1

Kinsmen, Friends and Allies

The society of states

When the city of Sybaris was sacked and razed to the ground, the peop
of Miletus, at the other end of the Mediterranean, shaved their heads a
went into deep mourning. Miletus and Sybaris, we are told, 'were mo
closely bound together by friendship than any cities we know'. Why th
were so close we can only guess;[1] the remarkable fact is that two ind
pendent, distant communities enjoyed a friendship far beyond the ter
of any formal alliance they may have had. Sybaris' failure to 'repay in ki
when Miletus was sacked in turn was greeted with surprise and dis
proval, and it was noted that some of Miletus' other friends did know wh
was expected of them: the Athenians showed 'extreme grief' in 'all sort
ways', including a ban on performances of *The Capture of Miletus* an
heavy fine for the play's author for 'recalling misfortunes close to ho
(Herodotus 6.21).

Informal relations of kinship and friendship between states were m
pervasive in ancient Greece than the 'special relationships' between sta
which exist in the modern world, and they were no less significant th
formal relations created by treaties or membership in international org
isations. Indeed, the hundreds of Greek communities in the homeland
scattered around the coasts of the Mediterranean and the Black Sea w
bound together by such a variety of relationships that they should
thought of as a *society* of states[2] – an international community with its
hierarchy and internal networks, shared rules and rituals, and, inevita
tensions and conflicts which sometimes turned violent.

Greeks against the world

For a Greek, everyone who lived beyond the borders of his city or re
was a 'stranger' (*xenos*); each community took pride in being different f
the others in dialect, script, cults and political institutions. Yet the Gr
also believed that all Hellenes, as they called themselves, shared cha
teristics which set them apart from others: 'the same blood and the s
language and common shrines and sacrifices, as well as similar cust
(Herodotus 8.144). All those who did not speak Greek were dismiss

'jabberers' (the literal meaning of *barbaroi*, 'barbarians') and excluded from taking part in competitions at the great panhellenic festivals. Boundaries between Greeks and others were only slightly blurred at the edges: the 'barbarian' Macedonians were excluded from the games, but an exception was made for their kings, who claimed that they were of distant Greek descent.[3]

Some sense of a distinctive Greek identity emerges already in the earliest surviving poetry, and it grew ever more pronounced. Homer's *Iliad*, composed *c.* 700 BC, presents the Trojan War as a conflict between the united forces of all the Greeks (the 'Panhellenes', or their legendary equivalent, the 'Panachaeans') and a loose coalition of eastern nations who were divided by their different languages and were inferior to the Greeks in military matters.[4] Success in war against the Persian empire during the fifth century fed into this kind of thinking, and inspired a popular theory of ethnic superiority which asserted that Greeks were innately superior and born to rule. Barbarians were born to live as slaves or subjects. The corollary was that in war one should spare Greeks but could legitimately massacre or enslave the 'alien and foreign' (Plato, *Republic* 470c). Xenophon in his historical memoirs approves when the Spartan admiral Lysander punishes the Athenians for their violent treatment of fellow-Greeks, and in the same chapter defends Lysander when he in turn enslaves the people of Cedreae, because 'they were half-barbarian' (*Hellenica* 2.1.15, 31-2).[5] In the fourth century BC, politicians and intellectuals alike urged the Greeks not to wage war against one another at all, but to direct their united aggression outwards against non-Greeks. Aristotle declared that waging war against barbarians with a view to enslaving them was 'righteous by nature', a legitimate form of violence much like hunting animals.[6]

Within the Greek world, all states were notionally equal insofar as they were meant to enjoy political independence (*autonomia*) without undue interference by others. Some were inevitably more equal than others, since the smallest of these communities had territories of only a few square kilometres inhabited by perhaps a thousand people, while the largest covered several thousand square kilometres and had up to a quarter of a million inhabitants, including slaves or serfs.[7] Superior resources could be translated into a recognised but informal position of *hêgemonia*, 'hegemony', also called *archê*, a term conventionally translated as 'empire' ('hegemony's evil twin') but really just another word for 'leadership'.[8]

A position of leadership might extend only to immediate neighbours or allies, or ultimately embrace all Greeks. The Spartans were the first to achieve the position of 'leader of the Greeks' around 550 BC. They presented themselves as legitimate successors to the legendary ruler of all Greece, Agamemnon, by creating a relic cult around the miraculously rediscovered skeleton of his son, Orestes. 'How loudly Agamemnon would wail if he heard that the leadership had been taken away from the

