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THE ARCHAIC WALL OF GREATER THEBES: CHRONOLOGICAL AND TOPOGRAPHICAL PROBLEMS¹

In this article I try to relate selected literary sources to archaeological data and to consider the possibility that the southeastern sector of the wall of Greater Thebes had existed even before the Persian Wars.

Key words: Thebes, Kadmeia, Greater Thebes, Apollo Ismenios, Elektrai Gates, Amphiarium, wall, sanctuary, temple, inscriptions.

At the end of the Archaic period, the population of Thebes is estimated to have been much higher than 10,000. The area of the Theban acropolis surrounded by the fortification wall, i.e. the famous Kadmeia, occupied in antiquity an area of 25 ha which probably sufficed to accommodate ca. 7,000 to 10,000 people. We should also consider the area outside the wall of Kadmeia, where the city extended before the Persian Wars, although it is not possible to count even approximately the number of people residing there because the archaeological record is far from complete.² We know neither when the wall of Greater Thebes was constructed nor its precise

¹ I would like to thank Ephor Emeritus of Boeotian Antiquities Dr. Vassilis Aravantinos for the opportunity to work in his team at the excavation of Kadmeia in 2013 and 2014, where I was able to discuss with him my views on the date of the southeastern sector of the wall of Greater Thebes, and for his useful suggestions. I would also like to thank Dr. Nikolaos Papazarkadas who kindly sent me his article on the new Theban epigrams, shortly after its publication (July 2014). Any inconsistencies or mistakes are exclusively of my own responsibility.

² Symeonoglou refers to site 158 of his Catalogue, pointing out that this site in northern Pyri suggests that there was some habitation outside the Kadmeia; although the remains of a house found there point primarily towards the Classical period, a deposit of Archaic pottery was also discovered. The configuration of the cemeteries also

course. We should however keep in mind that Thebes was a very big city according to the standards of the Late Archaic period. Simple comparison with Athens can be revealing: the residential area of contemporary Athens (excluding the rocky outcrops and the *agorai*) was no more than 20 ha and maybe there was no fortification wall at all (SYMEONOGLOU 1985: 118).³

What did scholars previously think of the date of the wall of Greater Thebes? Keramopoulos accepted the growing strength of Thebes during the Archaic period after collecting references from ancient historians: the links of Thebes with Cleisthenes of Sikyon (Hdt. 5,67), the gifts of Croesus (Hdt. 1,52), and Peisistratos' appeal to the Thebans for financial help (Hdt. 1,61). Keramopoulos also noted that the Thebans resisted the Thessalians under the command of Lattamyas near Thespieae (Plut. *de Hdt. mal.* 33, *Mor.* 866 E-F, *Cam.* 19; Paus. 9,14).⁴ He subsequently argued that these references to the Thessalian invasion and Theban resistance might also indicate that the city of Thebes did not have the wall, yet. Keramopoulos suggested that the earliest wall was built in the Late Archaic period at the end of the 6th or the beginning of the 5th cent. B.C. as a consequence of the war with Athens to resist the Athenians (KERAMOPOULLOS 1917: 296–298). He noted that there were traces of the wall at different places, but he did not provide archaeological arguments pertinent to the date of the wall. Soteriades assumed that the wall to the west of the Kadmeia was built in 458/457 B.C. (SYMEONOGLOU 1985: 120): this is indeed the date given by Diodorus Siculus for the construction of the wall of Greater Thebes by the Peloponnesian army that was in Boeotia after the battle of Tanagra (Diod. Sic. 11.81).⁵ Similarly to Keramopoulos, Demand stated that the wall of Greater Thebes was built in the Archaic period, but dated its construction very vaguely into the 6th century. She added that the outer walls survived

allows us to infer that the city extended beyond the Kadmeia (SYMEONOGLOU 1985: 105–106).

