dionysus and the Eleusinian mysteries. We know of *mystai* through literary sources and inscriptions, although most of the details remain hidden—as is to be expected of a secret ritual or cult. On the other hand, the term 'initiation' refers to rites of passage, something totally different from being initiated into the mysteries. Arguably, rites of passage involved the entire community, while mystery cults were open only to a small number of initiates. Moreover, the very existence of rites of passage in ancient Greece is debatable. The concept of the *rite de passage* was developed by the ethnologist Arnold van Gennep in the early twentieth century. There is no firm evidence that the Greeks had a special term for this type of 'initiation', and scholars have questioned the value of the rite-of-passage model for ancient Greece (Waldner 2000). At any rate, the equation of mystical (Orphic, Dionysian, Eleusinian) initiation rituals and rites of passage is misleading, as it fails to take account of fundamental differences between the two kinds of rituals.

Another problematic aspect of the interpretation is the attempt to identify the site with a sanctuary of Artemis mentioned by the fifth-century BC poet Bacchylides in Ode 11: "and with good fortune you [Artemis] dwell in Metapontum, golden mistress of the people. And to you belongs a lovely precinct beside the fine waters of the Kasas [the River Basento]" (p. 1468). The passage is the only literary reference to a cult site in the chora of ancient Metapontum. To identify the 'precinct' (*alsos* in the Greek original) of Artemis with the Pantanello sanctuary is problematic for several reasons. It is debateable whether Artemis was worshipped here at all, as outlined above. Furthermore another sanctuary, discovered at San Biagio, has also been identified with the sanctuary of Artemis mentioned by Bacchylides. Carter's attempt to demonstrate that the precinct beside the fine waters of the Kasas is a reference to Pantanello rather than to San Biago ultimately relies on the collecting basin, which is seen as evidence for "initiation rites such as those described in Bacchylides' poem" (p. 1524). Bacchylides' poem, however, does not

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describe any initiation rites. It refers to the myth of Proitos washing his mephitic skin in the stream of Lousioi, but taking this as evidence for initiation rites of young women into the cult of Artemis as—according to Carter—is attested at Pantanello, is questionable. The nature of the cult activities at the Pantanello sanctuary, and the deities worshipped, must therefore be considered still open to debate. Thanks, however, to the painstaking work of Carter and his team, and the huge amount of new data that they present in this volume, there is much new evidence to draw upon.

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