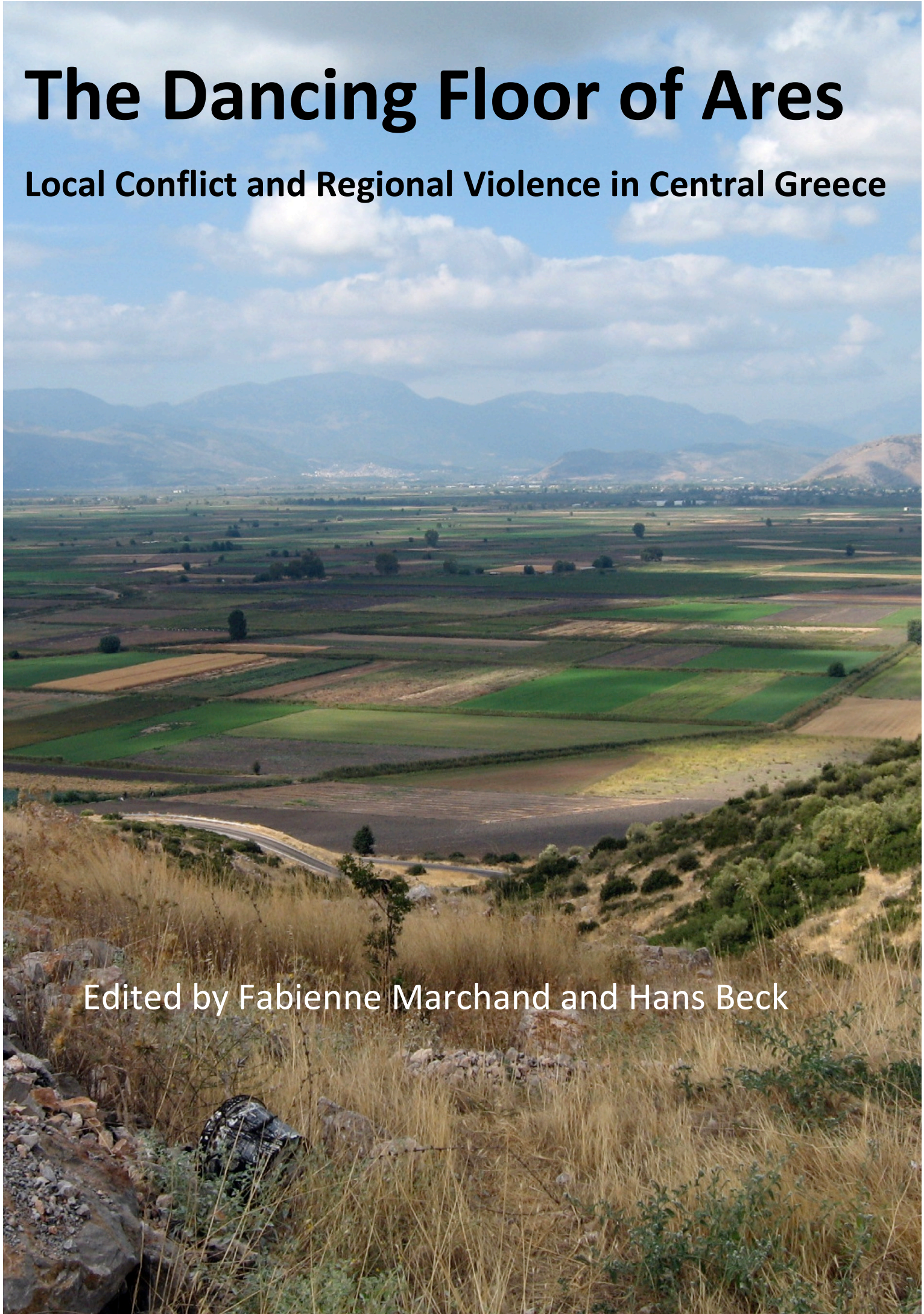


The Dancing Floor of Ares

Local Conflict and Regional Violence in Central Greece

Edited by Fabienne Marchand and Hans Beck



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Preface

The present collection of papers stems from two one-day workshops, the first at McGill University on November 9, 2017, followed by another at the Université de Fribourg on May 24, 2018. Both meetings were part of a wider international collaboration between two projects, the *Parochial Polis* directed by Hans Beck in Montreal and now at Westfälische Wilhelms-Universität Münster, and Fabienne Marchand's Swiss National Science Foundation *Old and New Powers: Boiotian International Relations from Philip II to Augustus*. The collaboration was further facilitated by a Swiss National Science Foundation Short Visit Fellowship that brought Fabienne Marchand as a Visiting Professor to McGill University in the fall of 2017.

Famously dubbed, according to Plutarch, the “Dancing Floor of Ares” by the 4th century Theban general Epaminondas (Plut. *Life of Marcellus* 21.2), the region of Boiotia hosted throughout Antiquity a series of battles that shaped the history of the ancient world, such as the battle of Plataia – which ended the Persian Wars in 479 – and the battle of Chaironeia, won in 338 by the Macedonian king Philip II and his son Alexander the Great over a coalition of Greek states. The present volume is devoted to different dances of Ares. Rather than discussing seminal battles through the lens of military history, it investigates regional conflicts and local violence in Central Greece, with a particular focus on the region Boiotia, through the complementary approaches, conceptual approaches and synergies offered by the two research projects. This double perspective allows us to explore the crucial role played by conflict in the shaping of the Boiotian experience. At the same time, the region's relations with various foreign powers (the Achaian *koinon*, the Macedonian kings, the Romans among others) as well as with its neighbours, such as Athens, Lokris, and Euboea, become visible. Organised as a series of thematic studies involving mythology, genealogy, federalism, political institutions, and geopolitical strategies, our inquiry starts with the Mycenaean period, and runs down through the Classical and Hellenistic periods to conclude with the involvement of the Romans in Central Greece.

The Montreal workshop received funding from the Anneliese Maier Research Prize that was awarded to Hans Beck by the German Humboldt Foundation, as well as from the John MacNaughton Chair of Classics, which he held at McGill University at the time. The Fribourg workshop was supported by the Université de Fribourg Fonds du Centenaire and the Faculté des lettres et sciences humaines. The respective teams of research assistants in Montreal and Fribourg did a magnificent job to turn both workshops into a wonderful experience: Corey Straub, Cyrena Gerardi, Emilie Lucas, Daniel Whittle, and Roy van Wijk. As the papers were prepared for publication, we received insightful comments from the anonymous peer-reviewers. Tim Howe offered helpful advice to improve the manuscript of this first volume in the new AHB Supplement Series. To all we offer our heartfelt thanks.

Fabienne Marchand and Hans Beck

May 2019

The Centrality of Boiotia to Athenian Defensive Strategy

Roy van Wijk

Abstract: A Dutch proverb holds that a good neighbour is better than a faraway friend and nowhere does this adage ring truer than in the case of Attica and Boiotia. Intertwined through their geographical proximity, events in one region inevitably had ramifications for the other. Most clearly this could be felt alongside the border territories flanking the Mount Kithairon-Parnes range. Nevertheless, Boiotia's location on the crossroads between Northern and Southern Greece, as well as its connection between the Euboic and Corinthian Gulfs, meant that it held the reigns to several vital strategic locations across Greece. Moreover, with Boiotia's suitability for hoplite warfare, its relatively easily defensible entry points at places in both its southern and northern hemisphere, and its capability to muster substantial military forces, the Boiotians were the ideal partner for the Athenians and their maritime prowess. Normally, however, scholars have tended to focus on the dangers the northern neighbour posed to Attica's security, or how other areas such as the Thraceward region were of more paramount importance to the Athenians to maintain and hold. In this article, on the other hand, it will be argued that control over, or collaboration with the Boiotians was essential to Athenian strategy and the maintenance of its control over the Aegean, in both a positive and a negative sense. A hostile Boiotia was detrimental to the security of Athenian rule, whereas a cordial neighbour provided all the security it needed to establish hegemony over the Aegean. In various cases, it acted as the ideal "buffer" state, prohibiting troop movements across Central Greece, whether coming from the Peloponnese or the north. The use of Boiotia as a buffer for Athenian defence, and interests, will therefore be shown to have run like a red thread throughout Athenian history and strategy.

Keywords: Athens, Boiotia, Ancient Strategy, Fortress Attica and Fortifications

An old Dutch adage holds that a good neighbour is better than a far-away friend.¹ The expression underlines the importance of cordial relations with one's neighbours on a personal level. On a grander scale, the same wisdom applies to the relationships between

A word of thanks is due to the Swiss National Science Foundation (SNSF), as their funding sponsored the research that supported this article and allowed me to travel to Montreal and McGill University to present the basis for this article. I would like to thank the audience there for their insightful remarks.

¹ All dates in this article are B.C.E. unless otherwise indicated. The Dutch saying runs as follows: *Een goede buur is beter dan een verre vriend*. According to the *van Dale* dictionary, the proverb can be retraced to the Bible: *Proverbs 27:10*. Interestingly, a comparison has been made between the Dutch and the Boiotians, as two peoples both geographically located in a fragile environment surrounded by enemies: Rhys Roberts 1890.

neighbouring polities. Whether Dutch politicians and leaders equally apply this proverb to their policies, is of rather minor importance here.

What will be argued here, on the other hand, is that this wisdom was adhered to by the Athenians in relation to their strongest neighbour, the Boiotians.² A diachronic overview of their relations throughout the Classical Period reveals that the *fil rouge* of Athenian strategy was centred on the Boiotians' attitude towards them. Their reason for doing so was a practical one. A friendly Boiotia could act as the perfect buffer to safeguard the Attic borders, whereas the hostility of the Boiotians in several cases proved detrimental to Athenian plans.³ Ideally, therefore, the Athenians controlled the adjacent region, either voluntarily or by force.

Naturally with borders came "twilight zones" around the frontiers that defied demarcation and as such were claimed by either party. These areas, the μεθόρια, could cause tensions; but these were only a matter of dispute during times of hostility.⁴ Conversely, the agreements in place during times of cooperation were surprisingly equivocal in the delineations of their respective territories. The willingness to arrange such matters in a clear way shows that contested territories or claims were not just grounds for divorce but were equally tools for negotiation and reconciliation.

In the following section, I will explore the reasons *why* a buffer was beneficial to the Athenians. After meandering through the Atheno-Boiotian relations in the 5th and 4th centuries, I will then use this diachronic overview to demonstrate the importance of Boiotia to Athenian strategic interests and the lengths they were willing to go obtain the Boiotians' compliance. What emerges from this investigation is a clearer understanding of the interconnectedness between these neighbours, by stressing the foundations of their relationships that were less reliant on the cadence of personal relations, but rather a natural extension of their geographical entwinement and interdependence.⁵

Protecting the Attic countryside: the buffer defence

Possessing a territory less arable in comparison to others in Greece, the Athenians had relied on grain imports since the times of Solon.⁶ This dependence led scholars to identify areas essential for the security of the incoming grain fleets, like the Hellespont, as key axes

² Ironically, there existed a Greek saying that regarded the Attic neighbour as the proverbial obnoxious neighbour: Duris *FGrHist* 76 F96; Craterus *FGrHist* 342 F21; Arist. *Rhet.* 1395a18. Although it resulted from their expulsions of the Samians in the 350s, similar attitudes might be found in the 5th century: Thuc. 3.113.6.

