

WILLIAM ST CLAIR



THE CLASSICAL PARTHENON

Recovering the Strangeness of the
Ancient World



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

4. A New Answer to an Old Question

As for the frieze of the Parthenon, what experiences, I now ask, were offered to the ancient viewers when the building was first brought into use? What events and stories were pictured and commended? How, and in which contexts, were they encountered? What expectations did the men, women, and children of that time bring to the experiences? What emerges if we temporarily throw off the mind-forged manacles of western categories, traditions, and academic disciplines, and look instead for answers that fit comfortably, and even predictably, into the discursive and rhetorical environment?

The frieze presents many of the standard components of ancient Greek festival processions as described by ancient authors and pictured on ancient objects. Large numbers of men, women, and children are shown as coming together for an occasion that will involve the ritual slaughter of cattle and sheep, whose meat, the viewers of the composition will know, will be used in ritual feasting. Indeed, the fact that only large and highly prized animals are pictured, rather than the pigs, rabbits, and fowls that were more commonly used in real festivals, itself marks the pictured event as special. The bones and other inedible body parts of the slaughtered animals will, in the fiction as in real life, be ritually burned, in ways that ensure that the fire, the smoke, and the smells, including some specially contrived with odorous substances added to the fire, catch the attention of people within a wide local periphery. The participants in an actual festival were being invited by the frieze to imagine a fictional festival.

At many actual festivals, the participants were not performing for an audience external to themselves like actors in a drama, but within in sight of one another for long periods, with all the pressures to conform,

at least outwardly, that such practices bring about, and that in classical Athens were among their publicly acknowledged purposes.¹ It is however unlikely that it was always possible, however eagerly and sincerely the participants may have wished to transport themselves into an alterative immaterial world, that they could forget or ignore the material setting. Many rituals required long-term planning and careful organisation on the day, which inescapably entered the conscious minds of participants during the events as well as in the assembling and dispersing, before and after. Many ancient Athenians, we can also be certain, knew that what was presented to them had passed through all the stages of approval that marked the formal acceptance of the completed work by the client who commissioned it: the city of Athens through its institutions. Indeed, many of the citizens had personally participated in these processes, with changing cohorts of citizens sharing a responsibility for the vision of the imagined city that was displayed and commended.

Individuals, and members of constituencies at a community-building festival, might display and perform their acceptance, but to suggest that they all always believed in what was ritually spoken and sung, or followed the advice of the appointed or elected officials, would be to risk confusing the implied with the historic viewer or assuming that the rhetoric was always successful in persuading those who received it. Such an approach also ignores or downplays the plentiful evidence for playing along, for scepticism, and for resistance, including the ever-present risk of the theft of valuables, despite the heavy penalties. What we can say with confidence is that participants knew that what they were offered, including the stories presented and the desired responses, had been officially approved and commended by the institutions of the city. As a society marked by a keen sense of rhetoric, it had little need for the modern concept of 'propaganda', often assumed to be a deception of those who receive it rather than as a reassurance to would-be conformists that what was offered had been officially 'deemed' to be true or right.²

1 As noted in the discussion of the *Ion* in Chapter 3.

2 As in many other societies that put a high value on outward conformity, including the propaganda companies overtly attached to the invading German army in 1941 as noted in St Clair, William, *Who Saved the Parthenon? A New History of the Acropolis Before, During and After the Greek Revolution* (Cambridge: Open Book Publishers, 2022) [hereafter *WStP*], <https://doi.org/10.11647/OBP.0136>, Chapter 23, <https://doi.org/10.11647/obp.0136.23>.

On the Parthenon frieze, young women and men, seldom differentiated as individuals, are presented as carrying what appear to be containers of food and drink that, we can be confident, will also be consumed by the participants pictured in the composition in the forthcoming feasting. Others are leading large animals, notably much-prized heavy cattle and sheep, but no day-to-day items, such as rabbits or fowls, to be slaughtered in a ritual sacrifice. As part of such rituals, a share was invariably scattered or poured on to the ground as offerings to the gods, and although small as a proportion, the rituals themselves were sufficiently frequent to affect the local ecosystem of the Acropolis site and how it appeared both to participants and to observers within the local periphery. Indeed, the flocking birds were as much part of the Acropolis festival experience as the buildings and the people.³

The events shown are pictured as a series of episodes in broadly chronological order, like frozen frames in a film, that the viewers experienced either individually, or at the group level. They are guided by leaders ('marshals') who are directing the events and whose presence within the composition itself both helps viewers to see the images episodically and gives silent advice on what to expect. If a visitor or member of a festival procession attempted to see the whole frieze in chronological order, he or she would have had to break ranks and disrupt the implied script of a united community arriving at its ritual culmination.

When the marble blocks are rearranged in a gallery or in a book of photographs, the sense of encountering a succession of episodes is lost, and attempts to understand the ancient experience are made harder. However, even with the complete loss of large sections of the frieze, the export of many sections, the almost total disappearance of the colour and the metal, and the changes brought about by weathering, by casual damage, and, in the case of most of the pieces at present entrusted to the care of the British Museum trustees, by deliberate mutilation and whitening, there remain markers that, when situated within the discursive environment, can help to reduce the obstacles

3 As implied by the character of Teiresias in the *Antigone* of Sophocles Soph. Ant. 1000. The presence of the birds as part of the ecology and human experience of large sacralised sites was useful to the 'priests' who delivered advice based on observing them, as in this example. The fuller example of the *Ion* of Euripides is discussed later in the chapter.

to understanding brought about by the many modern anachronistic intrusions into the strangeness.

The frieze was only comprehensible as a totality if the ancient viewers walked round the whole building. If they did so, negotiating any internal walls, gates, and guards, they would have had to choose whether to try to follow with their eyes the part of the procession that moved eastwards along the north side of the building or, alternatively, the other part of the procession moving in the same direction along the south side. Unless he or she doubled back after seeing one section and then started again, he or she would have had to view one of the two as moving in reverse. But however predisposed an ancient viewer might have been to regard the Parthenon frieze as an aid to imagining the invisible, it is hard to envisage anyone, even in a festival context, being so rapturously transported by the magnetic force running through the bodies of the hand-linked crowds as to be unaware that they were in a setting invented by human decisions.⁴

And here we encounter a problem. Those who have studied the sculptural components as objects to be subjected to stylistic analysis have found themselves withholding some of their usual admiration, describing the frieze, for example, as 'decorative', 'ornamental', 'repetitive', 'monotonous'.⁵ If, however, we regard the ancient viewer as at least an equal partner in the cognitive transaction with the ancient producer, we can see that it would have suited parties of ancient processioners and their guides to be able to halt simultaneously from time to time before an image of an episode.⁶ In ancient times, however, in sharp contrast with the easily visible pediments and metopes, it was hard for anyone looking up from ground level to see the frieze at all, let alone comprehend it as a unified composition. Indeed, only if viewers kept close to the steps of the building, or entered the tight Parthenon colonnade (assuming they were permitted to do so) and then stood still, could they make out much of the composition at all. Insofar as they

4 The metaphor of the magnet that was used by both Euripides and Plato was noted in Chapter 2.

5 For example, Ridgway, Brunilde S., 'Notes on the Development of the Greek Frieze' in *Hesperia*, Vol. 35 (2) (April 1966), 188–204.

6 In the fictional procession at Delphi described by Heliodorus, the processioners divide into two equal groups who dance and sing their way along both sides of the temple and come together again at the far end. That temple had no frieze.

were able to follow the frieze through the columns, it was as a series of episodes. The extraordinarily steep angle, around forty degrees, that any ancient viewer would have had to contend with in looking up at any section of the frieze can be seen from Figure 4.1.

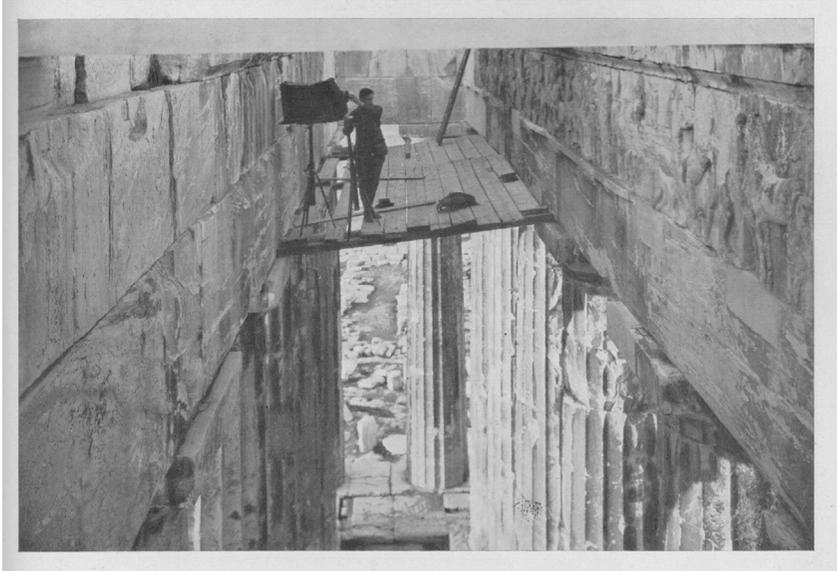


Figure 4.1. Walter Hege photographing the west frieze of the Parthenon, c. 1929.⁷

7 *Atlantis*, Heft 4, April 1930, 247. Private collection. The photographs of the frieze taken by Hege were published in a series of books that were published round the world, noted in the Bibliography. Since, in Hege's time, the Parthenon had lost its roof and the frieze was open to downward light, the eye-level photographs that he produced, which show the shadows in the wrong places, introduced another distortion compared with ancient times. A discussion of the ancient sightlines, with photographs from the Parthenon replica in Basel, although without any attempt to restore colour or metal or the other markers of identity such as head-pieces and bracelets now lost, was offered by Stillwell, Richard, 'The Panathenaic Frieze' in *Hesperia*, Vol. 38 (2) (Apr.–Jun., 1969), 231–241. Hege's style is discussed with biographical information by Harder, Matthias, *Walter Hege und Herbert List, Griechische Tempelarchitektur in photographischer Inszenierung* (Berlin: Reimer, 2003). The French photographer Frédéric Boissonas was allowed to erect ladders sixty or seventy feet long, from the top of which he made eye-level photographs from a few feet away, apparently also unaware that he was being unfair to the ancient viewers and to the ancient designers and craftsmen who had taken measures to present the frieze as it was seen from the ground. A photograph of him on his ladder is reproduced in Papageorgiou-Venetas, Αθήνα, ένα όραμα του Κλασικισμού (Athens: Kapon, 2001), 127.

A photograph taken in 1900, one of the first to show the portion of the frieze on the building, as shown as Figure 4.2, gives an indication of the scale of the frieze when seen close up.



Figure 4.2. Looking at the west frieze in 1900. Photograph.⁸

It was this section of the Parthenon frieze, within the west porch, that the agents of Lord Elgin had been ordered to leave on the building by the Ottoman vizierial letter ('firman') sent at the instigation of the French Ambassador Brune, and that, as a result, now gives us and

8 Bremond, Henri, de L'Académie française, *Le charme d'Athènes* (Paris: Pour la Société des Médecins Bibliophiles, 1924), frontispiece. The photograph was taken by a French student who must have positioned himself on a viewing station even higher on the building. The scaffolding had been hurriedly erected a few years earlier when the last section of building still standing was discovered on the verge of collapse as discussed in St Clair, *WSIP*, Chapter 21, <https://doi.org/10.11647/obp.0136.21>. The figures shown are the French Academician, Henri Bremond, a former member of the Roman Catholic order of Jesuits, and author of numerous books on religion in France, and Maurice Barrès, another well-known author of the time, part of a group who preferred Sparta.

future generations the best chance we have of understanding the ancient experience.⁹

At the end of the twentieth century, when the air pollution and acid rain in Athens were severe, it was decided to bring the blocks of the west frieze indoors, replacing them with replicas. To the surprise of many, although damage had been done to the surfaces, the deposits of soot of recent times resting on older deposits had, to an extent, not only acted as a shield against erosion but brought out the sharpness of the carving, as shown in Figure 4.3.



Figure 4.3. The surface of part of the west frieze before the removal of the surface deposits. Photograph c. 1999.¹⁰

It is possible that, in ancient times, the oily deposits from the smoke of innumerable acts of burning the non-edible parts of sacrificial animals improved visibility from ground level. The removal of the surface deposits also showed how little the surface had deteriorated over

⁹ As discussed with new archival information in Appendix A of St Clair, *WStP*, <https://doi.org/10.11647/obp.0136>.

¹⁰ Reproduced by courtesy of the Greek Ministry of Culture.

the centuries. And it provided further proof that the frieze had been coloured, as shown in Figure 4.4.



Figure 4.4. The surface of part of the west frieze after the removal of the surface deposits, showing the remains of bright blue mineral. Photograph c. 1999.¹¹

Some modern writers, aware of the difficulties faced by real ancient viewers looking up at a sharp angle, have suggested that it is ‘a mistake’ to think in such terms. Joan Breton Connelly, for example, has claimed that the intended and implied viewer was ‘Athena, not the human visitors’, giving renewed currency to what others had already suggested.¹² However, there is little or nothing in the ancient authors or in the wider discursive environment to support this suggestion. On

¹¹ Reproduced by courtesy of the Greek Ministry of Culture.

¹² 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), 166. Others in modern times who have taken this view include Sokratis Mavrommatis: ‘the certainty that the frieze served a higher purpose than to impress mortals’ in Delivorrias, Angelos, and Mavrommatis, Sokrates, *The Parthenon Frieze, Problems, Challenges, Interpretations* (Athens: Melissa and Benaki, 2004). A translation into English by Alexandra Doumas of the Greek edition of 2004. Unnumbered preliminary pages, and 17. Another example is cited by Osborne, R. G., ‘The viewing and obscuring of the Parthenon frieze’ in *Journal of Hellenic Studies*, Vol.

the contrary, with the Parthenon, as with other buildings, the ancient designers and the craftsmen that they employed were evidently aware of the need to help human viewers to understand the compositions as they were visually encountered at the steep angle.

Nor was the fact that offsets were routinely designed into buildings a secret or a guild secret. As ‘the stranger from Elea’, a character in the Platonic dialogue, *The Sophist*, points out, if the makers of visual images reproduced the true proportions: ‘the upper parts, you know, would seem smaller and the lower parts larger than they ought, because we see the former from a distance, the latter from near at hand’.¹³ Since the character of the stranger, who is introduced as an educated philosopher, presents his point as something well known, we can be confident that knowledge about offsetting from the orthogonal was routine and expected. Indeed, without such an understanding, the changing cohorts of Athenian citizens who served on the various commissions, including those with responsibility for the design, execution, and acceptance of building projects, would not have been equipped to meet the responsibilities laid on them. Since optical devices that help the ground-level viewer are employed in many other classical-era buildings besides the Parthenon, we can have confidence that the techniques needed for making images appear more convincing to the human eye than if they were produced orthogonally formed part of the training of the guild, passed on by experience and tradition from master to pupil, perhaps also with the help of written handbooks and treatises.¹⁴

CVII (1987), 98, <https://doi.org/10.2307/630073>, from a booklet by Langlotz, Ernst, *Phidias und der Parthenonfries* (Stuttgart: Reclams, 1965).

- 13 Notably the passage at Plat. Soph. 236a: τὰ ἄνω, μείζω δὲ τὰ κάτω φαίνονται ἂν διὰ τὸ τὰ μὲν πόρρωθεν, τὰ δ' ἐγγύθεν ὑφ' ἡμῶν ὀρᾶσθαι ...[and] ἄρ' οὐκ οὐ χαίρειν τὸ ἀληθὲς ἐάσαντες οἱ δημιουργοὶ νῦν οὐ τὰς οὐσας συμμετρίας ἀλλὰ τὰς δοξούσας εἶναι καλὰς τοῖς εἰδώλοις ἐναπεργάζονται to which the other main character in the dialogue known as the *Theaetetus* is presented as giving his wholehearted assent. Also made explicit in Plat. Criti. 107d. Alluded to in Xen. Ec. 15.
- 14 Discussed in St Clair, *WStP*, Chapter 21, <https://doi.org/10.11647/obp.0136.21>. The last works in the tradition of searching for an orthogonal secret can be regarded as Hambidge, Jay, with a preface by L. D. Caskey, *The Parthenon and Other Greek Temples: Their Dynamic Symmetry* (New Haven: Yale UP, 1924); and Flagg, Ernest, Architect, *The Parthenon Naos from the author's forthcoming book entitled The Recovery of Art, the present sheets being a communication addressed to Charles Marie Vidor, Perpetual Secretary of the Institute of France* (New York: Scribner, 1928). Later circulated with an inserted personal letter from the author to his readers, dated 16 January 1937.

