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“Megalopolis and the Achaean koinon: local identity and the federal state”

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DÉPÔT LÉGAL 4^{ème} trimestre 2016/LEGAL DEPOSIT 4th quarter 2016
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- 11.00 *The Liberation of Thebes (379 BC) as a Theban Revolution: Theban Politics As a Closed Framework*, Salvatore Tufano (Rome & Fribourg)
- 11.45 *Kai polemou kai eirēnēs: Military Magistrates At War and at Peace in Hellenistic Boiotia*, Alex McAuley (Cardiff)
- 12.30 Lunch Break
- 14.15 *Genealogies and Violence. Central Greece in the Making*, Elena Franchi (Trento)
- 15.00 *The Making of a Fetter of Greece: Chalcis in the Hellenistic Period*, Fabienne Marchand (Fribourg)
- 15.45 Break
- 16.15 *La guerre ou la paix? Pouvoir s'affronter sans violence. A propos de SEG XIII 327 (IG VII 187+188)*, Marcel Piérart
- 17.00 Discussion & concluding remarks

WORK IN PROGRESS

481.0.03 Elke Close, *Megalopolis and the Achaean koinon: local identity and the federal state*

Introduction

The primary goal of my doctoral thesis was to bring the Arcadian polis of Megalopolis back into the academic limelight. I felt this was a necessity since, as a general rule, Megalopolis has mostly been looked at as part of broader studies into research topics. Scholars tend to see the polis solely as the historian Polybius' hometown or as yet another member of the Arkadian and Achaian *koina*. Yet through a detailed analysis of the early history of the polis and particularly its membership of the aforementioned federal states, the thesis shows that Megalopolis certainly was a city with its own distinct local identity that merits a closer look than it has previously received.

In the thesis I therefore wanted to identify the different components of this Megalopolitan identity, i.e. a deep and traditional hatred for Sparta, longstanding relations with the Macedonian kings, a clear understanding of the mechanisms of a federal state and multi-ethnic politics, and, by Polybius' time, a connection to both Arkadia as well as Achaia. Secondly and more importantly, I wanted to see what their influence was on the politics of the Achaian *koinon*. I argued that this identity was a continuing and complex process which underwent several profound changes that started with the foundation of entirely new city by the Arkadians in the 360s BC and was shaped throughout the polis' membership of the Arkadian and Achaian *koina*.

With the creation of Megalopolis a new step was taken in the approach of Greek cities to their own ethnic identity as Megalopolis looked for a broader way of uniting the different communities that were now part of this brand new polis. Since this new attitude was more in line with the open and federal attitude of the *koina* and poleis in the Hellenistic period, Megalopolis was looking forward and should as an early example of a typical Hellenistic polis, something that is also seen in the archaeology of the polis. The open outlook of the city was undoubtedly the

result of Megalopolis' early connections and experiences with federalism; it was what made polis unique and what allowed it to flourish as well as it did in the federal framework of the Achaian *koinon* after 235 BC.



Figure 1: The theatre and Thersilion at Megalopolis. Author.

Megalopolis: A (Very Brief) History

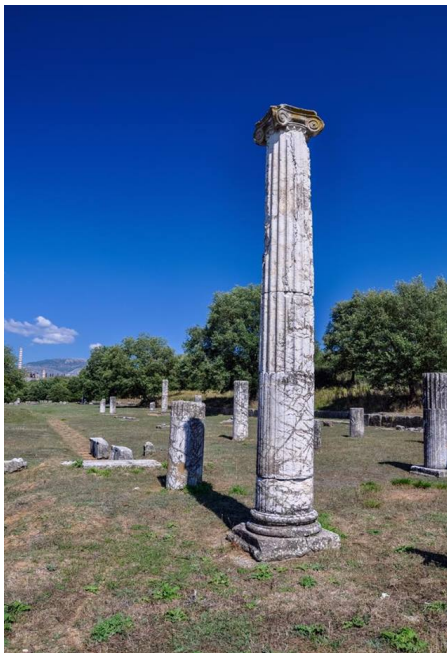


Figure 2: Close-up of the Philippeion on the Megalopolitan agora. Author.

