

## The Form of the Pergamon Altar: Reflecting Its Commemorative & Funerary Function

Item Type	Thesis
Authors	Weatherford, McKinley R.
Citation	Weatherford, McKinley R. "The Form of the Pergamon Altar: Reflecting Its Commemorative & Funerary Function". BA Thesis, John Cabot University, Rome, Italy. 2021.
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Link to Item	<a href="https://hdl.handle.net/20.500.14490/76">https://hdl.handle.net/20.500.14490/76</a>



## **John Cabot University**

Department of Art History

Bachelor of Arts in Art History  
Minor in Classical Studies and Philosophy

### The Form of the Pergamon Altar: Reflecting Its Commemorative & Funerary Function

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Spring 2021

## **Abstract**

Since the acquisition and display of the Great Altar at Pergamon in the Berlin State Museums in the 1870s, most academic writings have stated the function of the structure to be political and/or religious. These theories are primarily due to its exterior Gigantomachy frieze and its sacrificial altar in the interior courtyard, respectively. However, this conclusion overlooks two significant contributors to the overall design of the structure and thus, to its function. These contributors include the cultural complexity of Western Anatolia at the time and the presence of the lesser Telephos frieze within the raised interior courtyard.

This thesis aims to remedy this oversight by building on analyses of and comparisons with at least three structures – the Nereid Monument from Xanthos, the Stoa of Zeus at Athens, and the Attalids' Palace V in Pergamon. A comparison against these structures, though separate in both space and time, allows for a reinterpretation of the Great Altar as a heroön-mausoleum – a monument that commemorated the mythical founder and first king of Pergamon, Telephos. This needed reassessment of the structure's function seeks to encourage a broader view of ancient cultural complexity and fluidity, and the impact this then has how we view ancient monuments.

## **Dedication**

To my family.

Thank you all for the endless care and support you have always shown me, for always believing in me even when I did not believe in myself, and for sitting through my countless rambles with an ever-patient smile.

A special thank you to my best friend, the power to our duo, my mother. No matter if I am in the States or wandering somewhere abroad, you always manage to save the day and make it all the brighter. I have no doubt that, without you, I would be lost, figuratively and perhaps literally as well.

## **Acknowledgements**

My sincerest gratitude to my two academic readers. To Professor Sophy Downes for your kindness, diligence, guidance, and knowledge. To Professor Crispin Corrado, for your positivity both in and out of the classroom, and your invaluable insight. It has been a genuine pleasure to be able to work with you both on this project.

Thank you to my advisor, Professor Inge Hansen. Working with you for the past four years has been an absolute wonder. Your passion, professionalism, and support have inspired me more than you know.

An additional thank you to all the faculty and staff at John Cabot University that have contributed to my academic journey, shared their passions, and helped to cultivate my newfound love for the Eternal City.

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# 1. Introduction

*Pergamo ara marmorea magna, alta pedes quadraginta cum maximis sculpturis; continet autem gigantomachiam* – A great marble altar of Pergamon, forty feet tall, with the greatest sculptures; it contains a gigantomachy.

- Lucius Ampelius, *Liber Memorialis*<sup>1</sup>

It is with this brief passage in his book that the second century CE Roman writer Lucius Ampelius mentions the Great Altar of Pergamon, and thus places it among the miracles of the ancient world. It is with good reason that this building was given a place among the world's marvels as it is a breathtaking example of Hellenistic art, stunning in its decoration and monumentality, and distinct in its design. Accordingly, much has been and continues to be said about the Pergamon Altar. While earlier academic writing has focused on the Altar's Gigantomachy frieze, more recent attention has been directed toward the structure's less-celebrated interior frieze depicting the life of the city's mythical founder and first king, Telephos.

As the restoration of the Gigantomachy and Telephos friezes were hindered by the events of the twentieth century, the Fine Arts Museum of San Francisco and The Metropolitan Museum of Art in New York were able to offer conservational assistance to the Berlin State Museums after the reunification of Germany.<sup>2</sup> The international effort to study and conserve the Telephos frieze resulted in the 1996 exhibition *Pergamon: The Telephos Frieze from the Great Altar* and

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<sup>1</sup> Lucius Ampelius, *Liber Memorialis*, 8.14. <http://www.forumromanum.org/literature/ampelius.html>.

<sup>2</sup> Such events that hindered work on the Great Altar included the construction of the Pergamon Museum itself, both World Wars, the temporary relocation of the altar, and economic crises.



in a catalogue that expanded over two volumes, which ultimately sparked further interest in the frieze as an object of study.

This thesis will build on these recent studies by discussing the way in which the Great Altar's architectural form relates to the Telephos frieze, and how this affects the interpretation of the structure. Through an analysis of the structure's peculiar mixture of forms and details, this paper will propose a new interpretation of the Great Altar's function; that of a heroön.

To begin with brief historical information; the Great Altar was originally found within western Anatolia, in the city of Pergamon, the capital of the Kingdom of Pergamon and one of the major cultural centers of the Hellenistic world. Situated between the Antigonid kingdom to the west in Macedonia and the Seleucid Empire to the east, the Attalid kings were ambitious and clever in their rise to status, fostering connections with various foreign powers, including the Romans. With their military might and wealth, the Attalid kings, who saw themselves as the bearers of Greek culture, sought to elevate the city of Pergamon to a standard that would rival Athens's Golden Age in terms of beauty, knowledge, and status. This development began with the crowning of Attalos I in 241 BCE, who, among his many endeavors to monumentalize and beautify the city, commissioned a number of commemorative monuments on the city's acropolis.<sup>3</sup> [Figure 1.1] Unfortunately, these ancient monuments have not survived, but it is believed that the Roman marble statues of the "Dying Gaul" and the "Galatian Suicide" are copies (or the original versions) of the acropolis' initial sculptural assemblage.<sup>4</sup> When Attalos I's son and successor Eumenes II came to power, the ambitious program was continued. The urban ensemble came to include temples, royal palaces, a theater, a gymnasium, public markets, a

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<sup>3</sup> Max Kunze, *The Pergamon Altar: Its Rediscovery, History, and Reconstruction* (Staatliche Museen zu Berlin, Antikensammlung, 1991), 20.

<sup>4</sup> These works are both in Rome, Italy; currently in the Capitoline Museum and Palazzo Altemps, respectively.

military arsenal, barracks, and one of the largest libraries in the ancient world – second only to the Library of Alexandria.<sup>5</sup>

The Great Altar of Pergamon was one of the final pieces of this grand program, and indeed, a crowing piece. Built early in the second century BCE (180 to 160 BCE are the generally agreed upon decades for the monument’s construction), the Altar was built on a large terrace near the summit of the acropolis, just off the main road at the eastern end of the platform. [\[Figure 1.2\]](#) Facing the west, the Altar called the visitor to travel around its nearly square form, to admire its monumental size and its sculptural decoration. The continuous frieze that extended around its tall podium first attracted attention with its dynamic, emotional depiction of the overthrow of the earthly Giants by the Olympian Gods, who were aided by the hero Herakles. This mythological battle, known as the Gigantomachy, was a popular story depicted often in Greek monumental art – the northern frieze of the Siphnian Treasury at Delphi and the eastern metopes of the Parthenon at Athens are just two examples of earlier portrayals of the battle. However, in contrast to these earlier classical depictions, the Pergamon Gigantomachy’s over-life-sized depiction and dynamic treatment of the figures are exciting and inventive. The group of struggling figures appear to burst away from the wall with barely contained power and beauty, and it is indeed the frieze’s theatrical, yet unified appearance, that has garnered most of the attention and study since the monument’s rediscovery in 1864 by German engineer, Carl Humann.<sup>6</sup> [\[Figure 1.3\]](#)

Since the rediscovery, acquisition, and reconstruction of the Pergamon Altar in the Berlin State Museums (Staatliche Museen zu Berlin), many scholars have regarded the role of the Altar

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<sup>5</sup> John Griffiths Pedley, “The Hellenistic Period C. 323-31 BC,” in *Greek Art and Archaeology*, 5th ed (New Jersey: Prentice Hall, 2012), 344.

<sup>6</sup> Ursula Kästner, “Excavation and Assembly of the Telephos Frieze,” in *Pergamon: The Telephos Frieze from the Great Altar*, vol 1, ed. Renée Dreyfus and Ellen Schraudolph. (Fine Arts Museum of San Francisco, 1997), 19.

to have been predominantly religious and/or political, and the reasonings behind each of these theories will be explained in full in the following chapter. [\[Figure 1.4\]](#)

The purpose of this thesis is not to argue that the religious and political interpretations are incorrect. Rather, it is to explore a possible reinterpretation of the structure by considering the contemporary cultural complexity within western Anatolia at the time, and the substantial influence this had on the design of the Great Altar. This thesis will begin with an analysis and discussion of the structure's architectural elements. We will consider its lower segment and its Eastern and native connections, then a comparison of its upper section with Hellenistic stoas, followed by an examination of the Telephos frieze and the raised courtyard's relation to the courts found in the Attalid royal palaces. This will be done to offer a new analysis of the role of the Great Altar of Pergamon as a heroön-mausoleum.

To begin, I will clarify words such as tomb, mausoleum, and heroön as these terms relate to funerary structures, yet remain rather broad. The term "mausoleum," for instance, has generally been applied to tombs of various origin and size; these tombs do share some common characteristics such as (if we used original fourth century structures like the Nereid Monument as a standard) being very decorative and expansive.<sup>7</sup> We can note a trend of high, heavy podiums combined with a lighter superstructure above, as found in the Nereid Monument, the Mausoleum of Halicarnassus, and then the Great Altar at Pergamon. Next, the term "heroön" is an even broader term because it does not help to classify structures architecturally, but instead simply through purpose and function. A heroön is a funerary monument that commemorates a heroized figure, either as a simple construction or as a funerary ensemble; within Asia Minor, these cultic structures tended to have impressive architectural forms.<sup>8</sup> The Mausoleum of Halicarnassus can

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<sup>7</sup> Fedak, "Types of Monumental Tombs and Terminology," 23.

<sup>8</sup> Fedak, "Types of Monumental Tombs and Terminology," 23.

be seen as an enormous heroön-mausoleum, and the Great Altar at Pergamon, as it will be suggested by this paper, may be placed into this category as well.

To see how the Great Altar first falls into the category of a mausoleum, an analysis of the architectural form is needed.

## Visual Analysis

The Great Altar in its entirety was a nearly squared structure with an original platform measuring approximately 36.44 meters wide and 34.20 meters deep.<sup>9</sup> [Figure 2.1] Ancient visitors would have approached the altar precinct from the main road in the east, entering through an opening in the enclosure wall and initially facing the rear of the monument.

