THE HELLENIC LEAGUE OF 480 B.C. — FACT OR IDEOLOGICAL FICTION?

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The majority of modern historians, both in the standard handbooks and in specialized works on the Persian invasion of 480, continue to attribute the successful defence of Greece against Xerxes' invasion to the so-called Hellenic League of 480/479. They and their ancient counterparts have either taken the existence of such an institution for granted, or intimated that it generated itself spontaneously in response to the Persian danger and conducted operations during the campaign.¹ A small minority of scholars has suggested that this alleged panhellenic league was not a separate institution, associated only with the war against Persia, but was in fact the Lacedaemonian alliance (the 'Peloponnesian League'), perhaps with a few hangers-on.²

It is time to re-examine the extant ancient evidence and contest the 'popular' assumption that a new, separate political and military organization arose in response to the Persian danger. I submit that at the time of the invasion Sparta's military pre-eminence was undisputed in Greece, that the conduct of the campaign was co-ordinated by Sparta and that individual states, including Athens, looked only to Sparta for salvation. Only later did certain individuals regard the war of 480/79 as one of 'Hellenic' significance: first Aeschylus, in the Persae (472 B.C.),³ and above all, Herodotus, who wrote his History in the period of 'cold-war' between Athens and Sparta during the years 460–431 B.C. To Herodotus I would attribute the developed ideology of an organized, panhellenic, quasi-nationalistic or patriotic resistance against Persia. He was influenced by the Athenian sources of his own day which diminished Sparta's role in the defence of Hellas by emphasizing that of Athens as the saviour of Greece.⁴ Herodotus admitted his preference for Athens' role as the vital one,⁵ but nevertheless was broad-minded (and, as an exile, 'Hellenic') enough to attribute the overall success of the Greek cause, not to the initiative or valour of any one polis, but to a widespread spirit of Hellenic patriotism. Later historians, such as Ephorus and his epitomator Diodorus, elaborated Herodotus' idea of a joint Hellenic resistance and concocted the notion of a formal institution — a
A representative Hellenic council or *synedrion* of the Hellenes. This ideology has persisted in most modern accounts of the war.

It is well known that the ancient Greeks never coalesced into a political entity or, in the modern sense of the word, a nation. However it is generally believed that when Xerxes invaded Europe in 480, some kind of political unity was achieved which prevailed in the face of the common danger. This was the so-called Hellenic League, with its representative assembly at Corinth, which conducted the successful defence of Greece against the threat of barbarian domination and thus saved western culture and civilization from barbarism. Grote expressed this notion in a way that influenced most subsequent historians of ancient Greece:

The present congress, assembled under the influence of a common foe from Persia has more of a pan-hellenic character than any political event which has yet occurred in Grecian history ... it seeks to combine every city of Hellenic race and language, however distant — even the Kretans, Korkyreans and Sicilians .... The Congress at the Isthmus marks such further advance in the centralizing tendencies of Greece and seems at first to promise an onward march in the same direction.

Nearly a century later P.A. Brunt, in his influential article on the Hellenic League stated: 'For the first and last time in Greek history, consciousness of community in race, language, religion and customs, found the basis for common political action prompted by a common danger'. The same notion is still expressed or implied in almost every treatment of the subject which has appeared since then. In a recent work that even purports to be 'a critical history of the ancient Greeks', we find the statement: 'The Hellenic league, the first union of Greeks since the mythical times of the Trojan war, was the instrument through which the Greeks organized their successful resistance to Persia'.

The precise origin of this remarkable and unprecedented institution, 'the Hellenic League', is a mystery. Most modern scholars and even the ancient authors after Herodotus who deal with the Persian war, refer to the League as though it had always existed, or had somehow created itself in response to a danger that seemed to threaten the very Greek way of life — what we in fact identify with 'Western Civilization'. Diodorus, presumably reflecting the fourth-century historian Ephorus' concept, though not necessarily his precise vocabulary, refers to the existence of a permanent *synedrion* at Corinth, a representative assembly, which conducted the affairs of the League before, during and even after the war. One of the standard modern handbooks of Greek history, under the marginal *lemma* 481 B.C., says that it was 'Athens and Sparta who jointly convened an Hellenic congress to consult on the measures to be taken for common resistance'. This statement predicates the existence of a 'Hellenic congress' that could be summoned at will by any party (or number of parties) at any time. It also
presupposes a joint Athenian–Spartan hegemony over the Hellenic states, more than a century before such a concept was actually realized, as well as a meeting of a congress in the autumn of 481. However no ancient source explicitly refers to any kind of assembly (constitutive or otherwise) before the one at the Isthmus of Corinth in the spring of 480 which in any case would have overlapped with the celebration of the Isthmia. All the Greeks would of course have been present on that occasion.

The prevailing opinion then is that the Hellenic League was a new institution — not merely 'the Lacedaemonians and their allies' or, to use its modern and misleading title, the 'Peloponnesian League' — that was formed specifically for the task in hand: the defence of Greece against Persia. N.G.L. Hammond states the canonical view as follows: 'The title of the new (sic) organization was “the Greeks” .... It was now a league with a collective name: “the league of the Greeks” or “the Greek league”, with an administrative organization in its congress'. So much for modern opinions, but what do the ancient sources actually say? No term approaching Hammond’s is attested in any contemporary source. And if there had ever been such an official body with an official name, the latter would surely have been something like the one Plutarch gave it — ἡ τῶν Ἑλλήνων σύμμαχος. In fact the only phrase remotely approaching anything like a 'title' is the expression Herodotus uses of the allies twice (with minor variations) in book 7; that is, 'those of the Hellenes who had the better attitude towards Hellas'. The title is purely descriptive and does not necessarily denote any kind of organized institution, but may only be the author's own way of distinguishing the patriotic from the apathetic or traitorous Hellenes who did not resist Persia.

