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# Mother Canada and Mourning Athena: From Classical Athens to Vimy Ridge

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## INTRODUCTION

WITH DOWNCAST eyes and solemn mien, the colossal figure known as “Canada Bereft” or “Mother Canada” mourns over the tomb of an unknown soldier on Vimy Ridge in northern France. The central figure of Canada’s largest and most important war memorial, Canada Bereft stands as the personification of a young and newly confident nation. In the popular imagination today, and in the works of many historical writers, the Battle of Vimy Ridge in the spring of 1917—in which all four Canadian divisions, comprising French, English, Indigenous, and new Canadian soldiers from across the country, fought together for the first time—gave birth to Canada as an independent nation. According to this line of reasoning, prior to Vimy Canada was just one more in a long list of British subjects that had no sovereign choice whether or not to go to war in 1914, which changed in light of the victorious effort of the Canadians where others, including Britain, had failed. There were many powerful symbols behind Walter Allward’s controversial design for this monument, finally unveiled in 1936, but Canada’s nationhood, which Canada Bereft brought to the forefront, seems to underlay them all (see figs. 1–2).<sup>1</sup>

That Canada should have a figurative embodiment may seem only natural. After all, The United States of America have Uncle Sam, and the French have Marianne. Britain itself has Britannia, a figure that stands, among other prominent places, atop the legislature of New Brunswick, my home province in Canada. Yet, Allward’s Canada Bereft is virtually unique. While winged victories and other symbolic

female figures abound (such as on Allward's own earlier South African War Monument in Toronto), I can think of no public war memorial that represents Canada itself as a female figure, other than in the ill-fated attempt to erect a gigantic "Mother Canada" on the eastern edge of Cape Breton in recent years, a project that met with almost universal derision across the country. Not only are there no other examples of a female Canada figure on public monuments, she seems to be unique among the official war memorials of other countries too, at least in North America and Western Europe. In many ways, Allward's Vimy memorial stands as a provocative and unprecedented expression of art.

Canada Bereft, however, does closely resemble another female national figure, one far older: the so-called "Mourning Athena." Dating to c. 460 BCE, the Mourning Athena is sculpted in shallow relief on a small stone stele originally found on the Athenian Acropolis. Today she is prominently displayed in the Acropolis Museum. Though few scholars now read an expression of mourning into Athena's pensive downward gaze, a century ago she was originally interpreted as lamenting over the Athenian war dead, especially since she was sculpted as looking down upon a stone stele standing at waist-height (see fig. 3).<sup>2</sup> Beginning in the first half of the fifth century BCE, the Athenians commemorated their military dead annually by listing them by name on stone casualty lists, with little artistic or literary embellishment, a practice that probably influenced the Imperial (later Commonwealth) War Graves Commission in its decision to honor its dead similarly more than twenty-four centuries later.<sup>3</sup> Whether Athena really is mourning the past year's military casualties—the face and inscription of the stele she gazes at are not visible to us—she nevertheless resembles Canada Bereft in several ways, most of all in her symbolic embodiment of a nation.

The goddess Athena from time immemorial was inseparable from the city of Athens named in her honor, but at several points in history Athenian interest in her boomed more

than usual. The first half of the fifth century BCE, when an Athenian empire began to take shape following the defeat of Xerxes, was one of those times. Under the leadership of Cimon, Athens expanded its influence across the Aegean Sea, and with the spoils of these conquests, Cimon paid for an explosion of artistic activity, central to which was the goddess Athena as the personification of a newly confident and powerful Athens. The Great War, and Vimy Ridge in particular, sparked a similar surge in national consciousness and assertiveness in Canada, which perhaps Walter Allward sought to capture in his memorial and the figure of Canada Bereft. But where Athena only became more popular in Classical Athens, Canada Bereft failed to take hold in Canadian iconography despite the continuing importance of Vimy. Since I write this in 2017, the 100th anniversary of the Battle of Vimy Ridge and the 150th anniversary of Canada's confederation, it might be profitable to examine Canada Bereft and the Mourning Athena together—along with their respective historical contexts—in an effort to clarify some of the forms and functions of war memorials, ancient and modern. Canada Bereft and the Mourning Athena might converse with one another in instructive ways.<sup>4</sup>

At the outset I am compelled to explain my quite unexpected (to me, at any rate) interest in this subject by offering a personal reflection on my trip in May of 2016 to some of the European battlefields and cemeteries of the two World Wars. As an ancient historian, it is all too easy to be emotionally and intellectually detached from the real lives and persons affected by the subjects I study. The many centuries—and the often poor and brief primary sources—serve to blunt the edge of the suffering and violence inherent in ancient conflict and warfare. But to confront the names and images of those who lie buried in the fields of France, Belgium, the Netherlands, and Germany, on or close to the spot where they fell, focuses the mind on the true horrors of war. The soldiers who lie and are commemorated in Western Europe “look” a lot more like me, like others I know, than

the ancient Greeks do, and many of the veterans of these conflicts were and are still alive during my own lifetime, having fought for my own country and way of life. I now feel that I have a deeper understanding of what ancient memorials must have meant for the people who made and viewed them. I also would like to think that I have a deeper understanding of the human beings of antiquity who were affected by war. I encourage all ancient historians and students of antiquity to visit modern war memorials and cemeteries—not only as an aid to producing richer scholarship, but as a way more fully to appreciate the human condition. In this spirit, let us turn to Vimy and Athens.

