

**Tour 3:**  
**Central Hellas and Peloponnese Highlights**  
**A Journey Through Myths, Mountains and Sacred Lands**

**Day 1: Arrive at the Acropolis (Morning), Dinner in the Meze of Plaka (Evening)**

Dawn breaks as my taxi winds through the streets of Athens; a shaft of golden sunlight glints off the white marble of the Parthenon, casting a glow across the waking city. The brakes of a nearby motorbike squeal, echoing between ancient stones and modern storefronts. In this instant, the layers of time settle on me like dust. The lifeblood of the city is heart; the Acropolis looms above it all, a combination of rock and memory, waiting for me. I can see the cobblestone streets of Plaka, winding around past Monastiraki Square, full of people, with all the ancient stones looking down over us. There is no real separation between past and present; they are intertwined in every street, every conversation, and every moment. The sounds of Athens blend together into a rich tapestry; scooters and sirens intermingling with older sounds, like cries from the market, the distant sound of drums, and the sound of the people climbing these hills to pray or argue with one another, which is what Athens is famous for: arguing. For centuries, the air has been saturated with an unending discussion; the city is built with many things: stone, sound, and memory, all of which are both sacred and ordinary, intermixed.

As I walk through Plaka, underneath the bougainvillea trees, I can feel the age of the city pressing up through my feet; the stones are old and whispering their stories to me. The air is thick with the sugary scent of loukoumades frying in oil, mingling with the sharp, earthy aroma of Hellenic coffee escaping from a narrow doorway. Somewhere nearby, a moped rattles over uneven stones with a quick burst of sound. Over everything, the steady clatter of dice on a backgammon board seeps from an open café window. If I listen closely, I can almost hear the echo of philosophers arguing with one another in the breeze. However, not everything in Athens is about the past; there is always new life being lived and new stories unfolding. Laundry is clipped to flutter above a small shop, an old woman selects bunches of wild greens from a crate by the curb, a delivery boy whistles as his bicycle weaves through the lanes. The woody scent of incense drifts from a church doorway, mixing with a hint of grilled meat from a souvlaki stand. The summer heat is trapped in the stones beneath my shoes. The city lives on because of the simple things in life: Fetching water, baking bread, pressing oil, curing olives, and catching fish before sunrise. A myth should be viewed as a way of life rather than just an "art" form; it teaches how we face fear, welcome strangers, mourn our losses and recover from them.

With Athens' little lives, families, markets, and neighbours are what hold up the raw materials and monuments of a city.

And above that there is the most ancient argument in the city, the contest of Athens between Athena and Poseidon, which is not an ornament but rather Athens declaration about their values: "An olive tree is better than a tidal wave of salty water"; "To build, cultivate and nurture relationships is preferable to conquering others"; and "To endure should be preferred to using an act of violence". Athens has established its DNA through the olive and expresses it in all aspects of faith and life. The olive is pressed, processed into oil, used as a light source, and creates a platform for debate. An olive farmer, with grease on his hands from working in the grove, articulates how he defends the grove from expansion by the city, and you may be able to hear the vote of today about growth versus what can be sustained. Myths do not exist above this life; they are present in the daily routine

around the dinner table. The olive tree is more than a symbol. It is the land, its use and inheritance, the boundaries of people's lives and livelihoods. The olive tree represents the value of endurance and the reward for longevity. Poseidon provided salt water, horses and earthquakes as gifts: all of them provide shock, drama and power. Athena provides the power that creates stability for families through consistency in the olive groves of a citizen's family.

As I begin my journey, the story of the olive tree takes root in my mind; I decide to look for its presence, not only as a myth but as a thread binding together what I will encounter throughout this land—a living witness to the choices and the endurance of those who came before.

The founding myth of the olive tree conveys how future citizens should respect force, where admiration, honourable work, and risk for the future exist. These olive groves will remain as living proof of countless years of conversations about what should be preserved and what should be sacrificed.

