Thinking comparatively about Greek mythology XV, with a focus on Herakles of Tiryns as military leader of the Mycenaean Empire

The Harvard community has made this article openly available. Please share how this access benefits you. Your story matters

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Citation</th>
<th>Nagy, G. 2019.10.31. &quot;Thinking comparatively about Greek mythology XV, with a focus on Herakles of Tiryns as military leader of the Mycenaean Empire.&quot; Classical Inquiries. <a href="http://nrs.harvard.edu/urn-3:hul.eresource:Classical_Inquiries">http://nrs.harvard.edu/urn-3:hul.eresource:Classical_Inquiries</a>.</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Published Version</td>
<td><a href="https://classical-inquiries.chs.harvard.edu/thinking-comparatively-about-greek-mythology-xv/">https://classical-inquiries.chs.harvard.edu/thinking-comparatively-about-greek-mythology-xv/</a></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Citable link</td>
<td><a href="http://nrs.harvard.edu/urn-3:HUL.InstRepos:42181564">http://nrs.harvard.edu/urn-3:HUL.InstRepos:42181564</a></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Terms of Use</td>
<td>This article was downloaded from Harvard University’s DASH repository, and is made available under the terms and conditions applicable to Other Posted Material, as set forth at <a href="http://nrs.harvard.edu/urn-3:HUL.InstRepos:dash.current.terms-of-use#LAA">http://nrs.harvard.edu/urn-3:HUL.InstRepos:dash.current.terms-of-use#LAA</a></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Classical Inquiries

Editors: Angelia Hanhardt and Keith Stone
Consultant for Images: Jill Curry Robbins
Online Consultant: Noel Spencer

About

Classical Inquiries (CI) is an online, rapid-publication project of Harvard's Center for Hellenic Studies, devoted to sharing some of the latest thinking on the ancient world with researchers and the general public.

While articles archived in DASH represent the original Classical Inquiries posts, CI is intended to be an evolving project, providing a platform for public dialogue between authors and readers. Please visit http://nrs.harvard.edu/urn-3:hul.eresource:Classical_Inquiries for the latest version of this article, which may include corrections, updates, or comments and author responses.

Additionally, many of the studies published in CI will be incorporated into future CHS publications. Please visit http://nrs.harvard.edu/urn-3:hul.eresource:CHS.Online_Publishing for a complete and continually expanding list of open access publications by CHS.

Classical Inquiries is published under a Creative Commons Attribution-NonCommercial 4.0 International License. Every effort is made to use images that are in the public domain or shared under Creative Commons licenses. Copyright on some images may be owned by the Center for Hellenic Studies. Please refer to captions for information about copyright of individual images.

Citing Articles from Classical Inquiries

To cite an article from Classical Inquiries, use the author’s name, the date, the title of the article, and the following persistent identifier:
http://nrs.harvard.edu/urn-3:hul.eresource:Classical_Inquiries.

For example:
Thinking comparatively about Greek mythology XV, with a focus on Hēraklēs of Tiryns as military leader of the Mycenaean Empire

October 31, 2019  By Gregory Nagy

§0. While analyzing comparatively the myths about Hēraklēs as a leader of people in general and of military expeditions in particular, I have outlined in the essay TC XII, 2019.10.11, the special relevance of Tiryns, a strategically vital stronghold of the Mycenaean Empire, as the designated place where this Strong Man is stationed in the course of performing his services for Eurystheus, king of Mycenae and over-king of the people of the Mycenaean Empire. In my essay here, I now note also the relevance of ancient Tiryns as a strategic point of access to the Aegean Sea and, thereby, to reachable destinations throughout the Mediterranean world. The map that I show here helps illustrate what I have just noted.

Map 1. From an article by Eberhard Zangger 1994; drawing by Jill Robbins after original map by Rosemary Robertson. The abbreviations EH and LH indicate approximate datings.

EH = Early Helladic: in this case, around the middle of the third millennium BCE.
LH = Late Helladic: in this case, around the last two centuries of the second millennium BCE.

§1. The situating of ancient Tiryns-by-the-sea, as visualized in Map 1, must have involved structures that accommodated the beaching and the launching of ships, and there is evidence for positing the kind of advanced technology that such structures would have required. Supporting evidence can be found in the archaeological vestiges of a dam as pictured in Map 2. This dam, combined with a channel, also pictured in Map 2, had once diverted the waters of a nearby river from the immediate sea-front of Tiryns, thus protecting this sea-front from the ongoing process of silting caused by the local rivers in general. The technological sophistication that would have been required to construct the dam and the channel indicates, I think, the likelihood of a comparably sophisticated infrastructure for the beaching and the launching of ships.
§2. I posit the prehistoric existence of another such infrastructure in the environs of ancient Troy, as reconstructed in Map 3. Among the destinations accessible by way of ancient Tiryns-by-the-sea, shown in Map 1, would have been ancient Troy-by-the-sea, shown in Map 3, which had once been a functional seaport, situated on the shores of what had once been the Bay of the Hellespont—before that vast body of water got silted over in the course of successive centuries.
§3. I propose that the myth about the military expedition of Hēraklēs against Troy, as noted briefly at §3a in the essay TC XI, 2019.10.04, would have featured the seaside fortress of Tiryns as the launching point for such an expedition. Here I epitomize the relevant parts of TC XI §3a. As we read in Iliad 6.640–642, Hēraklēs had once upon a time launched a military expedition against Troy, hex oīēis sun nēusi (ἓξ οἴῃς σὺν νηυσί) ‘by way of merely six ships’, 6.641. As we see from the context, Hēraklēs was the main fighter in such a first Trojan War as opposed to the second Trojan War, which is of course the main subject of the Iliad. The story about the conquest of Troy by Hēraklēs can be found in retellings by Diodorus of Sicily (4.32.1–5) and by “Apollodorus” (2.6.4 pp. 245–247 ed. Frazer 1921 I).

Bibliography

See the dynamic Bibliography for Comments on Comparative Mythology.

Tags: Comments on Comparative Mythology, Herakles, Iliad, Mycenaean Empire, Tiryns, Troy

Comments are closed.