



Thinking comparatively about Greek mythology XV, with a focus on He#rakle#s of Tiryns as military leader of the Mycenaean Empire

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[Home](#) » [By Gregory Nagy](#) » Thinking comparatively about Greek mythology XV, with a focus on Hēraklēs of Tiryns as military leader of the Mycenaean Empire

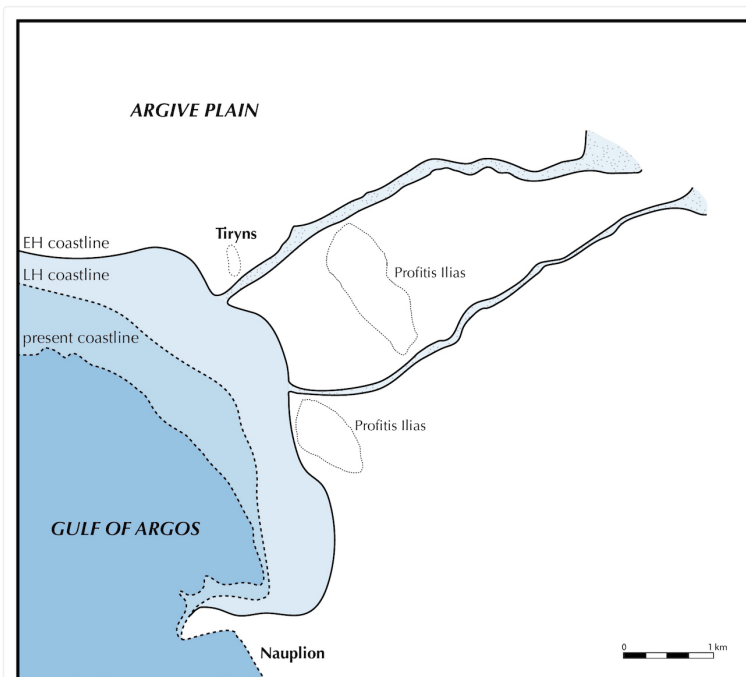
Thinking comparatively about Greek mythology XV, with a focus on Hēraklēs of Tiryns as military leader of the Mycenaean Empire

October 31, 2019 By Gregory Nagy listed under By Gregory Nagy

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§0. While analyzing comparatively the myths about Hēraklēs as a leader of people in general and of military expeditions in particular, I have outlined in the essay TC XII, [2019.10.11](#), the special relevance of Tiryns, a strategically vital stronghold of the Mycenaean Empire, as the designated place where this Strong Man is stationed in the course of performing his services for Eurystheus, king of Mycenae and over-king of the people of the Mycenaean Empire. In my essay here, I now note also the relevance of ancient Tiryns as a strategic point of access to the Aegean Sea and, thereby, to reachable destinations throughout the Mediterranean world. The map that I show here helps illustrate what I have just noted.



Map 1. From an article by Eberhard Zangger 1994; drawing by Jill Robbins after original map by Rosemary Robertson. The abbreviations EH and LH indicate approximate datings. EH = Early Helladic: in this case, around the middle of the third millennium BCE. LH = Late Helladic: in this case, around the last two centuries of the second millennium BCE.

§1. The situating of ancient Tiryns-by-the-sea, as visualized in Map 1, must have involved structures that accommodated the beaching and the launching of ships, and there is evidence for positing the kind of advanced technology that such structures would have required. Supporting evidence can be found in the archaeological vestiges of a dam as pictured in Map 2. This dam, combined with a channel, also pictured in Map 2, had once diverted the waters of a nearby river from the immediate sea-front of Tiryns, thus protecting this sea-front from the ongoing process of silting caused by the local rivers in general. The technological sophistication that would have been required to construct the dam and the channel indicates, I think, the likelihood of a comparably sophisticated infrastructure for the beaching and the launching of ships.

