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Editors' Note

Dear Reader,

The publication of *Epic Threads: Volume 1* marks the culmination of collective effort, vision, and steadfast dedication. Conceived as a space where creativity and scholarship converge, *Epic Threads* represents a shared commitment to exploring the ancient world through new voices and imaginative forms. This inaugural issue stands as both a celebration of that ideal and a testament to the collaboration that made it possible.

We wish to express our profound gratitude to our contributors — Angus, Evangeline, Jessie, Luisa, and Pavan — for their thoughtful engagement, patience, and artistry throughout the founding of this journal. Their willingness to experiment, refine, and reimagine has given life to the very essence of what *Epic Threads* seeks to be.

Our sincere thanks are extended to Dr. Altay Coşkun, who trusted us with bringing his idea to life, and whose intellectual guidance, encouragement, and mentorship have been indispensable. We are equally indebted to librarian Priscilla Carmini, whose technical expertise and generosity of spirit ensured that the vision for *Epic Threads* could become a reality.

This volume reflects the work of many hands and hearts — authors, editors, and mentors united by a belief in the enduring relevance of the classical world and the creative spirit that continues to draw us back to it.

Our sincere gratitude,
Madelynne Parish & Mary Harper

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University of Waterloo

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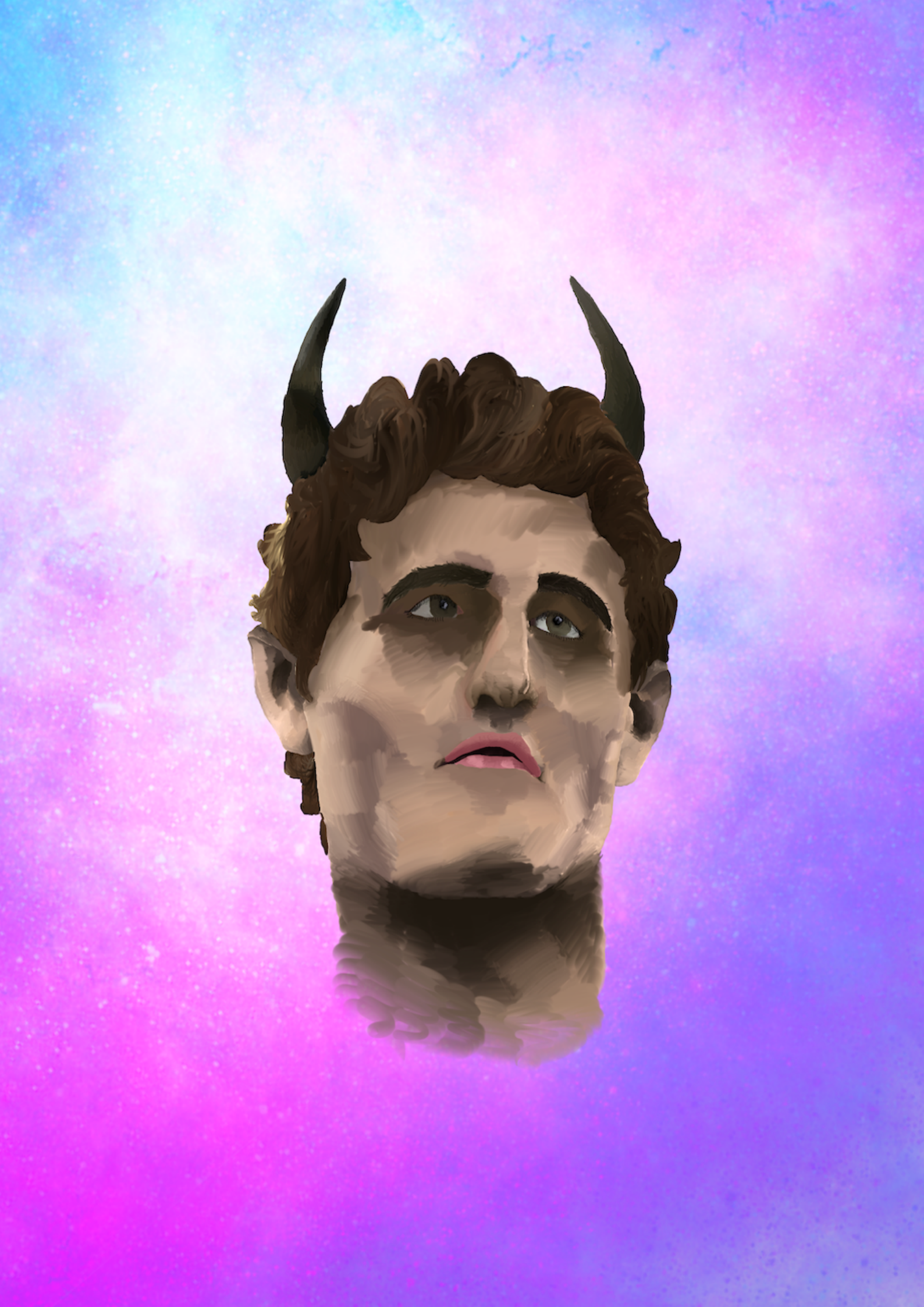

"Bull horns, Great King?" Aeneas, son of Jacob, considered Antiochus' orders in puzzlement. He had once the honour of viewing his patron's father as he marched an endless cavalcade of beasts and men, brazen and battle-born, to victory against his former employer at Lysimachia (281 BCE). Still half a *stadion* away, Seleucus was plainly of Heraclean strength and stature – especially so for a man of seventy years.[1] He was, in truth, not dissimilar to the huge trumpeting war machines which accompanied him – massive, mighty, and majestic. But Aeneas could not recall ever spying bull horns erupting from his head.

"Would not an elephant headdress reflect his majesty more clearly? Like that which divine Alexander once wore?" The proposition elicited only a frown from Antiochus.

"Do you take me for a Ptolemy?"[2] His disapproval was immediately met by the fawning of the courtiers present at Sardis, each endeavouring to assure the king that he was, in fact, not a Ptolemy.

"Enough – spare me your grovelling and leave us." Antiochus spoke sternly, waving them away. "No, Aeneas, I think a painting of my father with bull horns will sufficiently demonstrate the righteous glory of our kingdom and honour my divine father's memory. As he himself said at my accession, 'what is decreed by the king is always right.'"[3]

Aeneas bowed his head in obeisance. "Your wish is indeed my command, Great King." The painter paused and wrinkled his nose before continuing, weighing his words carefully. "But, to paint is not to follow orders. A painting reflects oneself, his passion, his initiative. A painting ought capture the very *psyche* of its subject, so that your divine father's very lifeforce might imbue it, as the gods inhabit their likeness of marble and bronze. A painting ought fuse ideal and reality as it does the spirit of its creator and subject. And so – you will forgive my ignorance – but I must ask: Why bull horns, Great King?"

Before Antiochus could answer, however, winged words flew from the room's dark corner: "*Like a bull who stands supreme above the assembled herd of cattle, just so Zeus made the son of Atreus supreme that day among so many fighters, the greatest of them all.*"[4]

Aeneas had forgotten the poet Aratus was even present, veiled as he was by shadow and assiduous silence.[5] At this Antiochus smiled – a rare sight these days. Some years had passed

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[1] Appian, *Syriaca* 57.294.

[2] While the elephant-scalp headdress was common on Ptolemaic coins from 320 onward (e.g. Coins of the Ptolemaic Empire vol. 1.1, 26), the motif proved short-lived in the Seleucid kingdom. See, most recently, Lorber and Iossif 2022.

[3] Appian, *Syriaca* 61.325, trans. B. McGing.

[4] Homer, *Iliad* 2.575–579, trans. E. Wilson.

[5] Vita, *Arati* 1.8: Antiochus allegedly tasked Aratus with reproducing an unadulterated version of the *Iliad*. See also Vita, *Arati* 3.16.

since the king officially laid his father to rest at the royal *temenos* in Seleucia Pieria and commissioned Aeneas. And yet, internal disorder, unruly barbarian hordes, and diplomacy with the king of Macedonia had impeded him from honouring Seleucus befittingly.[6] Age and apprehension gnawed at his once youthful countenance.

"Just so, my friend," Antiochus responded, nodding at Aratus before returning his attention to the painter. "Very well, Aeneas. I shall tell you of bull horns and heroic exploits, but I am afraid Homer and Aratus express it more elegantly than I ever could." The king shifted forward on his seat and raised interlocked hands to his lips in contemplation.

He began: "Did that treacherous wretch Lysimachus ever deign to tell my father's story while you were under his employment?" Aeneas nodded and replied, "More or less. Though undoubtedly with some impassioned exaggerations on my late employer's behalf. Your father, I hear, was a man of noble birth, who, against all adversity, attained your kingdom through virtue and valiance. The one time I saw him – by the gods – I thought I spied Heracles himself." Such a statement seemed to please Antiochus, for it was spoken in truth and not flattery.

"Good, then we need not be here all day. As you say, my father was a mighty man. War had moulded his shape, as Hephaestus hammers a blade, and Alexander soon noticed his worth during the campaign against Porus. One day on campaign, Alexander had ordered a momentous sacrifice for Zeus – a great beast, more like the savage Cretan Bull than those 'splendid' and 'broad-browed' cattle of the Sun.[7] Alexander himself failed to comprehend the creature's wanton fury and it soon wreaked havoc among those present. Some soldiers drew swords, ready to claim Zeus' prize for themselves, but my father alone – pious as he was – charged the beast head-on and unarmed."

"What a sight to behold!" Aeneas blurted in astonishment.

"Indeed, my friend. And so, they locked horns, and Seleucus subdued Zeus' prize, restraining its fury with his bare hands. This is why sculptors adorn my father's statues with horns. Have you seen such depictions?"[8]

"I am afraid not, Great King," Aeneas responded. "The only sculpted portrayals of Seleucus that I have seen are hornless.[9] Though, come to think of it, I do recall a tetradrachm with similar motifs." Antiochus smiled again and pulled a silver coin from a pouch at his waist, tossing it to

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[6] Appian, *Syriaca* 63.335–336; Malalas, 8.204.

[7] Apollodorus, *Bibliotheca* 2.5.7; Homer, *Odyssey* 12.380–382, trans. R. Fagles.

[8] Appian, *Syriaca* 57.294; *Suda* Σ 202, s.v. Seleucus; Libanius, *Orationes* 11.92 describes such a horned statue in 4th Century CE Antioch, though does not provide this story.

[9] The bust (a bronze Roman reproduction) on which my painting is based resides at the Museo Archaeologico Nazionale Naples. See inv. no. 5590.

the painter (fig. 1).[10] Aeneas caught the tetradrachm as Antiochus spoke: "One of mine, no doubt. Father minted a similar, albeit helmeted, portrait of himself after his victory at Ipsus (301). Its meaning was not lost on the soldiers."[11]

"I see," Aeneas replied, studying the coin. "So, the bull horns symbolise Seleucus' supernatural strength, but also that of your kingdom?"

"For the most part. My father was always cautious to ensure his imagery was open to diverse readings. Though not as bold to claim living godhead as my father-in-law Demetrius, Seleucus upheld an intimate relationship with the gods."

*Figure SEQ Figure * ARABIC 1. 25.5mm AR Tetradrachm of Antiochus I Soter. 276–274/1 BCE. Sardis Mint.*

"Ah, Zeus!" Aeneas interjected. "The horns symbolise Zeus through his connection to Io!" Antiochus nodded, and continued: "Zeus, Ba'al, Marduk, Ahura Mazda – call him what you will. The chief deity of all cultures under my yoke is bound up with taurine imagery."[12]

Aeneas was in awe of such ingenuity. "The gods certainly blessed you and your father with divine wisdom, Great King. Why destroy others' gods when you can gain their favour and strengthen your legitimacy as *kosmokrator*?"

Figure 2. 10mm Macedonian shield bronze of Antiochus I Soter. 281–261 BCE. Antioch Mint. SC 1.342. Horned elephant head with Heraclean club right. From the Jacobson Shield Coin Collection. Author's photo.

Antiochus reclined in seat, turning his palms up in agreement. "Needless persecution gains a king no friends among men or gods."

Realisation had dawned on Aeneas by now, and he began to contemplate the strange animalistic amalgamations he had seen on some of Antiochus' coins (fig. 2).[13] "So, the horned elephants and horses etched on your coins – they too must indicate the favour of Zeusian deities?"

"And other gods," Antiochus replied. "You yourself said that my father reminded you of Heracles. It may not surprise you that Temenid blood courses through our veins."[14]

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[10] The tetradrachm in question: Houghton & Lorber 2002, no. 323.2.

[11] See e.g. Houghton & Lorber 2002, no. 173; Marest-Caffey 2016, 21; The helmeted figure's identity is contested, but I think it most likely represents Seleucus in some way or another. Wheatley & Dunn 2021, 180.

[12] Libanius, *Orationes* 11.92; on these connections, see esp. Hoover 2011.

[13] See also Houghton & Lorber 2002, no. 340, 428.

[14] Libanius, *Orationes* 11.91.

"Remarkable." Antiochus' stories had stoked Aeneas' creative flair. Alongside a hornless bust and some coins, he now felt content that he could capture the late king's essence as if Seleucus himself guided his stroke. Though, one matter remained unresolved: "I understand the horns' significance, Great King. Shall I depict Seleucus in his old age? I believe this will adequately capture his sapience and sacr-"

Antiochus interrupted with a swift head shake and a raised hand. "There is wisdom in your suggestion, good fellow," the king responded, "but my father must be youthful, as if a deity."

Aratus' winged words flew once more: "*I am alone, and endlessly afraid of swift Aeneas, running towards me. He is very strong and very good at killing men in battle, and still retains the bloom of youth, when strength is greatest.*"[15]

Aeneas responded, but not before sighing. "Seleucus' portrait is to be youthful and horned then. Where is the reality to counter such idealism?"

Antiochus' lips curled up into a subtle smile. "My dear friend – the reality is what you make of it."