- ³ The existence of an Archaic Wall is doubted by PAPAPOULOS (2008: 31–45). The mainstream view is that, although no trace of an Archaic fortification wall has been found in Athens, there is sufficient written evidence to assure its existence: see OSBORNE (2008: 78–79); FREDERIKSEN (2011: 133).
- ⁴ On the date of invasion of the Thessalians and the battle with the Thebans with all historiography see: BUCK (1979: 107–112).
- ⁵ On this passage and its implications for Thebes' policy, see my dissertation on the foreign policy of Classical Thebes: МОЖАЙСКИЙ А.Ю. Внешнеполитический курс Фиванского полиса в классический период : диссертация ... кандидата исторических наук : 07.00.03 / Можайский Андрей Юрьевич; [Место защиты: Моск. пед. гос. ун-т].- Москва, 2007.- 231 с.: ил. РГБ ОД, 61 07–7/999. С. 77–80.

the Persian Wars and withstood the twenty-day siege of the Greeks bent on punishing the medism of the city (DEMAND 1982: 8–9).

The archaeological evidence for the dating of the wall is limited to the method of construction. For Symeonoglou the wall is characterized by regularity (as concerns the size of the stone blocks) and precision of execution, both traits thought to be indicative of a Classical rather than an Archaic date. Nonetheless, Symeonoglou also noted that “it may seem surprising that the area south of Kadmeia, where during the Archaic period there were many sanctuaries and public buildings, was not encircled by the fortifications” (SYMEONOGLOU 1985: 119–120). We will return to the south sector of the wall below. For the time being, it should be noted that for Symeonoglou a project of such magnitude (on the basis of the extant traces, the length of all the walls of Greater Thebes is thought to be around 7,000 m and to have encompassed an area of around 328 hectares) would not have been possible in the sixth century B.C. In his *Thebaika* Faraklas argued that the Archaic wall surrounded only the eastern part of the city and that it also covered the southeastern sector. This is theoretically possible since there are no Archaic burials in the western part of the city and there are some indications that in the 5th cent. B.C. the area of the western sector was cleared in order to receive buildings. Faraklas also noted that the Archaic wall was destroyed during the construction of the Hellenistic wall (FARAKLAS 1996: 9–10). This might well be so and the city gates towards Tanagra are not Archaic or Classical but Hellenistic (FARAKLAS 1996: 10). In this light, we must admit that it is impossible to say precisely when this or that part of the wall was erected.

In Herodotus’ work there are several passages that may bear on our problem. Around 546 B.C. the Lydian king Croesus sent messengers to inquire the Hellenic oracles about the war with Persians. Two of the oracles were Boeotian: the Amphiareum and the oracle of Trophonius. Croesus was satisfied with the answers of the Delphic oracle and that of Amphiaraus. Eventually Croesus dedicated to Amphiaraus a golden shield and a solid golden spear (Hdt. 1,52). What follows is important for the purposes of this discussion because Herodotus made the peculiar claim that both gifts were until his time at Thebes, in the Theban temple of Ismenian Apollo (Hdt. 1,52). Scholars have long debated the presence of Croesus’s dedication to Amphiaraus in the Theban shrine of Apollo. Some have even rejected Herodotus’ reference to Apollo and have assumed that Herodotus refers to the Theban shrine of Amphiaraus (VANNICELLI 2003: 341). Keramopoullos suggested that Croesus’ gifts were kept in the Ismenion for security after the destruction of the Theban Amphiareum. But should we really think that Herodotus has misled us or that the sanctuary of Amphiaraus fell into decline at some

point in the Late Archaic period or at the time of the Persian Wars? A new find might shed some light on this question.

In March 2005 a rescue excavation at the building plot of E. Bovalis, on 17 Amphionos Street, brought to light an inscribed unfluted column drum. It is now stored in the epigraphic collection of the Museum of Thebes, inv. no. 40993. The two inscriptions of the column were recently published by Dr. Papazarkadas (PAPAZARKADAS 2014: 233–248). On one side the column drum has a text in the epichoric script of Boeotia, whereas on the other side the script is Ionic. According to the ed.pr., the lettering of the new *ki-oniskos* appears to be quite similar to that of an inscribed dedicatory column from the Boeotian shrine of Apollo at Ptoion, which is believed to date to the late 6th century B.C. (CEG 336), hence Papazarkadas' placement of the new Theban inscription in the late 6th–early 5th century B.C.⁶ According to Papazarkadas it is clear from the epigram that the unknown “supervisor” of Apollo's shrine had miraculously discovered the stolen shield of Croesus. He further argues that at some unspecified point the shield was stolen and that it was subsequently recovered, with oracular help from Apollo Ismenios, by the supervisor (i.e. priest?) of Apollo's shrine. What strikes us most is that the recently found inscription proves that Herodotus had indeed visited the Theban Ismenion and had seen the gifts of Croesus, or at least the gifts thought by the Thebans to have been offered by Croesus.

