

# THE LION OF PIRAEUS: DEMOCRACY AND DENMARK

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**Summary:** This article addresses where the lion of Piraeus originally stood as well as the date and reason for its erection, why and when it was moved to the harbour shore of Piraeus and rebuilt as a fountain, as well as how during the nineteenth century it was exploited as a source of inspiration for modern lion sculptures. It is argued that the lion originally was erected outside the Eetioneian gate during the last years of the 390s or the 380s to honour those who had given their lives in the battle(s) of Mounychia and/or Piraeus in 404/403 BC to enable the re-establishment of the democratic government in Athens.

Anybody leaving or arriving by ferry at Piraeus during the last twenty years will have passed by the lion sitting on its haunches on Cape Alkimos, at the south side of the entrance to the harbour.<sup>1</sup> Piraeus used to be famous for this lion, at just over 3 m tall, that from the early fourteenth century until the eighteenth century gave the harbour its name – Porto Leone, Port de Lion, Porto Draco, Aslan Limani or Ejder Limani. The original lion had been taken in 1688 by Morosini from Piraeus to Venice, where it was placed on the left side of the entrance to the Arsenal. It was not until 2003 that a lion returned to Piraeus and was assigned its present location at Cape Alkimos. The home-coming lion, however, was only a copy of the original, which still today remains on watch outside the Arsenal in Venice.

- 1 I would like to express my gratitude to Thomas Heine Nielsen, Lene Rubinstein and Adam Schwartz for inviting me to contribute to this volume, as well as to the anonymous readers for their comments. Likewise, I owe thanks to all colleagues and friends with whom I have had the privilege to observe and discuss lions not only in Venice and Piraeus, but also in Thebes, Chaironeia, Amphipolis, Berlin and Flensburg, as well as to Klaus-Valtin von Eickstedt who drew my attention to Piraeus and to Bente Hvidt who introduced me to everything Danish.

Passing by the lion in Piraeus regularly over the last few years I have often wondered whether Mogens Herman Hansen ever had the opportunity to experience it after its restoration to Piraeus. I am sure that it would have caught his eye and interest. He had a marvellously open mind, with scholarly interests stretching far and wide in both chronological and geographical terms. I had the privilege to collaborate with him for a short period within the framework of the Copenhagen Polis Centre in 1998, but our first acquaintance went back to the Pnyx colloquium in Athens in 1994. At that time, he was known as one of the leading experts on Athenian democracy, partly because of his book *The Athenian Democracy in the Age of Demosthenes* (1991) with its focus on the re-established democracy between 403 and 322 BC.

When asked to contribute to this memorial volume for Mogens Herman Hansen, my thoughts immediately went to the lion of Piraeus, because of the interesting links offered by it – not only to Athenian democracy, but also to Denmark and Danish scholarship. I would have loved to discuss my thoughts on the lion with Mogens, either over a beer and *smørrebrød*, or a coffee and *kransekage*. Unable any more to do that, I am thus grateful for the opportunity to present my thoughts in writing here, to the honour of his memory.

### Lion on the move

When Athens became the capital of newly independent Greece in 1834 the lion had already been gone for more than 130 years, which perhaps explains why the locals could not any more remember exactly where Morosini had taken it from. This in turn may be why Konstantinos Pittakis, the leading archaeologist of the new state in 1835, claimed that the lion had once been placed close to the narrowest point of the entrance to the main harbour of Piraeus.<sup>2</sup> Cape Alkimos had already been mentioned before Pittakis as the Medieval location of the lion, a statement which has

2 Pittakys 1835: 2.

been repeated several times throughout the twentieth century.<sup>3</sup> This tradition may even have influenced the decision to place the copy of the lion in 2003 on Cape Alkimos.

There exist a total of four detailed early maps of Piraeus, all drawn in 1685 during Etienne Gravier d'Otières' expedition to the Levant.<sup>4</sup> One of these was published by Laborde in 1854, another one by Rafn in 1856.<sup>5</sup> On these maps, the lion is depicted next to the only building at Piraeus at that time, a customs house, at the spot where the road leading to Athens began (Fig. 1). This places it some 200 m to the northwest of the modern Plateia Themistokleous, close to the beginning of Odos Dim. Gounari which further inland continues as Odos Pireos, leading to Athens. This was the old road too, connecting Piraeus with Athens, and entering the town close to the Kerameikos.

The location of the lion is also described by several early travellers of the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries.<sup>6</sup> They all agree that the lion sat looking out at the opening of the harbour and that it had been rebuilt into a fountain with the water led through a pipe into its mouth from

- 3 For references, see Panagos 1997: 295; Hughes 1820: 288, envisaged two lions, placed one on each side of the narrowest part of the entrance to the harbour. Garland 1987: 147, and von Eickstedt 1991: 6, without going into details, still seem to support Pitakys' claim.
- 4 For the final report of the expedition, see *Estat des places que les princes mahométans possèdent sur les côtes de la Mer Méditerranée*, digitally available on Gallica BnF, including one of the four maps. The map made by Gravier d'Otières' expedition seems to have served as base for the maps of Piraeus published by Roux in 1764 (pl. 84) and by Chandler in 1776, from which only the lion has been removed. The same map is reprinted in the 1779 and 1805 editions of Roux 1764.
- 5 Laborde 1854: II, 61; Rafn 1856a: 67; Rafn 1856b: 69.
- 6 Cf. e.g. by De Dreux (Omont 1901: 7); Babin 1674: 8-10; Guillet de Saint-George 1675: 254; Spon 1678: II, 176-77; Wheler 1682: 418-20, as well as by Agriconia (for diary 6.9.1687, see Åkerhielm 1970: 68 with French transl. by Laborde 1854: II, 313, for letter 19.9.1687, see Åkerhielm 1970: 69-70) and an anonymous author (Collignon 1898: 64). The lion in the harbour with its fountain is already described by de la Vega in December 1537 in connection with Baron de Saint Blancard's expedition to Constantinople (quotation by Rafn 1856a: 63, for the expedition, see Grillon 1968, with reference to Piraeus on p. 647), the road with a lion fountain at each end is also remarked upon by Chandler 1776: 22-23. All early descriptions of Piraeus have been collected and translated into Greek by Euaggelou 1981.

where it fell into a basin at its feet. According to the Ottoman traveller Evliya Çelebi who visited Piraeus in 1667, the water came from a spring on Mount Hymettos, whence it had been brought to Piraeus by a water course, traces of which he reports having seen.<sup>7</sup> Vestiges of this later, rather crude re-use of the lion can still today be seen on its back, where the water pipe's route had been cut into it (Fig. 2).