³ It an observation shared by both the Thebans – from a positive point of view – and by the allies of the Spartans, in the case of hostility: Xen. *Hell.* 3.5.10, 14-5; 6.5.38-9.

⁴ Thuc. 2.18; 5.3.5.

⁵ That is not to say that personal relations did not matter; these certainly had a role to play in creating a friendly atmosphere between the neighbours. Yet these individualistic motives should not be overstated: they could help smoothe collaboration, but were not necessarily an intrinsic premise for its achievement.

⁶ Bresson 2016: 407. Athens is normally perceived as an extremely dependent *polis* in comparison to other Greek *poleis*; but recent population calculations by Mogens Herman Hansen suggest the majority of Greek *poleis* was dependent on grain imports: Hansen 2006. Garnsey 1988 had been of the opinion that Attica was capable of providing for its inhabitants, but see the recent remarks by Moreno 2007.

of the Athenian strategy. They saw their views vindicated by the significant investments in Athenian naval power, designed to guarantee the unabated flow of grain into the city. These were the two pillars on which the foundations of their rule were built. Thrusting this policy forward was the protection provided by the Long Walls of Athens, virtually transforming the city into an island and ensuring a steady flow of cereals into its harbour. The Attic hinterland, from which the seeds of autochthony had blossomed, was left to its own devices, a mere wrinkle on the ocean that was Athenian strategy. Its production did not warrant the investment of substantial manpower and resources. Instead, the reliance on the navy and grain imports, combined with an overall reticence to engage in battle, would see Athens through any conflict.

This defensive scheme has been dubbed the Periclean strategy.⁷ It was viewed as exemplary of the 5th century Athenian attitude towards the defence of the homeland, with the protection of the Attic hinterland only gradually coming into focus when the Athenian naval empire crumbled to dust, and with it, their guaranteed supply of grain imports. However, the Periclean strategy deviated from the norm, and was rather the exception than the rule. The true extent of the hinterland's abandonment has been questioned, with at least some form of resistance maintained occasionally.⁸ Regardless, the importance of the Attic hinterland may have suffered during these "Periclean" years, but the food it produced and provided for the city continued to play an essential role in the Athenian food supply while the emotional attachment to the land remained vital to the Athenian strategy and psyche. In fact, even at the apogee of their maritime prowess, the Athenians invested in strengthening their claims to contested fertile areas of the Boiotian borderlands, demonstrating the hinterland's continued relevance.⁹

So how was this precious territory protected? One scholar, Josiah Ober, came up with an intriguing theory in his seminal work *Fortress Attica*. He envisioned that the devastations of the Peloponnesian War brought upon the Athenians a reversal in their mentality, in which the protection of the hinterland became essential. Reflecting this mentality change was the construction of an elaborate defensive network of forts in the borders, aimed at thwarting any invading army's progress. However, his idea of "a defensive mentality" springing from the Athenians' head *ex novo* as a response to the collapse of their maritime empire, and the notion that fortresses controlled the routes and thereby prevented invasions, has been scrutinised.¹⁰ Doubt exists whether such a mentality change even

⁷ Most notably by Thucydides: Thuc. 1.143.4-5. Spence 1990 analyses the Periclean strategy for its merits, but attenuates the implied isolation of Pericles' words, as transcribed by Thucydides.

⁸ This came in the form of cavalry forces guarding the countryside against invasion: Thuc. 2.19.2; 22.2.

⁹ In the Mazi and Skourta plains, the Athenians physically demonstrated their claims to the lands and its exploitation through the construction of fortified settlements, such as Oinoe and Panakton. See Fachard 2013 for the Mazi plain; Munn 2010 for the Skourta plain. The first attestations of fortifications at these sites appear at the mid-5th century, amidst heightened tensions with the Boiotians, but also at the zenith of Athenian maritime power and during Pericles' dominance. See also the calculations made by Alain Bresson, detailing the comparatively impressive amount of cereal produced in these borderlands: Bresson 2016: 407-9.

¹⁰ Ober 1985. The criticism of the "road-control" thesis came mostly from Munn 1993; 2010 and Lauter 1993, and more recently Fachard 2012, 2013. Another problematic aspect of this idea is the difficulty of preventing armies from invading solely through the construction of small, garrisoned fortresses. The only possibility in Central Greece were it could be possible to seal off entry to a region through the construction of military infrastructure is the Corinthia: Pettigrew 2013: 70-4. Harding was a particularly harsh critic of Ober's theorem of a defensive mentality overtaking the Athenians: Harding 1988; 1995. See also Oliver 2007 for an

occurred – and Ober fervently denied it formed part of his hypothesis – but there is also reason to doubt whether the system actually prevented invasions and was the foundation for the safety and territorial integrity enjoyed by the Athenians in the 4th century, until the Lamian War of 323.

If these fortresses, garrison buildings, and military defensive structures were thus built with another purpose in mind – namely the exertion of political and military control over fertile farmlands – rather than to protect the borders of the territory and prevent relapsing into the psychological and physical damage done by invading armies, what other options existed to protect the countryside from invasion?¹¹

One was the so-called “beyond the border” defence. This meant sending troops away to protect the *polis*' territory by engaging the enemy far beyond the *polis*' respective borders. It either meant fighting at key strategic points or taking the fight to the opponents' territory. Examples of such tactics are the Athenian defence of Thermopylai in 353 against Philip, and their continuous raids on Laconian territory during the Peloponnesian War to lure their troops away from Attica. The only problem was that the opponent could employ a similar tactic, and thereby avoid the confrontation elsewhere altogether. Or worse, one could be stuck in hostile territory, with opposing forces and *poleis* surrounding the troops.¹²

A better option therefore was to create a “buffer zone”. Ober, basing himself on the seminal work by Adcock and Mosley, summarises this defence in the following manner:

It is predicated on persuading – through alliances – or coercing the states on one's borders to resist the (incoming enemy). These *poleis* therefore serve as buffers against the enemy, who must fight through the marshes before reclining one's own state. The idea is, of course, to exhaust or defeat the enemy within the buffer before he ever reaches the frontier.¹³

In this strategy, the enemy was to be confronted before it reached the frontiers. For Athens, the benefits are clear. Having their opponents fight in the “swamps” of Boiotia, or Megara for that matter, prevented the economic devastation of their hinterland, while at the same time creating a further obstacle to dissuade their opponents from entertaining the thought of launching a direct attack on Attica. What's more, besides the preservation of precious agricultural produce and thereby reduce the necessity of importing pricy grain, it was also economically more viable to cultivate friendly relations with the neighbours instead of equipping and garrisoning forts and other military structures.¹⁴ Entertaining close relations with the neighbours therefore had strategic and economic benefits.

appreciation of the hinterland's importance to Athens in a later period. Moreover, the interest in protecting the borders and fertile frontier regions can be traced to an earlier period: Daly 2015; Paga 2015.

¹¹ The psychological effects have been vividly passed down from antiquity through the plays of Aristophanes, his *Acharnians* in particular. There had been a tendency to downplay the destructive effects of invading armies on Attica on its physical environment, but see the comments by Thorne 2001 to the contrary.

¹² See Ober 1985: 73-4 for this form of defence.

¹³ Ober 1985: 72; Adcock and Mosley 1975: 131-2.

¹⁴ See for instance *IG I³* 21 ll. 10-15. The payment for an Athenian garrison is described as 4 obols a day. One talent would therefore support a 25 man garrison for a year. Considering the fortress at Eleutherai – though a Boiotian construction – could hold several hundred men and even more than a 1000 in times of war

Holding the keys to the kingdom: Boiotia

For the Athenians no other neighbour was as viable as the Boiotians. Because of their substantial border, a friendly Boiotia was best placed to serve as the ultimate buffer for Athens. First of all, the region covered most of the Athenian frontier and thus provided the largest “swamp” for enemies to get through. Boiotia also served as a deterrent against forces coming in from the Peloponnese. A friendly Boiotia would expose invading armies on their flanks, rendering a sustained attack on Attica more precarious through the looming threat of an attack on the rear or flank of the army. Moreover, the support of the neighbour took away other possible invasion routes, simplifying Attica’s defence and limiting it to the defence of one or two key access points, such as Eleusis.¹⁵

Maintaining friendly relations with the Boiotians offered other strategic advantages as well. The roads passing through Boiotia territory, connecting the Peloponnese to Euboea, Thessaly and other areas of economic interest up north, reflect the region’s function as a crossroads between northern and southern Greece.¹⁶ Any potential (Spartan) army wishing to cross from the Peloponnese to Thrace, for instance, would have to depend on maritime transport if the Boiotians were not well-disposed – an unfavourable option especially during the zenith of Athenian maritime power – or force their way through hostile territory. This connecting geography was one of the reasons that Boiotians were often involuntarily involved in broader conflicts, leading the general Epameinondas to quip that his homeland was the Dancing Floor of Ares.¹⁷ Other powers also realised the strategic potential of Boiotia. The Persians chose it as their base for the rest of their campaign in Greece in 480/79, while the Spartans installed several garrisons in Boiotian cities to maintain a firm grasp over the region in the 380s.¹⁸

For the Athenians, the region moreover offered desirable access to the Corinthian Gulf. This direct access granted two benefits. Firstly, it shortened the journey to the Adriatic and Sicily, two areas of increased importance for trade. Secondly, it was easier to launch direct attacks on the Peloponnese from the harbours on the Corinthian Gulf promontory.¹⁹

On the other hand, a hostile Boiotia was the greatest detriment to Athenian security, and not just for its borders. Although smaller-scale buffers could be deployed against the

(Fachard 2013: 98) costs for such garrisoning would amount to at least 20 talents in the case of a 500 man garrison.

¹⁵ It is one of the points made by the Athenian commander Hippocrates prior to the Battle of Delion (Thuc. 4.95.1-3). Another example is the swift action taken by the Boiotians during the Athenian attacks on Megara in 424, demonstrating how quickly their forces could intervene (Thuc. 4.72); conversely, they could engage with any oncoming foe from the west within a day.

¹⁶ The lack of a systematic investigation into the land routes through Boiotia, as has been done for other regions, remains problematic. The best possibilities for retracing the roads is through the physical factors of the terrain, as suggested by Farinetti 2011: 45 fig. 5. Alcock 1993: 149 offers the routes for the Roman period.

¹⁷ Plut. *Marc.* 21.2; *Mor.* 1932. Scholars have been quick to point to Boiotia’s “smooth plains” as an explanation for this moniker, but see the warranted criticisms of this interpretation by Konijnendijk 2017: 90-1.

¹⁸ Hdt. 9.2. Pinsent 1985 offers a short journey of Boiotia’s role in military operations from the Bronze Age to the end of the Nazi occupation in Greece. For the Spartan garrisons: Wickersham 2007.

