

# Pausanias

Translated by Gregory Nagy

The sacrificing of an animal and the pouring of its blood into a pit is precisely the way to activate the consciousness of the hero in hero-cult. It is also the way to make up for the death of a hero in hero-cult. We know this from the rituals of hero cult as documented by sources like the ancient scholar Pausanias, who flourished in the second century of our era—over half a millennium after the time of Herodotus. Consider Pausanias' description of initiation into the mysteries of the hero-cult of Trophonios. The oracle of the cult-hero Trophonios is mentioned already in Herodotus (paragraph 46 p. 16), who reports that Croesus had consulted the oracle of Trophonios, as well as the oracle of the cult-hero Amphiaraos. Here are the words of Pausanias [9.39.5ff] :

[9.39.5] At the oracle [*manteîon*], here are the kinds of things that happen. When a man decides to **descend** [*kat-ienai*] to the place of Trophōnios, first of all he undergoes a regimen for a set number of days in a **dwelling** [*oikēma*], and the dwelling [*oikēma*] is sacred to Good Superhuman Force [*Agathos Daimōn*] and to Good Fortune [*Agathē Tukhē*]. In undergoing the regimen there, he goes through various procedures of purification, avoiding hot baths; the water for bathing is the river Hercyna. He has unlimited access to meat from the sacrifices, for **he who descends** [*kat-ienai*] makes sacrifices to Trophōnios himself and to the children of Trophōnios; also to Apollo and to Kronos, to Zeus with the epithet King [*Basileus*], to Hera Charioteer [*Hēniokhos* = the one who holds the reins of the chariot], and to Demeter whom they name with the epithet Europa, saying that she was the wetnurse of Trophōnios. [9.35.6] At each of the sacrifices a seer [*mantis*] is present, who inspects the entrails of the sacrificial victim, and after an inspection makes prophecies to **him who descends** [*kat-ienai*], saying whether Trophōnios will be of good intentions [*eu-menēs*] and will be welcoming when he **receives** [verb *dekhesthai*] him. The entrails of the other victims do not make clear all that much the **thinking** [*gnōmē*] of Trophōnios. But the night when each person **descends** [*kat-ienai*], on that night they sacrifice a ram over a pit [*bothros*], invoking Agamedes.<sup>1</sup> Even if the previous sacrifices have appeared propitious, no account is taken of them unless the entrails of this ram mean **the same thing**. If all the sacrifices are in agreement with each other, then each person **descends** [*kat-ienai*], **having good hopes** [*eu-elpis*].

And each person **descends** [*kat-ienai*] in this way: [9.39.7] First of all, in the night, they take him to the river Hercyna. Having taken him, they anoint him with olive oil and wash him. They [who do the anointing and the washing] are two boys chosen from among the citizens, about thirteen years old, and they are named Hermae. These are the ones who are washing **the one who descends** [*kata-bainein*] and who are attending to whatever is needed, in their function as attendant boys. Afterwards he is led by the priests, not immediately to the oracle [*manteîon*], but to fountains of water. These fountains are very near each other. [9.39.8] Here it is necessary for him to drink water, called the water of Forgetting [*Lēthē*], so that there may be for him a forgetting [*lēthē*] of all thoughts that he was thinking [*phrontizein*] up to this point. Right after this, it is necessary for him to drink the other water, the water of Memory [*Mnēmosunē*]. From this he remembers [*mnēmoneuei*] the things seen by him as **the**

**one who descended [kata-bainein]**. Having viewed the statue [*agalma*] which they say was made by Daedalus—about this there is no revelation made by the priests except to those who are about to go to Trophōnios—having seen this statue [*agalma*] and having worshipped it and having prayed, he proceeds to the oracle [*manteion*], wearing a linen khiton and cinching the khiton with ribbons and wearing **the boots of the native locale [epikhōriai krēpides]**.

[9.39.9] The oracle [*manteion*] is beyond the grove [*alsos*], on the mountain. There is a foundation, of white stone, in a circle. The perimeter of the foundation is in the proportion of a very small threshing floor. Its height is just short of two cubits. On the foundation, there are rods standing there. They are of bronze, like the cross-bars holding them together. And through them has been made a double door. Inside the perimeter is a chasm [*khasma*] in the earth, not naturally formed, but artificially constructed as a work of masonry, according to the most exact specifications.