From the ground, a crepidoma of five steps and a low socle supported a high podium. On this high podium, framed between the base molding and a projecting Ionic cornice with dentils, a 2.30-meter-high and 120-meter-long frieze depicting a climactic moment of the Gigantomachy encircled the altar.<sup>10</sup> Though the exterior frieze depicted a traditional mythological battle, it did so in a powerful and dramatic way. Illustrating the crucial turning point in the battle between the Olympian gods and the earthly Giants, the figures were carved in such high relief as to make them burst away from the wall with vitality, monumentality, and sheer violence and excess. This outpouring of energy and entangled limbs follows the visitor as they move around to the western side of the monument where a nearly 20-meter-wide staircase is flanked by narrow risalit-wings. Here, on the stairs, the figures noticeably spill out from the walls, quite literally invading the

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<sup>9</sup> Kunze, *The Pergamon Altar*, 21.

<sup>10</sup> Kunze, *The Pergamon Altar*, 21.

viewer's space. For example, one of the sea nymphs coils her serpent-like tail on the stair, and another headless figure rests his knee on a step.

Above this dynamic frieze stood an exterior colonnade featuring Asiatic Ionic bases and with at least three types of Ionic capitals – type A with its quadruple-fluted cushions, type B with elongated tongue patterns on the side of the cushion that are then bound together by a band of leaves, and type C, which is similar to B except with stylized thunderbolts.<sup>11</sup> [Figure 2.2] To have such variations in the columns resulted in a shift in the length of the architraves and intercolumniations along the exterior. For instance, on the eastern and southeastern side, axial intercolumniation measured 1.44 meters long, while further preserved architraves measured 1.40 meters, and other architrave pieces reached 1.62 meters long.<sup>12</sup> This information – along with supplementary measurements that can be found regarding the coffered ceiling panels that decorated the exterior colonnade – can offer us an understanding of how many intercolumniations there might have been. That is, 21 intercolumniations on the east and 20 on the north and south sides.<sup>13</sup> Pieces of sculptural figures were found during the excavations around the area of the Great Altar, but it is not clear whether these statue figures had been placed between the columns along the exterior, on the roof, or somewhere within the interior courtyard.

At the center of the raised interior courtyard and surrounded by another peristyle is where the true altar sat. Numerous fragments of the tripartite cornice have been found in the area of the structure and it is highly believed that they were part of this richly decorated sacrificial altar.

[Figure 2.3] The two-fascia architrave and upper-molding, measuring about 9.6 meters, was

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<sup>11</sup> Volker Kästner, “The Architecture of the Great Altar and the Telephos Frieze,” in *Pergamon: The Telephos Frieze from the Great Altar*, vol 2, ed. Renée Dreyfus and Ellen Schraudolph (Fine Arts Museum of San Francisco, 1997), 70.

<sup>12</sup> Kästner, “The Architecture of the Great Altar,” 72.

<sup>13</sup> Kästner, “The Architecture of the Great Altar,” 72.

completed by a string of beads, a Lesbian cyma, an egg-and-dart pattern, and finally a floral frieze.<sup>14</sup> The middle section, roughly 29 centimeters high, consisted of a frieze section with lotus flowers and palmettes and a high dentil; and finally, the top of the entablature, formed by a crown molding, had a projecting sima with lion heads in front of an acanthus scroll pattern.<sup>15</sup> [Figure 2.4] The core of this structure is thought to have been made of either tufa or andesite, both of which were common at the time for altar podiums.

Surrounding this elaborate altar was a second frieze, one that will play a key role in the purpose of this paper. Though in poor condition compared to the Gigantomachy frieze, this lesser frieze told the story of Telephos, the city's mythical founder and the claimed hero-ancestor of the Attalid kings. Of the original 74 marble relief panels, which only measured 1.58 meters tall and 0.67 to 1.06 meters wide, only 48 panels have survived, either completely or partly intact.<sup>16</sup> Nonetheless, from the remaining slabs, we are able to gather an understanding of how the designer chose to tell Telephos's story in over 58 meters of sculptural frieze.<sup>17</sup> [Figure 2.5 & Figure 2.6] Beginning on the spur wall to the left of the entrance and the northern short wall, the plot was set up for the viewer with Herakles and Auge, Telephos's parents, meeting in Tegea. This was followed by the abandonment of infant Telephos in the Parthenion mountains, then to the shores of Mysia where Auge was sent, and then back to the Parthenion mountains where Herakles finds his son. The long eastern wall then illustrated Telephos's arrival in Mysia, his reunion with his mother, his hard-fought battles, and his defeat by the hero Achilles. Along the southern wall, the viewer finds Telephos seeking help from an oracle and then being healed

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<sup>14</sup> Kastner, "The Architecture of the Great Altar," 78.

<sup>15</sup> Kastner, "The Architecture of the Great Altar," 80.

<sup>16</sup> Kastner, "The Architecture of the Great Altar," 74.

<sup>17</sup> Andrew Stewart, "A Hero's Quest: Narrative and the Telephos Frieze," in *Pergamon: The Telephos Frieze from the Great Altar*, vol. 1, ed. Renée Dreyfus and Ellen Schraudolph (Fine Arts Museums of San Francisco, 1996), 39.

before spending his final years founding cults within Pergamon. Finally, on the spur wall to the right of the entrance, Telephos is shown resting on a dining couch, a *kline*, where he is moments away from being “consecrated as Founding Hero of Pergamon.”<sup>18</sup>

Further sculptural details, narrative style, and the significance of the frieze itself will be discussed more fully in a later chapter to help illustrate the heroön nature of the structure.

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<sup>18</sup> Stewart, “A Hero's Quest,” 40.

## 2. The Initial Reading of the Great Altar

### Earlier Theories Regarding Function

Since the excavation of the structure in the 1800s, academic writings have concentrated on the Gigantomachy frieze. From a close study of the outer frieze and the historical events around the time of its construction, many suggestions for the monument's purpose during antiquity have been made. The most widely held theories of the Great Altar are that it served a religious and/or a political purpose.

### Religious Function

The argument for the religious function of the Great Altar can be seen in primarily three aspects. First, the presence of a sacrificial altar within the raised courtyard is a strong aspect suggesting a religious element. However, it is believed that this altar – should it have truly been used for any religious ceremonies – was used for unburnt sacrifices as there have not been any trace of burnings found.<sup>19</sup> A second theory toward a religious function is found in the very placement of the Altar on Pergamon's acropolis. Scholars have noted that the Great Altar stands physically in line with the older Temple of Athena Polias, which rested on the terrace just above and faced the Altar in the south.<sup>20</sup> Even here, scholars have gone further in their claims for a religious function for the structure, for many have interpreted the grand exterior frieze as a

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<sup>19</sup> Wolfram Hoepfner, "The Architecture of Pergamon," in *Pergamon: The Telephos Frieze from the Great Altar*, vol 2, ed. Renée Dreyfus and Ellen Schraudolph (Fine Arts Museum of San Francisco, 1997), 55.

<sup>20</sup> The dating of this Doric temple is contested; however, it is agreed upon that the temple is amongst the oldest structures in Pergamon.



dedication to the Greek gods. In particular, Zeus and Athena have a prominent presence on the eastern frieze, which was just opposite of the precinct's entrance, and were the first aspects of the frieze that visitors saw. [Figure 2.7] Zeus was the father of Herakles – who is depicted on the exterior and interior friezes – and is the grandfather of Telephos. Genealogy had long been important to ruling Greek figures and the Attalids were no different. The importance and appeal of a favorable family lineage is illustrated throughout the Great Altar and especially on the Telephos frieze. Due to the fact that Telephos was the mythical first king of Pergamon, the son of Herakles, and “a descendant of the highest god, Zeus,” the Attalid kings were, therefore, descendants of this god.<sup>21</sup> Furthermore, the appearance of Athena, the claimed protectress of Pergamon, next to her father, Zeus, on the eastern frieze and ultimately placed just below the temple dedicated to her might all suggest that the Altar was dedicated primarily to these two deities. [Figure 2.8]

An additional theory is that the designer of the Great Altar's exterior frieze, specifically the eastern section, modeled Zeus and Athena after the figures of Athena and Poseidon found in the Parthenon's west pediment. A possible reasoning behind this could be to set an “intentional quotation,” one that showed the people of Pergamon as Greek as they “revered the same gods as the Athenians.”<sup>22</sup> Scholars like Bernard Andreae support the idea that Eumenes II once saw the Parthenon's western pediment in his youth and, upon surviving a near-death experience with the favor and aid of the gods, he recalled the mighty depiction of the gods in that pediment. To thank and honor them, Eumenes II dedicated the monument to the gods and instructed that Zeus and

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<sup>21</sup> Bernard Andreae, “Dating and Significance of the Telephos Frieze in Relation to the Other Dedications of the Attalids of Pergamon,” in *Pergamon: The Telephos Frieze from the Great Altar*, vol 2, ed. Renée Dreyfus and Ellen Schraudolph (Fine Arts Museum of San Francisco, 1997), 121.

<sup>22</sup> Andreae, “Dating and Significance of the Telephos Frieze,” 124.

Athena, the divine ancestor of the kings and the protectress of the city, be depicted just as boldly on the eastern side for all visitors to immediately marvel at upon approach.

The idea that Eumenes II – and later Attalos II – chose to cite works from Athens’ Acropolis is an interesting point that speaks to a close interconnectedness and adaption of images and materials. In fact, we will see in the next chapter that there are a number of elements from Athens and elsewhere that these Attalid rulers adapted for their own purposes.

### **Political Function**

Another view of the monument’s function claims that it served as a celebration of the city’s victories over barbarian groups, and as an exhibition of the ideology of the Attalid kings. Pergamon wanted to become the “standard-bearers of Hellenic civilization in Asia,” and to rival the status of Athens at its height of influence, and one such method in pursuit of this goal was a glorious artistic and architectural program.<sup>23</sup> Like the Athenians at the time of Perikles, the Attalid kings commissioned numerous monumental structures, and the Great Altar was one of the structures added in pursuit of their goals. However, the way that the designers of the Altar went about doing this is rather remarkable. By illustrating the Gigantomachy, a well-known mythological battle, in such an emotional manner and grand scale – “by far the most extensive treatment of the subject known to us” – the designers made “large claims on the viewer.”<sup>24</sup> These claims were that the viewer was meant to immediately link the Olympian gods’ triumph over the chaotic giants with the recent Attalids’ victory or victories over the barbaric Galatians in the surrounding area. The designers of the Altar, in depicting a mythological battle that had such a

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<sup>23</sup> Richard Whitaker, “ART AND IDEOLOGY: THE CASE OF THE PERGAMON GIGANTOMACHY,” *Acta Classica* 48 (2005), 163, [www.jstor.org/stable/24595401](http://www.jstor.org/stable/24595401).

