



# A bathtub in Pylos

## Citation

Nagy, Gregory. 2017. "A bathtub in Pylos." Classical Inquiries.  
[http://nrs.harvard.edu/urn-3:hul.eresource:Classical\\_Inquiries](http://nrs.harvard.edu/urn-3:hul.eresource:Classical_Inquiries).

## Published version

<https://classical-inquiries.chs.harvard.edu/a-bathtub-in-pylos/>

## Link

<http://nrs.harvard.edu/urn-3:HUL.InstRepos:40997811>

## Terms of use

This article was downloaded from Harvard University's DASH repository, and is made available under the terms and conditions applicable to Other Posted Material (LAA), as set forth at

<https://harvardwiki.atlassian.net/wiki/external/NGY5NDE4ZjgzNTc5NDQzMGIzZWZhMGFIOWI2M2EwYTg>

## Accessibility

<https://accessibility.huit.harvard.edu/digital-accessibility-policy>

## Share Your Story

The Harvard community has made this article openly available.  
Please share how this access benefits you. [Submit a story](#)

# 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](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](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](http://nrs.harvard.edu/urn-3:hul.eresource:Classical_Inquiries).

For example:

Nagy, G. 2019.01.31. "Homo Ludens at Play with the Songs of Sappho: Experiments in Comparative Reception Theory, Part Four." *Classical Inquiries*. [http://nrs.harvard.edu/urn-3:hul.eresource:Classical\\_Inquiries](http://nrs.harvard.edu/urn-3:hul.eresource:Classical_Inquiries).

[Home](#) » [By Gregory Nagy](#) » A bathtub in Pylos

## A bathtub in Pylos

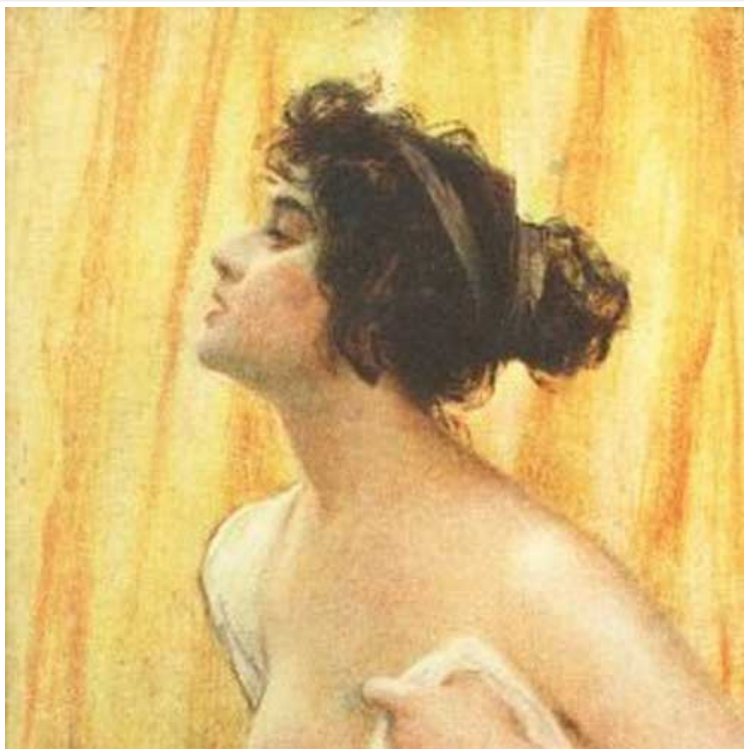
March 16, 2017 By Gregory Nagy listed under By Gregory Nagy

[3 Comments](#) [Edit This](#)

2017.03.16 | By Gregory Nagy

In Odyssey 3, Telemachus as guest of Nestor is given a bath in a bathtub called an asaminthos. Archaeologists have linked this asaminthos with a terracotta bathtub found in the so-called Palace of Nestor at Pylos. Explored here is the ritual significance of a bath in such a bathtub.

