

Disconnected Landscapes: Ancient Sites, Travel Guides, and Local Identity in Modern Greece

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A small upland basin administratively designated the Ancient Nemea Valley lies in the northeastern corner of the Peloponnesos of Greece, midway between the Corinth-Argos highway, and the rising mountains of the interior Corinthia.¹ In an intricate tale of movable names, this area has also been called simply the Nemea Valley or even the Koutsoumadhi Valley, depending on who was speaking and in what context. Depictions of the region have been similarly variable, and different viewers have constructed very different landscapes from the valley's visual evidence. This essay pursues such landscape dissonance as expressed in representations of the valley as a whole and the ancient site which stands within it. I begin with two portrayals which are at odds with each other and then reflect on what their contrast says about the relationship between foreign travelers and local residents, national imagery and daily land use.

Macneile Dixon Visits the Valley

In the spring of 1928, Macneile Dixon embarked on a journey made by scores of European travelers before him. He carried several books his English compatriots had written about such visits as well as the *Description of Greece* by Pausanias which they, too, had used. Like so many in the preceding two centuries, Dixon planned to tour ancient sites in the company of a few friends. In early 20th century fashion, Dixon was drawn to Greece as an appropriate destination for "lovers of the beautiful" (Dixon 1929:vii), and the Pausanias he packed was the version translated by James Frazer (Pausanias 1913). Dixon was accompanied by four men and two women, including a professor and a diplomat, and like many others, he inscribed the events of his tour in a book published a year later.

Landing in Athens, Dixon and his party took to the Greek countryside by a combination of automobile, railroad and sea. A steamer brought them to the town of Nafplio, where they began a drive northward toward Corinth. After stopping at Argos and Mycenae, they continued on through the Tretus Pass, then over an upland plateau to a vantage point on the

eastern hills which rim the Ancient Nemea Valley. Dixon described what he saw at this moment as follows,

"The little valley of Nemea, threaded by a brook of the same name, is a sleepy solitude with few habitations" (1929:137-38).

Like Pausanias, the next thing Dixon recorded in his verbal overview of the valley were the remains of a temple to Zeus built in 330 B.C.² He did not, however, mention the religious significance of the temple or the accompanying athletic games which were vitally important to Pausanias. Neither did he note the valley's 671 people nor its two modern villages, one of which stood a few hundred meters from the temple.³ Like virtually all who had come before, Dixon included no drawings of this hillside view, while his narrative account implied that the only things noticeable in an otherwise empty basin were the remaining columns of the temple.

Indeed the only engraving Dixon included with this passage was done from a different position, lower down, after he descended into the valley for an hour before continuing on to Corinth (Fig. 1 at end of article). There, a companion sketched Dixon leaning against the temple, in a view conforming to what had, by then, become the canonical form for illustrating Nemea. Such drawings focused on the temple and were remarkably consistent in viewing the valley by looking upward through the columns which thus loomed larger than the surrounding mountains that would have dwarfed them from other perspectives (e.g., Chandler 1776, Williams 1829, Wordsworth 1840, Farrer 1882). Dixon's idiosyncratic twist on this motif was to place himself on the temple as sole proprietor of the moment.

Dixon's account acknowledged the presence of vineyards and wheat- fields in the valley but went on to state that "no human figures enlivened the scene on the day of our visit," while "the peace of the surroundings invited [me] to idle dreams" (1929:138). Continuing his homage to those who had

preceded him, Dixon made no mention of the valley's present settlements, including the village of Iraklio which by then abutted the temple lands, as seen in a photograph taken by archaeologist J.P. Harland during his excavations there in 1926 (Fig. 2).⁴

Fotis Hiotis Tries to Give Me New Eyes

Fotis Hiotis, the then 72 year-old owner of the main coffee house in Iraklio, also composed a portrait of the valley when he took me and a research assistant up its western slopes in July 1985. I was there in conjunction with the Nemea Valley Archaeological Project, an enterprise for which I have returned seven summers since.⁵ I was examining current patterns of migration and settlement and not at all sure how my work fit with the archaeological survey going on around me, despite mutual interests in building a comprehensive history of the valley. In a vague sense, I envisioned myself bringing into the project some understanding of contemporary life on its own terms. William Alexander was helping in these efforts and also came up the mountain with Fotis that day.