<sup>24</sup> Whitaker, “ART AND IDEOLOGY,” 167.

long tradition and established meaning within Greek art, were able to adapt – and to also exaggerate – the art and message to fit their contemporary time and goal. This established tradition of using mythological battle scenes to reference more contemporary events of the time can also be found in the Parthenon metopes, which were seen as “a fixed set of mythic analogues” for the Persian Wars.<sup>25</sup>

Nonetheless, the royal house of Pergamon meant to ultimately convey “ideas of conquest and control in universal mythic terms” to the people of Pergamon and foreign visitors alike, and to enforce their presence as a powerful entity.<sup>26</sup>

It is possible to view the Telephos frieze as having a hand in the political message of the structure. Though not solely aimed toward the Greek world, the message that can be found within a section of the Telephos frieze does speak to the rest of the Mediterranean world and to Rome in particular. On the Altar’s interior frieze, there is a panel along the northern short wall of Herakles discovering the abandoned infant Telephos in the Parthenion mountains. Here, Telephos is being nursed by a lioness, while in other earlier depictions of the myth, he is nursed by a doe instead. [\[Figure 2.9\]](#) The Great Altar is the only instance where this section of the story is altered. The reason for this could stem from a politically tense moment between Pergamon and Rome, and in fact, this was precisely the case after the third Macedonian war. In this moment, the designer of the Pergamon Altar worked to show that, while the mythical first king of Rome was nursed by a she-wolf, the first king of Pergamon was nursed by a lioness and so, was stronger than Romulus.<sup>27</sup> [\[Figure 2.10\]](#)

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<sup>25</sup> David Castriota, “The Persian Wars and the Sculptures of the Parthenon,” in *Myth, Ethos, and Actuality: Official Art in Fifth-Century B.C. Athens* (Madison, Wis.: University of Wisconsin Press, 1992), 138.

<sup>26</sup> Whitaker, “ART AND IDEOLOGY,” 167.

<sup>27</sup> Andreae, “Dating and Significance of the Telephos Frieze,” 123.

This political and triumphant interpretation of the Great Altar's iconography has been carried on and highlighted by more modern scholars who may have infused it with contemporary political themes and tones. This is to say that, with the acquisition of the Great Altar at Pergamon by Germany in the 1870s, in the beginning of the German Empire, this political view of the Altar may have been emphasized.

Typical of the period, wherein nations sought to build up their status and legitimacy through museum collections, the imperial capital of Berlin wished to find a worthy cultural legitimacy for itself; one that would match or surpass the collections found in the Louvre and the British Museum. For the best chances at being able to build up their museum collections in a time where other institutions were conducting numerous excavations around the Mediterranean, the probability of great discoveries in Asia Minor seemed the most promising.<sup>28</sup> In fact, with this growing desire for notable museum pieces, the Prussian Minister of Culture wrote in a letter to Wilhelm I, the king of Prussia and later German Emperor, "It is of particular importance that the collections of the museums, thus far very weak in original works of Greek art . . . , acquire a work of Greek art that only the numerous Attic and Near Eastern sculptures in The British Museum can compare to or approach."<sup>29</sup> This wish was soon granted with the discovery of the Great Altar by Carl Humann.

The discovery and display of the Great Altar in Berlin was met with much enthusiasm and curiosity. Jacob Burckhardt, a Swiss historian of art and culture, and Adolf Trendelenburg of the German Archaeological Institute in Berlin, offered much praise to the Altar and particularly to the Gigantomachy frieze, viewing it as "the highest achievement" in Hellenistic sculpture.<sup>30</sup>

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<sup>28</sup> Kunze, *The Pergamon Altar*, 11.

<sup>29</sup> Kunze, *The Pergamon Altar*, 10.

<sup>30</sup> Lionel Gossman. "Imperial Icon: The Pergamon Altar in Wilhelminian Germany." *The Journal of Modern History* 78, no. 3 (2006), 551 and 556, [www.jstor.org/stable/10.1086/509148](http://www.jstor.org/stable/10.1086/509148).

However, this praise was not always given so readily. Some critics, mostly from an older generation of art historians, archaeologists, and artists – like German archaeologist Heinrich Brunn and German artist Johann Overbeck – were reluctant to praise such chaotic excess that was produced during a time that was seen as “a wretched repository of everything corrupt, rotten, and moribund.”<sup>31</sup> Indeed, Hellenistic art and culture was frowned upon at the time. The traditional neo-humanist view held that, as Greek culture spread to Asia Minor, it became “contaminated and enfeebled” through contact with the East and “lost more and more of its unique capacity to directly apprehend the essence of things and represent the universal in the particular.”<sup>32</sup> This view, with the discovery of the Altar, became a topic of careful reconsideration and was challenged. For example, Gustav Droysen, a student and protégé of August Böckh, in his *History of Hellenism*, rejected this traditional view and instead sought to define Hellenistic culture as a “distinct and dynamic stage in a continuous process of historical development.”<sup>33</sup>

Before such a proud and expressive example of art, admirers of the Altar came to see Pergamon as having been a center of might and culture, and they saw the Altar as a monument dedicated to the Attalid monarchy and to political triumph. They were quick to liken it to their own current political situation as a newly established empire, and this initial reception has lingered into the modern day.

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<sup>31</sup> Gossman, “Imperial Icon,” 571.

<sup>32</sup> Gossman, “Imperial Icon,” 564.

<sup>33</sup> Gossman, “Imperial Icon,” 570.

### 3. Reinterpreting the Monument

As this paper aims to reinterpret the theories of the Great Altar, to read its peculiar mixture of elements as a commemoration of the Pergamene kingdom and mythical first king, it would be of some use to reiterate the structure's location and situation at the time. Pergamon was an area within the region of Mysia in the northwest of Turkey; an area where there was some Greek influence already established along Turkey's west coast before the area fell under the control of the Achaemenid Empire around 550 BCE. Alexander the Great was then able to conquer the city and its surrounding area in the 330s BCE, bringing more Greek influence into Anatolia. Consequently, the area became a mix of indigenous, Persian, and Greek elements.

It is important to keep in mind the fluidity of what we consider to be culture, as mentioned at the end of the previous chapter. Recent studies of ancient culture have challenged earlier ideas that viewed culture as having been concentrated in one specific area, like a "potent force" that then dispersed outward to "fill a cultural vacuum."<sup>34</sup> Instead of seeing culture as defined and fixed, these recent models support the idea that ethnic identities were "discursively constructed" by the very peoples who shape "the terms and criteria of their self-identification."<sup>35</sup> It is necessary to keep in mind this fluidity, the ever-changing nature of culture and the influences it has on groups of people, because this impacts the objects and structures these groups produce at a given time. For Pergamon, who was caught in a mix of Greek, Persian, and Western Anatolian traditions, the question was, what does it mean to be Pergamene. The goal

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<sup>34</sup> Carol Dougherty and Leslie Kurke, "Introduction," in *The Cultures Within Greek Culture: Contact, Conflict, Collaboration*, ed. Carol Dougherty and Leslie Kurke (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2003), 3.

<sup>35</sup> Dougherty and Kurke, "Introduction," 3.

was to uncover an identity among influences from other groups and to then find a way to best express this image of itself in a time of rising powers.

In what follows, the ways in which these various styles were brought together to create the Great Altar will be examined. This will begin with an analysis of the structure's high podium and its Eastern and native connections, followed by a comparison of its upper section with Hellenistic stoas. Lastly, we will examine the Telephos frieze and the interior courtyard, and how this last element relates the overall space to courts in the Attalid royal palaces.

### **The Structure's Exterior**

To begin, the Altar's high podium is an unusual element for something that is typically seen as Greek. The model for this high podium cannot be found in classic Greek temples, which are typically closer to the ground level; rather, it is more similar to earlier structures found in Anatolia itself. The region of Lycia produced the "first full-fledged ancestor of the Hellenistic monumental tomb," in the Nereid Monument of Xanthos from the early fourth century BCE.<sup>36</sup>

[\[Figure 3.1\]](#) The Nereid Monument was a funerary monument that combined both semi-indigenous Lycia-Persian customs and traditional Greek aspects. This combination resulted in a new type of tomb monument that became a popular model in Asia Minor.<sup>37</sup> In fact, it is thought that, because of its elevated and noble design, the Nereid Monument was the inspiration for the famous Mausoleum of Halicarnassus – a tomb designed by Greek architects and built for a native Anatolian and satrap of the Achaemenid Empire between 353 and 350 BCE. If the Nereid

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<sup>36</sup> Janos Fedak, "Types of Monumental Tombs and Terminology," in *Monumental Tombs of the Hellenistic Age: A Study of Selected Tombs from the Pre-Classical to the Early Imperial Era* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1990), 16.

<sup>37</sup> Janos Fedak, "Tombs and Commemorative Monuments," in *Studies in Hellenistic Architecture*, ed. Frederick E. Winter (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2006), 78.

Monument could inspire such a grand and well-known structure as that found in Halicarnassus, then it would not be so difficult to imagine it also inspiring the Great Altar at Pergamon.

The Nereid Monument's tall podium comes from the older Persian and Lycian funerary traditions requiring that the deceased's body remain above ground. One reason for using a raised structure stems from the Zoroastrian belief that the deceased should never come into contact with bodies of water or the ground, in order to avoid a contamination of the earth.<sup>38</sup> A second reason is that a podium will allow the deceased to be lifted up in a call for a heroization as the living then surrounds the body with "a glorified setting."<sup>39</sup> These two different functions can be seen together, here in the Nereid Monument, through the structure's sizeable podium and numerous sculptural decorations. While the monument's podium lifted the deceased about three meters from the ground, the "glorified setting" is shown through the generalized combat scenes that wrapped around the podium in two bands, the nereid statues that danced in the intercolumnar spaces, the hunting themed frieze that chased across the architrave, and a funerary banquet scene that decorated the outer cella walls.<sup>40</sup> Here, by memorializing Lycian rulers in such a way, we find that the Nereid Monument stood as both a towering funerary monument and as a structure that commemorated the satrap's dynasty – another Perso-Lycian notion itself.<sup>41</sup> The Greek element – the Ionic temple that acted as the tomb at the center of the monument – arrived through Lycia's connections to the Greek world and through the Peloponnesian War that pressed

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<sup>38</sup> Anton Zykov, "Zoroastrian Funeral Practices: Transition in Conduct," in *Threads of Continuity: Zoroastrian Life and Culture*, ed. Shernaz Cama (New Delhi: Parzor Foundation, 2016), 287.

<sup>39</sup> Janos Fedak, "The Development of Tomb Structures in Asia Minor from the Nereid Monument Onwards," in *Monumental Tombs of the Hellenistic Age: A Study of Selected Tombs from the Pre-Classical to the Early Imperial Era* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1990), 66.

<sup>40</sup> The ruler of this particular monument was built for was Arbinas, a Xanthian dynast who ruled under the Achaemenid Empire.

<sup>41</sup> Fedak, "The Development of Tomb Structures," 68.



Greek artisans and craftsmen eastward.<sup>42</sup> By elevating and lavishly decorating the simple yet noble Greek temple, a very noticeable structure was created.

