

THE POWER DYNAMICS OF GREEK AKROPOLEIS IN CLASSICAL LITERARY SOURCES¹

By Peter Liddel

Summary: Mogens Hansen's research on the *poleis* of Greece means that it is fitting to contribute a study of Greek *akropoleis* to this volume in his honour. In this article I survey references to *akropoleis* in classical literary texts. I show that accounts of *akropoleis* are very much intertwined with the history of human conflict, political power struggle (and its resolution), and the rise and fall of hegemonies and empires. Classical authors demonstrate the importance of *akropoleis* to the religious and institutional history of both city-states and empires in Greece and beyond the Greek *oikoumene*.

1. Introduction

When one encounters the notion of the *akropolis* in both scholarly and popular literature on ancient Greek history, it usually tends to be in reference to the famous rocky outcrop in the city of Athens. But other *akropoleis* have a high profile in Greek history, especially those at Lindos on Rhodes and at Pergamon. Beyond these, there is a multitude of less well-known *akropoleis* across the Greek world, many of which are attested in literary and epigraphical texts,² though others of which can be traced only by material remains. This paper analyses classical literary attestations of *akropoleis* in Greece and beyond. It underlines that the ancient

- 1 It is a great honour to contribute to a volume in celebration of Mogens Herman Hansen, and I am grateful to the editors for inviting me. Polly Low and I delivered a paper on the *Phrykiladai* in Copenhagen in December 2013, when we had the delightful opportunity to discuss *philotimia*, *psephismata*, the *polis* and much more with Mogens. I would also like to offer my gratitude to the two anonymous readers of this paper, whose references and comments have greatly improved it, and to Robin Rönnlund for his comments on drafts of this paper.
- 2 For a catalogue of *akropoleis* in ancient textual sources (counting 133 examples), see Rönnlund 2026: Appendix A (online-only Supplementary Material).

Greek word ἀκρόπολις is much more than a topographical designation: its spatiality bears broad significance, especially in terms of accounts of political struggle and its resolution.

Mogens Hansen on the Akropolis

Mogens Hansen never dedicated any articles specifically to the study of the Greek *akropoleis*, but the concept is touched upon in at least five senses in his work on the *polis*:³

- (1) Hansen was interested in the use of the term πόλις used synonymously with the term ἀκρόπολις, approaching it in Appendix I to a 1996 article (Hansen 1996: 34–36) and discussing the original meaning of *polis* as ‘stronghold’ or ‘citadel’.
- (2) The *IACP*, candidly, never attempts to offer a dynamic definition of the term *akropolis*, but explains it as a ‘stronghold’ (*IACP* 42).
- (3) Hansen’s *IACP* chapter on the ‘Polis as an Urban Centre’ (*IACP* 139 with n. 19) reiterates Snodgrass’ distinction between city-states which (a) emerged out of a settlement often placed on an eminence which extended downhill; and those which (b) were made up of a cluster of villages which merged into a conurbation. At the same time Hansen acknowledged that type (b) could include *akropoleis* too.
- (4) Hansen proposes that whereas *akropoleis* sometimes were reserved for public buildings and sanctuaries, they also could have habitation (*IACP* 139; cf. Hansen 1996: 34). The possibility of the Athenian *akropolis* functioning in ancient times as a settlement is asserted by Thucydides (2.15.6), but it is a subject that may repay further critical analysis.
- (5) As well as an intellectual inspiration, *IACP* remains perhaps the most important modern source for information about *akropoleis*: Hansen (*IACP* 137) identifies a total of 101 *poleis* which possessed “both a fortified *akropolis* and a defence circuit enclosing the lower town,” adding that “at least 69 *poleis* seem to have had a

3 It is a theme of interest to scholars in Hansen’s fields of ancient democracy and the *polis*: see, for instance, the 16 references to *akropolis* in the index to the 2000 volume in honour of his sixtieth birthday (Flensted-Jensen et al.).

fortified *akropolis* only.” But Hansen underplays the achievement of *IACP*: as Rönnlund notes on the basis of his own survey of the *Inventory*, the word ἀκρόπολις is used there to describe features in 306 of the *poleis* accounted for in that book (Rönnlund 2018: 33; cf. 29).

Clearly, then, the *akropolis*-theme of the current paper is inspired by the work of M.H. Hansen. Furthermore, in terms of its methodology, we share an interest in close analysis of the sources (though Hansen’s level of efficiency and clarity in terms of historical exposition is inimitable). Among the principles of historical research that emerges from the work of Hansen is that the evaluation of literary references to particular terms is a key way of initiating research into the history of institutions and practices.⁴ It seems appropriate, on this occasion, to progress the study of the concept of the *akropolis* in the ancient Greek world by interrogating references to it in ancient literary sources of the classical period. Indeed, Rönnlund has already demonstrated the fruitfulness of this as a starting point for an analysis of the *akropolis*-phenomenon, noting that features mentioned in literary sources as *akropoleis* can be connected with 133 physical locations in virtually every region populated by the ancient Greeks (Rönnlund 2026: Appendix A).

Classical authors referred to geographically widespread examples of *akropoleis*: even among Athenian authors, reference was not limited to the Athenian *akropolis*. In this paper I observe that such accounts of *akropoleis* are very much intertwined with the history of human conflict, political power struggle (and its resolution), and the rise and fall of hegemonies and empires. Classical authors demonstrate the importance of *akropoleis* to the religious and institutional history of both city-states and empires in Greece and beyond the Greek *oikoumene*.

4 See especially, for instance, Hansen 1995. There is more to be added about the nuances of Hansen’s working methods than those noted by Piovan 2025; see, for instance, his distinction between ‘survivals’ and ‘accounts’ of democracy (Hansen 1999: 9–10) and his treatment of ‘ideals’ and ‘evaluations’ of the subject (Hansen 1999: 23–26). For his comparative approach to historical analysis, see Hansen 2000a; 2000b: esp. 611–12, reflecting upon the relevance of a comparative study of *polis*-cultures to contemporary political theory and conceptualisations of politics.

Akropoleis of the Greek World

Robin Rönnlund's important 2018 PhD thesis assesses the subject of *akropoleis* from a specifically non-Athenocentric perspective and highlights the need for a broad study of the concept of the *akropolis*.⁵ The time is ripe to re-think the *akropoleis* of the Greek world as a cultural and geographic phenomenon; as a space for interactions between humans of different status-groups, animals and deities; as a stage for displays of power and associated conflicts and their resolution; as a place for cult activity; as a location for the publication of the written word; and as a spatial phenomenon which was meaningful to ancient writers. Previous work on *akropoleis* (see Rönnlund 2018; 2026) draws closely upon the monumental *Inventory of Archaic and Classical Poleis (IACP)* edited by M.H. Hansen & T.H. Nielsen (2004), and so a preliminary study of the *akropolis*-phenomenon seems an appropriate topic to explore in an article dedicated to the memory of M.H. Hansen.

The significance of the *akropolis* is not one that can be comprehensively addressed within the confines of the current article, which will be restricted to classical Greek writings alluding to *akropoleis* in portrayals of past.⁶ The main focus of this paper will be on prose writers, but fifth-century verse provides a starting point (section 2) before I move on to considering how the *akropolis* of Aristophanes' *Lysistrata* underpins the political satire of that play (section 3). Section 4 analyses the range of uses to which *akropoleis*-references are put by the Attic orators. At that point we explore the spectrum of *akropolis* references in the three extant classical historians: Herodotus (section 5), Thucydides (section 6) and Xenophon (section 7). In sections 8 and 9 we assess the appearance of the Athenian and other *akropoleis* among the work of other classical writers

5 See now Rönnlund 2026; see also Rönnlund 2015: 37-39 for the *akropolis* as a normative phenomenon with potential implications for thinking about the spatiality of the ancient Greek city-state.

6 Hellenistic (literary and epigraphical) references will be surveyed in subsequent publications (see Liddel in press; Liddel in preparation). The origins of the word ἀκρόπολις (and its appearance in the earliest poetry) are discussed by Rönnlund 2026. For the role of the Athenian *akropolis* in Pausanias' conception of Greek culture, see Pretzler 2019.

about the past. Any study of the term ἀκρόπολις in ancient Greek literature will reflect the Athenocentric perspective of some of these texts, but at the same time reveals there is much of substance in their testimonies about non-Athenian spaces.

