

Routledge Monographs in Classical Studies

CRISIS AND RESILIENCE IN ANCIENT GREEK ALLIANCES

CROSS-BORDER COOPERATION

Edited by

Elena Franchi, Angela Ganter and Felix K. Maier



Crisis and Resilience in Ancient Greek Alliances

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

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

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

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LONDON AND NEW YORK

First published 2027
by Routledge
4 Park Square, Milton Park, Abingdon, Oxon OX14 4RN

and by Routledge
605 Third Avenue, New York, NY 10158

Routledge is an imprint of the Taylor & Francis Group, an informa business

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British Library Cataloguing-in-Publication Data

A catalogue record for this book is available from the British Library

ISBN: 978-1-041-00204-8 (hbk)

ISBN: 978-1-041-00210-9 (pbk)

ISBN: 978-1-003-60870-7 (ebk)

DOI: 10.4324/9781003608707

Typeset in Times New Roman
by Deanta Global Publishing Services, Chennai, India



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



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

Case Studies

Daniela Bonanno

1. Introduction

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

3. Keeping Oaths without Kinship

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

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

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

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

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

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

4. Keeping Alliances through Oaths

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

5. When Swearing Is Not Enough

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

6. Conclusion

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

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

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

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

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

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

Notes

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

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

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

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

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

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