During the seventeenth century, a second lion, reclining on its side, was seen by several early travellers close to the Kerameikos, where the road from Piraeus entered Athens. It had apparently also been re-worked into a fountain.<sup>8</sup> Morosini took this lion as well along to Venice where it rests to the right of the entrance to the Arsenal.<sup>9</sup> Travellers of the seventeenth century mention in addition to these two lions a third one on the acropolis itself, of which however nothing has been preserved to today. Lieutenant Alexander Sobiewolsky, who accompanied the Venetian troops to Athens in 1687-1688, described this third lion as a running lion depicted in the coat of arms of Athens.<sup>10</sup> I have in an earlier study shown that this in reality was the coat of arms of the Acciaiuoli family, who reigned as Dukes of Athens from 1388 until the Ottoman conquest of the town in 1456. It can be argued that the other two lions were placed at the ends of the road connecting Piraeus and Athens and re-worked into fountains during the period when Athens belonged to the Acciaiuoli family.<sup>11</sup>

Cyriacus of Ancona, who visited Piraeus in April 1436, offers us some hints concerning the original location of the seated lion, from where it

7 The passages of Evliya Çelebi, *Seyahatname*, concerning Athens and Piraeus (vol. VIII, fol. 250b-257a) have been translated into Greek by Biris 1959 and into English by Dankoff & Kim 2010.

8 Cf. the references given in n. 6, to which could be added Babin 1674: 20-21 and 57-59. This lion at the Kerameikos played an important role in the story of the child with a lion's head, said to have been born in 1665 on the Athenian acropolis. It is probably an adaptation of the Minotaur myth, a story that seems to have been transferred along with the lion to the west, where it became further transformed into a Venetian urban legend (cf. Forsén 2024: 28-31).

9 For Morosini and the lions in front of the Arsenal, see Sacconi 1991: 51-54.

10 Cf. Reddemann 1990: 24-25: "die Statt Athen führet in ihrem Wappen einen lauffenden Löwen."

11 Forsén 2024: 26-30.

was removed and subsequently re-worked as a fountain, although this so far has been overlooked. Only a very small part of Cyriacus' unpublished work has survived, in his own handwriting; the passage on the lion of Piraeus can be found in the edition of Carlo Moroni dating to 1660 with a reference to a drawing. The drawing in its turn is preserved in a copy made by Giuliano da Sangallo in the Codex Barberini of the Bibliotheca Vaticana, compiled between 1465 and 1516 (Fig. 3).<sup>12</sup> All Cyriacus' drawings have recently been published,<sup>13</sup> thus making it easier to follow his descriptions.

In Piraeus Cyriacus mentions in addition to the lion remains of fortifications and two round towers: *Athenis venimus Athenarum portum secus Pieream vetustissimam Atticarum Civitatem penitus vetustate collapsam: sed ad portum extant adhuc duarum rotundarum turrium aliquae partes, ac ingentia murorum hinc inde fundamenta extant, et ad faucem ingens marmoreus Leo*. The drawing is more informative; the lion is depicted as sitting outside two towers which are depicted as if flanking a gate, which detail led Michail Chatzidakis to identify the place with the Eetioneian gate in Piraeus, located on the western side of the main harbour (Fig. 4).<sup>14</sup> However, this identification is not totally unproblematic, because the three courses of blocks depicted by Cyriacus do not fit with the Eetioneian gate, where 5-6 such rows still remained during the nineteenth century. The Eetioneian gate furthermore leads towards Keratsini and Eleusis in the northwest and not towards Athens and would thus not have been along the road followed by Cyriacus inland from the harbour.

Piraeus had two other main gates: the Asty gate, through which the main road from Piraeus to Athens led, and the gate between the long walls, the latter only ca. 120 m to the southeast of the first (Fig. 4). The Asty gate was originally flanked by two round towers, which later during

12 Bodnar 1960: 41; Chatzidakis 2017: 248, pl. 252. For the preserved manuscripts of parts of Cyriacus work, see Bodnar 1960: 73-120, who believes that the manuscript exemplar of Moroni's book was copied directly from Cyriacus' journals. The Codex Barberini likewise seems to be close to Cyriacus' original notes (Chatzidakis 2017: 7-8).

13 Chatzidakis 2017.

14 Chatzidakis 2017: 248, pls. 251-52. For the Eetioneian gate, see von Eickstedt 1991: 34-43.

the fourth century BC were replaced by square towers. During the nineteenth century only the foundations of the round towers were preserved, whereas several layers of the blocks in the square towers survived; the situation would hardly have been much different during Cyriacus' days.<sup>15</sup> Recent excavations revealed a round tower on the southeast side of the gate between the long walls; together with the round tower B (more of a bastion) known since the nineteenth century, this gate would thus in a way have been flanked by two round towers as well.<sup>16</sup> Nonetheless it seems difficult to believe that Cyriacus would have referred to this gate. First of all, his drawing does not fit to it at all because of the long walls. Neither would the lion, if originally located here, have been seen by seafarers approaching the harbour.

Piraeus had at least since the early fourteenth century been known as *Porto Leone* (being first attested by this name in a map of Pietro Visconte from 1318), probably because the lion could be seen by boats approaching the harbour in a way similar to the statue of the tailor (*Raphtis*) at *Porto Raphti*.<sup>17</sup> The Eetioneian gate is located on the Hill of *Kastraki*, a high promontory, meaning that the lion if placed in front of it would have been visible from far away, partly even from the sea. We should probably not put too much importance on the fact that Cyriacus drew only three courses of blocks in the towers flanking the Eetioneian gate, although at least 5-6 must have been preserved at the time of his visit; expecting his drawing to be an exact rendering of what he saw would at any rate probably be a mistake.

Having tried all options we can thus conclude that the lion of Piraeus, based on Cyriacus' drawing, most likely stood somewhere outside the Eetioneian gate, from whence it was moved to the harbour shore some

15 For the *Asty* gate, see von Eickstedt 1991: 51-60, and more recently also Dova 2017.

16 For a map showing both the *Asty* gate and the gate between the long walls as well as the round towers B and D, see von Eickstedt 1991: fig. 33 or Garland 1987: fig. 32. The 'new' round tower southeast of the gate between the long walls remains as far as I know unpublished. I have not been able to figure out how many layers of blocks were preserved in these towers during the nineteenth century, but the round tower D between the two gates had then at least three layers of blocks (cf. von Eickstedt 1991: fig. 26).

