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# Erechtheus and the *Apobates* Race on the Parthenon Frieze (North XI–XII)

JENIFER NEILS AND PETER SCHULTZ

## Abstract

A reexamination of the north frieze of the Parthenon, blocks XI–XII in particular, indicates that the leading *apobates* contestant is the winner in this Panathenaic contest. Evidence from James Stuart's 1751–1753 drawing and his brief commentary support a reading of the so-called marshal beyond the horses as the judge bestowing the victor's wreath, and comparanda for this figure can be found in other art forms. The emphasis of this scene then shifts from the race to the victory and reinforces the presence of *nike* in the iconographic program of the Parthenon. Because of his distinctive costume, this *apobates* contestant may be identified as belonging to the foremost Athenian tribe, Erechtheis.\*

## INTRODUCTION

Although the famous cavalcade of the Ionic frieze of the Parthenon has received much scrutiny of late, the *apobates* race represented on the frieze of the temple has rarely been subjected to detailed analysis.<sup>1</sup> This is surprising, as the race was one of the most famous events of the Great Panathenaia (Dem., *Erotikos* 61.23–9) and, until late in the fourth century B.C.E., was practiced only in Athens.<sup>2</sup> Indeed, the representation of this specifically Athenian race on the Parthenon frieze is an important piece of evidence supporting the identification of the frieze's procession as the one held every four years in honor of Athena Polias.<sup>3</sup> The *apobates* race was an elaborate spectacle that consisted of armed warriors racing in, leaping off, and running alongside four- or two-horse chariots. This article ex-

amines the *apobates* team carved on blocks North XI–XII, a figural group that offers another possible key to understanding the complex iconography of the Parthenon frieze. Cyriacus of Ancona's ca. 1435 reading of the frieze as "the victories of the Athenians in the time of Perikles" may be closer to ancient reality than has been previously acknowledged.<sup>4</sup>

Representations of chariot groupings consisting of 21 chariot teams were carved in the center of the Parthenon frieze on its north (11 chariots) and south (10 chariots) sides.<sup>5</sup> They form a spatial and temporal interlude between the densely packed horsemen behind them to the west and the massed processional figures on foot in front of them to the east. Because there is more space around them, the quadrigae relieve the sometimes claustrophobic composition of the rest of the procession. On the south side, the 10 chariots take up 10 of the 47 blocks of the south frieze, as one might expect; however, the 11 chariots on the north side occupy 16 of the 47 frieze blocks, or more than one-third of the north frieze (compared with one-fifth on the south frieze). Clearly, the chariots were given more prominence on the north, where they would be most visible to visitors walking along the north side of the temple.

While the chariot race on the north side of the frieze most certainly represented the *apobates* race, the precise identification of the scene on the south is considered uncertain because no extant warrior is actually shown in the act of leaping off his chariot,

\*This article, which began with Schultz's research on the *apobates* race and Neils' work on the Parthenon frieze, has evolved into a truly joint project for which we are both responsible. We thank Donald Kyle, Margaret M. Miles, Nigel Nicholson, and Julia Shear for generously answering our inquiries on specific points.

<sup>1</sup>Recent discussions of the Parthenon frieze cavalcade include Pollitt 1997; Neils 2001, 126–37; 2005; Moore 2003; Stevenson 2003; Jenkins 2005; Ellinghaus 2011, 98–109; Osada 2011. The numbering of the frieze blocks and individual figures follows Jenkins 1994.

<sup>2</sup>Szemethy 1996; see also Schultz 2007a, 63 n. 11.

<sup>3</sup>On the Panathenaia in general, see Neils 1992; Shear 2001.

<sup>4</sup>Deutsche Staatsbibliothek, Berlin, *Codex Hamiltonianus Berolinensis* 254, fol. 85r.

<sup>5</sup>Recent discussions of the *apobates* race on the Parthenon frieze include Berger and Gisler-Huwiler 1996, 1:69–86 (north), 1:124–31 (south); Neils 2001, 97–8, 138–41; Shear 2001, 53–4; Schultz 2004, 2007a, 2007b; Ellinghaus 2011, 109–17; Fehr 2011, 52–67.

although three warriors are standing on the ground beside their chariots (S63, S66, and S86).<sup>6</sup> Because a Greek warrior carries his shield on his left arm, he is normally placed in the left half of the chariot box with the charioteer on his right side. The procession of the south frieze moves to the right (east), so it inevitably places the warrior in the far position (whereas the procession of the north frieze is the opposite, placing him in the position closest to the viewer). Therefore, if the sculptor had composed the scene on the south frieze to show an *apobates* in the act of descending from the chariot, the warrior's upper body would have been obscured by the charioteer.<sup>7</sup> Given these design constraints, it seems likely that, although no warrior is portrayed dismounting from his chariot, the *apobates* race is depicted on the south frieze also, especially as all other components of the composition echo the north side.<sup>8</sup>

Because the *apobates* race on the south frieze consists of 10 chariots, it seems likely that it, like the south cavalcade (which is clearly divided into 10 groups of six riders each), is tribal in its organization. Unfortunately, the one extant inscription that lists the contests of the Panathenaia in the mid fourth century B.C.E. is broken just at the point where it begins to list the tribal contests, which were open to Athenian citizens only.<sup>9</sup> Further support for the *apobates* race being a tribal contest is that it was restricted to Athenian citizens, according to Demosthenes (*Erotikos* 61.23). Some scholars have claimed that the contest cannot be tribal on account of some mid second-century B.C.E. inscriptions that list a different tribe for the driver (*enikos egbibazon*, literally, "chariot dismounter") and the runner (*apobates*).<sup>10</sup> However, it is more likely that these entries represent two separate contests, one for a charioteer who dismounts and runs alongside his team of horses and the other for the warrior who dismounts.<sup>11</sup> The two extant fourth-century B.C.E. references to a winner of the *apobates* contest mention only the dismounting warrior, not the charioteer.<sup>12</sup> Thus, it seems entirely

possible that the contest was a tribal one, at least at the fifth-century B.C.E. Panathenaic festivals.<sup>13</sup>

