

WILLIAM ST CLAIR



THE CLASSICAL PARTHENON

Recovering the Strangeness of the
Ancient World



<https://www.openbookpublishers.com>

©2022 William St Clair. ©2022 Preface by Paul Cartledge.



This work is licensed under a Creative Commons Attribution-NonCommercial-NoDerivatives (CC BY-NC-ND) license. This license allows you to share, copy, distribute, and transmit the work providing you do not modify the work, you do not use the work for commercial purposes, you attribute the work to the authors, and you provide a link to the license. Attribution should not in any way suggest that the authors endorse you or your use of the work and should include the following information:

William St Clair, *The Classical Parthenon: Recovering the Strangeness of the Ancient World*. Cambridge, UK: Open Book Publishers, 2022, <https://doi.org/10.11647/OBP.0279>

Copyright and permissions for the reuse of many of the images included in this publication differ from the above. This information is provided in the captions and in the list of illustrations.

In order to access detailed and updated information on the license, please visit <https://doi.org/10.11647/OBP.0279#copyright>. Further details about the Creative Commons licenses are available at <http://creativecommons.org/licenses/>

All external links were active at the time of publication unless otherwise stated and have been archived via the Internet Archive Wayback Machine at <https://archive.org/web>

Digital material and resources associated with this volume are available at <https://doi.org/10.11647/OBP.0279#resources>

Every effort has been made to identify and contact copyright holders and any omission or error will be corrected if notification is made to the publisher.

ISBN Paperback: 9781800643444

ISBN Hardback: 9781800643451

ISBN Digital (PDF): 9781800643468

ISBN Digital ebook (EPUB): 9781800643475

ISBN Digital ebook (AZW3): 9781800643482

ISBN XML: 9781800643499

ISBN HTML: 9781800646780

DOI: 10.11647/OBP.0279

Cover image: Aristophanes, *Lysistrata*, transl. C. Zevort (Paris: Librairie Charpentier et Fasquelle, 1898), pp. 20–21. Cover design by Anna Gatti.

1. Recovering the Strangeness

This book poses a question: since, in encounters between the present and the past, the present always wins, how might we in the present recover the strangeness of a society that flourished two-and-a-half millennia ago? Can we find ways of throwing off our mind-forged manacles, and instead make an attempt, without preconceptions or agendas, to re-enfranchise those who commissioned, designed, received and used the Parthenon in the classical era by removing the weight of modern practices and traditions? In the chapters that follow, I explore such apparently simple questions as: Why was the classical Parthenon built? What was its purpose or purposes? Why did it take the form that it did? Why, as the eighteenth-century travellers noticed, was it over-engineered?¹ Can we do more to release ourselves from traditions, whether admiring and co-opting ('the highest point of civilization ever reached by humanity'; 'men-like-ourselves'; 'our debt to Greece and Rome') or indignant ('not all dead white men')?² Can we set to one side

1 The question that bothered the eighteenth-century western architects, such as Cockerell, was discussed in St Clair, *WStP*, Chapter 6, <https://doi.org/10.11647/obp.0136.06>.

2 An example of 'highest point' was offered by de Moüy, Cte Charles de, Ambassadeur de France à Rome, *Lettres Athéniennes* (Paris: Plon, 1887), ii, and innumerable others, especially in the late nineteenth century. Like others, de Moüy regarded the changing light and colours as intrinsic to his experience of six years sitting at the foot of the Acropolis and to his opinion on the falsity inflicted on the experience when objects were placed in museums. The phrase, 'men like ourselves' had been popularized by J. P. Mahaffy, whose intervention in the debate on removing the Frankish Tower was noted in St Clair, *WStP*, Chapter 21, <https://doi.org/10.11647/obp.0136.21>, whose numerous popular and scholarly books dominated perceptions of ancient Hellas in the anglophone world for around half a century: 'The Greek classics are writings of men of like culture with ourselves, who argue with the same logic, who reflect with kindred feelings [...] In a word they are thoroughly modern, more modern than the epochs quite proximate to our own'. Mahaffy, Rev. J. P., *Social Life in Greece from Homer to Menander* (London: Macmillan, 1874), unnumbered page at beginning of Chapter 1. Perhaps under the influence of his pupil Oscar

the influence of modern master narratives, whether they take the form of the arrival of evidence-based Enlightenment ideas or, more recently, of post-colonial theories that present local peoples as being deprived of ‘indigeneous’ ways of interacting with the monuments? Can we clear our minds of the suggestion that the Parthenon is ‘the very symbol of democracy itself’?³

These enquiries grew from the research and writing of a book to which the present volume is a companion: *Who Saved the Parthenon? A New History of the Acropolis Before, During and After the Greek Revolution* (Cambridge: Open Book Publishers, 2022). That volume considered the meanings conferred on the Parthenon by opinion-formers in modern centuries, beginning at the moment when the bringing to bear of a knowledge of the ancient classical texts began.⁴ Only in the late seventeenth century, with at most a handful of exceptions, do we see attempts to understand the building within its ancient contexts. We see too that for centuries later, both locally and among foreigners, the older ways of seeing, mainly hostility and indifference, were not displaced, but overlaid, with older traditions remaining active even amongst some of the most highly privileged and well-educated men and women of the nineteenth century.⁵ We can appreciate more fully the

Wilde, Mahaffy confronted many of the differences, including what he called ‘that strange and to us revolting perversion’ pederasty, as well as homoerotic practices, enslavement and routine killing of prisoners. In later editions, perhaps responding to public opinion or pressure from publishers, he rowed back on these passages while maintaining his ‘men like ourselves’ claim, in effect crossing the line between applying his knowledge as a scholar and historian, and telling a bland story, which, by selective omission and reassurance, allowed him to continue his career as public intellectual, offering, for example, many comments on Irish politics. Wilde found an opportunity to retaliate at what he regarded as a betrayal when, in reviewing one of Mahaffy’s later works in the *Pall Mall Gazette* of 9 November 1887, he described his former teacher’s vision of ancient Greece as ‘Tipperary writ large’. The tradition of ‘our debt to Greece and Rome’ is discussed by Hanink, Johanna, *The Classical Debt: Greek Antiquity in an Era of Austerity* (Cambridge, Massachusetts; London, Harvard University Press, 2017), <https://doi.org/10.4159/9780674978249>, and in Zuckerberg, Donna, *Not All Dead White Men: Classics and Misogyny in the Digital Age* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2018).

3 Connelly, *Parthenon Enigma*, x.

4 Discussed in St Clair, *WStP*, Chapter 5, <https://doi.org/10.11647/obp.0136.05> and following, including the still unanswered question of why it had not begun centuries earlier during the Frankish period when the Acropolis was frequently visited by eminent classical scholars from Italy.

5 Discussed in St Clair, *WStP*, Chapter 7, <https://doi.org/10.11647/obp.0136.07> and Chapter 22, <https://doi.org/10.11647/obp.0136.22>.

extent to which changes in the meanings attributed to the building were driven by ideas, of which some were recent at the time they were first applied, others very ancient, but all framed within imagined pasts and aspired-to futures. We realise, too, how dependent we are on a number of would-be opinion-formers from elites for recovering even a scanty and patchy understanding of those from non-elite groups who saw the building, with the ever-present risk of assuming that the real reader or viewer can be derived from the implied reader/viewer of the works of opinion-formers. This is the case even for those readers or viewers of modern centuries, let alone those from earlier epochs. The responses of most actual viewers or reader can usually only be found from scattered mentions.⁶

And although, during the Greek Revolution, as an exceptionally well-constructed and over-engineered building, the Parthenon sheltered those besieged in the Acropolis from artillery bombardment, and some of its marble was turned into cannon balls, it was the attributed symbolic, rather than the physical, characteristics that gave the building its power. During the Revolution, the Parthenon and the other ancient monuments had come to be regarded as ambassadors of a fourth party in the conflict, the famous ancient Greeks of the classical period, and it was that symbolic power which, when converted into the real resources of armaments, military volunteers, money, loans, guarantees, and eventually direct foreign military intervention, ultimately brought success to the Greek Revolutionary cause and enabled an agreement to be made that framed the post-Revolutionary settlement.⁷

All three of the active participants in the Revolution mobilized the symbolic power of the building, with threats to destroy it by both the Ottomans and the Greeks, as well as negotiations and bargains to save it from further destruction. And the representatives of at least two of the European 'great powers' offered, in the event that the building was deliberately destroyed, to harvest selected broken pieces and export

6 Discussed, for example, in St Clair, *WStP*, Chapter 14, <https://doi.org/10.11647/obp.0136.14> that pieces together information about those who were enslaved. Chapter 22, <https://doi.org/10.11647/obp.0136.22>, which offers responses from a much wider, though still unrepresentative sample, shows what is normally missing.

7 As discussed in St Clair, *WStP*, Chapters 16, <https://doi.org/10.11647/obp.0136.16>, 17, <https://doi.org/10.11647/obp.0136.17>, 18, <https://doi.org/10.11647/obp.0136.18>, and 19, <https://doi.org/10.11647/obp.0136.19>.

them to their own countries in return for immediate direct benefits.⁸ Indeed, it was at that moment in 1826 and 1827 when both sides, the Greek revolutionaries and the Ottoman high command, were themselves confronting a choice between destroying or not destroying the building, in a trade-off between its military and its contested symbolic power, that what remained of the building was put at the greatest risk it had faced since Elgin's day.⁹

And it was the visible presence of the Parthenon and the other monuments of Athens in the landscape at a time when there were few other ancient buildings to be seen in Greece, as well as the many pictures that circulated abroad, that enabled the ancient Hellenes to influence policy-makers and decision-takers during the Revolution. After Independence, they continued to influence the many authors, image makers, street planners and street re-namers, as well as conservationists, restorers, and monument cleansers, who together present the Greek Revolution as a rebirth, regeneration, and resumption of the glories of ancient 'ancestors'. The moderns had appropriated ('colonized') the ancients, but the ancients had also colonized the moderns.

But were those who claimed, during recent centuries, that they had the authority and knowledge, as well as the opportunities, to make the mute stones speak, as aware of the difficulties as our generation has learned to be? With over three hundred years of experience of the new science, including an increasingly reliable understanding of cognition, of speech acts, of visual invitations to perceive the outside world in certain ways, of the techniques of rhetoric, and of many other insights, now available, the chances of being seduced into a simplistic fantasy land, ('the glory that was Greece') are themselves better understood.

The risks of imputing modern ideas to the ancients and of judging them against modern criteria ('presentism') are, of course, now well understood, and a rapidly growing literature unpicks the characteristics,

8 The 1801 firman, more properly the vizieral letter that provided Elgin's agents with some cover for their depredations, and the 1806 firman that ordered a cessation, are discussed in Appendix A, *WStP*.

9 As discussed in St Clair, *WStP*, Chapter 12, <https://doi.org/10.11647/obp.0136.12>, and 13 <https://doi.org/10.11647/obp.0136.13>. Another incidental effect of the saving of the monument during the Revolution was to destabilize the narrative of 'saving' that had been applied to the damage done to the building by Lord Elgin and his agents a generation before, and that led to the attempts to patch up the narrative as discussed in *WStP*, Chapter 20, <https://doi.org/10.11647/obp.0136.20>.

‘slippery, amorphous and polyvalent’, as Robin Osborne has warned.¹⁰ Indeed, the story of the modern quest to understand classical Athens can be told as a series of warnings against accepting the assumptions and practices of previous epochs. I need not emphasize that there is no good reason why a modern investigator should not turn to modern categories as well as to those used in various pasts, provided he or she consciously and explicitly differentiates between them, and accepts that present day categories are likely in their turn to become an episode that will need to be situated within wider contexts, just as the monument cleansing and romanticism of the nineteenth century, that appeared modern, forward-looking, and normal at the time, can now be seen as interludes.

Studying a Strange World

So how can we, in our own time, attempt to be fair to the ancient Athenians who built the Parthenon? Such an extraordinary and influential episode in the world’s past as classical Athens, I suggest, deserves to have its history told within its own cultural discourses, practices, and norms as well as within others invented later. Although the task of composing such a history is necessarily confined within what is knowable and thinkable in our age, a sincere attempt to prepare such an account is not only a re-enfranchisement of the past from the condescension of the present, but a contribution to an understanding of what used to be called ‘our debt to Greece and Rome’.

The difficulties are numerous and formidable. One difference between ancient Athens and the modern world that is seldom explicitly mentioned in modern writings on the Parthenon, let alone integrated into explanations, is what occurs during the act of cognition itself. Although we can be sure that cognitive processes have remained much the same for most of human existence, they have been overlaid with theories and cultural practices that may reinforce misunderstandings and therefore affect the decisions taken. It follows that, if we wish to understand the aims of those who designed, built, and used the classical Parthenon, we are obliged to take account of the assumptions that were

10 Osborne, Robin, ‘Classical Presentism’ in *Past and Present*, Vol. 234 (1) (2017), 217–226, <https://doi.org/10.1093/pastj/gtw055>.

present in the minds of both the producers and the consumers of the building, that is, of the shared civic discourse.

How, for example, can we restore the notions of ‘extramission’ that are seldom mentioned in modern works, but were almost universally accepted, and therefore likely to have been applied, in the ancient?¹¹ The attention paid to the sightlines of vision of characters pictured on vase painting becomes more understandable if we historicize the ancient viewer as imagining a cognitive transaction in which something, often a story of a mythic event with a moral, is transferred into the body and may lodge there, especially if the experience is regularly repeated in a context of high communal excitement, such as at a festival. And underpinning extramission was the then generally accepted theory of four elements, earth, air, fire, and water, that postulated that the beams of light emitted from the eyes derived from a preponderance of heat in the makeup of the body, a component of the cognitive transaction that could be influenced by education, as is explained in, for example, the works of Theophrastus and Hippocrates.¹² An alternative theory favoured by Epicurus and repeated in ancient writings over a similarly long period, which postulated that objects emitted atomic particles that caused changes in the viewer’s own atomic make-up, carries many of the same implications.¹³

11 As summarized in St Clair, *WStP*, Chapter 22, <https://doi.org/10.11647/obp.0136.22>. The notion of the eyes as carriers of light, as postulated by the mainstream theory of extramission, is referred to explicitly in Plat. Tim. 45b; and as φωσφόρους κόρας in Eur. Cycl. 611, a play in which the putting out of the light-bearing cognition of the one-eyed Cyclops by a fire-bearing torch is central to the story, and of which the usual translation, ‘shining’, that is, a quality conferred by an external observer, loses part of the context that an ancient viewer/listener/reader would recognize. Indeed, the numerous references in ancient Greek literature to actual torches as light-bearing, and their frequent use in ritual and in visual presentations of ritual processions (as on the Parthenon frieze) may have carried an implication that, metaphorically, they were like eyes, rather than that, as may also have been true, extramission was derived from the experience of torches.

12 The modern science-based understanding, with its vocabulary of ‘saccades’ and ‘salience’ was discussed in St Clair, *WStP*, Chapter 1, <https://doi.org/10.11647/obp.0136.01>.

13 Smith, Martin Ferguson, ‘New Fragments of Diogenes of Oenoanda’ in *American Journal of Archaeology*, Vol. 75 (4) (Oct. 1971), 360, where he quotes ‘an exposition of the Epicurean theory that visions, thoughts, and dreams are caused by effluences from objects [...] fine atomic films, similar in shape to the objects from which they emanate, which are emitted in consequence of the vibration of each object’s component atoms.’ I am grateful to Voula Tsouna at whose seminar ‘The Method of

And we have examples of how these ancient theories, in whose validity many of the ancients were heavily invested, led to consequences not only for abstract philosophical debate but for the lives of real people. For it was misunderstandings about cognition that led not only to the destruction and mutilation of images, including many of those presented on the Parthenon, but to the targeted oppression of those whom Paul of Tarsus and his emerging imagined community condemned, often with demands for severe punishments, for having accepted and acted upon the invitations to respond to texts and images in ways that were already built into their minds.¹⁴

The strangeness of ancient theories of what occurs in cognition cannot be easily grafted on to current understandings, or treated as a matter of aesthetic response. The Greek word for seeing, 'opsis', for example, seems normally to have connoted more than the physiological act of looking with the eyes. The authority given to the sense of sight compared with the others made it more like 'knowing', a perception that gave rise to an extensive ancient literature on the extent to which things seen, 'appearances', could be trusted to be truthful. The primacy given to sight can also help to explain the frequent resort to the rhetorical device of 'enargeia', in which a speaker or writer tries to conjure up images in the mind of the listener or reader by presenting events as occurring in real time before their very eyes, when they are actually reports in words of events that occurred in the past.¹⁵ Even Isocrates who, during the late classical era, composed model rhetorical speeches that were admired and applied, and who argued that listening to stories, whether, in modern terms, 'historical' or 'mythic', was a more reliable way of obtaining truthful knowledge about the past than looking at visual presentations, admitted that, in his privileging the sense of hearing, he was departing from a norm.¹⁶ Until the discoveries made by Isaac Newton about the

Multiple Explanations in Epicureanism' at the Institute of Classical Studies London, 9 November 2020, the topic was discussed.

14 As discussed in St Clair, *WSP*, Chapter 22, <https://doi.org/10.11647/obp.0136.22>. An example of how we can identify the presence of such misunderstandings, and use that knowledge to offset their effects, is in Chapter 4 and its discussion of the Parthenon frieze.

15 An example is given in Chapter 3.

16 Isocrates, *Panathenaicus*, 149 and 150. Isocrates, unlike Thucydides, is willing to give credence to stories told by poets, including those stories explored in the tragic drama, but he appears to invoke them as examples of moral questions being

nature of light were first given wide currency in early eighteenth-century Europe, all theories of what occurs in cognition were incorrect. How can we find ways of actively distrusting our modern ways of seeing and the modern viewing genres that depend on them?¹⁷ Can we historicize the other human senses, touch, smell, and taste, and the role that, in ancient times, they were believed to play in the making of meaning?

Another modern category that, partly as a result, may be more of a hindrance than a help in understanding ancient ways of seeing is the non-ancient notion of 'art.' Some champions of the object-centred traditions of western romanticism profess to value the Parthenon and its detached pieces for their 'aesthetic' qualities and for their 'beauty', often offered as universal and timeless categories rather than as historically contingent imputations.¹⁸ To some, operating within the same tradition, it may be enough that ancient objects have survived through to our times so they can be contemplated through modern eyes in new contexts. And some unashamedly accept, if not in these words, that 'art', conceptually and institutionally separated from 'non-art' as well as from 'propaganda', is a colonization, and often also a commodification and commercialization, of the culture of the past and the role that ancient objects, including the Parthenon, played in the customs and performances of that civilization. Such ideas continue to encourage the looting of archaeological sites, feeding the vast illicit international antiquities trade with rich customers far from Greece stoking the demand, and the destruction of knowledge about the societies that produced the objects. Many who support such ideologies might prefer to align themselves with the late Bernard

debated, not as factual accounts, which no-one familiar with the huge variety of plots, as he was, could seriously believe or expect his audience to believe. Isocrates himself rarely if ever resorted to *enargeia*.

