ISSN: 2632-4091 History *of* Classical Scholarship 21 July 2024
Issue 6 (2024): 137–167

EDITH HAMILTON [MIS-]READS TWO UNUSUAL TEXTS: PS.-XENOPHON'S *ATHENAION POLITEIA* AND A DELPHIC HONORIFIC INSCRIPTION

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ABSTRACT

Edith Hamilton, America's mid-century popularizer of classical Greek and Roman cultures, enjoyed a long career as a preparatory school Latin teacher and administrator before publishing her first book The Greek Way *at age 62 in 1930 (2nd expanded edition, 1942). The title embodies her reductionist view of what and who mattered. Disdaining scholarship and most scholars, she introduced pre- and post-World War II generations of Americans to a celebratory view of the Periclean age. Her appealingly (1942) retold tales in* Mythology *has always remained in print. Her admiration for the celebrity Sir Gilbert Murray, and possible acquaintance with him, encouraged her to depend on his* Rise of the Greek Epic *(1907/34[4]), especially in her titular essay for the posthumous collection* The Ever Present Past *(1958/64). There, praise of Athenian culture and "mind" produced mis-readings of Ps.-Xenophon's crabby journalism,* The Constitution of Athens*, and a misunderstanding of an honorific inscription at Hellenistic Delphi. Her dedication to individualism, self-reliance, and certain democracies made her useful to the United States State Department in the Cold War. Robert Kennedy quoted her translation of Aeschylus'* Agamemnon *with sincere passion. Her star qualities as a public intellectual representing Classics have yet to be replicated.*

KEYWORDS

Edith Hamilton, Gilbert Murray, Robert Kennedy, Aeschylus, The Greek Way*, Ps.-Xenophon's* Constitution of Athens*, Dionysius of Halicarnassus'* de Thucydide*; Cold War, Athenian Golden Age, "Savageness of man"*

Introduction

Edith Hamilton (1867–1963), a retired teacher turned writer, proselytized the Athenian century to mid-twentieth century Americans before and during World War II and the Cold War. American society, both middle class and elite, liked the idea that the Athenians, especially the tragedians, inspired our political culture (limited democracy) and our spiritual values (truth, individual enterprise, godliness). Hamilton's efforts to encourage this connection across two ages deserve more attention than benign and malign neglect. After

resigning her post as Latin teacher and Headmistress of the Bryn Mawr Preparatory School in Baltimore (1896–1922), Hamilton entered on a

Edith Hamilton, School Principal at the Bryn Mawr Preparatory School, Baltimore, Maryland 1896–1922 (Courtesy of the Bryn Mawr School)

new career when she was nearly sixty. Now she would bring the ancient Athenian tragedians, and other authors and the civilization that engendered them to a broad adult public. She achieved success not only with the "Book-of-the-Month Club" but also with culturally iconic figures and politicians — eventually the glamorous Kennedys.[1]

[1] Judith Hallett began the reassessment of perhaps "the most famous American female classicist" (Hallett 1996/7, 2009, 2015, 2016). Her archival scholarship on women classicists is foundational for study of Edith Hamilton. A version of this paper was delivered at Hallett's retirement celebration at the University of Maryland. Houseman's recent biography (2023) surveys Hamilton's eventful life and, to a lesser

This paper addresses three issues, arguing that: 1] Edith Hamilton generally mis-conceived the author of Ps.-Xenophon's[2] jaundiced "pamphlet" analyzing the *Political Regime of the Athenians* and misused its precious anti-Athenian, anti-imperial statements. 2] Gilbert Murray and his admirer Hamilton misunderstood and misrepresented both the fulsome rhetoric of a Hellenistic Delphic inscription (*FD* III.ii.69) and a florid defense of Athenian actions in Dionysius of Halicarnassus' essay *On Thucydides*. 3] Classicists can still honor the unique celebrity achieved by Hamilton, a former prep-school Latin teacher and girls' school administrator, in mid-century America and post-war Athens.

Hamilton's elegant titular essay in her book *The Ever-Present Past* (1958/64) cites a fierce ancient critic of democracy whom she does not identify. One can sleuth out his political inclinations but not authorial identity. In her widely circulated essay also entitled "The Ever-Present Past,"[3] she quotes this "aristocrat's" derogatory perspective on the political success of the imperial Athenian *demos*. The author of Ps.-Xenophon's *Political Regime of the Athenians*[4] was not, as Hamilton thinks, "a visitor to the city in the early fourth century, B.C. ...," but an Athenian citizen probably writing in the last quarter of the fifth century BCE.[5] He writes a simple Attic with clunky pseudo-objectivity about the

extent, her impact on American attention to Greek antiquity. It supplants Reid's memoir, partial in two senses.

[2] Long familiarly known in English-speaking lands as the "Old Oligarch." See below.

[3] First printed in *The Saturday Evening Post* 27 September 1958.

[4] "Pseudo-" because this brief essay survives in the manuscripts of the famous Xenophon, but the style is distinctly inferior. Nicknamed "the Old Oligarch" in Anglophone territories. Bowersock edited this curious pamphlet and added it to the Loeb reprint (1968) of Marchant's Xenophon volume VII: *Scripta Minora*. The text, of unknown and unliterary oligarchic, but not Xenophontic, authorship, voices the usually mute but not non-existent opposition to the then dominant Athenian imperial power. (Cf. Thuc. 2.8 on Spartan propaganda and Hellenic sentiment towards the Athenian Empire. See the full commentary of Dominique Lenfant, ed. *Pseudo-Xénophon. Constitution des Athéniens* (Paris: "Les Belles Lettres," 2017).) The unflattering, and partly inaccurate or at least unjustified, moniker for the vehement author has often been credited — but without proof — to the same Gilbert Murray (*sic*, Bowersock, introduction 463 n. 1) whom Hamilton (and Professors Grace Macurdy and Elizabeth Hazelton Haight of Vassar) deeply admired. Hamilton was indebted to him for many ideas, attributed or not (as in our instance). Bowersock states that the nickname had its print début in Murray's *Ancient Greek Literature* (London 1897). Murray's relevant but inadequate discussion of references to (the trope of) Athens' civilizing achievement appears in *The Rise of the Greek Epic* (1911, 1934[4]) 2 n. 1.

[5] Forrest (1970) argues from internal evidence for dating the "pamphlet" to the "Ten Year War" phase of the Peloponnesian War (108), and precisely for August 424 BCE.

unsavory (to him) democracy and Athenian control of hundreds of overseas tributaries at their empire's height, ca. 440–420 BCE. He condemns this power on the principle of polis autonomy as well as his disapproval of the worse sorts of people governing (1.1, 14). He was neither, as Hamilton states, a "visitor" studying Athenians, nor "an unregenerate old aristocrat" (*EPP* 1963, 51) nor did he write ca. 390/380.[6]

He writes as an oligarchical Athenian instructing his uninformed compatriots, echoing arguments of privileged persons who feel oppressed by elements of equality or absence of servility. He echoes Laconizers who admired the total subjugation of the helots. He employs first-person plural verbs and pronouns, such as "we fashioned" (1.12: ἐποιήσαμεν; cf. 2.12: οἱ τινες ἀντίπολοι ἡμῖν εἰσιν …) as well as third-person forms.[7] In fact, no evidence suggests that he was old, even if we deem his nit-picking to suggest age-related complaints, or suggests that he was an aristocrat. He might as well have been an aspiring young sophist, or perhaps an admirer and participant in the oligarchical opposition, for example, Antiphon (cf. Thuc. 8.68.1–2, 87.1–2). Like him, a prominent insurrectionary when given a chance in 411 BCE, he would betray his city's *politeia* to dis-establish the democracy. Hamilton never distinguishes hereditary clan nobility (e.g., the Philaids) or even achieved family distinction (e.g., the Alcmaeonids) from ideological adherence to aristocratic, anti-democratic doctrines, as did some of the Four Hundred's leaders, such as Peisander and Phrynichus. Many, if not most, of the oligarchs of the 411 revolution had no special "blood" or clan distinction to boast about.[8]

Hamilton presents but over- and mis-translates a number of phrases from a short passage (1.10). For example, "It is illegal here to deal a slave a blow." Her "illegal" is unjustified for οὔτε παταξαι ἔξεστιν αὐτόθι. The Athenians offered nearly no protection to the body or dignity of an

The "Old Oligarch" never mentions the ferocious plague of summer 430/29, a troubling omission that supports an earlier date for the "pamphlet."

[6] Hamilton candidly emphasizes her lack of interest in e.g. historical facts, minutiae of obscure names, dates, etc. She writes (1932, viii–ix), for example, that "Anthony Trollope or W. S. Gilbert [provide] a better view of what mid-Victorian England was like than any given by the historians." The viewpoint dismisses attention to economics, class, or even the evidence of the orators.

[7] Hamilton generally refers to the Athenians as "they" in her translation, and this pronoun may have led to her misapprehension of the "Old Oligarch's" own ethnicity, but he is rather creating space between himself and his *fellow* Athenian citizens. *They* support the regime that he loathes, but his paradoxical essay shows respect for its coherent economic extractive machinery and its oppressive political accomplishments.

