



A plane tree in Nafplio: decorating a reader for travel-study in Greece, March 2018

Citation

Nagy, Gregory. 2018.03.22. "A plane tree in Nafplio: decorating a reader for travel-study in Greece, March 2018." Classical Inquiries. http://nrs.harvard.edu/urn-3:hul.eresource:Classical_Inquiries.

Published Version

<https://classical-inquiries.chs.harvard.edu/a-plane-tree-in-nafplio-decorating-a-reader-for-travel-study-in-greece-march-2018/>

Permanent link

<http://nrs.harvard.edu/urn-3:HUL.InstRepos:40939994>

Terms of Use

This article was downloaded from Harvard University's DASH repository, and is made available under the terms and conditions applicable to Other Posted Material, as set forth at <http://nrs.harvard.edu/urn-3:HUL.InstRepos:dash.current.terms-of-use#LAA>

Share Your Story

The Harvard community has made this article openly available.
Please share how this access benefits you. [Submit a story](#).

[Accessibility](#)

Classical Inquiries

Editors: Angelia Hanhardt and Keith Stone

Consultant for Images: Jill Curry Robbins

Online Consultant: Noel Spencer

About

Classical Inquiries (CI) is an online, rapid-publication project of Harvard's Center for Hellenic Studies, devoted to sharing some of the latest thinking on the ancient world with researchers and the general public.

While articles archived in DASH represent the original *Classical Inquiries* posts, CI is intended to be an evolving project, providing a platform for public dialogue between authors and readers. Please visit http://nrs.harvard.edu/urn-3:hul.eresource:Classical_Inquiries for the latest version of this article, which may include corrections, updates, or comments and author responses.

Additionally, many of the studies published in CI will be incorporated into future CHS publications. Please visit http://nrs.harvard.edu/urn-3:hul.eresource:CHS.Online_Publishing for a complete and continually expanding list of open access publications by CHS.

Classical Inquiries is published under a [Creative Commons Attribution-NonCommercial 4.0 International License](#). Every effort is made to use images that are in the public domain or shared under Creative Commons licenses. Copyright on some images may be owned by the Center for Hellenic Studies. Please refer to captions for information about copyright of individual images.

Citing Articles from *Classical Inquiries*

To cite an article from *Classical Inquiries*, use the author's name, the date, the title of the article, and the following persistent identifier:

http://nrs.harvard.edu/urn-3:hul.eresource:Classical_Inquiries.

For example:

Nagy, G. 2019.01.31. "Homo Ludens at Play with the Songs of Sappho: Experiments in Comparative Reception Theory, Part Four." *Classical Inquiries*. http://nrs.harvard.edu/urn-3:hul.eresource:Classical_Inquiries.

[Home](#) » [By Gregory Nagy, Pausanias reader, travel-study](#) » A plane tree in Nafplio: decorating a reader for travel-study in Greece, March 2018

A plane tree in Nafplio: decorating a reader for travel-study in Greece, March 2018

March 22, 2018 [By Gregory Nagy listed under By Gregory Nagy, Pausanias reader, travel-study](#) [Comments off](#) [Edit This](#)

2018.03.22 | [By Gregory Nagy](#)

This new reader, posted 2018.03.22, “decorates” an earlier reader posted [2018.03.07](#). As I once tried to explain by way of simile, the earlier reader was like a Christmas tree waiting to be decorated with ornaments. But now I adjust the simile by comparing the new reader to that famous plane tree so loved by Xerxes, mighty ruler of the Persian Empire, which he honored as his very own Tree of Life by decorating it with ornamentation fit for a king—or, better, for a king of kings. The fame of the king’s beloved plane tree has been perpetuated by the corresponding fame of an aria composed by Handel for his opera about Xerxes. This aria, loved by lovers of music worldwide, features the intense countertenor voice of the king himself singing his song of adoration for his beloved plane tree: *Ombra mai fu | di vegetabile, | cara ed amabile, | soave più. ‘Shade there never was | of any plant | so dear and lovely | or any more sweet’*. To my mind, a fitting new symbol of this musical object of love may well be the plane tree gracing a corner of Syntagma Square in Nafplio: under its shade flourish countless memories of happy conversations about unforgettable travels in Hellenic realms. Such memories are now being encoded in the ornamentation for a new Tree of Life. The “ornaments” consist of photos, videos, and written comments contributed by fellow-travelers who participated in a travel-study program described in what follows.

[\[Essay continues here...\]](#)



Plane tree, Syntagma Square, Nafplio. [Image](#) via Flickr ([license](#)).

Share This



Classical Inquiries (CI) is an online, rapid-publication project of Harvard’s Center for Hellenic Studies, devoted to sharing some of the latest thinking on the ancient world with researchers and the general public.

Editor

Keith Stone
kstone@chs.harvard.edu

Search for:

Subscribe Now!

Subscribe to this site to receive email updates about the latest research—just one or two notices per week.

[EU/EEA Privacy Disclosures](#)

Now Online



The same plane tree in its leafless state, March 2018. Photo by Daniel Shen.

The earlier version of the reader posted here, 2018.03.22, which dates back to [2018.03.07](#), reflects the experiences of a travel-study group that visited Greece with me in March 2017. As I say already in that earlier version, each part of the reader focuses on things to see—or at least to note if they cannot be seen—at sites to be visited. In cases where a museum adjoins a site, I offer a separate inventory of things to see. As for the current version of the reader, as posted here, 2018.03.22, it reflects the experiences of a new group that traveled with me to Greece in March 2018. The names of the travelers in this new group are listed at the conclusion of the posting here.

Wherever possible, I use as my primary ancient source the reportage of the ancient traveler Pausanias, who lived in the second century CE and whose Greek text is translated into English at a website entitled [Pausanias Reader in Progress](#). At that site, the original English translation of W. H. S. Jones and H. A. Ormerod (1918) is being gradually replaced by my own translation.

As a microcosm of memories for our new group to treasure, I focus on the experience or wished-for experience of having coffee while conversing under the shade of the plane tree in Syntagma Square at Nafplio. This tree reminds me of a passage in Herodotus 7.31:

Ταύτην ἰὼν ὁ Ξέρξης τὴν ὁδὸν εὗρε πλατάνιστον, τὴν κάλλεος εἶνεκα δωρησάμενος κόσμῳ χρυσέῳ καὶ μελεδωνῶ Ἀθανάτῳ ἀνδρὶ ἐπιτρέψας δευτέρῃ ἡμέρῃ ἀπῆκετο ἐς τῶν Λυδῶν τὸ ἄστυ.

Going along the way [to Sardis], Xerxes found a plane-tree [platanistos]. Because of its beauty he presented it with golden decorations [kosmos] and entrusted it to the care of one of the Immortals. On the next day, he arrived at the city of the Lydians [= Sardis].

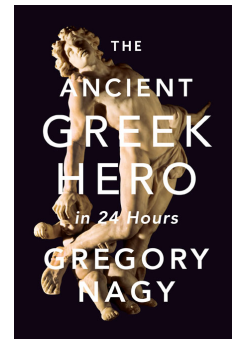
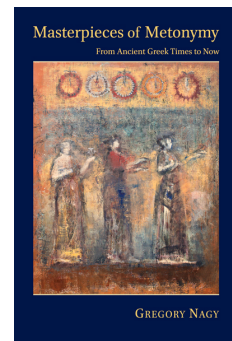
This episode inspired a piece of music known as Handel's "Largo":

Handels Largo intro



This largo (really, larghetto) is from the opera *Xerxes* (*Serse*), by George Frideric Handel. I recommend this posting about that opera...

<https://classical-inquiries.chs.harvard.edu/notes-on-xerxes-and-his-persian-empire/>



Top Posts & Pages

[The Last Words of Socrates at the Place Where He Died](#)

[A Roll of the Dice for Ajax](#)

[Penelope's great web: the violent interruption](#)

Most Common Tags

[Achilles](#) [Aphrodite](#) [apobatēs](#) [Ariadne](#)

[Aristotle](#) [Artemis](#) [Athena](#) [Athens](#)

[Catullus](#) [Chalcis](#) [chariot fighting](#)

Commentary [Delphi](#)

[Demodokos](#) [Dionysus](#) [etymology](#)

[Euripides](#) [Gregory Nagy](#) [H24H](#) [HAA](#)

[travel-study](#) [Helen](#) [Hera](#) [Herodotus](#)

[Hippolytus](#) [Homer](#)

Homeric epic Iliad

[Jean Bollack](#) [lament](#) [Lelantine War](#) [mimesis](#)

[Minoan Empire](#) [Mycenae](#) [Odysseus](#)

Odyssey [Pausanias](#)

[Phaedra](#) [Pindar](#) [Plato](#) [Poetics](#) [Posidippus](#)

Sappho [Theseus](#) [weaving](#) [Zeus](#)

Archives

The posting that I just cited has a link to one of the best recordings of the aria known as Ombra mai fu:

Archives ↕

Frondi tenere e belle
del mio platano amato
per voi risplenda il fato.
Tuoni, lampi, e procelle
non v'oltraggino mai la cara pace,
né giunga a profanarvi austro rapace.

Ombra mai fu
di vegetabile,
cara ed amabile,
soave più.

O leaves tender and beautiful
of my beloved plane tree
On you may fate shine resplendent
May thunder, lighting, and storms
never intrude, ever, on your dear peace of mind,
nor may there be any wind that comes to violate you
—some violent wind from the west.

Shade there never was
of any plant
so dear and lovely
or any more sweet.

translation by Gregory Nagy

Users

[Log out](#)

A reader for travel-study in Greece



Map of Greece keyed to the ten scrolls of Pausanias, Description of Greece

§1. The sacred space of Hērā

by Gregory Nagy [CI 2016.06.24](#), rewritten 2018.03.05

§1.1. Three points to note:

§1.1A. [The foundations of the classical temple of Hērā](#), as pictured in the posting of Classical Inquiries for [2016.03.16](#).

§1.1B. [The plain of Argos](#), as you look down from the elevation where the classical temple was situated.



Photo by Sarah Scott.

§1.1C. The foundations of earlier buildings at the Hēraion or 'sacred space of Hērā', as you look further up from the elevation where the classical temple was situated.



Photo by Sarah Scott.

§1.2. With reference to all three of the points that I have just listed, I now quote the relevant reportage of Pausanias:

{2.17.1} Fifteen stadium-lengths distant from Mycenae is on the left the Hēraion.

Alongside the road flows a rivulet called 'the water that makes-free' [hudōr eleutherion]. The women who attend the sacred space [hieron] use it [= the water] in purifications [katharsia] and for sacrifices [thusiai] that are mystical [apo-rrhētoi]. The sacred space [hieron] itself is on a lower part of Euboea. Euboea is the name they give to the hill here, saying that Asterion the river had three daughters, Euboea, Prosymna, and Akraia, and that they were nurses [trophoi] of Hērā.

{2.17.2} The hill opposite the Hēraion they name after Akraia, while the environs of the sacred space [hieron] they name after Euboea, and, further, the land beneath the Hēraion they name after Prosymna. This Asterion flows above the Hēraion, and falling into a cleft disappears. On its banks grows a plant, which also is called asterion. They offer the plant itself to Hērā, and from its leaves they weave garlands [stephanoi] for her.

{2.17.3} It is said that the architect of the temple [nāos] was Eupolemos, an Argive. The sculptures carved above the columns [kiones] refer not only to the birth [genesis] of Zeus and the battle between the gods and the giants but also to the Trojan war and the capture of Ilion. Before the entrance stand statues [andriantes] of women who have been priestesses [hiereiai] of Hērā and of various heroes [hērōes], including Orestes. I say it this way because the statue that has an inscription on it claiming that it represents the Emperor Augustus is really, they say, the statue of Orestes. In the front-part-of-the temple [pro-nāos] are on the one side ancient statues [agalmata] of the Graces [Kharites], and on the right the couch [klinē] of Hērā and a votive offering [anathēma], that is, the shield [aspis] that Menelaos once took from Euphorbos at Troy.

