THUCYDIDES, SEGESTA AND LEONTINI: RETHINKING THE SICILIAN EXPEDITION*

ABSTRACT

Modern accounts of Sicilian history in the late fifth century B.C.E. and its relations with Athens often follow Thucydides' Athenocentric narrative closely, largely ignoring the Sicilian background. This article instead foregrounds the actions and concerns of two important Sicilian cities, Segesta and Leontini, whose perspectives Thucydides chose to leave out or downplay. In particular, Segesta was involved in the complex cross-cultural dynamics of western Sicily, while Leontini demonstrated resilience in its resistance to Syracusan imperialism. Both cities' relations with Athens emerged from their pre-existing policies and strategies. This article thus develops an alternate narrative of these events that complements Thucydides' Athenocentric one. To accomplish this, it argues for a more nuanced approach to Thucydides' narrative: reading it against the grain, supplementing it with data from Diodorus and epigraphy, and placing it in its Sicilian historical and cultural context. In this way, the article develops a new approach to the methodological issues involved in writing the history of poleis *that are not emphasized in major extant narrative sources. Recognizing Segesta and Leontini as political actors with their own goals and agendas enables both a new reading of Thucydides and a less Athenocentric account of late fifth-century Sicilian history.*

Keywords: Thucydides; Segesta; Leontini; Syracuse; Sicily; Sicilian Expedition; Athenian empire

In the spring of 415 B.C.E., ambassadors from the Sicilian cities of Segesta and Leontini addressed the Athenian assembly, asking for military assistance. Segesta was at war with its neighbours in Selinus, and faring poorly; the people of Leontini had been expelled from their city by Syracuse, and needed help rebuilding their community. The Athenians listened to these ambassadors, sent their own envoys to investigate the situation on the ground and ultimately voted to send troops to Sicily. Thus began what modern historians usually call the Sicilian Expedition, driven by local conflicts in Sicily and the Sicilians' request for assistance.[1]

Yet many modern accounts of the origins of this episode say little about Sicily. Rather, they often begin with the Athenian debate over the dispatch of military forces in 415, dispensing with the Sicilian background in a fraction of the space they spend on Athens.[2]

[1] The following works are cited by author's name: S. Hornblower, *A Commentary on Thucydides*, 3 vols. (Oxford, 1990–2008); S. De Vido, *Gli Elimi: storie di contatti e di rappresentazioni* (Pisa, 1997); F. De Angelis, *Megara Hyblaia and Selinous: The Development of Two Greek City-States in Archaic Sicily* (Oxford, 2003). All translations are mine.

[2] P. Green, *Armada from Athens* (New York, 1970), 95–114; D. Kagan, *The Peace of Nicias and the Sicilian Expedition* (Ithaca, NY, 1981), 166–91; A. Andrewes, 'The Peace of Nicias and the Sicilian Expedition', in D.M. Lewis et al. (edd.), *CAH*², vol. V. *The Fifth Century B.C.* (Cambridge, 1992),

Similarly, studies of Athens' alliances with Segesta (now firmly dated to 418/7) and with both Leontini and Rhegium (made or renewed in 433/2) have focussed on Athens' motivations for expanding its alliance networks to the west, while taking for granted the western cities' desire to gain Athenian support.[3] This Athenocentric perspective has obscured the Sicilian background.

This focus on Athenian decision-making derives in part from Thucydides himself, who mentions Segesta's war briefly before plunging into an extended account of the assembly meeting in Athens that reaffirmed the decision to send an expedition and drastically expanded its scale. Thucydides is mainly interested in the workings of the democratic assembly and the currents of Athenian politics. Moreover, the historian portrays the Athenians as ruled by their emotions—they are struck by a sudden *erôs* for sailing to Sicily—and therefore making an irrational decision.[4] In such a situation, the precursors to this decision are not relevant: all that matters is the Athenians' psychological state. To make this point, as is well understood, Thucydides downplays Athens' prior connections with Sicily.[5] Similarly, the Segesta-Selinus war all but disappears under the cover of selectivity, one of Thucydides' major historiographical techniques.[6] Thucydides made choices about what he considered both historically important and literarily significant, and shaped his narrative to emphasize those elements while leaving out others. By contrast, modern scholars can and should write complementary narratives that emphasize different but still significant factors: in particular, ones that foreground the roles of Sicilians, rather than Athenians.

Refocussing attention on Sicilian actors enables a new approach to an important problem facing scholars working on Sicily, namely, how to write histories of *poleis* that are only marginally included in major extant narrative sources. Several techniques prove useful, especially reading Thucydides' text against the grain, supplementing his narrative with other evidence (mainly from Diodorus and inscriptions), and placing all of it in its Sicilian historical and cultural context. These techniques align with recent approaches to the Athenian empire, which have begun to place more emphasis on local factors, allied

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433–63, at 446–8; L.A. Tritle, *A New History of the Peloponnesian War* (Ithaca, NY, 2010), 146–51; J.T. Roberts, *The Plague of War: Athens, Sparta, and the Struggle for Ancient Greece* (Oxford, 2019), 185–90.

[3] J.D. Smart, 'Athens and Egesta', *JHS* 92 (1972), 128–46; R. Vattuone, 'Gli accordi fra Atene e Segesta alla vigilia della spedizione in Sicilia del 415 a.C.', *RSA* 4 (1974), 23–53; M. Chambers, R. Gallucci and P. Spanos, 'Athens' alliance with Egesta in the year of Antiphon', *ZPE* 83 (1990), 38–63; S. Cataldi, 'I proponenti del trattato tra Atene e Segesta e le correnti politiche ateniesi', *Kokalos* 38 (1992), 3–31; S. Cataldi, 'I rapporti di Segesta ed Alicie con Atene nel V sec. a.C.', in *Atti delle seconde giornate internazionali di studi sull'area elima* (Pisa, 1997), 303–56; M. Giangiulio, 'Atene e la Sicilia occidentale dal 424 al 415', in *Atti delle seconde giornate internazionali di studi sull'area elima* (Pisa, 1997), 865–87.

[4] Thuc. 6.24.3; W.R. Connor, *Thucydides* (Princeton, 1984), 158–68; T. Harrison, 'Sicily in the Athenian imagination: Thucydides and the Persian Wars', in C. Smith and J. Serrati (edd.), *Sicily from Aeneas to Augustus: New Approaches in Archaeology and History* (Edinburgh, 2000), 84–96; D.G. Smith, 'Thucydides' ignorant Athenians and the drama of the Sicilian Expedition', *SyllClass* 15 (2004), 33–70; Hornblower (n. 1), 3.311–67; E. Greenwood, 'Thucydides on the Sicilian Expedition', in R.K. Balot, S. Forsdyke and E. Foster (edd.), *The Oxford Handbook of Thucydides* (Oxford, 2017), 161–77; C.B.R. Pelling, *Thucydides: The Peloponnesian War Book VI* (Cambridge, 2022), 122–70.

[5] S. Hornblower, 'Narratology and narrative techniques in Thucydides', in S. Hornblower (ed.), *Greek Historiography* (Oxford, 1994), 131–66, at 146–7 n. 43; S. Hornblower, *The Greek World, 479–323 BC* (London, 2011⁴), 44–7; Pelling (n. 4), 35.

[6] A.W. Gomme, *A Historical Commentary on Thucydides: Book I* (Oxford, 1945), 1–29; S. Hornblower, *Thucydides* (London, 1987), 34–44; T. Rood, *Thucydides: Narrative and Explanation* (Oxford, 1998); C.B.R. Pelling, *Literary Texts and the Greek Historian* (London, 2000); S.L. Arcenas, 'The silence of Thucydides', *TAPhA* 150 (2020), 299–332.

responses to Athenian imperialism, and the agency of allies in shaping political dynamics both within and outside the empire.[7] This approach moves beyond Thucydides' historical and literary choices to write alternate narratives that complement his Athenocentric one, and thereby bring out the contribution of players he did not emphasize.

This article will examine the two local conflicts in Sicily, the Segestans' and Leontinians' perspectives on them, and why they might have seen first alliances with Athens and eventually appeals for Athenian military assistance as their best options. For Segesta, a major unrecognized factor was the complex cross-cultural dynamics of western Sicily. Leontini, meanwhile, was engaging in a long-term project of resistance to Syracusan imperialism, demonstrating a high degree of community solidarity and resilience in the face of setbacks. In both cases, their relations with Athens emerge from their pre-existing policies and strategies. Recognizing Segesta and Leontini as political actors in this story with their own goals and agendas enables new interpretations of a critical historical episode, the so-called Sicilian Expedition, from a wider variety of perspectives.