#### STONE GODDESSES

WAR MEMORIALS serve many functions, sometimes remarkably similar ones across times and places. This is not to say that Ancient Greeks and 20<sup>th</sup>-century Canadians saw wars and the war dead in the same way. As Nathan Arrington points out, whereas Western soldiers in the wars of the past century could look forward to a blessed afterlife, as reinforced by the prevalence of Christian imagery on modern war memorials, the ancient Greeks believed that life after death—for the brave and cowardly alike—promised only a grim existence as a shade in the gloomy halls of Hades. The best a Greek soldier could hope for, therefore, was to be remembered and honored by the living.<sup>5</sup> Yet the gulf between ancient and modern memorials is not as wide as we might imagine. Where the Greeks were concerned most of all with being remembered by posterity, this too was a concern of the builders of modern war memorials. The Stone of Remembrance designed for the Imperial War Graves Commission by Edward Lutyens is inscribed with a phrase coined by Rudyard Kipling that would be at home in an ancient context: “Their Name Liveth for Evermore.” Not without reason, the general perception of ancient war memorials is that they were unabashedly triumphalist. While the majority

of Great War memorials emphasize unfathomable loss of life and the horrors of war, “lest we forget” not only the fallen but the human tragedy of war itself, prior to the twentieth century modern memorials could be at least as triumphalist as anything in the ancient world. The Victory Column in the center of Berlin, for example, is partly decorated with French canons that were taken as spoils in the Franco-Prussian War. An early concept for the Vimy Memorial included an image of an unmistakably German helmet being crushed under foot, but Allward later removed it as being inappropriate to the somber and reflective nature of his overall design. Some of Allward’s earlier work, though, did contain triumphalist imagery, including his war memorial in Peterborough, Ontario, which depicts allegorical figures symbolizing civilization’s triumph over barbarism.<sup>6</sup> But as Arrington points out, the Classical Athenians were not merely militaristic and triumphalist. Rather, they depicted images of loss and defeat along with signs of triumph. Athenians could contemplate the sacrifices required in war, as well as collectively mourn the dead, by looking at images of fallen Greek soldiers sculpted on some of the city’s most famous public buildings.<sup>7</sup> Aside from providing a space for memory and mourning, ancient and modern memorials alike did not shy away from conveying the human costs of war and, if not representing a purely anti-war message, encouraging the community at least to think long and hard before going to war again.

Memorials from the Great War and Classical Athens, therefore, were designed to foster memory, mourning, and sober reflection on war’s costs. They also encouraged—sometimes explicitly, but often implicitly—the living to emulate the sacrificial service of the dead. The final lines of John McCrae’s iconic meditation on the dead of Flanders are pre-figured in Pericles’ exhortation to the citizens of Athens in his Funeral Oration:

Take up our quarrel with the foe:  
To you from failing hands we throw

The torch; be yours to hold it high.  
 If ye break faith with us who die  
 We shall not sleep, though poppies grow

(“In Flanders Fields,” from John McCrae, *In Flanders Fields*)

These men became of such a sort to be worthy of their city. The rest of us can pray that we might be safer than they were, but no less daring in our resolve against our enemies

(from Pericles’ *Funeral Oration*, in Thucydides 2.43)<sup>8</sup>

Literary and material memorials impress upon their hearers and viewers the idea that the deaths of the fallen will ultimately be in vain if the living do not take up the torch that the dead have passed. To this end, the Vimy Memorial contains a figure Allward describes as “The Passing of the Torch.” Where McCrae’s *In Flanders Fields* imagines a plea from the dead to the living, Pericles’ *Funeral Oration* first enumerates the many and good reasons that the state for which the dead sacrificed is worthy of such sacrifice. The dead fell in service to Athens and the noble idea of Athens. Modern memorials too, including those designed by Allward, carefully provide justification for past and future sacrifices in war.

Crucially, the memorials of the Great War, especially those overseen by the Imperial War Graves Commission, were directly inspired by Classical Athenian monuments and practices. After the unfathomable and unprecedented slaughter of the Great War, a new paradigm of remembrance was needed. Earlier memorials tended to celebrate famous victories or represent illustrious individual military leaders. The monuments and cemeteries from the Great War, on the other hand, commemorated the war dead as individuals, usually without distinction in terms of rank or where and how they fell. Rows of tombstones marking the burials of bodies that were recovered were joined by lists of names of those whose bodies were never found or identified, as seen in the Canadian context on the Menin Gate in Ypres and the Vimy

Memorial itself. As Graham Oliver outlines in a stimulating account of the Classical influences on the Imperial War Graves Commission, the scale of the loss of life in the Great War demanded a new form of commemoration, one in which the state assumed the responsibility to memorialize all the dead equally and prevent extreme individualism and the dominance of the rich and well connected.<sup>9</sup> The casualty lists of Classical Athens, on which the names of Athenians who died in a given campaign year were inscribed by the state and displayed with little embellishment or markers of class and wealth, provided the example that the Imperial War Graves Commission, as led by the noted Classical scholar Sir Frederic Kenyon, followed. It is likely one of these state casualty lists at which the Mourning Athena gazes.<sup>10</sup>