{2.17.4} The statue [agalma] of Hērā is seated on a throne [thronos]; it [= the statue] is huge in size, made of gold and ivory, and is a work of Polycleitus. She is wearing [on her head] a garland [stephanos] that features Graces [Kharites] and Seasons [Hōrai] worked upon it, and in one hand she holds a pomegranate while in the other a scepter [skēptron]. About the pomegranate... I must let go of this subject, since its story [logos] is somewhat mystical [apo-rrhētos]. The presence of a cuckoo seated on the scepter [skēptron] they explain by telling how, when Zeus lusted [erân] for Hērā as virgin [parthenos], he changed himself into this bird, and she caught it to be her plaything [paignion]. This story [logos] and similar things said about the gods I write down without accepting [apodekhesthai] them, but I write them down nevertheless.



Photo by Heidi Hardner.

{2.17.5} By the side of Hērā stands what is said to be a statue [agalma] of Hēbē fashioned by Naukydes; it, too, is of ivory and gold. By its side is an old statue [agalma] of Hērā on a column [kiōn]. The oldest statue is made of wild-pear wood, and was dedicated in Tiryns by Peirasos son of Argos, and when the Argives destroyed Tiryns they carried it away to the Hēraion. I myself saw it, a small, seated statue [agalma].

{2.17.6} Of the votive offerings [anathēmata] the following are worth speaking-about [logos]. There is an altar [bōmos] upon which is worked in relief the legendary [legomenon] wedding of Hēbē and Hēraklēs. This is of silver, but the peacock dedicated by the Emperor Hadrian is of gold and gleaming stones. He dedicated it because they hold the bird to be sacred to Hērā. Also deposited here are a golden garland [stephanos] and a purple robe [peplos], offerings [anathēmata] of Nero.

Pausanias 2.17.1–6

§2. On the festival of the goddess Hērā at the Hēraion overlooking the Plain of Argos

by Gregory Nagy [CI 2015.03.20](#), rewritten 2018.03.05

§2.1. In [H24H 13§§11–22](#) (see also [11§17](#)), I quote and analyze the narrative in Herodotus 1.31.1–5 about two young men named Kleobis and Biton who pulled a wagon that carried their mother, priestess of the goddess Hera, in a sacred procession that started at the city of Argos and reached its climax at the heights of the sanctuary of the goddess, known as the Hēraion. In terms of my analysis in H24H, this narrative is a “charter myth” centering on the importance of the goddess Hera in defining the identity of the city of Argos and of its Argive population.

§2.2. In the context of visiting the Hēraion, I quote here the relevant parts of my translation of the story of Kleobis and Biton as told by Solon as quoted in the History of Herodotus:

1.31.2 They [= Kleobis and Biton] were Argive by birth [genos], and they made a living that was quite sufficient. And, on top of this, they had such great physical strength! Both were prize-winning athletes [āthlophoroi]. Here is the story that is told about them. There was a festival [heortē] of Hērā in Argos, and it was absolutely necessary for their mother [= the priestess of Hērā] to be conveyed to the sacred precinct [hieron] [of Hērā] by a team of oxen. But their oxen had not come back from the fields in time [hōrā], so the youths themselves took the yoke upon their shoulders under constraint of time [hōrā] and started pulling the wagon, with their mother riding on top of it, transporting her [their mother] forty-five stadium-lengths until they arrived at the sacred precinct [hieron] [of Hērā]. 1.31.3 After they [= Kleobis and Biton] had done these things and had been seen [op-] doing these things by everyone participating in the festival [panēguris], the very best fulfillment [teleutē] of life now happened for them. And in all this the god showed that it is

better for a man to be in a state of death than in a state of life [zōein]. For the men of Argos, standing around the two youths, declared them blessed [makares] for having such physical strength, while the women of Argos declared the mother of the youths blessed for having such children as these two. |_{1.31.4} And the mother, overjoyed [perikharēs] about what had been accomplished and about what had been said about the things that had been accomplished, stood before the statue [= of Hērā] and prayed on behalf of Kleobis and Biton, her two children, who had so greatly honored [tīmazein] her. She prayed that the goddess [= Hērā] should give them [= the two youths] the very best thing that can happen to a mortal. |_{1.31.5} After this prayer, the people sacrificed [thuein] and feasted [eu-ōkheîn], and the youths went to sleep [kata-koimāsthai] right then and there in the sacred precinct [of Hērā]. And they [= the two youths] never got up [an-histasthai] again, but were held still [ekhesthai] in this fulfillment [telos]. And the people of Argos made likenesses [eikōn plural] of them and dedicated these at Delphi, saying that these were images of men who had become the very best of men.

Herodotus 1.31.2–5 [[On the mystical subtexts: Nagy 1990a:243–247 = 8§§45–48.]]

§2.3a. I argue that the Herodotean narrative about the priestess of Hera and her two boys shows that the myth of Hera, together with the rituals connected with the myth as localized at the Hēraion, preserves in many ways the world view of the Mycenaean era even after the eventual appropriation of this sanctuary by Argos.

§2.3b. My argument is inspired by a conversation, dated 2015.03.17, with the noted archaeologist Dr. Heleni Palaiologou, who observed that the Hēraion had once been controlled by the “palace” of Mycenae in the era of the Mycenaean Empire of the late second millennium BCE, and that the city of Argos took control of the sanctuary only after this city defeated the (by now) much smaller and much less powerful city of Mycenae in 468 BCE, many centuries after the heyday of the Mycenaean Empire.

§2.4. In the Museum at Delphi, the first thing we see is the sculpted ensemble of Kleobis and Biton. The boys had been found in the Delphi excavations of the late nineteenth century, and so the world could now know for sure that Herodotus was right in reporting that the people of Argos had arranged for statues of Kleobis and Biton to be placed in the sanctuary of Apollo at Delphi.

§2.5a. In the 2015 book *Masterpieces of Metonymy*, I argue at 4§142:

At the festival of Hera at Argos, there was a seasonally recurring hecatomb, that is, a sacrifice of one hundred cattle, and the act of sacrifice is expressed by way of the verb thuein ‘sacrifice’ (in the book, I give the textual references). The ritual of this mass sacrifice was a culminating event of the festival, and the corresponding ritual that led up to this event was a grand procession that was held in honor of the goddess. The word for this ritual lead-up is pompē ‘procession’. I find it most significant that this procession is the actual setting for a celebrated story told by Herodotus (1.31.1–5) about a priestess of Hera and her two boys, Kleobis and Biton. The mother and the two sons are, all three of them, major characters in what turns out to be an aetiological myth about the ritual practice of sacrificially slaughtering one hundred cattle in the precinct of the goddess Hera at the climax of the festival celebrated in her honor at Argos. Also involved as major “characters” in the story are two sacrificial oxen. The two boys, who are described as āthlōphoroi ‘prize-winning athletes’, willingly took the place of the two sacrificial oxen, chosen to pull the wagon carrying the priestess across the plain of Argos—over a distance of 45 stadium-lengths—along a sacred way leading up to the precinct of Hera (1.31.2). The oxen had been late in arriving at the starting-point of the procession (again, 1.31.2), and this lateness, in terms of the story, is the aetiological explanation for their replacement by the two athletes. If these two oxen had not been late, they would have been slaughtered along with the other ninety-eight oxen that had been chosen for the mass sacrifice of one hundred cattle at the finishing-point of the procession, inside the precinct of Hera. At the feast that followed the sacrifice inside the precinct, the two boys died a mystical death after having pulled the wagon of the priestess all the way to this finishing-point of the procession (1.31.5). Thus, by way of this death that they shared with each other, the boys became sacrificial substitutes for the two premier victims of the animal sacrifice. [At this point in the book *Masterpieces of Metonymy*, I refer to documentation on the ritual practice of choosing two premier animal victims out of a mass of animals destined for slaughter at a sacrifice.]

§2.5b. Here is a question that may arise: if the two oxen had really been destined for sacrifice, how would the priestess expect to get back to Argos from the Hēraion? My response is that such a question is based on a false assumption, since any procession that proceeded from the point of origin to the point of climax would not retrace its steps on the way back to the point of origin. Rather, the participants in the procession would disperse after the climactic sacrifice, and the participants would find their way back home on their own. Here is an example of what I mean, taken from the erotic novel *A Tale of Ephesus* attributed to one Xenophon of Ephesus (the translation is mine):

|_{1.3.1} When the procession [pompē] finally reached its culmination [telos] and the whole crowd entered the sacred [hieron] space in order to make sacrifice [thuein] and when the arrangement [kosmos] of the procession [pompē] was finally dissolved and all the men and women entered the same space, as well as all the ephebes and girls, then it was that

...

§2.5c. In this case, where the procession involves the worship of the goddess Artemis in Ephesus, not of Hera in Argos, it is made clear that the procession comes to an end after the sacrifice. So also in the case of the comparable event described by Herodotus, as I argue, the procession comes to an end after the sacrifice of one hundred cattle. In the case of the prototype of this procession, however, only 98 of the cattle would have been sacrificed because the two boys had been substituted for the oxen who were late to arrive for the beginning of the procession.

§2.6. For me, then, the narrative of Herodotus about Kleobis and Biton brings together the importance of the goddess Hera for the population of Argos and, earlier, for the entire Mycenaean Empire, which had once asserted its wealth, power, and prestige at the great feast of Hērā culminating in the sanctuary of the goddess at the Hēraion. Elsewhere, I compare this feast at the sanctuary of Hera near Argos with the feast at the sanctuary of Hera, Zeus, and Dionysus at a place called Messon on the island of Lesbos.

Video by Lin Zhu of Day 1 of the trip:

Fields of Asphodel - Greece 3.11.18



§3. Where it all comes together for me: the sanctuary of the goddess Hērā at Argos

by Gregory Nagy [CI 2016.03.16](#), rewritten 2018.03.05

§3.1. As we have seen in the essay preceding this one, the Hēraion or sanctuary of the goddess Hērā at Argos was the setting for an ordeal endured by Kleobis and Biton as substitutes for the sacrificial oxen that were meant to pull the ceremonial cart carrying the priestess of the goddess Hērā across the length of the plain in a sacred procession that started at the city of Argos and reached its climax at the heights of the sanctuary of the Hēraion.

§3.2. Housed in the Museum at Delphi are twin statues representing the heroic figures of Kleobis and Biton, two young sons of a priestess of Hērā. According to a story retold by the notional 'father of history', Herodotus, these two youths experienced a mystical death inside the sanctuary of Hērā and were then honored in a very special way by the people of Argos, who arranged for the placement of statues representing Kleobis and Biton in the sanctuary of Apollo at Delphi. By a stroke of good fortune, these twin statues were unearthed in modern times and now occupy pride of place in the Museum at Delphi. As you enter the museum and turn right and then left, they are the first thing you see on display. There they are, larger-than-life-size, just standing there and giving you an ethereal stare. But they are not really staring at you, since their grand stature makes it seem as if they were looking not at you when you look back at them but beyond you. The way they look, you would think that they are viewing their own heroic story.

§3.3. This story of Kleobis and Biton, as I emphasized in my previous essay, was all-important for the historical project of Herodotus. In this shorter follow-up essay, on the other hand, I emphasize the significance of this same story for my own ongoing quest to understand the relationship of the goddess Hērā to the very idea of what it is to be a hero.

§3.4. As I say already in the title of my essay here, it all comes together for me when I stand in the sanctuary of Hērā and look down from the heights of this holy place, viewing below the expansive Plain of Argos. Here was the setting for the ordeal endured by Kleobis and Biton as substitutes for the sacrificial oxen that were meant to pull the ceremonial cart carrying the priestess of the goddess Hērā across the length of the plain in a sacred procession that started at the city of Argos and reached its climax at the heights of the sanctuary of the goddess, known as the Hēraion.

§3.5. In my book [The Ancient Greek Hero in 24 Hours 13](#)§§11–22 (see also [11](#)§17), I analyze the story as told by Herodotus in his Histories at 1.31.1–5 (see H24H Hour 13 Text D) about the heroic ordeal of these two young men.

§3.6. To read this story, I argue, is to understand how the goddess Hērā, as the guiding cosmic principle that makes everything come together, was worshipped as the divine force that defined for the ancient Greeks what it means to become a hero.

§4. Mycenae

by Gregory Nagy [CI 2016.03.16](#), rewritten 2018.03.05

§4.1. Three points to note:

§4.1A. The so-called Treasury of Atreus.



Photo by Sarah Scott.



Photo by Marina Cheilitsi.

§4.1B. The Lion Gate, leading up to the top of the citadel.



Photo by Sarah Scott.

§4.1C. The Megaron at the top of the citadel.

