



ATHENS GREEK RELIGION SEMINAR



THE ATHENS GREEK RELIGION SEMINAR, Tuesday, April 2, 2024

Susan Deacy, University of Roehampton

'I danced myself right out the womb': Athena, dance and movement in ancient Greek religion

ABSTRACT

Recent studies have offered fresh ways to understand how ancient Greek ritualised movement and dance connected participants with the deity being worshipped. But what about when it is the *deity* who dances? This paper will explore the significance of dance in relation to one such dancing deity: Athena. It will consider how, as a dancer, and exemplifying the emphasis in much modern scholarship on Athena's supposed connections with ordering, 'mind' and overcoming alterity, this god has been linked with the *pyrrhike*, the dance supposedly - but likely in fact not - used in military training. The paper will examine how, far from dancing to uphold or reflect particular structures, Athena dances at times of turmoil, such as when a prevailing order is being challenged. In particular, the paper will consider images of Athena dancing herself into being, including when she is depicted leaping from the head - the mind indeed - of another, making violent movements. The paper will explore how Athena's frenzied birth dance is echoed in the etymology of the two names of the goddess in Plato's *Kratylos* where the theonym, Athena, is derived from 'mind of god' while the 'other name', Pallas, is derived from frantic pulsations. This discussion will lead into an exploration of representations of dancers moving like - or, better, *as* - Athena, suggesting a reconfiguration of space and time where the act of worship is creating the god, and where god and worshipper are joined in an intensely empathetic creative moment.

The seminar takes place on **Tuesday, April 2, 2024, 17.00 (Athens)** with live presence at the Swedish Institute and online via Zoom.

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