When the pan-Hellenic site of Delphi was excavated in the nineteenth century, it was discovered that the marble slabs of the frieze of the elaborate Treasury of the Siphnians had been designed to tilt from the perpendicular, being wider at the foot of the composition than at the top.¹⁵ Some have thought that the same optical device was used in the frieze of the Parthenon.¹⁶ What is, however, apparent to any modern visitor is that the composition is more deeply carved at the top than at the foot of the slabs. As was noted by the late Martin Robertson: ‘a three-quartered face [is] given almost its sculptural value, a foreshortened foot hardly more than drawn in the marble’.¹⁷ The general effect, as had been noticed earlier by Charles Waldstein (later Sir Charles Walston) who conducted experiments in the nineteenth century, was to pull the attention of the human viewer upwards to the top of the composition, making it appear larger and more ‘realistic’ than it would have appeared if it had been carved to a uniform depth.¹⁸

The details of the carving become more visible to a modern viewer when the pieces are presented close up in a gallery, but they detract from attempts to understand the ancient experience. The hair shown on the displayed persons and monsters, for example, that could be seen ‘only as masses’ at a distance, when it is re-presented at eye-level, wisp by wisp, curl by curl, misrepresents the experience of the ancient viewers.¹⁹ The aim of the classical-era commissioners, we can be

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- 15 Described by Demangel, R., *La Frise ionique* (Paris: de Boccard, 1932), 561, with a diagram.
- 16 Marconi, 5, commenting on the work of Haselberger and others, says the frieze is set at right angles and that there is no tilt. However, it is not impossible that there may have been differences in different parts of the building.
- 17 Robertson, Martin, and Franz, Alison, *The Parthenon Frieze* (London: Phaidon in association with British Museum Publications, 1975), 10. Cesare Brandi, who in a brief note in a specialist journal published in 1950 in Italy drew attention to the fact that many of the pieces of the Parthenon in London had been damaged by being scraped (‘grattate’) by the British Museum workmen at the behest of Lord Duveen, believed that chisels had been used on some pieces to deepen the relief. Brandi, Cesare, ‘Nota sui Marmi del Partenone’ in *Bollettino dell’Istituto Centrale del Restauro*, No. 3–4 (1950), 3–8.
- 18 Waldstein, Charles, Director of the Fitzwilliam Museum and Reader in Classical Archaeology in the University of Cambridge; Ph.D. Heidelberg; M.A. Columbia College, *Essays in the Art of Pheidias* (Cambridge: CUP, 1885), 204, 227–228.
- 19 A point made by Waldstein, Sir Charles, Litt.D., Ph.D., L.H.D., Fellow and Lecturer of King’s College, Cambridge, Sometime Slade Professor of Fine Art, Reader in Classical Archaeology, Director of the Fitzwilliam Museum, Cambridge, and Director of the American School of Archaeology, Athens, Greek Sculpture and

confident, was not to give ground-level visitors a technical lesson in how skilled craftsmen executed an intermediate stage of their work when the surfaces of the stones were being given their last touches before being lifted into their appointed place on the building, but to seduce the eyes of viewers towards a fuller appreciation of what they were being invited to think was there. In an age when alternatives can be offered with digital technology, it seems perverse to offer only a version that is anachronistic and therefore unfair to those who commissioned and executed the work.

When the carved front parts of the marble blocks are cut out and hung like pictures in a picture gallery, or when they are re-presented as a continuum in a book of photographs, they do not form a single narrative even within the sections where the composition is at its most simple.²⁰ Some horses are presented as moving so fast that they would cause an immediate pile-up as soon as they reached the next horse. In some places the wind is shown as blowing so strongly that it causes the drapery of the costumes of the horsemen to stream out almost horizontally, but the cloaks of the adjoining horsemen on either side are unruffled. Seen through the columns, it was a series of discreet panels or episodes that the viewer might choose to focus on, as, for example, the breezes as among the features of the local microclimate.²¹

Modern Art, *Two lectures delivered to the students of the Royal Academy of London* (Cambridge: CUP, 1914), 10. At the time of the 2014 loan of one of the pieces of the Parthenon east pediment to Russia, the British Museum authorities sought to take credit for making it harder to imagine the ancient experience, by implying, in accordance with the rhetorics of western romanticism and of post-modern consumerism, that the way of seeing that they recommended was a characteristic of the objects themselves: 'A new life, with new meanings in different stories, had begun. For the first time they could be seen and studied at eye level'. Blog of the director of the British Museum dated 5 December 2014.

- 20 I refer only to the books that attempt to present and describe the pieces as they have survived without further manipulation. Of little value to a reader who wishes to try to understand how the Parthenon was seen and regarded in ancient Greece are the numerous books that employ unusual camera angles, strong spot-lighting, and other devices associated with retail shopping. Such volumes tend to reinforce the suspicion that some museum managers wish to withdraw from their educational role of trying to explain the ancient past in all its strangeness, in favour of a consumerist ethic of giving the public what they think the public wants or ought to want.
- 21 Noted by Marconi, Clemente, 'The Parthenon Frieze: Degrees of Visibility' in *RES: Anthropology and Aesthetics*, No. 55/56 (2009), 8, <https://doi.org/10.1086/RESvn1ms25608841>. I am grateful to Michael Squire for drawing this article to my attention. The breezes were noted in Chapter 2.

The events pictured are, in accordance with long-standing pan-Hellenic convention, evidently set in mythic time when, in contrast with the civic time of the classical era, men went naked or semi-naked, and women wore the clothes associated with festivals and ceremonies, and that were also presented in the words used in the tragic drama as normal in mythic times. Occasionally some mortals are shown as suffering the same mishaps as contemporary viewers, as, for example, in Figure 4.5, where one of the carriers has either stumbled under the weight of the heavy jar, or is resting, without breaking ranks. Some males appear to be carrying liquids in large jars balanced on their left shoulders, with others bringing goods that cannot be identified, in all cases invariably carried on their left shoulders.²² It is likely that the jars were understood by viewers as containing fresh water, for pouring as well as for drinking and that the basins were for ritual washing. On the mythic Acropolis, as on the real, water was always a precious commodity.



Figure 4.5. Carriers of liquids, and, on the slab to the left of the viewer, an unidentified box-like object. Photogravure made at eye level before 1910.²³

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- 22 The significance of the left shoulder, with its alleged benefits of swaddling and its read across to hoplite warfare, was noted in Chapter 2. A real water carrier of the era before water could be pumped, bent under the weight of his jar, is pictured at Figure 2.3 in St Clair, *WStP*, Chapter 2, <https://doi.org/10.11647/obp.0136.02>, as part of a discussion of the lack of potable water on the site and the decisive military importance of that geological fact during the conflict and later. This gives an indication of how unrealistic are the unbending figures pictured as Figure 4.5.
- 23 Smith, Cecil, 'Additions to the Greek Sculptures in the British Museum' in *Classical Review*, Vol. 6 (10) (Dec., 1892), Plate 42. It was with this slab that the late Bernard

Such touches offered a hint of realism, part of a general assumption, shared with the conventions of the tragic drama, that the mythic world was inhabited by personages who were subject to the same contingencies as the humans who observed and dramatized them. Such touches encouraged viewers to see themselves, or rather their aspired-to-but-hard-to-attain better selves, self-reflexively. The temple dedicated to Zeus at Olympia, which is almost contemporaneous with the classical Parthenon, shows one of the Lapiths with a cauliflower ear like a then-contemporary boxer.²⁴ These details can be regarded as the equivalents in the static theatre of the Parthenon of the 'signs' that the character of the god Hermes in the Prologue to Euripides's play, the *Ion*, mentions in encouraging the audience of the performed theatre to be alert to contemporary parallels.²⁵

The Scene Above the East Door

The central slab on the east side, the culminating scene towards which both processions are moving, is the crux of one of the longest-running questions about the classical Parthenon. Figure 4.6, reproduced from a photograph taken at eye level before 1910 when the slab retained more of its surface than it does now, shows a scene that has caused puzzlement since it was first noticed by those who in modern times wished to learn about ancient Athens from a study of its standing remains.²⁶

Ashmole chose to illustrate the fact that all the slabs of the frieze are all more deeply carved at the top than at the foot, as discussed later in the chapter. Ashmole, Bernard, *Architect and Sculptor in Classical Greece* (New York: NYU Press, 1972), 118.

24 Noted by Barringer, Judith M., *Art, Myth, and Ritual in Classical Greece* (Cambridge: CUP, 2009), 29. From what is recorded of the violence tolerated in sporting competitions, the faces of successful sportsmen and women must often have been mauled to a far greater extent.

25 As discussed in Chapter 1.

26 A summary of the main interpretations offered since the mid-twentieth century until recently, but not including Connolly and Fehr, with some attempt to categorize them by Shear, T. Leslie, Jr., *Trophies of Victory: Public Building in Periklean Athens* (Princeton, N.J.: Department of Art and Archaeology, Princeton University in association with Princeton UP, 2016), 401–404. Many more suggestions had been offered earlier, some of which were collected and commented on, sometimes contemptuously, by Davidson, Thomas, *The Parthenon Frieze, and Other Essays* (London: Kegan Paul, 1882). The phrase used by Loraux, *Children*, 20.



Figure 4.6. The central scene of the Parthenon frieze as presented above the east door. Photogravure made before 1910.²⁷

In the eighteenth century the piece was built into the south wall of the Acropolis, facing inwards.²⁸ And, from its sheer length, weight, and size, its importance as an extraordinarily large piece of the Parthenon frieze that had required extraordinary feats of quarrying, transportation, and engineering, was quickly recognized.²⁹ Richard Chandler, for example, in many respects the best prepared of the eighteenth-century researchers, who saw it in 1765, realized that it was the slab that had ‘ranged in the centre of the back front of the cell’, that is, below the east

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- 27 Smith, A. H., ed., *The Sculptures of the Parthenon with an Introduction and Commentary* (London: British Museum Trustees, 1910), part of plate 35. The other even earlier photograph in *Grecian Antiquities, Photographed by Stephen Thompson*, in 2 volumes (London: Mansell, 1872) is less clear.
- 28 Shown, for example, as part of a picturesque composition in the drawing by Thomas Hope, in Hope, Thomas, and Tsigakou, Fani-Maria, ed., *Thomas Hope (1769–1831) Pictures from 18th Century Greece* (Athens: Benaki Museum, British Council, Publishing House “Melissa”, 1985), plate 29, probably sketched in 1799. I know of no other picture of the slab while it was built into the wall. If it was seen by the artist of the so-called Carrey drawings made in the 1670s, or if it was seen but not recognized, it was not copied.
- 29 ‘fourteen feet eight inches long.’ *A Description of the Collection of Ancient Marbles in the British Museum* (London: British Museum, 1839), viii, 50. As with the lintel of the Propylaea, as discussed and pictured in St Clair, *WSiP*, Chapter 4, <https://doi.org/10.11647/obp.0136.04>, for the ancients to have located such an unusual piece in the quarries and to have cut and transported it to the Acropolis implies that it had merited special attention at the time it was first made.

pediment that, as Pausanias had reported, displayed scenes from the birth of Athena.³⁰ Chandler could not, however, identify the event being pictured, suggesting that the display was of ‘a venerable person with a beard reading in a large volume, which is partly supported by a boy’.³¹ In the early 1750s, however, the architect James Stuart conjectured that the tall figure ‘is a man who appears to examine with some attention a piece of cloth folded several times double: the other is a young girl who assists in supporting it: may we not suppose this folded cloth to represent the peplos?’³²

The question of which story was presented on the frieze has been a matter of speculation and contention since the eighteenth century.³³ Among the suggestions that, in my view, are incompatible with the discursive environment are all those, such as the Stuart conjecture, that regard the frieze as reproducing pictorially a then-contemporary practice, such as the Panathenaic procession. Only a mythic story that looks back to a mythic past would pass the conditions applied to temples for hundreds of years across the Hellenic world. We should, I suggest, be searching for candidates from within the discursive tradition that shows an event already known to the main viewerships, and recognizable by them, as Loraux remarked, ‘without any hesitation’.³⁴

A display of a peplos ceremony, even if thought of as idealized version set in a mythic past—an Ur-peplos ceremony—would have been so exceptional that it is unlikely to have passed unnoticed in the plentiful

30 Chandler, Rev. Richard, *Travels in Greece* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1776), 51. Chandler, an academic of Oxford University, had been selected by the Society of Dilettanti partly because of his record of scholarly publications on ancient inscriptions.

31 *Ibid.*

32 Stuart, James, and Revett, Nicholas, *The Antiquities of Athens* (London: John Nichols, 1787), ii, 12.

33 A summary of the main interpretations offered since the mid-twentieth century until recently, but not including Connolly and Fehr, with some attempt to categorize them by Shear, *Trophies of Victory*, 401–404. Many more suggestions had been offered earlier, some of which were collected and commented on, sometimes contemptuously, by Davidson, *Parthenon Frieze*.

The phrase used by Loraux, *Children*, 20, that can serve to describe both the actual horizons of expectations existing in the actual viewerships, and the rhetorical conditions that the institutions of the city would feel the need to fulfill in approving the construction of heritage.

34 *Ibid.*

subsequent written record.³⁵ To commemorate the establishment of a commemoration would, in the discursive conventions of the time, I suggest, be almost as much a breach as displaying the commemorative ceremony.

In recent times, too, even those who have felt obliged, for lack of any more plausible explanation, to accept the Stuart conjecture as updated, have found it 'strangely anticlimactic'.³⁶ To Robin Osborne, writing in 1987, the central scene was 'an embarrassment', only explicable, if at all, as a preparation for looking at something else.³⁷ Some in the confident nineteenth century blamed the designers, which, since they assumed that the design was a matter for 'artists', implied that the Pheidias had misjudged. According to Thomas Davidson, even the best-known German scholars, Welcker and Michaelis, were of the opinion that the reason why the gods were presented with their backs turned was that the central scene was 'not specially worth looking at'.³⁸

Are there better candidates? Are we obliged, for lack of anything better, to accept that all these gods and heroes, men, women, and children, three hundred and seventy-eight personages in all, plus two hundred and forty-five edible animals, have been brought together just so as to be present when a piece of cloth made in a local workshop is ceremonially folded in order to be put away in a cupboard?³⁹ The

35 The suggestion that what is presented is an Ur-Panathenaic was made by the late Brian Shefton at a conference in the University of London, 1998, at which I was present, when Connelly first began to present her critique of the Stuart conjecture and her own alternative.

36 The phrase used by Neils, Jenifer, *The Parthenon Frieze* (Cambridge; New York: CUP, 2001), 67.

37 Osborne, 'Viewing and obscuring', 101, <https://doi.org/10.2307/630073>. Osborne's article tried to enfranchise the historic viewer and to draw attention to the fact that damage is done to the prospects of understanding the Parthenon by altering the viewing context: 'by re-displaying the frieze in a totally alien manner, a new monument is created, and one which stands between the viewer and the original', 105.

