

Chapter 1

Theory of Alignments

The god, whose oracle is at Delphi, does not speak, does not hide:
he shows by signs.

—Heraclitus (Fragment 93)

1. Delphi: Apollo and Athena

It all began during a first visit to Delphi in the spring of 1957. How could anyone not be filled with inspiration by the majesty of this site and its evocative combination of Greek deities? In the temple of Apollo, the god of celestial fire is associated with Gaia, the earth, and with Dionysus. Next to the sanctuary of Apollo stands that of Athena.¹ The form of Delphi itself suggests a sacred marriage. As Mircea Eliade has said: "Delphi, most famous of the clefts of ancient Greece, owed its name to this mythical image; 'delphi' signifies in fact the female generative organ."² The union of heaven and earth is implicit in the view of the gorge of the Phaedriades and the sacred mountain of Parnassus, stairway to the heavens.

The very shape of the sanctuaries unites the image of the earth with the projection of the heavens. The omphalos, the navel of the earth, lay in the most sacred part of the temple of Apollo. Nearby was the seat of the Pythia, who drank from the Castalian spring before giving prophecy.

I was intrigued by a certain detail of the cult at Delphi: the sacred drama of the battle of Apollo with the serpent Python was enacted there about every eight years. Now, the serpent not only is a symbol of the earth but also represents the path of the sun through the zodiac. One quarter of the thirty-three year cycle of the "mean sun" is just over eight years.

It has long been known that the development of peoples and civilizations is influenced by the great rhythms of the earth and of the celestial bodies. The Greeks, like all ancient peoples, were aware of this and wished to put their cities and temples under the protection of forces that ruled particular places and times, mountains, springs, and rivers. But the connection between Delphi, site of Apollo's main sanctuary, and Delos, his traditional birthplace, remained a mystery. I also wondered about the relationship of Apollo and Athena.

After a second trip to Greece in the spring of 1958 my original intuitive insight came to me. On the map of Greece I sketched a line joining Delphi to Athens and, to my surprise and great satisfaction, I saw that an extension of that

line went to Delos. A spatial relationship between the three sacred sites was thus revealed. It was already more understandable why at Delphi there was a sanctuary of Athena Pronaia by the modern road coming from Athens. Before the entrance of the temple of Apollo used to stand another statue of Athena.

The movement from Delos to Delphi can be interpreted as a symbol of the daily path of the sun, as Creuzer has already observed.³

From the time when I first began to draw my lines, I wondered what the ancient Greeks knew of the shape of their country. Surviving maps or those composed according to ancient geographical texts are almost useless.⁴ My later observations were to show that, although there were errors in the calculation of distances, especially in mountainous country, on the whole the ancients were well aware of the positions of sites in relation to one another, and especially of significant alignments. This makes good sense for a people of shepherds and navigators who were used to taking bearings on the stars. Many texts, such as the beginning of Aeschylus's *Agamemnon*, indicate that news was communicated by means of fire signals on high places. Aeschylus's text mentions a series of relays between Troy and Argos, which is an excellent way of determining certain alignments.

2. The Meridian of Delphi: Tempe–Delphi–Sparta–Cape Taenarum

By simple deduction I was led to consider the geometric figures that could connect Delphi with other parts of Greece. (For everything that follows see map 1.) It was naturally appropriate to pay most attention to the sites of the principal temples and religious traditions. Several geometrical constructions were possible: lines, triangles, arcs of circle, or even spirals. But because the overall shape that the Greeks ascribed to their country isn't known, the complex triangulations I first thought of were impossible. It soon became obvious that I would have to restrict my study to major alignments in relation to legends about the origin or the transfer of oracles.

Two legends, seemingly contradictory, but really complementary, establish the connection between Delphi and an Apollo who is both Cretan and Hyperborean, and the link between Delphi and Tempe.

