

1 | Introduction

In 424 an invading Athenian army was intercepted by a Boiotian army near Delion. Most Boiotian generals were disinclined to engage in battle, before one of their peers, Pagondas, delivered a rousing, mind-changing speech:

As between neighbours generally, freedom (*eleutheria*) means simply a determination to hold one's own; and with neighbours like these, who are trying to enslave near and far alike, there is nothing for it but to fight it out to the last. Just regard the state of the Euboians and of most of the rest of Hellas, and be convinced that others have to fight with their neighbours for this frontier or that, but that for us conquest means one border for the whole country, about which no dispute can be made, for they will simply come and take by force what we have. So much more have we to fear from this neighbour than from another... The Athenians have shown us this themselves; the defeat which we inflicted upon them at Koroneia, at the time when our quarrels had allowed them to occupy the country, has given great security to Boiotia until the present day.¹

In his speech Pagondas tackles the central theme of this book: the neighbourly relations between the Athenians and Boiotians. He summarises the key three themes. First, he touches upon the normative practices in the Greek world when he speaks of the inalienable right of *eleutheria* that each polity should enjoy. This rallying cry is specifically tailored to the ideological battlegrounds of the Peloponnesian War. In the rest of his speech he relates how the Athenians' abrasive, expansionist behaviour went against the mores of Greek politics. Second, the Athenians are relentless in their desire for more land, ignoring that traditionally frontiers between polities could be disputed, but should never be erased. This deals with the geo-political aspects of their relationship. Finally, he reflects on the past neighbourly interactions when he evokes the memory of the battle of Koroneia (446), when Boiotian insurgents expelled the Athenians and, through it, obtained freedom for the region. The conventions of conduct between polities, the role of disputed lands and geographical considerations, and the commemoration of the shared past

¹ Thuc. 4.92.4–6.

are the three themes that will be treated in this book. Together they constitute a fresh analysis that appreciates the neighbourly relations in a different, more positive and polyvalent light.

This represents a departure from previous studies. Scholars normally view this dyad as rife with hostility, inspired by the Realist school of international relations.² According to this view, poleis were in a constant state of war, and periods of peace constituted only a short-term reprieve from this state of affairs. Alternatively, times of collaboration were the result of a shared fear of a third party, such as the Spartans. It assumes decision-makers were rational actors principally interested in optimising their own gain at the expense of others, without concerns for morals or non-rational arguments such as justice. Induced by mutual fear and driven by expansionism, the Athenians and Boiotians were caught in a vicious cycle of fear, conflict and distrust, fuelled by an inveterate hostility. Force and strength, not moral principles, were the guiding light of Greek interstate affairs. This lack of morality is reflected in our sources. Periods of war are vividly remembered through oral traditions, memorials and festivals that commemorate the devious neighbour. In sum, they were natural enemies because of their proximity.

Or so the story goes. I will argue instead that Pagondas describes an anomaly in Atheno-Boiotian history that unfortunately has been taken as the norm. The aim of this book is to demonstrate that the Athenians and Boiotians were not natural enemies, but rather the opposite. This partially builds upon new insights in interstate relations and the formation of memorial practices, and will be combined with a re-evaluation of the borderlands and the geographical setting.³ A central point is their geographical entwinement, which tied their fates together, leading to a mutual understanding and realisation of dependence. Naturally that does not prohibit any hostile intentions between them. Just as human experience is varied and cannot be caught in a monolithic model, so too the neighbourly relations were idiosyncratic.⁴ The three themes mentioned above –

² Buckler and Beck 2008: 23; Cartledge 2020; Eckstein 2006; 2012; Finley 1985; Garlan 1989; Hornblower 2011; Kagan 1987; Roberts 2017. Two examples illustrate the dominance of the Realist discourse: 'In short, Athens had begun to fear Thebes more than Sparta' (Buckler and Beck 2008: 41); 'Nevertheless the chief Athenian anxiety continued to be Thebes' (Hornblower 2011: 255).

