Landscapes of the Greek Myths

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Introduction

Myth and religion in ancient Greek society

The Greek myths described the ancient Greeks' beliefs about their gods, their history, their ancestry and the nature of society itself. The Greek pantheon was large and complex and there is a large body of myth describing the gods' origins, their lives and their relationships with humanity. Another group of myths was concerned with the nature of society. These provided justifications for the form of social order, descriptions of rites of passage from childhood into the adult world, genealogies linking a ruling family to a hero or god and the foundation myths of the communities themselves. There were also myths to explain the formation of the landscape, myths describing the intervention of the gods in famous battles and myths that were shadows of genuine early history. Finally there are the stories of the heroes, superhuman figures who, as a group, lay somewhere between gods and men. These myths were often pan-hellenic but also told of local heroes venerated only within their own community. While the heroic myths were set in a previous golden age this was not an unknown dateless past. It was thought to be a period of just a few generations that came to an end shortly after the events of the Trojan War, itself the most important mythical event of the Mycenaean period.

The word myth originally simply meant story and did not have the modern connotation of something fictitious. Transmitted first orally and later in epic poetry, the myths were a fundamental element of ancient Greek religion and the standard explanatory device in divine matters. Religion for the Greeks was embedded within their society rather than the preserve of an organised church with a priesthood, sacred texts and a body of belief. The modern division between secular and religious life did not exist. The organisation of religious events, the great festivals and games, was in the hands of the civil authorities and, under democ-

racy, the general assembly. Each city-state organised its affairs as it thought fit and this extended to wide local variations in belief. Thus with no centralised church and no single creed there could be no meaning to the idea of heresy. In fact, the only real religious crime possible was sacrilege, but this would be seen as breaking the rules of society rather than a separate religious offence. Other concepts alien to Greek religion were those of Heaven and Hell in the later, Christian, sense. The heavens were for the gods alone. The underworld was not a place of punishment but the dwelling place of the "shades of the dead". The souls of the dead were thought to dwell there as mere shadows with no real existence. A place of punishment, known as Tartarus, did exist but only a very few, guilty of the most terrible crimes, were imprisoned within. Tantalos, who cooked his own son and served him as a meal for the gods, was punished there for eternity (see Chapter 7).

The Greek pantheon was already largely in existence by Mycenaean times. In its fully established form there were twelve principal gods; Zeus, Hera, Athena, Artemis, Apollo, Poseidon, Demeter, Dionysus, Aphrodite, Hephaistos, Hermes and Ares, perceived as dwelling on Mount Olympus. They were in fact the third generation of deities. The primary myth of the birth of the gods begins with Mother Earth, Gaia or Ge, emerging from Chaos, the empty and infinite space that existed before creation. She gave birth to her son Uranus (Ouranos), and by him she bore the Titans, the Cyclopes and the Hecatonkheries, the hundred-handed giants. Uranus was deposed by Kronos, one of the Titans. Kronos in his turn was deposed by his son Zeus (see Chapter 2). Zeus and his two brothers, Hades and Poseidon, then divided control of the world by lot. Zeus obtained the heavens, Poseidon the sea and Hades the underworld. The earth was to be shared by all three.

The Olympian gods were thought to have human form and many human attributes, both virtues and vices. They were born, had relationships and produced children. There is therefore a long list of minor gods from this extended family, often with important roles (for example see Nemesis, Chapter 2). The Greeks' anthropomorphic view of their gods meant that they were often shown as interfering or meddling in human affairs. Jealousy was a frequent motive for their actions and they also showed favouritism. Hera's jealousy over Zeus's affairs was the theme of many of the most potent myths. It was her actions that denied Hercules the kingdom of Mycenae. This anthropomorphism extended to physical frailties; Hephaistos was born lame. Each of the major gods also had specific powers or spheres of influence, indicated by the various epithets attached to their names. For example Apollo was

worshipped at Bassae (Chapter 7) as Apollo Epikourios, the Helper, and in Argos (Chapter 8), as Apollo Lykios, the Wolf-god. Often the epithet refers to a place, for example Apollo Ptoios, that is Apollo of Mount Ptoon (Chapter 3), and may simply reflect a community's need to differentiate their god from their neighbours'.

