

CLCS4009

READING ANTIQUITY: A SURVEY
OF ANCIENT LITERATURE



Lecture 25: Travels
and Religion in
Roman Greece

(The Second
Sophistic:
Pausanias)

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Pausanias

- 2nd century AD: he lived in the time of Hadrian, Antoninus Pius and Marcus Aurelius
- A Greek travel writer and geographer
- Pausanias' *Guide to Greece / Description of Greece* (*Periegesis*): more than just a travel guide – the intersection between travels and religion
- A cultural geography?
- A religious geography?

Pausanias' *Guide to Greece*

- But my narrative must not loiter, as my task is a general description of all Greece. [Pausanias 1.26.4]
- The Greeks appear apt to regard with greater wonder foreign sights than sights at home. For whereas distinguished historians have described the Egyptian pyramids with the minutest detail, they have not made even the briefest mention of the treasury of Minyas and the walls of Tiryns, though these are no less marvellous. [Pausanias 9.36.5]
- The work is in ten books describing Attica, Corinth, Laconia, Messenia, Elis, Achaia, Arcadia, Boeotia, Phocis and Locri.

Pausanias' *Guide to Greece*

“In general he prefers the old to the new, the sacred to the profane; there is much more about classical than about contemporary Greek art, more about temples, altars and images of the gods, than about public buildings and statues of politicians. Some magnificent and dominating structures, such as the Stoa of King Attalus in the Athenian Agora or the Exedra of Herodes Atticus at Olympia are not even mentioned.”

Christian Habicht, *Pausanias' Guide to Ancient Greece*, Berkeley 1985.

Travel and Religion in Pausanias

- Travels and Religion in ancient Greece
- Excursus / digressions on ancient ritual and myths
- Religion on the ground?
- Describes the religious art and architecture of Olympia and Delphi, but also describes many religious objects (such as statues of the gods etc.) in obscure places
- At Thebes he views the ruins of the house of Pindar, and the statues of Hesiod, Arion, Thamyris, and Orpheus in the grove of the Muses on Helicon, as well as the portrait of Corinna at Tanagra.

Religious Monuments in Pausanias' narrative



Oracle of Trophonios, Lebadeia

“The most famous things in the grove are a temple and image of Trophonios; the image, made by Praxiteles, is after the likeness of Asclepius. There is also a sanctuary of Demeter surnamed Europa, and a Zeus Rain-god in the open. If you go up to the oracle, and thence onwards up the mountain, you come to what is called the Maid's Hunting and a temple of King Zeus. This temple they have left half finished, either because of its size or because of the long succession of the wars. In a second temple are images of Cronus, Hera and Zeus. There is also a sanctuary of Apollo.”



Consulting the Oracle of Trophonios

“What happens at the oracle is as follows. When a man has made up his mind to descend to the oracle of Trophonios, he first lodges in a certain building for an appointed number of days, this being sacred to the good Spirit and to good Fortune. While he lodges there, among other regulations for purity he abstains from hot baths, bathing only in the river Hercyna. Meat he has in plenty from the sacrifices, for he who descends sacrifices to Trophonios himself and to the children of Trophonios, to Apollo also and Cronus, to Zeus surnamed King, to Hera Charioteer, and to Demeter whom they surname Europa and say was the nurse of Trophonios. [9.39.6] At each sacrifice a diviner is present, who looks into the entrails of the victim, and after an inspection prophesies to the person descending whether Trophonios will give him a kind and gracious reception. The entrails of the other victims do not declare the mind of Trophonios so much as a ram, which each inquirer sacrifices over a pit on the night he descends, calling upon Agamedes. Even though the previous sacrifices have appeared propitious, no account is taken of them unless the entrails of this ram indicate the same; but if they agree, then the inquirer descends in good hope. The procedure of the descent is this.” (9.39.5-6)

Consulting the Oracle of Trophonios

[9.39.7] “First, during the night he is taken to the river Hercyna by two boys of the citizens about thirteen years old, named Hermae, who after taking him there anoint him with oil and wash him. It is these who wash the descender, and do all the other necessary services as his attendant boys. After this he is taken by the priests, not at once to the oracle, but to fountains of water very near to each other. [9.39.8] Here he must drink water called the water of Forgetfulness, that he may forget all that he has been thinking of hitherto, and afterwards he drinks of another water, the water of Memory, which causes him to remember what he sees after his descent. After looking at the image which they say was made by Daedalus (it is not shown by the priests save to such as are going to visit Trophonius), having seen it, worshipped it and prayed, he proceeds to the oracle, dressed in a linen tunic, with ribbons girding it, and wearing the boots of the country.”