#### NORTH XI–XII

The *apobates* team represented on blocks North XI–XII (figs. 1, 2) differs considerably from the depictions of the other 20 chariots-cum-riders on the Parthenon frieze. The group is physically longer than any other chariot group, covering as it does two entire frieze blocks and overlapping a third (North XIII). In addition, each figure in the group is unique to the frieze. In the center, we see the chariot screeching to a halt, the rumps of its horses nearly colliding with the chariot's wheel; the horses are rearing higher than any of the other extant teams on the frieze. The charioteer on the north (N46) pulls back hard on the reins and leans far out of his vehicle; a charioteer on the south (S78) is also braking his chariot but leans out only slightly compared with N46. N46 is one of only two charioteers on the Parthenon frieze who turn and face the viewer frontally; the other is the first charioteer in this race (N73), who has not yet begun to move.<sup>14</sup> Ahead of the team is a marshal (N44); he is nearly nude, with his himation acting only as a backdrop, and he is leaning sharply to his right to avoid contact with the rearing horses. Behind the charioteer, his passenger (N47) has jumped to the ground. Running to the left, this warrior places his right foot on a prominent rock, a move that elevates his head above the racers who follow. Shoulder to shoulder with his charioteer, the racing warrior turns and looks back at his trailing competitors. He holds his left arm aloft, raising his shield, a gesture unique on the frieze. Although his stance is more widespread, his pose closely echoes that of the marshal (N44) at the opposite end of this group, as does his raised left arm. These twin figures effectively frame the composition of this dramatic chariot, which occupies the foremost position in the race.

The costume of the *apobates* N47 is also unique. He wears a large plumed Attic helmet and a leather cuirass

<sup>6</sup> E.g., Beschi (1984, 180) identifies the chariots of the south frieze as the *harmata polemisteria*.

<sup>7</sup> It is for this reason, no doubt, that the *apobatai* on commemorative reliefs (Agora S399; Athens, National Archaeological Museum, inv. no. 1391; Athens, Acropolis Museum, inv. no. 1326) are all moving to the left (Tzachou-Alexandri 1988, 297–99). The same is true for the few fourth-century Panathenaic prize amphoras that depict the *apobates* race (as opposed to depictions of the chariot race, where the vehicles move to the right) (Bentz 1998, 78–9; Miller 2004, 142, fig. 229). The frieze blocks that show these two races were severely damaged in the explosion of 1687, which has further hindered interpretation of these scenes.

<sup>8</sup> As persuasively argued in Jenkins 1995.

<sup>9</sup> *IG* 2<sup>2</sup> 2311. On the inscription, see Shear 2003.

<sup>10</sup> E.g., Beschi 1984, 185. For the inscriptions, see *IG* 3<sup>2</sup> 2314, lines 67–70; *IG* 3<sup>2</sup> 2316, lines 17–20.

<sup>11</sup> For victor lists citing these contests, see Tracy and Habicht 1991; Shear 2007.

<sup>12</sup> The relief sculpture Agora S399 and Plut. *Vit. Phoc.* 20.1; see also Kyle 1993, 205, A37; 213, A70.

<sup>13</sup> For other tribal contests at the Panathenaia, see Neils 1994.

<sup>14</sup> Frontal faces are rare in Greek art; they are equally rare on the Parthenon frieze. This in itself is significant. Other frontal heads preserved on the frieze include the old man adjusting his wreath (N38), a cavalry rank leader (N98), and the unusual *apobates* wearing a long chiton (N62).