Therefore, it seems clear that we should trust Herodotus. However a crucial question remains: how could it be that these gifts to Amphiaraus were not stored in the Amphiareum but in the temple of Apollo Ismenios? It is possible that the answer lies in the identification of these two sanctuaries and is also related to the date of the wall of Greater Thebes.⁷ Pausanias stated that the temple of Apollo Ismenios was on the right of the Electran Gates on the sacred hill of Apollo (Paus. 9,10,2). Now, the Electran Gates were identified and excavated by Keramopoulos (KERAMOPOULLOS 1917: 7–32). The orthodox view on the location of the temple of Apollo is also

⁶ According to Dr. Papazarkadas an early text in the epichoric alphabet was re-inscribed at some point in a different (Ionic) script and dates probably to the early or mid fourth century B.C.

⁷ Schachter has offered a different answer to this question. He believes that the Thebans sacked the Amphiareum in the course of the war and stripped it of its valuables, but otherwise left the sanctuary intact. He adds that hostility between the owners of Amphiareum and the Thebans was still evident in 480/479, when Mys consulted Amphiaraus on Mardonios' instructions (SCHACHTER 1981: 22). But this possibility may be right only if the Amphiareum always was in Oropia as Schachter believes, ignoring the testimony of Strabo (9,2,10); there are further arguments for a different interpretation that will be given below.

that of Keramopoulos who excavated the sanctuary in 1910 on the Ismenion hill of Thebes (KERAMOPOULLOS 1917: 33–79). Schachter has pointed out that the site excavated by Keramopoulos is on a low hill to the south-east of Kadmeia, near but not adjoining the Ismenos river, as Pausanias states. Although no direct evidence was found in the course of the excavations themselves, two inscriptions, *ADeltion* 3 (1917) 35.1 (a bronze oinochoe dedicated to Apollo Ismenios), and *ADeltion* 3 (1917) 36.2 (a bronze phiale to Athena Pronaia), apparently came from the vicinity of this hill, and Keramopoulos' identification has been generally accepted. What he discovered was the western end of a Doric building, which he identified as the temple of Apollo Ismenios (SCHACHTER 1981: 81; SYMEONOGLOU 1985: 238). Moreover, another artifact has to be added to these inscriptions as an identifying argument – the poros fragment (sixth century B.C.) found at the site and perhaps coming from a dedicatory base (KERAMOPOULLOS 1917: 61; SYMEONOGLOU 1985: 237–238). It is very important because it is the oldest inscription from the site and belongs to the Archaic period. Then, we should also add a new inscription on a bronze kantharos (Museum of Thebes, inv. no. 41064) from the Herakleion, recently excavated by Aravantinos outside the Electrai Gates (ARAVANTINOS 2014: 202–204). The bronze vessel was dedicated to Apollo Ismenios by an unknown individual. The lettering suggests that it was written in the late 6th or the early 5th century B.C. In a forthcoming article Aravantinos notes that the text is very similar to that inscribed on the bronze oinochoe from the Ismenion (ARAVANTINOS forthcoming).

If this is indeed the sanctuary of Apollo Ismenios, the temple excavated by Keramopoulos stood within the course of the wall of Greater Thebes in the southeastern sector, not far from the sanctuary of Herakles.⁸ These neighboring sanctuaries, dedicated to Apollo and Herakles respectively, were the most ancient and prominent cultic places of Thebes already in the Geometric period. Aravantinos also points out that it is highly probable that both of them may have also played their part in the process towards the urbanization of early historical Thebes on the hills of Kadmeia (ARAVANTINOS forthcoming). I will endorse this view, adding that one of the central aspects of urbanization is a construction of a city wall.⁹ The history provides us with a number of Greek city-states, e.g. Corinth, that had

⁸ The new archaeological project of Bucknell University on the site of Ismenion hill started in 2011. Although as yet there has not been any official publication, some information is available on the website of Bucknell University: <http://www.bucknell.edu/x65381.xml>

⁹ Phenomenon of defensive walls also may be sufficient for defining the polis (CAMP 2000). Frederiksen goes further and concludes that city wall is an important element

lower-town walls already by the late Archaic period (BINTLIFF 2012: 223, 240, 259–262).