- 17 Discussed further in relationship to the stories in stone presented on the Parthenon in Chapter 3, where, for example, to modern eyes, even those used to notions of maintaining critical distance, the metopes offer embarrassing scenes of gruesome interracial violence, but may to ancient eyes have been regarded either as a warning, or as a beneficial projection of the civic values ('*arete*') of classical Athens. The contemporary evidence for how the men and women of the classical era engaged with the stories in stone presented on temples, although not extensive, is fuller than is generally realized, and is discussed in Chapter 3.
- 18 The rhetorics of western romanticism are discussed in St Clair, *WStP*, Chapter 9, <https://doi.org/10.11647/obp.0136.09>. A recent example is the justification offered by the British Museum authorities in 2014 for sending a piece of the west pediment to Russia, as discussed in the same chapter.

Ashmole, who wrote of ‘that unhappy term “work of art” with all its gruesome implications’.¹⁹

Some modern authors have criticised Plato, Aristotle, and indeed all the philosophers of ancient Hellas whose writings survive, even if only in fragments, for not accepting ‘art’ as ‘an autonomous aesthetic domain’.²⁰ According to Jeremy Tanner, the ancients ‘had not developed (or bothered to appropriate from contemporary artists) a vocabulary for visual analysis of comparable richness to that for literary analysis’.²¹ However, it is not obvious why a modern person seeking to understand classical Athens in its own terms should regard western aesthetics, an academic ‘discipline’ invented in eighteenth-century western Europe, as a relevant conceptual framework for understanding classical Athens.²²

In 2019, Daniel O’Quinn used the term ‘pre-disciplinary’ to describe the ways of seeing practised by western visitors to Ottoman lands during the long eighteenth century.²³ But this phrase too, besides its implied suggestion that ‘disciplines’ are the preferred way of studying a strange world in which such categories were unknown, excludes many forms of experience, and the categories into which these experiences were organised, that were actually used by classical Athenians. Their practice of including the natural environment, landscape, seascape, skyscape, and non-human living creatures and plants, within their cognitive frame, for example, was far closer to their actual ancient experiences, cognitive practices, and explanations than the modern practice of

19 Ashmole, Bernard, *Architect and Sculptor in Classical Greece* (New York: NYU Press, 1972), 26. Ashmole, who was my teacher, was scarred by his experience of seeing the damage that had been caused to the historic surfaces of most of the sculptural pieces of the Parthenon held in trust in the British Museum, by the capitulation of the 1930s trustees to Duveen’s demand that the Parthenon pieces should be scraped to make them appear more white, and by the 1909 decision, discussed in St Clair, *WStP*, Chapter 9, <https://doi.org/10.11647/obp.0136.09>, to display them as ‘works of art’. He also resisted the consumerist practice of using spotlights in museums, wresting ancient objects that were designed to be seen in the open air into the conventions of an oil painting by Caravaggio.

20 Tanner, Jeremy, *The Invention of Art History in Ancient Greece: Religion, Society and Artistic Rationalisation* (Cambridge: CUP, 2006), 199.

21 *Ibid.*

22 As discussed in St Clair, *WStP*, Chapter 9, <https://doi.org/10.11647/obp.0136.09>.

23 ‘[P]re-disciplinary miscellanies.’ O’Quinn, Daniel, *Engaging the Ottoman Empire, Vexed Mediations, 1690–1815* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2019), 14, <https://doi.org/10.9783/9780812295535>.

erecting barriers, both physical and conceptual, round the material art object.²⁴

Plato was not the only classical-era Athenian who regarded what, in modern terms, is called 'art', as a deception. Nor was Thucydides unique in regarding poets, by which he meant writers of imaginative literature including dramatists and Homer, as well as composers of pictorial images, as obstacles that stand in the way of recovering truthful knowledge about the past. It was part of the explicitly-stated aim of Thucydides that his written work about the Peloponnesian War would be 'useful', a word that, with its cognates and synonyms, he frequently turned to in his aim of helping his own and future generations to distinguish between appearance and truth. And, as it happened, one of the cases where Thucydides foresaw that future generations were at risk of being deceived by visual rhetoric into a false view of the past was when they looked at the buildings of classical Athens, such as the Parthenon, that were still new or under construction in his time, and we can see looking back that events have proved his foresight to be well founded, and that he was destined to be a Cassandra, loved but unheeded.

Recovering Ancient Attitudes to Religion

If the modern notion of 'art' risks encouraging a decontextualizing and limiting attitude to ancient objects, the non-ancient category of 'religion', that was also absent from classical Greece, carries similar risks. The public discourse of classical Athens included a boast that the city paid more honours to more gods than did any other Hellenic city, a factual claim that contemporaries accepted which is amply confirmed by the literary and archaeological record.²⁵ This 'omnipresence' of the gods,

²⁴ Discussed further later in this chapter.

²⁵ I note, as examples, adding to previous lists, Sophocles, *Oedipus at Colonus*, 1006–1007; Isocrates *Panegyricus*, 33; Lycurgus *Against Leocrates* 1.15: 'For you must realize, Athenians, that you would be held to have neglected the virtues which chiefly distinguish you from the rest of mankind, piety towards the gods, reverence for your ancestors and ambition for your country, if this man were to escape punishment at your hands'; the call of the chorus in Aristophanes, *Clouds*, 299; for a complaint that because Athens held more festivals than any other city, they imposed unnecessary delays on day-to-day life, as well as direct costs, as well as many disputes, and without implying that 'the gods' were actually honoured or influenced, we have the

this 'taken-for-grantedness,' to use Robert Parker's phrases, was visible in the town, on the Acropolis summit, and in the caves and sanctuaries on the slopes where an almost continuous cycle of ceremonies, private as well as public, were observed and observable.²⁶ There could be no prayers without sacrifices, but also no sacrifices without processions.²⁷

But the word 'religion' comes loaded with later associations. To be a 'priest' or a 'priestess', for example, was to be the holder of an office, some menial, most time-limited, whose duty it was to perform a range of functions relating to the ceremonial practices and the upkeep of the

remarks of the 'Old Oligarch.' Ps. Xen. Const. Ath. 3; Aelius Aristides, *Panathenaic* 4.32,39,46; Pausanias 1.17.1; 1.24.3, apparently repeating a claim by the lost author Polemo. Frazer, J. G., trans., *Pausanias's Description of Greece* (London: Macmillan, 1898), i, lxxxvi; Josephus, *Against Apion*, ii, 130. 'Apion, who hath no regard to the misfortunes of the Athenians, or of the Lacedemonians, the latter of whom were styled by all men the most courageous, and the former the most religious of the Grecians.' Hegesias of Magnesia, a lost author, third century BCE, quoted by Strabo, 9,1. 'I am unable to point them all out one by one [the temples and shrines of the Acropolis]; for Attica is the possession of the gods, who seized it as a sanctuary for themselves, and of the ancestral heroes.' We hear the same thought in the often-quoted verse by Pindar in praise of Athens, translated as: 'Oh You, olive shiny and violet-crowned glorious Athens, famous in songs, rampart of Greece, "daimoned" city' which is discussed also in Chapter 2. Noted also by Livy 45.27.11. 'Athenas inde, plenas quidem et ipsas vetustate famae, multa tamen visenda habentis, arcem, portus, muros Piraeum urbi iungentis, navalia, monumenta magnorum imperatorum, simulacra deorum hominumque, omni genere et materiae et artium insignia.' The trope that the people of Athens were more 'religious' than those of other cities, basing the statement on the number of ceremonies and festivals, was adopted by the incoming Christians, perhaps remembering the comment attributed to Paul of Tarsus in the Acts of the Apostles and misunderstood in the subsequent tradition, as discussed in St Clair, *WStP*, Chapter 22, <https://doi.org/10.11647/obp.0136.22>. Examples in Kaldellis, Anthony, *The Christian Parthenon, Classicism and Pilgrimage in Byzantine Athens* (Cambridge: CUP, 2009), 132. Nearly a thousand years after the ancient rites and festivals of Athens had been banned, a Byzantine writer, who was familiar with the works of some ancient authors now lost, repeated the commonplace that there had been too many festivals devoted to Athena. Noted by Kaldellis, Anthony, *Byzantine Readings of Ancient Historians: Texts in Translation with Introductions and Notes* (London and New York: Routledge, 2015), 83, <https://doi.org/10.4324/9781315720067>, from [Lehnerdt's Canabutzes] *Ioannis Canabutzae magistri Ad principem Aeni et Samothracas in Dionysium Halicarnassensem commentarium primum edidit atque praefatus est Maximilianus Lehnerdt* (Leipzig 'Lipsiae': Teubner, 1890), 63. The phrase is εἰς τὴν ὑπερβολήν. Many of the classical-era festivals occurred at night.

26 Parker, Robert, *Polytheism and Society at Athens* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2005), 1, so/9780199216116.001.0001.

27 'a procession to the sacrificial altar was an essential part of a sacrifice, even a private one', Dunbar, Nan, ed., *Aristophanes, Birds* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1995), 502, <https://doi.org/10.1093/actrade/9780198150831.book.1>.

sacred sites, not a permanent status. Nor was there any equivalent of claims to universalism whereby, in the early centuries after the Christian takeover of the eastern Roman empire, 'priests' were constituted into imperial ecclesiastical career services that attempted to impose uniformity of practice and of outward displays of belief. As with art, so with religion, the terms are so heavily weighed down with later accretions that it is hard to use them without appending an essay of explanation.²⁸

Some modern authors, impatient with what they perceive as a tendency to impute too much rationality to ancient Hellenic civilization, which they attribute to the ideas of European Enlightenment, have drawn a picture of the men and women of classical Athens cowering in fear of chthonic forces in 'a spirit-saturated, anxious world, dominated by an egocentric sense of themselves and an overwhelming urgency to keep things right with the gods'.²⁹ And certainly much of what is recorded as occurring in festivals, with charms, amulets, a desperate search for comfort and hope, and a constant looking out for signs of supernatural interventions, resembles modern Lourdes. In ancient authors we are given word portraits of 'the superstitious man', not all comic exaggerations. And archaeology has brought to light 'curse tablets' that show that the officially recommended gods were not the only ones present in the imagination or in the practice of classical Athenians. We cannot, I suggest, therefore avoid addressing the question whether a belief in 'the gods' was embedded in the minds of the people who took part in the ceremonial displays and performances, or whether it would it be more fair to the real men and women of classical Athens, or at least to the mainly socially and economically privileged men and women of whose lives we have most records, to suggest that to many of them 'the gods' had become a set of customs, practices, visual presentations, and speech acts that, by repetition and performance, helped to meet other

28 As discussed by, for example, Connelly, Joan Breton, *Portrait of a Priestess, Women and Ritual in Ancient Greece* (Princeton: Princeton UP, 2007), pp. 17–25.

29 Connelly, Joan Breton, *The Parthenon Enigma, A New Understanding of the World's Most Iconic Building and the People Who Made It* (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 2014), xxi. The process of reclaiming the ancient Greeks from an assumption that they were always rational can be traced back to the publication of Dodds, E. R., *The Greeks and the Irrational* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1951).

objectives, such as maintaining social cohesiveness within the polity.³⁰ A collection of sayings attributed to Demetrius of Phaleron, who ruled Athens from 317 to 307 BCE, and a prolific author of whose writings little survives, notes as advice on rhetoric: ‘About gods, say there are gods’ and ‘whatever good you do, give the gods the credit for it, not yourself’.³¹

Furthermore, in classical Athens, as has seldom been noticed, ‘the gods’ are absent from many occasions where we might have expected to find them. They are, for example, scarcely mentioned in the famous funeral oration of Pericles as presented by Thucydides.³² Such references to the gods as occur in funerary orations not only appear perfunctory but are often used as metaphors for the reputation of the dead soldiers. Plutarch, for example, writing much later but quoting from Stesimbrotos of Thasos, a classical-era author, reported of one of Pericles’s other funeral orations: ‘Again, Stesimbrotos says that, in his funeral oration over those who had fallen in the Samian War, he declared that they had become immortal, like the gods, “The gods themselves,” he said, “we cannot see, but from the honours which they receive, and the blessings which they bestow, we conclude that they are immortal.” So it was, he said, with those who had given their lives for their country’.³³ The only mention of the gods in the funeral oration of Demosthenes acknowledges their arbitrariness in deciding who should die and who should live. And they are only mentioned in the funeral speech of Hyperides in two brief asides that repeat the advice to continue to honour the old Athenian gods with sacrifices and images. That speech, which follows the standard model, also implies that most of the audience believes that death is non-existence, and that the only ‘immortality’ is in maintaining memory by displaying and performing it.

In funeral orations, the most formal and solemn of public civic occasions, the citizen soldiers are praised for what they did out of their

30 To some, the gods had been invented at some intermediate stage between living like animals (‘brutishness’) and their own modernity, a mainstream narrative of the Athenian past to be discussed below and referred to in Chapter 2.

31 Fortenbaugh, William W. and Schütrumpf, Eckart, eds, *Demetrius of Phalerum, Text, Translation and Discussion* (Oxford: Routledge, 2018), 163, <https://doi.org/10.4324/9781351326926>.

32 Thuc. 2.34–46

33 Plut. Per. 8.6.

sense of duty to the imagined community of the city and to the continuity of its officially approved past and aspired-to future. 'Dionysius of Halicarnassus', the pseudonymous author of a brief advice manual on 'how to compose funeral speeches' written some centuries later, besides drawing on the most famous examples and on the Platonic *Menexenus*, lists other speeches, including some from the classical period now lost. In setting out the strict and long-lasting conventions of the genre, he only mentions the gods in one sentence in which he suggests that the speaker can round off his speech by saying that the dead are better off in the presence of the gods.³⁴ By silently withholding the opportunity to give a share of the credit or the glory to the gods, the words deployed keep the achievement of the dead undiluted.³⁵

And there were other occasions when the gods were either absent or given only a passing mention. In the elegies and epitaphs composed by Simonides and others to commemorate those killed in war, including that for the Spartans at Thermopylae that was frequently relayed in the Second World War, the gods are not mentioned. Indeed, in this genre too, the absence of 'the gods' seems to have been a constant feature.³⁶ In Athenian funerary monuments also, whether public such as war memorials or private such as those erected by families, the gods are noticeably absent both from the iconography and from the accompanying words. Although architecturally the 'little temples' ('naiskoi') of many of the carved memorials follow the conventions of large public sacred buildings such as the Parthenon, we seldom find any mention of the gods. They are not present in the examples selected from databases by Marta González González in a study that attempts to set funerary epigrams in their societal, performative, rhetorical, and not just their modern art-historical contexts.³⁷ Indeed, those mentions we do find can be regarded

34 Race, William H., ed., *Menander Rhetor and Dionysius of Halicarnassus*, *Ars Rhetorica* (Harvard: Harvard UP Loeb editions, 2019), 417–429.

35 Discussed by Loraux, Nicole, *The Invention of Classical Athens, The Funeral Oration in the Classical City*, translated by Alan Sheridan (Cambridge Mass: Harvard UP, 1986), especially 132.

36 I draw this conclusion from the list given by Kowerski, Lawrence M., *Simonides on the Persian Wars: a study of the elegiac verses of the "new Simonides"* (New York; London: Routledge, 2005), 151–160, <https://doi.org/10.4324/9780203958452>. The few apparent exceptions relate to the sanctuaries in which memorials are dedicated.

37 González González, Marta, *Funerary Epigrams of Ancient Greece: Reflections on Literature, Society and Religion* (London: Bloomsbury Academic, 2019), <http://doi.org/10.1017/9781108888888>.

as exceptions that prove the rule.³⁸ It is as if, by the classical period, some matters, such as death, were too important to be left to the conventions of the official theism of the city. Instead of offering comfort, a traditional function of religion in many cultures, the gods were presented in the stories told about them as arbitrary, unfair, unreliable, selfish, scheming, vindictive, morally worse than humans, and, in some cases, making no attempt to disguise their lack of scruple.³⁹ Nor, in classical Athens, was the absence of the gods a recent phenomenon that some might consider attributing to the influence of the philosophical schools that encouraged their pupils to treat all received and officially authorized ideas with scepticism. Even in the seventh and sixth centuries, of the dozens of inscribed archaic grave monuments erected in Attica, not one in a comprehensive list published in 1961 even mentions the gods.⁴⁰ A longer list published in 1962 is also almost completely silent about the gods.⁴¹ Indeed one of the few exceptions, the inscription on the grave memorial to Phrasikeia, a statue in the round ('kore') that has survived in excellent condition seems almost to scold the gods for letting her die unmarried.⁴² Although at funerals and on such occasions it is likely that processions, prayers, and sacrifices may have been performed, the gods, by being excluded from the permanent record of writing and reading, are given at best a secondary role.

org/10.5040/9781350062450.

- 38 For example, on the tomb of a non-Athenian settled in the city ('a metic') given in a Victorian-era verse translation:

Few griefs and many joys my life has held,
Out-lengthened to the utmost bounds of eld.
My name is Symmachus, in Chios born,
Which rich with grapes the branching vines adorn;
But when I died, my bones were hidden here.
In Attic land, to gods and men most dear.

From Gardner, Percy, *Sculptured Tombs of Hellas* (London: Macmillan, 1896), Preface, Gardner's translation.

- 39 A notable example is Aphrodite in the *Hippolytus* of Euripides.
40 This emerges from the Epigraphical Appendix to Richter, Gisela M. A., *The Archaic Gravestones of Attica ... and an Appendix with Epigraphical Notes by Margherita Guarducci* (London: Phaidon, 1961).
41 Jeffery, L. H., 'The Inscribed Gravestones of Archaic Attica', *The Annual of the British School at Athens*, Vol. 57 (1962), 115–153, <https://doi.org/10.1017/S0068245400013666>.
42 National Archaeological Museum, Athens 4889. The reconstructed inscription includes the phrase: 'ἀντὶ γάμο παρὰ θεον τοῦτο λαχούσ' ὄνομα'.