17 For the tailor at *Porto Raphti*, see Forsén 2024: 34-37.

700 m further to the east where it was seen by travellers during the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries (Fig. 4). This must have happened at some stage between 1436 and 1456, in combination with which the lion was re-fashioned into a fountain. Athens was ruled by Nerio II Acciaiuoli from 1435 until 1451, except for 1439-1441 when he was replaced by his brother Antonio II. Nerio II was a contemporary with Cyriacus of Ancona, whom he had met at least twice. While deposed by his brother, he returned for two years to Firenze, where he probably took part in the council ratifying the union of the Orthodox and Catholic churches in 1439.<sup>18</sup> He is the most likely candidate to have moved the Piraeus lion and to have repurposed it and the other one in the Kerameikos into fountains, perhaps on his return to the position as Duke in 1441.<sup>19</sup>

Thanks to Cyriacus of Ancona we can thus narrow down quite precisely when the lion of Piraeus was moved and re-built into a fountain at the harbour shore. What is more, he gives us an indication of where the lion originally, since antiquity, had been standing; it clearly was outside one of the gates of the wall surrounding Piraeus, most likely the Eetioneian gate. Based on this piece of information we now definitely can exclude the possibility that it was transported to Piraeus by ship from somewhere else.<sup>20</sup> On the contrary, the lion has, from the moment it first was erected, been connected to Piraeus. The reason for its positioning must thus be looked for in the history of the harbour town.

### Commemorating defenders of democracy?

Two pieces of information are needed to allow any kind of sensible speculation on why the lion originally was erected; as well as the location, we

18 For Nero II Acciaiuoli, see e.g. Setton 1975: 225-77.

19 On the breast of the lion of Piraeus there is a Medieval inscription by an unknown traveller: *Hic fuit Nicholaus Bres die XXVII Marci 1458*. It should be noted that this later inscription is on the front and not as the rune inscriptions on the sides of the lion, perhaps because the lion had been moved and placed in a way emphasising its front (with the basin) instead of its sides.

20 We can thus also finally put aside the suggestions that it once would have stood in Marathon or Salamis (e.g. Rafn 1856a: 62). Meletopoulos 1945 still supported the idea that the lion would have been brought from Marathon to Piraeus.

need to settle a date. The latter is not an easy prospect either, partly because the head of the lion was heavily restored in Venice, partly because of the general difficulty of dating fourth-century BC lions more precisely.<sup>21</sup> Giglioli dates it only broadly to the fourth century,<sup>22</sup> Vermeule correctly emphasises that it must predate the lions of Amphipolis and Chaironeia; first suggesting a date of 360-350 BC, later more precisely “about 360 BC.”<sup>23</sup> Vedder would be ready to push the date as late as 340-330 BC, whereas Mertens-Horn, who does not seem to be aware of Vermeule, speaks about a date before the mid-fourth century BC.<sup>24</sup> Willemssen finally, who wrote before Vermeule and Mertens-Horn, prefers a date around 400 BC.<sup>25</sup>

Not much has happened since the publications of Vermeule, Vedder, Mertens-Horn and Willemssen, except for Papazarkadas’ recent detailed publication of the Theban lion of Wastias,<sup>26</sup> which he dates to 395 BC, associating it with the battle of Haliartos. Papazarkadas does not try to date the Piraeus lion but emphasises that the Theban lion is much closer to it in terms of date than to the lions of Amphipolis and Chaironeia.<sup>27</sup> There are as a matter of fact striking similarities between the rendition of the lion of Piraeus and its Theban counterpart, mainly in posture and size. Worthwhile noting is also the absence of veins in both lions, a feature suggested to point towards the first quarter of the fourth century BC.<sup>28</sup> The Piraeus lion which is cut of one piece of stone clearly reminds more of the Theban one than of the large, composite ones of Amphipolis and

21 Mertens-Horn 1986: 47. This is reflected wonderfully in the case of the lion of Chaironeia, traditionally dated to shortly after the battle of Chaironeia in 338 BC, but which on stylistic grounds as well could be dated 20-30 years later (cf. Ma 2008: 84).

22 Giglioli 1952: 6-7.

23 Vermeule 1968: 100; Vermeule 1972: 53.

24 Vedder 1985: 299, T78; Mertens-Horn 1986: 52: “wohl ... vor der Jahrhundertmitte”.

25 Willemssen 1959: 48: “steht vom Stil aus nichts der Anahme im Wege, daß der Löwe nicht weitab von der kononischen Ummauerung des Piräus, um oder gegen 400, errichtet worden ist.” Later Willemssen (1959: 130) explicitly compares the Piraeus lion with the lions of Thespiai and Thebes.

26 Papazarkadas 2022.

27 Papazarkadas 2022: 302-3. Papazarkadas (2022: n. 23) mistakenly states that Mertens-Horn 1986 would date the Piraeus lion to the mid-fourth century BC.

28 Polijjorghi 2004: 252-53.

Chaironeia.<sup>29</sup> Unfortunately, we simply lack any means of dating it more precisely; a cautious guess would perhaps be ca. 390-360 BC.

Lions occur commonly in funerary art, mostly depicted as reclining or attacking. Large lions of the seated type are less common and have traditionally been connected to *polyandreia*, that is mass graves of soldiers who had fallen in battle. This does not necessarily have to be the case, as recently shown by Papazarkadas for the Theban lion, which probably is to be considered a private monument of Wastias, emphasising his heroic achievements and death in battle.<sup>30</sup> Consequently we cannot exclude the possibility that the Piraeus lion too would have marked the grave of a prominent male person from Piraeus, who had fallen fighting heroically in battle. Alternatively, the lion could have marked a *polyandreion* for soldiers having fallen in a battle fought somewhere close to Piraeus during the first half of the fourth century BC. Both would at any rate have required some extraordinary circumstances because Athenians who had fallen in war were since Kleisthenes' days in principle always buried in the *demosion sema* in the Kerameikos.<sup>31</sup>

Military combat is mentioned by written sources in or next to Piraeus in 404/403, 403, 387 and 361 BC. The two first cases – the so-called battles of Mounychia and Piraeus – are connected to the overthrow of the regime of the Thirty and the restoration of democracy. The two last cases were short raids on the main harbour conducted by the Spartan Teleutias (Xen. *Hell.* 5.1.17-23) and Alexander of Pherai (Polyain. *Strateg.* 6.2.2) respectively, seizing merchant ships, merchandise and money before rapidly departing again.<sup>32</sup> It is questionable whether the raiders came to any straightforward battle with Athenian troops, no casualties are by any

29 Cf. also Broneer 1941: 40-41 according to whom the mane of the lion of Piraeus rather recalls the formal treatment of hair in Archaic sculpture. However, Broneer refrains from suggesting a date of the lion of Piraeus.