§4.2. With reference to all three of the points that I have just listed, I now quote the relevant reportage of Pausanias:

[2.16.5] It was envy that caused the Argives to destroy Mycenae. For at the time of the Persian invasion the Argives made-no-move [hēsukhazein], but the Mycenaeans sent eighty men to Thermopylae who shared in the achievement [ergon] of the Lacedaemonians. This act-of-eagerness-for-distinction [philo-timēma] brought ruin upon them by aggravating the Argives. There still remain, however, parts of the circumference-wall [peribolos], including the gate [pulē] on top of which stand lions. These [walls], too, are said to be the work [erga] of the Cyclopes, who made for Proitos the [circumference-] wall [teikhos] at Tiryns.

[2.16.6] Inside the ruins [ereipia] of Mycenae is a spring [krēnē] called Perseiā; there are also underground chambers [hupo-gaia oikodomēmata] of Atreus and his offspring [paides], in which were stored the treasures [thēsaurōi] of their possessions. The tomb [taphos] of Atreus is there, along with the tombs of those who, besides Agamemnon, returned with him from Troy and were slaughtered by Aigisthos after they had been wined and dined by him at a banquet. As for the tomb [mnēma] of Cassandra [Kassandrā], there is a rival claim to it by the Lacedaemonians who dwell [oikeîn] in the vicinity of Amyklai. There is [at Mycenae] another tomb [mnēma] [besides the tombs in the Treasury of Atreus] that specifically belongs to Agamemnon, and there is also another tomb belonging to Eurymedon his charioteer, while still another one is shared by Teledāmos and Pelops, twin sons, they say, of Cassandra,

[2.16.7] whom while they were still children [nēpioi] Aigisthos slaughtered after he slaughtered their parents. As for Electra... Orestes married her off to Pylades, and Hellanicus [FGH 4 F 155] adds that the children of Pylades by Electra were Medon and Strophios. Clytemnestra and Aigisthos were buried at some little distance outside of the [circumference-] wall [teikhos].



Photo by Marina Cheilitsi.

They were thought unworthy of a place inside it [= the circumference-wall], which is where Agamemnon himself and those who were slaughtered with him had been placed.

Pausanias 2.16.5-7 [Some of this lore must predate the testimony of Pausanias.]

§5. Museum at Mycenae

§5.1. Three points to note:

§5.1A. A fresco painting that shows a goddess standing below ground-level, holding handfuls of wheat in each hand.

§5.1B. A Linear B tablet, on which we see a reference, in the first line, with regard to a divine recipient of an offering: si-to-po-ti-ni-ja (written in the Linear B syllabary), to be transliterated as sitopotniāi (or possibly sitōn potniāi) and to be interpreted as 'for the lady [potnia] of wheat [sita]'.

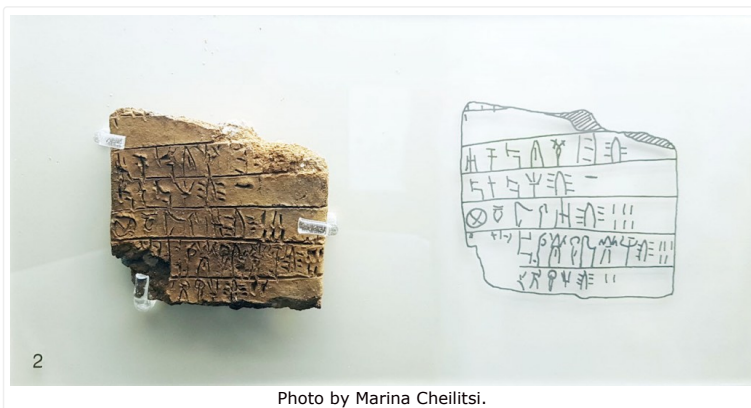


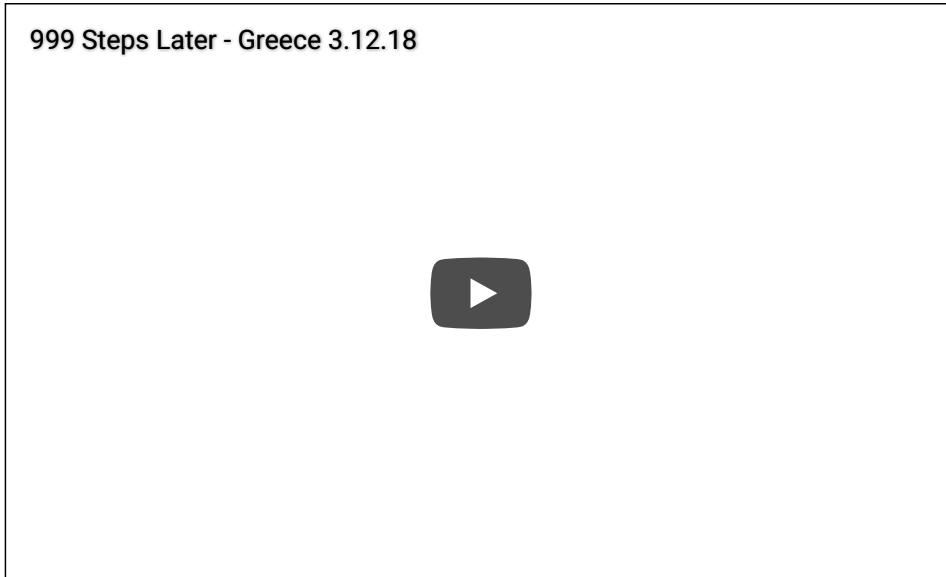
Photo by Marina Cheilitsi.

§5.1C. A plaque representing the cartouche of the Egyptian pharaoh Amenophis III. It appears that an Egyptian emissary had given it as a gift to the rulers of Mycenae. As our friend Eleni Palaiologou pointed out to us on the occasion of our visit to the Museum, this plaque was used as a foundation deposit.



Photo by Marina Cheilitsi.

Video by Lin Zhu of Day 2 of the trip:



Sunset at Olympia. Photo by Sarah Scott.

§6. Olympia

by Gregory Nagy 2018.03.05



Temple of Zeus. Photo by Sarah Scott.

§6.1. Three points to note:

§6.1A. The point where we stand at the SW corner of the Temple of Zeus. As we look up to the NW corner from here in the SW corner, we can get a good look at the reconstructed corner-column there in the NW and thus get a better idea of the size of the seated Zeus whose statue dominated the inside of the Temple.

§6.1B. The point where we stand at the entrance to the Temple of Zeus. As we look toward what was once the inside of the Temple, we can try to imagine the visual impact of the seated Zeus who would be facing us from back inside there.

§6.1C. The point where the Pit of Pelops could once be seen. The earlier configuration of the stadion footrace started from the Pit or Bothros and ended at the Altar of Zeus. Archaeologists have not made an attempt to restore the space of this earlier configuration. Instead, they have restored the later configuration of the stadion, which "spills out" from the sacred enclosure or Altis.

§6.2. The most relevant parts of the reporting by Pausanias:

{5.10.1} There are many things to be seen and to be heard in the Greek-world [Hellas] that are worthy of wonder [thauma]; but there is nothing in the thinking of the god [theos] that matters more than the rituals [drōmena] at Eleusis and the competition [agōn] at Olympia. The sacred grove of Zeus has been called from of old Altis, a corruption of the word "alsos," which means a grove. Pindar too calls the place Altis in an ode composed for an Olympic victor.

{5.10.2} The temple and the statue [agalma] were made for Zeus from spoils, when Pisa was crushed in war by the Eleians, and along with Pisa, those of the subject population who were fellow conspirators. The statue [agalma] itself was made by Pheidias, as is testified by an inscription written under the feet of Zeus: Pheidias, son of Kharmides, an Athenian, made me. The temple is in the Doric style, and the outside has columns all around it. It is built of native stone.

{5.10.3} Its height up to the pediment is sixty-eight feet, its width is ninety-five, its length two hundred and thirty. The architect was Libon, a native. The tiles are not of baked earth, but of Pentelic marble cut into the shape of tiles. [...] {5.10.4} [...] {5.10.5} [...]

{5.10.6} To come to the pediments: in the front pediment there is, not yet begun, the chariot race between Pelops and Oinomaos, and preparation for the actual race is being made by both. A sculpture [agalma] of Zeus has been carved in about the middle of the pediment; on the right of Zeus is Oinomaos with a helmet on his head, and by him, Sterope his wife, who was one of the daughters of Atlas. Myrtilos too, the charioteer of Oinomaos, sits in front of the horses, which are four in number. After him are two men. They have no names, but they too must be under orders from Oinomaos to attend to the horses.



River Kladeos. Photo by Sarah Scott.

{5.10.7} At the very edge lies Kladeos, the river which, in other ways also, the Eleians honor most after the Alpheios. On the left from Zeus are Pelops, Hippodameia, the charioteer of Pelops, horses, and two men, who are apparently grooms of Pelops. Then the pediment narrows again, and in this part of it is represented the Alpheios. The name of the charioteer of Pelops is, according to the account of the Troezenians, Sphairos, but the guide [ex-hēgētēs] at Olympia called him Killas.

{5.10.8} The sculptures in the front pediment are by Paionios, who came from Mende in Thrace; those in the back pediment are by Alkamenes, a contemporary of Pheidias, ranking next after him for skill as a sculptor. What he carved on the pediment is the fight between the Lapithai and the Centaurs at the marriage of Peirithoos. In the center of the pediment is Peirithoos. On one side of him is Eurytion, who has seized the wife of Peirithoos, with Kaineus bringing help to Peirithoos, and on the other side is Theseus defending himself against the Centaurs with an axe. One Centaur has seized a girl, another a boy in the prime of youth. Alkamenes, I think, carved this scene, because he had learned from Homer's poem [Iliad 14.318] that Peirithoos was a son of Zeus, and because he knew that Theseus was a great grandson of Pelops.

{5.10.9} Most of the labors [erga] of Hēraklēs are represented at Olympia. Above the doors of the temple is carved the hunting of the Arcadian boar, his exploit against Diomedes the Thracian and that against Geryones at Erytheia; he is also about to receive the burden of Atlas, and he cleanses the land from dung for the Eleians. Above the doors of the rear chamber, he is taking the waistband from the Amazon; and there are the stories of the deer, of the bull at Knossos, of the Stymphalian birds, of the hydra, and of the Argive lion.

{5.10.10} As you enter the bronze doors you see on the right, before the column, Iphitos being garlanded by a woman, Ekhekheiria ['Truce'], as the elegiac couplet on the statue says. Within the temple stand columns, and inside also are porticoes above, with an approach through them to the statue [agalma]. There has also been constructed a winding ascent to the roof.

{5.11.1} The god sits on a throne, and he is made of gold and ivory. On his head is placed a garland, which is an imitation of olive shoots. In his right hand, he holds a Nike, which, like the statue, is of ivory and gold; she wears a ribbon and—on her head—a garland. In the left hand of the god is a scepter, ornamented with every kind of metal, and the bird sitting on the scepter is the eagle. The sandals also of the god are of gold, as is likewise his robe. Worked into the robe [himation] are figures of animals and the flowers of the lily.

{5.11.2} The throne is adorned with gold and with jewels, to say nothing of ebony and ivory. Upon it are painted figures and worked images. [...] {5.11.3} [...] {5.11.4} [...] The throne is supported not only by the feet, but also by an equal number of columns standing between the feet. It is impossible to go under the throne, in the way we enter the inner part of the throne at Amyklai. At Olympia, there are screens constructed like walls which keep people out.

{5.11.5} Of these screens the part opposite the doors is only covered with dark blue paint; the other parts show pictures by Panainos. [...] {5.11.6} [...] {5.11.7} On the uppermost parts of the throne Pheidias has made, above the head of the statue [agalma], three Graces on one side and three Seasons on the other. [...] The footstool of Zeus, called by the Athenians thranon, has golden lions and, in relief, the fight of Theseus against the Amazons, the first brave deed of the Athenians against non-Greeks [barbaroi].

[...] {5.11.8} [...] {5.11.9} I know that the height and width of the Olympian Zeus have been measured and recorded; but I shall not make a citation [ep-ainos] of those who made the measurements, for even their records fall far short of the impression made by a sight of the statue [agalma]. No, the god himself according to what is said bore witness to the

artistic skill of Pheidias. For when the statue [agalma] was quite finished Pheidias prayed the god to show by a sign whether the work was to his liking. Immediately, according to what is said, a thunderbolt fell on that part of the floor where down to the present day the bronze jar stood to cover the place.

