

The Ionic Friezes of the Hephaisteion in the Athenian Agora

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Abstract: *This paper examines in depth all the features of the Ionic friezes of the Hephaisteion, their architectural position, their visibility, their iconography, their audience, their function and the intention of their construction. In contrast to the existing scholarship that examines separately single aspects of these architectural sculptures, in this research I have tried to investigate the Hephaisteion Ionic friezes as a whole and incorporate them in the ensemble of the other preserved Ionic friezes of fifth-century BC Attic Doric temples. My research started during the summer 2014 when I was working in the excavations of the Athenian Agora conducted by the American School of Classical Studies at Athens. During this time I had the opportunity to familiarise myself in detail with the topography, the monuments of the site of the Agora and the excavation reports of the American School and carry out an autopsy in the Hephaisteion. Additionally, I was granted permission from the First Ephorate of Classical Antiquities, to enter the interior of the Parthenon in order to investigate in detail the architectural position and the visibility of the copies of the Ionic frieze still standing at the Western side of the temple. I also visited the temple of Poseidon at Sounion and the Archaeological Museum of Lavrion to examine the Ionic frieze surviving from this temple. Through the autopsy of these three temples and their Ionic friezes and after the detailed study of modern scholarship, I tried to understand and interpret the function and the purpose of the Ionic friezes within Athenian Doric temples as well as their broader cultural and historical context.*

The Hephaisteion, the Doric temple of Hephaistos and Athena Ergane, crowning the Kolonos Agoraios hill, at the west side of the Athenian Agora, is the best preserved Doric temple from Antiquity.¹ Most scholars agree that its construction started sometime in the middle of the fifth-century BC (460-449/448 BC) but its upper parts, including its architectural sculptures, were finished in the 420s BC.²

Despite its Doric order, the sculptural decoration of the Hephaisteion included two continuous Ionic friezes set over the pronaos of the eastern side and the opisthodomos of the western side. The incorporation of these Ionic elements in a Doric structure was not a new feature in Greek architecture. The archaeological record shows that this juxtaposition of the two orders was exercised as an experimentation from early on in Asia Minor and became common practice in fifth-century BC Athens. Unfortunately, except for the Hephaisteion Ionic friezes, there are only two other cases preserved in Attica: one from the temple of Poseidon at Sounion and one from the Parthenon on the Acropolis of Athens. These Ionic friezes are not preserved today on their temples. The Sounion Ionic frieze is exhibited in the Archaeological Museum of Lavrion and the Parthenon Ionic frieze in the Acropolis Museum of Athens and the British Museum of London with some fragments in the Louvre and the museums of Palermo, the Vatican, Würzburg, Vienna, Munich and Copenhagen. Therefore, only the Ionic friezes of the Hephaisteion have the unique advantage of being preserved in their original position on the temple, with only minor damage and alterations, so that their situation and function can be researched *in situ*.

The structure of this paper mirrors the procedure of my research. The first part offers an examination of the architectural and sculptural features of the Sounion and the Parthenon Ionic friezes, the Attic predecessors of the Hephaisteion ones. My aim is to analyse the origins of the tradition of the Ionic friezes on Attic Doric temples and establish a benchmark

¹ Camp 1986, 82-84.

² Barringer 2009, 105; Camp 1986, 87; Lawrence 1983, 129.

against which to interpret the Hephaisteion Ionic friezes. In the next two sections, my main focus is the Ionic friezes of the Hephaisteion. I investigate how far these architectural sculptures were meaningful choices of their Athenian commissioners and how far their architectural position, their visibility, their audience and their iconography associate them with the historical circumstances and the political pursuits of fifth-century BC Athens. Therefore, through my research, I attempt to show that the Ionic friezes on these Doric temples were not simply an artistic innovation of fifth-century BC architectural sculpture that flourished in the wealthy environment of Periklean Athens, but that their architectural order and iconography were used consciously by the city of Athens to transmit pro-Athenian messages and constitute eternal monuments of the Athenian achievements.

The Doric temple of Poseidon, situated on the top of the cliff of cape Sounion, at the southernmost point of Attica, was constructed in c.440s BC.³ This date makes it contemporary to the construction of the Parthenon and earlier than the final upper parts of the superstructure of the Hephaisteion. Fourteen slabs of its Ionic frieze were discovered scattered around the temple in very poor condition during the nineteenth century and later during the systematic excavations on the site of Sounion.⁴ Since none of the fourteen Parian marble slabs survives *in situ*, the reconstruction of the frieze's positioning on the temple is very difficult and controversial. The most broadly accepted view situates the Ionic frieze in the interior of the front, eastern, porch of the temple. The various observations on the find spots of the slabs and the Lesbian kyma along the top of at least three sides of the inner architrave have shown that this frieze ran continuously around all four sides of the eastern porch looking inwards (Fig.1).⁵ This 'box-like scheme' covering all four walls of the pronaos is unique in Classical architectural sculpture. Only a variation of it appears in the late fifth-century BC in the temple of Apollo at Bassae in Peloponnese, where the continuous Ionic frieze crowned the architrave in the interior of the cella and was looking again inwards.⁶

This exact position of the frieze offered a difficult viewing perspective to the visitors of the sanctuary. The ancient viewer, when approaching the temple, would have probably been able to see through the exterior colonnade the side of the Ionic frieze situated over the entrance of the cella. But the other three sides would have only been visible if one penetrated the eastern porch of the temple and looked upwards over the colonnade into three different directions towards the north, the east and the south. The viewing conditions from there though must have been still poor due to the minimal light reaching the higher parts of the eastern porch, the shade created by the roof and the very steep angle of vision. All these problems reveal that the Sounion frieze probably had a very limited audience. However, the choice of its position at the eastern side of the temple and the careful detailed carving of various mythological scenes on it show that it had a great importance and that its commissioners attempted to emphasize the entrance of the temple.⁷

As for the stylistic and iconographical assessment of the frieze, from my visit in the Archaeological Museum of Lavrion, I found it almost impossible to recognise any specific myths on most of the slabs. The illustrations on the labels of the slabs in the museum and the drawings of Kanellopoulos accompanying Leventi's research are very ambitious attempts to reconstruct a few scenes by following the outlines of the figures, which are totally destroyed, and by using comparative evidence. The iconography that these reconstructions suggest

³ Boardman 1985, 146; Camp 2001, 108; Lawrence 1983, 130; Leventi 2009, 121.

⁴ Leventi 2009, 121.

⁵ Leventi 2009, 121-122.

⁶ Lawrence 1983, 134.