The Great Altar at Pergamon, with its tall podium and sumptuous ornamentation, can be interpreted as a continuation of the mixture of Lycia-Persian traditions and Greek features. Like the Nereid Monument and other similar structures within Anatolia, the Altar uses a high podium to lift the deceased – that is, Telephos, or at the very least the image of Telephos – to an elevated level to celebrate his life and connection to the kingdom of Pergamon. Additionally, with the sculptural decorations that the Great Altar uses around its podium, on its roof, and in the intercolumnar spaces as well, the individual was surrounded by a richly decorated environment.<sup>43</sup> In this way, we can read the Great Altar as a memorialization of the son of Herakles, the kingdom's mythical founder and the claimed hero-ancestor of the Attalid kings.

However, if the Great Altar was a continuation of these mixed styles, we may then question the design of its upper section. The Great Altar has a different form than the Nereid Monument and other similar western Anatolian tomb monuments. Rather than being rectangular in shape, the upper structure has projecting wings on either side which frame a central stairway. These wings, unusual in an Anatolian funerary context, are visually similar to the projecting wings that are found on Hellenistic stoas. Here, we may use the Stoa of Zeus as a reference structure. This particular stoa sat opposite of the Stoa of Attalos within the Athenian Agora and utilized similar elements that can be found in the Great Altar; a simple yet elegant plan with projecting wings.<sup>44</sup> [\[Figure 3.2\]](#) Built within the late fifth century BCE along the western side of

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<sup>42</sup> Fedak, "The Development of Tomb Structures," 66.

<sup>43</sup> Numerous sculptural figures were found at the site during excavation, and it is believed that they were placed between the columns of the exterior peristyle.

<sup>44</sup> In fact, the Stoa of Zeus has been cited as perhaps the oldest example of a wing-risalit stoa.

the Agora, the Stoa of Zeus served both religious and civic functions.<sup>45</sup> While having been built in dedication to the king of the gods, Zeus, this stoa also housed artworks and military objects that honored the Athenian state and its achievements. Therefore, though still quasi-religious, the Stoa of Zeus partly held a commemorative aspect as well.

While stoas were initially meant for simple public usage, they increasingly began to appear in sanctuaries and other secular spaces and simultaneously began to take on the role of a commemorative structure.<sup>46</sup> One example of this is the fifth century BCE Stoa Poikile or Painted Porch from the Athenian Agora. This structure was best known for housing several paintings by Polygnotus of Thasos and Mikon of Athens that depicted the sack of Troy, the Battle of Marathon and the Amazonomachy – which was intended to reference Athenian victory over the Persians like the Parthenon’s metopes and to continue the show of glorious past deeds.<sup>47</sup> In the Great Altar, this commemoration of the kingdom is shown through both the structure’s grandeur and the interior frieze which speaks of the royal and even divine lineage of the rulers and their accomplishments on behalf of the kingdom.

Continuing the idea that the increasing appearance of stoas in secular spaces affected a change in their function, we find that the form of the structure developed alongside this shift. In later stoas, the inner aisle has been partly or completely replaced by rooms. With these added rooms, stoas became multifunctional and could be used as public offices, for shops, dining, or again as public displays of booty and artworks.<sup>48</sup> If rooms could have been added into stoas to

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<sup>45</sup> Andreas Scholl, “The Pergamon Altar: Architecture, Sculpture, and Meaning,” in *Pergamon and the Hellenistic Kingdoms of the Ancient World*, ed. Carlos A. Picón and Seán Hemingway (Metropolitan Museum of Art, 2016), 49.

<sup>46</sup> Frederick E. Winter, “Stoas in Later Greek Architecture,” in *Studies in Hellenistic Architecture* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2006), 52.

<sup>47</sup> Winter, “Stoas in Later Greek Architecture,” 52.

<sup>48</sup> John McK. Camp II, “The Greek Agora,” in *A Companion to Greek Architecture*, ed. Margaret M. Miles (Somerset: John Wiley & Sons, Incorporated, 2016), 506.

hold works of art or other objects then it does not seem outlandish for an altar and a frieze to be placed in the interior space too. Further developments included the addition of projecting wings that created either an L-shaped or a bracket-shaped building, as found in the Stoa of Zeus.<sup>49</sup> Towering colonnaded facades and enclosures already had imposing, regal presences to them, but we can certainly imagine that adding risalit-wings only created a stronger emphasis to the building's presence, separating it from other nearby structures. In such a manner, the structure was prominent, majestic, and authoritative.

The Attalid kings were well-known for having a particular affinity for Greek stoas, precisely because of the structure's beauty and noticeability. As it became common for kings to erect buildings in religious and secular spaces, the Attalid kings left behind a handful of stoa examples, such as the Stoa of Attalos I in Delphi, the Stoa of Attalos II and the Stoa of Eumenes II, both in Athens.<sup>50</sup> Within Pergamon itself, there were several stoas found around the acropolis. While Eumenes II's additional embellishment of the Sanctuary of Athena Polias with stoas and a propylaeum is most notable, in general, "stoas as single monuments predominated" in the marketplace, the gymnasium, the theater, and in other areas as well.<sup>51</sup> These structures – most notably the Stoa of Attalos II – are still some of the best examples of stoa architecture today. Consequently, the number of stoas that were commissioned and admired by the Attalid kings makes it even more likely that they could have been used as models for the Great Altar. As previously mentioned, the Stoa of Zeus faced the Stoa of Attalos which was built around 150 BCE on the eastern side of the Agora. The proximity of these two structures is of interest due to Attalos II having reportedly studied for a time in Athens before he became the co-ruler alongside

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<sup>49</sup> Winter, "Stoas in Later Greek Architecture," 51.

<sup>50</sup> Winter, "Stoas in Later Greek Architecture," 52.

<sup>51</sup> Wolfram Hoepfner, "The Architecture of Pergamon," in *Pergamon: The Telephos Frieze from the Great Altar*, vol 2, ed. Renée Dreyfus and Ellen Schraudolph (Fine Arts Museum of San Francisco, 1997), 27.

his brother Eumenes II. From his time in Athens, Attalos II would have gained a familiarity with the art and architecture in the heart of this Greek city. It is highly likely that Attalos II would have seen the Stoa of Zeus directly opposite of where his own stoa was to be built, found inspiration in both its layout and impressive façade, and shared this inspiration with Eumenes II.

Even before the extensive use of stoas by the Attalid kings, stoas were already considered “the most characteristic expression” of Hellenistic architecture, precisely because of their monumentality and elegance.<sup>52</sup> To then combine such a distinctive structure with emphasizing, projecting wings surely had a powerful impact on all viewers.

With such an exalted, colonnaded façade, Hellenistic stoas came to be associated with palace façades.<sup>53</sup> In this way, we can interpret the Great Altar at Pergamon as a so-called palace for Telephos. To properly honor the city’s first king, the façade of the monument commemorating him should be both splendid enough to leave foreign visitors amazed and, at the same time, familiar enough to its location and people. That the Attalid kings also built their own spectacular palaces near the Great Altar serves as a further physical and visual link to their claimed hero-ancestor Telephos.

To draw inspiration from Hellenistic stoa designs – whose stateliness was then likened to palace façades – offers the Great Altar, like the Stoa of Zeus in Athens, a majestic and commanding presence. This purposeful modeling stands as a testament to Pergamon’s wealth, abilities, and connection to the Greek world. In addition, this modeling acts as a reinforcement of the Attalids’ right to rule by creating such a visible, palatial structure that was dedicated to their claimed ancestor, the city’s semi-divine founder and hero.

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<sup>52</sup> Winter, “Stoas in Later Greek Architecture,” 50.

<sup>53</sup> Scholl, “The Pergamon Altar,” 50.

A deeper consideration for this palace association will follow shortly with the analysis of the Altar's interior courtyard.

### **The Structure's Interior**

Unlike the exterior and its dynamic Gigantomachy frieze, the lesser Telephos frieze, which sat in the interior courtyard, illustrated the epic life of the mythical founder in a much calmer fashion, and in an interior space that we may assume only select people were allowed to see.<sup>54</sup>

The Telephos frieze – though not as bold or as large as the Gigantomachy frieze, and therefore overlooked until recently – is spectacular in the techniques used in its carving. The very style of the frieze is “another major achievement of the Hellenistic period,” precisely because it is one of the first to depict a “continuous narrative in the pictorial arts.”<sup>55</sup> The continuous narrative technique we find here is very different from Greek archaic and classical narrative methods, as these earlier styles usually condensed a story down into a single frame.<sup>56</sup> While the Telephos frieze differs from older forms through the storytelling method it utilizes, it is still carved in a classical Greek style. This may have been done in part to match the modest size and stillness of the interior space and partially to link Pergamon to Greece as the city had no “proper” Greek past – this link would be needed for Pergamon to become the standard-bearer of Greek culture.<sup>57</sup>

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<sup>54</sup> I say this with the divine nature of the space in mind, as it does honor a legendary founding hero that descended from Zeus, the king of the gods.

<sup>55</sup> Barbara H. Fowler, “The Creatures,” in *The Hellenistic Aesthetic* (Wisconsin: The University of Wisconsin Press, 1989), 122.

<sup>56</sup> Fowler, “The Creatures,” 122.

<sup>57</sup> Stewart, “A Hero's Quest,” 44 - 45.

Returning to the continuous narrative technique, the designer of the frieze gave notable consideration to the selection and depiction of landscapes and figures. They added depth to the characters and to the environment by separating each major scene with rocks, trees, interiors with furniture, and columns to best show a progression in the storyline.<sup>58</sup> [Figure 3.3] These elements give the story a spatial and temporal context. Furthermore, the attentive selection and arrangement of scenes and characters not only illustrated “the origin and achievements” of Telephos, but also related them to the structure’s overall architecture, showing that guiding the visitor through the story was a main priority of the interior frieze.<sup>59</sup> Being able to enter the courtyard space and walk along the frieze, witnessing the epic tale of Telephos from cradle to death, the visitor was allowed to partake “in the world of the deceased hero.”<sup>60</sup> This is similar to the Nereid Monument mentioned earlier, where select visitors were permitted to walk along the banqueting scene on the outer cella walls and to access the tomb via a ramp at the north end of the structure. That the Great Altar would follow this idea of allowing certain access into the world of the deceased supports its function as a funerary structure.

We will next examine more closely, three sections of the Telephos frieze to consider the fine details of the carving and careful selection of moments and characters. These scenes include a transitional panel that shows the fluidity of the story’s progression, an important battle scene that depicts the Mysians defending themselves from and repelling Greek forces, and finally, panels that illustrate the founding of the cult to Dionysus, a cult that was important to both Telephos and the Attalids.

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<sup>58</sup> Fowler, “The Creatures,” 123.

<sup>59</sup> Wolf-Dieter Heilmeyer, “New Arrangement and Interpretation of the Telephos Frieze from the Pergamon Altar,” in *Pergamon: The Telephos Frieze from the Great Altar*, vol 2, ed. Renée Dreyfus and Ellen Schraudolph (Fine Arts Museums of San Francisco, 1997), 128.