[15] Homer, *Iliad* 13.638–643, trans. E. Wilson.

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Four Tools Used by Kleaineta of Olynthus in Preparing Thread for Her Mother

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I. ὁ κτείς

The Wool-Comb

We are wealthy, here in our house set against the hill. There is hardly need for me to take the basket that Aristippus brings in from the wool-seller, but mother says that the weaving is not enough for a wife, not even one with a half-decent dowry. Besides, to know the feel and twine of the thread is to allow the shuttle to sing as it passes through the warp, building rows of fine fabric. This is what she has told me, sitting half-gauzy in the bouncing sunlight catching in the hung threads on her loom. So, I take the willow-basket, already feeling the reaching pricks of the thistles caught in the clumps of wool. I sit on the edges of the courtyard, nestled in the cool shade between the columns that support the upper floor, and I begin to comb. I thank Aristippus, who has been of the household longer than I have been, and who is now gnarled like the cane he uses to walk. I am fairly sure he has nursed a long flirtation with Thrasyla, who tends the cooking fires, as I have seen ash dusting his shoulders.

The comb I hold is a heavy thing, made of wood stuck through with nails, making the work surface echo the bristling canopy of a spear battalion. The wood grain is worn smooth by the use of many palms, and I am happy for it, as breaking in a new comb risks splinters. I pick a clump of matted white wool from the cone of the basket, and yank, teasing it through the comb. The thick tines pull and catch the heaviest debris, although this wool is mostly clean by the time it has reached me, and the detritus mingles with the dust on the ground. Euclida joins me soon after, chiding me for not waiting for her. She starts in on her own basket, although I occasionally see her discretely pull a clump from the basket nearest me. I say nothing, for all that I am almost-no-longer a child, the quiet coddling sits warmly in my chest. We swap stories softly, as our courtyard is not so big as others, and voices carry easily to the workmen that bring their jugs of lime to the entrance. They are meant to start updating the tiling on the front room today, with rich hues and fine lines. Soon enough they will move their attentions to the workroom, and I can already hear my mother's complaints of the sand settling upon her loom. The teeth of my comb snag the fibers of the clump I am working on and pull them aligned.

II. τό ἐπίνητρον

The Thigh-Thimble

In the workroom my mother stands at her loom. The beams are set against the side wall, hanging threads catching the light brought in by the adjoining open roofed space. In the faint breeze, the loom weights knock gently against each other, adding a distant rhythm to the low tones of my mother's voice as she speaks to Euclida, who stands spinning. From my angle,

they are framed by the row of idol figurines and cups that line the wall and seem like hens surrounded by their miniature brood. I catch myself before I laugh, as I would then have to explain that I have cast our clay goddesses as hatchlings.

The sun is warm on my back where I sit on the low ledge separating the room proper from the light-well; the warmth is tempered by the chill seeping from the bedrock that forms the far wall. The terracotta guard on my right thigh is an ill-fitting weight, made for someone larger than I, and the closed cone shifts and knocks onto my knee with each roll of the wool along the surface. The fiber rasps between the abrasions on the clay and the palm of my hand, snagging parallel strands together until they sit as a comfortable roving. I pull from my pile of combed wool, rolling in more until it spools like the discarded skin of a snake.

My own actions are echoed in tableau on the terracotta. The small white faces of women holding their own wool are flanked by black decoration, similar to the borders on the fabric my mother weaves. And, on the other arced side of my thigh, a battalion of Amazons march onwards, reminding me of the warriors in the stories my mother sings. Lately however, my mother has not wished to speak of war, with her eyes growing tense at the corners, but I find there is a comfort in the braced shield and spear of the leading soldier. The small shifting of the thimble gives, for the briefest unfocused moment, the impression that she is moving too.

III. ἡ ἠλακάτη
The Distaff

It does not take long to wind roving on the smooth stick that is my distaff. It is not engraved ivory like I have seen Philania use as she strolls the spinning from her own house to the house of her brother, which flanks us up the hill. Her mantle winds heavy around her head and arms, and it is such a delicate show to balance the folds of fabric alongside her full hands and gentle stride. She does not hold her own parasol, and I secretly doubt the intricate weave she wears was made with thread she spun. Her father was Heron, her dowry was grand, and the roll of her hips and lines on her eyes speak of a life comfortably lived. She smiles when she sees me watching through the fluttering curtain that guards from the dust of the street. She dips her head toward our courtyard altar and carries on.

Envy is uncomfortable and stings like the salt on my blue-stained hands when they have rubbed woad leaves to wool. My mother tells me I am young, and to not rush from maiden to matron, as she loops a glass bead around my neck that glints indigo in the sunlight.

IV. ὁ ἄτρακτος

The Spindle

The workmen have begun their work in the back room, and their amphorae of pigment and sand crowd out the easy standing room. Mother still works there on her loom, stubborn amidst any sort of chaos, her shuttle flying unimpeded through the warp threads. I stand beside her, feeling vulnerable with my left arm holding the distaff aloft and the other adding twist to the spindle.

On an angle, through the two doorways that separate the workroom from the courtyard, I can see Euclida place down the water she has brought in for washing. The amphora tilts and stains the courtyard stones a darker shade. Aristippus hustles from the kitchen to help her right it, and again there is a smear of ash on his cheek. The rough clay whorl that weights my spindle clatters against the ground and I turn back, stooping to pick it up. My mother raises a critical eyebrow, then reminds me that it is important I become accustomed to keeping eye on refurbishment work–that the decoration in this room of all places is of the utmost importance since it is where our weaving happens. I draw out freshly twisted thread, and I wind it on my spindle.

The decoration here in the weaving room may be second only to the colourful fresco of the receiving room, just on the other side of the wall. The painter's back is to us, as he kneels mixing red pigment on a tray, and the tiler sorts his stones of blue and black. Their heads bent together, I catch stray words that speak of warlords and fallen cities. Mother shifts to beat up her weft rows, the colour condensing on the web of the loom, and she begins her own tale of an ancient queen who wove within the walls of her fine house, and who kept her home standing by will and luck. My mother's song is almost enough to drown out the worries of the workmen, such things feel far away from our house set against the hill.

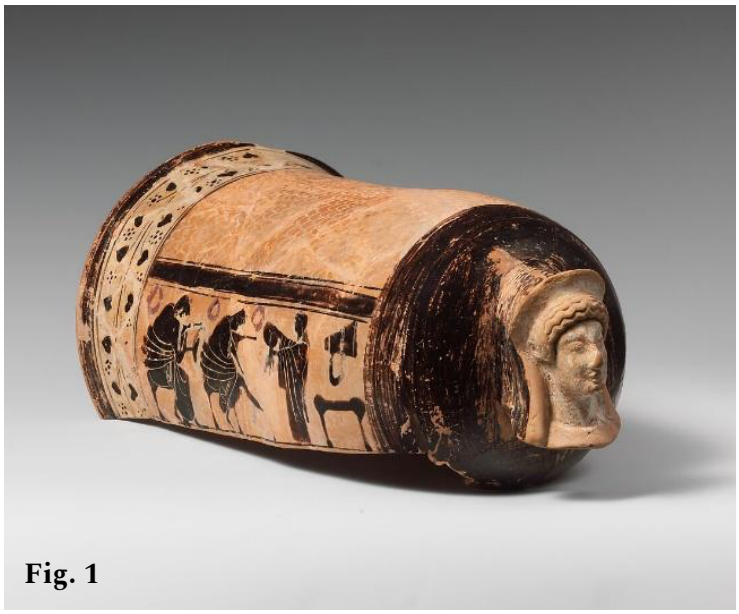

Fig. 1

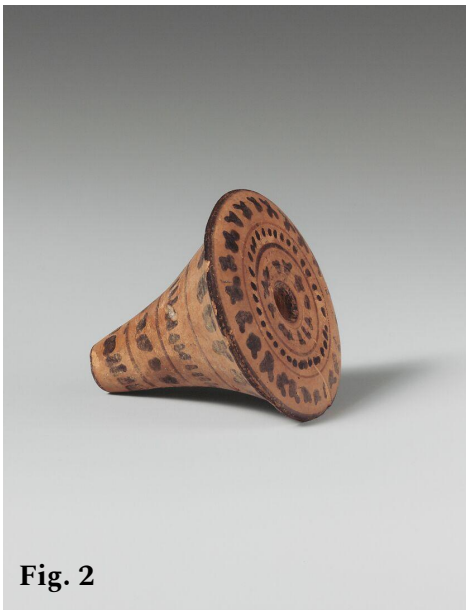

Fig. 2

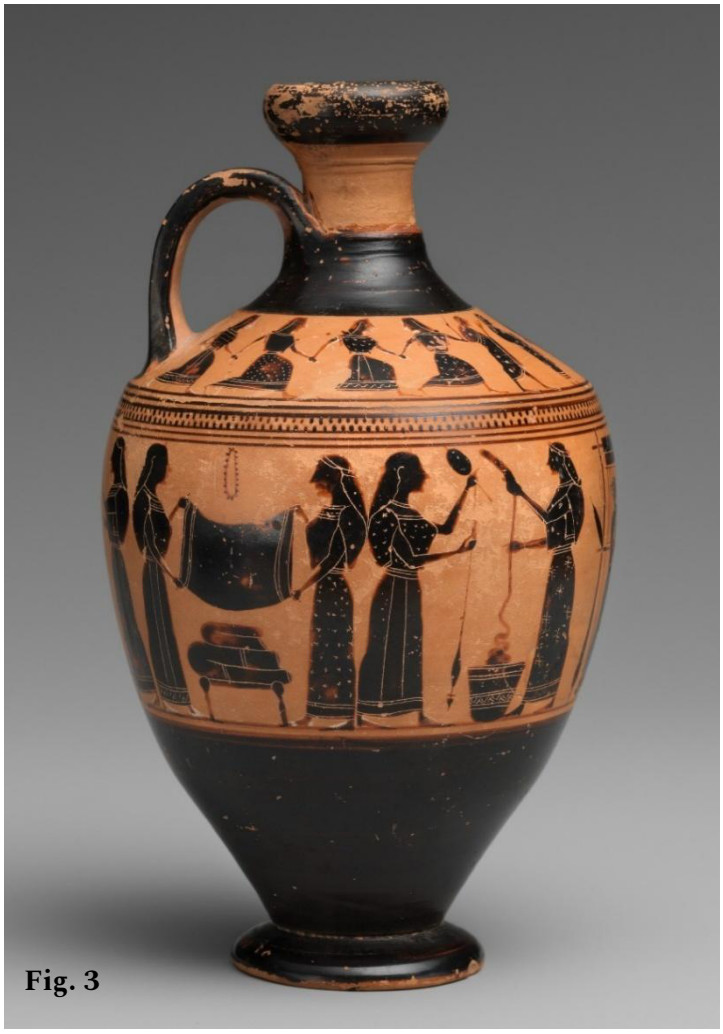

Fig. 3

Fig. 1. Terracotta epinetron (leg guard used in wool preparation). Potentially from Thebes, ca. 510–500 BCE. This one seems to portray a group of musicians, with a hanging wool basket on the wall. Common scene types include scenes of wool work and mythological episodes.

Fig. 2. Terracotta spindle whorl. Attica, 6th–5th century BCE. These whorls were used to add weight and spin to a drop spindle, with a shaft likely made from wood or bone.

Fig. 3. Terracotta lekythos (oil flask). Attica, ca. 550–530 BCE. This flask depicts a scene of wool work. The central figure uses a drop spindle with her distaff held aloft, and the right-hand figure prepares roving from a wool basket.

Table 1. Artifact list summarized from David M. Robinson's Excavations at Olynthus XII (The Johns Hopkins Press, 1946), 183-205.

Room	**Object Finds from The House of Many Colours**
(a) Northwest Workroom	A large stamnus, two grinders, red and blue pigments, vase that held red pigment, bronze handles, a boss, two spikes, a leap clamp, bronze tweezers, two slingbullets, a bronze coin of Amynta III, two Chalcidic bronze coins, forty-one loom weights, potsherds, blue pebbles, a spindle whorl, two black-glazed jugs, part of a fish plate, parts of a hydria, a small unpainted square tray, five miniature scyphi, four saucers, a squat lecythus, two stamped plates, vase fragments, part of an epinetron, part of a largynus, a red-figure lecane cover with running and seated women, a terra cotta female bust with yellow on the hair and red on the lips.
(b) Light Well	Potsherds, lime, wall plaster, a stamnus of cement, mosaic pebbles, pot of red pigment, an iron spike, a fishhook, a bronze Corinthian coin, two Chalcidic bronze coins, a coin of Perdiccas III, thirty-four loom weights, a small pyxis, a small bowl, a small lecythus, a black plate, part of an animal figurine.
(c) North Room	Pithos rim, a silver Chalcidic tetrobol, two iron spikes, two pieces of bronze.
(d) Northeast Andron	Two bronze bosses, an iron spike, two iron spearheads.
(e) Pastas	Two large amphoras, two small painted marble altars, bell crater, a loom weight, ten bronze bosses with carbonized wood, three spikes, a slingbullet, a miniature cup, a stamnos, pieces of black jugs, a saucer, three small black plates, a plate with four fish represented on it.
(f) Andron Anteroom	Eighteen bronze bosses, a bronze bead, a bronze spike, two loom weights, a large black stamped plate, a small saucer, a small vase cover, parts of a crater.
(g) Bathroom	Pieces of a bathtub, two lamps, four loom eights, a two-handled jug, a saucer, the head of a female figurine.
(h) Kitchen Flue	Cooking debris, potsherds, bronze pot lid, a fibula, a bronze nail, a bronze wire spiral ornament, a slingbullet, a Chalcidic bronze coin, four lamps, two asci, a lagynus, seven saucers, a stamnus, a one-handled cup, a spit, a terra cotta female figurine
(i) Courtyard	Stone pilaster capital, two iron dowels, three loom weights, a bronze tack, two bronze bosses, two iron spikes, guttus with relief of a seated lady, a bronze reinforcement, a wire spiral ornament, mouth and stamped handle of an amphora.
(k) Kitchen	A bronze arrowhead, a bronze coin of Aphytis, two Chalcidic bronze coins, a loom weight, a lead disc, a lead clamp, a lead mesomphalic patera, two black saucers, the leg and shoulders of a figurine.
(l) Portico	Two stamni, pieces of mosaic.
(m) Storage Room	Rims of four large pithoi, two pithoi, iron nails, a bronze bodkin, iron spikes, part of a draped figurine.