⁷ Leventi 2009, 121-128.

shows the existence of very traditional Athenian subjects on the Ionic frieze of Sounion, such as the Gigantomachy (Fig.5), the Centauromachy and the Calydonian boar hunt.⁸

The other predecessor of the Ionic friezes of the Hephaisteion comes from the Parthenon, the large Doric temple erected on the highest point of the cliff of the Acropolis. According to Pollitt, the Ionic frieze, which was part of the large assemblage of architectural sculptures that embellished the temple of Athena Parthenos, was constructed in the years from 442 BC to 438 BC.⁹ In contrast to the Hephaisteion that had two Ionic friezes, one over its pronaos and one over its opisthodomos, the Parthenon had one Ionic frieze which was c.160 m long and ran continuously along all four sides of the internal chamber of the Parthenon, over the architrave, looking outwards towards the exterior colonnade (Fig.2).¹⁰ As Korres observes, this type of Ionic frieze is unique in Doric temples because most of them are normally found at the front and the rear porches.¹¹ So, this kind of continuous frieze, running on all four sides of a structure, doesn't appear in any other Doric building. On the contrary, it is a common feature of Ionic temples like the Athena Nike temple on the Acropolis or the Ilissos temple both built in the second half of the fifth century BC.¹²

The situation of the Parthenon Ionic frieze described above, in combination with the large scale and monumentality of the Parthenon bring us to the question of its visibility. During my visits in the Parthenon I had the chance to investigate the degrees of visibility at the western porch where the superstructure of the building is still standing and copies of the Ionic frieze are preserved in their original place. From my autopsy various problems have been identified. First of all, when looking at the Parthenon from a distance the Ionic frieze seems hidden behind the exterior entablature. Additionally, the situation of the frieze c. 40 feet above the pteron floor and the narrow width of the pteromata create a very steep angle of vision so that it is almost impossible to recognise any details of the depicted iconography even for the viewer standing at the aisles of the temple.¹³ This exact problem has been identified also by many scholars who note that in Antiquity with the coffered ceiling still standing, the area of the frieze would not have had direct natural light coming in at almost any time of the day.¹⁴ During my inspection I found that the area offering the best visibility was from steps of the Parthenon or in close proximity to them, where in Antiquity, according to Marconi, there was an elevated terrace surrounding the Parthenon.¹⁵ But even from there, the viewer could not recognise all the details due to the height. Additionally, the view was interrupted by the columns so that there was a shift of what was seen according to the location of the spectator.¹⁶ Osborne argues that this exact obstruction of the frieze's continuity by the columns aimed at engaging the viewers. So, the spectators, by trying to comprehend the whole sequence of the frieze, moved around the temple, from the west along the long sides towards the east, the entrance of the temple.¹⁷

The carving style and the iconography implied the same action, too. The moving procession of the Panathenaic festival, as has been proposed by most scholars, with the cavalry of the western, southern and northern sides slowed down as approaching the eastern side.¹⁸ There the central 'Peplos scene' offered a lot of stability at a spot just over the

⁸ Leventi 2009, 122.

⁹ Pollitt 1997, 51.

¹⁰ Boardman 1985, 106; Camp 2001, 79.

¹¹ Korres 1994, 29.

¹² Palagia 2005, 177-192.

¹³ Lawrence 1983, 114; Marconi 2009, 159-160.

¹⁴ Lawrence 1983, 114-115; Marconi 2009, 161; Osborne 1987, 99.

¹⁵ Marconi 2009, 159.

¹⁶ Boardman 1985, 100; Marconi 2009, 162; Osborne 1987, 98-99.

¹⁷ Marconi 2009, 159; Osborne 1987, 99-102.

¹⁸ Boardman 1985, 106; Camp 2001, 79; Osborne 1987, 100-101.

entrance of the Parthenon and the viewers were encouraged to stop. So, the frieze was used to engage with the audience, move them around to the entrance of the Parthenon and attract their attention and focus at the eastern side of the temple.

Thus far we have been dealing with two fifth-century BC Ionic friezes which show a great level of individuality and experimentation in their architectural position. However, their situation very high above the eye-level of the viewers, their low visibility conditions, the emphasis of the eastern side of the temples and the engagement with the spectators are some common characteristics found on both the Sounion and Parthenon Ionic friezes. This observation could indicate that despite the great distinctiveness of each of the above Ionic friezes a common intention and agenda existed behind their construction and their incorporation within the Doric temples. Specifically for the Parthenon, Korres has proposed that the Ionic frieze was introduced in a later stage of the temple's construction. It replaced a simple Doric frieze of undecorated metopes and triglyphs of the original plan. According to this theory, the inclusion of the continuous figurative frieze intended to give a further meaning to the Parthenon by adding the representation of the Athenian state to its sculptural programme.¹⁹ This idea seems to me very plausible in the historical context of fifth-century BC Athens. As Marconi mentions, figural decoration in the Greek world had the power to transform a building into a spectacle that would catch the attention of the visitor of a sanctuary and transmit specific messages.²⁰ This function of monumental decoration was extremely important in Periklean Athens when all the artistic choices on public monuments were intended to project the wealth and the power of the city and strengthen the identity of fifth-century Athenians. So, several political intentions and ideological pursuits must have influenced the incorporation of Ionic friezes in Doric temples of Attica in the fifth century BC. This idea will be explored further in the two Ionic friezes of the Hephaisteion, a temple built in the Athenian Agora, the most central part of the Athenian civic life.

The Hephaisteion was a Doric temple, which, in addition to its pedimental sculptures and its external Doric frieze of metopes and triglyphs, incorporated two continuous Ionic friezes along its short sides: the one set over the opisthodomos of the western side and the other over the pronaos of the eastern side.

The western Ionic frieze consisted of four rectangular slabs of Parian marble and was set over the architrave of the opisthodomos starting from the corners above each of the antae of the walls of the rear chamber.²¹ It was approximately 8m long and was restricted to the width of the inner building without extending further out towards the pteroma nor the exterior colonnade.²² However, the eastern Ionic frieze was set in a slightly different position (Fig.3). Like the western Ionic frieze, it crowned the inner architrave of the pronaos, but the arrangement of architrave and Ionic frieze was not confined to the dimensions of the interior structure as it happened in the opisthodomos. On the contrary, it was longer (approximately 11m long), it consisted of six rectangular slabs of Parian marble and extended across and over the pteroma, up to the back of the entablature of the external colonnade. More specifically, the two ends of the eastern Ionic frieze were situated exactly over the third column from the façade on both the north and south long sides, at the exact spots, where also the last decorated metopes of the external Doric frieze of the Hephaisteion were set.²³

From the above description, it is clear that the two Ionic friezes of the Hephaisteion, despite their almost symmetrical setting within the front and rear chambers of the same temple, featured a slightly different architectural position. Morgan suggests that the lack of

¹⁹ Korres 1994, 33.