{5.11.10} All the floor in front of the statue [agalma] is paved, not with white, but with black tiles. In a circle around the black stone runs a raised rim of Parian marble, to keep in the olive oil that is poured out. For olive oil is beneficial to the statue [agalma] at Olympia, and it is olive oil that keeps the ivory from being harmed by the marshiness of the Altis. On the Athenian Acropolis, the ivory of the statue [agalma] they call the Maiden [Parthenos] is benefited not by olive oil but by water. For the Acropolis, owing to its great height, is over-dry, so that the statue [agalma], being made of ivory, needs water or dampness.

Pausanias 5.10.1–5.11.10

§7. Museum at Olympia

by Gregory Nagy 2018.03.05

§7.1. Three points to note:

§7.1A. Helmet [Kranos] of Miltiades. Evidently, he had dedicated it at Olympia.

§7.1B. Breastplate [Thōrax] of Hadrian. Note the positioning of Athena vs. Romulus & Remus.



Photo by Marina Cheilitsi.

§7.1C. East Pediment, relief sculptures showing Pelops and Oinomaos, contestants in the chariot race; West Pediment, relief sculptures showing the fight between the Lapithai and the Centaurs. Metopes showing the Twelve Labors of Hēraklēs.



Hercules in combat with Geryon. Photo by Marina Cheilitsi.

§7.2. Other points of interest:

—A plate showing Hector as he steps on the platform of his chariot, taking his departure from Andromache, who is holding their child Astyanax.



Photo by Marina Cheilitsi.

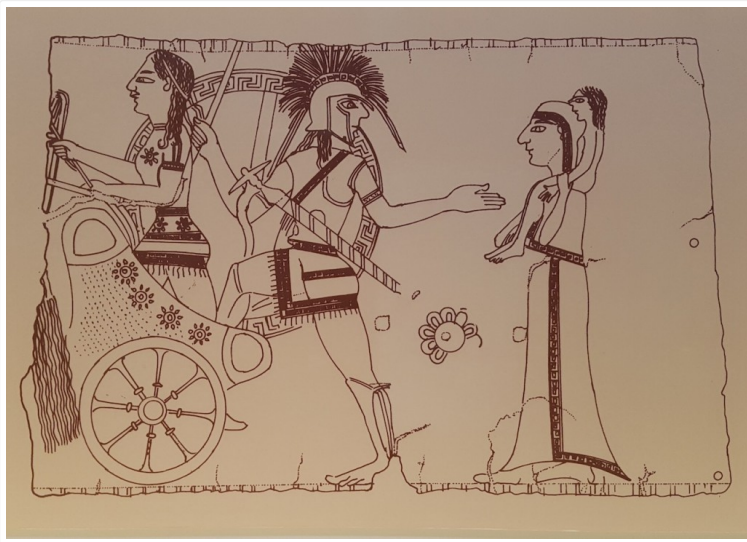


Photo by Marina Cheilitsi.

—The cup of Pheidias.

—The famous statue of Hermes holding the infant Dionysus, by Praxiteles.

Video by Lin Zhu of Day 3 of the trip:

Sunny with 100% Chance of Wine - Greece 3.13.18



§8. Delphi

by Gregory Nagy [CI 2016.06.24](#), rewritten 2018.03.05

§8.1. Three points to note:

§8.1A. The spring of Castalia. Pausanias has this to say about this spring, which is described in other sources as sacred to the Muses:

{10.8.9} Going up from the gymnasium along the way to the sacred space [hieron] [of Apollo] you reach, on the right of the way, the water of Castalia [Kastalia], which is sweet to drink and pleasant to bathe in.

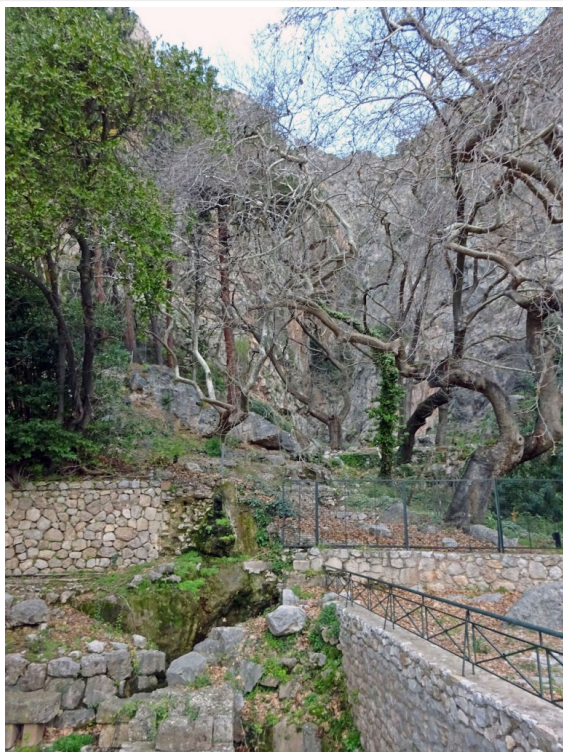


Photo by Sarah Scott.

Some say that the spring [pēgē] was named after a native [epikhōrios] woman, others after a man called Castalius [Kastalios]. But Panyassis son of Polyarkhos, who composed epic verses [epē] about Hēraklēs, says that Castalia was a daughter of Akhelōos. So, about Hēraklēs he [= Panyassis] says:

Crossing with swift feet snowy Parnassus | he reached the immortalizing [ambroton] water of Castalia, daughter of Akhelōos.

{10.8.10} I have heard another account, that the water was a gift to Castalia from the river Kephisos. That is the way Alcaeus has it in his prelude [proimion] to Apollo. There is confirmation from the Lilaeans, who on certain specified days have the custom [nomizein] of throwing into the spring of the river Kephisos cakes of-the-district [epi-khōria] and other things, and it is said that these reappear in Castalia.

Pausanias 10.8.9–10

§8.1B. The Serpent Column. A replica now stands where the original monument had been placed, in front of the east entrance to the Temple of Apollo.



The Serpent Column. Photo by Sarah Scott.

The centerpiece of the monument was a column around which a bronze serpent is shown coiling all the way to the top, culminating in three bronze serpentine heads that hold up a golden tripod. After the battle of

Plataea in 479 BCE, the Greeks celebrated their victory over the invading forces of the Persian Empire by commissioning this Serpent Column and installing it at Delphi at precisely the spot where the replica stands today. The replica shows only the coiling serpent, not the three heads—nor the golden tripod. In 324 CE, the Emperor Constantine I arranged for the original Serpent Column to be removed from Delphi and relocated in Constantinople at the Hippodrome, where it remains to this day. The replica in Delphi, which I mentioned a moment ago, shows what remains of the Serpent Column as it survives in its relocated home at the Hippodrome in Istanbul today. Pausanias saw the original Serpent Column when he visited Delphi, and he has this to say about it:

{10.13.9} The Greeks in common [en koinōi] dedicated from the spoils resulting from their deed [of victory] at Plataea a gold tripod set on top of a bronze serpent [drakōn]. The bronze part of the offering was still preserved [sōon] in my time, but the leaders of Phokis did not leave the gold as they did the bronze.

Pausanias 10.13.9

§8.1C. The foundations of the Temple of Apollo: the view from up above, as you walk past the Theater.



Photo by Heidi Hardner.

Pausanias has this to say about the inside of the nāos or 'temple' itself:

{10.24.4} [...] Here [inside the temple] you may behold the hearth [hestiā] on which the priest of Apollo killed Neoptolemos, the son of Achilles. The things concerning the end of Neoptolemos I have told elsewhere [Pausanias 4.17.4].

{10.24.5} Not far from the hearth [hestiā] has been dedicated a chair [thronos] of Pindar. The chair is of iron, and on it they say Pindar sat whenever he came to Delphi, and there composed his songs to Apollo. Into the innermost part of the temple [nāos] only a few may pass, and there is dedicated in it another statue [agalma] of Apollo, made of gold.

{10.24.6} Leaving the temple [nāos] and turning to the left, you will come to an enclosure [peribolos] in which is the tomb [taphos] of Neoptolemos son of Achilles. Every year, the Delphians sacrifice [enagizein] to him as to a hero. Coming further up from the tomb [mnēma], you reach a stone [lithos] of no large size. Over it every day they pour olive oil, and at each festival [heortē], they place on it unworked wool. There is also an opinion about this stone, that it was given to Kronos instead of his child and that Kronos vomited it up again.

{10.24.7} Returning to the temple [nāos] after seeing the stone [lithos], you come to the spring [pēgē] called Kassotis. Next to it is a wall of no great size, and the ascent to the spring [pēgē] is through the wall. It is said that the water of this Kassotis sinks under the ground and, inside the inner sanctum [aduton] of the god, it causes the women there to become inspired [mantikai]. She [= Kassotis] who gave her name to the spring [krēnē] is said to have been one of the nymphs [numphai] of Parnassus.

Pausanias 10.24.4–7



Photo by Sarah Scott.

§9. Museum at Delphi

by Gregory Nagy [CI 2016.06.24](#), rewritten 2018.03.05

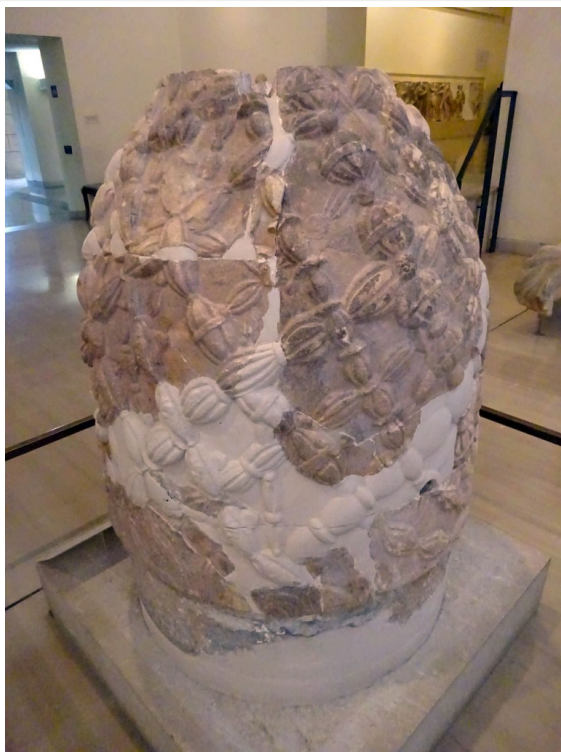
§9. Three points to note:

§9A. The statues of Kleobis and Biton. As we saw in the essay on the Hēraion, the narrative in Herodotus 1.31.2–5 ends with the report that the people of Argos commissioned statues of Kleobis and Biton to be set up at Delphi. And that is exactly where the two statues were unearthed in modern times.



Photo by Sarah Scott.

§9B. The Navel of the Earth. In the Hesiodic Theogony: at one point in the narrative, the goddess Rhea tricks Kronos into swallowing a stone that she substitutes for the newborn god Zeus (verses 485–491). This stone, along with the divine siblings of Zeus whom Kronos had already swallowed, is then vomited up by Kronos after he is overthrown by Zeus (497). The victorious Zeus then deposits this stone for display as a cult object at Delphi (498–500).



The Navel of the Earth. Photo by Sarah Scott.

Pausanias has this to say about the Omphalos or 'Navel':

[10.16.3] What is called the Omphalos ['Navel'] by the Delphians is made of white marble, and is said by the Delphians to be the center of all the earth. Pindar [Pythian 4.74] in one of his odes supports their view.

Pausanias 10.16.3

§9C. The Charioteer of Delphi. The limestone base of this exquisite bronze statue indicates that it was dedicated by Polyxalos, who was tyrant of the Sicilian city of Gela in the early fifth century BCE.



The Charioteer of Delphi. Photo by Sarah Scott.

Evidently Polyxalos had sponsored the winning chariot team of horses driven by our charioteer in the Pythian Games of 478 or 474 BCE. Later on, sometime in the fourth century BCE, the statue and the rest of the statuary that belonged with it (including statues of the four horses that drew the chariot) was accidentally buried in a rockfall. This accident helped preserve the statue until it was unearthed in modern

times. But it also hid this masterpiece from viewing by Pausanias, who visited Delphi in the second century CE. He never saw it.



Close-up of the Charioteer of Delphi. Photo by Sarah Scott.

For a brilliant article about statues of charioteers, I cite Bell 1995.

