

# AMBRAKIA AS A CONTESTED SPACE: FEDERAL CLAIMS TO POWER AND THE BORDER MANAGEMENT OF A CITY- STATE IN THE SECOND CENTURY BC<sup>\*</sup>

*By Sebastian Scharff*

**Summary:** Situated in the border area of several powerful neighbors, the polis territory of Ambrakia was exposed to numerous territorial claims from its early history onwards. A close reading of the story of the quarrel of the gods fighting over the possession of the city reveals that the passage must be understood as an illustration of those various interests in the city prior to the Roman conquest. Yet it was precisely when the domination of Greek states in the region came to an end that the Ambrakiots undertook a remarkable border-management initiative including at least three boundary regulations dating to the 160s BC. This article asks for the reasons behind this initiative and emphasizes the political room for maneuver the Ambrakiots exploited after the Third Macedonian War.

## I. Introduction

As point of reference for various foreign claims to power, the territory of Ambrakia was a contested area. Corinthian settlers, Athenian *stratēgoi*, Macedonian and Epirote kings, Aitolian politicians, and Roman generals all had a vested interest in the city after which the gulf is named. Consequently, Ambrakia's history was a history of changing affiliations from

<sup>\*</sup> This article was made possible by generous financial support from the European Union (project: "Federalism and Border Management in Greek Antiquity" [FeBo], ERC 2021 COG PR. No. 101043954) which I am most grateful for. Views and opinions expressed are however those of the author only and do not necessarily reflect those of the European Union or the European Research Council Executive Agency. Neither the European Union nor

independent settlement to Epeirote capital back to independence and membership in the Aitolian League, a process that finally resulted in the city's integration into the Roman Empire. In addition to the claims lodged by the major powers of the day, the people of Ambrakia had to face border conflicts with regional and local stakeholders, including the Amphilochians, Akarnanians, and the people of the small neighboring town of Charadros.

All of this makes the city a highly promising case for anyone interested in ancient border studies, especially since the surviving evidence for boundary disputes in which the Ambrakiots were involved is particularly rich and includes recently published epigraphic material such as a fourth-century BC treaty between the Ambrakiots, Amphilochians, and Akarnanians,<sup>1</sup> the boundary regulations between Ambrakia and Charadros,<sup>2</sup> and an arbitration by the Korkyraians in a border conflict between Ambrakia and Athamania.<sup>3</sup> Taken together with other epigraphic evidence,<sup>4</sup> these inscriptions add up to a cluster of boundary settlements dating to the 160s BC. This cluster is unusual in that not many cases are known from Greek antiquity in which a similarly large number of border regulations from a single polis survived in such close succession. It is the aim of this article to investigate how and why this cluster came about.

Precisely because Ambrakia was a contested area, the city's borders were of particular importance and had to be managed carefully. But why

the granting authority can be held responsible for them. – I would also like to thank the two anonymous referees for *Classica et Mediaevalia* and the journal editors Thomas Heine Nielsen (Copenhagen) and Christian Ammitzbøll Thomsen (Copenhagen) for their insightful comments. Kaja Harter-Uibopuu (Hamburg) and the members of our Trento research team Elena Franchi, Claudio Biagetti, Rebecca Massinelli, and Roy van Wijk discussed an earlier version of this paper with me. They all provided constructive comments that helped this article take shape. Jeremy McNerney (University of Pennsylvania) was kind enough to share two brilliant articles with me prior to publication.

- 1 Funke & Hallof 2013 II (SEG 68.391; Antonetti, Funke & Kolonas 2022: *Thyr.* 2; *Thyrreion*, end of the fourth century BC).
- 2 *Staatsverträge* IV 665 (SEG 35.665; ed. pr. Cabanes & Andréou 1985; Ambrakia, shortly after 167 BC; cf. Habicht 1986).
- 3 *IG IX* 1<sup>2</sup>, 4, 796 (Korkyra, mid-second century BC).
- 4 E.g., *IG II*<sup>2</sup> 951 (Ager 1996: no. 132; Athens, 166 BC).

do we find such a massive concentration of border-management activities at this particular moment in time? What strategies were applied to secure boundary lines? How were they established and legitimized and what can we say about the relationship of peoples from different sides of the border(s)? Following a brief sketch of the city's position in the Greek world prior to the Roman conquest, I will first explore how this political constellation was reflected in myth before examining in detail the cluster of boundary regulations of the 160s in a second step.

There can be no doubt that borders figured prominently in the history of Ambrakia on very different levels.<sup>5</sup> Situated among neighbors who, according to Thucydides, were originally not able to speak Greek, Ambrakia was imagined as the 'beginning' of the Greek and border to the barbarian world in the Archaic and Classical periods.<sup>6</sup> In this (geographical) sense, it is called 'the first city of Greece' by Pseudo-Skylax: ἐντεῦθεν ἄρχεται ἡ Ἑλλάς;<sup>7</sup> on the other hand, the northern border of Ambrakia's polis territory at times coincided with the outer boundaries of Greek kingdoms and federal states. For the Aitolians of the late third century BC, for instance, the city's territory became a federal border area, a perspective we will focus on in what follows.

- 5 For Ambrakia's history, see the monographic study by Fantasia 2017. On the city's coins, cf. Ravel 1928, on the excavations in Arta: Tzouvara-Souli 1992, for the museum: Papadopulu 2023.
- 6 Hdt. 8.47; cf. Plut. *Per.* 17.2, Dion. Calliphon. 399, see Kaponis 2020: 52. Language of the Amphilochean Argives 'hellenized' by the Ambrakiots: Thuc. 2.68.5. Ambrakia was an "Außenposten" (Beck 1997: 135). On the way the border to the barbarian world was perceived see Cabanes 1979.
- 7 [Skyl.] 33: Μετὰ δὲ Μολοττίαν Ἀμβρακία πόλις Ἑλληνίς. ἐπέχει δὲ αὕτη ἀπὸ θαλάττης στάδια π'. Ἔστι δὲ καὶ ἐπὶ θαλάττης τεῖχος καὶ λιμὴν κλειστός. Ἐντεῦθεν ἄρχεται ἡ Ἑλλάς συνεχῆς εἶναι ... – "After Molottia is Ambrakia, a Hellenic city distant 80 stades from the sea. But on the sea there is a fort with an enclosed harbor. From here Hellas begins ..." (Transl. B. Kiesling).

## II. The Location of Ambrakia as a Contested Area and the Story of the Quarrel of the Gods

In the third and early second centuries BC, Ambrakia was in a very difficult strategic position. Situated between Epeiros, Makedonia, and Aitolia, Ambrakia's political geography placed the city at the very center of a world of federal states and empires that tried to integrate the polis into their orbit. As we shall see, it is precisely the federal episodes of Ambrakia's history and their immediate afterlife that represent the most exciting periods of the city's history when it comes to the way in which the Ambrakiots managed their borders.

After the end of the Aiakid dynasty in 232 BC, Ambrakia had become a member of the expanding Aitolian League.<sup>8</sup> Though it is controversial among scholars whether the city remained Aitolian for the next 40 years

8 The exact date remains unclear, as the evidence for the integration of Ambrakia into the Aitolian League is somewhat conjectural. The city certainly belonged to Epeiros at least until 233/2 BC, since the last queen of the Aiakids, Deidameia, was murdered there (Iust. 28.3.4-8, naming the queen Laodameia; see also Polyaeus, *Strat.* 8.52, *Ov. Ib.* 305-6; cf. Paus. 4.35.3). Either in 226/5 or in 222/1 BC, then, the Ambrakiot citizen Aristarchos served as an Aitolian *hieromnēmōn* at Delphi (Grainger 1999: 228; Fantasia 2017: 159). Fantasia 2017: 148 thinks of the summer of 230 BC as a possible political context for Ambrakia's integration into the league. We do not know how exactly this integration was carried out at an institutional level. It is well-known, however, that the formal subdivisions (*telē*) of the Aitolian League which are securely attested (the *telos Lokrikon* and the *telos Stratikon*) refer to cases of newly acquired territory. According to the plausible interpretation of Funke 2024, this is no coincidence, and the *telē* could therefore point to a deliberate Aitolian strategy of integration of new members into the league (for the evidence Lasagni 2019: 147-59). Note that even Polyb. 13.1.1 describes the Aitolians as being "naturally fond of making innovations" in the institutional area, though that is not meant as a compliment here. And yet, accepting the idea of a deliberate Aitolian strategy of integration does not imply that we should overestimate the allegedly peaceful nature of Aitolian expansion (for such an irenic perspective, see, e.g., Grainger 1999: 228: "peaceableness of the Aitolian polity"; but note Rzepka 2019).

without interruption, there is no doubt that it was a contested area between Aitolian, Epeirote, and Makedonian interests.<sup>9</sup> We find this disputed character most clearly expressed in Polybius who states that, “for the Epeirotes”, it was “a matter of the utmost importance to recover Ambrakia from the Aitolians.”<sup>10</sup> The city had been Pyrrhos’ capital and must have had both strategic and symbolic significance for the Epeirotes. With its mighty stronghold Ambrakos, it was of crucial strategic importance to the major political powers of the day, including Hellenistic kings and Roman generals. Seized by Philip V in 219 BC,<sup>11</sup> Ambrakia was taken and plundered by the troops of Marcus Fulvius Nobilior in 189 BC,<sup>12</sup> an event that represented a decisive moment in the Antiochian War.<sup>13</sup>

After many statues and other works of art had been brought to Rome,<sup>14</sup> the city received the status of a *civitas libera* two years later.<sup>15</sup> It remained in Roman hands all through the war with Perseus and was only indirectly affected by the armed conflicts.<sup>16</sup> The good relations with Rome resulted in Ambrakia being spared the harsh consequences that befell Makedonia and Epeiros in 167 BC,<sup>17</sup> and the city even seems to have

9 Due to the fact that a certain Damokritos from Ambrakia was listed not among the Aitolian *hieromnēmones* but among the external delegates in a Delphic inscription dating between 206/5 and 204/3 BC, Grainger 1999: 332, 375-76 argues for the city being under Makedonian domination since 205 BC and “rejoining” the Aitolian League only in 198 BC (Grainger 1999: 393); cf. Fantasia 2017: 158-59. Besieged by Philip II in 338 BC, Ambrakia had already endured forty-three years of semi-autonomy under Makedonian suzerainty in the late fourth and early third centuries BC.