The city-state of Athens was a cradle of democracy, a product of its own democratic values as exemplified by the many different voices of citizens speaking through democracy, but there were a number of citizens whose voices were not integrated; they were women, slaves and foreigners (no foreigners were allowed to participate) and all those who were not counted. Simply put, the greatness of what cannot be measured is ultimately limited. It is possible to be filled with both light and darkness, hope and desire to finish, at the same time. Hidden economies, such as enslaved workers in the Laurion mines and women's work at home weaving, stored away and made available to provide the freedom enjoyed by all citizens of the city, contributed greatly to the splendour of the city. In the early morning, deep beneath the ground at Laurion, a boy wipes sweat from his brow by the glow of an oil lamp, hammer ringing on silver ore; above, a woman sits at her loom, her hands swift and silent as she works the pattern that will never bear her name. The monuments of the city provide the physical representation of its history—the actual city resides primarily in the kitchens and courtyards of citizens. The tragedies that form the basis of much of Western literature were created by a society whose culture of exclusion is well-known. Theatre provided a means for some of those excluded from society to return as moral voices; queens telling truth; slaves revealing faults; and foreigners bringing their pain. The story of Athens is not based on simple idealism and/or failure; Athens is made human by both. Democratic life is performance and exclusion, both are intertwined. There is always tension between light and fracture in the city's memory.

Athens has a flavour of debate to it, seen in the warmth of each koulouri, coated with sesame seeds. Each sesame seed represents a unique argument within an overall argument. Tomatoes that have been warmed by the sun burst with flavour, much like an argument. Olive oil stands out as having a very strong flavour, like an assertive statement brought before a deliberative body. The flavour of grilled octopus has a texture with a 'give' that is representative of the push and pull of the physical discourse of argument. Each small plate of meze, or appetiser, offers different voices united. The flavour of debate is more than just an idea in Athens; it is tangible through flavour and through the lively discussion occurring around each table.

Athens had provided me with nourishment during my travels. Koulouri, tomatoes, olive oil, grilled octopus, and all of the small plates of meze. Athens teaches me that democracy is more than just words, but is also based on bread, the price of bread, and who is first to eat at any dinner table. When the day cools down, I like to walk in the city. I feel the city supports me on the stone steps. The church bells mark the hours of the day. The scents of grilling meat and baking bread fill the air. Here, Athens is alive and vibrant. I would not call it just a museum. There are many small miracles around Athens, and being alive can be an ever-changing process, and at times, it will actively look for new ways to balance hunger with dignity. Here, at one time, sacred and ordinary were created in the same buildings. Food is a memory—oil, wheat, salt, lemon; these are the same foods that have been used to feed sailors, farmers, widows, priests, and soldiers long before anyone had ever

referred to this place as the Mediterranean Sea. Even now, the simplest of meals will always ask the same old questions: Who rests, who serves, who speaks, and who remains silent?

## Day 2: Journey from Athens to Delphi

**Leaving Athens, a question quietly persists within me like a thread: How do you seek guidance for a life shaped by both memory and uncertainty? As I move from the buzzing heart of the city toward the legendary oracle, I find myself searching for insight not just about the land ahead, but about my own future. The shift from city to oracle is not simply a change of scenery, but the next step in my quest for meaning amid the ruins and rituals of Hellas.**

As I leave the city, I notice that the landscape changes gradually as I drive along. Attica is transformed into olive fields, grey-green, shiny, and stubborn. Hellas's natural beauty is anything but soft and gentle because it has endured through wars, famine, fire, destruction, and political turmoil. Therefore, travelling to Delphi is more than simply covering a lot of ground; it is an experience; it is a trip to something that is much deeper.

Midway on the road, Yannis, who has been humming softly along with the radio, suddenly reaches forward and switches it off. For a moment, the car is filled with a deep, ringing quiet. He keeps his eyes on the winding asphalt ahead and, without looking at me, says, *Για να ακούσεις τους λόφους, πρώτη πρότεινε πρώτα να είσαι ήσυχος*—the same phrase his father would use. The silence settles between us, not awkward but dense, as if the land itself asked for our attention. The engine and the tyres are the only sounds left, muffled by the open window and the vast, breathing hills outside.

Just then, the land teaches you how to practice self-restraint. The hills do not easily yield to your weight; they only become resilient if you give them your full attention, practice thrift, and show respect for the change of seasons. I see small stone fields carved from rock; they are the handiwork of men coaxing food from rocks that are hard. Old and new stone walls and terracing show that ordinary people have always built. These terraced fields are built on the foundation of survival, which requires the strength of the human spirit to survive long after empires end. The silence of Hellas is not empty. It is full of paths that have been walked upon. Old shepherds once walked on these hills. Mules carried goods from the sea to the mountain plains. Refugees travelled at night. The hills are not just a thing to be looked at. They are an archive of memories; they contain the fear and the refuge that have occurred within them. The hills have trained people how to read the weather, how to keep food for the future (by creating a "grain cache"), and how to create an alternative plan. They also trained people to use their imagination to create gods for the forces which they cannot control (i.e., the wind, drought, earthquakes, etc., and plague). These forces come without warning and demand to be recognised through ritual, story, and a moral lexicon that can help support the disarray of randomness without creating havoc.