²⁰ Marconi 2009, 167-169.

²¹ Lawrence 1983, 129.

²² Camp 1986, 86; Morgan 1962, 221.

²³ Boardman 1985, 147; Camp 2001, 102.

extension of the western Ionic frieze to the entablature of the exterior colonnade could imply a shortage of Parian marble during the period of its construction, probably the first phase of the Peloponnesian War.²⁴ However, in my opinion, the reason for the extension of the eastern Ionic frieze over the pteroma and its uniformity with the exterior metopes have been to highlight the eastern side of the temple with an elaborate sculptural composition.²⁵

This idea of emphasizing the entrance of the temple has been explored also in chapter one, on the temple of Poseidon at Sounion and on the Parthenon where the setting of the Ionic friezes drew the attention to the entrance of those temples. In the Hephaisteion, this scheme can be supported further by other architectural and sculptural features of the temple. First of all, by examining the plan shows of the Hephaisteion one can see that the eastern end of the peristyle and the pronaos were deeper than the western end and the opisthodomos.²⁶ This feature is related to the different function of each room. So, the eastern side, where the entrance of the temple was, provided the first view in the interior of the building. Therefore the pronaos required more space to create a progressive magnificence that would have intensified the experience of the worshippers of the temple and would have as a highlight the cult statues of Hephaistos and Athena made by Alkamenes at the end of the cella.²⁷ On the contrary, the opisthodomos was a narrow room, enclosed with bronze grilles and did not require lots of space since it was used as a treasury and storage for dedications.²⁸ Secondly, most of the architectural sculptures of the Hephaisteion (Doric sculpted frieze, pedimental sculptural decoration and akroteria) were concentrated on the eastern side of the temple. According to Thompson's analysis the triangular space of the eastern pediment and the akroteria would have been decorated with elaborate sculptures including probably six sculptural pieces (In. No. S147, S1313, S1232, S785, S737, S429) discovered at the eastern, south-eastern and north-eastern sides of the Hephaisteion during the excavations of the Agora.²⁹ Additionally, only eighteen of the metopes of the exterior Doric frieze of the Hephaisteion were carved, and they are all set at the eastern part of the temple, ten on the façade and four at the easternmost northern side and four at the easternmost southern side. This evidence for the concentration of the major architectural sculptures of the Hephaisteion at its eastern side, shows that there was an intention in the plan of the temples' decoration to drive the viewer's attention to the entrance of the building.

The investigation of the degrees of visibility of the Hephaisteion Ionic friezes gave me slightly different results from the respective autopsy that I carried out for the Parthenon Ionic frieze. So, in the temple of Hephaistos and Athena Ergane, from the terrace at the top of Kolonos Agoraios hill, both Ionic friezes could be seen very clearly from inside and outside of the temple, from the steps and from slightly further away from them. Except for the six columns of the front and rear short sides of the Hephaisteion, that slightly disrupted the continuity of the Ionic friezes, there were no major obstructions by the roof or the exterior entablature, even when I examined their viewing perspective from the corners of the short sides of the temple. However, in the Parthenon, as I analysed in chapter one, the roof and the exterior superstructure hid and obstructed the view of the Ionic frieze to a high degree, allowing a better visibility of it only from the area of the steps of the temple or in close proximity to them. Additionally, in contrast with the Parthenon that required the moving of the gaze of the audience along the Ionic frieze, the frontal situation of the two Ionic friezes of the Hephaisteion impelled a more static viewing experience.

²⁴ Morgan 1962, 221-222.

²⁵ The height of the metopes and the eastern Ionic frieze of the Hephaisteion is c.0.828m (Morgan 1962, 222).

²⁶ Lawrence 1983, 129.

²⁷ Camp 1986, 86-87.

²⁸ Dinsmoor 1950, 393.

²⁹ Thompson 1949, 233-236.

The above observations urged me to research the possible factors that could lead to the higher visibility conditions of the Hephaisteion Ionic friezes from the level of the hill. By examining the measurements of the Hephaisteion and the Parthenon given by Dinsmoor, I realised that the relative dimensions of the Hephaisteion regarding its size, the height of its entablature, the height and width of its external columns and the width of its pteroma made this temple and its Ionic friezes more accessible to human eyes than the gigantic Parthenon.³⁰

However, the visibility of the two Ionic friezes of the Hephaisteion changes a lot from the ground underneath the Kolonos Agoraios hill which, according to scholars, was the intentional view designed for the temple.³¹ Considering the level of the Agora, as the most usual view of the temple, I investigated on the site the area with the best viewing angle for the eastern Ionic frieze of the Hephaisteion. That was on the foot of the Kolonos Agoraios hill at the end of its eastern slope. At this site on the lower slope of the hill four long rows of soft poros blocks were constructed sometime after the middle of the fifth century BC. This structure, usually called ‘the synedrion’, was probably a meeting-place used for law courts or other significant Athenian assemblies.³² From there I realised that when I was looking up to the Hephaisteion its prominent position on top of the hill created a ‘Parthenon-like’ effect for its eastern Ionic frieze. So, in contrast to the clear view I got from the top of the Kolonos Agoraios hill, in this case the eastern Ionic frieze seemed to be extremely high for the viewer and very far away for the human eye to make any specific identification. So, were these sculptures supposed to be seen just from the top of the hill or also from the ground of the Agora, even without clarity? Tomlinson notes that the sanctuary of Hephaistos was not a major cult centre but its prominence derived from its direct relationship with the Agora below and to the east.³³ Barringer as well as Thompson and Wycherley have commented that the benches of the ‘synedrion’ are aligned with the lines of the Hephaisteion (Fig.4).³⁴ The above observations could imply an effort to associate the temple of Hephaistos with the civic centre of Athens and intentionally frame it with the major buildings and structures used for various institutions of the Athenian democracy including the Bouleuterion and the Tholos further south. In this sense, it is clear that the sculptures of the Hephaisteion and its eastern Ionic frieze were meant to be seen by the citizens and the people in the Agora. Therefore, the viewing perspective from the ground of the civic centre of Athens, even though relatively poor, was acceptable and meaningful.

