

Chapter 7

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οὐ κακὸς ἔων: Megarian Valour and its Place in the Local Discourse at Megara

In this essay, I shall explore the ways in which the Megarians' conduct during the Persian Wars formed part of their local discourse. Our evidence shows that for centuries after the war with Persia, Megarians at both a communal and private level were concerned to vindicate and to commemorate their contribution to the defense of Greece. Through an analysis of this evidence for locally imbedded Persian War tradition, I shall demonstrate that issues of military participation and performance constituted an important part of emic Megarian discourse.

The Megarian contribution to the Hellenic alliance against the Persians from 480–479 BCE was substantial. Our main historiographical source, Herodotus, records that Megara sent 20 triremes (implying some 4000 *nautai*) to both Artemision (Hdt. 8.1.1) and Salamis (8.45) and mustered as many as 3000 hoplites for Plataia (9.28.6). The accuracy of the figures notwithstanding,¹ the ancient historiographical tradition is consistent: the Megarians were integral to the defense of Greece. The monumental Serpent Column commemorating the Greek victory in Boiotia would appear to corroborate ancient literary

1 Cf. Legon 1981: 165–167.

accounts, since it lists (in order of the magnitude of each city's contribution) the Megarians seventh out of 31 poleis “who fought this war.”²

Whereas Megara's participation in the alliance is undisputed, Herodotus and later authors appear to have disagreed over the conduct of the Megarians during the war, particularly in the definitive engagement at Plataia. Herodotus concedes that, during the initial maneuvering of the armies, the Megarian contingent bore the brunt of the Persians' cavalry harassment at Erythrai, enduring taunts against and aspersions on their manhood, as well as a steady hail of missiles (9.20–21). Nevertheless, his account includes an appeal to the rest of the Greek army in which the Megarians threaten, if they are not relieved, to abandon their post (ἴστε ἡμέας ἐκλείφοντας τὴν τάξιιν: 9.21.2) – an act that, in Herodotus' Greece, was considered the most disgraceful kind of cowardice.³ In the event, the Megarians are rescued by the valiant efforts of a mere 300 ‘picked’ Athenian troops (λογάδες: 9.21.3). In the aftermath of the main engagement, the Megarians – who take no significant part in the fighting – are among those Greek contingents who proceed, without any discipline (οὐδένα κόσμον ταχθέντες), into the plain, looking to opportunistically claim a part in Pausanias' victory, only to be badly mauled by the Theban cavalry (9.69.1–2). The Megarians thus suffer from the same lack of disciplined *taxis* that Herodotus says doomed so many Persians in their confrontation with the orderly Spartans in the same battle (9.62.3). Moreover, the Megarian troops at Plataia are cast among a number of other contingents who “perished in the battle without accomplishing anything noteworthy at all” (9.70.1).

The account of Diodorus Siculus of the same battle (11.30.3–4), likely based on the work of Ephorus of Kyme (fl. mid-4th cent.), is markedly different from that of Herodotus.⁴

2 *ME&L* 27; cf. Hdt. 8.91.1; Thuc. 1.132.2–3. A similar dedication at Olympia commemorating the cities that fought Mardonios at Plataia recorded the Megarians sixth (Paus. 5.23.1).

3 The moral imperative of the citizen-hoplite to remain in place ([ὑπο-]μένειν) is a familiar ethic that runs through literature from archaic poetry to fourth-century oratory (e.g., Tyrtaeus 10W, 15–32; 11W, 12W, 10–44; Aesch. *Pers.* 1025; Soph. *Ant.* 661–675; Hdt. 7.101–102, 9.55, 9.74; Eur. *HF* 159–164; *Phoen.* 999–1002; *El.* 388–390; Ar. *Peace* 1177–1178; Lys. 2.14–15; 14.15–16; Thuc. 2.42.4). For this ethic in Herodotus, see Hartog 1988: 44–50. For the stigma attached to abandoning rank, *lipotaxia*, see Christ 2004 and 2001.

4 There is general consensus that Ephorus is Diodorus' main source for his account of the Persian Wars. See Hornblower 1994: 36–38; Flower 1998: 365; Stylianos 1998: 49–50; Marincola 2002: 32.