While the complete world of minor deities, heroes and sundry mythological creatures is incredibly complicated, this complexity does not prevent an understanding of the relationships between the Greeks and their gods. The Greeks paid respect to their gods by observing their cult. Animal sacrifice was the central ritual of cult practice. All that was necessary to create a shrine was to dedicate a place or an object to the god and to mark out the sacred area with boundary stones or a wall. For regular sacrifice an altar would be required but shrines varied from the simple to the elaborate. Most shrines would have no temple. Although the temple seems to us the ultimate symbol of Greek religion it was not a place of worship as such but simply the building that housed the cult statue of the god. The centre of cult activity was the altar standing in the open air. Animal sacrifice was not the gory spectacle we might imagine as the animal was slaughtered primarily to provide meat for the human participants. The sacrifice to the gods was simply the inedible parts of the beast, the bones and skin, burnt as an offering on the altar, a very pragmatic division. (See Chapter 6 for the myth explaining the origin of this practice).

Although cult observance was essential to procure divine favour, the Greeks had limited expectations of the gods' influence on human behaviour. With no concept of original sin and no devil luring man from the correct path, they had no doubt that men were responsible for their own misfortunes. The gods might protect men from themselves and they might punish hubris but their principal role was to reinforce social morality. What the Greeks hoped for from their gods above all else were the gifts of healing and prophecy. However the Greeks did not think of prophecy as fortune telling. The need to discover the will of the gods was an essential part of decision-making, whether the decision was personal, political or military. The Spartans notoriously delayed marching to battle until the omens were favourable. There are examples of healing sanctuaries and oracles throughout the book.

The Greeks also had shrines to the great heroes and venerated their tombs. They believed that the heroes were blessed with superhuman strength and something of this power persisted beyond the grave. The great heroes of that time were the sons of gods but were not usually themselves immortal. The greatest of them all was Heracles, better

known as Hercules. Although a flawed character capable of great cruelty (see Hercules the nose-slicer, Chapter 3), he did achieve immortality and a place on Mount Olympus. Many of the tales of the age of heroes are concerned with dynastic or territorial disputes. Battles between brothers over their inheritance are common. This is the basic theme of the war of the Seven against Thebes. One of Hercules's lesser known roles was as a sacker of cities. These myths must have reflected real conflicts between the Mycenaean states in the Bronze Age. The list of heroes was not restricted to figures from a mythical past. Any individual who performed great deeds could acquire hero status and be venerated after his death. The 192 Athenians who died in the Battle of Marathon in 490 BC became heroes and their cult persisted for several hundred years.

Games and festivals were a fundamental part of Greek culture. Our perception of ancient Greek competition is dominated by images of the Olympic Games, which are now thought of as athletic contests. But all the great games were religious events. Each of the four pan-Hellenic games was dedicated to a major deity, Zeus at Olympia and Nemea, Apollo at Delphi and Poseidon at Isthmia. There were numerous other subsidiary games and every city would have had its gymnasia and training ground. The games also usually included, and at Delphi began with, musical contests and the performance of tragedies and comedies. In fact, in Athens, drama festivals were always both competitions and religious events, the most famous being the Great Dionysia honouring the god Dionysus.

The world of the myths, at least in terms of its geographical extent on mainland Greece, is essentially that of the Bronze age society of the Mycenaean period. Here in the Peloponnese and in central and western Greece may be found the surviving remains of the shrines and temples dedicated to the gods in their various guises; the sites of the famous oracles where the Greeks sought the gift of prophecy; the sanctuaries of the games and the remains of the walled cities that were the locations of the battles and dynastic struggles of the heroes and their legendary families.

Rhamnous (Ραμνούς)
The Temples of Nemesis and Themis. Nemesis's role in the Battle of Marathon. The myth of Leda and the swan.

Just a few kilometres north of Marathon lies the principal sanctuary of the goddess Nemesis, here called Nemesis Rhamnousia, identifying her directly with the site. Nemesis was the goddess of indignation and retribution for evil deeds or undeserved good fortune. She was the daughter of Night, Nyx, and granddaughter of Khaos, one of the Protogenoi, Khaos, Gaia, Tartaros and Eros, the first elemental gods. It is a common human feeling that those who are blessed with too many gifts deserve some offsetting misfortune. Nemesis was the goddess who dispensed this compensation to those who overstepped the boundaries. Her job was to balance the extravagance of her sister Tykhe, also known as Fortune. As well as the temple of Nemesis this sanctuary has a smaller temple to the goddess Themis who is often associated with the worship of Nemesis. Themis was the second wife of Zeus, the daughter of Gaia and the goddess of custom and order. Themis, Nemesis and Dike, the goddess of justice, were the principal assistants of Zeus in his role as founder of law and order.

