

CHAPTER 2

AN OUTLINE OF THESSALIAN HISTORY

The purpose of this chapter is to provide a brief narrative of Thessalian history, with special focus on the Archaic, Classical and Hellenistic periods. In so doing, I hope to create an adequate frame of reference for the following chapters which focus on religion. I neither canvas all of the relevant sources, nor do I tackle all of the region's numerous thorny historiographical problems. My focus is on basic domestic and foreign political developments in Thessalian history and broader, observable trends in Thessalian society.

2.1: Foreign Affairs

Long considered the northern frontier of Mycenaean civilization,¹ recent excavations at Bronze Age Dimini (= Homeric Iolkos?) may reveal a settlement equal in stature to the great Peloponnesian centers of Mycenaean civilization. Thessaly's prominence in the Homeric catalogue of ships is conspicuous. Although it is notoriously difficult to utilize that document for "historical" purposes, it is noteworthy that nearly all of the locations of Homeric Thessaly have produced Protogeometric material.²

Thessaly seems to have been a major military power in northern Greece during the Archaic period. Thessalian forces allegedly participated in the Lelantine War and the first Sacred War.³ A Thessalian alliance with the Peisistratids in Athens brought Thessalian forces into contact with the dominant power of the Peloponnese, Sparta, on

¹ Feuer 1983. On the Bronze Age in northern Greece more generally, cf. Andreou, Fotiadis et al. 1996.

² Morgan 2003: 102-5.

³ Cf. Lehmann 1983.

at least two occasions in the late sixth century. The Thessalians were among the first Greek powers to medize during the Persian Wars,⁴ although Herodotus suggests that this was a somewhat controversial decision of the Aleuadai, an aristocratic clan in Larisa, imposed upon Thessaly as a whole.

The Thessalians do not seem to have been a major factor in the buildup to and fighting of the Peloponnesian Wars of the later fifth century. Following the war, Thessaly was wracked by internal conflict brought on by a struggle between the ruling houses of Pherai and Larisa for regional hegemony.⁵ The most conspicuous outcome was the election of Philip II of Macedon as archon of the Thessalian League for life.⁶ Thessaly becomes in effect a Macedonian province: Philip collected tribute from some regions of Thessaly and utilized Thessalian cavalry in a number of military campaigns. Following Philip's assassination, Alexander maintained Macedonian control of Thessaly by winning election to the league archonship and used large numbers of Thessalian cavalry in his eastern campaigns.

While Thessaly emerges from the struggle of the diadochoi as Antigonid territory, the history of third-century Thessaly is extremely obscure. The most influential development in the region was Demetrius Poliorcetes' establishment in 294 BCE of Demetrias, a major Macedonian naval station and royal residence on the Pagasitic Gulf. The Macedonian presence in the region became more fully entrenched. The rise and dramatic expansion of the Aitolian League in central and northern Greece following the defeat of Brennus and the Gauls in 279 BCE gave Macedon a worthy opponent to the south. Thessaly was a major battleground for their competing interests throughout the middle and late third century and did not fully rest until Pydna.

⁴ Cf. Westlake 1936; Robertson 1976.

⁵ Cf. Westlake 1935; Mandel 1980; Sprawski 1999.

⁶ Just. 11.3.2.

Rome officially moves onto the scene in 196 BCE with the defeat of Philip V in the Second Macedonian War. Thessaly was “freed” from Macedon and, to a lesser extent, Aitolia, by Flamininus and the Thessalian *koinon* was renewed.⁷ Antiochus III’s invasion of Thessaly soon provided another context for the assertion of Roman power in the region. The territories administered by this league continued to grow throughout the second and first centuries BCE. Those possessions of Achaia Phthiotis which Aitolia did not continue to hold following the Flaminian settlement were fully integrated within the Thessalian League in 196 BCE. As a reward for her support of Rome during the war with Antiochus, Malis became Thessalian in 189 BCE; previously perioikic Perrhaebia joined in 146 BCE. The *koina* of the Spercheios valley—Ainis and Oetaea—were likely incorporated within the Thessalian League in 27 BCE. Of the Archaic and Classical *perioikoi*, only Magnesia maintained independence from the Thessalian League in the Imperial era. Thessaly was officially integrated within the Roman province of Achaia, most likely in 27 BCE. In 67 CE, Thessaly was likely detached from Achaia and incorporated within the province of Macedonia.⁸

2.2: Domestic Affairs

The Early History of the Thessalian League

To what extent can one speak of a Thessalian League in the Archaic and Classical period? Just who or what is concealed by mention of “the Thessalians” in literary and epigraphic sources is unclear in the pre-196a era. That the Thessalians possessed some mechanism for organizing concerted military activity by the time of

⁷ The circumstances surrounding this event will be considered in much greater detail in Chapter 4.

