

The Architecture of Access: Ramps in Ancient Greek Sanctuaries

By adopting the perspective of modern disability studies in ancient architectural studies, we can ask more questions of and consider potential interpretations for the material remains of the past. Through careful study of the architectural layout of public spaces and facilities alongside epigraphic, iconographic, and literary accounts of transportation and mobility aids, I argue that ancient Greeks gave serious consideration to the general accessibility of spaces and places. In particular, I argue that ancient Greeks planned and constructed ramps in order to make sanctuaries more accessible to those who would not easily ascend or descend steep stairs. Providing access to mobility-impaired human traffic was not the sole purpose for these ramps, but it was a recognized and intended benefit.

Well-known examples of ramps include the one leading to the top of the Acropolis in Athens and that on the Temple of Aphaia on Aegina. These ramps could have been constructed only to convey major dedications, building materials, and/or sacrificial animals, with little active thought given to their potential use by humans. At places where literary and epigraphic testimonia document high concentrations of incapacitated individuals, however, we find a higher concentration of ramps. At the healing Sanctuary of Asklepios at Epidauros, for example, a ramp leads not only into the main temple, but ramps also provide access to and through numerous subsidiary buildings, including the *propylaia*, the *tholos*, and the gymnasium. At the Sanctuary of Asklepios at Corinth, one ramp leads into the temple and another stretches down to the courtyard to the west. What is more, literary and epigraphic sources (e.g. Herodotus, the Epidaurian *iamata*, Hippocratic texts, and Lysias) provide evidence for transportation aids for the mobility-impaired, including carriages, canes, crutches, litters, and carts, all of which would benefit from ramps. By acknowledging that some people lived and travelled in antiquity with

various disabilities, we can reconsider the material remains of the ancient world. In this case, we can consider that ramps were actively conceived as a means of access for humans, animals, and heavy materials.