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# ARGO

A HELLENIC REVIEW

ISSUE 11, SPRING/SUMMER 2020



**THEBES:  
FORGOTTEN CITY  
PAUL CARTLEDGE**

**CLASSICAL MOUNTAINEERING** MATTHEW SHIPTON

**GREECE IN THE SWINGING SIXTIES** DON SHORT

**DID ODYSSEUS WRITE THE *ODYSSEY*?** THOMAS W. HODGKINSON

## THE HELLENIC SOCIETY ONLINE

As this issue goes to press, we have had to postpone Professor Leslie Brubaker's lecture ('Dancing in the streets: urban life in medieval Constantinople') scheduled for 7 May, and there is some uncertainty over whether the AGM and Presidential Lecture will go ahead on 13 June.

However, while this outbreak of coronavirus COVID-19 continues, there are many ways to enjoy membership of the Society online.

### Publications

Membership with a subscription to the *Journal of Hellenic Studies* gives you online access to all the back issues of that journal via Cambridge Core (Cambridge University Press). Members who subscribe to *Archaeological Reports* have online access to all back issues of that publication in the same way.

While it is not possible to despatch print copies, members with a subscription to *ARGO* will be sent a link by email to access the magazine online. We hope to print copies of these issues as soon as it is possible to do so.

If you need help to access these resources, please email [secretary@hellenicsociety.org.uk](mailto:secretary@hellenicsociety.org.uk).

### Library

All members are entitled to use the Library. While it is not possible to visit in person, the Library offers a wide range of electronic resources which can be accessed using the barcode on your reader's card. The librarians are still able to issue cards at this time to new members and to any current members who do not already have a card, and will email the barcode number. Members can contact the librarians at [iclass.enquiries@london.ac.uk](mailto:iclass.enquiries@london.ac.uk).

Some of the key online resources are:

*JSTOR Classics Journals*

*Loeb Digital Library*

*Gnomon*

*Table of Contents for Classical Studies (TOCS-IN)*

*Packard Humanities Institute (PHI) Latin Literature*

*Greek Documentary Papyri/Inscriptions Database*

*Beazley Archive (Databases for Pottery/Gems/Terracottas)*

### Events

Finally, although it is not possible to hold live events at the moment, please do explore the Society's YouTube channel where you can find podcasts of all our recent lectures and conferences: <https://www.youtube.com/user/HellenicSociety1879>.

Enjoy Professor Patrick Finglass talking about 'Passionate lacunae: towards a new edition of Sappho' last autumn, joint events with the Roman Society ('Animals in the Ancient World', 'Memorialisation', 'The Culture of the Greek Cities of the East') and major day conferences ('Saving Ancient Treasures for the World', 'Sculptural Display: Ancient and Modern', 'Greek and Roman Armour').





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*The opinions expressed in these pages are those of the authors, and do not necessarily represent those of the Society for the Promotion of Hellenic Studies*

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*Front cover image: 'Thebes' by Amanda Short, gouache and collage, 2020 (© Amanda Short; www.amandashortdesign.com). Back cover image: Giants of the Valais (© Matthew Shipton)*

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# LETTER FROM THE EDITOR



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**W**hen we founded *ARGO* in 2015 we were determined that it should be an elegant, colourful, well-illustrated journal, and that it should be in print. At a time when so many publications are online only, we continue to take great pride in *ARGO* as a physical object to be picked up and savoured at leisure, rather than scrolled through at speed on a screen.

As you'll have noticed, however, we are publishing this edition digitally. The spread of Coronavirus (Covid-19) has had an impact on all areas of our lives, and the publishing industry is having to adapt quickly. At the time of writing, editors are making unprecedented moves to delay the release of spring and summer titles. Ordinarily, *ARGO* is dispatched from Senate House in London, but with the closure of the building some weeks ago and uncertainty hanging over the status of the printers, which like all businesses are having to take things a day at a time, we made the decision to produce this issue as a PDF rather than delay its publication. Our hope is that we might print it later in the year, or as soon as this is possible, so that you may yet receive a copy for your coffee tables and bookshelves.

The articles in this issue will certainly merit a second reading. In our cover story (pages 8–10), exquisitely illustrated by our artist Amanda Short, Paul Cartledge throws a spotlight on ancient Thebes, a city as rich in myth as it is in history. As you read his article you will undoubtedly find yourself wondering why Thebes is not better known today.

Home to Oedipus and the praise-poet Pindar, among many others, it certainly wasn't the pigsty the Athenians endeavoured to characterize it as. This city, with its many idiosyncrasies, was surely one of the most fascinating in the ancient world.

Elsewhere in this issue you'll find a knowingly provocative – but persuasive – argument for recognizing Odysseus as the true author of the *Odyssey* (pages 4–7), an exploration of why classical myth so appealed to mountaineers in the 19th century (pages 18–20) and a thought-provoking essay on the *Brousos* of Alexander Pallis (pages 24–27), an author you may not have heard of, but will be eager to explore further soon. There is of course much more besides.

The books reviewed in this issue have a distinctly international flavour, three-quarters of them having originally been published in Europe – in Greek, Swedish and Italian. While Henry Cullen and J.W. Bonner immerse themselves in two very different paeans to Greek language, Alice Dunn discovers the short stories of Alexandros Papadiamandis, who was one of the fathers of modern Greek literature.

In difficult times, I hope that we may continue to seek diversion and joy in reading books, both fiction and non-, poetry, essays, articles, and in sharing memories and dreams of travels in Greece. From all of us at *ARGO*, we hope that you stay safe and well.

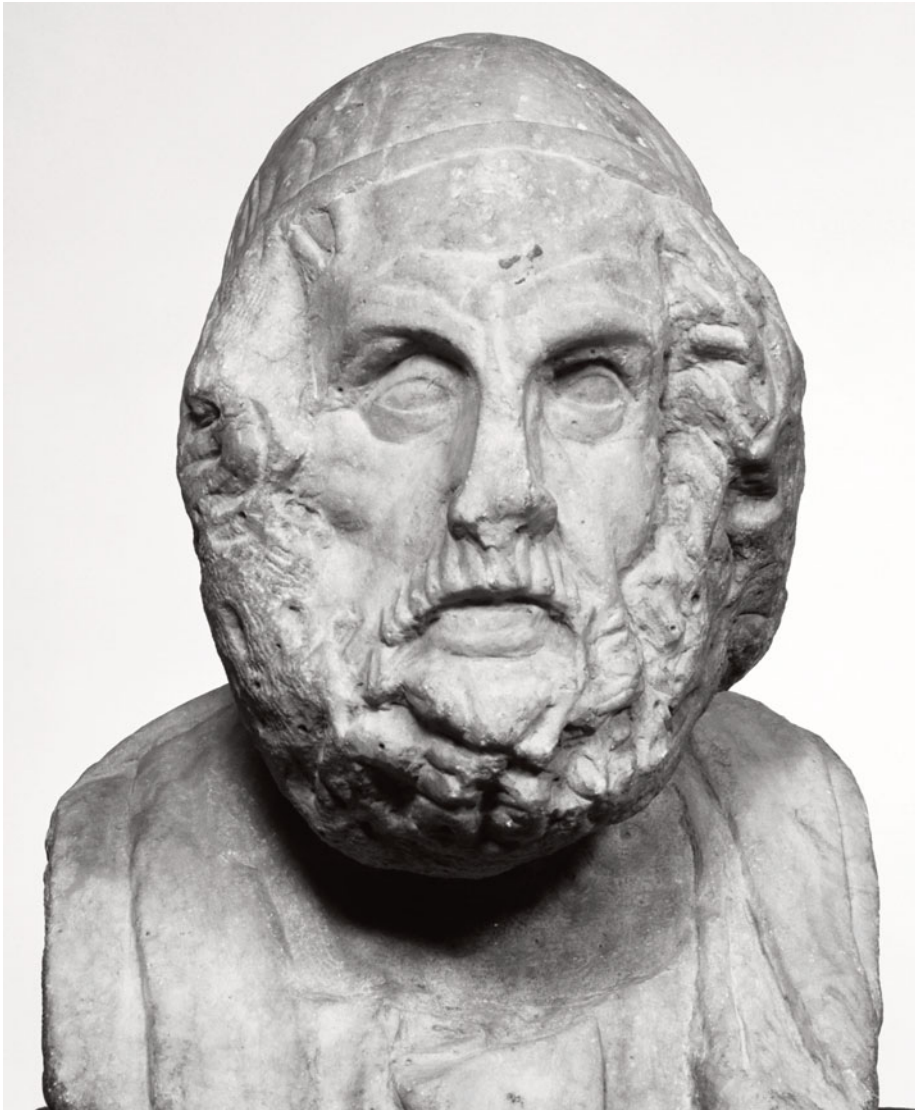
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*A herm portrait of Homer depicted blind and made in the 20th century.*

## ODYSSEUS: AUTHOR OF THE *ODYSSEY*

*Odysseus, argues **Thomas W. Hodgkinson**, was not only a hero but the poet behind the name 'Homer' too*

One hundred and eight men are competing for a woman. It's an archery contest. One by one, they fail: they aren't strong enough even to string the great bow of her husband, a man who is missing, presumed dead. In reality, of course, Odysseus is secretly among them, disguised as an old beggar. He asks if he can have a go, and, reluctantly, they agree.

*And Odysseus strung the bow easily,  
With as little effort as a poet strings his lyre,  
Looping the soft sheep's gut at either end.  
Then, with his right hand, he tested the string,  
And it sang out with the note of a swallow*

(*Odyssey* 21.406–11).

It's one of the great similes in any literature. At this climactic moment of the *Odyssey*, the hero cocks, as it were, the gun that he will use to massacre his enemies, and the poet compares his action to the quintessential act of peace, the preparation of a musical instrument to amuse an audience. On one level, it's brilliantly descriptive of Odysseus' heroic ease. While his enemies couldn't

string the bow, he does so without effort. But at the same time, there's more going on here. The question is: how much more?

No one knows who wrote the *Odyssey*, and 'wrote' is in any case the wrong word for a work of oral poetry, which was developed over the centuries through a form of collective creativity: via recitation and elaboration by different poets in a society that had lost the skill of writing. There may have been an originator poet. There was most probably a finalizer poet, who was to the *Odysseus* poem as the Mesopotamian scholar Sîn-lēqi-unninni was to the older *Gilgamesh* poem, expanding it and honing it into something like the director's cut with which we're familiar.

What we know is that this is a poem steeped in, and in some sense about, poetry. It begins and ends in *Odysseus'* palace at Ithaca, which is presented as a place of music and dancing. The first thing of any significance said by a human character is *Odysseus'* son, Telemachus, observing that the so-called suitors – the Bullingdon louts who have invaded his house – are preoccupied with poetry. They are sitting around listening to Phemius, the palace poet, who is singing of the return of the Greeks from the Trojan War. Immediately, we wonder why Phemius picked this theme, which inevitably distresses *Odysseus'* wife, Penelope. Worse, it seems he often does so, since she says it 'always' saddens her to hear it.

Phemius' theme is also the theme of the *Odyssey*. The finalizer poet – let's call him Homer – uses the device to materialize like a ghost within the action (while singing of the return of the Greeks, Phemius *is* Homer). In the process, he turns us, his audience, into the unsuitable suitors. There's a joke there, as there is in the remark that he performs 'reluctantly'.

Phemius will return, but before he does, we meet another poet, Demodocus. At the court of the Phaeacians, where *Odysseus* lands up, the blind palace poet also sings

about Troy, but he goes even further. He happens to sing of a quarrel between Achilles and *Odysseus*, having no idea that *Odysseus* is in the audience, incognito. Hearing him, the hero weeps, covering his face with his cloak so that no one will see.

*Whenever the godlike poet paused,  
Odysseus wiped his tears and  
uncovered his head  
And made an offering to the gods  
from his two-handled cup.  
But when the poet began again, and  
the Phaeacian noblemen  
Urged him to continue with his  
entrancing story,  
Again Odysseus covered his head  
and wept*

(*Odyssey* 8.87–92).

According to this literary GIF of the paradoxical relationship between artist and audience, the emotion evoked by the artist simultaneously identifies you and strips you of your identity. The blind singer picks up his lyre and the silent listener covers his face and eyes, whose vision is already obscured by tears. When the first action is reversed, the second action is reversed. This intimate thread between creator and consumer is like that between a puppet and puppeteer.

*Odysseus* comments that Demodocus sings as if he had been at Troy – as if, that is, he were *Odysseus* himself. It's an instance of the typically Homeric device of paired similes that are loosely the inverse of each other. A warrior, comparing a poet to a warrior, reverses the simile we began with, when a poet compared a warrior to a poet.

The link continues, with *Odysseus* as puppeteer. After telling Demodocus he admires him more than any man, he asks him to sing of the Wooden Horse and how *Odysseus* used it to sack Troy. In effect, he says: 'let's talk about me'. Demodocus sings and *Odysseus* weeps. How does he weep? Like a woman cradling her husband, who has fought to defend his city and

been fatally wounded. That's to say, he weeps like a character in the story just told: a woman who has been widowed by *Odysseus* himself.

What Homer is presenting us with here is a corridor of mirrors, a *mise en abyme* in which the faces of poet and warrior alternate. Noticing the warrior weeping, the Phaeacian king calls a halt, instead asking *Odysseus* to tell them who he is, becoming the storyteller instead of Demodocus. *Odysseus* obliges, after a final tribute to the poet, in which he remarks that life doesn't get better than listening to such extraordinary poetry.

Which brings us to the salient moment when *Odysseus* literally becomes the author of his own story. The 24 books of the *Odyssey* are not autobiography, or not straightforwardly. 'Tell me, Muse, about the man', the poem begins (ἄνδρα μοι ἔννεπε, μοῦσα, *Odyssey* 1.1), drawing an instant distinction between the poet (me) and his subject (man). Yet the fact is, most of the *Odyssey's* best-known episodes – Cyclops, Circe, Scylla, etc – are narrated by *Odysseus* himself.

He isn't telling his story in verse. Yet he is, because he speaks in the metre of the poem. He's not accompanying his story with a lyre. Yet equally he is, because in books 9, 10 and 11, he's being portrayed by whoever is performing the poem. The *Odyssey* is not a book, or it didn't develop as one. It's a verse drama, an improvisatory one-man show.

It is Homer improvising *Odysseus*, who is improvising his memoirs. And when the hero pauses, as Demodocus did and Homer would have done, the Phaeacian king observes that he has told his story as skilfully as a poet, narrating 'both the sufferings of the Greeks in general, and his own in particular'. That latter phrase (πάντων τ' Ἀργείων σέο τ' αὐτοῦ κήδεα λυγρὰ, *Odyssey* 11.369) serves as a thumbnail diptych of the *Iliad* and the *Odyssey* themselves. As a storyteller, *Odysseus* displays the talent of Homer.

*‘So I’m a crank,  
but a crank with a degree  
of self-awareness.  
I know I won’t persuade  
many of my theory,  
or not in full.’*

At this point, though, I need to pause, too. I must wipe my tears and uncover my head. I’ve written a novel and a screenplay, both based on the idea that the *Odyssey’s* originator poet was Odysseus himself. So I’m a crank, but a crank with a degree of self-awareness. I know I won’t persuade many of my theory, or not in full.

So I won’t make reference to the ancient tradition that the *Odyssey* was composed, if not by Odysseus, then by one of his descendants: an intriguing idea that would explain the poem’s consistently propagandist tone, which seems designed to defend its protagonist against the charge of responsibility for any of the many misfortunes that befall him and his men.

I won’t note that the first words of the poem are ‘man’ and ‘me’, and that, notwithstanding the misaligned cases, that proximity creates an association between poet and protagonist from the get-go. I won’t observe that the *Gilgamesh* poem, whose influence on the *Odyssey* has been documented, provides a precedent by naming Gilgamesh as its author. I won’t draw attention to the scene in book 9 of the *Iliad* when Odysseus reaches the tent of Achilles to find the murderous truant passing his time playing a lyre and singing of the deeds of great men – a fine paradigm, delivered casually, of a warrior-king with the skill and inclination to perform self-referential poetry.

I know it’s tantamount to an admission of pure derangement to speak of messages concealed within the text. So I won’t mention that, at what is structurally the hinge-point of

the story, when the returning hero sets foot on his native Ithaca after 20 years away, the word ‘Homer’ (Ὅμηρος) is embedded in the syllables. Athena shrouds the landscape in mist, so he can’t recognize where he is, and in his despair, he groans and strikes his thigh (πεπλήγητο μηρῶ, *Odyssey* 13.198).

I won’t say any of these things – only that the *Odyssey* is a story of concealment, studded with moments of self-revelation that link hero and poet. More tentatively, I will speculate that these amplified, ambiguous moments bear traces of an earlier version of the *Odyssey*, which may have identified Odysseus as the originator poet.