[8] See Hornblower *Comm. Thuc.* III, 953–60, for a partial prosopography of the leaders of the 400.

enslaved person.[9] Hamilton and Glen Bowersock's 1968 Loeb edition mis- or over-translate *isêgoria* as "equality", a word more accurately translated as "equal access to speaking" (cf. Lenfant's ed. and comm., 2017, 71). Hamilton places in quotation marks sentences that appear nowhere in the Greek text, statements entirely invented. For example, "they [enslaved Athenian persons] can go to the theater too." This statement does not appear in the Greek text or, in so many words, anywhere else in our texts, although it is probably true, as theater historians have come to realize.[10] Sloppiness in translations and errors in characterization diminish confidence in her argument and display her limited attention to Greek history.[11]

The perceptive but ideologically driven ancient observer of the high empire strongly prefers *demos*-excluding regimes, so he praises Sparta as

[9] While Plato's *Euthyphron* (4c–d) starts from a very cloudy situation in which a free man of unknown Attic status had killed a slave in Naxos and Euthyphron's father left the killer bound and he died, the legalities are uncertain, but slaves themselves had no recourse in Attic law. See Todd 1993, 189, discussing both Ps. Xen. *Ath.Pol.* 1.10 and Dem. 21.46–50 with 22.55, 24.167), who clarifies that only an owner could lay a charge of *hybris* against a third party for his slave, in defense of his property and his honor. Euthyphron's father was inquiring if that was what he should do with his client who killed the slave.

[10] The best near-contemporary evidence for attendance of women and slaves at the Athenian Dionysos' festivals: Pl. *Gorg*. 502d. *Nom*. 658c–d is much vaguer; cf. Demosth. *Phil*. 3.3; the question remains unsettled, as Csapo and Slater (1994, 286–91) show.

[11] Hallett 2016, 227, cites this passage from Hamilton, *The Ever-Present Past*, the eponymous and first essay of her 1964 collection (32, 35). Hamilton had originally presented these cheerleading remarks in an address in the early Atomic Age (1957 CE). She offered them at CAAS's Fiftieth Anniversary fest. Later published in *CW* (51 (1957) 29–32), it enjoyed another, wider appearance in *The Saturday Evening Post*, 1958). Neither Hamilton nor Hallett identifies the address's paradoxically anti-democratic, ancient source. Selective interest in Greek history: Hamilton's sequel book on the fourth century and afterwards is pointedly titled *The Echo of Greece*, since in her view the creative genius period of Athens had ended (with exceptions for Plato and Aristotle). It was (1957, 9) "the prelude to the end of Greece, not only of her glory but of her life historically." This hyperbolical way of expressing her view that the Periclean Age was the apex of Greek history is meant to convey her disinterest in Alexander and his successors and her distaste for Greek culture under Roman domination (for half a millennium). Despite Hamilton's claim, "I was very carefully trained in history" (Nelson 1961, 18), she everywhere forcefully disdained Greece's sobering and (arguably) less spiritually elevated epochs. While other writers may share her disdain for the late classical, Hellenistic, and Roman imperial province, her dogmatic asseverations reflect her preferences for an imaginary age of widespread Greek freedom. The *Echo of Greece* offers post-Alexander chapters on only Menander, three Stoics, and Plutarch. No Callimachus, Apollonius, Longus, or Lucian. These absences demonstrate her limits.

Athens' foil. Their law and totalitarian social practice, he approvingly observes, permit masters to beat and knock around (*πατάξαι*, *τύπτεσθαι*) or knock up "your slave" (1.11: *ὁ σὸς δοῦλος*). In Athens, to his disgust, citizens and enslaved victims wear the same clothes, carry themselves similarly, and the latter won't step aside for "you." You can't tell the difference! "There are rich slaves … my slave does not fear you, … and therefore there is equality [between free man and enslaved] in speaking freely" (Ps.-Xen. 1.11–12). Foes of popular rule, Athenian or otherwise, by definition wish to demolish the entire late fifth-century Athenian government and relatively open social order. Hamilton generalizes from this dyspeptic, polemical, hyperbolic, and philo-Spartan criticism that the Athenians "treated their slaves well."[12] In the next generation, Plato likewise and predictably lambasted Athenian liberality toward those they enslaved as well as toward their horses, dogs, and asses (*Resp*. 8.563b–c).[13]

But, she notes correctly, Athenians and Greeks took slavery for granted, even the brighter lights such as Plato and the Thracian metic Aristotle.[14] Indeed, she distinguishes the Athenians from the Romans for their humane disposition, proven by their not crucifying misbehaving slaves (*EPP* 32). She ignores or forgets her revered guide Plato's discussion of the aforementioned case in which an Athenian beat a free laborer who while drunk had killed his slave; Euthyphron's father beat the client, shackled him, and left him in a ditch while he sent off to Athens

[12] *EPP* 32. Aristotle judged the rich but popular Nicias, a revered figure in his own day, to be one of Athens' three finest citizens, the others being Thucydides son of Melesias and Theramenes (Plut. *Nic.* 2). Nicias kept hundreds of enslaved laborers busy in his lethal silver mines and metal factories (Plut. *Nic.* 8).

[13] Hamilton unexpectedly, on the next page (33), correctly observes that Euripides repeatedly condemned slavery, and the Stoics denounced it.

[14] Hamilton claims that "The very best Greek minds … had never an idea that slavery was evil." Athens treated her slaves well (*EPP* 31–2, citing Ps.-Xenophon's tendentious account). To the contrary, the Sophist Hippias condemned it, so too Euripides, and Alcidamas perceived its ethical problems. Alcidamas, a student of Gorgias, wrote, "God left all men free; Nature has made no man a slave" (F19, cf. Vogt 1964, 14–20). Aristotle (*Pol.* 1253b 20–3), however, *inter alios*, defends the institution, and everywhere Greeks exploited slave labor, like their later American "cousins," especially in the Southern states. Elsewhere, Hamilton praises Greek voices (including Plato) that condemned slavery (Nelson 1961, 21). Her own grandmother defended the peculiar institution of Negro slavery: "Doubtless it was hard on the slaves, but we had to have cotton" (Reid 1967, 22). Hamilton's position was certainly different. Hallett (1996/7, 136–8) reports her defense of a black janitor in the face of Cary Thomas' racist demands that he be fired and later she publicly protested the Alabama courts' decision to execute Jimmy Wilson, a petty thief who happened to be black (Houseman 2023, 5, 354).

for advice (*Euthyphron* 4c–d; cf. *Nom*. 865c–d). The client did die in the meantime. Plato's incessant condemnations of Athenian people-power show similar disdain for the lower classes, variously denominated by derogatory terms, such as the *ponêroi*, the *cheirous*, the *penêtai*, depending on his mood or speaking characters. Hamilton's essay, nevertheless, inconsistently praises messy Athenian democracy and freedom as emphatically as the "Old Oligarch's" essay condemns Athenian political and social habits. So, she has her cake and eats it, too.

Hamilton consciously downplays and barely notices the economic basis of Athens' cultural achievement, the imperial tribute that the "allies' annually owed and paid to the Athenians, for the same reasons that Ps.-Xenophon hammers on it. Like slavery, this oppression of autonomy and freedom remains low on her horizon. In her defense, Pericles likewise underplays Athenian political violence practiced against imperial subjects in his *Epitaphios*. He alleges not that the Athenians treat their subjects well, but that those subjects have no cause of complaint that their masters are unworthy (Thuc. 2.41.3; cf. 2.64.5),[15] his only allusion in the eulogistic "Funeral Oration" to the Empire that he helped build and maintain by force.

Central to Ps.-Xenophon's moral and political critique of the Athenian democracy and overseas empire is Athens' efficient if immoral oppression of other, supposedly free and autonomous members of the Delian League, two hundred *poleis* inhabiting the shores of the Aegean and beyond. Pericles' rival, Thucydides son of Melesias, thought the monies paid in to the treasury for defense should not be expended on the city to dress her up like a "boastful woman," *ἀλαζόνα γυναῖκα*. Hamilton does not consider revolts by members of the Delian League and their suppression.[16] She ignores Plutarch's description of the exposure and head-bashing of the leaders of the Samian revolt, from Douris — a native of Samos — and perhaps tendentious.

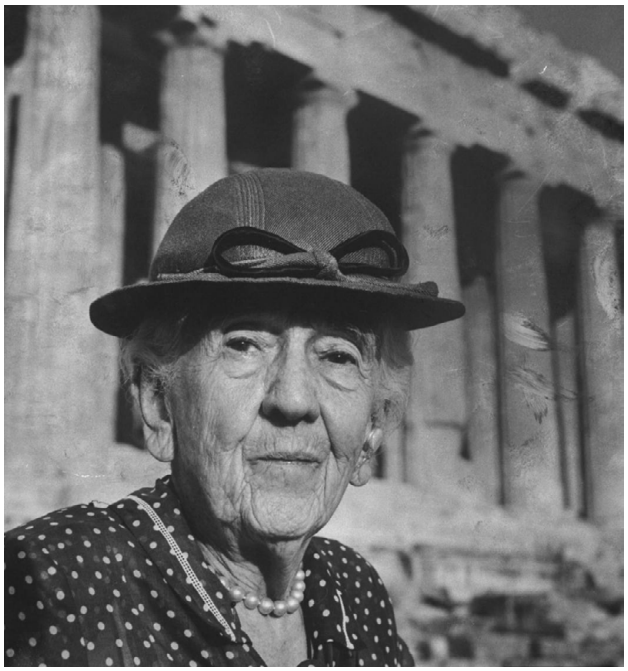
Hamilton, writing before and after World War II, identified her paradigmatic polity in the imperialistic Athens of Pericles. She encouraged Americans to aspire to the ideals of Periclean Athens, a polity "at its height an almost perfect democracy" (1958: *Saturday Evening Post*; *EPP*

[15] Cf. 2.64.5, where Thucydides' Pericles mentions the "hatred" that Athens' success and control have inspired in subject "allies." Pericles acknowledges to the assembly that the Empire is a tyranny for non-Athenians. One of his lesser successors, Cleon the popular leader, hated by Aristophanes as well as by Thucydides, repeats this public admission of oppression — or is it a boast (3.37.2)?