Here, the isolated (μόνοι) Megarians withstand the full onslaught of the dreaded, elite Persian cavalry (τοὺς ἀρίστους τῶν Περσῶν ἵππεῖς), eventually being relieved by an unspecified number of Athenian *epilektoi*.⁵ Crucially, Diodorus emphasizes in a parenthetical remark that “despite being hard-pressed in the battle, [the Megarians] did not break rank” (πιεζόμενοι τῇ μάχῃ, τὴν μὲν τάξι οὐ κατέλιπον).⁶

The account of the Megarians at Plataia given by Plutarch in his *Life of Aristides* is consonant with that of Ephorus and Diodorus. In Plutarch’s version, the disposition of the Greek forces is initially secure along rocky and rugged ground, out of the reach of Mardonios’ horsemen – “except, that is, for the Megarians” (14.1). The Megarians, suffering heavy casualties, appeal to Pausanias, the Greek commander, for relief, but the threat of *lipotaxia*, explicit in Herodotus, is glossed. Plutarch’s Megarians simply ask for aid, saying they are not strong enough, alone, to repel the Persians (14.2). Moreover, their request is made to appear all the more valid when Plutarch has Pausanias notice that the Megarians’ position is utterly obscured from sight (ἀποκεκρυμμένον) by great clouds of Persian javelins and arrows.⁷

Discrepancies between Herodotus and Diodorus are also noticeable, if less pronounced, in their descriptions of the disposition of forces at Salamis. One significant difference is that, in the former, the Megarians are completely elided (8.45, 85); in the latter, they are given the important tactical post of the right flank since “they were reputed to be the best sailors after the Athenians” (11.18.2). Scholars have noted the differences in these historiographical accounts, but the implications of such disagreement for emic, local discourse among the Megarians need to be explored.⁸

The precise historicity of the involvement of the Megarians in the Persian Wars is probably irrecoverable and is, at any rate, not the issue I am concerned with here.⁹ What

5 For the Greek literary *topos* of the isolated and outmatched army facing down a menacing foe, see, e.g., Hdt. 6.106, 7.220, 9.27; Lys. 2. 20–24, 50; [Dem.] 59.94–95; Dem. 60.11.

6 The diction of the passage, which seems clearly to respond to Herodotus, may be Diodorus’ own or indeed that of Ephorus. On Diodorus’ tendency to closely follow Ephorus’ text, see Marincola 2002: 32; Flower 1998: 365.

7 The language is clearly meant to evoke the heroic stand of Leonidas’ Spartans at Thermopylai (7.226).

8 Noting the differences in the historiographical tradition, e.g., Marincola 2007: 119–121; Legon 1981: 166.

9 Cf. Green 1996: 267–268.

matters more for the study of local discourse is how the Megarians reacted to the charge of having played a rather spiritless and ineffectual part in the defense of Greece. One might presume that the historiography preserves competing local traditions about what had occurred, and it would be valuable to recover the Megarians' own tradition and its place in their discourses of identity.

Certainly, alternative local narratives of this sort existed.¹⁰ For example, the Thebans and other Boiotians devoted considerable energies to an historical reappraisal of Theban conduct in the Persian War period that was antithetical to the accounts circulating in Greek communities outside of Boiotia (Paus. 9.6.1-2; Plut. *Arist.* 18.4-6).¹¹ Plutarch's polemical stance in his essay against Herodotus and his impassioned efforts to redeem the Isthmian and central Greek poleis from the pen of the historian hint at the existence of a multiplicity of local narratives that stood in opposition to Herodotus. It is clear, moreover, that the role played by poleis in the war against Xerxes continued to be a subject of discussion and contention in the fifth and fourth centuries. Athenian public discourse in the fourth century commonly invoked the antithesis between Theban and Plataian reactions to the Persian threat (e.g., Isoc. 14.30, 58-59; [Dem.] 59.95).¹² What is more, on the international stage, invocations of the memory of a community's contribution against the Persians were a feature of inter-polis diplomacy. Some examples include: the claim in the Plataian Debate of the Plataians to clemency from the Spartans in recognition for their effort against the Persians (Thuc. 3.52-68); the antagonism toward the Thebans in the Athenians' dedication at Delphi of shields captured from Thebans defeated at Plataia (Aeschin. 3.116); the apparent exemption, granted upon appeal by a public inscription (SEG 31.358), to the Thespians from a fine levied against *Boiotoi* by the magistrates of Olympia for the offense of medism.¹³ Such invocations formed a part of what Steinbock has called inter-poleis "memory wars".¹⁴

10 Pausanias refers to "those who have written about Plataia" in a way that suggests a profusion of historical accounts (5.23.3).