⁸ Bowersock 1965.

the Lelantine War is sure—if the literary traditions concerning this conflict are valid—and Herodotus’ testimony on the medism of Thessaly suggests that the Aleuads of Larisa had the ability to enforce their will on Thessaly at large. Whether this power was realized through a set of formal institutions like assemblies and elective councils or through an informal web of political alliances among the region’s local elites is unclear. Coins bearing the title “of the Thessalians” appear alongside local issues in the fifth century.⁹ The earliest epigraphic evidence for the existence of a Thessalian *koinon* is supplied by an early fourth-century proxeny decree, most likely from Pherai. The balance of evidence does suggest that some form of *koinon* existed in Thessaly in the Archaic and Classical periods.

*Aleuas the Red and the Tetrads*¹⁰

Harpocration, s.v. τετραρχία, preserves fragments of Hellanicus and Aristotle which are the foundation of our knowledge of Archaic Thessaly: τετάρων μερῶν ὄντων τῆς Θεσσαλίας ἕκαστον μέρος τετράς ἑκαλεῖτο, καθά φησιν Ἑλλάνικος (= FGrHist 601a F1) ἐν τοῖς Θεσσαλικοῖς. ὄνομα δέ φησιν εἶναι ταῖς τετράσι Θεσσαλιῶτιν Φθιωτῖν Πελασγιῶτιν Ἑστιαῖωτιν. καὶ Ἀριστοτέλης (= Aristotle fr. 497 Rose) δὲ ἐν τῇ κοινῇ Θεσσαλῶν πολιτείᾳ ἐπὶ Ἀλεῦα τοῦ πυρροῦ διηρῆσθαι φησιν εἰς ὄμοιρας τὴν Θεσσαλίαν.

“Thessaly has four parts and each part is called a tetrad, just as Hellanicus says in the *Thessalika*. He says that the tetrads are named Thessaliois, Phthiois, Pelasgiois and Hestiaois. In the *Common Constitution of the Thessalians*, Aristotle claims that Thessaly was divided into four parts during the time of Aleuas the Red.”¹¹

⁹ Cf. Martin 1985: 37-8.

¹⁰ Cf. the fundamental contribution of Gschnitzer 1954.

¹¹ Aleuas is commonly dated to the middle to late sixth century.

How did these tetrads function? Positive evidence is extremely scarce. A pair of inscriptions offer snapshots at different periods of Thessalian history.

IG ii² 175 (Athens: 353/2a)

[- - - - - - - καλέσαι δὲ τοὺς πρέσβ-]
 ες τῶν Θετταλῶν ἐπὶ ξ[ένια ἐς τὸ πρυτανεῖον ἐ-]
 σ αὔριον · οἶδε ἠιρέ[θ]ησ[αν πρέσβες - - "E-]
 [μ]πεδος Ὀῆθεν, Αἰσχίνη[ς - - - - - - -]
 - ορος Ἀχαρνεύς, ΛΙΥ [- - - - - - -] 5
 [οἶδε] ὄμοσαν Θετταλῶν [- - - - - - -]
 [π]ολέμαρχοι· Πελασγιωτ[ῶν - - - - - - -]
 Φθιωτῶν· Μεγάλος. Θετ[ταλιωτῶν - - - -]
 [E]στ[ι]ωτ[ῶ]ν· Εἴρων. πέζαρχο[ι - - - - -]
 Φ[ί]λιππος, Πολυμίδης · Λ [- - - - - - -] 10
 Θίβρων, Κοτιμίλας · Ὑπ [- - - - - - -]
 Θεόδωρος, Παμε . ος, [- - - - - - - -]
 Δρα . . . ς, Φιλόλαος, Οἰ [- - - - - - - -]
 Ἴπποκράτης *vacat*

vacat

“[...] (Let it be decided) to invite the ambassad]ors of the Thessalians to a m[eal in the prytaneion t]omorrow. The following were select[ed as ambassadors...E]mpedos of Oe, Aischine[s...]oros of Acharnai, Liu[...]: The following of the Thessalians took an oath¹² [...] Polemarchs: Of the Pelasgiot[ans...]; of the Phthiotans, Megalos; of the Thes[salio]tans...]; of the Hestiotans: Eiron. Pezarch[s...] Philip, Polymides, L[...],

¹² Or “the following took an oath: of the Thessalians...” Helly suggests that the lacuna should be filled “Thettalon [archon.]”

Thibron, Kotimilas, Hyp[...], Theodorus, Pameos, [...], Dra[...],s, Philolaos, Oi[...], Hippokrates *vacat*”

This inscription commemorates an official delegation sent by the Thessalians to Athens. Each tetrad provided a polemarch. Although one cannot infer too much from such titulature, it is entirely possible that these tetrads were somehow connected with military organization.