Delphi is situated on Mount Parnassus. It is incredibly beautiful but very remote. It was originally designated as the centre of the universe, where the heavens meet the earth. The Pythia was the most powerful of the oracles in the ancient world; she was sought after by all the pilgrims and, through oracle prophecies, would predict their futures. In addition to its possibly mystical significance, Delphi was a major centre of diplomacy in the ancient Hellenic world and was the primary source of diplomacy in the ancient world. Treasuries were located along the Sacred Way in Delphi, and each city-state claimed that its treasury had importance reflective of its respective treasury. The treasuries not only served as storehouses of money, they visually represented one's ability to accumulate wealth and create sacred legitimacy of that wealth through the performance (delivering on) of their sacred (theological) obligations. Delphi provided a means of linking the spiritual with

the geo-political. In later historical eras, it was referred to as "pure" religion. The sanctuary of Delphi existed through various transportation modes, including road transportation, port transportation, agricultural harvests, and human concerns about the future. Oracles traversed the transportation network system of Delphi, similar to how one would use asset management to mitigate risk. People did not simply travel to Delphi for the mystery of the oracle. Uncertainty and risk of loss are expensive. The oracle provided ceremonial means to contain it. Apollo killing the great serpent was more than a tale of monster-slaughter; it illustrated an overall takeover and the restructuring of power, where the new ruling party replaced an ancient ruling party that had power from the land. In this case, truth is created from the use of rites and politics. The oracle is supposed to be ambiguous, and therefore is not considered a flaw but rather an intrinsic attribute. As a result, when a prophecy can be interpreted in different ways, it becomes a type of mirror in which people see their own intentions. Priests interpret; cities advertise; rulers speculate. Subsequent historians clean up the debris from the original event. The lesson of the myth is that one's authority has been purged of sin. Apollo did not just buff the serpent; he stated that by doing so, he created order out of chaos. Consequently, violence has been given the meaning of cleansing. The serpent was old; the serpent was associated with the soil, caves, and plagues—dreadful things that validated that life could be ended without reason. Through the killing of the serpent, the former structure of society underwent a reorganisation of sorts from the terror of the old world into order; order was created through law, measure, music and prophetic revelation being enforced. The ground was not eliminated; the previous exercising of power was managed and executed through the wholesale adoption of newly defined titles. The sanctuary performed this act of translation daily through the application of smoke (produced from burnt offerings), laurel branches, holy water, and the staging of events that converted fear into the collective ritual of worship.

As you walk the Sacred Way, imagine how different the experiences and motives of those who walked that same route many years ago might have been: praying, hoping, fearing. The scent of sandalwood and laurel drifts on the wind. Shepherders still move their flocks along the hillsides, their calls echoing like music far older than the carved stones. Next to them, modern tour buses line up, and people drink coffee in the sunlight. Each person here, ancient or present, is reaching for guidance in their own way.

The interplay of time at Delphi is brutal. The archaeological remains of the Bronze Age lie beneath the Temple of Apollo, itself part of Roman civilisation. A powerful Christian presence followed, and now modern Hellas writes its own national story over it all. Not only do you see layers of meaning in stone, but you feel them in your body. Each new era settles on you, changing the way you walk, making you aware that with every step, you are treading on the weight of centuries. This is your lesson: not just for your mind, but for your body. Understanding comes slowly, and the mountain teaches that true perspective, like an ascent, has to be earned.

### **Day Three: From Delphi to Kalambaka (Meteora) — The Middle Way**

Going north, you see the land being both spread apart and closed in on—you have wide open plains, and then suddenly the earth becomes very unusual, as though it has been interrupted mid-sentence. Hellas has historically been caught in between these two states—being open to outside influences, while at the same time being resistant to outside influences; with the vast plains being perfect for establishing cavalry and collecting taxes and the mountains creating places for refuge and strong, independent local communities. The road is more than just a pathway; it is a piece of history. Along it have travelled armies, merchants and pilgrims. Beyond just people, there has been a slow flow of ideas such as music, saints, gossip, farming techniques and even the recipes travelling with olives and grains. The very concept of central Hellas is a political creation by later states attempting to make a fragmented land seem administratively coherent.