The temple of Nemesis was rebuilt in the 5C BC after the Persians destroyed the original during their second invasion of Greece ten years after Marathon. The temple held the cult statue of the goddess. The head still exists and is now in the British Museum. Pausanias, the Greek traveller who wrote his Guide to Greece in the 2C AD, believed that Nemesis was responsible for the fate of the Persians at Marathon. They had been so sure of success in battle with the Athenians that they had brought with them a block of Parian marble from which to carve their victory monument. Such presumption showed that the Persians believed they controlled their own destiny. Their hubris in denying the gods' power to intervene in human affairs brought down divine wrath and their defeat. According to Pausanias Pheidias carved the statue of Nemesis from the same block of marble the Persians had brought.

The base of the statue, now thought to have been made by Pheidias's pupil Agorakritos, has been reconstructed from fragments and is now housed in a new building on the site. It shows Helen of Troy being presented to her real mother, Nemesis, by Leda. The legend of Leda, the swan and the birth of Helen is well known but complex. It is one of the myths linking the gods to the genealogy of ancient kings. Leda was the daughter of Thestius, the son of the god Ares, and the wife of Tyndareus, king of Sparta. Zeus saw her bathing in the river Evrotas (Sparta

Figure 7 Rhamnous: The main gate of the fortress.

Figure 8 Rhamnous: Base of funerary monument.

is in the Evrotas valley) and was captivated by her beauty. He disguised himself as a white swan and commanded Aphrodite to pursue him in the form of an eagle. The swan took refuge in Leda's arms. The resulting union produced not children but a pair of eggs. From one egg came Helen and her brother Polydeuces (Pollux) and from the other Clytemnestra and Castor. Versions of the legend differ as to how many of the four were fathered by Zeus and how many by Tyndareus. Helen and Clytemnestra were ultimately to marry Menelaus and Agamemnon, respectively kings of Sparta and Mycenae. Later the legend grew that Helen's mother was really Nemesis and it was she who produced the mythical egg. One version has Leda finding the egg in a marsh, another has Hermes carrying the egg from Nemesis and throwing it into Leda's lap. In both tales Leda brings up Helen as her own child. This later story may be an Athenian appropriation of the original Spartan myth and the inspiration for the carving.

The remains of the sanctuary consist of the lower courses of the small temple of Themis and the larger Doric temple of Nemesis built side by side on an artificial platform faced with marble blocks. There are also foundations of the essential altar and of a long stoa. The sanctuary stands at the head of a narrow valley or ravine that runs for 500m down to the coast where the remains of the township of Rhamnous survive on a low hill. The fortified settlement was both a town and a fortress, one of a series of coastal and border forts of Attica built to command a road or, as in this case, a stretch of coastline. Towards the end of the 5C BC during the final phases of the Peloponnesian War Sparta began to blockade the land routes into Attica and Rhamnous became strategically important as the port through which Athens imported grain from Euboia. A small cove below the hill, now silted up, functioned as a harbour. The site has been meticulously excavated in recent years. The fortification circuit is about one kilometre long and the south gate and various towers are visible. Within the walls the network of streets with its elaborate drainage system can still be seen. The lower courses of houses, a theatre and other public buildings survive. An ancient road runs down the valley connecting the sanctuary with the main gate of the fortress. In the Classical period elaborate burial enclosures were built on either side of the road and the bases of their massive funerary monuments survive.

To visit the sanctuary drive to the outskirts of the village of Marathon where there is a right turn signposted to Rhamnous. Near Kato Souli (Κάτω Σούλι) take care to follow the road around to the left. A tarmac road rises steadily and three kilometres after passing the right

open portico that formed the original skene for the theatre. The two structures were thus linked and perhaps were both used for League meetings. The Thersileion was destroyed about 222 BC and not rebuilt. Eventually the theatre acquired a Roman stone stage. All that can be seen today are the foundations stones of the rows of pillars that supported the Thersileion roof. The extensive agora lay on the other side of the river. Very little is now visible.

Lykosoura (Λυκόσουρα)
The Sanctuary of Despoina.

In the hills above Megalopolis are to be found some of Arcadia's most sacred places. At Lykosoura there were sanctuaries of Pan and Despoina while the famous Sanctuary of Zeus stood on the summit of Mount Lykaion. Although remote and little visited both these sites are now easily accessible by car.