Fotis, a central figure in Iraklio who carried much of its history in his head, had been both patient and intrigued by our questions on the village. It was he who suggested there was much to learn by climbing the promontory known as Vayia which rises 450 m. above the valley floor.⁶ We set out at 6:30 the next morning, following a dirt road southwest out of the village through rows of currant vines. At the base of Vayia, the road turned abruptly upward and then ended altogether as we came to the last vineyard. From there, we continued on what my fieldnotes describe as a "faint footpath." I was humbled but not surprised that Fotis moved more quickly up the mountain than I, despite his not having done this for many years.

It was tough going, but suddenly the path gave out, and we were atop Vayia, amidst low, scrub vegetation and able to walk easily in all directions. Fotis identified this as the border between the lands of Iraklio and those of the westward market town to which the name of Nemea had officially migrated in the early days of the Greek state. The wind was bracing, the swallows were crying, and I felt like a new person. The valley below was leafy green in a

way to which I was unaccustomed in Greece. The columns of the temple were barely distinguishable at this altitude, and the valley floor a velvety carpet of vineyards. Fotis began to direct us to see its landmarks and divisions.

As we walked around Vayia, Fotis pointed out, of course, the two contemporary villages on which my eyes were rather narrowly focused. Fotis' landscape, however, was broader and more textured than this. It spoke of community history through the eroded mud brick foundations of the old hillside village which had been replaced by new ones on the valley floor a century ago, and the ruined animal folds (*galaria*) reminding him of shepherds who once pastured flocks on Vayia. The valley's greenery was not nondescript to Fotis, but a quilt-like record of familial properties and cash-cropping strategies, dotted by many small churches built by families near their major land holdings in the early 20th century.

Looking at my notes for that day, I am also struck how many times Fotis used the mountaintop as a means of surveying the valley's connections to other areas, including the nearby market town, the more distant city of Argos, and the westward mountains. Where Dixon had looked inward and encircled the temple with an isolating wall of hills, Fotis spoke as much of the other communities we could see from Vayia, and the ties which local residents had with these areas.

During our time on Vayia, Fotis repeatedly mentioned how much he had enjoyed coming up here as a young man when his family still kept sheep. While he had disliked the drudgery of the work, he had relished the chance to look around. Like many others, however, his family completed their gradual transformation from herding to farming around 1928, and he has climbed the mountain only sporadically since that time. In all this discussion, not once did Fotis mention the temple.

A Silent Dissonance

In a very Foucauldian sense, both Macneile Dixon and Fotis Hiotis recognized the power of panoramas for rising above, changing perspective, and mastering an area⁷. Both also created landscapes in the sense that these are, as Meinig has phrased it, "defined by

our vision and interpreted by our minds" (1979:3). The difference in their two depictions was not, of course, a matter of eastern and western views. For over two centuries, this valley has been construed as two different landscapes by travelers visiting its ancient remains and farmers living there. This has produced an often silent dissonance masked by assumptions of speaking about the same place. Out of this have come confusion, contention, and long-term habits of speaking past each other, points to which I will return after reaching some general understanding of each of these two disconnected landscapes.