[16] Thuc. 1.89–117 for the *Pentacontaetia*, IV for the Chalcidice, and VIII for the Aegean in the Ionian War; cf. Plut. *Per*. 22–8.

1963, 30). She eschews dwelling on Athens' direct democracy, a government granting the legislature nearly unlimited power (seen unflatteringly by Thucydides and Xenophon in decisions about Mytilene, Melos, and Arginusae) and granting its unwieldy judicial organs unfettered discretion (satirized by Aristophanes in *Wasps* (422 BCE) and condemned by Plato, e.g., in Socrates' *Defense*). The unwilling tribute of "allies" paid for the expensive Parthenon temple and other Athenian monuments. They also subsidized the costly but admirable theatrical festivals, comic and tragic. Those payments were originally contributed to defend against Persian aggression. This incontrovertible and grubby fact was perfectly clear to Thucydides son of Melesias, his followers and perceptive contemporaries (Plut. *Per*. 12, 14), but admirers of drama pay them little heed.

Three factors won flattering recognition from contemporary Athenian Greeks for Hamilton's writings: Hamilton's praise of Athens — prized for the ancient community's artistic and intellectual attainments and devotion to freedom; the wide dissemination in America of her grand image of the Greeks; and the Greek's Cold War need of American support when she had Communist neighbors and the party was strong in Greece itself. Hamilton, thus, at age ninety in 1957 gained the unusual honor of local citizenship bestowed by the descendants of her beloved Athenians.



Edith Hamilton visits the Athenian Akropolis, 1957, Age 90
(James Whitmore for Life Magazine)

Hamilton contrasted Athenian freedom to Spartan totalitarianism and helot subjection. This antithesis provided a persuasive parallel for her American readers, since the United States had been decisive in the recent defeat of Fascist totalitarianism, the Axis alliance in the recent hot war. The USA now again dominated an alliance in the "cold war," one aimed against the Soviet Union's Communist totalitarianism featuring internal gulags and an empire of oppressed, exploited, contiguous European and Asian subjects.[17] The Chinese Communists in 1949 further advanced totalitarian oppression of persons and thought, during and after gaining control of mainland China. Hamilton, a pacifist and isolationist, a Taft-Republican, a traveler who had visited pre-war Japan and China in 1915, wrote in response *The Echo of Greece* (1957; cf. Houseman 2023, 108–9, Ch. 9), a book in which her fear of an American cultural and political decay, one parallel to fourth-century BCE Greece's, is prominent.

Such analogies between these ancient and modern opponents flattered American readers, although they conveniently disregarded less attractive comparisons. Hamilton pays less attention to Athenian suppression and exploitation of women, "allies," and enslaved workers, and nearly none to nearer home-grown inequalities and oppression. In our time, these would include the lawless terrorism of American racist lynchings in the South, court-ordered if unconstitutional internments of citizens of Japanese descent in World War II, Senator Joseph McCarthy's 'fifties "witch-hunts" looking for Communist subversion and identifying innocent victims, and the long-time nation-wide "Jim Crow" disenfranchisement of "colored" peoples in the armed forces and local, state, and federal elections, as well as in daily life. Hamilton objected to specific examples of such American departures from ideals, but maintained a patriot's admiration for both Athens and her own country. The American political machinery found a way to use her enthusiasm for ancient Athens as anti-Communist propaganda, although she herself did not spout any such line.[18]

[17] This antithesis is explicit in her inapposite comparison of Demosthenes to Joseph McCarthy (*EG* 107–10; Houseman 2023, 318–19, misunderstands the analogy). Alexander's burning ambition "saw with a glowing spirit One World, to be brought into union by himself" (*EG* 121). While the analogy of the USA and Athens, the USSR and Sparta is generally implicit in Hamilton's works, the thrust is clear. In a letter of this period (1959), she wrote "Communism could never defeat Christianity" (Houseman 2023, 320). Her appearance in Athens (8 August 1957) promoted official State Department American efforts to promote democracy and counter Communist influence in that fragile post-war democracy.

[18] I owe this formulation to an e-mail from Judith Hallett (6 March 2024), the Edith Hamilton expert. Hamilton wrote (*EPP* 26) that "There is today a clearly visible trend toward making it the aim of education to defeat the Russians. That would be a sure way

Thus, lip service to full democracy and free speech in benign but imperial polities had coexisted with selective suppression of personal freedom and political choice, economic exploitation, covert actions, overt garrisons and Athenian supervisors in the tributary states, and assassinations of inconvenient or uncooperative overseas "allies." Amongst these two hundred plus tributary allies, local aristocratic elites who did not appreciate their states' subordinate status promoted efforts to regain local autonomy, also known in Athens as revolt, from the thalassocrats of the Aegean.[19] The commons found some domestic freedom in the Athenian arrangement. More recently, robust American power decreed a blockade for its allies isolating Cuba, a policy that paralleled the Athenians' Megarian decree blockading that neighbor, starving it, as Aristophanes dramatizes in the *Acharnians* (425 BCE) — first prize!

No wonder, then, that two Kennedy politicians found the culturally glamorous Hamilton's idiosyncratic, apolitical politics congenial. She had attended Miss Porter's School in Connecticut where Jackie Kennedy later was a student. She indigenized, "Americanized" (Hallett 2015, 271–2) not only Attic tragedy but other genres, too. She expropriated elements of her blinkered, optimistic take on the best elements of the Athenian "spirit" so as to encourage their development in the adventurous, but less philosophic spirit of the United States. That is why the United States Information Service placed her Athenophile, "American spirit" books in many libraries abroad. "The greatest civilization *before ours* was the Greek" ("Ever-Present" 25).

to defeat education. Genuine education is possible only when people realize that it has to do with persons, not with movements."

[19] Meiggs notes *inter alia* (1972: "Instruments of Empire") the following suppressive mechanisms: garrisons, Athenian supervisory officials (*phrourarchoi*, *archontes*, *episkopoi*), "allies'" trials moved to Athens from their home city-state, honors for the loyal (*euergetai*), confiscations for the disaffected. His notable index oddly omits an entry for "Revolt." Among the significant *poleis* that chose that dubious "Greek way" were Thasos, Euboea, Megara, Samos, Byzantion, Mytilene, Acanthus, Stagira, Amphipolis, Torone, Mende, and many more specified in Thucydides VIII. The terms ending the Archidamian War demand certain liberties for certain cities that the Athenians may not abridge. After Sparta handed them back to their Athenian enemies, this handful of cities could not preserve those privileges. Amphipolis remained in Spartan alliance and its citizens destroyed the monuments to their Athenian founder, Hagnon. On the other hand, many poorer members of the *demos* in tributary states were content to be part of Athens' "alliance."

Edith Hamilton at Miss Porter's Finishing School ca. 1885–1886 (2nd from left)

Ancient Rome, especially America's Hollywood pagan Rome, decadent and openly imperial, could never serve such an uplifting purpose, whether or not the parallels were more prominent.[20] Among other problems, Romans regularly praised the law and order that their armies brought to *mare nostrum*. Enforcement of *pax Romana* included mass enslavements of free peoples and reduction to subject-status of the rest, as in second century BCE Corcyra (Strabo 7 F8), and rough treatment of Jews and Christians, once members of this latter illicit sect emerged. Hamilton judged the Romans to have developed an imitative and uncreative literary and artistic culture that was parasitic on the Hellenic (cf. *RW* 4–5): "No other great national literature goes back to an origin borrowed in all respects. … Everything … is modelled on the Greek."

Hamilton's claim (*EPP* 32) that "Athens treated her slaves well" seems unsurprising, given her own background and place in society.[21]

[20] The Romans having judicially executed Jesus received an inexpugnable black mark. When Huntington Cairns in a recorded and published interview asked Hamilton to compare the two ancient civilizations, she replied (Nelson 1961, 23) "Oh, dear me, Rome is so far below …. The best thing that can be said for Rome is that she recognized how good Greece was."