38 Reported by Davidson, *Parthenon Frieze*, 44, 45.

39 The number as estimated by Neils, *Parthenon Frieze*, 33. In the *Hecuba* of Euripides, when the Chorus of women recently enslaved after the fall of Troy debate the degrees of misery that they might face when shipped to Greece, as between Sparta and other possible locations, their best hope is that they will be sent to Athens and be employed in the weaving of a ceremonial peplos for the Panathenaic festival, another example of the claim that Athens was the city in Hellas that was most advanced from brutishness, but also implying that the weaving was work suitable for slaves who had come from high-class families. Eur. *Hec* 466.

modern discussions too, that mostly take the Stuart conjecture as their starting point, have tended to suggest that ‘peplos’ is a term of art for the ceremony performed in the Panathenaic festival. There has also been modern writing about the alleged deep significance of the ceremony in the Panathenaic festival.⁴⁰ In the usage of classical Athens, however, a peplos meant festival or ceremonial clothes as distinct from those worn day to day, as when, in the *Suppliants* by Euripides, the character of Theseus is surprised that the women who are in distress at not being permitted to bury their dead relatives, and are tearing their skin with their nails, are not peplosed.⁴¹ On an Attic funerary monument of the fourth century, a grieving widower, in praising the devotion of his dead wife to himself and to family values, declares that she was ‘not impressed by peploses or gold’.⁴² In the world of tragic drama, peplos could refer to the garments worn by a male, as when, in the *Orestes* by Euripides, the hero lies comatose after killing his mother and is described by the Chorus as coming back to life, stirring in his peploses.⁴³ And it is the same sense of a large piece of cloth that might, or might not, be cut and worn that is employed when the character of Agamemnon, recently returned from sacking Troy, was stepping out of his specially prepared bath when the character of his wife Clytemnestra, all smiles, wrapped him in an embroidered peplos before murdering him.⁴⁴

The ‘deep significance’ suggestion, leaving aside that almost everything about the Parthenon and the mythic stories it presented could be so regarded, was evidently contested. In Plato’s dialogue, the *Euthyphro*, the character of Socrates, who in the dialogue has already been indicted for spreading disbelief in the gods, is presented as confronting the credulous Euthyphro with the absurdity of believing that the story of the war between the gods and the giants is true. It also runs counter

40 For example by Sourvinou-Inwood, Christiane, *Athenian Myths and Festivals: Aglauros, Erechtheus, Plynteria, Panathenaia, Dionysia*; Edited by Robert Parker (Oxford: OUP, 2011), 263–311, <https://doi.org/10.1093/acprof:oso/9780199592074.001.0001>.

41 Eur. Supp. 97. *κουραὶ τε καὶ πεπλώματ’ οὐ θεωρικὰ*.

42 Discussed by González González, Marta, *Funerary Epigrams of Ancient Greece: Reflections on Literature, Society and Religion* (London: Bloomsbury Academic, 2019), 67, <http://doi.org/10.5040/9781350062450>. I have made a slight amendment to her translation.

43 *ὄρῳ; ἐν πέπλοισι κινεῖ δέμας.* Eur. Orest. 166, recently translated by David Kovacs as ‘he stirs in his blankets’, replacing the ‘robes’ of the previous Loeb edition.

44 Aesch. Eum. 665.

to the remark of Aelius Aristides that the peplos was an 'ornament' used in that festival, the Greek word ('kosmos') being cognate with that used for the 'cosmetic', that is, he remarks, was deemed ('nomismatized') to be symbolic by those observing the spectacle.⁴⁵ In Xenophon's Socratic dialogue on the management of the household ('oikos') and of the city ('polis') the character of Ischomachos is set up as exemplifying the arguments whose incoherence Socrates is about to expose. Dutiful and rich, a man who pays his taxes and contributes voluntarily as examples of his 'charis', to the cost of festivals, Ischomachos is presented as well satisfied with the education he gave his wife whom he married when she was 'not yet fifteen'. Among the wifely qualities that he picks out for special praise is her care in looking after clothes and making sure that they are neatly folded away in the right places, along with 'the things that we use only for festivals or entertainments, or on rare occasions'.⁴⁶ That passage has been read as a comic exaggeration, although it need not be, but we can guess that if such a scene had been presented on the Parthenon frieze, it would also have raised wry smiles. The 'deep significance' of the peplos in the Panathenaic festival lay in the picture it exhibited, that is, as a reminder of the age at the beginning of the world when gods struggled with giants, one of a range of images that reminded viewers of an era when chaos reigned as were traditionally offered on Hellenic temples, such as the Telamons of Acrigas (modern Agrigento), and not in the soft fabric on which the picture was able to be carried and shown off by processioners.⁴⁷

Can more be gleaned from the history of the slab in modern times? In 1801, acting under the authority of the Ottoman firman of May of that year, it was removed by Elgin's agents from its then setting on the inside of the Acropolis wall. Although the agents were astonished and

45 ὡσπερ ἀκρόπολιν τινα ἢ κορυφὴν νομίσαντας τῆς Ἑλλάδος καὶ τῶν ὁμοφύλων τὴν πόλιν καὶ ἔργῳ καὶ λόγῳ κοσμεῖν, καὶ μετέχειν τῆς δόξης, ἀλλ' οὐκ ἀποστερεῖσθαι νομίζοντας. εἴργασται καὶ ἡμῖν ὁ λόγος ἀντὶ τοῦ πέπλου κόσμος Παναθηναίων τῇ θεωρίᾳ: δοῦναι δὲ χάριν τῆς αὐτῆς θεοῦ ἥσπερ καὶ ὁ λόγος καὶ ἡ πόλις. Ael. Ar. Orat. 13 197. The wordplay of repeated words provides evidence that Aristides was making a juxtaposing parallel between the static Acropolis as an object of vision, and the peplos as an object of vision in the parallel world of display and performance, which adds yet more to the many objections to the Stuart conjecture.

46 Xen. Ec. 9.

47 The long timescale within which such legends were fitted was summarized in Chapter 1.

impressed by its size, they did not at first realize that, when on the building, it had displayed the culmination of the composition presented by the frieze.⁴⁸ Since the slab was too heavy to be transported with the resources available to Elgin's agents in Athens, mainly ships' tackle, they had planned to cut it into two, but they seem to have changed their minds before the sawing was completed. However, as the slab was being moved, it broke down the middle.⁴⁹ Both pieces, which were separately packed, were included among the cargo of the brig, the *Mentor*, commissioned by Elgin that sank near Cerigo (Cythera) in the Arches in September 1802. They spent some months on the seabed before being brought to the surface, and were then stored under a temporary covering on the beach, from where they were shipped in another vessel to Malta in February 1805, and later to England, where they were put in store again, and a few years later gathered into the Elgin Collection.⁵⁰ If any paint or gilding had remained in Elgin's day when it was removed, as is possible given that colour survived on the west frieze that Elgin's agents had been obliged to leave on site, it is unlikely to have survived its months in the sea and on the beach.⁵¹ When the broken slab was reassembled on its arrival in the British Museum in 1817, besides the empty holes for metal attachments that are found on many other pieces of the Parthenon, the traces of rust were thought to indicate that the two personages presented on the central scene on the viewer's right, had been shown wearing coronets or wreaths made of ferrous metal that had been painted or gilded, as is likely, from what we know of the general custom, to have been the case.⁵²

An earlier photograph, made with a source of light that brings out more of the contours, is shown as Figure 4.7.

48 It is described variously in the Elgin documents of the time as 'a great bas-relief', 'a long piece of the Baso Relievo from ye Temple of Minerva', 'the great relief' and 'the great bas relief that was on the Acropolis walls', and 'one half ... taken from the South wall'. Smith, A. H., 'Lord Elgin and his Collection' in *Journal of Hellenic Studies*, Vol. 36 (Nov. 1916), 201, 217, 231, 233, 248, <https://doi.org/10.2307/625773>.

49 The jagged line caused by the sawing and the breakage can be seen on the piece on display in the British Museum.

50 Summarised from the documents transcribed in Smith, 'Lord Elgin', notably 231: 'Not being well sawn, for want of sufficiently fine saws, and being a little weak in the middle it parted in two in the course of transport, in spite of all the precautions taken'.

51 *Ibid.*

52 [British Museum] *Ancient Marbles* (1839), viii, 43.



Figure 4.7. Detail from the central scene. Photograph made before 1885.⁵³

With low relief, even small differences in the position of the source of light affects where the shadows fall, and therefore the modern viewer's ability to re-imagine what was to be seen before the ancient surface was battered, bleached and stripped down to the layer below the epidermis of the marble.⁵⁴

So how might the scene have appeared in ancient times? An example of looking at the slab through modern eyes, defended on the grounds that: '[T]he first law of iconography [is] that a depiction ought in some way to look like what it represents' was provided by the art historian Evelyn B. Harrison in 1996.⁵⁵ Harrison invited her readers to 'think of yourself folding up a sheet after you have taken it out of the dryer', noting that 'if you have a little helper it will be easier to get the edges

53 Inserted in Waldstein, *Essays*, after page 234. Not further identified.

54 The best photograph at present available, which shows the shape of what is carried in the wrapping peplos, albeit taken, as the photographer says, 'en face', are in Delivorrias and Mavrommatis, *The Parthenon Frieze*, 164 and 165, where the photographer waited for an opportunity for the distorting spotlights in the British Museum gallery to be temporarily turned off, and the image photographed in a downward, although not of course a natural, light.

55 Harrison, Evelyn B., 'The Web of History: A Conservative Reading of the Parthenon Frieze', in Neils, Jenifer, ed., *Worshipping Athena: Panathenaia and Parthenon* (Madison, Wis: University of Wisconsin Press, 1996), 198–214.

and corners even'.⁵⁶ She also addressed the question of the sex of the young person pictured on the viewer's right by looking at the surviving marble through modern eyes, suggesting, in leading a race to the bottom, that 'the bare buttocks of the child are obvious enough to identify the figure from a distance as a boy'.⁵⁷ When it was pointed out that in the Metropolitan Museum of Art, New York is a grave memorial to a girl shown in a similar pose that has been known since the eighteenth century, Harrison suggested, not without prudery, that on that piece, 'the bare flesh is very discreet', and 'this child is alone with her pets in the sheltered courtyard of her home'.⁵⁸

What we can say with confidence is that the smaller figure on the viewer's right is wearing a peplos. Ancient costumes were mostly not

56 *Ibid.*

57 *Ibid.* 203–204.

58 MMA, 27.45. Fletcher Fund, 1927, found in 1785 in the island of Paros, a centre of marble production. It was held in a private collection in England until 1927, frequently reproduced since the nineteenth century. Harrison was participating in a western tradition of fear of nudity and its power to cause sexual arousal, which can be traced back to Paul, Augustine, to the Christian tradition, and to the long-exploded theories of extramission, as discussed in St Clair, *WSIP*, Chapter 22, <https://doi.org/10.11647/obp.0136.22>. In 1817, as part of selling to the British public the idea that Elgin's collection of marbles was worth buying, Felicia Hemans had emphasized their 'chastity', an idea that we find repeated frequently into the twentieth century, including by Lord Duveen.

During the nineteenth century, there were calls, for example, by French historian Jules Michelet, that only married women should be allowed into the Elgin gallery of the British Museum. Younger women, he feared, were already at risk from reading novels that made adultery appear exciting. His visit in 1834 is noted by Seznec, Jean, 'Michelet devant les Elgin marbles' (Paris: *English Miscellanies*, Rome, 1860). I have not found any evidence that the authorities of the British Museum ever agreed to demands, of which there are reports, that figleaves should be fitted to conceal the male private parts, but in standard histories of the materiality of ancient Greek culture published in Germany in the nineteenth century, whose illustrations were sometimes photographs of casts, the so-called Ilissos from the east pediment of the Parthenon that in 2008 was sent to Russia, was fitted with a fig leaf. For example, in Baumgarten, Fritz, Poland, Franz, and Wagner, Richard, *Die Hellenische Kultur* (Leipzig and Berlin: Teubner, second edition, 1906), 359. This finely produced book, edited by the foremost scholars of the time, includes photographs of other statues or casts, similarly figleafed, including some from Athens, the bronze from Anticythera, the Apoxyomenos in Vienna, and the pieces of the Aegina pediments in Munich. As discussed in Chapter 2, such evidence as exists for classical Athens suggests that sexuality was not only not feared but was actively mobilized as a 'natural' power able to draw attention to images that promoted gendered 'arete' to both sexes as on the Parthenon frieze.

tailored but consisted of a folded piece of cloth, sometimes pinned at the shoulder, as reconstructed from presentations elsewhere in Figure 4.8.

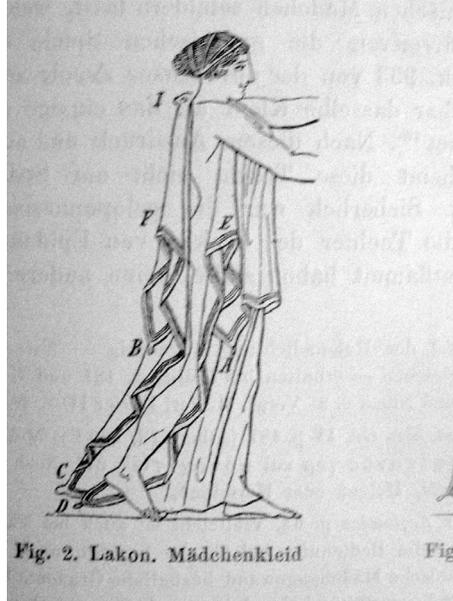


Figure 4.8. 'Open peplos'. Wood engraving.⁵⁹

The idealized female body presented by Athenian families in korai, the perfect 'social body' pictured on grave memorials, so that viewers can remember the dead at their best (or aspired-to best) is usually, in the case of classical Athens, physiologically young, with the shape of the back of the body presented in such a way that it is often impossible to tell from the surviving marble whether the figure was pictured as naked or as wearing a diaphanous garment that may have been rendered with paint.⁶⁰ Nor need we exclude the possibility that the young men and women, the boys and girls, and even the gods and goddesses, who are themselves mostly shown in varying degrees of dress and undress,

⁵⁹ Studniczka, F., *Beiträge zur Geschichte der altgriechischen Tracht* (Vienna: O. Gerold's Sohn, 1886), 7.

⁶⁰ Discussed by Stewart, Andrew, *Art, Desire, and the Body in Ancient Greece* (Cambridge: CUP, 1997). An image of a mythic adolescent girl, the shape of whose naked body beneath a finely pleated chiton is made plain, is presented on a large fifth-century cup from the pottery workshop of Euphronios. Obtained in Athens in 1871, now in the Louvre. G 104. Frequently reproduced and discussed, notably by Neils, Jenifer, *The Youthful Deeds of Theseus* (Rome: Bretschneider, 1987), 58–61.

were designed to attract an erotic, including a homoerotic, gaze.⁶¹ Aristotle, discussing sexuality, says that a boy resembles a woman in shape.⁶² In the ancient romance known as *Aethiopica*, written much later but preserving older conventions, albeit in fictional form, and perhaps mocking the official values and verities, a father introduces his seven-year-old daughter, who is ‘as beautiful as a statue’ and appears to her male admirer to be ‘approaching marriageable age’.⁶³ What Harrison regarded as an objection may instead be evidence that ancient viewers were being shown a mythic scene relating to the women’s sphere and to its rituals and customs.⁶⁴

That an erotic gaze was discursively a valid way of generating extramissionary exchange with the imagined city emerges from an image of Aphrodite on the Acropolis, surrounded by scenes from olive cultivation and consumption, shown as Figure 4.9.

