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Connecting the Greeks

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Connecting the Greeks

Multi-scalar festival networks in the Greek and Roman world

Research project (NWO and OIKOS Anchoring Innovation Research Initiative) of the University of Groningen. Onno van Nijf (Principal Investigator); Christina Williamson (Supervisor and Postdoc); Adam Woznura, Tom Britton, and Robin van Vliet (PhD Candidates)

Festivals, with games at Olympia and Delphi, formed the hallmark of Classical Greek civic life (fifth and fourth century BC). Less well known, however, is that their actual flourish occurred during the Hellenistic and Roman periods, when the urban network expanded. By this time, the traditional Greek festival was popular as never before. Throughout the Greek world and Asia Minor in particular, old festivals were revived or reorganised, and new ones were founded in large numbers. An important innovation, however, was that these festivals now operated on different scales at the same time: local, by consolidating the (new) citizenry of the polis; regional, by including surrounding cities in athletic competitions; and ‘global’, by forging links between cities across the expanded Greek world. The *Connecting the Greeks* project aims to shed new light on the development of a shared festival culture in the Hellenistic and Roman periods, anchored in existing Greek festival traditions, and proposes that festivals formed a driving force that played a crucial and active role in the continuous and complex process of interconnectivity that arose between the Greek communities and the new powers: Hellenistic kingdoms and eventually the Roman empire.

It is hypothesised that the festivals formed networks of interconnectivity, and hence were crucial for the ‘globalisation’ processes widely observed during the Hellenistic and Roman era (see figure 1). The project adopts a network theoretical approach as a means to conceptualise and analyse the interactions produced by and around agonistic festivals.¹ Moreover, this project opens up a new perspective on the role of festivals in connecting the Greek and Roman world. Although previous studies have highlighted interesting aspects of festivals, for instance the role festivals played in ancient public life and the importance of athletics in identity-politics, this role has hitherto been understudied.² To analyse and visualise this complex story of interconnectivity, innovative tools, theories and methods derived from social sciences and digital humanities are used, such as network analysis, agent-based modelling and deep-mapping with geographic information systems (GIS).

This project will study agonistic festivals from several angles and comprises distinct but interrelated research projects conducted on different (local, regional, and global) scales. Christina Williamson will study the ways in which festivals shaped local identity and the creation of multi-vocal memories through place at sanctuaries of Kos,

Stratonikeia, and Pergamon. Adam Woznura will research festival networks and regional identity in the Hellenistic period, with a particular focus on how Thessalian festivals formed a network not only intra-regionally, but also between other regions. Tom Britton will explore the ways in which the policies of the Hellenistic kings influenced, and were in turn influenced by, the numerous actors within the network, along with efforts to align interactions within the network with the political projects of particular dynasties. Robin van Vliet will work on Rome-oriented festivals. She especially focuses on how the spread of Roman influence was perceived and experienced in the Greek world and the particular role that Rome-oriented festivals played as a driving force in connecting the Greek and Roman world.

The outcome of this project will open up a new perspective on festivals, highlighting a rapidly-changing set of institutions key to our understanding of identity and communication in the Hellenistic and Roman Mediterranean – one that drew in actors from across a diverse range of geographical, social and political backgrounds.

Endnotes

- 1 For recent fruitful examples of such an approach, see Malkin, I. 2011, *A small Greek world*, Oxford University Press, Oxford; and Mack, W. 2015, *Proxeny and polis: institutional networks in the ancient Greek world*, Oxford University Press, Oxford.
- 2 See for example Pleket, H.W. 2010, “Games, prizes, athletes and ideology: some aspects of the history of sport in the Graeco-Roman world” in *Greek Athletics*, (ed.) J. König, pp. 145-174.

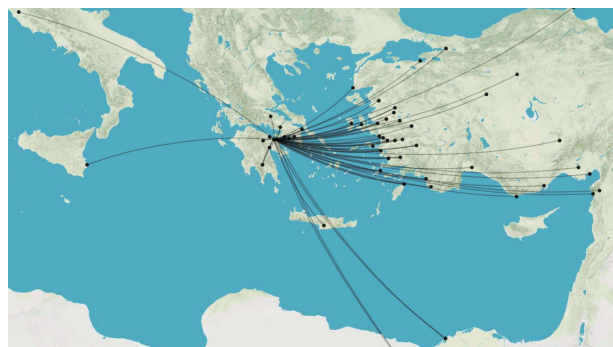


Figure 1. Network of participants in Isthmian Games between 323-31 BCE (figure Adam Woznura).