10 Polyb. 4.61.5-6: περὶ πλείστου ποιούμενοι τὸ κομίσασθαι τὴν Ἀμβρακίαν παρὰ τῶν Αἰτωλῶν. (Transl. E.S. Shuckburgh).

11 Polyb. 4.61-66; Scholten 2000: 221, and Fantasia 2017: 149.

12 Polyb. 21.27; Liv. 38.4-5.

13 Polyb. 21.26-30.

14 Polyb. 21.30.

15 Liv. 38.44.2; Fantasia 2017: 183-84, 190.

16 Fantasia 2017: 179; Roman garrison in Ambrakia in 170/69 BC: Liv. 42.67.9.

17 According to Polyb. 30.15, Aemilius Paullus destroyed 70 cities in Makedonia and sold 150,000 people into slavery. However, the figures seem to be rhetorical, as Dreizehnter 1978: 53-69 has convincingly argued (70 meaning all the cities of the region and 150,000 symbolizing the size of the destruction), and are evidently exaggerated, as

flourished to such an extent that it probably hosted the prestigious festival of the Naia for a short period in time (167-146 BC), when the games could not be held in Dodona.<sup>18</sup>

Although the years after the Third Makedonian War (171-168 BC) were a difficult time for the region, Ambrakia's position had improved from a strategic point of view. Instead of being confronted with many strong powers laying claim to the city, Ambrakia now had to take into account above all the wishes of Rome as the dominant power in the Mediterranean. For a city that had suffered from its multiple border location, this must have been a clear advantage compared to the previous situation.

Ambrakia's isolated position as an object of foreign claims to power is reflected in a story that came down to us in the work of the second/third-century AD grammarian Antoninus Liberalis: the quarrel of the gods Apollon, Artemis, and Herakles fighting over the possession of the city.<sup>19</sup> It reads as follows:

Κραγαλεύς ὁ Δρύοπος ᾧκει <τῆς> γῆς τῆς Δρυοπίδος παρὰ τὰ λουτρά τὰ Ἡρακλέους, ἃ μυθολογοῦσιν Ἡρακλέα πλήξαντα τῇ κορύνῃ τὰς πλάκας τοῦ ὄρους ἀναβαλεῖν. ὁ δὲ Κραγαλεύς οὗτος ἐγεγόνει γηραιὸς ἤδη καὶ τοῖς ἐγχωρίοις ἐνομίζετο δίκαιος εἶναι καὶ φρόνιμος. καὶ αὐτῷ

Forsén 2021: 230, 249 has shown: Molossia, for instance, suffered less than Thesprotia, and it is not very likely that the Romans had the capacity and the willingness to transfer 150,000 slaves to Italy. Although it remains clear that Roman punishment was severe, we must assume that there was a lower level of destruction than suggested by the literary sources.

18 See n. 70. The political structure and settlement pattern of the entire region do not seem to have changed much for more than 130 years (Fantasia 2017: 188-89; Forsén 2021: 250), even the integration of Epeiros in the new Roman province of Macedonia in 146 BC brought "no great changes" (Forsén 2021: 235). It was only when Octavian founded his 'victory city' of Nikopolis after the battle of Actium and most of Ambrakia's inhabitants were transferred to the new settlement (Strab. 7.7.6; Anth. Pal. 9.533; Paus. 5.23.3; see Fantasia 2017: 190-97) that we find a larger break in the settlement pattern of the region. Although we still hear of Ambrakia in the second century AD (CIG II 1801; SEG 39.1868), it never reached its former political significance after that.

19 Ov. Met. 13.713-14 briefly summarizes the story as *certatam lite deorum Ambraciam*.

νέμοντι βοῦς προσάγουσιν Ἀπόλλων καὶ Ἄρτεμις καὶ Ἡρακλῆς κριθησόμενοι περὶ Ἀμβρακίας τῆς ἐν Ἠπείρῳ.

καὶ ὁ μὲν Ἀπόλλων ἑαυτῷ προσήκειν ἔλεγε τὴν πόλιν ... Ἄρτεμις δὲ τὸ μὲν νεῖκος κατέπαυε τὸ πρὸς τὸν Ἀπόλλωνα, παρ' ἐκόντος δ' ἡξίου τὴν Ἀμβρακίαν ἔχειν· ἐφίεσθαι γὰρ τῆς πόλεως κατὰ πρόφασιν τοιαύτην ... ὁ δὲ Ἡρακλῆς ἀπεδείκνυνεν Ἀμβρακίαν τε καὶ τὴν σύμπασαν Ἠπειρον οὔσαν ἑαυτοῦ· πολεμήσαντας γὰρ αὐτῷ Κελτοὺς καὶ Χάονας καὶ Θεσπρωτοὺς καὶ σύμπαντας Ἠπειρώτας ὑπ' αὐτοῦ κρατηθῆναι, ὅτε τὰς Γηρυόνης βοῦς συνελθόντες <ἐβούλευον> ἀφελέσθαι, χρόνῳ δ' ὕστερον λαὸν ἔποικον ἔλθεῖν ἐκ Κορίνθου καὶ τοὺς πρόσθεν ἀναστήσαντας Ἀμβρακίαν συνοικίσει. Κορίνθιοι δὲ πάντες εἰσὶν ἄφ' Ἡρακλέους.

ἅ διακούσας ὁ Κραγαλεὺς ἔγνω τὴν πόλιν Ἡρακλέους εἶναι. Ἀπόλλων δὲ κατ' ὀργὴν ἀψάμενος αὐτοῦ τῇ χειρὶ πέτρον ἐποίσεν ἵνα περ εἰστήκει. Ἀμβρακιῶται δὲ Ἀπόλλωνι μὲν Σωτῆρι θύουσι, τὴν δὲ πόλιν Ἡρακλέους καὶ τῶν ἐκείνου παίδων νενομίκασι, Κραγαλεῖ δὲ μετὰ τὴν ἐορτὴν Ἡρακλέους ἔντομα θύουσιν ἄχρι νῦν.

Kragaleus [the king of Dryopis, i.e. Ozolian Lokris] was at this time already an old man and was considered by his countrymen to be just and wise. While he was pasturing his cattle, Apollon, Artemis, and Herakles introduced themselves to him since they wanted a decision about Ambrakia in Epeiros.

Apollon said that the city belonged to him ... [*He gives his reasons.*] Artemis on her part was for keeping her dispute with Apollon within bounds, but claimed that she had acquired Ambrakia with his consent ... [*She makes her claims.*] Herakles in his turn put forward the argument that Ambrakia and the whole of Epeiros belonged to him. All the peoples that had made war with him [when he was mortal], Keltoi, Chaonians, Thesprotians, and all the Epeirotes, had been defeated by him after they had formed an alliance to steal the cattle of Geryon. Some time after, a settlement of colonists from Corinth had expelled the original settlement of colonists and founded Ambrakia. All the Corinthians are descended from Herakles.

Kragaleus heard these arguments through to the end and recognized that the city belonged to Herakles. Apollon became enraged,

touched Kragaleus with his hand and turned him into a stone where he stood. The Ambrakiots sacrifice to Apollon as the Saviour, but they have acknowledged that the city was that of Herakles and his sons.<sup>20</sup>

Obviously, the passage was at least in part intended to give an *aition* for the veneration of Apollon Soter in Ambrakia and to establish Corinth's status as the city's metropolis.<sup>21</sup> Generally, the story must have pleased the Ambrakiots, as three main deities of the Greek pantheon are so interested in the city that they fight over it.<sup>22</sup> On the other hand, it reflected the overall political constellation in which the city found itself, a constellation which was characterized by various foreign claims to the possession of the city. I will identify some key elements of those claims in what follows.

In order to do so, we have to take a look at the sources of our author. Fortunately, Antoninus gives them away quite frankly at the beginning of the passage:

Ἰστορεῖ Νίκανδρος Ἑτεροιομένων ἅ καὶ Ἀθανάδας Ἀμβρακικοῖς.