WALTER ALLWARD'S WORK is genuinely unique among war memorials, both of the Great War and more broadly. The first thing that struck me upon visiting Vimy was the distinct lack of Christian imagery on the monument, despite the pervasiveness of such imagery on the vast majority of contemporary memorials. Imperial/Commonwealth War Graves cemeteries from the two World Wars typically feature a Cross of Sacrifice—a stone cross with a bronze sword superimposed—as the conceptual focal point, in addition to other architectural and spatial features such as the Stone of Remembrance. France's national monument at Notre Dame de Lorette, within sight of Vimy Ridge, is laid out around a specially-built church. A centerpiece of the understated German cemetery at Langemark, near Ypres, is a Christian message meant to comfort the bereaved and promise solace for the dead, which can be translated from the German as "I have called you by name; you are mine." The Vimy Memorial displays only a relatively small cross within a shield on the rear side of one of the two piers, opposite a shield decorated with a fleur-de-lis on the other pier. These two piers



were said by Allward himself to represent the alliance between English and French peoples in the war, and thus the cross is most naturally interpreted as a Cross of St. George, that is, an English symbol to parallel the French fleur-de-lis.

Many observers, however, have argued for strong Christian themes on the memorial, particularly in the male figure dubbed the "Spirit of Sacrifice" standing in a cruciform position at the base of the piers' front side. Some have pointed out that Canada Bereft herself, standing in front of the Spirit of Sacrifice figure, is shrouded in a traditional manner of mourning reminiscent of the Virgin Mary in many *pietà* images, that is, groups of the Virgin Mary lamenting the body of her dead son, Jesus, of which the most famous is Michelangelo's in St. Peter's Basilica in Rome. Canada Bereft, then, coupled with the Spirit of Sacrifice, might be interpreted as forming a "deconstructed" *pietà*, and therefore one of the most powerful Christian images of all.<sup>11</sup> Even so, I find Allward's memorial to be remarkable precisely because of its lack of the sort of clear and unambiguous Christian imagery that dominates many other modern war memorials. Dennis Duffy attempts to correct the standard Christian reading of the memorial by suggesting that Allward's design represents an "altar in a civil cult" and a "post-Christian shrine."<sup>12</sup>

Allward's monument is unique too in its use of human figures to represent ideas and ideals. By contrast, the British national monument at Thiepval, on the Somme, was designed by Lutyens as a collection of simple and abstract forms, primarily an intersecting series of arches. As Winter argues, Lutyens's memorial, like his famous cenotaph at Whitehall and his Stone of Remembrance, invites viewers to project their own thoughts and ideas onto his work.<sup>13</sup> The concept behind Allward's monument, which carefully reflects the artist's own vision and conveys a clear set of messages, could not be more different. To be sure, there were many figural representations on contemporary war memorials, including in a Canadian context, but these figures tended

to be either human mourners, including especially bereaved mothers, or winged victory goddesses, celebrating earthly triumph.<sup>14</sup> Allward's abstract human figures seem to be unparalleled.

We have some comments from Allward himself concerning his vision for the Vimy Memorial. First, he recounts a dream he had at the concept stage:

When things were at their blackest in France during the war, I went to sleep one night after dwelling on all the muck and misery over there. My spirit was like a thing tormented. So I dreamed. In my dream I was on a great battlefield. I saw our men going by in thousands, and being mowed down by the sickles of death, regiment after regiment, division after division. Suffering beyond endurance at the sight, I turned my eyes and found myself looking down an avenue of poplars. Suddenly through this avenue, I saw thousands moving to the aid of our armies. They were the dead. They rose in masses, filed silently by and entered the fight, to aid the living. So vivid was this impression, that when I awoke it stayed with me for months. Without the dead we were helpless. So I have tried to show, in this monument to Canada's fallen, what we owed them and will forever owe them.<sup>15</sup>

Next, he describes the monument itself:

At the base of the strong impregnable walls of defence are the Defenders, one group showing the Breaking of the Sword, the other the Sympathy of the Canadians for the Helpless. Above these are the mouths of guns covered with olive and laurels. On the wall stands an heroic figure of Canada brooding over the graves of her valiant dead; below is suggested a grave with a helmet, laurels, etc. Behind her stand two pylons symbolizing the two forces—Canadian and French—while between, at the base of these is the Spirit of sacrifice who, giving all, throws the torch to his Comrade. Looking up, they see the figures of Peace, Justice, Truth and Knowledge, etc., for which they fought chanting the hymn of Peace. Around these figures are the shields of Britain, Canada and France. On the outside of the pylons is the Cross.<sup>16</sup>

