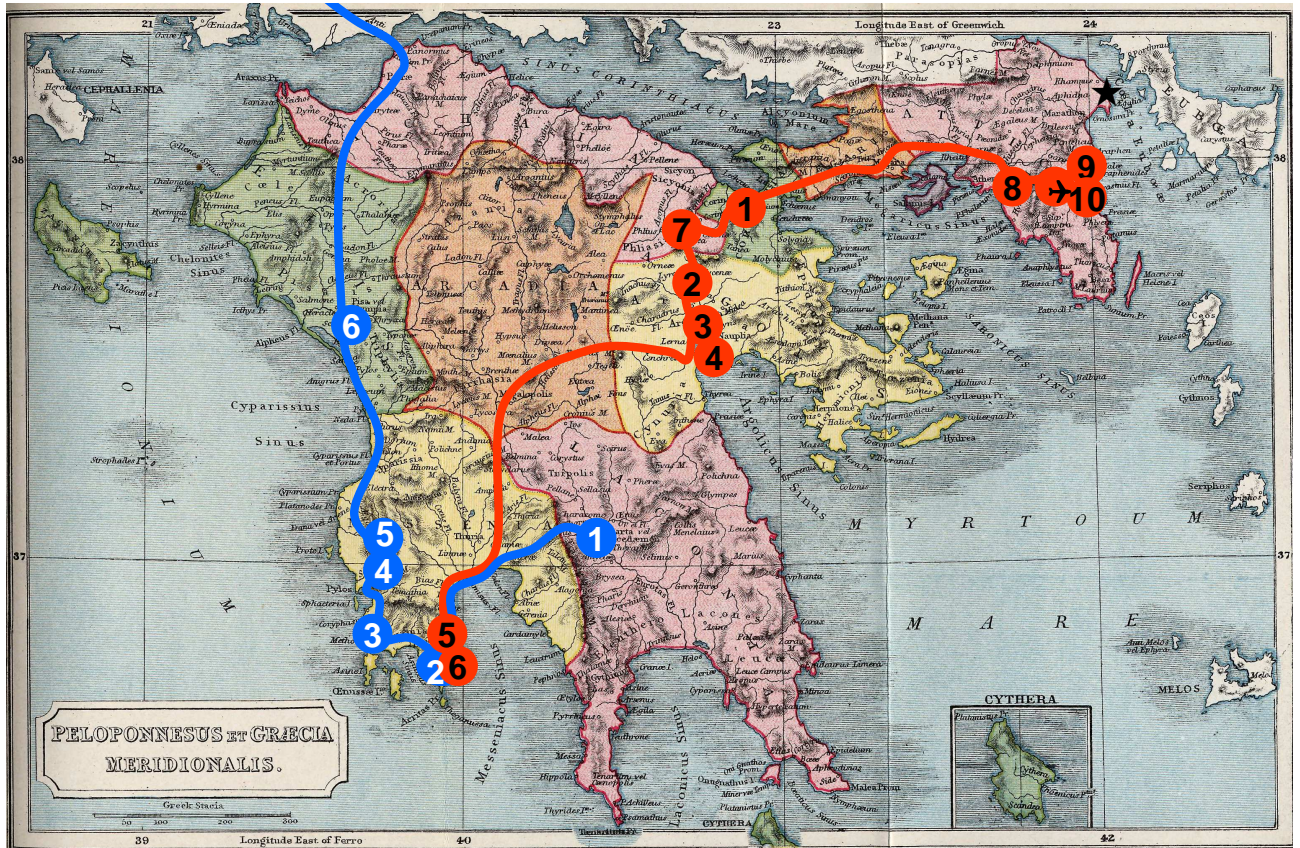


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Trip to Greece, October 2011: Rough notes