Nikandros tells this tale in the first book of his *Metamorphoses*, as does Athanadas in his *Ambrakika*.<sup>23</sup>

It is striking that two authors and their works are named, as it is not a common practice in the *Metamorphoses* to refer to more than one source.<sup>24</sup> It is therefore likely that we are dealing with a composite text

20 Ant. Lib. Met. 4 (Transl. F. Celoria).

21 Fantasia 2011; 2017: 105-21 has analyzed the episode in detail. On Corinth's role in the region, see Graham 1964: 118 ("colonial empire"), Stickler 2010: 265, Quantin 2012 ("diaspora"), Kaponis 2020, Scharff 2022: 290.

22 Fantasia 2011.

23 Ant. Lib. Met. 4 (Transl. F. Celoria).

24 Out of 41 stories only seven have more than one source mentioned. In addition to Ant. Lib. Met. 4, those stories include Met. 10, 12, 20, 23, 25 and 35. Except from Met. 23 which has six they all name two sources. However, "[t]he extent to which he [sc. Antoninus Liberalis] 'cribbed' from them is unknowable," as Celoria 1992: 11 rightly pointed out.



here. Athanadas' *Ambrakika* have not survived,<sup>25</sup> but the remaining fragments point to the beginning of the third century BC.<sup>26</sup> The floruit of Nikandros of Kolophon who must have picked up an already existing story can be dated either to the third or to the second century BC.<sup>27</sup>

But how could we assign individual elements of the story to one of the sources? One important element can be found, if we take a closer look at the way of how Herakles justifies his claim to the city:

ὁ δὲ Ἡρακλῆς ἀπεδείκνυεν Ἀμβρακίαν τε καὶ τὴν σύμπασαν Ἠπειρον  
οὔσαν ἑαυτοῦ· πολέμησαντας γὰρ αὐτῷ Κελτοὺς καὶ Χάονας καὶ Θεσ-  
πρωτοὺς καὶ σύμπαντας Ἠπειρώτας ὑπ' αὐτοῦ κρατηθῆναι ...

Herakles ... put forward the argument that Ambrakia and the whole of Epeiros belonged to him. All the peoples that had made war with him, Keltoi, Chaonians, Thesprotians, and all the Epeirotes, had been defeated by him ...<sup>28</sup>

It is not surprising that the winning argument in the debate is military conquest, which represented a legitimate form of land acquisition in ancient Greece.<sup>29</sup> Yet what puzzled many editors and commentators of the passage is the mention of the Keltoi among the peoples defeated by Herakles. As Francis Celoria pointed out, "[t]he Celts were not conspicuously connected with Epirus until historical times,"<sup>30</sup> which is why some scholars doubted the manuscript reading Κελτούς and suggested similar-

25 *FGrH* III 303.

26 Fantasia 2011: 506-7.

27 There were probably two poets of the name Nikandros living between 270 and 135 BC (*FGrH* 271-72; Pasquali 1913). One of them is known to have authored *Aitolika* (Cazzaniga 1973). It remains a fair assumption that the Nikandros cited by Antoninus Liberalis was a phil-Aitolian poet (Vollgraf 1909; Antonetti 1990: 58; 310 n. 83; Funke 2015: 90-91; pace Fantasia 2011).

28 *Ant. Lib. Met.* 4.

29 See, e.g., Chaniotis 2004.

30 Celoria 1992: 115; cf. Papathomopoulos 1968: 79-80.

sounding local names such as, most notably, Κελαίθους.<sup>31</sup> However, the single surviving manuscript, the codex *Palatinus Graecus* 398, has Κελτούς which is also accepted in the present authoritative edition of the *Metamorphoses*<sup>32</sup> for good reasons. Strabo understood the nation of the Iapodes as a “mixed Keltic and Illyrian tribe”.<sup>33</sup> Thus, even if there is no clear evidence that Celts actually lived in Epeiros, it is by no means certain that the assumption of a Celtic presence in the region must have seemed implausible to Antoninus Liberalis and/or his sources.<sup>34</sup>

What is more, accepting the text as it is can also help identify a key element of the political message of the story. If we take Herakles as an Aitolian hero and read the passage as an Aitolian attempt at taking part in Ambrakia’s foundation,<sup>35</sup> the mention of the Keltoi makes perfectly sense and must not be understood as an error of transmission. By naming Herakles’ opponents, the passage creates a competitive constellation, and the Keltoi must have been listed among Herakles’ adversaries because the victory over the Celts constituted a foundational moment of Aitolian history that was proudly advertised on the league’s coins. The tetradrachm (*Fig. 1*) on the reverse of which Aitolos is seated on a pile of

31 The reading was already suggested in a 17th-century edition of the *Metamorphoses* by Berkel 1674 [1677]; it has been accepted, e.g., by Oberhammer 1887: 62 n. 1 and Cazzaniga 1962. The Kelaithoi referred to by ancient authors (Kaponis 2020: 126–27) were a sub-division of the Epeirote people of the Thesprotians (Steph. Byz. s.v. Κέλαιθοι; cf. Domínguez Monedero 2018).

32 Papathomopoulos 1968: 79–80. The same is true for the commentary of Celoria 1992: 53; 115. See also Fantasia 2011: 504 n. 36.

33 Strabo 7.5.2: μέχρι τῶν Ἰαπόδων, Κελτικοῦ τε ἄμα καὶ Ἰλλυρικοῦ ἔθνους (Transl. H.C. Hamilton & W. Falconer); see Papathomopoulos 1968: 79–80.

34 This applies in particular to the third century BC, a time when the Epeirotes under Pyrrhos had recently fought the Celts (Anth. Pal. 6.130; cf. Lévêque 1957: 566; Papathomopoulos 1968: 80). We also have to bear in mind that the Celts were very often connected to Herakles (Kistler 2009: 42–45; 333–46).

35 Although the only known sanctuary of Herakles in Aitolia in Arsinoeia (Antonetti 1990: 278–80) was not a very prominent one, the hero did play a role in Aitolian myths (see e.g., Antonetti 1990: 264–65), and became a constant presence on the league’s coins from 279 BC onwards (Imhoof-Blumer 1873: 145, no. 62; Scheu 1960: no. 8; BMC 4ff.).

Galatian and Makedonian shields resting on a Celtic *karnyx* is good evidence of that.<sup>36</sup> The victory over the Celts was so prestigious that it could even be used, at least in theory, to claim Aitolian precedence over Rome.<sup>37</sup> In Rome, however, it was at the place of an earlier temple of Hercules in the Campus Martius that M. Fulvius Nobilior, confronted with the accusation of having enriched himself by looting Greek sanctuaries,<sup>38</sup> had a temple built during his triumph in 187 BC and erected a portico of Hercules Musarum, to whom he donated the statues he had taken from Ambrakia in 189 BC. Would it be too bold to assume that, for Fulvius, Herakles did not only represent Ambrakia, but also stood for the Aitolians he had fought against and celebrated a triumph over?<sup>39</sup>

What is more, Herakles' emphasis on having defeated "all the Epeirotes"<sup>40</sup> takes on a deeper meaning if situated in the context of competing Aitolian and Epeirote claims.<sup>41</sup> It also shows that the existing version cannot be an Epeirote or Makedonian one.<sup>42</sup> Herakles' victory over the

36 Antonetti 2012.

37 Just think of the late reflex of Aitolian third- and second-century BC propaganda that we find in Justin's epitome of Pompeius Trogus (Iust. 28.2.3–13; cf. Funke 2018: 114 n. 13). See also the important role the Celts played in Hellenistic propaganda in general (Kistler 2009) and in royal propaganda in particular (Strootman 2005).

38 Liv. 38.9.13.

39 Fulvius as victor over the Aitolians: Cic. *Arch.* 11.27; Liv. 40.45.6–7: *M. Fulvius Nobilior, qui ex Aetolis triumphaverat*. On Fulvius' campaign against the Aitolians and the debate in the Senate concerning his triumph, see Östenberg 2009: 44 and Walther 2016: 60–82, 94–125.

40 Ant. Lib. *Met.* 4.

41 A response to Aitolian claims to the ownership of Ambrakia is probably to be found in Polyb. 4.61.6, where it is emphasized that the Epeirotes considered it "a matter of the utmost importance" to be in possession of the city. Cf. also Liv. 38.3.9: *Epirotis Ambraciam placebat aggredi ...* ("The advice of the Epeirotes was to attack Ambrakia," transl. E. T. Sage).

42 Fantasia 2011: 505–7; 2017: 105–21 has argued that Philip II had been behind the promotion of Herakles to the legendary founder of Ambrakia, and it is true that the Makedonian king Antigonos Gonatas is well-known to have won victory over the Galatians at Lysimacheia in 277 BC. However, it is also well known that he was defeated twice by Pyrrhos, king of Epeiros, afterwards, which evidently does not fit the claim of having defeated "all the Epeirotes", especially if Athanadas' artistic prime belonged to Ambrakia's golden age under Pyrrhos, as Fantasia 2011: 506 seems to assume.