<sup>60</sup> Fedak, “Tombs and Commemorative Monuments,” 72.

Beginning with panel three from the northern short wall, we find a particularly good example of the way in which the scenes transitioned onward as this piece seems to straddle two scenes; both of which take place in Tegea, but which are separated by a pilaster in the background. To the left of this pilaster is the beautifully robed Queen Neaira, wife of King Aleus of Tegea, who sits in a palace that is evident by her cushioned chair, the footstool, and the drapery in the background. The fragmented scene preceding this depiction of Queen Neaira suggests that she is welcoming Herakles to King Aleus's court. This welcoming is followed, to the immediate right of her and the pilaster, by a near-nude Herakles standing outside next to a tree, his lion skin flowing down his back and his club held in his left hand, resting on his broad shoulder. [See again [Figure 3.3](#)] This scene depicts the moment Herakles fell in love, at first sight, with the priestess Auge, the daughter of Aleus and Neaira and the soon-to-be mother of Telephos; unfortunately, the image of Auge on the succeeding panel has not survived.

Moving along the eastern wall next, panel 25 marks the beginning of several panels that illustrate the fierce battle that took place along the river Kaikos. Panel 25, following a quiet scene, quickly places the viewer in the middle of the fight between the Greeks and Mysians, just after Mysia was invaded by the Argives in their search for Troy. We can see in this panel, two Scythian warriors wearing leather cuirasses have been defeated and nearly overlap one another as they fall on top of a collapsed horse. [[Figure 3.4](#)] The warrior on the right still has his circular shield in his left hand as he seems to look up toward an armed fighter who approaches from the right. It is believed that these two fallen warriors are the brothers Heloros and Aktaios, sons of the river god Danube and who, according to legend, were killed in battle by the Greek warrior

Ajax.<sup>61</sup> This combat scene is not as vigorous as the exterior frieze, but nevertheless, we are still able to gather the movement, energy, and emotion of the scene.

What has survived of panels 30 and 31 illustrates the end of this depiction of the battle along the Kaikos. The fragmented panel 30 shows a nude male on the far left who is striding off while looking back with a seemingly surprised or worried expression, and to the right of him remains only the lower half of another male figure. To the right of this scene, on panel 31, we find only the upper half of a robed figure with no background having survived. [\[Figure 3.5\]](#) This robed figure, calmly watching the two in the previous panel, is most likely a young Dionysus who is said to have aided the hero Achilles – probably the figure whose lower half is visible – in wounding Telephos –most likely the fleeing figure – because Telephos had failed to properly honor the god. The figure of Dionysus was made smaller than the other characters, and this may not be because of his youthfulness but rather because he seems to appear more so in the background, as a sort of apparition.<sup>62</sup>

The depiction of this vengeful Dionysus is later contrasted toward the end of the frieze in panels 44 to 46 (also in panels 49 and 50) where we find cultic ceremonies taking place and the founding of a cult to Dionysus. This new cult suggests a reconciliation between Telephos and the god as the cult to Dionysus Kathegemon was particularly important to Pergamon and to the Attalids.<sup>63</sup> [\[Figure 3.6\]](#)

These well-planned scenes carefully carry the visitor through both time and space, allowing us to be witness to the birth and death of Telephos, to his many struggles and

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<sup>61</sup> Heres, Huberta, “The Myth of Telephos in Pergamon,” in *Pergamon: The Telephos Frieze from the Great Altar*, vol 2, ed. Renée Dreyfus and Ellen Schraudolph (Fine Arts Museums of San Francisco, 1997), 89.

<sup>62</sup> Dreyfus, Renée and Ellen Schraudolph, “Catalogue,” in *Pergamon: The Telephos Frieze from the Great Altar*, vol 1, ed. Renée Dreyfus and Ellen Schraudolph (Fine Arts Museums of San Francisco, 1996), 68.

<sup>63</sup> Huberta, “The Myth of Telephos in Pergamon,” 94.



accomplishments. This detailed storytelling allows the viewer to form an investment in the hero precisely because we have followed his story every step of the way, and we feel called to celebrate his life by the end of the frieze. Commemorating this heroized figure is a main concern of the frieze and the designer's continuous narrative achieves this wonderfully, effectively transforming the Great Altar into a proper heroön.

Zooming out from the details of the Telephos frieze, we can now consider the attention that went into the design of the raised courtyard that holds this frieze as this space quotes the very courtyards found in the home of the Attalid kings.

The overall design of the peristyle courtyard is similar to the courtyards found in the royal palaces that, as mentioned before, the Attalid kings built on the acropolis near the Great Altar, just farther up the main road. Unfortunately, the palace buildings were altered and ransacked on multiple occasions since the time of the Attalids, so we are forced to only speculate and to rely on poorly preserved remains along the northeastern side of the acropolis that have been conventionally identified as the palace complexes.<sup>64</sup> Nonetheless, there have been about five structures identified as palace complexes, but we will look specifically at Palace V because of its layout and its dating. [\[Figure 3.7\]](#)

The palace was built within the time of Eumenes II (197-159 BCE) and was roughly 2,420 m<sup>2</sup> overall.<sup>65</sup> With a richly decorated, colonnaded court that was over 20 meters long, Palace V is thought to have been the space used for official banquets and receptions.<sup>66</sup> In this court, it is believed that its upper story was decorated, in the intercolumnar spaces, by 86-centimeter-high marble panels that illustrated similar subjects found on the Altar – the

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<sup>64</sup> Stella G. Miller, "Hellenistic Royal Palaces," in *A Companion to Greek Architecture*, ed. Margaret M. Miles (Somerset: John Wiley & Sons, Incorporated, 2016), 494.

<sup>65</sup> Miller, "Hellenistic Royal Palaces," 494.

<sup>66</sup> Hoepfner, "The Architecture of Pergamon," 37.

Gigantomachy and the story of Telephos.<sup>67</sup> [Figure 3.8] Along with the identical sculptural subject matter, short double Ionic half-columns were meant to be seen as part of the walls in the Great Altar's interior courtyard, acting as frames that the Telephos frieze could be viewed between from the center of the court, similar to the intercolumnar spaces of Palace V's court.<sup>68</sup>

This palace connection can be enforced even more by the very presence of Telephos who, especially in the final panel of the frieze, is seen resting on a *kline*. [Figure 3.9] Certainly, this “thematically places us in the house of a king.”<sup>69</sup> Additionally, *klinai* were common sights in western Anatolian funerary imagery, so to stand before this panel that depicts the moment of Telephos's memorialization as the city's founder, reminds us again that, in that intimate space, we are still visitors in the world of this deceased hero.

As mentioned, another reason for considering Palace V to be of some inspiration for the Great Altar's interior courtyard comes from its dating. We can date Palace V because of discarded building materials found in its foundations that came from the Pergamon Altar, suggesting that the two structures were under construction around the same time.<sup>70</sup> This discovery supports the possibility of deliberately similar designs moving between the palace and the Great Altar, therefore, promoting the idea of the Altar's interior having a regal nature.

These palatial and funerary elements – the court and the Telephos frieze – places the Great Altar into the heroön category, as it is a monument that commemorates the heroized figure of Telephos. To carry this further, the structure's ornamentation, high base, and lighter upper structure brings the Great Altar one step further into the class of heroön-mausoleum.

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<sup>67</sup> Hoepfner, “The Architecture of Pergamon,” 39.

<sup>68</sup> These half-columns have been found in other Attalid architecture, like the upper story of the Stoa of Attalos in Athens and in the north stoa's windows in the Sanctuary to Athena.

<sup>69</sup> Hoepfner, “The Architecture of Pergamon,” 55.

<sup>70</sup> Miller, “Hellenistic Royal Palaces,” 494.

## 4. Conclusions

This thesis has examined and promoted the cultural complexity in western Anatolia that helped to produce such a grand commemorative monument as the Great Altar at Pergamon. The structure's overall appearance was a creative and selective fusion of different ideas that derived from elaborate funerary monuments, stoas, and palaces to create a unique form perhaps never before seen. Indeed, idea and execution have come together in the Pergamon Altar to embody the very "climax of Hellenistic culture in Asia Minor."<sup>71</sup>

For Pergamon, clarifying and expressing their own sense of identity after periods of various foreign influences was crucial if they were to become a formidable Hellenistic power; especially if they were intending to rival Athens' Golden Age and to carry on the standard of civilization and progress. The question that remained was how those separate from the Greek mainland, far from such centers like Athens, were meant to go about expressing and fixing themselves to a "Greek" identity and culture.

While it is well known that the Greeks adopted and modified many elements from foreign cultures to suit their culture, the opposite is also true. The adoption and modification of materials and symbols speaks to a sense of interconnectedness and to cultural exchange. The adapted symbols, materials, and designs can then be seen inserted into the social, political, and cultural messages of those who have taken it on, and it is vulnerable to change as they see fit.<sup>72</sup> We can

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<sup>71</sup> Kastner, "The Architecture of the Great Altar," 82.

<sup>72</sup> Dougherty and Kurke, "Introduction," 6.

catch a glimpse of this at work in Pergamon. Adopting mythological stories and architectural forms was certainly one method that advocated for what we may call Greekness in Pergamon.

Through a close reading of the Great Altar's architectural elements, we can see this adaption of symbol and materials taking place; we can then trace parts of the Altar back to a number of structures found in different locations and times. The Altar's high podium and lavish exterior decoration, which heroizes and glorifies those who passed, recalls ancient Persian and native Lycian customs into the Hellenistic period. By incorporating these aspects into the monument, the designers spoke to the history of the area and to its peoples, as mentioned in the beginning of the previous chapter. Simultaneously, the stoa-like design and façade of the Altar's upper structure acted as the Greek element that connected the structure, its kingdom, and its rulers to mainland Greece. This striking utilization of what is viewed as the characteristic expression of Hellenistic culture, and which references to notable structures within the heart of Athens, works to confirm the Attalids' attempts at fitting into the mold as the next standard-bearers of Greek culture.

Visitors who entered the Altar's precinct and moved about the structure's exterior could see and make out the intermingling of cultures in its various elements, marveling at Pergamon's wealth and abilities, and connecting the kingdom to a wider, complex world. However, those who were allowed to enter the interior space, like in the Nereid Monument, could then interact more directly with the royal family and the kingdom. This was done through the design of the courtyard and through the story of Telephos, which illustrated the figure's connection and fundamental contributions to the Pergamene kingdom.

The classical carving and continuous narrative style of the Telephos frieze, as shown in this paper, was meant to invite the viewer into an intimate space and on a journey through both

time and space with the first king. The way in which the frieze guided its viewer was of high importance to the designers of the Great Altar because the viewer needed to feel an investment as a sort of eyewitness to the ancient world and life of the deceased hero and king. Only then did the frieze urge its audience to honor Telephos's many deeds, achievements, and contributions to the Pergamene state. This celebration was then ended by the final panel that depicted the king on a *kline* in a courtyard, abruptly bringing the viewer back to the monument's contemporary time as it cited the same funerary banqueting scenes that have been found on countless other structures – to remind us of our visitor status in Telephos's world – and it referenced to the Attalid kings and their palaces.