Clearly, though he makes some mention of Christian themes, likely a necessity in his context, other notions were

more paramount. Christian imagery, as useful as it could be in conveying powerful ideas and eliciting emotional responses in twentieth-century viewers, did not express all that Allward wanted to with his work, nor did concrete human figures or simple abstract shapes. Moreover, despite the great influence Classical and Classically inspired art had on Allward—as is suggested by his known affinity for the Renaissance works of Michelangelo and the modern sculptures of Rodin, he was not driven primarily by a desire to adapt Classical forms to a modern war memorial, to do for memorials what Rodin had recently done for sculpture in general.<sup>17</sup> A proponent of abstract and allegorical images, including sculpted figures that represent the broader ideals for which countries go to war as evinced by his earlier work in Peterborough, Allward chose to convey a new abstraction for his Vimy memorial. Front and center at Vimy is the idea of nationhood, Canada's in particular. Instead of turning to what other pioneers of modern war memorials had done, Allward explored a new—or, as I think, old—iconography. Allward's way of making sense of and memorializing the slaughter of the Great War was to reflect and perhaps help forge the idea of Canada as a nation, believed by many to have been born at Vimy. What he arrived at in the figure of Canada Bereft bears a striking resemblance to the Classical Greek figure of Athena. It is worth pondering to what extent Canada Bereft and Athena served similar purposes and called to mind similar notions in the eyes of their respective viewers.<sup>18</sup>

#### ATHENS AFTER THE PERSIAN WARS AND CANADA AFTER VIMY

MOST CANADIANS will be familiar with the general line about the nation of Canada being born at Vimy. From the video presentation of the Battle of Vimy Ridge at Canada's National War Museum to the image of the newly restored Vimy Memorial on the 2012 issue of the twenty-dollar bill, and from Pierre Berton's beloved popular history to Jane

Urquhart's beautiful novel *The Stone Carvers*, Vimy has been consistently and deliberately thrust to the forefront of the Canadian national consciousness.<sup>19</sup> Even allowing for a fair amount of national myth-making, the Great War and Vimy Ridge really were formative for Canada in key ways, especially cultural memory.<sup>20</sup>

As explored by Jonathan Vance in his groundbreaking 1997 book *Death So Noble*, Vimy afterward became a symbol for Canadians of nationalism and unity. The battle—and its eventual memorial—would prove essential in the myth-making that followed the war, which, as Vance points out, was assimilationist in subsuming all groups and nationalities under a single, homogenous Canadian identity.<sup>21</sup> In recent years many historians have argued that the myth of Canada's nationhood being forged in the Great War and at Vimy was little more than the product of elite manipulation, but it is difficult to deny that regardless of its origin, the myth had a profound impact on Canadians across the social spectrum. And in real historical terms, Canada did become far more independent and assertive as a nation in the interwar years, eventually declaring war on its own as a sovereign nation for the first time in 1939. Perhaps Canadians would have grown to feel more *Canadian* (as opposed to British) even without Vimy, but also perhaps not, at least not in the same ways. The Vimy Memorial, with its universalizing human figures and the two piers representing the English and French people, encourages this reading of Vimy as formative for Canada.

Athens after the Persian Invasion of 480–479 BCE underwent a similar period of emerging national consciousness and assertiveness. From our perspective in the 21<sup>st</sup> century, it is difficult to believe that Athens was not always the most prominent or famous of Greek states. Yet Athenian dominance was entirely a product of the 5<sup>th</sup> century BCE. In earlier centuries, Athens, while perhaps bigger than many Greek poleis, or city-states, was nowhere near the top in terms of influence and prestige. Homer's *Iliad*, for instance, barely mentions Athens at all, and those references to Athens that

are in the *Iliad* might be due more to the Athenian tyrant Pisistratus' patronage of a new edition of the Homeric poems in the late 500s BCE than anything from the original poets themselves. Seemingly out of nowhere, Athens emerged onto the world stage during the Persian Wars.

The Athenians, having developed the world's first democracy in 508 BCE, shocked everyone by defeating a much larger Persian force at Marathon in 490, less than two decades after the political revolution that changed the course of Greek history. When the Persian Great King Xerxes invaded the Greek mainland by land and sea in 480 and burned Athens to the ground, the Athenians evacuated their city and remained firmly patriotic, despite bearing the brunt of Xerxes' aggression. The Athenian fleet, by far the largest in the Greek alliance, played the lead role at the Battle of Salamis in the fall of 480, a decisive defeat for the Persians that marked the beginning of the end of Xerxes' campaign. No less a figure than Herodotus argues that by refusing to yield despite the loss of their city and by fighting the Persians at sea, the Athenians had saved Greece, even though Sparta had been the titular leader of the Greek alliance (Herodotus 7.139). In the years after the Persian invasion Athens came into its own and entered what we now consider to be its Golden Age.