SEGESTA AND SELINUS ON THE MIDDLE GROUND

Thucydides records little about Segesta's war with Selinus: merely that the war was over 'issues regarding marriage and disputed territory' (6.6.2), and that Selinus, with its ally Syracuse, was pressing Segesta hard by land and sea. A fuller understanding of Segesta's role in launching Athens' expedition, therefore, requires looking beyond Thucydides. The argument will begin by placing Segesta and the war of 415 (as it will be called here) in their full cultural and historical context, before turning to the war itself and Segesta's appeal to Athens. This analysis will show that both Segesta and Selinus were acting opportunistically and that by appealing to Athens, Segesta hoped to achieve small-scale and short-term advantages—a far cry from the war of conquest Athens actually launched. This in turn enables scholars to read Thucydides in a more sophisticated way, highlighting his literary and historical choices by observing what he left out.

Segesta's attitudes, goals and motivations in 415 were rooted in its prior relationship with Selinus, which has often been misunderstood. Because these two cities had fought each other in the past, historians have often inferred that they were implacably hostile to each other, and that their rivalry had persisted continuously for as much as 150 years.[8] Bolstering this assumption was the fact that while the Selinuntines were Greeks, the Segestans were Elymians—one of the indigenous peoples of Sicily—and therefore non-Greek. Scholars therefore constructed models of interaction between the various peoples of western Sicily that assumed an expansionist Greek presence colliding with resistance from native Elymians.[9] These models were based above all on analogies with modern

[7] C. Constantakopoulou, *The Dance of the Islands: Insularity, Networks, the Athenian Empire, and the Aegean World* (Oxford, 2007); J. Ma, N. Papazarkadas and R. Parker (edd.), *Interpreting the Athenian Empire* (London, 2009); A. Powell and K.S. Meidane (edd.), *'The Eyesore of Aigina': Anti-Athenian Attitudes in Greek, Hellenistic and Roman History* (Swansea, 2016); J.P. Nudell, *Accustomed to Obedience? Classical Ionia and the Aegean World, 480–294 BCE* (Ann Arbor, 2023).

[8] T.J. Dunbabin, *The Western Greeks: The History of Sicily and South Italy from the Foundation of the Greek Colonies to 480 B.C.* (Oxford, 1948), 326–9; Green (n. 2), 52–3, 95; see especially the discussion of L. Gallo, 'Per un riesame dei rapporti tra Segesta e Selinunte', in *Atti delle terze giornate internazionali di studi sull'area elima* (Pisa, 2000), 517–31.

[9] E.A. Freeman, *The History of Sicily from the Earliest Times*, vol. 3: *The Athenian and Carthaginian Invasions* (Oxford, 1891), 81–2; Dunbabin (n. 8), 329; De Angelis (n. 1), 153–4; C. Marconi, *Temple Decoration and Cultural Identity in the Archaic Greek World: The Metopes of Selinus* (Cambridge, 2007), 66–9, 205–7.

colonization, particularly in America and Australia, and have been sharply criticized in recent years.[10] Instead, the war of 415 grew out of a far more complex interrelationship between Greeks, Elymians and also Phoenicians that encompassed a mixture of accommodation and conflict.

Recent scholarship has applied a number of theoretical models to the complex ethnic and cultural landscape of western Sicily, particularly hybridity, code switching and the Middle Ground.[11] While all of these models have some validity, the Middle Ground—a theory originally developed to describe the Great Lakes region of North America in the colonial period—is particularly useful for western Sicily.[12] A Middle Ground is a situation where disparate cultural groups interact with each other, but where no one player can establish themselves in a position of dominance and remake the region in their own image. This well describes the relations between Greeks, Elymians and Phoenicians in western Sicily prior to the Carthaginian conquests at the end of the fifth century, since no individual city-state was able to dominate others consistently. In a Middle Ground, various players are often in conflict with each other, but they also engage in strategies of integration and accommodation that help them understand each other and reduce (but not eliminate) tensions, on both the cultural and political levels. In western Sicily, these strategies developed particularly through cultural practices such as intermarriage, origin stories and religion, which will be discussed first. The political history of western Sicily, which will be traced next, was shaped in part by these cultural practices, leading to a pattern of shifting and temporary alliances, rather than stable ones. Both Segesta's war with Selinus and its appeal to Athens thus emerged from the combination of conflict and cooperation that was characteristic of the region.

The role of cross-cultural accommodations in shaping political outcomes emerges clearly from the 'issues regarding marriage' (γαμικῶν τινῶν), which are listed by Thucydides as one of the causes of the war of 415 (6.6.2). This phrase is usually, and surely rightly, interpreted as referring to *epigamia*, the right of citizens of one city to

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[10] F. De Angelis, 'Ancient past, imperial present: the British Empire in T.J. Dunbabin's *The western Greeks*', *Antiquity* 72 (1998), 539–49; D.G. Smith, 'Colonisation in Sicily and North America', *Ancient West and East* 10 (2011), 309–28; L.M. Urquhart, 'English-speaking traditions and the study of the ancient Greeks outside their homelands', in F. De Angelis (ed.), *A Companion to Greeks Across the Ancient World* (Hoboken, NJ, 2020), 37–51.

[11] J.M. Hall, *Hellenicity: Between Ethnicity and Culture* (Chicago, 2002), 90–124; C. Antonaccio, 'Hybridity and the cultures within ancient Greek culture', in C. Dougherty and L. Kurke (edd.), *The Cultures Within Greek Culture: Contact, Conflict, Collaboration* (Cambridge, 2003), 57–74; M. Giangiulio, 'Deconstructing ethnicities: multiple identities in archaic and classical Sicily', *BABesch* 85 (2010), 13–23; I. Malkin, 'Hybridity and mixture', in *Ibridazione e Integrazione in Magna Grecia* (Taranto, 2017), 11–27; C. Ampolo, 'Compresenza di ethne e culture diverse nella Sicilia occidentale. Per una nuova prospettiva storica', *Aristonothos* 7 (2012), 15–57; G. Shepherd, 'Archaeology and ethnicity: untangling identities in western Greece', *DHA* Supplement 10 (2014), 115–43.

[12] Originally R. White, *The Middle Ground: Indians, Empires, and Republics in the Great Lakes Region, 1650–1815* (Cambridge, 1991); with updates by North American historians such as H. Bohaker, '*Nindoodemag*: the significance of Algonquian kinship networks in the eastern Great Lakes region, 1600–1701', *William and Mary Quarterly* 63 (2006), 23–52. The model has been applied to western Sicily by I. Malkin, *A Small Greek World: Networks in the Ancient Mediterranean* (Oxford, 2011), 119–41; C. Bonnet, 'Greeks and Phoenicians in the western Mediterranean', in J. McInerney (ed.), *A Companion to Ethnicity in the Ancient Mediterranean* (Malden, MA, 2014), 327–40; cf. C. Antonaccio, 'Networking the Middle Ground? The Greek diaspora, tenth to fifth century BC', *Archaeological Review from Cambridge* 28 (2013), 237–51. For a critique, see S.P. Morris, 'Close encounters on Sicily: Molech, Meilichios, and religious convergence at Selinus', in E. Blakely and B.J. Collins (edd.), *Religious Convergence in the Ancient Mediterranean* (Atlanta, 2019), 77–99.

choose spouses from another city without affecting their children's citizenship rights.[13] This is the only known example of *epigamia* between Greek and non-Greek communities anywhere, and implies a far closer and more enduring relationship between the two cities than is usually contemplated. Such marriages must have been considered desirable by significant numbers in both communities. That in turn implies close contacts of many kinds between citizens of the two communities, and the desire to cement those bonds by marriage alliances. Within a short time, citizens of each city would have relatives (with all the obligations that entails) in the other. Presumably, since there was controversy, many others considered such marriages improper, and it is not clear what precisely the dispute that led to war involved. Nevertheless, the idea of a strict separation and implacable hostility between Segestans and Selinuntines becomes difficult to sustain. Instead, the practice of *epigamia* should be understood as a strategy of accommodation between the two communities, which co-existed with (and helped them manage) tensions and occasional conflict.

Similarly, a myth of origin recorded by Thucydides (6.2.3) makes the Elymians a mixture of Trojan refugees and immigrants from Phocis, in Greece.[14] Regardless of whether this story was developed by Elymians or Greeks, it was useful to both sides. Like many origin stories, it articulated a new understanding of the Elymians' place in the world. The story actually makes them partly Greeks by descent, while the other half of their ancestry integrates them into the most prestigious of Greek myths, the Trojan War. However, it further clarifies that the Segestans were not actually themselves Greeks; much as for the Romans later, claims of Trojan ancestry brought them closer to Greeks while still allowing them to maintain a separate identity. In this way, Greeks and Elymians created a shared framework for understanding who they were and how they related to each other.