11 Beck 2014: 20. These local accounts provide a rich, alternative, local tradition that is the subject of a forthcoming monograph (Beck). See also, Marincola 2002: 103-104; Buck 1979: 129-135.

12 Steinbock 2013: 120-124; for allusions to Theban medism in Attic oratory generally, see idem 101-103.

13 Beck 2014: 38-40; cf. Paus. 5.23.1-2.

14 Steinbock 2013: 84-94.

Such competing local narratives of the events of 480/79 seem particularly to be a feature of central Greece, where the presence of the Persians had resulted in actual or suspected cases of medism. Scholars have attempted to construct micro-histories of the Megarid during the war against Xerxes and to smooth out discrepancies between our main, evidently hostile source in Herodotus and others.¹⁵ Such an approach to the evidence, however, is fraught with difficulty and the accounts produced by this method are as open to challenge as Herodotus' own.¹⁶ However, by plumbing what distinctive Megarian evidence we have for signs of parochial responses to the war, we can hope to understand how this Panhellenic event represented a truly Megarian moment – an experience articulated and encoded through time by a distinctive community using a set of idiosyncratic and local memes.

Pausanias' account of the Megarid reveals a local interest in and discourse around the Persian Wars such as has been noted among Boiotian Greeks. He reports a story told by the Megarians of his day (“φᾶσι”) that explained the dedication of a statue to Artemis Soteira for her help in an engagement with a Persian force within the Megarid just prior to the Battle of Plataia (1.40.2–3). Herodotus reports the incursion of Persian forces into the Megarid but makes no mention of any action taken against them by its inhabitants. In the summer of 479, Herodotus writes, Mardonios was moving his army from Attica to Boiotia when he received word that the Spartans had an advance army quartered in Megara.¹⁷ The Persian commander then turned his force around and brought it before the city, while his cavalry ravaged the countryside; after this, Mardonios withdrew to Boiotia (9.14).¹⁸ The prayer to Apollo for the safety of the acropolis in the *Theognidea* probably also refers to this traumatic invasion (775–777):

Lord Phoebus, since you raised the battlements of the acropolis as a favour to
Alkathous, son of Pelops, keep away from this city the violating army

15 E.g., Highbarger 1927: 147–153; Burn 1962: 509–510; Hignett 1963: 291–292; Legon 1981: 166–174.

16 Moles 1993; Marincola 2002: 20–21; on the historical reliability of Herodotus on the campaigns and battles of the Persian War, see Lazenby 1993: esp. 198–247 (Plataia).

17 For discussion of Herodotus' reliability on this episode and possible reconstructions, see Hignett 1963: 291–292.

18 Herodotus' keen interest in this being the most westerly point reached by the Persians in Europe should provide confidence in the historicity of the incursion into the Megarid, if not in the historian's cartography.

(στρατὸν ὑβριστῆν) of the Medes so that when spring comes (ἦρος ἐπερχομένου) the people may send you splendid hekatombs in celebration.¹⁹

The fact that the Peloponnesians under Kleombrotos had destroyed the road granting the quickest access to Megara from the south in the previous autumn (Hdt. 8.71.2) will have heightened the sense of vulnerable isolation so resonant in these verses. These lines, then, would seem to support the tradition that there was a significant incursion into the Megarid in 479, but the historicity of this event is not the prime consideration here.