2. Fifth-Century Poets on Akropoleis

Some lines of Simonides, attributed to him by Athenaios (13.573c-d), account for the supplications of a group of women at the temple of Aphrodite at Corinth before the Persian invasion:

These very women stood and prayed to the goddess Kypris on behalf of the Greeks and the fair-fighting citizens. For divine Aphrodite did not intend to betray the citadel of the Greeks (Ἑλλάνων ἀκρόπολιν) to the bow-carrying Persians (transl. Page 1982: fr. 14).

This passage could refer either to the physicality of the Akrokorinthos or, figuratively, to the possession of the Peloponnese (or indeed the whole of Greece), envisaged as an *akropolis*.⁷ Either way, the idea that an *akropolis* could be betrayed by a deity to an enemy onslaught suggests its value in a situation of human conflict.

Pindar's *Olympian* 7, for Diagoras of Ialysos on Rhodes, describes an event pertaining to the mythical history of the island, relating how the *Heliadai* (the descendants of Helios) created a sacred precinct on an *akropolis* (ἄλσος ἐν ἀκροπόλει) and established a fireless sacrifice there (vv. 48-49). As Cairns notes, the lack of specificity about which of the three Rhodian *poleis* (Ialysos, Kameiros, and Lindos) to which it refers made the ode potentially relevant to the wider glory of Rhodes,⁸ but as Rönnlund points out, Diodoros' (5.57.6) allusion to the *Heliadai* establishing a *polis* known as *Achaïa* at Ialysos elaborates the story to associate it with that location.

7 For an earlier figurative reference to ἀκρόπολις, see Theognis 233-34. I owe the Peloponnesian reading to one of the anonymous reviewers of this paper, who points out that Strabo 8.3.1 divides Greece into a series of peninsulas, with the Peloponnese as its *akropolis*.

8 See Cairns 2005: 80-81.

Tragic references to *akropoleis* also extend beyond Athens. In Aeschylus' *Seven Against Thebes* the chorus of Theban women say that they fled in trembling fear (ταρβοσύνῳ φόβῳ) to the *akropolis* (ἐς ἀκρόπολιν), the seat of worship (τίμιον ἔδος), when they heard a clamour from their enemies (240-41). This is indicative of the image of the strength and security of the Theban Kadmeia, and their fleeing there seems to pre-empt the strategy of the women of the *Lysistrata* (see below). The theme of *akropolis* as a stronghold occurs also in Euripides' *Orestes* (1094): Orestes' friend Pylades refers to Delphi as the "*akropolis* of the Phokians" (Φωκέων ἀκρόπολιν), perhaps metaphorically,⁹ when he envisages returning home. Athenian viewers of drama, sitting on the south slope of the Athenian *akropolis*, would have had their backs to the monuments on top of the rock. But it was comedy, in the shape of Aristophanes' *Lysistrata*, that would have cast the audience's minds back to the setting of Athena's temples that loomed over the dramatic stage.

3. Aristophanes on the Akropolis

The *akropolis*-focus of Aristophanes' *Lysistrata* was noted by Rogers (1911: xviii), and Loraux underlines its importance for the operation of its comedy (1993: 148). Use of the term ἀκρόπολις ensures the specificity of the reference to the space of the citadel.¹⁰ The women aim to seize the *akropolis* (176, 241, 262), allocating their elders to this task under pretence of making sacrifice (θύειν δοκούσαις καταλαβεῖν τὴν ἀκρόπολιν (179)), and the male chorus refer to the location as μεγαλόπετρον ἄβατον ἀκρόπολιν ἱερὸν τέμενος. As elsewhere, the capture of an *akropolis* is to be identified with the seizure of power (Loraux 1993: 152; cf. Rosivach 2008; Boyd 2017).

9 West 1987: 260 regards it as an "ad hoc designation" to connect Delphi and the land of the Phokians.

10 In the late fifth century (and down to the 380s in epigraphy), the term *polis* could still be used to refer to *akropolis*; indeed, at some points in the play the term *polis* was used to refer to the *akropolis* (e.g. 245, 266, 288, 302, 317, 754, 758, 912); see Hansen 1996: 34-36. Fowler 2013: 451 proposes that Κραναά means *akropolis* at 481.

Why did the women seize the *akropolis*? This question preoccupied the chorus of Old Men (257-63, 479-83) and it was revisited by Loraux (1993: 159-73). Strategically, they did so to capture Athena's treasury and prevent the sacred monies being used for military purposes (173-77, 422-23, 487-88). Furthermore, as Loraux shows, they seized it to appeal to the protection of Athena, in the hope that "as guests of Athena, they are under the sign of purity" (Loraux 1993: 161). But there are also historic reasons for the women's tactic: as we see below, assuming power by taking the *akropolis* is a common theme in literature. And in the *Lysistrata*, as on many other occasions, Aristophanic comedy built upon shared knowledge of, and ideas about, the Athenian past: in the first choral ode, the old men plan to besiege the space and recall the success of the Athenians' blockade of Kleomenes as he occupied it (257-318) and we are treated to a reminiscence on that event (which is narrated in Hdt. 5.72.2-4).

In a 2017 article, Paga argues that the entrance to the *akropolis* of the ancient Athenians was viewed as a space of historical struggle and memories of it, suggesting that it was "deliberately crafted by the early democracy to commemorate and serve as a site for dissent, protest, and, ultimately, triumph" (Paga 2017: 155). This conclusion identifies a connection between the history of democracy and the Athenian *akropolis* which is visible in some ancient oratorical assessments (see below), but is absent, for instance, from Aristotle's view of the *akropolis* as a fortification-place suitable for oligarchies and monarchies: he recommends that a level place (ὀμαλότης) is more appropriate for democracies (Pol. 1330b17-20). Paga's conclusions build upon the material culture of the area and literary references, and provide a reading of the *akropolis*-satire of Aristophanes' *Lysistrata* which give a snapshot of the power-implications of Greek *akropoleis* (Paga 2017: 167-68).

4. The *Akropoleis* of Attic Oratory

As is well-known, Attic orators often dealt with ideas drawn from the past in their attempts at persuasion. Their references to the *akropolis* frequently use it as a place that is emotive of the past, evoking both positive and negative memories to their audiences. As we shall see, oratorical citations of the *akropolis* draw out its rhetorical capital in terms of power

dynamics: such references were strengthened by the visibility of the *akropolis* to those who gazed at it across the agora from the open-air law-courts (Blanshard 2014: 265) or those who were reminded of its presence to the NE of the Pnyx auditorium where the Athenian *demos* met at the assembly.

Geopolitical Perspectives on the Akropolis

Highlighting past Athenian strengths founded on the conclusion of peace treaties in the speech *On the Peace*, Andocides made (inaccurate: see Harris 2000) references to the deposit of silver on the *akropolis* as a positive outcome of the Thirty Years' Peace and the Peace of Nikias (Andoc. 3.7, 8). Aeschines formulated the same association in *On the Peace* (2.174, 175). Demosthenes in his speeches to the assembly also presented the accumulation of 10,000 tal. on the *akropolis* as an achievement of the Athenians' ancestors (3.24; 13.26).

Lysias, on the other hand, referred to the Spartan occupation of the Athenian *akropolis* to evoke memories of the dark days of enslavement at the end of the Peloponnesian War (12.94; 13.46), Athenian defeat and the end of empire. The history of *akropoleis* was also indicative of the onset of Philip of Macedon, who is said to have planted a garrison on the *akropolis* of Pherai: the author of the speech *On Halonnesos* ironically says that this was done to ensure that they would be *autonomoi* ([Dem.] 7.32). And in the *On the Liberty of the Rhodians* (15.15), Demosthenes maintains, as a measure of the Rhodians' fate, that they had admitted enslaved possessions of 'barbarians' (perhaps the forces of satraps?) onto their *akropoleis*. Hypereides' *Funeral Speech* deployed a familiar theme by referring to the Theban *akropolis* garrisoned by the Macedonians as symbolic of their annihilation and enslavement (Hyp. 6.17 with Herrman 2009: 82 summarising scholarly views on its military value).

