

Chapter Title: Introduction

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# Introduction

Shortly after the fall of Troy, a new group entered the land we call Thessaly, in northern Greece. They came from the west, over the Pindos mountains, though Epeiros may not have been their original home. They were the Thessaloi, and they would come to dominate Thessaly, giving it its historical name – Thessalia, land of the Thessaloi – and enslaving its indigenous population as an agricultural workforce.

Such, in essence, is the story that Greeks from the fifth century onward told about the origins of the Thessalians and their presence in the land they inhabited. There are two ways of looking at the tradition. For some scholars past and present it encapsulates elements of historical truth: post-Mycenaean migration, the arrival of a new ethnic element in the region, the step by step subordination of pre-existing communities.<sup>1</sup> Alternatively, one can regard it as deriving from ‘intentional history’, as Gehrke has called it:<sup>2</sup> stories the Thessalians told about themselves to create a sense of shared origin and therefore of collective identity, and to justify the inequality of power between themselves and various subaltern groups such as the Penestai (enslaved agricultural workers). The sheer prevalence of migration narratives in the origin-stories of *ethnē* strongly suggests the

<sup>1</sup> For the most part, migration theories are a feature of somewhat older scholarship, such as Sordi (1958), 1–31, and Larsen (1968), 13–14. Sordi sees the origin of the Thessaloi as coming from Kos and adjoining areas; for Larsen, they arrived over the Pindos from the west, a position also taken, and developed in a great deal more detail, by Corvisier (1991). The migration of the Thessaloi is sometimes embroiled in the theory of the Dorian invasion: see, for example, Hammond (1931–1932), 147–55 (cf. Hammond [1967], 393). The historicity of the arrival of the Thessaloi has, however, significant current exponents, chief among them Bruno Helly, who explains intra-regional variations in the Thessalian dialect by reference to the arrival and expansion of the Thessaloi over the Pindos. See Helly (1991), 144–47; Helly (2007); Bouchon and Helly (2013), 210–11; cf. Helly (2013), which proposes a model for the gradual displacement of the Magnetes by the Thessaloi. For a sceptical view of the historical reality of the arrival of the Thessaloi and the displacement of the Boiotoi, by contrast, see Morgan (2003), 188. For discussion of the Dorian invasion and its role in historiography and archaeology see Middleton (2010), 41–48.

<sup>2</sup> Gehrke (1994).

potency of the motif as a way of unifying populations on the symbolic level, however diverse and indeed conflicted they were in other modes of life.<sup>3</sup> These two perspectives are not mutually exclusive, and ‘no smoke without fire’ is in general a sound historical principle: probably trans-Pindos and trans-Aegean population movements were part of the upheavals in Thessaly that occurred between the Bronze and the Early Iron Age. To that extent, this book abnegates membership of the ‘*école hypercritique*’ that presents the traditions of the Thessalian migration as wholly imaginary, a position lambasted by Sakellariou.<sup>4</sup> In fact the reality of population movements is simply not its subject. The real question is why certain memories, real or not, are preserved, while others fall by the wayside; this book considers the stories told, and their significance, without making an assumption either way about their basis in shreds of reality from the very distant past. It focuses on when, how and why certain stories were told about who the Thessalians were and where they came from; why those stories and not others (since migrations will have been various and multidirectional); and why it became desirable to promote them at certain times and through certain channels of symbolic communication.

As Luce has remarked, ‘L’identité est donc avant tout un fruit de la parole. En effet, c’est par les mots que l’on peut se nommer et que l’on peut nommer les autres, c’est par la parole que l’on peut raconter l’histoire de son groupe.’<sup>5</sup> Recovering Thessalian stories, and how they described themselves, will be the core purpose of this book, though the speech is often indirect; we rarely have the words of the Thessalians themselves, used in explicit self-definition, but we can build up some understanding of their symbolic language from myth, cult, iconography and certain significant material choices.

## 1. The structure of the book

This book follows a largely chronological trajectory, both within and between chapters, in order to chart the discernible phases of Thessalian ethnic articulation. Chapters 1 and 2 examine the place and significance of Thessaly within Archaic Greece; first its role within the political and

<sup>3</sup> As Kaplan observes (2014, 306), ‘Virtually every Greek community located its origins in a story of immigration.’