Our second inscription dates to the period of the renewed Thessalian League and concerns a massive shipment of Thessalian grain to Rome. The passage in question concerns the sources of the grain within Thessaly and the schedule of its delivery:

SEG 34.558.31ff. = Garnsey, Gallant et al. 1984 (Larisa: 150-130a)

τὰς δὲ πόλεις ἐκ[ά]στην τοῦ διαταγέντος σίτου ποιήσασθα[ι]
τὴν καταγωγὴν ἐπὶ λιμέν[α] τὸν ἐπὶ τοῦ Δημητρείου ἢ ἐμ
Φαλάρους ἢ ἐν 32

Δημητριάδι, τῶν μὲν τριάκ[ο]ντα δύο μυριαδῶν Πελασγιώτας
μὲν καὶ

Φθιώτας ἐν τῷ μηνὶ τῷ Ἀφρίῳ, Ἰστιώτας δὲ καὶ Θεσσαλιώτας
ἐν τῷ μη- 34

νὶ τῷ Θυί<φ> πρὸ τῆς εἰκάδος, τῶν <δὲ> δέκα μίας μυριαδῶν
ἐν τῷ μην[ῖ]

τῷ Φυλλικῷ πρὸ τῆς πέγτε καὶ δεκάτης ἐπὶ τῆς Πετραίου
στρατη- 36

γίας.

“...that each of the cities arrange the transport of its allocated grain down to the harbor, whether that of the Demetreion or at Phalera or at Demetrias; of which 320,000 (*kophinoi*) by the Pelasgiotai and the Phthiotai in the month of Aphrios, and

by the Hestaiotai and Thessalioi in the month of Thyos before the 20th, and 110,000 (*kophinoi*) in the month of Phyllikos before the 15th, while Petraios is *strategos*...”

(Trans. Garnsey, Gallant et al.)

The passage suggests that a system of tetrads was still functioning in the middle of the second century BCE. Flamininus must have found them useful. The new Thessalian League seems to have maintained an aspect of the geographic organization of the Archaic and Classical league. While it would be rash to retroject the function of the Roman tetrads into an earlier period, it is nevertheless striking that these tetrads seem to occupy an intermediate administrative position between the League and its constituent cities.

The Augustan geographer Strabo was acquainted with the tetrads. His introductory sketch of Thessalian topography remains the most useful discussion of their geographical boundaries (9.5.3):

Τοιαύτη δ' οὔσα εἰς τέτταρα μέρη διήρητο· ἐκαλεῖτο δὲ τὸ μὲν Φθιώτις τὸ δὲ Ἑστιαιώτις τὸ δὲ Θεσσαλιώτις τὸ δὲ Πελασγιώτις. ἔχει δ' ἡ μὲν Φθιώτις τὰ νότια τὰ παρὰ τὴν Οἴτην ἀπὸ τοῦ Μαλιακοῦ κόλπου καὶ Πυλαϊκοῦ μέχρι τῆς Δολοπίας καὶ τῆς Πίνδου διατείνοντα, πλατυνόμενα δὲ μέχρι Φαρσάλου καὶ τῶν πεδίων τῶν Θεσσαλικῶν· ἡ δ' Ἑστιαιώτις τὰ ἐσπέρια καὶ τὰ μεταξὺ Πίνδου καὶ τῆς ἄνω Μακεδονίας· τὰ δὲ λοιπὰ οἳ τε ὑπὸ τῇ Ἑστιαιώτιδι νεμόμενοι τὰ πεδία, καλούμενοι δὲ Πελασγιῶται, συνάπτοντες ἤδη τοῖς κάτω Μακεδόσι, καὶ οἱ ἐφεξῆς τὰ μέχρι Μαγνητικῆς παραλίας ἐκπληροῦντες χωρία.

“Such being its nature, Thessaly was divided into four parts. One part was called Phthiotis, another Hestiaiotes, another Thessaliois, and another Pelasgiotes. Phthiotis

occupies the southern parts which extend alongside Oeta from the Maliac, or Pylaic, Gulf as far as Dolopia and Pindus, and widen out as far as Pharsalus and the Thessalian plains. Hestiaetis occupies the western parts and the parts between Pindus and Upper Macedonia. The remaining parts of Thessaly are held, first, by the people who live in the plains below Hestiaetis (they are called Pelasgiotae and their country borders on Lower Macedonia), and, secondly, and those who fill out the districts extending as far as the Magnetan sea-coast [= Thessalioi].” (Trans. Jones)

Strabo reflects the geopolitical realities of the Augustan age when territory that had once been administered by the various *ethne* and *koina* bordering Thessaly to the north and south was not only controlled by the Thessalian League but also apparently incorporated within the pre-existing tetrad structure. For the Archaic period, it is likely that the tetrads consisted primarily of the two large plains of Thessaly.¹³

*Perioikoi*¹⁴

In the discussion so far, I have distinguished between Thessaly in the narrower sense—the tetrads, the plains—and Thessaly in the broader sense—the tetrads plus *perioikoi*. The three major perioikic regions—Magnesia, Perrhaebia, Achaia Phthiotis—are geographically contiguous to the tetrads. These three areas were represented on the council of the Delphic Amphictyony together with the Thessalians, a fact which suggests that these *ethne* had an equal status *viz-à-viz* the Thessalians at

