

Routes in Ancient Greece: Toward a New Approach

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Abstract

Recent archaeological discoveries on Greek soil have shed light on the previously underestimated road system built by the Greek poleis, showing an extensive road network across central and southern Greece. The aim of this paper is to explore the possibilities offered by the archeological investigations from an historical point of view, going beyond the traditional approach. In political terms, late Archaic Athens offers a relevant case study due to the interest of the Peisistratids toward the road network, which was later the cornerstone of Cleisthenes' democratic reform. Secondly, some marble quarries in Laconia are explored in relation to the inland web of roads of the region.

Key Words

Greek road system, Peisistratids, Cleisthenes, Laconian marble quarries

Introduction

In a well-known section of his *Geography* discussing Rome, Strabo (V, 3, 8) emphasizes the superiority of Roman construction projects, such as bridges, tunnels, and notably roads, compared with their ancient Greek counterparts, noting that the Greeks directed their energy toward different ends.¹ Strabo's admiration for the architects of the Roman Empire is rooted in his firsthand examination of engineered structures still standing in his day: those of the Romans far surpassed the smaller Greek endeavors from earlier centuries. Consequently, Strabo's pronounced viewpoint, coupled with a limited interest in the subject from subsequent commentators, has significantly shaped modern scholarship on the Greek road system, leading to a historical bias

¹ "The Hellenes succeeded especially well with their foundations, aiming at beauty, strength, harbors, and fertile land, but the former [*i. e.* the Romans] had particular foresight in what the latter paid no attention to, such as the laying down of roads, the introduction of water, and sewers that are able to wash away the refuse of the city into the Tiberis. They have also laid down roads throughout the country, adding cuts through hills and embankments through valleys, so that covered wagons can ferry freight" (tr. D. W. Roller). For a cautious reading of this passage, see Daverio Rocchi, 2002, p. 148.

undervaluing Greek road construction.² Compared with Roman roads, Greek roads are regarded merely as local pathways and not appreciated for the level of skill and knowledge they would have required in planning, construction, and maintenance.

Nonetheless, fresh archaeological findings have shed light on the ancient Greek road system, revealing an extensive network of interconnected land routes that linked Greek city-states throughout mainland Greece. Attica was particularly well serviced by roads (Korres, 2009): archaeological excavations surrounding the city have unveiled roads that reach virtually all the Attic demes. One noteworthy route is the Athens–Piraeus road (Figure 1), which connected the Acropolis to the principal Attic port through the deme of Coile (Dakoura-Voghiatzoglou, 2009). Stretches of this road boast an impressive width of 3.5 to 8.5 m, complete with parallel wheel ruts, allowing for the simultaneous passage of two carts.

In the south, a recent systematic survey in Laconia has unveiled an exceptional road network (Pikoulas, 2012). This extensive system comprises hundreds of routes that catered to the needs of Sparta and its neighboring settlements. A clear example of this is the ancient city of Geronthrai in southern Laconia, which served as the central hub for the entire region, connecting with thirteen distinct routes.

From an archaeological point of view, one can immediately identify an ancient carriageable road (ἀμαξιτός ὁδός) from the characteristic wheel ruts, grooves made for carts dragged by animals, especially mules. Saving time and money, the ancient Greek roadbuilders preferred to carve the rocky ground, rather than paving a completely new roadbed. These wheel ruts can be approximately dated to the pre-Roman Age (8th–3rd century BCE), being absent from Greek soil both before the poleis period and afterwards, during the Byzantine period.³

This line of research forms a starting point for exciting new perspectives on ancient Greek society. Traditionally, modern scholars in search of specific routes on the ground used to rely on accounts of military expeditions by ancient historians. The prevailing assumption was that ancient routes were primarily relevant for military campaigns. However, this traditional approach, focused on military actions, has recently been called into question (Fachard & Pirisino, 2015). Greek highways can, of course, be examined from various angles: these routes

² The standard work is Casson, 1994.

³ The date of ancient roads in Greece still poses problems, however. Beyond wheel ruts, there are no clues that might reveal a precise chronology of the development of this infrastructure (which remained in use in later times). One must encompass *grosso modo*, therefore, the whole period of the Greek poleis.

not only served military purposes but also, and more importantly, facilitated economic activities, religious pilgrimages, and concurrent political endeavors. In this paper, I contribute to our understanding of these connections by examining two case studies in Attica and Laconia that highlight the political and economic dimensions that influenced the development of the Greek road system in each region.