¹⁹ It also allowed them to avoid the treacherous waters around Cape Maleas: Morton 2001: 41, 83. For the strategic importance of the Corinthian Gulf for attacking the Peloponnese, see Freitag 2005: 330-368.

Thebans for instance, as exemplified by the Athenian interest in annexing the Oropia and the Parasopia near the end of the 6th century, these buffers were incapable of withstanding the full force of the Boiotian army, should a conflict arise. This danger of proximity was also realised by the Athenians themselves. In his *On the Mysteries*, Andocides infers the Boiotians will be on the doorstep whenever they hear of internal disarray to profit from, a danger imminently more threatening than the far-away Spartans.²⁰ Ambassadors of other *poleis* were equally aware of the dangers lurking over the borders. Procles of Phlius, for instance, in a speech designed to convince the Athenians to abandon their Boiotian alliance in favour of a compact with the Spartans, alludes to the ramifications of the Thebans' growing power for Athens, precisely because they were so close.²¹

These fears and premonitions concern a direct attack on Attica by the Boiotians. The latter were certainly skilful in that aspect, as demonstrated by the profits gathered from the final stages of the Peloponnesian War.²² But hostile Boiotian actions could have ripple effects beyond the immediate border with Athens as well. Thanks to their country's connectivity, linking the Corinthian Gulf to the Euboian strait, and their border with the Megarians, Locrians and Phocians, the Boiotians were ideally suited to make life difficult for any prospective hegemon in Central Greece, the Athenians included. For these hegemons, the Boiotians held the keys to the kingdom. The immediate reverberations of the Athenian loss at the Battle of Koroneia in 446 beautifully illustrate the impact a hostile Boiotia could have on Athenian ambitions.²³ The defeat, suffered at the hands of a group of exiles from Locris, Euboia and Boiotia, was felt across central Greece. Rebellions erupted in Megara, Phocis and Euboia. Megara and Phocis were eventually lost, while Euboia could only be brought back into the fold with substantial effort.²⁴

The short geographical distance separating Euboia from Boiotia proved troublesome on other occasions. During the Peloponnesian War, the Boiotians extended their influence to Euboia and stirred revolts to dislodge the *poleis* from the Athenian yoke. The clearest physical expression of their intimate connection capable of mitigating Athenian influence came during the Peloponnesian War. In 411 the Euboian *poleis*, in revolt against their Athenian overlords, approached the Boiotians with a plan to construct a bridge across the Euripos.²⁵ On both ends of the bridge, fortresses and towers were constructed to decrease its vulnerability to naval attacks. The bridge allowed the partners to control the ebb and flow of the strait, limiting the traffic to a single ship at a time. That the Euboians would approach their neighbours is not only a matter of practicality, it also shows they reckoned their best chances of withstanding Athenian pressure was by allying themselves with the Boiotians: its potential impact was realised by the Athenians, who endeavoured to prevent its construction, but ultimately failed. The bridge became a physical testimony to the

²⁰ And. 1.45. See also Ar. *Ach.* 1022-3.

²¹ Xen. *Hell.* 6.5.39; see also the remarks by Xenophon in his *Memorabilia* 3.5.4.

²² See Thuc. 7.27; *Hell. Oxy.* 17.4; Parke 1932; Jones et al 1962.

²³ The date is from Lewis 1992. Thuc. 1.113 is the preferred source, but see also Diod. 12.6. For the importance of this victory to Boiotian identity: Beck and Ganter 2015: 140; Larson 2007: 184-9; Mackil 2013: 35.

²⁴ The effects were also felt closer to home with the independent Boiotians pressing claims to the Mazi and Skourta plains: Munn 2010; Fachard 2013; Fachard 2017.

²⁵ Diod. 13.47.3-4 is our only source for this event, but it appears to have been based on first-hand info, see Bakhuizen 1986: 13. Andrewes 1992: 483 accepts this testimony. The various phases of the bridge have been treated by Bakhuizen 1970. Unfortunately, Diodorus is the only primary source which mentions the construction of the bridge. See also Bearzot 2013: 133-5.

Euboian-Boiotian resistance, and their alliance was aimed to prevent any future possible Athenian naval incursions to reverse the situation.

Of course, the importance of the bridge should not be overweighed; there were still other routes available to the Athenians to import their grain.²⁶ But it did empower the Euboians and mostly prevented Athenian interventionism on the island. The Euboians' assertiveness can be seen by their involvement in overthrowing the Athenian garrison in Oropos.²⁷

These examples show the devastating effects a hostile Boiotia could have on traditional spheres of Athenian influence, both directly and indirectly. Their collusions with the surrounding *poleis*, like the Euboians and Megarians, proved problematic for the Athenians on numerous occasions. A look at the neighbourly history throughout the 5th and 4th centuries will clarify the Athenians' desire for security in Boiotia and how they therefore ventured to maintain control over it, either voluntarily or by force.

A turning point: the late 6th century and the Persian Wars

The earliest contours of Athenian interest in strengthening their position outside of the borders of Attica proper, and into Central Greece, came at the end of the 6th century. Following the transition from tyranny to democracy, disputes over the border territories such as Oinoe resulted in a clash between the Athenians on the one side, and the Boiotians and Chalkidians on the other.²⁸ The ensuing war ended in a resounding Athenian victory, leading to the confirmation of their claim in the border territories such as Oinoe and Eleutherai, the establishment of a cleruchy at Chalkis, an alliance with the Plataians and the occupation of Oropos.²⁹ These actions not only extended the Athenian power in Central Greece; they also served as preventive measures for a renewed attack by the combined front of Chalkis and Boiotia.

The hostile situation changed with the approach of Xerxes' army in 480. Part of the Boiotians were initially favourable towards a common Greek defence at Thermopylai.³⁰

²⁶ Thuc. 8.95 gives a sense of how important Euboia was felt to be: Moreno 2007: 77-123. Moreno insists on the importance of Euboia as a grain producer for Athens, but see comments by Fachard 2012: 114-5 to the contrary.

²⁷ Thuc. 8.60.2. For the role played by Eretrians in Oropos' history: Bearzot 1987.

²⁸ The Peisistratids had been friends with the Thebans, as Hdt. 1.61.3; Arist. *AP*. 15.2 mention, perhaps explaining why the new democratic regime did come into conflict with the Boiotians.

²⁹ The end of the war had always been seen from a distinctly Athenian perspective but see the new evidence from Thebes that illuminates the Boiotian side, clearly aimed at occupying contested territory: Aravantinos 2006. Habitually, the alignment between Plataia and Athens has been dated to 519, but elsewhere I have argued to regard it as the result of the events in 507/6: van Wijk 2017. For the cleruchy and the fortifications at Chalkis: Coulton et al. 2002; Moreno 2007: 101-2; 120; Igelbrink 2015: 175-84. The date of Oropos' occupation by Athens is contested, but a date at the end of the 6th century does fit in well with all the changes in that period. New evidence from Thebes might offer an intriguing insight into the matter too: Papazarkadas 2014.

³⁰ The Boiotian contingent was actually larger than the more famous Spartan 300; the Athenians, on the other hand, provided forces for the fleet at Artemision. The question of the stages of Boiotian medism is unrelated to the current matter and will not be treated here; suffice to say, I believe that initially they were in the Greek camp and only changed sides when Thermopylai fell. For a more in-depth discussion: Beck and Ganter 2015: 139-40.

When this plan failed, and Boiotia medised accordingly, the Persian advance on Attica continued unabated, inexorably leading to the destruction of the Athenians' countryside and their city. Furthermore, the Spartans decided to retreat to the Peloponnese to form a line of defence at the Isthmus, leaving the Athenians and Attica to fend for themselves.³¹ It became clear that in times of danger the Spartans could not be relied upon to salvage forces to come to their allies' aid. At the same time, the *volte-face* by the Boiotians demonstrated how important their support was: without them to hold down the front, enemy forces could easily enter Athenian territory and destroy it.

With this in mind, it might explain Athenian behaviour towards the Boiotians in the decades following the Persian Wars. In previous scholarship, there was a tendency to chastise the Boiotians for their apparent *volte-face*. These "traitors" surely would have been punished by the Greek alliance through the dissolution of their *koinon*, and more symbolically, by suffering the ignominy of their stigmatisation as medisers throughout Greece. Recent scholarship has drifted away from these dichotomous interpretations. There are no grounds to believe in a dissolution of the *koinon*, nor is there any evidence for a social exclusion of the Boiotians. In fact, they appear to have rebounded relatively quickly from the vicissitudes of the war and there are traces in our sources of an actual rapprochement between the Athenians and Boiotians in this period.³²

Although it concerns a later source, and suspicions over the historicity of the reference have been raised, Plutarch's *Life of Themistokles* is still the clearest indicator of Athenian interest in preserving the Boiotians against Spartan involvement in the aftermath of the war.³³ The Delphic priest recounts a dispute within the Amphictyonic Council, a body in charge of affairs relating to the famous Apollo sanctuary in Delphi. The Spartans, wishing to obtain a seat in this prestigious council, wanted to ban all medisers from it. In response, Themistokles blatantly refused on the grounds that the majority of *poleis* had medized, making the continuation of the Council tenuous should all be punished accordingly.³⁴ What prompted his intervention can only be guessed at. Judging from a strategic point of view, it makes sense for the Athenian leader to minimise Spartan influence in Central Greece, whose egregious behaviour ultimately led to the creation of the Delian League.³⁵ More importantly, it preserved the Boiotians as a future prospective ally, should relations with

³¹ The Athenians would continue to hold this against the Spartans in later discourse: Queyrel-Bottineau 2014a.

³² Amit 1971 first confronted the thesis of "dissolution" convincingly and Mackil 2013: 31-2 supports this suggestion, but based on the premise there had not existed any *koinon* before 446. For the remarkable resilience of the Boiotians after the war: Schachter 2016: 69-70. Of course, the dedications commemorating the war in Olympia and Delphi emphasise the participants and also those who did not (*ML* 27; Steinbock 2013: 108) but that does not mean it prevented their inclusion in the Greek community. In fact, the Athenians were reluctant to stress medism in their commemoration of the Persian Wars, probably until the Peloponnesian War, as recent studies have shown: Yates 2019. That had to do with their alliance with various known medizers, making it counter-productive to emphasise medism: Hall 2002: 187-9.

³³ For a discussion see Schachter 2016: 69-70. The fragment is not completely isolated; there is also Themistokles' reluctance to comply with Spartan wishes shortly after the war: Thuc. 1.111.

³⁴ Plut. *Them.* 20.3-4.

³⁵ See also the new investigation into the nature of the Hellenic League, proving its early inception was less of the common and more like an exclusively Spartan affair: Yates 2015. This makes Themistokles' actions all the more understandable.

the Spartans turn sour.³⁶ The Boiotians could then act as the ultimate buffer for the Athenians, and prevent Spartan armies from intervening in Central and Northern Greece.