As for the western side of the hill, due to the modern landscaping and the occupation by Agion Asomaton street, it was very difficult for me to assess the possible viewing perspectives of the western Ionic frieze from the area underneath the hill, but I would suggest that the visibility might have been similar to the visibility of the eastern Ionic frieze from the ground of the Agora. The excavations by the American School have shown that the slope and the ground beneath the western side of Kolonos Agoraios hill were occupied by a more commercial area of the centre of Athens. The finds (iron and bronze slags, bronze casting pits, fragments of clay moulds) correspond also to references in the ancient literary sources, such as Andocides mentioning a ‘χαλκείον’ close to the temple of Hephaistos, and indicate the existence of metalworking workshops with craftsmen who worked under the guardianship

³⁰ The dimensions of the Hephaisteion are 13.708 x 31.769 m. while of the Parthenon 30.880 x 69.503 m. Similar differences can be found at the height of the external columns of the temples (Hephaisteion: 5.713 m, Parthenon: 10.433 m.) and the entablature (Hephaisteion: 6 ft. 7 ½ inches and 6 ft. 6 inches, Parthenon :10 ft. 9 ¾ inches.). Furthermore, the columns of the Hephaisteion are more slender (diameter: 1.018 m. and 1.038 m. at the corners) than the Parthenon ones (1.905 m. and 1.948 m. at the corners). (Dinsmoor 1950, Appendix: Chronological List of Greek Temples).

³¹ Camp 1986, 84; Lawrence 1983, 129; Tomlinson 1989, 44.

³² Camp 1986, 100.

³³ Tomlinson 1989, 74.

³⁴ Barringer 2009, 110-111; Thompson and Wycherley 1972, 149.

of their patron god, Hephaistos.³⁵ The main roads, which led from the gates of the walls of Athens to the centre of the city, was another feature of the area under the hill. These roads probably had a view to the western side of the Hephaisteion and its sculptures but with no possibility of a comprehensive viewing of the iconography.³⁶ Pausanias' description, who approaches the Agora from a colonnaded street that led inward from the Dipylon gate, can prove the visibility of the temple from the major road ways that led to centre: *‘ὕπερ δὲ τὸν Κεραμεικὸν καὶ στοὰν τὴν καλουμένην Βασιλείον ναὸς ἔστιν Ἡφαίστου’*.³⁷ The use of the word *‘ὕπερ’* (above) can help us also reconstruct the prominent viewing effect that the temple would give to the passers-by at the road ways.

The above examination of the visibility of the two Ionic friezes of the Hephaisteion and the context of the proposed viewing perspectives opens the question of the audience that these sculptures addressed. This clarification is needed to help us understand the function and the meaning of the iconography of the Hephaisteion Ionic friezes that will be analysed later.

The most obvious category of people that the friezes referred to were the worshippers of the sanctuary of Hephaistos. The worshippers would have approached the entrance of the temple from its eastern side. On ascending the hill from the area of the Agora, they would have been confronted by the heavily decorated exterior of this side with the pedimental sculptures, the Doric sculpted metopes and the eastern Ionic frieze. The visibility of the iconography of these sculptures would have been enhanced as the individuals came closer to the entrance of the temple. Furthermore, the worshippers spending time within the temenos of Hephaistos on the top of Kolonos Agoraios hill would have also been the intended audience for the high visibility offered on the level of the hill. From there the viewers would have had the opportunity to examine in detail the represented scenes and the iconography of the two Ionic friezes identifying the depicted subjects and the figures that participated in them.

The audience seeing the view from beneath the hill, was extremely significant, too, despite the low visibility conditions. From the Agora the immediate viewers of the eastern Ionic frieze would have been mostly Athenian citizens engaged in political affairs in the structures like the *‘synedrion’* and the *Bouleuterion*. We will return to this point in chapter three, but it suffices to say that this area constituted a highly charged political context that was taken into account in the choice of the iconography of the eastern Ionic frieze. On the western slope of the hill, in the area where metalworking activity has been detected, the immediate audience would have been the craftsmen and metalworkers whose patron god was Hephaistos. Finally, in the audience of the Hephaisteion Ionic friezes must be included the traders, the passers-by and the visitors who would be in the area and the streets around Kolonos Agoraios hill. These could have been either citizens, metics, foreigners living in Athens, or people from other cities visiting Athens. The visibility that the above audiences would have from underneath the hill would have been relatively poor and it would not allow them to identify with specificity the depicted subjects. This fact though, would not decrease the value or the impact that these reliefs would have to the viewers. On the contrary, it would give to the reliefs a more generic character that would allow a self-interpretation of the meaning of the represented scenes according to the individual spectator.

Hölscher mentions that each architectural sculpture has an iconographic programme that expresses the ideology of the commissioners. In each case there is what he calls *‘an intensive situation of visual communication’* where authors or artists would aim intensively to influence their specific audience with their visual concepts and the viewers would decipher equally such concepts.³⁸ The Athenian ideology in the second quarter of the fifth century BC

³⁵ Andocides *On the Mysteries* 40; Thompson and Wycherley 1972, 142-145 & 171 & 188-190.

³⁶ Thompson and Wycherley 1972, 192-193.

³⁷ Pausanias, *Description of Greece* 1.14.6.

³⁸ Hölscher 2009, 54.

relates very much to this idea. Due to the power of Athens during this period and the increasing rivalry with the Peloponnesians the external image of the city was very important. The city of Athens as a commissioner used the decoration of every public monument as a vehicle of political propaganda. Therefore each architectural or sculptural work had a carefully planned agenda that considered the possible audience and the messages that it intended to transmit. The result of this policy is expressed very elaborately by Thucydides in his first book where he compares the impression that Athens and Sparta would give to the future generations from just their buildings. In this case he mentions that ‘διπλασίαν ἂν τὴν δύναμιν εἰκάζεσθαι ἀπὸ τῆς φανεράς ὄψεως τῆς πόλεως ἢ ἔστιν’, namely that Athens would seem to have double the power than it really had just from the appearance of the city.³⁹

The identification of the exact subject of the eastern Ionic frieze of the Hephaisteion has been very controversial for scholars due to the lack of descriptions in the ancient literary sources, as for example Pausanias’ *Description of Greece*, and the difficulty in defining the represented figures. However, from the general representation it is certain that an indeterminate battle observed by an assembly of gods is depicted.

This frieze is preserved in a relatively good condition on the temple except for the mutilated faces and genitals of the figures, destroyed probably during early Christian times.⁴⁰ With a close observation on the relief one can understand that a single moment of the struggle is represented and not the whole sequence of it. The symmetry of the composition and the synoptic narrative which is depicted do not require the gaze of the viewers to move along the continuous relief from the one end to the other. On the contrary the observers are urged to move their gaze from the two edges towards the centre and then focus on a central point over the entrance of the temple.