Wim van Binsbergen

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LEGEND:

red: itinerary 2011: 1. Ancient Corinth; 2. Mycenae; 3. Tiryns; 4. Nauplia; 5. Harakopio; 6. Koroni; 7. Nemea; 8. Athens; 9. Artemis Tauropolos / Artemida; 10. Artemis Brauronia

blue: itinerary (partial) 2009 (see Topicalities under August 2009 – item under construction): 1. Sparta; 2. Koroni; 3. Methone; 4. Pylos / Palace of Nestor; 5. Hora; 6. Olympia; (other destinations lying North of the map area)

★ Aulis, place of Iphigenia's legendary sacrifice by Agamemnon

The description below follows the stops of the red itinerary

1. Ancient Corinth: temple of Apollo with museum



Dionysus



Byzantine plate



Roman statue depicting Medusa head as apotropaic device on a breastplate



Heracles in Amazonamachia; I was delighted to find, in this museum, an extensive set of representations of Herakles' Works – which I had known since my childhood initiation into Greek mythology through Diephuis n.d.



ostrakon for Asklepios – apparently an Asklepeian therapeutic shrine had been part of the temple complex, which interests me as an African diviner-healer



representations of body parts as votive offerings to Asklepios; note the emphasis on reproductive organs



the male figure holding a disc (cf. the Chinese pi-disc?), the female figure poppies and ears of corn (Hades and Persephone?)



Athena with peplos garment and owl



Temple of Apollo



an abandoned Islamic shrine in midst of residential area reminds us of the Ottoman history of Greece



fight of Pygmies and Cranes, a famous mythical motif



Roman painting reminiscent of Hieronymus Bosch

2. Mycenae

In 2011 I published, with Fred Woudhuizen, a major archaeological study *Ethnicity in Mediterranean protohistory* (British Archaeological Reports International Series, Oxford: Archaeopress; see: http://shikanda.net/ethnicity_mediterranean_protohistory/ethnicit.htm). Inevitably, considerable attention was paid to Mycenaean Greece of the Middle to Late Bronze Age. Therefore, although our first attempt to visit the site was frustrated by a national strike in the context of the Greek financial crisis and its strained position with the European Union, I tried again on the return journey from Koroni, and this time with success. Having familiarised myself, over the years, with the main publications on Mycenae, it was mildly exciting to see the real thing, within the lush surroundings of the Argolid plain to which Mycenae must have owed most of its wealth and power. However, even when realising that most of the treasures of this capital had been looted and carried off to distant museums, it was a disappointment to see the relatively small size and humble scope of this royal city, once the centre of a kingdom whose influence could be traced across the Mediterranean all the way to Cornwall, England. Especially the miniature size of the royal palace and its throne room confirmed what I had insisting on in our recent book: that the king of Mycenae was only a primus inter pares, whose contribution to the allied Greek fleet was within the range of other major kings, who could not even contain the wrath of a minor prince like Achilles, and who was by no means the overlord of all of Greece.



in mid-October 2011 the Greek financial crisis was coming to a head, and national antiquities sites were often closed because of strike (*apergia*)



although, therefore, in our first visit we could only view the Mycenae site from the other side of the fence, I was impressed by the near-perfect conical mountain overlooking it all – if Bernal was right and the place had been a refuge for Hyksos nobles ousted from Egypt, had they picked this place because of its pyramid reminiscences?



excavations in progress outside the citadel



Lion tholos (beehive tomb) outside the citadel



the most photographed object in the Peloponnese: the Lion Gate



excavations due South of Grave Circle A



Grave Circle A



Grave Circle A



grave circle A continued



the lush Argolid plain



this kind of sign post one encountered all over Greece: the Greeks' bitterness when finally the EU restricted its generosity towards their country, cannot conceal that billions have already been put into their country's infrastructure

3. Tiryns

Due to the national strike, also at Tiryns we had to contend ourselves with gazing at the cyclopean walls through the fences.



