

**CLASSICAL ASSOCIATION CONFERENCE 2020,  
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NARRATING THE PAST, TRANSFORMING THE PRESENT: UNRAVELING COLLECTIVE  
MEMORY IN THE ANCIENT WORLD**

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**PANEL COORDINATOR**

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**PANEL TITLE**

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Narrating the Past, Transforming the Present: Unraveling Collective Memory in the Ancient World

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## **PANEL ABSTRACT**

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Collective identities are based on narrative constructs that social groups communicate to internal and external audiences. These constructs gradually become 'traditions', through performance or ritualisation, and are perpetuated by social mechanisms. This collection of papers examines the development of different forms of communicating stories and perceptions of identity in the Ancient Greek world. Local histories, imbued to the very core of the community, became a distinct genre after the late Classical period and an essential aspect of communal perceptions of the past. Tales of phyletic descent were used as separators between different population groups and made their mark on communities' pasts. On several occasions, however, narratives of the past were consciously modified as an answer to contemporary social and political needs. Different perceptions of geographical space were a direct outcome of political developments and changing worldviews, thus adding a temporal aspect to geography and allowing communities to subscribe to multiple identities. The panel examines the ways communities, and individuals re-evaluated relations, actual and conceptual space, and their past in Classical Antiquity. Moreover, it explores the issue of agency to establish by whom, how, and to what purpose the past was negotiated continuously in the Greek world.

## Early Peloponnese: Mythical Origins and the Boundaries of the Political Community

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This paper examines the evolution of the narrative means of group-identification in the long process of the formation of political communities in the Archaic and Early Classical Peloponnese. A variety of symbolic systems was used in this process, ranging from the construction of origin stories and questions of autochthony or migration to the connection with selected supra-*polis* narratives that developed a Pan-Hellenic reach. These symbolic systems often incorporated contradictory elements that created a clear differentiation with neighbouring *poleis* or groups within the *poleis* themselves. The most prominent traditions in the region were connected to the main storyline of the Homeric epics, but also to the tradition of the *Herakleides*, usually combined with elements of Dorian cultural heritage. As a response, different political or social formations tend to contradict such narratives through a symbolic system that emphasises pre- or anti-Dorian elements.

The importance of the use of symbolic systems is apparent during the process of the separation of groups or populations. These constructs, well attested in our evidence, are essential components in the process of group formation and segregation, and appear in evidence from the Archaic Peloponnese, in a time when the *polis* identity was being formed, and social groups were segregated in constitutional and political terms.

This paper will focus on specific cases from the Peloponnese, ranging from Sicyon to the theoretical foundation of the Arcadian autochthony and Spartan expansionism. It will examine narratives from the Archaic and Early Classical periods, supplemented, when possible, by other evidence such as distinctive features on material culture, elements of cult, and the visualisation of local narratives in local art.

## Forgotten Memories in Macedonia: Was there Even a Persian Invasion?

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From the 5th century onwards, the construction of the Macedonian past was based on different elements such as mythology, genealogy, language, and others, which pointed to a shared past with the rest of the Greeks. However, there was another element that has been generally obviated. Beginning with Alexander I and Herodotus' account, the Macedonians decided to consciously 'forget' that their territory was under Persian control.

During the Graeco-Persian Wars, Alexander I played an ambiguous role, offering advice to the Greeks, although he was a subject to the Great King. Even if Alexander, in a turn of events, only attacked the Persian army in its retreat, he promoted actively this action to conceal his previous support to the Persians. Since memory is consciously constructed, some historians (like Herodotus) preferred this narrative, so that Alexander I could be remembered as the 'Philhellene'.

Following this tradition, even during the time of Alexander III, the causes of the war against the Persians would revolve around the previous destruction of Greek sanctuaries. Yet, again, contemporary and later sources omitted the desire for vengeance that the Macedonians had probably nurtured due to the Persian occupation at the end of the 6th century BCE. Elsewhere, a Persian occupation would have spurred strong reactions; one can easily think of Sparta before the 410s when any attempt to approach the Persians would have been prosecuted. However, in the case of the Macedonians, this episode was practically erased from history.

This paper focuses on aspects of the Macedonian identity in the making during the Classical Period. I will argue that the Macedonians, in a way, put aside their honour in the official propaganda. They downplayed Persian occupation of Macedonia to favour their acceptance in the Greek political scene. After all, it is not convenient to stir up certain memories.

# Conceptual Landscapes and Collective Identities: The Fluctuating Boundaries of Aeolis, Mysia, and the Troad in Ancient Asia Minor

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This paper examines the perception of Aeolis in Asia Minor as a geographical entity and conceptual space in ancient textual sources; it investigates the political and social factors that led to different perceptions of the region in Antiquity. Indeed, ever since Herodotus had listed twelve Aeolian poleis on a narrow coastal strip in Asia Minor, ancient sources implied or defined different sizes and boundaries for Aeolis and neighbouring areas.

Instead of merely assuming confusion by ancient authors, I will suggest a different context for the fluctuating borders between Aeolis, Mysia, and the Troad. I will examine how ancient authors applied not only their ideological conception of Aeolis in their works, but also current public knowledge on what Aeolis was and views of political authorities. Discrepancies do not necessarily constitute misunderstandings of ancient authors, but rather reveal attempts to construct aspects of the world under the influence of political conditions and changing worldviews. Political developments, such as the independence of the communities of the Mytilenean *peraia* and the rise of Rome, introduced new perceptions of the three regions. Divergent views and pressing needs within a dynamic political environment led to fluctuating conceptual sizes for regions, which could expand, shrink, or even disappear from ancient accounts. Back to the actual ground, by responding to exogenous factors, communities in NW Asia Minor could ascribe to a Troadic or Aeolian identity (or both) and forge ties to other communities.

In the end, tracing the fluctuating borders of Aeolis cannot provide a firm response to the question “Where is Aeolis?”. Instead, a different approach would be to modify the question to ‘When was Aeolis?’, in order to trace and explain those changing perceptions of geographical space, and consider the temporal aspect of geography.

# At the Service of the Community: Local Histories, Local Historians, and the Transformation of Collective Identities

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The sheer number of local historians (more than 500 entries in Jacoby's *FGrHist*) demands scholarly attention; at the very least, it confirms that the past of the *polis* was at the forefront of intra- and inter-*poleis* discussions. This paper examines the role of local history in the creation and consolidation of collective (civic or communal) identities.

As historiography developed alongside *polis*' identity in the Greek world, local histories began to supplement the historical record. From as early as the 6th/5th c. BCE, local narratives, from founding histories (*ktiseis*) and elegies to epics and chronicles, contained elements of local traditions revealing the active interest local communities had in the(ir) past. For Jacoby, the purpose of local history was dual. It was both a way for a *polis* to secure a place in 'Great History', and to correct the mistakes and misrepresentations in the narratives of the 'great historians'. However, for any locality, local historiography was a means of identity creation and consolidation of co-belonging. Thus, a significant resurgence in local histories and foundation myths occurred during the Hellenistic period. The epigraphic record shows that *poleis* honoured local historians, and their accounts were trustworthy evidence in arbitrations and petitions. Even 'Great History' reflects, at times, the importance of locality in the historiographical account; arguably, Polybios' *Histories* were written under the perspective of local history, not of a *polis* but the Achaian *Koinon*.

Focusing on examples from the Hellenistic period, I will approach the role of local history as a narrative of continuation and identity and the role of the historian as an agent of identity-formation, complementing similar processes. To this end, I will discuss local history as a response to concurrent civic and political aims, bridging the chronological expanse between the cultural and communicative memories of social groups, and creating new narratives.