30 Papazarkadas 2022: 311. This could perhaps also go for the lion of Amphipolis, which Broneer 1941 explained as a cenotaph over Alexander the Great's general Laomedon. For other kinds of mass graves in ancient Greece, see e.g. Bérard & Castex 2021.

31 Cf. e.g. Walter-Karydi 2015: 164-97, emphasising the battle at Marathon as an exception; the fallen Athenians were all buried at the battlefield, although a cenotaph to their honour later was erected at Kerameikos.

32 For the two raids, see Garland 1987: 40-43, for Alexander, e.g. Sprawski 2006.

rate mentioned by our sources. However, if there were casualties, any Athenians falling would certainly have been buried at the Kerameikos.

The battles of Mounychia and Piraeus have more to offer, being described in relative detail, above all by Xenophon. The Thirty tyrants came to power in Athens shortly after the end of the Peloponnesian war, when the long walls and the fortification walls of Piraeus, following the peace settlement with Sparta, had been demolished. Thrasyboulos collected a small group of soldiers opposing the tyrants in Thebes, from where during the winter 404/403 he attacked and took the Phyle fortress guarding the border between Boeotia and Attica. From here again they continued to Piraeus and took up their position on the Mounychia hill. When the troops of the Thirty, supported by Spartans, arrived, they entered Piraeus, gathered at the main Hippodamian market, and tried to attack Thrasyboulos' men on Mounychia from there, but were defeated and ejected from Piraeus (Xen. *Hell.* 2.4.10-19; Diod. Sic. 14.33.2-3; for the topography, see Fig. 4).

After the battle of Mounychia, the Thirty asked for help from Sparta, who later in the spring sent an army commanded by Pausanias to Attica. Pausanias camped in the Halipedon plain (Xen. *Hell.* 2.4.30), just to the northeast of Piraeus, thus cutting off the route from the harbour to Athens. When Pausanias was returning to his camp from a tour to Kophos Limen to plan where to build a wall to blockade Piraeus, his troops were attacked by Thrasyboulos' supporters from the town.<sup>33</sup> Pausanias killed nearly 30 of the attackers and drove the rest back into town, all the way to the theatre at the foot of the Mounychia hill, where more of Thrasyboulos' men were gathering (for the topography, see Fig. 4). Subsequently Pausanias' troops were forced out of the town, in the process losing several men (Xen. *Hell.* 2.4.31-33). Outside Piraeus the two armies clashed in a fierce battle, from which Pausanias finally emerged as the winner. According to Xenophon (*Hell.* 2.4.34) about 150 of Thrasyboulos' troops were killed; the number of Spartan casualties is not given.

33 During the early nineteenth century, the Halipedon plain was (according to Ulrichs 1843: 648-49) flooded for large parts of the year; Piraeus might as a matter of fact at some stage in the past have been an island. Kophos Limen was probably the innermost muddy part of the main harbour (cf. von Eickstedt 1991: 68-69 for the state of research on this).

Both incursions into Piraeus must, based on Xenophon's description and the topography, have taken place somewhere at, or close to the Asty gate or the gate between the long walls. The final battle took place at some distance outside the demolished walls; the exact location remains unclear: Xenophon (*Hell.* 2.4.24) mentions that Pausanias withdrew 4-5 stadia to a small hill and that Thrasyboulos' troops at the end of the battle were pushed into the muddy ground of the marsh at Halai.<sup>34</sup> After the final battle, the two Athenian factions were reconciled and democracy restored to Athens. According to Xenophon (*Hell.* 2.4.33), the fallen Spartans were buried shortly after the battle in May – exceptionally – in the *demosion sema* of the Kerameikos. Here their burial has been found and excavated; a burial inscription verifies this matter.<sup>35</sup>

Xenophon does not mention where the fallen of Thrasyboulos' side were buried, with the exception of the *mantis*, or seer, who was killed in the battle of Mounychia and buried at the fords of the Kephisos river (*Hell.* 2.4.19: ἐν τῇ διαβάσει τοῦ Κηφισοῦ). This must have been somewhere in the Halipedon plain along the road leading to Athens; however, we do not know how far outside Piraeus, because the Kephisos river probably has changed its lower course several times since antiquity. There must have been others who fell on Thrasyboulos' side in the battle of Mounychia, they may well have been buried next to the *mantis*. The *demosion sema* must at any rate have been excluded as a possible burial place because of the ongoing *stasis*.

Concerning the battle at Piraeus, it has been suggested that those who fell on Thrasyboulos' side would have been buried at the Kerameikos

34 Ulrichs 1843: 673-74 identified the inner muddy part of the main harbour of Piraeus with Halai, but this was more likely Kophos Limen. Halai is rather to be looked for somewhere along the coast of the Halipedon plain, to the northeast of Mounychia.

35 Willemsen 1977, emphasises that since Pausanias after the battle moved his camp to the Academy not too far from the Kerameikos, this proximity was one of the reasons why the fallen Spartans were buried there. For further references to this burial, see Stroszeck 2013. Clairmont's suggestion (1983: 204), according to which the Spartans first would have been temporarily buried somewhere else and not re-buried before the burial enclosure was ready, finds no support in the archaeological record; the burials are inhumations. Cf. also Ma 2008: 84, showing that the burial enclosure at the Theban burial at Chaironeia was set up much later, probably together with the lion itself.

– just like the Spartans,<sup>36</sup> something I find highly unlikely, because the two sides were not reconciled until September 403,<sup>37</sup> before which the democratic faction at Piraeus had no access to Athens. Thrasyboulos' fallen men must rather, due to the exceptional situation, have been interred in a *polyandreion* close to Piraeus. Graves have been found outside both the Asty gate and the Eetioneian gate, but also along both sides of the entrance to the harbour.<sup>38</sup> A large tumulus with a diameter of ca. 76 m and a height of ca. 24 m was already back in 1802 excavated somewhere along the road leading from the Eetioneian gate towards Eleusis, unfortunately we do not know how far away from the gate itself. This grave dating to the 310s BC has recently been suggested to have belonged to the grandson of Konon and clearly shows that important graves were placed along the road leading out from the Eetioneian gate.<sup>39</sup>

*Polyandreia* were often located at symbolically important locations rather than at the exact battle sites.<sup>40</sup> The spot just outside the Eetioneian gate may well have been considered symbolically important. From here the monument would have been visible from widely around. Other important graves were obviously also placed here. This may even have been

36 E.g. Rhodes & Osborne 2003: 25; Buck 1998: 85; Azoulay & Ismard 2025: 90–91. This is based on Lys. 18.66: according to Rhodes & Osborne 2003: 25, this would indicate that it had been decided to give non-citizens who died fighting for the democrats at Piraeus a public funeral, a decision they believe would have been taken together with the decree of 401/400 BC, and preserved as an inscription (Rhodes & Osborne 2003: no. 4). Such a decision would then probably mainly have concerned soldiers dying later from their wounds, unless one believes that the fallen could have been cremated in the hope of later being brought to the *demosion sema*. But how likely was it that Thrasyboulos' men in May 403 would have been able to anticipate the coming truce with the oligarchic regime in Athens? But would such a re-interment really have encompassed all the fallen, even including the slaves, who had joined Thrasyboulos' troops?