The Herms of Hipparchus and Other Enterprises of the Peisistratids

Roads have always been a powerful tool for arranging the territory since ancient times. The experience of late sixth century BCE Athens, in which the road network was the object of attention by the rulers, shows that the political reorganization had to be based necessarily on the roads that connected the center of the region with the Attic demes. In a relatively short time, in the crucial transition from tyranny to democracy, political change was implemented exploiting the regional road system both by the Peisistratids and Cleisthenes to integrate the countryside to Athens.

Beginning with the case of the Peisistratids, in a pseudo-Platonic dialogue ([Plato] *Hipp.* 228d–229b) there is mention of the herms erected by the tyrant Hipparchus, the son of Peisistratus (527–514 BCE). This provides notable evidence pertaining to Attic roads in the late sixth century BCE. Socrates ironically considers these herms as one reference point for friendship thus:

ἐπειδὴ δὲ αὐτῶ οἱ περὶ τὸ ἄστυ τῶν πολιτῶν πεπαιδευμένοι ἦσαν καὶ ἐθαύμαζον αὐτὸν ἐπὶ σοφίᾳ, ἐπιβουλεύων αὐτὸς ἐν τοῖς ἀγροῖς παιδεῦσαι ἔστησεν αὐτοῖς Ἑρμᾶς κατὰ τὰς ὁδοὺς ἐν μέσῳ τοῦ ἄστεος καὶ τῶν δήμων ἐκάστων, κἀπειτα τῆς σοφίας τῆς αὐτοῦ, ἦν τ' ἔμαθεν καὶ ἦν αὐτὸς ἐξηῦρεν, ἐκλεξάμενος ἃ ἠγεῖτο σοφώτατα εἶναι, ταῦτα αὐτὸς ἐντέινας εἰς ἔλεγειον αὐτοῦ ποιήματα καὶ ἐπιδείγματα τῆς σοφίας ἐπέγραψεν, ἵνα πρῶτον μὲν τὰ ἐν Δελφοῖς γράμματα τὰ σοφὰ ταῦτα μὴ θαυμάζοιεν οἱ πολῖται αὐτοῦ, τό τε "Γνώθι σαυτόν" καὶ τὸ "Μηδὲν ἄγαν" καὶ τᾶλλα τὰ τοιαῦτα, ἀλλὰ τὰ Ἰππάρχου ῥήματα μᾶλλον σοφὰ ἡγοῖντο, ἔπειτα παριόντες ἄνω καὶ κάτω καὶ ἀναγιγνώσκοντες καὶ γεῦμα λαμβάνοντες αὐτοῦ τῆς σοφίας φοιτῶντες ἐκ τῶν ἀγρῶν καὶ ἐπὶ τὰ λοιπὰ παιδευθησόμενοι. ἔστων δὲ δύο τῶπιγράμματα· ἐν μὲν τοῖς ἐπ' ἄριστερα τοῦ Ἑρμοῦ ἐκάστου ἐπιγέγραπται λέγων ὁ Ἑρμῆς ὅτι ἐν μέσῳ τοῦ ἄστεος καὶ τοῦ δήμου ἔστηκεν, ἐν δὲ τοῖς ἐπὶ δεξιᾷ –
 μνήμα τόδ' Ἰππάρχου· στείχε δίκαια φρονῶν
 φησίν. ἔστι δὲ τῶν ποιημάτων καὶ ἄλλα ἐν ἄλλοις Ἑρμαῖς πολλὰ καὶ καλὰ ἐπιγεγραμμένα· ἔστι δὲ δὴ καὶ τοῦτο ἐπὶ τῇ Στεριακῇ ὁδῷ, ἐν ᾧ λέγει –
 μνήμα τόδ' Ἰππάρχου· μὴ φίλον ἔξαπάτα.