The Arcadians believed themselves to be descendants of the Pelasgians, the people of Pelasgos, a mythical first man who sprang from the earth. His family provided a foundation myth for all the ancient cities of Arcadia. His son, Lykaon, is said to have founded the city of Lykosoura and this is the basis for its claim to be the oldest city in the world. Lykaon's sons in turn founded the other ancient cities of Arcadia, from Alifera and Phigalea in the west (see Chapter 7), to Orchomenos and Mantinea in the east. Lykosoura was one of the few Arcadian cities unaffected by the founding of Megalopolis. Its inhabitants refused to abandon their own homes and the Arcadian League was reluctant to force the move because of the sanctity of the city. Lykaon's only daughter was Callisto (see the myth of Callisto and the bear, Chapter 2). Her son by Zeus, Arkas, became king after the death of Lykaon's eldest son, Nyltimos. Arkas was taught agriculture by Triptolemos, who himself had been taught the secret by Demeter (see Eleusis, Chapter 2). Thereafter the people were called Arcadians.

Opencast mining of the local brown coal and the power stations that consume it have changed, and continue to change, both the landscape and the road layout to the west of Megalopolis. Modern maps do not reflect this accurately. To reach Lykosoura from Megalopolis take the Karitena (Καρίταινα) road from the town centre. About 300m from the main square a blue sign, in Greek only, points left to 'Αρχαιολογικός Χώρος' (Archaeological Site). This road heads towards the power stations. After five kilometres turn left at a junction where confused signs

(Προς Κιπαρίσσια and Προς Μαυριά) indicate the villages of Kiparissia and Mavria straight on and a faded blue sign for Lykaio (Λύκαιο) points left. Continue towards the second power station and drive through the small village of Thoknia (Θωκνία) following signs for Kalivia Karion (Καλύβια Καρυών) and Lykaio (Λύκαιο). Then cross the Alpheios over a modern concrete bridge to reach Kalivia Karion in the shadow of the power station. At a fork, with a host of confusing signs and a large descriptive board showing the mountain and its sights, turn left. Two kilometres later, at another fork, a badly drawn sign points right to Lykosoura and Lykaion. After reaching the wooded hills a brown sign indicates an ancient cistern by the left hand side of the road. At a fork another brown sign points left to Ancient Lykosoura two kilometres before the village of the same name. The road climbs the hillside and ends after 500m at the site gate. The sanctuary is open daily 08.30 to 14.00, closed on Mondays. The museum, just inside the gate, is unfortunately permanently closed. The sanctuary lies out of sight below the museum on a lower terrace. The city lay to the west. Fragments of its walls are hidden on the hillside.

Despoina, which simply means Mistress in Greek, was the daughter of Demeter and Poseidon (see above). She bears a close resemblance to Demeter's daughter by Zeus, Kore or the Maid. However while Kore's true name, Persephone, is well known, that of Despoina has never been revealed. Pausanias tells us that she was the most worshipped god in Arcadia and that her name could not be disclosed to the uninitiated. Her worship involved mystery rites, perhaps related to those at Eleusis.

The Sanctuary of Despoina consists of a 2C BC temple on earlier foundations, a long colonnaded stoa and a monumental altar on several levels where offerings were made and the mystery performed. The temple is a plain rectangle with a porch fronted by six Doric columns. In the main body of the building, the cella, are the remains of a mosaic floor, currently protected by gravel and plastic sheeting, and the pedestal that supported the cult statues. This group of marble figures consisted of a central statue of Demeter and Despoina sitting on a double throne with a figure of Artemis to the left and Anytos to the right. Anytos was a Titan, supposed to have been responsible for Despoina's upbringing. Pausanias claimed that the two central figures were carved from a single block of stone and that the sculpture was the work of Damophon of Messene. Reconstructed fragments of the group are displayed in the National Museum in Athens and it is clear that the construction was a hybrid of marble and wooden components. The path down to the terrace from the museum gives a panoramic view of the

