

**LEGACIES OF
ANCIENT GREECE
IN CONTEMPORARY
PERSPECTIVES**

Edited by

Thomas M. F. Gerry

Laurentian University

Series in World History



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List of Contributors

Cynthia Alexander is a Hellenophile who has studied and lived in Greece at different times throughout her life. She is a public policy analyst in the Department of Politics at Acadia University in Nova Scotia, Canada. She received her PhD from Queen's University in Kingston, Ontario, Canada. Cynthia co-authored *A Stake in the Future* (UBC Press, 1997), a book about multi-stakeholder, consensus-based decision-making. She co-edited *Digital Democracy* with Dr. Leslie Pal (Oxford University Press, 1998).

Ioannis Andronoglou holds a PhD in musicology from the National and Kapodistrian University of Athens, and he is a guitar soloist. His album, *Travelling*, recorded and released in 2010 on Legend Classics, was reissued by Aerakis Cretan Music Workshop and Seistron in 2014. His musical works *Mandilatos Impressions* and *Fantasia on a Thracian Folksong* were published in 2015, as well as his 2020 book *Greek Traditional Music as a Source of Inspiration in the Composition of Works for Guitar*, all published by Aerakis Cretan Music Workshop and Seistron.

Ioannis is a Teaching Fellow at the University of Western Macedonia in the School of Humanities and Social Sciences, where he has also completed postdoctoral research. As a guitar soloist, Ioannis has given numerous concerts in Greece and abroad. As a soloist-tutor, he has participated in international festivals such as the Guitar Foundation of America and the Volos International Guitar Festival. He has given lectures at conferences on the subject of guitar as well as at conferences of musicological, historical and pedagogical interest, including the Interdepartmental Musicological Conference/Greece, the Dublin Guitar Symposium and the 2019 Paros Symposium on the Greeks.

Senti (Stamatia) Chaniadaki held a bachelor's degree in pedagogical science from Athens University and bachelor's and master's degrees in painting from the Athens School of Fine Arts. She created illustrations for children's books and showed her work in exhibitions at galleries, institutions, biennales and various museums around Greece. The paintings and drawings that Senti shared at Paros for the 2019 Symposium on the Greeks, some of which are included in this volume, are based on the idea of how inspirational ancient Greek art can be for a contemporary artist.

Steve Edwards is currently an Emeritus Professor and Research Fellow at the University of Zululand. His qualifications include doctoral degrees in psychology and education and registration in South Africa and the United Kingdom as a clinical, educational, sport and exercise psychologist. Steve's research, teaching and professional activities are mainly concerned with health promotion. He has supervised many doctoral students, published much research, presented papers at many international conferences, and served on the boards of various national and international organizations. Academic and professional

awards include a Fulbright Scholarship, South African National Research Foundation ratings, and the Psychological Society of South Africa Mentoring and Development Award. He is happily married with two children and four grandchildren. His research record is available at https://www.researchgate.net/profile/Stephen_Edwards11.

Thomas Gerry, editor of this volume, is Professor Emeritus, Laurentian University, where he taught in the English Department from 1988 to 2017. In 1983 Tom received his PhD from the University of Western Ontario, London, Canada. His thesis title is *David Willson (1778–1866): Canadian Visionary Writer and Hymnodist*. He has published more than 100 book reviews, 20 scholarly articles and the books *Contemporary Canadian and U.S. Women of Letters* (Garland, 1993) and *The Emblems of James Reaney* (Porcupine’s Quill, 2013). For five years, Tom edited *Arachnē: An Interdisciplinary Journal of the Humanities*. He edited and helped translate from Spanish into English Mercedes Luanco’s *Una experiencia sorprendente: Apremiendo a Pintar / The Story of an Encounter: Painting My New Way* (Scrivener, 2013). Contributing to the organization of the 2019 Paros Symposium on the Greeks, participating in it and now editing this volume of essays are highlights of Tom’s academic career.

Hélène Jeannin holds a master’s degree in communication and a PhD in sociology of arts and media from the University of Paris III Sorbonne-Nouvelle. She is a sociologist in the Human and Social Sciences Research Department of Orange, a telecommunications company. Her work focuses on prospective and emerging topics related to technology, including surveillance, drones, augmented bodies, artificial intelligence and ethics. Her work takes a transdisciplinary approach crossing several angles of view, ranging from the concrete analysis of practices to discourses and representations. Her areas of expertise revolve around emerging digital and communication technologies and their repercussions on society. She is based near Paris, France.

Ioannis Kostopoulos is a researcher in Greek prehistory, focusing particularly on ancient Greek technologies.