4. Nauplia / Navplion



Navplion is now a centre of internal Greek tourism; like elsewhere in the Mediterranean today, *taalibe* (marabout's servants) from Senegal try to claim and retain a portion of the curio market



the town's island fortress, also the residence of the local executioner



the town viewed from across the Argolid Gulf



roadside shrine at the same spot as where previous picture was taken



from the same spot: looking across the Argolid plain



signs of political agitation on a road sign: 'The South will rise again'



memento shrine at the same spot

6. Koroni

Having spend nearly two weeks near Koroni in 2009, returning here was almost like coming home. However, the late season and the country's financial crisis made the place appear considerably less attractive than two years earlier. We had never visited the fort overlooking the town, and it was there that our attention concentrated on now. While the fort itself was in ruins, its premises turned out to house a considerable number of civilian houses – many of them in a depressing state – and moreover a nunnery (with lush gardens full of flowers and fruit trees) annex tourist shop, several interesting churches, and an extensive cemetery. Beyond the fortress the South-western Pelopponese peninsula tapers to the sea and a lonely maritime beacon, surrounded by fruit and vegetable gardens. A cluster of churches was built upon the remains of an early Christian basilica, while I believed to spot also a domes Islamic shrine (re-?)converted to Christian use. For the rest the pictures will speak for themselves. As Fermor (1958) tells us in his book on Mani (the middle peninsula of the Pelopponese, South of Sparta/i) Koroni was once famous as the sole place where giant ceramic olive oil containers were being produced, but hardly any traces of this traditional industry seem to remain.



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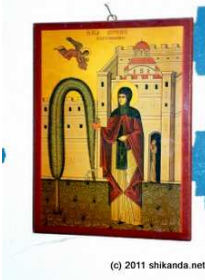
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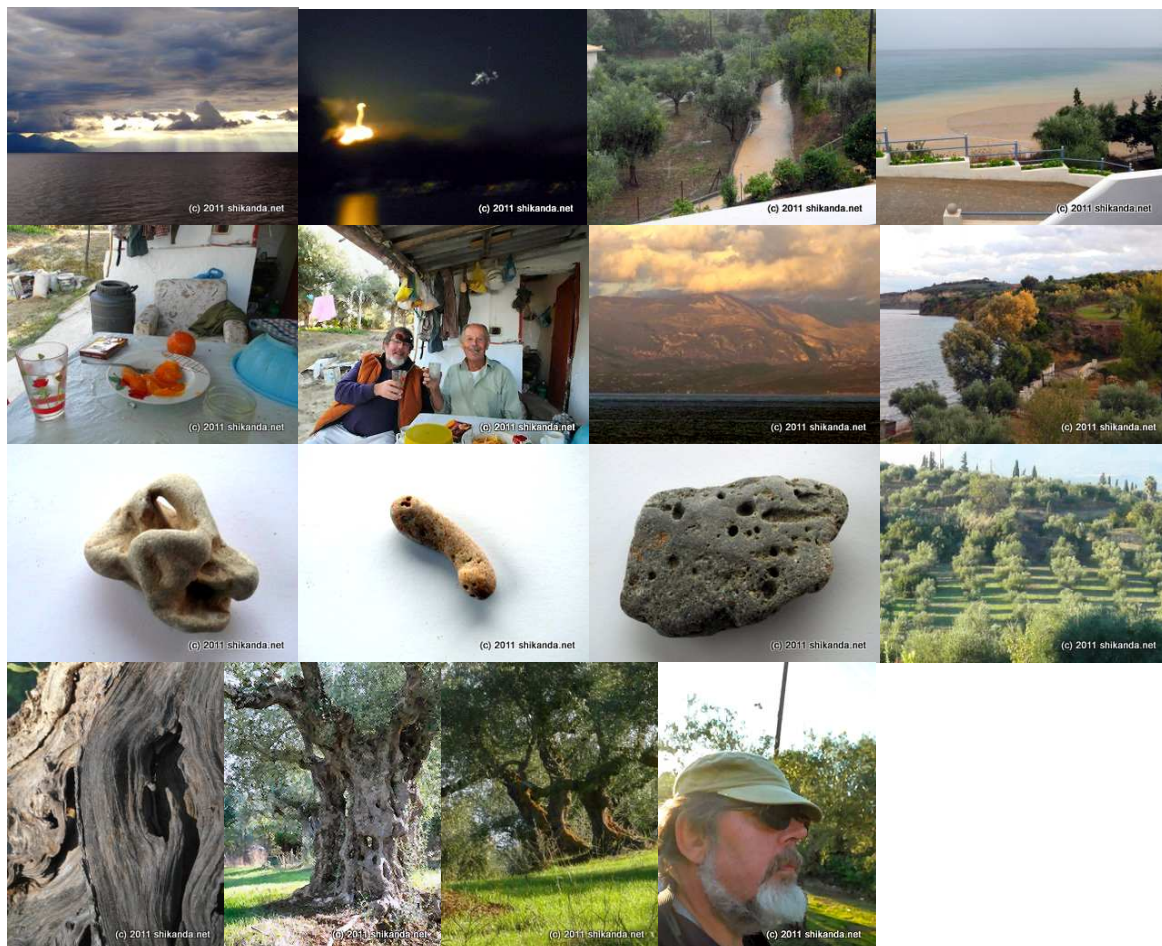
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5. Harakopio