Near-sited Journeys

Dixon's description was not anomalous. Travelers have visited Nemea with some frequency since the late 18th century, when the Grand Tour of Greece first found its place on the itineraries of northern Europeans and Americans. I have identified 58 accounts of the valley published between 1766 and 1890, roughly one every year and a half. Such narratives have been replaced in the 20th century by dozens of general guidebooks for Greece, most of which accord Nemea a paragraph or two.⁸

Over time, these narratives and guides built an increasingly formulaic discourse reducing the valley to a single emblem, the temple's three remaining columns, which, in turn, were treated as a portal to reverie on an ancient Greece as much 19th century in origin as 4th century BC. The various forms of classicism and philhellenism prominent in the early 19th century were enfolded in a running critique and commentary on contemporary life. Travel to ancient sites was intended for personal contact with this imagined past, and until the 1870s, most travelers to Nemea omitted local residents from their accounts even as the valley's population and vineyards steadily grew. These visitors had not come to see such things at Nemea and turned instead to ways in which a few moments at the temple could evoke a sense of isolation, melancholy, and the silence of centuries.⁹ This characterization was reinforced by repeated mention of a solitary tree near the temple, the mountains cutting the valley from the outside world, the time and distance necessary to reach it, and the rough upland plateau crossed in the approach from the east. Fewer than half the travelogues between

1770 and 1870 mentioned seeing any people at all, and then usually a single shepherd conveying picturesque effect.

While Dixon followed in the tradition of these early writers, by the time he visited Nemea, there were other narrative possibilities available. Greater numbers of foreign visitors annually came to Greece, staying less time, seeing fewer places, and retaining an interest in ancient sites not so much as social commentary, but as signifiers of beauty, the glories of western civilization, and an appropriate journey for those of education and class (Eisner 1991:244). Village Greeks played more prominent roles in the travelogues and guides emerging from this new tourism.

Indeed, partially due to the peasant philosophers who were deemed to live there, the Greek countryside and seacoast were by then generally perceived as places where the worries of urban life could be temporarily suspended, a perception as strongly held by many urban Greeks as foreigners.¹⁰ To this day, the ruins at Nemea have remained the primary attraction drawing travelers to the valley, but since the 1870s, they have been surrounded by eternal villagers whose mute presence aids the process of leaving one's concerns behind. The valley was thus quickly peopled with farmers who appeared to have been there from time immemorial. While the Nemean wine sold at roadside stands has come to evoke enduring peasant life and the pleasures of travel, in no guides is it ever portrayed the way local farmers see it: an expanding cash crop destined for national and international markets. The valley remains a place primarily defined by its antiquities,¹¹ and local residents are a silent, supportive backdrop, as evidenced in this passage from a 1994 guidebook,

"This splendid site located in a lush valley... is frequently deserted, and when you suddenly see the three slender standing limestone columns of the Doric Temple of Zeus, you might almost think you had discovered it yourself" (Tucker 1994:151).¹²

For two centuries, travel literature has thus portrayed the temple at Nemea in such a way that it stood for the entire valley. Even now some guides completely bypass the villages and vineyards around the temple (e.g., Hall 1994, Tucker 1994), while others place it

amidst wine-drinking peasants who continue to speak less than do its columns. General work on Greek travelers has established the irrelevance of most travelogues for learning about modern Greece (Angelomatis-Tsougarakis 1990, Augustinos 1994, Eisner 1991, Leontis 1995, Spencer 1954, Tsigakou 1981). At Nemea, this meant active erasure of local places and people from the landscape. That such narratives were in truth restricting their discussion to the temple was unremarkable and thus hidden. Descriptions of the temple's solitude thus became descriptions of the valley. This was so even for those who normally described conditions of trade and commerce for other parts of Greece. Those few early travelers, for example, who mentioned farming at Nemea could thus still characterize it as a "solitary valley" (Pouqueville 1826:V:301) with the "dreary vacancy of a death-like solitude" (Dodwell 1819:11:210).¹³ Nemea became a place for contacting the past, and the present has only been included in so far as it advances this goal.