[21] Houseman 2023, 5, 8, 13, 28. Her grandfather was sympathetic to the rebel Southern Confederacy, her Indiana home-schooling as a child of the mercantile elite did not expose her to different classes and races of people, and her positions as a girls' school teacher and principal in segregated Maryland surely contributed to her unsurprising social and political conservatism. In a more intimate way, her enduring social and sexual union with Doris Reid, the daughter (28 years her junior) of an elite Baltimore family (with which she lived for years) reinforced conservative values. Her

Hierarchy, social and political, and Taft Republicanism fit her idea of a successful American democracy. In a word, she unconsciously enjoyed "white privilege," *avant la lettre*. While Athenian propaganda proclaimed the government of "all the people," and Thucydides (2.37–41) paints in Pericles' *Epitaphios* an idealistic picture of Athenian tolerance and open-mindedness towards fellow citizens, in practice, as Thucydides (2.65.2–9) soon after observed, first citizen Pericles channeled most political decisions in the assembly for nearly three decades, in ways that his successors could only envy.[22]

Hamilton considers this period "Athens' great prime" (*EPP* 32 and often, e.g., *GW* 190, 203, 338, *EG* 9, 20, 30, etc.). In Hamilton's lifetime, in Baltimore and Bryn Mawr, too, where she lived, one could not strike your cleaning "lady" or push "Negroes" off "your" sidewalks, or lynch them as in Mississippi. Nevertheless, the Jim Crow rules of the game were clear enough in Maryland and Pennsylvania. *This* ideology of equality for all, in word — but in deed only for the deserving, dominant race — comfortably occluded economic, social, and even legal forms of exploitation in both ancient and recent societies.

Hamilton's positive take on Ps.-Xenophon's negative take on uppity (*ἀκολασία*) slaves, who literally knew not their proper place on the street (*οὔτε ὑπεκστήσεται*), in the end, wriggles free from analyzing the rules of Athenian notions of class and status, gender and race. She takes refuge, when cornered into facing realities of slavery (not looking into the mines however), in citing the harsher, but irrelevant, standards of Roman slave punishments, specifically, crucifixion. This foil supposedly proves that Athenians treated slaves humanely, but it actually only proved that even harsher masters existed in antiquity.

Hamilton held a dim view of Roman achievements. She thought that their literature and culture in general were derivative from the Greek in

own family had lost its fortune and she needed to work for a living. One should, however, also note her opposition to anti-Semitism, fascism, imperialism, and colonialism, as well as to communism (ibid.). Her idiosyncratic life-style and views encouraged her to favor actively women's suffrage and to object to widespread American Biblical literalism.

[22] Pericles' proposals excluded from citizenship both foreigners and native-born Athenians with only one Athenian parent. The *demos*, however, made Pericles' son Pericles a citizen, although his mother was not Athenian, after his two citizen sons died from plague (Plut. *Per*. 37). Historians debate the extent to which Pericles directed policy within the democratic institutions of the Athenian state, but acknowledge it for Athenian imperial matters. Hamilton did not quarrel with Thucydides' explicit judgment, and perhaps thought well of the primacy of one man. This is not the place, as one reader wrote, to take a position on how democratic the Athenian state was in Pericles' ascendancy.

all particulars (*RW* 201–3). She disapproved of the politics of the Roman state, republic and empire. She found no balance of spirit and civic life, she despised their brutal amusements and their vulgar banquets. She thought Rome's splendid edifices "all Greekish — … bigger and better Greek." The statues were heavy and ill proportioned copies (*RW* 207). Her dedication to teaching Vergil's *Aeneid* to her prep school seniors, and no other author, reflects this distaste (*GW* 32 and 341 n., *RW* 4, 199, 202, 272; Houseman 2023, 100–1, 222–3).

Hamilton was rebalancing American opinion about democracy since the Revolutionary founders. That view contrasted the Athenian and Roman polities to the latter's advantage, as seen in the *Federalist Papers*. Perhaps, she was responding to another, more famous Hamilton, the Manhattanite Alexander Hamilton. This American statesman and James Madison — guided by the Roman-assimilated, Peloponnesian POW hostage Polybios and the self-made, *novus homo* Cicero, a glorifier of Roman traditions — repeatedly disvalued the Athenians' direct democracy. They feared the power of the mob, its generally undependable and inconsistent passions, the insecurity of state officials, and the instability of state policy (see, e.g., *Federalist Papers* 6, 10, and 14). Since democracy had become the twentieth-century's catchword ("make the world safe for democracy"), spokespersons have needed to shoe-horn the American republic into the definition of a democratic state.[23] After all, the United States has no direct voting for legislation, a more Roman judiciary, indirect election of the President by the Electoral College, and hard-wired, wildly skewed over-representation of underpopulated states in the Senate. The shared term "democracy" obscures severe differences, but the two imperial regimes share uncomfortable similarities.

"To Tame the Savageness of Man and Make Gentle the Life of the World"[24]

Edith Hamilton provided Americans with what they ought to know about ancient Greek civilization. Her apolitical and anachronistic package

[23] I recall from my childhood one catchphrase of the right-wing John Birch Society for which I had no riposte: "This is a republic, not a democracy." See J. T. Roberts, *Athens on Trial, The Anti-Democratic Tradition in Western Thought* (Princeton 1994) for a history of the reception of Athens' peculiar regime.

[24] The Athenians *ἐγ μὲν τοῦ θηριώδους βίου μετήγαγε τοὺς ἀνθρώπους εἰς ἡμερότητα* …. Hamilton, *EPP* 34, paraphrasing Murray (1934, reprint of 4th ed. 1949) 2, who cited *BCH* 24 (1900) 96 and translated several clauses. The inscription was re-edited by G. Daux, *FdD* (Paris 1911) III.ii.74–8, #69). Dionysius (*Thuc.* 41), also cited in Greek and English by Murray, simplified the Delphic rhodomontade with the smoother

reflects post-World War II American triumphalism and romantic "city on a hill" exceptionalism. Without attribution, she creatively "sampled" one quotation of the Edwardian Classicist, her contemporary, whom she lionized, Sir Gilbert Murray (1866–1957).[25] When the prestige of Greek and Latin studies was rapidly decreasing, he wished in his Harvard lectures of 1907 to justify the continued study of Greek life and literature. He argued that the Greeks were "upward striving" and the source of "the progressive spirit" in (Western) civilization.[26] Trivial historical details and context did not distract this public intellectual and fellow pacifist from grand ideas about human progress in political organization and human knowledge. Thus, his admirer Hamilton's vague phrase, "An old Greek inscription states that the aim of mankind should be …" (*EPP* 34). It does not state a Greek aim but an Athenian accomplishment. When she employed it in her essay written nearly a half-century later, she obscured the date and locale of the quotation that she had "borrowed" without attribution. In fact, she herself *created* the present statement, conflating two phrases in Murray's better sourced essay, as we shall see. Hamilton briefly excerpted a clause carved on a marble block of the epigraphically rich Athenian treasury at Delphi. She misunderstood or misused *un*remarkable Delphic flattery, boiler-plate — borrowed from Athenian festival panegyric of an Isocratean provenance[27] and contained in an Amphictyonic decree honoring an Athenian guild of poets and actors.[28]

Isocratean: *οἱ τὸν κοινὸν βίον ἐξημερώσαντες*, "they made gentle the life of the world." The phrase titles the memoir/selection of writings chosen by the ninth child of John Kennedy's younger brother, Maxwell Taylor Kennedy: *Make Gentle the Life of this World. The Vision of Robert F. Kennedy* (New York 1998).

[25] R. B. Todd provides a tidy biography of the Australian Murray in the *Dictionary of British Classicists* 2.688–94. He credits Murray *inter alia* for "communication with non-specialist audiences" and the *Oxford Classical Texts* of Aeschylus and Euripides. When Hamilton confessed to her intimate partner Doris Reid (1967, 111) that the (recently dead) Sir Gilbert should have received her Athenian honors, she was acknowledging her frequent debts to his work.

[26] Murray 1911, 3: "Yet it is curious how seldom Greek Literature is regarded … as an embodiment of the progressive spirit, an expression of the human soul towards freedom and ennoblement."

[27] E.g., Isocrates *Paneg*. 4.23–34, esp. 29, 100: "Athènes civilisatrice", as the Budé editor G. Mathieu notes; *Panath*. 12. 188, 196, or *SIG*^{3}, 704E 10ff, also at Delphi. Fragments of the Athenian copy, mentioned in the Delphi text (v.42), help fill lacunae: *IG* II^2, 552; cf. the Delphi text found at *IG* II^2, 1134. A generous reader suggests that Delphic officials repeating Athenian *topoi* is remarkable "for the cross-over between inscriptional language and Athenian oratory."

[28] Joseph Casazza helpfully investigates the modern antecedents of this text (*CW* 2003; cf. Hallett 2009, 157–8). The inscription refers both to general human savagery

The Athenian Treasury at Delphi, reconstructed. The *technitai* inscription is inscribed on the third and fourth orthostates from left (Photo: courtesy of Brad Cook)

Hamilton provides no further context: not the town, sanctuary, or the specific location, no ethnic or individual identity of author and financer, no specific dedicator or honorees, no discussion that might clarify the originators' intention, no explanation of the relevance of the excerpted phrase to the full inscription. When one recognizes the context of the inscription and that of an *entirely separate* quotation from Dionysius of Halicarnassus, the fulsome praise on inspection makes no claim to

and the rise of Athenian civilization, but Sir Gilbert did not flag the Athenian flattery, its nod to Athenian primacy. Murray 1934, 2 n. 1, understood that he was presenting two unrelated texts, an honorific community inscription and "Denys of Halicarnassus'" rhetorical meme written more than a hundred years later, but Hamilton, for her purposes, paraphrased the sentiment, making a profundity of a cliché, and she ignores Dionysius.

objectivity; rather, it actually only repeats formulaic, indeed, Athenian oratorical tropes populating epideictic oratory for funerals and festivals. The Delphic officials honoring Athenians restate Athenian claims to honor.