Our main and, as C. Hignett has convincingly shown, essentially only source for the Greeks' defensive preparations is Herodotus. All later accounts (Ephorus, Diodorus, Plutarch, Trogus and Justin) are to a degree derived from his interpretation of the events. Variations in details evident in the later tradition can be ascribed either to the authors' own interpretations of Herodotus or to the intrusion of incidental data from his contemporaries or successors who dealt with individual persons or events connected with the Persian war. To some extent they, too, were themselves dependent on, or influenced by, the Father of History. Herodotus, however, is the only author who dealt with the 'great event' and with the theme of the Hellenic resistance (we have the word of Dionysius of Halicarnassus for this). Therefore any investigation of the origin, structure and purpose of the Hellenic League has to centre on Herodotus' account, and nowhere in his History does he specifically mention anything remotely resembling an institution or organization which can be described in terms of the modern conception of the Hellenic League. The origin of the belief in the institution is to be found in Diodorus' references to a permanent com-
mon assembly of the Hellenes, which suggests some kind of representative council. But such a concept is patently a fourth-century phenomenon, derived from Ephorus, who himself would have been familiar with the representative synedria of the Boeotian and the Second Athenian Leagues and would have interpreted conditions which Herodotus describes in the light of the institutions of his own time. It is Ephorus’ concept that still prevails.

From Herodotus we have only the vaguest suggestion regarding the origin of this alleged new institution. The details are given in 7.145, a passage which K. Wickert misleadingly calls ‘a detailed report’ of the alleged first meeting of the Hellenic League.

When the Hellenes who had the better notion about Hellas gathered together in the same place and debated among themselves and exchanged pledges, they thereupon took council and decreed first to reconcile all matters, both feuds and wars that were going on among themselves — and there were wars that had been brewing between several states, the most serious being between the Athenians and Aeginetans. Then afterwards, discovering that Xerxes was in Sardis with the army, they planned to send men to Asia to spy on the King’s affairs, and messengers to Argos to make an agreement that they fight on their side against the Persian, also to send others to Sicily, to Gelon, the son of Deinomenes, and to Corcyra to bid them to assist Hellas, and others to Crete; for they had reached the opinion that perhaps the Greek Thing might become one, and everyone having put their heads together, they might all do the same, since dreadful things were threatening all Hellenes alike.

In a paragraph of about a dozen lines Herodotus states the following ‘facts’: first, there were ‘patriotic’ Greeks who were more concerned about the welfare of Hellas as a whole than about their own poleis; second, they assembled of their own volition (there is no suggestion of their being summoned by a hegemon) at a common venue; third, they debated and exchanged pledges (the nature of the pledges is not stated); fourth, they took counsel and ‘decreed’ (see note 26) to make peace among themselves. A
new sentence, beginning μετὰ δὲ πυνθανόμενοι, may well denote an interval of time between the peace treaties and the next plans (to reconnoitre enemy resources and to seek aid from the neutral states), but in its immediate context it suggests that all the steps were discussed and decided upon on a single occasion. The paragraph concludes with a unifying rhetorical flourish: the Greeks’ prime motive (so Herodotus will have us believe) was panhellenic solidarity in the face of a common danger.

It is odd that in this chapter Herodotus indicates neither the convenor and participants nor the location and occasion of the assembly. Essentially he does no more than link together in a single literary context a number of discrete events or actions and so creates the impression of the foundation of an institution and its operation. In short, he makes one ‘assembly’ responsible for organizing a common peace and for sending spies to Asia and embassies to other states — the theme of the next few chapters. Furthermore, although at 7.148 he refers to the Greeks who had sent the embassies as συνώνυμοι, he nowhere mentions the exchange of oaths. He merely says that ‘those of the Hellenes who had a better attitude towards Hellas’ met ‘at the same place’ and there exchanged λόγος and πίστις and resolved to terminate their mutual hostilities. This is a strange way of describing the inauguration of a panhellenic alliance, since no oaths are taken between the patriots; and the forging of military alliances surely presupposes the taking of oaths (cf. 9.92 and 106). The ‘word’ and ‘pledge’ seem to be connected only with the ending of hostilities and the establishing of peaceful relations. These are of course necessary steps towards making a military alliance, but certainly do not constitute that act of alliance. When could the alliances have been made? Presumably in the period between the reconciliation of the warring states and the arrival of the news that Xerxes was in Sardis.²⁸ Herodotus (who is writing patriotic, not political history) prefers however to gloss over the intervening political process and to confront the audience with the apparently spontaneous expression of Hellenic solidarity. He also says that these patriotic Greeks met ‘at the same place’. But where? Surely he must have known, or if he did not, there must have been many people alive in his day who did. He could have found out if he had wanted to. Modern historians such as J.B. Bury, P.A. Brunt and others assume too much when they say that the meeting took place in the autumn of 481 at Corinth.²⁹ They simply retroject the attested assembly of προβουλοι at the Isthmus in the spring of 480 (Hdt. 7:172) to the previous year without the basis of any evidence. Could this earlier assembly have taken place at Sparta? A late tradition, reflected in Pausanias, is believed to suggest this.³⁰ But let us look at the context of this passage. Pausanias, describing the Hellenion at Sparta, cites as one of two obviously propagandistic accounts of its origin, the story that it was the place where ‘the Hellenes’ prepared defensive measures against Xerxes. He does not say ex-
plicitly that the Hellenic League was founded there and on that particular occasion. For all we know it may simply have been where Sparta’s regular allies, the so-called ‘Peloponnesian League’, usually convened. Moreover we have to take into account the fact that in the same context Pausanias says that the Hellenion was also the place where the Hellenes assembled before the Trojan war. He is evidently using a tradition which reflected Spartan propaganda and which justified Spartan hegemony of the Hellenes on the basis of Agamemnon’s leadership of the Greeks in the war against Troy. Stesichorus propagated this myth in the sixth century, 31 and it also recurs in Herodotus’ History (e.g. the logos of the bones of Orestes [1.66ff.] and Syagros’ speech before Gelon [7.159]). 32 Pausanias’ evidence for the foundation of the Hellenic League is therefore qualified by the probability that this remark about the Hellenes and the Persian war is no more trustworthy than the tale about the congress to decide on the Trojan war. We are thus left in the dark about the occasion and location of the alleged ‘first’ meeting of the Hellenic League. If Herodotus did know where the place was, he did not feel obliged to reveal it. It would, after all, have been in Sparta — the obvious place!