The religious landscapes of both Segesta and Selinus also contributed to this shared framework. Segesta built two Doric temples, in fully Greek style. One of these, the famous Unfinished Temple, was built in the late fifth century, while the other, located at Contrada Mango and preserved only in foundations and fragments, dates to the mid-fifth century.[15] These were massive prestige projects, which reshaped the city's urban fabric and made a strong declaration of what kind of city Segesta wanted to be. The two temples overlook the two main approaches to the urban centre on Monte Barbaro, making a strong visual impact on any traveller and suggesting a wealthy and prosperous community that has chosen to learn from Greeks. In fact, the Segestans learned from Greeks—and from Selinus in particular—in other ways as well. Dozens of inscribed potsherds have found there, written in Elymian but using a Greek alphabet derived specifically from the one used at Selinus. Moreover, their coin types were based on Selinuntine models; these in turn inspired types elsewhere, including at Motya and Eryx.[16]

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[13] Hornblower (n. 1), 3.302–3; Ampolo (n. 11), 33–5; on *epigamia* more broadly, see S. Saba, '*Epigamia* in Hellenistic interstate treaties: foreign and family policy', *AncSoc* 41 (2011), 93–108; A. Oranges, 'La concessione dell'*epigamia* agli Eubei', in C. Bearzot and F. Landucci Gattinoni (edd.), *Tra mare e continente: l'isola d'Eubea* (Milan, 2013), 173–89.

[14] A. Mele, 'Le origini degli Elimi nelle tradizioni di V secolo', *Kokalos* 39–40 (1993–4), 71–109; De Vido (n. 1), 98–114; Hornblower (n. 1), 3.268–70; M. Fragoulaki, *Kinship in Thucydides: Intercommunal Ties and Historical Narrative* (Oxford, 2013), 298–316.

[15] D. Mertens, *Der Tempel von Segesta und die dorische Tempelbaukunst des griechischen Westens in klassischer Zeit* (Mainz, 1984); De Vido (n. 1), 416–20; Shepherd (n. 11), 133–6; M.M. Miles, 'Large temples as cultural banners in western Sicily', in E. Blakely and B.J. Collins (edd.), *Religious Convergence in the Ancient Mediterranean* (Atlanta, 2019), 59–75.

[16] J. De La Genière, 'Ségeste et l'hellénisme', *MEFRA* 90 (1978), 33–49; Gallo (n. 8), 518; Miles (n. 15), 62.

Moreover, Herodotus mentions a hero cult at Segesta for Philippus of Croton, an Olympic victor and 'the most beautiful Greek of his day'.[17] He was a follower of Dorieus, the prince of Sparta who tried to found a colony at Eryx at the end of the sixth century (see further below). When Philippus was killed in battle against Segesta, the Segestans buried him and instituted a hero cult at his tomb. Although Herodotus clearly identifies these rituals as a hero cult, it is unclear whether Elymians understood this peculiarly Greek institution in the same way Greeks did.[18] In fact, it is likely that this cult acted as a kind of 'creative misunderstanding', one of the major features of a Middle Ground. Greeks and Elymians could each interpret the cult of Philippus in their own way, while at the same time recognizing what they shared.[19]

Meanwhile, at Selinus, the sanctuary complex on the Gaggera hill, just west of the city, displayed close links with Phoenicians. Among the various deities worshipped there was Zeus Meilichios, an enigmatic deity whose epithet is likely derived from the Phoenician Molech. Nearby, the Triolo Nord complex, which in its earliest phase dates to the early sixth century, presents a small temple containing a set of triple stelae, which closely resembles Graeco-Phoenician shrines elsewhere.[20] Much is still debated about the interpretation of Selinus' western sanctuaries, but what is clear is that living in a colonial contact zone had substantial effects on the cultures of Selinus as well as Segesta.

Finally, the figure of Heracles played an important role in mediating between all three peoples of western Sicily. Malkin has argued that he was originally brought to Sicily by Phoenicians as Melqart, a Tyrian deity often interpreted by Greeks as Heracles.[21] That Phoenician myth, adopted and transformed by Greeks, enabled Dorieus, a descendant of Heracles, to claim the land of Eryx as an inheritance (Hdt. 5.43). Meanwhile, an inscribed dedication to Heracles, found near Poggioreale, in the Belice valley about halfway between Selinus and Segesta, has sparked intense debate.[22] The inscription is a dedication by a private individual, who from the dialect and alphabet was certainly a Selinuntine, and it likely testifies to a sanctuary of some kind nearby. A number of scholars have argued that the sanctuary and dedication testify to aggressive intent and desire to assert control over this liminal area. Others, by contrast, observe that Heracles was a widely shared figure who could mediate between Greeks and others, precisely because he was such a multi-valent figure.[23] In fact, it is entirely possible that both aspects were relevant at different times and in different situations—emblematic of the mixture of conflict and accommodation between all three peoples of western Sicily.

Little of this cultural material is likely to have caught Thucydides' interest, and he would have considered it irrelevant to his political and military history.[24] Nevertheless, a broader view of what is historically significant can help move the discussion beyond Thucydides' self-imposed limitations. The political actions of Segesta and Selinus were

[17] Hdt. 5.47; cf. especially F. Frisone, 'Le *thysiai* dei Segestani sulla tomba di Filippo di Butacide (Hdt., 5, 47) alla luce della "*lex sacra*" selinuntina', in *Atti delle terze giornate internazionali di studi sull'area elima* (Pisa, 2000), 499–515.

[18] De Vido (n. 1), 415–16; S. De Vido, 'Gli Elimi', in P. Anello, G. Martorana and R. Sammartano (edd.), *Ethne e religioni nella Sicilia antica* (Rome, 2006), 147–79, at 166.

[19] Malkin (n. 12), 46.

[20] Bonnet (n. 12), 331; Morris (n. 12); S. De Vincenzo, 'Sicily', in C. López-Ruiz and B.R. Doak (edd.), *The Oxford Handbook of the Phoenician and Punic Mediterranean* (Oxford, 2019), 537–52, at 547–8; C. López-Ruiz, *Phoenicians and the Making of the Mediterranean* (Cambridge, MA, 2022), 138–40.

[21] Malkin (n. 12), 119–41.

[22] *SEG* 19.615; M.T. Manni Piraino, 'Iscrizione inedita da Poggioreale', *Kokalos* 5 (1959), 159–73.

[23] De Vido (n. 1), 129–39; De Angelis (n. 1), 153–4; Marconi (n. 9), 68–9; Malkin (n. 12), 138.

[24] Gomme (n. 6), 25–6.

embedded in the cultural matrix just described, and cultural factors played an important role in shaping their decisions. The strategies of accommodation discussed above did not prevent conflict, of course, and were not intended to, but they show that conflict was not inevitable and was not the only way in which these communities related to each other. All sides, in fact, were culturally integrating and finding ways to accommodate each other, even as tensions remained. This, in turn, should affect interpretations of Segesta's appeal to Athens, as an attempt to gain advantage within a relatively small-scale conflict.

Although the political history of western Sicily is known only sketchily, a clear picture emerges of shifting short-term alliances among the major players, rather than permanent enmity—the natural result of the mixture of tension and accommodation described above, and exactly what is predicted by the Middle Ground model. First, around 580, a man from Knidos called Pentathlos attempted to establish a colony near Cape Pachynum, west of Selinus.[25] According to Diodorus' report, Pentathlos' colonists found their new Selinuntine neighbours at war with Segesta; they sided with Selinus but were defeated, lost many men, including their leader, and decided to leave Sicily. In Pausanias' version, drawn from Antiochus of Syracuse, the colonists were instead driven out by a coalition of Phoenicians and Elymians; neither Selinus nor Segesta specifically are mentioned. These two versions are usually combined to suggest an alliance between Elymians, including Segesta, and Phoenicians, aimed at containing Selinus' territorial ambitions. But this is the only securely attested war between Segesta and Selinus prior to the late fifth century.