One was the arrival on the beach. Another comes when, with the swineherd, he reaches the palace, and recognizes it not by sight but from the sounds of Phemius performing in the hall. Or again, when he enters, the overbearing Antinous asks why the swineherd has dragged in a beggar off the street. The swineherd replies indignantly:

*Who goes out of his way  
To invite a stranger into his house  
Unless he happens to have a special  
skill,  
Like a prophet, say, or a doctor or  
carpenter,  
Or a poet who enchants with his  
song?*

(*Odyssey* 17.382–85)



*This bronze statuette of a lyre player with a companion is thought to have been made on Crete in the seventh century BC.*



In an exchange that drips with irony, we're conscious that Odysseus, who alone knows what the future holds, is a kind of prophet. The man who has come to cure the house of its plague of suitors is also like a doctor (the Greek phrase is ἱπτήρα κακῶν, which could as well refer to an exorcist as a physician). He is a carpenter, too, who conceived the Wooden Horse, whittled a stake to blind the Cyclops, made a raft to escape Calypso and even rebuilt his bed and bedroom during an extensive palace refurbishment.

If the first three elements of our ascending tetracolon have formed inadvertently fitting descriptions of Odysseus, what should we expect from the fourth? Is Odysseus, then, a 'poet who enchants with his song'? By now we have our answer ready. He is, in a way that is more than metaphorical. He is a poet, maybe *the* poet.

This insinuation never radiates more seductively than at the most crucial moment of self-revelation. We've arrived back at the stringing of the bow. The suitors have tried and failed. The swineherd has placed the bow in the hands of the beggar, with the same ceremony as, elsewhere, a lyre is placed in the hands of Phemius. With a now familiar irony, the beggar tests if the bow has contracted woodworm, and one of the suitors observes that he handles it as confidently as a man who has a similar bow at home.

This scene isn't only being recited. It's being performed. When the beggar tests the bow, the performer may have made an equivalent gesture with his lyre. While comparing the stringing of the bow with the stringing of a lyre, he may have mimicked that movement, looping invisible sheep's gut around a tuning key. When he describes the hero plucking the string, which sings out with the note of a swallow, he would surely have done likewise, selecting the tightest string, and making it sing. I like to imagine that, when the hero aims an arrow at his most arrogant antagonist, the suitor Antinous, the performer might have adjusted his

grip on his instrument, and aimed it at his audience like a bow.

And so on, through the scene of slaughter. In a flourish that feels post-modernist three millennia too soon, the finale of the *Odyssey* is set in the kind of room in which the poem would have been performed. So the effect would have been the same as if, at the cinema, you saw a film that ended with the massacre of a cinema audience.

I'm aware of some of the objections to my argument. Among them is the conviction that the Mycenaean Greeks didn't quite have our modern concept of authorship, seeing poetry less as an achievement than as a gift from god. Maybe. But the attribution, even if later, of the *Odyssey* to a poet by the name of Homer seems like counter-evidence. And if we sift the bloodbath in the hall, there's more. Phemius begs Odysseus for mercy on the grounds that he is 'self-taught'. The Greek word is αὐτοδίδακτος, a Homeric hapax whose exact meaning in the context is obscure. But what seems clear is that the poet is taking some credit for the quality of his work, maybe staking a claim for its originality.

Ultimately, Odysseus spares him. Not only that, he then deploys him as a means of controlling the story about what has happened in the palace. He tells him to strike up music. The survivors dance, celebrating the defeat of the suitors. As Odysseus intended, passers-by hearing the sound assume this is the wedding feast for Penelope, who has agreed to remarry. In a sense, they're right.

After some resistance, Penelope tearfully accepts that Odysseus is her husband. Two decades apart end in emotional reunion.

*And dawn would have found them still weeping*

*If grey-eyed Athena hadn't had other ideas.*

*She held back the night at the world's edges*

*And restrained the golden sun in the sea.*

(*Odyssey* 23.241–44)

More magic. What follows occurs within a strange supernatural time pocket: while Athena holds back the sun, Odysseus and Penelope go to bed and make the most of an infinite night, after which, fittingly for the end of a poem about storytelling, they swap stories. Like an oral poet, Odysseus retells tales he has told before. A story whose multiple authorship exists out of time, and which at its climactic moment compares its hero to a poetic storyteller, ends with him telling stories while folded into a temporal nowhere that sees the normal laws of physics suspended.

There's no consensus about a historical Odysseus. Even if there were, we couldn't link him to the poem we have. Yet the *Odyssey* is a work haunted by ghosts – not only the literal ghosts of the Underworld, but also the ghosts of past and future versions of the hero, and of past and future versions of the text he lives in. Among these I detect a draft that may, even if only as a literary conceit, have named him as its author.

Perhaps if we imagine Odysseus as the originator poet, it makes sense to imagine Homer, the finalizer poet, suppressing the attribution. He was happy to sing Odysseus' praises, but not to give him credit for his masterpiece.

***'A story whose multiple authorship exists out of time, and which at its climactic moment compares its hero to a poetic storyteller, ends with him telling stories while folded into a temporal nowhere that sees the normal laws of physics suspended.'***



*Soldiers fight to defend their walls – possibly those of Thebes – from attack on this Attic red-figure kylix or drinking cup attributed to Apollodoros from ca 500 BC.*

## THEBES: THE FORGOTTEN CITY

*Whether you prefer the city of History or the city of Myth, it's high time Thebes reclaimed its place on the map, says **Paul Cartledge***

**T**he Greek city of Thebes is absolutely central, not only geographically, but also culturally. It is central both to the ancient Greeks' achievements, especially political and high-cultural, and to their continuing impact on European, Euro-American and by extension global civilization, now and for the foreseeable future. And yet, for many centuries, the city has been very largely – and quite deliberately – forgotten. While there are a

number of reasons for this oblivion, not all of them bad, the reasons for rescuing it from the condescension of posterity are more powerful.

The first and most obvious reason for oblivion, or confusion, is the existence of the Egyptian Thebes, situated within modern Luxor. This great city was the capital of Egypt during the New Kingdom, the era of Rameses the Great; and of the two namesakes, Egyptian Thebes, which earned a mention in Homer, is far the

better known today. (There was in fact yet another Greek Thebes, but that one *is* eminently forgettable.)

Second, unlike Sparta and Athens, Thebes only briefly drove the ancient Greek political agenda. Indeed, while Sparta and Athens hogged the limelight, Thebes languished in the deep shadow of their incandescence.

Third, and probably most decisive of all, in 480 BC, at a pivotal moment in all ancient Greek and

thus European and Western history, the then ruling regime of Thebes made a fatal mistake – it chose the wrong, that is the Persian, side in the Graeco-Persian Wars. This earned inhabitants of the city an undying reputation as traitors to Hellenism at a time when it really mattered to stand up and be counted politically.

Herodotus was for that reason down on Thebes, and there was no Theban Thucydides to redress the balance. Indirectly, too, this act of treachery brought on Thebes' head 145 years later the most awful retribution – its near-total physical destruction, on the orders of the then master of the Greek world and ultimate Greek culture-hero, Alexander the Great.

What is to be put on the other side of the ledger? As I see it, and as I have written it, there was not one ancient Greek city of Thebes but two: the city of History and the city of Myth. Thebes, the real historical – and indeed prehistorical – city, was a major place in its own right. In the Late Bronze or Mycenaean age of the 14th and 13th centuries BC it boasted an important palace located on what was always the ancient city's most distinctive feature, the Acropolis, later known as the Cadmea (Kadmeia).

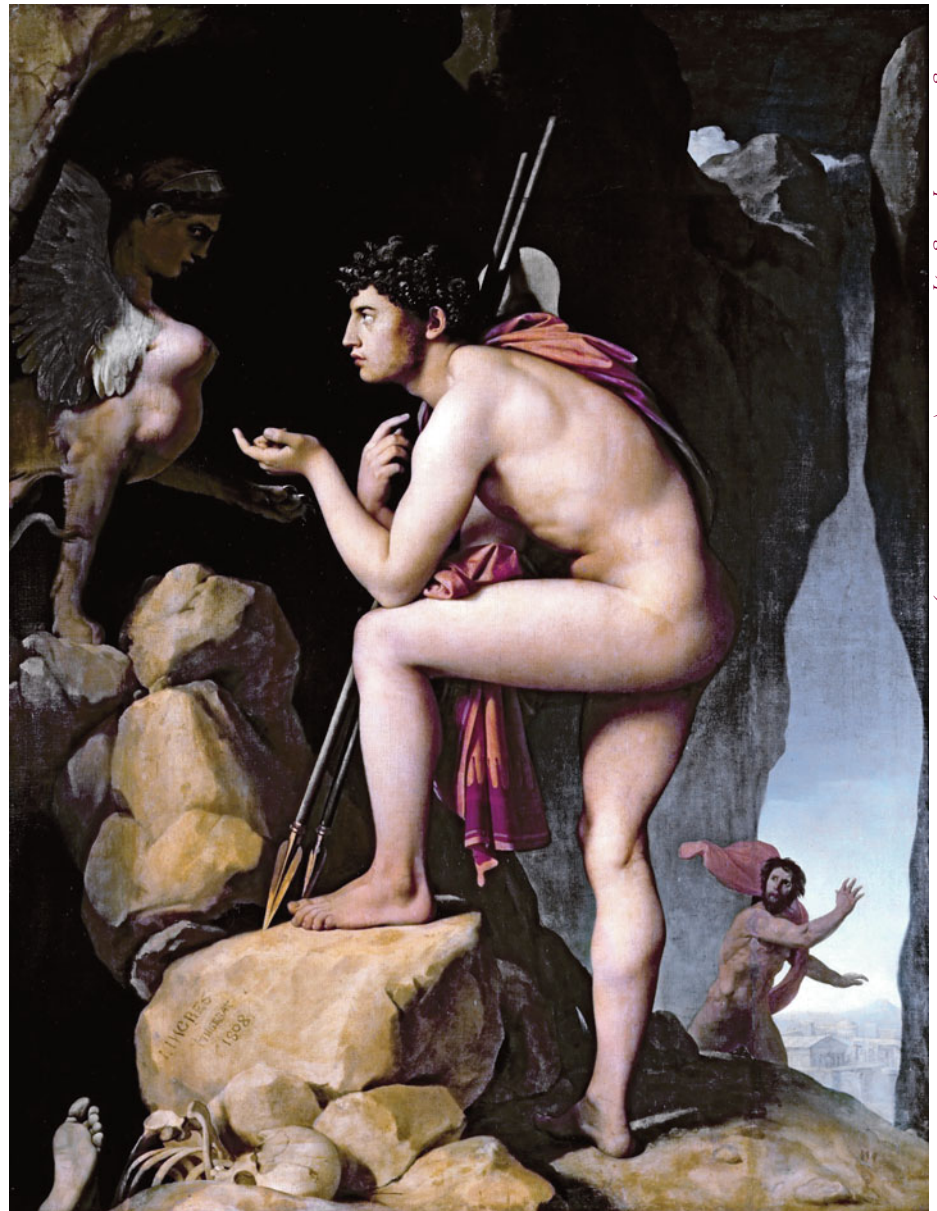
In the sixth century BC, Thebes inaugurated a most fruitful form of political association, namely federalism, one that eventually influenced the world's most powerful democratic state today, the United States of America. In the fourth century BC it produced a series of brilliant political leaders who were also genius generals. Between them – and the chief among them was Epaminondas, whom Walter Raleigh rated the greatest of all the ancient Greeks – they introduced stunning social, military and political reforms, reduced once omnipotent Sparta to a nullity and established Thebes, for a brief but important decade, as the major power of all mainland Greece. It was under this Theban hegemony of 371–362 BC that the original Megalopolis was built, in Peloponnesian Arcadia, and that Messene

was constructed, also in the Peloponnese, as a home and capital city for the now liberated ex-Helot Greeks whom the Spartans had kept enslaved for centuries.

Spanning that decade but originating a few years earlier was one of the most unusual social formations known from all the ancient world: the so-called 'Sacred Band'. This was a crack infantry force of 300 composed of 150 pairs of male 'lovers'. We are not well informed on how it was recruited or maintained. But Thebes was especially renowned – or excoriated, according to taste – for its alleged 'invention' of ritualized pederasty and for its actual practice of male-male homosexu-

ality, so that it was possible to create such a force in such a city. Its creation in 378 BC was credited to one Gorgidas, and it is mentioned in Plato's famous *Symposium* dialogue.

Its most important achievement was its contribution to the Thebans' decisive victory over the Spartans at Leuctra in 371 BC, but its most famous exploit was also its last. At the Battle of Chaeronea in Boeotia in 338 BC, where the Thebans and Athenians were crushed by King Philip of Macedon, assisted by his 18-year-old son Alexander, the Band perished to a man. They were buried on the battlefield as they had fought, in a single body, and the site of their



Jean-Auguste-Dominique Ingres, public domain (Wikimedia Commons)

'Oedipus Solves the Riddle of the Sphinx' by Jean-Auguste-Dominique Ingres, 1827.

***‘This mythic Thebes of theatre has been labelled the “anti-Athens”, the upside-down city onto which the Athenians projected everything they weren’t, or didn’t have, or didn’t want to have.’***

communal grave is still marked today by the famous marble Lion of Chareonea. So much for the Thebes of History.

Yet it is the Thebes of Myth that really deserves our commemoration as well as admiration. We might plausibly start our quest from the city’s unique connections with the Orient. Thebes, although it was located in the centre of mainland Greece, was reputedly founded by Cadmus, a Phoenician from Tyre, in what is today roughly modern Lebanon. That intriguing myth enables us to re-examine the whole issue of Eurocentrism – or alternatively, Orientalism – in the study of ancient Greek history, with Thebes as a prime exhibit.

For example, the Greeks themselves attributed their own original creation of a fully phonetic alphabetic script – the ultimate ancestor of our own – to the Phoenicians, in the sense that they called their alphabet ‘Phoenician’ or ‘Cadmean’ letters. The Phoenicians did use an alphabet but did not employ signs for vowels. At the same time, both in their foundational ‘national’ epic, the *Iliad* of Homer, and in later literature, such as the *Histories* of Herodotus, the Greeks portrayed the Phoenicians quite negatively, as ‘barbarians’ embodying cultural traits that were the diametric opposite of good, Hellenic values.

So far as religion is concerned, Thebes had specially intimate and deep connections with major ancient Greek gods, above all Dionysus and Heracles. Both owed at least a part

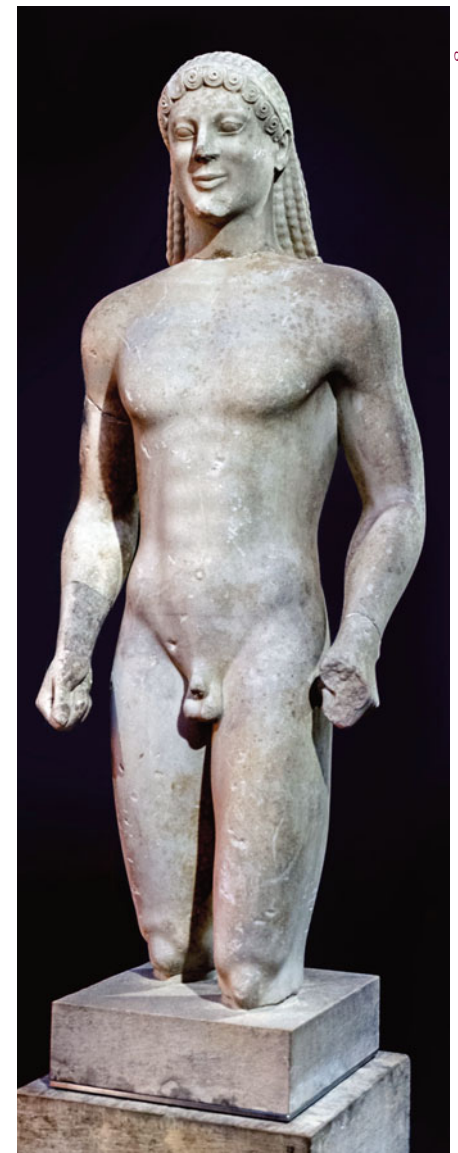
of their birth to Theban personages. One level down from those gods were the heroes – and anti-heroes – of ancient Greek myth. Thebes was notoriously the city of swell-foot Oedipus, the patricide who, misapplying a Delphic oracle, married his own widowed mother and then fathered four children upon her – children who were simultaneously both his sons and daughters and his half-brothers and half-sisters. Horrors.

Oedipus and Thebes became the fount and origin of a thousand myths. Not just those of Cadmus (who with Dionysus turns up in Euripides’ *Bacchae*) and of Oedipus himself (think of Sophocles’ *Oedipus Tyrannus* and *Antigone*, with their brilliant plays on the disorienting role of the Delphic oracle, and the hero’s tragic solving of the riddle of the Sphinx), but also of the *Seven Against Thebes* (the title of a surviving tragedy by Aeschylus, the prequel to *Antigone*) and the two *Suppliant Women* tragedies (again by Euripides and by Aeschylus) and so many more. In fact, this mythic Thebes of theatre has been labelled the ‘anti-Athens’, the upside-down city onto which the Athenians projected everything they weren’t, or didn’t have, or didn’t want to have – tyranny, patricide, fratricide, incest, treason, civil war. You name it. As Sigmund Freud, for one, memorably did: his ‘Oedipus-complex’ has its roots in the complex and complexity of ancient Greek Thebes.