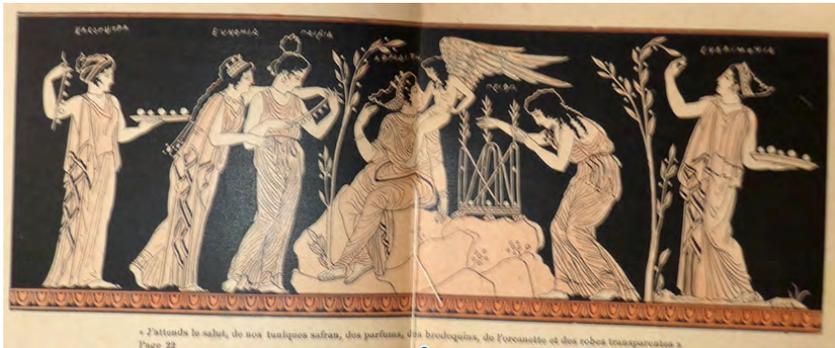


Figure 4.9. Aphrodite with Eros on the Acropolis. Engraving by Notor from a vase painting in the British Museum, not identified.⁶⁵

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- 61 In Plato’s *Phaedrus*, 237b–241d, for example, the character of Socrates describes the advantages, as well as the risks, of certain types of homoerotic desire for boys, who are mainly presented as meeting a physical need on the part of the adult male in exchange for educational and career benefits. Sexual desire as a powerful force of ‘nature’ that can bring about change was discussed with reference to Aristotle’s theories in Chapter 2.
- 62 Ἔουκε δὲ καὶ τὴν μορφὴν γυναικί παῖς Aristotle, *Generation of Animals* 728b, his word for ‘woman’ normally used to mean one who has reached the stage of marriage and childbearing that was often in mid teens, and presented as such as the perfected social body.
- 63 Heliodorus, *Aethiopica*, I. 30.6.
- 64 As, for example, in Figure 4.9, there can be no doubt that the figure shown to the viewer’s right is a girl wearing a garment that reveals her bare bottom.
- 65 Aristophanes, *Lysistrata*, 20. The words in Greek, of which the first is not fully readable, are ‘Reputation-building, good laws (‘Eunomia’), Civic education

Notor may have over-adapted his source. However that suspicion cannot apply to a key moment presented on the Parthenon frieze that shows the gods sitting in a circle going about their normal activities when Aphrodite, with Eros, turns away from the others to point to the central scene as shown in Figure 4.10.



Figure 4.10. Aphrodite and Eros pointing to the central event. Line drawing.⁶⁶

These two images suggest that the passage in the Thucydidean Funeral Oration in which the character of Pericles advises his audience to learn to love Athens sexually, in accordance with the conventions, social hierarchies, and reciprocities noted and discussed in Chapter 2, was not an invention of Pericles or of Thucydides but part of the mainstream discourse, here shown visually, and would have been regarded as such by the Athenian viewer. So: what was the event that could turn the heads even of the gods?

As was pointed out, with some impatience, by a nineteenth-century scholar, there is nothing in the ancient authors to connect the Parthenon

(‘Paideia’), Aphrodite, Persuasion (‘Peitho’), and Well-being (‘eudaimonia’).

66 Carrey drawing of East Frieze see plate 62 Mark, Ira S., ‘The Gods on the East Frieze of the Parthenon’, in *Hesperia* Vol. 53, No. 3 (Jul.–Sep., 1984), pp. 289–342. Frequently reproduced, for example in the fine edition by Bowie, Theodore and Thimme, Diether, eds, *The Carrey Drawings of the Parthenon Sculptures* (Bloomington and London: Indiana UP, 1971), and earlier by Michaelis, Leake, and others. Modern photographs of the full set of drawings are viewable on Gallica, <http://gallica.bnf.fr/ark:/12148/btv1b7200482m.r=.langEN>, and a large selection in low resolution on Wikimedia Commons.

with the Panathenaic festival.⁶⁷ Nor is the building alluded to in formal written compositions where we might have expected to find it mentioned, for example in the long Panathenaic orations of Isocrates or Aristides, nor in any description of the festival during the subsequent half-millennium when it continued to be celebrated. On the contrary, as many have pointed out, the scene displayed on the Parthenon frieze does not match what is recorded about what occurred in the historical Panathenaic procession. Where are the hoplites, where is the ship, where are the allies?⁶⁸ Nor, when we read on an ancient public inscription how the duties were allocated according to ancient custom, does the washing and folding away of the ceremonial peplos, a commemoration of the establishment of a commemoration, to qualify for the place of honour.⁶⁹

Far from being immediately recognizable by those who participated in the real event, it would have required an implausible stretch of imagination to see any resemblance.⁷⁰

When we imaginatively restore the archaic costumes familiar from archaic korai, including the crowns, wreaths, and chaplets, the decorated garments, the nudity and semi-nudity and other markers that signal that a mythic scene was being offered to viewers, we should expect that what was presented on the central slab before it was stripped was more like the image shown as Figure 4.11, one of many scenes from myth pictured on ancient pottery. We have an opportunity then to imagine it bright with strange non-realistic colours and glittering in endless variations as the changing sunlight, and at some festivals the changing moonlight, was reflected from the metal.

67 Davidson, *Parthenon Frieze*, 19.

68 Discussed by many, including Castriota, David, *Myth, Ethos, and Actuality: Official Art in Fifth-Century B.C. Athens* (Madison, University of Wisconsin Press, 1992), 199, who provides a useful summary of the decrees by which the contributions of the allies to the Panathenaia were regulated.

69 I draw this inference from the discussion by Robertson, Noel, 'The Praxierygiae Decree (IG I3 7) and the Dressing of Athena's Statue with the Peplos' in *Greek, Roman, and Byzantine Studies*, Vol 44 (2) (2004), 111-161.

70 The evidence was collected by, for example, Holloway, R. Ross, 'The Archaic Acropolis and the Parthenon Frieze' in *The Art Bulletin*, Vol. 48 (2) (Jun., 1966), 223-226, <https://doi.org/10.1080/00043079.1966.10788948>.



Figure 4.11. Mythic scene with Pherephatta ('Persephone') and Triptolemos. Engraving of a vase painting, flattened.⁷¹

Can we find a local myth, preferably one recognized across Hellas, such as those shown on the metopes and the central figures in the pediments that ancient viewers might have expected to see shown on the Parthenon frieze? The suggestion that the frieze shows the sacrifice of the daughters of Erechtheus, made by Joan Breton Connelly in the 1990s and later the subject of her book-length study, is the only one offered so far that meets the requirement that what was pictured must be a scene from myth, which had evidently become as inflexible as the convention that only stories from myth should be allowed in the tragic drama.⁷² Connelly was the first to relate the composition to the speech in the play by Euripides, the *Erechtheus* (of which fragments previously unknown were first published in 1948, adding to a substantial passage already known) and to suggest that what is displayed is the sacrifice of the daughters of Erechtheus. In the story, Erechtheus, the king of Athens, surrounded by enemies, saves the city by agreeing to sacrifice his eldest

71 Berlin Antikensammlung. Flattened image of a kyphos by Heiron in Notor, G., *La Femme dans l'Antiquité Grecque, Texte et Dessins de G. Notor. Préface de M. Eugène Müntz, Membre de l'Institut, Trente-trois Reproductions en couleurs et 320 dessins en noir d'après les documents des Musées et collections particulières* (Paris: Renouard, Laurens, 1901), 233.

72 I have been among those who have commended the Connelly conjecture in print, but now offer an alternative.

daughter, and the other two daughters proudly offer themselves too. What is presented, according to Connelly, is the sacramental dressing before death.

Human sacrifice, a means of appeasing, or negotiating with, supernatural forces, is common in Hellenic myth, Iphigeneia being the best-known example—and she was among many mythic characters whose actual tomb was allegedly situated in Attica—but human sacrifice is to be found in other religions practised in the Eastern Mediterranean region, with many instances found in the archaeological record, including some from prehistoric Greece. Connelly's conjecture, however, although the most plausible offered so far, has its own difficulties. The speech includes many of the features of the emergence-from-brutishness narrative familiar from the version offered by Thucydides; for example, that the inhabitants were only able to remain autochthonous because Attica, having poor-quality land, was not resettled as a result of successive conquests, re-conquests, and re-settlements, which are compared to moves in a board game, implying, as Thucydides does, that no justification other than a wish to seize 'useful things' was needed in mythic times. The passage reports the transition to living in families in an oikos-based economy, an episode in the brutishness narrative of which examples of the different stages were observable across Hellas and beyond. The speech includes a comparison with those brutes that have a well-developed culture, in this case, with bees. There is an emphasis on the mutual obligations of 'charis' that are directly linked with the mutual obligations of children and parents, with the word in its cognates being repeated in the same line, as 'useful'.⁷³ In all these respects, the Connelly conjecture meets expectations of what might have been offered to the viewer to picture and animate in his or her imagination. However, the notion of human sacrifice would set the occasion as a stage in the brutish narrative that had long been superseded. And there are remains of a countering speech to the anti-immigrant rhetoric that we would expect in a dialogic text, with its metaphor from the building industry, as when the character of Praxithea, the mythic queen, declares: 'a person who

73 As was done in the passage Milton misquoted from the *Suppliants* of Euripides discussed at the end of St Clair, *WStP*, Chapter 22, <https://doi.org/10.11647/obp.0136.22>.

moves from one city to another is like a peg badly fitted into a piece of wood, a citizen in name but not in action'.⁷⁴

The story of the Eumolpides, one of the eponymous families by which the classical city was politically constituted, and among the core corpus of Athenian identity-constructing myths, grates in a community-building context. It would have had to be presented by the guides as a step in the brutishness narrative that, in the drama, was brought to an abrupt end when Athena causes an earthquake. Lycurgus, the orator, whose works have been preserved as examples of the arts of persuasion used in schools of rhetoric, who quotes the passage from the speech in making the case against a man on a capital charge of deserting Athens in its hour of danger, refers to it as having been 'composed' by Euripides, with the implication that the playwright had invented a variation.⁷⁵

Although, in one sense, the saving of the city by a human sacrifice may be an event to be celebrated, it was also a horror to be mourned. In the *Agamemnon* by Aeschylus, the character of Iphigeneia does not go willingly to have her throat cut by her father, but protests and resists. And the Chorus, when inviting the audience to imagine the scene, refers them to 'pictures', appealed to as normalizing and legitimating that reaction—but the one visual image that has been found offers horror, not honour.⁷⁶ Nor does the character of Iphigeneia go willingly to her death in the *Iphigeneia in Aulis* by Euripides.

Moreover, in the rest of the composition of the frieze with which ancient viewers were presented, there is little to suggest an act of impending heroism. The figures identified as the Eponymous Heroes, who flank the gods on the east side, wear sandals and cloaks, an informal dress usually a sign of having travelled from a distance.⁷⁷ They stand

74 Collard, C., Cropp, M. J. and Lee, K. H., eds, *Euripides, Selected Fragmentary Plays Volume I* (Warminster: Aris and Phillips, 1995), 158, fragment 360, lines 12–13. Quoted by Connelly, *Parthenon Enigma*, 289. Whether the sentiment was answered by another character or by the Chorus, or it was a reply to a speech already delivered, as was normal in the tragic drama, is not known.

75 In the speech of Lycurgus in the criminal trial of Leocrates, which has evidently been edited and has some of the characteristics of a rhetorical discourse.

76 πρέπουσά θ' ὡς ἐν γραφαῖς. Aesch. Ag. 242. Discussed with examples by Woodford, Susan, *Images of Myths in Classical Antiquity* (Cambridge: CUP, 2003), 4–8. The role of pictures as 'nomismata', that is, as being deemed to confer authority, is discussed later in the chapter in the discussion of the *Ion* by Euripides.

77 Discussed by Morrow, Katherine Dohan, *Greek Footwear and the Dating of Sculpture* (Madison: University of Wisconsin Press, 1985), notably 47 and 55.

around, apparently chatting, scarcely appropriate for the imminent judicial killing of the three most highly privileged young women in the mythic city.⁷⁸ Although twelve, invisible, deities are shown seated, six male, six female, they are not the twelve Olympians. Hestia, the goddess of the hearth, whose role is to stay at home when the other gods go out, is omitted, her place being taken by Dionysus, the god of festivals.⁷⁹ Athena has taken off her helmet and left her shield behind. Described by the late Martin Robertson as 'relaxed and informal' and as having a 'casual gossipy air', the gods do not evince the solemnity required at a human sacrifice intended to placate their wrath.⁸⁰ Under the Stuart conjecture, what the female figures are carrying on their heads are cushions brought by slaves or temple servants, as they may appear to modern eyes, but scarcely, in ancient terms, worth noticing, let alone assigned spaces of honour on the most significant story pictured on the whole frieze. Under the Connelly conjecture, they are the shrouds of the daughters of Erechtheus who are about to die for the city. If, however, as I suggest, the ancient Athenians were being shown a scene of joy, the objects are gifts appropriate to a mythic rite of celebration, such as are shown as Figure 4.12.

In a telling detail, Aphrodite and Eros are shown pointing to the central scene, a neat example of how presenting the viewer in the picture can not only direct the gaze of the viewer but, as on the west pediment, recommend the appropriate response. None of the women are presented as having cut off their hair as signs of impending mourning. The horsemen have not cut off the manes of their horses, as was the custom in the mythic world as presented in the tragic drama, and the manes stream conspicuously behind the horses as part of an illusion that they are moving.⁸¹

78 Noted by Mattusch, Carol C., 'The Eponymous Heroes; the Idea of Sculptural Groups', in Coulson, W. D. E., Palagia, O., Shear, T. L., Jr., Shapiro, H. A., and Frost, F. J., eds, *The Archaeology of Athens and Attica under the Democracy: proceedings of an international conference celebrating 2500 years since the birth of democracy in Greece, held at the American School of Classical Studies at Athens, December 4–6, 1992* (Oxford: Oxbow, 1994), 74.

79 Noticed by Robertson and Frantz, *The Parthenon Frieze*, unnumbered, at IV.

80 *Ibid.*

81 The custom is alluded to in Eur. Alc. 427.



Figure 4.12. Woman carrying a basket on her head. Engraving.⁸²

In the modern tradition, the naked and semi-naked horsemen are commonly said to be ‘cavalry’, but no weapons are depicted.⁸³ The fact that many are presented as naked by itself rules out any suggestion that a contemporaneous event is being pictured.⁸⁴ The horsemen display

82 From Aristophanes, in Zevort, Ch., ed., *Lysistrata Traduction nouvelle, avec une Introduction et des Notes de Ch. Zévort. Edition ornée de 107 gravures en couleurs par Notor, d’après des documents authentiques des musées d’Europe* (Paris: Eugène Fasquelle, éditeur, 1898), 98, said to be from the Museum at Naples, not identified. It would be tempting to push the idea further and suggest that the long ribbons are mythic-era swaddling bands, an appropriate gift for a new-born child.

83 Some supporters of the Stuart conjecture, aware of this difficulty, have suggested solutions to the apparent contradiction. Jeffrey M. Hurwit, for example, suggested that ‘the martial character of the frieze is pervasive’ by postulating that it shows ‘preparations for the presentation of a representation of battle’, by which he means the battle scene (gigantomachy) that was displayed on the ‘peplos’, although he also noted that ‘few of the riders bear weapons or wear armor, and action is not imminent’. Hurwit, Jeffrey M., *The Acropolis in the Age of Pericles* (Cambridge: CUP, 2004), 249, 250.

84 That ancient viewers, from their understanding of genre and of markers, could scarcely have imagined that they were being shown a contemporary event in which human processioners were presented as naked did not need to be pointed out to the authors of older histories of ancient sculpture, who were familiar not only with

so wide a variety of combinations of dress, including of headgear and footwear, as to suggest not uniformity but diversity. If they were intended by the ancient designers to be seen as cavalrymen, they are not on duty.⁸⁵ As Thucydides says explicitly in his account of the Athenian development from brutishness, the decision not to carry arms, in which the Athenians of the past had set an example that others later followed, was only made possible by the trust that had been built up.⁸⁶ These features, taken together, we may reasonably conclude, not only signalled that viewers were being offered a procession on a non-military occasion, but that they asserted the values, including the practical usefulness, of the internal civic peace and mutual trust that Athenian civic and personal *paideia* was intended to promote.