The most ancient sanctuary of Greece, and for a long time the only one, was that of Zeus at Dodona, the "Druidic" oracle of a woodland people. During the period in the development of Hellenic religion when Apollo was becoming the dominant Greek god and was acquiring, by more or less explicit delegation, some of the attributes of a supreme deity, merging at times with Helios and Dionysus, the Tempe valley became quite prominent and it was from there, it would appear, that the cult of Apollo spread throughout Greece. According to the tradition told by Pausanias (IX, 30), it was from Tempe that the cult of Apollo was brought to Delphi. There is also the legend of Zeus releasing eagles or swans from the ends of the earth and the two birds crossing at Delphi. Of particular interest in this tradition is that it seems to be an allegorical description of a geo-

metrical figure. This could be, for example, the intersection of two arcs of circle. An arc can be drawn on the map of Greece with the probable site of Tempe as the center of a Dodona-Delphi curve, because the distances from Tempe to Dodona and Tempe to Delphi are equal. This distance is also equal to that between Delphi and Prasiae. This port, the modern Porto Rafti, is located where the Delos-Athens-Delphi line cuts the coast of Attica.⁵ And it was from that very place that the sacred Theores set sail for Delos. In determining the site of Delphi, it is as though the legendary birds had been simultaneously released and had flown towards one another at a presumably uniform rate, one of them leaving from Tempe, and the other from Prasiae (and hence the direction of Delos).

The line joining Dium-Tempe-Delphi-Taenarum is identical to the meridian of Delphi. A line drawn very close to it, slightly deviating to the northwest, joins Amyclae, Sparta, Tegea, and the summit of Olympus.

The noteworthy position of Sparta foreshadows the city's prominent role in the history of the Delphic oracle. I believe that the evolution of this oracle, according to Pausanias's description of its successive temples, must essentially be seen as an allegory.⁶

3. Bassae, Tegea, Corinth

In my further travels in Greece, I was struck by the unusual and apparently arbitrary placement of certain great sanctuaries of the Peloponnese. Why was the temple of Tegea on an otherwise featureless point of the immense plateau of Arcadia? Why was the temple of Apollo at Bassae high in the mountains at an altitude of more than a thousand meters? Could anything but predetermination have dictated the choice of such sites? From the work of Mircea Eliade already mentioned two relevant comments were to guide my research. One had to do with the meaning and function of the omphalos: "It is from a 'center' (navel) that the creation of the world starts and, in solemnly imitating this primary model, every 'construction,' every 'fabrication' must operate from a starting 'center.'" ⁷ The other concerned the fundamental meaning of the triangle for the Greeks, which symbolized fertility, the source, the matrix, the universal principle of generation.⁸

My attempts with triangulation were not always successful. I will mention only what is of interest to introduce some simple alignments.

An almost equilateral triangle joins three important sanctuaries of Athena at Delphi, Athens, and Tegea (as the Protectress). One may therefore assume that a triangulation, with Athens and Delos as two of the points, had in all likelihood governed the choice of the site of Tegea.

The height of this triangle passes very near Corinth. The unique position of this city, key to the isthmus, where there was also a great sanctuary of Apollo, suggested that it had to some degree acted as a center.⁹

The selection of the site of Apollo's temple at Corinth seems to have been as much for geographical considerations as for geometrical and astronomical

reasons. The imposing mass of the Acrocorinth acts as a gigantic gnomon in relation to the temple. From the summit of the Acrocorinth and the northwest corner of the temple of the Syrian Goddess (the celestial Astarte) on the upper terrace, the eye follows the slope of the mountain to the exact southwest corner of the temple of Apollo, as any visitor to the Acrocorinth can see. And directly opposite, on the other side of the gulf, rise Mount Helicon and Parnassus, whose steep slopes overhang Delphi to the northeast.

4. From Crete to Hyperborea

The Homeric Hymn to Apollo indicates that there were ancient relations between the sanctuaries of Knossos and Pytho and that the temple of Apollo was originally served by Cretan priests.

The Delphi-Corinth line (i.e., Mount Parnassus–Acrocorinth) defines a direction parallel to the mountain range of Pindus and to the line between Patrae and Cape Malea. But the original generating center really seems to have been the summit of Mount Ida in Crete, reputed cradle of the supreme god of Hellenic mythology.