Finally, the snooty Athenians, not content with appropriating sophisticated Theban myths, abused their Theban near-neighbours collectively as ‘Boeotian swine’. Boeotian they certainly were: Thebes was the principal city of the Boeotian ethnic sub-group of Greeks who gave their name to the region of Boeotia. Theban history cannot be properly understood except within its regional, Boeotian context. But swine in the philistine, low-cultural sense they certainly all were not.

In myth, the original city walls with their famous Seven Gates had been built to the sound of music, and

in 335 BC they reputedly came tumbling down on the orders of Alexander to a similar accompaniment. Pindar, the praise-poet of victors at the great Olympic and other panhellenic festival games, was a Theban by adoption if not birth. A younger contemporary of his was Pronomus, the James Galway of his day, though the reeded instrument he blew, called *aulos*, was more like an oboe than a flute. And then there were the Theban philosophers: Simmias and Cebes, followers like Plato of Socrates, whose works have not been preserved, and, not least, Crates the famous Cynic, who opted for a life of poverty on the streets of Athens. There are, in short, many reasons why ancient Greek Thebes not only should not but must not be forgotten.



*Ptoion Kouros.*

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*Vulcan, Venus and Cupid on a 16th-century intaglio.*

## NO ORDINARY CRAFTSMAN WINNER OF THE STUDENT ESSAY COMPETITION

*In 2019, the Hellenic Society launched a new essay competition which gives undergraduate students the chance to showcase their work. We received scores of high-quality entries from students from all over the world, and are delighted to present the winning essay here. **Emma Bentley** impressed the judges with her originality and the way that she uses the Hymn to Hephaestus to open up several important issues. Congratulations, also, to our two runners up: Gaia Marziale (King's College London) and Victoria Downey (Durham). The competition will be back this summer for its 2020 edition – keep an eye on our website for details.*

*Sing, clear-voiced Muse, of  
Hephaestus, famed for his skill,  
Who, with gleaming eyed Athena,  
taught splendid crafts  
To mankind upon the earth.  
Hymn to Hephaestus 1–3 (translations are the author's own unless stated otherwise)*

So begins the *Homeric Hymn to Hephaestus*, a hymn to the Greek god of fire and metallurgy that presents craftsmanship as essential to the development of mankind. It praises Hephaestus (alongside the goddess Athena) for teaching mankind the skills that enabled humans to progress from living in caves 'like beasts' to enjoying a peaceful life 'in their own homes'.

This is one of 33 *Homeric Hymns*, each dedicated to a god and attributed to Homer in antiquity. Modern scholars argue that they had multiple authors and that most date to the Archaic period (seventh to sixth century BC), yet the *Hymn to Hephaestus* was likely composed in the second half of the fifth century BC in Athens. It features concepts typically associated with far grander philosophies and tragedies from this period, and is significant because it elevates the role of Hephaestus as well as that of the ordinary craftsman.

Praise of Hephaestus illuminates his technical skill. He is *klutotechnēs*, 'famous for his art', and this *technē* (craft or skill) is what sparked human progress. Now mankind lives in

peace throughout the year, protected by the homes they constructed. Life before craftsmanship was violent; the reference to 'wild beasts' conjures up images of a hostile natural world in which mankind was no different from animals. The fact that these technical skills are *taught* to mankind suggests a learning process, rather than an innate ability to master arts from birth (or from mankind's genesis). Craftsmanship has divine origins, but progress is driven by education and skill.

Unsurprisingly, the god that the hymn calls 'famous for his art' is known throughout Greek culture for his technical skills. Hephaestus constructed the shield of Achilles (*Iliad* 18.368–617), built palaces for

the gods and fashioned Pandora out of raw materials (*Theogony* 570–87). He was physically disabled; this is central to his mythology, significantly his expulsion from Olympus as a child. Accounts differ, but one has Hera eject him due to his disability and another (*Iliad* 1.590–94) claims that his disability was a result of Zeus throwing him from Olympus. Thus, Hephaestus is positioned as an outsider in the divine sphere. The scholar Robert Garland claims that Hephaestus' role as smith to the gods 'conforms to the social conditions of the day': many persons with physical disabilities in the ancient world took up occupations such as metalworking.

It was this technical skill that gave rise to Hephaestus' brief popularity in Athens during the building project initiated by the statesman Pericles in 447 BC. Craftsmen were in demand, so it is no surprise that Hephaestus' status flourished. This is demonstrated by the architecture of the period. The travel writer Pausanias describes both an altar to Hephaestus in the Erechtheion on the Acropolis (Pausanias 1.26.5) and the temple to Hephaestus (built between 449 and 414 BC), with a statue of Athena beside it (Pausanias 1.14.6). Athena and Hephaestus were associated with each other within Athens, just as they are in the hymn. The people of the island of Lemnos (to where Hephaestus fell from Olympus; *Iliad* 1.590) performed rites to Hephaestus and named their capital Hephaesteia in his honour, and imperial Athenian interest in the island may also explain societal interest in the god, as Edith Hall discusses. The central role of craftsmanship and the pairing of Athena and Hephaestus in the hymn support claims of a fifth-century Attic origin.

However, craftsmen, even during the Periclean building project, were not a universally privileged class, and the celebration of their profession is arguably a reflection of the demand for labour above all. Scholars such as Garland and Hall note that their ambiguous social position reflected that of Hephaestus

in relation to the other Olympians, who were a physically able 'leisure class'. His physical disability frequently rendered him the 'butt of cheap jokes', in the words of Garland, which modern audiences would hopefully condemn.

Yet one cannot minimize the role of *technē* in the progress of mankind, something that also occurs within the *Prometheus Bound*. The ambiguous dating and authorship of both works makes it impossible to know if *Prometheus Bound* influenced the hymn in any way, yet concepts certainly overlap. Here Prometheus, rather than Hephaestus, gives crafts (alongside fire) to mankind, *technē* helps liberate humans from a beast-like existence (*Prometheus Bound* 436–505). Both works suggest that artisanal skills enable or develop the qualities within mankind that render them recognisably human, and now able to exert influence over the natural world. *Technē* has a divine origin, but it is the skills of the humble worker that are paramount.

Further evidence to attribute the hymn to fifth-century Athens can be found in Martin West's statement that the 'concept of human progress from a primitive state' that is present in this hymn 'was an invention of the mid fifth century, associated with the sophist Protagoras'. Little of Protagoras' philosophy survives, but Plato characterized him in his *Protagoras*. In this dialogue he claims that Prometheus stole fire and technical skills from Hephaestus and Athena to give to mankind, and, on account of this, humans were able to build shelter and defend themselves (*Protagoras* 320d–22b). Plato sets this discussion in Athens in 433 BC or earlier, and, whilst we can never know what is Platonic and what Protagorean, it seems likely that the concept of progress within the *Hymn to Hephaestus* has a Protagorean influence.

However, for Plato's Protagoras, *technē* is not enough to ensure human survival, and Zeus has to intervene with the gift of political skill (*Protagoras* 322a–d). One should be

careful not to read a short hymn as a philosophical work, yet it does connect practical arts to virtue to a limited extent: the composer requests that Hephaestus grant them *arete*, excellence or virtue (*Hymn to Hephaestus* 8). *Arete*, when taken to mean moral virtue, is not normally associated with Hephaestus, yet it does connote fulfilling one's purpose or potential in any field. Therefore, the hymn may simply be appealing for excellence in craftsmanship. There is no real explanation of how mankind obtained the political skills that were necessary for survival in the *Protagoras* (perhaps they already possessed such virtues); however, this is irrelevant. It is possible that the *Hymn to Hephaestus* was composed for an Attic festival honouring Hephaestus, and this purpose requires no thorough philosophical or anthropological inquiry.

The *Hymn to Hephaestus* is not a grand work of tragedy or philosophy, but within it there are traces of complex concepts and mythologies. Of course, eight lines of verse do little to capture the difficult reality of being a craftsman, and it is likely that these arts were praised because of economic and architectural needs. Whether this celebration of craft was genuine or not, however, one can hope that the elevation of Hephaestus' intelligence and ability within the hymn, alongside the significance attributed to often marginalized professions, demonstrates the importance of both Hephaestus and ordinary labour to divine and human narratives.

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*Alexander the Great, Greece, ca 320 BC.*

## MACEDONIA THROUGH MODERN EYES

**Zosia Halina Archibald**

*introduces Macedonia and its extraordinary archaeological history*

**W**hen we think of classical Greece, we think immediately of Athens or Sparta. We don't think about the north. The north only comes into the political game later, when the story moves, in the middle of the fourth century BC, to the equivocal contest for dominance of the Aegean region and the rise of Macedon. Historians have tried to explain what happened in terms of the military and diplomatic brilliance of King Philip II and of his more famous son, Alexander the Great. The Macedonian kings swept the whole of Greece into a new world order, in which classical Greek political and cultural values

were fused in a new, multicultural, territorial empire.

There is much to commend in this historical sketch. At the same time, this broad-brush image distorts the past. Before the foundation of modern universities, in the 19th and 20th centuries, ideas about ancient societies developed in the context of discussions about contemporary societies. The philosophical works of Plato and Aristotle formed a natural framework for these conversations, alongside Plutarch's biographies. Models of the Greek states and of the Roman Republic were frequently adopted in the heated debates of the 17th and 18th centuries about good

society, the most desirable political order and statecraft. In the 18th century, the Macedonian kings, Philip II and Alexander the Great, offered models of leadership. From the 19th century onwards, the aspirations of nation states towards democracy increasingly favoured Athens as a model. In the Greek War of Independence, Athens became the geographical, ideological and political focus of national Greek aspirations. The classical past, visibly represented in the surviving monuments of central and southern Greece, was intimately linked with the emergent nation state, in the eyes of politicians and public alike.

### **First clues to ancient northern secrets**

The north of the Balkans is a mountainous region, dominated by the Pindos range, which forms a giant spine down the Greek peninsula, separating the western districts of Epirus, Aitolia and Ambrakia from Macedonia and Thessaly. Mount Olympos was always, it seems, a natural point of orientation, visible, in clear weather, from hundreds of kilometres away. Wreathed in clouds and snow, it became the seat of the gods from the time of Homer onwards. Beyond Olympos were numerous peoples with whom the southerly Greeks had regular maritime connections: Macedonians, Thracians, Paionians and others.

When Professor Manolis Andronikos, and fellow archaeologists from the University of Thessaloniki, discovered royal tombs at Vergina, in Macedonia, in the late 1970s they were at first unsure whether this gift horse was one that they wanted to accept. After all, they had all been schooled in a Greek liberty based on Athenian democracy. What would it mean to recover the tomb, and the body itself, of Philip II, the man who, according to the Athenian orator Demosthenes, had crushed Greek freedom?

Andronikos proved to be not just a very successful archaeologist, but also a charismatic storyteller. He created a new story about the Macedonian kings and their royal cemetery at Vergina, which charmed his fellow Greeks. These were kings, but they were Greek kings, who commissioned splendid art works, as well as being magnificent hosts and great military commanders.

### **Greece between the 'Great Powers'**

The nascent Greek kingdom did not include large parts of what had been the community of Greek-speaking states in the pre-Roman era as well as under Byzantine rule. The provinces of the Ottoman Empire were organized along territorial divisions that were quite different from the divisions of pre-Roman,

Roman or Byzantine administration. Most of Greece north of Thermopylae belonged to the Ottoman province of Rumeli until 1867. By the time that significant territorial changes took place, at the Congress of Berlin (1878), the so-called 'Great Powers' of Europe had become closely involved in the affairs of the Ottoman provinces of southern Europe. Greece took control of Thessaly and part of Epirus, while Macedonia remained part of the Ottoman Empire. Macedonia at this time included lands that extended well to the north of what is now North Macedonia, and Thrace extended into large parts of what is now Bulgaria. The final chapters of this story of territorial rearrangements occurred in the latter years of the 19th century, and particularly in the first two decades of the 20th century (the era of the 'Balkan Wars'), when the geographical apportionments began to resemble the border lines that we see today.

### **World War I and the discovery of Early Iron Age Macedonia**

An important moment in the story of archaeological discoveries in Macedonia took place during the First World War. Until the early 1900s, Macedonia did not play a part in the national Greek narrative of the classical past. Significant steps began to be made by Greek and non-Greek scholars, notably Christos Tsountas, Alan Wace and Maurice Thompson, who had started to investigate the surviving above-ground monuments and remains, which included the prominent 'tombas' or 'tells', the artificial mounds created by long-lived human settlements over centuries in prehistory.

The French scholar and explorer Léon Heuzey had identified the ancient site of Vergina and published a detailed map and account in 1876. Nevertheless, it was not until 1912, when Macedonia was incorporated into the Greek state, that this interest developed. The first Archaeological Service was founded to record and investigate sites in Macedonia. When French and British troops

landed in Salonika in 1915, during the First World War, recording of archaeological remains became a key auxiliary activity of the British Salonika Force and the Service Archéologique of the Armée de l'Orient, its French equivalent. The Governor-General of Macedonia, Giorgios Oikonomos, became the first Ephor of Antiquities in Macedonia, and made it his task to ensure that military (and non-military) activities in the region conformed to the state's laws about the preservation of antiquities and that the recording of monuments would proceed systematically.

In the years that followed, a wide range of sites and monuments, of different historical periods, was investigated by detachments of allied troops. Ernest Gardner, who was Professor of Classical Archaeology at the University of London, happened to be seconded to the Royal Naval Volunteer Reserve, and became a key figure in the organization of a strategy and as curator of the British Salonika Force Museum. Gardner had been Director of the British School at Athens, and some of his former students, including Captain Stanley Casson, were among the archaeologists who conducted fieldwork, while Lieutenant Marcus Tod, a university lecturer in Greek epigraphy, was a pioneer in the recording of inscribed texts in the region. For the first time, plans and drawings began to be made of a wide series of sites and monuments across Macedonia, but particularly those in the region north and east of Thessaloniki and in the direction of the Chalkidic peninsula. These discoveries continue to represent the founding datasets of archaeology in the region.

### **The Early Iron Age in the Thermaic Gulf**

Among the sites excavated by archaeologists such as Wace, Thompson and Casson, or Léon Rey of the French service, were settlement mounds and cemeteries with remains of the Early Iron Age (ca 1000–700 BC). Some of these



were located in the immediate vicinity of the city of Thessaloniki, notably the 'Toumba' on its north-eastern periphery and another at Karabournaki, in the direction of the modern airport and closer to the sea. These settlements did not become comprehensible until they had been investigated by large teams of specialists, using modern scientific methods, from the 1970s onwards, 'Toumba' under the direction of Stelios Andreou, on behalf of the University of Thessaloniki, and Karabournaki by Professor Michalis Tiverios. They were unlike the sites of central and southern Greece, with their stone public monuments.

The cemeteries, on the other hand, such as those at Chauchitsa and Karabournaki, yielded rich, even spectacular burials, the men furnished with iron weapons, bronze ornaments and sometimes helmets, and occasionally gold-foil attachments, the women with rich bronze jewellery and decorative attachments for clothing. Sometimes they too wore gold-foil ornaments and necklaces. Like the enigmatic settlements, the men, women and children of Macedonia and its neighbouring regions looked very different from their southern counterparts.

### 'North' and 'south' in the archaeology of the Greek mainland

Andronikos' discoveries at Vergina changed the ways in which the 'north' was perceived by educated Greeks of the south, as well as by popular audiences, in Greece and internationally. From the late 1970s onwards, investments and resources began to be directed northwards, not just to Vergina and the preservation of its royal tombs, but also to many significant cities and rural districts, including Pella and Kozani. The pan-Macedonian sanctuary at Dion became the focus of major long-term investment, as did sites along the north Aegean coast, such as Amphipolis and Abdera.

The rapid expansion of the city of Thessaloniki brought with it the need for rescue excavations in the city centre (most recently the Metro

project), as well as in the suburbs. An updated railway line towards Athens, motorways to Athens and across Macedonia, particularly the new Egnatia Odos, linking central Europe to Istanbul, and the Transadriatic Pipeline Project have all resulted in major archaeological discoveries that are transforming the image of the north. New ancient city centres (such as Edessa and Kozani), wealthy country houses and farmsteads (along the Egnatia Odos) and traces of quays along the coastline of the Thermaic Gulf (Transadriatic Pipeline) are among the most notable additions to Macedonia's burgeoning range of antiquities. Discoveries of inscribed texts and graffiti on clay show that a number of different dialects of Greek co-existed in the region (North Greek and Ionian Greek).

A six-year field project at ancient Olynthos, which is a collaboration between the Greek Archaeological Service (represented by Bettina Tsigarida) and the British School at Athens (Zosia Archibald, University of Liverpool; Lisa Nevett, University of Michigan), has revealed new data about a complete ancient city and its

immediate rural hinterland. The city had a nucleus, on the South Hill, dating from the Early Iron Age, which expanded across the slopes and onto the North Hill in the late fifth century, as a result of an initiative by the Macedonian king, Perdikkas II, in 432 BC. Ceramic finds on the South Hill suggest that the population shared many features with the occupants of the 'Toumbas' in the area of Thessaloniki. As research continues, we are likely to find out a great deal more about the inhabitants of the 'north' and their societies.