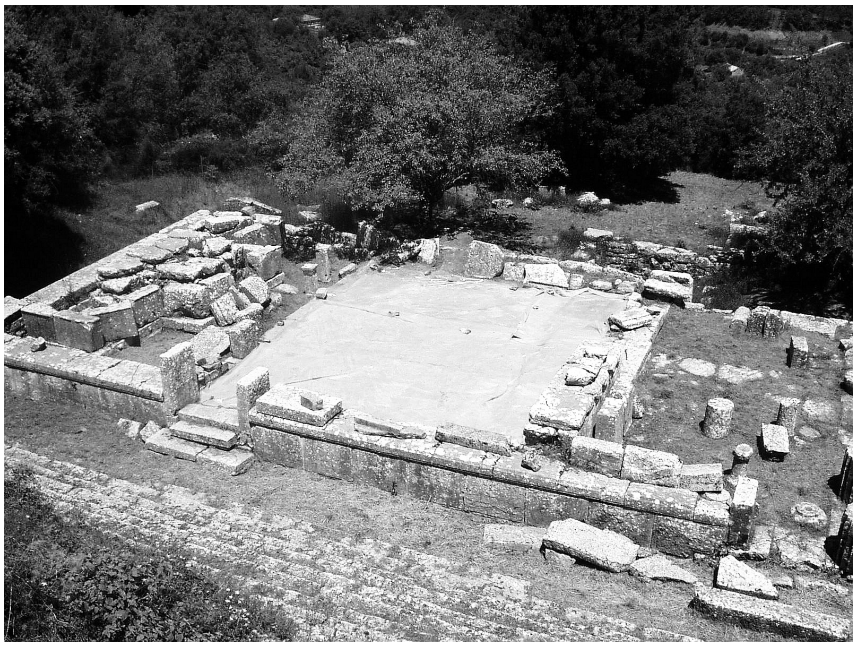

Figure 39 Lykosoura: The Temple of Despoina viewed from the south with its side door facing the rows of seats built into the hillside.

site and the layout of the buildings can clearly be seen. The temple is directly below. Its portico faces east. The stone frame of an unusual side door to the south is still in place. It faces a long series of steps, or possibly seats, built against the slope of the hill. These may have been connected with the mysteries or may simply be a retaining wall. The footing slabs of the stoa mark its position along the terrace to the east of the temple. South of the stoa, built against the hillside, are fragments of the Megaron, or Hall, where the cult altar stood and animal sacrifices to the goddess were made. Here the ritual involved not the cutting of the animal's throat but chopping off a limb. Above the Megaron was a sacred grove dedicated to Despoina.

Somewhere on the hill above the temple was a Sanctuary of Pan with a colonnade and a statue. Pausanias writes of climbing steps to reach it. In front of the statue a perpetual flame burnt. There was also an altar to Ares and idols of Aphrodite, Apollo and Athena. All these features remain unexcavated. Pan was very much an Arcadian god whose worship did not spread to the rest of Greece until after 490 BC. Little is known of his mythology before this date and there are many versions of

his birth myth. Usually he is regarded as the son of Hermes and variously Dryope, Thymbris, Callisto, Orneios or Penelope. Images of Pan often show him with horns, pointed ears and the legs and tail of a goat. His ugliness was said to have caused his mother to run away from him in fear. Originally he was an oracular god and gave oracles through the nymph, Erato, wife of Arkas. Pausanias records that the prophecies Erato delivered in verse were written down and that he had himself read them. As the god of shepherds and their flocks Pan is depicted wandering in the mountains of Arcadia playing his reed pipes. Travellers who came upon him in the hills were often filled with terror or *panic.* Despite the lack of visible remains it is not difficult to imagine his presence in this lonely spot.

In a smaller fenced area, on the opposite side of the road from the museum, are some further remains including a large square bath, or fountain, on another small terrace formed by retaining walls. The site guard will unlock the gate on request.

Mount Lykaion
The Sanctuary of Zeus

The whole of Mount Lykaion was considered sacred by the ancient Arcadians. In the earliest myth, Lykaon, son of Pelasgos, founded not just the city of Lykosoura but also the Lykaian Games on the mountain. He created the title of Lykaian Zeus, that is, Zeus of the Wolves. Arcadia claimed Mount Lykaion as the birthplace of Zeus. The accepted myth was that he had been born on Crete. However, the Arcadians believed that the name referred to an area on the eastern slopes of the mountain called Kretea and that Rhea bathed the infant Zeus in the river Neda to the west (see Phigalea, Chapter 7). The river is named after one of the nymphs charged with his upbringing.

The altar to Zeus on the peak of the mountain was famous in antiquity for human sacrifice. Pausanias, in recounting the achievements of Lykaon, adds that he slaughtered a child, poured its blood on Zeus's altar and at that moment was turned into a wolf. Thereafter Pausanias refers to the practices at the altar only as 'secret sacrifices' and refuses to explain their nature further. He clearly believed that human sacrifice here was a reality. Yet when the Greek Archaeological Service excavated the area of the altar at the beginning of the 20C they found nothing but animal bones along with pottery fragments, clay figures and iron implements. Their finds indicated that the altar was first used in the

Troizen (Troezen, Trizina, Τροιζήν, Τροιζήνα)
Birthplace of Theseus and scene of the death of Hippolytus.

