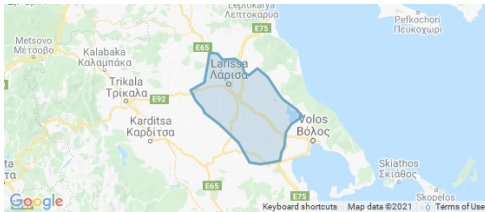


# Marmarini Stele

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**Entry tags:** Sacred Law, Inscription, Greek Religions, Greek Cult, Ancient Greek text, Mystery Religion, Text, Anatolian Religions, Religious Group, Phoenician Cult, Syncretic Religions, Hellenistic Religions

The Marmarini inscription was written on a large orthographic stone stele dating to the middle of the 2nd c. BC (probably the first half rather than the second half of the century) on palaeographic grounds. The site of its original location (a sanctuary) is unknown as the stele was looted and dumped on the side of the road in the area of Marmarini to the northeast of Larissa in Thessaly, Greece. The inscription details the rites and regulations for behaviour at the sanctuary in which the stele was erected. The inscription provides details concerning the sanctuary, as well as a festival to an unnamed goddess. The text provides information concerning a festival to an unnamed goddess, with other subsidiary deities such as Artemis Phylake. The cult described by the inscription seems to have had a lot of Near Eastern features (names of calendar months, proscription against pork, rituals from Near Eastern traditions, etc.). The stone stele was found in 2002 and the text and translation of the inscription has only recently been published (2015).



**Date Range:** 199 BCE - 150 BCE

**Region:** Larissa Plain

**Region tags:** Europe, Southeastern Europe, Southern Europe, Eastern Mediterranean, Greece

The Larissa plain is one of the two large plains of Thessaly (the other being the Karditsa plain). It is named after its largest city both in antiquity and the present.

## Status of Readership:

✓ Elite    ✓ Religious Specialists    ✓ Non-elite (common people, general populace)

## Sources and Corpora

### Print Sources

Print sources used for understanding this subject:

- Source 1: Decourt, Jean-Claude, and Athanasios Tziafalias. 2015. "Un règlement religieux de la région de Larissa." *Kernos* 28: 13-51.
- Source 2: Parker, Robert, and Scott Scullion. 2016. "The Mysteries of the Goddess of Marmarini." *Kernos* 29: 209-266.
- Source 3: Carbon, Jean-Mathieu. 2016. "The Festival of the Aloulaia, and the Association of the Alouliastai: Notes Concerning the New Inscription from Larisa/Marmarini." *Kernos* 29: 185-208.

## General Variables

### Materiality

## Methods of Composition

– Incised or Inscribed



Method of inscription

– Chisel

Medium upon which the text is written/incised

– Stone

Was the material modified before the writing or incising process?

– Physical preparation

Notes: The stone block was cut and carved to have the imitation of a pediment with three akroteria.

Was the text modified before the writing or incising process?

– Physical preparation

## Location

Is the text stored in a specific location?

[Note at which point in time, for reference, if known; select all that apply]

– Field doesn't know

Notes: The stele was found after having been looted and disposed in 2002. The text of the inscription indicates that it was set up at a sanctuary but the location of this sanctuary, as well as the exact location in which this stele was erected in that sanctuary, is unknown.

Is the location where the text stored accompanied by iconography or images?

– Field doesn't know

Is the area where the text is stored accompanied by an-iconic images?

– Field doesn't know

## Production & Intended Audience

### Production

Is the production of the text funded by the polity?

– Field doesn't know

Notes: The stele seems to have been undertaken by the administrators of the sanctuary. Carbon 2016

argues that the body responsible for publishing the rules of the sanctuary were more likely a private body rather than a city. Parker 2016 does not think it likely that it is unlikely to have been published by an association as it is unlike other surviving decrees by associations. He points out that because the cult was open to the uninitiated as well as the initiated and the fact that shrines to foreign deities (e.g. the cult of Bendis in Athens, run by an association) were sometimes incorporated into civic cult, we should not preclude the possibility that those responsible for the sanctuary (and therefore the publication of this sacred law) was the city-state.

Is the text considered official religious scripture?