The polis was founded by the Arkadian *koinon* in 368 BC. The main reason for the city's foundation was the Arkadian need to protect the southern part of the region against the looming threat of Sparta and its frequent invasions of the border areas. As a result of this, the Megalopolitan identity was characterised throughout its history by a strong antagonism towards Sparta which was only fuelled by its close geographical proximity to Sparta and the countless attacks on the city, one of which was so severe in 227 BC that it took several years to rebuild the polis and can still be detected in the archaeological remains.¹ Due to its size – in 227 BC, the city walls were estimated to be fifty stades and the city has the largest theatre in the Peloponnese with a seating capacity of around 20,000 people² – it was easy for the city to become an influential member of the Arkadian *koinon* to which it contributed ten of the fifty federal *damiorgoi* (IG V 2.1, l. 23-33).

After the dissolution of the Arkadian federation in 363 BC, the city remained politically active in its native region and the Peloponnese. In fact, the polis' decade-long alliance with the Macedonian kings was formed in this period after Philip II of Macedon gave several Spartan regions to Megalopolis soon after the battle of Chaeronea in 338 BC.³ The

¹ Lauter (2005), 237.

² Gardner et al. (1892), 78-81.

³ The border areas in question, i.e. Skiritis, Aigythis and Belminatis, would become a frequent point of contention between Sparta and Megalopolis throughout the Hellenistic period. See also *IvO* 47; *Syll.* 665; Harter-Uibopuu (1998) n. 11; Ager (1996) n. 135-137; Mackil (2013) n. 45; Shipley (2000) and Roy (2009), 207-208.

Megalopolitan loyalty to Macedon is a second characteristic of the city's local identity that had a far-reaching influence on Megalopolitan politics. For one, it was strong enough for the citizens to dedicate one of the biggest buildings on their agora, a monumental stoa of ca. 160 meters, to Philip II.⁴ Moreover, it allowed the polis' two only tyrants to come to power in the 270s and 250s BC: Aristodamos the Good and Lydiadas. While only a handful of literary sources talk about the two tyrants, one of them played a crucial part in the history of Megalopolis.

By 235 BC, the Achaians had become a genuine threat to Megalopolis and the tyrant Lydiades as well as the citizens most likely thought that joining the *koinon* was a good course of action. This decision proved beneficial, as the polis quickly rose to a prominent position within the federation and was also responsible for the addition of an Achaian component to the Megalopolitan identity by the middle of the second century BC. The polis remained a member of the Achaian *koinon* until its destruction by the Romans in 146 BC and was inhabited well into the Roman period. However, when Pausanias visited the city in the second century AD, a lot of the buildings and sanctuaries had fallen into ruin (Paus. 8. 30-32).

Megalopolis and the Arkadian *koinon*

One of the most important arguments that the thesis made, was that because of the context in which the polis of Megalopolis was founded, i.e. by a federation, it was aware early on of the benefits that membership of such a federation could bring. This becomes clear when one looks at the Megalopolitan pantheon which was deliberately created to promote a shared Megalopolitan identity. After all, the polis was founded through a synoicism of many different communities that now found themselves forced to live in the polis and which needed to come together as one city. Clearly, the best way to make sure that the communities felt at home was to incorporate typical Arkadian deities like Pan, Zeus Lykaios and others that were known in different variations throughout the region into the religious life of the polis.⁵ Undoubtedly, the magistrates would have drawn their inspiration from the way in which the bigger organisations that the polis had interacted with like the Arkadian and Boiotian *koina*, dealt with the same problem.