On the side slabs, 1 and 6, two quiet and relatively unimportant episodes of the battle are depicted.⁴¹ Each of these episodes consists of five figures engaged in small-scale battles, some naked and some draped and, according to Harrison’s analysis, they would have held a variety of weapons.⁴² The next pair of slabs, 2 and 5, are situated over the antae of the walls of the pronaos and carry two assemblies of gods who are the spectators of the conflict. On each of the slabs three deities are depicted. The divinities at the south, slab 2, are easily recognisable from their attributes. The goddess Athena with her aegis and shield is at the southernmost end. Then Hera or the Mother of the Gods is depicted and then Zeus holding his sceptre.⁴³ Unfortunately, the attributes of the divinities at the north assembly, slab 5, haven’t survived and their identity is more difficult to determine. Despite this problem, scholars have recognised Hephaistos at the northernmost end, corresponding to Athena, the co-owner of the temple, at the south assembly. The next figures have been suggested as Aphrodite, the wife of Hephaistos, and Apollo. More specifically, Aphrodite and Apollo could be considered appropriate for this assembly because they also had their shrines in the Agora, not far away from the site of the Hephaisteion.⁴⁴ The deities are highly distinguishable from the other figures due to their representation and style. All of them are seated and draped with elaborate formal clothing. Additionally, they appear on a larger scale in comparison to the combatants and their seated position covers the whole height of the frieze. This element separates them from the mortals and emphasizes their supremacy and their divine origins. The same feature that distinguishes the immortals from the mortals is also found in the divine assembly of the Parthenon Ionic frieze. However, on both slabs 2 and 5, next to the divine

³⁹ Thucydides, *History* 1.10.2-3.

⁴⁰ Harrison 2005, 121.

⁴¹ I have adopted the numbering system used in: Morgan 1962, 221-235.

⁴² For the metal attachments see: Harrison 1988, 340-349.

⁴³ Morgan 1962, 232.

⁴⁴ Morgan 1962, 222.

assemblies, some combatants are also represented. The presence of these figures unifies the whole composition and situates the divine assembly within the battlefield. The juxtaposition of the divine world with the mortal one has parallels in Homer's *Iliad* where the gods actually watched the heroic combats between Greeks and Trojans and was a meaningful iconographical choice for fifth-century BC Athenians who commonly in their monuments associated the past or contemporary history of Athens with the divine world and tried thus to project symbolically their supremacy over the other Greek cities.

In the two central slabs, 3 and 4, the battle becomes more intense. Here, the most furious and cruel moments of combat are depicted with dead figures lying in the ground of the battlefield. The bodies are very naturalistic in style, and the opponents fight actively with extreme tension, so that they appear even with their back to the viewer. The complexity of the scene on slabs 3 and 4, make the exact identification of these battles impossible. However, on slab 4 a snapshot stands out from the rest of the combats: some of the naked combatants fight by carrying rocks instead of weapons while at the left edge of this slab a single naked figure dominates the scene. He wears only a himation and moves forward in a dynamic stance, attacking the figures with the rocks with his left extended arm. This is the key figure of the eastern Ionic frieze and was the focal point of the representation. The posture of this figure is extremely well known. It is copied from the posture of Aristogeiton from the bronze group of the Tyrannicides made by Kritios and Nesiotes in 477/476 BC. This was the second honorific statue set in the Agora of Athens for the heroes of Democracy who killed Hipparchos, the son of Peisistratus and contributed in the abolition of tyranny in Athens.⁴⁵ The Tyrannicides were heroized shortly after their own deaths (514 BC). Their first statue was made by Antenor and was set in the Agora of Athens in 510 BC, but it was looted by the Persians after the sack of Athens in 480 BC, only to be returned back to the city probably by Alexander the Great in the fourth century BC.⁴⁶ The act of the Tyrannicides as well as the abduction of their first statue by the Persians made gradually this sculptural group an important symbol of Athens. So, by the middle of the fifth century BC the second sculptural group of the Tyrannicides made by Kritios and Nesiotes was considered the emblem of Athenian democracy and had a high political value and significance for the city of Athens. Therefore, as I will argue below, the choice of the Tyrannicide's posture for the central figure of this frieze must have been very meaningful in the context of the Athenian Agora.

There is a big debate between scholars about who the central figure in the Tyrannicide's stance is. Hephaistos, the owner of the temple, participating in some mythological battle such as the battle between Greeks and Trojans at the Skamander River, has been suggested or the mythical Athenian king Erechtheus fighting Eumolpos and the Thracians.⁴⁷ Even though these ideas are plausible, I strongly agree with the suggestion that Theseus is the central figure of the eastern Ionic frieze.⁴⁸ This Athenian hero fitted very well in the context of the Hephaisteion for various reasons. First of all, Theseus' labours appeared in the northern and southern decorated metopes of the same temple.⁴⁹ Therefore, the Ionic frieze could be considered a further echo or continuation of the theme of Theseus. Secondly, the depiction of Theseus involved in various mythological battles was a very common Athenian decorative theme during the fifth century BC. In the Poikile Stoa, at the northern edge of the Agora, there was a famous painting of the Amazonomachy also depicting

⁴⁵ Thucydides *History* 6.54-59.

⁴⁶ Arrian, *Anabasis* 3.16.7; Pausanias, *Description of Greece* 1.8.5; Pliny, *Natural History* 34.70; Spivey 1996, 114.

⁴⁷ Delivorrias 1997, 89-90.

⁴⁸ Barringer 2009, 116; Morgan 1962, 226.

⁴⁹ Barringer 2009, 106; Camp 1986, 84.

Theseus and it was created in 475-450 BC.⁵⁰ Additionally, Pausanias writes about an akroterion at the Royal Stoa (sixth/early fifth century BC), just underneath the Kolonos Agoraios hill, which depicted an exploit of Theseus.⁵¹ So, we can understand that the mythological battles of Theseus were popular and suitable fifth century BC themes in the setting of the Agora.

