

I. GODS AND HUMANS: THE NEW CONTRACT WITH NATURE

Homer's great epic poems, the *Iliad* and the *Odyssey*, composed probably in the eighth century B.C.E., reveal to us a confident civilization of youthful promise, at a time when it was fashioning for itself a glorious narrative of its history as a diverse but culturally united people. Valor in war, accomplished horsemanship, and the consoling power of a well-developed sense of beauty are intrinsic to this worldview. The worship of trees and aniconic stones—nonrepresentational, non-symbolical forms—had been superseded by the personification of divinity. Although the powers and personalities of the gods and goddesses were still in the process of formation, it is clear that they populated the collective imagination not as representatives of an ethical system or figures commanding worshipful love, but rather as projections of the human psyche and personifications of various aspects of human life. As such, they acted as the idealized and worthy guardians of human society and served as socializing forces, bonding disparate peoples into larger territorial groups through common worship.

GREEK MYTH, RELIGION, AND CULTURE

In fashioning their myths, the Greeks took their native inheritance, Minoan and Mycenaean religions—which are believed to have been centered upon worship of a Great Goddess or Earth Mother—and added to them divinities derived from Asia Minor. Thus, Athena, the majestic patron of the arts and the goddess of reason and justice, probably traced her origin to the Earth Mother in Minoan and Mycenaean cultures. However, Apollo, the god of light, order, and inspiration, was perhaps the descendant of a god worshiped in the region formerly called Anatolia, the large peninsula now occupied principally by Turkey. These gods can be seen as archetypes of emerging aspects of civilization at a period when primal beliefs were gradually being replaced by a more rational, ethical, and scientific outlook. Greek religion was nevertheless still firmly embedded in the matrix of nature. On the Athenian Acropolis, a shrine for the worship of the rustic god Pan is evidence of the duality implicit in Greek religion, which acknowledged the wild, irrational impulses associated with human sexuality alongside the civilized values personified by Athena.

There were numerous holidays in which procession, worshipful slaughter, and feasting helped forge the bonds of community and civic pride among all the inhabitants of the *polis* and sometimes between neighboring city-states (*poleis*), while placating the divinities that were believed to ensure cosmic order. With the notable exception of Athens, where the

reverse was true in the case of its principal festival, the Panathenaia, these processions took the people from the city into the exurban landscape, where many of the important religious sanctuaries were located, thereby affirming the territorial dominance of the *polis* over its surrounding agrarian countryside. These ritual festivals held in nature also served as initiatory rites for adolescents as they became participants in civic life. In ancient Sparta, where the city-state played an especially strong role in the education of children and adolescents, the festivals were connected with the worship of Artemis Orthia.

The increasing power of the aristocracy spurred the creation of the arts and the organization of athletic competitions. The festivals were characterized by communal procession and sacrifice performed before the sanctuaries of the gods, as well as by dancing and athletic and dramatic competition performed in the gods' honor. Dionysus became the patron deity of the theatrical arts, and when the plays of Aeschylus, Sophocles, and Euripides were performed, it was at the Great Dionysia, the important dramatic festival competition held every four years at Athens. At Olympia, the Panhellenic (all-Greek) festival of games sacred to Zeus was begun in 776 B.C.E. and continued at four-year intervals for the next thousand years. Zeus also presided over the Nemean Games, while Apollo was honored in the athletic festival held at Delphi and Poseidon in the contests that took place at the Isthmus of Corinth. Truces among warring city-states were maintained to allow the contestants and spectators to arrive safely at these Panhellenic celebrations.

People also made pilgrimages to important shrines, particularly the one at Delphi, to find spiritual guidance. The desire to chart a safe course, whether through the perils of statecraft or one's own lifetime, made oracular consultation a popular religious exercise in a society that saw human activity as drama directed from on high, the plot of which could be discerned by the spirit forces of the earth.