Spartans!', they would say in defence of their dominance.[9] Sparta's leadership was challenged in the fifth century by Athens, and in the fourth century by many another contender, but the idea that *someone* needed to be the leader of the Greeks became deeply ingrained. Unless one state was in charge, the world seemed in 'disorder'.[10] The leader's role was ideally to act as 'champion' (*prostatês*) of the other Greeks. 'Since everyone treats them with the greatest respect, leaders must look out for the common interest, as much as cultivate their own interests' (Thucydides 1.120.1). The Spartans were asked more than once to liberate fellow-Greeks from the Persian empire on the grounds that this was a champion's rightful duty.[11]

Reality fell short of these ideals. Powerful cities infringed, to a greater or lesser degree, the autonomy of nearby towns or more distant allies, and were often accused of relying on coercion, like 'tyrants', rather than on their authority as 'champions'. In war, fellow-Greeks were certainly not always spared: some two dozen small cities were annihilated in the classical period alone. Nevertheless, the ideals of the Greek community were not an irrelevance in international politics. The autonomy of the city-states was taken seriously enough to win enthusiastic support for the greater powers when they announced that their goal in war was the 'liberation' of the weaker, while the taboo on enslaving other Greeks was strong enough to cause an outcry whenever it was broken.[12]

'The same blood and common shrines'

Blood relations were almost as important between Greek states as they were between individuals. The Greeks saw themselves as a single large family, descended from Hellen, son of Deucalion, and the four main dialect groups – Dorians, Ionians, Aeolians and Achaeans – were regarded as kin groups as well, each with a son or grandson of Hellen as common ancestor. Particularly close ties of kinship (*syngeneia*) existed where one city had, or claimed to have, founded another by providing settlers or at least an official founder for it. These affiliations were important enough to be specified for almost every entry in Herodotus' catalogue of Greek forces at the Battle of Salamis ('the Aeginetans are Dorians from Epidaurus', 'the Naxians are Ionians from Athens', and so on; 8.43-8) and to be cited repeatedly in his *Histories* as a motivation in international relations. Whereas Sparta got involved with the affairs of eastern Greek cities in their capacity as 'leader of the Greeks', the Athenians did so on the basis of kinship with 'their colonists'.[13]

In an extraordinary extension of the concept, some non-Greeks claimed kinship with the Greeks. A king of Persia is said to have argued that it was appropriate for the Persians to form an alliance with the city of Argos since they were descended from Perses, son of Perseus, a legendary Argive hero: 'We are your descendants, and it is not proper for us to campaign against

our ancestors, or for you to support others and become our adversaries' (Herodotus 7.150). The story is unlikely to be true, but it expresses clearly the Greek notion that kinship between communities should be a major consideration in interstate relations.[14]

Thucydides, by contrast, went out of his way to argue that kinship was only a nominal factor in international politics, or, more precisely, in international politics as conducted by the Athenians. He insisted that 'the truest reason' for the Athenians' interventions in Sicily – officially in defence of kindred cities – was their desire for strategic advantages and, later, for the conquest of the whole island (3.86.4; 6.6.1). At the culmination of Athens' Sicilian expedition, he presented a catalogue of the assembled forces, specifying, in an echo of Herodotus, their kinship affiliations; his purpose, however, was to show that 'they took sides *not* primarily in accordance with justice or *kinship*, but according to either expedience or coercion, as the circumstances dictated in each case' (7.57.1). He noted, therefore, all instances of kinsmen fighting one another (along the lines of 'these Aeolians fought under compulsion against Aeolians, their founders', or 'the Argives, ... for their private gain, as Dorians followed the Ionian Athenians against Dorians', 7.57.5, 9). Because there is no parallel for kinship between states in the modern world, we too may feel sceptical about it as a motive in war, and we may even be tempted to deny kinship any real role at all. But we would be wrong. Thucydides did not categorically dismiss kinship, but freely admitted that some communities supported one another 'on the basis of their kinship'.[15] His claim that the Athenians dismissed such considerations was not a statement of the obvious, but a controversially 'realist' view of their behaviour, argued in opposition to the likes of Herodotus who clearly felt that kinship was a major concern even for Athens.[16]