[9.39.10] The form [*skhēma*] of this **constructed dwelling [oikodomēma]** is like that of a bread-oven [*kribanos*]. One might estimate its breadth across the middle to be about four cubits. And the depth of the **constructed dwelling [oikodomēma]** could be estimated to extend to not more than eight cubits. There has been made by them no constructed **descent [kata-basis]** to the bottom level. But when a man comes to Trophōnios, they bring him a ladder—a narrow and light one. There is, for the one who has descended [*kata-bainein*], a hole between the bottom level and the constructed dwelling [*oikodomēma*]. Its breadth appeared to be two spans, and its height one span. [9.39.11] So, **the one who descends [kat-ienai]** is now lying down in the direction of the bottom level, holding barley-cakes kneaded in honey [*māzai memagmenai meliti*], and he pushes forward with his feet, forward into the hole; he himself pushes forward, eager for his knees to get into the hole. Then, after the knees, the rest of his body is suddenly drawn in, rushing forward, just as the biggest and most rapid river will catch a man in its torrents and carry him under. After this, for those who are now inside the inner sanctum [*aduton*], there is no single or same way [*tropos*] for them to learn the things of the future. One person will see them, another person will hear them.

To return and go back for those who descended [*kata-bainein*] is through the same mouth, with feet first, pushing forward. [9.39.12] They say that no one of **those who descended [kata-bainein]** has ever been killed, except for one of the bodyguards of Demetrius. They say that this person did not perform any of the customary rituals in the sacred space [*hieron*], and that he **descended [kata-bainein]** not in order to consult [*khrēsomenos*] the god but in hopes of stealing gold and silver from the inner sanctum [*aduton*].<sup>2</sup> It is said that the corpse of this person appeared [*anaphainesthai*] **in another place**, and was not expelled at the sacred mouth. With reference to this man many other things are said. What has been said by me is what is most worthy of being taken into account.

[9.39.13] **The one who has ascended [ana-bainein]** from Trophōnios is received once again by the priests, who seat him upon what is called the Throne [*thronos*] of Memory [*Mnēmosunē*], which is situated not far from the inner sanctum [*aduton*]. Having seated him, they ask him all he has seen and found out. After learning the answers, they then turn him over to his relatives or friends. These take him to **the dwelling [oikēma]** where he had earlier passed through his regimen in the presence

of Fortune [*Tukhē*] and Superhuman Force [*Daimōn*], the Good [*agathoi*] ones. They [= relatives or friends] **take him back** [verb *komizein*] to this place by lifting him and carrying him off, while he is still possessed [*katokhos*] by terror and still unconscious both of himself and of those who are near him. Afterwards, his mind [*phronēsis*] will again be working not at all less well than before, in all respects, and even laughter **will come back** [*ep-an-ienai*] to him.

[9.39.14] What I write is not hearsay; I myself have consulted [*khresamenos*] Trophōnios and have seen others doing so. And it is a necessity for **those who have descended** [*kat-ienai*] into the sacred space of Trophōnios to dedicate writings on a tablet that record all the things that each person has heard or seen.

### **Now backtrack and read Pausanias' description of the myth of Trophonios (9.37.5):**

[The hero Erginos] married a young wife, and had children, Trophonios and Agamedes. Trophonios is said to have been a son of Apollo, not of Erginos. This I am inclined to believe, as does everyone who has gone to Trophonios to inquire of his oracle. They say that these, when they grew up, proved clever at building sanctuaries for the gods and palaces for men. For they built the temple for Apollo at Delphi and the treasury for Hyrieus. One of the stones in it they made so that they could take it away from the outside. So they kept on removing something from the treasury. Hyrieus was puzzled when he saw keys and seals untampered with, while the treasure kept on getting less. So he set over the vessels, in which were his silver and gold, snares or other devices, to catch any who should enter and try to steal the treasure. Agamedes entered and was caught in the trap, but Trophonios cut off his head, so that when day came his brother would not be tortured and inform on him that he was connected to the crime. The earth opened up and swallowed Trophonios at the point in the grove at Lebadeia where is what is called the pit [*bothros*] of Agamedes, and next to it is a stele.<sup>3</sup>

