

0. Introduction

Given the central role of Sparta in the history of archaic and classical Greece, studies of the alliance it led are as old as classical studies themselves. An investigation into the beginnings of these studies, while interesting in itself, would, however, make little sense from the point of view of historical reconstruction. Due to an increasing number of sources (inscriptions), the progress of our knowledge concerning the mechanisms of Greek interstate laws and political structures of the archaic world, as well as a deeper reflection on the functioning of oral tradition and its use by historiography emerging in the fifth century, the earlier attempts to describe the Spartan symmarchy have become more of a historical curiosity than a foundation for further research. Nevertheless, it is worth noting how very different interpretations of the origins of this alliance have been. The reconstructions of Friedrich Körting, who saw in the Peloponnesian League (on this designation, see below) a Doric alliance from the period of the Return of the Herakleidai appropriated by the Spartans, or Ernst Curtius, who recognised in it a kind of amphictyony meant to protect the Olympian sanctuary, nowadays seem completely fanciful. But fanciful as they are, they actually have very little in common.¹ Such diversity reminds us that all the reconstructions of the early history of the Peloponnesian League were possible because of the fact that—in contrast with the Hellenic League, or Delian League and the Second Athenian Empire—the Spartan symmarchy had no starting point that could be easily determined.²

¹ On these old theories, see BALTRUSCH (1994) 19 n. 86.

² Although it goes beyond the scope of the present work, let us note that the Peloponnesian League has no obvious ending point either. Although the events of 365, when Corinth and a number of other cities accepted the peace with the Boiotians that the Spartans did not, are

The fact that the Peloponnesian League was not created through a sworn confirmation of a foundation act by a group of states is crucial for our understanding of its character. The members of the Hellenic League were aware that they were members of the Hellenic League, while the members of the Delian League shared the same awareness with regard to their alliance. But were the inhabitants of particular Peloponnesian cities who became allies of Spartans throughout the sixth century aware that they acceded to a *symmarchy* under Sparta's hegemony? To put it in more general terms, was an idea of a *league* possible at all among the Greeks in the mid sixth century BCE? The historical 'fuzziness' of the idea of the Spartan *symmarchy* at its beginnings did not stop scholars answering this question in the affirmative and envisaging a specific shape of the network of Spartan alliances. The Greek linguistic usage seemed to encourage such an approach. Since the Hellenic League is called in the sources 'the Lakedaimonians and their allies' (and the Delian League, respectively, 'the Athenians and their allies') what would be the reason to treat the Spartan *symmarchy*, which the ancients called 'the Lakedaimonians and their allies', as a political entity of a different nature? In consequence, it was named with a convenient, although unattested by the ancient authors designation 'the Peloponnesian League', which seemed no more imprecise with respect to the Spartan alliance than the modern label 'Hellenic League' with respect to the anti-Persian coalition of 481–479, or 'Delian League', with respect to the Athenian *archē*.³ The fact that the sources apply to the Spartan allies the collective designation 'the Peloponnesians', which seems to suggest tight institutional bonds between them, provides an additional argument.

The idea of the Spartan *symmarchy* as a concrete political reality resulted in the conception of the origins and form of the Peloponnesian League that continues to dominate the discourse; it was based on the narratives of Herodotus, Thucydides, and Xenophon, and supported by scanty epigraphic evidence (inscriptions or, more frequently, their discussions in the sources). Due to its firm foundations in

usually thought to have marked the end of the alliance (see e.g. RHODES [2011] 1087 with n. 6), Xenophon, who witnessed the events, makes no such statement; see *Hell.*7.4.6–11.