Blood relations involved shared religious rites. Just as all Greeks took part in panhellenic games and cults, so their ethnic subdivisions and 'family' clusters each had common festivals and rituals. Even at the height of their power and at their most 'tyrannical', the Athenians went to much trouble to forge religious bonds, most spectacularly through their repeated ritual purifications of the sanctuary of Apollo on Delos, a common cult centre for all Ionians. They exhumed and relocated all burials on the island, revived and enhanced the traditional local Ionian festival, and finally purified Delos yet more thoroughly by temporarily removing all its, supposedly polluted, living inhabitants as well. Thucydides, for all his cynicism, accepts that this was done from genuinely religious motives. Athens also obliged its allies and colonists to attend the major Athenian festivals, bringing 'a cow and a panoply' to the Great Panathenaea and a large image of a phallus to the Dionysia.[17]

Some groups of states formed 'amphictyonies', cult-associations responsible for the protection of a sanctuary. Historically the most important of these was the Delphic amphictyony, a league of mainly central and north-

ern Greek communities which met at a sanctuary near Thermopylae and, crucially, was also in charge of the Delphic oracle. Further south, we hear of Calaurian and Argive amphictyonies, while the Greek cities in the east divided along kinship lines, with Aeolians, Ionians, and Dorians each maintaining a common sanctuary from which other ethnic groups were banned.[18]

An amphictyony provided a forum for political co-operation and tried to regulate the conduct of its members. The Delphic oath included a promise 'not to destroy any city of the amphictyony nor to cut it off from running water, whether in war or in peace, but, if anyone broke these oaths, to send an army against him and destroy his cities' (Aeschines 2.115). The destruction of the town of Melia by the other members of the Ionian league, perhaps *c.* 700 BC, as a punishment for aggression, may show a similar rule being enforced, but otherwise we know only of attempts to fine aggressors. In 494 BC, the Argive amphictyony tried to impose a fine of 500 talents of silver each on two member states which had helped an outsider, Sparta, invade Argos itself, while after the battle of Leuctra in 371 BC, the Delphic amphictyony tried to impose the same 500-talent penalty on Sparta for their unjustifiable occupation of the citadel of Thebes. These attempts were ineffective, but they do tell us that the Greeks felt strongly enough about religious ties to try, at least, to contain conflict between fellow-worshippers. Those who 'shared the most solemn rituals and sacrifices and the most beautiful festivals' certainly *ought* not to fight one another.[19]

Friendship and reciprocity

Communities had sworn friends as well as family in the Greek world. Around 550 BC, two north-western cities recorded the following:

> THE AGREEMENT OF THE ANAITOI AND THE METAPIOI
> Friendship for fifty years. If anyone from either side is not steadfast, the representatives and the seers may drag him from the altar. If they break the oath, the priests at Olympia must be informed.

At about the same time, some Greek cities in southern Italy became even better friends:

> The Sybarites and their allies and the Serdaioi united in friendship, faithful and without deceit, *forever*. Guarantors: Zeus, Apollo and the other gods, and the city Posidonia.

Sworn friendship (*philia*) was not the same as a military alliance. Sybaris made a clear distinction between its new 'friends' and its old 'allies' (*symmachoi*); many other archaic and classical treaties promised both 'friendship *and* alliance'.[20] This was not an empty formula: the contractual obligations of an alliance differed from the commitments of friendship,

which were broader, more open-ended – and more emotionally charged, if the laments of the Milesians for the Sybarites (p. 6) are anything to go by. Even the Trojan War nearly ended with Greeks and Trojans becoming sworn friends, according to the *Iliad*: in a doomed attempt to stop the fighting they 'swore faithful oaths and friendship' (*philotês*) in a ritual which involved the sacrifice of sheep, libations of wine and solemn handshakes.[21]