¹³ Aristotle associates the Aleuas responsible for the division of the Thessalian plains into tetrads with another fundamental land division:
Schol. (Vat.) ad Eurip. Rhes. v. 307 (p. 296 Cobet, p. 29 t. I Dind.)
πέλτη ἄσπις ἔστιν ἴτυν οὐκ ἔχουσα, καθάπερ φησὶν Ἄριστοτέλης (= Aristotle fr. 498 Rose) ἐν Θεσσαλῶν πολιτείᾳ γράφων οὕτως διελὼν δὲ τὰς πόλεις Ἀλεύας ἔταξε κατὰ τὸν κλῆρον παρέχειν ἐκάστους, ἰππέας μὲν τεσσαράκοντα, ὀπλίτας δὲ ὀγδοήκοντα.

“The *pelte* is a shield that lacks an outer border, just as Aristotle claims in the Constitution of the Thessalians, writing as follows: ‘After dividing up the cities, Aleuas ordered that each of them provide 40 cavalry and 80 hoplites per kleros.’”

¹⁴ The best discussion of the *perioikoi* remains Kip 1910. Cf. also Gschnitzer 1958: 1-6.

the time of the Amphictyony's foundation. By the late sixth century, however, evidence begins to suggest that these perioikic regions were semi-dependant upon the tetrads.

A number of references in Classical historians are crucial for our interpretation of the phenomenon. Herodotus comments at 5.94:

Ἴππῆ δὲ ἐνθεῦτεν ἀπελαυνομένῳ ἐδίδου μὲν Ἀμύντης ὁ
Μακεδῶν Ἀνθεμοῦντα, ἐδίδοσαν δὲ Θεσσαλοὶ Ἴωλκόν

“To Hippias, while he was in exile from Athens, Amyntas the Macedonian was offering Anthemous, the Thessalians, Iolkos.”

The Thessalians, rather, some ruling clans of the Thessalians, and the Peisistratids were allies. Following Hippias' expulsion from Athens, Herodotus informs us that he was offered the city of Iolkos, presumably to rule. Ps.-Skylax offers good fourth-century evidence that Iolkos belonged to Magnesia, the mountainous, rocky peninsula which furnishes the eastern border to the eastern Thessalian plain.¹⁵ In the early third century, Demetrius Poliorcetes founded the city of Demetrias by synoikism of a number of villages of Magnesia: Epigraphic and literary testimony prove that Iolkos participated in this synoikism.¹⁶

If we assume, as seems likely, that Iolkos belonged to the territory of the Magnesians in the late sixth century, then we have evidence for that city's lack of sovereignty with respect to the Thessalians.

Thucydides provides evidence for the other *perioikoi*. At 2.101.2, he described the preparations of the Thessalians and their *perioikoi* for the arrival of Sitalkes' army: καθημένου δ' αὐτοῦ περὶ τοὺς χώρους τούτους οἱ πρὸς νότον οἰκοῦντες Θεσσαλοὶ καὶ Μάγνητες καὶ οἱ ἄλλοι ὑπήκοοι

¹⁵ Ps.-Skylax 65.

¹⁶ Strabo 9.5.15; McDevitt 1030A-B (= Béquignon 1935: 74-7).

Θεσσαλῶν καὶ οἱ μέχρι Θερμοπυλῶν Ἕλληνες ἐφοβήθησαν μὴ καὶ ἐπὶ σφᾶς ὁ στρατὸς χωρήσῃ, καὶ ἐν παρασκευῇ ἦσαν.

“While he [Sitalkes] remained in these parts, the people farther south, such as the Thessalians and the Magnesians and the remaining subjects of the Thessalians, and the Hellenes as far as Thermopylae, all feared that the army might advance against them, and prepared accordingly” (Trans. Crawley, with some modifications).

Later, at 4.78.6, Thucydides describes the movements of Brasidas in Thessaly:

ἀπὸ δὲ τούτου ἤδη οἱ μὲν τῶν Θεσσαλῶν ἀγωγοὶ πάλιν ἀπήλθον, οἱ δὲ Περραιβοὶ αὐτόν, ὑπήκοοι ὄντες Θεσσαλῶν, κατέστησαν ἐς Δίον τῆς Περδίκκου ἀρχῆς, ὃ ὑπὸ τῷ Ὀλύμπῳ Μακεδονίας πρὸς Θεσσαλοῦς πόλισμα κεῖται.

“Here his Thessalian escort went back and the Perrhaebians, who are subjects of Thessaly, brought him to Dium, a Macedonian city on the slopes of Mount Olympus, looking toward Thessaly in the dominions of Perdiccas” (Trans. Crawley, with some modifications).

