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Φιλοπόται Μεσσηνίους ἀστυγείτονες ὄντες  
Arcadian Phigaleia as a Geographical, Political and  
Cultural Crossroad\*

Alla dolce memoria di Cristiana,  
amica generosa, discreta, elegante.  
*Alors on sort pour oublier tous les problèmes ...*  
(15.9.2023)

«Some anthropologists have been primarily interested in the social boundaries which order social relations and mark membership in collectivities, others in the cultural boundaries which separate different worlds of meaning, and yet others in boundaries whose principal characteristic is that they are marked in geopolitical space. Of course, these three elements – the social, the cultural and the territorial – are not necessarily mutually exclusive. They may distinguish different types of boundary but they need not; they may, in fact, be aspects of a single boundary».

(DONNAN - WILSON 1999, 19)

1. *Preliminary Remarks*

A multilevel inquiry into the notion of *border* in the ancient world reveals insights into the enduring historical, political, and socio-cultural dynamics which often found their development and synthesis in borderlands, occasionally in original and unparalleled forms. Despite undergoing substantial alterations and deviations from their original trajectories, such processes can also be observed in cross-border areas of inter-ethnic contact. These regions can be regarded as sorts of *middle grounds*, particularly in terms of the nature and quality of the exchanges that occurred there<sup>1</sup>. These spaces of negotiation and exchange can alternatively be

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depicted as zones of hybridisation, geographically open to the interaction between individuals from diverse ethnic backgrounds and culturally receptive to exogenous contributions. Within these ‘hinge-spaces’, it is possible to identify frontier *poleis*, the geographical location and cultural traditions of which render them fascinating subjects for case studies.

Against this background, the *polis* of Phigaleia highlights a number of peculiarities tied to its local culture and traditions. The origin and configuration of these features are to some extent due to the *polis*’ role as a crossroad strategically situated at the junction between Arcadia, Messenia, and Triphylia. The powerful position guaranteed by its geographical position rendered it an obvious object of attention for those regional actors who, from time to time, were engaged in maintaining, consolidating, or extending their control over the western Peloponnese. Different political players such as the Arcadians, Spartans, Aetolians, and Achaeans sought to wield their influence over Phigaleia, employing a range of strategies that included diplomatic measures and even the deployment of military force. It would indeed be intriguing to conceive of Phigaleia as a contemporary border city, established to overlook the natural boundary delineated by the course of the river Neda<sup>2</sup>. However, very little is actually known about the origins of the city and one can but hope that the resumption of archaeological investigations at the site of *Pavlitsa* will help to shed light on the earliest phases of the settlement.

By reconsidering the evidence on ancient Phigaleia, this paper will address the political relations between this Arcadian border polis and the

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<sup>1</sup> The notion of *middle ground*, as elaborated in WHITE 1991, has become a firm part of the hermeneutic toolkit of ancient historians, demonstrating exceptional efficacy – when appropriately contextualized – in illustrating the interactions that occurred within the colonial context between Greek migrants and indigenous populations. In the field of classical studies, the reception of *middle ground* in Irad Malkin’s investigations devoted to Greek colonization remains of paramount importance (see, e.g., MALKIN 1998; MALKIN 2002; MALKIN 2004).

<sup>2</sup> See BUURSINK 2001, 7-8: «A border city is, in our opinion, a place that is more or less dependent on the border for its existence. That is to say, it is not just a city located close to the border, but it also came into existence because of the border. Without the border it would not be there. This aspect is particularly relevant to border cities that are situated on a long established border».



regional powers that successively exercised influence over its territory. The broader aim here, however, is to show how Phigaleia's border location is a key element not only in understanding the reasons behind the attempts of the Spartans and the Hellenistic *koina* to control the city or establish good diplomatic relations with it, but also, at an earlier stage, in shaping the cultural traditions of the *polis*.

## 2. *Phigaleia, Arcadia*

Nestled between the western foothills of Mount Lycaeus and a meeting place between the Messenian territory to the south, the Triphylian coast to the north-northwest and the Arcadian hinterland to the north and east, the city of Phigaleia is the major centre in the area and, for that matter, the one for which the available documentation is the most extensive and intellectually stimulating<sup>3</sup>. Indeed, ancient sources emphasise its frontier location not only because of the role played by the *polis* as a strategic crossroads, but also – to some extent – to point out some unusual characteristics of its local customs<sup>4</sup>.

First, it is worthwhile first to place Phigaleia in its geographical context, relying on what Strabo reports in a passage in Book VIII:

«Cyparissia is on the Triphylian Sea, and so are Pyrgi, and the Acidon and Neda Rivers. At the present time (νυνί) the stream of the Neda is the boundary between Triphylia and Messenia (τῆ Τριφυλίας πρὸς τὴν Μεσσηνίαν ὄριόν ἐστὶ τὸ τῆς Νέδας ῥεῦμα) (an impetuous stream that comes down from Lycaeus, an Arcadian mountain, out of a spring, which, according to the myth, Rhea, after she had given birth to Zeus, caused to break forth in order to have water to bathe in); and it flows past Phigalia, opposite the place where the Pyrgetans, last of the Triphylians, border on the Cyparissians, first of the Messenians (ῥεῖ δὲ παρὰ Φιγαλίαν, καθ' ὃ γειτνιάσι Πυργῖται Τριφυλίων ἔσχατοι Κυπαρισσιεῦσι πρῶτοις Μεσσηνίων); but in the early times the division between the two countries was different (τὸ δὲ παλαιὸν ἄλλως διώριστο), so that some of the territories across the Neda were subject to Nestor—not only Cyparissæis, but also some other parts on the far side. Just so, too, the poet prolongs the Pylian Sea as far as the seven cities which Agamemnon promised to Achilles: *and all are situated near the sea of sandy Pylus*»<sup>5</sup>. (transl. by H.L. JONES)

<sup>3</sup> An overview of the available sources can be found in NIELSEN 2002, 586-588.

<sup>4</sup> See, for example, JOST 1985, 82-83.

<sup>5</sup> Strab. VIII 3, 22 (Κυπαρισσία τέ ἐστὶν ἐπὶ τῆ θαλάττῃ τῆ Τριφυλιακῆ καὶ Πύργοι καὶ ὁ Ἀκίδων ποταμὸς καὶ Νέδα. Νυνὶ μὲν οὖν τῆ Τριφυλίας πρὸς τὴν Μεσσηνίαν ὄριόν ἐστὶ τὸ τῆς Νέδας ῥεῦμα λάβρον ἐκ τοῦ Λυκαίου κατιὸν Ἀρκαδικοῦ ὄρους, ἐκ πηγῆς ἦν ἀναρρῆξαι τεκοῦσαν τὸν Δία μυθεύεται Ῥεῖαν νίπτρων χάριν. ῥεῖ δὲ παρὰ Φιγαλίαν, καθ' ὃ γειτνιάσι Πυργῖται Τριφυλίων ἔσχατοι Κυπαρισσιεῦσι πρῶτοις Μεσσηνίων. τὸ δὲ παλαιὸν ἄλλως διώριστο, ὡς καὶ τινὰς τῶν πέραν τῆς Νέδας ὑπὸ τῷ Νέστορι εἶναι, τὸν τε Κυπαρισσηντα καὶ ἄλλα τινὰ ἐπέκεινα, καθάπερ καὶ τὴν θάλατταν τὴν Πυλίαν ὁ



This passage suggests that, at Strabo's time (or perhaps as early as the time of the source he was consulting), the river Neda marked out the Triphylian-Messenian border (ὄριον)<sup>6</sup>. Following a brief reference to mythological traditions, which will be revisited in subsequent discussion, Strabo proceeds to make mention of Phigaleia. He emphasises that the territorial boundaries of this city, along with those of Pyrgoi and Kyparissia, defined the border between Triphylia and Messenia. With respect to the demarcated borders, it is worth noting that Strabo's text omits any reference to the ethnic identity of the Phigaleians. This aspect, along with the city's association with the Arcadian territory, is not specifically elaborated upon in this passage, nor is it addressed in the comprehensive representation of Arcadia in the final section of Book VIII, where Phigaleia remains noticeably absent<sup>7</sup>. Similarly, Polybius described Phigaleia as a frontier settlement yet made no mention – once again – of its location in Arcadia:

«This Dorimachus, being young and inspired with the true spirit of Aetolian violence and aggressiveness, was sent by the state to Phigaleia in the Peloponnese, which, being on the borders of Messenia (κεῖται δὲ πρὸς τοῖς τῶν Μεσσηνίων ὄροις), happened at that time to be in political union with the Aetolian League (συμπολιτευομένη τοῖς Αἰτωλοῖς)<sup>8</sup>. His mission was nominally to guard the city and territory of Phigaleia, but in fact to act as a spy on the politics of the Peloponnese»<sup>9</sup>. (transl. E.S. SHUCKBURG with minor adjustments)

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ποιητῆς ἐπεκτείνει μέχρι τῶν ἑπτὰ πόλεων ὧν ὑπέσχετο Ἀγαμέμνων τῷ Ἀχιλλεῖ “πάσασι δ’ ἐγγυς ἄλλος νέεται Πύλου ἡμαθόεντος”).

<sup>6</sup> For the Neda as the border between Triphylia and Messenia in Strabo's time, see NIELSEN 1997, 131 n. 6. According to BALADIÉ 1980, 64-67, however, the Neda ran along the same border as that of the Roman occupation of Greece. For some methodical cautions on the interpretation of Strabo's chronological indications such as νῦν, νεωστὶ and καθ’ ἡμᾶς, see BALADIÉ 1978, 4-7.

<sup>7</sup> See ROY 2000, 141: «When describing Arkadia in its own right, Strabo (8.8.1) does not define its frontiers, but when giving an account of eastern Elis he says (8.3.32) that all Pisatis and most of Triphylia have a common frontier with Arkadia».

<sup>8</sup> This passage should be read in parallel with Polyb. IV 31, 1, where it is stated in very general terms that Phigaleia was in the power of the Aetolians (as translated by E.S. SHUCKBURGH). According to LASAGNI 2017, 81-84, the term συμπολιτεύω lacks any legal connotation in this context. Therefore, the translation provided here for συμπολιτευομένη τοῖς Αἰτωλοῖς might not necessarily involve the membership of Phigaleia in the Aetolian *koïnon*.

<sup>9</sup> Polyb. IV 3, 5-7 (νέος δ’ ὧν καὶ πλήρης Αἰτωλικῆς ὀρμῆς καὶ πλεονεξίας [scil. Δωριμάχος ὁ Τριχωνεὺς] ἐξαπεστάλη κατὰ κοινὸν εἰς τὴν τῶν Φιγαλέων πόλιν, [6] ἥτις ἐστὶ μὲν ἐν Πελοποννήσῳ, κεῖται δὲ πρὸς τοῖς τῶν Μεσσηνίων ὄροις, ἐτύγχανε δὲ τότε συμπολιτευομένη τοῖς Αἰτωλοῖς, [7] λόγῳ μὲν παραφυλάξων τὴν τε χώραν καὶ τὴν



In spite of some approximations made by Strabo and Polybius, the Arcadian identity of Phigaleia (or Φιαλία, according to a form of the place name in use from the 3<sup>rd</sup> century BCE)<sup>10</sup> found expression in formulations like Φιγαλεὺς ἀπ' Ἀρκαδίας in Herodotus and Ἀρκὰς ἐκ Φιαλίας in Harmodius of Lepreon (3<sup>rd</sup> century BCE?)<sup>11</sup>, as well as Φιγαλεῖς Ἀρκάδες in the list of contributions for the temple of Delphi from 364-362 BCE.<sup>12</sup> While the federal significance of such expressions of identity has been appropriately reconsidered, it cannot be ruled out that they may have resurfaced during phases when a community sought to reaffirm its membership to a specific ethnic or political group<sup>13</sup>. In the case of Phigaleia, historical documentation suggests that the community appeared to associate its name with the indication of the *ethnos* at times when it came to engage with, if not actually be a part of, federal entities or aggregations of a presumably symmachic nature, like the Arcadian League, the Achaean League, or even the elusive 5<sup>th</sup>-century *Arkadikon*<sup>14</sup>.

In actual truth, the ancient sources provide limited information about the role played by the *polis* within the various individual federal entities. The absence of any explicit allusion to Phigaleia's contribution to the ephemeral experience of the Arcadian *koinon* is particularly regrettable<sup>15</sup>. In the 460s, the territory of the city, which stretched in the direction of the Triphylian coast, would surely have been a key connecting area, both geographically and politically<sup>16</sup>. By the end of the 5<sup>th</sup> century, Triphylian communities had

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πόλιν τῶν Φιγαλέων, ἔργω δὲ κατασκόπου τάξιν ἔχων τῶν ἐν Πελοποννήσῳ πρᾶγματων); see also Polyb. IV 31, 1.

<sup>10</sup> MOGGI - OSANNA 2003, 477; NIELSEN 2004, 527-528 (No. 292).

