

Chapter 1

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“If I am from Megara.” Introduction to the Local Discourse Environment of an Ancient Greek City-State

Neaira ran. Gathering what she could carry – presumably a few personal items, clothes, jewelry – she fled from the exploitation she experienced in Athens. Thebes would have been the obvious destination, but the city was too far to keep in touch with regular clients from Athens who desired to do so. Corinth, about the same distance, was out of the picture because she had been freed from there earlier; returning to Corinth would have implied a return to slavery. The most appealing choice, then, was Megara. But things didn’t work out as she would have hoped, for Neaira hadn’t reckoned with the Megarians. In his famous prosecution speech from the 340s BCE, Apollodoros explains that,

she spent two years in Megara, Her work as a prostitute was not bringing in enough money for her to run her household, since she was a big spender, and the Megarians are stingy and pusillanimous; also, there wasn’t much foreign traffic because the Megarians had sided with Sparta, and you [the Athenians] had control of the sea. (*Against Neaira* 36)

According to Apollodoros, Neaira’s business in Megara suffered from travel obstacles created by war, along with the Megarians’ general lack of appreciation for high-end prostitutes. Their “stingy and pusillanimous nature” (ἀνελεύθεροι καὶ μικρολόγοι), highlighted in the present tense as an ongoing character trait, prevented the Megarians

from lavish spending on escort girls. We note an involuntary irony at play, but this is not the point here. Apollodoros did what was typical of an Athenian, judging from so many speakers before him, in court, on the theatre stage, or from the orator platform on the Pnyx: he disparaged the inhabitants of another city, recollecting their backward nature, narrow-minded attitudes, and unrefined ways. In turn, dismissing the local idiosyncrasies of others fueled the idea that the *nomima* of the Athenians, their customs and traditions, were superior to those of the rest of the Greeks.¹

The Scope of this Volume

The mechanics of positionality are immediately obvious. A certain image of Megara circulated in Athens and, while not necessarily coherent or conclusive, let alone authoritative in any grounded sense, this image was part of the Athenian imaginary (Nicole Loraux). It served as a canvas for the projection of deeply entrenched ideas of self and other. The local discourse in Megara was, by default, subject to different projections. The Megarians had their own views, and their own image of Athens. Their assessment of the world was not coherent either: as we will see shortly, the fragmentation of the local horizon into multiple groups of agents and functional localities – neighbourhoods, villages, the countryside, harbours, etc – makes the quest for the local a kaleidoscopic endeavor rather than one that aims for coherence. The general configuration, however, is clear. The present volume seeks to see through the Megarian lens. Rather than writing a continuous history of a Greek city-state,² the purpose is to recreate the Local Discourse Environment (LDE, below) of Megara and trace its governing tenets and themes as they shine through at various moments in the history of the city. In the quest for a distinctly Megarian perspective, the various contributions also explore, in a paradigmatic manner, how the local context brought order and meaning to those who shared in it. To borrow

1 For the context of Neaira's situation, cf. Hamel 2005; Glazebrook 2005 and 2006.

2 Previous local histories of Megara: Hanell 1934, Legon 1981, Smith 2008 (Hellenistic Archaeology and Epigraphy), Robu 2014 (Archaic period).

the famous phrase from the *Anthologia Palatina*, albeit with some creative variation, the subsequent chapters all respond to the question “If I am from Megara, so what?”³

Theorizing Local and Local Discourse Environment in Ancient Greece

Pronouncing the dichotomous opposition to others – Greek cities near and far, non-Greeks – was a key method for polis communities to position themselves in an interstate environment that was both dense and subject to swiftly changing constellations. The notion of positionality resonates some of the associated expressions of cultural and/or ethnic ‘othering’; the details have received broad attention in scholarship, especially regarding the Persian War and its capacity to serve as a catalyst for the articulation of a charged ethnic identity among many Greek cities.⁴ At the same time, the language of cultural mapping follows its own grammar, one that goes beyond the syntax of slander. As Simon Goldhill (2010) posited recently, there is a marked difference between verdicts such as ‘this is how they do things there’ and ‘this is how we do things here’. Both expressions draw on different strategies of complicity and inclusion. The former, ‘this is how they do things there,’ is of limited authority to those whose local world is observed. Looking at others from the outside and detecting among them customs and traditions that are curious enough to be referenced, ‘this is how they do things there’ resembles strategies of stereotyping and ‘othering’. It is easy to foresee how this technique might traverse to the critiquing or mocking of local idiosyncrasies. In its most flagrant form, it segues into strategies of asserting identity through alterity, along with the coarse expression of ethnic discrimination and disparagement.⁵

By contrast, ‘this is how we do things here’ hits a different tone as it bales from a different source of authority and knowledge. Anthropologists call this the emic perspective, the insider’s take who is not only knowledgeable about local attitudes and allures but is also in

3 The original text, which is referenced in full further down, reads “If I am from Syria, so what?” For a discussion, see below.

4 In lieu of this new orthodoxy, Gruen 2011 (esp. 9-39) has argued for a more nuanced picture.

5 Goldhill 2010: 46-51.

complicity with the group that nourishes them.⁶ Such epichoric self-awareness of Greek city-states extended to a very wide spectrum of societal practices, in politics, religion, culture, and beyond. No matter how these practices were branded or mocked by others, they mattered to the locals. ‘This is how we do things here’ is thus filled with purpose and meaning.

As part of the everyday experience, the internal point of view is reflective of, and in turn gives voice to, a local regime of truth (Michel Foucault). The attitude that a communal practice is correct and proper – that something is ‘done in this way and not another’ or ‘not done at all’ – is the result of preconceptions that are deeply entrenched in the workings of society. In Foucault’s terms, those preconceptions constitute a meta-power. As the state is unable to occupy the whole field of power relations, society is governed by a series of sub-power systems such as the family, education, and the media. Each of these establishes their prohibitions and constraints. Taken together, meta-powers foster a regime of sentiment and belief, or truth; they produce a reality in which certain things are done in accordance with prevailing meta-powers, while others are ‘not to be done at all’. The validity of those regimes of truth is confined to the society that produces them. In other words, in each community each regime creates a different reality. What is valid in any one society is not automatically valid in another, even if they share certain cultural traditions otherwise.⁷

The festival cycle of the Greek polis offers a striking example of how local Hellenic regimes of truth played out. Polis festivals were key in the dissemination and veneration of local traditions (legends of foundation and descent, myths of attachment to place, etc), as were the city’s many commemorative rites and religious rituals that followed a local script. For instance, many cities celebrated the Thesmophoria, but only in Eretria were the sacrificial meats grilled in the sun rather than on the fire. The festival of Agrionia was celebrated in Orchomenos differently from the festival of the same name in nearby Chaironeia, less than 10 kilometers away. In Boiotia alone, a total of 19 different cult variants of festivals in honor of Apollo have been identified, with an even higher number

⁶ Cf. Hansen 2004: 3, on emic approaches to the ancient Greek city-state.