Artist's Statement

The preceding imagined work is based on artifact finds excavated from the House of Many Colours at Olynthus. The city was razed by Philip II of Macedon in 348 BCE, leaving many quotidian tools close to their potential locations of daily use. Included on the following pages is an account of object finds from the House of Many Colours, and images of artifacts from other sites that serve as visual representations of the tools used in thread preparation and would have been handled by women and girls throughout their lifetime. Further accessible reading on textile history may be found in Elizabeth Wayland Barber's "Women's Work: The First 20,000 Years."

The Athenian Way: For Our Allies, Subjects and Neighbours

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In my years of service to the Athenian *demos* I have been asked by many men both worldly and intelligent how the Athenian system works, and why? Ironically, I must begin my explanation by discrediting myself in many people's eyes. I am asked habitually "As Athens' ruler why …." but I am no such thing. Athens has no ruler, I am merely a citizen who has had the honour to serve as one of ten *strategoi* several times throughout my career.[1] I know no offence is meant by these allegations, but still I must fervently diminish them. My fellow Athenians do not take kindly to such ambitions, and I have no aspirations to be ostracized. Nonetheless, I will attempt to explain the ways of my people and justify my fondness for them.

Demokratia is rule by the common people and its most valued principles are the election, the lot and open discussion.[2] Elections seem to be the easiest for foreigners to grasp. You see it simply as a more elaborate way of selecting men of noted intelligence and pedigree. The wider population may vote but the positions are only open to them in theory.[3] In some ways the foreigners are right; because of this limitation, elections must be restricted to only the most specialized and consequential roles, like the *strategoi.* Selection by lot is the truest democratic institution because it gives all citizens access to government positions. It allows for genuine rule by the common people rather than electing from a small pool of elites. It fosters an engaged citizenry, ready and willing to serve. Citizens understand that our system allows the *polis* to serve them and are willing to serve their city in return.[4] I know many of you will find it absurd that our people are paid for the governmental and judicial positions for which they are selected. You may think to yourself: "All this talk of the Athenian sense of duty, and they need to be paid! In my city politics is an act of service to the state and the gods." When politics is uncompensated, it becomes a hobby of the leisure class. [5] The average citizen should not be excluded because they must work to survive. His dedication to his fields, business and feeding his family should not prevent a good man from serving his state [6]. There is therefore no *Demokratia* without this pay. Finally, the value we place on openness to discussion and debate. I have heard others joke that we are a city of many words and little action, that our love of deliberation ultimately paralyzes us. Here I must remind you that discussion is not an impediment of action, but the prerequisite to any and all wise deeds.[7]

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[1] Pomeroy et al., *Ancient Greece*, 244.

[2] Pomeroy et al., *Ancient Greece*, 247.

[3] Pomeroy et al., *Ancient Greece*, 246.

[4] Christ, *Bad Citizen*, 26.

[5] Markle, *Jury Pay*, 265-269.

[6] Thucydides 2.37.1

[7] Thucydides 2.40.1

Our critics accuse us of being blind to the prowling threat of self-interest to which we will inevitably fall prey. Democracy is not a failure to recognize that citizens are motivated by individual interest but an open acceptance of it.[8] It is an attempt to make this interest compatible with the preservation and prosperity of the state. No one man can compel Athens to act; to be actionable politically, self-interest must be approved by the masses. If something is in the interest of the majority of citizens, does it not transcend the individual and become Athens' interest? Good citizenship entails the use of enlightened self-interest to make rational decisions. Citizens understand their fate is one with the empire and their contribution (*eranos)* to the city will be paid back.[9] We, of course, have means of compulsion such as the courts, but we prefer to persuade a citizen to willingly enter a social contract in exchange for the freedom and prosperity it will bring him.

You may have heard of the restrictions on Athenian citizenship that were passed several years ago; citizenship was limited to those with two citizen parents.[10] For some this is an inexcusable degradation of our principles, but I suspect for most it is a comforting triumph of Athenian pragmatism over 'democratic ideologues'. To my mind neither perspective is correct because none of our values were abandoned in the process, however pragmatic. You must understand the environment this change evolved in. It was a time of simultaneous peace, food shortages, and strain on democratic institutions.[11] In peace we had no war-dead and no need to expand the army or navy. With shortages of grain, we needed effective distribution of state resources and supplies from our allies in Egypt. And as always, there was the enduring desire to sustain our system of direct democracy. All these problems found a suitable solution in the reduction of the citizenry. I briefly outlined why this decision was logical, but it was also democratic and just. It passed through the democratic assembly and was fair to all those affected. The *metoikoi* still have their personal rights protected, although they are not citizens, and they were given the opportunity to move to new settlements in Thurioi and Histiaia and become full citizens in those *apoikiai*, if they chose to.[12]

I have heard complaints from Delian League members about the artistic and architectural indulgences of Athens. Our goal is to honour the gods in a way benefiting the city of the goddess of wisdom and crafts. The focal point of these criticisms is often the Parthenon, but is it not any *polis*' duty to give their patron a befitting home? Athena has been Hellas' unwavering protector

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[8] Christ, *Bad Citizen*, 16.

[9] Christ, *Bad Citizen*, 29.

[10] Coşkun, *Perikles*, 22.

[11] Coşkun, *Perikles*, 20-21.

[12] Coşkun, *Perikles*, 23.

since the Trojan War, aiding Achilles in his fight against Hector, rearming him with his spear.[13] We all know of her devotion to the freedom, protection and revenge for which this League fights. In honouring her we extend her protection and wisdom to all our subjects. Do not, I implore you, go forth with the false notion that her *aegis* covers only Attica as Athena protects and guides all her subjects. Critics are persistent, muttering about a violated oath which says the temples must remain in ruins to remember the sacrilege and cruelty of the Persians.[14] In the spirit of *isegoria*, I have presented their case and ask you to decide which you value more, oaths among men or our duties to the gods?

I know many questions and valid criticisms have gone unaddressed, but I am but one man of limited time and capacity. It would be hypocritical of all my exposed values to not allow you to draw your own conclusion. Persuaded by my arguments or not, I invite you with open arms to come visit our great city — to see our ways and our people.[15] I believe you can learn much more from the masses than from me. Come see our art and architecture, which, though some may find it 'distasteful', very few have denied its beauty. I wish my fellow Hellenes to know not just Athena's protection but to witness the glory of her home here in Athens. I will consider this speech a success if you leave with an understanding that Athens fights valiantly and maintains the League insistently because we are blessed and have a myriad to lose.[16]

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[13] *Iliad* 22.

[14] Lycurgus, *Against Leocrates* 76-82; see also Diodorus 11.29.2. Note that versions of the oath are found in these sources but the oath's historicity is debated, so I have chosen to consider it a rumour believed by some.

[15] Thucydides 2.39.1

[16] Thucydides 2.42.1

Artist's Statement

I wrote this piece as a third-year Political Science student with a minor in Classical Studies. My aims were to explain the basic mechanisms of Athenian democracy and embody their self-understanding. One of the ideological tensions in the piece is how Athenian propaganda managed the contractions between empire and democracy. The speech is delivered by Pericles (d. 429), a statesman and general during the Athenian Golden Age, roughly between the Greco-Persian and Peloponnesian Wars. He was a prominent political leader in the Athenian democratic system and helped transform the Delian League into an Athenian Empire. His domestic political projects, including the construction of the Parthenon, continue to shape the landscape of Athens.

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Shadows of Conquest

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Chapter 13

~ The Conspiracy of Pages ~

Daylight spilled through the open folds of Alexander's tent, casting a warm glow on the finely woven rugs that softened the ground beneath their boots. The air was thick with the scent of figs and sun-warmed leather, mingling with the faint aroma of oil from the gilded armour resting on a polished wooden stand near the back. Embroidered tapestries hung along the walls, bearing the symbols of Macedon and Persia—the sun and the lion intertwined—a visual declaration of Alexander's expanding empire.[1] A bronze basin glimmered in the corner, reflecting the light, while untouched goblets sat abandoned among a scattering of scrolls and maps on the low table.

Hephaestion[2] stood dutifully at Alexander's right, as he often did, hands clasped behind his back. His eyes rested on the king, who leaned forward over the table, a finger tracing the eastern edge of the map with a wistful precision. There was a fire in Alexander's gaze—a gleam Hephaestion knew well. It was the spark that could rally armies or raze cities, a force that inspired both awe and fear.

"I can practically taste the salt of the seas to the east in the air," Alexander murmured, his voice low but reverent, as though he spoke not to his generals but to the map itself. "We are close—so close—to the ends of the earth."[3]

The words lingered, heavy with conviction. Hephaestion glanced at the others in the room—Craterus[4] and Perdiccas[5] stood to Alexander's left, their faces carefully composed. But Hephaestion caught a flicker of unease on Craterus' face before the general masked it. He then

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[1]Jovan Jonovski, The Sun and the Lion as Symbols of the Republic of Macedonia: A Heraldic and Vexillological Analysis, ed. Edward B. Kaye (Danvers, MA: Flag Heritage Foundation, 2020), 9–11.

[2]Arrian, *Anabasis of Alexander*, trans. E. J. Chinnock (London: Hodder and Stoughton, 1884), 245 (Book 4, chap. 22). In this section, Hephaestion is tasked with overseeing critical logistical operations, a responsibility reflective of his elevated status and foreshadowing his later role as Chiliarch.

[3] Arrian, *Anabasis,* 306–11 (Book 5, chaps. 25–26).

[4] Commander of the heavy infantry (pezhetairoi) and a senior field general. See, Arrian, *Anabasis*, 183 (Book 3, chap. 11). Craterus is described leading the Macedonian phalanx and supporting Alexander during operations in the Persian Gates.

[5] Commander of battalion of the pezhetairoi and trusted field leader. See, Arrian, *Anabasis,* 203 (Book 3, chap. 18). Perdiccas is noted as commanding a battalion of the pezhetairoi during the capture of Persepolis.

returned his gaze to Alexander, the only man in the room who could speak with such confidence, leaving no room for doubt.

The moment was shattered when the tent flap flew open with a rush of wind. Ptolemy, son of Lagus[6], strode inside, his face flushed with urgency. Behind him stumbled a boy—young Eurylochus, his fine tunic dishevelled, his head bowed so low that his shoulders trembled under the weight of his fear. The boy dropped to his knees before Alexander, pressing his forehead to the rug[7].

"My King," Ptolemy began, his voice taut with urgency. "I have uncovered a conspiracy."

Hephaestion's stomach twisted, though his face betrayed nothing. He watched Alexander stiffen, his gaze sharp as he turned toward Ptolemy. "Speak," he commanded, his tone cutting through the air like a knife.

Ptolemy gestured to the boy, who raised his head slowly. His pale face was slick with sweat, and his eyes darted nervously between Alexander and Hephaestion. Yet, despite his trembling, there was a flicker of resolve in his voice as he began. "Great King," he said, his voice barely above a whisper. "I tell you this not only to save myself but because I believe in your greatness—your divine wisdom and heritage."

The faintest of sneers curled Alexander's lips downwards, but he said nothing. His piercing gaze bore into the boy, and Hephaestion could feel the heat of it even from where he stood.

Eurylochus swallowed hard, his voice faltering as he continued. "I learned of the plot from Charicles, son of Menander. He confided in me after hearing it from my brother, Epimenes, son of Arseas—who had taken part in the conspiracy himself." His hands fidgeted in his lap, and his voice grew steadier as he went on. "What I have learned is the plan was to strike while you slept, during the watch of Antipater, son of Asclepiodorus, viceroy of Syria. But fate intervened. That night, you did not rest—you were drawn to a drinking party, where you stayed until dawn. It was this, my king, that kept you from their treachery."[8]

Alexander stepped around the table with deliberate calm, his boots sinking softly into the thick carpet. Without a word, he reached for a sheet of papyrus on the desk. He held it out to Eurylochus along with a reed pen and a small ink pot, the motion slow, deliberate.

"I need the names of everyone involved," Alexander said, his voice dangerously quiet.

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[6] Arrian, *Anabasis*, (Book 4, chap. 6). Describing Ptolemy's role during the crossing of the Oxus and the subsequent campaign in Sogdiana.

[7] Sarah B. Pomeroy et al., *Ancient Greece: A Political, Social, and Cultural History*, 4th ed. (New York: Oxford University Press, 2018), 454–455. Discussing proskynesis and prostration.

[8] Arrian, *Anabasis*, 229–33, (Book 4, chaps. 13-14).

Eurylochus hesitated only a moment before dipping the reed pen into the ink. His hand trembled violently as he traced each name onto the sheet, the faint scratching of the tip the only sound in the room. Hephaestion watched as the boy's face grew paler with each letter as if the act of writing itself drained him of life. When he finally finished, he held the sheet out with trembling fingers, unable to meet the king's gaze.

Alexander snatched the papyrus from his hands and scanned the names. His lips curled faintly as he read aloud, his tone sharp and clipped: "Hermolaus, son of Sopolis... Sostratus, son of Amyntas... Anticles, son of Theocritus... Philotas, son of Carsis the Thracian."[9] His voice faded as he read through the rest of the list, but each of the mentioned names struck the room like a blow.

He turned and handed the list to Seleucus[10]. "Take your most trusted men," Alexander commanded, his tone carrying deafening authority. "Arrest every name on this list. Put them to the rack until we know all who are involved and every last detail of this treachery[11]. By sunset, I want all of them assembled in the valley to the east."

