



Smooth surfaces and rough edges in retranslating Pausanias, Part 1

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Smooth surfaces and rough edges in retranslating Pausanias, Part 1

June 14, 2018 By Gregory Nagy listed under [By Gregory Nagy, Pausanias commentary, Pausanias reader](#)

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2018.06.14 | By Gregory Nagy

§0. My experiments with translating Pausanias, as reflected in several essays I have posted in *Classical Inquiries*, have by now reached a point where I have finished retranslating most of Pausanias Scroll 1. In the present posting, I explain what I mean by “retranslation,” showing a sample. In this sample, I retranslate the original Greek wording used by Pausanias as he briefly retells a myth about the sad death of an Amazon named Hippolyte.

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



Marble sarcophagus in the Louvre. [Image](#) via Wikimedia Commons. The dying Amazon depicted here is Penthesileia.

§1. As of now, 2018.06.14, I am done with my first try at retranslating most of Pausanias Scroll 1 for a long-term project that goes by the title *A Pausanias reader* in progress. A rough version of that project is available [here](#). The original translation goes back to W. H. S. Jones, 1918 (assisted by H. A. Ormerod in the case of Scroll 2). The eventual goal is for me to retranslate all his work on Pausanias, from Scroll 1 all the way through Scroll 10.

§2. I call my work a retranslation, not a translation, because the *modus operandi* has been to leave the wording of Jones in place wherever I see no need for change. That is as it should be, since I do respect his work (I should add that he is the same Jones as the third author of the Greek-to-English dictionary produced by Liddell, Scott, and Jones, 1920), and I have no intention of replacing it. I intend only to supplement by retranslating wherever I think that the original Greek wording has more to say—or less to say—than what is said in the corresponding English wording. My attempts at retranslation will have their rough edges, to be sure, in comparison with what is likely to be a smoother version attempted by Jones. But there will also be occasions where the translation of Jones has its own rough edges—and where my retranslation can be seen as an attempt to smooth them over.

§3. Here is a sample text from Pausanias—in this case focusing on the death of the Amazon Hippolyte.

First, I show the translation by Jones:



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{1.41.7} Near the shrine of the hero Pandion is the tomb of Hippolyte. I will record the account the Megarians give of her. When the Amazons, having marched against the Athenians because of Antiope, were overcome by Theseus, most of them met their death in the fight, but Hippolyte, the sister of Antiope and on this occasion the leader of the women, escaped with a few others to Megara. Having suffered such a military disaster, being in despair at her present situation and even more hopeless of reaching her home in Themiscyra, she died of a broken heart, and the Megarians gave her burial. The shape of her tomb is like an Amazonian shield.

Next, I show my own working retranslation:

{1.41.7} Near the hero-shrine [hērōion] of Pandion is the tomb [mnēma] of Hippolyte. I will write down [graphein] the kinds of things that the people of Megara say with regard to her. When the Amazons, having made war against the Athenians because of Antiope, were defeated by Theseus, most of them met their death in the fighting, but Hippolyte, the sister of Antiope and on this occasion the leader of the women, escaped with a few others to Megara. Having failed so badly with her army and feeling disheartened [athumōs ekhein] at her present situation, given that she felt-there-was-no-way-out [aporein] with regard to getting back home in safety [sōtēriā] to Themiskyra, she died in her sorrow [lupē]. And, now that she was dead, the people of Megara buried her. The shape [skhēma] of her tomb [mnēma] is like an Amazonian shield [aspis].