This closer bond between the Athenians and Boiotians was symbolised by the return of a cultic statue of Apollo from Delos to Delion. Herodotus describes its theft during the Persian campaign in 490 and its return to Delos in 470 at the behest of the Thebans.³⁷ Normally this story has been perceived as an antagonistic piece of Theban propaganda, aimed as a jab at the Athenians. The recent interpretation by Albert Schachter, however, points in a different direction.³⁸ Athens' control over Delos makes it unlikely that the statue was returned without their consent. Therefore, the statue's return must have been a gesture of reconciliation, rather than antagonism. This interpretation more favourably aligns with Plutarch's remarks regarding the Delphic Amphictyony. If these examples are accepted as indications of friendship between the neighbours, then it is possible to regard the post-Persian war period as a time of collaboration, presumably prompted by the Athenians' awareness of the buffer role a friendly Boiotia could fulfil.³⁹ That realisation again played a role in the conflict between the Spartan and Athenian coalitions in the 450s, also known as the First Peloponnesian War.

A decade of turmoil: the 450s

The First Peloponnesian War did not solely revolve around the control of Boiotia, but Central Greece *in toto*. Increasing tensions between the Athenian and Spartan alliance finally erupted, providing a fertile ground for conflict.⁴⁰ A military intervention in Phocis on behalf of their brethren in Doris left the Spartans stranded. They had crossed the Corinthian Gulf by ship beforehand, but that was now prevented by the Athenian navy. Stuck in Phocis, but with a Boiotia ruptured by internal division close-by, the Spartans may have decided a march overland was a saner option and eventually ended up near Tanagra. Their reasons could have been manifold, ranging from instigating a revolt in Athens, overthrowing the incumbent regimes in Boiotia to endangering Oropos and the food supply of Athens.⁴¹ Notwithstanding their motives, the Athenians decided to march out *en masse*

³⁶ Cozzoli 1958 said otherwise, namely that the Spartans wished to keep Thebes as a buffer against Athens. But how these actions in the Council would help towards that goal is unclear. Themistokles' intervention tallies well with the reciprocal nature of interstate relations, as demonstrated by Low 2007. By protecting the Boiotians, the Athenians could call upon this favour in future interactions. The story of Themistokles' slave Sikinnos obtaining Thespian citizenship after the war (Hdt. 8.75) may be a further indication of Themistokles' Boiotian ties, as opposed to philo-Laconian leanings.

³⁷ Hdt. 6. 118.

³⁸ Compare Mackil 2013: 189-91 versus Schachter 2016: 69-70.

³⁹ A recently published inscription from Thebes, famous for its mention of a boiotarch, adds another layer to this rapprochement (Aravantinos 2014). It concerns the grant of certain privileges to possibly a foreigner. His identity might be Athenian, as suggested by the editor. If the proposed date (500-475) is correct, it means the Boiotians and Athenians were engaging in friendly relations at this time. There is the inscription from Olympia detailing an Athenian backed Thespians wishing to be excluded from the fines incurred by the Boiotians (NIO 5). Yet that is not necessarily an Athenian attempt to attack the Boiotians, but rather to preserve the territory of the Thespians.

⁴⁰ Lewis 1981 for an overview of possible causes for the war.

⁴¹ See the overview in Plant 1994. Another possibility could be the invasion of Attica at the Persian King's instigation to draw Athenian forces from Egypt, as Thucydides mentions: Thuc. 1.109. The argument

(πανδημεί) to Tanagra in Boiotian territory to counter the Spartan threat, resulting in their loss at the Battle of Tanagra.⁴²

It was a strong signal, but understandable at this time since the safety blanket of later decades, the Long Walls of Athens, were unfinished.⁴³ The question nevertheless remains, why would the Athenians march their entire army into Boiotia to fight the Spartans there? In other instances, whenever the Athenians marched out their army to Boiotia, they either fought *with* or *against* the Boiotians. This time, however, they were joined by allies from Thessaly and Argos and it would be remarkable if the Boiotians had allowed this access to all these armies if they had no stake in the outcome: otherwise such an unprovoked act of aggression would be detrimental to any relationship.⁴⁴

If the Athenians had a vested interest in fighting the battle on Boiotian soil, on the other hand, the situation lay different. Firstly, it presented the perfect middle ground between the Athenians, Argives and Thessalians, making Boiotia the most practical region to gather all the troops.⁴⁵ Secondly, the use of the participle περιπλεύσαντες in Thucydides suggests the Athenian fleet was already present in the Corinthian Gulf to prevent another Spartan maritime crossing.⁴⁶ In that case, the decision to send troops to the Megarid was not so much an attempt to block off the Megarid, as Diodorus would have it, but perhaps more an expectation of the route the Spartans would take, namely via Plataia.⁴⁷ The detour to Tanagra must have thrown the Athenians somewhat off-guard as the Spartans closed in on Attic soil, thus prompting the march of the full-scale army.⁴⁸

Besides the preservation of Attic territory, the Athenian plan was also devised to protect their interests in Boioia. As mentioned above, the Athenians and Boiotians were on good terms after the Persian Wars, and the Spartan presence in Boiotia could be dangerous for that relationship. This lends further credence to Diodorus' explanation for the events after the Battle of Tanagra, despite his obvious errors in historiography.⁴⁹ According to the Sicilian historian, some Thebans approached the Spartans following the battle with hopes of reclaiming their lost position within Boiotia. In return, the new regimes would fight the Athenians for the Spartans. This episode suggests the Athenians were not only fighting in

made by Fowler 1957 that the Tanagraians were the leading power in Boiotia, allied to the Athenians and therefore needed to be tackled, can no longer be maintained: Schachter 2016: 61-2.

⁴² Thuc. 1.107.

⁴³ Conwell 2008: 37-63.

⁴⁴ Hunt 2010: 134 for passing through foreign territory without permission.

⁴⁵ Ober 1985: 192 regards it as an offensive measure to trap the Spartans, rather than a defensive measure to safeguard Attica's borders. Yet I would contend that the notion of trapping the Spartans in Central Greece was meant to keep the fight away from Attica, as evidenced by the decision to march to Tanagra before the Spartans could gather at the Athenian borders.

⁴⁶ Thuc. 1.107.3. He uses the participle to denote the actions of the Athenian fleet. Translators have normally favoured interpreting it as a hypothetical, with the ships possibly sailing around the Peloponnese to obstruct a renewed maritime crossing. Hornblower 1991: 170, on the other hand, has convincingly argued to view the participle as indicating the ships were already present in the Gulf (perhaps at a Boiotian harbour?), supporting my hypothesis that the Athenians intended on opposing the Spartans in Boiotia.

⁴⁷ Diod. 11.80.1-2 claims the Athenians sent troops to seal off the Megarid to prevent a Spartan return, but Holladay 1982 argued that such a plan would be untenable.

⁴⁸ At this same time, this reveals the Spartans still had some agency, regardless of Athenian interventions.

⁴⁹ Diod. 11.81.1-2. For comments on the historiographical errors: Mackil 2013: 33-4.

Boiotia for their own survival: it was also an attempt to demonstrate their commitment to their allies in the region.

The Spartans were successful in installing friendly regimes. Yet after their departure, it only took the Athenians 60 days to recover from their loss at Tanagra and march an army into Boiotia to reverse the recent changes. The Boiotians were soundly defeated at Oinophyta, and the Athenians quickly moved to secure the greater part of Central Greece, like Phocis and Locris, for their own alliance.⁵⁰

Their swift response is indicative of the central position Boiotia occupied in their strategic considerations. More important are the reasons they ascribed to their actions. Thucydides is characteristically cursory in his treatment of these events, but from other sources we can gather the Athenians wished to restore those exiled Boiotians who had been expelled by the new regimes.⁵¹

If that were indeed the case, it shows the centrality of Boiotia to the Athenian strategy. First of all, a unified Boiotia under pro-Athenian rule could restrict Spartan movement in Central Greece; secondly, the access to the harbours on the Corinthian Gulf were an excellent advantage to have in the war with the Corinthians, whose influence extended into both the Corinthian and Saronic Gulf.⁵² A final factor includes the security Boiotia offered, which allowed the Athenians to intensify their campaigns elsewhere throughout the Aegean, with the knowledge that Spartan movement in Greece had been impeded.⁵³ Naupaktos, at the narrows of the Corinthian Gulf, was conquered in 456/5 and settled by rebellious Messenians, ensuring Athens control over the Corinthian Gulf, and made for a useful base to raid the coastlines of the Peloponnese from. This venture would have been incrementally more difficult without control over Boiotia.⁵⁴ Raids in Sicyon and campaigns in Thessaly followed, proving the inability of the Spartans to protect their allies. It was their impotence, combined with the disastrous Egyptian campaign of the Athenians, that resulted in a truce between the warring parties.⁵⁵ Unencumbered by the war in Greece, the Athenians could now pursue Persian targets elsewhere, such as Cyprus.⁵⁶ Other

⁵⁰ Thuc. 1.108.

⁵¹ In Thucydides, the Thebans accuse the Athenians of having taken advantage of the *stasis* in Boiotia in an act of opportunism, rather than than any other reason (Thuc. 3.62.5; 4.92.6). Plato, in his *Menexenus*, suggests otherwise. He claims the Athenians aimed to re-install the exiled pro-Athenian regimes (Pl. *Men.* 242a-b). Normally the *Menexenus* was treated as a satirical text, but David Engels has argued to view it as a serious 4th century political pamphlet: Engels 2012. See also the forthcoming work by Albert Schachter on this period in Boiotia and Athens' involvement: Schachter forthcoming. Similarly, the exiled Boiotians after Koroneia (446) went to Athens for help: *IG I³* 23; 73. Again, during the Archidamian War, it was in conjunction with exiles and local agents that the Athenians aimed to overthrow the Theban led *koinon*.

⁵² The latter aspect was mitigated by the Athenian conquest of Aegina in 457: Thuc. 1.108.4; *IG I³* 259 l.18 = Osborne and Rhodes 2017 no. 119A.

⁵³ Perhaps this is what Thucydides refers to when he says the Persian King was disappointed with the limited effectiveness of his financial support for the Spartans to draw away Athenian troops from Egypt: Thuc. 1.109. See also the remarks by Meiggs 1972: 111-2 that Boiotia safeguarded Athens.

⁵⁴ Thuc. 1.103.3; Diod. 11.84.7; Kallet 2016.

⁵⁵ Thuc. 1.112-3.

⁵⁶ Thuc. 1.112.1; Diod. 12.3-4; Plut. *Cim.* 18-19.1. For an analysis of the sources and strategy: Parker 1976.

considerations may have factored in these events, but it is impossible to deny the strategic advantages a friendly relationship with the Boiotians offered.⁵⁷

Conversely, a turnaround in the Boiotian loyalties proved to be catalytic for the Athenians in 446. A group of Boiotian, Locrian and Euboian exiles had gathered in north-western Boiotia and instigated a small rebellion. The Athenian force despatched to deal with this insurgence was initially successful, but nevertheless was overcome by the rebels near Koroneia. In the subsequent settlement, the Athenians were forced to withdraw from Boiotia completely.⁵⁸ News of the loss resonated beyond the borders, as it sparked rebellions in Megara and Euboia. The former was lost, whereas the latter could only be subdued with substantial efforts.⁵⁹ The loss at Koroneia therefore greatly decreased the Athenian sphere of influence, but more importantly, now transformed a former friend and “buffer” into a hostile neighbour and Spartan ally. Its potential dangers came to the fore in the ensuing war in the last three decades of the 5th century, further demonstrating to the Athenians the need to keep their neighbours as friends.