The inscription does not describe and was not cut in mid-fifth-century Periclean Athens. The credits describe mostly mythical achievements such as the Eleusinian Mysteries and god-given laws. A mason inscribed the text three hundred years later, in the middle Hellenistic epoch — not an epoch of Athenian primacy (ca. 130–112 BCE; Daux argues for 117). The Amphictyons (or Governing Council) of Apollo's Delphic sanctuary had authorized the inscription on the Athenian Treasury found there to certify crown-wearing display privileges (*χρυσοφορία*). The privilege honors certain priests of the Athenian *technitai*, a sodality of poets and actors that profited from Athens' legendary reputation as the birthplace of theatrical drama. Murray alleged that it contains "remarkable language,"[29] quoting the phrase that reads: "the Athenians led all mankind away from the life of wild beasts to gentleness." The language is remarkable not for unique sentiment but for repeating standard lavish and pompous praise (Daux's descriptor, 1911, 77) commonly found among Athenian self-gratulation. It lauds Athenian kindness, compassion, invention of grain cultivation, and unselfish sharing of the Eleusinian Mysteries with benighted mankind. The rhetoric apes and surpasses Isocrates' patriotic *Panegyrikos*, that is, traditional *topoi* of Athenian epideictic, self-satisfaction of the sort that recurs in every extant "Funeral Oration" except Pericles' who explicitly varies the already established commonplaces.[30] That untraditional traditionalist (Thuc. 2.35.1) deploys stronger and more idiosyncratic chauvinistic praise of the imperial and beautiful city — exceptionalism of a kind echoing in Hamilton's and our time.

Dionysius of Halicarnassus presents similar, derivative flattery in a most peculiar argument that Hamilton borrows from Murray. Murray

[29] *ὧν ὁ δῆμος ἁπάντων τῶν ἐν ἀνθρώποις ἀγαθῶν ἀρχηγὸς κατασταθεὶς , ἐγ μὲν τοῦ θηριώδους βίου μετήγαγεν τοὺς ἀνθρώπους εἰς ἡμεροτήτα* .... Murray quotes the inscription in the original and in translation at length (from *BCH* 24 (1900) 92–6, 219, revised in *Fouilles de Delphes* III.ii 1911) #69. Prof. Daniel Levine supplied me a .pdf of the latter.

[30] Consider a few elements of Lysias' *Epitaphios*: 18 democracy; 44: spreading freedom around. Isocrates *Paneg*. on Athenians' benefactions to mankind: 28: crops and Mysteries, 29: Athenian philanthropy, 39: laws and constitution, 45: festival *θεάματα*, 49: the art of rhetoric, 52: concept of freedom, 74: funeral orations and their *topoi*. Isocrates unsurprisingly even defends as best he can his fellow Athenians' murder of prisoners of war after the Melians and Skionians surrendered (100–1).

throughout names him "Denys." This literary critic of Greek rhetoric immigrated to Rome after the Roman civil wars. In the traumatized but nostalgic Augustan age, he "sums up the praises of the Athenians in the very language of an old Delphian decree."[31] True, the Halicarnassian rhetorician echoes his Roman *princeps'* affection for a gilded image of olde Athens, three centuries after the Macedonian reduction of its political power to a capital of culture and education. In his essay *About Thucydides*, Dionysius focuses on that historian's peculiar rhetoric, syntax, and objectionable organization and representations of the Athenians. The Augustan critic offers apologetics for the Athenians bordering on the bizarre, special pleading for the city that had later perfected the sort of verbal artistry that he prized and promoted.

He argues that his noble Athenians, those who "have made gentle the life of the world,"[32] *could not* have spoken the brutal words that Thucydides (5.84–116) attributes to their generals besieging the independent Dorian Melians. Such words introducing the laws of greed and violence (*τὸν τῆς βίας καὶ πλεονεξίας νόμον εἰσάγοντες*) would have been contrary to [the gentle Athenian] character. Those educated representatives of gentling *Kultur* were too civilized even to *threaten*, much less carry out, the extermination of a *polis*,[33] mass-murdering the men

[31] Murray dates and places the text. These two documents share the "gentling" verb, but Dionysius' version features an intensifying prefix on the participle. Hamilton, we recall, admired Murray and told her intimate friend Doris Reid (1967, 111) that the honor of citizenship in modern Athens, "naturalization," should have been bestowed on Murray, not on her (Hallett 1996/7, 123–4). This modesty reflects her debts to his work in resurrecting the Hellenic past — as in the present excavation of her source. Nevertheless, Hallett (ibid. n. 38) acutely observes her anachronicity here, because Murray had died two and a half months before the ceremony, and his obituary promptly appeared in the *New York Times* (21 May 1957). Despite her approval — probably based on their friendship and his robust proselytizing for Greek classics — in a popular review she reasonably objected to many elements in Murray's popular Victorian translations, here of the *Agamemnon*, since he has been "besprinkling" it with "yea, lo, mayhap," and other off-putting archaisms such as "abideth, plotteth, forgetteth ("Born under a rhyming Planet," *Saturday Review*, 29 June 1935/64, 112). Hamilton also objected to Murray's translation of *Seven Against Thebes* (*Saturday Review*, 29 June 1935; Hamilton 1964, 111). She had defensible views of what makes a good translation, and her translations have often been staged. The producer Michael Cacoyannis admired them — he staged and filmed them.

[32] The Athenians, *οἱ τὸν κοινὸν βίον ἐξημερώσαντες* …. The verb is noteworthy. The root verb interestingly can convey "civilize" or "subdue."

[33] Murray, unlike Hamilton, had the excuse of citing Dionysius' naive argument about civilized people before World War II, when the rest of civilization witnessed the murder of millions of people, many their fellow citizens, by the civilized Germans, Austrians, and their allies in Europe and Asia. While Hamilton cites neither Dionysius nor Murray, she was not one to hunt down inscriptions. Her friend Murray's essay,

and enslaving the women and children (Thuc. 5.116, Dion. *de Thuc.* 41). "Fake News." Dionysius regards General Thucydides' detailed report of the Melian atrocity as incredible and "perverted" (S. Usher's "Loeb Classical Library" translation of *πονηρόν*, p. 587).

Dionysius alleges in his *argumentum ad hominem* that the disgraced and exiled Athenian Thucydides bore a grudge, and so presented "the *most disgraceful* arguments as the words of the *wisest* of the Greeks … and he does so in the *most unpleasant* language."[34] Note Dionysius' three superlatives, straining to persuade with rhetorical hyperbole. Thucydides himself had his cold-blooded commanders frankly explain to their victims that the Athenians behaved so, in summer 416 BCE, to set other small-fry states a frightening example of the fate of other holdouts from the so-called "Delian League," when Athenian naval expansion seemed unstoppable. Minor league *poleis* must submit to Athenian rules — pay and obey (5.94–9).

Dionysius accurately observes that the Thucydides could not have attended the reported parley, because he was in exile from 424 to 404. Nevertheless, no scholar today follows Dionysius' phil-Athenian denial of their reported words, or would agree to his naive and *a priori* erasure of their subsequent brutality.[35] Not even Isocrates or Edith Hamilton disbelieved the common knowledge of Athenian violence against revolting tributaries. The best one can say for Dionysius is that here he is coaching rhetoric, not writing history — a fault he also shows elsewhere. Therefore, Thucydides' words are *οὐ προσήκοντα*, not fitting for orators or statesmen in his retro classicizing day, or for culture and freedom-bestowing

"Greece and the progress of man," from which our header was lifted, could have served as a 26 page sketch for *The Greek Way*, and possibly did.

[34] *οἱ φρονιμώτατοι τῶν Ἑλλήνων αἴσχιστα μὲν ἐνθυμήματα φέρουσι, ἀηδεστάτῃ δ'αὐτὰ περιλανβάνουσι λέξει.*

[35] Other critics have disbelieved that any General would present such amoral arguments, but such delicacy does not qualify as evidence. Other Athenian outrages mar the record, such as the parallel treatment of Scione (Thuc. 5.32). Plutarch's report, taken from the Samian author Douris, of Pericles' brutal treatment in 440 of the Samian revolt's ringleaders, included exposing them to the elements for ten days fastened to planks and then bashing in their heads. Cf. Meiggs 1972, 188–92, on the story's credibility. A reader objected to my describing Dionysius' rhetorical critique as "bizarre" and "naive," but to "rewrite Thucydides into an Isocratean version of the Athenian past" is *ipso facto* naive in its arrogant mishandling of what happened long before Dionysius, and bizarre in treating a foundational historical text of a genius as no more than a source for students of oratory. For his own purposes, he recommends jettisoning the "Archaeology" of 1.2–20 entirely — Dionysius considers it an unnecessary and undignified disparagement (19–20: *καταβλητικά*) of earlier Greece, one filled with irrelevant factoids.

