

Routledge Monographs in Classical Studies

CRISIS AND RESILIENCE IN ANCIENT GREEK ALLIANCES

CROSS-BORDER COOPERATION

Edited by

Elena Franchi, Angela Ganter and Felix K. Maier



Crisis and Resilience in Ancient Greek Alliances

This is the first book to explore ancient Greek alliances in terms of both crisis and resilience, offering readers a deeper understanding of how such alliances were formed, dissolved and reestablished.

The chapters in this volume understand disputes between Greek allies not simply as precursors to alliance breakdown but as a structural feature of bilateral and federal formations. By analysing their susceptibility to crises from both external (etic) and internal (emic) perspectives, this volume explores how these challenges proved to be catalysts for the transformation and adaptation of alliances. Ancient concepts of crisis were seen as inherent to the system, rather than modern notions of crisis as catalysts for revolution and instability, making resilience and adaptation crucial to the formation of alliances in ancient Greece. The book highlights the creative power and potential of ancient Greek alliances through a range of case studies, which revolve around sections on concepts and historiography, rituals and media, border management and a comparison between the Delian League and NATO. To showcase how the alliances thrived in the face of crises, the views of historiographers like Herodotus, Thucydides and Polybius are discussed. Equally, the actors within alliances are characterized: the Delphic Amphiktyony, powerful poleis like Athens and Sparta and federal states like the Aitolians and the Boiotians. Mainly with a view to Hellenistic kings, the impact of external powers on the texture of Greek alliances also comes into play.

Crisis and Resilience in Ancient Greek Alliances will be valuable for students and scholars working on politics and diplomacy in ancient Greece, as well as those interested in ancient history and politics in the ancient world more broadly.

Elena Franchi is a full professor of Greek History at the University of Trento, Italy. She was granted a postdoctoral fellowship (Freiburg i. Breisgau, 2011–2013) and a fellowship at the level of an experienced researcher by the Alexander von Humboldt Foundation (Münster, 2020). In 2022, she was awarded an ERC Consolidator Grant with the project ‘FeBo: Federalism and Border Management in Greek Antiquity’ (ERC 2021 COG PR. Nr. 101043954). She is currently working on border management cultures in ancient Greece.

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Contents

<i>List of Contributors</i>	<i>x</i>
1 Introduction ANGELA GANTER	1
PART I	
Alliances Reflected: Concepts and Historiography	15
2 Enduring and Shaping Crises: Fragile Alliance Constellations in the Archaic and Early Classical Era ANGELA GANTER	17
3 Thucydides and the Relationship between Sparta and Athens in the Early Years of the Pentecontaetia MASSIMO NAFISSI	30
4 Friends as Foes in the Delian League: Thucydides on an Alliance in Crisis KATARINA NEBELIN	53
5 From Crisis to Creativity: The Productive Instability of Alliances in Polybius FELIX K. MAIER	70
PART II	
Best Practice: Rituals and Media	85
6 Fighting for the Tripod? Crisis and Cooperation in the Delphic Amphiktyony EMMA ASTON	87

7	Breaking Boundaries and Preserving Alliances: Oaths and Kinship Ties as Crisis Management Tools in Interstate Relations in the Sixth and Fifth Centuries BC: Case Studies	104
	DANIELA BONANNO	
8	Oaths of Alliance: Material Manifestations and Epichoric Encodings	120
	HANS BECK	
9	Commemoration to Overcome Crisis? References to the Past in Interstate Relations of Classical Times	142
	MARIA OSMERS	
PART III		
Border Management: Facing Conflicts within and between Alliances		157
10	Allied Enemies: On Conflict Persistence in Greek Poleis	159
	OLIVER GROTE	
11	Against All Odds: The Long Theban Hegemony and Its Resilience	181
	SALVATORE TUFANO	
12	Crisis as Opportunity: Intra-federal Disputes between Religion, Politics and Economy	199
	ELENA FRANCHI	
13	Aitolian Resilience in the Lamian War and Its Propagandistic Afterlife: An Invitation to Join the League	213
	SEBASTIAN SCHARFF	
14	Diadochi and Epigoni Facing Crisis: Federalism as an ‘Art of Government’ and (Border)land Control in the Early Hellenistic Aegean	229
	CLAUDIO BIAGETTI	

PART IV

Alliances Compared: Transepochal Perspectives 247

- 15 Comparing Alliances under Pressure: An Experimental Approach in Comparative History 249

MARIAN NEBELIN

- Conclusions: Alliances and Resilience across Borders 268

ELENA FRANCHI

Index Locorum 275

Index Rerum 285

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Map 1 Regions of ancient Greece and western Anatolia. Adapted by Felix Maier.



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1 Introduction

Angela Ganter

Crises are on everyone's lips. The inflationary use of the term in the daily media conveys the impression that we are living in a time of permanent crises.¹ At the same time, the omnipresence of the term in everyday communication leads to a loss of significance. It is enforced by speaking of a 'polycrisis'² in order to express the oppressive drama caused by the conglomerate of climate problems, the COVID-19 pandemic, the Russian-Ukrainian and the Israeli-Palestinian wars. Is the term still suitable in scientific contexts? Complaints about the exponentially increasing use and dilution of the term have accompanied academic crisis discourse for some time.³ Synchronically, crisis research is booming due to its relevance. The omnipresence and vagueness of this apparently indispensable historical concept confronts the question of how its heuristic potential can be sharpened.

The conference 'Verbündete in der Krise – Alleati nella crisi', which took place at Regensburg University in October 2023, started from these observations by applying them to a specific topic: how allies dealt with crisis phenomena in ancient Greece. We assume a double affinity between current senses of crisis and conditions of life in this era. First, the self-diagnosis as an epoch of permanent crises determines crises as normality.⁴ Second, concepts of crisis in Antiquity have nothing to do with a modern comprehension of crisis directed towards a revolution. Rather, crises in Antiquity are to be understood in terms of their system-immanent and thus system-preserving function.⁵ In this respect, resilience proves to be a key concept. Although in psychology 'resilience' has played a prominent role since the 1950s, in Classics it has garnered attention only very recently.⁶ But it has become the reverse side of a medal, which is adorned by 'crisis' on the obverse.

Greek alliances have not been studied with a view to crisis, nor to resilience. In the polymorphous ancient Greek world, however, crises appear as characteristics of bilateral and federal alliances alike. The focus of the volume is on testing a concept of crisis that allows us to view disputes between allies not primarily as precursors of an alliance collapse but as a creativity-challenging permanent state of bilateral and federal formations. The crisis proneness of Greek alliances will be discussed from etic and emic perspectives alike to understand it as a fruitful factor of transformation.

1. Reaccentuation of ‘Crisis’ as a Historical Concept

Much work has been done on crises in Roman history. First, studies like Christian Meier’s *Res publica amissa* concentrated on epochal tales.⁷ They were inspired by a concept of crisis which had risen after the experience of the French Revolution: crisis as an epoch and process concept, “expression of a new experience of time, factor and indicator of an epochal upheaval”, as Reinhard Koselleck put it.⁸ By using the term ‘crisis’ instead of ‘revolution’ for the political incidents of the Late Republic, Christian Meier rightly dismissed the latter as something alien to ancient thinking because no Roman would even have thought of overcoming the *res publica*.⁹ Gruen, with his alternative interpretation of the Late Roman Republic, also took up the cudgels in favour of constancy, albeit with a functionalist view of institutions: at its core, the Roman Republic was intact until Caesar as an individual – talented and ruthless – started and won a civil war.¹⁰ But what does Meier’s famous “Krise ohne Alternative” (“crisis without alternative”) mean?¹¹ By emphasizing how deeply the historical agents were tied to the endangered system, unable to conceive of alternatives, he suggests the impossibility of any revolution. In this way, his perspective aligns with ancient thinking. However, the ancient figures in his narrative are portrayed as helpless observers, blindly driven and trapped by the crisis.¹² In this regard, his model diverges significantly from the ancient Greek use of the term.

From the 1990s onwards, agency was back. The focus turned to contemporaneous perceptions of crises. Accordingly, general attributions to epochs as epochs of crisis were questioned, because the emic view revealed much more varied pictures than general tales from a bird’s-eye view provide. It was doubted whether contemporaries conceived the third century AD as an epoch of crisis as did observers of the twentieth century until the 1990s.¹³ Although the third century AD is a difficult subject because we lack sources telling us diversified tales about perceptions and feelings of coevals, generally speaking, historical actors were granted more insight into contemporary conditions and more capacity to react to them, to shape their environment consciously. Crisis was defined as a situation in which massive problems recognized by contemporaries lead either to decisive reforms or to the collapse of a system.¹⁴ Building on Koselleck’s concept of *Zeiterfahrung* (experience of time), crisis semantics, patterns of perception and discourse came to the fore.¹⁵ Accordingly, Mischa Meier convincingly understands crises as historical constellations that, under the influence of contingent factors, become recognizable as incongruences between expectations and experience.¹⁶ This is not only about mental dispositions, but also about patterns of behaviour and action that result from perceived grievances; in other words, actions that arise from the perceived dysfunctionality of the political-social system.¹⁷ Mischa Meier stresses that there is hardly ever a period of stability in history, that the stable is the abnormal, that crisis is the rule.¹⁸ But public and scientific debates have been dominated by a concept of crisis as an exceptional state ever since at least the outbreak of the pandemic in 2020.

In sociological terms, a crisis can be defined as a perceived threat to an institutionalized pattern of action that results in fundamental legitimacy problems and puts a society's values at risk.¹⁹ Such a model must be specified for ancient circumstances. As mentioned, a concept of crisis as a general threat to order and a situation of upheaval was not yet widespread. Actor-oriented and systemic approaches should be brought together, because *krisis* aims at criticism, reflection, judgement and decision²⁰ – not in the sense of overcoming the existing system but in the sense of, first, a diagnosis of the situation that endangers the system and, second, flanking, system-preserving actions. To cite the Italian philosopher Dario Gentili: *krisis* is about a judgement “that is functional to the preservation of order itself”; it is “an expression of the self-preservation of the natural and physical order”.²¹ The crisis in Hippocratic medicine marks the turning point of an illness, which can influence its course favourably or unfavourably.²² An ancient physician, however, did not bring about the death or survival of a patient; he was able only to recognize and support the body's inherent resilience.²³ It is therefore important to analyze crises as periods not only of danger, but also of opportunity,²⁴ and to focus on their creative potential.²⁵

Although this notion of ‘crisis’ has not yet explicitly taken hold in classical scholarship, it has done so implicitly: since 2020, the titles of papers and monographs increasingly combine ‘crisis’ with keywords that suggest a similar line of thought. Mario Telò, in his reading of Greek tragedies through the lens of the pandemic, speaks of a “*stasis* of constant crisis”.²⁶ Others focus on crises as opportunities and their creative potential.²⁷ And the volume *Classicising Crisis: The Modern Age of Revolutions and the Greco-Roman Repertoire*²⁸ is dedicated to the use of crisis models from Antiquity in reception processes of modern revolutions. By comparing the epochs, differences and commonalities of the concepts come to the fore. What is more, publications reveal that from the height of the pandemic onwards, ‘crisis’ has been combined with another term, which is as vague and as omnipresent as crisis has been for a very long time: ‘resilience’.²⁹ ‘Resilience’ has become the junior partner of ‘crisis’. Like the latter, it has exerted a retroactive effect on the meaning of ‘crisis’ itself.

2. Resilience as a Recent Concept in Classical Studies

In psychology, resilience has been an established concept since the 1950s. Resilience (from Latin *resilire*: to jump back, to rebound) means adaptability, the process by which people react to problems and changes by adapting their behaviour. The process includes triggers that require resilience, resources or skills that promote resilience and consequences, i.e. changes in behaviour or attitudes.³⁰

In Classics, in contrast, the term has been used only recently. Hits in the *Gnomon Bibliographische Datenbank*³¹ demonstrate that it has experienced explosive growth since the pandemic. In summer 2024, one obtained 43 hits for the English term ‘resilience’, with single titles dating to 2012, 2014 and 2015, three to 2018, four to 2019 and the overwhelming rest to the years from 2020 onwards. The

4 *Crisis and Resilience in Ancient Greek Alliances*

German term *Resilienz* has eight hits, one of them stemming from 2019, the rest from the 2020s onwards. And the Italian word *resilienza* appears thrice in publications from 2015, 2019 and 2023, respectively.³²

Concerning systematic approaches to resilience, the research network ‘DFG Netzwerk Resilienz’ stands out. It deals with structural coping strategies that help to survive crises. Resilience is understood as the ability of historical societies to emphasize their capability for resistance in the context of different crises. Resilience has to be staged by different actors, e.g. through stories, performative acts or monumentalization, they stress. According to the members of the network, historical actors tended to focus on the persistence and continuity of certain social forms rather than on change and transformation – a thesis that fits well into the observations made by the members of our conference. Their analysis model is threefold in concentrating, first, on material practices of resilience, second, on performative acts of resilience and, third, on resilience narratives³³ – all of them shall reappear in the chapters presented here. They rightly stress that resilience often is a phenomenon of retrospective ascription. And they ask whether resilience was the inevitable consequence of certain systems or whether contingency played the major part.³⁴

Resilience against a systemic crisis can be described as ambiguity tolerance, as Oliver Grote does in his chapter.³⁵ But does it mean that a systemic crisis is only postponed? And has resilience always a positive significance? Apparently not, as papers which deal with the Delian League illustrate (Nafissi, K. Nebelin): the evaluation of resilience very much depends on the perspective you take. An Athenian had a different view on this alliance and its resilience than the subdued had. Methodologically, the volume is pervaded by emic, or inside, perspectives to get close to ancient perceptions of crisis reality. However, ancient actors could recognize only crisis trends. Therefore, the historian is always encouraged to apply the term ‘crisis’ as an analytical tool and thus to approach the topic from an etic, or outside, perspective. As such, we can describe phases of Greek societies as phases of a crisis, although the ancient actors themselves never used the word. In sum, every author was free to find the approach to the topic most personally suited to them. As such, a multifaceted volume has risen to illustrate the many ways Greeks in alliances coped with crises and how they proved, or were thought, to be resilient.

3. **Crisis and Resilience in Ancient Greek Alliances**

Alliances are built on the mutual trust, cooperation and shared interests of their members. However, these elements are vulnerable to shifting personal ambitions, external pressures and changing circumstances. This volatility makes alliances particularly susceptible to crises, as the very cohesion of the group depends on the continued alignment of individual loyalties and interests. In the context of Greek alliances, where power dynamics were often fluid and competition between city-states intense, the reliance on human loyalty made these coalitions especially fragile. The potential for crisis was ever-present, as any shift in loyalty could unravel the delicate balance of power and cooperation that held the alliance together.

Understanding this inherent instability is key to comprehending the frequent crises that plagued Greek alliances and the strategies they employed to manage or mitigate these challenges.

Although ancient Greek history is often characterized by its fragmented and competitive city-states, it has been studied less frequently through the lens of crises when compared to Roman history.³⁶ This may be due to the perception that Greek political upheavals, while significant, often resulted in the restoration of traditional structures rather than the creation of entirely new systems. But is that not also true for Roman history? Of course, there were crises in the sense of epochal turning points, such as the end of the Peloponnesian War or the confrontation with the new Macedonian superpower. When we come to emic perceptions, however, when we come to expectations and perceptions, epochal tales come to their end and begin to diversify.³⁷

Instead of ‘crisis’, the opposites ‘conflict and cooperation’ dominate the field of ancient Greek history.³⁸ Recent studies on Greek federal states focus on the dynamics and the flexibility of federal relations. “Federalism therefore requires persistent and complex negotiation”, emphasize Hans Beck and Peter Funke, thereby highlighting the importance of interaction and communication as put into the foreground by the culturalist turn. Consequently, the history of alliances should no longer be written as a history of construction and disintegration, but as a history of constant transformation.³⁹ This also applies to other forms of cross-polis organizations such as the *symmachia* and the *sympolitia*, to intra-federal or intra-communal units. The creative handling of crises could transform alliances in a way that they emerged anew from disagreements. Due to the strong binding force of regional and local identity structures in the Greek world, the basis for the interaction of alliances was repeatedly called into question.⁴⁰ Creative responses based on local and regional ties can be seen both as part of the problem and as possible ways out of a crisis.

The ERC Consolidator project ‘Federalism and Border Management’ (FeBo), hosted at the University of Trento under the direction of Elena Franchi, focuses on the question of how Greek federal states dealt with the problem of internal and external borders, an important discussion that lurks behind many topics in this volume. Although alliances are framed in a much wider sense here than federalism does, the underlying central problem of how to manage crises when internal or external borders of communities come into play is the same. Every contributor is compelled to answer the question whether the Greeks developed a specific culture to deal with crisis in alliances, as FeBo assumes for Greek federal states and their border-management policies. In determining whether, rather than peaceful coexistence, a balance of power was the main aim of alliances in crises, as FeBo holds for *koina*, also might depend on situations and perspectives. Is the term ‘balance of power’ a euphemism that emanates from the hegemon whereas the subdued do not want to live with this so-called balance, as was, again, the case in the Delian League during the Peloponnesian War? Certainly, strategies were needed that took economic, ethnic, cultural and religious networks into account.⁴¹

The volume opens with a section on ‘I. Alliances Reflected: Concepts and Historiography’. To begin with, Angela Ganter approaches emic perceptions of

kriseis ('Enduring and Shaping Crises: Fragile Alliance Constellations in the Archaic and Early Classical Era'). Embedded in a semantic history of the term *krinein* in Archaic and early Classical Greek, the contribution analyzes fragile alliance constellations in Herodotus. They are perceived in the broad Archaic meaning of the term *krinein*, which implies judgement, competitive selection and the formation of opinion. *Symmachoi* in Herodotus have to endure crises on a daily routine. But the agents are far from being mere victims of the situation. They have to reflect on the question of how to cope best with the situation and they have to take decisions, as insecure as their result might be. According to Herodotus and his use of language, crises were part of everyday life. They did not so much endanger an alliance as form it. The Greeks were accustomed not only to endure crises, but also to shape them.

Next, two contributions on Thucydides highlight his historiographic approaches to alliances in crisis, one with reference to the relations between Sparta and Athens during the Pentecontaetia, one with a focus on the imbalance of power in the Delian League. Massimo Nafissi deconstructs Thucydides' coherent crisis narrative of escalation between Sparta and Athens after the Persian Wars by arguing that the common hatred of the Persians was a strong bond making the Greek alliance much more resilient than the Thucydidean version suggests, before it broke up abruptly around 462 BC ('Thucydides and the Relationship between Sparta and Athens in the Early Years of the Pentecontaetia'). Katarina Nebelin, in 'Friends as Foes in the Delian League: Thucydides on an Alliance in Crisis', focuses on discourse patterns in Thucydides' analysis of the Delian League during the Peloponnesian War. How does the historian frame the crisis of the asymmetrical alliance? By using the technique of lending both the Athenian hegemon and the subdued a voice in various speeches as they could have been given in reality, historiography revitalizes a crisis caused by the imbalance of power within the alliance and the external pressures of war against the Peloponnesian League. First and foremost, three discourse patterns stand out: the legitimization of Athens as the mother city of the Ionians, her position as their defender due to her overwhelming success during the Persian Wars and the natural right of the stronger to dominate the weaker. Whether these arguments served to strengthen the alliance is to be doubted. And how Thucydides valued these discourse patterns is something else to ask.

To complete the historiographic section, Felix K. Maier draws on the insights of Polybius, a historian, who was himself an experienced politician well acquainted with alliances. The title, 'From Crisis to Creativity: The Productive Instability of Alliances in Polybius', alludes to the kernel of the Polybian view on crises in alliances, which is astonishingly close to the semantic observations made by Ganter on the base of Herodotus: Although alliances in ancient Greece were key to maintaining stability in political dealings, breakups had to be expected. Rather than surrendering to fatalism, however, Polybius's analysis encourages embracing uncertainty. By accepting it, he argues, the members of an alliance should be heartened to look for opportunities to act on and to achieve strategic goals. By accepting crises as parts of alliances, they turn into a tool of productively shaping contingency.⁴²

The second section, 'II. Best Practice: Rituals and Media', consists of four variously interwoven contributions. They deal with sanctuaries, with oaths and with kinship ties, in short with models of best practice in ritual and medial contexts. Emma Aston, in 'Fighting for the Tripod? Crisis and Co-operation in the Delphic Amphiktyony', contradicts the common opinion that the Delphic Amphiktyony was first and foremost an instrument of central Greek imperialist or expansionist ambitions, e.g. by the Thessalians. She argues, in contrast, that it was meant to, and did, moderate crises across borders, mainly in the Archaic, but also in the Classical period when the sanctuary provided a frame of cooperation for those "living around".

In 'Breaking Boundaries and Preserving Alliances. Oaths and Kinship Ties as Crisis Management Tools in Interstate Relations in the Sixth and Fifth Centuries BCE: Case Studies', Daniela Bonanno demonstrates the efficacy of oaths as a ritual practice and tool for strengthening the resilience of interstate relations. By focussing on the Delian League, she explains that many oaths sworn between the Athenians and their Ionian allies date to the Archidamian War, a period of profound crisis between Athens and her allies. Apparently, the Athenians used the oaths to resolve conflicts, to transcend boundaries and to reclaim divine sanctification for the alliance, in short to ensure its resilience. In a complementary way, Hans Beck, in 'Oaths of Alliance: Material Manifestations and Epichoric Encodings', comes to a comparable result, the divine sanctification of treaty oaths, which lent resilience to the agreements taken and thus strengthened an alliance. In contrast to Bonanno, however, he looks at local diversity of the involved gods and the objects that played a decisive role in the according rituals. Finally, Maria Osmers opens the field of common practices of remembrance in the Classical period, which helped to cope with crises of alliances across borders ('Commemoration to Overcome Crises? References to the Past in Interstate Relations of Classical Times'). Osmers shares the Polybian view that alliances were endangered constantly and that the actors knew that. References to a common, flexibly retold past were a strategy to deal creatively with the symptoms of crises, which threatened the alliance.

'III. Border Management: Facing Conflicts within and between Alliances', the third section, highlights border management as a tool for stabilizing alliances. Borders are to be understood both as inward-looking phenomena and as phenomena directed to the external world of an alliance. They are to be understood physically or metaphorically. By referring, first, to the constellation between Athens and Eleusis and, second, between Spartans and helots, Oliver Grote, in 'Allied Enemies: On Conflict Persistence in Greek Poleis', concentrates on remembered enmities in communal political life. Fundamental conflicts were not eluded but integrated and regularly remembered, he argues, be it in myths, festivals or literary texts. According to his analysis, ambiguity tolerance is the key to understanding how the Greeks were able to cope with a seemingly paradoxical situation: the integration of conflicts into communities, which depended on the cooperation between two former opponents who wanted or had to cooperate. For Salvatore Tufano, in 'Against All Odds. The Long Theban Hegemony and Its Resilience', the resilience

of the Boiotian *koinon* after the battle of Mantinea in 362 BC consisted of the capacity of rediscussing internal borders and relationships towards the former hegemon Thebes and to present themselves externally in a different way at Delphi. Instead of acting as a fixed federation, it was the flexibility of the primarily military alliance that helped the Boiotians to cope with the crisis of the *koinon*.

By analyzing three conflict situations among members of the Achaian, Aitolian and Boiotian Leagues, Elena Franchi discusses crises in Greek intra-federal relations, especially the function of the *koinon* in solving border disputes between its members. Border disputes are considered to be an opportunity to reshape the balance of power. Rather than provoking the breakdown of alliances, the federal management of border disputes stabilized a *koinon* and strengthened its future resilience ('Crisis as Opportunity. Intra-federal Disputes between Religion, Politics and Economy').

Sebastian Scharff addresses the management of military defeats ('Aitolian Resilience in the Lamian War and Its Propagandistic Afterlife: An Invitation to Join the League'). How did the Aitolians come to terms with their defeat in the Lamian War? he asks and discusses different strategies of surviving, or resilience, in the aftermath. As stressed in many papers before, the crisis evoked creative responses. Whether you see them as effective crisis management or accidental success, that is the question. Finally, Claudio Biagetti moves to the Hellenistic era ('Diadochi and Epigoni Facing Crisis. Federalism as an "Art of Government" and (Border)land Control in the Early Hellenistic Aegean'). Diadochi and Epigoni are characterized as promoters of federal entities because cross-border alliances were seen as guarantors of governance efficiency and political resilience.

The volume concludes with a comparative approach transcending Antiquity ('IV. Alliances Compared: Transepochal Perspectives'). Marian Nebelin, in 'Comparing Alliances under Pressure: An Experimental Approach in Comparative History', highlights the advantages of comparing alliances from different historical epochs. On the ground of a valid crisis typology, he argues, comparisons enhance our understanding of alliances by providing a more precise functional description of them and by featuring the individual characteristics of each alliance. Like that, specific forms of resilience as apparent in crisis constellations become evident. By applying the said approach in a comparison of the Delian and the Second Athenian League with NATO, a thematic circle is completed and the general questions underlying the volume are once more considered from a systematic bird's-eye view. Finally, Elena Franchi draws a general conclusion of the volume by focusing on 'Alliances and Resilience across Borders'.

In sum, is there a specific Greek culture of dealing with crises in alliances? The conditions are clear: crises were expected in the highly competitive, fragmented Greek world – they were part of the alliances, as many chapters show. However, this observation should not lead us to take a harmonizing view of the Greek world. Crises were answers to genuinely fragile constellations. How you judge their outcome very much depends on the perspectives you take. In asymmetrical alliances, the partners themselves had different views on the issue (K. Nebelin). Some communities, in contrast, apparently achieved a level of ambiguity tolerance that

allowed them not to suppress but to mythically or ritually integrate a former, under the cover of lasting conflict into community life (Grote). What is more, we observe a capacity to deal with the consequences caused by severe defeats (Scharff). In such cases, crises were not suppressed. To shape them, they were allowed to persist.

When it comes to attitudes and behaviour, the Greeks generally appear to have dealt with crises in the true sense of the word *krinein*. Instead of giving in to fatalism, people dealt with crises by acting and debating to come to a diagnosis, by deciding and judging (Ganter, Maier). Furthermore, resilience consisted of an astonishing flexibility to deal with the exigencies of the day (Tufano). To know that the next crisis will emerge can be seen as a form of resilience because it enables flexibility and constant negotiation. But again, this was no guarantee that the alliance would be maintained – the outcome of a crisis was unclear and even resilient alliances could break quite abruptly (Nafissi).

To cope with crises, the Greeks developed several tools, measures and strategies. Oaths that sanctified the fundamentals of alliances and treaties were crucial to make alliances resilient (Beck, Bonanno). Of course, we should ask which impact they had, how long their effect lasted. This is also true for the flexible common tales of the past (Osmers). As changeable as they were, they were meant to formulate a common goal. Equally, federal alliances fostered active border management to strengthen the resilience of the federal body (Biagetti, Franchi). But resilience was not only anchored in the institutions of a *koinon*, it was also strengthened in the context of Panhellenic sanctuaries as platforms of communication, moderation and cooperation (Aston).

Crises could reveal the fragility of an alliance's substance and lead to its failure as much as they could emphasize its value and fuel the struggle to go on. Viewing crises as an inherent aspect of alliances, introducing a fragility that necessitates creative answers, reveals a complex interplay of cooperation and conflict. In responding to crises, Greek alliances demonstrate a surprising resilience.

Notes

- 1 Cf. Farwick 1994: 15; Fassin 2021.
- 2 Homer-Dixon et al. 2022.
- 3 Cf. Koselleck 1982: 647–50; Farwick 1994: 11; Meier 2007: 125; Scholten 2007b: 5, 8; Gentili 2018: 22.
- 4 Critically Meier 2007: 124.
- 5 Cf. recently Gentili 2018.
- 6 See below: '2. Resilience as a Recent Concept in Classical Studies'.
- 7 Meier 1966.
- 8 "Ausdruck einer neuen Zeiterfahrung, Faktor und Indikator eines epochalen Umbruchs" (Koselleck 1982: 617). His article is still fundamental. More recent overviews with regard to Antiquity include Colozzi 2015; Gilhaus 2016; surveys of historical and cultural studies are to be found in Mergel 2012; Meyer et al. 2013. By putting the focus on "Krisen und Untergänge", Fink and Rollinger 2023 depart from the concept of crisis as an epochal upheaval, although they stress the importance of transformation (Fink and Rollinger 2023: 3).
- 9 Cf. agreeing Christ 2019; Hölkeskamp 2009.

10 *Crisis and Resilience in Ancient Greek Alliances*

- 10 Gruen 1974/1995.
- 11 Meier 1966: 201–5 *passim*. Cf. the revised models by Linke 2005: 141–2, who speaks of “Krise durch Alternative” (“crisis through alternative”), and by Grote 2020: 370, who chooses “alternatives through crisis” in order to express that the crises were part of the system and generated alternatives.
- 12 According to C. Meier, the actors had power in, but not beyond, the circumstances (“Macht in den, aber nicht über die Verhältnisse”, Meier 1966: LIII).
- 13 Critical towards the so-called crisis of the third century AD: Strobel 1993; Witschel 1999; Liebeschuetz 2007; towards the questionable crisis of the polis in the fourth century BC: Eder 1995.
- 14 Jehne 2007: 8. Already Alföldy et al. 1975 emphasize the aspect of perception.
- 15 Cf. Steil 1993; Scholten 2007a; Harding and Krentz 2011a; Goeze and Strobel 2012; Meyer et al. 2013.
- 16 “Inkongruenzen zwischen Erwartungshaltung und Erfahrung” (Meier 2007: 125); cf. his classic monograph Meier 2003.
- 17 Gilhaus 2016: 18. Cf. the SFB 923 *Bedrohte Ordnungen* at the University of Tübingen at <https://bedrohte-ordnungen.de/> [accessed 20 October 2025].
- 18 Meier 2007: 124.
- 19 Friedrichs 2007: 14.
- 20 On the ancient Greek word ‘field’, see Schlesier 2007, on the origins in the medical field, e.g. Vierhaus 2002: 193; Scholten 2007b: 8.
- 21 “la decisione che induce la *krisis* (...) è sempre orientata alla conservazione dell’ordine dato” (Gentili 2018: 11); “La *krisis* è dunque espressione dell’autoconservazione dell’ordine naturale e corporeo” (Gentili 2018: 12).
- 22 Hippoc. *Morb.* 8 (6.216, 4–5 L.).
- 23 Cf. Gentili 2018: 11–12.
- 24 Comparably Farwick 1994: 11.
- 25 On such an approach in psychology cf. Kast 1997.
- 26 Telò 2023: 3.
- 27 Cf. Chaniotis 2021 (“Crisis as necessity and opportunity”) and Atack 2022 (“Crisis and Leadership Opportunity”).
- 28 Goff and Simpson 2021.
- 29 Cf. Strootman 2018; Fless et al. 2020; Salzman 2021; Bats et al. 2023; cf. also Fink and Rollinger 2023: 2.
- 30 At [https://de.wikipedia.org/wiki/Resilienz_\(Psychologie\)](https://de.wikipedia.org/wiki/Resilienz_(Psychologie)) [accessed 20 October 2025]. Cf. the definition at <https://www.apa.org/topics/resilience> [accessed 20 October 2025], adapted from the APA Dictionary of Psychology.
- 31 At <https://www.gbd.digital/metaopac/start.do?View=gnomon> [accessed 20 October 2025].
- 32 Apart from studies already mentioned, on Greek history see Monson 2014; Piepenbrink 2020; Coşkun 2021; Suto 2021; Bady et al. 2023; some papers in Yasur-Landau et al. 2024 with an ecological focus.
- 33 “DFG Netzwerk Resilienz”, placed at Augsburg University, principal investigator: Christopher Schliephake: “*Ressourcen der Resilienz in der Antike – ökologische, soziale und kulturelle Systeme zwischen Beharrung und Transformation*” – “*Resources of resilience in antiquity – ecological, social and cultural systems between persistence and transformation*” (2021 – 2023) at <https://www.uni-augsburg.de/de/fakultaet/philhist/professuren/geschichte/alte-geschichte/forschung/dfg-netzwerk-resilienz/> [accessed 20 October 2025].
- 34 Cf. the conference report on the final meeting of the network: Batorfi 2024; Hartmann et al. 2025.
- 35 Cf. also Grote 2020.

- 36 But see the discussion on the alleged crisis of the polis in the fourth century BC, cf. Eder 1995. The Peloponnesian War is predestined for discussing crises, cf. Shaw et al. 2020. Papers on crisis phenomena in the Greek world can be found in various anthologies, e.g. in Grunwald and Pfister 2007; Scholten 2007a. Significantly, the volume Klooster and Kuin 2020 contains only three contributions on Greek history, most of it treats the Roman Civil Wars. Only two contributions on Greek history have enriched the conference ‘Crises We Live By’ (29–31 February 2023) at <https://www.hsozkult.de/event/id/event-134020> [accessed 20 October 2025]. Against the backdrop of the climate crisis, pollution and crisis have been studied in Greek tragedies, cf. Meinel 2020. And against the backdrop of current crises of democracy, the crisis-prone nature of Athenian democracy becomes particularly interesting, cf. Miller 2022.
- 37 Cf. Whitmarsh 2020, who stresses the heterogeneous perceptions of periods of turmoil; although there was no term like revolution or crisis in our sense, he argues, the Greeks had similar conceptions.
- 38 Cf. the conclusion by Mackil 2013: 401: “there was as much conflict as there was cooperation”; Franchi 2016 (*Die Konflikte zwischen Thessalern und Phokern*); Franchi and Proietti 2017 and, of course, although with different vocabulary, Gehrke 1985; Jehne 1994.
- 39 Beck and Funke 2015: 1. Cf. the terminology used by Mackil 2013: 407 in her conclusion.
- 40 Cf. Kühn 2006; Beck 2020; Franchi 2022.
- 41 Cf. the outline of the *FeBo* project at <https://erc-febo.unitn.it/about-the-project.html> [accessed 20 October 2025].
- 42 Cf. already Maier 2012.

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Part I

Alliances Reflected

Concepts and Historiography



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2 Enduring and Shaping Crises

Fragile Alliance Constellations in the Archaic and Early Classical Era*

Angela Ganter

1. Fighting over the Battle Formation at Plataiai

At the end of the Persian Wars, the Hellenic *symmachoi* had to decide on the battle formation before facing the Persian land forces at Plataiai. Both the Tegeans and the Athenians claimed that they were supposed to be holding the second wing of the army.¹ The dispute that ensued is famous because both sides legitimized their claims by referring to deeds and achievements of historical or, rather, mythical quality. The Tegeans argue as follows:

We gained because of the achievement which we will relate. When we marched out at the Isthmus for war, along with the Achaeans and Ionians who then dwelt in the Peloponnese, and encamped opposite the returning exiles, then (it is said) Hyllus announced that army should not be risked against army in battle, but that that champion in the host of the Peloponnesians whom they chose as their best (κρίνωσι εἶναι ἄριστον) should fight with him in single combat on agreed conditions. The Peloponnesians, resolving that this should be so, swore a compact that if Hyllus should overcome the Peloponnesian champion, the Heraclidae should return to the land of their fathers, but if he were himself beaten, then the Heraclidae should depart and lead their army away, not attempting to return to the Peloponnese until a hundred years had passed. Then our general and king Echemus, son of Phegeus' son Eeropus, volunteered and was chosen (προσκρίθη) out of all the allied host; he fought that duel and killed Hyllus. It was for that feat of arms that the Peloponnesians granted us this in addition to other great privileges which we have never ceased to possess, namely that in all united campaigns we should always lead the army's second wing.²

We do not know whether the Athenians and the Tegeans really argued about the battle formation in 479 BC.³ Certainly the order of battle, being an important prerequisite for participation in later victory, became particularly important in retrospect,

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in the years and decades after the Persian Wars when everyone knew how they had ended and what significance this victory had for the position of individual poleis in the concert of Greek powers.⁴ Be that as it may, the episode is a significant testimony to Greek ways of dealing with conflicts between *symmachoi*, at least in the period in which it was recorded by Herodotus, i.e. during the last third of the fifth century BC. Whoever shaped, or even invented, the episode, however you measure the influence of Herodotus on its design, the episode fits into the concept of ‘invented tradition’.⁵ To use an Italian proverb: *se non è vero, è ben trovato*; if it is not true, it is a very good fabrication. A good invention that convinces contemporary audiences and readers is likely to go to the heart of widespread habits and attitudes. Therefore, the episode is a good source for Greek conflict management in the fifth century BC.

The example from the past is a model for a contemporary way of dealing with the conflicts between *symmachoi*.⁶ More than that, it is prototypical of a contemporary understanding of crisis. If we have a look at the semantic level, more precisely, at the use of the verb *krinein*, ‘conflict’ and ‘crisis’ are not synonymous in this context. While the analytical category of ‘conflict’ refers to the broader confrontation between the two allies over battle formation, ‘crisis’ denotes the specific dispositions and mechanisms employed to resolve the conflict and preserve the alliance. The persistence, continuity and resilience of the alliance is a matter of surviving and winning. To achieve this goal, the allied forces of mythical times, including the Achaeans, Ionians and Tegeans, swear an oath (ὄρκος, Hdt. 9.26.4) to keep their agreement.⁷ Rather than pitting army against army and risking the lives of many, the two sides agree to choose the warrior who seems best able to defeat the enemy in single combat. Twice the verb *krinein*, in the sense of choosing the best, marks the decisive step taken by the allies to prevent their alliance from falling apart. The man who should be entrusted with the dangerous and prestigious task has to be selected wisely. The involved Greeks actively face the problem, they manage the conflict by acting, by taking a decision. In the words of Dario Gentili, the *krisis* is about a judgement “that is functional to the preservation of order itself”.⁸

The repeated application of the term *krinein* in the episode is significant. It helps to get closer to emic perceptions of conflict management and emic perceptions of crises. The chapter focuses on a close reading of corresponding passages by spotlighting the use of the term in Archaic and Early Classical sources, assuming that the analysis of language is one way of approaching thought and mentality. Diving into the micro level of language use in conflict scenarios does not mean that our etic applications of crisis scenarios in the Greek world are of no use, on the contrary. We ought to see only that the corresponding categories are bound up with different levels of description. To what extent does language use provide access to Greek attitudes towards crisis and resilience within ancient alliances? This is the aspect the chapter sheds light on.

2. Semantic Approaches to *krinein* in Archaic and Early Classical Greek Texts

To understand what the verb *krinein* meant, we first have to look at the semantic range of the concept. A *Begriffsgeschichte* of *krisis* has not yet been written, a real

desideratum. For the present, I draw upon Renate Schlesier's profound observations in *Entscheidungsrisiken: Krisis und Kultur in der griechischen Antike*,⁹ which unfold semantic connotations mainly of the ancient Greek verb *krinein* because the noun *krisis* was not used before the fifth century BC.

Undoubtedly, it is significant, whether you have a noun to designate a phenomenon or whether you rely exclusively on a verb that, in contrast to the abstract concept labelled by the noun, puts action at the forefront. One of the most prominent meanings of the term *krisis* over the centuries right into modern times – a crisis as the turning point during a severe disease – was not part of the semantic range of the term before the fifth century BC.¹⁰ As said, we are lacking a decent semantic history of the concept, which would be very illuminative and not only for the topic of alliances. Indeed, it would be interesting to see how the term was correlated with expressions such as *stasis*, how the Greeks developed an abstract concept of crisis when the noun *krisis* was used and to observe how the roughly known basic semantic spectrum changed, for example, when the meaning of the crisis as a turning point was also applied to political analysis in the second half of the fifth century BC.¹¹ This is beyond the intention and the possibilities of the present chapter, which concentrates on semantic contexts of the expression and, thus, mainly the verb in early literary sources with a reference to alliances between Hesiod and Herodotus.

Instead of telling a semantic history, dictionaries usually focus on the distinction between different semantic fields. From a bird's-eye view, the semantic spectrum of the verb and the noun are not that different, as the lemmata by Liddell/Scott and Montanari s.v. *krino*,¹² or s.v. *krisis*,¹³ respectively, demonstrate. The basic general denotations of the verb are

- I. to separate, distinguish;
- II. to choose, decide, settle a dispute;
- III. to judge, question, condemn;
- IV. to interpret, consider.

If we look at the appearance of the verb *krinein* in the Archaic period, many aspects of this semantic spectrum are already present. To begin with, the Homeric epics offer a wide range of meanings. Mostly, *krinein* characterizes the organization of warfare by regulating the position of the combatants. Men are to be selected and ranked.¹⁴ Obviously, *krinein* is an analytical, functional practice based on planning and deliberate choice, which leads to competition, to confrontation and to a selection of the best. Interestingly, the decision-making based on life-sustaining processes of reflection and the decision-making based on a potentially fatal physical confrontation are linguistically designated by the same word.¹⁵

In Hesiod's *Theogony* the alliance of men and gods comes into play. The story of Prometheus focuses on their eventual separation. As Evelyn-White translates, they "had a dispute". Alternatively, one might say that they separated:

For when the gods and mortal men had a dispute (ἐκρίνοντο) at Mecone, even then Prometheus was forward to cut up a great ox and set portions before them, trying to deceive the mind of Zeus.¹⁶

In Hesiod's interpretation, the prehistory of mortals and gods is hidden in the verb *krinein*.¹⁷ This distinction, the difference ultimately set by death, is the origin of everything that should happen between humans and gods. To put it another way: the effects of the original crisis continue. The alliance does not end; instead, it is transformed. Humans have to live with the lasting shadows of the original *krinein* if they want to stay in the alliance that they cannot give up. But they are far from being imprisoned. On the contrary, Prometheus acts, he immediately prepares a sacrifice to calm Zeus down and to maintain interaction.

Pindar, who also emphasizes the original separation – the *krinein* between humans and gods – gives another nuance to the situation:

There is one race of men, one race of gods; and from a single mother we both draw our breath. But all allotted power divides us (κεκριμένα): man is nothing, but for the gods the bronze sky endures as a secure home forever. Nevertheless, we bear some resemblance to the immortals, either in greatness of mind or in nature, although we do not know, by day or by night, towards what goal fortune has written that we should run.¹⁸

Pindar does not deny the separation between humans and gods. But for him, it is not the result of a final rupture; rather, it is compatible with an ongoing kinship.¹⁹ The crisis is part of everyday life. Thus, *krinein* constantly transforms the relationship because humans must develop an attitude of how to face the original crisis that underlies the alliance forever.

Krinein is hard work. Yet once the deed is done, it can have a liberating or healing effect. In the verses that follow, *krinein* alludes for the first time to a medical meaning, which was to become so important in the long run:

When toils have been resolved (κεκριμένων), festivity is the best physician; and songs, the skilful daughters of the Muses, soothe with their touch. And warm water does not wet the limbs so gently as praise that accompanies the lyre. Speech lives longer than deeds [...].²⁰

Divinely inspired musesong is superior to athletic action and heals its consequences,²¹ Pindar implies. In this case, the verb *krinein* denotes a decision. In Pindaric hymns, *krinein* usually refers to a specific decision: the decision in the battle of the athletes. But the implication of the term is true on a more general level. A divisive decision requires judgement, which presupposes deliberative discernment.²² Again, human agents are at the heart of the process. But you never know the consequences of these judgements. Insecurity and uncertainty are part of the process, as Homer puts it when qualifying men in the *agora*.²³

Moreover, from Hesiod onwards, *krinein* in the sense of 'judging' often had a specific meaning: the judgement of judges, of a court.²⁴ Again, insecurity and uncertainty accompany the process. In Aischylos's *Eumenidai*, for example, the judicial decision itself is questioned because it is seen as the sanction of a decision already made by the gods. In general, decisions qualified by *krinein* can be

precarious and arbitrary. Although human action is at the centre, *krinein* depends on contingency. In these cases, there is no autonomous or conscious human choice. This is the other side of the coin. The uncertainty of the process makes it a risk. You never know what the outcome will be, you are always dependent on factors you cannot fully control. In his *Seven against Thebes*, Aischylos proverbially summarizes the idea: ἔργον δ' ἐν κύβοις Ἄρης κρινεῖ – “Ares will decide the outcome with a throw of the dice”.²⁵

The same applies to *krinein* in the sense of ‘choosing’, a meaning that also carries a degree of arbitrariness. Selection may have the connotation of divine destiny or predestination for aristocratic, noble action (*arete*), as in the case of Pindar.²⁶ Selection is very often synonymous with competition, a selection of the best. The *Histories* of Herodotus perfectly illustrate the nuances of this semantic spectrum. κρίσις γίνεται μεγάλη, Herodotus formulates when describing the competition among the widows of a recently deceased Crestonaeon. One might expect the description of a system-challenging turning point. Not at all. The “great *krisis*” refers to the rivalry between widows. No one would think of an alternative to the underlying system of honour that provokes the rivalry; no one would challenge the custom of slaying the wife, who proves to be the best loved of the deceased.²⁷ In the well-known story of Kleisthenes of Sikyon, who arranged a complex competition to choose the best husband for his daughter, the process is also qualified as a *krisis*.²⁸ Kleisthenes does not know who his son-in-law will be. *Krisis* implies a competitive selection process, insecurity and a choice, or final decision.²⁹

But how to choose? Once again, we enter the realm of uncertainty, of risk and of danger that is inherent to *kriseis*. *Krinein* also means interpretation, above all the interpretation of dreams as a special case of intellectual discrimination and judgement.³⁰ For Herodotus, the cultural relativist, the uncertainty of interpretation and opinion challenges the self-reflection of the historian.³¹ Sophocles focuses on the very uncertainty of decision-making itself: *krisis*, the decision once made, need not to be anything final; decisions do not so much provide definitive answers as provisional solutions to problems that generate new questions.³²

To sum up, in the Archaic and early Classical periods, *krinein* and the finally emerging abstract *krisis* essentially cover the wide range of meanings listed in the dictionaries: separation and distinction, choice and decision, judgement, questioning and interpretation. Although human beings, with their intellectual capacities, are at the centre of the action, they are not in absolute control of the situation because uncertainty is inherent to *krinein*. The outcome is unclear. Therefore, crises are inseparable from risk and uncertainty. From this perspective, a crisis is something to be endured. And it may persist – as in the case of the alliance between humans and gods. What is more, the ongoing process transforms the alliance, potentially with a healing dimension. At the macro level, there is no crisis. For the overarching system, the crisis cannot be overthrown. Such a goal is neither intended nor even imaginable. That is why the notoriously competitive constellations reappear, and that is why crises in the described sense of the word are expected, accepted or even actively produced, or at least shaped. Crises are expected parts of everyday life.

3. The Hellenes at Thermopylai and after the Battle of Salamis

Coming back to the episode of the allies fighting over the battle formation at Plataiai, which has been discussed at the beginning of the chapter, it illustrates that ‘conflict’ may be used to describe the general framework of interaction, whereas ‘crisis’ in the emic sense of the term refers to the dispositions and management tools that should resolve the conflict to save the alliance. Not that the crisis is resolved, the crisis possibly resolves the conflict. Apparently, there is no upheaval against the conflict as such. The conflict is accepted as a part of Greek alliances, accepted and expected as crises in general were. From this point of view, alliances of the competitive Greeks were always fragile. But the fragility was closely linked to management tools designated by the verb *krinein*, it could be overcome by a healing crisis. From this perspective, the conflict is the real menace, not the crisis. The crisis arises because the conflict has to be ended to maintain the coalition. The crisis is a tool to solve the conflict, a tool to restabilize and save the system of the coalition. Therefore, the *symmachoi* develop strategies on how to achieve this goal. They act. They prepare a choice between the two competing partners by arguing with historical examples. The crisis consists of a diagnosis of the situation, a competition between two possible solutions and the selection that is taken in the end by determining the winner of the competition.

This manner of reading can also be applied to other conflicts involving Greek allies, even if the vocabulary of *krinein* or *krisis* is not used. At least, this is how Herodotus describes the conflict that the united Greeks faced when the Persian army approached the pass at Thermopylai in 480 BC. The Greeks knew they had little chance of escaping because they were encircled by the enemy.³³ Herodotus’s outline of the story unfolds as follows: The Spartan leader, Leonidas, suspects the Thebans of medism and of undermining the Greek coalition by cooperating with the Persians.³⁴ From this point of view, the coalition is in great danger. Although Herodotus’s account suggests that the Spartans were strong and daring enough to face the enemy alone,³⁵ Leonidas seems to know that he would need support and therefore tries to save parts of the coalition. He decides to test the Thebans by inviting them to join the battle.³⁶ Certainly, he is confronted with a severe crisis, a decision of life and death. Therefore, he had consulted an oracle beforehand³⁷ and decided to stay with his elite troop to secure glory for the Spartans alone. Herodotus conveys the self-image of the Spartans by encoding it in the famous episode of the three hundred fighting and dying for their fatherland. The episode codifies the iron law of always being the best and superior to others,³⁸ a typical trait of Greek elitist mentality. This explanation seems much more plausible and recordable to Herodotus than the description of an exploding conflict, a Greek coalition falling apart and Greeks abandoning their comrades when their lives and countries were in the utmost danger.³⁹ Leonidas is also heroized as an admirable conflict manager who proactively shapes the crisis that the *symmachoi* were facing. He decides that his own troops should stay, while most of the others are to return home. Modern readers may suspect that this is only part of the story, as it seems implausible to force the Thebans to stay.⁴⁰ Equally, it does not make sense that the

Spartans are portrayed as fighting to be glorified for their courage, whereas the Thebans are depicted as fighting only to be punished for breaking the alliance, in contrast to all the others, who, apart from the Thespians, were allowed to go home with the argument that they were unwilling to fight and therefore deemed useless.⁴¹ It is more likely that all the other allies broke the *symmachia* and that Leonidas was unsuccessful in his attempts to hold them back. In contrast, Herodotus portrays Leonidas as a brilliant crisis manager⁴² who sacrifices everything for the Greek cause and the Greek alliance, even though it had in fact broken down. In the utmost danger, Greek heroes manage a selection process, they recognize what needs to be done and decided. As depicted in this episode, they serve as ideal exemplars of effective crisis managers. This conveys an important value of the ancient Greeks: the ability to endure and to shape crises.

Another prototypical episode is the dispute between the Hellenes arising after they had successfully defeated the Persians at Salamis. In the passage below, we find the most concentrated use of the verb *krinein* in Herodotus:

After the division of the spoils, the Greeks sailed to the Isthmus, there to award the prize of excellence to him who had shown himself most worthy of it in that war. But when the admirals came and at the altar of Poseidon gave their votes to judge (κρίνοντες) who was first and who second among them, each of them voted for himself, supposing himself to have done the best service. The greater part of them, however, united in giving (κρίνοντες) the second place to Themistokles. So they each gained but one vote, while Themistokles far outstripped them in votes for the second place. The Greeks were too jealous to decide the matter (κρίνειν) and sailed away each to his own place, leaving the matter undecided (ἀκρίτων); nevertheless, Themistokles was lauded, and throughout all of Hellas was deemed the wisest man by far of the Greeks.⁴³

Again, we are dealing with a competitive constellation, with a conflict between the eminent *strategoï* of who might be declared to be the best. The competition shall be decided by vote. As the result clearly reveals, the diagnosis and the decision of assigning a first and a second prize is an important part of the solution. The aim of the *strategoï* is a *krisis*, a judgement to identify the best of all, the most honourable person. To this end, they define the rules of vote. As the judgement leads to an assignment of honour, *krinein* also denotes the choice, the selection of the best. Interestingly, the conflict is only partly resolved in the end. Although the strategy to assign both a first and a second place was a very wise response to the situation, the last step of the crisis, the assignment of the prize, is not made because the participants, who had shaped the competitive constellation well, were in the end unable to accept the inherent rules of the procedure they themselves had established.

Significantly, Herodotus uses *krinein* twice in one semi-clause, which results in a strange doubling of the statement, in order to stress that the Greeks were unable to make a decision: οὐ βουλομένων δὲ ταῦτα κρίνειν τῶν Ἑλλήνων [...] ἀκρίτων – “the Greeks did not want to make a decision [...] leaving the matter undecided”;

they did not want to make a decision and they did not decide.⁴⁴ Clearly, the incapacity of performing the crisis to its end is the essential point for Herodotus. To look at it from another perspective, *krinein* is the necessary management tool. Rightly applied, it might solve a conflict. If not, the crisis goes on and the conflict lasts. But even so, the setting the Greeks had established at the beginning, the process of *krinein* initiated to manage the divisive conflict, yields a partly healing outcome, although the outcome could not be foreseen and the original plan aimed for something else. In sum, the multi-phased crisis improved the situation, demonstrating that conflict, when structured and navigated through a crisis, could have constructive outcomes.

This is the ambiguous face of a *krisis*; you never know the outcome. Apparently, the deeply embedded agonistic trait of Greek culture and mentality could not be healed. And why should it? It functioned as a system-maintaining force. In this sense, fragile alliances were not a flaw but themselves part of the system.

4. Conclusion

Crisis and critique have the same Greek word history. ‘Crisis’ means, on the one hand, the decisive moment in which danger is present – in illness or war – and, on the other, the act of discernment and judgement. [...] This view of the world gives rise to the question: What does it mean that things are the way they are? What are the consequences? How could it be different?

Didier Fassin, a contemporary sociologist, considers semantic aspects of the Greek term *krisis* because it seems to have become important again to better deal with the many crises we are confronted with.⁴⁵ He stresses that *krisis* first and foremost refers to the intellectual capacities of men to make a distinction, to judge and to decide. At the same time, he alludes to the inherent risk and the danger of a crisis, whose outcome is unclear. The diagnosis comes first, then the question of how to transform the system, in our case the alliance. In contrast to a modern concept of crisis, which arose after the French Revolution and tends to imply a final judgement which leads out of a constellation to restore order,⁴⁶ crisis denotes a form of judgement that is functional for the preservation of order itself. The agents dealing with crises were not faced with the binary situation of deciding in favour of or against the system, i.e. the alliances, but were challenged to deal with tensions within the alliances.

The descriptions of alliances in Herodotus illustrate that the Greeks, in accordance with their competitive attitudes, were accustomed to enduring crises, which may be interpreted as evidence of their ambiguity tolerance.⁴⁷ Crises were parts of conflicts, both were inevitable. Competition and conflict themselves could not be harmoniously healed because they were part of the Greek way of life. But they challenged the intellectual capacities of the *symmachoi*. At the heart of the processes stood the acting and judging agent. The Greeks were accustomed to navigating conflict and crisis. They expected and accepted them as integral parts of their culture. Crises were an everyday phenomenon, they were normal, not exceptional.⁴⁸

Crises on a micro level are what the Archaic and Early Classical term *krinein* implies. And they were necessary to make the most of a conflict-oriented, pluralistic society with many agents who were allowed to openly express their opinions and positions. They were system-immanent and system-preserving. A crisis did not necessarily question the alliance, although alliances could break, but it tested capacities of transformation. The Greeks were accustomed not only to enduring crises, but also to shaping them.

Notes

- 1 Hdt. 9.26.1.
- 2 τότε εὐρόμεθα τοῦτο διὰ πρῆγμα τοιόνδε· ἐπεὶ μετὰ Ἀχαιῶν καὶ Ἴωνων τῶν τότε ἐόντων ἐν Πελοποννήσῳ ἐκβοηθήσαντες ἐς τὸν Ἰσθμὸν ἰζόμεθα ἀντίοι τοῖσι κατιούσι, τότε ὦν λόγος Ὑλλὸν ἀγορεύσασθαι ὥς χρεὸν εἴη τὸν μὲν στρατὸν τῷ στρατῷ μὴ ἀνακινδυνεύειν συμβάλλοντα, ἐκ δὲ τοῦ Πελοποννησίου στρατοπέδου τὸν ἂν σφέων αὐτῶν κρίνωσι εἶναι ἄριστον, τοῦτόν οἱ μουννομάχησαι ἐπὶ διακειμένοισι. ἔδοξέ τε τοῖσι Πελοποννησίοισι ταῦτα εἶναι ποιητέα καὶ ἔταμον ὄρκιον ἐπὶ λόγῳ τοιῷδε, ἣν μὲν Ὑλλος νίκησεν τὸν Πελοποννησίον ἡγεμόνα, κατιέναι Ἡρακλείδας ἐπὶ τὰ πατρώια, ἣν δὲ νικηθῇ, τὰ ἔμπαλιν Ἡρακλείδας ἀπαλλάσσεσθαι καὶ ἀπάγειν τὴν στρατιὴν ἑκατὸν τε ἐτέων μὴ ζητῆσαι κάτοδον ἐς Πελοπόννησον. προσκρίθη τε δὴ ἐκ πάντων τῶν συμμάχων ἐθελοντῆς Ἐχεμος ὁ Ἡρόπου τοῦ Φηγέος, στρατηγός τε ἐὼν καὶ βασιλεὺς ἡμέτερος, καὶ ἐμουννομάχσέ τε καὶ ἀπέκτεινε Ὑλλόν. ἐκ τούτου τοῦ ἔργου εὐρόμεθα ἐν Πελοποννησίοις γε τοῖσι τότε καὶ ἄλλα γέρεα μεγάλα, τὰ διατελέομεν ἔχοντες, καὶ τοῦ κέρους τοῦ ἐτέρου αἰεὶ ἡγεμονεύειν κοινῆς ἐξόδου γινομένης (Hdt. 9.26.3–5, transl. A. D. Godley).
- 3 Cf. the commentary by How and Wells 1912: 297 ad loc. In contrast, Flower and Marincola 2002: 147 in their commentary ad loc. are convinced that the debate really took place.
- 4 Cf. Jung 2006; Osmers 2013.
- 5 H.-J. Gehrke's 'intentional history' has been preeminent in treating the ancient Greek amalgam of history and myth: "Social knowledge of the past, in other words that which a society knows and holds for true about its past, its 'intentional history', is of fundamental significance for the imaginaire, for the way a society interprets and understands itself, and therefore its inner coherence and ultimately its collective identity" (Gehrke 2001: 286).
- 6 The episode figures prominently in Osmers 2013: 12, 45, 113, 326, especially 190–1; cf. also her chapter in this volume.
- 7 On the tool of *horkoi*, see the chapters by H. Beck and D. Bonanno in this volume.
- 8 "la decisione che induce la *krisis* [...] è sempre orientata alla conservazione dell'ordine dato" (Gentili 2018: 11); cf.: "La *krisis* è dunque espressione dell'autoconservazione dell'ordine naturale e corporeo" (Gentili 2018: 12) and the Introduction to this volume.
- 9 Schlesier 2007.
- 10 Cf. the overviews by Koselleck 1982: 617–19; Goeze and Strobel 2012: 512.
- 11 Cf. Thuc. 1.23.1. Köiv 2023: 43 lists many terms used by the Greeks: *stasis* (political sedition and discord), *anarchia* (lack of rule), *anomia* and *dysnomia* (lawlessness), *kakonomia* (condition of bad laws), *metabole* (political change), *neoterismos* (innovation) and *katastrophe* (a turn downward). First, he provides an account of Greek history from the Bronze Age to the Hellenistic era to clarify where "critical turning points in history" (83) took place that we tend to perceive as crises. As such, he departs from contemporary notions of crises in historiography. Second, he examines how Greeks described and perceived these upheavals. Methodologically, his approach to the topic is the exact opposite of that taken in this chapter.

- 12 Liddell/Scott s.v. *krino*: (a) separate, distinguish, (b) choose, decide, judge, interpret, (c) question, accuse, condemn. Montanari s.v. *krino*: (a) to separate, distinguish, (b) to choose, (c) to settle, usually of disputes, to decide, win, to interpret, explain, (d) to deliver/pronounce a judgement, settle a case/an action, to interrogate, question, (e) to think, consider, believe, value, estimate, (f) to assign, (g) medic. to bring to a crisis.
- 13 Liddell/Scott s.v. *krisis*: I. (1) separating, distinguishing, (2) decision, judgement, (3) choice, election, (4). interpretation of dreams, II. judgement of a court, III. event, issue to be decided, turning point, sudden change, (IV. middle of the spinal column). Montanari s.v. *krisis*: (a) separating, (b) choice, (c) judgement, capacity for judgement, discernment, (d) judgement, trial, condemnation, (e) outcome, resolution, (f) dispute, quarrel, contest, (g) (medic.) crisis, critical phase.
- 14 Cf. Hom. *Il.* 1.309, 2.362, 2.446, 6.188, 9.521, 10.417, 13.129, 16.199, 19.193; *Od.* 4.408, 4.530, 4.666, 4.778, 8.36, 8.48, 9.90, 9.195, 10.102, 14.217, 16.248, 24.107–8; for a selection in other contexts cf. Hom. *Il.* 5.501, 11.697, 14.19; *Od.* 13.182, 14.108.
- 15 On decisions in competition and war, see Hom. *Il.* 18.209; *Od.* 18.264, 24.507. For a warriors' test of strength in a fight to the death Hom. *Il.* 2.385; *Od.* 16.269. Cf. Schlesier 2007: 23–4.
- 16 καὶ γὰρ δὲ ἐκρίνοντο θεοὶ θνητοὶ τ' ἄνθρωποι
Μηκῶνῃ, τότε ἔπειτα μέγαν βοῦν πρόφρονι θυμῷ
δασσάμενος προύθηκε, Διὸς νόον ἔξαπαφίσκων.
(Hes. *Theog.* 535–8, transl. E. G. Evelyn-White).
- 17 Cf. Schlesier 2007: 27.
- 18 Ἐν ἀνδρῶν, ἐν θεῶν γένος· ἐκ μιᾶς δὲ πνέομεν
ματρὸς ἀμφοτέροι· διείργει δὲ πᾶσα κεκριμένα
δύναμις, ὥς τὸ μὲν οὐδέν, ὁ δὲ χάλκεος ἀσφαλὲς αἰὲν ἔδος
μένει οὐρανός. ἀλλὰ τι προσφέρομεν ἔμπαν ἢ μέγαν
νόον ἦτοι φύσιν ἀθανάτοις,
καίπερ ἑφαμερίαν οὐκ εἰδότες οὐδὲ μετὰ νύκτας ἅμμε πότμος
ἀντὶν' ἔγραψε δραμεῖν ποτὶ στάθμην
(Pind. *Nem.* 6.1–7, transl. D. Arnson Svarlien).
- 19 Schlesier 2007: 28.
- 20 Ἄριστος εὐφροσύνα πόνων κεκριμένων
ιατρός· αἱ δὲ σοφαὶ
Μοισᾶν θύγατρεις αἰοδαὶ θέλξαν νιν ἀπτόμεναι.
οὐδὲ θερμὸν ὕδωρ τόσον γε μαλθακὰ τεύχει
γυῖα, τόσον εὐλογία φόρμιγγι συνάορος.
ῥῆμα δ' ἐργμάτων χρονιώτερον βιοτεύει (...)
(Pind. *Nem.* 4.1–6, transl. D. Arnson Svarlien).
- 21 Schlesier 2007: 28.
- 22 On *krinein* as judging cf. Hdt. 1.30.4, 1.214.1, 2.167.1, 3.34.5, 4.64.2, 4.142, 5.6.2, 5.22.2, 6.66.3, 6.123.2, 6.128.2, 7.16a.
- 23 ὥς δ' ὑπὸ λαίλαπι πᾶσα κελαινὴ βέβριθε χθών
ἡματ' ὀπωρινῶι, ὅτε λαβρότατον χέει ὕδωρ
Ζεὺς, ὅτε δὴ ῥ' ἄνδρεςσι κοτεσσάμενος χαλεπήνηι,
οἱ βίηι εἰν ἀγορῇ σκολιὰς κρίνωσι θέμιστας,
ἐκ δὲ Δίκην ἐλάσωσι, θεῶν ὅπιν οὐκ ἀλέγοντες.
“And even as beneath a tempest the whole black earth is oppressed, on a day in harvest-time, when Zeus poureth forth rain most violently, whenso in anger he waxeth wroth against men that by violence give crooked judgments in the place of gathering, and drive justice out, recking not of the vengeance of the gods” (Hom. *Il.* 16.384–38, transl. A. T. Murray).
- 24 Cf. e.g. Hom. *Il.* 16.387; *Od.* 12.440; Hdt. 2.129.
- 25 Aesch. *Sept.* 414, transl. H. Weir Smyth; cf. Schlesier 2007: 31.

- 26 σὺν δὲ τὴν
καὶ παῖς ὁ Θεαρίωνος ἀρετᾶ κριθεῖς
εὐδοξος ἀεῖδεται Σωγένης μετὰ πενταθέλοις.
“But it is by your favor that, even so, Sogenes the son of Thearion, distinguished by his excellence, is celebrated in song as glorious among pentathletes” (Pind. *Nem.* 7.6–8, transl. D. Arnson Svarlien). Cf. Schlesier 2007: 27, 30.
- 27 οἱ δὲ κατὸπερθε Κρησιωναίων ποιεῦσι τοιάδε· ἔχει γυναῖκας ἕκαστος πολλὰς· ἐπεὰν ὧν τις αὐτῶν ἀποθάνῃ, κρίσις γίνεται μεγάλη τῶν γυναικῶν καὶ φίλων σπουδαὶ ἰσχυραὶ περὶ τοῦδε, ἥτις αὐτέων ἐφίλέετο μάλιστα ὑπὸ τοῦ ἀνδρός· ἡ δ’ ἂν κριθῇ καὶ τιμηθῇ, ἐγκωμισθεῖσα ὑπὸ τε ἀνδρῶν καὶ γυναικῶν σφάζεται ἐς τὸν τάφον ὑπὸ τοῦ οἰκησιότατου ἐσுτήης, σφαχθεῖσα δὲ συνθάπτεται τῷ ἀνδρί· αἱ δὲ ἄλλαι συμφορὴν μεγάλην ποιεῦνται· ὄνειδος γάρ σφι τοῦτο μέγιστον γίνεται. – “Those who dwell above the Crestoneans have yet other practices. Each man has many wives, and at his death there is both great rivalry among his wives and eager contention on their friends’ part to prove which wife was best loved by her husband. She to whom the honor is adjudged is praised by men and women alike and then slain over the tomb by her nearest of kin. After the slaying she is buried with the husband. The rest of the wives are greatly displeased by this, believing themselves to be deeply dishonoured” (Hdt. 5.5, transl. A. D. Godley).
- 28 Hdt. 6.131.1, cf. already 6.129.1.
- 29 Cf. also Hdt. 3.20.2, 3.31.3, 3.120.2, 7.26.
- 30 Cf. Hom. *Il.* 5.150; Hdt. 1.120, 7.19.1; Schlesier 2007: 24.
- 31 Hdt. 2.167.1: εἰ μὲν νυν καὶ τοῦτο παρ’ Αἰγυπτίων μεμαθήκασιν οἱ Ἕλληνες, οὐκ ἔχω ἀτρεκέως κρίναι – “Now whether this, too, the Greeks have learned from the Egyptians, I cannot confidently judge.” 6.123.2: καὶ οὕτω τὰς Αἰθῆνας οὗτοι ἦσαν οἱ ἐλευθερώσαντες πολλῶ μᾶλλον ἢ περ Ἀρμόδιός τε καὶ Ἀριστογείτων, ὥς ἐγὼ κρίνω. – “Thus in my judgment it was they who freed Athens much more than did Harmodius and Aristogeiton.” Cf. 1.214.1: ταύτην τὴν μάχην, ὅσαι δὴ βαρβάρων ἀνδρῶν μάχαι ἐγένοντο, κρίνω ἰσχυροτάτην γενέσθαι, καὶ δὴ καὶ πυνθάνομαι οὕτω τοῦτο γενόμενον. – “Such was the end of Spargapises. Tomyris, when Cyrus would not listen to her, collected all her forces and engaged him. This fight I judge to have been the fiercest ever fought by men that were not Greek; and indeed I have learned that this was so” (transl. A. D. Godley). On cultural relativism in Herodotus e.g. Nippel 1990; Munson 2020.
- 32 Cf. Soph. *OT.* 501 with Schlesier 2007: 32–3.
- 33 Hdt. 7.205–28. The famous battle and the whole episode have been very much discussed. This is not the place to refer to the entire debate in research. For the interplay of myth and reality, see Szemler 1996; for the reception of the incident over the centuries Albertz 2006.
- 34 On Theban medism, narratives and social memory, see Steinbock 2013: 115–18; Beck 2020: 190–7.
- 35 Hdt. 7.220.2.
- 36 Hdt. 7.205.3.
- 37 Hdt. 7.220.3–4.
- 38 Cf. Hom. *Il.* 6.208.
- 39 Hdt. 7.219 narrates that the Greeks were divided as to whether to stay or to leave and that they decided to either go or die by staying, regardless of what Leonidas decided: to save their lives and let them go. However, the latter is considered another version of the events in Hdt. 7.220.1.
- 40 Hdt. 7.222.
- 41 Hdt. 7.220.2.
- 42 It is significant that Herodotus, in contrast to his usual habit, twice explicitly opts for the second version, the version of Leonidas sending the others home: ταύτη καὶ μᾶλλον τὴν γνώμην πλεῖστός εἰμι, Λεωνίδην, ἐπεῖτε ἦσθετο τοὺς συμμάχους ἐόντας ἀπροθύμους καὶ οὐκ ἐθέλοντας συνδιακινδυνεύειν, κελευσαὶ σφεας ἀπαλλάσσεσθαι, αὐτῷ δὲ ἀπιέναι οὐ καλῶς ἔχειν· μένοντι δὲ αὐτοῦ κλέος μέγα ἐλείπετο, καὶ ἡ Σπάρτης

εὐδαιμονίῃ οὐκ ἐξηλείφετο. [...] ταῦτα τε δὴ ἐπιλεγόμενον Λεωνίδην καὶ βουλόμενον κλέος καταθέσθαι μούνων Σπαρτητέων, ἀποπέμψαι τοὺς συμμάχους <δοκέω> μᾶλλον ἢ γνώμῃ διενειχθέντας οὕτως ἀκόσμως οἴχεσθαι τοὺς οἰχομένους. – “I, however, tend to believe that when Leonidas perceived that the allies were dispirited and unwilling to run all risks with him, he told them to depart. For himself, however, it was not good to leave; if he remained, he would leave a name of great fame, and the prosperity of Sparta would not be blotted out. [...] Considering this and wishing to win distinction for the Spartans alone, he sent away the allies rather than have them leave in disorder because of a difference of opinion” (Hdt. 7.220.2 and 4, transl. A. D. Godley).

- 43 μετὰ δὲ τὴν διαίρεσιν τῆς ληΐης ἔπλωον οἱ Ἕλληνες ἐς τὸν Ἴσθμὸν ἀριστήια δώσοντες τῷ ἀξιοτάτῳ γενομένῳ Ἑλλήνων ἀνὰ τὸν πόλεμον τοῦτον. ὥς δὲ ἀπικόμενοι οἱ στρατηγοὶ διένεμον τὰς ψήφους ἐπὶ τοῦ Ποσειδώνος τῷ βωμῷ, τὸν πρῶτον καὶ τὸν δεῦτερον κρίνοντες ἐκ πάντων, ἐνθαῦτα πᾶς τις αὐτῶν ἐωυτῷ ἐτίθετο τὴν ψήφον, αὐτὸς ἕκαστος δοκέων ἄριστος γενέσθαι, δεῦτερα δὲ οἱ πολλοὶ συνεξέπιπτον Θεμιστοκλέα κρίνοντες. οἱ μὲν δὴ ἐμουνούντο, Θεμιστοκλῆς δὲ δευτερείοισι ὑπερεβάλλετο πολλόν.

οὐ βουλομένων δὲ ταῦτα κρίνειν τῶν Ἑλλήνων φθόνῳ, ἀλλ’ ἀποπλώνωντων ἐκάστων ἐς τὴν ἐωυτῶν ἀκρίτων, ὅμως Θεμιστοκλῆς ἐβώσθη τε καὶ ἐδοξώθη εἶναι ἀνὴρ πολλὸν Ἑλλήνων σοφώτατος ἀνὰ πᾶσαν τὴν Ἑλλάδα (Hdt. 8.123.1–24.1, transl. mod. A. D. Godley).

- 44 I am grateful to H.-G. Nesselrath for our discussion of the double construction. He convinced me that Herodotus composed the sentence to emphasize the Greeks’ inability to make a decision. His German translation clarifies the double construction much more effectively than the English formulation: “Obwohl die Griechen nun keine Entscheidung treffen wollten – und zwar aus Neid –, sondern jeder in seine Heimat davonfuhr, ohne eine Entscheidung getroffen zu haben, war gleichwohl von Themistokles laut die Rede, und er gelangte in den Ruf, der bei Weitem klügste Mann unter den Griechen zu sein, und zwar überall in Griechenland.”
- 45 “Krise und Kritik haben dieselbe griechische Wortgeschichte. ‘Krisis’ bedeutet zum einen den entscheidenden Moment, in dem die Gefahr präsent ist – in Krankheit oder Krieg –, und zum anderen den Akt von Unterscheidung und Urteil. [...] Aus diesem Blick auf die Welt ergibt sich die Frage: Was heißt es, dass es ist, wie es ist? Welche Folgen hat es? Wie könnte es anders werden?” (Fassin 2021).
- 46 Cf. the Introduction.
- 47 Cf. the chapter by Oliver Grote in this volume.
- 48 Cf. the observation by Grunwald and Pfister 2007: 20: “Krisen sind nicht immer mythisch groß und tödlich-katastrophal; sie sind auch Teil unserer alltäglichen Erfahrung, und wir überleben sie nicht nur, sondern sie halten uns am Leben.”

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3 Thucydides and the Relationship between Sparta and Athens in the Early Years of the Pentecontaetia

Massimo Nafissi

To the memory of Giovanni Parmeggiani,
scholar and man of rare warmth and wisdom.

The concept of crisis can be invoked in relation to political and historical events, serving as a lens both for diagnosing the past and for anticipating the future.¹ In the former case, the historian risks retroactive projection – or, to put it bluntly, hindsight bias – influenced by subsequent moments, processes, outcomes. The *telos* (endpoint) chosen by the narrator plays a crucial role, framing events so that the narrative itself may appear as a crisis culminating in that point.²

Thucydides wrote his *Peloponnesian War* viewing the defeat of Athens in 404 as its main *telos*. But his account of the relationship between Athens and Sparta up to the dissolution of the alliance in 462/1 BC and the conflagration of the ‘First Peloponnesian War’ demonstrates the pervasive role of a partial culminating point on its historical narrative. Thucydides’s decision to present the events of the Pentecontaetia in order to elucidate the causes of ‘his’ war shapes his account of the relations between the two Persian War allies as a teleological process of escalating crisis.

However, the subsequent hostility between the two cities shaped not only the narrator’s perspective, but also the Athenian civic memory and, in particular, some of the oral traditions that Thucydides reworked when recounting how Athens and Sparta moved from *philia* and *symmachia* (friendship and alliance) against the Persians to open conflict. These traditions underpin the narrative of the reconstruction of the walls of Athens following their destruction by the Persians,³ the Spartan accusations against Themistokles and his condemnation and subsequent flight to Persia,⁴ as well as some details of the events leading to the Athenians being dismissed from the siege of Ithome.⁵

The historiographical analysis presented in this chapter forms part of a broader project on the transition of hegemony from Sparta to Athens and on relations between the two cities after the formation of the Delian League. It asks whether this transition can truly be regarded as ‘smooth’, as Thucydides implies at 1.95.7, or whether the signs of tension found in other Thucydidean and extra-Thucydidean passages should carry greater weight. Two companion studies accompany the present one. The first focuses on Diodoros’s later account of Hetoimarias,⁶ a key text for those who argue that Sparta harboured hostility towards Athens from the outset. The second examines the Centauromachy on the west pediment of the Temple

of Zeus at Olympia, sculpted between the late 470s and 456 BC, as evidence that Sparta and Athens were not perceived as hostile towards each other at that time.

1. The Crisis between Athens and Sparta in Thucydides

Thucydides views the deterioration of relations between Sparta and Athens in the early years of the Pentecontaetia as a slow process of degeneration from *philia* to *diaphora* (quarrel).⁷ In the light of his interpretation of the dynamics of the period and the causes of the Peloponnesian War, he provides a coherent account. This account has to follow the historical sequence of events, which, objectively, did not include military conflict between Athens and Sparta for a long time. Thucydides also assumes that Sparta reacted slowly to the rapid growth of Athens. Thucydides expresses this very clearly in 1.118.2:

In this period the Athenians consolidated their empire and made great advances in their own independent power. The Spartans could see what was happening but made only little attempt to prevent it and were inactive for most of the time. They had never been quick to go to war without immediate compulsion, and they were to some extent hampered by wars closer to home: but now the growth of Athenian power was unmistakable, and the Athenians were making inroads on Sparta's allies. At this point, then, the Spartans could tolerate it no longer and decided that they must go on the attack with all their energies and, if possible, destroy the power of Athens by undertaking this war.⁸

The gradual deterioration of relations between the Spartans and the Athenians unfolds over five key stages:

- a. Initial *philia*, linked to the commitment and bravery of Athens and its citizens, particularly Themistokles, in their fight against the Persians: "Spartan feeling was very friendly" (προσφιλεῖς),⁹ cf. "through their friendship" (διὰ φιλίαν).¹⁰
- b. A period of covert resentment, linked to the Spartans' failure to prevent the construction of the Athenian city walls: "On hearing this the Spartans showed no open anger against the Athenians. [...] Nevertheless, without showing it, they were vexed at the failure of their plan."¹¹
- c. At the time when hegemony in the struggle against the barbarians was transferred to Athens, relations remained positive, largely because this served Sparta's own interests: "the Athenians were useful" (ἐπιτηδείους,¹² see below on this translation).
- d. Willingness to wage war against the Athenians in support of rebellious allies. Urged by the Thasians, the Spartans were now ready to invade Attika: "The Thasians [...] appealed to the Spartans and urged them to help by invading Attika. The Spartans promised to do so (this was kept secret from the Athenians) and would have done so."¹³ However, circumstances (the earthquake and the ensuing revolt) prevented them from doing so.

- e. Unable to crush the rebellion that broke out after the earthquake, the Spartans asked the Athenians for military aid. They then suddenly dismissed the Athenian allied contingent. After the Athenians had become aware of the Spartans' unjust suspicions towards them, the differences between the two sides became apparent for the first time: "This campaign led to the first open dispute between the Spartans and the Athenians."¹⁴ The ancient alliance was broken by the Athenians: true to the description of their character by Thucydides, they swiftly and decisively abandoned the *symmachia* on their return from Laconia.¹⁵

2. Thucydides and the Spartan Evaluation of the Athenians on the Foundation of the Delian League

Many current interpretations of the passage in which Thucydides describes the reasons for Sparta's acceptance of the new order brought about by the formation of the Delian League (*c* in the preceding paragraph) obscure the gradual nature of this development.¹⁶

According to Thucydides, the allies asked the Athenians to take command in place of Pausanias as they could no longer tolerate his violence. In the meantime, Pausanias was recalled to Sparta. When Dorkis and a few other Spartans arrived to take charge, they found that the allies no longer wished to grant them hegemony: "Seeing how things were, Dorkis and his colleagues left for home and the Spartans thereafter sent out no further commanders, fearing that any who did go out would become corrupted, as they had seen in the case of Pausanias. And they wanted to be rid of involvement in the Persian War. They thought the Athenians fully capable of taking the lead and believed them well disposed towards Sparta at that time."¹⁷

To understand how Thucydides describes the relations between Sparta and Athens in the Pentecontaetia, we need to focus on the meaning of the adjective *ἐπιτήδειος*. Translators mostly render it with reference to the semantic sphere of friendship;¹⁸ the Spartans would have considered the Athenians friends, or as having a friendly attitude towards Sparta – or to good relations between the two communities.¹⁹ In fact, being *ἐπιτήδειος* is a quality of a friend, a *φίλος*, and the diplomatic agreements it characterized led to cordial inter-community relations.²⁰ However, in itself *ἐπιτήδειος* indicates a proactive attitude on the part of one partner, providing an advantage for the other. To some extent this utilitarian sense is also noticeable when *ἐπιτήδειος* is used as a noun, essentially when functioning as a synonym for *φίλος*.²¹

Nonetheless, the utilitarian value of *ἐπιτήδειος* is evident, and sometimes even pronounced, in the other three passages in which Thucydides uses the adjective in the plural to describe relationships between communities or political entities, as is the case here. Once again, translators often refer generically to 'friendship', but this seems an inappropriate choice. Kleon in 3.40.3, in a speech characterized by utilitarianism,²² proposes a drastic choice regarding the communities to which generosity should be shown. This benevolence should be reserved for those who would be "loyal" and "reliable": τοὺς μέλλοντας ἐπιτηδείους καὶ τὸ λοιπὸν ἔσεσθαι.²³

In 6.46.2 Thucydides recalls the despondency of the Athenian *strategoi* heading for Sicily, having received no support from the Rhegians, who were related to the Athenians and had always been *ἐπιτηδείοις* to them in the past. Here Thucydides uses the adjective to mean that the Rhegians had not only been on friendly terms, but had also been fully cooperative with the Athenians.²⁴ The text at 8.46.3 is particularly significant as it is here that Alkibiades explains to Tissaphernes why the Athenians would be “more convenient” to the king than the Spartans as “partners of empire” (*ἐπιτηδαιοτέρους* [...] ἔφη τοὺς Ἀθηναίους εἶναι κοινωνοὺς αὐτῷ τῆς ἀρχῆς).²⁵

The idea of acting in someone else’s interests, a characteristic of *ἐπιτήδειος*,²⁶ also appears in other passages referring to relations between communities. In a well-known passage, the adverb *ἐπιτηδείως* describes how Sparta ensured that its allies were governed by loyal oligarchic regimes willing to cooperate (*κατ’ὀλιγαρχίαν δὲ σφίσιν αὐτοῖς μόνον ἐπιτηδείως ὅπως πολιτεύσουσι θεραπεύοντες*).²⁷ Similarly, the oligarchy established in Argos in 418 is *ἐπιτηδεῖα* τοῖς Λακεδαιμονίοις, “suitable” to the Lakedaimonians, i.e., “in the interest of the Lacedaemonians”, as Jowett translates.²⁸

In conclusion, *ἐπιτηδείοις* in 1.95.7 defines Spartan judgement of the Athenians in relation to its usefulness for their own decisions and interests. Before the incident of the walls, however, Thucydides attributes to the Spartans true feelings of friendship inspired by the enthusiasm with which the Athenians faced the common enemy in the war against the Persians (thus in 1.91.1, *φιλία*, and explicitly in 1.92, *προσφιλεῖς* [...] διὰ τὴν ἐς τὸν Μῆδον προθυμίαν). The proposed interpretation of *ἐπιτηδείοις* in 1.95.7 allows us to place the aforementioned passage within Thucydides’s perspective of continuing deteriorating relations. This deterioration began with the episode of the walls and the ensuing covert animosity (*ὀργὴν μὲν φανεράν οὐκ ἐποιοῦντο τοῖς Ἀθηναίοις, [...] τῆς μέντοι βουλήσεως ἀμαρτάνοντες ἀδήλως ἤχθοντο*).²⁹ Despite these worsening feelings, according to Thucydides, a rational calculation of the benefits involved led the Spartans to accept the new role of Athens as *hegemon* of the allies in the Aegean.

3. The Athenian Oral Tradition

This section analyses three passages from Thucydides in which the bias of the Athenian local tradition is most apparent. These oral narratives depict Sparta as being radically hostile towards Athens from the outset. Two of these passages feature Themistokles as the protagonist: the account of the construction of the walls of Athens³⁰ and the *excursus* dedicated to Themistokles and Pausanias.³¹ A comprehensive examination of the tradition concerning Themistokles in Thucydides is thus necessary in order to highlight a pivotal factor in the formation of popular traditions, namely that some Athenians were convinced that the accusations Sparta made against Themistokles were unfounded. It is also important to clarify how Thucydides reworks these traditions.³² Finally, we will examine the third Thucydidean passage: the account of the secret agreement between the rebellious Thasians and Sparta on the eve of the great earthquake of 464 BC.³³

3.a *The Construction of the Walls of Athens*

In this episode, the Spartans sent envoys to Athens to prevent the rebuilding of the city's fortifications, which had been destroyed by the Persians. Relations between the two cities were positive for the time being,³⁴ but the allies urged on the Spartans out of fear of the Athenians. The Spartans themselves considered it to be in their general interest for the cities to remain unwalled. However, Themistokles left instructions to the Athenians, travelled to Sparta and, through a clever delaying tactic, ensured that construction continued and that the walls reached a sufficient height for the city's defence.³⁵ Thus, through Themistokles's advice and cunning, the Athenians presented Sparta with a *fait accompli*.³⁶

Current opinion on this passage is well summarized by Peter J. Rhodes: "The details may well be embroidered, but we need not doubt that Sparta tried to prevent the rebuilding and was foiled by Themistokles."³⁷ However, there is no shortage of dissenting voices. Charles W. Fornara and Loren J. Samons II and, more recently, Wolfgang Blösel have adopted a more sceptical interpretation, reiterating that the account cannot be considered historically reliable.³⁸

Indeed, there are various reasons why one might not consider the tale to be a faithful account of real events. The trickster role played by Themistokles is a narrative motif of clear popular origin.³⁹ Furthermore, the idea that the Spartans were ready to wage war on Athens immediately after the Persian Wars is simply not credible.⁴⁰ Nevertheless, certain 'historical facts' evidently lie at the root of the narrative. Thanks to an enthusiastic collective effort driven not only by defensive needs but also by the symbolic value of the walls in the rebirth of the city, the work could certainly have been completed relatively quickly. However, critics have rightly questioned how plausible it is that the wall, which is estimated to have been 6,400 metres in length, could have been built so quickly.⁴¹ The tale of deception exaggerates the speed of construction beyond what is credible.⁴²

The narrative draws on material visibly reused in the walls, yet it cannot be reduced to mere aetiological fiction.⁴³ Thucydides's account, rooted as it is in folk-tale, retains many features of intentional history. Interpreting it from a memorial perspective, and considering how it was shaped, is as important as identifying the events it recounts. This approach requires examining the subject of the walls and the tradition surrounding Themistokles. Let us begin with the former.

Unsurprisingly, accounts of the reconstruction of urban fortifications had significant connotations with regard to identity. The walls symbolized the city's recovery after the devastation wrought by the Persians that had resulted in the near-total destruction of the pre-Themistoklean fortifications.⁴⁴ Traditions about city walls are inherently patriotic and they inevitably took on anti-Spartan overtones once conflict with Sparta began. In the Archidamian War in particular, the city wall, along with the Long Walls, became a tangible means of defence against the enemy. But well before that, during the First Peloponnesian War, it was suspected – and indeed quite likely – that some Athenians had invited the Spartans to intervene and overthrow the democracy at the time of the battle of Tanagra (457 BC), thereby halting the construction of the Long Walls.⁴⁵

In this context, it is useful to recall the Herodotean passages on the construction of the Isthmos wall by the Peloponnesians, as in many ways it provides a similar instructive case. The fortification had a central role in the events of the battle of Salamis, particularly concerning the strategic decisions made by the Greeks, with Themistokles once again playing a leading role.⁴⁶ The Herodotean account allows us to determine how long it took to build a fortification that, according to Diodoros,⁴⁷ was 40 stadia long (ca. 7.5 km). Construction of the wall at the Isthmos would have begun upon receiving the news of the defeat at Thermopylai in October 480 BC,⁴⁸ and work would have been ongoing between June and July 479 BC, despite the efforts of “several tens of thousands” of Peloponnesians.⁴⁹ While the precise start and finishing times might have been influenced by ancient controversies (see below), the overall timescale for the building of the fortification seems plausible and it does not corroborate Thucydides’s account of the rapid erection of the walls of Athens.

The episode, as narrated by Herodotus from an Athenian perspective, has two notable connotations. First, the Athenians were disappointed to learn that their Peloponnesian allies did not advance into Boiotia after Thermopylai to face the Persian enemy; instead, they remained at the Isthmos, intent on fortifying the entrance to the Peloponnese and disregarding their fellow Greeks beyond.⁵⁰ The sudden start of construction work after the defeat at Thermopylai, combined with the large number of men involved, highlighted the selfishness of the allies.

Even more interestingly, Herodotus records that immediately before the battle of Plataiai the Spartans delayed their departure to allow time for the completion of the Isthmos wall.⁵¹ Once again, the episode conveys the resentment of the Athenians towards the Lakedaimonians. Herodotus attributes words of protest to the Athenian envoys who went to Sparta: the Spartans were showing that they no longer cared about the Athenians now that they felt safe behind the fortification on the Isthmos of Corinth.⁵² Herodotus then states his own opinion that the Spartans had been slow to intervene on behalf of Athens as they were waiting for the Isthmos walls to be completed.⁵³ He thus echoes widespread opinions and suspicions in Athens about the actions of the Peloponnesians, particularly the Spartans, on the eve of Plataiai and the delay that allowed Mardonios to destroy Athens completely.⁵⁴

One might question the historical accuracy of a narrative claiming that the work at the Isthmos was completed – with suspiciously perfect timing – on the eve of the battle of Plataiai. On the other hand, the parallel between the Spartans’ attempt to delay their departure to finish the work and the episode of the walls of Athens is striking. In Athens, it was believed that the Spartans had bought time to build the Isthmos walls, bringing the city to near destruction. Similarly, thanks to Themistokles, the Athenians had bought time to construct their own walls. Both episodes, recounted by Herodotus and Thucydides, stem from the Athenian oral tradition and are fuelled by animosity towards Sparta, with Thucydides’s account portraying Themistokles as repaying the Spartans and Peloponnesians in their own coin. These tales may have been elaborated well before the Archidamian War, during the First Peloponnesian War.⁵⁵

3.b Themistokles: The Walls, the Spartan Accusations and the Flight to Persia

Thucydides devotes a long excursus to Themistokles following the Spartan demand that Athens expel the descendants of the Kylonian conspirators.⁵⁶

Themistokles was a highly controversial figure, as Herodotus's vivid portrait shows.⁵⁷ Known early on for his greed, he was later ostracized and eventually accused of medism, being driven into exile – the charge seemingly confirmed by his flight to Asia and the favour he received from the Persian king.⁵⁸ His disrepute endured even after death: some claimed he took his own life when unable to fulfil his promise to subjugate Greece.⁵⁹ His greed, moreover, made him a convenient emblem of imperial Athens.⁶⁰

Thucydides's digression on Pausanias and Themistokles is triggered by the Spartans' attempt to discredit Perikles, or even have him exiled, by urging the Athenians to expel those responsible for the Kylonian *agos*.⁶¹ The Athenians replied by demanding equal punishment for those guilty of sacrilege at Tainaron and Chalkioikos. At this point Thucydides turns to the story of the regent Pausanias and the *agos* of Chalkioikos.⁶² From Pausanias he passes to Themistokles, whom the Spartans accused of conspiring with him.⁶³ The two figures are set in implicit contrast: Pausanias appears as a genuine supporter of the Great King, while Themistokles is declared innocent. Neither at Salamis nor in the episode of the bridges over the Hellespont had he ever intended to aid Xerxes, but he deceived Artaxerxes by claiming fictitious services to his father. Thucydides acknowledges the tradition that presented his death as the suicide of a failed traitor, but he firmly rejects it, insisting instead that the victor of Salamis died of natural disease.⁶⁴ His account thus suggests that, on the eve of war, Athens foiled Sparta's manoeuvre and avoided repeating its earlier mistake with Themistokles. According to Thucydides, Themistokles's political acumen, characterized by foresight and improvisation, prefigures that of Perikles.⁶⁵

The form and structure of this biographical diptych have long been the subject of scholarly debate.⁶⁶ Beyond the evident connection between Thucydides and Herodotus, any inquiry into the Themistokles tradition in the fifth century must grapple with lost works and fragmentary allusions, so conclusions remain largely speculative.⁶⁷ Scholars have suggested links between Thucydides's portrayal and those of Stesimbrotos of Thasos or Charon of Lampsakos.⁶⁸ Yet public discussion at the time was surely broader, involving many voices beyond intellectual circles and generating multiple narratives. Written accounts themselves were closely connected with oral versions, on which they partly depended. Thucydides's style, marked by Herodotean forms and vocabulary, reflects both this oral background and his deliberate aim to present his work as a continuation – and a correction – of his predecessor.⁶⁹

One thing is clear: Thucydides portrays Themistokles as an entirely positive figure. In chapters 1.135.2–138, he appears both an innocent victim of Spartan plots and a man of remarkable cunning, able to outwit Spartans and Athenians while preserving his moral standing with the Persian king. Likewise, the account of the walls presents a clever, patriotic Themistokles defending Athens from Sparta.⁷⁰ These

personal, anecdotal and strongly pro-Athenian passages draw on well-formed oral traditions.