The second event referred to in 7.145 evidently took place some time after the λόγος and πίστις, when reports came through that Xerxes was at Sardis. 33 The patriotic Greeks resolved to send spies to Sardis and ambassadors to other Greek states. We do not know whether these resolutions were made together at one and the same assembly, or on different occasions, possibly independently, by different states. Herodotus probably did not know either. His wording (especially the use of the aorist) gives the impression that it was the former. Moreover we are told neither how many or which Greek states were represented in making this decision, nor which states were represented in the embassy to Argos, nor whether any states other than Athens and Sparta were among the ambassadors to Gelon of Syracuse. In the last instance only Syagros, the Spartan ambassador, is named. 34 Was there really an Athenian at the same time and in the same embassy as Syagros, or did Herodotus simply invent one as a dramatic foil for the Spartan? 35 The sole purpose of the Athenian’s speech in the context is merely to indicate to the audience that Athens was entitled to command the allied fleet but was graciously prepared to concede the command to Sparta, for the good of the common cause. 36 Herodotus gives us no reason to believe that the resolutions regarding the despatch of spies to Sardis or ambassadors to the Greek states involved any parties other than Sparta and Athens. The identity of the spies and the provenance of the embassies are left vague.

Examined separately the events documented in 7.145 do not suggest the foundation of a Greek League with a representative assembly — a synedrion. But within the literary context of chapters 132–145 and in the
light of the motive which the author imputes to the Greeks at the end of 145, these discrete facts are given a specious unity. ‘Their wish (Herodotus says) was to unite if possible the entire Greek name (τὸ Ἑλληνικὸν) in one and to bring all to join in the same plan of defence, inasmuch as the approaching danger threatened all alike’. By this statement he imputes to the patriots in 481 a panhellenic ideology as the catalyst for forming a pattern of Hellenic cooperation, and thus suggests the formation of a league. We have no idea whether this is exactly how the Greeks felt at the time. Nevertheless it is how Herodotus himself saw the situation when he composed the Persian war narrative not long before (or even during) the Archidamian war, when the relations between Athens and Sparta (as well as those between Athens and many of her allies) were at their lowest ebb. The gloomy situation of the 430s may have prompted him to take as his theme a period when, on the surface at least, the Greeks appeared to him to have achieved a state of internal accord unprecedented since the Trojan war.

The panhellenic oath against the medizing states also suggests the notion of unification and the spirit of panhellenic cooperation: ‘Against the following did the Hellenes, who undertook the war against the barbarian, swear the oath; as many who, though Hellenes, surrendered to the Persian without compulsion, while their affairs were still in good shape, these they would tithe and dedicate the proceeds to the God at Delphi’. Now Herodotus does not mention this oath in the context of 7.145 — the so-called inaugurating congress — but instead earlier in the narrative, at chapter 132, in the context of Xerxes’ journey through Northern Greece and his diplomatic overtures to the Thessalians and their neighbours. Chronologically then, the events here described must postdate those documented in 145. The juxtaposition of the list of medizing states, the oath and the observation in 133 that Xerxes refused to negotiate with Athens and Sparta, emphasizes the isolation of the patriots and the urgency of the situation. Moreover, the heroic attitudes of these two states are epitomized respectively by the logoi of Sperthias and Boulis (the Spartans who voluntarily offered their lives in atonement for the murder of Darius’ heralds many years before) and of Themistocles’ bravely optimistic re-interpretation of the terrifying oracles which Delphi issued to the Athenians. The events described in 145, then, are framed, as it were, in the narrative by circumstances which are distinctly hostile to the Hellenic cause. In this way the resolution of the patriotic Greeks, in the face of such adversity, is brought to the fore. Herodotus’ treatment in a short logos of the Greeks’ meeting at the same place, laying aside their quarrels, exchanging pledges and deciding on a common course of action, thus gives the impression of a single consolidating act of unity in the face of appalling danger. We therefore gain the impression that on a single (though unspecified) occasion some kind of co-
operating organization was formed. The facts alone do not say this, but the way in which Herodotus relates them and the context in which he sets them certainly suggests it.43

Who then were these patriotic Greeks? Are they to be identified with 'the Lacedaemonians and their allies'? Although Herodotus initially mentions only Sparta and Athens, we are fortunate in having a valuable primary source: the Delphic Serpent Column.44 Set up by Pausanias the victor at Plataea on behalf of the Hellenes who fought against Persia,45 the inscription does not allude to, or even remotely suggest, any kind of organization. Its superscript reads simply: 'The following fought the war...' then follows a list of states headed by Sparta, followed by Athens and Corinth, then more or less in succession, by Peloponnesians (lines 3–5), Central Greeks (line 6), then the islands and the more remote northern and western allies (lines 9–1). The grouping of the Peloponnesian states does not suggest that the author of the inscription was trying to convey the idea that there was a Peloponnesian core, or that Sparta's 'league' in any way played a more important role than the other allies or formed the nucleus of the new 'wider' organization.46 There is simply a list of Hellenic states, grouped roughly geographically, with Sparta at its head.