As I mentioned above, the specific mythological battle depicted is very difficult to determine. However, from other well-known iconographical motifs, and from the representation of slab 4 we can suggest that a battle between civilised and uncivilised forces is depicted. The central figure, possibly Theseus, is the leader of some heroic combatants that fight against the primitive opponents who carry rocks. These opponents could of course be Giants and the battle could be a Gigantomachy which would correspond well to the Centauromachy represented on the western Ionic frieze of the Hephaisteion. However, the lack of divine involvement in the struggle, as we would expect in a Gigantomachy, argues against this interpretation. The most popular scholarly view, expressed first by Karl Müller, identifies the battle of Theseus against the Pallantids.⁵² Theseus defeated the children of Pallas who tried to claim his throne in the city of Athens after the death of his father Aegeus. The myth is described in Plutarch and Pausanias and could be used as an allegory for the abolition of tyranny by the act of Harmodios and Aristogeiton.⁵³ Theseus was the major local hero who unified Attica and according to Thucydides founded the city of Athens by setting one Bouleuterion and one Prytaneion: 'Ἐν βουλευτήριον ἀποδείξας καὶ πρυτανεῖον'.⁵⁴ So, during the fifth century BC Theseus was projected as the founder of the Athenian Democracy. However, even though I find Müller's identification of Theseus very plausible, I think it is important to mention that the figural composition of the eastern Ionic frieze of the Hephaisteion could have an allegorical meaning to the audience even without the specificity of a particular theme. Thus, in a period when the Athenians were engaged in the promotion of their Ionic origins, their military power and the superiority of democracy, the representation of a battle of mortal combatants against uncivilised forces, with a central figure in the stance of a Tyrannicide, would evoke pro-Athenian messages to the audience and would project the military supremacy of Athens, and of its democracy against any non-democratic foes.

In contrast to the difficulty in identifying the subject depicted on the eastern Ionic frieze, it is generally agreed that the western Ionic frieze shows a Centauromachy. This is a well-known mythological subject, found in the sculptures of many temples of mainland Greece such as the south metopes of the Parthenon, the west pediment of the temple of Zeus at Olympia and the Ionic frieze of the temple of Apollo at Bassae. On the four slabs of the western Ionic frieze of the Hephaisteion, a snapshot of the intense battle between the Centaurs and the Lapiths is captured. The representation is very uniform and compact and has tension and dynamism across its whole length. The viewer observes one moment of the struggle where mainly pairs of combatants fight each other. The individual combats do not have any sequential order or continuity but show the same moment of the turmoil in the battlefield.

Starting from the north-west side, on slab 1, a Centaur is ready to hit a fallen Lapith with a rock while next to him two Lapiths are attacking a hurt Centaur. On slab 2 an indeterminate struggle between a Centaur and a Lapith is shown next to a triangular composition of two Centaurs ready to hammer with a boulder into the ground a half-buried Lapith. This group is a very well-known iconographic motif of the Centauromachy which is

⁵⁰ Camp 1986, 66-72.

⁵¹ Pausanias, *Description of Greece* 1.3.1-2; Camp 1986, 53-54.

⁵² Müller 1873, 5-19.

⁵³ Pausanias, *Description of Greece* 1.22.2; Plutarch, *Theseus* 13.1-3.

⁵⁴ Thucydides, *History* 2.15.1-2.

found in other Ionic friezes of fifth-century BC Doric temples. It depicts the immortal Lapith Kaineus been beaten to the ground by the Centaurs in order to be killed.⁵⁵ This scene is also recognised on one of the slabs of the Ionic frieze of the temple of Poseidon at Sounion (c.440s BC) and on the Ionic frieze of the temple of Apollo at Bassae (c.429-400 BC).⁵⁶ The use of the same imagery on three different fifth-century BC temples suggests either the use of a common source or that this scene was an iconographical commonplace for fifth-century BC sculptors and a necessary clue for the identification of Centauromachy.⁵⁷ This last suggestion could also explain the central situation of the group on the western Ionic frieze of the Hephaisteion, next to an important figure, who is recognised as Theseus. Theseus is represented at the centre of the frieze, at the very start of slab 3 looking towards the Kaineus group and trying to defend the Lapith. He appears in heroic nudity leaning forwards with his right foot advanced and probably his right arm held up in a gesture of threat towards the Centaurs. As on the eastern Ionic frieze here too the posture of Theseus' body is highly recognisable. It derives again from the same bronze group of the Tyrannicides made by Kritios and Nesiotes in 477/476 BC. However, this time Harmodios and not Aristogeiton is copied.⁵⁸ With this artistic convention both of the Tyrannicides are shown symmetrically on the Ionic friezes of the Hephaisteion (Fig.5). The recognisable incident of Kaineus and Theseus, set in the middle of the battle, was probably supposed to be the focal point of the frieze and could make the subject recognisable even from further away. Next to Theseus, on the slab 3 the battle continues with two pairs of Lapiths and Centaurs fighting. Finally, on slab 4 a Lapith is shown attacking a Centaur who has just probably killed another Lapith who is lying at his feet and the composition ends with another struggle between a Centaur and a Lapith.

From the above description, some very important observations can be made. First of all, it is interesting that all the figures, both Lapiths and Centaurs, are carved in the same scale. This is probably due to the lack of a divine representation, which we had for example on the eastern Ionic frieze. This feature indicates the equal nature of the opponents and also the difficulty of the struggle that could be considered as a clash between equal powers. Secondly, there is a wide variety in the outcome of the represented combats of the Centauromachy. On the northernmost fight, slab 1, the Centaur is defeating the Lapith, while in the same slab some others Lapiths have overpowered a Centaur. Additionally, in some pairs, for example at the southernmost pair, slab 4, the result of the fighting between the opponents is yet to be determined. This diversity of outcomes emphasizes the fact that a frozen moment of the battle is depicted and gives to the scene a continuous, infinite and everlasting value. So, even though the end of the Centauromachy, with the defeat of the Centaurs, must have been well-known to the fifth-century BC audience, the vivid battle itself as an image must have transmitted to the viewers the agony of a struggle that goes on and on.

This observation could be linked to the actual function of this frieze in the context of the Athenian Agora. The Centauromachy was a suitable theme for Athenian architectural sculpture due to the involvement of the most important Athenian hero, Theseus, in it. However, the depiction of Theseus in the Tyrannicides' stance and the lack of other common subsidiary events of the struggle, as for example the rape of the Lapith women found on the western pediment of the temple of Zeus at Olympia, indicate that a further allegorical meaning was meant to be given to this subject. Spivey notes that according to Xenophon's *Cyropaedia* the Persians admired the Centaurs due to their own horsemanship and for this reason the Centauromachy was commonly used in the fifth century BC as a metaphor for the

⁵⁵ Camp 1986, 86.

⁵⁶ Lawrence 1983, 134.

⁵⁷ Morgan 1962, 223.