The language used by Pausanias in recounting the stories of the Megarians is so redolent of Herodotus' Greek that it suggests a dialectical relationship between the historian's global or Hellenic account of the events of 480/79 and the local Megarian tradition. According to Pausanias, the Megarians claim that a Persian force ravaging near Pagai was confounded by Artemis and became lost in the hills at night. Concerned over a possible ambush, the Persians shot some volleys of missiles into the hills to discern the presence of enemy troops. Miraculously, the rocks groaned, tricking the Persians into thinking they were firing on Megarian troops. By morning the Persians had exhausted their supply of arrows and when the Megarians attacked, "because they were hoplites fighting unarmed men" (μαχόμενοι δὲ ὀπλιῖται πρὸς ἀνόπλους), they butchered a great number of them (1.40.3). This language evokes Herodotus' famous description of Greek hoplites slaughtering Persian *anoploi* at Plataia (9.62.3). The term *anoplos*, clearly an ideologically charged antithesis to the citizen *hoplitēs*, strikingly elides the distinctive Persian arms that Herodotus describes elsewhere (7.61) and is used only here in the *Histories*.²⁰ Herodotus' depiction of the Persians as *anoploi* is extraordinary enough to have invited comment and criticism from readers in antiquity (Plut. *de Herod.* 43).²¹ Given the notoriety of Herodotus' Plataian *logos* and his distinctive depiction of the Persians therein as *anoploi*, it is tempting to read the Megarian story as a local attempt to claim a greater part in the defense of Greece than that allowed in

19 Cf. 778-788, 757-764.

20 Hartog 1988: 44-45; Marincola 2002: 217.

21 Plut. *Arist.* 18.3, too, appears to correct Herodotus' account of the same moment at Plataia; Plutarch's explicit mention of Persian equipment (wicker shields: γέρρα; daggers: κοπίδες; swords: ἀκινάκαι) is the only essential departure.

the dominant narrative by appropriating an element of that narrative itself.²² Even apart from any such inter-textual relationship, the narrative of the skirmish at Pagai clearly valorizes the victory as one of Megarian hoplites over Persian bowmen.

The story given to Pausanias by his Megarian guides thoroughly fixes the fight against the Persians within the Megarid and the hills of Pagai. Pausanias claims to have been shown by local guides some arrows still embedded in the hills. These, he says, appear to travelers just a little way off from the road (ὀλίγον τῆς λεωφόρου: 1.44.4). Regardless of whether these arrows seen by Pausanias were actual Persian War relics preserved from an historical skirmish or had been set up at a later date, what mattered about the perforated rock face is that it monumentalized what the Megarians themselves said about their own history. The rocks at Pagai served to mark Megara and the Megarid as the site of resistance to Persia both to future generations of Megarians and to those traveling through the *chōra* via the coastal road from the Peloponnese to Boiotia.

In the city of Megara itself, Pausanias had visited a memorial for the Persian War dead. Evidently not far from a sacred rock called by the Megarians “Recall” (Ἀνακληθρίδα: 1.43.2), they had constructed a tomb “for those who died in the invasion of the Medes” (1.43.3).²³ Adorning the tomb was an inscription, a late copy of which was found in Palaiochori (IG VII.53 = SEG 13.312).²⁴ This inscription purports to be a rededication of “an epigram for those who died in the Persian War and are buried here as heroes” (lines 1–2). The epigram that follows is predictably attributed to Simonides:

Ἑλλάδι καὶ Μεγαρεῦσιν ἐλεύθερον ἄμαρ ἀέξειν
 ἰέμενοι θανάτου μοῖραν ἐδεξάμεθα, [5]
 τοὶ μὲν ὑπ’ Εὐβοίαι καὶ Παλίωι, ἔνθα καλεῖται

22 That is to say, the inter-textual allusion in Pausanias’ report to Herodotus’ description of the decisive moment at Plataia serves to aggrandize the action at Pagai and to associate the Megarian hoplites there with the Spartans at Plataia, whose arms and dedicated hoplite *taxis* proved so effective against undisciplined *anoploi*. Questions arise, however, with respect to the nature of Pausanias’ account: we cannot be certain whether the terminology is Pausanias’ own, or that of his Megarian guides; and even if the latter is the case, there would seem to be no way to confidently fix such an inter-textual reference to an oral tradition.