The episode of the walls and the story of Themistokles's escape to Persia were both underpinned by a reinterpretation of his character that gradually developed and consolidated in Athens during the fifth century. However, this was not the only possible evaluation of Themistokles in the city, let alone across Greece as a whole. Themistokles's rehabilitation was based on the Athenians' conviction that Spartan accusations were false and slanderous, and that they had accepted them too hastily given Themistokles's innocence.⁷¹ Undoubtedly, the call to expel the Kylonians, and the historical and political considerations that arose from it, reinforced the positive image of Themistokles. Nevertheless, doubts about Themistokles's guilt probably began to surface very early on, following the events that led to the rupture and subsequent clash between Sparta and Athens in the late 460s.⁷²

The belief that Themistokles was a patriot and not a Medizer was born out of hostility towards Sparta. Therefore, one might question whether the stories that depict Themistokles as a staunch opponent of Sparta are a product of Athenian culture in the mid-fifth century and its later echoes.⁷³ Consequently, it is also reasonable to ask if even sceptics are being overly credulous when they concede that the narrative about the city walls in Thucydides actually reflects a Spartan attempt to dissuade Athens from constructing its own defences.⁷⁴ The details in Thucydides's narrative are no trivial addition to genuine recollections of historical events, and the reference to Spartan intervention and hostility does not simply arise from the need to explain why the walls were hastily built. On the contrary, the Spartan intervention itself is a fictional intentional element of the popular narrative that underlies Thucydides's account.

Nevertheless, Thucydides reworks traditional material to create a highly sophisticated narrative. In the anecdote of the walls, for instance, he revisits and builds upon certain details from Herodotus's *Histories*⁷⁵ while also reimagining the tale, drawing upon his own flair as an author (as demonstrated in Themistokles's elaborate, rhetorical speech to the Spartans).⁷⁶ When Thucydides reveals that the request not to build the walls came from the allies, he is inspired not only by Herodotus's references to Corinth and Aigina's hostility towards Athens, but also reproduces the trope that recognizes the allies' pivotal role in triggering the subsequent Peloponnesian War.⁷⁷ Furthermore, each community acts in accordance with the 'national character' that Thucydides presents and highlights. Thus, the Athenians, as is their custom, are quick to take the initiative. The allies fear Athens and urge Sparta to intervene, while the Spartans simply respond to this request. The Spartans are angry, yet they refrain from an immediate hostile reaction. They are slow to engage, as the historian repeatedly emphasizes.⁷⁸

By these means, Thucydides adapted the traditional narrative to make it more realistic and fit it into his reconstruction of the gradual development of hostilities between Sparta and Athens. For Thucydides, before this the Spartans were simply *προσφιλεῖς* towards the Athenians⁷⁹ and Themistokles had been able to gain leverage from the *φιλία* of the Spartans with him.⁸⁰ Conversely, the plot of the tale about the walls presupposes a deep rift between Sparta and Athens that already

existed. The stratagem Themistokles devised to ensure that the Spartan messengers remained in Athens,⁸¹ plus the idea that the Athenians needed to swiftly construct walls high enough to defend themselves against a potential Spartan attack,⁸² both presuppose serious hostility.⁸³ Those who devised the story imagined that Sparta might want to wage war on Athens – a notion that was certainly at odds with Thucydides's view of the relationship between the two cities at that time.⁸⁴ The way Thucydides describes the Spartans' feelings after being deceived by Themistokles is – and could we expect anything else? – detailed and also characterized by what is left unsaid:

On hearing this the Spartans showed no open anger against the Athenians. The ostensible purpose of their original embassy had not been to limit Athens, but to suggest a policy for the common good: and besides they were then on particularly friendly terms in view of the Athenians' determined stand against the Persians. Nevertheless, without showing it, they were vexed at the failure of their plan.⁸⁵

Despite his tendency to criticize these popular accounts elsewhere (e.g. the case of the tyrannicides),⁸⁶ Thucydides lent credence to the Athenians' story about Themistokles, the Spartans and the walls. His willingness to accept the story was certainly influenced by his intellectual pride: he had the possibility – partly illusory – of ascertaining the truthfulness of the tale by examining the walls and so demonstrating his own acumen.⁸⁷ Additionally, an ancient, serious incident helped to explain the reasons for the gradual estrangement between the two cities. Furthermore, the missed opportunity to thwart the growth of Athens's power was consistent with the historian's idea that the Spartans had been unable to oppose their rivals' growth sufficiently.

Thucydides thus achieved a compromise between the narrative that circulated in Athens and the actual facts (that the city walls were built and Sparta did not wage war on Athens), laying the foundations for his own reconstructive scheme.⁸⁸ From this moment, resentment begins to simmer and relations between the two cities gradually begin to deteriorate.⁸⁹

3.c The Duplicitous Spartans: The Thasian Connection

Another section of the excursus on Pentecontaetia is also heavily influenced by Athenian oral tradition. During their revolt against Athens, the Thasians reportedly asked the Spartans for support with an invasion of Attika. The Spartans had secretly agreed and were preparing to act when an earthquake occurred followed by a revolt by some of the *perioikoi* and helots of Messenia.⁹⁰ While the traditional view is that this information is reliable,⁹¹ it is now greeted by many with justified scepticism.⁹² When besieging Ithome, the Spartans appealed to the Athenians in the hope that they would live up to their reputation for sieges. As the results fell short of expectations, the Spartans became suspicious of the Athenians and feared that they would be drawn into sedition by the besieged.⁹³ Suspicion is a central theme

of this passage: the Spartans are suspicious of the Athenians⁹⁴ and the Athenians resent having their loyalty called into question.⁹⁵ The Athenians angrily abandoned the alliance established against Persia: “This campaign led to the first open dispute between the Spartans and the Athenians.”⁹⁶ Are we wrong to consider that the rumours about Sparta’s support of the Thasians were the result of Athenian resentment? A suspicion fuelled by feelings of Spartan duplicity and ingratitude, which in turn backs up this idea?

The episode involving the promise to help the Thasians shows the same anti-Spartan traits found in Thucydides’s stories about Themistokles. This narrative must have originated in Athens shortly after the events it describes, when the Athenians were reconsidering their relationship with the Spartans after being dismissed from Ithome. Sparta did indeed later support rebellious allies of Athens, but the contemporaneity of the revolts of the Thasians and the Messenians – which made Sparta’s promise to the Thasians and the request for help to the Athenians almost simultaneous, thus highlighting Spartan duplicity – would have been difficult to establish.⁹⁷ Thucydides drew on this evidence of Sparta’s difficulties in opposing Athens once again. He was well aware of how important victory over Thasos was for Athenian power to grow. In this case, however, the slowness of the Spartan reaction was not the product of ‘national character’ but of circumstance and chance factors.⁹⁸ Nevertheless, the result was the same. Despite being determined to oppose the Athenians, the Spartans did not act and allowed Athenian power to grow. This popular rumour fits in well with Thucydides’s overall account of the Pentecontaetia.

4. Concluding Remarks

Thucydides presents the transition from Sparta’s hegemony within the Hellenic League to the formation of the Delian League as a smooth process, emphasizing Sparta’s misguided pragmatism. Herodotus was not concerned with Sparta’s reaction, although he put greater emphasis on the opportunism of the Athenians.⁹⁹ The later tradition is divided: some sources echo Thucydides’s description,¹⁰⁰ while others paint a very different picture.

The *Athenaion Politeia* notes that the Athenians seized hegemony ἀκόντων Λακεδαιμονίων, “against the wishes of the Lacedaemonians”.¹⁰¹ The doubts raised about the text of the papyrus or its significance are unfounded: the *Politeia*’s reconstruction of events contrasts with Thucydides’s version.¹⁰² However, it is unclear how the author of the *Constitution* conceived the resentment or opposition of Sparta and what his different reconstruction is.

A more detailed account can be found in a famous passage from Diodoros, which is currently, and correctly, believed to be based on Ephoros’s work.¹⁰³ Diodoros stages a debate in the Spartan assembly of 475/4 BC. The Spartans seemed determined to wage war on Athens in order to regain naval hegemony, and it was hard to imagine anyone dissenting. However, Hetoimaridas, an otherwise unknown *geron*, delivered a speech full of well-founded arguments that saved Greece from the

conflict – for the time being. Opinions are divided on this account. Some regard it as preserving a genuine record of events and discussions that took place in Sparta, while others are more cautious.¹⁰⁴ In one of the companion studies already mentioned, I will examine the grounds for interpreting this narrative as a reworking and dramatization of the Thucydidean version, viewed through the lens of a typically fourth-century historiographical perspective.

Even those who doubt the accuracy of Diodoros's account in 11.50 believe that "it is nearer to the atmosphere of the time than Thucydides' version".¹⁰⁵ It is evident that the accounts of Herodotus, Thucydides and later sources make it hard to ascertain the nature of the relationship between Sparta and Athens during the period between the formation of the Delian League and the turning point marked by the ostracism of Kimon and the dissolution of the alliance with Sparta around 462/1 BC.

Nevertheless, the present reassessment of the most significant source on this subject, Thucydides's narrative, has thrown light on this intricate issue. Thucydides depicts the rupture between Athens and Sparta as the outcome of a crisis between the two communities.

Some Athenian traditions, influenced by subsequent conflicts and characterized by hostility towards the Spartans, contribute to the crisis narrative in a decisive way. According to Athenian anecdotal tales, the Lakedaimonians acted against Athens driven by jealousy and rancour. Thucydides retains clear traces of these traditions in the episodes of the construction of the walls following the Persian retreat,¹⁰⁶ the Spartan accusations against Themistokles which resulted in his condemnation and exile to Persia¹⁰⁷ and the Spartan promise to the Thasians shortly before calling for Athenian assistance during the siege of Ithome.¹⁰⁸

In Thucydides's account of the Sparta–Athens crisis, two lines of force intersect. Thucydides conceives the crisis as a process. According to Athenian local tradition, on the contrary, the Spartans were inclined to wage war on Athens from the outset. Thucydides, however, manages to incorporate these local accounts into a coherent narrative of a gradual process. In his version, first the 'sentiments' that inspire the typically slow-to-act Spartans evolve from sincere *philia* to covert irritation; their attitudes then change according to circumstances. Initially, the Spartans accept Athens's hegemonic position in the struggle against the barbarians with expediency, but this gives way to a willingness to act against Athens on the Thasians' request. Only chance prevents the Spartans from making war on Athens, and they do ask the Athenians for help in their hour of need. The Spartans' deceitful and opportunistic behaviour is accompanied by a lack of respect for their allies' honour, loyalty and bravery. This disrespect for the Athenians finally leads the latter to formally declare the old alliance forfeit.

Thucydides's account is crucial to the argument that the beginning of the Pentecontaetia was akin to a cold war. However, the historical accuracy of the oral accounts he referred to is questionable. The idea that Sparta was ready to attack Athens after the capture of Sestos, as implied in the anecdote of the walls, is simply implausible. It cannot even be taken for granted that the Spartans asked the Athenians not to rebuild the city walls. The story of the promise made to

the Thasians is most likely a malicious rumour caused by Athenian resentment. Conversely, there is no doubt that the Spartans accused Themistokles of being Pausanias's accomplice in medism. The accusation was probably unfounded, and the idea that the Spartan accusations were of malicious intent was later decisive in establishing the 'innocentist' tradition regarding Themistokles's flight and exile to Asia, as well as in creating those narratives portraying him as a staunch opponent of Sparta, beginning with the story of the walls. Sparta wanted to diminish the prestige of Athens. The object of this rivalry was the symbolic capital gained in the war against the barbarians. The betrayal of Pausanias, coupled with Athens's engagement in the conflict, threatened to rob Sparta of its much-desired primacy in this respect.

However, even this episode does not suggest that relations between the two cities were tense. The Spartans did not target Athens as a whole, but a single individual – and, moreover, one already expelled by ostracism. Hostility towards the Persians remained a central concern and reference point in intercity relations. Guided by these shared ideals and trusting the Spartans, the Athenians condemned Themistokles and joined Sparta in pursuing him as a traitor to the common cause of the Hellenes.¹⁰⁹

Inevitably, Greek views on the conflict with Persia focused on Sparta and Athens. In one of the companion studies already mentioned, the present author will examine the west pediment of the Temple of Zeus at Olympia as possible evidence for these views. The Eleian patrons selected for this pediment a theme that was especially prominent in fifth-century Athenian figurative art and deeply embedded in Attic mythology. The Centauromachy of Theseus and the Lapiths, with Apollo of Delos prominently leading the heroes against the barbaric centaurs, most likely alluded to the war waged by the Athenians and their Delian League allies against the Persians. For the Eleians, this theme evidently suited the Panhellenic character of their sanctuary and festivals: the Delio-Attic alliance simply stood for 'the Greeks', while the gods were shown guiding the Greeks along the path of justice.

Indeed, all the data collected converge in a single direction, which accords with Thucydides's explicit comment on the events at Ithome: "This campaign led to the first open dispute between the Spartans and the Athenians."¹¹⁰ Until the incident at Ithome, the vast majority of Greeks were unaware of any significant disagreement between the two cities. One might wonder how accurate the perception of the Greeks was and how much discord was actually smouldering beneath the surface.

By way of conclusion, both the results and the interpretive perspective developed here can be briefly restated. The refusal of the new allies from the Aegean Islands and Asia Minor to accept Spartan leadership undoubtedly created conditions for a crisis. The alliance could also have disintegrated. The formation of the Delian League shows that the allies were able to establish a new form of collaboration. However, the shift in leadership from Sparta to Athens might have led to new tensions. With a touch of hindsight and some cynicism, we tend to suppose an early rivalry between Sparta and Athens, a view reinforced by Thucydides's account of their post-Persian War relationship. As we have noted, two explanatory strands converge in his narrative. He conceives this relationship as undergoing

progressive deterioration, whereas Athenian local tradition insists that the Spartans were bent on war from the very outset. With deliberate skill, Thucydides weaves these traditions into a coherent story of progressive escalation that culminates in the Athenians repudiating the old alliance in response to Spartan disrespect. By framing events as a ‘crisis’, however, Thucydides reprojects the tensions between the two cities. There were many reasons that made the allies resilient in times of emergency, and they cannot all be explored here. However, the most significant reason should be stressed. In the 470s and 460s BC, Panhellenic solidarity was still very much alive and may have been stronger than the rivalry between the two communities.

On Ithome, lightning flashed in a clear sky – much as it does today across the Atlantic, unexpectedly rumbling above the Allies on Europe’s shores.

Notes

- 1 On the concept of κρίσις and its modern adoption, see Koselleck’s seminal work (1982), Goeze and Strobel 2012; Fink and Rollinger 2023 and the introduction to the volume.
- 2 Grethlein (2013, 2014) lays particular emphasis on the end point of a historical narrative in shaping historiographical discourse.
- 3 Thuc. 1.90–93.2.
- 4 Thuc. 1.135.2–138.
- 5 Thuc. 1.102.
- 6 Diod. 11.50; Nafissi 2026.
- 7 See also the speech of the Athenians at Sparta: ὅμων τε ἡμῖν οὐκέτι ὁμοίως φίλων, ἀλλ’ ὑπόπτων καὶ διαφόρων ὄντων – “You were no longer our friends as you once were, but suspicious and hostile” (Thuc. 1.75.4, transl. Hammond 2009).
- 8 ἐν οἷς οἱ Ἀθηναῖοι τὴν τε ἀρχὴν ἐγκρατεστέραν κατεστήσαντο καὶ αὐτοὶ ἐπὶ μέγα ἐχώρησαν δυνάμεως, οἱ δὲ Λακεδαιμόνιοι αἰσθόμενοι οὔτε ἐκώλυνον εἰ μὴ ἐπὶ βραχύ, ἡσύχαζόν τε τὸ πλεόν τοῦ χρόνου, ὄντες μὲν καὶ πρὸ τοῦ μὴ ταχεῖς ἰέναι ἐς τοὺς πολέμους, ἦν μὴ ἀναγκάζωνται, τὸ δὲ τι καὶ πολέμοις οἰκεῖοις ἐξειργόμενοι, πρὶν δὴ ἡ δύναμις τῶν Ἀθηναίων σαφὲς ἦρετο καὶ τῆς ξυμμαχίας αὐτῶν ἦπτοντο. τότε δὲ οὐκέτι ἀνασχετὸν ἐποιοῦντο, ἀλλ’ ἐπιχειρητέα ἐδόκει εἶναι πάσῃ προθυμίᾳ καὶ καθαιρετέα ἡ ἰσχὺς, ἣν δύνωνται, ἀραμένοις τόνδε τὸν πόλεμον.
- 9 Thuc. 1.92.
- 10 Thuc. 1.91.1.
- 11 Thuc. 1.92: ὀργὴν μὲν φανεράν οὐκ ἐποιοῦντο τοῖς Ἀθηναίοις [...], τῆς μέντοι βουλῆσεως ἀμαρτάνοντες ἀδήλως ἤχθοντο.
- 12 Thuc. 1.95.7.
- 13 Thuc. 1.101.1–2: Θάσιοι [...] Λακεδαιμονίους ἐπεκαλοῦντο καὶ ἐπαμύνειν ἐκέλευον ἐσβαλόντας ἐς τὴν Ἀττικὴν. οἱ δὲ ὑπέσχοντο μὲν κρύφα τῶν Ἀθηναίων καὶ ἔμελλον.
- 14 Thuc. 1.102.3: διαφορά ἐκ ταύτης τῆς στρατείας πρῶτον Λακεδαιμονίοις καὶ Ἀθηναίοις φανερά ἐγένετο.
- 15 Thuc. 102.4: εὐθὺς ἐπειδὴ ἀνεχώρησαν, ἀφέντες τὴν γενομένην ἐπὶ τῷ Μήδῳ ξυμμαχίαν πρὸς αὐτοὺς Ἀργείοις τοῖς ἐκείνων πολέμοις ξύμμαχοι ἐγένοντο (“As soon as they returned, they abandoned the alliance with Sparta first made against the Persians and allied themselves with Argos, the enemy of Sparta.”).
- 16 Thuc. 1.95.7. Hornblower (1997: 143, *ad* 1.95.7) notes the contradiction with the ‘anger’ and ‘annoyance’ that Thucydides attributes to the Spartans in 1.92.
- 17 Thuc. 1.95.6–7: καὶ ἐκεῖνον μὲν οὐκέτι ἐκπέμπουσιν ἄρχοντα, Δόρκιν δὲ καὶ ἄλλους τινὰς μετ’ αὐτοῦ στρατιὰν ἔχοντας οὐ πολλήν· οἷς οὐκέτι ἐφίεσαν οἱ ξύμμαχοι τὴν

- ἡγεμονίαν. οἱ δὲ αἰσθόμενοι ἀπῆλθον, καὶ ἄλλους οὐκέτι ὕστερον ἐξέπεμψαν οἱ Λακεδαιμόνιοι, φοβούμενοι μὴ σφίσιν οἱ ἐξιόντες χεῖρους γίνωνται, ὅπερ καὶ ἐν τῷ Πανσανίᾳ ἐνείδον, ἀπαλλαξείοντες δὲ καὶ τοῦ Μηδικοῦ πολέμου καὶ τοὺς Ἀθηναίους νομίζοντες ἱκανοὺς ἐξηγεῖσθαι καὶ σφίσιν ἐν τῷ τότε παρόντι ἐπιτηδείους.
- 18 “Friends” (Jowett 1881; Hornblower 1997: 143 ad loc.); “amici” (Donini 1982; Ferrari 1985); “amigos” (Torres Esbarranch 1990), “close friends” (Lattimore 1988); “friendly to themselves” (Smith 1919; Warner 1954; Rhodes 2014); “eine ... befreundete Macht” (Weissenberger 2017).
 - 19 “Buoni ... rapporti” (Sgroj 1942; Moggi 1984); “en bonnes termes” (de Romilly et al. 1958–1972); “favorevoli” (Canfora 1996); “well disposed” (Hammond 2009).
 - 20 The Melians propose to agree on a peace treaty on terms that are ἐπιτήδαιοι to both sides in order to be φίλοι of the Athenians (Thuc. 5.112.3); Nikias is ἐπιτηδεύτατος for his commitment to free the prisoners of Sphakteria, and therefore the Spartans are προσφιλεῖς towards him (7.86.3–4).
 - 21 Konstan 1997: 64: “As a noun, it is often little more than a synonym of *philos* [e.g. Lys. 1.22; Demosth. 35.6, 36.1; Isocr. *Antid.* 19.102], but it preserves the sense of advantageousness or serviceability which is basic to the adjective”: cf. Liddell, Scott and Jones s.v. ἐπιτήδειος I (“made for an end or purpose, fit or adapted for it, suitable, convenient”); Ernstman 1932: 52–75.
 - 22 Thuc. 3.40. See Arist. *Rh.* 1358b21–28, and Barbato 2020: 69–76. Note, however, with respect to what is observed in Barbato 2020: 70, that Diodotos does not merely state that Kleon’s speech risks appearing convincing because it is inspired by the principle of punishing the guilty (Thuc. 3.44.4), but also that what Kleon claims is advantageous is not advantageous (Thuc. 3.44.3).
 - 23 When translating ἐπιτήδειους, most refer to friendship (Jowett 1881; Finley 1951; Warner 1954; Torres Esbarranch 1990; Hammond 2009) or a friendly relationship (Donini 1982; Lattimore 1988), while others refer to loyalty (Cagnetta in Canfora 1996; Weissenberger 2017), reliability (de Romilly, Weil and Bodin 1958–1972) and fidelity (Smith 1919; Cagnetta in Canfora 1996; Ferrari 1985).
 - 24 Here too, the translators describe the Rhegians’ behaviour towards Athens with reference to friendship (Finley 1951; Donini 1982; Torres Esbarranch 1990; Ferrari 1985) or to a friendly relationship (Smith 1919; Corcella in Canfora 1996; Hammond 2009; Lattimore 1988; Weissenberger 2017, cf. Gomme et al. 1945–1981: IV 312 ad loc.). Rather similar is “on good terms with Athens” (Warner 1954). Other translations are more pragmatic: “had always hitherto been in the Athenian interest” (Jowett 1881); Bodin and de Romilly emphasize the imbalance between the Athenians and the Rhegians, who “avaient toujours été dévoués à Athènes”; Pelling 2022: 209, refers to the “supportive record” of the Rhegians.
 - 25 Here, the translators naturally refrain from opting for “friendship”: they generally emphasize the advantages and usefulness of the partnership (e.g. de Romilly et al. 1958–1972; Warner 1954; Ferrari 1985), often describing it as ‘suitable’ (e.g. Jowett 1881; Smith 1919; Lattimore 1988; Hammond 2009; cf. Weissenberger 2017) or ‘convenient’ (e.g. Finley 1951; Hornblower 2008: 889–90, ad loc.; in other languages Donini 1982; Torres Esbarranch 1990).
 - 26 A significant example is found in 8.47.1, where Alkibiades seeks to demonstrate that Tissaphernes is ἐπιτήδειος to him, meaning familiar enough to support his plans. ἐπιτήδειος or ἐπιτήδαιοι often designate those who favour another community: in some cases, they are considered to be well disposed towards the enemy (Thuc. 2.18.3, 5.44.3, 76.2, 6.64.2, 7.86.3), and in extreme instances they form factions or betray their own community (Thuc. 4.78.1, 113.3, 5.64.1, 7.73.3, 8.48.2). This use reflects the willingness of those who are ἐπιτήδαιοι to collaborate actively. Even in the case of relations between friendly communities, Aristeus of Corinth is defined as αἰεὶ ποτε ἐπιτήδειος to the Potidaeans, reflecting the actions he carries out in their interest (1.60.2).
 - 27 Thuc. 1.19.1.

- 28 Thuc. 5.81.2.
- 29 Thuc. 1.92.
- 30 Thuc. 1.90–3, cf. Section 1.3a above..
- 31 Thuc. 1.135.2–138.
- 32 Cf. Section 1.3b above.
- 33 Thuc. 1.101.1–2, cf. Section 1.3c above.
- 34 Thuc. 1.90.1–2.
- 35 Thuc. 1.90.3–92.
- 36 Fantasia 2008: 126–8, who stresses the “anecdotal” nature of the episode of the walls recalling the tendency to consider it unreliable (cf. n. 3), has offered an excellent commentary on Thucydides’s account, highlighting the compromise that Thucydides reached with the “historical memory” of the Athenians; here we will explore the assumptions of that “historical memory”.
- 37 Rhodes 2014: 242 at 1.90.3.
- 38 Fornara and Samons 1991: 118–21 provides an illuminating critical commentary; Blösel 2012: 218. Beloch 1893–1904: I 458 n. 2 (1912–1927 II.2²: 152–3) and later Stern (1904) recognized here the naive transfer of Peloponnesian War–age contrasts; immediately, in response, Busolt (1905) and, with more subtlety, Meyer (1905), defended the substantial historicity of the events narrated by Thucydides, as did Gomme (1945–1981: 1267–70 *ad* 1.93.8); for other scholars along these lines, see Fornara and Samons 1991: 119 n. 18. More recently, see Lendon 2010: 47–8 and Di Cesare’s even-handed review (2015: 40–1).
- 39 Murray 2001: 30. On the oral nature of the account taken from Thucydides, see Westlake 1955: 59–60; Thomas 1989: 285; Tsakmakis 1995a: 118–19.
- 40 This point is strongly underlined by Fornara and Samons 1991: 119–20 n. 18.
- 41 Theocharakis 2020: 227. On the Themistoklean walls in brief, see Di Cesare 2015: 37–42; Theocharakis 2020: 23–5 and *passim*.
- 42 From Thucydides’s account it does not appear that work had seriously begun before Themistokles’s departure. The usual comparison is made with the construction of the 300 stadia of the Epipole ordered by Dionysius I, which according to Diodorus (14.18) was accomplished in twenty days with a gigantic effort in terms of men and means (Mertens 1999: 146–9). According to Thucydides, the construction of the long walls at Argos also required exceptional effort that involved women and experienced personnel from friendly cities (5.82.6): begun in the summer of 417, it was interrupted by the Spartans the following winter (5.83.2). It is unclear if the walls of Messene were built in eighty-five days, as is usually inferred from Diod. 15.67.1 (Muth 2014: 108–10: note Nino Luraghi’s suggestion about how the passage should be interpreted). The fortification of the Isthmos recounted by Herodotus can also be adduced as a comparable example (cf. below).
- 43 Many highlight the aetiological character of the story: this is already partly seen by Beloch 1893–1904: I 458 n. 2, and, more recently, Fornara and Samons 1991: 119; Blösel 2012: 219–21.
- 44 Hdt. 9.13.2; Thuc. 1.89.3. Thucydides considered the destruction less radical: on the difference between the two descriptions, see Ferrucci 2020. Pre-Themistoklean fortifications will not be discussed here: cf. Di Cesare 2015: 38–9; Page 2021: 129–30.
- 45 Thuc. 1.107.4 and 6. Badian 1993: 213 n. 50 again raises doubts about this event but is probably mistaken given the upheavals of the period that also counted Ephialtes among the victims: see Mitchell 2022: 246.
- 46 The Peloponnesians are not concerned with defending Thespiiai, Plataia, Athens and Attika, but only the Peloponnese (Hdt. 8.40.2), and they intend to give battle at sea near the Isthmos (Hdt. 8.49.2); on the strategic alternative between Isthmos and Salamis there is a clash in the night council (8.57–63); when then the decision made on Themistokles’s advice to fight at Salamis is about to be abandoned (Hdt. 8.74, cf. 79.2),

- a stratagem by Themistokles himself induces the Persians to give battle. As Herodotus (7.139.3–4) explicitly states and as is implied by the words attributed to Chيلةus of Tegea (9.9.2) and Demaratos (7.235.4), the wall on the Isthmos would have been useless without Athenian naval support.
- 47 Diod. 11.16.3.
 - 48 Hdt. 8.40.2, 71.1.
 - 49 Hdt. 8.71.2. Flower and Marincola 2002: 110–11; Asheri et al. 2006: 183 both at 9.7.1.
 - 50 Hdt. 8.40.2.
 - 51 Hdt. 9.6–8.
 - 52 Hdt. 9.7. In an unpublished study, Lewis notes the analogy with the Spartan embassy regarding the construction of the walls of Athens. Cf. Hornblower 1992: 141 n. 1, 1997: 136 ad 1.90.1.
 - 53 Hdt. 9.8.
 - 54 Hdt. 9.13.2. Cf. above n. 44. The Athenians in Sparta will boast of their loyalty to the Hellenic cause at that juncture, and the lack of resentment shown (Thuc. 1.74.2). This evidently implies that reasons for resentment existed, as Hornblower (1997: 119 ad loc.) rightly points out.
 - 55 Proietti (2021: 366–437) highlights the importance of this phase for the development of hostility between Athens and Sparta.
 - 56 Thuc. 1.135.2–138. Elsewhere Thucydides mentions Themistokles’s building of the fleet (1.14.3), his merits at Salamis and the honours he received in Sparta (1.74.1).
 - 57 Blösel 2004.
 - 58 Thuc. 1.138.5. Themistokles ‘received’ from the king Magnesia on the Maeander, Lampsakos and Myous (Marr 1994), and settled as a dynast in Magnesia (Nollé and Wenninger 1998–1999; Sheedy 2017).
 - 59 Thuc. 1.138.4.
 - 60 Hdt. 8.111–112 Blösel 2004: 285–320. The case of 8.4–5 is less focused on the future of imperial Athens but again portrays Themistokles as being very interested in his own gain.
 - 61 Thuc. 1.126–7.
 - 62 Thuc. 1.128–135.1.
 - 63 Thuc. 1.135.2–138.
 - 64 Thuc. 1.138.4. On Themistokles in Thucydides, see Rhodes 2006: 530–3; Blösel 2012; Jaffe 2022. Thucydides denies that Themistokles committed suicide as a medizer, although Aristophanes had already spoken of his death as a noble act (*Eq.* 80–4), and some later sources suggest that he committed suicide in order to save Greece (Diod. 11.58.2–3, Plut. *Them.* 31.4–6).
 - 65 Tsakmakis 1995a: 139–44; Jaffe 2022: 37–40. On the overall logic of the excursus, see Tsakmakis 1995a: 145–56; Nafissi 2004a: 159–60, 177–9.
 - 66 See Nafissi 2004a: 158–9 with bibliography, and above n. 64. More recently, in addition to the bibliography cited in these notes, see Moles 2010: 30–9; Rood 2013, 119–38; Rusten 2023: 82–4; Raafflaub 2023: 109–14.
 - 67 Montana 2002: 285–99; Blösel 2004: 336–57. Timokreon provided the clearest evaluation of Themistokles (see Scodel 1983; Tsagalis 2020, 2022), but his judgement was the least significant in terms of later discussions and disagreements.
 - 68 According to Podlecki 1975: 56–8 and Carawan 1989, Thucydides’s excursus on Themistokles depends on, and indeed argues with, Stesimbrotos of Thasos. Tsakmakis 1995: 131–8 shows that this thesis is not supported by sufficient evidence (see also J. Engels, *FGrHist* 4 A.1, 1002: 55), *pace* Pownall 2020: 86. After Westlake 1977, Blösel 2004: 350–3, 2012: 226–8, as well as Parker 2005, return to attribute to Charon of Lampsakos a decisive role in how the biographical diptych emerged; see, however, the reservations of P. Ceccarelli, *BNJ* 262 *Commentary* F 11 and *Biographical Essay*.

It should be noted that Westlake (1977: 96 n. 9) refers the section on Themistokles and the walls to the Athenian oral tradition.

- 69 Patterson 1993: 145–52; Tsakmakis 1995a: 117–19, 124, 152; Munson 2012: 251–6. On the relationship between the double *excursus* and the Herodotean narrative, see Raaflaub 2023: 109–14; note that in the case of Pausanias the relationship is much less oppositional than is usually thought, as shown in Nafissi 2004b.
- 70 Thuc. 1.90–2. The similarities between the wall episode and the *excursus* are often emphasized: see Schwartz 1919, 155–6; Westlake 1955, 59–61; Fantasia 2008: 127.
- 71 Thuc. 1.135.2–3. Nafissi 2004a: 159–64.
- 72 That Themistokles's relatives played a role in promulgating the tradition about him is explicitly stated by Thuc. 1.138.6, with Hornblower 1997: 225 (on Themistokles's sons return to Athens, see Marr 1995: 161–3); what we have before us, however, is more than a family tradition. Fornara and Samons 1991: 119, on the other hand, believe that the reassessment of Themistokles may have occurred only a generation after his death at the height of the Age of Perikles.
- 73 The latter probably includes Themistokles's opposition to the Spartan proposal to expel the medizers from the Pylaeo-Delphic Amphiktyony. The only source for this event is Plut. *Them.* 20.3–4. Contrary to the prevailing view, Sánchez (2001: 98–103) has put forward compelling arguments that Plutarch's account is not historically accurate. The story is inspired by the discussions at the meeting in Samos regarding the resettlement of Greek communities from Asia Minor to the *emporía* of the medizers (Hdt. 9.106.2–3).
- 74 Thuc. 1.90–2. Fornara and Samons 1991: 121.
- 75 Blösel 2012: 217–18.
- 76 See Jaffe 2022, especially 25–30.
- 77 We will limit ourselves to mentioning the emphasis that Thucydides put on the efforts of Corinth to promote the war, with the Aiginetans acting as a prudent second line (1.67.1–2: the Athenians punished the latter severely for promoting the war in 431 bc: 2.27.1), and will not revisit the reasons for the hostility between individual communities and Athens. The Corinthians accused the Spartans (1.69.1) of allowing the Athenians to grow in strength after the Persian Wars and then build the Long Walls. This reproach also implicitly refers to the construction of the city walls (cf. Debnar 2001: 40 and n. 30). Later tradition emphasized the role of Aigina, recalling that a citizen of the island, Polyarchos, had allegedly accused Themistokles in Sparta: Plut. *Them.* 19.2 (see Carena et al. 1996: 260–1 ad loc.).
- 78 Fornara and Samons 1991: 119–20. This is made very clear in 1.118.2, which summarizes the Pentecontaetia and provides a key to its interpretation (quoted above in the text). On Thucydides's authorial commentary on the characters of the Athenians and Spartans in 8.96.5, see Connor 1984: 36–47; Luginbill 1999: 83–91, 105–33; Luginbill 2011: 33–5, 46–9, 85–8; Jaffe 2017: spec. 67–73, 106–9. For further details on Spartan slowness, which was often determined by economic and political circumstances but sometimes also by chance, see Debnar 2021.
- 79 Thuc. 1.92.1.
- 80 Thuc. 1.91.1: οἱ δὲ ἀκούοντες τῷ μὲν Θेमιστοκλεῖ ἐπέθοντο διὰ φιλίαν αὐτοῦ: the 'friendship' undoubtedly relates to Themistokles's prestige in Sparta and the honours he received there after Salamis (Hdt. 8.124.2–3), which Thucydides's Athenians also allude to in their speech in Sparta (1.74.1).
- 81 Thuc. 1.91.3.
- 82 Thuc. 1.90.3.
- 83 Some note the presupposed hostility, but do not mention the contradiction (Tsakmakis 1995a, 75 and n. 39), which Fantasia rightly highlights (2008: 127–8). The comparison with Diod. 11.39–40, which provides a simpler account, is telling. The Spartans travel to Athens unsolicited by their allies, and the Athenians treat the Spartan hostages far more aggressively and unscrupulously.

- 84 According to the oral tradition, the decision to prevent the construction of the walls must have come from the Spartans alone and was not the result of the complex interplay between allied fears and Spartan opportunism as Thucydides describes (1.90.1). In the appendix to his account of the walls of Piraeus, Thucydides once again challenges the logic of the anecdote, which clearly places great emphasis on the city walls. There, he reminds us that Themistokles recognized that Piraeus itself was more important than the city (1.93.7).
- 85 Thuc. 1.92: οἱ δὲ Λακεδαιμόνιοι ἀκούσαντες ὀργὴν μὲν φανεράν οὐκ ἐποιοῦντο τοῖς Ἀθηναίοις (οὐδὲ γὰρ ἐπὶ κωλύμῃ, ἀλλὰ γνώμῃς παραινέσει δῆθεν τῷ κοινῷ ἐπρεσβεύσαντο, ἅμα δὲ καὶ προσφιλεῖς ὄντες ἐν τῷ τότε διὰ τὴν ἐς τὸν Μῆδον προθυμίαν τὰ μάλιστα αὐτοῖς ἐτύγχανον), τῆς μέντοι βουλήσεως ἀμαρτάνοντες ἀδήλως ἤχθοντο.
- 86 Thuc. 1.20.2; 6.54–9.
- 87 Thuc. 1.93.2.
- 88 Fantasia 2008: 127–8.
- 89 Ferrario (2013: 186–9) analyses the story in realistic terms: the Spartans would ‘learn’ how dangerous the Athenians are; however, the story fundamentally remains an example of imagined, not real, history.
- 90 Thuc. 1.101.1–2.
- 91 Busolt 1893–1904: III 1, 203; Hammond 1955: 376–7; Westlake 1955: 57; Kagan 1969: 61 and n. 15; Meiggs 1972: 87; Ste. Croix 1972: 178–9 (who defends it against Sealey 1957, 369–70, attributing the promise to Spartan ‘hawks’); Steinbrecher 1985: 146–9. See later, Rood 1998: 218, 221, and, more recently, Powell 2018a: 298 (but also earlier Powell 1980: 89–90 n. 12); Rahe 2019: 93.
- 92 The list of sceptics begins with Beloch 1912–1927: II 1 149 n. 2, and includes, among others, Sealey 1976: 253; Fornara and Samons 1991: 127; Bradford 1994: 71–2; Hornblower 1997: 156 ad loc. (that Thucydides is right here is “far from certain”, Hornblower 1991: 35, 2011: 22); Lendon 2007: 266, 2010: 55 and n. 73; Fantasia 2008: 125 n. 7; Zaccarini 2017: 184–5, who provides an extensive analysis (183–98) of the affair, though he downplays its significance. Roveri 1980: 43 n. 32 lists other doubting voices. Badian 1993: 92–4, 134–6, even assumes that Thucydides was intentionally “misinforming” his readers here – a view to which Rhodes 1998: 66 rightly objects while sharing scepticism about the Spartan promise.
- 93 Zaccarini 2017: 186–90.
- 94 Thuc. 1.102.3.
- 95 Thuc. 1.102.4.
- 96 Thuc. 1.102.3: καὶ διαφορὰ ἐκ ταύτης τῆς στρατείας πρῶτον Λακεδαιμονίους καὶ Ἀθηναίους φανερὰ ἐγένετο.
- 97 A similar promise was made to the Potidaeans by the Spartan magistrates in 433/442 (Thuc. 1.58.1), and the coming invasion of Attika was announced to the revolting Mytilenians (3.25.1): these episodes could lend vigour to an older rumour. Zaccarini 2017: 185 and n. 9, also recalls Thasos’s revolt in 411, wondering if it might have been known to Thucydides when he wrote the passage.
- 98 Cf. Debnar 2021.
- 99 Hdt. 8.3.2. For a balanced assessment of the passage, see Fantasia 2008: 130–2.
- 100 Xen. *Hell.* 6.5.34, Isoc. *Paneg.* (4) 72; Plut. *Ar.* 23.7.
- 101 συνέβη γὰρ αὐτοῖς κατὰ τὸν χρόνον τοῦτον τὰ τε περὶ τὸν πόλεμον ἀσκήσαι, καὶ παρὰ τοῖς Ἑλλήσιν εὐδοκιμῆσαι, καὶ τὴν τῆς θαλάττης ἡγεμονίαν λαβεῖν, ἀκόντων Λακεδαιμονίων (23.2).
- 102 While some have proposed amending ἀκόντων ἐκόντων, εἰκόντων or <οὐκ> ἀκόντων, others have attempted to translate the text of the papyrus as “unwilling to keep the leadership” (Gomme et al. 1945–1981: I, 272 ad 1.96.1; Meritt et al. 1950: 172 n. 30; Meiggs 1972: 40; Ste. Croix 1972: 171 n. 13). However, the transmitted text should be accepted, and the lack of the object of ἀκόντων makes Gomme’s trans-

- lation implausible. See, for example, Rhodes 1981: 291–2 and Chambers 1990: 250 ad loc., as well as Fornara and Samons 1991: 121 and n. 26 and Fantasia 2008: 132 n. 47; cf. Hornblower 2011: 9.
- 103 Diod. 11.50. Even scholars who are very cautious when dealing with the subject of the Ephoros–Diodoros relationship admit that the material originates from Ephoros: see Vattuone 2008: 136, n. 13 with bibliography; Parmeggiani 2011: 334, 411–14, 454.
- 104 Suffice to mention Vattuone 2008 among the optimists and Fornara and Samons 1991: 122–4 among the sceptics.
- 105 Meiggs 1972: 40–1, quoting from 41. Hornblower 1997: 143 *ad* Thuc. 1.95.7 is confident that the Spartans were disgruntled and points out that there is a “disquieting amount of non-Thucydidean evidence for Spartan unease”.
- 106 Thuc. 1.90–93.2.
- 107 Thuc. 1.135.2–138.
- 108 Thuc. 1.102.
- 109 Thuc. 1.135.2–3.
- 110 Thuc. 1.102.3.

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4 Friends as Foes in the Delian League

Thucydides on an Alliance in Crisis

Katarina Nebelin

The Athenians did not fight for the liberty of the Hellenes, or the Hellenes for their own liberty, but the former to make their countrymen serve them instead of him [i.e., the Persian King], the latter to change one master for another.¹

This is how Hermokrates of Syracuse, in Thucydides's *History of the Peloponnesian War*, characterizes the outcome of the Delian League. The Corinthians' statements are even harsher: in their address to the Peloponnesian League they refer to Athens as *polis tyrannos*² and describe the Athenians' treatment of their allies as "slavery pure and simple".³ These statements come from Athens's enemies, who voice such accusations to incite their audience to support a war against Athens. Thus, we might expect that Thucydides, consistent with his stated intention to have speakers express what was appropriate for them in their particular situation,⁴ would place decisively negative judgements in the mouth of Athens's opponents.

The statements of Athenian representatives in Thucydides, however, do not differ from these verdicts fundamentally: according to him, they themselves described their hegemony over the members of the Delian League as a "tyranny" and frequently referred to their allies not only as "subjects" (*hypekooi*), but also as "necessary and permanent enemies".⁵ In the Melian Dialogue, the Athenian envoys even declare that they would rather be defeated by their rival Sparta than by their own allies, who might stand up against them and take revenge one day.⁶ At the same time, explanations of the benefits and advantages of Athenian hegemony and rule for their allies are notably rare in Thucydides's text. And although he presents a certain range of attitudes towards Athens's allies, all of these perspectives have one thing in common: none is favourable to the allies. Yet one might ask if they are favourable to Athens. In other words: who is to blame for the suppression and contempt directed at the allies – Athens, the allies themselves, or both? Is the politically and morally weak position of the allies simply an inherent aspect of asymmetrical alliances? Thucydides does not directly answer these questions. Having written a work that he himself describes as a "possession for all time" (*ktema es aei*),⁷ he avoids to explicitly spell out which everlasting conclusions could or should be drawn from it: "he does not offer a theory; he pushes us to think theoretically".⁸

Thucydides describes the Peloponnesian War as a period of multisectoral crises – of democracy, civic cohesion, political language and morality and, of course, of the Delian League, which was a major cause of the conflict and did not survive Athens's defeat. In Thucydides's account, the internal structure of the league both shapes and was shaped by the entire development of the Peloponnesian War: the very foundation of the league laid the groundwork for division between Athens and Sparta; Athens's treatment of its allies both provoked and legitimised the Peloponnesian League's declaration of war. Throughout the conflict, Athens's maritime empire was a main theatre of war.⁹ For the Athenians, the conflict thus became a continuous two-front war, both within and outside their alliance, as they were forced to continually suppress their allies' attempts to withdraw. And in the end, Athens's defeat in the war was directly tied to the collapse of its alliance.

On the one hand, these developments were inherent in the structure of an alliance so clearly dominated by a hegemon; on the other hand, the transformation of a military alliance (*symmachia*) into direct rule (*arche*) was actively driven and fostered by the actions of Athens and its allies.¹⁰ In the end, Thucydides states, Athens lost both the war and its allies due to internal weaknesses and strategic errors; its rule over the Delian League obviously lacked the resilience required to endure crises.¹¹ But why was this the case? The league's asymmetrical structure and internal imbalance of power had brought about ongoing tensions, mistrust, dissatisfaction and prejudices against each other. The allies thus sought to take advantage of Athens's crises in the fields of military and foreign affairs as an opportunity to free themselves from Athenian dominance. Consequently, perceptions of the Delian League's crisis as well as responses to it strongly depended on the actor's position of power: 'alliance in crisis' had very different meanings for Athens and for its allies.

Current research takes a nuanced view of Thucydides's account: Scholars debate whether the ancient author portrayed the relationship between Athens and its allies with relative accuracy or whether he presented it in an overly negative and one-sided manner.¹² To explore the range of meanings encompassed by the term 'alliance in crisis', it is thus crucial to analyze how Thucydides described the Delian League and its members. Several complementary discourse patterns can be identified: First, the claim that Athens was the 'mother city' (*metropolis*) of all Ionians (1.). Second, the notion that Athens had earned a right to rule as a consequence of its military successes in the Persian Wars (2.). This claim was, third, reinforced by the idea that the Ionians, having been Persian subjects and, in many cases, having fought against the Hellenic Alliance during the Persian Wars, forfeited their right to self-rule due to their disloyalty to their *metropolis* Athens (3.). Fourth, the relationship between Athens and other poleis, whether they were part of its *symmachia* or not, was mostly framed in terms of imperialistic power politics,¹³ particularly the assertion of a 'natural right' of the stronger to dominate the weaker (4.). The analysis of these discourse patterns is complemented by a closer examination of the perspectives of Athens's allies as portrayed by Thucydides (5.). To conclude, it is necessary to briefly discuss whether Thucydides's depictions correspond to historical reality (6.).

1. *Metropolis and Apoikia*

The idea that all the Ionian poleis of Asia Minor and the offshore islands were colonies founded by Athens can be traced back at least to the early sixth century BC.¹⁴ Although this notion cannot be regarded as historically accurate, its significance in the symbolic communication between Athens and the other Ionians has to be emphasised.¹⁵ Symbolic communication through diplomacy, cultic contacts and religiously connoted self-presentation and legitimisation enabled both sides to frame their relationship as traditional, allowing each of them to invoke their own customary privileges and the obligations of the other side: The colonies were expected to show respect and honour to their mother city, while the mother city was obliged to treat its colonies with care, generosity and support.¹⁶ The fiction of the common descent of all Ionians from Athens thus not only facilitated the intellectual understanding and acceptance of the new alliance system, but also shaped the formulation of behavioural expectations. The fact that, strictly speaking, not all members of the Delian League were Ionians – some being Aiolian and Dorian – was of little significance given the communicative advantages of the common descent narrative and was rarely, if ever, addressed.¹⁷

Thucydides makes it clear that appeals to Ionian ancestry were regarded by the Athenians as a convenient starting point and justification for their own actions.¹⁸ So, the Ionians repeatedly “resorted to the Athenians and requested them as their kinsmen to become their leaders”¹⁹ after the Spartans had demonstrated their unwillingness and inability to continue the fight against the Persians in 479 BC. And in 427 BC, envoys from the Sicilian city of Leontinoi appealed to Athens for support against Syracuse, invoking their shared Ionian ancestry.²⁰ According to Thucydides, the Athenians acknowledged the Leontinoi’s claim, but they viewed their Ionian ancestry merely as a “pretext” (*prophasis*) to “prevent the exportation of Sicilian corn to Peloponnese and to test the possibility of bringing Sicily into subjection”.²¹ Thucydides’s use of the term “pretext” does not imply that he regarded the tribal kinship as purely fictional, as his own narrative demonstrates,²² nor does it suggest that he believed the Athenians saw it as such. Rather, he seems to have assumed that assertions of kinship cannot force a certain action per se, but only exert influence if the actors consider them to be valid. This validity arose because both parties had a vested interest in actualise the kinship bond and the mutual obligations of support it entailed. In this instance, the invocation of kinship functioned as a connector between the two parties, facilitating a relationship motivated by their immediate political interests while at the same time disguising and euphemising them. Furthermore, the reference to Athens’s role as the mother polis of all Ionians could serve to frame an asymmetrical interstate relationship in established, traditionally understood terms, mitigating and legitimising its imbalance by grounding it in a supposedly historical framework.

This pattern of thought also confirmed the political and symbolic predominance of the Athenians. Athens’s exceptional status was further shaped by a particular myth of origin, according to which the Athenians were autochthonous and therefore, unlike the Ionians, had never left their ancestral land.²³ This, again, helped to emphasise the fundamental inequality between them: as Athenian colonists, the

Ionians depended on Athens, whereas Athens did not depend on them and was not even considered to be Ionian, as Jonathan Hall has noted.²⁴ In this way, the Athenians constructed a kinship relationship while simultaneously highlighting their distinction.²⁵ This approach was influenced, among other factors, by the relatively low prestige of the Ionians in the fifth century BC, as further discussed below (see especially 2. and 3.).

2. Military Success and Just Rule

The argument that the Athenians had earned their rule through their military achievements in the Persian Wars is articulated frequently in Thucydides, usually dismissed as mere ‘nice words’ or ‘all that old stuff’ by the Athenian speakers themselves.²⁶ Nevertheless, they continue to invoke their military accomplishments, and it is telling that this argument is presented at length in the first Athenian speech in Thucydides’s work.²⁷ This speech, delivered by anonymous Athenian envoys before the assembly of the Peloponnesian League, provides a detailed review and self-justification of the development of the Delian League. In their speech, Athens’s envoys stress that their rule was not undeservedly attained, but was hard-earned through the Athenians’ bravery, their willingness to sacrifice both their polis and themselves and also to invest a great deal of money, time and effort in building and maintaining a powerful fleet.²⁸ Such statements suggest that the rapid and far-reaching expansion of Athens’s power provoked irritation among the other Greeks and created a certain pressure for the Athenians to justify themselves.²⁹ Athens’s maritime empire is thus presented as the direct consequence and reward of their military successes: it was “acquired by no violent means”,³⁰ but offered to them voluntarily by the Ionian Greeks of Asia Minor.³¹

This argument could be connected with a more or less explicit comparison of Athens with other Greeks, particularly the Spartans and Ionians, who, according to the Athenians, failed to prove themselves as gloriously as they themselves did: the Spartans joined the fight against the Persians late and withdrew early, failed to fulfil their role as the leading power at the outset of the Persian invasion and left a power vacuum after its successful repulsion by refusing to liberate and protect the Ionian poleis from Persian rule.³² The Athenians’ criticism, however, is directed with even greater emphasis at their later allies in Ionia, who had failed to liberate themselves. On the contrary, they had fought alongside their Persian rulers against the Hellenic League and joined the latter only after the Persian fleet’s defeat at Mykale.

Although it could be argued that as subjects of the Persian King, the Ionians had few alternatives but to support him, their behaviour was later labelled as cowardice and even treachery against their *metropolis* Athens.³³ This perspective is further developed in a pair of speeches that Thucydides places in the mouths of Hermokrates of Syracuse and Euphemos of Athens, which provide contrasting views on Athens’s expansionism on the eve of the catastrophic Sicilian expedition. Addressing his fellow Sicilians, Hermokrates warns them about Athens’s power politics and urges resistance, using the Ionians of Asia Minor as a cautionary

example. He portrays them as foolish and cowardly for accepting Athenian leadership, exchanging one ruler (*despotes*) for another and getting enslavement instead of liberation.³⁴ Hermokrates then contrasts the Ionians with his Sicilian audience, whom he describes as “free” (*eleutheros*) and “autonomous” (*autonomos*) Dorians, untainted by what he characterises as the Ionians’ slave mentality.³⁵

Significantly, in his counter-speech, the Athenian Euphemos does not reject the harsh critique of Athens’s allies presented by Hermokrates; instead, he reinforces and amplifies it. According to Euphemos, Athens has indeed enslaved the Ionians, but justifiably so, as:

they, our kinsfolk, came against their mother country, that is to say against us, together with the Mede, and instead of having the courage to revolt and sacrifice their property as we did when we abandoned our city, chose to be slaves themselves, and to try to make us so.³⁶

Euphemos thus accuses the Ionians not only of cowardice and passivity but also of actively participating in an attempt to enslave other Greeks, including, most egregiously, their own *metropolis*.³⁷ Consequently, it was not the Athenians who violated the norms of proper behaviour toward their own ‘tribal kinsmen’, but rather the Ionians, against whom the Athenians rightly took revenge.

This decidedly negative depiction of the Ionians can be partly explained by the immediate rhetorical contexts of the two speeches: Hermokrates seeks to discourage cooperation with Athens by using the Ionians as a negative example. Euphemos, on the other hand, appears unable to identify any positive aspects of membership in the Delian League and thus resorts to asserting that Athens would treat its southern Italian allies much better than those of Ionia. However, this portrayal is not exclusively due to the speech situation. Rather, both speakers reproduce and reinforce ideas that were part of a broader discourse of devaluation directed at the Ionians. This discourse systematically characterised them as weak, disloyal and subordinate.

3. Ionian Decadence and Barbarian Cowardice

The derogatory remarks about the Ionians’ lack of bravery, their cowardice and idleness can be interpreted as part of a discourse of decadence that was initially formulated as early as the mid-sixth century BC. This discourse, primarily a form of Ionian self-criticism following the conquest of Ionia by the Lydians, is evident in authors such as Xenophanes and Herodotus and resonates in the perspectives of Thucydidean speakers.³⁸ The early urbanised cities of Asia Minor, situated at the crossroads of several cultures and thus well positioned for trade and the assimilation of cultural influences from the East, had already developed a sophisticated lifestyle during the Archaic period, but when they came under the rule of the Lydian and later the Persian Empires, their lifestyle became increasingly linked with notions of luxury, decadence and effeminacy.³⁹

In Herodotus’s narrative of the Ionian Revolt, the indiscipline and lack of commitment of the Ionian soldiers are held directly responsible for their military defeat

by the Persians. Before the naval battle at Lade, the Ionians, after only a week of rowing training, grew unwilling to endure the intense and exhausting physical effort required, particularly under the harsh conditions of the summer heat, and preferred to “suffer anything, and endure this coming slavery, whatever it will be, rather than be oppressed by that which is now upon us”.⁴⁰ Faced with the choice between enduring temporary hardship for the sake of long-term freedom or preserving momentary comfort at the cost of remaining in Persian subjugation, the Ionians chose the latter and thus effectively opted for their own slavery. During Xerxes’s campaign, they remained loyal to the Persians almost until the end, just like other subjugated peoples.⁴¹ These peoples, like the Persians themselves, were labelled as ‘barbarians’ from a Greek perspective and it is notable how closely the clichés describing the Ionians in fifth-century BC sources align with the *topos* of the ‘Asiatic’, i.e. cultivated, yet decadent and cowardly barbarian.⁴²

In view of their geographical location and political situation, it seems comprehensible that the Greeks of Asia Minor were denied their Greekness by other Greeks. In the Hippocratic treatise *On the Winds* (*De aeribus*), for instance, it is argued that a person’s character is primarily shaped by the climatic and political conditions of their environment. According to this text, the mild climate of Asia Minor rendered its inhabitants, whether Greek or barbarian, more refined, balanced and intelligent, but also less courageous, resilient and enduring than those living in Europe.⁴³ Being subjects of a single ruler, the “Asians”, “be they Greeks or Barbarians”, had little reason to show bravery in warfare, as they did not fight for themselves and their own glory.⁴⁴

The linking of political freedom, personal liberty and military bravery was also a cornerstone of Athens’s democratic ideology. According to Herodotus, Athens under tyranny was weak and unsuccessful, but with democracy, the Athenians fought for themselves and gained courage and military success.⁴⁵ The Ionians, by contrast, had never fought successfully for themselves. Consequently, after the Persian Wars, Athenian identity was defined by a sharp differentiation from the Ionians. Herodotus reports that Athens and other Mainland Ionians “would not be called Ionians, but spurned the name”, as they were “ashamed of it”.⁴⁶ Ionians were perceived as more akin to barbarians than to ‘real’ Greeks; they were used to be ruled and deserved to be ruled.⁴⁷ This perspective could justify Athenian dominance by framing their rule not as subjugation of other Greeks – an action widely detested – but as governance over ‘barbarian-like’ people with an internalised slave-mentality. Being Ionian had become synonymous with being mentally, physically and politically weak.⁴⁸ And in an interstate system where the concept of the ‘natural right’ of the strong to rule over the weak was routinely evoked, no one wanted to appear weak.

4. The Rule of the Strongest and the Fear of the Ruler

Regarding Thucydides’s power-political thinking, the extent to which he expresses his own opinions through the different speakers remains a matter of debate. Moreover, the refutation of the most extreme power-political maxims voiced by

actors in his work does not always require a direct counter-speech. Assertions presented as immutable laws can also, and perhaps more effectively, be undermined by subsequent events narrated in the text.⁴⁹ Nevertheless, several theses about Athens's relationship with others, including its allies, are recurrently expressed by different speakers throughout Thucydides's work:

- *The thesis that all people have a natural desire to rule over weaker people.* This idea is most radically formulated in the Melian Dialogue, where the Athenian envoys describe the rule of the strongest as a natural law,⁵⁰ but it is already present in the aforementioned Athenian key speech delivered to the Peloponnesian League in Sparta and is also articulated on other occasions throughout the text.⁵¹ Of course, the principle that the strong "rule wherever they can"⁵² introduces significant dynamism and instability to interstate relations, because, on the one hand, the stronger's claim to power can be limited only through his own strength and, on the other hand, unless there is an obvious, generally accepted imbalance of power between them, the roles of strong and weak, and, consequently, ruler and ruled can be determined only through practical, ultimately violent confrontation.⁵³ Accordingly, Euphemos in his speech to the Sicilian Greeks underscores this dynamic by proclaiming that in the past, the Athenians had been dominated by the Spartans, "being the strongest at that moment", but now the times had changed, as the Athenians built up a fleet to prevent further subjugation.⁵⁴ Thus, being stronger or weaker is a relational state, subject to change over time, at least in the medium and long term. The rule of the strong inevitably provokes the weaker to strive for liberation, and so it fuels a cycle of power shifts.
- *The thesis that rule necessarily generates hatred among the ruled.* As mentioned before, the position of the Athenians within the Delian League is frequently characterized as *tyrannis*, i.e. as illegitimate, violent, unjustly appropriated and exercised rule.⁵⁵ This view is expressed not only by Athens's opponents, but also by Athenian speakers themselves.⁵⁶ In ancient political thought, the notion that a tyrant lived in constant fear of the hatred of those he ruled was a well-established topic and it could be applied not only to an individual ruler, but also to a *polis tyrannos*.⁵⁷ Thucydides highlights this dynamic in a programmatic speech delivered by Perikles in order to bolster the morale of the Athenians after the setbacks of the first year of the Peloponnesian War. Perikles argues that even if they wished to, they could neither abandon the war nor relinquish their rule: being an imperial power, Athens was concerned not only with its own freedom (*eleutheria*), but also with the "loss of empire (*arche*) and danger from the animosities incurred in its exercise".⁵⁸ To resign from the empire out of fear of the hatred it provoked, Perikles insists, would only heighten the danger to Athens, "for what you hold is, to speak somewhat plainly, a tyranny; to take it perhaps was wrong, but to let it go is dangerous".⁵⁹ Any display of weakness or concession by the ruler would immediately incite rebellion among the ruled, endangering not only his rule, but also his very survival. In this context, it is telling that the Athenian speakers in the Melian

Dialogue do not describe Sparta, their principal rival for hegemony over the Greek world, as the greatest danger to Athens, but rather their own subjects.⁶⁰ Controlling them is more important than being on good terms with them; in fact, being hated is better than being liked, as the latter might be regarded as a sign of weakness.⁶¹

This imperialist logic reaches its extreme in Alkibiades's speech delivered to the people's assembly to promote the large-scale expedition to Sicily, which later failed catastrophically. Alkibiades warns that not only retreat but even stagnation would endanger Athens, "for, if we cease to rule others, we are in danger of being ruled ourselves".⁶² The world is seen here as binary in structure, offering only two options in a zero-sum game: domination or subjugation. To avoid becoming subjects themselves, the Athenians thus must wage preemptive wars against all potential adversaries. This worldview is also expressed in the Melian Dialogue, where the Athenians argue that even weaker poleis threaten them simply by existing, as they might inspire rebellion or resistance among Athens's subjects.⁶³ In this perception, fear becomes the sole driving force: "[i]mperial powers are afraid to look afraid" and therefore aspire to make others afraid by constantly demonstrating their power.⁶⁴

- *The thesis that moral behaviour is possible and sensible only between equals or those of equal strength.* In a system where every concession signals weakness and invites rebellion, ethical conduct aimed at mutual benefit is considered impractical. Justice, in this view, is not an intrinsic, universal value 'in itself', but a conditional concept that applies only when actors are unable to gain dominance due to the counterbalancing strength of an equal opponent.⁶⁵ In this constellation, 'justice' does not emerge from acting together, but from acting against each other.⁶⁶

Within the context of the Peloponnesian War, the assertion that justice can exist only between equals implies that it is applicable only to the two leading powers, Athens and Sparta, while the other Greek *poleis*, including Athens's allies, are deemed too weak to qualify as equal participants in the competitive struggle for honour and dominance.⁶⁷ This perspective aligns with the prevailing 'everyday ethics' of the time, which often defined values and norms relationally to the parties involved, tying it to factors like strength, rank and social status.⁶⁸ Therefore, what makes the Athenians' stance particularly offensive is not their postulate that justice depends on equality as such, but rather its application to the relationships between Greeks – who were generally regarded as being nominally free and equal. The Athenians ruthlessly expose the asymmetry between themselves and their allies and address them bluntly as subaltern subjects, leaving no room for the concept of 'weaker allies'. Instead, they categorise all parties based on their relative power: they are seen as either stronger and thus potential subjugators, as equals and therefore rivals for dominance, or as weaker and consequently either already subjugated or destined to be so.⁶⁹ For the Athenians, allies who fall into the 'weaker category' hold no higher status than equally powerful non-allies; "all are seen as potential enemies".⁷⁰

5. The Perspective of the Allies and the Chances of the Ruled

As noted before, Athens fought on at least two fronts at the same time during the Peloponnesian War: externally against the Peloponnesian League and internally against its own allies, who were ready to take the first opportunity to rebel. In Thucydides's work, the Mytilenians exemplify the perspective of these discontented allies. Along with Chios, they were among the last Delian League members to contribute their own ships instead of paying the *phoros*.⁷¹ Thus, they had a greater chance of successful rebellion than other members and they initiated it in 428 BC when Athens appeared weakened. Secretly allying with Sparta and the Peloponnesian League and negotiating their support at Olympia, the Mytilenian envoys delivered a speech in which Thucydides transfers the power-rational argumentation, which he usually presents from Athens's perspective, to the situation of the renegade ally.

At first glance, the Mytilenians seem to advocate cooperative values when they insist that a stable alliance must be based on mutual goodwill (*eunoia*),⁷² shared views (*gnome*)⁷³ and solidarity (*koinonia*).⁷⁴ However, this argument is far from impartial, as they use it to justify their attempt to change sides during the war. Lacking the aforementioned positive bonds with Athens, the Mytilenians argue that their actions do not constitute treason.⁷⁵ They further underline this claim by presenting the history of the Delian League as continuous progression of power accumulation and concentration: as long as Athens's and the league's main goal was the fight against Persia, the Mytilenians followed them loyally, but then the Athenians exploited the support of the more powerful, ship-providing allies to subjugate the weaker members.⁷⁶ This allowed them to grow increasingly powerful, widening the power gap between themselves and the next strongest members. The latter thus had to fear that Athens would eventually subjugate them like the other weaker allies, although, for the moment, Athens favoured them for strategic reasons.⁷⁷

This reasoning aligns with the logic of power politics as outlined by the Athenians elsewhere in Thucydides: justice and mutual respect are possible only among equals, while "the only sure basis of an alliance is for each party to be equally afraid of the other", as each anticipates that the other might hinder its ambitions.⁷⁸ Moreover, like the Athenians, the Mytilenians argue that in asymmetrical power dynamics, preemptive wars are necessary and justified. Not only must the strong prevent potential rivals from coming to power, but the weak must also prevent themselves from becoming even weaker. In both cases, violence and war are regarded as the only solution. The Peloponnesian War then altered the balance of power and fear, creating a new asymmetry of dependence: on the one hand, the Athenians, though militarily superior, relied more heavily on Mytilenian support and were increasingly vulnerable to ally rebellions. On the other hand, the Mytilenians, unlikely to face subjugation during the war due to their strategic value, feared they would be overpowered once the conflict ended.⁷⁹ Each side feared and mistrusted the other, but while the Athenians had more to fear during the war, the Mytilenians feared the peace. Accordingly, for the Mytilenians too, the

‘real’ threat was not the foreign enemy Sparta – whose side they wanted to join – but Athens, their dominant ally.

In the end, the Mytilenians affirm the Athenian claim that justice and cooperation are feasible only among equals, while in asymmetrical relations, no actor is able to restrict the actions of the other. There, the stronger can ruthlessly pursue his natural desire for dominance, but the weaker is also not bound by norms or values. Precisely because the Athenians have escalation dominance, the Mytilenians claim the right to launch a preemptive strike as soon as the opportunity arises: “the liberty of offence being always theirs, that of defence ought clearly to be ours.”⁸⁰

6. Alliance in Crisis – between Discourse and Reality

In Thucydides’s narrative, the relationship between Athens and its allies is defined by asymmetrical power dynamics, rooted in traditional ties (*metropolis* and *apoikia*), in the idea that domination was an appropriate reward for military achievements and in the alleged ‘natural law’ of the stronger ruling the weaker. Another factor, also crucial for Athens’s treatment of its allies, was its distinctive political system and the practices and ideologies associated with it. Athens’s democracy, with its institutionalised self-determination, fostered the self-confidence of the citizens and possibly a sense for superiority or disdain towards weaker and less self-efficient allies.⁸¹ In practice, the direct democracy hindered the integration of the allies into the political framework, as expanding political participation would have restricted the dominance of the Athenian *demos*.⁸² Alternative methods of governance, such as integrating the allies into elite networks, clashed with democratic principles and were thus unfeasible. Additionally, Athens’s restless activism (*polypragmosyne*) and lust for regulation, coupled with its relatively advanced legal certainty, created expectations among allies that, when unmet, led to discontent.⁸³ Ironically, to maintain their political order based on freedom and equality among the citizens, the Athenians oriented themselves towards the only imperialist power of their time, adopting Persian practices of governance and fostering evident similarities between Persian and Athenian self-conceptions as “dominant ethno-class” ruling over non-Persian respectively non-Athenian, Ionian subjects.⁸⁴ Perikles’s boast that the Athenians “held rule over more Hellenes than any other Hellenic state”⁸⁵ encapsulates this imperialist mindset succinctly.

One might, however, question the accuracy of Thucydides’s depiction of Athens’s “extreme unpopularity with the Hellenes”, including its own allies.⁸⁶ Of course it is possible to identify individuals, groups and even poleis that profited from Athens’s rule – for example those who supported democracy, those who obtained privileged positions like the *proxenoi* and those who benefitted as free-riders from Athens’s attempts to fight back the Persians, control the Aegean Sea, curtail piracy and promote trade.⁸⁷ In contrast, the Athenians’ partial interference in their allies’ internal affairs, political order and economy and the harsh punishment of rebellious allies – consisting of ethnic cleansing (*andrapodismos*), the expropriation of land and the establishment of cleruchies – likely did little to increase their popularity.⁸⁸

During the Peloponnesian War, there were only a few instances in which members of the Delian League refused to join the Peloponnesian League – mainly due to the presence of Athenian garrisons⁸⁹ – or returned temporarily back to Athens – mainly under compulsion.⁹⁰ The war proved to be a high-pressure stress test, revealing that this conflict between two consolidated blocs of a bipolar interstate system weakened rather than strengthened cohesion within the Delian League. Instead, it gave the allies opportunities to leave the alliance, which most of them seized promptly, despite all Athenian “gestures of inclusion”.⁹¹ The only possible exception is Samos, which stayed loyal even after Athens’s unconditional surrender to Sparta.⁹² For this extraordinary allegiance, the Samians were granted autonomy and even named Athenians by decree of the Athenian assembly.⁹³ But can this be interpreted as the emergence of a more cooperative, mutual partnership adapted to the changed circumstances shortly before Athens’ final defeat and thus as evidence of the Delian League’s ‘resilience’ or ‘adaptability’?⁹⁴ John Ma has argued that grants of autonomy were part of an “imperial-style surrender-and-grant” strategy, constituting a “privileged, rare status” that was essentially “a franchise defined by the ruling power”.⁹⁵ Considering Samos’s strategic importance as Athens’s naval base, especially during the second part of the Peloponnesian War, its role in both the oligarchic coup of 411 BC and its suppression and its consistent loyalty to democracy and Athens until the end,⁹⁶ it seems reasonable that it was awarded a privileged status. However, since this occurred shortly before the war’s end in 404 BC, the measure came too late to have a decisive impact. It is thus difficult to speak of resilience here, as the Athenians’ adaptability ultimately failed to prevent the Delian League’s self-destructive crisis. Instead, the course of events confirms Thucydides’s interpretation that, despite the Athenian’s inventive power politics, their rule remained unstable, as it lacked acceptance and could be maintained only through coercion.⁹⁷

In the end, it is worth asking whether alternatives to Athens’s approach to rule, and thus to the eventual self-destructive crisis of the Delian League, were conceivable. Thucydides does present such possible alternatives, for instance, through Kleon’s opponent Diodotos, who argues that it would make sense, if only out of self-interest, to at least minimally accommodate the allies and offer them a positive perspective.⁹⁸ Similarly, while the Mytilenians tell the Spartans that “the only sure basis of an alliance is for each party to be equally afraid of the other”,⁹⁹ they also suggest later the potential for alliances founded on “sympathy, the ordinary basis of confidence”, rather than fear.¹⁰⁰ These alternatives could clearly be imagined and formulated only within the framework of Thucydides’s narrative. However, if the Athenians ever attempted to implement such strategies, it is evident that they ultimately failed.

Notes

- 1 καὶ οὐ περὶ τῆς ἐλευθερίας ἄρα οὔτε οὗτοι τῶν Ἑλλήνων οὔθ' οἱ Ἕλληνες τῆς ἐαυτῶν τῷ Μήδῳ ἀντέστησαν, περὶ δὲ οἱ μὲν σφίσιν ἄλλα μὴ ἐκεῖνῳ καταδουλώσεως, οἱ δ' ἐπὶ δεσπότου μεταβολῇ (Thuc. 6.76.4, transl. R. Crawley). Here and throughout, Thucydides is quoted in the translation by Richard Crawley (London 1910).

- 2 Thuc. 1.124.2; see also chapter 4.
- 3 ἀντικρὺς δουλείαν (Thuc. 1.122.2). According to Ste. Croix (2008: 233) Thucydides “makes no less than eight of his speakers accuse the Athenians of ‘enslaving’ their allies”.
- 4 Thuc. 1.22.1.
- 5 ἐξ ἀνάγκης [...] αἰεὶ πολεμίους (Kleon in Thuc. 3.40.3, own translation); cf. Rengakos 1984: 63; Rose 1999: 23. See also Schuller 1974: 121, 1978: 10; Connor 1984: 184; Flaig 2005: 43; Ste. Croix 2008: 250–1. In comparison, Donald Trump’s statement that “in many cases, our allies are worse than our so-called enemies” (Campaign Rally in Warren, Michigan, 1 November 2024 at <https://rollcall.com/factbase/trump/transcript/donald-trump-speech-campaign-rally-warren-michigan-november-1-2024/>, min. 00:13:59–00:14:21 [accessed 08 February 2026]) appears relatively moderate. However, in this instance, it is not the weaker allies who seek to leave the alliance, but the hegemonic power itself, i.e. a reversal of the situation referred to by Kleon.
- 6 Thuc. 5.91.1.
- 7 Thuc. 1.22.4.
- 8 Morley 2018: 119. See also Hawthorn 2012: 220–3.
- 9 As the Mytilenians state: “It is not in Attica that the war will be decided, as some imagine, but in the countries by which Attica is supported” – οὐ γὰρ ἐν τῇ Ἀττικῇ ἔσται ὁ πόλεμος, ὥς τις οἶεται, ἀλλὰ δι’ ἣν ἡ Ἀττικὴ ὠφελεῖται (Thuc. 3.13.5). See also Nudell (2023: 68), referring specifically to Athens’s Ionian allies: “In this period, Ionia was a setting for military campaigns designed to reclaim the Ionians as subjects or that used the region as a beachhead to reach another enemy.”
- 10 Rengakos 1984: 10–22; Raafflaub 2011: 182, 185–6; Kallet 2009: 48–9, 57; Forde 2012: 185; Low 2017: 106–8; Low 2023: 145–7; Nudell 2023: 30.
- 11 Thuc. 2.65.12; cf. Xen. *vect.* 5.6.; Forde 2012: 192–3; Hawthorn 2012: 224–5; Low 2023: 153–4.
- 12 See, for example, Ste. Croix 2008; Bradeen 1960; Romilly 2008; Ma 2009a, who also summarises the other contributions in that volume.
- 13 On whether the Delian League can be described as an ‘empire’, see, for example, Rose 1999: 20–2; Flaig 2005: 55; Low 2005: 98. Against the concept of a ‘Greater Athenian State’, developed by Morris (2009), see Ma (2009a: 227) and Igelbrink (2015: 479–80), who explicitly calls Athens a “colonial empire”.
- 14 Sol. fr. 4a (West); Hdt. 1.147.2. See also Barron 1964: 46; Hall 1997: 52; Crielaard 2009: 42; Osmers 2013: 109; Mac Sweeney 2013: 163.
- 15 Mac Sweeney (2013: 24–5) emphasises that “[b]y labelling Ionia Asian or European, Greek or Barbarian, you were making a statement about who had rightful control of the region and where the region belonged”. See also Schuller 1974: 113; Hornblower 1992; Low 2005: 107–8; Parker 2008; Osmers 2013: 97–142; Igelbrink 2015: 411–12; Nudell 2023: 6–7, 27–30.
- 16 Hornblower 1992: 175–97; Crielaard 2009: 52–7; Igelbrink 2015: 413–17. On the importance of kinship-based ties in general, see Thauer 2016: 52.
- 17 Schuller 1974: 113, 1978: 9.
- 18 Cf. also the contribution by Maria Osmers in this volume.
- 19 φοιτῶντές τε πρὸς τοὺς Ἀθηναίους ἡξίουσαν αὐτοὺς ἡγεμόνας σφᾶν γίγνεσθαι κατὰ τὸ ξυγγενές (Thuc. 1.95.1).
- 20 Thuc. 3.83.3.
- 21 βουλόμενοι δὲ μήτε σῖτον ἐς τὴν Πελοπόννησον ἄγεσθαι αὐτόθεν πρόπειράν τε ποιούμενοι εἰ σφίσι δυνάτᾳ εἶη τὰ ἐν τῇ Σικελίᾳ πράγματα ὑποχεῖρια γενέσθαι (Thuc. 3.86.4); cf. Osmers 2013: 119.
- 22 Thuc. 1.12.1; see also 2.15.4; cf. Osmers 2013: 117.
- 23 Hall 1997: 51–6; Osmers 2013: 153–9; Mac Sweeney 2013: 15; cf. Hdt. 1.56.2, 7.161.3; Thuc. 1.2.5.

- 24 See Hall 1997: 55.
- 25 Kinship perceptions do not prevent war crimes and brutal oppression, as demonstrated by Russia's behaviour in its current war of aggression against Ukraine.
- 26 Thuc. 5.89, 1.73.2; see also Rengakos 1984: 95; Osmers 2013: 198–275.
- 27 Thuc. 1.73 2–74.4. Schuller 1974: 119f; Low 2023: 147–9.
- 28 Thuc. 1.74.1–2; see also 1.76.2, 6.82.3; Osmers 2013: 216–8.
- 29 ἀξιοί τε ἅμα νομίζοντες εἶναι (Thuc. 1.76.2).
- 30 οὐ βιασάμενο (Thuc. 1.75.2).
- 31 Thuc. 1.75.2.
- 32 Thuc. 1.74.2. Rengakos (1984: 116) emphasises that at this point, Spartans and Ionians are declared enemies of Athens since the Persian Wars.
- 33 Heinrichs 1989: 40–4.
- 34 Thuc. 6.76.3–4.
- 35 Thuc. 6.77.1.
- 36 ἦλθον γὰρ ἐπὶ τὴν μητρόπολιν ἐφ' ἡμᾶς μετὰ τοῦ Μήδου καὶ οὐκ ἐτόλμησαν ἀποστάντες τὰ οἰκεῖα φθεῖραι, ὥσπερ ἡμεῖς ἐκλιπόντες τὴν πόλιν, δουλείαν δὲ αὐτοῖ τε ἐβούλοντο καὶ ἡμῖν τὸ αὐτὸ ἐπενεγκεῖν (Thuc. 6.82.4). See Connor 1984: 183–4.
- 37 A similar accusation arises in Thucydides (3.62.2, 63.2–4), though framed differently: Here, the Thebans accuse the Plataians not of supporting Persia, but of supporting Athens in its attempt to dominate other Greeks.
- 38 See, for example, Xenophanes fr. 3 (DK).
- 39 Alty 1982: 7; Kurke 1992: esp. 93–4, 102; Crielaard 2009: 60–74; cf. Thuc. 1.6.3 and fragments from Old Comedy: Kallias fr. 8 (Storey); Eupolis fr. 272 (Storey).
- 40 καὶ ὅ τι ὦν ἄλλο παθεῖν ἐστὶ καὶ τὴν μέλλουσιν δουλητὴν ὑπομεῖναι ἥτις ἐσται, μᾶλλον ἢ τῇ παρεούσῃ συνέχεσθαι (Hdt. 6.12.3, transl. A. D. Godley).
- 41 See Hdt. 7.52.93–5, 8.10.22, 85.1.
- 42 On this *topos*, see Isaac 2004: 60–168.
- 43 Hippocr. *De Aer.* 12.1–6, 16.1–5. On Ionia's comfortable climate, see also Hdt. 1.42.1; Alty 1982: 7.
- 44 ὁκόσοι γὰρ ἐν τῇ Ἀσίῃ Ἕλληνες ἢ βάρβαροι (Hippocr. *De Aer.* 16.5, see also 16.3–5, 23.4). According to Herodotus (9.122.3), the same principle applied to the Persians, who had been rough, brave and capable to conquer western Asia, but eventually became soft, lazy, cowardly and decadent due to the influence of the region's mild climate on their character.
- 45 Hdt. 5.78.
- 46 οἱ μὲν νυν ἄλλοι Ἴωνες καὶ οἱ Ἀθηναῖοι ἔφυγον τὸ οὐνομα, οὐ βουλόμενοι Ἴωνες κεκλησθαι, ἀλλὰ καὶ νυν φαίνονται μοι οἱ πολλοὶ αὐτῶν ἐπαισχύνεσθαι τῷ οὐνόματι (Hdt. 1.143.3, see also 5.69.1); cf. Alty 1982: 8–9; Hall 1997: 54; Nudell 2023: 18–19.
- 47 App. *Syr.* 1.2.; cf. Nudell 2023: 1–2. See also Osmers 2013: 131f.
- 48 Cf. Thuc. 5.9, 6.77.1, 8.25.3.
- 49 Deininger 1939: 80–1, 103; Connor 1984: 154; Thauer 2016: 47–9; Morley 2018: 112–13.
- 50 Thuc. 5.105.2.
- 51 Thuc. 1.76.2; cf. Connor 1984: 152.
- 52 οὗ ἄν κρατῇ, ἄρχειν (Thuc. 5.105.2).
- 53 Strasburger (1982: 693) emphasises that “ein Herrschaftsanspruch nach dem Recht des Stärkeren logisch keine andere Grenze kennt als die der eigenen Kraft”.
- 54 ἐν τῷ παρόντι μείζον ἴσχυον (Thuc. 6.82.3).
- 55 Schuller 1978: 16–21. Low (2023: 155) points out that the characterisation of Athens's rule as tyranny also implied that it would not be long-lasting, as tyrannies were considered inherently short-lived due to their illegitimacy and the tyrants' lack of self-control.
- 56 Thuc 1.122.3, 124.3.
- 57 Ps.-Xen. *Ath. Pol.* 1.14; see also Rengakos 1984: 48–9; Dreher 2016: 97–102.

- 58 μηδὲ νομίσεια περὶ ἐνὸς μόνου, δουλείας ἀντ' ἐλευθερίας, ἀγωνίζεσθαι, ἀλλὰ καὶ ἀρχῆς στερήσεως καὶ κινδύνου ὧν ἐν τῇ ἀρχῇ ἀπήχθεσθε (Thuc. 2.63.1).
- 59 ὡς τυραννίδα γὰρ ἦδη ἔχετε αὐτήν, ἣν λαβεῖν μὲν ἄδικον δοκεῖ εἶναι, ἀφεῖναι δὲ ἐπικὶ νδυνον (Thuc. 2.63.2).
- 60 Thuc. 5.91.
- 61 Thuc. 5.95.
- 62 διὰ τὸ ἀρχθῆναι ἂν ὑφ' ἐτέρων αὐτοῖς κίνδυνον εἶναι, εἰ μὴ αὐτοὶ ἄλλων ἄρχοιμεν (Thuc. 6.18.3); cf. Rengakos 1984: 107–10. Deininger (1939: 78) points out that in Alkibiades's statement, power takes over: The Athenians no longer possess power; rather, they are possessed by it and become its slaves.
- 63 Thuc. 5.97.
- 64 Koivukoski 2009: 106.
- 65 Thuc. 5.89; see also Thuc. 1.76.2–4.
- 66 Thuc. 5.111.4.
- 67 Thuc. 5.101, 111.3–4; see Forde 2012: 195f; Koivukoski 2009: 102–3.
- 68 Cf. Dover 1974: 273.
- 69 δίκαια μὲν ἐν τῷ ἀνθρωπείῳ λόγῳ ἀπὸ τῆς ἴσης ἀνάγκης κρίνεται, δυνατὰ δὲ οἱ προύχοντες πράσσουσι καὶ οἱ ἀσθενεῖς ξυγχωροῦσιν (Thuc. 5.89).
- 70 Koivukoski 2009: 106.
- 71 Schuller 1974: 11, 54.
- 72 Thuc. 3.9.2.
- 73 Thuc. 3.9.2.
- 74 Thuc. 3.10.1.
- 75 Thuc. 3.9.
- 76 Thuc. 3.10. According to Thucydides (1.99.3), the weakening of the allies was partly their own fault, as they preferred to pay the *phoros* instead of contributing ships; cf. Forde 2012: 194–5.
- 77 Thuc. 3.10.6, 11.3–12.2.
- 78 τὸ δὲ ἀντίπαλον δέος μόνον πιστὸν ἐς ξυμμαχίαν (Thuc. 3.11.2); cf. Raaflaub 2011: 184.
- 79 Thuc. 3.12.1.
- 80 ἐπ' ἐκείνοις δὲ ὄντος αἰεὶ τοῦ ἐπιχειρεῖν καὶ ἐφ' ἡμῖν εἶναι δεῖ τὸ προαμύνασθαι (Thuc. 3.12.3). On the “universal human impulse” and, therefore, the right of the weaker to rebel cf. Forde 2012: 194; see also Deininger 1939: 103; Rengakos 1984: 84.
- 81 Galpin 1983/84: 100–2; Flaig 2005: 51–2; Koivukoski 2009: 102.
- 82 Schuller 1974: 177–82, 1978: 21; Raaflaub 2016: 107–25.
- 83 Thuc. 1.77.1–5; see also Ps.-Xen. *Ath. Pol.* 1.16–18.
- 84 Ma 2009a: 230. On Persia's influence on Athenian ruling practices and particularly the collection of the *phoroi*, see Nixon and Price 1991: 145–52; Ma 2009b: 125–9; Raaflaub 2009; 2016: 123.
- 85 Ἑλλήνων τε ὅτι Ἑλλήνες πλείστον δὴ ἥρξαμεν (Thuc. 2.64.3).
- 86 Ἑλλήσι [...] ἄγαν ἐπιφθόνως (Thuc. 1.75.1); cf. 1.75.4, 2.8.5, 2.64.5, 5.95. See also n. 17, with further literature.
- 87 Kallet 2009: 44–6; Low 2017: 109–11. On the debate whether Athens promoted democracy systematically, see Ste. Croix 2008: 233–49; Galpin 1983/84: 103; Schuller 1974: 130–3; Rose 1999, 23–5; Brock 2009; Ma (2009a) explicates that the existence of collaborators is typical for empires, see examples in Low 2005; Koivukoski 2009: 97; Ma 2009b: 129–36.
- 88 Galpin 1983/84: 103–5; Ma 2009b: 128–9; Igelbrink 2015: 483–4. Moreno (2009) draws a parallel between the cleruchies and Sparta's conquest of Messenia.
- 89 See, for example, Xen. *hell.* 1.6.12–13 (Methymna).
- 90 See, for example, Xen. *hell.* 1.4.9 (Thasos).
- 91 Low 2005: 108–9; she states that such gestures were part of Athens's politics toward its allies, though not a consistent practice. In contrast, the overall coercive character of

- Athens's rule is emphasised by Schuller 1974: 129–30, 133–6, 203–9; Igelbrink 2015: 481–5; Raaffaub 2016: 123–4; Nudell 2023: 40.
- 92 Xen. *hell.* 2.2.6, 2.3.6.
- 93 *IG I³* 127; esp. line 12: Σαμῖος Ἀθηναῖος εἶναι.
- 94 For both terms, see the introduction of this volume.
- 95 Ma 2009b: 128; he also refers to *IG I³* 29, 66, 118 and 1454 as further examples for Athenian autonomy-degrees.
- 96 See Thuc. 8.21, 8.75.2–3; Xen. *hell.* 2.2.6.
- 97 Low 2017: 108–9.
- 98 Thuc. 3.44–8.
- 99 Thuc. 3.11.2; see also above.
- 100 εὐνοῖα πίστιν βεβαιοῖ (Thuc. 3.12.1).

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5 From Crisis to Creativity

The Productive Instability of Alliances in Polybius

Felix K. Maier

“There is no security in this life. There is only opportunity.”

General Douglas MacArthur

1. Introduction

As a military man deeply engaged with the practical challenges of leadership and strategy, the Athenian politician, commander and writer Xenophon was especially interested in questions of alliance resilience – how leaders might weather, adapt to and even thrive amid the shifting fortunes of coalition politics.¹ In Xenophon’s work *Cyropaedia*, Xenophon lets the young Kyros and his father Kambyzes engage in a discussion about the best way to conduct oneself in war and achieve success on the battlefield. Interestingly, Kambyzes does not simply advise his son to be brave, honest and courageous at all times. Instead, he recommends that one “must be designing and cunning, wily and deceitful, a thief and a robber, overreaching the enemy at every point”.² Kyros is surprised by this advice and points out that he has only ever been taught to use such skills in dealing with animals. Kambyzes, however, replies that the training with animals was meant precisely as preparation for real life – for learning how to navigate the complex and sometimes treacherous relationships one would later encounter among people.

Another passage from Xenophon – this time from his panegyric on the Spartan king Agesilaos – sheds further light on the complex dynamics of loyalty and betrayal. Xenophon describes how Agesilaos agreed to a mutual truce with the Persian satrap Tissaphernes while awaiting envoys from the Great King in 396 BC. Tissaphernes even pledged to argue for the independence of the Greek cities in Asia Minor. Yet, behind the scenes, he broke faith – secretly amassing Persian troops to move against the Greeks. Xenophon’s judgement is telling: Agesilaos, he suggests, deliberately adhered to the agreement in order to make the Persians’ treachery plain for all to see and to highlight his own reliability.³ Xenophon does not linger on whether Agesilaos was angry or anticipated this turn of events; instead, he shows how Agesilaos made productive use of his partner’s betrayal to strengthen his own position.

In this way, Xenophon offers a vivid example of how setbacks in alliance politics can become catalysts for resilience and strategic renewal. The *Cyropaedia* passage, too, underscores the Greek awareness that true success in politics depends

not only on virtue and courage, but also on the ability to respond flexibly – and sometimes shrewdly – to unexpected challenges.

Xenophon's handling of uncertain alliances is particularly striking. On the one hand, he advocates a confident, pragmatic approach, highlighting the potential advantages that can arise from broken alliances. On the other, his repeated attention to the issue suggests that he aimed to offer guidance to his readers – especially politicians and military leaders – on a subject that continually provoked anxiety and debate. In this way, Xenophon's works provide both practical examples and a broader framework for navigating the perennial challenges of alliance politics.

2. The Essence of Ancient Alliances

The purpose of an alliance is to provide mutual benefits to both parties, whether through military support, economic cooperation or political security. At the same time, there is always an implicit desire for such an alliance to endure, as stability forms the foundation for long-term strategic planning. Alliances establish predictable parameters in a world otherwise characterized by uncertainties and shifting power dynamics. Especially in ancient Greece, where the political landscape and the high density of independent political entities forced all players to permanently clarify and negotiate mutual relationships, stable alliances offered the opportunity not only to react to crises, but also to shape the 'game of war' proactively and dominantly – a game defined by complex dynamics and unforeseen events.⁴

Stable conditions, particularly in military alliances, provided much-needed predictability in an otherwise unpredictable domain. Such stability, however, required loyalty and reliability among the allied partners. Fickleness, unreliability or outright betrayal could quickly become devastating breaches of security, undermining even the most meticulous plans and strategic calculations with far-reaching consequences. From this, one might conclude that stability and the avoidance of crises were among the most valued states an alliance could achieve.

Nevertheless, it is important to recognize the inherent tension between expectations and actual experience. Military alliances, like in any era, were constantly at risk of collapsing under the pressure of new political realities. Failure was as integral to the system of alliances as the forging of new pacts. The actors involved were well aware of this. Rhetorical invocations of eternal friendship were as much a staple of diplomatic language as the implicit understanding that such declarations were often fragile and insincere.⁵

But reality often unfolded in stark contrast to the expectations and hopes of the parties involved, making it necessary to repeatedly recalibrate aspirations in light of prevailing circumstances. This raises the question of how actors responded to such persistent uncertainty: when faced with unreliable allies and fragile alliances, how did political agents feel compelled to consider alternative options and contingency plans? Which strategies did they employ to cope with the challenges of unpredictable partners?

In line with the perspective of this volume, this chapter does not seek to explain why alliances ultimately broke apart or managed to endure. Rather, it shifts

attention to the moments of tension and uncertainty within alliances – situations often viewed primarily in negative terms – as symptoms of risk, instability or crisis in military cooperation. I will explore a series of interrelated questions: how was uncertainty assessed and navigated within alliance systems? In what ways were precarious and fragile alliances understood not simply as undesirable states, but as settings that opened up new possibilities? And to what extent did moments of crisis – those tipping points in political-military collaboration that generated contingent fields of action – serve as catalysts for a more productive engagement with uncertainty? By addressing these questions, this chapter aims to illuminate how instability within alliances could foster innovation, adaptation and strategic flexibility, rather than merely signalling failure or dysfunction.

3. Polybius and the Ramifications of the *Symploke*

I will focus my attention on Polybius, whose narrative brings to life a period marked by the fluid and ever-shifting dynamics of alliance-making and unmaking: the Mediterranean world of the third and second centuries BC, as described by Polybius, was characterized by an unprecedented intensity of diplomatic activity, shifting loyalties and strategic realignments.⁶ This era saw the emergence of new types of coalitions – some fleeting, others remarkably enduring – against a backdrop of near-constant military and political upheaval.⁷ By concentrating on Polybius's detailed narratives and analyzes, I aim to trace not only the immediate outcomes of particular alliances, but also the underlying principles and mentalities that shaped how ancient actors perceived and managed alliance crises. Polybius's unique position as both a participant in and a historian of these processes offers unparalleled insight into the challenges and resources of alliance resilience in a world defined by contingency and change.⁸

The period chosen by Polybius as the central focus of his historiography is distinguished by a unique historical dynamic: between 264 and 145 BC, the political landscape of the Mediterranean not only intensified but also became strikingly interconnected. This was primarily driven by the far-reaching Roman expansion and the unprecedented way in which different theatres of war – Africa, Spain, Italy, Greece and Asia Minor – became entwined. Events that began in one region could rapidly reverberate across the entire Mediterranean, as the fates of Carthago, Rome, Macedonia, the Greek leagues and the Hellenistic kingdoms in the East became inseparable.⁹

Polybius's account of the Punic Wars offers a particularly vivid illustration of this development. He reveals how the conflicts unfolding in the West – especially between Rome and Carthago – quickly became entangled with wars in the Eastern Mediterranean. Diplomatic entanglements, military interventions and shifting allegiances meant that no actor could afford to treat their affairs in isolation; decisions made in one sphere sent ripples across distant regions. Polybius famously captured this new reality with the notion of *symploke* – a profound interconnectedness in which events and actors across the Mediterranean found themselves woven into a single, ever-evolving web of relationships. The *symploke* of various historical

arenas, for Polybius, renders human spheres of action increasingly complex. The overlapping intentions, objectives and plans of the parties involved create a political landscape marked by contingency, where the potential outcomes of specific actions become difficult, if not impossible, to anticipate.¹⁰

In this era of intensified political interactions, the question of how to manage alliances under pressure or in crisis became particularly urgent. The contingency of the political landscape brought opportunities, significantly broadening the range of potential partners available from a strategic perspective. However, this came at a price. The opportunity to forge entirely new alliances on a political stage where the cards could always be reshuffled also undermined the reliability of existing partnerships. These dynamics made it all the more critical to secure trustworthy partners in order to retain some degree of strategic foresight amidst the shifting events of the third and second centuries BC. Stable and dependable coalitions were therefore the cornerstone of effective foreign policy and a vital means of reinforcing one's own power.¹¹

4. Learning from the Past for Navigating Alliances

Polybius was undoubtedly drawn to this unique political constellation, which he highlights as a defining feature of the era he describes.¹² This is evident from the very beginning of Polybius's work, where he explicitly links one of the main purposes of studying the past – learning from history – with the need to accept unpredictable turns of fate with dignity.¹³ For Polybius, it is not only about extracting practical lessons from history, but also about coming to terms with contingency and the unforeseeable.¹⁴ In connection with the sea battle of Tyndaris, which took place between the Romans and Carthaginians during the First Punic War around 257 BC, Polybius tells us how close the Roman advance guard was on the brink of being sunk by their enemies. The Carthaginians managed to surround the opposing fleet along with the flagship of commander Gaius Atilius Regulus. Whereas some Roman ships were conquered, C. Atilius managed to escape: "They sank the rest [...] and almost (*παρ' ὀλίγον*, *par' oligon*) took the admiral's ship with his crew. However, as it was well manned and swift, it foiled their expectation (*παραδόξως*, *paradoxos*) and got out of danger."¹⁵ Here, the reader is confronted with an alternative course of events (capture of Atilius's ship), which must have appeared even more probable to the protagonists than what actually happened (the rescue of Atilius's ship); the adverb *paradoxos* lays emphasis on the slim chance of the Roman's escape in contrast to different developments. Everyone immediately realizes how history could have ended up quite differently and by no means followed the path which seemed predictable.