The fact that the intimate space of the Altar's interior courtyard mirrored those built in the Attalids' Palace V and was built around the same time help to not only place the structures in a narrower period, but also to support the view of the Altar's raised courtyard as a regal space. This connection, as we have seen, only then maintains the right and authority of the Attalid kings who claimed to be the descendants of Telephos, Herakles, and in turn, Zeus himself.

The points of argument made here have proposed a much-needed reinterpretation of the Great Altar at Pergamon. By comparing the Altar to the Nereid Monument at Xanthos, the Stoa of Zeus in Athens, and the Attalids' Palace V, we have examined four main elements – its high podium, the stoa-like upper structure, the continuous narrative Telephos frieze, and the regal courtyard – that have contributed to the structure's function as a heroön-mausoleum. We have seen that by examining the Great Altar through a complex cultural lens and by considering its Telephos frieze in an architectural context, aspects that have initially been overlooked, finally reveal themselves to us. Such a reassessment can potentially be extended to other ancient

monuments as we continue to broaden and deepen our understanding of ancient cultural complexity and fluidity.

With scholarly work reevaluating the intricacies and interconnectivity of the ancient world and offering a more proper and attentive study to the Telephos frieze, we are urged to view the Altar in a new light, one that is more heroic and multicultural than before.

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### Image Citation

Figure 1.1 – *Catalogue No. 19. Portrait Head of a Hellenistic Ruler*. In *Pergamon: The Telephos Frieze from the Great Altar*, volume 1, edited by Renée Dreyfus and Ellen Schraudolph. Fine Arts Museums of San Francisco, 1996, pp. 83.

Figure 1.2 – Map of Pergamon's acropolis (drawing by Wolfram Hoepfner). In *Pergamon: The Telephos Frieze from the Great Altar*, volume 2, edited by Renée Dreyfus and Ellen Schraudolph. Fine Arts Museums of San Francisco, 1997, pp. 36.

Figure 1.3 – *Excavation Site of the Pergamon Altar* by Christian Wilberg, 1879. In *Pergamon: The Telephos Frieze from the Great Altar*, volume 1, edited by Renée Dreyfus and Ellen Schraudolph. Fine Arts Museums of San Francisco, 1996, pp. 24.

Figure 1.4 – "3D Model of the Pergamon Altar." Staatliche Museen zu Berlin.  
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Figure 2.1 – Ground plan of the Great Altar (drawing by Volker Kästner). In *Pergamon: The Telephos Frieze from the Great Altar*, volume 2, edited by Renée Dreyfus and Ellen Schraudolph. Fine Arts Museums of San Francisco, 1997, pp. 71.

Figure 2.2 – *Catalogue No. 29. Capital from the External Altar Colonnades with a Band of Leaves*. In *Pergamon: The Telephos Frieze from the Great Altar*, volume 1, edited by Renée Dreyfus and Ellen Schraudolph. Fine Arts Museums of San Francisco, 1996, pp. 95.

Figure 2.3 – *Catalogue No. 34. Cornice of the Sacrificial Altar*. In *Pergamon: The Telephos Frieze from the Great Altar*, volume 1, edited by Renée Dreyfus and Ellen Schraudolph. Fine Arts Museums of San Francisco, 1996, pp. 101.

Figure 2.4 – Pergamon Altar (drawing by Wolfram Hoepfner). In *Pergamon: The Telephos Frieze from the Great Altar*, volume 2, edited by Renée Dreyfus and Ellen Schraudolph. Fine Arts Museums of San Francisco, 1997, pp. 55.

Figure 2.5 – The Telephos Frieze (drawing by Marina Heilmeyer). In *Pergamon: The Telephos Frieze from the Great Altar*, volume 1, edited by Renée Dreyfus and Ellen Schraudolph. Fine Arts Museums of San Francisco, 1996, pp. 16.

Figure 2.6 – The Telephos Frieze (drawing by Marina Heilmeyer). In *Pergamon: The Telephos Frieze from the Great Altar*, volume 1, edited by Renée Dreyfus and Ellen Schraudolph. Fine Arts Museums of San Francisco, 1996, pp. 17.

Figure 2.7 – “The East Frieze of the Altar: Zeus.” Google Arts & Culture.  
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Figure 2.8 – “The East Frieze of the Altar: Athena.” Google Arts & Culture.  
<https://artsandculture.google.com/asset/the-east-frieze-of-the-altar-athena-unknown/iQGHWoRRhhywA?hl=en>.

Figure 2.9 – Hercules and Telephus. National Archaeological Museum, Naples, Italy.  
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Figure 2.10 – *Catalogue No. 5. Panel 12. Herakles Discovers His Son Telephos*. In *Pergamon: The Telephos Frieze from the Great Altar*, volume 1, edited by Renée Dreyfus and Ellen Schraudolph. Fine Arts Museums of San Francisco, 1996, pp. 61.

Figure 3.1 – “Nereid Monument, 390–380 B.C.” The British Museum.  
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Figure 3.2 – Restored plan of the Stoa of Zeus Eleutherios (drawing by John Travlos). ASCSA.  
<https://agora.ascsa.net/id/agora/drawing/da%204152?q=references%3A%22Agora%3AMonument%3AStoa%20of%20Zeus%22&t=&v=icons&sort=rating%20desc%2C%20sort%20asc&s=184>.

Figure 3.3 – *Catalogue No. 1. Panel 3. Herakles at the Court of King Aleos at Tegea*. In *Pergamon: The Telephos Frieze from the Great Altar*, volume 1, edited by Renée Dreyfus and Ellen Schraudolph. Fine Arts Museums of San Francisco, 1996, pp. 55.

Figure 3.4 – *Catalogue No. 8. Panel 25. Two Scythian Warriors are Slain in the Battle by the River Kaikos*. In *Pergamon: The Telephos Frieze from the Great Altar*, volume 1, edited by Renée Dreyfus and Ellen Schraudolph. Fine Arts Museums of San Francisco, 1996, pp. 67.

Figure 3.5 – *Catalogue No. 9. Panel 31. Dionysus Takes Action in the Fighting*. In *Pergamon: The Telephos Frieze from the Great Altar*, volume 1, edited by Renée Dreyfus and Ellen Schraudolph. Fine Arts Museums of San Francisco, 1996, pp. 69.

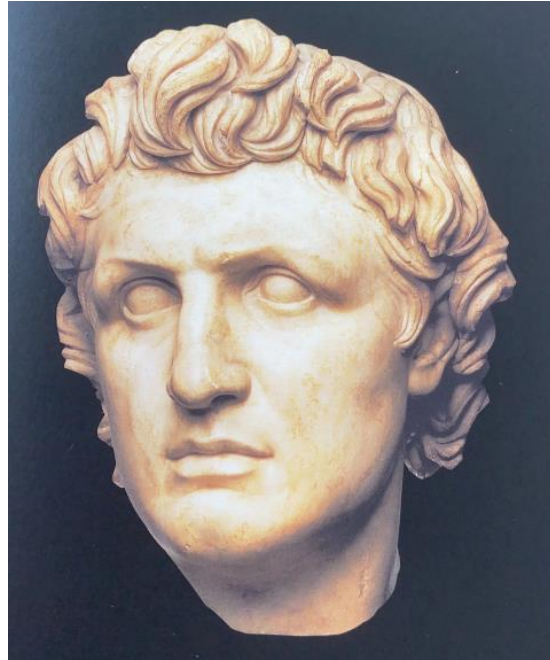
Figure 3.6 – Scenes of the cult of Dionysus(?), panels 44–46. In *Pergamon: The Telephos Frieze from the Great Altar*, volume 2, edited by Renée Dreyfus and Ellen Schraudolph. Fine Arts Museums of San Francisco, 1997, pp. 93.

Figure 3.7 – Palace V's ground plan (drawing by Wolfram Hoepfner). In *Pergamon: The Telephos Frieze from the Great Altar*, volume 2, edited by Renée Dreyfus and Ellen Schraudolph. Fine Arts Museums of San Francisco, 1997, pp. 38.

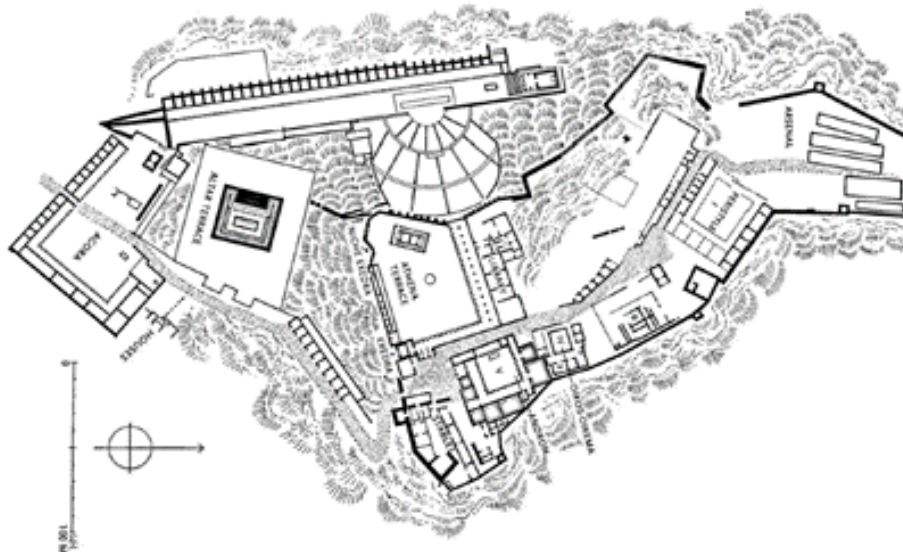
Figure 3.8 – Marble relief panels from andron V. In *Pergamon: The Telephos Frieze from the Great Altar*, volume 2, edited by Renée Dreyfus and Ellen Schraudolph. Fine Arts Museums of San Francisco, 1997, pp. 39.

Figure 3.9 – A woman hurries toward a kline on which reclines the heroized Telephos, panel 48. In *Pergamon: The Telephos Frieze from the Great Altar*, volume 2, edited by Renée Dreyfus and Ellen Schraudolph. Fine Arts Museums of San Francisco, 1997, pp. 95.