⁷ Regime of truth: the foundational text on “Truth and Power” is reprinted in Rabinov 1984: 51-75.

of local epithets.⁸ The celebration of all of these festivals was governed not only by cultic idiosyncrasy at the local level, but also by a calendar that was once again locally encoded. No two poleis had the same (festival) calendar.⁹ So while the conduct of religion in the Greek city was inspired by Hellenic communality or ‘Hellenicity’ – Herodotus (8.144.2) famously spoke of a common conduct of sacrifices to the gods –, there was also substantial local variation in ritual practice and meaning.¹⁰

In their exercise of cult and sacrifice, Greek polis societies of the Classical period proceeded in an auto-referential and sociocentric manner. Auto-referential because their ways and traditions clustered around the local cosmos first and foremost, the people, and the land; we will return to this shortly. And sociocentric because their interpretations relied mostly on readings that were conceived of, and sanctioned by, the local community itself.

The term local requires conceptual clarification.¹¹ Local is typically understood in descriptive terms, referring to local traditions and tastes, the study of local dialects, local knowledge cultures, or the writing of local history. Also, as Tim Whitmarsh (2010) remarked, the term local is often used in a dismissive sense, for instance when applied to a plethora of ethnic groups in the Mediterranean that were neither Greek nor Roman.¹² Semantic pettiness has also been detected in the genre of local historiography. The common view that local history offers “images of tiny, parochial studies which might be of interest perhaps only to the equivalent of a minor local history society”¹³ suggests that much. In the same vein, local Greek religion is usually portrayed as being confined by a small place and a limited number of participants, and hence as petty. Local religion was thus not only subject to a small-world horizon, but also, according to the orthodox view, of low significance.¹⁴

8 Cf. Schachter 1981: 43–90. On Orchomenos and Chaironeia, Schachter 1981: 173–174 and 179–181. Thesmophoria at Eretria: Plut. *Mor.* 298b–c = *Greek Questions* #31.

9 Cf. Trümpy 1997; Hannah 2013.

10 See below.

11 The following sketch will be fleshed out in greater detail in Beck, forthcoming.

12 Whitmarsh 2010: 3. Cf. also Hingley 2005: 93 on such a reading of the local and postcolonial theory.

13 Cf. Thomas 2014: 145, referencing the common view.

14 Cf. the discussion by Kindt 2012: 123–154, who fosters a different approach.

Throughout these examples, the inherent – and inherently pejorative – idea is that the local is subject to a taxonomy of relevance in which it is belittled by greater formations – the universal, global, or Panhellenic – that are viewed as landmarks of Greek culture, its connectivity and worldliness. It is intriguing to see how much scholarly attention this aspect, the paradigm of connectivity and exchange, receives in current conversations in the Humanities and Social Sciences. Everything is “Linked” (Barabási 2002). In Ancient History, the new wave of Mediterranean studies is only the most eminent and also most impactful expression of a true paradigm-shift toward omnipresent connectivity.¹⁵

For instance, in his recent study (2011) of the Mediterranean world, Irad Malkin examines the multiple networks of colonization, commerce, and religion that allowed communities near and far to interact with increasing frequency. In this *Small Greek World*, the boundaries of exchange were gradually replaced by patterns of connectivity. The necessary prerequisites in infrastructure and technology that enabled such connectivity are relatively easy to pin down: improved navigation at sea and developing road networks on land; increasing volume of trade in response to the rising demands of urban societies; advanced security of travel, and so forth. Malkin moves, however, beyond the issue of improved infrastructure. Drawing on network theories that are inspired by social media communication on the internet, he examines how networks as such constitute a particular type of social morphology. Networks are prone to trigger a shift in the mindsets of those who engage in them. They disregard the juxtaposition of near and far. In concrete terms, despite the vast distances between them, the Greeks of the Mediterranean basin occupied a world that was global and local at the same time. The paradox is resolved with reference to the omnipresence of tightly meshed networks that provided both the infrastructure and the mental interface of interaction.¹⁶

Network theory has become a powerful paradigm that contributes to the understanding of intercommunal exchange in ancient Greece, relating to the larger questions of a joint political culture, the rise of a more or less coherent religious belief system, and the establishment of a common sense of Hellenicity. All of these trends cut across the dividing

15 Some of the basic texts include Morris 2005; Malkin et alii 2009; Dabag et alii 2016.

16 Malkin 2011: 3-64.

lines of small and geographically scattered city-states, highlighting their collective quality as constituents of one cultural hemisphere. The true agents of that hemisphere, however, remained local organizations: according to Eberhard Ruschenbusch, the *Normalpolis* was a small-scale city (25 to 100 km²), sometimes with not more than a few hundred citizens, with access to modest natural resources and a limited potential for growth.¹⁷ As much as those cities were stitched into the ‘Hellenic Wide Web’ (Malkin) of the Aegean world, as much they were drawn to a deliberately local horizon.

Greek authors of all times gave voice to this local world. Phokylides of Miletus, in the later sixth century BCE, declared that “a small and orderly polis on a rock is better than foolish Nineveh” (fr. 4 Gentili/Prato). In a way this followed up on Hesiod’s famous statement that traveling to Chalkis, across the straits that separated Euboia from Boiotia, was the maximum trip he was willing to consider (*W&D* 517-667). Journeys to far-away lands held no appeal for Hesiod.¹⁸ Theognis, in a similar vein, declared his hometown Megara the ultimate place where he would pursue his goals in life, for good or for ill. He had journeyed “to Sicily, the vine-rich plains of Euboia and to Sparta, splendid city of the reed-nourishing Eurotas,” but nothing was dearer to him than his *patria*, his homeland (783-788).¹⁹

It appears that these authors were immune to the glamour and excitement of distant worlds that are the nuts and bolts of Homer’s poetry. The attitude voiced by Phokylides is usually understood as an early reference to the normative force of the polis as a political aggregation with a growing sense of self-governance or, *avant la lettre*, *autonomia*. Note how Phokylides’ polis was orderly – the arrangement was κατὰ κόσμον –, which underscores the political connotation of his verdict. Yet the city as such was built on a rock or steep hilltop, which might signal that it had good natural defenses. The image is one that occurs frequently in the *Iliad*, where Greek cities are described as steep or scanty (Kalydon: *Il.* 2.640; 14.118). The impression here is that those cities had a certain degree of

17 Ruschenbusch 1985, with Hansen 2004: 71. See also Bintliff 2006, who calculates that 80% of Greek city-states had populations of 2,000 to 4,000 people, with a territory of a 5 to 6 kilometer radius.

18 Reference to long-distance trade is confined to one passage in *Works and Days* (618-694), cf. Edwards 2004: 48-51; Strauss Clay 2009. On the poetic theme of Hesiod’s reluctance to travel, cf. Rosen 1990.

19 See the contributions by David Yates and Jonathan Reeves below.

honesty in their favour: they occupied a spot that was not necessarily pleasant, nor did it have abundant resources. Nevertheless, they were seemingly well thought-out and well maintained by their inhabitants because the place meant something to them. It is interesting to see how Nineveh (Mosul, Iraq), the most captivating metropolis of the Assyrian Empire of the day, is portrayed as foolish or, literally, meaningless (ἄφραινούσης). In this sense, the fame of Nineveh was outweighed by the well-governed but potentially un-worldly polis. For Phokylides, in the contest between mega-city vs. parochial polis, the latter prevailed.²⁰

Phokylides' praise of the small city resonates an identity of place, one that is truffled with specificities of culture, encoded in foundational ideas of human interaction, and supported by the authority of tradition, all of which were appropriated in the Hellenic discourse of hanging on to the local – even if it was in a somewhat poor location. At the same time, Phokylides touches on a transhistorical quality of the local, that is, its capacity as a source domain that wields impact over individuals in their daily exchanges.