And when his people in the city had been educated and were admiring him for his wisdom, he proceeded next, with the design of educating those of the countryside, to set up figures of Hermes for them along the roads in the midst of the city and every district town; and then, after selecting from his own wise lore, both learnt from others and discovered for himself, the things that he considered the wisest, he threw these into elegiac form and inscribed them on the figures as verses of his own and testimonies of his wisdom, so that in the first place his people should not admire those wise Delphic legends of *Know thyself* and *Nothing overmuch*, and the other saying of the sort, but should rather regard as wise the utterances of Hipparchus; and that in the second place, through passing up and down and reading his words and acquiring a taste for his wisdom, they might resort hither from the country for the completion of their education. There are two such inscriptions of his: on the left side of each Hermes there is one in which the god says that he stands in the midst of the city or the township, while on the right side he says:

The memorial of Hipparchus: walk with just intent.

There are many other fine inscriptions from his poems on other figures of Hermes, and this one on the Steiria road, in which he says:

The memorial of Hipparchus: deceive not a friend.

(tr. W. R. M. Lamb)

According to this account, Hipparchus erected herms in the Attic countryside with the aim of imparting wisdom to his fellow citizens and outdoing similar engravings on the oracle in Delphi. The author's irony becomes apparent when one considers the commonplace nature of expressions such as 'deceive not a friend' or 'walk with just intent' (Reale, 2015, pp. 58–61).

In addition to Hipparchus' hortatory aim, the herms are explicitly described as positioned midway between Athens and each deme, resembling Roman milestones in the rural landscape. A herm, in this context, is a sculpture featuring a head above a squared lower section representing the god Hermes; the type introduced by Hipparchus appears to be the first in the Athenian-style tradition.⁴

By chance, a fragment of a herm attributed to Hipparchus has been discovered at Coropi (ancient Sphettus), corroborating the literary evidence. Although the inscription containing the philosophical wisdom is absent, the other inscription pertaining to topographic details remains legible (IG I³ 1023):

⁴ On the herms, see Hdt. II, 51; Thuc. VI, 27–28; Paus. IV, 33, 4. The modern bibliography is extensive: see mainly Agora XI, pp. 108–136, in particular pp. 113–114, Wrede, 1986; Shapiro, 1989, pp. 125–132 (for an iconographical analysis).

[ἐ]ν μῆεσοι Κεφαλῆς τε καὶ ἄστεος ἀγλαὸς ἡερμῆς
 “A stunning herm between Cephales and the city” (tr. L. B. Micheli)

Evidently the herm was positioned midway between Athens and the deme of Cephales (modern Ceratea), situated in the southeastern corner of Attica. If the identified location at ancient Sphettus is accurate, then the inscribed herm provides valuable insights into the ancient inhabitants’ travel routes. Given that Sphettus is the midpoint of the inland journey, the route would have traversed a direct path through the Hymettus ridge, negotiating the challenging Pirnari pass (16 km). Conversely, the modern highway takes a longer route (25–27 km), skirting the northern edge of Hymettus to avoid steep gradients for cars (Langdon, 2002; Tomlinson, 2002). This reveals that ancient routes could be designed to follow the most direct path, even if it involved challenging ascents.

Moreover, the information provided by the herm regarding the route is quite unusual. A *comparandum* is found in the *horoi* inscriptions from Attica (IG I³ 1096; 1097, etc.), where only the indication of a specific route is mentioned (e.g., the road to Eleusis), which makes us wonder about its practical utility. Note that distance indications in stadia, such as those given by Pausanias in his *Description of Greece* (2nd century CE), emerged only later when the work of bematists – specialists in step measurement – became widespread across Greece (Geus & Guckelsberger, 2017). In contrast to the *horoi* inscriptions, the herms provided information about the mid-point of travel – for example Sphettus on the Athens–Cephale route. This serves as a clever way to convey information about travel time because one must cover the same amount of distance already traveled. This assumes that the traveler is familiar with the route, which is likely for locals heading to well-known demes or Athens.

Above all, the key point to emphasize is the significant measurement task behind Hipparchus’ initiative. To precisely determine the midpoint of each Attic highway, a team of experts or the like must have traversed the entire region, strategically placing the herms in the correct locations. Given the lack of information about their specific placements, it can be inferred, based on the pseudo-Plato text, that the herms were situated in the countryside rather than within the demes. This suggests that the task was carried out under a centralized order by the Athenian tyrants, rather than being the responsibility of individual demes.

