

Conclusion

I began this book with Pagondas' speech before the Battle of Delion in 424, because his exhortation beautifully encapsulates the main themes for the study of interstate relations. Initially, I envisioned a work more in line with what Pagondas describes: abrasive, uncontrollable Athenians, intent on the destruction of the neighbouring Boiotians, as neighbours are wont to do. Fomenting the hostile attitude was the continual desire to procure as much as territory as possible and eliminate any obstacles towards that goal. Further fuelling the fire was their intense dislike, based on past interactions, which made any collaboration the result of mere chance, a brief intermission when interests converged due to the threat of a common foe, before returning to neighbourly hostility. My expectations, therefore, fitted the mould of Simon Hornblower's description of neighbourly relations: 'The Thessalians hated the Phokians as only Greek neighbours could hate.'¹ While there is a kernel of truth in such a supposition – the proximity to one another makes it easier, almost imperative, to distance oneself from the neighbour – it also negates the complexities of neighbourly interactions, as I have explored in the various case studies throughout this book.

It was the aim of this book to excavate and elaborate these complexities. This study provides the first extensive investigation of the Atheno-Boiotian relations in the sixth to fourth centuries. This long-term diachronic perspective helped to uncover the various nuances underlying the neighbourly interactions that often get lost in shorter-term approaches. The aim was to understand the true nature of Atheno-Boiotian interactions, devoid of the standard treatments of neighbourly relations. These often rely on Realist discourse and ignore the moralistic, ethical considerations or, worse, make them subservient to a deterministic, inexorable mutual enmity. Another recurrent theme was the compartmentalisation of these histories into grander events that were not necessarily pertinent to the Athenians and Boiotians. While some overlap was inescapable, I have employed a different division, one that appreciates and accentuates the nature of the Atheno-Boiotian interactions, rather than

viewing them as a subsidiary branch of the Spartan-Athenian or Atheno-Macedonian relations.

The chronological study in Chapter 2 covered the political and military interactions in the period 550–323 and provided a background to the analysis of the conventions of neighbourly conduct. It showed the meandering fates of the neighbours shifting between peace and war. Yet that was never a predetermined outcome. Following this diachronic analysis, it became clear there were times normally perceived of as hostile times that in reality were more peaceful. Notions of perpetual hostility should therefore not be accepted *a priori*. Chapter 3 explored how the Athenians and Boiotians came to loggerheads or, conversely, found common grounds. Analysing various aspects such as reputation, elite interactions and reciprocity revealed that far from frequently waging war on each other, the Athenians and Boiotians often found a mutual understanding. The analysis showed their rapprochements were dictated not necessarily by the rise of a common foe, but through the continued back and forth between their elites. Normative practices dictated the cadences of their relations and frequently tempered hawkish tendencies whenever tensions arose. Another, more straightforward conclusion is that in most cases whenever our sources are silent on neighbourly relations, it implies there were no hostilities. This realisation is like understanding there is a dark side to the moon that we do not always see, but is nevertheless there. One example is the period following the Persian Wars of 480–479, which scholars denounce as a time of intense friction, sparked by the divergent paths taken during the conflict – the Boiotians' *medism* – although there is no evidence suggesting any troubles between the neighbours. A case was made to the contrary, arguing that warmer relations may have existed between them than normally assumed, inspired by the geography in which their interactions took place, which was a far different arena than the 'Panhellenic' platform of interactions scholars normally apply.

That mention of geography inevitably conjures up the issue of borders and the thematic study of the geopolitical aspects of the neighbourly relations, as discussed in Chapter 4. Their geographical entwinement meant their fortunes were tied, which had a profound influence on their interactions. Essentially, it created a mutual magnetism. There was no place to hide, and that realisation must have enabled some leaders to understand the benefits of collaboration, instead of antagonism. That equally holds for the question of disputed borderlands. Contrary to the Realist discourse and its Finleyan adherence to autarky, contested borderlands became an issue only when conventions and agreements were violated, in accordance with

the moralistic stipulations of interstate relations in antiquity. Far from the explosive concoction that could escalate local conflicts into 'system-wide wars', territorial ambitions could be negotiated, and even traded, when it suited the neighbours. Lingering hopes of restoring Plataia or recapturing Oropos never prohibited the Athenians from seeking – and agreeing to – an alliance with the Boiotians at opportune times, nor were desirable territories a constant bone of tension. When looking at case studies such as the Skourta plain, there are longer periods of peaceful co-existence without risk of war, despite the continuous draw of the fertile lands of the plain. The same applies to Oropos, where long periods of control continued uninterrupted by neighbourly interventions. Gains in the borderlands were simply not worth instigating wars over, despite the *communis opinio*. The memory of losing the contested lands may have lingered on in the minds of the Athenians and Boiotians for a long time but were swiftly forgotten whenever the situation required it, as the Atheno-Theban alliance of 339/8 demonstrates.

From the memory of lands that are lost, we jumped to how the neighbours recollected and commemorated their shared past in Chapter 5. A targeted approach, with Panhellenic, local and disputed sites accorded separate investigations, disclosed the general tendencies that can be detected in the commemorative practices of the Athenians and Boiotians vis-à-vis one another. What emerged was a preference for the local over the global. In most cases, these local commemorations took the form of festivals, war memorials or dedications that aimed to illuminate and strengthen the cohesion of the community in the face of struggle, rather than foment any inherent hostile attitude towards the neighbour. Even at a sanctuary such as the Amphiareion, embodying the disputed lands of the Oropia, the layers of domination present in the surviving material demonstrate a subtler approach, whereby the past of the sanctuary is respected and incorporated, before making way for attestations of the new power.

Of course, this is not to deny that neighbourly relations could be violent, hostile and antagonistic at times, nor that normative practices of the interstate realm could avoid serious abuse of power, as Pagondas adumbrated in his speech. Yet these were the anomalies of neighbourly relations, not the rule. That was my aim in this book, and it can provide a blueprint for further investigations into interstate relations, between neighbours, and between polities further apart. Even with these insights, the ways in which each neighbourly relationship acts *sui generis* cannot be forgotten, but can inspire a different way of analysing disputed borderlands and the way they influence relations between polities, such as the Athenians and Megarians,

or the Argives and Spartans. In a sense, it could even provide us with clues on how to move forward in the world today, where the peaceful co-existence of neighbours is at risk of falling apart due to precisely those issues that Pagondas mentioned in his speech: the selfish actions of solipsist polities that ignore the mores so vital to the co-existence between states. In the end, far from the pessimist wanderings of my mind with which I started, it is my sincere belief that just as the old Dutch adage holds, the Athenians and Boiotians also realised that a good neighbour is indeed better than a far-away friend.