### **Pausanias 2.27.3-4**

Inside the enclosure [*peribolos*] are slabs [*stēlai*]. There used to be many more of these in ancient times, but in my time there were only six surviving. On these slabs are inscriptions recording the names of men and women who were healed by Asklepios, including details about the kinds of illness experienced by each one of them—and about how each one of them was healed. And they are all written in the Dorian dialect. [2.27.4] Standing apart from these slabs is one particularly ancient one, which says that Hippolytus dedicated to the god [*theos*] twenty horses. What the inscription on this slab says is in conformity with what is said by the people of Aricia: according to them, after Hippolytus died as a result of the curses [*ārai*] hurled at him by Theseus, Asklepios resurrected [*an-histanai*] him. And, after he [= Hippolytus] came back to life [*authis biōnai*], he decided not to grant forgiveness to his father [= Theseus]. Instead, showing contempt for the father's entreaties, he [= Hippolytus] went to Italy to dwell among the people of Aricia. He became king there, and he established a sacred space [*temenos*] for Artemis, where to this day, even in my time, there are athletic contests [*āthla*] featuring one-on-one combat [*monomakhiā*], and the winner is considered to be consecrated [*hierâsthai*] to the goddess [= Artemis].

## Pausanias 2.31.4

Near the theater is a shrine [*nāos*] of Artemis of the Wolves [*Lukeia*], which was made for her by Hippolytus. With regard to the epithet 'of the Wolves', I received no information from the local guides [*ex-hēgētai*]. It seemed to me at the time that it might have to do with wolves that had been devastating the territory of the Trozenians and that had been killed by Hippolytus. Or the epithet 'of the Wolves' might have applied to Artemis among the Amazons, since Hippolytus was related to them on his mother's side. Or again there might be some other explanation that I do not know.

## Pausanias 2.32.1–2

[2.32.1] Hippolytus son of Theseus has a most prominent sacred space [*temenos*] set aside for him [in Trozen]. And there is a shrine [*nāos*] inside this space, with an archaic statue [inside it]. They say that Diomedes made these things and, on top of that, that he was the first person to make sacrifice [*thuein*] to Hippolytus. The people of Trozen have a priest of Hippolytus, and this priest is consecrated [*hierôûsthai*] as a priest for the entire duration of his life. There are sacrifices [*thusiai*] that take place at a yearly festival, and among the ritual actions that the people do [*drân*], I describe this event that takes place [at the festival]: each and every virgin girl [*parthenos*] in the community cuts off a lock of her hair [*plokamos*] for him [= Hippolytus] before she gets married, and, having cut it off, each girl ceremonially carries the lock to the shrine [*nāos*] and deposits it there as a dedicatory offering. The people [of Trozen] wish that he [= Hippolytus] had not died when he was dragged by the horses drawing his chariot, and they do not show his tomb [*taphos*], even though they know where it is. As for the constellation in the heavens that is called the Charioteer [*hēniokhos*], they [= the people of Trozen] have a customary way of thinking [*nomizein*] that this one [*houtos* = the Charioteer] is that one [*ekeinos*], Hippolytus, who has this [*hautē*] honor [*tīmē*] from the gods. [2.32.2] Inside this [*houtos*] enclosure [*peribolos*] is also the shrine [*nāos*] of Apollo the Epibatērios ['the one who steps on'—either on the platform of a chariot or on board a ship], established by Diomedes as a votive offering because he had escaped the seastorm inflicted on the Hellenes while they were trying to get back home safely after Ilion [= Troy].

## Pausanias 2.32.3–4

[2.32.3] Along the other part of the enclosure [*peribolos*] is a racecourse [*stadion*] that is named after Hippolytus. And there is also a shrine [*nāos*] situated on a slope overlooking it [= the racecourse], and this shrine is sacred to Aphrodite *kataskopiā*, 'the one who is looking down from on high'. She is called that because it was from this place, when Hippolytus was once upon a time exercising naked, that Phaedra took just one look at him, looking down from where she was, and right away she became afflicted with passionate love [*erân*]. It was also at this same place where the myrtle tree was, I mean, the one I wrote about earlier [= 1.22.2]—the one with leaves that had holes pricked into them. It happened when Phaedra, at a total loss about what to do, and not finding any remedy that could alleviate her passionate love [*erōs*], mutilated the leaves of the myrtle bush. [2.32.4] And there is also a tomb [*taphos*] of Phaedra there, and it is not far away from the memorial marker [*mnēma*] of Hippolytus. That marker in turn has been built not far away from the myrtle bush.