The timing of Meteora was also significant. Those monasteries were flourishing in a time of great insecurity. During this time, many empires were changing, and the roads became unsafe; so the world below was very unstable. This made the elevation from the ground level a safe haven and symbolically meant that the soul holds a higher status (geographically) than any ruling authority. The original rope nets and ladders were a functional means of ascending to the monastery, yet through the act of climbing the mountains, the act became part of the ritual. The view and silence became a reward for the climber's efforts. Similarly, today, as one ascends the stairs that have been carved into the rock, one's physical body learns before one's mind understands.

The fourteenth century was more than just a date on the calendar; it was a state of being. Following the dislocation caused by the Fourth Crusade and the subsequent results from this widespread loss of authority, 14th-century society experienced fear as a result of transitory and compromised governance, combined with non-standardised transportation routes that resulted in a fear of random acts of aggression against them. Meteora was architecturally created to create a home for its occupants outside of the reach of governance. However, the monastery could not rely solely upon itself. The monks relied heavily on the agricultural labour of the peasant community surrounding them for such things as food, water, oil and labour. There is an inseparable bond between the Sacred and the Economic. The Sacred is not above or below the Economic, but its existence is reliant on it, all at once forcing it into humility but simultaneously reaching for a transcendent place outside of the constraints of the economic world. I spent time at a great Monastery and was reminded of this connection during a brief conversation with a monk, Brother Nicholas. As he guided me through the Monastery and shared with me stories about how the Monastery developed, flourished and still exists today, I was struck when he stopped to take in the view of the valley below. He remarked, "We are fed by the world we are looking after." He pointed to the olive trees swaying in the mild breeze, further solidifying the connection between his life as a monk and the relationship he has with the earth and the seasons; he was reminded daily of his dependency on the earth. There is a modern-day representation of this dependency through modern logistics that remain in place to sustain this connection. One way to see this 'Sacred above, Economic below' principle in action is through the process of tracing the path of a bag of flour from its source (milling grain) to the Monastery that rests atop the cliffs. For instance, trucks bring the grain to local millers; millers then transport that flour, via narrow roads that echo historical trails, to sustain the daily living and traditions of the monks who reside high above. The story of supply and support is evidence of the long history that has provided continuity to Meteora and shows how the height of Meteora continues to rely on the world that exists below it.

There is also a deep connection to Hellas's own continuity; there is a consistency in the grammar of the Christian frescoes and the old myths—a "journey through trials, the process of ascending to an elevated state, the process of transfiguring oneself, light". While there are different theologies, there exists a commonality in the way humans desire to elevate themselves beyond the ordinary and return to the ordinary transformed. The mountain has always been a stage for revelations in this region, whether the God being worshipped was Apollo, Zeus, Christ or whatever people, when they cannot reconcile the randomness of loss, call 'fate'. Meteora does not eliminate old gods; Meteora reorders the same fear and hope of humanity into a new liturgy. The cliff is still the cliff; the wind is still the wind. The desire to seek out a higher order is still the same.

While I was in Kalambaka, preparing for a meal that would bring me back down to Earth, thus experiencing the connection between Meteora and the daily lives of ordinary people, bread, cheese, walnuts, and beans that had been cooked with love for long enough so that they were both tender and warm. Although I was high above in Meteora, my meal reminded me that extraordinary places have always depended on ordinary hands. Monks require bread just like everyone else. And bread in Hellas is never merely food; each loaf of bread is a result of countless repeated steps—sowing, harvesting, milling, kneading and baking—that have occurred over centuries by people whose

names will never be remembered. The beans remind me of a time when food had to endure, and nothing was wasted; the walnuts remind me of the land's ability to provide. As I consumed my meal, I was reminded that even simplicity is a type of wisdom by ensuring that all of God's creation will endure.