A enemy at the gates: Athens and Boiota in the second half of the 5th century

The Athenians went from a position of comfort to being hemmed in by enemies on their northern and western borders. The losses suffered in Central Greece meant their direct access to the Corinthian Gulf vanished, which increasingly isolated their naval base at Naupaktos. In the following decades, war clouds were gathering over Greece, but it was not until 431 that a local Boiotian dispute provided the sparkplug for the (Second) Peloponnesian War.⁶⁰

The opening phase of the conflict between the Athenian and Spartan alliances immediately demonstrated the repercussions for the Attic countryside of losing the buffer zones. Hostile armies repeatedly invaded Attica to devastate the homes and harvests of its inhabitants, hoping their actions would provoke a call for peace and a quick end to the war. Their expectations were not met; instead the Athenians stayed behind their Long Walls and secured their food import with the help of their navy. Counter-attacks were launched on the Megarid to off-set these invasions, with hopes of drawing troops away from Attica.⁶¹

The situation continued for several years. Unimpeded by any “buffers”, especially after the destruction of Plataia in 427, the Spartans and Boiotians were free to invade the

⁵⁷ In my opinion it is not correct to speak of an effort to create a “land empire” as Hornblower 2011: 33 and Mackil 2013: 33 do; instead, control over Boiotia and its harbours, as well as Phocis and Megara, fitted in perfectly with the overall maintenance of a naval empire.

⁵⁸ Thuc. 1.108; Diod. 12.6.

⁵⁹ See also *IG I³ 40* = Osborne and Rhodes 2017: no. 131. See the discussion in Papazarkadas 2009: 73-4. The loss also had repercussions in the border areas, with the Athenians now becoming more adamant about pressing their claims, as can be seen in the earliest traces of construction and settlement in the Skourta plain: Munn 2010.

⁶⁰ Namely the conflict between the Plataians and Thebans. The Theban attempt to take-over Plataia was regarded as a direct attack on Athens: Munn 2002. But primary sources other than Thucydides point to several factors: *Ar. Ach.* 528; *Peace* 990; *And.* 3.8.

⁶¹ Thuc. 2.31. Occasionally there were forays into the Attic countryside, leading to cavalry skirmishes: e.g. Thuc. 2.22.2.

Athenian countryside. Maritime raids were launched against the Peloponnese, but these could not effect a breakthrough in the war. A turning point came in 426/5. An earthquake ravaged the Peloponnese, prohibiting the Spartans from enacting their annual invasion of Attica.⁶² Freed from this burden, the Athenians set out to launch raids against the Peloponnese and the island of Melos.⁶³ This latter attack is quite striking, as after the initial attack the fleet under Nicias sailed to the Oropia. After the army's nocturnal landing, the heavy infantry made its way to Tanagra, where it was met by the entire levy of the Athenians. They were encountered by a combined Theban and Tanagran force, leading to an Athenian victory, after which the majority of the army returned to Athens.⁶⁴

The reasons for the attack can only be guessed at, as Thucydides is cursory in his treatment of the attack on Tanagra. Some scholars have therefore posited the possibility that the attack on Melos was a façade, while Tanagra was the actual target of Nicias' campaign.⁶⁵ It may have been a ruse to test the Boiotian defences and their cohesion. Similarly, Demosthenes had an invasion of Boiotia in mind during his Aitolian campaign.⁶⁶ Quite possibly, we could perceive an early conception of the later plan to invade Boiotia, which was to take place in 424. What it certainly demonstrates, is the desire to effect change in Boiotia as soon as the situation allowed. With the Spartan threat dormant in the Peloponnese, the Boiotians were on their own. The attack on Tanagra could have been an attempt to take control of Boiotia in one manoeuvre, like what happened after Oinophyta. Perhaps this explains the decision to move out *en masse*. Should the possibility present itself, the Athenians could then take advantage of their neighbours' isolation.⁶⁷ At least it was an indication of a new realisation in Athens that the Periclean strategy was not working. With the Spartans temporarily hamstrung, the fastest way to decide the war was to aim at reconquering the "buffer zones": the Megarid and Boiotia.

A similar picture is painted by events two years later. A group of Spartans at Sphacteria had voluntarily surrendered to the Athenians. Their capture put an end to the annual invasion of Attica.⁶⁸ The key to that success was the creation of a fortified site (*epiteichismos*) off the Laconian coast. Repeating that tactic elsewhere could therefore offer dividends.⁶⁹ An opportunity presented itself in Megara, where the democratic faction approached the Athenians with plans to re-align themselves with their neighbours. The plans were only foiled by alertness from the Boiotians, who, supported by a Peloponnesian contingent under the Spartan general Brasidas, intervened and beat the Athenians back.⁷⁰

⁶² Thuc. 3.89; Diod. 12.59.1.

⁶³ Presumably the circumvention of the Peloponnese is to be seen as a raid; Melos, on the other hand, was a show of force to include the neutral *polis* in the Athenian Empire: Hornblower 1996: 499-501.

⁶⁴ Thuc. 3.91. Although the attack could have occurred in 429 as well: Schachter 2016: 83.

⁶⁵ Holladay 1978: 405-7. Geske 2005: 48-53 regards the attack as a punitive action against the Boiotians for instigating the Mytilenean revolt. Buck 1994: 15 remains neutral in his assessment, while Welwei 1999: 175 regards the whole campaign as futile.

⁶⁶ Thuc. 3.95 for Demosthenes' campaign: Roisman 1993: 23-32.

⁶⁷ Perhaps there was a sense of opportunity over the foundation of Spartan colony at Herakleia Tracheia, which incensed their Boiotian allies and became a frequent point of dispute between them: Cook 1990.

⁶⁸ Thuc. 4.2-9.

⁶⁹ Westlake 1983: 16 suggests this "turn-around" in strategy, within a larger study of *epiteichismos* in general. See also Garland 1974: 33-40.

⁷⁰ Thuc. 4.70-3.

In the same summer, the Athenians conceived of a two-pronged attack on Boiotia. Armies would land on the western and eastern shores of Boiotia and be helped by local agents to create pro-Athenian enclaves from which to further erode the cohesion of the Boiotian *koinon*. The double manoeuvre would force the *koinon* to divide its troops, making a direct confrontation between the Athenians and the entire Boiotian levy unlikely.⁷¹ When the plan was spoiled, however, only one part could be executed, handing the Boiotians the chance to focus their full military capacity on one threat. The Athenian fears of such an encounter were realised, as the ensuing Battle at Delion was a military debacle and the hitherto largest loss suffered during the war.⁷²

Despite its failure, certain aspects of the plan stand out. The collusion with the local elements was a logical step, considering *stasis* plagued the *koinon* throughout its existence. The decision to fortify sites within a foreign territory, on the other hand, indicates the Athenians were not simply planning on disrupting the unity of Boiotia. Building fortifications and towers suggests they were intending to transform a religious boundary into a territorial demarcation. This marked a considerable change in their overall strategy, which had started with the *epiteichismos* at Pylos the year prior. Apparently, the Athenians wished to replicate this formula in Boiotia and the conditions were perfect for it; Delion was close to the sea and the Athenian frontier. But the plan failed before it could be realised, and the fortifications were bested by an ingenious siege engine.⁷³

The fact that the Athenians were willing to invest these resources into the submission of Boiotia reveals the region's importance to Athenian strategy. A case in point is Thucydides' writing. Between revealing the outlines of the Delion plan and its eventual demise, the historian inserts the story of Brasidas' march to Thrace. Undoubtedly his attention for the expedition was a personal matter; the loss of Amphipolis had cost Thucydides his military career.⁷⁴ Others have noted how the historian attempts to minimise the loss of Amphipolis and the direct access to wood and precious metals it provided.⁷⁵ Rather than attempting to salvage these resources and other investments, the Athenians decided to turn their full efforts to Boiotia, inadvertently contributing to the downfall of Amphipolis and consequently, severely weakening their war-effort. What I am suggesting here is that both campaigns were intertwined, not through Thucydides' intentions, but through the strategic advantages a perfect execution of the Boiotian plan would have meant for the course of the war.

In Thucydides' wording, Brasidas' departure for Thrace occurred in the same summer as the Delion campaign. He had been preparing for the expedition when the Athenians attacked the Megarid.⁷⁶ Should the attacks on Megara and Boiotia have succeeded, the Athenians would have prevented Brasidas from marching to Thrace, or at least hindered him in such a way to render it more problematic. Even if he did succeed in reaching the northern shores in this situation, he would have been stranded in Thrace as Athenian rule

⁷¹ Thuc. 4.76-7.

⁷² Thuc. 4.95-101.

⁷³ Thuc. 4.90-101.

⁷⁴ Thuc. 4.78. As others had noted prior: Dewald 2005: 97; Hornblower 1996: 256-7.

⁷⁵ Nevin 2008: 7. For the resources: Borza 1987: 39, 43-4; Kallet 1993: 176. Knight 1970: 154 notes the loss of Amphipolis also denoted a threat to the Athenian grain supply.

⁷⁶ Thuc. 4.78: Βρασίδης δὲ κατὰ τὸν αὐτὸν χρόνον τοῦ θέρους πορευόμενος ἑπτακοσίους καὶ χιλίους ὀπλίταις ἐς τὰ ἐπὶ Θράκης. Cf. Thuc. 4.70.1: Βρασίδης δὲ ὁ Τέλλιδος Λακεδαιμόνιος κατὰ τοῦτον τὸν χρόνον ἐτύγχανε περὶ Σικυῶνα καὶ Κόρινθον ὄν, ἐπὶ Θράκης στρατείαν παρασκευαζόμενος.

in Boiotia prevented a march back overland, while their maritime dominance prevented a return by sea.⁷⁷ Therefore, I would suggest that although Thucydides may have regarded the Delion campaign as a wrong use of resources – hindsight is a wonderful thing – we can postulate that Boiotia was perceived as a key element of Athenian strategy to win the war and perhaps was seen as an attempt to stop Brasidas in his tracks. Whether the Delion campaign was down to the influence of one general in particular, Demosthenes, as Holladay seems to imply, is to be doubted.⁷⁸ His influence perhaps swung the vote in the Assembly, but if the decision-makers did not regard Boiotia as a key cog in the wheel of war, the plan to prioritise Boiotia over Amphipolis would not have been accepted in the first place.