In this context, Polybius puts forward a straightforward demand to his readers: first, one should act as rationally as possible in political life, for only then does one stand a real chance of success.¹⁶ By emphasizing reason and clear-headed decision-making, Polybius underscores the idea that rational conduct – especially in the face of uncertainty and adversity – is the most reliable path to achieving political goals. On the other hand, Polybius repeatedly emphasizes in his work that it is insufficient

to rely solely on absolute rationality and flawless planning, as the contingent nature of reality consistently overrides the designs of individuals and groups.¹⁷

Second, Polybius insists on the necessity of exercising the greatest caution in dealings with others. Yet what, in his analysis, does this caution truly require? Is mere vigilance sufficient? Polybius goes on:

For trusting no one is practically unworkable, but obtaining all possible guarantees and acting accordingly is not objectionable. [...] Therefore, one must primarily ensure to secure such safeguards that make it impossible for the person entrusted to betray that trust. However, since such guarantees are rarely attainable, the next best approach is to remain as vigilant as possible, so that if harm does occur, we may at least gain leniency in judgment from outsiders.¹⁸

Polybius is on the same line with Xenophon, but even the most prudent and seemingly unassailable course of action offers no guarantee against the collapse of an alliance – be it through deception, betrayal or unforeseen circumstances. Political excellence lies not in eliminating uncertainty, but in combining safeguards and vigilance with the readiness to adapt swiftly when alliances falter. In other words, caution is indispensable, yet it must be paired with flexibility and strategic imagination if statesmen are to remain effective in a world where no agreement is ever fully secure.

Polybius illustrates this point with striking force in his account of the downfall of the separatist ruler Achaïos at the hands of the Seleukid king Antiochos. When the negotiator Bolis betrayed Achaïos to the Seleukids in 214/213, Polybius writes:

Thus ended Achaëus, despite having taken every precaution humanly possible. A victim of the treachery of those he trusted, he serves as a double warning of no small value for future generations: first, not to trust anyone lightly; second, not to be overconfident in one's fortune, but to remain prepared for anything, ever mindful of the fact that we are human.¹⁹

Ancient readers realize that even flawless conduct cannot guarantee success. Absolute mistrust is as unworkable as complete certainty is unattainable. Instead, one must learn to operate within this realm of ambiguity and come to terms with its inherent uncertainties. By drawing his readers' attention to this persistent dilemma, Polybius immediately prompts a new set of questions: how should one navigate such treacherous waters? Or, to frame it in contemporary terms: what guidance does Polybius offer for cultivating a tolerance for ambiguity in a world where the threat of betrayal is ever-present?

Polybius's conviction that success is achievable even in uncertain alliances becomes clear in his habit of offering his readers practical rules and historical patterns. These serve as valuable guideposts, helping to navigate and manage the unpredictable realities of political life. In the context of Carthaginian rule in Africa, Polybius articulates a fundamental law: in asymmetrical relationships,

false or arrogant conduct towards one's allies inevitably turns friends into enemies. According to Polybius, after their initial successes over the Romans, the Carthaginians began to see themselves as the invincible rulers of Spain. This shift in self-perception led to a change in their behaviour towards their allies – transforming what had once been a harmonious and loyal partnership into a fragile and unstable alliance. Commenting on the subsequent defection of the Iberian population, Polybius observes: “In this way, they made their subjects, who had been allies and friends, into enemies – a necessary consequence of their treatment”, adding that this was a process that has happened many times before.²⁰

Polybius's interpretation is further exemplified in his treatment of Philip of Macedonia. According to Polybius, Philip was at first the favourite of the Greek world, enjoying stable alliances with leading partners in the Peloponnese, as well as with the Boiotians, Epirotes and Akarnanians. Yet, as Philip's behaviour changed, so too did the attitudes of his allies.²¹ Polybius is explicit that it was this shift in conduct that led to a loss of sympathy and trust, ultimately causing many of these alliances to unravel. In this way, he underscores how the stability of political partnerships depends crucially on the character and actions of their participants and how quickly alliances can be lost when these expectations are betrayed.²²

For Polybius, these are not merely abstract patterns of limited practical value. Because of the didactic purpose of his work, he seeks to provide his readers with concrete guidelines for action – principles that can be directly applied, even in the complex realm of diplomacy. In offering such practical advice, Polybius aims to equip his audience with the tools necessary for success in real-life political and diplomatic situations: “For it is the mental transference of similar circumstances to our own times that gives us the means of forming presentiments of what is about to happen.”²³

5. Embracing Contingency

However, simply learning from the past and projecting lessons from similar situations is not sufficient to deal effectively with unstable alliances. For this reason, Polybius goes a step further. The first principle Polybius advances is the necessity of accepting contingency and unpredictability as inherent features of political alliances – and acting with this awareness in mind. He makes this especially clear in his discussion of certain episodes, highlighting that, in some alliances, the participants seem to have recognized the inherent fragility and instability of their relationships from the very beginning.

Polybius presents his readers with various possibilities, suggesting that unstable alliances can open up new opportunities and, at times, may even be anticipated in their very precariousness. In various episodes of his historical narrative, Polybius illustrates how one might respond in such situations. One of those is Hannibal's passage across the Alps. While its historical accuracy may be open to debate, the description of this event offers a revealing glimpse into the kinds of calculations Polybius wished to emphasize. As Hannibal advanced through the mountains,

he forged an alliance with the local Celtic tribes. Yet, as Polybius makes clear, Hannibal was under no illusion about the trustworthiness of his new allies; he fully recognized their potential for treachery from the outset:

Since he feared the treachery of the Celts and the potential for assassination attempts, given the newly formed alliance with them, he had false wigs made to give himself the appearance of entirely different ages. He constantly changed these wigs, along with matching clothes, so that he was unrecognizable not only to those who saw him fleetingly but even to those in his close circle.²⁴

Rather than passively accepting the risks of betrayal or simply trusting to fortune, Hannibal – according to Polybius – takes concrete and inventive steps to safeguard himself. The Carthaginian's use of disguises is a vivid demonstration of his ability to adapt to danger, anticipate hostile intentions and implement practical solutions. Through this, Polybius showcases a leader who does not simply endure uncertainty but confronts it head-on – turning awareness of potential threats into decisive action.

This proactive stance in the face of uncertainty is echoed elsewhere in Polybius's narrative. In another episode, Polybius shows that the symptoms of crisis within alliances are not merely something to be acknowledged or guarded against – they can, under certain conditions, be actively leveraged for strategic gain. During the Second Punic War, after the death of Hieron in Sicily, his successor Hieronymos, swayed by the influence of his two uncles, adopted a decidedly anti-Roman stance. This shift introduced a new dynamic: Hieronymos approached Carthago and offered to change sides. The Carthaginians, well aware of his volatile character and the sway his relatives held over him, faced a difficult decision. Yet despite these clear risks, they chose to seize the opportunity, hoping to turn the unsettled political landscape in Sicily to their own advantage. As Polybius observes: "The Carthaginians were fully aware of the instability and unreliability of the delusional youth."²⁵ This clear-eyed assessment did not hold the Carthaginians back; on the contrary, it allowed them to integrate Hieronymos's unpredictability into their broader strategic calculations. Although the Romans ultimately succeeded in foiling the Carthaginian scheme in 212 BC, the outrage voiced by pro-Roman authors – highlighted by Polybius²⁶ – attests to the significant strategic edge the Carthaginians had momentarily secured through this act of betrayal. In this way, Polybius shows that uncertainty, when anticipated and incorporated into planning, can itself become a powerful asset. Those who factor instability into their strategies are able to turn unpredictability into genuine opportunity.

This ability to turn uncertainty into a source of strategic strength, as illustrated by the episode with Hieronymos, recurs throughout Polybius's narrative. Again and again, Polybius underscores that true political acumen lies not simply in surviving instability, but in actively harnessing it. When Philip V sought to secure alliances with the northern neighbours of his kingdom in 217, Polybius notes how easily Philip persuaded the Illyrian ruler Skerdilaidas to join him – precisely by referencing the well-known fickleness of the Aitolians, whose chronic unreliability

had become a byword.²⁷ Although Polybius's account is inevitably coloured by his own political sympathies, the broader point remains: fluid and unpredictable alliances do not just threaten plans; they also open new avenues for action. In Polybius's view, those who recognize and adapt to the ever-shifting dynamics of loyalty and trust are best positioned to shape outcomes to their own benefit.

This episode underscores how moments of crisis and instability within alliance networks need not be paralysing; on the contrary, they can serve as opportunities for strategic action and creative adaptation. By making use of the weaknesses and unpredictability of others, political actors demonstrate a form of resilience – transforming the challenges of a precarious situation into productive outcomes.

6. New Opportunities – Anticipating Crises and Productive Insecurity

Disloyalty and crises within alliances have the potential to overwhelm even the best-laid plans, as they introduce a field of contingency in which few reliable parameters remain. The unpredictability of such situations can be deeply unsettling, since it disrupts the foundations of strategic calculation. Yet, as Polybius demonstrates, it is precisely through acts of defection and sudden shifts in loyalty that new opportunities arise – opportunities that can be turned to one's own advantage.

A particularly striking case is that of Abilyx, the Celtiberian leader whose story Polybius recounts in the third book of his *Histories*. At the outset, Hannibal approaches his Italian campaign with remarkable caution, demanding hostages from every city he does not fully trust – a strategy that seems to leave little room for miscalculation. Among the Iberians, too, Hannibal appears to have secured his position: Abilyx, described by Polybius as exceptionally wealthy and, initially, as the Carthaginians' most steadfast and dependable ally, seems above suspicion. Everything appears to be in order for Hannibal and his coalition – at least on the surface.²⁸

But the situation takes an unexpected turn. Observing the changing fortunes of the war, Abilyx comes to believe that the Romans are likely to prevail. As Polybius puts it, Abilyx “formed a plan worthy of an Iberian and a barbarian: to betray the hostages to the Romans. He hoped to win their favour by offering his submission in good time and rendering them a great service.”²⁹ Abilyx therefore goes over to the Romans and provides Publius Cornelius Scipio with a crucial advantage, enabling the Romans to return the hostages – even those recently reclaimed by the Carthaginians – to their home cities, thereby strengthening their own position in Spain.

It is clear that Polybius does not condone Abilyx's actions, even though they benefit the Romans. He cannot entirely conceal a certain sympathy for Hannibal's predicament. Yet, Polybius is careful to show both sides of the story: from the Roman perspective, this episode was nothing less than an extraordinary stroke of luck, as he himself writes at the end of Book three.³⁰ Here again, Polybius underscores the openness and unpredictability of events. While such developments can have disastrous consequences for some, for others they present wholly unexpected

and transformative opportunities. In this way, uncertainty in alliances is depicted not merely as a threat, but also as a potential source of resilience and renewal.

At the next level, the breaking of an alliance is no longer seen merely as something to be accepted – a rather passive form of resignation – but as a call for active response. Again and again, Polybius presents situations in which the implicit message is clear: potential alliance crises should be turned to one's own advantage. When the Romans were deliberating on how to confront Hannibal at the Trebia in 218 BC, Polybius pays close attention to their strategic thinking. Tiberius Sempronius Longus was eager to force a decisive battle as quickly as possible, but his colleague, P. C. Scipio, advised against immediate engagement. Instead, P. C. Scipio proposed waiting out the winter, reasoning that if the Carthaginians failed to win a quick victory, the Celts – who were always a fickle ally – would grow restless and eventually abandon Hannibal.³¹ Nevertheless, Tiberius chose a different path and launched an attack on the Carthaginians, with well-known disastrous consequences.

The way Polybius presents this episode is particularly striking. By highlighting P. C. Scipio's advice, he invites the reader to consider a counterfactual scenario – one that never materialized but might have spared Rome from even greater disaster. In this case, the 'predictable unpredictability' of the Celts could have rendered an otherwise unstable situation more manageable.

7. Conclusion

This chapter set out to explore the phenomenon of resilience within ancient alliance systems, focusing on how actors navigated moments of uncertainty, crisis and shifting loyalties. The guiding question was not simply why alliances broke down or endured, but rather how instability itself – so often perceived as a symptom of dysfunction – could serve as a catalyst for innovation, adaptation and renewed strategic thinking.

Already in Xenophon's writings, we observe how a leading general and political thinker grappled with the dilemmas and opportunities that arise from fragile coalitions; his vivid portrayals of trust, betrayal and flexible leadership foreshadow many of the themes later developed by Polybius. The fact that both Xenophon and Polybius – himself both a statesman and, at times, a military commander – devote such sustained attention to the uncertainties of alliance politics is telling. It reveals not just a recurring problem in ancient international relations, but also an acute awareness among contemporary decision-makers that the fate of entire states and campaigns could hinge on the reliability – or sudden collapse – of coalitions.

Limiting the scope to Polybius is not only defensible, but also fruitful. Polybius stands out among ancient historians for his acute awareness of the contingency and interconnectedness that defined the Hellenistic world. His concept of *sympleke* – the interweaving of events and fates – offers a unique analytical framework for understanding the fragility and resilience of alliances. By delving deeply into his thought, it was possible to reconstruct a coherent set of strategies, principles and mental habits that informed the actions of historical actors confronted with alliance

crises. Moreover, as Polybius's explicit aim was to draw practical lessons from history for future statesmen, his work is especially well suited for analysing the resources of resilience available in Antiquity.

Several core results emerge from this reading of Polybius:

1. Polybius consistently argues that uncertainty and unpredictability are not accidental flaws of the political order, but its very essence. Successful actors are those who accept this contingency and act with it in mind, rather than seeking an unattainable security.
2. While Polybius highlights the necessity of sober, rational calculation in alliance politics, he is equally emphatic about the limits of such calculation. Absolute security is never possible; even perfect foresight and careful planning can be undone by chance or betrayal. This insight leads to a more flexible, pragmatic approach to diplomacy and strategy.
3. Polybius's narrative abounds with episodes in which instability and defection are not simply disasters to be endured, but openings for creative adaptation. He repeatedly demonstrates how actors – be it Hannibal, the Carthaginians or the Romans – turned the weaknesses or unpredictability of their partners into strategic advantages.
4. Through a didactic use of historical *exempla*, Polybius encourages his readers to derive practical rules for future conduct. By relating past patterns of alliance-making and alliance-breaking to current situations, statesmen are equipped to anticipate and manage future crises with greater confidence and resourcefulness.
5. Perhaps most importantly, Polybius rejects the idea that alliance instability is merely a negative or paralysing force. On the contrary, it is precisely in navigating this instability – through adaptability, vigilance and strategic foresight – that resilience emerges. The capacity to act productively within a field of uncertainty defines the truly skilful statesman.

What does this Polybian perspective contribute to our broader understanding of alliance resilience in the ancient world? First, it reveals that resilience – according to the Greek historian – does not lie in the avoidance of crises, but in the capacity to engage constructively with them. Resilience is achieved not through eliminating uncertainty, but by developing an ethos of acceptance, vigilance and flexibility.

Second, Polybius's analysis makes clear that even the most robust alliances were always provisional and open to renegotiation. Ancient actors harboured no illusions on this point: they knew that the trust underpinning alliances could be – and regularly was – broken. For Polybius, however, this very precariousness does not simply constitute a weakness; it can also become the starting point for creative political action and renewal. The resilience of ancient alliances was thus less a matter of institutional stability than of strategic imagination and adaptability. Polybius's vision reminds his readers that the durability of alliances depends less on guarantees than on the ongoing willingness to face risks and embrace the possibilities hidden within crisis.

In this respect, Polybius's practical guidance is closely aligned with his approach to historiography. In a famous passage Polybius emphasizes that those who focus solely on recounting miraculous disasters (περιπετείας, *peripeteias*) fail to contribute to the meaningful enjoyment of history (ὠφελείας καὶ τέρψεως, *opheleias kai terpseos*). After all, who would want to emulate dreadful actions?³²

According to Polybius, it is essential that his account of historical events – which acknowledges a contingent environment where success is never assured, absolute security in alliances is unattainable and betrayal and uncertainty must be accepted – does not culminate in a nihilistic rejection of political agency. Instead, his aim is to highlight the ways in which alliance politics can still be shaped actively and sustainably, even under such precarious conditions. His *Histories* thus read less as a lament over the instability of human affairs than as a handbook for living with it.

Notes

- 1 Buxton 2017.
- 2 ἀλλ' εὖ ἴσθι ὅτι δεῖ τὸν μέλλοντα τοῦτο ποιήσῃν καὶ ἐπίβουλον εἶναι καὶ κρυψίνου καὶ δολερὸν καὶ ἀπατεῶνα καὶ κλέπτην καὶ ἄρπαγα καὶ ἐν παντὶ πλεονέκτην τῶν πολέμιων (Xen. Cyr. 1.6.27, transl. W. Miller).
- 3 Xen. *Ages.* 1.9–12.
- 4 Chroust 1954; Strauss 1997; Low 2007: 77–128; Meeus 2018; Wendt 2022.
- 5 Osmers 2013, e.g. Hdt. 5.79–80.
- 6 Burton 2011; Grainger 2017.
- 7 Rosenstein 2012: 176–211.
- 8 Maier 2012a.
- 9 Eckstein 2008.
- 10 Walbank 1975; Champion 1997; Quinn 2013; Maier 2018.
- 11 Eckstein 2006.
- 12 Pol. 1.4; Maier 2012c.
- 13 Εἰ μὲν τοῖς πρὸ ἡμῶν ἀναγράφουσι τὰς πράξεις παραλελειφθαι συνέβαινε τὸν ὑπὲρ αὐτῆς τῆς ἱστορίας ἔπαινον, ἴσως ἀναγκαῖον ἦν τὸ προτρέπεσθαι πάντας πρὸς τὴν αἵρεσιν καὶ παραδοχὴν τῶν τοιούτων ὑπομνημάτων διὰ τὸ μηδεμίαν ἐτοιμοτέραν εἶναι τοῖς ἀνθρώποις διόρθωσιν τῆς τῶν προγεγενημένων πράξεων ἐπιστήμης. ἐπεὶ δ' οὐ τινὲς οὐδ' ἐπὶ ποσόν, ἀλλὰ πάντες ὡς ἔπος εἰπεῖν ἀρχῇ καὶ τέλει κέχρηται τούτῳ, φάσκοντες ἀληθινωτάτην μὲν εἶναι παιδείαν καὶ γυμνασίαν πρὸς τὰς πολιτικὰς πράξεις τὴν ἐκ τῆς ἱστορίας μάθησιν, ἐναργεστάτην δὲ καὶ μόνην διδάσκαλον τοῦ δύνασθαι τὰς τῆς τύχης μεταβολὰς γενναίως ὑποφέρειν τὴν τῶν ἀλλοτρίων περιπετειῶν ὑπόμνησιν – “Had previous chroniclers neglected to speak in praise of History in general, it might perhaps have been necessary for me to recommend everyone to choose for study and welcome such treatises as the present, since men have no more ready corrective of conduct than knowledge of the past. But all historians, one may say without exception, and in no half-hearted manner, but making this the beginning and end of their labor, have impressed on us that the soundest education and training for a life of active politics is the study of History, and that the surest and indeed the only method of learning how to bear bravely the vicissitudes of fortune, is to recall the calamities of others” (Pol. 1.1.1–2, transl. Patton).
- 14 Polybius is deeply concerned with how individuals and states should respond to the uncertainties of fortune, emphasizing the importance of cultivating an attitude that acknowledges the limits of human control. Polybius thus encourages his readers to find ways of coping with the unexpected, accepting the contingent nature of historical events and facing adversity with resilience and composure: Maier 2012b; Moore 2020.

- 15 Pol. 1.25.3.
- 16 οὕτως ἡ φύσις πρὸς τὰς ἀποτυχίας τῶν ἐπινοηθέντων ἱκανὸν ἐν καὶ τὸ τυχὸν ἐποίησε τὼν κατὰ μέρος· πρὸς δὲ τὸ κατορθοῦν μόλις ἱκανὰ πάντα. – “So true is it that nature makes a single trivial error sufficient to cause failure in a design, but correctness in every detail is barely enough for success” (Pol. 9.12.10).
- 17 Πολλὴν μὲν ἐπισκέψεως χρειαν ἔχει τὰ συμβαίνοντα βαίνοντα περὶ τὰς πολεμικὰς ἐπιβολὰς· ἔστι δὲ δυνατόν ἐν ἐκάστοις αὐτῶν εὐστοχεῖν, ἐὰν σὺν νῶ τις πράττῃ τὸ προτεθέν. ὅτι μὲν οὖν ἐστὶ τῶν κατὰ πόλεμον ἔργων ἐλάττω τὰ προδήλως καὶ μετὰ βίας ἐπιτελούμενα τῶν μετὰ δόλου καὶ σὺν καιρῷ πραττομένων, εὐχερὲς τῷ βουλομένῳ καταμαθεῖν ἐκ τῶν ἤδη γεγονότων· ὅτι γε μὴν αὐτῶν τῶν ἐν καιρῷ πάλιν ἐνεργουμένων πλείω γίνεται τὰ διαμαρτανόμενα τῶν κατορθουμένων – “The accidents attendant on military projects require much circumspection, but success is in every case possible if the steps we take to carry out our plan are soundly reasoned out. That in military operations what is achieved openly and by force is much less than what is done by stratagem and the use of opportunity, can easily be learned from the history of former wars. And it is no less easy to be convinced by facts that in those actions depending on the choice of opportunity failure is far more frequent than success” (Pol. 9.12.1–3).
- 18 τὸ μὲν γὰρ μηδενὶ πιστεύειν εἰς τέλος ἀπρακτόν, τὸ δὲ λαβόντα τὰς ἐνδεχομένας πίστει πράττειν τὸ κατὰ λόγον ἀνεπιτίμητον. [...] διὸ καὶ μάλιστα μὲν τοιαύτας ζητεῖν πίστει <δεῖ>, δι’ ὧν ὁ πιστευθεὶς οὐ δυνήσεται τὴν πίστιν ἀθετεῖν. ἐπεὶ δὲ σπάνιον εὐρεῖν ἐστὶ τὸ τοιοῦτο, δεῦτερος ἂν εἴη πλοῦς τὸ τῶν κατὰ λόγον φροντίζειν, ἵν’ ἂν τοῦ καὶ σφαλλώμεθα, τῆς παρὰ τοῖς ἐκτὸς συγγνώμης μὴ διαμαρτάνωμεν (Pol. 8.36.2–6).
- 19 Ἀχαιῶς μὲν οὖν πάντα τὰ κατὰ λόγον πράξας, ὑπὸ δὲ τῆς τῶν πιστευθέντων ἡττηθεὶς ἀθεσίας, κατεστρέψατο τὸν βίον, κατὰ δύο τρόπους οὐκ ἀνωφελές ὑπόδειγμα γενόμενος τοῖς ἐπесоμένοις, καθ’ ἓνα μὲν πρὸς τὸ μηδενὶ πιστεύειν ῥαδίως, καθ’ ἕτερον δὲ πρὸς τὸ μὴ μεγαλυνεῖν ἐν ταῖς εὐπραγίαις, πᾶν δὲ προσδοκᾶν ἀνθρώπους ὄντας (Pol. 8.21.10–1). For an analysis of the dramatic tension in the narrative of this episode, see Miltsios 2016: 151–4.
- 20 ὑπερφάνως ἐχρῶντο τοῖς κατὰ τὴν χώραν. τοιγαροῦν ἀντὶ συμμάχων καὶ φίλων πολεμίους ἔσχον τοὺς ὑποταττομένους. Ἄνδ’ ὅδε καὶ περὶ πολλοὺς ἤδη γέγονε. – “The same thing has happened before to many people” (Pol. 10.36.4, 10.36.1).
- 21 Pol. 7.11.
- 22 Nicholson 2018.
- 23 ἐκ γὰρ τῶν ὁμοίων ἐπὶ τοὺς οἰκείους μεταφερομένων καιροὺς ἀφορμαὶ γίνονται καὶ προλήψεις εἰς τὸ προῖδέσθαι τὸ μέλλον (Pol. 12.25b.3).
- 24 ἀγωνίων γὰρ τὴν ἀθεσίαν τῶν Κελτῶν καὶ τὰς ἐπιβουλὰς τὰς περὶ τὸ σῶμα διὰ τὸ πρόσφατον τῆς πρὸς αὐτοὺς συστάσεως, κατεσκευάσατο περιθετὰς τρίχας, ἀρμοζούσας ταῖς κατὰ τὰς ὁλοσχερεῖς διαφορὰς τῶν ἡλικιῶν ἐπιπρεπείαις, καὶ ταύταις ἐχρήτο συνεχῶς μετατιθέμενος· ὁμοίως δὲ καὶ τὰς ἐσθῆτας μετελάμβανε τὰς καθηκούσας ἀεὶ ταῖς περιθεταῖς. δι’ ὧν οὐ μόνον τοῖς αἰφνιδίως ἰδοῦσι δύσγνωστος ἦν ἀλλὰ καὶ τοῖς ἐν συνηθείᾳ γεγονόσι (Pol. 3.78.2–3; Moore 2020: 58–60).
- 25 τὴν μὲν οὖν ὅλην ἀκαταστασίαν καὶ μανίαν καλῶς συνθεώμενοι Καρχηδόνιοι τοῦ μειρακίου (Pol. 7.4.8).
- 26 Pol. 7.7.
- 27 Pol. 4.29.
- 28 Hau 2018: 110–2.
- 29 συνελογίσατο παρ’ ἑαυτῷ περὶ τῆς τῶν ὁμήρων προδοσίας συλλογισμὸν Ἴβηρικὸν καὶ βαρβαρικόν. πεισθεὶς γὰρ διότι δύναται μέγας γενέσθαι παρὰ Ῥωμαίοις προσενηγμένος ἐν καιρῷ πίστιν ἅμα καὶ χρειαν (Pol. 3.98.3–4).
- 30 ἱκανοῦ τινος ἐκ τῆς τύχης γεγονότος συνεργήματος τοῖς Ῥωμαίοις τοῦ περὶ τοὺς παῖδας πρὸς τὰς ἐπικειμένας ἐπιβολὰς. – “Chance in this matter of the children having materially contributed to assist the projects the Romans had in view” (Pol. 3.99.9).
- 31 τὴν τε τῶν Κελτῶν ἀθεσίαν οὐκ ἐμμενεῖν ἐν τῇ πίστει, τὸν Καρχηδόνιον ἀπραγούντων καὶ τὴν ἡσυχίαν ἀναγκαζομένων ἄγειν, ἀλλὰ καινοτομήσειν τι πάλιν κατ’ ἐκείνων. –

“And that the fidelity of the fickle Celts would never stand the test of want of success and enforced inactivity on the part of the Carthaginians: they would be certain, he thought, to turn against them once more” (Pol. 3.70.1–5, here 4).

- 32 δυνεῖν γὰρ ὑπαρχόντων τελῶν, ὠφελείας καὶ τέρψεως, πρὸς ἃ δεῖ τὴν ἀναφορὰν ποιεῖσθαι τοὺς διὰ τῆς ἀκοῆς ἢ διὰ τῆς ὁράσεως βουλομένους τι πολυπραγμονεῖν, καὶ μάλιστα τῷ τῆς ἱστορίας γένει τούτου καθήκοντος, ἀμφοτέρων τούτων ὁ πλεονασμὸς ὑπὲρ τῶν ἐκ λεκτικῶν συμπτωμάτων ἐκτὸς πίπτει. ζηλοῦν μὲν γὰρ τίς ἂν βουληθεῖ τὰς παραλόγους περιπετείας; οὐδὲ μὴν θεώμενος οὐδ’ ἀκούων ἥδεται συνεχῶς οὐδεὶς τῶν παρὰ φύσιν γενομένων πραγμάτων καὶ παρὰ τὴν κοινὴν ἔννοιαν τῶν ἀνθρώπων. ἀλλ’ εἰσάπαξ μὲν καὶ πρῶτον σπουδάζομεν ἃ μὲν ἰδεῖν, ἃ δ’ ἀκοῦσαι, χάριν τοῦ γνῶναι τὸ μὴ δοκοῦν δυνατόν εἶναι διότι δυνατόν ἐστίν – “For those who are engaged on representing anything either to eye or ear can have only two objects to aim at, – pleasure and profit; and in history, more than in anything else, excessive prolixity on events of tragic interest fails of both these objects. For, in the first place, who would wish to emulate extraordinary catastrophes? And next, no one likes to be continually seeing and hearing things that are unnatural and beyond the ordinary conceptions of mankind. We are, indeed, eager to see and hear such things once and for the first time, because we want to know that a thing is possible which was supposed to be impossible” (Pol. 15.36.3–5).

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6 Fighting for the Tripod?

Crisis and Cooperation in the Delphic Amphiktyony

Emma Aston

1. Introduction

The *Blackwell Companion to Ancient Greek Government* includes a chapter on Amphiktyonies, and with good reason; after all, such ‘cultic leagues’ (as the chapter’s author calls them) held an important role in the diverse range of alliances and federations with which the ancient Greeks formalized their inter-polis relations.¹ No Amphiktyony enjoyed greater salience in this regard than that of Delphi, the grouping of twelve *ethne* which governed many important aspects of Apollo’s sanctuary, including – perhaps especially – the organization of the Pythian Games.² Twice a year, the meetings of the Amphiktyonic Council brought together twenty-four *hieromnemones*, two from each member-*ethnos*. They processed between Delphi itself and their second meeting place at Anthela, near Thermopylai, spending, as Lefèvre shows, about two weeks in each other’s company.³ As a cooperative enterprise, the Delphic Amphiktyony was exceptional, and its importance in a discussion of alliances and their resilience is plain, not least in light of its longevity. Its origins are hard to pinpoint, and its composition flexed to meet new circumstances, but, all told, it was in operation at least from the seventh century BC to the second century CE. Such a span of time surely reflects the Amphiktyony’s ability to retain significance in a drastically changing world.

Despite this, there has been a tendency in scholarship to see Delphi as a focal point, even a cause, of crisis and conflict. The Amphiktyony has often been assumed to be especially susceptible to undue influence, to being used by one state to achieve or consolidate dominance over others in central Greece. The prime candidate for the role of ‘neighbourhood bully’ has always been Thessaly.⁴ According to this view, Thessaly dominated the Amphiktyony because it had begun, from the seventh century BC at least, to encroach upon the freedom of the *perioikic* communities on its margins, and on its southern neighbours, regions which made up the core territory of the Amphiktyony. At the biannual meetings of the Amphiktyonic Council, therefore, Thessaly was essentially able to call the shots.⁵

This chapter, however, will argue both that this view of Thessaly’s role is a distorted one and that, if we are prepared to dispense with it, we are able to see the wider picture of Delphi’s contribution to resolving and diffusing conflict rather than enflaming it, avoiding crises rather than triggering them. This applies both to the Amphiktyony as an interstate body and, more generally, to the sanctuary as a

place of ritual interaction and a locus of myth in which traditions were maintained, accumulated and adapted over the centuries. It will be argued that Delphi provided a space in which conflicts could be symbolically enacted and thereby resolved through myth and ritual. This did not prevent sporadic flareups of antagonism and open warfare between states, Amphiktyonic members included. But the resilience of the sacred space outlived such conflicts and provided more stability and continuity than did the shifting patchwork of short-term *symmachiai*.

2. Conflict and Delphi: The Role of Thessaly

As I have argued elsewhere, the idea of Delphi as a catalyst of interstate crises rests heavily on the notion that central Greece in the Archaic period was more or less dominated by the northern state of Thessaly, and that the Amphiktyony was the chief manifestation of this dominance.⁶ It is necessary, therefore, before turning to the broader picture, to address this specific aspect. To a large extent, the methods that produced the image of the dominant Thessaly are now no longer applied: we are rightly cautious about retrojecting into the Archaic period the political conditions of the fifth and fourth centuries and also about the sort of approach that Defradas or Guillon (for example) pursued: that is, ‘uncovering’ the coded messages of interstate conflict supposedly hidden within epic verse or visual art.⁷ But the fruits of such methods are now thoroughly embedded in how we view the Amphiktyony in the Archaic period, as essentially an instrument of Thessalian ambitions.⁸ In fact, however, the evidence supports a perception of Thessaly as influential, and perhaps conducting some aggressive moves southwards in the later sixth century,⁹ but not as the regional hegemon some have sought to find.

Equally unprovable is the idea that Thessaly, once in the Amphiktyony, came to dominate it.¹⁰ This idea rests heavily on the notion of Thessalian leadership of the Amphiktyonic forces during the so-called First Sacred War, conventionally dated to ca. 590 BC.¹¹ Even if we accept this conflict as a historical reality,¹² and even if we set aside the extraordinary complexity of its incorporation in fourth century and later myth-making,¹³ in fact the Thessalian involvement is no more emphasized in our ancient sources than that of other regions and states. Athenian and Sikyonian contributions are just as strongly represented in the various traditions, and they are just as susceptible to historical explanation as a Thessalian role – more so, since both Athens and Sikyon (or rather, certain elements in those states) had a fraught relationship with Delphi in the sixth century.¹⁴ Non-proximate leaders, with clear ambitions towards interregional influence, are perfectly plausible actors in such a conflict, more so perhaps than the Thessalians, whose Archaic machinations are largely lost to our view.¹⁵ Scepticism is further encouraged by Sprawski’s well-judged reconsideration of Thessaly’s relationship with the perioikic communities which flanked her (Perrhaibia, Magnesia, Dolopia and Achaia Phthiotis), which does away with the notion that, in the Archaic period at least, their votes on the Amphiktyonic Council would, *de facto*, be more votes for the Thessalians, as has sometimes been supposed.¹⁶ Once one starts picking away at the idea of Thessaly as controlling her *perioikoi* and her southern neighbours, the

idea of her dominance within the Amphiktyony – typically treated as both cause and effect of her commanding position – essentially evaporates.

This realization leaves us free to consider Thessaly's interaction with Delphi more broadly and more neutrally. Viewed without preconceptions, the relationship between the Thessalians and Delphi emerges as entirely comprehensible in terms of the normal contacts that trade, and individuals' attendance of a major sanctuary, would lead us to expect. The archaeological record places both Delphi and Thessaly (especially the sites around the Bay of Volos) among a number of interconnected central and northern Greek sites; this goes back to the Middle Bronze Age,¹⁷ though from the eighth century especially, as Morgan has observed, Thessaly emerges as "a particularly important intermediate area in an exchange network, linking the [Corinthian] Gulf coast with the southern Balkans".¹⁸ This has nothing to do with the desire to control and dominate sanctuaries; both Delphi and Kalapodi were important sites of interregional interaction, with a Thessalian presence in both, but there is no need to infer Thessalian predominance.¹⁹

Thessalian votives at Delphi were not striking in their scale or number. There was 'the small Apollo' dedicated by one Echekratidas of Larisa, said by Pausanias to be the earliest dedication in the sanctuary, according to the Delphians.²⁰ In fact, by the time Pausanias visited Delphi, local accounts of what monuments were put up when would have been extremely confused and subject to the vagaries of the oral tradition. The same difficulty of dating applies to the statue group showing Achilles mounted and Patroklos on foot, put up, according to Pausanias, by the people of Pharsalos,²¹ though in this case a possible similarity with Pharsalian coinage of the last quarter of the fifth century may support a tentative dating to that time, if the coins were meant to mark the setting up of a significant new monument and a renewed connection with the sanctuary.²² Before the construction of the Daochos Monument,²³ probably in the 330s but possibly between 287 and 277,²⁴ Thessalian dedications at Delphi were relatively modest, in keeping with those of most other Amphiktyonic communities.²⁵ The Thessalians did occasionally use Delphi to mark major events, such as the battle of Tanagra in 457 BC: a tenth of the plunder from that engagement went into the offering of a horse statue.²⁶ In no way, however, are such dedications suggestive of a special level of Thessalian influence or control within Delphi itself.

As I have argued elsewhere,²⁷ the years after the second Persian invasion may have seen the enlargement, if not the inception, of the Septerion, an enneacteric festival in which a procession travelled north from Delphi to Tempe and harvested laurel from the banks of the Peneios, laurel to be used as crowns for Pythian victors, while a boy enacting the part of Apollo obtained purification in the river from his killing of the monster Python.²⁸ This rite is generally assumed to be very ancient, but none of the evidence for it pre-dates the fifth century,²⁹ and it must surely have had fresh salience, at least, after the war, providing a focus of Thessaly's connection with Delphi in a zone not overshadowed by the memory of recent disgrace.³⁰ We should recall that often crisis and discomfort galvanize energetic innovation better than security and comfort. Once again, the role of Thessaly in Archaic Delphi is hard to grasp and only materializes through processes of problematic retrojection.

Rather than deploring this situation, however, we should embrace the invitation it gives us to reconsider not just Archaic Thessaly's role in central Greece, but indeed Archaic Delphi in general. Once the hegemonic Thessaly is largely removed from the picture, should we still see the sanctuary as a locus of conflict and contestation, or should we engage in a more wholesale process of reevaluation? Without, of course, suggesting that Archaic Delphi was free from tension, this chapter will go on to make the following essential points: that the kind of conflict we find in the fifth and fourth centuries cannot be assumed to have prevailed in earlier times; that 'decoding' Archaic mythology to reveal 'real' interstate conflicts is inherently unwise and misleading; and that it is essential to acknowledge the ways in which the Delphic Amphiktyony, in particular, and Delphi, more generally, actually worked to defuse conflict and negotiate interactions in a complicated geopolitical context. Considering this effect helps to explain the longstanding importance of Delphi as a place where shared Greek identity could be negotiated and affirmed across the boundaries of individual poleis and *ethne* during a critical phase of state-formation in the Archaic period.

3. The Amphiktyony and Political Conflict

The fifth and fourth centuries give us clear instances of states using Delphi to serve their own interests within the context of interstate rivalry. In the decades following Xerxes's invasion of Greece, Delphi was caught up in the Spartan ambition to increase its presence in central Greece, including its representation in the Amphiktyony, and Athens's desire to obstruct this process. This set of circumstances lies behind the Sacred War in 450 BC,³¹ and indeed behind the Spartan foundation of Herakleia Trachinia in 426.³² There is no sign, in the sources, of the Amphiktyony being drawn in as an instrument in these actions; the Sacred War was not, if Thucydides is to be believed, an Amphiktyonic enterprise, and the foundation of Herakleia was thoroughly unpopular among the core communities of the Amphiktyony. Neither Athens nor Sparta, as chief antagonists, had a substantial traditional role within the group;³³ conflict arose from relative outsiders muscling in, and the group typically associated with its political use, the Thessalians, are virtually invisible. While their credit at Delphi in general may have been weakened by their recent medism, there is no good evidence for a drastic reduction, in the fifth century, of Thessalian activity on the Delphic stage.

In the fourth century, by contrast, we do find the Thebans and the Thessalians, the latter with Macedonian contrivance from the arrival of Philip II on the scene, 'weaponizing' the Amphiktyony for their own political purposes. None of the events and conditions of this time, however, is amenable to retrojection into the Archaic period. Jason of Pherai, for all that he espoused a discourse of Thessalian tradition, represented an unheard-of regional and interregional ambition;³⁴ the prominence of Daochos and Thrasydaos would not have happened without Macedonian backing. There is no doubt that Thessalians played a role in the increasing tension which presaged, led up to and partly triggered the outbreak of the Third Sacred War,³⁵ but

it reflects circumstances within and beyond Thessaly which cannot be assumed to apply in the Archaic period.

If we had sustained historical accounts, like those of Thucydides and Xenophon, for the Archaic period, it is quite likely that comparable conflicts with those of the Classical period would emerge to view. The direct use of the Amphiktyony by states embroiled in such conflicts, however, may well be largely a feature of the fifth century onwards. As Tausend remarks, when the Thessalians attacked the Phokians in the late sixth century, there is no sign that they tried to use the Amphiktyony to galvanize support on their side.³⁶ Also – and this is a crucial point – trying to extract political messages from early myths misrepresents the nature and purposes of the material. In the remainder of this section, I shall draw attention to how ill-suited mythological narratives actually are to serve a narrow political function – that is, in allowing one Amphiktyonic community to enhance its own standing while denigrating another. I shall focus on two mythical figures associated with the threat to plunder the Apollo sanctuary, Achilles and his son Neoptolemos. Both have been interpreted as constituting an implicit, coded accusation against a community regarded as a menace to Delphi; but, in fact, it will be argued that their roles in myth and cult allow them instead to neutralize and to resolve threat, rather than simply embodying it.

Delphi was not the only wealthy and important interregional sanctuary in the Archaic period. Yet none other – even Olympia – came to be implicated in so many myths of attempted plunder. Sometimes the would-be perpetrators are individuals, sometimes tribes such as the Phlegyai. Both have been claimed as coded stand-ins for historical aggressors, including the Thessalians; according to this model, one could paint a rival as the enemy of Apollo's interests through the use of mythological proxies.³⁷ Such an approach overlooks, however, the fact that 'bad' figures and groups in myth are not always deployed by one community against another, but are very often incorporated in a community's own self-presentation and collective identity. Phokian Panopeus and (perhaps) Thessalian Gyrtion seem to have forged links with the Phlegyai.³⁸ Kragaleus, the eponymous ancestor of the Kragallidai, who, alongside the Krisaioi, supposedly constituted the opponents of the Amphiktyons in the First Sacred War, was associated with Ambrakia in such a way as to suggest very strongly that Ambrakia itself asserted the connection.³⁹ The Dryopes are another clear example: they were supposedly driven from the Spercheios Valley by Herakles as punishment for an attack on Delphi; several historical communities claimed to have been settled by refugee Dryopes and to be descendants of these original transgressors.⁴⁰ It is clear that a reputation for attacking Delphi or its interests did not make mythological characters unpalatable, useful only to fling at one's enemies as a coded criticism.

Another obvious but important point is that the myths of an attack on Delphi normally situate the event in the distant past; the Dryopes indeed are one of the early peoples of Greece, like the Pelasgoi and Leleges.⁴¹ The exception is the traditions surrounding the First Sacred War, in which the use of myth is slightly different: in that case, for the most part, the fraught circumstances of the Third and Fourth Sacred Wars sparked a manufacture or at least a major embellishment of

legends with the aim of endorsing, through ancient precedent, the Amphiktyony's campaign against the Phokians.⁴² There myth was indeed being used to separate "Them" (impious Phokians, the contemporary equivalents of the Krisaians and Kragallidai) from "Us" (righteous Amphiktyons undertaking their punishment in the name of Apollo). The fact that so much myth-making went into justifying the Amphiktyonic side of the conflict is in itself significant, suggesting how starkly unusual and controversial the punishment of the Phokians actually was. Nothing of the sort, on that scale, had happened before. Myths were mobilized in a highly unusual way to cope with a set of *extraordinary* circumstances.

This use of myth as supplying a justificatory parallel for unfolding conflicts should not, therefore, be taken as the norm. As often, or perhaps more often, I would suggest, the stories of Delphic attacks were designed to present strife as in the past and fully resolved, retribution done and dusted. The role of Delphic myth and ritual to supply resolution and neutralization of conflict is far more substantial, I would argue, than the weaponization of myth in the context of an ongoing conflict. This can be clearly observed in the linked cases of Achilles and his son Neoptolemos/Pyrros. Both are associated with the possibility of Delphi's riches being plundered or harm otherwise being done to the sanctuary of Apollo – Achilles very subtly, Neoptolemos much more overtly. Neoptolemos, in particular, has sometimes been interpreted as a symbolic representation of Thessaly as a dominant member of the Amphiktyony which established control over Delphi after the First Sacred War.⁴³ But, in fact, neither hero seems to have functioned primarily as a reproach against a particular group so much as an expression of the delicate balance of different interests prevailing in the sanctuary.

As early as the *Iliad*, the idea of Delphi's wealth and vulnerability to plundering appears in connection with Achilles. Refusing Agamemnon's attempts at peace-making in Book 9, Achilles announces that, instead, he will return to 'Hellas and Phthia' to marry there and live out his life in comfort; nothing will induce him to rejoin the fighting at Troy, for "my life is worth more than [...] all that the stone doorsill of the Archer holds fast within it, / of Phoibos Apollo in Pytho of the rocks".⁴⁴ The fact that he then goes on to remark that, in any case, he can always obtain wealth by raiding strikes a sinister note, with the juxtaposition of Delphi (Pytho) and the motif of plunder. A mere few lines later, Achilles explains his dual destiny, the choice that Thetis set before him, between a long and obscure life if he returns home or a brief but glorious one if he stays to fight at Troy. He appears to be renouncing the latter, but in fact we – and the ancient audience – know which fate will be his, a glorious death at Troy and a tomb near the Hellespont.⁴⁵ Pytho's treasures are safe because Achilles never returns home, and what ensures his continued presence in the Troas is the cult which was practised around his supposed tomb. Ritual – implied in the *Iliad* – fixes him east of the Aegean and thereby saves Delphi from the hinted menace of his return.

Apollo's sanctuary is not, however, spared the *nostos* of Achilles's son Neoptolemos, or Pyrrhos. Achilles is, of course, presented as a problematic figure in the *Iliad*, not least because of his perpetual enmity with Apollo,⁴⁶ but this is magnified tenfold in the character of his son. Whereas Achilles spares Priam and

returns to him Hektor's body, Neoptolemos hacks the old man down at an altar during his bloody sack of Troy, his violence breaking all the bounds of the heroic ideal.⁴⁷ And once back in Greece, he takes the animosity towards Apollo which he has inherited from Achilles to the god's very doorstep. His motives are variously reported: in one version, he seeks revenge for the god's killing of his father; in another he attempts to take Hermione away from her suitor, Orestes. His killer is variously Apollo himself, a Delphic priest or a group of Delphians at the instigation of Orestes.⁴⁸

Neoptolemos's story was included in the Epic Cycle, but it seems to have gained in popularity in the fifth century BC, in part because two groups, the Aiginetans and the rulers of Molossia, claimed a connection with him at that time. In the case of the Aiginetans, their interest in the hero was strongly focused on his Delphic dimension, linked to the sanctuary not only through mythology, but also through cult. According to Pindar, Neoptolemos was a *themiskopos*, overseeing good ritual order, especially as regards sacrifices.⁴⁹ He also appears to have presided over the Theoxenia, a festival in which gods and heroes received symbolic hospitality and which put strong emphasis on the fair and appropriate allocation of portions, *moirai*.⁵⁰ Neoptolemos's role as guarantor of this process is on the face of it odd, since, in the version Pindar reports, he himself was killed by a Delphic priest in a quarrel over the division of sacrificial meat.⁵¹ But it is by no means unknown for a cult hero to neutralize or ward off the very threat which he himself embodies. By burying Neoptolemos within Apollo's *temenos* and giving him the role of ritual overseer, the Delphians co-opted his violent energies and made him a servant of the very god against whom he had, in some accounts, pitted himself.⁵²

Neoptolemos at Delphi has been considered by scholars from a variety of angles. Kurke has situated him within wide-ranging discourse on religious authority; Kowalzig and Polinskaya have placed him within the context of Aiginetan self-advertisement.⁵³ A third approach, however, sees Neoptolemos as a cipher representing Thessaly, and his negative characterization in the Delphic context as reflecting hostility towards Thessaly.⁵⁴ This last it seems to involve a reading of myth wholly at odds with how the Greeks themselves treated it. Though of course Greek authors were perfectly capable of conceiving of a metaphorical dimension to myths, I can think of no instance of an ancient writer 'decoding' stories, from a political perspective, as we now like to do. Is that because we cleverly identify a layer of meaning which they cannot see? Of course, studies of symbolism tend to entail readings beyond those the ancients themselves carried out, but that process is about making latent meanings manifest; the 'decoding' strategy rests on a presupposition of significance so blunt and basic (Neoptolemos = the Thessalians) that if that is what ancient authors or artists intended we should surely hear about it from them from time to time. And yet this is a form of interpretation in which they never explicitly engage.

The approach also, as I have said, overlooks the power of a staged and controlled conflict within a ritual context. Through ritual, Neoptolemos is turned from agent of chaos to arbiter of order, from Apollo's foe to his servant. And Apollo himself is a god of violence. He himself is fond of plunder,⁵⁵ and he took Delphi

by force from its previous incumbent.⁵⁶ There is no sharp dichotomy between a vulnerable god and a threatening hero. If Neoptolemos was intended to represent Thessaly, or the Amphiktyony, the code was a singularly ineffective one.

The same is true of another of Apollo's opponents, Herakles. On the east pediment of the Siphnian Treasury beside the Sacred Way in Delphi (ca. 525 BC) was depicted a striking scene of Apollo and Herakles pulling a tripod between them, while Zeus stands at centre, also clutching the tripod (and perhaps trying to stop the struggle) and other deities flank them. This sculptural composition seems to have inspired, or at least encouraged, a spate of depictions in Attic black figure pottery from ca. 520 BC onwards, plainly relishing a piquant and sometimes almost comical scene.⁵⁷ Literary accounts of the story are all much later, and it is not impossible that some distortion of the narrative has crept in. According to them, Herakles stole the tripod in anger at being refused an oracle by Apollo, perhaps with the intention of setting up his own rival oracle, but we cannot be sure this is exactly the myth that prevailed in the late sixth century.⁵⁸

As with Neoptolemos, the "trained cryptographers" (to use Neer's phrase)⁵⁹ have busied themselves about this episode, interpreting Herakles as Krisa (offending against Apollo and requiring punishment by the Amphiktyons)⁶⁰ or as the Amphiktyony itself taking control of Delphi (represented by the tripod) in the aftermath of the First Sacred War, the latter interpretation resting on Herakles's ties to the area of Anthela and nearby Mount Oita.⁶¹ Such a layer of hidden meaning is, as Neer points out, unnecessary, and would surely not have been how the passing viewer regarded the scene.⁶² If we do take the tripod to represent the oracle, a story that Herakles tried to seize it is in keeping with the pervasive motif of Apollo taking and retaining control of the oracle by force; however, tripods also evoke victory in ritual *agones*, and the struggle of the two powerful figures on the east pediment may also, in a sense, model and evoke the agonistic activities of those participating in the Pythian Games. It is not implausible to suggest that the struggle for the tripod does evoke the idea of a rich prize – the sanctuary, the oracle – potentially subject to contestation. However, the contest is resolved, order and justice are restored, and to try to decide that Herakles was code for one group or person or another is an inherently spurious enterprise.

So we have seen that myth and ritual, so far from being used as a simple instrument to rebuke and defame rival interests in the sanctuary, in fact serve to characterize Delphi as a place where conflict is held in check, balance is achieved, resolution is found. The opponents of Apollo are either disposed of (the Phlegyai) or neutralized and brought into collaboration with him (Neoptolemos, Herakles).⁶³ Delphic mythology is, first and foremost, about reassurance, not rebuke. Delphi was a tense space; its riches invited plunder, its pilgrims sustained the perils of long-range travel, its Oracle held out the possibility of major political influence. The fabric of its mythology was designed to endorse, rather than challenge, the order of the religious site, the peaceful interaction of its human and divine occupants and visitors.

This mythology was not developed in a single moment but rather built up through centuries of layered tradition; the motif of threat averted is a cumulative

and intensified one. For example, as observed above, Neoptolemos's violence is a more extreme and more actuated version of that of Achilles. Unlike Achilles, who merely issues a veiled threat, Neoptolemos actually comes to Delphi with malign plans. Unlike Achilles, whose cult in the Troas ensures his distance from Delphi, Neoptolemos is secured by ritual within Delphi itself. While the *Iliad* does express the theme of a crisis averted, later sources bring the motif to the fore and intensify the jeopardy. Perhaps this intensification is related to the increasing weaponization of the sanctuary from the fifth century, noted above. It is interesting, from that point, to see legendary and historical hazards being woven together into a flexible myth-history: Phlegyai and Aiakidai lead on to Xerxes's soldiers, to Phokians in the fourth century, to Celts in the third, and Pausanias crowns his remarkable catalogue of such threats to Delphi with that arch-plunderer, the Roman emperor Nero.⁶⁴ This myth-history is the work of centuries and of many voices; it is never controlled by a single central authority. Its ultimate effect is to endorse and emphasize the resilience of the sanctuary and of its administrative organization, even in the face of massive surrounding change and periodic interstate crises.

To return to the role of the Amphiktyony in the theme of conflict-avoidance, it is also important to note myths linked less with Delphi itself than with the Amphiktyony's primary base, at Anthela near Thermopylai, where both Demeter Amphiktyonis and the hero Amphiktyon had sanctuaries.⁶⁵ Although archaeology has massively increased our understanding of the Spercheios Valley region in recent decades,⁶⁶ it has not been able to illuminate the religious site itself to any significant extent.⁶⁷ Nonetheless, the connection of Delphi with Anthela has massive strategic implications. The sites are located one at each end of the Great Isthmus Corridor, linking the Malian with the Corinthian Gulf;⁶⁸ Anthela is also near Thermopylai, the site of fully five recorded battles (between 480 BC and 1941 AD) in which an attempt was made to hold the narrow pass, between mountain and shore, against an invader.⁶⁹ The Gates – Pylai – as the area is often known constituted the essential junction between north and south, and they were a natural point of convergence. There was a harbour nearby,⁷⁰ and in the Late Bronze Age and the Early Iron Age the Spercheios Valley and the Malian Gulf were fully integrated into the network of overland and maritime routes linking central Greece, southern Thessaly, Euboea and some coastal and island sites beyond. A more fitting and significant location for a place of regular congregation cannot be imagined. Nor is it surprising to find a close association between the area and early articulations of Hellenism. When, in the Catalogue of Ships, the poet of the *Iliad* lists the contingents led by Achilles at Troy, he includes Hellas and the Hellenes, both of which names appear to designate the area of the Spercheios Valley and its inhabitants.⁷¹ The *Catalogue of Women*, probably early sixth century in date, also signals the importance of the region, this time by associating it with the descendants of Deukalion and of his son the *Stammvater* Hellen.

Once again, Thessalian dominance has been extrapolated, this time from the claim that Deukalion and Hellen are made rulers of Thessaly.⁷² But in fact they are as closely linked with the Lokrians⁷³ – like Kyknos, mentioned above. Achilles, Deukalion, Hellen, Kyknos – all these figures spill between the state and regional

boundaries we now consider so important. But perhaps the importance of those borders was, or could be, slight before the fifth century. Or was the geographical indeterminacy of the original Hellas and Hellenes, like that of the Phlegyai and the Dryopes, deliberately cultivated, because they were the possession not of any one state but of the Amphiktyony, all those converging at Anthela (and later also at Delphi)? I would strongly suggest that this was so, and that the original Hellas, so far from being subject to exclusive claims by individual states and regions, was actually shared – that the Amphiktyony may be seen as a mechanism for such sharing, and for preventing concepts of high value from being commandeered to the advantage of specific actors and the detriment of others. Thus, it helped to maintain a delicate but longstanding religious alliance in an area of Greece whose huge strategic importance was matched by its symbolic resonance, both of which might generate risk if subject to unilateral political control.

The act of situating Hellas and the Hellenes as an Amphiktyonic possession is also discernible in the inclusion of the eponymous hero Amphiktyon within the lineage of Deukalion and Hellen. Amphiktyon may have been included in the *Catalogue of Women* (fr. 4 MW is not exactly clear on which details go back to that work, and which derive from later variants); certainly, by the fifth century at least, Amphiktyon had been woven, in various ways, into the local myth-histories of the Athenians, the Lokrians, the Thessalians and the Boiotians, reflecting the desire of those communities to advertise their role in the Delphic Amphiktyony.⁷⁴ None of this, however, amounts to an exclusive appropriation of Hellenism by any one state in the Archaic period. Nor does it reflect a contest among communities for actual tangible control of, or dominance in, the Amphiktyony itself.

Overall, it is vital to see the articulation of Hellenicity in the Archaic period as operating on the basis of networks rather than as the exclusive possession of individual states. We should also remember, with regard to all time periods, that Greek myths were flexible enough to allow for different claims of connection, without the process constituting a zero-sum game. Working in the Augustan period, the geographer Strabo refers to claims by the Thessalian poleis of Pharsalos and Melitaia to have held in their territory the original Hellas (here conceived as a town), with Melitaia strengthening the point by showing a supposed tomb of Hellen in their own agora.⁷⁵ At what point these local connections were asserted we cannot say, but they, like the different localizations of the hero Amphiktyon, represent the desire of communities to plug themselves into a network rather than to deprive others of their place in it.

4. Conclusions: The Value of the Amphiktyony beyond Conflict and Crisis

This chapter has sought a middle ground between two methodological extremes in our historical approach to Delphi: on the one hand, a hard-nosed emphasis on conflict and attempted domination, which reads myths as vessels of coded information and as weapons in bitter interregional conflicts; on the other, that which sees Delphi as the crucible of religious discourse in the broad and abstract sense, ‘good

to think with' for the Greeks and for us. I have tried to shift the political significance of the Amphiktyony, in particular, away from an endless series of attempted takeovers, and towards a recognition of the delicate power balance which, before the fourth century especially, it actually contrived to maintain. There is no evidence that it, or Delphi, became the political instrument of any one state or region in the Archaic period, though influence was wielded by many. Instead, Delphi staged *agones*: those in the formal programme of the Pythian Games, but also the inter-polis rivalries which underpinned the erection of monuments in Apollo's sanctuary, the "spatial politics" that Scott (2010) discusses. In this process of agonistic self-advertisement, the Amphiktyonic states were self-effacing. Moreover, we saw that mythology, so far from being deployed to exacerbate tension, often articulates its resolution: Achilles does not return to Greece but oversees the Hellespont and its shipping; his son becomes a useful lieutenant of Apollo; Herakles lets go of the tripod and Apollo has won the bout; violent Phlegyai are consigned to the past. Even when, from the fifth century, the sanctuary becomes more visibly embroiled in interstate rivalries, the resulting crises can be dealt with, in part, through their incorporation into the pre-existing *topos* of the defeated marauder, to reassure all the sanctuary's stakeholders of its continued integrity.

In challenging the automatic assumption of the Amphiktyony's role in interstate conflict, we should also follow Bowden's injunction⁷⁶ to remember what work the organization actually did, in particular organizing the Pythian and Pylaian festivals year in and year out. Even the preparation of a village *fête* can result in conflict. But until the fourth century we hear nothing of problems with festival management; the events simply happen, regularly and routinely; no doubt minor squabbles attended the details, now lost to view, but the key point is that the Amphiktyony simply did what it was meant to do. Most of its activities would have been behind the scenes, and of little interest to the other Greeks who visited Apollo's sanctuary. Only in very particular circumstances did the spotlight swing round to shine on them. Most of the time, Amphiktyonic gatherings would have served local concerns, not the grand events of interest to a Thucydides or even a Herodotus. Ancient festivals tended to have fairs attached, occasions for the selling of livestock and goods;⁷⁷ the former particularly would have been important to the central and northern Greek *ethne* in which pastoralism played a large role.

Against the backdrop of such routine – even humdrum – interactions, we may speculate about mutual influence between members, whose leading men held the roles of *hieromnemon* and Pylagoras. It is hard not to impute to Anthela a role in the processes of ethnogenesis in the area. Of course, it was not the only inter-regional religious meeting place (Kalapodi was important in this regard), but it is highly significant that participation was organized on an *ethnos*-by-*ethnos* basis. It is striking that the *ethne* attested in our earliest literary source, the Catalogue of Ships in the *Iliad*, are, with the exception of the Arkadians, all Amphiktyonic members in central Greece. There is little we can do with this observation, not least because the composition of the Amphiktyony in the seventh century, when the Catalogue was composed, is unknown, but a significant correlation may be the subject of conjecture. A sense of ethnic difference and distinctiveness relies

heavily on contact with out-groups, and that contact is just what early gatherings at Anthela would have provided, in a more formalized and substantial way than the *ad hoc* encounters in borderlands, patches of shared or contested grazing, on roads and passes.⁷⁸ As ethnic and territorial boundaries were established and contested, local conflicts are bound to have flared up, but there is no evidence that meetings at Anthela, or indeed the existence of the Amphiktyony, were in any way instrumental in their exacerbation. Quite the reverse: the Amphiktyony should be seen as a religious alliance with a remarkable capacity for resilience in the face of interstate crises and with the ability to contribute to their resolution.

Notes

- 1 Funke 2013.
- 2 The most substantial and detailed accounts of the Amphiktyony are, of course, those of Lefèvre 1998 and Sánchez 2001. Funke 2013 also provides a useful overview.
- 3 Lefèvre 1998: 193–6.
- 4 Aston 2024: 39–72.
- 5 Accounts of Thessalian dominance include Wade-Gery and Morrison 1942: 59; Forrest 1956: 42; Sordi 1958: 32–84; Larsen 1960, 1967: 111–13; Lehmann 1983; Hall 2002: 125–54. As we shall see, this perception, for all its genesis in mid-twentieth-century scholarship, has become a rarely questioned orthodoxy.
- 6 Aston 2024: 39–72.
- 7 Defradas 1954; Guillon 1963; see also Ducat 1964; Sordi 1966.
- 8 For a quite recent example, see Scott 2010: 52, n. 66: control of Delphi allowed Thessaly to '[control] the Isthmus trading corridor'; the Anthela base is simply called 'Thessalian', presupposing – without argument – total Thessalian control. Such brief mentions especially reflect the extent to which such a perception has become part of the historiographic orthodoxy of Delphi.
- 9 As suggested, especially, by Herodotus (8.27) – for the complexities of his narratives, however, and the need for caution in their interpretation, see Londey 2020; Aston 2024: 64–70.
- 10 See, e.g. Downie 2004: 169–75.
- 11 For example, Tausend (1992: 43) links the First Sacred War with 'massive Expansionstendenzen' displayed by the Thessalians at the time.
- 12 Scholarly approaches to the First Sacred War range from attempting to reconcile its occurrence with some plausible realia (e.g. Howe 2003) to wholesale denial that it ever took place (e.g. Robertson 1978; Londey 2015). There is a useful summary of scholarly views in Londey 2015: 225–9.
- 13 On which see, especially, Franchi 2016, 2018.
- 14 Forrest 1956: 38–42. He argues that Kleisthenes of Sikyon moved in and out of favour with Delphi. As for his allies, the Athenian Alkmaionidai, they were declared accursed in the late 630s; Forrest detects Delphic authority behind this event.
- 15 *Contra*: Woodbury 1979: 101.
- 16 Sprawski 2008.
- 17 Knodell 2021: 90.
- 18 Morgan 1990: 116. Linking the Spercheios Valley with the Corinthian Gulf was the Great Isthmus Corridor, whose significance and features are explored in detail in Kase, Szemler, Wilkie and Wallace 1991. Their argument about the viability and significance of Thermopylai as a land route may have found relatively few adherents (for criticism, see e.g. McInerney 1999: 333–9), but they are surely right in establishing the Corridor as a major connection between Delphi and Anthela, the two poles of the Amphiktyonic administration.

- 19 Franchi 2016: 78–9; Kramer-Hajos 2016: 168–71; Aston 2024: 32–4.
- 20 Paus. 10.16.8.
- 21 Paus. 10.13.5.
- 22 Lavva 2001: 46 and nr. 265–359.
- 23 Jacquemin and Laroche 2001; Aston 2012.
- 24 For the later date, see Geominy 1998, 2007. The dedicator Daochos identifies himself as a *hieromnemon*, and this seems to make the earlier date more likely; the Daochos who was *hieromnemon* between 336 and 332 was an influential and prominent figure, with substantial epigraphic attestation, whereas no such figure is known from the early third century.
- 25 Scott 2010: 88–91.
- 26 *SEG* 17.243; Daux 1958; Helly 1995: 226–33.
- 27 Aston 2019.
- 28 Plut., *Quaest. Graec.* 12; *De Def. Or.* 15.
- 29 The earliest mention is in Pind. *Pae.* X(a) and perhaps VIII: Rutherford 2001: 201–2.
- 30 *Contra*: Suárez de la Torre 1997, arguing for a seventh century *floruit* for the ritual, as part and parcel of Thessaly's supposed Amphiktyonic dominance at the time.
- 31 Thuc. 1.112.5. On the term and concept of 'Sacred War', see Pownall 1998. For analysis of the episode and the available sources, see Franchi 2022: 13–18, which plots the ways in which the conflict between Athens and Sparta put old alliances (for example between Athens and Phokis) under new tensions.
- 32 Thuc. 3.92.3–4.
- 33 The two Dorian votes were allocated to the Dorians of the Metropolis and the Dorians of the Peloponnese; Sparta strove to achieve representation through the former. The foundation of Herakleia increased Spartan representation: Herakleia held, through Spartan contrivance, one of the votes allocated to the Oitaiaans. See Hornblower 2007: 49–50; see also Lefèvre 1998: 52–8 and 92–3.
- 34 On Jason's Delphic plans, see Xen. *Hell.* 6.4.29–32 and Sprawski 1999.
- 35 The tensions within Delphi in this period are also amply illustrated by an Amphiktyonic decree dated, on the basis of letter forms, to some time between 370 and 356; the document appears to forbid bringing troops into the sanctuary (or onto sacred ground); to allocate to the Amphiktyons (alone) the right to levy taxes on those using the port of Kirrha; and, likewise, to give the Amphiktyons the right to control sacred money. See *CID* IV 2; cf. Lefèvre 1998; see also Salviat 1995; Buckler and Beck 2008: 214–15. In Aischines 3 (*Against Ktesiphon*) 113, the Amphissians rebuilt and occupied the harbour and levied charges there; at 119 he describes their misuse of the sacred Krisaia Plain, the building of pottery works and agricultural facilities. These activities will have been going on for years before the Amphiktyons decided suddenly to strike against them in 339 BC.
- 36 Tausend 1992: 36–7.
- 37 Aston 2024: 50–9.
- 38 Panopeus: McInerney 1999: 169–70. Gyrtionians as Phlegyai: Str. 9.5.21; Mili 2015: 188–9.
- 39 Ant. Lib. *Met.* 4.
- 40 For a discussion of the sources, which go back to Pherekydes, see Fowler 2013: 100–3. The eponymous ancestor of the tribe, Dryops, is a son of Spercheios and Polydore in Pherekydes: *FGrH* 3 F 8.
- 41 McInerney 2014: 28–34.
- 42 Franchi 2016 and 2020.
- 43 See, e.g. Defradas 1954: 154–6; Kowalzig 2007: 198–9.
- 44 οὐ γὰρ ἐμοὶ ψυχῆς ἀντάξιον [...] οὐδ' ὅσα λάϊνος οὐδὸς ἀφήτορος ἐντὸς ἐέργει / Φοίβου Ἀπόλλωνος Πυθοῖ ἐνι πετρῆεσση (Hom. *Il.* 9.401–5, transl. mod. Lattimore).
- 45 Hom. *Il.* 23.125–6; *Od.* 24.80–4. See Nagy 1999: 147–51.

- 46 Achilles and Apollo as both antagonists and parallels: Rabel 1990. Apollo and Achilles at enmity in Homer and in Pindar: Hedreen 2009: 327–9.
- 47 This was included in the *Little Iliad* (fr. 25 West) and in the *Iliou Persis* (Proklos's summary).
- 48 In Euripides's *Andromache* (ll. 1085–160) he is killed by the Delphians after Orestes accuses him of planning to plunder the sanctuary. Pherekydes has him scuffle fatally with Delphian priests who are taking an unfair share of sacrificial meats: *FGrH* 3 F 64; the quarrel over meat is also represented in Pind. *Nem.* 7.33–48. Killed by Apollo: Pind. *Pae.* 6.117–20. For a full collation and analysis of the sources, see Fontenrose 1960: 191–266; Suárez de la Torre 1997: 153–5.
- 49 Pind. *Nem.* 7.47.
- 50 On the phenomenon of the *theoxenia* generally, see Petridou 2016: 289–312.
- 51 See n. 48 above.
- 52 As Nagy remarks (1999: 121): “antagonism between hero and god in myth corresponds to the ritual requirements of symbiosis between hero and god in cult”.
- 53 Kurke 2012: 75–85; Kowalzig 2007: 188–201; Polinskaya 2013: esp. 248–59.
- 54 See n. 43 above; the idea is reiterated more recently in Downie 2004: 153.
- 55 *H. Hom.* 4 (*To Hermes*) 335.
- 56 *H. Hom.* 3 (*To Pythian Apollo*) 300–4.
- 57 See, for example, Louvre F341, an oinochoe painted by the Taleides Painter: the lissom Apollo's frantic pursuit of the stockier, bearded, tripod-carrying Herakles was surely meant to bring a smile to the face of the viewer.
- 58 Heineman 2021.
- 59 Neer 2001: 294.
- 60 Parke and Boardman 1957.
- 61 Tausend 1992: 43–4.
- 62 Neer 2001: 292–7.
- 63 Note also that Herakles works on behalf of Apollo in the pseudo-Hesiodic *Aspis*, a poem of ca. 580 BC, in which the hero kills Kyknos, a son of Ares, who is attacking pilgrims to Delphi. Kyknos is linked with southeastern Thessaly (strictly, Achaia Phthiotis), and the poem is probably of Theban composition, and so it has been interpreted as conveying a pro-Theban, anti-Thessalian message. See, for example, Guillon 1963; Sordi 1966. As I argue elsewhere, however (Aston 2024: 52–3), it is not so simple: the land of Thessaly itself symbolically rejects Kyknos, and the Apollo in the poem is as much the Apollo of Thessalian Pagasai as of Delphi. If we are imputing a political meaning to the poem, it must be one in which Kyknos is the enemy of all, and all are unified in the desire to protect the interests of Apollo.
- 64 Paus. 10.26.4.
- 65 Hdt. 7.200.2 (transl. mod. A. D. Godley). Note that both Demeter and Amphiktyon are described as having a *ipón*, so we cannot be sure that a temple *sensu stricto* is meant. Béquignon 1937: 181–90 prefers the vaguer ‘sanctuary’ and points to the fourth century as the time when a temple of Demeter was constructed. He thinks that the earlier sanctuary was near the stoa, and the fourth-century temple closer to the hot springs (where Strabo saw it – 9.4.17).
- 66 Papakonstantinou and Vouvalidis 2015.
- 67 Béquignon's investigation revealed some structures plausibly connected with the new buildings created after the Third Sacred War, but the earlier *hira* described by Herodotus are probably under the sedimentary material whose deposition has, over millennia, caused the shoreline to expand so dramatically outwards. See 1937: 182–91; Leekely and Efstratiou 1980: 127. The work of Marinatos in 1939 was largely focused on the site of the 480 BC battle (for a summary, see Marinatos 1951), that of Kase, Szemler, Wilkie and Wallace 1991 on the topography of the pass and surrounding landmarks. See also Thalmann 1980; Dakoronia 2015.

- 68 Hall 2002: 145.
- 69 Londey 2015.
- 70 Strabo (9.4.17) mentions a λιμὴν μέγας at Thermopylai.
- 71 Hom. *Il.* 2.681–5; Hall 2002: 125–34; Calce 2011: 25–7.
- 72 Fowler 1998: 11; Kowalzig 2007: 197. This is on the basis of fr. 6 MW: ‘those deriving their lineage from Deukalion were kings in Thessaly, according to Hekataios and Hesiod.’
- 73 Fr. 234 MW.
- 74 For analysis of the different sources and their interrelation, see Fowler 2013: 140–7, 187–8 and 448–51.
- 75 Str. 9.5.6. Cf. Str. 9.4.2: the tomb of Pyrrha is in Lokrian Kynos; Paus. 1.18.8: the tomb of Deukalion is exhibited by the Athenians.
- 76 Bowden 2003.
- 77 De Ligt and Neeve 1988.
- 78 This model is the opposite of the view argued by Tausend 1992: 35, that representation in the Amphiktyony was by *ethnos* because it predated the polis; this is not a sustainable perspective in light of (especially) Morgan 2003 and her challenge to traditional theories of the development of the polis as a successor to ‘primitive’ tribal communities.

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7 Breaking Boundaries and Preserving Alliances: Oaths and Kinship Ties as Crisis Management Tools in Interstate Relations in the Sixth and Fifth Centuries BC

Case Studies

Daniela Bonanno

1. Introduction

Ancient Greeks adopted several terms to describe situations of severe instability or political disorder such as *stasis*, *anomia*, *dysnomia*, *metabole*, *metastasis* or *neoterismos*.¹ By contrast, the word *krisis* refers to a different semantic sphere, that of reflection, decision and judgement. This term is a typical example of a ‘false friend’, one of those that can enrich and encourage research into the lexical interference between ancient and modern languages.

This is the reason why, in the following pages, I will oscillate between the use of the term ‘crisis’ in the sense of a ‘delicate situation’ that requires a change of course, adaptations and decisive action on the part of actors involved and that, closer to the Greek meaning, of a decision based on discernment and adopted on the basis of calculation, opportunities and the alternatives at stake.²

I will therefore examine a selection of case studies in which the adoption of precise choices and political measures in the context of interstate relations appears to be sealed by the use of specific ritual practices, first and foremost those of swearing oaths.³ The question I aim to answer is whether a sworn pact between two contracting parties can, in itself, serve as an effective tool for managing a crisis that threatens the cohesion of a coalition and ensuring its resilience or whether it is merely one of several elements that can be invoked to restore compromised or neglected political relationships. To tackle this issue, I will start by considering some passages by Herodotus and then move on to explore some of Athens’s sworn alliances with members of the Delian League together with the strategies implemented by the Athenians to overcome divisions and conflicts with their allies and, through further measures, recover a dialogue focused on a common memory and on shared religious spaces and times.

2. Without Strong Constraint, Agreements Will Not Keep Their Force

The first episode reported by Herodotus that highlights the use of sworn pacts to ensure the resilience of a coalition involves non-Greek populations, specifically the Phoinikians and Carthaginians.⁴ The narrative context is the Persian expedition to Egypt led by Kambyases, the son of Kyros, whom Herodotus describes in the third book of his *Histories* as a violent, resentful and suspicious man, prone to transgress religious norms, disrespect the divine and commit any crime in pursuit of his ambition.⁵

Once Kambyases arrived in Egypt, he began planning three additional expeditions, one of which was directed against Carthage, and he ordered his fleet to set sail for the city. However, he was forced to abandon this plan when the Phoinikians refused to comply.⁶ They claimed to be bound to the Carthaginians – their own colonists – by solemn oaths (*megala horkia*) and believed that attacking them would be an impious act, akin to raising arms against their own children.

Kambyases thus decided to step back, displaying, in one of his rare moments of lucidity, an understanding that it was more advantageous not to force the Phoinikians – both because they had voluntarily submitted to Persian rule without resistance and because his fleet was dependent on them. He made a strategic and political choice aimed at avoiding the alienation of a crucial military ally, namely the Phoinikian naval forces.

Herodotus comments that in this way the Carthaginians managed to escape the *doulosyne* under Persian domination. He appears especially interested in emphasizing the kinship and sense of shared identity between Phoinikians and Carthaginians, which the solemnity of the oaths serves to reinforce during a time of profound crisis and uncertainty, marked by the threat posed by an irrational and unpredictable adversary like Kambyases, bent on their subjugation.

Scholars have long debated whether, in this passage, Herodotus was projecting onto the Phoinikian-Punic world the procedural forms and conceptual models typical of Greek relationships between *metropolis* and *apoikiai*. However, other sources support the perception of a bond – almost biological in nature – clearly expressed in terms of filiation.⁷ From Herodotus's perspective, the solemnity of oaths and their observance appear, in fact, to be reinforced and made more credible by the presence of a kinship tie. Already in the first book of the *Histories*, he had stressed the fundamental importance of such ties in the pact concluded between the Medes and the Lydians, which was sealed by a marriage alliance; because – as he points out: “without strong constraint, agreements will not keep their force.”⁸

Ultimately, in Herodotus's view, it is precisely the combination – so to speak – of familial relationships and solemn oaths that endowed the Phoinikian-Punic community with stability and resilience, protecting it from the risk of dissolution. Indeed, the ancient sources repeatedly preserve traces of a solidarity that stretches across centuries, surfacing persistently in the folds of historical narrative.⁹ Even Theodor Mommsen, in his *Römische Geschichte* (1854–1856), frequently emphasized the geopolitical weight of the Phoinikians and Carthaginians in shaping the

balance of power in the Mediterranean.¹⁰ A striking episode that clearly attests to the strength of the ancestral bond uniting them – perceived as both binding and salvific – is found in the twentieth book of Diodoros’s *Bibliotheca Historica*.¹¹ In 310 BC, the Carthaginians, besieged by Agathocles of Syracuse, in a state of panic, became convinced that their misfortunes stemmed from the anger of the god of Tyros, the so-called Herakles of the colonists. In earlier times, they had regularly sent a tithe of their revenues to this deity, but this practice had gradually diminished as their wealth increased. On that occasion, however, they dispatched large sums of money and lavish offerings, including small golden temples fashioned after their own, in miniature, along with *aphidrymata*.

The meaning of this term has long been debated by scholars. Generally speaking, an *aphidryma* can be defined as an object imbued with divine power, facilitating the transfer of a cult from its place of origin to a new location, as commonly occurred in colonial contexts.¹² In the case of the Carthaginians, however, the *aphidrymata* travelled in the opposite direction – from the colony back to the motherland. In a moment of deep crisis, they sent these objects, accompanied by prayers, from their own sanctuaries – where the god of Tyros had been received – as a tangible reminder and symbol of a profound tie and reciprocal obligations. These gestures reflected not only a shared worship but also a material testimony of a religious and cultural interconnectedness that served as an antidote to the threat of forgetfulness.¹³

The fulfilment of the sworn pact was thus entrusted to the sending of sacred objects, intended to reactivate the memory of a kinship relationship that had been weakened by time and distance, yet which, in that moment of acute danger, urgently needed to be renewed.

3. Keeping Oaths without Kinship

Now that we have reached this point, we must ask ourselves whether the strength of the oath is equally binding within groups and coalitions that are not cemented by parental ties. Once again, Herodotus comes to our aid. In the first book of the *Histories*, he refers to the establishment of a pact of hospitality and alliance between Sparta and Kroisos, the Lydian King, which was also sealed by an oath.¹⁴ Kroisos, eager to determine which of the Greek states should join forces to wage war against Kyros, King of the Persians, decided to send envoys to Sparta, which he regarded as the leader of all of Greece.

The ambassadors, duly instructed, presented themselves before the Spartans and proposed an alliance “without deceit or guile”.¹⁵ This formula is called *anti-deceit clause*: with some variations, is also attested in epigraphic sources and may have referred either to how the oath was pronounced or to the very content of the agreement itself.¹⁶ The Spartans readily agreed to the alliance with Kroisos, to whom they were bound by ancient ties and obligations of gratitude. When the city of Sardis was besieged by Kyros’s troops, Kroisos’s ambassadors arrived in Sparta requesting aid. Then the Spartans declared their willingness to act and began outfitting their ships. In the meantime, however, a new embassy arrived announcing that

the Lydian capital had sadly fallen and that their sovereign had been taken prisoner. Herodotus notes that the Spartans, considering this event as a grave misfortune, a *symphore*, desisted to sail. A cause of force majeure had, in effect, released them from the obligations deriving from this sworn covenant.¹⁷

Yet, the impression that the Spartans maintained a rather flexible relationship with oaths also emerges from other episodes recorded by the sources. One might briefly mention here the episode told by Herodotus involving Glaukos, son of Epikydes, and his attempt to use an oath to evade the restitution of a sum of money that had been entrusted to him;¹⁸ or to the casual manner in which the Spartans reversed the meaning of the promises made by the regent Pausanias during the war against the Medes, despite the Plataians' warm appeal for a proper remembrance of the pacts, an aspect on which Thucydides particularly dwells.¹⁹

By contrast, during the years of the *Pentecontaetia*, the Athenians appeared – at least formally – more respectful of their religious obligations than the Spartans.²⁰ In 464 BC, during the Third Messenian Revolt, the Spartans appealed to Athens for assistance, invoking the old alliance formed under the Hellenic League. The Athenians, though reluctant, honored the oath sworn at that time and sent aid to Sparta. However, they were soon dismissed, suspected of harbouring ulterior motives. Offended by this treatment, the Athenians renounced the wartime alliance upon their return, viewing the Spartans' mistrust as a release from their previous obligations.

These examples illustrate how oaths between parties not bound by kinship – such as Spartans and Lydians or Athenians and Spartans – were more fragile, and more easily forgotten or even deliberately nullified.

4. Keeping Alliances through Oaths

If appeals to ancestral kinship were particularly effective in making oaths durable, binding or at least worthy of protection, then it can be also useful exploring those political strategies aimed at reactivating and promoting such ties. The history of the complex relationship between Athens and its allies in the Delian League offers an extraordinary case study in this regard, particularly due to the series of oaths that marked the phase of *Pentecontaetia* and the Archidamian war.

Herodotus, in the final book of the *Histories*, already recalls the first of these oaths when, at the end of the battle of Mykale, a meeting was held in Samos to determine the future of the Ionians and to deliberate on the actions to be taken.²¹ On that occasion, the Peloponnesians were of the opinion that Ionia should be evacuated in order to protect them from potential Persian retaliation. They proposed to resettle its inhabitants in the territories of those Greek cities that had supported the Persians. The Athenians, however, opposed this plan, considering it inappropriate for the Peloponnesians “to decide about their colonies”.²² They consequently admitted the Samians, Chians, Lesbians and the inhabitants of the islands into the alliance and had them swear an oath not to betray the pact. This oath, whose *raison d'être* seems rooted in the alleged filial bond between Athens and the Ionians, appears to foreshadow the oath later taken when the Delian League was founded.

On that later occasion, the Ionians – whose relationship with the Spartans had reached the peak of crisis because of the intemperance of the Spartan regent Pausanias – decided to turn to the Athenians, requesting their leadership explicitly “on the basis of shared kinship”.²³ Once again, as before, kinship serves both to reinforce the strength of the pact and to provide its very groundwork. We also learn from the Pseudo-Aristotelian *Constitution of the Athenians* that at the time of the Delian League’s foundation in 477 BC, the Athenian statesman Aristides persuaded the Ionians to definitively sever ties with the Lakedaimonians and proceeded to organize the system of tributes for the allied cities. Together with Aristides, the Ionians swore “to have the same enemies and friends” and sank the *mydroi* (masses of iron) in the sea.²⁴

As revealed by the comparison with another passage from Herodotus that narrates of the oath taken by the Phokaians, pronounced according to the similar procedure of the immersion in water of a *mydros*, the alliance was established to last for eternity – or at least, theoretically – until the reappearance of these objects from the seabed.²⁵ The formula of the oath thus concentrates on the object a divine power that intertwines, on a unique temporal horizon, the destinies of each member belonging to the community of swearers, already bound by a parental bond, and that of their descendants, inexorably intertwining them.²⁶

In the following years, along with the dense network of alliances forged with various other poleis,²⁷ Athens concluded a series of bilateral agreements with cities that were already members of the Delian League, but with whom the relations had reached a severe breaking point. Concrete traces of these agreements can be found in a group of Athenian decrees referring to the communities of Erythrai, Kolophon, Chalkis and Samos, all initially dated by the scholars, respectively, between the late 450s and the early 430s BC. This period roughly corresponds to the phase in which scholars traditionally identify a transformation in the Athenian relations with its allies, following the transfer of the treasury from Delos to Athens in 454 BC and the controversial Peace of Kallias.²⁸ However, the reliability of this interpretation began to falter when epigraphists demonstrated the inadequacy of the ‘three-bar sigma’ criterion, once considered a definitive clue for dating official inscriptions to the pre-446 BC period, before its replacement by the Ionic sigma. Subsequent research revealed the fallacy of this parameter, prompting a reconsideration of the dating of the *Pentecontaetia* documents, including the authoritative *Athenian Tribute Lists*. This, in turn, has necessitated a re-reading of the history of the Athenian empire within a revised chronological framework.²⁹

In the wake of the doubts raised about the validity of the three-bar sigma criterion, Nikolaos Papazarkadas has proposed redating the decree for the Kolophonians, usually dated to 447 BC, to the Archidamian war period. He has also suggested that the decrees concerning the Erythraians and Chalkidians, which were, respectively, placed in 450 and 446 BC, may likewise be dated to the 420s BC.³⁰ This revision would effectively invert the traditional sequence of decrees and their embedded oaths. The earliest document would consequently be that concerning Samos – placed in the early 430s and linked to Thucydides’s account of the island’s revolt and subsequent reintegration into the Athenian sphere following a nine-month

siege.³¹ On that occasion, the Samians swore loyalty to Athens – a polis already involved in several theatres of war in previous years. They pledged not to rebel against the Athenians and its allies, and to defend them.³²

The most recent decree, by contrast, would be the one concerning Chalkis, which N. Papazarkadas does not rule out dating to the Archidamian war. He bases this assumption on two key pieces of evidence: first, a passage in Aristophanes's *Knights* portraying the Chalkidians on the brink of rebellion; second, a report by Philochoros, quoted in the *scholia* on the *Wasps*, which recalls an Athenian invasion of Euboia in the year before the play was performed (i.e. 424/3 BC).³³ N. Papazarkadas therefore situated the decree in the context of the events leading up to the battle of Delion in 424 BC, on the border of Attika and Boiotia.³⁴ The clauses, imposed on the Chalkidians, reflect a scenario similar to that proposed for Samos, in which the key promise extracted from the contracting parties is not to rebel but to support and defend the Athenians and to pay tribute.³⁵ Robin Osborne and Peter John Rhodes have also noted that this oath does not reference allies;³⁶ such an omission may suggest a context in which the Athenians were the only relevant interlocutors, as in the case of local military operations precisely like those that took place near Delion.

The dramatic situation in Euboia at the time is further hinted at in the motivational speech of the boiotarchs, reported by Thucydides.³⁷ Adding to this, the agreement's relatively lenient terms – Athens promises to protect the city and its citizens in exchange for obedience and even allows the Chalkidians to benefit from the confiscated assets of those who refused to swear – further suggest a precarious yet strategic effort to maintain control.³⁸

Identifying now a plausible historical backdrop for the last decrees for Erythrai and Kolophon seems more challenging. Yet, following N. Papazarkadas's intuition, the Kolophon decree may be placed within the events narrated in the third book of Thucydides's work, regarding the Mytilenean revolt of 427 BC.³⁹ At that time, Athens was in a state of deep crisis: reeling from the resurgence of plague, facing a severe climate emergency and burdened by the financial costs of war.⁴⁰ During this period, the Peloponnesian army was based in the territory of Erythrai and the Lesbians were attempting to incite a revolt in Ionia, an area that provided Athens with its most vital resources.⁴¹ They even tried to enlist Pissuthnes, the satrap of Lydia, who had previously been involved in the conflict between Athens and Samos.⁴² This situation alarmed the Athenians to the point that Paches, stationed in Mytilene, launched a pursuit of the Spartan navarch Alkidas, though he failed to intercept him. On his return, Paches liberated Notion by returning it over to the Kolophonians and putting an end to a prolonged phase of internal strife and Persian interference.⁴³ Subsequently, the Athenians dispatched *oikistai* to reestablish Notion under Athenian law and to gather Kolophonians scattered across other cities.⁴⁴ Thucydides's account, although concise and elliptical, offers a plausible setting for the issuing of the decree for Kolophon, and possibly that of Erythrai as well, known to us only through two nineteenth-century transcriptions.⁴⁵

These two decrees display striking similarities: both inscriptions not only display the three-bar sigma and the tailed rho, but they also contain the invocation of the same deities in the oath formula (Zeus, Apollo and Demeter).⁴⁶ Furthermore, they present the same commitment to deliberate and act in the best interest of the alliance and not to rebel against the Athenians or their allies.⁴⁷ Compared to the earlier treaties, the situation appears to have shifted: the actions taken against these cities, both affected by Persian interference, suggest a renewed need to reconstruct an alliance with the Ionian cities, attempting to shield them from external enticement. This strategy appears consistent with Athenian policy in western Greece as well: in 427 BC, the Athenians chose to intervene in support of the people of Leontinoi, who were at war with Syracuse. They decided thus, as Thucydides says: “both on the ground of an earlier alliance and because they were Ionians”.⁴⁸

Erythrai – an early League ally that perhaps contributed ships as tribute – was itself an Athenian colony, founded by Neleos, son of Kodros, the last King of Athens.⁴⁹ It was located in a politically volatile border area where internal strife within individual poleis reignited the broader rivalry between the Athenian and Persian Empires. On the one hand, Athens benefitted from local governmental stability, which ensured steady tribute payments. On the other hand, the persistent threat of Persian reengagement in the region enhanced Athens’s leadership of the Aegean district and among the Ionian cities.⁵⁰

This tension is evident even in the difficult reading of the bouletic oath in *IG* 1³ 14 from Erythrai.⁵¹ Among the sworn promises is one not to offer refuge to those who fled to the Medes⁵² – evidence that the city’s population, like those of Notion and Kolophon, was caught between loyalty to Athens and “nostalgia” for their former overlords. In such contexts, oaths, stationed officials, political and judicial oversight and annual tribute collections were not sufficient to ensure committed allegiance to the League. With these border cities stronger bond needed to be forged.

The Athenians seem to have been aware of this: the decree opens with the obligation of a grain offering to the Great Panathenaia – perhaps the festival immediately following the events in Mytilene in 426/5 BC⁵³ – amounting to no less than three minas, to be distributed to Erythraians present in the city. Their inclusion in the most prestigious festival of the Athenians reveals Athens’s aspiration to be recognized as a metropolis and thus receive offerings signifying a deep, ancestral connection, one that could, in future, legitimize military interventions in defence of the city.

This was not an isolated case. As we will see, similar requests appear in other epigraphic documents. While scholars have often interpreted them as a display of Athenian dominance,⁵⁴ they may also be understood as a part of a broader, more complex strategy to reinforce imperial cohesion through religious and symbolic integration.

5. When Swearing Is Not Enough

Sworn agreements were not the only means Athens employed to secure the loyalty of its allies and counter the centrifugal forces that threatened the cohesion of the

League. Ancient sources allow us to trace a gradual opening of Athenian religious spaces through repeated invitations to offer tributes to the city's most important local deities. A stele found at Eleusis, dated variously between 440 and 421 BC, records a decree instructing that the Athenians, their allies and – should they wish so – all the Greeks were to pay the *aparchai* of their harvest to the goddesses of the sanctuary.⁵⁵ This resolution appears to have been supported by an oracle from Delphi and frequent references to ancestral customs.⁵⁶ The appeal was grounded in the recognition of Athens's special status as a city beloved by the gods; a city in whose territory Demeter had once been hosted and, in return, had granted its people knowledge of the mysteries and techniques of cultivating the land, which they then shared with the rest of the Greek world.⁵⁷

Furthermore, in the founding act of the Athenian colony of Brea in Thrake, recorded in an inscription dated to 430 BC, Athens required the *apoikoi* to send an ox and a panoply to the Great Panathenaia and a phallus to the Dionysia.⁵⁸ The *apoikoi* were therefore invited to participate in Attika's major festivals with significant offerings. One was dedicated to the city's patron goddess, honoured with the most prestigious sacrificial animal and an offering that exalted her martial character. The other was intended to pay homage, through involvement in *phallegphoria*, to the power of Dionysus and celebrate his arrival in Athens, where the god had taught mortals the proper way to drink wine.⁵⁹ A few years later, in 425/4 BC, the decree of Thoudippos established that an ox and a panoply were to be sent to the Great Panathenaia by all the cities listed in the tribute registers, and that they were to take part in the procession, plausibly as *apoikoi* (as intended by the editors of the inscription).⁶⁰

It is within this framework that the participation of people from Erythrai in the celebration of the Great Panathenaia, including the sharing of the public meal, should be understood.⁶¹ This requirement can be interpreted as part of a broader strategy to reestablish a more effective relationship with the Ionian colonists and the allies in general, grounded in shared religious sentiment and intended to counterbalance future centrifugal tendencies. The *pompe*, held during the festival in honour of Athena, led from the Kerameikos to the Akropolis. They were two places symbolically linked in a single, coherent public narrative: on the one hand, as Nicole Loraux observed, the cemetery space where the fatherland's children were buried; and on the other, the sacred space where the city's gods and heroes were honoured, including Erechtheus, the first Athenian born from the very soil of Attika.⁶² The Great Panathenaia was the festival of all Athenians, in which the myth of the city's foundation and the autochthony of its people were renewed, along with the special bond with the goddesses, who had claimed the land of Attika by planting the olive tree there.⁶³ It is not surprising, then, that the resolution of tensions with the Ionians, and the response to the crisis that threatened to sever this ancestral bond between Athens and its colonies, menacing the resilience of the coalition, came through a decision culminating in the forging of new sworn pacts. These were designated to involve the newly recovered allies in the most important and foundational celebrations of the Athenian polis, during which Athens presented

itself to the Hellenic world as the land beloved by the gods, through whom the most precious gifts, like grain and wine, had been bestowed upon mortals.