Isocrates' rhetorical analyses formulate both positive and negative perspectives on the history of the power of the Athenians and other city-states. In the *Antidosis*, *akropolis*-references serve as a barometer of imperialism: as it did for other orators, Perikles' accumulation of 10,000 tal. (234) and gold and silver (307) there evokes his great leadership (cf. *On the Peace* 126), whereas the presence of an enemy dwelling on the Athe-

nian *akropolis* illustrated the enslavement of the city (319). In the *Panegyrikos*, paying tribute and seeing *akropoleis* occupied demonstrated the servitude of Athens' allies (123), while the razing of cities and fortification of *akropoleis* was associated with the Great King's advance into Greece (127). In the same text Isocrates also criticises Spartan aggression as misplaced by reference to their occupation of the Theban Kadmeia (126; cf. 55). In *On the Peace*, the righteousness of the fifth-century Athenians was highlighted by the fact that they still waged war against other states when they believed it right to do so even when their *akropolis* was full of silver and gold (47). In the *Areopagitikos*, the *akropolis* was part of a narrative of rise and fall: imposing garrisons on the *akropoleis* of other cities was the peak of the Athenian *demos*' power, but when The Thirty took over, the enemy occupied the Athenian *akropolis* (65; cf. *On the Peace* 92).

In the *To Philip*, however, Isocrates is critical of the Athenians' extortion of money from allies and its accumulation upon the *akropolis* (146): "No-one would praise our city because she was once mistress of the sea, or because she extorted such huge sums of money from her allies and carried them up into the *akropolis*." Yet his observation that the Thessalians have their *akropoleis* occupied by enemies from time to time despite their resources, reminds the Athenians of the dangers of arrogance and self-assurance (118).

The crucial nature of *akropoleis* to military power dynamics emerges in other speeches. In his *On the False Embassy* (19.183), Demosthenes underlined the importance of making ambassadors answerable for their speeches, given that they do not control "triremes, positions or soldiers or *akropoleis*" but rather words or times. And Demades refers to the *akropolis* in a strategic sense where he envisages fighting against his enemy, saying that they would fight "just as I would against its *akropolis*, the wall, the dockyards, and the trench" (BNJ 227 fr. 137). A tyrannical misapplication of the cultural capital of the *akropolis* is exemplified by the orator Demochares' (BNJ 75 fr. 1) account of Euaion of Lampsakos of the 350s, who had lent money to his homeland with its *akropolis* as the security, and once it was withheld, attempted to establish a tyranny

The Akropolis in Persuasion

Rhetorical invocations of *akropoleis* also reveal protreptic intention or critical censure aimed at the Athenian audience: at 2.74 Aeschines accuses speakers of ignoring the salvation of the state but instead cause their audiences to gaze at the *propylaia* of the *akropolis*,¹¹ the battle of Salamis, and the tombs and trophies of their forefathers. Lykourgos (1.17) alleges that Leokrates gazed back at the *akropolis*, Zeus Soter and Athena Promachos, which he had betrayed, without fear, as he fled Attica. And towards the end of the speech, in his account of traitors, he cited the example of Hipparchos son of Charmos, who was sentenced to death for treason, his statue taken down from the *akropolis*, and recast as a stele which they decreed should be used to record the name of sinners and traitors (117-18). Demosthenes (13.14) reports that at one point, some men broke into the *opisthodomos* of the Parthenon and stole a few oars, and that this led some men to proclaim that democracy had been overthrown and the laws nullified: this story was held to exemplify the kind of misleading interpretations that orators were accustomed to repeat at the assembly, but it suggests also the sense of anxiety that a story about intruders onto an *akropolis* building might provoke.¹²

Deinarchos' references to the *akropolis* also draw upon the past to make critical points against his enemies: whereas Aristides and Themistocles were said to have constructed the city walls and carried up *phoros* to the *akropolis* (1.37), Demosthenes failed to embellish it (1.96). In the speech *Against Aristogeiton* Deinarchos refers to the stele of Arthmios on the *akropolis*, as a "lesson to your descendants" (2.24); Demosthenes had more to say about this decree in the *Third Philippic* (9.41) which he held up evocatively, reading it out, imploring the Athenians to consider it as they reflect upon their attitude towards traitors (cf. also Dem. 19.171-72). This moralistic assessment of *akropolis*-oriented documents emerges also in Apollodoros' speech *Against Neaira* ([Dem.] 59.105), recalling that a list of naturalised honorands who passed a scrutiny were to be inscribed on

11 As Plastow 2023: n. 5 points out, mentions of the *propylaia* could be viewed as synecdochic references to the *akropolis* as a whole. In *Against Agasikles* Deinarchos imagined the ephebes as the *skaphephoroi* making their way up to the *akropolis* (BNJ 228 fr. 5).

12 Demosthenes refers to the burning of the *opisthodomos* in 378/7 (24.136 with scholia) but without comment.

the *akropolis* and were set up so that the reward “should be preserved for their descendants and that each one of these might be in a position to prove his relationship to one of those receiving the grant.”

Most rhetorical invocations of the *akropolis* refer specifically to the Athenian *akropolis*. But Aeschines’ allegation that Epaminondas had told the Theban assembly that they should remove the *propylaia* of Athens’ *akropolis* and set it up at the entrance to the Kadmeia (2.105), suggests that this type of argumentation was perceived as having appeal beyond Athens.

Orators on Institutional Practices

Andocides’ *On the Mysteries* cites some institutional practices on the *akropolis* in detail: a personal pledge (*pistis*) being taken there (1.42); the *boule* (with the exception of the *prytaneis*) taking up quarters there for the night during the crisis that followed the mutilation of the Herms (1.45); the memory that the Athenians took a pledge (*pistis*) on the *akropolis* about *homonoia* to end their differences after the overthrow of The Thirty (1.76). These and other references attest to the *akropolis* as a place for the administration of profound matters related to disputes.

In Isocrates’ *Trapezetikos*, Satyros described how he met Pasion at the *akropolis* for arbitration, and that Pasion made an emotional appeal to allow him an extension on his debt (18); this led to an agreement in writing and the bringing in of a certain Pyron of Pherai as the guardian of the agreement (20); we are reminded too that voting urns containing ballots naming the judges of the dramatic contests were kept securely in the *akropolis* and that a corrupt ally of Pasion, Pythodoros, had opened the seals and removed ballots (33-34).¹³ The *akropolis* was a place for a settlement (*gnosis*) made as part of an arbitration, after Apollodoros received a gift of 5,000 dr from Phormio and in return agreed to release him from all demands (Dem. 36.15-17). These attestations of the working out of reconciliations are indicative of a wider role of the *akropolis* in resolving disputes under the eyes of the deities. It is unclear where upon the *akropolis* such exchanges would have taken place, but it seems likely that they

13 For discussion of the motives of the removal of ballots, see Whitehead 2022: 726-27; Rhodes 1972: 131 reconstructs the process of the selection of *choregoi*.

would have done so either at a small sanctuary (Whitehead 2022: 699) or one with specific relevance to the pledge or agreement being made.

Some Demosthenic speeches refer to the *akropolis* when accusing opponents of financial misdemeanours. At 24.120, Demosthenes attacks Timokrates' law on the basis that its supporters "still retain the tithes of the goddess and the fiftieths of the other gods" and furthermore "they never brought money to the Acropolis at all when they were required" (transl. Harris 2018). And this is followed up at 128-29 with the story of the debtor Glauketes who, "as Treasurer stole from the acropolis the trophies that the city had taken from the barbarians, the throne with golden feet, the sword of Mardonius which weighed 300 darics" (transl. Harris 2018). The speaker of [Dem.] 25 discredits his enemy Aristogeiton by maintaining that he was listed on the *akropolis* as an *atimos* who had defaulted on his debts (25.4 cf. Dem 58.19, 48; *Agora* vol. XIX P26 494-95, 505, 508-9). And in the same speech (25.99) he contrasts the idea of acquitting Aristogeiton with the Athenian practice of going up to the *akropolis* on the first day of the month and praying for the blessing of the city.