The embedded quality of the local to imprint on society is largely under-researched. As a working hypothesis, we might assert that this quality plays out in two arenas of spatial semantics: the physical and the imagined realm. As a physical space, the local is the manageable, accessible realm through which individuals navigate in their everyday lives. Such an embodied experience implies multiple groups of human agents. It expresses itself in a variety of functional localities in which their relations are realized, like neighbourhoods and demes, and/or places of artisanal or agricultural productivity; hence the urban center and the countryside. Religious and profane places, once again associated with locations in the polis territory, were also subject to divergent strategies of communal maintenance. The local of the farmer in the countryside is not the same as that of the perfumer in the agora. What unites them is that they fall within the same radius of everyday engagement: typically not more than five to six kilometers, or less than a two

20 E. Bowie, "Phocylides," *Brill's New Pauly*. Online Database (print 2006); Itgenshorst 2014: 88, 208-210, and *passim*, who dismisses the idea of assigning the fragment to a Jewish-Egyptian author from the Imperial Period (Korenjak and Rollinger 2001). Hall 2007: 74 conjectures that Phokylides had a "compact settlement" in mind, similar to what is portrayed on Achilles' shield (*Il.* 18.484-607). Political renderings of Phokylides, Walter 2013: 518. See also frs. 3, 5, and 12 Gentili/Prato.

hour walk. With over the majority of inhabitants being peasant farmers, this distance was covered during the daily commute to their fields in the countryside, which usually consisted of a short ride or walk from their homes in the city. If farmers lived in villages or hamlets, they would find the distance between their homes and the market place in the city equally manageable. The physical local is thus subject to the circumstances of human mobility. In the context of Greek culture, it overlaps with the horizon of the *Normalpolis*, as we characterized it above.²¹

The next realm beyond the local is region, which transcends quotidian interactions. In the regional sphere, human agency is exposed to a series of subsidiary modes of communication and infrastructures that enable interactions beyond the daily radius. Effectively, in their experience of the local and the regional, individuals turn to strategies of exchange that are categorically different. One strategy is governed by directness, auto-referentiality, and complicity; the other by intermediary contact, cyclical exchange, and a hybrid of inside/outside perspectives. In the culture-specific setting of ancient Greece, the regional is commonly associated with the *ethnos*. For instance, the Phokians, Boiotians, or Arkadians, have a joint ethnic identity that is also tied to geography: the territory of the *ethnē*, as reflected in expressions of tribal communality, regional sanctuaries and amphiktyonies, or in the organization of a federal state. Given the precarity of inside/outside relations in the regional sphere, this also explains why the interactions between neighbours, separated by only a few kilometers, were often exposed to a particular volatility. The further the regional extends from the local, the less it is charged with the burden of this volatility.²²

21 A radius of 5 kilometers equals c. 78 km². The figures for the *Normalpolis* of a 1 to 1.5 hour radius have been endorsed by survey archaeology, see especially Bintliff 2006, with much bibliography. Gehrke 1986: 19 calculates that up to 80% of the inhabitants of the *Normalpolis* were peasant-farmers.

22 The mechanics of the *ethnos* in its regional context are fairly well understood, cf. Mackil 2013; Beck and Funke 2015 for the most recent overview. Precarity of relations, Beck 2016.

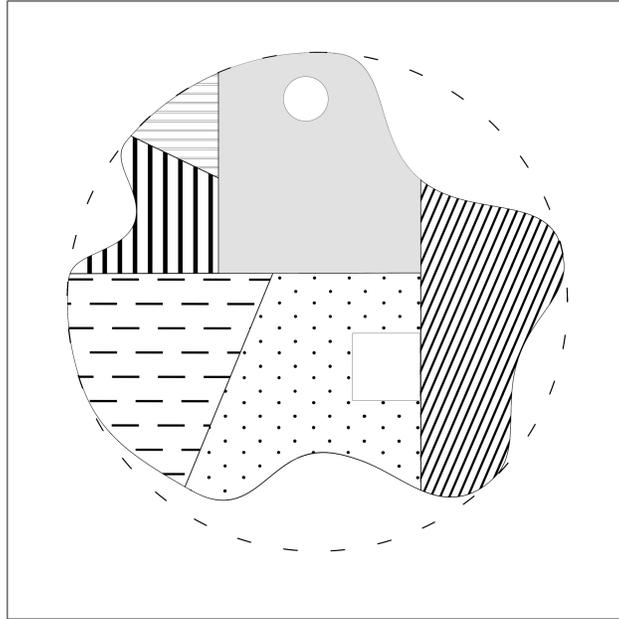


Figure 1: The local horizon, real and imagined. The irregular shape symbolizes the vagaries of the land, while the dashed circle represents the imagined local. Shaded areas indicate diverse functional localities, e.g. neighbourhoods, agricultural land, harbours, market places, sanctuaries, etc.

As a metaphorical or imagined place, the local extends this experience to an imagined circle of individuals, building an imagined community (Benedict Anderson). Henri Lefebvre has argued that the metaphorical manifestation of space is both separate from the physical world and related to it. As we have seen, physical space segregates, it shapes multiple localities that exist in proximity to each other; we have noted the existence of multiple functional localities in one and the same locale. Social space, on the other hand, “implies actual and potential assembly at a single point, or around that point. It implies, there, the possibility of accumulation”.²³ This implied possibility of collective accumulation

²³ Lefebvre 1974/1991: 101.

is contextual. It is inspired by various real-life constellations, including physical infrastructure and modes of communication. The natural environment too fuels the idea of possible accumulation, in the sense that it provides a real canvas (e.g., a valley, plateau, island, etc) for the projection of social space. This does not imply that the natural environment – its topography and geography – wields a deterministic force over society. If anything, the causal relation went in the opposite direction. As David Harvey has demonstrated, the social quality of space is not determined by geography, but is defined through human practice, i.e., through an ongoing, complex, and often non-linear negotiation in the course of which space is made subject to, and appropriated by, the governing ideas of society.²⁴ In their conversations about cultural practices and social meaning, the members of society constitute a series of links to their locality. The local is invoked as a figure that binds them together in their imagined community with its everyday norms and practices, and its regime of truth.

In this avenue of exploration, the local is a rich source that brings order and meaning to the reassessment of changing circumstances in the world. It provides society with a place for convictions, beliefs, and patterns of reasoning. The local is more than a firm footing from which to struggle forward. It is the glue that binds people together in the comfortable familiarity of established norms and practices. In sum, the twofold meaning of the local speaks to a particular ontology of place, one that amalgamates physical and imagined realms, marries relational and contextual approaches, and combines nature and society. It turns space into place.²⁵

The terms locality and localism relate to this approach. Locality, beyond its casual meaning of having a location, denotes the long-standing patterns that emerge from the association with the local. Locality subsumes all expressions of local culture, knowledge production, and communal conviction, each one in relation to the local horizon that inspires

²⁴ Harvey 1979/2006: 275.