## Pausanias 6.20.2–6

[6.20.2] Within the periphery of [Mount] Kronion, on the north, between the treasuries [*thēsauroi*] and the mountain [*oros*, = Mount Kronion], is a sanctuary [*hieron*] of Eileithuia, and in it Sosipolis [‘savior of the *polis*’], a local [*epi-khōrios*] superhuman force [*daimōn*] of Elis, receives honors [*tīmai*]. Now they give to Eileithuia the surname Olympian [*Olumpiā*], and choose a priestess for the goddess every year. As for the senior priestess who cares for [*therapeuein*] Sosipolis, she lives a pure ritual life [*hagisteuei*], in accordance with the customary laws of Elis, bringing to the god [*theos*] water for washing, and she deposits for him barley cakes [*mazai*] kneaded with honey [*meli*]. [6.20.3] In the front part of the temple [*nāos*], for it is built in two parts, is an altar [*bōmos*] of Eileithuia and an entrance for humans [*anthrōpoi*]; in the inner part, Sosipolis receives honors [*tīmai*], and no one may enter it except the woman who cares for [*therapeuein*] the god [*theos*], and she must wrap her head and face in a white fabric [*huphos*]. Girls [*parthenoi*] and women [*gunaikes*] wait in the sanctuary of Eileithuia, singing a hymn [*humnos*]; they burn all manner of incense to him [=Sosipolis], but it is not the custom to pour libations of wine. An oath is taken in the name of Sosipolis on the most important occasions. [6.20.4] The story is that when the Arcadians had invaded the land of Elis, and the Eleians were set in array against them, a woman came to the Eleian generals, holding a baby to her breast, who said that she was the mother of the child but that she gave him, because of dreams, to fight for the Eleians. The Eleian officers believed that the woman was to be trusted, and placed the child before the army naked. [6.20.5] When the Arcadians attacked, the child turned at once into a snake [*drakōn*]. Thrown into disorder at the sight, the Arcadians turned and fled, and were attacked by the Eleians, who won a very famous victory, and so call the god Sosipolis [‘savior of the *polis*’]. On the spot where after the battle the snake [*drakōn*] seemed to them to go into the ground, they made the sanctuary [*hieron*]. Along with him, the Eleians established the custom [*nomizein*] of worshipping [*sebesthai*] Eileithuia also, because this goddess [*theos*] produced her son for humans [*anthrōpoi*]. [6.20.6] The tomb of the Arcadians who were killed in the battle is on the hill across the Kladeos to the west. Near to the sanctuary of Eileithuia are the remains of the sanctuary of Aphrodite, the celestial one [*Ourania*], and there too they sacrifice upon the altars.

## Pausanias 8.44.4

There is a path leading uphill from Asea [in Arcadia] to the mountain called the North Mountain [*Boreion*], and on top of that mountain there are traces of a sacred space; it is said that Odysseus had made this sacred space in honor of Athena the Savior [*sōteira*] and in honor of Poseidon, in return for his having arrived back home safely from Iliion [= Troy].

## Notes

[ [back](#) ] **1.** Agamedes was the brother of Trophonios. In the corresponding myth, Agamedes died when the two brothers were buried alive, while Trophonios escaped; later, Trophonios experiences the mystical process of "engulfment": Pausanias 9.37.5ff, quoted below.

[ [back](#) ] **2.** Note that Pausanias considers the hero in the afterlife to be a *theos* ‘god’.



[ [back](#) ] **3.** Notice the focal point of the myth and the ritual: it is a pit [*bothros*]. This pit marks the spot where the hero Trophonios was engulfed by the earth. It also marks the spot where the hero-worshipper sheds the blood of the ram that is sacrificed to the hero. The pouring of blood into a pit is a primary form of libation. Libation is in general the ritual pouring of a liquid, be it blood, wine, water, or whatever mixture. The blood establishes mental communion with the consciousness of the dead hero. In ancient Greek hero cults, it was believed that the blood of a sacrificed animal activates the consciousness of the dead hero. In other contexts, the ritually correct pouring of libations in general can activate that consciousness.

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