So can we find another candidate that fits, in Connelly's phrase, the 'ultimately genealogical function of architectural sculpture' and that 'demands the telling of local versions of myths, grounding the formula in specific landscapes, cult places, family lines, and divine patronage'?⁸⁷ A point that has seldom, if ever, been noticed is that, whichever authority it was that first arranged for the huge central slab to be removed from its slots on the Parthenon without breaking it, performed a complex feat of engineering, almost as impressive as that of the ancient builders who

numerous examples but with what the ancient Roman authors—who had seen many more that are now lost—had written. James Dallaway, for example, who had lived in the Ottoman territories and who rushed out his book on ancient sculpture shortly after the publication of the Select Committee report in 1816, noted, as a matter of common knowledge that: 'Statues without drapery are confined to the representation of the deities male and female, heroes, Olympic victors, Genii, and the characters employed in the most ancient mythology or heroic fables'. Dallaway, James, *Of Statuary and Sculpture among the Antients: With some account of specimens preserved in England* (London: Murray, 1816), 67. Dallaway evidently drew on the work of Emeric-David, T. B., *Recherches sur l'art statuaire, considéré chez les anciens et chez les modernes, ou Mémoire sur cette question 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). Dallaway's book, by situating Phidias as the 'zenith' in a long parade of sculptors in a narrative of rise and decline, may have encouraged the British Parliament to vote for the funds, although it is seldom mentioned in accounts of the episode.

85 Noted by Fehr, Burkhard, *Becoming Good Democrats and Wives: Civil Education and Female Socialization on the Parthenon Frieze*. Hephaistos Sonderband. Kritische Zeitschrift zu Theorie und Praxis der Archäologie und angrenzender Gebiete (Berlin, Münster, Vienna, Zürich, London: Lit Verlag, 2011), 36.

86 Thuc. 1.6.

87 Connelly, *Parthenon Enigma*, 184.

raised it into place in the first place. The modern suggestion that such a long slab could have ‘fallen to the ground’ whether accidentally or deliberately brought about, accelerating through a drop of nearly forty feet, without breaking up on impact, is next to impossible.⁸⁸ When that dismantling occurred is not noted in any surviving literary or epigraphic record, although a technology already exists that will enable the dates of breakage and mutilation to be estimated with greater precision, for example to the nearest century, and could be proposed as a project to the authorities responsible for the site.⁸⁹ From recent studies of the stones, it is already almost certain that this slab was taken down and repositioned at the time when the ancient Parthenon was adapted for use as a Christian basilica, sometime in the middle centuries of the first millennium CE. It is likely that the dismantling occurred at that same time as the changes authorized and financed by the ecclesiastical authorities, that the door at the west end, which had previously been the entrance to the part of the building, normally shut, where the city’s possessions were kept secure, became the entrance to the building, having being adapted to receive a congregation inside and to align it along a Christian axis. At the same time, again in accordance with a top-down empire-wide decision to bring Christian ritual practice indoors, an apse was built into the east end, making the removal of the huge central slab of the frieze architecturally unavoidable.

The slab was, however, not actively destroyed, nor treated as marble waste to be recycled as building material, as seems to have happened with the private dedications on the Acropolis at that time. A more plausible explanation is that it was carefully taken down and then systematically mutilated, as had been the custom of the Romans and occasionally in classical Athens. In this case, as with other parts of the Parthenon frieze and figurative sculpture found in sanctuaries all over the ancient world, the mutilations were not intended to destroy the artefact outright and so remove it from the built memory altogether, but to commemorate the act of mutilation itself. The intention was to display to members of the then newly triumphant religion, and to others who might not have actively wanted to be Christianized, the fact that the ‘idolatrous’ images

88 The comment by Tsigakou in Hope and Tsigakou, *Thomas Hope*, 223.

89 For informal advice on this point, I record my thanks to Professor Yannis Lyzitzis of the University of the Aegean.

which their 'pagan' votaries had allegedly 'worshipped' had now lost their power. To these men, the Parthenon was, in modern terms, a dark heritage, that had a value as a building that made it worth preserving, but only provided it no longer exercised the power to persuade that it had done in former, now happily superseded, centuries.

When the piece was examined in preparation for the first formal publication, the museum managers thought that 'the heads of these figures, as of almost the whole line of the [east] frieze, appear to have been purposely defaced'.⁹⁰ The care given to the taking down and selective mutilation can be regarded as part of the slow, long-drawn out, step-by-step, top-down policy of imperial Christianization.⁹¹ Paradoxically, if this is what happened, it has not only brought about the survival of the slab but has had the incidental result of enabling us to offset the damage that was done at that time. We can also offset the distortion of presenting the composition at eye level. A recent photograph, as shown as Figure 4.13, taken from a more oblique angle, shows a bulge more clearly.

Even without the adjustment to the viewing angle, it is implausible that the lump of mutilated marble at the top of the composition is the left hand of the central male figure as many have assumed.⁹² If

90 British Museum, *Ancient Marbles* (A series, of which engravings of the sculptured pieces from the Parthenon were published, after many delays, in expensive volumes (pediments 1830, metopes 1835, frieze 1839)), viii, 50. Indications of the actual practice of displaying the performance of mutilation are given in *The Reunification of the Parthenon Marbles, A Cultural Imperative* (Athens: Ministry of Culture and others, 2004), a catalogue of an exhibition showing the effects of the scattering of the sculptured pieces arranged by the Council of Europe, which show how some heads or parts of heads were apparently cleanly severed, and left among the débris, so enabling them to survive, while other heads and faces were defaced.

91 As discussed in St Clair, *WStP*, Chapter 4, <https://doi.org/10.11647/obp.0136.04>.

92 The speculation that the lump presents a hand and knuckles can be traced back to the engraving in British Museum, *Ancient Marbles* (1839), viii, opposite 41, which was designed by Corbould and engraved by Le Keux. This apparently authoritative representation was subsequently copied without discussion by Ellis, Sir Henry, *Elgin and Phigaleian Marbles* (London: Knight, 1833), i, 167, and repeated by others who relied on Corbould throughout the age of engraving, including, Le Normant/Collas, Michaelis, Boetticher, Flasch, Lucas, and Davidson. Exceptions are the drawings offered by Waldstein, *Essays*, 198 and Perry, 296 who present the marble as a large, unexplained, lump without imposing this interpretation. Curiously, the guidebook to the British Museum, Vaux, W. S. W., *Handbook to the Antiquities in the British Museum* (London: Murray, 1851), whose paratext claimed that the central scene was illustrated in plates along with the rest of the frieze, does not include the scene at all. Since the pagination is continuous, and this is not therefore a case of a page having been torn out, it may be that the omission is deliberate, possibly

that had been the case, the left arm of the adult male figure under the cloth would be grotesquely long, and the knuckles of the hand implausibly disproportionate, even if some allowance were to be made for helping the ground level viewer. Nor is the lump likely to be some disproportionately large piece of a frame positioned in the most central spot of the central composition to which all eyes are drawn.



Figure 4.13. Detail of the slab in its state at the time of writing. Photograph by author taken from an oblique angle. CC BY.

As was pointed out in the nineteenth century, the action assumed by the Stuart conjecture to be the handing over a piece of cloth by the smaller figure to the tall bearded male figure on the viewer's left is better seen as the man who is looking at the viewer as he hands over or accepts something wrapped in the cloth to or from the smaller figure.⁹³ In 1975, the late Martin Robertson suggested that what was wrapped in the cloth

because the editor could see that the traditional image did not match the marble. A hand was, however, recently drawn in by Valavanis, Panos, *The Acropolis through its Museum* (Athens: Kapon, 2013), a translation into English by Alexandra Doulmas of the Greek edition, 139.

⁹³ For example, Davidson, *Parthenon Frieze*, 65. He attributes the suggestion to Dr Flasch, referring to Flasch, Adam, *Zum Parthenon-Fries* (Würzburg: Druck der Thein'schen Druckerei, 1877) and describing it as 'the one thing that redeems his pamphlet from utter worthlessness'.

might be the image made of olive wood ('xoanon') that had allegedly fallen from the skies at the time of Erechtheus. But, like the Stuart conjecture, it is open to the objection that it is not a mythic event.

When we adjust the viewing angle, the lump of marble becomes the feature of the composition to which the eyes of viewers are drawn. As Waldstein had noticed in another context, once we offset the distortion brought about by presenting the piece at eye level, the effect is to draw the eye of the viewer upward. From the most common angles at which the composition was seen in ancient times, that is, all those other than full frontal, the central male figure, even in its mutilated state, appears to be looking at the viewer, exhibiting to him and her the object under the cloth, a pose encouraging the reflexivity that is to be expected in the central action of the composition of the frieze. A co-opting stance of this kind can be seen in Figure 4.14, a photograph of a plaster cast that also preserves only the contours of the marble sub-surface as it has come down to our time.



Figure 4.14. Cast of the central scene, Acropolis Museum. Photograph by the author of a cast taken from an angle, June 2018. CC BY.

The cast also preserves a line of holes, whose purpose is not clear, but which, if they are the remains of coloured ceramic studs of the kind that were prominent on the Erechtheion nearby, would have indicated to the ancient viewers both the shape and the importance of the covered object that is being displayed to them by the male figure. And, even in its mutilated state, and after over a thousand years without maintenance, unsheltered from wind and weather, and its surface cleansed by its months in the sea, the exposed marble subsurface may still retain traces of other identity markers. The figure on the viewer's right, for example, appears to be shown as wearing something on her wrist that was so pronounced that it has been picked out in marble and not just in paint or ceramic. The raised lump may be a survival of the 'golden snake' that was worn by those women of Athens who belonged to families who claimed to be autochthonous.⁹⁴ The puzzling incisions to the neck could be the remains of a golden snake necklace that, as is noted in the *Ion*, served the same identifying purpose.⁹⁵ If the heads of the older men depicted on the frieze had survived in better condition, with their paint and metal, it might have been possible to find traces of the golden cicadas or grasshoppers that Thucydides and others say were worn in the hair by old-fashioned Athenians as symbols of their Ionianism.⁹⁶ Among the objects listed in the inventories of valuables held in the Acropolis temples, alongside the special clothes, wreaths, brooches, necklaces,

94 Another close-up photograph of the hand and forearm, that also brings out the rounded piece of raised marble on the wrist was included by Lagerlöf, Margaretha Rossholm, *The Sculptures of the Parthenon: Aesthetics and Interpretation* (New Haven, Conn.; London: Yale UP, 2000), 121.

95 The late Martin Robertson, puzzled by the irregularities on the neck, speculated that they might be 'pronounced Venus rings,' although that seems unlikely for a figure that in its mutilated state appears as almost child-like. Robertson and Frantz, *The Parthenon Frieze*, unnumbered page following plate V.

96 'it was only recently that their [Athenian] older men of the wealthier class gave up wearing tunics of linen and fastening their hair in a knot held by a golden grasshopper as a brooch; and this same dress obtained for a long time among the elderly men of the Ionians also, owing to their kinship with the Athenians.' Thuc. 1.6. In the main manuscript tradition, the word for grasshopper is given in Ionic dialect that tends to confirm that Antisthenes is referring to the claims to autochthony in the Ionian brooches and not just the real creatures. Prince, 41. The force of his contempt is lessened if it is altered to Attic. Among the candidates are the figures depicted on the north frieze X in the Acropolis Museum. Delivourias and Mavrommatis, *The Parthenon Frieze*, page 95.

and other paraphernalia used in festivals, are golden grasshoppers.⁹⁷ Whether they were made available to temple servants ('priests'), male or female, or to other participants in festivals in which Ionian kinship was remembered and re-enacted, is not recorded but seems likely.

The object wrapped in a cloth is, I suggest, a baby tightly wrapped in swaddling bands, a public display of a custom known to every Athenian family, even if not always practised.⁹⁸ Among the tens of thousands of visual images surviving from the ancient world, not one has been found that shows a man and a young person folding a piece of cloth.⁹⁹ By contrast images of tightly swaddled babies, of which a typical example is shown as Figure 4.15, are common.

97 Harris, Diane, *The Treasures of the Parthenon and Erechtheion* (Oxford: OUP, 1995), no 372, item 373. χρυσίδια διάλιθα σύμμικτα πλινθίων καὶ τεπτίγων σταθμόν τοῦτων.

98 A terracotta of a satyr shown holding a tightly wrapped baby is reproduced by Hall, Edith, *The Theatrical Cast of Athens; interactions between ancient Greek Drama and Society* (Oxford: OUP, 2006), 92, <https://doi.org/10.1093/acprof:oso/9780199298891.001.0001>. A tightly swaddled new-born infant is shown, with deities present, perhaps as a representation of the acceptance ceremony, on a votive stele in the Metropolitan Museum of Art, New York, MMA 24.97.92 discussed by Demand, Nancy H., *Birth, Death, and Motherhood in Classical Greece* (Baltimore; London: Johns Hopkins UP, 1994), 88, and viewable at <http://exhibits.hsl.virginia.edu/antiqua/gynecology/>. A birth scene with a baby apparently about to be wrapped in highly decorated cloth and swaddling bands is presented on a red-figure hydria in the British Museum, usually said to be the birth of Erichthonios, reproduced by Loraux, *Children*, plate 3. Swaddled babies are shown on the so-called Sigeian relief, one of the first antiquities to be acquired, against the wishes of the local population, by Lord Elgin on his way to Constantinople in 1799. Illustrated in [British Museum] *Ancient Marbles*, ix, 1842, plate xi. It appears to show a procession in which women seek to put their children under the care of Athena. Since one woman is shown as mourning, the piece may have been part of a tomb. Two examples of swaddled babies pictured on funerary pottery are noted by Lewis, Sian, *The Athenian Woman: An Iconographic Handbook* (London: Routledge, 2002), 221, note 20, <https://doi.org/10.4324/9780203351192>.

Swaddling was assumed to have been practised in the mythic age, as for example, at Eur. Tro. 759. Even baby gods are put in swaddling bands, as is the character of Hermes in the passage in Homeric Hymn 4 beginning at 237, although, since he is presented as only one day old and yet is able to speak and argue coherently, play the lyre, and steal cattle, this may be an example of the playful nature of the text and of non-reverential attitudes towards the gods.

99 The only exceptions I know of, which tend to prove the rule, are scenes pictured on images in the Naples Museum, *Raccolta delle più interessanti Dipinture e de' più belli Mosaici rinvenuti negli scavi di Ercolano, di Pompei, e di Stabia che ammiransi nel Museo Reale Borbonico* (Naples: n.p., 1840), 43 and 76 where a lady is apparently shown as considering buying cloths from a tradesman.



Figure 4.15. Grave memorial apparently of a woman who died in childbirth or soon afterwards handing over the swaddled baby to be cared for by another woman. Author's photograph. CC BY.¹⁰⁰

According to Hippocrates in his treatise on how climate, diet, and social customs affect the character of a people, those babies who were not swaddled were likely to grow up to be flabby, squat, and impotent.¹⁰¹ In Plato's ideal state it was to be laid down in law that a child should be swaddled, 'moulded like wax', until the age of two, and to be carried by their nurses till the age of three to ensure that their legs were straight.¹⁰² To present a baby tightly swaddled was therefore itself a recommendation to viewers, female as well as male, on how they ought to bring up their children to become useful to the city. Images of tightly swaddled babies made from terracotta, a material associated with personal votive offerings, look much the same.¹⁰³ Although there

100 Photograph taken at the British Museum, unprovenanced, probably made in Athens in the last quarter of the fifth century, GR 1894. 6–16.1 (Sculpture 2232). A similar image, apparently also of a baby surviving a mother's death in childbirth, is shown, tightly wrapped, with its face fully sculpted, on a grave memorial reproduced in Neils, Jenifer and Oakley, John H., eds, *Coming of Age in Ancient Greece: Images of Childhood from the Classical Past* (New Haven and London: Yale UP, 2003), 223, figure 3. Described as 'Attic marble grave stele ca 375–350 BCE. Houston, Museum of Fine Arts. Gift of Miss Annette Finnegan. From Athens.'

101 Hp. Aer. 20.

102 Plat. Laws 7.789e, although the idea is presented as an example of how some legislation would lead to ridicule among women and be unenforceable in practice.