The exchange of favours was central to Greek personal friendship, and so it was in friendships between states. The negotiations which set in motion the Peloponnesian War relied heavily on appeals to this sort of reciprocity. In asking for Athenian military aid the Corcyraeans admitted that Athens did not owe them anything 'on account of either a great good deed or an alliance'; they promised to show 'unshakeable gratitude' for this 'favour' (*charis*; Thucydides 1.32.1, 33.1-2). The Corinthians tried to win back Athens by calling in the favours which they were owed: apart from voting down Spartan action against Athens seven years ago, they said, 'let the younger men be informed by their elders' that some sixty years earlier Corinth had given the Athenians twenty warships, almost free of charge. It was now time for 'some gratitude in return', and a 'timely favour' from Athens would cancel out both the debt and some serious grievances.[22] The appeal to oral tradition about an act of generosity two generations old may seem strained, but the story was seriously discussed in Athens at the time. Herodotus heard it told as proof that the Corinthians had indeed shown themselves 'the best of friends' to Athens on that occasion (6.89). Folk memory was long: the Samians could claim that Sparta had 'returned a favour' by sending military aid in 525 BC, because Samos had done the same for Sparta a *century* earlier.[23]

Athenians liked to think that generosity was part of their national character. 'We win friends by doing rather than receiving favours ... and we are unique in fearlessly helping others, motivated less by calculations of expediency than by faith in generosity', Pericles was supposed to have said in his funeral oration for the war-dead (Thucydides 2.40.4-5). This attitude extended to international relations as well. When the Athenians accepted an alliance with the Boeotians in 395 BC, they were keen to point out that in doing so they were 'returning a greater favour than they had received' eight years earlier when the Boeotians had refused to march against Athens (Xenophon, *Hellenica* 3.5.8, 16). They were particularly fond of citing their crucial role in repelling two Persian invasions at great cost to themselves, not so much as evidence of their bravery, but as proof of their willingness to sacrifice everything for the benefit of others. Usually, such reminders that all Greeks were obligated to Athens served to justify Athenian international leadership: 'having single-handedly destroyed the barbarian, it is proper that we should be in charge'.[24]

Diplomats and politicians who invoked past acts of generosity did not confine themselves to the last few years or even the last few generations,

but cited, in all seriousness, examples from legend. A striking example is the envoy to Sparta in 371 BC who argued that, since the Spartans had once upon a time received a gift of seed-grain from an Athenian hero, 'it would be right for us never to bear arms against one another' (Xenophon, *Hellenica* 6.3.6). The Athenians' penchant for advertising past favours as the basis of their hegemony was also evident in their choice of relic cult: whereas the Spartans picked Orestes to hint at a hereditary position of leadership, the Athenians dug up and worshipped the bones of their mythical king Theseus, a selfless protector and benefactor of the vulnerable.[25]

Thucydides felt that Athens cynically exploited such appeals to the past, but the persistence and constant repetition of the themes of friendship, reciprocity and generosity shows that many Greek communities did keep a tally of favours done and received.[26] Obligations to friends were not, of course, the only consideration, and perhaps not often the decisive consideration, in making foreign policy, but they did count. Sparta sent 'an ox as a gift of friendship' to a loyal ally (Xenophon, *Hellenica* 7.2.3). Athens treated exceptional loyalty in its allies as a 'favour' or 'benefaction', and rewarded it with special honours, including Athenian citizenship.[27] Most dramatically, in the *Odyssey* the king of Sparta declares that he should like to reward the Ithacans for their services at Troy by clearing an entire city nearby for them to live in (4.168-80). This might seem an extravagant epic fantasy, were it not that the Spartans in 431 BC actually let the people of Aegina resettle in a city within Spartan territory, because these Aeginetans had been 'their benefactors' in a war some thirty years earlier.[28]

An offer of 'great mutual friendship and closeness', as well as 'peace and alliance' (Thucydides 4.19.1), thus implied a willingness to form ties broader than those of a military alliance alone. Indeed, communities could be friends, or 'close' (*oikeios*), or 'in harmony' (*arthmios*) without making a formal alliance at all. Such relations of reciprocity were taken seriously: even in early Greece, when states and international relations were at their least developed, a raid on a community 'in harmony' with one's own was deemed such an outrage that the raider on his return home could expect to be met by a lynch mob.[29]