The Greek political system, with its isolated city-states, accounted for the many festivals of various kinds held throughout the mainland and the Peloponnese, the large peninsula below the Gulf of Corinth that constitutes the southern part of Greece. Altars studded both the rural and urban landscapes, as animal sacrifice, an essential and integral part of every festival including those featuring athletic games, was necessarily performed out-of-doors. Ritual sacrifice was only one manifestation of the interrelationship of the human, animal, and divine in ancient Greece. There was considerable overlap between urban and agrarian spheres, and objects in nature

2.1. The Athenian Acropolis with the olive tree planted to commemorate the presence in antiquity of Athena's sacred tree. It stands in the courtyard of the Erechtheion where it is believed that a charred olive tree managed to sprout leaves, bringing hope of renewal and rebirth of the Athenian polis after the Persians had burned and razed the buildings of the Acropolis in 480 B.C.E. The Erechtheion housed a *xoanon*, the ancient cult statue of Athena. The caryatids that form the columns of its south porch overlook the fire-scarred foundation stones of the Old Temple of Athena. Although the Acropolis was rebuilt later in the fifth century B.C.E. by Pericles, and the Parthenon became the majestic replacement of the destroyed temple, its site was always considered by Athenians to be hallowed ground.



were everywhere charged with magical meaning. By roadsides, sacred stones glistened with oil where passersby offered libations. Caves and springs, often the sites of votive shrines, served as places of human purification. Frequently sanctuaries encompassed sacred springs, and often there were sacred groves nearby as well. Certain trees became identified with particular divinities: the olive tree was sacred to Athena, and a revered specimen grew on the Acropolis; at Samos, a willow's branches hung over Hera's sanctuary; on Delos, a palm tree commemorated a similar tree upon which Leto had leaned when giving birth to Artemis and Apollo; at Dodona, the oracle imparted wisdom through the rustling branches of an oak; at Didyma, Daphni, and Delphi grew the laurel tree sacred to Apollo (fig. 2.1).

The columned temples that began to appear from the eighth century onward throughout Greece were not houses of worship. Instead, they were conspicuous and worthy "residences" of large-scale sculptural representations of gods or goddesses associated with the sacred sites where they were built. These cult figures were occasionally carried in procession, but normally they remained within an interior chamber, or *cella*, facing east toward the altar, which was set up within the sacred temple precinct in front of them.

A *temenos*, a sacred landscape marked off by stones or encircled by a wall, might contain one or more temples. From a religious perspective, the motive for establishing a *temenos* was the epiphany of a god in a particular spot. It was the sense of the indwelling spirit of the god—the god or goddess manifesting himself or herself in a certain place—

that made that site holy. From a social and political perspective, the sacral landscape provided a means of asserting territorial dominance by a particular polis, which is why the destruction of important exurban sanctuaries in wartime was tantamount to destroying a city itself.

The sanctification of a particular spot was subject to various political considerations. At some sites, votaries of existing gods were reluctant to admit competition from a new deity. On the other hand, there were economic benefits to the communities where major deities were given residence, for pilgrims brought fees and a brisk production and sale of votive objects. A series of wars was actually fought to gain control of the Panhellenic sanctuary of Delphi.

Topography and a tendency for siting within a well-chosen frame of the spirit-charged natural world dictated the location of temples and altars. Axiality for its own sake did not govern the planning of pre-Hellenistic Greek temple precincts. Symmetrically laid-out terraces, colonnades, stairways, and altars were devices of the Hellenistic era; prior to the second third of the fourth century B.C.E., in the Archaic and Classical periods, the approach was less studied, and such axial relationships as existed were implied lines linking temples with particular distant mountains because of their associations of sanctity. The result was often a landscape "design" that we experience as dramatic and picturesque. These impressions, however, are informed by a modern sensibility. The Greeks did not see their temple precincts as we do—as an artistic arrangement of bleached ruins haunted by vanished time, with mountains and sea

completing the romantic scene. In their ascendant centuries, the temples were brightly painted, and pilgrimages to them were not those of tourists, but of religious supplicants. Nature and divinity were inextricably fused; landscape was experienced religiously rather than aesthetically.