While these references illustrate institutional transactions taking place on the *akropolis*, they also point up two themes of *akropolis*-based activity: its relevance as a place for the working out of disputes, whether they be between political factions or individuals in dispute; and its role as a place for the recording of financial matters (both in terms of financial accumulation and the administration of debts). Overall, the oratorical picture of the *akropolis* is one that emphasises its role in the memories of geopolitical histories and in the performance of human rivalries and, sometimes, their reconciliation.

5. Herodotus on *Akropoleis*

Akropoleis, notably those of Sardis, Xanthos, Susa, Samos and Athens, are the scenes of important events in Herodotus' histories,¹⁴ and play a role

14 See De Bakker 2021: 12-13, observing that Herodotus uses the term ἀκρόπολις, whereas πόλις is used to describe a city as a whole; De Bakker notes also that Herodotus (7.43) refers to the *akropolis* of Troy as the "Pergamon of Priam."

central to some of his narratives, especially but not exclusively in books 1 and 8.

The first location Herodotus describes as an ἀκρόπολις is that of Sardis, capital of the kingdom of the Lydians, which, according to Strabo (13.4.6), was known to some as Hyde; it is now identified with a spur of Mount Tmolos or Bozdağ (see Müller 1997: 680-722 and 744-47). The theme of its impregnability is one which, as Asheri et al. (2007: 140) note, was a common one. At 1.15 we read that the fugitive Kimmerians captured Sardis with the exception of its *akropolis* (πλὴν τῆς ἀκροπόλιος). Later in the same book, Cyrus' capture of Sardis from the Lydians places the *akropolis* at the centre of narrative's drama: after Cyrus offered a reward to the first person to mount its wall (1.84.2), Hyroiades, a Mardian, resolved to approach the *akropolis* at an unguarded point (1.84.2) where it had seemed, owing to its precipitousness, impregnable (ἄμαχος) to its defenders. It was deemed significant that the ancient king Meles had not carried around that part of the *akropolis* the lion (said to have been borne to him by his concubine) which the Telmessians had declared would make it unconquerable, though he had conveyed it around the rest of the stronghold (1.84.3). Moreover, Hyroiades was encouraged by witnessing a Lydian descend the *akropolis* in pursuit of a dropped helmet (1.84.4) and then climb it again, and himself made the attempt, followed by a large number of Persians. This account ties together a military account of the capture of an *akropolis* (which was synecdochic for the fall of Sardis and the Lydian empire) with a mythological narrative about the apotropaic role of Meles' lion: a supernatural aspect and Hyroiades' observations are the things that make it possible to conquer the Sardian *akropolis*. The *akropolis* of Sardis appears again at 1.154 when Tabalus, its Persian governor, was trapped and besieged there by Paktyes and those Lydians who were rising up against Persian rule (1.154). Its final mention is at 5.100, where the Greeks took the whole of Sardis with the exception of the *akropolis* (χωρὶς τῆς ἀκροπόλιος), which was defended by Araphrenes in person with a considerable force. The Sardian *akropolis*, then, appears to be one which stood its ground well, until the time of Cyrus' assault.

Later in book 1, at 1.176, the *akropolis* of the Xanthians of Caria (see Müller 1997: 396-406) is mentioned as the last refuge of those fleeing the forces of the Median general Harpagus: "they took everything – wives,

children, property, and servants – to the *akropolis*, set fire to it, and burnt it to the ground” before embarking on a suicide-mission at the final stages of their resistance (1.176.2). The episode perhaps stands in contrast to the Athenians’ decision specifically not to flee to their *akropolis*, a decision that evidently paid off (see below). As Rönnlund (2015: 39) notes, *akropoleis*, as locations lacking fresh water and shelter, were unsuitable as places of refuge

The *akropolis* of Susa (which Herodotus refers to also as a *pyrgos* [‘tower’: see Hdt. 3.74.3; 3.75.1, 3] and Strabo 15.3.2 identifies as the *Memnoneion*: see below) plays a role in the upheaval surrounding the Persian succession of 522 BC. It is said that the Magus’ withdrawal within the *akropolis* of Susa led Otanes to suspect that he was not, as was claimed, Smerdis the son of Cyrus but rather an imposter (3.68.2). The isolated and introverted nature of the leader is reminiscent of the concentric fortifications at Ecbatana that were attributed by Herodotus to Deioces, but that location was described as a *κολωνός* (‘hill’ or ‘mound’) rather than an *ἀκρόπολις* (1.98.4). The narrative of book 3 involves the *akropolis* of Susa, from the walls of which Cambyses’ former officer Prexaspes jumped (3.75.3) and to which the conspirators against the Magus gained access by subterfuge (3.76–77) but later abandoned their wounded there “because they were incapacitated and because the *akropolis* needed guarding” (3.79.1).

In the cases we have explored this far, it is quite possible that Herodotus is projecting a Greek idea of the *akropolis* onto non-Greek entities, but we are on firmer ground when it comes to the Greek examples he discusses. The *Samiaka* of book 3 feature the *akropolis* (probably what is now the Kastro hill with the Logothetis fortress at Pythagoreion; see Tölle-Kastenbein 1974; Müller 1987: 1013–17; Boyd 2017: 15 with n. 54) in accounts related to contested political succession, with controversial rulers exploiting the space: Maiandrios, the successor of Polykrates, walled himself up in the *akropolis* and enticed his enemies there with offers of money, and imprisoned them (3.143.1).¹⁵ And as the Persians negotiated the re-imposition of their vassal Syloson and Maiandrios agreed

15 Boyd 2017 underlines the importance of Polyainos’ account in interpreting the role of the *akropolis* episodes concerning the rise to power of Polykrates. The *akropolis* is absent from Herodotus’ account (3.39–60, 120–25) of the rise of Polykrates.

to step down and leave the island, the most important Persians took up seats facing the *akropolis* (3.144). Maiandrios escaped the siege of the forces of Syloson by way of a secret passage from the *akropolis* to the coast (3.146.2, 4; 3.147.2).¹⁶

Stories about the seizure of the Athenian *akropolis* were significant to Herodotean narratives of political upheaval at Athens (Rosivach 2008). Pisistratus' first attempt to control the Athenians was based upon his club-carriers who helped him take the stronghold (1.59.6). His second attempt drew upon the rhetoric of control when his messengers arrived at the city and announced that Athena was escorting Peisistratus back to the *akropolis* (1.60.5).

In book 5 and beyond, the word ἀκρόπολις usually (with the exception of 5.100: see above) pertains to the Athenian example (see Müller 1987: 604–35). It was the setting for Kylon and his supporters' attempt to make himself tyrant at 5.71.1; the failure of this undertaking led him and his supporters to take sanctuary as a suppliant at the statue of Athena, though they were persuaded to remove themselves from that position. In the next chapter, Herodotus relates the account of Kleomenes' attempt in Athens: when the council resisted his orders to disband, he occupied the *akropolis* with Isagoras and his supporters (5.72.2) and spent two days there. When Kleomenes climbed the hill to seize the *akropolis* and intended to enter the sanctuary of Athena, the priestess objected to his presence there on the grounds that he was a Dorian (5.73.2), to which he responded that he was an Achaian. Kleomenes eventually escaped (5.74.1), and we discover later on that during his occupation of the *akropolis* he uncovered certain prophecies (*chresmoi*) of coming disasters (5.90.2) that had previously been in the possession of the Peisistratids, who had left them in the temple upon their expulsion from Athens.