Military aid and alliances

In early Greece, communities at war relied on friends and kinsmen to come to the rescue more or less spontaneously. As the *Iliad* pictures it, a city under attack would light fire-beacons 'to be seen by its neighbours, in the hope that these might come to protect them from war' (18.207-13). The poet imagined that kinsmen living abroad came to the aid of Troy of their own accord as soon as they 'heard the news' of the Greek invasion. Others were asked to send troops as 'helpers' (*epikouroi*), and these expected to be rewarded with generous gifts.[30] The invading army was assembled on a

similar basis: its commander travelled round Greece asking friends and others to follow him as a favour, in return for a share of the booty. Their 'agreements' (*synthêsiai*) were sealed with oaths, libations and handshakes, but remained short-term, not extending beyond a single campaign.[31]

At the very end of the seventh century BC, we first hear of a long-term military alliance, or 'symmachy' (*symmachia*), concluded between Miletus and the king of Lydia. At about the same time, the Sybarites and the Spartans each started making bilateral military alliances with their neighbours; by 550 BC both had established far-flung networks of allies in southern Italy and in the Peloponnese, respectively.[32] The earliest treaty of alliance of which we know the terms, dating to 550-500 BC, was defined in remarkably broad terms (Fig. 1):

THE AGREEMENT OF THE ELEANS AND THE HERAEANS

> Let there be an alliance for a hundred years, starting this year. If there is any need, whether for words or for deeds, let them join together in everything, especially in war. If they do not join together, those who have destroyed the agreement shall give in compensation a talent of silver to be used in the service of Zeus of Olympia.[33]

The relationship between the parties outlined in this treaty was so wide-ranging that it almost amounted to one of general friendship. What makes it different is the effort made to stress the need for mutual military aid ('especially in war') and to enforce the agreement by fining those who did not comply. A moral, reciprocal obligation was made more binding by turning it into a contractual and quasi-legal duty.

