RETHINKING THE PARTHENON FRIEZE AS A VOTIVE LIST OF DEDICATOR, RECIPIENT, AND BENEFICIARY

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THE PROBLEM

The subject of the Parthenon frieze has generally been interpreted as representing the procession of the Great Panathenaia, which was held in Athens every four years, though many other readings have also been proposed. Some recent theories interpret the frieze not specifically as a representation of the Panathenaia but rather as a generic, idealized representation of Athenian religion and culture in the Periklean period. Other scholars also think that the relief embodied Perikles’ ideology, implying the cultural institutions and diplomacy of democratic Athens through the glorification of the city-state’s religious life.

This article is one of the results of the Parthenon Project Japan 1994–1996, 2007–2009, 2011–2014, 2018–2021. Here, I could not mention all the scholars, but special thanks are due to everyone who assisted in the whole project. I am much obliged to Dr. O. Krischer, Deputy Director at China Studies Centre, University of Sydney, who not only revised my English in the preparation of this article but also inspired my thinking greatly. I also appreciate the kindness of M. Akiyama, Professor of Classical Philology and Theology at the University of Tsukuba, who assisted my reading of the inscriptions of the votive reliefs. The research project 2018–2021 is supported by JSPS KAKENHI Grant Number JP18H03566. – This article follows the abbreviations for journals, series, lexika, and frequently cited works of the DAI. For the antique authors see DNP III (1997) p. XXXVI–XLIV and Liddell – Scott – Jones p. XVI–XLV. To refer to the Parthenon frieze blocks and figures the article uses the numbering system found in Jenkins 1994.

1 James Stuart and Nicholas Revett interpreted the frieze as a representation of the Panathenaic festival. Neils (2001, 1–8) sets out in detail the scholarship before the 1950s.

2 Earlier studies up to 1999 are succinctly summarized in Hurwit (1999, 222–228, 232–234). According to him, theories of the Parthenon frieze as representing the procession of the Great Panathenaia can be placed in three categories: mythological, historical, and generic. Hurwit himself, however, does not adhere to any of these three views, instead interpreting the frieze as depicting a synopsis of many Attic festival events. The mythological approach interprets the subject as representing the procession of the first Panathenaia festival, see Kardara 1961; Connelly 1996; Connelly 2014; see also Jeppesen 2007. Boardman (1977) states the historical reading and interprets the frieze as a depiction of the Great Panathenaia in 490 before the battle at Marathon. The third, generic, view forms what is probably the prevailing approach: seeing the frieze as a representation of a ritual performed by idealized citizens. Brommer (1977) views the frieze as an idealized expression of the Great Panathenaia in the Periklean period; the perspectives of Jenkins (1994, 42), Bird et al. (1998, 10) and Shear (2001, 160) seem broadly to accord with this. For a discussion of the ritual represented in the eastern frieze see also Steinhart 1997; Steinhart 2014. For more recent studies see Wesenberg 2016a; Wesenberg 2016b; Borbein 2016; Delivorrias 2017.

3 See especially Wesenberg 1995; Pollitt 1997. Jenkins (1994, 42) sees also the peplos scene as a visual metaphor for the spirit of the Panathenaic festival, embodying the communal values of the city but at the same time transcending them. See also Harrison 1984; Harrison 1996; Nagy 1992; Neils 2001; Wesenberg 2014; Wesenberg 2016a.

4 Since the late 1990s, many readings have appeared; most tend to accord with Wesenberg’s and Pollitt’s views, seeing the relief as the representation of the cultural value-system of democratic Athens. See Hurwit 1999, esp. 227; Holloway 2000; Barringer 2008, esp. 85–91; Wrede 2004, esp. 22 f.; Schneider 2010, esp. 277; Papini 2014,
After 2000 there seems to have been no notable change in opinions, excepting certain contributions to the so-called mythical approach. B. Wesenberg and J. J. Pollitt, in particular, contributed to a reconsideration of this theme, with Pollitt asserting that the frieze imagery could be connected only «in a general and somewhat loose way» with a particular festival procession. J. M. Hurwit elaborated this idea further, emphasizing a simple fact that could be a valid premise for all attempts of interpretation: the subject of the Parthenon frieze cannot simply be a festival procession since the chariot scenes depict an athletic competition, and such apobates games were held at a different time and place to the procession. Hurwit suggests that the frieze instead represents a collection of festival events, lacking any unity of time and place, which would constitute an exceptional and unique theme in classical Greek art. D. Castriota also states that the frieze was selective and chose elements that often ignored the precise order of the events and ceremonies. And herein lies perhaps one of the most difficult problems in reading the Parthenon frieze: lacking any unity of time and space, the scenes of the frieze have often been read as representations of religious civic culture, or as a proud self-portrait of Athenian citizenry. In ancient Greek art, however, the votive relief is another pictorial category that represents an episodic subject, with the depiction of a god and approaching worshipper. Yet, despite the existence of detailed, fruitful studies on the representation of animal sacrifice in both votive reliefs and vase painting, the implications of such research have seldom been seriously considered in analyses of the Parthenon frieze. This paper therefore aims to structurally analyze the votive relief and the Parthenon frieze, in an attempt to reconstruct how a contemporary viewer may have read the frieze’s festival scenes.