#### **Day Four: Walking with the Gods of Sports, from Kalambaka to Olympia**

You descend from a heavenly realm into a different sacred architecture; Olympia, the location where the Hellenic instinct to turn everything-sport, war, religion and reputation- into a ritual of some sort is perfected. But, again, the sacred is not an abstraction. The landscape around Olympia must be farmed for the food and material needed to sustain the Games. The essence of the sacred is to us through the smell of dust, river water and heat; the weariness in the bodies that have walked long distances to the site. The ideal of "excellence" does not float around in the sky; it is achieved through training, and training requires food, time and leisure; these resources are not distributed evenly. A mirage of heat causes shimmering waves to hover over the land, proving that ambition demands perseverance. This creates an immediate tension within you as you contemplate the different definitions of the term, arete (excellence) as an ideal, as a privilege and as a civic advertisement. The grandeur of the Ancient Games is overwhelming, but the shadows cast by the Games are equally as large.

There is a quiet beginning to the city of Olympia; it is one of its secrets. As you supply the missing crowd, the fever Heat intensifies. You walk among the temples of Zeus and Hera below the olive trees that have been the only witnesses to hundreds of years of striving by the Olympians trying to achieve fame through victory in the Games; you can nearly hear the applauding roar of the crowd as the feet of the athletes race through the footrace for a prize of victory. Athletic sports were not just "sports"; they also carried out the genealogy of the city-state; if we are descended from greatness, then we must act with greatness; however, there was nothing metaphoric about it. It was political technology. In 776 B.C.E. (the date Ancient Hellas used as the anchor date upon which they began to measure time), Olympia became the clock, the unity of the time and the rhythm of a city-state that existed for only a brief moment in time within a nation that had been divided by warring factions for hundreds of years. The Olympic Games could not stop the wars being fought among the city-states. It created orderliness to conflict through time, by providing a meeting point and a stage where people could show their status without the necessity to draw swords at that moment. This is an example of governance as well. Arete (the excellence in the body and mind) was not a show of personal vanity, but rather what someone would offer to their community. Ekecheiria (the sacred truce) is an example of hope: it was proof that the people were able to visualise, while under the order that Zeus created for them, a time period in history they would only dream of having, when victorious by political means. The athlete represented individuals, while the glory associated with both of them is shared by the entire city in the Hellas Pantheon of Gods and Goddesses. A wreath of wild olive is symbolic of community pride and assists in developing and creating political alliances, and it gives the name to the winner a stronger voice throughout the Hellenic world. A person's life continues off of the public space of the stadium as well; the farmers who cared for their olives produced the olive oil for their training and religious ceremonies, as well as the people who prepared the food and cleaned and provided water for the athletes, will more than likely not have an opportunity to display their athletic abilities because they are all labourers. Myth continues the presence of the operating system; by validating the effort, viewing the competition as sacred, and management of mortality through providing the opportunity for achieving greatness (the theatre of greatness). The Goddesses do not remove death, but give it a stage to perform upon.

From the dust, heat rises; from the cicadas, space is awash with the sound of moving air; and the olive leaves will flash silver, that is driven by the intensity of heat, as they pulsate at the consistent tempo of Olympia; as if a metronome is providing the tempo and the air has the ability to drive the tempo of Olympia.

The open expanse, glaring sun and relentless blue sky forces the body to know what its limits are within your environment; however, Olympia imbues the realization of your existence that glory is much like a flame – it will eventually flicker out – and humans base their lives around their fleeting, and sometimes visual, glory; therefore, it cannot be viewed as a failure, but only reflects the condition. Temperature and Dust Taste

In this area, water is worth more than gold. In addition, fruit is a way of saying, "I'm sorry for everything that has gone wrong in my life," as evidenced by the taste of an orange or peach. When you eat again, it will not be as if you are a tourist, but as if you are returning to being yourself again. This meal contributes to your daily ritual of restoring your body so that your brain can retain everything that has been learned from the day before. There is one specific instructor. Very bright, very calm. He's taken a knee, and has slowed time down, and made patience a virtue and enabled you to understand how the Hellenics have had centuries of time stretched out in the summertime, how noon is a time of peace between all people and the usefulness of shade for more than just comfort, but for your very survival. The flavour of your fruit is evidence of God's forgiveness, and all gifts given from God require thanks before receiving.

## **Day 5, Olympia To Nafplio, The Venetian Walls and the Sea**

Nafplio has the ability to create change like a new musical beat. The smell of the sea produces an entirely different pitch than land. The light/lights appear softer and are much more painterly. Nafplio is an example of artistic beauty without any semblance of innocence (i.e., Venetian Geometry, Ottoman History and Hellenic Adaptation all built one on top of another, like the stones in a wall). Port cities are a moral machine, and they teach the importance of a practical life; how to accept and care for strangers while remaining unchanged, how to create economic gain from a chance meeting without losing the relationship with the person who came to your port. They teach their people how to negotiate because wealth and danger come from the sea. Nafplio is a stunningly beautiful city; however, its beauty goes beyond simple aesthetics—it is a political statement. Nafplio represents "legibility," the idea of "being seen," and being part of the "global" community, even though many of Nafplio's historic buildings have endured years of damage.