Gabrielle Moyer teaches at Stanford University in the Program in Writing and Rhetoric. Her work attends to the stories we tell about ourselves and others—in the way aesthetics can form a response to philosophical doubts, and in the contingent relationship between ethics and epistemology. In the classroom and in her research, she asks how styles of reading and writing can help us countenance uncertainty and complexity: in others, in our choices and in our judgments. She is completing a book, *Suggestions for A New Magic*, which explores these questions in both modernist and contemporary fiction. She has published on modernist poetry, Samuel Beckett’s letters, Joseph Conrad and Ford Madox Ford.

Alexander Nagel is Chair of the Art History and Museum Professions Program and Associate Professor at the State University of New York, Fashion Institute of Technology. He is a Research Associate in Residence at the Smithsonian Institution’s National

Museum of Natural History in Washington, D.C. He received a PhD from the University of Michigan in 2010 and was Assistant Curator of Ancient Near East in the Smithsonian Institution's National Museum of Asian Art. Alex works on aspects of heritage preservation and legacies worldwide, on polychromies and materials from Persepolis and Susa in Iran, and on first millennium BCE materials from Aitolokarnania in Greece. He has received grants and fellowships from the German Academic Exchange Service, the American Philosophical Society, the Smithsonian Institution, the Graham Foundation, State University of New York and other institutions and organizations. The volume *Cave and Worship in Ancient Greece: New Approaches to Landscape and Ritual*, which he co-edited with Stella Katsarou of the Hellenic Ministry of Culture, Ephorate of Palaeoanthropology-Speleology, was published by Routledge in 2020.

William Ramp is an Associate Professor at the University of Lethbridge, Alberta, Canada, where he teaches in the Department of Sociology and the graduate program in cultural, social and political thought. His publications include articles and book chapters on a range of subjects, including religion, identity, neo-Durkheimian social theory, and agrarian politics and culture. He is also a regular contributor to *Weekly Hubris* (<https://weeklyhubris.com/>), an online general-interest literary magazine, on a range of subjects including political, cultural and material history.

Sahar Siavashi was born in Iran and moved to Canada in 2015. Currently, she is a master's student in cultural, social and political thought at the University of Lethbridge. She specializes in film criticism and women's studies, with a special interest in Iranian and Middle Eastern politics. She has previous degrees (MSc, mathematics) from the Universities of Tehran and Lethbridge but has always been particularly interested in political and social studies. Her current master's thesis is about identity formation among Iranian immigrant women in Canada, exploring political and societal factors (neoliberalism, orientalism, patriarchy and despotism) that have shaped the identity of women in the Iranian diaspora.

Helen Vatsikopoulos is a Lecturer in Journalism at the University of Technology Sydney, Australia. Her research areas include journalism as a tool for discovering suppressed stories, hidden truths and histories as well as ways to counter the digital disinformation and misinformation filling the vacuum left by suppressed histories. She has worked for the Australian Broadcasting Corporation, the Australia Network and the Special Broadcasting Service in Australia. She has specialized in international reporting and has covered history-changing events such as the fall of the Berlin Wall, the collapse of communism, the Rwandan genocide, the HIV-AIDS crisis in West Papua, the Sri Lankan civil war, the assassination of Rajiv Gandhi, and the Bali bombings, among many others. Her reporting on the collapse of the USSR won her a coveted Walkley Award. She has also made three documentary films, *New World Borders* and the award-winning documentaries *Agatha's Curse* and *Getting Gehry*. Helen has a doctorate of creative arts awarded in 2018 for an

exegetical investigation of identity and nationalism with an auto-ethnographical memoir on the Greek Civil War.

Velvet L. Yates is a Lecturer in Classics at the University of Florida, where she directs the Classics Graduate Distance Program. She received her PhD in classics, with a concentration in ancient philosophy, from Princeton University. Her main research interests are a feminist approach to Aristotle's *Politics* and ancient Greek stone-carving methods. She also enjoys visiting Tarpon Springs and scuba diving, so her topic for this volume was a natural.

Editor's Introduction

Thomas M. F. Gerry

A wonderful “Symposium on the Greeks” was held on the island of Paros from June 28 to 30, 2019. This volume includes nine essays that began as the authors’ oral and visual presentations at the Symposium. How did the idea for the Symposium occur? Marianne Vardalos, Anas Karzai and I, colleagues at Laurentian University, had for some time been talking about our felt need for an expansive, intellectually engaged gathering to share ongoing research interests and develop areas for future studies. Marianne summarized our motivation this way: “We wanted to get back to the basics and thought, what better way to do that than to return to the Greeks? We lamented that professional development activities we were attending had become so formulaic. So boring. So uninspiring. We designed this symposium to put the passion back into professional development activities.”