The next available glimpse presents a different picture. Around 510, Dorieus, a prince of Sparta, came to found a new colony, Heraclea, at Eryx in northwest Sicily.[26] He, too, was attacked and killed by Segesta and the Phoenicians, but from here the story diverges from that of Pentathlos. Eryx is not particularly close to Selinus (see Fig. 1), and indeed Selinus did not take part in this war. Instead, after Dorieus' death, his sole surviving follower, Euryleon, attacked Selinus under the guise of removing its tyrant, Pythagoras, and ruled the city himself until he was killed by the Selinuntines (Hdt. 5.46). Thus in 510 Selinus did not take a strong anti-Segesta stance, but remained neutral, finally siding against the Greek colonists (and therefore loosely aligned with Segesta) when attacked.

Next, in 480, Segesta did not take part in the battle of Himera, fought between Carthaginian forces under Hamilcar and Greek forces led by Gelon of Syracuse, but Selinus sided with Carthage.[27] Segesta's neutrality and Selinus' alignment with Carthage both differ sharply from their prior arrangements, and speak strongly against a model of stable alliances.

A confusing passage in Diodorus reports that war broke out between Segesta and Lilybaeum in 454/3 over land on the Mazarus river (11.86.2). A reference to the city Lilybaeum prior to its foundation in 397 is surprising and has led some scholars to emend the text to refer to Selinus. However, there is no palaeographical basis for that emendation, but merely an assumption by scholars that Selinus is the most likely enemy for Segesta. Moreover, it is not surprising to see such an anachronism in a writer of the first century B.C.E.: it is likely Diodorus' way of referring to the Phoenicians of western Sicily (he also uses that name for the land settled by Pentathlos), and perhaps more specifically to Motya. It is better, therefore, to accept the transmitted text and try to

[25] Paus. 10.11.3 = Antiochus *FGrHist* 555 F1; Diod. Sic. 5.9.2–3; De Angelis (n. 1), 153–4.

[26] Hdt. 5.42–8; I. Malkin, *Myth and Territory in the Spartan Mediterranean* (Cambridge, 1994), 192–218.

[27] Diod. Sic. 11.21.4–5; N. Luraghi, *Tirannidi arcaiche in Sicilia e Magna Grecia* (Florence, 1994), 304–21; De Angelis (n. 1), 162–3.
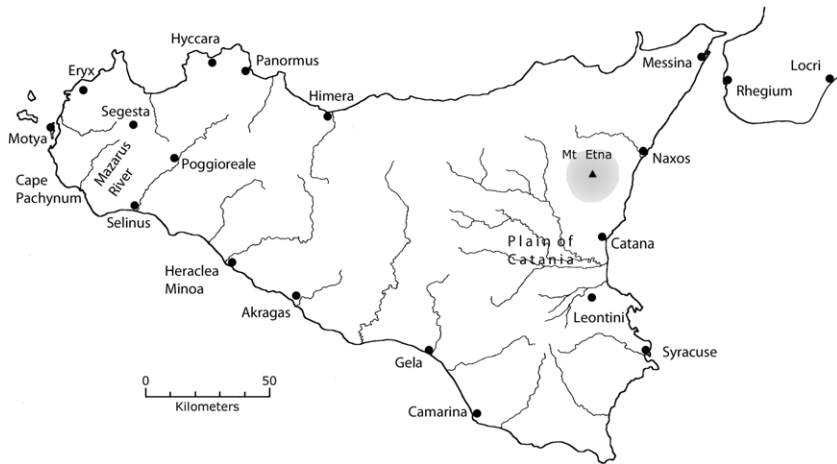
FIG. 1. Map of Sicily.

account for it historically.[28] What appears then is conflict between Elymians and Phoenicians, who had previously been allied, and no mention of Selinus.

Other evidence is harder to place chronologically, but supports the same picture.[29] A mid-sixth-century tombstone found at Selinus describes the deceased, Aristogeitos, as a cavalryman who fell before the walls of Motya; this must refer to an otherwise unattested war between Selinus and Motya.[30] Further Phoenician–Selinuntine conflict might be attested by Polyaenus' account of how a tyrant seized power in the aftermath of a battle with Carthage (or Phoenicians), although the story has been doubted.[31] At the end of the sixth century, Selinus fought Akragas as well, leading to the loss of the port of Heraclea Minoa, which lay between them (*Lind. Chron.* 30). Meanwhile, no wars between Segesta and other Elymians are attested, but it is easy to imagine that some have gone unreported. The Segestans did exercise some sort of imperial control over the neighbouring community and religious centre of Eryx, and in the summer of 415 they were eager for Athens to take the neighbouring indigenous town of Hyccara, whose land they appropriated.[32]

The history of western Sicily in the sixth and fifth centuries thus disproves the idea that Segesta and Selinus maintained a constant enmity over that whole period. Instead, Greeks, Elymians and Phoenicians engaged in short-term, shifting alliances—virtually every conceivable permutation is attested—and the relatively rare open conflicts punctuated long periods of peace. Neither community had a unique and long-standing grudge against the other, and conflict co-existed with cooperation. To be sure, this is partly an argument from silence, which is weakened further by the scanty sources. But

[28] D. Musti, 'La storia di Segesta e di Erice tra il VI ed il III secolo a.C.', in G. Nenci, S. Tusa and V. Tusa (edd.), *Gli Elimi e l'area elima fino all'inizio della prima guerra punica* (Palermo, 1990), 155–71, at 160–3; A. Longo, 'Segesta e Mozia: il problema del conflitto presso il fiume Mazaro', *Messana: rassegna di studi filologici, linguistici e storici* 13 (1992), 87–103; *contra* De Angelis (n. 1), 174–5; Ampolo (n. 11), 24.

[29] See broadly De Angelis (n. 1), 152–63; Marconi (n. 9), 66–9.

[30] B. Rocco, 'Morto sotto le mura di Mozia', *Sicilia Archeologica* 9 (1970), 27–33.

[31] Polyaen. 1.28.2; F. Frisone, 'Polyaen.,I,28,2. Il problema dei rapporti tra greci e non greci nella Sicilia occidentale in una pagina di storia selinuntina', in *Atti delle seconde giornate internazionali di studi sull'area elima* (Pisa, 1997), 729–53; De Angelis (n. 1), 156–8.

[32] Thuc. 6.46, 62; Musti (n. 28); De Vido (n. 1), 350–6.

what is positively attested is that Selinus fought against every one of its neighbours, but also worked together with most of them at other times. Segesta, too, changed sides repeatedly. Although the full reasoning behind each actor's choices in each episode of conflict is not always visible, it is clear that such decisions were made situationally, according to whatever would give advantage in the moment, and not on the basis of permanent alliances or long-term hostility.[33] This short-term (or at most medium-term) thinking contrasts sharply with the long-term planning used, as will be argued below, by Leontini, because the cities of western Sicily never faced the kind of ongoing existential threat that Leontini did. This dynamic can be traced for more than 125 years, from Pentathlos to Diodorus' war of 454/3, and there is no reason to think that it did not continue into the late fifth century.

Turning now to the war between Segesta and Selinus in 415, this conflict should also be understood in the same immediate and situational way, especially since neither Thucydides nor Diodorus gives any indication that it was the culmination of lengthy hostilities. According to Thucydides (6.6.2):

ὅμοροι γὰρ ὄντες τοῖς Σελινουντίοις ἐς πόλεμον καθέστασαν περί τε γαμικῶν τινῶν καὶ περὶ γῆς ἀμφισβητήτου, καὶ οἱ Σελινούντιοι Συρακοσίους ἐπαγόμενοι ξυμμάχους κατεῖργον αὐτοὺς τῷ πολέμῳ καὶ κατὰ γῆν καὶ κατὰ θάλασσαν.

The Segestans had gone to war with their neighbours the Selinuntines over issues regarding marriage and disputed land; the Selinuntines had brought in the Syracusans as allies and pressed Segesta hard by land and sea.

Diodorus (12.82.3–7) offers a much more elaborate story in which the Selinuntines seized a sizeable tract of land across a river that divided their territory from Segesta's, and Segesta expelled them by force. Next, Selinus defeated Segestan forces in a pitched battle, and Segesta unsuccessfully sought help from Akragas, Syracuse and Carthage before sending envoys to Athens. Diodorus' story is entirely compatible with Thucydides' briefer account and should be accepted; it likely derives from one of the Sicilian historians, either the contemporary Philistus or the third-century Timaeus. Meanwhile, Thucydides' focus on Athens' decision-making processes led him to pass over the Segesta-Selinus war as briefly as possible.