This plan to re-federate the Ionians around shared cults did not end there but took on increasingly sophisticated and even paradoxical forms. Diodoros explicitly links these initiatives to the moment of crisis in which Athens was suffering from a severe climatic emergency that had contributed to the resurgence of a plague, which decimated its army.⁶⁴ During this phase – marked not only by the return of the plague, perceived as a divine punishment, but also by what Thucydides describes as the weakening of oaths⁶⁵ and even blood ties – the Athenians resolved to purify the island of Delos, once the beating heart of the alliance with the Ionians, and to reactivate the celebration of the *Delia* festivals. Thucydides highlights the prestige of the island, originally a beloved destination of the Ionians, who would journey there with their wives and children, much like they now did for the *Ephesia*. To underscore this return to ancestral tradition, he quotes some Homeric verses that evoke the island's primordial role as the site of the Ionians' *panegyris*, which the Athenians sought to revive through this initiative. On that occasion, Athens also established choral and athletic competitions. Plutarch recalls the generous enthusiasm and dedication with which Nikias – an advocate of a foreign policy focused on the Aegean – oversaw the celebration of these festivals.⁶⁶

The creation of these additional gathering occasions was part of the same overarching strategy: to artificially reconstitute a unified and cohesive community of worshippers, bound by shared Ionian lineage. At a time when even sworn oaths had lost their effectiveness in ensuring the loyalty of allies and the resilience of the alliance, it became essential to emphasize the strength of ancestral ties – or even to fabricate them *ad hoc* through a vast and deliberate effort to construct fictive kinship or brotherhood.⁶⁷ This effort clearly reveals a plan to reweave the now frayed kinship fabric by harnessing the power of festive *performances*, the circulation of offerings and the repetition of songs and ritual practices as a mean of constructing or reactivating collective memories.⁶⁸

6. Conclusion

The cases examined so far primarily reveal the limited capacity of oaths to ensure resilience to specific coalitions, especially in the absence of additional supporting conditions. In times of severe crisis and weakened alliances, it is the bond of kinship that comes into play, which constitutes a more solid foundation for the establishment or renewal of sworn pacts with lasting impact. Indeed, the ancestral bond of kinship is invoked to prevent the collapse of the alliances and to ensure its resilience. This is achieved through a subtle strategy involving the sending of offerings, the creation of special religious spaces for collective convergence and interaction, and the initiation of a dynamic circuit of gifts and reciprocal exchanges. In such a context, Athens responded to the growing discontent among its allies not only by imposing new pacts of trust, but also by taking the decision to symbolically open its borders, reviving ancient festivals specifically aimed at rebuilding a relationship in which tensions, conflicts and particularistic tendencies, if not

entirely resolved, could at least be managed. These measures conveyed a strongly Panathenaic message, aimed at giving the impression – both to the communities of the Ionian *apoikiai* and to the broader group allies – that they were not only indebted to Athens, but also that they were integral parts and active participants in the city’s relationship with its deities.

However, the question remains whether these measures actually succeeded in strengthening the Delian League’s resilience during the Archidamian war. In the short term, they seem to have borne some fruit, given the frequent participation of the Ionian allies in the military operations led by Athens. Samians, Chians and Milesians, for instance, took part in several campaigns, most notably in the expedition to Sicily (415 BC).⁶⁹

A decree dated to 427 BC in honour of Apolophanes of Kolophon recalls his services to the city and its soldiers, as well as his oversight to the port of Notion, which indicates intense collaboration. The accompanying relief strikingly depicts precisely the goddess Athena crowning a male figure, symbolizing the city’s gratitude.⁷⁰

Firmly convinced – perhaps even then – that the oath was the glue of democracy,⁷¹ the Athenians nonetheless shared Herodotus’s disillusionment, who used to say: “without strong constraint agreements will not keep their force”.⁷² In the aftermaths of the disastrous Sicilian campaign, which claimed the lives of many Ionian soldiers, the situation rapidly deteriorated. Thucydides’s account records the gradual withdrawal of several allies from the Athenian cause and the concurrent strategic shift towards Euboia and the eastern Aegean.⁷³ These were the years when sworn pacts increasingly gave way to plots and conspiracies. Even the discourse surrounding *syngeneia* faded from the political agenda, becoming little more than a dead letter.⁷⁴

Both tools that Athens had relied on to ensure the alliance’s strength and resilience – namely sworn pacts and renewed appeals to kinship ties – proved ineffective in the face of a larger crisis. This crisis saw the rise of Spartan hegemony as an alternative to Athenian dominance, within a context where, with the resumption of hostilities in the Ionian War, the Persian Empire, pressing on the borders of Ionia, also emerged again as a potential interlocutor.

Notes

- 1 Kōiv 2023: 43–4.
- 2 For a comprehensive examination of the term ‘crisis’ and its semantic transformations since Antiquity, see Koselleck 1982; Gentili 2022. For the use of the term in its modern sense within the cultural practices of Antiquity, see Schlesier 2007. Cf. also the Introduction by Angela Ganter in this volume.
- 3 Lateiner 2012: 155: “The oath thus stabilizes and seals an uneasy relation between two or more parties.”
- 4 I previously addressed this issue a few years ago in a co-authored article with Corinne Bonnet, from which I will draw a few key points here: Bonanno and Bonnet 2018.
- 5 On the acts of madness committed by Kambyzes, see Hdt. 3.27–38.

- 6 Hdt. 3.19. On Carthago in Herodotus's work, see 1.166–7, 4.195–6, 5.42–8, 7.165–7. On the Kambyses's portrait, Hartog 1980: 336–7; Brown 1982: 387–403; Vignolo Munson 1991: 43–65; Payen 1997: 108–14 et passim.
- 7 Asheri et al. 2007: 419, ad loc. and Bonanno and Bonnet 2018: 353.
- 8 Hdt. 1.74 (transl. A. D. Godley): the term used by Herodotus in this context is *sym-basis* but immediately follows it with a reference to the exchange of oaths (ἀνευ γὰρ ἀναγκαίης ἰσχυρῆς συμβάσεως ἰσχυραὶ οὐκ ἐθέλουσι συμμένειν).
- 9 See Bonanno and Bonnet 2018: 338–9 for a comparison with other passages in which Herodotus mentions solemn oaths, namely, the oaths by which Solon binds the Athenians to respect his laws (1.29) and the so-called great oath of the Skythians (4.68: *megistos horkos*).
- 10 One need only consider the joint reaction of the Phoinikian-Punic coalition to the plans of the Spartan Dorieus, who was first expelled from Libya by the Carthaginians and Libyan Makai and then met his death at the hands of the Phoinikians and Egestans in Sicily, where he had intended to “plant a colony at Heraklea” (Hdt. 5.42–46). Another significant episode is the presence of Phoinikian and Carthaginian forces at the battle of Himera in 480 BC, where they fought against Syracuse and Akragas – an event that further illustrates the military cooperation and shared strategic interests of these closely connected populations (Hdt. 7.165).
As Bonnet 2013: 73, argues: “Dans la vision géopolitique de Mommsen, les Phéniciens et leurs héritiers puniques sont *ceux qui assurent le lien entre Orient et Occident* (ce thème est récurrent dans la narration de Mommsen).”
- 11 Diod. 20.14.3: this passage presents interpretative difficulties from a philological perspective. In this respect, see: Malkin 1991: 88 and n. 44. On the importance on this kinship: Bonnet 2015.
- 12 Bonnet 2015: 89.
- 13 On the meaning and role of the *aphidrymata*, see Malkin 1991 with discussion about previous references. Specifically, about this episode: Bonnet 2015.
- 14 Hdt. 1.56, 69, 77, 84.
- 15 Hdt. 1.69.2: ἀνευ τε δόλου καὶ ἀπάτης.
- 16 On *anti-deceit clauses*, Wheeler 1984, who also provides the definition, showing that such formulae inserted into Greek treaties were not intended to attest to good faith but rather reflected genuine concerns about possible misleading or captious interpretations of the agreement. For a study on the epigraphic variants of *anti-deceit clauses*, see Gazzano 2005. On the importance of oaths in international agreements, see Lonis 1980 and, more recently, Bayliss 2013: 147–325.
- 17 Hdt. 1.83. Breaking a sworn covenant was considered dishonourable in any case and the responsibility for violating the agreement, as literary sources suggest, was typically attributed to the other party: Gazzano 2005: 12–13.
- 18 Hdt. 6.86. For an analysis of this episode and the profound connection between oath and memory, see Cusumano 2013.
- 19 Thuc. 2.71–2; Cusumano 2016: 39–40.
- 20 Athens, among other considerations, was likely particularly concerned with maintaining a certain balance with Sparta at this time, given that, as Matteo Zaccarini argues: “an alliance or, at least, a peace with Sparta and the Peloponnese was initially a *condicio sine qua non* for a long-term maritime expansion” (Zaccarini 2017: 235).
- 21 Hdt. 9.106.
- 22 Hdt. 9.106.3: περὶ τῶν σφετέρων ἀποικιέων βουλευεῖν.
- 23 Thuc. 1.95: κατὰ τὸ ξυγγενές.
- 24 [Arist.] *Ath. pol.* 23: ὥστε τὸν αὐτὸν ἐχθρὸν εἶναι καὶ φίλοι. As Bayliss 2013: 201, argues the word order emphasized the obligation to fight against the enemies alongside the allies.

- 25 The Phokaians, prepared to sail to Kyrnos, swore never to return to their homeland, and sank a mass of iron in the sea: Hdt. 1.165.
- 26 Lateiner 2012: 156: “The departed object symbolizes their community’s irreversible departure from Anatolia with the impossible act of iron rising from the sea.” About the various hypotheses concerning this ritual: Scharff, 2016: 88–91.
- 27 See, for example, the treaties with Rhegion and Leontinoi (*M&L* 63 and 64) or with Egesta and *Halikyai* (*RO* 166).
- 28 Erythrai (*IG* I³ 14: end of the 450s BC); Kolophon (*IG* I³ 37: 447/6 BC); Eretria (*IG* I³ 39: 446 BC); Chalkis (*RO* 131 [= *IG* I³ 40] 446/5 or 424/3); Samos (*RO* 139: 439 BC). On the historicity and evidence of the Peace of Kallias, as well as issues of dating, see Meister 1982; Badian 1987.
- 29 The research carried out by Mortimer Chambers, Ralph Gallucci and Pantelis Spanos 1990 using advanced imaging techniques to reconstruct the name of the archon in the treaty between Athens and Egesta (*IG* I³ 11), re-dated the document to 418 BC. This finding undermined the reliability of three-bar sigma criterion, which had been thought to disappear after 446 BC. These discoveries have prompted a reconsideration of the chronology of the *Pentecontaetia* documents, including the foundational assumptions of the authoritative *Athenian Tribute Lists*. This reassessment remains ongoing, although authoritative progress has been made, such as Rhodes 2008 or the collection of essays edited by J. Ma et al. 2009, and more recently a volume by Nudell 2023, which advances a reinterpretation of the history of the Athenian Empire.
- 30 Papazarkadas 2009; Mattingly 1963: 272, n. 69, proposed mid-430s for the Erythraian “troubles” with Athens.
- 31 *RO* 139 and Thuc. 1.117.
- 32 *RO* 139, fr. C.
- 33 Aristoph. *Equ.* 236–7; *Schol. Vesp.* 718. Papazarkadas 2009: 73–4.
- 34 Thuc. 4.89–100.
- 35 *RO* 131 (= *IG* I³ 40) l. 42.
- 36 *RO* 177.
- 37 Thuc. 4.92.
- 38 See Papazarkadas 2009: 74.
- 39 Papazarkadas 2009, 70.
- 40 Thuc. 3.3.13; Diod. 12.58.
- 41 Thuc. 3.29.31 and 32.
- 42 For a reconstruction of this episode, see Bearzot 2017: 38–48.
- 43 As Thucydides recounts (3.34), the city of Kolophon had been conquered by the Persian Itamanes, in 430 BC, during a period of internal strife (*stasis*). He introduced barbarian forces into the city that was in the grip of *stasis*. The Kolophonians relocated to Notion, where, a few years later, civil conflict broke out once again. One faction turned to the Persian satrap Pisuthnes, who intervened with mercenaries and barbarian troops. The pro-Athenian faction, having fled the city, appealed to Paches, who succeeded in recapturing Notion and restoring it to the Kolophonians opposed to Persian influence. An analysis of Pisuthnes’s anti-Athenian policy can be found in Bearzot 2017: 37–48.
- 44 Thuc. 3.34.
- 45 The inscription was first published by August Böckh in *CIG* 1 Add. 73b p. 890 ff., based on a facsimile found among the papers sent by the philologist Heinrich K. E. Köhler and attributed to the hand of the archaeologist L. F. S. Fauvel. Later, in the archives of the *Inscriptiones Graecae* at the Berlin-Brandenburgische Akademie der Wissenschaften, Georgia Malouchou discovered a second facsimile in the notebook of Kiriakos S. Pittakis, likewise derived from Fauvel’s transcription. On this subject, see Malouchou 2014.

- 46 *IG I³ 14* l. 16; *IG I² 14–15* l. 41. On the deities involved in these oaths: Scharff 2016: 104–8.
- 47 *IG I² 15* ll. 32–4; *IG I³ 14* ll. 21–4. This decree records the oath of the *bouletai* of Erythrai, while fr. d of *IG I³ 15*, the corresponding one of the Erythraians, likely dates to the same period. On the relationship between *IG I³ 14* and 15, see Moroo 2014: 103–4, who dates *IG I³ 14* to 435/4 BC, on the basis of the clause in lines 3–4, which mandates the delivery of grain to the Great Panathenaia for distribution to the Erythraians residing in the city. According to Moroo (2014: 104), such a provision would have been logical only in close temporal proximity to the festivals, which were held every four years. This line of reasoning renders the traditional dating to 453 BC, too far removed from the Panathenaic festival of 450 BC, hardly credible. *RO* 119, on the other hand, following Balcer (1984: 386–7), continue to date the inscription to the late 450s BC. They argue that the Athenian defeat in Egypt in 454 BC would have created a favourable context for a potential revolt by Erythrai, possibly supported by the Persians.
- 48 Thuc. 3.86: *κατά τε παλαιὰν ξυμμαχίαν καὶ ὅτι Ἴωνες ἦσαν* (transl. C. F. Smith). Athens concluded, and later renewed, treaties with Rhegion and Leontinoi, which were sealed by oaths: *M&L* 63 and 64.
- 49 Harp. ε 141 Keaney Ἑρυθραῖοι = Hellanicus *FGrH* 323 a F 11.
- 50 A development in the relationship between Athens and Erythrai can be observed through changes in the Athenian tribute lists. The city appears at the head of a *synteleia* of other poleis that, in the year 450/49 BC, paid a collective quota of nine talents to the League. The fluctuations in the payments of *phoros* in previous years, attributed to Boutheia, another city on the same peninsula, which paid three talents in 454 and 453 BC, but only 1,000 drachmas in 450/449, may reflect a political shift. It is possible that, during the years when Erythrai is absent from the tribute lists, the pro-Athenian faction expelled from the city took refuge in Boutheia, which then continued to pay tribute on their behalf as members of the League. Further variations in tribute records appear in 430/429 BC, where the Erythraian contribution is again listed first, alongside other communities noted as pertaining to the Erythraians. In 428/7 the tribute is recorded separately, while in 427/6 and 424/5, the Erythraians are again grouped with certain dependent communities. These fluctuations do not clearly reflect specific political developments either in the relationship between Athens and Erythrai and between Erythrai or between Erythrai and its surrounding communities. Rather, they suggest changes in the cities subject to taxation and in mechanisms by which tribute was assessed and collected. For analyses of these developments in connection with the city of Erythrai, see Paarmann 2004: 82–3; Jensen 2012; Moroo 2014: 108–10; Nudell 2023: 45–6.
- 51 Scharff 2016: 110–11 demonstrated that the decision regarding who should take the oath on each side is far from marginal from a diplomatic perspective.
- 52 *IG I³ 14* l. 27.
- 53 See Phillips 2003: 208, for the sequence of the Great Panathenaic celebrations in the fifth century BC.
- 54 Smarczyk 1984: 621, defines the Great Panathenaia as “Reichsfest des Seebunds”; Parker 1996: 147 hold a similar view. *Contra* Jameson (2014: 245), who argues the opposite: “Even the requirement that allied cities send a cow to the Panathenaia can be seen as a generous extension of ancestral ritual: Athens opens its chief festival to outsiders by regarding them as kinsmen and giving them the privilege of joining in the sacrifice alongside the Athenians by offering a victim to the goddess. That this action also shows the power of the principal sacrificer, the polis of Athens, in no way diminishes its religious function.”
- 55 A critical review of the various dating proposals can be found in Cavanaugh (1996: 29–72), who concludes that the inscription should be dated to the 450s BC.
- 56 *RO* 141.

- 57 Xen. *Hell.* 6.3.6; Isocr. *Pan.* 31; Aristid. 1.36–7, 22.3–4. See in this respect, Parker 1996: 143; Jim 2014: 99–100.
- 58 *RO* 142.
- 59 On the relationship between Dionysos and the phallus offering, see Sissa and Detienne 1989: 209–19, and about his arrival in Attika: Apollod. *Bibl.* 1.7.2, 3.14.7; Eust. *ad Hom.* p. 1815. Cf. Detienne 1986.
- 60 *IG I³* 71 ll. 57–8. Cf. *RO* 153.
- 61 *RO* 121 ll. 3–4.
- 62 Loraux 1990²: 41–5.
- 63 Apollod. *Bibl.* 3.14.1.
- 64 See above. Diod. 12.58. Thucydides 3.104 reports the event but attributes the decision to purify Delos to an oracle.
- 65 Thuc. 3.82, 6–7.
- 66 Plut. *Nic.* 3.
- 67 This practice would later undergo another, and far more significant, development – for instance, in the operation carried out at Nakone in Sicily, during the first half of the third century BC, where a situation of internal discord was resolved through the artificial brotherhood (*adelphothetia*) of members within the same community (*ISegesta* App. 3). For this episode at Nakone, see Loraux 2005²: 199–230 and, more recently, Brugnone 2013. On the involvement of the allies in Panathenaic festivals, see Smarczyk 1984: 571.
- 68 Cf. Kowalzig 2007: 108–10.
- 69 On the Ionian contribution to warfare during the Archidamian war, see Nudell 2023: 65–6.
- 70 *IG I³* 65. Lawton 1995: 113, n. 65.
- 71 Lycurg. *Against Leokrates*, 79.
- 72 See above.
- 73 Thuc. 8.5.
- 74 Thuc. 8.1–7.

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8 Oaths of Alliance

Material Manifestations and Epichoric Encodings*

Hans Beck

Interstate alliances in ancient Greece were sealed with the exchange of oaths. Invoking divinities and other superhuman beings as guarantors, the swearing parties shrouded their alliance with divine sanction and religious charge. Both lent durability, they were considered to make *symmachies* resilient to future crisis. This chapter surveys strategies to foster adherence to alliance oaths, beyond the swearing ceremony and its inherent theology of the oath. The first section (I) explores material objects that were used during the ceremony as well as their afterlife in the community: putting the oath of alliance, literally, before the public eye through the display of props used in the ceremony served as a visual reminder of the obligation. The chapter then moves on to the intricate relation between local swearing deities, the land they represented and the purpose this provided to the convictions of oath-takers (II). To illustrate the blending of interstate affairs with deeply entrenched religious convictions, section III turns to the case study of the notorious alliance between Thebes and Aigina from the late sixth century BC. In its course, the cult images of the Aiakids played a curious role. According to Herodotus, they were critical object agents of the *symmachia*. In-depth analysis of Herodotus's narrative illustrates how the materiality of oaths and their epichoric encoding were interlocked with the basic grammar of Greek alliances.

1. Greek (Interstate) Oaths: Material Manifestations

The swearing of an oath is a fleeting thing. Speaking out loud the oath formula typically takes not more than a few minutes, if not less. The ephebic oath of Athens, which is the fullest and among the longest surviving citizen oaths from Greek antiquity, required an estimated 170 seconds for crowd performance, just under three minutes. The transience of the moment stood in sharp contrast to the longevity of obligations. Alliance oaths typically set a definite time limit to the agreement or were considered by the swearing parties to last forever.¹ The effectiveness of

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the oath thus relied largely on its cultural encoding: among others, notions of law and legal persecution, social reprisal and religious belief and divine intervention. Close association with the latter – divine sponsorship and its endorsement in ritual and cult – put Greek oaths on a firm religious footing. As Bayliss and Sommerstein have remarked, “oath exchanges entailed more than spoken words; they were routinely accompanied by sacrifices and libations to the gods. These rituals ‘crystallize and strengthen oaths.’”²

Ceremonial practices lent depth to the theology of oaths – they highlighted, through ritual action, the sincerity of the obligation as well as its endurance over time. For instance, Herodotus and Aristotle speak of parties sinking iron in the sea in purposeful fashion both to express and to endorse the eternal character of an oath-agreement; Herodotus explains that this was done to vouch the duration of the agreement, which is valid until the iron would reappear.³ So the moment of speaking out the formula was extended by symbolic acts, further by prayer and sacrifice, celebrations, common meals and the like. If Pausanias is to be believed, there was the “ancient custom that no human being might eat of that sacrificial meat on which an oath had been sworn”,⁴ but that did not exclude feasting as such. Yet even the most elaborate oath ceremony was limited by time. Vows were spelled out swiftly, including the detriments that may befall the disobedient.

Iron lumps adumbrate that a variety of props were in use during swearing rituals, although, in the case of Herodotus, these objects might perish in the course of the ceremony; once the party was over, they were gone. In the Foundation Charter of Kyrene, wax figurines were burnt off, not to suggest the eternal validity of the agreement but as a threat. The decree stipulated that “the person who does not abide by the sworn agreement but transgresses it shall melt away and dissolve like the images – himself, his descendants and his property”.⁵ The same symbolic force of staged perishability was otherwise, and more commonly, expressed in animal sacrifice. Beyond the charged ritual chain of the preparation of the animal, the kill and the treatment of the meat, the perishable quality of animal sacrifice had a theology of its own. According to Walter Burkert, the kill anticipated not only the violence and bloodshed that followed if the oaths are broken, but it also reminded participants of the irreversibility of the covenant into which they had entered. For oath ceremonies that included animal sacrifice into the script of their ritual action, scholars have therefore coined the twin notion of irreversibility through irretrievability, to capture the deeper meaning of disappearance of the animal.⁶

Other markers of materiality were of durable quality. As such, they had an innate capacity to serve as reminders, as material testimony to the sacred covenant into which the swearing parties had entered. The quest for this type of materiality of the oath is not identical with the quest for archaeological evidence. Rather, what is meant here by materiality is the complicated interplay between, on the one hand, objects as material expressions, that is, their expressive dimension: the ability of objects to magnify the pronouncement of a sacred pledge through visual, symbolic display. On the other hand, the articulation of any type of meaning is itself subject to and impacted by its encoding into the material language of objects. We note in

passing that in the performative arena, which is so vital for the swearing of oaths, both qualities of materiality overlap, they intersect in a congenial way: the meaning of the oath performance, the inherent ideas and convictions it wishes to display, are subject to the materiality of the ritual script. Material objects punctuate the ritual space; they influence the ways in which rituals are carried out and valued by all participants in the ceremony. Thing theory, effectively, distinguishes between ‘things’ – unspecific materials that are reflective of ideas – and ‘objects’. The latter have a complex relationship with humans; they are fused by the tenets of culture, expressions and embodiments of meaning alike that frame societal action as much as they are crafted by it.

In the study of Greek religion, the importance of material dimensions has been stressed in recent years. Most religions assign a prominent role to objects in ritual practice and other forms of communication. In monotheistic religions, comprehensive conceptualizations of an ‘almighty’ or ‘great god’ almost inevitably call for metaphorical condensations of belief mantras into plain objects that are visible and tangible, sometimes edible. For Greek religion, the prime importance of objects surfaces from the triangle of ritual, dedication and mythology: material objects played a lead role in all of these.⁷ In dialogue with one another, they created dense objectscaes that defined the nature of the divine as much as its interactions with humans on earth. While some of these objects point to artistic mastery, the type of monumental displays of the divine coated with ornamentation and precious décor, others are subject to the aesthetics of plainness. As the editors of the volume *The Stuff of the Gods* have observed, “the power of materiality can be insidious. It can sometimes have the greatest influence when it is most humble, least noticed or most taken for granted.”⁸

The materiality of oaths began with the location where vows were taken, at times a contingent site: a battlefield, the stormy sea or the city in disarray. The grand majority of oaths were sworn at functionally organized sites reserved for the event and that, in turn, lent sanction to the pledge. In the Athenian agora, a special stone, plainly called *lithos*, provided the venue for archons and arbitrators to stand when taking their oaths to “govern justly and according to the laws”.⁹ The famous reconciliation oath taken by the citizens of Dikaia on Chalkidike stipulated that all citizens were to swear in the three holiest sanctuaries as well as in the agora.¹⁰ The inscription decreed where copies of the oath were to be put in display; hence, it specifies the place of publication before turning to the actual swearing ritual: after the ceremony, a copy of the oath was set up in the sanctuary of Athena and in the agora, which served as a visible reminder of the agreement.¹¹ Durable materials such as metal tablets and stone *stelai* gave the oath a material afterlife, typically in a prominent location; they carried the oath (metaphorically and practically) in the heart of the city, the agora or in specific sanctuaries. On many instances, the decrees or treaties sanctioned by oath were deposited in the public archive of the polis, where they bore witness to the stipulation. In Plato’s *Kritias*, reference is made to an oath “inscribed upon the pillar, besides the laws, [...] which invoked mighty curses upon those that disobeyed”¹² – and whose physical presence in the centre of the community served as a material reminder of these curses.

Interstate agreements were in particular need of such reminders. The Greeks relied extensively on the force of oaths to govern the relations between communities. As Polybius remarks, in the realm of interstate alliances, “oaths were the most sanctioned trust (*pistis*) among humans”.¹³ Given that the contracting parties were often far apart and did not interact with one another in quotidian exchanges, the risks of oblivion and obliteration, out of convenience or sheer ignorance, was real.¹⁴ The sanctioned trust of the agreement thus was supported and indeed endorsed by the oath’s physical presence in the community. For many alliance oaths it is not reported where they were sworn. The most obvious locations would have been the same venues where civic oaths were taken. Depending on who the swearing authorities were in each case – the polis highest officials, an empowered delegation or institution or the citizenship writ large – oaths of alliance might also be taken in the citizen-assembly, hence, in the arena demarcated for their meetings. Inscriptions of the alliance were then set up in the agora or in sacred sites (or in both, as in the case of the Dikaia oath) that lent visibility to the agreement, and the detriment looming over potential violators.

Well-known treaty obligations such as “to have the same friends and enemy”,¹⁵ “to lend assistance on land and sea”¹⁶ or to stand by the alliance “within one’s power and according to what is possible”¹⁷ were thus, literally, before everyone’s eyes. Potential hierarchies in power between the alliance partners were also imprinted on strategies of making the oath visible. In the grand symmachies of Athens and Sparta of the fifth century, great care was taken that bilateral agreements with their allies were put on display in the *agorai* of allied states, which fully captures the idea of endorsement through visibility of the oath.¹⁸ The idea is prominent also in alliances between neighbouring cities, when agreements were placed in the borderlands between them.¹⁹ Beyond the city and its outer *chora*, translocal sanctuaries were a prime location for the publication of oaths. For Olympia, such a quality is amply attested in the epigraphic record.²⁰ A curious example comes, however, not from the inscription but from the body of literary sources, which offers insight into material as well as territorial dimensions of the oath. In Euripides’s *Suppliants*, Athena advises Theseus to extract an oath from Adrastos, who as king of Argos was empowered to swear for the entire land (the *chthōn*):

Now hear from me with what vessel you are to perform this sacrifice. In your house there is a bronze-footed tripod. When Heracles had destroyed the foundations of Troy, he bade you dedicate it near the Pythian hearth as he set off on another mission. Over this tripod you must cut the throats of three sheep and inscribe the oath on its curved hollow, and then give it for safe-keeping to the god who rules Delphi, a memorial of the oath and a witness to it in the eyes of Hellas.²¹

In this case, the object onto which the oath was to be inscribed was not a worked stone slab or a manufactured tablet but a vessel that had had its own memorial agency. The oath added to and extended the sanctioned quality of the object. Close association with the god, both through the vessel type and through its previous

location in Theseus's house, "near the Pythian hearth", was continued and taken to the next level through dedication in Delphi, which served as divine "memorial of the oath and a witness to it in the eyes of Hellas".

Beyond the materiality of swearing venues and inscribed stele, a variety of movable objects were used during the oath-taking. As non-perishable objects, they had the ability to carry and spread messages: they disseminated the oath across place and space to contingent, sometimes random locations where they released the oath's message. Much like the inscribed stone in the agora, but more malleable in meaning and association, they encapsulated the binding nature of the agreement. In war, the weaponry of the army, that is, the armor of each hoplite, tied oath-takers to the sacred covenant. For the 10,000, Xenophon relates a sacred vow that bound them together, Greeks and non-Greeks alike: "These oaths they sealed by sacrificing a bull, a wolf, a boar, and a ram over a shield, the Greeks dipping a sword in the blood and the barbarians a lance."²² The curious distinction between sword and lance or javelin is endorsed by Herodotus, who describes the oath practices of the Skythians in the Skythian logos as follows:

As for the giving of sworn pledges to such as are to receive them, this is the Skythian fashion: they take blood from the parties to the agreement by making a little hole or cut in the body with an awl or a knife, and pour it mixed with wine into a great earthenware bowl, wherein they then dip a scimitar and arrows and an axe and a javelin; and when this is done the makers of the sworn agreement themselves, and the most honorable of their followers, drink of the blood after solemn imprecations.²³

Greeks, on the other hand, relied on the sword and shield when proclaiming the binding nature of their sacred pledge. In the Oath of Plataiai, it is stated:

They swore these oaths, covered the sacrificial victims with their shields and at the sound of the trumpet made a curse: if they transgressed what was sworn and did not keep true to what had been written in the oath, a curse was to be upon the very people that had sworn.²⁴

Sword and shield gave a material voice to the oath that was both rooted in and responsive to the cultural context in which the pronouncement was made. As symbolic references to the ideal of hoplite citizens, the prominent role of weaponry in the swearing ceremony expressed civic convictions and beliefs that were foundational to the community.²⁵ Beyond such abstractions, shield and sword were very concrete material objects that reminded oath-takers of their sacred vow and made them subject to the power of divine witnesses. The hoplite armor served as an interface between the two – we encounter here the intimate interplay between the realms of humans and the divine, mediated by consecrated objects that bound both together in faith – and fateful fashion. When the hoplite's armor was moved from the civic world to war, it carried, literally, the sacred covenant onto the battlefield. In other words: the oath of allegiance – to safeguard the country, stand by the

alliance, adhere to the divine – was not simply an abstract formula that accompanied warriors in battle, but was physically present there. When battle raged, shield and sword reminded combatants of the sacred pronouncement they had made.

Less violent yet not less assertive in their communicative force were the *skeptron* (“staff of the leader”) and *kerykeion* (“herald staff”). When Achilles takes an oath in *Iliad* 1, he pronounces that

I will speak frankly to you, and will swear a mighty oath on it: by this staff here (*skeptron*), that will never again put out leaves or shoots since it first left its stump in the mountains, nor will it again grow green, for the bronze has stripped it of leaves and bark, and now the sons of the Achaians that give judgment bear it in their hands, those who guard the laws that come from Zeus; and this shall be for you a mighty oath [...] So he spoke and down to the earth he dashed the staff studded with golden nails.²⁶

Agamemnon, in similar fashion, when taking an oath to Zeus, “lifted up the staff to all the gods”.²⁷ In the exchange of oaths between Hektor and Dolon in *Iliad* 10, the latter calls upon Hektor “to raise the *skeptron* and swear to me”,²⁸ and so Hektor “took the *skeptron* in his hands and swore him”.²⁹

The ways in which these pronouncements are made indicate that the *skeptron* does not belong to any one of the heroes. It is a communal object that can be passed around, present when the community assembles to hold counsels and make decisions – and, as such, embody the decision-making power of the community and wield authority over its judgement.³⁰ Homer betrays the idea of an intriguing interplay. Initially an object of nature, grown in Zeus’s domain and skillfully crafted by men who clad it in bronze, the *skeptron* had an imposing appearance; in Achilles’s case, it was adorned with golden nails. Seemingly elegant yet awe-inspiring if not terrifying, the *skeptron* was free-moving between the earth upon which it might be slammed and the sky to which it might be raised, pointing to the highest god of all who had vested it with divine powers. In the process of working the staff, the piece of wood was appropriated by men, transmitted from one domain to another, from that of the divine to the human realm, where it radiated with sanction and authority.

The narrativized Homeric *skeptron* transformed in later periods into the staff of the herald, the *kerykeion*, that symbolized the authority of its bearer. By the fifth and fourth centuries, *kerykes* had absorbed and were vested with the power to swear the oath of an alliance on behalf of their community. On the stele from Athens announcing the alliance with Arkadia, Elis and other Peloponnesians from 362/1 BC, it was stipulated that

the herald shall vow forthwith to Zeus Olympios and to Athena Polias and to Demeter and Kore and the Twelve Gods and to the August Goddesses, that, if what is resolved about the alliance is to the advantage of the people of Athens, a sacrifice and procession shall be made [...] That is to be vowed.³¹

2. Epichoric Encodings

The transformation of Achilles's scepter from tree branch to sacred object, while itself subject to the complicated process of human appropriation of the environment through working and effectively bringing to life its divine spirit, adumbrates the impact the natural world wielded upon the oath. Durability of the oath and resilience in times of crisis were thus not only supported by the material dimension of swearing practices, but they were also endorsed through the oath's intricate relation with swearing deities and the land they represented. Indeed, scholars have revealed a potent combination of typical swearing deities that embody the force of nature. In alliance oaths, in particular, Zeus, Helios and Gaia appeared as a frequently invoked *trias*.³² Sometimes these were expanded by Poseidon, shaker of land and sea, and Athena (with the epithet *Areia*), or other war deities that pointed to disruptive, violent intervention.³³ The *trias* of Zeus, Helios and Gaia is already present in the *Iliad*, when Agamemnon evokes during the oath ritual "father Zeus, who rule from Ida, most glorious, most great, and you o Helios, who see and hear all things, Gaia and Rivers, and you who in the realms below chastise those mortals who have broken their oath".³⁴ While Zeus here figures as "guardian of Ida", literally the highest god who observes the affairs of humans from his vantage point in the mountains, later practices attested to him explicitly as Zeus Horkios, guarantor of oaths. Zeus represented the sky, whereas Helios's domain was the sun and Gaia's that of the earth.³⁵

Walter Burkert has suggested to see the tripartite invocation of Zeus, Helios and Gaia as citation of the cosmos as a whole, comprising sky, sun and the world and/or underworld, respectively.³⁶ Inclusion of chthonic elements such as rivers and the potentially destructive force of Athena *Areia* and Poseidon can also be understood as reference to the four elements of air, earth, fire and water – again, this most likely articulates the idea of symbolic representation of the world writ large.³⁷ Although abstract and metaphorical in nature, these representations were visible and tangible – there was a degree of substance to them that could be experienced by oath-takers. Homer is again foundational. In *Iliad* 14, the oath of Hera plays on the idea of a distinct realness of the material world, which cannot only be touched but in itself lends purpose to the oath:

So she spoke, and Sleep rejoiced, and made answer saying: "Come now, swear to me by the inviolable water of Styx, and with one hand lay hold of the bounteous earth, and with the other the shimmering sea, so that all the gods who are below with Cronos may be witnesses for us two, that you truly will give me one of the youthful Graces, Pasithea, for whom I have been longing all my days."³⁸

Late Archaic poetry entertains the same idea. Bakchylides, for instance, in his victory songs, frequently vouches for the immortal fame of his champions by "resting my hand on the earth" – not quite by means of an oath, but still expressing the witnessing authority Gaia might wield over his pronouncement.³⁹

It is worthwhile to note that abstractions such as these – invocation of the most foundational divine quantities of the pantheon – were well equipped to be communicated between communities that otherwise subscribed to a thoroughly local encoding of their religious life. The formative force of the local horizon suggests that the swearing authorities of the oath could be, but by no means had to be, identical with the highest order of the pantheon. Indeed, the invocation of divine witnesses did not end with Panhellenic abstraction, on the contrary. Although frequently overlooked, epichoric notions, the rooting of the oath in and its intertwinement with the land of the polis, were omnipresent. In a document from Hellenistic Dreros, an array of abstract deities is addressed, alongside with epichoric authorities. The oath formula culminates in “Earth, Heaven, heroes, heroines, fountains, rivers”.⁴⁰ In similar fashion, a late Classical inscription from Kolophon decreed that, upon the extension of the city walls, the people had invoked a number of specific polis deities as well as “the other gods and goddesses, and [...] the heroes who occupy the city and country”.⁴¹ Focalization on the deities present in the lands of the polis is also attested to in the *symmachia* of Athens, Argos, Elis and Mantinea from c. 420 BC, in which each state swore “the oath most binding in his country”, that is, the epichoric gods and goddess who in each case were considered the highest local authority to vouch for the agreement.⁴² In the same fashion, the Peace of Nikias from 421 BC was vouched for by the swearing parties “by the most binding oath of their country”.⁴³

In a prominent passage in Thucydides, in the renowned Plataiai Debate in Book Two, due diligence is given to the recognition of the epichoric gods of the country of Plataiai: “We appeal”, thus the Plataians’ request to Sparta, “to the gods to whom the oaths were then made, to the gods of your ancestors, and lastly to those of our country (*tous hemeterous epichorios*), and call upon you to refrain from violating our territory or transgressing the oaths”.⁴⁴ King Archidamos of Sparta, in his less than pleasant answer, too calls upon the “gods and heroes of the Plataian territory, be my witnesses” that the Spartans had not been the first who had departed from the common oath with the Plataians.⁴⁵ We are not told who the swearing deities had been exactly, neither of the initial agreements nor those that the war parties had before their eyes in the present day, “those of our country”. In the great majority of attested cases, the actual identity of swearing deities remains unknown. But the point is reasonably clear. Beyond the most sanctioned gods and goddesses of the pantheon, there was a bewildering local variation among the deities invoked during oath ceremonies. Athens, in the fifth century, typically swore by Zeus, Apollo and Demeter, the Thebans by Herakles and Iolaos. In some Cretan documents, up to sixteen local swearing authorities vouch for the agreement!⁴⁶

Local divinities, gods and goddesses, heroes and heroines, hint at the deeply epichoric quality of the oath. Erich Ziebarth has long framed this the *ho enchorios/epichorios horkos*, which draws attention both to the local encoding of the oath and to its physical backdrop, that of city and *chora*, the epichoric environment.⁴⁷ The polis was the wider stage where the oath was sworn, typically at a demarcated location that, rich in symbolism and sanction, captured unity within and radiated

authority without. We have already mentioned the *lithos* in the Athenian agora, on which the archons swore their oaths. Upon the adoption of young men into their phratries, the corresponding oaths were sworn at the altar of Zeus Phratrios.⁴⁸ The ephebes, too, swore at a reserved spot: the altar in the Sanctuary of Aglauros on the eastern slopes of the *akropolis*.⁴⁹

Beyond sanctioned locations such as altars and stones, the country backdrop of the oath suggests that the physical manifestation of city and *chora* rendered material meaning to the oath. The epichoric deities that vouched for the agreement had their habitat in the land of the polis – in groves, rivers, caves and in the fields; their presence was real, in this sense. More so, as (semi-)divine creatures tied to the epichoric environment, they were impersonations of the land or the people, or of both. As Irene Polinskaya observed, “of all divine figures, heroes have perhaps the strongest connection to the place of their worship. Any hero is implicitly a patron and a guardian of the area where he resides.”⁵⁰

King Archidamos, in his response to the Plataians, recognizes the protective powers the epichoric deities had as guardians of the initial oath, and that he had no intention to challenge them: the upcoming devastation of their land by the Spartans is announced as an act of retaliation rather than the violation of the sacred agreement, since the oaths had been broken by the Plataians first. Archidamos’s observation betrays an intriguing interplay between the *chora* as a spirited place under the protection of the gods and the precarity this quality posed, in material terms, to the issue at hand. The *chora* of Plataiai was both the material substance of the oaths once exchanged between Spartans and Plataians and the vouching authority, the subject matter and guarantor alike.

In the much-discussed oath of the Athenian ephebes, delivered in the sanctuary of Aglauros, this twofold capacity of the land is documented by the meaningful assemblage of various of its natural features. Towards the end, the vow of the young men concludes with the invocation of divine witnesses: “the gods Aglauros, Hestia, Enyo, Enyalios, Ares and Athena Areia, Zeus, Thallo, Auxo, Hegemone, Herakles, and the boundaries of my fatherland, wheat, barley, vines, olives, figs”.⁵¹ It is intriguing to see how the *chora* and its agrarian produce figure as deified witnesses here, referencing the link between those who swear the oath and the land they pledge to protect. As indicated in countless ephebic inscriptions from Athens and elsewhere, the ties between the ephebes and the land also entailed excursions to the borderlands and liminal sanctuaries. En route, the ephebes learned about the intricacies of the *chora*, its topography and geography, its major roads and lines of communication and its areas of agricultural activity. But there was more at stake than environmental localism. Recalling the testimony of wheat, barley, olives and other agrarian goods, the ephebic oath attributed a sublime quality to the local produce, assigning to it a spirited quality. Much like the sacred nature of caves and groves, the agrarian land figured as a place with a spirited aura: the veneration of gods and goddesses ‘in the fields’ or ‘in the marshes’ exuded a deep rootedness of the divine in the agricultural landscape. The sacred aura inspired the ephebes as much as it instilled in them the obligation to safeguard the land, observe its conditions and perform their duties in deference to the holy covenant the polis had with

the powers in place. The oath objectivizes the land, and the land vouches for the oath.

3. The Alliance of Thebes and Aigina in Herodotus 5.80–1

The interlocking of oaths of alliance with the land they swore to defend transpires in Herodotus's famed account of the alliance between Aigina and Thebes. The decades prior to the Persian Wars were a troubled period in Boiotia. On the one hand, a growing sense of solidarity among various cities was fostered by several wars fought against common enemies and an emergent ethnic identity, expressed also in ritual and cult. On the other hand, the thrust towards togetherness triggered pressing questions of belonging, boundary-drawing and alliance-making: questions of who belonged to Boiotia and who did not – and among those who were not part of the land and its *ethnos*, who was an appropriate alliance partner in the pursuit of interests in realms beyond.

On the margins, these questions were particularly troublesome. In a much-discussed passage, Herodotus relates that in c. 519, the Plataians were hard pressed by the Thebans to join the emerging Boiotian League, “to partake in the Boiotians”.⁵² The people of Plataiai declined and turned to the Athenians for help, who offered them an alliance with the purpose of protection from Thebes. The Thebans next launched a campaign against Plataiai to force the city into their *koinon*, whereupon the Athenians came to the aid of their new allies. Before battle was joined, the Corinthians arbitrated between the two sides and set a boundary, with the condition that the Thebans would not “force such of the Boiotians to be Thebans as did not want to be such”.⁵³ Despite the arbitration, the Thebans attacked the Athenians as they made ready to leave but were defeated. A new boundary was drawn by the victors in battle: “they set the river Asopos as a boundary for Hysiai and Plataiai against the Thebans”.⁵⁴

Hostilities did not end there. The main literary source is again Herodotus, whose account is supplemented by important epigraphic evidence. In 506, along with contingents from the Peloponnese under the command of King Kleomenes of Sparta and the Chalkidians of Euboia, the Boiotians launched a coordinated campaign against Athens. The allied forces crossed the Asopos and took Hysiai. Next, they entered the Mazi plain and attacked Oinoe and Phyle; some Boiotian and Peloponnesian detachments pushed towards the Saronic Gulf and raided several smaller villages in the vicinity of Eleusis. Dissent among the Peloponnesian forces led, however, to their departure before a major battle had been fought. Once they had withdrawn from the scene, the Athenians turned against the Chalkidians for revenge. En route, they first defeated the Boiotian army in an unknown location and took 700 prisoners.⁵⁵

The disintegration of the allied forces, along with the loss of men, seriously hampered Theban hopes of regaining possession of the lands south of the Asopos. Soon after 506, a new attempt was made, adding another curious case to the crowded space of alliances in the region. Disaffected with the state of affairs, the Thebans consulted the Delphic oracle on how they might take vengeance on the

Athenians. The god advised them to “submit it to the Many-Voiced [...] and beg those who are nearest to you”. Corresponding to the “Many-Voiced”, an assembly was convened, at which it was pointed out that “our nearest neighbours are the men of Tanagra, Koroneia, and Thespiiai. These are always our comrades in battle and zealously wage our wars”.⁵⁶ The meaning of the oracle was then discovered by recalling the story that Asopos had two daughters, Thebe and Aigina, and the Thebans thus requested an alliance with the Aiginetans. According to Herodotus,

[the Aiginetans] told them [the Thebans], who were asking for military assistance, that they were sending along the Aiakids. When the Thebans had made an attempt relying on the alliance of the Aiakids and were roughly handled by the Athenians, the Thebans having sent the Aiakids back returned them, but asked for men instead.⁵⁷

The peculiarities of the alliance between Thebes and Aigina have attracted much scholarly attention. That an alliance was made is apparent from Herodotus’s wording: once the dispatch of the Aiakids from Aigina had been announced, the Thebans devised their action in the war against Athens in reliance “on the symmarchy of the Aiakids”.⁵⁸ The Aiginetans were not quite the nearest neighbours of the Thebans, although the northern Saronic region was close: it was separated from core Boiotia only by the contested lands south of the Asopos and the corridor from Eleutherai towards Eleusis farther south, territories that the Thebans had sought to bring under their influence in the decade prior to the incident.⁵⁹ Proximity was explained by Herodotus in any case not in geographical terms but as a primordial relationship. Through their father Asopos, the epichoric nymphs Thebe and Aigina were tied together by familial bonds and, hence, “nearest” to one another.⁶⁰

Roughly one generation earlier, Pindar highlighted close relations between Asopos’s daughters. According to the lengthy recollection of the tradition in *Isthmian* 8, Aigina was the twin sister of a nymph named Thebe, eponymous divinity of Thebes; both were daughters of Asopos.⁶¹ The ode was commissioned by Kleandros of Aigina to commemorate his victory in the pankration at the Isthmian Games of 478 BC, hence, in the year following the Battle of Plataiai. If Herodotus is correct in asserting that the alliance of c. 506, before the Persian Wars, was forged also on the grounds of kinship ties (and there is no reason to doubt Herodotus on this), then it is curious to see that Pindar returned the theme immediately after the war. At Plataiai, Thebans and Aiginetans had fought in opposite camps. There is a somber undertone to the ode, a mixed sense of sorrow and deliverance that provided the backdrop for the joyful praise of Kleandros’s victory. Pindar did not quite go as far as to recall the former alliance between Thebes and Aigina but reference to the joint mythical parentage clearly pointed in this direction.⁶² The Aiakids do not seem to have taken offence at this, judging from the high volume of victory odes they continued to commission from Pindar in the subsequent decades.

Herodotus’s anecdote plays on the ambiguity of the Aiakids: first, the Aiakids were a distinct status group on Aigina, the highest echelon of society that governed the affairs of the island. Their authority derived, in part, from the claim that

they were distant descendants of mythical Aiakos, son of Zeus and the nymph Aigina, the aforementioned daughter of Asopos. In contrast to the ‘real’ Aiakids, the collective of heroes that had descended from Aiakos, his two sons, Peleus and Telamon, and their sons, Achilles and Ajax, battle champions of the Trojan War, were also labelled the Aiakids. As cultic figures, semi-divine and from a heroic past, the latter Aiakdis wielded formative, all-encompassing authority over the politics, society and religion on the island; through the nymph Aigina, they rooted the Aiginetans in their land.

A scholion to Pindar refers to a *heroon* of Aiakos.⁶³ Pindar himself, in three odes that were commissioned by Aiginetan champions and that hence were fully appreciative of the local discourse environment, comments further on the nature of the Aiakids. *Isthmian* 5 attests to the heroic worship of “Aiakos and his sons”.⁶⁴ In *Pythian* 8, Pindar cites a prayer, “Dear mother Aigina, on its voyage to freedom safeguard this city, together with Zeus and king Aiakos, Peleus and noble Telamon, and with Achilles”, which highlights the protective sways of the Aiakids over the island.⁶⁵ Safeguarding powers of Aiakos are further attested in *Nemean* 8, which describes his cult statue, “the hallowed knees” of which might be clasped by suppliants.⁶⁶ Pausanias visited a cult site that he called the Aiakeion and that might have been identical with the scholion’s *heroon*. Its location was near the harbor, “in the most conspicuous part of the town”. Most likely, it marked the center of the cult of the Aiakids on Aigina. Commenting on the architectural reliefs on the gates, Pausanias observes that the rectangular Aiakeion was otherwise surrounded by white stone. Within the enclosure grew ancient olives, and there was an altar that rose but little from the ground. Pausanias makes no mention of a cult statue but gives away the secret belief that the altar was the tomb of Aiakos himself.⁶⁷

Pindar’s prayer indicates that the Aiakids were heroes who were summoned and, as in the case of the Theban alliance, might be dispatched for help in military matters. An interesting parallel is evidenced for the Spartan Dioskouri, which also provides insight into how the heroes were fielded in practical terms. When the Lokrians of southern Italy sent an embassy to Sparta to request help in the war against neighbouring Kroton, the Spartans gave them “as allies the sons of Tyndareus [...]. And the ambassadors accepted the aid they proffered, and after they had received favorable signs in sacrifice, they prepared a couch on their ship for the Dioskouri and sailed back to their home land”.⁶⁸ The form in which the Dioskouri made the crossing is left uncommented by the referencing authority Diodoros. Mention of a special couch (*kline*), itself a beautifully crafted piece of furniture, suggests that the Dioskouri had a material quality, hence, they were objects of movable size, weight and form. Most likely, then, the Dioskouri traveling to Lokroi were artful cult images made from wood or clay, or portable statuettes of bronze or carved from stone.⁶⁹

That the allies sent to Thebes were cult images of comparable material quality is obvious from a second fielding of the Aiakids, also related by Herodotus. Before the battle of Salamis, when at daybreak an earthquake hit the area where the allied armada had anchored, it seemed good to Greeks

to pray to the gods and to invite the Aiakids to be their allies. Since this seemed to them the best course, they did so. Having prayed to all the gods, from the place where they were, they summoned Ajax and Telamon from Salamis, and for Aiakos and the other Aiakids they sent a ship to Aigina.⁷⁰

Just before battle commenced, the vessel that “had been sent to Aigina to fetch the sons of Aiakos, rejoined the fleet”.⁷¹ In the aftermath of the battle, the Aiginetans claimed that this was also the first ship of the Greek navy to go into action.⁷² While Telamon and Ajax were already on Salamis – either they were worshipped there or they had come to the island with the Aiginetan contingent of thirty triremes⁷³ – Aiakos and “the other Aiakids” (Achilles, Peleus and maybe others) were brought by an allied vessel. Presumably, much like the travelling Dioskouri, Aiakos and his offspring were priority passengers who travelled under privileged circumstances. Their ship was noticeable among the Greek armada; having taxied the Aiakids obviously was a special distinction. Note that the heroes could be summoned in swift fashion. In Herodotus’s narrative, there is a window of two nights between the Greek call for allegiance⁷⁴ and the arrival of the Aiakids at the allied fleet.⁷⁵ There is a widespread consensus among scholars that they took this journey in the form of moveable cult images, most likely fetched from the Aiakeion in the city and carried by means of special cultic arrangements aboard a ship to the strike force at Salamis.⁷⁶

So the cult images of the Aiakids were believed to provide military assistance to the Aiginetans and their allies. Diodoros, in the passage cited on the Dioskouri, comments that the Spartans had sent them to the aid of the Lokrians almost “in a perfunctory manner”, implying that Sparta’s commitment to the alliance was lukewarm, if not insincere.⁷⁷ The convenient way out was to send *xoanes* instead of men.⁷⁸ The alliance between Thebes and Aigina differed from this in that both sides seem to have acted on the grounds of good faith and best practice. The Thebans did not object to the sending of the Aiakids. They were initially content with the dispatch and relied on the cult objects as aid from their alliance with Aigina; support from the Aiakids was, in this sense, real. It was only when the Thebans were “roughly handled by the Athenians”⁷⁹ that they asked for men instead. The Aiginetans, too, proved themselves as reliable allies. When asked for fire power rather than cult images, they sent a contingent that attacked the coastline of Attika near Phaleron and elsewhere while the bulk of the Athenian army was in Boiotia. The Aiginetan intervention brought immediate relief to the Theban cause, because the Athenians hastened to withdraw to their homeland to shield Phaleron and surroundings.⁸⁰ It is unknown where things went from there. Herodotus’s main interest in this part of the *Histories* is in the rising power of Athens and, as we shall see shortly, the complicated relation between Aigina and Athens in the run-up to the Persian invasion of 480, and so the narrative thread of Thebes and Aigina ran cold.

The ‘realness’ of the Aiakids as allies – their ability to provide military assistance – deserves further deliberation. The debate about the potency of Greek deities is muddled by the dynamics of polytheism. Zeus, Helios and Earth were omniscient, all-seeing and, in this sense, omnipotent, although the reach of their power is

debated in scholarship. Although there were some omnipotent deities, others were more restricted in their capacity to wield superhuman power.⁸¹ The issue is further complicated by the question of whether the cult statuettes of the Aiakids were perceived only as a representation of the heroic champions or were heroes themselves. If only the former, this might have accounted for potential failure to bring about the desirable effects without harming the reputation of the hero. As Irene Polinskaya points out, the widespread Greek practice of turning to cult statues “with the evident goal of bringing about material results” suggests, however, that the object was vested with ‘real’ powers.⁸²

There is another explanation to the riddle. Herodotus might have had something else in mind when he crafted the anecdote about the images of the Aiakids: expressions of exhortation and encouragement, probably yes; superhuman power, most likely no. The statuettes were hardly considered capable of bringing victory to the Theban army if the Athenians had sent them on the road to defeat. A middle ground between the possibility of defeat and heroic potency is to see the Aiakids as swearing authorities of the alliance with Thebes. When dispatched to the aid of allied forces, they – literally – brought the alliance with Aigina to the battlefield (presumably, they played a ceremonial role during the swearing ceremony). As such, they bore testimony to the ‘realness’ of the symmarchy and they energized the alliance with heroic power that was drawn from their multiple, intricate implications with the political community of the Aiginetans. Maybe it was standard practice of the ruling elite on Aigina to send movable cult images of the Aiakids to their respective allies. Herodotus relates two Aiginetan alliances, with the Hellenes before Salamis and with Thebes, and, in both instances, they were dispatched.

For the Spartan Dioskouri that were sent to Lokroi it is attested that they otherwise figured as swearing authorities of the Spartans.⁸³ For the Aiakids, their eminent role in epichoric worship, inextricably intertwined with the land and its ruling elite, makes it very likely that the oath of alliance was sworn by them, maybe at an altar in the precinct of the Aiakeion. In Thebes, the swearing counterpart might have been Aigina’s twin sister Thebe, although this can only be surmised. The Thebans are otherwise attested to have sworn by Herakles and Iolaos.⁸⁴ Thebe had a cult statue at Thebes; however, the circumstances of her veneration are unclear. In analogy to rituals elsewhere, the statue might have been touched during the swearing ceremony to establish a physical connection with the heroine.⁸⁵ Given the genealogical tenor of the symmarchy, oath-taking by Thebe, like Aigina the eponymous heroine of the country, in any case would have been obvious. The epichoric qualities of both were further vouched for and amplified by their father Asopos; we encountered the role of river gods as deities typically called upon in oath ceremonies above. Once again, Asopos not only facilitated the alliance through his twin daughters, but his lands were also the hard-wired point of contention in the conflict between Thebes and Plataiai/Athens: his domain was geographically located in between. All of this suggests that the Aiakids dispatched to the aid of Thebes represented the symmarchy between both parties. As divine swearing authorities of the Aiginetans, they carried their support to the battlefield, where they captured the realness of military assistance from the Aiakid warrior elite from Aigina.

When push came to shove and the Thebans required further support, the Aiginetans would stand by their alliance and launched an attack on Phaleron.

We have just observed that the topic of the Theban war is dropped in and Herodotus turns to bad blood between Athens and Aigina instead.⁸⁶ It is important to note, however, that the Aiginetans' motivation to enter into an alliance with Thebes was triggered by the subsequent sections in the narrative.⁸⁷ There was a causal connection between the sending of the Aiakids to Thebes and the violent dispute with Athens, introduced by the announcement: "The desire of the Aiginetans to pay off their old score against Athens [and hence accept the Theban proposal of an alliance] arose from the following circumstances."⁸⁸ After the end of the section, the same connection between mutual hatred of Athens and Aigina, on the one hand, and Aigina's eager response to the Theban call, on the other, is reiterated.⁸⁹ As Herodotus makes laboriously clear in between, both topics were tied together by a web of epichoric instantiations, incidents that were both subject to local traditions and their physical rooting in the lands of the respective opponents. It is worthwhile to paraphrase the passage 5.82–8 in full.

Long before the quarrels at hand the crops had failed in Epidauros, whereupon Delphi had advised the Epidaurians to honor Damia and Auxesia with statues, not made from bronze or stone but from wood of the cultivated olive. Believing that olive trees from Attika were of peculiar sanctity, they sought and obtained permission from the Athenians to fell some trees and bring them to Epidauros. Permission was granted on the condition that the Epidaurians offered annual sacrifices to Erechtheus and Athena Polias, to which the Epidaurians agreed. The statues were crafted and erected, and the harvest improved.⁹⁰ When a swelling conflict between Epidauros and Aigina went sour, the Aiginetans stole these statues and put them up somewhere in the middle of their island, where they gave rise to the institution of an all-new ceremony, one with a decidedly epichoric thrust: the sacrifices, dancers and singers, and board of *choregoi* followed a local script, while the ribald mode of the performances mocked the women in the area.⁹¹ The Epidaurians now stopped payment of their annual tributes to Athens on the grounds that the statues of Damia and Auxesia were no longer in their land. Since the Aiginetans had them, it appeared only right that they were the ones to pay tribute to Athens. The Athenians requested the wooden *agalmata* back – made from Athenian wood, they were Athenian property – but were shown a cold shoulder.⁹² Athenian and Aiginetan accounts on what happened next differed. The former claimed to have landed on the island with a single trireme whose crew sought to carry off the statues, while the Aiginetans spoke of a full-fledged invasion. Either way, the Athenian expedition corps was unable to secure the statues, because an earthquake had frightened them or they were simply too unwieldy. The deities fell from their pedestals onto their knees where they remained ever since.⁹³ Only one Athenian survived the Aiginetan expedition, yet upon his return to Phaleron he was struck down by the wives of those who died during the mission with the brooches that were used to fasten their dresses. The incident led to the introduction of a new dress code for women in Athens that Herodotus labelled Ionian but identifies as Karian. Its characteristic feature was that it worked without brooches.⁹⁴ The Aiginetans, on the other hand,

put no ban on brooches but passed a law instead regulating their length; brooches were henceforth declared the prime votives offered to the shrines of Damia and Auxesia. In turn, nothing of provenance from Attika, including pottery, was to be used in the worship of both deities, “only drinking vessels made in the country”.⁹⁵

So far Herodotus’s story. The account is one giant super aitiology, crafted from the lineup of explanations of a whole phalanx of cultural traditions and phenomena, including local festivals and rituals, dress cultures and the appearance of cult objects – the kneeling *agalmata* of Damia and Auxesis. The divine quality of the latter provided the fitting point of departure for this type of reasoning. Summoned by the Epidaurians as goddesses of the fertile earth to end the detriment of failing crops, they marked the meaningful point of departure for Herodotus’s composition.⁹⁶ At the same time, the narrative is interspersed with Athenian claims for cultural distinction, including leadership in the manufacturing of ceramics and the cultivation of olive trees.

The statues of Damia and Auxesia are the narrative thread of the story, they are intertwined with three different soils. Deriving initially from Athenian land and therefore of supreme quality, the wooden *agalmata* came to Epidauros, where they embodied the ritual obligations that tied both parties together. The embodiment was literal: Once the statues had left the country of Epidauros – they were stolen by the Aiginetans – the ritual ties were cut. On Aigina, they fostered an all-new cultural dialogue with the land. Brought to the middle of the island, into its geographical center, they inspired a new cult that was thoroughly local: Herodotus was so intrigued by this that he spelled out the details of sacrifices and musical performances, all of which subscribed to the peculiarities of place. It seems that, at that point in the history of the *agalmata*, the Aiginetans had fully appropriated the wood from Athens and its transformation into cult statues in Epidauros. The Aiginetans had made the images of Damia and Auxesia theirs. Returning them to Athens was not an option, nor was there any grounded interest in ritual ties with the Athenians similar to those the Epidaurians had entertained – and which, implicitly, would have inculcated the primordial origins of the statues in Athens.

When thrown off their pedestals and fallen to the ground, Herodotus describes the cult images as kneeling statues: “Both the images together [...] fell with the selfsame motion on their knees, and have remained so from that day.”⁹⁷ The posture has been understood to represent a birthing position of the goddesses, a reading which extends the idea of prosperity of the land to the fertility of the womb. The implication of this interpretation is that the cult images had been crafted in this position from the outset. According to some scholars, this aspect of Herodotus’s story also belongs to the realm of aitiology, i.e., it explains the physical appearance to the statues in their sanctuary on Aigina.⁹⁸ This is certainly a possibility, although maybe not a very convincing one. The detailed description of the rites performed in veneration of the deities makes no mention of ritual practices relating to the fertility of women. Moreover, note that Herodotus states that the statues adopted their particular posture only when they were torn ἐκ τῶν βάθρων, “from their bases”. Both Athenians and Aiginetans agreed that the statues were pushed violently; subsequent attempts to move them remained fruitless; hence, there was quite some

shaking. In the course of this, and during attempts no doubt made after the incident to restore a somewhat dignified outlook of the ensemble, the statues might have dug knee-deep into the soil; maybe they had lost parts of their lower legs so that they appeared as on their knees. The deep meaning of such a presentation was that it made an intricate connection between the *agalmata* and the soil – the land onto which they were placed.

Attachment to the land, in immediate fashion and with no base or other device in between, symbolized the close ties of Damia and Auxesia with the country of Aigina – an irrefutable and insoluble connection that symbolized the full appropriation of cult images that had initially derived from another *chora*. In recognition of this, and to voice the covenant between Aigina and the goddesses in the language of ritual, their veneration was geared towards a deliberate environmental localism: the cult protocol was through and through local, no raw materials and produce from abroad was allowed – the objects used in worship were made in, from, and in accordance with the manufacturing practices of the local horizon of Aigina.

Herodotus's narrative thus betrays the same cultural dialogue between ritual and the land, and the epichoric quality one lends to the other, that we have encountered with the wooden cult statues of the Aiakids (which, as we have seen, provide the narrative bookends to the digression on affairs between Epidauros, Aigina and Athens). Beyond treaty obligations, military assistance and other forms of mutual aid, the realm of interstate alliances was interlocked with motifs and motivations that grounded the act of alliance-making, and its translation into actual support, in the epichoric horizon of each allied city, and the meaning and purpose it lent to the community. When allies swore an oath of alliance, this was done on the understanding and in recognition of a close relation between *horkos* and *chora*. The swearing deities evoked in the ceremony embodied the integrity of both, reminding everyone of what was at stake if faith in the alliance ever dropped. Beyond the festive dimension of oath ceremonies and the symbolic practices it entailed, the exchange of oaths brought stability and resilience to interstate alliances, in non-violent times as much as in periods of crisis.

Notes

- 1 Cf. only *RO* 6 ll. 2–3, 20 l. 36, 34 l. 12, 41 ll. 17–18, 44 l. 12.
- 2 Bayliss 2013b: 151; cf. Sommerstein and Torrance 2014: 138–42.
- 3 Hdt. 1.165; Arist. *Ath. Pol.* 23.5; cf. Plut. *Arist.* 25.1.
- 4 ἐπει τοῖς γε ἀρχαιοτέροις ἐπὶ ἱερεῖα ἦν καθεστηκός, ἐφ' ᾧ τις ὄρκον ἐποιήσατο, μηδὲ ἐδώδιμον εἶναι τοῦτο ἔτι ἀνθρώπων (Paus. 5.24.10, transl. W. H. S. Jones).
- 5 τὸμ μὴ ἐμμένοντα τούτοις/τοῖς ὀρκίοις ἀλλὰ παρβεῶντα καταλείβεσθαι νιν καὶ κα/ταρρὲν ὥσπερ τὸς κολοσός, καὶ αὐτὸν καὶ γόνον καὶ χρήματα [...] (*M&L* 5 ll. 46–9).
- 6 Burkert 1985: 55–63; Scharff 2016: 58–64.
- 7 Cf. Mili 2024: 25.
- 8 Haysom et al. 2024: 8.
- 9 [...] ὁμνύουσιν δικαίως ἄρξιν καὶ κατὰ τοὺς νόμους (Arist. *Ath. Pol.* 55.5, transl. H. Rackham). The decree of the Athenian deme Ikarion (*IG* I³ 254) regulating the organization and finances of the local Dionysia festival stipulated that chorus leaders might make a formal application under oath to be excused from the obligation. During the oath-

taking, participants were required to touch the archaic statue of Dionysos. The statue was a material artefact that enabled oath-takers to vouch for and endorse their pledge through physical connection with the divine. See also the *horkomosion* near the Temple of Hephaistos, which seems to have had an official function in the processes of swearing and/or publicizing oaths (Plut. *Thes.* 27.5–7).

- 10 *SEG* 57.576.
- 11 *SEG* 57.576 ll. 9–12; Voutiras and Sismanides 2007; Sommerstein 2013: 141.
- 12 ἐν δὲ τῇ στήλῃ πρὸς τοῖς νόμοις ὄρκος ἦν μεγάλας ἀρὰς ἐπευχόμενος τοῖς ἀπειθοῦσιν (Pl. *Criti.* 119e).
- 13 [...] ὄρκους, τὰς μεγίστας πίστει παρ' ἀνθρώποις (Pol. 9.31, transl. W. R. Paton); cf. Scharff 2016: 228.
- 14 Cf. Bolmarcich 2007.
- 15 E.g. [...] ὥστε τὸν αὐτὸν ἐχθρὸν εἶναι καὶ φίλον (Arist. *Ath. Pol.* 23.5). Cf. also Xen. *Hell.* 2.2.20; 4.6.2.
- 16 E.g. [...] Λακεδαιμονίοις ἔπεσθαι καὶ κατὰ γῆν καὶ κατὰ θάλατταν (Xen. *Hell.* 2.2.20); also in religious matters: [...] θεωρεῖν κατὰ τὰ πάτρια τὸν βουλούμενον καὶ κατὰ γῆν καὶ κατὰ θάλασσαν (Thuc. 5.18.1 and 3).
- 17 E.g. βοηθεῖν δὲ καὶ Αθηναίους [...] τρόπῳ ὁποῖῳ ἂν δύνωνται ἰσχυροτάτῳ κατὰ τὸ δυνατόν (Thuc. 5.47.4). cf. also Thuc. 5.47.3.
- 18 Cf. Scharff 2016: chapter IV, *passim*.
- 19 Cf. the curious treaty between Sparta and Tegea from c. 550 bc (Plut. *Quaest. Graec.* 5 = *Mor.* 292b) that was published on a stele in the upper Alpheios Valley.
- 20 Examples are discussed by Scharff 2016: 93–103.
- 21 ἐν ᾧ δὲ τέμνειν σφάγια χρή σ', ἀκούέ μου. ἔστιν τρίτους σοι χαλκόπους ἔσω δόμων, ὃν Ἰλίου ποτ' ἐξαναστήσας βάθρα σπουδῇ ἐπ' ἄλλην Ἡρακλῆς ὀρμώμενος στησαί σ' ἐφεῖτο Πυθικὴν πρὸς ἐσχάραν. ἐν τῷδε λαιμοὺς τρεῖς τριῶν μῆλων τεμὼν ἐγγραψὼν ὄρκους τρίποδος ἐν κοίλῳ κύτει, κάπειτα σφάζειν θεῶ δὸς ᾧ Δελφῶν μέλει, μνημεῖα θ' ὄρκων μαρτύρημά θ' Ἑλλάδι (Eur. *Suppl.* 1196–204, transl. D. Kovacs).
- 22 ταῦτα δὲ ὤμοσαν, σφάζαντες ταῦρον καὶ λύκον καὶ κάπρον καὶ κριὸν εἰς ἀσπίδα, οἱ μὲν Ἑλληνες βάπτοντες ξίφος, οἱ δὲ βάρβαροι λόγχην (Xen. *An.* 2.2.9, transl. J. Dillery).
- 23 Ὅρκια δὲ ποιεῖνται Σκυθαὶ ὧδε πρὸς τοὺς ἂν ποιέωνται· ἐς κύλικα μεγάλῃν κεραμίνην οἶνον ἐγγέαντες αἶμα συμμισγούσι τῶν τὸ ὄρκιον ταμνομένων, τῷφαντες ὑπέατι ἢ ἐπιτα μόντες μαχαίρῃ σμικρὸν τοῦ σώματος, καὶ ἔπειτα ἀποβάψαντες ἐς τὴν κύλικα ἀκινάκην καὶ οἰστοὺς καὶ σάγαριν καὶ ἀκόντιον· ἐπεὰν δὲ ταῦτα ποιήσωσι, κατεύχονται πολλὰ καὶ ἔπειτα ἀποπίνουσι αὐτοὶ τε οἱ τὸ ὄρκιον ποιούμενοι καὶ τῶν ἐπομένων οἱ πλείστου ἄξιοι (Hdt. 4.70, transl. A. D. Godley).
- 24 ταῦτα ὁμόσαντες κατακαλύψαντες τὰ σφάγια ταῖς ἀσπίσιν ὑπ'ὸ σάλπιγγος ἀρὰν ἐποιήσαντο, εἴ τι τῶν/ὁμωμένων παραβαίνοιεν καὶ μὴ ἔμπε/δορκοῖ<ε>ν τὰ ἐν τῷ ὄρκῳ γεγραμμένα, αὐτοῖς ἄγος εἶναι τοῖς ὁμόσασιν (*RO* 88 ll. 43–8). The same motif occurs in Aeschylus' *Seven Against Thebes* (43–8), when the Argive warlords swear: ἄνδρες γὰρ ἐπτά, θούριοι λοχαγέται, ταυροσφαγοῦντες ἐς μελάνδετον σάκος καὶ θιγγάνοντες χερσὶ ταυρείου φόνου, Ἄρη τ', Ἐνυώ, καὶ φιλαίματον Φόβον ὀρκωμότησαν ἢ πόλει κατασκαφὰς θέντες λαπάξιν ἄστῳ Καδμείων βία, ἢ γῆν θανόντες τήνδε φυράσειν φόνῳ – “Seven men, bold leaders of companies, slaughtered a bull, let its blood run into a black-rimmed shield, and touching the bull's blood with their hands swore an oath by Ares, Enyo, and blood-loving Terror, that they would either bring destruction on the city, sacking the town of the Kadmeian by force, or perish and mix their blood into the soil of this land” (transl. A. H. Sommerstein). Cf. Fletcher 2012: 10–11; Scharff 2016: 61.
- 25 Cf. the ephebic swearing scene (?) on a black-figure amphora from c. 500 to 450 bc, Beazley Archive nr. 9305, which most likely captures this ideal; Bayliss 2013a: 14–15.
- 26 ἀλλ' ἐκ τοι ἐρέω καὶ ἐπὶ μέγαν ὄρκον ὁμοῦμαι/ναὶ μὰ τὸδε σκεῖπτρον, τὸ μὲν οὐ ποτε φύλλα καὶ ὄζους/φύσει, ἐπεὶ δὴ πρῶτα τομῆν ἐν ὄρεσσι λέλοιπεν, /οὐδ' ἀναθλήσει· περὶ γάρ ῥα ἐ χαλκὸς ἔλεψε/φύλλα τε καὶ φλοιόν, νῦν αὐτὲ μιν υἱὲς Ἀχαιῶν/ἐν παλάμῃς

- φορεύουσι δικασπόλοι, οἷ τε θέμιστας/πρὸς Διὸς εἰρύεται· ὁ δέ τοι μέγας ἔσσεται ὄρκος· [...] Ὡς φάτο Πηλεΐδης, ποτὶ δὲ σκῆπτρον βάλε γαίη/χρυσείοις ἤλοισι πεπαρμένον (Hom. *Il.* 1.233–9; 245–56, transl. A. T. Murray). Cf. Kozak 2014: 215–16.
- 27 Ὡς εἰπὼν τὸ σκῆπτρον ἀνέσχεθε πᾶσι θεοῖσιν (Hom. *Il.* 7.412, transl. A. T. Murray).
- 28 ἀλλ' ἄγε μοι τὸ σκῆπτρον ἀνάσχεο, καὶ μοι ὄμοσσον (Hom. *Il.* 10.321, transl. A. T. Murray).
- 29 Ὡς φάθ', ὁ δ' ἐν χερσὶ σκῆπτρον λάβε καὶ οἱ ὄμοσσεν (Hom. *Il.* 10.328, transl. A. T. Murray).
- 30 Aristotle references the communal authority of old by stating that when kings once had the “supreme command in war and control over all sacrifices that were not in the hands of the priestly class, and in addition to these functions they were judges in law-suits; some gave judgement not on oath and some on oath – and the oath was taken by holding up the *skeptron*” – κύριοι δ' ἦσαν τῆς τε κατὰ πόλεμον ἡγεμονίας καὶ τῶν θυσιῶν ὅσαι μὴ ἱερατικάι, καὶ πρὸς τούτοις τὰς δίκας ἔκρινον· τοῦτο δ' ἐποιοῦν οἱ μὲν οὐκ ὀμνύοντες οἱ δ' ὀμνύοντες, ὁ δ' ὄρκος ἦν τοῦ σκῆπτρου ἐπανάτασις (Arist. *Pol.* 1285b.10–14, transl. H. Rackham).
- 31 εὐξασθαι μὲν τὸν κήρυκα αὐτίκα μ'ἄλλα τῶι Διὶ τῶι Ὀλυμπίῳ καὶ τῇ Ἀθηνᾷ τῇ Πολιά/δι καὶ τῇ Δήμητρι καὶ τῇ Κόρῃ καὶ τοῖς Δώδεκα [Θ]/εοῖς καὶ ταῖς Σεμναῖς Θεαῖς, ἐὰν συνενεῖγκῃ Ἀ[θη]/ναίων τῶι δήμῳ τὰ δόξαντα περὶ τῆς συμμαχία[ς, θυ]/[σί]αν καὶ πρόσδοδον ποιήσεσθα[ι] [...] τα[ῦ]τα μὲν ἡϋχθαι (RO 41 ll. 6–12). A curious example of an inscribed bronze *kerykeion* survives from Polyrrhenia on Crete (c. 475–450 bc; Martínez Fernández 2012: 71–2) that voices the staff's (and its bearer's) in apodictic fashion: “I am of the Argive Hera.” The evoked divinity is neither Hera of the Homeric pantheon nor the local Hera of Polyrrhenia but a local patron deity elsewhere, Hera from Argos.
- 32 E.g., RO 50 and 53; cf. Bayliss 2013b: 160–2.
- 33 Bayliss 2013b: 160–1.
- 34 Ζεῦ πάτερ, Ἰδῆθεν μεδέων, κύδιστε, μέγιστε, /Ἡέλιός θ', ὅς πάντ' ἐφορᾷς καὶ πάντ' ἐπακούεις, /καὶ ποταμοὶ καὶ γαῖα, καὶ οἱ ὑπ'ἐνερθε καμόντας/ἀνθρώπους τίνυσθον, ὅτις κ' ἐπίορκον ὁμόςση (Hom. *Il.* 3.276–9, transl. mod. A. T. Murray).
- 35 Bayliss 2013b: 160.
- 36 Burkert 1985: 251.
- 37 Bayliss 2013b: 161; cf. RO 50 (comm.).
- 38 Ὡς φάτο, χήρατο δ' Ὑπνος, ἀμειβόμενος δὲ προσηύδα·“ἄγρει νῦν μοι ὄμοσσον ἀάατον Στυγὸς ὕδωρ, /χευρὶ δὲ τῇ ἐτέρῃ μὲν ἔλε χθόνα πουλυβότειραν, /τῇ δ' ἐτέρῃ ἄλα μαρναρέην, ἵνα νῶιν ἅπαντες/μάρτυροὶ ὦσ' οἱ ἔνερθε θεοὶ Κρόνον ἄμφις ἐόντες, /ἡ μὲν ἐμοὶ δώσειν Χαρίτων μίαν ὀπλοτεράων, /Πασιθέην, ἧς τ' αὐτὸς ἐέλδομαι ἡματα πάντα” (Hom. *Il.* 14.270–6, transl. A. T. Murray).
- 39 γαῖ δ' ἐπισκῆπτων πιφαύσκω” and γαῖ δ' ἐπισκῆπτων χέρα (Bacchyl. 5.42, 8.19, transl. D. A. Campbell).
- 40 ὀμνύω [...] καὶ τὰν Γᾶν/καὶ τὸν Οὐρανὸν καὶ/ἥρωας καὶ ἡρώσσας/καὶ κράνας καὶ ποτα/μὸνδς καὶ θεοὺς πάντας/καὶ πάσας (ICret I.9 I A ll. 31–6).
- 41 [...] τοῖς ἄλλοις θεοῖς/πᾶσι καὶ πᾶσαις καὶ τοῖς ἥρωσιν οἱ κατέχουσιν ἡμῶν τήν τε πόλιν καὶ τὴν/χώραν (Malkin 1987: 152).
- 42 ὀμνύντων δὲ τὸν ἐπιχώριον ὄρκον ἕκαστοι τὸν μέγιστον κατὰ ἱερῶν τελείων (Thuc. 5.47.8). ὀμ[ό]σαι δ/[ἐ] τὰς σπονδὰς Ἀθηναῖος μὲν ὑπὲρ τε σφὸν αὐτὸν καὶ τὸν χυσιμάχον, Ἀργεῖοι/δὲ καὶ Μαντινῆς καὶ Ἑ[λ]/[λείοι καὶ οἱ χυσιμαχοὶ τούτον κατὰ πόλεις ὀμνύντον] (IG I³ 83 = RO 165, oath formula missing). Note the case of IG II² 111, where the oath formula is imposed upon the island of Keos, which translates power hierarchies between the swearing parties into the actual language of the oath.
- 43 ὀμνύντων δὲ τὸν ἐπιχώριον ὄρκον ἐκάτεροι τὸν μέγιστον (Thuc. 5.18.9, transl. W. Smith).
- 44 μάρτυρας δὲ θεοὺς τοὺς τε ὀρκίους τότε γενομένους ποιοῦμενοι καὶ τοὺς ὑμετέρους πατρώους καὶ ἡμετέρους ἐγχωρίους, λέγομεν ὑμῖν γῆν τὴν Πλαταιίδα μὴ ἀδικεῖν μηδὲ π αραβαίνειν τοὺς ὀρκους (Thuc. 2.71.4, transl. W. Smith).

- 45 Θεοὶ ὅσοι γῆν τὴν Πλαταιίδα ἔχετε καὶ ἥρωες, ξυνίστορές ἐστε ὅτι οὔτε τὴν ἀρχὴν ἀδίκως, ἐκλιπόντων δὲ τῶνδε προτέρων τὸ ξυνώμοτον, ἐπὶ γῆν τήνδε ἤλθομεν [...]
(Thuc. 2.74.3, transl. W. Smith). For a full discussion of the passage, cf. Polinskaya 2013: 36–43; Beck 2020: 131–3, 2023: 35–7.
- 46 Cf. Bayliss 2013b: 160–7; for Thebes, see below.
- 47 Ziebarth 1892: 14–15; cf. also his entry on “Eid” in Pauly-Wissowa volume V.2 (1905): 2076–83.
- 48 *IG* II² 1237.
- 49 See above note 20 which possibly captures the scene.
- 50 Polinskaya 2013: 139.
- 51 ἱστορες θεοὶ Ἀγλαυρος, Ἑστία, Ἐνυώ, Ἐνυάλιος, Ἄρ/ης καὶ Ἀθηνᾶ Ἀρεία, Ζεὺς, Θαλλώ, Αὐξώ, Ἥγε/μόνη, Ἡρακλῆς, ὅροι τῆς πατρίδος, πυροὶ, /κριθαί, ἀμπελοι, ἐλάαι, συκαῖ (*RO* 88 ll. 17–20).
- 52 ἐς Βοιωτοὺς τελέειν (Hdt. 6.108.5). The date is inferred from Thuc. 3.68.
- 53 παρατυχόντες δὲ καὶ καταλλάξαντες ἐπιτρεψάντων ἀμφοτέρων οὐρσαν τὴν χώραν ἐπὶ τοῖσιδε, ἔαν Ὀηβαίους Βοιωτῶν τοὺς μὴ βουλομένους ἐς Βοιωτοὺς τελέειν (Hdt. 6.108.5, transl. A. D. Godley).
- 54 [...] τὸν Ἀσωπὸν αὐτὸν ἐποιήσαντο οὐρον Ὀηβαίοισι πρὸς Πλαταιέας εἶναι καὶ Ὑσιᾶς (Hdt. 6.108.6, transl. A. D. Godley).
- 55 Hdt. 5.77 and *M&L* 15; see also *SEG* 54.518 = Aravantinos 2006. For the events see now van Wijk 2024: 182–6; Beck 2025a.
- 56 ἐς πολύφημον δὲ ἐξενεϊκάντας ἐκέλευε τῶν ἄγχιστα δέεσθαι [...] ‘οὐκ ὦν ἄγχιστα ἡμέων οἰκέουσι Ταναγραῖοί τε καὶ Κορωνάιοι καὶ Θεσπιεες; καὶ οὗτοί γε ἅμα ἡμῖν αἰεὶ μαχόμενοι προθύμως συνδιαφέρουσι τὸν πόλεμον (Hdt. 5.79.1–2, transl. mod. A. D. Godley).
- 57 Πειρησαμένων δὲ τῶν Ὀηβαίων κατὰ τὴν συμμαχίην τῶν Αἰακιδέων καὶ τρηχέως περιεφθέντων ὑπὸ τῶν Ἀθηναίων, αὐτὶς οἱ Ὀηβαῖοι πέμψαντες τοὺς μὲν Αἰακίδας σφι ἀπεδίδουσιν, τῶν δὲ ἀνδρῶν ἐδέοντο (Hdt. 5.81.1, transl. A. D. Godley).
- 58 κατὰ τὴν συμμαχίην τῶν Αἰακιδέων (Hdt. 5.81.1, transl. A. D. Godley).
- 59 On the corridor, cf. Beck 2025b.
- 60 Pind. *Isthm.* 8.16–18; Bakchyl. 9.53–5; Korinna 654 col. III 1 PMG; cf. Larson 2007: 813; Nagy 2011: 44.
- 61 Pind. *Isthm.* 16–31.
- 62 Cf. Nagy 2011.
- 63 *Schol. Pind. Nem.* 5.94.
- 64 Pind. *Isthm.* 5.35–6.
- 65 Pind. *Pyth.* 8.98–100.
- 66 Pind. *Nem.* 8.13–14.
- 67 Paus. 2.29.7–8; cf. Polinskaya 2013: 129–34; Hornblower 2013: 242.
- 68 Ὅτι οἱ Λοκροὶ ἐπεμψαν εἰς Σπάρτην περὶ συμμαχίας δεόμενοι. οἱ δὲ Λακεδαιμόνιοι τὸ μέγεθος τῆς Κροτωνιατῶν δυνάμεως κοῦοντες, ὥσπερ φοσιούμενοι καὶ μόνως ἂν οὕτω σωθέντων Λοκρῶν, πεκρίθησαν αὐτοῖς συμμαχίης διδόναι τοὺς Τυνδαρίδας. οἱ δὲ πρέσβεις [...] προσεδέξαντο τὴν βοήθειαν παρ’ αὐτῶν καὶ καλλιερήσαντες ἔστρωσαν τοῖς Διοσκόροις κλίνην ἐπὶ τῆς νηὸς καὶ πέπλευσαν ἐπὶ τὴν πατρίδα (Diod. 8.32.1–2, transl. C. H. Oldfather).
- 69 Cf. Polinskaya 2013: 136.
- 70 ἔδοξε δὲ σφι εὐξασθαι τοῖσι θεοῖσι καὶ ἐπικαλέσασθαι τοὺς Αἰακίδας συμάχους. ὥς δὲ σφι ἔδοξε, καὶ ἐποίεν ταῦτα· εὐξάμενοι γὰρ πᾶσι τοῖσι θεοῖσι, αὐτόθεν μὲν ἐκ Σαλαμῖνος Αἰαντὰ τε καὶ Τελαμῶνα ἐπεκαλέοντο, ἐπὶ δὲ Αἰακὸν καὶ τοὺς ἄλλους Αἰακίδας νέα ἀπέστελλον ἐς Αἴγιναν (Hdt. 8.64.2, transl. A. D. Godley).
- 71 καὶ ἦκε ἡ ἀπ’ Αἰγίνης τριήρης, ἡ κατὰ τοὺς Αἰακίδας ἀπεδήμησε (Hdt. 8.83.2, transl. A. D. Godley).
- 72 Hdt. 8.84.
- 73 Hornblower 2013: 230–1.
- 74 Hdt. 8.64

- 75 Hdt. 8.84.
- 76 Cf. Versnel 2011: 93; Polinskaya 2013: 136–7; Hornblower 2013: 229–30.
- 77 Diod. 8.32.1.
- 78 Diodoros l.c. further comments that the Spartans were concerned about the military strength of the Lokrians' enemies, which casts doubts upon the sincerity of the move.
- 79 Hdt. 5.81.1, see n. 57.
- 80 Attacks on Phaleron Hdt. 5.81.3, 5.89.1–2; Polinskaya 2013: 136–9.
- 81 Cf. Versnel 2011: esp. 379–438.
- 82 Polinskaya 2013: 137.
- 83 Ziebarth 1892: 9.
- 84 Aristoph. *Ach.* 860 and 867; cf. Paus. 9.23.1; Ziebarth 1892: 9.
- 85 Pind. *Isthm.* 1.1–3 and fr. 195 Race; Soph. *Ant.* 844–5 (Antigone calls upon Thebe as witness [ξυμάρτυρα] of her misery); Paus. 2.5.2; cf. Schachter 1981–1994: 3.42.
- 86 Hdt. 5.81.
- 87 Hdt. 5.82–8.
- 88 ἡ δὲ ἔχθρη ἢ προοφειλομένη ἐς Ἀθηναίους ἐκ τῶν Αἰγινήτεων ἐγένετο ἐξ ἀρχῆς τοιῆσδε (Hdt. 5.82.1, transl. A. D. Godley).
- 89 Hdt. 5.89.1.
- 90 Hdt. 5.82.
- 91 Herodotus' text highlights the epichoric context: ἰδρυσάμενοι δὲ ἐν τούτῳ τῷ χώρῳ θυσίῃσι τε σφέα καὶ χοροῖσι γυναικηίοισι κερτομίοισι ἱλάσκοντο, χορηγῶν ἀποδεικνυμένων ἐκατέρῃ τῶν δαιμόνων δέκα ἀνδρῶν: κακῶς δὲ ἡγόρευον οἱ χοροὶ ἄνδρα μὲν οὐδένα, τὰς δὲ ἐπιχωρίας γυναῖκας. – “Having set them up in this place they sought their favor with sacrifices and female choruses in the satirical and abusive mode. Ten men were appointed providers of a chorus for each of the deities, and the choruses aimed their raillery not at any men but at the women of the country” (Hdt. 5.83.3, transl. A. D. Godley).
- 92 Hdt. 5.84.
- 93 Hdt. 5.85–6.
- 94 Hdt. 5.87.
- 95 ἐκ χυτρίδων ἐπιχωρίων νόμον τὸ λοιπὸν αὐτόθι εἶναι πίνειν (Hdt. 5.88.2, transl. A. D. Godley).
- 96 Cf. Polinskaya 2013: 271.
- 97 τὰ ἀγάλματα ἀμφοτέρω τῶντ' ποιῆσαι [...] ἐς γούνατα γάρ σφι αὐτὰ πεσεῖν, καὶ τὸν ἀπὸ τούτου χρόνον διατελέειν οὕτῳ ἔχοντα (Hdt. 5.86.3, transl. A. D. Godley).
- 98 See the discussion by Polinskaya 2013: 278, who raises doubts about aitiological arguments.

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9 Commemoration to Overcome Crisis?

References to the Past in Interstate Relations of Classical Times

Maria Osmers

1. Introduction

In 339 BC, the Athenians and the Thebans formed an alliance against Philip II to stop the Macedonians from advancing into mainland Greece.¹ The initiative for this alliance came from Demosthenes, who successfully pushed it through in the Athenian assembly.² The speech *On the Crown*, delivered in 330 BC,³ cites the decree enforced by Demosthenes and thus provides insight into the arguments employed by him to substantiate his position in the previous assembly.⁴ For instance, Demosthenes invoked the example of the ancestors, which should be emulated by all. He argued that it was imperative for the Athenians to stop being passive observers while other Greeks were subjugated. Instead, they should take a stand for the freedom of Hellas and, in the manner of their ancestors, prioritize this freedom over their personal concerns.⁵ Such calls to selflessly follow in the footsteps of the ancestors and thus prove oneself worthy of them are quite common in political debates.⁶ However, beyond this, Demosthenes's speech also included sections that highlighted similarities and common ground, which could serve as a foundation for a prospective alliance between Athens and Thebes.

Of course, in alliance politics it is always important to emphasize some kind of previous connection or common ground in order to create a basis for cooperation.⁷ But this was particularly true in this case because the relationship between the two parties was an extremely complicated one: in Classical times, the interaction between Athens and Thebes was mostly characterized by rivalry; there were only rare periods when the two poleis faced each other peacefully or even neutrally.⁸ Demosthenes was aware of this difficult situation. Accordingly, the decree stated that in the present situation it was necessary to strive for an alliance by "harboring no ill will for previous mutual differences between the states"⁹ and to fully support the Thebans against Philip. As Demosthenes knew that the past disagreements could jeopardize the alliance, it was even more important for him to address any reservations the Athenians might have had about the Thebans and their loyalty.

The decree demonstrates that Demosthenes used references to the past to ease these concerns. For example, he pointed to the shared Greek ancestry of the two cities, which provided a common ground despite all past conflicts. He saw it as legitimate for the Greeks to engage in conflict with one another in their quest for supremacy. However, in the face of external threats, such as those posed by the

Macedonians, it became necessary to put aside old enmities and to support each other.¹⁰ Demosthenes went on to supplement his appeals to Panhellenic ideals with additional historical arguments, stressing that there was a tradition of friendly cooperation between Athens and Thebes that could be continued. The decree states:

Furthermore, the people of Athens regard the people of Thebes as in no way alien either in race (*syngeneia*) or in nationality. They remember the services rendered by their own ancestors to the ancestors of the Thebans, for, when the sons of Heracles were dispossessed by the Peloponnesians of their paternal dominion, they restored them, overcoming in battle those who were trying to oppose the descendants of Heracles; and we harbored Oedipus and his family when they were banished; and many other notable acts of kindness have we done to the Thebans.¹¹

At the beginning of this passage, an unspecified kinship between Athenians and Thebans is mentioned, which may go beyond their common Greek ancestry.¹² However, the following sentences show that Demosthenes was more concerned with giving specific examples of friendly cooperation in the past. Demosthenes's decision to include these points in his argument to convince his audience demonstrates two things: on the one hand, it illustrates how important it was in general to refer to a shared history in order to justify joint activities in foreign policy.¹³ Not only in negotiations with potential partners, but also in debates of the Athenian assembly, alliances needed historical authorization in order to be recognized and accepted.¹⁴ On the other hand, at least in this particular situation, general references to a common Greek ancestry were considered insufficient to provide a basis for the alliance. Instead, only references to very specific shared experiences or explicit connections between the two poleis could create the necessary conditions for considering future cooperation. It seems that it was only through these concrete examples that the scepticism about the proposed cooperation on both sides could be overcome.