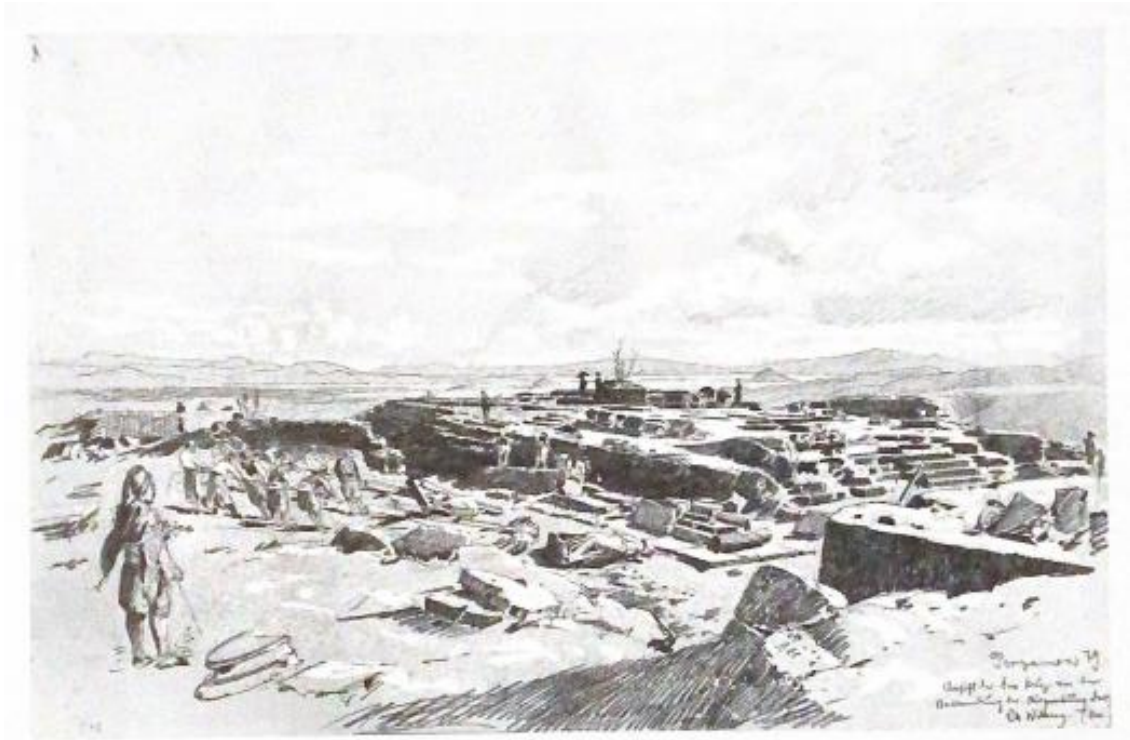
## Appendix



**Figure 1.1:** Portrait of a Hellenistic ruler – thought to depict Attalos I; marble, 39.5 cm



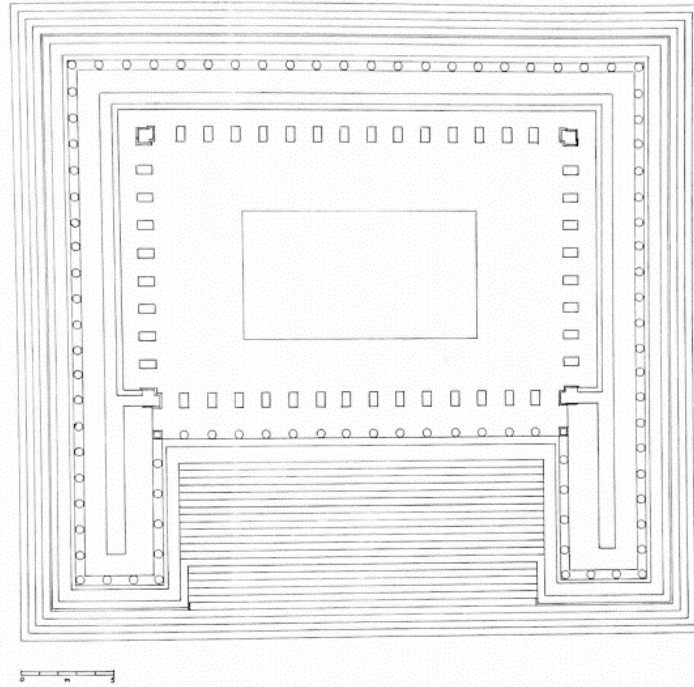
**Figure 1.2:** Map of Pergamon's acropolis (drawing by Wolfram Hoepfner).



**Figure 1.3:** *Excavation Site of the Pergamon Altar* (drawing by Christian Wilberg, 1879).



**Figure 1.4:** The reconstructed Great Altar in the Pergamon Museum in Berlin, Germany.



**Figure 2.1:** The ground plan of the Great Altar (drawing by Volker Kästner).

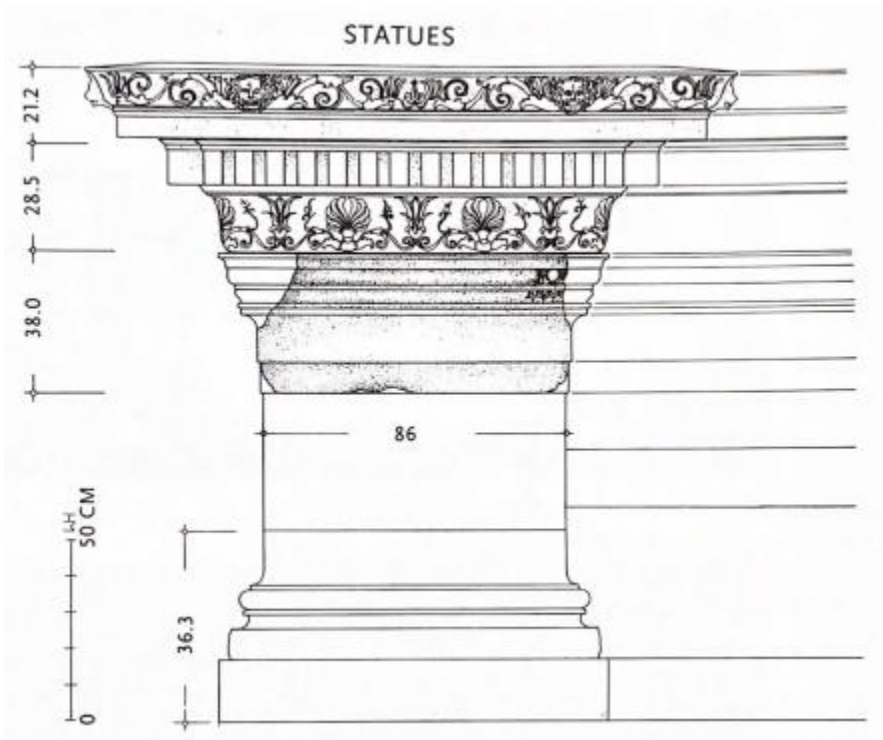


**Figure 2.2:** Type B capital and base fragment from the exterior colonnade.





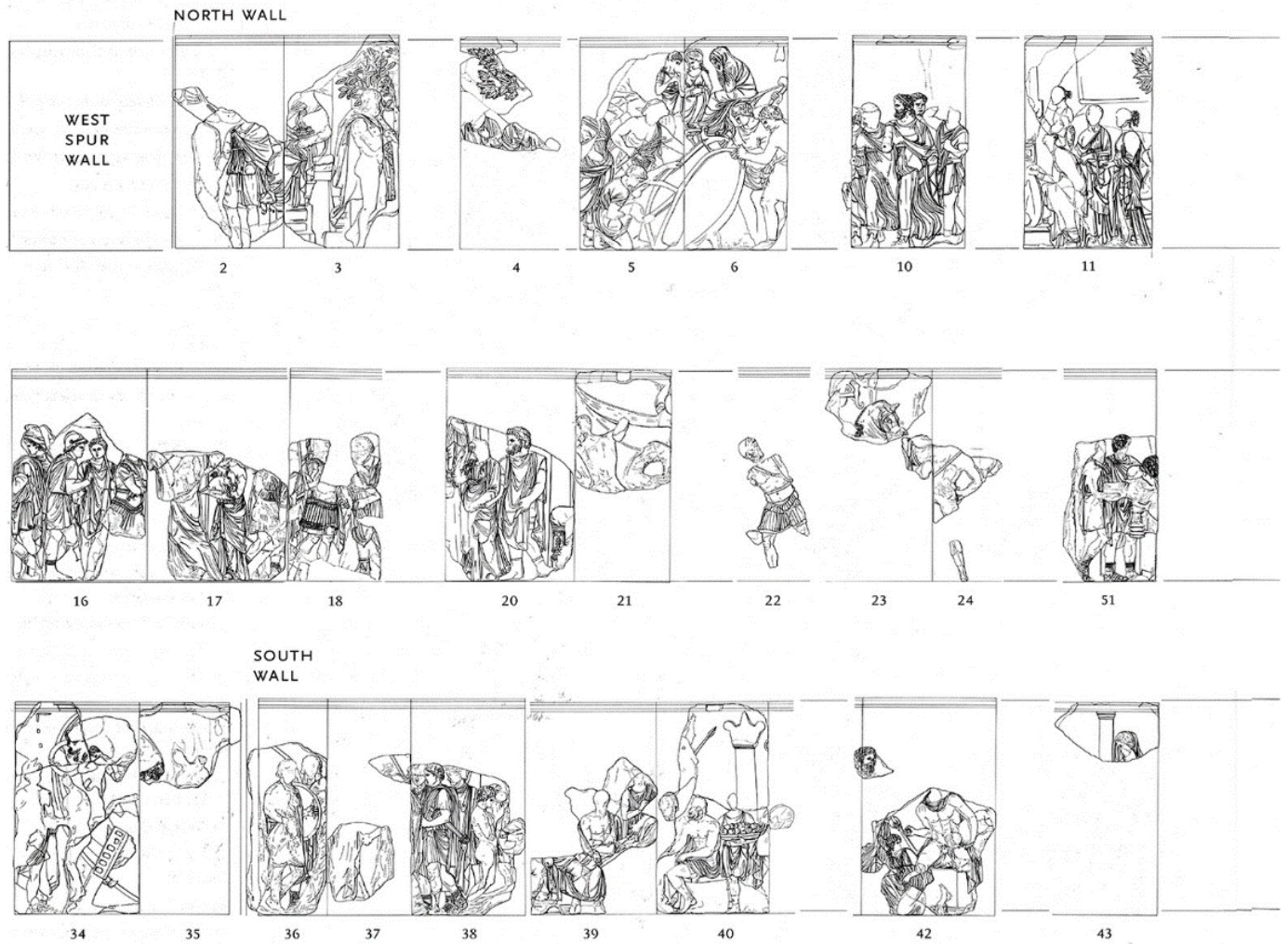
**Figure 2.3:** Cornice of the sacrificial altar.