As the first capital of modern Hellas, Nafplio creates a strong sense of the "founding mood" through its urban fabric—a new government establishing itself through governance, identity, division among various factions, and external influences, while also being proud of its unique history. The fortifications of Nafplio represent architectural monuments, while its aesthetic qualities represent political power. The early nineteenth century occupies this place like a ghost that continues to pay rent: there are the "uprising" of 1831, and the urgent state-building efforts by Kapodistrias in 1828; there are two assassinations in 1831; and there are the anxious efforts to create a cohesive country out of a disparate set of institutions that provided dignity and disappointment to a country that was still being born. The physical place and history of Nafplio reflects the confluence of time; both the Venetians' control of Nafplio, the Ottomans' presence in Nafplio, and the previous societal rhythms of family and parish will all co-write the creation of Nafplio's history—history which does not exist in linear fashion, but rather as a collection of layers, with each set of layers co-existing.

The palatable connection of food and the narrative backbone of the place exists within the context of the table: the sea, lemons, and olive oil are all important elements of the meal and the narratives that support the meal. Nafplio's unique food traditions are the direct result of cuisine created by the Argolic Sea; thus, many of the foods served at Nafplio are symbolic representations of how the citizens of Nafplio will come together through gastronomy. Tradition holds that, at the beginning of each meal, guests share a toast by raising their glasses and drinking to one another's health (called 'Yamas'), which creates a sense of unity between all who drink and receive blessings for the meal shared. Things to gather from the ocean are the economy of the harbour in what you eat: night fishing becomes a meal in the morning at the markets, nothing goes to waste when fish is plentiful,

and fish never fails to be ready for you to eat due to your understanding of the seasons. Lemon is not a garnish on your plate but a technology provided to you by the land: acidic lemon preserves, sharpens, raises, and makes fish safe for consumption with bright colour. Olive oil is the same as above, but is provided to you inland, where the land meets the sea through the olive tree. Your meal consists of products growing on the land and the sea, with all of the mountain lands meeting all of the coastal lands. Everything on your plate represents the country; everything you've gone through together, from the mountains to the ocean, from work to pleasure, from lack of food to the generosity of the land, all can be found on your plate.

## **Day 6: Nafplio to Mycenae and Epidaurus — Myths carved in stone**

The journey through the Argolid is a maximum effort at understanding the competitive nature of the area through various forms of mythology, such as mythic kings, mythic curses, and significant mythic events.

The Argolid landscape provides stories, contains all types of mythologies, and creates all types of mythologies. The hills provide a mixture of protection from and exposure to dangers, places where people could hide, and places where they could rule over the places where they found their houses. The dry riverbeds, cliffs, and hills provide the framework for criminal behaviour, and a criminally minded person in the Argolid will try to find a way to do so to those living near him/her.

As you touch the sun-baked limestone, you can feel the power of the Mycenaean culture's continual effort to build a society that uses the power of myths, traditions, beliefs, values, and customs to define itself. At the same time, you realise the many ways in which these myths will not protect a person from the legitimate threats from outside the walls of their home, including betrayal, violence from family members, and fear that you will be betrayed or attacked by someone from inside your home, as well as outside the walls of your home. The Lion Gate is known for more than just its renown; it is also an experience. As you walk through its archway, you have to duck, and it makes your shoulders tense. Just from the architecture alone, you learn about hierarchy, without being told. The entrances are narrow, the walls lofty, the views controlled. The power resides as a material entity in stone prior to assuming philosophical intent. The Bronze Age (c. 1600 to 1200 B.C.E.) is not relegated to the past but also is used as a model moving forward for such things as how to centralise grain, how to delineate labour, how to maintain wealth in contained environments and how to convert awe into compliance. The concept of "king" in later Hellenic imagination receives part of its weight from spaces such as this, but most importantly, the day-to-day board workers, such as women weaving, service people carrying water, and stone workers, were the invisible basis of the citadel's splendour. Their capacity to endure helped to create the myth of kingship.