Since the other gods are no more than emanations of Zeus, unique aspects of his power, this has bearing on the legend of the Cretan origins of the Delphic Apollo, whose name is associated with the dolphin. The legend seems to contradict those suggesting a Hyperborean origin of the cult of Apollo. On the line in question, the Castalian spring at Delphi may represent the female element in counterpoise to the male element of Parnassus. This symbolism also applies to the Acrocorinth at Corinth, a name meaning “city of the summit,” and its springs of upper and lower Pirene (it is known that the priestesses of the Syrian Goddess practiced sacred prostitution).

The Mount Ida–Corinth–Delphi direction symbolizes the vital spirit of the country of Greece. This line intersects parallels of latitude at a 60-degree angle and may be considered as the projection over part of the earth’s surface, taken as flat, of the Leo-Aquarius cosmic axis, which defines the same angle in relation to the line of the equinoxes.

This axis is the cosmic signature of Greece and makes it a mirror of the celestial harmony of the zodiac and the planets of the solar system.

If the other end of the cosmic axis is taken as the origin, Apollo, instead of coming from Crete, is coming or returning from the “Hyperboreans” of Scotland or even of Iceland.

Incidentally, the equivalence of Hyperborea and Egypt is easily explained if one accepts the existence of a primordial tradition, probably of “Hyperborean” (or Borean) origin, from which Egyptian civilization and religious practices would also have derived.

These thoughts adjoin Charles Picard’s comment: “Who knows whether the Delphians had not worshipped both a Creto-Anatolian Apollo who had come

to Delphi by sea, with its priests of Knossos, and another god by the same name, believed to be 'Hyperborean' or 'Lycian'; this would explain the variety of his divine epithets."¹⁰

At almost a right angle to the Delphi–Mount Ida axis lies Delos, and at the point where this line cuts the coast of Ionia stood the other great oracle of Apollo at Claros. Extended southeast, it ends at Cape Epidelium, site of the ruins of a temple of Apollo Delios (map 1). It is parallel to the Corinth-Bassae line.

My brother, Lucien Richer, has shown that an extension of the Delos-Athens-Delphi axis through Europe coincides with an alignment of sites dedicated to Saint Michael. This line goes through Monte Sant' Angelo, Sacra di san Michele, Mont-Saint-Michel, Saint Michael's Mount, and Skellig Michael. It would seem that Saint Michael was the true successor of the Apollo associated with this axis (see *Atlantis*, May–June 1977).

5. Leucas

My reconstruction of the system of references would have remained incomplete if, at this stage in my research, I had been unable to find the site on the Greek coast that was for the ancients the allegorical place of the daily death of the sun god Apollo-Helios. An extension of the Delos-Athens-Delphi line passes near Arta, the ancient Ambracia, a Corinthian stronghold in enemy territory, which was long in conflict with Corfu, also on this line. But this wasn't what I was looking for.

The sanctuary at Leucas with its tradition of a ritual dive seemed to be the place I was seeking. Carcopino has described it:

There was a succession of priests of Apollo on the island from at least the seventh century B.C. to the time of the Roman empire. To my knowledge there were two temples to the solar deity of the golden arrows at Leucas: one on the fatal cliff at the southern end in the western part of the island, the other in the northeast, near the city with which Thucydides associates it. . . . Of the second nothing remains but a memory. Of the first, a few debris of indistinct age may still be seen near the lighthouse. There is nothing to show that the sanctuary on the isthmus was built earlier than the neighboring city, founded by Corinthian colonists toward 635 B.C., to which it was subordinate, and the sanctuary on the Rock must be considered as an annex of the other and subsequent to it. . . .

[According to Aelian,] the ritual dive sacred to the priests of Apollo took place at the end of a processional festival, and was followed by the sacrifice of an ox or bullock for the purpose of getting rid of the flies, which, after gorging themselves on the sacrificial blood, did not take long to die.

In describing the evolution of the rite, Carcopino has said that by Strabo's time the ordeal was no longer practiced more than once a year. He also noted:

To avoid defections from among the faithful, threatened by losses in population and resources, the priests of Leucas decided to substitute for the defectors. They practiced the sport of the sacred dive, which they performed both in the name of the city and, by substitution, in the name and at the expense of individuals.¹¹

By a procedure opposite that of the eminent scholar, who was researching the moral and spiritual meaning of the rite for the Pythagoreans, I was able to define a working hypothesis on the origin of the dive from the White Rock.