Celts is therefore best understood as an element deriving from Nikandros' phil-Aitolian version of the story and probably belongs to the time of the expansion and heyday of the Aitolian League in the late third century.<sup>43</sup> This does not mean that the entire story, as we have it in the *Metamorphoses*, is a pure version of the Aitolian rendering of the myth. Since the Aitolians are not explicitly mentioned by Antoninus, other parts of the story may well have been composed before or after the Aitolian phase of the city (232-189 BC), but a victory over the Celts was such a prestigious affair that this truly Herculean deed was kept in the text after Ambrakia had left the Aitolian League.<sup>44</sup> Centered on a figure such as Herakles who was at home at almost every Greek city and kingdom including Makedonia and Epeiros,<sup>45</sup> the passage could easily be adapted to changing historical conditions.<sup>46</sup> Therefore, Herakles could indeed have been promoted to the legendary founder of Ambrakia already under Philip II, as argued by Ugo Fantasia,<sup>47</sup> before becoming an Aitolian hero in the years following 232 BC.

No doubt, myths have a history, and the story of the gods fighting over the possession of Ambrakia is one of the occasions when we stand a chance to trace political interventions in the mythical narrative through the centuries.

43 The end of the episode emphasizing the connection to Corinth, then, must be regarded as a local fabrication (Fantasia 2011) and probably goes back to Athanadas. It is important to note that Antoninus presents Herakles' actions and the Corinthian settlement as two different phases of the foundation of Ambrakia. – On the heyday of the Aitolian League in the third century BC, Scholten 2000 and Funke 2008. For the history of the *koinon* after the Antiochian War, Mitropoulos 2019.

44 For the Galatians as the most terrifying opponent of the Greeks in the third century BC, see, e.g., Kistler 2009: 31-41, and Chaniotis 2018: 58-64.

45 It is well-known that the Argeads traced their ancestry back to Herakles (Plut. *Alex.* 2.1), but he also appeared in the lineage of the Epeirote kings (e.g., in Plut. *Pyrrh.* 1.2 via Hyllos; on Aiakid representation, see Funke 2000).

46 A tragedy fragment has Herakles say about himself: Ἀργεῖος ἢ Θηβαῖος οὐ γὰρ εὖχομαι μιᾶς ἅπας μοι πύργος Ἑλλήνων πατρίς “Am I Argive or Theban? I don't pride myself on only one city. In every fortress of the Greeks I am at home” (*TrGF* II, adesp. 392 = Plut. *Mor.* 600f; cf. Ganter 2024: 40). In the case of Ambrakia's foundation story such a “fortress” was Corinth.

47 Cf. n. 42.

### III. Ambrakiot Border Management in the 160s BC

We have seen so far that the history of Ambrakia was dominated by the city being exposed to various foreign claims to power since the late fourth century BC, a political constellation clearly reflected in the story of the quarrel of the gods fighting over the possession of Ambrakia. It was only when the Romans entered the scene that those foreign claims lost their former relevance in terms of *realpolitik*. This was also the time when the cluster of Ambrakiot boundary regulations of the 160s BC came about.

At least four inscriptions explicitly referring to the borders of Ambrakia's polis territory are known. The earliest one, a fragmentary fourth-century inscription from Thyreion, contains a treaty oath sworn by the Amphilocheians, Akarnanians, and Ambrakiots.<sup>48</sup> For us, the most interesting clause is to be found in lines eight and nine which include a reference to the common use of the sea: [τᾱί δὲ θαλά]σσαι κοινᾷ χρήσθω.<sup>49</sup> No doubt, the Gulf of Ambrakia provided an ideal environment for economic disputes over fishing rights, as several scholars have observed.<sup>50</sup> Like the territory of the city, parts of the gulf served as a border area.

Even more important to our research question are the very accurate boundary regulations stipulated between Ambrakia and the small neighboring town of Charadros. The inscription including the regulations was first published in 1985 and consists of two fragments.<sup>51</sup> For prosopographic reasons and due to the appearance of "Roman magistrates" (ἄρχαὶ Ῥωμαϊκὰς) in the first part of the document,<sup>52</sup> the text is to be dated after Pydna, in the 160s BC.

48 Funke & Hallof 2013 II (SEG 68.391; Antonetti, Funke & Kolonas 2022: Thyr. 2; Thyreion, end of the fourth century BC). For exclusively historical reasons, Fantasia 2018 (cf. Fantasia 2017: 89) argues for a slightly earlier date (ca. 342 BC).

49 Funke & Hallof 2013 II, l. 8-9.

50 Strauch 1996: 137; Dany 1999: 233-34; Fantasia 2017: 183.

51 *Staatsverträge* IV 665a + b (SEG 35.665; ed. pr. Cabanes & Andréou 1985; see also the additions of Cabanes 1985; Ambrakia, shortly after 167 BC).

52 Prosopographic reasons: Habicht 1986; "Roman magistrates": *Staatsverträge* IV 665a (SEG 35.665), l. 38.

Following a long dating clause of almost fifteen lines, the beginning of the border regulations is visibly marked by a *vacat* (Fig. 2).<sup>53</sup> That way, the design of the text emphasizes the specific content of the boundary regulation, the ὅρια τᾶς χώρας clause. It is interesting to note that the first point of reference for the boundary regulations is represented by walls which had been understood by the editors as those of Ambrakia.<sup>54</sup> Vivi Karatzeni, however, has shown that they must have meant the walls of Herakleia, a settlement which is also referred to in the inscription, since otherwise the measurements mentioned in the inscription would not add up.<sup>55</sup> In any case, the fact that walls provide the first fixed point for the course of the boundary line is a nice reflection of the strategic importance of the area.<sup>56</sup>

No doubt, the (high) degree of regulation provided by the inscription is remarkable.<sup>57</sup> Thus it is emphasized more than once that the connection between the τέρμῳνες should be “a straight line” (κατ’ εὐθύ).<sup>58</sup> A river between both cities is designated a common property ([ὁ ποταμὸς] κοινὸς ἔστω),<sup>59</sup> and it is stipulated that both parties “shall be allowed to

53 *Staatsverträge* IV 665a (SEG 35.665), l. 16–18: ἐπὶ τοῖσιδε *vac.* ὥστε εἴμεν ὅρια τᾶς χώρας τοῖς Ἀμβρακιώταις καὶ Χαραδρεί[[ταις, ἐκάτεραι αἱ πόλεις ἔκριν]αν· καὶ ἀπομετρηθέντος πλέθρου, ἀπὸ τᾶς γωνίας τᾶς πρώτας τοῦ τείχεος | [τῶν Ἀμβρακιωτᾶν.

54 According to Liv. 38.4.4, they represented a quite impressive fortification in the first half of the second century BC: *muro quoque firmo saepta erat, patente in circuitu paulo amplius quattuor milia passuum* “it (sc. Ambrakia) was also protected by a strong wall, extending in circumference a little more than four miles” (transl. E. T. Sage).

55 Karatzeni 1999; see also McNerney forthcoming.

56 On the exact course of the border Andreou 1996–1997; cf. Salviat 1997. For the border between Ambrakia and Orraon which is also mentioned in the inscription, see Karatzeni 1999; on Orraon (modern Ammotopos): Rinaldi 2019. For all topographical aspects of the inscription and their influence on the interpretation of the entire document McNerney forthcoming is indispensable reading.

57 Freitag 2007: 58–59.

58 *Staatsverträge* IV 665a (SEG 35.665), l. 19, 22; for parallels see Ager 1996: 17 n. 48, and Harter-Uibopuu 1998: no. 6, l. 7; no. 7, l. 2, 12, 20; no. 8A, 24, 25–26, 28, 33; 8B, 11, 12; no. 9A, l. 2. On the course of Greek borders, see Daverio Rocchi 1988, 2015, Rousset 1994, and Freitag 2007.

59 *Staatsverträge* IV 665a (SEG 35.665), l. 29.

rent out their land” only to the other party and to those who have *symbola* with the other party.<sup>60</sup> This provision is explained by the fact that most of this land was marginal land in the border region (ἔσχατιαί) between the two communities which is why the neighbor was affected by the activities of the tenants, such as shepherds, charcoal burners, and woodcutters – typical cross-border commuters that is.<sup>61</sup> At the end of the document, the contracting parties did not even forget to regulate in detail how the boundary stones should be set: a committee of ‘border officers’ (τερμασταί) made up of equal numbers of representatives from both sides was appointed in order to walk along the boundary and determine the exact position of the *horoi*.<sup>62</sup>

Beyond the generally high degree of regulation, two clauses are of particular interest: first, the Ambrakiots were able to pay for the boundary regulations including the boundary stones and the field surveyor.<sup>63</sup> Although the devastation of the Third Makedonian War had brought about a very tough period for the region, Ambrakia was more or less spared, since it enjoyed the privilege of a *civitas libera* since 187 BC and served as the Romans’ base of operations in the war.<sup>64</sup> So when the Ambrakiots asked the Thessalian League for money some time in between 179 and 165 BC,<sup>65</sup> the situation was far from being hopeless for them,

60 *Staatsverträge* IV 665b, l. 12-13: [ἔχουσίαν ἔχόντω οἱ Χ]αραδρίται ἐγδιδόμεν τὰν ἰδίαν χώραν ξένοις [ποθ’ οὖς | ἐντὶ σύμβολα τοῖς τε Ἀμβρακιώταις καὶ Χαραδρίταις καὶ Χαραδρίταις], ἄλλοι δὲ μηθενί.