The helmsman of the Athenian ship in the first part of this period was Cimon, son of the famous general Miltiades who had commanded the victorious Athenians at Marathon. Following the expulsion of the Persians from mainland Greece, Cimon won for the Athenians an empire, sailing in Athenian ships around the Aegean to add new territories and allies to the benefit of Athens (if not always for the "allies" in the long term). The Athenians justified their new position of pre-eminence, and eventual imperial domination of the Aegean Sea, by appealing to their heroic and selfless contributions during the Persian War. While a glorious period for Athenian nationalists, this imperial expansion came at a high cost in terms of human lives. As they fought abroad in far-flung

reaches of the Greek world, Athenian soldier-adventurers died in great numbers—in fact, in greater numbers and with more regularity than ever before. Athenian glory, therefore, went hand-in-hand with scores of Athenian dead, mirroring the Canadian experience in the Great War.<sup>22</sup>

To memorialize and make sense of the great numbers of the dead, during the era of Cimon's preeminence the Athenians began the practice of inscribing on stone their annual casualty lists.<sup>23</sup> These stark monuments were set up in a public place just outside of the city walls where many Athenians would pass by on a regular basis and thus be forced to confront and contemplate the realities of Athens' new geo-political ascendancy. Pausanias, a travel-writer active during the height of the Roman Empire, describes the casualty lists in Athens and accounts for their origin after a botched campaign in the north Aegean:

There is also a monument for all the Athenians to whom it was allotted to die in naval engagements or in battles on land, except for all those who fought at Marathon. These men, because of their courage, have their graves on the spot where they fell. But the others lie along the road to the Academy, and on their graves stand stelai telling the name and home neighborhood of each one. First were buried those whom the Edonians unexpectedly attacked and slaughtered in Thrace, after the Athenians had conquered as far as Drabescus [c. 465 BCE].

(Pausanias 1.29.4)

The massacre at Drabescus, which occasioned the first public casualty list, was a direct result of Cimon's expansionist policies. Drabescus is located a few kilometers inland from the northern Aegean coast, close to the port of Eion which had been captured and settled by Cimon himself.

Writing in the later 300s BCE, Aristotle, or more likely one of his students, compiled a history of Athens' constitution. To account for the increasingly broad base of Athenian democracy in the decades after the Persian Invasion, the author of this institutional history argues that the many mil-

itary casualties of the Cimonian era led to political upheaval:

For it happened at that time that the finer people had no leader, but the foremost man of their number was Cimon son of Miltiades, who was a rather young and had just recently become prominent in the city. Moreover, the common people had been destroyed in war, because in those days military expeditions were prepared from a roll of citizens, and the generals placed in charge had no experience of war but were honored because of their family status. The result was that the troops on an expedition always experienced as many as two or three thousand deaths, with the result that there was a serious lack of the better sort of people both from the common classes and the wealthy

([Aristotle] *Constitution of the Athenians* 26.1)

And finally, the fourth-century BCE orator Isocrates enumerates the costs of Athenian imperial adventures in the time of Cimon:

Who could account for the ships lost by fives or tens or more, or the soldiers killed in groups of a thousand or two thousand? One can only say that at that time they performed public burials every year, which many of our close neighbors and other Greeks attended, not grieving our dead but celebrating our misfortunes. Finally, without even noticing, they filled the public cemeteries with graves of citizens, and the rolls of the phratries and the neighborhoods of Athens with the names of those having no part in the city. And this is how you could come to know the multitude of the dead: you will find that the families of the most famous men and the greatest households, which survived tyrants and civil discord and the Persian Wars, are utterly gone.

(Isocrates, *On the Peace* 87–88)

The policies and military activities of Cimon—which led not only to greater numbers of military casualties, but unprecedented numbers of deaths abroad, just like the Canadian experience in the Great War—therefore necessitated a new way to commemorate the dead. At the same time, a newly self-assured and powerful Athens, won dearly, demanded new symbols of what Athens *was*. In other words,

Cimon needed a rallying cry, an image of what these men were fighting and dying for. The obvious choice was the patron goddess of Athens herself: Athena, child of Zeus. Much more than simply a mascot for Athens, during Cimon's time Athena came to be equated with the very polis itself. Cimon stands at the threshold of both the famous Athenian casualty lists and the adoption of Athena as a personification of Athens.

#### THE ICONOGRAPHY OF A NATION

DESPITE ITS TOUCHING beauty and fine embodiment of the Classical Severe Style, at only 54 cm in height the Mourning Athena is a modest piece of public art. Cimon's promotion of Athena would spark far more extravagant monuments to the city's patron goddess.<sup>24</sup> Very shortly after the Mourning Athena, Cimon probably commissioned the great sculptor Pheidias to make a colossal bronze Athena clad in armor.<sup>25</sup> Eventually known as the Athena Promachos, or Defender of the City, this sculpture of the armored goddess was spectacularly large and stood in front of the later Parthenon temple near the official entrance of the Acropolis. One ancient writer claimed that the sun glinting off Athena's spear could be seen by ships rounding Cape Sounion, dozens of kilometers away. At Delphi, Cimon dedicated a victory monument in honor of his defeat of the Persians at the Eurymedon River in what is now southern Turkey. Crowning this dedication was a golden Athena. Other famous dedications that featured Athena probably also reflected Cimon's agency or at least influence, including the Marathon monument at Delphi, the Painted Stoa at Athens, and the shrine of Warlike Athena at Plataea, a tiny state that had been Athens' lone ally at the Battle of Marathon. Cimon undertook an aggressive artistic program designed to highlight the figure of Athena and identify her more profoundly with her polis. This program both reinforced and was made possible by Cimon's military activities around the Aegean.<sup>26</sup>



Following Cimon's fall from prominence, the Athenians' celebration of their goddess only intensified. Pheidias eclipsed his own Athena Promachos with the later Athena Parthenos sculpture, a gigantic gold and ivory cult statue that filled the main chamber of the Parthenon. Though the Parthenon certainly served a religious function as a temple to Athena, this most famous of Classical buildings also stood as an ostentatious victory monument to the triumph of "civilized" Greeks over "barbarous" Persians decades earlier. Athena, resplendent in the most precious of materials, symbolized the glory of her city and her people, the Athenians. The Athenians did not seem to think that any celebration of their patron—and of themselves—could be too excessive.