In these stories, the Athenian *akropolis* emerges as a place for the launching of a political attempt but also has a role as one of political refuge and suppliance. Such notions of sanctity and religious entitlement make the space a more dynamic one, while particular details in Herodotus' text elucidate the writer's experience of the *akropolis*. A little further

16 Rönnlund informs me that in his experience of contemporary Thessaly, stories featuring hidden subterranean tunnels leading down from hilltops are still today widespread in local traditions.

on in book 5 (5.77.3), he tells us that the Athenians dedicated the fetters with which they had bound the Chalkidian and Boiotian prisoners, hung on the walls which the Persian fire scorched; he describes and cites the dedicated bronze chariot with quadriga to Athena, which, he writes, “is the first thing you see on the left as you pass through the Propylaia on the *akropolis*” (5.77.4).¹⁷

In the Persian wars sections of Herodotus’ work the *akropolis* gets a mention for its association with cult, at the point where, after Pheidippides’ advice, the Athenians decide to construct a shrine to Pan on its slopes (6.105.3). The *akropolis* crops up in a story, cited from Hekataios, about the interaction between the Athenians and the Pelasgians (at 6.137.2) and the fortification of the hill. It is clear, then, that Herodotus’ account is very much wrapped up with lore about the Athenian *akropolis*.¹⁸

Book 7 contains only a single reference to the *akropolis*: that is to the (mistaken) interpretation by some older men (*hoi presbuteroi*) of Apollo’s second prophecy to the Athenians, that the wooden wall of the oracle was a reference to the *akropolis*’ thorn-hedge and meant that the *akropolis* would not fall (7.142.1). Crucially, of course, the majority of the Athenians did not flee to the *akropolis* and therefore did not suffer the fate that the Xanthians had endured earlier when they had fled to their *akropolis* (see above, on 1.176.2).

Chapters 41–56 of book 8 are the richest section in terms of frequency of reference to the *akropolis*, which takes centre stage in the narrative at the time of the Persian invasion. Just before the battle of Salamis we are told that the Athenians feared that the goddess had abandoned the *akropolis* on the grounds that the great snake (representing Erechtheus/Erichthonios) which lived there and was said to guard the temple had stopped consuming the monthly honey-cake that was left out for it (8.41.2–3). The other mentions are essentially related to military detail: at 8.51.2 the Persians found Athens abandoned apart from the few (treas-

17 See Allgaier 2022: 25–26.

18 See Fowler 2013: 85–86 n. 5 critiquing Jacoby’s proposal that Herodotus was the first to combine two originally separate stories (one about the Pelasgians and the *akropolis* wall; another about the Lemnians who raided Brauron).

urers and poor people) in the temple of Athena Polias who had barricaded the *akropolis*. The Persians occupied the Areopagus (opposite the *akropolis*: 8.52.1) but the Athenians continued to defend the *akropolis*, rolling boulders down its slopes (8.52.2). The Persians accessed the fortress by attacking the place “behind the way up to the gates” (ὀπισθε δὲ τῶν πυλέων καὶ τῆς ἀνόδου) “where the ascent was so steep that no guard was set, because it was thought to be inaccessible ...” (τῇ δὲ οὔτε τις ἐφύλασσε οὔτ’ ἄν ἥλπισε μή κοτέ τις κατὰ ταῦτα ἀναβαίη ἀνθρώπων: 8.53.1). In some sense (as noted by Bakker 2021: 12) this is reminiscent of the belief that the *akropolis* of Sardis would, owing to its precipitousness, be impregnable (ἄμαχος) at 1.84.2 (see above) in the description of Hyriades’ capture of it.¹⁹ The *akropolis* then became the scene for dramatic action, as some Athenians leapt from the wall to their death, others sought sanctuary within the temple; but the Persians are said to have slaughtered those who remained, stripped the temple of its treasures and burnt everything (8.53.2; the remains of archaic evidence demonstrate that not everything was destroyed; cf. below on BNJ 688 fr. 13). Later Xerxes ordered those Athenians who were fighting alongside him to mount the *akropolis* and sacrifice there, and Herodotus speculates that he was led to do this by some dream or perhaps his guilty conscience for burning the temple (8.54). This leads to another *akropolis*-detail: the eighteen-inch shoot that sprang from the sacred olive the day after it was burnt down (8.55), a story that follows a pattern of Greek foundation myths (Bowie 2007: 144). Nevertheless, the news of what had happened on the *akropolis* disturbed the Athenian naval commanders at Salamis, and it led some of them to take flight (8.56).

So: in Herodotus, the *akropoleis* of the Greeks and non-Greeks (we return to non-Greek *akropoleis* at the end of section 9) are the scenes of military and political upheavals, but also human responses to cult activity and religious lore about these locations (involving oracles, snake, lion and an olive shoot). Bringing these references together suggests the Athenians’ *akropolis*-decisions compared favourably those of the Xanthians or even the Lydians (whose capitulation was long-lasting), and we

19 As Bowie (2007: 140) points out, the motif of the ‘unguarded stretch of wall’ is also deployed in the account of Babylon: see Hdt. 1.191.

might even suggest that one appreciates Herodotus' account of the Athenian *akropolis* more profoundly by comparing it with those of other strongholds.

6. Thucydides

The references to *akropoleis*, clustering episodically in the first two books of Thucydides' work, are to the Athenian example. 1.126.3-12 is an account, touching upon ground covered in Hdt. 5.71 (see Hornblower 1996: 140), of Kylon's seizure of the *akropolis*. Thucydides adds the detail that he was instructed by Apollo to make the attempt (1.126.4), and also that Kylon escaped but that it was his supporters who took refuge at the altar of the God (1.126.10).

The first two references to *akropolis* in book 2 highlight its financial significance: at 2.13.3 Thucydides cites the 6,000 tal. of coined silver held there, "out of the 9,700 that had once been there, from which the money had been taken for the propylaia of the *akropolis*, the other public buildings and for Potidaia." And he reports at 2.24.1 that the Athenians resolved to set aside a fund of 1,000 tal. from the *akropolis* accumulation which could be used only for the purposes of defending the city in the case of an attack by sea.

But the most extensive Thucydidean meditation on the Athenian *akropolis* comes at 2.15.3-2.17.1, which reveal how it was embedded into conceptions of the distant Athenian past. In his account of the evacuation of Attica in 431 BC, he zooms back to Athens in the time of Theseus, noting that before its *synoikismos*, their city consisted of the *akropolis* and the district to the south (2.15.3). This, asserts Thucydides, is demonstrated by the fact that the temples of the other deities are located in the *akropolis* or are in that part of the city (2.15.4-5). He adds also that, on the grounds of their former settlement in that part of the city, the *akropolis* was still known to the Athenians as *Polis* (καλεῖται δὲ διὰ τὴν παλαιὰν ταύτη κατοίκησιν καὶ ἡ ἀκρόπολις μέχρι τοῦδε ἔτι ὑπ' Ἀθηναίων πόλις (2.15.6)). In 2.17.1 he mentions that some of those fleeing Attica moved to unbuilt parts of the city or temples, but that among the places exempt from settlement was the *akropolis*: this he explained on the grounds that

the part of land below the *akropolis* known as the Pelargikon was forbidden from occupation by a curse. The other mention of the Athenian *akropolis* in Thucydides is that at 6.55.2, a citation of the stele commemorating the crimes of the tyrants (στήλη περὶ τῆς τῶν τυράννων ἀδικίας ἡ ἐν τῇ Ἀθηναίων ἀκροπόλει σταθεῖσα), which supports his inference that only Hippias of the legitimate Peisistratid sons had children.²⁰ Thucydidean references to the Athenian *akropolis* are informative about its role as a financial storehouse, but reveal also how embedded it was into ideas about the more distant past.

Once we move past book 2 of Thucydides, the other mentions of *akropoleis* are those of other cities at times of political or military struggle, concerning communities fleeing into *akropoleis* or surrendering them: in book 3.72.3 the popular party in the Corcyrean *stasis* fled to their *akropolis* and other higher parts of the city; at 3.90.3 the Athenians forced the people of Mylai to surrender their *akropolis* after an assault on their fortifications. The Athenians had less success in their expedition against the Sikel town Inessa, the *akropolis* of which was held by the Syracusans (3.103.1). At 4.26.2 there is a mention of the quality of the spring-water (cf. Hornblower 1996: 184) on the *akropolis* of Pylos as symptomatic of the difficulties that the Athenians faced in sustaining themselves when they were besieging the Spartans at Sphakteria. At 4.130.6 the Mendaeanes fled to their *akropolis* before the Athenians cut them off by connecting it to the sea with walls and setting guards along the walls (4.130.7); the Mendaeanes besieged on the *akropolis* shortly managed to force their way through the guard on the coast and reached the city of Skione in the darkness (4.131.3). And the final mention is that at 8.108.5 where the Antandrians of Troas drive Arsakes' garrison out of their *akropolis*.