[\[Essay continues here...\]](#)



Piękna Polycaste, najmłodsza córka Nestora [Beautiful Polykaste, the youngest daughter of Nestor] by Jan Styka, 1901

§1. The background for this posting of 2017.03.16 was my visit, 2016.06.15, to the newly-reopened archaeological site of “the palace of Nestor” at Pylos. On the occasion of this visit, I was accompanied by participants in a travel-study program sponsored by Harvard University’s Center for Hellenic Studies together with the Harvard Alumni Association. My fellow visitors and I had viewed the whole site, and I came away with many new impressions. I focus here on one in particular. It has to do with a terracotta bathtub found in the palace. The tub is fixed, not movable, and it would have been filled and emptied by hand. Archaeologists have linked this object with a scene in the Homeric Odyssey. At O.03.464–468, Telemachus the son of Odysseus is bathed in a tub called an asaminthos, O.03.468. The bath is part of a welcoming ceremony organized by Nestor, king of Pylos, who is hosting the young prince. Telemachus is being bathed by Polykaste, youngest daughter of Nestor. After the bath, O.03.469, Telemachus proceeds to a dinner hosted by Nestor in his honor. But while he is still finishing the bath, as we see him emerging from the bathtub, O.03.468, Telemachus is described as *athanatoisin homoiōs*, usually translated as ‘looking just like the immortals’. This description brings me to my topic, which is the impression I get about the ritual significance of such a bath.

### Share This



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.

### Editor

Keith Stone  
[kstone@chs.harvard.edu](mailto:kstone@chs.harvard.edu)

Search for:

### Subscribe Now!

Subscribe to this site to receive email updates about the latest research—just one or two notices per week.

[EU/EEA Privacy Disclosures](#)

### Now Online



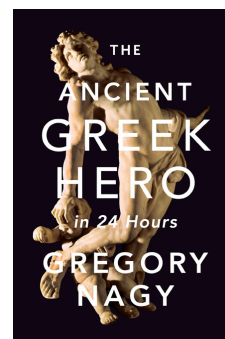
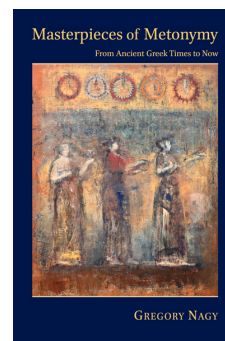
Bathtub at Nestor's Palace, Pylos, by Dan Diffendale. Image provided under a Creative Commons Attribution-NonCommercial ShareAlike 2.0 Generic License.

§2. In a book entitled *Masterpieces of Metonymy* (MoM in the Bibliography), I highlighted the Homeric comparison of Telemachus with the immortal gods in the context of his emerging from his bath in the *asaminthos* 'bathtub'. What I now highlight here, however, is different: it is the relevance of this comparison to the ritual function of actually taking such a ritual bath.



Bains de Télémaque [Baths of Telemachus], from *Odyssée d'Homère* by Jan Styka. 2 vols. Paris: Société générale d'imprimerie et d'édition, 1922–1923.

§3. Most relevant to this act of comparison to the gods is the etymology of *homoios* (ὅμοιος), which shows that the meaning 'looking just like' derives from a more basic meaning, 'same as'. In what follows, I epitomize what I said about this etymology in MoM 2§7. From the standpoint of Indo-European linguistics, the Greek adjective *homoios* (ὅμοιος) derives from a prototypical form *\*somo-*, meaning 'same as'. The English adjective *same* is derived from this same prototypical form. Another derivative is the Latin adjective *similis*, meaning 'same as' or 'similar to'. In the usage of both Latin *similis* and Greek *homoios* (ὅμοιος), the same semantic principle applies: for A2 to be similar to A1, it has to be the same as A1 in some respect, which is X. Further, for A2 to be the same as A1, it has to be one with A1 in respect to X. That is because the Indo-European root *\*som-* of *\*somo-* 'same as' means 'one', as we see in such forms as the Latin adverb *semel* 'one time'. And the idea of 'one' in words like English *same* has to do with an act of comparing. When we compare things, what is the 'same as' something else in some respect becomes 'one with' that something in that respect. That is how a word like Latin *similis*, deriving from the concept of