Such characterizations were also supported by an implicit belief that ancient sites existed outside normal political and economic relations. In elevating visitors above the concerns of modern life, trips to such sites masked connections between the travelers' home places and rural Greece. The Nemea Valley presented abundant evidence of increasing commercial ties between Greece and the West, the countryside and Athens, yet few travelers or guides mention anything connected to this. As Pratt (1992) and van den Berghe (1994) have elsewhere discussed, such travelers neither challenged nor reflected on the conditions of economic and governmental dominance which framed their visits. The 18th century growth of northern European-eastern Mediterranean trade and the simultaneous initiation of widespread travel to Greece were probably not, however, merely coincidental (Droulia 1968:7; Eisner 1991:50; Spencer 1954).

National Lands, Family Lands

The landscape seen by Fotis Hiotis and many residents of the Ancient Nemea Valley stands at odds with that of the travelers. For many who live there, the valley is filled with tangible markers of familial property, community history, and commercial

agriculture. While people do not regularly climb to the top of Vayia, their frequent trips to the westward market town provide similar panoramas at only slightly lower elevations. These overviews now afford an almost daily means of taking stock of the valley. What appears is a record of generally successful familial efforts to settle and cultivate the area.

The local history I have come to understand over the last ten years from family narratives, public records and other archives (Sutton 1994, Wright et al. 1990) flies in the face of what might have been assumed from traveler's accounts. When travel to the area began in the 18th century, there were several small settlements on the western hills, and a settled population of 140, amplified in the winter by transhumant shepherds. After Greek independence from the Ottomans in the 1820s, the valley's population grew as settlements and fields spread across its floor in a pattern common for the Peloponnesos. Formerly vacant areas became part of the National Lands now open to Greek smallholders (McGrew 1985). By 1907, the valley's population had reached 490, and two new villages had been founded along the main road through it. The area's production of wine must (*mousto*) for sale in Argos had expanded, and currant vineyards had been planted for export to northern Europe.

The ancient Nemea Valley today remains an active cash-cropping area of some 700 people, whose economy rests very little on the tourists who visit its ancient site for an hour or so, something giving it a particular ability to elucidate the nature of such sites in Greece. There are no souvenir shops, cafeterias or snack bars. Tourists rarely enter the nearby village. The site and museum remain physically and conceptually a world apart, controlled and visited by outsiders, and now buffered by an official archaeological zone of some 40 acres.

The temple is thus mentioned surprisingly little in local stories about the valley. Many Nemeans take general pride in the presence of a major site, but it figures little in local histories except for stories of working on the excavations and land negotiations. In discussing antiquity, residents more often mention another place which they have endowed with

significance. A rocky overhang in the eastern hills is often identified as the cave of the Nemean lion of Herakles' first labor. While guidebooks discount this as folk legend, it remains a touchstone of antiquity for local residents, and a direct way in which they have claimed part of the valley's past. The temple itself, however, evokes mixed feelings.

Ancient Sites and Local Residents

The landscapes built by travelers and local residents for the ancient Nemea Valley thus have only a seeming congruence. In many ways they operate as separate tectonic plates. They generally float independently, hovering near one another without touching. Sometimes they crash into each other in violent upheavals, and only occasionally do they meld together.

This landscape dissonance is illuminating. Local indifference toward what visitors see as the only thing of interest, the temple, reveals how much the construction of ancient sites in Greece has played into national and international imagery, but not necessarily local (see also Leontis 1995). Indeed the site at Nemea was created by sundering it from the people around it, a condition which explicates the disinterest and resentment which some inhabitants of the valley have expressed toward the site, and exposes the appropriating quality of those travelogues which remarked that local residents did not understand the temple.

This analysis also speaks to the bewilderment experienced by some current visitors to the valley. They are prepared neither for present settlement patterns nor the dusty expanse left by recent archaeological work. Confusion reigns ironically supreme in the fact that the town in the next valley westward is now called New Nemea, or even simply Nemea. Tourists using the public bus system often disembark there only to declare that this cannot be Nemea (e.g., Serstevens 1961:59). Certainly it does not look like what they expected to see. Neither, however, does the present condition of the site back in the Ancient Nemea Valley. It is now a network of archeological trenches and labels which confounds those who came simply for a contemplative experience.