37 Buck 1998: 82–83.

38 Williams 2014: 422 with further references. The most well-known grave located at the entrance to the harbour was the so-called Tomb of Themistokles (Wallace 1972).

39 For this tomb, excavated by Lord Elgin's agent Giovanni Battista Lusieri (who called it the tomb of Aspasia), see Williams 2014. For Lusieri, see Poulou 2016.

40 Ma 2008.

considered a specially fitting place for a *polyandreion* because of the military importance of the Eetioneia. It may be noted that Konon's grandson, whose grave was located somewhere close by, also had a military past, having served twice as general of Piraeus during the late 330s and frequently as a trierarch during the 320s.<sup>41</sup>

The lion most likely was added at a later stage to commemorate the fallen. John Ma has recently shown that the lion at Chaironeia may not have been erected until 315 BC in connection with Kassandros re-establishing Thebes and re-building its walls.<sup>42</sup> It took years for the wounds of the civil war to heal in Athens. The outbreak of the Corinthian war in 395 BC brought about a change; Athens joined the war against Sparta on the side of Thebes, Corinth and Argos.<sup>43</sup> The long walls and the walls surrounding Piraeus were rebuilt between 395 and 391 BC, partly as a result of Konon's victory in the battle of Knidos against the Spartans in 394 BC.<sup>44</sup> These events would likely have created a desire to commemorate those who had died fighting for Thrasyboulos against Pausanias at Piraeus, giving their lives in defence of democracy in Athens. The lion would then have been erected during the last years of the 390s or during the 380s BC.

John Ma stresses the link between the lion of Chaironeia and the famous lion of Thermopylai which we only know about thanks to Herodotos (7.225). In Ma's view, the lion of Chaironeia should not be understood only as a memorial of the battle against Philip II, but also as a symbol for the "pan-Hellenic narrative of liberty and remembered good deaths."<sup>45</sup> I would like to add both the lion of Thebes, recently connected to the battle of Haliartos in 395 BC (although a marker of a single grave),<sup>46</sup> and the lion of Piraeus to the same narrative of liberty and remembered good

41 Williams 2014: 431. He also had his residence in Piraeus.

42 Ma 2008: 84-86, referring to modern war memorials, for which there typically exists "a memorial gap of a generation or two, for the rawness and violence of events to settle into something that could bearably be reified and monumentalized". Neither was the famous lion at Thermopylai (Herod. 7.225; Clairmont 1983: 114-15) erected in connection with the battle in 480 BC, although we lack further information of when it was put up.

43 For an excellent overview of the political development, see Funke 1980.

44 Cf. e.g. von Eickstedt 1991: 27-28, 33; Rhodes & Osborne 2003: 46-49 n. 9.

45 Ma 2008.

46 Papazarkadas 2022.

deaths, in these cases while fighting against what at the time of their erection must have been experienced as Spartan tyranny.

There is more that unites the lions of Thermopylai, Thebes, Piraeus and Chaironeia than the narrative of liberty. They all symbolise the valiant fight and death in defence against a superior and stronger aggressor. This aspect is also built into the posture of the seated lion that symbolises defence and safeguarding. This is beautifully encapsulated in the old Athenian saying concerning the lion lying down at the Kerameikos as compared to the seated one at Piraeus: *Tu peux bien dormir, Lion d'Athenes, celui du Port veille pour toy.*<sup>47</sup>

### The Danish connection

The lion of Piraeus is strongly connected to the Nordic countries through the runic inscriptions cut into its legs and flank (Fig. 5). None of the early travellers who described the lion in Piraeus mentions the inscriptions, except for Evliya Çelebi, who thought that they had been made by Canpolat Mustafa Paşa during the early 1630s.<sup>48</sup> The Swedish scholar Johan David Åkerblad in 1800 was the first to understand that they were runic inscriptions carved by Vikings, without however suggesting a reading.<sup>49</sup> Because of the poor preservation of the inscriptions, there have been many suggestions as to how to interpret them, several of which are based on pure phantasy. Thorgunn Snædal recently reached the conclusion, in

47 Spon 1678: II, 177; Guillet de Saint-George 1675: 254 (who refers to two lions guarding; the one in Piraeus and another one on acropolis, which has not been preserved).

48 For an English translation of Evliya Çelebi's description, see Dankoff & Kim 2010: 290–91. Çelebi speaks about pictures created on the body of the lion with the help of different colours. For more on the early travellers, cf. Forsén 2024. Rune inscriptions were widely known already during the seventeenth century with some Swedish officers during the Thirty Years' War even using them as cipher for their correspondence. Rafn 1856a: 74, had already noted that Anna Agriconia must have been aware of rune inscriptions because two well-known rune stones stood close to the church, where her father was priest back in Sweden.

49 Åkerblad 1800 (in Swedish) and Åkerblad 1804 (in French). Laborde 1854: II, 243 n. 1, mistakenly considers Åkerblad a Dane.

a new and thorough study, that they were carved on three different occasions, the first sometime during the late 1020s or early 1030s, and the last during the last decades of the eleventh century.<sup>50</sup>

Because of the unique runic inscriptions, the lion of Piraeus attracted particular interest in the Nordic countries. A copy of the lion was ordered during the 1890s and exhibited in the Swedish History Museum in Stockholm. Plaster casts of the inscriptions had already been made by the Danish historian and antiquarian Carl Christian Rafn, who in 1856 published the first detailed description and interpretation, together with drawings, of the lion and its inscriptions in a bilingual (French and Danish) monograph.<sup>51</sup> Rafn's reading of the inscription is today mostly superseded, but his publication is important because through it the lion became more widely known.