³ Van Wees 2004: 9–13; Low 2007; Giovannini 2007; Hunt 2010. Scharff 2016; Sommerstein and Bayliss 2013 on the credibility of oaths in interstate discourse. For the investigation of memory: Barbato 2020; Canevaro 2018; Harris 2013; Liddel 2020; Shear 2011; Steinbock 2013.

⁴ This is a median way between the Christ's pessimistic view of altruism (Christ 2012) and Herman's idealistic naïve image of the Athenians embracing a code of conduct that underreacted to aggression (Herman 2006). Low 2007: 175–211 offers a more satisfactory approach.

the conventions of conduct between polities, the role of disputed lands and geographical considerations, and the commemoration of the shared past – will illuminate the complex nature of the relations between these two regions. To grasp the interrelatedness of these regions and how that impacts their relations, a short description of Attica and Boiotia is needed.

1.1 More Than Spots on the Map: The Geography of Attica and Boiotia

Attica and Boiotia were similarly sized, yet differed in various ways.⁵ Attica was more arid, save for the fertile areas around Eleusis and Rhamnous. It was home to several larger settlements, such as Eleusis, which were gradually integrated into the Athenian *polis*.⁶ Of its harbours, Phaleron was the oldest but was supplanted by Piraeus.⁷ Attica also contained a rich vein of silver in the Laurion region.⁸ The peninsula's northern edge were the mountain ranges stretching from Mount Kithairon to Mount Parnes, while the Aegean and Saronic Gulf beckoned in the east and south. The access to the sea, combined with the mining activities, formed the basis of the Athenian wealth, especially since the lands were not capable of supporting the population, making food imports essential.⁹

Boiotia was fertile, filled with rich plains watered by alluvial deposits flowing from rivers like the Asopos. The region consisted of two basins, one in the northwest and one to the southeast, enclosed on both sides by mountain chains. Mount Parnassos acted as a beacon in the northwest, with Mount Parnes and Mount Kithairon fulfilling that role in the south. The waters of the Corinthian Gulf and the Euripos Strait straddled the Boiotian coasts.¹⁰ In contrast to Attica, Boiotia was home to several independent poleis, such as Tanagra, Thespiai and Plataia, with Thebes the dominant force due to its size. The mosaic of poleis created a different political ecology, leading to the Boiotian experiments with common polities like the *koinon*.¹¹

⁵ The section title is a direct nod to Finley 1963: 35, who claimed that Athens itself – whether its territory or economy – ‘never meant anything but a spot on the map’. Attica is ca. 2.550 km² with islands included, but without Oropos: Busolt and Swoboda 1926: II 758. Boiotia is 2.580 km²: Bintliff and Snodgrass 1985: 142; Gonzalez Pascual 2006: 44 calculates 2.554 km².

⁶ For pre-Kleisthenic Attica: Rönneberg 2021. ⁷ Paga 2021: 187–96. ⁸ Nomicos 2021.

⁹ Bresson 2016; Moreno 2007 for the food supply. Paga 2021: 257–63 for the basis of wealth.

¹⁰ For more on Boiotian geography: Farinetti 2011.

¹¹ Boiotia's political innovations contrast with its reputation as a cultural backwater, as ancient sources and modern scholars are wont to do. Ephoros FGrH 70 F119 believed the Thebans offered little culturally in comparison to Spartan *agoge* and Athenian *paideia*. Yet Sabetai 2022

Binding these regions was the intermediate mountain range between Mount Kithairon in the west to Mount Parnes in the east. Previous studies viewed these mountains as a severe obstacle to communications and interactions, yet the realities of quotidian life show the opposite.¹² Mountains may seem an intransigently physical boundary, but the mountainous delineation of the frontier between Athens and Boiotia was ultimately a human construct. The mountains could be circumvented by way of Oropos, rendering the notion of a defensible border through fortifying the mountain passes tenuous.¹³ Their geographical entwinement ensured both polities could not act independently of another. This realisation is key, as it functions as an important corrective to the notion of constantly warring poleis.