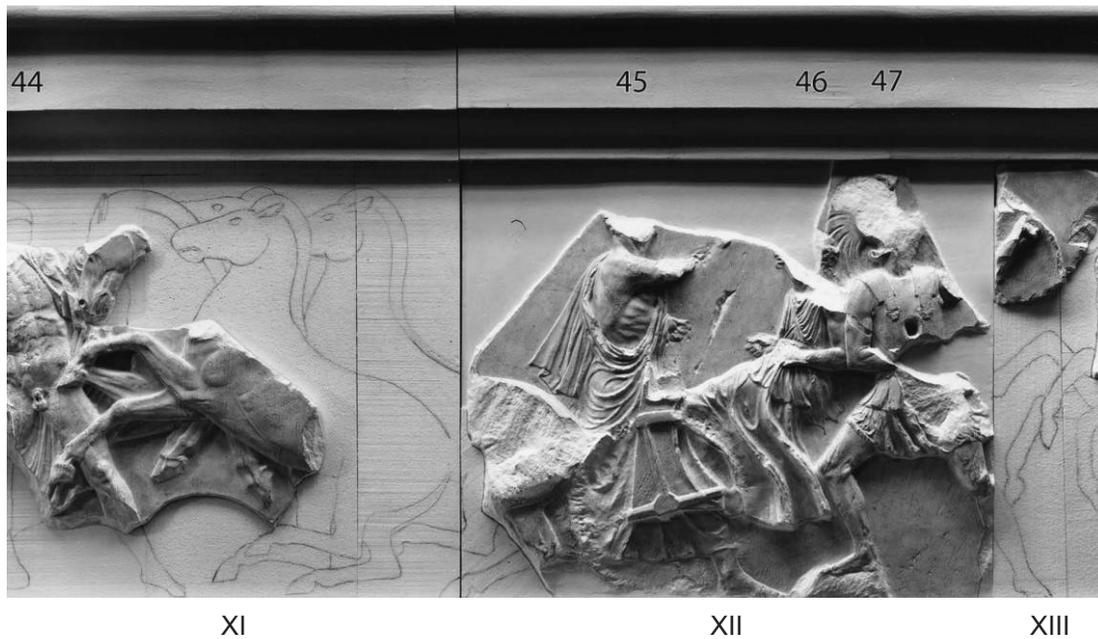


Fig. 1. Casts of Parthenon frieze blocks North XI–XIII (courtesy Skulpturhalle, Basel).

with shoulder clasps ending in carved panther heads. The generous cutting in the center of his chest once held an elaborate bronze attachment, most likely a Gorgoneion like the one carved on the cuirass of the equestrian on the west frieze (W11) or the one worn by Athena in the west pediment.<sup>15</sup> In every respect—position, pose, size, and dress—this racing warrior and his team are extraordinary among the apobatic racers on the frieze.

The fourth figure in the group (N45), a beardless male draped in a himation, is usually identified as a marshal, although this identification is already suspect, since there is a marshal at the front of the team (N44) and each chariot appears to have no more than one marshal at most. Like N46 and N47, the male figure N45 is unique. Striding in profile to the right, he raises his right arm toward the charioteer. While such gestures are quite common among marshals on the frieze (e.g., E47, S67, N90), closer examination of his right hand as drawn by Stuart and Revett in 1751 (fig. 3) indicates a different kind of gesture.<sup>16</sup> Stuart and Revett's rendering shows that the palm of N45 was



Fig. 2. Parthenon frieze block North XII. London, British Museum, inv. no. B 3221 (courtesy the American School of Classical Studies at Athens, Alison Frantz Photographic Collection, EU 145).

held flat with the thumb raised (in contrast to N90, who uses his curled index finger to beckon). Although the hatching around the hand is vague, the engraving seems to indicate a circular or oval object. While

<sup>15</sup> For the Gorgoneion on the cuirass of W11, see Neils 2001, 138, fig. 99. For Athena's bronze Gorgoneion in the west pediment, see Smith 1906, 46. Smith (1906, 46) noticed traces of "a circular object 6 inches in diameter" surrounding the dowel hole in the center of Athena's aegis.

<sup>16</sup> Stuart and Revett 1787, ch. 1, pl. 20. Jenkins (1994, 88) has restored this hand as raised in a gesture signaling the next chariot to stop. There is no evidence for such a gesture here, and in fact no extant marshal on the frieze uses such a gesture.



Fig. 3. Etching of North XII in situ, 1751–1753 (drawing by J. Stuart; Stuart and Revett 1787, pl. 20).

this object is missing in Carrey's drawing of 1674 (fig. 4), even there the hand is clearly positioned as if N45 once held an object.<sup>17</sup>

But what did N45 hold, exactly? We know that this section of the north frieze represents the *apobates* race. We also know that the designer of North XI–XII singled out one particular apobatic team as being especially significant. In addition to the specific details noted above, the importance of this group is most obviously shown by its position at the front of the column of racing *apobates* teams. It is also suggested by a specific aspect of the pose of another figure, N47. As noted above, N47 has leaped from his chariot, finishing the race on foot, all the while looking back at the trailing contestants. This position, pose, and action find precise parallels on Athenian black-figure vases that depict the winner of the *apobates* race. Of the nearly 100 Attic black-figure Haimonian lekythoi dated to ca. 490–480 B.C.E. that illustrate this event, most show the victorious racer, having leaped off his chariot, running forward on foot and—most importantly—looking back over his shoulder toward the racers who follow (fig. 5).<sup>18</sup>

If we accept that the scene shown on North XI–XII is the moment of victory, then we can easily identify the object held forth in the outstretched left hand of

N45. This circular object should be a victor's crown. Thus, by our reading, N45 moves forward not to signal the charioteer in some way, as is almost universally believed; rather, he moves forward to crown the winner. Importantly, this idea was already proposed by Stuart in 1753 when he wrote in his commentary on North XII that “the last [figure] is a youth, whom I suppose a Victor in the Chariot race, a man is about to crown



Fig. 4. North XII in situ, 1674 (drawing by J. Carrey; Bowie and Thimme 1971, pl. 33).

<sup>17</sup>Neils 2001, 6, fig. 4.

<sup>18</sup>Schultz 2007a, appx.

him.<sup>19</sup> Although modern scholars have not taken note of Stuart's reading, he must have seen evidence of this crown. He specifically mentioned it and included some indication of the victor's wreath in his drawing (see fig. 3). Because the crown is no longer visible today on the stone (this section of the frieze has broken off and is now lost), and since Stuart was the last artist to examine these slabs before they were removed from Athens by Lord Elgin, his observation deserves consideration. The scene on North XI–XII shows the winner of the *apobates* race, the runner, about to be crowned victorious by a judge.<sup>20</sup>