61 Charneux & Tréheux 1988: 369-70; see also Errington’s comments at *Staatsverträge* IV 665a.

62 *Staatsverträge* IV 665b, l. 22-25: [εἰ δὲ τί κα διαφέρωνται ἅ πόλις τῶ]ν Ἀμβρακιωτῶν καὶ ἅ πόλις τῶν Χαραδριτῶν ἐν τῷ μετὰ Διο[[φάνην τὸν Δαιμάχου μηνὶ τῷ Ἀ]ρτεμισίοι τῷ τριακάδι καταστασάντω ἑκάτεροι παρ’ αὐτῶν ἄν[[δρας τερμαστὰς τρεῖς(?) οὕστινα]ς διασαφούντω ποτ’ αὐτοσαυτοὺς οἱ ἄρχοντες οἱ παρ’ ἑκατέρᾳ [τῶν πόλεων]. Cf. Freitag 2007: 58-59. On similar designations for judges in interstate arbitrations including τερμαστήρες and ὀρισταί, Ager 1996: 13 n. 31.

63 *Staatsverträge* IV 665b, l. 31-32: παρε[[χόντω δὲ οἱ Ἀμβρακιῶται τὰν] εἰς τοὺς τέρμονας δαπάναν καὶ τοῖ γεωμέτραι. οἱ Ἀμβρακιῶται is an addition to the text, but it is the most plausible one and widely accepted among scholars.

64 *Civitas libera*: Liv. 38.44.4: *in libertate essent ac legibus suis uterentur*; cf. Gruen 1984: 154. Charadros unlike other parts of Epeiros was not destroyed as well; see Errington’s comments on *Staatsverträge* IV 665 (cf. Forsén 2021: 231).

65 SEG 26.688 (Itonion, ca. 179-165 BC [Habicht 1976]); cf. Graninger 2011: 65.

which is why the request is probably not so much to be seen as a financial cry for help but as an attempt at fostering existing political relations with the region. This is in line with another provision of the treaty between Ambrakia and Charadros which is of special interest here: the publication clause. It supports the above interpretation by providing for the erection of a stele also in the sanctuary of Apollo Kerdoios in Larisa.<sup>66</sup>

The close political ties between Ambrakia and Thessaly in the 170s and 160s BC have already been stressed by Christian Habicht in 1976.<sup>67</sup> They may have been rooted in the fact that the Ambrakiots and the Thessalians shared a similar political situation: both suffered from the wars of the second century but profited from the Roman conquest in the long run. The Thessalians had already openly welcomed the Roman victory with the first celebration of their ‘Freedom Games’ (Eleutheria) in 196 BC.<sup>68</sup> For the Ambrakiots, the Roman invasion meant the liberation from other claims to their territory and thus the political leeway to act more independently with regard to their borders.

On the other hand, the Ambrakiots must have realized what was going on in their immediate neighborhood in Epeiros (and Makedonia), and it is a fair assumption that at least some of them were “terrified” by the behavior of the Roman legions in the area, as Jeremy McNerney convincingly argues in a forthcoming article.<sup>69</sup> And yet, the history of a contested city had taught the people of Ambrakia that territorial changes also produce new opportunities: no longer having to serve as a bone of contention between Aitolian, Makedonian, and Epeirote claims to power could

66 Note that no stele is to be erected in Dodona (as it was the case, for instance, in *Staatsverträge* III 480, l. 15 [Aitolians-Akarnanians, Olympia and Thermos, 263/2 BC]). On the meaning of the publication of a version of the treaty in the sanctuary of Apollo Kerdoios in Larisa, see Graninger 2011: 143–45.

67 These close relations can be seen most clearly in a decree of the Thessalian *koinon* concerning Ambrakia (*SEG* 26.688; Itonion, ca. 179–165 BC; see Habicht 1976). They are also recognizable in the circulation of coins from Ambrakia and Thessaly (Kaponis 2020: 259, 270–71, 436, table 2A) and in mutual influences in the area of cult and religion (Kaponis 2020: 335–36).

68 Graninger 2011: 74–85 and now Graninger 2024.

69 McNerney forthcoming, who sees the series of boundary treaties of the Ambrakiots in the 160s as a demonstrative demarcation from their Epeirote neighbors in order to show their support of the Roman cause.



only improve the city's strategic position. This is probably why they adapted so quickly to the new political circumstances and may have already used the presence of the Roman garrison under Q. Mucius in 170/69 BC as a chance to get deeper in touch with members of the elite of the new superpower of the Mediterranean. Would it be too bold to assume that some of the "Roman magistrates" mentioned in the Charadros treaty had already spent some time in Ambrakia during the winter of 170/69 BC? Regardless of whether fear or realistic insight into the political climate at the time was the main motor behind their behavior, it is striking that the Ambrakiots made good use of the new political realities – and had the political leeway to do so within certain limits. The success of their policy could be indicated by the plausible assumption that the city was chosen to organize the prestigious athletic festival of the Naia in the middle of the second century BC.<sup>70</sup>

In any case, the Ambrakiots were clever enough to include the Romans in their border agreements of the 160s, as also becomes clear in another Ambrakiot boundary regulation belonging to the same chronological context. In the mid-second century BC, the Roman Senate delegated an interstate arbitration to a commission of five magistrates (*archontes*) from Korkyra, who gave their judgement in a border dispute between Ambrakia and Athamania.<sup>71</sup> The surviving inscription that consists of three fragments stems from Korkyra and includes both, a letter of the Roman magistrate P. Cornelius Blasio asking the Korkyraians to

70 The assumption is based on the ingenious restoration of an agonistic inscription from Rhodes by Cabanes 2014–2015, who argued that one of the victories of the successful Rhodian heavyweight Pythion was won in the Νᾶα ἐν Ἀμ[βρακίᾳ] (SEG 58.816, l. 10 [Rhodes, 167–146 BC]). A different reading Νᾶα ἐν ἁμ[έρᾳ μιᾷ] referring to two victories won on one and the same day at the Naia (of Dodona) was proposed by Strasser 2015, who also preferred an earlier date of the inscription (between 185 and 175 BC; but note BE 2017, 264 [D. Knoepfler]). Strasser's restoration has been rejected with good reasons by Badoud, Fincker & Moretti 2016: 414–16, who consequently argued for a date of the inscription between 167 and 146 BC; see also Domínguez Monejero 2022: 71. The fact that the stele of the treaty between Ambrakia and Charadros was not set up in Dodona (cf. n. 66) may be seen as a hint that the sanctuary that was destroyed by the Aitolians in 219 BC also severely suffered at the hands of the troops of Aemilius Paullus in 168 BC.

71 IG IX 1<sup>2</sup>, 4, 796 (Korkyra, mid-second century BC); five *archontes*: fr. B, l. 8–9.

arbitrate,<sup>72</sup> and the judgement (κρίμα) of the commission from Korkyra.<sup>73</sup> The first 24 lines of fragment B had remained a phantom of the scholarly debate for a long time and were only published in 2001 in connection with the relevant corpus of the *Inscriptiones Graecae*.<sup>74</sup>

In addition to the number of judges,<sup>75</sup> we learn from the new fragment that the arbitration process included two *periēgēseis* (descriptions of boundary inspections of the territory) of the Ambrakiots and the Athamanes.<sup>76</sup> In arbitrations of boundary disputes, the advocates of both parties often (though not always) showed the judges the territory in question. The survey could take place either before or after hearing the evidence,<sup>77</sup> and it was precisely in interstate arbitrations conducted by small commissions that such inspections became frequent.<sup>78</sup> Of course, this was for practical reasons, since a *periēgēsis* always included some form of travel for the judges which could have got quite expensive in cases of larger tribunals. Therefore, such inspections of the territory were characteristic for small-commission arbitration which is why it

72 IG IX 1<sup>2</sup>, 4, 796 A (Ager 1996: no. 131, I); for parallel cases where the Romans delegated a Greek polis to arbitrate see Davies 2019: 72–73 n. 76.

73 IG IX 1<sup>2</sup>, 4, 796 B (Ager 1996: no. 131 II including only l. 25–34).

74 IG IX 1<sup>2</sup>, 4.

75 IG IX 1<sup>2</sup>, 4, 796 B, l. 8: ἄνδρας πέντε.

76 *Periēgēseis*: l. 17: Ἀμβρακιωτῶν περιάγησις and l. 25: [Ἀ]θαμάνων περι[άγησις]. The procedure of such land inspections that resulted in the boundary descriptions is known from other cases of interstate arbitration quite well. Among the parallels that include another inscription from Korkyra (IG IX 1<sup>2</sup>, 4, 795 [Ager 1996: no. 118], l. 14–16 [Mondaia and Azoros, Korkyra, shortly after 179 BC]) are SEG 18.238 (Ager 1996: no. 30; Magnetto 1997: no. 29) l. 9 (Melitaia, Chalai, and Peuma, Delphi, ca. 270–260 BC), SEG 18.238 (Ager 1996: no. 31; Magnetto 1997: no. 30), l. 19 (Pereia, Phylladon, and Peuma, Delphi, ca. 270–260 BC), SEG 23.178 (Ager 1996: no. 44; Harter-Uibopuu 1998: no. 4), l. 5 (Argos and Kleonai, Nemea, ca. 229 BC), Syll.<sup>3</sup> 546A (Ager 1996: no. 55; Magnetto 1997: no. 69), l. 10 (Melitaia and Xyniai, Delphi, 214/13 BC), and IG IV<sup>2</sup> 1, 75 (Ager 1996: no. 63; Magnetto 1997: no. 41; Harter-Uibopuu 1998: no. 10), l. 11 (Hermione and Epidauros, Epidauros, ca. 200 BC). The procedure could also be referred to as ὑφηγήσις (Ager 1996: no. 88 II, B, l. 4 [Amphissa, Delphi, Myania, and Antikyra, Delphi, 190 BC]) or ἐφήγησις (F.Delphes III 4, 4, 354 [Ager 1996: no. 129], l. 12 [Boumelita and Halai, Delphi, after 167 BC]) in the sources. Cf. Ager 1996: 14 n. 32; on the “Lokalaugenschein”, see also Harter-Uibopuu 1998: 28, 155–57.