³ Cf. KAGAN (1969) 10: 'The ancients usually called the group the "Lakedaimonians and their Allies", a term that modern historians would do well to adopt, had not the title Peloponnesian League already gained universal currency'. I did not conduct a systematic research in order to find out who was the first to use the term 'Peloponnesian League'. The earliest attestation I encountered is Maximilian Jacoby's rendering of the difficult αἱ Λακεδαιμονίων σπονδαί in Th.1.31.2 as *Peloponnesischer Bund* in his German translation of Thucydides' *Historiai* (Hamburg 1804). Anyway, in BUSOLT (1878), the first 'modern' study on the Spartan *symmarchy*, the term *Peloponnesischer Bund* appears as something obvious.

scholarly tradition dating back to Busolt, I will call this approach a traditionalist one. In a general outline it looks as follows:⁴

The Spartan symmarchy was officially named ‘the Lakedaimonians and their allies’. The alliance was founded upon treaties concluded ‘for all eternity’; these treaties had essentially identical structure and bound particular allies with Sparta without creating bonds between the allies themselves. The two most important clauses of these treaties obliged the allies to ‘have the same friends and enemies as the Lakedaimonians’ (the so-called *Freund-Feind-Klausel*) and ‘to follow the Lakedaimonians wheresoever they may lead them’ (the so-called *Hegemonie-Klausel*). It was impossible to leave the symmarchy. The ‘foundation treaty’ of the Peloponnesian League and the model for subsequent bilateral arrangements of this type was the treaty with Tegea from c. 560–550.⁵ What follows, Peloponnesian League preceded all known “leagues” and as the first known league, might serve as a model or the point of reference to such alliances as Hellenic League and Delian League. The chief driver of the Spartan policy of alliances was the need to stabilise the external relations in view of the threat posed by Sparta’s own subjects, the helots, who had to be isolated from possible outside help in case of rebellion. Formally the allies were independent (*autonomoi*) as far as their internal affairs were concerned, but, in practice, the Spartans tried to exert a discreet influence on them by supporting oligarchs well-disposed towards Sparta in particular poleis. Since the allies were bound by nothing but Sparta’s hegemony, they could fight each other, except for situations of higher necessity when the alliance undertook actions as a whole. Sparta was obliged to help an ally attacked by an enemy from the outside of the league and the allies were compelled to help Sparta in case of attack.

Perhaps from the end of the sixth century onwards,⁶ according to some more cautious traditionalists, the Peloponnesian League possessed a rudimentary

⁴ The most important contributions are BUSOLT (1878), KAHRSTEDT (1922), BUSOLT & SWOBODA (1926), LARSEN (1932), (1933), (1934), WICKERT (1961), MORETTI (1962), STE. CROIX (1972), TAUSEND (1992), BALTRUSCH (1994), CARTLEDGE (2002a) and now (with some reservations) BAYLISS (2013). See also the recent discussion of the literature in CAPRIO (2005) 1–19. Of course, the aforementioned contributions are not unanimous in every respect (for some of the differences, see notes below). This does not change the fact that in spite of their polemics about details, their authors function, so to speak, in the same paradigm.

⁵ Some of the traditionalists give priority to the treaty with Elis from c. 600, see, e.g. TAUSEND (1992) 167. The conclusion of such a treaty, which is not directly attested in any of the ancient records, is usually assumed in the light of the information about the Spartan-Eleian collaboration in the sixth century, see below, pp. 98–101.

⁶ On other propositions of the date of the appearance of the constitution, see below, p. 169 n. 30.

‘constitutional structure’, restricted to a common assembly. From that time on, the decisions about the symmarchy’s participation in Sparta’s wars (and most probably about ending the wars) required the consent of the assembly of allies.⁷ The members of the symmarchy acquired the right of refusal to participate in Sparta’s offensive wars with third parties if the allies’ participation had not been approved by the majority of the assembly of alliance members, with each ally casting one vote. Such a resolution was binding for everyone, with the reservation that a hindrance of religious nature could excuse particular allies from compliance. If the decision to start a war was made through a vote, the command of military operations lay entirely with the Spartans. The introduction of the institution of the assembly of allies brought about the distinction between the permanent allies, or the members of the ‘Peloponnesian League’, and the occasional allies, who remained outside the structures of the symmarchy. At least from the end of the sixth century, the Spartan symmarchy can be considered a *Bündnissystem*, but not a *Staatenbund* or a league (which does not discourage the promoters of such conception from using the convenient names ‘Peloponnesischer Bund’ or ‘Peloponnesian League’, see above).