Now, since the sanctuaries of Apollo at Leucas were founded by Corinth, this city once again could have acted as a generating center. If one draws from Corinth a parallel to the Delos-Delphi line, one will arrive at the island of Leucas. A right angle (which can be interpreted as the image of a fall) ends at Cape Leucatas.

I suggest the following hypothesis. Every evening, the sun appears to die in the west. In the history of religions, especially that of Mexico, the purpose of human sacrifice was to give the day star the strength necessary to traverse the darkness and to be reborn. Couldn't one suppose that at Leucas there may originally have been a daily human sacrifice, which gradually became weekly, then monthly, and finally annual, with the substitution of animal for human victims in the process? Certain rites of Leucas and Patrae hint at such a transition.

Strabo¹² says that in his time on Apollo's feast day every year a criminal victim was thrown from the cliff of Leucas. Feathers were glued to his body and live birds were even tied onto him to slow his fall. The victim was spared if he came out of the water alive, so fishing boats were waiting at the foot of the cliff for his rescue.

In Pierre Chantraine's *Dictionnaire étymologique de la langue française*, the article on $\Lambda\epsilon\Upsilon\chi\acute{o}\varsigma$ indicates that the word is "part of a great family of words meaning 'light': Latin, *lux*; Greek, $\lambda\acute{\epsilon}\upsilon\sigma\sigma\omega$, $\lambda\acute{\upsilon}\chi\nu\omicron\varsigma$; Indo-European **leuq*/**louq*, etc." The symbolic importance of places bearing a name derived from this root, which are generally associated with the sunrise or the sunset, may be deduced from this.

6. The Four Temples of Hermione

I was especially interested in the point where the Mount Ida-Delphi line cuts the coast of Argolis. On the map I pinpointed Hermione.

The site seemed noteworthy. It was at the latitude of Delos, and a right angle struck from the Mount Ida-Delphi line at Hermione intersected Amyclae. Also, Hermione occupied a position that is almost symmetrical to that of Delphi in relationship to Corinth.

These purely topographical indications, giving a quadruple spatial definition, led me to believe that Hermione must have been an important site in the cult of Apollo. I researched the existence of any texts to support this. A page of Pausanias then provided a series of suggestive relationships, which were enough to show the nonarbitrary nature of my constructions and to encourage me to pursue my research. Pausanias wrote on Hermione:

Of Apollo there are three temples and three images. One has no surname; the second they call Pythaeus, and the third Horius (of the Borders). The name Pythaeus they have learned from the Argives, for Telesilla tells us that they were the first Greeks to whose country came Pythaeus, who was a son of Apollo. I cannot say for certain why they call the third Horius, but I conjecture that they won a victory, either in war or by arbitration, in a dispute concerning the borders (*horoi*) of their land, and for this reason paid honors to Apollo Horius.¹³

More interesting than the traveler's cumbrous and spurious explanations are the names he mentions, because the name Pythaeus suggests Pytho, the ancient name for Delphi. Should one assume some connection between the cult at Hermione and that of Apollo Lykeios at Argos?

What is more, Hermione is on the Mount Ida–Delphi line, a line whose more distant origin is in Egypt. Hermione marks the extreme frontier of this line in the Poloponnese. Did Pausanias believe in his own explanation? Or did he wish to avoid overtly mentioning the cult of Horapollo, derived from the cult of the Egyptian solar god Horus? This name inevitably springs to mind when one thinks of this passage of Plutarch in *Isis and Osiris*: "It is said that Typhon took Nephthys to wife, and that Isis and Osiris, being in love with each other even before they were born, were united in the darkness of the womb. Some say that Aroueris, whom the Egyptians call Horus the Old and the Greeks Apollo, was born of this union."¹⁴

There was rather widespread conviction in antiquity that Hellenic religion was at least partly of Egyptian origin. Herodotus also confirms this. In regard to the sanctuary without a special name, Pausanias says that at Hermione, on the feast of Demeter-Chthonia, children wreathed with hyacinths took part in the procession. So it could be that this sanctuary was sacred to Apollo as the slayer of Hyacinthus, which relates to the esoteric side of a cosmic religion in which astral influences were predominant.