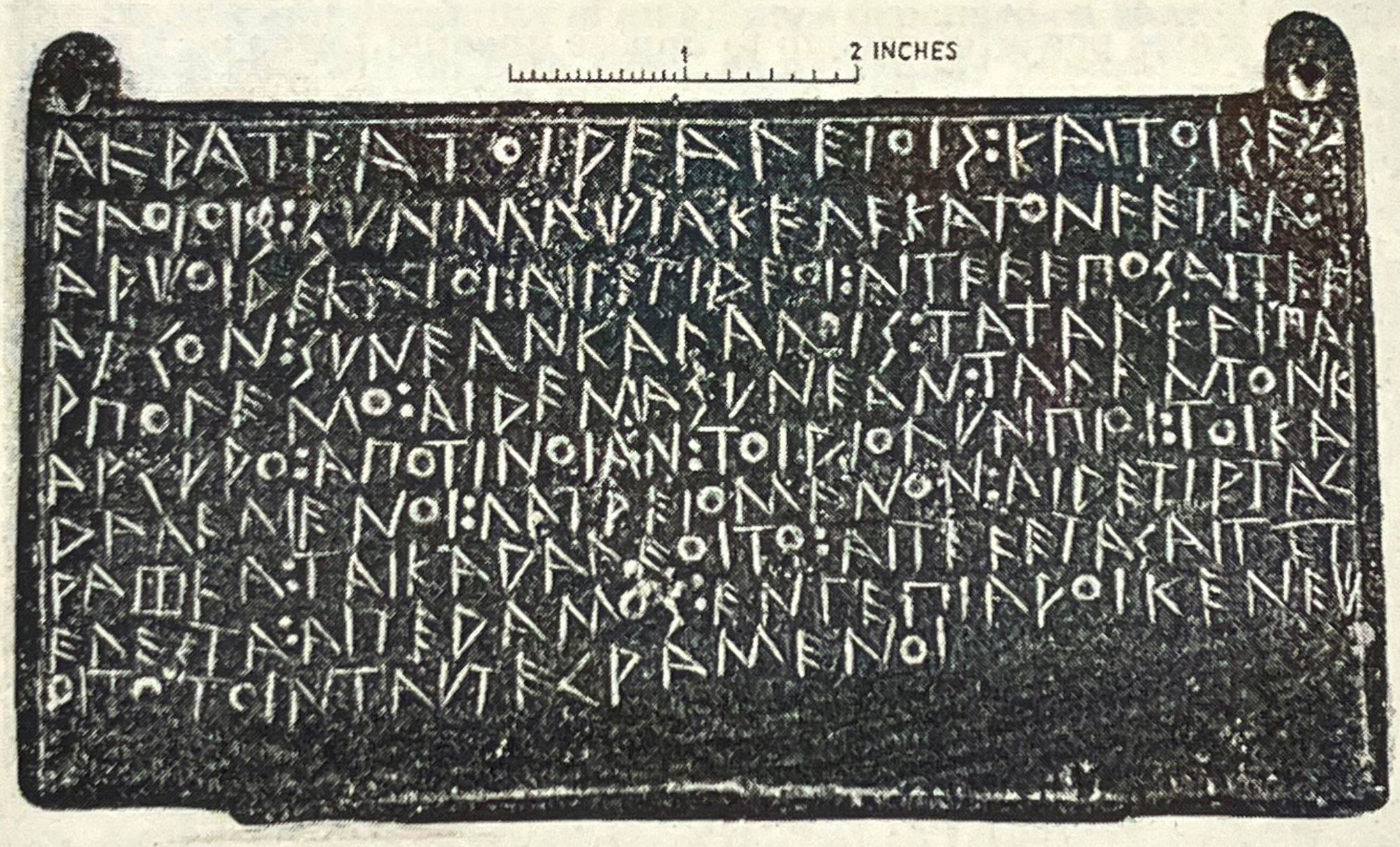


Fig. 1. The treaty between the Eleans and the Heraeans, inscribed on a bronze plaque and set up at Olympia, *c.* 550-500 BC.

Not many alliances were so broadly defined. The only Spartan treaty o which the text has survived, in a fragmentary state and of uncertain date is an alliance with the Erxadieis in Aetolia, which probably represents th standard form imposed by Sparta:

AGREEMENT WITH THE AETOLIANS

On these terms there will be friendship and peace and alliance with the Aetolians ... They must follow wherever the Spartans may lead, by land and by sea, and have the same friend and enemy as the Spartans, and they must not put an end to war without the Spartans, and not slacken in fighting the same opponent as the Spartans do.

They must not shelter refugees who have shared [...?]

If anyone marches against the land of the Erxadieis to make war, the Spartans must come to their defence with all the force within their power; if anyone marches against the land of the Spartans to make war, the Erxadieis must come to their defence ....[34]

The promise to 'have the same friend and enemy' featured in many Greek treaties of alliance and meant that one would support *all* the ally's campaigns, both defensive and offensive.[35] Here, the Aetolians alone make this promise: the Spartans do not reciprocate, but instead hammer home their superiority by demanding that their ally must always and everywhere 'follow' them. Sparta takes upon itself only *defensive* duties, in the last clause of the treaty, which constitutes a mutual agreement to send help against enemy invasion, another common element of Greek alliances. It was by imposing such unequal terms upon defeated enemies that Sparta created the set of 'hegemonic' alliances known as the Peloponnesian League.[36]

Other states powerful enough to impose unequal terms on their allies adopted similar terms.[37] Full offensive and defensive alliances in which *both* sides swore to 'have the same friends and enemies' as the other were conceivable, but very few are known.[38] Between equals, the normal treaty of alliance was purely defensive: a mutual promise to send help 'in the most vigorous manner possible' to protect the ally against aggression.[39] In the fourth century, attempts to establish a 'common peace' in Greece (p. 18) involved defensive alliances only, since all participating states were asumed to be equal and willing partners.

The great exception was the so-called Delian League, established by Athens in 478/7 BC. It was founded on a basis of equality, since its members originally joined voluntarily rather than under duress, yet the allies went beyond a promise of defensive assistance and all swore to have the same friends and enemies. That Athens, as the leading power, should have been prepared to commit itself to this extent was a measure of its fierce enthusiasm for a war of revenge against the King of Persia, explicitly named as the enemy in the treaty. Athens was indeed keener to fight

than most of its allies, who soon began to resent their leader's habit of campaigning year in, year out, rather than intermittently, as Sparta did.[40]

Modern studies often say that the normal form of *symmachia* was an offensive-and-defensive alliance, and that purely defensive alliances were a late fifth-century invention, a sign that the Greeks' enthusiasm for war was on the wane.[41] This is misleading. Only the defeated, the weak, and the exceptionally driven would accept an offensive military alliance. From the sixth century onwards, most states, given half a chance, would happily impose offensive obligations on *others* but willingly commit *themselves* only to defensive alliances.