This model remained almost unchallenged in the literature until the 1990s; almost, because of two dissenting voices. The first objection was that of Hans Schaefer, a student of Helmut Berve, who put forward a hypothesis of a ‘pre-political’ character of the Spartan symmarchy within his systematic presentation of the theory of interstate relations contained in his habilitation thesis published in 1932. For Schaefer, as late as the fifth century the symmarchy was merely a kind of ephemeral ‘agonistic brotherhood in arms’ (*agonale Kampfbündnis*), actualised only in case of armed conflict. Correspondingly, the Spartan leadership was an ‘agonistic hegemony’ (*agonale Hegemonie*) based on Sparta’s primacy (*Prostasie*),

⁷ The radical difference between the stance of Larsen, who was an extreme ‘constitutionalist’, and the ‘anti-constitutionalist’ Kahrstedt is only apparent, for even the latter acknowledged the existence of a kind of a constitution for the league, only to him it consisted merely in the bonds between Sparta and particular allies ([1922] 81–82). Kahrstedt’s anti-constitutionalism was inconsistent, as the scholar recognised at least one constitutional rule, namely the existence of legal foundations of the assembly of allies (p. 92). It was also Kahrstedt who put forward the most rigid, legalist image of the Spartan symmarchy. BUSOLT & SWOBODA (1926) spoke not of a constitution but of *Bundesrecht*, by which they understood both the resolutions of the assembly of allies and the treaty provisions. Some among the constitutionalists see in the events of 504 the moment when the constitution of the Peloponnesian League was created, while others claim that it is only from this moment onwards that we can speak about the Peloponnesian League at all. This, however, is rather a question of nomenclature, since it is otherwise universally acknowledged that the Spartan symmarchy had existed before 504, and this year was the most important turning point in its functioning.

acknowledged by other *poleis* and resulting from Sparta's military superiority. The symmarchy's character began to change in the face of intensified rivalry with Athens and assumed full political dimensions only in the second phase of the Peloponnesian War.⁸

While Schaefer presented a consistent alternative model of the Spartan symmarchy, Donald Kagan, who saw no chance of explaining all the actions of the alliance and the relations between Sparta and its allies by referring to the traditionalist model, questioned the sense of searching for the model as such. According to Kagan, treaty obligations notwithstanding, the relations of Sparta with its allies were regulated by pragmatism alone; thus, any attempts to formulate legal rules organising the symmarchy, based on particular events as described by historians, are bound to fail. Even if we assume that the alliance treaties had identical content, Kagan sees this as inconsequential, since in each case the interpretation of the arrangement depended on the position of the partner, which could be either strong (as in the case of Corinth), or weak; another factor was whether Sparta felt secure or not at the moment when the arrangement was concluded. For instance, calling the assemblies of allies or a failure to do so was determined only by the wishes and needs of Sparta.⁹

The ideas of Schaefer and Kagan, which challenged the traditionalist outlook, were met with immediate criticism. Both scholars were accused (not without some reason) of selective treatment of the sources and their conceptions were rejected.¹⁰ When in 2002 Michael Whitby published a selection of representative texts which were supposed to offer the reader an image of ancient Sparta, he chose without hesitation the fragment of Paul Cartledge's book of 1987 to illustrate the Spartan symmarchy; this book repeated to a great extent the canonical presentation of traditionalist approach penned by Geoffrey de Ste. Croix in 1972.¹¹

But the traditionalist image of the Peloponnesian League had lost its supremacy even before Whitby's publication. An article by George Cawkwell, published in 1993, brought about the rehabilitation of some of the elements of Schaefer's model (the turning point in the functioning of the Spartan symmarchy in the fifth century, a very 'primitive' model of the symmarchy until the 460s), while in the part concerning the archaic period, the general framework of the model has been

⁸ SCHAEFER (1932), esp. 63–85, 201–221, 234–242.

⁹ KAGAN (1969) 9–30.