<sup>11</sup> Hdt. VI 83; Harmod. Lepr. BNJ 319 F 3. Regarding Harmodius of Lepreon, whose fragments are solely preserved through Athenaeus, see JOST - ROY 2010 (*Biographical Essay*) and DE LUNA 2017, 225-240. If the use of the form Φιαλία in Athenaeus goes back to Harmodius, one should conclude that this author lived during or after the 3<sup>rd</sup> century BCE (DE LUNA 2017, 227). For a first-hand use of Harmodius' work by Athenaeus, see ZECCHINI 1989, 147-148 and DE LUNA 2017, 230.

<sup>12</sup> FD III 5, 3 (col. III, l. 45). See also *I. Magnesia* 38 (ll. 58-59 + 64): ἀκολουθῶς δὲ ἔδοξεν ψηφίσασθαι | καὶ τοῖς ἄλλοις *vac.* Ἀρκάσιν· | [...] Φιαλεῦσιν (end of the 3<sup>rd</sup> or 2<sup>nd</sup> centuries BCE).

<sup>13</sup> NIELSEN 2002, 54-66.

<sup>14</sup> On the purported political implications of these expressions of identity, see the cautious observations in BECK - FUNKE 2015, 18-19. Regarding the 5<sup>th</sup>-century *Arkadikon*, possibly an anti-Spartan alliance led by Tegea between 479 and 465 BCE, and the coin series featuring the legend ΑΡΚΑΔΙΚΟΝ, see NIELSEN 2002, 121-157; PRETZLER 2009, 94-95; NIELSEN 2015, 250-252; GANTER 2021.

<sup>15</sup> On the Arcadian *koinon*, see esp. NIELSEN 2015. For the membership of Phigaleia to the Arcadian *koinon*, see NIELSEN 2002, 393 n. 392.

<sup>16</sup> For an overview of the borderlands between Arcadia and Elis, see ROY 2000.



broken away from the Elean yoke thanks to Spartan intervention and began to reshape their genealogies with a pro-Arcadian shading, ultimately uniting to form the new *koinon* of the Arcadians around 370<sup>17</sup>. With Triphylia's integration into the emerging federal entity, the Arcadians gained direct control over a significant stretch of coastline. Consequently, Phigaleia, which had previously functioned as a border community and most likely accessed the sea via the navigable lower course of the Neda River<sup>18</sup>, found itself aligned politically with Lepreon, the main centre of Triphylia, with which the *polis* shared a substantial portion of its northwestern frontier<sup>19</sup>. The effects of the Arcadian confederation's crisis in 363 on Triphylia and Triphylians remain unclear. According to Polybius, the region was still perceived as an integral part of the Arcadian geographic space in 219<sup>20</sup>. Regardless of the fate of the neighbouring Triphylians and the relatively short lifespan of the *koinon*, it is evident that the ideological and political leanings of the Phigaleians were in line with the tendencies and policy expressed by the Arcadian *koinon*, as suggested by some of the indications provided by Pausanias<sup>21</sup>.

An initial indication of a 'pan-Arcadian sentiment' can be identified in the genealogical tradition of the eponymous Φίγαλος, as mentioned by Pausanias at the outset of Book VIII.<sup>22</sup> According to Pausanias, who claims to have drawn from local traditions to compile the royal Arcadian lineage<sup>23</sup>, Phigalus was a son of King Lycaon who, in turn, was the son of Pelasgus, the founder of Lykosoura and the cult and agons of Zeus Λυκαῖος<sup>24</sup>. As recorded by Pausanias and supported by other traditions, Lycaon was considered the ancestor of a line of eponymous founders who would increase the number of

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<sup>17</sup> See NIELSEN 1997, 144-157; RUGGERI 2009; MACKIL 2019, 14-16, 18-20. For Τριφύλος son of Arcas, see *FD* III 1, 3; Polyb. IV 77, 8; Paus. X 9, 5 (see MACKIL 2019, 11-12, 15-16 and FRANCHI 2020, 16-18 for some commentary). For the transfer of the perioecic cities from Elis to Arcadia, see Xen. *Hell.* III 2, 30; Diod. XIV 34, 1.

<sup>18</sup> For the navigability of the lower course of the Neda River, see Paus. VIII 41, 3 with COOPER 1972. For the relations of the Arcadians with the sea, see ROY 2015.

<sup>19</sup> On the border disputes affecting the Elean-Arcadian territory and the territorial changes in this region, see ROY 2000, 141.

<sup>20</sup> Polyb. IV 77, 8-9; see also Ps. Scyl. 44.

<sup>21</sup> For the enduring pan-Arcadian sentiment fostered by major *poleis* such as Tegea, Mantinea and Orchomenos, see PRETZLER 2009, 96-99 and NIELSEN 2015, 265-267. A different view is expressed by ROY 2019, 251-253 who considers the invocation of pan-Arcadian solidarity a tool exploited to pursue local political interests.

<sup>22</sup> Paus. VIII 3, 1.

<sup>23</sup> Paus. VIII 6, 1.

<sup>24</sup> Paus. VIII 2, 1.



cities and population of Arcadia<sup>25</sup>. According to James Roy, the figure of Lycaon, to whom Pausanias assigns 28 sons (22 of them eponyms of centres converged by synoecism into Megalopolis)<sup>26</sup>, would only have been fully elaborated after 370 in an aim to provide a mythical expression for the new Arcadian unity sealed by the founding of Megalopolis<sup>27</sup>. Following this interpretation, it can be assumed that the genealogical connection between Lycaon and Phigalus, which is in fact a projection of the preferential (not synoecistic) link between Megalopolis and Phigaleia, was intended to allude to the contribution made by the Phigaleians to the establishment of the new *koinon* and the recognition of the newly founded *polis* as a symbol of solidarity among all Arcadians<sup>28</sup>.

Another crucial aspect of the involvement of Phigaleia in the common Arcadian cause is its significant, both material and highly symbolic, contribution to the establishment of Megalopolis<sup>29</sup>. Pausanias, when describing the monuments of the latter city, dwells briefly on the northern sector of the agora where, in the second half of the 2<sup>nd</sup> century CE, it was still possible to admire the bronze statue of Apollo Ἐπικούριος, relocated from the territory of Phigaleia to Megalopolis at the time of its foundation<sup>30</sup>. Originally, the statue was a part of the decorative programme of the temple of Apollo at Bassai, which was reconstructed under the supervision of Phigaleians. They called upon Ictinus, the architect of the Parthenon, for this project that coincided with the outbreak of the plague epidemic in 430/29<sup>31</sup>. While the exact meaning of the divine epithet remains a matter of debate<sup>32</sup>, it is evident that Pausanias recreates the terms of a full-fledged symbolism associated with the statue. This symbolism, including the association of the additional attribute Ἀλεξίκακος to Apollo, appears to reflect a gift imbued with a clear apotropaic value. It is as though the protection originally granted to Phigaleians then extended to encompass the entire Arcadian

<sup>25</sup> Paus. VIII 3, 1; Apollod. *Bibl.* III 8, 1 (= § 96-99); Dion. Hal. *AR* I 11, 3.

<sup>26</sup> Paus. VIII 3, 1-5.

<sup>27</sup> ROY 1968.

<sup>28</sup> On the synoecism of Megalopolis, see esp. MOGGI 1974.

<sup>29</sup> See JOST 1985, 82 («elle entretient avec Mégalopolis, sa voisine, des liens privilégiés»).

<sup>30</sup> Paus. VIII 30, 2-4.

<sup>31</sup> Paus. VIII 41, 8-9; see also VIII 30, 4. For the different construction phases of the temple (I-IV), ranging from the 7<sup>th</sup> to the late 5<sup>th</sup> century BCE, see COOPER 1992, 81-97. An informative state-of-art can be found in SASSÙ 2016, 85-102.

<sup>32</sup> According to COOPER 1978, 20-26 and JOST 1985, 485-489, the epithet Ἐπικούριος depicts Apollo as a war deity (see also CARDETE DEL OLMO 2005, 104-105). However, JOST 1985, 488-489 points out that this might be the original meaning of the divine attribution, while Ἐπικούριος was later reinterpreted as an epithet of salutary character.



people. Pausanias characterises such a contribution as συντέλεια ἐς κόσμον τῆ Μεγάλη πόλει, illustrating how Phigaleia, despite not being directly involved in Epaminondas' synoecism, actively participated in the monumentalization of the new federal 'capital' as an eloquent expression of pan-Arcadian solidarity<sup>33</sup>.

Thirdly, an important tribute to Megalopolis can be discerned in the narrative surrounding the voluntary sacrifice of one hundred Oresthasians, who died on the battlefield for the freedom of the Phigaleians. Pausanias records that, during the archontal year of Miltiades in Athens, which corresponds to the second year of the 30<sup>th</sup> Olympiad (659 BCE), Phigaleia was reportedly besieged and subsequently occupied by the Spartans. Phigaleians are said to have regained their freedom only through the actions of a group of fighters from Oresthasion<sup>34</sup>. As Giovanna Daverio Rocchi has pointed out, the assistance provided by the Oresthasians, although imposed in this tradition by a Delphic response, fits quite well into a rather common dynamic of genetic solidarity among communities that perceived themselves as heirs to a common ancestor<sup>35</sup>. In the genealogical lineage reported by Pausanias, Orestheus, the founder of Oresthasion, is described as the son of Lycaon and brother of Phigalus<sup>36</sup>. The site of ancient Oresthasion, presently identified as the modern village of *Perivolia* (approximately 2.5 kilometres southeast of Megalopolis)<sup>37</sup>, positions this ancient *polis* as one of the closest centres to the federal 'capital', rendering it a natural participant in the synoecism<sup>38</sup>. In a retrospective reconstruction imbued with a pan-Arcadian nuance, it comes as no surprise that the small *polis* may have served as an ideal precursor to the new Epaminondean foundation, to such an extent that its name even conveys the reference to the half of the (urban?) territory of Megalopolis, sometimes indicated as Ὀρεστία<sup>39</sup>. In a discourse aimed at

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<sup>33</sup> See PRETZLER 2009, 92 («... Megalopolis, a city that still retained many monuments of pan-Arcadian significance in the Roman period, and that was itself a lasting memorial of regional unification»). For the modern use of the term 'capital' for Megalopolis, see BECK - FUNKE 2015, 14-15. Megalopolis is termed *Bundeszentrum* in BECK 1997, 83 (but see ROY 2007, 291-292).

<sup>34</sup> Paus. VIII 39, 3-5. At that time, the Spartans launched an attack on the Phigaleians, who found themselves surrounded along the entire perimeter of the walls. Later, they managed to recover the city with the help of the Oresthasians.

<sup>35</sup> DAVERIO ROCCHI 1990, 19 n. 17.

<sup>36</sup> Paus. VIII 3, 1.

<sup>37</sup> FRITZILAS 2018 (esp. 225-226: the city ethnic can be identified on a loom weight, as well as on a tile); see BE 2019, No. 127. The identification of Oresthasion with the ancient settlement at *Perivolia* was already proposed by JOST 1974, 181 n. 7.

<sup>38</sup> Paus. VIII 27, 3.

<sup>39</sup> Steph. Byz. s.v. Μεγάλη πόλις (μ 105 Billerbeck).





celebrating the historical continuity of relations between Phigaleia and Megalopolis, and thereby the commitment of the Phigaleians to the federal ideal, it is undeniable that, as observed by Noel Robertson some years ago, the episode concerning the sacrifice of the Oresthasians would have lent itself (and quite possibly was indeed exploited) to every sort of ideological manipulation, predominantly within the context of a pan-Arcadian and anti-Spartan narrative<sup>40</sup>.

All in all, a pervasive anti-Spartan sentiment fostered a sense of cohesion among Arcadian communities over time, albeit accompanied by phases of disintegration and reaggregation among *poleis*, driven by momentary interests and conveniences<sup>41</sup>. In this regard, Phigaleia appears to be no exception. Nevertheless, in comparison to other *poleis*, its location, distant from traditional leading cities such as Tegea, Mantinea, or later Megalopolis, likely granted Phigaleia a certain degree of autonomy, particularly considering that its regional counterparts were not only Arcadian allies, but also *poleis*, *ethne* and *koina* settled along the immediate borders of its territory.

### 3. *Phigaleia and Sparta*

In order to properly explore the role of Phigaleia as a border city, particularly for the Archaic and Classical Age (though not exclusively), one must inevitably address its problematic relationships with Sparta. Phigaleia was situated on a strip of Arcadian territory wedged between areas traditionally subject to Spartan influence, such as Messenia and Triphylia, and presented for this reason presented a twofold challenge for Sparta. It was not only a potential obstacle for controlling the lower Neda region but could also act as a cross-border bastion along the most direct route connecting the southern Peloponnese to the north-western coast. The lower Neda Basin played a key role, for example, in Spartan operations during the

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<sup>40</sup> ROBERTSON 1992, 232-233. The well-established relations between the two cities must have led to the mutual bestowal of honours for eminent citizens, as suggested by an unpublished decree found in the shrine of Athena and Zeus Σωτήρ at Phigaleia, where the figure of a Megalopolitan *proxenos* is celebrated (ARAPOGIANNI 1996, 44). In relation to the connections between Phigaleia and Megalopolis, it cannot go unnoticed that Aristodemus “the Good”, tyrant of Megalopolis during the Chremonidean War (ca. 269/8-261 BCE), was a Phigaleian native, as reported by Pausanias (VIII 27, 11; see also Paus. VIII 30, 7; 32, 4; 35, 5; 36, 5; Polyb. X 22, 1-3; Plut. *Philop.* 1, 3-4).