However, Megalopolis' early connections to federalism has led some scholars to believe that the polis was founded as the capital of the Arkadian *koinon*.⁶ While the federal Arkadian assembly called the *myrioi* is said to have assembled in *Thersilion* (Paus. 8. 32. 1.), both James Roy and Thomas Heine Nielsen have correctly pointed out that there is no consistent evidence for Megalopolis enjoying a special status within the *koinon* that would equal that of a capital as we know the term today.⁷ What is more, looking at Megalopolis' foreign politics in the decades after the dissolution of the Arkadian *koinon*, it is clear that the city also felt the need to show that it was an individual unit that should be considered more than just another Arkadian city. The polis was consistently asking for outside help against other Arkadians (Pol. 4. 33. 8; Diod. 15. 94. 1-3) or Sparta (Dem. *Meg.* 16; Diod. 16. 39. 1-3), interacted with these outsiders through the establishment of treaties (with Argos, Sikyon, Messene, Thebes and Orneai: Diod. 16. 39. 1-4), received ambassadors (both from Athens: Dem. *Meg.* 19. 10; Aeschin. 2. 157).

⁴ Gardner et al. (1890), 140-141; Lauter and Spyropoulos (1998), 445; Verfenstein (2002), 57-60. Whether the Philip mentioned by Pausanias (8. 30. 6.) and on the inscriptions on roof-tiles found inside the building (IG V² 469 6a and 6b) is Philip II or Philip IV, as Caitlyn Downey Verfenstein has tried to argue, is not relevant. The building remains the only physical evidence of the Megalopolitan connection to Macedon.

⁵ Jost (1985), 225-235.

⁶ Among others, Bury (1898), 15; Larsen (1968), 187; Braunert and Pedersen (1972), 73; Verfenstein (2002), 9; Donati (2015), 207.

⁷ Roy (2007), 291; Nielsen (2015), 266-267.

Megalopolis and the Achaian *koinon*

Once Megalopolis joined the Achaian *koinon* (235 BC), the interaction between the polis and the federal state was one that had a profound influence on both parties: by the middle of the second century BC Megalopolis had added a distinct Achaian element to its complex, local identity and Achaian political life was soon overflowing with prominent Megalopolitans whose personal agenda and hatred for Sparta helped shape the federal government and its actions more than once. Thus, once I had established the core elements of the Megalopolitan identity, I then looked the the way these characteristics influenced the Achaian politics, both internally and externally.

Megalopolis and internal Achaian politics

In many ways Megalopolis was a typical member of the Achaian *koinon*: it minted federal coinage, was represented in the federal institutions, hosted assembly meetings after 188 BC and a considerable number of influential Achaian statesmen were Megalopolitan.⁸ Moreover, from the available source material an important conclusion can be drawn: given the chance, Megalopolis would not hesitate to take part in federal politics or express its affinity with it. This eagerness is shown in the city's inclusion on both of the Achaian *nomographoi* lists. Despite many problems with their interpretation as one of the inscriptions is incomplete, these – one from Épidauros dated between 210 and 207 BC (*JG IV.I² 73*) and one from Aegion dated after 182 BC (Rizakis (2008), no. 116) – both list Megalopolitan representatives that took part in these meetings.⁹ If a theory posed by Sergey Sizov is true in which he argues that the only a portion of the board of *nomographoi* had to be present in Epidauros since the meeting was not compulsory, while the one in Aegion was due to the city's central position within the federal state, then it seems as though Megalopolis purposefully made an effort to send its *nomographoi* to Epidauros.¹⁰ After all, the city was a considerable distance from Megalopolis. This eagerness is also visible in the bronze federal coinage minted by Megalopolis which the city seems to have been one of the first members to have minted based on die comparisons done by Jennifer Warren.¹¹ This commitment of the polis to the federal institutions and procedures is also a typical example of the Megalopolitan identity and is also exemplified by Polybius in his comments on the superiority of the Achaian constitution.