Seleucus nodded and departed swiftly, leaving the tent in tense silence once more. Alexander stood at the centre of the room, motionless, his eyes fixed on nothing. Then, like a storm breaking, he erupted.

"Traitors!" he roared, his voice reverberating through the tent. "How dare they even think to raise their hands against me—me!" His fists clenched, trembling with rage. "I am Alexander, King of Macedon! Hegemon of the Hellenic League! Pharaoh of the Two Lands! Son of Ammon! King of Persia! Lord of All Asia!"[12]

His voice rose with each title, shaking the air as his fury filled the room. With a sudden, violent motion, he gripped the edge of the table, his knuckles white with tension, and flung it onto its side. The table toppled with a resounding crash, sending maps, goblets, and scrolls scattering across the floor in a heap. He stood there, his chest heaving, his eyes blazing with an intensity that made even Hephaestion flinch inwardly.

"I have led them to glory!" Alexander bellowed. "To riches beyond their dreams! To immortality! And this—this is how they repay me?"

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[9] Arrian, *Anabasis,* 230 (Book 4, chap. 13).

[10] Commander of the Royal Hypaspists, closely connected to Alexander's personal safety. See, Arrian, *Anabasis*, 310 (Book 5, chap. 13). Seleucus is mentioned as the commander of the Royal Hypaspists, an elite corps within Alexander's army.

[11] Arrian, *Anabasis*, 231 (Book 4, chap. 13).

[12] Krzysztof Nawotka, Alexander the Great (Newcastle upon Tyne: Cambridge Scholars Publishing, 2010), chap. 5, "King of Asia," 213–94.

The room fell silent, his words pressing down on everyone present. After a long pause, Alexander exhaled, his breath ragged, and his tone dropped to a low, venomous growl. "Get out. Gather every soul from this camp and ensure they are present for the executions as the sun sets. I don't want to see a single one of you until then."

The generals filed out quickly, leaving only Hephaestion. For a moment, he lingered, his heart heavy with concern for his friend. Alexander turned to him, his gaze cold but steady. "Bring me the ringleader," he said, his voice soft but unyielding. "Bring me Hermolaus."[13]

The camp was still as Hephaestion approached Alexander's tent, situated at the heart of the encampment. Unlike the more austere tents of the rank and file, Alexander's headquarters loomed as a grand structure of thick, unadorned fabric. Its size alone distinguished it, visible from nearly every corner of the camp, flanked by the smaller, orderly tents of his generals and officers. Standards bearing the Vergina Sun of Macedon and the Lion of Persia fluttered in the breeze, unmistakable markers of his dual authority.[14]

Hephaestion marched steadily, gripping Hermolaus by the arm. The young page, his face still smooth and unmarked by a first beard, stumbled as they neared the tent, his bound hands forcing him to keep his balance with awkward steps. Guards stationed at the entrance stood rigid, their *kopis* blades gleaming in the setting sun. They stepped aside with synchronized precision, their heads bowing in deference as Hephaestion passed.

Inside the tent, the air was heavy with the mingling scents of leather, oil, and incense. Alexander stood near the back, the light filtering through the open folds of the tent, catching the gold of his cuirass, which gleamed as if freshly polished. Though Macedonian in design, the armour bore intricate Persian engravings—lions, griffins, and the winged figure of Ahura Mazda—testaments to the king's claim over the East. His *chlamys*, deep crimson and edged with gold embroidery in royal Persian patterns, fell over one shoulder, contrasting sharply against the darkened metal of his greaves.[15]

Hephaestion hesitated briefly, as he often did when entering Alexander's presence. Even after years of friendship, the sight of the king in full regalia, commanding without a word, never failed to stir awe. Here was no mortal general but a man who could walk with the gods.

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[13] Arrian, *Anabasis,* 232 (Book 4, chap. 14).

[14] Jonovski, *Sun and the Lion*, 9–11.

[15] Arrian, *Anabasis of Alexander*, trans. P.A. Brunt (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1976), (Book 4, chap. 9).

Hephaestion shoved Hermolaus forward, causing him to stumble and fall to the ground. Alexander turned, his expression calm but unreadable. His gaze dropped briefly to Hermolaus, who was struggling to get back to his knees, then rose to meet Hephaestion's.

"Why?" Alexander asked the page, his voice low, almost conversational.

Hermolaus took a shaky breath, lifting his head to meet Alexander's gaze. Though his body trembled, his voice rose with bitter defiance. "Why?" he repeated, spitting the word back. "Because no free man can bear your tyranny."

Hephaestion stiffened, his hand instinctively resting on the hilt of his xiphos, but Alexander raised a hand, halting him. Hermolaus continued, his voice growing louder, sharper with every word.

"You speak of glory, but it is soaked in the blood and humiliation of your own men! Philotas—betrayed and slaughtered without trial! Parmenio—your most loyal general, executed on a whisper of suspicion! Clitus—who saved your life—struck down in a drunken fury by your own hand! And what of your cruelty to those closest to you? When I struck down the boar that threatened your life, you flew into a rage, punishing me not for failure, but for daring to act too swiftly. You had me scourged in front of my peers, stripped of my horse, and humiliated for your own pride! You call yourself a king, yet you drape yourself in Persian silk and strut like a god. You force free Macedonians—men like me—to bow as slaves. You abandon the simplicity of Macedon for wine-soaked feasts and foreign decadence, leaving yourself unfit to rule while demanding blind loyalty from those you have wronged!"[16]

The page leaned forward, his face twisting with anger. "You betray everything we are. You are no king of Macedon. You are a tyrant. A god in your own eyes—and nothing more."

The tent was silent, the air thick with the weight of Hermolaus's words. Alexander's face remained impassive, but his eyes never left the page. After a long moment, he spoke, his voice measured and cold. "Get up."

Hephaestion stepped forward, seizing Hermolaus by the elbow and hauling him roughly to his feet. Alexander turned sharply and strode out of the tent, his crimson *chlamys* trailing behind him like a river of dark blood. Hephaestion followed, dragging Hermolaus as they exited into the waning sunlight.

The camp around them lay in perfect order, its pathways lined with neatly arranged tents. Those of the *pezhetairoi*[17] formed the central block, flanked by the quarters of the *hetairoi*[18], and, farther out, the tents of allied Persian and Thracian auxiliaries. Every part of the camp reflected

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[16] Arrian, *Anabasis* (Chinnock), 229–33 (Book 4, chaps. 13-14).

[17] 'Foot Companions'. See Pomeroy et al., *Ancient Greece*, 418.

[18] 'Elite Companion Cavalry'. See Pomeroy et al., *Ancient Greece*, 74.

Alexander's meticulous discipline, its design ensuring not only efficiency but a visual hierarchy of power.[19]

As they walked, the silence was broken only by the faint rustle of canvas in the wind and the crunch of stones under their feet. The camp was deserted, its usual hum of activity replaced by an unnatural stillness. Every man and woman had been summoned to the outskirts, where justice would be served.

Soon, they approached the outermost defences of the camp, a trench that encircled the perimeter. The shallow ditch had been dug quickly but with precision, its earth piled on the inner side to create a low embankment fortified with sharpened wooden stakes. Guards stood at regular intervals along the line, their spears resting at their sides, their gazes sharp and alert. At the narrow entrance to the camp, two sentries stepped aside with disciplined movements, their heads lowering as Alexander passed.[20]

Beyond the defences, they entered the large clearing where the army had gathered. A vast sea of soldiers, camp followers, and officers stood in tense clusters, their faces grim and expectant. Murmurs rippled through the ranks as Alexander approached, his presence silencing even the faintest whispers. One by one, the men bowed their heads, stepping aside to clear his path. The air felt charged, each movement laced with fear and reverence.

Hephaestion, walking a pace behind, tightened his grip on Hermolaus, whose pale face glistened with sweat. The young page stumbled once more, but the *Chiliarch's*[21] strong arm kept him upright, propelling him forward toward his inevitable fate.

On the far side of the crowd, a dais had been hastily constructed, its platform elevated to ensure Alexander could be seen by all. Before it stood the conspirators, their hands bound, their faces battered and bruised. Behind each of them stood an armed guard, their expressions grim.

Closest to the dais stood Callisthenes[22], his defiant glare fixed on the approaching king. Alexander's gaze lingered on him briefly, his expression frigid. He paused, his voice low yet cutting as he addressed the man. "I wish I were surprised," Alexander murmured. "There is a special torture reserved for traitors like you." Without another word, he turned sharply and ascended the platform.

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[19] Robert Lock, *The Army of Alexander the Great* (PhD diss., University of Leeds, 1974), 157–99.

[20] Pomeroy et al., *Ancient Greece*, 454–55. Discussing *proskynesis* and prostration.

[21] Jeanne Reames, "The Cult of Hephaestion," in *Responses to Oliver Stone's Alexander: Film, History, and Cultural Studies,* ed. Paul Cartledge and Fiona Greenland (Madison: University of Wisconsin Press, 2010), 188.

[22] Pomeroy et al., *Ancient Greece,* 436.

As he turned, silence fell, his presence enough to command absolute attention. He stood tall, his image regal as he looked across the assembly. "These men," Alexander began, his voice commanding and resolute, "have conspired against me. Against you. Against everything we have built together."

His eyes swept over the crowd, his tone growing in intensity. "Think of where we began. In Macedon—a small kingdom, overshadowed by the mighty empire of Persia. Yet we dared to dream of something greater. And so, we marched. We crossed the Hellespont into Ionia and the Persian satrapies, stepping into lands that once seemed untouchable.[23] At the Granicus, we faced Darius's forces for the first time and crushed them, proving that Macedon would not be underestimated. From there, we pressed onward, freeing cities from Persian rule and standing as liberators to those who had only known oppression.[24]

"At Issus, we confronted Darius again and shattered his pride, forcing him to flee into the heart of his empire. We turned southward, laying siege to Tyre, a city that no one believed could fall. Yet after months of relentless effort, we broke its walls and claimed it, securing control of the seas and opening the way to the satrapy of Egypt. There, the people did not resist us—they welcomed us once again as liberators, not conquerors. In Memphis, we stood together before the great Nile, where the decision to found Alexandria was made, destined to shine as a beacon for all eternity—a city of knowledge and culture that will outlast all time. Further, at the Oasis of Siwa, the oracle of Zeus-Ammon confirmed what I have always known about our divine path."[25]

His tone hardened, his voice rising with conviction. "But we did not stop. We pressed eastward, confronting Darius for the last time at Gaugamela, where we didn't just defeat his army—we broke his empire. The treasures of Babylon, Susa, and Persepolis became ours, and Persia itself fell to Macedon. Still, we marched. Over the Zagros Mountains, through Bactria and Sogdiana, into lands no Hellene had ever seen. Along the way, we built cities and brought order to chaos. We carried the light of Hellas to places that had known only darkness."[26]

His gaze swept over the crowd, his voice steady yet sharp. "Many of you have lost brothers, friends, and comrades who stood beside you on these battlefields. They gave their lives for this vision, for this empire, for the immortality that we now stand on the brink of achieving. Their sacrifices demand not only respect but action—to honour their memory by completing the task we set out to do."

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[23] Pomeroy et al., *Ancient Greece,* 439–42.

[24] Pomeroy et al., *Ancient Greece,* 442–45.

[25] Pomeroy et al., *Ancient Greece,* 445–52.

[26] Pomeroy et al., *Ancient Greece,* 452–56.

Alexander paused, letting his words settle. The entire army stood still, hanging on his every word as he turned his piercing gaze toward the conspirators.

"But these once noble pages—these selfish boys—sought to undo it all. Their treachery is not only against me. It is against every one of you. Against the memory of our fallen. Against the future we are building. And for that, they will die."

The crowd thundered, the sound crashing like a wave through the tense air. Alexander stood motionless, his gaze steady, waiting until the roar faded into uneasy silence. The stillness was absolute, every breath held as he turned to the guards. His voice was sharp, unyielding. "Stone them."[27]

No one moved. The guards remained fixed in place, gripping the conspirators tightly, their eyes trained on Alexander, awaiting the final word. The crowd remained frozen, suspense crackling like fire through the gathered ranks.

Alexander's gaze shifted to Callisthenes, his tone cutting through the air like a blade. "Stretch him upon the rack," he said, his voice venomous, "and then let him hang until the wind scatters what the carrion birds could not swallow."[28]

The silence lingered as Alexander began his descent, his steps deliberate and measured, his expression calm. The soft glow of dusk framed him, casting long shadows across his face. Hephaestion followed closely, the soldiers parting and bowing once more as the two passed.

When they reached the back of the crowd and began their walk uphill toward the camp, the chaos erupted behind them. Soldiers surged forward with roars of vengeance, their cries and shouts overpowering the pleas of the condemned.

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Hephaestion lingered outside Alexander's tent for a moment, his hand resting on the entrance flap. He expected destruction—a scene of utter devastation left in the wake of Alexander. The massive table, already upturned earlier in the day, would surely be smashed by now, the tapestries torn from the walls, and perhaps even chairs or goblets flung across the space in a fit of rage. It would not be the first time Alexander had followed in his father Philip's footsteps, venting his fury on inanimate objects.

But when Hephaestion stepped inside, the scene before him was entirely different.

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[27] Plutarch, *Life of Alexander*, in *Parallel Lives*, trans. Bernadotte Perrin, vol. 7 (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1919), 267 (55.4).

[28] Plutarch, *Alexander,* 267 (55.5).

Alexander was bent over, straining to right the massive table that had been overturned hours earlier. The creaking of wood followed by a heavy thud echoed in the quiet space. Hephaestion paused, his steps faltering, as Alexander calmly began gathering the remaining scattered items—maps, ink pots, and rolled scrolls—placing them back on the table with meticulous care.