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# CASSIODORUS: UNSUNG SAVIOUR OF ANTIQUITY

*Violet Moller explains why Cassiodorus was such a pivotal figure in the preservation of Greek and Latin texts – and of classical education more broadly*

**F**lavius Magnus Aurelius Cassiodorus Senator was one of the last great Romans; he was born, with a silver spoon firmly in his mouth, into a wealthy family in late fifth-century Calabria. A distinguished lineage – his father, grandfather (who was part of an embassy to Attila the Hun) and great-grandfather all served in high office – ensured a smooth route to power for young Cassiodorus.

He was appointed *consiliarius* when he was just 20 years old, rising to the position of *magister officiorum* (chief minister) to Theodoric, the Ostrogothic king of Italy, in 523. Theodoric was keen to preserve and assimilate as much imperial Roman culture as he could and Cassiodorus, as a member of the Roman elite, was on hand to help with this. He took over the role of chief minister from the disgraced, and soon to be brutally executed, scholar Boethius. These two men dominated classical learning in sixth-century Italy. Thanks to their efforts, the tenets of the Roman education system were preserved and passed on in western Europe.

Boethius, as author of works such as *The Consolation of Philosophy*, has retained a reputation through the intervening centuries. Cassiodorus was not so fortunate. His contribution has been largely forgotten, which is a shame, because he played an important and remarkable role in the history of knowledge.

His initial plan was to found a theological school in Rome, supported by a library of Greek and Latin texts that he established in

collaboration with Pope Agapetus I. Sadly, conditions in the eternal city during the mid-sixth century were not really conducive to study, and things only got worse when the Byzantines deposed the Gothic king as part of their reconquest of Italy in 536. Twenty desperate years of war followed; Justinian's attempt to protect Roman culture and reunify the old empire destroyed far more than it saved. Within a few decades, all the lands he reconquered had slipped away; the empire in the west was lost for good.

Cassiodorus retired from the world of politics in 538, fleeing the chaos in Italy in favour of Constantinople. He spent the rest of the period of conflict there, but strangely never served the emperor in any official capacity. It is likely he spent much of his time studying, perfecting his Greek and travelling around Asia Minor. One of the places he visited was Nisibis, which was a great centre of scholarship, one of the few during this period. When he returned from Constantinople, he settled on his family estates near Squillace and founded a large monastic complex called Vivarium. For Cassiodorus, this was the culmination of a long-held dream, something he had been planning since the failed attempt to found a school in Rome.

Situated on the far southern coast of Calabria, close to the shore of the Ionian Sea, Vivarium was well placed, accessible via the roads that led north to Rome and south to Sicily, and the east–west maritime routes between Spain, Africa, Greece and Constantinople. The

complex actually contained two monasteries. One was a retreat for those seeking a life of silence and contemplation and the other was a traditional monastery where monks lived, worked and prayed together.

At Vivarium's heart was the library Cassiodorus founded and personally stocked with books. It was divided into two main sections – Greek and Latin – which were stored in separate cupboards. This library, as Cassiodorus explained, was based on the idea 'of what had been done formerly in Alexandria and of what was being done now in the Syrian town of Nisibis'. He must have brought back many of the Greek texts with him from Constantinople, and at least some of these were non-religious – many of them were translated into Latin so that the monks could read them. They included what later became known as the 'liberal arts': rhetoric, logic, grammar, arithmetic, astronomy, geometry and music – subjects that were becoming increasingly side-lined in favour of Christian texts as religion took over every aspect of education. By the end of the century, the only real option (aside from a private tutor at home) if you wanted to learn to read and study was to enter a monastery.

A library is dependent on a good supply of texts to fill its shelves and Cassiodorus took care of this by building a large scriptorium at Vivarium. Not only this, he insisted that book copying was carried out by specially trained monks working to a high standard. In doing so, he helped to re-establish a degree of professionalization and quality in

book production not seen for many years. In monasteries, copying texts was not valued; it was usually done by either the very young, or the very old and infirm – anyone who was not capable of doing other more important, strenuous tasks. Cassiodorus put writing and book production at the centre of monastic life. This focus was gradually adopted by other foundations in the following centuries.

While the fate of Cassiodorus' library is a mystery, scholars believe that a bible (known as the *Codex Grandior*) made in the scriptorium was purchased in Rome in 679 by Ceolfrith, Abbot of Monkwearmouth-Jarrow in northeastern England. Ceolfrith had made the long journey to Rome (astonishingly, a journey he made no fewer than five times) in order to buy books and ornaments to furnish his new monasteries. Back in the scriptorium of Wearmouth Jarrow, the *Codex Grandior*, which no longer survives, was copied and this new version, the *Codex Amiatinus*, was taken to Italy by Ceolfrith on his last journey south. He had planned to give it to the Pope as a present, but unfortunately died before he reached Rome; the *Codex* ended up in the library of a monastery in Tuscany. A gigantic tome weighing 34kg, it is the oldest surviving complete copy of the Latin (Vulgate) version of the Bible. The exquisite quality of the script and the beauty of the hand-painted illustrations provide us with a fabulous witness to the achievements of Cassiodorus and the scribal traditions he founded. In 2018, the *Codex Amiatinus* was brought back to England for the first time in 1,300 years to play a starring role in an exhibition of Anglo-Saxon manuscripts at the British Library in London.

Ceolfrith was able to buy the *Codex Grandior* in 679 because the Vivarium monastery was no longer active and its library was being sold off. The fact that we know so much about the books it contained is down to the *Institutiones* that Cassiodorus wrote to act as a teaching curriculum



*Cassiodorus shown in the Gesta Theodorici, 1176–1177, Netherlands (Leiden University Libraries; Leiden MS Vul. 46, fol. 2r).*

for future generations, describing the subjects and listing the texts needed to study them. The *Institutiones* is divided into two books: divine and secular. As such, it is an explicit attempt to combine the Christian and the profane into one harmonious curriculum, in order to give young men everything they needed to go on to lead productive, fulfilled lives, inside or outside the Church.

Cassiodorus was a devoted Christian, but one who realized the need for a broad, balanced education. He must have been horrified at what he saw going on around him in sixth-century Italy – schools closing and the whole apparatus of the classical education system collapsing. Prominent churchmen were also becoming aware of this situation and beginning to realize that simply being able to read the Bible was not enough – priests and monks needed to be properly educated.

Officially, steps were taken to ensure that young men were taught in monasteries, but Cassiodorus had a much more profound influence on the survival of the classical education than any decree passed by the Papacy. Librarians and

scholars used the *Institutiones* as a bibliographical guide throughout the Middle Ages and, as such, it was one of the most influential texts of the period. Book 2, the secular section, describes the central tenets of these subjects: rhetoric, grammar and logic (the Trivium), followed by geometry, astronomy, arithmetic and music. These went on to form the framework of medieval education.

Just a couple of decades earlier in the sixth century, the other great monastic manual of that period had been written by St Benedict of Nursia. Benedict's *Rule* was extremely influential, providing the guiding principles of the huge network of Benedictine monasteries that were founded over the following centuries, many of which endure to this day. As a guide to monastic life, it is mainly concerned with the practicalities of how to organize a monastery and live a pious life. Reading is prescribed as a regular part of the monk's routine, but there is no detail about education or secular texts. Later in the Middle Ages, after the monastery had been refounded for the second time in 949, the scriptorium became famous for the quality of its manuscripts and talents of its scholars, but there is no evidence this was the case in Benedict's time. In this early period, it was Cassiodorus who kept the flame of intellectual enquiry burning at Vivarium.

Cassiodorus' desire to unite the two halves of the old Roman Empire within the walls of his library was a defining feature of his life and achievement. But he was pushing against an unstoppable tide; by the end of the sixth century an almost total cultural and intellectual schism had taken place, one that was not redressed until the Renaissance. However, thanks to his efforts, some Greek knowledge was preserved and passed on in the West, and classical education survived, albeit in a much-reduced form. For this, and the tradition of monastic book production he founded, Cassiodorus deserves to be remembered and celebrated.



*View from the Eiger.*

## MYTHICAL PEAKS

**Matthew Shipton**

*considers 19th-century mountaineers' fascination with the classical myths*

**O**n we went. Hark once more, to the thunder, now preceded by vivid lighting gleams which flash into my eyes from the polished surface of my axe. Gleam follows gleam, and peal succeeds peal with terrific grandeur; and the loaded clouds send down from all their fringes dusky streamers of rain ... Grandly the cloud-besom swept the mountains, their colossal outlines looming at intervals like overpowered Titans struggling against their doom.

This *mise en scene*, vividly presented by John Tyndall in his famous book *Mountaineering in 1861*, dramatizes the 19th-century scientist and mountaineer amongst the glaciers and peaks of the Valais, a small figure in an epic landscape. The work made Tyndall's name as a mountaineer and

contains one of a great number of echoes from classical antiquity we find in mountaineering literature of the period.

This was the Golden Age of Alpinism, when news of climbing glory and tragedy was celebrated or castigated in equal measure in the letters pages of *The Times* (Charles Dickens being one famous correspondent on mountaineering – he disapproved). The Reverend Girdlestone, an occasional climbing companion of Tyndall, prefaced his own work, *The High Alps without Guides*, with a truncated quote from Horace's *Ars Poetica*: *qui studet optatam cursu contingere metam multa tulit fecitque*. With winning incongruity, Girdlestone liberally dusted his writing with a spindrift of classical references, quoting ominously from the *Book of Revela-*

*tions*, 'I saw a great white throne', in reference to Mont Blanc, before continuing 'After crossing the Tour, I enjoyed a day of idleness'. And he enlisted Virgil to colour a description of deceitful mountain passes, before recounting a happy chance encounter with fellow 'scholars' from Cambridge.

But perhaps the most famous work of mountaineering literature of the time is Leslie Stephen's account of his travels in the Alps, *The Playgrounds of Europe*. *Playgrounds* elevated Alpinism in the popular Victorian imagination. Stephen, father of Virginia Woolf and Vanessa Bell, had a much closer knowledge of the classical world than many of his contemporary mountaineers. He was well-schooled in Greek and Latin, and wrote influentially on Pope's translations of Homer's *Iliad* and *Odyssey*.

Stephen valued equally learned perspectives on both mountains and the classical world, comparing an 'educated' view of the Alps with the 'cultured' gaze of the British upper classes towards Greek statuary in the British Museum (in a passage that, sadly yet typically of Stephen, contrasts this desired ability with that absent in the Cockney, a cipher for the working class more generally). He describes the pinnacles and slabs of Alpine ridges as akin to pyramids or Roman amphitheatres; pictures his team of climbers, in the eyes of the residents of Courmayeur at the Italian base of Mont Blanc, as like 'uncouth visitors from the ice-world as their classical ancestors might have stared at a newly-caught Briton' and the famous Alpinist Francis Fox Tuckett as Odysseus; and suggests the mountain landscapes could be read like Greek drama, as either unintelligible black marks on a white background to the untutored or as some of the noblest poetry in the world to those with experience.

Florence Grove, a climbing contemporary of Tyndall, Girdlestone and Stephen, summed up his own hierarchy of value thus:

*Going up a big mountain is an act of smallest importance to the world and does not, like knowledge of Greek or high birth, entitle a man to think himself very much better than his fellows.*

By contrast with Stephen and Grove, Tyndall had no formal education in classics, but there was another force adding a mythological patina to his writing. Tyndall had written poetry throughout his life, had read some ancient texts in translation and idolized Tennyson and his many classics-infused works. There are resonances of Shelley's *Mont Blanc: Lines Written in the Vale of Chamouni* of 1816 in Tyndall's mountain tableaux:

*Where Power in likeness of the Arve comes down  
From the ice-gulfs that gird his secret throne,*

*Bursting through these dark mountains like the flame  
Of lightning through the tempest*

Tyndall's description of the storm on the glacier suggests an engagement with a famous Greek myth, that of the Titan Prometheus and the Titanomachy. In 1820, Percy Shelley published his version of the myth of the Titan's punishment by Zeus under the title *Prometheus Unbound*, itself undoubtedly a by-product of his earlier composition of *Mont Blanc*.

*The crawling glaciers pierce me with the spears  
Of their moon-freezing crystals, the bright chains  
Eat with their burning cold into my bones.*

Given that several Titans were specifically associated with mountains in the mind's eye of a reader of Shelley, it would be a simple imaginative step towards an Alpine framing of the Titanomachy or Prometheus' punishment. One can visualize Tyndall on the mountainside – thunder, the Zeta of Zeus' lightning bolts crashing down, the monstrous bulk of the Titanic mountains, glimpsed just briefly through the gloom of the storm. Viewed through the optic of Shelley's *Prometheus*, this mountain landscape becomes filled with elemental beings animated as though characters from Greek mythology.

While the Alps may have inspired Shelley's *Prometheus*, it was, of course, the Caucasian mountainside to which the Titan was chained in myth. In *The Frosty Caucasus*, Grove gives his account of travels in this mountainous region and describes scaling Mount Elbrus, the highest peak in Europe. Grove had achieved several fine first ascents in Europe, sometimes with Stephen and the famous guide Melchior Anderegg, before he turned his attention to the East. At this time, in the latter half of the 19th century, the Caucasus was at the boundary of

European mountaineering knowledge and, as it was to the ancient Greeks, considered an inhospitable and remote region. If there remained in Victorian cartography a location still marked 'here be dragons', Georgia could lay claim to that territory, not least as dragons featured prominently in the local variant of the Prometheus myth, that of Amirani, an epic hero from the remote Georgian past.

Grove animated *The Frosty Caucasus*, no doubt with the aim of demonstrating his elevated status, by adding historical digressions on the places through which he passed en route to the Caucasus. Arriving at Poti, on the Georgian Black Sea coast, Grove introduces the river Rion (Phasis to the ancient Greeks): 'I need hardly tell the reader that the Rion is the stream down which came Jason and the Argonauts'. While Grove's objective was Elbrus, ancient myth was never far from view. Setting out on this quest, Grove writes:

*With the mountain of Prometheus and his vulture, we should have, alas, nothing to do, for, though a very similar myth exists about Elbruz, the scene of Jove's vengeance was, according to local tradition, on Kasbek.*

Grove cast his net widely in search of ancient texts with which to burnish his accounts, including the Bible, just as Girdlestone had done, comparing a rime-clad pinnacle to Lot's wife draped in a snowy gala dress. And from the top of Elbrus he perceived the mountains arrayed beneath him and his party as nameless Titans, before spotting Kazbek, some 120 miles away, and, improbably, Ararat, which he placed in Iran.

The sum of Grove's use of classical antiquity in his mythologization of mountaineering is on full display in a passage on Kazbek, which is worth quoting at length, where he repeats the observations from 1811 of a (sadly) unnamed traveller:

*It is not difficult, therefore, to see why Kazbek has become thus famous, why the mass of crags on the face of the mountain, so conspicuous from the post-station, is made the scene of Prometheus' torment, ... it was assuredly in these abodes that Medea compounded her love-potions and her poisons; here it was that Prometheus received the reward of his bold impiety; this is the very birthplace of magic; and it is from these lofty peaks that the immense roc used to take its flight, intercepting the rays of the sun.*

That mountain, some 600m lower than Elbrus' mighty 5,642m, was first ascended in 1868 by several English mountaineers, including Douglas Freshfield, a former editor of the *Alpine Journal* and renowned author and mountaineer. Freshfield had also a keen interest in the classical and remains a major source today for the ongoing discussion of Hannibal's crossing of the Alps, having published, in 1914, *Hannibal Once More*. It comes as no surprise, then, that Freshfield would approach Kazbek (and write about it in *Travels in the Central Caucasus ...*) mindful of the local mythic tradition around the figure of Amirani. Between the two mythologies, that of Prometheus and Amirani, there appears a common thread; punishment by the gods for disobedience was banishment to a place beyond civilization, i.e. the mountainside.

On a similar view from Caucasian mountain tops, Freshfield remarks:

*before us rose ridge behind ridge, until behind and above them, all towered the peaks of the central chain of the Caucasus ... showing us plainly enough that we were in the presence of an array of giants, armed in like panoply of cliff and ice to those we had so often encountered in the Alps.*

Freshfield's use of the term 'panoply' seems quite purposeful, painting a scene of Titans as mountains equipped for battle, like

those Tyndall describes in the Valais. In the language of the time, these opponents would have to be defeated through their climbing – the Titanomachy is transformed here into the battle between the modern, Olympian Victorian climbers and the ancient, elemental Titans.

The widespread use of classical sources in mountaineering accounts of the period can be explained in several ways. Sometimes authors wished simply to display their erudition. At other times, they wished to locate their works within a particular social or cultural context, to illustrate otherwise pedestrian accounts or to appeal to wider audiences. But more fundamentally, these works show the climber's identification with a landscape populated by figures and shaped by events from ancient myth, allowing the creation of a heroic narrative.

Of all the figures from the ancient world, it was Prometheus with whom these Alpinists could best identify. Tyndall on the glacier was both

assisted and endangered by metalwork, the gleam of lightning in his ice axe an elemental strike forewarned. Both climber and Titan existed in a topographically liminal space, both represented civilizing influences within elemental realms – the forces of *Bia* and *Kratos* ever present – and the experience of both was defined by struggle. Equally, both occupied a mythic space between life and death, immortality and mortality, and their stories are by turn self-serving, compelling and inspirational.