1.2 A Constant State of War?

‘For (as he would say) “peace”, as the term is commonly employed, is nothing more than a name, the truth being that every polis is, by a law of nature, engaged perpetually in an informal war with every other polis.’¹⁴ These words have frequently been accepted *prima facie* as constituting the natural state of affairs between Greek poleis.¹⁵ Envisioning a similar scenario for the neighbourly relations seems almost natural. The Athenians in particular had a reputation for constant warfare. A recent study calculates war was on the agenda almost every year of the Classical period, an impressive tally.¹⁶ War was ubiquitous in Athenian life and war with the neighbours was no exception.¹⁷

Or was it? The annals of history appear replete with references to conflict. Scholars eagerly follow the ancient sources by assuming these neighbours were natural enemies, their licentious desire to outdo one another interrupted by hiatuses of peace.¹⁸ Collaboration was perceived

has persuasively traced the cultural influence of Boiotian artists in various media. On the *koinon*: Beck 1997; Beck and Ganter 2015; Kalliontzis 2021; Mackil 2013; Schachter 2016a.

¹² König 2022.

¹³ Farinetti 2011; Fossey 1988: 1–13. Ober 1985a for the idea of a defensive wall shielding Attica from invasion.

¹⁴ Pl. *Laws* 626a. See also Hdt. 7.9.

¹⁵ Low 2007: 1–6; 16–29. A good corrective to the notion of ubiquitous warfare can be found in the desire for peace over war in ancient sources: Moloney and Williams 2017; Raaflaub 2007; 2016.

¹⁶ Pritchard 2018: 7; 138–57. ¹⁷ Meier 1990.

¹⁸ Kühn 2006: 176: ‘unter Peisistratos, nur im einen seltenen Phase athenisch-thebaischer Kooperation’.

as an exception, brought about through a common threat. Times of possible peace unmentioned by our sources were automatically assumed to be periods of hostility.¹⁹ Yet this overlooks ‘the dark side of the moon’: the side of the neighbourly relations omitted by our sources. Uneventful years could be ignored by ancient chroniclers and historians, as these make for less compelling storytelling. Understanding the limitations of our sources is therefore necessary, as it can correct some of the misassumptions regarding the neighbourly relations.

Another helpful tool to redress this issue is a longer diachronic perspective. In Chapter 2 the Atheno-Boiotians relations from the mid-sixth century till the start of the Hellenic or Lamian War in 323 will be reviewed. This historical overview provides the backdrop on which to project the subsequent thematic chapters. It also demonstrates that war was not the natural state of the neighbours. The years of hostility add up to 104 years, less than half of the time under consideration. This includes the thirty-six years of ‘cold war’ in the mid-fourth century, during which little combat occurred (Chapter 2.6). This is not to refute that war was a real possibility, but it serves as a reminder that war was not a natural outcome. Collaboration or friendly relations were not an anomaly, as evidenced by the years of peaceful co-existence (Chapters 2.1, 2.3, 2.5).

If mutual anxiety over a common foe did not lead to chronic warfare or collaboration, what were the factors that influenced the neighbourly relations? Chapter 3 addresses this question. The thematic investigations of the military and political relations in the years between 550 and 323 build upon new insights in the study of international relations in Classical Greece. These studies stress the importance of ‘non-rational’ factors such as kinship, social memory, reputation, reciprocity and justice for guiding interstate norms and decision-making.²⁰ Several case studies will demonstrate how these factors impacted decision-making, whether negatively or positively. What emerges is a more complex picture of neighbourly relations and the realisation that the skein of kinship ties, reciprocal considerations

¹⁹ Steinbock 2013: 79 dismisses the diplomatic solution in Aeschylus’ *Eleusinians* as an Athenian-Theban rapprochement ‘in light of the political circumstances’. But there is no evidence of hostilities at the time (Chapters 2.3, 3.2.1). Cartledge 2020: 16; Lalonde 2019: 183 n. 63; Wilding 2021: 32 for similar assessments of this period.