Starting from this dynamic of passion, we called on symposiasts from a variety of fields to reconsider aspects of Greek culture, particularly in terms of that culture’s continuing influences. The richness of the responses to the call for presentations was extraordinary. Just as a block of marble can be transformed into a sculpture, the raw material of the Symposium emerged into a marvelous form on Paros.

Legacies of Ancient Greece in Contemporary Perspectives features artwork by the Athenian artist Senti (Stamatia) Chaniadaki, who also graciously exhibited and discussed her drawings and engravings during the Symposium. One of the symposiasts, Cynthia Alexander, commented that Senti “illuminated our gathering with her art and presence.” Sadly, Senti died in 2021; she is deeply missed. Fortunately for us, though, Senti had agreed to our featuring her art in this volume. With her creations, Senti embodied the artistic spirit of ancient Greece in her own way. We are honored by the presence of her spirit in the pages of this volume.

Another major element of the richness of the Symposium, and now of this book, is the important work that all the contributors have done in order to get past the numerous clichés that abound in our notions of the Greeks. In her meditative essay “Bearing Witness: Becoming Greek in the Diaspora,” Helen Vatsikopoulos unpacks the question “What is Greece?” Contemporary Greece, she says, is a product of 19th-century nation building, an “imagined community” in Benedict Anderson’s phrase. A nation existentially requires unity, while actualities such as diverse populations within its borders be damned. A predominant tool for conceptualizing Greek unity—and, of course, for promoting tourism—is to connect with achievements in the ancient past as a way to construct status for the present nation. Vatsikopoulos writes that, as young Greeks in Australia, “we boasted that we were descendants of the cradle of Western civilization.” Also examining

the impacts of “commodities” from ancient Greece in a New World setting— Washington, D.C.—Alexander Nagel’s essay “Transatlantic Hellas: Archiving Eastern Mediterranean Collections and Materials in the Smithsonian Institution” raises fascinating issues concerning recent political and social usages of ancient artifacts.

Velvet Yates’s “The Greeks of Tarpon Springs in the Hollywood Imaginary” reflects on particular examples of the racist exploitation of Greek stereotypes in movies, insightfully rethinking the meanings of *Greece*. Sahar Siavashi and William Ramp also use film examples, in “Pedagogies and Possibilities of Crisis in Greek and Iranian Film.” The authors contrast filmic depictions of the economic discipline of neoliberalism as it is imposed by “austerity regimes.” In their essay, Siavashi and Ramp offer an intriguing overview of the “Symposium on the Greeks”: “The present volume emerged from a symposium that gathered together a diverse group of artists, musicians, scholars and teachers. It generated a creative tension between two ways of understanding classical Greek culture: (1) as expressive of a harmonics of the human spirit or civilizational convergence, and (2) as particular, contingent, specific, variable, even contradictory.”

Instances of the first way of understanding classical Greek culture include three essays in this volume that set out convergences in cultural contexts less expected than cinema. In “Decolonizing the Boundaries of Belonging and Citizenship: Turning to Ancient Hellenic and Indigenous Cosmopolitanisms during the Climate Crisis,” Cynthia Alexander explores ideas of citizenship through the lenses of Hellenic cosmopolitanism and Inuit traditional knowledge, or *Qaujimagatuqangit*. With profound acumen based on research and personal witnessing, Stephen Edwards examines themes related to healing in both ancient Greek and contemporary Zulu cultures. In “Athens is Burning: A Tragedy in Three Acts,” Gabrielle Moyer links Aristotelian ethics, modernist literature and neoliberalism in order to formulate possibilities for surviving neoliberalism. For readers, each of these sets of juxtapositions yields fresh perceptions.

In employing the critical potential of legacies of ancient Greece, two contributions stand out in emphasizing the “particular, contingent, specific, variable, even contradictory” aspects of classical Greek culture noted by Siavashi and Ramp. Guitarist, composer and scholar Ioannis Andronoglou, whose delightful presentation at the Symposium was partly verbal and partly musical, describes in his essay modern and contemporary Greek compositional strategies that engage Greek traditional music. In a similar way, Héléne Jeannin and Ioannis Kostopoulos focus on the world’s first robot, Talos, constructed by the god Hephaestus. Jeannin and Kostopoulos explain Talos as a significant example of the technologies of antiquity and their impacts on today’s culture.

For over two years, the authors and I have worked together to prepare *Legacies of Ancient Greece in Contemporary Perspectives*. Along with giving us opportunities to demonstrate scholarly patience and persistence, the time since the Symposium has allowed the authors to keep their contributions up to date.

This anthology of essays promises to challenge its readers, to fascinate them and to inspire them with the passion that the contributors have brought to their work.

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