The influence of Shelley's *Prometheus*, and his other works on mountain landscapes, cast a long shadow over the period. To the Alpinist of the late 19th century, the Caucasus represented mountaineering at the geographical and physical limits of possibility, the range occupying a not dissimilar place to that it held in the ancient Greek imagination. The Caucasus would provide the ultimate arena in which to seek immortality through mythologization.



© Matthew Shipton

*The descent to the Aosta valley in the Alps.*



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# AN ENGLISH CHURCH ON KYTHERA

*Paul Watkins* explores the relics of Britain's Greek Empire on Kythera

**'I have been asked where the Ionians were?  
And what England could have to do with the people of Persia?'**

*Lord Kirkwall, former official of the Lord High Commissioner  
during the British rule of the Ionian islands, 1815–1864*

One of the unsung joys of travel is the moment when you open the shutters of a darkened hotel room to the wakening view. A late arrival in Chora, capital of the Greek island of Kythera, provided me with such a pleasure. With the need for a good night's sleep paramount, the shutters had remained closed until morning.

Framed by the open window was the revelation of a shallow, verdant valley, with only one man-made feature. At first I could not clearly identify the tumbled mass of stone, glowing warmly in the early morning light, as a building. All I knew was that at some time in the island's early Venetian period (13th century) the site had been chosen for the

construction of a small domed church in the Byzantine style, dedicated to the Orthodox St Martin (Ayios Minas) and later on, in the 16th century, transferred to the Catholic faith as part of a Franciscan monastery.

Later still, in the early 19th century, Ayios Minas became the 'English Church', converting to the Protestant faith during the British occupation of the Ionian islands (1815–1864). In its brief life as an Anglican place of worship for the handful of British soldiers and administrators and their families, the church played an important if minor role in maintaining the idiosyncrasy of a British Greek Empire, formed of Kythera and the other Ionian islands dominated by Corfu.

Sadly the church's landmark dome had recently collapsed and I realized that the building I was contemplating was now no more than a ruinous memorial to a short-lived but intriguing period in the island's history.

## **'King Tom' and his 'Viceroys'**

British occupation of the seven Ionian islands was the result of the withering of French power in the Mediterranean during the Napoleonic Wars. Napoleon had seized them from the Venetians in 1797 prior to his campaign in Egypt, but his subsequent defeat at the Battle of the Nile in 1798 brought their surrender to the forces of Russia and Turkey – two of the powers allied against the French. A

**The *Mentor* shipwreck**

On 12 September 1802 a British ship, the *Mentor*, was sailing from Athens to Malta with a precious cargo: 17 crates of marble sculptures newly removed from the Parthenon by Lord Elgin. The route of the voyage, via the southern coastline of the Peloponnese, was diverted by strong northwesterlies to the southern tip of Kythera, where it took on water. In desperation, the crew made for the island's nearest port, Avlemonas, on the east coast. Unfortunately the heavily weighted ship struck the shore just outside the harbour and quickly sank.

Happily all on board were saved. Among them was Lord Elgin's private secretary, William Hamilton, who had been involved in a similar mission – the removal of the Rosetta Stone from Egypt – the previous year. (This was the same Hamilton who later became Britain's Envoy to Naples and protector and husband of Nelson's Emma.) His companion on the voyage, another great philhellene, was Colonel William Martin Leake, renowned for his geographical surveys of Greece and, like Hamilton, a dedicated collector of antiquities.

It was essential that the marbles – along with Lord Elgin's reputation – were recovered. Sponge divers from Symi and Kalymnos were recruited to explore the wreck and retrieve its priceless cargo, which was subsequently shipped to England in two Royal Navy vessels.\* Sold to the British Museum by Lord Elgin, the marbles remain there as a major attraction for visitors despite the efforts of Greece to repatriate them.

Under the supervision of the Greek Archaeological Committee, excavations of the shipwreck have continued into the 21st century. Some of the other antiquities stowed on the *Mentor* along with the marbles have been recovered, and much has been learnt about ship design and equipment of the period.

\*Although the British were not in control of the Ionians at the time of the shipwreck, it has been suggested by the historian G.N. Leontsinis, author of a doctoral thesis on the social history of Kythera, that the islanders were strongly pro-British (following the expulsion of the French and the setting up of the short-lived Septinsular Republic), and thus happy to permit the export of their Greek heritage.



© Howard King

*Derelict interior of the 'English Church'.*

period of independence created a 'Septinsular Republic' but this only lasted until 1807, when the French briefly returned, then to be finally evicted by the British after a long blockade (1809–1814). The British protectorate imposed on the islands lasted until 1864 when they were united with Greece.

The first overlord of Britain's Greek possessions, commanding his insular domain from a splendid palace on Corfu, was Lord High Commissioner Sir Thomas Maitland. Something of a maverick in the great tradition of British colonial governors, 'King Tom' was the guardian and executor of a constitution which ensured control of the Islands' Assembly, and which could enact legislation without the authority of a British parliament. He was effectively an independent sovereign with complete power over his subjects. His view of their political rights was best summed up by his confident assertion that 'colonial assemblies are injurious to the people and disadvantageous to good government'.

Though forming part of the Ionian Assembly, the noble families who had governed the islands in the 400-year Venetian period were subverted by the offer of large salaries and titles,

and offered little opposition to Maitland's rule. But a colonial adventure that might have seemed little more than a move on the geopolitical chessboard had a positive outcome for the inhabitants of Corfu, Paxos, Levkas, Cephalonia, Zakynthos, Ithaca and Kythera, bringing about a degree of order, local justice and material advancement for the islands unknown in their history.

In this respect, Maitland's 'viceroys' had a major role to play. These men, colonial officials and army officers, were made Residents (governors) of the smaller islands, where their exploitation of the people and resources was to some extent balanced by their contribution to the general good. Kythera's best-known Resident, Captain John McPhail, is remembered for his public works, the product of his training as an architect and engineer. The island's road network, still in use today, was largely his creation (and that of the islanders' *corvée* labour) as were the splendid bridges, many still capable of carrying modern traffic. McPhail's most interesting architectural legacy, however, is the half-dozen or so school buildings whose English Gothic design stands out so strikingly against the Kytheran landscape (see panel on page 23).



These schools, serving a population swollen by refugees from the Greek War of Independence, were built for the purpose of educating a Greek civil service to provide future recruits for the British administration.

### The 'English Church'

I followed the track to Ayios Minas along the valley floor to a small cemetery behind the church, where a path between the marble Orthodox tombs led to a square stone vault shaded by a pine tree. A carved inscription showed that this was an ossuary containing the bones of the British residents who had been disinterred from an earlier graveyard and from the interior of the church, transferred here in 1935. Inside the church a plaque from 1971 recorded this event in Greek and English.

Apart from a second plaque (1623) commemorating a Venetian burial within the church, the interior was bare, with crumbling plaster revealing the ragged stonework and an east end open to the sky. The sanctuary was buried by the rubble of the recently collapsed dome. Here was a sad glimpse of a misplaced and near-forgotten imperialism. The church, like so many similar relics on the island, is unlikely to be restored.

A memory of Kythera's British community survives, however, in the Archaeological Museum of Chora. Here the headstones from their former graves have been stored and archived. Sadly, the engraved epitaphs give little information on the burials, with no reference to the birthplace or place of death (i.e. Kythera) of the men, women and children who found themselves so far from their homeland. This speaks volumes about the attitude of the British expatriates towards their adopted home, which they saw as foreign and remote.

The most celebrated antiquity in the museum is undoubtedly the impressive Archaic 'Lion of Kythera' (sixth century BC) which stands proudly near the entrance. This cannot be mistaken for any other symbolic lion, either Venetian or British.

### The British architectural legacy on Kythera



*British School, Milapidia, exterior and interior (© Paul Watkins).*

#### Schoolhouses

One of John McPhail's most inspired projects was the building of schools throughout Kythera to educate local children as potential administrators. The schools were based on the Lancastrian system, which owes its name to the pioneering work of Joseph Lancaster (1778–1838), in establishing schools in which more advanced students assumed the role of teachers, thus alleviating the burdens – and cost – of adult staff. The method was highly influential in the earlier part of the 19th century, which included the period of school construction on Kythera (1820s). McPhail's venture had the enthusiastic support of Frederick North, Fifth Earl of Guilford, who established the Ionian Academy on Corfu, the first university of modern Greece.

British schoolhouses, mainly built in the years around 1825, can be found at Potamos, Milopotamos (Kato Chora), Milapidia, Fratsia, Osios Theodoros and Aroniadika. They are notable for their derivative architectural styles, inspired by the contemporary fads of British academe (such as the neo-Gothic). As in the case of Chora's 'English Church', however, these buildings have lacked any substantial restoration and are in a sad state of disrepair.

#### Bridges and other structures

Their modern function has ensured that McPhail's bridges are better preserved than the schools. Most notable are those at Katouni, Kapsali, Potamos, Mitata and Karavas. Other British works include the lighthouse at Moudari (1854) at the northern end of the island, the market building at Chora (1834) and the Lazaretto (quarantine station) at Kapsali, an 1817 reconstruction of the original Venetian building. Also at Kapsali is a tall, stone-built reservoir (1825), once supplied by an aqueduct, used for watering the ships which came into the harbour.



*Bridges at Kapsali (left) and Katouni (© Paul Watkins).*

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*It's not hard to see why Prousos Monastery, in western mainland Greece, is a popular tourist attraction.*

## THE ULTIMATE TRAVEL WRITER

**David Ricks**

*revisits the Brousos of Alexander Pallis, an unparalleled travel book that takes him back a century into the heart of Greece*

The remote and historic monastery of Prousos is listed by TripAdvisor as the #1 attraction in Karpenisi, in Evrytania in western mainland Greece, and rightly so. More surprisingly, perhaps – and this will be known by few pilgrims or tourists – the place supplied the title of one of modern Greece's liveliest pieces of travel writing, Alexander Pallis' *Brousos*. This late work, first published serially in the journal *Noumas* between February and November 1921, and in book form in 1923, gave a distinctive form to its author's idiosyncratic stance and is still vivid a century on.

Pallis was a long-term resident of Britain and its empire, yet a fierce

partisan in Greek politics; well read in English literature and in sympathy with modern thought, he was also committed, intellectually and philanthropically, to the 'hirsute' idiom of extreme demotic Greek; he was a liberal anti-monarchist with a domineering streak. A man whose whole career places him at the intersection of two cultures, Pallis (1851–1935) can be seen as both proudly Greek and an exemplar of a characteristically Western disappointment with the actuality of Greece. Firing salvos on all sides, *Brousos* – ostensibly an innocent travelogue – still rewards attention, not least for the questions it poses about Greek identity and especially Greek Diaspora identity. With Brexit, but

not Brexit, seemingly averted, a centennial glance at this rough, tough little volume of a hundred or so pages may be timely.

The *Oxford Dictionary of National Biography* entry by Richard Witt identifies Pallis with a knowing zeugma as 'cotton merchant and translator'. Dr Witt's vivid short biography – I hope the full-length one he has been preparing will one day appear – makes an excellent starting point for encountering Pallis, but for those unfamiliar with his presence in Greek and British life, I give some essential information here.

Born of Epirot (and Albanian-speaking) antecedents in Piraeus in 1851 (he often used the jesting pen name Lekas the Arvanitis), Pallis

was one of many intellectually gifted members of the Greek Diaspora to be drawn away from university studies to commercial life overseas. In a career that extended from Manchester to Bombay with Ralli Brothers and culminated in a palatial Liverpool mansion, now sadly demolished, Pallis amassed considerable wealth and experience of the world. Concurrently, he devoted attention and acumen to language reform, as manifested particularly in his translations of (and commentaries on parts of) the *Iliad* and the Gospels (the Foyle Special Collections at King's College London houses copies of these important works with his own annotations). His translation of the epic into an often compelling Greek folk-song idiom was a *tour de force*; in 1901 his Gospel translation provoked riots in Athens with a death toll of eight.

In addition to cultivating the Greek *dēmotikē* as a literary artist, Pallis dug deep in his pocket to support the distribution of demotic texts among children of the unredeemed Greeks of the Balkans. (I remember with pleasure and gratitude perusing the relevant correspondence lent to me by Pallis' grandson Dr Alexis Vlasto.) But it is important to point out that Pallis was very much a man of the British establishment, taking citizenship after the disastrous Graeco-Turkish war of 1897, sending his sons to Eton, where he endowed bursaries for boys lacking means, and firing off pamphlets and more extended works in English. His Greek is a highly coloured version of demotic with drastically reformed spelling.

So when, late in life, Pallis published a travel book, *Brousos*, one would expect it to have interest as a document of its time – and in particular as a contrast with two more familiar types of travel writing. The first, ably surveyed by Edmund Keeley, David Roessel, David Wills and others, is Anglo-American writing about Greece; the second – less common than one would expect – is travelogues by Greek writers such as Nikos Kazantzakis, Kostas

Ouranis and Stratis Myrivilis. Pallis' stance as a Greek of the commercial diaspora is different, neither seeking novelty nor – at least on the face of it – engaged in a search for the authentically *völkisch*. Like the protagonist of the folk song known as *The Exile's Return*, most famous from the version published in 1914 by N.G. Politis – in a volume funded by Pallis himself – the returning traveller, like Odysseus before him, peruses the landscape and his wife for marks (*semadia*) of authenticity. Is he really home? And, if he is, will his wife recognize him as her own?

Yet *Brousos* makes an odd sort of *nostos*. From its title, one would expect it to revolve around a pilgrimage to the remote but famous monastery in Evrytania: the tale of a prodigal son, perhaps, seeking his roots in Greek life and the Orthodox faith in lands where St Paul preached. Yet Pallis was not the Diaspora Greek in whom nostalgia provokes religious piety, and his Anglophilia came with a leaning to what used to be called modern churchmanship.

The narrative of the journey begins on 18 November 1920 (while Greece is at war in Asia Minor), starting at the Peloponnese railway station in Athens, arriving finally at Prousos, leaving there on 26 November and returning to Athens by Christmas. It is, though not entirely lacking in descriptions, a winding course, with none of the topographical precision of a Colonel Leake or of other English travel writers on whom Pallis draws copiously. Instead, it is a pretext for a Diaspora Greek with a large emotional stake in Greece as a going concern to let off steam about politics and life in general, rolling into his *causeries* memories from a dozen or so visits to Greek-speaking lands over the years. But what gives the work the classic status which has led to its republication in a series of modern Greek classics?

Much of the praise for the book in its time came from those who shared its linguistic predilections and Venizelist allegiances. It is worth

pointing out that the trigger for the journey, which begins only on page 11, is the election of 1 November 1920 which saw Venizelos' defeat. The opening pages dwell bitterly on the fate of those great men to whom 'the free kingdom', as Pallis mordantly refers to it in general (compare the sardonic Irish use of 'the Free State'), has been ungrateful: Venizelos, and before that King Otto, and before that Capodistria. None of them born in mainland Greece, all rejected by her, they stand in opposition to the antitype of Theodore Kolokotronis: Pallis was not the first Greek or the last to lay the country's ills at the door of the Peloponnesians. And he positions his book provocatively by quoting the realist philhellene and historian George Finlay on its very first page. But if there is a key precursor to *Brousos*, it may lie in a work of exactly a century earlier never mentioned in the text: William Cobbett's *Rural Rides*, serialized in 1821–1826, published in book form in 1830 and a classic ever since. Armed with a strong constitution and strong opinions, Cobbett returned from exile in the United States in 1817–1819, still full of animus against the governing regime, and traversed the English south and midlands with an eye to injustice and abuse, wrapped up in a disarming diary form.

The twists and turns of *Brousos* can only be taken in fully by reading the work itself – and, sadly, a work of such a marked linguistic idiom, with so many in-jokes, is unlikely ever to find a translator. But let me pluck out what I see as those elements which most clearly mark a view of Greece as seen from the Diaspora, then and perhaps now, a century on. A Greek who has made good will often contribute to the old country through philanthropy, and Pallis' material contribution cannot be gainsaid, in his patronage of authors, Kostis Palamas among them, who made central contributions to modern Greece's sense of itself. But what Pallis intended to contribute through *Brousos* was more specific: a vein of Greek self-criticism.

If it is true that ‘violence is as American as apple pie’, then it is also true that self-laceration is as Greek as *tyropita*: how else can we explain the more than 30 editions of Nikos Dimou’s *The Unhappiness of Being Greek* since 1975? And it is important to note that Pallis’ wide-ranging strictures against Greek *mores* come fuelled by knowledge of the wider world but animated by a sense of solidarity or complicity with other Greeks: an early reviewer spoke of ‘self-criticism’ here. And the nature of that self-criticism has particular contours shaped by history as well as individual sensibility.