To better understand the implications of these herms, we might compare another, similar, venture of the Peisistratid family. In the same period, Peisistratus, the son of Hippias and grandson of the homonymous

tyrant, dedicated an altar to the Twelve Gods in the Athenian Agora, as reported by Thucydides (VI, 54, 6–7). This altar, of which only poor fragments remain,⁵ stood in the well-known sanctuary of the Twelve Gods, situated in the heart of Athenian social, political, and religious life. It seems plausible to identify it with what Pindar calls “the navel of the city” (frg. 75, 3–5 M.).⁶

Two sources shed light on the purpose of this altar. First, in Herodotus (II, 7, 1–2), a metrological comparison is mentioned in the Egyptian section of his *Histories*:

ἔστι δὲ ὁδὸς ἐς Ἥλιου πόλιν ἀπὸ θαλάσσης ἄνω ἰόντι παραπλησίη τὸ μῆκος τῆ ἐξ Ἀθηνέων ὁδῶ τῆ ἀπὸ τῶν Δωώδεκα Θεῶν τοῦ βωμοῦ φερούση ἕξ τε Πίσαν καὶ ἐπὶ τὸν νηὸν τοῦ Διὸς τοῦ Ὀλυμπίου. μικρόν τι τὸ διάφορον εὗροι τις ἂν λογιζόμενος τῶν ὁδῶν τουτέων, τὸ μὴ ἴσας μῆκος εἶναι, οὐ πλέον πεντεκαίδεκα σταδίων ἢ μὲν γὰρ ἐς Πίσαν ἐξ Ἀθηνέων καταδεῖ πεντεκαίδεκα σταδίων [ὡς] μὴ εἶναι πεντακοσίων καὶ χιλίων, ἢ δὲ ἐς Ἥλιου πόλιν ἀπὸ θαλάσσης πληροῖ ἐς τὸν ἀριθμὸν τοῦτον.

Inland from the sea as far as Heliopolis Egypt is a wide land, all flat and watery and marshy. From the sea up to Heliopolis it is a journey about as long as the way from the altar of the Twelve Gods at Athens to the temple of Olympian Zeus at Pisa. If a reckoning be made there will be seen to be but a little difference of length, not more than fifteen furlongs, between these two journeys; for the journey from Athens to Pisa is fifteen furlongs short of fifteen hundred, which is the tale of furlongs between the sea and Heliopolis. (tr. A. D. Godley)

The ancient historian is at pains to illustrate to the Greek reader the considerable distance from the Egyptian coast to the inland settlement of Heliopolis, situated at the beginning of the Delta of the Nile (approximately 265 km). In doing so, he offers a remarkably accurate comparison by citing the distance between the well-known Altar of the Twelve Gods in Athens and the equally renowned temple of Zeus in Olympia (approximately 241 km).

A second source relevant to the altar is an inscription (IG I³ 1092bis) dating back to 440–430 BCE, discovered on the Athenian Acropolis, which corroborates the same method of marking distance, albeit on a smaller scale. The epigraphic text reads as follows:

[ἡ πόλις] ἔστ<η>σ[έμ με β]ροτ[οῖς] μνημεῖον ἀληθές /

⁵ See Agora XIV, pp. 129–136; Gadbery, 1992, pp. 447–489; TopAt. 1.3, pp. 1051–1055.

⁶ See Neer and Kurke, 2014, pp. 527–579.

[- ∞] σημαίνει[ν μ]<έ>τρ[ον] ὁδοιπορίας /
 [- ∞ - τ]ὸ μεταχθὺ θεῶμ πρὸς δώδεκα βωμόν /
 [ἔξ καὶ τ]εσσαράκοντ' ἔγ λιμένος στάδιοι.

“The city set me up among the mortals as a truthful memorial
 - - - to tell the extent of the journey
 - - - the distance between the Altar of the Twelve Gods
 and the harbor is forty-six stadia.” (tr. L. B. Micheli)

In this case, the inscription provides information about the distance between the Altar and the harbor of Piraeus. It becomes evident that the Altar functioned in Attica and beyond as a Zero Milestone, serving as the reference point from which all road distances were measured.