When we put the pieces of evidence together, classical Athens emerges as having many of the characteristics of what is now called a post-religious society, that is, one that attaches a value to adhering to the old forms but for the purposes of conserving identity and promoting social cohesion, not from intellectual conviction. By the time of the Panathenaic oration of Aelius Aristides, the most formal of all expressions of the official self-fashioning of the Athenian polis, delivered in 155 CE, the speaker leads with the theory, in modern terms the narrative ('logos') of the city, demoting the gods to second place. And another professional orator, Dio of Prusa, whose professional role and duty was also to uphold the public narratives of cities, felt obliged to tell audiences that they had to really believe in the gods and not just go through the motions.⁴³

In Menander's comedy, the *Tyche*, in English 'Chance' or 'Fortune', the character of Tyche is presented as the only explanation for the unfairness of life. And when Tyche appears as the goddess from the machine who tidies everything up at the end of this and other plays, there is no need to dismiss her as a comic subversion.⁴⁴ In the world of the tragic drama, which was controlled, financed, and its content patrolled by the institutions of the city, and perhaps also by formal guilds, Tyche could be invoked in the same terms as a god.⁴⁵ And she was also to be seen on the stories in stone on the Acropolis. In 1839, among the first finds as the Acropolis was cleared after the Ottoman army left was a statue base dateable to c. 360 to 350 BCE that named 'Tyche' alongside Zeus.⁴⁶

Tyche may have been imagined by some as a force that intervenes, a non-Olympian god, a personification of randomness or contingency, a disturbance to a normally ordered universe. But she appears mainly to have been perceived as an alternative to formal theism.⁴⁷ In a society

43 Dio, 3rd 5.

44 In *Aspis*, fragments 97, 147, in Arnott, W. G., ed., *Menander* (Cambridge, Mass. and London: Harvard University Press, 1979–2000), i, 25, 29.

45 For example, in Sophocles, *Searchers*, fragment 314. Other examples noted by Lefkowitz, Mary R., *Euripides and the Gods* (New York, NY: Oxford University Press, 2016), <https://doi.org/10.1093/acprof:oso/9780199752058.001.0001>, with plentiful references to predecessors who have explored the uses of the word.

46 Acropolis Museum. Full description at <http://www.perseus.tufts.edu/hopper/artifact?name=Athens,+Acropolis+4069&object=sculpture>

47 Discussed by Lefkowitz, *Euripides and the Gods*, <https://doi.org/10.1093/acprof:oso/9780199752058.001.0001>, with plentiful references to predecessors who have

that, since the time of Homer, had given little weight to ideas of divine providentialism, Tyche offered a way of excusing the moral failings and the indifference of the gods.⁴⁸ 'Tyche' also performs a useful role in exonerating 'the gods' and theism generally from having to accept any blame for failing to protect a city, for example when a battle is lost or an earthquake strikes.⁴⁹ Tyche enabled 'the gods' to perform their societal role in classical Athens, without any need for them to exist, or even for them to be generally believed or deemed to exist. This understanding of the frailty and contingency of human experience is markedly different from the theistic providentialism, often presented as benevolent, and other forms of determinism that are built into the self-construction of all the imagined communities mentioned in the book so far, as well as into the self-fashioning of the many 'great men', including Stratford Canning and Adolf Hitler, who saw themselves as instruments of destiny. The concept of Tyche is among the components of the public discourse of classical Athens that many in recent times prefer to those still practised in their own societies.⁵⁰

Myths, Origin Stories and the 'Emergence from Brutishness' Narrative

In attempting to recover an understanding of the ancient classical experiences of seeing, sightlines, conventions, and genres, we ought also, I suggest, give weight to what the eighteenth-century philosophers called 'Nature', not as a tiresome and unwanted 'pre-disciplinary' intrusion to be elided in the same way as eighteenth-century artists and engravers excluded the storks from their pictures of the Parthenon. On the contrary, they and other birds, animals, and insects, ought to be re-inserted. In ancient times, for example, an area of the Acropolis slopes was called 'the pelasgikon', a place that, according to a local myth, the Pelasgians, a pre-Hellenic people, had cultivated

explored the uses of the word.

48 Tyche as a figure on the official inscriptions that relate to the making of a statue is mentioned in Chapter 2.

49 As, for example, in Dem. 60 19 and in the whole tradition of funeral orations.

50 The contradictions of Christian providentialism and the contortions that its advocates found themselves resorting to were discussed in St Clair, *WSIP*, Chapter 22, <https://doi.org/10.11647/obp.0136.22>.

in pre-historic times.⁵¹ The Pelasgians were credited with having been the first to level the Acropolis summit and surround it with a defensive wall before the arrival of the Hellenes, although that story was to come up against another piece of Athenian myth-making, namely that they were autochthonous.⁵² But the area was also called by a verbal slippage the ‘pelargikon’, ‘the place of the storks’, the birds being a common sight in and around the Acropolis until the Greek Revolution.⁵³ An Athenian inscription of the classical period records an official decree that forbids the setting up of altars in the Pelargikon, so called.⁵⁴ As a terrace high above ground level where olive trees and other crops could be grown and animals grazed, the Pelargikon/Pelasgikon was part of the Acropolis military defences. It was, as one clever translator has called it, ‘a storkade’.⁵⁵

During the recent centuries for which we have records, domestic animals, including dogs, goats, donkeys, mules, horses, and chickens were kept on the summit, all of which helped to fertilize and deepen the soil and to encourage the insects on which wild birds fed. In ancient times too, the Acropolis summit was evidently a green space, almost a garden town. In the *Ion* of Euripides, for example, the rocky slopes

51 The location of the Pelasgikon is not known for certain, but it seems to have included the part of the north-west slope near the Clepsydra. Camp, John M., *The Archaeology of Athens* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2001), 254.

52 The sources are brought together and discussed by Harding, Phillip, editor and translator, *The Story of Athens: The Fragments of the Local Chronicles of Attika* (London: Routledge, 2008), 23–26, <https://doi.org/10.4324/9780203448342>, and in his Appendix 3, ‘Notes on pelasgians’, 196–198.

53 The destruction of the storks by the Christians in the Greek Revolution as part of a religious cleansing was discussed in St Clair, *WStP*, Chapter 15, <https://doi.org/10.11647/obp.0136.15>; and their role in the eighteenth-century Enlightenment search for a philosophy of history in Chapter 8, <https://doi.org/10.11647/obp.0136.8>.

54 Quoted by Iakovidis, Spyros E., *The Mycenaean Acropolis of Athens* (Athens: Archaeological Society of Athens, 2006, translated from the Greek edition of 1962), 266 from W. Dittenberger SIG 3, 83. It is dated to c. 433/2 BCE. The early mythography and historiography of the Pelasgians, including the storks, is discussed by Fowler (2013) 89–96. The ancient testimonia about the Pelasgians and the storks, including the jokes by Aristophanes, inscriptions, and later scholiasts, are usefully collected by Iakovidis 257–272. The verbal slip was already known to Hesychios who noted it in his dictionary of the fifth century CE, quoted by Iakovidis, *Mycenaean Acropolis*, 270. And to Strabo: ‘The race of the Pelasgi clearly sojourned here too, and on account of their wanderings were called Pelargi.’ Strabo, 9, i, 19. The point was discussed in some of the standard educational books in the eighteenth century, notably Potter, so was known to many visitors from the west.

55 Benjamin Bickley Rogers in the first Loeb edition of Aristophanes.

of the Acropolis by Pan's cave where the character of Kreousa claimed to have been raped by Apollo, are contrasted with the 'green acres' in front of the temples of Athena on the summit.⁵⁶ On and around the Acropolis, many species of birds, including storks, owls, pigeons, finches, and sparrows, shared with humans the natural environment for their food and the built environment for their nesting sites. In ancient times, dogs, as agents of both actual and of symbolic pollution, were not normally allowed.⁵⁷ However, in the numerous festivals, cows, sheep, and domestic fowls were ritually slaughtered, eaten, and their bones burned and thrown away. Grain, fruit, honey-cake, and other food were ritually scattered, and wine poured. So frequent were the rituals, and so inflexible the conventions of no prayers without sacrifice, no sacrifice without a ceremonial procession to the altar where the creature was to be killed, and no eating or drinking without scattering a share for the gods, that the ancient Acropolis, like Delphi and Delos, had developed its own micro-ecosystem of food chains, the hunted and the hunters, the eaten and the eaters, the natural world interacting with the human, the real with the symbolic.⁵⁸ Fresh water, whether it was drunk, poured, accidentally spilled, excreted, or used in washing rituals, benefited the insects, possibly causing buried eggs of the 'autochthonous' cicadas suddenly to hatch.⁵⁹ The insects benefitted the birds and other creatures that inhabited a local eco-niche higher up the food chain. And we can take it that similar results were encouraged by other scatterings and spillages, whether of dry foods, wine, oil, or the blood and innards of

56 στάδια χλοερὰ πρὸ Παλλάδος ναῶν. Eur. Ion 497. Literally 'stades', a measure of six hundred English feet, from which the modern word 'stadium' derives. The fact that the 'temples' are put in the plural is, in my view, further confirmation that the author is referring to the open ground at the east end of the Acropolis, where the main action of sacrificing took place and from where the scene offered on the east frieze of the Parthenon, to be discussed below, is most visible.

57 Noted by Harding, *Story of Athens*, 172, <https://doi.org/10.4324/9780203448342>, from Philochorus.

58 'A procession ... to the sacrificial altar was an essential part of a sacrifice, even a private one.' Discussed in Aristophanes, *Birds*, Dunbar edition, 502, <https://doi.org/10.1093/actrade/9780198150831.book.1>, where examples, mainly from the comic and tragic drama, are cited. Sometimes it appears to have been enough to have a female attendant or a slave to bring the water that was also always needed.

59 The 'golden grasshoppers' [cicadas], and Aristotle's thought that they were among the creatures that may have been spontaneously generated, as well as their symbolic use as markers of autochthony is noted in Chapter 3.

slaughtered animals. All were part of the festival experience.⁶⁰ Since, in order to be effective, outward conformity is required at least on formal occasions, we should not expect a single answer to the question of how ancient Athenians understood religion. We do, however, have plentiful evidence that the issue was constantly debated in classical Athens, as well as earlier and later, with some writers insisting that, measured against the justifications offered, the whole nexus of temples, shrines, processions, prayers, sacrifices, and feasts was ineffective and, to some, both absurd and dangerous. Indeed, many writers made little secret of the fact that ‘the gods’ were a useful fiction, a ‘nomisma’, something ‘deemed’ to have value, an institution conventionally established and customarily practised because it serves a useful social purpose, without having either to exist or even to be believed to exist.

In the tragic theatre, a public medium that was financed and its content vetted by the institutions of the classical city, gods appear and speak, and characters cast doubt on the existence of the gods. In a fragment of the *Bellerophon*, a play by Euripides, the character of Bellerophon declares: ‘Does anyone say there are truly gods in heaven? There are not, there are not, unless a fool is willing to make use of the old story’.⁶¹ The character of Bellerophon goes on to note the injustice of tyrants who break oaths, sack cities, and get off scot-free, and of small cities that fall victim to the armies of larger cities however much honour they pay to the gods.

The ‘autochthony’ claim, as was discussed in Chapter 16 of *Who Saved the Parthenon?*, an example of a backward-looking myth of origin or foundation as an event occurring at a specific moment in the past, is an ‘aetiology’ with many parallels in other ancient Greek cities, and still a staple rhetoric of modern nationalisms that thrive on othering. As an element in the discursive environment, it was given prominence in, for example, the west pediment of the Parthenon and other visual

60 Discussed, with evidence from classical-era authors, in Chapter 2.

61 Collard, C., Cropp, M. J. and Lee, K. H., eds, *Euripides, Selected Fragmentary Plays Volume I* (Warminster: Aris and Phillips, 1995), 104. Fragment 286. My translation. The passage is discussed, with useful contextualizing and plausible suggestions, by Whitmarsh, Tim, *Battling the Gods, Atheism in the Ancient World* (London: Faber, 2016), 109–113. The only counter argument available within Athenian theism was that the gods were sometimes slow to act, an idea that had its own difficulties in a region often struck by earthquakes and other geophysical disasters.

objects on the Acropolis, as a characteristic of 'Athena'.⁶² We would be anachronistic, however, if we regarded such inventions or elaborations as mere antiquarian lore. They are, I suggest, better understood as a rhetorical reaffirmation of an 'aristocratic' ideology that, in classical Athens, had consequences both in dividing Athenians from non-Athenians and in privileging one group of Athenians over others. The autochthony claim, in literal terms nonsensical as Aristotle and others pointed out, was mocked by Antisthenes, a philosopher and contemporary of Plato, one of those who was disenfranchised by the Periclean translation of the myth into political action.⁶³ By promoting difference, whether silently or avowedly, it made claims to superiority, and therefore ultimately the legitimacy and necessity of threats, violence, and war, another omnipresent component of the discursive environment of classical Greece.

Then there is the Athenian conception of time. Besides the climate, the landscape, and the built environment, which the Athenians of the classical period and earlier had turned into a theatre of mythic stories about their past, they had also set their city's uniqueness within a chronological narrative that began at a remote time and ran to their present day. Together the 'storyscape' and the 'timescape' as we might call them, provided the co-ordinates for an explanation, within whose conceptual boundaries the Athenians of the classical era looked backward to a time when their world had first come into existence and forward to successive futures that, to an extent, lay within their own power to shape. This world view sometimes included looking upward to the clear sky, whether during the night or in daytime, where some heavenly objects appeared to be fixed and others to move, which ancient Greek writers had also recorded, turned into stories, and included in their explanations as a skyscape.⁶⁴ Those phenomena that did not follow obvious patterns, such as strikes of lightning, storms at sea and on land—often damaging and sometimes fatal to human societies and

62 The numerous presentations of autochthony in Athenian vase painting of the classical period are collected and discussed by Shapiro, H. Alan, 'Autochthony and the Visual Arts in Fifth-Century Athens', in Boedeker, Deborah Dickmann and Raaflaub, Kurt A., *Democracy, Empire, and the Arts in Fifth-Century Athens* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1998), 127–151.

63 Discussed in Chapter 3.

64 Notably in the competing ideas offered by the characters in the *Symposium* by Plato.

individuals—as well as earthquakes, floods, droughts, plagues, and other disasters that could not be reconciled with notions of benevolent, just, or even interested deities, also attracted a range of stories and explanations, mainly mythical and theistic, that enabled them to be fitted into an overarching, unified, world view. In the opening Preamble to the horrors enacted in *Trojan Women*, Euripides presents a verbatim conversation between Poseidon and Athena. The two principal deities of Athens come across as selfish, scheming, indifferent to human concerns, vengeful, and petty-minded.⁶⁵ Not only did *Trojan Women* obtain the approvals and financing needed to be accepted for production, but it won the prize in 415 BCE.

As for the origin of the universe, it was commonly claimed, not only in Athens but elsewhere in Greece, that there had been a time when only gods existed and they had engaged in a long struggle to bring about some order against the forces of chaos, personified as giants. The ‘gigantomachy’ seems to have become a shorthand for the arrival of a more stable, but always precarious, cosmos, and it was frequently given fixed visual form on Hellenic temples, including the Parthenon, and in the design of fabrics used in ceremonies, such as the peplos (a formal garment worn by both males and females and associated with the mythic age) that featured in the Great Panathenaic, a festival that had been instituted in Athens in the sixth century but that was presented, as with many other institutions, as having existed much earlier.

To explain the earliest stages of human existence, the classical Athenians had access to ancient ‘theogonies’ mainly in the form of lists of names that gave some shape to the past, of which one composed by Hesiod, which has survived, commanded almost as much respect as the epics of the Homeric cycles, of which the *Iliad* and the *Odyssey* were accorded primacy over others of which we only have fragments. The classical Athenians knew that these texts had been translated from oral live performance to written, and therefore more fixed, forms in their fairly recent past, and to judge from the numerous quotations, in the classical era it was the fixed forms that were performed at festivals and

65 Eur. Tro. 1–97. My suggestion that the audience was offered a subversive alternative to the official ideology presented on the west pediment of the Parthenon, just as in the *Ion* they were given an alternative to the central event pictured on the frieze, is discussed in Chapters 3 and 4.

in competitions. As it happens, the fullest, albeit fictional, account of how classical-era viewers engaged dynamically and collectively with the stories presented in fixed form on ancient temples refers to looking at a gigantomachy.⁶⁶ The main stages were summarized by the character of Protagoras in Plato's dialogue of that name, which purports to give the actual words of Protagoras of Abdera, who was born in the early fifth century and was therefore of an earlier generation than Plato. According to this version, no mortal creatures had existed until the gods instructed their servants Prometheus and Epimetheus to make humans, as well as animals and birds, by moulding them from earth and fire, regarded as the primary elements along with water and air.

Of the texts from the classical period that have survived through to our own time, the last and longest of the dialogues of Plato, the *Laws*, is set in Crete, a location where some of the struggles from which the gods had emerged victorious had allegedly taken place, in and around the terrifying volcanic Mount Ida. The *Prometheus Bound* by Aeschylus was set on a mountain in Scythia, the remote area north of the Black Sea, where the unrepentant Prometheus is being eternally punished by Zeus, regarded as the 'father', that is, the first god to have existed, for stealing from the domain of the gods a knowledge of fire and of how it could be tamed by humans.

As for the emergence of human beings, a variety of explanations were offered, some of which, such as that of a great flood overwhelming the Aegean basin, may also have been rooted in memories of actual occurrences carried, mainly orally, across generations.⁶⁷ According to the character of 'the Athenian', with whom the other characters in the dialogue seldom disagree, and who may record the views of Socrates or Plato himself, a great flood had overwhelmed the world, from which the only survivors were a few herders of goats and sheep living simple lives

⁶⁶ In the *Ion* of Euripides discussed in Chapter 3.

⁶⁷ As will be noted in Chapter 2, the Athenians did not however disdain taking such precautions as they could, of which the successful earthquake-proofing of the Parthenon columns, itself an example of the progressiveness of the narrative, is discussed. Crete was also the site of stories about an ancient civilization dependent on the sea, a kingdom of Minos that excavations in the late nineteenth century proved to be more than a legend.

on the tops of mountains, who were now cut off from one another. All that they knew of the past before the flood were a few names.⁶⁸

When time reached the more recent past, the story took on a form that was supported by evidence, partly historiographical and anthropological, but also derived from observation of other living things, animals, birds, and insects, and more rarely of the fish and plants with which humans shared the physical environment. What is common to all is that humans moved from a solitary brutish state, as a first step to living together in extended families in an 'oikos', seen as a political as much as an economic institution, before, in some cases such as Athens, coming together as a 'polis' that enabled them to do more as a unit than they could do separately, including, in many cases, the building of defensive walls.

The emergence-from-brutishness narrative, though seldom pieced together or integrated into explanations, is to be found both as a description of what occurred in the past and as a framework within which choices about the future should be made, in some of the most formal occasions on which the official ideology of the state of Athens was performed. An account of the brute-to-oikos stage can be found in the brief Homeric *Hymn to Hephaistos*. To judge from other hymns in the collection, of which the attribution to Homer appears to have been accepted in the classical period, this hymn was probably ceremonially sung at festivals.⁶⁹ This brute-to-oikos narrative is employed or alluded to at least three times in the formal works of Isocrates.⁷⁰ As he declared on one occasion, he could add further proofs that 'no one would think of disbelieving' based on the creditworthiness of ancient traditions and on actions that were deemed to have occurred.⁷¹ The Funeral Oration of Lysias that, unlike the one put into the mouth of Pericles by Thucydides,

68 At the beginning of book 3 of the *Laws*.

69 HH 20 4.

70 *Panegyricus* Isoc 4.28; *Antidosis* Isoc. 15 254; and in *Nicocles or the Cyprians*. Isoc. 3 6, all with the tell-tale θηριωδώς or its cognates, the mention of which, I suggest, was enough by itself to remind audiences of the narrative and its role in the self-construction of Athens as an imagined community. It is also alluded to in his rhetorical exercise by Isocrates known as the *Busiris*, perhaps playfully. Isoc. 11 25.