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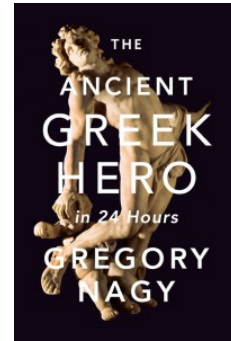
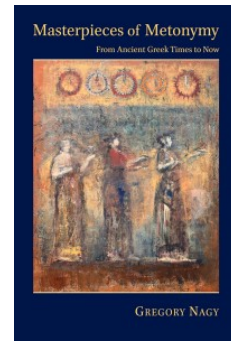
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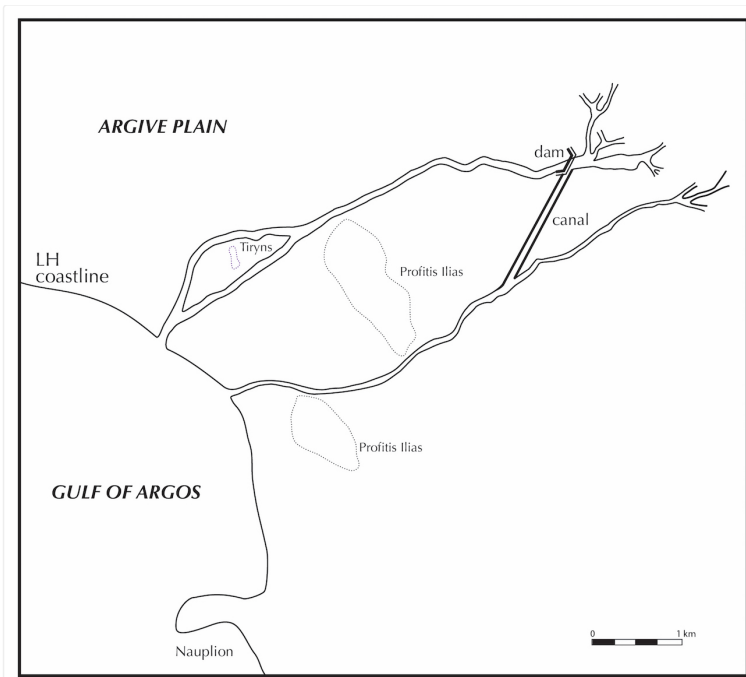
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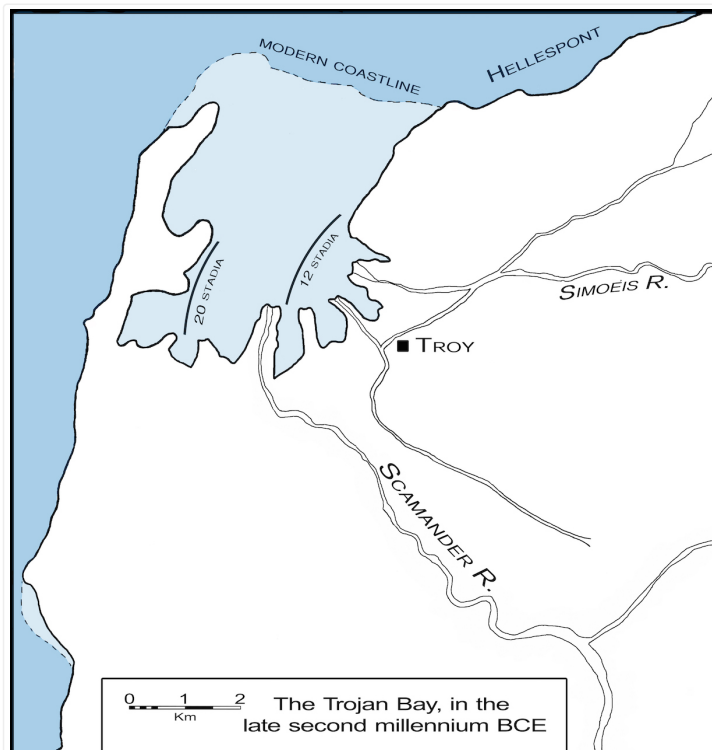
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Map 2. Again, from the article by Eberhard Zangger 1994; drawing by Jill Robbins after original map by Rosemary Robertson. The time when the dam was built is unclear, but the most likely dating gravitates toward the last two centuries of the second millennium BCE.

§2. I posit the prehistoric existence of another such infrastructure in the environs of ancient Troy, as reconstructed in Map 3. Among the destinations accessible by way of ancient Tiryns-by-the-sea, shown in Map 1, would have been ancient Troy-by-the-sea, shown in Map 3, which had once been a functional seaport, situated on the shores of what had once been the Bay of the Hellespont—before that vast body of water got silted over in the course of successive centuries.



Map 3. From Nagy HPC II §64, where I add commentary. As indicated in this map, there existed in the second millennium BCE a Great Bay on the coastline of the Hellespont between the promontory of Sigeion to the west and the promontory of Rhoiteion to the east. The map here shows the relevant topography, as reconstructed by geologists on the basis of the existing geomorphology. The lines marked "12 stadia" and "20 stadia" indicate distances separating the site of ancient Troy from two different points on the coastline of the Great Bay of the Hellespont. These distances were calculated by Strabo, who lived in the first century BC/BCE and who regularly used as his standard unit of measure the length run by competing athletes in the prestigious Olympic footrace known as the stadion. In making such measurements in this case, Strabo was interested in calculating the distance separating ancient Troy from the headquarters of the Achaeans, whose ships were beached along the shore of the Great Bay during the Trojan War as narrated in the

Homeric Iliad. The two points labeled "12 stadia" and "20 stadia" indicate two different interpretations, analyzed by Strabo, about the location of the headquarters. Strabo took into account the likelihood that the course of the river Scamander had shifted over the centuries since the era of the Trojan War, dated by the ancients around the last two centuries of the second millennium BCE.

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§3. I propose that the myth about the military expedition of Hēraklēs against Troy, as noted briefly at §3a in the essay TC XI, [2019.10.04](#), would have featured the seaside fortress of Tiryns as the launching point for such an expedition. Here I epitomize the relevant parts of TC XI §3a. As we read in Iliad 6.640–642, Hēraklēs had once upon a time launched a military expedition against Troy, hex oiēis sun nēusi (ἕξ οἴης σὺν νηυσὶ) 'by way of merely six ships', 6.641. As we see from the context, Hēraklēs was the main fighter in such a first Trojan War as opposed to the second Trojan War, which is of course the main subject of the Iliad. The story about the conquest of Troy by Hēraklēs can be found in retellings by Diodorus of Sicily (4.32.1–5) and by "Apollodorus" (2.6.4 pp. 245–247 ed. Frazer 1921 I).

Bibliography

See the dynamic [Bibliography for Comments on Comparative Mythology](#).

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