The role of history is at its most evident when we note the small but significant changes which the text saw between serial publication in 1921 and book form in 1923: in between, ‘one third of Hellenism had been uprooted’, as Pallis tersely and bitterly notes, and the nature of the Greek Diaspora, with the loss of Asia Minor, was forever changed. That makes his comments about the small-mindedness of the Greek state the more poignant. But it also changes the nature of the identity of the people he describes. It was not out of place for one early reviewer to

write of Pallis’ ‘fine perception of the Romaic soul’, or for another to speak of his ‘overview of *Romiosini*’. ‘And what should they know of England, who only England know?’ Rudyard Kipling’s question from 1891 has an analogy in Pallis, who in effect asks, ‘And what should they know of *Romiosini*, who only the *romeïko* [a disparaging Greek word for the Greek state] know?’ Yet Pallis, undeterred, pressed ahead with the book version – encouraged by a favourable reception – rather than discarding it as a period piece now perhaps rendered out of date by events. And the revisions he made to the text, though of interest as tending to sharpen the political polarization, are fewer than might have been expected.

Where, then, does Pallis bring the perspective of a Diaspora Greek, of a distinctly Anglophile and Liberal stripe, to his encounter with Greece? This raconteur frequently divagates well beyond any conventional travelogue so as to reflect the journey of a whole life, a life spent for more than half a century outside Greece. In addition, Greek travel writing being something of a rarity, the author draws, by necessity as

well as temperament, on foreign and especially English travel writing more than on Greek. But had Pallis ‘gone native’ in England?

To say so would be unfair to an author so distinguished in the sphere of practical life and who had Greece very much to heart. Yet predominant in the book is a strong vein of satire. Among the author’s targets are many which are familiar from the tropes of travel writing by foreign visitors to Greece: litter, neglect of ancient sites, economy with the truth when it comes to directions, uneven culinary standards, cruelty to animals and, of course, defective plumbing. Yet many of Pallis’ criticisms of Greek life concern matters which we would now consider of the highest importance – the degradation of the physical environment, and of Greece’s tree cover in particular, among them. But *Brousos* can be read as a sly sort of para-pilgrimage. As Witt puts it:

*His last visit was a leisurely secular pilgrimage into the Agrafa foothills, written up in Brousos (1921), in which wit, learning, and unsparing criticism of Greek foibles clothe a robustly didactic philosophy of life.*



*Pallis’ final journey was to the foothills of the Agrafa mountains, shown here at night.*

***‘That the Church saved the nation is an old wives’ tale; the historical truth is the converse ... The Church was no mother but a blood-sucking stepmother.’***

Let me briefly endorse but also refine this assessment, coming back at the end to the motif of the exile’s return and its playful literary handling.

The fact that *Brousos* begins with hot news – an election, and in wartime – should not conceal from us the fact that the whole text is saturated in the Bible and contains many references to the Greek Church (here George Borrow’s *The Bible in Spain* is an acknowledged model). Pallis comes out swinging against the Crown on page 1, quoting the Epistle of James 3:8 in the original in a somewhat truncated form: ‘And [their] tongue is a fire, an unrighteous world, set on fire by hell, full of deadly poison.’ He then moves to the Shepherd of Hermas and in turn to St Paul’s First Epistle to Timothy 13, where the strictures made by the Apostle to the Gentiles against gossipy women are attributed by Pallis to his experience of Athens. At many places in the narrative, scripture springs to this traveller’s mind. A free-marketeer, Pallis has a dig against the Workers’ Federation, citing Deuteronomy 32:15: ‘But Jacob ate and had his fill and waxed fat ... and he forsook God who made him.’ He does not hesitate to enlist the English missionary John Hartley in praising Capodistria’s actions against piracy or to enlist the High Anglican layman Athelstan Riley in mild humour at the expense of Athos, while describing Oliver Cromwell as perhaps the greatest of England’s worthies. The religion behind all this is essentially founded on wisdom literature, embracing Proverbs, Exodus and indeed the Talmud, and is at some considerable distance from popular piety.

A passage exactly half way through the textual journey brings this out strongly.

On arrival at what he calls Agrini (present-day Agrinio), Pallis notes that it was known as Vrachori at the time of the Revolution; and one of the things that alienates and disorients this returning exile in contemporary Greece is the pervasive renaming of places to give them a classical ring. The entire page of text in question was inserted after the 1922 Disaster: having criticized the clergy for rapacity and inhumanity towards the sick during the Revolution, Pallis concludes with a biting assessment: ‘That the Church saved the nation is an old wives’ tale; the historical truth is the converse ... The Church was no mother but a bloodsucking stepmother.’

But to end there would be to leave the story half-told. After this burst of indignation, the narration, with all its divagations, takes the narrator on a journey which, though never reverent, is increasingly consoling: descriptions of scenery proliferate as we approach the spectacular setting of Prousos. For all Pallis’ disapprobation of superstition and his incapability of conquering what he sees as his ancestrally authentic anti-clericalism, he finds the abbot of Prousos admirable – the more so because the abbot is out of favour with the obscurantist and populist clergy of Athens. But he does not leave Prousos on this note. Instead, the narration culminates with a double allusion to the two aspects of Greek culture he loves best.

The first is Homer:

*Before I say farewell once and for all to those parts of Brousos, let me say a word about the monastery dog ... When I saw him old but still splendid, a faithful guard in his place, I thought straight away of Odysseus’ Argus.*

And Pallis then quotes in a neat hexameter translation made for the occasion the entire affecting scene from *Odyssey* 17. This might seem a fitting place for his *nostos* to end, but

having mocked so many others, our narrator is ready to conclude with a little self-mockery.

The book’s final scene witnesses a flirtatious stichomythic encounter between the elderly (and married) narrator and a widow of advanced years, Vavoulo, in a clear parody of the question and answer form of the ballad of the exile’s return. Vavoulo eventually vows to send the narrator some sausages for Christmas, in a double-entendre that brings the house down. But the sausages never arrive, prompting the final *cri de coeur*, ‘How can I ever trust woman again?’ Pallis guys himself as a failed Odysseus here. And it is as if Vavoulo personifies the 100-year-old independent Greece which this Diaspora Greek cannot stay away from but which leaves him perpetually exasperated.

#### **Further reading**

Richard Witt’s short life of Pallis in the *Oxford Dictionary of National Biography* is excellent. Of Pallis’ own writings, his two volumes of Homeric commentary contain much good sense and entertainment value – one of his emendations was commended by the editor (and banker) Walter Leaf – likewise his digressive and entertaining notes on New Testament books. *The Twenty-Second Book of the Iliad* (London 1909) and *A Few Notes on the Gospels according to St Mark and St Matthew* (Oxford 1932) are currently available online as print-on-demand editions. For Pallis and the language question, see Peter Mackridge’s invaluable *Language and National Identity in Greece, 1766–1976* (Oxford 1976).

***‘It is as if Vavoulo personifies the 100-year-old independent Greece which this Diaspora Greek cannot stay away from but which leaves him perpetually exasperated.’***

© Don Short



*Don Short took on a number of exciting assignments in Athens.*

## IN GREECE WITH ANTHONY QUINN AND CO

*Veteran Fleet Street journalist **Don Short** met many stars while reporting from Greece in the heyday of British journalism. He recounts his meetings with Anthony Quinn, Sammy Cahn and Zorba the Greek composer Mikis Theodorakis, among others*

**A**s the showbusiness writer at the *Daily Mirror* in the 1960s and 1970s, I was regularly in Greece covering events for my column, from music festivals to news emerging from film sets. My stories and experiences have stayed with me ever since.

The Olympiad of Song festival started in 1968 and was originally conceived as a light-hearted festival. It ran for six years and was hugely popular. Stars performed to crowds of 50,000 people, but ultimately the event was cancelled owing to funding withdrawals.

Thirty-seven nations competed in the Olympiad of Song in Athens in 1970. But there was a notable absence from the list of composers

when I was there in July that year. Mikis Theodorakis' name was taboo. Theodorakis, famous for writing chamber music, ballets and the film scores of blockbusters such as *Zorba the Greek*, had become chairman of the Patriotic Front and been arrested. I learned that he had been freed by the Greek colonels a few months earlier and gone first to Paris and then to London, where he gave his first concert since his release. But in Greece, I discovered, the new regime had branded him a Communist. His music was banned across radio, bistros and discos. As I noted in my column at the time, Zorba the Greek was now officially Zorba the Commie.

The UK's hopes for the festival that year were pinned on 16-year-old

Gaynor Jones from Wales. The locals called her the Pixie Goddess. Her innocent sound captured the hearts of a land which, although tightly ruled by a military junta, could still know romance as the strings of the bouzouki plucked out the nation's ancient history. Even passers-by around the giant Athens arena where the contest took place stopped in their tracks to listen to the talented singer during rehearsals. *With Everything* was the name of her song, and with everything she sang it. Appearing in front of tens of thousands was a daunting experience even for the festivals' guest stars like Adamo from Italy and our own Sandie Shaw. But Gaynor handled it with aplomb.

She came from the Swansea Valley and remembered singing songs as a toddler in amateur village shows put on by her father. She was offered a place at a well-known stage school and later found herself in the West End production of *The Sound of Music*. Then came television programmes with Sir Ralph Richardson, Derek Nimmo and Charlie Drake. But, when I met her, she had just veered closer to her ambition of becoming a singer.

Things were not easy, as top composers dispensed their best material to established artists, and Gaynor found it difficult to find a song. Her father, an accomplished pianist, came to the rescue. He penned her first patter, *Peaches and Pears*. It wasn't a hit, but hopes were high for the next one.

She told me her only regret about showbusiness was that there were not many people her own age. 'Why, there's only me and Jack Wild', she said jokingly. Those words rang in my ears when I later learned that she had married Wild, who had played the Artful Dodger in the hit production of *Oliver*.

While I was back in Athens the following year, I heard the sad news that Louis Armstrong had died. I met the American lyricist Sammy Cahn who had written many of Satchmo's hits. He reminisced about his friend's one big failing – his refusal to learn the words of his songs. Lucille, Armstrong's wife, used to plaster them up everywhere. If he went into the bathroom to have a shave, they would be pasted upon the mirror. When he climbed into bed at night, they would be lying on the pillow. And he still couldn't learn them.

Said Sammy fondly: 'He would blur his words, and always end up with baby'. Sammy, 58, four times Hollywood Academy award winner, had notched up hundreds of the world's best-loved songs and was sitting on the song festival jury. My lunch with Sammy and his wife was filled with thoughts of Satchmo. Sammy said: 'A year ago I tried to organise a tribute night to him. But Satchmo just felt too unwell to face it. As he said himself, when you're dead, everything's wrong.' My sentiments too.

Years later, I found myself in Corfu on the film set of Anthony Quinn's latest movie *The Greek Tycoon*. Controversy surrounded the film as, remarkably, it resembled the life story of Aristotle Onassis. I flew out to see what was happening.

Quinn was not worried about the difficulties that had heated up with potential lawsuits. He was quite comfortable in the title role because he would be able to say: 'Onassis asked me to play his double.'

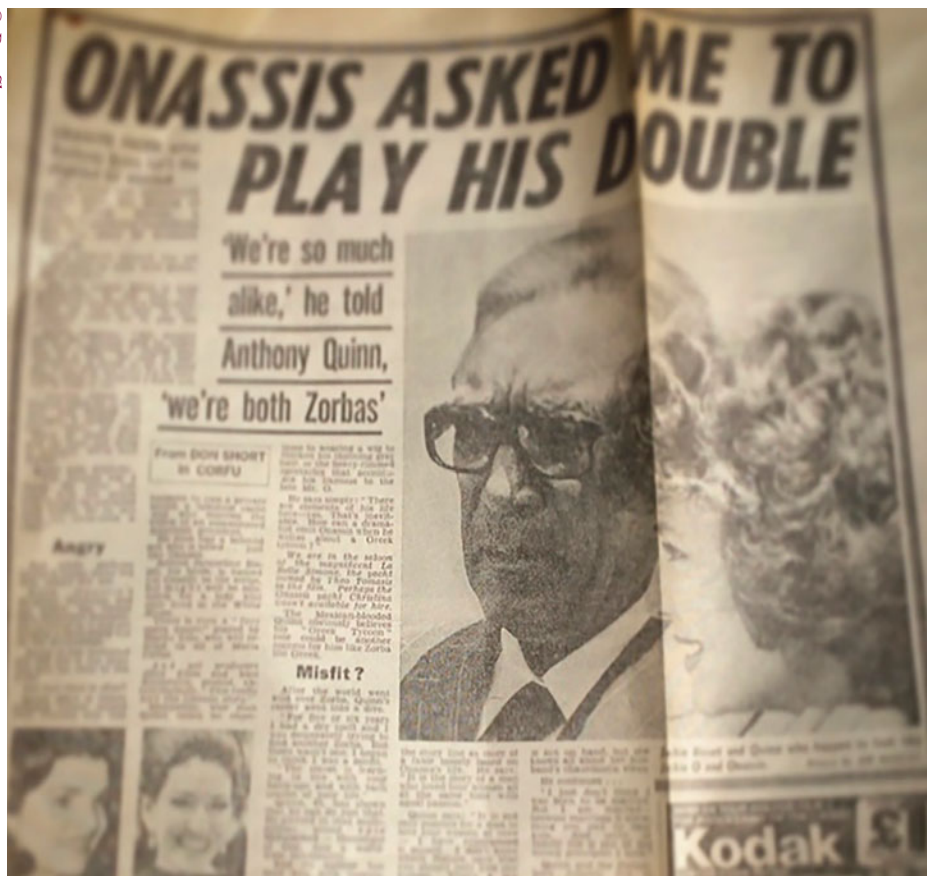
Quinn explained: 'Six months before Mr Onassis died, he called me and suggested I should play him in a film. He said to me: "Somebody is going to do it some day, Tony, why not you? I'd be very happy about it – because I know you will be kind to me." Another reason Mr Onassis asked me to play him was because he thought I looked like him. "Tony," he said, "We're so much alike and we have one thing in common. We're both Zorbas."'

Quinn nodded wistfully. 'Yes, Onassis was a Zorba. He never lost touch with his people even though he possessed such wealth. So on this issue my conscience is clear.'

There were certainly strong parallels between the film and Onassis: Quinn's character Theo Tomasis owns a private island and a yacht and marries the widow of an assassinated American president. He even has a beloved son who is killed ... just like Onassis. But the producers Allen Klein and Nico Mastorakis protested and insisted, 'This really isn't the Onassis story.' Meanwhile, wise man Quinn raised no objections to wearing a wig to thicken his thinning hair, or to wearing the heavy-rimmed spectacles that accentuated his likeness to the late Mr O.

The director, Lee Thompson, added: 'Quinn is just magnificent. He was tailor cut for the role.'

So it proved. No writs were served.



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The original press cutting of the author's article on Anthony Quinn.

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*Caroline Lawrence in front of the east end of the Parthenon.*

## THE TIME TRAVELLER

**Caroline Mackenzie** meets author **Caroline Lawrence** to discuss the challenges of writing for children about the ancient world – and of ‘finding’ Socrates

**Could you begin by telling me a little about your background?**

I was born in London to American parents. A year after I was born, my parents returned to California. My mother was an artist and my father taught French and drama at middle school. The seeds of my love for classics were gently sown as I pored over mythological paintings and Greek art in my mother’s art books,

and when we all went to see *A Funny Thing Happened on the Way to the Forum* at a drive-in cinema, and when my parents sent me to Europe on a summer study tour and I spent a magical afternoon in Ostia Antica. But my *coup de foudre* occurred when I read Mary Renault’s book *The Last of the Wine*, a historical novel set in the time of Plato, Socrates and Xenophon. I was in

Switzerland on my gap year, and read it along with the *Iliad* in translation. As soon as I got back, I rushed to sign up for ancient Greek at U.C. Berkeley and fell totally in love with classics. After Berkeley, I managed to win a scholarship to Newnham College, Cambridge, where I studied classical art and archaeology. I found Cambridge too academic and took a few years off to get married and have



a son. I remained in England, and later took an MA in Hebrew and Jewish studies at University College London. I then taught Latin, French and art at my son's primary school, first as a parent just helping out, later as a paid teacher.

**When did your writing career start and how you did you get into writing in your particular genre?**

I loved teaching but it was exhausting and I fancied the idea of being a screenwriter. So I started writing a spec script about a Jewish slave-girl in Pompeii. I was telling my sister about this while visiting her in California and she suggested that I write a book for kids instead of a movie for adults. Immediately I had the idea of a girl detective a bit like Nancy Drew from the popular mystery stories which I had read as a little girl. But my girl detective would live in first-century Rome. Back in London, I wrote a first draft during the last two weeks of the summer holidays. *The Thieves of Ostia* was published in 2001 and became the first of a 17-book series called *The Roman Mysteries*.

**What fascinates you about the ancient world?**

My main motivating factor is to solve the mystery of what life really would have been like back then. I am fascinated by the tension of how like us they were and how unlike us they were. Even now, whenever I think I'm beginning to understand the past, I read or see something that makes me realize how little I really know.

**Why do you think the ancient world strikes such a chord with both children and adults today?**

The ancient world is like a country you're not allowed to visit; you only hear tales about it. So, in the absence of a time machine, you seek out the most convincing accounts and depictions in literature, film, re-enactment and even computer games. I believe everyone likes being transported to another world.