71 καὶ τούτοις ἀπιστεῖν μικρῶν ἔτι προστεθέντων οὐδεὶς ἂν ἀξιώσειεν. πρῶτον μὲν γάρ, ἐξ ὧν ἂν τις καταφρονήσειε τῶν λεγομένων ὡς ἀρχαίων ὄντων, ἐκ τῶν αὐτῶν τούτων εἰκότως ἂν καὶ τὰς πράξεις γεγενῆσθαι νομίσειεν. Isoc. 4 30.

may have been delivered, declares: 'For they [our ancestors] deemed that it was the way of wild beasts to be held subject to one another by force, but the duty of men to delimit justice by law, to convince by reason, and to submit to the rule of law and the instruction of reason'.⁷² The narrative occurs in the tragic drama, put, for example, into the mouth of the character of Theseus in the *Suppliants* by Euripides, speaking as the spirit of Athens at its best, in a passage that brings together acquired ability to think and to communicate with economic developments in agriculture and trade.⁷³

The narrative is mocked in the comic drama. Aristophanes, for example, in reversing the roles of humans and birds in the *Birds*, has one bird sneer at another as 'a most cowardly brute', the joke being that his fellow bird, in flying away from the bird-catchers who frequented the slopes of the Acropolis and choosing to save himself by quitting the field, was not yet advanced enough to be a citizen-soldier of the polis.⁷⁴ In the *Cyclops* by Euripides, a burlesque satyr play, the unheroic character of Odysseus, in an ancient equivalent of the pot calling the kettle black, addresses his noisy, cowardly, and untrustworthy followers as 'brutes'.⁷⁵ The narrative is also set out, within a strong teleological assumption about fulfilling the purposes of 'nature', in the opening chapters of Aristotle's *Politics*.

The brutishness narrative continued to be deployed long after the classical period, and is found for example in the work of first-century-BCE historian Diodorus Siculus.⁷⁶ His description of the difference between the 'mused', who had already developed a civilized life, and the 'unmused' who needed more 'paideia', repeats features found in the authors of the classical era.⁷⁷ Later still, more than half a millennium after the building of the Parthenon, it is found in the Forty-Sixth Oration of Aelius Aristides, delivered in 156 CE, in which the earliest humans are presented as living like brutes, from day to

⁷² Lys. 2 19.

⁷³ Eur. Supp. 195–215. The key phrase with the word 'brutish' that, with its cognates, is enough to signal that the development claim is being referred to when used by other authors, is εἰ μὴ γὰρ ἦν τόδ', οὐκ ἂν ἦμεν ἐν φάει. αἰνῶ δ' ὅς ἡμῖν βίοντον ἐκ πεφυρμένου καὶ θηριώδους θεῶν διεσταθμίσαντο.

⁷⁴ Βρε δειλότατο θηρίο! Aristophanes, *Birds*, 85.

⁷⁵ Eur. Cycl. 650 and Eur. Cycl. 707.

⁷⁶ For example, τῶν ἀνθρώπων φασὶν ἐν ἀτάκτῳ καὶ θηριώδει βίῳ. Diod. 1.8.

⁷⁷ Diod. 4.7.

day, in holes and clefts in the ground and in trees.⁷⁸ Thucydides, who was distrustful of the truth value of mythic stories and of imaginative literature, offered a version that related the start of material and social improvement that he observed in Attica, and to a lesser extent in other regions, to the political economy of Hellas as a whole. The situation that he observed in his own time, and which he put into the mouth of Pericles in the Funeral Oration, was one where all the good things of the earth flowed into Athens, and where Athens was also able to gather the fruits of its own soil with as much security as other lands, two apparently separate points that are linked in the speech.⁷⁹ Thucydides wrote in his summary of the early history of Greece that elsewhere in the Hellenic world, the seas were cleared of pirates by the Corinthians and by the overseas Ionians, making it safe for others as well as for themselves to trade by sea. Thucydides did not need to tell his readership that, apart from live animals, prisoners, and slaves who could be compelled to walk, the landscape of mountains and gulfs made it prohibitively uneconomic to take other goods, including most agricultural products, from one city to another, even with the help of donkeys.⁸⁰

The ability to trade by sea, Thucydides says, enabled Athens to move from a precarious oikos economy of self-sufficiency, household by household, to one that produced tradable crops for the growing of which the soil and climate of Attica was most suited, including olives and olive oil, which could then be exchanged, with the use of sea transport, for different products grown elsewhere. That move away from an inefficient use of the fixed capital, the land, enabled the Athenian economy to generate 'surpluses', a word familiar to modern students of economic development that Thucydides uses twice in his

78 I have amended the translation offered by Behr, in Behr, Charles A., ed., *P. Aelius Aristides, The Complete Works* (Leiden: Brill, 1986), ii, 271.

79 Thuc. 2.38. I have translated the word for 'everything' as 'good things' to include ideas and avoid implying that he meant only tradable goods, although they were the most obvious.

80 In St Clair, William, *The Reading Nation in the Romantic Period* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2004), 217, describing an age still dependent on human, animal, and wind power, I noted that in real resource, as well as in monetised terms, it cost much the same to send a packet of books from Edinburgh to the port of Leith—roughly the distance from Athens to Piraeus—as it did to send it from the quayside in Leith to the quayside in Philadelphia.

explanation.⁸¹ Empirical data from a variety of studies recently collected tend to confirm the account.⁸² Among the benefits Thucydides mentions are the reduction in the need for every *oikos* to employ guards, and for men to be normally armed, while the manufacturing and service industries needed to support them could be dispensed with altogether when replaced by social trust. The resulting net reduction in the human resources employed in exploiting the land, whether free or slave, then became available to be redeployed to other productive purposes. From the fragmentary records of Solon, a historic figure, it appears that the transition was managed, with, for example, restrictions on olive oil exports to preserve or slow the reduction of jobs. The change may have been aided by an increasing use of metal coinage, although Athens did not produce its own coinage in Solon's time, despite having deposits of silver in its territory. Nor is it clear whether Thucydides thought that the move to a polis with walls and political institutions preceded the economic change or was a result. But, in many Hellenic cities, including Athens, these developments ushered in the 'age of the tyrants', it being easier for a would-be usurper to extract resources from an economy when

81 Thuc.1.2. περιουσίαν χρημάτων. It is anachronistic to translate the phrase as 'a surplus of money'. The notion of surplus is also used in Thuc. 1.7. And the misunderstanding persists, such as, for example, when Charles Forster Smith, in his 1919 Loeb version of Thucydides (still probably the one most used by students and others dependent on translations) has Thucydides explain why it took ten years for the Greeks to win the war against Troy: 'The cause was not so much lack of men as lack of money' and again in the same passage, 'because of lack of money'; the translator was, in effect, accusing Thucydides of what generations of teachers of that time would have called a 'schoolboy howler'. Anyone with a knowledge of the bronze-age heroic world of Homeric epic, a category that included most of the potential readers at the time when Thucydides wrote, knew that, in the world described in the *Iliad* and the *Odyssey*, the institutions of money as denominated by metal coins, though possibly not by oral contracts, had not yet been invented. Thuc. 1.11. αἴτιον δ' ἦν οὐχ ἡ ὀλιγανθρωπία τοσοῦτον ὅσον ἡ ἀχρηματία. τῆς γὰρ and later in the paragraph ἀλλὰ δι' ἀχρηματίαν. As Thucydides goes on to explain, the Greek army had to devote time that could have been devoted to fighting to foraging for food and even to planting crops.

82 Izdebski, Adam, Słoczynski, Tymon, Bonnier, Anton, Koloch, Grzegorz and Kouli, Katerina, 'Landscape change and trade in ancient Greece: evidence from pollen data' *The Economic Journal*, 130 (November 2020), 2596–2618, <https://doi.org/10.1093/ej/ueaa026>. 'Both literary sources and inscriptions from the Classical period provide us with examples of grain transfers occurring over significant distances to major urban centres, such as Athens [...] Archaeological evidence also points to trade in food commodities (not just olive oil and wine) at quite long distances in the Classical period [...] presenting a possible case for market integration in a wide geographical context already in the fifth century BCE'. 2611.

they took the form of amphorae of oil, durable and exchangeable as a form of money, than to send his thugs round numerous semi-defended households to seize a goat here, a lump of cheese from somewhere else, and small quantities of grains. So successful was the change that the oil itself was credited by Aristotle, and others, not only with increasing the numbers of men that Athens could field as soldiers or ships of war that could be manned, but with making the men themselves militarily more effective.⁸³

The importance of the olive tree to classical Athens was noted by the character of the Chorus, speaking as the voice of the imagined community, in the *Oedipus at Colonus* of Sophocles, which, at first sight, is puzzling: 'It is a tree, self-born, self grown, unaided by men's hands, a tree of terror to our enemies and their spears, a tree that grows best upon this very land. It is the grey-leaved olive tree, a tree that nurtures our youth, a tree that no youth nor aged citizen can damage or destroy because it is cared for and protected by ever-watching eyes of Zeus Morios and Athena of the grey eyes'.⁸⁴

As another example, in their puzzling description of olive trees as a 'terror to our enemies and their spears', the Chorus may be alluding to the increase in useful manpower, such as those who built the ships and manned the fleet, that the shift to tradable crops made possible. And when, writing centuries later but within the same discursive conventions, Aelius Aristides imagines from afar his walks round the Acropolis of Athens, he mentions that 'when I considered that both trade and naval warfare were gifts of Athena', he may be confirming the story offered on the west pediment of the Parthenon that connects the naval success of Athens to the economic changes brought about by

83 The presentation of an olive tree on the most prominent part of the west pediment of the Parthenon is discussed in Chapter 3. How the decision to place it there was justified to the democratic assembly is discussed as part of the Thucydidean speech offered as an experiment in Chapter 2.

84 Soph. OC 699. The play is thought to have been first produced between 450 BCE and 430 BCE. 'Zeus Morios' alludes to an altar to 'Zeus of the [sacred olive] groves', a feature of the landscape that the audience of the play would recognize; we can be confident that part of its function when it was established was, by the regular (though not necessarily frequent) ceremonies conducted there, including animal and other sacrifices, to remind viewers of the importance of the groves to the city and the penalties faced by those who damaged or stole them.

the cultivation of olives and tradable olive oil.⁸⁵ The Chorus may also be alluding to the opinion of Aristotle that rubbing the body with oil mixed with water ‘stops fatigue’.⁸⁶ Aristotle presents his comment as an observation for which he had no explanation, and he may have had in mind the exercising of the body in games that were preparations for war, which became a feature of classical Athens and are alluded to in the funeral oration put into the mouth of Pericles by Thucydides. From our own perspective, we can suggest that neither Aristotle nor his contemporaries appreciated the extent to which consuming olives or olive oil, even in small quantities, can improve the general health of people whose main diet is grain. Although they were evidently not seen as the nutritious foodstuffs that they are, there are enough references to their being consumed in the classical period for them to have improved the diet, the health, and therefore, the effectiveness in war, of those who consumed them in any amount.⁸⁷ And it seems likely that, whatever the price that olives and olive oil may have fetched in final markets abroad, in Attica they may have been plentiful, cheap, and perhaps, for many, free for the picking or the gathering.⁸⁸ As was noted by Duris of Samos, a fourth-century author who knew Demetrius of Phaleron, but of whose works only a fragments have survived, before Demetrius rose to power and indulged himself with grand banquets, he had lived entirely on ‘olives and island cheese’.⁸⁹

None of the ancient authors whose works we know presented the progress-from-brutishness narrative as inevitable or even as systemically self-generating, as some authors of the European Enlightenment had claimed for their own theories. On the contrary, in the ancient Greek versions, all societies, including those such as Athens who thought of themselves as the most advanced along the trajectory, were always at risk of slipping back. As Plato wrote: ‘Man is a tame animal, as we put

85 ‘Speeches prescribed by oracle XXXVII Athena.’ Aristides, *Complete Works*, Behr edition, ii, 226, to be discussed in Chapter 3.

86 *Problems*, 5.6.

87 The evidence in Plato is collected in Skiadas, P. K., and Lascaratos, J. G. ‘Dietetics in ancient Greek philosophy: Plato’s concepts of healthy diet’ in *European Journal of Clinical Nutrition*, Vol. 55 (2001), 532–537, <https://doi.org/10.1038/sj.ejcn.1601179>.

88 The evidence for diet, including olives and olive oil to be found in the works of Plato is collected in Skiadas, P. K., and Lascaratos, J. G. ‘Dietetics in ancient Greek philosophy: Plato’s concepts of healthy diet’ in *European Journal of Clinical Nutrition*, Vol. 55 (2001), 532–537, <https://doi.org/10.1038/sj.ejcn.1601179>, and there are references to human consumption in Theophrastus and other authors.

89 παντοδαπὰς ἐλάας ἔχοντα καὶ τυρόννησιωτικόν Ath.12.60.

it, and if he receives a good education and has the right disposition, he can be the most god-like and gentle living animal, but if his education in the civic values [‘paideia’ in ‘arete’] is inadequate or misguided, he will become the wildest of all animals’.⁹⁰

Viewing Light and Time

While every generation cannot avoid being influenced by its own time, can we actively hold in check the urge to ask whether the Parthenon ‘resonates’ with our modern experience? And can we put aside the alleged right of individuals to interpret, invent, and impute meanings to the cultural productions of the past as they choose – what the late Wolfgang Iser, the theorist of response to literary works, sardonically called ‘the great adventure of the soul among masterpieces’?⁹¹

In many respects, our present can rightly claim to be better equipped than the intermediate pasts of the modern centuries for the task of unravelling and trying to understand the intertwined threads that make up ancient cultures. However, there are some respects in which the men and women of classical Athens had at their disposal a range of intellectual means to arrive at a surer understanding of the world in which they found themselves than many modern commentators. One is that, for the classical period and later, almost everyone who was educated at all was educated in rhetoric, meaning the arts of persuasion, which the tradition has tended to associate with the arts of speaking or ‘oratory’ but was evidently also applied to the arts of picturing with visual images. We have a body of excellent, and largely self-consistent, literature that sets out the do’s and the don’t’s, as well as specialist tricks of the trade, including advice on how to make visual images speak as if they were alive. Those who had been trained in rhetoric were, as a result, able to understand, point out, respond to, and if necessary to discount, rhetorical devices when they heard them. Dio of Prusa, who

90 Plato, *Laws* 765e3–76a4, καὶ ἀγρίων καὶ ἀνθρώπων: ἀνθρώπος δέ, ὥς φαμεν, ἡμερον, ὅμως μὴν παιδείας μὲν ὀρθῆς τυχὸν καὶ φύσεως εὐτυχοῦς, θειότατον ἡμερώτατόν τε ζῶον γίνεσθαι φιλεῖ, μὴ ἱκανῶς δέ ἢ μὴ καλῶς τραφέν ἀγριώτατον, ὅποσα φύει γῆ. The phrase ‘as we put it’ shows that the thought was, or was becoming, a commonplace, or piece of useful wisdom, ‘chreia’, and that it can be regarded as part of the general discursive environment rather than an insight personal to Plato.

91 Iser, Wolfgang, *How to Do Theory* (Oxford: Blackwell, 2006), 3.

was both a theorist and a practitioner, spent much of the introductions to his public speeches claiming not to be using rhetoric, itself a form of rhetoric, and Dio earned the name 'Chrysostomos', the golden-mouthed, or, as a modern person might say, 'silver-tongued', which brings out the ambiguity with which the skill was regarded.

Much can be deduced about the classical world from the geographical environment and the sightlines it permitted. Those who commissioned, designed, and caused the Parthenon to be constructed were, for example, evidently concerned with how it appeared from the long and from the middle distances, including from particular viewing stations, some readily identifiable, as I discussed in the companion volume to this book.⁹² However, apart from the full-frontal view from the west where the entrance was and is situated, the Parthenon could not be seen by those going about their daily business in the town. Nor could it be seen even by those who approached the entrance along the 'Sacred Way' along the Areopagus, or by those who approached or left by the *peripatos*, the road that encircled the Acropolis within the enclosure.

The Parthenon was within the sightlines of those who gathered to take part in the processions that began at a distance from the Acropolis, disappearing below the horizon of their sight as they came nearer. It was still out of sight as they reached the Areopagus, where some processions appear to have halted and where it is possible that at least some of the facilities of the modern frontier zone could be found. But, as now, the Parthenon did not open up to their view until they had passed through the entrance gates of the Acropolis summit, the Propylaea.⁹³

The classical Athenians had lived mostly outdoors in a microclimate with highly unusual characteristics, as they themselves knew, a fact that was noted with surprise and delight as something to be experienced by the visitors from the west from the time of the encounter.⁹⁴ The light, which had evidently remained remarkably stable over the ancient centuries, was different, not only day by day, week by week, or season by season, but in the course of every day. This ever-changing light, an intrinsic feature of the exceptionalism and the geodeterminism claimed by classical Athens, could still be experienced in the long eighteenth

92 St Clair, *WStP*, <https://doi.org/10.11647/obp.0136>. See particularly Chapters 2 and 4.

93 As will be discussed in Chapter 3.

94 Examples of how the light was understood and included in the self-image of classical Athens are given in Chapters 2 and 3.

century and for many years afterwards.⁹⁵ However, for two centuries after the encounter with the classically educated westerners and their books, most images of Athens that were taken abroad were in monochrome, black ink on white paper, a translation of a moving phenomenon onto a fixed flat surface of the lines and dots carved into a metal plate. Even in ancient times, with the exception of designs on fabric, and a few ceramics specially prepared, the Athens that was presented outside Athens was also mainly a duochrome world, known elsewhere, if at all, from the painted images in red and black ceramic that were mostly allusive and allegorical, as befitted the uses they were designed for, such as grave goods containing the ashes of the dead, or as prizes in formal contests such as games and dramatic competitions.

The pre-industrial microclimate of Athens, and the extraordinarily long sightlines it makes possible, can still occasionally be experienced. However after air pollution caused by carbon emissions became a regional, indeed a global, phenomenon, it was only during a window between the late nineteenth century and the first half of the twentieth that there was a conjuncture between the non-polluted climate and the arrival of the technology of printing in colour. Our attempts to imagine of the ancient lightscape and the way that it impinged on real ancient Athenians as they used the Parthenon and other features of the cityscape therefore relies on the few coloured images made during that window.