WHILE ALLWARD'S WORK suggests the inspiration of Classical artistic forms, there is no evidence to suggest that he was directly influenced by Athena imagery in particular, or Cimon's aggressive artistic program. At the same time, Cimon's use of Athena to represent and remind the Athenians of the ideals for which Athenian soldiers were fighting and dying abroad serves as a useful paradigm with which to interpret the Vimy Memorial and the unparalleled figure of Canada Bereft. Like Athena, Canada Bereft serves as a focal point of all the reasons Canadians fought in the Great War, which Allward might have hoped would give comfort to the families of the dead and inspiration to those who would follow in the dead's footsteps. Eventually, Canadians came to recognize Vimy as the first place Canada fought as a nation, and the post-war mystique of Vimy went a step further to foster the idea that this battle had helped to forge Canada's nationhood itself. I should note that Tim Cook correctly points out that the "Birth of a Nation" idea was only fully expressed fifty years after the battle.<sup>27</sup> But even in the 1920s and 1930s, Allward conceived of and sculpted a unique allegorical figure to stand in for the nation that came into full

bloom at Vimy and that provided the perhaps still nebulous ideas for which the young Canadian men had gone over the top on April 9, 1917, in the face of entrenched German resistance. While *Canada Bereft* mourns over the dead, offering sympathy and bringing comfort to the nation's bereaved, she might also be read as appealing to future soldiers to offer their lives in defense of the Canadian nation and the ideals for which it stands.<sup>28</sup>

Not that Allward himself wanted the monument to be conceived of in triumphalist or militaristic terms. As his own descriptions of the monument suggest, he saw his work as most of all foregrounding the loss and grief brought about by the Great War. Ian McKay and Jamie Swift call the monument Allward's "sermon against the futility of war." The fact that the monument met with no resistance from the Left, members of which at the time frequently railed against expressions of militarism, meant that Allward's work was at least initially not interpreted as in any way pro-war. McKay and Swift argue, however, that by the time of the monument's unveiling in 1936, many did read such militarism into its design and figures, perhaps an inescapable result given the monument's sheer size and ostentatiousness.<sup>29</sup> McKay and Swift are right to emphasize that the monument's interpretation took on a life of its own once it was unveiled, and that the way the monument has been used in various acts of remembrance do not necessarily reflect Allward's own views. At the same time, Allward's personification of Canada as a nation could hardly have failed to inspire in visitors the sense that this nation was something worth fighting for in the future. Also, how could the monument's use of other allegorical figures representing noble ideals and actions, including the "passing of the torch," be interpreted as anything other than an encouragement to future Canadians to pick up the torch and fight for these same ideals? Perhaps an unfortunate consequence of the monument's overall artistic program is that it has played some role in undercutting Allward's own anti-war ideas.

It is fair to say that Cimon and his contemporaries did not worry so much about the glorification of war inherent in images of Athena, a goddess traditionally depicted in full military kit. What mattered for the Athenians was that the goddess represented their city for which soldiers fought and died abroad. After Cimon, Athena was entrenched as the increasingly ostentatious symbol of her polis. Following the unveiling of Allward's monument, however, Canada went in the opposite direction. While most Canadians were happy with Allward's final product and the unveiling in 1936 attracted thousands of "Vimy Pilgrims," Canada Bereft, or Mother Canada, failed to take hold as the personification of her nation on other monuments and public works, perhaps, as Jonathan Vance has suggested to me in person, because other icons had taken hold in the many years it took for the monument to be completed. In recent years, plans for a similarly grandiose monument were met with scorn across Canada. A businessman named Tony Triggiani proposed to Parks Canada constructing a 24-meter-high "Mother Canada" statue on the tip of Cape Breton as a monument to those Canadians who died overseas. A Toronto Star article on the monument and the controversy it generated is useful for a few select comments from various opinion-makers:

"Mother Canada statue is hubristic, ugly and just plain wrong."  
 "Oversized," "monstrous," "offensively tasteless," "grotesque," a  
 "brutal megalith," "gigakitsch" and "Dollywood."  
 "The bigger-is-better approach to art is best left to Stalinist tyrants, theme-park entrepreneurs and insecure municipalities hoping to waylay bored drive-by tourists."<sup>30</sup>

In an editorial, the *Globe & Mail* also weighed in against the new monument:

Mother Canada is merely an oversized knock-off of the mournful Canada Bereft statue created for the 1936 Vimy Memorial—as if, 80 years later, far from the bloody battlegrounds of the Great War, in a very different Canada, the only artistic adjustment required was to scale up, way up.<sup>31</sup>

In my opinion (and in the opinion of most others), Allward's monument is far superior aesthetically to Trigiani's concept. But, in any case, it is difficult to imagine that even Allward's monument would be built today, either abroad or in Canada. I was personally struck when visiting Vimy Ridge by the monument's grandiosity and ostentatiousness, despite its very real artistic charms and the beauty of its figures and lines. My fellow Canadians seem to have become rather bashful as of late, though that bashfulness was at least partially put on hold for the celebration of the nation's 150<sup>th</sup> this year. Or, perhaps, we are now self-confident enough as an independent nation not to need to advertise our nationhood as openly as we did in the first half of the twentieth century. Do we simply have no need any longer of a Mother Canada—or Canada Bereft?<sup>32</sup> Perhaps my compatriots would change their minds if more of them spent some time at Vimy, pondering Allward's masterpiece, as I did. Perhaps too they would feel something similar to what Cimon's contemporaries experienced as they gazed at the many images of Athena sprouting up throughout their city.

#### NOTES

I have benefited greatly from the generous suggestions and criticisms offered by Tim Cook and Jonathan Vance. I am grateful for opportunities to speak on this topic afforded by the Atlantic Classical Association, the Gregg Centre for the Study of War and Society at the University of New Brunswick, and the Classics faculty of the St. John's and Grenfell campuses of Memorial University of Newfoundland. I am also thankful for the stimulating conversations about Vimy I have enjoyed with my father, Alan Sears, and father-in-law, John Denault, who visited the battlefields and memorials of the World Wars with me in 2016.

1. In recent years, owing to the restoration of the Vimy Memorial and the battle's one-hundredth anniversary, scholarly interest in the battle has burgeoned and the traditional place of Vimy in Canada's nationhood has been rightly questioned and problematized. See especially G. Hayes, A. Iarocci, and M. Bechthold (eds.), *Vimy Ridge: A Canadian Reassessment* (Waterloo, ON 2007); and T. Cook, *Vimy: The Battle and the Legend* (Toronto 2017). For a provocative and polemical new take on the importance of Vimy to our national myth-making, see I. McKay and J. Swift, *The Vimy Trap: Or How*

*We Learned to Stop Worrying and Love the Great War* (Toronto 2016), who argue that Vimy and its memorial have been coopted by politicians and others eager to advance a triumphalist and militarist narrative of Canada's history. For the memorial itself and its designer, Walter Allward, see the collection of papers in the special issue of the *Journal of the Society for the Study of Architecture in Canada*, 33.1 (2008), along with J. Pierce, "Constructing Memory: The Vimy Memorial," *Canadian Military History* 1.1 (1992), 5–8; A. Mosquin, "Walter Seymour Allward," Submission Report, National Historic Sites and Monuments Board of Canada, 2001; D. Duffy, "Complexity and Contradictions in Canadian Public Sculpture: The Case of Walter Allward," *American Review of Canadian Studies* 38 (2008), 189–206; D. Duffy, "Among the Missing: Mass Death and Canadian Nationalism at the Vimy Memorial." *disClosure: A Journal of Social Theory* 18.10 (2009), 159–80; D. Duffy, "An Ideal Solution: Sculptural Politics, Canada's Vimy Memorial, and the Rhetoric of Nationalism." *Mosaic* 43.2 (2010), 167–84; and T. Cook, *Vimy: The Battle and the Legend* (see above in this note), 191–217 (with a wealth of up-to-date bibliography).

2. For the many scholarly views on the Mourning Athena, see E. F. Bloedow, "The 'Mourning'/ 'Sinnende' Athena: The Story behind the Relief." *Athenaeum* 87 (1999), 27–50. For his part, Bloedow does not interpret the relief as depicting mourning, but he does connect it to the cultural program of Cimon, on which see below.

3. For the Classical influences on the War Graves Commission, see G. Oliver, "Naming the Dead, Writing the Individual: Classical Traditions and Commemorative Practices in the Nineteenth and Twentieth Centuries," in P. Low, G. Oliver, and P. J. Rhodes (eds.), *Cultures of Commemoration: War Memorials, Ancient and Modern* (Oxford 2013), 113–34.

4. For some modern scholarship on ancient and modern war memorials, see especially the fascinating collection of papers gathered in Low, Oliver, and Rhodes (note 3).

5. N. T. Arrington, *Ashes, Images, and Memories: The Presence of the War Dead in Fifth-Century Athens* (Oxford 2015), 7–8. Bruno Currie, *Pindar and the Cult of Heroes* (Oxford 2005), 73–74, however, argues that the Greek war dead could be recipients of formal cult honors too, which implies a sort of literal immortality to complement the figurative immortality represented in the memories of the living.

6. See L. Borstad, "Walter Allward: Sculptor and Architect of the Vimy Ridge Memorial," *Journal of the Society for the Study of Architecture in Canada* 33.1 (2008), 23–38, for more on Allward's life and work.