Modern scholars, who subscribe to the canonic view of a Hellenic League separate from and larger than the 'Peloponnesian League', argue from a preconceived idea of the nature and extent of the Lacedaemonian alliancesystem, particularly for the period preceding the Peloponnesian war — namely that it was a proper league with an established constitution;47 that membership of the alliance was confined to a certain fixed number of states and that the allies were permanently bound by oath to their hegemon.48 Such preconceptions are based on the evidence of Thucydides and Xenophon49 and on the connotations of the modern term, 'the Peloponnesian League', which is generally applied to Sparta's sphere of patronage or hegemony between the sixth and fourth centuries. Sparta's influence over the Greeks in the sixth and first half of the fifth century, however, was based not merely on military superiority (this only directly affected the closest and weaker states), but, to a far greater extent, on prestige, myth and above all, the sympathetic leanings of ruling factions even in more remote states, outside the Peloponnesian.50 Athens is a case in point. Cleomenes could not use coercion to get his way with the new democracy in the time of Cleisthenes,51 but the Athens of Miltiades or Cimon was considered by those who had the say in the assembly at the time to be an ally of Sparta's.52 Brunt argues that the names on the Serpent Column reflect a membership far wider than that of the 'Peloponnesian League'.53 He (and others), however, base their concept of 'the Peloponnesian League' on the list of states which Thucydides (2.9.2) says were militarily supporting Sparta in the first year of the Peloponnesian war.54
fact that the political and military situation in the Greek world in 431 would have been vastly different from what it had been in 480, we should remember that Thucydides is not giving a description of the ‘Peloponnesian League’ but merely stating a historical fact in listing those allies who fought for Sparta in a particular season. This is to say that the states not listed as actually fighting at the time, were unsympathetic to Sparta or did not regard Sparta as their prostates.\textsuperscript{55} There still may have been certain states which, while regarding Sparta as prostates, or even as hege-mon at the time and for reasons with which Thucydides did not concern himself, did not participate in the invasion of Attica. This especially would have been the case with non-contiguous and isolated states, such as Melos. This island state, though listed on the Serpent Column, did not actively support Sparta in the Peloponnesian war. This to Brunt supports his argument that the league of 480 was not the ‘Peloponnesian League’.\textsuperscript{56} There is however evidence that the Melians in fact supported Sparta’s cause by making a contribution to the war-effort.\textsuperscript{57} Thucydides is strangely silent about this but then he may not have known about the contribution and probably never saw the inscription.

In 431 the Melians may not have perceived the war against Athens as a threat. They had never had any part in the Athenian-led alliance and even as late as 426/5 they held out single-handedly against a large Athenian force, sent to extract tribute from them.\textsuperscript{58} However, in 416, when the Melians actually did require Sparta’s assistance, they reply to the Athenian ambassadors in terms which suggest (according to Thucydides’ reconstruction) that they had no hesitation in regarding the Spartans as prostates and in counting on their assistance (as allies) on grounds of ζυγγένεα and αδογγόνη,\textsuperscript{59} ties of blood (because they were Dorians, such is the implication of the phrase τής γε ζυγγενεις ζενεκα)\textsuperscript{60} and ‘a sense of honour’, which the position of prostates would naturally have required. Sparta’s, like most other political propaganda, was multifaceted and she claimed to be prostates of the Dorians as much as of the freedom of the Hellenes.\textsuperscript{61} When hard-pressed in 416, therefore, the Melians would have regarded Sparta as prostates as readily as they had done in 480, perhaps even to the extent of accepting their hegemony in a war against the Athenian aggressor. The relationship between Melos and Sparta may thus be representative to some extent of the nature of the bond that existed between Sparta and some of her more distant allies, not only in 480, but throughout the first three quarters of the fifth century. Sparta’s access to Persian gold in the closing stages of the Peloponnesian war, however, drastically changed her position and the nature of her influence over other states.\textsuperscript{62}

In the sixth and for most of the fifth-centuries Sparta lost or gained allies among the Greek states in accordance with the rise and fall of ruling factions within them or their need for a strong champion in times of danger.
The 'Peloponnesian League' was probably much more amorphous than is generally supposed, with a membership which fluctuated in accordance with a state's preparedness or need to acknowledge Sparta's hegemony.\textsuperscript{33}

Brunt also rejects the identification of the Hellenic League with the 'Lacedaemonians and their allies' on the grounds that Herodotus' description of the 'first congress' of the Hellenic League does not 'read like a description of a congress of the Peloponnesian League'.\textsuperscript{64} As indicated above, the facts which Herodotus presents at 7.145 do not describe any kind of single congress. This is only an inference which can be drawn from the context. Brunt also objects that in the 'Hellenic League' Athens played 'a leading part from first to last'. This (he maintains) could not have been the case in the 'Peloponnesian League'. But this is precisely the impression that Herodotus wanted to convey, as I shall explain below.

There is only a single instance where Herodotus mentions specifically a congress of the Hellenic League — this is the one at Corinth in 480, which took place probably during, or soon after, the Isthmia. It is the only account which furnishes any information about its composition. Delegates whom Herodotus calls πρόσομαοί, were chosen by the states which 'had the better attitude towards Hellas' (he uses the same phrase in ch. 145).\textsuperscript{65} We do not know whether πρόσομαοί was their official title. Herodotus uses the same term also to describe the representatives of the Panionium who conducted the Ionian revolt in 499–94.\textsuperscript{66} It may well be the author's own coinage. The particular meaning he gives it in these contexts is unparalleled in classical Greek prose.\textsuperscript{67} He does not say specifically which states were represented at the Isthmus, only that they were 'the patriots'. This congress of Hellenes (although Herodotus only mentions the Spartans and Athenians specifically) made a joint resolution to send a task force to Thessaly in response to a petition for support against the pro-Persian partisans. The mode of procedure is not however clear.\textsuperscript{68} Yet there is no indication that it was on this occasion any different from that adopted by the Spartans and their allies on former occasions (e.g. Hdt. 5.91 and 93). According to Herodotus' account this 'league-council' played only a small and not at all successful or useful role in the defence of Hellas. After the Thessalian débâcle\textsuperscript{69} the conduct of the war was henceforth in the hands of an allied council of strategoi, under the supreme command of the Spartan general: that is, the council — συνέδριον — of the Lacedaemonians and their allies.