Situated a few kms North of Koroni, Harakopio is a small village whose surroundings have recently seen much real-estate development, especially East of the village where the olive orchards slope off to the sea. The late seasons meant rain and thunderstorms, which brought out the exploitative and short-sighted nature of such real-estate development: the desperately narrow roads were turned into wild mountain currents, washing the precious

soil into the sea. As a sign of the destitute state in which the European Union has left Greece, many ordinary villagers had built nice modcomf villas here to rent to tourists. Meanwhile fruits were ripening, including the local *loto*, an orange-coloured fruit of intoxicating sweetness, and probably the preferred food of Homer's *Lotofagoi* (*Odyssea* IX, 84). Across the Gulf of Messina, the ragged peaks of the Taëgetos massive dominated our view. Along the rocky beach interesting pebbles could be picked up, reminding me (as a long-standing investigator of prehistoric cupmarks as possible signs, among other possibilities, of star maps and mankala-type board-games; cf. http://shikanda.net/ancient_models/gen3/starmaps_3_2000/cupmarks_0.html and http://shikanda.net/ancient_models/gen3/mankala.html) that such holes would often have a purely natural, non-man-made origin. The rugged, contorted shapes of old olive trees inspired me to a new book of poetry, *Dendrogram* (for text and illustrations see: http://shikanda.net/topicalities/dendrogram_beeldgedichten2011.pdf), started in Harakopio, and subsequently finished in Eastern France and in my Haarlem home.



7. Nemea: Temple of Zeus and museum

Passing by Nemea on our return journey, we stopped by at the Zeus temple and adjacent attractive museum. Interestingly, the Nemean games have been revived in the last few years. Competition is open to persons from all ages (and genders?), provided they dress –