A red-figure column krater attributed to the Boreas Painter in Naples and dated to ca. 460 B.C.E. is worth noting in this context.<sup>21</sup> It depicts the winner of a chariot race about to receive a fillet from an official. Like N45 on North XII, the official on the krater strides vigorously toward the racing chariot holding the victory token in his raised right hand. It also seems significant that in his left hand he cradles a long stick that closely resembles the *rhabdos* held by judges on Panathenaic amphoras.<sup>22</sup> The clenched left fist of the official N45 seems to have held a similar staff rendered in paint. The two figures are analogous. And, again, both crown or bestow victory on the winner of a dramatic chariot competition.<sup>23</sup>

An even closer parallel for N45, albeit much later in date, appears on a Roman mosaic from Pompeii that depicts a victor in a cockfight (fig. 6).<sup>24</sup> The pose, drapery, gesture, and clenched left fist of the official awarding victory are so close to the corresponding features of N45 that some influence derived ultimately from the Parthenon frieze seems likely. That the Roman official holds the victor's palm in his other hand supports our reconstruction of N45 with a staff. When one considers the position and prominence of the leading apobatic team along with the presence of an official bestowing a crown, it seems clear that the designer of the frieze meant to represent not only the *apobates* race but also its victor.

In conceptual and compositional terms, support for our reading can be found in the well-known difference in the rhythm of blocks North XI–XXVIII compared with the rhythm seen on the chariot groupings at South XXV–XXXIV or with the sacrificial animals

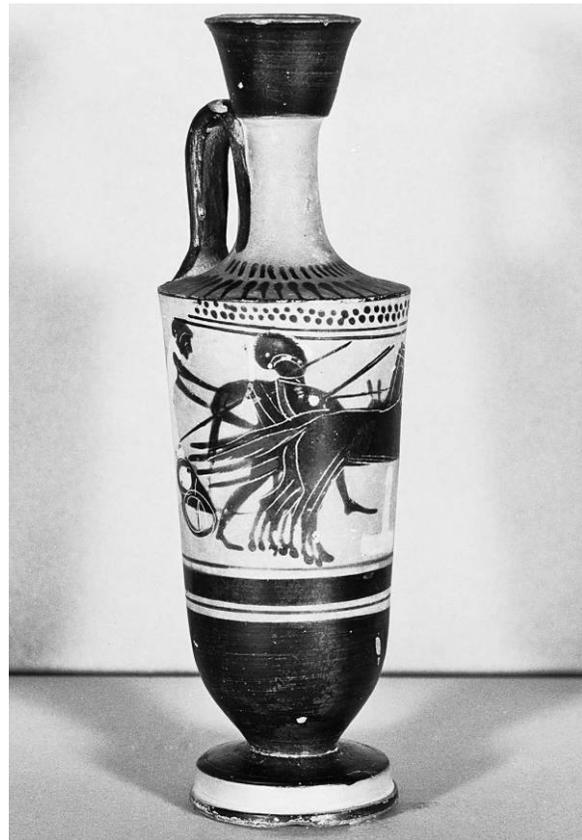


Fig. 5. Attic black-figure lekythos depicting *apobates* race, in the manner of the Haimon Painter, first quarter of the fifth century B.C.E. New York, Metropolitan Museum of Art, Rogers Fund 1941, inv. no. 41.162.226 (© Metropolitan Museum of Art).

at North I–III. In the latter two instances, a compositional pattern of stasis-action-stasis can be observed as a viewer moves to the east. Sacrificial animals step, then lunge, then step—all in easy, processional cadence. On the south frieze, the chariots at the front and rear of the file appear to be stationary, while those in the center are racing. The *apobates* race on the north frieze is different entirely. There is no slow tapering or fluctuation of narrative action like that seen elsewhere on the frieze. Instead, there is a slow, easy buildup of motion that moves east, gains speed,

<sup>19</sup> Stuart and Revett 1787, 12. For a recent study of Stuart, see Soros 2006.

<sup>20</sup> Beardless judges appear on fourth-century Attic vases (Oakley 2007, 82).

<sup>21</sup> Naples, Museo Archeologico Nazionale di Napoli, inv. no. 127929 (ARV<sup>2</sup> 537, 20; see also Kephaliadou 1996, 232, cat. no. I19, pl. 66).

<sup>22</sup> For similar staffs held by judges or referees, see Kratzmül-

ler 2001.

<sup>23</sup> It also seems important that the presentation of crowns became a common motif on Attic document reliefs of the late fifth and the fourth centuries. This motif, like others on these reliefs, could derive from a similar motif on the Parthenon. For crowns on Attic document reliefs, see Lawton 1995, 30–1.

<sup>24</sup> VI.11.8–10 (House of the Labyrinth), dated to 70–60 B.C.E. (Pugliese Carratelli 1994, 45, fig. 74).

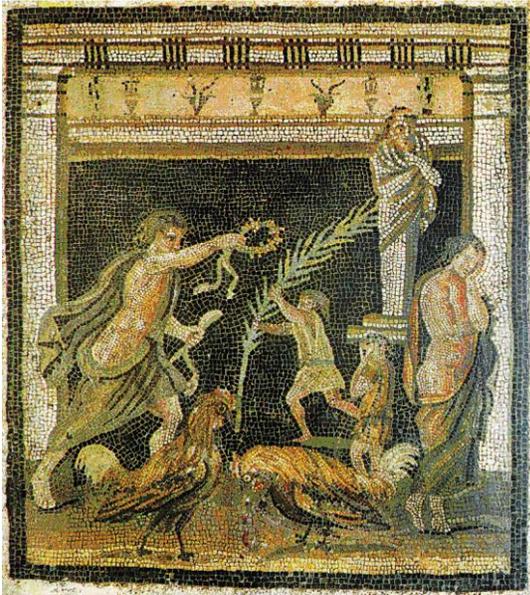


Fig. 6. Roman mosaic depicting a cock fight. House of the Labyrinth, Pompeii (Pugliese Carratelli 1994, fig. 74).

and then dramatically culminates with the scene on North XI–XII. This kind of escalating composition makes little sense for a simple procession of chariots, but it would be an ideal compositional solution if the designers of the north frieze intended to show the *apobates* competition and the actual winner of the race as he crossed the finish line.