The story of Agamemnon is more than just the glamour of the Trojan War. It conveys the House of Atreus's unremitting historical trajectory (i.e., enslaved, betrayed, avenged, and a family turned into a machine for the attainment of political power). The most significant source of Hellenic tragedy was the moment when power demanded a price the soul could not pay. The story of Iphigenia [daughter of Agamemnon who was sacrificed to ensure fair winds] defines a "myth" in the sense that it includes an ethical warning encoded in narrative software – that if a leader could sacrifice a daughter for the sake of generating fair winds and success in the future, then nothing was safe.

This story illustrates political theory's basic truth in that unrestrained authority will sooner or later ask for intimate sacrifices. In time, the authority will enter the home/household of the individuals interested in political livelihood; thus, the authority will ask for the body of the individual living in the household. The moment that the home/household becomes the site of political sacrifice, revenge is no longer a product of mental illness (i.e. pathology), but rather a product of the logic of the act.

Clytemnestra symbolises more than just a villain or victim; she reflects the household as it becomes responsive to demons of the empire while communicating blood for blood through her own language and active mythology — teaching us how injustice begets fear, and how eventual 'returns' to one another manifest catastrophically.

The Air-Medicine of Epidaurus allows us to see that healing is cultural (rituals, purification, dietary practices, sleep, dreams, and theatre combined make up the medicine of the Hellenic person's 'whole') and reminds us that the body and all of its multitude of stories are inseparable from each other.

More than just being a god of medicine, Asklepios provides a blueprint for how we as societies take care of and manage our vulnerable members. The sanctuary of Asklepios created an infrastructure of hope for ordinary people — oppressed, apathetic, hopeless, devoid of confidence, and suffering both within themselves and from their place in the world — and laid out their suffering (i.e., pain, sleeplessness, infertility, injury, etc.) through their communal experience (ritually) so that these burdens would not become private sources of shame.

Access to the sanctuary and healing process of Asklepios was open to all — women, the poor, and, when allowed by their owners, enslaved persons. Healing was not solely for "winners" and/or "heroes", but for the "non-winners", or the majority who lived mundane lives, and do not tend to be included in history.

There exists in the inscriptions, dream accounts (recorded) that function as archives of non-elites. A sample reads, 'May Asklepios free me from sleepless nights', documenting the fears, anxieties, and hopes of the rotor, and their wish to see their bodies healed through a return to health. Additionally, the theatrical performance surrounding the sacred space of Asklepios gives previous impetus to the audience and the people of Epidaurus: that being a listener can ultimately heal, and create a 'community of healing and support' where the ownership of your oppression can be shared, accepted, and transformed into 'a life of health and hope for the whole'.

The final example of the ordinary mercy of my food represents another form of community. Eating means continued existence and growth for me, and I consume to mediate my heavy truths, and in doing so, sustain the ability to retain what I have been taught. Hellenics' connection to Lemon on greens, bread dipped in oil, simple gastronomy and grilled food continues into their everyday lives. The significance of Hellas has taught me that if something so important does not remain an edible item, it turns into something else in the world — tyranny.

## **Day 7: Nafplio to Corinth — Empire meets mythology**

Corinth is geographically situated on a hill. It is an isthmus, and it creates a narrow restriction; therefore, each way that it touches other land has a way for controlling every movement across it. It is 6km across at its narrowest point; therefore, it must be monitored. If you own that narrow space, you will get to charge everyone that goes through the country; you get to decide how many are going through the space, and you get to charge them money, you can tax every person going through the country, and you can manage every war going on in that country and all the countries located on either side of the country. History states that Corinth would charge to pull ships across the Diolkos, an ancient stone road going across, demonstrating how one can graze land by calculating exactly how much money the land has without ever having to have livestock grazing land.

The power of Corinth originates with its landscape. Landscapes are not mere pieces of real estate. They present domination through their nature. They provide the illusion of managing the world via

its largest vantage point. To do that, you must be able to calculate all the people, animals, and goods that moved across or through that one confined space.

The geography of Corinth provides educational lessons to build an empire through economic leverage. Part of the learning is developing the right political view of the advantages of being calculative with passageways and turning all movement into money.