Denmark in 1848-1851 fought the First Schleswig War against the Germans in revolt in the duchies of Schleswig, Holstein and Saxe-Lauenburg that then all belonged to the Danish crown.<sup>52</sup> The rebellious Germans created a provisional government and army that were supported by the German Confederation and above all by Prussian troops. The war led to a strong growth of Scandinavism, as other Nordic people sympathised with the Danes. Great Britain and Russia supported in their turn the Danish claims over the mutinous duchies, because they were afraid of Prussia gaining too much influence over the Danish straits. The war ended in a return to the status quo.<sup>53</sup> After the war in 1858, the Danish sculptor Her-

50 Snædal 2016.

51 Rafn 1856a; Rafn 1856b. For the plaster casts, see Rafn 1856a: 47-48. Sacconi 1991: 52, is wrong in considering Rafn a Swede. Already Laborde 1854: II, 242, had published small-scale sketches of the lion.

52 The Duchy of Schleswig was in 1848 part of Denmark, whilst the Danish king was Duke of the Duchies of Holstein and Saxe-Lauenburg which belonged to the German Confederation.

53 For the first Schleswig War, see e.g. Svendsen 2008; von Bezold 2014 with further references.

man Vilhelm Bissen was commissioned to create a lion monument commemorating the Danes who had fallen in the war's largest battle at Isted, which in 1862 was erected in Flensburg (Fig. 6).<sup>54</sup>

The coat of arms of Denmark included three lions and the coat of arms of Schleswig in its turn had two lions, which explains why the Isted monument had to include a lion.<sup>55</sup> Bissen faced the same challenge as had Jean-Louis van Geel, who was commissioned to make a lion monument for the battle site of Waterloo, or more specifically to mark the spot where the elder son of King William I of Netherlands had been wounded. The royal Dutch coat of arms also included lions, but van Geel planned his monument of 1826 on the base of the Medici lions, one of which is a Roman second century AD marble statue depicting a standing lion with its right paw on a globe.<sup>56</sup> van Geel was not the only early nineteenth century sculptor drawing inspiration from antiquity for lion sculptures. Bertel Thorvaldsen was, for instance, influenced by the Archaic Keos lion when planning his lion for the monument in Lucerne of 1821 commemorating the members of the Swiss guard killed in 1792 while defending the Tuileries in Paris against revolutionaries.<sup>57</sup>

Bissen, just like van Geel and Thorvaldsen, sought inspiration among the ancient sculptures. According to his statements, he decided to plan

54 On the base of the lion there was an inscription referring to the battle of Isted 25.7.1850. However, the lion was not erected on the battlefield, but rather at St Mary's cemetery in Flensburg, where soldiers fallen during the war in general had been interred. This led from the very beginning to a discussion as to whether the lion should be seen as a victory monument just for the battle at Isted or rather as a national monument honouring all who had fallen fighting for the Danish side in the war. The German subjects of Schleswig and Holstein regarded the lion an arrogant victory monument, ridiculing their national feelings. Cf. e.g. Adriansen 1993: 94-98.

55 Ostwald 1993: 49.

56 For the Medici lions, see e.g. Haskell & Penny 1981: 247-50. As a pair the Medici lions served well to flank a doorway or a staircase and were often used to decorate palaces. For another single lion of this type commemorating a battle, see the Swedish Narva lion erected in 1936 to commemorate the battle at Narva in 1700.

57 Thielen 2020. Thorvaldsen had apparently access to drawings by Cockerell of the Kean lion. He was also heavily influenced by the lions in Canova's monument to Clement XIII.

his monument based on the lion of Piraeus.<sup>58</sup> He had probably seen it already when he visited Venice in 1824 as a young man, but he had had a chance in 1853 to re-study the lion in detail together with Rafn when the latter collected information for his study on the runic inscriptions.<sup>59</sup> Rafn's publication of 1856 had also made the lion of Piraeus widely known in Denmark. It must have seemed predestined as a suitable prototype because of the runic inscriptions, taking into account the important role Vikings played in the Scandinavism movement. Emphasising the importance of the lion of Piraeus as a source of inspiration was without doubt politically and culturally the correct thing to do. However, while finalising his lion Bissen was probably more influenced by the naturalistic seated lion made by the French Antoine-Louis Baryes 1847/1848, although he does not mention it himself.<sup>60</sup>

Could Bissen perhaps also have been influenced by the lion of Chaironeia? The remains of it had been found already back in 1818, but it was not until 1839 that a reconstruction was considered. Christian Heinrich Siegel finished the reconstruction proposal in 1842, but the project was stopped by the Greek revolution in 1843. Though it would not be before 1902 that the lion of Chaironeia was reconstructed,<sup>61</sup> yet Siegel's proposal was published by F.G. Welcker, by coincidence also in 1856, together with a drawing of the planned reconstruction of the monument (Fig. 7).<sup>62</sup> There are several obvious parallels between Bissen's monument and Siegel's reconstruction proposal for the Chaironeian lion. First of all, the base of Bissen's lion is nearly identical with Siegel's modern base, which does not rest on any ancient evidence.<sup>63</sup> Secondly the posture of Bissen's lion is much closer to that of Siegel's planned lion than

58 Ostwald 1993: 54, with reference to a letter by Nissen to Orla Lehmann 29.7. 1858.

59 For Bissen's visit to Venice in 1824, see Schultz 1934; for his visit together with Rafn in 1853, see Ostwald 1993: 48, or Rostrup 1945: 373. We know next to nothing of what Bissen saw in Venice 1824.

60 Ostwald 1993: 58-59. The final rendering of the Isted lion also very much resembles Johann von Halbig's lion in Lindau, which had been erected in 1856. It remains unclear to what degree Bissen was aware of von Halbig's lion.

61 For a good overview of the history of publication and reconstruction, see Ma 2008.

62 Welcker 1856.

63 Ma 2008: 80, who emphasises that the base nonetheless occurs in modern studies on ancient statue bases.

to the more upright seated Piraeus lion, or to the reconstruction eventually implemented in 1902 by Lazaros Sochos at Chaironeia (Fig. 8). The upright posture of Sochos' reconstructed Chaironeia lion may as a matter of fact have been influenced by the lion of Piraeus.<sup>64</sup>