As we know from inscriptions, the *apobates* race took place in the Agora, and the finish line was situated near the Eleusinion.<sup>25</sup> It is at this point in the southeast corner of the Agora that the Panathenaic Way becomes considerably steeper, and it would have made further progress for four-horse chariots too challenging. Next to and just inside the entrance of the Eleusinion is a prominent topographical feature known as the “rocky outcrop,” which would have been visible throughout the sanctuary’s history (fig. 7).<sup>26</sup> Approximately rect-

angular in plan, the stone is 2 x 3 m in size and has a rounded top surface. In antiquity, it may have had some ritual or cult significance, as did other rocky outcrops in sanctuaries.<sup>27</sup> Given the location of this stone, one could speculate that the prominent rock under the right foot of N47 references the point where the race ended. While some scholars see the rocks carved on the frieze as mere artistic devices to support specific poses, Fehl has argued that the rocks represent the terrain along the Panathenaic Way from outside the Kerameikos to the Acropolis.<sup>28</sup> Situated midway in this course was the Eleusinion, just as the *apobates* race was represented in the middle of the north and south friezes. It cannot be a coincidence that the largest of three rocks on the north frieze is placed directly under the foot of the victor.

#### THE VICTOR

Is it possible to identify further the victor on North XII? Although it may appear that the judge is about to crown the charioteer, the victory token must be meant for the *apobates*. In the tradition of aristocratic athletics, the dismounting warrior would be the competitor and owner of the team, while his charioteer was merely a professional driver hired for the occasion.<sup>29</sup> Clues to the victor’s identity may lie in his costume. Helmets are worn by all the *apobatai* as well as by one rider on the west frieze (W11), so this is not an identifying feature. The leather corselet with shoulder straps and a series of *pteryges* (lappets) hanging from the waistband and worn over a short chiton, though, does not seem to be worn by other warriors on chariots.<sup>30</sup> However, this military garb is the cavalry costume of the sixth group of riders (S32–S37) on the south frieze. Harrison has attempted to identify all 10 tribal groupings on the south frieze on the basis of their different costumes; she identifies the sixth group wearing leather corselets as the tribe Erechtheis.<sup>31</sup> The second of the riders in this group of six (S35) actually wore a bronze wreath, as evidenced by three drill holes; no other riders, north or south, are singled out for this special treatment.<sup>32</sup> Thus, there seems to be evidence for a special focus

<sup>25</sup> Tracy and Habicht 1991, 198; Shear 2001, 313–14.

<sup>26</sup> For a thorough description and discussion of this feature, see Miles 1998, 20–1. Also found in the vicinity was a rough piece of Acropolis limestone inscribed “λιθοϛ”; of Roman date, it may have served as a marker for this special stone outcrop (Miles 1998, cat. no. 1, no. 59, pl. 31). It is also worth noting in this context that Xenophon (*Eq.* 1.1, 11.6) mentions the dedication of a bronze horse in the Eleusinion by a horse trainer named Simon. He likely trained horses for the Panathenaic contests, and possibly even the *apobates* race, given the placement of his votive.

<sup>27</sup> Kron 1992.

<sup>28</sup> Fehl (1961, 5) states regarding the rocks on the lateral friezes that “we see several rocks of a fair or considerable size, each of which plays an essential part in the presentation of an action related to an uphill movement.” For a reading of the rocks as artistic devices, see Waywell 1984.

<sup>29</sup> For the absence of the charioteer in aristocratic victory memorials, see Nicholson 2005.

<sup>30</sup> The *apobates* N71 wears a leather cuirass with flaps, but his chiton is double girt.

<sup>31</sup> Harrison 1984, 232–33.

<sup>32</sup> The rider W2 wears a wreath.



Fig. 7. Rocky outcrop in the Eleusinion, Agora, Athens (courtesy the Excavations of the Athenian Agora).

on the tribe of the Eponymous Hero Erechtheus, and for good reason.<sup>33</sup>

Erechtheis appears first in the official inscriptions, such as monuments for the Athenian war dead, listing members of the Attic tribes.<sup>34</sup> The Eponymous Hero Erechtheus is typically characterized as the warrior-king of Athens, with his major victory being the defeat of the Eleusinians under Eumolpos, son of Poseidon.<sup>35</sup> He died fighting for Athens, felled either by the trident of Poseidon (Eur., *Ion* 281–82) or the thunderbolt of Zeus (Hyg., *Fab.* 46). A large bronze group statue of Erechtheus fighting Eumolpos was set up near the Erechtheion (Paus. 1.27.5), and it was said to be the famous sculptor Myron's most important work (Paus.