– No

Written in distinctly religious/sacred language?

– No

Notes: It is written as a decree, but dealing with religious/sacred matters.

### Intended Audience

What is the estimated number of people considered to be the audience of the text

This should be the total number of people who would serve as the intended audience for the text.

– Field doesn't know

Does the Religious group actively proselytize and recruit new members?

– Field doesn't know

Notes: The cult to an unknown deity seems to have been either a foreign (i.e. non-Greek and probably Near Eastern) import into Thessaly and syncretized with local cults. The cult did include initiation but was also open to the uninitiated (to a certain extent). It is unknown whether the members actively recruited new members or if initiation was exclusive.

Are there clear reformist movements?

(Reformism, as in not proselytizing to potential new conservative, but "conversion" - or rather, reform - to the "correct interpretation"?)

– No

Is the text in question employed in ritual practice?

– No

Notes: The text contained regulations for behaviour and activities within a place of ritual but was not in itself an object of ritual.

Is there material significance to the text?

– Yes

↳ Is it visible?

– Yes

Notes: It was meant to be read by those visiting the sanctuary, so yes.

↳ Is it hidden?

– No

↳ Can it be touched?

– Yes

↳ Does touching the text during ritual have a specific function?

– No

↳ Does the material significance have an esoteric function?

– No

↳ Does the text serve a protective function?

– No

↳ Does the text serve a healing function?

– No

↳ Does the text serve a cleansing function?

– No

↳ Does the text serve as a form of expiation?

– No

↳ Does the text serve as an incantation?

– No

↳ Has the materiality of the text been altered?

– No

↳ Are there debates about whether or not altering the materiality of the text is acceptable?

– No

↳ Other important aspects of materiality with regard to the text?  
– No

↳ Are there material substance that commonly accompany the text?  
Please specify the substances in the sub-questions  
– No

## Context and Content of the Text (Beliefs and Practices)

### Context

Is the text itself accompanied by art?

– Yes

Notes: The top of the stele was cut and carved into the shape of a pediment (gables of a roof in Greek architecture) with three akroteria on the cornices.

↳ Calligraphy?  
– No

↳ Illustrations?  
– No

↳ Illuminations?  
– No

Are there multiple versions of the text?

– No

Is the text part of a collection of texts?

– No

If the text is not explicitly scripture, is it part of another important literary tradition?

– No

### Content

Is the text - or does the text include - a ritual list, manual, bibliography, index, or vocabulary?  
(Select all that apply)

– Ritual list

Notes: As a *lex sacra*, it only coincidentally includes a list of rituals that can be performed at the sanctuary, the proper sacrifices/offerings to carry out, who was allowed to participate in activities, proper treatment of the cult statue, etc. Whether or not this was a complete list of the rituals performed at the sanctuary is unknown. I would not call it a ritual manual even though it contains prescriptions for how rituals should be carried out because the text can be vague in details.

Are there lineages or a single lineage established by the text?

– No

Does the text express a formal legal code?

– Yes

↳ Are there formal institutions merged with the state or polity of the religious group?  
– Field doesn't know

Formulating a specifically religious calendar?

– Yes

↳ What is the arrangement of the calendar? [Select all that apply]  
– Lunar?

Notes: The surviving month names in the inscription seem to have been from the standard Mesopotamian calendar, which was lunar. I hesitate to state with extreme certainty that the calendar of the cult described in the Marmarini stele was lunar as I would not hold it impossible that Mesopotamian dates were ignored when transferred to a Thessalian Greek context but think it more likely that the calendar was lunar.

↳ Does the calendar specifically dictate acceptable times for certain activities?  
– Yes

↳ Planting?  
– No

↳ Water management? (such as opening or closing dams/dykes)  
– No

↳ Harvest?  
– No

↳ Naming ceremonies (for toddlers)?

– No

↳ "First haircuts" (pre-teen)

– No

↳ Ceremonies marking puberty/entry into adulthood?

– No

↳ Marriage?

– No

↳ House construction (often a metaphor for marriage)?

– No

↳ Divorce?

– No

↳ Warfare?

– No

↳ Funerary services?