The interactions of the polis with other Achaian member states shown yet another side of the relationship between the *koinon* and Megalopolis. In the majority of the five disputes between the city and other members such as Messene, Thouria, Helisson and Sparta, show that Megalopolis actively sought the involvement of the federal state.¹² While these overall support my thesis that Megalopolis held a special position in the Achaian *koinon*, the specifics of each of the five boundary disputes provide a more nuanced result. In the first place, the *koinon* intervened to secure the internal status quo of the federation as was the case in boundary disputes between Megalopolis and Messene (SEG 58.370) and Megalopolis and Sparta (Mackil n. 45) where the difficult relationships of both poleis with the Achaians complicated matters. This does not mean that Megalopolis did not try to use its position within the federation to its own advantage, particularly as all of the inscriptions have some sort of reference to the federal *damiorgoi* or a fine imposed by the federal magistrates when one of the disputant did not listen. The city also shows this through their repeated and varied appeals in the boundary dispute with Messene where they try different approaches to get control over the disputed areas, but they

⁸ O'Neil (1984-86), 55-57.

⁹ Rizakis (2008), no. 116, 168-170.

¹⁰ Sizov (2016), 107.

¹¹ Warren (2007), 31; 125-126.

¹² See Harter-Uibopuu (1998) for a general discussion of the disputes of Achaian members and the role of the federal states.

remain unsuccessful in the end.¹³ In the boundary dispute with Thouria (Harter-Uibopuu n. 8.), the polis has a different tactic which is successful: they sent their most influential and famous citizens to represent Megalopolis at the arbitration (B. l. 5-6).¹⁴

Megalopolis and Achaian foreign politics

The way in which Megalopolis influenced the Achaian foreign politics can be deduced throughout the polis' federal membership. In the 220s BC, Megalopolis as a city was responsible for the first connections between the Achaians and the Macedonian king Antigonos during the Kleomenean War. However, after the Achaian *synodos* of 198 BC, the *koinon* abandoned their alliance with Philip V of Macedon in favour of Rome, and the nature of the Megalopolitan influence shifted from the civic level to the individual one as a result of the rise of important individuals from Megalopolis within Achaian federal politics, including like Philopoimen and Lykortas. Therefore, because the Megalopolitan role in Achaian foreign politics was very different in the second century BC from what it had been in the decades after they first joined the Achaian *koinon*, I chose to separate the third and second century BC.

The first major Megalopolitan influence on the Achaian foreign politics expressed itself most notably in the establishment of the Achaian-Macedonian alliance of the 220s BC. In the thesis, I argue that this alliance was not the result of Aratos' scheming and planning, but only came about after a first Megalopolitan embassy to Antigonos Gonatas in 227 BC. This was sent to the Macedonian king on behalf of the polis but with the approval of the federal state, on account of their inability to shield Megalopolis from the Spartan attacks and the city's previous connections to the Macedonian kings (Plut. 23. 2-3). Contrary to what Polybius (Pol. 2. 40. 2) and subsequent other sources report, Aratos was thus not the mastermind behind this alliance but did use the initial contacts between Megalopolis and Antigonos as the basis for his own polity later on.¹⁵

About three decades after they first joined forces with Antigonos Doseon in the Kleomenean War (225 BC), the Achaians found themselves on the verge of yet another important political decision. The Achaians dutifully stood by their ally during the following decades, albeit with increasing reluctance but when Philip IV got himself involved in yet another conflict with Rome, the Achaians had an important decision to make at their *synodos* in 198 BC: would they remain loyal to their old ally or join the war on the Roman side (Livy 32. 19-25)? After a lot of commotion and resistance from the Megalopolitan contingent, the Achaians voted to break their alliance with Philip and become a Roman ally which they would remain until the Achaian War of 146 BC. While the Megalopolitan opposition came as no surprise there might be an indication that within the polis there was a faction that was slowly moving away from the traditional loyalty to Macedon and had replaced it with a vehement Achaian patriotism as there are some indications that the Achaian strategos Aristainos who strongly advocated a move towards Rome, was a Megalopolitan.¹⁶

¹³ Luraghi and Magnetto (2012), 510-521. This boundary dispute between the two poleis provides not only provides an interesting insight into the internal relations of the Achaian *koinon* but also shows a different side of the interaction between the local and federal level within the federal state. Additionally, it is an interesting addenda to the Messenian rebellion of 182 BC in which the polis attempted to secede from the *koinon* and ended up killing the great Megalopolitan and Achaian statesman Philopoimen. Incidentally, the latter's death could be an explanation for Megalopolis' determination to get to win the boundary dispute with Messene.