Athenian generals of the Periclean age — even if they were actually spoken.[36]

Edith Hamilton's Achievement

What does Hamilton say of the darker side of the Athenian Golden Age, about bullying and slaughter? Not much, especially in the first edition of *The Greek Way*, because the dark sides of Athenian glory did not fit either her ideal or her public message. When she decided to add the chapter on the historian Thucydides, she could not, and did not, ignore examples of imperial savageries that feature in his account of the war's violent teaching.[37]

Her resonant English phrase about Hellenism's achievement (the header cited above) featured in a Hellenistic document dispensing an honor couched in inflated, Athenocentric formulae. Murray quoted a Greek rhetorician's paraphrase, a clause in an elaborate, apologetic denial of grim fact, to wit, the Athenians' culpability for attempting to wipe out the island of Melos' population. Hamilton here nicely rewrote an ancient Greek clause with a finite verb and a prepositional phrase into one English paratactic clause: "to tame the savageness of man and make gentle the life of the world."[38] The sonorous creation developed a life of

[36] Aristotle (*Poetics* 1451b) famously argued that historical events have less seriousness than poetry's invented scenes, since historical facts are merely particular and sometimes improbable.

[37] Her twenty-page chapter on Thucydides first appeared in the revised edition of *The Greek Way* (1942). She corrected her inexplicable previous omission of both Herodotus and Thucydides in the 1930 first edition, calling the earlier roster of great fifth-century authors "incomplete" (7). She now acknowledges that the Athenians abused their power (188), referring to Pericles' admission (2.64) of the hatred that the Athenians' league aroused. "The cause of humanity was defeated." She intelligently juxtaposes the incidents of Mytilene and Melos (200–2). She observes and condemns the change in Athenian spirit from (barely) sparing defeated rebels, presumably before and during the Peloponnesian War, to a willingness to kill *all* men and enslave women and children. After a hard-won change or heart and/or Cleon's policy, the Athenians decided to execute *only* "a little more than one thousand" Mytilenean rebels (Thuc. 3.49–50; the reading remains a crux). Hamilton praises the reconsideration and states that the second ship was able to "prevent the massacre" (*GW* 100). She ignores a distinction that multiplied the crime: the Mytilenean men so spared were former long-time allies who became rebels under duress, when the terms of "alliance" were altered to subjection, while the Melian men who were executed claimed to be neutrals in Thucydides' presentation and probably had no prior treaty, or alliance with Athens or Ionian "racial" affinity.

[38] A reader cogently suggested that the inscriptional clause alone sufficed for Hamilton's "translation." Her wording of the "taming" phrase, however, is closer to

its own. Hamilton's phrase had re-deployed Gilbert Murray's impassioned plea for renewed attention to Greek literature for her own generation. The phrase became famous because a martyred politician, Senator Robert Kennedy, quoted it from memory in 1968, after Dr. Martin Luther King's assassination, shortly before his own (*v. infra*). Indeed, it was literally carved in stone to honor the Senator's grave in section 45 at Arlington National Cemetery across the Potomac.

Did, then, Hamilton encourage or discourage intelligent and accurate knowledge of Greeks and Romans? Certainly, her assimilationist *The Greek Way* bowdlerized the peculiar, otherness found in early Greek myth to render that culture more "relatable" for mid-century Anglophone audiences. She quaintly "gentles," for instance, Hesiod's description of Cronus' crude and graphic castration of Ouranus,[39] as knowledgeable readers have noticed. On the other hand, the convenient 1,743-page Bollingen Foundation edition of *Plato, The Complete Dialogues* (1961), edited more by Hamilton Cairns than by Edith Hamilton, still occupies a spot on many bookshelves. Hamilton lent her influential name to this project, chose the Victorian Jowett and later translations, and wrote the eccentric, personal introductions.[40]

Honors accrued to the non-, indeed anti-Academic, the public intellectual, and the charming zealot, the "ambassador of antiquity." She received honorary degrees from Universities: Rochester, Yale and Pennsylvania. She was elected to the American Academy of Arts and Letters. She conversed with statesmen such as William Fulbright, the prominent labor leader John L. Lewis, and poets as divergent as Robert Frost and the Fascist-friendly Ezra Pound, whom she visited weekly at St. Elizabeth's Hospital (Reid 1967, 73).[41] The spare modernist verse of both these poets suited her vision of what poetry should be, although her own favorites were from an earlier era. Even the distinguished émigré German philologist Werner Jaeger came knocking at her door, in appreciation of

Dionysius'. Further, the whitewashing of Athenian imperialism, common to all four documents under consideration, deserves attention. The three epigones had an empire to defend.

[39] Hamilton in her *Mythology* (1942, 67) delicately eschews Hesiod's report of Kronos castrating his father Ouranos. "Cronus lay in wait for his father and wounded him terribly."

[40] See Reid 1967, 125–6. Hamilton observed to Cairns that Socrates "had a great distaste for high-sounding talk." I cannot explain this judgment. The Jowett index in Hamilton/Cairn's volume in some ways (e.g., subheads, topics) offers more information than that in the more complete edition (more of the disputed and spurious dialogues) edited by John Cooper and D. S. Hutchinson, Plato, *Complete Works*, Indianapolis 1997, 1808 pages.

[41] Hallett 1996/7 assembles most of these data.

her glowing review of his like-mindedly, supra-temporal *Paideia* I and II.[42] This scholar from Berlin and Harvard with a puzzling career requires attention elsewhere.[43] Edith Hamilton, like two of her younger Classics contemporaries, Elizabeth Hazelton Haight[44] and Moses Hadas,[45] sought to de-alienize the parochial and polytheistic Greeks, to make them into "timeless" friends or neighbors. The title of *The Ever-Present Past* epitomizes this gospel.[46] Her *Mythology*'s iconic status as a modern "classic" attracted its own seventy two page "Spark Notes," Eric Protter's 1966 pedestrian but fitfully insightful "critical commentary" to *The Greek Way*. Her intimate friend, longtime companion, and lover, Doris Reid edited *A Treasury of Edith Hamilton* (1969), old wine in a new bottle,

[42] Se *EPP* 107–11, *New York Times Book Review*: "The most illuminating book I have ever read on Greece." "Professor Jaeger show the changelessness of truth, the eternal verity of what Socrates … exemplified in his life …"

[43] She reviewed most favorably the first two volumes of his now unread *magnum opus*, *Paideia*. Gilbert Highet, a Scots professor transplanted to Columbia University, translated all three volumes. He was one of the few philologists that she admired; he blurbed her books (*New York Times* 2 Jan. 1944; see Hamilton 1964, 107). Highet also served as a member of the "Book-of-the-Month Club" selection board and was arguably the most celebrated professional classicist resident in the United States. Jaeger, like Hamilton, had an apolitical, supra-temporal, morally improving understanding of culture — Germanic and essentially ahistorical. As Elsner (2013) points out, his sympathies with Prussian *Bildung* and Nazi *Kultur*, smothered in erudition, responded to his personal situation and Nazi-induced crisis. This academic star, once the leading light of German philological *Wissenschaft*, avoided most political commitments but expressed approval of the new government. Even after decades of semi-isolation at Harvard, he may have imagined that Hamilton could boost his status so that he might again become a "public intellectual," as he had been in Germany and she was in America. Hallett's 1992 paper explores why he was not chosen to be President of the American Philological Association. *Werner Jaeger Reconsidered*, in which Hallett's essay appears and edited by W. M. Calder, found an amusing review by Charles Beye 1992. He faults that volume's quite negative take on the Harvard professor, not least Jaeger's chapter examining Thucydides.

[44] Professor E. H. Haight of Vassar taught with Grace Macurdy for thirty-five years. Macurdy, more a scholar than a popularizer, admired her enthusiasm and teaching skills, but considered her research superficial. See Lateiner 1996/7, 153–66, on Haight, and McManus 2017, 121, on Macurdy's measured estimation of her as teacher and researcher.

[45] She reviewed positively Hadas' translation of Burkhardt's *Age of Constantine the Great*. *New York Times Book Review* 4 Sept. 1949 (= Hamilton *EPP* 1964, 115–17).

[46] Anonymous (1957, Brendan Gill) attended Hamilton's original CAAS presentation and summarized it, titling it not quite positively by its length, as "Nineteen and a Half Minutes," a joke about the speaker's wanting to keep it brief. Hamilton said that "I'll have to make it much more logical in print than I did in speaking it."

featuring rubrics like "Mind and Spirit" and "Freedom." It remains in print.[47]

She portrays the Greeks as precursors of American individualists and freedom-lovers, inferior to Americans, of course, in mass production and atomic bomb-making, but forever far ahead in literature, art, and thought. From this godlike viewpoint, the Greeks are neither the most primitive of civilized people, nor most civilized of primitives, but they remain the founders of Western Civilization. When in the '30s of the twentieth century, the demise and near erasure of Classical Studies in the humanists' Academy and curriculum was thorough but still fresh, she convinced Americans that the ancient world still had something to teach. Her pulpits included the *Saturday Evening Post*, the *Saturday Review*, the *New York Times*, and even *Vogue*, a woman's fashion magazine of fashion and cosmetics. She remained dismissive of many ancient writers or epochs, and she ignored material that she regarded as trivial, such as tribute lists, fragments of Greek historians, Sophists of either era, and logographers' published revisions of Athenian court defenses.[48] The *Saturday Evening Post* would now not consider publishing an article on what she termed the freedom of Greeks, a freedom not widely shared in her favored period beyond the borders of Attica. First, because the *Saturday Evening Post* no longer exists to accept or reject it, for it last

[47] *Everyday Life in Ancient Times* (Grosvenor 1951, 6th printing) prints two Hamilton "introductory chapters" first published in monthly issues of *The National Geographic* magazine, e.g., 85.3 (March 1944). These chapters themselves were condensed from *The Greek Way* and its sequel, *The Roman Way*. Many of the contemporary photos of Greek shepherds and fishermen or a French bullfight comport oddly with the facing text. Other authors, such as Richard Stillwell and Rhys Carpenter, represented more academic authorities. Hamilton's inclusion in this materialist-archaeological volume suggests a desire to attract America's foremost celebrator of any ancient culture. Hamilton the celebrity was a master recycler and entrepreneur.