²⁵ See also Soja 1989: 118–137, whose “spatialized ontology” became a landmark contribution on the way toward the spatial turn.

them. Localism, finally, is the mindset that prioritizes the sum of these local expressions and experiences over alternative sources of meaning from outside the community.²⁶

It has been pointed out by scholars that the opposition of the local and the global presents a difficult binary because each category infiltrates the other. Also, studies in cultural globalization indicate that the relation between the local and the global is never static but is exposed to adaptation and change. This is how, and why, the terms ‘glocal’ and ‘glocalization’ (Roland Robertson) have entered the debate. According to a prominent cycle of cross-fertilization between the local and the global, globalization triggers an increasing sense of disconnect from the local, or a delocalization. This fuels a new need for locality. In its most immediate variant, this need leads to the rise of a new localism, that in turn challenges the basic tenets of globalization. Neither end of the binary is pristine, in spite of what societal conversations about the local and the global often suggest.²⁷

The constellation is amply attested in the Greek world, most eminently in the Hellenistic Age and its vibrant coexistence of divergent trajectories of “Belonging and Isolation” (Ager and Faber 2013). As we have seen earlier, the Hellenistic poet Meleager addressed the crucial question of local belonging in times of global change, in a series of self-epitaphs that are preserved in the *Anthologia Palatina*. In one notable text, it is observed

The isle of Tyre raised me; my true hometown, however, was Gadara, Syria's Athens. From Eukrates I sprouted, I Meleager, who first by the help of the Muses raced against Menippos' Graces. If I am from Syria, so what? We all, stranger, inhabit one country: the world. It was one chaos that gave birth to all mortals. (7.417)

As was pointed out by Tamara Chin (2016), in Meleager's times, the question of local belonging was intertwined with a growing sense of cosmopolitanism. The delicate balance between the local and the global was tipped by a new quality of the global. As a

²⁶ See also Beck 2017 for a transhistorical concept of localism, its many derivatives, and their semantic charge.

²⁷ The point has been stressed by historians of globalization, cf., for instance, Osterhammel and Petersson 2005: 1–12. In the Roman world: Pitts and Versleuys 2015.

consequence, this new global quality triggered a crisis of identity at the local level. Note how the one local (Gadara) was described by means of comparison with another (Athens). By the first century BCE, the latter had obtained the status of a foothold of global culture.²⁸ While the traces of a cosmopolitanism mindset thus run back to the early Hellenistic period, the notion of identity crisis was not confined to the Hellenistic Age. It was a common trait of Greek culture, which has always been subject to the dynamic of expanding horizons, from the so-called Age of Colonization through the Classical period, and beyond. With it, the attitudes towards the local were persistently probed, tested, challenged, and, effectively, renegotiated. The ontology of place was a constant, governing power that realigned individuals with place and time. As we noted above, however, the ways in which this realignment played out was neither set nor stable, but malleable over time. In other words, as the locality of a place remained principally the same, inspiring long-standing patterns for the cultivation of an identity of people and of place, the long duration of the local was exposed to shifting parameters in the world around it.

The local, then, is a place that allows individuals to connect to common sources of knowledge and meaning.²⁹ In the course of the cultural turn, the multifaceted nature of these has been disclosed through the exploration of symbolic practices, civic rituals, and communicative realms within the community. The gravity of these practices results from the fact that they are repeated; repetition adds power and potency to the equation. Along the way, social practices evolve into social norms; and as such, it informs the constitution of reality in society. It has therefore become key to seek out narratives that speak to the cohesion of the community. The adoption of this avenue of inquiry demonstrates how legendary tales of primordial descent, and of a common ancestry, fed into the beliefs of polis societies and reinforced their sense of collectivity. Much of this kind of work was carried out under the rubric of ethnic identity studies, which in turn draw on a plethora of local and regional expressions of material and immaterial culture (e.g., pottery, dress, dialects), from what Lillian Jeffery has famously labeled *The Local Scripts of Archaic Greece*

28 Cf. also Hörschele 2013, who discusses the temporal, spatial, and cultural gulf that both separates the author from, and unites him with, the Hellenistic world.

29 The classic text is Geertz 1983.

(1961) to a wave of studies on foundation myths and tales of belonging to place, that were so critical to the Greek mindset.³⁰

Two further observations bear on the attachment to the land. The first is that the land was a spirited place, one that was inhabited by what Aischylos and Thucydides called the ἐπιχώριοι θεοί – the epichoric gods, demigods, demons and nymphs, all of which resided in the territory of the polis.³¹ The inhabitants of Greek cities were tied to the land through divine beings whose presence was detected in specific topographical features of the *chōra* like rivers, groves, and caves. This cultic topography called for particular veneration. Indeed, there are countless examples that speak to this localization, or spacialization, of Greek religion: rites of procession through the countryside that paid homage to each minute topographical feature of the *chōra* and its divine spirits; the veneration of places of memory that encapsulated the origins of the community; or the hymnic evocation of prayer and song that was not only performed in relation to place, but actually localized the god/goddess. As recent scholarship highlights, the exercise of rites and sacrifices in the polis was a local performance first and foremost. When Apollo, for instance, was evoked in prayer, the time-space continuum shrunk and melted into the local horizon; the god was localized. The very nature of Greek religion generated a sense of attachment to place that was deeply enshrined in the self-perception of polis communities.³² Julia Kindt has noted that the idea of opposing localizations and taxonomies of Greek religion – universal vs. local, important vs. petty – suffers from significant conceptual shortcomings; indeed, she posits that the duality is “a false dichotomy” (2012: 130-131). Rather, Kindt concludes by showing how the local thoroughly infiltrated the more Panhellenic or universal paradigms of Greek religion. Much like the glocal helix outlined above, both spheres were implicit in each other.³³

30 Much of this work was carried out under the rubric of ethnic identity studies. There is no need to revisit the terrain here. In a work that is in many ways paradigmatic, Kühn 2000 has demonstrated how the various threads of the Theban foundation saga were grounded in multiple layers of place – in Boiotia, Thebes, and individual locations within the city. This grounding, in turn, provided the Thebans with a robust sense of belonging.

31 Thuc. 2.71-74; Aesch. *Suppl.* 482. 704-705; cf. Polinskaya 2013: 36-43.

32 Cf. now Thomas 2016; also Calame 2011 and 2013.

33 Kindt 2012; cf. also Kindt 2015.

The second point with regards to the land has to do with the natural environment itself. As Peregrine Horden and Nicholas Purcell illustrated in their study on *The Corrupting Sea* (2000), Aegean Greece comprised a diverse tapestry of micro-regions, often with very different ecological zones in very close proximity to each other. Different eco-zones invited different patterns of agrarian practice, which is why scholars have started to study regional variation in Greece with regards to the divergence of agricultural and pastoral regimes. In turn, such an approach allows for conclusions on the rural economies of individual cities and, by extension, on certain aspects of their social history. Building off of Horden and Purcell's observations, it is easy to see how the agrarian communities of ancient Greece were prone to a particular form of parochialism, one that was inspired by the natural environment itself.