The modern village of Trizina is twenty-five kilometres to the south of Epidavros and lies at the foot of the mountains that border the fertile coastal plain south of the Methana peninsula. This was the territory of the ancient city of Troizen whose walls enclosed a large area of the plain to the west of the modern village as well as the hill to the south that formed the acropolis. As the birthplace of Theseus the city has a rich mythology and both its myths and history are closely linked to Athens. When Xerxes's army marched into Attica and Athens was evacuated, Troizen sheltered much of the population. Both Athena and Poseidon were worshipped as the city's patron deities. This unusual joint patronage was said to be Zeus's solution to a dispute between the two gods for control of the territory. The city's coins reflected this arrangement showing both Athena's face and Poseidon's trident. The city is named after Troizen, a son of Pelops. He and his brother, Pittheus, came from Pisa (see Chapter 7), becoming joint kings with Aetios from the previous ruling family. However the sons of Pelops held the real power. When Troizen died, Pittheus consolidated the existing scattered settlements into one city which he named after his dead brother.

The most famous of Troizen's myths are those of Theseus and his family. This story begins with the dynastic struggles of king Aegeus of Athens. His father, Pandion, had been expelled from Athens by his cousins, the sons of Metion. Pandion fled to Megara, between Eleusis and Corinth, and Aegeus was born there. When they became adults Aegeus and his brothers, Pallas, Nisus and Luycus, attacked Athens and Aegeus recovered the kingship. Aegeus's concern was now for the future of his dynasty. As neither his first wife, Meta, nor his second, Chalciope, had borne him sons he feared that his brother Pallas's fifty sons would overthrow him. Suspecting that his childless marriages might be the work of Aphrodite, the goddess of love, he introduced her worship into Athens for the first time. He also decided to consult the oracle at Delphi about the problem but received the usual enigmatic prophecy that he did not understand. The oracle told him that he should not untie his wine-skin until he had reached the heights of Athens or he would one day die of grief. From Delphi he went to Corinth to meet Medea, celebrated for her skill in magic. She offered to cure him of his childlessness in exchange for his protection should she ever need it. From there he journeyed to Troizen to visit Pittheus. Aegeus, if he had understood the oracle, would have refrained from drinking. However

Pittheus managed to make him drunk and then sent him to bed with his daughter, Aethra. The next day Aegeus realised what he had done. Fearing that Aethra was pregnant he told her that if she gave birth to a son she should rear him without telling him who his father was. By this enforced secrecy Aegeus hoped to protect the child from Pallas's sons. He then hid his sword and sandals under a large rock known as the Altar of Strong Zeus. Before returning to Athens he told Aethra that if the child could move the rock when he grew up and retrieve these objects, he should be sent to Athens with them. In due course Aethra gave birth and the boy, Theseus, was brought up in Troizen by his grandfather, Pittheus. However the myths manage to introduce the possibility of Theseus having divine parentage because they have Poseidon sleeping with Aethra on same night as Aegeus.

When Theseus came to manhood Aethra revealed the story of his birth. She took him to the altar stone which he was able to move with ease to recover the sword and sandals. The altar has been known ever since as the Theseus Stone. Although his mother encouraged him to sail to Athens, Theseus insisted on making the journey by land. He wished to emulate the deeds of Hercules, his second cousin, by ridding the coast of the all the robbers and villains that infested it. These adventures became known as the Labours of Theseus. Meanwhile, Medea had fled to Athens from Corinth after murdering Glauke (see Chapter 5). Aegeus had married her and she had borne him a son, Medus. When Theseus arrived in Athens Medea recognized him immediately. Wishing to protect the position of her own son she pointed out Theseus to Aegeus as an assassin. She arranged for Theseus to be invited to a banquet where Aegeus would offer him a cup of poisoned wine that she had prepared. However when the moment came Aegeus saw the carved hilt of the sword that Theseus carried and immediately recognized him as his son. General rejoicing followed. With Medea's plans destroyed she fled from Athens with Medus. Theseus's next great adventure was to lead to the tragic death of Aegeus foretold in the prophecy.