That Sparta actually had been solely in charge of the defence of Greece from the beginning is clear enough from Herodotus' account of the course of the war. He had no real need to state this explicitly. After all, by 481 Sparta was the only major military power in mainland Greece: true, Athens had recently enlarged her fleet (thanks to Themistocles' judicious use of the proceeds of the Laurion silver mines)\textsuperscript{70} but had scarcely had much opportunity of proving her mettle as a naval power. Sparta, on the other
hand, had for over half a century been building up a collection of bilateral alliances with like-minded states (at some stage including Athens, probably, after the expulsion of the Peisistratids). Such allies would have either been compelled, through weakness or dependency, to maintain, or would have benefited from maintaining, a partnership with the prostates. In 481, under the threat of imminent barbarian invasion, it is quite likely that an unprecedented number of Greek states recognized existing, or formed new, ties with Sparta. Yet Herodotus presents us with a vague and circumscribed account of ‘the Greeks’ preparations, with suggestions of multilateral and common deliberation and action which betrays his apparent unwillingness to give Sparta credit for the initiative as well as for her acknowledged position as hegemon of many Greek states — including Athens — at the time. How can we account for his ambivalent attitude towards the nature of the alliance of 480?

Herodotus was probably writing his Persian war narrative in the 440s or later, perhaps while he was in Athens. He would naturally have been influenced by current Athenian propaganda, which at that time would have been hostile to Sparta. His personal beliefs (7.139) concurred with the Athenian propaganda of his day, and perhaps out of personal conviction, or in deference to his audience, he avoided stating an embarrassing truth: the Athenians, who at the time based their supremacy over their allies on their reputation as Saviours of Hellas at Marathon and Salamis (this propaganda is cited in Thucydides, in fourth-century sources and numerous commemorative inscriptions) were actually under orders from Sparta during their ‘finest hour’. Not only had they found it necessary to approach the acknowledged prostates of the Hellenes for aid against the barbarian, but also to accept her hegemony! Herodotus preferred to see the Persian war as a ‘panhellenic’ achievement, with both Sparta and Athens as protagonists but with the balance tilted slightly in favour of the latter, and without explicitly ascribing the role of hegemon to either party, even though Sparta’s position of command is implicit in the actual narrative.

Herodotus’ account of the so-called Hellenic congress in 7.145 gives the impression that there was an assembly of a panhellenic league and something like a common-peace in 481. In other words, he created a panhellenic occasion. Close scrutiny of the text, however, shows that he did not actually document the ‘foundation’ of a Hellenic League, but that he grouped together a number of disparate events which involved Sparta’s allies and created a historical fact: that is, the unity of the Greeks in the face of the barbarian invasion. By giving a low profile to Sparta’s acknowledged hegemony of her allies and prostasia of the Hellenes, and enhancing Athens’ role in the defence of Hellas, he created the illusion of widespread Hellenic cooperation. In other words, it was Herodotus who created the notion of a Hellenic League as a thing apart from and overshadowing the existing Lacedae-
monian alliance. This was a creation which later historians, ancient and modern, influenced by fourth-century notions of panhellenism, multilateral alliances, koine eirene, homonoia, and the representative synedria of the Boetian and Second Athenian Leagues, developed into the historical myth which to this day we still think of as the Hellenic League of 481 and the Common Synedrion of the Hellenes.

NOTES


3. In line 402 the messenger reports the battle cry of the Greeks at Salamis:

\[ \text{... ὃς ἔφε Εὐρήμων ἤτε ἔλευθεροῦτε πατρίς ἔλευθεροῦτε δὲ ταῖς, γυναικαῖς, θεῶν τε πατρῴων ἔθη.} \]

4. This tradition influenced the extant 'patriotic' epigrams (cf. C.W. Forsara, Archaic Times to the End of the Peloponnesian War, Cambridge 1983, no.50 and 51), the fourth (or third)-century 'Themistocles Decree' (cf. R. Meiggs and D.M. Lewis, Greek Historical Inscriptions (GHI), Oxford 1969, no.23) and the Athenian orators.

5. E.g. Hdt. 7.149.8: οὕτω γὰρ ἐπὶ ἥκτυτα τῶν πρεσβευτίων ἐπάθοντο, τοῦτο ἐξῆς εἴη ἔλευθεροῦτε πατρίς, ἔλευθεροῦτε δὲ ταῖς, γυναικαῖς, θεῶν τε πατρῴων ἔθη.


8. Brunt (above, n.1) 135.


10. See below, note 21. Diodorus' almost exclusive dependence on Ephorus for his account of the Persian war is generally accepted; cf. Hignett, Xerxes' Invasion of Greece, London 1982, 10f.

12. In 369, cf. Xenophon, *Hell.7.1.1.* There is no literary or epigraphic evidence of such a system of leadership ever having existed before.

13. There is no evidence for the precise months and years in which the panhellenic games (including the Isthmia) were held in the first quarter of the fifth century. However, on the analogy of the third century B.C., for which there is evidence, it would appear that in the odd-numbered years only the Nemean festival was held, while in the even-numbered years the Isthmian and the Olympic or Isthmian and Pythian were held. For the spring date of the Isthmia, see G.F. Unger, *Philologus* 33 (1834) 227ff. and 37 (1838) 1ff, who calculates that it took place on the 8th of the Attic month Mounichion (mid-April to mid-May, approximately), also J.H. Krause, *Hellenica* 2(1), Leipzig 1838 and 2(2), Leipzig 1841 and K. Schneider, ‘*Isthmia*’, *RE* 9 (1916) 2249 for the ancient references.

14. N.G.L. Hammond (above, n.1) 225.

15. Plut. *Arist.* 10.6. The name is late: either Plutarch’s own or that of his source, perhaps Craterus’ *Ψηφοματία Συνεχεία* (the context — cf. 10.4 — refers to ‘Aristides’ decree’ against the traitors); cf. P. Krech, *De Crateri Psephismaton Synagoge et de locis aliquot Plutarchi ex ea petitis*, Diss. Berlin 1888, repr. Chicago 1979, 56. Craterus apparently used his ‘documentary’ sources uncritically, making no distinction between genuine documents or late propagandistic forgeries. This is therefore not a reliable source. J.A.O. Larsen however (‘The Constitution and Original Purpose of the Delian League’, *HSCP* 51 [1940] 175–213; 177) accepts the Plutarch passage as genuine evidence for the official name of the league of 480.