After the debacle of Delion, little is heard of Athenian interest in Boiotia, save for few exceptions that do not reflect any attempts to instigate political changes in the neighbouring region.⁷⁹ Possibly this is due to the fact that the theatre of war moved westwards toward Sicily. This campaign ended in disaster, and put further strains on Athenian finances and manpower, making the wish to repeat the Delion campaign an unattainable fantasy. In fact, the Peloponnesian League was gaining the upper hand in the conflict. The clearest example of the reversal in fortunes is the fortification of Dekeleia – the *epiteichismos* par excellence – near the Boioian border, in 413.⁸⁰ The effects of this “outpost” cannot be overstated. It severed ties between Athens and its hinterland and created severe problems for the grain supply of Athens.⁸¹ The final Boiotian blow came from the ceding of Oropos and the construction of a bridge with Euboea, further reducing the Athenian influence in Central Greece.⁸²

The Boiotians were not solely responsible for achieving the downfall of Athens in the Peloponnesian War. Yet their victory at Delion was a turning point. The further erosion of Athenian power in Northern and Central Greece could not have been accomplished if Boiotia was under Athenian sway. Shortly after the Peloponnesian War, convulsions in inner Boiotian politics led to increased tensions between the Spartans and Boiotians, opening the door to renewed collaborations between the neighbours. Their cooperation proved a more tenable strategy for the Athenians, shielding their precious territory from the violations it had suffered in the later decades of the fifth century.

The Corinthian and Boiotian Wars: from friend to foe (395-369)

⁷⁷ Cawkwell 1997: 51 notes the Spartans would have been confined to the Peloponnese, thereby altering the entire outlook of the war. In the same way, I would add it would have isolated Brasidas in Thrace, allowing the Athenians to send out their full force thereafter.

⁷⁸ Holladay 1978: 421.

⁷⁹ There were disputes over the Panakton border during the peace negotiations of 421 (Thuc. 5.42) and there was the revolt of the Thespian *demos* in 414, put down by the Thebans (Thuc. 6.95.2) after which refugees made their way to Athens (IG I³ 72). Whether this confirms Athenian involvement, as Rockwell 2017: 77 n. 82 suggests, cannot be confirmed. Finally, there was the massacre at Mykalessos, preceded by an attack on Tanagra: Thuc. 7.27; 29. For an insightful analysis of the peculiarities of Thucydides’ description of this brutal attack, see Kallet 2002: 140-6.

⁸⁰ See also Westlake 1983: 17.

⁸¹ Thuc. 7.27-8. For an analysis of the effects: Funke 2000.

⁸² See n. 25-6.

The Spartan and Boiotian elation over defeating the Athenians soon made way for suspicion and friction. A decade of egregious Spartan behaviour finally led to an outburst of hostility with their erstwhile allies, the *koinon*, in 395. With Spartan forces on their doorstep – Lysander was approaching Boiotia by way of Phocis – the Boiotians sent an embassy southward for help.⁸³ Their speech, or at least a transcribed version of it, has been recorded by Xenophon.⁸⁴ The delegates exculpated their former hostility towards the Athenians, but thereafter reminded the Athenians of their recent hospitality and support in their defiance of the Spartans. More importantly for the current investigation are two other arguments employed. Hoping to persuade their hosts to support their struggle with the Spartans, they presented them with a daunting perspective: a friendly Boiotia more advantageous to the Athenians than it ever was to the Spartans. Continuing this thread, they remind the audience of their great desire to reclaim their lost empire at the expense of the Spartans, while subtly suggesting the Boiotians would be a part of it too.⁸⁵

Clearly the delegates were aware of long-cherished hopes among the Athenians for recapturing their empire and regaining control over Boiotia.⁸⁶ Because it was one of the last arguments made, one has to assume it was the most decisive argument, since it would resonate the most with the audience. The flattery of Athenian feelings of justice notwithstanding, it was the tantalising allure of regaining their empire through the help of the Boiotians that mattered.

A look at the actual terms of the alliance shows how far the Athenians were willing to go to conclude the alliance. Although it was the Boiotians who had approached the Athenians, the terms of the agreement can be considered evenly balanced. Xenophon adamantly insists on calling the emissaries, and the political entity they represent, Thebans. His insistence on reducing the allying party to the city, rather than the entire *koinon*, is proven wrong by the surviving *stele* of the alliance, which specifically concerns a treaty between the Athenians and the *Boiotoi*.⁸⁷ This is more than a semantic issue. By referring to the Thebans, instead of the *koinon*, Xenophon ignores the fact that the Athenians accepted the territorial status quo as it had developed after the Peloponnesian War. By agreeing to a deal with the *Boiotoi*, the Athenians accepted the territorial integrity of the *koinon*, including contested areas such as Eleutherai and Oropos.

Whether or not this could be made up for by the promise of a new Athenian empire including Boiotia, remains conjecture. There was an antagonistic wind blowing in Athens, with several factions ready to take on the Spartans. Yet despite Lysander's army entering Boiotia at the time of the embassy, the Athenians were neither pressured nor immediately

⁸³ To venture into the complex origins of the Corinthian War is not my intention here. Suffice to say is that Spartan imperialism to “all four corners of the Greek world”, as Hornblower 2011: 217-25 has it, was one main cause. The bubble finally burst through a “proxy conflict” between Locrians and Phocians. See Buckler and Beck 2008: 44-58 for an in-depth investigation.

⁸⁴ Xen. *Hell.* 3.5.8-15. Although the speech is not recorded word-for-word by Xenophon, I cannot follow Buckler and Beck 2008: 58 in their rejection of the account as simply an encomium of Athenian virtues. See also the comments by Tuplin 1993: 61; Steinbock 2013: 251-3. Some form of flattery from Xenophon's perspective was certainly involved, but Andocides seems to refer to a Theban speech in 395 as well: And. 3.24.

⁸⁵ Xen. *Hell.* 3.5.10, 14-5: ὅτε μὲν γὰρ ἦρχετε, τῶν κατὰ θάλατταν μόνων δήπου ἡγεῖσθε; νῦν δὲ πάντων καὶ ἡμῶν.

⁸⁶ Which would speak against authenticity, were it not for the occurrence of exactly this situation in the 370s, when the Thebans joined the Second Athenian League, see also Rhodes and Osborne 2007: no 22.

⁸⁷ Xen. *Hell.* 3.5.16; Rhodes and Osborne 2007: no. 6 for the *stele*. This discrepancy had been noted by Hornblower 2011: 230.

under threat to accept the alliance.⁸⁸ Considering the difficult position the Boiotians found themselves in, the Athenians could have bargained for these territories should they wished to do so. The fact that they did not, in exchange for an alliance with their neighbour, implies the returns of a potential collaboration outweighed the occupation of these territories.

Throughout the war the importance of Boiotia as a buffer proved its merit for the Athenians. The first battles were fought in Boiotia and afterwards the theatre of war slowly moved westwards, leaving Attica unharmed. Part of that was undoubtedly because the Spartans now did not have the backing of the Boiotians and could not venture into Attica protected. This sentiment was shared by certain circles of Athenian society as well. In his *On the Peace* of 391, Andocides pleaded with his countrymen to accept the agreed upon peace treaty with the Athenians.⁸⁹ Although the delegates had overstepped their duties, Andocides implores his listeners to accept the treaty regardless under the false pretence that the Boiotians were doing the same.⁹⁰ What stands out about his speech is the central role occupied by the Boiotians.⁹¹ He repeatedly places them on a pedestal in comparison to other allies in the war and their place within the Athenians' strategic outlook, ranging from the joyous day when the alliance was concluded to their efforts in the war.⁹²

The strategy to rely on a Boiotian buffer – and perhaps a Corinthian one too – proved successful until the later phases of the war, when the Spartans obtained Persian funds to construct a navy strong enough to take control of Rhodes and the Hellespont, thereby

severing the vital life-line of Athens: its grain supply.⁹³

A similar strategy was employed by the Athenians a little over a decade later. Spartan hubris had led to the instalment of a military junta in Thebes and the placement of garrisons in Boiotian cities. These strongholds created a string of military bases for the Spartans to maintain a firm grasp over Central Greece, and Boiotia in particular.⁹⁴ The regime in Thebes was eventually overthrown in 379/8 – whether or not the Athenians provided official help to the insurgents remains a question of debate – and one of the

⁸⁸ See the treatment by Steinbock 2013: 245-53 on the Athenian readiness for war. A year before, they had openly disavowed Demaneitos after he had approached Conon, in Persian service, to wage war against the Spartans. Now, with the Boiotians in a dire position, they wholeheartedly accepted their offer to wage war together on these terms.

⁸⁹ Whether the Athenians had fallen into the conviction that a land-based hegemony was more sustainable than a maritime based one, as prevalent in the writings of contemporary writers such as Xenophon and the author of the *Hellenica Oxyrhynchia* (Occhipinti 2016: 116-30) is unclear.

⁹⁰ There is a discussion on the authenticity of the source: Edwards 1995 versus Harris 2000. Magonetto 2013 has shown the speech is consistent with the diplomatic norms of the period. Rhodes 2016: 83-6 questions further arguments made by Harris.

⁹¹ Other factors play into it as well, mostly warmer feelings for the Spartans and the oligarchic sympathies of Andocides. For an excellent analysis of this text and Andocides' background: Missiou 1992.

⁹² And. 3.24-5.

⁹³ Diod. 14.97; Xen. *Hell.* 5.1.29. The Persians were only willing to hedge their bets on the Spartans as they were receptive to the idea of the leaving Asia Minor to the Persians. For a new reading of Persian-Greek interactions in the fourth century: Hyland 2017.

⁹⁴ For an overview of these events and relevant bibliography: Buckler 2003: 184-231. A recent overview of the Spartan occupation in Boiotia can now be found in Fossey 2019: 95-135; 156-171.

Thebans' first arrangements was to conclude a separate alliance with the Athenians.⁹⁵ What's more, when the Second Athenian Confederacy was finally formalised, the Thebans were one of its founding members.⁹⁶

Several things stand out about the alliance between the Athenians and Thebans. The first striking feature is that it only concerns the Thebans, and not the Boiotoi *in toto*. Secondly, the Thebans are the only participating *polis* in the list of allies in the Confederacy that can plausibly be termed “land-locked”, whereas the other members are either island or coastal *poleis*. The notion of attaining a strong land power to act as a buffer for a renewed claim to power – which the Second Athenian Confederacy was – therefore had stuck, explaining why the Thebans were included.⁹⁷ In fact, the impetus for forming the tighter bond may have come from the Athenians. Additionally, the Thebans appear to have occupied a special leading position within the Confederacy.⁹⁸ Their membership of the Confederacy was thus not a convalescence of fortunate events, bringing together two enemies of Sparta with friendly ties. On the contrary, the Athenians had worked to “re-obtain” their buffer, before ensuing hostile actions against the Spartans and in return granted the Thebans a special place in the Confederacy's structure.

In the ensuing war, aptly termed the Boiotian war, the strategy showed its advantages. Most of the battles were fought out in Theban territory, with the Spartans unable to manoeuvre freely against the combined Athenian and Theban forces.⁹⁹ With the Spartans pinned down in Central Greece to maintain their grasp over Boiotia – the other cities had remained garrisoned – the Athenians were able to extend their hold over the Aegean and north-western Greece.¹⁰⁰ The short reprieve granted by the peace treaty in 375 also allowed the Thebans to regain their dominance in Boiotia. In quick succession, recalcitrant

⁹⁵ IG II² 40; see Buckler 1971. See the excellent treatment by Stylianos 1998: 236 and Steinbock 2013: 260-7 on the matter of Athenian help for the Theban insurgents.