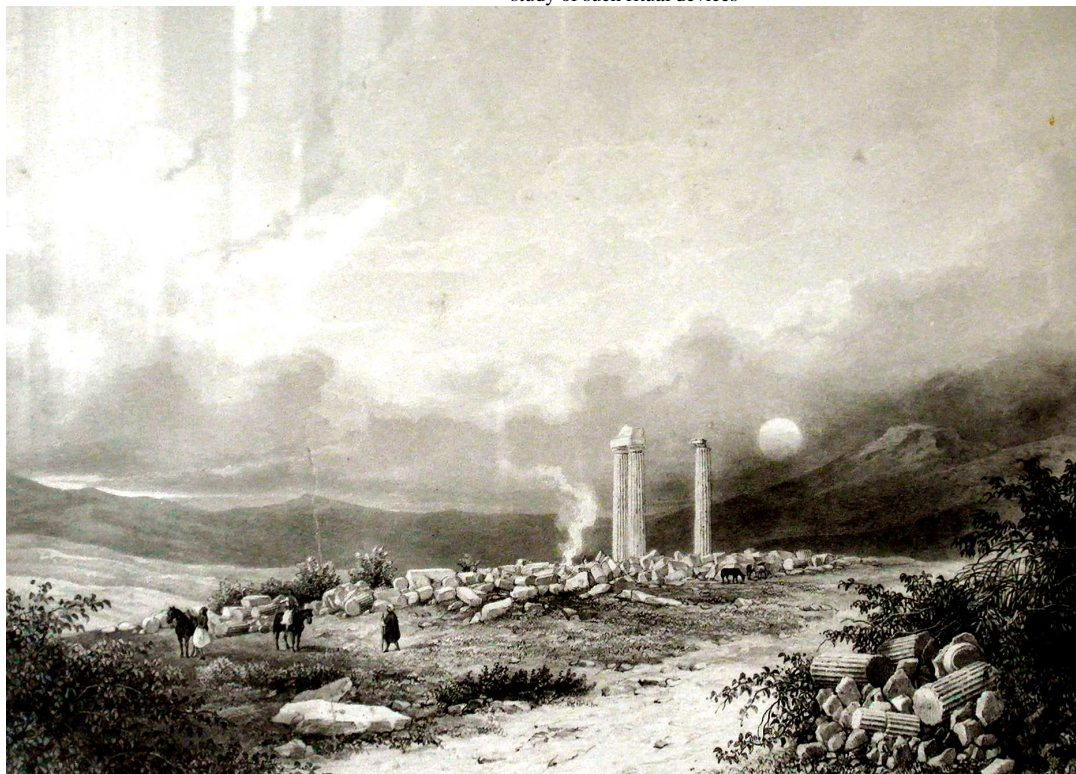
out of character – in some early-Christian, rustic tunic (instead of simple, time-honoured nudity) and run the set trajectory bare-footed, which considering the roughness of the path constitutes a major penitence. The beautiful little museum proved well endowed.



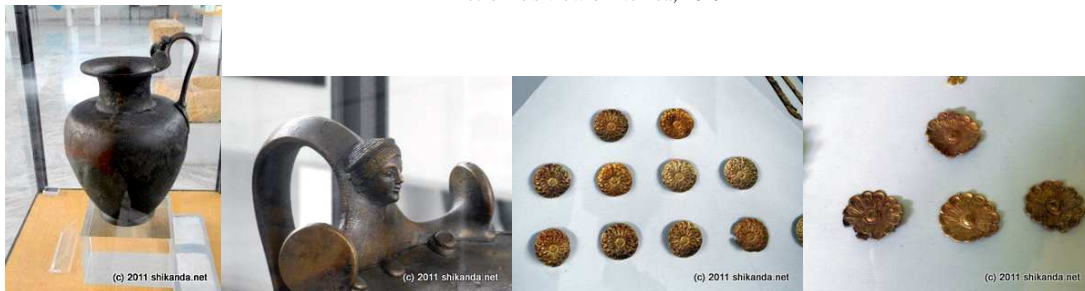
plaque depicting gods awaiting sacrifices