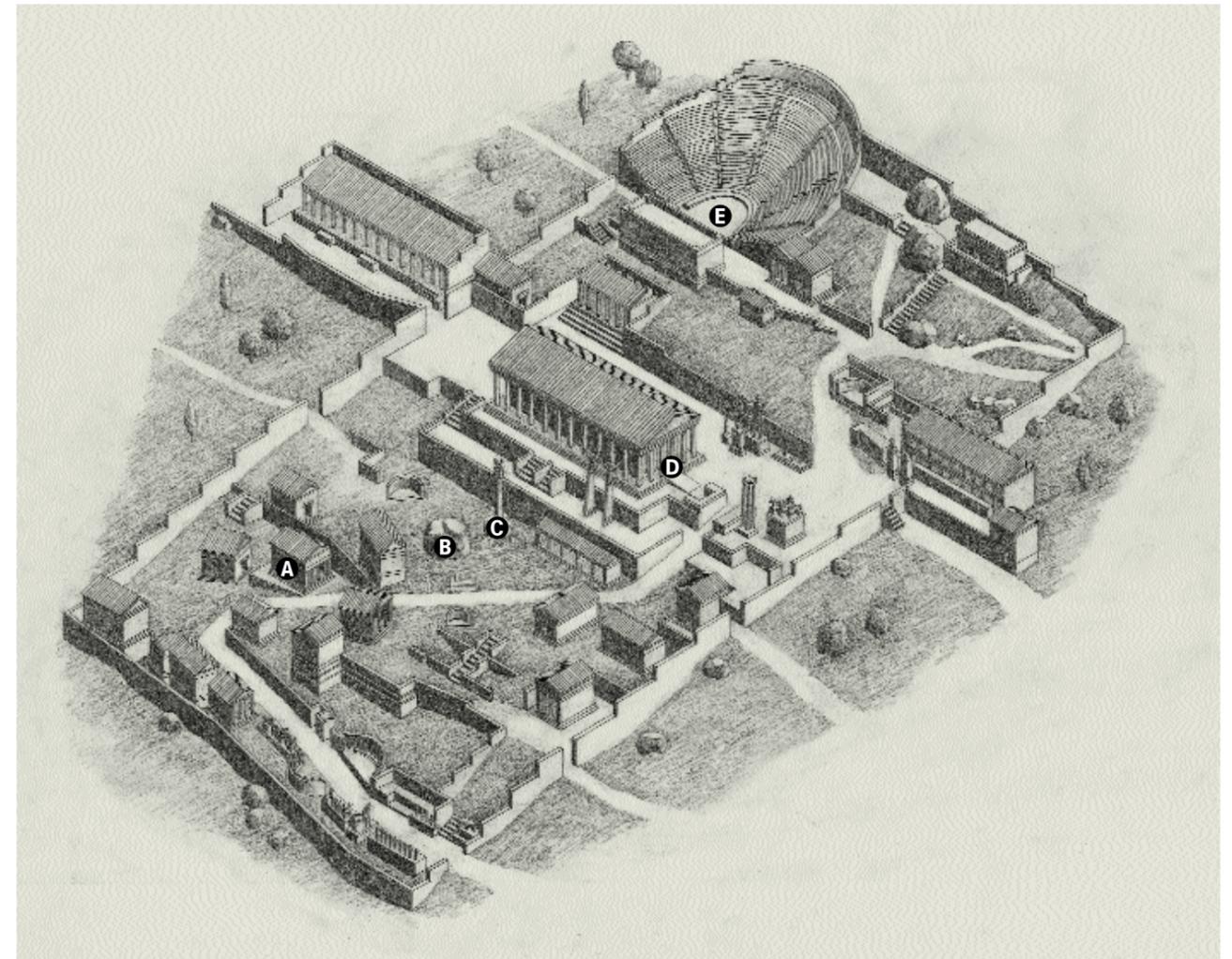
The visible echoes of previous ceremony and custom only deepened the sanctity and fame of certain sacred sites. Bloodstains on the altar, oil-anointed stones, accumulations of ash, bone, horns, and skulls—these signs of others' piety provided the weight of tradition. Votive offerings (the source of lively local industry), valuables of all kinds, including but not limited to the paraphernalia of sacrifice (vessels, axes, roasting spits, and especially, tripod cauldrons of metal) were contributed to the sanctuaries. Grateful victors donated shields and weapons of war. The victorious erected monuments and inscribed tablets proclaiming acts of glory. Various *poleis* built treasuries in the form of miniature temples, notably at Olympia and Delphi, to house valuable offerings and as further gifts to the presiding gods. *Stoas*, long

colonnades, roofed and with walls and often a series of rooms on the back side, provided shelter from the sun and an opportunity for the placement of more sanctified objects. Wealthy individuals contributed to the construction of stadiums and the many monuments that adorned the site. In this manner, important sanctuaries became crowded with a host of structures, numerous memorial gifts, and votive offerings. Nowhere was this more evident than at Delphi.