²⁰ Giovannini 2007; Hunt 2010; Lendon 2010; Low 2007; van Wees 2004. Lebow 2008 created an overly reductionist honour-centric model, as there were several overarching motives in the interstate arena.

and moral arguments played an equally large, if not larger, role in military and political matters.²¹

1.3 For Lands That Are Lost Now, but Once So Dearly Held?

Motivations like kinship, honour and standing could outweigh ‘rational’, materialistic considerations like the conquest of disputed borderlands. Scholars have been preoccupied with hostile interactions as the governing mode of interaction in the borderlands.²² They argue the attachment to ancestral lands or desire for symbolic capital in a rivalry underpins neighbourly interactions.²³ Yet Chapter 4’s analysis of the borderlands reveals a different reality.

Contrary to scholarly orthodoxy, quarrels over borderlands arose *after* hostilities had broken out over other matters, which granted the opportunity to conquer disputed districts. The successful conquest of land showed the approval from the gods. This success could be confirmed in the final treaty following the conflict. Such a re-evaluation integrates recent advances in our understanding of borderlands as zones of interaction.²⁴ This meshes with a re-appraisal of the ancient economy that moves away from the ideal of autarky advanced by the primitivist school of Moses Finley. Specialisation in the Greek world stimulated exchange and dependence on other polities for certain products.²⁵ This interdependence

²¹ Stressing ‘non-rational’ factors does not mean the Greeks were incapable of rational decision-making. Ober 2022 argues they were instrumentally rational, capable of thinking ahead and determining the cost and benefits of actions. Irrational arguments such as oracles could thereby still inform decision-makers, who then calculated whether a decision should be taken.

²² Buckler and Beck 2008: 23; Cartledge 2020; Eckstein 2006; 2012; Finley 1985; Garland 1989; Hornblower 2011; Kagan 1987; Rockwell 2017: 45; vanden Eijnde 2011. Another recent example, albeit in a different area, is Ager 2019. She employs the contemporary theoretical framework of enduring rivalries to uncover the difficulties of the Spartan integration into the Achaian *koinon*. Their attachment to their lands prevented a smooth integration. In Ager 1996 she traces the history of arbitration over disputed borders, demonstrating mechanisms that existed to channel border disputes into diplomatic venues. Cf. Müller 2016: 20: ‘Wars over borders and territories were incredibly numerous and persistent in the world of Greek poleis until the Roman Empire.’

²³ Ma 2009; Sartre 1979; van Wees 2007 stress the symbolic value of border disputes.

²⁴ De Polignac 2011; 2017; Fachard 2017; McInerney 2006. There were possible ‘border markets’, supporting the idea of border areas as transitional negotiatory zones: Munn 1989; Tandy 1997: 120. The ‘Plataia gate’ inscription at the Eleutherai fortress demonstrates how goods could be taxed and travelled through the borderlands: Fachard et al. 2020a.

²⁵ Bresson 2016; Harris, Lewis and Woolmer 2015; Izdebski et al. 2020. Manning 2017 on the futility of creating a dichotomous application of ancient economy.

added another motivation to avoid warfare, as it obstructed economic exchange.²⁶

To understand the geographical entanglement of the neighbours, and how it impacted their relationship, additional geographical factors like the Boiotia's harbours and its role as a buffer for Attica will be considered. These case studies reveal that the geographical entwinement of the neighbours impeded repeated conflicts, for it was more advantageous for the Athenians and Boiotians to cooperate. The geographical entwinement inhibited the desire to wage war over coveted lands, despite the repeated claims by orators that Oropos should be recovered, or Plataia be restored.