Both Thucydides and Diodorus focus on a territorial dispute as a key issue in the war. Territory was a familiar *casus belli* across the ancient world, and in fact had been the cause of prior wars in western Sicily already. But this need not imply long-standing tensions between the two cities. After all, Selinuntines and Segestans had been living next to each other for two centuries by this point, and had only fought each other on one known previous occasion. Instead, Selinus' actions look opportunistic—seizing land across a river—rather than the culmination of a long-held strategy. From there, the scope of the war expanded drastically through step-wise escalation by both sides, which again looks like responses in the moment. Moreover, the sequel in 410, as narrated by Diodorus (13.43–4), further shows both Segesta and Selinus acting opportunistically, with similar goals as in the previous round. After Athens' defeat, Selinus tried again to secure the disputed land, and Segesta—terrified of retribution from other Sicilians—conceded it. Soon Selinus occupied another piece of land, clearly taking advantage of Segesta's temporary weakness to make further limited gains. Only then, after what amounts to a new provocation under new circumstances (rather than a continuation of the previous

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[33] Cf. Musti (n. 28), 159–63; De Vido (n. 1), 262–98; Gallo (n. 8).

dispute), did Segesta seek assistance from Carthage. Segesta's appeal to Athens should be placed in the context of this opportunistic manoeuvring.

Why Athens? This question is tightly connected with the question of when and under what circumstances Segesta sought first an alliance and then military intervention. Until the 1990s, the inscription recording Athens' alliance with Segesta (IG I³ 11 = ML 37 = OR 166) was usually dated to 458/7, but new readings and scientific examination of the stone have firmly assigned it to 418/17.[34] This new dating in turn creates difficulties in Thucydides' account: he seems to suggest that the Segestans' initial request, various negotiations and speeches, and the Athenians' decision to send help all took place in the winter of 416/15. If this is the case, how could the whole process, which included multiple round trips to and from Sicily, fit into one winter? And why does Thucydides never explicitly mention the alliance, which was recent? A pre-existing alliance between Athens and Segesta would be a powerful argument for the Segestan envoys, and it can hardly be supposed that they did not use it, if it was available to them. Cawkwell therefore argued that omission of the alliance would vitiate Thucydides' entire account.[35]

A closer look at Thucydides' text (6.6) shows, in fact, that he has telescoped the events of a longer period into a brief account, in a manner familiar from Diodorus but less so in Thucydides. He begins with the Athenian vote to send sixty ships to Sicily, and then explains what happened earlier:

αὐτὴν οἱ Ἀθηναῖοι στρατεύειν **ὥρμηντο** [...]. μάλιστα δ' αὐτοὺς **ἐξώρμησαν** Ἐγεσταίων [τε] πρέσβεις παρόντες καὶ προθυμότερον ἐπικαλούμενοι. ὅμοροι γὰρ ὄντες τοῖς Σελινουντίοις ἐς πόλεμον **καθέστασαν** [...] τοὺς Ἀθηναίους **ἐδέοντο** σφίσι ναῦς πέμψαντες ἐπαμῦναι [...]. ὧν ἀκούοντες οἱ Ἀθηναῖοι ἐν ταῖς ἐκκλησίαις τῶν τε Ἐγεσταίων **πολλάκις λεγόντων** καὶ τῶν ξυναγορευόντων αὐτοῖς ἐψηφίσαντο πρέσβεις πέμψαι πρῶτον ἐς τὴν Ἔγεσταν.

The Athenians **had been eager** to send an expedition against Sicily [...]. Envoys from Segesta, who came to Athens and urgently requested assistance, **were** especially **inciting** them. The Segestans **had gone to war** with their neighbours the Selinuntines [...]. The Segestans **were begging** the Athenians to send ships to defend them [...]. The Athenians, hearing the Segestans and their supporters **frequently making these arguments** in the assemblies, voted first to send envoys to Segesta.

The pluperfect tenses (ὥρμηντο, καθέστασαν) show that Thucydides has begun in the spring of 415, jumped backwards by an unknown amount of time, and then described a lengthy process of persuasion.[36] A better reconstruction runs as follows: war broke out between Segesta and Selinus in, probably, 418. The Segestans did not yet have an alliance with Athens, but they sent envoys seeking one, and the envoys presented their requests repeatedly (πολλάκις λεγόντων). The Segestan arguments are summarized as part of a flashback; they do not mention their alliance with Athens, because they do not have one yet. Finally Athens agreed to a formal alliance, which was concluded roughly in

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[34] Chambers, Gallucci and Spanos (n. 3), confirming the earlier arguments of H.B. Mattingly, 'The growth of Athenian imperialism', *Historia* 12 (1963), 257–73, at 267–70; Smart (n. 3); Vattuone (n. 3); followed by S.E. Dawson, 'The Egesta decree *IG* I³ 11', *ZPE* 112 (1996), 248–52; P.J. Rhodes, 'After the three-bar *sigma* controversy: the history of Athenian imperialism reassessed', *CQ* 58 (2008), 500–6; and many others.

[35] G. Cawkwell, *Thucydides and the Peloponnesian War* (London, 1997), 12–13. Serious concerns are also expressed, but ultimately dismissed, by P. Anello, 'Segesta e Atene', in *Giornate internazionali di studi sull'area elima* (Pisa, 1992), 63–98; F. Raviola, 'Tucidide e Segesta', *Hesperìa: studi sulla grecità di Occidente* 5 (1995), 75–119.

[36] Pelling (n. 4), 112–14.

the spring of 417; Thucydides does not mention this stage, in order to focus attention on the far more important decision, two years later, to send troops. Further negotiations, including a fact-finding mission (6.6, 46), ensued between spring 417 and spring 415, when a further set of envoys (by now including Leontinians: 6.19.1) made a more specific request for Athens to put the alliance into effect by dispatching troops. Segesta's requests for an alliance and for military assistance were thus not two separate events but two stages in a longer process.

This is by no means the only possible reconstruction; in particular, Matthaiou's theory—that the alliance was first formed in 427 and renewed in 418/17—should not be ruled out.[37] However, this scenario requires that, for literary reasons, Thucydides suppressed the Segestans' argument from an existing alliance—exactly what Cawkwell resisted, as noted above. By contrast, the reconstruction proposed here does not require that Thucydides suppressed anything: the Segestans could not have made this argument, because they did not have an alliance at the time. Instead, he deployed his standard repertoire of techniques for focussing attention in a vivid narrative, especially compression, omission and emphasis. All of this is in the service of focussing attention on Athenian decision-making (and especially portraying it as rash and spontaneous), and taking it away from the Segestans themselves.

What were Segesta's goals in its relations with Athens? An important clue comes from Diodorus, who reports that Segesta sought help from Akragas, Syracuse and Carthage before turning to Athens (12.82.7). Although the veracity of this report (and especially its reference to Syracuse, whom Thucydides has fighting against Segesta) has sometimes been doubted, in fact it is logical that Segesta would seek help from these three cities before looking to Athens. Each was a substantial power, capable of making a difference in the ongoing conflict, and all three were located close to home—Akragas and Syracuse in Sicily itself, and Carthage only a short voyage away—so sending assistance would not be too onerous. These were local options, ones which the Segestans knew well and with which they had worked before. Although in the end none of these cities supported Segesta, the way in which alliances tended to shift in Sicily suggests that Segesta's hopes were reasonable. That said, Segesta's need to approach four cities in turn before finally achieving their goal further indicates their lack of a long-standing, well-considered strategy.

According to Diodorus, it was only after these nearby cities turned them down that Segesta began thinking about an 'overseas alliance' with Athens. At this point, Athens was one of the only remaining powers anywhere in the Mediterranean with the ability to project force to Sicily. Since Selinus and Syracuse were aligned with Sparta, seeking out Sparta's enemy would be logical. Most importantly, Athens had sent troops to Sicily before, in the so-called First Sicilian Expedition of 427–424, suggesting that they might be persuaded to do so again. Athens' other Sicilian allies, especially Leontini, may also have encouraged them to appeal to Athens, and Segesta and Leontini were working together at least by the spring of 415.

Ultimately, Segesta's goals should be understood as situational: they hoped to gain a temporary advantage in a local conflict, and the alliance should be understood as a response to the immediate crisis with Selinus. Segesta probably hoped that making an alliance with Athens would induce Selinus to back off; once Athenian troops became

[37] A.P. Matthaiou, 'Περὶ τῆς IG I³ 11', in A.P. Matthaiou and G.E. Malouchou (edd.), ATTIKAI ΕΠΙΓΡΑΦΑΙ (Athens, 2004), 99–122; followed by N. Papazarkadas, 'Epigraphy and the Athenian Empire: reshuffling the chronological cards', in J. Ma, N. Papazarkadas and R. Parker (edd.), Interpreting the Athenian Empire (London, 2009), 67–88, at 75–6.

involved, Segesta wanted them to force a return to the status quo—and then leave. The conquest of Selinus was not on Segesta's agenda, nor did the Segestans have any interest in subjecting themselves to Athens. Segesta had no particular affinity for Athens; in fact, their first choice was to seek help locally. The Athenians had other ideas, and Segesta's reluctance fully to support the massive Athenian force that arrived in the summer of 415 suggests a significant gap between Athenian and Segestan goals.