<sup>41</sup> PRETZLER 2009.



second year of the Elean Wars (402-400)<sup>42</sup>. At that time, Sparta and its allies launched an attack from the *Aulon* of Messenia, with prompt support from the Lepreatai, neighbours of the Phigaleians<sup>43</sup>. While it remains unclear whether this manoeuvre encroached upon Phigaleia's territory, the possibility cannot be ruled out due to the Arcadians' involvement in the conflict alongside the Spartans<sup>44</sup>. In addition, Lepreon, the main city of Triphylia, remained a loyal ally of Sparta for significant periods throughout its history<sup>45</sup>. The city had already been a matter of dispute between Spartans and Eleans in 421/0<sup>46</sup> but was eventually freed by Sparta at the end of the Elean Wars<sup>47</sup>. Later, despite Arcadian federal solidarity, the Lepreatai unexpectedly provided support to the Spartans in an attack on Mantinea in 370<sup>48</sup>. Ultimately, sharing its borders with Lepreon to the north-west and Messenia to the south must have made the Phigaleians all too aware of the looming Spartan threat<sup>49</sup>.

The traditional instability of relations with Sparta indelibly marked the identity of Phigaleia.<sup>50</sup> This memory of an ancient hostility toward Sparta appears to have persisted across various epochs of Phigaleian history, appropriately revived (if not properly refunctionalized) during periods of renewed conflict with the Spartan power. Going back in time, the earliest reference to the name of Phigaleia is associated with the Spartan occupation of 659 BCE and the sacrifice of the Oresthasians.<sup>51</sup> However, these events are

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<sup>42</sup> Xen. *Hell.* III 2, 21-31; Diod. XIV 17, 4-12; 34, 1-2; Paus. III 8, 3-5; see, for example, SORDI 1984; ROY 2009.

<sup>43</sup> Xen. *Hell.* III 2, 25.

<sup>44</sup> Xen. *Hell.* III 2, 26. According to TAITA 2004, 71, the Spartan army could not proceed towards Lepreon using the mountain route through Phigaleia as this itinerary was not suitable for a large army. However, in the subsequent assault on Elis, Agis is reported to have led the Spartan army, reinforced by an Arcadian contingent, along a mountainous path (Xen. *Hell.* III 2, 26), as noted by TAITA 2004, 73.

<sup>45</sup> An ancestral kinship with Sparta was earlier elaborated in the traditions on Mynyan Lepreon (Hdt. IV 148, 1-4).

<sup>46</sup> Thuc. V 31, 1-5; 34, 1; 49, 5-50, 2; Diod. XIV 17, 4; Paus. III 8, 3; see also Polyæn. VI 27, 2 (and see below).

<sup>47</sup> Xen. *Hell.* III 2, 30; Diod. XIV 17, 5; 34, 1; Paus. III 8, 4-5.

<sup>48</sup> Xen. *Hell.* VI 5, 11; see also IG V 2, 1, ll. 20-22.

<sup>49</sup> The rivalry between Lepreon and Phigaleia influenced the coalitions in the War of Aristomenes, with a group of the Lepreatai supporting the Spartans and the Phigaleians allied with the Messenians (Paus. IV 15, 7-8; but see IV 24, 1).

<sup>50</sup> See, for example, CARDETE DEL OLMO 2005, 6-7, 77-78, who, however, seems to be all too optimistic about our possibility to reconstruct some historical processes or events, such as the long-lasting conflicts that we commonly label as Messenian Wars.

<sup>51</sup> The chronology follows Paus. VIII 39, 3.



suspected to have undergone alterations when Megalopolis was founded<sup>52</sup>. Alongside the recollection of this Spartan attack, Pausanias' narrative includes a Delphic inquiry 'ύπερ καθόδου' by the Phigaleians, with the oracle's fulfilment resulting in the death of one hundred Oresthasians<sup>53</sup>. Pausanias' account relied on Phigaleian local traditions, which were rooted in the presence of a monumental πολυάνδριον in the agora<sup>54</sup>. In Pausanias' time, the memory of the episode was annually reactivated at the tomb of the Oresthasians with the collective celebration of έναγισμοί<sup>55</sup>, traces of which are thought to be discernible in the heroic cult rituals described by Harmodius of Lepreon<sup>56</sup>. Despite the precise chronology provided by Pausanias, tracing the historical core of the tradition in terms of the earliest Spartan attack on Phigaleia remains a challenging endeavour. The Delphic intervention reveals its nature as a narratological *topos* when compared with similar Pausanian narratives about the relics of Arcadian heroes<sup>57</sup>, as well as in the Herodotean model of the discovery of Orestes' bones at Tegea<sup>58</sup>. The memory of this event may have been perpetuated through adaptations by local μάντεις, who are known to have been active as far back as Herodotus

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<sup>52</sup> As observed by DAVERIO ROCCHI 1990, 18 n. 14, it cannot be ruled out that the episode was conceived in continuity with the parallel reworkings of neighbouring traditions regarding the War of Aristomenes (for its chronology, see, in general, LURAGHI 2008, 97-99).

<sup>53</sup> Paus. VIII 39, 4-5 (= P.-W. II No. 30). The theme of a victory achieved at the cost of death recalls not only well-known episodes like the so-called Battle of the Champions for the control of Thyreatis (recent discussions of the sources in BERSHADSKY 2012; FRANCHI 2013), but also the story of the Phigaleian pancratis Arrachion, whose archaic marble statue once stood in the agora of Phigaleia (Paus. VIII 40, 1). Pausanias reports that the athlete, already Olympian champion on two occasions before 564 BCE, is said to have died of suffocation just as his opponent was declared defeated due to a fractured toe (Paus. VIII 40, 2; Eus. *Chron.* 201-202 SCHOENE = 93 [54] KARST; see BROPHY 1978; HOLLENBACK 2010; BECK 2020, 106-107).

<sup>54</sup> Paus. VIII 41, 1; see JOST 1985, 65.

<sup>55</sup> Paus. VIII 41, 1; see MOGGI - OSANNA 2003, 477.

<sup>56</sup> Harmod. Lepr. BNJ 319 F 1 with JOST 1985, 538-539; ROBERTSON 1992, 232-252; DE LUNA 2017, 233-236 (who attributes the information provided in Theopomp. BNJ 115 F 125 to Phigaleian context).

<sup>57</sup> A narrative concerning the bones of the eponymous Arcas at Mantinea is found in Paus. VIII 9, 3-4.2

<sup>58</sup> Hdt. I 67-68. A terminological echo can be appreciated in the use of βαλανηφάγοι (same metrical position) in the opening verse of the hexametric response concerning the re-establishment of the cult of Demeter Μέλαινα (Paus. VIII 42, 6 = P.-W. II No. 493: Ἀρκάδες Ἀζᾶνες βαλανηφάγοι, οἳ Φιγάλειαν; see also Hdt. 66, 2 = P.-W. II No. 31: πολλοὶ ἐν Ἀρκαδίῃ βαλανηφάγοι ἄνδρες ἔασιν). On the use of Ἀζᾶνες as a literary amplification, see NIELSEN 2002, 296 n. 154.



(Cleander) and can also be inferred from Pausanias' reference to an oracular response concerning the re-establishment of the cult of Demeter *Μέλαινα*<sup>59</sup>.

Little is known about Phigaleia's political history and, at present, its membership of the Peloponnesian League remains simply a plausible assumption<sup>60</sup>. The involvement of Ictinus in the renovation of the temple of Apollo Ἐπικούριος at Bassai around 430/29 suggests the existence of friendly relations between Phigaleia and Athens in the early years of the Archidamian War<sup>61</sup>. Ictinus had previously contributed to the construction of the Parthenon in the years preceding the outbreak of hostilities between Sparta and Athens<sup>62</sup>. The Spartan attack on Phigaleia, documented in an epitomised stratagem by Polyaeus, likely dates after the peace of Nicias<sup>63</sup>. In this context, a plea for assistance issued by the Phigaleians to the Argives is mentioned. This reference evokes a well-known chapter by Thucydides, outlining the coordinated efforts of some Arcadian *poleis* to form a united

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<sup>59</sup> Hdt. VI 83, 2 (Cleander's involvement in the defense of Tiryns around 470-468, as discussed in VANNICELLI 1993, 84-85; SCOTT 2005, 308; 84-85; FRULLINI 2021); Paus. VIII 42, 5-7 (bronze ἄγαλμα of Demeter made by Onatas of Aegina after a Delphic response [hexametric text in Paus. VIII 42, 6 = P.-W. II No. 493], for which see DÖRIG 1977, 8-9; BRUIT 1986, 77-82). For the role of the μάντις, his social function, and the transmission of this function within the context of *gene* and/or civic elite-related environments, see FLOWER 2008, 37-50; GIANGIULIO 2014, 216-217, 225-227. If it holds true that «l'intervento (...) di versificatori, e in certi casi recenziatori di 'redattori' di responsi oracolari esametrici (...) [n]on (...) diversi dai portatori delle tradizioni nel loro complesso» is a prerogative of «figure quali *manteis* itineranti e 'residenti'» (quotations from GIANGIULIO 2014, 227), then it is reasonable to assume that even remote traditions linked to Delphic intervention, such as the sacrifice of the Oresthians or the episode of the refoundation of the cult of Demeter *Μέλαινα*, may have survived the passage of generations precisely due to μάντις like Cleander. From a chronological point of view, moreover, a certain temporal proximity between the Herodotean episode involving Cleander and the refoundation of the cult of Demeter cannot go unnoticed, both occurring shortly after the conclusion of the Persian Wars (Paus. VIII 42, 7: [Ὀνάτας] ἐποίησε χαλκοῦν Φιγαλεῦσιν ἄγαλμα, γενεᾷ μάλιστα ὕστερον τῆς ἐπὶ τὴν Ἑλλάδα ἐπιστρατείας τοῦ Μήδου μαρτυρεῖ δέ μοι τῶ λόγῳ; see JOST 1985, 312-317. For Onatas' chronology, see DÖRIG 1977, 5-8; JOST 1985, 89). On the Phigaleian origin of the story of the refoundation of the cult of Demeter, see NIELSEN - ROY 1998, 33-36. For the use of the name Ὀνάτας in Phigaleia, see *I.Olympia* 402 (1<sup>st</sup> cent. BCE). In addition, it is worth noting that Pausanias records the presence of ψυχαγωγοί in Phigaleia during the age of Pausanias, the victor of Plataiai (Paus. III 17, 9; see also Plut. *Cim.* 6, 4-7 [with an alternative setting to the νεκρομαντεῖον Herakleia Pontica]) and, more precisely, at the time when the king returned to the Peloponnese after the conquest of Byzantium (478 BCE: Thuc. I 128, 3; 131, 2).

<sup>60</sup> NIELSEN 2002, 393.

<sup>61</sup> Paus. VIII 41, 8-9.

<sup>62</sup> A biography of Ictinus can be found in SASSÙ 2016.

<sup>63</sup> Polyaeus. VI 27, 2. The association of this stratagem with the Spartan siege of 659 BCE has been proposed by ROBERTSON 1992, 234.



front around Argos in response to Spartan hegemony<sup>64</sup>. Although the available documentation lacks any further details regarding the events of these years, Phigaleia's connection with Athens and Argos, and the subsequent tensions with Sparta, suggest that the city underwent one or more political realignments during the Peloponnesian War.

The rivalry with Sparta resurged during the 4<sup>th</sup> century. In 375/4 BCE, a group of exiled oligarchs from Phigaleia, with the support of Spartans, endeavoured to overthrow the democratic leadership in the city, moving from the stronghold of Ἡραία<sup>65</sup>. According to Diodorus, this assault, which took place during the city's *Dionysia* and was concentrated in the area around the theatre, ultimately proved unsuccessful. Following this failure, the Phigaleian exiles sought refuge in Laconia. The existence of two factions fighting for the city government prefigures an earlier alternation of power between democrats and oligarchs, of which, however, there is no clear confirmation in the available sources.