In light of this evidence, we can agree with those scholars who see a connection between Hipparchus’ herms and the dedication of the Altar of the Twelve Gods, as joint projects to enhance political cohesion in Attica.⁷ The measurement of the roads, indicated by both the hermes and the Altar of the Twelve Gods, denotes the centralized character of the policy of the Peisistratids and highlights the interest of the tyrants in the Attic countryside. A similar insight comes from the pseudo-Aristotelian *Economics* (II, 1347a, 4–8), which indicates that Hippias, Peisistratus’ son, generated funds by compelling Athenians to purchase their building facilities located on “public streets” (δημοσίου ὁδοί). The mention of Athenian streets is noteworthy, as it suggests that the Peisistratid policy focused not only on countryside roads but also on urban streets. Besides, Aristotle (*Athenian Constitution* 16, 2–5) reveals that Peisistratus himself paid regular visits to the Attic countryside to retain demesmen in rural areas and thus to uphold political stability during his tyranny. Although isolated, this detail reveals a potentially broader agenda that touches on mobility across Attic: an improved road system could have contributed to a higher level of political cohesion and, consequently, support for the tyrant’s family.

In conclusion, the development of a road system effectively connecting each deme with Athens emerges as a major venture among the Peisistratid enterprises. Considering the extensive building program undertaken by the Peisistratids throughout Athens and Attica (Angiolillo, 1997, pp. 9–100), it is plausible to speculate that existing roads were not only systematically measured but also renovated, possibly with the addition of wells at strategic spots (Tomlinson, 2002, pp. 41–42).

⁷ See Angiolillo, 1997, pp. 82–83; Ficuciello, 2008, p. 51; *pace* Lavelle, 1985, pp. 411–420.

Cleisthenes' Trittyes and Attic Roads

As mentioned above, the Peisistratids were not alone in taking care of the road system for their own political projects: just few years later, in 508/507 BCE, the statesman Cleisthenes is credited with reforming the Athenian constitution, setting it on a democratic footing. To accomplish this, he turned to a comprehensive territorial reorganization that was based on existing roads.

Despite the importance of this reform, we have only two historical accounts, one by Herodotus (V, 66, 2; 69, 2) and the other, more detailed, by Aristotle (*Athenian Constitution* 21, 1–4). The historian from Halicarnassus appears to focus more on the political struggles within the Athenian oligarchy, placing particular emphasis on the radical alterations in the number and names of the Attic tribes. In contrast, the philosopher collects more valuable evidence about this epoch-making political transformation in Athens and presents the following account:

διὰ μὲν οὖν ταύτας τὰς αἰτίας ἐπίστευεν ὁ δῆμος τῷ Κλεισθένει. τότε δὲ τοῦ πλήθους προεστηκώς, ἔτει τετάρτῳ μετὰ τὴν τῶν τυράννων κατάλυσιν, ἐπὶ Ἰσαγόρου ἄρχοντος, πρῶτον μὲν συνένειμε πάντας εἰς δέκα φυλάς ἀντὶ τῶν τεττάρων, ἀναμείζαι βουλόμενος, ὅπως μετάσχωσι πλείους τῆς πολιτείας. ὅθεν ἐλέχθη καὶ τὸ μὴ φυλοκρινεῖν, πρὸς τοὺς ἐξετάζειν τὰ γένη βουλομένους. ἔπειτα τὴν βουλὴν πεντακοσίο[υ]ς ἀντὶ τετρακοσίων κατέστησεν, πεντήκοντα ἐξ ἐκάστης φυλῆς. τότε δ' ἦσαν ἑκατόν. διὰ τοῦτο δὲ οὐκ εἰς δώδεκα φυλάς συνέταξεν, ὅπως αὐτῶ μὴ συμβαίῃη μερίζειν πρὸς τὰς προὔπαρχούσας τριτῶν. ἦσαν γὰρ ἐκ δ' φυλῶν δώδεκα τριτῶν, ὥστ' οὐ [συν]έπιπτεν ἄν' ἀναμίγεσθαι τὸ πλῆθος. διένειμε δὲ καὶ τὴν χώραν κατὰ δήμους τριάκοντα μέρη, δέκα μὲν τῶν περὶ τὸ ἄστυ, δέκα δὲ τῆς παραλίας, δέκα δὲ τῆς μεσογείου, καὶ ταύτας ἐπονομάσας τριτῶν, ἐκλήρωσεν τρεῖς εἰς τὴν φυλὴν ἐκάστην, ὅπως ἐκάστη μετέχη πάντων τῶν τόπων.