77 Ager 1996: 14.

78 Ager 1996: 11–2; Harter-Uibopuu 1998: 28; 155–57.

does not come as a surprise that we find surveys of the territory in the case of the boundary dispute between Ambrakia and Athamania, which was arbitrated by five judges only.

The final decision (κρίσις), however, was given in Korkyra, as it is explicitly stated in the inscription.<sup>79</sup> This also means that the hearing was held there. It is not known what kind of arguments the advocates presented in front of the jury. Yet evidentiary proceedings began earlier when smaller commissions were involved than in cases of large-court arbitration, i.e. during the *periēgēseis*. The most illuminating example of this is an arbitration conducted by a commission of five Rhodian judges in a territorial dispute between Samos and Priene.<sup>80</sup> In the surviving document, the judges give detailed reasons for their decision, citing not only the evidence on both sides,<sup>81</sup> but also their assessment of the material in question, which consisted of different historical versions of a war going back to the eighth century BC.<sup>82</sup> Working “like modern historians”<sup>83</sup> the judges examined the historical material critically and decided that the sources presented by the Samians either did not match the content of what the Samians claimed or had not been written by the historian (Maiandrios of Miletus) whom the Samians had named as the author of the information. In other words, the judges applied bone-dry source criticism.

Due to the fragmentary state of our evidence, we cannot say for sure how the advocates of the Ambrakiots and Athamanians tried to win their cases with the Korkyraian judges. However, it is likely that they made good use of some kind of supplementary evidence, and, if so, there can

79 IG IX 1<sup>2</sup>, 4, 796 B, l. 13: ἡ κρίσις ὑμῖν τελεσθῆσεται ἐν Κ[ορκύραι].

80 *LPriene* 37 (Ager 1996: no. 74, I; Priene, ca. 197–190 BC).

81 Among the documents brought forward by both sides were several historians: the Samians cited Maiandrios of Miletus (*FGrHist* 491) as well as their local historians Euagon (*FGrHist* 535), Olympichos (*FGrHist* 537), Ouliades (*FGrHist* 538), and Douris (*FGrHist* 76), whereas the Prieneans supported their case by quoting Theopompos of Chios (*FGrHist* 115), Kreophylos (*FGrHist* 417), and Eualkes (*FGrHist* 418) of Samos.

82 The judges' evaluation of the Samian evidence: *LPriene* 37 (Ager 1996: no. 74, I), l. 118–57.

83 Chaniotis 2004: 201.

be no doubt that the Korkyraian judges examined the evidence on the spot.<sup>84</sup>

The *periēgēseis* allowed the advocates to discuss the matter on site with the judges, thus entering into an evidence-based conversation early in the process. There were clearly different informal rules and conditions for arbitrations before small commissions and for those in front of large *dikastēria* up to several hundred judges.<sup>85</sup> Generally speaking, interstate arbitrations reveal a strong commitment to guarantee equal opportunities for the parties involved in the dispute. However, in cases of large-court arbitration without *periēgēsis*, the course of the hearing was probably regulated even more strictly. Thus it is maybe no coincidence that we find the famous water clocks used to ensure the same amount of speaking time given to the advocates of both parties precisely in a hearing conducted in front of a large tribunal of 204 judges.<sup>86</sup> In such hearings, the speeches of the advocates were even more significant than in arbitrations in front of small commissions and emotional arguments are likely to have played a major role. By implication, all of this shows what an important function the *periēgēseis* had in cases of small-commission arbitration.

In the final decision of the document, concrete references of the border descriptions included the mention of adjacent regions such as Molossia and toponyms such as Euryna.<sup>87</sup> The fact that the precise course of the border is three times referenced as καθ' ἄκρην ('along the mountain ridge') is good indication of the mountainous character of the border area between both communities.<sup>88</sup> However, it also shows how the geomorphology of the area influenced the boundary regulation. While in the treaty with Charadros the course of the border between two boundary

84 Note that it was part of the judges' oath in Ager 1996: no. 21 to check the validity of the evidence properly.

85 On the differences between arbitration by a small number of judges and by larger *dikastēria*, see Ager 1996: 11-12, and Harter-Uibopuu 1998: 139-48.

86 204 judges: IG XII 4, 5, 4044 B, l. 131-33 (Ager 1996: no. 21; Kalymna, early second century BC [date according to IG]); water clocks: IG XII 4, 5, 4044 A, l. 39-41, 72-74.

87 IG IX 1<sup>2</sup>, 4, 796 B, l. 19 (Molossia) and 20 (Euryna).

88 IG IX 1<sup>2</sup>, 4, 796 B, l. 20, 23 (καθ' ἄκρην), 32. On the exact course of the border: Andreou 1996-1997. For the frequent use of peaks and mountain ridges as reference points in boundary regulations, see Rousset 1994: 117; cf. also Freitag 2007: 54.

stones was supposed to run “in a straight line” (κατ’ εὐθύ), in the boundary regulation with the Athamanes the border is to follow the course of the mountain ridge (καθ’ ἄκρην). There was more than one way for the Ambrakiots to demarcate the borders of their territory.

In any case, fragmentary as the inscription is, the surviving lines of the document show that the initiative for the arbitration came from the Ambrakiots and Athamanes themselves the Roman praetor P. Cornelius Blasio being our main witness:

πρεσβευ|ταὶ Ἀμβρακιῶται καὶ | Ἀθαμᾶνες ἐμοὶ προσ|ήλθοσαν, ἵν’  
αὐτοῖς σύγ|κλητον δῶ· ἐγὼ αὐτοῖς | σύγκλητον ἔδωκα.

Envoys of the Ambrakiots and the Athamanes have come to me that I may give them (access to the) senate. I have given them (access to the) senate.<sup>89</sup>

It is interesting to note that, with the Korkyraians, traditional enemies of the Ambrakiots are chosen and accepted as arbitrators.<sup>90</sup> Yet the Korkyraians seem to have been quite eager to gain an international reputation as trustworthy judges in this period.<sup>91</sup> Beyond that, a proxeny decree for Pausanias from Ambrakia indicates that the political relations between both poleis had improved in the second century.<sup>92</sup>

89 IG IX 1<sup>2</sup>, 4, 796 A, l. 5-10. Although Blasio obviously enjoys the presentation of his role as *patronus* very much here, we do not have reason to doubt that the diplomatic negotiations proceeded as described. The Ambrakiots and Athamanes must have been much more interested in the concrete course of the border line than the Romans were who applied their typical policy of delegation and restraint actively intervening only when absolutely necessary.

90 Van Wijk 2024 has recently shown for the Athenian-Boiotian relations that such traditional enmities were not always key when it came to everyday interstate decision-making.

91 See IG IX 1<sup>2</sup>, 4, 795 (Ager 1996: no. 118 [Mondaia and Azoros, Korkyra, shortly after 179 BC]) where among the three arbitrators appears Xenophantos, son of Dameas, from Korkyra. A model for such ambitions of the Korkyraians could be seen in the well-known case of the Rhodians, who frequently acted as arbitrators and mediators in the third and second centuries BC (see Ager 1991; 1996: 11, 207).

92 IG IX 1<sup>2</sup>, 4, 791 (Korkyra, second century BC).

In 166 BC, there was then a third boundary regulation of the time regarding the borders of Ambrakia.<sup>93</sup> In this case, the other party of the dispute was represented by the Akarnanians. The inscription is firmly dated by the appearance of the Athenian archon Nikosthenes in the first line of the document. Again a commission of five foreign judges, this time stemming from Athens, was appointed to decide the conflict.<sup>94</sup> As in the treaty with Charadros, an oath figured prominently in the inscription. However, while the oath in the Charadros treaty was a joint oath of both parties in order to protect the entire agreement,<sup>95</sup> the oath in the document from Athens is best understood as an oath taken by the Athenian judges.<sup>96</sup> The difference between the groups of oath takers explains the divergent positions of the oaths at the beginning and at the end of the respective documents. Unfortunately, the rest of the text remains too fragmentary to draw further conclusions.<sup>97</sup>

All in all, Sheila Ager is right in assuming that the people of Ambrakia “were seeking to redraw” the city’s boundaries “in all directions”<sup>98</sup> in the 160s. In contrast, other scholars have rather emphasized Roman agency,<sup>99</sup> and there can be no doubt that Roman weapons had to provide the necessary political freedom that made the cluster of boundary regulations possible. And yet, I cannot but sense a local Ambrakiot impulse behind this sudden explosion of border-management initiatives. After years of Epeirote and Aitolian domination, as expressed in the myth of the quarrel of the gods, the people of Ambrakia seized the opportunity to deal with their borders in their own way.