It is interesting to put Thebes in the wider context of fortified Archaic Greek cities. In his recent study, Frederiksen assembled all the archaeological and literary sources for city walls in the Archaic Greek world and argued that already as early as in the seventh century there had been two cases that showed impressive intramural spaces of more than 100 hectares: Abdera with between 110 and 120 hectares, and Corinth perhaps comprising as many as 300 hectares.¹⁰ In the middle Archaic period (600–550 B.C.) there was a group of five settlements that had 35–81.5 hectares of intramural space, and three settlements had between 100 and 145 hectares. The late Archaic period is a step further in this direction with eleven settlements of between 35 and 80 hectares, and as many as five between 110 and 240 hectares (FREDERIKSEN 2011: 90, 208–211). The total number of securely attested city walls dating to the Archaic period is 75 or 121, depending on the inclusion of walls dated by masonry style. As Frederiksen puts it, “if we assume the maximum number of Archaic *poleis* to be *c.* 1000, it follows that city walls are attested at about 10 per cent of all *poleis*” (FREDERIKSEN 2011: 118).¹¹ In mainland Greece and the neighboring islands, archaeologically attested lower-town walls of the Archaic period existed at Corinth, Halieis, Eretria (phase 2, *c.* 550 B.C. up to 81,5 hectares of walled area),¹²

in the Archaic concept of *polis* and the city wall must have been among the basic elements which constituted the Greek city (FREDERIKSEN 2011).

¹⁰ The seventh-century wall at the west edge of the Potters’ Quarter in Corinth has caused much controversy. It is either ignored in treatments of early Corinth, or interpreted as a fortification wall around what is considered to be a part only of the settlement area of Corinth (see discussion in FREDERIKSEN 2011: 75–76). However, I share the view that although Archaic Corinth had a number of clusters of houses, rather than one large settlement, it seems unlikely that only one of the clusters, the one at the Potters’ Quarter, was fortified. Frederiksen suggests that fortification of Corinth was already one single circuit comprising the north slope of Akrokorinthos, Akrokorinthos itself, and part of the plain below from the Potters’ Quarter to the southeastern gate of the Classical circuit, consisting of a fortified area of around 300 hectares in total (FREDERIKSEN 2011: 75, Fig. 27).

¹¹ Although this percentage may seem quite impressive, it is certain that not all of these *poleis* had lower-town walls. A lot of them had only a hilltop fortification wall, what is often called an acropolis wall. Therefore, we should compare the Theban situation only with those settlements that patently had lower-town walls. The geographical location is another important criterion for comparison, since circumstances for urbanization vary, depending on a particular region. I find it appropriate to compare Thebes with settlements that are situated in mainland Greece and the nearest islands, such as Aigina and Euboea.

¹² On Eretria see the discussion of FREDERIKSEN (2011: 74–75, 138–142).

and Aigina (up to 52 hectares of walled area).¹³ Halieis was not a significant polis of the Archaic period, and had no more than 5 hectares of fortified space so it cannot be compared with Thebes, but the other three *poleis* definitely can. Thus, it was not unique for Greek *poleis*, most of all those in the core of the Greek world, to have lower-town walls in the Archaic period, especially in the Late Archaic era. Furthermore, Thebes and Aigina were close allies against Athens and shared the same political line towards Persia in the Late Archaic period.