ADORATION RELIEF

To understand what scenes of animal sacrifice on archaic votive offerings might have communicated to a contemporary viewer, a good example is the pinax from Pitsas (fig. 11). It appears to represent the ritual activity, yet the attached inscriptions reveal that the scene would have served as a precise list or document of the dedicator, recipients and beneficiaries related to the offering.
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of the monument. The following table succinctly explains how inscription and imagery together conveyed complicated information about those involved in the cult in Attic votive reliefs.

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Table 1. The depiction and the subject of the Parthenon frieze

On the Parthenon frieze, the scenes can be summarized as a procession towards seated gods, extended in long, band-like compositions. Male and female worshippers proceed with ritual items and sacrificial victims, while the gods sit in front of them. Compositionally as well as thematically the Parthenon frieze thus seems to belong to the category of votive relief. Moreover, the height differentiation between gods and mortals, which was always explicitly expressed in votive reliefs, is also seen on the Parthenon frieze, emphasizing the separation of the two.

Votive reliefs began to be offered to the goddess Athena at the end of the sixth century B.C. Within this category, a type of so-called adoration relief appeared roughly at the same time, in which worshipper and god face each other. Fig. 1 shows the oldest known marble votive relief, made ca. 490, the period during which the basic iconographical type of adoration was developed, as I discuss below. At the end of the archaic period the number of monuments declined, but around 420, production again notably increased. Scholars assume that the Parthenon frieze affected the genre. Figs. 2 and 3 show typical examples of votive reliefs produced at the end of the fifth century. Many similar examples followed in the next century.
The composition of the adoration relief is generally described as an encounter of a mortal worshipping an immortal, but, as in figs. 2 and 3, the figures are often represented not facing each other but merely coexisting in the same composition\(^9\). Although the typical scene depicts an altar and sacrificial animal, there are also many examples without either (figs. 2, 3, 7, 8). The frequency of the depiction of animal and altar seems to depend on the category of the scene, notably appearing more in so-called family votive scenes\(^9\). The worshipper often shows a typical gesture of prayer. While adult males, adult females, and youths are uniformly portrayed without individual character, the rendering of children varies in size to denote their

\(^9\) On the representation of the relationship between god and human in votive reliefs, see Neumann 1979, 28. 37–39; Edelmann 1999, 70 f. 154–165. In examples from the late fifth century two extreme types are found: monuments representing close contact between gods and humans and monuments that do not suggest any such closeness, such as figs. 2 and 3. On depictions of encounters between mortals and immortals in Greek art, see Klöckner 2010; Platt 2011, 31–50.

Fig. 2. Athens, Nat. Arch. Mus. 1597: Votive relief. Demeter, Kore, Aphrodite, Eros and worshipper.

Fig. 3. Copenhagen, Ny Carlsberg Glypt. 1430: Votive relief. Four immortals and worshipper on the left.
Fig. 4. Brauron, Arch. Mus. 1152: Votive relief dedicated by Peisis. Apollo, Leto, Artemis, boy servant leading bull, man, two women, four children, and female servant with kiste

various ages, from a baby in the arms of an adult to teenage boys and girls (figs. 4, 5)\(^2\). Boys and adult males wear a himation, while girls and adult females are dressed in a chiton or peplos and himation\(^2\). If the representation includes an altar and sacrificial animal, the typical scene depicts a boy servant handling a victim at the head of the procession (figs. 4, 5), and he often carries a kanoun\(^2\). On the other hand, a female servant with a kiste is usually shown following at the rear (figs. 4, 5)\(^2\). Thus the viewer could easily recognize the number, age, and gender of the worshippers. The sacrificial animal is usually a cow, a sheep, or a pig\(^2\). The divinities are often deities of nurture (e.g. Artemis) or medicine (e.g. Asklepios), but many other gods and heroes can appear\(^2\). As extant examples show a wide variety of depictions, scholars suppose that the votive reliefs were made on commission rather than bought from stock in the precinct\(^2\).