Take the issue of food. The incorporation of locally available food into everyday diets is not an automatic process, as Igor de Garine (1976 and 1979) has long observed. When nature meets with the need for nutrition, the emergence of local cuisines is subject to expressions of cultural awareness. Food consumption is thus an important medium of self and social projection, as it allows people to articulate and reassert patterns of belonging. The precondition to such projection is that a group has agreed on common practices of preparation and consumption, as both the diet and its associated expressions are subject to a social judgment of taste (Bourdieu 1984). Public feasts in the polis, where everyone received a share in the sacrificial food, and all, in theory, ate together, highlighted such need for social acceptance by all. They also reinforced the idea that the solidarity of the group was expressed in choices of taste that united people in their small local world.³⁴

What was tasty in one polis was not necessarily tasty in another. Indeed, the Greek world was neither short nor shy of local practices that corresponded with the local land in one way or another. The people of Thasos notoriously prided themselves on their wine, which grew under particularly favourable combination of soil, sun, and wind. The city of Orchomenos was renowned for fat geese and the giant eels its inhabitants harvested in

34 The topic of food/consumption and identity has become a trending topic, both in scholarship and in more popular academic approaches; cf. only Erdkamp 2012; Crowther 2013; also the online journal *Anthropology of Food*.

Lake Kopais; and the Thessalian cities for their grain pudding (*chondron*) that was dripping with lamb broth and finessed with toasted nuts from local pine trees.³⁵

It would be easy to continue with this list or to extend the notion of local distinction to local craftsmanship. For instance, the territory of Sikyon has significant amounts of pale limestone-rich marl clay, with occasional pockets of iron-rich reddish terra rossa. The clays were found to have an ideal plasticity and suitability for forming and firing pottery. It has long been conjectured that the excellent clay quality supported Sikyon's pioneering role in the production of ceramics and in the visual arts.³⁶ Unsurprisingly, the soils of neighbouring Corinth are similar to those in the Sikyonia, especially in the low land coastal strip along the Gulf. Clay work and ceramics production had an equally impactful tradition at Corinth. In the so-called Potter's Quarter, archaeologists have discovered a high volume of maiden figurines with what is labeled today as typically "Sikyonian" folds in their skirts. The evident conclusion is that those pieces were manufactured by Sikyonian craftsmen in Corinth or, more likely, in an attempt to imitate the Sikyonian style. As was pointed out by Angela Ziskowski, the Sikyonian-style *korai* thus offer an exciting example of the Corinthians integrating a non-local or foreign "stylistic practice into [their] own repertoire of production" (2016: 104). *Mutatis mutandis*, we would assume that the same was true for Sikyonian styles in clay modeling, toreutics, and certainly in painting, with so many travelling artists coming through to work with the renowned experts of the local 'School'.³⁷

It is notoriously difficult to assert how exactly those specialized practices translated into the identity of place, but the general point is obvious. Seeing artisanal expertise as representative of communal values, norms, and habits, scholars have argued that cultural

35 Cf. Pray Bober 1999: 112-116, who collects several such food idiosyncrasies; Dalby 2003.

36 Sikyonian soils: Lolos 2011: 28-32; Trainor 2015: 19-39.

37 Cf. Griffin 1982: 99-100; Ziskowski 2016: 103-106. The Sikyonian toreutics school reached its peak in the fourth century BCE with Lysippos, who was generally regarded among the most distinguished bronze sculptors of the day. One of his mentors was Eupompos of Sikyon who was the founding father of another vibrant local school, that of painting. Eupompos' fame was later eclipsed by Apelles, a native of Kos and master painter of ancient Greece, who had studied for some time in Sikyon with Eupompos' successor, a certain Pamphilos. See also the contribution of Matthias Haake below on Megara's Philosophical School.

output reverberates a sense of belonging, a sense that was again magnified through repetition over time. Contextual readings of local dietary traditions and production thus not only offer a prism through which we see the daily life of local societies but, more importantly, they serve as a mirror of society, one in which we might observe the “social production and reproduction of meaning” (Hodos 2010: 3).

Fernand Braudel has famously argued that the history of micro-regions often remained untouched from the seismic shifts in global politics. Our advances in the understanding of the local invite a more nuanced picture. As we have seen, the local inspires a particular discourse environment. Shaped by a polyphony of voices and a plurality of realms where public conversations between shifting groups of speakers and audiences take place, the Local Discourse Environment (LDE) is of a kaleidoscopic nature. Voice and place are typically bracketed by the local horizon, which delineates a communicative boundary. At the same time, they are energized by, and receive critical input from, the local. Through this amalgamation with the local, the LDE provides public deliberations with a robust, common frame of reference. Drawing on long-term discursive sentiments, conditions, and beliefs as they prevail in a particular place, it renders self-evidence, validity, and in this sense truth, to societal assessments. Similar to an echo chamber, this autoreferential quality of the LDE endorses local readings of the world writ large and buttresses the local’s place in global constellations. In the swiftly changing world of Ancient Greece, the LDE was a dynamic engine that powered strategies of distinction and competition, and, most eminently, a vibrant stage for the dialectic interplay between the local, the regional, and the global. At the same time, and in response to each one of these, the swiftly changing circumstances in the world of the Hellenes inspired a culture-specific ontology of place, one that was governed by the local horizon as much as it was by movements of connectivity and exchange.

Megara’s Local Discourse Environment: Facets and Fragments

As we have seen earlier, their Athenian neighbours were quick to judge the Megarians. “Men of Megara, why don’t you go to hell” shouts the speaker in Aristophanes’ *Peace* (500), which hit the tone. For instance, Megarians were depicted as notorious garlic-eaters or “garlic-stung” (Aristoph. *Akarnians* 526), their diet being otherwise determined by poor

men's foods: turnips, overripe things and flat-cakes, along with an avid love of strong salt. According to Apollodoros of Karystos (third century BCE), Megarians savored rolls of cabbage, sometimes stuffed with pork (*PCG* II). Kallias (*FCG* V.1, fr. 23) adds "Megarian sphinxes" to the mix of mediocre local produce, most likely a slang word for prostitutes. Indeed, the low standards of Megarian prostitutes is another recurring theme in Athenian comedy (no wonder Neaira had such difficulties in Megara). Following the common conjecture in Greek literature that there was an innate relation between culinary habits and the ethical and intellectual capacity of people, it comes as no surprise that Megarians had only a childish humor. Ekphantides, who wrote in the generation before Aristophanes, suggested that the term "Megarian farce" was proverbial (fr. 3). Generally speaking, Megarians were a little slow. When it is necessary to sink your teeth into something and try hard to achieve a goal, they accomplish nothing, "gnawing like puppies" (Aristoph. *Peace* 482). Local styles in dress were also targeted. The Megarian tunic, the so-called *chlanis*, became the object of ridicule, inviting various condescending comments (Aristoph. *Akarnians* 519). When imports from Megara became illegal as a consequence of the sanctions imposed in 432 BCE, "Megarian" turned into a watchword in the agora for all kinds of illegal and low-quality products. The sanctions were lifted at some point, but the saying lingered on. Summing up her analysis of Megarian stereotypes in Athens, Monica Florence concluded that the public discourse in Athens built on, and in turn endorsed, the image of an antithetical relationship between Athens and Megara, one in which the Megarians were at the receiving end. Everything in this discourse was construed to "sanction Athens' right to rule over its wild and less civilized Greek neighbors" (2003: 55).