16. 7.145: συλλεγομένων δὲ ἐς τά τοῦτο τῶν περὶ Ἑλλάδα Ἐλλήνων τὰ ἁμείνα φρονεστῶν καὶ 7.172: ἐν δὲ τῷ Ἰσθμῷ ἦσαν ἁμείναν πρόβουλοι τῆς Ἑλλάδος ἀραρημένοι ἀπὸ τῶν πολέων τὰ ἁμείνα φρονεστῶν περὶ τὴν Ἑλλάδα. Elsewhere he uses the term ‘the Hellenes’ (cf. 9.90; 98.4; 106.6).

17. These included the Argives, Syracusans, Cretans and Corcyreans who, for reasons of their own, remained neutral or aloof.


20. *De Thuc.* 5. See also R. Drews (above, n.19), 22f.

21. Diod. 11.1.1: ἐν δὲ οὐν πρὸ τοῦτος βίβλος ... τὸ τέλος ἐστὶ τῶν πράξεων εἰς τῶν προηγομένων ἔνασιον τῆς Ἑλλάδος διαφάσεως εἰς τὴν Εὐρώπην καὶ εἰς τὰς γενομένας δημηγορίας ἐν τῇ κοινῇ συνάντησι τῶν Ἐλλήνων ἐν Κορινθίαι περὶ τῆς Ἐλλάδος συμμαχίας τῆς Ἐλλάδας. The wording of the last part of the sentence suggests that the author sees ‘the Hellenes’ as an entity, that is, as one party of a (proposed) bilateral alliance with Gelon. Cf. also 11.3.3: ὁ δ’ ἐν Ἰσθμῳ συνενδέχεσθαι τῶν Ἐλλήνων ἐρωτισάντο. The implied *syndrion* and the notion of ‘voting’ suggests an institution.

22. Cf. *Hellenica Oxyrhynchia*, 16.2.4; Tod 2, 123.1.44.

23. Cf. E.N. Tigerstedt, *The Legend of Sparta in Classical Antiquity* 1, Stockholm 1965, 105 and 208. We also have to take into account the fact that Diodorus, our chief extant source apart from Herodotus, lived during the time of Julius Caesar, when most of the civilized world, as he knew it, was nominally influenced by the decisions of the Roman Senate. It would have been quite natural for him to view any large-scale joint enterprise such as the defence of Hellas as the work of some council or ‘syndrion’.

24. K. Wickert (above, n.1), 40, refers to it as the ‘ausführliche Bericht (!) des Herodotos’.

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25. ἐνθαῦτα has both a temporal and local meaning: 'then' or 'there' (cf. LSJ q.v. ἐνθαῦτα). Herodotus frequently uses it in either sense. Here the ambiguity may be deliberate. Although the Greeks (or some of them) may have decided to take counsel about sending spies and ambassadors on some occasion after (temporal adverb) they had exchanged λόγος and πίστες, the wording (if the adverb is interpreted in its local sense) strongly suggests that the decision was made then and there, at the first meeting.


27. The ms.-reading ἐγκεφρημένα (from ἔγραμαι or ἔγραψα) makes little sense in this context. Reiske's very plausible emendation (adopted here) has found wide acceptance; cf. R.W. Macan, Herodotus: Books VII–VIII–IX 1 (1), London 1908, 196, note ad loc.

28. It is possible that some states were already allies of Sparta. They could have been of long standing or could have become allies in 481 or later. Members of the 'Peloponnesian League' were not obliged to be at peace with each other all the time (e.g. Thuc. 134.1); cf. de Ste Croix (above, n.1), 114.

29. E.g. Bury-Meiggs (above, n.1), 170; Brunt (above, n.1), 136.


32. Agesilaos also exploited the Agamemno-myth for his Eastern war in 396, Xen. Hell. 3.4.3.

33. μετὰ δὲ πυθανόμενοι Ξέρξεα ... ἦνοι ἐν Σάρδοις κτλ. The present participle implies that some time elapsed before the Greeks actually decided to send out spies and ambassadors.

34. Hdt. 7.157. Herodotus' account of the embassy to Argos (7.148ff.) is vague and obviously based on hearsay (the phrase 'the Argives say ... ', vel sim. appears five times in under two pages of text); only the Spartans are mentioned in the context.


36. According to Herodotus (7.161.2), Gelon generously offers Sparta half of the command but, before Syagros can respond, the nameless Athenian ambassador breaks in (ὑπερακός), assuring Gelon of Athens' right to be hegemon of the ἀκρίνγους and providing spurious or irrelevant arguments in support of his claim.

37. G. Rawlinson's translation. The term τὸ Ἐλληνικόν, which I translate neutrally above (p.96), is generally interpreted as having an ethnic sense; e.g. 'all of Greek blood' (Godley), 'the entire Greek People' (Greene) and 'le monde hellenique' (Le Grand).

39. Hdt. 7.132.2: ὁσοὶ τῷ Πέρσῃ ἔδωκαν σφέας αὐτῶς Ἐλλήνες ἑόντες, μὴ ἀναγκασθέντες, καταστάντων σφι εὗ τῶν πρηγμάτων, τούτους δεκαείς τῷ ἐν Δέλφοι τηδές.

40. This could not be the oath that Herodotus intends his audience to infer at 7.148 (οὐ δὲ συνομίζατα Ἐλλήνων ἐπὶ τῷ Πέρσῃ). Its content presupposes the fact that Xerxes was already in Greece and that some Greeks had already defected. The oath against medizers was probably taken during (or soon after) the Isthmia of 480.

41. Hdt. 7.137.

42. Ibid. 140–144.

43. In blunt terms, Herodotus groups events in such a way as to form a false impression. For a similar use of an ‘inferred sequence’ of events in connection with Delphi’s responses to Athens, see P.B. Georges, ‘Saving Herodotus’ Phenomena: the Oracles and Events of 480 B.C., Class Ant 5 (1986) 14–59, especially 19–22.