A phase of reconciliation between Phigaleia and Sparta can be observed during the Chremonidean War. In these years, both cities joined a broad anti-Antigonid coalition led by Ptolemy II Philadelphus, the Athenian Chremonides, and Areus I of Sparta<sup>66</sup>. The so-called decree of Chremonides, dating back to 269 BCE (*IG II<sup>3</sup> 1, 912 = IG II<sup>2</sup> 686-687*), documents the Phigaleians' participation in the agreement, alongside other Peloponnesian communities and the Cretans<sup>67</sup>. The alliance included the neighbouring Eleans and other major Arcadian cities (Tegea, Mantinea, Orchomenos, and Kaphyiai), while the longstanding anti-Spartan strongholds of Megalopolis, Messene, and Argos were notably absent<sup>68</sup>. Determining whether Phigaleia entered the alliance thanks to good relations with one of the three main contracting parties is certainly a challenge. While it is possible that Sparta sought to regain its ancient hegemony over the Peloponnese and supported the entry of the Arcadian *polis* into the coalition, other plausible scenarios can equally be taken into account<sup>69</sup>. The Athenian diplomatic mission to Orchomenos and the concomitant granting of proxeny to Glaucon of

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<sup>64</sup> Thuc. V 29, 1-4.

<sup>65</sup> Diod. XV 40, 1-2 with ROY 1973 and STYLIANOU 1998, 330-334. See also Xen. *Hell.* VI 4, 18 for similar upheavals in Mantinea and Tegea.

<sup>66</sup> On the Chremonidean War, see, for example, HEINEN 1972, 95-213; HABICHT 1995 [2006], 161-167.

<sup>67</sup> *IG II<sup>3</sup> 1, 912*, ll. 21-25, 35-40 (= *StV III 476*; see HEINEN 1972, 117-142; HABICHT 1995 [2006], 163; LURAGHI 2018, 36-41). For the dating of the decree and the archontal year of Peithidemus (269/8 BCE), see BYRNE 2006-2007, 175-178.

<sup>68</sup> LURAGHI 2018, 24.

<sup>69</sup> As observed by LURAGHI 2018, 36.



Aithalidai, Aristides of Lamprai and Callippus of Eleusis (MORETTI, *ISE* 53) suggest that a similar result would also have been within Athens' grasp, assuming delegations such as this had arrived in Arcadia before the formal signing of the alliance<sup>70</sup>. Nor can the possibility be ruled out that the Phigaleians took part in the anti-Antigonid front of their own initiative, that is, outside the ranks of the three main allies. Relations between representatives of the Phigaleian elites and the Aetolian *koinon*, which remained outside the conflict<sup>71</sup>, demonstrate a certain autonomy in the management of foreign policy. This suggests that the Aetolians were perceived as strategic partners capable of effectively protecting the interest of the *polis*.<sup>72</sup> The case of the neighbouring Eleans, traditional allies of the Aetolians and involved in the fall of the tyrant Aristotimus (272 BCE), highlights the volatility of alliances between the 70s and 60s of the 3<sup>rd</sup> century<sup>73</sup>. While the alliance of Phigaleia with Sparta within the broader framework of the treaty between Ptolemy II, the Athenians and the Spartans is ultimately an incontrovertible fact, the existence of a bilateral agreement between the Phigaleians and Spartans within the framework of a renewed Spartan-led Peloponnesian coalition is not so obvious.

After a new period of formal alliance within the framework of the Achaean *koinon*<sup>74</sup>, the later phase of relations between Phigaleia and Sparta is associated with a hitherto unpublished inscription which has come to light in the sanctuary of Athena and Zeus Σωτήρ at *Pavlitsa*<sup>75</sup>. According to Athanassios Themou and Eleni Zavvou, the *koinon* of the Lacedaemonians, presumably organised into a league around 195 BCE<sup>76</sup>, granted proxeny to a

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<sup>70</sup> HABICHT 1995 [2006], 162-163; LURAGHI 2018, 38 n. 60. Caution regarding the traditional dating of the Athenian embassy at Orchomenos is expressed by CANEVARO - IACOVIELLO - LURAGHI 2022, 77-78, 97-98, who draw attention to Aristides' journey to the Peloponnese at the beginning of the Chremonidean War (*I.Rhamnous* 404, ll. 18-20).

<sup>71</sup> See HEINEN 1972, 139-142 and SCHOLTEN 2000, 70-77.

<sup>72</sup> For the proxeny granted by the Aetolians to Euagathus from Phigaleia (*IG IX* 1<sup>2</sup>, 1, 13, ll. 19-22), see below.

<sup>73</sup> On the short-lived tyranny of Aristotimus of Elis, supported by Antigonos Gonatas, see Plut. *Mul. Virt.* 15 (= *Mor.* 250F-253E); Iust. *Epit.* XXVI 1, 4-10; Paus. V 5, 1 (with GÓMEZ ESPELOSÍN 1991). The Aetolian support for the Eleans opposed to Aristotimus is testified both by the reception of 800 Elean refugees in Aetolia (Plut. *Mul. Virt.* 15 [= *Mor.* 251C, 252A]; Iust. *Epit.* XXVI 1, 5-6), and by the Aetolians' dedication of a statue of Aristotimus' murderer Cylon at Olympia (Paus. VI 14, 11).

<sup>74</sup> On the entry of Sparta into the League in 192 BCE, see Liv. XXXV 37, 1-3; Paus. VIII 51, 1; Plut. *Phil.* 15, 2-3.

<sup>75</sup> On the archaeological fieldwork on the site of *Pavlitsa* (anc. Phigaleia), see ARAPOGIANNI 1997; ARAPOGIANNI 2001.

<sup>76</sup> GITTI 1939; KENNELL 1999; FARACE 2014.



Phigaleian citizen during the 1<sup>st</sup> century BCE<sup>77</sup>. This evidence is all the more relevant as it not only enlightens us about the history of Hellenistic Phigaleia but also offers new valuable insights into the international relations of the League of Lacedaemonians. While much of the history of this late *koinon* is still shrouded in shadows, its origins, as well as its denomination, seem to support the idea of a political rebalancing (if not outright contention) of the dominance of Sparta<sup>78</sup>. There may have *also* been enduring and mutually shared grounds rooted in the traditional hostility towards Sparta behind the interactions between the *koinon* and Phigaleia. It is noteworthy, however, that diplomatic contacts between the *koinon* and Sparta, now nearly 'encircled' by the small centres of the perioecia, are attested in the early 1<sup>st</sup> century BCE through the granting of proxeny to the Spartan Philo<sup>79</sup>. Although Themis and Zavvou do not provide any further indications regarding the chronology of the Phigaleian inscription, it would be intriguing to reestablish the respective chronological framework underlying the proxeny decrees for the son of Procleidas of Phigaleia and Philo of Sparta. Furthermore, on a macro-historical level, it would be interesting to explore the plausibility of a connection between both inscriptions and the intervention of Mithridates in Greece<sup>80</sup>. In this respect, literary sources indicate that the Λακεδαιμόνιοι suffered an almost immediate setback upon the arrival of Pontic troops in 88 BCE<sup>81</sup>. At a slightly later stage, Ἀχαιοὶ καὶ Λάκωνες are reported to have fought at Chaeroneia alongside Archelaus, Mithridates' most active general in Greece during 88/7 BCE<sup>82</sup>. However, the precise identity of the defeated Lacedaemonians remains elusive – were they Spartans, the *koinon* of Lacedaemonians or, in actual fact, both? Likewise, the identification of the Achaeans and Laonians in the Pontic army ranks remains ambiguous. The use of such ethnics may reveal, albeit in a nuanced and imprecise fashion, what remained of those federal Peloponnesian aggregations in which Phigaleia, Sparta and the cities of the Laconian

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<sup>77</sup> THEMOS - ZAVVOU 2019, 106; see also ARAPOGIANNI 1997, 44; ARAPOGIANNI 2001, 304. For the anthroponym Πρωκλείδας, see *LGPN* V 3a s.v. [3] (4<sup>th</sup> cent. BCE), [4] (2<sup>nd</sup> cent. BCE).

<sup>78</sup> FARACE 2014, 58-59; see also GITTI 1939, 197; KENNEL 1999, 189-190.

<sup>79</sup> *IG* V 1, 1226.

<sup>80</sup> The premises and consequences of Mithridates' intervention in Greece are given in greater detail in SHERWIN-WHITE 1984, 132-148 and MCGING 1986, 121-126.

<sup>81</sup> Memn. Heracl. BNJ 434 F 1, 22, 10.

<sup>82</sup> App. *Mithr.* 29. Indeed, the texts of Memnon and Appian, primary sources for these events, do not clarify whether the ethnics Λακεδαιμόνιοι and Ἀχαιοὶ καὶ Λάκωνες should be understood in an extensive or restrictive sense (*pace* CARTLEDGE - SPAWFORTH 2002, 86-87).



perioecia had each played a distinct role<sup>83</sup>. The stabilisation of relations among these different communities may have materialised through their collective participation in the Mithridatic conflict and their subsequent reconciliation with the Romans. Such a scenario can be conjectured – based on Pierre Assenmaker’s interpretation of Plut. *Luc.* 2, 2 concerning the minting of Λευκόλλεια in the Peloponnese – as early as the summer or winter of 87/6 BCE<sup>84</sup> and further substantiated by the dispatch of delegations to Sulla from all the *poleis* (except Athens) immediately after the Roman army moved on to Greece<sup>85</sup>.

#### 4. *The diplomatic relations of Hellenistic Phigaleia: Aetolian League and Achaean League*

The events that saw Phigaleia take a crucial role in the Aetolian-Messenian conflict of 220/19 clearly showcase how the border location of the *polis* decisively contributed to reshaping the boundaries of this part of the Peloponnese around the mid-3<sup>rd</sup> century BCE. Serving as an outpost for Aetolian power in the peninsula, the liberation of Phigaleia was deemed by the Messenians one of the two indispensable cornerstones for concluding the anti-Aetolian symmarchy with Philip V in 220<sup>86</sup>.

Diplomatic exchanges between the Phigaleians and the Aetolian League can be traced back to around 271/0 concerning the strategy of Scopas of Trichoneion. A *dossier* of proxeny decrees, retrieved in an inscription from Thermon, attests that the Phigaleian Euagathus, son of Philoxenus, obtained proxeny, *isopoliteia* and all other honours typically accorded to *proxenoi*, for himself and his descendants.<sup>87</sup> More relevant from a political point of view is the intermediation role that the Aetolian *koinon* assumed in the agreement settled between Phigaleia and Messene around 240 BCE. The treaty, the text of which is reproduced on a stele from Phigaleia<sup>88</sup>, resulted from a diplomatic mission conducted by Aetolian envoys to resolve a disagreement

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<sup>83</sup> On the purely formal survival of the Achaean *koinon* in Roman times, see SCHWERTFEGGER 1974 (esp. 19-26).

<sup>84</sup> ASSENMAKER 2017.

<sup>85</sup> Plut. *Sull.* 12, 1; App. *Mithr.* 30.

<sup>86</sup> Polyb. IV 6, 32.

<sup>87</sup> IG IX 1<sup>2</sup>, 1, 13, ll. 19-22: [ἀ]γαθῶι τύχαι. τὸ κοινὸν Αἰτωλῶν ἔδωκεν. Εὐαγάθωι Φιλοξένου Φιαλεῖ πρ[ο]|[ξ]ε|νίαν, ἰσοπολιτείαν, ἀσφάλειαν αὐτῶι καὶ ἐγγύοις καὶ τᾶλλα, ὅσα καὶ τοῖς ἄλ[λ]οις| δίδονται προξένοις. στραταγούντος Σκόπ[α] Τριχονίου, γραμματέος Παντάρ[ο]|[κε]ος Πελλωτίου. ἔγγυος Ἄθαμβος Μακυ[ν]εύς.

<sup>88</sup> IG V 2, 419 = StV III 495 = AGER, *Arbitrations* 40 I.





between the two communities<sup>89</sup>. As a seal of their renewed concord, the Phigaleians and Messenians drew up an agreement of *epigamia* and *isopoliteia* pledging to resolve private disputes and jointly exploit a particular territory, the limits of which are left unspecified<sup>90</sup>. As proposed by Sheila Ager, the *chora* subject to this shared exploitation may in fact be identifiable as the territory submitted to border demarcation in two epigraphic fragments from Messene, dated to the 2<sup>nd</sup> century BCE<sup>91</sup>. Indeed, while this remains a conjecture, and even if the fragments from Messene relate to different circumstances or involve other disputed border territories between the Messenians and Phigaleians, one may consider that the agreement fostered by the Aetolians and the territorial arrangement underlying the decree of Phigaleia required, as it were, an update, given the distinct dating assigned to the three documents. Furthermore, an additional aspect of interest lies in the literary reworkings that the agreement apparently inspired. The reciprocal granting of *epigamia* is hardly unrelated to evidence found in the Μεσσηνιακά of Rhianus of Bene (second half of the 3<sup>rd</sup> century BCE), where a character is depicted in the act of leading his bride to Phigaleia<sup>92</sup>. Pausanias, drawing upon the Μεσσηνιακά as a source-guide for the War of Aristomenes, aids in reconstructing the broader Rhianean context. Towards the conclusion of the conflict, Aristomenes, emblem of the Messenian resistance, is reported to have bestowed the hand of his sister, Hagnagora, in marriage to Tharyx of Phigaleia before leaving the Peloponnese forever more<sup>93</sup>. A further transposition of the treaty can be identified in a passage by Polybius pertaining to the final stages of the Aristomenean War. In expressing his personal wish for concord between the Messenians and

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<sup>89</sup> IG V 2, 419, ll. 1-5: [ἐπειδὴ ἐπελθόντες οἱ] πρεσβευταὶ καὶ διαλύο[ντες οἱ παρὰ τῶν Αἰτωλῶν Τίμαιος Κλεόπατρος | [...] τό τε ψάφισ]μα τὸ παρὰ τῶν Αἰτωλῶν ἀπ[ι]δέωκαν καὶ αὐτοῖ] διελέγοντο ὅμοια τοῖς ἐν τ[ῶ]ν ψαφίσσ[ματι ἀ]ξιῶντες διαλυθῆ[ναι] > ποτὶ τῶ[ς Φιαλέας].