⁵⁸ Barringer 2009, 107.

intrusion of the Persians upon Greek territory.⁵⁹ So, the Centauromachy could be an evocation of actual historical battles against the Persians who stole the first honorific sculptural group of the Tyrannicides made by Antenor, but were defeated by the Athenians in Marathon (490 BC) and Salamis (480 BC). Therefore, this architectural sculpture functioned allegorically first of all as a memorial of the victory of the past generations over the foes of democracy, and secondly as a reminder of the role and responsibility of the Athenian citizens. In any case, Theseus is seen as a symbolic defender of the Athenian constitution who fights over despotism. He constitutes the exemplar for the citizens who could identify themselves on the figures of his fellow Lapiths. The everlasting sense of the battle between Centaurs and Lapiths could send a message about the necessity for the citizens to be constantly ready with a sleepless spirit to defend Athens from any type of tyranny.

The iconography of the two Ionic friezes of the Hephaisteion might seem to be the result of very common artistic choices regarding temple architectural sculpture. However, if we focus on the details of the represented subjects within the context of the fifth-century BC Athenian Agora, we will see that the themes were not just usual temple decoration but were planned to evoke particular political messages to the specific audience which they addressed.

As we saw earlier, the most immediate audience of the two Ionic friezes of the Hephaisteion would be the worshippers in the sanctuary on Kolonos Agoraios hill. In this sacred context the mythological subjects which were depicted on the friezes and especially, the divine assembly at the eastern Ionic frieze, which included also Athena and Hephaistos the owners of the temple, greeted the worshippers as they were approaching the sacred area of the temple and prepared them to confront the bronze cult statues of Hephaistos and Athena Ergane inside. Additionally, the use of mythical combats to allude events of historical Athens showed that the city was under the attention of the gods. The Olympians as spectators of the Athenian fights blessed, protected and favoured the city for its victories and successes against various foes of civilization, justifying thus its superiority over the other cities of the Greek world.⁶⁰ In that sense the Ionic friezes with the depiction of the mythical Athenian hero, Theseus, in the stance of the Tyrannicides, the historical Athenians heroes, in combats that alluded to real Athenian battles, worked as appropriate votive offerings that celebrated and gave thanks to the gods for what the Athenians have achieved.

As for the people underneath the hill, the vividness of the carving style, the vibrant colours (blue, red and green), the recognisable motifs such as the Tyrannicides' stance and the intense warfare, would have given to the representations a more generic character, understood and interpreted in different ways by the viewers.⁶¹ For Athenian citizens the mythological themes of the Hephaisteion served as analogies from mythical times for the more recent historical circumstances of Athens. Barringer writes that the Hephaisteion images invited Athenian viewers to take inspiration from the heroic deeds of the distant and recent past.⁶² In the face of Theseus we can see the mythical but also historical predecessors of Athens who never gave up but fought heroically against uncivilised forces and sacrificed themselves in favour of their city. This idea of constant defence of the city and sacrifice for it, no matter how difficult the struggle, is expressed also in Herodotus' book eight when he writes about how the besieged Athenians in the Acropolis during the Persian invasion of 480 BC defended themselves, although they had come to the utmost danger and their barricade had failed them, without listening to the proposed terms of surrender offered by the Peisistratids: *ἐνθαῦτα Ἀθηναίων οἱ πολιορκεόμενοι ὄμως ἡμύνοντο, καίπερ ἐς τὸ ἔσχατον κακοῦ ἀπιγμένοι καὶ τοῦ φράγματος προδεδωκότος οὐδὲ λόγους τῶν Πεισιστρατιδῶν*

⁵⁹ Spivey 1996, 142. See: Xenophon *Cyropaedia* 4.3.17-22.

⁶⁰ Boardman 1985, 168-169.

⁶¹ Harrison 1988, 339-341.

⁶² Barringer 2009, 106.

προσφερόντων περι ὁμολογίης ἐνεδέκοντο.⁶³ So, Theseus and his comrades on the two Ionic friezes of the Hephaisteion constituted the heroic models that the fifth-century Athenians were urged to imitate. At this point I think it is significant to mention that it was a common Athenian convention during the fifth century BC to represent mortal Athenians fighting alongside their local hero. The paintings of the Poikile stoa at the northern edge of the Agora represented mythological and historical Athenian exploits where mortal soldiers fought next to heroes like Marathon, Theseus and Herakles.⁶⁴ Additionally, according to Pliny and Plutarch, on the shield of the chryselephantine statue of Athena in the Parthenon, Pheidias carved a battle between the Athenians and the Amazons with portraits of Pericles and himself in the struggle.⁶⁵ The popularity of the self-identification of the Athenians in their sculpture and the juxtaposition of the human and mythical worlds in fifth-century BC Athens was a result of the contemporary political ideology of the city and its dominant strategy regarding public art. According to Osborne, in Greek temple architectural sculpture each narrative was planned in a way that enabled the viewers to read a story but also encouraged them to include themselves in the narrative told.⁶⁶ This idea can suggest that it would have been very easy for the Athenian observers of the Hephaisteion Ionic friezes to see themselves as the comrades of Theseus in the represented mythological battles.

The naturalism in the representation of the figures and some further features of the iconography encouraged the self-identification of Athenians on these sculptures even more. One of these elements is the clothing that some of the followers of Theseus are wearing on the eastern Ionic frieze. More specifically, some of the draped figures wear chlamydes and exomides, a type of dress which according to Barringer was commonly worn by soldiers, labourers, craftsmen or even slaves.⁶⁷ This iconographical choice can be explained by either the association of the sculpture with Hephaistos, the god of craftsmanship, or the need to increase the realism and the human-likeness of the scene. This artistic choice could be an immediate reference to the audience of the craftsmen and the metalworkers and could suggest that even the citizens who were craftsmen were considered heroes within the Athenian democracy. Delivorrias also suggests that this parallelism could indirectly indicate the important role in the city of Athens of the metalworkers who constructed and provided all the weaponry for warfare.⁶⁸ This association would have been even more obvious in Antiquity when the various metal attachments were still on the friezes.⁶⁹ Therefore, the friezes could also work as a tribute to the smiths who helped the city to achieve its great military victories.

The increasing realism of the themes of the Hephaisteion Ionic friezes and the allegorical association with the real Athenian world was achieved also with the reference of actual areas of the Agora. Allusion to the topography of a sanctuary on the sculptures of a temple was a common practice in Classical art. Two very famous examples are the representation of the rivers Alpheios and Kladeos on the eastern pediment of the temple of Zeus at Olympia and of the rivers Eridanos and Ilissos/Kephisos on the western pediment of the Parthenon. On the Ionic friezes of the Hephaisteion the most obvious topographical reference is the stance of the central figures, Theseus, on both friezes that echoes the group of the Tyrannicides that was situated in the middle of the Agora, close to the orchestra (east of the later temple of Ares and north of the Odeion) and constituted one of the most common

⁶³ Herodotus, *Histories* 8.52.1-2.