© Roman Mysteries Ltd

*Serenaded by bouzouki and guitar in a taverna near the Agora.*

**Are children more discerning readers than adults?**

I wouldn't say children are more discerning, but I believe they are more demanding. The moment they get bored they are liable to toss the book aside. But that's also why I prefer children's fiction: the plots are usually much faster moving and almost always more uplifting.

**How does writing about (and researching) ancient Greece compare to ancient Rome and what are the different challenges?**

Somehow ancient Greece has always felt more remote to me than ancient Rome, and not just because it happened longer ago. One reason is that women had very little place in ancient Greece ... or perhaps I should say ancient Athens, which gave us most of the literature. Another reason is that Greek literature seems to me to deal more with abstract concepts: Plato's forms, the myths about the gods and the almost operatic extremes of Athenian tragedy all seem like ideas rather than history. I used to think that Latin literature was more firmly grounded in the concrete sensory world. However, now that I'm delving more deeply into Plato and Aristophanes I'm finding some nice concrete material in Greek literature.

**Your *Roman Mysteries* books cleverly introduce Latin words throughout the text which give the stories great didactic value. Can we look forward to some ancient Greek in your new book?**

Definitely! I have introduced it by transliterating the Greek words. A recurring phrase is *oo den oy dah*, which means 'I know nothing'. I also introduce the words *daimonion* ('little divine thing') and *aretay* ('virtue' or 'excellence').

**How was your recent research trip to Athens? What was the most surprising/unexpected part of the experience?**

One of the things that surprised me about Athens was music. It was everywhere! Outside the Acropolis Museum I listened to a couple of students playing buzzy ancient flutes called *diauloi*. I heard five men playing bouzouki outside Monastiraki metro and later an electric base player. An old man played *santouri* near my hotel. And at a taverna near the Agora, I was serenaded over lunch by a delightful bouzouki and guitar duo. Upstairs at the new Kotsanas Museum of Ancient Greek Technology in the posh Kolonaki part of Athens, I found a reconstruction of every musical instrument you can think of, including a few that were for sale. I even heard the alarm clock that Plato supposedly invented, a water-operated warbling bird whistle.

**You have been diligently researching Socrates through Plato. Were the archaeological sources as important as the literary sources?**

For my last book, based on the Mithraeum and the remains of a girl from third-century Roman London, I had lots of archaeology to inform the story. This one was much harder. I tried reading Plato's *Apology* in ancient Greek but got distracted by the grammar. My breakthrough came when I started listening to Plato's dialogues in audio version. Suddenly the 'archaeological' bits, the concrete elements if you will, started jumping out at me.

**Can you give me any examples?**

Many of Plato's dialogues are set in specific parts of Athens. At the beginning of the dialogue called *Phaedrus*, Socrates and Phaedrus

walk outside the city walls by the Ilissos river and stop on a grassy spot underneath a spreading plane tree. In the *Protagoras* (314c), a eunuch doorkeeper refuses Socrates and his friend entry, mistaking them for sophists. And the dialogue called *Euthyphro* finds Socrates on a step of the Royal Stoa. While in Athens I met a tour guide and scholar named George Kokkos who pointed out the exact point where Socrates stood.

But my favourite literary artefact is one I have never seen in any museum. In the *Symposium* (215b), Alcibiades likens Socrates to certain Silenus figures that apparently sat in statue-makers' shops. These carved figures were shown holding pipes or flutes in their hands. They were made in two halves and when you opened them up, they were found to contain images of a god, Apollo or Dionysus, I'm presuming. A wooden Silenus based on this description will feature prominently in my book.

**One of the great qualities of your writing is the use of sensory experiences. Which Athenian/Greek smells, sights and sounds inspired you the most?**

Modern Athens is too far removed from ancient Athens, but I had a moment in the Parthenon car park when I saw modern Greek taxi drivers standing around in groups and imagined them wearing ancient garb – mantles, sandals, walking sticks... I was helped in this imaginative exercise when a tanned, oiled and nearly-naked jogger wove through groups of tourists. He looked like an Olympic athlete, and he knew it!

My afternoon wandering around the ancient Agora was probably my best few hours. Back in the 1930s this ancient marketplace was cleared of houses and then excavated by the American School at Athens. They reconstructed a stoa which now houses the small collection of the Agora Museum. They also planted the ruins with period flora which have grown lush in the past 70 years. I spotted red poppies, mauve mallow

as well as pink and white oleander. I watched a line of diligent ants, saw butterflies flutter by and stalked one of the famous agora tortoises. Myrtle, pine, oak and laurel trees were filled with the twitter of birds. Chattering magpies were highly visible but wood pigeons cooed unseen. I experienced the relief of moving from blazing sun into a pool of shade and of giving aching feet a rest. When I found the site of the prison where Socrates probably spent the last month of his life, I sat by the Great Drain in the shade of an almond tree and meditated on his life and death.

**Where would you time travel to personally?**

I'd like to go back to Alexandria in the time of Cleopatra, to Jerusalem in the time of Jesus and to Pergamum in the time of the physician Galen.

**Last but not least, what (else) can you tell us about your much-anticipated new book?**

I wrote it in order to try to understand why Socrates – an odd, barefoot, satyr-looking Athenian who never wrote a word – ended up as one of the most influential figures in Western culture. As Plato has a character say in the *Symposium* (221c): 'Many are the marvels which I might narrate in praise of Socrates; most of his ways might perhaps be paralleled in another man, but his absolute unlikeness to any human being that is or ever has been is perfectly astonishing' (translation by Benjamin Jowett).

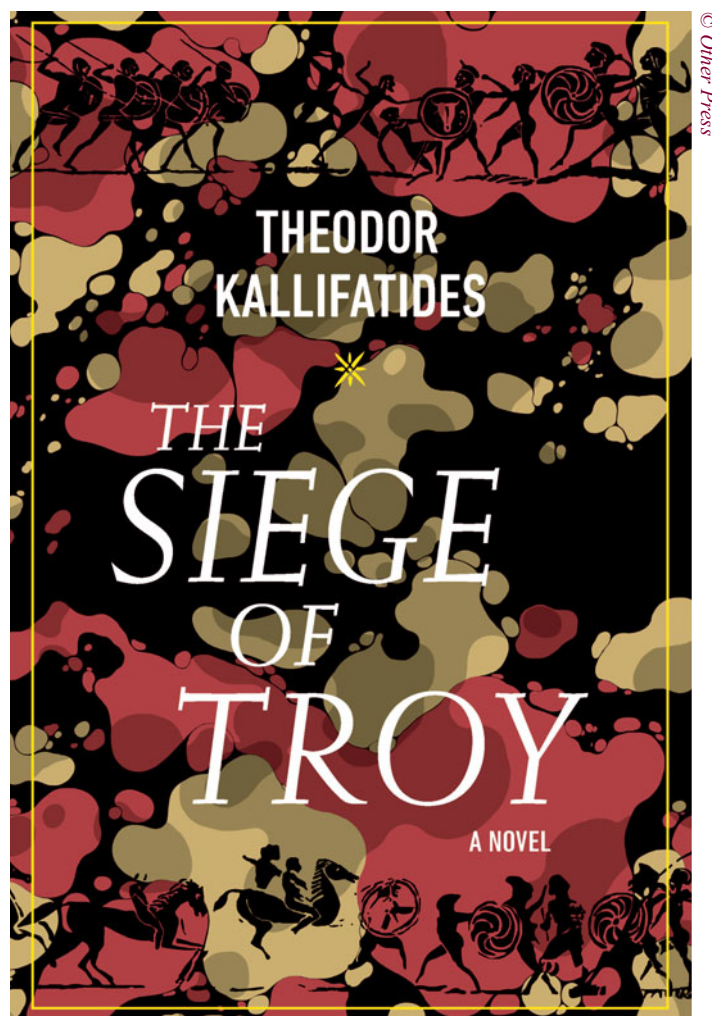
I think I've finally 'got' Socrates, or at least found a version of him that makes sense... Whether I can convince ten-year-old kids of his fascination and achievement is another matter!

*Caroline Lawrence's new book, The Time Travel Diaries: Adventure in Athens, is published by Piccadilly Press on 28 May, and her website is www.carolinelawrence.com*



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*Caroline Lawrence before the ruins of the prison where Socrates probably spent his last month.*



## HOMER RETOLD

*J.W. Bonner*

*questions the place of Homer in a curious Second World War novel*

Theodor Kallifatides, *The Siege of Troy* (translated by Marlaine Delargy). New York: Other Press 2019. Pp. 203. £12.99. ISBN 9781590519714

**H**omer's great epic, the *Iliad*, set after nine years of fighting between the Trojans and the Achaeans, compresses into an expanse of just a few weeks lessons on anger, love, friendship, hubris, fear and bravery. It abounds in portraits of human nature made all the more explosive or potent because of the intensity of war. It is described as a war poem, but it might better be called a death poem: young and old, courageous and

cowardly descend to the Underworld. Democratic Death never plays favourites.

In scale, the poem focuses on the angry dispute between Agamemnon, leader of the Achaean forces, and Achilles, the Achaeans' greatest warrior. Their spat, and the sense of honour each feels due to him and to him alone, plagues the Achaean army. All subsequent major events in the poem follow with deadly logic from all too human nature.

Debates among scholars and readers about contemporary English translations of Homer's poem fill pages of papers and magazines: there are Lattimore fans, Fitzgerald devotees and supporters of Fagles (I am rather keen on Logue's efforts). Theodor Kallifatides, in his novel, *The Siege of Troy*, tries his hand, but with a somewhat tepid sleight. He returns the poem to its oral tradition by having a school teacher tell its story

to her class of Greek village students in 1945. This frame allows Kallifatides the opportunity to draw readers into engaging with the Homeric text through a rather cursory handling of Greek village life under Nazi occupation.

The school teacher, named Miss or Witch (since the town dogs fall silent in her presence) by the students, beguiles them with her rendering of the Trojan and Achaean conflict. The novel's 15-year-old narrator finds himself in love with Miss. And the novel hints at complications in the loyalties of Miss: a love for the German pilots stationed in the village and a role in the partisan movement to rid the country of its German occupiers. This thread deepens the developing love story between the narrator and a classmate and the fate of the narrator's father, who has been imprisoned by the Germans.

It is the teacher's narrative of Homer's poem to her students that provides most of the novel's material. In addition to the brutal array of deaths she vividly revives (all prose variants of Homer's descriptions) – warriors disembowelled, brains spilled, limbs severed – there are emotional pauses. There is Priam kissing the hands of Achilles to urge the return of Hector's defiled body with the words, 'I have just done what no mortal man has done before: I kissed your hands, the same hands that slew my son' and Priam telling Achilles that the Trojans need 11 days to pay their respects to Hector and adding, 'On the twelfth – if necessary – we can resume the battle'. Homer's poem ends with the Trojans celebrating Hector's life. The reader finishes the poem knowing that the battle will rage on with as much fury and destruction as the poem's opening rage between Agamemnon and Achilles.

The narrator looks back on these events from a distance of 50 years. That expanse of time perhaps adds to the novel's nostalgic glow, one that suffuses even the most tragic events at its swift conclusion.

War is Hell – that's truth. War is an accelerant of human mortality. The Greeks knew it, and Achilles knew he would encounter death at some point in his life, whether in a short burst of glory at Troy or a long and forgotten stretch of years in his homeland. The death of Patroclus at the hands of Hector settles the decision.

Kallifatides, who was born in Greece just before the onset of the Second World War and who has lived in Sweden since 1964, attempts to unsettle the glamour of war, arguing in an Afterword that Homer was attempting to do the same (I tend, from my contemporary vantage point, to agree with Kallifatides; at least, I don't see how readers can read the poem today and not feel the brutal grotesqueness of death in so many of the poem's lines).

There is much to be gained from reading Homer's poem in this way.

The attempt by Kallifatides to sneak into the novel the story of this epic conflict is interesting. It's as if the novel is a Trojan Horse, a ruse by which to bring the tale into the hands of the reader and unleash it on them by surprise. The problem is that the frame is flimsy, the Second-World-War tale little more than a young-adult, coming-of-age novel, though the attention paid to women is interesting.

The pathos of so much death suffuses Homer's poem in its final lines. And that pathos infuses the final pages of Kallifatides' novel. Achilles grants Priam time to pay homage to Hector: days to gather wood for a great pyre and a day to feast in honour of Hector. But on the 12th day, the forces return to battle – to fighting that will end with the death of Achilles, the total destruction of Troy and the murder of Agamemnon when he returns to his wife. War is Hell. So, oftentimes, is Life.



© The J. Paul Getty Museum (digital image courtesy of the Getty's Open Content Program)

*A fragmentary mosaic floor showing two heralds leading Briseis away from Achilles who grasps his lyre. Thought to have originated at Antioch in AD 100–300.*



*The author set many of his stories on Skiathos, where he was born.*

## MASTER OF THE GREEK SHORT STORY

*Nineteenth-century writer Alexandros Papadiamandis is one of the forefathers of modern Greek literature. As a new collection of his short stories is released, **Alice Dunn** wonders how typical his stories are of their time*

Alexandros Papadiamandis (edited by Lambros Kamperidis), *The Boundless Garden: Selected Short Stories II*. Evia: Denise Harvey Publishers 2019. Pp. 390. £35. ISBN 9789607120410

**T**he short story is a young art' declared Elizabeth Bowen in 1937.

This is a popular opinion, based in part on the 'explosion' of short stories, as Dean Baldwin called it, published in magazines in the late 19th century. In his book, *Art and Commerce in the British Short Story 1880–1950*, Baldwin states: 'I have counted at least twenty-three magazines founded during the 1890s that published short fiction either significantly or exclusively.' There was a ravenous appetite for the form. Short stories, however, have always existed. As Mary Rohrberger explains, 'Short narrative fiction is as old as the history of literature.'

This is clearly a contentious topic, and the way we approach the question of when short stories started tells us a lot about how we think culture happens and originates. Is there something in society drawing these creations forth? Or is it the artist who throws the idea at society and society has to wake up to it? This concern has been central to the process of assembling this collection of short stories by Alexandros Papadiamandis.

The acknowledgments for the book, released last year, tell their own story of the difficulties encountered in the journey to its publication: 'The year 2011 was the centenary anniversary of Alexandros Papadiamandis' death', they read. 'It was our

wish also to mark this centenary with the publication of the second volume of his Selected Short Stories in English translation ... Unfortunately, this was also the time that Greece was entering a deep financial crisis and there were insufficient funds to underwrite this substantial project.' Despite the difficult economic climate in Greece, work on the project continued, and the collection was finally produced.

The stories were written mainly in the years 1894 and 1902, a time that is often thought of as Papadiamandis' most creative. This was, nonetheless, an uncertain age for Greece, 'A period of post-Enlightenment turmoil that followed closely on the heels of Greece's War of

Independence, when the traditional old ways were disappearing under the pressure of the indiscriminate adoption of western mores and ideas', as the blurb on the inside cover asserts.

Papadiamandis may have looked to the brevity of the short story for punchiness and power in such a climate. Its brief form allows the reader an intense experience – a series of epiphanies – when the whole world becomes clear in an instant.

Consider, for example, Papadiamandis' description of snow in 'Love in the Snow': 'Snowflakes, white flies, wisps of cotton driven to whirlwinds in the air, falling to the earth; seeing the mountain turn white in the darkness.' Or, in 'The Yearly Sacrifice', how 'the echoing sea heard the horrible jest of the old seaman and transmitted it from wave to wave, not to the shore across the way where the calm blue waves lap playfully, but to the centre of the sea, to the measureless deep, the terrible abyss.' Papadiamandis' short stories encapsulate moments in time beautifully.

Papadiamandis was not only a writer of short stories and novels, but also an avid translator. He put many works into Greek, including Bram Stoker's *Dracula* and Rudyard Kipling's *The Strange Ride of Morrowbie Jukes*. Kipling was well known for practising the art of omission. When Ernest Hemingway turned his hand to writing short stories, he looked to Kipling's short fiction and became preoccupied with condensing his prose as much as possible. Papadiamandis' own use of omission is apparent not only in his skilful economy with language, but also in his plotting. In his story 'Neighbourhood Entertainment' he uses dialogue almost exclusively to tell the story of a young man's suicide, handled as though it is merely gossip among friends:

'It's over? Is it really?'  
'He's just died.'  
'Did they give him communion?'  
'Will they bury him with priests?'

Papadiamandis' words work hard for effect and his character observations are so convincing that we find ourselves recognizing people from our own lives in his fiction.

The writer was born in 1851 on the island of Skiathos, where many of his short stories are set. 'The Matchmaker', for example, features a description of its glorious light: 'The winter sun entered freely and lit up all of the widow's tile-covered ground floor.' There's a strong sense of place in 'Dream on the Wave', too: 'This sheer rocky coast of mine – Platana, Grand Shore, The Vineyard – was exposed to the North-east wind and sloped towards the Northern wind.'

Papadiamandis had a busy and interrupted education, attending several schools before going on to study philosophy at the University of Athens. He never obtained his degree owing to economic difficulties. He began work, however, on his first novel, *The Migrant*, which was published in serialized form in a newspaper. After being briefly conscripted into the army, he worked as a translator and had his first short story published in 1887. He had a quiet life, mainly in Athens, working on his writing.