In addition, let us look at the possible location of the Amphiareum. Pausanias did not know of an oracular shrine of Amphiaraus but he knew of a *peribolos*, a precinct dedicated to Amphiaraus (Paus. 9,8,3): “On the way from Potniae to Thebes there is on the right of the road a small enclosure with pillars in it. Here they think the earth opened to receive Amphiaraus, and they add further that neither do birds sit upon these pillars, nor will a beast, tame or wild, graze on the grass that grows here” (translated by W.H.S. Jones). It is not surprising that Pausanias was unaware of the location of Amphiaraus’s oracle near Thebes since Strabo (9,2,10) relates that the oracle had been transferred to Oropus from Knopia lying in Theban territory. In his *History of Boeotia* Buck provides the full bibliography associated to the location of Knopia and argues that although the Scholiast to Nicander (Ther. 889) places Knopia by the Ismenus River, its precise location is unknown. He further points out that Bursian’s suggestion that Knopia should be located at the ancient site near Syrtzi on Mt. Hypatus is not commonly accepted. The ruins seen on Lake Hylice which are usually identified with Schoenus, are a possibility, but there is no particularly good reason to place Knopia so far away from Thebes (BUCK 1979: 14). Regarding Pausanias’ *peribolos*, Buck points out that it has been suggested as a possible location of the Amphiareum (FRAZER, Paus. 5.31), but he also points out that a *peribolos* is not a town. He adds that a cemetery and the architectural remains of the temple excavated at Kanapetra, about two kilometers north of Thebes, have also been suggested as belonging to the Amphiareum and the village of Knopia, but as yet nothing can be confirmed.¹⁴

For us the most crucial question remains if the Amphiareum was situated inside the wall of Greater Thebes, like the temple of Apollo Ismenios, or

¹³ The most likely date of the foundation of this wall on the plain is the period between 490 and 480 B.C. because the latest objects found in graves inside the wall perimeter date to ca. 490–480 B.C.. This suggests that the actual perimeter, or most of it, was defined around that time (FREDERIKSEN 2011: 125–126).

¹⁴ A different interpretation on the location of the Amphiareum has been advocated by Schachter (SCHACHTER 1981: 21–23). His view is that there was only one Amphiareum, the famous one of Oropia.

outside it. The candidate nearest to Thebes is the *peribolos* described by Pausanias as located on the way from Potniae to Thebes. Archaeologists have identified ancient Potniae as the settlement of Takhi that lays on the northern edge of the Parasopia about 2km south–southwest of the center of modern Thebes (FOSSEY 1988: 208; PAPADAKI 2000). Immediately to the north of Takhi, in the property of T. Douros-Agatsas, Keramopoulos found the remains of an isodomic wall, a roof tile, a fragment of a column, a bronze *phiale* and many terracotta figurines of seated women, standing boys, and animals, including pigs, cows and birds (KERAMOPOULLOS 1917: 261–266). Most of the ceramics belong to the fifth century B.C.; only three potsherds were Mycenaean and two were Geometric. This material clearly documents the existence of a sanctuary, and Keramopoulos connected the site with Pausanias' *peribolos*. Symeonoglou put forward a different interpretation: he rejected its identification with the Amphiareum, and instead argued that it was the double sanctuary of Demeter and Dionysos also mentioned by Pausanias (9,8,1–2) (SYMEONOGLOU 1985: 292). Unfortunately, the architectural remains discovered by Keramopoulos have been destroyed over time, and archaeologists are no longer able to examine the site thoroughly (PAPADAKI 2000: 361–362). Anyway, it is clear that wherever we place it, the Amphiareum was outside the wall of Greater Thebes.¹⁵

To sum up, I think that the gifts of Croesus were transported from the Amphiareum to a safer place, i.e. the temple of Apollo Ismenios which was protected by the late Archaic wall of Greater Thebes that included the southeastern sector near Kadmeia. The reason was arguably the disturbance caused by the Persian invasion of Greece. This is hardly surprising if we consider that in 490 B.C. the Persians stole the statue of Apollo from the Boeotian Delium (Hdt.VI.118). It is possible that in order to justify and legitimize the transportation of Croesus' dedication, the Theban priests of Apollo invented the story that they had discovered the shield with the help of the oracle of Apollo Ismenios. At any rate, the transportation of the gifts is meaningful only if the southeastern sector of the wall of Greater Thebes already existed before the Persian Wars.

¹⁵ Symeonoglou (SYMEONOGLOU 1985, 108, 115, 136, 296) thinks that the Amphiareum could be near the church of Agios Nikolaos (site 215 in his Catalogue of Sites).

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