These considerations demonstrate the importance of the Sicilian cultural context and historical background for understanding Segesta's goals and actions leading up to 415. By contrast, Thucydides' narrow focus and historiographical choices led him to ignore these factors. Supplementing his narrative with outside evidence and placing it in a broader context prove to be useful approaches to writing the history of a *polis* that is mentioned only briefly in Thucydides, but is richly attested outside of his work. This approach provides a complementary viewpoint on Segestan-Athenian relations and a new understanding of Segesta's role in the dispatch of Athens' expedition.

LEONTINI IN THE CROSSHAIRS OF SYRACUSE

Athens' other main Sicilian ally, Leontini, faced a different situation, but one that should also be interpreted with careful attention to local dynamics and attitudes. Throughout the fifth century, Leontini repeatedly fell under the acquisitive gaze of its much larger neighbour Syracuse, which had once ruled most of eastern Sicily and desired to do so again. This danger from Syracuse was Leontini's primary reason for seeking an alliance with Athens, which it did (together with Rhegium in southern Italy) prior to the Peloponnesian War. During the war, Leontini twice sought successfully to turn this alliance into concrete military assistance, first in 427 and again in 415. Precisely because the dynamics of a stronger power taking advantage of a weaker one seem so familiar, the Leontinians' responses to this situation have often been overlooked. They faced a situation that Segesta never did: an ongoing threat to their very existence. Their responses naturally differed from Segesta's: they engaged in careful strategic thinking, planning how best to keep themselves safe in the long term. They also demonstrated great resilience in the face of existential threats, maintaining a strong sense of internal cohesion and civic identity over a period of decades, until the community finally splintered under Syracusan pressure.

Focussing on Leontini's goals and perspectives shows the value of reading Thucydides against the grain. Unlike in the case of Segesta, where the historian largely ignores important material, Thucydides, particularly Books 3–5, is the main source for much of Leontini's history. His discussion, though, is often framed through Athenian goals, desires and perspectives, not those of Leontini. Meanwhile, Leontini barely appears in the opening of Book 6, where (as noted above) Thucydides' agenda is to downplay Athens' prior western entanglements, in order to present its invasion of Sicily as a new and surprising departure. Reading Thucydides' account of Leontini carefully and in combination with other evidence highlights his literary and interpretative choices and allows the recovery of a different history of the Peloponnesian War.

The roots of Leontini's fear of Syracuse went back more than half a century, to the reign of the Deinomenid tyrants in Syracuse.[38] In the 490s, Leontini came under the control of Hippocrates, tyrant of Gela. After Hippocrates' death, his power passed to

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[38] S. Berger, 'Great and small poleis in Sicily: Syracuse and Leontinoi', *Historia* 40 (1991), 129–42; Luraghi (n. 27), 148–53, 335–46; G. Vanotti, 'Leontini nel V secolo, città di profughi', in M. Sordi (ed.), *Coercizione e mobilità umana nel mondo antico* (Milan 1995), 89–106, at 91–3; S.N. Consolo Langher, *Un imperialismo tra democrazia e tirannide: Siracusa nei secoli V e IV a.C.* (Rome,

Gelon, the first Deinomenid ruler, who soon seized Syracuse and made it his capital. Leontini thus became part of a Syracusan empire that quickly expanded to encompass most of eastern Sicily (Hdt. 7.154–6). In 476, Gelon's brother Hieron, who had succeeded him, interfered further in Leontini's affairs by forcing the people of Catana and Naxos to leave their cities and live at Leontini (Diod. Sic. 11.49). This must have been a disruptive event for the Leontinians: the population drastically increased overnight by the fiat of a foreign tyrant, the community's resources (such as housing and food supply) would have been strained, and incorporating the refugees from Catana and Naxos into the Leontinian community would have been a challenge. Syracuse's main concern, however, was the large and fertile Plain of Catania, an enormous stretch of arable land that had previously been divided between Leontini, Catana and various Sikel communities. Through its control of Leontini, Syracuse now controlled the resources of this region.

In the 460s, the Deinomenid regime collapsed and its empire vanished; the various cities controlled by Syracuse, including Leontini, all re-established their independence under democratic regimes. At Leontini, the new regime quickly moved to erase traces of Syracusan dominance and reassert their identity as a separate community. Leontini's coinage under the Deinomenids, for instance, had taken on markedly Syracusan characteristics, displaying a Syracusan quadriga and the name Leontini written in the Syracusan alphabet. Going forward, however, Leontini used a lion's head, punning on the name of the city, and proudly wrote its own name in the Chalcidian alphabet.[39] Though under the thumb of foreign tyrants for three decades, the Leontinians remembered who they were and worked hard to maintain their separate *polis* identity.

Still, Syracuse remained large, powerful and eager to reclaim its lost territories. Leontini was Syracuse's closest neighbour and a major obstacle to accessing the Plain of Catania. For several decades, Syracuse did not attack Leontini directly, but a number of attested Syracusan campaigns would have concerned the smaller city. Syracuse attacked the Deinomenid colonists at Aetna in 461, fought the Sikel leader Ducetius twice in 451 and 450, defeated Akragas in 446, and destroyed the Sikel city of Trinacia in 440.[40] Most of these campaigns took place in the interior of Sicily, north and west of Leontini, and on several occasions Syracusan armies must have marched through Leontini's territory. More broadly, these campaigns demonstrated beyond doubt Syracuse's ambitions to recreate the former Deinomenid empire, and Leontini stood squarely in its way. At sea, moreover, Syracusan fleets had been active in the Tyrrhenian Sea over the past half-century (Diod. Sic. 11.51, 88), passing right by Rhegium, on the Italian side of the Straits of Messina. This location gave Rhegium a strategic position that any imperial power would be eager to control. Rhegium also shared a land border with its long-standing enemy, Locri, which was an ally of Syracuse.[41] Thus, Rhegium, much like Leontini, had reason to fear Syracusan imperialism. Finally, Diodorus reports that in 439 Syracuse ordered the building of 100 ships, doubled its cavalry forces, and increased the tribute it levied on the Sikels it controlled, all as part of a plan to 'subdue Sicily little by little'

1997), 26–7; D. Bonanno, *Ierone il Dinomenide: storia e rappresentazione* (Pisa 2010), 127–57; F. De Angelis, *Archaic and Classical Greek Sicily: A Social and Economic History* (Oxford, 2016), 105–6.

[39] N.K. Rutter, *The Greek Coinages of Southern Italy and Sicily* (London, 1997), 129–32, 135; N.J. Nicholson, *The Poetics of Victory in the Greek West: Epinician, Oral Tradition, and the Deinomenid Empire* (Oxford, 2015), 262–5; M.R. Thatcher, *The Politics of Identity in Greek Sicily and Southern Italy* (Oxford, 2021), 128–9.

[40] Diod. Sic. 11.76, 91; 12.8, 29; D. Asheri, 'Rimpatrio di esuli e ridistribuzione delle terre nelle città siciliote, ca. 466–461 a.C.', in *Φιλίας χάριν. Miscellanea di studi classici in onore di Eugenio Manni* (Rome, 1980), 1.143–58; Vanotti (n. 38), 93–6; Consolo Langher (n. 38), 61–72.

[41] Bonanno (n. 38), 75–84.

(12.30.1). This report has been doubted, however, especially because less than fifteen years later, during the first Athenian invasion, Syracuse does not appear to have had a large fleet; perhaps the whole passage should be rejected.[42] Even discounting Diodorus' report, however, it is clear that Syracuse wanted to expand its power, and both Leontini and Rhegium would justly have looked at their neighbour with suspicion.

Against this backdrop, both Leontini and Rhegium signed alliances with Athens, which are preserved as *IG* I³ 53–4 (= ML 63–4 = OR 149a–b). These two alliances are normally (and correctly) read together, especially because the inscriptions show they were passed in the Athenian assembly on the same day, with the same Athenian proposer. This strongly suggests that the two cities coordinated their embassies to Athens and were collaborating in response to the same set of problems.