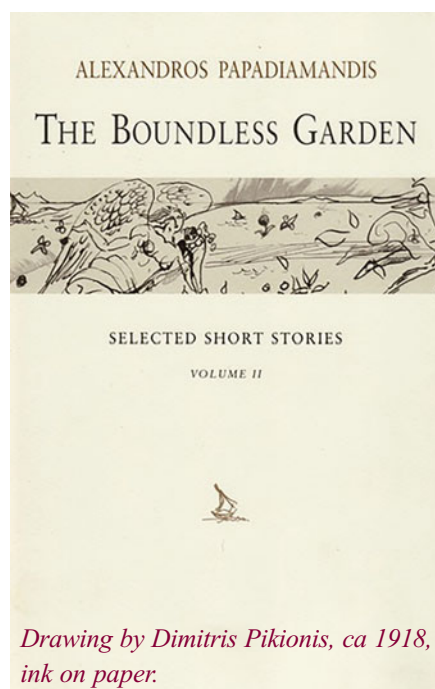
His father was a priest, and ideas of spiritualism litter his short stories, as they do those of many writers of

the early 20th century. Anton Chekhov and Edgar Allan Poe, with whom Papadiamandis has been compared, wrote several stories about spirits. Poe's famous story, 'The Facts in the Case of M. Valdemar', is about a mesmerist who puts a man in a hypnotic state just before he dies. In Papadiamandis' story, 'Sin's Spectre', we are asked the question of what happens to the soul after death. 'Is it true that the departing soul is filled with loathing, when it sees its maggot-ridden, mortal frame?' Perhaps Papadiamandis was influenced by the beliefs of Alcmaeon, who thought the soul was the source of life.

Papadiamandis' stories are notable for their inclusion of mythical sentiment – a nod to the Hellenic but also Christian past. There is a story about witches: 'They were women. Three naked women, completely naked. Like Eve their ancestress, in the days before fig leaves were used and the coats of skins were sewn together.' Later, in the same story, the narrator questions what he has seen, 'What were they meditating on, what were they invoking from pale Hecate, their mother, who sailed high in the skies, these three unveiled, unvested priestesses?' His work also moves into animism and naturalism – a world perhaps inspired by Émile Zola, whose work he also translated into Greek.

Having moved between myths, spirits and naturalism, we are somehow unprepared for the moment when we find a story on materialistic concerns. In 'Gagatos and the Horse' we are given a snapshot of a 'big shot' who is busy 'lending sometimes at 18%, sometimes at 16% or 15% plus compound interest. Shipping loans, usually at 36%, again plus compound interest.' The torrent of contrasts in this book of stories is truly exciting.

By the end of the collection, we are convinced that a degree of disenchantment must accompany enlightened truth. It is the job of brilliant writers like Papadiamandis to reinject some enchantment into our lives through reading.



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*Pillars of language: a column capital from the Parthenon.*

## WHAT MAKES GREEK UNIQUE?

**Henry Cullen**

*gives his verdict on a book on Greek language that has taken Europe by storm*

Andrea Marcolongo (translated by Will Schutt), *The Ingenious Language: Nine Epic Reasons to Love Greek*. London: Europa Compass 2019. Pp. 176. £12.99. ISBN 9781787701830

One of the more revealing questions you can ask a classicist (whether they are a nervous sixth-former enduring a mock university interview, an applicant for a teaching post or simply a colleague musing over a glass of retsina) runs something like this: what's distinctive about how Greek operates as a language? If your chosen victim also knows Latin, a comparison between the two can serve as a productive sub-question.

The best answers I've heard generally focus on:

(a) the astonishingly versatile definite article, the uses of which include the bog-standard 'the', a vestigial pronoun form, *ὁ δε* ('but he'), the quasi-relative *ὁ τρεχων* ('the man who is running') and a gerund (*το εἶναι*; '[the act of] being');

(b) the full use of participles in various tenses and voices, which enables long sentences to get away with the bare minimum in terms of main verbs and obviates the need for so many temporal clauses, relatives, absolute phrases and so on;

(c) the surprisingly small 'core' vocabulary on which Greek relies – it makes a small set of words do a lot of work, meaning that ostensibly simple words like *λογος* need to have umpteen meanings and nuances. Number-crunchers at Dickinson College in Pennsylvania have calculated that fewer than 500 separate Greek words account for some 65–70% of all words in the Greek corpus. This means that just a small pool gets you a very long way; for the equivalent coverage in Latin you need to learn nearer 1,000.

None of the above, though they may well identify a thoughtful linguist, is particularly sexy. It's hard to claim that any one of them proves that speakers of Greek thought about the world in a manner wholly set apart from speakers of less-blessed tongues. And none of them features in Andrea Marcolongo's *The Ingenious Language*, which attempts to pitch Greek as a language that has a unique way of conceptualizing the world around it.

The book, first published in Marcolongo's native Italian in 2016 to much acclaim, has now been translated for an English-speaking audience. The blurb on the inside flap promises us 'a joyous love song', and in this regard it does not disappoint, for the book's primary asset is its sheer missionary zeal.

Marcolongo claims that she ‘thinks in Greek’. She frequently recalls her *liceo classico* training, which comes across as a rather grim slog where the sunlit uplands of reading poetry are never reached, even after years of prose. Its lessons, though, have clearly stuck with her into adulthood; the Greek bug bit hard and has not yet released its grip.

Marcolongo’s exploration of some of the ‘nine epic reasons to love Greek’ (the book’s subtitle) is heartfelt and often touching. She focuses on linguistic features that she believes set Greek aside: aspect (i.e. Greek verbs are, she claims, overwhelmingly concerned with frequency of action rather than tense); the dual, which expresses how two items are spiritually bound into a pair; the optative, which reveals nuanced attitudes of the speaker or writer about likelihood and desire; and so on. The final chapters are more general, offering reflections on the process of translation itself and a whistle-stop history of the Greek language. Inset text-boxes scattered liberally throughout the volume offer a rich assortment of entertaining tangents on topics as diverse as Greek colours and Isidore of Seville; they are probably my favourite sections.

There are plenty of gems at which both Hellenists and experienced teachers will nod approvingly. I particularly liked this:

*I know that all teachers recommend reading the entire passage before beginning to translate, and that no student ever does.*

And this:

*The survival of the optative in Greek, the one Indo-European language to safeguard it tenaciously, is proof of Greek’s unmistakable, extraordinarily durable verb system. Verbs, not nouns, dominate ancient Greek.*

Marcolongo’s discussions of features such as breathings and cases are lively, accessible and clearly the product of half a lifetime’s careful rumination.

You will sense a  $\delta\epsilon$  coming to balance the unspoken  $\mu\epsilon\nu$ , and indeed the book is not without problems. Most frustrating, perhaps, is something that almost inevitably dogs ‘joyous love songs’, in that many passages are overblown and their claims rather over-egged. Marcolongo was, in a previous life, a speechwriter for the Italian Prime Minister Matteo Renzi, and sections of the book do indeed feel rhetorical to a fault. The following typifies what I mean:

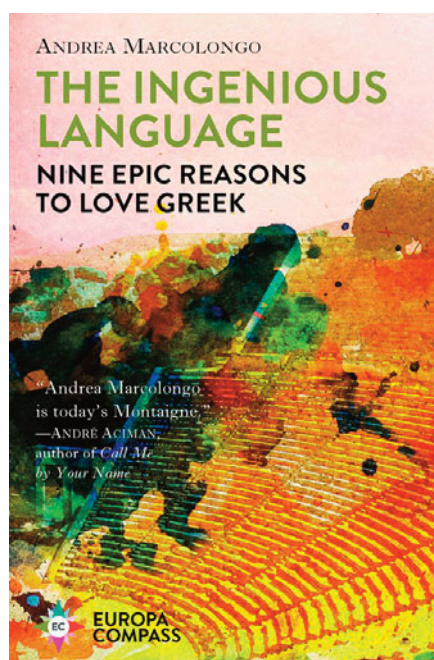
*The Greek optative is, for this reason, the perfect measure of the distance between the effort required to take stock of what we desire and the strength needed to express it – to ourselves most of all; in the conviction that, no matter the situation, elegance is what gives us a slight but sure advantage, especially when it comes to language. It’s just us – and our desires.*

It’s one thing for explanations to be poetic; it’s another, though, for them to be undermined by errors, and there are some unfortunate ones in this edition. Most obvious is that, after claiming that aspect (the first ‘epic reason’) was completely dominant in the psyche of Greek verbs, Marcolongo seeks to illustrate

it by using three *indicative* verbs (they flee; they fled; they have fled). The problem here is that, in the indicative, Greek verbs do in fact operate by tense rather than aspect. Marcolongo might rather have used imperatives or infinitives to make her point. She is correct to observe aspect as a quirk of Greek, but her claims are too sweeping. A second problem is that this English translation seems not to have been checked by an English-speaking classicist, who would have spotted some obvious slips; twice, for example, it is claimed that the verb ‘to translate’ is derived from the Latin verb *traducto/traducer* [sic]. This claim works for the Italian *tradurre*, but not for the English equivalent, whose Latin root is *transfero*. Such slips, and several others like it, cannot help but undermine the reader’s confidence.

An overarching issue is that it is not entirely clear whom this book is for; I wasn’t sure, even after finishing it. Practising classicists will be frustrated by the flaws I’ve identified above; those without Greek will, meanwhile, be unable to follow a fair bit of the finer detail, despite the blurb’s assurances to the contrary. In her introduction, Marcolongo singles out lapsed Hellenists who may have studied the language at school, but have memories of it that make them shudder or even recoil. But it’s worth reflecting that in the English and US educational systems there are vanishingly few students who are forced to stick with Greek without having chosen to; Hellenists who get as far as encountering the concepts of aspect, the dual or the optative will have generally been won over already.

Marcolongo has certainly created a thought-provoking volume whose enthusiasm will win it many admirers. But I sense that a gap in the market remains for a book which can cover some of this one’s omissions (including the less-than-sexy features I mentioned at the outset) and convey rather more clearly, if rather more soberly, just what makes Greek unique.



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*The beauty of the Greek alphabet: gold ring with Greek inscription to Hera, ca. 575 BC.*

## WHAT HUMANS MOST NEED TO KNOW

**J.W. Bonner**

*is enchanted by one writer's journey to learn – and love – the Greek language*

Mary Norris, *Greek To Me*. New York: W.W. Norton 2019. Pp. 227. £14.99. ISBN 9781324001270

**M**ary Norris, in her debut book *Between You & Me*, made proofreading and editing seem as sexy and glamorous as fashion and world travel. For her second book, *Greek To Me*, she embarks on several real journeys and a torrid affair with all things Greek (including a sailor or two). The result is a work in which etymological examinations appear almost as delightful as a playful lover's pillow talk.

Norris brings a wry wit and tone to this book from the very beginning. She opens it, in proper epic fashion,

with an invocation of the Muse: 'Sing in me, O Muse, of all things Greek that excite the imagination and delight the senses' – a fair summary of what Norris hopes – and manages – to convey in her writing. She closes her opening paragraph with a sassy twist:

*things that have survived three thousand years and more, since the time before the time of Homer, things that were old then and are new now – you know, the eternal. If that's not too much to ask, Muse. Please?*

This invocation is rendered in the voice of a wise-acre, a New York wise-cracking voice by way, as we learn in reading, of a youth in Ohio. Norris might be channelling her inner Woody Allen.

This opening invocation also demonstrates Norris' frequently riveting writerly moves. She succinctly balances her clause: 'things that were old then and are new now' by closing with alliteration. There is, as well, the lovely repetition of *time*: 'since the time before the time of Homer' – a

cadence or rhythm that pleases. *Greek To Me* abounds in these small pleasures.

Norris describes in some depth her childhood and school experiences, including her inability to study Latin in fifth grade as a result of her father's refusal to allow her to attend a Saturday class offering. In high school and for a year in college, she studies French, but then switches to German. Watching Sean Connery play Agamemnon in Terry Gilliam's *Time Bandits* sparks her interest in Greece, and the resources available at *The New Yorker* (colleague recommendations and paid opportunities to study Greek), where she finds work as a writer and copy-editor, lead her to study the language and prepare the stage for her travel adventures: Lesbos, Sparta, Naxos, Athens, Cyprus. We read here of her skinny-dipping experiences; she may not emerge as Aphrodite from sea foam, but Norris does grow in self-confidence and self-awareness. Travels, as Emerson suggests, lead her back into her own self, and Norris seems the stronger for them.

Norris educates as much as she elates. Her intimacy with the language, culture and place steadily deepen her passion into wisdom. One of the first Greek words she learns (*ilios*; 'sun') prompts her to consider the Greek in association with English:

*the Greek ilios had come into English as Helios. What in English is the sun god is, in Greek, the everyday word for the sun. Greek seemed to exalt the everyday.*

This exaltation of the daily extends, for Norris, into

*the way the Greeks have squeezed so much out of everything they have: oil from the olive, wine from the grape ... mosaics from pebbles, temples from stone. It is not a rich land, but they have made it rich in ways that transcend a country's gross national product.*

*Greek To Me* is an extended tribute to Norris' belief in the Greek ability to transform the ordinary into the extraordinary.

Norris loves language. Hers is a love that she manages, as well, to trace to the Greek: *alphabet* arrives from the Greek, and 'Anyone who loves language loves the alphabet.' Norris describes reverently and rapturously her childhood classrooms: the 'frieze' of letters in elementary classrooms, 'each capital [letter] paired with its offspring. I used to think of them as mothers and babies.' Indeed, words for Norris have 'a spark of the divine'. (*Greek To Me* concludes with an appendix of the Greek alphabet. A map tracing Norris' various trips and journeys to Troy and elsewhere would have aided the reader further.)

Norris manages to examine various mythological figures and events, from Athena to the Trojan War. She ponders the various sites and ruins: the Sacred Way and Eleusinian Mysteries, the Acropolis. She describes her studies of Greek and her performances in staged productions of Greek tragedies: a chorus role in *Electra* and the role of Hecuba in *The Trojan Women*. Her curiosity about the Parthenon takes her from Athens to Nashville, Tennessee, and a lengthy descrip-

tion of the Nashville Athena, 'four stories tall' – both the process of construction and the human models to counterfeit the goddess.

In writing about Edith Hamilton, author of the classics *Mythology* and *The Greek Way*, Norris demonstrates her associative technique and connective process: she moves from mentioning Edith Hamilton to writing about Margaret Hamilton, 'who played the Wicked Witch of the West in *The Wizard of Oz*.' Both, notes Norris, 'lived on Gramercy Park for a while.' Norris doesn't stop here. She then describes Margaret Hamilton's features: 'famous thin face and sharp chin and dark eyebrows (and, in the movie, a green complexion).' Norris then returns to her story about Edith Hamilton and makes a case for the popularizers of Greek and Roman culture:

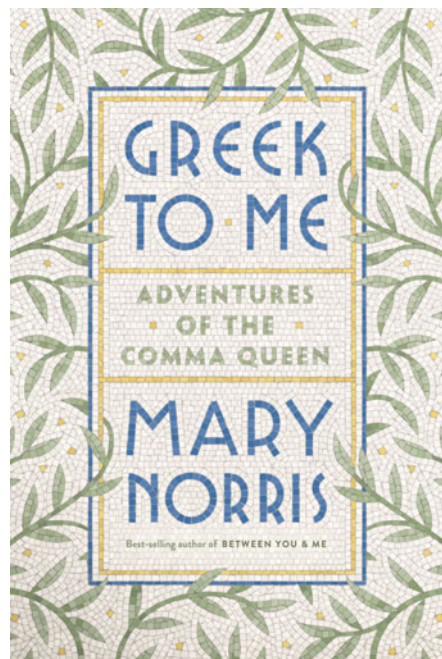
*these writers with the common touch are introducing mythology to people who may fall in love with it and go on to read Hesiod in Greek and Ovid in Latin.*

Hamilton provides the epigraph to the book:

*though the outside of human life changes much, the inside changes little, and the lesson-book we cannot graduate from is human experience.*

And while studying her lines to play her chorus role in the production of *Electra*, Norris perceives 'that ancient Greek is like the Bible ...: records of the past that preserve the things that humans most need to know.'

Norris ends by tracing her way to Patrick Leigh Fermor's adopted home in Kardamyli, where she encounters swarms of magical yellow butterflies and tours Fermor's house. It's here that she takes a swim in the nude, after which a metamorphosis seems to occur: her 'intimates', placed in her hat while she walks back to her hotel from the not-so-private cove, produce a beautiful yellow butterfly.

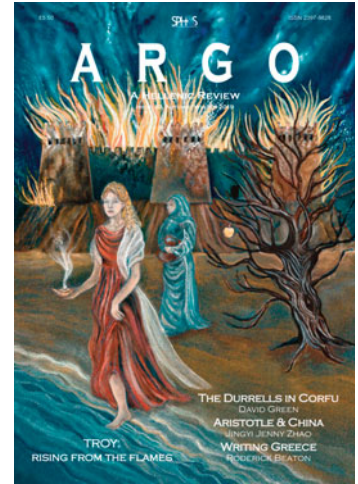


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