9.30.1). Erechtheus' joint worship with Athena is attested as early as Homer (*Il.* 2.546–51), and, according to most readings of Pausanias (1.26.5), the Erechtheion is considered part of the Temple of Athena Polias. If Erechtheus can be associated with the baby Erichthonios (who is only represented as a child), as most scholars now assume, he was born from the Attic soil and raised on the Acropolis by the daughters of King Kekrops. He is credited (as Erichthonios) as the founder of the Panathenaia and the first human to yoke quadrigae.<sup>36</sup> He eventually was placed among the stars as the constellation Auriga. Unlike any of the other Eponymoi, he is depicted as a racer of chariots, and on an Attic black-figure oinochoe of ca. 510 (fig. 8),

<sup>33</sup> D'Ayala Valva (1996) has argued that N62 (a passenger rather than an *apobates*), who wears a long chiton like the one worn by charioteers, is the priest of Poseidon Erechtheus. As this identification has little bearing on our argument, it will not be discussed here other than to observe that there are 11 chariots and thus one is not part of the tribal race.

<sup>34</sup> Trail 1974.

<sup>35</sup> For details of the life and cult of Erechtheus, see *LIMC*

4:923–51, s.v. "Erechtheus" (Kron); Kron 1976, 32–83; Mikalson 1976; Parker 1987; Kearns 1989, 110–15, 160; Christopoulos 1994. For the relationship of Erechtheus and Erichthonios, see Sourvinou-Inwood 2011, 51–111. For ancient sources on Erichthonios, see Powell 1906.

<sup>36</sup> It has been argued by Mikalson (1976) that the Panathenaia was originally a festival of Erechtheus.



Fig. 8. Attic black-figure oinochoe depicting Erechtheus and Athena, by the Painter of Oxford 224, ca. 510 B.C.E. Copenhagen, National Museum of Denmark, Collection of Classical and Near Eastern Antiquities, inv. no. Chr. 340 (courtesy National Museum of Denmark).

Athena is shown running alongside what is probably his quadriga.<sup>37</sup>

If we pursue the motif of Erechtheus, we find that he plays both prominent and subtle roles in the sculptural program of the Parthenon.<sup>38</sup> Because of

<sup>37</sup> Copenhagen, National Museum of Denmark, inv. no. Chr. 340 (BAPD, no. 303330; CVA Denmark 3, pl. 124.2a, b). In 1862, Smith interpreted the *apobates* scene on this late sixth-century black-figure oinochoe in Copenhagen as depicting Athena's invention of the *apobates* race, a reading that has been widely accepted (Smith 1862, 33–4, no. 108; 1865; Pfuhl 1917; Breitenstein 1951, 122 n. 199; d'Ayala Valva 1996; Neils 2001, 141; Shear 2001, 48–9 nn. 69–71, 305 n. 340). For the oinochoe generally, see Pfuhl 1923, 271; Neils 1992, 21, fig. 6; d'Ayala Valva 1996, 8, fig. 2.1. Athena, having leaped down from her chariot, sprints toward a white end post (*terma*), the iconographic confirmation that the scene depicts a race. Athena's status as a victorious competitor is suggested not only by the tripod device on her shield, a common sign for agonistic *nike*, but also by the glance over her shoulder toward her invisible, trailing opponents. This iconographic device—the backward glance—is consistently used in apobatic imagery to designate the winner of the event.

<sup>38</sup> Not, however, sacrificing his daughters, as in Connelly

his autochthonous birth and association with snakes, he is often identified with the large serpent coiled beside the Athena Parthenos (Paus. 1.24.7).<sup>39</sup> He is certainly shown among the ancestral Athenians in the west pediment of the temple, although it is debated which figure is Erechtheus.<sup>40</sup> He is depicted among the Eponymous Heroes on the east frieze and is usually identified as the northernmost figure (E46), a bearded man leaning on his staff.<sup>41</sup> Directly around the corner on the north frieze appears the sacrificial procession of four bovines and four sheep. The sheep have been identified as the ewes that are offered to Pandrosos when a cow is sacrificed to Athena, but their horns may indicate that they are male.<sup>42</sup> We know that Erechtheus received an annual sacrifice of bulls and rams on the Acropolis.<sup>43</sup> These sacrificial animals are also mentioned in the famous passage from the *Iliad* (2.550–51): “ενθα μιν ταυροισι και αρωειοις ιλαονται Αθηναίων περιτελλομένων ενιαυτών.”<sup>44</sup> It is possible that these animals are for his cult, rather than that of Pandrosos, who would have received ewes. It is perhaps not coincidental that these sacrificial animals, as well as the winning charioteer from the tribe of Erechtheus, are positioned directly south, across from the Erechtheion.

Our interpretation of North XI–XII is at variance with most readings of this portion of the frieze. Most scholars see this scene simply as part of the Panathenaic procession.<sup>45</sup> In modern scholarship, the scene has never been read as taking place at or near the finish line of the *apobates* race near the Eleusinion in the Agora, with the victor, representing the tribe Erechtheis, being crowned.

#### THE APOBATES RACE

The *apobates* race was one of the most prestigious of the Panathenaic contests. Traditionally established by

1996.

<sup>39</sup> Recently it has been shown that the most prominent constellation over the Acropolis during the time of the Panathenaic festival was the snake, or Draco (Boutsikas 2011).

<sup>40</sup> For a list of possible candidates for Erechtheus on the Parthenon's west pediment, see Palagia 1998, 61. Figure E, a nude youth, is identified by most scholars as Erichthonios/Erechtheus. For further discussion of the iconography of the west pediment, see Spaeth 1991; Harrison 2000.

<sup>41</sup> See Harrison (1979), who identifies E45 as Erechtheus. Kron (1976) identifies E46 as Erechtheus.

<sup>42</sup> Simon (1983, 61) argues, based on an old Attic law, that the ewes are for Pandrosos (Philoch. [in *FCrHist* 328 F 10]).

<sup>43</sup> *IG* 2<sup>2</sup> 1357. This inscription is dated to ca. 400–350 B.C.E.