A look at map I will show that one may assume the presence of four temples of Apollo at Hermione:

1. Apollo-Horus (southeast)
2. Pythian Apollo (northwest)
3. Apollo, slayer of Hyacinthus, worshipped at Amyclae (southwest)
4. Delian Apollo (east).

The more ancient fourth sanctuary is described by Pausanias (XI, 34, 10) as being sacred to Helios and must be related to Delos.

I then traveled to Hermione, and this visit revealed the outstanding nature of the site, finally convincing me of its relevance.

The modern village, which occupies a part of the ancient city, is situated on a narrow spit of land orientated almost exactly east-west. It lies under the lee of the island of Dokos farther south, which has the same orientation as the peninsula.

The temples of Hermione have not been thoroughly researched and excavated. Greek researchers have brought to light some mosaics of Byzantine basilicas in the village. What might still lie underneath them?

At the eastern end of the peninsula, facing south, there is a slope, as a villager showed me, that has patches of vegetation with peculiar circular irregularities. The slope makes a hollow sound when it is struck and may well hide cupola tombs.

7. The Oracle of Ptoon

The remarkable case of Hermione, coming after my preceding observations on Delphi, Delos, Corinth, and Leucas, suggested a sort of preestablished agreement on the geographical position of the sites, their structure, and their cult significance. Another interesting example of this harmony appeared on the map of Greece. The cities of Corinth, Argos, and Sparta lay on a straight line and at a right angle to the Delphi-Delos axis. Extended northeast, this line intersects the latitude of Delphi at a point corresponding to the sanctuary of Ptoon.

A visit to Ptoon therefore seemed useful. I made the journey there in the spring of 1960 (the later construction of the northern highway has made it more easily accessible.)

How could anyone miss the obvious similarities between this site and that of Delphi? In both, the temple was in the heart of the mountains in a gorge with a gushing spring that promised continuity of the oracle. Like at Delphi, Apollo is associated with the earth. On the southern slope of the valley, near the temple of Apollo, stands a sanctuary attributed to Demeter.

Upon leaving this inspiring place at sunset, I took a few photographs of the temple terrace and the general view with Mount Ptoon in the background. Examining them several days later, I saw that Mount Ptoon has the clear outline of a human profile. There are certainly many rocks and mountains in Greece in whose shape the human eye may discern a face, with the aid of some imagination. Among the best known is the "head of Zeus" formed by Mount Joutas, behind the Heracleion of Crete and Knossos. But Mount Ptoon is a case that deserves special mention because it may have been a factor in the placement of the sanctuary. Oddly enough, Vincent Scully, who attributes such importance to these simulacra in his book *The Earth, the Temple and the Gods* (1962), missed this head, although it is quite clear on photographs of the site (figs. 5 and 6).

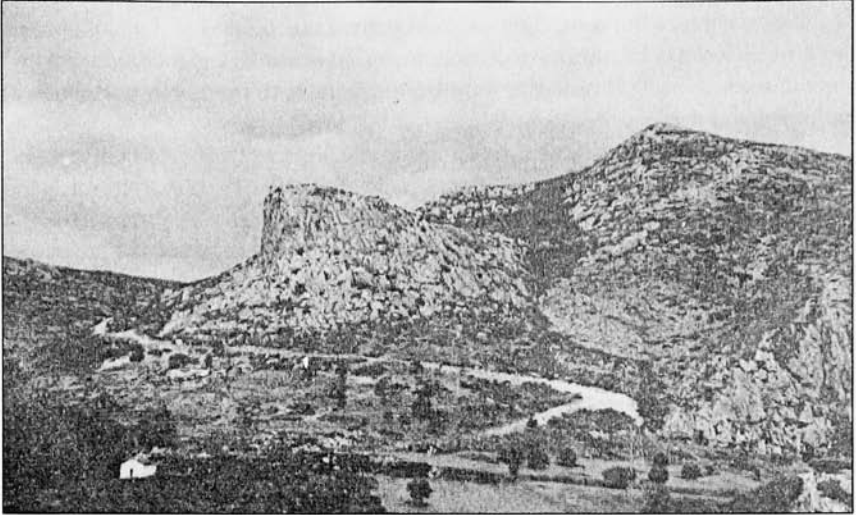


Figure 5. Mount Ptoon and the sanctuary of Apollo.