– No

↳ Trade/commerce?

– Yes

Notes: Side A of the inscription lists the dates in which prescribed rituals and instructions were to be conducted. Side B several instances in which the sacrificial animals/offerings could be purchased from the sanctuary. In this sense, commerce (the sale of specific animals) is dictated by the calendar.

↳ Festivals?

– Yes

↳ Frequency of festivals?

–Specify: Annual

Notes: An annual festival called the Eloulaia/Aloulaia is mentioned as having been celebrated from the 12th to the 19th of the month of Elul (Itonios in the

Thessalian calendar). It also mentions another major festival called Nisanaia celebrated on the 9th of an unknown month (probably Aphrios), as well as an annual sacrifice to Adar in a month preceding the Nisanaia (probably the 7th of Leschanorios).

↳ Do all members of the society participate in the festival(s)?

– All members

Notes: The festivals themselves seem to have been open to both current and potential initiates but certain activities were restricted to initiates.

↳ On average, how many participants are gathered at festivals?

– number: Unknown

↳ Is feasting part of the festival(s)?

– Yes

↳ Is food consumption limited to certain members of the population?

– No

↳ Pilgrimages?

– No

↳ Feasting?

– Yes

↳ Is feasting connected to the worship/sacrifices performed in accordance with the guidelines of the text?

– Yes

↳ Is feasting sponsored by the same entity that produced the text/copies of the text?

– Yes

↳ Priests

– Field doesn't know

↳ Other spiritual elect



– No

↳ Local elites

– Yes

↳ Patricians

– No

↳ Private contributions

– Yes

Notes: The regulations in the text indicate that any individual who wishes to set up a table for the deity during certain parts of the year are to bring a certain amount of specific food/drink/serving implements and money to the sanctuary.

↳ Communal elders

– Field doesn't know

↳ Other

– Specify: NA

↳ Does feasting occur in a specific locations in accordance with guidelines from the text?

– Yes

↳ Specify

– Specify: Various locations

Notes: The inscription mentions various locations within the sanctuary (prothyron, naos, altars, peristyle, etc.). Certain areas are barred from the uninitiated (e.g. naos, Great Altar). The food and drink were to be placed on the trapeza.

– Yes

↳ Is feasting connected to the worship/sacrifices performed in accordance with the guidelines of the text?

– Yes

↳ Is feasting sponsored by the same entity that produced the text/copies

of the text?

– Yes

↳ Priests  
– Field doesn't know

↳ Other spiritual elect  
– No

↳ Local elites  
– Yes

↳ Patricians  
– No

↳ Private contributions  
– Yes

Notes: The inscription gives instructions for what sorts of food/offerings to bring to certain feasts individuals wish to sponsor and the financial cost of doing so.

↳ Communal elders  
– Field doesn't know

↳ Other  
– Specify: Associations

↳ Does feasting occur in a specific locations in accordance with guidelines from the text?

– Yes

↳ Specify  
– Specify: Various parts of the sanctuary

Notes: Both sides of the inscription describe the names of parts of the sanctuary (prothyron, naos, altars of various deities, peristylion, etc.). The uninitiated are barred from parts of the sanctuary (prothyron, naos, the great altar). Sacrifices occur on the altar of the specific deity being honoured/recognized on a specific date. The food is to be set up at the trapeza (offering table).

## Beliefs

Is a spirit-body distinction present in the text?

– No

Is belief in an afterlife indicated in the text?

– No

Is belief in reincarnation in this world specified in the text?

– No

Are there special treatments for adherents' corpses dicated in the text?

– No

Does the text indicate if co-sacrifices should be present in burials?

– No

Does the text specify grave goods for burial?

– No

Are formal burials present in the text?

– No

Are there practices that have funerary associations presented in the text?

– No

Are supernatural beings present in the text?

– Yes

Notes: Several deities are mentioned, some are unnamed.



A supreme high-god is present

– Field doesn't know

Notes: As the main deity of the sanctuary is unnamed in the inscription, it is uncertain whether it was a supreme high deity. What is certain is that the deity was a goddess, and that it was possibly a Near Eastern import.