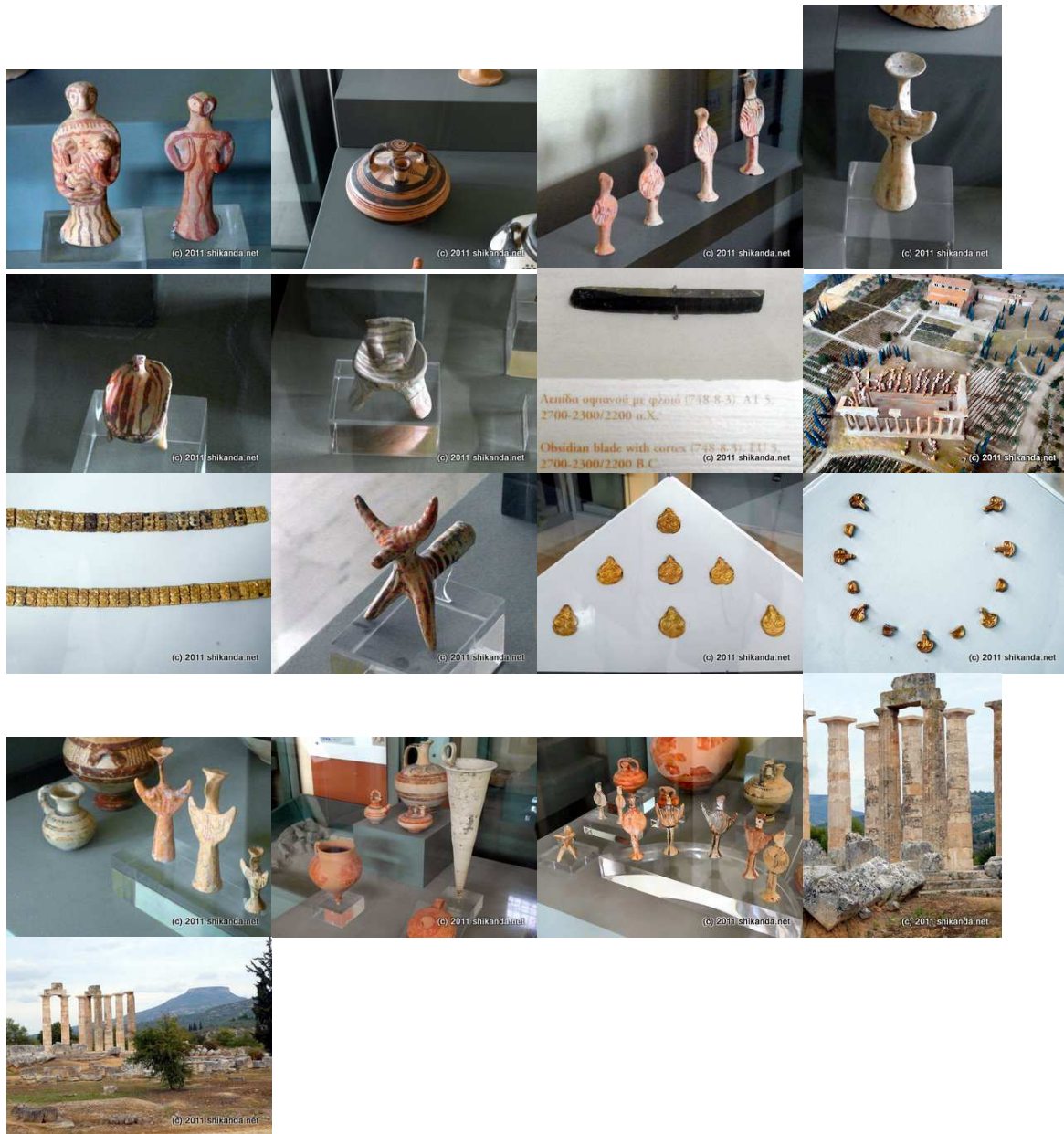
double sacrificial basin; ever since my work on mankala and cup holes I have taken an interest in the comparative study of such ritual devices

an ornate capital



Letronne's view of Nemea, 1829





9. Artemis Tauropolos / Artemida

Traversing Athens from West to East, we spent the night in Eastern Attica prior to our return flight. Here, with the island Euboea in view, we were only a few dozen kms from the spot of Agamemnon's (attempted? failed? alleged?) sacrifice of his daughter Iphigeneia in honour of the goddess Artemis. In our recent book, an attempt to determine the true nature of Mycenaean kingship and hegemony led me to consider the traditional reasons for Agamemnon's sacrifice – arguing that the winds were hardly Artemis' province, but pubescent girls were, and on the basis of considerable parallels with female puberty rites in Africa (where they have had my special attention during fieldwork in Zambia since 1972), Eurasia and North America I suggested that Agamemnon's real offence may have been that he interfered with the goddess' control over the child while

she was going through the puberty rites known to be associated with Artemis, specifically at the East Attican site of Brauron (van Binsbergen & Woudhuizen 2011: 112 f; for the footnotes and references, omitted here, see the full version as listed in the bibliography below):