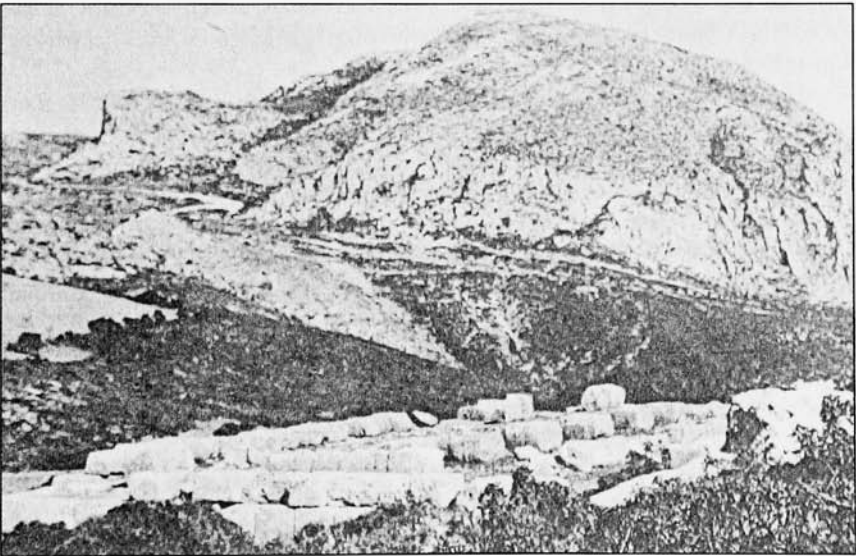


Figure 6. Mount Ptoon seen from the sanctuary of Demeter. (Photos J.R.)

8. The Apparently “Abnormal” Orientations of Temples: Bassae, Delos
Archeologists generally seemed to agree that the “normal” orientation of a sanctuary and especially of a *naos* of Apollo was east-west with the entrance to the east. Any other orientation was said to be “abnormal,” and attempts were made to take into account local customs, the requirements of the terrain, etc.

Now, some of the most famous and greatest sanctuaries of Apollo, notably those of Delos and Bassae, have orientations that are at first glance unusual and even inexplicable. At Bassae the temple's entrance is to the north-northeast; at Delos it faces west.

For Bassae it is ordinarily claimed that the limited dimensions of the terrace forced the builders to orientate the temple to the north, that is, towards the mountain. One only need examine and measure the site even cursorily to be convinced that a rather minimal embankment, executed in twenty other places in a spectacular way (for example, the five foundations of the temple of Hera at Perachora, the nine foundations of the temple of Aphaia at Aegina, and the mound of Calydon), would have allowed the temple to be orientated east-west without changing its dimensions. A door in the east wall at Bassae brought the rays of sunrise to the statue of the god and, according to Corbett, as transmitted by Scully, it also gave a view of Mount Lycaeon, a major site in the cult of Zeus. However, has anyone realized that, orientated as it is to the north, the temple's entrance faces the direction of Delphi? In addition, the plan of the sanctuary of Apollo at Bassae is identical to that of the temple at Delphi.

At Delos there is nothing obvious to justify the orientation of the temple to the west. But so placed the entrance faces Hermione, which is on the same latitude, and where the cult of Helios-Apollo may have begun somewhat earlier than at Delos.

Another "abnormal" orientation long eluded me: that of the most ancient temple of Apollo in Rhodes, situated at Camiros and facing north. The solution to this enigma was to put me on the track of other discoveries (see chapter 4). In my opinion, these so-called "abnormal" orientations will be seen to obey certain definite rules if, instead of studying each temple separately, one is willing to consider the network of the great Apollonian sanctuaries as a whole. I will be giving many examples of this. Such observations can also be used to confirm what is known from other sources of the probable dates of the temples' construction.¹⁵