At the Museum at Delphi we saw the stone inscription with the Delphic Paean to Apollo with the musical notations.



Inscription in stone of the text of a paean to Apollo. Photo by Sarah Scott.

This video by Armand d'Angour includes some information about it, and a reconstructed performance with chorus and aulos (the link should start at the relevant section; the rest of the video includes other works which might also be of interest):

Rediscovering Ancient Greek Music (2017)



—Sarah Scott

Video by Lin Zhu of Day 4 of the trip:

Marble Jungle - Greece 3.14.18



§10. The Agora of Athens

by Gregory Nagy [CI 2016.06.24](#), rewritten 2018.03.05

§10.1. Three points to note:

§10.1A. The Altar of the Twelve Gods. This spot marks the place where the twelve Olympian gods were worshipped by the Athenians in an era when their city's affairs of state were controlled by the Peisistratidai, an aristocratic lineage of political strongmen who were retrospectively labeled 'tyrants' after they were overthrown in 508/507 BCE by a democratic régime founded by Cleisthenes, member of a rival aristocratic lineage known as the Alkmaionidai. According to Athenian tradition, this Altar was the centerpoint of the world: to measure the distance of any place from Athens, the starting point had to be this altar. The so-called father of history, Herodotus, was aware of this tradition when he spoke of the distance between the Altar in Athens and the Temple of Zeus in Olympia (2.7.1): in this case, the distance as reported by Herodotus was one thousand five hundred Olympic stadium-lengths minus fifteen. I must add that the theological and political significance of the Altar can be linked to the "politics of Olympus" as reflected in the poetic construct of the twelve Olympian gods in the Homeric Iliad and Odyssey.

[[I have more to say about this point at pp. 295|296 of my article "[Hesiod and the Ancient Biographical Traditions](#)," Nagy 2009.]]

§10.1B. The Monument of the Ten Eponymous Heroes of the Athenian State.



Photo by Marina Cheilitsi.

After the democracy was instituted in 508/507 BCE at the initiative of Cleisthenes, the citizens of the Athenian State were originally subdivided into ten phulai (phylai) or 'subdivisions' (the translation 'tribes', used by some modern historians, is misleading). Each phulē (phyle) or 'subdivision' was named after a hero, and that is why the term epōnumos 'eponymous' applies: this term indicates that someone is being named after someone who in this case is notionally an ancestor. So, it is as if all the citizens of Athens were derived from civic ancestors stemming from the heroic age. The Monument of the Ten Eponymous Heroes originally featured a marble base upon which stood the bronze statues of the following ten heroes: [1] Erekhtheus, [2] Aigeus father of Theseus, [3] Pandion, [4] Leos son of Orpheus, [5] Akamas son of Theseus, [6] Oineus, [7] Kekrops, [8] Hippothoön, [9] Aias (Ajax), and [10] Antiokhos son of Hēraklēs. §10.1C. [The place where Socrates was forced to drink the hemlock in 399 BCE](#). In the essay that follows, I quote what I said about this place in a posting from [2015.03.27](#).

§10C. The Last Words of Socrates at the Place Where He Died

by Gregory Nagy [CI 2015.03.27](#), rewritten 2018.03.05

§10C.1. In [H24H 24§45](#), I quote and analyze the passage in Plato's *Phaedo* 117a–118a where Socrates dies. His last words, as transmitted by Plato, are directed at all those who have followed Socrates—and who have had the unforgettable experience of engaging in dialogue with him. He tells them: don't forget to sacrifice a rooster to Asklepios.

§10C.2. I will quote the whole passage in a minute. But first, we need to ask: who is this Asklepios? As I explain in [H24H 20§§29–33](#), he was a hero whose father was the god Apollo himself, and, like his divine father, Asklepios had special powers of healing. More than that, Asklepios also had the power of bringing the dead back to life. That is why he was killed by the immortals, since mortals must stay mortal. But Asklepios, even after death, retained his power to bring the dead back to life.

§10C.3. So, what does Socrates mean when he asks his followers, in his dying words, not to forget to sacrifice a rooster to Asklepios?

§10C.4. Let us consider again the site where Socrates died—and where he said what he said about sacrificing a rooster to Asklepios. On the surface, this site is nothing much to write home about. All we can see at the site is the foundation stones of the State Prison where Socrates was held prisoner and where he was forced to drink the hemlock in the year 399 BCE. But I feel deeply that, just by visiting the site, we can connect with a sublime experience. We can make contact with a place linked forever with the very last words of one of the greatest thinkers in world history.

§10C.5a. I now quote my own translation of Plato's *Phaedo* 117a–118a, which situates these last words of Socrates:

"Go," said he [= Socrates], "and do as I say." Crito, when he heard this, signaled with a nod to the boy servant who was standing nearby, and the servant went in, remaining for some time, and then came out with the man who was going to administer the poison [pharmakon]. He was carrying a cup that contained it, ground into the drink. When Socrates saw the man he said: "You, my good man, since you are experienced in these matters, should tell me what needs to be done." The man answered: "You need to drink it, that's all. Then walk around until you feel a heaviness |_{117b} in your legs. Then lie down. This way, the poison will do its thing." While the man was saying this, he handed the cup to Socrates. And Socrates took it in a cheerful way, not flinching or getting pale or grimacing. Then looking at the man from beneath his brows, like a bull – that was the way he used to look at people – he said: "What do you say about my pouring a libation out of this cup to someone? Is it allowed or not?" The man answered: "What we grind is measured out, Socrates, as the right dose for drinking." "I understand," he said, |_{117c} "but surely it is allowed and even proper to pray to the gods so that my transfer of dwelling [met-oikēsis] from this world [enthende] to that world [ekeise] should be fortunate. So,

that is what I too am now praying for. Let it be this way.” And, while he was saying this, he took the cup to his lips and, quite readily and cheerfully, he drank down the whole dose. Up to this point, most of us had been able to control fairly well our urge to let our tears flow; but now when we saw him drinking the poison, and then saw him finish the drink, we could no longer hold back, and, in my case, quite against my own will, my own tears were now pouring out in a flood. So, I covered my face and had a good cry. You see, I was not crying for him, |_{117d} but at the thought of my own bad fortune in having lost such a comrade [hetairoi]. Crito, even before me, found himself unable to hold back his tears: so he got up and moved away. And Apollodorus, who had been weeping all along, now started to cry in a loud voice, expressing his frustration. So, he made everyone else break down and cry—except for Socrates himself. And he said: “What are you all doing? I am so surprised at you. I had sent away the women mainly because I did not want them |_{117e} to lose control in this way. You see, I have heard that a man should come to his end [teleutân] in a way that calls for measured speaking [euphêmein]. So, you must have composure [hêsukhiâ], and you must endure.” When we heard that, we were ashamed, and held back our tears. He meanwhile was walking around until, as he said, his legs began to get heavy, and then he lay on his back—that is what the man had told him to do. Then that same man who had given him the poison [pharmakon] took hold of him, now and then checking on his feet and legs; and after a while he pressed his foot hard and asked him if he could feel it; and he said that he couldn’t; and then he pressed his shins, |_{118a} and so on, moving further up, thus demonstrating for us that he was cold and stiff. Then he [= Socrates] took hold of his own feet and legs, saying that when the poison reaches his heart, then he will be gone. He was beginning to get cold around the abdomen. Then he uncovered his face, for he had covered himself up, and said—this was the last thing he uttered—“Crito, I owe the sacrifice of a rooster to Asklepios; will you pay that debt and not neglect to do so?” “I will make it so,” said Crito, “and, tell me, is there anything else?” When Crito asked this question, no answer came back anymore from Socrates. In a short while, he stirred. Then the man uncovered his face. His eyes were set in a dead stare. Seeing this, Crito closed his mouth and his eyes. Such was the end [teleutê], Echekrates, of our comrade [hetairoi]. And we may say about him that he was in his time the best [aristos] of all men we ever encountered—and the most intelligent [phronimos] and most just [dikaios].

§10C.5b. So I come back to my question about the meaning of the last words of Socrates, when he says, in his dying words: don’t forget to sacrifice a rooster to Asklepios. As I begin to formulate an answer, I must repeat something that I have already highlighted. It is the fact that the hero Asklepios was believed to have special powers of healing—even the power of bringing the dead back to life. As I point out in [H24H 24§46](#), some interpret the final instruction of Socrates to mean simply that death is a cure for life. I disagree. After sacrificing a rooster at day’s end, sacrificers will sleep the sleep of incubation and then, the morning after the sacrifice, they will wake up to hear other roosters crowing. So, the words of Socrates here are referring to rituals of overnight incubation in the hero cults of Asklepios.

§10C.6. The city of Epidaurus was famous for its hero cult of Asklepios. The space that was sacred to Asklepios enormous, and the enormity is a sure sign of the intense veneration received by Asklepios as the hero who, even though he is dead, has the superhuman power rescue you from death. The mystical logic of worshipping the dead Asklepios is that he died for humanity: he died because he had the power to bring humans back to life.

§10C.7. So, Asklepios is the model for keeping the voice of the rooster alive. And, for Socrates, Asklepios can become the model for keeping the word alive.

§10C.8. In [H24H 24§47](#), I follow through on analyzing this idea of keeping the word from dying, of keeping the word alive. That living word, I argue, is dialogue. We can see it when Socrates says that the only thing worth crying about is the death of the word. I am about to quote another passage from Plato’s *Phaedo*, and again I will use my own translation. But before I quote the passage, here is the context: well before Socrates is forced to drink the hemlock, his followers are already mourning his impending death, and Socrates reacts to their sadness by telling them that the only thing that would be worth mourning is not his death but the death of the conversation he started with them. Calling out to one of his followers, *Phaedo*, Socrates tells him (Plato, *Phaedo* 89b):

“Tomorrow, *Phaedo*, you will perhaps be cutting off these beautiful locks of yours [as a sign of mourning]?” “Yes, Socrates,” I [= *Phaedo*] replied, “I guess I will.” He shot back: “No you will not, if you listen to me.” “So, what will I do?” I [= *Phaedo*] said. He replied: “Not tomorrow but today I will cut off my own hair and you too will cut off these locks of yours – if our argument [logos] comes to an end [teleutân] for us and we cannot bring it back to life again [ana-biôsasthai].”

What matters for Socrates, as I argue in [H24H 24§48](#), is the resurrection of the ‘argument’ or logos, which means literally ‘word’, even if death may be the necessary pharmakon or ‘poison’ for leaving the everyday life and for entering the everlasting cycle of resurrecting the word.

§10C.9a. In the 2015 book [Masterpieces of Metonymy](#), published both online and in print, I study in Part One a traditional custom that prevailed in Plato’s Academy at Athens for centuries after the death of Socrates. Their custom was to celebrate the birthday of Socrates on the sixth day of the month Thargelion, which by their reckoning coincided with his death day. And they celebrated by engaging in Socratic dialogue, which for them was the logos that was resurrected every time people engage in Socratic dialogue. I go on to say in [MoM 1§§146–147](#):

For Plato and for Plato's Socrates, the word *logos* refers to the living 'word' of dialogue in the context of philosophical argumentation. When Socrates in Plato's *Phaedo* (89b) tells his followers who are mourning his impending death that they should worry not about his death but about the death of the *logos*—if this *logos* cannot be resurrected or 'brought back to life' (*ana-biōsasthai*)—he is speaking of the dialogic argumentation supporting the idea that the *psūkhē* or 'soul' is immortal. In this context, the *logos* itself is the 'argument'. For Plato's Socrates, it is less important that his *psūkhē* or 'soul' must be immortal, and it is vitally more important that the *logos* itself must remain immortal—or, at least, that the *logos* must be brought back to life. And that is because the *logos* itself, as I say, is the 'argument' that comes to life in dialogic argumentation.

§10C.9b. Here is the way I would sum up, then, what Socrates means as he speaks his last words. When the sun goes down and you check in for sacred incubation at the precinct of Asklepios, you sacrifice a rooster to this hero who, even in death, has the power to bring you back to life. As you drift off to sleep at the place of incubation, the voice of that rooster is no longer heard. He is dead, and you are asleep. But then, as the sun comes up, you wake up to the voice of a new rooster signaling that morning is here, and this voice will be for you a sign that says: the word that died has come back to life again. Asklepios has once again shown his sacred power. The word is resurrected. The conversation may now continue.