For these reasons the people placed their trust in Cleisthenes. Then, as champion of the masses, in the fourth year after the overthrow of the tyrants, the archonship of Isagoras [508/7 BCE], he first distributed all the citizens through ten tribes instead of the old four, wanting to mix them up so that more men should have a share in the running of the state. This is the origin of the saying 'Don't judge by tribes', addressed to those who want to inquire into a man's ancestry. Next, he made the council a body of five hundred instead of four hundred, fifty from each tribe (previously there had been a hundred from each old tribe). He refused to divide the Athenians into twelve tribes, to avoid allocating them according to the already existing thirds: the four tribes were divided into twelve thirds, and if he had used them,

he would not have succeeded in mixing up the people. He divided the land of Attica by demes into thirty parts – ten parts in the city region, ten in the coast and ten in the inland – and he called these parts thirds and allotted three to each tribe in such a way that each tribe should have a share in all the regions. (tr. P. J. Rhodes)

According to Aristotle, Cleisthenes wanted to mix up Attic society by introducing a new tribal and district system to redistribute his fellow citizens. First, he abolished the existing four tribes (or phylai) and created ten new tribes. Subsequently, Cleisthenes organized thirty-thirds or trittyes, ten each from the city, coast, and inland regions, encompassing various demes. These trittyes were scattered by lot into the ten phylai.

The focal point of Cleisthenes' reform is based on the nature of the trittyes. Scholarly understanding of trittyes has evolved over the years, moving from perceiving them as entirely new entities cutting ties of previous aristocratic factions (Lewis, 1963) to considering them as geographical ensembles based on traditional and pre-existing religious associations, which the associated demes lie contiguous with (Ismard, 2011; de Polignac, 2021).⁸ Although the trittyes are uneven in size, they exhibit a noteworthy topographic contiguity. Scholars including P. Siewert (1982, pp. 32–78) have correctly pointed out that trittyes align with major Attic routes, while J. Paga (2010) has emphasized that identified Attic theaters correspond roughly to the trittyes framework. All in all, trittyes and roads appear to be intricately connected within Cleisthenes' political project.

For example, the highway where Hipparchus' herm was discovered could be referred to as the "Sphettia hodos" (the road of Sphettus), as mentioned in Plutarch's *Life of Theseus* (Kakavoghianni, 2009, pp. 188–189). According to the abovementioned inscription, Sphettus lies between Athens and Cephale, the route's final destination. If the road extended to this deme, one would encounter demes such as Cicynna, Sphettus, Hagnous, Prospalta, Cephale, and possibly Thorikos along the way. The first four towns are situated in the same area in Mesogaia (the Attic inland region) and belong to the Sphettion trittys (IG I³ 1119) in the Acamantis tribe. In contrast, Cephale and Thorikos, located in the southeastern coastal corner of Attica, belong to the Thorikion or Cephale trittys (IG I³ 1122; Traill, 1986, p. 108) within the Acamantis tribe. The

⁸ See Lewis, 1963, pp. 22–40; 1976, pp. 311–312; Traill, 1975, pp. 70–72; Siewert, 1982; Stanton, 1994, pp. 161–208; Paga, 2010, pp. 351–384. For new trends in the research, see Ismard, 2011, pp. 165–174; Polignac, 2021, pp. 135–147; and most recently, Russo, 2022, pp. 37–38.

implication is that Cleisthenes based his democratic reform largely on the road network.

In short, Cleisthenes' initiative appears to be aligned with the Pisistratids' intervention on the Attic road network. Among other factors, road measurement and the overall reorganization of the regional road network seems to have been fundamental in laying the foundations of political cohesion that were skilfully exploited by Cleisthenes for his own political project. The newborn political system could in this manner benefit from a strong connected region, where micro-connectivity played the fundamental role in granting democratic participation to the Athenian and Attic institutions.

Laconian Marble Quarries

In late Archaic Athens, the Athenian tyrants betray a significant interest in the local road system as part of their efforts to sustain power. Similarly, Cleisthenes' democratic reforms became intricately intertwined with the Attic routes. Beyond politics, however, economic endeavors too can exhibit profound ties to roads. In this context, the extraction and utilization of a fundamental natural resource, such as marble, can reveal strong correlations with the transportation infrastructure in a specific region. Sparta was able to exploit both the nearest and the most distant marble quarries because of its branched road network.