23 Smith 2008: 16–17.

24 Cf. SEG 31.383.

ἀγνᾶς Ἀρτέμιδος τοξοφόρου τέμενος,
τοὶ δ' ἐν ὄρει Μυκάλας, τοὶ δ' ἔμπροσθεν Σαλαμῖνος
[...]
τοὶ δὲ καὶ ἐν πεδίῳ Βοιωτίῳ, οἵτινες ἔτλαν [10]
χεῖρας ἐπ' ἀνθρώπους ἵππομάχους ἰέναι.
ἄστοι δ' ἄμμι τόδε <ξυνόν> γέρας ὀμφαλῶι ἀμφίς
Νισαίων ἔπορον λαοδόκῳ ἦ ἀγορᾷ.²⁵

The verses pay homage to the Megarian efforts at Artemision, Mykale, Salamis and Plataia (lines 4–10). There is a line missing (line 9), omitted by the stonecutter, which some have posited may have attested Megarians at Thermopylai.²⁶ An alternative suggestion is that the missing verse alluded to the action at Pagai.²⁷ In either case, the omission is puzzling. One wonders why the Megarians would have passed over a chance to claim a place at any additional battle – especially Thermopylai – but perhaps the exclusion was somehow a part of a process of renegotiation within the Megarian community itself of the city's relationship to its past.

While the poem mentions several battles in which Megarians fell, it devotes the most space to Plataia and fixes this battle (ἐν πεδίῳ Βοιωτίῳ) as the place where the Megarians “had the courage to lay hands on the men fighting from horseback” (ἔτλαν / χεῖρας ἐπ' ἀνθρώπους ἵππομάχους ἰέναι). This verse thus triumphantly represents the action of the (close-fighting) Megarians against the cavalry forces (Persian or Theban is not specified) as a critical element of the Greek victory. Such a claim, once again, clearly stands as part of a dialectic between encomiastic and deprecating accounts of the Megarians' participation in the battle in a wider Hellenic context. What is significant is that the epigram constitutes part of the story of the Megarians at Plataia that the Megarians told themselves. In the

25 While striving to foster the day of freedom for Greece and the Megarians, we received the portion of death, some under Euboea and Pelion, where stands the sanctuary of the holy archer Artemis, others at the mountain of Mykale, others before Salamis ... others again in the Boiotian plain, those who had courage to lay hands on the cavalry warriors. The citizens granted us this privilege in common about the navel of the Nisaians in their agora where the people throng. (Trans. Campbell).

26 Wade-Gery 1933: 96; Page 1981: 214–215.

27 Legon 1981: 173.

minds of ‘the Megarians,’ there was no question as to the veracity and momentousness of the Megarians’ fight against the Persians as reflected in the act of publicly inscribing the epigram. Whether the poem adorned a monumental tomb already in classical antiquity we cannot say, but the late inscription accompanying the epigram reminds us, “the chief priest, Helladios, had it re-inscribed in honour of the dead and the polis” (lines 2-3). It is the nature of such public inscriptions to reflect communal values and interests.²⁸

The ancient attribution of the epigram to Simonides is dubious, but *communis opinio* is that the poem is a genuine fifth-century work.²⁹ The poet³⁰ uses strikingly vivid language to describe the citizens of Megara granting the dead the exceptional honour of burial in the agora (lines 9-10; cf. Paus. 1.43.3).³¹ This language not only appears “novel and original,” recommending its antiquity to critics,³² but also grounds the reader in the topographical civic center (λαοδόκῳ ἀγορᾷ) of the polis. The phrase “the navel of the Nisaians” (ὀμφαλῶι Νισαίων), furthermore, constitutes the sort of epichoric reference that gave shape and articulation to the imagined community of Megarians.³³ The poem emphatically announces that the Persian War dead (or at least the focal point of their commemoration) are located “here.” Such a claim is in some tension with the testimony of Herodotus, who writes that the Megarians who fell at Plataia, at least, were buried there (9.85);³⁴ the usual supposition is that the tomb in Megara was a cenotaph.³⁵ Even if so, it is very significant to an understanding of the place of the Persian War in Megarian civic identity that the poem announces “our fellow citizens granted us public honour around the center of the busy agora.” Whether or not the *xynon geras* in the heart of the city actually housed the bodies of the dead, the construction of a monumental tomb (even a cenotaph) for the Persian

28 Beck 2014: 23.

29 Page 1981: 214.

30 Page suggests a western Greek poet, likely a Megarian, based on the form Παλίῳι (line 6) for Πήλιον, a variant familiar from Pindar (1981: 215).