WHY WOULD A BOW-WIELDING VIRGIN GODDESS WITHHOLD THE WINDS? Ever since Graeco-Roman Antiquity, various *ad hoc* explanations have circulated as to why Artemis was withholding the winds, thus preventing the Greeks from sailing against Troy: allegedly, Agamemnon had killed a deer in the goddess' sacred forest, or he had boasted that he was a better hunter than she. Since Agamemnon is known as a warrior and a king, rather than as a hunter, such explanations fail to convince. Comparative-mythological and religious digression may help to put this episode in proper perspective. The winds do not typically fall under Artemis' jurisdiction within the classical Hellenic context, where Artemis, as the virgin daughter of Zeus and Leto, features as the patroness of hunting, of death, of the forces of nature, and probably of puberty rites. Admittedly, use of the bow presupposes air, one of the handful of widely recognised elements, but that element was hardly ever explicitly assigned to Artemis. One of her manifestations is that of the quail, *ortux*, some of whose species are merely terrestrial although others are capable of long-distance flight; moreover, Artemis is implicitly associated with the stormy Wild Hunt (rather the domain of her cognate Hecate). This however nearly exhausts Artemis' flimsy associations with the airy element. Like all major Greek goddesses, also Artemis betrays her (putative) origin in the prehistoric Mother of the Waters by a close association with the sea, navigation, and marine trade – notably under her Cretan forms of Britomartis and Diktynna. However, the Mother of the Waters by implication also controls the Waters Above (the sky) and Below (the underworld), and this could give Artemis some implicit control over meteorological phenomena. All this goes some way to explain Agamemnon's sacrifice, but does not really convince. In this connection I would submit that Agamemnon was understood to have incurred Artemis' wrath since he withdrew his daughter from the ritual control of the goddess: Iphigeneia may have been a novice in seclusion, about to be initiated in female puberty rites sacred to her. These rites (to which only girls from noble families had access, and where, dressed in black, they impersonated *arktoi*, 'bears') were associated with the locality of Brauron, outside Athens. However, a red thread through my argument [in the present book] is that the so-called Greek gods cannot be understood on the basis of a local, Aegean and contemporary, Early Iron or Late Bronze Age reading alone, but bring out mythological and ritual themes that have a very wide distribution encompassing much of the Old World and often part of the New World, over many millennia – possibly harking back, in some cases, all the way to the Upper Palaeolithic. Although the name of Artemis does not readily fit into the list of goddesses whose name appears to be a reflex of **-[a]N[V]t-*, such as Neith, Athena, Anat, Nzambi and Anahita, as a virgin wielder of the bow she is semantically very much part of that company. The Egyptian foundation and wisdom goddess Seshat comes close to this: her headdress may consist of an arch, a pair of horns inverted, or a seven-petalled motive usually interpreted as papyrus – these emblems closely resemble those of Neith (a bow and arrows, notably two crossed arrows in front of a shield lemniscate-shaped shield; two facing bows inside a tassel – the latter symbol also interpreted as a weaver's shuttle) (Bonnet 1952 / 1971: 264 f., 512 f., 699 f.). A bow as headdress can also be discerned in the famous Aouanrhet engraving of the White Lady of Tassili (Central Sahara Neolithic), which its discoverer Lhote did not hesitate to connect with Ancient Egypt (Lhote 1959: Fig. 54 oppos. p. 105); however, Lhote was found to have jumped to conclusions on other points. The Aouanrhet image bears a superficial likeness to the apparently rather younger image of the bow-wielding 'White Lady' (who may well be male or bisexual, while the white colour may be ritual paint) of the Brandberg in Namibia. In Southern Africa, the mythological interpretation is that of Inkosazana / Nomkhubulwana, the heavenly princess, daughter of the King of Heaven – she is the demiurge mediating between Heaven and Earth (particularly for rain and fertility and general well-being), has the rainbow as her weapon, and may be associated with female puberty rites (Berglund 1976, Scorgie 2002). In the light of the Pelasgian Hypothesis, these parallels to Artemis would not constitute mere transcontinental coincidence but rather the manifestation of a central Old World theme in a periphery, where (as has long been recognised for formal cultural systems such as languages, myths and rituals) such themes tend to have greater chances of survival. This suggests that the bow in the hands of the Mediterranean goddesses including Artemis was primarily an attribute of an avatar of the Mother of the Primal Waters in her celestial aspect (mimicked in male form by, for instance, Artemis' brother and