44. GHI, No. 27.

45. Hdt. 9.81; cf. Thuc. 1.132.


48. Among others, J.A.O. Larsen, ‘The Constitution of the Peloponnesian League’, CP 28 (1933) 257–76; 29 (1934) 1–19; Brunt (above, n.1), 149ff; Wickert (above, n.1); de Ste Croix (above, n.1), 128ff; cf. Appendices 18 and 19.

49. Thuc. 2.9.2; 1.40; 5.7; 30; Xen. Hell. 2.2.20. None of these loci states explicitly that Sparta’s allies (even Athens after 404) were permanently pledged to loyalty although it no doubt suited the Spartans to believe and expect it.

50. Cf. Thuc. 1.18. Herodotus’ statement (1.68.6) that by the middle of the sixth century (when Croesus approached her for aid, Sparta had subjected most of the Peloponese — καὶ ἡ κοιλη τῆς Πελοποννήσου ἵνα κατεστραμμένη), is an exaggeration. Argos and Achaea were never under Spartan control. Achaea was not even an ally until after 431 (Thuc. 2.9.2; 5.81, cf. de Ste Croix [above, n.1], 97f.). Sparta had subjected Laconia and Messenia militarily but had failed to subject Arcadia (Hdt. 1.66ff). Herodotus is not referring in this context to Sparta’s ‘league’ or her allies, but to her area of actual political control. Through political and mythological manipulation, however, she was able to influence Tegea (and later, other states) only as ἴππος — protector or champion (i.e. προστάτης) — a role sanctioned by the Delphic Oracle (1.67.3–4), not as hegemón. See below, note 55.

51. Hdt. 5.72.

52. Hdt. 6.106 and 120; Thuc. 1.102.4.

53. Brunt (above, n.1), 143.

54. Thucydides lists the following combatants: ‘All the Peloponnesians within the Isthmus except the Argives and Achaean (save the Pellenians) . . . . Outside the Peloponese the Megarians, Locrians, Boeotians, Phocians, Ambraciots, Leucadians and Anactorians’.

55. The term προστάτης τῆς Ἐλλάδος (as applied to Sparta) was current in Herodotus’ time. In his account of Croesus’ appeal for aid (1.69) he makes the King say: ὅμως γὰρ πυνθάνομαι προστάτη, Ἐλλάδα. Elsewhere he refers either implicitly or explicitly to Sparta’s acknowledged prostasia of the Hellenes (3.148; 5.49; 84; 6.61 and 108). H. Schaefer (Staatsform und Politik, Leipzig 1932, 250) defines the term as an informal ‘protective leadership’ — Schutzherrschaft — as opposed to actual

56. Brunt (above, n.1), 143.


58. Thuc. 5.91. with *GHI* 69, line 64. Cf. A.W. Gomme, *Historical Commentary on Thucydides* 4, Oxford 1970, 156, also ATL 3, 503. Thucydides states explicitly that the Melians, even though they were islanders, would neither obey the Athenians nor even join the alliance.

59. Thuc. 5.104. The artificial nature and rhetorical and philosophical tendency of the Melian Dialogue undermines its value as a historical source, but the motives expressed would have seemed appropriate to Thucydides as well as to his contemporaries.

60. The Melians were probably not Dorian. Thucydides' statement that they were colonists of the Lacedaemonians may either have been based on Melian propaganda or his own (false) inference from Herodotus who says that they were of Lacedaemonian stock (8.48.1.; γένος ἄντες ἀπὸ Λακεδαίμονος; cf. Thuc. 5.84, Μῆλος Λακεδαιμονίων... εἰσὶν ἄποικοι); the two statements do not mean the same. In the catalogue of loyal islanders at Salamis, Herodotus' wording in the context implies that he does not include the Melians among the Dorian contingent. As we may infer from Diodorus (12.65.1–2), Ephorus, who wrote in an age of more sharply defined political institutions, rationalized and simplified the amorphous and complex state of political affairs of the fifth century by explicitely referring to Melos both as a member of the Lacedaemonian league and as Sparta's colony!

οὗτος (ὁ Νικιάς) δὲ ἐπὶ πρῶτην τὴν Μῆλον πλέοσα τὴν τε χώραν ἑδήσωσε καὶ τὴν πόλιν ἐπὶ ἑκάστας ἡμέρας ἐπολύρκησεν· ἂν τρίη γὰρ μνή τῶν Κυκλάδων νήσων διεφύλαττο τὴν πρὸς Λακεδαιμόνιος συμμαχίαν, ἄποικος οὗτος τῆς Ἐπάρτῃς.

Emphasis added: this statement is an obvious misinterpretation of Thucydides by a later source.

61. According to Herodotus (9.98) Sparta began using the Freedom of the Greeks as a slogan at the battle of Mycale. The Athenians took it over after Sparta ceded the naval *hegemonia* in 478. At least this is the argument Thucydides attributes to the Mytilineans in a speech (3.10.3). The earliest contemporary evidence for the use of the slogan however comes from Thucydides (5.9.9) in recounting the propaganda of Brasidas in 427. On the early composition-date of Book 5, see K.J. Dover and A. Andrewes, *Historical Commentary on Thucydides* 5, Oxford 1981, Appendix 2. For allusions to Sparta's Dorian propaganda, cf. Thuc. 1.124; 3.86; 4.61; 68; 5.9; 7.76–82; 7.5; 57–58; 8.25.