93 Ager 1996: no. 132 (Akarnanians and Ambrakiots, Athens, 166 BC).

94 We already find an Athenian delegation seeking to arbitrate (though on an informal level) in a conflict involving the Ambrakiots in 189 BC (Polyb. 21.29).

95 *Staatsverträge* IV 665b, l. 45–50.

96 On the role of oaths in interstate arbitration see Scharff forthcoming.

97 However, I see no compelling reason why the inscription should have referred to a private dispute, which was considered a possibility by Fantasia 2017: 182–83.

98 Ager 1996: 370.

99 Cabanes 2010; Errington in his comments ad *Staatsverträge* IV 665: “auf römische Anregung.”

#### IV. A City of Borders – Some Concluding Remarks

Borders clearly played a decisive role in Ambrakia's history, and it was of crucial importance for the city's well-being to manage them properly. However, situated at the intersection of Epeirote, Aitolian, and Akarnanian interests for most of their history, the Ambrakiots did not have the autonomy to do so. The story of the quarrel of the gods fighting for the possession of the city must be read as an illustration of those foreign political interests in the city. In important parts of its surviving version, the myth represents Aitolian claims to the city and belongs to the context of Aitolian imperialism.<sup>100</sup> It is the tale of a city in between.<sup>101</sup> For a polis such as Ambrakia located in the border areas of federal states and object to diverging territorial claims of its neighbors, a world dominated by Rome provided a political chance: the opportunity to overcome the city's isolated position by a border-management initiative that mainly had to take into account one major player. Despite the general unrest caused by Roman expansion in the region, it should be noted that, from an Ambrakiot perspective, federal states were not necessarily guarantors of interstate stability, but rather posed a threat to it. Ambrakia's strategic position undoubtedly improved under Roman rule.

Therefore, the Ambrakiot boundary regulations of the 160s BC can be regarded as an expression of the city's newly achieved political leeway. The Ambrakiots had come into a position to regulate their own borders – and they did so effectively and with great enthusiasm, including various political, economic, and religious activities. In a nutshell, Ambrakiot politics had essentially become border politics in the 160s.

100 On the Aitolians' "federal imperialism" Rzepka 2019; see also Scholten 2000 and Funke 2008.

101 On the surface, this means between the fighting gods; on a metaphorical level, however, it clearly refers to a position between the diverging interests of strong neighbors.

## BIBLIOGRAPHY

- Ager, S.L. 1991. 'Rhodes. The Rise and Fall of a Neutral Diplomat' *Historia* 40, 10-41.
- Ager, S. L. 1996. *Interstate Arbitrations in the Greek World, 337-90 B.C.* Berkeley, Los Angeles & London.
- Andreou, I. 1996-1997. 'Τα ὁμόλογα των Αμβρακιωτών και η ιστορική τοπογραφία της νοτιοανατολικής Ηπείρου' *AD* 51-52, 141-72.
- Antonetti, C. 1990. *Les Étolien. Image et religion.* Paris.
- Antonetti, C. 2012. 'Aitolos and Aitolia: Ethnic Identity per imagines' in M. Offenmüller (ed.) *Identitätsbildung und Identitätsstiftung in griechischen Gesellschaften.* Graz, 183-200.
- Antonetti, C., P. Funke & L. Kolonas 2022. *Epigraphische Sammlungen aus Westgriechenland. Collezioni epigrafiche della Grecia occidentale, II: Die epigraphische Sammlung des archäologischen Museums von Thyrio. La Collezione epigrafica del Museo archeologico di Thyrio (in Zusammenarbeit mit/in collaborazione con D. Baldassarra, C. Biagetti, E. Cavalli, F. Crema, K. Freitag, M. Haake, K. Hallof, K. Knäpper, S. Scharff, D. Summa.* Bonn.
- Badoud, N., M. Fincker & J.-C. Moretti 2016. 'Les monuments érigés à Délos et à Athènes en l'honneur de Ménodôros, pancratiaste et lutteur' *BCH* 139-140, 345-416.
- Beck, H. 1997. *Polis und Koinon. Untersuchungen zur Geschichte und Struktur der griechischen Bundesstaaten im 4. Jahrhundert v. Chr.* Stuttgart.
- Berkel, A. 1674 [1677]. *Antonini Liberalis transformationum congeries.* Leiden.
- Cabanes, P. 1979. 'Frontière et rencontre de civilisations dans la Grèce du Nord-Ouest' *Ktèma* 4, 183-99.
- Cabanes, P. 1985. 'Le règlement frontalier entre les cités d'Ambracie et de Charadros: Compléments' *BCH* 109, 753-57.
- Cabanes, P. 2010. 'Rome et la délimitation des frontières de la cité d'Ambracie, après la troisième guerre de Macédoine (172-168 avant J.-C.)' in L. Lamoine, C. Berrendonner & M. Cébeillac-Gervasoni (eds.) *La praxis municipale dans l'Occident romain.* Clermont-Ferrand, 113-26.
- Cabanes, P. 2014-2015. 'Les Naia célébrés à Ambracie?' *Dodone(hist)* 43-44, 65-70.
- Cabanes, P. & J. Andréou 1985. 'La règlement frontalier entre les cités d'Ambracie et de Charadros' *BCH* 109, 499-544.



- Cazzaniga, I. 1962. *Antoninus Liberalis: Metamorphoseon synagoge*. Milan.
- Cazzaniga, I. 1973. 'Gli Aetolika di Nicandro: esegesi dei frammenti.' *ASNP* s. III 3.2, 357-80.
- Celoria, F. 1992. *The Metamorphoses of Antoninus Liberalis. A Translation with a Commentary*. London & New York.
- Chaniotis, A. 2004. 'Justifying Territorial Claims in Classical and Hellenistic Greece: The Beginnings of International Law' in E.M. Harris & L. Rubinstein (eds.) *The Law and the Courts in Ancient Greece*. London, 185-213.
- Chaniotis, A. 2018. *Age of Conquests. The Greek World from Alexander to Hadrian (336 BC - AD 138)*. London.
- Charneux, P. & J. Tréheux 1988. 'Sur le règlement frontalier entre Ambracie et Charadros' *BCH* 112, 359-73.
- Dany, O. 1999. *Akarnanien im Hellenismus. Geschichte und Völkerrecht in Nordwestgriechenland*. Munich.
- Daverio Rocchi, G. 1988. *Frontiera e confini nella Grecia antica*. Rome.
- Daverio Rocchi, G. 2015. 'Systems of Borders in Ancient Greece' in S. Bianchetti, M. Cataudella & H.-J. Gehrke (eds.) *Brill's Companion to Ancient Geography: The Inhabited World in Greek and Roman Tradition*, Leiden & Boston, 58-77.
- Davies, S. 2019. *Rome, Global Dreams, and the International Origins of an Empire*. Leiden & Boston.
- Domínguez Monedero, A.J. 2018. 'New Developments and Tradition in Epirus: The Creation of the Molossian State' in A.J. Domínguez Monedero (ed.) *Politics, territory and identity in Ancient Epirus*, Pisa, 1-42.
- Domínguez Monedero, A.J. 2022. 'Los festivales de Zeus Naios en Dodona' in R. Gordillo Hervás, E. Ferrer Albelda & Á. Pereira Delgado (eds.) *Compitiendo para los dioses. Los rituales agonísticos en el mundo antiguo*, Sevilla, 59-76.
- Dreizehnter, A. 1978. *Die rhetorische Zahl. Quellenkritische Untersuchungen anhand der Zahlen 70 und 700*. Munich.
- Fantasia, U. 2011. 'Eracle ad Ambracia e dintorni' in L. Breglia, A. Moleti & M. L. Napolitano (eds.) *Ethne, identità 'e tradizioni: la 'terza' Grecia e l'Occidente, I*. Pisa, 497-519.
- Fantasia, U. 2017. *Ambracia dai Cipselidi ad Augusto: contributo alla storia della Grecia nord-occidentale fino alla prima età imperiale*. Pisa.