⁹⁶ As can be established from Rhodes and Osborne 2007: no. 22, the Prospectus of the Second Athenian League. For a discussion of the sequence of events leading to the establishment of the Second Athenian League, see Beck and Buckler 2008: 71-8; Kallet-Marx 1985.

⁹⁷ Cargill 1981 is of the opinion that the Athenians were not the aggressive oppressors they had been in the 5th century, but his sentiments have not been shared widely. See further Dreher 1995 and Hornblower 2011: 260-3.

⁹⁸ There is an enigmatic phrase that only concerns the Thebans. The Athenians are to send ambassadors to Thebes to convince them of any good they can (ἐλέσθαι δὲ τὸν δῆμον πρέσβεις τρεῖς αὐτίκα μάλλ[α] εἰς Θήβας, [οἴ]τινες πείσοσι Θηβαίους δ[ε] τῶν ἄν δύνω[ν]ται ἀγαθόν) (Rhodes and Osborne 2007: no. 22 ll. 73-5). The lines have been interpreted as Athenian fears over a resurgent *koinon* (Hornblower 2011: 241; Mackil 2013: 69), but this appears to have been influenced by Xenophon's remark that the Thebans wished to “rekindle the Theban business” (Xen. *Hell.* 5.4.46). On the other hand, similar lines on embassies sent with the purpose of convincing the other party of whatever good they can, do appear in other treaties, like an Athenian alliance with the Thessalians (Rhodes and Osborne 2007: no. 44 ll. 46-7). Stephen Lambert, in his *Attic Inscriptions Online ad loc.*, interprets the lines as implying the Athenians took the initial steps to form the alliance with the Thessalians in this case. For the leading position of the Thebans in “allied matters”: Rhodes and Osborne 2007: no. 29, l.15.

⁹⁹ For an in-depth treatment of this conflict: Munn 1993. The eventual end came after a naval battle put the Spartans in a predicament, leading to a (short-lived) treaty: Xen. *Hell.* 5.4.61-2; Diod. 15.34.4-35.2.

¹⁰⁰ See the addition of new members into the Confederacy, most of them located in north-western Greece: Rhodes and Osborne 2007: no. 24.

neighbours such as Orchomenos, Thespiai and Plataia were either re-integrated into the *koinon* or destroyed altogether.¹⁰¹

Habitually scholars point to the actions against Thespiai, and Plataia in particular, as a turning point in the neighbourly relations. But aside from an acerbic pamphlet by Isocrates, the Athenians appeared to have done little, nor is there any indication of any intention to act against their allies.¹⁰² Isocrates even goes to great lengths to convince the Athenians of the intolerable behaviour of the Thebans and the need to punish them on behalf of the Plataians, *despite* all the benefits of the Boiotian alliance. Isocrates, in the midst of his vitriol, must admit that “Boiotia” was now fighting in the defence of the Athenian *chora*, an argument that surely had its supporters in the Assembly for him to bring it up.¹⁰³ Ending the friendship with the Thebans would even be to the detriment of your allies, he proclaims, let alone if the Thebans chose the Spartan side once again.

Moreover, there are reasons to argue the Thebans were not violating any terms of the alliance. After all, the Second Confederacy had been set up to combat the Spartans. By removing Spartan garrisons from Boiotia, the Thebans did exactly this. A stronger Thebes also meant a stronger ally to oppose the Spartans in Central Greece. Another explanation for the reluctance could be the recent alignment of the Oropians with the Athenians. Sometime before 374 they exchanged their independence for Athenian protection, or so the story goes in Isocrates. Whether this was as voluntary as the orator claims is another question, but perhaps the Athenian aloofness in Boiotian affairs was a *quid pro quo* for their acceptance of the Oropians’ decision.¹⁰⁴

That is confirmed by the fact that the Athenians did not accept a Spartan alliance against the Thebans until 369.¹⁰⁵ Until that time – and perhaps even afterwards – their relationship with the neighbours may have been strained but did not break.¹⁰⁶ At the point of cessation, the geo-political situation had already radically altered. The Thebans had been left to their own to withstand a new Spartan invasion in 371. After their famous victory at Leuktra, their influence swiftly spread across Central Greece. Alliances were forged with other powers in the region, like the Phocians and Locrians, whereas the Euboian *poleis* went over to the Thebans *en masse*.¹⁰⁷ If the Athenians needed more convincing of the dangers of

¹⁰¹ See Mackil 2013: 68-9. Recently, the case of Thespiai in particular has received significant attention, diminishing the credibility of our Athenian sources as concerning its destruction: Snodgrass 2017.

¹⁰² For Isocrates’ notorious Thebes bashing: Queyrel-Bottineau 2014b.

¹⁰³ Isoc. 14.33. Note his salient wording: ἡ Βοιωτία προπολοεμεῖ τῆς ὑμετέρας χώρας. It is Boiotia, not the *koinon* or the Thebans, that defends the Athenian *chora*.

¹⁰⁴ Isoc. 14. 20-1. For the date, Knoepfler 1986. See also his recent treatments of Oropos under Athenian dominance: Knoepfler 2012; 2016.

¹⁰⁵ E.g. Buckler and Beck 2008: 33-43 but there is no indication of hostilities, nor of an official severing of the alliance; see Hornblower 2011: 249 who offers convincing arguments for believing the Athenians and Thebans were only openly hostile from 369 onwards.

¹⁰⁶ From Xenophon’s writing, we may believe the Athenians openly welcomed the opportunity to punish the Thebans earlier. For Athens’ lukewarm response to the Theban victory at Leuktra: Xen. *Hell.* 6.4.14-5. Yet Xenophon is notoriously anti-Theban, and was writing in the 360s at a time when relations had already deteriorated. For the timeframe of his work’s inception: Dillery 1995.

¹⁰⁷ See Buckler and Beck 2008: 134 n. 44 contra Rhodes 2010: 252. See Xen. *Hell.* 6.5.23; Ages. 2.24. A recent find from Thebes has illuminated the early relations between the Thebans and Euboians: Aravantinos and Papazarkadas 2012.

neglecting their relationship with the neighbours, this was it.¹⁰⁸ Despite the still present support for maintaining the alliance with the Thebans, the Spartan supporters won out.¹⁰⁹ The Thebans were now in a stronger position than they had ever been, with a nexus of alliances in Central Greece, whereas the Athenians were isolated, their distant allies in the Aegean and the Peloponnese notwithstanding. Swapping the Thebans for the Spartans therefore seemed to prefer the ephemeral political developments over the perpetual strategic advantages. Or to put it in the words of John Buckler: “[This] policy was short-sighted, wasteful, and potentially dangerous, and from it Athens gained nothing but regrets.”¹¹⁰

Years of war and a final reunion (369-338)

Buckler’s work was written with the benefit of hindsight, but there are plausible reasons to follow this assessment. The stability provided by the Confederacy and the Theban buffer allowed the Athenians to extend their influence in the Aegean and the Ionian Sea. When relations turned sour, however, this base of power was slowly eroded, by the Thebans in particular. In the years following 369, the relationship between the neighbours would deteriorate even further. But despite vitriol thrown back and forth, a direct clash never occurred.¹¹¹

Of course, that does not mean there were no repercussions from the recent split. The toxic combination of Euboian-Boiotian hostility again weakened the Athenian position. In 366 a collaboration between the two ensured the removal of an Athenian garrison from Oropos and subsequently, the removal of Oropos from the Athenian sphere of influence. More importantly, the responses to this event demonstrated the Athenian isolation within the Greek world. Their allies were hesitant to support their efforts to reclaim the town, both military and judicially. Through arbitration the Oropia was officially awarded to the Thebans, leaving the Athenians empty-handed.¹¹² The loss of the territory stung – both from a geo-political and economic point of view – and it was repeatedly cast as a hot topic of debate in the Assembly to demonstrate the depravity of the Thebans.¹¹³

The fragility of Athenian power was further tested in 364. The Thebans sent a flotilla around the Aegean as a means of dislodging several key allies from the Confederacy, such

¹⁰⁸ On the other hand, the Peloponnesian delegates wished to exploit this resurgence of Theban power as a forewarning to the Athenians that a far-away nemesis was less dangerous than a near one: Xen. *Hell.* 6.5.39.

¹⁰⁹ As Buckler and Beck 2008: 140-64 argues, Xenophon deliberately omits the defenders of the Theban alliance, as their arguments lost out to the Spartan ones. Fisher 1994 moreover points out the rather laconic attitude towards the Spartan alliance in Athens at the time as well.

¹¹⁰ Buckler 2003: 310.

¹¹¹ Schachter 2016: 120. In the following 30 years, there were only two confrontations between the two: Mantinea (362) and on Euboia (357) but in both cases, it was the result of other parties calling in their help, rather than a confrontation between the Athenians and Boiotians.

¹¹² The Athenian generals responsible for the loss were indicted, cf. Xen. *Hell.* 7.4.1; Diod. 15.71.1; Ar. *Rhet.* 1364a; Plut. *Dem.* 5.1. For the date: schol. Aesch. 3.85 (186 Dilts). Their subsequent actions in Samos; the installation of a cleruchy and the expulsion of the inhabitants, certainly would not have strengthened their popularity: Hornblower 2011: 260.

¹¹³ For the economic viability of the territory: Cosmopoulos 2001; Fachard and Pirisino 2015; Knoepfler 2012. References to Oropos: e.g. Dem. 9.16; Isoc.5.53.

as Byzantium. The level of success of this endeavour is still a matter of debate, but that is not what matters; it is the psychological effect.¹¹⁴ By employing a strategy to erode Athenian maritime power, the Boiotians showed they were *on par* with their neighbours and were capable of being more than a nuisance outside of the boundaries of Central Greece.

In a similar sense, one can perceive the Boiotian diplomatic audacity vis-à-vis the Athenians by repeatedly attempting to finalise a Common Peace treaty. Sponsored by the Persian King, the treaty would undermine the Athenians and their base of power in the Aegean. Although these attempts were the result of their recent hostility, the difference in the Theban manner of execution for the erosion of power, compared to their actions in the Peloponnese, is striking. Rather than rely on brute force or the subjugation of Athens, they simply knew an Athens without their maritime empire would be more easily culled into acceptance of the Theban dominance in Greece, or at least a stable peace.¹¹⁵

Monetary issues undercut Theban power, however, and in the following years the power of both Athens and the Boiotians was questioned by various other *poleis*.¹¹⁶ The Athenians suffered from rebellions within their alliance, stimulated by the support of Persian satraps, and perhaps inspired by the Boiotian naval scheme before. For the Boiotians, the Phocians were causing trouble in the Delphic Amphictyony, sparking the Third Sacred War (357-346).¹¹⁷ Technically, the Boiotians and Athenians were in opposing camps, but there was little direct fighting between them.