Once everything had been set in order, Alexander moved to pour himself a glass of wine, then walked around the desk and took his seat, leaning back as if nothing of consequence had happened that day. The golden light of the now-lit lamps flickered over his armour, which he had not yet removed, casting his face in a warm, shifting glow.

Looking up, Alexander noticed Hephaestion's expression—concerned, bewildered. "What?" Alexander asked, his tone almost amused.

Hephaestion swallowed, his brows furrowing. "Are you… alright? How can you move on so quickly?"

Alexander took a measured sip of his wine and then smiled, but it was not one of reassurance. It was cryptic, a tilt of the lips which carried the weight of secrets Hephaestion did not yet understand. "Why would I be upset?" Alexander's voice was calm, almost playful, as if he relished Hephaestion's confusion. "Everything has gone exactly as I've intended."[29]

The words slammed Hephaestion like a wave. He stood frozen, searching Alexander's face for any trace of jest, but found none. Alexander rose then, setting the wine glass down with deliberate care, and began lighting the remaining oil lamps scattered throughout the tent.

"I knew this would happen eventually," Alexander said, his voice calm, almost peaceful. "The men are weary, their spirits frayed from years of marching, fighting, conquering. We have not stopped since we left Macedon—not truly. Fatigue eats away at loyalty, no matter how strong the oaths once sworn." He turned, the light catching his eyes before he continued. "I found out about the whispers weeks ago. I let them grow and fester because I needed to see who among us would falter. Weakness is a contagion, Hephaestion. If left unchecked, it will spread until it has nothing left to devour."

He paused, lighting another lamp, his voice steady. "And treachery, even in noble blood, cannot be tolerated. These boys—Hermolaus, and Callisthenes—thought their lineage would shield them. They believed their birth elevated them above consequence. Today, the army saw otherwise. They saw that cowardice, no matter its source, will be punished."

Hephaestion shifted uncomfortably, his mind reeling at the cool precision of Alexander's words. "You waited for this to happen?" he asked, his voice quieter than he intended.

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[29] Kenneth R. Thomas, "A Psychoanalytic Study of Alexander the Great," *Psychoanalytic Review* 82, no. 6 (1996): 880–91.

"I encouraged it," Alexander replied without hesitation, turning to face his closest friend. "Do you think I would allow such dissent to build without control? No, I allowed it to evolve—to draw out those who harboured treachery in their hearts. The executions today served their purpose. The men needed a reminder of what happens to those who challenge me, especially now, when we are so far from home." He paused, his gaze unyielding. "Fear and love, Hephaestion. Measured and controlled, these two emotions are the levers that move men's hearts. Together, they bind loyalty tighter than any amount of gold or glory."[30]

Hephaestion was silent for a moment, his thoughts racing. Finally, he asked, "Why, then, did you act so enraged earlier? The outburst, the fury?"

Alexander smiled again, this time with the faintest hint of pride. "It was all a performance," he said, his tone measured. "My generals, my officers, even my closest allies—they had grown too comfortable. Too sure of their standing. They had to see me as dangerous, unpredictable, and unyielding. They needed to remember that I am not simply their leader—I am their king. Hephaestion, I respect their opinions and advice but if they think me soft, they will test their limits and cross lines they should not dare cross. Now… now they will think twice."

Hephaestion's breath caught in his chest. Before him stood not only the friend he had grown up with, the boy who once dreamed of becoming a second Achilles and recited Homer beneath Macedon's summer skies, but someone changed.[31] The brightness once lit by Aristotle's teachings had hardened into calculation; the innocence he remembered now burned with Olympias's ruthless cunning.

A chill ran through him as the truth struck: Alexander was no longer merely a king or a conqueror. He had become something more dangerous—a man who carried both his father's military genius and his mother's seething cruelty. Hephaestion thought of the comrades they had lost, the cities consumed by fire, the sacrifices that paved their ascent. The empire they had forged together loomed like a storm cloud, vast and unyielding—and at its heart stood Alexander, his friend and his king, wielding a power that seemed without limit.

Alexander's voice broke the quiet. "You look troubled, Hephaestion. What is it?"

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[30] Plutarch discusses the balance of fear and love in Alexander's leadership, with the destruction of Thebes as an example of instilling fear (ch. 11), his generosity and shared hardships with soldiers (ch. 16), the siege of Tyre showcasing his use of fear to intimidate enemies (ch. 24), his execution of Philotas and the purge of the Companion Cavalry to assert authority (ch. 28), his personal connection with troops (ch. 39), his refusal to drink water to inspire loyalty (ch. 42), his respect for conquered peoples fostering goodwill (ch. 47), and his disciplinary actions after the Cleitus incident highlighting his authority (ch. 50). See Plutarch, *Alexander,* chs. 11, 16, 24, 28, 39, 42, 47, 50.

[31] Arrian, *Anabasis* (Chinnock), 1.11, 36-38.

Hephaestion forced a faint smile. "Nothing, my king. Nothing at all."

Alexander studied him a moment, then smiled—a genuine smile this time, one that softened the hard edges of his expression. "You've always stood with me, from the very beginning."

Hephaestion nodded, his voice steady despite the turmoil within. "And I will stand with you until the end, my friend."[32]

Alexander's smile deepened, the boyish warmth returning to his features. "Until the end."

Hephaestion turned to leave, his steps measured as he moved toward the entrance of the tent. Before stepping outside, he glanced back one final time. The man who sat at the desk, now bathed in triumph, was both familiar and foreign. The friend he had known and the ruler he now served were one and the same, yet he could not shake the quiet fear that this empire they had built together might one day consume them both.[33]

[32] Reames, "Cult of Hephaestion," 187, describing Alexander's vision of a shared future with Hephaestion and its Platonic philosophical underpinnings.

33 Reames, "Cult of Hephaestion," 191, discussing Hephaestion's multifaceted roles and responsibilities, categorized into diplomatic/advisory, building cities, troop supply, troop movement, and combat

Artist's Statement

Shadows of Conquest is a work of historical fiction deeply inspired by Arrian's *Anabasis of Alexander*. Its aim is to remain faithful to the ancient text while capturing the grandeur and complexity of Alexander the Great's character and his monumental campaigns. At the same time, creative liberties have been taken to explore the psychological and emotional dimensions of the individuals involved, particularly Alexander and his closest companion, Hephaestion.

This reimagining centres on the infamous Conspiracy of the Pages, as recounted by Arrian, while examining the personal dynamics and political machinations that surrounded this critical moment. It seeks to illuminate the pressures, ambitions, and fears that shaped Alexander's leadership and tested the loyalty of his army. The aftermath of the executions—especially Alexander's private reflections and his exchanges with Hephaestion—has been elaborated to provide readers with a more nuanced understanding of their bond and its role in Alexander's vision of conquest.

The dialogue and internal monologues are works of creative interpretation, grounded in historical source, that bring these figures to life in ways the surviving texts only suggest. While this narrative adheres closely to the events outlined in Arrian's account, it also endeavours to explore the human elements behind the grand strategy, offering a perspective on how ambition, loyalty, and betrayal intersect in the pursuit of empire.

It is my hope that *Shadows of Conquest* serves not only as an engaging story but also as a tribute to the enduring legacy of one of history's most enigmatic figures and his closest confidant. This work reflects both admiration for the ancient sources and an awareness of the creative license necessary to reimagine them for modern audiences.

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The Keeper of Flame and Shadow

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Before names, before fire curled in cupped palms, I was here. Stone-bellied, dark-lunged, waiting. They came to me with ochre fingers and a breath warm with wonder.

Come closer. Not too fast. Let your eyes adjust. Do you see them? They're still here. The spirits of those who danced with flame and shadow. I have kept them safe. Thirty-six thousand years ago, they stepped into me with torches; children of flesh and bone. And with time, they began to sing. Then, they painted. And in that instant, I became more than stone.

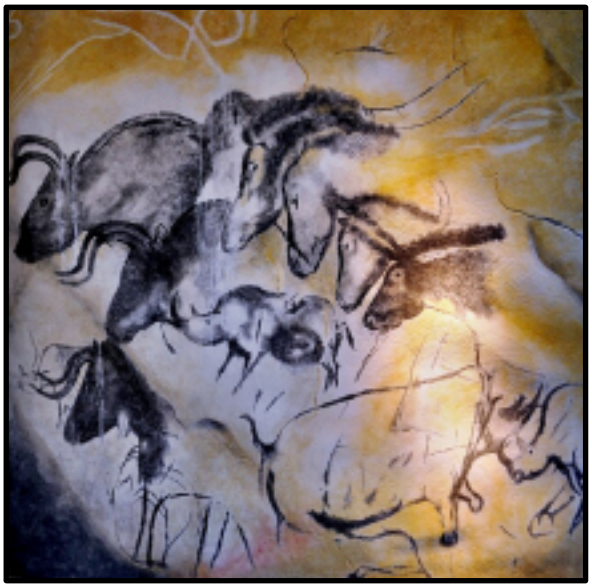

Figure 1 features a photograph of some of the wild animals depicted at the Chauvet caves (T., 2010)

The first of those who climbed in and passed through my crevices were unnamed, though their eventual development of language was followed by the creation of symbolism and art. My walls became spattered with illustrations, depictions of brave hunts and antagonistic beasts. The scenes were awoken through the dim torchlight of my people. With each flicker of a flame bringing a moment to life; the movement of the men, the hunting of varmints. My people had tamed the dancing light, using it to determine where to thicken and thin the lines of charcoal on my vitreous walls, starting at the harsh edges and working into the shaded interior. Through layers of red ochre and charcoal, my walls began to depict the Ancients' story of survival.

My people, I later learned were known as Aurignacians, were experts in this craft, leaving traces of their love behind on my frigid frame.

But these depictions of adventure are not the illustrations I treasure most.

When they first entered my cave, I felt their hesitation, their curiosity. As unfamiliar fingers covered in ochre pressed against my cold walls, I felt a warmth spread across my icy ribs and braced for the wound I was sure would come. However, unlike nature's elements before them, they did not carve, or break me apart. They left their delicate touch, on my walls for me to keep, to protect.

A handprint: what a strange, tender thing. Not simply a projection of their daily life, but an outline of their being– a mark that proclaimed so much: I am here, will you remember me?

Although the brief two thousand years with my people meant they left without much of a goodbye, I was left eternally with their art, a projection of their souls, livelihood, and being. Finally, as nature's violence continued to tear into me again and again, I offered up a piece of my body, sealing their precious gifts within forever.

Now, for twenty thousand years I have kept their secrets safe. As the world outside me changed with each season, I kept my treasure buried inside. It wasn't until three little humans wandering my exterior felt a breeze escape a crack within my walls, a breath I was unable to hold, that my secret was discovered. As my people once had, they entered my opening with light in hand, wonder playing a faint smile at their lips. With determination they treaded forth into my chambers, entering my space carefully, amazement flashing across all their features. These strange explorers were no threat to me, I realized–they were of the same kind as my people had been. I began to show off my walls proudly, and although the slowly forming stalagmites and stalactites had encroached on some of my passageways, I presented myself clearly. I was unmoving and everlasting for all to see.

Figure 2 features a positive outlines of handprints at the Chauvet caves (Valette, 2016)

What a quiet wonder there is, in having loved one's own kind, being touched by those who are also of earth, creatures of breath and bone — those whose love may be temporary, but radiates for eternity, one being to the next, professing that they are here, waiting to be heard and understood. This love and curiosity is so tender, it has been a privilege to return.

Artist's Statement

Travelling through the vast rooms of the Chauvet Pont d'Arc cave reveals bountiful treasures, secrets kept safe within the enclosed walls for myriad years, preserved by a rock fall 20,000 years ago. The paleolithic era spans nearly 2.5 million years of human prehistory, from 2.5 million BCE to 10,000 BCE. This vastness of time covers significant amounts of human social development, with the consequence that the cultural engagements of the late prehistoric people often goes unnoticed or unappreciated– specifically the Aurignacians, who were Homo sapiens that lived between 43,000 and 35,000 years ago. While prehistoric cave art has gained a name primarily through the discovery of the 17,000 year old Lascaux Cave by the teenagers Marcel Ravidat, Georges Agniel, Simon Coencas, and Jacques Marsal in September 1940, I have always been taken by its neighbour, the 36,000 year old Chauvet Caves, which were discovered by three speleologists named Jean-Marie Chauvet, Éliette Brunel, and Christian Hillaire in December 1994, a mere few hours drive southeast. Covered wonderfully in Werner Herzog's Documentary *Cave of Forgotten Dreams*, the cave system contains depictions of 425 animals and features curious ceremonial and ritual spaces.

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M. Porcius Cato to Cicero

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On the sixth day before the Ides of April, in the 708th year after the founding of Rome[1]

As you once called upon me to defend you against Clodius, and later to uphold your victories to the senate, I now call upon you and our friendship in return. Here in Utica, standing before failure, I reflect not in sorrow, but in duty. Was there a path, however narrow, that might have averted catastrophe?

I am writing to you now at greater length than ever before, for I wish there to be an account of the truth as I see it that is unmarred by ambition.[2]

From the beginning, I foresaw the tyrant approaching. Years ago, it was I who opposed Caesar and his bill to divide Campania, and for this he dragged me from the tribunal to prison, hoping I would beg and debase myself. When I did not yield, he resented me more.[3] Since then, he and Pompey rose, both men consumed by ambition; their own failed alliance proved it. When I was asked to give my opinion on the conspirators of Catiline, I implored the Senate to punish them with the full might of the law, to penalize them in the same way our ancestors would have.[4] Caesar, who had been enraged by this call for justice, refused to attend the Senate until your consulship was finished. Many praised his clemency, but I only saw a man willing to defend mutiny. Caesar already had the makings of another Catiline.[5]

He has since tightened his grip on our Republic. For nothing but his own glory, he began an illegal war in Gaul. While many of us called his ambition for what it was, others celebrated him. I stood against Caesar myself in that final bid for consulship, unplagued by the disease of bribery. You told me then – as many did–that this was a mistake, and there would be no path to victory against his deceit.[6] Even with the gift of hindsight, I do not regret my actions, lamenting only their failure.

