

Teiresias Journal Online 4.2 (2025)

Section 2 Work in Progress

Alice SOLAZZO (Università degli Studi di Palermo, Universität Münster)
alice.solazzo@unipa.it

PhD thesis: Religious connectivity in Boeotia. The sanctuaries of the Kopais region (abstract)

My PhD thesis, a project to which I have dedicated the past three years under the supervision of Professors Hans Beck, Daniela Bonanno and Matteo Zaccarini, and which is now reaching its final stages, investigates religious connectivity in Boeotia through a case study of the sanctuaries in the Kopais region. The thesis aims to elucidate why these particular religious centres became associated with an identity that was not merely local but regional in scope. It argues that the sanctuaries situated around the lake Kopais basin played a crucial role in fostering diverse forms of religious connectivity among Boeotian communities that underpinned every political configuration that took shape in the region from the Archaic through the Hellenistic period.

The study adopts an interdisciplinary approach, bringing together literary, epigraphic, and archaeological evidence and interpreting it through a range of theoretical perspectives that fall under the broad framework of connectivity.

The first chapter provides a geographical, historical, and environmental overview of the lake Kopais basin, with the aim of clarifying its hydrography and the ways in which it shaped settlement patterns, inter-community connections over time, and the religious dynamics that involved Boeotian populations from very early periods.

The second chapter focuses on the first major hub within the religious landscape of the Kopais area: the sanctuary of Poseidon at Onchestos. This sanctuary was deeply embedded in the territorial and religious connectivity of lake Kopais due to its geographical location, its cultic functions, and its relationships with the communities living around this hydrological resource. Situated at a strategic crossroads on the boundary with the *chorai* of several major cities of the region the sanctuary of Poseidon emerged as one of the earliest points of convergence for Boeotian communities and the landscape that framed them. Its prominence made it a highly coveted site for those seeking control of the region and allowed it to develop into one of the principal centres of the Boeotian confederation from the sixth century BCE onwards.

The third chapter aims to investigate two sanctuaries, each representing a node within the network formed by the Kopais landscape: the cult site of Athena Alalkomenia, located to the south of the lake, and that of Athena Itonia, situated to the southwest of the basin, within the territory associated with the city of Koronea. Positioned in visually prominent locations within the lacustrine landscape and, like Onchestos, along one of the main communication routes, both sanctuaries played a leading role in the processes of ethnic integration that led the Boeotians to perceive themselves as part of a single group. The Alalkomeneion occupied a liminal landscape, at the interface between plain and mountain. Its physical characteristics gave rise to stories and traditions, which contributed to the shaping of Boeotian identity over the centuries. The Itoneion, on the other hand, attracted Boeotian populations due to the fertility of its location and was associated with a supra-regional network that extended to Thessaly, the region from which the Boeotians believed they originated as early as the Archaic period.

The fourth chapter, by contrast, focuses on another hub within the religious landscape of the lake: the Ptoion of Akraiphia. Located northeast of lake Kopais, this sanctuary occupied a key position along another important communication route in Boeotia, linking the southern part of the region to northern continental Greece, from which the main roads leading to the Euboean sea diverged. Its strategic position as well as the reputation of its oracular site, made it a central node of religious and cultic connectivity. This explains why the sanctuary dedicated to Apollo

attracted not only the inhabitants of nearby Akraiphia but also the wider populations around the Kopais basin, becoming one of the symbols of the Boeotian confederation.

Finally, the last chapter proposes an interpretation of the Kopais region as a connective landscape, in which water, lake access routes, and roads served as primary channels of communication among the region's populations. It demonstrates how this landscape also became a connective religious space, promoting cultic mobility. Festivals, processions, and diverse rituals made the Kopais sanctuaries the principal centres of attraction for the Boeotians as early as the eighth century BCE. The ritual and symbolic connections established around the lake's sanctuaries fostered the development of a shared Boeotian identity. The data from the individual case studies are integrated in this chapter to show how these cult sites functioned synergistically to maintain cohesion among those moving within the network, even during periods of instability. A new reading of Boeotian history from the Archaic period to the second century BCE is consequently proposed.

This study aims not only to contribute to the understanding of the religious landscape of the Kopais region but also to a broader reflection on how cult sites within a region operate as part of a network that generated mobility, inter-community ties, and shared symbols. In areas characterized by federative experiences, such as Boeotia, such networks constituted the true cradle of the regional identity that defined the communities.