The majority of extant inscriptions that accompanied votive reliefs are simpler than dedication inscriptions in general: the typical formula was »X (person) dedicated (me) to Y (god)«\(^2\).


\(^{24}\) Van Straten 1995, 60 f.; Edelmann 1999, 146 f. Kistephoros often appears in reliefs of the so-called family and family groups of the fourth century, like the boy with an animal. The male kistephoros and the female kistephoros are not always represented as a pair; each can appear alone. About kistephoros see also Hamilton 2009.


\(^{27}\) Van Straten 1995, 66; Edelmann 1999, 93, esp. 118. 178 f.

Fig. 5. Brauron, Arch. Mus. 1151: Votive relief dedicated by Aristonike.
Artemis, boy servant leading bull (cow?), four pairs, each with child, and female servant with kiste

Many extant inscriptions are found on the upper or lower frame of the relief\textsuperscript{9}. One of the recent catalogues of this category is Edelmann 1999, comprising 455 monuments. Of these surviving examples, 46 retain both inscription and relief in good condition and date from after the mid-fifth century\textsuperscript{10}, allowing us to analyze how the inscription and relief relate to each other\textsuperscript{11}.

DEDICATOR IN INSCRIPTION AND DEDICATOR IN RELIEF

Of these 46 examples, the inscriptions of 17 monuments state that they were erected by a single dedicador, and all these in fact depict a single worshipper (e.g. fig. 7)\textsuperscript{12}. Thus the relief,

\textsuperscript{9} As Keeling (2003, 118) states, it is possible that other inscriptions might have been added on a pillar which is now lost. But any such inscriptions would in many cases have given only supplementary information such as the name of the dedicador. In the case of the relief of the pythias infra (fig. 8), for example, we find the main inscription on the upper frame of the relief, while the four names are inscribed on the lower frame. In the case of the votive of the doctors (fig. 6) the formula was inscribed in the epistyle, while five names were added under the relief. Therefore, even if there once existed additional inscriptions, they were most likely complementary to the extant main formulaic inscriptions.

\textsuperscript{10} Edelmann 1999, B5, B10, B13, B18, B24, B28, B31, B34, B37, B39, B47, B51, B55, B58, B59, B63, B66, B79, B80, C5, C9, C13, C14, C15, C17, D10, D11, D23, D28, D30, D32, D33, D39, D42, D46, E6, E8, E14, E17, F5, F7, F27, F28, G9, G11, G18.

\textsuperscript{11} Most of these were found in Attica.

\textsuperscript{12} Edelmann 1999, B5, B10, B13, B24, B28, B31, B34, B47, B51, B55, B58, B59, B63, B66, B78, B79, B80. Of these 17 examples, 16 inscriptions mention a male name as dedicador, and a male adult figure is represented in each of the reliefs, while one example refers to a female name, Hagnote, as dedicador, and the relief indeed
in these cases, seems to have represented the dedicat or facing the recipient deity of the monument\textsuperscript{33}. When more than one worshipper is represented in a relief, however, we often find a discrepancy between the inscription details and relief imagery\textsuperscript{34}. For example, there is a group of monuments that depicts a male and a female\textsuperscript{35}; occasionally with a child\textsuperscript{36}, which would seem to show a couple or a family, yet their inscriptions refer to a single male or female dedicat or. Further, in the case of the so-called family groups, in which multiple »families« would

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\textsuperscript{33} The issue is mentioned in Lawton 2007, 42.

\textsuperscript{34} TheosCRA I (2004) 285 n. 2 v. Dedications, Gr. 2 d. (E. Vikela).

\textsuperscript{35} There are three examples depicting a male and female couple with an inscription referring to a single male name (Edelmann 1999, C5, C14, C15), and one example showing a couple with an inscription referring to a female name (Edelmann 1999, C13). See also the two examples featuring a couple with inscriptions referring to both a male and a female name (Edelmann 1999, C9, C17).

\textsuperscript{36} There are six examples depicting a couple and a child in relief with an inscription referring to a single male name (Edelmann 1999, D10, D28, D33, D39, D42, D46), three examples depicting a couple and a child with an inscription referring to a single female name (Edelmann 1999, D11, D23, D32), and one example showing a couple and a child with an inscription referring to a male and a female name (Edelmann 1999, D30).
be depicted, we often find examples where the inscription similarly refers only to a single name as dedicator (e.g. fig. 5)\(^{17}\).