<sup>90</sup> IG V 2, 419, ll. 10-15: ἡμεν τοῖς Μεσσανίοις κα[ὶ] [ι τοῖς Φια]λέοις ἰσοπολιτεῖαν καὶ ἐπιγαμία[ν ποτὶ ἀλλ]άως, ποιήσασθαι δὲ καὶ συνβολάν, ἅ[ν] [νπερ δοκεῖ] ἀνφοτέρας ταῖς πόλεσι, τὰν δὲ χ[ώ]ραν καρπ[ι]ζέσθαι ἐκατέρως τῶς τε Μεσανίω[ς] καὶ τῶς Φιαλέας, καθὼς καὶ νῦν καρπιζόμεθα.

<sup>91</sup> IG V 1, 1429-1430 = AGER, *Arbitrations* 40 II + III. In fact, Ager appears to align with an earlier assumption aired by R. MEISTER *ad* SGDI 4647 and more resolutely asserted by RÆDER 1912, 95-97 (No. LI) and TOD 1913, 9-10 (No. V-VII). See, more cautiously, G. THÜR - H. TAEUBER *ad* IPArk 28 (300 n. 6); A. MAGNETTO *ad* MAGNETTO, *Arbitrati* 38 (236 n. 8); HARTER-UIBOPUU 1998, 47-52 and SABA 2020, 172.

<sup>92</sup> Rhian. BNJ 265 F 40 *ap.* Steph. Byz. *s.v.* Φιγάλεια (φ 61 Billerbeck - Neumann-Hartmann).

<sup>93</sup> Paus. IV 24, 1.



Megalopolitans<sup>94</sup>, Polybius invokes historical circumstances, both remote and recent, during which these two communities were bound by sentiments of mutual solidarity<sup>95</sup>. He refers to the troubled events of the Spartan-Messenian wars and recalls that, at the end of the Aristomenean War, the Arcadians hospitably received the fleeing Messenians. Among other expressions of goodwill towards the refugees, they even granted them the hands of young Arcadian maidens of marriageable age<sup>96</sup>. Polybius' account, therefore, substantiates the assumption that the reciprocity regarding the right to contract mixed marriages between Phigaleians and Messenians, as recorded in the agreement promoted by the Aetolians, actually found expression in the lost elaborations of the Aristomenean War.

Moving from the mythical projection of the treaty between Phigaleia and Messene to its historical reality, it remains uncertain whether the two *poleis* had formally joined the Aetolian League at this stage or had rather requested its intervention in a mediating role. Recent epigraphic discoveries seem to indicate that Phigaleia's process of rapprochement to the League also entailed the strengthening of diplomatic relations with cities close to the Aetolian *koinon*, such as Messene and Kephallenia<sup>97</sup>. Nevertheless, the ephemerality of the Phigaleian-Messenian convention is implied by Phigaleia's entanglement as a base for Aetolian raids against Messene around 220 BCE. This role sparks doubts about the stability of the agreement, raising questions about the actual duration of the earlier accord.

With his usual anti-Aetolian attitude, Polybius portrays the figure of Dorimachus of Trichoneion as that of a greedy and shameless official of the Aetolians, dedicated to personal advantage and the plundering of the subject communities<sup>98</sup>. At the beginning of the reign of Philip V, Dorimachus was sent to Phigaleia not so much to defend the *polis*, which – according to Polybius – was apparently associated with the Aetolian League through an agreement (συμπολιτευομένη τοῖς Αἰτωλοῖς)<sup>99</sup>, but rather to oversee the political-military developments in the Peloponnese from a strategic post *along the borders towards Messenia*<sup>100</sup>. The position of Phigaleia undoubtedly

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<sup>94</sup> Polyb. IV 32, 10; 33, 11.

<sup>95</sup> Polyb. IV 33, 1-11.

<sup>96</sup> Polyb. IV 33, 5.

<sup>97</sup> THEMOS - ZAVVOU 2019, 111-116 (No. III; 230-228 a.C.?); see also BE 2020, 169. For an unpublished proxeny decree of the Phigaleians for a citizen of Messene, likely dating back to the 3<sup>rd</sup> century BCE (P. FRÖHLICH in BE 2018, 225), see FRITZILAS 2011, 234-235.

<sup>98</sup> Polyb. IV 3, 4-5.

<sup>99</sup> On the federal implications of terms like συμπολιτεία and συμπολιτεύω, see BECK - FUNKE 2015, 14.

<sup>100</sup> Polyb. IV 3, 5-7.



made it an ideal outpost for controlling neighbouring Megalopolis, one of the leading cities of the Achaean League. According to Polybius, Dorimachus allegedly incited some Aetolian marauders in the territory of Phigaleia to satisfy their desire for plunder by attacking cattle in the territory of Messene, which was then a friend and ally of the Aetolian League<sup>101</sup>. After a number of night raids on the herds of cattle in the ἐσχατιαῖ, the brigands plundered Messenia, arousing the protests of the Messenian leaders<sup>102</sup>. Faced with the threats of the ephor Scyron, Dorimachus retreated to Aetolia, instigating the war against the Messenians (221/0 BCE)<sup>103</sup>. Moving again from Phigaleia (220/19), the Aetolian offensive in the Peloponnese led to a rupture of relations with Messene<sup>104</sup> and, indeed, a rapprochement between the Messenians and Philip V in an anti-Aetolian function<sup>105</sup>. Phigaleia itself, exhausted by the presence of the Aetolians and brigands in its territory, eventually shifted allegiance in favour of Philip V<sup>106</sup>. Within just a few years, Phigaleia went from being a frontier city of the Aetolian *koinon* to a frontier city of the Achaean League, which it probably joined shortly after surrendering to Philip V and, in any case, before the publication of the epigraphic list of Achaean *demiurgoi* (191/82 BCE), where a Phigaleian citizen is mentioned<sup>107</sup>.

Once Phigaleia's entry into the Achaean *koinon* was sanctioned, the *polis* became an outpost for the control of Messene, fulfilling a strategic function similar to the one held during the years of the alliance with the Aetolians. In a broader context, Phigaleia's integration was part of the Achaean League's expansion process between approximately 220 and 182 BCE. This development led to a notable contraction of the neighbouring Messene's territory, ultimately resulting in its forced membership in 182 BCE<sup>108</sup>. The Phigaleians' ability to use the instruments of diplomacy to adapt to changing circumstances and manage relations with their neighbours has been substantiated by the proxeny decrees recently unearthed at *Pavlitsa*.<sup>109</sup> In addition to the decree for Callistratus, a citizen of nearby Alipheira<sup>110</sup>, and other unpublished decrees for *proxenoi* of Arcadian cities (Alea and

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<sup>101</sup> Polyb. IV 3, 9.

<sup>102</sup> Polyb. IV 3, 11.

<sup>103</sup> Polyb. IV 4, 8-9; 5, 2-10.

<sup>104</sup> Polyb. IV 6, 8.

<sup>105</sup> Polyb. IV 6, 31-32.

<sup>106</sup> Polyb. IV 79, 5-8.

<sup>107</sup> SEG 58, 417, l. 2: [Φι]αλεύς· Κλεόξενος.

<sup>108</sup> LURAGHI 2008, 260-264.

<sup>109</sup> THEMOS - ZAVVOU 2019, 107-116 (No. I-III).

<sup>110</sup> THEMOS - ZAVVOU 2019, 107-109 (No. I).



Megalopolis)<sup>111</sup>, there is a list of individuals engraved on two sides of a limestone pillar<sup>112</sup>. This list has been interpreted by the editors as a proxenic list and includes the name of a citizen of Alipheira (side A), that of an Achaean from Aigion and those of three citizens of Kephallenia (side B). If the interpretation of Themios and Zavvou is correct and, in particular, if the dating of Side B to the second half of the 3<sup>rd</sup> century can be accepted, the text would once again demonstrate the efforts of the Phigaleians to establish a dialogue with all neighbouring communities, regardless of whether they belonged to antagonistic alliance systems. By granting proxeny to both representatives of the Achaean elites and citizens of Kephallenia, allies of the Aetolians, the Phigaleians likely succeeded in securing a balanced position among the *koina* that were pressing at its borders.

### 5. *Natural Borders, Cultural Borders*

The relevance of the Phigaleia border for the community of Messene between the mid-3<sup>rd</sup> and mid-2<sup>nd</sup> century BCE is illustrated by two fragmentary inscriptions on border regulations<sup>113</sup>. The morphology of the territory, as depicted by these 2<sup>nd</sup>-century BCE texts, evokes the landscapes outlined by Strabo and Pausanias: a mountainous and economically significant scenario rich in springs<sup>114</sup>. The abundance of κρηναί made it a favourable territory for grazing, although it was nonetheless exposed to raids by local brigands, as well as the Aetolian marauders mentioned by Polybius<sup>115</sup>. Olive cultivation likely played a crucial role not only in the economy but also in local cults. According to Pausanias, one of the summits that encircled the territory of Phigaleia was called Ἐλάτιον and the rituals for Demeter Μέλαινα, held in a cavern on this summit, culminated in the ritual sprinkling of oil on offerings to the goddess<sup>116</sup>. All in all, the Phigaleian

<sup>111</sup> ARAPOGIANNI 2001, 304; THEMOS - ZAVVOU 2019, 105.

<sup>112</sup> THEMOS - ZAVVOU 2019, 111-116 (No. III).

<sup>113</sup> IG V 1, 1429-1430 = AGER, *Arbitrations* 40, II + III.

<sup>114</sup> Strab. VIII 3, 22; Paus. VIII 39, 5: κείται δὲ ἡ Φιγαλία ἐπὶ μετεώρου μὲν καὶ ἀποτόμου τὰ πλέονα, καὶ ἐπὶ τῶν κρημνῶν ὠκοδομημένα ἐστὶ τεῖχη σφίσις: ἀνελθόντι δὲ ὁμαλῆς ἐστὶν ὁ λόφος ἤδη καὶ ἐπίπεδος («Phigalia lies on high land that is for the most part precipitous, and the walls are built on the cliffs. But on the top of the hill is level and flat»; transl. W.H.S. JONES). See also *IPArk* 29 (= *SEG* 23, 236), ll. 3 (ἐς τὸ ῥοῖον), 9 (τὸ ὕδ[ωρ]) (2<sup>nd</sup> half of the 3<sup>rd</sup> cent. BCE).

<sup>115</sup> IG V 1, 1429, ll. 3 ([--- ἐπ' εὐ]θείας εἰ[ς τὰν κράναν ---]); IG V 1, 1430, ll. 2 ([--- κατ]ὰ τὸ κοῖλον εἰς τὰν κ[ράναν ---]); 5 (ὔδωρ κοινόν), 8 (κράναν), 12 ([---] ἐπ' εὐθείας εἰ[ς τὰν κρά[ναν ---]), 15 (εἰς τὰν κρά[ναν τὰν καλουμένην ---]). See also Polyb. IV 3, 9-11; 79, 5-7.

<sup>116</sup> Paus. VIII 42, 11; see also VIII 41, 7; 42, 1.



landscape is one with numerous borders, nestled between Triphylia, Messenia and Arcadia, and receptive to a variety of cultural influences – from the customs of its inhabitants to religious traditions. Indeed, certain aspects of Phigaleian culture become particularly intriguing when one embarks on a comprehensive discussion of border communities.

### 5.1. *Genealogies, Myth, History*

Firstly, it may be useful to delve into the characterisation of Phigaleia as a border city in ancient sources. Polybius, with his usual attention to the geographical backdrop of historical and military events, provides some detail on the position of Phigaleia. His aim is not so much to highlight its frontier location in the geography of the Peloponnese but rather to offer an explanation of its strategic importance<sup>117</sup>. For a different purpose, and perhaps with an ironic touch, Harmodius mentions Phigaleia's border position, associating the inhabitants' φιλοποσία with that of the neighbouring Messenians (φιλοπότας Μεσσηνίους ἀστυγείτωνας ὄντας).<sup>118</sup> Finally, Strabo's passage reproduced at the beginning of this paper provides information on three levels: the physical geography (the natural boundary of Neda), the ethno-political aspect (the boundary among the communities of Triphylia, Arcadia and Messenia), and the mythical-historical dimension (the boundary of the Homeric age)<sup>119</sup>. While examining the formulations related to the borderlands along the Neda, it is important to consider the logic behind the different references to Phigaleias's border location.