We see this in Laconia, where extensive field research has detected many ancient marble quarries spanning from the Archaic period through the Roman Age (Christien, 2014; Christien, 2018). Notably, the world-known rosso antico marble was extracted from Cape Tainaron along the southern coast of Laconia, and extensively utilized by Roman rulers and aristocrats seeking luxurious stones. The coastal location facilitated easy transportation of the marble by sea to Italy and other destinations. For instance, this prized stone was employed in the creation of the well-known Faun from Hadrian's Villa in Tivoli. During the Greek period, however, local architectural and artistic endeavors made use of inland quarries, connected to the main settlement of Sparta by several roads.

Were we to possess precise information about the marble's usage and its origin from a specific quarry, we could reconstruct the likely routes through which the valuable material was transported more accurately. Nevertheless, the case of Laconian grey marble quarries is striking. This type of marble was extensively exploited from the Archaic period onwards, utilized for statues and perirrhanteria (large basins with cylindrical shafts). These marble products were both locally

employed in Sparta and exported to other regions (Kokkorou-Alevra, 2002).

We are aware of at least three significant inland quarries producing gray marble in the region. The first is located in modern Goranoi, locally known as Gynaika (CAL, n. 700). Situated in the foothills of the Taygetus ridge, southwest of the main Laconian city, this quarry appears to have been in use since the early stages of the Greek era (7th century BCE) for Spartan purposes. As regards the road infrastructure, an ancient bridge named Rasina has been found near Goranoi, providing a clue to the route from the Taygetus ridge to the underlying plain (Pikoulas, 2012, n. 89). The road followed the Eurotas River up to the city (Pikoulas, 2012, n. 49). The overall route was relatively short and the stone's quality, coupled with the short journey, explain the early exploitation of this particular quarry.

A similar scenario applies to the Platyvouni quarry (CAL, n. 701), situated at Socha, slightly north of Goranoi. Although this extraction site was undoubtedly utilized during the Roman period (Christien & Della Santa, 2001–2002), scholars agree that the marble was employed earlier for the sanctuary at Amyclae, situated just in front of the plain below (Kokkorou-Alevra et al., 2006). Indeed, researchers have uncovered stretches of a mountain road with wheel ruts specifically serving the Platyvouni quarry and facilitating the transport of stones to the plain.

The proximity of potential extraction sites must have had strong appeal to the Laconians. The third case, however, involves a more distant quarry in the northern part of the region. Discovered by R. G. Lepsius as early as 1890 in the foothills of the Parnon ridge near Vresthena along the Oinus River, this quarry offered both gray and yellowish marble. Later researchers identified the former only in vertical strips along the riverbed (Christien, 2014, p. 178; Christien, 2018, pp. 626–627). Despite its inland location, the area was close to a major highway in Laconia, leading to Arcadian Tegea (Pikoulas, 2012, n. 1 and 2). Following this route, the marble could be transported directly to Sparta via Sellasia. And this may well settle the question of why Sparta would exploit a gray marble site so far inland when closer quarries were available. While some argue it might have been for the specific need of the yellowish stone, exploited alongside the gray marble, the use of this quarry nevertheless remains uncertain. On the other hand, the presence of an accessible, well-traveled, and significant road infrastructure, such as the Tegea highway, surely offers insights into Spartan choices for marble supply.

Conclusion

In conclusion, this brief overview shows the potentiality of examining the Greek road network from different perspectives, highlighting the multifaceted nature of material connections. Modern scholars can analyze political, economic, and even religious aspects within specific regional and extra-regional contexts, drawing both on written sources and archaeological findings in Greek territories. The political cases we have examined – namely, the Peisistratids' implementation of the road network and Cleisthenes' geographical restructuring of Attica grounded in existing routes – show continuity in the project of the Pisistratids and Cleisthenes, which represents the integration of the countryside with the city of Athens.

The economic case study, on the other hand, has unveiled the dynamics of transporting extracted marble in Laconia and its deep reliance on the region's road network. Spartans typically favored quarries that were accessible via the existing network of arteries that characterized their region.

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Figure 1: a stretch of the Coile road. Note the wheel ruts. Photograph by L. B. Micheli.