Treaties often narrowed down still further the precise rights and duties of each party. Who was to provide overall leadership in a coalition of equals was a sensitive issue which had to be thrashed out before any alliance could made to work.[42] The matter of allocating the cost and the profits of joint expeditions also needed to be dealt with. The Athenians, not content with vague promises of 'vigorous' help, stipulated the exact number of ships or amount of silver which each ally was required to contribute to joint expeditions of the Delian League. In an alliance of 420 BC, they stipulated that any party requiring the presence of allied troops in its territory for more than 30 days should pay a fixed sum per man per day to cover the cost of provisions. An alliance between Cretan cities, notorious raiders, characteristically concentrated on the division of spoils: one of the parties was entitled to half of all booty taken at sea, but only a third of what was taken on land.[43] Many treaties remained vague by modern standards, but they tended to become more like legal contracts and less like the broad reciprocal agreements of old.

The success and durability of an alliance depended on shared interests and genuine goodwill on both sides, as amusingly illustrated by Aristophanes' parody of a politician speaking in support of an allied ruler: 'He really is a huge admirer of Athens. He is your one true lover. So much so, in fact, that he covers walls with graffiti saying ATHENIANS ARE BEAUTIFUL' (*Acharnians* 141-4). When interests changed or good intentions evaporated, an alliance was liable to be abandoned quite quickly, since few states were both able and willing to keep reluctant allies in line by force. Those who tried, like the Athenians, were resented as 'tyrants'. In principle, however, alliances were designed to be durable. All were confirmed by 'the most binding' oaths, sworn by representatives of both sides, in some cases renewed every year, and no alliance, so far as we know, was meant to last less than 50 years. Not coincidentally, the shortest alliances were those between Sparta and its chief rivals, Athens and Argos. The next shortest were concluded for a full century, and most known treaties of alliance either specified no limit in time or explicitly announced that they were made 'for ever'. The members of the Delian League theatrically sank lumps of metal into the sea and swore to keep the alliance until iron floated.[44]

Keeping the peace

When Odysseus was a lad, the elders of Ithaca sent him abroad to deman
compensation for 300 sheep rustled by Messenian raiders (*Odyssey* 21.1(
21). This may not have been our hero's most exciting adventure, but it
important evidence that the Greeks' first reaction to an internationa
incident was negotiation, not war. The Trojan War itself, we are tol
began only when the Trojans refused to negotiate and threatened to ki
the Greek ambassadors.[45] A community might admit to public wrongdo
ing, or distance itself from private offences committed by its members, an
pacify the victims by offering some form of compensation, acting as 'a give
of justice'. In international relations as in civic life, it was regarded as th
normal and preferable alternative to retaliation and the use of force.[46]

There was no shortage of channels through which negotiation could b
conducted. Private contacts abroad were numerous: to have a network o
'foreign friends' (*xeinoi*) with whom one exchanged gifts and favours wa
for upper-class Greeks as much a part of the good life as having children
horses and hunting dogs (Solon F 23 West). Throughout the archaic an
classical periods such contacts were exploited for public purposes. A
crucial instance was the personal friendship between Lysander of Sparta
and Cyrus, a Persian prince, on the strength of which Sparta gained the
Persian financial support which enabled it to win the Peloponnesian
War.[47] In addition, from the late seventh century BC onwards, states
publicly appointed formal 'foreign representatives' (*proxenoi*), natives o
other cities charged with looking after the appointing state's interests in
their home towns.[48] When relations became fraught, ambassadors (*pres-
beis*, literally 'elders') travelled back and forth to conduct negotiations, and
sacrosanct heralds (*kerykes*), who could travel safely at all times, ensured
that one channel of communication was kept open even when war broke
out. In an act of extreme hostility the Spartans and Athenians once killed
heralds from Persia, and this was thought such an outrage that two
generations later Herodotus was still searching for evidence that the gods
had exacted punishment for this crime.[49]