¹⁰ Against Schaefer, see HIGHBY (1936) 58–74, cf. WILL (1955) 627 n. 1 and 654 n. 3. Against Kagan, see STE. CROIX (1972) 101–102, cf. the conciliatory reply in KAGAN (1981) 41 n. 21.

¹¹ Respectively WHITBY (2002), CARTLEDGE (1987) 9–13 = CARTLEDGE (2002a). On traditionalists' view(s), cf. KENNEL (2010) 51 and BAYLISS (2013) 212–213.

recently accepted (based on more thorough studies of the source material than in Schaefer's work) in the monograph of Ralph Kimmerle.¹² One year after the publication of Cawkwell's article, Jon Lendon picked up some important threads of Kagan's reasoning (the negation of constitutional character of the assemblies of allies and a pragmatic interpretation of at least some of the political actions).¹³ Following Cawkwell, David Yates accepted the distinction between the archaic and the classical Spartan symmarchy.¹⁴ Finally, in two important articles Sarah Bolmarcich overturned the traditionalist image of historical and legal sequence of the alliances (the Peloponnesian League – the Hellenic League – the Delian League), pointing out that the rules organising Sparta's relations with at least some of its allies were derivative of the rules governing the relations between Athens and its Delian League allies. Moreover, Bolmarcich presented serious arguments for acknowledging a diverse character of Sparta's relations with its allies.¹⁵

The contributions discussed above were not meant to create a new orthodoxy. Their common denominator is the deconstruction of the traditionalist model by questioning its fundamental assumptions.

The first premise concerns *the nature* of the sources. The traditionalists take it for granted that the scanty historiographical sources, in spite of their chronological distance from the events they describe (this concerns Herodotus in particular), constitute a relatively faithful reflection of the political realities of the sixth and early fifth centuries, and/or that we have at our disposal an epigraphic documentation (transmitted directly or indirectly) which pertains to these realities (especially treaties with Tegeans and Aitolians). This gives rise to a *historical premise*: by juxtaposing the alleged pieces of information about the archaic interstate relations of Sparta with the more extensive and detailed data pertaining to the classical period and by observing similarities in the images of the Spartan alliance, the scholars become convinced that the structures of the symmarchy remained unchanged with the passage of time, or, more precisely, that the symmarchy as we know it from the period of the Peloponnesian War had already existed *in the same form* one hundred years earlier. At the same time, since the Spartan symmarchy appears to be a uniform political entity during the Peloponnesian War, also the image of a uniform pattern of relations between Sparta and the allies is projected onto the archaic period. This, in turn, results in a legal-historical construction: if the structure of the Peloponnesian League had not changed between the

¹² CAWKWELL (1993a), KIMMERLE (2005).

¹³ LENDON (1994).

¹⁴ YATES (2005).

¹⁵ BOLMARCICH (2005) and (2008).

archaic and the classical period, it means that it predates, in the shape we know, the other alliance systems attested by our sources, namely the Hellenic League and the Delian League.

The principal aim of the present book is a systematic critique of historiographical and historical assumptions of the traditionalist model, taking the studies discussed above as its starting point and providing fresh arguments. The structure of the present study, as is so often the case with works dominated by *pars destruens*, may seem somewhat convoluted.

Chapter 1 is devoted to the critique of the sources. I will first attempt to demonstrate that the Spartan treaties with the Aitolians and with Tegea, traditionally taken to be the earliest and thus key to any effort at reconstruction of Sparta's foreign relations in the late archaic period, refer in fact to much later events and ought to be dated to the early fourth and mid-fifth century BCE, respectively. As demonstrated in the latter part of chapter I, the Herodotean account of Sparta's mid-sixth century relations with Tegea, taken by traditionalists mostly at face value, is in fact a presentist reconstruction, in which a (limited) memory of a distant past is mixed with the historian's views on his contemporary world and his observations of Sparta's relations with its allies, which he then projected into the past.