31 Whether the ‘tomb’ itself was actually a cenotaph is hardly the point.

32 Page 1981: 215.

33 For the mythological connection between Megara and Nisos, see Paus. 1.19, 39, 41, 44.

34 Herodotus’ report is corroborated largely by Paus. 9.2.4. The burial of those who died at Plataia on the battlefield, however, need not preclude the repatriation of the dead from the other battles mentioned in the epigram. It appears, based on a Megarian casualty list dating from the 420s, that, sometime in the fifth century, the Megarians adopted a similar practice to the Athenian *epitaphios nomos*. See Low 2003: 98-103; Kritsas 1989.

35 Legon 1981: 173; Page 1981: 213.

War dead within the *asty* itself has important implications. Intramural graves, in most poleis, were reserved for founding figures – typically “semi-deified heroes” from the mythological past.³⁶ The placement of this special burial site, then, with the language of the accompanying epigram, works to incorporate the fallen soldiers of Megara into the very essence of the community alongside figures like Nisos. Moreover, that later generations of Megarians encountered the tomb and could identify themselves as ‘*ammi astoi*’ of the dead ensured that the memory of Megara’s contribution to the fight against Persia remained a crucial part of the fabric of Megarian communal experience and identity.

It is not only at the public level, however, that the Persian Wars formed part of the discourse environment of Megara. The recent publication of a remarkable private funerary stele provides unique insight into the manner in which *ta idia* and *ta koina* could be implicated in the creation of epichoric media. The large stele of Parian marble (153cm x 45cm) depicts in relief a nude male hoplite in right profile.³⁷ The otherwise naked figure is armed with a ‘Thracian’-style, open-face helmet and the iconic large *aspis* and thrusting spear of the Greek heavy-infantryman. Under his left arm hangs a sword suspended by a strap. The figure is depicted bending slightly at the waist, with his chest pressed forward and with knees slightly bent in a widening and forward-moving stance, giving the impression of a warrior poised for action. The severe artistic style suggests an early fifth-century date, probably no later than c. 470 BCE. The provenance of the stele is unknown, but an inscription accompanies the relief, identifying the deceased as Pollis, son of Asopichos. The letterforms of the inscription are distinctively Megarian.³⁸

36 Low 2003: 103. Cf. the first lines of the accompanying inscription: “for those who died in the Persian War and are buried here as heroes (καὶ κειμένων / ἐνταῦθα ἥρώων)” (1-2). As an indication of their heroic status, the final line of the inscription, appended to the poem, claims that the polis habitually “up to this time” (i.e., c. 490 CE) consecrated a bull to the dead warriors (line 14), though scholars have been dubious (e.g., Chianotis 2005: 165).

37 Malibu. J. P. Getty Museum: 90.AA.129. A high-resolution image can be found on the museum’s website: <http://www.getty.edu/art/collection/objects/13049/unknown-maker-grave-stele-of-pollis-greek-megarian-about-480-bc/?dz=0.4373,1.3236,2.66>.

38 Jeffrey 1990: 132-138; Ebert 1996a: 19.

The inscription is well preserved and easily legible apart from the first letters of the first line, which have all but disappeared where the stone has been chipped.³⁹ The damaged section has space for additional letters and uncertainty over the missing letters has led to two proposed readings. Corcella (1995: 47) reads:

I speak, I, Pollis, dear son of Asopichos, not having died a coward, with the wounds of the Tattooers, yes myself.

ΛΕΓΟ ΠΟΛΛΙΣ ΑΣΟΠΙΧΟ ΗΥΙΟΣ
Ο ΚΑΚΟΣ ΕΟΝ ΑΠΕΘΑΣΚΟΝ ΗΥΠΟ ΣΤ[]ΚΤΑΙΣΙΝ ΕΓΟΝΕ

Ebert (1996b: 66), restoring the first letters to ΑΙΑΙ ΕΓΟ reads:

Ο weh ich! Pollis, des Asopichos lieber Sohn (ich starb, obwohl kein schlechter Mann, unter den Händen von Brandmarken) war ich.