Discussing renewed Spartan preparations for war with Athens following the Sicilian expedition, Thucydides comments at 8.3.1:

καὶ Ἀχαιοὺς τοὺς Φθιώτας καὶ τοὺς ἄλλους τοὺς ταύτη Θεσσαλῶν ὑπηκόους μεμφομένων καὶ ἀκόντων τῶν Θεσσαλῶν ὁμήρους τέ τινας ἠνάγκασε δοῦναι καὶ χρήματα

“...in spite of the the protests and opposition of the the Thessalians, he [Agis] forced the Achaeans of Phthiotis and the other subjects of the Thessalians in those parts to give him money and hostages...” (Trans. Crawley, with some modifications)

The three passages of Thucydides offer good evidence for the status of the Magnesians, Perrhaebians and Phthiotic Achaeans as *hypēkooi* of the Thessalians at the time of the Peloponnesian War. Perrhaebia is the upland region north of the

Peneius river, bounded on the east by the Olympos massif, the Pindus chain on the west and Macedon to the north. Achaia Phthiotis is located to the southeast of the Thessalian plains and is roughly comprised of the Othrys massif and attendant coastal plain on the Malic and Pagasitic Gulfs. The passages do not allow us to make further inferences about the character of this status, but one may conjecture that the lack of sovereignty encountered in the case of Magnesians Iolkos was extended to these other territories as well.

Xenophon reveals Jason of Pherai's intentions with respect to the *perioikoi* at *Hell.* 6.1.19:

προεῖπε δὲ τοῖς περιοίκοις πᾶσι καὶ τὸν φόρον ὥσπερ ἐπὶ
Σκόπα τεταγμένος ἦν φέρειν

“And he [Jason of Pherai] ordered all of the *perioikoi* to pay tribute as it had been ordained in the time of Skopas.”

The chronology of Skopas is uncertain, but he likely belongs to the Archaic period. Had the collection of perioikic tribute stopped between the era of Skopas and that of Jason? Had it been reduced? Increased? We cannot know. The assumptions revealed by the passage in Xenophon imply a dependant relationship: Jason orders, προεῖπε, that tribute be paid according to what had been ordered, τεταγμένος ἦν, in an earlier period.

Finally, the testimony of Strabo at 9.5.19 is vital for the question:

οὔτοι [sc. Λαρισαῖοι] δ' οὖν κατεῖχον τέως τὴν Περραιβίαν
καὶ φόρους ἐπράττοντο, ἕως Φίλιππος κατέστη κύριος τῶν
τόπων

“The people of Larisa at that time controlled Perrhaebia and extracted tribute, until Philip became master of the region.”

Strabo suggests that the “people of Larisa,” by which term he most likely means the Aleuads, had a special relationship with Perrhaebia. One is tempted to speculate that the other leading cities of tetradic Thessaly in the Archaic and Classical period, Pherai and Pharsalos, had individualized relationships with their perioikic neighbors—Pherai with Magnesia and Pharsalos with Achaia Phthiotis. The case for Pherai and Magnesia is suggested by a genealogy preserved by [Hesiod] in the *Megalai Ehoiai* (fr. 256 Merkelbach-West = Antoninus Liberalis 23.1):

Ἄργου τοῦ Φρίξου καὶ Περιμήλης τῆς Ἀδμήτου θυγατρὸς
ἐγένετο Μάγνης.

“Magnes was the son of Argos, the son of Phrixos, and Perimele, the daughter of Admetus.”

Here Magnes, the eponymous hero of Magnesia, is brought into a subordinate genealogical relationship to Admetus, son of Pheres, the eponymous hero of Pherai. Xenophon’s specification the Jason was forcing “all” of the *perioikoi* to pay tribute may suggest an opposition to Magnesians, that is the *perioikoi* with whom the Pheraians were traditionally linked. Although there is no direct evidence for the relationship of Pharsalos and Achaia Phthiotis, it would not be surprising if this other great city of Archaic and Classical Thessaly had an exploitative relationship with its neighbor to the south.

The admittedly patchy evidence allows us to glimpse different aspects of the relationship between tetradic Thessaly and its perioikic hinterland. At the time of the establishment of the Delphic Amphictyony, or at least very early in its history, the Magnesians, Perrhaebians, Phthiotic Achaeans and Thessalians were recognized as distinct *ethne* and had equivalent representation on that council. By the time of the Peloponnesian War, however, each of these *ethne* was described as being subject to the Thessalians. This subjection at the very least consisted of tribute-payment, but, as I

will show in the next section, may also be connected with the provision of *penestai*. Herodotus shows to what extent the sovereignty of the *perioikoi* could be infringed upon.

The Perrhaebians and Magnesians both formed *koina* distinct from the Thessalian League in the post-Flamininus era. The Perrhaebians were eventually incorporated within the Thessalian League; the Magnesians remained an independent league until the era of Diocletian.