§10C.10. For more on the last words of Socrates, I refer to my essay "The Vow of Socrates," [2015.04.17](#).

§11. Agora Museum

by Gregory Nagy [CI 2016.06.24](#), rewritten 2018.03.05

§11.1. Three points to note:

§11.1A. There is a [display case showing a collection of small vials](#) that must have contained doses of hemlock used for executions approved by the State of Athens. In this case as well, I return to my posting from [2015.03.27](#), entitled "The last words of Socrates at the place where he died." The photograph of the display case was taken by Hunt Lambert.

§11.1B. There is a [terracotta plaque](#), dating back to the seventh century BCE or beyond, showing a [female figure with the palms of both hands turned seemingly outward](#), straight at the viewer. Flanking the figure are two serpents: the one on our left is red and the one on our right is blue. The description "snake goddess," applied to her by some, is not all that helpful.

§11.1C. Outside the Museum, in the portico of the reconstructed "Stoa of Attalos," there is a [relief sculpture on a marble base, dated to the fourth century BCE, showing an "apobatic moment."](#)

§12. Acropolis Museum

by Gregory Nagy [CI 2016.06.24](#), rewritten 2018.03.05

§12.0. We start at the southwest corner of the display showing the Parthenon Frieze, on the top floor of the Acropolis Museum. The Frieze and even the floor that contains the Frieze are aligned exactly with the Parthenon, which we can see looming up above on the Acropolis as we look out the window of the Museum. What do I mean by "alignment" here? Simply this: the north-south-east-west coordinates of the Frieze match exactly the original coordinates of the Parthenon itself. And the Acropolis Museum, situated on street-level to the south of the Acropolis looming above it, recreates in scale the entire Frieze as it had existed before its stonework was taken down in two phases. The first phase was the violent sawing-off that took place at the initiative of Thomas Bruce, also known as Lord Elgin, who dismantled and hauled off major portions of the Frieze along with other priceless artifacts within the years 1801 and 1812. What Elgin took down is now housed in the British Museum. The second phase was the scientifically-supervised removal and transfer of the remaining portions of the Frieze to their existing home on the top floor of the Acropolis Museum. These portions, now protected from the ravages of air pollution on the outside, are awaiting a hoped-for reintegration with their counterparts in the British Museum.

§12.1. Three points to note:

§12.1A. For the first point, I start at [the southwest corner of the Parthenon Frieze](#): at this corner, the actions that are represented by the sculpted figures are split into two perspectives for viewing a parallel movement of exquisitely sculpted figures headed toward one single destination, which is the center of the east side of the Frieze. On the right side, the movement rounds the southwest corner and then heads for the East along the southern side of the Frieze. On the left side, the movement has a longer way to go: there are figures that move along the west side heading from South to North before rounding the northwest corner and then joining the left-hand side of the overall movement as it heads for the East along the northern side of the Frieze. What is all this "movement," as I refer to it here? Primarily, it is a procession. In fact, it is the ultimate procession of the Athenians, generally known today as the Panathenaic Procession because it occurs at the Great Panathenaic Festival, celebrated every four years to honor the primary divinity of Athens, the goddess Athena.

§12.1B. For the second point, I choose the blocks on the north side of the Panathenaic Frieze that represent scenes of apobatic chariot racing (blocks 11–29). What I mean is this: an armed athlete known as an apobatēs, which means literally, 'the one who steps off', is getting ready to jump off the platform of a speeding chariot driven by a fellow athlete, who is the charioteer. Although the Frieze represents primarily the Panathenaic Procession, not all of the events depicted in the relief sculptures of the frieze involve the actual procession. Although as I just said the primary event is the procession itself, the frieze also represents other events that were aspects of the Great Panathenaic Festival, including various forms of athletic events. A case in point is a set of depictions centering on apobatic chariot racing. As we know from a variety of sources, this kind of chariot racing was a major athletic event at the celebration of the Great

Panathenaic Festival. Here is what I have to say about apobatic chariot racing at this festival in my book *The Ancient Greek Hero in 24 Hours* (7b§§3-4):

[H24H 7b§3.] In the relief sculptures of the Panathenaic Frieze of the Parthenon, we see twenty-one apobatic chariot teams on display, with eleven chariots featured on the north side (North XI-XXIX) and ten on the south side (South XXV-XXXV); in each case, the chariot is shown with four horses, a driver, and an apobatēs, who is wearing a helmet and a shield. The apobatai are shown in a variety of poses: stepping into the chariot, riding in the chariot, stepping out of the chariot, and running alongside the chariot; in two cases, the apobatai are evidently wearing a full set of armor.

[H24H 7b§4.] What makes the feat of leaping into or out of a speeding chariot so commandingly distinctive is that the apobatēs executes his leap in the mode of an epic warrior. While the fellow athlete who drives the chariot is standing on the right side of the vehicle and wearing the full-length gown of a charioteer, the apobatēs standing on the left side wears a helmet and carries a shield. I focus here on the critical moment when the apobatic athlete, holding on to the shield with his left hand, starts loosening the grip of his right hand on the rail of the speeding chariot and then suddenly leaps to the ground. Weighted down by all this armor, the apobatēs must hit the ground running as he lands on his feet in his high-speed leap from the platform of his chariot. If his run is not broken in a fall, he continues to run down the length of the racecourse in competition with the other running apobatai, who have made their own leaps from their own chariots.

§12.1C. For the third point, I choose a scene depicted at the center of the east side of the Panathenaic Frieze. Here we have reached the central scene in the wrap-around relief sculptures of the Frieze. I analyze this scene in Part Three of my book *Masterpieces of Metonymy*, and I provide [here](#) a link to the full text of my analysis, which goes from 3§1 all the way to 3§102. To read this text in its entirety, however, would take about a full hour, and I appreciate the fact that some of my readers will not have the time to go through my whole argumentation, step by step. One short-cut would be to read only 3§§32-102. An even shorter alternative would be to go from 3§32 only as far as 3§60. And the shortest alternative of them all would be to read only the epitome that follows, which takes us from 3§32 only as far as 3§39:

[MoM 3§32.] The central scene of the Parthenon Frieze refers to an event that took place in the Panathenaic Procession. The sacred robe of Athena, called the Peplos, was paraded along the Sacred Way for all to see, and then it was finally presented to the goddess at the climax of the procession. That Peplos is the folded robe that we see pictured in the relief sculptures of Block 5 of the east side of the Parthenon Frieze. In terms of my argumentation, this robe is the one and the same sacred Peplos of Athena. Here is a line drawing of the scene:



[MoM 3§33.] This relief sculpture is carved into a block (often called instead a "slab") occupying the most prominent space of the Parthenon Frieze. This block, "Block 5," features a sculpted scene picturing five human figures in all. The two figures that I show in the line drawing are situated on the right side of Block 5, and there are also three other figures on the left side. Framing both sides of Block 5 are the sculpted figures of seated

gods, larger in size than the five humans. On our left, in Block 4, the gods Zeus and Hērā frame these humans, while in Block 6, on our right, the framing gods are Athena and Hephaistos.

[MoM 3§34.] The scene picturing the five human figures in Block 5 has been described as “the high point” of the overall narrative of the Parthenon Frieze, “framed between the central columns of the temple façade” [Neils 2001:166], and “[i]t was here that the design [of the frieze] must have begun and for which an exceptionally long block [= Block 5] was ordered, quarried, and set into place.” [Neils p. 67]. The expert whom I have just quoted about Block 5 goes on to describe the narrative sculpted into this “exceptionally long block” as “important enough to dictate the layout of the entire frieze” into “two processional files” that converge on this narrative. When she says “two processional files” in her description, she makes it clear that she has in mind the overall narrative of the Parthenon Frieze, which she sees as a representation of the Panathenaic Procession at the festival of the Panathenaia.

[MoM 3§35.] I have already noted the importance of this procession as the setting for the ritual presentation of the Peplos. I have more to say about the ritual presentation, as experts call it, but for now I concentrate on the Panathenaic Procession itself, as represented on the Parthenon Frieze.

[MoM 3§36.] In emphasizing the importance of the narrative carved into Block 5 at the east side of the Frieze, the expert that I have already quoted is saying that the overall representation of the Panathenaic Procession converges on this one single narrative. In her wording, as we just saw, the Procession splits into “two processional files” proceeding eastward from the north and from the south sides of the Parthenon Frieze and then converging at the “high point” featuring the five human figures carved into Block 5 of the east side.

[MoM 3§37.] But the narrative of this “high point” is problematic, since experts have till now been unable to shape a consensus about what it all means. From the standpoint of a casual viewer’s first impression, the five human figures of Block 5 may seem unimpressive. But I think that all five of these human figures are in fact all-important.

[MoM 3§38.] To back up this line of thinking, I start by concentrating on the two human figures positioned on the right side of Block 5, as shown in the line drawing. These two figures are pictured here in the act of holding on to a fabric as they face one another, and I agree with those who think that the two of them are participating in a ritualized act—an act that I have been describing up to now as the presentation of the Peplos.

[MoM 3§39.] While I agree with the idea that this scene, as sculpted into Block 5 of the east side of the Parthenon Frieze, is picturing some kind of a ritual that features the presenting of the Peplos to Athena, I disagree with the further idea that this scene describes the ritual of such a presentation as it took place in the era when the Panathenaic Frieze was sculpted. Instead, I argue that the presentation of the Peplos in Block 5 follows the pattern of a myth that aetiologizes this ritual, and this argumentation takes me from 3§40 all the way to 3§102 in *Masterpieces of Metonymy*. And who are the two figures who are participating in such a myth? As we can see from the line drawing that I just showed, the figure on our left is a male adult, and the figure on our right is an adolescent, shorter than the corresponding adult by well over a head’s length. The gender of the adolescent is no longer clearly distinguishable, partly because the surface of the relief sculpture has been so massively eroded, but I argue in 3§§40–102 that this figure is female. I will leave it for the reader to decide whether or not to look up the step-by-step argumentation that I present there.

§13. The Acropolis of Athens

by Gregory Nagy [CI 2016.06.24](#), rewritten 2018.03.05

§13.0. Proceeding upward to the Propylaea, which is the grand western entrance that leads into the upper ground of the Acropolis, we move along what was once a ramp instead of a set of stone steps. At one point, to our right, we can look through a “window” into the Mycenaean world: it is an opening in the fifth-century wall. Such openings were constructed deliberately to reveal the inner layer of “Cyclopean” wall-construction dating from a millennium earlier.

§13.1. Seven major points to note, A B C D E F G, once we have finally reached the grounds of the Acropolis:

A. After we have passed through the grand gateway of the Propylaea, we would see facing us, if it were still there, a gigantic bronze statue of the goddess Athena, made by the renowned sculptor Pheidias. I drew attention to the description by Pausanias:

In addition to the works of art I have mentioned, there are two tithes [dekatai] dedicated by the Athenians after wars. There is first a bronze statue [agalma] of Athena, tithe [dekatē] from the [victory over the] Persians who landed at Marathon. It is the work [tekhne] of Pheidias. [...] The point of the spear of this Athena and the crest of her helmet are already visible to those sailing to Athens as they pass by Cape Sounion.

Pausanias 1.28.2

B. As we stand at the southwest corner of the Parthenon and look upward, we can see looming there some fragmentary horizontal stonework that marks the location of the Panathenaic Frieze. This frieze, created in

the 440s BCE during the long-term building program that culminated in the Parthenon, was a masterpiece of relief sculpture that originally wrapped itself all the way around the inside of the Parthenon. I will have more to say about this masterpiece in a few minutes. For now, however, I simply note that the small part of the Panathenaic Frieze that we see from down below as we now look up at the southwest corner of the Parthenon is merely a copy, but it gives modern viewers a reasonable idea of what could be seen by ancient viewers in the Age of Pheidias, who supervised the massive building program initiated by Pericles for the Athenian Acropolis. The original stonework that is represented by the fragmentary copy that we see up above from down below—as well as the rest of the stonework that survives in Athens—can be viewed in the Acropolis Museum.

C. Starting to walk counterclockwise around the Parthenon, we marvel at the prodigious architecture as we look to the left (including a view of the earlier layers of “Cyclopean” wall construction).

D. As we keep walking ahead, we now look all the way down from the walls to the right and see below us the foundations of the Theater of Dionysus, to the left of which used to stand the Odeum (ōideion) of Pericles. The Theater was the primary venue for premiere performances of the tragedies composed by Aeschylus, Sophocles, and Euripides. As for the Odeum, as I argue, it was the primary venue for performances of the Homeric Iliad and Odyssey at Athens in the era of Pericles. [[HC 4§§173–180.]]