<sup>44</sup> For this passage, see Frazer 1969.

<sup>45</sup> Most commentators (e.g., Jenkins 1994, 21) call the frieze a procession but debate its place and time. For a summary of these interpretations, see Neils 2001, 173–201.

no less an Attic personage than Erechtheus/Erichthonios, the *apobates* race was uniquely Athenian. It was run only at the Panathenaia and then only by Athenian citizens.<sup>46</sup> This fact would have been particularly important after the establishment of Perikles' citizenship law in 451/0 B.C.E. For Demosthenes (*Erotikos* 61.25), who was writing in the fourth century B.C.E., the event is said to provide the most exhilarating spectacle and to consist of the greatest number and variety of athletic feats:<sup>47</sup>

[Y]ou have singled out the noblest and grandest of competitive exercises and the one most in harmony with your natural gifts, one which approximates to the realities of warfare through the habituation to martial weapons and the laborious effort of running, one that imitates the magnificence and majestic equipment of the gods, one that presents the largest number and the greatest variety of features and has been deemed worthy of the most valuable prizes.

Of course, this discussion of warriors racing on foot raises one of the most familiar problems associated with the study of the race: the reconstruction of the event itself. This famous problem stems from a supposed conflict between the definition of the event as given by the late lexicographers and the account of the race provided by Dionysios of Halikarnassos (*The Roman Antiquities* 7.73.2–3).<sup>48</sup> For the lexicographers, as is well known, the *apobates* team consists of a chariot, a charioteer, and an *apobates* who ran the race stepping in and out of his moving chariot. No information is given as to how the race was finished. For Dionysios of Halikarnassos (who quotes the third-century B.C.E. historian Quintus Fabius Pictor's description of the *apobates* race as possibly practiced in fifth-century Athens), however, the *apobates* completed the race by leaping from his chariot and sprinting madly to the finish line on foot. No information is given as to what took place during the rest of the race. Because both sources describe different phases of the race, there would appear to be no contradiction, and it seems possible that this most elaborate of spectacle events could easily have involved a combination of mount-

ing, dismounting, and a dramatic final sprint. This reconstruction is supported by the visual evidence.

The date of the institution of the *apobates* competition at the Great Panathenaia is problematic. It could antedate the reorganization of the festival in 566 B.C.E., if the suggestion that the race appears on Attic Late Geometric vases is valid.<sup>49</sup> While some scholars have seen *apobates* competitions in Late Geometric depictions of chariot processions, there remains a question as to how these images are connected to later representations of the event. Indeed, it is not entirely evident that these vessels show the race at all. It is possible that some form of an "*apobates* race" was conducted in eighth- and seventh-century Athens (esp. when we consider the well-known heroic, aristocratic, and funerary contexts of early athletics that encompass Geometric painting), but the iconographic evidence for these early *apobates* scenes consists solely of armed men stepping into chariots. Skeptics may find this act by itself insufficient for confident identification of the *apobates* race, especially since no end posts are shown.

The earliest representation of what seems to be an *apobates* race appears on the lid of an Attic red-figure pyxis signed by the potter Nikosthenes and dated to ca. 510 B.C.E. (fig. 9).<sup>50</sup> Here, two quadrigae with long-robed charioteers race to the right around the circular lid. Behind each chariot is a running warrior wearing helmet and greaves and carrying a spear. Each warrior looks back as he raises his shield. Even in the absence of a turn post, this image can be assumed to illustrate an athletic contest because there are two chariots and because the scenes on the body of the pyxis are athletic. Given the 200-year gap between this vase and the Geometric examples, it is possible that the *apobates* race was a newly introduced event at about this time.

This alternative dating is corroborated by the series of Haimonian lekythoi depicting the *apobates* race (see fig. 5) that flooded the market in the first quarter of the fifth century. The sudden appearance of this new theme on a series of inexpensive oil vessels might indicate the popularity of a new contest inserted at this time into the Panathenaic program.<sup>51</sup> The Parthenon

<sup>46</sup> Only later in the fourth century was the event exported to Athenian satellites and then to the rest of the Mediterranean (Szemethy 1996).

<sup>47</sup> Crowther (1991) treats the passage in detail.

<sup>48</sup> For sources, see Crowther 1991, 175; Müller 1996, 57–63; Reed 1998, 43–44.

<sup>49</sup> For the *apobates* race in Late Geometric vase painting, see Thompson 1961; Tölle 1963, 225; Metzger 1965, 71–2; Ahlberg 1971, 191–94; Kahanes 1973, 133 n. 80; Roller 1981, 115 n. 61; Rombos 1988, 119–23; Szemethy 1991, 92–9; Kyle 1993, 16–17; Reber 1999 (with comprehensive bibliography). While there is no conceptual problem with an early invention

of the event (e.g., Evjen 1986; Poliakoff 1987, 149–57; Morgan 1991; Kyle 1993, 15–31; Müller 1996, 63–5; Golden 1998, 88–95; Shear 2001, 53–4), these early vases should perhaps be separated from later black-figure lekythoi that surely show the *apobates* race until the discovery of further evidence and comparanda allows a clearer picture.

<sup>50</sup> Rome, Villa Giulia, inv. no. 20749 (ARV<sup>2</sup>, 127, no. 30; BAPD, no. 201058; see also Moretti 2003, 26–7, cat. no. 6; Lyons 2009, 169, 175, no. 14).

<sup>51</sup> Anderson (2003, 168–70) also concludes that the *apobates* race was invented in the 490s B.C.E.



