



THE ATHENS GREEK RELIGION SEMINAR, Tuesday, March 11, 2025

Julia L. Shear, American School of Classical Studies at Athens

Religion and Remembrance at Athens and Plataia: Two Case Studies

ABSTRACT

Before the battle of Marathon, the Athenians vowed that, for every enemy killed, they would sacrifice a female goat to Artemis, but, so many were the dead, that the Athenians changed their vow to 500 goats annually, a ritual which they continued to carry out in Xenophon's day (Xen. *Anab.* 3.2.12). These offerings did not cease at the end of the classical period because they are attested both in second and first centuries B.C., as well as in Plutarch's day. Rituals commemorating the defeat of the Persians were not limited to Athens, as we shall see at Plataia, where the various rites were equally long lived. The longevity of these observances leads us to ask how religion created remembrance, an issue which has not been the focus of attention among scholars of Greek religion or those working on commemorations of the Persian Wars. Scholars active in Memory Studies, meanwhile, have not concentrated on remembering in the long term, that is beyond living memory, and how these processes work. Focusing on our case studies at Athens and at Plataia allows us to see the role of religion and ritual in creating, maintaining, and transmitting remembrance. As we shall see, the rituals for Artemis Agrotera at Athens and those at Plataia were very long lived: they were going strong in Plutarch's day and beyond. When these rites were performed, they created remembrances for participants and spectators of the events which they commemorated. They also influenced how later authors, such as Plutarch and Diodoros, understood the events and their related commemorative activities. The ritual setting clearly endows remembering with a longevity which it might otherwise not have. Thus, winning the battles of Marathon and Plataia were still being remembered during Plutarch's lifetime, long after the events had taken place and the original participants had died.

The seminar takes place Tuesday, March 11, 2025, at 17.00 (Athens) in a hybrid format with live presence at the Swedish Institute at Athens and online via Zoom.

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