A further speech by Demosthenes serves to reinforce the impression that, in the context of the Athenian-Theban collaboration against Philip II, concrete historical links were established between the two poleis to stabilize the alliance. In his funeral oration of 338 BC, Demosthenes constructs a line of descent from the eponymous hero Oineus of the *phyle* Oineis to Cadmus,¹⁵ the mythical founder of Thebes.¹⁶ Accordingly, the inhabitants of this *phyle* would have had multiple motivations for engagement in the fight against the Macedonians. In this sense, Demosthenes makes the following assertion: "Since the danger in question was common to both states, on behalf of both they thought themselves bound to endure any anguish to the end."¹⁷ The emphasis placed by Demosthenes on the connection between Cadmus and Oineus in his funeral speech for the fallen at the battle of Chaironeia indicates that such stories were already circulating in Athens by this time. Given the absence of earlier evidence on a comparable pedigree of Oineus,¹⁸ it is probable that the connection between the two heroes was initially introduced in the context of the alliance against Philip II and became relevant in political debates afterwards.

The example of the Athenian-Theban alliances shows that references to a common past could be an appropriate tool for dealing with the changeable and fragile nature of Greek cooperations, and thus for counteracting the crisis-proneness of alliances in Hellas.¹⁹ But can this observation be extended to the entire Classical period? Did commemoration help the Greeks to overcome crises in alliance politics? And if so, which motifs have been chosen to provide a common ground, and what are the reasons for each choice? The last question is of particular interest, as the selection of historical motifs in Demosthenes's speech is far from being obvious. Indeed, all three stories offered by Demosthenes contradict numerous other accounts that were ubiquitous in Athens during the Classical period:²⁰ Herodotus and Euripides, for example, portray Cadmus as a Phoinikian partly in order to prove the 'barbaric' origin of the Thebans and to discredit them.²¹ Similarly, the reference to the return of the Herakleidai only establishes a very indirect link with Thebes, which in Classical times claimed to be the birthplace of Herakles.²² A comparable situation can be observed with regard to Oedipus. In the tragedy of the fifth century BC, Oedipus's stay in Athens is presented in a very different way from Demosthenes's version.²³ But why did Demosthenes choose these particular motifs? Which criteria did the stories have to fulfil in order to engender trust in negotiations with other poleis, and how did they achieve the desired effect in the face of conflicting versions? To answer these questions, I will examine the significance of references to the past in the alliance politics of the fifth and fourth centuries BC. Therefore, I will analyze the contexts in which they were invoked, and the extent to which they were employed in response to crises or problems. In addition, I will also discuss the motives chosen by the participants in the respective situations and possible reasons for these choices.

2. The Fragility of Alliances and References to the Past in the Fifth and Fourth Centuries

In Classical times, foreign policy was characterized by a degree of uncertainty.²⁴ In particular, the fourth century BC is regarded as a period of little reliability in interstate relations.²⁵ Nevertheless, a similar fragility of alliances can already be observed in the fifth century BC. Alliances across borders rarely lasted, treaties were often broken and allies often changed sides. Even the great and supposedly more stable alliance systems, such as the Athenian Empire and the Peloponnesian League, were repeatedly challenged and therefore prone to crises. From the middle of the fifth century BC onwards, Athens faced growing discontent among its allies, who were seeking to withdraw from the Athenian Empire. Sparta was also criticized and put under pressure by its allies on several occasions. In the run-up to the Peloponnesian War, for instance, the Corinthians threatened to withdraw from the Peloponnesian League unless the Spartans finally declared war on the Athenians.²⁶ Similarly, the Peloponnesian League was on the brink of collapse at the time of the Peace of Nikias because the allies felt that their interests had not been sufficiently taken into account when the peace treaty with Athens was negotiated.²⁷

Of course, the leading cities often responded to crises within their alliances with military and verbal demonstrations of power. Nevertheless, their status as hegemonies could not be maintained on the basis of their actual superiority alone. Moreover, actual leadership had to be transferred into the past in order to be more easily accepted.²⁸ As a result, both Athenians and Spartans referred to the significant role they had played in a number of major Greek victories. References to their achievements at the battle of Troy or in the Persian Wars served to reinforce the hegemonic status of both poleis within their respective alliance systems and also to support their claim to leadership in the Greek world as a whole.²⁹ The Athenians, for example, also emphasized the cultural achievements, which had made their city the “School of Hellas”³⁰ in the fifth century, and which had already begun as a cultural mission with Triptolemos’s gift of grain and its dissemination throughout the Greek world.³¹ The Spartans presented themselves as the liberators of Hellas, who had always fought for the greater good.³² By pointing to various services they had rendered to Hellas, both the Athenians and the Spartans sought recognition as legitimate leaders who had been in that position from the very beginning and should therefore be praised and rewarded rather than criticized and hated.

Nevertheless, pointing to their own achievements did little to counter the crisis-prone nature of the alliances in the long run. Instead, it merely served to reinforce the asymmetry and thus accentuate the object of criticism. In order to strengthen unity within the alliances and thereby increase their resilience to crises, commonalities were emphasized. Overall, the Greeks developed various measures to address uncertainty and fragility in foreign policy.³³ One of the most important tools for establishing common ground, however, was the reference to shared ancestry. The Athenian Empire, for example, was portrayed as a Ionian alliance, which found visible expression in shared cultic practices at the sanctuary of Apollon at Delos.³⁴ Similarly, and probably in response to this, the Peloponnesian League in the fifth century BC was increasingly presented as a Dorian alliance, whose members shared certain characteristics and values beyond common political interests.³⁵ According to Thucydides, these references to common ancestry and kinship were positively received and widely disseminated within the alliance systems: in the *History of the Peloponnesian War*, the Greek world appears to be divided along ethnic lines. Consequently, Thucydides recognizes and identifies patterns of behaviour that deviate from these categorizations as irritations.³⁶ At the same time, the conflict in Hellas became more entrenched in the portrayal of the two ethnic groups: the Dorians and Ionians were seen as archenemies whose antagonistic natures made the current conflict seem inevitable.³⁷ The success of the ethnicity concept in the late fifth century shows that shared ancestry was an effective tool for strengthening the resilience of alliances, even or especially in times of crisis.

The partitioning of Greece along ethnic lines also facilitated the formation of new alliances when participants accepted the argument of ethnicity. In interstate negotiations of the fifth century BC, references to kinship and shared ancestry were often sufficient to persuade the hegemonic powers to act;³⁸ there was no need to cite specific shared experiences, as in the example of the alliance between Athens and

Thebes. The success of the references to the Ionian and Dorian character can probably be attributed to the fact that they not only depicted the current constellations in the Greek world, but also drew on existing ideas among the allies. This is supported by the fact that other attempts to establish common figures of identification within the Athenian Empire were largely unsuccessful. Although Athens was regarded as the mother city of the Ionians, accounts of the eponymous hero Ion and his origins in Attika were as rarely received in the Athenian Empire as stories of Theseus and Triptolemos.³⁹ To strengthen an alliance's resilience through shared ancestry on a permanent basis, it was advantageous to build on stories that were already familiar to all potential partners.

The examples of the Athenian Empire and the Peloponnesian League confirm the impression that references to the past were used to strengthen unity within an alliance in times of crisis. However, given the apparent superiority of the leading powers in both alliance systems, other methods of maintaining peace, such as physical force, were also available. Therefore, a common ground, which would foster trust within the leagues and enable the allies to interact on an equal footing, was always of secondary importance for remaining in the alliance. In consequence, the references in the major alliance systems could, to a certain extent, remain undefined and vague. It was not necessary to convince the allied poleis by concrete examples that there was already a long tradition of friendly cooperation and that they could rely on each other. The references to Ionian or Dorian ethnicity thus reflected an exceptional situation and, in this sense, lost their relevance immediately after the end of the Peloponnesian War. With the defeat of Athens, not only did the Athenian Empire collapse. The period during which Athens was regarded as the mother city of the Ionians also came to an end.⁴⁰ In the absence of the corresponding position of power held by the Athenians, references to a Ionian alliance, and thus to the Dorian character of the Peloponnesian League, lost their meaning and were no longer suitable for building trust for future cooperation.

In terms of creating common ground through reference to kinship and shared ancestry, the *koina*, which emerged in several regions of Hellas from the fifth century BC, functioned similarly to the major alliance systems. Alliances such as the Boiotian League or the Arkadian League built on existing ethnic assignments and accentuated these for their own purposes. In addition to references to common ancestry, shared religious practices also played a role in creating unity within the *koina*.⁴¹ Of course, the *koina* were not always resilient to crises; conflicts within the leagues were frequently caused by internal power struggles or individual poleis seeking supremacy and could also lead to the collapse of the federal state structure.⁴² Nevertheless, the common ancestry of the members of the *koina* could potentially serve as a unifying argument, despite the political alliance's failure.⁴³

A different picture to that of the cooperations discussed so far emerges when we look at alliances between two specific poleis not being members of a *koinon* or major alliance systems. Particularly where there was little or no tradition of cooperation, references to very specific and sometimes even unexpected links between the two poleis assumed greater significance in the establishment of alliances. The motifs employed in these contexts were predominantly drawn from

the mythical past, which seems to have been particularly well suited to providing a basis for alliances. This can be seen, for example, in the case of Thebes and Aigina. According to Herodotus, an alliance against Athens in the late sixth century BC was justified by a close relationship between the nymphs Thebe and Aigina, who were portrayed as sisters.⁴⁴ In another instance, Herodotus documents how the Minyans claimed descent from the Argonauts in order to win the support of the Spartans. And indeed, according to the historian, the Lacedaemonians agreed to the Minyans' request because their forefathers, the Dioskouroi, had sailed the Argo with the Minyans' ancestors.⁴⁵ Less successful, however, was the attempt of Gelon of Syracuse, who, according to the *Histories*, referred to his connection with Dorieus in order to persuade the Spartans to form an alliance against Carthago. His appeal to the Lacedaemonians for help in avenging Dorieus's death went unheeded.⁴⁶

Similarly to the examples just outlined, in the fifth century BC common ancestry could also be used to substantiate alliances with non-Greeks: The Athenians and Thrakians, for example, are said to have referred to a certain Tereus to legitimize their joint activities,⁴⁷ while the Argives justified their neutrality in the Persian Wars by their connection to the Persians through Perseus.⁴⁸ It is important to note that these examples are likely less indicative of the arguments chosen in the actual negotiations between the parties and, instead, reflect later justifications, presented within the poleis themselves and to the rest of the Greek world.⁴⁹ Nevertheless, these examples underline once again the importance attached to such patterns of argumentation in Greek alliance negotiations. Particularly when cooperation did not seem obvious, even greater efforts had to be made to build a solid foundation for the alliance by looking to the past.

In the fourth century BC, references to the past continued to be relevant to foreign policy, in general, and alliances, in particular. However, as the alliance systems became more fragmented and allies changed even more frequently, overarching narratives such as that of Dorian and Ionian identity became less relevant. Of course, some new *koina* gained importance, while others continued to exist, referring to their common ethnic foundations.⁵⁰ However, these cooperations rarely extended beyond their original borders, and when they did, they adopted new patterns of argumentation to justify their rule.⁵¹ Neither the Thebans nor the Phokians nor the Macedonians, for example, can be seen to have sought to establish new superordinate figures of identification within their spheres of influence or to extend their own ethnicity to others.⁵²

Probably against the background of this development, and as the Greek world appeared increasingly fragmented and divided, references to Panhellenic ideals gained importance in the fourth century BC. This is shown by the speeches of Isocrates, who repeatedly urged the Greeks to put aside their differences and focus on what they had in common.⁵³ The frequent references to a Panhellenic identity during this period corresponded to new ideas of an order that encompassed the whole of Greece, such as the common peace that found expression in the *koinē eirēne* treaties.⁵⁴ Despite the ubiquity of such ideas in the writings of the fourth century BC, Panhellenism seems to have been of little use in building trust among allies or in creating the basis for new cooperation. This is already evident in the

speech of Demosthenes quoted above, since the orator not only added further arguments to his references to a shared Greek ancestry, but also described the discord between the poleis almost as a state of nature.⁵⁵ In this sense, Isocrates's references to Panhellenic ideals were also complemented by the formulation of a common goal, namely a military campaign against the Persians, suggesting various hegemonic powers under whose leadership such an operation could succeed.⁵⁶ Similarly, Philip II's failed attempt to establish the Corinthian League as a permanent alliance between the Greek poleis shows that appeals to a common Greek identity were not sufficient to provide a crisis-resistant basis for cooperation.⁵⁷ Common Greek ancestry was only a loose bond and was too variable to effectively counteract the crisis-prone nature of alliances.

Apart from this, references to the past continued to be highly relevant in alliance negotiations between individual poleis in the fourth century BC. As no hegemonic power was able to establish itself permanently, many alliances were formed between equal partners, whereby the allies could change quickly and only a few cooperations lasted for long. This is best illustrated by the example of Athens, which also demonstrates how references to the past could be adapted to potential allies. Some of the most popular motifs could even be used in a variety of contexts: Herakles, for example, was a hero who not only had visited most of the Greek cities, but was also very important in both Thebes and Sparta.⁵⁸ Consequently, specific phases of Herakles's life were associated with Attika's history and were invoked in negotiations with these poleis. In addition to the accounts of the return of the Herakleidai mentioned by Demosthenes, Pausanias provides evidence that Herakles was associated with the goddess Athena, in order to secure the cooperation of the democratic party with Thebes during the reign of the Thirty Tyrants.⁵⁹ Furthermore, references to Herakles were also used in the peace negotiations between Athens and Sparta in the run-up to the battle of Leuktra. In this situation, the hero was presented as the ancestor of the Lacedaemonians, while the Athenians established a connection to one of their own heroes, Triptolemos. According to Xenophon's *Hellenika*, an Athenian envoy pointed out to the Spartans that Triptolemos had initiated Herakles and the Dioskouroi into the secrets of agriculture.⁶⁰ Given the complicated relationship of Athens with the cities just mentioned, the alliances were certainly met with a degree of scepticism by those involved. However, these concerns should be alleviated by drawing on a shared past and connecting relevant stories of Athens with those of the future partners. Once again, the past was used in order to build trust and overcome the crisis-prone nature of alliance politics.⁶¹

3. Commemoration to Overcome Crisis? References to the Past in Alliance Politics of Classical Times

As the examples from the Classical period presented in the previous section showed, the past was often invoked in alliance politics. Thereby, references to the past were especially used in two main situations: first, they allowed the poleis to initiate alliances and were thus presented in the run-up to concrete cooperation.

In this context, references to the past were expected to lend the alliance authority through tradition. However, invoking a shared history could also serve a second purpose. There was often a degree of scepticism towards the other side, especially when the parties involved had little or no experience of working together, or even a history of conflict. It seems as if a common political interest was often not enough to overcome these concerns – and it was precisely in these situations that a shared history or ancestry should provide a common basis for further cooperation. Pointing to a common history or related ancestors seemed to be a suitable means of replacing or compensating for the lack of trust. References to the past therefore helped to ensure that alliances could continue to be forged despite the uncertainty and fragility of foreign policy.

Second, the past was invoked to secure and stabilize existing alliances. References to common ancestry, in particular, helped to strengthen the internal cohesion of existing leagues. However, there is no evidence that alliances between two specific poleis were consolidated by repeated references to shared forefathers. Successful cooperation in the recent past or existing treaties seem to have generated enough trust between the cities for them to continue cooperating. Consequently, the majority of cases in which the shared ancestry was regularly addressed concern the major alliance systems and the *koina*. In these leagues, ethnicity was used to create a common identity, often in response to internal problems or crises. References to shared experiences, kinship or common ancestry therefore became particularly important in the absence of a long history of cooperation or when alliances were in danger. Against this background, it seems reasonable to view them at least partly as a reaction to the uncertainty and fragility of Greek cooperations in general. They were attempts to promote trust and address the omnipresent crisis-proneness of alliances. Thus, the past offered a tool to strengthen the resilience of alliances and to confront the crisis-prone nature of interstate relations, which was already apparent to contemporaries in Classical times.

But some questions still remain: How were the narratives chosen that the poleis used in interstate communication? Which motifs were used and why? And how did the Greeks deal with conflicting versions of their history? First of all, besides the cases described above, ethnicity played only a subordinate role in foreign policy, since several factors had to interact for this argument to be used successfully. In alliance politics in general, connections between individual heroes of local significance and references to concrete shared experiences were more relevant than references to a broader ethnic assignment. Thereby, the Greeks had a wide selection of concrete motifs to choose from, since they were quite flexible in their approach to the past. Stories that circulated in the poleis could be modified or adapted as needed, and in some cases new narratives were introduced or forgotten accounts were resurrected.⁶² However, this did not mean that the past lost its authority. On the contrary, as the history was adaptable, it could be used in almost any situation to justify current interests or to substantiate certain claims.⁶³ As a result, there was little or no irritation when, as in the case of Demosthenes's speech, the narratives presented in the political debate did not correspond in every respect to what the audience already knew.

And it was this peculiar way of dealing with the past that proved to be an advantage in alliance politics, since the motifs chosen in negotiations not only had to reflect the perspective of one side, but also had to meet the expectations or at least be acceptable to the other side in order to achieve the desired outcome. While poleis could present their own versions of the past and contrast them with those of others in disputes over hegemony or other privileges,⁶⁴ in alliance negotiations this was impossible. Rather, it was advantageous to familiarize oneself with the local customs and narratives of the parties involved in order to maximize the chances of success. Against this background, Demosthenes's choice of motifs seems plausible, since Herakles and Oedipus played a significant role in the cultural memory of the Thebans.⁶⁵ This peculiarity also explains why some references to the past – for example, to the Ionian character of the Athenian Empire or to the hero Herakles – were more prominent than others. And a further aspect stands out in the choice of motives: the recent past played a subordinate role in alliance politics, at least in official declarations. It is probable that mutual support between Athenians and Thebans, as witnessed during the time of the Thirty Tyrants, was publicly discussed in both cities and influenced decision-making.⁶⁶ To establish common ground and build trust in official negotiations with potential allies, references to the mythical past seemed more appropriate.

Notes

- 1 On this alliance, see Diod. 16.84.5, cf. *Stv* II 345. The alliance was also joined by the Euboians, Achaians, Corinthians, Thebans, Megarians, Leukadians and Korkyreans, see Dem. *or.* 18.237.
- 2 On the important role played by Demosthenes in initiating the alliance in Athens, see Dem. *or.* 18.169–74; Diod. 16.84.5; Theopomp. *FGrH* 115 *fr.* 328.3 = Plut. *Demosthenes* 18; for an opposing perspective, see Aeschin. 3.137–41.
- 3 On the speech *On the Crown*, see Wankel 1976; on the historical context, see Worthington 2013: 294–309. On the importance of historical arguments in this speech, see Westwood 2020: 275–327. On the relationship between Demosthenes and Aischines in general, see Buckler 2000.
- 4 The entire decree is quoted in Dem. *or.* 18.181–7.
- 5 [183] [...] νῦν δὲ ὄρων Ἑλληνίδας πόλεις τὰς μὲν ὑβριζομένας, τὰς δὲ ἀναστάτους γινομένας, δεινὸν ἡγέται εἶναι καὶ ἀνάξιον τῆς τῶν προγόνων δόξης τὸ περιορᾶν τοὺς Ἕλληνας καταδουλομένους: [184] διὸ δεδόχθαι τῇ βουλῇ καὶ τῷ δήμῳ τῷ Ἀθηναίων, εὐξαμένους καὶ θύσαντας τοῖς θεοῖς καὶ ἥρωσι τοῖς κατέχουσι τὴν πόλιν καὶ τὴν χώραν τὴν Ἀθηναίων, καὶ ἐνθυμηθέντας τῆς τῶν προγόνων ἀρετῆς, διότι περὶ πλείονος ἐποιοῦντο τὴν τῶν Ἑλλήνων ἐλευθερίαν διατηρεῖν ἢ τὴν ἰδίαν πατρίδα – “[183] [...] but now, seeing Greek states outraged or wiped out, they consider it a scandal and unworthy of the reputation of their ancestors to suffer the Greeks to be enslaved; [184] therefore be it resolved by the Council and People of Athens, after offering prayers and sacrifices to the gods and heroes who guard the city and country of the Athenians, and after taking into consideration their ancestors' merits, in that they ranked the preservation of the liberties of Greece above the claims of their own state” (Dem. *or.* 18.183–4, transl. C. A. Vince and J. H. Vince).
- 6 On the frequency and function of references to the past in interstate relations, see Malkin 1994; Jones 1999; Chaniotis 2004, 2009; Patterson 2010; Osmer 2013.

- 7 On the faith-building nature of the past in interstate relations, see Gazzano 2021. On the phenomenon of kinship diplomacy in the Greek world, see Curty 1995; Jones 1999; Patterson 2010; Fragoulaki 2013; Osmers 2013: 100–42. Further examples of the use of historical arguments in the context of foreign policy are discussed by Gottlieb 2000; Chaniotis 2004, 2009; Franchi 2023.
- 8 Demosthenes, for example, points out that the decree of 339 “was the first beginning and such the basis of our negotiations with Thebes; the first, I say, for hitherto the two cities had been dragged by these men into mutual enmity, hatred, and distrust.” – αὕτη τῶν περὶ Θήβας ἐγίγνετο πραγμάτων ἀρχὴ καὶ κατάστασις πρώτη, τὰ πρὸ τούτων εἰς ἔχθραν καὶ μῖσος καὶ ἀπιστίαν τῶν πόλεων ὑπηγμένων ὑπὸ τούτων (*Or.* 18.188, transl. C. A. Vince and J. H. Vince). On the orators’ view of the relationship between Athens and Thebes, see also Buckler 1980: 275–7. On the picture of Thebes in tragedy, see Zeitlin 1986. On the relationship between Athens and Thebes during the Classical period in general, see Steinbock 2013; Cartledge 2020. On the Theban-Athenian relations in the fourth century, see Buckler and Beck 2008: especially 33–43. In his recently published work, van Wijk 2024 presents a more optimistic portrayal of the relationship between Athens and Thebes. However, his account is not entirely convincing.
- 9 οὐδὲν μνησικακῶν εἰ τι πρότερον γέγονεν ἀλλότριον ταῖς πόλεσι πρὸς ἀλλήλας (*Dem. or.* 18.185, transl. C. A. Vince and J. H. Vince).
- 10 εἰδὼς ὅτι αὐτοῖς μὲν πρὸς ἀλλήλους διαμφισβητεῖν περὶ τῆς ἡγεμονίας οὖσιν Ἑλληνιστὶ καλόν, ὑπὸ δὲ ἀλλοφύλου ἀνθρώπου ἀρχεσθαι καὶ τῆς ἡγεμονίας ἀποστερεῖσθαι ἀνάξιον εἶναι καὶ τῆς τῶν Ἑλλήνων δόξης καὶ τῆς τῶν προγόνων ἀρετῆς – “knowing that, while it is an honor able ambition for Greeks to dispute with each other for the hegemony, yet to be ruled by a man of alien race and to be robbed by him of that hegemony is unworthy both of the reputation of the Greeks and of the merits of their ancestors” (*Dem. or.* 18.185, transl. C. A. Vince and J. H. Vince).
- 11 ἐτι δὲ οὐδὲ ἀλλότριον ἡγεῖται εἶναι ὁ Ἀθηναίων δῆμος τὸν Θηβαίων δῆμον οὔτε τῇ συγγενείᾳ οὔτε τῷ ὁμοφύλῳ. ἀναμνησθήσεται δὲ καὶ τὰς τῶν προγόνων τῶν ἑαυτοῦ εἰς τοὺς Θηβαίων προγόνους εὐεργεσίας: καὶ γὰρ τοὺς Ἡρακλέους παῖδας ἀποστερουμένους ὑπὸ Πελοποννησίων τῆς πατρώας ἀρχῆς κατήγαγον, τοῖς ὅπλοις κρατήσαντες τοὺς ἀντιβαίνειν πειρωμένους τοῖς Ἡρακλέους ἐγγόνους, καὶ τὸν Οἰδίπουν καὶ τοὺς μετ’ ἐκείνου ἐκπεσόντας ὑπεδεξάμεθα, καὶ ἕτερα πολλὰ ἡμῖν ὑπάρχει φιλόφρονος καὶ ἔνδοξας πρὸς Θηβαίους (*Dem. or.* 18.186, transl. C. A. Vince and J. H. Vince).
- 12 He may even refer to their shared Pelasgian descent. On the significance of the Pelasgians in Athens and Thebes, see Sourvinou-Inwood 2003; McInerney 2014.
- 13 See Osmers 2013; cf. Gazzano 2021.
- 14 On the uses and meanings of the past in public discourse and rhetoric in Athens in general, see Steinbock 2013; Kostopoulos 2019; Barbato 2020; Westwood 2020; Wojciech 2022; Kapellos 2023.
- 15 Demosthenes mentions not only that Oineus’s father was Bacchus, but also that his mother was a descendant of Cadmus: “It did not escape the Oeneidae that Semele was the daughter of Cadmus, and of her was born one whom it would be sacrilegious to name at this tomb, and by him Oeneus was begotten, who was called the founder of their race.” – οὐκ ἐλάνθανεν Οἰνεΐδας ὅτι Κάδμου μὲν Σεμέλη, τῆς δ’ ὃν οὐ πρέπον ἐστὶν ὀνομάζειν ἐπὶ τοῦδε τοῦ τάφου, τοῦ δ’ Οἰνεὺς γέγονεν, ὃς ἀρχηγὸς αὐτῶν ἐκαλεῖτο (*Or.* 60.30, transl. N. W. DeWitt and N. J. DeWitt).
- 16 On Cadmus and his importance in Thebes, see Kühr 2006: 87–105.
- 17 κοινοῦ δ’ ὄντος ἀμφοτέραις ταῖς πόλεσιν τοῦ παρόντος κινδύνου, ὑπὲρ ἀμφοτέρων ἅπασαν ᾧοντο δεῖν ἀγωνίαν ἐκτεῖναι (*Dem. or.* 60.30, transl. N. W. DeWitt and N. J. DeWitt).
- 18 In general, the sources provide only a limited amount of information about Oineus, cf. Hanslik 1937.

- 19 In this sense, the decree itself highlighted the complicated relationship between the two cities, which is quite unusual for an official document; see Dem. *or.* 18.185.
- 20 On ambiguity tolerance in the Greek world, see Grote in this volume.
- 21 On the Phoinikian origin of Cadmus, see, for instance, Bacchyl. 19.46–8; Hdt. 2.49.3, 4.147.4, 5.57.1; Eur. *Phoen.* 638–9; Eur. *Bacch.* 1333–6. For a multifaceted image of Cadmus, see Edwards 1979: 45–86; Hubbard 1992: 97–8; Kühr 2006: 91–105. On his importance in Athenian-Theban relations, see Steinbock 2013: 196–8.
- 22 On Thebes as the birthplace of Herakles, see Kühr 2006: 169–74. On the importance of the Herakleidai in Classical Athens, see Hdt. 9.27.2; Lys. 2.11–6; Isoc. *Or.* 4.55–60, 5.33–4, 10.31, 12.194; Dem. *or.* 60.8–9; Aristot. *Rh.* 1396a6; see also Allan 2001: 25–7.
- 23 Only a handful of variations on the Oedipus theme place the former king in Athens in his later years. In the most important of these, Sophocles's *Oedipus at Colonus*, Oedipus finds himself isolated and deprived of his family in exile in Athens, where he also perishes; cf. Henrichs 2003. On the historical context of Sophocles's *Oedipus at Colonus*, see Tzanetou 2012: 105–28.
- 24 Although approaches such as Eckstein 2006: 76 may be perceived as one-sided in concluding that “the harsh and unforgiving interstate system of classical Greece fits the realist paradigm”, it is nevertheless the case that a certain degree of uncertainty cannot be denied. This was also recognized by contemporaries, who sought to identify tools and measures to facilitate the establishment of trust, see Giovannini 2007: 90–103; Low 2007: 252–7; Buis 2018: 229–32; cf. Gazzano 2021: 50–2. For further insights into the conception and perception of interstate relations in Classical times, see Osmers 2015.
- 25 In this sense, Xenophon concludes his *Hellenika* with the sentence: “but there was even more confusion and disorder in Greece after the battle than before.” – ἀκρισία δὲ καὶ παραχῇ ἔτι πλείων μετὰ τὴν μάχην ἐγένετο ἢ πρόσθεν ἐν τῇ Ἑλλάδι (Xen. *Hell.* 7.5.27, transl. C. L. Brownson). On the dynamization of interstate relations in the fourth century and the consequences for alliance policy, see Jehne 1994: 269–70; Osmers 2017: 44–7.
- 26 See Thuc. 1.71.4–6. On the importance of Corinth for the outbreak of the Peloponnesian War in general, see Stickler 2010: 225–99; Zahrt 2010.
- 27 See Thuc. 5.28–32; cf. Osmers 2017: 28–9.
- 28 See Osmers 2013: 337–9; cf. Gehrke 2004.
- 29 On references to past victories in order to justify current leadership, see Patterson 2010: 69–82; Osmers 2013: 190–280.
- 30 τῆς Ἑλλάδος παίδευσιν (Thuc. 2.41.1, transl. C. F. Smith).
- 31 On Triptolemos and his importance in Athens, see Raubitschek 1982; Osmers 2013: 280–8.
- 32 See Osmers 2013: 249–51.
- 33 A variety of instruments and regulations existed which facilitated and regulated the conduct of Greeks in interstate relations. On religious practices and oaths used in that context, see Scharff 2016. On an early interstate/international law in general, see Giovannini 2007; Low 2007; Buis 2018; cf. Osmers 2013; Mari 2022.
- 34 On the Ionian character of the Athenian Empire, see Smarczyk 1990: 318–618; Osmers 2013: 116–24.
- 35 Alty 1982: 1–5; Osmers 2013: 124–32; Fragoulaki 2013: 140–87.
- 36 See Alty 1982: 4–5; see Fragoulaki 2013 for further examples.
- 37 On the contrasting conceptions of the Dorians and Ionians in the context of the Peloponnesian War, see Alty 1982; Osmers 2013: 132–3.
- 38 A number of poleis from Central Greece appealed to the Spartans for support, invoking their shared Dorian ancestry; see, for example, Thuc. 1.107; Diod. 11.79, 12.59; cf. Thuc. 5.84.2, 5.104. When potential allies approached the Athenians, they also invoked their shared Ionian heritage as a basis for seeking assistance; see, for instance, Thuc. 3.86.3, 6.30.2, 6.50, 7.57.1.

- 39 On the relevance of Ion within the Athenian Empire, see Smarczyk 1990: 370; Osmers 2013: 109–11.
- 40 There are only few exceptions; see Diod. 11.41.4, 12.83.1. However, Paus. 4.25.6 and Str. 8.7.1, for instance, distinguish between Athenian and Ionian colonies. Cf. Osmers 2013: 124, 133.
- 41 On unifying factors within the Boiotian League, see Kühr 2006. On the Arkadian League, see Nielson 2002. On *koina* in Classical times in general, see Beck 1997; Mackil 2013; cf. Beck 2015.
- 42 On traditions in Boiotia that were established in opposition to Thebes, see, for instance, Thuc. 3.56; cf. Kühr 2006: 295–7. On the conflicts emerging within the Arkadian League, see, for instance, Xen. *Hell.* 7.4.33–5; Diod. 15.82.1–4; cf. Beck 1997: 78–9; Nielson 2002: 470–5.
- 43 On surviving Boiotian traditions, see, for example, Diod. 4.67.2–3; Paus. 9.1.1–2. On the Arkadian identity in later times, see, for instance, Ephor. *FGrH* 70 *fr.* 18c, 113; Paus. 8.1.4–6; cf. Franchi 2023.
- 44 See Hdt. 5.80.1; Pind. *Isthm.* 8.16–20; cf. Flaig 2005: 240–2; Osmers 2013: 100–5.
- 45 See Hdt. 4.145; cf. Jones 1999: 25; Osmers 2013: 142.
- 46 See Hdt. 7.158.
- 47 See Thuc. 2.29.3; Soph. *Fr.* 581–93; Xen. *An.* 7.3.31, 7.3.39; cf. Jones 1999: 29–30; Patterson 2010: 53–9; Osmers 2013: 138.
- 48 See Hdt. 7.150; cf. Jones 1999: 28–9; Patterson 2010: 46–53; Osmers 2013: 138–9.
- 49 See Patterson 2010: 45–59; Osmers 2013: 138–40.
- 50 On the Messenians, see Luraghi 2008. On the Achaian League in the fourth century, see Beck 1997: 55–66. On ancient Phokis, see McInerney 1999; cf. Franchi 2016. On *koina* in the fourth century in general, see Beck 1997, 2015.
- 51 On the contrary, Alexander the Great, for example, used different kinship myths to establish connections with his various allies and subjects, see Patterson 2010: 83–108. On the importance of Panhellenic arguments for Philip and Alexander, see also Yates 2019: 202–48.
- 52 One possible exception might be the love affair between the Phokian hero Phokos and Antiope from Boiotia, which is told by Paus. 9.17.6–7, 10.32.10. However, the primary aim was to incorporate the Boiotians into the Phokian history without transferring the Phokian ethnicity to them.
- 53 See, for instance, Isoc. *Or.* 4.173, 12.12–13. On the increasing importance of Panhellenic ideas in the fourth century BC, see Flower 2000: 93–6; Mitchell 2007: 169–202; cf. Osmers 2013: 288–9.
- 54 On the *koina eirene* treaties and the emerging idea of a common peace in the fourth century, see Jehne 1994; Wilker 2012; cf. Osmers 2015: 56–8.
- 55 See particularly Dem. *or.* 18.185.
- 56 In his *Panegyricus*, Isocrates argues for a campaign against the Persians under Athenian leadership (see Isoc. *Or.* 4.18–20, 99) or at least under joint Athenian and Spartan leadership (see Isoc. *Or.* 4.17, 185, 188). On other occasions, Philip of Macedon (Isoc. *Or.* 5) or other Greek leaders such as Dionysius I of Syracuse are called upon to take the lead; see also Flower 2000: 95.
- 57 For example, Panhellenism could be used against the Macedonians after Alexander's death, as seen in the Lamian War; see Jung 2006: 298–320; cf. Low 2018: 468–70.
- 58 See Huttner 1997: 7–16; Kühr 2006: 169–70; Avramidou 2010: 217–21; cf. Osmers 2013: 185–7.
- 59 See Paus. 9.11.6; cf. Steinbock 2013: 229–35. The connection between Herakles and Athena could also be evoked in other contexts; see, for instance, Isoc. *Or.* 5.32–3.
- 60 See Xen. *Hell.* 6.3.6; cf. Raubitschek 1982: 111; Jones 1999: 39; Osmers 2013: 280–1.
- 61 In his speech to the Lakedaimonians in Xenophon's *Hellenica*, for example, the envoy Kallias refers to the ongoing conflicts that were still influencing the relationship between

- Athens and Sparta. In order to overcome these conflicts and find a way to achieve peace, he highlights the connection between Triptolemos and Herakles, see Xen. *Hell.* 6.3.5–6, cf. Isoc. *Or.* 4.186–8. Similar arguments can be found in relation to Thebes; see, for instance, Dem. *or.* 18.185–6, and Philipp; see, for example, Isoc. *Or.* 5.30–5.
- 62 On the way the Greeks dealt with their past in general, see Flaig 2005; Gehrke 2010; Grethlein 2010; Osmers 2013; Thomas 2019.
- 63 See Grethlein 2010: 8–10; Marincola 2010; cf. Osmers 2013: 70–96.
- 64 On this function of the past in interstate communication, see Osmers 2013: 143–288.
- 65 See Kühn 2006.
- 66 On the importance of the recent past in Athens, see Steinbock 2013: 211–79; Kapellos 2023; cf. Wojciech 2022.

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Part III

Border Management

Facing Conflicts within and between Alliances



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10 Allied Enemies

On Conflict Persistence in Greek Poleis*

Oliver Grote

1. Introduction

“The liberal,¹ secularized state is sustained by conditions it cannot itself guarantee. That is the great gamble it has made for the sake of liberty.”²

The famous Böckenförde Dilemma highlights a fundamental tension within modern states: the necessity of a unifying civic ethos that cannot be generated or enforced by the state itself. It underscores the importance of a political culture that transcends formal institutions while also pointing to the inescapability of social contradictions. Resolving these social and cultural ambiguities would require a “a claim to totality”³ that risks undermining the liberal state’s very foundation and disregarding the complexities of society. Modern societies, however, as social science has observed, often struggle with ambiguity, tending instead towards simplification and unification – a trend rooted in “a movement against ambiguity led by Western intellectuals since the seventeenth century”.⁴

In this chapter, I argue that such tendencies were less pronounced in Greek antiquity. Greek poleis, in contrast, appear to have been adept at navigating contradictions without lapsing into deadlock – even when groups within the same society were simultaneously characterized as both allies and enemies. My first case study examines Sparta’s relationship with the helots, a population subjugated and exploited for centuries and yet part of the Spartan alliance. Despite their dependence on helot labour and military support, the Spartans annually declared war on these ‘allied enemies’. Remarkably, this ritualized hostility coexisted with long-standing, albeit asymmetrical, cooperation. Both the Spartans and the helots, who rarely revolted over the centuries, seem to have been capable of navigating and enduring this inherent contradiction. Curiously, this alliance displayed a striking degree of resilience.

The second case study focuses on classical Athens. While the complexity of this polis cannot be fully compared to those of modern societies, a notable parallel

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emerges in the necessity of Athenian citizens to cooperate despite their diverse local identities. Citizens from over 130 demes, each with at least partially distinct local affiliations and identities,⁵ were able to engage in collective decision-making on a communal level. Against the backdrop of unavoidable tensions between local and overarching identities, different perspectives had to be balanced to cultivate a cohesive civic ethos. This active engagement with ambiguity and, presumably, with crises is analyzed using the example of the remembered mythical war between Eleusis and Athens. Cult practices, mythological narratives and theatrical performances reveal a form of reconciliation with this old enmity, serving as a paradigm for the capacity to tolerate tensions and contradictions. Ultimately, this approach facilitated the formation of a unified political community that integrated, rather than suppressed, local and regional perspectives into a cohesive, resilient whole.

The attribution of contradictory characteristics to specific groups within a society evidently offered advantages that a uniform description could not provide. As this chapter aims to demonstrate, it was functionally effective to label the helots as enemies while frequently treating them as (albeit subordinate) allies. Similarly, in Athens, the memory of Eleusis as both an integral part of the polis and an ancient enemy appears to have served a purpose. I argue that ambiguity tolerance is key to understanding the mechanisms that sustained the functionality of such contradictory descriptions without undermining societal cohesion.

2. The Spartans and Their Helots – Allied Enemies

The ancient city-state of Sparta has traditionally been portrayed as an exceptionally unique and somewhat isolated society – a characterization shaped not only by academic research, but also by its prominent depiction in literature and film. Sparta is frequently imagined as a militarized camp, xenophobic and closed off from the broader Greek world, with an internal order sustained by *eunomia* ('good order' or 'governance according to good laws') and a rigid social hierarchy. While these perspectives have been questioned by modern scholarship, the debate over Sparta's alleged exceptionalism remains ongoing and vibrant. A key contribution to this discourse occurred about fifteen years ago, sparked by a lively exchange between Mogens Herman Hansen and Stephen Hodkinson. Their discussion culminated in two nearly homonymous contributions – provocatively titled "Was Sparta (a Normal or) an Exceptional Polis?" – published in a conference volume, which also featured their joint essay on "Spartan Exceptionalism". Just two years later, Stefan Link revisited the debate in a comprehensive article, offering his own position based on an in-depth analysis of Spartan society. Together, these works reflect the lively scholarly discourse surrounding the question of Spartan exceptionalism.⁶

One particularly odd institution has always attracted the attention of observers and has evoked associations with a totalitarian state: helotage.⁷ Specifically, it concerns the relationship between the Spartans and the helots, the latter being primarily drawn from the subjugated Messenian population. This exploitative institution underpinned the economic foundation of the Spartan ruling class, the Spartiates. Even in military affairs, the helots played a role in supporting the Spartan polis – yet

they were still formally declared enemies each year through an official proclamation of war. This system represents a paradoxical blend of hostility and cooperation between the groups involved, providing a case study in how deeply rooted conflict can persist within a social system that otherwise relies on mutual coexistence and functional collaboration.

For a long time, scholarship emphasized Sparta's profound fear of the helots, interpreting Spartan policies as a form of institutionalized terror designed to maintain control. Geoffrey de Ste. Croix famously noted: "The cardinal fact about Sparta is her uniquely dangerous position as mistress of the Helots, above all the Messenian Helots."⁸ However, recent research suggests a more nuanced and cooperative relationship between the two groups. For instance, helots maintained (or established) their own religious cults, including access to temples where they could claim *asylon*.⁹ Furthermore, they played a crucial role in Spartan military campaigns. According to Herodotus, each Spartan soldier at the battle of Plataiai was accompanied by several lightly armed helots, reflecting a degree of trust in their loyalty.¹⁰ Anecdotal accounts further illuminate the complexities of Spartan-helot relations. One story recounts a nearly blind Spartan being led into battle by his devoted helot¹¹ and highlights the possibility of personal bonds that extended beyond mere utility and exploitation. While such narratives must be approached with caution, they remain significant as they fall within the realm of plausibility and suggest a more intricate dynamic of social relationships. Additionally, evidence of intermarriage or at least sexual relationships between Spartans and helots, producing offspring, underscores the close yet asymmetrical nature of their interactions.¹²

These findings, which suggest a certain ambiguity tolerance and associated resilience in the face of social tensions, are challenged by the idea that the Spartans maintained a regime of terror, including the constant humiliation of the helots.¹³ However, the view of a permanent repression of the helots has increasingly been called into question. As Carsten Zimmermann convincingly argued in his dissertation, the *krypteia*, a group of young Spartans sent out into the countryside and often considered as a system of state-sponsored violence against the helots, was rather a mechanism for maintaining economic stability following the defeat of Leuktra in 371 BC, primarily through enforcing curfews rather than conducting mass killings.¹⁴ Earlier references to the *krypteia*, such as those in Plato,¹⁵ suggest that this institution may originally have functioned as a rigorous training programme rather than an instrument of terror.¹⁶

This reinterpretation aligns with R. J. A. Talbert's contention that relations between Spartans and helots were not as fraught with tension as commonly portrayed. Talbert argues that the helots "knew their place" in Spartan society and accepted it, "regardless of how humiliating or undesirable it might seem to others".¹⁷ While Talbert perhaps overstates the harmony of this coexistence, his perspective highlights an important distinction: the difference between the external view of the helots as articulated in Greek literary discourse – where their condition appears unequivocally oppressive – and the perspective of the helots themselves, who may have perceived their lives as stable and sustainable within the routines of daily social practice. A system that persisted for centuries, punctuated by only a handful

of uprisings with significant intervals between them, likely operated with a degree of functionality and relative stability.¹⁸ Even in 370 BC, amidst Sparta's precarious situation following the invasion of Laconia by Theban and Arkadian forces, 6,000 helots, newly enfranchised as *neodamodeis* ('new citizens') and promised their freedom, fought loyally for Sparta.¹⁹ Moreover, even after the catastrophic defeats at Leuktra and the liberation of Messenia, when Sparta's citizenry was in decline, its territory diminished and its alliances fractured, the remaining Laconian helots showed no signs of insurrection.²⁰ Despite the unprecedented vulnerability of their Spartan overlords, they did not organize a rebellion.

The above-mentioned evidence of cooperative coexistence is further underscored by cultural practices, such as those observed during the Hyakinthia festival. On the second day of the celebrations, the Spartan citizens hosted feasts not only for their friends, but also for their personal slaves (τοὺς δούλους τοὺς ἰδίους – *tous dulous tous idious*), as attested by Polykrates.²¹ The Greek author notes that the city was nearly empty during this celebration, as everyone participated. Given that some helots stayed in the city permanently or at least temporarily,²² the term 'personal slaves' plausibly includes helots, as there was literally no one to be found on the streets. This anecdote provides further evidence of the relatively integrated, if asymmetrical, dynamics between Spartans and helots within the broader framework of Spartan society.

An increasing body of scholarship supports the conclusion that the helots "may not have seriously troubled the consciousness of the average Spartiate".²³ This view finds support in a passage from Xenophon's *Hellenika*:²⁴

But when he [sc. Archidamos, the son of king Agesilaos] saw him going out, in the first place, if anyone among the citizens was present, he gave way to allow them to converse with Agesilaos, and again, if it was a stranger, he did the same, and again he even made way for any one of his attendants (*therapontes*) who wished to address him.²⁵

Stephen Hodkinson aptly summarizes the implications of this passage as follows: "The servants who approach Agesilaos know their place: they wait until after the citizens and also any foreigners; but their position as petitioners in public audience to the king appears to be accepted."²⁶ This hierarchy, while distinct, was not inherently problematic in the context of Spartan social practices concerning helots.²⁷ Alongside other evidence already cited, this suggests that helots were embedded within the social fabric of the polis, functioning as a vital yet subordinated component of Spartan society. Despite the profound asymmetry in their relationship with the Spartiates, helots were not treated as external enemies.

However, with all this in mind, how can this relatively stable coexistence be reconciled with one of the most conspicuously hostile and humiliating procedure recorded in Spartan history: the practice that "the ephors, as soon as they came into office, made formal declaration of war upon the helots, in order that there might be no impiety in slaying them?"²⁸ This custom, recorded by Aristotle but archaic in nature,²⁹ is unique in the annals of Greek history: a systematic, ritualized

act in which the ruling class declared war on the very group responsible for the agricultural sustenance of the polis. It is as if the German Bundestag declared war on every German farmer year after year³⁰ – a flawed comparison that nonetheless underscores the peculiar nature of the practice. The deliberate characterization of a critical economic class as perpetual adversaries, through ritualized declarations of war, illustrates a deep structural tension within Spartan society.

Nonetheless, the declaration of war was institutionalized, performed by the ephors as part of their official duties and sacralized to conform to divine law. At first glance, this might suggest a state-sponsored and sacredly secured campaign of terror against the helots. Aristotle himself links this declaration to the *krypteia*, portraying it as part of a broader regime of control.³¹ However, this interpretation may owe more to Aristotle's biases and assumptions than to an accurate representation of Spartan practice. A closer examination reveals a more complex reality. If the goal of the *krypteia* was to instil fear through systematic violence, why were these actions reportedly carried out "at night",³² when most helots would have been asleep? Such an approach would have limited their psychological impact and practical effectiveness as instruments of terror.³³

Setting aside its religious justification, the annual declaration of war remains striking for several reasons. First, the helots were neither wartime enemies nor actively rebelling at the time of these declarations; they were prisoners of war or, better to say, their descendants. Typically, neither slaves nor prisoners of war are the recipients of formal declarations of war. Second, the responsibility for this declaration rested not with the Spartan assembly – the body ordinarily tasked with decisions on war and peace – but with the ephors.³⁴ This anomaly is often overlooked. Finally, the ritualized, annual repetition of this declaration demands attention. Why declare war anew every year, rather than issuing a single declaration and continuing hostilities indefinitely until the defeat of the enemy (and without worrying that the killings might provoke the displeasure of the gods in the years of war that followed), as was customary in other conflicts? That the Spartans chose an alternative approach suggests that the conventional procedure was deemed insufficient. In other words: while we know the solution (the annual ritual), the underlying problem remains elusive. By reconstructing the rationale behind this peculiar practice, we can gain deeper insight into the intricate relationship between Spartans and helots – a relationship marked by tension, resilience and interdependence.

Against this background, we must turn to the role of the ephors, the primary actors in the ritual. Two of their ritualized practices provide valuable context for their fundamental function. First, the ephors are recorded issuing a "proclamation commanding all men to shave their moustaches, and to obey the laws, that these may not be severe upon them".³⁵ This act demonstrates the ephors' responsibility for ensuring both outward conformity and internal obedience to Spartan law. Their authority extended not only over common citizens but even over the kings, as illustrated by a second significant example:

They exchange oaths monthly, the Ephors on behalf of the state, the King for himself. And this is the King's oath: "I will reign according to the established

laws of the state.” And this the oath of the state: “While you abide by your oath, we will keep the kingship unshaken.”³⁶

This statement reveals *ex negativo* that the ephors had the power to impose sanctions on kings for violating “the established laws of the state”: in other words, the kings endangered their kingship by committing such offences.³⁷ Acting as guardians of the Spartan order, the ephors represented the collective body of Spartan citizens against the individual king or citizen. While they also held political duties, such as presiding over assemblies,³⁸ their primary role was supervisory, as implied by their title *ephoros* (‘overseer’). This authority extended to maintaining discipline across all strata of Spartan society, including the kings and the helots.

To a certain extent, the helots were more integrated into Spartan society than, e.g. the perioeci, who lived in semi-autonomous communities under Spartan domination. Therefore, the latter were connected to Sparta but not embedded within its social fabric. Although there is debate over whether a helot was owned by a specific master or assigned to masters in a looser sense, it is clear that the helots brought “to their masters out of grievous necessity half of all the produce that the land brings forth”, as Tyrtaios details the unfortunate lot of the Messenians.³⁹ The poet also attests to an intimate connection between helots and their masters: he describes the helots as “wailing for their masters, they and their wives alike, whenever the baneful lot of death came upon any”.⁴⁰ Such practices, as humiliating as they may have been,⁴¹ made helots not only visible within Spartan society, but also integral component of the polis. In this respect, helots were both less free and more socially integrated than the perioeci. However, this integration was maintained within a rigid framework of distinction between Spartiates and helots – a separation that, paradoxically, bound the two groups inseparably together. This othering took place on a different level than the distinction between both groups, as shown by another ritual Herodotus reports:

When a king of the Lacedaemonians dies, a fixed number of their perioeci must come to the funeral from all Lacedaemon, besides the Spartans. When these and the helots and the Spartans themselves have assembled in one place to the number of many thousands, together with the women, they zealously beat their foreheads and make long and loud lamentation, calling that king that is most recently dead the best of all their kings.⁴²

The initial enumeration (“perioeci ... besides the Spartans”), which omits the helots, creates a dichotomy between perioeci “from all Lacedaemon” and Spartiates based on geographical proximity: ‘away’ and ‘home’. However, the subsequent inclusion of the helots in the lamentation ritual (“these and the helots and the Spartans”) suggests their association with the Spartan home sphere, aligning them more closely with the Spartiates than with the perioeci. Implicitly, the helots belong to the Spartan community as an appendage to the explicitly named Spartiates, reinforcing their place within Spartan society.

This paradoxical relationship – integration through separation – made the helots an inseparable part of Spartan life. A parallel can be drawn with the differing levels

of integration between a slave and a *thes* (a hired labourer) in Homeric society. A slave within a household was more integrated into the society dominated by Homeric *aristoi* because they were part of an *oikos* (household), which provided stability and a form of advocacy. By contrast, a *thes* often lacked this support, existing on the margins of society.⁴³ It is true that the helots could not benefit from this close connection to the *oikos* of their lords; nevertheless, they were embedded in the Spartan agricultural system and therefore deeply intertwined with the social and economic foundations of Spartan life, while the perioeci remained peripheral.

If we now turn our attention to the ephors, it becomes evident that their supervisory role in Spartan domestic affairs extended to the helots. The ephors had once been established specifically to oversee and regulate the exploitation of the helots, as already suggested by the meaning of the word ('overseer') and confirmed by the annual declaration of war against the helots.⁴⁴ The mechanics of this exploitation, though only briefly outlined here, can be traced back to practices familiar from Homeric times. After their conquest of Messenia, the Spartans employed a system akin to the Homeric custom of extorting half the wealth of a besieged city as a ransom for survival, rather than enslaving the women and children. For instance, Hektor contemplates offering Achilles and the other Greeks (in addition to the abducted Helen) half of all the treasures that Troy held to secure the city's release.⁴⁵ This was indeed a realistic option. Similarly, on the 'Shield of Achilles', the victorious besiegers were depicted as being in disagreement with each other: "Twofold plans found favour with them, either to lay waste the town or to divide in portions twain all the substance that the lovely city contained within."⁴⁶ With this historical pattern in mind, we can explain the plight of the unfortunate enslaved individuals in Tyrtaios's poem, who are likened to donkeys carrying half-loads into their masters' barns.⁴⁷ The helot system originated as a fusion of these two Homeric forms of war booty: ransom through payment of half one's wealth *and* permanent enslavement.⁴⁸ The genius of this exploitation system lay in combining a steady yield of resources with the preservation of the conquered population's agricultural and social structures. By allowing the helots to remain on their farms and maintain their settlements, the Spartans ensured both continuity and sustainability in the extraction of wealth without having to deploy too many Spartans for inspection. To perpetuate this system, however, the helots had to be formally designated as war enemies on an ongoing basis. By re-declaring war annually, the ephors reinforced the notion of a perpetual, albeit dormant, state of hostility, thereby legitimizing the helots' status as a subjugated class.

The reality of this contrived enmity stood in tension with the complexities of Spartan-helot relations. Over the centuries, helots and Spartans often fought alongside each other, and they were intertwined in numerous social contexts. Nevertheless, the annual declaration of war evoked the legacy of the Messenian Wars, which remained foundational to Spartan identity.⁴⁹ Tyrtaios, for instance, preserves the memory of these conflicts, celebrating the First Messenian War under King Theopompos and passing down the Second Messenian War,⁵⁰ which Tyrtaios himself witnessed. His poetry, originally used for military exhortations, was cited by later Spartans, ensuring their continued relevance in Spartan collective memory.

Material culture further reinforced this ideological narrative. In Amyklai, one of Sparta's villages, tripods supported by statues of gods were erected using spoils from the Messenian War.⁵¹ These monuments served as enduring reminders of Spartan triumph and as visual affirmations of their subjugation of Messenia. Whether through poetry, physical monuments, rituals or sanctuaries, these elements perpetuated a narrative of Spartan superiority. This collective memory functioned as a powerful tool for ideological reinforcement, sustaining the legitimacy of helot exploitation across generations.

On the other side of the coin lay the numerical superiority of the helots, the relative freedom they enjoyed in their daily lives and in the production of goods⁵² and their military participation, which implied access to weapons.⁵³ These factors collectively presupposed a certain degree of mutual trust. Against this backdrop, an inevitable question arises: from the perspective of the Spartans, was it truly advantageous to continually emphasize the inferiority and subservience of the producing group within such a conflict-ridden system of exploitation, where a majority of helots coexists under hierarchically unequal conditions with a minority of dominant Spartans – especially when the compliance of the latter was essential? Or, to put it differently: how could such a problematic 'alliance configuration', grounded in an ancient and perpetually reinforced conflict, remain as resilient as it evidently was? The system endured for decades, even centuries, without significant uprisings, despite the Spartans facing adverse situations during this time, including the Persian Wars, the Peloponnesian War and a general, steady population decline. Is it possible to reconcile the relatively conflict-free coexistence of Spartans and helots in everyday life, and even during existential wars, with the simultaneous ritualistic remembrance of an enduring enmity – an enmity that the Spartans could ill afford to escalate into open conflict, particularly when surrounded by helotic auxiliaries in battle? Did this not create an unresolvable structural contradiction? A simplistic explanation – that the system functioned solely through deterrence and terror – proves insufficient in light of recent research, which has challenged or significantly nuanced the idea of an all-encompassing fear of helots and their potential for rebellion.

The discourse surrounding the Messenians, the Spartans and their wars reveals a far more ambivalent reality than previously believed. It combined elements of oppression and deterrence with aspects of integration, albeit alongside stark internal demarcations. In practical terms, the helotized Messenians demonstrated the capacity to coexist for extended periods as formerly subjugated enemies within a society that included the Spartiates, even though the latter ritualistically reaffirmed this enmity through annual declarations of war. The Spartiates, for their part, managed to sustain their intricate system of economic exploitation without succumbing to a perpetual fear of helot rebellion. Yet, this system required them to symbolically mark the helots as enemies each year, ostensibly to justify the confiscation of half of their annual harvest. At the same time, in daily interactions, it was crucial for Spartans to view the helots not as friends, but certainly as allies (in war) and as an integral part of Spartan society (in domestic affairs).

Traces of inclusive rituals, such as the banquet during the Hyakinthia Festival and the occasional participation of favoured helots in the communal meals of the *syssitia*, reveal a degree of integration that initially seems surprising. However, such gestures, even when negatively portrayed in historical accounts – as in the example of helots being included “to show the young men what a thing drunkenness was”⁵⁴ – served a social function. In summary, the helots were, simultaneously, exploited enemies, indispensable allies in war and an integral part of Spartan society.

To frame this social construction in a more nuanced manner: one might argue that the figuration of the ‘Messenian helot’, using the wording of G. W. F. Hegel, represents a *dialectical synthesis* in which the concepts of ‘ally’ and ‘enemy’ are simultaneously and dialectically *sublated*. To sublate (‘aufheben’ in German) does not merely negate or suspend these concepts but preserves and elevates them to a higher level.⁵⁵ The verb *aufheben* carries a threefold ambiguity, with three seemingly contradictory meanings: (1.) ‘to cancel’, ‘suspend’ or ‘abolish’ (lat. *tollere*), (2.) ‘to keep’ or ‘retain’ something (*conservare*), and (3.) ‘to elevate’ or ‘advance’ something (*elevare*).⁵⁶ Hegel uses the tension between these meanings to describe a productive process arising from opposition and contradictions. In his framework, ‘the unity of the opposition’ or ‘the negation of the negation’ leads to a productive result and the creation of a new entity by transcending previous determinations.⁵⁷ To summarize the Hegelian dialectic: a concept that is *sublated* ceases to exist in its previous form because it is negated by contradiction, yet it is preserved within that contradiction and elevated to a higher, more complex state by transcending its original limitations.⁵⁸

Applying the Hegelian model to the institution of helotage, we can shed light on this obscure arrangement. In the figure of the helot, the concepts of ‘friend’ or ‘ally’ and ‘enemy’ were not opposed in a simple dichotomy but were instead *sublated* into a single, synthesized whole. Although this may appear contradictory from an external perspective, it functioned within the Spartan society for centuries. In practical terms, the contradiction was *aufgehoben* in the Hegelian sense: the tension between ‘ally’ and ‘enemy’ was integrated into a productive (at least from a Spartan perspective) and resilient relationship between Spartans and their helots.

The foundation for this dynamic lay in a remarkable capacity to tolerate ambiguity and manage complexity – what sociologists term *ambiguity tolerance*.⁵⁹ This concept refers to the ability to navigate unclear or ambiguous situations and to accept the parallel existence of conflicting or ambiguous ideas without succumbing to paralysis. In this context, both the Spartans and the helots demonstrated ambiguity tolerance: the former were able to coexist with a group officially designated as enemies without resorting to constant terror, while the latter, despite being labelled as enemies and subjected to exploitation, refrained from uprisings and found ways to navigate their lives within Spartan society.

This preliminary observation invites us to reconsider how ancient societies, such as Sparta, managed the complexities of their social and political structures and how they embraced seemingly contradictory elements. One need only recall

the contradictory portrayals of historical figures in Herodotus – Kroisos of Lydia, for example, whose character is depicted through conflicting narratives yet remains plausible.⁶⁰ The Spartans, too, occasionally faced problems with their helots, though perhaps less frequently than one might expect. Nevertheless, they managed to derive advantages from the seemingly contradictory and ambiguous social construction of ‘trusted enemies’⁶¹ or ‘frenemies’⁶², leveraging their capacity for ambiguity tolerance to extract value from this paradoxical relationship. In conclusion: it was likely advantageous for the Spartans (and perhaps for the helots as well) not to resolve the contradiction between allies and enemies once and for all, nor to settle the matter definitively. Instead, they allowed the situation to remain in a state of suspension – something that required a high degree of ambiguity tolerance.

3. Athens and Eleusis at War

Classical Athens, my second case study, arguably succeeded even more effectively in cultivating a ritualized, almost internalized sense of ancient enmity towards a group that, by then, was much more integrated into the polis than the helots in Sparta.⁶³ In the fifth century BC, it was common knowledge in Athens that the city had once been at war with her neighbour Eleusis, which, at that time, allegedly was not part of the Athenian polis. For example, Thucydides recalls that the various towns of Attika “sometimes waged war against each other” and cites “the case of the Eleusinians with Eumolpus against Erechtheus”, the Athenian king, as a prime example.⁶⁴ Euripides provides even more details about this conflict in his fragmentary play *Erechtheus*: Athens was under threat from an invasion by the Eleusinians, led by Eumolpos, the son of Poseidon, while Athena protected the besieged Athenians. This narrative represents a tradition that linked the war of Eleusis against Athens to the mythical struggle of Athena and Poseidon for control of Attika. Later authors, such as Isocrates, also reference this connection between these myths,⁶⁵ which is further reflected in artistic evidence, most notably in the famous west pediment of the Parthenon.⁶⁶

What is particularly striking is the persistence of the conflict’s memory, even long after Eleusis had been incorporated into the Athenian polis.⁶⁷ As a *demos*, Eleusis was fully integrated into the Athenian political system: it served as the hub of an eponymous *trittys* and as a significant religious and urban centre in general, being the home to the famous Eleusinian Mysteries. Given the fact that Athens was a polis composed of more than 130 different communities (*demoi*), this is even more surprising. Allusions to an earlier conflict between Athens and a community that had long since become part of the Athenian polis seem, in the context of the Peloponnesian War – when Euripides staged his *Erechtheus* – to have been less than conducive to internal peace.⁶⁸ Athens was, in fact, rich with myths and cults that emphasized the social cohesion of its diverse towns and villages, each with unique local traditions and identities, which facilitated their integration into the broader Athenian polis. One prominent example is the memory of the *synoikismos* under Theseus, commemorated as a unifying act for the dispersed communities of Attika and celebrated during the festival of *Synoikia*.⁶⁹ This myth forged a link between the distant past and the contemporary reforms of Kleisthenes, whose

democratic organization – structured around *demoi*, *trittyes* and *phylai* – incorporated institutions that, although inherently local and regional, required the subordination of particular identities to enable collective political action on behalf of the entire polis.⁷⁰ To translate these local identities into a cohesive Athenian polis identity, a complex political culture – including theatre, visual imagery and cult – developed in Athens.⁷¹

But which role did memories of earlier conflicts among communities, especially within Attika, play in this integration process? Indeed, there is every reason to consider a distinct social function for the explicit references to intra-Attic conflicts. This question can be explored exemplarily by analysing accounts of the Eleusinian War and connecting them to the cultic practices of the two former adversaries Athens and Eleusis.

It can be surmised that the resolution of conflict in Euripides's drama served as an exemplary lesson in overcoming internal societal conflicts, for every viewer, of course, knew in the back of their mind that Eleusis was, in reality, an integral part of the Athenian polis, even though this was not the case within the play's plot. At the close of the play, Praxithea, the wife of King Erechtheus, is willing to sacrifice her daughter to prevent the intruder Eumolpos from positioning Poseidon's trident on the akropolis. Ultimately, the Athenians are victorious: Erechtheus kills Eumolpos, yet he himself is struck down by Poseidon. This outcome appears to be straightforward, almost binary: only one side can prevail, the other loses, and Athens comes under the protection of the goddess Athena – the winner takes it all. But is it truly that simple? Not really! After the victory, Athena orders the establishment of a new cult:

For your husband I command the building in mid-city of a precinct with stone enclosure. In recollection of his killer the citizens, slaughtering sacrificial oxen, shall call him august Poseidon surnamed Erechtheus.⁷²

This etiological explanation for the cult of Poseidon-Erechtheus conveys a significant message: the defeated enemy Poseidon did not vanish, even though Athena had triumphed in their mythical conflict.⁷³ Instead, Poseidon is said to be present ἐν μέσῃ πόλει (*en mesi polei*, “in the midst of the polis”), not alone but alongside Erechtheus in a joint cult honouring both deities. Henceforth, Erechtheus is to be invoked as *Semnos Poseidon*.

With this amalgamation of deities, Euripides alludes to a cult of Poseidon-Erechtheus that was actually practised during his time, as attested by contemporary inscriptions.⁷⁴ This fusion primarily symbolizes the resolution of the conflict between the gods and heroes, and, in combination with the invasion myth, underscores Athens's victory over the Eleusinian invaders.⁷⁵ However, such an allusion could arguably have been more straightforwardly expressed than through the demanding concept of a doubled deity. Poseidon-Erechtheus is neither Poseidon nor Erechtheus but a new entity – a synthesis emerging from a fusion of these former adversaries. This process can be interpreted as a Hegelian *dialectical sublation* again, as previously outlined in relation to the Spartan helots. In this instance, the defeated Poseidon, who contested Athena for the patronage of Athens, was *negated* in his role as an antagonist but *retained* within the figure of Poseidon-Erechtheus.

Both preexisting elements of the cult were *elevated* into a new, albeit familiar, deity. Poseidon's continued presence was tangibly represented in the form of the famous *Thalassa*.⁷⁶

By analogy with this fusion of deities, the retrospective Athenian view on the incorporation of Eleusis can be understood as a dialectical amalgamation with the extended or overarching polis of Athens. This dynamic is reflected in the sanctuary known as the Eleusinion, located at the base of Athens's akropolis during the period in question. Before the celebration of the Greater Mysteries, sacred cult objects were carried in a procession from Eleusis to the Eleusinion in Athens and returned afterwards.⁷⁷ These and similar rituals emphasized,⁷⁸ on the one hand, the connection between Athens and Eleusis and, on the other, their distinct identities. Through these shared practices, both sides became integral to a common cultural memory of Athens. A similar dynamic is evident in the treatment of Eumolpos's family, the former aggressors, who were designated as the founders of the Eleusinian cult, which became an inseparable part of Athenian religious and cultural identity.⁷⁹ For fifth-century Athenians, this aspect of their foundational myth highlighted that both parties – and the cults they represented – had been integrated and preserved within the cultural framework of the polis after the Eleusinian invasion of Attika. From the union of Eleusis and 'old Athens', a new polis emerged that was greater than the sum of its parts. While bearing the name of the victorious side, this new polis encompassed the defeated as well. Eleusis was not merely assimilated but *sublated* into the Athenian polis, contributing to the creation of something entirely new: the Athenian *synoikia* as a 'polis of poleis', celebrated annually at the eponymous festival. This integration was the lesson conveyed by the invasion myth: the creation of unity through the preservation and elevation of difference.

A close examination of Athenian festivals throughout the year supports this assumption, as I have demonstrated elsewhere, particularly in relation to the Plynteria, the Skirophoria, as well as through iconographic evidence, such as a relief on a bridge traditionally regarded as marking the boundary between the areas of Eleusis and Athens.⁸⁰ In all these instances, Poseidon and Athena are portrayed acting together to symbolize the connection between Athens and Eleusis. More precisely, these representations negotiate the principles of difference, connection and unity – a dynamic vividly captured in the bridge relief, where Athena and what is likely Eumolpos are shown shaking hands.⁸¹ All three concepts – difference, connection and unity – were preserved and remembered both in the surrounding area and at the heart of the city itself. On the akropolis, we find not only the grave of Immarados, the son of Eumolpos, but also two large bronze statues of Erechtheus and Eumolpos: depicted as facing each other, these figures embody unity through shared struggle, serving as a powerful visual reminder of the integration of Eleusis into the Athenian polis, united in struggle.⁸²

The rituals, practices and emblematic expressions consistently reproduced and embodied both the conflict and the connection between Athens and Eleusis.⁸³ In this way, a longstanding relationship between these two centres was maintained within the context of conflict, avoiding simplistic binary interpretations or black-and-white thinking, and steering clear of rigid distinctions. Initially, the antithesis was emphasized, then negated and ultimately sublated, resulting in an enduring

relationship between Athens and Eleusis that supported the unification of Athens as a polis encompassing the entirety of Attika. This synthesis produced a community that, though bearing the name of one of its original components, constituted a distinct entity *sui generis*. The local, sectional element of Eleusis was not merely added but became an essential and functional part of the overarching system that emerged: the Athenian polis, which represented more than just a formal connection between the deme of Eleusis and the city of Athens. This effort could succeed only within a discourse that relied on a culturally embedded ability to deal with ambiguity.

All these associations of Eleusis with Athens – emphasized through cult, theatre, historiography and myth – embodied a key Athenian principle that was itself inherently ambiguous: the incorporation of local and sectional structures into the unified and overarching polis without dissolving them. However, in Athens, there is no indication of repression, either of the conflict between Athens and Eleusis or of the diverse patchwork structure of the Athenian polis. On the contrary, regional distinctions were actively celebrated – for instance, through the use of the *demotikon* to identify individuals since Kleisthenes or by the establishment of the ten *phylai*, each with its own heroes and cult practices. Every Athenian was familiar with the legendary *synoikismos* of Theseus, which allowed “individuals”, according to the myth, to “still live on their own lands just as before, but they were henceforth compelled to have only one political centre”, i.e. Athens.⁸⁴

Ideally, the Athenian citizenry could collaborate across different political levels⁸⁵ to make political decisions on behalf of the common good.⁸⁶ In practice, however, everyday political life must have often been marked by friction, particularly when the members of different demes, *trittyes* and *phylai* encountered one another in political bodies.⁸⁷ Against this backdrop, it is hardly surprising that the Athenians worshipped Aphrodite, the goddess of love, under the surname *Pandemos* in conjunction with Peitho, the personification of persuasion, on the Athenian akropolis.⁸⁸ These paired deities symbolized the essential virtues required to maintain unity in an Athenian polis defined by its diversity and constant negotiation of competing interests – a dynamic best described as cooperation among the demes, *trittyes* and *phylai*, coupled with a cultivated rivalry. The *phylai* may serve as an example of the latter: honours were bestowed upon members who had distinguished themselves and shown dedication to their group, often at the political level of the broader community.⁸⁹ It is therefore not surprising that officials of the *phylai* – in this case, the *epimeletai* – sometimes defended their phyle’s position before the assembly, even arguing with the archon, as Demosthenes⁹⁰ recounts. Similarly, the festive competition of the Athenian choruses was understood as a competition among the *phylai*,⁹¹ as is well documented through inscriptions.⁹² In a word: rivalry was ever-present in classical Athens, yet it was integrated into the framework of cultural activities across the entire polis. Against this backdrop, the resilience of this alliance – comprising various communities under the umbrella of the Athenian polis – becomes clear, making the memory of old hostilities (as in the case of Eleusis) appear less problematic than a superficial view might suggest. Quite the opposite, in this dynamic interplay of rivalry and community, the memory of past conflicts and their resolution was even functional.

To return to Aphrodite Pandemos: her epithet could be interpreted as an appeal to the citizens to act as a unified community, a *pandemos polis*, despite their differences and local interests, suggesting that they sometimes failed in doing so.⁹³ For all the apparent harmony, we can infer *ex negativo* that unity had to be actively established. It is hardly surprising that the Athenians, coming from diverse towns to gather on the *pnux*, required symbolic reminders from Aphrodite and persuasion from Peitho to act harmoniously in the interests of the collective *demos*.⁹⁴ Transferred to the local level, this is emblematic of the sublation of every 139 local *demoi* in the overarching *demos* of Athens. The Synoikia festival served as a similar reminder of the need for unity, akin to Aphrodite Pandemos. Linked with the legendary war between Athens and Eleusis, it conveys a profound political insight: harmony, common identity and political unity cannot be assumed; they are the outcomes of considerable and sustained effort.

Binary thinking, or an inclination towards unambiguity, would have been unproductive in this context. Even at the individual level, the residents of Attika's many municipalities were required to cultivate a tolerance for ambiguity,⁹⁵ not only towards the perspectives of others, but also regarding the multifaceted nature of their own identities. A single individual could simultaneously be an Eleusinian, a member of the *phyle* Hippothontis and an Athenian citizen – roles that were activated contextually or, at times, all at once.⁹⁶ The institutional arrangement of the polis, as it had developed since the reforms of Kleisthenes, was crucial to realizing this immense potential.⁹⁷

Another equally critical requirement, particularly in light of frequently contentious local issues, was the ability of Athenian citizens to navigate diversity, ambiguity and multiperspectivity. Founding myths – such as the story of 'Athens and Eleusis at war' – alongside associated cultural and religious practices, contributed significantly to this capacity. To achieve unified decision-making, a *phyle* had to transcend local and particular interests, which often arose within the individual *trittyes* and especially within the *demes*.⁹⁸ Even members of the same *phyle* with opposing agendas could, at times, find themselves as 'allied enemies' in day-to-day politics.⁹⁹ Nonetheless, as evidenced by the numerous resolutions passed by the *phylai*,¹⁰⁰ these associations successfully maintained remarkably resilient 'alliances' among different *demes* and *trittyes*. Similarly, the polis as a whole functioned as a complex alliance among *phylai*, *trittyes* and, most importantly, local communities and groups – both within the framework of formal organization and through transient, overlapping groups meeting and making decisions in the people's assembly. While problems and conflicts were ubiquitous, a survey of Athenian history demonstrates that the polis, as a political and social structure, exhibited extraordinary resilience over time. Even when crises broke out, they were by no means rooted in the alliance of the polis's diverse regional or local elements.

4. Summary

In contrast to the case of Sparta and its helots, the dual role of Eleusis as both ally and adversary to Athens played out primarily on a discursive and culturally

mediated level. By comparison, Sparta's annual declaration of war on the helots had far more tangible consequences, even though it remained largely symbolic in nature and did not result in actual acts of war. Furthermore, the Athenians always regarded the Eleusinians as 'allies' or, more accurately, as an integral part of their community, whereas the helots remained stigmatized as enemies, despite their indispensable economic and military cooperation. In Athens, Eleusis was understood as an essential component of the constructed entity of 'the polis of the Athenians', embedded or *sublated* within this framework. The cultural memory of the old enmity with Eleusis, along with its resolution, was absorbed into a communal identity that unified diverse groups while maintaining their distinctiveness. This process fulfilled a functional role, symbolizing the integration of multiplicity within the overarching polis. By contrast, Sparta derived its functional benefits precisely by *not* integrating the helots into the community of Spartiates. The strict separation between those groups was fundamental to preserving the polis's social structure, identity and economic foundations. In this sense, Sparta relied on maintaining clear distinctions rather than embracing a unified model of inclusion.

Nevertheless, both cases illustrate a structural element tied to ambiguity tolerance: the recognition that enmity and alliance need not necessarily be mutually exclusive. Both poleis demonstrated that conflicts could be managed productively, though contradictions and ambiguity endured. Indeed, contradictions became functional when tolerated: in Sparta, this tolerance of ambiguity upheld an exploitative system that was difficult to legitimize and dependant on the acquiescence by the subjugated helots. In Athens, ambiguity tolerance provided a model for integrating a diverse array of communities, each with distinct characteristics, into a cohesive collective identity.

These examples from ancient Greece lend tangible support to the often-discussed yet somewhat premature assertion within the social sciences that premodern societies were more adept at embracing ambiguity,¹⁰¹ while modern societies lost the capacity to deal constructively with ambiguity and tend to an idealization of clarity and certainty.¹⁰² Of course, neither the Spartans nor the Athenians were familiar with Hegelian dialectics or the concept of sublating contradictions. Nevertheless, in practice, they exemplified a remarkable tolerance for ambiguity – the capacity to navigate contradictions without succumbing to paralysis and instead engaging with them productively. Indeed, both Spartan and Athenian societies derived significant coherence and resilience from their ability to tolerate and manage ambiguity effectively. A productive engagement with crises proved to be a factor in transforming otherwise fragile alliances into resilient structures.

Notes

- 1 The original German word '*freiheitlich*' does not carry the political and economic connotations associated with 'liberal' in English; therefore, 'freedom oriented' may serve as a suitable equivalent.
- 2 Böckenförde 2020: 153.
- 3 Böckenförde 2020: 153.

- 4 Levine 1985: 21. See also Baumann 1991. From a historian's perspective, see, for example, von Thiesen (2021), who argues that the acceptance of contradictions and ambiguity has declined since the eighteenth century.
- 5 On Greek localism, see Beck 2020.
- 6 Hansen 2009; Hodkinson 2009; Hodkinson and Hansen 2009; Link 2011.
- 7 For an overview, see Figueira 2018; for more details, the contributions in Luraghi and Alcock 2003. Cf. Link 2000: 45–58.
- 8 Ste. Croix 2002: 190. For a similar view, see Baltrusch 2001.
- 9 Thuc. 1.128.1; cf. Talbert 1989: 23, n. 5; Figueira 2018: 567.
- 10 Hdt. 9.28–9. On this, see recently Zimmermann 2019: 31–6, with further evidence.
- 11 Hdt. 7.229. This implies a great deal of trust: after all, Eurystos had remained alone with his comrade in suffering Aristodemus in the camp of the fighters and, since Aristodemus stayed away from the battle, allowed himself to be led into battle completely alone.
- 12 See Ail. *var.* 12.43 about the μόθακες (*mothakes*), the children of slaves and citizens.
- 13 See e.g. Cartledge 1991; Baltrusch 2001.
- 14 Zimmermann 2019: 119–31. Cf. Nafissi 2015 for a different view.
- 15 Pl. *Leg.* 633b–c.
- 16 Link 2006.
- 17 Talbert 1989: 30.
- 18 Cartledge's (1991: 380) argument that the revolts of the mid-460s and 370 presuppose the helots' condition of life as intolerable can be turned on its head: assuming they lived under constant strain and oppression, it is far more peculiar why the helots refrained from revolting for nearly 100 years. Moreover, when evaluating the few uprisings, we must consider the possibility of a Tocqueville effect that describes 'revolutions of rising expectations' ("The hatred that men bear to privilege increases in proportion as privileges become fewer and less considerable, so that democratic passions would seem to burn most fiercely just when they have least fuel"; de Tocqueville 1840: 271–2). This is not to say that there was no oppression of the helots or that the helots were always content with their lowly position within the Spartan social system or their exploitation by the Spartans. It only means that the social circumstances and everyday practices of the helots offered opportunities to come to terms with the system.
- 19 Xen. *Hell.* 6.5.28–9.
- 20 We hear only of some helots deserting in battle: Plut. *Ages.* 32.7.
- 21 Ap. Athen. 4 (139F).
- 22 Cf. Plut. *Lyc.* 28.7. On helots as private slaves, see Ducat 1990: 19–29; Hodkinson 2000: 113–15.
- 23 Talbert 1989; Whitby 1994: 92; Hodkinson 2007.
- 24 5.4.28
- 25 ἐπει δὲ εἶδεν αὐτὸν ἐξιόντα, πρῶτον μὲν, εἴ τις τῶν πολιτῶν παρῆν, παρίει τούτους δ' ἰαλέγεσθαι αὐτῷ, ἔπειτα δ', εἴ τις ξένος, ἔπειτα δὲ καὶ τῶν θεραπόντων τῷ δεομένῳ παρεχώρει. (transl. Brownson 1989).
- 26 Hodkinson 2007: 54.
- 27 As Hodkinson (2007: 52–3) has demonstrated, Xenophon employs the term 'helots' in a broad, generic sense, and only when referring to them in geographical contexts or as a population group. In more concrete situations, however, he consistently resorts to functional designations such as *douloi*, *oiketai* or *therapontes*. As outlined above, helots were indeed present within Sparta itself, including individuals serving as private slaves. It is therefore highly probable that the *therapontes*, too, were recruited from among the helots.
- 28 Ἀριστοτέλης δὲ μάλιστα φησι καὶ τοὺς ἐφόρους, ὅταν εἰς τὴν ἀρχὴν καταστῶσι πρῶτον, τοῖς εἰλωσι καταγγέλλειν πόλεμον, ὅπως εὐαγὲς ᾖ τὸ ἀνελεῖν Aristot. fr. 538R (= Plut. *Lyc.* 28.7, transl. B. Perrin).
- 29 Link 2000: 11–19.

- 30 This is only half-joking, as farmers' protests in 2024 suggest that the reverse could be more likely the case.
- 31 Aristot. fr. 538R (= Plut. *Lyc.* 28.7).
- 32 Not only reported by Plutarch (see above), but also by Herakl. Lemb. fr. 10 Dilts (= Aristot. fr. 538 Rose).
- 33 Zimmermann 2019: 119–31; Cf. Baltrusch 2001; Nafissi 2015.
- 34 Thuc. 1.79–87, 6.88–93; Diod. 11.50. On the political function of the Spartan people's assembly, see Grote 2017.
- 35 προεκήρυττον οἱ ἔφοροι τοῖς πολίταις εἰς τὴν ἀρχὴν εἰσιόντες [...], κείρεσθαι τὸν μύστακα καὶ προσέχειν τοῖς νόμοις, ἵνα μὴ χαλεποὶ ᾖσιν αὐτοῖς (Plut. *Kleom.* 9.3, transl. B. Perrin).
- 36 καὶ ὄρκους δὲ ἀλλήλοισι κατὰ μῆνα ποιοῦνται, ἔφοροι μὲν ὑπὲρ τῆς πόλεως, βασιλεὺς δὲ ὑπὲρ ἑαυτοῦ. ὁ δὲ ὄρκος ἐστὶ τῷ μὲν βασιλεῖ κατὰ τοὺς τῆς πόλεως κειμένους νόμους βασιλεύσειν, τῇ δὲ πόλει ἐμπεδορκοῦντος ἐκείνου ἀστυφέλικτον τὴν βασιλείαν παρέξειν (Xen. *Lac.* 15.7, transl. E. G. Marchant and G. W. Bowersock). Cf. Carlier 1984: 252 n. 87, 276.
- 37 For an example of an intervention of the ephors in a king's private life, see Hdt. 5.39.1–40.1: When no children were born to King Anaxandridas and his family line was about to perish, the ephors urged him to divorce and marry another woman. In the end, a compromise was reached, as the king simply married a second wife alongside his first. In order to really push this decision through, the ephors threatened Anaxandridas quite blatantly with a decision by the people that would harm the king.
- 38 Thuc. 1.87.1; Plut. *Lys.* 17.1. Meier (1998) examines the appropriation of political competences by the ephors. See also Link 2000: 11–30, 61–77.
- 39 δεσποσύνοισι φέροντες ἀναγκαίης ὕπο λυγρῆς ἡμισυ παντὸς ὅσον καρπὸν ἄρουρα φέρει (Tyrt. fr. 6 West, transl. D. E. Gerber).
- 40 δεσπότης οἰμώζοντες ὁμῶς ἄλοχοί τε καὶ αὐτοί, εὐτέ τιν' οὐλομένη μοῖρα κίχοι θανάτου (Tyrt. fr. 7 West, transl. D. E. Gerber).
- 41 However, it is Pausanias (4.14.5) who records the compulsion to mourn in the second fragment; this is not evident from the quotation of Tyrtaeus.
- 42 ἐπεὶ γὰρ ἀποθάνῃ βασιλεὺς Λακεδαιμονίων, ἐκ πάσης δεῖ Λακεδαιμόνος, χωρὶς Σπαρτιητέων, ἀριθμῶ τῶν περιοίκων ἀναγκαστοὺς ἐς τὸ κῆδος ἵεναι. τούτων ὧν καὶ τῶν εἰλωτέων καὶ αὐτῶν Σπαρτιητέων ἐπεὶ συλλεχθῶσι ἐς τὸν πόλεον πολλὰ χιλιάδες σύμμιγα τῇσι γυναιξί, κόπτονται τε τὰ μέτωπα προθύμως καὶ οἰμωγῇ διαχρέωνται ἀπλῆτω, φάμενοι τὸν ὕστατον αἰεὶ ἀπογενόμενον τῶν βασιλέων, τοῦτον δὲ γενέσθαι ἄριστον (Hdt. 6.58.2–3, transl. A. D. Godley).
- 43 In Hom. *Od.* 11.489–91, the worst fate that Achilles can imagine is that of a *thes*, not that of a slave.
- 44 The full argument is presented in Link 2000: 61–77; cf. Richer 1998: ch. 10 and 507–9.
- 45 Hom. *Il.* 22.111–128.
- 46 δίχα δὲ σφισιν ἦνδανε βουλή, ἥ δὲ διαπραθέειν ἢ ἄνδιχα πάντα δάσασθαι κτῆσιν ὅσην πτολίεθρον ἐπήρατον ἐντόξ' ἔργεν (Hom. *Il.* 18.510–12, transl. A. T. Murray).
- 47 Tyrt. fr. 6 West.
- 48 Link 2000: 50–8.
- 49 Tyrt. fr. 5 West. Other sources further attest to this ritualized remembrance of conflicts between Spartans and Messenians prior to the Messenian Wars (Paus. 4.4.2–3 and 4.4.5–8).
- 50 Tyrt. fr. 5 West.
- 51 Paus. 3.18.7.
- 52 See Plut. *Mor.* 239e: It was legally prohibited to impose excessive levies on the helots, so that they could retain some profit.
- 53 For an example of the helots' easy access to weapons, see Xen. *Hell.* 3.3.7.

- 54 ... ἐπιδεικνύμενοι τὸ μεθύειν οἷόν ἐστι τοῖς νέοις. (Plut. *Lyc.* 28.7, transl. Perrin 1914). Cf. Figueira (2018: 577), who interprets “the messes as channels for redistribution, for giving back to the helots a portion of the helot rents they paid in kind”.
- 55 Hegel 1812/1874: §§ 79–82.
- 56 See Hegel’s pupil J. E. Erdmann 1841/1896: 29–30 (§ 33 fn. 1) for a concise description of these three aspects.
- 57 Hegel 1812/1874: § 93: “Something becomes its other; this other is itself something; therefore it likewise becomes an other, and so on *ad infinitum*.”
- 58 Later interpreters like H. M. Chalybäus described this dialectical process with the three stages *thesis*, *antithesis* and *synthesis* (originally formulated by J. G. Fichte). However, Hegel himself never used the term *synthesis*.
- 59 This ability was first described as a psychological disposition of individuals: Frenkel-Brunswick 1949; Budner 1962. However, societies and cultures also exhibit varying degrees of tolerance for ambiguity, shaped by cultural and normative frameworks. For this concept of cultural ambiguity tolerance, see Levine 1985; Bauer 2018: 20–1.
- 60 Wesselmann (2011: 74–8) demonstrates this by analysing the two mutually exclusive versions of Kroisos’s river crossing (Hdt. 1.75.3–6), where Herodotus, by presenting these contradictions, constructs a coherent portrayal picture of the fickle nature of Kroisos precisely through the contradictory versions of the story.
- 61 Appropriately enough, Zimmermann’s book (2019) about Spartan-helot relations is called *Der vertraute Feind*.
- 62 The portmanteau ‘frenemy’ fits well, at least if we follow the value-neutral part of the OED definition s. v. *frenemy n.*: “a person who combines the characteristics of a friend and an enemy”.
- 63 For a detailed study of the narrative of ‘Athens and Eleusis at war’ and its function, see Grote 2025.
- 64 καὶ τινες καὶ ἐπολέμησάν ποτε αὐτῶν, ὥσπερ καὶ Ἐλευσίνιοι μετ’ Εὐμόλπου πρὸς Ἐρεχθεᾶ (Thuc. 2.15.1, transl. R. Crawley).
- 65 Isoc. 12.193.
- 66 Simon 1980; Spaeth 1991. Cf. Meyer 2017a: 399–402 for a different view and further literature.
- 67 The date of the incorporation of Eleusis has been the subject of endless scholarly debates. Most recently, Rönnberg (2020, 2021: 101–4) argues, especially based on the latest archaeological findings, that during the seventh and sixth centuries, the sanctuary of Eleusis was not dominated by Athens. In general, the author suggests a successive deepening of intra-Attic relations in the context of the structural consolidation of the community, regarding the Kleisthenic reforms as a provisional conclusion to this gradual development.
- 68 Cf. Meyer 2017a: 378.
- 69 Thuc. 2.15.
- 70 For an interpretation and further literature on the reforms of Kleisthenes, see Grote 2016: 205–20.
- 71 Ober 1989; Meier 1988; Fisher 2021. For a short overview of cultural aspects concerning the Athenian democracy, see Cartledge 2016: 123–44.
- 72 πόσει δὲ τῷ σῶι σιγὸν ἐν μέσση πόλει τεῦξαι κελεύω περιβόλοισι λανίοις· κεκλήσεται δὲ τοῦ κτανόντος οὐνεκα σεμνὸς Ποσειδῶν ὄνομ’ ἐπωνομασμένος ἀστοῖς Ἐρεχθεὺς ἐν φοναῖσι βουθῦτοισι. (Eur. *Erechth.* F 370. 90–4, transl. C. Collard and M. Cropp).
- 73 Herodotus also mentions the traces left by Poseidon, such as the olive tree and a pool of salt water in a shrine on the akropolis, the famous *thalassa*, “set there by Poseidon and Athena as tokens when they contended for the land” – τὰ λόγος παρὰ Ἀθηναίων Ποσειδέωνά τε καὶ Ἀθηναῖν ἐρίσαντας περὶ τῆς χώρας μαρτύρια θέσθαι (8.55). Cf. Paus. 1.26.5, 1.27.2.

- 74 *IG* I³ 873 = *IG* I² 580. For further evidence for the combined worship of Poseidon and Erechtheus in a joint cult, see *IG* II² 1146, 3538, 4071, 5058, III 805.
- 75 Spaeth 1991: 359; Primavesi 2016: 106.
- 76 Note that this monument on the middle of the akropolis was called Ερεχθίδης θάλασσα (Apollod. 3.14.1). Cf. Herodotus, who mentions the shrine of Erechtheus containing “an olive tree and a pool of salt water” – ἐν τῷ ἐλαίῃ τε καὶ θάλασσα ἐνι (8.55).
- 77 Mylonas (1961: 243–80) discusses the proceedings of the festival. For the results of the excavation of the City Eleusinion, see Miles 1998. For further rituals in this respect, see Sourvinou-Inwood 1997: 142–9.
- 78 Sourvinou-Inwood 1997: 142–9.
- 79 H. *Hom.* 473–82; Pind. *fr.* 346 b V. 5–6 (ed. Maehler); Hesych. s. v. Εὐμολπίδαι. For further references, see Meyer 2017a: 382–3.
- 80 Grote 2025. On the Plynteria and Kallynteria, see Sourvinou-Inwood 2011, 135–224; on the Skirophoria, Christopoulos 1994: 128–9; Sourvinou-Inwood 2011: 35, 59–60. On the *relief*, see Spaeth 1991: 361; Clinton 1992: 75–6 and 140, n. 2; Harrison 2000: 277; Smith 2011: 101.
- 81 *IG* I³ 79.
- 82 Paus. 1.27.4. Brinkmann (2018) identifies the famous Riace Bronzes with Erechtheus and Eumolpos.
- 83 See Sourvinou-Inwood (2003: 26), who claims that Eleusis “was ritually and mythologically connected with the centre and helped articulate symbolically polis territory, the integration of the periphery”. Cf. Sourvinou-Inwood 1997. However, she is too confident to date the origins of those myths and connecting practices and rituals back to the eighth century, for which there is no evidence.
- 84 καὶ νεμομένους τὰ αὐτῶν ἐκάστους ἄπερ καὶ πρὸ τοῦ ἡνάγκασε μῦθ πόλει ταύτη χρῆσθαι (Thuc. 2.15.2, transl. mod. R. Crawley).
- 85 Whitehead 1986: 291–326. On the important role of the *phylai* in this context see Grote 2016: 205–20.
- 86 Flaig 2013: 221–9; cf. Grote 2016: 213–17.
- 87 Whitehead (1986: 255–326) examines the relationship between local and central government in Athens and shows “that under the Athenian democratic system the workings of central and local government were intricately and deliberately interlocked with each other” (258).
- 88 Paus. 1.21.4–5; Xen. *Symp.* 8.9. Apollodoros of Athens (*FGrH* 22 F113) claims that a temple of Aphrodite Pandemos once stood in the agora.
- 89 Eg. *IG* II² 656, 1142, 1749, 3202.
- 90 21.13
- 91 Cf. Dem. *or.* 4.36. For a detailed study on the *choregia*, see Wilson 2000. With regard to competition (145–94), he emphasizes the conflictual nature and underestimates the unifying effect.
- 92 As examples, see *IG* II² 3042: Λυσικράτης Λυσιθείδου Κικυννεὺς ἐχορήγει. Ἀκαμαντὶς παίδων ἐνίκᾱ. – “Lysicrates, son of Lysitheides, from Kikkyna led the choir. The *phyle* Akamanthis won with the boys’ choir” and *IG* II² 3055: Νικ[κ]ίας Νικοδήμου Εὐ[π]ρεαίων ἀνέθηκε νικήσας χορηγῶν Κεκροπιδὶ παίδων. – “Nikias, son of Nikodamos, from Xypete, dedicated this after winning as *choregos* for the boys’ choir for the *phyle* Kekropis”.
- 93 Cf. Soph. *Ant.* 7, 1141.
- 94 Thuc. 2.16.2 underlines the emotional attachment of Attic residents to their demes in 431. – Cf. Parker 1987: 137 who emphasizes “the emotional significance of his deme to an Attic countryman”. In addition, the cultural characteristics and individual lifestyles of the demes come to light in this passage.
- 95 The ability to perceive ambiguity in open way or, ideally, “the tendency to perceive ambiguous situations as desirable” (Budner 1962: 29). See n. 46.