The abbreviation HC stands for: Nagy, G. 2009|2008. Homer the Classic. Printed | Online version. Hellenic Studies 36. Cambridge, MA, and Washington, DC. http://nrs.harvard.edu/urn-3:hul.ebook:CHS_Nagy_Homer_the_Classic.2008.

E. We now round the southeast corner of the Parthenon and find ourselves facing the east side of the Parthenon. I will have more to say in a minute about this all-important stopping-point.

F. But let me first describe what happens after this point. We walk toward the north of the Acropolis, heading for a building-complex known as the Erechtheum (Erechtheion). On our way, we pass by the poorly-identifiable remains of the Old Temple of Athena.

G. Here we descend the modern steps leading down to a lower level, where we confront the Temple of Poseidon. A stylized hole in the floor of this temple marks the place where a small pool fed by a salt-water spring once existed. In terms of the myths and rituals associated with this place, the pool was created when Poseidon violently struck the ground with his trident, and a mark of his divine action from above is a stylized hole in the roof, diagonally corresponding to the stylized hole in the floor.



Photos by Heidi Hardner.

§13.2. The first of the seven major points A B C D E F G that I have just now indicated, point A, was a gigantic bronze statue of Athena, made by Pheidias, which is no longer to be seen—but which was once upon a time the very first sight to dazzle visitors as they entered from the Propylaea into the high ground of the Acropolis. Now I must mention an even more dazzling sight: it is point E, the fifth point, in my sequence of A B C D E F G. This point E is the gigantic gold-and-ivory statue of Athena, also made by Pheidias, which had once been housed inside the Parthenon. As in the case of the bronze Athena, this gold-and-ivory Athena, one of the world’s greatest marvels of classical art, is no longer to be seen. To have lost the sight of this dazzling statue is arguably one of the greatest losses of civilization. At the moment when our travel-study group stands in front of the east side of the Parthenon, I invite us to imagine the spectacular moment, repeated every day at dawn, when the attendants of Athena opened her temple’s massive wooden door—and the first light of day would now be streaming into the inner darkness, gradually illuminating the gold-and-ivory figure of the goddess of Athens. This dazzling sight of Athena evidently

made a deep impression on Pausanias, who describes what he saw in words that I quote here from my own translation:

And now, as one enters the temple [nāos] that they name the Parthenon, all the things you see on what is called the [east] pediment [aetos] show the birth [genesis] of Athena, but on the rear [= west] pediment you see the strife [eris] between Athena and Poseidon over the ownership of the land [of Athens]. The statue [agalma] itself is made [poieisthai] of ivory and gold. On the middle of her helmet [kranos] is placed a likeness [eikōn] of the Sphinx. [...] and on either side of the helmet [kranos] are griffins [grupes] in relief. {1.24.6} [...] {1.24.7} The statue [agalma] of Athena is standing [not seated], with a tunic [khitōn] reaching to the feet, and on her breast the head of Medusa is worked in ivory. She holds a [statue of] Nike about four cubits high, and in the other hand a spear [doru]; at her feet is placed a shield [aspis] and near the spear [doru] is a serpent [drakōn]. This serpent [drakōn] would be Erikhthonios. On the pedestal of the statue [agalma] is the birth of Pandora in relief. It has been said-in-poetry [poieisthai] by Hesiod and others that this Pandora was the first woman; before Pandora was born there was as yet no womankind.

Pausanias 1.24.5-7

§13.3. What happened to the statue of Athena? In my book [Masterpieces of Metonymy](#) (2015), I quote and analyze an ancient report that tells all about it. What follows is an epitome of what I present at 1§§122-125 in that book. The report starts with a man named Proclus, a famed neo-Platonic philosopher who lived in the fifth century CE, and the reporter is his faithful student, named Marinus, who composed a work known as *The Life of Proclus*. As we read in the report of Marinus (*Life of Proclus* 30), Proclus experienced in a special way the fate of the statue of Athena. This spectacular statue, which had been meant to dazzle for all eternity a never-ending stream of daily visitors approaching the Parthenon to get a glimpse of the goddess, was unceremoniously carted off by Christian zealots—never to be seen again. In the report of Marinus, this catastrophe for civilization is linked with an epiphany experienced by Proclus:

How dear [pros-philēs] he [= Proclus] was to the goddess of philosophy [= Athena] was amply demonstrated by the fact that he chose for himself a philosophical life. But, even more than that, the goddess herself showed it when her statue, which had been until this time situated in the Parthenon, was removed by those [= the Christians] who move [kineîn] things that must not be moved [akinēta]. In a dream [onar], he [= Proclus] seemed to be seeing a woman of great beauty coming toward him and announcing to him that he must, as quickly as possible, get his home [oikiā] ready for her, “because the Athenian Lady wishes to live with you in your home [para soi].”

Marinus *Life of Proclus* 30

§13.4. Goddesses have a way of talking like that. Even when they speak in the first person, they will refer to themselves in the third person. A classic example is the wording of Aphrodite in the [Hippolytus of Euripides](#) (verse 33). As we consider further the story about the epiphany of the goddess Athena, appearing as she does to Proclus in a dream, I need to highlight the fact that the goddess here is following up on an earlier epiphany experienced by the philosopher. As we are about to read in a passage extracted from an earlier point in *The Life of Proclus*, Athena appeared to the philosopher already in his youth, when he was still living in Constantinople. In this earlier epiphany, the goddess had invited young Proclus to embrace philosophy as his lifelong passion. I will now quote the wording of this story, calling attention in advance to a striking detail. As we are about to see, this epiphany is meant to explain why the philosopher developed a special feeling of intimacy with Athena as the goddess of wisdom, as the patroness of philosophy. Here, then, is the wording, which explains why Athena cared so much for Proclus from the very start:

You see, she [= Athena] appeared [phainesthai] to him in a dream [onar] and summoned him to a life of philosophy. And I think that this is why he experienced such great familiarity [oikeiotēs] with the goddess. As a result, he especially adored her and was observant of her rituals [orgia] with more of a passionate intensity of divine possession [enthousiastikōteron].

Marinus *Life of Proclus* 6

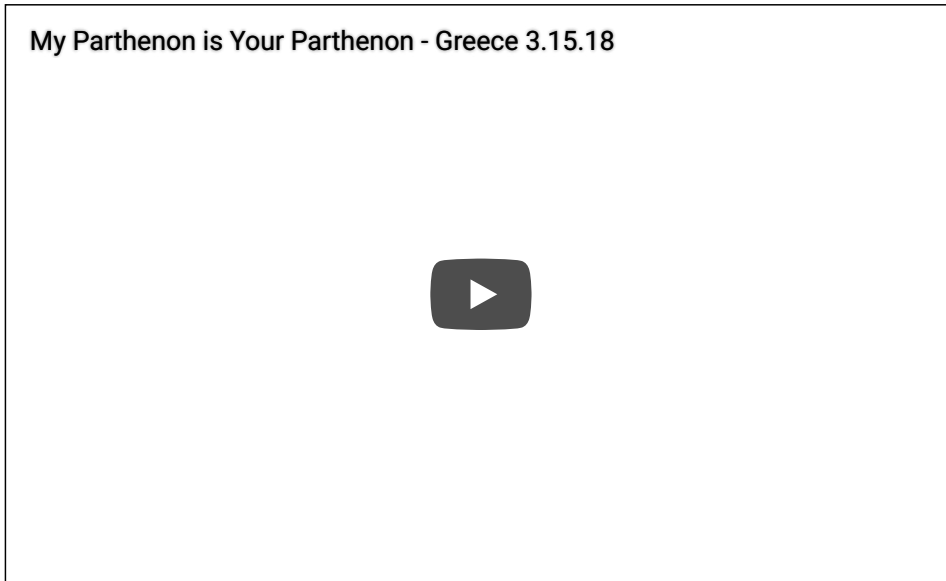
§13.5. The intimacy that Proclus felt he shared with the goddess Athena is expressed here by the word *oikeiotēs*, which I translate as ‘familiarity’. To be familiar with something or someone is to be at home with that something or someone. After all, the adjective *oikeio-* is derived from the noun *oikos*, meaning ‘home’; a related noun is *oikiā*, likewise meaning ‘home’, which is used in the text I quoted earlier (*Marinus Life of Proclus* 30) when Athena at the moment of her epiphany tells Proclus that he must, as quickly as possible, get his *oikiā* ‘home’ ready for her. Here I return to the story about the removal of the statue of Athena from her home in the Parthenon on top of the Acropolis of Athens. As we saw in this story, Proclus experiences the sensory fusion of both seeing and hearing the goddess at the very moment when her statue is being permanently removed from sight. As her statue disappears forever, the goddess re-appears to Proclus in a final epiphany that recalls the primal epiphany that had bonded the philosopher to her forever. Though the statue of the goddess is gone, removed from her home in the Parthenon, the goddess of philosophy now finds for herself a new home in the heart of the philosopher who will love her forever and ever.

§13.6. Here is a check-list of further views to be noted at the Acropolis:

—The ‘Hill of the Muses’: as we ascend to the Acropolis, it can be seen off to the right, while looking down at the Odeum of Herodes Atticus.

- The Pnyx: you see it as you turn around and look West just before you enter the Propylaea.** (I deliberately format here in boldface: this place was the setting for the deliberations of the ekklēsiā, which was the Assembly of the Athenian Democracy.)
- The olive tree of Athena, now of course replaced by a new olive tree: visible after we leave the Temple of Poseidon
- Temple of Hephaistos: visible as we descend from the Acropolis
- Cave of the Furies, known in Greek as the Erinues or Eumenides: visible after the descent from the Acropolis
- Areopagus or 'Hill of Ares': looming over the Cave, the ancient site for trials relating to homicide—and where the Apostle Paul once delivered a speech to the Athenians.

Video by Lin Zhu of Day 5 of the trip:



§14. National Archaeological Museum of Athens

by Gregory Nagy GN [CI_2016.06.24](#) [via 2016.06.17 via 2016.03.14], rewritten 2018.03.05

§14A. Three brief notations for slow reading:

§14A.1. In a vast hall straight ahead as you enter, which houses Mycenaean antiquities, we find at the farther end of this hall a slanted-horizontal display case containing seals and sealings. One seal, found in a Mycenaean tholos tomb at Vapheio near Sparta, shows the image of a man in a long robe who is carrying a fenestrated axe (CMS I.225). This axe is shaped like a capital P with a vertical bar bisecting the semicircle attached to the straight line of the P. In a vertical display case nearby—it is to our right as we face the two posts from the "Treasury of Atreus"—we actually see the fenestrated axe (National Archaeological Museum inventory no. 1870): this object had been buried together with the seal that shows the picture of the man carrying the axe. And the man who is pictured on the seal is the same man who had been buried in the tomb containing both the axe and the seal that shows the man carrying the axe; in fact, the seal was attached to the man's wrist (Yasur-Landau 2015:141). It has been observed about this axe that, by the time it was buried with its owner in the Mycenaean tomb at Vapheio, it was already "a centuries-old ceremonial weapon," dating as far back as sometime between the 20th and 18th centuries BCE (Yasur-Landau pp. 139, 146); both the axe and the seal had been acquired from Minoan Crete (Yasur-Landau p. 141).

§14A.2. Backtracking to the entrance to the museum ... Instead of proceeding straight ahead as you enter the museum, there is an alternative route if you turn left. We find in the very first hall, to our right, a huge Geometric vase known as the Dipylon Amphora. Here is a utensil that has evolved into something so big that it has outgrown its utility as a utensil (in the present case, as an amphora). We focus on the patterns painted on the vase. They show natural figures that are human and animal and floral and so on, surrounded by decorative geometric figures. Represented at a centerpoint of the vase is the human figure of a dead body lying on a bier, surrounded by other human figures who are making gestures of lamentation. The primary gesture centers on the raising of the two arms, pointing them straight up from the elbow. Shown hanging over the bier on which the dead body rests is an expansive fabric, and the painting here represents the pattern-weaving of this fabric in a stylized way. In real pattern-weaving, the patterns woven into a fabric would represent natural figures that are human and animal and floral and so on, surrounded by decorative geometric figures. So, the world that is pictured by way of pattern-weaving matches the world that is pictured by way of Geometric vase-painting. But in the vase-painting here that represents a fabric that would have shown the many varieties of such woven figures, what is shown instead is merely a checkerboard patterning. So, the painting represents the variety of what is seen in a pattern-weave by way of a simple alternation of black and white squares. As for the human figures that are being represented in the paintings on the vase, lozenge-shapes are used for representing parts of the body. For example, the chest of a human figure is represented as an upside-down triangle. In pattern-weaving, such lozenge-shapes are typical in representing parts of the human body. That is why I think that the techniques

of painting figures on Geometric vases are modeled on techniques of pattern-weaving figures into fabrics. If my thinking here is valid, then it is fair to say that the art of Geometric pottery-painting, presumably performed by professional men, is modeled in some ways on the art of pattern-weaving, presumably performed by non-professional women.