DELPHI

The most dramatic synthesis of site and sanctuary is to be found at Delphi, the spiritual center sacred to all Greeks and a place where rivalries among *poleis* were superseded by bonds of Panhellenic identity (fig. 2.2). Some of the architectural forms found here have served as frequently imitated prototypes throughout the history of landscape design. The circular *tholos* in the sanctuary of Athena Pronaia at Delphi in the site called Marmaria (the Marbles) along the pilgrimage route to Apollo's sanctuary, is the model for innumerable later garden temples (fig. 2.3). The various

2.2. Reconstructed Plan of Sanctuary of Apollo, Delphi. c. 400 B.C.E.
 A Treasury of the Athenians
 B Rock of the Sibyl
 C Sphinx of the Naxians
 D Temple of Apollo
 E Theater





2.3. Tholos, Sanctuary of Athena Pronaia, Delphi, perched on a ridge at Marmaria along the approach to Apollo's sanctuary. 4th century B.C.E.

Below: 2.4. Rock of the Sibyl and Temple of Apollo, Delphi. 4th century B.C.E.

treasuries within the *temenos* of Apollo found infinite replication in mausoleums of later times (fig. 2.5). Delphi's influence, along with that of other important sanctuaries, is visible in our own stadiums and outdoor summer festival theaters.

Pilgrimage to Delphi was made both for the purpose of consulting the Delphic oracle on affairs of state and in order to participate in the sacred games. It was a journey of men rather than women, who lacked an official role in government and did not generally take part in athletic contests. After

passing the fourth century B.C.E. *tholos* and the fifth century B.C.E. Temple of Athena Pronaia, marking the sanctuary of the goddess at Delphi, one stopped at the Kastalian Spring, a long-established site of cult worship marking the place known as Pytho because here Apollo killed "the bloated, great she-monster went to do great mischief to men upon earth," thereby becoming Pythian Apollo according to the Homeric hymn.⁴ It was believed that here Apollo had planted a branch cut from his sacred laurel tree in the Vale of Tempe, and because he had assumed the shape of a dolphin in order to steer the ship of the men from Crete whom he had commandeered as keepers of his temple, he enjoined them to pray to him also as Apollo Delphinus. Pilgrims to his Delphinus altar and participants en route to the Pythian Games, as the Panhellenic athletic contests held in Apollo's honor at Delphi were called, purified themselves with a ritual bathing of their hair in the water of the spring.

Upon entering the *temenos* of the Pythian Sanctuary of Apollo, which is perched on a flank of Mount Parnassus beneath the sacred Korycian Cave and above a steep drop to the valley where the Pleistos River snakes to the sea, they embarked upon the Sacred Way, a switchback path leading to the Temple of Apollo (fig. 2.4). This circuitous approach made access to the temple indirect, and intensified the dynamic relationship of the visitor to it and its dramatic surrounding landscape. Above the temple to the god loom the twin peaks of the Phaedriades, the Brilliant Ones. Though unplanned, this long-established approach route operated as an organizing force in the placement of the many treasuries and



monuments scattered about the site. The reservation of certain portions of the site for particular rituals also helped to create some sense of discipline within the array of monuments and structures.

At a point where the Sacred Way reversed its course and headed due north, it passed the Rock of the Sibyl. This was believed to be the precise spot where the female voice of Ge, or Gaia, the earth goddess, who had been worshiped here long before Apollo, originally offered oracular wisdom. Behind this boulder once stood the Archaic Sphinx of the Naxians: a crouched lion with eagle's wings and the visage of a woman held aloft on a tall Ionic column. With serene and enigmatic authority, it asserted the ancient rights of female prophecy within Apollo's sanctuary. Above the sphinx stood the peripteral colonnade of the temple, and soaring above these, hornlike, were the twin peaks of the Phaedriades. Upon the temple terrace, engraved marble *stelai* (of which one remains) and a fourth-century, 50-foot tall statue of Apollo gave majestic welcome to the pilgrim. Directly in front of the temple stood the Great Altar of Apollo, made of dark marble from the island of Chios, with white marble at its base and top.

In addition to a central hall, or *naos*, the Temple of Apollo contained an inner chamber, called the *adyton*, entered from above by steps. Beneath a stone canopy within the *adyton* was a round stone covered with fillets woven into a net. This was *omphalos*, the "navel" of the world and the "grave" of Dionysus, who was honored by an important biennial Delphic festival and was thus entitled to share with Apollo occupancy of the temple's most sacred area. A large tripod with a cauldron-shaped seat was placed next



to the *omphalos*. Within the belly of this tripod-cauldron priests stored sacred objects. Upon it sat the Pythia, priestess of Apollo, freshly bathed in the Kastalian Spring, when it was time to utter prophecy. Beside her grew a sacred laurel tree.