- 96 In addition, there are of course all kinds of other roles, identities and patterns that played a role on a psychological and sociological level, which cannot be examined here in detail. Cf. Whitehead 1986: 326 who identifies a “dual capacity as demesman and citizen”; Steinbock (2017) underlines the multipolarity of social memory in demes, *phylai* and polis.
- 97 See Meier 1990: 186–221 on the potential produced by the Athenian citizens by acting together politically. The Athenians developed a “consciousness of ability” (“Könnensbewusstsein”), which enlarged “the scope for thought, action, and decision making [...] to a huge and alarming extent” (216).
- 98 On this topic, see Grote 2016: 205–20.
- 99 See, for example, a decree of the *phyle* Akamantis, *AE* 1965.131 ll. 6–8 (= *SEG* 23.78; cf. *SEG* 64.94): Each member faced the threat of a fine should they act “contrary to the decision of the *phyle*” (παρὰ τὸ δόγμα τῆς φυλῆς), which presupposes internal discord or, at the very least, seemed likely to those responsible for the decree.
- 100 The decrees of the assemblies of the *phylai*, whose decision formula follows the pattern ἔδοξεν τῇ Πανδιονίδι φυλῇ (cf. *IG* II² 1138–40), were also called *agorai* (see Jones 1995: 511–18). See the list of documents issued by *phylai*, *trittyes* and demes in Jones 1987: 65–72.
- 101 Levine: 1985, 44–54; Bauer: 2018.
- 102 Most prominently formulated by Zygmunt Baumann (1991) in his famous work *Modernity and Ambivalence*. See also Levine: 1985, esp. 2–4, 21–8, who speaks of a “movement against ambiguity led by Western intellectuals since the seventeenth century” (21).

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11 Against All Odds

The Long Theban Hegemony and Its Resilience

Salvatore Tufano

1. Internal Borders and Crisis in Boiotia: A Methodological Introduction

Is a federal union assimilable to an alliance? The answer depends on the features of the federal union. Today, federal states strive for balance and each of their components is technically at par with the other subunits. In antiquity, for many federal unions such equality was not always the norm.¹ The Boiotian *koina* are a telling example, as their history is marked by significant differences over time. The different status of the board of the *boiotarchoi*, the highest magistrates, reflects how the territorial subunits of the Boiotian federation were variously engaged in its administration.² Over time, these magistrates could come exclusively from one city or represent more than one area: this variation reflects the fact that, in the absence of explicit indications, there was not a clear and constant boundary between a federal state and what modern observers would define a military alliance.

This paper addresses how a seminal event in the fourth century BC, the battle of Mantinea (362),³ impacted the internal borders of the Boiotian federation and thus contributed to its resilience during the consequent crisis.⁴ By ‘internal borders’ I refer to two aspects. First, the role of Thebes, the eminent city of the region during the so-called Theban hegemony (371–362), was challenged because the Boiotians could no longer be simply described as ‘Thebans’ by external actors.⁵ Since Thebes was no longer representative of the whole region, the internal borders gained new weight in external representation. Second, the members were perceived as allies rather than as members of a single federation. Therefore, it was as a military alliance with strong ‘abstract’ internal borders among the allies that the Boiotian *koinon* survived the crisis in the aftermath of 362.

The first definition of internal borders, as geographical markers, will underlie the first section on the external representation of the Boiotians at Delphi and abroad.⁶ The second definition of internal borders, as signs of local resistance to the federation, will be exemplified in the second section on the Athenian perception of the Boiotians during these years. Both sections help explain why rediscussing the internal borders permitted the survival of the Boiotian *koinon* after the battle of Mantinea.

Before assessing the role of these internal borders as a resilience factor, it is helpful to return to the famous conclusion of Xenophon's *Hellenika*. This passage deals with the crisis that began after Mantinea:

[A]lthough each side claimed the victory, neither side was seen to have gained anything – no city, territory or increased rule – that they did not have prior to the battle. In Greece as a whole there was more uncertainty and disturbance after the battle than there had been before. To this point, then, let it be written by me. Perhaps someone else will be concerned by what happened after this.⁷

Attention is normally given to the final keyword *ταραχή* ('disturbance'), which sums up the polycentrism of the fourth century.⁸ It is worth adding that these words end a chapter that brings the battle of Mantinea to the forefront. Since all of Greece was on the spot, it was natural for Xenophon that the battle would cause consequences everywhere.

Yet, as there were no winners, there were no gains either. Xenophon states that no party acquired more territory, cities and power.⁹ The *ταραχή* can be considered a moment of crisis, especially from the point of view of a historian like Xenophon, who seems to hope for a rapprochement between Sparta and Athens throughout his work. The noun *ταραχή* betrays a negative perspective, which is due to the impossibility for either big city to retrieve that balance.

However, this disturbance (*ταραχή*) was a productive crisis in Boiotia. The death of Epaminondas did not have ominous consequences for his hometown (Thebes) or the league.¹⁰ Not only did the Boiotians continue to benefit from the victories of Epaminondas and Pelopidas even after 362: the allies gained during that campaign remained loyal to Thebes in the following decade. A case in point may be the Aiolian island of Tenedos: here, Epaminondas had obtained private benefits that underpinned the creation of a proxeny tie between Thebes and this city, evidenced by Aristagoras of Tenedos' private contribution during the Third Sacred War.¹¹

The crisis opened by the battle of Mantinea, therefore, was not an abrupt turning point in Boiotia because the benefits gained during the hegemony were still operative in the 350s and the *koinon* maintained its influence in the following years. This occurred by leveraging its internal borders, both in its external self-presentation (section 1) and in the mechanisms of cooperation among its members (section 2).

2. Internal Borders and Pluralism: The Emic Perspective

After the battle of Mantinea, the single cities of Boiotia felt more confident in cultivating their specific poleic identity in contrast with the previous Theban influence. By 'internal borders' I will refer here to the relevance of this new balance of power from an emic perspective. The study of the relationships among the Boiotian towns in the fourth century is particularly tricky because we lack fully extant historiographical works on the Boiotian *koinon* from that period, beyond Xenophon and the long fragments of the *Hellenika Oxyrhynchia*.¹² Diodoros is a particularly

problematic source, despite his reliance on fourth-century sources.¹³ Studying fourth-century federalism in this scenario implies overcoming a series of caveats, which can be summed up in two points. First, the flow of events in the fourth century BC is still a segmented one.¹⁴ It is often assumed that the death of the Boiotian *koinon* long predated the battle of Chaironeia and that one hegemony, the Theban one, was immediately followed by the Macedonian one.¹⁵

This assumption is easily confirmed by the second bias that must be recalled. The 370s are marked by a unique moment of alliance between Thebes and Athens, under the umbrella of the Second Athenian Confederacy. This period of appeasement began in 395, but it did not change the overall narrative of Athenian-Boiotian relationships in the Athenian sources: these Athenian sources talk about Thebes as reflecting the entire league, as if the two cities had been acting independently. Despite the varying weight of oral and written sources on these events in the representation of Thebes by Athenian authors, the history of Boiotia in the second half of the fourth century BC therefore needs to be rewritten with a more inclusive perspective. In particular, in order to retrieve the role of the internal borders in the self-presentation of the Boiotian cities, one has to recur to documentary evidence such as contemporary inscriptions.

In this class of documents and from a Boiotian perspective, the most important achievement was the *promanteia* granted by Delphi to the city of Thebes:

Δε[λφοὶ ἔδωκαν]
Θηβαίῳ[ις]
προμα[ντείαν]
μετὰ Δ[ελφοῦς]
5 πρᾶτο[ις].

“The Delphians granted the Thebans the right to consult the oracle first after the Delphians.”¹⁶

The inscription, to be dated not much later than 362, can be connected with the completion of the Theban *thesauros* and belong to the same venture. Pausanias’ observation on the use of funds from the battle of Leuktra may be based on a lost dedication and cannot be taken at face value.¹⁷ Apparently, Pausanias seems to have taken for granted the chronological details as they were presented in the dedicatory inscriptions,¹⁸ although the monument was built over a much longer period than the connection with one single battle might suggest. In any case, it was as a Theban, rather than as a Boiotian, monument that it got preeminence; and it were the Thebans specifically who received proxeny.

The Theban treasury is the largest building in the *carrefour des trésors* and, as such, it stands out not only because of the contrast with the previous commitments, but also because it redesigns the Boiotian presence in Delphi according to a deliberate collocation of these dedications in the sanctuary.¹⁹ The modern label *base des Béotiens* depends on the discovery of inscriptions on the spot. Archaeological research has confirmed that a construction was erected in the second quarter of the fourth century.²⁰

The Theban venture of the fourth century marks a definitive new start for the entire Boiotian community in Delphi and it is impossible to dissociate this decision from the bustling years of the Theban hegemony. This commitment may be attributed to Epaminondas himself,²¹ but in general, such an expenditure could not have relied exclusively on Theban will. In the fifth century, the Boiotians had been represented in the Amphiktyonic Council by two votes: one for the Thebans and the other one for the rest of the region.²² There is no reason to believe that in the fourth century the situation drastically changed. What did change, however, was the Theban self-representation as the fulcrum of the region. The *promanteia* thus marks the decision to isolate one component, the Thebans, over the collective identity of the Boiotians.

The absence of the other components of the league is less mysterious than one would expect when considering all the sources of the period. The doubts on the chronology of the *promanteia* go along with two basic facts: first, *promanteia* was not automatically linked with political prestige in the sanctuary,²³ because it only granted priority over the Delphians; second, the proclamation may belong to the years when the Thebans equated themselves with the Boiotians in their public transcript, as they did, for instance, in the proxeny decrees of the 360s. It was only after 337 that the *hieromnamones* from Boiotia are recorded with origins from cities such as Orchomenos, Plataia and Tanagra.²⁴

When one concentrates on Boiotian forms of self-representation of other Boiotian poleis than Thebes in Delphi in the third quarter of the fourth century BC, there is evidence for expressions of local pride as will be soon clear. The stark contrast with the public transcript of the 360s implies that the Boiotian cities were eager to underline their local identities as independent from Thebes.

The only extant inscription that may contradict this scenario includes the ethnic only as a proposal. It is engraved on a limestone base with statues:

[Βοιωτοὶ ἀνέθιαν μετὰ τὸν πόλεμον ὃν ἐπο]λέμεισαν
[πὸτ τῶς τὸ ἱερὸν τῷ Ἀπόλλωνος τῷ Πουθίῳ ἄσ]εβείσαντας.

“The Boiotians dedicated this monument after the war they fought against those who had misbehaved against the Tempe of Pythian Apollo.”²⁵

About this presumed *base des Béotiens*,²⁶ Schachter observes: “it is not impossible that the dedication was made in their own name by the Thebans.”²⁷ Even if the restoration *Boiotoi* were faithful, it would remain completely reasonable to imagine a common, exceptional dedication at the end of the Sacred War, which had begun thanks to the impulse of the Thebans and had seen its main development along the axis of Thebes and Boiotia versus Phokis. This public inscription is in dialogue with another, because the dedication echoes the previous document listing contributions to the Boiotians who were fighting for the sanctuary of Delphi (περὶ τῷ ἱερῷ τῷ ἐμ Βελοφοῖς).²⁸

When single men mentioned in Delphi are considered, however, the situation changes.²⁹ The few Delphic witnesses from the third quarter of the fourth century BC other than the *base des Béotiens* tend to obliterate the ethnic ‘Boiotian’, if one

can judge from the corpus of proxeny decrees. This behavior stands in contrast to the previous stress on the Boiotian community, which is also restricted to the small corpus of the important proxeny decrees of the mid-360s passed by the Boiotian *koinon* for single individuals.³⁰ These acts make these foreign men *proxenoi* of the Boiotians, and the decision is regularly passed by the *damos* of the Boiotians, as is clear from the known proxeny decrees.

When individual Boiotians received proxeny after (and once before) the battle of Mantinea, however, this was apparently only valid as a one-to-one relationship, i.e., between the community that granted the proxeny and the single polis, not the *koinon*, from which the honoree originated. Before the battle, it was the Theban Epaminondas who received proxeny from Knidos.³¹ The same observation can be made for two Tanagreans known in Eretria in 343,³² and for a Theban who received it in Delphi in 350:

[θε]ός. Εὐά[ρει Θη]-
 βαιοδώρ[ου Θηβ]-
 αίωι Δελ[φοὶ ἔδ]-
 ωκαν προ[ξενία]-
 ν, προμαν[τείαν],
 [ἀτέ]λεια[ν κτλ.]

“God. The Delphians granted proxeny, right to consult in the first place, tax exemption to the Theban Euareis, son of Thebaiodoros.”³³

While these few data may warrant caution, they resemble the later mentions of Boiotians from Tanagra, Thebes or Koroneia, inscribed in the late fourth century BC on the same *base des Béotiens*, creates a vibrant picture that invites us to reflect upon the external perception of the *koinon* in the fourth century BC.³⁴ This class of documents insists on the single poleic identities and the variation, as a stress on the internal borders, is a lively reflection of the impact of the battle of Mantinea on this self-presentation.

Two representative case studies are those of Thespiiai and Thebes. Two men, one from Thespiiai and the other from Thebes, feature in the list of the voluntary contributions made in 361 to reconstruct the Delphic temple.³⁵ It is interesting that they, unlike the contributors from Arkadia, are not mentioned by their ethnonym, but retain their civic, local identity. Thespiiai had been one of the last cities to join Thebes in 373 and was reportedly destroyed.³⁶

However, this alleged destruction contrasts with the life of the city that archaeologists have uncovered. The city did not truly disappear.³⁷ This speaks of a continuity that is worth remembering to understand what kind of contribution a medium-sized city like Thespiiai could make once Thebes had lost the men who had made their hometown the leader of Boiotia. Proof of the life of Thespiiai in the third quarter of the century is offered by the proxeny granted to the Thespian Hermon in Delphi.³⁸ Thespians, as well as Thebans, are also mentioned as *hieromnamones*³⁹ in Delphi. Sometimes the origin of these Boiotians is clear, for instance from Thebes.⁴⁰ A more complicated example is another *hieromnamon*, Ismenias.⁴¹

As far as Thebes is concerned, three Thebans are listed separately as *naopoioi*, in an inscription detailing the credit of Delphi to the *naopoioi* for the temple's construction.⁴² Two of these men, Telles and Philippos, were later *prostatai* in Delphi.⁴³ While men such as Telles are described with a civic, it is striking to observe that only common workers seem to have been presented as *Boiotoi* in Delphi at this stage.

Against this Delphic background, illustrating that the Thebans were often the only Boiotians involved in the administration of the sanctuary, the imperial writer Athenaios records an interesting self-dedication offered by the courtesan Phryne from Thespiiai:

[A]nd the neighbours, having had a statue made of Phryne herself, of solid gold, consecrated it in the temple of Delphi, having had it placed on a pillar of Pentelican marble; and the statue was made by Praxiteles. [...] And this statue stood in the middle between that of Archidamus, king of the Lacedaemonians, and that of Philip the son of Amyntas; and it bore this inscription: "Phryne of Thespiiai, the daughter of Epikles", as we are told by Alketas, in the second book of his treatise *On the Offerings at Delphi*.⁴⁴

The episode is retold by Pausanias and Plutarch.⁴⁵ The main difference between Pausanias' and Athenaeus' account is the dedicant (Phryne herself in Pausanias, the neighbours in Athenaeus). As mentioned before, Pausanias tends to exaggerate the documentary evidence of inscriptions.⁴⁶ The interplay between personal experience and literary expertise is imbalanced in Pausanias, whereas Athenaeus deserves more credit in this case. Against past skepticism towards the statue's existence, I agree with Cavallini that there was a statue and that it reflected the wealth of the woman.⁴⁷ However, it still seems more logical to trust the source of Athenaeus for these votives, Alketas, regarding the procedure, because it would have been in the Thespians' (or, more exactly, the neighbours') interest to commemorate such a figure.

Alketas wrote *On the Monuments in Delphi* in the Hellenistic period.⁴⁸ The historiographical lens is important, because Alketas' wording is unclear on this dedication. By assigning it to the *περίκτιονες*, 'the neighbours', Alketas did not explicitly refer to the inhabitants of Thespiiai itself. On the other hand, Pausanias believes that the statue was dedicated by Phryne herself. If one follows him, the statue cannot have been instigated by the community of Thespiiai or by an actor presenting himself as the *koinon* of the Boiotoi. If one follows Alketas, the statue was not sponsored by Phryne herself but by more than one Boiotian community. Pausanias and Alketas concur in suggesting a plural dedication and in denying the exclusive role of Thespiiai.

A confirmation may be found in the statuescape that Alketas describes, because this gilded Thespian woman was positioned next to a Spartan and to Philippos. The noun *περικτίων* is a highly poetical choice and revives a rare root for "inhabiting" that is attested in a fragment by Pindar. Pindar mentions the *ἀμφικτίονες* who used to meet at Onchestos.⁴⁹ In Boiotia, in two different moments (the 440s with Pindar;

Phryne in the fourth century⁵⁰), the communities display their joint action with an emphasis on locality (ἀμφι-/περι-κτίονες). The debate on the statue's dedication is relevant because it is indirect evidence that the Boiotians were presenting themselves as a united community, while still having strong internal borders that resurfaced in the dedications.

In other words, the Boiotian *koinon* seems to have behaved as a military alliance well after the battle of Mantinea. On a different note from the case of Phryne, Diodoros describes with these words the Theban participation in military ventures in the 350s:

[W]hen he [Chares] had gone and he [Artabazus] was left alone he induced the Thebans to send him an auxiliary force. Choosing Pammenes as general and giving him five thousand soldiers, they dispatched him to Asia. Pammenes, by the support he gave to Artabazus and by defeating the satraps in two great battles, won great glory for himself and the Boeotians. Now it seemed an amazing thing that the Boeotians, after the Thessalians had left them in the lurch, and when the war with the Phocians was threatening them with serious dangers, should be sending armies across the sea into Asia and for the most part proving successful in the battles.⁵¹

In this passage, Pammenes acts both as a Theban and in the name of the Boiotians.⁵² One would be tempted to claim that the fourth century did not allow the *koinon* sufficient time to become properly refined, for the simple fact that the Boiotian institutions, shaped after the liberation of Thebes in 379, lacked the strong architecture well-attested for the previous *koinon* of the 390s,⁵³ and for the later Hellenistic *koinon*, where the role of the districts became central.⁵⁴

This *symmachia* incorporated the cities around Thebes and may have had Onchestos as its central meeting place,⁵⁵ rather than Thebes. This detail is meaningful because it would represent a return to the archaic weight of Onchestos and at the same time a strong contradiction of the sources that constantly locate the decision-making assemblies in Thebes.⁵⁶ In fact, thanks to the dense information we have on Epaminondas and Pelopidas, these assemblies and the bulk of the army met in Thebes and moved from there. It is rather uncertain, whether the Boiotian poleis joined this *koinon* on a permanent basis. One wonders whether this precocious statement of regional unity, as expressed through closeness in battle, for instance, rather than in properly political terms, did not have an impact on the isolated dedication of Phryne's neighbours.

To sum up this first section, one observes how varied the self-presentation of the Boiotians was during these years, particularly when moving away from the historiographical sources. The Boiotian cities stressed more and more their specific identity, i.e. what we tentatively defined the 'internal borders'. While it is undeniable that the two votes of the *hieromnamones* in Delphi were considered Boiotian votes and that common workers could be labelled as such, individuals tended to prioritize their polis-origin as citizens. This remains true well after the crucial year of Chaironeia, which did not immediately imply the end of the *koinon*

and prioritized new poleic identities such as Onchestos.⁵⁷ In its self-presentation, the *symmachia* prioritized Thebes and Thespiiai over other cities of the region. Documentary evidence and individual cases such as that of Phryne and Diodoros' view of the Boiotian army as Theban highlight the positive tension among the most important cities of the league.

3. Internal Borders and the Athenian Perspective

In the previous section, the role of the internal borders was observed indirectly, mostly through direct evidence from inscriptions, and it was argued that the Boiotian *koinon* largely acted as a military league whose individual members were still able to present themselves as independent. Contemporary Athenian sources agree on this from a different angle, as the case of Orchomenos, first of all, makes clear.

Orchomenos had always been a powerful centre in western Boiotia and its relationship with Thebes was more often hostile than not. This long history of opposition explains why Orchomenos would not be willing to join immediately the new Theban League born after 379. Despite this reluctance, Epaminondas suggested avoiding a harsh treatment of Orchomenos in 370:

In their term of office the Thebans campaigned with a large army against Orchomenos. Their objective was to reduce the city to slavery, but, on Epaminondas' advice, they changed their mind. He advised them, if they were aiming for the leadership of the Greeks, to preserve by generosity what they had gained by courage. So, they assigned the Orchomenians to the political status of the allies.⁵⁸

The passage insists on Epaminondas and his mercy. The decision to consider the Orchomenians as 'allies' is ambiguous, because it does not imply an annexation or the formal inclusion of Orchomenos in a league. Their status as an ally is confirmed by the same Diodoros, who mentions a military overview of Orchomenian knights in Thebes in the context of the later revolt of Orchomenos in 364:

At that same time, the Thebans resolved to mount a campaign against Orchomenos. The following are the reasons. Some Theban exiles, who wanted the Theban constitution to change back to aristocracy, had convinced the 300 members of the Orchomenian cavalry to join them in their plan. These cavalrymen were in the habit of going to meet their Theban counterparts on an appointed day for military exercises and they agreed to make their attempt on that day. Along with many other supporters, who had joined the movement, they met at the set time. But, the instigators of the conspiracy got cold feet and, changing their minds, revealed the plot to the Boiotarchs. [...] The magistrates ordered the arrest of the Orchomenian cavalry and paraded them in front of the Assembly. There, the People voted to put them to death, to reduce the population of Orchomenos to slavery and to raze the city to the

ground. [...] After capturing the city, they slaughtered the men and sold the women and children into slavery.⁵⁹

This overview may reflect a status of “*osservati speciali*”,⁶⁰ or just a more common practice that is only recorded for Orchomenos, given the exceptionality of the later event. A few Orchomenian aristocrats, in fact, conspired with Thebans. The plot was meant to change the Theban government, rather than the Boiotian constitution. In contrast to Xenophon, Diodoros normally uses the adjectives ‘Boiotian’ and ‘Theban’ carefully.⁶¹ It is interesting that these Orchomenians chose Thebes as their target, as if they were looking for a domino effect, or perhaps because there were no solid common institutions of the *koinon*. Significantly, Diodoros also places the assembly in Thebes.⁶²

The discovery of the plot led to the destruction of Orchomenos and to the massacre of all its citizens, as recorded by Demosthenes in his *Against Leptines*, delivered in 355/4:

The Thebans, men of Athens, plume themselves more on brutality and iniquity than you on humanity and love of justice. If a prayer may be allowed, may they never cease to withhold honor and admiration from those who do them service, or to deal with kindred states in the same way. (For you remember how they treated Orchomenos). And never may you cease to do the opposite, honoring your benefactors and winning your rights from your fellow-citizens by debate and in harmony with the laws.⁶³

In this passage,⁶⁴ Demosthenes concentrates on Thebes because there is no point in importing measures uncommon in a democracy. Demosthenes is particularly skeptical about learning anything from Thebes, as he focuses on the city’s dishonesty. There might have been personal reasons for this hatred. Furthermore, there was a long tradition in Athens that Thebes was the antithesis of all that was desirable in Athens. Accordingly, one should be cautious in using the passage of the *Against Leptines* as an explicit confirmation of Diodoros’ passage on Orchomenos.⁶⁵ Besides, the only other source on the event, Pausanias, concentrates exclusively on the enslavement of the citizens.⁶⁶

According to these traditions, Epaminondas was dissatisfied with the decisions the Thebans took in his absence. Consequently, Pausanias may be relied upon to suggest that the brutality was not as harsh as Diodoros’ version conveys. After all, the survival and the prosperity of Orchomenos are independently confirmed for the 350s, by the reference to an Orchomenian *theorodokos* in a list from 360/59.⁶⁷ The document implies that, a very few years after the alleged destruction, an Orchomenian *theorodokos* hosted envoys in his hometown. If so, the city cannot have been totally destroyed. It may be a literary topos and we should accept that Orchomenos survived the rebellion of 364 and was one of the internal members of the military alliance well after the battle of Mantinea.

Another key witness to the Athenian narrative of the internal borders of the Boiotian League, as markers of their poleic identity, is the orator Aischines in his

On the false embassy (343 BC).⁶⁸ He addresses the point of the fate of Boiotia after the peace of Philokrates, stating that he had actually vouched for the rights of the Boiotian cities:

“He said that I deceitfully claimed that within a few days Thebes would be humbled and that I panicked the Euboeans while encouraging you in empty hopes. [...] At Philip’s court I affirmed, and I reported to you on my return, that I thought it right that Thebes should be part of Boeotia, not Boeotia part of Thebes.”⁶⁹

In another passage, Aischines talks about the necessary restoration of Boiotian cities, which may refer to a high status of independence for these allies.⁷⁰

On the false embassy is also central to the recollection of the other side of the coin of the Athenian-Theban relationships: the help granted by Athens in 382 and that offered by Thebes in 403, previously mentioned by Lysias.⁷¹ Aischines complements the Demosthenic picture of the relationship between Athens and Thebes and adds the idea of a *koinon* that was still an unstable situation – more properly a ‘quantum entanglement’ than a stable union. According to this phenomenon, the conditions of a particle, i.e., its position and behaviour among other things, can only be described when one views that particle as part of a system where other particles are in motion. The entanglement among the particles of this union is the result of the reciprocal dependency of each particle on the other components of the system. One cannot measure a particle (in our case, a member of a league) without simultaneously being aware of the status and conditions of the other particles (the other members).⁷²

Further observations on the fluidity of the specific ‘entanglement’ that constituted the Boiotian League in the years after the battle of Mantinea are provided by Aischines’ later text *Against Ktesiphon*, delivered in 330 to contest the allegedly poorly justified grant of honors to Demosthenes.⁷³ Aischines offers an alternative reading of Boiotian politics, firstly by reducing the encounters around Eretria to a fight between Thebes and Athens:

You had been seriously wronged on many occasions by Mnesarchus of Chalcis [...] and by Themison of Eretria, who robbed us of Oropos when we were at peace with him. But you voluntarily forgot these wrongs, and when the Thebans crossed to Euboea in an attempt to enslave the cities there, you gave them support within five days with a fleet and a land force. Within thirty days you sent the Thebans back to the mainland under truce and made yourselves masters of Euboea. You honestly and fairly restored the cities themselves with their constitutions to the people who had placed them in your care, because you did not think it right to remember your anger when people had put their trust in you.⁷⁴

While this may be rhetorical exaggeration, it should not be forgotten that *Against Ktesiphon* is in dialogue with the previous speeches of 343, and that Demosthenes

himself had been on the battlefield on that occasion. Besides, according to Aischines, in the alliance between Athens and Thebes, it was the latter that gained most, because the alliance transferred to Thebes the Boiotian cities that were unwilling to surrender:

[H]e [=Demosthenes] handed over the whole of Boiotia to Thebes by stating in the decree: 'If any city secedes from Thebes, the Athenians are to support the Boiotians in Thebes'. He used the wording to conceal and distort the situation, as usual, as though, when the Boiotians were suffering real mistreatment, they would be happy with Demosthenes' verbal formulation rather than feel resentment at their mistreatment.⁷⁵

While the external presentation of the Boiotians in Delphi and abroad – as examined in the previous section – depicts a loose community, a military alliance in which internal borders in a geographical sense became increasingly important, according to other contemporaries, the Boiotian *koinon* of the post-Mantinean years was still dominated by Thebes. When one views Thebes as a particle of a system, one also understands why the behavior of the other cities only rarely surfaces in the extant sources, which are more attentive to the result of the entanglement than to its actual internal mechanisms and borders.

4. The Resilience of a Fragmented Community

This overview has helped to rethink the Theban *koinon* and the conditions upon which it depicted itself and was perceived abroad after the death of Epaminondas. In the first section, I presented a few documents concerning the external representation of the Boiotians and of the Thebans. These data depict a variety that is in line with the possibility that the central institutions offered a gradient of independence to the members of the *koinon*, and this may also explain why, in the end, Thebes obtained a place of honor in Delphi (*promanteia*). In the second section, I suggested that we should also concentrate on literary sources to see what the actual perception of the *koinon* was and how it reacted to the crisis of Mantinea. This task is demanding given the nature of the trials from which the speeches by Demosthenes and Aischines derive. However, it is worth asking whether there was a counternarrative to the bleak picture of the Thebans dominant in Isocrates and whether the sources actually agree on Thebes' role well beyond Mantinea: the city could be perceived as overshadowing the contributions of the other cities of the region.

The evidence confirms that the alliance among the Boiotian cities was unstable and that this instability afforded them success in the first decade after Mantinea and well into the Sacred War but did not endure beyond the peace of Philokrates. If Aischines' testimony can be trusted, by 346 BC there were cities in Boiotia that would not immediately define themselves as strong Theban allies. For this reason, I suggest that the confederation can be better understood as a 'fixed' *symmachia* working with its individual members, the Boiotian poleis as 'quantum particles'.

As already mentioned, the behaviour of the individual members can be compared to the interconnection between the particles, when they are considered as part of an entanglement. What remains to be assessed is whether this model can explain the reaction of federal communities to critical moments. To observe an entanglement is to break it, since any observation fixes the particles as the separate units they never were in action. Thus, what Aischines observes in Thebes, or Pausanias in Orchomenos, regardless of their respective sources, are single facets of a multipolar, internal entanglement. This is something that may be, once again, an exaggeration, but an indirect confirmation is offered by a series of later sources with which I will conclude.

In 335 BC, Alexander famously decided to destroy Thebes, after the revolt of this city in his absence.⁷⁶ The commemoration of the reactions to the event in historiography is unanimous, albeit with a few differences. Diodoros is the first to name the satisfaction of the Plataians, Orchomenians and Thespians:

[A]s the slaughter mounted and every corner of the city was piled high with corpses, no one could have failed to pity the plight of the unfortunates. For even Greeks – Thespians, Plataeans and Orchomenians and some others hostile to the Thebans who had joined the king in the campaign – invaded the city along with him and now demonstrated their own hatred amid the calamities of the unfortunate victims.⁷⁷

The persistent negotiation required by ancient federalism to withstand moments of crisis worked after Mantinea, because the preceding two decades before had been marked by successes of the league in Boiotia and abroad. What slowly changed was the inability to proceed without a solid federal corpus of institutions that could resolve moments of financial crisis or, for instance, mitigate the problem of manpower for the army. From this point of view, the resilience of the Boiotian alliance was weak and the crisis of 362 was only initially overcome. Neither Philip nor Athens caused the implosion of the *koinon*; it was the uncertainty of its members regarding Thebes's position.

Notes

- 1 After Larsen 1968: xi–xxviii, see Beck and Funke 2015: 1–29.
- 2 On the history of this board, see Salmon 1995; Tufano 2023a.
- 3 Unless otherwise stated, all dates are BC.
- 4 On the role of internal and external borders in Boiotia in the Hellenistic period, with solid consideration of the premises, see Müller and Lucas 2023.
- 5 On the literary references to the Boiotians as 'Thebans' for events related to the Theban hegemony, see Orsi 1987.
- 6 This paper does not deal with arguments among single Boiotian poleis: the subject was carefully studied by Müller and Lucas 2023.
- 7 νενικηκέναι δὲ φάσκοντες ἑκάτεροι οὔτε χώρα οὔτε πόλεις οὔτ' ἀρχὴ οὐδέτεροι οὐδὲν πλέον ἔχοντες ἐφάνησαν ἢ πρὶν τὴν μάχην γενέσθαι· ἀκρισία δὲ καὶ ταραχὴ ἔτι πλείων μετὰ τὴν μάχην ἐγένετο ἢ πρόσθεν ἐν τῇ Ἑλλάδι. ἐμοὶ μὲν δὴ μέχρι τούτου γραφέσθω· τὰ δὲ μετὰ ταῦτα ἴσως ἄλλω μελήσει (Xen. *Hell.* 7.5.27, transl. J. Marincola).
- 8 On this idea of polycentrism, see Davies 1996.

- 9 “Ninguno de los dos bandos enfrentados obtuvo mas poder del que tenía antes de ella” (“Neither of the two opposing sides gained more power than what they had before”; Pascual 2023: 115).
- 10 On this naval campaign, see van Wijk 2019; Tufano 2023b: 162–71.
- 11 *RO* 57 ll. 1–4, 14–5, 24–5. On this document, see Lewis 1990; Schachter 2016: 123. Epaminondas was named *proxenos* in Knidos (*SEG* 44.901), and the overall reconstruction of the Social War forces us to believe that the disruption caused by those maneuvers was still meaningful between 357 and 355 (cf. Russell 2017; van Wijk 2019).
- 12 On the role of the *Hell. Oxy.* in forcing our definitions of the federation, see Solazzo 2024.
- 13 E.g. during Diodoros’ lifetime, there was again a Boiotian *koinon*, and he is aware of this, as he explicitly states (15.53.4) when he recalls the founding of the Basileia by Epaminondas: “the Boiotians have celebrated this festival in Lebadeia since then”. That festival, however, contrary to what Diodoros claims, had not been enacted without interruption and had suffered a serious breakup for almost a century after 171 (Tufano 2023a).
- 14 Cf. Gehrke 1985; Papazarkadas 2014; Beck and Ganter 2015; Schachter 2016; Lucas et al. 2019.
- 15 e.g. Pascual 2023.
- 16 *FD* III 4.375 l. 1–5 = *Choix Delphes* 35.
- 17 Paus. 10.11.5.
- 18 See Jacquemin 2018.
- 19 Cf. Franchi 2016.
- 20 Bommelaer-Laroche 2015: 154; Franchi 2023: 44.
- 21 So Tufano 2023b: 108–13.
- 22 See Lefèvre 1998: 70–8.
- 23 Sánchez 2001: 166–7.
- 24 Lefèvre 1998: 70. In a commentary on *IG* VII 3206, an inscription listing a group of Boiotians, Lucas (2021) detected a peculiar combination of places of origin for the officers who dedicated the text. According to Lucas, this implies a reconfiguration of the territorial units in Boiotia for military purposes after 337, an epochal year because, even before the destruction of Thebes in 335, the consequences of the battle of Chaironeia were lethal for the Boiotian *koinon*.
- 25 *FD* III 3.77.
- 26 See Roesch 1984.
- 27 Schachter 2016: 125 n. 34. Cf. Franchi 2016: 54–5.
- 28 *RO* 57.
- 29 Robert 1951: 13: “toute mention épigraphique de l’ethnique [...] peut être capitale” (“every epigraphic mention of the ethnic can be fundamental”). In the main text I follow Roesch (1982: 441–3) in his careful assessment of the Delphic documents.
- 30 *IG* VII 2407 and 2408; *SEG* 34.355 and 58.447.
- 31 *SEG* 44.901 ll. 1–3: Έ-[πα]μειν[ών]δαν Πο-[λύ]μμη Θεβαίων – “the Theban Epaminondas, son of Polymmeis”.
- 32 *IG* XII.9 203 ll. 1–4.
- 33 *SGDI* 2747.
- 34 Tanagra: *FD* III 5.89[2]; Thebes: *FD* III 5.93 ll. 1–2; Koroneia: *FD* III 5.95 l. 2.
- 35 *RO* 45 l. 75, Πάγκων Θεβαῖος, and 78, Θρασύ[συ]βουλος Θεσπιεύς. Both these names are hapax in these cities. There is another Thrasyboulos from Oropos (*IOrop* 325). Their amounts of one drachm are very small when contrasted with the generosity of the Athenian actor Theodoros, who contributed 70 drachms (*RO* 45 l. 77; Theodoros’ contribution was extremely high even for private standards: Csapo and Slater 1995: 237; Csapo 2010: 87).
- 36 Xen. *Hell.* 6.3.1
- 37 Cf. Bearzot 2002 and the overview by Tufano 2023b: 68–9.

- 38 *CID* II 56 I A 1. 10.
 39 Scott 2017: 113.
 40 *FD* III 5.22, 47, 339: Eunostos from Thebes and Asopodoros. Eunostos is known from a Theban catalogue of personal names of the same century (*IG* VII 2427 l. 7; cf. Vottéro 1996: 162–3). Although the inscription is sometimes dated to the late IV cent. BC (cf. *LGP*N 3B s.v. Εὐνοστός), Koumanoudis 1979: 79; Vottéro 1996: 163 stress that the combination of epichoric and Ionic scripts indicates a slightly earlier date, before 350 (Koumanoudis) or 371 (Vottéro). This evidence therefore indicates that the Eunostos active as a *hieromnamon* in Delphi may have been this Theban Eunostos, because all other known Eunostos from Boiotia are definitely later and from other cities.
 41 Ismenias was *hieromnamon* in 340 (*FD* III 5.22 ll. 1–2, ll. 21–2). According to Roesch 1982: 467, he came from Thespiiai, but the name is common in Boiotia and Lenfant 2011: 335 n. 21 and Schachter 2016: 77–8 argued for a Theban origin.
 42 *Choix Delphes* 38 ll. 71–9.
 43 *FD* III 5.20 ll. 3 and 9.
 44 αὐτῆς δὲ τῆς Φρύνης οἱ περικτίονες ἀνδριάντα ποιήσαντες ἀνέθηκαν ἐν Δελφοῖς χρύσειον ἐπὶ κίονος Πεντελικοῦ· κατεσκεύασε δ' αὐτὸν Πραξιτέλης. [...] ἔστηκε δὲ καὶ ἡ εἰκὼν αὐτῇ μέσῃ τῆς Ἀρχιδάμου τοῦ Λακεδαιμονίων βασιλέως καὶ τῆς Φιλίππου τοῦ Ἀμύντου, ἔχουσα ἐπιγραφὴν 'Φρὺνῃ Ἐπικλέους Θεσπικῇ', ὥς φησιν Ἀλκέτας ἐν β' περὶ τῶν ἐν Δελφοῖς Ἀναθημάτων (Athen. XIII 59 = 591B, transl. mod. H. G. Bohn).
 45 Paus. 10.15.1; Plut. *Mor.* 401A–D and 753F.
 46 *BNJ* 2 405; Cf. Zizza 2006.
 47 Cavallini 2014.
 48 Probably in the third century: Rzepka 2021.
 49 F 94b Sn.-M., 36–49.
 50 On the date of the dedication, see Todisco 2020: 216.
 51 ἅμα δὲ τούτοις πρῆστοις Ἀρτάβαζος, ἀποστάτης ὢν τοῦ βασιλέως, διεπολέμει πρὸς τοὺς ἀποσταλέντας ὑπὸ τοῦ βασιλέως σατράπας εἰς τὸν πόλεμον. καὶ τὸ μὲν πρῶτον συμμαχοῦντος αὐτῷ Χάρητος τοῦ Ἀθηναίων στρατηγοῦ ἔρρωμένως ἀντετάττει τοῖς σατράπαις, ἐκείνου δ' ἀπελθόντος μονωθεὶς ἔπεισε τοὺς Θηβαίους συμμαχίαν αὐτῷ πέμψαι. οἱ δὲ Παμμένη στρατηγὸν ἐλόμενοι καὶ δόντες αὐτῷ στρατιώτας πεντακισχιλίους ἐξέπεμψαν εἰς τὴν Ἀσίαν. ὁ δὲ Παμμένης βοηθήσας Ἀρταβάζῳ καὶ τοὺς σατράπας μεγάλαις μάχασι δυσὶ νικήσας περιεποιήσατο μεγάλην δόξαν ἑαυτῷ τε καὶ τοῖς Βοιωτοῖς. ἐφάνη γὰρ θαυμαστὸν εἰ Βοιωτοὶ τῶν μὲν Θετταλῶν ἐγκαταλειπομένων, τοῦ δὲ Φωκικοῦ πολέμου μεγάλους ἐπιφέροντος κινδύνους διαποντίους δυνάμεις εἰς Ἀσίαν ἐξέπεμπον καὶ προετέρουν κατὰ τὸ πλεῖστον ἐν τοῖς κινδύνους (Diod. 16.34.1–2, transl. mod. C. H. Oldfather).
 52 Diodoros (16.30.4) claims that in 354 more than 13,000 men were mobilized by Thebes. As they cannot have been mobilized exclusively by Thebes, other Boiotian cities must have contributed (cf. Snodgrass 2017: 12–13).
 53 *Hell. Oxy.* 19.3.
 54 Cf. Knoepfler 1992; Kalliontzis 2020.
 55 See Roesch 1982: 268–75.
 56 See Orsi 1987.
 57 Roesch 1982: 463 believed that the *koinon* survived the battle because the ethnic *Boiotoi* reappeared in a series of inscriptions (*FD* III 3.89–90, 92, 93). Interestingly, the number of cities and the citizens adding ἐκ Βοιωτίας to their civic increased after the battle of Chaironeia.
 58 ἐπὶ δὲ τούτων Θηβαῖοι μεγάλῃ δυνάμει στρατεύσαντες ἐπ' Ὀρχομενὸν ἐπεβάλοντο μὲν ἐξανδραποδίσασθαι τὴν πόλιν, Ἐπαμεινώνδου δὲ συμβουλευσάντος ὅτι τὰ διὰ τῆς ἀνδρείας κατεργασθέντα τῇ φιланθρωπία δεῖ διαφυλάττειν τοὺς τῆς τῶν Ἑλλήνων ἡγεμονίας ὀρεγομένους, μετέγνωσαν. διόπερ τοὺς μὲν Ὀρχομενίους εἰς τὴν τῶν συμμάχων πολιτείαν κατέταξαν (Diod. 15.57.1, ed. Vial 2002, transl. mod. P. Harding).

The word πολιτεία, ‘political status, condition’, is an emendation by Vial 2002. The previous editor, Vogel (1893), printed χώραν, ‘territory’, transmitted by the manuscript F (Laur. 70, 12; XV Cent. AD), a *recentior deterior*. Other manuscripts (P, X) have πόλιν, ‘city’, which does not make sense, since a territorial annexation was impossible, in contrast to what Thebes did to other communities. Vial 2002 suggested a proper enrollment of Orchomenos in a confederation, as clarified by Harding 2021, who supported Vial’s emendation (Harding 2021: 207 n. 1100).

- 59 Τότε δὲ τοῖς Θηβαίοις ἔδοξε στρατεύειν ἐπὶ τὸν Ὀρχομενὸν διὰ τοιαύτας τινὰς αἰτίας. τῶν φυγάδων τινὲς βουλόμενοι τὴν ἐν Θήβαις πολιτείαν εἰς ἀριστοκρατικὴν κατάστασιν μεταστῆσαι, συνέπεισαν τοὺς τῶν Ὀρχομενίων ἱππεῖς, ὄντας τριακοσίους, συνεπιλαβέσθαι τῆς ἐπιβολῆς. οὗτοι δὲ εἰωθότες μετὰ Θηβαίων ἀπαντᾶν ἡμέρα τεταγμένη πρὸς τὴν ἐξοπλισίαν, εἰς ταύτην συνέθεντο ποιήσασθαι τὴν ἐπίθεσιν· πολλῶν δὲ καὶ ἄλλων κοινωνούντων τῆς προθέσεως καὶ προσορμησάντων, ἀπήντησαν πρὸς τὸν καιρὸν. οἱ μὲν οὖν συστησάμενοι τὴν πρᾶξιν μετανοήσαντες ἐδήλωσαν τοῖς βοιωτάρχαις τὴν ἐπίθεσιν [...]. τῶν δ’ ἀρχόντων συλλαβόντων τοὺς τῶν Ὀρχομενίων ἱππεῖς καὶ παραγαγόντων εἰς τὴν ἐκκλησίαν, ὁ δῆμος ἐψηφίσατο τούτους μὲν ἀποσφάζει, τοὺς δ’ Ὀρχομενίους ἐξανδραποδίσσασθαι καὶ τὴν πόλιν κατασκάψαι. [...] κατασχόντες δὲ τὴν πόλιν τοὺς μὲν ἄνδρας ἀπέκτειναν, τέκνα δὲ καὶ γυναῖκας ἐξηνδραποδίσαντες (Diod. 15.79.3–6, transl. mod. P. Harding).
- 60 Tufano 2023b: 180.
- 61 On Xenophon’s use of these adjectives, cf. Orsi 1987.
- 62 Diod. 79.1–2.
- 63 μείζον, ὃ ἄνδρες Ἀθηναῖοι, Θηβαῖοι φρονοῦσιν ἐπ’ ὀμότητι καὶ πονηρίᾳ ἢ ὑμεῖς ἐπὶ φιλοανθρωπία καὶ τῷ τὰ δίκαια βούλεσθαι. μήτ’ οὖν ἐκεῖνοί ποτε παύσαιντο, εἰ ἄρ’ εὖξασθαι δεῖ, τοὺς μὲν ἑαυτοὺς ἀγαθὸν τι ποιοῦντας μήτε τιμῶντες μήτε θαναμάζοντες, τοὺς δὲ συγγενεῖς (ἴστε γὰρ ὅν τρόπον Ὀρχομενὸν διέθηκαν) οὕτω μεταχειριζόμενοι, μήθ’ ὑμεῖς τάναντία τούτοις τοὺς μὲν εὐεργέτας τιμῶντες, παρὰ δὲ τῶν πολιτῶν λόγῳ μετὰ τῶν νόμων τὰ δίκαια λαμβάνοντες (Dem. or. 20.109, transl. C. A. and J. H. Vince).
- 64 On the speech, see Harris 2008; Kremmydas 2014.
- 65 Diod. 15.79.6.
- 66 Paus. 9.15.3.
- 67 IG IV.1² 94.
- 68 Cf. Cawkwell 1962.
- 69 εἴτε δέ, ὥς ψευδολογουν φάσκων ὀλίγων ἡμερῶν τὰς Θήβας ἔσεσθαι ταπεινάς, καὶ τοὺς Εὐβοέας ὥς ἐφοβούν, προάγων εἰς ἐλπίδας κενὰς ὑμᾶς. [...] ἐγὼ γὰρ παρὰ Φιλίππῳ μὲν ὦν ἡξίωσα, πρὸς δ’ ὑμᾶς ἤκων ἀπήγγελλον, ὅτι τὰς Θήβας Βοιωτίαν δίκαιον ἡγοίμην εἶναι, καὶ μὴ τὴν Βοιωτίαν Θήβας. τοῦτο οὐκ ἀπαγγεῖλαι, ἀλλ’ ὑποσχέσθαι μέ φησιν (Aeschin. 2.119, transl. C. Carey).
- 70 Aeschin. 2.137.
- 71 See Lys. fr. 286–7 Carey; IG II² 37; Plut. Lys. 27.3; cf. Tufano 2020: 69 n. 34.
- 72 On quantum entanglement as a productive tool in human sciences, see Aspalter 2024; a case study is offered by Terrinoni 2024 (quantum entanglement and literature).
- 73 See Harris 2017.
- 74 ὑμεῖς γάρ, ὦ ἄνδρες Ἀθηναῖοι, πολλὰ καὶ μεγάλα ἡδικημένοι ὑπὸ Μνησάρχου τοῦ Χαλκιδεῶς [...] αἱ πάλιν ὑπὸ Θεμισωνος τοῦ Ἑρετριεῶς, ὃς ἡμῶν εἰρήνης οὔσης ὤρωπὸν ἀφείλετο, τούτων ἐκόντες ἐπιλαθόμενοι, ἐπειδὴ διέβησαν εἰς Εὐβοίαν Θηβαῖοι καταδουλώσασθαι τὰς πόλεις περὶ αὐτοὺς, ἐν πέντε ἡμέραις ἐβοηθήσατε αὐτοῖς καὶ ναυσὶ καὶ πεζῇ δυνάμει, καὶ πρὶν τριάκονθ’ ἡμέρας διελθεῖν ὑποσπόνδους Θηβαίους ἀφήκατε, κύριοι τῆς Εὐβοίας γενόμενοι, καὶ τὰς τε πόλεις αὐτὰς καὶ τὰς πολιτείας ἀπέδοτε ὀρθῶς καὶ δικαίως τοῖς παρακαταθεμένοις, οὐχ ἡγούμενοι δίκαιον εἶναι τὴν ὀργὴν ἀπομνημονεύειν ἐν τῷ πιστευθῆναι (Aeschin. 3.85, transl. C. Carey).
- 75 [...] ἐκδοτον μὲν τὴν Βοιωτίαν ἅπασαν ἐποίησε Θηβαίοις, γράψας ἐν τῷ ψηφίσματι, ‘ἐάν τις ἀφιστήται πόλις ἀπὸ Θηβαίων, βοηθεῖν Ἀθηναίους Βοιωτοῖς τοῖς ἐν Θήβαις,’

τοῖς ὀνόμασι κλέπτων καὶ μεταφέρων τὰ πράγματα, ὥσπερ εἴωθεν, ὥς τοὺς Βοιωτοὺς ἔργῳ κακῶς πάσχοντας τὴν τῶν ὀνομάτων σύνθεσιν τῶν Δημοσθένους ἀγαπήσοντας, ἀλλ' οὐ μᾶλλον ἐφ' οἷς κακῶς ἐπεπόνθεσαν ἀγανακτήσοντας (Aeschin. 3.142, transl. C. Carey).

76 See Prandi 1998; Worthington 2010 on the hidden transcript of this revolt.

77 πολλοὺ δὲ φόνου γενομένου καὶ τῆς πόλεως κατὰ πάντα τόπον νεκρῶν πληρουμένης οὐκ ἦν ὅστις ἰδὼν οὐκ ἂν ἠλέησε τὰς τύχας τῶν ἀκληρούντων. καὶ γὰρ τῶν Ἑλλήνων Θεσπιεῖς καὶ Πλαταιεῖς, ἔτι δ' Ὀρχομένιοι καὶ τινες ἄλλοι τῶν ἀλλοτρίως διακειμένων πρὸς τοὺς Θηβαίους συστρατεύομενοι τῷ βασιλεῖ συνεισέπεσον εἰς τὴν πόλιν καὶ τὴν ἰδίαν ἐχθραν ἐν τοῖς τῶν ἡτυχηκότων ἀκληρήμασιν ἐναπεδείκνυντο (Diod. 17.13.5, transl. C. H. S. Oldfather). Justin (11.3.8–11) summarizing a historiographical text not sensibly later than Diodoros, concentrates on the hatred of the Phocians.

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12 Crisis as Opportunity

Intra-federal Disputes between Religion, Politics and Economy*

Elena Franchi

1. Border Disputes and the Crisis of Intra-federal Relations

The history of many Greek *koina* is marked by border conflicts between members of the same *koinon*, and scholars have long questioned the presumed and real centrality of the *koinon*'s role in managing the resolution of these conflicts and the objectives and effects that such a resolution had and/or could have had: a final pacification resulting from an ultimate resolution of conflicts lasting centuries?

This chapter proposes a shift in perspective at several levels. First, the intra-federal conflict is conceived as a moment of crisis¹ in the federal alliance where crisis is seen as an opportunity. Second, the opportunity triggered by the crisis of alliance is not interpreted as the possibility of reaching a final resolution of the conflict, but rather as the possibility of reshaping the balance of power between the different members. Third, the question arises as to whether the interest in seizing this opportunity should be ascribed only to the *koinon* itself or whether there are, in fact, other actors who may have benefitted from a resilience of the intra-federal alliance resulting from the transformation of a moment of crisis into an opportunity for adaptation. In what follows, I will analyze three cases in which it seems very likely that tensions in intra-federal relations turned out to be opportunities to reshape these same relations to the benefit of the *koinon*, especially in terms of its stability and resilience.

2. Epidauros and Corinth

It is not only the fact that intra-federal border wars clearly represent a moment of crisis in relations between members of the same *koinon* and that a decision must be

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made (i.e. that it is necessary – literally – to separate, to distinguish, to choose²). There is more to it than that: border disputes are linked to crisis far beyond the semantic level, and this despite the fact that the ancient Greeks did not use words with the root *κρίν- to indicate moments of crisis.³ In fact, the word κρίνω and related terms occur very often in inscriptions reporting arbitral decisions on border disputes. Arbiters have to κρίνειν,⁴ in some cases the judges who have to decide are called κριταί⁵ or the very dispute is called κρίσις περὶ χώρας.⁶ Where there is a crisis, decisions have to be made.

This singular (yet somehow consistent) conjunction of the semantic and lexical levels is also to be found in one of the two inscriptions⁷ of our first case study: the dispute between Epidauros and Corinth. In this dispute, the Megarians served as judges⁸ and attributed the territory to the Epidaurians.⁹ The inscription concludes with the names of the judges who delivered the verdict.¹⁰

As it is well known, Epidauros and Corinth were both members of the Achaian *koinon* in the second half of the third century BC,¹¹ and it is not by chance that the *koinon* intervened in the dispute several times: first when Epidauros joined the *koinon*, then again by appointing arbitration to a member of the *koinon*: the city of Megara.¹² What is at stake here are clearly territories and their borders, which are addressed in two independent inscriptions, both found in the Asklepieion of Epidauros (it is not clear, however, if the disputed area alluded to in the first inscription is the same as that mentioned in the second one: see below).¹³

The first inscription is usually considered a formal document relating to the entry of Epidauros into the Achaian League.¹⁴ If this is true, it must be dated to the year 243 when Epidauros (as well as Troizen and Megara) joined the Achaian League¹⁵ (while Corinth had become a member the year before).¹⁶ In the text, several issues are referred to; from line 15 onwards, one or more regions, including the Epidaurians, Achaians, Corinthians and possibly also the Argives (if Peek's restoration in l. 15 is correct)¹⁷ are mentioned. The second inscription is dated to a period from 242 to 238, based on general considerations as well as the reference to Achaian and Epidaurian magistrates.¹⁸ It refers to a dispute over Speraion and Sellas, most probably both overlooking the Saronic Gulf, maybe coinciding with the *chora* mentioned by the first inscription.¹⁹ While the river Sellas cannot be easily located, a harbour on the Saronic Gulf might be identified as part of Speraion. If this is the area described by Thucydides, it is not only characterized as *eschatia* (i.e. land integrated but still on the margins), but also as *methoria* (i.e. land beyond the *horoi* of Epidauros or between the *horoi* of Epidauros and that of another community – Corinth?):

[3] and afterwards [the Athenians] manned thirty-seven vessels in all and chased him on his passage along shore into Spiraecum, a desert Corinthian port on the edge of the Epidaurian frontier. After losing one ship out at sea, the Peloponnesians got the rest together and brought them to anchor.²⁰

Even if the reading of the manuscripts Πειραιόν (as favoured by Felix Böhle) were not to be corrected to Σπείραιον (as suggested by Georg Müller and most other scholars)²¹ and the passage in Thucydides referred to an area different from that

of the inscription, it remains remarkable that both Plinius and Ptolemy mention a promontory called Speraion in close proximity to which there were harbours;²² and even more importantly, the inscription refers to a chariot road leading there, which testifies to its significance. If the identification with today's Gulf of Korphos is correct, it represented a natural harbour that offered protection by its very conformation, was suitable for accommodating ships of various sizes, provided excellent access to the hinterland and guaranteed freshwater springs.²³

The above-mentioned elements indicate that the disputed area between Corinth and Epidauros was of strategic importance. The outcome of the dispute therefore inevitably had a significance for the political and spatial dynamics of power in the eastern Peloponnese. The second inscription records the decision over these territories given by a board of Megarian judges who had been appointed by the Achaian League. As has been noted, the Achaians chose the Megarians most likely because their geographical proximity allowed them to carry out the necessary inspections of the territory²⁴ and because of the established Megarian practice of a functional or practical neutrality.²⁵ It is not only the second reason that may have convinced the Corinthians to accept the arbitration of the Megarians despite the uneasy relations between both cities; the Achaians most likely supervised the Megarians: in both inscriptions, they seem to play a relevant role in matters concerning the disputed territories.²⁶ With regard to the role of the Achaians in the second inscription one cannot but notice that reference is made to a 'decree' by the Achaians both in a first phase, when the Achaians appointed 151 judges,²⁷ and in a second phase, when the Corinthians contested the boundary and the Achaians appointed 31 judges.²⁸

The role of the Achaians behind the Megarians seems likely to explain the outcome of the arbitration. The territory was adjudged to the Epidaurians, and the Corinthians, even if objecting to the precise details of the boundary demarcation, generally accepted the verdict. That the decision by the Megarians, which was related to the influence of the Achaians, favoured the Epidaurians seems to respond to a need for a rebalancing of power in the area. It is known, in fact, that in previous centuries the Corinthians appear to have expanded their control as far as the gates of Epidauros on several occasions. This is evidenced by the passage from Thucydides quoted above.²⁹ With regard to the problem we are analysing, it does not matter so much whether the amendment is appropriate or not. What is of interest here is not that the same disputed land as in the inscription is at stake, but that it is about borderlands between the two cities on a more general level. The supremacy of Corinth over Epidauros is then evidenced, for the earlier periods, by a passage from Herodotus recounting the affairs of Periander.³⁰

But again, there is more to it. As mentioned above, the arbitration between Epidauros and Corinth most probably took place between 242 and 238, when Argos had not yet joined the Achaian League (it entered in 229). The dispute therefore concerns intra-federal borders that are very close to the outer borders of the *koinon*, outer borders that are, however, destined to shift shortly thereafter. The favouring of Epidauros in the dispute cornered Argos, not yet a member of the league. This might make even more sense if Markellos Mitsos is right in integrating ἀργυ into Ἀργεῖοι at line 15. Boundary disputes became an opportunity for the

koinon to rebalance the powers in the eastern Peloponnese, limiting the hegemonic thrusts of cities such as Corinth and Argos and fostering the growth of cities that less threatened the centrality of the *koinon* such as Epidaurous.

3. Koroneia and Lebadeia

There are few cases of intra-Boiotian disputes for which the intervention of the *koinon* is documented. One of these is the well-known dispute between Koroneia and Lebadeia.³¹ At some time between the fourth and third centuries BC, the two cities competed for control of a “[Troph]onian (?) land” ([Ὅρια τᾶς Τροφ]ωνιάδος γᾶς) bordering an “altar of Zeus”.³² The syntax of the first three lines of the inscription suggests that the Boiotians made a decision (Βοιωτοὶ ὥριπται) in favour of the Lebadeians.³³ As Sheila Ager observes,³⁴ even if the word Κορωνεΐας is restored, it seems quite likely that Koroneia was the second party to the dispute, since the stone bearing the inscription, a round pillar, was found at Granitza, approximately 4 km southeast of Lebadeia, in the direction of Koroneia. Similar arguments can be made with reference to the altar of Trophonian Zeus given that Τροφ]ωνιάδος is a restoration, too: as far as I know, experts in Boiotian history follow Roesch³⁵ in maintaining that it is the Trophonian land which is in dispute.³⁶

Already known to Herodotus as an oracular shrine of international importance, the Trophoneion must have been a reference shrine for the Boiotians on a more regional level too since the Archaic age.³⁷ It is here that the Pan-Boiotian festival of the Basileia, established in the aftermath of the Theban victory at Leuktra (371),³⁸ took place. Several cities aspired to control the oracular sanctuary, Thebes in particular. If ποτ Τροπονίοι inscribed on a bronze tablet from Thebes that records owner, location and size of landed properties³⁹ refers to the Trophoneion, then we must admit that sometime between the late sixth and early fifth centuries BC (the tablet is dated on palaeographic grounds) an individual from Thebes owned land at the oracular sanctuary that became the subject of the dispute between Lebadeia and Koroneia a few centuries later. Unfortunately, there are no arguments to support Yannis Kalliontzis’s idea that this property should already be placed in a federal context.⁴⁰ However, the tablet could indicate the interest of Theban individuals in that area in the Archaic period. Mythical traditions document that Theban ambitions were not only long standing but also long lasting.⁴¹

On the other hand, the traditions about the construction of temples at Mantinea (of Poseidon) by Trophonios and Agamedes⁴² and a treasury of Hyrieus⁴³ (probably at Hyria)⁴⁴ testify to the interest of other Boiotian communities in the Trophonion, while the Homeric tradition that makes him the son of Erginas King of Orchomenos⁴⁵ refers to Orchomenos’s ability to control Lebadeia and the Trophoneion.⁴⁶ Lebadeia, however, must have been able to maintain control over the long term. According to Herodotus,⁴⁷ to gain access to the Trophoneion one had to be accredited to Lebadeia, while some inscriptions from the Classical and Hellenistic periods confirm the role of the city,⁴⁸ as do some allusions by Herakleides Pontikos⁴⁹ and Kallisthenes.⁵⁰ Some scholars have been led to believe that a reorganization of the sanctuary following the victory of Leuktra and the downsizing in terms of

political weight of Orchomenos is highly plausible.⁵¹ Moreover, it has been pointed out with good reason that the wording of the inscription itself suggests that the sanctuary's land is considered the prerogative of Lebadeia, as if it were equivalent to its public lands.⁵²

With regard to the later period, it should be noted that the oracle was in Lebadeia according to Strabo.⁵³ The same is true for Pausanias,⁵⁴ who repeatedly emphasizes the mythical connection between Trophonios and Lebadeia.⁵⁵ On the other hand, there are no known sources that, like our inscription, refer to claims by Koroneia. However, if we consider where the inscription was found and that Koroneia (as Lebadeia) developed into a significant urban centre with an important population,⁵⁶ claims to the Trophoneion by the latter are not surprising. Things get even more interesting, if we have a look at them from a federal perspective.

Evidence on the Boiotian *koinon* for the period to which this inscription can be dated is scarce, but there is some,⁵⁷ and Βοιωτοὶ ὄριτται in our inscription indeed suggests that this text should be included in the dossier. There is no reason to think that from the point of view of intra-regional organization the relationship between Lebadeia and Koroneia is very different from the one described in the famous passage in the *Hellenika Oxyrhynchia*,⁵⁸ where it is stated that Koroneia and Lebadeia were part of the same administrative sub-unit of the *koinon*⁵⁹ and shared the quota of federal councillors, which was divided among the cities of this district.⁶⁰ The territorial organization of the *koinon* between 446 and 387 and after 338 may have been very similar, especially if our inscription dates to a period after 280 rather than to previous decades.⁶¹ It was convenient for the *koinon* to promote agreement and a balance of power between the two. This was achieved by regulating the balance through intervention in the religious sphere. Koroneia already had control of the Itonion, from the end of the fourth (or the beginning of the third) century onwards an important federal centre of worship in honour of the goddess Athena Itonia⁶² where also, from the second century onwards at the latest, the Pamboiotia took place,⁶³ participation in which was on a federal basis.⁶⁴ To grant Koroneia control of the Trophonian land would have increased its power,⁶⁵ which, in turn, would have destabilized the balance of the *koinon*. Economic factors also come into play in this regard. We know that in Greek antiquity sanctuaries sometimes pertained to several levels at the same time (civic, federal, Panhellenic)⁶⁶ and that they attracted a lot of visitors.⁶⁷ Favouring the power of one city and its control over a sanctuary to the detriment of the other implies favouring her economic growth. And the evidence suggests indeed that the Trophoneion was a pole of attraction:⁶⁸ when the *koinon* decided where to draw the border line (Βοιωτοὶ ὄριτται) and thus who to assign control to, it made a decision (κρίνειν – κρίσις) that had relevant economic implications.

4. Melitaia and Pereia

Our third case refers to the many local conflicts in which the city of Melitaia in Thessaly was involved and whose management was entrusted to the Aitolian *koinon*,⁶⁹ which at the time was able to control a large part of Central Greece and

therefore also Achaia Phthiotis⁷⁰ (a region that had already experienced phases of autonomy from the Thessalians in the past).⁷¹ Here again we are dealing with a crisis in federal relations, and this crisis manifests itself in a conflict in which judges are called upon to decide (ἐκρίναν). The conflict involved Melitaia and Pereia, whose relations probably deteriorated at some point and were regulated by the *koinon*: its provisions are preserved in an inscription dated to the years 213–212 BC.⁷²

It seems clear that the crisis was an opportunity for the *koinon* to recalibrate the balance of power between its members on two different levels: the one pertaining to the relationship between the different cities in Achaia Phthiotis, the other to the specific relationship between Melitaia and Pereia.

As for the first level, it has already been noted that Melitaia had previously been involved in conflicts with other centres in the region and that the *koinon* took into account the outcome of the resolution of these conflicts. In these resolutions, undertaken by others (the Aitolians did not yet control the region), Melitaia was favoured; in the case of the conflict with Pereia, the *koinon* favoured the latter to the disadvantage of Melitaia, as if to redress the balance.⁷³ And so while judges from Kassandreia had endorsed Melitaia over Peuma in the seventies or the sixties of the third century BC⁷⁴ and a certain Pyllos (or Pyrrhos according to Berard's correction) again had favoured Melitaia over Narthakion in a dispute going back to the beginning of the third century BC (depending on the correction),⁷⁵ in the dispute with Pereia, the *koinon* supported the latter: the typology of provisions seems to imply specific demands of Pereia that the *koinon* met by looking into the local institutional and economic grammar, and this leads us to the second level.

Melitaia and Pereia were united by a *sympoliteia*, which represented at that stage one of the many types of sub-units of the Aitolian *koinon* but probably predated the *koinon*'s control of the area (Ager 1996). The implications of the *sympoliteia* between Melitaia and Pereia for the structure of the *koinon* are first and foremost political and are addressed in the inscription: they shared the number of councillors to be sent to the council. However, there are also economic implications: Melitaia and Pereia shared federal taxes. When there were disagreements between the two cities (which may have led to the secession of one of them, Pereia, from the *sympoliteia*), the *koinon* had to intervene on several levels: regulating the number of council members and the amount of federal contributions that each should send, separately in the event of secession, to the federal council and defining the territorial boundaries, which are then disputed. In short, a genuine case of border management, not only because the borders between Melitaia and Pereia are at stake, but also because the entire region constituted the outer border area of the Aitolian *koinon* in this period.

So far scholarship has been investigating this dispute from a *koino*-centric, top-down perspective, to deduce the number of councillors in the *koinon*'s federal council or the mechanism for defining the taxes that went into the centrally managed finances.⁷⁶ If we reverse the perspective, from top-down to bottom-up, and delve into the area where the dispute took place and into its specific economic

landscape, we can grasp an important aspect. In fact, in lines 12–16 of the inscription reference is made to the renting of common lands (located in Karandai and Phyladon) whose profit was to be divided between the two cities united in the *sympoliteia*. The *koinon* must also intervene in this regard: it required the Melitaeis, as long as the Pereis remained politically united with them (πολιτευόντων Πηρέων μετὰ Μελιταιέων),⁷⁷ not to sell these common lands, but rather to continue to rent them. It is commonly agreed that each of the common lands originally belonged to a different community⁷⁸ and that they had been united into a single complex of land called *damosia* common to both after the *sympoliteia*-agreement. Clearly, the prohibition to sell such public lots was intended to allow the city that originally occupied a part of them, whichever city it was, to regain possession of it in the event of division. Even more interestingly, at closer look the prohibition is mainly addressed to Melitaia, as political authority for the sale (or lease) of public lands, to protect Pereia, which is related as a subordinate community to Melitaia (πολιτευόντων μετὰ Μελιταιέων). In its provisions, the *koinon* is careful not to over-advantage Melitaia, which already had an advantage in the region in the past, and rather to protect Pereia. The crisis between the two offered a rare chance to restore equilibrium in a region where control remained uncertain, and to secure its stability. In all this, the regulation of the *koinon*'s internal and external borders played a major role.

5. Crisis and Its Alliance-Maintaining Potential

The relationships between Epidauros and Corinth, between Koroneia and Lebadeia and between Melitea and Pereia went into crisis. As in the acute moment of an illness, decisions had to be made. The wrong decision could lead to the decline of the *koinon* they were part of, in the sense that it could destabilize it. The right one could, instead, enhance its stability; it had the potential to adjust the crisis to the extent of enhancing the resilience of the alliance that resulted from resolving the crisis. This resilience seems to have been based above all on a balance of power. Corinth had expanded in the past to the detriment of Epidauros, so the Achaeans needed to restrain Corinth. Koroneia already controlled the Itonion, so the Boiotians left the Trophoneion to Lebadeia. Melitaia had already been favoured in some past disputes, her rights needed to be limited now. Beyond that, an economic balance had to be ensured as well. Common land could not be sold for Melitaia's profit. Both Melitaia and Pereia needed to continue to be able to profit from the lease of those same lands. If Pereia was not annulled, Melitaia did not grow too large. The crisis between the two became an opportunity to stabilize an area that for the Aitolians was, in its entirety, a frontier area. Manipulating the balance of powers by manipulating borders may have been effective: a mechanism that worked if that boundary definition was not definitive. A dynamic boundary definition that reflected a balance of power that was temporary, suitable for certain historical circumstances but not necessarily for others, represented an opportunity for the *koinon* and its members to face crises, overcome them and be resilient in the future.

Notes

- 1 As already pointed out by many scholars, *crisis* was originally understood as an exacerbated, life-threatening, almost clinical pattern that will develop either for the better (recovery) or for the worse (death) in the immediate aftermath: for this reason, the moment of decision and of judgement ending a conflict is originally inherent in the term (κρίνω means *to separate, to distinguish, to judge, to decide*; κρίνομαι *to compete, to argue, to fight, to decide* – also and often with reference to battles, athletic competitions or trials, where a decision is taken to settle a dispute and thus restore order; see Goeze and Strobel 2012: 511; Kōiv 2023: 43; Piepenbrink 2020; Fink and Rollinger 2023a: 2–4, 7 with literature). While the ancients did not use the term to refer to political or social crises, for which they had a different and diverse vocabulary (Kōiv 2023: 43; Goeze and Strobel 2012), modern scholars did, and many remarks concerned the ways in which, from a historical point of view, a crisis can be overcome through a reconfiguration (more than a restoration) of the system, especially in those parts that are problematic, precisely in crisis (Liebeschütz 2007: 16; Fink and Rollinger 2023b: 2–4). This is also the perspective of this chapter, which starts from a conception of crisis as a moment of necessary adaptation and change, and not from that of a crisis without an alternative (a notion elaborated by Meier 1966 in reference to the fall of the Roman republic) (cf. in this regard the remarks of Jehne 2006: 8 and the studies collected in Hölkeskamp 2009). See also Ganter, Introduction to this volume, with discussion and further literature.
- 2 See above, n. 1.
- 3 Cf. Kōiv 2023; Colozzi 2015 and above, n. 1.
- 4 Cf. e.g. *IvO* 52 l. 63.
- 5 Cf. e.g. *IG* IX.2 521 ll. 9–10 and, again, *IvO* 52, *passim*. See Rousset 1994: 105–6; Matijašić 2022: 401.
- 6 Cf. again *IvO* 52.
- 7 *IGIV*.1² 71: see below, n. 13.
- 8 ἐκρίναν τοὶ Μεγαρεῖς, l. 2.
- 9 κρίνάν[τω]ν Ἐπιδαυρίων εἶμεν τὰν χώραν, ll. 6–7.
- 10 δικασ[ταὶ τ]οὶ κρίναντες τοῖδε, ll. 31–2; cf. also l. 19.
- 11 See below and n. 15.
- 12 See below and n. 15.
- 13 *IGIV*.1² 70, 71; Ager 1996, nr. 38, I; II; Harter-Uibopuu 1998, nr. 3; Magnetto 1997, nr. 36, all with further evidence and previous literature. See also Harter-Uibopuu 2014: 5–6; Economou 2020: 123–4, 134–5.
- 14 Niccolini 1914: 34; Mitsos 1937: 713; *StV* III 489; *BE* 1940, nr. 53 (vs. Hiller von Gaertringen 1925–6, nr. 7); see Harter-Uibopuu 1998: 17 and 21 with literature and discussion.
- 15 Plut. *Arat.* 24.3; Paus. 2.8.5, 7.7 (as well as Polyb. 2.43.5–6 with regard to Megara) with Magnetto 1997: 216 and 220, n. 4. See also Will 1966: 329–33; Urban 1979: 192–3 (but also 51); Bastini 1987: 20.
- 16 Plut. *Arat.* 21.2; 23.1–4 with Walbank ad Polyb. 2.43.4 and 1933, 45–7, 168, 1957, 236; Pédech 1964: 458; Urban 1979: 48–54.
- 17 Ἀργεῖοι supplementing ἀργ. The restoration is accepted by Magnetto 1997.
- 18 Some precision in dating can be achieved based on general considerations and the indication of the *strategos* Aigialeus in the first line of the second inscription. As has been rightly noted, it is (a) highly probable that the arbitration was rendered after Epidaurus, Corinth and Megara had joined the league (243, see above) and (b) unlikely to have taken place in the period when Megara was part of the Boiotian League (224–192: cf. Polyb. 20.6.8 with Hennig 1994: 327–9 including further reading). What is more, the epigraphic features suggest a date before 192 (Magnetto 1997: 216), and Aigialeus's name is absent from the list of known *stratego*i for the years 234 to 224 (Sonne 1888: 30–2, amending what was proposed by Droysen 1877, 32–79). Therefore, the arbitration

- must be placed between 243 and 234. Given that the *strategos* of the years 242/1, 240/39 and 238/7 is unknown (Dioetas's strategy in 236/5 is fairly certain: Beloch 1927: 434; Niccolini 1914), it is to these years that the arbitration should be placed. It is possible, but not necessary, that it is close to the year of the entry into the league of those involved in the dispute. See Ager 1996: 116; Magnetto 1997: 217, and, more recently, Massinelli forthcoming b.
- 19 1.15; Harter-Uibopuu 1998: 21 (vs. Daverio Rocchi 1988: 157–61).
- 20 ἀλλ' ὕστερον ἄλλας προσπληρώσαντες ἐς ἑπτὰ καὶ τριάκοντα παραπλέοντας αὐτοὺς καταδιώκουσιν ἐς Σπείραιον (Πειραιὸν MSS, corr. Müller) τῆς Κορινθίας: ἔστι δὲ λιμὴν ἐρῆμος καὶ ἔσχατος πρὸς τὰ μεθόρια τῆς Ἐπιδαυρίας. καὶ μίαν μὲν ναῦν ἀπολλύασι μετέωρον οἱ Πελοποννήσιοι, τὰς δὲ ἄλλας ξυναγαγόντες ὁρμίζουσιν (Thuc. 8.10.3, transl. J. M. Dent and E. P. Dutton).
- 21 Bölte 1929; Magnetto 1997, nr. 28 (p. 223).
- 22 Plin. *N.H.* 4.18; Ptol. *Geog.* 3.16.12–13.
- 23 Harter-Uibopuu 1998: 22.
- 24 Ager 1996: 117; Harter-Uibopuu 1998: 19.
- 25 Smith 2018: 211.
- 26 ll. 16 and 19 in the first inscription; ll. 4 and 92 Πειραιὸν MSS, corr. Müller 10 in the second one.
- 27 ll. 4–5: κατὰ τὸν αἶνον τὸν τῶν Ἀ[χαί]ων.
- 28 ll. 9–10: κα[τὰ] τὸν αἶνον τὸν τῶν Ἀχαιῶν; see Massinelli forthcoming a.
- 29 Thuc. 8.10.3.
- 30 Hdt. 3.52.7.
- 31 The only other document that attests the intervention of the Boiotian *koinon* is *IG VII* 2792, the dispute between Akraipheia and Kopai.
- 32 ἐπὶ τῷ βωμῷ τῷ Δι[ὸς] (perhaps the oracular shrine of the god/hero Trophonios). See Vollgraff 1902: 570; Wilhelm 1911: 13–19 nr. III; *SEG* 23.297 (= 44.412), cf. Schachter 1981–1994, 3: 106–8 and n. 3 on p. 108; Ager 1996: nr. 16; Magnetto 1997, nr. 15; Bonnechere 2003: 25. On the cultic context, see more generally Kanellopoulos and Partida 2021, esp. 384.
- 33 Roesch 1965: 61
- 34 1996: 70.
- 35 Roesch 1965: 61–2 (vs. Pappadakis 1916: 259, n.1); Sartre 1979: 216 n. 26; Roesch 1982: 398.
- 36 Followed by Schachter 1981–1994, 3: 78.
- 37 Hdt. 1.46.
- 38 Cf. Schachter 1981–1994, 3: 111–12; Kühr 2006: 284.
- 39 *SEG* 60.507.
- 40 Matthaiou 2014: 218–20; Kalliontzis's interpretation would support a rather early existence of the *koinon*; for discussion and literature, see van Wijk 2017: 191–2; Beck 2025: 36–8.
- 41 Cf. e.g. Hes. fr. 157 Most; *schol.* Aristoph. *nub.* 508 with comments by Kühr 2006: 278–9.
- 42 Paus. 8.10.2.
- 43 Paus. 9.37.5–6; Bonnechere 2003: 75.
- 44 Located near Euripos southeast of Aulis, the city Hyria is already mentioned in Hom. *Il.* 2.496. Cf. Kühr 2006: 278–9; Moggi and Osanna 2010 ad l. [p. 423].
- 45 Hom. *h.* 3.295–7; cf. also Paus. 9.37.4 with Bonnechere 2003: 71.
- 46 Schachter 1981–1994, 3: 75 and n. 7; Kühr 2006: 278, n. 23 and 297.
- 47 Hdt. 8.134.
- 48 *IGVII* 3055 (mid-fourth century), 3086, 3087 (mid-third century) with commentary by Bonnechere 2003: 27 with nr. 2 and 3.
- 49 Fr. 155 Wehrli.

- 50 (*FGrH* 124 F 11 [τὸ δὲ Τροφώνιον ἐν Λεβαδείᾳ]; cf. also 22a); Schachter 1981–1994, 3: 77 n. 2. Nafissi 1995, 162.
- 51 Schachter 1981–1994, 3: 77. See, most recently, Tufano 2024: 89 with further sources and literature.
- 52 See Müller et al. 2023: 574.
- 53 Str. 9.2.38.
- 54 Paus. 1.34.2: Lebadeia dedicated to Trophonios.
- 55 Paus. 4.16.7: ἐς τὸ ἄδυτον ἱερὸν τοῦ Τροφωνίου τὸ ἐν Λεβαδείᾳ; 9.37.4. See Pirenne-Delforge 2008: 325–31; Moggi and Osanna ad l. (p. 423).
- 56 Fossey 1988: 322; Hansen 2004: 444.
- 57 See esp. *StV* III 463 (cf. Müller 2011: 268; Scharff 2023: 178 and 184 with literature); *FD* III 3.102 with Müller 2021: 20; *IG* VII 2716, 2723, 2724, 2724a (all pre-280, although it is not clear how much earlier); 2724b (t.p.q. 272: Müller 2011: 268); *CID* IV 47; and Pausanias's account on the festival of Daidala (9.3.5–8 with Knoepfler 2001: 347) and their organization on a federal principle (by *tele*): “The combined evidence from Pausanias and the inscriptions implies that the Boiotian League operated on seven subdivisions, or federal *telē*” (Beck and Ganter 2015: 153). Cf. Busolt and Swoboda 1920–1926: 1432–42; Roesch 1965: esp. 282–411; Larsen 1968: 178–80; Étienne and Knoepfler 1976: 263–350; Gullath 1982: 49–55; Buck 1993; Corsten 1999: 38–47; Müller 2011: 275–6; Beck and Ganter 2015: 152–6; Müller 2020: esp. 62–4.
- 58 Cf. *SEG* 3.354; Lauffer 1976: nr. 8 with Roesch 1979: 247; *IG* VII 2723, 2724, 2724a, 2724b; *SEG* 15.282 with Larsen 1968: 179; Corsten 1999: 42–3; Müller 2011: 272.
- 59 *Hell. Oxy.* 19.3.
- 60 Müller et al. 2023: 591.
- 61 See Beck 1997: 92–3; Corsten 1999: 27–47 (and 39 on the similarity with the districts of the period 312–270 ca); Cartledge 2000; Müller 2011: esp. 262, 268; Beck and Ganter 2015: 143; Kalliontzis 2020.
- 62 Schachter 1981–1994, 1: 117–27, esp. 123, and, most recently, Tufano 2024: 95 with literature. See esp. *IG* IX.1² 170 recording a treaty among the Boiotians, Aitolians and Phokians. In the inscription, dating to the end of the fourth century or the beginning of the third century BC, it is established that copies should be placed in sanctuaries, and in the case of the Boiotians these are the sanctuaries of Onchestos, Alalkomeneion and Koroneia (ll. 4–6).
- 63 Schachter 1981–1994, 1: 123; Kühr 2006: 286 commenting on Pol. 4.3.5. See also Str. 9.2.27–8; Plut. *Narr. Am.* 4. Quite how far back the festival stretched is difficult to determine, though a fragment of Pind. (fr. 94b.41–9 S–M) refers to the “celebrated victories with swift-footed horses [...] by the famed shrine of Itonia”.
- 64 *IG* VII 1764, esp. l. 8 (if the integration is to be considered correct), 2871 l. 17; *SEG* 3.354 with comment by Roesch 1965: 107.
- 65 On the relationship between city and territory of a sanctuary on the margins see, most recently, McNerney 2006.
- 66 Cf. e.g. McNerney 2006: 53; Müller 2020: esp. 63, 65, both with previous literature.
- 67 The “religious economy of sanctuaries”: cf. esp. Dignas 2002.
- 68 Roesch 1965: 63 commenting on *IG* VII 3055; Str. 9.2.38; Paus. 9.37.4–6; 39, 5–14.
- 69 Larsen 1968: 209–10.
- 70 Cf. *IG* XI.4 643 and *SIG*³ 444/5, n. 10 on a possible Melitaian Aitolian *hieromnemon* supporting a Melitaian membership around 260/59 (but note Klaffenbach's scepticism: *IG* IX.1², XXI; a date around the 30s seems more safe: see Ager 1989: 110 with literature). See Flacelière 1937: 198–200; Hammond and Walbank 1988: 289; Piccirilli 1973, nr. 35; 51; Ager 1996, nr. 30, 32, 55, 56; Magnetto 1997, nr. 29; 31; 54; 55 with sources and bibliography. On the Aitolian control of that part of Thessaly, see most recently Grainger 1999: 100–12; Scholten 2000: 164–70; Helly 1995: 263, 2001: 245–8, 254–6, 2009 *passim* and fig. 3 on p. 368; Haagsma et al. 2019: 300–1; Aston 2024: 343.

- 71 Hdt. 6.72 with comment by Sordi 1958: 101–3; Diod. 15.80.6 (on Alexander the tyrant) with the comment of Westlake 1935: 151–2; Dem. or. 18.211 with comment of Westlake 1935: 192–3 and 211 (on Philip II).
- 72 IG IX.1² 188 + IG IX 2 add. p. XI 205 III B. The first inscription is the copy found in modern Avaritza, on the site of ancient Melitaia, and is preserved in a less fragmentary form; the second is the copy found in Delphi. Cf. Ager 1996, nr. 57; Magnetto 1997, nr. 55.
- 73 As already suggested by Magnetto 1997: 336 and 346.
- 74 FD III 4, 351 (= IG IX 2 add. p. XI 205 II). Cf. Ager 1989: 109; 1996, nr. 30; Magnetto 1997, nr. 29.
- 75 IG IX 2, 89 (Ager 1996, nr. 32; Magnetto 1997, nr. 31). The evidence on the outcome of the dispute with Xyniai in the previous year (214 BC), on the other hand, is unclear and therefore not conclusive; if it was favourable to Melitaia, as seems to be indicated (Ager 1989: 111; Magnetto 1997: 336), this would further support the thesis presented here.
- 76 See, e.g., Ager 1996; Magnetto 1997; Lasagni 2019: 141–7.
- 77 Il. 14–15.
- 78 The lands near Phyladon most probably belonged to Pereia: FD III 4.351 Il. 16–38.

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13 Aitolian Resilience in the Lamian War and Its Propagandistic Afterlife

An Invitation to Join the League*

Sebastian Scharff

1. Introduction

Much has been said about the brutal consequences the Lamian War (322–321 BC) had for the city of Athens, including the overthrow of democracy and the suicide of Demosthenes,¹ the loss of Samos and economic decline,² the destruction of the Athenian fleet and the installation of a Macedonian garrison in Piraeus;³ in short, the end of the city's independent history as we know it.⁴ Initiated by a Greek coalition in an attempt to end Macedonian hegemony over Greece, the war occurred at an epochal turning point after the death of Alexander III and can be seen as a prime example of a military conflict arising in the situation of a major political crisis.

However, this crisis has mainly been studied from the point of view of the Athenians, whilst the way the Aitolians, Athens's most important ally in the war, emerged from the military confrontation with Macedon has not received the same scholarly attention.⁵ By taking the perspective of the Aitolians, this chapter aims at unveiling the creative potential inherent in a crisis constellation that developed at a watershed moment of Greek history. It argues that Aitolian resilience based on an innovative strategy of alliance and military defence was a key factor for the survival of the league during the turmoil caused by the Wars of the Successors.

2. The Aitolians and the Lamian War

The Aitolian seizure of the city of Oiniadai in 330 BC represents the necessary starting point from which every study of the Aitolian role in the Lamian War must begin.⁶ During Agis's revolt, the Aitolians had remained quiet and the fact that Antipatros did not act after the league took Oiniadai can be seen as an indication

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that the city was offered as a reward for their behaviour.⁷ According to Plutarch, Alexander was not thrilled by the concession made by his “*strategos* of Europe” and threatened to come to Aitolia himself to take revenge.⁸ Whether he immediately understood the Aitolians’ attack as opposing to the text of the Greek alliance at Corinth,⁹ or if his anger actually resulted from a later period, is hard to tell. What is clear, though, is that the Aitolians had managed to make the most powerful ruler of the time their enemy.

The conflict arose, when Alexander issued the Exiles’ Decree in 324 BC.¹⁰ Whether or not originally intended to destroy the remaining opposition in Greece,¹¹ the decree clearly was an effective means to keep the Greek cities busy among themselves. For the Aitolians, the decree meant that they had to restore the Oiniadai exiles, which was the reason why the league resisted.¹² Diodoros emphasizes that the Athenians faced a similar situation on Samos,¹³ that way suggesting to the reader that both states became natural allies.¹⁴ The time for a formal alliance should indeed come quickly, when Alexander died unexpectedly in early June 323 BC.¹⁵ The Athenians saw their chance to expel Macedonian power from Greece, put themselves at the head of a Greek coalition that included the Aitolians as its strongest partner and declared war.¹⁶

However, in spite of some initial success under the leadership of the Athenian general Leosthenes who managed to besiege Antipatros in Lamia, the Greek coalition proved to be quite the opposite of a resilient alliance. The Aitolians, who had been the first to join the coalition, were also the first to withdraw their contingent. They returned home “because of some national business”¹⁷ at the beginning of the siege of Lamia, a decision that, in retrospect, turned out to be a fortunate one, as they were not present when the Greek coalition was decisively defeated in the battle of Krannon in September 322 BC.¹⁸ As a consequence, the installation of new, Macedonian-friendly regimes in Athens and other cities followed and the Aitolians remained as the last free member of the alliance.¹⁹ As another consequence, a Macedonian army of about 32,500 men led by Antipatros and Krateros invaded Aitolia. Although the Aitolians could only muster a much smaller number of soldiers, it became a “difficult and murderous campaign”²⁰ for the Macedonians because of the effectiveness of the Aitolian defense strategy that made best use of their lightly armed troops.²¹ Yet the end of the campaign came for another reason: inner-Macedonian struggle made Antipatros and Krateros leave Aitolia to fight Perdikkas in the upcoming First War of the Successors.²² Thus what ultimately saved the Aitolians were the overall political constellation and their own relative insignificance for the larger events.²³

This unexpected last-minute rescue gave the Aitolians the chance to look for new allies. Although they had just concluded a peace treaty with Antipatros,²⁴ it is not surprising that they expected him to return.²⁵ Thus, when they approached Perdikkas, they were probably in search of a new ally, but they also displayed the skilful strategy of a middle power, which consisted of playing the Macedonian generals off against each other. With Antipatros in Asia Minor, the Aitolians went a step further, united with the remaining free Thessalians and started a campaign

to Lokris in spring 321 BC. Following an initial victory over Antipatros's general Polykles, the Aitolian and Thessalian forces split, after the Akarnanians had invaded Aitolia. The Aitolians succeeded in expelling the Akarnanians, but the Thessalians were defeated by Polyperchon.²⁶ Again the Aitolians were saved by the fact that the Wars of the Successors required the attention of the Macedonian generals. That way the Aitolians emerged as a winner out of the Lamian War, although their coalition had been defeated militarily.

For the next twenty years, the Aitolians aimed at further establishing their position as a regional power and did their best not to be drawn into the Wars of the Successors.²⁷ This does not mean, however, that they stayed 'neutral'.²⁸ We find the Aitolians on friendly terms with Polyperchon in 316,²⁹ 315³⁰ and 310 BC,³¹ see them supporting Antigonos in 313³² and concluding alliances with Antigonos in 312 and Demetrios in 303 BC.³³ Active diplomacy supported by military actions helped the league strengthen its position in those years.³⁴ However, still on the radar of the political claims of Macedonian warlords, the league gained a new powerful enemy in Kassandros, who had inherited the unfulfilled task of conquering Aitolia from his father, Antipatros. In the autumn of 315 BC, the Aitolians guarded the pass at Thermopylai against Kassandros,³⁵ but the major military events of the period were yet to come, when Kassandros conducted campaigns in Aitolia in 314 and 313 BC, respectively.³⁶ Seeing the Aitolians involved in a "border war" (πόλεμος ὁμορος, *polemos omoros*)³⁷ with the Akarnanians, Kassandros supported the enemies of the Aitolians by enlarging three Akarnanian cities and leaving some Macedonian troops in the region.³⁸ At this point, the Aitolian restraint came to an end, as regional supremacy was their main objective. The moment Kassandros had departed the Aitolians started besieging Agrinion and took the city by deceit.³⁹ For the Aitolians themselves it became dramatic one year later, when their land was plundered and their army defeated by Philip. They responded by the tried-and-tested tactics of seeking shelter in the mountains.⁴⁰

After that, we do not hear much of the Aitolians until the turn of the century. With military resilience and skillful diplomacy, they survived the turmoil of the Wars of the Successors and became ready to start into a new phase of their existence. In this new phase, proven strategies continued to be applied. I have already noted elsewhere that the rise (and fall) of the league in the third century is marked by important treaties.⁴¹ These interstate agreements represent the continuation of skillful Aitolian diplomacy in this period.

Other important lessons could be learnt in the field of warfare: the first one was that resilience paid off. The alliance had withstood several invasions and was stronger than ever. The second lesson was to realize that military strategy must be adapted to geographical conditions. Occupying the passes, retreating to areas that are difficult to access, waiting for a change in the overall political circumstances, all these were necessary strategies to succeed. And the Aitolians made good use of them in the first half of the third century BC again.⁴² Around 301 BC, they took control of Parnassos, including Delphi, defended their position against Demetrios in 289–287 BC and later hold it against Areus I in 281 BC. Being in

control over the crucial pass at Thermopylai, the Aitolians were even able to fend off the Galatians in 279 BC, a victory which is told by Pausanias as a masterpiece of Aitolian resilience.⁴³

The Aitolians celebrated their success by large dedicatory monuments and the emission of impressive coin issues depicting Aitolos holding a spear and a sword and seated on a pile of Celtic *and* Macedonian shields, which rest on a Celtic *karynx*.⁴⁴ The message is clear: the Aitolians had survived Macedonian attacks and were able to defeat even the most terrifying barbarian opponents.

3. Resilience in Many Forms: The Reasons for the Survival of the League during and after the Lamian War

But what role did resilience (of alliance) play in all of this? I will address this question in what follows by discussing the reasons for the survival and later rise of the league. It is important to note that Diodoros does not give a mono-causal explanation. The passage where he is most explicit about this regards the campaign of 322 BC and reads as follows:

Antipatros and Krateros coming to Aitolia and finding that the *cities* which were easy to capture were *deserted*, moved against the *men who had withdrawn into the difficult regions*. At first, then, the Macedonians, violently attacking *positions that were strongly fortified and in broken terrain*, lost many of their soldiers; for *the hardihood of the Aitolians joined with the strength of their positions* easily turned back men who rushed headlong into dangers beyond reach of succour. Afterward, however, [...] the Aitolians were brought into the greatest dangers; [...]. When they were already giving up hope of salvation, *relief* from their troubles *appeared of its own accord, just as if one of the gods had been moved to pity by their high courage*. For Antigonos, he who had fled from Asia, joined Antipatros and told him the whole plot of Perdikkas, and that Perdikkas [...] would come at once with his army to Macedonia as king and deprive Antipatros of the supreme command.⁴⁵

In this short passage, Diodoros names four different explanations for the question of how the Aitolians survived the Macedonian attack. In the order in which they appear the explanations include (1) the military defence strategy of the Aitolians (“cities [...] deserted”; “positions that were strongly fortified”), which made good use of (2) the difficult terrain (“withdrawn into the difficult regions”; “broken terrain”),⁴⁶ (3) their bravery and endurance (“the hardihood of the Aitolians”; “their high courage”), and (4) the overall political constellation of the time, that is simple luck (“relief [...] appeared of its own accord”). However, none of these reasons is considered to be exclusively valid. Instead, the explanations are sometimes explicitly linked (“the hardihood of the Aitolians joined with the strength of their positions”). What emerges is a well-balanced report that avoids simplistic explanations.⁴⁷ And yet, one reason is given priority at the end of the passage: the virtue attributed to the Aitolians above all others is their ability to resist. Diodoros

mentions this ability even twice. By using the terms *τόλμα* (*tolma*, “bodily hardihood”) and *εὐψυχία* (*eupsychia*, “good courage”), he refers to different aspects and emphasizes both, the Aitolians’ physical and mental resilience,⁴⁸ which also appears as the last explanation in the passage’s climax-like argumentation structure. And finally, the Aitolians’ luck with the overall political situation of the time is presented as a kind of divine reward for their resilient behaviour. Taken as a whole, the passage constitutes a textbook example of a resilience narrative.⁴⁹

However, the conclusion that the essence of the episode would merely be a literary *topos* with little historical value is not justified. What Diodorus presents here is the result of an in-depth historical analysis, which probably goes back essentially to Hieronymos of Kardia.⁵⁰ The description of the guerrilla-style tactics of the Aitolians is plausible and coherent in itself. Consequently, resilience based on an innovative military strategy that made good use of local geography could indeed be regarded as a key factor for the Aitolians to withstand the Macedonian campaigns; and there can be no doubt that this resilience also included the aspect of cohesion of the federation.⁵¹ From the events following the battle of Krannon, the Aitolians had learnt that the war was lost in the moment the Thessalian poleis started negotiating peace treaties city by city.