It was also only with the advent of printing in colour in a few industrially developed countries in the later nineteenth century that sizable numbers of people were able visually to experience something of the phenomenon at a distance. Although many visitors experienced the microclimate, it could usually be described to others only by the use of words, as many tried to do. Many of the books that carried an allusion to the light in their titles either remained unillustrated or used only black and white.⁹⁶

⁹⁵ As discussed in St Clair, *WStP*, Chapter 6, <https://doi.org/10.11647/obp.0136.06>.

⁹⁶ For example Ancey, George, *Athènes couronnée de Violettes* (Paris: Charpentier and Pasquelle, 1908) not illustrated; Rodd, Rennell, *The Violet Crown, and Songs of England* (London: D. Scott, 1891) and several subsequent editions; Butler, Howard Crosby, *The Story of Athens, A Record of the Life and Art of the City of the Violet Crown read in its Ruins and in the Lives of Great Athenians* (New York: Century Company, 1902); and Whiting, Lilian, *Athens the Violet-Crowned, Illustrated from Photographs* (Boston: Little Brown, 1913). The description of Athens as 'violet-crowned' long predated Pindar, the word being used in *Homeric Hymn To Aphrodite* 6, by Solon, and twice by Theognis. Noted by Owens, Ron, *Solon of Athens: Poet, Philosopher, Soldier, Statesman* (Brighton: Sussex Academic Press, 2010), 217.

And as the twentieth century advanced, and the air pollution gradually increased, what had once been normal gradually became ever more rare. Paradoxically, the ancient buildings that innumerable viewers of earlier times had described as made of white marble, assuming wrongly that this was their colour in ancient times, are now, as a result of the loss to air pollution of the thin topmost layer ('epidermis') of the stone, whiter than they have ever been. For centuries the buildings had presented themselves in a variety of browns, except where the marble had been chipped or struck by gunfire, where it was bright white.⁹⁷ And the colour experienced by the viewer changed with the changing light, morning and evening, sunlight or moonlight, summer or winter. Sometimes when the sun was strong the Parthenon appeared cream-coloured, at other times violet, almost black.⁹⁸ It was this effect of the changing light on the marble that the first colour photographers attempted to convey, as shown in the examples that follow. We can also recover something of what had been normal before, including in antiquity, by looking at images made by artists in the window from the 1890s to the 1920s, including the brightness of the light, the purpling mountains, the wild flowers, and the long clear sightlines, as in Figures 1.1, 1.2, and 1.3.



Figure 1.1. 'The Propylaea from within'. Print 'from a water-colour drawing by L. V. Hodgkin'.⁹⁹

97 Discussed, with coloured illustrations, in St Clair, *WStP*, Chapter 8, <https://doi.org/10.11647/obp.0136.08>.

98 I use the language of inherent colour for convenience, although it has long been known that colour is constructed in the human brain, and everyone's experience may be different.

99 Bosanquet, Mrs R. C., *Days in Attica* (London: Methuen, 1914), frontispiece. In the List of Plates, the artist is named as 'Miss Hodgkin'.



Figure 1.2. 'The Solemn Majesty of the Parthenon'. Thought to be from a painting reproduced by the three-colour process.¹⁰⁰

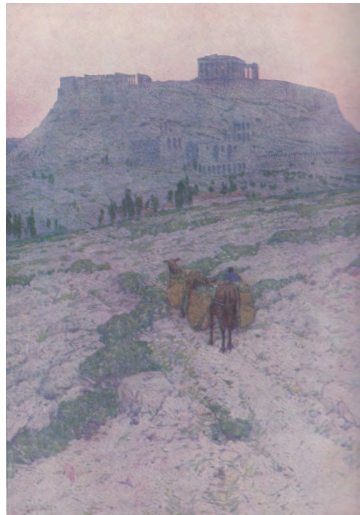


Figure 1.3. 'The Acropolis at Athens, Early Morning'. Print from a painting by Jules Guérin, 1912.¹⁰¹

100 Frontispiece to Greer, Carl Richard, *The Glories of Greece* (Philadelphia: Penn. Company, 1936), no date given nor artist named.

101 Hichens, Robert, *The Near East, Dalmatia, Greece, and Constantinople, illustrated By Jules Guérin and with photographs* (London and New York: Hodder and Stoughton,

Others attempted to carry to others something of the enveloping light as in Figure 1.3.

In Figure 1.4, we have an image of how the Parthenon appeared to those approaching in festival procession along the road from Eleusis. They first saw it from a distance as crowning the Acropolis with Hymettus behind, only to disappear from view as they came nearer, and reappear in part when they arrived in front of the entrance on the west side and saw the west pediment.¹⁰²



Figure 1.4. 'Athens from the road to Eleusis'. Reproduction of a painting in watercolour, made by John Fulleylove, 1895, published in book form in 1906.¹⁰³

By the end of the nineteenth century, however, there was already a sense that the era when it was possible to experience the same micro-climate as had existed in classical Athens was coming to an end. Athens was now a city of ever encroaching modernity, with industries that polluted the air. A glimpse of the change can be seen in the small photograph shown as Figure 1.5.

1913), opposite 93. Hichens and Guérin visited Athens in the late summer of 1912, at the time of the Greek declaration of war against the Ottoman Empire, when Hichens was briefly arrested.

102 The ancient encounter with the stories presented in the west pediment, by far the most often-seen part of the building, is discussed in Chapter 3.

103 Fulleylove, John, *Greece Painted by John Fulleylove Described by Right Rev. J. A. McClymont* (London: A. and C. Black, 1906), opposite 174.



Figure 1.5. 'The Street of Tombs'. Photograph, 1890s.¹⁰⁴

The English novelist George Gissing invented a conversation between two friends that picked up their sense of superiority to the Greeks, appropriated from the Roman satirist Juvenal, concerning the changes to the microclimate and the lightscape. Paradoxically, it was at the very time when the pieces of the Parthenon in the British Museum were being scraped white at the behest of Lord Duveen that the then director Sir Frederick Kenyon, who had evidently not looked at them for some time, was praising one of the books that brought out the 'light and colour and wonderful atmosphere of Athens', and commending how 'the clear atmosphere blended and subdued the colours on the marble which in a picture looks exaggerated yet is after all within the truth'.¹⁰⁵

It was William Ewart Gladstone, whose periods as British Prime Minister made him one of the most famous men of the nineteenth century, who had first pointed out how variable were the Homeric words for colour. The sky might, he noticed, be described in English translation as 'violet' as could the sea, and the hills as 'purple' and

104 Hall, Mrs. Herman J., *Two Travelers in Europe; A unique story told by one of them, What they saw and how they lived while traveling among the half-civilized People of Morocco, the peasants of Italy and France, as well as the educated classes of Spain, Greece, and other countries* (Springfield: Hampden Publishing Company, 1898), 133. Ellen S. Bosanquet, returning to Athens in 1930 after nearly twenty years, remarked on the many smoking factory chimneys, especially from cement works, that were then to be seen, as Athens rapidly expanded to cope with the influx of refugees whose ancestors had colonized Ionia thousands of years before. Bosanquet, *Story*, 186, 196.

105 Boyajian, Zabelle C., *In Greece with Pen and Palette, Illustrated by the Author and with a Preface by Sir Frederic Kenyon* (London: Dent, 1938). Preface dated 'April 1938'.

the sea as 'wine-coloured'. And what, the question arose, did Homer mean by describing sheep as violet? Were the animals being presented prophetically as carrying wool that would be turned into garments dyed in that colour? Gladstone, who visited Athens in December 1858, had from his knowledge of the Homeric epics already noticed that in these words, as in others, Homer was not concerned with colour as fixed 'descriptions of prismatic colours or their compounds', but with the impact of the light on the human who experienced it.¹⁰⁶ In northern countries, he wrote, colours in the external world, 'nature', mostly changed only slowly. But, in a phrase that showed that he understood that perception is also conditioned by prior consumption of images—in modern terms, by horizons of expectations—he attributed this anachronistic way of seeing to two British national stereotypes of his day, a literalist tendency to force complexity into countable categories, like 'an auditor in the accounts of some delinquent Joint-Stock Company'.¹⁰⁷ He noted that a similar oversimplification was applied to the colours of the Newtonian spectrum. His contemporaries regarded them as qualities fixed, not as events experienced.¹⁰⁸ Gladstone's key observation has since been carried forward, with further evidence, as a persuasive emerging theory, and examples are displayed in colour plates by Adeline Grand-Clément.¹⁰⁹ In the world of Homer, colour was, as Gladstone appreciated, an embodied experience, with no sharp boundary expected or experienced between the mind of human viewer and things viewed. And perception and cognition appear to have been regarded and encouraged in the same way during the

106 Gladstone, Right Hon. W. E., *Studies on Homer and the Homeric Age* (Oxford: OUP, 1858), iii, 457–499. An example, from the Platonic dialogue known as the *Menexenus* is picked up in Chapter 2.

107 In modern terms, a joint stock company is normally a public limited company or plc, but some joint stock companies even in Gladstone's time were not publicly quoted on stock exchanges.

108 'Next to the idea of number, there is none perhaps more definite to the modern mind generally, as well as in particular to the English mind, than that of colour. That our own country has some special aptitude in this respect, we may judge from the comparatively advantageous position, which the British painters have always held as colourists among other contemporary schools. Nothing seems more readily understood and retained by very young children among us, than the distinctions between the principal colours.' *Ibid.* iii, 446.

109 Grand-Clément, *La fabrique des couleurs*. At the time of writing, most museums that contain Greek antiquities, including the British Museum, employ fixed spotlights, sometimes tinted, that make it even harder to imagine the ancient experience.

classical period too. This is to be found, for example, in the images of seeing to be found on vase paintings, which cannot easily be made to fit into the categories of modern representational or allegorical art where a live viewer is assumed to encounter an inert—objectified—object.¹¹⁰ The museum practice of using fixed, sometimes tinted, spotlights is therefore not only a relic of western romanticism and a usurpation of the visitor's choice, but an obstacle to attempts to look at, or even imagine, objects such as the 'marbles' from the Parthenon in the ways that the classical Athenians and their successors encountered them for many centuries.¹¹¹

Besides the ancient lightscape, much of the visible timescape encountered in classical Athens had also survived into modern times. The Athenians of the classical era, we can be certain, did not regard themselves as living 'in the youth of the world', a thought common in the modern centuries.¹¹² Nor did they regard themselves as living in the 'morning lands of history'.¹¹³ At the time that the classical Propylaia, with its astonishing lintel, was built in the classical age, there had been

110 Discussed by Tanner, Jeremy, 'Sight and painting: optical theory and pictorial poetics in Classical Greek art', in Squire, Michael, ed., *Sight and the Ancient Senses* (London: Routledge, 2016), 107–114, <https://doi.org/10.4324/9781315719238>, and other essays in that volume.

111 To be discussed further in Chapter 3.

112 'Tout s'est réuni pour fêter ici le jeunesse du monde. Qu'ils étaient heureux ces Athéniens qui avaient passer l'idéal dans la pratique de la vie, puisque nous, barbares qui ne contemplons que des ruines, nous palpitions encore au seul souffle du passé.' Beulé, E., *Journal de mes Fouilles* (Paris: Claye, 1872), 14. Extracted from *Gazette des Beaux Arts*, 1872. Beulé was especially struck by the clear air and changing colours of the landscape that, at the time he wrote (1852), could not yet be economically reproduced in a book, as discussed in this chapter. As another example, which rode on the stadial theory of the philosophers of history: 'By no hypothesis within my power of framing, can I account for that extraordinary excellence, in art and literature, which the Greeks so unquestionably attained, except by embracing the notion that the world has its stages of age like man; and supposing that the antients lived in the youth of the world, when all things were more fresh and beautiful than in the state in which we see them.' Galt, John, *Letters from the Levant* (London: Cadell and Davies, 1813), 131.

113 The 'Morning Lands of History', the title of the book by Hugh Price Hughes, was discussed in St Clair, *WStP*, Chapter 22, <https://doi.org/10.11647/obp.0136.22>. Other examples: 'Those who approach [Attica] ... may still know the joy of being young in the world's youth.' Bosanquet, *Days in Attica*, 66. 'In the days of the world's youth', Hanson, Charles Henry, *The Land of Greece Described and Illustrated with 44 Illustrations and three maps* (London: Nelson, 1886), 14. In the writings of visitors from western countries there are innumerable references to cradles, birthplaces, and dawns.

a gateway on the site for around eight hundred years.¹¹⁴ In a long era of almost constant war and internal dissension, they are unlikely to have thought that they had achieved a perfect balance between the body and the soul, the useful and the beautiful, the citizen and the state, and liberty with patriotism, as the archaeologist Ernest Beulé wrote in 1869.¹¹⁵ Nor could they have thought of themselves as living in the ‘dawn of every thing which adorned and ennobled Greece’, as the Select Committee that recommended the purchase of Lord Elgin’s collection of antiquities had declared.¹¹⁶

On the contrary, to judge from the writings of the classical era that have come down to us, they were well aware that they were inhabiting a time that was the outcome of a deep past of which they knew little. Within a day’s march from Athens were the deserted acropolises of Mycenae and Tiryns, which had been built of large irregular blocks of masonry with astonishing skill in pre-historic times by people about whom they knew little. Remnants of the ‘Cyclopean’ structures, as the classical Greeks named them, after the Cyclops, the one-eyed, gentle, vegetarian though not lacto-vegetarian, giant in the *Odyssey*, were to be found over much of the world that they knew as far as Italy. Huge, well-built monuments, some ruinous, but others with their walls still standing, not only reminded the ancient Athenians of a civilization of which they knew little, but scolded them. How could mere Athenian mortals living in the modernity of the fifth and fourth centuries BCE hope to match the achievements of the predecessors who had performed such feats of building? And why had the men who had built these huge structures disappeared, leaving only the stones and stories of uncertain historicity? The Athenians of the classical era seem also to have had an explicit understanding of the loss even of remembrance, disasters

114 Dinsmoor, William B. and Dinsmoor, William B. Jr, *The Propylaea to the Athenian Akropolis* (Princeton: American School of Classical Studies at Athens, 1980 and 2004), i, 4.

115 Beulé, E., Membre de l’Institut, Secrétaire Perpétuel de l’Académie des Beaux Arts, *Phidias, Drame Antique* (Paris: Didier, second edition, 1869), ii. The Preface is not in the first publication in the *Revue des Deux Mondes*, 2e période, tome 32, 1861, 292–331, nor in the first edition in book form. Beulé’s excavations on the Acropolis were described in St Clair, *WStP*, Chapters 15, <https://doi.org/10.11647/obp.0136.15>, and 21, <https://doi.org/10.11647/obp.0136.21>.

116 *Select Committee Report*, 8, as discussed in St Clair, *WStP*, Chapter 9, <https://doi.org/10.11647/obp.0136.09>, including the rebuttals made at the time.

that had struck whole peoples, not only as long-run slow trends of depopulation and abandonment, although they saw these too, but as catastrophes that had occurred at sudden moments in deep time.

Images of Cyclopean remains as they still existed in the long eighteenth century largely undisturbed since they had apparently been abandoned in some remote past, are given as Figures 1.6 and 1.7.

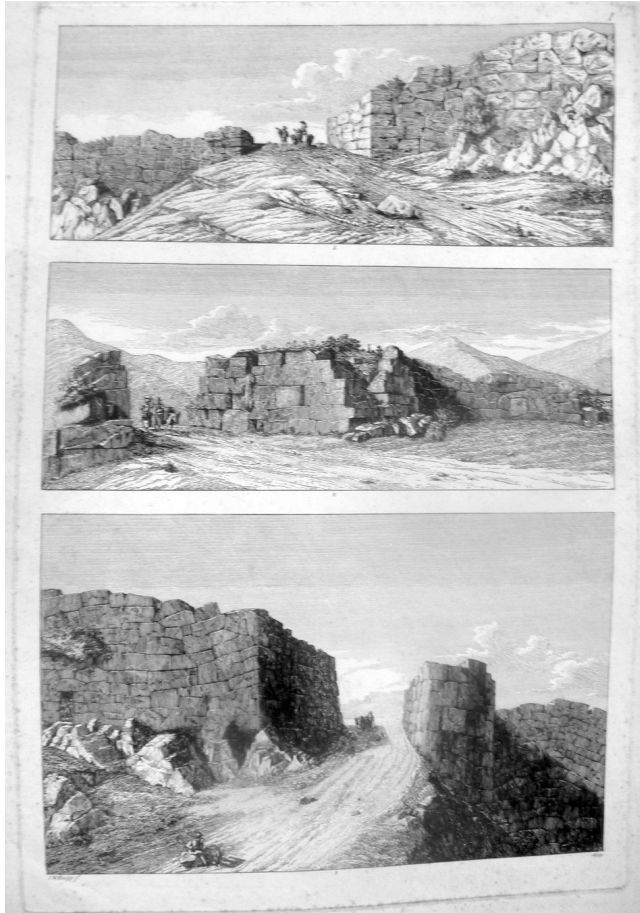


Figure 1.6. Cyclopean walls in Greece. Engraving dated 1829.¹¹⁷

¹¹⁷ Not identified. Noted as 'J. M. Knopp f[ecit]'.



Figure 1.7. 'Portal to one of the treasuries at Mycenae'. Hand-coloured lithograph.¹¹⁸

On the scale shown in the caption to the image, the portal was around fifteen English feet long. A glimpse of Edward Dodwell using a rod to measure Cyclopean ruins in Italy is shown in Figure 1.8.

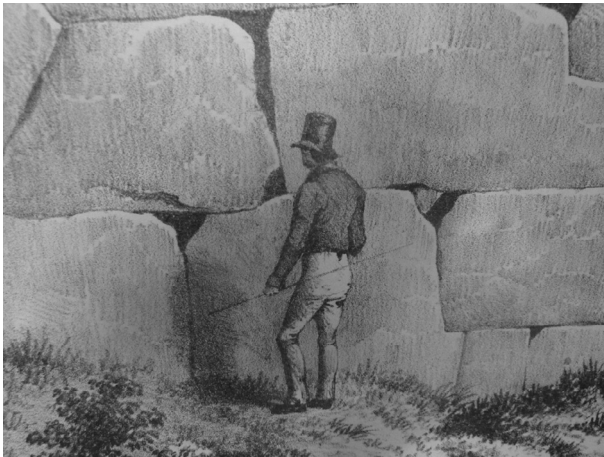


Figure 1.8. Detail from 'Subterraneous gate at Alatrium'. Aquatint from a drawing by Edward Dodwell.¹¹⁹

¹¹⁸ From Dodwell, Edward, *Views and Descriptions of Cyclopean, or Pelasgic Remains, in Greece and Italy, with Constructions of a Later Period, Intended as a Supplement to his Classical and Topographical Tour through Greece during the Years 1801, 1805 and 1806* (London: Rodwell and Martin, 1834). Since most copies of the book show the views in monochrome, it is possible that the colouring was added later.