103 One found in the sanctuary of Artemis at Munychia, dated to the late fourth century, now in the Archaeological Museum of Piraeus, 5383, is reproduced in Lee, Mireille M., *Body, Dress, and Identity in Ancient Greece* (Cambridge: CUP, 2015), 97, <https://doi.org/10.1017/CBO9781107295261>. Another, unprovenanced except as derived from a collection made in Corfu, presented as lying in a crib with a pillow, is reproduced in Walters, H. B., *Catalogue of the Terracottas in the Department of Greek*

are innumerable presentations of actual swaddling both in words and images over many hundreds of years, making it one of the most enduring and recognizable components of the discursive environment, only one image of an event set in the mythic age is known to me. Shown as Figure 4.16, as noticed and copied by Winckelmann, it is thought to picture the birth of Telephos and may refer to the play by Euripides, of which some fragments survive.



Figure 4.16. Birth of Telephos, , facsimile of an engraving from a bas relief in the Villa Borgese, with a similar image depicted in a mural from Heculaneum that was moved to the Museo Archeologico in Naples.

and Roman Antiquities, British Museum (London: Trustees of British Museum, 1903), B106. A terracotta of a satyr shown holding a tightly wrapped baby is reproduced by Hall, *Theatrical Cast*, 92. A tightly swaddled new-born infant is shown, with deities present, perhaps as a representation of the acceptance, on a votive stele in the Metropolitan Museum of Art, New York, MMA 24.97.92 discussed by Demand, *Birth, Death, and Motherhood*, 88, and viewable at <http://exhibits.hsl.virginia.edu/antiqua/gynecology/>

A birth scene with a highly decorated cloth and swaddling bands is presented on a red-figure hydria by the Oinante painter, British Museum, usually said to be the birth of Erichthonios, reproduced by Loraux, *Children*, plate 3.

The image, which appears to present the pregnancy of a mother and the presentation of the swaddled child, ‘scenes from the birth of Telephos’, shows the infant with even its head tightly swaddled, wrapped in a large peplos, as it is ceremonially handed over and accepted. What was shown positioned under the pediment that presented scenes surrounding the birth of the Athena, I suggest, were episodes relating to the birth and naming of a famous mythic child. Indeed, since both pediments offer myths of eponymous naming, we might even have guessed that the frieze would do the same.

In the custom of classical Athens, there was a time gap between the physiological birth of a child and the ceremony of accepting it as a member of the family.¹⁰⁴ Although there are differences in the record, it appears that on the fifth day, the nurse, in the presence of close family members, carried the infant round the family hearth in the middle of the room, hence the name ‘amphidromia’, literally ‘walking round in a circle’, a custom so well known to contemporary Athenians that the character of Socrates, in Plato’s *Theaetetus*, used it to explain his method of arguing as a circular process.¹⁰⁵ On the tenth day the child was formally named. During that interval, from which males appear to have been excluded or to have excluded themselves, the baby was without identity, born physiologically but not yet socially.¹⁰⁶ One of the characters of Theophrastus, commonly called ‘The Superstitious Man’ but perhaps more accurately rendered as ‘the man who pays excessive attention to customs’, refuses to visit a woman when she has given birth for fear of pollution, which he regards as equivalent to the prohibition on touching a dead body.¹⁰⁷

104 According to Aristotle’s *History of Animals*, 7, 12: ‘The majority of deaths in infancy occur before the child is a week old, hence it is customary to name the child at that age, from a belief that it has now a better chance of survival.’

105 *Ibid.*

106 The custom is described by Hall, *Theatrical Cast*, 62–67, <https://doi.org/10.1093/acp/rof:oso/9780199298891.001.0001>, drawing on the primary contemporary sources collected by Hamilton, Richard, ‘Sources for the Athenian amphidromia’ in *Greek, Roman, and Byzantine Studies*, Vol. 25 (1984), 243–251.

107 Theophrastus, Character 16. The Greek word, deisidaimonia, is cognate with that used by Paul of Tarsus in his initial complement to the men of Athens as discussed in St Clair, *WStP*, Chapter 22, <https://doi.org/10.11647/obp.0136.22>. The prohibition, many scholars have suggested, applied even to the biological father.

Nor was the interval between physiological and social birth a formality. Exposing an unwanted child to die seem to have been legal and acceptable during the first days of a child's life, both on grounds of physical unfitness, if, for example, the infant exhibited a disability, and also on moral and social grounds, as would be the case, for example, if it was not born legitimately according to the city's norms.¹⁰⁸ In archaeological excavations in the Athenian agora in the 1930s, a well was discovered near the so-called Theseion that contained the skeletal remains of about four hundred and fifty children as well as of dogs. Although dated to the Hellenistic period, it appears to give confirmation that infanticide whether active or passive was practised in Athens, as well as in Sparta, and probably in other Hellenic cities.¹⁰⁹ The autochthony claimed by certain Athenian families was not only a discourse, but ensuring racial purity was a current social practice.

When, however, as I suggest is the case here, the birth is entirely legitimate and a source of family and social celebration, the giving of gifts, of animal sacrifices and feasts, a birth scene fits well with the general storytelling function of the Parthenon and of the site. In Aristophanes's comedy, the *Birds*, the character of Euelpides, who boasts of how Athenian he is by birth, complains that his cloak was stolen when he was drunk at a tenth-day naming party. The dramatic purpose of the remark in the context of the play, other than to imply that Euelpides is a free-loader, is not obvious since it hangs without further explanation or follow up. The anecdote may have had a topicality not now recoverable, but its presence in the play shows that naming parties were a normal part of life in classical Athens.¹¹⁰ Nor should we assume that kinship festivals took second place to civic, nor that attendance was optional.¹¹¹

108 Noted by Swift, Laura, *Euripides, Ion* (London: Duckworth, 2008) referring to Patterson, Cynthia, "'Not Worth the Rearing": The Causes of Infant Exposure in Ancient Greece' in *Transactions of the American Philological Association*, Vol. 115 (1985), 103–123, and other works.

109 The evidence is revisited in Liston, Maria A., and Rotroff, Susan I., *The Agora Bone Well* (Boston: American School of Classical Studies, *Hesperia Supplement*, 2018).

110 Aristophanes, *Birds*, line 493. Nan Dunbar, in her authoritative edition, Dunbar, Nan, ed., *Aristophanes, Birds* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1995), <https://doi.org/10.1093/acrade/9780198150831.book.1>, adds a little more, notably that the amphidromia may have happened in the afternoon and continued into the night, which would account for the presence of many torches on the presentation of the procession.

111 Plutarch records that Pericles during his long period of ascendancy never accepted invitations from friends, with the exception of a wedding celebration given by

In the *Birds*, Aristophanes includes a parodic description of a naming ceremony with its procession, whose comic potential is exploited to great effect. Although it is usually overambitious to infer actuality from comedy, it is striking that when the scene is introduced, the first things that are called for, which serve as markers for the audience of the play, are a basket and a washing basin, both of which are presented among the objects being assembled on the Parthenon frieze.¹¹² In the *Clouds*, we are given a comic conversation between the character of Strepsiades and his wife about the choice of names and how the child would be affected by the alternatives.¹¹³ At the naming ceremony, a birth tax that can also be regarded as a registration fee, consisting of a quart measure of barley and another quart of wheat, plus one obol in cash, was also payable by the father, as it had been since the age of the tyrants, so turning the ceremony of acceptance of a child into a public civic duty. The same tax was levied at death, so marking both the entrance to and the exit from the status of Athenian citizen.¹¹⁴

Figure 4.17, a detail of a nineteenth-century sepia photograph of an unidentified funerary monument appears to show a woman who has died soon after giving birth handing over responsibility for the infant to surviving family members. It conforms with a common theme, but also, unusually, provides visual evidence for the practice of swaddling an infant's head in order to turn him into a 'long-head' like Pericles.¹¹⁵

As Figure 4.17 showed, head swaddling was also presented as occurring in the mythic world. Although my suggestion does not depend upon the point, I note that if the image of the swaddled baby in the central scene of the Parthenon included such a head covering, it would situate its head even more prominently in the composition as

a kinsman. Plut. Per. 7.4. That expulsion from the community of the city meant exclusion from the family and not just from the civic festivals is explicitly stated in a speech put into the mouth of Oedipus in the *Oedipus Tyrannus* of Sophocles. Soph. OT 234-235.

112 Aristoph. *Birds* 850' παῖ παῖ, τὸ κανοῦν αἴρεσθε καὶ τὴν χέρνιβα.

113 In the passage following Aristoph. Cl. 56.

114 Noted by Aristotle as payable to the priestess, that is, to a member of staff of the temple to Athena, at Aristot. Econ. 2.1347a. While it might be going too far to suggest that the central scene reminded viewers of their duty to pay their taxes, if more had survived, we might have been able to pick out the preamble to the act of payment in the composition, set back in time in the same way as recent customs were given an imagined ancient pedigree in, for example, the *Eumenides* of Aeschylus.

115 As discussed as part of the discursive environment in Chapter 2.

seen by viewers looking up, and make it an even stronger candidate to be mutilated. The same would be true of any other head-dress that acted as a marker.



Figure 4.17. A swaddled infant with a conical head covering. Detail from a nineteenth-century sepia photograph, perhaps by Constantinos, of a grave memorial in high relief.¹¹⁶

So, if viewers of the Parthenon were being shown a mythic baby being accepted into the community of the city, who is being pictured? One candidate jumps to mind. What was being shown, I suggest, are ‘scenes relating to’ the birth and naming of Ion, to adopt the phrase used by Pausanias for the stories presented by the pediments, ‘birth’ being understood as the social birth that did not occur until the naming ceremony. Ion, the eponymous father of all Ionians, was one of the most ancient of Athenian heroes, being mentioned in the eighth century in Hesiod’s *Catalogue of Women* in a fragment not discovered till the twentieth century, and with an apparently unbroken tradition for over a thousand years.¹¹⁷ According to Thucydides, the Ionian descendants

116 Loosely inserted in an album of nineteenth-century photographs of Greece, none labelled or dated. Private collection. I have been unable to identify the piece photographed in any collection. A swaddled baby with a similar head wrapping shown as highly decorated, is reproduced in a scene from myth from the Laborde collection in Notor, *La Femme dans l’Antiquité Grecque*, 91. Another image from a bas-relief from the Troad in the same volume, page 8, perhaps showing a farewell or a handing over scene, shows a mature and a young woman each holding a swaddled infant. That held by the younger, to judge from the reproduction, may also be hatted.

117 The Hesiod fragment noted, with transcription by Martin, Gunther, ed., *Euripides, Ion, Edition and Commentary* (Leiden: de Gruyter, 2018), 15, <https://doi.org/10.1515/9783110523591>.

of the Athenians who lived in Athens continued in his day to celebrate their (kinship) connexion annually on a special day in the month of Anthesterion as part of the 'ancient Dionysia'.¹¹⁸ My suggestion therefore fits well with Nicole Loraux's suggested requirement, as well as that of Connelly already noted, that the mythic stories, if they were to fulfil their purpose, had to be recognizable by Athenians 'without any hesitation on their part, as if these identifications were self-evident'.¹¹⁹

The suggestion, unlike those suggested by others, is fully in line with the rhetoric of the building as a whole and with the discursive environment. Besides the allegedly welcoming attitude to foreigners presented by the character of Pericles in the Thucydidean funeral oration, there is plentiful evidence of a fear of hybridity.¹²⁰ To reassert the common kinship and the mutual obligations through the mythic figure of Ion was therefore not just a useful old story alongside others in the mythic past of Athens, but, as was the case in some tragedies, one with topical relevance. As Lisa Kallet has remarked about the classical period: 'They [the Athenians] also, through an increasing cultivation of the hero Ion and an emphasis on their connection to Ionians, marketed themselves as the mother city of all Ionians', an observation well attested in the contemporary authors who described the institutions of the classical city, the claims to antiquity, and the use of eponyms.¹²¹

118 Thuc. 2.15.

119 Loraux, *Children*, 20. Fehr's suggestion that the scene presents an idealized family, the domain of the 'oikos' a female space, as a parallel with the male world of the 'polis', is attractive and consistent with my suggestion, but except as part of a displayed myth, it is not enough to meet the postulate.

120 As evidenced by the examples in Chapter 2. Indeed, the fact that the character of Pericles was presenting his point suggests that it was not universally shared

121 Kallet, Lisa, 'Wealth, Power, and Prestige: Athens at Home and Abroad', in Neils, Jenifer, ed., *The Parthenon from Antiquity to the Present* (Cambridge: CUP, 2005), 61. In the *Persians* by Aeschylus, thought to have been produced for the first time in 472, a pitiless celebration of the misery inflicted on the leadership and people of the Achaemenid empire by the defeat of the invasion led by Xerxes, the characters frequently refer to the Athenians as 'Ionians'. The vital role accorded to Ion in the construction of Athenianness is referred to several times in the Aristotelian 'Athenian Constitution' [Ath Pol] and in the fragments preserved in the works of other authors, where, as is normal with eponyms, he is treated as a historical as well as a mythological personage. In 41.2, for example, Ion is credited along with others unnamed with having divided the recently unified people of Attica into the 'families' of which the four 'sons of Ion' described earlier by Herodotus, Her 5. 66, were the old Ionians. Even after the Athenian political domination ('arche') came to an end, the genealogical commonality of the Ionians continued to be celebrated on formal occasions, as, for example, Aelius Aristides in his panegyric *Panathenaic*

And her comment is amply borne out not only by the experiment that brings out the plentiful references to Ion in the discursive environment, but by much other evidence. It was part of their self-fashioning that the Athenians were themselves Ionians, and that overseas Ionians as their 'children' owed them obedience, especially at a time when the original Ionians, the Athenians, had saved them in the still recent unsuccessful Persian invasion.¹²²

But a presentation of scenes surrounding the birth of Ion offered even more. One of the biggest, the most regular, amongst the most ancient, and, at three days, the longest-lasting of all the festivals, the pan-Ionian Apatouria, which occurred in various sites in Attica every autumn, was not only a celebration of kinship, but the administrative occasion when new members were formally enrolled.¹²³ Although there appears not to have been any age limit after which a boy or man could not be enrolled, most enrolments appear to have been of infants born to the legitimate wives of existing members in the previous calendar year. The naming and enrolment displays not only enabled boys to proceed through later rites of passage to the privileges and duties of citizenship, but they determined private property and inheritance rights far into the future. As emerges from the corpus of legal speeches of the fourth century in which the details of the induction ceremonies were put under scrutiny, naming and enrolment were amongst the instruments by which the inter-generational continuity of the city was celebrated and performed.

Once modern assumptions are discarded and the lost paint and metal restored, the smaller figure can emerge as the mythic Kreousa, mother of the eponymous Ion. Since it is a social birth that is being celebrated, not the physiological, she is pictured as a girl at the moment of transition

Discourse, 57–58, tells the Athenians that 'at both ends of our [Mediterranean] world, there dwell children of your children'. The tomb of Ion at Potamoi, a small port town in Attica, was still a site of commemorative ceremonies at the time of Pausanias. Paus 1, 31.3, with a substantial passage on stories about Ion and the Ionians in Paus 7, 1–17.

122 In the *Persians* by Aeschylus, 591, the Chorus claims that the peoples of Ionia who were formerly under Achaemenid domination need no longer curb their tongues but can speak freely, a celebration of Athenian democracy.

123 What is known about the Apatouria is summarized by Parker, Robert, *Polytheism and Society at Athens* (Oxford: OUP, 2005), 458–461, <https://doi.org/10.1093/acprof:oso/9780199216116.001.0001>. The study by Lambert, S. D., *The Phratries of Attica* (Ann Arbor, University of Michigan Press, 1991) adds more details especially about the enrolment of names.

to adulthood, as an ancient viewer would recognize.¹²⁴ And the male figure who is accepting the baby into the family can be identified as Xuthus, the husband of Kreousa, whose memory was also honoured in recurrent ceremonies, as testified by a fragmentary inscription of c. 430; one of many that regulate the calendar of sacrifices, it notes that an Attic 'trittys', one of the large constituencies of citizens into which the population had been divided in 506, records a duty to sacrifice 'a lamb to Xuthus'.¹²⁵ As for the female figure to the left of the tall male figure, she may be formally receiving the gifts associated with a naming ceremony, some of which are mentioned in ancient authors, brought to her by female kin and friends holding trays on their heads.¹²⁶

Recovering the Ancient Meanings of the Ion Myth

If my suggestion is valid, can more be said about the way the stories were likely to have been understood by real Athenians? Although the Parthenon frieze was part of the background experience of those participating in rituals on the Acropolis for around a thousand years, not a single author of the surviving corpus makes even a passing reference to it in the terms used by modern histories of sculpture, or even in those used by Pausanias as a collector of stories.¹²⁷ However, there are some indirect indications. In listing the benefits that a mother can give to her daughters that will be precluded by her voluntary death, for example, the character of Alcestis, in the play by Euripides of that name, declares that attending them in childbirth is the most caring.¹²⁸

And we have a few reports of critiques of the discourses of autochthony and Ionianism. Antisthenes, for example, a learned and prolific author and friend of Plato, had a personal reason for resenting the backward-looking nativism of the two-parent decree. Although born in Athens,

124 'For Greek women, the first birth marked the transition from youth to adulthood.' Fehr, *Good Democrats and Wives*, 96.