The situation changed when the Macedonian king Philip entered the fray on behalf of the Amphictyony, aiming to salvage the situation that crippled the Boiotians. At this point, he was already at war with the Athenians and the dangers of a hostile Boiotia became increasingly apparent in Athens, with some voices claiming a Macedonian invasion was imminent. There could be no relying on the Boiotians to act as a buffer now. Worse still, there were fears the neighbours would happily join in wrecking the Attic countryside with their royal ally. Hence the Athenians decided to lavishly spend a fortune on mercenaries to guard the Thermopylai pass to prevent Philip from entering Central Greece.¹¹⁸ The plan was successful as the king had other matters to attend to and had no wish to force his entry.¹¹⁹ Attica was safe for the time being but relying on expensive mercenaries to withhold a narrow pass was not a long-lasting solution. As long as the Boiotians were hostile, the risk of a combined Macedonian-Boiotian force marching into Attica remained.

¹¹⁴ Scholars have been divided over the rates of success. See for instance Buckler and Beck 2008: 199-210; Hornblower 2011: 260-3 who are more sceptical, versus Ruzicka 1998 who argues for a full-blown revolt. Schachter 2014 occupies a more neutral position. Russell 2017 investigates the case of Byzantium. A most recent overview can be found in van Wijk 2019.

¹¹⁵ This involved attempts at a Common Peace in 367/6, which called for the beaching of the Athenian navy, but was rejected, and the one confirmed in 366/5, which was a much more diluted form and acknowledged the Theban claim to Oropos. See Xen. *Hell.* 7.1.33; 4.6-11; Plut. *Pel.* 30; Diod. 15.76.3 with remarks by Jehne 1994: 82-6 and Hornblower 2011: 259-60.

¹¹⁶ Monetary issues: Schachter 2016: 113-132.

¹¹⁷ See Buckler 1989 for an overview of the war.

¹¹⁸ Diod. 16.38.1.

¹¹⁹ Diod. 16.37.3; 38.1; Dem. 19.84; 319. It also worked because the Thebans were too wrecked from their vicissitudes suffered at the hands of the Phocians to pose a real threat in the back of the allied forces.

Perhaps it was in this light that Demosthenes openly suggested the possibility of allying the Thebans in his *For the Megalopolitans* in 352.¹²⁰ Despite flavouring his speech with familiar anti-Theban tropes in an attempt to curry favour with the crowd and to adhere to the current atmosphere, the orator uttered the following words: “It would be better to obtain an alliance with the Thebans on our own strengths and resist Spartan ambition, than that we should shrink from rescuing the allies of Thebes and abandon them now, only to rescue the Thebans in the end.”¹²¹ Although it appears as if Demosthenes is only thinking of future changes in the political landscape, he may have been thinking of recapturing Athens’ former glory, and realising the importance the Boiotians occupied throughout the fourth century by saying they had always been useful in deploying their allies against the enemies of Athens, whereas the Spartans used their allies against the Athenians.¹²²

Of course, Demosthenes enjoyed friendly ties with some of his Boiotian peers and arguably acted in an official capacity as a Theban proxenos in Athens.¹²³ Yet it was not personal relations that coloured his views. The tangible Macedonian threat had yet to crystallise; the orator had mentioned the king in passing before, but only after the Thermopylai affair did he become the foremost concern of Demosthenes.¹²⁴ His concerns here must therefore have been focused on re-creating the buffer around Athens, a purpose the Spartans could not serve. The Boiotians, on the other hand, were the most natural ally for the Athenians.¹²⁵

It is a statement Demosthenes made again in the aftermath of the Peace of Philocrates (346), the treaty that had ended the on-going war. Demosthenes warns his listeners that the Thebans are not to be feared. The reason for their reluctance in going to war with the Athenians was the following. In case of a possible war, the Thebans would be in the front line.¹²⁶ More importantly, they feared a repeat of the Sacred War scenario. They had borne the brunt of the war, but it was Philip who had enjoyed the spoils of victory.¹²⁷ But Demosthenes says, whenever the Thebans shared in the cause, they had fewer qualms over

¹²⁰ It was written in response to a call for help from the Megalopolitans against the Spartans. The former were Theban allies and the Spartans promised the return of Oropos to the Athenians in exchange for help. Nevertheless, Demosthenes advised his listeners to remain steadfast in not allowing the Spartans to recapture the Peloponnese. For more on the speech and Demosthenes’ position to the Thebans: Ingenkamp 1972.

¹²¹ Dem. 16.21: πολὺ δὴ κάλλιον καὶ ἄμεινον τὴν μὲν Θηβαίων συμμαχίαν αὐτοὺς παραλαβεῖν, τῇ δὲ Λακεδαιμονίων πλεονεξία μὴ πιτρέψαι, ἢ νῦν ὀκτοῦντας μὴ τοὺς Θηβαίων σώσωμες συμμαχούς, τούτους μὲν προέσται, πάλιν δὲ σώζειν αὐτοὺς τοὺς Θηβαίους, καὶ προσέτ’ ἐν φόβῳ καθεστάναι περὶ ἡμῶν αὐτῶν. Trevett 2011: 274-6 argues Demosthenes was looking for powerful alliances to restore Athens’ glory; partially through involvement in wars elsewhere.

¹²² Dem. 16.29.

¹²³ As Aeschin. 2.141, 143 claims. Harris 1995: 199 n. 15 views it as an invention of Aeschines, but Trevett 1999: 185 argues against it, saying the proxenoi of influential cities such as Thebes would have been widespread knowledge in Athens.

¹²⁴ If Trevett 1999: 201 is right in assigning this speech prior to the expedition to Thermopylai.

¹²⁵ Trevett 1999: 201 claims the previous cooperations between Athens and Thebes were inspired through a mutual fear of Sparta in the earlier 4th century; but I believe this would be a gross over-reliance of “fear” as a determining factor in interstate relations. For a revision of this “Realist” view of interstate relations in classical Greece: Low 2007; Giovannini 2007; Hunt 2010.

¹²⁶ Dem. 5.14-5. Maybe Demosthenes here shows insight into the Theban psyche through his connections there.

¹²⁷ The Thebans still claimed responsibility, as shown by their dedications at Delphi: Schachter 2016: 125 n. 36.

acting as the front line. Presumably he had the previous collaborations with the Boiotians in mind here. He would not make these points, if he believed they would not resonate in the Athenian Assembly. Therefore, it was paramount to Athenian interests to re-obtain the Theban alliance, especially since there were fears the Peace of Philocrates was of an ephemeral nature.

The treaty lasted longer than expected, but in 340 hostilities re-emerged between the king and the Athenians. The Macedonian threat was initially contained to the Thraceward region, but when Philip got involved in a renewed dispute within the Delphic Amphictyony, his gaze turned southwards.¹²⁸ At that time, the Boiotians were still nominally allied to the king but cracks had appeared in the foundation of that relationship. Philip's involvement in two traditional spheres of influence for the Boiotians, Megara and Euboea, had agitated the *koinon's* leadership, while his actions had tempted the Boiotian allies in the Peloponnese to throw in their lot with the new power.¹²⁹ In 339, their frustrations were translated into actions. The Macedonian garrison at Nicaea was expelled and replaced by a Boiotian one, essentially granting the *koinon* control over the Thermopylai pass and denying it to Philip.¹³⁰

In order to regain control over the situation, the king's troops captured a fortress on the Phocian-Boiotian border, Elatea. The Boiotians were now confronted with their angered ally on their doorstep and were forced to make a decision as both Philip and the Athenians sent embassies to Thebes to ask for aid. The king demanded the return of Nicaea, whereas the Athenians offered an alliance against Philip. After careful consideration, the latter option was chosen by the *koinon* over the commitments to Philip.¹³¹ Yet the Athenian-Boiotian alliance had not materialised without extensive concessions from the Athenians. Trust must have been an issue, as the Athenians had neglected to protect the Boiotians against Spartan aggression in 371, despite the terms of their alliance. Thus, they demanded their neighbours to pay for the majority of the costs for the landed force that would be under Theban command, while the leadership and costs for the navy would be equally shared. A final clause stipulated all contested claims were settled in the Boiotians favour.¹³² Although the deal at first sight appears to be heavily skewed towards the Boiotians, it was not such a substantial sacrifice as Demosthenes' opponents have made it out to be. The territorial claims were merely a confirmation of the status quo, and the Athenians had not been able to reclaim Oropos even when the Thebans were down. The costs for the army, moreover, were not that much different from the costs of the mercenaries that had protected the Thermopylai pass. The Athenians, therefore, had to be willing to repair the damaged Boiotian trust if they truly wished to keep Philip from invading Attica.

Again, it is a testimony to the importance of Boiotia in Athenian strategy, and not simply a fearful equation of two powers wishing to stop Philip. In an almost mirror image of the Persian Wars, the two neighbours had learned that the Spartans were not to be

¹²⁸ Buckler 2003: 452-87.

¹²⁹ Kelly 1980 provides an overview. This can also be perceived from the fact that the Thebans had allowed Athenian troops to march to Amphissa, and thus through their territory, unhindered: Aeschin. 3.146.

¹³⁰ Philoch. *FGrH* 328 F 56b.

¹³¹ Demosthenes used to be ascribed the majority of the responsibility for obtaining the alliance, but new fragments of Hyperides' speeches have thrown a new light on the situation: Guth 2014. The Athenians had to demonstrate their commitment to defend the Boiotian border, which they did by marching their army out to Eleusis to evidence their willingness.

¹³² See the treatment of the arrangement by Mosley 1972.

trusted to venture beyond the Peloponnese to protect their allies. The only ones they could reliably call upon to defend their borders, were each other, even if the combined forces were no match for Philip's military prowess.

The defeat at Chaironeia in 338 inaugurated a new political landscape in Central Greece. The king set about strengthening his hold over Central Greece by granting Oropos its freedom, while installing Macedonian garrisons in places such as Thebes.¹³³ The calming effects these garrisons had on Athenian willingness to fight the Macedonians can be gauged in their reluctance during the Theban revolt of 335 and the rebellion of Agis III in Sparta. Conversely, when they did rise in revolt at the start of the Lamian War, their efforts were initially blocked by the Boiotians – *sans* Thebes – again demonstrating the problems a hostile Boiotia could pose to Athenian plans.¹³⁴

Conclusion

In sum, Boiotia occupied a central position in Athenian strategic considerations. Because of its strategic location, the region of Boiotia could act as the perfect safeguard for the Athenians, either as a buffer for oncoming forces from the north, or to prevent hostile armies crossing into northern Greece. Therefore, it was imperative to keep the Boiotians on the right side of the equation. In the 5th century, this was mostly achieved through the instalment of friendly regimes, or through forceful occupation. The futility of the latter tactic was proven by the disastrous campaign at Coronea in 447, and the debacle at Delion in 424. In the 4th century, on the other hand, a different strategy was applied. Most of the times, their alliances came together voluntarily – albeit due to some external pressure. In these cases, equivocal agreements over the contested border regions accompanied their alliances, mitigating any negative effects over border issues. Finally, their collaborations were not simply inspired by fear of a mutual foe. It was the realisation that they were the perfect natural ally for each other, not only dictated by personal preferences, but just as much through geography.

¹³³ For Oropos: Knoepfler 2001: 371-85.

¹³⁴ Sealey 1993: 202-5, 215-19.

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