## Top Posts & Pages

The Last Words of Socrates at the Place Where He Died

Musings about a scene pictured by the Achilles Painter

Homo ludens at play with the songs of Sappho: Experiments in comparative reception theory, Part Five

## Most Common Tags

Achilles Aphrodite apobatēs Ariadne

Aristotle Artemis Athena Athens

Catullus Chalcis chariot fighting

**Commentary** Delphi

Demodokos Dionysus etymology

Euripides Gregory Nagy H24H HAA

travel-study Helen Hera Herodotus

Hippolytus Homer

**Homeric epic Iliad**

Jean Bollack lament Lelantine War mimesis

Minoan Empire Mycenae Odysseus

**Odyssey Pausanias**

Phaedra Pindar Plato Poetics Posidippus

**Sappho** Theseus weaving Zeus

## Archives

'one', means 'similar to' in the sense of 'one with'. What is similar 'similar' to something else in some respect is 'one with' that something in that respect. In the case of the Greek adjective homoios (ὁμοῖος), it refers to something that is 'one with' and therefore 'the same as' something else in some respect. And, as we will see later, if something else is not the same, then it is alloios (ἀλλοῖος) 'a different kind', which is the opposite of homoios (ὁμοῖος) or 'the same kind'. As we will also see later, the extension -ios (-ιος) of the two adjectives homoios (ὁμοῖος) 'the same kind' and alloios (ἀλλοῖος) 'a different kind' is parallel to the extension -ios (-ιος) of the adjectives hoios (οἷος) 'what kind' and toios (τοῖος) 'that kind'.

§4. In MoM 2§16, my starting point was the passage where Telemachus is 'looking the same as' the immortal gods after he takes a bath in the asaminthos. I compared that passage, which I call here Extract A, with another passage, Extract B:

### Extract A

He [= Telemachus] emerged from the asaminthos, **looking the same as [homoios] the immortals** in shape.

O.03.468[1]

### Extract B

He [= Odysseus] emerged from the asaminthos, **looking the same as [homoios] the immortals** in shape.

O.23.163[2]

§5. And here is another relevant passage, Extract C, involving the related word enalinkios (ἐναλγκίος) 'looking just like':

### Extract C

And he [= Odysseus] emerged from the asaminthos. His dear son [= Telemachus] marveled at him, | **when he saw him, face to face, looking just like [enalinkios] the immortal gods.**

O.24.370–371[3]

§6. In all three of these extracts, we are dealing with a kind of comparison that modern literary critics normally call a simile. In the example that we have just seen, Extract C, the visual aspect of the simile is made explicit with the phrasing ὥς ἴδεν ... ἄντην 'when he [= Telemachus] saw him [= Odysseus], face to face'. In this example, then, Odysseus is quite literally 'looking just like' the gods, as expressed by the adjective enalinkios.

§7. In the next example, which is far more complex than the other examples we have seen so far, it is the adjective homoios that expresses the idea that Odysseus is 'looking just like' the gods when Telemachus sees him, face to face. In this case, the divine looks of Odysseus are caused not by a ritual bath in the asaminthos but by direct physical contact with the goddess Athena herself:

### Extract D

|<sub>172</sub> So spoke Athena, and she touched him [= Odysseus] with her golden wand. |<sub>173</sub> First she made his mantle and his tunic to be cleanly washed, |<sub>174</sub> she made it be that way, what he was wearing over his chest, and she augmented his size and his youthfulness. |<sub>175</sub> His tan complexion came back, and his jaws got firmed up, |<sub>176</sub> and dark again became the beard around his chin. |<sub>177</sub> Then she [= Athena], having done her work, went back where she came from, while |<sub>178</sub> Odysseus headed for the shelter. His dear son [= Telemachus] marveled at him, |<sub>179</sub> and, in his amazement, **he [= Telemachus] cast his gaze away from him, in another direction, fearing that he [= Odysseus] might be a god.** |<sub>180</sub> And he [= Telemachus] addressed him [= Odysseus], speaking winged words: |<sub>181</sub> "As **a different kind of person [alloios]**, stranger, **have you appeared [phainesthai]** to me just now, different than before. |<sub>182</sub> You have different clothes and your complexion is no longer **the same kind [homoios]**. |<sub>183</sub> You must be some god, one of those gods who hold the wide sky. |<sub>184</sub> So be gracious, in order that we may give you pleasing sacrifices |<sub>185</sub> and golden gifts of good workmanship. Have mercy on us." |<sub>186</sub> And he [= Telemachus] was answered then by the one who suffered many things, the radiant Odysseus: |<sub>187</sub> "I am not some god. Why do you **liken [eĩskein] me to the immortals?** |<sub>188</sub> But I am your father, for whom you mourn and |<sub>189</sub> suffer many pains, enduring the violent acts of men." |<sub>190</sub> Having said these things, he kissed his son and let fall from his cheeks |<sub>191</sub> a tear, letting it fall to the ground. Until then he had persisted in showing no sign of pity. |<sub>192</sub> And Telemachus, since he was not yet convinced that he [= Odysseus] was his father, |<sub>193</sub> once again addressed him with words in reply: |<sub>194</sub> "You are not Odysseus my father. Instead, some superhuman force |<sub>195</sub> is enchanting me, and it makes me weep and mourn even more. |<sub>196</sub> I say this because no mortal man could craft these things that are happening to me, |<sub>197</sub> no mortal could do these things by way of his own devising, unless a god comes in person |<sub>198</sub> and, **if he so wishes**, easily makes someone a young man or makes him an old man. |<sub>199</sub> Why, just a little while ago you were an old

Archives

Users

[Log out](#)

0.16.172-212[4]

§11. This posting is dedicated to my fellow travelers Hunt and Kelly Lambert, Hélène Emeriaud, David Beardsley, Marina Cheilitsi, Leanne Gaffney, Stephen and Irene Trivers, Michael and Cathy Winer, Robert and Judy Kryger, Cecilia Taiana, Philip Anderson, John Kenny, Milica Ivanis, Alaisha Sharma, Alec Douglas, Ryan LaMonica, Theresa Nguyen, Sunday Hull, Cecil Williams II, Abdur Rehman, Mariam Topeshashvili, Lisa Zheng.

[4] |172 ἦ, καὶ χρυσεὴ ῥάβδῳ ἐπεμάσαστ' Ἀθήνη. |173 φάρος μὲν οἱ πρῶτον εὐπλυνὲς ἥδ' ἰχθῶνα |174 θῆκ' ἄμφι στήθεσφι, δέμας δ' ὥρελλε καὶ ἥβην. |175 ἄψ δὲ μελαγχροῖς γένητο, γναθμοὶ δ' ἐτάνυσθεν, |176 κυάναει δ' ἐγένοντο ἐθειράδες ἄμφι γένειον. |177 ἦ μὲν ἄρ' ὥς ἔρρασα πάλιν κίεν· αὐτὰρ Ὀδυσσεύς |178 ἦϊεν ἐς κλισίην. θάμβησε δὲ μιν φίλος υἱός, |179 παρθήσας δ' ἐτέρωσα βάλ' ὄμματα, μὴ θεὸς εἴη, |180 καὶ μιν φωνήσας ἔπεα πτερόεντα προσηύδα· |181 "ἀλλοιὸς μοι, ξεῖνε, φάνης νέον ἢ ἐπάροιθεν, |182 ἄλλα δὲ εἵματ' ἔχεις καὶ τοι χρώς οὐκέθ' ὁμοῖος. |183 ἦ μάλα τις θεὸς ἐσσι, τοὶ οὐρανὸν εὐρὺν ἔχουσιν· |184 ἄλλ' ἔληθρ', ἵνα τοι κεχαρισμένα δώομεν ἱρὰ |185 ἥδε χρύσεια δῶρα, τετυγμένα· φεῖδω δ' ἡμέων." |186 τὸν δ' ἡμίβητ' ἔπειτα πολὺτλας δῖος Ὀδυσσεύς· |187 "οὐ τίς τοι θεὸς εἰμι· τί μ' ἀθανάτοισιν εἴσκεις; |188 ἀλλὰ πατὴρ τεὸς εἰμι, τοῦ εἵνεκα σὺ στεναχίζων |189 πάσχεις ἄλγεα πολλὰ, βίας ὑποδέγμενος ἀνδρῶν." |190 ὥς ἄρα φωνήσας υἱὸν κύσε, καὶ δὲ παρειῶν |191 δάκρυον ἤκε χαμάζε· πόρος δ' ἔχε νωλεμές αἰεῖ. |192 Τηλέμαχος δ',—οὐ γάρ πω