- Fantasia, U. 2018. 'Ambracia e l'Acarnania nel IV secolo a.C. (a proposito di un nuovo documento epigrafico)' in M. Intrieri (ed.) *Koinonia. Studi di storia antica offerti a Giovanna De Sensi Sestito*. Rome, 497-511.
- Forsén, B. 2021. 'Destruction, Survival and Colonisation. Effects of the Roman Arrival to Epirus' in S. Fachard & E.M. Harris (eds.) *The Destruction of Cities in the Ancient Greek World. Integrating the Archaeological and Literary Evidence*. Cambridge, 228-57.
- Freitag, K. 2007. 'Überlegungen zur Konstruktion von Grenzen im antiken Griechenland' in R. Albertz, A. Blöbaum & P. Funke (eds.) *Räume und Grenzen. Topologische Konzepte in den antiken Kulturen des östlichen Mittelmeerraums*. Munich, 49-70.
- Funke, P. 2008. 'Die Aitolier in der Ägäis. Untersuchungen zur sogenannten Seepolitik der Aitolier im 3. Jh. v. Chr.' in E. Winter (ed.) *Vom Euphrat bis zum Bosporus. Kleinasien in der Antike. Festschrift für E. Schwertheim zum 65. Geburtstag*. Bonn, 253-67.
- Funke, P. 2015. 'Aitolia and the Aitolian League' in H. Beck & P. Funke (eds.) *Federalism in Greek Antiquity*. Cambridge, 86-117.
- Funke, P. 2018. 'Poleis and Koina. Reshaping the World of the Greek States in Hellenistic Times' in H. Börm & N. Luraghi (eds.) *The Polis in the Hellenistic World*. Stuttgart, 109-30.
- Funke, P. 2024. 'Aligning the Dots: Local Self-Assertion in a Politically Expanding World' in S. Ager & H. Beck (eds.) *Localism in Hellenistic Greece*. Toronto, 201-16.
- Funke, P. & K. Hallof 2013. 'Zwei neue Staatsverträge aus Akarnanien' in F. Lang (ed.) *Interdisziplinäre Forschungen in Akarnanien*. Bonn, 55-64.
- Funke, S. 2000. *Aiakidenmythos und epeirotisches Königtum. Der Weg einer hellenischen Monarchie*. Stuttgart.
- Ganter, A. 2024. 'The Universe in a Nutshell: The Theban Herakleia' in S. Scharff (ed.) *Beyond the Big Four. Local Games in Ancient Greek Athletic Culture*. Münster, 20-44.
- Graham, A.J. 1964. *Colony and Mother City in Ancient Greece*. New York.
- Grainger, J.D. 1999. *The League of the Aitolians*. Leiden, Boston & Cologne.
- Graninger, D. 2011. *Cult and Koinon in Hellenistic Thessaly*. Leiden & Boston.
- Graninger, D. 2024. 'The Eleutheria and Larisa' in S. Scharff (ed.) *Beyond the Big Four. Local Games in Ancient Greek Athletic Culture*. Münster, 200-18.

- Gruen, E. S. 1984. *The Hellenistic World and the Coming of Rome*. Berkeley, CA.
- Habicht, C. 1976. 'Ambrakia und der Thessalische Bund zur Zeit des Perseuskrieges' in V. Milojevic & D. Theodoridis (eds.) *Demetrias, I*. Bonn, 175-80.
- Habicht, C. 1986. 'Zum Vertrag zwischen Ambrakia und Charadros' *ZPE* 62, 190-92.
- Harter-Uibopuu, K. 1998. *Das zwischenstaatliche Schiedsverfahren im achäischen Koinon. Zur friedlichen Streitbeilegung nach den epigraphischen Quellen*. Cologne, Weimar & Vienna.
- Imhoof-Blumer, F. 1873. *Monnaies grecques*. Amsterdam.
- Kaponis, A. 2020. *The Corinthian apoikiai around the Ambracian Gulf. From the Archaic Period to the Era of Philip II*. Diss. Athens.
- Karatzeni, V. 1999. 'Ambracia during the Roman era' in P. Cabanes (ed.), *L'Illyrie méridionale et l'Épire dans l'Antiquité. 3. Actes du IIIe colloque international de Chantilly (16 - 19 octobre 1996)*. Clermont-Ferrand, 241-47.
- Katsikoudis, N. 2020. 'Η απαρχή των Ναίων και η συνάφεια του αγώνος στο ιερό της Δωδώνης' in E. Gasti (ed.) *Δόσις ἀμφιλαφής: τιμητικός τόμος για την ομότιμη καθηγήτρια Κατερίνα Συνοδινού*. Ioannina, 161-96.
- Kistler, E. 2009. *Funktionalisierte Keltenbilder: die Indienstnahme der Kelten zur Vermittlung von Normen und Werten in der hellenistischen Welt*. Berlin.
- Lasagni, C. 2019. *Le realtà locali nel mondo Greco. Ricerche su poleis ed ethne della Grecia occidentale*. Alessandria.
- Lévêque, P. 1957. *Pyrrhos*. Paris.
- Magnetto, A. 1997. *Gli arbitrati interstatali greci. Introduzione, testo critico, traduzione, commento e indici, II: dal 337 al 196 a. C.* Pisa.
- McInerney, J. forthcoming. 'The Border between Ambrakia and Charadros: Negotiating Survival in the Shadow of Rome.'
- Mitropoulos, G.S. 2019. 'The Sphinx and the She-Wolf: Some Remarks on Aetolian Politics after the Antiochian War' *Klio* 101, 77-106.
- Oberhummer, E. 1887. *Akarnanien, Ambrakia, Amphilochien, Leukas im Alterthum*. Munich.
- Östenberg, I. 2009. *Staging the World. Spoils, Captives, and Representations in the Roman Triumphal Procession*. Oxford & New York.
- Papadopulu, B.N. 2023. *Αρχαιολογικό Μουσείο Άρτας*. Athens.

- Papathomopoulos, M. 1968. *Antoninus Liberalis: Les Métamorphoses, texte établi, traduit et commenté*. Paris.
- Pasquali, G. 1913. 'I due Nicandri' *SIFC* 20, 55-111.
- Quantin, F. 2012. 'Du même aux autres et de l'autre aux mêmes. Les Corinthiens sur les rives orientales de la mer Ionienne et du sud de l'Adriatique' *Pallas* 89, 247-74.
- Ravel, O. 1928. *The "Colts" of Ambracia*. New York.
- Rinaldi, E. 2019. 'Bolli su tegole a Orraon (Epiro): una nuova lettura' *PdP* 74, 183-99.
- Rousset, D. 1994. 'Les frontières des cités grecques: Premières réflexions à partir du recueil des documents épigraphiques' *CCG* 5, 97-126.
- Rzepka, J. 2019. 'Federal Imperialism: Aitolian Expansion between Protectorate, Merger, and Partition' in H. Beck, K. Buraselis & A. McAuley (eds.) *Ethnos and Koinon. Studies in Ancient Greek Ethnicity and Federalism*. Stuttgart, 167-74.
- Salviat, F. 1997. 'Convention entre Ambracie et Charadros. Le tracé de la frontière' in *Ἀφιέρωμα στον Ν.Γ. Hammond*. Thessaloniki, 393-406.
- Scharff, S. 2022. 'Against the Rules. Plurality of Oikists and New Perspectives on the Greek "Colonisation"' in M. Canevaro & J. Bernhardt (eds.) *From Homer to Solon. Continuity and Change in Archaic Greece*. Leiden & Boston, 265-300.
- Scharff, S. forthcoming. 'Δῶρα οὐκ ἔδωκα οὐδὲ δώσω. Oaths in Interstate Arbitration.'
- Scheu, F. 1960. 'Coinage Systems of Aetolia' *NumChron* 20, 37-52.
- Scholten, J. B. 2000. *The Politics of Plunder. The Aitolians and their Koinon in the Early Hellenistic Era, 279-217 BC*. Berkeley, CA.
- Stickler, T. 2010. *Korinth und seine Kolonien. Die Stadt am Isthmus im Mächtigegefüge des klassischen Griechenland*. Berlin.
- Strasser, J.-Y. 2015. 'Inscriptions agonistiques de Rhodes' *Philia* 1, 57-76.
- Strauch, D. 1996. *Römische Politik und griechische Tradition. Die Umgestaltung Nordwestgriechenlands unter römischer Herrschaft*. Munich.
- Strootman, R. 2005. 'Kings against Celts. Deliverance from Barbarians as a Theme in Hellenistic Royal Propaganda' in K.A.E. Enenkel (ed.) *The Manipulative Mode. Political Propaganda in Antiquity, a Collection of Case Studies*. Leiden & Boston, 101-41.
- Tzouvara-Souli, C. 1992. *Αυβράκια*. Arta.

- Van Wijk, R. 2024. *Athens and Boiotia. Interstate Relations in the Archaic and Classical Periods*. Cambridge.
- Vollgraf, W. 1909. *Nikander und Ovid, I*. Groningen.
- Walther, A. 2016. *M. Fulvius Nobilior. Politik und Kultur in der Zeit der Mittleren Republik*. Heidelberg.



*Fig. 1: Tetradrachm minted by the Aitolian League, 279-260 BC (Scheu 1960, no. 8). The obverse shows the head of Herakles looking to the right, with lion's skin headdress. On the reverse of the coin, we find Aitolos seated on a pile of Gallic and Makedonian shields which rest on a Gallic karnyx, with his hands Aitolos holds a spear and a sword.*

© <https://creativecommons.org/licenses/by-sa/2.5/deed.en>  
[https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:Aitolian\\_League.JPG](https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:Aitolian_League.JPG)



Fig. 2: Fragment a of the boundary regulations concluded between Ambrakia and Charadros in the 160s BC (*Staatsverträge* IV 665a [SEG 35.665]).  
 © <https://www.flickr.com/photos/dandiffendale/8403198614>  
<https://creativecommons.org/licenses/by-nc-sa/2.0/>