Beyond the Macedonian campaigns, however, Aitolian resilience was based on different strategies and focused on other fields of activity that helped the league stand their ground, including, above all, a skillful diplomacy.⁵² According to Doron Mendels, the main element of this diplomacy was to keep the head down and to not attract any attention, a strategy he labelled as “the art of low profile politics”.⁵³ Given the political instability of the time, this was an obvious choice. However, although the Aitolians were efficient diplomats and acted cautiously, it is not so clear whether this really was all planning and calculation,⁵⁴ as Mendels suggests. Rather, it should be emphasized that a belligerent age, characterized by the frequent change of alliance,⁵⁵ required flexible ad hoc solutions to the ever-changing diplomatic and military challenges of the day.⁵⁶

As we have seen, the Aitolians showed a remarkable military and political resistance to external Macedonian pressure, but what about the factors that held the league together? Especially one aspect must have gained particular importance with regard to the league’s resilience of alliance. As convincingly argued by Peter Funke, an “adroit integration policy”⁵⁷ contributed to the attractiveness of the league and set the expansion of the third century BC on a solid foundation.⁵⁸ According to Funke, this policy was based on the way newly acquired territories were integrated into the league. As so-called *tele* (subunits of the league), formerly non-Aitolian tribes and *koina*, such as the West and East Lokrians, Dorians or Oitaian, were able to maintain their original ethnic identity, in fact so much that the former Central Greek *koina* were easily resurrected later and swiftly acted independently after 168 BC, although they had been part of the Aitolian League for a long time before that.⁵⁹

Even if this theory cannot yet be regarded as proven due to the lack of a more comprehensive state of the evidence, it must nevertheless be noted that it is fully compatible with the surviving numismatic and epigraphical sources. The only *tele*

that we know of are the *Lokrikon* and *Stratikon telos*, which both do not belong to the Aitolian heartland but to the areas acquired during the expansion of the league in the third century BC.⁶⁰ What is more, the Aitolian bronze coinage, that, unlike the league's gold and silver coins,⁶¹ does not bear the legend ΑΙΤΩΛΩΝ, but the reference to a local mint, points in the same direction: now dated to the third century BC,⁶² these coins were not minted in the core area of the league; rather, they stem from Lokrian poleis, a Phokian city and the territory of the central Greek *ethne* of the Ainianes and Oitaianes.⁶³ Since the areas for which *tele* are attested and the area of origin of the bronze coinage are identical, it is a fair assumption that "the right to mint local bronze coins was one of the privileges granted by the Aitolians to the newly admitted, originally non-Aitolian members of the league".⁶⁴ Thus, the institutional organization of the *koinon* probably served a policy of integration and fostered the resilience of alliance in the Aitolian *koinon*.

Various internal and external factors came together and enabled the rise of the Aitolian League after the Lamian War. Most prominently among these factors figured Aitolian resilience as the physical and mental basis for a successful military and diplomatic defence strategy against Macedonian claims. During the expansion of the league another form of resilience gained importance: the resilience of the Aitolian federation based on a policy of integration. No doubt, federalism had become a survival strategy in a world dominated by mighty kings and warlords.⁶⁵

4. Commemorating the War

Thus, Aitolian resilience could indeed be considered a key factor for the later rise of the league. What remains to be asked is how Aitolian resistance against Macedonian claims was commemorated, especially during the heyday of the league's power in the third century BC. What role did the conflict play, for instance, in comparison to the victory over the Celts?

According to a passage from Justin's epitome of Pompeius Trogus, which probably contains a later reflex of Aitolian self-presentation of the time,⁶⁶ there were two main events of Aitolian probation in war: their resistance against the Macedonians and their victory over the Celts.⁶⁷ The passage which includes the alleged Aitolian response to a Roman demand to withdraw from Akarnania reads as follows:

They [sc. the Aitolians] then desired them [sc. the Romans] to remember who they were that threatened, and whom they threatened. That the Romans had not been able to defend their city against the Gauls; and, when it was taken, had recovered it, not by the sword, but with gold; but that when that people entered Greece, in considerably greater numbers, they themselves had utterly destroyed them, not only without the assistance of any foreign power, but without even calling into action the whole of their own force [...]; while Italy, on the other hand, when the Romans were still trembling at the recent burning of their city, was almost entirely occupied by the Gauls. [...] that they [sc. the Aitolians] were the only nation who had always despised

the Macedonians, even when flourishing in possession of the empire of the world; who had felt no dread of king Philip, and who had spurned the edicts of Alexander the Great, after he had conquered the Persians and Indians, and when all trembled at his name. That they therefore advised the Romans to be content with their present fortune and not provoke the arms by which they knew that the Gauls had been cut to pieces, and the Macedonians set at nought.⁶⁸

The victory over the Celts takes center stage in the passage and is dealt with in more detail than the resistance against the Macedonians. However, this does not mean that it had always been of greater importance for the Aitolian self-presentation. The Aitolians were responding to Roman claims here,⁶⁹ and it was much easier for them to demonstrate their superiority with the Celts as a point of comparison. The defeat against the tribe of the Senones who had conquered Rome in the first quarter of the fourth century BC represented one of the most traumatic military disasters in the history of the city. In contrast, the Aitolians had good reason to be proud of their victory over the Celts. From an Aitolian perspective, the point of comparison was an obvious choice,⁷⁰ and the juxtaposition would not have worked equally well with regard to the Macedonians as a point of comparison: everybody knew by the time Pompeius Trogus was writing that Rome's confrontation with the Macedonian kings had resulted in a smashing success of the Roman weapons. However, one aspect of the Aitolian self-portrayal regarding the anti-Macedonian resistance is striking. It is important to note that the Aitolians are presented as "the only nation (*solos*) who had always despised the Macedonians".⁷¹ In order to stress the extraordinary character of the deed, the emphasis is on the Aitolians having achieved it all by themselves.⁷²

A similar motif, including a special reference to the Lamian War, is to be found in the oration of Chlaineas the Aitolian, as it has survived in Polybius's *Histories*:

For surely there is no man living, so uninterested in public affairs, as not to have heard how Antipater in his victory at Lamia treated the unhappy Athenians, as well as the other Greeks; and how he went so far in violence and brutality as to institute man-hunters, and send them to the various cities to catch all who had ever spoken against, or in any way annoyed, the royal family of Macedonia: of whom some were dragged by force from the temples, and others from the very altars, and put to death with torture, and others who escaped were forced to leave Greece entirely; nor had they any refuge save the Aitolian nation alone.⁷³

Again, it is emphasized that the Aitolians succeeded alone, but this time they did so not so much for their own good, but saved other Greeks, even against Macedonian man-hunters. In contrast to the "unhappy Athenians", they were able to protect all the Greeks who sought refuge with them. Another passage from the work of Polybius, which may be placed directly after this excerpt from Chlaineas's speech, puts even more emphasis on this motif. It reads:

For the Aetolians were *the only people in Greece* who withstood Antipater *in behalf of those unjustly defrauded* of safety to their lives: *they alone* faced the invasion of Brennus and his barbarian army: and *they alone* came to your aid when called upon, with a determination to assist you in regaining your ancestral supremacy in Greece.⁷⁴

The uniqueness of the Aitolian resilience is referred to no less than three times (μόνοι τῶν Ἑλλήνων; μόνοι; μόνοι). What is more, the Aitolians are said to have based their defence on a selfless approach, “in behalf of those unjustly defrauded of safety to their lives”. In this line of reasoning, the Lamian War became a Panhellenic cause, as the Aitolians made good use of an argument which was well known from a fifth-century Athenian strategy to commemorate the Persian Wars: the idea that they alone of all the Hellenes had selflessly defended the Greeks at Marathon.⁷⁵

A similar finding results from an analysis of the relevant passages in Pausanias which refer to the Lamian War.⁷⁶ They reveal that the Lamian War, like the battles of Marathon, Salamis, Thermopylai, Plataiai and Chaironeia, has to be included in the list of military conflicts that served as Panhellenic *lieux du mémoire* later and for which it became especially important on which side you had fought. Sharing the negative outcome, the war usually builds a pair with the battle of Chaironeia in Pausanias’s account.

Would it be too bold to assume that this was also where the implementation of an Aitolian strategy of integration came in handy? For obvious reasons, the strategy could not have been implemented much earlier than at the time new territories were incorporated into the league, that is the late fourth and early third centuries BC. I wonder whether this policy of integration might have to do with the experiences the Aitolians had recently had with the way the Macedonians had treated their allies in the League of Corinth. Alexander’s Exiles’ Decree had produced the very opposite of integration; rather, its impact was internal strife and disintegration among the member states, which might actually have been Alexander’s intention after all. The Aitolians, however, needed an alliance that firmly stuck together. At a time, when they construed a self-image of having been the only Greek state that had resisted the Macedonians when they were at the height of their power, a policy of integration which was the exact opposite of what the Macedonians had done before became quite a natural choice.

Undoubtedly, the Aitolians proudly emphasized their role as selfless fighters for the Panhellenic cause very much, indeed so much so that their Achaian rivals must have felt the need to compensate in turn. They probably did so by explaining that they were not able to participate in the Lamian War because of a prior defeat against the Boiotians and by stressing the bravery of one of their own people, the wrestler Cheilon, son of Cheilon, who had participated in the fighting on his own initiative and died on the battlefield.⁷⁷ In his Olympic victor epigram, which survived in the work of Pausanias,⁷⁸ it is emphasized that Cheilon was honoured by the Achaian state and that he died in war, both of which are a kind of information usually not mentioned in agonistic epigrams.

5. Conclusion

This chapter has argued that resilience was a key factor in the rise of the Aitolian League in the third century. Together with skilful diplomacy and a favourable political constellation, two different forms of resilience paved the way for the expansion of the league and allowed it to rise to the status of a middle power in the Greek world. By adopting a successful military defence strategy, the Aitolians became resilient in terms of war; by creating a strategy of political integration, they took active measures to ensure the league's inner cohesion and the resilience of their alliance.

The notion that for an alliance to be resilient in times of crisis it needed active efforts to keep the federation together emerged in Aitolia as a lesson learnt from history. After the anti-Macedonian coalition had just failed due to its lack of resilience (as evidenced by the apparent readiness of the allies to negotiate city by city when the first difficulties arose), the idea to strengthen the cohesion of one's own league was an obvious conclusion. To achieve this, the Aitolians came up with a strategy that targeted areas whose loyalty seemed particularly uncertain at first glance. That way, the focus shifted to the newly conquered territories, namely the league's border areas, and the Aitolians developed a unique border-management strategy aimed at integrating the newly acquired territories into their confederation.⁷⁹ Whilst this strategy was directed towards the internal self-assurance of political communities within the league, the Aitolians also took care of the external presentation of the *koinon*. By creating a new image of the confederation, they generated an innovative political response to the pending issues of the time. The core argument of this strategy was to present the Aitolians as sole fighters for Greek freedom, a motif reminiscent of a well-known narrative from fifth-century Athens. In the context of Aitolian self-presentation, however, the crucial element was not to frame the Macedonians as foreign intruders but to celebrate the Aitolians' own role as resilient and selfless defenders of the Greek cause. That way the image of a state emerged that was unique in its ability to protect the Greeks. Federalism became a survival strategy, and the Aitolians' self-portrayal of their role in the Lamian War can be seen, at least in part, as an invitation to other states to join the league.

Notes

- 1 Oliver 2003, but note Dreyer 2001. Demosthenes's death is described in Paus. 1.8.2–3.
- 2 Errington 1975.
- 3 Martin 2005; Walsh 2015.
- 4 Westlake 1949; Gehrke 1976: 77–86; Habicht 1995: 47–62; Dreyer 1999; Bosworth 2003. As we learn from contemporary epigraphic evidence (*IG* II² 448 l. 43–4 [Athens, 323/2 BC], 505 l. 17 [Athens, 302/1 BC]; 506 l. 9–10 [Athens, 302/1 BC]), the term used for the war in Athens was Ἑλληνικός πόλεμος (*Ellenikos polemos*, “Hellenic War”). By comparing the current situation of the city to that during the Persian Wars, it bore anti-Macedonian notions (Lehmann 1988). Although the term was still used by Plutarch (*Phokion* 23.1), the situation probably changed with the work of the philo-Macedonian writer Hieronymos of Kardia, who wanted to avoid negative connotations (Ashton 1984: 154–5). Originally, however, the term ‘Lamian War’ may very well have been intro-

- duced by the poet Choirilos of Iasos, who is known to have composed an epic named *Lamiaka* and could have identified the siege of Lamia as the turning point of the war, as Walsh 2011 has convincingly argued.
- 5 In addition to a 40-year-old article by Doron Mendels (1984), there is not much more than a single chapter by Grainger (1999: 54–84) devoted to the topic (cf. also Hope Simpson 1958) and it is somehow characteristic that the main narrative of Scholten’s *Politics of Plunder* (2000) only starts with the year 279 bc. Both Mendels (1984) and Grainger (1999: esp. 61–84) argue that the Aitolians voluntarily advocated a low-profile policy in order to survive difficult years, whereas Rzepka (2019: 168) has recently emphasized that already the very outcome of the Lamian War had produced a political constellation that favoured Aitolian aspirations. As we will see, this chapter combines both approaches and adds another piece to the jigsaw.
 - 6 Although the exact date of the foundation of the Aitolian League cannot be determined with absolute certainty, the Aitolian Koinon as a federal state probably was a relatively new structure at the time the league entered the orbit of Macedonian power politics: the most convincing approach puts the establishment of the league to “[a]round the early fourth century” bc (Funke 2015: 100). For the history and topographical situation of Oiniadai, see Freitag 1994.
 - 7 Mendels 1984: 136. In contrast, Grainger (1999: 54) emphasizes Antipatros’ “shortage of manpower”.
 - 8 Plut. *Alexander* 49; cf. Diod. 18.8.6.
 - 9 According to one of its clauses (*StV* III 405 l. 11–13), it was forbidden to “alter the constitution” of a member state.
 - 10 Among the extensive scholarly literature discussing the reach and intention of the Exiles’ Decree famously announced at the Olympic Games of 324 bc (Diod. 17.109.1, 18.8.3–5), see, e.g., Worthington 2015.
 - 11 Diod. 18.8.2 points towards this direction. The idea is argued in detail by Zahrnt 2003.
 - 12 Diod. 18.8.6.
 - 13 Diod. 18.8.7.
 - 14 Diod. 18.8.7.
 - 15 On Alexander’s death, see most recently Roisman 2024.
 - 16 The fragmentary inscription *IG* II³.1 381 (*SEG* 21.299 – Αἰτωλ[ῶν καὶ Ἀθηναίων] | φιλία [καὶ συμμαχία]) might very well record this treaty (Worthington 1984), but could also refer to the later Athenian-Aitolian treaty of 306 bc against Kassandros (Paus. 1.26.3), as rightly noted by Stephen Lambert (*AIO*). With Diod. 18.10.5–11.2 and Paus. 1.25.3–5, two divergent lists of the other allies, among whom the Thessalian contingent was of particular military importance, came down to us. The evidence on the alliance is collected in *StV* III 413. For the composition of the lists, see Grainger 1999: 58–9.
 - 17 διὰ τινὰς ἐθνικὰς χρείας (Diod. 18.13.4). That sounds pretty much like an excuse, but it is not entirely clear why the Aitolians wanted to leave the front as things went well for the alliance at that time. For possible reasons, see Mendels 1984: 152–3; Grainger 1999: 59–60.
 - 18 Diodoros (18.16.4–17.8) gives the account of the battle. Admittedly, some resilience of alliance was shown by the Greeks, when they refused to negotiate “peace terms city by city” – τὰς κατὰ πόλιν διαλύσεις (18.17.7). But when Antipatros and Krateros began to siege the cities in Thessaly one by one, the cities each sent their envoys for negotiations immediately.
 - 19 Or, as Diodoros (18.24.1) put it: “the Aitolians alone were left unconquered (ἀχέϊρωτοι)”.
 - 20 Grainger 1999: 65.
 - 21 Diod. 18.25.1; cf. Grainger 1999: 63–4.
 - 22 According to Diodoros (18.25.5), they concluded a kind of peace treaty (διάλυσις, *dialysis*) with the Aitolians before leaving.

- 23 ἤδη δ' αὐτῶν ἀπογινωσκόντων τὴν σωτηρίαν αὐτόματός τις λύσις τῶν κακῶν ἐφάνη, καθάπερ θεῶν τινος ἐλεοῦντος αὐτῶν τὴν εὐψυχίαν. — “When they were already giving up hope of salvation, relief from their troubles appeared of its own accord, just as if one of the gods had been moved to pity by their high courage.” (Diod. 18.25.2, transl. R. M. Geer). It is interesting to note that Diodoros understands the Aitolians’ luck as a reward for their bravery. We will return to this aspect in Section III.
- 24 Diod. 18.25.5.
- 25 This expectation is illustrated in the somewhat strange episode reported in Diodoros that the Macedonian generals had agreed to conquer the region later and to move all the Aitolians “to the most distant desert of Asia” — εἰς τὴν ἐρημίαν καὶ πορρωτάτῳ τῆς Ἀσίας κειμένην χώραν (18.25.4).
- 26 “Persuaded the Aitolians to lay low” (Diod. 18.38.1–6; Grainger 1999: 69).
- 27 This is also the basic assumption of Mendels 1984: 157–80, esp. 157.
- 28 Grainger 1999: 71.
- 29 Diod. 19.35.2; for the context, see Mendels 1984: 162; Meeus 2022: 273.
- 30 According to Diodoros (19.52.6), Polyperchon considered the region “a very safe” (ἀσφαλέστατα, *asfalestata*) place for him. For the date, see Errington 1977: 495.
- 31 Diod. 20.20.3; cf. Mendels 1984: 176. On friendly relations with Polyperchon as a leit-motif of Aitolian diplomacy from 320 to 309 bc, see Mendels 1984: 157; but note the reservations by Grainger 1999: 71n. 51.
- 32 Diod. 19.67.3.
- 33 Alliance (*symmachia*) with Antigonos (and the Boiotians): Diod. 19.75.6 (cf. Meeus 2022: 451–3), with Demetrios: 20.100.6. The fragmentary text of another treaty between Demetrios and the Aitolians probably dating to 289 bc (the possible context of the treaty is described in Plut. *Pyrrhos* 7) has been published by Lefèvre 1998 (*SEG* 48.588).
- 34 Embassies, see Diod. 20.99.3 (304 BC; Mendels 1984: 178), sending and receiving letters, see Diod. 20.20.3.
- 35 Diod. 19.53.1; Mendels 1984: 164; Meeus 2022: 357–8.
- 36 Diod. 19.67.3–68.1.
- 37 Diod. 19.67.3. It is explicitly added that the conflict stems “from ancient times” — πόλεμον ἔχουσιν ὁμορον ἐκ παλαιῶν χρόνων (19.67.4), which cannot refer to the Akarnanian invasion of 321 bc. Strabon (10.3.1–8) gives a mythological explanation of the Aitolio-Akarnanian enmity. On the ‘border war’, see Meeus 2022: 426 (contra Grainger 1999: 75–6).
- 38 Diod. 19.67.5.
- 39 Diod. 19.68.1; cf. Meeus 2022: 430. For Agrinion as an Akarnanian city at the time (as follows from Diodoros’s account), Mendels (1984: 169) is to be preferred over Grainger (1999: 76) (“I [...] see it as an Aitolian city”). The focus of the passage is on Aitolian wrongdoing by breaking an agreement (παρὰβάντες τὰς συνθήκας, *parabantes tas syntheikas*) and slaughtering their trusting enemies.
- 40 Diod. 19.74.3–6; cf. Grainger 1999: 80; Meeus 2022: 447.
- 41 Scharff 2023: 181–2. The surviving treaties include those with Hellenistic kings (Demetrios Poliorketes, Alexander II of Epeiros, Antigonos Gonatas, Philip V), Greek cities and federal states, including the Athenians, Milesians, Boiotians and Akarnanians, and the new major power of the Mediterranean world: Rome (ibid. 178 n. 529).
- 42 For the following events, see Flacelière 1937; Scholten 2000: 15–25.
- 43 Paus. 10.19.5–23.14 (esp. 20.4 and 22.2–7); Nachtergaele 1977.
- 44 Scheu 1960: nr. 8 (reverse); cf. Funke 2007: 84–5. The obverse shows the head of Herakles looking to the right, with lion’s skin headdress. On the dedicatory monuments, including the famous dedication of Celtic weapons from Delphi (*SEG* 28.496: Αἰτ[ω]λο[ί] — — — five meters — — —) τὰ ὄπλα ἀπὸ Γαλατῶν — — —), see Knoepfler 2007; Antonetti 2012.

- 45 οἱ δὲ περὶ τὸν Ἀντίπατρον καὶ Κρατερὸν εἰσβαλόντες εἰς τὴν Αἰτωλίαν καὶ τὰς εὐχειρ-
ώτους πόλεις ὀρῶντες ἐρήμους ὥρμησαν ἐπὶ τοὺς ἀνακεχωρηκότας εἰς τὰς δυσχωρίας.
τὸ μὲν οὖν πρῶτον οἱ Μακεδόνες πρὸς τόπους ὄχυρους καὶ τραχεῖς βιαζόμενοι πολλοὺς
τῶν στρατιωτῶν ἀπέβαλον· ἡ γὰρ τόλμα τῶν Αἰτωλῶν προσλαβοῦσα τὴν ἐν τοῖς
τόποις ὄχυρότητα ραδίως ἡμύνετο τοὺς διὰ τὴν προπέτειαν εἰς ἀβοηθήτους κινδύνους
προπίπτοντας· μετὰ δὲ ταῦτα [...] εἰς τοὺς ἐσχάτους ἦλθον κινδύνους, [...]. ἡδὴ δ' αὐτῶν
ἀπογινωσκόντων τὴν σωτηρίαν αὐτόματός τις λύσις τῶν κακῶν ἐφάνη, καθάπερ θεῶν
τινος ἐλεοῦντος αὐτῶν τὴν εὐνυχίαν. Ἀντίγονος γὰρ ὁ πεφευγὼς ἐκ τῆς Ἀσίας συμμίζας
τοῖς περὶ τὸν Ἀντίπατρον ἐδίδασκεν αὐτοὺς περὶ τῆς ὅλης ἐπιβουλῆς τοῦ Περδίκκου [...]
εὐθὺς ἤξει μετὰ τῆς δυνάμεως εἰς Μακεδονίαν ὡς βασιλεὺς καὶ τὴν ἡγεμονίαν αὐτῶν
παραιρήσεται (Diod. 18.25.1–3, transl. R. M. Geer; the emphases are my own).
- 46 Both reasons are repeated in Diodoros (19.74.6) for the way the Aitolians overcame the
campaign of 313 BC. For the military strategy of the Aitolians, see also Grainger (1999:
84) who observes “a well-organized system of defence”.
- 47 Often simply dismissed by earlier research as an unimaginative compiler, Diodoros’s
work has been given greater justice in more recent studies, see Rathmann 2016 and the
contributions in Hau et al. 2018.
- 48 Deriving from the verb *τλῆναι* that shares the same root with Latin *ferre* (‘to carry’, ‘to
bring’, ‘to bear’, ‘to endure’; German ‘(er)tragen’ is similar to the Greek and Latin use),
τόλμα includes the aspect of physical endurance.
- 49 On narratives of resilience, see, e.g. Basseler 2019 and the contributions in Fraile-
Marcos 2020.
- 50 In books 18–20, Diodoros derived much of his material from Hieronymos (*FGrH* 154),
who had written a major history of the period (Hope-Simpson 1959; Merker 1988;
Walsh 2021; Meeus 2022: 58–90).
- 51 Although Grainger (1999: 62) discusses the “dissolution” and end of “the very exist-
ence” of the league as a real possibility for the period after the battle of Krannon, this
never became a likely option until the first half of the second century BC.
- 52 For this aspect, see esp. Mendels 1984: 157–80; cf. Grainger 1999: 84.
- 53 Mendels 1984: 157.
- 54 Mendels 1984: 157: “cautiously calculated”.
- 55 Meeus 2018.
- 56 The friendly relations with Polyperchon, for instance, were based on a shared inter-
est: the common enmity towards Kassandros. They ended the very moment Kassandros
ceased to be a common enemy, when Polyperchon and Kassandros came to terms and
concluded an agreement in 309 BC (Diod. 20.28.1–2; cf. Mendels 1984: 176).
- 57 Funke 2018: 114.
- 58 Funke 2015: 95–6, 115, 2016, 2018: 113–4, 2024: 202–9.
- 59 As scattered the evidence as controversial is the issue: Corsten (1999: 140–8; cf. Löbel
2014: 145–61) advocates a completely different model according to which the entire
territory of the Aitolian League was divided into *tele* of equal size regardless of ethnic
affiliation; see also Mackil 2013: 380–4.
- 60 *Lokrikon telos*: *SGDI* 2070 l. 1–2, 2139 ll. 1–2; *IG* 9.1² 3, 618 ll. 1–2, 625a l. 1; *telos*
Stratikon: *IG* IX.1², 1, 3B l. 2; cf. Lasagni 2019: 147–59. In some of these inscriptions,
an eponymous *boularchos tou teleos* is attested, and I follow Lasagni (2012) in interpret-
ing this office not as a federal one, but as connected to the *telos*. In consequence, the *tele*
can probably be regarded as “an independent level of political action within the Aitolian
League” (Funke 2024: 204).
- 61 Weidgenannt 2024: 26–7.
- 62 Picard 1984; Liampi 1998.
- 63 For the evidence, see Liampi 1998; Tsangari 2007: 249–55; further references in Funke
2016: 104 n. 6; cf. also Mackil 2013: 252–4.

- 64 Funke 2024: 207.
- 65 On federalism as a survival strategy, see Funke 2018: 119, 125–6.
- 66 Funke 2018: 114 n. 13.
- 67 We have already seen that the same finding can be deduced from the numismatic evidence as well, see Scheu 1960: nr. 8; cf. n. 47.
- 68 *Meminisse deinde iubent, qui quibus minentur. Adversus Gallos urbem eos suam tueri non potuisse captamque non ferro defendisse, sed auro redemisse; quam gentem se aliquanto maiore manu Graeciam ingressam non solum nullis externis viribus, sed ne domesticis quidem totis adiutos universam delesse, [...] contra Italiam trepidis ex recenti urbis suae incendio Romanis universam ferme a Gallis occupatam. [...] Aetolos [...] solos denique esse, qui Macedonas imperio terrarum semper florentes contempserint, qui Philippum regem non timuerint, qui Alexandri Magni post Persas Indosque devictos, cum omnes nomen eius horrerent, edicta spreverint. Monere igitur se Romanos, contenti sint fortuna praesenti nec provocent arma, quibus et Gallos caesos et Macedonas contemptos videant* (Iust. 28.2.3–7, 2.12–13, transl. J. S. Watson).
- 69 The Aitolians had been Rome’s first Greek ally, but the situation changed after Kynoskephalai and became much worse, when the Aitolians sided with Antiochos III. For the time after the Antiochian War, see Mitropoulos 2019.
- 70 It is surprising that the name of the chieftain which was Brennus in both cases is not mentioned by Justin, since it would all the more emphasize how meaningful the comparison was. It is possible that the name was mentioned in Trogus’ original version, but it could also be that the Gallic chieftain of the fourth century was only later named after the one who invaded Greece in 279 BC (Gundel 1979).
- 71 Iust. 28.2.12.
- 72 A similar formula, which has been called “πρῶτος formula” by Ebert (1972: 19: “Erst- oder Einmaligkeit des Sieges”), can be found in agonistic inscriptions from the end of the fifth century BC onwards, was already common in the fourth (Scharff 2024: 197) and became more popular by the end of the third century BC (Scharff 2024: 28). It was later expanded to the expression πρῶτος καὶ μόνος (*protos kai monos*, “the first and only”) and reached its peak in the Roman Imperial age (Ebert 1972: 24).
- 73 οὐδεὶς γάρ ἐστι τῶν ὄντων οὕτως ἀπράγμων ὃς οὐχὶ πέπυσται πῶς Ἀντίπατρος μὲν ἐν τῇ περὶ Λαμίας μάχῃ νικήσας τοὺς Ἕλληνας κάκιστα μὲν ἐχρήσατο τοῖς ταλαιπώροις Ἀθηναίοις, ὁμοίως δὲ καὶ τοῖς ἄλλοις, εἰς τοῦτο δ’ ὕβρεως ἤλθε καὶ παρανομίας ὥς φυγαδοθήρας καταστήσας ἐξέπεμψε πρὸς τὰς πόλεις ἐπὶ τοὺς ἀντειρηκτάς ἢ καθόλου λελυπηκότας τι τὴν Μακεδόνων οἰκίαν. ὧν οἱ μὲν ἐκ τῶν ἱερῶν ἀγόμενοι μετὰ βίας, οἱ δ’ ἀπὸ τῶν βωμῶν ἀποσπώμενοι, μετὰ τιμωρίας ἀπέθνησκον, οἱ δὲ διαφυγόντες ἐκ πάσης ἐξενηλατοῦντο τῆς Ἑλλάδος: φύξιμον γὰρ οὐδὲν ἦν πλὴν ἐνὸς αὐτοῖς τοῦ τῶν Αἰτωλῶν ἔθνους (Polyb. 9.29, transl. E. S. Shuckburgh).
- 74 Αἰτωλοὶ γὰρ μόνον μὲν τῶν Ἑλλήνων ἀντωφθάλμησαν πρὸς Ἀντίπατρον ὑπὲρ τῆς τῶν ἀδίκως ἀκληρουμένων ασφαλείας, μόνον δὲ πρὸς τὴν Βρέννου καὶ τῶν ἄμα τούτῳ βαρβάρων ἐφοδὸν ἀντέστησαν, μόνον δὲ καλούμενοι συνηγωνίζοντο, βουλόμενοι τὴν πατριὸν ἡγεμονίαν τῶν Ἑλλήνων ὑμῖν συγκατασκευάζειν (Pol. 9.30, transl. E. S. Shuckburgh). The passage is evidently out of place where it came down to us.
- 75 Jung 2006: 395.
- 76 Paus. 6.4.6–7, 7.6.3–9 (Achaians), 10.3.4 (Phokians).
- 77 Paus. 6.4.6, 7.6.5. It is interesting to note that while still speculating in book six about the question of whether Cheilon has died in the battle of Chaironeia or in the Lamian War, the Periegetes refers to an anonymous local historian from Patrai to solve the question in book seven.
- 78 Paus. 6.4.6; Ebert 1972: nr. 50; second half of the fourth century BC.
- 79 However, such a flexible strategy of integration was possible only when regional supremacy was no longer at stake, as it had been during the Aitolo-Akarnanian ‘border war’ referred to by Diodoros (19.67.3).

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14 Diadochi and Epigoni Facing Crisis

Federalism as an ‘Art of Government’ and (Border)land Control in the Early Hellenistic Aegean*

Claudio Biagetti

1. Preliminary Remarks: The Age of the Diadochi as a Crisis and the Emergence of New Federal Entities

Alexander’s death in Babylonia marked a critical turning point in Greek history, triggering a shift in the political landscape across the central and eastern Mediterranean. The negotiations over Alexander’s legacy led to short-lived arrangements among the Diadochi, which nevertheless paved the way for the emergence and consolidation of the Hellenistic kingdoms and dynasties.

Perhaps no ancient author more vividly conveys the state of anxiety that gripped the Greek world after Alexander’s death than Diodoros:

When Cephisodorus was archon at Athens, the Romans elected Lucius Frurius and Decius Junius as consuls. During this term, since Alexander the king had died without heirs, anarchy and great discord over the leadership arose (ἀναρχία καὶ πολλὴ στάσις ἐγένετο περὶ τῆς ἡγεμονίας).¹

Notably, anarchy and discord also permeate the narratives of Trogus/Iustinus² and Curtius.³ The power struggles described by Diodoros came to an end only after the battle of Kouroupedion in 281, a crucial turning point that laid the groundwork for the stabilization of the borders of the Hellenistic kingdoms by 276.⁴ This ancient perspective highlights two recurring key notions that also feature prominently in modern discourse on crisis: (political) uncertainty and conflict.⁵

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Yet, in a miscellany titled “*Krisen*” und “*Untergänge*” als historisches Phänomen, Sabine Müller has recently expressed some scepticism as to the applicability of the term *crisis* to the four decades between Alexander’s death and the watershed of Kouroupedion.⁶ However, when observing how some implications of the modern concept of *crisis* seem to resonate in certain ancient sources, the use of the term for the period from Alexander’s death to Kouroupedion may not be entirely unjustified. According to modern definitions, such as Reinhardt Koselleck’s influential one, a crisis can be conceptualized as a lack of medium- or long-term political or economic stability.⁷ From a political perspective, instability can be understood as a persistent state of tension between two or more actors who are unable to reach an agreement on matters of shared concern.

Much like the unstable alliances among the successors, the boundaries of the emerging territorial states were often fluid and contested. Processes of political aggregation – such as synoikisms and federal unions – emerged as effective constitutional instruments for consolidating conquests and asserting control over both smaller and larger territories, as well as in critical contact zones.⁸ Federal institutions, in particular, offered a flexible means for rulers to establish their authority across regions while providing a structured framework for managing local affairs. Among the Diadochi, Antigonos Monophthalmos stands out as the one who explored – and exploited – the potential of federal models more systematically. In his seminal monograph *Antigonos the One-Eyed and the Creation of the Hellenistic State*, Richard Billows draws attention to Antigonos’s promotion of federal bodies after the proclamation of Tyre in 315.⁹ He shows how federalism enabled Antigonos to bind a large network of Greek cities to his authority, while formally preserving their autonomy. Inevitably, however, this ‘federal option’ reduced significantly the agency of the poleis in matters of foreign policy.¹⁰ Such a strategy was occasionally taken up by other Hellenistic rulers, offering advantages not only for their hegemonic power, but also for the interests of emerging polis associations.

The League of the Islanders may be regarded both as a case in point of this Antigonid policy and as an example of a federal organization that enabled its members to safeguard their interests and enhance their collective diplomatic weight. However, the origins and function of the league have elicited different interpretations. In a paper published in 2012, Christy Constantakopoulou claimed that the *koinon* of the Nesiotai was essentially a bottom-up initiative.¹¹ She argued that at the end of the fourth century the Islanders formed a new federal entity by reactivating elements of their shared identity.¹² This sense of common belonging is believed to have developed through earlier associative experiences, such as the Ionic Amphictyony and the two Delian Leagues. According to Constantakopoulou, the league emerged as an expression of identity-based resistance to external domination:

The Islanders’ League is, I believe, an exemplary instance of the creation of identity as resistance to and reaction against external powers within the interconnected space of the southern Aegean.¹³

In contrast, Kostas Buraselis has offered a more top-down interpretation,¹⁴ considering the League of the Islanders primarily as a power instrument in the hands of major overarching players (viz. the Antigonids and the Ptolemies).¹⁵ He highlights the league's long-term effectiveness as a tool of maritime control in the Aegean Sea, emphasizing the persistence of the league well into the late third century:

[P]erhaps the best proof of the suitability of the confederacy as a tool of control over the islands of the central Aegean in the framework of the Antigonid and Ptolemaic policy is the further use of that model in the second half of the third century BC by the new leader of the Aegean, Rhodes.¹⁶

Despite their differences, both Constantakopoulou's and Buraselis's interpretations address the issue of how the League of the Islanders operated within the dynamic interplay between local agency and external power.

This chapter aims to reconsider these perspectives by reviewing the extant evidence on the League of the Islanders and by extending the discussion to include other federal organizations that emerged in the decades following Alexander's death. The formation of supra-polis bodies during this turbulent period can be understood as an institutional response to the political instability that marked the post-Alexander world. These processes of aggregation often took place in contact zones between competing powers, raising the question as to whether geographic position played a role in their very constitution.¹⁷ For many poleis threatened by the looming spectre of war, the formalization of alliances into federal bodies may have represented a viable and pragmatic strategy for pursuing common political interests, enhancing diplomatic agency and securing protection from superordinate powers.

Against this broader background, Hellenistic federalism might be viewed not only as an 'art of government' implemented by major political actors, but also as an instrument through which local communities sought to preserve a certain degree of autonomy and maintain inter-polis cooperation in a context of hegemonic competition among the Diadochi.

2. The League of the Islanders

The early post-Alexander period has been aptly described by Pat Wheatley as an age of political unrest, marked by "an ever-shifting pattern of alliances, treaties and betrayals".¹⁸ It was during this era of *transition*, as Wheatley and others have put it with good reason,¹⁹ that the history of the League of the Nesiotai began.

A well-known passage from Book 19 of Diodoros is taken to be the earliest allusion to the existence of the *koinon*:

Dividing this naval force, he (*i.e.* Antigonus) sent fifty ships to the Peloponnesus, and ordered his nephew, Dioscorides, whom he had made commander of the rest, to make a circuit of the sea, guaranteeing the safety of the allies and winning the support of the islands that had not yet

joined the alliance (καὶ τῶν νήσων τὰς μήπω μετεχούσας τῆς συμμαχίας προσαγόμενον). Such was the state of Antigonos' affairs.²⁰

Here, Diodoros reports the events of the year 315/4, placing them within the broader context of the so-called Third War of the Diadochi. During this period, Greece and the Aegean were key battlegrounds in the Mediterranean. Antigonos was aiming to expand his influence over the Peloponnese and the Aegean Islands, opposing a large coalition that included Ptolemy, Kassandros and Lysimachos. At the outset of this Diodorean chapter, a passage provides further insights into the Greeks' expectations regarding an alliance with one of the parties:

- (1.) While these things were going on, Ptolemy, who had heard what had been decreed by the Macedonians with Antigonos in regard to the freedom of the Greeks, published a similar decree himself, since he wished the Greeks to know that he was no less interested in their autonomy than was Antigonos.
- (2.) Each of them, indeed, perceiving that it was a matter of no little moment to gain the goodwill of the Greeks, rivalled the other in conferring favours upon this people.²¹

Given the urgent need for both Antigonos and his opponents to secure Greek support, one might infer that the constitution of a league at this stage was likely to promote a more bottom-up effort to pursue a coordinated action among the Islanders rather than a pure top-down imposition by Antigonos.

The earliest evidence for the activity of the League of the Islanders is found in *IG* XI 4.1036, a fragmentary decree from Delos likely passed in 307.²² Issued by the Islanders themselves, the decree established the new festival of the Demetriaia, to be celebrated every two years in alternation with the preexisting (ἦν νῦν ποιῶσιν) Antigoneia.²³ What makes this document particularly significant is that it contains measures extending beyond the strictly religious sphere. It refers to typical structures of a fully developed *koinon*, such as a *synedrion*²⁴ and a common treasury,²⁵ and it also alludes to a federal system of financial contributions.²⁶

Apart from Andrew Meadows – who argues that the *koinon* was a creation of the Lagids²⁷ – scholars generally place the emergence of the League of the Nesiotai between 314/3 and 307.²⁸ The history of the *koinon* is better documented for the decades of Ptolemaic rule (c. 287/6–258). The bulk of the evidence comes from the reign of Ptolemy II and it sheds light on the league's institutions, religious activities and international relations.²⁹ The Islanders were led by a nesiarch,³⁰ and they could rely on officials such as *epimeletai*³¹ and *oikonomoi*.³² On the religious side, the celebration of the Ptolemaia replaced the earlier Antigoneia and Demetriaia, and the Nesiotai are recorded as sending *theoroi* to the Ptolemaia held in Alexandria.³³ Honorific decrees are indicative of the league's international network, attesting to privileges granted to benefactors from Knidos, Thebes, Samothrace, Halikarnassos and possibly Aigai in Macedonia.³⁴ Despite the wealth of documentation from the Ptolemaic period, the attitudes of the Nesiotai towards royal authority and the extent of their negotiating power vis-à-vis Ptolemaic envoys remain difficult to discern. The famous decree from Nikouria suggests that the Ptolemies granted

the Islanders a certain degree of autonomy by reinstating the *patrios politeia* in each island community, while at the same time securing the loyalty of the league's members through reductions in their financial contributions.³⁵

A similar policy appears to have been implemented by the Rhodians between the third and second centuries. A handful of epigraphic texts shed light on the fortunes of the *koinon* at the time of the Rhodian hegemony over the Aegean, revealing the capacity of the league to maintain a sense of cohesion over time and to navigate periods of crisis through its federal structures.³⁶ Evidence from this post-Ptolemaic phase shows that the league's focal point shifted from Delos to Tenos, where the assembly of the Islanders now met under Rhodian patronage.³⁷ The autonomy enjoyed by the Islanders in this late phase of their league has been ascribed by Richard M. Berthold³⁸ and Kenneth A. Sheedy³⁹ to its alleged commercial character. No conclusive evidence, however, has yet confirmed this interpretation.⁴⁰

A review of the evidence concerning the Nesiotic League lies beyond the scope of this chapter. What matters here is the geographic and historical context in which the *koinon* emerged and continued to operate over time, as well as its long-term resilience. The Aegean Islands – particularly the Cyclades – became a bone of contention during the early and mid-Hellenistic period. Their position at the crossroads between mainland Greece and Anatolia and between the Pontos Euxinos and the North African shores made their control essential for any power aspiring to dominate maritime routes, whether for economic, political or military purposes.⁴¹ Gary Reger incisively describes the Cyclades as “stepping-stones,” while Kenneth A. Sheedy has referred to the insular region of the Aegean as “a border area separating the powerful Hellenistic kingdoms”.⁴²

From a top-down perspective, the Antigonids, the Ptolemies, the Rhodians and – albeit to a lesser extent – the Aitolians and the Seleukids, as well as other Diadochi who failed to establish lasting dynastic rule (such as Kassandros and Lysimachos), all sought to assert their presence and/or wield influence across the Aegean Sea.⁴³ From a bottom-up perspective, by contrast, the Islanders appear to have reinforced their cooperation to cope more effectively with periods of (geo)political instability. It could therefore be no coincidence that the Ptolemaic influence on the Nesiotai becomes evident shortly after Demetrios's withdrawal from Greece in 288/7,⁴⁴ nor that the Rhodians took advantage of Philip V's defeat in 197/6, promptly filling the power vacuum left across the Aegean.⁴⁵

In the shifting course of events, the Islanders placed themselves under the umbrella of powerful patrons but managed to preserve a considerable degree of autonomy by exploiting geographical fragmentation – and the resulting difficulties of control – as negotiating leverage in dealing with regional and supra-regional powers.

In the Hellenistic period, a federal association appears to have been the most suitable instrument of both governance and self-governance in a regional context marked by extreme insularity, gradually emerging as a critical contact zone among major political players. When reconsidering Diodoros's account,⁴⁶ it is tempting to see the foundation of the league not purely as a political, top-down construct

conceived by Antigonos but – following Constantakopoulou – as a collective, bottom-up response by the Islanders to the political and military instability affecting the Aegean from the late fourth century onwards.⁴⁷ All in all, despite gaps in the documentation, the available evidence suggests that the league's most visible phases often coincided with periods of military and political crisis, highlighting the resilience and pragmatism of its members.⁴⁸

3. Federal States under Antigonid Rule

When considering its origins and geostrategic significance, it is useful to compare the Nesiotic *koinon* with similar federalization processes mobilized or catalysed under Antigonos's rule. The cases of the *koinon* of Athena Ilias and the revitalized League of Corinth are particularly instructive. Although these federations emerged under different premises and followed distinct trajectories, they illustrate that the formation and resilience of a federal group depended not only on historical circumstances and internal cooperation, but also on geographical location and the capacity to secure political stability. By contrast, the alleged revival of the Ionian League is of limited relevance here, as the nature and extent of Antigonos's intervention in the preexisting federal structures remain ambiguous.⁴⁹

The League of Athena Ilias took its name from the sanctuary of Athena at Ilion and included ten cities of Troas (Ilion, Parion, Lampsakos, Abydos, Dardanos, Rhoiteion, Skepsis, Alexandria in Troas, Assos, Gargara), as well as two poleis of Bithynia (Myrleia) and the Bosphoros (Chalkedon).⁵⁰ As the list of members indicates, ethnic identity was not the glue of this polis association. Instead, the primary concerns of the *koinon* were the administration of the sanctuary and the organization of the common panegyris.⁵¹ The member cities, scattered across the Hellespontine and Propontic regions, occupied a crucial border zone that, as William Pillot emphasized, lay “au carrefour d'influences européennes et asiatiques”.⁵² After Alexander's death, this area was long contested among the Diadochi (especially, Antigonos, Lysimachos and Seleukos I), becoming a battleground between the Seleukids and Attalids during the third century.⁵³ As in the case of the Nesiotic League, ancient literary sources make no mention of the League of Athena Ilias. According to epigraphic evidence, a number of officers – including *agoranomoi*,⁵⁴ *hieronomoi*⁵⁵ and *gymnasiarchs*⁵⁶ – ensured the smooth functioning of the common activities.

According to a scholarly view, the *koinon* of Athena Ilias (or, as the official formula states, “the poleis who share the sanctuary and the *panegyris* of Athena Ilias”)⁵⁷ might have come into being around 307/6, although a gradual process of aggregation – possibly initiated under Alexander's reign – cannot be ruled out.⁵⁸ Much of the information about the early phases of the league comes from the decrees honouring Malousios of Gargara, which provide evidence of Antigonos's involvement in the constitution of the *koinon*.⁵⁹ With regard to federal institutions, Malousios's dossier refers to a common *synedrion*,⁶⁰ a panel of *epistatai*⁶¹ and a board of *agonothetai*.⁶² Apart from this, however, the knowledge about the league's interactions with royal authority remains extremely limited. Only one decree of the

Ilians mentions the dedication of an equestrian statue to a king named Antiochos (either I or III), which had to be announced during the athletic contests of the Panathenaia.⁶³ More generally, the majority of decrees pertain to local notables or seek to regulate intra-federal matters.⁶⁴

When compared to the organization of the Islanders, the *koinon* of Athena Ilias was apparently oriented towards the management of strictly local affairs. While it is entirely possible that Antigonos fostered its constitution in order to stabilize the area, epigraphic evidence suggests that the *koinon* continued to operate throughout the Hellenistic period without external patronage. The latest inscriptions, dating to Roman times, reveal that Augustus supported the league's activities and was accordingly honoured with two statues and the titles of συγγενής, σωτήρ, πάτρων and εὐεργέτης.⁶⁵ Borrowing the words of Laurent Capdetrey,⁶⁶ one may conclude that the experience of the *koinon* of Athena Ilias was not (or, at least, not only) a product of "political engineering" in the hands of the Diadochi and Epigoni, but rather a resource for its members to pursue and safeguard their own interests and initiatives. Indeed, the league's members leveraged their internal organization and cohesion, maintaining their institutional structures well into the Roman imperial period.

A different perspective emerges when considering the Antigonid revival of the League of Corinth.⁶⁷ Unlike the League of the Islanders or the *koinon* of Athena Ilias, evidence for the league's establishment is attested in both epigraphic and literary sources. According to Diodoros, from 307/6 onwards, Antigonos and Demetrios devoted all their efforts to winning the favour of the mainland Greek communities.⁶⁸ Until then, mainland Greece had remained on the margins of Antigonid ambitions, which were primarily directed towards the eastern territories of Alexander's empire.⁶⁹ In the broader context of the Antigonid strategy, the establishment of a hegemonic *koinon* may have been envisaged as a pragmatic solution for controlling and stabilizing Greece.⁷⁰ Plutarch reports that in 302/1 Demetrios was proclaimed ἡγεμὼν τῆς Ἑλλάδος before a general assembly of the Greeks at the Isthmos:

And at the Isthmus of Corinth, where a general assembly was held and throngs of people came together, he was proclaimed Commander-in-chief of the Greeks, as Philip and Alexander had been proclaimed before him; and to these he considered himself in no slight measure superior, lifted up as he was by the good fortune and power which he then enjoyed.⁷¹

As this passage suggests, Antigonos and Demetrios adopted a form of hegemonic symmarchy that was modelled on the Hellenic League promoted by Philip and Alexander. Confirmation of this can be found in the treaty between the Greeks and the kings preserved on a stele from Epidauros,⁷² an agreement that was stipulated in the midst of the conflict between Demetrios and Kassandros.⁷³

Unsurprisingly, alongside provisions concerning the functioning of the common *synedrion*,⁷⁴ the bulk of the prescriptions pertain to the military obligations to be fulfilled by the Greeks during wartime.⁷⁵ Two more points, however, deserve

attention: first, the likely perpetuity of the alliance;⁷⁶ second, the clause regarding the convocation of the assembly in time of peace and of war.⁷⁷ Both details indicate that, in the plans of Antigonos and Demetrios, the new Isthmian *synedrion* was meant to outlast the war against Kassandros and potentially serve as the basis for future Antigonid control over mainland Greece.

As far as can be inferred from epigraphic sources, only the Athenians and Eretrians took concrete steps to legitimize the Panhellenic coalition, as indicated by the honorific decrees for the *prohedros* of the *synedrion* Adeimantos of Lampsakos, the chief lieutenant of Demetrios in Greece.⁷⁸ However, the battle of Ipsos put an end to the ambitions of Antigonos and Demetrios and to their project of stabilizing the western limits of the Antigonid Empire.⁷⁹ The renewed League of Corinth fell into oblivion after only a few months, seemingly without any regret on the part of its former members. This very indifference displayed by the allies explains the failure of this ephemeral symmachic experiment.

4. Some General Outcomes

The latter example demonstrates, from a top-down perspective, how federal structures should be regarded not only as tools of administrative simplification, but also as institutional responses adopted to manage critical political junctures. As Billows has argued, Antigonos was likely the Diadochos who most fully exploited federalism in its different shades to consolidate and stabilize some areas under his control.⁸⁰ As highlighted above, they were often contact and border zones shaped by a long-standing tradition of Greek urbanization and informed by a strong sense of local identity. In the shifting dynamics of the early Hellenistic regimes, the rule over old and new borderlands required the recognition of a degree of autonomy that had to take into account the geographical, cultural and political peculiarities of each region.⁸¹ Safeguarding these local traits fostered effective cooperation between local elites and superordinate powers, ultimately granting the latter firmer regional control and thereby contributing to greater and durable stability.

The political landscape resulting from the reconfiguration of power in early Hellenistic Anatolia invites us to regard Antigonos as a *federator* of the conquered territories.⁸² This is exemplified by the case of Karia, where Antigonos – much like in other satrapies – allowed Asandros to retain power in return for loyalty.⁸³ However, his death at Ipsos was a temporary setback in the development of Hellenistic federal forms. In this respect, no comparable initiative can be attributed to his son Demetrios, whose talents were more inclined towards military activities than in political-administrative matters.⁸⁴ Paradoxically, the Epigoni took more advantage of this aspect of Antigonos's legacy. After Demetrios's withdrawal from Europe, on the one hand, Ptolemy II and Ptolemy III took over the control of the Nesiotic League and maintained their influence over the Aegean through royal envoys to the islands.⁸⁵ Meanwhile, the Seleukids appear to have early exploited the potential of the *koinon* of Athena Ilias, assuming that *I.Ilion* 32 dates back to the reign of Antiochos I.⁸⁶

From a bottom-up perspective, federal unions such as the League of the Islanders provided smaller political entities with the opportunity to collectively manage critical phases and to gain some strength in negotiations with dominant powers. After the prolonged instability that followed Alexander's death – a forty-year *crisis*, using modern terminology – it is plausible that members of the new *koina* perceived the advantages of responding collectively to the challenges posed by an ever-shifting political scenario. This likely explains why these new federal frameworks were not immediately dismantled but – as Buraselis has pointed out for the Islanders – endured for more than a century after their emergence.⁸⁷

Notes

- 1 ἐπ' ἄρχοντος γὰρ Ἀθήνησι Κηφισοδώρου Ῥωμαῖοι μὲν κατέστησαν ὑπάτους Λεύκιον Φρούριον καὶ Δέκιον Ἰούνιον. ἐπὶ δὲ τούτων Ἀλεξάνδρου τοῦ βασιλέως τετελευτηκότος ἄπαιδος ἀναρχία καὶ πολλὴ στάσις ἐγένετο περὶ τῆς ἡγεμονίας (Diod. 18.2.1, transl. mod. R. M. Geer).
- 2 Iust. 13.2.1–14.
- 3 Curt. 10.5.12–13.
- 4 Meuss 2013: 113.
- 5 Koselleck 1982; Gentili 2018; see also Koselleck 2009: 95–109.
- 6 Müller 2023: 96 (“Inwiefern die folgenden Auseinandersetzungen der Generäle um die Aufteilung von Alexanders Erbe in den Diadochenkriegen als ‘Krise’ zu bewerten sind, ist Ansichtssache”). In contrast to this, see, for example, Capdetrey 2007: 113–14 (114: “Ce n’est que par la structuration progressive des royaumes entre 305 et 280 que furent rétablis à la fois des centres légitimes renouant avec un pouvoir royal intégrateur et des périphéries dépendantes incarnées par des dynastes locaux dans certains de ces royaumes. À l’occasion de cette longue crise du pouvoir impérial inaugurée par la conquête d’Alexandre, l’émancipation de plusieurs principautés indigènes, qui devaient devenir des royaumes, contribua ainsi à simplifier la carte politique de l’Asie Mineure, en excluant définitivement de la souveraineté séleucide des dynastes indigènes qui avaient su s’affranchir de la domination macédonienne”). Moreover, the word *crisis* is used no less than six times in the reference work of Robin Waterfield on the Wars of the Diadochi (Waterfield 2011: 10, 24, 57, 89, 154, 219).
- 7 The gradual resemantization of the Greek term κρίσις has also taken on strongly economic connotations in modern times (Koselleck 1982: 641–4; see also Gentili 2018: 59–65). While signs of economic crisis can be detected in the second half of the fourth century (Descat 2006: 360–1), scholars such as Angelos Chaniotis and Sitta von Reden are cautious in drawing conclusions about the economic implications of the uninterrupted state of warfare over the Greek world in the (early) Hellenistic period (Chaniotis 2011; von Reden 2022). Nevertheless, Chaniotis points out that “[t]he long-term impact of war on agriculture should also not be underestimated. The maintenance of agricultural terraces, required for the exploitation of the slopes of hills, was neglected; [...] the investment in labour for the cultivation of olive trees, vineyards, and orchards was lost. [...] War resulted in both loss of production and increased demands on food. Given all these problems, shortage of food, especially of the most important staple product, grain, were not uncommon in the Hellenistic period, although it is not always possible to date them, to recognize the historical context, and to attribute them securely to a war” (Chaniotis 2011: 128). All in all, the available evidence is far too sparse and patchy to allow the reconstruction of an overall, reliable picture. For the political sphere and general concepts of crisis, see the Introduction of this volume.

- 8 An early attempt to make use of synoikism as a tool for consolidating control over Akarnania and stabilizing its borderlands with Aitolia was undertaken by Kassandros in Akarnania in 314 (Diod. 19.67.3–5). For some possible attempts by Polyperchon to restore Philip II's League of Corinth and the Arkadian Confederacy, see Kralli 2017: 90–3. For the notion of contact zone(s), see below n. 17.
- 9 Billows 1990: 189–236 (ch. 6: *Antigonos' Relations with the Greeks*). For the proclamation of Tyre, see Diod. 19.61.1–4.
- 10 Billows 1990: 231–2.
- 11 Constantakopoulou 2012. A similar view was earlier sketched out by Davies 2002: 10–11. On the bottom-up approach to the research on ancient *koina*, see, for example, Alcock 1992: 164–5; Mackil 2004: 510–11.
- 12 In a similar vein, see Brun 1996: 176–9 and 181–2. On the relevance of identity-related factors in the formation of insular federal states in the modern world, see Veenendaal 2015.
- 13 Constantakopoulou 2012: 53. Significantly, the main title of Constantakopoulou's paper is *Identity and Resistance*. Ultimately, the study seeks to explore how geographic position, fragments of a shared political past and the sense of collective identity contributed to the formation of an unprecedented federal entity.
- 14 Buraselis 2015.
- 15 In this case, too, earlier statements by Davies 2002: 10–11 are enlightening.
- 16 Buraselis 2015: 363. A similar view has been earlier held by Gallo 2009: 337–8.
- 17 The notion of *contact zone(s)* was first introduced in the field of literary and cultural studies in the early 1990s. It was elaborated by Mary Louise Pratt “to refer to social spaces where cultures meet, clash, and grapple with each other, often in contexts of highly asymmetrical relations power, such as colonialism, slavery, or their aftermath as they are lived out in many parts of the world today” (Pratt 1991: 34). While not always explicitly linked to literary and cultural studies, the phrasing (or its equivalent *contact area(s)*) has increasingly come into use in political science to designate regions of cultural and (geo)political interaction and confrontation (see, for example, Bufon 2006; Csurgai 2021: 34, quoting Ratti and Reichman 1993: 23), in which degeneration into conflict is not excluded (Sternfeld 2017: 260). In this chapter, the term is used in a somewhat flexible manner to identify regions where marked political instability paved the way – at least at an incubatory stage – for the emergence of new federal formations that proved effective over time, both from a top-down and from a bottom-up perspective (on the flexibility of the notion of *contact zone*, see Rohde and Boaglio 2022: 5: “Solch eine flexible Definition sozialer Räume erlaubt, Regions- und Raumbegriffe als historische Analyseeinheiten in Betracht zu ziehen, die nicht administrativ-territorialen Entitäten entsprachen” / “Una definizione così flessibile consente di esaminare come unità storiche anche concetti di regione e spazio che non corrispondono a entità amministrativo-territoriali”).
- 18 Wheatley 1998: 20, quoted by Meuss 2018: 104.
- 19 See, for example, Wheatley 2009: 54 (“transitional forty-year period”); Anson 2014: 10 (“first transitional generation, the Diadochi”); Capdetrey 2022: 14–15 (“Ce démi-siècle [*i.e.* la période qui court de la mort d’Alexandre aux années 270 a.C.], identifié comme une transition [...]”).
- 20 διελόμενος δὲ τὸν στόλον πεντήκοντα μὲν ναῦς ἐξέπεμψεν εἰς Πελοπόννησον, τῶν δ’ ἄλλων ναύαρχον καταστήσας Διοσκουρίδην τὸν ἀδελφίδου προσέταξε περιπλεῖν τοῖς τε συμμάχοις παρεχόμενον τὴν ἀσφάλειαν καὶ τῶν νήσων τὰς μὴπω μετεχούσας τῆς συμμαχίας προσαγόμενον. τὰ μὲν οὖν κατὰ τὸν Ἀντίγονον ἐν τούτοις ἦν (Diod. 19.62.9, transl. R. M. Geer).
- 21 Ἄμα δὲ τούτοις πραττομένοις Πτολεμαῖος μὲν ἀκούσας τὰ δεδογμένα τοῖς μετ’ Ἀντιγόνου Μακεδόσι περὶ τῆς τῶν Ἑλλήνων ἐλευθερίας ἔγραψε καὶ αὐτὸς τὰ παραπλήσια, βουλόμενος εἰδέναι τοὺς Ἕλληνας ὅτι φροντίζει τῆς αὐτονομίας αὐτῶν

- οὐχ ἤττον Ἀντιγόνου· (2.) οὐ γὰρ μικρὰν ῥοπὴν ὀρῶντες οὔσαν ἐκάτεροι προσλαβέσθαι τὴν τῶν Ἑλλήνων εὐνοίαν διημιλλῶντο πρὸς ἀλλήλους περὶ τῆς εἰς τοὺτους εὐεργεσίας (Diod. 19.62.1–2, transl. R. M. Geer).
- 22 On the establishment and early history of the League of the Islanders, see Bagnall 1976: 136–41; Buraselis 1982: 60–87 and 180–8, 2013: 174–7, 2015: 359–66; Billows 1990: 220–5 (with earlier bibliography); Constantakopoulou 2012 (further elaborated in Constantakopoulou 2017: 31–56). According to Badoud 2014, the dismemberment of the ‘first’ League of the Islanders must be placed around 258.
 - 23 *IG* XI.4 1036 ll. 3–7: ποῆ[[σαι δὲ αὐτοὺς ἐν] Δήλῳι [τ]ὸ μὲν ἕτερον ἔτος τὴν π[α]] [νῆγυριν τῶν Ἀν]τιγονε[ι]ῶν ἦν νῦν ποιοῦσιν, τὸ δ[ε] | [ἕτερον θυσίαν] καὶ ἀγ[ῶ]νας καὶ σύνοδον ἐπονο[[μάσαντας Δημ]η[τρ]ιε[ι]α. The Antigoneia were still celebrated in 296, when the inventory list *IG* XI.2 154 was inscribed (see A, l. 42: τοῖς Ἀντιγονεῖσι δαῖδες εἰς τὸν χορόν).
 - 24 Ll. 6–8: καὶ σύνοδον ἐπονο[[μάσαντας Δημ]η[τρ]ιε[ι]α, καὶ συνέδρους ἀποστέλ[λειν εἰς ταῦτ]α. An assembly held at Samos is attested by *IG* XII.7 506 for the period of Ptolemaic control of the League (ll. 3–4: ὅπως ἂν ἀπο[στ]εῖ[λ]ωσιν συνέδρους εἰς Σάμον).
 - 25 L. 12: [ἀπὸ τῶν κοιν]ῶν χρημάτων.
 - 26 L. 12–14: κατὰ | [τὴν σύνταξιν] τὴν νῦν οὔσαν τοῖς νησιώταις ὑπ[έρ] τῶν Ἀντιγ[ον]εῖων; ll. 14–15: καὶ ἐάν τις τῶν νησιωτῶν | [μὴ τελῶσιν εἰς ταῦτα τὴν σύνταξιν κτλ.
 - 27 Meadows 2013 (see also *BE* 2015, nr. 519). Meadows revitalizes an earlier view held by Félix Dürnbach in 1907 (Dürnbach 1907). Meadows’s view is shared by Wörrle 2021: 121.
 - 28 Among the scholars who argued against Meadows’s view, see at least Buraselis 2013: 174–5 with n. 6; Buraselis 2015: 361 (Buraselis’s main arguments can already be found in Buraselis 1982: 60–4); Landucci Gattinoni 2016: 51–5; Constantakopoulou 2017: 34–5; Étienne and Lefèvre 2018 (with *BE* 2020, nr. 306).
 - 29 See esp. *IG* XI.4 1037–1048; *IG* XII.7 506.
 - 30 A number of inscriptions preserve the names of three or four nesiarchs (Apollodoros, Bakchon, Hermias and [---]dros?). Apollodoros of Kyzikos: *I. Mysien Rep.* 1437 (beginning of the third century); *I. Délos* 338.B (dating back to 224), l. 24; 396.B (dating back to 194), l. 57. Bakchon from Boiotia: *IG* XI.4 559 l. 10, 1125 ll. 2–3, 1126 (τὸν νησιάρχον | [Βάκ]χοντα [Νι]κῆ[του] Βριώ[τιον]; on the provenance of Bakchos, see also *IG* XI.4 1038 l. 5), XII.4 135 ll. 15–16, XII.5 1004 l. 2, XII.7 506 ll. 2–3; *I. Délos* 298.A, ll. 170–1; *I. Délos* 300.B ll. 18–19. Further Delian dedications made by Bakchon are listed in Rigsby 1980. Hermias: *I. Délos* 297 l. 55, 298.A ll. 79–80, 314.B ll. 68–9, 396.B (dating back to 194) l. 57, 399.B (dating back to 192) l. 99, 425 l. 15, 426 l. 3, 439.A l. 66, 442.B (dating back to 179) l. 71, 455.B (dating back to 173) ll. 32–3. [---]dros?: *I. Délos* 300 l. 22. For the attribution of νησιάρχης to Agathokles of Syracuse in Plut. *Demetr.* 25.7 and the various tinges of the term, see De Vido 2023: 196–214.
 - 31 *IG* XI.4 1040 l. 26 and 1041 l. 19.
 - 32 *IG* XII Suppl. 169 l. 4.
 - 33 *IG* XI.4 1038 ll. 16–17, 1043 ll. 14–15; *IG* XII.7 506 ll. 4–8 and 53–62; see also *IG* XI.4 1037.
 - 34 Respectively, *IG* XI.4 1038 (Sostratos of Knidos); 1040 (Hypatodoros and Kaphisodoros from Thebes); 1044 (unknown honorand from Samothrace); 1046 (Peleos and another unknown honorand from Halikarnassos); 1042 (Theon of Aigai). Additionally, the Nesiotai dedicated some statues to Ptolemy II (*IG* XI.4 1123–4), Bacchon the Boiotian (1125–6) and the Samian navarch Kallikrates (1127).
 - 35 ἐπειδὴ ὁ | [β]ασιλεὺς καὶ σωτὴρ Πτολεμαῖος πολλῶν | καὶ μεγάλων ἀγαθῶν αἴτιος ἐγένετο τοῖς | [τ]ε νησιώταις καὶ τοῖς ἄλλοις Ἑλλήσιν, τὰς τε π[όλ]εις ἐλευθερώσας καὶ τοὺς νόμους ἀποδοὺς | [κ]αὶ τῇ πατρίῳ πολιτείᾳ πᾶσι καταστήσας, | κ[αὶ] τῶν εἰσφορῶν κουφίσας κτλ. – “since King Ptolemy [I] Soter [the Saviour] has been respon-

- sible for many great blessings to the Islanders and the other Greeks, having liberated the cities, restored their laws, re-established to all their ancestral constitution and remitted their taxes, etc.” (*IG* XII.7 506 ll. 10–16, transl. M. M. Austin).
- 36 *IG* XI.4 751–2; XII.5 817, 824, 918.
- 37 Berthold 1984: 142–4; Sheedy 1996; Wiemer 2002: 271–6; Badoud 2014: 120–4; Buraselis 2015: 363–5.
- 38 Berthold 1984: 143–4.
- 39 Sheedy 1996: 447–8.
- 40 Berthold 1984: 144; Sheedy 1996: 448–9.
- 41 Reger 1994; Brun 1996: 9–17 and 163–70; Reger 2011; Constantakopoulou 2017: 22–30.
- 42 Reger 1994: 62, n. 124; Sheedy 1996: 425.
- 43 Buraselis 1982; Reger 1994: 47–65; Badoud 2014. For the Aitolian presence across the Aegean during the third century, see Funke 2008. For the Seleukid ambitions in the Aegean Sea, see *IG* XII.6 1.11 (Samos, honorific decree for Boulagoras, shortly after 243/2), as well as Liv. 35.51.6–10; 36.11.1–3 and 21.1–3 (conquest of Chalkis in Euboia and submission of other Euboian poleis).
- 44 Plut. *Demetr.* 44.1–1, 45.1, 46.1–4; *Pyrrh.* 11.1–12, 6; Paus. 1.10.2; Iust. 16.2.1–3; Eus. *Chron.* 110.18–20 Karst. Glimpses of the Athenian revolt against Demetrios’s garrison in 287/6 can also be gleaned in the Athenian decree for Kallias of Sphettos (*IG* II/III³.1 911 ll. 11–46).
- 45 Berthold 1984: 133–42; Sheedy 1996: 426, 432, 447–9; Wiemer 2002: 225–8.
- 46 Diod. 19.62.
- 47 For a comparative perspective, studies on modern federalism demonstrate that federalization processes may follow either aggregative or devolutionary dynamics, driven by a combination of coercive and voluntary impulses (see Kössler 2024: 70–3). Australia, as a part of the British Commonwealth, may be taken as the “purest case of an aggregative federation, having been formed in 1901 by voluntary and democratic union of the same six constituent units as make it up today” (Fenna 2018 quoted in Kössler 2024: 81).
- 48 For a modern, illuminating perspective on resilient regions, see Hudson 2010: 12: “[the term *resilience*] denotes the capacity of ecosystems, individuals, organisations or materials to cope with disruption and stress and retain or subsequently regain functional capacity and form”.
- 49 See Billows 1990: 217–8; Billows 2007 (esp. 40–1); Lefèvre 2019: 364–5.
- 50 See esp. Robert 1966a: 18–46; Lefèvre and Pillot 2015; Capdetrey 2022: 221–5.
- 51 See Robert 1966a: 37–9; Lefèvre and Pillot 2015: 5–8. In this respect, as emphasized by Pillot 2021, the official designation of the league clearly reflects the religious implications of this polis association (αἱ πόλεις αἱ κοινωνοῦσαι τοῦ ἱεροῦ καὶ τῆς πανηγύρεως in *I.Ilion* 1 ll. 25–6, 57–8, αἱ πόλεις αἱ κοινωνοῦσαι τῆς πανηγύρεως in *SEG* 53.1373 ll. 25–6, or αἱ πόλεις αἱ κοινωνοῦσαι τῆς θυσίας καὶ τοῦ ἁγῶνος καὶ τῆς πανηγύρεως in *I.Ilion* 2 ll. 42–3, 48–9; 12 ll. 1–3; 13 ll. 1–5; 14 ll. 1–3; 15 ll. 1–3; 16 ll. 1–4; 17 ll. 1–3; 18 ll. 2–3; 81 ll. 1–2; 82 ll. 1–3).
- 52 Pillot 2016. See also Capdetrey 2022: 11 (“la Troade, cette sorte de finistère séleucide”) and 14 (“Les effets de la conquête renforcèrent cependant le caractère de ‘région frontrière’ de l’Anatolie occidentale, ne serait-ce que parce qu’à partir de la mort d’Alexandre la région fut tiraillée entre plusieurs polarités politiques et administratives tout à fait nouvelles, des polarités structurées autour des puissances dynastiques puis royales et alimentées aussi par les nouvelles conditions de la circulation des hommes et des biens”).
- 53 Pillot 2016: 145–54.
- 54 *I.Ilion* 12 l. 12 (honours for Agathes of Ilion; first century).
- 55 *I.Ilion* 53 l. 26; *I.Ilion* 58 l. 4 (both from the second century).
- 56 *I.Ilion* 2 (honours for Kydimos of Abydos; end of the third or beginning of the second century); *SEG* 53.1373 (honours for Antikles of Lampsakos; first half of the second century).

- 57 See above, n. 50.
- 58 See, for example, Robert 1966a: 20–1; Landucci Gattinoni 2005–2006: 21–4 (with earlier bibliography); Lefèvre and Pillot 2015: 4, n. 6; Capdetrey 2022: 221–2. A dating to 334 for the dossier of Malousios of Gargara has been proposed by Verkinderen 1987.
- 59 *I.Illion* 1 = *Syll.*³ 330 = Migeotte, *Emprunt* 79. See at least Robert 1966a: 20–1; Billows 1990: 218–19 and Landucci Gattinoni 2005–2006: 21–2.
- 60 *I.Illion* 1 ll. 1 (supplemented), 14, 23, 24, 27, 29, 34, 37, 40–41, 41–42. On the *synedrion* and its functions, see Knoepfler 2010: 36–8; Lefèvre and Pillot 2015: 21–4.
- 61 Ll. 10–11, 22, 36. On the ephemeral nature of this board, see Lefèvre and Pillot 2015: 21.
- 62 Ll. 42, 44. On the federal ἀγωνοθέται, see Knoepfler 2010.
- 63 *I.Illion* 32 ll. 33–41. The dating of this inscription is much debated: Antiochos son of Seleukos is sometimes identified with Antiochos I (see, for example, Robert 1966b; Jones 1993; Capdetrey 2022: 11–12 with 223 n. 52), sometimes with Antiochos III (see, for example, Sokoloff 1904; Piejko 1991).
- 64 A survey of the available evidence can be found in Lefèvre and Pillot 2015.
- 65 *I.Illion* 81–2 (see also *I.Illion* 13), with a commentary by Kantiréa 2016.
- 66 Capdetrey 2022: 221–5.
- 67 On the Hellenic League of Antigonos and Demetrios, see at least Billows 1990: 172–3 and 228–30; Harter-Uibopuu 2003; Smarczyk 2015: 458–61; Kralli 2017: 101–2; Wheatley and Dunn 2020: 228–32.
- 68 Diod. 20.45.1.
- 69 See, for example, Billows 1990: 1–2 and 230; Capdetrey 2022: 73–122 (ch. II: *L’Asie Mineure, épicerie du pouvoir antigonide*).
- 70 Capdetrey 2022: 116; Wheatley and Dunn 2020: 229–30.
- 71 ἐν δ’ Ἰσθμῷ κοινοῦ συνεδρίου γενομένου καὶ πολλῶν ἀνθρώπων συνελθόντων, ἡγεμὼν ἀνηγορεύθη τῆς Ἑλλάδος ὡς πρότερον οἱ περὶ Φίλιππον καὶ Ἀλέξανδρον· (5.) ὧν ἐκεῖνος οὐ παρὰ μικρὸν ἐνόμιζεν ἑαυτὸν εἶναι βελτίονα, τῇ τύχῃ τῇ παρούσῃ καὶ τῇ δυνάμει τῶν πραγμάτων ἐπαίρομενος (Plut. *Demetr.* 25.4–5, transl. B. Perrin)
- 72 *StV* III 446 = *ISE* I 44 = *IG* IV².1 68 ll. 8–9, 12–14.
- 73 Ll. 70–1 ([...] ἔως μὲν ἂν ὁ κοινὸς πόλεμος λυ[θῇ][...]); 77 ([...] ὅταν ὁ πόλε[μος] λυθῇ[...]); 91 (ἔως ἂν ὁ κοινὸς πόλεμος λυθ[ῇ][...]). On the military operations of Demetrios in Greece and the war against Kassandros, see Billows 1990: 169–79 and Wheatley and Dunn 2020: 203–38.
- 74 Ll. 67–99.
- 75 Ll. 1–15, 25–6, 66–9, 95–9, 107.
- 76 Ll. 10–11: τοῖς δὲ μετέχουσι τοῦ συνεδρίου φιλίαν εἶναι καὶ | [συμμαχίαν εἰς αἰε ---].
- 77 Ll. 66–9: συνέρχεσθαι δὲ τοὺς συνέδρους ἐμὲ μὲν τῇ εἰρήνῃ τοῖς ἱεροῖς ἀγῶσιν(?), ἐν δὲ τῷ πολέμῳ, ὅσας ἂν δοκῇ | [σ]υμφέρειν τοῖς † συνέδροις καὶ [τῷ στρατῷ] γὰρ τῷ ὑπὸ τῶν βασιλέων ἐπὶ τῆς κοι[ν]ῆς φυλακῆς καταλειμμέν[ωι].
- 78 *Agora* 16.122; *IG* XII.9 198. For Adeimantos of Lampsakos, see Robert 1946: 15–33; Landucci Gattinoni 2001; Wallace 2013 (see 144–5 for a commentary of *SEG* 43.27, a new document from Rhamnous, now *I.Rhamnous* 401).
- 79 See Capdetrey 2022: 112 (“les années qui suivirent [i.e. after 311] virent la mise en place d’une ligne de fracture – d’Athènes et du Péloponnèse à Chypre – le long de laquelle devait se structurer, d’ouest en est, l’affrontement [i.e. among the Diadochi]”).
- 80 Billows 1990: 217.
- 81 For the notion of autonomy within Greek *koina* and its impact on the interstate relations in the fourth century, see Beck and Funke 2015: 3 and Smarczyk 2015: 454–5 (with further references).
- 82 For a survey of the powers in early Hellenistic Anatolia, see Capdetrey 2022: 100–2.
- 83 Diod. 19.75.1–2 with the commentary of Capdetrey 2022: 86–90. The political organization of Asia Minor under Seleukid rule presents a pattern of territorial control broadly comparable to that previously adopted by Antigonos (Capdetrey 2007: 115–24).

- 84 See Billows 1990: 186: “The serious reverse at Gaza, the failure of the Egyptian expedition, the debacle of the siege of Rhodes, and the final disaster at Ipsos itself were all due in great part to errors on the part of Demetrios, who simply lacked the consistent political, strategic, and tactical sureness of touch which marked out Antigonos as the greatest of the Diadochoi, and which were required if Demetrios were to play the role intended for him by Antigonos satisfactorily.” Harsh as they may be, Billows’s words at the end of its historical survey on Antigonos’s achievements convey an image of Demetrios that is strongly shaped by the unfavourable lens of our main sources – essentially Diodoros and Plutarch. For Demetrios’s military talent, eternalized by the epithet of *besieger*, and a more balanced view of its personality, see Wheatley 2020; Wheatley and Dunn 2020: 279–300.
- 85 See above, nn. 35 and 44.
- 86 See above, n. 62.
- 87 Buraselis 2013: 176–7; Buraselis 2015: 365–6.

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Part IV

Alliances Compared

Transepochal Perspectives



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15 Comparing Alliances under Pressure

An Experimental Approach in Comparative History

Marian Nebelin

This chapter focuses on the question of how alliance systems from various historical periods can be compared to one another. This comparison seeks to enhance our understanding of the alliance systems by providing a functional description and explaining how they operated. It provides insights not only into the more general characteristics of alliance systems, but also into the unique features of each specific case. One useful approach is to analyze how alliance systems responded to crises, since crises can be recognized only in relation to periods of stability. Such scenarios also reveal the factors of resilience that ensure the continued existence of these alliance systems and enable them to adapt to new challenges. Comparing alliances under pressure thus can help to better understand alliances and crises within alliance systems, as well as external crisis dynamics that influence an alliance. Therefore, historical comparisons simultaneously shed light on different aspects of a historical topic, meaning their value is not limited to the past.¹ Comparisons can reveal aspects that may also be relevant to other cases and situations.

In this chapter, the two alliance systems of democratic Athens in the fifth and fourth centuries BC, the Delian League (478–404 BC) and the Second Athenian League (378–338/337 BC) are compared to a modern alliance that still exists and whose history is therefore not yet completed: the North Atlantic Treaty Organization (NATO). The history of Athens and its imperial order has frequently been compared to that of the United States as the leading world power of the twentieth and twenty-first centuries.² Comparisons are occasionally drawn between the Athenian alliances and NATO, between the Cold War and the Peloponnesian War.³ However, a closer look not only at the similarities, but also at the differences between the alliance systems would be beneficial to this discourse. Such a comparison reveals general as well as specific aspects, highlighting the possibilities, opportunities and challenges of solving specific problems in historical and current cases. By focusing on crisis situations, it is possible to reveal factors of resilience that may help not only to overcome the crisis, but also to analyze reasons for the collapse of alliances.

The following text provides a brief overview of the history of the three alliance systems, considering how these alliances were involved in changing conflicts. (1) Building upon this, the first comparison focuses on the institutional structures of the alliance systems: the organization of the military, the decision-making processes and the distribution of power. (2) Then, a concept of crisis and a concept of

resilience are proposed and crises in the alliance systems, as well as the potential and factors of resilience, are discussed and compared on this basis. (3) The concluding remarks summarize the results and raise the general question of the potential of historical comparisons for understanding alliance systems. (4) The following considerations can provide only a brief comparative outline. The main focus is on the methodological aspects, with the aim of informing subsequent comparative approaches.

1. Alliances in Conflict

The Delian League as well as NATO were a result of the struggle against a common enemy: in the case of NATO, the Soviet Union, in the case of the Delian League, the Persians.⁴ Many Greek poleis had initially united under the leadership of Sparta, Greece's leading land force, to form the Hellenic League to defend themselves against Persian hegemony. After the victory at Plataiai, the Spartans declared that the aims of the alliance had been achieved. In 478 BC, Athens, the aspiring "sea power",⁵ initiated an alliance whose aim was to continue the war against Persia in favour of the Greek poleis of Asia Minor.⁶ This *symmachia* (συμμαχία), a military alliance both defensive and offensive,⁷ was an alliance of autonomous partners, with Athens as the strongest power acting as hegemon.⁸ The self-designation as "the Athenians and their allies" (*hoi Athenaiotai kai hoi symmachoi*) reflects the power asymmetry within the new alliance.⁹ This name was also adopted by the subsequent alliance.¹⁰ Over time, the Delian League became a system of rule in which Athens monopolized military power and treated her allies as subordinate followers. The allies increasingly perceived this power structure as repressive. Athens responded with extreme violence to any attempt to secede, for example against Naxos in 470 BC and Thasos in 466/455 BC.¹¹ To symbolize the new balance of power, the alliance's treasury was moved from Delos to Athens in 454 BC.¹²

After the so-called Peace of Kallias in 448 BC, the struggle against Persia became less significant. The subsequent period, until the outbreak of the Peloponnesian War in 431 BC, was characterized by "constructive consolidation".¹³ During this interim period, "the decisive structural transformation from a hegemonic alliance to the Attic Empire" occurred.¹⁴ Ultimately, the alliance's main test was not the war against Persia, but against Sparta, which increasingly perceived Athens's growing power as a source of rivalry and concern.¹⁵ The Peloponnesian War (431–404 BC) was therefore essentially a war between two alliance systems: the Delian League, led by Athens, and the Peloponnesian League, led by Sparta.¹⁶ Athens's defeat in 404 BC also signalled the end of the Delian League. Ironically, the Spartans were able to achieve this victory not least because of Persian support.¹⁷

Several decades passed before Athens had recovered sufficiently from its defeat to pursue the formation of a maritime alliance once again. The smaller, less repressive Second Athenian League existed from 378 to 338/337 BC.¹⁸ When it was founded, it was primarily directed against Sparta's hegemony,¹⁹ but also against the continuing threat to the autonomy of the Greek poleis posed by the Persian Empire. As in the Delian League, the definition of the main enemy changed in the

decades that followed. First it was Sparta (378–371 BC), then Thebes (371–361 BC) and finally Macedonia (since 348 BC).²⁰ During the so-called Social War (358/357–356/355 BC),²¹ Byzantium, Chios, Kos and Rhodes attempted to secede from the alliance. These poleis may have withdrawn from the alliance either due to dissatisfaction with Athens's "ghost of Empire"²² or because they wanted to form an alliance with Maussolos, the ruler of Karia from 377 to 353 BC and a Persian vassal.²³ The remaining members of the alliance continued to side with Athens. Due to the ensuing unrest, Athens was no longer able to protect its allies in Asia Minor from Persian aspirations. While the Second Athenian League was once considered a "second Empire", this view has changed.²⁴ In current scholarship, it is described as "the free alliance its organisers proclaimed it to be".²⁵ The final end of the Second Athenian League was signalled only by the establishment of Macedonian rule in 338 BC, although "Athens maintained friendly relations with many of its [= the League's; M. Nebelin] loyal members".²⁶ But ultimately, both Athenian alliance systems failed.

In contrast,²⁷ NATO emerged victorious from the conflicts that led to its formation. As previously mentioned, NATO was also established following a victory over an enemy.²⁸ Immediately after defeating National Socialist Germany, the British government – concerned about an imminent escalation of the ideological and hegemonic conflict between the liberal, capitalist Western European powers and the communist Soviet Union (Union of Soviet Socialist Republics – USSR) – sought to strengthen the US presence in Europe, recognizing it as the leading 'Western' military power.²⁹ To protect the USA and its Western European allies from Soviet influence, NATO was founded in 1949. In 1955, the Warsaw Pact (WP; to be precise: the Treaty of Friendship, Cooperation and Mutual Assistance – TFCMA) was established under Soviet leadership.³⁰ The Cold War between the two superpowers, which defined the second half of the twentieth century politically, overstretched the economic, social and political resources of the USSR. In 1991, the Warsaw Pact was dissolved on 25 February, followed by the Soviet Union on 26 December.

The NATO states had won the systemic competition. However, this also meant that the main reason for the foundation of the alliance had ceased to exist. The 1990s therefore became a time of reorientation for NATO.³¹ This process was essentially shaped by two developments. First, many Eastern European countries that had been forced to join the Warsaw Pact wanted to join NATO.³² They saw this as a guarantee of their independence, which they believed was under long-term threat from Russia, the successor state of the Soviet Union. The question of whether written assurances were given to Russia that NATO would not expand eastwards has recently become the subject of intense public debate, influenced by Russian propaganda in the wake of the Russian invasion of Ukraine. However, Mary E. Sarotte's thorough analysis of the sources and events provides a clear picture:³³ No written commitment had been made to Russia during treaty negotiations that NATO would not expand or require Eastern Europe to remain neutral. Therefore, the military integration of these countries was a logical step for NATO members seeking to support these states in their challenging system transformation, as well

as to stabilize the alliance's eastern border region. On the other hand, the alliance increasingly began to address regional security issues, such as the conflict in Kosovo in 1999,³⁴ as well as global ones ('out of area-interventions'),³⁵ such as anti-piracy operations.³⁶ Since then, the alliance has become "a controversial player whose actions encompass the roles of protector, peacemaker, saviour and arbitrary hegemon".³⁷

After the turn of the millennium, fighting terrorism became a major objective of the alliance. While the alliance never declared a state of emergency during the Cold War, it did so after the 11 September 2001 attacks,³⁸ when the partners supported the USA in its global 'war on terror'.³⁹ The alliance's area of operation expanded to a global scale.⁴⁰ However, over the last ten years, an old conflict has begun to affect NATO policy in a new way. Following Russia's military annexation of Ukrainian territories in 2014 and its full-scale invasion in 2022, the Eastern European members of the alliance have been subject to a direct military threat.⁴¹ Finland and Sweden joined the alliance in 2023 and 2024, respectively. At the same time, there are increasing signs that the USA, NATO's strongest member, could be entering a new phase of isolationism.⁴² The present era is therefore undoubtedly a time of crisis for NATO.

2. First Comparison: Institutions – Military Organization, Decision-Making and the Distribution of Power

At first glance, the differences between ancient and modern alliances are obvious: they operate on vastly different scales, with significant disparities in territory, population and technological development. However, when considered in the contemporary context, these factors do not prevent comparison. This is a question of identifying a *tertium comparationis* and of 'scaling', to establish a common ground for comparison.⁴³ The overarching category of 'military alliance systems' applies to both cases. For example, there is no doubt that ancient Athens did not have aircraft carriers and that NATO never built triremes. But both alliances' strategies rely heavily on naval forces. For this reason, despite huge technological differences, the respective military and political strategies can be compared. Accordingly, there are significant differences in spatial coverage, means of communication, military response options and temporal and communicative processes within the alliances. However, as will be shown, the decisions to be made are very similar, especially in times of crisis. Therefore, the time-related differences in these areas do not represent an obstacle to a historical comparison. Setting aside the issue of scaling, we can consider the organization of the military in general terms, the decision-making processes and the distribution of power within the alliances.

In the Delian League, most partners did not have their own fleet, with the exception of a few powerful allies (Chios and Mytilene).⁴⁴ Instead, they paid a contribution, the *phoros* (φóρος),⁴⁵ which the Athenians used to build a military force, making them "the eastern Mediterranean's superpower".⁴⁶ Vincent Gabrielsen accurately identified this as a process of "resource-conversion",⁴⁷ "monetization and centralization".⁴⁸ Consequently, the Second Athenian League was not planned

to receive such financial contributions, “though ‘voluntary contributions’ eventually became more or less obligatory”.⁴⁹ Nevertheless, Athens had lost the income from its former empire, leaving it unable to regain its former status.⁵⁰ The balance of military power within NATO is also asymmetrical, with the United States possessing the world’s most powerful military. Its forces form the core of NATO’s military capabilities. The other members of the alliance depend on the USA militarily, especially in terms of military technology.⁵¹ In all three alliances, spatial control also plays a central military role: the Athenian alliances tried to control the Aegean Sea, while NATO tries to control the Atlantic Ocean, including the North Sea and the Baltic Sea. A significant difference between the three alliances lies in their respective attitudes towards war: Athens, for example, had a “pro-war culture” in the Delian League.⁵² By contrast, preserving peace became a central goal of the Second Athenian League following the Peloponnesian War.⁵³ Until 1990, NATO’s focus also was on preventing wars. Since then, it has become involved in numerous military actions without cultivating a ‘pro-war culture’.

The second and third points of comparison should be considered together because decision-making is directly linked to the distribution of power within an alliance. Organizational issues are power issues. However, the distribution of power within alliances is visible not only in formal structures, but also in symbolic and ritual practices. Analysing and comparing the internal relationships within alliance systems requires considering both formal and real power relations. While formal power relations are usually evident in contractual agreements and institutional decision-making processes, real power relations are more difficult to identify. Contracts may contain relevant information, such as granting partners different rights and obligations or giving one partner symbolic priority. Ultimately, shifts in power become apparent in terms of influence over decisions concerning the alliance’s joint actions.

Both the Delian League (and later also the Second Athenian League) were formed through a series of treaties of their members with Athens.⁵⁴ This meant that the alliance was centred around Athens as the most powerful partner. In practice, however, the power relations within the two alliance systems were structured differently. In the first alliance system, Athens was the ruling power: The Delian League was “an organised, hegemonic, and therefore asymmetrical or subordinated offensive and defensive alliance”.⁵⁵ The extent to which Athens was willing to interfere in the internal politics of its allies is evident from the fact that it established democratic regimes in the cities of those allies who were defeated after rebelling.⁵⁶ This demonstrates not only that the Athenians viewed the conflict with Sparta as a competition between constitutional orders, as Thucydides reported,⁵⁷ but also that they were prepared to overthrow their allies’ political power structures if necessary. The league’s administration was based in Athens and comprised around 700 magistrates.⁵⁸ As Jonathan M. Hall has emphasized, decision-making in both the maritime alliances led by Athens was ‘bicameral’: the Athenian assembly (which normally discussed matters first) possessed an authority equal to that of the *synedrion* (συνέδριον, “council or assembly”) in which all the other allies had one vote.⁵⁹ In both cases, Athens was the place of decision-making.⁶⁰ The transfer

of the Delian League's treasury marked a turning point in the alliance's decision-making processes and power relations: the alliance assembly ceased to be convened,⁶¹ conflicts between partners were settled in Athens and all partners' coinage was subject to the Athenian system.⁶²

In the case of the Second Athenian League, the two 'chambers' remained in place and Athens relinquished its voting rights on the alliance's council.⁶³ However, Kurt A. Raaflaub has demonstrated that the ruling ideology and practices of the Athenians in the Delian League, including the subsequent 'enslavement' of their allies,⁶⁴ continued to influence the attitudes of the Second Athenian League's members towards Athens. Despite Athens's leading role in the second alliance, it was not able to directly control the internal affairs of its allies. The "timeframe of 481 to 386" marks "Athen's imperial age";⁶⁵ "[a]fter 378 the *dēmos* generally did not treat allies as imperial subjects".⁶⁶ The structure of a membership treaty of the Second Athenian League is illustrated by the stele bearing the so-called Aristotle Decree from 378/377 BC.⁶⁷ It defines the status of the individual members upon accession: members retain their 'freedom' and 'autonomy' (line 20) and are admitted on the same terms as all other members (lines 23–5). This guarantee of freedom also included the assurance that they would be able to organize their internal affairs independently: each member of the alliance was assured the right to "govern himself according to the constitution which he prefers" (lines 20–1: πολιτ[ευομέν]ωι πολιτείαν ἣν ἂν βόληται).

The stele not only documents a relationship and an organizational structure but also conveys complex symbolic allusions. For instance, references to political terms such as 'freedom' and 'autonomy', which were guaranteed to the smaller allies, can be interpreted as the basic propaganda message: The alliance is presented as a coalition of independent poleis. The smaller allies emphasize their independence, while the largest one demonstrates respect for the smaller ones. While the smaller allies' right to self-organization is highlighted, along with the explicit limits on Athens's power to interfere in their internal affairs, the most important symbolic point is that the treaty is concluded by the allies with Athens. This underlines Athens's role as the alliance's leading power, both symbolically and in fact. The alliance exists through the totality of the treaties with Athens. Thus, the alliance's multilateralism stemmed from its bilateral relations with Athens. Accordingly, the treaty's symbolic dimension accentuates the legal and symbolic autonomy of the smaller allies, as well as Athens's primacy within the Second Athenian League.