Artists do not always reveal the sources of their inspiration. It is also without doubt easier to admit that you have been influenced by a piece of ancient art than to say that it was by the work of a contemporary colleague.<sup>65</sup> Because of nationalistic and political reasons, it would at any rate have been impossible for Bissen to admit that he had been inspired by Siegel. Bissen was born in Schleswig ca. 30 km to the south of Flensburg, Siegel in Wandbek close to Hamburg, at that time part of the Duchy of Holstein. Both were thus subjects of the Danish king, and both likewise studied at the Royal Danish Academy of Fine Arts. Bissen came from a bilingual family, his father originating from Holstein, while his mother belonged to the Danish speaking minority of Schleswig. He was appointed professor of sculpture at the Royal Danish Academy of Fine Arts in 1834, then director of the same institution in 1850, and made several important Danish nationalistic sculptures. Siegel who was 10 years younger than Bissen was still studying in Copenhagen when Bissen was appointed professor. Siegel's career brought him later via Bavaria to Greece, where he finally became the first professor of sculpture at the Royal School of Fine Arts.<sup>66</sup>

The lion of Piraeus has thus, in addition to the Nordic connection created by the runic inscriptions, also a more specific Danish connection embodied by Bissen's Isted lion, which commemorates those Danes who fought and died against the rebellious Germans of Schleswig and Holstein, supported by the German Confederation. Fate later forced the Isted lion, just like the lion of Piraeus, to 'take to the road'. After the Second

64 Ma 2008: 80–81, who correctly describes Sochos' lion as "a modern statue, built out of ancient fragments".

65 Cf. Rostrup 1945: 378, according to whom Bissen could not afford to refer to Baryes, because he had declared that he despised modern art.

66 For Bissen, see e.g. Rostrup 1945; Schultz 1934; for Siegel, see Thielen 2020. Siegel was originally hired by the Bavarian king Ludwig I to plan a monument for the Bavarian soldiers who had died from typhus in Nauplion while following Leopold I's son Otto there when he became king of Greece in 1832. This monument, the Bavarian lion of Nauplion, is strongly inspired by Thorvaldsen's dying lion in Lucerne.

Schleswig War in 1864, the victorious Prussian troops transported the lion to Berlin, where it was re-assembled in 1868 at the Zeughaus, later to be moved to the Cadet Academy in Lichterfelde. In addition to this, the Germans in 1874 erected a zinc copy of the lion in Berlin close to the Colonie Alsen association of war veterans. Bissen's original lion was returned to Copenhagen in 1945, and finally in 2010 re-assembled on its original place in Flensburg. The zinc copy has remained in Berlin, today moved to the shore of Wannsee, where it sits, looking out at the lake.<sup>67</sup>

### Concluding remarks

Scholarly interest in the lion of Piraeus has so far mostly focused on the runic inscriptions cut into its legs and flank, whereas other aspects of it largely have been ignored. I have here discussed where the lion originally stood as well as the date and reason for its erection, why and when it was moved to the harbour shore and rebuilt as a fountain, as well as how during the nineteenth century it was exploited as a source of inspiration for modern lion sculptures. Because of the lack of written sources and the difficulty of dating fourth-century BC lion sculptures, we will probably never be able to prove with certainty why and when the lion was erected. However, combining Cyriacus of Ancona's description of the lion's original location with our general knowledge of Piraeus' topography and history makes it likely that the lion was erected during the last years of the 390s or the 380s to honour those who had fallen in the battle(s) of Mounychia and/or Piraeus in 404/403 BC. In addition to commemorating those who gave their lives to enable the re-establishment of the democratic government in Athens, the lion also functioned as a symbol for liberty, in this case from Spartan tyranny.

The lion of Piraeus was during the early fifteenth century re-used by the Acciaiuolis who reigned as Dukes of Athens from 1358. Piraeus had been known as Porto Leone at least since the early fourteenth century (being first attested by this name in a map of Pietro Visconte from 1318), based on the lion that stood outside one of Piraeus' gates. The Acciaiuoli

67 For the wanderings of the Isted lion, see Adriansen 1993 and Adriansen 2011, with a description of the re-assembling in Flensburg on pp. 119-27.

family, who had a lion with raised paws in their coat of arms, moved the lion to the shore of the main harbour next to the road leading to Athens, thus drawing more attention to it. The road from Piraeus entered Athens close to the Kerameikos, where another lion, reclining on its side, had been placed. Both lions had been reworked to serve as fountains for thirsty travellers, and both were later in 1688 taken as war booty by Morosini to Venice, where they were placed in front of the entrance to the Arsenal.

Unique runic inscriptions cut into the flank and legs of the Piraeus lion attracted the interest of Nordic scholars, beginning with Åkerblad in 1800. The first detailed publication of the lion and the runic inscriptions was published by the Danish scholar Rafn in 1856, although the debate concerning the runic inscriptions has continued all the way up until today. The lion of Piraeus finally became a source of inspiration for the Danish Isted monument erected in Flensburg eleven years after the First Schleswig War. It thereby in a way creates a bridge from the defenders of Athenian democracy in 403 BC to scholars and artists in Denmark, thus also neatly symbolising the long and very productive academic career of Mogens Herman Hansen.