¹¹⁹ Dodwell, *Cyclopean Remains*, number 92.

The image incidentally preserves information not only about the skill of the construction but about the measuring rods that were commonly used, with little change until recent times. Although no ancient example has been found, the image enables us to reimagine what was amongst the commonest sights during the building of the classical Parthenon, and was commonly used as a simile not only for exactitude and reliability but for anchoring the imagined to the familiar, and as an image of what was believed and presented as occurring in the act of seeing itself.¹²⁰

In Athens itself, a fragment of a Cyclopean wall remained to be seen despite the classical-era refashioning of the Acropolis, as was discovered in the nineteenth century. An amateur photograph of unknown date, but taken before the Acropolis summit was cleared, is shown as Figure 1.9.



Figure 1.9. Remains of a wall at the entrance to the Acropolis. Amateur photograph, nineteenth or early twentieth century.¹²¹

This Cyclopean wall is, in modern terms, ‘polygonal’ and ‘hammer-dressed’, in construction, although with smaller stones than is normal.¹²²

¹²⁰ To be discussed in Chapter 2.

¹²¹ Unidentified. Private collection.

¹²² Discussed, with illustrations, one from 1846, by Shear, Ione Mylonas, ‘The western approach to the Athenian akropolis’ in *Journal of Hellenic Studies*, Vol. 119 (1999), 86–127, <https://doi.org/10.2307/632313>.

Whether it was an accidental survival of the Mycenaean-era acropolis from before the Persian destruction of 480, or was purposely preserved as a commemoration or a demonstration of continuity, it anchored the stories to the site, giving credence, at least in the moment of encounter when the imagination was already engaged, to this claim: that the characters who populated the stories displayed on the buildings and re-performed in newly imagined variants in the tragic drama were not entirely fictional, but had actually walked the land.

Together the landscape, the built cityscape, and the lightscape made a storyscape that the western visitors from the seventeenth century onwards immediately recognised from their knowledge of the ancient authors. They also discovered that it had, for local people, been so completely covered over and repurposed by a millennium and a half of imperial Christianization that it had been almost entirely lost from memory. However, since the storyscape was a human construct it could easily be recovered and substituted, as happened apace locally as well as amongst visitors after the Greek Revolution.¹²³ The surviving works of ancient authors, especially the writers of dramatic and dialogic texts, are replete with examples of interactions with the storyscape, including descriptions of how it was used on ceremonial occasions, such as festival processions, as a component of attempts to persuade and to internalize. Visual presentations of the Athenian storyscape are rarer, perhaps because, for the local people who already knew and lived among them, there was no need for the stories to be mediated. An example, which, because it contains explanatory words, may have been intended for export to a place geographically distant from Athens, is shown on an unprovenanced item of ceramic ware ('skyphos') as Figure 1.10, flattened in the reproduction so that the whole image is visible to the modern viewer in two dimensions.

In this example, the mute stones are made to speak not only in words set beside the visual image but also by translation into performance, as the stories were listened to, retold, and repeated and the pictures were seen and re-seen as part of an iterative process of making, authenticating, and consolidating a storyscape. By showing mythical figures using measuring rods and lines, the image humanizes them, making it easier

123 As discussed in St Clair, *WStP*, Chapter 6, <https://doi.org/10.11647/obp.0136.06>.



Figure 1.10. Athena apparently directing a giant, Gigas, in the building of the walls of the Acropolis, and another giant, Phlegyas.¹²⁴

for its viewers both to see what were to them familiar objects, and to connect the imagined and invisible world of the gods to the real material world that they experienced.

The educated classes of classical Athens, we can be confident from the remarks made by authors of the time, were both conscious of their deep past and aware of how little they knew about it. Many had some knowledge of what had actually happened ('anteriority'), although only for the short period that can be held in human family memory without becoming unreliable. Most too had a fairly complete, if patchy, reliable knowledge of a longer anteriority that had been gathered by researches that were undertaken, written up, and preserved by those scholars and historians who placed high value on evidence, observation, and critical reading of primary sources, including ancient inscriptions. However, in the classical period of the fifth and fourth centuries, despite much effort, they found that there was little that could be regularized into calendar time before 776 BCE, the date of the first Olympic games. But the Athenians were also aware of more remote anteriorities about which they knew little other than what might be discerned from a corpus of stories that they preserved, critiqued and queried, added to and subtracted from, and that they presented, performed, and re-performed, of which

124 From a fifth-century skyphos in the Louvre, Reproduced from Harrison, Jane Ellen, *Primitive Athens as Described by Thucydides* (Cambridge: CUP, 1906), 22–23. Discussed by Cromey, Robert D., 'The Penelope Painter's Akropolis (Louvre G372 and 480/79 BC): History and Image' in *Journal of Hellenic Studies* Vol. 111 (1991), 165–174, <https://doi.org/10.2307/631894>. Although the landscape offered many stories, presentations of the Acropolis in the visual, mainly ceramic, record is rare, and of the Parthenon even more so. Since the piece is unprovenanced, we know nothing of where, why, or for what purpose it was commissioned.

the story of the birth of Athena was one that they chose to preserve and curate both on the Parthenon, on images inscribed on pottery, in written stories, and perhaps in dramatic performance.

There were overlaps between the categories, especially when attempts were made to reconcile the variations among the stories about deep time and to regularize them into a single narrative within calendar time. Taken together, however, they may still be able to provide us with the conceptual framework that the ancient Athenians themselves, as well as modern evidence-based disciplines, have found most useful in understanding their situation in general and, more particularly, the aims of their own cultural production and consumption, including the Parthenon.

What the eighteenth-century travellers did not recognize, and even today is seldom explicitly noticed, is that alongside the stories of mythic gods and heroes was a modern progressive narrative of how human beings had emerged from brutishness through a series of economic and social step changes to the Athenian city-based democracy in which they lived, as described earlier in this chapter. And that spoke too of a projected future that, from their fifth-century baseline, had the potential to progress even further in specific identified ways.¹²⁵

Looking In / Looking Out: Experiments in Recovering the Strangeness

I leave to last another problem that needs to be addressed face-on if we are to recover the strangeness of the ancient world. How can the modern investigator take proper account of the huge gaps in the evidence as it has come down to us? In the case of the Greek Revolution of 1821–1832, he or she can recover an understanding by joining up the vast quantities of evidence that we now have not only for the events but for the mentalities and discursive practices of the main participants. But in the case of classical Athens, the evidence that we have, although plentiful,

¹²⁵ Discussed further in Chapter 2, with citations to the numerous mentions by classical-era authors, and a consideration of its implications for understanding both the Parthenon and the tragic drama in which its presence can be seen. A useful list of the common fauna and flora of Athens in classical times, and of the noises and the smells in the natural environment, with some quotations from ancient authors, is provided by Connelly, *Parthenon Enigma*, 8.

is systemically unrepresentative in ways that we can recognize, such as the loss of the materiality of all those items kept on perishable materials such as papyrus and parchment, including some recorded as having been held for safe keeping in the Parthenon.¹²⁶ Lost too are the many painted images in two dimensions, ‘pictures’ in the modern sense, some famous in their time, which were commissioned by the Athenian polis and others, which played their parts in constructing the meanings offered to viewers of the classical Parthenon.¹²⁷

And the evidence that we have is also the result of other non-systemic contingencies that have resulted in some written texts having come down to us, but not others. Because money in the form of coins made from metal has survived in large numbers, whereas money in the form of bonds, IOUs, guarantees, and oral agreements has been entirely lost except for occasional references in ancient authors, we have another systemic bias in the evidence, but also an asystemic bias since the survival of coins has depended on innumerable other contingencies, including their having been used in some cases as grave goods and treated as ‘works of art’ in accordance with western romantic aesthetics.¹²⁸ Over a hundred financial documents in the form of inscriptions on marble are now known, including many fragments that relate to cash flows during the construction of the Parthenon and of the other buildings and statues on the Acropolis. Partly as a result of conjectures for how the numerous lost lines and unreadable words might be restored that came to be accepted as authoritative, there has been a tendency to infer more from them than is warranted.¹²⁹ They relate mainly to cash flows during the financial years of the physical construction of the Parthenon and of other buildings and cult statues on the Acropolis, prepared for the purpose of audit. The transcription of the texts onto marble is the last step, the

126 Discussed by Harris, Diane, *The Treasures of the Parthenon and Erechtheion* (Oxford: OUP, 1995). Some specific examples are noted in footnotes in Chapter 2. Discussed, summarized and added to by Wagner, Claudia. *Dedication Practices on the Athenian Acropolis*. D. Phil thesis, University of Oxford, 1997, <https://ora.ox.ac.uk/objects/uuid:6f2e2c02-7bc0-43c0-843c-cc76217c1485>.

127 For example, the word description of, and commentary on, a lost picture (ekphrasis) of ‘the people of Athens’ referred to in Chapter 4.

128 To be discussed further in Chapter 3. Much writing on coins has, as result, concentrated on their symbolic and iconographical functions.

129 Discussed by Foley, Elizabeth, and Stroud, Ronald S., ‘A Reappraisal of the Athena Promachos Accounts from the Acropolis (IG I³ 435)’, *Hesperia*, Vol. 88 (1) (2019), 87–153, <https://doi.org/10.2972/hesperia.88.1.0087>.

conclusion of a process that proclaims itself as already settled. Although informative for other reasons, they are of little use for establishing the considerations and justifications offered for the expenditures before choices were arrived at. The ancient Parthenon therefore offers a case where questions about the representative quality of the evidence are central to any attempt to understand why and how it came into existence. Since the work of collecting mentions in the ancient authors began with Meursius in the early seventeenth century, for example, many have been surprised to discover quite how few, how thin, how far between, and how incidental, are the references to the Parthenon, as distinct from those to the Acropolis, where there are many more.¹³⁰ And although many tens of thousands of visual images from the era survive on ceramic pottery, none featuring the Parthenon have been found. Among ancient written works, now lost, one on the Parthenon by the architect Karpion, which appears to have been concerned with professional architectural matters, is almost an exception that proves the general rule.¹³¹ Is this paucity an accidental result of the contingencies of survival? Or does it suggest that the modern attention to the 'architecture' and the 'sculpture', and to the Parthenon as a building, has diverted attention both from ancient ways of seeing and from the uses for which it was intended in the life of the city?

Attempts to bring together all the evidence from the ancient world, fragments of artworks, actual later copies, and mentions in the corpus of ancient texts and inscriptions have been denounced as 'utopian', even where they are plentiful and focused, since all are dependent on the 'serendipities of survival'.¹³² However it is not obvious that voluntary

130 The few references and allusions are noted and commented upon by Kondaratos, Savas, 'The Parthenon as Cultural Ideal', in Tournikiotis, Panayotis, ed., *The Parthenon and its Impact in Modern Times* (Athens: Melissa, 1994), 20–28.

131 Discussed by Beulé, E., *L'Acropole d'Athènes* (Paris: Firmin Didot, 1862), 24. Among the records of what has been lost, Heliiodorus wrote fifteen books on the Acropolis; Polemon wrote four books on the votive offerings and a treatise on the pictures of the Propylaia; and there are mentions and occasional quotations from works by Menekles, Callistratus, and Hegesias, Collected by Pausanias, *Description of Greece*, Frazer edition, ii, 396.

132 Stewart, Andrew, 'Pheidias: The Sculptures & Ancient Sources', a review of Davison, in *American Journal of Archaeology*, Vol. 115 (3) (July 2011), <https://doi.org/10.3764/ajaonline1153.Stewart>. The fact that the problems of presentism and skewed evidence were linked was set out explicitly by the French scholar Toussaint-Bernard Emeric-David, as long ago as 1805. Emeric-David, T. B., *Recherches sur l'art statuaire, considéré chez les anciens et chez les modernes, ou Mémoire sur cette question*

self-isolation within the artificial and limiting conventions of, say, art history as first practised by Vasari in the Italian Renaissance, is to be preferred, especially when it is obliged by the same contingencies to focus on the produced work, at the risk of marginalizing, taking for granted, or assuming that the contribution of the consumer is already known. Nor is it obvious that joining the dots of the miscellaneous pieces of evidence that have come down to us can free us from the haphazardness of the sources themselves.

Without implying that other ways are illegitimate, I therefore propose in this book, as an experiment, to go direct to the primary evidence that has come down to us, working from the geographical landscape, the climate and the light, the natural world, overarching world views such as the brutishness narrative, and the ways in which experience was turned into words and images, with the shared assumptions and the rhetorical conventions within which they were presented. I widen the notion of 'culture' to include sightlines, the encounters, the viewing stations, the occasions of seeing, and the resulting construction of landscape, as well as the surviving materiality, both of the buildings themselves and the information they can still offer.

I will attempt to recover the practices and rhetorics that were shared between the ancient producers and consumers, within whose conventions meanings were offered and interpretations made: in other words, the discursive environment that coexisted with and interacted with the other environments. The experiment enables me to give full weight to what Bernd Steinbock has called 'meaningful' history, preserving a social memory that may be more 'real', and carry greater weight in the making of decisions than the evidence-based history of the Hellenic and modern European tradition that attempts to recover a knowledge of what actually happened.¹³³ Dense with intertextuality, itself a device that aims to co-opt and flatter by offering familiarity and recognition, the discursive environment allows for exhortations

proposée par l'Institut national de France: Quelles ont été les causes de la perfection de la Sculpture antique, et quels seroient les moyens d'y atteindre? (Paris: Nyon, an XIII, 1805), 4.

133 Quoted by Steinbock, Bernd, *Social Memory in Athenian Public Discourse: Uses and Meanings of the Past* (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 2013), 8, <https://doi.org/10.3998/mpub.1897162>. Other terms he notes are 'usable past', 'imagined and remembered history', 'cultural memory', 'believed history', and 'intentional history'.

to a future while apparently discussing the past and the present. The rhetorical conventions, although flexible and open to modification, both preceded the events that caused them and also outlasted them. They were the means by which the long-lasting natural environment was turned into useful long-lasting literary and visual practices. My suggested experiment can therefore also be regarded as an attempt to extend an understanding of cognition beyond the mind/brain, as theorized recently as 'extended cognition', but that can also be understood as my historical observation that many of the ways of presenting acts of seeing and cognition in ancient Athens drew their analogies and their metaphors from the shared experience of the actual environments.

I suggest that our best hope of approaching nearer to the historicity of what occurred in decision-taking is to confront the incompleteness face on; to postpone the dot-joining of pieces of doubtfully representative evidence until we have recovered what I will call the 'discursive environment' as a whole and the interconnections between the components. In effect I propose to change the viewing station of the author, and of his potential readers, from that of an external observer looking in and down from the heights of the present to that of an insider looking out from within the many encircling environments, discursive as well as geographical, of classical Athens itself.

In offering this answer to the historiographical challenge of inadequate and skewed evidence, can we learn from Thucydides and other ancient authors on how they chose to deal with the incompleteness in their time? Can we present the debates about the building of the Parthenon in the long-lived genres that were used at the time but have since fallen into disuse?¹³⁴ As an experiment, in addition to the main narrative account, I offer two such alternatives to narrative, firstly a 'Thucydidean speech', such as might have been delivered during the years of consideration of

134 In the text of Thucydides there are fifty-two speeches in direct speech, eighty-five in indirect speech, and three in a mixture of the two. Stadter, Philip, ed., *The Speeches in Thucydides: A Collection of Original Studies, with a Bibliography* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1973), 5. The main Athenian direct speeches have recently been newly translated and commented on by Hanink, Johanna, trans., *Thucydides. How to Think about War: An Ancient Guide to Foreign Policy* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2019), <https://doi.org/10.2307/j.ctvc77gmj>. She adds a warning to those contemporary politicians who draw on the Periclean speeches and appropriate their rhetoric in justification of modern wars to remember 'the ultimate fate of Thucydides' Athens'.

the aims, choice of design, and execution of the Parthenon; and secondly a 'rhetorical exercise' such as might have been composed at one of the philosophical schools in Athens around five hundred years later on the theme of 'historical lessons of the Parthenon'.

As for the Thucydidean speeches, we can be confident that the Athenians of the classical age had a strong sense of the visual cityscape of Athens and of Attica, not only as the cumulative result of innumerable decisions, public and private, but as a visual text in its own right that had, to a large extent, been composed, and was available to be added to and to be subtracted from. Some of the classical or post-classical expedients for anchoring the official memory to the built and natural landscape, such as the mark where Poseidon had allegedly struck the rock with his trident causing salt water to flow, can today scarcely be looked at, or even read about, without the thought that they must have been deliberately contrived, and may therefore also have been discounted as inauthentic by those who encountered them in ancient times. However, even when we remember that they were devices put in place by the producers, we may be wise to think instead that the ancient consumer did not regard such contrivances as fakes aimed at deceiving the uncritical but as pictures in three-dimensional space that were brought to life by the imagination of the viewers. Pausanias, for example, appears at least on occasions to have so regarded them, willingly suspending of disbelief. But, if anyone in post-classical Athens ever thought that the stories of deep time, including the dramas, were just inventions, the Cyclopean stones provided incontrovertible evidence, evidenced by, and palpable to, all the senses, that the deep past was not just a useful fiction, and a starting point for locating mythic stories, although it performed these roles too, but that it had actually occurred.

Since the Acropolis was an official site, and everything built or displayed there required the approval of the institutions of the ancient city, we are able to assume intentionality.¹³⁵ And although the custom of scolding Pausanias for not thinking like a modern art historian may have come to an end, the baleful influence of western romanticism is still pervasive. It is sometimes suggested, for example, that Pheidias,

¹³⁵ The usefulness of this fact, present without interruption at all periods in the history of the Acropolis from neolithic times to the present day, is discussed in St Clair, *WStP*, Chapter 1, <https://doi.org/10.11647/obp.0136.01>.

as the general manager of the Parthenon project, a famous and professionally successful man at the time, was given a free hand to do what he wanted. For example, according to Olga Palagia, Pheidias 'had control over everything'.¹³⁶ For the classical Acropolis, however, it happens that almost uniquely, we have direct, mainly epigraphic, contemporary evidence for the commissioning of public sacred buildings by the civic authorities of Athens, sometimes by competition; the evaluation of the submitted designs; and the processes of acceptance and building, including some relating to the Athena Nike temple on the Acropolis.¹³⁷ The formal contemporary documents are a resource of extraordinary potential explanatory value. But Palagia, influenced by modern romanticism, is forced to assume that the annually appointed supervisory committees of citizens, many of whose names are known from the marble inscriptions set up on the Acropolis, were mere puppets, and she scolds those citizens who prepared the reports on the state of progress, such as the accountants and the auditors, for not naming Pheidias, or 'the true authors'.¹³⁸ Palagia also dismisses as unimportant some of the details of the recorded expenditure, for example, on clay and horse-hair. If, however, as seems likely, these were materials used in making models, we may have a glimpse here not only of how the design of parts of the composition of the sculptural components was experimented with, before decisions were taken to move to the expense and near irreversibility of carving the marble, but also how the appointed representatives of the city and others might have been consulted.