Yet, I do regret my conduct towards you. Consumed by my rivalry with Caesar, I demanded you oppose him as openly as I did. I deemed you duplicitous. Upon reflection, perhaps it was

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[1] April 5th, 46 BCE

[2] Cicero, Marcus Tullius. *Cicero's Letters to His Friends. M. Porcius Cato to Cicero (In Cilicia).*

[3] Plutarch, *Cato Minor* 33.2-4.

[4] Sallust, *Conspiracy of Catiline,* 52.13; This could be a reference to *mos maiorum*, which he refers to later in the letter. His family has consistently held up this idea of Roman ideals since Cato the Elder.

[5] Cf. Drogula 2019, 78-79.

[6] Plutarch, *Cato Minor* 50.2.

not defiance that could have preserved Rome, but temperance.[7] Battle hastened her fall, and your reasoned voice may well have steadied her longer.

I have also opposed Pompey, believing he lacked integrity. Though, when forced to choose, I sided with him, believing he could uphold the law. He failed us and Rome. He never wished for her lawful restoration. At Dyrrhachium, while he celebrated victory, I wept for those that had fallen for the despotic ambition of two men.[8]

After Pharsalus, I held onto the hope that he escaped and sought to rally our remaining forces. I had offered you command of these legions, but you, ever the moderate, declined and returned to Rome.[9] Some might call it cowardice, I do not. I commend your desire to return to our noble Republic and find some way to protect her from within. I, instead, followed Scipio into Africa, though I knew that victory under him would bring little more virtue than defeat under Caesar.

Now, through a series of events I wish not to relive, I am held here, in Utica.

Not long ago, I received word of Scipio's defeat at Thapsus as the news spread chaos through the ranks. I feared that some might attempt to flee, but I did my best to calm them. Caesar, for all his faults, is not needlessly cruel. I told my men, if they remain united until the end, he would be more willing to grant leniency when asked for pardon.[10] Though, while they are free to choose that path, I will not do the same.

I have weighed every course and see no true road of dignity. I even considered living the rest of my days in exile–as far from Caesar as I could manage–but I cannot bear a life where I am left powerless while my Rome falls from her former glory. If I wished it, he would spare me, though he would do so more for his own sake than mine. I will again deny him the satisfaction of begging for my freedom. I cannot suffer his mercy any more than his wrath.

As I take this path, I have found counsel in Plato's On the Soul, as Socrates himself faced his death with conviction.[11] If the soul is truly immortal, then death is no defeat.[12] I told my son: I,

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[7] Drogula 2019, 283-85.

[8] Plutarch, *Cato Minor* 54.11; Weeping from such a prominent Stoic is unusual, but Plutarch does mention it, as well as his emotional reaction when his half-brother passed away, suggesting that Cato, as much as he might have wanted to live the Stoic ideals, still had human emotions.

[9] Plutarch, *Cato Minor* 55.6.

[10] Plutarch, *Cato Minor* 59.6-7.

[11] Plutarch, *Cato Minor* 68.2.

[12] Plato, *Phaedo ("On the Soul").*

who have grown up under freedom, cannot suffer slavery in my old age, I cannot learn to endure it. He may still learn to be content, if he can forgive the failures of his father.[13]

I wish not to leave him, but I take solace in knowing he is now a man grown, not a child in need of paternal guidance. I was not granted such a fortune. My father left me too soon, so I sought guidance in Rome herself, her laws, traditions, and unyielding spirit. To continue now, lingering in exile, would be an axe to the threads that have tied me to the city that raised me. Watching her, I find myself feeling much the same as when my brother died, without hope or meaning.

If our Republic must perish, so must I.

Our Rome, while under tyrannical rule, must maintain some part of herself. Mos maiorum has governed both you and me and cannot be relinquished so readily. The burden of preserving what little remains now rests with you. I trust in you now to continue to be a voice of moderation and restraint. Though I carry regrets, I do not fear my end. I have conducted myself true to the values of a Roman. Only the gods may judge me now.

Farwell, my friend. May you find the path that has eluded me.

[13] Cassius Dio, *Roman History* 43.10.5.

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Alexander at Issus
A Reflection of Conquest and Destiny

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Preface

As the sun rises over the Cilician Gates, I stand witness to a pale light shining upon the path that lies ahead. It feels as though the land beneath my feet is alive, holding in its breath waiting for something to release it. This stillness is broken by the clatter of boots on stone, shouted orders, and the clanging of armour as the men prepare themselves. I see my men who stand ready, with ferocity in their hearts and a wild glint in their eyes. I feel their hunger for victory and their faith in me which is as steadfast as their shields. In this moment, I know I cannot falter–not now, nor ever.

I scan the ranks, sun-darkened faces, eyes sharpened by hardship, sandals worn thin from endless marches. They stand without complaint, blades at their sides, resolve in their bearing. Only then do I reflect on how far we've come. We have marched from Pella to the frontiers of the known world. I think of my father, Philip, whose ambition was the seed of this campaign. Although my father and I had our difficulties, I can admire what he achieved for the people, and for the country. Yet, where he sought to unify Greece, I seek to transcend it. This battle is not just for Macedon, or even for Greece, it is for history. I had the *Iliad* to accompany me as a boy, but now, I live its verses. I must surpass Achilles, whose name still echoes through the ages.

While gazing upon the opposite bank of the Pinarus River, Darius III gathers his forces. His Immortals stand proud, their gilded weapons glinting even in the dim light. However, beneath this display lies a fragile core. Darius commands through fear, not loyalty, as his men are fuelled by coin, not conviction. My phalanx, by contrast, is a living thing, each man a tendon in the greater body. We fight not only for glory, but to show our enemies the might of an empire they cannot withstand.

Tension Before the Storm

As we prepare to engage, I feel the weight of more than my armour. The Persian Empire is not just an opponent, it is a legacy, a force of history that has stood for centuries. To challenge it, is to challenge the gods themselves, but I have no patience for hesitation. The gods are watching; they have shown their favour. Zeus whispers in my ear, "*Take what is yours*".

The scouts bring word that Darius underestimates us. He believes the narrowness of the battlefield to be an advantage, that our numbers cannot outmanoeuvre the river. He forgets that it is not size but strategy that wins wars. I have ordered Parmenion to secure the left flank while

I lead the cavalry on the right. The plan is clear—strike fast, strike decisively, and drive straight into the heart of the Persian line.

Battle of Issus

It begins. The cry of war rises like a storm, and we surge forward. The phalanx advances with the purpose of holding the line, waiting for what is to come. As ash-wood sarissas and bronze spearheads grind against the Persian front, the earth begins to tremble beneath the thunder of hooves as I lead the Companion Cavalry.

Noticing the enemy's exposed left, we wheel and crash into the side of the Persian infantry with extreme precision and speed. It is here the line begins to bend. Their shields are turned toward the phalanx; they do not see us until we are already upon them. Horses scream, and lances tear through cloth and flesh. We strike like lightning at the weakened flank, and it is enough for the phalanx to break through in a slow push forward, while the cavalry carves a path.

I see the river has become a battlefield of chaos and blood. Men slip on the muddy banks, their cries drowned by the clash of steel. My heart pounds with the rhythm of war, the thrill of combat consuming all thought. I seek Darius amidst the fray, my eyes scanning until they fall upon the gilded chariot that marks his position. There, he is flanked by his Immortals, though I am not deterred. The ground trembles with Bucephalus's charge, my pulse locked to his rhythm, as we push toward the enemy's core.

As Darius senses me advancing, he turns and falters, his confidence crumbling. I witness him grab hold of the reins in his golden chariot and pivot to flee, choosing to abandon his army to its fate. The King of Kings breaks, and with him, so does Persia. His men scatter, some run, some kneel, and some die where they stand.

Victory is ours.

Wake of Victory

The war-torn field quiets, the roar of battle dimming to the heavy breaths and moans of the wounded. The bodies of men and horses lie scattered across the field, a grim testament to the cost of ambition. Still though, my heart swells with pride. We have achieved the impossible, the great Persian Empire has been humbled with its King reduced to a fugitive.

I command my men to treat the wounded of both the Greek and Persian armies. It is mercy, I believe, that can be wielded as a weapon just as powerful as the sword. I pivot to see Darius's family, now captured in the chaos, being brought before me. They kneel, trembling, expecting death–but I offer them kindness. "You are not my enemies," I tell them. "You are under my protection now." This gesture will echo through time, a reminder that I, Alexander, am not merely a conqueror, but a great unifier.

Reflecting Beyond

As night falls, I find myself alone in my tent, the toll of the day pressing heavily upon me. The victory at Issus is monumental, though it feels like only a single step on an endless road. Persia is vast, its cities glittering with untold riches. Babylon, Susa, and Persepolis–these names tempt me, calling me onward. But it is not the wealth I seek. It is legacy.

I think again of Achilles, whose deeds are immortalized in song. My own story is still being written, each battle a verse in the epic of Alexander. But I fight not just for my own renown, as Achilles once did. I fight to unite the world, to create a new order where East and West are not rivals but partners. The Hellenistic culture I envision will blend the best of both worlds, a synthesis that will endure long after I am gone.

Nevertheless, doubt gnaws at the edges of my resolve. How far can I push my men? They are loyal now, but will they follow me to the ends of the earth? Will they see the vision that drives me, or falter under the strain of endless campaigns? The gods have favoured me thus far, but even their patience is not infinite.

The road ahead is uncertain, but one thing is clear, I cannot stop. To stop now is to admit defeat, to deny my destiny. The stars above remind me of the vastness of the world, and the uncharted lands that are filled with riches and mysteries call to me. Beyond that, who knows? Perhaps the edge of the world itself.

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Austin gave me a better insight into how Alexander is a force on the battlefield, not only at the Battle of Issus, but in other such conflicts he described. I tried to play in this fact of him being tactically flexible as well as disciplined during this battle.

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Heckel, Waldemar. *The Conquests of Alexander the Great.* Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2008, 57-65.

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Augustus' Laudatio of Agrippa

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I wish, truly, that this was a skill in which I was not so well versed,[1] that the call for commemoration was heard less often. Though if any man is owed tribute, it is Marcus Vipsanius Agrippa.

We met studying at Apollonia, then both filled with the youthful vigor befitting the city's namesake.[2] Upon the death of my father, *Divus Julius*,[3] I found in Agrippa a reliable and skilled ally. When my heart was filled with the unconquerable strength of just vengeance and my body was weakened by illness, it was he who stood by my side allowing Justitia's[4] sentence to be brought down upon Brutus and Cassius.[5] Many we fought alongside at Philippi in time revealed themselves to be traitors to my father and the Roman people for whom we sought retribution.[6] Agrippa and I together defeated Sextus Pompeius,[7] who proved himself to be the lesser spawn of a great man. Here, my dear friend showed himself worthy of an honour which no man was bestowed before nor has been since, a golden crown ornamented by ships' beaks.[8] It is a fool's game to think one can tame Neptune's realm. Agrippa bested the sea not by conquering but by complimenting; where the sea is unreliable and wild, he was loyal and steady. When he clashed with roaring waves, they became a gentle stream whose slow current propelled Agrippa's victory. In the Battle of Actium, we united to defeat the false gods and betrayers of Rome, Mark Antony and his Queen Cleopatra.[9] Heeding his counsel, I followed a current which led me not merely

[1] Suet. *Aug*. 8: "in [Octavian's] twelfth year he delivered a funeral oration to the assembled people in honour of his grandmother Julia".

[2] Zanker, *Augustan Program,* 108. Apollonia was named after Apollo. The god was heavily favoured by Augustus and possessed an eternal youthful depiction.

[3] Warrior, *Becoming a God*, 106.

[4] Lott, *Augustan Sculpture*, 267. The goddess of justice, often accredited to Augustus and one of the four virtues carved on the honorific shield in the Curia Julia.

[5] Suet. *Aug*. 13: "[t]hen, forming a league with Antony and Lepidus, [Augustus] finished the war of Philippi also in two battles, although weakened by illness ... He did not use his victory with moderation, but after sending Brutus's head to Rome, to be cast at the feet of Caesar's statue."

[6] Said in reference to Mark Antony and his allies.

[7] Boatwright et al., *The Romans*, 268.

[8] Cf. Cassius Dio 49.14: "[u]pon his lieutenants he bestowed various gifts and upon Agrippa a golden crown adorned with ships' beaks—a decoration given to nobody before or since".

[9] Warrior, *Becoming a God*, 112.; Scheid, Augustus, 180. The Civil War against Mark Antony operated as a moderating influence on Octavian's divine ambitions. Antony and Cleopatra's pursuit of living and dynastic divinity led Octavian to return to religious traditions, declaring war according to the ritual of the *fetiales* (priest of Jupiter). The desire to win over more conservative members of the senate led him to stress his status as the son of a god, in comparison to the bolder divine ambitions of his enemies.

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to triumph in battle, but total victory for Rome.[10]

Upon the death of my beloved nephew, Marcus Claudius Marcellus, I once again turned to my friend and colleague, for there could be no better match for Julia, my only and beloved child.[11] I was honoured not just to call him my son-in-law, but his sons my own.[12] Rome happily places her fate into the hands of Agrippa's children.[13]

I should stress that my friend was not only a great man of war, but an ingenious partner in my project of peace.[14] If I leave Rome a city of marble, beauty, and splendor, it is due to his aid.[15] He took his prowess on the sea's harsh waves and turned it to the building of aqueducts, reservoirs, and basins.[16] This shows a man with a true fullness of character; in the places he stepped, there flowed either the blood of the unjust or the water of life.