Archaeological work conducted at Nemea since 1884 (Blegen 1925, Stephen Miller 1990, Wright et al. 1990) has thus not occurred in a neutral setting. It has sometimes directly participated in the travelers' landscapes, and even when this has not been the case, it has been understood in terms of them. While recent excavations and surveys have been particularly careful to involve villagers in more than digging, and to develop a complex and even critical understanding of the area in antiquity, they have still operated on a conceptual minefield. Archaeologists and travelers are both interested in sites. Unexamined assumptions that both mean the same thing by this term, however, has sometimes taken archaeological statements into unintended territory (Fotiadis 1992, Dunnell 1992). Creation of the protected archaeological zone has also played into the disjunction of past and present in clear and obvious ways.

Ethnographers also move across these landscapes. The recognition that we, too, are topographers is not lost on many of us these days. While my early writings on the modern valley ignored the temple, I now see this as reinforcing the separation of these two landscapes, and missing an power relation which operates at Nemea, even if more opaquely than areas marked by tourism. Herzfeld (1991) and others have revealed the contestations between national and local perceptions in places under the grip of preservation laws and tourist development. This may be an equally important endeavor for places like Nemea where such dissonance also occurs but lies masked and muted, beneath the surface.¹⁴

Endnotes

1. The valley measures roughly 4 km. by 8 km. (peak to peak), and its floor stands at 310 m. above sea level on the average. It contains the remains of an ancient religious/athletic sanctuary named Nemea in antiquity. In the 18th century, the valley as a whole bore the same name as the main village and river through it, Koutsoumadhi, and the next basin westward was called the Ayios Yeorgos valley after its market town of that name. After creation of the modern Greek nation, these two valleys were placed in the same *demos* (local administrative unit) in

- 1834 (Vayiakkakos 1975: 68-69). In a national effort to emphasize Greek antiquity, this *demos* was named for the most prominent ancient site within it, Nemea. When the *demos* split into several separate *koinotites* in 1912, the name Nemea stayed with the large market town in the Ayios Yeorgos valley, and what is here called the Ancient Nemea Valley became the *koinotis* of Iraklio after what had become its main village. In local discourse, however, the market town was still known as Ayios Yeorgos for the first half of the 20th century. In 1958, the town was officially renamed New (Nea) Nemea, and the *koinotis* of Iraklio became Ancient (*Archaia*) Nemea. At present local residents generally use the term Nemea for the market town, and Iraklio or Ancient Nemea for the valley discussed in this paper. Travelers and guidebooks, on the other hand, have consistently referred to the latter simply as Nemea.
1. Frazer's translation of Pausanias' passage on Nemea (*Description of Greece*, XV, lines 2-3) is as follows: "In Nemea there is a temple of Nemean Zeus, which is worth seeing, though the roof had fallen in, and there was no image left. The temple stands in a grove of cypresses; and it was here, they say, that the serpent killed Opheltes, who had been set down by his nurse on the grass. The Argives sacrifice to Zeus in Nemea as well as in Argos, and they choose a priest of Nemean Zeus. Moreover they announce a race to be run by armed men at the winter celebration of the Nemean festival. Here is the grave of Opheites enclosed by a stone wall, and within the enclosure there are altars. Here, too, is a barrow, the tomb of Lycurgus, the father of Opheltes. The spring is named Adrastea, perhaps because Adrastus discovered it, or perhaps for some other reason. They say that the district got its name from Nemea, another daughter of Asopus. Above Nemea is Mount Apesas, where they say that Perseus first sacrificed to Apesantian Zeus." (Pausanias 1913:93).
 2. The 1928 national census conducted shortly before Dixon's visit, counted 499 inhabitants for the village of Iraklion and 172 for the village of Koutsoumadhi, both located in the Ancient Nemea Valley.
 3. This photograph comes from the Harland Archives at the Archaeological Museum at Nemea.
 4. I came to Nemea to direct the ethnological component of the multidisciplinary, multi-institutional Nemea Valley Archaeological Project which was pursuing the settlement history of the valley from prehistoric times to the present. The project has been funded by grants from the National Endowment for the Humanities, the National Geographic Society, and the Society for Aegean Prehistory.
 5. The highest point on Vayia is 721 m. above sea level. It is also known as Mt. Daouli.
 6. See Pratt(1992) and Mills(1991:78) for general discussions of the use of panoramas in travel narratives.
 7. A more detailed analysis may be found in Sutton (1995).
 8. See Stella Miller (1983) for a parallel account of this imagery for Nemea.
 9. See Urry (1990) and van den Berghe (1994) for general discussions of this aspect of contemporary tourism.
 10. Nemea has thus not become the kind of quaint peasant site sought after by those who come to Greece with the goals of "ethnic tourism" as discussed by van den Berghe (1994),
 11. The passage continues on, "time telescopes at Nemea, where a modern threshing floor and massive sixth-century AD Christian basilica and cemetery site beside the fourth-century BC Temple of Zeus."