¹⁴ Harter-Uibopuu (1998), 53-62.

¹⁵ Gruen (1972), 609-625, closely followed by Urban (1979), 117-155; Le Bohec (1993), 366-367.

¹⁶ Both Plutarch (Phil. 17. 3) and Pausanias (8. 51. 4) mention that he was a Megalopolitan, while several epigraphical sources (FD III, 3. 122; Achaie I 629) give the impression he was a Dymaian. Because of the fragmentary evidence of the the sources, nothing can be said with certainty, although it remains an interesting theory for my present argument. For more information on the discussion, see Deininger (1966), 376; Errington (1969), 276-279; Rizakis (1995), 352; Niccolini (1913), 194.

This new Achaian patriotism together with the tradition Megalopolitan antagonism towards Sparta are the two elements that seem to have dominated the Megalopolitan influence on the Achaian politics after the *synodos* of 198 BC. More than before, it was the individual Megalopolitan leader like Philopoimen, Lykortas and Aristainos that shaped and steered Achaian foreign politics through their local interests and were in part responsible for the *koinon*'s overt focus on forcing Sparta to become a member of the federation. The interactions between Achaia and Rome were heavily dominated by this local conflict; this is evident from the plethora of Spartan envoys to Rome concerning Achaian conduct and the Roman intervention in the boundary dispute between the two states. Furthermore, any big problems between the two states seems to have been connected to this Spartan problem, including the Achaian War and the subsequent abolition of the *koinon*, which was caused by the greed of the new generation of Megalopolitans who had lost the realism displayed by their predecessors during the Third Macedonian War.

Polybius, the Megalopolitan?

A final theme of the thesis is connected to the historian Polybius. As a Megalopolitan and an Achaian federal leader in the second century BC, Polybius is an excellent embodiment of the interaction between the local and federal identity. However, the Megalopolitan context of Polybius' identity and his narrative is often forgotten by Polybian scholars.¹⁷ Throughout the thesis I pay particular attention to this as I wanted to establish a new context for Polybius to be read in. When analysing Polybius' narrative and passages in which he speaks about Achaia (2.38-42), Arkadia and Megalopolis (Pol. 2. 55; 2. 61; 4. 20-21 and 4. 32-33), it is clear that Achaia was not the only region that he held in high esteem. In these passages, Polybius not only praises the Achaian *koinon* but also Megalopolis as for him it embodied the best qualities of the region. This is the reason why the historian criticizes the historian Phylarchus so heavily when he does not mention the Megalopolitan bravery against Kleomenes during the destruction of the city in 227 BC and refusal to join him (Pol. 2. 56. 6-8). Aside from the many other critiques expressed in the Histories about Phylarchus and his historical method, it seems that his silence on the bravery of the Megalopolitans was extremely offensive to Polybius as both a Megalopolitan and a historian. After all, he considered this behaviour to be a typical characteristic of his hometown and it deserved the necessary respect and attention since it was a benchmark for him which each and every one of his readers should aspire to learn from. Obviously, Polybius is an Achaian, Megalopolitan and Arkadian, thus perfectly exemplifying the complex and layered identity of Megalopolis as a whole.

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¹⁷ For example Although Craig Champion has looked at Polybius' views on the Achaian *koinon* and their virtues, Megalopolis is omitted from the analysis. However, Polybius' bias towards his native city and his obvious disdain for certain Spartan figures such as Kleomenes and Nabis, is a direct result of his origins. Arthur Eckstein clearly states this in articles from 1987 and 2013; yet in his book *Moral Vision in the Histories of Polybius*, he only needs the first four pages to see how growing up in Megalopolis influenced Polybius' views of the world and how these manifested itself in the development in his aristocratic ethos.

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