Megarian images of self were hardly confined to garlic, onions, and funny tunics. To be sure, cabbage rolls were a local delicacy to which the people of Megara were given no matter what others said. Climatic conditions in the Megarid were better for the cultivation of cabbage than in Attica, with lower levels of annual rainfall there. The local food delicacy thus seems to have adapted to the microclimate of the Megarid. The same applied to the production of salt in the saltpans on the coast facing Salamis that had a particular taste.³⁸ Beyond the cultivation of cabbage, a high proportion of the land was used for

38 Salt: Aristoph. *Acharnians* 817; *Schol.* in Aristoph. *Ach.* 700; Legon 1981: 88; Smith 2006: 77-78.

pasturage, which gave special importance to raising sheep and producing wool. According to Aristotle (*Pol.* 1305 a 25-26), in their violent competition for influence in the polis in the later seventh century BCE, some aristocratic leaders made it their strategy to slaughter the grazing flocks of their opponents, which underscores their value. Soon enough, local spinners developed their own style, the aforementioned *chlanis*, a durable, short woolen tunic. Later sources credited a certain Nikias of Megara with the invention of a particular fulling process that was applied (Plin. *nat.* 7.57). Megarian *chlaniskia* were a desired export product. Known for their wool quality, they were appreciated both as ready-to-wear clothes and also as good winter wear. According to Xenophon (*Mem.* 2.7.6), many Megarians made considerable profit from their production and trade in the Saronic Gulf, and beyond. At about the same time as Xenophon, Diogenes of Sinope scolded the Megarians for their ignorance and vulgarity; he, Diogenes, “would rather be a ram belonging to a Megarian than his son” (*Ail. Var.* 12.56).

We see the pendulum of positionality in full swing. Whatever the mockery – most likely animals will not have mattered more than sons – it is easy to see how Megarian sheep breeders were concerned over their stock rams, which were critical for successful flock management. As the end product of a particular artisanal epistemology (Pamela Smith), the wool *chlanis* was the sum of multiple manufacturing skills at all steps of the production chain: from the more generic animal husbandry and sheering to the specific skills of dying, spinning, and weaving that were applied to make the *chlanis* distinct. As mentioned above, it is difficult to assert just how exactly such an artisanal epistemology translated into social meaning, but this does not undermine the more general observation that the Megarian garb was both an expression and reassurance of a distinct identity of place.³⁹

Moving beyond the dining tables and dress rooms, being from Megara implied daily exposure to a complicated set of determinants that made the city unique. Geography put the city on the land routes from the Peloponnese to Athens and Central Greece, with all the vagaries and changing fortunes that came with a location near one of the great junctions of the Greek mainland. Nothing highlights the charge the local topography had

39 Cf. also Legon 1981: 21-40, 87-88.

more than the famous pillar erected by Athenians and Peloponnesians in the western borderlands of the Megarid. On the side facing the Peloponnese, it read, “This is the Peloponnese, not Ionia,” and on the side facing Megara, “This is not the Peloponnese, but Ionia” (Strab. 9.1.6). We will return to the corresponding ethnic charges shortly. The route was one of the most frequented travel arteries in Greece. In the words of Sheila Ager, “Megara was a local to the Megarians, yet a highway to others”. In addition to their connectivity on land, the Megarians were a seafaring polis that relied on overseas trade and was known for its expert navigators; yet on many occasions, the Megarians were shut out from their harbours.⁴⁰

The most eminent impact, however, came from the political trajectory. The loss of Salamis to Athens in the early sixth century BCE put Megara on an irreversible downward spiral. Like many other city-states, the community was shaken by ruptures of civil strife and domestic violence, although the political climate appears to have been even more volatile in Megara than elsewhere. The Persian War, paradoxically, caused a temporary delay in the city’s ongoing strife. Unlike other prominent poleis along the Hellenic corridor, for instance, Orchomenos, Thebes and Argos, the Megarians sided with the Greek coalition. The Serpent Column, which listed the dedicating parties according to the contributions they had made to the war, puts them in the seventh spot of the Hellenic alliance (*M&L* 27). As soon as the threat was over, the Megarians became the punching bag of both Athens and Sparta. One of the earliest members of the Peloponnesian League outside the Peloponnese, the Megarians defected from Sparta in c. 460 BCE. But the Thirty Years Peace (446 BCE) voided their defection and they were returned to Sparta, against their will. Only a decade or so later, the Athenians bullied the Megarians over the so-called Sacred Tract, the borderlands between Eleusis and the Megarid. The quarrel led to all sorts of grievances, and it never went away. In an Athenian decree from the mid-fourth century, several concerns over the border with Megara are raised; they were brought

40 Freitag 2000: 174–186. See the contributions by Klaus Freitag and Sheila Ager below.

before the Pythia in Delphi. The way the request is framed makes it clear that there was no concern whatsoever for the Megarian cause.⁴¹

How did the Megarians situate themselves between the frontlines? Pausanias records that Megara once had been part of Athens and thus of the Ionian tribe (note how the Isthmos inscription referenced above made them part of Ionia, too). But,

later, when Kodros was king, the Peloponnesians went to war with Athens. As they withdrew, having achieved nothing glorious, they took Megara, which was Athenian, and allowed anyone from Corinth, and the rest of the league, who wanted, to settle there. In this way the Megarians changed their customs (ἔθος) and their speech (φωνή) and became Dorians. (1.39.4)

There is an interesting archaeological layer in Pausanias' observation, one that resonates the prominence of Athenian claims as we encountered them earlier: Megara had once been theirs, which supported claims for superiority over time.⁴² At some point in the late-Archaic period, similar claims of ethnic belonging were raised by Megara's northern neighbour, Boiotia.⁴³ In the end, however, the Megarians did not maintain an Ionian or Boiotian identity, but involuntarily became Dorians. Sparta brought about the transition of their customs and speech by making arrangements to settle all kinds of peoples in Megara. Pausanias saw it as a means to secure Megara's future loyalty.

41 *REO* no. 58 = *IG II³* 1.292. For the Sacred Tract, which is first mentioned in Thuc. 1.139, cf. Ober 1985: 216-217; McInerney 2006: 50-53; Papazarkadas 2011: 244-259. The region continued to be a bone of contention: Androtion *BNJ* 324 F30 and Philochoros *BNJ* 328 F155. Athenians and Megarians each had a watchtower on either end of the tract (Ober 1985: 175-178; Smith 2008: 73).

42 The Athenian argument was built around Nisos, the son of a mythical Athenian king, who was given as his inheritance the land that was henceforth Nisaia, later Megara: Pind. *Pyth.* 9.91; *Nem.* 5.46; Strab. 9.1.6; Paus. 1.5.3 and 1.39.4. 2.34.7. Plutarch records that Theseus was said to have ruled over the Megarid (*Thes.* 25).

43 The Boiotian link came by means of a marriage tie between Nisos and a noble woman from Onchestos. When pressed for his kingdom, her brother Megareus set out to aid Nisos against foreign invaders. Later he succeeded to the throne: Paus. 1.39.5; Plut. *Mor.* 295a-b = *Greek Questions* #16. The *Catalogue of Ships* mentions Nisa as part of the Boiotian contingent, two lines apart from Onchestos (*Il.* 2.506-508).