⁶⁴ Camp 1986, 69-71; Stansbury-O'Donnell 2005, 73-87.

⁶⁵ Plutarch *Life of Pericles* 31.4; Pliny *Natural History* 36.18-19.

⁶⁶ Osborne 2009, 2-12.

⁶⁷ Barringer 2009, 116.

⁶⁸ Delivorrias 1997, 83.

⁶⁹ Harrison 1988, 340-349.

sights for the Athenian citizens.⁷⁰ Additionally, if we consider Morgan's recognition of the deities on the eastern assembly correct, then the Mother of the Gods, Zeus, Aphrodite and Apollo refer immediately to the shrines of the respective deities that existed around the Kolonos Agoraios hill.

The carving style is another feature that would have encouraged the identification of the represented themes with real human circumstances. Morgan strongly argues that the slimmer and active bodies of the Ionic frieze of the Hephaisteion feature a more naturalistic rendering of the human body than the metopes of the same temple and the sculptures of the Parthenon.⁷¹ Especially the representation of the combatants with their back to the viewer is a totally new element for the date of the Hephaisteion and is seen again in the more elaborate carving style of the Ionic frieze of the Athena Nike temple (430-410 BC) where real historical battles of the Athenians are represented.⁷² The more realistic carving style of the Hephaisteion Ionic friezes could place its date but also its purpose closer to that of the Athena Nike sculptures on the entrance of the Acropolis.

All the details and the messages of the iconography described above, show that the Ionic friezes of the Hephaisteion had a well-designed artistic programme that used myth to transmit messages of political propaganda within the religious and political environment of the Athenian Agora. The main aim of the friezes was to provide to the current and future generations a memorial of Athens' military and political splendour and a monumental reminder to the Athenians of the importance for fighting like heroes for the political institutions, the sanctuaries and the civic life of Athens.

In this paper, my concern has been to give a comprehensive interpretation of the Ionic friezes within Athenian fifth-century BC Doric temples. Through the detailed examination of the architectural position, visibility, audience and iconography of the Hephaisteion Ionic friezes, along with the comparative research of the Sounion and Parthenon Ionic friezes, I have argued that the incorporation of these architectural sculptures in the Doric temples of Attica was a very meaningful artistic innovation in the historical context of fifth-century BC Athens. Despite the high degree of differentiation in the architectural position and the iconography of each of the Ionic friezes examined here, the historical occasions and the political intentions of the city induced the symbolic function of these sculptures within important Doric temples such as the Hephaisteion, the Parthenon and the temple of Poseidon at Sounion that were chosen particularly because of their location and the variety of the audience that they attracted.

More specifically, the various viewing perspectives of the two Ionic friezes of the Hephaisteion as well as the symbolic character of their mythological iconography indicate that these sculptures were used in the environment of Periklean Athens to celebrate the achievements of the city and transmit specific political messages to a very wide audience. This audience included both Athenians and foreigners, worshippers and passers-by. Even though the generic character of the represented subjects allowed different interpretations at the level of the individual viewer, all the artistic choices were aimed at the promotion of Athenian power and superiority over the other cities of the Greek world. The Ionic order of the friezes was chosen to highlight the Ionic origins of the Athenians. Additionally, the mythological subjects memorialised allegorically the great victories of the city, such as the defeat of the Persians, while the various political connotations projected the importance of the Athenian democracy and strengthened the identity of the Athenian citizens. Therefore, I can conclude by saying that the incorporation of Ionic friezes within the Attic Doric temples shows very elaborately how an artistic innovation of fifth-century BC Athens was introduced

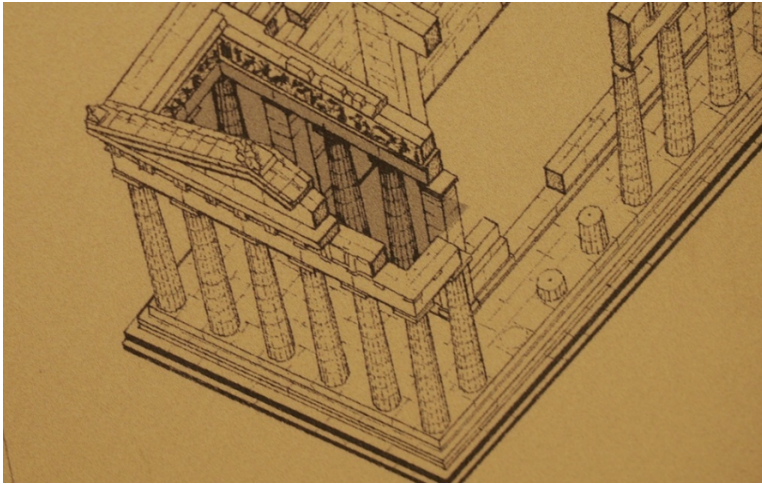
⁷⁰ Thompson and Wycherley 1972, 155-156.

⁷¹ Morgan 1962, 222-226.

⁷² Velentza 2014, 73-80.

due to the contemporary historical events and political pursuits of a city. In my opinion, this idea of the entanglement of art with politics needs to play an important role in the study of architectural and sculptural monuments of the ancient Greek world because through the inquiry of the social and historical context that influenced specific artistic forms of an era, we can get a more accurate interpretation of their function and a better understanding of the society that created them.

Illustrations



(1) Reconstruction of the position of the Ionic frieze within the pronaos of the temple of Poseidon at Sounion, from the Archaeological Museum at Lavrio. Photograph: Author.



(2) View of the south-west corner of the Parthenon Ionic frieze, showing its situation over the architrave of the internal chamber and behind the exterior entablature. Photograph: Author.

(3) The eastern Ionic frieze of the Hephaisteion (top) extending up to the entablature of the exterior colonnade compared to the western Ionic frieze (bottom) restricted to the width of the opisthodomos. Photograph: Author.





(4) View of the Hephaisteion from the area in front of the Bouleuterion. The red frame shows the position of the slabs of the 'synedrion.' Photograph: Author.

(5) The eastern (top) and western (bottom) Ionic friezes of the Hephaisteion. The red frames show the central figures, possibly Theseus, represented in the posture of the Tyrannicides. Photograph: Author.



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