The exact date of these alliance, however, has been a matter of considerable debate. The inscriptions as preserved specify the date as 433/2. However, at some stage the prescripts of both inscriptions (containing the archon-date) were erased and new ones inscribed in different hands; it is the new version that includes the date of 433/2. Some scholars, therefore, have understood this as recording a renewal in that year of an alliance that was originally made earlier, most likely in the 440s,[43] while others see the alliance as originally made in 433/2, with the inscription modified later.[44] Further support for an earlier date has come from Thucydides, who has Leontinian envoys in 427 refer to their 'old alliance' (παλαιὰν ξυμμαχίαν, 3.86.3) with Athens. Surely, it is argued, an alliance that was only six years old could not be described as 'old'. To be sure, the Leontinians were trying to persuade the Athenian assembly to take their alliance seriously and send military assistance; claiming that their alliance had existed for a long time (a flexible description) would help them make their case. The word παλαιάν should be taken as a rhetorical claim, not a fact.[45] Absent new evidence, this debate is unlikely ever to be settled definitively. Fortunately, however, the historical sketch above shows that the exact date within the 440s or 430s does not matter for the argument here. Fear of Syracusan encroachment would have been prominent at Leontini throughout that period, and Leontini might well have sought alliances at any point. Moreover, the year 433/2 was clearly significant even if what occurred then was a renewal, because the decision to renew an alliance implies that both sides are choosing to reaffirm the importance of the alliance.

As with Segesta, most scholarship on the Leontini alliance has focussed on Athenian motivations for allying with a small and distant Sicilian city.[46] However, it is equally important to ask why Leontini was seeking an overseas alliance, and why it saw Athens in particular as its best option. More than fifty years of Syracusan imperialism lay behind Leontini's alliance with Athens, and the larger city had been flexing its muscles recently. Leontini's primary goal throughout the later fifth century was to deter Syracusan

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[42] A. Morakis, 'The fleet of Syracuse (480–413 BCE)', *Historika* 5 (2015), 263–76.

[43] ML 64; OR 149; T.E. Wick, 'Athens' alliances with Rhegion and Leontinoi', *Historia* 25 (1976), 288–304; F. Raviola, 'Fra continuità e cambiamento: Atene, Reggio e Leontini', *Hesperìa: studi sulla grecità di Occidente* 3 (1993), 85–97; A. Mele, 'Atene e la Magna Grecia', in E. Greco and M. Lombardo (edd.), *Atene e l'Occidente: i grandi temi* (Athens, 2007), 239–68; G. Maddoli, 'La παλαιὰ συμμαχία fra Atene e Leontini nel quadro della politica occidentale ateniese', *Klio* 92 (2010), 34–41.

[44] Mattingly (n. 34), 272–3; Smart (n. 3), 132–3; S. Cataldi, 'Atene e l'occidente: trattati e alleanze dal 433 al 424', in E. Greco and M. Lombardo (edd.), *Atene e l'Occidente: i grandi temi* (Athens, 2007), 421–70; Papazarkadas (n. 37); A. Oranges, 'Trattato di alleanza tra Atene e Reggio', *Axon* 2 (2018), 39–52.

[45] H.B. Mattingly, 'Athens and the Western Greeks: c. 500–413 B.C.', in *La circolazione della moneta ateniese in Sicilia e in Magna Grecia* (Rome, 1969), 208–9.

[46] Raviola (n. 43); Cataldi (n. 44); Mele (n. 43); Maddoli (n. 43); but cf. the brief discussion of OR 149.

aggression, and if necessary to defend itself to maintain its independence.[47] By 433/2, with the Peloponnesian War clearly on the horizon, this goal was becoming particularly urgent. Although Syracuse had so far refrained from attacking Leontini directly, with the outbreak of war across the Greek world that could easily change—as in fact it did. In the chaos that would ensue in such a massive war, would anyone notice if one minor city was gobbled up by its neighbour? Leontini needed to make sure that someone would.

Why Athens? Leontini had some natural allies in the west, but they were not especially powerful; for additional security, they needed to look farther afield. Finding a powerful but remote ally was useful, since a distant power was less likely to try to control Leontini directly; the Leontinians had no more interest in becoming subjects of Athens than of Syracuse. Moreover, Syracuse's long-standing ties with its mother-city, Corinth, made it clear that they would side with the Peloponnesians when war came (as indeed they did: Thuc. 2.7.2, 3.86.2); Leontini therefore naturally looked to Sparta's enemy. Moreover, much discussion at the time focussed on an argument from kinship. Leontini was Chalcidian (a Sicilian term for Ionian), which gave it an ethnic connection to Athens. The Athenians, meanwhile, had made heavy use of ethnic ideology to create legitimacy for their empire. For instance, they emphasized a story that the Ionian cities of Asia Minor had been founded from Athens (implying that they owed loyalty to Athens as their mother-city), and they both purified the island of Delos and founded a new festival there (displaying their piety towards a particularly Ionian sanctuary).[48] Although not all of Athens' allies were Ionians, enough were to make this attempt at legitimacy plausible. Leontini did not actually join the Delian League, but nevertheless it would have found Athens' pro-Ionian ideology familiar and welcoming, especially given its conflict with Dorian Syracuse. The ethnic ties between Athens and Leontini were repeatedly cited as a reason for action over the next two decades.[49] This kind of kinship diplomacy was common in the fifth century, and seems to have played a real role, alongside other factors, in leading cities to decide on their alliances.[50] Leontini's decision to seek an alliance with Athens was thus the result of careful long-term planning and strategic thinking about what alliances would best maintain their security.

In 427, Leontini sought to put its alliance with Athens into practical effect, resulting in the so-called 'First Sicilian Expedition'.[51] According to Thucydides (3.86), Syracuse and Leontini had gone to war against each other. Although he gives few other details of this initial clash, Syracuse's goal was surely to regain control of Leontini and its rich agricultural territory. It is notable, however, that while Thucydides discusses Athens' motivations in accepting this appeal, he does not explicitly say why Leontini asked for their help. Leontini's goals and strategies are worth investigating. By this point, Leontini had put together a coalition consisting of the small Sicilian cities of Naxos, Catana and Camarina, plus Rhegium and (it emerges from the later narrative) various non-Greek Sikel communities. Such coalitions do not spring into existence overnight: more likely, this was the result of painstaking diplomatic efforts, perhaps over several years, by all of

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[47] Berger (n. 38), 135–6; Vanotti (n. 38), 96–8.

[48] J. Barron, 'Religious propaganda of the Delian League', *JHS* 84 (1964), 35–48; Hornblower (n. 1), 1.141–2, 520–1, 2.72–3; Fragoulaki (n. 14), 210–20.

[49] Thuc. 3.86; 6.6, 44, 46, 50, 76–7, 82.

[50] J. Alty, 'Dorians and Ionians', *JHS* 102 (1982), 1–14; L. Patterson, *Kinship Myth in Ancient Greece* (Austin, 2010); Thatcher (n. 39), 181–8.

[51] H.D. Westlake, 'Athenian Aims in Sicily, 427–424 B.C.', *Historia* 9 (1960), 385–402; D. Kagan, *The Archidamian War* (Ithaca, NY, 1974); B. Bosworth, 'Athens' first intervention in Sicily: Thucydides and the Sicilian tradition', *CQ* 42 (1992), 46–55.

those cities. Leontini had prepared in advance to defend itself. Nevertheless, this coalition was relatively small in comparison with the roster of major cities backing Syracuse, including Akragas, Selinus, Gela and Locri, and Syracuse's much larger resources made Leontini's situation grave (Thuc. 3.86.2; Diod. Sic. 12.53.1). The Leontinians' goal was simply to remain independent, and since they had an alliance with Athens, bringing in this outside power to level the playing field was not only a logical step but also likely a step they had foreseen when they made that alliance originally.