Historicity is not at stake here.⁴⁴ What matters for our purposes is how the Megarians related to the claim that they were, allegedly, convert Dorians. It is noteworthy to see that the Megarians, as such, figured as a distinctive group over which Dorians, Ionians, and Boiotians laid claims. Is it conceivable that they became wholehearted members of any one of these groupings, or, according to the tradition of shifting ethnic affiliation, first either Ionians or Boiotians and then Dorians? Dialect analysis shows that Megarian speech shares some features with Doric Greek, but it is also too distinct, containing various other linguistic influences, to be labeled Dorian. Studies in material culture also alert us that the pottery production followed mostly local styles. The decree culture of the Megarid is best understood as one of local distinctiveness. Finally, Megara's calendar (the little that can be said about it) was strictly Megarian rather than Dorian or anything else.⁴⁵

The various indexes of ethnic affiliation (dialects, material culture) are notoriously fraught with interpretative challenges. Each of these rubrics comes with its baggage of methodological conjectures and caveats. Moreover, there is a marked difference between what others thought about Megara's place in the genealogical tree of Hellenicity and what the Megarians believed to be the case. This belief translated into a lived, local experience. When we address the question of the Megarians' Dorianness from this latter perspective, it is extremely doubtful that Dorian affiliations wielded a significant impact over the Megarians, if any.

Pausanias clarifies the discrepancy. When he visited the city, the opposition between Dorians and Ionians had long lost its initial meaning. As mentioned earlier, Pausanias encountered many stories of primordial descent and ethnic belonging: what the Athenians said, and what the Spartans said. Yet the people of Megara also had something to say about their origins, and their version was decidedly epichoric. The famous Fountain House of Theagenes at Megara, they said, was supplied with waters sacred to the Sithnidian nymphs that were local, *epichōrios*. One of these had sex with Zeus and the resulting child,

44 Hanell 1934 organized his "Megarische Studien" according to a pre-Dorian and a Dorian period, a separation which also figured, yet less antithetically, in Legon 1981: 41-85. This is not the place to engage with, and dismiss, the extensive presumptions of the Dorian question.

45 Cf. Robu 2014; Robu and Birzescu 2016; see also Adrian Robu's contribution below. Decrees: Liddell 2009.

Megaros, had escaped Deukalion's flood in his youth by taking refuge in Mt Geraneia to the west of the Megarid. The name of the mountain range was connected with Megaros' temporary flight, and up until Pausanias' day, there was a sanctuary nearby that was connected with this story. Everything in this legend, from the land as a habitat of divine figures, to the countryside as physical space of human agency and canvas of meaning, related to an ontology of place as we characterized it earlier. The local discourse persisted over time.⁴⁶

Few have noted the longevity of Megarian discourses in Plutarch's *Greek Questions*. Of the 59 questions raised, five relate to Megara either directly or implicitly. Other than Delphi, this is the highest occurrence of any one polis in the *Greek Questions*.⁴⁷ Why this prominence? The *Greek Questions* show a general interest in the central section of the Hellenic corridor, from the Malian Gulf into the Peloponnese. By and large, this was Plutarch's home turf, which helps to explain in part the preponderance of cultural idiosyncrasies from the region. Also, two or three of the Megarian questions related to Apollo's pronouncements at Delphi. Hence, Plutarch will have learned about them in Delphi rather than in Megara, although the one source of information does not automatically preclude the other. For instance, when he relates what an "*aphabrōma* is among the Megarians" (#16, *Mor.* 295a-b), Plutarch advises that it is a particular female dress that went back to mythical beginnings of the city. The Megarian women had wanted to change their attire over time, but each time they initiated the switch, the god prevented them by an oracle. In a similar vein, Plutarch dwells on the meaning of Megarian "return interest" (#18, *Mor.* 295c-d) and Megarian "wagon rollers" (#59, *Mor.* 304e-f), which related back to what Plutarch called the period of the "unbridled democracy" (ἀκολάστου δημοκρατίας).⁴⁸ While the "wagon rollers" had killed several people who were on a festival embassy to Delphi, "return interest" was emblematic of the wave of violence against the local elites triggered by the Megarian poor.

⁴⁶ Paus. 1.40.1-2. Larson 2001: 146. On the Fountain House, cf. now Tsalkou 2016: 263-265.

⁴⁷ Cf. Halliday 1928; Payen 1998. If we add #39, where Megara is mentioned only in passing (from Architimos *BNJ* 315 F1), this makes for a frequency of c. 10% of all questions.

⁴⁸ Unbridled democracy: Legon 1981: 104-135; Forsdyke 2005a.

Both instances paint a tumultuous picture of Megara in the decades after the downfall of Theagenes, when, according to Plutarch, the poor and unscrupulous governed the city. Given the voice of antidemocratic prejudice, combined with the intellectual figure of constitutional upheaval and system change, Plutarch's source might have been Aristotle's (lost) *Constitution of the Megarians* (fr. 550 Rose³). Condemnations of the violent and insolent behavior of the poor toward the rich during the decades in question suggest that much.⁴⁹ Yet, at least the “wagon rollers” from #59 were remembered by the Delphic Amphictyony, as Plutarch makes it clear with reference to the legal action of the council against the perpetrators. Moreover, both the clan of “wagon rollers” – who bore the name for generations to come, branding them as descendants of wrong-doers – as well as the more general circumstances associated with the issue of “return interest” were grounded in place. Plutarch references the site where the “wagon rollers” committed their sacrilege: “at Aigeiros beside the lake”. The comment is so casual that everyone seems to have known where it was.⁵⁰ The place where “return interest” had taken its toll was different. Many members of the local elite nourished traditions of turmoil and dispossession during the “unbridled democracy”, when the poor violently entered their homes and demanded money. Effectively, the homes of the local elites bore witness to the story, if only to remind the fellow citizens about the disastrous consequences of the “wanton violence of the poor” (Arist. *Pol.* 1304 b 20).⁵¹ Questions #18 and 59 thus shed light on a moment in Megarian history that wielded a lasting impact over the city and its people.

Question #57 sheds light on an isolated instance in Megara's early history. At some point during the “unbridled democracy” the Megarians sent an expedition force of 600 men to attack the Samian colony Perinthos on the northern shores of the Propontis. The region had virtually become a “Megarian preserve”⁵² in the course of the seventh century BCE. Yet the troubles in Megara in the decades on either side of 600 BCE soon spilled over into

49 This was first established by Halliday 1928; cf. also Legon 1981: 104-105; Forsdyke 2005a: 55 and 2005b.

50 The town is also mentioned in the Megarian mockery of the *Catalogue of Ships* as recollected by Strabo, see below note 54.

51 The contribution by Alex McAuley below sheds light on a different strategy of preserving elite memories, the institution of the *ephebeia*.