125 LSCG 27. Because the inscription is incomplete, the trittys is unidentifiable.

126 As for example in the illustration from a vase in Naples reproduced by Notor, *La Femme dans l'Antiquité Grecque*, 237, which shows gifts appropriate to a funeral ceremony being carried on such trays. We might, for example, see what others have regarded as mere cushions, or in the case of the Connelly conjecture, as shrouds, as swaddling bands, or the long peploi in which babies were wrapped.

127 LSCG 27. Because the inscription is incomplete, the trittys is unidentifiable.

128 Eur. Alc. 319.

his mother had been born in Thrace, and he was therefore barred from participating in many aspects of public life, including speaking in the Assembly.¹²⁹ He was 'Attic' but not 'Athenian'. His sardonic remark that moving from Athens to Sparta was like moving from the women's quarters to the men's, a variation on a standard theme that Spartans were more manly than Athenians, is more pointed if he is alluding to scenes relating to the birth of Ion.¹³⁰ And when he said, in a sardonic phrase that owes its survival to its having been adopted as a moral tag ('chreia'), that the only autochthonous creatures on the Acropolis were the snails and the grasshoppers/cicadas, he was referring both to the creatures that appeared to hatch spontaneously and to the golden grasshopper brooches of the 'old Ionians' who wore them.¹³¹

As Jenifer Neils has pointed out: 'images of youths carrying troughs or baskets are not common'.¹³² And the suggestions for what the receptacles might have been understood by viewers to contain, for example honeycombs, as well as other free-standing items, have tended to start from descriptions of the Panathenaic processions, despite the lack of any correspondence with what is pictured on the frieze in any of the main features. If, however, we start instead from a hypothesis that what are presented are scenes from the naming of Ion, in which all the elements presented are immediately recognizable as following the normal Athenian practices of birth ceremonies, the youths are explainable as male guests bringing gifts. Athenaeus, a later writer who gathered stories about the lore of food, preserves mentions of the customs of the naming festivals that he had extracted from works now otherwise lost: the *Geryones* by Ephippus; the *Parasite* by Antiphanes; the *Insatiable Man* by Diphilus; the *Palæstra* by Alcæus; and the *Birth of the Muses* by Polyzelus.¹³³ We also have a papyrus fragment that may come from the tragedy of Aeschylus known as *Semele, or the Water Carriers*, which seems to have been enacted by the Enneakrounos

129 Price, Susan, ed., *Antisthenes of Athens: Texts, Translations, and Commentary* (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 2015), <https://doi.org/10.3998/mpub.5730060>.

130 ἐκ τῆς γυναικωνίτιδος λέγειν εἰς τὴν ἀνδρωνίτιν ἐπιέναι. Price item 7, page 39, from Theon.

131 *Antisthenes of Athens*, Price edition, 41, <https://doi.org/10.3998/mpub.5730060>.

132 Neils, *Parthenon Frieze*, 150.

133 Ath. 9.10.

(‘Nine Channels’) spring.¹³⁴ The ceremony of inducting children into the community, real and imagined, by washing them in the local source of fresh water, thus linking them securely to the life-giving earth, is recorded for several ancient Greek cities, including Argos and Thebes, as well as for Athens. As familiar to every Athenian family of the classical period as the practice of swaddling new-born babies, it is referred to by Thucydides, and given authority by being pushed back in time to the heroic age as already noticed.¹³⁵

Although there are many descriptions in words, visual images of the ceremony are rare. One, evidently drawing on a Greek model, was seen and pictured by Winckelmann in the collection of Cardinal Albani, as shown in Figure 4.18.

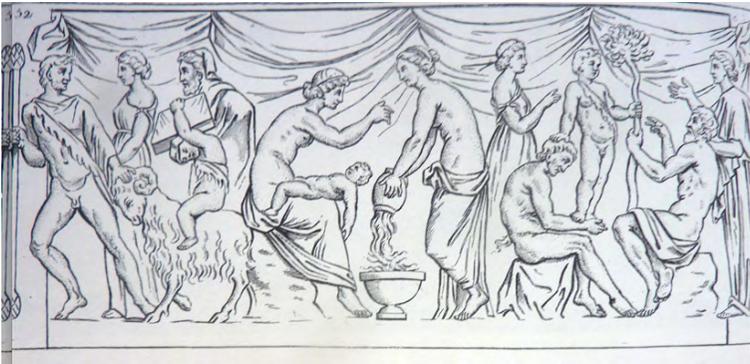


Figure 4.18. ‘Bacchus raised by the nymphs of Dodona’. Engraving.¹³⁶

If my suggestion is right, how should we regard the *Ion*, the play by Euripides? The first public production, which depended upon its having passed through the stages of obtaining approval and financing required of all works entered for dramatic festivals and competitions, can be reliably dated to some time in the latter part of the mid-fifth century when the main plans for the Parthenon had already been approved

134 Smyth, Herbert Weir, ed., *Aeschylus, with an English Translation* (London: Heinemann; Cambridge: Harvard UP, 1971, 1973). Appendix and Addendum to Vol. 2 edited by Hugh Lloyd-Jones. ii, 566–571.

135 In Chapter 2.

136 No 52 from Winckelmann, *Monumenti antichi inediti*. Private collection, showing some browning of the page. Reproduced in Winckelmann and Appelbaum, *Winckelmann's Images*, 24.

and some of the actual construction work had begun and perhaps been completed.¹³⁷ Since Euripides's career as a dramatist began in 455, there is no problem in relating one of its themes to the Periclean two-parent decree of 451/450. How, we can therefore ask, would an early audience of Athenians have regarded the play in the circumstances in which it was first performed?

In the play, a male baby who was found abandoned by some unfortunate local girl outside the perimeter of the holy site ('temenos') of Delphi, is taken in by one of the female temple servants, out of kindness and against the regulations, itself a critique of convention. Gradually the child learns to survive by living off scraps from the sacrifices. As he grows into a boy, he makes himself so useful by doing odd jobs that he is given permanent employment. Among those whom he meets as he goes about his temple duties is Xuthus, husband of the Kreousa, daughter of King Erechtheus of Athens who has come to seek advice. After many unexpected twists, it turns out that the boy is the same person as a baby whom Kreousa bore in secret in a cave of the Acropolis slopes and then she abandoned. When the boy's true history is eventually discovered, he is given his name 'Ion' in a belated ceremony, and taken to Athens where he is installed as heir to Xuthus and awaits his destiny as founding father of all Ionians.

My suggested answer has used the *Ion* as a source for contemporary Athenian customs of the classical era, such as the gold rings, bracelets, and other markers that signalled to viewers that a woman was from an autochthonous family. My suggestion is not however that the story offered on the Parthenon frieze shows any moment, episode, or set of scenes in the play, something we should not expect. It does, however, fit well into the discursive environment. Indeed, it fills a gap in the array of stories that my experiment suggests demand to be given prominence on the Parthenon.

As was common in the Athenian tragic theatre, especially in the plays of Euripides, the *Ion* took the myth in a new direction while maintaining many features of its predecessors. In the world of myth, it was not uncommon for characters to be abandoned as infants, brought up by shepherds or animals, and eventually recognized and either

¹³⁷ The difficulties of establishing a more precise date are summarized by Swift, *Euripides, Ion*, 28–30.

rehabilitated into a normal social hierarchy, or, as in the case of Oedipus, made to confront an unwelcome truth.¹³⁸ In the *Ion*, Euripides offered a plotline full of mistaken identities, plans to kill family members, and of death by stoning narrowly averted. The drama, a work of astonishing poetic power and of narrative complexity, is held together by fantastical coincidences and by no less than three instances of dramatic reversal, of ‘peripateia,’ defined by Aristotle, who may have coined the term, with the peripatos road round the Athenian Acropolis in mind, as ‘a change by which the action veers round to its opposite, subject always to our rule of probability or necessity’.¹³⁹ The skill of the playwright, presenting within a genre that in modern terms is more romance than tragedy, and that was shared with the implied and the actual audience, enabled the interlocking complexities and instances of implausibility to be fitted into the complex formal structure demanded by the rules of the dramatic festival competition into which the *Ion* was entered.¹⁴⁰

In the *Wise Melanippe*, an earlier play by Euripides, of which fragments survive, the eponymous heroine notes, as an incidental contribution to the setting of the scene, that Ion had been born in Athens to Kreousa and her foreign-born husband Xuthus.¹⁴¹ Indeed, in the new play, in order to display and draw attention to the change being made from the version of the Ion myth known to and expected by the first audiences, Euripides included a summary of the older version in the Prologue where it was reported under the allegedly unquestionable authority of the god Hermes and of the Delphic oracle.¹⁴²

As a story, the *Ion* elaborated what had hitherto been an unremarkable foundation myth of a child born to a Athenian mother, Kreousa, and to her husband, the military hero Xuthus, into one in which Ion implausibly

138 *Ibid*, 88, mentions as examples Zeus, Paris, and Oedipus, as well as Cyrus, Moses, and Romulus and Remus. The fragmentary *Antiope* of Euripides also has some other similarities in its plots and surprises to the *Ion*, which tends to suggest that the *Ion* may have conformed with a genre that audience already knew; when Antiope claims that she was made pregnant by Zeus who took the form of a satyr, her sons do not believe her and decide to put her to death. Euripides, *Selected Fragmentary Plays*, Collard et al, ii, fragment 210. The foundling is also a common character in Menander and in the traditions of New Comedy.

139 Aristotle, *Poetics*, 1452a. Some of the reversals are attributed to Tyche.

140 Rehm, Rush, *Understanding Greek Tragic Theatre*, second edition (London and New York: Routledge, 2017), 149, <https://doi.org/10.4324/9781315748696>.

141 Euripides, *Selected Fragmentary Plays*, Collard et al edition, i, Fragment 491, 9–10, pages 251 and 267.

142 Eur. *Ion* 70.

turns out to have been fathered by the god Apollo, Kreousa having been impregnated against her will outside the Cave of Pan on the north slope.¹⁴³ In the *Ion*, as the story was recast, Ion therefore eventually turns out to be Athenian by both parents, and to conform with the Periclean two-parent decree of 450, assuming that Apollo is a deity closely although not exclusively associated with Athens.

By the end, the mythic eponymous hero Ion has been culturally reconstructed to be in full compliance, with implications not only for his exercise of citizenship in the male public sphere of speaking in debates, participating in elections, and in his eligibility for holding public offices, but in the private and family sphere, especially in questions relating to inheritance. As Gunther Martin has written, the character of Ion ‘who was formerly only half Athenian is turned into a “pure” citizen’.¹⁴⁴ And, as the character of Ion himself makes explicit, before he knows about the soon-to-be revealed circumstances of his birth and upbringing, if it had not been for the unexpected change in the story of his birth, he would be excluded from participating in public affairs. His tongue, he says, would have been enslaved.¹⁴⁵ If he did not satisfy the two-parent rule, he could not have passed the test set at the Ionian-wide festival of the Apatouria at which his name would be voted on and registered on a citizen list (‘phratry’), a rite of passage that, for most male children occurred in their first year of adulthood but that had no age or time limit.¹⁴⁶ One of the many ironies in the old Ion story, which Euripides has the character of Ion himself point out, is that after the two-parent decree, Ion was not even an Ionian.¹⁴⁷

143 It was from the evidence of the *Ion*, among other sources collected by Meursius, that Spon and the early topographers had been able to refute the local story that Pan’s cave was the far larger one under the Monument of Thrassylos on the north slope as discussed in St Clair, *WStP*, Chapter 7, <https://doi.org/10.11647/obp.0136.07>.

144 Martin, *Euripides, Ion*, 22, <https://doi.org/10.1515/9783110523591>.

145 Eur. *Ion* 675. And Eur. *Ion* 585–589, with an even more explicit long passage that follows that has been omitted from some editions as a gloss that made its way into the text as manuscripts were copied.

146 Summarised by Garland, Robert, ‘Children in Athenian Religion’, in Grubbs, Judith Evans, and Parkin, Tim, eds, *The Oxford Handbook of Childhood and Education in the Classical World* (Oxford: OUP, 2013), 213, <https://doi.org/10.1093/oxfordhb/9780199781546.013.010>, with references to the ancient sources and modern discussions.

147 Among the other candidates for Athenian founders whose birth might have been presented is Theseus, but, as discussed in Chapter 2, Theseus, for all his importance in Athenian self-fashioning, does not appear to have been pictured on the Parthenon, being too important just to be one of the many presented on the

The *Ion* concludes with what Gunther Martin has called ‘a glorifying twist’ that asserts that all Ionians are the descendants of the autochthonous citizens of Athens, a point about an aspired-to future already trailed in the Prologue.¹⁴⁸ The implication is that the Ionians overseas, as ‘kin’ of the Athenians, owe obedience to the largest city in the Ionian world, a staple of the discursive environment. However, before the play reaches what Donald J. Mastronarde has called its ‘veritable orgy of imperialistic genealogy’, it has performed another function of the Athenian tragic drama. In a series of exchanges, the characters question the credibility of the implausible narrative of a series of events that the audiences, and later the readerships, of the play were being invited to believe. Surely Kreousa’s story that she had been raped by a god, the character of Ion suggests, was just a tale commonly invented by women who become pregnant in circumstances they are unable or unwilling to explain?¹⁴⁹

The women viewers of the frieze on the temple at Delphi were wrong to trust the stories and songs that they had heard from other women as they worked at their looms.¹⁵⁰ The knowledge of the future supposedly obtained from scrutinizing the entrails of sacrificed animals and bird omens is unreliable.¹⁵¹ What the gods allegedly tell humans through the medium of the Delphic oracle also turns out to have been untrue.¹⁵² With example after example, the characters in the play are presented as losing their confidence in the ways in which Athenians had been officially taught to regard their city.

The character of Kreousa presents herself as a victim of gender stereotyping when she asserts that women are all treated in the same way by men. But shortly afterwards her husband Xuthus not only

Parthenon pediments. Stories of his early life given by Plutarch in his *Life of Theseus*, apart from the killing of the Minotaur, consisted mainly of rapes and murders. Like the character of Ion, he would not have counted as an Athenian citizen under the Periclean two-parent decree, and, like that of Ion, his name was also derived from a groan-inducing pun. Theseus did, however, have his own cult in a site in the town.

148 Martin, *Euripides, Ion*, 22, <https://doi.org/10.1515/9783110523591>. The Prologue declares ‘Apollo will cause his name throughout Greece to be called Ion, founder of the cities of Asia’. Eur. *Ion* 74.

149 Mastronarde, Donald J., *The Art of Euripides: Dramatic Technique and Social Context* (Cambridge: CUP, 2010), 184, <https://doi.org/10.1017/CBO9780511676437>. Another example of a god allegedly raping a girl during a festival is in the *Auge* of Euripides.