A crossroads in the western Peloponnese and thus a strategic hub in the region<sup>120</sup>, the city of Phigaleia was undoubtedly not immune to external cultural influences. These influences found their most fertile ground in myth and religion. When looking at the mythical founders of the city, we observe that the two toponymic forms, Φιγαλία and Φιαλία, allowed for a ramification of founding traditions, each reproducing an interpretation of Phigaleia's origins according to ideologically oriented and never completely overlapping schemes. While the eponym Φίγαλος, son of Lycaon, was a figure elaborated (if not refunctionalised) when Megalopolis was founded<sup>121</sup>, Φίαλος, responsible for the *metonomasia* of the city, descended from the line

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<sup>117</sup> Polyb. IV 3, 5.

<sup>118</sup> Harmod. Lepr. BNJ 319 F 2. For an interpretation of this fragment, see below.

<sup>119</sup> Strab. VIII 3, 22.

<sup>120</sup> Polyb. IV 3, 7 (control of the Peloponnese); 6, 10-11 (route to Messenia); Diod. XV 40, 2 (road from Heraia); Paus. VIII 39, 1 (road from Lykosoura).

<sup>121</sup> Paus. VIII 3, 1; 39, 2. According to Pausanias, a local tradition portrayed Phigalus as an autochthonous (see below).



of Hippothous and was linked through Cypselus, Hippothous' grandson, to the traditions of the Heraclids of Messenia (Hippothous > Aepytus > Cypselus > Holaeas > Boukolion > Phialus)<sup>122</sup>. Both genealogies presumably expressed an etic point of view, likely conceived in connection with the agglutination process of the Arcadian royal lines that was boosted with the foundation of the *koinon* of the Arcadians<sup>123</sup>.

On the other hand, indications of emic reworkings are discernible in the epichoric tradition that traces the city's origins to the name of Φιαλώ, the daughter whom Alcimedon of Methydrion repudiated for her union with Heracles<sup>124</sup>. This Phigaleian tradition is particularly intriguing as it establishes, once again, a subterranean connection with Megalopolis. According to Pausanias, the small centre of Methydrion was one of the *poleis* that contributed to the foundation of Megalopolis, albeit without being completely depopulated after the synoecism<sup>125</sup>. While caution must always be exercised when superimposing the traditions of the communities engaged in the 370 BCE synoecism onto those of Megalopolis, one cannot rule out that a fragment of Phigaleia's 'intentional history', seeking to establish a link with the newly founded city of the Arcadians, might be reflected in the narrative related to this obscure hero of Methydrion<sup>126</sup>. Moreover, if, as the available evidence suggests, the form Φιαλία is more recent than Φιγαλία, the eponyms linked to the former (seemingly in use from the 3<sup>rd</sup> century onwards) must be considered part of post-Classical and Hellenistic reinterpretations. Be that as it may, without endorsing alternative accounts (ἄλλα οὐκ ἀξιόχρεα ἐς πίστιν), Pausanias alludes to two more traditions concerning the toponym Φιγαλία, potentially tracing back to the earliest core of local mythopoesis<sup>127</sup>. The first stems from the *topos* of Arcadian autochthony and revolves around the figure of an autochthonous eponym, otherwise unknown<sup>128</sup>. The second tradition traces the place name back to a

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<sup>122</sup> Paus. VIII 5, 4-7; 39, 2

<sup>123</sup> See Paus. VIII 6, 1: τὰ μὲν δὴ ἐς τοὺς βασιλεῖς πολυπραγμονήσαντί μοι κατὰ ταῦτα ἐγενεαλόγησαν οἱ Ἀρκάδες («I spent much care upon the history of the Arcadian kings, and the genealogy as given above was told me by Arcadians themselves», transl. W.H.S. JONES), with some commentary in MOGGI - OSANNA 2003, ix-x.

<sup>124</sup> Paus. VIII 12, 3-4.

<sup>125</sup> Paus. VIII 27, 4. See MOGGI 1974, 93-94 (with a discussion of related sources).

<sup>126</sup> Paus. VIII 12, 3-4.

<sup>127</sup> Paus. VIII 39, 2.

<sup>128</sup> For the autochthony of the Arcadians, see BORGEAUD 1979 [1988], 3-22; BURELLI BERGESE 1995, 61-112.



Dryad, possibly identifiable with one of the nymphs who, according to local tradition, assisted Rhea in delivering Zeus to the banks of the Lymax<sup>129</sup>.

In the form still in circulation in the mid-2<sup>nd</sup> century, the genealogical traditions of Phigaleia conveyed a strong interconnectedness with neighbouring communities. As expected, their primary focus was on accentuating kinship with the Arcadians. However, the collateral connection with the Heraclids of Messenia is significant, expressing a sense of solidarity dictated by the sharing of a common border and occasionally fuelled by common political agendas. Considering the integration of border issues into the myth, it is interesting to observe how the identity of Neda, the eponymous figure of the river that traditionally demarcated the border between the Phigaleians and Messenians, has sparked a dialectic between competing traditions related to the birth of Zeus. In both, the nymph Neda plays the same role, helping Rhea to endure the pains of childbirth<sup>130</sup>. It is scarcely worth pointing out that Neda's incorporation into local traditions – the Arcadian more established and elaborate, the Messenian less so – provided both communities with a basis for legitimising their right to occupy the borderlands near the river.

## 5.2. *Glimpses of the religious landscape of Phigaleia*

The receptive nature of the Phigaleian tradition, so open to embrace external contributions in the reworkings of its mythical past, mirrors the unique hybridization of local religiosity. The plurality of divine attributes inherent within the cults of Phigaleia implies a fusion of elements from various origins, shaping a religious landscape with distinctive, arcane and seemingly ancestral features<sup>131</sup>. Pausanias, exhibiting his usual keen interest in Eleusinian religious practices, explicitly states that he was attracted to Phigaleia due to the reputation of Demeter Μέλαινα, dedicating some chapters of the Book VIII to her cult<sup>132</sup>. At the cave on Mount Elaion, where the cult was held, he claims to have performed a ritual of bloodless sacrifice, characterised by plant offerings that entailed no kind of transformation<sup>133</sup>. A

<sup>129</sup> Paus. VIII 41, 2; see also Strab. VIII 3, 22.

<sup>130</sup> Paus. IV 33, 1; VIII 31, 4; 38, 3; 47, 3; Steph. *s.v.* Νέδη (v 29 Billerbeck). The figure of Neda was elaborated at a literary level by leading exponents of Hellenistic poetry such as Callimachus and Euphorion (Callim. *In Jov.* 28-41; Euphor. fr. 174 Lightfoot).

<sup>131</sup> See BRUIT 1986, 72, 83, 85-86; CARDETE DEL OLMO 2005; ASTON 2011, 235-236.

<sup>132</sup> Paus. VIII, 42, 1-13, with commentary in BRUIT 1986.

<sup>133</sup> Paus. VIII 42, 11: ταύτης μάλιστα ἐγὼ τῆς Δήμητρος ἔνεκα ἐς Φιγαλίαν ἀφικόμην. καὶ ἔθυσσα τῇ θεῶ, καθὰ καὶ οἱ ἐπιχώριοι νομίζουσιν, οὐδέν: τὰ δὲ ἀπὸ τῶν δένδρων τῶν ἡμέρων τὰ τε ἄλλα καὶ ἀμπέλου καρπὸν καὶ μελισσῶν τε κηρία καὶ ἐρίων



cult with such distinctive features was linked to an equally unique representation of the goddess. According to Pausanias' sources, an earlier cult statue was said to have theriomorphic elements<sup>134</sup>. Demeter's lost *xoanon* was believed to bear the appearance of a woman, along with a combination of other attributes including a horse's head and the hair of serpents and other monstrous creatures. The image presented her adorned in a black chiton which covered her feet, with a dolphin in one hand and a dove in the other<sup>135</sup>. This description by Pausanias, resurfaces a representation of the deity that is at least disharmonious, if not outright terrifying<sup>136</sup>. From description to religious exegesis, Pausanias relied on local tradition that recognised an allusion to the goddess's union with Poseidon and the mythical abduction of Persephone in the attributes of Demeter Μέλαινα<sup>137</sup>. Regarding local religious traditions about Demeter, more specifically, he reports the terms of an inter-ethnic dialectic between the Phigaleians and the Thelphousians, who did not agree on the outcome of her union with Poseidon (Despoina for some, the horse for others), while sharing the same modes of representation for the goddess<sup>138</sup>. The genealogical connection of Phigaleian Μέλαινα with Despoina, however, inevitably presupposes an additional interplay with the primary worship of the deity at Lykosoura<sup>139</sup>. In Lykosoura too, the union between Poseidon and Demeter resulted, according to Arcadian tradition, in the birth of Despoina<sup>140</sup>. The horse attribute in the figure of Μέλαινα finds a correspondence in the divine name Ἴππιος, by which the Poseidon of Lykosoura was invoked<sup>141</sup>. In the myth developed around the Phigaleian cult, the function of Pan and the Moirai as intermediaries between Demeter and Zeus cannot but recall the cult of Pan at the sanctuary of Despoina, as

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τὰ μὴ ἐς ἐργασίαν πω ἤκοντα ἀλλὰ ἔτι ἀνάπλεα τοῦ οἰσύπου, ἃ τιθέασιν ἐπὶ τὸν βωμὸν τὸν ὠκοδομημένον πρὸ τοῦ σπηλαίου, θέντες δὲ καταχέουσιν αὐτῶν ἔλαιον («It was mainly to see this Demeter that I came to Phigalia. I offered no burnt sacrifice to the goddess, that being a custom of the natives. But the rule for sacrifice by private persons, and at the annual sacrifice by community of Phigalia, is to offer grapes and other cultivated fruits, with honeycombs and raw wool still full of its grease. These they place on the altar built before the cave, afterwards pouring oil over them»; transl. W.H.S. JONES); see BRUIT 1986, 83.

<sup>134</sup> On divine theriomorphism and its interpretation, see JOST 2005; ASTON 2011 and now MCINERNEY 2021.

<sup>135</sup> Paus. VIII 42, 4.

<sup>136</sup> ASTON 2011, 100-101 questions the credibility of Pausanias' sources, denying that such a statue ever existed.

<sup>137</sup> Paus. VIII 42, 1-2 with NIELSEN - ROY 1998, 33.

<sup>138</sup> See also Paus. VIII 25, 4-7.

<sup>139</sup> Paus. VIII 37, 1-10.

<sup>140</sup> Paus. VIII 37, 9.

<sup>141</sup> Paus. VIII 37, 10.





well as the image of the Moirai and Zeus Μοιραγέτης in the panels of the monumental portico leading to the temple of the goddess of Lykosoura<sup>142</sup>. Against this mythological and religious backdrop, one can identify, once again, a strong feeling of pan-Arcadian cohesion, emphasised by Pausanias:

«This Despoina the Arcadians worship more than any other god, declaring that she is a daughter of Poseidon and Demeter» (transl. W.H.S. Jones with minor adjustments)<sup>143</sup>.

Returning to Phigaleia, the bewildering plurality of the deity, characterised by semitheriomorphic traits, resurfaced even in an almost unique cult such as that of Eurynome. The *χοανον* represented a creature of the waters, half woman, half fish, and girded with a golden chain<sup>144</sup>. The goddess and her sanctuary, located at the confluence of the Lymax and Neda rivers, are clearly connected to the surrounding area, which is rich in watercourses and springs.

However, departing from the local tradition, which identified Εὐρυνόμη as an epithet of Artemis, Pausanias observed that the divine representation conveyed to him by the Phigaleians closely overlapped with the image of the daughter of Oceanus mentioned in the *Iliad*<sup>145</sup>. Sister of Thetis, the Homeric Eurynome belongs more to the sea world than to the sphere of inland waters<sup>146</sup>. Like Demeter Μέλαινα, Eurynome had a sanctuary on the edge of the city, but the ἱερόν was rendered almost inaccessible by the ruggedness of the place (ὑπὸ τραχύτητος τοῦ χωρίου δυσπρόσοδον) and the custom of hosting only one celebration during the year (ἡμέρα δὲ τῇ αὐτῇ κατὰ ἔτος ἕκαστον τὸ ἱερόν ἀνοιγνύουσι τῆς Εὐρυνόμης, τὸν δὲ ἄλλον χρόνον οὐ σφισιν ἀνοιγνύναι καθέστηκε)<sup>147</sup>. In this case, marginality was not a consequence of the topographic location of the sanctuary but rather took the form of a radical separation from the religious life of the *polis*.