These examples seem to present two issues concerning the representation of the votive relief in general, particularly when the inscription refers to a female dedicator\(^{18}\). One issue relates to the beneficiary of an offering, another is the distinction between the nominal and actual dedicator, i.e. those who managed the offering and paid for the monument. Of the 46 examples in good condition, ten bear inscriptions referring to a single female name as dedicator\(^{19}\). For example, the inscription on the relief of Peisis, found in Brauron, states that the

\(^{17}\) Edelmann calls such monuments “Familiengruppen”. Two examples depict “families” in the relief, while their inscriptions refer to a single male name (Edelmann 1999, F7, F14), three examples depicting “families” bear inscriptions referring to a single female name (Edelmann 1999, F5, F27, F28).

\(^{18}\) On the topic of females as dedicators, see Edelmann 1999, 103. 141 n. 619, 889–890.

\(^{19}\) Edelmann 1999, A3 (Hagiothea), C13, D11, D23, D32, E6, E8, F5, F27, F28. Of these ten, in five cases we can confirm that the female name in the inscription definitely belongs to the adult, not the child, who also appears to be depicted in the relief. In the other five cases we cannot exclude the possibility that the female names refer to children depicted. In the cases of E6 (Xenokrateia relief), F5, F27 and F28, the inscriptions each state that the female dedicator was a wife or mother; in A3 (Hagiothea) the female name seems to belong to the depicted adult; while in C13 the female name also appears to refer to the depicted adult woman.
female was a *gynē* or wife, who scholars assume is the woman depicted walking behind the man leading the procession (fig. 4)⁴⁰. The Aristonike relief depicts four couples and four children as worshippers (fig. 5)⁴¹, and the inscription states that Aristonike was also a wife, though we are not sure why these parents and children are gathered⁴². Thus the inscription informed the viewer that Aristonike, rather than anyone else among the worshippers on the relief, was connected by a special relationship to the goddess Artemis.

**BENEFICIARY AND NOMINAL DEDICATOR**

As seen in the Peisis and Aristonike examples, in votive reliefs we often find worshippers who are not mentioned in the inscription yet, but are carved in the relief. It seems most likely that such additional figures were the beneficiaries of the hoped for divine protection⁴³. Immortals were assumed to give favor to mortals in gratitude for the dedicated monument based on a reciprocal relationship⁴⁴. For example, when a mother dedicated a votive relief, she could refer to herself as dedicator in the inscription and specify herself as beneficiary of the dedicated monument, but she could also have her family members carved on the relief so that they would belong to the beneficiaries of this dedication, too. In votives generally, the specifying of beneficiaries must therefore have been a matter of great significance, since dedications were connected to real benefits⁴⁵. The careful differentiation of children by size suggests that the relief was meant to express exactly who the beneficiaries involved in the donation of the monument were⁴⁶. Although the scenes of the votive reliefs appear to depict a scene of animal

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⁴² They seem to represent the extended family or *thiasos*. About the relationship between members of a family or extended family in votive culture, see Löhr 2000.

⁴³ Of the 46 examples in good condition, nine depict multiple worshippers in the relief, while their inscriptions refer to a single female dedicator (see n. 39). On the other hand, only six examples depicting multiple worshippers have inscriptions referring to a male dedicator (Edelmann 1999, C5. C14. C15. E14. F7. F14). Therefore, in this group of reliefs a greater number of monuments were dedicated by a female donor, which is noteworthy, since offerings were far more often dedicated by men.

⁴⁴ As ThesCRA I (2004) 270–281, esp. 275. 280 s. v. Dedications, Gr. 2.d. (R. Parker) states the dedications seem to have been made in fulfillment of a vow. Keesling (2003, 4–10, esp. 4) also emphasizes the importance of a vow in the mechanism of dedication. On the reciprocal relationship between mortal and immortal, see also Burkert 1985, 93; Linders 1987; Larson 2007a, 8 f.; Kearns 2010, esp. 264–275; Naiden 2015, esp. 39–130; Keesling 2003, 6–10; Jim (2014, 59–97, esp. 65–67. 76) criticizes the simplified assumption of a reciprocal relationship; she feels that modern scholarship over-emphasizes the idea of Greek religion being fundamentally foreign to the perspective of researchers today.

⁴⁵ See ThesCRA I (2004) 276 s. v. Dedications, Gr. 2.d. (R. Parker). For example, the inscription for an offering often includes ὑπὲρ τῶν παιδίων as a formula.

⁴⁶ Edelmann 1999, 45.