150 Eur. *Ion* 507.

151 Eur. *Ion* 369–380.

152 Eur. *Ion* 369–380.

declares that he is not interested in who was the biological father of Ion, whom he intends to treat as his son and heir, but shows himself to be considerate of Kreousa's feelings. Indeed, some audience members might have thought, he is remarkably forgiving of a wife who, in an earlier scene, had intended to kill him.¹⁵³ And not only is gender-stereotyping critiqued as a two-edged weapon. When the generous-minded Xuthus, in deciding to accept the temple boy Ion as his son and heir, reaches out to touch him as a member of his family, Ion thinks he is being subjected to a homoerotic advance and has to be reassured that, in this case, his normally useful working assumption did not apply.¹⁵⁴

When the character of Ion, in repeating the official civic ideology of autochthony, says he was 'born from the earth', the character of Xuthus tells him that the earth does not give birth to children.¹⁵⁵ In affirming his belief in the autochthony myth, the still un-disillusioned character of Ion quotes, as his evidence that the stories are true, the fact that they are validated by 'pictures'.¹⁵⁶ There are other examples in classical Athens of images of the half-man, half-serpent creature that personified autochthony, but none was more often seen nor more officially normative than the so-called Cecrops group presented on the west pediment of the Parthenon and on the base of the more rarely seen cult statue inside. If so, we have another example of the custom of inserting features of the classical-era built landscape into the mythic age of the tragic drama, and also of how, as with 'the gods', that does not shield them from discursive assault. By using a cognate of the Greek word 'nomizo', the character of Ion implies that the mythic stories and the gods that people them are also fictions, socially useful for those who benefit, but with nothing intrinsically valuable supporting them, other than the misplaced belief that they are true which is conventionally accorded to them.

There are other passages in the play in which the nature of what should count as evidence is discussed, drawing attention, for example, to the absurdity of judging individuals by their external markers and indicators ('gnorismata') rather than by their observable behaviour. In

153 Eur. Ion 655–657.

154 Eur. Ion 519–526.

155 Eur. Ion 542.

156 Eur. Ion 542. ὡσπερ ἐν γραφῇ νομίζεται, The almost identical phrase ὡς ἐν γραφαῖς is also used in *Iphigeneia in Aulis*, Eur. IA 265, to give vividness to the description in language of Iphigeneia's distress at her impending death.

the play, neither Kreousa nor Ion meets the standard of *paideia*, although the non-autochthonous Athenian Xuthus usually does. When the character of Xuthus performs the belated naming ceremony on the boy, he prophesies a good fortune ('Tyche') that any audience would have recognised as a reference to the future role of Ion as the eponymous hero and father of all Ionians. But that ceremonial speech act is immediately followed by what to modern ears is a groan-inducing pun: '... for I first met you when you were exiting ('exIONti') the sanctuary'.¹⁵⁷ The same word had already been used twice in the play where we can imagine the actors drawing attention to the pun in their diction and preparing the audience for the comic bathos of the naming ceremony.¹⁵⁸ By word play, more suited to comedy than to tragedy, the mythic characters, like the historic Antisthenes, dismiss the whole discourse of eponyms and of Ionianism, and suggest that the play may be giving currency to the ideas of Prodikos, who taught that the gods were in origin nothing more than names of useful things.¹⁵⁹

As in Athenian tragedy generally, the *Ion* exposes moral questions to scrutiny and debate. Although, when he is a mere temple servant, the character of Ion has qualms about killing the birds 'that bring messages from the gods', he decides to be a slave to his human duties and never to 'cease serving him who feeds me', an unheroic and hypocritical pragmatic surrender to outward conformity and its system of economic beneficiaries, who include not only himself but the sections of the Athenian citizenry who made good money from building, supplying goods and services to, and promoting the official rhetoric.¹⁶⁰

When the character of Kreousa is complimented on her illustrious ancestry, she replies that it has not been of any use to her, indeed has caused her three sisters to be put to death as sacrifices 'for the city', a riposte to those advocating conquering war and glorious death found in funeral orations and celebrated on the Parthenon.¹⁶¹ The gods themselves

157 Eur. *Ion* 661. Ἴωνα δ' ὀνομάζω σε τῆ τύχῃ πρέπον, ὀθοῦνεκ' ἀδύτων ἐξιόντι μοι θεοῦ ἴχνος συνήψας πρώτος.

158 At lines 516, by the Chorus, and at 535 by Xuthus.

159 Other examples of appropriate punning names that were collected by Aristotle, *Rhetoric* 2.23 and by others are noted by Mayhew, Robert, ed., *Prodicus the Sophist: Texts, Translations, and Commentary* (Oxford: OUP, 2011), 37.

160 Eur. *Ion* 179–183.

161 Eur. *Ion* 264, 268. The playwright explicitly refers to the story of the sacrifice of the daughters of Erechtheus, which provided the topic for another play by Euripides

that claim to advise mortals on how to act do not practise what they are deemed to preach. Who can blame mortals if they copy the gods? It is the teachers who are to blame.¹⁶² If the gods had to pay the fines that mortals are charged for their rapes, their temples would soon be empty, a reference to the role of buildings such as the Parthenon as strong-room repositories of a city's assets, including inflows of payments from fines.¹⁶³ Near the end of the play, the Chorus, who are not yet up to date with the civically reassuring raped-by-the-god explanation and are still xenophobic, pronounce their curse on the formal feast for the naming of Ion that is about to take place.¹⁶⁴

In episode after episode, the play glories in pointing out quite how many and quite how implausible are the changes needed to the usual story if Ion is to be regarded as autochthonous. But the solution that the character of Athena, speaking as the personification of the city, offers in her *deus ex machina* culmination is straightforward. First, let there be no recriminations, and, second, maintain a silence. Let Xuthus continue to remain in ignorance of the 'true' story. And her advice appears to have been accepted. To Pausanias, writing hundreds of years later, as he listened to the stories being told elsewhere in Greece, Ion was the regular son of Kreousa and of her husband Xuthus, with no mention of the elaborate chains of coincidences, deceptions, plots, and surprises set out in the play.¹⁶⁵ In the list of genealogies and eponyms of the Athenian kings given by the learned Strabo, no alternatives to 'Ion, the son of Xuthus' was even mentioned.¹⁶⁶

When, in 1890, on a stage in Cambridge, England, the play was publicly performed as a drama, not read as a literary text, perhaps for the first time for over two thousand years, Arthur Verrall, then a famous academic classicist who had helped make the arrangements, was horrified. Euripides, he declared, was a 'botcher', a 'bungler', and no 'true Greek'. He was 'morally a monster, intellectually a fool' and his works were 'unfit for our theatres'. Among the audience too, he

that tells a version of a myth that Joan Breton Connelly has conjectured is shown on the central slab of the Parthenon, as discussed above.

162 Eur. Ion 449.

163 Eur. Ion 447.

164 Eur. Ion 705–711.

165 Notably Paus.2.14.1; and 7.1.2.

166 Strab. 9.19.

reported: 'the revolting nature of the subject, unredeemed ... by any serious purpose, provoked a merited disgust'. What sort of man', he thundered, deducing the personality of the author from the characters in his works, could proclaim that the oracles were frauds and that the gods do not exist? Only a 'rationalist' who hated 'embodied mystery'.¹⁶⁷

A few years earlier, as part of the preparations, Verrall had published an edition and translation of the *Ion* with mainly respectful philological notes with no indication of the shock and sense of betrayal he was to experience after seeing it performed.¹⁶⁸ The 'men like ourselves' rhetoric had met its match. For if Euripides had pointed out to the classical Athenians that their gods were only a 'nomisma', a social convention that produced economic benefits for some, where did that leave the official religion of the audience? Unlike the DDs of Mars Hill who had mostly regarded the ancients as unfortunate pre-Christians doing their best with what they had, the intellectuals of Cambridge University, many of whom had lent their prestige to the Christian cause, were also now being forced into retreat, not by modern arguments but by ancient.

To return finally to the classical period, in attempting to reconstruct the interior mental experiences of real historic viewers of plays, the problem of evidence is almost insuperable, although I would suggest, made more imaginable by recovering the discursive environment within whose boundaries producers proffered and consumers received. Pausanias, the only sustained ancient observer of the interactions of images and stories whose work has survived, is more of an anthropologist looking in than a participant organising his experiences into words for his own memorializing purposes. We do however have another set of texts, the so-called 'Sacred Tales' of Aelius Aristides, a man much concerned about his own bodily health who, externally at least, took seriously the discourses of theism, of cognition, and of dreams prevalent in his own times and assembled into a long-lasting discursive environment.¹⁶⁹ One

167 All the quotations are from the chapter on the *Ion* in Verrall, A. W., Litt.D. Fellow of Trinity College, Cambridge, *Euripides, the Rationalist: A Study in the History of Art and Religion* (Cambridge: CUP, 1895), 129–165.

168 Verrall, A. W., ed., *The Ion of Euripides, with a Translation into English Verse and an Introduction and Notes* (Cambridge: CUP, 1890).

169 That Aristides was conventional is among the conclusions arrived at by Israelowich, Ido, *Society, Medicine and Religion in the Sacred Tales of Aelius Aristides* (Leiden: Brill, 2012), <https://doi.org/10.1163/9789004229440>.

of his works, the so-called 'Athena', although presented as a dream and a prayer, is an imagined walk among the monuments on the Acropolis of Athens, almost a companion to Pausanias, but one in which the statues, pictures, and the stories that they tell are integrated into a single paean of praise for the city, its history, its achievements, and its inventions, deeply internalised. Aristides begins, as is to be expected, with the birth of Athena on the east pediment, interpreting it as a presentation of the indissolubility of the connection between Athens and the father of the gods, picking out a feature of the shield to allow his mind to remember Homer, with other authors, including Pindar, as infiltrating ('intertextualizing') his mind. He looks at the Gigantomachy of the metopes in much the same terms as the women at Delphi, and appears to let his mind meander to the stories on the west pediment, and other thoughts and interpretations that are unique to the occasion.

When in his peroration he addresses Athena, presented as an imagined presence on the Acropolis, he invokes a verse from a lost play by Aeschylus: "'Oh thou before the royal palace as sang the Chorus of Aeschylus" the heavenly palace and the greatest palace in our land, grant ... [etc]!', and he reveals a mind so deeply infiltrated by traditions that, although a professional orator, he cannot compose his own words.¹⁷⁰ A prisoner of phrases removed from their first contexts to serve new rhetorical purposes, he may have thought that he was participating in a tradition that he was upholding and reinforcing, but he has become a reciter of words written by others to describe experiences allegedly felt by himself. The weight of the intermediate past, in modern terms, 'reception', has deprived him of independence and he has become a mere participant in a predictable ritual.

The waking dreamer does, however, sum up *paideia* as a series of hoped-for results, making explicit that the Acropolis is a visual equivalent of the long-enduring conventions of funeral orations and panegyrics. Banished are 'folly, wantonness, cowardice, disorder,

170 Ael. Ar. Orat. 2 16. My translation, with an amendment to Behr's translation, in Behr, Charles A., ed., *P. Aelius Aristides, The Complete Works* (Leiden: Brill, 1986), ii, 229 of 'phronesis' as 'intelligence' to accord more fully with the use of the word in the policy-making process noted in Chapter 1 from Aristotle's account of that process. The quotation is ἀλλ' ὡ τῶν βασιλείων πρόδρομος μελάθρων Aeschylus fragment 216 renumbered from 388, apparently a description by Hekabe of the gates of Troy.

faction, scorn of the gods'. In comes 'rational consideration, moderation, courage, concord, good order, success, and honour of the gods and from the gods'.¹⁷¹ Here we have a formal statement of why the Parthenon was built and of how those who commissioned and designed it intended that it would be seen and internalized by its users over the long term.

Isocrates had used the same phrase in an earlier speech, on the Areopagus: 'Yes, and who of my own generation does not remember that the democracy so adorned the city with temples and public buildings that even today visitors from other lands consider that she is worthy to rule not only over Hellas but over all the world'.¹⁷² But then he had almost immediately undermined his implied claim that it had been rhetorically successful, by pointing out that the Thirty Tyrants who took over Athens after its defeat in the Peloponnese had plundered the temples and privatized the dockyards on which a thousand talents had been spent so that they could be destroyed and the land used for other purposes.

In the following chapter I offer another experiment in recovering the mentalities of the past by reviving another genre of ancient historiography that is also composed from the inside looking out. The 'rhetorical discourse' is offered as an example of those composed for the competitions at the philosophical schools in Athens during the first centuries CE.¹⁷³ The open-ended title allowed candidates a choice between opting for one of the more common and safer genres, such as panegyric or refutation of a well-known argument, and bolder alternatives, such as putting an argument into the mouth of a mythic or historic personage, a device much favoured by Libanius centuries later.

In the event, the speaker chose to follow the model attributed to Laurentius, a superintendent of temples and sacrifices, who

171 Aristides, *Complete Works*, Behr edition, ii, 228. ' δι' ἦν ἀφροσύνη μὲ καὶ ἀσέλγεια καὶ δειλία καὶ ἀταξία καὶ στάσις καὶ ὕβρις καὶ ὑπερηφανία θεῶν καὶ πάνθ' ὅσα τοιαῦτ' ἂν εἴποι τις ἐκχωρεῖ: φρόνησις δὲ καὶ σωφροσύνη καὶ ἀνδρεία καὶ ὁμόνοια καὶ εὐταξία καὶ εὐπραγία καὶ τιμὴ θεῶν τε καὶ ἐκ θεῶν ἀντεισέρχεται.' Ael. Ar. Orat. 2 16.

172 Isoc. 7 66.

173 A survey of what Simon Swain calls the 'discursive practice' of the period, including the heavy use of themes and examples from classical Athens and its past, is provided by Swain, Simon, *Hellenism and Empire, Language, Classicism, and Power in the Greek World AD 50–250* (Oxford: Clarendon, 1996). As he notes, the variety is wide, and, at page 93, drawing on earlier work, he notes that the titles of at least three hundred and fifty recorded in the writings have come down to us.

was described by Athenaeus as ‘proposing questions deserving of investigation; and at other times asking for information himself; not suggesting subjects without examination, or in any random manner, but as far as was possible with a critical and Socratic discernment; so that every one admired the systematic character of his questions’.¹⁷⁴ Laurentius is recorded as having been as knowledgeable about the literature of the Greeks as he was of his own, and also as possessing a large collection of books.¹⁷⁵ However, as with the experiment in Chapter 2, despite the evidence of the many parallels referred to in the editorial footnotes, our Pseudo-Laurentius shows him to have been a clumsy imitator writing much later.

Like the Thucydidean speech, the rhetorical discourse offered here is an experiment in reclaiming an ancient discourse that prescribes, or reveals the boundaries of, the socially constructed norms of the age, a form of historiography, not a work of imaginative literature such as a modern historical novel. Its attempts to recover some of the conventions that were shared between speakers and listeners, producers and consumers may help to build an understanding of the mentalities, or at least of the publicly displayed values, of those who looked at the classical-era Parthenon half a millennium after it was first brought into use, that is, at a time when, besides continuing in its former roles, notably as a backdrop to processions, sacrifices, and other community-building religious rites, it had become a site of heritage.

As with the Thucydidean speech, it exemplifies some of the conventions of the times as evidenced by passages in the surviving texts and by the advice of rhetorical manuals. The speaker has, for example, caught some of the rhetorical tropes of the so-called ‘Second Sophistic’, a modern term derived from the *Lives of the Sophists* written by Philostratos

174 Ath. 1.4.

175 ‘a library of ancient Greek books, as to exceed in that respect all those who are remarkable for such collections; such as Polycrates of Samos, and Pisistratus who was tyrant of Athens, and Euclides who was himself also an Athenian, and Nicocrates the Samian, and even the kings of Pergamos, and Euripides the poet, and Aristotle the philosopher, and Nelius his librarian; from whom they say that our countryman Ptolemæus, surnamed Philadelphus, bought them all, and transported them with all those which he had collected at Athens and at Rhodes to his own beautiful Alexandria’. Ath. 1.4. Only known as a character in a Platonic dialogue written long after Plato’s time, it is impossible to say whether he ever existed other than as a useful fiction in an exercise.

in the fifth century CE, that retrospectively imputed a cultural unity to a group of writers in Greek, some practicing in Athens, who, between the mid-first and the fifth centuries CE, revived the traditions of classical Athens for which they showed great respect.