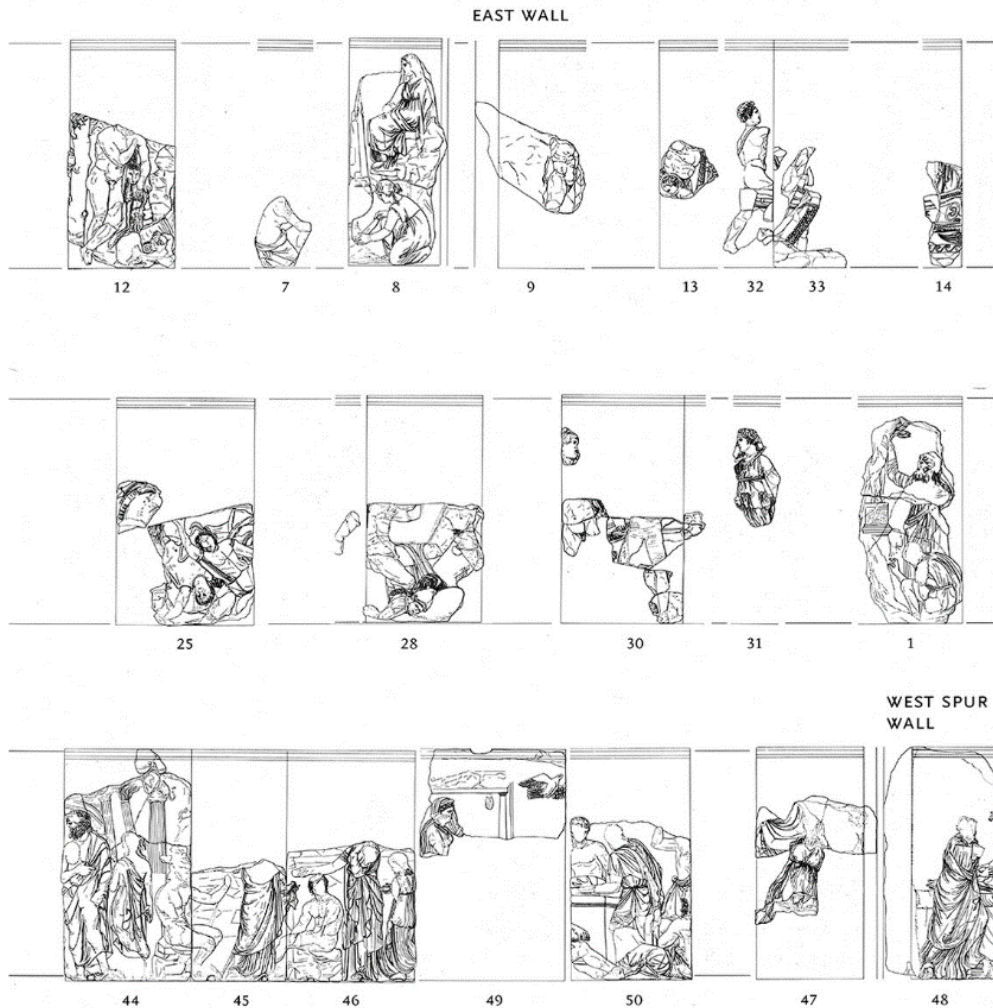
**Figure 2.4:** Sacrificial altar measurements (drawing by Wolfram Hoepfner).

# THE TELEPHOS FRIEZE

DRAWINGS BY MARINA HEILMEYER



**Figure 2.5:** The Telephos frieze; part I (drawing by Marina Heilmeyer).



2. The court of King Aleos
3. Herakles sees Auge in the sanctuary of Athena
4. Telephos is abandoned in the wilderness
- 5-6. Carpenters build the boat in which Auge is cast out to sea
10. King Teuthras finds Auge on the shore
11. Auge establishes the cult of Athena
12. Herakles discovers his son Telephos
- 7-8. Nymphs bathe the infant Telephos
9. Telephos as a youth
- 13, 32-33, 14. Telephos sails to Mysia
- 16-17. Telephos receives arms from Auge
18. Telephos departs for the war against Idas
20. Teuthras gives Auge to Telephos in marriage
21. Mother and son recognize each other
- 22-24. The Amazon Hiera is slain by Nireus
51. The ceremonial funeral of Hiera interrupts the fighting (?)
25. Two Scythian warriors are slain in battle
28. Battle scene by the river Kaikos
- 30-31. Achilles wounds Telephos with the help of Dionysos
1. Telephos consults the oracle
- 34-35. Telephos lands at Argos
- 36-38. Telephos is welcomed by the Argives
- 39-40. Telephos seeks a cure for his wound
42. Telephos threatens the infant Orestes at Agamemnon's altar
43. Telephos is healed
- 44-46. Cultic ceremonies; sanctuary of Dionysos
- 49-50. A cult is founded
- 47-48. Women hasten to the heroized Telephos

*Panel numbers follow order of former placement. Spaces between panels are not to scale. See volume 2 for a more accurate rendering.*

**Figure 2.6:** The Telephos frieze; part II (drawing by Marina Heilmeyer).



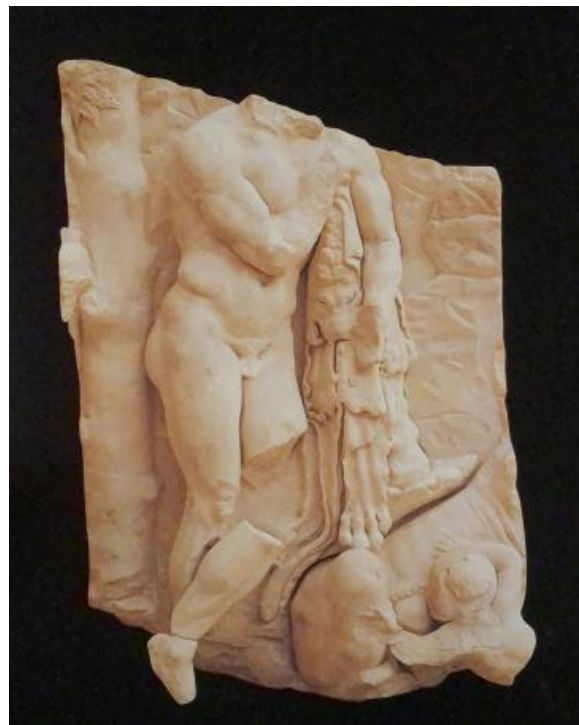
**Figure 2.7** Zeus as depicted on the eastern frieze of the Altar.



**Figure 2.8:** Athena as depicted on the eastern frieze of the Altar.



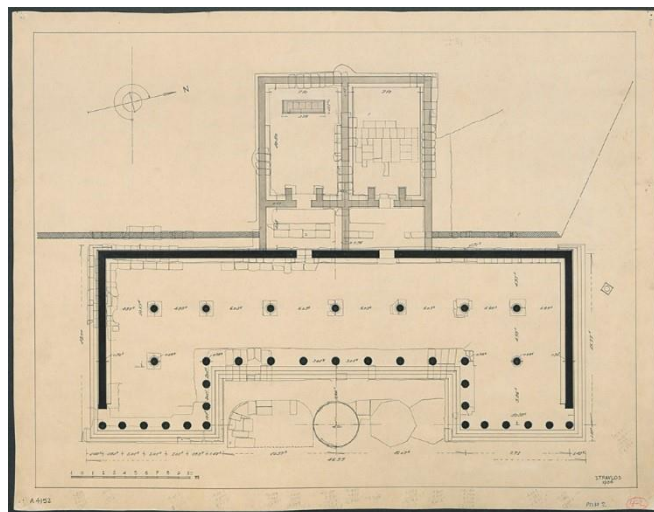
**Figure 2.9:** Herakles finds Telephos, with Arkadia, Pan, and Parthenos looking on; fresco from the Basilica at Herculaneum, c. 64-68 CE, now in the Museo Nazionale in Naples.



**Figure 2.10** Panel 12 – Herakles and Telephos frieze fragment; marble, 110 x 74 x 37 cm.



**Figure 3.1:** Reconstructed Nereid Monument in The British Museum.



**Figure 3.2:** Restored plan of the Stoa of Zeus Eleutherios (drawing by John Travlos).



**Figure 3.3:** Panel 3 – split scene with Herakles in the court of King Aleus; marble, 158 x 82.5 x 34 cm.



**Figure 3.4:** Panel 25 – fallen Scythian warriors; marble, 79 x 82.5 x 29 cm.

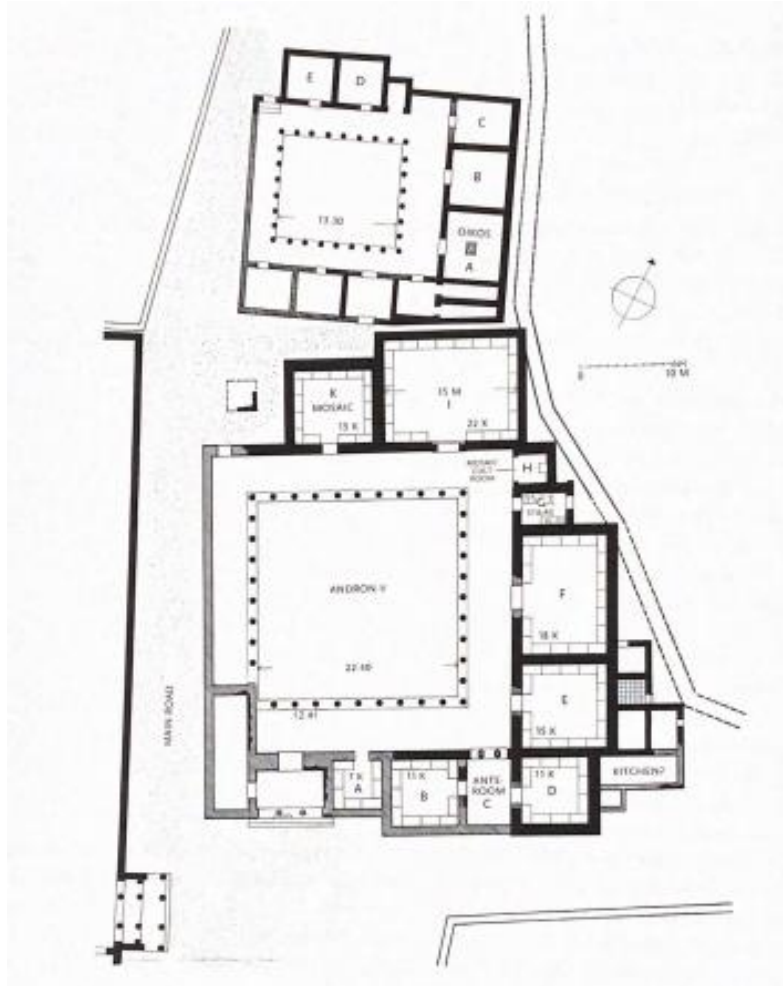


**Figure 3.5:** Panel 31 – fragmented image of the god Dionysus; marble, 70 x 34 x 19 cm.



**Figure 3.6:** Panels 44–46 – scenes of the cult of Dionysus(?)





**Figure 3.7:** Palace V's ground plan (drawing by Wolfram Hoepfner).



**Figure 3.8:** Marble relief panels from Palace V; depicts the hero Telephos, the Trojan War, and the Gigantomachy.



**Figure 3.9:** Panel 48 – partial image of a reclining, heroized Telephos.