7. N. T. Arrington (note 5).

8. All translations of the ancient Greek texts are my own.

9. Oliver (note 3).

10. See C. W. Hedrick, "Democracy and the Athenian Epigraphical Habit," *Hesperia* 68 (1999), 387–439, for a discussion of the so-called Greek epigraphic habit through time. Hedrick indicates that there were very few public decrees before the mid fifth century BCE. If the generally

accepted date of c. 460 for the Mourning Athena is correct, there is a high probability, therefore, that Athena is looking at a casualty list, since they were among the most common and important inscriptions of that time.

11. D. Duffy, "An Ideal Solution: Sculptural Politics, Canada's Vimy Memorial, and the Rhetoric of Nationalism," *Mosaic* 43.2 (2010), 167–84.

12. D. Duffy, "Among the Missing: Mass Death and Canadian Nationalism at the Vimy Memorial," *disclosure: A Journal of Social Theory* 18.10 (2009) 159–80, 166–67.

13. J. Winter, *Sites of Memory, Sites of Mourning: The Great War in European Cultural History* (Cambridge 1995), 102–8.

14. J. F. Vance, *Death So Noble: Memory, Meaning, and the First World War* (Vancouver 1997), 17; Winter (note 13), 94–95.

15. A. A. Perry, "Walter Allward—Canada's Sculptor," *International Studio* 75 (1922), 121.

16. W. S. Allward, "Accruals 1927" file. Allward Papers. Queen's University Archives, Kingston, ON.

17. For Allward's artistic influences, see Mosquin (note 1), 4–7.

18. I am not the first to see Canadian nationalism and national identity as key to interpreting the Vimy Memorial. See Duffy (note 12) for a discussion of Canadian nationalism, or in fact different "nationalisms," reflected in and fostered by Allward's work.

19. Pierre Berton, *Vimy* (Toronto 1986); Jane Urquhart, *The Stone Carvers* (Toronto 2001).

20. As studied in depth by Vance (note 14). Now, see also Cook (note 1), esp. 300–27.

21. Vance (note 14), esp. 66–71, 226–56.

22. For the Athenian Empire in general, including the Cimonian era, it is still difficult to beat Meiggs's classic study, *The Athenian Empire* (Oxford 1979).

23. These casualty lists have been discovered at different times and are thus published and discussed in many different places. The most comprehensive treatment of Athenian public burials is C. W. Clairmont, *Patrios Nomos: Public Burial in Athens during the Fifth and Fourth Centuries B.C.* (Oxford 1983).

24. Bloedow (note 2) explicitly links the Mourning Athena to Cimon's artistic and cultural program.

25. See E. B. Harrison, "Pheidias," in O. Palagia and J. J. Pollitt (eds.), *Personal Styles in Greek Sculpture* (Cambridge 1996), 16–65, for a useful discussion of Pheidias' works.

26. See I. Kasper-Butz, *Die Göttin Athena im klassischen Athen: Athena als Repräsentantin des demokratischen Staates* (Frankfurt 1990), for a comprehensive study of Athena imagery, including her role under Cimon as representing the Athenian polis. For Cimonian monuments, see also D. C. Castriota, *Myth, Ethos and Actuality: Official Art in Fifth-Century B.C. Athens*

(Madison 1992), 33–95; and J. M. Camp, *The Archaeology of Athens* (New Haven 2004), 63–72.

27. Cook (note 1), 316.

28. In addition to Canada's nationhood, a standard interpretation of Allward's central figure is specifically as a "mother," even if Allward himself did not call her "Mother Canada." The "Mother Canada" reading of the monument is in line with the prevalence of grieving mothers in other contemporary war memorials and imagery, and seems to have been prevalent among the pilgrims to Vimy at the monument's unveiling. For the bereft mother as an important post-war image, see Winter (note 13), 94–95.

29. For their take on the Vimy Memorial and its fraught context, see the provocative and comprehensive sixth chapter (entitled "Sculpting the Jagged Edges of War: Momentous Questions, Monumental Decisions") of McKay and Swift (note 1).

30. "The Mother Canada Memorial Dream that Won't Die," by Amy Dempsey. Published in the print edition of the *Toronto Star* on Feb. 28, 2016.

31. "Mother Canada Statue is Hubristic, Ugly and Just Plain Wrong." Unsigned editorial published in the print edition of *The Globe & Mail*, June 23, 2015.

32. McKay and Swift (note 1) on the other hand, argue that Vimy is now more prominent than ever (on the \$20 bill, for instance), and deliberately so because of a politically-driven desire to remake Canada's history along militaristic lines. While many might advocate an increased awareness and appreciation of Vimy, particularly in this 100th year after the battle, there does not seem to be a widespread appetite for grandiose public monuments, as the response to the Cape Breton "Mother Canada" suggests.



Figure 1: “Canada Bereft,” in front of the “Spirit of Sacrifice” and “Passing of the Torch,” by Walter Allward, Vimy Memorial, France (photo by author).



Figure 2: “Canada Bereft” by Walter Allward, Vimy Memorial, France (photo by author).





Figure 3: The “Mourning” or “Pensive” Athena; Athens, Acropolis Museum no. 695 (photo by author).

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