[48] The original 1930 edition of *The Greek Way* omitted Herodotus or Thucydides. She added those two historians and three others to *The Great Age of Greek Literature* (1942). Later editions reverted to the original, more encompassing but less accurate, title. The absence of Homer and Sappho from a book discussing ancient Greek literature and thought is indicative of Hamilton's unease with earlier and later, less familiar epochs and genres of Greek poetry and political, social, and cultural history. Her tables of contents reveal by their omissions her restricted spectrum of writers, aside from dismissals such as *EG* 9–12: "Fourth century Athens is completely overshadowed by Athens of the fifth century …: Real interest in Greece ceases with Sparta's victory over Athens. [The fourth century] is the prelude to the end of Greece, not only of her glory, but of her life historically … Athens drops out of history. Fundamental to everything the Greeks achieved was their conviction that good for humanity was possible only if men were free, body, mind, and spirit, and if each man limited his own freedom."

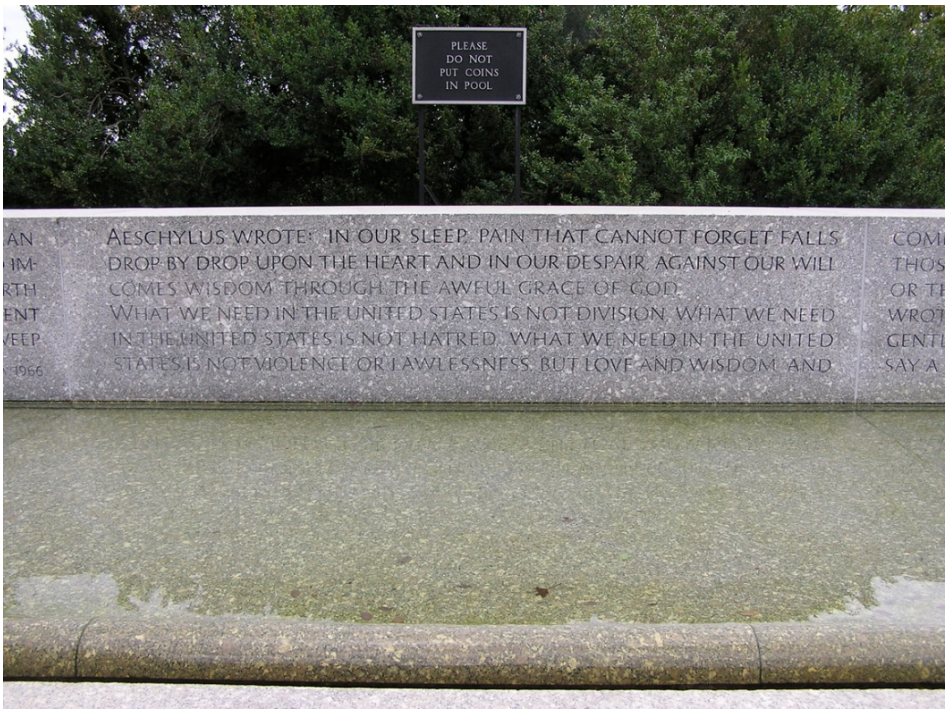
published in familiar form in 1969; second, because the Athenian paradigm of freedom and culture no longer as comfortably fits American policy as the Athenian paradigm of beneficent imperialists. This public intellectual's unique amateur authority, her dramatic certitude in intuiting what Aeschylus or Plato meant, and her lucid prose held a magical potency for the "Greek-less." *The Greek Way* began its successful career as mini-lectures about the ancient Greeks presented to friends at tea parties and to children living or visiting in her homes (Reid 1967, 30, 66). That is, her "brilliant" popular articles were pitched to those who otherwise had successfully ignored Greek social and political history.

President John F. Kennedy invited Hamilton to his 1960 presidential inauguration, but she refused, preferring to watch it on television, glad to remain at a distance from liberal democrats (Reid 1967, 137). He sought her advice through an intermediary, again in vain, for designing a Washington Cultural Center, the one that bore his name after he was assassinated in Dallas (November 22, 1963; Bacon 1980, 308). On 4 April 1968, after Dr Martin Luther King was murdered (see Casazza 2003), Jack's brother Bobby Kennedy, no saint but a person who had endured the loss of two older brothers, quoted Hamilton's influential translation of a choral passage in the *Agamemnon*. In a catastrophic moment for the nation, after another murder by a high-powered rifle, Kennedy addressed *ad hoc* a mostly African-American, confused and angry crowd in Indianapolis. He emphasized the power of Aeschylus' chorus of old men in Hamilton's rendition. First, he postulated the godly gift of violent human *privilege* arising from lessons of pain, ΠΑΘΕΙ ΜΑΘΟΣ, in human experience.[49]

> For those of you who are black and are tempted to be filled with hatred and distrust at the injustice of such an act, against all white people, I can only say that I feel in my own heart the same kind of feeling. I had a member of my family killed, but he was killed by a white man. But we have to make an effort in the United States, we have to make an effort to understand, to go beyond these rather difficult times. My favorite poet was Aeschylus. He wrote: "*In our sleep, pain which cannot forget falls drop by drop upon the heart until, in our own despair, against our will, comes wisdom through the awful grace of God.*[50]

[49] Strophe 3, vv. 176–81; see the Indianapolis video, https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=GoKzCff8Zbs.

[50] Cf. Hamilton 1937, 170, the first stasimon of the *Agamemnon*. The passage, already cited at the end of her introductory note (161), clearly possessed a special significance to her: "Drop, drop — in our sleep, upon the heart/ sorrow falls, memory's



Robert F. Kennedy, Arlington Memorial Site (1971) featuring a reflection Pool with a quotation from Aeschylus' *Agamemnon* (Arlington National Cemetery, Wikipedia)

Robert Kennedy had meditated often on that Athenian's powerful perception of theodicy. Second, he quoted Hamilton's paraphrase of a Greek inscription — not an everyday event in American politics. Concluding the brief five-minute speech, he encourages his audience: "Let us dedicate ourselves to what the Greeks wrote so many years ago: *to tame the savageness of man and make gentle the life of this world*. Let us dedicate ourselves to that, and say a prayer for our country and for our people."

Given Hamilton's philological limits and critical accomplishments, how does one evaluate this inarguably influential, *sui generis* Classicist? My own conclusions surprised me. We can easily critique a dead white female who sincerely loved and promoted her conservative and idealizing understanding of a narrow set of Greek and Roman Classical literary texts. What remains? We should not ignore this best-selling, "self-credentialed" television guru.[51]

pain,/ and to us, though against our very will,/ even in in our own despite,/ comes wisdom/ by the awful grace of God."

[51] (Hallett 1966/7, 125; Reid 1967: photo section). She recorded a "moving discourse" in 1958 for a vinyl LP of her wisdom (Spoken Arts 928). I salvaged a copy discarded by the Ohio Wesleyan University Library. Huntington Cairns, Hamilton's

Since she served as the apostle of Classics to ignorant Americans, a "virtual cult figure," her reception and later influence need explication.[52] One hundred and fifty-two years after her birth (12 August 1867), Hamilton will sleep undisturbed in her grave in Hadlyme, Connecticut, and in bronze sit proudly with her impressive progressive sister Alice, and cousin Agnes on Fort Wayne's monuments. Nevertheless, this dual-selection Book-of-the-Month Club's summer-reading author explicitly and repeatedly disavowed Academic pretensions, indeed dissociated herself from footnotes, fellow classics teachers, contemporary and earlier scholarship, and the philological profession. Hamilton's bold rejection enhanced her public success, outreach, and influence. She seemed more accessible without footnotes. The United States' State Department sponsored her trip to Athens in 1957, because her riveting performances promoted ties with a teetering ally. She provided helpful Cold War propaganda (Hallett 2008). Her celebrity and long-term effect should not

friend and co-editor for their one volume Bollingen Plato volume, interviewed her for the NBC television network; see four photos from the event in Reid 1967.

[52] Sicherman 1984, 484, provides the quotation. Prof. Hallett in her twelve publications (so far) notes Hamilton's limitations, as I have here. Although this icon of Classicism may be a whipping-girl for circumscribed attention to the classics, Hamilton promoted interest in the Greeks more effectively than most current academics have. Her translations of drama, her expositions of myth, and expositions of ancient attitudes and practices still attract readers. A few call for the dismantling of the "colonialist, imperialist field." Hamilton gained high visibility for herself and Greek antiquity in the press, theater, other media, and in politics. Classicists are now nearly invisible in national conversations about the past or present, with the embarrassing exception of right-wing and racist ideologists. Hollywood's "Sword and Sandals" cinematic epics, such as Ridley Scott's *Gladiator* (2000) or Wolfgang Peterson's *Troy* (2004), or Zack Snyder's *300* (2006) provide celluloid for profit and modern emotional catharsis or racist satisfaction rather than understanding of ancient society and its dynamics. Scott's production of the Marcus Aurelius/Commodus fictionalized vehicle hired Harvard historian Kathleen Coleman as historical consultant, but management generally disregarded her observations of anachronistic historical detail or otherwise unjustified screen actions and speech. Coleman 2004, 45–52, provides an amusing description of the experience. Frank Miller-Lynn Varley's (1998) comic-book/graphic novel dramatizing Herodotus' Thermopylae narrative grossly overstates his polarization between Persian and Spartan values and behavior, although Herodotus' ancient account already exemplified local and panhellenic, ethnocentric legend-making. "Thermopylization" has become a noun as Carey 2019 demonstrates. See further the unscholarly but nevertheless helpful website "History vs. Hollywood (Movies)": http://www.historyvshollywood.com/reelfaces/300spartans.php). Roland Barthes (1957/72, 19–21) identifies an analogous semiotics of modern representations of universal bangs and sweat on ancient Roman men in his essay, "Romans in the Movies."

be dismissed from American classicists' memory and deserve attention elsewhere.