Fig. 9. Attic red-figure pyxis lid depicting chariot race, by the potter Nikosthenes. Rome, Villa Giulia, inv. no. 20749 (courtesy Soprintendenza per i Beni Archeologici dell'Etruria Meridionale, Rome).

frieze would then serve to “ratify” a novel event, and by embedding it into the traditional procession, the designer gives it a veneer of authenticity and timelessness. The same has been claimed for other novel features of the frieze—for example, the peplos ceremony on the east frieze.<sup>52</sup>

A connection to the *apobates* race has also been noticed in the contest of Athena and Poseidon as depicted in the west pediment of the Parthenon; the gods have arrived and leaped off their chariots in a manner very much like *apobatai*.<sup>53</sup> Although Poseidon loses this contest, the tribe of his counterpart, Erechtheus, with whom he was jointly worshiped, wins on the north side. Clearly, the representation of the winner of this “grandest of competitive exercises” crowned on the north frieze must have had special significance for the Athenians.

#### CONCLUSION

But in what way? What is the significance of our interpretation of North XI–XII for the overall subject and meaning of the Parthenon frieze? First, our reading

reinforces the notion that the frieze represents various aspects of a real event as opposed to a legendary or mythological one, an event that would be recognized as an important component of the actual Panathenaic festival by both Athenians and foreign visitors to the Acropolis. As the one sporting contest founded by Athena and Erichthonios, the *apobates* race—*pars pro toto*—represented all the contests of the Great Panathenaia. The finish of this race—a dead sprint in armor with shields flashing—was the most spectacular part of the most spectacular event. And every four years this moment took place with the entire polis watching. This may be one reason that this moment was chosen on North XI–XII. Indeed, a victory in this important and traditional race would have been a coup for the winning Attic tribe and would have been celebrated in their symposia. Winners in the *apobates* race were not distant heroes or characters of legend; they were living, breathing family members and friends, fellow tribesmen, respected and honored throughout Athens.

Second, our reading confirms the Athenians’ preoccupation with bestowing prizes to victorious competitors and echoes the obsession with *nike* evident throughout the Parthenon’s sculptural program. Ever since the first Panathenaic prize amphora was produced ca. 566 B.C.E., the Athenian Games stood apart from other Panhellenic games on account of their incredibly lucrative prizes.<sup>54</sup> Numerous red-figure vases produced in the fifth century portray Nike bringing a prize to the victor, and many fourth-century Panathenaic prize amphoras place Nike herself at the contest on their reverse.<sup>55</sup> This fascination with victory dominates the *kosmos* of the Parthenon, which extends from the lateral Nike akroteria on the roof (as reconstructed by Manolis Korres) to the interior of the building, where Nike alights on the outstretched hand of Pheidias’ great chryselephantine cult statue of Athena holding a golden wreath in her hand.<sup>56</sup> Just as the victorious *apobates* is about to be crowned in North XII, so Athena on East Metope 4 is crowned by Nike as she slays the giant. In effect, to single out the winning *apobates* runner who wears the badge of Athena (the Gorgoneion) so prominently on his chest is to award the crown to Athens and to proclaim it victorious.

This proliferation of wreaths may even suggest that Athens was attempting to insert its festival into the prestigious “crown” games of Greece. The Pan-

<sup>52</sup> Neils (forthcoming).

<sup>53</sup> Shear 2001, 738; Schultz 2004, 2007a, 2007b.

<sup>54</sup> On the importance of prizes at the Panathenaia, see Kyle 1996; Goette 2007; Oakley 2007; Themelis 2007. For Panathenaic amphoras, see Bentz 1998; Kratzmüller 2007; Tiverios 2007; Tsouklidou 2007.

<sup>55</sup> For Nike on red-figure vases, especially kraters, see Kephallidou 1996. For fourth-century Panathenaics, see Valavanis 1991.

<sup>56</sup> On this pervasive theme of victory, see Hurwit 1999, 222–34.

athenaic festival (566 B.C.E.) was a relative newcomer compared with the Panhellenic games of Olympia (776 B.C.E.), Delphi (582 B.C.E.), Isthmia (581 B.C.E.), and Nemea (573 B.C.E.), and it obviously patterned its contests after theirs. However, Athens was unusual in awarding second- and third-place honors, and its lucrative prizes, amphoras filled with olive oil, were clearly intended to attract the best contestants. The designer of the frieze chose not to depict the characteristic Panathenaic amphoras that could be awarded to any victor but rather prominently displayed the wreath that was awarded to the tribal victor, thus elevating these tribal contests to the level of the “crown” games.

Finally, if our reading of North XI–XII is correct, then it seems clear that the frieze designers explicitly incorporated the concept and the representation of agon into the frieze. It also suggests that they felt the *apobates* race was the most appropriate vehicle by which this idea might be expressed, even if this event was not a part of the Panathenaic procession proper but rather a part of the Panathenaic festival in broader terms. And, if this is correct, then the iconography of the frieze can no longer be considered a “snapshot” of the Panathenaic procession. Rather, the frieze can be productively understood as an artistic construct able to incorporate multiple Panathenaic themes that include competitions, rituals, and processions.<sup>57</sup> That victory was an essential component of this construct was recognized long ago by one of the last commentators to see the building intact, Cyriacus of Ancona, as well as by Stuart, who saw these particular slabs more or less whole. Reintroducing the crown to the Parthenon frieze enhances our understanding of ancient Athens’ proudest monument.

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<sup>57</sup> Neils 2001, 146, 173–201; see also Schultz 2007a, 64 n. 16; 69 n. 30.

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