counterpart Apollo), and only secondarily (when in the process of masculinisation these goddesses, claims to divine prominence became problematic) was interpreted as a weapon – spawning, apparently, a whole, rather surprising, mythology of virgins’ military prowess – which perhaps in its turn spawned not only the myth but also the actual historical practice of female warriors, Amazons, both in the Mediterranean region and in sub-Saharan Africa.’

Meanwhile it turned out that the East Attican coast has several more sites specifically sacred to Artemis. One of them is the Temple of Artemis Tauropolos at Artemida.



10. Artemis Brauronia

A few kilometres South of Artemida, in a valley sheltered from the sea, we find the temple of Artemis Brauron, where however we have no access due to reconstruction work in progress. The site is largely undeveloped, and lacks the vending booths and parking area typical of other Greek archaeological sites. However, I was thrilled to be at a spot where Ancient Greek continuity with sub-Saharan, Niger-Congo speaking Africa was particularly marked in the ancient literature.



The temple of Artemis at Brauron

The valley South of Artemis Brauronia

Wim van Binsbergen in front of the temple of Artemis Brauronia

8. Athens: Airport museum

During the recent Greek turmoil, Athens was the centre of contestation and strikes, and hardly accessible for touristy and academic purposes. Moreover, on our way to Rafina on the East Attican coast our car’s gps system, much against our intentions, made us leave the Attican Highway that bypasses Athens at a distance, and instead we were forced to drive through the very city centre – an agonising drive of a few hours that I hope never to repeat. Luckily, a branch of the new Acropolis Museum was recently established on Athens International Airport, and there a few finds captured my attention. The cranes depicted on the Late Geometric pitcher are reminiscent of seals used in the 1st dynasty Egypt; no doubt this has to do with the objective peculiarities of the species in question, but given the widespread Cranes / Pygmies themes as indicative of the transcontinental continuities of sub-Saharan Africa, it caught my attention. Mediterranean bee keeping has been an interest ever since I began to look (1996) into the sub-Saharan African

implications of Bernal's *Black Athena* thesis – an interest that recently yielded my collection *Black Athena Comes Of Age* (2011). A find of a Greek horizontal beehive, with cover, is an interesting addition to my collection. Fishbone patterns in masonry, here detected in a 'Pelasgian' (= pre-Hellenic) setting from the Early Bronze Age, are reminiscent of masonry styles in South Central Africa (Great Zimbabwe and Botswana 'kopjes'), and raise once more the question as to the extent of Pelasgian influence; according to my Pelasgian thesis (van Binsbergen & Woudhuizen 2011), the Pelasgian complex arose in West Asia in Neolithic or Early Bronze times, spread and developed into the Mediterranean, and from there spread in the Late Bronze Age in all four directions, including sub-Saharan Africa. Interesting, another, but considerably later specimen of fishbone masonry I encountered in Olympia, Western Peloponnese, in 2009; it will ultimately be included in my belated travel report for that trip.



Zagani Hill boundary marker

pitcher Late Geometric period (2nd half 8th c. BCE)



ceramic bee hive 4th c. BCE)
bee hive cover (3rd-1st c. BCE)

Zagani Hill 2500-3000 BCE
fishbone masonry pattern cf.
Great Zimbabwe

glass beads from 'Twin
Sanctuary', 5th c. BCE

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