Although, from the epigraphic record it seems that the Parthenon was built, with astonishing speed, between 447/6 and 433/2, a fact

136 Palagia, Olga, *The Pediments of the Parthenon*, second unrevised edition (Leiden: Brill, 1998), 7.

137 The evidence summarized by Tanner, Jeremy, in 'Social Structure, Cultural Rationalization and Aesthetic Judgment in Classical Greece', in Rutter, N. Keith, and Sparkes, Brian A., eds, *Word and Image In Ancient Greece* (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2000), 183–205, fn 5.

138 The accounts for building the Parthenon are summarised, consolidating earlier work, by Pope, Spencer A., 'Financing and Design: The Development of the Parthenon Program and the Parthenon Building Accounts', in Holloway, R. Ross, ed., *Miscellanea Mediterranea* (Providence, R.I.: Center for Old World Archaeology and Art, Brown University, 2000), 61–69. He estimates, at page 62, that the extant fragments constitute less than ten per cent of what once existed, although there is no reason to think the lost parts ever included the information that Palagia thinks they ought to have recorded.

that has encouraged romantic-era notions of bursts of ‘creativity’, we have few immediately contemporary sources about the commissioning and selection of the designs; the arranging of the financing and the management structures; the gathering of the necessary resources, both human and material, some highly specialized that were only obtainable from outside Athens and Attica; and the processes of obtaining approvals, including decisions on financing, from the civic authorities, although they are plentiful for later centuries.

It was the institutions of the Athenian polis (‘the city’) that proposed, commissioned, voted the financing arrangements for, and drew up the specifications for the massive buildings. It was the institutions who negotiated and agreed the contracts, supervised the progress, decided whether or not to accept the modules of the work as and when they were completed and invoices presented for payment. And it was officers of the city’s institutions who audited the results both against the contractual design obligations and the budget, paying especial attention to the opportunities for theft of precious materials, including gold and ivory, and fraud by over-reporting of expenditures. Furthermore, it was the responsibility of the whole citizen body to scrutinize and, if they agreed, to approve the accounts when they were presented by these formal auditors, and arrange for decisions and accounts to be translated into durable marble in inscriptions that were viewable by citizens and others on the Acropolis, often set up alongside the buildings to which they referred. Although classical Athens was a limited democracy in the sense that political decisions were taken by citizens, it was also a highly regulated society with a large number of citizen office-holders given responsibility for a wide range of functions, from ensuring the security of the water supply to determining the fate of individual orphans. It may be unfair and unhistorical, as well as condescending and at odds with their conception and practice of democracy, to imply that the men of classical Athens who eagerly debated political questions that affected the civic actuality became mere stooges when proposals on the civic imaginary were under discussion.

There is still the problem of the gaps that exist in the available evidence. No example survives from the time of the wooden ‘white tablets’ in which proposals, meeting notices, drafts, minutes of meetings, and other temporary and intermediate records were written and read before

decisions were taken, although there are plentiful references to their existence and to their importance.¹³⁹ Nor is it only public documents that we lack. One of the *Characters* of Theophrastus, traditionally translated as 'The Shameless Man', turns up at court 'with a potful of papers in the breast of his cloak and satchels of note-books in his hands'.¹⁴⁰

Although, besides a body of historical, literary, and philosophical writings that have survived as a result of successive copying from manuscript to manuscript over hundreds of years, we have another corpus of over a hundred financial documents in the form of inscriptions on marble that were produced almost immediately after the events to which they relate, including many fragments concerning cash flows during the construction of the Parthenon and of other buildings and statues on the Acropolis. The fact that they are of contemporaneous manufacture may have tempted some into exaggerating their potential usefulness as evidence compared with other texts, although if they can be situated in their own rhetorical environment, including identifying their implied readerships and intended purposes, they may indeed be useful. Partly because certain conjectures about how the numerous lost lines and unreadable words might be restored have become accepted as authoritative, there has been a tendency to draw more inferences from them that is warranted.¹⁴¹ Although, in some cases but not in most others, the agencies of the Athenian state ordered that the results of decisions be inscribed, or re-inscribed, on permanent stone, such translations of a text from what was, to them as well as to us, a perishable to an imperishable material, only occurred at the very end of the deliberative and decision-taking processes. The inscriptions normally do not mention the considerations that informed the decisions nor choices not taken. Indeed, as part of their rhetorical function as public documents that

139 For example, Rhodes, P. J., *The Greek City States: A Source Book, Second Edition* (Cambridge: CUP, 2007), nos 190, 203, 211, <https://doi.org/10.1017/CBO9780511818035>. White tablets used as schoolbooks surviving from the third century CE are described in Hock, Ronald F., and O'Neil, Edward N., eds, *The Chreia and Ancient Rhetoric: Classroom Exercises* (Atlanta: Society of Biblical Literature, 2002), 56, 60, 62.

140 Theophrastus, Character 6, as translated by Jebb, except for my change from boxfull to potfull, which reflects the fact that documents in the form of scrolls were stored in jars.

141 Discussed by Foley and Stroud in 'Reappraisal of the Athena Promachos Accounts', 87–153, <https://doi.org/10.2972/hesperia.88.1.0087>.

record and publicly display what has already been decided and, in some cases, already carried out, inscriptions may imply a greater degree of prior consent than had actually occurred. Indeed, the loss of the contested and perhaps muddled processes of coming to the decisions that they record is likely to have itself been among the rhetorical purposes of the translation to durable stone, including especially to impute a unanimity to the decision and to bring the processes of consideration to a close.

Documents prepared for the purpose of *ex post facto* audit, although full of interest, cannot take us to the processes of making policy ['proairesis'] that begin with the aims ['tela'], and proceed through rational consideration ['phronesis'] to options, choices, decisions, and actions, as they were described most fully by Aristotle.¹⁴² They are of little help in recovering what Thucydides and others called the 'prophasis', usually translated as the cause, or the true or underlying cause, that retains within its etymology a notion that ancient hearers may have understood as something already spoken of beforehand, an underlying logic, still discoverable by investigation but that also requires the investigator to deal explicitly with the gaps.

There comes a point when so many qualifications have to be added to the modern terms such as 'art' and 'religion', and even 'inscriptions' and 'money' that the categories lose their explanatory usefulness. The risks are multiplied when, in an attempt to move from things to people, these modern categories are spun into other modern terms as 'the cultural life of the ancient city' as if that was easily, or usefully, separable from 'the political' or 'the religious', or even the 'social' or the 'economic'. In considering the society of classical Athens, it may therefore be a mistake to draw too sharp a distinction between the verbal and the visual technologies of inscription. When, for example, in his treatise on the government of a city, Aristotle mentions, almost as an aside, that reading and writing are necessary for conducting the city's business, we can be confident that he does not only mean the skills needed for reading the public marble inscriptions that displayed a record of what had already

142 *Eudemian Ethics*, ii, 9–11, in Kenny, Anthony, trans., *Aristotle: Eudemian Ethics, A New Translation* (Oxford: World's Classics, 2011), 30–36, <https://doi.org/10.1093/actrade/9780199586431.book.1>. I use Kenny's translation for the Greek word 'proairesis'. Although set in the context of a theory of ethics for an individual, since a city was personalized, it is reasonable, in my view, to apply the description to collective decision-taking.

been decided.¹⁴³ And when, in the same sentence, Aristotle remarks on the need for citizens to be able to understand visuality ('graphike') so as to be able to judge which works made by the craftsmen are to be preferred, we can be confident that he has in mind participating in the processes of consultation, of approval, and of decision-making on what should be displayed, not the passive 'aesthetic' pleasures that arose from looking at objects already manufactured such as an eighteenth-century collector and/or connoisseur of ancient 'art' might enjoy sitting in his armchair or showing off to his friends.¹⁴⁴ To draw a sharp distinction between the technologies of inscription and the technologies of performance and display, as exemplified by, for example, parades, processions, and ceremonies, may also be anachronistic. The apparently simple question 'why did the Athenians of the classical era decide to build the Parthenon in the form that it took?', on the surface simple, is therefore a case in which questions about the representative quality of the evidence and how it is categorized are inseparable from all attempts to re-enfranchise the classical Athenians from the contingencies of the intermediate centuries.

So how can we best set about recovering not only the immediate considerations that presented themselves to the institutions of the Athenian city in the classical era, but also address the problem of how, in the words of Francis Macdonald Cornford in his discussion of Thucydides, much of a conceptual nature was 'already inwrought into the very structure of the author's mind'.¹⁴⁵ Can we find ways not only of shedding modern assumptions and attributions but systematically recovering what Cornford called, 'the circumambient atmosphere of his place and time', the discursive environment? I have extended from an individual to a constituency, where, as an added advantage, the

143 Aristot. Pol. 8.1338a. The other normal benefits he mentions in this passage are, in modern terms, making business contracts, managing a household (oikos) and education. ὥσπερ τὰ γράμματα πρὸς χρηματισμὸν καὶ πρὸς οἰκονομίαν καὶ πρὸς μάθησιν καὶ πρὸς πολιτικὰς πράξεις πολλάς

144 *Ibid.* δοκεῖ δὲ καὶ γραφικὴ χρήσιμος εἶναι πρὸς τὸ κρίνειν τὰ τῶν τεχνιτῶν ἔργα κάλλιον

145 Cornford, Francis Macdonald, Fellow and Lecturer of Trinity College, Cambridge, *Thucydides Mythistoricus* (London: Arnold, 1907), vii. Although I quote Cornford's aims with approval, I do not wish to imply that he entirely succeeded in carrying them out. Indeed, some of his explanatory categories, as a man of his own time, such as 'the Oriental mind', exemplify the problem of presentism.

evidence has turned out to be plentiful. In using the word ‘discourse’ I aim to bring together the limits within which it was normal to debate public questions, to recover the publicly thinkable—or rather ‘publicly sayable’—in approved contexts, not to present an argument as a proposition.¹⁴⁶ Nor do I wish to imply that the design of the Parthenon followed sequentially from the discourse, although that is also likely to have happened, nor that the arguments offered were necessarily internally coherent. I suggest instead that we regard the Parthenon, along with the ritual ceremonial events that occurred in its vicinity, as components of a wider public discourse that mutually interacted with other cultural activities. What we can, I suggest, say with confidence is that there was a high degree of overlap between and among the actual producers and consumers, and that since the classical Parthenon was built, documents or speeches such as the experimental reconstruction offered here were not only prepared and delivered but, in the event, they proved to be persuasive.

Among the resources for building the experiment already alluded to in this chapter are the longevity of the highly unusual microclimate, the geographical sightlines, and the natural environment of weather, flora, and fauna, which immediately struck the classically educated at the time of the encounter in the later seventeenth century, although many of these features have altered since the later nineteenth century.¹⁴⁷ Is it possible, I now ask, to use the longevity of what I will call the ‘discursive environment’ as another resource that, in the world of ancient Athens persisted for centuries, not unchanged but with remarkable stability, surviving through the ups and downs of mere events, as enduring as the marble, and itself riding on the longevity of the natural environment?

Traditionally, in the western tradition, the main solution to the problem of inadequate and skewed evidence has been the historical novel, using invention to fill the gaps. However, thorough and

146 The extent to which written texts, including those of plays, were pre-censored or self-censored in accordance with budgetary allocation or private donations (‘liturgies’ a form of ‘charis’) or, as is most probable, by guild-enforced conventions, is not known. Compared with the practice of most states until recent times the limits appear to have been unusually wide. There were, however, general laws and customs, notably those against blasphemy or disrespecting the local gods and their images (‘asebeia’) that were unpredictably applied, of which the judicial putting to death of Socrates is the best known.

147 As discussed in St Clair, *WSIP*, Chapter 6, <https://doi.org/10.11647/obp.0136.06>.

scrupulous though some historical novelists may have been in their researches, modern fiction, with its traditions of concentrating on plot and individual character, is often open to the suspicion that, as a genre, it is more concerned with creating a literary object for modern readers than with explaining or exploring the strangeness of the past. It is a form of 'reception'.

Are there other, evidence-based ways of approaching the problem? Methods that enable the modern reader or scholar to engage critically with the components of the discourse? And can these components be employed to change the viewing station of the modern investigator from that of a detached, all-seeing, well-librariied, Olympian who looks downward and inward, of which there are many examples, to that of an involved fifth-century Athenian, trying to make sense of the situation in which he or she found himself or herself, with the knowledge and resources available at that time, looking upward and outward?¹⁴⁸

As an experiment, I offer two candidates. On the arguments (proaerthesis, prophasis, etc), we have an example of a problem that Thucydides solved by turning to the literary device of the Thucydidean speech, seldom now used, although one highly successful later example has been mentioned.¹⁴⁹ The main characteristics were described and justified by Thucydides himself in a general passage that explained his approach, of which the following is an extract:

148 Among notable works devoted to recovering the discursive environment, I mention Steinbock, *Social Memory*, <https://doi.org/10.3998/mpub.1897162>;

Swain, Simon, *Hellenism and Empire, Language, Classicism, and Power in the Greek World AD 50–250* (Oxford: Clarendon, 1996); and for political metaphors, Brock, Roger, *Greek political Imagery from Homer to Aristotle* (London; New York: Bloomsbury, 2013), <http://doi.org/10.5040/9781472555694>.

149 Notably the speech put into the mouths of the Ottoman authorities in Athens in 1821 composed by Andreas Staehelin, quoted and discussed in St Clair, *WStP*, Chapter 10, <https://doi.org/10.11647/obp.0136.10>, another occasion when, because the author faced the same problem, it was not only necessary but, in my view, it served its purpose well, and its veracity has since been validated by contemporaneous documentary evidence not available until recently. Another example: when it became clear that the tradition that Paul of Tarsus began his speech with an aggressive insult was the result of a concatenation of mistranslations, as noted in St Clair, *WStP*, Chapter 22, <https://doi.org/10.11647/obp.0136.22>, the Rev. E. F. Burr attempted to repair the damage by including an alternative speech to that reported in the Acts of the Apostles, by inventing the second speech that was trailed by the narrator of the Acts in the phrase 'We will hear thee again of this matter.' Burr, Rev. E. F., *Dio, the Athenian; or, From Olympus to Calvary* (New York: Phillips, 1880), 468.

With reference to the speeches in this history, some were delivered before the war began, others while it was going on; some I heard myself, others I got from various quarters; it was in all cases difficult to carry them word for word in one's memory, so my habit has been to make the speakers say what was in my opinion demanded of them by the various occasions, of course adhering as closely as possible to the general sense of what they really said.¹⁵⁰

Closely related to the Thucydidean speech is the Thucydidean letter, a written report sent by an army commander to be read aloud to the Assembly by an official clerk, the conventions of which are the same.¹⁵¹ Xenophon, who wrote a continuation of the account of the war by Thucydides, did not compose a fully-formed Thucydidean speech even on occasions that cried out for such a presentation, but soon lapsed into chronicling.¹⁵² The *Plataicus*, a speech that shares many of the characteristics of the genre, is included among the surviving works of Isocrates.¹⁵³ Like the speeches by Thucydides, it has already been polished, and to an extent made predictable, and although purporting to be a historiographical contribution to understanding the recent past, in this case events of the 370s, as a composition it has already taken on some of the characteristics of a rhetorical exercise, as will be discussed in the experiment in Chapter 5.

As practised by Thucydides, the Thucydidean speech, as was noticed by Christopher Pelling in his critique of the form, allowed on occasions

150 Thuc. 1.22. There are elements of the conventions of a Thucydidean speech in the work of his predecessor Herodotus, notably the speeches attributed to Xerxes and members of the Achmaenid leadership as they considered their strategy towards Greece, and towards Athens in particular, presented by Herodotus in book 7 of his *Histories*. Like those of Thucydides, they are primarily addressed to a later readership and include remarks such as the inability of the Hellenes to combine that were still being quoted by Ottoman commanders during the Greek Revolution and by the authors of guides to Greece intended for British soldiers in 1945. See also his account of the debates before the battle of Salamis, in book 8. Nowhere is the convention explicitly justified as a historiographical practice. It was also adopted by authors influenced by Thucydides, for example, in the speech attributed to the Rhodians presented by Polybius, *Plb.* 21.23.

151 For example the letter sent by Nikias from Sicily reported by Thucydides at Thuc. 7.10. The reciter is called ὁ γραμματεὺς ὁ τῆς πόλεως, implying that there were others.

152 For example on the occasion in 408 when representatives of Greek cities conferred with the Great King of Persia, where his readers are only offered a plain chronicle of names. Among the few exceptions are Xen. *Hell.* 1.4.13–17; and Xen. *Hell.* 1.6.5.

153 Isoc. 14.

for a degree of prescience to be displayed that, even if it was not likely to have been available to the speaker, was useful to the reader.¹⁵⁴ And if, as Pelling noted, the arguments can, on occasion, be exposed as ‘contradictory or self-masking’, that too is part of a dialogic form that readers at the time were familiar with, and that they might have noticed and perhaps discounted.¹⁵⁵ Thucydides himself evidently had in mind a readership that went beyond his contemporary fellow Athenians, as when, for example, he explains the circumstances of a funeral oration that most such readers could have been expected to be familiar with, and when, on occasion, he recounts the mythic history that was deployed by his speakers. On at least one occasion too, the speakers admit that, under the pressure of events, they stretch the truth in hopes of persuading their opponents.¹⁵⁶ Since it is not normal for a magician to reveal the secrets of his tricks, we may have another example here of how Thucydides was educating his readership not only in the arts of rhetoric, but in how to recognize them, and if necessary, to make the necessary offsets.

The occasion for the experiment that I have chosen relates directly to the question of why the classical Parthenon was built, and why it took the form that it did. Each year Commissioners (‘epistatai’) were elected by lot by the Assembly (‘demos’) to supervise the rebuilding of the sacred places destroyed by the Persian army in 480/479 BCE, and were required to report on their progress. The secretaries of the Commission, with their supporting clerical staff, were formally tasked with the duties of being the official remembrancers and keepers of archives. It also appears to have been part of their duty to present the reports of the Commissions they served in oral form, many citizens not being able to receive them in any other way. They were therefore also professional reciters who had no responsibility for the text other than to convert it faithfully from words into oral performance.¹⁵⁷ Since it is recorded that these officials were elected, not chosen by lot, their office

154 Pelling, Christopher, *Literary Texts and the Greek Historian* (London: Routledge, 2000), 118.

155 The phrase used by Pelling, 115.

156 Notably in Thuc. 5.90 where the Melians are arguing for their lives, to be discussed further in Chapter 2.

157 Discussed by Rhodes 220, from [Aristotle] *Ath. Pol.* 54, v. χειροτονεῖ δὲ καὶ ὁ δῆμος γραμματεῖα, τὸν ἀναγνώσκοντα αὐτῷ καὶ τῇ βουλῇ, καὶ οὗτος οὐδενός ἐστι κύριος ἀλλ’ ἢ τοῦ ἀναγνῶναι.

was amongst a handful, another being the superintendent of the water supply, that, in the democracy, were regarded as requiring professional expertise. It was reported by Thucydides that, when Pericles delivered his Funeral Oration, he stood on a raised platform so that as many people as possible could hear, but whether this was a common practice with speeches delivered on other less formal occasions is not recorded.¹⁵⁸ Although the Greek word, 'grammateus' is often translated as 'scribe', for the present purpose I will use the word 'reciter'. It is conceivable that the reciters were drawn from the professional actors in the Athenian drama for which similar qualities of voice were needed.