As Hansen (1996: 35) notes, Thucydides uses the term *akropolis* both in the sense of an 'eminence used as a settlement' (Mylai) or as a 'fortified place devoid of human habitation'. But, beyond Athens, Thucydides' mentions of *akropoleis* are generally more tightly circumscribed than those of Herodotus and are usually made concisely in reference to political struggle or military developments.

20 For extensive discussion of this example, see Allgaier 2022: 122–30.

7. Xenophon

Xenophon's references to *akropoleis* play the same functions as do some of those in the work of Thucydides, but they are more vividly described and more closely embedded into his details of political upheaval, armed struggle and religious practice. There are some key moments that take place on the Athenian *akropolis*. In his account of The Thirty, Xenophon describes their confiscation of arms of those who were not included among the 3,000 and their storage in the temple on the *akropolis* (2.3.20). And after the retreat of Pausanias' occupying troops and their disbandment, the men from Piraeus, bearing arms, went up to the *akropolis* and sacrificed to Athena (2.4.39), which would have symbolised the renewed unity of the city (Krentz 1995: 153) before their generals called a meeting of the assembly (2.4.40). Some decades later, just after the battle of Leuktra, a garlanded Theban herald announcing the rout of the Spartans found the Athenian *boule* in session on the *akropolis* rather unimpressed by the news (6.4.19–20).

Xenophon's observations on non-Athenian *akropoleis* sometimes demonstrate not just military capabilities but religious proclivities of his subjects. As soon as the Spartan Derkylidas persuaded Meidias, the governor of Skepsis, to admit him to the city, he sacrificed to Athena on their *akropolis* and led Meidias' garrison troops outside the walls (3.1.21). Later, when Meidias felt persuaded to admit Derkylidas to the neighbouring city of Gergis, the first thing Derkylidas did was to go up to the *akropolis* and, with his followers, again sacrifice to Athena (3.1.23).

Xenophon reveals a strong association between political freedom (*autonomia*) with garrison-free *akropoleis*: accordingly, when Pharnabazus and Konon came to attempt to liberate cities, they dragged out the Spartan harmosts and reassured the populations that they would not fortify their *akropoleis* (deploying the type of language that orators used when warning of the coming of Philip: οὔτε ἀκροπόλεις ἐντειχίσοιεν ἑάσοιεν τε αὐτονόμους (4.8.1); cf. [Dem.] 7.32). This was welcomed by the people of the cities, who sent gifts to Pharnabazus as symbols of friendship (4.8.2). This same theme of the centrality of the *akropoleis* to the freedom or subjection of a city emerges also in the narratives about the occupation of the Theban Kadmeia in 382 BC. The Theban Leontiades, on friendly terms with the Spartans, instructed Phoebidias to follow him with his hoplites

so that he could lead him to the *akropolis*, adding, “once this is done, you may consider that Thebes will be entirely under the control of Sparta and of us who are your friends” (5.2.26). On the day of the occupation the women were celebrating the *Thesmophoria* in the Kadmeia (5.2.29) and the council was meeting in the agora, and so Leontiades was able to lead Phoebidias to the *akropolis*; once he was established there he gave him its key on the understanding he would not admit others without prior orders (5.2.29); Leontiades then declared to the council that the Spartans “were now in control of the *akropolis* but that they should not be dismayed” (Λακεδαιμόνιοι κατέχουσι τὴν ἀκρόπολιν, μηδὲν ἀθυμεῖτε (5.2.30)). The Spartans then cemented their control of Thebes by installing a garrison on the *akropolis* (5.2.35). Shortly after, the occupation of *akropoleis* was a policy pursued by Agesilaus elsewhere, and when the Phleisians refuse to hand theirs over, he invaded their territory and besieged their city (5.3.16).

Moralistic reflection is never far away from Xenophon’s narrative, and the *akropolis* plays also a role in this when we come to the beginning of the end of the Spartan occupation of the Kadmeia and the disappearance of Spartan supremacy (5.3.27). 5.4.1 opens with the declaration that many examples from history demonstrate the gods are not indifferent to irreligion or evil, and Xenophon substantiates this by reference to the Spartans’ seizure of the Theban *akropolis* when they had sworn to leave the cities independent and, still worse, to “the Thebans who had brought them into the *akropolis* with the aim of enslaving their city to Sparta” (τούς τε τῶν πολιτῶν εἰσαγαγόντας εἰς τὴν ἀκρόπολιν αὐτοὺς καὶ βουληθέντας Λακεδαιμονίοις δουλεύειν τὴν πόλιν (5.4.1)). Shortly afterwards, the Theban exiles made an attack on their *akropolis* where the Spartan harmost was stationed (5.4.10). Encouraged by the offer of prizes to the first man to break into the *akropolis* their enthusiasm undermined the morale of the defenders (5.4.11). The Spartan harmost abandoned the *akropolis* without waiting for the relief force (5.4.13) and was put to death by the Spartans: clearly his abandonment of the *akropolis* had symbolic value to the Spartan hierarchy but was also, for Xenophon, the moral outcome of the episode.

Spartan sway over other city-states was reliant on the occupation of *akropoleis*: the Spartan commander of the garrison at Euboian Oreos kept

300 hostages under guard on the *akropolis* where he had his own quarters (5.4.56). But he became distracted by his visits to a lover in the lower city: this was observed by his prisoners, who seized the *akropolis* and consequently the city was able to revolt (5.4.57). And another mini-narrative with the *akropolis* at its centre concerns the rule of Polydamas over Pharsalos. When the city experienced a period of strife, Xenophon reports that he was so highly regarded that the people handed over the *akropolis* to him, and gave him the task of collecting revenues (6.1.2); he used the money for guarding the *akropolis* (6.1.3). Archaeological research, however, suggests physical structures of the *akropolis* were probably very limited at the time of Polydamas (Rönnlund 2023: 84–89), and this makes Xenophon’s account all the more intriguing.

Xenophon’s excursus on the history of the people of Phleious gives us a more extensive strife-narrative centred on the *akropolis*. This is part of his excursion on the history of the Phleiasians, which is said to illustrate “their fidelity to their friends, their valour in war” and their steadfastness to alliance (7.3.1) – they had remained resolutely pro-Spartan even after Leuktra – and was part of his mission to publicise the great deeds of small states (7.2.1). Xenophon narrates an account of the time when some Arcadians and Eleians met up with anti-Spartan Phleiasian exiles and launched an assault (with short-lived success) on the city’s *akropolis* and occupied it (7.2.6). There follows (7.2.7–9) a dramatic account of how fighting might carry on in such an area: the citizens attacked the occupiers, who initially came out from the *akropolis* to meet them but then were driven back into it. Next the citizens poured into the space at the centre of the *akropolis* and the occupiers retreated to the walls and towers (7), and were challenged by the citizens “who made a combined charge, fighting like madmen” (8). Meanwhile, the Arcadians and Argives (advocating the exiles) arrived and tried to dig through the *akropolis* wall, and the citizens started to set fire to the towers still occupied from below, bringing sheaves of corn which had been cut on the *akropolis* itself. Accordingly, in defeat the occupiers jumped off the towers, fell off the walls (8) and gave way, and before long the whole *akropolis* was cleared of them (9).

The next chapter consists of an account of upheaval at Sikyon and also contains a significant element of *akropolis*-activity: Aeneas the

Stymphalian, general of the Arkadians, decided that things at Sikyon were unbearable and so went up to the *akropolis*,²¹ and summoned a meeting of the aristocrats inside the city and recalled those who had been exiled without a popular vote; Euphron was terrified and fled (7.3.1-2). Xenophon carries the narrative on with the story of Euphron, and says that at another time of conflict between the aristocrats and the democrats he realised that “so long as the Thebans were in the *akropolis* he could not control the state” (7.3.4); he then negotiated on the *akropolis* with the Thebans to banish the aristocrats but was assassinated while the Theban official and council were holding a session there (7.3.4-5; cf. 7.3.9). The final mention of the *akropolis* in *Hellenika* is that in the description of civil strife in Elis, where the party of Charopos with Arcadian help seizes the *akropolis* (7.4.15).