An approach that combines an analysis of treaty structures with symbolic aspects is also fruitful with regard to NATO. The alliance was founded on 4 April 1949 with the signing of the North Atlantic Treaty.⁶⁸ According to Article 6, the territorial scope is "the North Atlantic area north of the Tropic of Cancer". The initial articles outline a commitment to resolving conflicts peacefully between partners (Article 1) and to maintaining the "individual and collective capacity to resist armed attack" (Article 3). Domestic political freedom and stability are named as common goals of all partners (Article 2). The NATO Council is the central organ of the North Atlantic Treaty Organization (NATO), in which each of the allies "shall be represented" (Article 9). According to Article 4, if one partner perceives

(“whenever, in the opinion of any of them”) that “the territorial integrity, political independence or security of any of the Parties is threatened”, consultations are to be held.

At the heart of the North Atlantic Treaty lies Article 5, which sets out how to respond to a detected attack. The allies agree that “an armed attack against one or more of them in Europe or North America shall be considered an attack against them all”. They declare that they would support the ally under attack “individually and in concert with the other Parties”. However, the nature and extent of this support is left to the individual partners, each of whom may take “such action as it deems necessary, including the use of armed force”. This formulation allows for flexibility within the alliance, considering the varying military strengths of its members. It increases the alliance’s threat potential by leaving open the possibility of a military response to an attack, while clearly emphasizing this option, thus establishing strategic ambiguity. The disadvantage of this article for the alliance is that there is no definitive basic obligation to use military force in favour of an attacked ally.

A significant difference between ancient and modern alliance systems is the institutionalization of self-reflection. In Antiquity, military knowledge was primarily experiential and military leadership skills were acquired through practical experience. Historiographical, technical and military-strategic forms of knowledge repositories and reflections were not yet institutionalized and depended largely on individual initiative. In contrast, NATO’s strategic self-reflection is institutionalized in three ways: NATO reporting and analyzes by NATO research institutions like the NATO Defense College Research Division reflect the alliance’s *self-observation*;⁶⁹ the *societal observation* by the alliance’s member states and their publics (e.g. academia⁷⁰ or the press) indirectly feeds into this process, too; and reflections resulting from the systematic evaluation of NATO by non-NATO partners and the alliance’s (potential) adversaries offer insights gained by *observing the observation*. This form of analysis enables institutions to identify potential crises at an early stage, although concrete responses to these crises are then subject to political decision-making. Self-reflection is important for recognizing and understanding differences among allies in order to maintain the alliance despite differing views on details.

The first level of comparison reveals the differences and similarities between the two ancient alliances and the modern one. While there are significant technological and spatial differences in terms of military organization, spatial control remains a fundamental aspect of power for all three alliances. The decision-making processes within the ancient alliances differ and a broad spectrum emerges when compared to the modern alliance, ranging from control by the strongest partner to a round table of formally equal partners. The two alliances led by Athens are remarkably similar to NATO because in all of them the role of the most powerful partner is always symbolically visible. However, power imbalances can also be a source of conflict. Realistic self-analysis can help alliance partners stabilize the alliance and identify potential risks. This analytical capacity is much more pronounced in modern times than it was in Antiquity, even though some of the most significant analyzes of

alliance systems can be found in the historical works of ancient authors such as Thucydides and Polybius.

3. Second Comparison: Crises and Resiliences

The concept of a ‘crisis’ is part of the established political and social vocabulary of modern societies.⁷¹ The term originates from ancient Greek medical discourse, where it referred to a pivotal moment in the course of an illness that would lead to either lasting improvement or deterioration.⁷² When transferred to the social, political and economic sphere, crises represent moments of upheaval, resulting in changes of a (development) process. As a metaphor, crisis implies the transfer of an individual-related meaning to supra-individual, largely abstract processes. Therefore, it is necessary to clarify the extent to which the term is suitable for application to alliance systems. Furthermore, given that the concept of crisis is a ‘concept in the plural’, the question arises as to which meaning of crisis is most relevant for analysing alliances.

Reinhart Koselleck has emphasized that concepts of crisis used in historical comparative studies belong to the category of “iterative period concepts”,⁷³ which can be used “according to the conditions of possible historical developments in order to identify similarities and differences based on their comparability”.⁷⁴ Therefore, the concept of crisis is proposed as an analytical category.⁷⁵ Here, *crisis* is understood as *a moment or phase of upheaval that can turn out for better or worse*. It is important to distinguish between recurring (‘cyclical’) crises and structural (or systemic) crises: recurring crises are “within the realm of previous experience”, therefore bearable or manageable.⁷⁶ They are perceived as a disruptive phenomenon in everyday life, but they do not jeopardize the fundamental functioning of the system. This happens only in the course of a “structural crisis” or a systemic crisis. Walter L. Bühl has identified such a crisis as a ‘threat’ to the “macrostability of the system”.⁷⁷ During such a crisis, the foundations and functioning of a system change so comprehensively that it either becomes dysfunctional and disintegrated or undergoes lasting change. A systemic crisis can be triggered by specific internal or external events, or arise from the intensification of cyclical crises, or from the accumulation and combination of various ‘crisis tendencies’.⁷⁸ Therefore, an essential aspect of resilience might be the ability to counteract the emergence of structural crises, or at least to offset their negative effects. As previously mentioned, crises do not necessarily have negative consequences; a period of uncertainty can also result in an improved, a restructured or strengthened system. Resilience is clearly an important factor in helping systems to cope with crises. This is particularly relevant in the case of negative crises, when it is important to safeguard the systems’ basic principles during times of change. But what exactly does ‘resilience’ mean?

The concept of ‘resilience’ is derived from the field of developmental psychopathology.⁷⁹ In psychologically oriented case studies, trauma tends to be seen as the antithesis of resilience.⁸⁰ These concepts of resilience are based on the idea that a person or a system can overcome a crisis through “internal disturbance processing competence” when subjected to external pressure.⁸¹ But when transferring a

category originally derived from individual psychology to groups and collectives, the potential for distortion must also be considered. While the term 'resilience' usually functions as a metaphor in this context, it can also refer to shared experiences. Starting from psychological definitions, we can seek a more general meaning of the concept. For this purpose, a definition must be found that can be applied to groups of people.

I suggest adopting Corina Wustmann Seiler's definition of resilience as "psychological resistance to biological, psychological and psychosocial developmental risks".⁸² This psychological definition can easily be generalized: *Resilience is resistance to (developmental) risks*, enabling more positive development than would be expected given the negative influencing factors.⁸³ Resilience therefore has a positive impact on developmental processes. What constitutes positive development in collectives is much more difficult to determine than developmental disorders to be avoided in individuals. Resilience can be promoted or challenged by internal and external factors and it can change over time.⁸⁴ It is possible to distinguish between factors that increase risk ('risk factors') and those that minimize risk ('protective factors').⁸⁵ From the perspective of psychology, the term 'resilience' encompasses all person-related protective factors.⁸⁶ Therefore, when applying the term 'resilience' to groups and collectives, it can be generally referring to those protective factors that are inherent in, established by, or institutionalized by the collective itself, or that can be influenced by it. A distinction must be made between these and external factors that are beyond direct influence. Therefore, resilience is important in dealing with both cyclical and systemic crises.⁸⁷ It is about preparing individuals or systems for crises that are expected to last a long time, enabling them to survive and potentially overcome them. Resilience in individuals or systems can also facilitate resistance and subversion.⁸⁸

Resilience is particularly important in preventing and managing structural crises within military alliances, as the controlled handling of certain types of crisis events, crisis tendencies or cyclical crises is one of their defining features. Such alliances are designed to respond to crises in specific settings, such as direct attacks or perceived threats to the alliance's security. Everyday crises are managed through institutions specially created for that purpose, for example assemblies posing decisions and resolving conflicts.⁸⁹ These institutions facilitate communication, thereby fostering trust and social bonds between the member states. Despite the differences between ancient and modern alliances, they fulfil this purpose in all cases. Following Lewis A. Coser, these institutions could be referred to as "safety-valve institutions".⁹⁰ Coser understands these to be primarily institutions that redirect conflicts. However, I would like to broaden the term to include institutions whose function is to resolve conflicts in times of crisis through communication and other regulating measures. Such institutions – like assemblies, councils or administrative units – are a primary source of resilience, as communication density is the main indicator of a resilient system. As an important part of its organization, the administration of an alliance also aims to ensure its continued existence. Therefore, both political institutions and the administration are essential to maintaining alliances. The varying degree of development of these institutions in ancient and modern

alliances affects the strength of this resilience factor; the weaker administrative structures of Antiquity result in lower resilience compared to the modern.

In addition to communication and organization, learning is an essential factor in building resilience. Both – the members and the institutions of an alliance – gain experience. Of course, institutions and individuals learn differently. But the result is the same: the members of an institution share knowledge, they evaluate and optimize processes. Gained experience can facilitate learning that will aid coping with future crises, as Robert Jervis has observed with regard to learning processes in modern organizations:

when an event affects the perceptual predispositions of many members of an organization we can speak of organisational learning. The lessons can become institutionalized in textbooks, rules and even language itself [...]. Lessons become working assumptions and form the basis for future planning. In the military they involve not only strategic and tactical thinking but the conduct of manoeuvres, formal instructions, and standing orders. [...] Past successes and failures are reflected in organizational routines and guidelines. [...] Success is apt to consolidate the power of those who advocated the policy, defeat to undermine it and strengthen the hand of those who had different views.⁹¹

Jervis emphasizes the importance of transferring innovations into new routines, particularly within institutions. Implementing these changes can enhance and strengthen a system's crisis response capabilities:

An event will exercise an especially powerful influence over an organization's memory if the organization's structure is altered so that part of it (perhaps a newly created part) has a special interest in seeing that the previous event is taken as the model for the future.⁹²

Prevention can increase an individual's resilience.⁹³ Similarly, institutional learning may have an impact on collectives, such as alliances. As discussed previously,⁹⁴ there is a significant difference between NATO and the two ancient alliances: only NATO has institutions that are explicitly geared towards learning. These institutions analyze and interpret events and developments. They not only store the gained knowledge, but also use it to devise new courses of action. Scientific services and advisors support the alliance's administration and politics in adapting its structures to changes.

A good example is the 2016 report by the RAND Corporation, a think tank closely tied to NATO. The report concluded that the alliance would be unable to defend its Eastern member states immediately in case of a Russian attack. Following these discussions, NATO increased its troop presence in the region.⁹⁵ In addition, NATO is developing longer-term considerations on how to deal with risks: NATO's so-called strategic concepts are developed at relatively long intervals to guide the work of the alliance. A key factor in this process is to identify and prepare for threats to which the alliance may be exposed, both in the present and in the future.⁹⁶ This clearly illustrates how the degree of institutionalization affects an

alliance's resilience. However, learning played an important role even in ancient times. The contractual structures of the Second Athenian League were designed to prevent Athens from gaining the same level of dominance as in the first alliance. Learning did not take place within the administrative sphere, but rather among the individuals and societies that formed the new alliance. Despite the alliance's ultimate failure, this seems to have been an important factor in its resilience; without it, the alliance might not have been possible.

However, structural crises can undermine the ability to act because they affect the functioning of an alliance's organizational and decision-making structures, as well as its culture of cooperation. Resilience is therefore an internal factor that should counteract such crises. It does not solely consist of a relationship characterized by a combination of benefit considerations and mutual trust, which ideally unites alliance members. Further factors can be identified as essential: the density of communication, the degree of institutionalization in politics and administration and the ability to learn. This also includes the ability to recognize, acknowledge and publicly revise mistakes made by the members of the alliance. Thucydides's vivid account of the debate over the punishment of the people of Mytilene illustrates how institutional and collective learning can occur within a short period of time.⁹⁷ Those Mytileneans who had not attempted to leave the alliance were rescued thanks to a shift in the public opinion in Athens, prompted by intensive discussions among Athenian citizens after the assembly's initial decision to destroy the city, kill all men and sell the women and children into slavery.⁹⁸ These discussions were fostered by well-established communication channels between individual Athenians and the Mytilenean ambassadors.⁹⁹ The next day, the Athenian assembly implemented a new political strategy, which saved the polis from complete destruction.¹⁰⁰ Time is also an important fourth factor: The longer a system has been functioning, the more experience it will have gained in dealing with crises and the more management routines it will be able to mobilize. The more familiar people become with a system, the less likely they are to question its existence. The longer an alliance exists, the more likely it is to continue out of habit and familiarity. In contrast, the aforementioned events surrounding Mytilene demonstrate that speed is sometimes as important as duration in resilient alliance politics.

These factors help to build resilience against crises arising from internal and external sources. But another key factor of resilience in alliances is, of course, the handling of the power asymmetries within them. These can have a significant and sometimes surprising impact. For instance, they prompted the defection of Athens's allies during and following its defeat in the Peloponnesian War, which led to the dissolution of the Delian League. However, the balance of power is not always clear-cut. For example, it was essentially the Corinthians, as allies of the Spartans, who pushed them into war against Athens.¹⁰¹ Nevertheless, if the strongest or leading power leaves an alliance, it can hardly continue to exist. Sparta's withdrawal, for example, destroyed the Hellenic League. However, the withdrawal of even lesser powers can have significant and negative consequences. For example, France's partial withdrawal from NATO,¹⁰² caused by conflicts with the USA, the alliance's leading power, weakened the alliance. The successful management of power imbalances is therefore the fifth resilience factor in (asymmetrical) alliances.

4. Concluding Remarks: Comparing and Storytelling

Comparing alliances across different historical periods can yield valuable insights. This comparison reveals not only similarities and differences among alliances, but also how each alliance system functions. A two-stage approach has proven useful in this regard: first, by comparing institutions, relations and long-term challenges. Then, moments of crisis within the alliances can be examined to identify possible resilience factors. In the cases in question, the following resilience factors proved relevant: communication density, institutional stability, organizational learning processes, time (especially duration) and the management of power asymmetries. However, two crises can push alliances to the limits of their resilience: military defeat, as suffered by Athens, and a crisis of storytelling, which undermines the purpose of an alliance. But what is a crisis of storytelling?

As Rebecca Solnit has pointed out, “every crisis arises, in part, from a crisis of storytelling”.¹⁰³ In this sense the end of the Delian League was marked by the emergence of a narrative of crisis: the story of the Athenian Empire oppressing its weaker partners. Once Athens had been defeated, there was nothing left to keep the allies together; there was no positive narrative of solidarity. In contrast, like NATO, the existence of the Second Athenian League was determined by a different narrative. While the weaker allies were de facto part of the imperial order established by the hegemon, the two alliances became stable when the larger ally guaranteed the security of the smaller ones and did not exercise its superiority too overtly. Meanwhile, the smaller allies were bound to the hegemon through its cultural ‘soft power’. Therefore, the counter-narrative to a crisis in an alliance is one of trust and affinity. This is an important basis for resilience in alliance systems. This circumstance can also be described and explained more generally: A military alliance is particularly well placed to manage crises when it has become a “security community” (Karl W. Deutsch), characterized by internal peace among its members, as well as compatible values, stable communication channels and a sense of “stability of mutual expectations”, among other things.¹⁰⁴ In such a community, (long term) socialization processes, connecting individuals and communities with each other, may occur.¹⁰⁵ Over time, members of an alliance share a common history and refer to shared stories. These connections strengthen the resilience of the alliance and its members, as well as their ability to act under pressure. Successful military alliances therefore need a utopian vision of comprehensive peace and understanding, at least among their own members.

Notes

- 1 On comparative history and its methodology, see the following works, which mostly focus on comparisons between states: Daum et al. 1998; Welskopp 2010; Zimmermann 2010; Kaelble 2021. Cf. also the more general and reconstructive methodological considerations of the Collaborative Research Centre SFB 1288 *Practices of Comparing: Ordering and Changing the World*, as discussed in Epple and Erhart 2020; Carrier et al. 2021 and in Flüchter et al. 2024.
- 2 See Tabachnik 2009, for example.

- 3 Tabachnik 2009: 41, 45.
- 4 On the Persian Wars and the Hellenic League, see Meiggs 1972: 30–41; Dreher 2001: 70–84; Cawkwell 2005: 1–161; Baltrusch 2008: 46–8, 137–40; Kehne 2014: 329–34; Ober 2015: 169; Schmidt-Hofner 2016: 15–95; Schulze and Walter 2022, vol. 1: 169–75; vol. 2: 229–39; Ganter 2024: 69–70.
- 5 Ober 2015: 169.
- 6 Cf. the reconstruction by Petzold 1993: esp. 437–8.
- 7 On terminology, see also Hall 2007: 102; cf. Baltrusch 2008: 40–3.
- 8 Kehne 2014: 335; Schmidt-Hofner 2016: 94.
- 9 See, e.g. Thuc. 4.119.1, 5.18.3–4; cf. *IG I³ 14 I. 23–4*. See also Meiggs 1972: 45; Schuller 1978: 10; Dreher 2001: 87; Baltrusch 2008: 49; Kehne 2014: 335; Schmidt-Hofner 2016: 94; Ganter 2024: 70. Cf. also the contribution by K. Nebelin in this volume.
- 10 See, e.g. *IG I² 43 I. 26–7*.
- 11 Thuc. 1.98.4 (Naxos); 1.100.2; 1.101.1 (Thasos). See Meiggs 1972: 48, 70, 80–90; Raaflaub 1985: 152, 173–8; Dreher 2001: 88–9; Trittle 2010: 6.
- 12 See Plut. *Arist.* 25.2; Plut. *Per.* 12.1–2. Cf. Kendrick Pritchett 1969; Meiggs 1972: 235; Dreher 2001: 97–8; Ganter 2024: 70–1 on the relocation of the alliance's treasury to Athens and the background to this process.
- 13 Kehne 2014: 240 (transl. M. Nebelin).
- 14 Kehne 2014: 341. On Athenian 'imperialism' and the Athenian 'Empire' see Meiggs 1972; Cargill 1981; Petzold 1994; Samons 1998; Flaig 2005; Kehne 2014: esp. 339–56; Ober 2015: 198–202 and the contributions in Low 2008. Raaflaub 1979 has presented a convincing interpretation of Thucydides's account.
- 15 Cf. also the contribution by Nafissi in this volume.
- 16 Reconstructions of the Peloponnesian War, including its causes and course, can be found in Meiggs 1972: 306–23, 350–74; Dreher 2001: 124–38; Trittle 2010; Ober 2015: 212–22; Schmidt-Hofner 2016: 163–225; Ganter 2024: 82–8, for example, and the many books of Donald Kagan on the subject. See Raaflaub 1985: 153–9; Hall 2007: 103; Baltrusch 2008: 43–6, 135–7, on the Peloponnesian League, its structures of decision-making and its internal power relations.
- 17 See Dreher 2001: 131; Cawkwell 2005: 139–61; Pritchard 2019: 30–1.
- 18 See Cargill 1981: esp. 189–96; Dreher 2001: 152–63; Pritchard 2019: 30–1; Kehne 2014: 348–9; Ober 2015: 193–222; Schmidt-Hofner 2016: 254–6, 287–93, for the history of the Second Athenian League.
- 19 Hall 2007: 102.
- 20 This chronology is based on Cargill 1981: 51, 67, 77, 81, 83.
- 21 See Schmidt-Hofner 2016: 291–3, on the Social War.
- 22 Cf. Badian 1995.
- 23 On the latter theory, see Ober 2015: 239–40; Schmidt-Hofner 2016: 291–2.
- 24 Cargill 1981: 3.
- 25 Cargill 1981.
- 26 Cargill 1981: 51.
- 27 The success or failure of a military alliance is determined by comparing the objectives achieved during the conflict with the main adversary. When comparing alliance systems, the extent to which objectives are achieved is just as important as the extent to which the opponent is neutralized. The Delian League's primary adversary changed over time. Ultimately, Athens's alliance was defeated by Sparta. This marked the league's ultimate failure. The threat posed by the Persians was only temporarily contained. Persia was never vanquished. It remained a constant presence in the Aegean world. At best, the Greeks could only contain Persian expansion. The idea of achieving a victory over Persia that would result in the enemy's complete elimination was unthinkable at the time. Therefore, it can be said that the Delian League was confronted

with a constant threat. By contrast, NATO was able to neutralize its enemy, at least temporarily, and definitively won the ideological contest with the communist states of the time. This was not solely the result of the alliance's actions, of course, but of other factors. Nevertheless, NATO benefitted from these developments. When their successes in confronting their main opponents are compared, it is clear that the Delian League failed, whereas NATO was successful.

- 28 The following reconstruction of NATO's history is based on the works of Giegerich 2012: 9–19; Varwick 2017: 41–61; Ostermann 2020. On NATO's organizational structure, see Giegerich 2012: 21–30; Varwick 2017: 62–84; Ostermann 2020: 46–78.
- 29 On Britain's exceptional role in the founding of NATO, see Kaplan 2000: 2; Loth 2000: 311–14; Ovendale 2000: 129–30.
- 30 Kramer 2025: 1; cf. Ostermann 2020: 99. On the Warsaw Pact, see Byrne and Mastny 2005; Umbach 2005 (with the review of Wettig 2005) and, more recently, Kramer 2025. The founding of the Warsaw Pact was, of course, by no means a purely reactive act. Instead, securing and unifying the Soviet sphere of influence also played an important role.
- 31 For a more detailed analysis of the NATO crisis of the 1990s and the alliance's reorientation, see Giegerich 2012: 18–19, 35–7; Varwick 2017: 48–53 (who distinguishes between two phases in NATO's history between 1990 and 2014); Meier-Walser 2018: 5–8; Ostermann 2020: 129–35, 183–6.
- 32 On NATO's eastward enlargement, see Giegerich 2012: 46–55; Meier-Walser 2018: 16–9; Varwick 2017: 100–16; Ostermann 2020: 45–6, 136–41; Sarotte 2021.
- 33 Sarotte 2021.
- 34 On the NATO intervention in the Kosovo war, see Krause 2000; Giegerich 2012: 61–5; Calic 2016: 567–79; Varwick 2017: 50; Meier-Walser 2018: 9–10; Ostermann 2020: 208–17, 237–8.
- 35 Ostermann 2020: 184 (transl. M. Nebelin).
- 36 Specifically, the counter-piracy operations were Operations Ocean Shield (2000–2016), Allied Protector (2009) and Allied Provider (2008). For more information on these missions, see the self-presentation at NATO 2022. See also Giegerich 2012: 72–4; Ostermann 2020: 207.
- 37 Ostermann 2020: 205 (transl. M. Nebelin).
- 38 On the new orientation of NATO after 9/11, see Varwick 2017: 50, 57–9; Meier-Walser 2018: 8–10; Ostermann 2020: 141–53, 217–26.
- 39 Solidarity with the USA was partially withdrawn by Germany and France, among others, when it became clear that the 'war on terror' would be extended to include an attack on Iraq. This caused considerable tension within the alliance. See Ostermann 2020: 149–53.
- 40 Varwick 2017: 50; Ostermann 2020: 235.
- 41 For more information on the Russian attack and invasion of Ukraine, see Gestwa 2023, for example. An analysis of long-term backgrounds and of NATO's reorientation is provided by Varwick 2017: 53–7; Meier-Walser 2018: 19–21, 32–3; Ostermann 2020: 160–6, 169–75, 236–7, 275–7.
- 42 The isolationist tendency has become particularly evident during Donald Trump's presidency. Although some of his predecessors also aimed to reduce US engagement in Europe, they did not question the value of NATO. On changes to US foreign policy in recent years, see Ostermann 2020: 237, 270–2. For the NATO policy of the first Trump administration see Varwick 2017: 59–61; Meier-Walser 2018: 29–30 and, also embedding it in the broader context: Ostermann 2020: 261–87. However, there has also been good reason to question whether Trump's foreign policy can be accurately described as isolationist. Instead, it may represent a "shift" in "US foreign policy towards hard power" (Gawthorpe 2025: 190).
- 43 Eppe and Erhart 2020, 15: "A comparison might be described as a logical operation that puts into perspective two entities, the two *comparata*, in respect to a *tertium com-*

- paratonis*.” On ‘scaling’ as a historiographical method, see Steglich 2024; on “the relationship between comparing and narrating in epistemic practice”, see Carrier et al. 2021 (cit. 7).
- 44 See Thuc. 2.85.2, for example; see also Kehne 2014: 337, n. 61.
- 45 Thuc. 1.96.3. See Kehne 2014: 337–8.
- 46 Pritchard 2019: xv.
- 47 Gabrielsen 2007: 261 (emphasis in italics has not been reproduced).
- 48 Gabrielsen 2007: 263 (emphasis in italics have not been reproduced). For a concise overview of the measures that resulted in the centralization of power in Athens, see Baltrusch 2008: 50. Cf. Ober 2015: 203–6 on the Athenian “Economics of Empire.”
- 49 Hall 2007: 104. For further details, see Gabrielsen 2007: 267–8; Martin Dreher 1995: 41, transl. M. Nebelin, assumes that “all allies had to pay this syntaxeis”, i.e. the financial contributions of the alliance partners.
- 50 Gabrielsen 2007: 264–72; Schmidt-Hofner 2016: 289. It appears that Athens accepted Persian financial contributions in the years following 404 BC (Gabrielsen 2007: 267).
- 51 See Varwick 2017: 85; cf. also Meier-Walser 2018: 9; Ostermann 2020: 237.
- 52 Pritchard 2019: xv.
- 53 Baltrusch 2008: 52.
- 54 Kehne 2014: 335–6; Ganter 2024: 71 (on the contracts of the Delian League).
- 55 Kehne 2014: 336 (transl. M. Nebelin).
- 56 Cf. Kehne 2014: 343.
- 57 Cf. Thuc. 3.82.1.
- 58 See Aristot. *Ath. Pol.* 24,3, with Meiggs 1972: 215; Kehne 2014: 338; 341.
- 59 Hall 2007: 103; see also Kehne 2014: 337.
- 60 Hall 2007: 103. On the institutions of the Delian League, see Meiggs 1972: 46–9, 205–33; Dreher 2001: 86–8; Baltrusch 2008: 48–51, 141–4; Kehne 2014: 337; Schmidt-Hofner 2016: 94–6. On the institutions of the Second Athenian League, see Cargill 1981: 99–128; Dreher 1995, 2001: 87–8; Baltrusch 2008: 51–3; 144–5; Schmidt-Hofner 2016: 256–7.
- 61 Dreher 2001: 96.
- 62 Hall 2007: 105–106.
- 63 Cargill 1981: 113, 115, 191; Kehne 2014: 349.
- 64 See Raaflaub 1985: 162–89; cf. K. Nebelin in this volume.
- 65 Pritchard 2019: 31.
- 66 Pritchard 2019: 31.
- 67 *IG II²* 43. For a detailed commentary on the decree, see Cargill’s commentary (1981: 29–47). See also Baltrusch 2008: 52–3.
- 68 NATO 1949. On the treaty, see Giegerich 2012: 11–14; Varwick 2017: 35–40; Ostermann 2020: 38–9.
- 69 NATO 2024.
- 70 Discussions of NATO ‘crises’ play an important role in academic literature on the alliance. See, for example, Thamm 2002; Meier-Walser 2018; Ostermann 2020: 261–87.
- 71 For the modern discourse on the concept, see Koselleck 1982: 620–50; Koselleck 1986; Bühl 1984; O’Connor 1987; Graf and Jarausch 2017. Examples of historical applications of the concept of crisis as an analytical category can be found in Scholten 2007.
- 72 See Koselleck 1982: 617–19, for the conceptual history and ancient meanings of ‘crisis’. Cf. also the introduction to the volume.
- 73 Koselleck 1986: 208 (transl. M. Nebelin).
- 74 Koselleck 1986: 210.
- 75 See Nebelin 2021: 190–200, on the following.
- 76 Bühl 1984: 69 (transl. M. Nebelin).
- 77 See Bühl 1984: 81.

- 78 On ‘crisis tendencies’ in the modern Age see Jürgen Habermas’s crisis theory from 1973. See the adaptations of this theory in ancient studies in Maschek 2018 (esp. 15) and Nebelin 2021.
- 79 Fröhlich-Gildhoff and Rönnau-Böse 2024: 14.
- 80 Cf. e.g. Busche 2014; Miller-Karas 2015.
- 81 Bröckling 2017 (transl. M. Nebelin); cf. Endreß and Maurer 2015.
- 82 Wustmann Seiler 2020: 18 (transl. M. Nebelin).
- 83 Cf. Fröhlich-Gildhoff and Rönnau-Böse 2024: 12–14.
- 84 Fröhlich-Gildhoff and Rönnau-Böse 2024: 10–12.
- 85 Fröhlich-Gildhoff and Rönnau-Böse 2024: 21–58.
- 86 Fröhlich-Gildhoff and Rönnau-Böse 2024: 43.
- 87 Cf. Fröhlich-Gildhoff and Rönnau-Böse 2024: 54.
- 88 Although Jung 2020; Mahdiani 2021; Speicher 2021; Behn et al. 2022 offer very different case studies, they point in the same direction. Despite their different research subjects, they emphasize the subversive potential of resilience.
- 89 Cf. Ostermann 2020: 35: “The greater the degree of institutionalisation, the more likely it is that an organisation will survive crises and global political changes, such as the end of the Cold War, while adapting its activities” (transl. M. Nebelin).
- 90 Coser 1956: 52–4, esp. 52, n. 16 (re-transl. M. Nebelin).
- 91 Jervis 1976: 238.
- 92 Jervis 1976: 239.
- 93 Fröhlich-Gildhoff and Rönnau-Böse 2024: 59, 61.
- 94 See 2.
- 95 See Meier-Walser 2018: 20–1.
- 96 Giegerich 2012: 31.
- 97 Cf. Thuc. 3.1–19, 3.25–50.
- 98 Thuc. 3.36.2, 3.36.4–6.
- 99 Thuc. 3.29.1, 3.36.5.
- 100 Thuc. 3.49–50.
- 101 See Thuc. 1.119–125.2.
- 102 See Loth 2000: 317; Thamm 2002: 112–15; Meier-Walser 2018: 23; Ostermann 2020: 154–5.
- 103 Solnit and Szyzskowitz 2025: 28.
- 104 Ostermann 2020: 248.
- 105 Ostermann 2020: 251.

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Conclusions

Alliances and Resilience across Borders*

Elena Franchi

When addressing the topic of crisis, it is essential to distinguish between the emic and etic levels, as well as between the ancient and modern perspectives (two binary pairs that only partially overlap); in other words, it is essential to tackle the lexicon of crisis before examining the crisis of alliances and their resilience from different perspectives.¹ Following a thorough lexical investigation, Matt Kōiv has already shown that, to designate what we moderns call social and political crisis, the ancients used words other than the term *krisis*, such as *stasis*, *anarchia*, *anomie*, *dysnomia*, *kakonomia*, *metabole* and *neoterismos*.² It follows that, to study crises in the Greek world, it is necessary to analyze those passages in which a crisis is described even without resorting to the word *krisis* and its coradicals (as it often happens). That said, an investigation of the semantic evolution of the ancient Greek word *krisis* is necessary, too, and for various reasons: because it allows us to understand why we use the modern term ‘crisis’ to define situations that the ancients called by different names, and because it enables us to grasp some implications of this modern use of crisis. These implications are highly relevant with reference to the crisis of political alliances, since *krisis* does not only indicate a crisis, but also the decisions and the means taken to resolve it. Angela Ganter showed us, both in the introduction and in her contribution, how language use is a key to better understand Greek attitudes towards crisis and resilience in ancient Greek alliances.³ In Hesiod’s *Theogony*, *krinein* means “to have a dispute” (535–8); more generally speaking, in Archaic sources *krinein* seems to have the broad semantic spectrum that is also recognizable in classical times: “to separate, choose, decide, judge, interpret”.⁴ Pindar (*N* .4. 1–6) attributes a medical meaning to the term, which will be very popular in Hippocratic writings.⁵ When the body faces a crisis, it is

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necessary to understand, discern the various aspects and decide in one direction rather than another. In the Age of Enlightenment, Jean-Jacques Rousseau characterized the medical meaning of the concept of crisis as a metaphor for politics.⁶ He addressed the crisis that would strike the ‘body politic’, the state, generating a condition of anarchy and triggering unpredictable unrest and revolutions. In such situations, it is unavoidable to take critical decisions: *krinein* is necessary.

The ancients were keenly aware of this,⁷ especially in reference to interstate relations and relations between allies, even in cases where they do not directly use the term *krinein*. While the topic of resilience in crisis per se is not new,⁸ it may be innovative concerning relations between allies, whether they are part of a federal state or a military alliance system. In this volume, Ganter stresses how, for Herodotus, allies must endure crises daily, but they did not so much endanger an alliance as form it. Thucydides, on the other hand, focuses more on describing the evolution of the crisis and highlighting its dynamic and process-oriented nature. As Massimo Nafissi explains, the Athenian historian constructs a teleological narrative of the crisis in relations between Athens and Sparta based on the idea of a slow but progressive deterioration. In the aftermath of Plataiai and in the following decade, the two cities, which had been allies against the Persians in previous decades, still maintained a relationship that could not be defined as the subsequent aggressive bipolarism. It was only after the Messenian revolt of Ithome that the Athenians and Spartans entered into crisis. According to Katarina Nebelin, however, in Thucydides’s account, this happened at the very moment of the founding of the Delian League. Conversely, some Athenian oral memories for which their origin as intentional history can be demonstrated, retro-project these hostilities and make the crisis in relations between the allies Athens and Sparta begin in the aftermath of Plataiai. Future research needs to consider the implications that Nafissi’s analysis has for the study of Themistokles, the episode of the construction of the walls destroyed by the Persians and the treatment that the Spartans reserved for the Athenians at Ithome. But that is another story. Here, we are interested in ancient historiographical representations of crises between allies, and Thucydides has more to say on this subject, as Katarina Nebelin points out. Not only in reference to the relations between Sparta and Athens, allies at the time of the Persian Wars, but also in reference to the relations between allies of the Delian League. When these relations entered into crisis, Thucydidean Athenians attempted to overcome the crisis in various ways: by appealing to their common Ionian ancestry (a topic we will return to later), to the crucial role Athenians played in defending the Greeks from the Persians and to the motif of just rule, understood “not as subjugation of other Greeks but as governance over Barbarian-like people with an internalized slave-mentality: moral behaviour is only possible and sensible between equals or those of equal strength.”⁹ The issue of overcoming crisis is also addressed by Polybius on several occasions. In this case, the crisis in relations between allies is often the outcome of the unpredictability of their behaviour, as Maier’s analysis shows. And from Polybius’s perspective, this very unpredictability, which is a factor of crisis, can become an opportunity for innovation within the alliance and thus a factor of resilience.

This brings us to the theme of the causes of crisis and the means to resolve or prevent it, a topic addressed by many contributions in this volume. However, it should first be emphasized that the crisis in relations between allies can be a more general, multisectoral crisis. Katarina Nebelin points out that during the Peloponnesian War, a time of crisis between Sparta and its allies, on the one hand, and Athens and its allies, on the other, there was also an internal political crisis in Athens. This was a crisis of democracy, civic cohesion and, more generally, a moral crisis. Claudio Biagetti draws attention to how the alliance itself can be a response to a more general epochal crisis. More specifically, he explores the crisis of autonomy of small state entities, which can be safeguarded precisely by a system of federal alliances such as the League of the Islanders. Furthermore, even in reference to interstate alliance relations, a crisis can be multilayered: in illustrating the history of the Aitolians from their defeat at Lamia to their victory over the Galatians, Sebastian Scharff highlights how the Aitolians had to overcome, on the one hand, the crisis in relations between the Aitolians, i.e., an intra-federal crisis, and, on the other hand, the crisis in relations between the Aitolians and other Greeks.

But what are the most frequent causes of crises in relations between allies in a military alliance system or between allies who are members of the same *koinon*? Many articles in this book reflect on this point. It should also be noted that an investigation into the causes of a crisis often leads to a discussion of the means of resolving or preventing it. Maier's analysis clearly highlights how, for Polybius, the cause of crises in relations between allies may be the unpredictability of their reliability. From a comparative perspective, Marian Nebelin draws attention to the power asymmetries (to which we will return) in the Delian League. If pushed beyond a tipping point, they could cause discontent among the weaker members and make the alliance unstable. Conversely, Katarina Nebelin points out that the correct and prudent management of these same asymmetries can become a means of resilience for alliances and thus of crisis prevention. Moving further, in a hegemonic alliance, the secession of one or more hegemonic leaders can throw the alliance itself into disarray: Marian Nebelin mentions the cases of Sparta and the Hellenic League, on the one hand, and France and NATO, on the other. A certain imbalance of power is to be expected and is often reflected in the alliance oath formulas analyzed by Hans Beck. Conversely, in the cases of crises in intra-federal interstate relations that I have investigated, the crisis itself offers an opportunity to adjust or control this imbalance, whether or not it is the cause of the crisis itself. After all, it could be in the interest of the *koinon* to promote a certain symmetry to control any hegemonic tendencies that may potentially subvert federal structures.

In the case of the Boiotians, it is precisely the ability to revisit power relations and boundaries (understood in an immaterial sense) between members of the *koinon* that allows it to resist after Mantinea, as Salvatore Tufano shows. On the subject of federal states, the failure to integrate newly conquered peoples and territories in an institutional form – e.g., through the establishment of *tele*, as in the case of the Aitolians – can become a cause of instability in intra-federal relations, as highlighted by Scharff.¹⁰ Nafissi's analysis has revealed how, in the Athenian intentional histories received and reoriented by Thucydides, the reaction to the

construction of the walls by the Athenians is perceived as hostile and therefore as a factor of crisis. The wall divides, creating a hard border that can put pressure on relations between allies (see below). That a crisis-oriented narrative can cause a crisis – and, conversely, that a narrative oriented towards solidarity, trust and affinities between allies can prevent or resolve a crisis – also emerges in Marian Nebelin's comparative analysis of the Delian League and NATO.

Oliver Grote highlights how the inability to tolerate ambiguity between cooperation and conflict in relations with an ally – or, in other words, intolerance of ambiguity *as such* – can trigger a crisis. Conversely, tolerance of this ambiguity, which would be the hallmark of the relationship between Spartans and helots – hostile relations marked, however, by some forms of cooperation – explains the resilience of that relationship. In analyzing the causes of the crisis, many authors in this volume have indirectly focused on the means to resolve them: positively managing, to the advantage of the alliance, the unpredictability of the ally's reliability, power asymmetries, integration strategies, the marking of boundaries, tolerance of cooperation-conflict ambiguity and the very narrative of the crisis (i.e., the solidarity, trust, and affinities of the allies). Other studies collected in this volume discuss more directly the strategies for preventing and resolving crises in relations between allies, examining others in addition to those just listed.

More than one contribution (Nafissi, Bonanno) highlights how Athens used the argument of common Ionian kinship to promote a sense of solidarity among allies. Bonanno adds that this could also have been promoted by opening up Athenian religious spaces (borders) to allies and involving them in certain Athenian festivals. This is how Bonanno interprets the Athenian invitation to the allies to pay *aparchai* ('first-fruits') at the sanctuary in Eleusis (GHI 141), as well as to send an ox and a panoply to the Great Panathenaea and a phallus to the Dionysia (GHI 142). Emma Aston shows that the sacred space itself – Anthela, Delphi – can be more than a space of competition; it can be a space where cooperation is cultivated and encouraged. The latter would mark the relations between members of the Delphic Amphiktyony more than conflict, also because, in her view, the Amphiktyony was not an instrument of Thessalian hegemony. Her analysis demonstrates that even myths and rituals connected to the Amphiktyony are functional, in many cases, to the promotion of cooperation. Indeed, there is a veritable mythology of articulating resolution.

Bonanno and Beck emphasize the role of oaths. As the former demonstrates, the appropriate revision of the chronology of many inscriptions concerning Athens and its allies with embedded oaths now dated to the period of the Peloponnesian War is, first of all, an argument in favor of the use of oaths as a means of resolving relations between allies in crisis (precisely, in times of war). Second, she shows that the oath itself does not guarantee the solidity of the alliance if there is no kinship between the allies themselves. Beck, for his part, draws attention to the material aspects (movable objects used during oath-taking, such as swords, shields, scepters, *kerkeion*) and epichoric aspects of the oath, both of which contribute to making it more binding. Concerning the second aspect, it is interesting to note that, following a request for help from the Boiotians to the Aiginetans, an alliance was sealed

by an oath, most likely pronounced in the presence of the Aiakids and the nymphs Thebe and Aigina, daughters of Asopus.

Several scholars then explore the topic of the memory of joint ventures, alliances and conflicts. Nafissi stresses how the memory of the joint Panhellenic venture against the Persians provides a critical basis to prevent an immediate resurgence of hostility between the Athenians and the Spartans in the aftermath of Plataiai. Similarly, Scharff stresses how the Aitolian representation of the defeat of Lamia as an Aitolian commitment to a Panhellenic cause was intended to foster alliance relations between the Aitolians and the other Greeks.¹¹ Maria Osmer offers numerous examples in which the memory of common endeavours is reworked and evoked to promote the sanctioning of an alliance between two cities that was unprecedented in some respects. One need only think of the fact that, to promote an alliance between Athens and Thebes, Demosthenes constructs a line of descent from the eponymous hero Oineus of the phyle Oineis to Cadmus, the mythical founder of Thebes.

Conversely, Grote stresses how the transmission of memories of a border conflict, such as that between Eleusis and Athens, for example, through Euripides's drama *Erechtheus*, can serve to provide a model for resolving relations between neighbours, a model that is particularly important in a historical context in which these same neighbours find themselves integrated into a model that encompasses the whole of Attica.

If animated by a well-oriented agency, certain spaces may then lend themselves better than others to promoting cooperation and solidarity among allies. This is the case of the contact zones between Hellenistic kingdoms studied by Biagetti as places of aggregation that can stimulate processes of federalization. The picture of the means aimed at preventing and resolving crises is completed in a comparative perspective by Marian Nebelin: density of communication, degree of institutionalization in politics and administration, ability to learn, experience due to the alliance's antiquity, storytelling of trust and affinity.

Finally, many contributions address the role that material and immaterial borders and their management play in the resilience or dissolution of relations between allies and members of the same koinon. It goes without saying that the very need to define the border between neighbouring political communities can be a factor of crisis.¹² We have already seen above, commenting on Nafissi's contribution, how a narrative that stages the perception of hostility in the action of rebuilding walls by an alliance partner can be connected to (and in this case be the effect of) a crisis aimed at backdating a break that has not yet actually taken place (but will take place shortly thereafter). The border can be and was perceived as an element of rupture, as Beck also clearly emphasizes on the example of the various border disputes involving Thebes, Athens and some places on the border between the Boiotians and the Athenians. However, numerous contributions in the volume highlight that careful management of borders can become a factor in the resilience (and not crisis) of the alliance, in intentions and sometimes even in practice. As mentioned above, the opening of Athenian religious spaces to allies, as studied by Bonanno, is intended to promote cohesion.¹³ It is to teach and therefore promote strategies of cohesion

that the conflict between Eleusis and Athens continues to be recounted, as shown by Grote. Being *periktiones* (neighbours) and sharing borders becomes a resource for some Boiotian cities in the decades after Mantinea. It is then no coincidence, perhaps, that joint dedications to Delphi are documented in this context, as argued by Tufano. Moving from the Boiotians to the Aitolians, is the creation of *tele* for the newly annexed ethne not perhaps a form of integration resulting from an effective border management strategy, given that the newly annexed ethne constitute the external border territories of the koinon? As for internal, intra-federal borders, they were managed in a manner functional to the resilience of the *koinon*, and therefore of the alliance, by the Achaians in the controversy between Epidaurus and Corinth, by the Boiotians in the dispute between Lebadeia and Koroneia and by the Aitolians in the border dispute between Melitaia and Pereia. It can be concluded that, to a certain extent, the ancient Greeks understood how to promote the resilience of alliances across borders, despite borders and through borders.

Notes

- 1 See, most recently, Longhi 2023. Further literature in Ganter's introduction to this volume.
- 2 Kõiv 2023: 43; see also Longhi 2023.
- 3 Ganter in this volume.
- 4 See already Goeze and Strobel 2012: 511. Further literature in Ganter's introduction to this volume.
- 5 See, most recently, Fink and Rollinger 2023b: 2 with previous literature.
- 6 Rousseau 1762 II, 8: 94; cf. Colozzi 2015: 106.
- 7 Piepenbrink 2020. Further literature in Ganter's introduction to this volume.
- 8 Salzman 2021; Fink and Rollinger 2023b: 2 with bibliography.
- 9 Cf. the contribution by K. Nebelin in this volume.
- 10 On integration strategies, see also van Wijk 2025.
- 11 See also Scharff 2023a.
- 12 See Franchi 2024 with further literature.
- 13 See Scharff 2023b; Biagetti 2024; Franchi 2025 for religious and political cross-border activities.

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Index Locorum

1. Inscriptions

Agora

16.122 241

Choix Delphes

35 193

38 194

CID

II.56 I A 194

IV 47 208

IV.2 99

CIG

1 Add. 73b p. 890 ff. 115

FD III

3.77 193

3.89–90 194

3.92 194

3.93 194

3.102 208

4.351 209

4.375 193

5.20 194

5.22 194

5.89[2] 193

5.93 193

5.95 193

I.Délös

297 239

298 239

300 239

314 239

338 239

396 239

399 239

425 239

426 239

439 239

442 239

455 239

IG

I²

14–15 116

15 116

43 261

580 177

I³

11 115

14 110, 115, 116, 261

15 116

29 67

37 115

39 115

40 115

65 117

66 67

71 117

79 177

83 138

118 67

127 67

254 136

873 177

1454 67

II²

37 195

43 263

111 138

448 221

505 221

506 221

656 177

1138–1140 178

1142 177

1146 177

1237 139

1749 177

3042 177

- 3055 177
 3202 177
 3538 177
 4071 177
 5058 177
 II³.1
 381 222
 II/III³.1
 911 240
 III
 805 177
 IV.1²
 68 240
 70 206, 211
 71 206
 94 195

 VII
 1764 208
 2407 193
 2408 193
 2427 194
 2716 208
 2723 208
 2724 208
 2724a 208
 2724b 208
 2792 207
 3055 207, 208
 3206 193
 IX.2
 89 209
 103 210
 521 206
 IX
 2 209
 IX.1²
 1 3B 224
 3 224
 170 208
 188 209
 618 224
 625a 224

 XI.2
 154 239
 XI.4
 559 239
 643 208
 751–752 240
 1123–1124 239
 1125 239
 1126 239

 1127 239
 1036 232, 239
 1037 239
 1037–1048 239
 1038 239
 1040 239
 1041 239
 1042 239
 1043 239
 1044 239
 1046 239
 1123–1124 239
 1125 239
 1126 239
 1127 239
 XII.4
 135 239
 XII.5
 817 240
 824 240
 918 240
 1004 239
 XII.6
 1.11 240
 XII.7
 506 239, 240
 XII.9
 198 240
 203 193
 XII Suppl.
 169 239
I.Illion
 1 240, 241
 2 240
 12 240
 13 240, 241
 14 240
 15 240
 16 240
 17 240
 18 240
 32 236, 241
 53 240
 58 240
 81 240, 241
 82 240, 241
I.Mysien Rep.
 1437 239
I.Rhamnous
 401 241

M&L
 5 136

15 139
 63 115, 116
 64 115, 116
Migeotte, Emprunt
 79 241
ISE I
 44 241

RO

6 136
 20 136
 34 136
 41 136, 138
 44 136
 45 193
 50 138
 53 138
 57 193
 88 137, 139
 119 116
 121 117
 131 115
 139 115
 141 116
 142 117
 153 117
 165 138
 166 115
 177 115

SEG

3.354 208
 15.282 208
 17.243 99
 21.299 222
 23.78 178
 23.297 208
 28.496 223
 34.355 193
 43.27 241
 44.901 193
 48.588 223
 53.1373 240
 54.518 139
 57.576 137
 58.447 193
 60.507 208
 64.94 178

SGDI

2070 224
 2139 224
 2747 193

StV

II 345 150
 III 405 222
 III 413 222
 III 446 241
 III 463 208
 III 489 206
*Syll.*³
 330 241

2. Literary Sources

Aeschin.
 2.119 195
 2.137 195
 3.85 195
 3.137–141 150
 3.142 196
Ail. Var. 12.43 174
Ant. Lib. Met. 4 99
App. Syr.
 1.2 65
 Aristid.
 1.36–37 117
 22.3–4 117
Aischyl. Sept.
 43–48 137
 Apollod.
 1.7.2 117
 3.14.1 117, 177
 3.14.7 117
 Aristoph.
Ach.
 860 140
 867 140

Equ.
 80–84 45
 236–237 115
Schol. Aristoph. Vesp.
 718 115
 Aristot. [*Ath. Pol.*]
 1.14 65
 1.16–18 66
 23 114
 23.5 136, 137
 24.3 263
 55.5 136
Aristot. Pol.
 1285b10–14 138
 1285b10–15 138
Aristot. Rh.
 1358b21–28 44
 1396a6 152

Aristot. *fr.* 538R 174, 175
 Athen.
 4 (139F) 174
 13.59 (591B) 194

Bacchyl.
 5.42 138
 8.19 138
 9.53–55 139
 19.46–48 152

Kallias *fr.* 8 Storey 65
 Curt.
 10.5.12–13 237

Dem. *or.*
 4.36 177
 18.113–117 197
 18.169–174 150
 18.181–187 150
 18.183–184 150
 18.185 151–4
 18.186 151, 154
 18.188 151
 18.211 154
 18.237 150
 20.109 195
 60.8–9 152
 60.30 151
 Diod.
 4.67.2–3 153
 8.32.1 140
 8.32.1–2 139
 11.16.3 45
 11.39–40 46
 11.41.4 153
 11.50 42, 48, 175
 11.58.2–3 45
 11.79 152
 12.58 115, 117
 12.59 152
 12.83.1 153
 14.18 44
 15.53.4 193
 15.57 194
 15.66.4 44
 15.67.1 44
 15.79 195
 15.80.6 209
 15.82.1–4 153
 16.30.4 194
 16.34 194
 16.84.5 150

17.13 196
 17.109.1 222
 18.2.1 237
 18.8.2–7 222
 18.10.5–11.2 222
 18.13.4 222
 18.16.4–17.8 222
 18.24.1 222
 18.25.1 222
 18.25.1–3 224
 18.25.1–5 223
 18.38.1–6 223
 19.35.2 223
 19.52.6 223
 19.53.1 223
 19.61.1–4 238
 19.62 238–40
 19.67.3–5 223, 238
 19.67.3–68.1 223
 19.74.3–6 223
 19.75.1–2 241
 19.75.6 223
 20.14.3 114
 20.20.3 223
 20.28.1–2 224
 20.45.1 241
 20.99.3 223
 20.100.6 223
 79.1–2 195
 Ephoros *FGrHist* 70
fr. 18c 153
fr. 113 153
 Eupolis *fr.* 272 Storey 65
 Eur.
Bacch. 1333–1336 152
Erechth. *fr.* 370.90–94 176

Phoen. 638–639 152
Suppl. 1196–1204 137
 Eus. *Chron.*
 110.18–20 Karst 240
 Hellanicus *FGrH* 323a F 11 117
Hell. Oxy. 19.3 194, 208
 Herakl. Lemb. *fr.* 10 Dils 175
 Herakleides Pontikos *fr.* 155 Wehrli 208
 Hes.
fr. 157 207
theog. 535–538 26
scut. (Aspis) 100
Ehoiai
fr. 6 MW 101

- fr. 234 MW 101
Hdt.
1.30.4 26
1.42.1 65
1.46 207
1.56 114
1.56.2 64
1.69 114
1.69.2 114
1.74 114
1.75.3–6 177
1.77 114
1.83 114
1.84 114
1.120 27
1.143.3 65
1.147.2 64
1.165 115, 136
1.166–7 114
1.214.1 26, 27
2.49.3 152
2.129 26
2.167.1 26, 27
3.19 114
3.20.2 27
3.27–38 113
3.31.3 27
3.34.5 26
3.52.7 207
3.120.2 27
4.64.2 26
4.70 137
4.142 26
4.145 153
4.147.4 152
4.195–6 114
5.5 27
5.6.2 26
5.22.2 26
5.39.1–40.1 175
5.42–8 114
5.42–46 115
5.57.1 152
5.69.1 65
5.77 139
5.78 65
5.79.1–2 139
5.79–80 80
5.80.1 153
5.81 140
5.81.1 139, 140
5.81.3 140
5.82 140
5.82–88 140
5.82.1 140
5.83.3 140
5.84 140
5.85–86 140
5.86.3 140
5.87 140
5.88.2 140
5.89.1 140
5.89.1–2 140
6.12.3. 65
6.58.2–3 175
6.66.3 26
6.72 209
6.86 114
6.108.5 139
6.108.6 139
6.123.2 26, 27
6.128.2 26
6.129.1 27
6.131.1 27
7.16 α 26
7.19.1 27
7.26 27
7.52.93–5 66
7.150 153
7.158 153
7.161.3 64
7.165 114
7.165–7 114
7.200.2 100
7.205.3 27
7.205–228 27
7.219 27
7.220.1 27
7.220.2 27, 28
7.220.3–4 27
7.220.4 28
7.222 27
7.229 174
8.4–5 45
8.10.22 65
8.40.2 44, 45
8.49.2 44
8.55 176, 177
8.57–63 44
8.64 139
8.64.2 139
8.71.1 45
8.71.2 45
8.74 44
8.79.2 44
8.83.2 139

- 8.84 139, 140
 8.85.1 65
 8.111–112 45
 8.123.1–124.1 28
 8.124.2–3 46
 8.134 207
 9.6–8 45
 9.7 45
 9.8 45
 9.13.2 44, 45
 9.26.1 25
 9.26.3–5 25
 9.26.4 18
 9.27.2 152
 9.28–9 174
 9.106 114
 9.106.2–3 46
 9.106.3 114
 9.122.3 65
 Hesych.
 s. v. Εὐμολπίδαι 177
 Hippocr. *De Aer.*
 12.1–6 65
 16.1–5 65
 16.3–5 65
 16.5 65
 23.4 65
 Hom.
Il.
 1.233–9 138
 1.245–6 138
 1.309 26
 2.362 26
 2.385 26
 2.446 26
 2.496 207
 2.681–5 101
 3.276–9 138
 5.150 27
 5.501 26
 6.188 26
 6.208 27
 7.412 138
 9.401–5 99
 9.521 26
 10.321 138
 10.328 138
 10.417 26
 11.697 26
 13.129 26
 14.19 26
 14.270–6 138
 16.199 26
 16.384–8 26
 16.387 26
 18.209 26
 18.510–2 175
 19.193 26
 22.111–28 175
 23.125–6 99

Od.
 4.408 26
 4.530 26
 4.666 26
 4.778 26
 8.36 26
 8.48 26
 9.90 26
 9.195 26
 10.102 26
 11.489–91 175
 12.440 26
 13.182 26
 14.108 26
 14.217 26
 16.248 26
 16.269 26
 18.264 26
 24.80–4 99
 24.107–8 26
 24.507 26
Hom. h.
 3.295–7 207
 3.300–4 100
 4.335 100
Iliou Persis 100

Little Iliad fr. 25 West 100
Isocr.
Antid.
 19.102 43
Or.
 4.17 153
 4.18–20 153
 4.55–60 152
 4.99 153
 4.173 153
 4.185 153
 4.186–8 153
 4.188 153
 5 153
 5.30–5 153
 5.32–3 153
 5.33–4 152
 10.31 152

- 12.12–13 153
 12.193 176
 12.194 152
Paneg.
 31 117
 72 47
Iust.
 2.12–13 225
 11.3.8–11 196
 13.2.1–14 237
 16.2.1–3 240
 28.2.3–13 225
 28.2.12 225
 Kallisthenes *FGrH* 124 F 11 208
 Korinna 654 col. III 1 PMG 139
Liv.
 35.51.6–10 240
 36.11.1–3 240
 36.21.1–3 240
Lys.
 1.22 44
 2.11–16 153
 fr. 286–287 Carey 196
Paus.
 1.8.2–3 221
 1.10.2 240
 1.18.8 101
 1.21.4–5 177
 1.25.3–5 222
 1.26.3 222
 1.26.5 176
 1.27.2 176
 1.27.4 177
 1.34.2 208
 2.5.2 140
 2.8.5 206
 2.29.7–8 139
 3.18.7 175
 4.4.2–3 175
 4.4.5–8 175
 4.16.7 208
 4.25.6 153
 5.24.10 136
 6.4.6 225
 6.4.6–7 225
 7.6.3–9 225
 7.6.5 225
 7.7 206
 8.1.4–6 153
 8.10.2 207
 9.1.1–2 153
 9.11.6 153
 9.15.3 195
 9.17.6–7 153
 9.23.1 140
 9.37.4 207, 208
 9.37.4–6 208
 9.37.5–6 207
 9.39.5–14 208
 10.3.4 225
 10.11.5 193
 10.13.5 99
 10.15.1 194
 10.16.8 99
 10.19.5–23.14 223
 10.26.4 100
 10.32.10 153
 Pherekydes *FGrH* 3 F 8 99
Pind.
Isthm.
 1.1–3 140
 5.35–36 139
 8.16–18 139
 8.16–20 153
 8.16–31 139
Nem.
 4.1–6 26
 6.1–7 26
 7.6–8 27
 7.33–48 100
 7.47 100
 8.13–14 139
Pyth.
 8.98–100 139
Pai.
 6.117–120 100
 8 99
 10 99
 fr.
 94b.41–9 S–M 208
 195 Race 139
 346 b V. 56 177
 Schol. *Pind. Nem.* 5.94 139
Plat.
Kriti. 119e 127
leg. 633b–c 174
Plut.
Ages. 32.7 174
Alexander
 49 222
Arat.
 21.2 206
 23.1–4 206
 24.3 206
Arist.

- 23.7 47
 25.1 136
 25.2 261
De def. or. 15 99
Demetr.
 25.4–5 241
 25.7 239
 44.1–11 240
 45.1 240
 46.1–4 240
Demosth.
 18 150
Kleom.
 9.3 175
Lyk.
 28.7 174, 175, 176
Lys.
 17.1 175
 27.3 195
mor.
 239e 175
 292b 137
 401a–d 194
 753f 194
Narr.Am.
 4 208
Nic.
 3 117
Per.
 12.1–2 261

Quaest. gr.
 5 137
 12 99
Phok.
 23.1 221
Pyrrh.
 7 223
 11.1–12.6 240
Them.
 19.2 46
 20.3 46
 31.4–6 45
Thes. 27.5–7 137
Pol.
 1.1.1–2 80
 1.4 80
 1.25.3 81
 3.70.1–5 82
 3.78.2–3 81
 3.98.3–4 81
 3.99.9 81
 4.3.5 208

 4.29 81
 7.4.8 81
 7.7 81
 7.11 81
 8.21.10–11 81
 8.36.2–6 81
 9.12.1–3 81
 9.12.10 81
 9.30 225
 9.31 137
 10.36.1 81
 10.36.4 81
 12.25b.3 81
 15.36.3–5 82
 Solon fr. 4a (West) 64
 Soph.
Ant.
 7 177
 844–845 140
 1141 177
Oid. T. 501 27
 fr. 581–593 153
 Strab.
 8.7.1 153
 9.2.27–8 208
 9.2.38 208
 9.4.2 101
 9.4.17 100, 101
 9.5.6 101
 9.5.21 99
 10.3.1–8 223
 Theopomp. *FGrH* 115 fr. 328.3 150
 Thuc.
 1.2.5 64
 1.3a 44
 1.3b 44
 1.3c 44
 1.6.3 65
 1.12.1 64
 1.19.1 43
 1.20.2 47
 1.22.1 64
 1.22.4 64
 1.23.1 25
 1.58.1 47
 1.71.4–6 152
 1.73.2 65
 1.73.2–1.74.4 65
 1.74.1–2 65
 1.74.2 45, 65
 1.75.1 66
 1.75.2 65
 1.75.4 42, 66

- 1.76.2 65
 1.76.2–4 66
 1.77.1–5 66
 1.79–87 175
 1.87.1 175
 1.89.3 44
 1.90–93.2 42
 1.90–93 44
 1.90.1–2 44, 46
 1.90.3 46
 1.90.3–92 44
 1.90–93.2 48
 1.91.1 42, 46
 1.91.3 46
 1.92 42, 44, 47
 1.92.1 46
 1.93.2 47
 1.93.7 47
 1.93.8 44
 1.95 114
 1.95.1 64
 1.95.6–7 42
 1.95.7 42, 48
 1.96.3 263
 1.98.4 261
 1.99.3 66
 1.100.2 261
 1.101.1 261
 1.101.1–2 42, 44, 47
 1.102 42, 48
 1.102.3 42, 47, 48
 1.102.4 42, 47
 1.107 152
 1.107.4 44
 1.107.6 44
 1.112.5 99
 1.117 115
 1.118.2 31
 1.119–125.2 264
 1.122.2 64
 1.124.2 64
 1.126–7 45
 1.128–135.1 45
 1.128–138 45
 1.128.1 174
 1.135.2–3 46, 48
 1.135.2–138 42, 44, 45, 48
 1.138.4 45
 1.138.5 45
 1.138.6 46
 2.8.5 66
 2.15 176
 2.15.1 176
 2.15.2 177
 2.15.4 64
 2.16.2 177
 2.18.3 43
 2.29.3 153
 2.41.1 152
 2.63.1 66
 2.63.2 66
 2.64.3 66
 2.64.5 66
 2.65.12 64
 2.71–72 114
 2.71.4 138
 2.74.3 139
 2.85.2 263
 3.1–19 264
 3.3.13 115
 3.9 66
 3.9.2 66
 3.10 66
 3.10.1 66
 3.10.6 66
 3.11.2 66, 67
 3.11.3–12.2 66
 3.12.1 66, 67
 3.12.3 66
 3.13.5 64
 3.25.1 47
 3.25–50 264
 3.29.1 264
 3.29.31 115
 3.29.32 115
 3.34 115
 3.36.2 264
 3.36.4–6 264
 3.36.5 264
 3.40 43
 3.40.3 64
 3.44.3 43
 3.44.4 43
 3.44–48 67
 3.49–50 264
 3.56 153
 3.62.2 65
 3.63.2–4 65
 3.68 139
 3.82.1 263
 3.82.6–7 117
 3.83.3 64
 3.86 116
 3.86.3 152
 3.86.4 64
 3.92.3–4 99

- 3.104 117
4.119.1 261
4.78.1 43
4.89–100 115
4.92 115
4.113.3 43
4.119.1 261
5.9 65
5.18.1 137
5.18.3 137
5.18.3–4 261
5.18.9 138
5.28–32 152
5.44.3 43
5.47.3 137
5.47.4 137
5.47.8 138
5.64.1 43
5.76.2 43
5.81.2 44
5.82.6 44
5.83.2 44
5.84.2 152
5.89 65, 66
5.91 66
5.91.1 64
5.95 66
5.97 66
5.101 66
5.104 152
5.105.2 65
5.111.3–4 66
5.111.4 66
5.112.3 43
6.18.3. 66
6.30.2 152
6.46.2 33
6.50 152
6.54–59 47
6.64.2 43
6.76.3–4 65
6.76.4 64
6.77.1 65
6.82.3 65
6.82.4 65
6.88–93 175
7.57.1 152
7.73.3 43
7.86.3 43
8.1–7 117
8.3.2 47
8.5 117
8.10.3 207
8.21 67
8.25.3 65
8.46.3 33
8.47.1 43
8.48.2 43
8.75.2–3 67
Tyrnt.
fr. 5 West 175
fr. 6 West 175
fr. 7 West 175
Xen.
Ages. 1.9–12 80
An.
2.2.9 137
7.3.31 153
7.3.39 153
Cyr.
1.6.27 80
Hell.
1.4.9 66
1.6.12–13 66
2.2.6 67
2.2.20 137
2.3.6 67
3.3.7 175
4.6.2 137
5.4.28 174
6.3.1 193
6.3.5–6 154
6.3.6 117, 153
6.4.29–32 99
6.5.28–9 174
6.5.34 47
7.4.33–5 153
7.5.27 152, 192
Lak. Pol.
15.7 175
Symp.
8.9 177
vect.
5.6 64
Ps.-Xen.
Ath. Pol.
1.14 65
1.16–18 66

Index Rerum

9/11 262

Abilyx 77

Abydos 234, 240

Achaeus 74

Achaia, Achaians 8, 18, 88, 125, 150, 153, 200, 201, 204, 205, 220, 225, 273

Achaia Phthiotis 88, 100, 204, 210

Achilles 89, 91–3, 95, 97, 100, 102, 103, 125, 131, 132, 165, 175

Adeimantos (Lampsakenos) 43, 236, 241

administration 98, 181, 186, 234, 242, 244, 253, 257–9, 262, 272

Adrastos 123

Aegean Islands/Sea 41, 62, 231–3, 240, 242, 243, 253

Africa 72, 74

Agalmata 134–6

Agathes (Ilian) 240

Agesilaos 70, 162

Aglauros 128

Agonothetai 234

agora 20, 96, 122–4, 128, 177, 179, 241

agoranomoi 234

Aiakeion 131–3

Aiakids 120, 130–4, 136, 272

Aiakos 131, 132

Aigai (Macedonia) 232, 239

Aigina/Aiginetans 46, 93, 120, 129–36, 147, 272

Aischines 99, 150, 189–92

Aitolia, Aitolians 8, 76, 203–5, 208, 212–25, 233, 238, 240, 272–75

Aitolian League 217, 218, 221, 222, 224

Ajax 131, 132

Akarnania 218, 238

akropolis 111, 128, 169–71, 176, 177

Alexander the Great 153, 219

Alexandria (Egypt) 232

Alexandria (Troas) 234

Alketas 186

Alkibiades 33, 43, 60, 66

Alkidas (Spartan navarch) 109

Alpheios Valley 137

altar 23, 93, 128, 131, 133, 202

ambassador 106, 131, 259

ambiguity tolerance 4, 7, 8, 24, 152, 160, 161, 167, 168, 173, 176

Amphiktyony, amphiktyons 7, 46, 87–92, 94–6, 98–101, 271

Anatolia 115, 233, 236, 241

Anthela 87, 94–8, 271

Antigoneia 232, 239

Antigonids 231, 233

Antigonos Monophthalmos 230

Antikles (Lampsakenos) 240

Antiochos I 236, 241

Antiochos III 225, 241

Apollo 41, 89, 91–4, 97, 100, 103, 110, 127, 184

Apollodoros of Kyzikos 239

Apollophanes of Kolophon 113

arche 54, 59

Archidamian War 7, 34, 35, 107–9, 113, 117

Archidamos 127, 128, 162

Ares 21, 100, 128, 137

Argonauts 147

Argos, Argives 33, 42, 44, 123, 127, 137, 138, 147, 200–2

Aristides 108

Aristotle 121, 138, 162, 163, 254

Arkadia, Arkadians 97, 125, 162, 185

Arkadian Confederacy/League 146, 153, 238

Asandros 236

Asia 241, 250, 251

Asia Minor 41, 46, 55

- Asopos 129–31, 133
 assembly 39, 56, 60, 63, 123, 130, 142,
 143, 163, 171, 172, 175, 188, 189, 233,
 235, 236, 239, 253, 259
 Assos 234
 asymmetry 60, 61, 145, 162, 250
 Athena 111, 113, 122, 123, 125, 126, 128,
 134, 148, 153, 168–70, 176, 234–6
 Athena Areia 126, 128
 Athena Ilias, koinon of 234–6, 244
 Athena Itonia 203
 Athena Polias 125, 134
 Athenian 4, 6, 8, 11, 30–3, 35, 37–43,
 45, 46, 53–9, 62–4, 66, 67, 70, 88, 98,
 108–16, 122, 128, 132, 134–6, 143–8,
 150–3, 160, 168–73, 176–8, 181, 183,
 188–90, 193, 213, 214, 220, 222, 228,
 240, 249–54, 259–61, 263, 271–74
 Athens, Athenians 4, 6–8, 11, 17, 27,
 30–47, 53–67, 70, 88, 90, 96, 98, 99,
 101, 104, 107–16, 120, 122, 123, 125,
 127–30, 132–6, 142–8, 150–3, 159,
 160, 168–73, 176–8, 181–3, 188–93,
 200, 213, 214, 219–23, 229, 236, 240,
 249–55, 259–61, 263, 269–72
 Attalids 234
 Attika 31, 38, 44, 47, 109, 111, 117, 132,
 134, 135, 146, 168–71
 August Goddesses 125
 Augustus 235
 autonomy 63, 67, 204, 230–3, 236, 241,
 250, 254, 270
 Auxesia 134–6
 Auxo 128

 Bakchon from Boiotia 239
 Bakchylides 126
 barbarians 31, 40, 41, 58, 124
 Basileia 193, 202
 battle of: Chaironeia 143, 183, 193, 194,
 220, 225; Delion 109; Mantinea 8, 181,
 182, 185, 187, 189, 190; Mykale 107;
 Plataiai 35, 130, 161; Salamis 22, 35,
 131
 betrayal 41, 70–4, 76, 78–80
 bipolarism 269
 boiotarch 109, 188
 Boiotia, Boiotians 8, 35, 75, 96, 109, 129,
 130, 132, 153, 181–94, 202, 205, 208,
 220, 223, 239, 270–3
 Boiotian League/Koinon 8, 129, 146,
 153, 181, 182, 185, 187–90, 193, 203,
 205–8
 border 5, 7–9, 109, 110, 199, 200, 202–4,
 213, 215, 221, 223, 225, 229, 233, 234,
 236, 252, 271–3
 Bosphoros 234
 Boulagoras (Samian) 240
 Boutheia 116
 Brea 111
 Britain 262
 Bühl, Walter L. 256
 Byzantium 251

 Cadmus 143, 144, 151, 152, 272
 Carthago, Carthaginians 72, 73, 75–9, 82,
 105, 106, 114, 147
 Catalogue of Ships 95, 97
 centauromachy 30, 41
 Chaironeia 187, 193, 194, 220, 225
 Chalkedon 234
 Chalkis, Chalkidians 108, 109, 115, 129,
 240
 Charon of Lampsakos 36, 45
 Chios 61, 251, 252
 chora 123, 127, 128, 136, 200
choregoi 134
 cohesion 4, 54, 63, 104, 110, 149, 160, 168,
 217, 221, 233, 235, 270, 274
 commemoration 7, 142–5, 147, 148, 192
 communication density 257, 260
 comparative history 8, 249, 260
 competition 4, 19, 21–4, 26, 171, 177, 231,
 251, 253, 271
 conflict 5, 7–9, 11, 18, 22–5, 30, 31, 34, 40,
 41, 54, 61, 63, 87, 88, 90, 92–7, 99, 109,
 115, 133, 134, 142, 145, 149, 159, 161,
 166, 168–71, 199, 204, 206, 213, 214,
 218, 223, 229, 235, 238, 250–3, 255,
 261, 271
 contact area/zone 233, 238
 contingency 4, 6, 21, 71–3, 75, 77–9
 Corinth, Corinthians 35, 37, 43, 46, 53,
 129, 144, 150, 152, 199–202, 205, 206,
 214, 220, 234–8, 259, 273
 Coser, Lewis A. 257, 264
 council 44, 87, 88, 150, 184, 199, 204, 213,
 229, 253, 254
 Crete 138
 Cronos 126
 cult statue/image 120, 131–3, 135, 136
 Curtius Rufus 229
 Cyrus 27

 Damia 134–7
 Daochos Monument 89

- Dardanos 234
 decision 18–24, 26, 28, 76, 78, 104, 111,
 112, 116, 117, 125, 143, 150, 160, 172,
 175, 178, 184, 185, 188, 199, 201–3,
 205, 206, 214, 249, 252, 253, 255, 259,
 261
 defeat 8, 18, 30, 35, 44, 47, 54, 56, 57, 63,
 116, 133, 146, 161, 163, 216, 219, 220,
 233, 250, 258–60, 270, 273
 Delia Festival 112
 Delian League 4–7, 30, 32, 39–41, 50,
 53–9, 61, 63–5, 104, 107, 108, 249, 250,
 252–4, 259–61, 263, 269, 270
 Delion 109
 Delos 41, 108, 112, 117, 145, 232, 233,
 239, 250
 Delphi 8, 87–100, 111, 123, 124, 134, 181,
 183–7, 191, 194, 209, 215, 223, 271,
 274
 Delphic oracle 129
 Demeter 95, 100, 110, 111, 125, 127
 Demetriaia 232
 Demetrios (Poliorketes) 215, 223, 235, 236,
 241, 242
 democracy 11, 34, 54, 58, 62, 63, 66, 113,
 176, 189, 213, 270
 demos 62, 168, 172, 254
 Demosthenes 142–4, 148, 150, 151,
 189–91, 213, 272
 Deukalion 95, 96, 101
 Deutsch, Karl W. 260
 Diadochi 8, 229–35, 237–9, 241
 Diadochi, Third War of 232
 dialectical synthesis/sublation 167, 169
 Dikaia (Chalkidike) 122, 123
 Diodotos 43, 63
 Dionysia 111, 136, 271
 Dioskouroi 147, 148
 diplomacy 55, 75, 79, 151, 215, 217, 221,
 223
 distribution of power 249, 252, 253
 Dolon 125
 Dolopia 88
 Dorians 57, 99, 145, 152, 217
 Dorieus 114, 147
 Dreros 127
 Dryopes 91, 96
 duplicity 39

 Earth (deity)/Gaia 26, 122, 125–7, 132, 135
 Egesta, Egestans 114, 115
 Egypt 105, 116
 Eleusinian mysteries 168
 Eleusis 7, 111, 129, 130, 160, 168–73, 176,
 177, 271–3
 Eleutherai 130
 Elis 125, 127
 embassy 38, 45, 106, 131, 190
 emic perceptions 5, 18
 empire 31, 33, 54, 56, 59, 64, 108, 113,
 115, 144–6, 150, 152, 153, 219, 235,
 236, 250, 251, 253, 260, 261, 263
 enemy 18, 22, 33–5, 42, 43, 62, 64, 70, 91,
 100, 123, 160, 163, 167, 169, 176, 214,
 215, 224, 250, 251, 262
 Enyalios 128
 Enyo 128, 137
 ephebe 128
 Ephor 153
 epichoric 7, 120, 126–8, 130, 133, 134,
 136, 140, 194, 271
 Epidauros, Epidaurians 134–6, 199–202,
 205, 206, 235
 Epigoni 8, 229, 235, 236
 Epikydes 107
epimeletai 171
 Epipole 44
epistatai 234
 Erechtheus 111, 124, 168–70, 177, 272
 Eretria, Eretrians 115, 185, 190, 236
 Erythrai 108–11, 115, 116
eschatia 200
 ethnic, ethnicity 5, 62, 97, 98, 129, 145–7,
 149, 153, 184, 193, 194, 217, 224, 234
 ethnos 87, 97, 101, 129
 Eubolia 95, 109, 113, 129, 240
 Eunostos 194
 euphemism 5
 Euripides 144, 168, 169
 Europe 58, 214, 236, 251, 255, 262

 federal state 146, 181, 222, 269
 Finland 252
 flexibility 5, 8, 9, 72, 74, 79, 238, 255
 fragility 9, 22, 75, 78, 144, 145, 149
 France 262, 270
 freedom 58, 59, 62, 87, 131, 142, 162, 166,
 173, 221, 232, 254
 French Revolution 2, 24
 Frenemy 176

 Gaia/Earth (deity) 126, 132
 Gargara 234, 241
 Gelon of Syracuse 147
 Glaukos 107
 gymnasiarch 234

- Halikarnassos 232, 239
 Hall, Jonathan M. 253
 Hannibal 75–9
 hegemon, hegemony 5–8, 30–3, 39, 53, 54,
 60, 88, 113, 150, 151, 181–4, 192, 213,
 233, 250, 252, 260, 271
 Hektor 125, 165
 Helios 126, 132
 Hellas, Hellenes 22, 23, 41, 53, 62, 92, 95,
 96, 123, 124, 133, 142, 144–6, 220
 Hellen 95, 96
 Hellenic League/League of Corinth 39, 56,
 107, 220, 234–6, 238, 241, 250, 259,
 261, 270
 Hellespont 36, 92, 97
 helot, helotage 159, 160, 164–7, 176
 Hera 126, 138
 Herakleia Trachinia 90
 Herakleidai 144, 148, 152
 Herakles 91, 94, 97, 148, 150, 152–4,
 223
 Herakles of Tyros 106
 Hermias (nesiarch) 239
 Hermokrates 53, 56, 57
 hero, heroine 92–6, 100, 101, 128, 133,
 143, 146, 148, 150, 153, 207, 272
 Herodotus 6, 18, 19, 21–4, 27, 28, 35, 36,
 39, 40, 44, 45, 57, 58, 65, 97, 98, 100,
 104–8, 120, 121, 124, 129–31, 133–5,
 140, 144, 147, 161, 164, 168, 176, 177,
 201, 202, 269
 heroon 131
 Hestia 128
 Hetoimaridas 30, 39
hieromnamon 185, 194
hieronomoi 234
 Hieronymos of Kardia 217, 221
 Himera 114
 historiography 5, 6, 15, 25, 72, 80, 171, 192
 Homer, Homeric 9, 19, 20, 100, 112, 125,
 126, 138, 165, 202
horkos 114, 127, 136
horoi 200
 Hypatodoros (Theban) 239
 Hysiai 129

 Ida 126
 Iliad 92, 95, 97, 100, 125, 126
 Ilion 234, 236, 240, 241
 instability 5, 6, 59, 70, 72, 75–80, 104, 191,
 217, 230, 231, 233, 234, 237, 238, 270
 institution 123, 134, 160, 161, 167, 258
 invented tradition 18

 Iolaos 127, 133
 Ionia, Ionians 6, 7, 17, 18, 54–8, 62, 64, 65,
 107–13, 117, 134, 145–7, 150, 152, 153,
 269, 271
 Ionian League/Amphiktyony 7, 46, 87–92,
 94–8, 101, 234, 271
 Ismenias 185, 194
 Isthmian Games 130
 Isthmos 35, 44, 45, 235
 Italy 72, 131, 218
 Ithome 30, 38–42, 269

 Jervis, Robert 258, 264
 judgement 3, 6, 18, 20–4, 26, 33, 45, 70,
 104, 125, 138, 206

 Kagan, Donald 47, 49, 261
 Kalapodi 89, 97
 Kallias (Sphettian) 65, 108, 115, 153, 240,
 250
 Kallikrates (Samian navarch) 239
 Kambyses 70, 105, 113
 Kaphisodoros (Theban) 239
 Karia, Karians 134, 236, 251
 Kassandros 215, 222, 224, 232, 233, 235,
 236, 238, 241
 Keos 138
kerykeion 125, 138
 kinship 7, 20, 55, 56, 64, 65, 104–8,
 112–14, 130, 143, 145, 146, 149, 151,
 153, 271
 Kleandros 130
 Kleisthenes of Sikyon 21, 98
 Kleomenes 129
 Kleon 32, 43, 64
kline 131
 Knidos 185, 193, 232, 239
koine eirene 147, 153
koinon, koina 5, 8, 9, 129, 146, 147, 149,
 153, 181–3, 185–94, 199–205, 207, 217,
 218, 221, 222, 230–8, 241, 244, 270,
 272
 Kolophon 108–10, 113, 115, 127
 Kore 125
 Koroneia 130, 185, 193, 202, 203, 205,
 208, 273
 Kos 251
 Koselleck, Reinhart 2, 9, 25, 113, 237, 256,
 263
 Kosovo 252, 262
 Kouroupedion 229, 230
 Kragallidai 91, 92
 Kroton 131

- krypteia* 161, 163
 Kydimos 240
 Kyknos 95, 100
 Kyrene 121
 Kyrnos 115
 Kyzikos 239
- Lakedaimonians/Spartans 6–7, 22–3, 28,
 30–48, 53–6, 59–63, 65, 70, 90, 99,
 106–9, 113–14, 123, 127–9, 131–3, 137,
 140, 144–5, 147–8, 152–4, 159–69,
 172–6, 182, 186, 250–1, 253, 259, 261,
 269–71
 Lampsakos 36, 45, 234, 236, 240, 241
 learning from history 73
 Lebadeia 193, 202, 203, 205, 208, 273
 Leonidas 22, 23, 27, 28
 Leontinoi 55, 110, 115, 116
 Leptines 189
 Lesbos, Lesbians 107, 109
lithos 122, 128
 localism 128, 136, 140, 174
 Lokris, Lokrians 96, 101, 131, 132, 140,
 215, 217, 218
 Long Walls (Athens) 34, 44, 46
 Loyalty 4, 39, 40, 43, 45, 63, 70, 71, 77,
 109, 110, 112, 142, 161, 221, 233, 236
 Lydia, Lydians 57, 105–7, 109, 168
 Lysias 190
 Lysimachos 232–4
- Macedonia/Macedon, Macedons 72, 75,
 153, 213, 216, 219, 232, 251
 Magnesia (Perioikic region of Thessaly)
 55, 88
 Malousios (Gargarean) 234, 241
 Mantinea 8, 127, 181, 182, 185, 187,
 189–92, 273
 materiality 120–2, 124
 Mausolos 251
 Medes 105, 107
 medism 22, 27, 36, 41, 90
 Megara, Megarians 150, 200, 201, 206
 Melian Dialogue 53, 59, 60
 Melitaia 96, 201, 203–5, 209, 273
 mentality 18, 22, 24, 57, 58
 Messene 44
methoria 200
 Milet, Milesians 213, 223
 military 8, 31, 32, 54, 56–8, 62, 64, 70–2,
 78, 81, 105, 109, 110, 113, 114, 130–3,
 136, 140, 145, 148, 159–61, 165, 166,
 173, 181, 187–9, 191, 193, 213, 215–22,
 224, 233–6, 241, 242, 249–53, 255, 257,
 258, 260, 261, 269, 270
 Minyans 147
 Molossia, Molossians 93
 Mykale 56, 107
 Myrleia 234
 myth, mythology 25, 27, 41, 55, 88, 91–7,
 100, 111, 122, 168–71, 271
 Mytilene 109, 110, 252, 259
- naopoioi* 186
 National Socialist Germany 251
 NATO (North Atlantic Treaty
 Organisation)/OTAN 8, 249–55,
 258–60, 262, 263, 270
 NATO Council 254
 NATO Defense College Research Division
 255
 Naxos 250, 261
 Neleus 110
 Neoptolemos 91–5
 nesiarch 232
 Nesiotai, League of the/Islanders 230–3,
 237, 239, 240, 270
 network 4, 10, 89, 95, 96, 108, 230, 232
 Nikias (Athenian strategos) 43, 112, 127,
 144, 177
 Nikouria, decree of 232
 North America 255
 North Atlantic 249, 254, 255
 notion 3, 38, 54, 55, 59, 72, 88, 109, 110,
 113, 115, 121, 165, 206, 221, 238, 241
- oath 18, 106–10, 113, 114, 116, 119–29,
 133, 136–8, 140, 163, 164, 270, 271
 observation 8, 28, 97, 128, 136–8, 144,
 167, 183, 185, 192, 255
 Oedipus 143, 144, 150, 152
oikonomoi 232
 Oineus 143, 151, 272
 Oinoe 129
 Olympia 31, 41, 61, 91, 123
 oral tradition 33, 35, 38, 46, 47, 89
 Orchomenos 184, 188, 189, 192, 195, 203
 organisation 264
- Paches (Athenian strategos) 109, 115
 Pamboiotia 203
 Panathenaia 110, 111, 116, 235
panegyris 112, 234
 Panhellenism, Panhellenic 9, 41, 42, 127,
 143, 147, 148, 153, 203, 220, 236, 272
pantheon 127, 138

- Parion 234
 Pasithea 126
patrios politeia 233
 Pausanias (Spartan king) 32, 33, 36, 41, 46, 107, 108
 Peace of Kallias 108, 115, 250
 Peace of Nikias 127, 144
 Peleus (Halikarnassian) 239
 Peleus 131, 132
 Peloponnese, Peloponnesians 17, 35, 44, 55, 75, 99, 107, 114, 125, 129, 143, 200–2, 232, 241, 249
 Peloponnesian League 6, 53, 56, 59, 61, 63, 144–6, 250, 261
 Peloponnesian War 5, 6, 11, 30, 31, 34, 35, 37, 44, 53, 54, 59–61, 63, 144–6, 152, 166, 168, 249, 250, 253, 259, 261, 270, 271
 Pentecontaetia 6, 30–2, 38–40, 46, 107, 108, 115
 Perrhaibia 88
 Perseus 147
 Persia, Persians 6, 22, 23, 30, 31, 33, 34, 37–9, 41, 42, 45, 55, 56, 58, 61, 62, 65, 70, 106, 107, 116, 147, 148, 153, 219, 250, 261, 269, 272
 Persian Empire 113, 250
 Persian Wars 6, 17, 18, 34, 46, 54, 56, 58, 65, 129, 130, 145, 147, 166, 220, 221, 261, 269
 Phaleron 132, 134, 140
 Pharsalos 89, 96
philia 30, 31, 40
 Philip II 90, 142, 143, 209
 Philip V 76, 223
 Philokrates, peace of 190, 191
 Phlegyai 91, 94–7, 99
 Phoinikia, Phoinikians 105, 114, 144, 152
 Phokaia, Phokaiaians 108, 115
 Phokis, Phokians 91, 92, 95, 99, 147, 153, 184, 208, 218, 225
phoros 61, 66, 161, 252
phratry 128
 Phryne 186–8
phyle, phylai 129, 143, 169, 171, 172, 177, 178, 272
 Pindar 20, 21, 93, 100, 130, 131, 186, 268
 piracy 62, 252, 262
 Piraeus 47, 213
 Pissuthnes (Persian satrap of Lydia) 109, 115
pistis 123
 Plataiai, Plataians 17, 22, 35, 65, 107, 124, 127–30, 133, 161, 192, 220, 250, 269, 272
 Plutarch 112, 175, 186, 214, 221, 235, 242
 Polybius 6, 70, 72–80, 123, 219, 256, 269, 270
 Polyperchon 215, 223, 224, 238
 Polyrrenia 138
 Pontos Euxinos 233
 Poseidon 23, 126, 168–70, 176, 177, 202
 power 4–6, 8, 10, 20, 31, 38, 39, 54, 56, 58–64, 66, 71, 73, 93, 97, 106, 108, 111, 112, 116, 122–5, 132, 133, 138, 145, 146, 148, 164, 182, 193, 199, 201, 203–5, 214, 215, 218, 220–3, 229–33, 235, 236, 249–55, 258–63, 270, 271
 Proclamation of Tyre 230, 238
 Prometheus 19, 20
 Propontis 234
 pro-war culture 253
 proxeny 182–5
 psychology 1, 3, 10, 257
 Ptolemaia 232
 Ptolemies/Lagids 231–3
 Ptolemy I 201, 232, 239
 Ptolemy II 232, 236, 239
 Ptolemy III 236
 Publius Cornelius Scipio 77
 Punic Wars 72
 Pythia 92
 quantum entanglement 190, 195
 Raaflaub, Kurt A. 45, 46, 64, 66, 67, 163, 254, 261
 RAND Corporation 258
 Resistance 3, 4, 56, 60, 105, 181, 217–19, 230, 238, 257
 revolt 31, 38, 47, 57, 107–9, 116, 188, 192, 196, 213, 240, 269
 Rhamnous 241
 Rhodes, Rhodians 233, 241
 Rhoiteion 234
 risk 21, 24, 71, 72, 96, 105, 257
 Romans 73, 75–9, 81, 218, 219, 229
 Russia 251
 Sacred War, First 88, 91, 92, 94, 98
 Sacred War, Third 90, 100, 182
 safety-valve institutions 257
 Salamis 22, 23, 35, 36, 44–6, 131–3, 220
 Samos 46, 63, 107–9, 115, 213, 239, 240
 Samothrace 232, 239
 Sardis 106

- Saronic Gulf 129, 200
 scholion 131
 Second Athenian League 8, 249–54,
 259–63
 selection 6, 19, 21–3, 26, 104, 144, 149
 Seleukids 74, 233, 234, 236
 Seleukos I 234
 Septerion 89
 Sestos 40
 Sicily 33, 55, 60, 76, 113, 114, 117
 Sikyon 21, 88, 98
 Skepsis 234
skeptron 125, 138
 Skythia, Skythians 114, 124
 socialization 260
 Social War 193, 251, 261
 solidarity 42, 61, 105, 129, 260, 262, 271–2
 Solnit, Rebecca 260, 264
 Sparta, Spartans/Lakedaimonians 6–7,
 22–3, 28, 30–48, 53–6, 59–63, 65, 70,
 90, 99, 106–9, 113–14, 123, 127–9,
 131–3, 137, 140, 144–5, 147–8, 152–4,
 159–69, 172–6, 182, 186, 250–1, 253,
 259, 261, 269–71
 Sphettos 240
 stability 2, 6, 71, 75, 79, 88, 105, 110, 136,
 161, 162, 165, 199, 205, 230, 234, 236,
 249, 254, 260
stasis 3, 19, 25, 104, 115, 197, 268
stela, *stelai* 111, 122, 124, 125, 137, 234,
 254
 Stesimbrotos of Thasos 36, 45
 storytelling 260, 272
strategos, *stratego*i 23, 33, 206, 207, 214
 strategy 5, 23, 63, 70, 77, 79, 93, 110–12,
 207, 213–18, 220, 221, 224, 225, 230,
 231, 235, 259, 273
 Styx 126
 suspicion 38, 39, 77
 Sweden 252
symmachia, *symmachy*, *symmachoi* 5, 23,
 30, 32, 54, 120, 127, 187, 188, 191, 223,
 250
symploke 72, 78
synedrion 234–6, 241, 253
synoikismos, *synoikism*, *synoikia* 168,
 170–2, 238
syntaxis 263
 Syracuse 53, 55, 56, 106, 110, 114, 147,
 153, 239
 Tanagra 34, 89, 130, 184, 185, 193
 tax 185
 Tegea, Tegeans 17, 18, 45, 137
 Telamon 131, 132
 Tenos 233
 Tereus 147
 terrorism 252
 Thallo 128
 Thasos, Thasians 31, 33, 36, 38–41, 45, 66,
 250, 261
 Thebe 130, 133, 140, 147, 272
 Thebes, Thebans 8, 21–3, 65, 90, 120, 127,
 129–34, 137, 139, 142–4, 146–8, 150–4,
 181–95, 202, 232, 239, 251, 272
 Themistokles 23, 28, 30, 31, 33–41, 45–7,
 269
 Theodoros 193
 Theon (Aigaian) 239
 Thermopylai 22, 35, 87, 95, 98, 101, 215,
 216, 220
 Theseus 41, 123, 146, 168, 171
 Thespiai, Thespians 23, 44, 130, 185, 186,
 188, 192, 194
 Thessaly, Thessalians 7, 87–96, 98, 100,
 101, 187, 203, 204, 208, 214, 215, 217,
 222, 271
 Thrakians 147
 Thucydides 6, 30–3, 35–42, 44–7, 53–9,
 61, 63–6, 90, 91, 97, 107, 109, 110, 112,
 115, 117, 127, 145, 168, 200, 201, 253,
 256, 269, 270
 Tiberius Sempronius Longus 78
 time (esp. duration) 1–3, 20, 24, 26, 31,
 34–6, 38, 40, 53, 55, 56, 59–62, 70, 71,
 77, 82, 87, 89, 90, 93, 95–100, 105–9,
 112, 114, 120, 121, 135, 143–5, 150,
 161, 163, 166, 168, 169, 172, 181, 187,
 188, 202, 203, 214, 216–23, 225, 233,
 236, 238, 250–2, 257, 259–62, 269
 Tissaphernes 33, 43, 70
 treasury 94, 108, 183, 202, 232, 250, 254,
 261
 tribute lists 108, 115, 116
 tripod (Delphic) 7, 87, 89, 91, 93–5, 97,
 100, 123
 Triptolemos 145, 146, 148, 152, 154
 trireme 134
 Troas 92, 95, 234
 Troglus/Iustinus 218, 219, 225, 229
 Trojan War 131
 Trophonios, Trophoneion 202, 203, 205,
 207, 208
 Troy 92, 93, 95, 123, 145, 165
 Trump, Donald J. 64, 262
 Twelve Gods 125

- Tyndareus 131
 tyranny 53, 58, 59, 65
 Tyre 230, 238
- Ukrainia 1, 252
 uncertainty 6, 20, 21, 71–4, 76, 78–80, 105,
 144, 145, 149, 152, 182, 192, 229, 256
 USA (United States of America) 251–3,
 259, 262
 USSR (Union of Soviet Socialist
 Republics) 251
- vigilance 74, 79
- wall 34, 35, 45, 46, 271
 war 2, 5–8, 11, 17, 23, 24, 26, 28, 30–44,
 46, 53, 54, 59–61, 63–5, 70–3, 76, 77,
 82, 88–92, 94, 98–101, 106–10, 113,
 117, 124, 126, 127, 130, 131, 134, 138,
 144–6, 152, 153, 159–63, 165–9, 172,
 173, 176, 182, 184, 187, 191, 193,
 213–23, 225, 231, 232, 236, 237, 241,
 249–53, 259, 261, 262, 264, 269, 271
 Warsaw Pact 251, 262
 Wustmann Seiler, Corina 257, 264
- Xenophon 70, 74, 78, 91, 124, 152, 174,
 182, 189
- Zeus 19, 20, 26, 31, 41, 94, 110, 125–8,
 131, 132, 202
 Zeus Horkios 126
 Zeus Olympios 125
 Zeus Phratrios 128