12. Urquhart's description (1839) provides one of the few exceptions for Nemea.
13. Landscapes can, of course, be reconstructed. Fotis Hiotis lifted my eyes from too narrow a focus on village rather than valley, and in so doing led me to reconsider what Greek villages signify in a very general way (Sutton 1988, 1994). In 1994 and 1996, Stephen Miller, director of current excavations at the temple, worked with local leaders to re-enact the ancient athletic games at the newly excavated stadium (Marker 1996). This effort met with a remarkable response, as some villagers entered the site for the first time, and others said they felt connected to it in a way they never had been before. I heard not a single negative comment. Many local villagers now belong to the Society for the Revival of the Nemean Games which has 1000 members in 15 nations. Indeed I now wonder what might result if tourists were also encouraged to look across landscapes and make sense of the villages and vineyards that surround the site in the ways that local residents understand them. This might be an endeavor worth pursuing for perhaps it is our job to make connections as well as expose separations.

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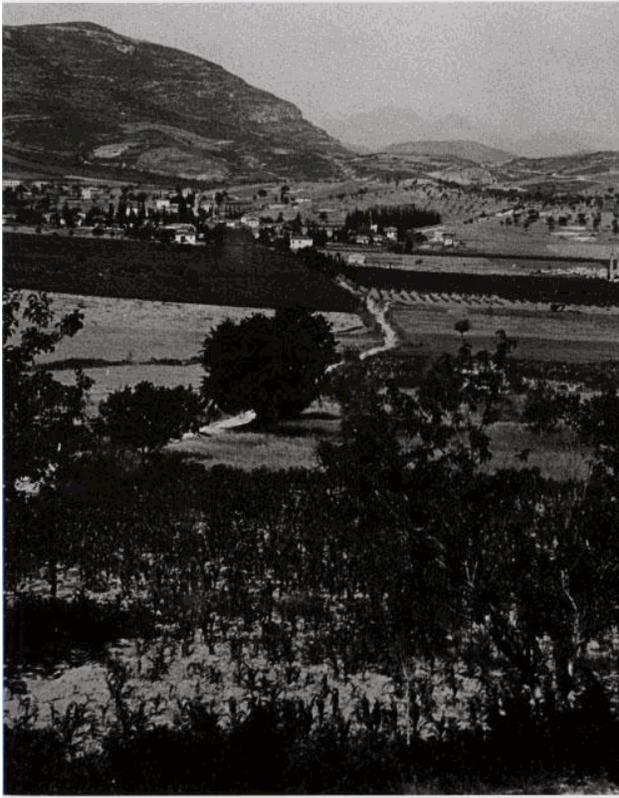


Figure 1



Figure 2