While Theseus was growing up Aegeus had been involved in a war with King Minos of Crete. Minos's son, Androgeos, had come to Athens as a guest of Aegeus to compete in the Panathenaic Games. After he had won every competition, Aegeus had sent him to kill the Marathonian bull that Hercules had originally brought from Crete as his seventh Labour. Unfortunately Androgeos was killed and Minos, seeking revenge, attacked Athens with his army eventually extracting a terrible tribute from the Athenians. Every nine years Athens had to send seven maidens and seven youths to Crete as prey for the famous Minotaur,

half bull, half man, kept in the labyrinth at Knossos. When the third of these tributes was due Theseus volunteered to be one of the seven youths. He slew the Minotaur and escaped from the labyrinth with the help of Ariadne, Minos's daughter. Before setting out for Crete he had arranged that on the return voyage a white sail would be hoisted, in place of the normal black, to signal the success of the expedition. As his ship approached Athens he forgot his plan and Aegeus, seeing the black sail, threw himself into the sea in despair, thinking that his son had perished. Henceforth the sea was known as the Aegean.

After his father's death Theseus became king of Athens. He had a bastard son, Hippolytus, by Antiope, queen of the Amazons. After concluding a treaty with Deucalion of Crete he married Deucalion's sister, Phaedre, by whom he had two further sons. In order to avoid any dispute over the succession he sent Hippolytus to Pittheus at Troizen who adopted him as his heir. When Phaedre later travelled to Troizen with Theseus she fell in love with Hippolytus on sight. She built the shrine of Peeping Aphrodite next to the gymnasium where he trained each day naked so that she could watch him unobserved. Eventually, when he had come to Athens for the Panathenaic festival, she sent him a letter confessing her love. Hippolytus was horrified and rejected her. Phaedre, in despair, wrote a note to Theseus accusing Hippolytus of raping her and then hanged herself. Theseus immediately banished Hippolytus from Athens. In his rage he also prayed to Poseidon to slay his son. Hippolytus had set off with his chariot and horses for Troizen. At a point where the road led by the seashore Poseidon created a gigantic wave that carried a monstrous bull ashore. Hippolytus's horses were terrified. They bolted, overturned the chariot and Hippolytus, tangled in the reins, was dragged to his death. After his death Hippolytus was worshipped at Troizen as a hero. Annual sacrifices were made and there was a tradition that a girl about to be married would bring a lock of her hair to the shrine to be dedicated.

Pausanias gives a detailed description of the city of Troizen. In his time all the buildings that claimed a connection with the city's myths were still standing. As well as the temple of Peeping Aphrodite and the shrine of Hippolytus he describes a shrine or temple to Saviour Artemis, a sanctuary of the Muses and a shrine to Artemis of the Wolves built by Hippolytus. The temple of Artemis was said to mark the place where Dionysus returned from Hades with Semele, and where Hercules brought back Kerberos on his twelfth Labour. The shrines of Aphrodite and Hippolytus stood in a separate precinct outside the city walls. This area has been excavated and contains the principal remains still visible

Figure 44 Troizen: Remains of the Bishop's Palace and the temple of Peeping Aphrodite.

today. They include the foundations of a temple, probably that of Hippolytus, the remains of a building complex tentatively identified as an Asklepion, and the more extensive remains of a Byzantine bishop's palace or church. Known as the Palaia Episkopi this incorporates elements of a Classical temple possibly that of Peeping Aphrodite. The graves of Hippolytus and Phaedre are said to be somewhere nearby. For the most part the ruins are reduced to their foundations but some arcaded walls of the palace are still standing surrounded by a confusion of ancient blocks and pillars. The Asklepion has a complex arrangement of water channels still visible. In the distance can be seen a solitary tower, the principal fragment of the city walls still standing.

From Palaia Epidavros the main road swings west towards the Sanctuary of Asklepios and Nauplio. To reach Troizen take the left fork after two kilometres, towards Methana, Galatas and Poros. The road climbs for three kilometres to a fork where the left branch drops back down to the coast to a newly engineered road cut into the steep hillside 100m above the sea. After twenty-five kilometres a prominent sign for the Poros centre of Psisiculture and a smaller sign for the archaeological site

Nestor's Cave
The myths of Hermes and Apollo

At the northern end of Navarino Bay the prominent hill of Koriphasion is the location of the mediaeval castle of Old Pylos built on the remains of a much earlier acropolis. In the cliffs below the castle overlooking Voidokilia Bay is the large cave known as Nestor's Grotto. It was said to be the place where Neleus and Nestor kept their animals and where the infant Hermes hid the cattle he stole from Apollo.