The reference to the mysterious ‘Tattooers’ is precisely the kind of epichoric or emic marker that speaks to a localized, peculiar discourse not easily intelligible to outsiders. A plausible explanation of the identity of *hoi stiktai* can be deduced from Herodotus’ account of the battle of Thermopylai. In the section in which he assigns praise and blame to the participants of the battle, he records that the Thebans fought alongside the Spartans only so long as they were compelled to (ἐμάχοντο ὑπ’ ἀναγκαίης) and that, when they saw the Persians beginning to prevail, they seized upon the opportunity to defect to Xerxes’ forces, claiming that they had medized well before the battle and had participated in the fight against the Persians only under duress and half-heartedly (7.233.1). Xerxes, we are told, accepted the Thebans’ claims after corroborating them with the turn-coat Thessalians and spared the lives of the majority of the Theban combatants. “These were not, however, wholly fortunate,” Herodotus continues, since the Persians slew a number of them and, on Xerxes’ orders, “branded most of the rest with the royal mark” (ἔστιζον στίγματα

39 A full text of the inscription was first published in 1991 as *SEG* 41.413. Thereafter, it has been published as *SEG* 45.421, and in Corcella 1995 and Ebert 1996a, 1996b.

βασιλῆια: 7.233.2).⁴⁰ Herodotus' anecdote is dubious – those Thebans who fought at Thermopylai were likely patriots – but the tattooing of captives by the Persians is probably genuine.⁴¹ Thus, the Pollis stele proudly displays a valiant Megarian, who resisted the Persians to the end, in contrast to those who capitulated, whether as medizers or as prisoners of war.⁴²

If the reference sets up a binary opposition between the *cities* of Megara and Thebes, as has been suggested,⁴³ it also works at a level even more intimate than 'Megarian.' The unique name of Pollis' father, Asopichos, suggests that this monument may have responded to some suspicion hanging over the family of Pollis in relation to the broader question of the Megarians' role in the Persian War. Potamonyms derived from the Asopos are common in fifth-century Boiotia and are well-attested in Attica, but outside of these two regions are rare.⁴⁴ I am not aware that to date anyone has commented on Pollis' peculiar patronymic, but it is eminently plausible that Pollis was the son of a Megarian *proxenos* to a Boiotian city. The implications of this for the self-representation of Pollis as a faithful and contributing Megarian citizen can thus be set in the wider Megarian/Boiotian binary and

40 Corcella 1995: 48. Herodotus also uses the term '*stigeis*,' a synonym of *stiktai*, to refer to men ordered by Xerxes to symbolically brand the waters of the Hellespont, which had resisted his authority (7.35.1). The historicity of the Thebans' surrender and their subsequent indignities has been called into question by ancient and modern critics. Plutarch singles out the episode for sustained refutation in his polemical essay against Herodotus (33). For anti-Theban sentiments in Herodotus, see 1.61.3, 7.132.1. For discussion of the Thebans at Thermopylai, see Buck 1987.

41 Buck 1987: 59.

42 In the fifth century, the branding of slaves among Greeks was common (Ar. *Wasps* 1296, *Birds* 760–761, *Frogs* 1510–1514; Aeschin. 2.79; cf. Hdt. 5.6.1–2) as was the marking of war-captives (Plut. *Per.* 26.3). The branded war-captive or slave was a kind of antithesis to the free and courageous citizen-hoplite, who died fighting in place rather than flee or submit. Plutarch, for example, expresses shock in his *Life of Nicias* that some of the Athenian citizens on the doomed campaign against Syracuse tried to pass themselves off as servants in order to escape their captors and received the Syracusan horse as a brand on their foreheads (στίζοντες ἵππον εἰς τὸ μέτωπον: 29.1). Nicias himself, we are told by Pausanias, was denied commemoration on the casualty lists from the campaign because he was said to have surrendered and was "condemned as a voluntary prisoner and an unworthy soldier" (1.29.12).

43 Corcella 1995.

44 E.g., Asopodorus, the Theban cavalry commander at Plataia (Hdt. 9.69.2); Asopolaos, a Plataian representative to the Spartans at the siege of Plataia (Thuc. 3.52.5). For epigraphic attestation within Boiotia and Attica see, *Lexicon of Greek Personal Names* II, 11536–11540, 11543; IIIB 22626, 37289. For a recent catalogue of Asopos-derived names, see Meidani 2011. Meidani does not include Asopikhos father of Pollis, but records only one attested fifth-century Asopos-derived anthroponym in mainland Greece from outside of Boiotia and Attica (CEG I.380: a certain Asopodoros from the Argolid [170–173]).

into the context of the ‘memory wars’ outlined above. The claim that the son of a Boiotian *proxenos* died “not having been a coward” (i.e., fighting as a stalwart hoplite) is consonant with the evidence surveyed above of attempts to assert the Megarians’ valiant contributions against the Persians, and for Pollis exculpates him of any particular suspicion to which he was subject by virtue of his father’s connections. This private commemoration, which speaks to Megarian experiences of the Persian War at multiple registers, provides an example of the dynamic interchange between the local and the extra-local.