Previously human spirits are present

– No

Non-human supernatural beings are present

– No

Does the text attest to a pantheon of supernatural beings?

– Yes

↳ Organized by kinship based on a family model?

– Field doesn't know

↳ Organized hierarchically?

– Field doesn't know

↳ Power of beings is domain specific?

– Yes

Notes: The gods described in the inscription seem to have had different roles. For example, the goddess Moira (Fate) has an altar at the sanctuary and specific sacrifices during specific circumstances were prescribed in the text.

↳ Other organization of pantheon?

– Specify: Unknown

Notes: As the cult seems to have been imported from the Near East (with Syrian, Phoenician, general Semitic, Mesopotamian influences), there were both Near Eastern deities (e.g. Men, Adara, and a deity called the Pan of Syria in the interpretatio graeca--the Syrian name is unreadable in the inscription) and Greek deities (e.g. Artemis Phylake, Moira, Helios. Because of the Interpretatio Graeca (i.e. the names of foreign deities are associated with Greek deities and renamed accordingly), as well as the fact that imported deities are often easily domesticated in their new context, whether these deities were all considered part of the same extended family or whether they acquired new mythologies is unknown.

Are mixed human-divine beings present according to the text?

– No

Is there a supernatural being that is physically present in the/as a result of the text?

– No

Are other categories of beings present?

– Other [specify]: NA

Does the text guide divination practices?

– No

### **Supernatural Monitoring**

Is supernatural monitoring present in the text?

– No

Do supernatural beings mete out punishment in the text?

– No

Do supernatural beings bestow rewards in the text?

– No

### **Messianism/Eschatology**

Are messianic beliefs present in the text?

– No

Is an eschatology present in the text?

– No

### **Norms & Moral Realism**

Are general social norms prescribed by the text?

– No

*Notes:* The prescriptions in the text are not meant to be social norms but rather regulations for behaviour and participation in the cult at the sanctuary. In many ways, the practices in the sanctuary are foreign and would be outside what would have been considered social norms in this region (e.g. prohibition of pork--and even then the prohibition is on offering, not eating).

Is there a conventional vs. moral distinction in the religious text?

– No

Are there centrally important virtues advocated by the text?

– No

### **Advocacy of Practices**

Does the text require celibacy (full sexual abstinence)?

– No

Does the text require constraints on sexual activity (partial sexual abstinence)?

– No

Does the text require castration?

– No

Does the text require fasting?

– No

Does the text require forgone food opportunities (taboos on desired foods)?

– Yes

*Notes:* There is a prohibition on the offering of pork at the sanctuary and a recommendation for initiates to abstain from certain foods for three days before entry.

Does the text require permanent scarring or painful bodily alterations?

– No

Does the text require painful physical positions or transitory painful wounds?

– No

Does the text require sacrifice of adults?

– No

Does the text require sacrifice of children?

– No

Does the text require self-sacrifice (suicide)?

– No

Does the text require sacrifice of property/valuable items?

– No

Does the text require sacrifice of time (e.g. attendance at meetings or services, regular prayer, etc.)?

– No

Does the text require physical risk taking?

– No

Does the text require accepting ethical precepts?

– No

Does the text require marginalization by out-group members?

– No

Does the text require participation in small-scale rituals (private, household)?

– Yes

↳ What is the average interval of time between performances?  
– Field doesn't know

Does the text require participation in large-scale rituals?

– Yes

↳ On average, how many participants gather in one location?  
– Field doesn't know

↳ Interval of time between performances (in hours)  
– Field doesn't know

↳ Are there orthodoxy checks?  
– No

↳ Are there orthopraxy checks?  
– No

↳ Does participation entail synchronic practices?  
– Yes

↳ Is there use of intoxicants?

– Yes

Notes: Wine was consumed/offered.

Are extra-ritual in-group markers present as indicated in the text?

– No

Does the text employ fictive kinship terminology?

– No

Does the text include elements that are intended to be entertaining?

– No

Does the text specify sacrifices, offerings, and maintenance of a sacred space?

– Yes

↳ Are sacrifices specified by the text?

– Yes

↳ Animal sacrifice?

– Yes

↳ Human sacrifice?