Ultimately, the cult landscape of Phigaleia undeniably showcases distinctive features within the Greek world, peculiarities of which Pausanias himself appears fully aware. However, the examination of these traits, locally adapted in an original fashion, reveals broader connections with cultic

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<sup>142</sup> Paus. VIII 42, 3; 37, 1, 11. Further iconographic, ritual and symbolic similarities have been studied by ASTON 2011, 103, 239-241, 299-301.

<sup>143</sup> Paus. VIII 37, 9: ταύτην μάλιστα θεῶν σέβουσιν οἱ Ἀρκάδες τὴν Δέσποιναν, θυγατέρα δὲ αὐτὴν Ποσειδῶνός φασιν εἶναι καὶ Δήμητρος.

<sup>144</sup> Paus. VIII 41, 4-6.

<sup>145</sup> *Il.* XVIII 397-405.

<sup>146</sup> See JOST 1985, 411-414; ASTON 2011, 64-67.

<sup>147</sup> JOST 1985, 89; ASTON 2011, 67.



and/or ritual traditions in areas close to Phigaleia. The multiple influences of Arcadian religious traditions, discernible behind the cult of Demeter Μέλαινα, and the reference to the sea world that can be identified in the figure of Eurynome, intertwine in the hybrid nature of these two deities. This synthesis, as highlighted by Emma Aston, is partially due to the border location of Phigaleia and the intensity of exchanges fostered by such a liminal position<sup>148</sup>.

### 5.3. *Insatiable Appetites and Limitless Drunkenness: Cultural Attitudes and Cross-border Mockery*

One final aspect worth exploring pertains to two seemingly stereotypical features that characterise the representation of the Phigaleians: the πολυφαγία and φιλοποσία. Harmodius, an author likely from the Hellenistic period and a native of Lepreon, a city sharing a significant part of its south-eastern borders with Phigaleia, provides an account of these attitudes<sup>149</sup>. Three fragments of his historical-antiquarian work entitled *On the Customs in Phigaleia* are transmitted by Athenaeus *verbatim* (F 1) or in a form likely very faithful to the original (FF 2 and 3).

In F 1, Harmodius gives a vivid description of a ritual banquet. While the broader festive setting is not explicitly stated, the different stages of the ritual meal are depicted in great detail. Harmodius mentions the celebration of a Dionysian-style banquet known as *mazones* (some sort of 'flatbread feast') and reports that, during all convivial gatherings, the Phigaleians used to offer additional portions of flatbreads and breads to the young ἀνδρικότεροι. The ability to eat, referred to as πολυφαγία, was regarded as a sign of nobility and virility<sup>150</sup>.

In F 2, the evidence that inspires the title of this paper, Harmodius further elaborates on the question of the φιλοποσία of the Phigaleians, a trait they shared with the Messenians, their ἀστυγείτονες. The third testimony,

<sup>148</sup> ASTON 2011, 244-250.

<sup>149</sup> JOST - ROY 2010 [*Biographical Essay*]; DE LUNA 2017, 225-240.

<sup>150</sup> Harmod. Lepr. BNJ 319 F 1: Ἐνόμιζον δ' ἐν ἅπασιν τοῖς δείπνοις, μάλιστα δὲ τοῖς λεγομένοις μαζῶσι, τοῦτο γὰρ ἔτι καὶ νῦν ἡ Διονυσιακὴ σύνοδος ἔχει τοῦνομα, τοῖς ἐσθίουσι τῶν νέων ἀνδρικότερον ζωμόν τ' ἐγχεῖν πλείω καὶ μάζας καὶ ἄρτους παραβάλλειν. Γενναῖος γὰρ ὁ τοιοῦτος ἐκρίνετο καὶ ἀνδρώδης ὑπάρχειν· θαυμαστὸν γὰρ ἦν καὶ περιβόητον παρ' αὐτοῖς ἡ πολυφαγία («They were accustomed in all their meals, and especially among those called *mazones* ['barley-eaters'] – for the Dionysiac gathering still has that name even now – to pour out more soup for those of the young men who have a more manly appetite and set before them barley-cakes and wheaten loaves. Such a young man was judged to be noble and manly; for among them eating a lot was admired and much talked of»; transl. M. JOST - J. ROY).



as preserved by Athenaeus, also focuses on the convivial theme. In F 3, a passage included in a review of cup collectors from history and myth<sup>151</sup>, Harmodius reports that the epitaph of the Phigaleian Pytheas celebrated the high quantity of precious κύλικες at the express will of the deceased. Of course, it cannot be ruled out that all of Harmodius' fragments integrated into Athenaeus' narrative were infused with a note of irony, likely motivated not only by reasons of *Lokalpatriotismus* between neighbouring communities but also by more tangible factors related to inter-civic competition<sup>152</sup>.

Beyond sympotic contexts and comic exaggerations, behaviours marked by excess, like πολυφαγία and φιλοποσία, were generally perceived as expressions of a lifestyle one should avoid<sup>153</sup>. Yet, at least in the case of πολυφαγία, there must have been no lack of circumstances to justify its practice in daily life. Heracles was a mythical prototype of the πολύφαγος who, in the tradition of Lepreon, was said to have engaged in a gastronomic competition with the eponym of the Triphylian polis<sup>154</sup>. The most comprehensive account of this episode is found in a passage by Aelianus, who places the story on the sidelines of Heracles' ἄθλον at the service of Augeas. According to Aelianus, Heracles and the young Lepreus, son of Caucon and Astydamia, were believed to have undertaken in a series of physical trials. These included competitions in discus throwing, drawing water, consuming a bull as quickly as possible, drinking the largest amount of wine and, finally, engaging in a hand-to-hand combat, which resulted in Lepreus' death<sup>155</sup>. The version of the myth reported by Aelianus is similar to Athenaeus' account that draws upon Zenodotus and offers additional details on the elaboration of the myth in late Classical and early Hellenistic literature<sup>156</sup>. Pausanias, on the other hand, followed an alternative tradition that saw Lepreus descend from Pyrrhus. This version did not involve the theme of φιλοποσία and mentioned a τάφος of the hero Lepreus in the territory of Phigaleia<sup>157</sup>.

Besides the symbolism associated with the compensatory action of fate – Lepreus dies at the hands of Heracles for having earlier suggested that Augeas chain his opponent – the trials between Heracles and Lepreus also

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<sup>151</sup> Athen. XI 14-16, 465c-781d.

<sup>152</sup> *Contra* JOST - ROY 2010 [*Biographical Essay*].

<sup>153</sup> Useful remarks and a valuable overview of sources is in CAIRNS 1996, 23-25.

<sup>154</sup> PIKE 1980; LARMOUR 1999, 56-67; CHANDEZON 2015, 143-144.

<sup>155</sup> Ael. VH 1, 24.

<sup>156</sup> Athen. X 1-2, 411a-412b with quotations of Cauca. BNJ 38 F 1 (4<sup>th</sup> cent. BCE); Zenod. BNJ 19 F 1 (4<sup>th</sup>/3<sup>rd</sup> cent. or 2<sup>nd</sup>/1<sup>st</sup> cent. BCE); Matris BNJ 39 F 1 (3<sup>rd</sup> cent. BCE).

<sup>157</sup> Paus. V 5, 4. Despite the local Leprean tradition, the Phigaleians claimed to have no knowledge of any grave of Lepreus within their territory.



operate on a symbolic level, referring to the sporting dimension and athletic competitions of nearby Olympia. The theme of πολυφαγία, common to the three main versions of the episode, is a characteristic trait of athletes engaged in physically demanding disciplines such as boxing or wrestling<sup>158</sup>. The portrayal of the young eponym of Lepreon who fights strenuously with Heracles echoes the prototype of the Phigaleian νεός, as outlined by Harmodius the Lepreates (F 1). The πολυφαγία of young men, admired by the community, was considered by the Phigaleians an expression of noble and virile character, encouraged by the polis, which derogated from the principle of the ίσομοιρία on this matter<sup>159</sup>. According to Philostratus, the μαζαι – άρτοι pair, which Harmodius describes as foods distributed as extra portions to the most vigorous νεοί of Phigaleia, played a crucial role in the diet of boxers and pancratists from the earliest times<sup>160</sup>.

By interweaving mythological suggestions with what is known about the diet of ancient athletes, one may wonder whether the motif of πολυφαγία reflected an inter-civic competition extending beyond the parochial exaltation of one polis or another. This motif may have also embraced the realm of sporting rivalry between Phigaleians and Lepreatai in the grand athletic events of Greece, particularly the renowned contests of Olympia. Scrolling through the lists of ancient Olympic victors, it is evident that Phigaleia and Lepreon boasted a tradition in the disciplines based on strength, with multiple winners such as the unlucky pancratist Arrachion of Phigaleia (572, 568, 564)<sup>161</sup> and the boxer Alcaenetus of Lepreon (456 and 444)<sup>162</sup>. Given the competitive dynamic between these neighbouring

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<sup>158</sup> See the list of voracious athletes in Athen. X 4-6, 412d-414c, with RENFREW 1988, 175-176.

<sup>159</sup> DE LUNA 2017, 231-232.

<sup>160</sup> Philostr. *Gymn.* 43, with RENFREW 1988, 174-176.

<sup>161</sup> Paus. VIII 40, 1-2 (statue in the agora of Phigaleia); Philostr. *Imag.* II 6; *Gymn.* 21; Eus. *Chron.* 201-202 SCHOENE = 93 (54) KARST (with MORETTI 1957, 70, No. 95, 99, 102). *I.Olympia* 161 records another Olympic victor from Phigaleia, named [ΝαϚ]υκίδας (see Paus. VI 5, 1), or more likely [ΘαϚ]υκίδας (see *IG V 2*, 419 [= *IPArk* 28], l. 7; Paus. IV 24, 1). This athlete was victorious in wrestling, most likely in 384 BCE (MORETTI 1957, 117, No. 392).

<sup>162</sup> Paus. VI 7, 8; *P.Oxy.* II 222, II l. 7 (with MORETTI 1957, 98-99, No. 276; 103, No. 309). As reported by Pausanias, two sons of Alcaenetus, Hellanicus and Theantus, were honored with a statue for their victories in boxing. They were victorious in 424 and 420 BCE respectively (MORETTI 1957, 106-107, No. 331; 108; No. 338). The pedestal of Hellanicus' statue was re-inscribed during the 1<sup>st</sup> century BCE and reused at short distance from its original position (*I.Olympia* 155). Other notable athletes also include the pancratist Antiochus (Paus. VI 3, 9; see also Xen. *Hell.* VII 1, 33), an Olympic victor around 400 BCE (MORETTI 1957, 112, No. 360), and the boxer Labax, whose victory date remains uncertain (MORETTI 1957, 119, No. 405 [376 BCE]; but see MADDOLI - NAFISSI - SALADINO 1999, 187).



communities, the record of Harmodius, a native of a *polis* that traced its origins back to the νεανικὴ φιλονεικία of Lepreus, might be reconsidered from a different perspective.

As evident from passages in Aelianus and Athenaeus, the πολυφαγία of Lepreus was combined in myth with his πολυποσία. Harmodius, in F 2, similarly referred to πολυποσία, identifying in it, however, a cultural and stereotypical trait of the Phigaleians. In order to gain a fuller understanding of the original context of this fragment, it is essential to establish the value of the participial proposition:

Ἀρμόδιος δὲ ὁ Λεπρεάτης ἐν τῷ Περὶ τῶν παρὰ Φιγαλεῦσι νομίμων,  
φιλοπότας φησὶ γενέσθαι Φιγαλεῖς, Μεσσηνίους ἀστυγείτονας ὄντας [...].

Generally speaking, modern translators appear to refrain from dissolving the semantic ambiguity of the participle ὄντας, often opting to render it an attributive participle<sup>163</sup>. However, this choice may pose challenges in the interpretation of the passage, as it follows a form of geographical determination regarding the position of the Phigaleians in the Peloponnese. It then becomes important to ascertain whether Μεσσηνίους ἀστυγείτονας ὄντας is a gloss by Athenaeus intended to aid the reader or whether it refers back to some formulation by Harmodius. It is likely that the first option can be ruled out, for no other reason than the fact that F 1 is mentioned in Book IV and no clarification of the location of Phigaleia is provided there<sup>164</sup>. On the other hand, assuming that a similar formulation was already present in the source, it would seem peculiar for Harmodius to provide geographical information to the reader in a monographic work on Phigaleia – perhaps also in a parenthetical form. It is perhaps better to assign a clear semantic connotation to ὄντας and attempt to offer a consequent

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<sup>163</sup> «And Harmodius of Lepreum, in his treatise on the Laws in force among the people of Phigalea, says that the Phigaleans are addicted to drinking, *being neighbours of the Messenians*, and being also a people much accustomed to travelling» (transl. C.D. YONGE); «Harmodios of Lepreon in the book On the Customs among the Phigaleians says that the Phigaleians were fond of drinking, *being the neighbouring town of the Messenians* and accustomed to be away from home» (transl. M. JOST - J. ROY); «Armodio di Lepreo, in *Usi e costumi di Figalia*, sostiene che gli abitanti di questa città, *situati ai confini con la Messenia*, erano amanti del bere e inoltre avevano abitudine di viaggiare fuori della loro terra» (transl. R. CHERUBINA); «Armodio di Lepreo, nello scritto *Sui costumi di Figalia*, dice che i Figalesi, *confinanti con i Messeni*, erano amanti del bere e soliti viaggiare al di fuori della propria terra» (transl. M.E. DE LUNA); «Harmodios aus Lepreon bemerkt in seiner Abhandlung “Über die Bräuche in Phigalia”, daß die Einwohner von Phigalia trinkfreudig gewesen sind; *sie waren Nachbarn der Messener* und hatten sich daran gewöhnt, fremde Länder aufzusuchen» (transl. C. FRIEDRICH).