§14A.3. Further along in a nearby hall is the statue of a girl named Phrasikleia, standing on a base that bears an inscription that tells about the statue. Evidently, the statue and its base were once markers of a tomb. The statue of this girl was buried sometime between 530 and 510 BCE or so, evidently to protect it from destruction or defacement by political enemies of the girl's aristocratic family. The base of the statue was not buried but survived independently. The statue, once it was buried and thus hidden away, remained undetected for some 2,500 years, until it was finally unearthed in 1972 at a place called Merenda outside the city of Athens. Reunited with its base at the Museum, this statue (inv. no. 4889) represents one of the most exquisite pieces of archaic art, and it preserves most aspects of the artistry that went into its creation, including a wide range of colors. An inscription on the base of the statue tells the story of Phrasikleia:

σεμα Φρασικλειας · κορε κεκλεσομαι | αιει αντι γαμο | παρα θεον τουτο | λαχουσ' ονομα

This is the marker [sēma] of Phrasikleia. 'Girl' [korē] is what I will be called for all time to come. Instead of marriage, I have been fated by the gods to have this name.

(The base of the statue is also inscribed with the name of the sculptor: Aristion of Paros.) The unopened flower that the girl holds in her hand is to be contrasted with the opened flowers, intertwined with flower buds, that we see woven into the garland adorning her hair. Many experts think that the flower she holds forever is a lotus, which closes at night—only to open every morning with the coming of daylight. The name of the girl, Phrasikleia, contains the word kleos, which indicates poetic 'glory', and this name 'points', as indicated by phrasi-, to an eternal glory that is promised her by the poetry of the inscription whenever its inscribed words are read out loud by a passerby (Svenbro 1988:12–25).

§14B. Here is check-list of further points of interest to be noted in the Museum:

§14B.1. As you enter the Museum, to the right, there is a hall featuring Cycladic art. I drew attention to two figurines, placed next to each other in a display case: one figurine represents the player of a string instrument, prototype of the kitharā, while the other represents the player of a wind instrument, prototype of the aulos. These two instruments were the essential accompaniment for most forms of song and dance in the later periods of the second and first millennia BCE and beyond.

§14B.2. As you enter the Museum, straight ahead is the grand hall containing artifacts from the Mycenaean era. Introducing all the displays are slabs from Grave Circle A of Mycenae, placed in the foreground of the hall. Just as these slabs are now the prime markers for the prestige of the Museum, they used to be prime markers for the prestige of Mycenaean civilization. I noted the hunting scenes depicted on the surfaces of the slabs. Grave Circle A is dated to the sixteenth century BCE.

§14B.3. I note, in passing, the golden death mask of "Agamemnon"; inside the same display-case are two exquisite daggers that I also note in passing. From here on, I will just say "note," not "I note."

§14B.4. Note the depiction, on a rhyton (#8 in the relevant display-case), of a wartime siege that is evidently cognate with depictions of sieges in the verbal art of Homeric poetry. I speak here of a cognate relationship between the visual arts and the verbal arts. I use the word "cognate" here to indicate that these two forms of art, visual and verbal, are related to each other, yes, but there is no need to suppose that the visual arts are dependent on the verbal arts—or vice versa.

§14B.5. Note a set of gold-leaf scales (#9 in the relevant display-case) buried along with the bodies of aristocratic women in Shaft Grave III of Grave Circle A of Mycenae. Among the decorations on the gold-leaf "weights" that accompanied the scales were representations of butterflies or moths, the word for which in Classical Greek is psūkhē; other meanings for this word in Classical Greek include 'breath of life' or 'spirit' or even 'soul'. Comparing the expression "life hangs in the balance," I argue for the significance of representing a moth or butterfly as a "weight" to be weighed at the moment of death. There is a cognate idea in Homeric poetry, as in Iliad 22.208–213, where Zeus is weighing on his golden scales the lives of Achilles and Hector, and the technical word for this idea is psūkho-stasiā, meaning 'weighing of the psūkhē' on a set of scales.

§14B.6. Note a particularly large seal-ring on display, featuring a depiction of what archaeologists guardedly describe as a "religious scene."

§14B.7. Note the displays of fresco paintings of two figure-eight shields, featuring representations of the natural patterning of spots to be found on the hides of most cows: the shields made from cowhide in the Mycenaean era preserve such natural patterning, and the artistic representations of the cowhide shields transmit naturalistically the same patterning. On the idea of a cowhide shield as an exteriorization of the interior heroic self, you can read about it in [Nagy 1990b](#):263–265.

§14B.8. Note the "Warrior Vase," dating from the late Mycenaean period, depicting uniformed helmeted warriors heading off to war. Behind them is the figure of a woman with outstretched arms. This gesture signifies the performance of lament.

§14B.9. A boar's-tusk-helmet.



Photo by H el ene Emeriaud.

 14C. Here are still further points of interest in the Museum:

 14C.1. Note in passing the bronze statue of the bearded male figure throwing... a trident? ... a thunderbolt?

 14C.2. Note in passing another relief sculpture representing "the apobatic moment." Relevant analysis in *Classical Inquiries* [2016.06.24](#) at  9.1B. Also at  11.1C.

 14C.3. Note in passing a relief sculpture showing a warrior mourning himself. He is a "marine," whose task would have been to fight in hand-to-hand combat by boarding the decks of enemy ships in naval battles. Evidently, this marine had been lost at sea, and now we see him sitting sadly on a headland overlooking the watery blue expanse that will not release his body for a proper burial in Mother Earth. The headland is eerily shaped like the prow of a battleship. And the person who is sitting there dejectedly on that headland is not really a person. Rather, he is a kind of disembodied self who is sadly contemplating the irretrievable loss of his own body at sea.

 14D. We proceed to the upper floor of the Museum, and I select only a small sampling of the many wonders to be seen here. In this case, I will offer only a minimalist description of each sampling:

 14D.1. [[The revised observations here stem from a new visit by GN, 2018.06.24.]] Geometric vase featuring an image of two lyre-players (the lyre in this case looks like a kithar ), and each one of the two is sitting on a stool (equivalent of a diphros). #15842.

 14D.2. [[The revised observations here stem from a new visit by GN, 2018.06.24.]] Geometric vase featuring an image of a chariot with a warrior standing on the platform. #806.

 14D.3. [[The revised observations here stem from a new visit by GN, 2018.06.24.]] Geometric vase featuring an image of a funerary carriage, flanked on either side by chariots with warriors standing on the platforms; the rails on the left and the right of the chariots are accentuated. #990.

 14D.4. Geometric vase featuring an image of a "mistress of animals." The date on the label: around 675-650 BCE. #355.

 14D.5. On a terracotta decoration for a temple of Apollo, we see a painting that shows the images of A d n and Khelid n, two doomed sisters in a myth about their tragic transformation into a nightingale and a swallow. In this fragmentary painting, we see an inscription that labels the sister on the right as ΧΕΛΙΔΦΝ, which means 'swallow' (khelid n). In another version of the myth, the sisters are known as Procne and Philomela. For an analysis of this myth, see my posting in *Classical Inquiries* for [2016.01.07](#)   19-23.

 14D.6. [[This observation, added to the four previous observations, stems from a new visit by GN, 2018.06.24.]] Geometric vase featuring, along one of its bands, a series of chariots, one after the next, each one of which is drawn by two horses, but at least one of which is drawn by four horses, not two. On the platform of the four-horse chariot stand two warriors, one of whom is the driver while the other holds a spear. Only one warrior stands on each one of the two-horse chariots. It looks as if the warriors are wearing boar's tusk helmets decorated with horsehair plumes. Along a lower band are "hoplites" carrying round shields, as distinct from the "body-shields" of the warriors standing on the platforms of chariots. The date on the label: around 720-700 BCE. #894.

 14D.7. Wooden panels, dating from the sixth century BCE, found at Pitsa in the region of Corinth. On the surface of the stucco that coats the wood underneath are paintings of a ritual scene.

 14D.8. Vase painting that features H rakl s in the act of killing a noxious Centaur named Nessos [spelled

veToc here]. The best-known version of the myth is transmitted in the tragedy *Women of Trachis* by Sophocles, where we read that some of the fluid oozing from the dying Centaur was preserved in a vial by Deianeira, the future wife of Hēraklēs. She was led to believe that this fluid could be used as a love-ointment to restore the affections of her husband if he ever strayed. It is made explicit in Diodorus of Sicily 4.36.5 that the fluid was the semen of the dying Centaur. As we read further in Diodorus and in Sophocles, this fluid that Deianeira smeared on the clothing that made contact with the skin of Herakles turned out to be no love-ointment: it became a deadly poison that pervaded the insides of the hero.

Here is a list of participants in the Harvard Spring Break Travel Study in Greece, March 2018:

Alyssa Bravin, Jeffry and Diana Burnam, Marina Cheilitsi, Ngar Man (Rebecca) Chow, Avery Coffey, Stanley Dawson, Judith Ferry, Jessica Garcia, Joseph Glenmullen, Heidi Hardner, William Humphrey, Cynthia Liberman, William Northum, Heleni Palaiologou, Richard Regalado, Stephanie Robinson, Jennifer Saal, Sarah Scott, Yong (Daniel) Shen, John and Adele Siegmund, Achilleas Stamatiadis, Shu Shuen (Audrey) Tam, Einat and Miri Wilf, Yvonne Wing, Lin Zhu

Videos by Lin Zhu of Days 5 & 6 of the trip:

Greek Smoothies? - Greece 3.16.18



Until Next Time! - Greece 3.17.18



Bibliography of relevant works by Nagy

Nagy, G. 1990a. *Pindar's Homer: The Lyric Possession of an Epic Past*.
Baltimore. http://nrs.harvard.edu/urn-3:hul.ebook:CHS_Nagy.Pindars_Homer.1990.

---. 1990b. *Greek Mythology and Poetics*. Ithaca NY. Revised paperback edition 1992. Available online at http://nrs.harvard.edu/urn-3:hul.ebook:CHS_Nagy.Greek_Mythology_and_Poetics.1990.

---. 2009. "Hesiod and the Ancient Biographical Traditions." *The Brill Companion to Hesiod* (ed. F. Montanari, A. Rengakos, and Ch. Tsagalis) 271–311. Leiden. http://nrs.harvard.edu/urn-3:hinc.essay:Nagy.Hesiod_and_the_Ancient_Biographical_Traditions.2009.

---. 2013. *The Ancient Greek Hero in 24 Hours*. Cambridge, MA. http://nrs.harvard.edu/urn-3:hul.ebook:CHS_NagyG.The_Ancient_Greek_Hero_in_24_Hours.2013.

—. 2015. *Masterpieces of Metonymy: From Ancient Greek Times to Now*. *Hellenic Studies* 72. Cambridge, MA, and Washington, DC. http://nrs.harvard.edu/urn-3:hul.ebook:CHS_Nagy.Masterpieces_of_Metonymy.2015.

Tags: [Athens](#), [Delphi](#), [HAA travel-study](#), [Mycenae](#), [Nafplio](#), [Olympia](#), [Pausanias](#), [Spring Break 2018](#)

Comments are closed.

« [Achilles and the Apobates Race in Euripides' Iphigeneia in Aulis](#)

[Learning to sing, and a dead master of song](#) »



Classical Inquiries, edited by Keith Stone, is licensed under a [Creative Commons Attribution-NonCommercial 4.0 International License](#).

[EU/EEA Privacy Disclosures](#) [Cookie Policy](#) [CHS GR Privacy Notice](#)

Classical Inquiries powered by [WordPress](#) and [The Clear Line Theme](#)