Agrippa will be buried in my Mausoleum, where one day I will have the honour and privilege of joining him.[17] For now, let us all remember a man who proved I was merely first among *equals.*

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[10] Cassius Dio 50.31: "[Octavian] was restrained, however, by Agrippa, who feared that they would be too slow for the fugitives, who were going to use sails, and he was also confident himself that he would conquer without difficulty, because in the meantime a violent rainstorm, accompanied by a mighty wind, had struck Antony's fleet, though not his own".

[11] Boatwright et al., *The Romans*, 282; Tac. *Ann*. 1.53: There are allegations of adultery taking place before Agrippa's death. For example, Tacitus' account: "Sempronius Gracchus, a man of noble family, of shrewd understanding, and a perverse eloquence, who had seduced this same Julia when she was the wife of Marcus Agrippa". Regardless of their validity, Augustus would have no reason to present his daughter as anything but virtuous until the adultery charges were made public in 2 BCE.

[12] Boatwright et al., *The Romans*, 288. Augustus adopted Julia and Agrippa's sons Lucius and Gaius in 17 BCE.

[13] Boatwright et al., *The Romans*, 288. Agrippa died in 12 BCE and Lucius and Gaius would not die until 2 CE and 4 CE respectively. At the time of this speech, Augustus could feel some security in a straightforward dynastic succession.

[14] Cf. Aug. *RG* 34: "after I had extinguished civil wars, and at a time when with universal consent I was in complete control of affairs". Augustus' propaganda relied heavily on his promotion of peace and consensus, assigning Agrippa's (and his) accomplishments merely to the realm of warfare would undermine this.

[15] Suet. *Aug*. 29, based on alleged words of Augustus: "[t]he city, which was not built in a manner suitable to the grandeur of the empire … that [Augustus] boasted… that he had 'found it of brick, but left it of marble.'"

[16] Zanker, *Augustan Program*, 139.

[17] University of Chicago, 'Mausoleum of Augustus'.

Artist's Statement

This piece is a fictionalized funeral oration for Marcus Agrippa, delivered by his friend and colleague, Augustus, upon Agrippa's death in 12 BCE. It serves two main purposes: to highlight Agrippa's vital role in Augustus' rise to power, and to explore what Augustus himself would have chosen to emphasize about his closest allies. As a public *laudatio* by the emperor, the speech reflects not only the legacy of the deceased, but also the values of Augustus and the broader imperial ideology he sought to promote. There was a real funeral oration for Agrippa by Augustus, of which a short fragment was discovered on a Greek papyrus by Ludwig Koenen.[18] The Greek shows clear signs of having been translated from Latin, as an effort was made to follow the Latin idiom at the expense of the Greek.

[18] Badian, *Notes*, 97; Haslam, *Funeral Oration*, 193.

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The Legend of Pheidippides

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~ The Unbroken Stride of Athens' Messenger ~

The Athenian hills were merciless, their jagged, sun-scorched stones biting into the tattered remnants of Pheidippides' leather sandals with each strained step. His feet, raw and blistered from days of relentless running, throbbed with a pain so deep he feared it had pierced into his very bones. The frayed, dust-stained straps of his sandals had long ceased to offer any real protection. Each stride sent shocks through his swollen muscles, yet Pheidippides felt as though he were gliding, his mind numb to the agony that threatened to consume him. Only his purpose remained, clear and urgent, bound to him as tightly as the hastily written message strapped to his belt.

The memory of the past week's events flashed before his eyes, triggered by each dull thud of his feet against the earth and a desire to quicken time's passing. Just a day earlier, he had been chosen as the *hemerodromos*[1]—the swift-footed messenger—entrusted with delivering a plea to the Spartan *ephors*[2] for aid, leaving what felt like the entirety of Athens' fate resting on his shoulders.

Pheidippides had set out from his home with the dawn, wearing little more than a simple *chiton* cinched at the waist. Leaving behind the familiar cityscape, he ran westward through the plains of Eleusis and past the bustling city of Megara. The rocky path through the narrow Isthmus of Corinth was punishing, yet he had pushed forward through Argos, driven by the urgency of Athens' plight. After hours without pause, he finally allowed himself a brief rest by a stream at the base of Mount Parthenium, hoping to soothe his parched throat.

The messenger knelt at the stream's edge, cupping his hands to drink, when a flicker in the water caught his eye. Staring back from the rippling surface was a face not his own—ancient and wild, crowned with curling horns, its shadowed eyes glimmering with something older than myth. He jerked his head up, heart hammering. The banks lay empty, the air hushed but for the whisper of leaves stirred by a wandering breeze. Slowly, warily, he looked down again.

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[1] *Hemerodromos*, meaning, "day runner" or "courier runner". See Matthews, "The 'Hemerodromoi': Ultra Long-Distance Running in Antiquity." *CW* 68 (1974): 161–69.

[2] Annually elected magistrates. *Ephors*, meaning, "overseers". See Pomeroy et al., *Ancient Greece,* 4th ed. (2017), 108.

The face had returned. From the water's depths rose a voice like shifting earth, resonant and near enough to tremble in his bones. "Why do the Athenians forsake me, Pheidippides? Have I not guarded them in ages past, and would I not rise again to shield them in every trial to come?"[3]

In an instant, the reflection fractured, dissolving into sunlight on ripples. Pheidippides blinked hard. The god was gone.

For a heartbeat the world held itself in abeyance. No bird chattered. Even the water softened its murmur. He stayed kneeling, fingers pressed into the cool bank and felt—as keenly as a hand upon the shoulder—the presence of something that belonged to rock and root.

He bowed his head. Gravel and fine sand shifted beneath his palms. When he spoke, it was not a murmur, but a pledge shaped carefully as one names a god at an altar: "Athens will remember. We will construct a temple for you, keep the seasons with offerings, and bind our gratitude to song." He did not bargain. He promised.

A breath of air slid along the ravine—cool, spiralling, edged with pine. The leaves shivered once, as if acknowledging witness, and the ache that had crowded his limbs loosened. Strength did not blaze; it settled—quiet, enduring—into tendon and lung. His pulse found measure. The path before him no longer seemed so endless.

He rose. The stream's murmur resumed, but it sounded changed—clearer, brighter, as though it carried his vow downstream to waiting spirits. The breeze stirred again, no longer heavy but playful, weaving through branches with a melody that beckoned him onward. Even the earth beneath his feet felt altered, not hostile but steady, as if the land itself lent him strength.

Where the path had once loomed endless and merciless, it now stretched before him like a ribbon drawn by unseen hands, leading him not merely to Sparta but toward something larger than any city's walls. His breath found rhythm, his heart thrummed with quiet conviction, and his steps steadied into certainty. The exhaustion that had shadowed him was gone; in its place burned a calm resolve, deep as stone and steady as the gods themselves. He would run. He would deliver this message—not just for Athens, not just for Sparta, but for all of Hellas—for the fragile freedom that trembled at the edge of history.

He set off at a pace that felt strangely effortless, each step a vow renewed, each mile a hymn to the unseen power that had touched him. Behind him, the ravine exhaled, returning to its ancient silence—but for those who might pass that lonely place, the air would still carry a faint, reedy song, a whisper of Pan's blessing, light as breath, eternal as stone.

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[3] This quote has been rephrased slightly from the original translation. See Herodotus, *Histories* 6.105 (Rawlinson p. 411).

Hours dissolved as he pressed southward, crossing Arcadia's ridges and descending into the broad valley of the Eurotas. Dawn spread across the horizon in pale gold, and for the first time he saw Sparta not as a word on a map or a legend in a soldier's tale, but as a living city.

It was nothing like Athens.

There were no walls to startle the eye, no marble facades to proclaim ambition. Instead, the settlements stretched loosely along the river, villages—Pitane, Mesoa, Limnai, Kynosoura—linked by fields and roads.[4] The openness unsettled him at first. Yet here lay the essence of Lacedaemon: a city that trusted its defence not to stone but to the discipline of its citizens.

He had heard of this contrast many times but witnessing it now gave the words a sharper truth. Athens carried the din of politics, markets, and artistry, its towers and gates rising as monuments to its restless energy. Sparta stood bare, disciplined, and assured. Its strength lay in men trained to stand as walls themselves.[5]

As he entered the valley floor, the city stirred with quiet purpose. It was the season of the *Karneia*, and the signs of preparation were plain. Men carried wood for fires. Women bore loaves and meat for the *syssitia*[6], the common meals where citizens gathered. Boys moved in files with wooden spears, watched closely by their instructors, for not even holy days excused the drills of the young.[7] A thin plume of smoke lifted where fat was tested on an altar. Nothing was hurried and each task had its place.

The rest he knew from stories. The *Karneia* lasted nine days, and for that time Sparta laid aside war.[8] Outside the city, nine tents were raised, one for each tribe, serving as the ritual heart of the festival. There were choruses in honour of Apollo. There were races—the chase of a garlanded runner whose capture was a sign of prosperity, and the grape-bearer's race, where dropping a single cluster foretold misfortune for the harvest. At the centre of it all were sacrifices to Apollo Karneios, the shepherd and guardian of the Dorians, whose protection no Spartan would set aside.[9] These were not spectacles for outsiders. They were the fabric of the city itself, the law of the gods and people joined.

Even on this first morning, that discipline pressed upon everything he saw. There was no shouting, no bargaining, no spectacle. Every movement was deliberate. The city breathed with the god's order.

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[4] Pausanias, *Description of Greece*, 3.16.9 (Jones p. 321).

[5] Thucydides, *History of the Peloponnesian War*, 1.10–11 (Warner).

[6] Plutarch, *Lycurgus* 12 (Perrin p. 249).

[7] Xenophon, *Constitution of the Lacedaemonians* 2 (Marchant p. 139).

[8] Herodotus, *Histories* 6.106 (Rawlinson p. 411).

[9] Pausanias, *Description of Greece* 3.13.4–5 (Jones p. 285).

At the edge of Pitane, two men in crimson cloaks regarded him. Their eyes lingered on his dust-caked limbs. One stepped forward, broad-shouldered, hair bound in the Lacedaemonian fashion. He spoke no words. A nod sufficed, and Pheidippides followed.

As they walked, they passed a mess-hall where shields lay stacked in neat rows by the doorway, their bronze rims dulled from long use. In a courtyard, elders oversaw youths at practice, spear-thrusts sharp and controlled. At a small shrine of Apollo Karneios, garlands were being fastened to wooden posts. Nothing was gaudy and nothing was wasted. The city prepared as it always had, steady and unhurried.

The *Skias*[10] soon came into view, its round timbered roof casting a wide circle of shade across the packed earth. Within that chamber void of ornament, the affairs of Sparta were conducted with a severity as old as the city itself.

Inside, the air was cool and bare. Two thrones stood apart at the head of the space, emblems of Sparta's dual kingship.[11] On one sat Cleomenes, lean and sharp-eyed, his frame coiled with restless energy. On the other, Demaratus, broader, slower to move, carrying the weight of tradition. Around them stood the five *ephors*, magistrates chosen yearly whose authority even the two kings must heed. Beyond, seated in a half-circle, were the elder men of the *Gerousia*, silent guardians of law.[12]

Pheidippides bowed low, his voice hoarse but steady.

"Men of Lacedaemon," he began, "the Athenians beseech you to hasten to their aid, and not allow that state, which is the most ancient in all Hellas, to be enslaved by the barbarians. Eretria is already carried away captive; and Hellas weakened by the loss of no mean city.[13]

But Athens stands next. Even now the Persian fleet rides at anchor off the plain of Marathon, their cavalry restless, their archers eager to darken our skies. We are a single city, outnumbered many times over. Yet our men have not faltered. Under the command of Callimachus the *polemarch*, and with generals such as Miltiades, Themistocles, and Aristides dividing the days of command, we have gathered on the plain to bar the invader's path.

If Athens falls, the road into Hellas lies open. The fate of every *polis* hangs upon this hour. I beg you, Lacedaemonians, do not delay."

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[10] The *Skias* is a round structure originally built for the purpose of holding assemblies. See Pausanias, *Description of Greece*, 3.12.10 (Jones p. 275)

[11] The dual kingship system of Sparta. See Herodotus, *Histories* 6.50–6.85 (Rawlinson pp. 388–402).

[12] Aristotle, *Politics* 1270b–1271a (Rackham pp. 459–61).

[13] Herodotus, *Histories* 6.106 (Rawlinson p.411).

When he finished, the chamber held its silence. Cleomenes' gaze was sharp, Demaratus' unreadable. At a signal from an *ephor*, attendants stepped forward and guided Pheidippides from the hall. The heavy doors closed behind him.

He stood waiting, the stillness pressing on him harder than the miles he had run under the burning sun.

Before long, he was summoned back. The kings sat unchanged, the *Gerousia* unmoving. One of the *ephors* stepped forward, his voice calm and deliberate.

"Stranger of Athens, your plea is heard. Sparta will not turn from you. We will march. But we are bound to the god. The days of the *Karneia* must be fulfilled, for Apollo Karneios watches over us as shepherd over flock. Until the nine days have passed and the full moon rises, no Spartan may take the field. To break that law is to dishonour both god and people. When the moon is full, our army will come."

The words carried finality, yet not of refusal.

Though disappointment pricked at him, Pheidippides bowed. He had not been dismissed; he had been answered with honour. Sparta would march, though not yet.

He stepped out from the shadow of the *Skias* into the glare of noon. Warriors in crimson cloaks stood nearby, their faces grave, their stances unyielding. They met his gaze without words, and in their silence, he saw what Hellas had always feared: if Spartans carried such power in peace, what must they be in war? He was grateful they would come as allies and not as foes.

Yet urgency pressed on him anew. It was not enough that Sparta had promised aid. Athens had to know at once that the Lacedaemonians would march—but only after the full moon. That knowledge alone could decide whether the generals stood at Marathon or fell back to guard the city walls. Every hour of delay risked ruin.

He set out again, retracing the rugged passes, the mountains rising and falling before him. Hours blurred until at last, Athens came into view. He delivered the message to the remaining generals inside the city without pause: Sparta would come, but bound by Apollo's festival, their march would be delayed. He also told of Pan's voice on Mount Parthenium, urging that the god be honoured in return for his protection.