And next, just for the record, I show the original Greek text:

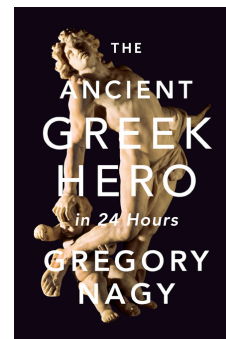
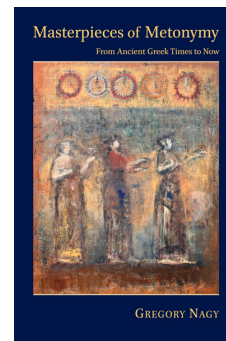
{1.41.7} πλησίον δὲ ἐστὶ τοῦ Πανδίωνος ἡρώου μνήμα Ἰππολύτης· γράψω δὲ καὶ τὰ ἐς αὐτὴν ὅποια Μεγαρεῖς λέγουσιν· ὅτε Ἀμαζόνες ἐπ’ Ἀθηναίους στρατεύσασαι δι’ Ἀντιόπην ἐκρατήθησαν ὑπὸ Θησέως, τὰς μὲν πολλὰς συνέβη μαχομένας αὐτῶν ἀποθανεῖν, Ἰππολύτην δὲ ἀδελφὴν οὖσαν Ἀντιόπης καὶ τότε ἡγουμένην τῶν γυναικῶν ἀποφυγεῖν σὺν ὀλίγαις ἐς Μέγαρα, ἅτε δὲ κακῶς οὕτω πράξασαν τῷ στρατῷ τοῖς τε παροῦσιν ἀθύμως ἔχουσαν καὶ περὶ τῆς οἴκαδε ἐς τὴν Θεμισκυραν σωτηρίας μᾶλλον ἔτι ἀποροῦσαν ὑπὸ λύπης τελευτήσαι· καὶ θάψαι αὐτὴν ἀποθανούσαν, καὶ οἱ τοῦ μνήματος σχῆμά ἐστιν Ἀμαζονικὴ ἀσπίδι ἐμπερές.

§4. As is evident from this sample, my rewordings of the translation by Jones are minimal. But the meaning that I read out of the original Greek is not always minimally different. For example, the translation by Jones here accentuates the Amazon’s feeling of ‘despair’, which leads to her dying ‘of a broken heart’. I think, however, that these translations overstate what is being said in the original Greek, which is far more understated.

§5. What predominates is the Amazon’s feeling of lupē ‘sorrow’ over her losses—which happen to include, she now recognizes, the ultimate loss of any possibility for homecoming. But there is also a problem of understatement in the wording of Jones with regard to ‘reaching her home’. Here Jones has omitted translating the word sōtēriā as embedded in the Greek expression περὶ τῆς οἴκαδε . . . σωτηρίας, which I translate ‘with regard to getting back home in safety [sōtēriā]’. This word sōtēriā means ‘safety’ on the surface, but it can also mean ‘salvation’ in a deeper sense, as in Pausanias 1.5.2 and elsewhere (I have more to say in [H24H 24§§1–2](#) about the mysticism inherent in this word).



Amazon on horseback, from Louis Vallet, *Le chic à cheval: histoire pittoresque de l'équitation*, 1891.



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§6. As for the translation 'she died of a broken heart', it seems to me not an understatement but an overstatement, in that it overly sentimentalizes the Amazon's doom. I have similar problems with the many instances where Jones translates the verb *erasthēnai* as 'fall in love'. One such instance is to be found in Pausanias 1.2.1, where this verb applies to the experience of Antiope the Amazon, sister of Hippolyte the Amazon. The context has to do with the feelings of Antiope toward Theseus, who figures as the abductor of Antiope in myths that tell the story of this Amazon. There is a comparable situation in Pausanias 1.3.1, where the same verb applies to the experience of Eos, goddess of the dawn, who conceives a passion for the beautiful young hero Kephalos. Only, in this case, it is Eos who abducts Kephalos, whereas Theseus abducts Antiope. To imagine a reversal of roles in the case of Theseus and Antiope, I must add in passing, is to engage in comedy. I show an example taken from modernity:



Katharine Hepburn as Antiope and Colin Keith-Johnston as Theseus in the 1932 Broadway production of Julian Thompson's *The Warrior's Husband*. Image [via](#).