ἐπείθετο ὃν πατέρ' εἶναι,—|<sub>193</sub> ἐξαυτίς μιν ἔπεσιν ἀμειβόμενος προσέειπεν· |<sub>194</sub> “οὐ σύ γ' Ὀδυσσεύς ἐσσι  
πατήρ ἐμός, ἀλλὰ με δαίμων |<sub>195</sub> θέλγει, ὅφρ' ἔτι μάλλον ὀδυρόμενος στεναχίζω. |<sub>196</sub> οὐ γάρ πως ἂν  
θνητὸς ἀνὴρ τάδε μηχανόωτο |<sub>197</sub> ᾧ αὐτοῦ γε νόω, ὅτε μὴ θεὸς αὐτὸς ἐπελθὼν |<sub>198</sub> ῥηϊδίως ἐθέλων θείῃ  
νέον ἠδὲ γέροντα. |<sub>199</sub> ἦ γάρ τοι νέον ἦσθα γέρων καὶ ἀεικέα ἔσσο· |<sub>200</sub> νῦν δὲ θεοῖσιν ἔοικας, οἳ οὐρανὸν  
εὐρὺν ἔχουσι.” |<sub>201</sub> τὸν δ' ἀπαμειβόμενος προσέφη πολύμητις Ὀδυσσεύς· |<sub>202</sub> “Τηλέμαχ', οὗ σε ἔοικε φίλον  
πατέρ' ἔνδον ἐόντα |<sub>203</sub> οὔτε τι θαυμάζειν περιώσιον οὔτ' ἀγάασθαι· |<sub>204</sub> οὐ μὲν γάρ τοι ἔτ' ἄλλος ἐλεύσεται  
ἐνθάδ' Ὀδυσσεύς, |<sub>205</sub> ἀλλ' ὅδ' ἐγὼ τοιόσδε, παθὼν κακὰ, πολλὰ δ' ἀληθείς, |<sub>206</sub> ἦλυθον εἰκοστῷ ἔτει ἐς  
πατρίδα γαῖαν. |<sub>207</sub> αὐτὰρ τοι τόδε ἔργον Ἀθηναίης ἀγελείης, |<sub>208</sub> ἣ τέ με τοῖον ἔθηκεν ὅπως ἐθέλει, δύνатаι  
γάρ, |<sub>209</sub> ἄλλοτε μὲν πτωχῷ ἐναλίγκιον, ἄλλοτε δ' αὔτε |<sub>210</sub> ἀνδρὶ νέω καὶ καλὰ περὶ χροῖ εἵματ' ἔχοντι. |<sub>211</sub>  
ῥηϊδίον δὲ θεοῖσι, τοῖ οὐρανὸν εὐρὺν ἔχουσιν, |<sub>212</sub> ἡμὲν κυδῆναι θνητὸν βροτὸν ἠδὲ κακῶσαι.”

Tags: [HAA travel-study](#), [Odyssey](#), [Pylos](#), [Telemachus](#)