1.4 Lest We Forget: Commemoration and Social Memory

The mention of orators leads us to the expressions of remembering the neighbourly history and its outlet in the commemorative practices. Social memory could influence decision-making, as orators recalled past events and pointed to older decrees to sway their listeners.²⁷ Physical markers in the landscape, such as trophies or buildings, acted as foundations to build their stories of glorious memories or eventful defeats upon. These stories, festivals and memorials helped shape the Athenian and Boiotian self-image. These views could feed into the decision-making process and positively or negatively impact the neighbourly relations.

The cultures of commemoration were not a homogenous phenomenon. In Chapter 5 both sacred and civic spaces will be analysed to unravel the perception of the shared past and investigate the use of sanctuaries as mirrors for neighbourly relations. This investigation will show that its memorisation was mostly a local affair and intended to act as a backdrop for galvanising the population against the neighbour at opportune times. On a Panhellenic level, however, this rivalry went understated. Rather, it was frequently Spartan agency that determined dedications at Panhellenic sanctuaries. Concerns over displaying the credentials to act as leaders of the Greeks were another factor. This undercuts the notion that these neighbours were natural enemies. One would expect any advantage gained at the expense of the other would have been advertised at the highest possible platform at sanctuaries such as Delphi. This localised perspective clarifies

²⁶ E.g., the famous eels of Lake Kopais: *Ar. Ach.* ll. 940–50; *Pax* l. 1000.

²⁷ Barbato 2020; Canevaro 2019; Harris 2013; Shear 2011. Liddel 2020 demonstrates how the interplay between decrees and orators strengthened the bonds of social memory in swaying decision-making processes.

that stories of conflict fostered bonds between people within the same community. To facilitate that feeling, it was necessary to have an obvious 'other'. In this case, the neighbour performed that task since their proximity provided the perfect foil to project a different image on.²⁸

1.5 Studying the Neighbourly Relations *sui generis*

A new manner of looking at the neighbourly relations necessitates a fresh way to read our sources since the questions you ask shape the answers you get. Our (literary) sources are not infallible and should be treated as such. One issue is the Athenocentrism of many literary sources. The occasions where we catch a true glimpse of the viewpoint of other polities are rare. Sometimes these shine through, but are then imbedded within an anti-Boiotian source like Herodotus or Xenophon, which complicates the task of extracting a more benign view of an event. On other occasions, these non-Athenian views are lodged in later historians or writers such as Diodorus or Plutarch, whose historical pedigree is often dismissed on the basis of their lateness. Yet their reputation has been rehabilitated in recent years.²⁹ The appreciation of local histories, combined with the critical engagement with historians of impeccable credulity such as Thucydides, has allowed these authors to be viewed as representatives of other traditions that merit investigation.³⁰ Additionally, authors with credibility, such as the Oxyrhynchus historian, suffer from the fragmentary nature of their work.³¹ Xenophon has stepped out of the shadow of Thucydides and has been viewed as a useful historian in his own right, but his anti-Theban sentiment and moralistic tendency clouds much of his narrative.³² Orators such as Isocrates or Demosthenes provide other pieces of information that can reveal those parts not covered in the historical writers and help patch together the history of the fourth century.

Each writer has their own agenda and this will be treated accordingly within the main text when critical engagement with the source is necessary.

²⁸ For Thebes as an anti-Athens: Zeitlin 1990. Cerri 2000; Berman 2015: 75–121 warn for overly monochromatic interpretations of Athenian plays.

²⁹ For Diodorus' reputation as a historian: Muntz 2017; Sacks 2014. Buckler 1993; Stadter 2015: 56 rightly note that Plutarch exhibits an adroit sense of historical criticism vis-à-vis established historians such as Thucydides.

³⁰ For a critical evaluation of Thucydides and Herodotus' speeches: Scardino 2007. For local histories: Thomas 2019; Tufano 2019a.

³¹ Occhipinti 2016. ³² Christ 2020.