Within the *hestia*, or sacred hearth, burned laurel leaves and barley. The fumes from these enhanced the mystical atmosphere of the *adyton* and presumably aided the prophetess in achieving a trancelike state known as *enthousiamos*, in which the spirit of the god entered into her mind and mouth. Her speech, which was often unintelligible, was "translated" into hexameter verse by priests standing nearby. Thus, this temple, which was holy to all Greeks, was the place where art joined with the old mystical powers of the earth, and Apollonian light fused with the dark impulses of Dionysian spirit.

Assisting in this process at Delphi was the theater, or rather a succession of theaters, the latest one, which seats five thousand people, dating from the time of imperial Rome (fig. 2.6). Behind a horseshoe-shaped orchestra, 60 feet in diameter, thirty-five rows of seats, broken at the twenty-eighth row by a *diazoma*, or inside circular aisle, are set within the contours of the steep hillside. Here choristers sang hymns to Apollo, and playwrights and musicians competed for honor during various festivals, including the Pythian Games.

After 450 B.C.E., a stadium occupied a site farther up the hillside above the sanctuary and theater. Musical contests and, later, games were held there. During Roman imperial times, an Athenian philanthropist gave the stadium its monumental entrance and stone seating for seven thousand spectators.



2.5. Treasury of the Athenians, Delphi. After 490 B.C.E., built following the Battle of Marathon

Below: 2.6. Theater, Delphi. 4th century B.C.E.



2.7. Theater, Epidaurus.
c. 320–30 B.C.E.

EPIDAUROS

Among the most important festival centers of ancient Greece is the sanctuary of Asclepius at Epidaurus, an ancient sanatorium where patients' dreams played a role in their diagnosis and where a special open-air sleeping area served as a therapeutic facility. According to the Greek lyric poet Pindar, Asclepius, the son of Apollo and his mortal lover, Coronis, was raised by the centaur Chiron, who taught him the healing arts. While dedicated to Apollonian harmony of mind, body, and spirit, Asclepius was linked to the remote Greek past, and he therefore shares with the Cretan goddess Potnia the symbol of the snake. It is for this reason that the modern physician's emblem, bequeathed to us from ancient Greece, is a *caduceus*, a staff intertwined with snakes.

To the powerful natural serenity of the site at Epidaurus, cradled in undulating hills, was added the harmony of architectural geometry. Polycleitus the Younger designed the theater there in the fourth century B.C.E.; it was enlarged in the second century B.C.E. (fig. 2.7). The perfect circle of the orchestra is thought to be an outgrowth of the *halos*, the circular threshing floor upon which the first ritual dances and dramas of ancient Greece were performed. The ratio of its lower fan of thirty-four rows to its upper twenty-one (34:21), is 1.618, or that of the Golden Section.⁵ The ratio of fifty-five total rows to its original thirty-four (55:34) is also close to 1.618. Further evidence of the use of the Golden Section as the underlying design principle by Polycleitus and his followers: the sum of the first ten numerical digits added together is fifty-five; the sum of the first six digits is twenty-one; and the sum of digits seven

through ten is thirty-four. Even those unaware of Greek mathematics, however, feel intuitively the beauty derived from the combined power of site and geometry, of mountainous majesty and mathematical beauty.

In the process of enlarging both its form and its meaning, the Greek *polis* had incorporated and absorbed its ancient acropolis, the fortified citadel that had once been the home of both the people and their gods. Though, with the important exception of Athens, the residential and civic center was now separated from the outlying sanctuaries set in nature, both together constituted the regional space defined as *chora*. Cityscape, or the urbanized landscape, is an important part of our continuing story, and the Greek contribution to landscape design was certainly not confined to pilgrimage centers remote from the everyday haunts of humanity. Because the philosophical notion of *chora* was one in which the festival center in nature was perceived as one pole of a spatial continuum and the urban center the other—both together constituting the *polis*, or city-state, a regional polity—we must now look more closely at the civic component. Inevitably, the *polis* as a governmental institution gave rise to new ideas about urban layout and new urban institutions, enriching the concept of city with customs and structures that reflected an independent, collective society. And, as is common knowledge, the Greek political concept of self-governance and the planning and architectural forms that expressed it have been vastly influential in the West throughout history.