Hermes was an ancient Arcadian god originally having many of the roles subsequently taken over by Pan as protector of the flocks and homes. It was common for Greeks to place stylised statues of Hermes by the doors of their houses. These took the form of a square pillar with male genitals surmounted by a head of the god. When Hermes assumed the role of protector of travellers these images were set up at crossroads. Hermes was the son of Zeus and Maia, the eldest of the Pleiades (see below), and was born in a cave on Mount Kyllini. In the Homeric Hymn to Hermes he is called a robber, a cattle driver, a bringer of dreams, a watcher by night, a thief at the gates. The hymn recounts the tradition that Hermes was such a precocious child that, born in the morning, by

Figure 51 Pylos: The entrance to Nestor's Cave in the cliffs below the castle of Old Pylos.

midday he had invented the lyre and by the evening he had stolen Apollo's cattle. The full version of the myth describes how he escaped from his cradle and travelled to Pieria, the narrow coastal plain near Mount Olympus where Apollo was grazing his cattle. Hermes separated fifty beasts from the herd and drove them off, contriving to make them move backwards over a sandy spot to disguise the direction he had taken. He drove them to Pylos and hid them in the cave. After he prepared fire and sacrificed two of the animals he returned to Kyllini. Apollo possessed the gift of prophecy and was able to divine the identity of the thief. He made his way to Kyllini to confront Hermes and demand the restoration of his cattle. Hermes denied all knowledge of the crime until Apollo carried him to his father, Zeus, who compelled him to reveal the truth. Zeus commanded that the two gods should make their way to Pylos and Hermes should restore Apollo's property. When they reached the cave Apollo saw the hides of the sacrificed animals spread out on the rocks. He was astonished that the infant Hermes could have dispatched such large beasts. Hermes carried with him the lyre he had made by stretching strings of sheep-gut across a tortoise shell. When Apollo heard the music of the lyre he was so charmed that he agreed to exchange the instrument for the cattle. Apollo and Hermes became close friends. Zeus appointed Hermes as his messenger. He appears in numerous myths as Zeus's agent.

To reach Nestor's cave take the main road north from modern Pylos for six kilometres. Towards the northern end of Navarino Bay the road runs close to the shore then makes an abrupt turn to the right in the village of Gialova (Γιάλοβα). About 800m further on a left turn with a conspicuous sign to "Camping Erodios" leads after four kilometres to the northern tip of the bay directly below the southern end of Koriphasion. The last part of the road is gravel. At the time of writing it was possible to drive right up to the rock but the area of the lagoon is an important nature reserve and it may soon be necessary to walk the final section. At the end of the track a footbridge crosses the creek that connects the lagoon to the sea. An information board provides a good map of the nature reserve and surrounding area. Paths fork left and right. Signs for the castle point left along a footpath that follows the rocky shore of the narrow northern entrance to the bay. This leads to the gentler slopes on the seaward side of Koriphasion and an obvious track heads up to the main gate of the castle. This track provides a less strenuous route to the summit than that described below.

To the right the path to the cave runs beneath the cliffs along the edge of the lagoon to an area of sand dunes between the lagoon and

Figure 52 The castle of Old Pylos or Navarino.

Voidokilia Bay. The cave lies in the hillside above the dunes. The easiest way to find it is to walk through the dunes to Voidokilia beach and, from the seaward end of the curve of sand, climb the dunes where they abut the rocky promontory. Above the dunes, which are surprisingly high, is a footpath that leads through a meadow to the cave now visible at the base of a cliff. The interior of the cave is enormous and a dim light is cast from a hole in the roof. The stalactites inside were thought to represent animal hides hanging from the roof. Pottery has provided evidence of occupation from Mycenaean times. The lower slopes of Koriphasion are considered to be the most likely site for the Mycenaean harbour town associated with Nestor's palace. The harbour itself may have been at the very north of the bay in the area now occupied by the Gialova lagoon, or in the beautiful half-moon Bay of Voidokilia on the seaward side of the peninsula. However recent surveys have also found evidence of an artificial harbour basin cut through the sand dunes about two kilometres to the north. On the opposite side of Voidokilia Bay is a very early tholos tomb contemporary with the shaft graves of Grave Circle A at Mycenae. It is known as the tomb of Thrasymedes, a son of Nestor, but if mythical chronologies are at all accurate this must be