52 Legon 1981: 120.

the colonies. Plutarch relates a series of raids and counter-raids in the Propontis in which the Megarian forces played a critical role, although their actions lacked consistency and coherence. Things did not go well. The fetters they had initially brought to Perinthos to enslave their enemies were put on display in a building of the same name at Samos, the Hall of Fetters, which is the trigger to Plutarch's tale. Both the language and the way in which the conflict is outlined make it likely that Plutarch drew again on Aristotle's corpus, this time most likely the *Constitution of the Samians*.⁵³ It is difficult to miss the sense of pride over past imperial grandeur: the glorious days when Megara was an Aegean power on equal footing with Corinth, Sikyon, Athens, and the great maritime powers of Miletus and Samos. In the Classical Period, and more so by the time of Plutarch's writing, this grandeur had of course long vanished. In the local discourse of the city, this decline must have invited an ongoing communicative mediation between local and colonial affinities that responded in one way or another to the long trajectory of demise.⁵⁴

Scholars have attempted to couch the Perinthos episode in the wider web of political and military events. At around the same time, maybe a few years later, Megara was shaken by the loss of Salamis, which further complicated the situation. As the local discourse indicates, the Megarians struggled with the loss. When the Athenians, citing Homer in their support, claimed that the island of Salamis was their possession of old, the Megarians countered this with a local parody of the *Catalogue of Ships*. In their counter-version, they claimed that much of the Athenian armada was actually Megarian.⁵⁵ The Megarian point of view was also articulated in local historiography.⁵⁶ Hereas of Megara betrays that the Megarians had a very different understanding of the events that led to the loss of their control over the island Salamis than the Athenians did (*BNJ* 486 F 4, comm.). Praxion of Megara (fourth century BCE) extended the issue of rival claims over Salamis to the wider horizon of the Saronic Gulf. In his work, he said that Athena Skiras, which the Athenians

53 See also #20, *Mor.* 296a-b = fr. 576 Rose³. The story of the renowned Megarian engineer Eupalinos (Hdt. 3.60), architect of the tunnel at Samos, somehow relates to the picture of close contacts between Samos and Megara although we do not know how.

54 On Megara's colonial experience, see also the contribution by Franco de Angelis below.

55 Strab. 9.1.10 with Robu 2015: 34-41.

56 Cf. also the contribution by Daniel Tober below.

said was of Eleusinian (and hence Athenian) provenance, took her name from Skiron, a small site along the road from Athens and Megara, and in the territory of the latter (*BNJ* 484 F 1). There was potential for all sorts of confusion of Skiron the place, with Skiros the mythical king of Salamis, and Skiron the rogue bandit from Isthmia who tortured people along the Skironian Way to Corinth. The web of legends is impossible to disentangle, but Praxion's local history makes it clear that the Megarians saw Skiron in a particular light: he was one of their earliest kings (cf. Paus. 1.39.6; Plut. *Thes.* 10). Thus, he was firmly rooted on the Megarian side of the border, and so was all cultural capital that emanated from his legend.⁵⁷ In sum, no matter what the actual entanglements of the Perinthos campaign were, its commemoration reminded everyone of the glory of the olden days. The difference between the seventh century and any period thereafter was obvious to everyone. Clearly, it left its mark on the Megarian local discourse environment.⁵⁸

The final Megarian question highlights the perseverance of local knowledge over time. In #17 (*Mor.* 295b–c) Plutarch explains that “spear-friends” among the Megarians were those who had become prisoners during a remote civil war. The war was fought in the noble manner: no men working the fields were captured, while other prisoners were treated with respect in their opponents' homes before being released for a ransom. In the future, they were “spear-friends” of their former enemies. Introducing the episode, Plutarch says it occurred in a distant past when the Megarians still settled in five villages (κατὰ κώμας), and citizens were divided into five parts (μέρη): Heraïis, Peraiïis, Megareïis, Kynosoureïis, and Tripodiskioi. With *kōmai* being prominent fixtures of the so-called Dorian constitutions, scholars have approached the passage in an attempt to provide evidence for a Dorian identity at Megara. Ronald Legon has pointed out that throughout its later history, a five-part structure was characteristic of “magistracies, probouleutic bodies, and commissions” (47) at Megara, which suggested a certain longevity of the *kōmai* in local

57 Cf. commentary to *BNJ* 484 F1 (Peter Liddel).

58 Cf. the contribution by Philip Smith below who argues for a particular Megarian middling way, which rose also in response to the city's unique historical trajectory.

life.⁵⁹ Indeed, Aristotle (*Poet.* 1448a) explains that the Megarians saw their *kōmai* as equivalent to the demes of Attica. Aristotle does not elaborate on their socio-political capacities and functions, however; the context of the passage is that it was claimed by certain Megarians that their *kōmai* were indicative of the city's distinct tradition, if not entire invention, of the literary genre of comedy. Again, the way in which Plutarch cites those place names suggests that they were of common knowledge to everyone in the area. As such, they bore testimony of Megarian conceptions of space in the plains between Mt Kerata and Mt Geraneia.

When the smaller villages coalesced into the Megarian city-state, in the course of the eighth century BCE, the rise of the new urban center provided the Megarians with a new local horizon, with its characteristic separation between polis and hinterland. Theognis bears ample witness of this local world.⁶⁰ Throughout the polis territory, there existed several second order settlements and functional localities, such as small agricultural settlements, harbour places, and fortified sites. They were all part of the imagined community of the Megarians. Given their long duration, it should come as no surprise that some of them established a gravitational pull of their own: Pagai and Aigosthena are but two obvious cases.⁶¹ Other localities amalgamated with the local horizon of what was considered to be the Megarian state.⁶² The Megarian *kōmai* thus offer a good example both of the shifts in the local horizon and of its functional localities within. Megara's local world was built on the idea of an imagined community with multiple functional localities within, but none of those shapes was ever set or static.

59 Plut. *Mor.* 295b-c; Aristot. *Poet.* 1448a 30-33. See also *IG VII.1* from the Hellenistic period, which references *kōmai* in line 18. On their believed Dorian backdrop, Hanell 1934: 69-91; Legon 1981: 41-58. See now also Robu 2015: 361-366 who is naturally more cautious here.

60 Nagy 1985 continues to be foundational; cf. also the contribution by Stein-Hölkeskamp below.

61 Cf. Legon 2004: 462-465 and Klaus Freitag, below. Another interesting case is the region around Panormos, half-way between Pagai and Aigosthena, see Freitag 2000: 179-180. To the southwest of Pagai, another functional locality has recently been discovered, a rural sanctuary of Apollo (Apotropaios?), which gained local prominence in the fifth century BCE: Valta 2016.

62 See Robu 2015: 15-54 for an in-depth discussion of the Megarian synoikism. The village Aigeiros (above) is a good example of a settlement that was absorbed at one point into the imagined community of Megara.

Composed many centuries after the instances they relate, Plutarch's *Greek Questions* are the result of multiple ruptures of meaning. Some of the aetiologies reported, while initially conceived to disclose the meaning of cultural practice, will have appeared folkloristic in Plutarch's days. Other pieces of information were filtered on multiple occasions and appropriated to the purposes of diverse referencing authorities. The corresponding sections from Aristotle's collection of constitutions, and their classification according to set socioeconomic criteria, make this amply clear. At the same time, Plutarch's *Questions* disclose the meaning of locally encoded practices and sayings – incomprehensible semantic idiosyncrasies that were erratic to those who lacked local literacy. The mere fact that these traditions survived indicates that they mattered to the Megarians in one way or another, although we cannot always determine with certainty just exactly how. Over time, however, in swiftly changing circumstances in the world around them, those local idiosyncrasies provided the Megarians with stability, allowing them to relate to time and place, and adding to a rich, colorful canvas of meaning.

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