<sup>164</sup> Athen. IV 31, 148f-149c = Harmod. Lepr. BNJ 319 F 1.



interpretation of the passage. In this case, the causal value is certainly preferable:

«Harmodius of Lepreon in the book *On the Customs among the Phigaleians* states that the Phigaleians are lovers of drink, because they share the border with the Messenians, ...»

This formulation shifts Harmodius' focus to some extent, placing more emphasis on the Messenians than on the Phigaleians. Wine is ever present and features in all the fragments from the *Περὶ τῶν παρὰ Φιγαλεῦσι νομίμων*, whose selection undoubtedly reflects Athenaeus' interests in sympotic topics<sup>165</sup>. In F 1, it is reported that the *σίταρχος* of Phigaleia was entrusted with the supply of wine for the celebration of the sacrifice, while the *polis* provided a *ύδριαφόρος*. Once the sacrifice had been performed, participants sipped wine from a bowl (*κοτταβίς*) and, at the end of the banquet, libations were made. The connection established in F 1 between the feast called *μαζῶνες* and the cult of Dionysus suggests a possible relationship with Pausanias' mention of the *ναός* of Dionysus *Άκρατοφόρος*, whose epithet refers to the effect of wine *that makes one lose control or loosen the limbs*<sup>166</sup>. Diodorus records the organisation of the *Dionysia* for the year 375/4, and an inscription documents the joint celebration of *Dionysia* and *Andrineia* (*Άνδρίνεια*) for the 2<sup>nd</sup>/1<sup>st</sup> century BCE<sup>167</sup>. As for ritual practices, the latter evidence makes reference to *κῶμοι* and processions, a parallel of which can be glimpsed in the *χόροι* mentioned in Harmodius' lengthy excerpt (F 1). Nothing is known about the rituals of a mystic character cited in a scholium to Lycophron<sup>168</sup>. Finally, the sympotic background of the precious cups of Pytheas, reported in F 3, cannot be overlooked.

Although the evidence we have just explored provides only partial insights into the local religion of Phigaleia, it is undeniable that the attestations related to the cult of Dionysus stand out as some of the most numerous and well-distributed across sources and over an extended period<sup>169</sup>. Ultimately, in the dimension of religion and ritual alone, tangible traces of Phigaleian *φιλοποσία* can be discerned. On the other hand, the Messenians' love for drinking is rooted in a mythical stereotype of Homeric descent. Athenaeus offers its constituent features in Book X<sup>170</sup>. Indeed, among

<sup>165</sup> See BECK 2020, 172.

<sup>166</sup> Paus. VIII 39, 6. The term *άκρατοφόρος* was employed to designate a particular type of cup used in Dionysian rituals (Poll. VI 99; X 70).

<sup>167</sup> Diod. XV 40, 2; IG V 2, 422, with commentary in JOST 1985, 436-437.

<sup>168</sup> Lyc. *Alex.* 212 with Σ *ad loc.*

<sup>169</sup> JOST 1985, 425, 429-432.

<sup>170</sup> Ath. X 42, 433b-d.



the Greek heroes at Troy, Athenaeus assigns the primacy of the φιλοποσία to Nestor, drawing upon a selection of Iliadic passages that culminate with the description of Nestor's famous cup<sup>171</sup>. The passages quoted by Athenaeus also include some verses from Book XXIII, where the φιάλη given by Achilles to Nestor 'διά τὴν φιλοποσίαν' on the occasion of the games for Patroclus is recalled<sup>172</sup>. While Athenaeus does not explicitly specify the source of this parodied image of Nestor, reviewing the authors cited in the extensive section devoted to the φιλοπόται (433b-442a), it can be assumed that the inspiration came from intellectuals (perhaps Homeric philologists) working in the Hellenistic age<sup>173</sup>.

In short, Harmodius' emphasis on the πολυφαγία and φιλοποσία of the Phigaleians may conceal the existence of a mocking motif common in the Hellenistic period among neighbouring communities. In F 2, Harmodius' ironic *pointe* is geared towards both Phigaleians and Messenians. One might also speculate that, in Athenaeus' selection of the three fragments, the faint reflection of a Leprean 'apologetic' version may have been preserved – one that aimed to rebut the irony of the neighbouring communities and, indeed, reverse it by transposing the πολυφαγία and φιλοποσία attributed to the eponym Lepreus onto the Phigaleians and Messenians. Additionally, alongside Nestor's πολυποσία, there was also a tradition circulating in antiquity about the πολυφαγία of the Messenian Idas, son of Aphareus, who, together with his brother Lynceus, is said to have contended with the Dioscuri for the hands of the Leucippides<sup>174</sup>.

According to a well-known and widespread tradition, the hands of the Leucippides was to be awarded to the pair of brothers (Dioscuri or Apharetids) who prevailed in a gastronomic competition<sup>175</sup>. After raiding livestock in Arcadia, Dioscuri and Apharetids divided one of the captured oxen into four portions and established that the Leucippides would be

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<sup>171</sup> *Il.* XI 632-637.

<sup>172</sup> *Il.* XXIII 615-624. It is interesting to observe how the term φιάλη resonates with the toponymic variant Φιαλία in this context, although it is not possible to establish any clear link between them.

<sup>173</sup> The passage is generally assigned to an author named Dioscurides, possibly a pupil of Isocrates, whose identity, however, remains largely elusive (= Dioscur. XXIV WEBER). For insights into the 'clustered' quotations of Athenaeus and the composition criteria of the *Deipnosophists*, see CHÁVEZ REINO - OTTONE 2007 (esp. 153).

<sup>174</sup> *Ps. Apollod.* III 11, 2 (= III § 135-136); see also Tzetz. *Sch. Lyc.* 511bis and 547. While the abduction of the Leucippides is usually regarded as the subject of metope 4 of the temple of Apollo at Bassai, the arguments underpinning this assumption are too speculative to deem this identification guaranteed (discussion in HIGGS 2022, 49-56, 197-200).

<sup>175</sup> For some commentary on the sources of this episode, see BIAGETTI 2018, 106-126.



betroted to the pair of brothers who finished first. As the challenge began, Idas' πολυφαγία prevailed over that of the opponents, securing victory for the sons of Aphareus<sup>176</sup>. This image of Idas as πολύφαγος was presumably derived from a well-known Homeric passage that depicted him as *the strongest of the mortals of his generation* (Ἰδεώ θ', ὃς κάρτιστος ἐπιχθονίων γένετ' ἀνδρῶν | τῶν τότε)<sup>177</sup>. Similar to Lepreus, his superhuman qualities allowed him to compete on equal footing with a deity, Apollo, in an archery contest, from which – according to a tradition dating back at least to the Athenian Pherecydes – Idas emerged victorious<sup>178</sup>. This agonistic theme, moreover, would have been set against the backdrop of the centre of Arene on the Elean coast and enjoyed a certain fame in Olympia, where its representation could be admired on the so-called Ark of Cypselos<sup>179</sup>.

Regardless of the continuation of the story, which proceeded with a quarrel between the two pairs of cousins and concluded with the death of the Apharetids and the deification of the Dioscuri, what is noteworthy here is the recurrence of seemingly stereotypical traits in the traditions of neighbouring communities. These traits, often characterised by excess, would have been susceptible (and at times were indeed susceptible) to reinterpretations with a humorous undertone in a cross-border dialectic entirely devoted to mocking one's neighbour. The existence of such a dialectic at the border among Arcadia, Triphylia and Messenia has only so far been hinted at in the fragments of Harmodius' Περί τῶν παρὰ Φιγαλεῦσι νομίμων and in a few isolated passages of Pausanias.

## 6. *By way of conclusion*

The available evidence demonstrates how the history and cultural traditions of Phigaleia, a peripheral *polis* of Arcadia, were shaped to some extent by the Phigaleians' ability to interweave and nurture intercommunal relationships on a regional and supra-regional scale. The Phigaleian community engaged in informal cross-border activities that allowed the city to stand out as a

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<sup>176</sup> Ps. Apollod. III 11, 2 (= III § 135): καὶ φθάσας κατηνάλωσε τὸ μέρος τὸ ἴδιον πρῶτος Ἰδας, καὶ τὸ τοῦ ἀδελφοῦ, καὶ μετ' ἐκείνου τὴν λείαν εἰς Μεσσήνην ἤλασε («And before they knew where they were, Idas had swallowed his own share first and likewise his brother's, and with him had driven off the captured cattle to Messene»; transl. J.G. FRAZER).

<sup>177</sup> Il. IX 558-559.

<sup>178</sup> Il. IX 559-560; see also Pherecyd. BNJ 3 F 127 + 127a (with Pherecyd. *ap. Sch. [D] Il. IX 562 VAN THIEL*); Ps. Apollod. I 7, 8-9 = I § 60-61.

<sup>179</sup> Paus. V 18, 2. On the coastal location of Arene, situated between the mouths of the Alpheus and Minyeus rivers, see Il. II 592-592; XI 722-723.





regional key actor and to play a significant role in the strategies of prominent powers like Sparta and the Hellenistic *koina*. Due to its strategic position at a crossroads of the western Peloponnese, the city drew the attention of overarching powers. Its location ensured control over the Neda valley and the northern slopes of Messenia to the south, provided access to Triphylia and southern Elis to the north-east and north, and allowed a direct connection with Megalopolis in the east.

Effectively exploited by Phigaleians, myth, religion, cultural customs and local athletic culture contributed to the fostering of cooperative and competitive relations with surrounding communities. One need only look, for instance, at the genealogical web of the various eponyms of Phigaleia and see how these figures linked the origins of the city to neighbouring Arcadian *poleis* like Oresthasion, Methydrion and Megalopolis. The unique hybridization phenomenon of Phigaleian cults, exemplified by the eccentric features characterising the statue of Demeter Μέλαινα, may also be considered. Pausanias' account of local Demeter's cult embeds Phigaleia within an Arcadian religious network that included cities like Thelphousa, Lykosoura and once again Megalopolis. Conversely, evidence from Harmodius of Lepreon highlights the city's attempt to reaffirm its identity by contrasting its stereotyped image with that of its neighbour.

Ultimately, in the case of Phigaleia, ultimately, the frontier must not be envisioned as a rigid demarcation zone. Instead, displaying strong permeability, the porous borders around the city allowed the penetration of foreign cultural influences and, at the same time, enabled the *polis* to open up to the outside world. After all, as Harmodius reminds us, the Phigaleians themselves *used to stay outside their own land* (ἀποδημεῖν ἐθισθέντας).

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### Abstract

This paper focuses on the historical evidence concerning ancient Phigaleia, exploring the political dynamics between this Arcadian 'border' *polis* and regional powers that occasionally exerted influence over its territory. The Phigaleian community engaged in informal cross-border activities, distinguishing the city as a key regional actor and enabling it to wield significant influence in the strategic considerations of dominant entities, including Sparta and the Hellenistic *koina*. This exploration not only contributes to our understanding of the political landscape surrounding Phigaleia but also emphasizes how some ancient borders can, in fact, be porous, thereby influencing the cultural identity of the *polis*.

Keywords: Arcadians, Cross-border activities, Hellenistic *koina*, Phigaleia, Sparta

Questo studio ripercorre alcune fasi cruciali della storia politica di Figalia, una *polis* della periferia arcadica che giocò un ruolo strategico cruciale per il controllo del Peloponneso occidentale. La capacità dei Figalei di intessere rapporti politico-diplomatici con i principali attori regionali (Spartani, Arcadi, Etoli, Achei) passò anche per la promozione di attività transfrontaliere informali, le quali trovarono espressione nelle tradizioni culturali della città, dal mito alla religione, dai costumi locali alla cultura atletica. La ricerca proposta in queste pagine non vuole soltanto offrire un contributo alla ricostruzione della storia politico-diplomatica di Figalia, ma si propone anche di dar rilievo all'alto grado di permeabilità che caratterizza il confine antico e all'alto grado di osmosi culturale che poteva aver luogo nelle stesse aree di confine.

Parole-chiave: Arcadi, attività transfrontaliere, Figalia, *koina*, Sparta