



Opinion Article

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The Prehistoric Ruins on the Acropolis of Athens as Landscapes of Memory (Mnemotopoi) and their Relevance to the Buildings of Classical Times

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Opinion

The preservation, recalling and creation of memories, as well as the experienced memories connected with specific landscapes (τόποι) — where very important and had a long tradition in ancient Greece, with the first testimonies dating back to Homer.¹ Homer, in his Catalogue of Ships (Iliad 2.494-760), presents all the Greek cities who participated in the Trojan war and additionally he presents another list of the best Greek (Iliad, 2.761-79) and Trojan (Iliad, 2.815-77) warriors, pointing on the preservation of memory. The first attempts to record local histories in Athens were made by the Atthidographers in the 5th century B.C.² The Atthidographers were the first who created lists of kings, presented in chronological line, connecting the past with the present, exhibiting a conceptual unity of place.³

Besides the recalling of memories through catalogues and lists, the existence of a specific location (τόπος) and the experience of

being in this specific place may trigger a memory. Euripides (Ion, 249-51) attests the words of Kreousa to Ion when she visited the temple of Apollo: “when I saw Apollo’s halls, I recalled an ancient memory; I suppose that my mind was at home, though I am present here”. We note from Kreousa’s words that the existence and experience of being in a specific place is highly related to memories connected to it. The exact same relationship of visiting a place that recalled specific memories applies to other later ancient authors. For example, Pausanias’ testimonies point on the relevance between the landscape, the living experience and the recalling of memories.⁴

Evidence deriving from inscriptions (and official documents) point on the same direction, further stressing out the connection between history, time and memories. The Lindian Chronicle attests the several different traditions related to Lindos of Rhodes. Similarly, in Athens, the Parian Marble reflects the early history of Attica.⁶

¹ On Homer and memories, see Bakker 2005.

² The most extensive work on the Atthidographers still remains the seminal work of Jacoby 1949.

³ Schepens 2001, 20.

⁴ Most extensively on Pausanias testimonies, see Alcock 1996; Galli 2005, 260-263.

⁵ Most recently on the Lindian chronicle, see Higbie 2003; Clarke 2011, 321-325.

⁶ IG XII 5.444. Most recently on the Parian Marble, see Clarke 2011, 325-338; Rotstein 2016.

Scholars have long been involved in the examination of the factor of memory in antiquity. Already from the beginning of the 20th century, Maurice Halbwachs — a French sociologist — developed the concept of collective memory. Later scholars — such as: Nora [1]; Assmann [2] and Gehrke [3]; [4] — further extended the research scope on the concept of memory, pointing on the cultural aspects, as well as the incorporation of space in the examination of memory studies.⁸

In two of my previous studies, by employing an interdisciplinary approach — taking into consideration the literary sources, the epigraphic, iconographic and topographic evidence — I

have examined the relationship between the topography of the Erechtheion and the myths of the Acropolis with the creation and recalling of memories connected to prehistoric and historical times.⁹ Similar connections between topography and the recalling of memories can be traced in the temple of Athena Nike (Figure 1) and the Propylaia (Figure 2) at the Acropolis of Athens. In both buildings, the prehistoric and Mycenaean ruins are highly related to the structures of historical times and it seems that the intentions of the Athenians of the classical period were to create a tradition of an undisrupted relationship between the mythical/prehistoric past and the current historical present.

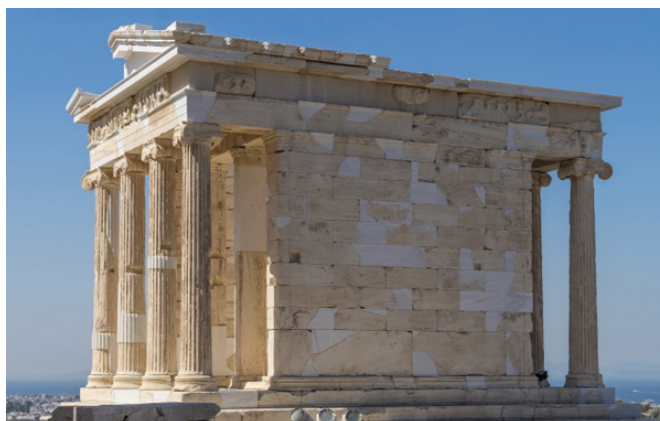


Figure 1.



Figure 2.

⁷ Halbwachs 1925; 1941; 1950.

⁸ Nora 1984; Assmann 1992; Gehrke 2001; 2010.

⁹ Mitsios forthcoming a); forthcoming b).

In my upcoming research, by employing a similar interdisciplinary approach, I will examine the relationship between the prehistoric ruins and the historical buildings on the Acropolis of Athens, with special emphasis in the topographic area of the temple of Athena Nike and the Propylaia.

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Conflict of interest

No conflict of interest.

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