



The Traveling Tales of Apollo Orestes

JOSHUA EDWARDS

Joshua Edwards blends narrative and scholarship in this imaginative account of a time-traveling artist working under the sculptor Phidias in Pericles' Athens, home of the fabled Parthenon and its monumental, gold-paneled tribute to the goddess Athena. This essay was written for Ancient and Classical Art History with Layne Thrift, MFA.

IN MY TRANSPORTATION through time, I landed in Ancient Greece during the Classical Period. I chose to go by the alias of Apollo Orestes. Since Apollo is after all the God of Art, I found it a naturally fitting name. Orestes is a Greek name meaning “he who stands on the mountain” or “one who can conquer mountains,” which I found a wise choice as I found myself in Athens among the mountains of Attica. One may also recall that to the Greeks in this classical this name may be familiar to them as the son of Agamemnon from the Iliad of Homer. I feel I may fit right in with this alias as an artist in Athens.

The project or work I am tasked with is with the completion of the Parthenon, which was a dedication to Athens' patron goddess Athena: “Located at the highest point on the Acropolis, the 300-foot-high hill overlooking the city, the Parthenon was a shining symbol of the enlightened city-state under its most famous statesman,

Pericles” (Strickland, *Annotated Arch* 13). Yes, I had a magnificent view over all of Athens, able to take in the surrounding mountain scenery and watch the people of the city go about their day. I breathed in the fresh crisp air blowing in off the Aegean Sea.

It was a wonderful time in Athens under the leadership of Pericles. The city state flourished as it rebuilt and established itself: “Pericles, in power from 495-429BC, felt that the ruins should be made better than before and dedicated to Athena” (Thrift). So, he brought in Phidias to commission rebuilding the Parthenon: “Phidias (500-432B.C.), most famous Athenian sculptor, overseer of the Parthenon statuary, first used drapery to reveal body” (Strickland, *Annotated Mona Lisa*, 13). It was Phidias who I was working directly under, learning to sculpt and work metal, specifically gold. I was tasked with finding creative ways to store the wealth of Athens within the temple. “What better way to intertwine the wealth of Athens and the dedication to Athena than with our work of Athena, and what is more valuable or worthy of a god than gold?” I said to Phidias. (As Carol Strickland notes, “Today, one can only imagine the impression the temple made when it housed the nearly 50-foot-tall ivory statue of Athena, adorned with more than a ton of gold by the sculptor Phidias” [*Annotated Arch* 13].) I had to admit that the choice of ivory for the flesh of Athena was fitting for a Greek goddess. Not only was it an excellent idea, but it sure made a magnificent spectacle for anyone lucky enough to lay their eyes upon this rich sculpture of Athena.

It surprised me just how much the Greek gods meant to the Greeks once I got there, even though I had what I thought was a strong idea. Truly picturing the wealth and power of Athens blew away my preconceptions: “Athens is a very, very strong, city, state; it becomes a seaport one of the major seaports in Greece, if not the major Greek [seaport]” (Thrift). It is clear a major seaport in the ancient world will be quite capable of any measure of wealth. But it is clear that Athens is *the* major Greek seaport, which says much about Athens’ influence in a civilization so well known for trade by sea. The

one regret I have about my transport in time to Ancient Greece is not traveling more by sea. It could have been amazing to see much more of Greece and the foreign trading ports. If it were not for my former obligation to working on the Parthenon, I would have had the opportunity with some of the interesting characters I met at the port while acquiring supplies.

It was rewarding to make Athena the literal protector of Athens' wealth by adorning her statue with so much gold. Holding and touching that much gold, let alone working with it artistically, is an experience few men or artist will ever enjoy. However, working under the famed Phidias was an even greater honor. Learning from and working so close to such a renowned artist is something I am sure many would die to experience. I knew this experience would do more for me as an artist than the seafaring that I forewent could have ever come close to. My life and experience in Athens under the famous leadership of Pericles could not have been greater. I only wish I had a small remanence of that gold as a souvenir of this marvelous time I had as an artist in Ancient Greece sculpting and working metal. ►►

►► WORKS CITED

STRICKLAND, CAROL. *The Annotated Arch: A Crash Course in the History of Architecture*. Andrews McMeel, 2001.

———. *The Annotated Mona Lisa: A Crash Course in Art History From Prehistoric to Postmodern*. 2nd edition, Andrews McMeel, 2007.

THRIFT, LAYNE. "Ancient and Classical Art History Lectures." Course lecture series, The University of Science and Arts of Oklahoma, Fall 2020, Chickasha, OK.