The very act of commemoration (public or private) of the war dead in Hellenic culture, in which martial confrontation was viewed as a contest or *agōn*, was faced with an ontological problem. Commemoration aimed to praise the fallen soldier for his bravery and martial prowess but memorializing a man’s death in war meant acknowledging in some inescapable way that he had been bested in direct martial confrontation.⁴⁵ In the case of the fallen hoplite, however, this problem was obviated. By analogy with the Athenian *epitaphios nomos*, the hoplite’s beautiful death, dying *en taxei*, crystalized his *aretē*, providing irrefutable testimony that the dead man was an *anēr agathos*. Such sentiments are traceable not just in the fifth-century *epitaphios nomos* but to the earliest Athenian martial expressions as evidenced by an epigram from a mid-sixth century grave marker (*IG I³.1200 = IG I².984*) comparable to the Pollis inscription: “[He who] pauses and beholds your grave marker, Xenocles, the marker of a spearman, will know your manliness.”⁴⁶ There is just enough evidence contained in the *Theognidea*, presuming this is a genuinely Megarian artifact, to give us confidence that such a hoplitic ethos was also embraced by Athens’ neighbours, such as the inclusion of several lines of a poem of Tyrtaeus, which are generally regarded as the earliest expression of (if not the *locus classicus* for) the ideology of the citizen-hoplite (*Thgn.* 1003–1006 = *Tyrt.* fr. 12.13–16):

45 Arrington 2014: 105–123.

46 *IG I³.1200*: [τι]ς αἰχμητῶ, Χσενόκλεες, ἀνδρὸς [ἐπι]τὰς / σῆμα τὸ σὸν προσιδὸν γνό[σεται] ἐν[ορέαν]. Cf. *IG I³.1240*: “...ἠὸν ποτ’ ἐνὶ προμάχοις ὄλεσε θῶρος Ἄρες.”

This is excellence, the best human prize and the fairest for a wise man⁴⁷ to win. This is a common benefit for the city and the whole people, whenever a man, having planted himself firmly, holds his ground among the front ranks.⁴⁸

Elsewhere we find an original formulation not very different (Thgn. 865–868):

To many worthless men the god gives splendid prosperity, which is of no advantage to the man himself or to his friends, since it is nothing, whereas the great fame of valour will never die. For a spearman keeps his land and city safe.

For Theognis, then, just as for Tyrtaeus, the *kleos* of true *aretē* is earned by the hoplite who defends his city. Thus Pollis' monument on the one hand vaunts him and his fellow Megarians above the Persians and the medizing Greeks⁴⁹ and, at the same time, works to claim for Pollis and his family a place of distinction within Megara (quite literally if Corcella's 'I speak' is retained), distancing him from the taint of association with Thebes and silently exhorting his fellow *astoi* to emulate his model conduct in one of the community's chief defining moments.

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47 Tyr. 1004 = ἀνδρὶ νέεω.

48 We need not concern ourselves here with the debate over whether the heavy-armed men exhorted by the poet are to be imagined as fighting in a closed- or loose-order phalanx (see van Wees 2004: 167–183; Hanson 1989: 160–189). Questions and debates surrounding the origins, development and mechanics of the closed hoplite phalanx do not detract from the ethos, which surrounds *menein* (see above, n. 2). Tyrtaeus' heavy-armed fighters are praised for not retreating, for their steadfastness and resoluteness. While they may be able to retreat, as van Wees has shown in his reassessment of the putative archaic phalanx, they are exhorted not to, and the poems, as they are preserved (indeed perhaps especially due to Athenian and Megarian fascination), display a martial code or ethos which governs the *panoploi* according to which flight is shameful (αἰσχρῆς δὲ φυγῆς: cf. Tyr. 10.17).

49 Corcella 1995.

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