You can see all the historical life that took place at the agora: commercial activities, religious practices, and trying to make it there. The Temple of Apollo is there and gives authority to the sacred theatre and worldly desires. You think of the boats that were dragged across the Diolkos and how there was power on both land and water long before anyone could pump the sea over to the fertile floors of western Hellas. The real genius of Corinth was their practical, ruthless and lucrative business practices. There is something deeply practical about the way a city works. You can sense its older mythic operating system right away as well — an overwhelming belief that being clever is always a good thing, even if it causes some harm to others. There is a community here that provides a civic manifestation for those who like to trick others in order to get their way. Moving ships over land is an act of mythological proportions: taking the power of the world and commanding it into our plans, taking the long way around journey, turning hard work into dominion.

Sisyphus would feel at home in this city; his punishment (that of working without any hope of doing something greater) is perfect for a city that has an obsession with leverage. Also, Aphrodite, desire attached to wealth, worship tied to commerce. Corinth is unyielding in its rejection of the (false) comfort of believing that the religion of antiquity was pure; it was human, and, therefore, complicated. Myths in Corinth do not provide moralistic judgment but rather describe from within, as if to say: you can profit from your desires; you can use pleasure as a way to endorse power; you can use the sanctity of worship to meet your appetite. The simultaneity of Corinth is, at times, overwhelming with a variety of experiences, such as: archaic temples; ultimate domination through Roman Colonization (44 B.C.E.); byzantine remnants; current transportation systems; and, ultimately, the same isthmus continuing on in its duality — teaching man that controlling your life is possible, and yet reminding man that it is fleeting.

At some point during my experience, I taste the pleasure of good food (olives, bread, cheese, something acidic and simple) — and that feeling resonates with me. But, eating in Corinth is equally so. Tasting the food in this area not only allows you to taste (the intensity), but it is also very much a representation of Earth itself; the taste of something that was created honestly through the earth and the sun (limestone & sunlight). A simple meal here means that I am in agreement with the land, as the land gives me what is there, and I will accept what is given without expecting more. This honesty is an opportunity for us to accept what is given and to be thankful for what we have been given.

I am leaving the Acropolis in its remnant light as my time here comes to an end.

I return to Athens a changed man, as I now have a better understanding of what it means to be a familiar person. The Acropolis is a reflection of all the stories I have collected from long before I arrived in Hellas, as it is illuminated only with the unyielding light of all of my timelines. When you hold all the stories of the times that have had an impact upon you and the journey of your life, you can feel how heavy they can be, as heavy and as difficult to carry as the weight of time on you. This is the underlying structure of your trip ("nostios" = going back home and feeling different). The end result of your journey is also the end of your history. Yet in the act of returning, you realise that travel does not just change the traveller; it offers everyone who journeys a new way to bear their memories, to carry the shape of their experience into all that follows. Each person who travels

completes their own circle, returning home not to where they began, but to a new understanding of what home means.

As I look up at the Acropolis, I realise that my trip to Hellas is more than just a group of places I visited; I learned about myself through my connection with the enduring and communicative values that the ancient Hellenics passed on to us. I now carry echoes of the wisdom of Athena, the courage to question, and the strength to persevere. The Acropolis at dusk reminds me one last time of how we define our abilities based on the kind of stone we have, how many different ways we can measure a stone, and how we measure time using memories.

While the Acropolis is beautiful, its beauty has more to do with the interpretation of what a city means to the people in it, whether it comes from an academic or ethical standpoint. How do people who built a city define its purpose? Who is included in the membership of that city? Who is excluded? What kinds of things did they create that would outlast them? What did they blind themselves to? The stones of the Acropolis do not exist in a vacuum; the stone is also torn apart: by bread, olive oil, something that has been grilled, a small dish of greens with lemon, raised glasses—to celebrate [not rituals or ceremonies, only in recognition of our time together—"we will see each other again"]—our recognition will have been marked in the number of days that we spent together.

Conversations have occurred with respect to politics, families, grief, laughter, memories and the normal weight of the next day. From all of my experiences of being with Hellenics during my time there, the sacred is—alive—and with life. In Hellas, life does not exist in a linear fashion; it exists one story, one argument, one cup of coffee, and one meal at a time. In addition to being non-linear, the arguments that take place in Hellas are not merely noise; they offer the opportunity to keep memories alive—not only through the monuments of today and in the manner that they have lived each day—but in the manner that everyday people will continue to live beyond the time that history has forgotten them. This occurs through their words, food, actions, and countless acts of love and kindness. The journey may be completed, but the lessons will remain and continue to teach me long after leaving this table.