Penestai

Tetradic Thessaly was home to a semi-permanent underclass known as *penestai*.¹⁷ The scattered and fragmentary sources suggest that the *penestai* were a major source of agricultural labor and could, on occasion, be mobilized for military service.¹⁸ The tendency of ancient authors to group them with, e.g., the *helots* of Laconia, has led modern scholars to project details about the experience of the *helots* onto the less well-known *penestai*. One must exercise caution, for the social structures of Thessaly and Laconia/Messenia in the Archaic and Classical periods were quite different.¹⁹ Boiotian, Thessalian and *perioikic*, specifically Perrhaebian and Magnesian, origins are attested for the *penestai*.²⁰ Revolts seem to have been fairly common.²¹ Xenophon, for example, claims that the oligarchic Critias traveled to Thessaly in 406 to foment a revolution of the *penestai* against their masters.²² Ducat has persuasively argued that the institution was in decline by the late third century BCE.²³

¹⁷ The *penestai* have recently been the subject of a thorough monograph: Ducat 1994.

¹⁸ Ducat 1994: 87ff.

¹⁹ Ducat 1994: 116-7.

²⁰ Ducat 1994: 93-8.

²¹ Ducat 1994: 103-4.

²² Xen., *Hell.* 2.3.36.

²³ Ducat 1994: 105ff.

*Thessaly under Macedonian Rule*²⁴

Of the period of Macedonian rule in Thessaly, Westlake observed: “The Macedonian period contains not a single historical character... More than ever before is it difficult to gauge the Thessalian point of view in foreign politics or to decide what party or section of the population is indicated when an authority refers vaguely to the ‘Thessalians.’ At home the inner history of the national state and the relationships between the leading cities are for long periods absolutely unknown.”²⁵ Little evidence has come to light since 1935 to ease Westlake’s despair. Since so much of the evidence for Thessalian religion dates precisely to the period of the Macedonian occupation, we must nevertheless inquire into the character of Macedonian rule in Thessaly.

The successors of Alexander in Pherai soon revealed that they would continue an aggressive course in domestic and international politics. The Aleudai of Larisa enlisted the aid of Philip II of Macedon who had ascended to the throne in 360-359 BCE. The great northern king seems to have been responsible for some maneuvers in Thessaly against the tyrants of Pherai as early as 358. Aside from a marriage between Philip and Philinna, a Larisan woman, though, the consequences of these campaigns are dubious and their chronology has been disputed by modern scholars.²⁶

²⁴ An excellent survey in Errington 1990: 59-70.

²⁵ Westlake 1935: 162-163.

²⁶ The key passage is Diodorus Siculus 16.14.1-2, where the author has compressed the activities of a number of years into a single one (357/6):

Κατὰ δὲ τὴν Ἑλλάδα Ἀλέξανδρος ὁ Φερῶν τύραννος ὑπὸ τῆς ἰδίας γυναικὸς Θήβης καὶ τῶν ταύτης ἀδελφῶν Λυκόφρονος καὶ Τισιφόνου ἐδολοφονήθη. οὗτοι δὲ τὸ μὲν πρῶτον ὡς τυραννοκτόνοι μεγάλης ἐτύγγανον ἀποδοχῆς, ὕστερον δὲ μετανοήσαντες καὶ τοὺς μισθοφόρους χρήμασι πείσαντες ἀνέδειξαν ἑαυτοὺς τυράννους καὶ πολλοὺς μὲν τῶν ἀντιπραττομένων ἀνεῖλον, κατασκευασάμενοι δὲ τὴν δύναμιν ἀξιόλογον βία κατείχον τὴν ἀρχήν. οἱ δ’ Ἀλευάδαι καλούμενοι παρὰ τοῖς Θετταλοῖς, δι’ εὐγένειαν δὲ ἀξίωμα ἔχοντες περιβόητον ἀντεπράττοντο τοῖς τυράννοις, οὐκ ὄντες δὲ καθ’ ἑαυτοὺς ἀξιόμαχοι προσελάβοντο Φίλιππον σύμμαχον τὸν Μακεδόνων βασιλέα. οὗτος δὲ παρελθὼν εἰς τὴν Θετταλίαν κατεπολέμησε τοὺς τυράννους καὶ ταῖς πόλεσιν ἀνακτησάμενος τὴν ἐλευθερίαν μεγάλην εὐνοίαν εἰς τοὺς Θετταλοὺς

Hoplites of the Thessalian League were involved in the early stages of the Third Sacred War in 356-5.²⁷ The conflict between Pherai and the League continued throughout this period, culminating in a further overture to Philip on the part of Larisa and the League. Lycophron of Pherai responded by enlisting the aid of Onomarchus, general of the Phokian forces. In 354, Onomarchus defeated Philip twice in Thessaly.²⁸ Philip returned to Thessaly in 353 and was appointed head of league forces. He seized Pagasai, the port of Pherai, and had begun to move against Pherai itself when Onomarchus returned to Thessaly. Philip won a decisive victory in the ensuing engagement and then forced a settlement with Pherai: The tyrants Lycophron and Peitholaus together with their mercenary forces were permitted to leave the city in peace.