Methodologically, these sources require re-evaluating. Scholars perceived them in a classical historicist sense and thus *looked* for evidence of hostility, which these ancient writers provide aplenty. A more critical historicist approach reveals these accounts of conflict were written because of their value as compelling stories, but they do not reflect the lived experience. Posing different questions to our sources can thus reveal a divergent underlying dynamic of the neighbourly relations. It is this perspective I aim to uncover in this book.

Archaeology is a great aid to this endeavour. Survey archaeology provides glimpses of lived realities, for instance, in the hinterland of Thespiai; excavations uncovered new inscriptions that significantly altered our understanding of the neighbourly relations in the Archaic and Classical periods.³³ These inscriptions, most prominently the *kioniskos* from Thebes, act as an important corrective to the Athenocentrism of our written sources (see Figure 1.1 for these places).³⁴ Epigraphy and archaeology can therefore help illuminate a different side to the neighbourly relations.

A final note concerns my usage of the ‘Thebans’, the ‘Boiotoi’ or ‘Boiotians’. These are not interchangeable. These terms are not a collective for *all* Boiotians, since the Plataians were notorious dissidents. Whenever I employ ‘the Thebans’, I mean the Thebans alone, since our sources are unspecific. In the case of ‘the Boiotoi’ or Boiotians, I mean the *koinon*. This never includes the Plataians; these will be mentioned separately if they played a role. Confusingly, the sources do mention the Thebans when they mean the Boiotians. However, this is often the result of the mid-fourth-century dominance of the Thebans over their Boiotian brethren. In Athenian sources, referring to the Thebans rather than the Boiotians was meant as an insult, considering the Thebans viewed themselves as the *extension of the Boiotoi* and representatives of the *koinon*. Sources such as Demosthenes or Diodorus thus refer to the Thebans as representing the *koinon*, rather than the inhabitants of the polis. A case in point is the situation in 402 in Oropos. Diodorus writes that the Thebans added the Oropia to Boiotia (Chapter 4.1.2).³⁵ This is a tricky example, since Diodorus retrojects the dominance of the Thebans onto the past. It probably concerned the *Boiotoi* who decided to add the Oropia to Boiotia rather than the Thebans. Another interesting example is the shift

³³ Bintliff, Howard and Snodgrass 2007; Bintliff, Farinetti, Slapšak and Snodgrass 2017; Fachard et al. 2020a.

³⁴ Aravantinos 2006. This inscription is treated in Chapters 4.1.1, 5.2.2.

³⁵ Diod. 14.17.2–4; Theopompos FGrH 115 F12.



Figure 1.1 Overview of important places.

from ‘Boiotians’ to ‘Thebans’ in the narrative of the invasion of 507/6 and subsequent quarrels with the Athenians (Chapter 2.2).³⁶ This clarification hopefully helps to distinguish my usage of these names.

By combining chronological and thematic approaches, this book will highlight the idiosyncrasies of the Atheno-Boiotian relations. What emerges is a polychrome picture of the ancient experience. There is not one overarching theoretical model that explains the nature of these relations, nor is there one answer to determine it. Several case studies will illuminate how the neighbourly relations were influenced by a range of factors, such as reputation, honour and reciprocity, rather than being dictated by fear and military power. This applies to the contested borderlands as well. Disputes over these lands were an *extension* of conflict, not the cause thereof. The outbreak of hostilities cannot be reduced to a monolithic picture of territorial desiderata. It will be argued that the Athenians and Boiotians understood that their geographical entwinement

³⁶ Hdt. 5.76–9.

meant their fortunes' entwinement, and that collaboration was more beneficial than hostility. That did not preclude the outbreak of hostilities, as the commemoration of the shared past demonstrates. Yet even those layers of antagonism can be stripped back to reveal their apparent 'hatred' aimed to strengthen the internal bonds of the polis or *koinon*, rather than foment further hostilities. This book will thus help to illuminate the possibilities a study of interstate relations in the 'longue durée' can procure, and the importance of taking geography into consideration when studying the relations between polities.