The opening chapter's negative conclusion compels to attempt a different approach to the origins of the Spartan symmarchy. Since we have no direct sources on the character of Sparta's relations with its allies in the late archaic period, let alone treaty texts (if they featured in such relations at all¹⁶), then the origins, extent and character of the Spartan alliance network in the sixth century must be deduced indirectly from the history of the events in the period. Thus, in chapter 2, we look at three areas where the original impulse for the creation of a coherent, uniform alliance around Sparta has been sought: Sparta's helot problem, relations with Argos and finally the alleged Spartan "crusade" against Greek tyrants. As will be seen, none contains the seeds of a uniform Peloponnesian League, as postulated by the traditionalists for the sixth century. On the contrary, a variety of interstate relationships in the late archaic period does suggest that such diverse problems and regional networks coexisted.

In chapter 3, the supposed constitution of the Peloponnesian League is addressed. It will be seen that the events of 504 do not constitute a turning point in the mechanisms of its functioning, that no "constitution" was introduced at the time, not even a rudimentary one, such as the institution of a permanent assembly to decide on matters of war and peace. The Peloponnesian League could

¹⁶ On the impossibility of studying Greek alliance treaties earlier than the very end of the sixth century, see below, p. 50 n. 94, cf. also p. 159.

not therefore constitute a model for the Hellenic, much less the Delian League. The analysis of the political history of the Peloponnese in the late archaic period, which concludes the chapter, aims to demonstrate the absence of strictly defined (strictly exercised?) obligations of the Spartan allies towards the hegemon.

As well as demonstrating the Spartan *symmarchy's* structural weakness in the late archaic period, chapter 3 provides an attempt at a tentative answer to the question of the time and circumstances in which the Peloponnesian League took on the relatively coherent political structure known to us from Thucydides and Xenophon. As will be seen, the Peloponnesian League assumed that shape in the 450s in reaction to the emergence of the Athenian empire, which provoked fear similar to that generated by the Persian Wars. The more formal character assumed by the Peloponnesian alliance was presumably aided by the existence of a model in the form of the Delian League.

In the closing chapter 4, I attempt to buttress this theory by an analysis of a problem that has to date nearly evaded scholarly attention but which, as I hope to demonstrate, is central to any attempt at understanding the Spartan *symmarchy*, namely the history of the term “the Peloponnesians” and its use. In this chapter, I trace the development of an originally purely geographic designation into a slogan used from the mid-fifth century onwards as propaganda for the Peloponnesian unity against Athenian aggression while cementing the anti-Athenian alliance around Sparta. The history of the word constitutes a crucial argument in the discussion of the time, place and character of the formation of the Peloponnesian League.

As the reader will readily see, my arguments are based on a number of assumptions derived from my earlier research and reflection. It may be worthwhile stating them clearly.

The fifth century witnessed the birth of historiography, which from the outset was a hostage to its own time. When historians – Herodotus primarily, but also Thucydides – undertook the task of describing a remote past of a state or institution, their interpretations were informed by the events and ideas of their own time - with the rise and fall of the Athenian empire as the most important process of the fifth century, which left an impression on the entire Greek world in both political and cultural aspect. From a textual perspective, this state of affairs dictates an extremely cautious approach every time a fifth-century author ascribes to an archaic state an intentional, consistent imperialist policy based on a system of precisely defined and managed alliances.

From a historical perspective, the recognition of the central role of Athens in the fifth century compels us to constantly observe that polis. Even if rhetorical

simplification and hyperbole is taken into consideration, Thucydides' Corinthians give an accurate account of the history of the Pentekontaetia in describing the "national" character of the antagonists: the active Athenians and passive Spartans/Peloponnesians.¹⁷ The history of the Pentekontaetia is a story of external reactions to Athenian activity and the policy of the Spartan symmachy must be read in this context.

I hope that, without succumbing to *petitio principii*, the present work does not merely throw a new light on the history of the Peloponnesian League, but also provides fresh arguments in favour of these underlying assumptions.

¹⁷ Th.1.68-71, cf. 120-124. On this I side with Thucydides against e.g. POWELL (1988/2001) 119-129.