After an aborted attempt on Thermopylae, Philip retreated north and began to remake Thessaly to his liking.²⁹ It was perhaps at this time that Philip was elected archon of the Thessalian League for life. After Philip's assassination, the league elected Alexander as archon.³⁰

ἐνεδείξατο· διόπερ ἐν ταῖς μετὰ ταῦτα πράξεσιν ἀεὶ συναγωνιστὰς ἔσχεν οὐ μόνον αὐτός, ἀλλὰ καὶ μετὰ ταῦτα ὁ υἱὸς Ἀλέξανδρος.

“In Greece, Alexander the tyrant of Pherae was murdered by his own wife Thebe and her brothers Lycophron and Tisiphonus. These at first won much approbation as tyrannicides, but later they underwent a change, and, by corrupting the mercenaries with bribes, they revealed themselves as tyrants. They put to death many of those who were opposed to them and, by building up a significant armed body of support, they proceeded to maintain their rule by force. Those among the Thessalians called the Aleuadae, who enjoyed a well publicized reputation because of their aristocratic lineage, began to set themselves up in opposition to the tyrants. But since they were not capable of fighting them on their own, they acquired as an ally Philip king of the Macedonians. He then entered Thessaly and, by overcoming the tyrants and regaining freedom for the cities, showed much goodwill to the Thessalians. Consequently in subsequent events not only Philip but also after him his son Alexander acquired them as confederates” (Trans. McQueen). For a sample of modern controversy, cf. Ehrhardt 1967, Griffith 1970. Ehrhardt suggests that Philip was not involved in Thessaly before 353, viz. the 3rd Sacred War; Griffith rehabilitates the case for earlier interventions beginning ca. 358.

²⁷ The reliability of Diodorus Siculus, our main source for the war, is another matter of scholarly debate. Cf. Hammond 1937 with the response of Markle 1994. The best modern account of the war is Buckler 1989.

²⁸ DS 16.35.2-3.

²⁹ For a synopsis of what was involved in this reorganization of Thessaly, cf. Helly 1995: 55.

³⁰ Just. 11.3.2.

In his analysis of Thessalo-Macedonian relations during the early reign of Philip II, Westlake argues that the Thessalian league “ultimately profited by subjection to an organizer who substituted order for chaos,” but was “far too short-sighted to appreciate the menace of a growing power in the north.”³¹ The decision to seek help from Philip was in keeping with traditional Thessalian politics where quarreling clans and poleis routinely sought military assistance beyond the region’s borders.

For Westlake, Philip’s interest in Thessaly was also a combination of long-term tradition and short-term contingency. Strong Macedonian rulers always kept one eye on their southern border and Thessaly offered both military might and decent harborage in the Pagasitic gulf.³² Cawkwell focuses on the same set of issues: The Thessalian cavalry was the largest and best-trained cavalry in the Greek world and could be an extremely valuable acquisition. A strong Macedonia required “a controlling interest in northern Thessaly.”³³

In an oft-quoted but rarely analyzed passage, Polybius provides one of the most suggestive images of Thessaly under Macedonian rule. I offer the passage in its full context (4.76.1-7):

Ἄπελλῆς δ', ὃς ἦν μὲν εἷς τῶν ὑπ' Ἀντιγόνου καταλειφθέντων ἐπιτρόπων τοῦ παιδός, πλείστον δ' ἐτύγχανε τότε δυνάμενος παρὰ τῷ βασιλεῖ, βουλευθεὶς τὸ τῶν Ἀχαιῶν ἔθνος ἀγαγεῖν εἰς παραπλησίαν διάθεσιν τῇ Θετταλῶν, ἐπεβάλετο πρᾶγμα ποιεῖν μοχθηρόν. Θετταλοὶ γὰρ ἐδόκουν μὲν κατὰ νόμους πολιτεύειν καὶ πολὺ διαφέρειν Μακεδόνων, διέφερον δ' οὐδέν, ἀλλὰ πᾶν ὁμοίως ἔπασχον Μακεδόσι καὶ πᾶν ἐποίουν τὸ προσταττόμενον τοῖς βασιλικοῖς. διὸ καὶ πρὸς ταύτην ἀρμοζόμενος τὴν ὑπόθεσιν ὁ

³¹ Westlake 1935: 161.

³² Westlake 1935: 161.

³³ Cawkwell 1978: 68-70.

προειρημένος ἐπεβάλετο καταπειράζειν τῶν συστρατευομένων. τὸ μὲν οὖν πρῶτον ἐπέτρεψε τοῖς Μακεδόσιν ἐκβαλεῖν ἐκ τῶν σταθμῶν ἀεὶ τοὺς προκατέχοντας τῶν Ἀχαιῶν καταλύσεις, ὁμοίως δὲ καὶ τὴν λείαν ἀφαιρεῖσθαι· μετὰ δὲ ταῦτα τὰς χεῖρας προσέφερε διὰ τῶν ὑπηρετῶν ἐπὶ ταῖς τυχούσαις αἰτίαις, τοὺς δὲ συναγανακτοῦντας ἢ προσβοηθοῦντας τοῖς μαστιγούμενοις παρῶν αὐτὸς εἰς τὴν ἄλυσιν ἀπήγε, πεπεισμένος διὰ τοῦ τοιούτου τρόπου τὸ κατὰ βραχὺ λήσειν εἰς συνήθειαν ἀγαγὼν τοῦ μηδένα μηδὲν ἡγεῖσθαι δεινόν, ὃ ποτ' ἂν πάσχη τις ὑπὸ τοῦ βασιλέως.