Consulting the Oracle of Trophonios

“[9.39.9] The oracle is on the mountain, beyond the grove. Round it is a circular basement of white marble, the circumference of which is about that of the smallest threshing floor, while its height is just short of two cubits. On the basement stand spikes, which, like the cross-bars holding them together, are of bronze, while through them has been made a double door. Within the enclosure is a chasm in the earth, not natural, but artificially constructed after the most accurate masonry.[9.39.10] The shape of this structure is like that of a bread-oven. Its breadth across the middle one might conjecture to be about four cubits, and its depth also could not be estimated to extend to more than eight cubits. They have made no way of descent to the bottom, but when a man comes to Trophonios, they bring him a narrow, light ladder. After going down he finds a hole between the floor and the structure. Its breadth appeared to be two spans, and its height one span.”

Consulting the Oracle of Trophonios

[9.39.11] The descender lies with his back on the ground, holding barley-cakes kneaded with honey, thrusts his feet into the hole and himself follows, trying hard to get his knees into the hole. After his knees the rest of his body is at once swiftly drawn in, just as the largest and most rapid river will catch a man in its eddy and carry him under. After this those who have entered the shrine learn the future, not in one and the same way in all cases, but by sight sometimes and at other times by hearing. The return upwards is by the same mouth, the feet darting out first.

Consulting the Oracle of Trophonios

[9.39.13] After his ascent from Trophonios the inquirer is again taken in hand by the priests, who set him upon a chair called the chair of Memory, which stands not far from the shrine, and they ask of him, when seated there, all he has seen or learned. After gaining this information they then entrust him to his relatives. These lift him, paralyzed with terror and unconscious both of himself and of his surroundings, and carry him to the building where he lodged before with Good Fortune and the Good Spirit. Afterwards, however, he will recover all his faculties, and the power to laugh will return to him. [9.39.14] What I write is not hearsay; I have myself inquired of Trophonios and seen other inquirers. Those who have descended into the shrine of Trophonios are obliged to dedicate a tablet on which is written all that each has heard or seen.

Cledonomanacy: an Oracle of Hermes

“The market-place of Pharae is of wide extent after the ancient fashion, and in the middle of it is an image of Hermes, made of stone and bearded...It is called Hermes of the Market, and by it is established an oracle. In front of the image is placed a hearth, which also is of stone, and to the hearth bronze lamps are fastened with lead.

Coming at eventide, the inquirer of the god, having burnt incense upon the hearth, filled the lamps with oil and lighted them, puts on the altar on the right of the image a local coin...and asks in the ear of the god the particular question he wishes to put to him. After that he stops his ears and leaves the market-place. On coming outside he takes his hands from his ears, and whatever utterance he hears he considers oracular”

Being Greek under Rome

■ Sanctuary of *Peitho* at Sicyon

The precinct near the sanctuary of Persuasion that is devoted to Roman emperors was once the house of the tyrant Cleon. ... Before this house is a hero-shrine of Aratus, whose achievements eclipsed those of all contemporary Greeks. ... After the despotism of Cleon, many of those in authority were seized with such an ungovernable passion for tyranny that two actually became tyrants together, Euthydemus and Timocleidas. ... [description of generations of tyrants until] This Nicocles was attacked by Aratus with a force of Sicyonian exiles and Argive mercenaries. Making his attempt by night, he eluded some of the defenders in the darkness; the others he overcame, and forced his way within the wall. Day was now breaking, and taking the populace with him he hastened to the tyrant's house. This he easily captured, but Nicocles himself succeeded in making his escape. Aratus restored equality of political rights to the Sicyonians, striking a bargain for those in exile; he restored to them their houses and all their other possessions which had been sold, compensating the buyers out of his own purse. [Paus. 2.8.1-3]

Being Greek under Rome

It seems that from the beginning the sanctuary at Delphi has been plotted against by a vast number of men. Attacks were made against it by this Euboean pirates, and years afterwards by the Phlegyannation; furthermore by Pyrrhus, son of Achilles, by a portion of the army of Xerxes, by the Phocian chieftains, whose attacks on the wealth of the god were the longest and fiercest, and by the Gallic invaders. It was fated too that Delphi was to suffer from the universal irreverence of Nero, who robbed Apollo of five hundred bronze statues, some of gods, some of men.

[Paus. 10.7.1]



Questions?

Further Reading

- Pausanias. *Description of Greece*. Translated by Jones, W. H. S. and Omerod, H. A. Loeb Classical Library Volumes. Cambridge, MA, Harvard University Press; London, William Heinemann Ltd. 1918
<http://www.theoi.com/Text/Pausanias1A.html>
- Alcock, S.E., J.F. Cherry, and J. Elsner, *Pausanias: Travel and Memory in Roman Greece* (Oxford, 2001)
- Elsner, J. 'Pausanias: A Greek Pilgrim in the Roman World', *Past and Present* 135, 1992, pp. 3-29.