Homer suggests that the people of a community might have enough of
a sense of justice to offer compensation and spontaneously punish the
wrongdoers among them by stoning.[50] As one would expect, however, the
parties to a dispute often could not agree on what was fair. In such
situations, they could appeal to a third party to arbitrate. The earliest
stories about arbitration are set around 600 BC, when Athens referred its
disputes over Sigeum and Salamis to, respectively, the ruler of Corinth
and a committee of distinguished Spartans. These arbitrators were evi-
dently chosen for their ability to back up the judgement by military force,
if necessary.[51] The appeal to the priests at Olympia in the treaty between
the Anaitoi and Metapioi (p. 10), by contrast, relied on their religious
authority. Referring the matter to the oracle of Apollo at Delphi was also

an option.[52] It was deemed 'not legitimate to initiate action against one who offers justice' (Thucydides 1.85.2) and states which declined to submit their disputes to judgement did so with a guilty conscience. Thucydides, despite playing down the role of religion at large, accepted that Sparta suffered from poor morale throughout the first ten years of the Peloponnesian War because they had refused the arbitration offered by Athens and consequently lived in fear of divine punishment (7.18.2).

In the classical period communities increasingly often concluded a type of treaty, the *symbola*, which regulated private dealings between their respective citizens and defined legal procedures for solving problems which might arise from any cross-border contacts, thereby minimising the scope for conflict and reducing the risk of war breaking out.[53]

Finally, classical Greek states regularly concluded non-aggression pacts called *spondai* ('libations', i.e. 'pledges') in which they swore not to take up arms against one another but to 'give justice' in disputes. In the fifth century BC these pacts were bilateral and of limited duration. For many scholars this is proof that the Greeks saw war as the norm in international relations and could only conceive of peace as a temporary, localised interruption of a universal state of conflict. This might have been the right conclusion to draw if *spondai* had been the *only* type of interstate relation, other than war, known to the Greeks. But they were not. The timeless ties of kinship and common worship which bound together Greek communities were fundamentally incompatible with the idea of eternal war of all against all. The terms of some of the earliest treaties of friendship and military alliance, designed to last 'forever', tell even more explicitly against any such notion. Non-aggression pacts were merely one element of an array of interstate relations, some of which were temporary and some of which were not.[54]

The short-term nature of *spondai* is explained by their origin in armistices and truces, ranging from a few days to recover the bodies of the dead after battle to perhaps a year's cessation of hostilities in which to conduct negotations.[55] In the early fifth century, we first hear of states extending such truces to many years' duration, to become in effect treaties of peace (*eirênê*) – which is what they were called colloquially, even if in official language they were strictly *spondai*.[56] Truces of five, ten, and thirty years were concluded between states with a long history of mutual enmity who wanted to end or prevent hostilities for the time being without committing themselves to friendship, alliance or permanent peace. Still longer truces, for fifty and a hundred years, accompanied and reinforced defensive alliances of the same duration, making doubly sure that the allies would not fall out.[57] The limited duration of these alliances themselves is hardly surprising: a state would in many cases be wary of binding itself to another indefinitely, since, as someone once put it, 'an alliance does not mean peace, but a change of war' (Xenophon, *Hellenica* 7.4.10).

In the fourth century, a series of efforts was made to put a stop to war

among Greek states altogether. Most of these attempts to create a 'common peace' (*koinê eirênê*) were dictated by an external power: repeatedly by the king of Persia from 386 BC onwards, and by the king of Macedon after his defeat of the Greeks in 338 BC. These peace treaties were made 'for all time' and laid down that any state infringing the autonomy of another would be punished collectively by all Greeks, with the support of the king.[58] This new way of organising interstate relations was a remarkable further stage on the road to a less conflict-ridden international society, even if it was not quite as revolutionary as it has seemed to those who believe that universal war had been the norm only decades earlier. Many common peaces were short-lived, but they confirm that for the Greeks, as for us, peace was not only more desirable but more normal than war. Indeed, proverbial wisdom declared peace, not war, part of the natural order: 'in war, the sleeping are woken by trumpets; in peace, by the birds' and, more poignantly, 'in peace, sons bury their fathers; in war, fathers bury their sons'.[59]

The Greek international community presented itself in its ideal form – close-knit and in perfect harmony – at panhellenic festivals such as the Olympic Games:

> After concluding truces with one another and putting an end to any current hostilities, we come together in one place. Then, with shared prayers and sacrifices, we remember the kinship which exists between us and behave with greater goodwill towards fellow-Greeks ever after. We renew old friendships and create new ones. (Isocrates 4.43)

Alongside a show of unity, however, these festivals also offered more than a hint of what drove Greek cities to war: the intense competitiveness of individuals and cities.