62. With a navy and the money to maintain a full-time force on land and sea, Sparta was able to dictate the terms she did to Athens in 404 (cf. Xen. *Hell.* 2.20) and to the Euxidian Aetolians (*SEG* 26. 461, cf. 36. 326: the date is disputed but from its imperious tone and the sophistication of its language is likely to be late fifth, or even
fourth century; cf. P. Cartledge, Agesilaos, Baltimore 1987, 9 for references for the discussion of the controversy. On the basis of this evidence historians (e.g. Wickert, de Ste Croix, and many others) maintain that from its inception all members of ‘the Peloponnesian League’ were required ‘to have the same friends and enemies as the Spartans and to follow wherever they led by land and sea’. It is, nevertheless, quite illegitimate to reconstruct on the basis of such late (or indecisive) evidence the ‘constitution’ of the early fifth-century ‘Peloponnesian League’.

63. As Beloch aptly expresses it (GG 2, 1, 387): ‘Es war allerdings nur ein loses Band, das diese Staaten an Sparta knüpfte; es fehlte dem Bunde jede wirkliche Organisation, und es hing in letzter Linie von dem Belieben jedes Bundesgliedes ab, ob es im Kriegsfalle seine vertragsmässigen Verpflichtungen erfüllen wollte. Aber die Überlegenheit des Vorortes war so gross, dass nicht so leicht ein Staat wagen konnte die Bundeshilfe zu weigern’ (see also note 72, below). Were Sparta’s allies permanently bound to her? Although Thucydides explicitly mentions oaths which bound Sparta’s allies (5.7 and 5.30), we have no indication that they were εκ τον δει πρόνοιας. M.N. Tod long ago observed that this formula does not appear before the fourth century (Greek Historical Inscriptions 2, Oxford 1948, p.15). No epigraphic evidence published since then has yet proved him incorrect. According to our evidence treaties in the archaic period were made for periods of fifty or a hundred years (cf. H. Bengtson, Staatsverträge des Altertums, München/Berlin 1962, nos. 110, 111). This is how the Greeks of the time expressed perpetuity. The Delian League, however, was a much more formal institution (cf. Thuc.1.96-97); nevertheless, none of the extant documents of the League specifically refers to Athens’ treaties with any of her allies as perpetual, even though Athens herself interpreted them as such whenever it suited her. Plutarch’s story (in the context of the League’s ‘foundation’) of the symbolic sinking of metal (Aríst. 25.1; see also Ath. Pol. 23.5) has often been interpreted as a gesture which guaranteed the permanence of the alliance between Athens and the Ionian states (Larsen [above, note 15], 183; N.G.L. Hammond, JHS 87 [1967] 41-61; but contrary to this view see H. Jacobson, ‘The Oath of the Delian League’, Philologus 119 [1975] 256-258). In any case this action is only attested in fourth-century tradition and its historicity is therefore suspect (cf. N.D. Robertson, ‘The True Nature of the Delian League’ AJAH 5 [1980] 64-87; 110-131, 89, note 43, for references). Whatever origin the myth had, or whenever it was first propagated, the implications were vague enough to have provided Athens with justification to coerce her uncooperative allies after the Persian crisis had faded.

64. Brunt (above, n.1), 144; see also de Ste Croix (above, n.1), 301f and Sealey (above n.1), 206f.

65. Hdt. 7.172. See above, n.16.

66. Hdt. 5.109 and 6.7.

67. The term may not have had any specific technical meaning in 499 or 480. After 430 it is attested as having a technical meaning quite different from Herodotus’ (cf. Aristophanes, Ach. 755; Thuc. 8.1, referring to a standing committee, and LSJ s. v. πρόδοσος II, for fourth-century instances). Plutarch (Arist. 21) uses the term in connexion with the ‘Hellenic League’ of Aristides. In this instance however he may reflect his fourth-century source which probably used Herodotus’ terminology. However, the fact that Herodotus alone uses the same terminology to describe both the representatives to the Panionium in 499 and the representatives at the Isthmus in 480, may mean no more than that he simply found the term useful for describing representatives of individual states at an inter-state assembly.

68. Hdt. 7.173; Diod. 11.2.5.
69. There is a marked division in the source tradition regarding the Thessalian campaign. Herodotus (7.173f) says that the Thessalians had already medized before the Hellenic force got to Tempe. Diodorus (11.2.5), based on and reflecting Ephorus' account, maintains that it was the Greeks who abandoned the Thessalians, thus forcing the latter to medize. The latter tradition may well reflect Thessalian propaganda which originated after the war and which was intended to mitigate charges of medism. Herodotus' version however, whether true or not, of course sheds a more favourable light on the integrity of 'the Hellenes'.

70. Ath. Pol. 22.7.


72. States such as Athens (or Corinth) were sufficiently strong and distant to get away with disregarding their relationship with Sparta when it suited them. Thus in the time of Cleisthenes the Athenians could make an 'alliance' with Persia (Hdt. 5.73) yet could call on Sparta for help in 490 (Hdt. 6.105).

73. See above, n.4.

74. Thus Wickert, cf. above, note 24.

75. There is no reason why 'the Hellenes' of 480 and the allied states under the hegemony of the Lacedaemonians (what we call 'the Peloponnesian League') could not have been one and the same (loose) organization. Even though more states are attested as under Sparta's hegemony in 480 (the evidence of the Serpent Column) than at the outbreak of the Peloponnesian war (the evidence of Thucydides 2.9), no-one can deny that what is being referred to in both contexts amounts to the same thing: a group of states under Spartan hegemony or, expressed in dualistic terms, the Lacedaemonians and their allies. As we have indicated, the earliest sources apply the term 'the Hellenes' to Sparta's sphere of political influence, both to her formal allies and to those under her prostasia (see note 55). The maritime wing of the alliance before and after the battle of Mycale continued to be called 'the Hellenes' as long as it was nominally under Spartan hegemony. (Hdt. 9.92; 106.1 and 4; see also above, notes 49 and 61, as well as Thuc. 1.94.1; 1.28.3; 3.10.5; 6.76.4). Athens' usurpation of the naval hegemony and, above all, the termination of the alliance with Sparta in 464, resulted in the polarization of the Hellenes as 'the Athenians and their allies' and 'the Lacedaemonians and their allies', respectively. But before 478 there was only one major power with a large body of allies — Sparta.

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