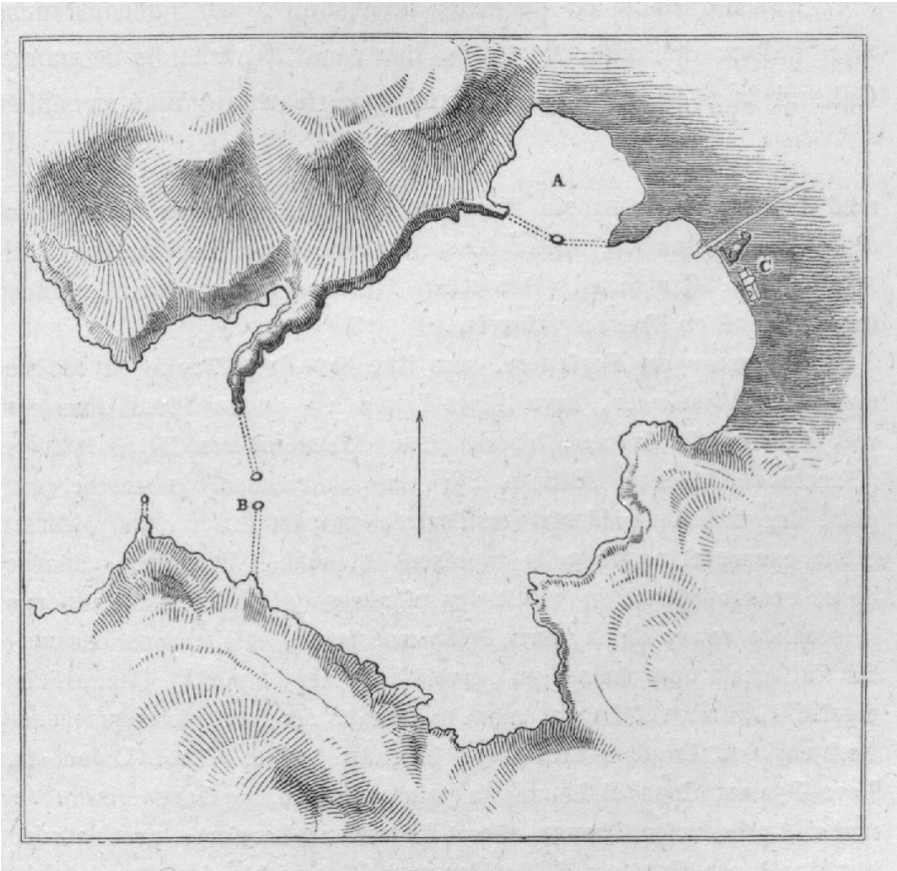


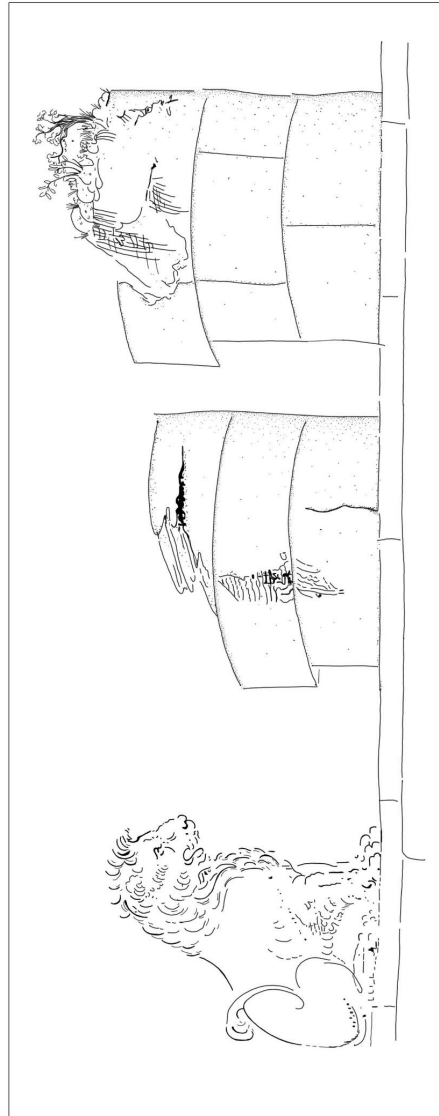
Fig. 1

Map of the main harbour of Piraeus in 1685, made during Etienne Gravier d'Otières' expedition to the Levant and before the lion was moved to Venice by Morosini in 1688. The lion can be seen top right, in between the beginning of the road leading to Athens and a customs house, the only building at Piraeus then. After Rafn 1856b: 69.



Fig. 2

The back of the lion of Piraeus, showing how during the fifteenth century a water pipe was cut into the lion, leading water to exit from its mouth, from where it flowed out into a basin placed before its feet. Photograph: Björn Forsén.



**Fig. 3**

Drawn copy of part of the Codex Barberini of the Bibliotheca Vaticana (Vat. Lat. 4424), fol. 29v, depicting the lion of Piraeus sitting in front of two round towers seemingly flanking a gate, probably the Eetioneian one. Drawing: Hanna Immonen based on Chatzidakis 2017: fig. 252.

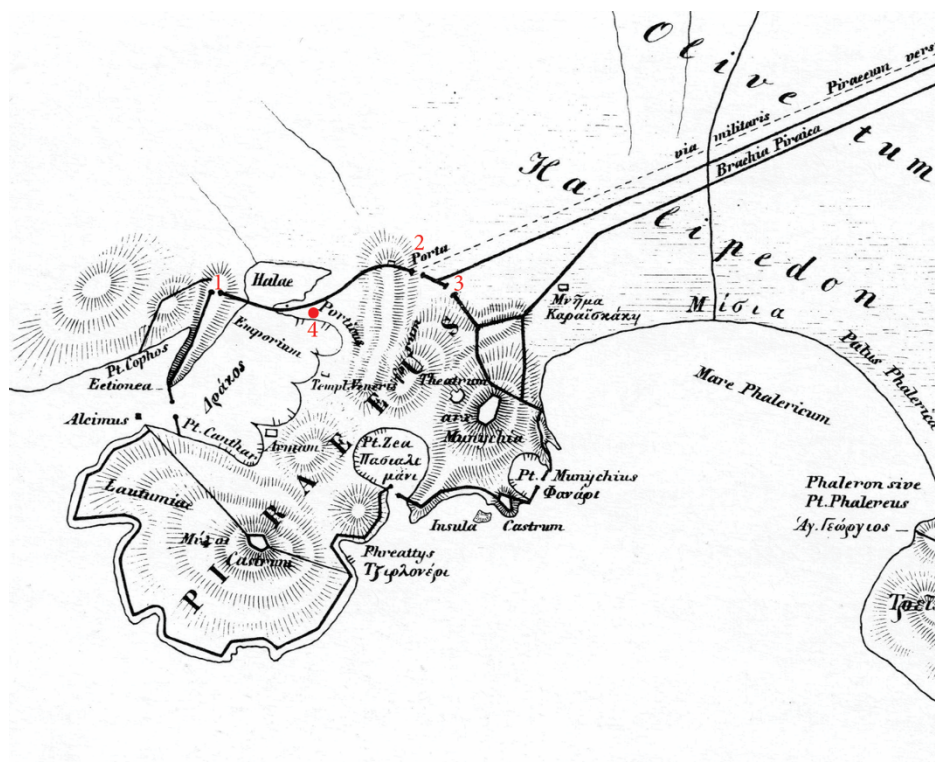


Fig. 4

The topography of Piraeus. Visible are the fortification walls, the long walls and the main road to Athens. Marked are the Eetioneian gate (1), the Asty gate (2), the gate between the long walls (3) and the rough position of the lion from the late 1430s/1440s until 1688 (4). After Ulrichs 1843: pl. I.



Fig. 5

The lion of Piraeus with runic inscriptions visible on its right flank and leg. Photograph: Björn Forsén.



**Fig. 6**

The Isted lion by H.W. Bissen, first erected 1862 in Flensburg. Side-view taken 2007 when the lion was exhibited in Copenhagen. © Wikimedia Commons.



Fig. 7

Reconstruction proposal for the lion of Chaironeia by C.H. Siegel, from 1842. After Welcker 1856: pl. I.



**Fig. 8**

The lion of Chaironeia as reconstructed by L. Sochos in 1902. Photograph: Klaus-Valtin von Eickstedt 1984.

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