“Apelles was one of those who had been left by Antigonus as guardians of his son, and had, as it happened, more influence than any one else with the king. He conceived the wish to bring the Achaeans into the same position as the Thessalians; and adopted for that purpose a very offensive line of conduct. The Thessalians were supposed to enjoy their own constitution, and to have quite a different status to the Macedonians; but in fact they had exactly the same, and obeyed every order of the royal ministers. It was with the purpose of bringing about the same state of things, that this officer now set himself to test the subservience of the Achaean contingent. At first he confined himself to giving the Macedonian soldiers leave to eject Achaeans from their quarters, who on any occasion had taken possession of them first, as well as to wrest from them any booty they might have taken; but he afterwards treated them with actual violence, through the agency of his subordinates, on any trifling pretext; while such as complained of this treatment, or took the part of those who were being beaten, he personally arrested and put into confinement: being convinced that by this method he would gradually and imperceptibly bring them into the habit of submitting, without remonstrance, to any thing which the king might choose to inflict.”³⁴

³⁴ Trans. Shuckburgh.

Polybius' anti-Macedonian and pro-Achaian biases are well-known and one cannot underestimate the role that they play in this description. His statement that Apelles was trying to bring the Achaians "into the same position as the Thessalians" nevertheless opens up a window on Macedonian strategies for dealing with a subject population. Apelles aims to create a docile Achaian populace which will cater to every whim of the Macedonian king. The logic of the passage suggests that what Apelles is aiming to achieve in Achaia has already been achieved with great success in Thessaly. It will be a slow process, but we are led to believe that, in time, the Achaians will be like the Thessalians: Completely unaware of their submissive status.

Had Philip II, Alexander and their Antigonid successors to the Macedonian throne followed a similar course of forced conscription and naked violence in Thessaly? In the context of Philip V's interventions in Messenia in 216/5 or 215/4, Polybius makes another set of incisive comments about Thessaly's position within the Macedonian empire (7.11.4-5):

ὅτι μὲν οὖν αὐτῷ μετὰ τὸ παραλαβεῖν τὴν βασιλείαν τὰ τε κατὰ Θετταλίαν καὶ Μακεδονίαν καὶ συλλήβδην τὰ κατὰ τὴν ἰδίαν ἀρχὴν οὕτως ὑπετέτακτο καὶ συνέκλινε ταῖς εὐνοίαις ὡς οὐδενὶ τῶν πρότερον βασιλέων, καίτοι νέω ὄντι παραλαβόντι τὴν Μακεδόνων δυναστείαν, εὐχερὲς καταμαθεῖν ἐκ τούτων. Συνεχέστατα γὰρ αὐτοῦ περισπασθέντος ἐκ Μακεδονίας διὰ τὸν πρὸς Αἰτωλοὺς καὶ Λακεδαιμονίους πόλεμον, οὐχ οἶον ἔστασίασέ τι τῶν προειρημένων ἔθνων...

"That after he succeeded to the throne, Thessaly, Macedonia, and all his hereditary dominions were more submissive and more attached to him than to any king before him, although he had come to the throne at such an early age, it is easy to see from the

following facts. Although he was frequently called away from Macedonia owing to the war against the Aitolians and Lacedaimonians, none of these peoples revolted...³⁵

Like the Macedonian homeland, Thessaly in the late third century behaved like a “hereditary possession” of the Macedonian king.³⁶ This was not just an internal perspective, but recognized in the broader Greek world: When the Aitolians wished to strike at Macedon in the third century, they attacked Thessaly.³⁷

³⁵ Trans. Paton.

³⁶ The impressions one gets from Polybius and the epigraphic record about Macedonian “imperialism” offer a useful counterweight to the claims of Billows 1995: “The pose of the king being a friendly and generous benefactor was, in short, a wonderful way for both ruler and city to cover the naked fact of domination, and so be able to get along without overt conflict despite the incompatible desires of the kings to control the cities and of the cities to be free of control” (p. 74); “In sum, the Greek cities remained in the Hellenistic period vital centers of Greek life and their support and good will was a valuable commodity to the kings. The kings recognized this by adopting the pose, largely thrust upon them by the Greeks themselves, of benefactors, and the Greeks in turn took advantage of this pose to extract whatever concessions they could in their relations with the kings” (p. 79).

³⁷ For the history of Thessaly under Roman rule, cf. Bowersock 1965; Helly 1980; Helly 1983a.