What sets Xenophon apart from his predecessors is, perhaps, the relative frequency with which narratives take place on *akropoleis* of city-states: their relevance to civic histories of political strife and even geopolitics is clear, but Xenophon makes a case for a moral aspect too.²² *Akropoleis* appear to be central to Xenophon’s vision of how and where spectacular upheavals take place and are important to his narrative strategy for describing them.²³ His setting of scenes upon *akropoleis* may reflect an appeal to consensus expectations about their significance in such scenarios. Xenophon’s work makes the case strongly that there is more to the historiography of *akropoleis* beyond Athens.

21 As Rönnlund advises me, there is no archaeologically attested urban settlement of Sikyon at the time before Demetrios Poliorketes, and this may refer to an *akropolis* in a much looser sense.

22 *Akropoleis* crop up in other works of Xenophon: in the *Hieron* he offers a reflection on the tyrant who covets “cities, lands, harbours, and strong *akropoleis*” (ἀκροπόλεων ἰσχυρῶν): I am grateful to Professor Marceline Boyd for this reference. Other mentions add little to the impressions from the *Hellenika*: *Cyr.* 7.2.3 (an enslaved person as an *akropolis* guard); *An.* 1.2.1 (troops garrison *akropolis*), 1.2.8 (a palace of the Great King in Kelainai, strongly fortified and situated at the foot of the *akropolis*), 1.29 (the defeated Xerxes builds the palace and *akropolis* of Kelainai), 1.6.6 (*akropolis* of Sardis), 7.1.20 (Eteonikos’ escape to the *akropolis* and subsequent action).

23 On Xenophon’s representation of space and his topographical thinking, see Dan 2014; on his presentation of spectacular scenes, see Harman 2024: 16-20.

8. Other Texts on the Athenian Akropolis

At this point we turn to explore texts outside the three significantly extant Greek historians to think first of all about some texts with local interests: they draw upon a wide spectrum of *akropolis* themes, which assert its breadth of meanings (including power relations, myth, cult and monumentality) to their contemporaries.

The author of the *Ath. Pol.* mentions the *akropolis* in relation to narratives familiar to readers of Herodotus and Thucydides, in particular those relating to the rise of Peisistratos (14.1, 15.4), the story of the tyrannicides (18.3), the incursion of Kleomenes and defeat of Hippias (19.6, 20.3), and the Spartan garrison there (37.1). As do Thucydides and Herodotus, the *Ath. Pol.* reports inscribed material from the *akropolis* to support a narrative account (the inscription on Anthemion's dedication demonstrating his elevation to the *hippeis* (7.4)). And in terms of institutional description, at 55.5 we are told that office-holders took an oath on the *akropolis* before entering office; at 60.3 the author explains that the archon held the *aparche* of sacred olive on the *akropolis* until the time of the Panathenaic festival. In short, mentions of the *akropolis* in the *Ath. Pol.* seem to highlight its role in the sometimes violent negotiation of power-relations but there is some attention paid to institutional activities (including pledges) that are undertaken there.

The Athenian *akropolis* attracted the interest of historians (both Athenian and non-Athenian), predating, contemporary with, and subsequent to Herodotus, Thucydides and Xenophon. In the case of Athens, some of these accounts involve the mythical group who frequently crop up in the history of that people, the Pelasgians. As noted above, Herodotus (6.137) quoted Hekataios of Miletos (6th century BC: *BNJ* 1 F127) for a story about the construction of the Pelasgian wall around the *akropolis*. According to Dionysios of Halikarnassos (*Ant. Rom.* 1.28), Myrsilos of Methymna (3rd century BC: *BNJ* 477 fr. 9) said that the Pelasgians, who became known as Pelargians owing to their wandering round Greece and beyond in flocks, erected the Athenian wall around the *akropolis* known as the Pelargikon.

Other accounts of stories involving deities and heroes of the Athenian *akropolis* include those of Akousilaos of Argos (early 5th century BC: *BNJ* 2 fr. 30), who reported that Erechtheus sent his daughter Oreithyia as a basket-bearer to the *akropolis* to sacrifice to Athena Polias. Philochoros

of Athens (4th century BC: *BNJ* 328 fr. 93) states that it was during the time of the first Athenian king Kekrops that the olive tree on the *akropolis* first grew; the writer Amelesagoras (ca. 300 BC?: *BNJ* 330 fr. 1) explained that crows did not fly towards the Athenian *akropolis* by reference to an encounter between such a bird and Athena who was carrying the mountain which would become Lykabettos.

Local historians of Attica also make reference to cult activity on the *akropolis*: Philochoros reports that there was a sanctuary (*hieron*) of Demeter Chloe there, at which the Athenians sacrificed during the month Thargelion (328 fr. 61); Antiochos (unknown date: *BNJ* 333 fr. 1) says that there was a temple of Akrisios on the Athenian *akropolis*. Omens could be read into events that took place there: Philochoros reports that the appearance of a dog on the *akropolis* was interpreted as an omen about the return of exiles (*BNJ* 328 fr. 67). Atthidographers and other fragmentarily preserved authors make reference to the Athenian *akropolis* in accounts of historical events that are treated in extant writers: the 700 tal. that Harpalos brought to the *akropolis* is central to that Alexander-era narrative (Philochoros *BNJ* 328 fr. 163; cf. Hypereides). Ephoros' statement that Pericles spent a larger part of Athenian money on the *akropolis* than on the war, however, adds little to our understanding of either the *akropolis* or of Periklean finances (4th century BC: *BNJ* 70 fr. 193). Ktesias' detail (5th century BC: *BNJ* 688 fr. 13) that Xerxes burned Athens with the exception of the *akropolis*, however, contradicts what Herodotus says about this episode (see above on Hdt. 8.53.2).

On occasion authors offer antiquarian details about the aspects of monuments of the *akropolis*: Philochoros (*BNJ* 328 fr. 36) chronicled that the Athenians began to build the *propylaia* on the *akropolis* during the archonship of Euthymenes (437/6) with Mnesikles as the architect; and Anaximenes of Lampsakos (4th century BC: *BNJ* 72 fr. 13) reported in his *History of Philip* that Ephialtes had moved the *axones* and *kyrbeis* from the *akropolis* to the agora. Kleidemos is quoted to explain that they (the Athenians) levelled the *akropolis* and set the *pelargikon* around it with nine gates (4th century BC: *BNJ* 323 fr. 16). And an anecdote about Demetrios of Phaleron (*BNJ* 228 test. 1) mentioned that there was only one remaining statue of him on the *akropolis*.

9. Other Writers on Non-Athenian *Akropoleis*

The *akropoleis* of other cities were also the subject of local historiography beyond that of Athens, and these mentions follow a similar set of motifs, and were sometimes embedded in mythological narratives concerning themes of human conflict. Hellanikos of Lesbos (5th century BC: *BNJ* 4 fr. 31) offered an account of Aeneas and the Trojans fleeing to the stronghold of Pergamos and occupying its *akropolis*, which was fortified with its own wall (καρτερὰ τοῦ Περγάμου συμφυγόντες τὴν ἀκρόπολιν ἰδίῳ τείχει φρουρουμένην καταλαμβάνονται), adding that it was the place where the ancestral objects, most of their movable wealth, and the strongest troops of the Trojans, were held.