§7. In the ancient myth about Antiope and her love for Theseus, I see passion, yes, but I hesitate to call it love. My hesitation is only compounded when I see other situations where Pausanias uses the verb *erasthēnai*, as at 1.6.8–1.7.1 in his narrative about various affairs of the Ptolemies. In such situations, I nowadays prefer to translate *erasthēnai* as 'conceive a passion for' instead of 'fall in love with'. Another example is at 1.17.3, where Minos conceives a passion for Periboia, and the verb again is *erasthēnai*. Or, shall we say that he 'falls for' her?

§8. As we can see from the text of Pausanias that I have used as a sample in this posting, one of the most salient features of my retranslation is my practice of selectively adding, within square brackets, transliterations of the original Greek words that are being translated. Some of these additions require a rewording of the language used by Jones, as we see in the present sample at the point where he transfers the English word 'hero' from the meaning of the Greek word *hērōion* 'hero-shrine' and makes it an epithet of the hero Pandion.

§9. Correlated with my practice of selectively showing transliterations of Greek words is my use of hyphens where more than one English word is needed for translating a single Greek word: in the text I have just retranslated, for example, English 'felt-there-was-no-way' renders Greek *aporeîn*. A related matter: in the case of Greek verbs, I generally give the "present" infinitive—so, *aporeîn* here—and not the present first-person singular, which would have been *aporéō*. (In the case of "contract" verbs ending in *-áō* / *-éō* / *-óō*, I indicate the contraction by using circumflex accents in transliterating the infinitive endings, *-ân* / *-ēin* / *-oûn*.)

§10. Two more observations on my formatting of transliterations for Greek verbs:

1) Occasionally, I use the aorist instead of the "present" infinitive, as in the case of *khṛēsai* 'make-an-oracular-pronouncement' at Pausanias 1.44.6.

2) Where the sense requires it, I use the middle or the passive of the infinitive instead of the active; where the sense is obvious, however, as for example at Pausanias 1.43.1, I revert to the active form of the Greek verb even if I translate it by using a passive construction in English.

§11. In Scroll 1 of A Pausanias Reader in progress, I have retranslated with considerable care most of the translation as published by Jones. In the case of the other nine scrolls, however, the process of retranslating remains sporadic as of now, 2018.06.14. But, there too, I hope to make considerable progress in the weeks and months to come.

§12. In closing for now, I will list some of the reworkings I intend for Scrolls 2 through 10. This list of reworkings, most of which I have already integrated into my retranslations of Scroll 1, goes above and beyond the changes I have already outlined in the posting here.

1) The misleading word 'legend', which Jones uses in contexts where Pausanias says simply 'they say' or 'it is said' in the original Greek, will be eliminated everywhere. The elimination has already been completed in Scroll 1. The retranslations 'they say' and 'it is said' convey more accurately the value-free applications of the original Greek wording. By contrast, 'legend' is hardly value-free and conveys different meanings for different Classicists.

2) The overly personalized and even invasive 'you' that Jones uses in situations where the traveler goes to place X and sees monument Y has been eliminated in Scroll 1 and will also be eliminated in Scrolls 2–10. Instead of 'when you go to X you see Y', as we read in the translations of Jones, I retranslate 'when one goes to X there is Y', which matches more closely what Pausanias is saying in the original Greek.

3) The references to Hadrian and to other Roman emperors as 'emperor' are defamiliarized by Pausanias in the original Greek, where the relevant word is basileus 'king'. To render this word as 'emperor', which is what Jones does consistently, is to neutralize the intended defamiliarization, which is most explicit in Pausanias 1.18.6: there the author refers to Hadrian as 'king of the Romans'.

4) More work is needed in retranslating words like agorā and kōmē, which Jones translates respectively as 'marketplace' and 'village'.

5) More work is needed in editing random glosses devised by Jones for various names. A typical example: Pausanias at 1.40.6 refers to Zeus Konios, and Jones adds '(Dusty)'.

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For an overall bibliography that accompanies A Pausanias reader in progress, see the dynamic [Bibliography for APRIP](#).

Tags: [Amazonomachy](#), [Antiope](#), [Hippolyte](#), [Pausanias](#), [Theseus](#), [W. H. S. Jones](#)

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