– No

↳ Are there self-sacrifices specified by the text?

– No

↳ Are there material offerings present?

– Yes

↳ Are they mandatory?

– No

↳ Are they composed of valuable objects?

– Field doesn't know



↳ Are they composed of daily-life objects?

– Yes

↳ Are material offerings interred at this place (in caches)?

– Field doesn't know

↳ Are there particular smells associated with material offerings?

– Yes

Notes: A great deal of various types of incense and other aromatic material is prescribed by the inscription to be censed to the goddess' statue and also thrown into the fire during a holocaust sacrifice.

↳ Are there particular visual stimuli (colors, symbols) associated with the offerings? (I.e. 'must be bright' 'must include red')

– No

↳ Other?

–Specify: NA

↳ Is attendance to worship/sacrifice mandatory?

– No

↳ Is the maintenance of the place regulated by the text?

– Yes

↳ Is it required?

– Yes

↳ Is there cleansing (for the maintenance)?

– Yes

Notes: The statue of the goddess is bathed. There are also sacrifices required if a restricted place in the sanctuary is entered by an uninitiated individual or those barred from entry because of pollution enter the sanctuary. There are periods of physical cleaning of the place as well.

↳ Are there periodic repairs/reconstructions?

– Field doesn't know

↳ Is the maintenance performed by permanent staff?

– Field doesn't know

Notes: The maintenance is prescribed but it does not specify whether priests, volunteers, or other sanctuary personnel were to carry them out.

↳ Other?

–Specify: NA

## Institutions & Production Environment of Text

### Society & Institutions

Society of religious group that produced the text is best characterized as:

– Other

Notes: It is debated as there is not a single individual named in the surviving part of the text. Carbon 2016 argues that it was a private association but Parker 2016 argues that we shouldn't exclude the possibility that the responsible body was a polis.

Are there specific elements of society that have controlled the reproduction of the text?

– Other

Notes: As in the above question, it is debated as there is not a single individual named in the surviving part of the text. Carbon 2016 argues that it was a private association but Parker 2016 argues that we shouldn't exclude the possibility that the responsible body was a polis.

Are there specific elements of society involved with the destruction of the text?

– Other

Notes: NA

### Welfare

Does the text specify institutionalized famine relief?

– No

Does the text specify institutionalized poverty relief?

– No

Does the text specify institutionalized care for elderly & infirm?

– No

Other forms of welfare?

– Yes

Notes: There is a sense of euergetism in the text as private individuals could fund feasting for members of the cult.

## Education

Are there formal educational institutions available for teaching the text?

– No

Are there formal educational institutions specified according to the text?

– No

Does the text make provisions for non-religious education?

– No

Does the text restrict education to religious professionals?

– No

Does the text restrict education among religious professionals?

– No

Is education gendered according to the text?

– No

Is education gendered with respect to this text and larger textual tradition?

– No

Does the text specify teaching relationships or ratios? (i.e.: 1:20; 1:1)

– No

Are there specific relationships to teachers that are advocated by the text?

– No

Are there worldly rewards/benefits to education according to the text specified by the text itself?

– No

## Bureaucracy

Is bureaucracy regulated by this text?

– No

## Public Works

Does the text detail interaction with public works?

– No

## Taxation

Does the text specify forms of taxation?

– No

## Warfare

Does the text mention warfare?

– No

## Food Production

Does the text mentioned food production/disbursement?

– Yes

↳ Does the text in question dictate how the religious group in question provide food for themselves?

– No

↳ Does the text celebrate/restrict food provided to the group's adherents by an institution(s) other than the religious group in question?

– No

↳ Which of the follow are forms of ritual food production [choose all that apply]?

– Pastoralism

– Small-scale agriculture/horticultural gardens or orchards

– Large-scale agriculture (E.g., monocropping, organized irrigation systems)

## Bibliography

### General References

Reference: Jean-Mathieu Carbon. The Festival of the Aloulaia, and the Association of the Alouliastai: Notes Concerning the New Inscription from Larisa/Marmarini.

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Reference: Maria Mili. Religion and Society in Ancient Thessaly. Oxford: Oxford University Press.