The men conferred amongst each other then, one turning to the others with concern, "Another runner must be sent at once. This man has already carried more than any body should endure."

Pheidippides straightened at this, though his legs trembled beneath him. "No," he said, voice low but firm. "I have run this road before. I know the tracks through Parnes that will cut the

hours. Let another go, and Athens may wait too long. Let me finish what I have begun with the divine strength gifted to me."

The generals exchanged glances. They could see the strain carved into his frame, but also the fire that would not be put out. At last, Callimachus gave a single nod. "So be it. Take food, take water, and rest for a short while. At nightfall, you will go."

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When Pheidippides finally arrived at the Athenian camp, twilight had gathered, shadows stretching long over the encampment. The air was thick with the tang of sweat and bronze, mingling with the low murmur of voices as soldiers sharpened spearheads, tested shield straps, and whispered to one another of what the dawn would bring. Exhaustion hollowed his body, yet he pressed on until he stood before Miltiades. The general's face, weathered by years of command, betrayed no fear, only a calm resolve that steadied those around him. Pheidippides delivered Sparta's answer once again, but this time in a parched and struggling whisper.[14]

Miltiades inclined his head, the lines of his jaw tightening. He had faced many wars and knew what it meant to be alone. A gesture sent Pheidippides off toward a nearby tent, urging him to rest. Though his mind churned with anxiety for the battle ahead, his body betrayed him the moment he lay down. As he sank into the rough bedding, his eyes fluttered shut almost immediately, overriding his fears with the heaviness of sleep as the murmurs of the camp faded around him.

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It was the sound of distant marching that jolted him awake. Disoriented, his limbs ached with every movement as he scrambled from his tent. He stumbled toward a small rise overlooking the plain, where he could make out the Athenian forces assembling below. From this vantage point, he could see Marathon Valley stretching out to the Bay, the early morning mist lifting to reveal the stark contrast between the two armies.[15]

Below him, ten thousand Athenians and one thousand Plataeans stood in disciplined rows, forming a *phalanx*—a shield wall of bronze and wood, unyielding in its unity. Each man bore a polished *thorax*, a Corinthian helmet, bronze *knemides*, and either an *aspis* or *hoplon* shield, every piece reflecting the sun's early light. All held their *dory* spears upright with *xiphe* at their sides, presenting an impenetrable front, undeterred by their difference in numbers.

In contrast, the Persian army, a terrifying twenty-five thousand, filled the far side of the plain in looser, more fluid lines. They were dressed in what appeared to be scale, linen, or leather

[14] Namely the Scythian Campaign (513 BCE) and the Ionian Revolt (499-493 BCE). See Mark, "Miltiades" (*World History Encyclopaedia*, 2016).

[15] Miltiades persuades Callimachus to attack at or soon after dawn once he learned of the absence of the Persian Cavalry. See Hammond, "The Campaign and the Battle of Marathon," *JHS* 88 (1968): 37

body armour while their heads were covered with the softer *kyrbasia*. Unlike the Hellenes, who relied on heavy armour and tight formations, the Persians emphasized speed and mobility. They wielded shorter spears and *sagaris* axes, while many carried *gerron* shields made of woven wicker that he mused would offer little protection against the piercing thrust of a *hoplite's* spear. Archers stood behind the Persian infantry, ready to release a deadly volley that would darken the skies of the battlefield.[16]

From hushed conversations among the *hoplites* the night before, he had learned that King Darius I had entrusted command of the Persian forces to the two generals, Datis and Artaphernes[17], who had brought six hundred Persian triremes[18]—a number he could scarcely believe. Now, as he looked beyond the valley, the monstrous sight of the warships anchored in the bay foreshadowed the destruction that would reach Athens should they fail here.

Pheidippides watched as the Persian archers unleashed their first volley, the sky thick with black fletching. The shafts whistled downward, but the *hoplites*, trained for this storm, raised their shields in unison, the bronze rims clanging together to form a roof of protection. The arrows splintered harmlessly, rattling off helmets and shields, embedding themselves in the earth.

At Miltiades' command, the Athenians advanced. At first, they moved deliberately, each step measured, the *phalanx* keeping its tight wall. Then, when they closed to within a few stadia, the trumpet blared. With a sudden roar, the entire line broke into a run. Bronze and scarlet surged forward as one, the pounding of thousands of sandals shaking the plain. The Persians, stunned by this unexpected charge, loosed arrows too high, the deadly shafts sailing over and past the Hellenes' heads.[19]

The collision was a crash louder than any of Poseidon's largest waves. The *dory* spears of the *hoplites* punched through wicker *gerrha*, splintering the Persian shields as if they were kindling. Men screamed, trampled underfoot, or were driven back by the relentless advance. The Persians slashed with *sagaris* axes and thrust with shorter spears, but they could not withstand the crushing weight of the *phalanx*. Their ranks locked tight, each man's weight forcing the invaders backward step by bloody step.[20]

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[16] Relative to the Greek *hoplites*, the Persian infantry wore far lighter armour as their style of combat required them to be more mobile. See Herodotus, *Histories* 6.111–6.117 (Rawlinson pp. 414–16).

[17] Herodotus, *Histories* 6.94 (Rawlinson pp. 405–06); 6.102 (Rawlinson p. 409); 6.113 (Rawlinson p. 415).

[18] A swift, agile, and light warship with three rows of oars and versatile maneuverability. See Thucydides, *History of the Peloponnesian War* 1.13.2 (Crawley).

[19] Miltiades ordered the soldiers to, "rush headlong upon [the Persians]". See Hammond, "The Campaign and the Battle of Marathon," *JHS* 88 (1968): 26.

[20] A *hoplite phalanx* was a tightly packed formation of heavily armed soldiers, using overlapping shields and long spears for collective defence and attack. See Herodotus, *Histories* 6.111-112 (Rawlinson pp. 414–15).

Miltiades' stratagem now revealed its force. The centre, drawn up thinner than custom, bent under the Persian assault, yet it did not break. On the wings, where he had placed Athens' strongest ranks, the *hoplites* drove hard, pushing the enemy inward. The plain echoed with the crash of bronze on wicker, the cries of men pressed too tightly to wield their weapons. Slowly, then with gathering speed, the wings curled around, enclosing the Persians in a tightening crescent.

Confusion rippled through the invaders, men stumbling over the fallen as shouts to hold the line went unanswered. The Athenians and their Plataean allies surged onward, breaking the enemy ranks into fragments. Thousands fled across the field toward the waiting ships, throwing down shields in their haste. The Hellenes pursued without mercy, driving them to the very surf, where the clanging of spear and axe was swallowed by the crash of water upon land.[21]

The plain of Marathon lay strewn with the fallen, the soil darkened where the Persians had broken. At the shoreline, the rout reached its climax: cries of terror rang out as men fought to board their ships. In the struggle, the Athenians seized seven vessels, though most slipped their anchors and fled to sea.

Victory surged across the field. Men raised spears in triumph, a chorus of disbelief and pride rising from ten thousand throats. Yet the rejoicing was shadowed soon by grief. Callimachus, the war-*archon* who had led the right flank with unflinching resolve, lay among the dead.[22] His fall tempered the glory of the day, reminding all that freedom's price was written in the blood of their leaders as well as their kin.

Pheidippides, weary but unwilling to yield to rest, had drifted toward the knot of generals. There he saw Themistocles apart from the celebration, his gaze fixed on the horizon where the black masts still glimmered in the bay. Even as men shouted of triumph, Themistocles summoned a scribe. Pheidippides stood close enough to hear the clipped urgency of his words: a message for Athens—victory had been won, but the danger had not passed. The fleet might round Cape Sounion and strike the city before its defenders could return.

When the letter was sealed, Themistocles' eyes turned to him. Pheidippides felt the general's gaze linger not on the hollows of fatigue carved into his face, but on the steadiness of his stance, the quiet resolve that had not been broken.

"You were with us at the beginning, and you are still standing now," Themistocles said, his voice measured. "I could entrust this to no one else. You have mastered the road once already.

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[21] Followed a new strategy due to the Athenians being outnumbered. See Ploumis, "Strategy, Sun Tzu and the Battle of Marathon," *Defence Studies* 21 (2021): 107–21.

[22] Callimachus the *polemarch* was a casualty in the pursuit of the fleeing Persians. See Hammond, "The Campaign and the Battle of Marathon," *JHS* 88 (1968): 30.

Athens must learn both our triumph and our peril before the Persians can reach her. Will you bear it?"

Weakness pressed like lead through every fibre of his body, yet in that moment Pheidippides felt no hesitation. He bowed his head.

"I will bear it. For Athens, I will not falter."

Themistocles' hand rested briefly on his shoulder. "Then go. The city's safety runs with you."

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The memory of the battlefield faded as Pheidippides crested the last rise before Athens. The city unfurled below him, its white walls and marble temples burning in the midday sun, the Acropolis[23] standing proud as a crown upon the rock. His sight swam, his breath tore ragged in his chest, but still the city seemed alive with light — a beacon of *demokratia*[24], born of Solon's[25] reforms and secured by Cleisthenes' hand, daring to entrust power to its people in defiance of tyrants and kings.

With each agonizing step, he thought of men like Themistocles[26] and the rising Aristides[27], who continued to fight tirelessly to preserve Athens' freedom against tyranny. His task was not just for the *strategoi*[28] who had led on the battlefield, but for every citizen who believed in the city's ideals. Athens was a city that dared to entrust power to its people, that defied the vast empire threatening its shores.

At the gates he was met by a throng already gathered. Their faces were etched with terror and longing. Women craned into the distance for sight of husbands. Fathers searched for sons. The chaos pressed in on him, arms reaching, questions overlapping, the desperate hunger of a city waiting on one word.

Through the press of bodies, he caught sight of a familiar face — his younger brother, forcing his way forward, eyes wide with alarm at the sight of him. He reached Pheidippides' side, slipping an arm beneath his to steady him as he swayed. Breath ragged, the runner pressed the sealed message into his brother's hands.

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[23] Paga, "Contested Space at the Entrance of the Athenian Acropolis." *JSAH* 76 (2017): 154–74.

[24] Translates literally to, "the power of the people" or "rule by the people". See Sealey, "The Origins of 'Demokratia,'" *CSCA* 6 (1973): 253–54.

[25] Aristotle, *Constitution of the Athenians* 5-12.

[26] Aristotle, *Constitution of the Athenians* 23.

[27] Aristotle, *Constitution of the Athenians* 23.

[28] Strategos, plural strategoi; meaning "army leader" or "military general". The chief powers, civil and military, of the old archons. See Badian, "Archons and Strategoi," *Antichthon* 5 (1971): 5.

"Take it," he rasped, his grip firm despite the tremor in his limbs. "To the generals. Now. Do not fail me."

For a heartbeat, his brother did not move. His eyes searched Pheidippides' face, unwilling to leave him in such a state. "But you—" he began, his voice cracking not from fear but from love.

"Go!" Pheidippides forced the word out, more plea than command. At last, his brother nodded, pride mingling in his gaze before vanishing into the crowd with the charge entrusted to him.

Only then did Pheidippides turn back to the multitude. Summoning the last of his strength, he planted his feet, lifted his head, and forced the breathless words past the fire in his chest.

"At Marathon, we have won!"

For a heartbeat there was silence. Then the multitude erupted. Shouts of disbelief and joy rose. Tears streamed down hardened faces as the weight of dread dissolved. The sound washed over him like a tide, but his body, at last spent, gave way. He sank to his knees and toppled onto his back, the world a blur of sky and stone.

In that final moment, as his lungs burned and his heart stuttered, he offered no cry of despair. He gave only a silent prayer to Athena, protector of the city, and a thought of Pan, whose strength had carried him from Parthenium to this hour. His gaze clung to the Acropolis, radiant above the city he had given all to defend.[29] With a last, untroubled breath, Pheidippides yielded to the darkness.

Athens still stood.

His stride was ended, but his sacrifice would echo through all of Hellas for eternity.

[29] See Plutarch, *Moralia* "On the Glory of Athens" 347c–347d.

Artist's Statement

The following prose of historical fiction seeks to bring to life the arduous final journey of the trained *hemerodromos*, Pheidippides, as he races across the Greek landscape to fulfill his crucial missions. This account follows Pheidippides' legendary feats, beginning with his dash from Athens to Sparta, then back to Athens, followed by a hasty journey to Marathon, and finally culminating in his dramatic run back to Athens. According to later traditions, it is in this final leg, after running five hundred and sixty-four kilometers, that Pheidippides collapses and dies after announcing the victory of the Athenian forces.

It is essential to clarify that the earliest and most reliable source on Pheidippides' journey is Herodotus, who in *Histories* (Book 6.105-106) describes only the initial stage: Pheidippides' run from Athens to Sparta to seek Spartan assistance before the Battle of Marathon, followed by his return to Athens. Herodotus makes no mention of a run from Marathon to Athens, nor does he describe Pheidippides' dramatic death upon his return. Instead, he focuses solely on the grueling 240 km journey to Sparta and back, underscoring the urgency of the Athenian plea for aid.

The tale of Pheidippides' final run from Marathon to Athens, where he allegedly died after exclaiming "we have won" (νικῶμεν), is first recorded by Plutarch in his work *On the Glory of Athens* (*Moralia* 347c), written several centuries later in the 1st century CE. This version appears to be a later embellishment, adding dramatic flair to the story of Athenian resilience. It is thus important to acknowledge that there is no historical evidence confirming Pheidippides as the messenger who ran this entire sequence, nor proof that such a runner perished after delivering the victory message.

For the purposes of this narrative, I follow Herodotus' account for the majority of Pheidippides' journey, emphasizing the historically attested mission to Sparta. However, I also incorporate the dramatic conclusion described by Plutarch, merging the historical and legendary elements to create a compelling portrayal of one of antiquity's most enduring stories.

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