Omens too make an appearance in the stories about non-Athenian *akropoleis*: Plutarch's *Dio* 24 quotes a narrative of fourth-century BC Theopompos which accounts for a number of prodigies at the time of Dion's expedition against Dionysos and Syracuse, including that of the sea-water that washed against the walls of the *akropolis* of Syracuse becoming sweet and drinkable for the day (*BNJ* 115 fr. 331). Some *akropolis*-lore concerns the naming of the places: Hellanikos tells us that one of the *akropoleis* of Argos, the Larisa, was named after the daughter of Pelasgos (*BNJ* 4 fr. 91). The writer on Boiotian matters, Armenidas, maintained that the *akropolis* of Thebes had been known as the Isle of the Blest (3rd century BC: *BNJ* 378 fr. 5).²⁴

Other texts refer to *akropoleis* in their account of political and military struggles: the *Lindian Chronicle* records the siege of the *akropolis* of Lindos by Darius in 490 or 494 (1st century BC: *BNJ* 532 fr. 4) and the relief offered to the besieged by a downpour. Another inscribed narrative, the dossier on the kings of Macedon and the tyrants at Eresos, tells the story of the tyrant Agonippos' doing something to those besieged on the *akropolis* and also arresting and confining of wives and daughters there (RO 83 γ front, ii, l. 2 and 8-10). In Plato's *Letters* (3.315d-e), Dionysios reported that he

24 This is the only source to make this identification, and may, as Schachter suggests in *BNJ*, have come up in a description of the monuments of that city. Fowler 2013: 500, however, approves Latte's view that it "originated as a joke in some (Athenian) comedian." On the names of *akropoleis*, see Rönnlund 2026: Appendix B.

had been criticised by Philistides (that is, perhaps Philistos) for remaining inside the *akropolis* (556 test. 6b); Charon of Lampsakos (5th century BC; *BNJ* 262 fr. 10) mentions that Artaphernes fled to the *akropolis* of Sardis at the time of the Ionian revolt. Ephoros (*BNJ* 70 fr. 94a) mentions Onomarchos' capture of Koroneia and seizure of its *akropolis* in his account of the Phocian or Third Sacred War (355–346 BC), an event recorded also by Diodoros (16.35.3). And the late fourth-century Hekataios of Abdera (*BNJ* 264 fr. 25) describes how an Egyptian king founded Memphis and at the same time created a metaphorical *akropolis*: “he threw up a massive earthen bank to the south which constituted an obstacle against flooding from the river as well as an *akropolis* against enemies by land.”

The *Poliorketika* or *How to Survive Under Siege* of the fourth-century writer Aineias, has relatively little to say explicitly about the defence or siege of *akropoleis*. In his general recommendations he refers to loyalist soldiers as a bastion “in place of an *akropolis*” (ἀντ' ἀκροπόλεως (1.6)), offers advice about the securing of ramparts for protecting “a tyrant's *akropolis*” (ἐν τυράννου ἀκροπόλει (22.19)) and gives an account of the smuggling of an object that in the past had supported the “capture of cities and even their *akropoleis*” (οἷς ἤδη πόλις καὶ ἡ ἀκρόπολις κατελήφθη (29.1)); elsewhere he makes reference to methods by which the Theban Kadmeia was captured (24.18; 31.34). However, throughout his work, their presence can very much be envisaged at the background of his advice.

Non-Greek Akropoleis

As we saw above in a survey of the work of Herodotus, *akropoleis* (or features interpreted as such) play a role in Greek accounts of the world to the east of Greece. Diodoros' Hellenised account of Assyrian history, based possibly on the fifth-century work of Ktesias of Knidos (*BNJ* 688 fr. 1b), identifies some landscape features as *akropoleis*. Diodoros maintains that the Baktrian city of Baktra “surpassed the others in its size and the strength of the *akropolis*” (2.6.2; cf. 2.6.4, 2.6.7) but concedes that Semiramis' rock-climbing soldiers were able to enter it through a narrow cleft (2.6.8). The tomb of Ninos was said to be visible for many stadia “as if an *akropolis*” (2.7.2), and Semiramis was credited with fortifying the *akropolis* of Babylon (2.8.6). In the same narrative (2.22.3) we read that Memnon

constructed a palace on the *akropolis* of Susa, which survived until the Persian hegemony and was called the *Memnoneia* after him (see above).

Ktesias brings us back to a theme familiar from Herodotus: the Persian assault on Sardis, the *akropolis* of the Lydians. Ktesias offers an account of how the Persians tricked the Lydians into thinking that they had taken control of their *akropolis* displaying images of Persians on long wooden poles above their walls (BNJ 688 fr. 9b). And the *akropolis* of Lydians looms large in Xanthos of Lydia (BNJ 765 fr. 41a), who maintains that Cyrus brought a wagon full of gold to the *akropolis* to bring over some traitors. And there is another story about the same *akropolis* preserved by Hermesianax of Colophon (4th century BC: BNJ 691 fr. 1) attributing Cyrus' capture of it to the treachery of Kroisos' daughter Nanis, who offered herself in marriage to Cyrus in return for admitting his forces to an unguarded part of the *akropolis*. A version of this story is mentioned also in an inscribed chronology from Rome of ca. AD 16–20 (SEG 33.802.11–15).

As Francesca Gazzano points out (pers. comm.), Greek authors sometimes present *akropoleis* as a central element (especially in terms of security and conquest, or as seats of power) of the narrative history of non-Greek places which, like Sardis and Xanthos in Lykia, might not normally be classified as *poleis*.²⁵ This Greek interpretation of non-Greek *akropoleis* is a subject which may repay further exploration.

10. Conclusion

This assessment of classical writers with past-oriented themes has demonstrated the importance of the *akropolis* as a space not just in the history of Athens but also that of other city-states and sovereign entities beyond the Greek world. It is important to acknowledge that whereas Athenian discussions of their own *akropolis* sometimes present it as a multi-faceted space, involving money, cult, politics and institutional activities, most discussions of non-Athenian *akropoleis* refer to their role

25 Rönnlund 2026 counts 22 cases of *interpretatio graeca* (including Babylon, Carthage Inessa and Rome). See above, n. 22, on the *akropoleis* referred to in other works of Xenophon.

largely in contexts of military power-struggle. But this is likely to be consequential of the emphases of our sources and should not be accepted uncritically as a reflection of a simplistic reality: in fact, the details of military narratives set on *akropoleis* (especially those in the work of Herodotus and Xenophon) attest occasionally to their importance in terms of cult activity and religious lore. Moreover, the complexity of human activity on *akropoleis* is reflected in the epigraphical evidence from non-Athenian *akropoleis*, which will be subject of a separate study; but for now one can point to Polly Low's discussion of the Spartan *akropolis*, which demonstrates that it was a place for the display of proxeny decrees, treaties and agonistic achievements.²⁶ And, even though it is a late source, Pausanias (2.13.3-5) portrays an *akropolis* of Phleious which preserves a rich set of traditions about the landscape of a non-Athenian site.

On another level this survey showcases the value of spatially-informed approaches to ancient writers (cf. Gilhuly & Worman 2014) by probing senses in which *akropoleis* were sites of evocative belief, memory and narrative. Of the texts we have looked at, Aristophanes in the *Lysistrata*, Herodotus, and Xenophon in the *Hellenika* seem particularly drawn to setting episodes on *akropoleis*; in so doing they add spectacle to their accounts and appeal to their audience's expectations about the spatial settings of historical episodes. From a historical perspective, several themes have arisen: the *akropolis* as a place for cult activity; as a place where there were buildings and other physical phenomena meaningful to a community's identity; as a place for the storage of sacred and secular material wealth or for the public inscription of written words significant to the community. But it is in the broader working out of power-relations that the significance of the *akropolis* looms large in these literary texts: the *akropoleis* of Greece and those in adjacent lands were venues for the performance of political struggle, whether that be hegemonic, geopolitical, or civil or related to governance and sovereignty, but also sometimes, under the eyes of the gods, the resolution of tensions between individuals or human groups or by resolution or by reconciliation. Perhaps this power-dynamics orientation of *akropoleis* was one reason why the Athenians thought it appropriate to set up treaties and other decrees on

26 On the epigraphical evidence from non-Athenian *akropoleis*, see Liddel in preparation. On the Spartan *akropolis*, see Low 2011.

theirs (cf. Osborne 1997; Liddel 2003); discussing the degree to which other city-states used their *akropoleis* for such purposes will be subject of a separate study.²⁷

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27 Cf. on the place of publication of treaties, Drauschke 2019. It was only the Athenians who specified simply that their treaties and decrees should be set up as 'on the *akropolis*'; other cities tend to give the instruction to set up at a particular sanctuary (sometimes one located on an *akropolis* but which was not usually described as so: see Liddel in preparation).

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