The speeches, we can be confident, also existed in part at least in written form, probably on papyrus, not necessarily as a continuous text but in some material form from which the professional reciter could enact and enunciate an authoritative text. The thoughts, arguments, and policy recommendations, we can therefore say, travelled from the minds of the authors of the proposals to the materiality of writing, and then, back through the orality of delivery and discussion, to the minds of the decision takers. From them, it was passed by a mixture of orality and writing, as in contracts, to those who executed the work, with the thoughts not taking the form of durable material evidence until it was ordered that decisions and financial accounts should be inscribed on stone for public display in a prominent place.

The orally-delivered report of the Commissioners on the progress of the rebuilding was accompanied at around the same time by a financial statement made by the Council ('boule') also addressed to the Assembly on the budget that they proposed for the forthcoming year, and that followed a similar transmission from oral, through material, back to oral, and in some cases, back again to fixed material. As with the policy decisions, so with the financial options and choices too. Although we can readily accept that ancient Athens depended less on writing than some other societies, and that the arts of memory were taught and successfully practised, it would have been hard, even if there had not been plentiful evidence to the contrary, to believe that complex matters that involved the cooperation of the many dozens of citizens who served on the commissions, as well as the hundreds more who took oral delivery of the reports and who came to collective decisions that were

158 Thuc. 2.34.8. Modern visual presentations usually omit this feature.

then passed to thousands of agents to implement, could have occurred without the help of numerous written documents. These would have included successive drafts, and other forms of demonstration such as diagrams ('paradeigmata') that include within themselves notions of showing to others. And there is plentiful scattered evidence that this is indeed how public business was transacted in a culture that was literate to an extent difficult to measure, as well as oral and performative, both in the sense of the viewing of dramatic and sporting performances and in the sense of citizens and others performing in front of one another in festivals and in partly-scripted ceremonies, such as occurred on and around the Acropolis. Some would have taken place in the vicinity of the Parthenon and of the other public sacred buildings, and of the stories that were displayed upon them.

In Chapter 2, I offer my suggestion for what the Commissioners for the rebuilding of the post-480 Acropolis might have said to the Assembly in one of their annual reports prepared during the later fifth century.¹⁵⁹ What I offer is not a 'competition piece', to use the term adopted by Thucydides in defending his own Thucydidean speeches, in a passage in which he dismissed consumerist writing that aimed to please only on the occasion.¹⁶⁰ Like Thucydides, I only present claims that can be 'evidenced' ('tekmaironomenos'), either directly or by reasonable inference.¹⁶¹

159 According to the author of the Ath. Pol, Fragment 50, writing later, there were 'ten Commissioners for Repairs of Temples, elected by lot, who receive a sum of thirty minas from the Receivers-General, and therewith carry out the most necessary repairs in the temples.' But this may be a reference to commissioners responsible for the upkeep of buildings already completed, not those given the responsibility for preparing proposals for the first rebuilding and for seeing them through.

160 ὥφελίμα κρίνειν αὐτὰ ἀρκούντως ἔξει. κτήμα τε ἐς αἰεὶ μᾶλλον ἢ ἀγώνισμα ἐς τὸ παραχρῆμα ἀκούειν ζύγκεται. Thuc 1.22. The part of Thucydides's claim that he wanted his work to be 'a possession for ever' has frequently been interpreted as an assertion that he was writing a work of wisdom that would be perennially true, constructing him as a boastful prophet or romantic self-proclaimed seer. Put in its linguistic and discursive context, however, he was merely, if merely is not too ungenerous a word, distancing himself from those who resorted to the arts of rhetoric to mislead audiences. In describing his history as a 'useful' 'possession for ever', he was making a more limited claim that his work should be treated as a material capital item, like a farm, that would yield benefits over time, not as a delivered speech that is consumed as it occurs. My experiment in composing a rhetorical exercise of the kind from which Thucydides distances himself is in Chapter 5.

161 The crucial role of evidence in this sense is a theme of Euripides's play, the *Ion*, to be discussed in Chapter 3.

For the experiment, Tyche has provided an invaluable resource that enables an integration between the physical and the discursive to be attempted. Not only were the geophysical characteristics of Athens, (mild dry microclimate, rocky soil, shortage of potable water and so on) remarkably stable from antiquity to the long eighteenth century, but the discursive environment, including the storyscapes and metaphors that, to an extent derived from the geophysical, persisted, in essentials unchanged except at the margin, for around five hundred years after the Parthenon was first conceived of and brought into use. I have sometimes referred to later writings that illustrate the durability of the conventions.¹⁶²

The aim of the experiment is not to champion one form of presentation over another, such as elevating the scientific above the mythic, or to revive schools of thought that dismissed myth as an absurd and barbaric frontier between the civilized and the primitive mind.¹⁶³ It is an attempt to recover a discursive environment in which myth was frequently deployed alongside other forms of explanation and techniques of persuasion. There have, of course, been others who have suggested that approaches based on western notions of aesthetics or semiotics, which assume that images are ways of encoding reality in accordance with conventions, are inadequate for understanding the world view prevalent in classical Athens. Tonio Hölscher, for example, has argued that such approaches exaggerate the extent to which ‘images’ can exist outside the social and temporal, and, we may add, the viewing contexts and consumption genres for which they were commissioned and made in classical Athens, rather than displaying a conceptual framework within whose presented rhetorics real human beings were encouraged to live their lives.¹⁶⁴ But I know of no attempt to recover the strangeness of that world view by describing it from within.

In calling the composition ‘Thucydidean’, I allude to the conventions of the reconstructed speeches as employed by Thucydides and other ancient authors, with no attempt to imitate his individual style, ideology,

162 I am grateful to Sarah Moroson for encouraging me to pursue this idea and for her comments on an early draft.

163 Many examples are of such comments are given by Detienne, Marcel, *L'invention de la mythologie* ([Paris]: Gallimard, 1981).

164 Notably, for example, Hölscher, Tonio, *Visual Power in Ancient Greece and Rome: Between Art and Social Reality* (Oakland, California: University of California Press, 2018), 12, <https://doi.org/10.1525/california/9780520294936.001.0001>.

or assumptions, including his frequent resort to personal motivation as explanation, which are irrelevant to the experiment. Instead the discourse employed words and metaphors derived from making the city straight again or righting a ship that has keeled over. For example, in the peroration to speech put into the mouth of Nikias by Thucydides, where the general urges his soldiers to give up the struggle against Syracuse and concentrate on making the great power straight again, he repeats the commonplace that it is men who make a city great, not walls or warships.¹⁶⁵ The words, which imply that disasters are to be expected, reaffirm that the city, through its men, is always capable of renewing itself through its own efforts, itself a constant of the discursive environment.

In the footnotes I have noted the evidence along with comments, so giving choices to my potential readers on the extent to which they want to follow up particular sentences. The evidence offered has, in many cases, been selected from texts that present themselves as expressions of mainstream opinion, notably the pieces of conventional wisdom known as 'chreia', for example by the choruses in the tragic drama, and others deployed by many authors of the time, sometimes signalled by phrases such as, for example, 'as the saying goes', some of which appear to have been deliberately invented in order to be brought into circulation as co-opting rhetorical devices. The songs of the choruses in surviving plays and fragments of plays often supply commentaries from the point of view of mainstream observers. Speeches attributed to gods and heroes frequently take the form of statements about essential Athenianness. The philosophical dialogues of Plato and others, although they often offer novel, non-mainstream, ideas, present themselves as composed within a range of what was reasonably thinkable that are put forward in the dialogues in order to be queried and their inadequacies exposed. In statements of the mainstream, highly speculative ideas are sometimes introduced within a convention of 'some say ... but I tell you'. The choice and deployment of this evidence is not, therefore, reverse-engineered from a known result, but as an experiment that, I claim, can yield new insights.

165 'οἱ Ἀθηναῖοι τὴν μεγάλην δύναμιν τῆς πόλεως καίπερ πεπτωκυῖαν ἐπανορθώσοντες: ἄνδρες γὰρ πόλις, καὶ οὐ τεῖχη οὐδὲ νῆες ἀνδρῶν κεναί.' Thuc. 7 77.

Other pieces of evidence that are used in the footnotes are taken from other works and fragments including speeches, plays, and dialogues, and the corpus of works written by Plato including those whose authenticity may be in doubt. Although these are much studied as windows into the minds and ideas of Socrates and Plato, they remain, as literary compositions, under the control of the author or compiler and, I suggest, without in any way disparaging their value, always serve the author's rhetorical purposes of hoping to convince. Since these purposes include limiting the boundaries of a debate to what would be regarded as acceptable limits by the audience or readership, they are of great value in attempting to recover the mainstream. At the risk of labouring the obvious, I refer throughout to 'a character in ...', a distinction that the classical Athenians did not themselves always observe, with many common sayings regarded as rhetorically useful attributed to famous men and women, and sentiments put into the mouths of characters in dialogues and dramas, whose purpose was to set out an argument being attributed to the authors of the compositions. Euripides especially, whose compositions contain many pithy sentences (Latin 'sententiae') that were usually answered by another character was often a victim of this unfairness.

In using the word 'discourse' I aim to set out the limits within which it was normal to debate public questions, to recover the thinkable, not to present an argument as a proposition. I therefore note alternative thinkables in the footnotes. Nor do I wish to imply that the design of the Parthenon followed sequentially from the construction of the discourse, although that is also likely to have happened, nor that the arguments offered were necessarily internally coherent. I suggest instead that we regard the Parthenon, along with the ritual ceremonial events that occurred in its vicinity, as components of a wider public discourse that mutually interacted with other components, just as the institutions of politics interacted with those of the drama. What we can say with confidence is that there was a high degree of overlap among the actual producers and consumers, and that since the classical Parthenon was in fact built, documents or speeches such as the reconstruction offered here were not only prepared but, in the event, proved to be persuasive.

The composition offered is a reconstruction of a speech delivered to the Assembly of the People by the Commissioners responsible for the

rebuilding programme in the fifth and fourth centuries. Like the many proposed reconstructions of the physical Parthenon, this reconstruction of the discursive environment is assembled from scattered pieces of evidence as an experiment in recovering the mainstream mentalities, including the worldview, within whose assumptions and conventions the proposals to build the Parthenon were developed, discussed, approved, and carried into effect. The evidence turns out to be plentiful and since the discursive environment, like the climatic, was, to a large extent, consistent over centuries, it provides a stronger defence against unintended and unconscious presentisms than traditional approaches that depend upon the modern investigator looking in from the outside. Although the speech offers a sustained and apparently coherent argument, it has been drafted in modular form so that passages can be dropped if they are not regarded as sufficiently well evidenced without causing the rest of the edifice to collapse. It also permits those who may wish to take the experiment further, to add or substitute other modules if they choose.

The construction of the Parthenon as a building was said by Plutarch, writing more than half a millennium later, to have been carried out with remarkable speed between 447 and 432, a remark he is likely to have taken from authoritative authors who wrote earlier.¹⁶⁶ However, the period of time before the actual work could begin that was needed for generating ideas and options, for considering respective merits, for taking decisions, and for arranging for the skills, materials, and other real resources to be found, assembled, contracted for, and put in place at the required times, is likely to have occupied several years before 447. Those with experience of planning and executing large-scale building works have realized that it was only because much preparatory work had been done on the earlier phases of the project that the actual construction work was carried out so speedily. But it is only as a result of the researches carried out on the site during the current conservation and restoration programme that we know the extent to which the classical-era Parthenon used marble that had already been selected and cut in the quarries, transported to Athens, and made ready for the building of the so-called Pre-Parthenon, whose construction was already well advanced at the time of the Persian

166 Plut. Per. 13.7.

sack of 479/480; we can therefore appreciate the extent to which the huge building had been planned, designed, approved, and the work started years before, although with later modifications.¹⁶⁷

From the surviving fragments of various accounts inscribed on marble, it appears that there was normally an annual commission of five 'epistatai' (ἐπίσταται) who supervised the work on a particular building during construction.¹⁶⁸ The commissioners who were responsible for the earlier processes of drawing up the proposals in writing and for securing the financing were known as 'suggrapheis' (συγγραφείς), the same word as was used to describe writers now called 'historians', including Thucydides, although the main ancient connotation of the word may have been to their other function as record-keepers.¹⁶⁹

What purports to be a verbatim draft of a resolution that had to be put before the Assembly of the Demos for approval when there was a proposal to erect a statue in honour of an individual is given by Lucian in

167 Discussed by Korres, Manolis, 'Topographic Examination of the Acropolis at Athens', *Brewminate*, 1 June 2017, <https://brewminate.com/topographic-examination-of-the-acropolis-at-athens/>.

168 Burford, Alison, *The Greek Temple Builders at Epidauros, A Social and Economic Study of Building in the Asklepien Sanctuary, During the Fourth and Early Third Centuries B.C.* (Liverpool: Liverpool UP, 1969), 24. There also appear to have been commissioners for a whole site. An example from c. 450 from Eleusis is noted by Rous, Sarah A., *Reset in Stone: Memory and Reuse in Ancient Athens* (Madison: University of Wisconsin Press, 2019).

169 As discussed by Boersma, John S., *Athenian Building Policy from 561/0 to 405/4 B.C.* (Groningen: Wolters-Noordhoff, 1970), 4. The use of the same word to cover both forward-looking and backward-looking discourses suggests that the opening words of Thucydides's work, Θουκυδίδης Ἀθηναῖος ξυνέγραψε τὸν πόλεμον τῶν Πελοποννησίων καὶ Ἀθηναίων, signalled from the start that he intended to cover both, as part of his aim of being 'useful', and that for this purpose his Thucydidean speeches were to be at least as useful as his narratives of events. In expressing his hope later in his introduction that his work will be judged to be 'a benefit', Thucydides turns to another word for useful, possibly because in the previous section on the emergence from brutishness he has made plentiful use of the other more commonly used words, 'chrestos' and its cognates, including especially 'chremata', as useful things, including forms of money, and he did not want to confuse his readers. The newly introduced word 'ophelima' is more modest, as befits the polite style of Thucydides, but leaves little doubt that the purpose of his history is to be useful to his contemporaries for the foreseeable future, which he expected to be long (as indeed the Parthenon was planned to last in its then roles) not for a remote posterity. ὠφέλιμα κρίνειν αὐτὰ ἀρκούντως ἔξει. Thuc. 1.22. In this regard Thucydides differed from his predecessor Herodotus, whose stated aim in his opening words, besides his claimed wish to celebrate and memorialize great deeds, was to record the results of his inquiry into what happened and why, a claim whose sincerity was disputed in ancient times as discussed in Chapter 4.

his Timon.¹⁷⁰ Although included in a work written centuries later, which may be more rhetorical exercise than historical chronicle, the transcribed document may nevertheless preserve traditional formulae about the separate branches of the civic government whose consent was needed. Besides the Council and the Demos, it mentions those responsible for organizing a festival, as well as the ‘tribes’ and the ‘demes’.¹⁷¹

The text is presented as it might have been compiled and edited later by a historian who, like Thucydides, was able to take account of documents now lost as well as of personal recollections by himself and others, and who, in order to avoid repetition, has condensed a number of speeches by cohorts of *epistatai* and *suggrapheis* into a single text attributed to ‘the Commissioners’. As a result, the composition preserves indications of how the speech was received when delivered orally to an occasionally rumbustious live audience, such as might have been added by an ancient scholiast. Spoken in literary Attic Greek by a professional reciter on one of the many occasions during the planning and approvals processes in the fifth century BCE, it follows the conventions of polite rhetoric.

In Chapters 3 and 4, I revert to the normal authorial voice looking in to discuss how the Parthenon was regarded and used in classical Athens, making use of the results of the experiment, some of which comfortably match the evidence, but also others which are surprising and which help to understand which stories in stone, metal, paint, and other materials were presented on the building and why, including a suggestion for answering a three-hundred-year old question.

My experiment with a Thucydidean speech and its lessons is then followed, as Chapter 5, by another experiment in looking out, an attempt to revive and mobilize another ancient invention that was also used as a means of assembling complex arguments, namely, the ‘rhetorical discourse’, a genre that was taught, practised, and theorized in Athens and elsewhere over hundreds of years. As genres, both the Thucydidean speech and the rhetorical discourse explicitly look both backwards and

170 Luc. Tim. 50. The genre of the ‘rhetorical exercise’, much practised in ancient Greece for many centuries, with my experiment in reconstructing an actual example, is discussed in Chapter 5.

171 ‘ἔτι δὲ καὶ ψηφίσματα γράφων καὶ συμβουλευόντων καὶ στρατηγῶν οὐ μικρά ὠφέλησε τὴν πόλιν ἐπὶ τούτοις ἅπασιν δεδόχθω τῇ βουλῇ καὶ τῷ δήμῳ καὶ τῇ Ἡλιαίᾳ καὶ ταῖς φυλαῖς καὶ τοῖς δήμοις ἰδίᾳ καὶ κοινῇ ...’ Luc. Tim. 51.

forwards in time, positioning their implied readership in a specific, unrepeatable, moment. In modern terms, when read together, the two historiographical forms of writing, here revived, provide the materials for piecing together both an ex-ante appraisal and an ex-post evaluation.

As non-professionals, both the Commissioners and the author of the rhetorical discourse may have insufficiently disguised their own rhetorical strategies, as was the universal advice given in ancient times by those who taught the arts of persuasion. They may also have alienated their audience by their lumbering, strained, and clichéd attempts to show off their knowledge and display their wit.

Even for a straightforward translation of the Thucydidean speeches of Thucydides into English, it is hard to avoid what a Victorian scholar called the 'portly pedantry of Bloomfield, the grotesque likeness of Hobbes, the hideous fidelity of Dale, and the slipshod paraphrase of Crawley', the 'pretentious bigotry of Colonel Mure'.¹⁷² The Commissioners have not always have been successful in limiting the lavishness of antithesis 'which is the more remarkable in one who lay under no temptation to redeem poverty of thought by rhetorical embellishment'.¹⁷³ I would hope however that, for the modern reader, their very clumsiness may itself be of value.

172 Comments by Wilkins, Henry Musgrave, M.A., Fellow of Merton College, Oxford, *Speeches from Thucydides Third Edition Revised and Corrected* (London: Longman, 1881), xiii, xvii.

173 *Ibid.*