The anti-Syracusan coalition was active in its own defence. In 425, for instance, when Messina took advantage of the Athenian fleet's temporary absence by attacking Naxos, the Naxians together with Sikel allies fought back and routed the Messinians. They anticipated help from Leontini and other Greek allies, which soon arrived, and the coalition attacked Messina in turn. The whole coalition was ready to fight, even at the cost of heavy losses (Thuc. 4.25.7–12). In the winter of 426, 'the allies in Sicily', dissatisfied with Athens' commitment of only twenty ships to their defence, sent envoys to ask for further help; Athens responded by sending forty more ships (3.115). The whole coalition, not just Leontini, thus came together to take steps for their common defence. Moreover, the stated reason behind the request—that Syracuse controlled their land and was building a fleet to contest control of the seas—shows, if perhaps with some rhetorical exaggeration, the stakes of this war. Finally, at some point, probably in 427, allies including Rhegium, Catana, Naxos and the Sikels made enormous financial contributions, totalling more than 250 talents, to the war effort.[52]

The course of the war, which lasted at least three years (427–424), affected Leontini and Rhegium in different ways. Rhegium's experience was harsher: it served as Athens' main naval base, and much of the fighting was centred directly on the Straits. The Rhegians also suffered from Locrian incursions on land, and Athenian attempts to attack Locri were ineffective.[53] All this likely made the Rhegians more hesitant about inviting Athenian intervention, and in 415 they refused to support the much larger Athenian expedition (Thuc. 6.44). By contrast, Athens ultimately did little to help Leontini directly, and instead mainly pursued its own goals, such as trying to gain control of the Straits of Messina. Eventually, in 424, frustrated with a war that was largely stalemated, all the Sicilian cities made peace with each other and the Athenians sailed home.

The Leontinians signed on to this peace, but it came with great complications. On the one hand, their major ally was forced to leave Sicily, while Syracuse remained powerful and right next door. For this reason, the Athenian alliance remained important to the Leontinians, even if it had been ineffective. On the other hand, the Syracusans had agreed to the peace treaty as well, suggesting that they would leave Leontini alone, at least temporarily. That would give the city some breathing room to rebuild its strength and make new plans to meet future challenges.

It is exactly at this time, when the threat from Syracuse seemed to be at a low ebb, that the communal solidarity Leontini had enjoyed for so long broke down and the community fell into *stasis*.[54] First, Leontini decided to enrol new citizens, who were most likely a mixture of Greeks from various other cities, mainly in Sicily. As Dreher points

[52] *IG* I³ 291; C. Ampolo, 'I contributi alla prima spedizione ateniese in Sicilia (427–424 a.C.)', *PP* 42 (1987), 5–11; S. Pope, 'The Athenians and the Sikels in the late 5ᵗʰ century B.C.', in D.W. Rupp and J.E. Tomlinson (edd.), *From Maple to Olive* (Athens, 2017), 401–19; Pelling (n. 4), 207. Hornblower (n. 1), 3.458–61 instead dates the inscription to 415.
[53] Thuc. 3.90, 99, 103, 115; 4.1, 24–5.
[54] Thuc. 5.4.2–4; M. Dreher, 'La dissoluzione della *polis* di Leontini dopo la pace di Gela (424 a.C.)', *ASNP* 16 (1986), 637–60; Berger (n. 38), 137; Vanotti (n. 38), 98–102; Consolo Langher (n. 38), 87–9.

out, this step appears designed to increase the city's population and therefore its military effectiveness.[55] In other words, they were developing a new strategic plan for defending themselves. Next, however, a democratic faction wanted to redistribute land to the new citizens; this involved confiscation of land from wealthy landowners. For this group, the *dynatoi*, economic concerns overrode both communal solidarity and fear of Syracuse, and they responded by handing the city over to Syracuse. The lower classes were scattered, but the *dynatoi* went to live at Syracuse as citizens. Despite the peace agreement, Syracuse saw an opportunity and achieved a long-standing goal by diplomatic means. For Leontini, by contrast, their worst fears were realized.

Some of the *dynatoi*, however, soon fell out with the Syracusans and returned to Leontini, occupying part of the site and a nearby fortress; much of the lower classes joined them, and they all resisted Syracusan control from there. The reasons why the *dynatoi* changed their policy are obscure, but the outcome clearly shows a renewed sense of shared identity as Leontinians. Their city was far weaker than previously, but they nevertheless demonstrated resilience and determination to assert their independence. Other Leontinians remained in exile, however, and the conflict remained essentially frozen for several years, until a new opportunity to seek Athenian help arose.

The Athenians' official reasons for sending an expedition to Sicily in 415 mention Leontini prominently. Thucydides lists 'restoring Leontini' as one of the three official goals voted by the assembly (the other two are helping Segesta against Selinus and ordering affairs in Sicily as would be best for Athens: 6.8.2), and he has the Athenians proclaim the same goal to the Syracusans in what amounts to a declaration of war (6.50.4). Yet in his account of the debate at Athens prior to the dispatch of the expedition, it is Segesta which is prominent, not Leontini. Segestan envoys make an appeal on Leontini's behalf as well as their own, in a passage that has caused much confusion (6.6), but Thucydides only briefly mentions a few Leontinian exiles who happened to be present (6.19.1). Diodorus, by contrast, has Leontinian exiles send envoys along with the Segestan ones (12.83.1–3), and there is no reason to doubt this, given Leontini's strong sense of identity and history of resilience. Thucydides downplays their role to portray the Athenians' decision as surprising and irrational; including Leontini more prominently would instead remind the reader that Athens had long-standing connections in Sicily.

An alternate perspective would instead foreground the Leontinians' sense of community. In 415, their situation was dire. Many of their most prominent citizens had gone to Syracuse, while others continued to resist Syracuse's conquest. The latter were deeply unhappy with this situation. They had been forced off their land, and the wealthy among them had realized that they did not want to be Syracusans. Their identity as Leontinians was strong, and that led them to try to alter their situation for the better, by appealing to Athens once again. All of the reasons that led them to think of Athens as a good option two decades earlier were still valid; more recently, Athens had shown that it was willing to expend resources to help Leontini. Both in 427 and in 415, Leontini desperately needed help, and Athens looked likely to provide it—ideally in moderation. In the event, however, Athens ultimately provided little real assistance: they got bogged down in the siege of Syracuse and were defeated without ever 'restoring Leontini'.

Leontini's long history with Syracuse, combined with its fierce desire to remain independent of its larger neighbour, was the other half of the spark that led Athens to invade Sicily. Athens' goal of resettling the Leontinians in their city has often been dismissed as a pretext to cover up their imperialistic goals. From a Sicilian vantage point,

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[55] Dreher (n. 54), 642–3.

however, the desire first to safeguard and then to restore their city's independence was the driving force behind Leontini's actions before and during the Peloponnesian War, and ignoring this perspective gives an incomplete picture of this period. The way Thucydides has shaped his narrative means that it must be read against the grain to understand Leontini's goals and motivations—another useful technique for the historian of a *polis* whose concerns are downplayed in his narrative.

CONCLUSION

The approaches modelled here thus produce better understandings of the histories of two *poleis* that Thucydides mentions but does not emphasize, and they could equally be applied to other regions of the Greek world that are peripheral to his concerns. In the case of Segesta, Thucydides considered much background material extraneous to his purposes, and so supplementing his account allows scholars to write complementary narratives that are equally historically valid. By contrast, Thucydides provides most of the material for an account of Leontini that highlights its active responses to Syracusan imperialism, but that material is embedded within a narrative that has been subtly manipulated to focus on Athenian actions and responses. Reading Thucydides' account against the grain enables modern historians to use his narrative in a way he did not intend. Finally, placing available data in its Sicilian historical and cultural context allows historians to foreground Sicilian attitudes and ideas, rather than the Athenian ones highlighted by Thucydides, and to account for ways in which political strategies were shaped by cultural factors.

Focussing on the Sicilian actors in this story produces a less Athenocentric narrative of Sicilian history in the late fifth century, and particularly a version of Sicily's relations with Athens that complements that of Thucydides. Asking what Segesta and Leontini wanted from Athens—why they wanted to ally with Athens in the first place and what they hoped to achieve with Athenian military assistance—gives a more balanced picture of the motivations of all parties involved, not just Athens. Segesta wanted to gain a short-term advantage in its small-scale local conflict with Selinus, a conflict that was both embedded in and shaped by a complex cross-cultural landscape. For Leontini, meanwhile, the problem was the much longer-term issue of Syracusan imperialism; they hoped initially to protect and later to regain their independence.

For both cities, Athens seemed to be a safe ally particularly because it was far away, and therefore unlikely to try to project its power in Sicily beyond what the allies wanted. The Athenians, of course, had their own goals, ranging from pure imperial expansion and financial gain to preventing Sicilian grain and other assistance from flowing to Sparta. Their pursuit of these goals often ran orthogonally to their allies' goals, which to a great extent the Athenians did not even attempt to achieve. Instead, when an opportunity presented itself in a complex region with local concerns and rivalries that they did not fully understand, they leapt in, twisting the situation to suit their own goals. This conclusion emerges much more sharply from a direct comparison of Athenian with Segestan and Leontinian goals and motivations. The two narratives of Athens' expedition contrasted in this article—a familiar Athenocentric one and a novel Sicilian one—thus work together to produce a more nuanced understanding of a critical historical event.

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