Statue of Edith Hamilton, Headwaters Park, Fort Wayne, Indiana, USA: Her Hometown (2000) (Credit: R. J. Sharpe)

Two consequences flow from her unique self-positioning. One, scholars would be ill advised to judge her *only* by scholarly standards and to ignore her pop-culture celebrity. Two, *quo bono* as well as *cui bono*, what did she gain by her iconoclastic spiritual, anti-philological approach?[53] One must explain her narrow horizons, for example, her dismissal of pre-Periclean and post-Periclean centuries and non-Athenian creativity as unimportant, mostly uncreative. Her willful choices and omissions require recognition — *The Greek Way* has no chapter on Homer or Sappho, or the pre-Socratics. Classicists now, however, might emulate her success in interesting publics in ancient Athenian and other ancient communities' experiences — beyond celluloid

[53] Houseman 2023, 67–8, 73, 77, 85, collects information about Hamilton's academic ambitions and growing distaste for philological research. British aesthetic appreciation appealed to her more than German *Wortphilologie*.

romances. Spokespersons promoting awareness of the ancient Mediterranean past ought to account for her effect and rebut consequences of her limitations.[54]

For example, when she dismisses non-Periclean centuries as insignificant, others must demonstrate how Homer, Archilochus, Solon and Ephialtes enabled her brief "Golden" age, how the unwritten laws of trade and war and the machinations of Themistocles and observations of Thales enabled that brief efflorescence. Similarly, she silently dismisses the later literary successes and spiritual force of Callimachus and Theocritus, Lucian and Heliodorus. The Roman peace produced vigorous art and thought, but not of the sort that she (and for that matter, Ulrich von Wilamowitz-Moellendorf) admired.[55] Her preference for grand and majestic drama, the "loftiness and majesty" of the tragedians' thought and diction[56] over subtle elegiac love elegy, satirical exposés, her lack of interest in everyday people in general, in prosaic wage-earners, trireme oarsmen and even romantic pirates, suited the unvoiced yearnings for idealism and uplift among many twentieth-century strivers living in an epoch of rampant postwar materialism. Postwar Americans and their children welcomed a "Great Books" curriculum especially suited to G.I.s, liberal arts colleges, and post-collegiate adult education.[57] One better understands Hamilton's impressive appeal to audiences, when one comprehends the power of her laser-focused, simplified prose, her

[54] "Her concern is 'the nature of Comedy [capital C], and there are no 'ifs,' 'ands,' or 'buts' or 'it seems to me's' in what she writes … only fundamental truth." So wrote her student and long-time companion, Doris Reid (1967, 153). Hamilton had five years of formal education altogether, a relatively short period of teaching and administrative employment (22 years) under no nearby boss, and from her elevated platform as prophet knowing Greek suffered no editorial interference from Norton's publishing establishment.

[55] He famously damned the culture of the Roman second century CE as the spiritual vacuity of "a whited sepulcher." See Wilamowitz 1895/1959, 175–7.

[56] *GW* 85, in a chapter on "the last Greek aristocrat," Pindar the Boeotian. This non-Athenian gained a full though somewhat exasperated chapter in Hamilton's book about Athenian genius probably because of his distance from politics' dirty hands and his instantiation of a gentlemanly creed that directed his gaze away from the present (Boeotia capitulated when faced with the Persian advance to their borders) and to the past (ibid., 102–3).

[57] My father belonged to a "Great Books" group that met weekly at a Public Library in the New York suburbs during the early 'sixties. Monthly sessions populated by businessmen and housewives discussed Sophocles, Thucydides, Plato, and other major Western authors who lived into the twentieth century. The Great Books Foundation (founded 1947) printed and sold boxed paperback sets in blue, pink, and other colors. I don't know if teenagers were allowed to attend, but I never did.

ahistorical approach and dogmatic judgments, her idealistic but somewhat vague spiritual values that suited her "Book of the Month Club," middle-class readership.[58] Her formal education had ended in the 1890s. Her politics were conservative and based on the values of the previous century.

Hamilton expanded interest in Greek and Roman literatures and prominent ancient personalities among power brokers, ordinary citizens, and future scholars — some perhaps reading this essay.[59] She brought Americans, from a President and his glamorous wife[60] to high school students, from poets to casual readers, to read ancient Greek poetry. She brought one brash but thoughtful presidential candidate to quote it.[61] The power of her rhetoric and his quotation of it caused this phrase to be graven on Arlington cemetery's monumental reflecting pool adorning Robert Kennedy's burial-site. Hamilton's eloquence was celebrated again in readings for the fiftieth anniversary of Kennedy's death, 6 June 2018 (J. P. Hallett reports). No classicist now commands an audience of millions — or even thousands. Her enthusiasm for, and knowledge of, Greek literature and thought attracted attention from two generations or

[58] Not only middle-class, as the private as well as later public adhesion of the Kennedy family makes clear. For instance of her initially puzzling choices, her widely popular book, *Three Greek Plays* (1937), consists of two plays by Aeschylus and one by Euripides. None by Sophocles. The answer seems to be that when invited to publish a book of translations, those were the three she had at hand. She began with choruses of the *Agamemnon* (begun before 1927), had published (July 1927) *Prometheus Bound*, and previously completed in 1935 and nearly staged *Trojan Women*. The first portrays a powerful woman plotting and executing the assassination of a bullying, daughter-murdering generalissimo, the second celebrates a demi-god's resistance to Zeus's absolute tyranny, and the third portrays the suffering of innocents in war, especially bereaved women's grief — an argument for pacifism. She strangely omitted "sententious but quintessential" (258, 262) Sophocles' tragedies entirely. One imagines that the *Antigone* appealed to her, but she regarded Sophocles as impossible to translate (cf. *GW* 264–7) Euripides, the last of the three surviving tragedians, is placed first for reasons unclear to me. At a time when forceful, modern translations were rare, Hamilton filled a gap.

[59] My former student, Jennifer Lewton Yates, revered Hamilton's *Greek Mythology* and gave me a copy. She now teaches Greek and Latin at Millsaps College. I read *The Greek Way* in a Mentor paperback in junior high school and it made me want to know more.

[60] Jackie Kennedy gave Robert her copy of *The Greek Way* (Hallet 1996/7, 144 citing Arthur Schlesinger, Jr.'s biography of Robert Kennedy).

[61] David Brooks wrote (see https://www.wikiwand.com/en/Edith_Hamilton#/Modern_Influences; last consulted 13 December 2020): "He carried his beaten, underlined and annotated copy [of *The Greek Way*] around with him for years, reading sections aloud to audiences in a flat, unrhythmic voice with a mournful edge" and could recite from memory various passages of Aeschylus that Hamilton had translated.

more. She, therefore and paradoxically, remains a capital asset for professional classicists. Her forte, as she saw it, was not facts but "truths of the spirit."[62] Such a broad-brush horizon is more digestible than the quarrels that scholars obsess over, such as the three-bar sigma controversy of Athenian epigraphy or the precise date of Cleisthenes' reforms.

Vespasian persuaded Titus of the legitimacy of the proceeds from his urinal tax with a joke about their not smelling foul like their source.[63] Classicists too might acknowledge that questionable assertions and dubious arguments can produce positive consequences — here, excitement about studying ancient Mediterranean classics. Therefore, while one recognizes her proselytizing achievement, one must vigilantly consider Hamilton's *idées fixes* and rebut them, when they travel a "wrong way," or when she pronounces that there was only one "Greek Way." Her monument in hometown Fort Wayne, Indiana can refresh the memory of her *way* of digesting ancient Greek literature and thought.[64]

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[62] Prins 2017, 107, citing Helen Bacon, and indirectly Hamilton herself.

[63] Suet. *Vesp*. 23: Titus complains about how low the administration has sunk now that it is taxing bodily functions, *urinae vectigal*, but Vespasian sticks a coin under his son's nose and wonders whether he is offended by the odor. When Titus says "no," Vespasian observes that the money comes from taxing piss. *admovit ad nares* [of Titus], *sciscitans num odore offenderetur; et illo negante, Atquin inquit e lotio est*. Cf. Dio Cassius 65.14.5. The incident, boiled down to the phrase *pecunia non olet*, continues to live in the present. Meanwhile, Italians and the French call public urinals "Vespasians."

[64] Judith Peller Hallett and two attentive, anonymous readers commented on and improved an earlier version of this paper. I am responsible for errors remaining and evaluations of Hamilton's methods.

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