<sup>4</sup> Sakellariou (2009), 75. It is striking that in his treatment of the proto-history of the Thessalian *ethnos* (749–58) he makes no mention of the theories of Helly, despite some elements of compatibility.

<sup>5</sup> Luce (2014), 37. (‘Identity is above all a product of speech. In effect, it is through words that one can name oneself, and name others; it is through speech that one can recount the history of one’s group.’)

religious landscape of central Greece, and then, in Chapter 2, in the production of epic verse. As these two chapters establish, most of our surviving Archaic sources show little or no desire to emphasise the unity of Thessaly or its identity as sharply separated from that of other Greeks. This is not because texts such as the Iliadic Catalogue of Ships predate the presence of the Thessaloi in Thessaly, but because they reflect different priorities of self-expression within Thessaly and different ways of seeing Thessaly from the outside. Around the end of the sixth century, this starts to change. Chapter 3 charts the development of the origin-myth of the Thessaloi, from its beginnings as a ‘wandering heroes’ tale designed to assert the privileged ethnic standing of a west-Thessalian elite to its gradual extension and adaptation, culminating in the first half of the fifth century, as a charter-myth for the Thessaloi as a whole *ethnos*. Chapter 4 shifts the focus to cult and examines the development, again in the late sixth and earlier fifth century, of a complex of ritual and myth connected with Poseidon and designed to express a suite of Thessalian characteristics to do with the land, its abundance and its natural products, especially horses and grain. While the late Archaic period did not see the creation *ex nihilo* of ethnic terms and consciousness in Thessaly, it did see the start of a project, led by polis elites, to find ways of articulating what the Thessalians had in common and what set them apart from other Greeks.

This development coincided with the first attested stages of Thessalian political co-operation, in particular the creation of the tetrads, the four districts of Thessaly with their highly significant names, Pelasgiotis, Thessaliois, Hestiotis<sup>6</sup> and Phthiotis. However, as Chapter 5 asserts, to read this co-operation as the creation of a fully fledged federal state is to imagine the conditions of the late fifth century and the fourth back into the late sixth. Thessalian political and military unity should not be regarded – as some have regarded it – as somehow primordial, inherent in the warrior identity of the invading Thessaloi and in the geographical unity of the Thessalian plains.<sup>7</sup> Rather, over the course of the Classical period various models of political co-operation seem to have been tried, ranging from *philia*-ties between polis elites, through various paradigms of pan-Thessalian rule, to the formal *koinon* mechanisms discernible from the 360s BC. Chapter 5 follows this political evolution of Thessaly on the regional level, tracing its phases without trying to smooth over the massive rifts in our available evidence and therefore our understanding.

The story thus far may be seen as, in effect, the creation of Thessaly, first as a mythological entity, then as a ritual one and finally as a political

<sup>6</sup> This spelling is preferred to the more usual Hestiaiotis/Histiaiotis because it is attested in Thessalian inscriptions. See Chapter 3.

<sup>7</sup> E.g., Larsen (1968), 12–26; cf. Tziafalias (1994), 154–56.

one. In this process, the role of the external perspective should not be ignored. We may regard it as a necessary inconvenience to have to rely so often on non-Thessalian sources in our quest to understand how the Thessalians themselves regarded their own identity. In some ways it is, but in fact non-Thessalian sources are not just a cracked and faulty lens through which one peers dimly at realities beyond; they are themselves part of the picture. The formation and expression of regional identity in ancient Greece always had a dialogic element, as ingredients of external perception, even pejorative stereotyping, were co-opted and incorporated within how a community regarded and presented itself. Arkadia is a good example of this: other Greeks regarded it as primitive and primordial, and while in fact the isolated untouched Arkadia was very far from historical reality, this characterisation of the region and its people was built into the cults and myths most salient to the articulation of its shared identity from the fourth century BC onwards.<sup>8</sup> Sparta, too, affords examples of a community 'playing up' to external perceptions, of internal and external perspectives informing each other.<sup>9</sup> This dialogic process is fully in play in Thessaly too, and cannot be written out of the picture.

The external perspective takes centre stage in Chapter 6, which discusses the increasingly hostile treatment of the Thessalians and the perceived Thessalian character, especially in the Athenian sources, from the later fifth century, and the climax of criticism occasioned by the close association between the Thessalians and Philip II of Macedon. This sees the traits traditionally regarded as positive – wealth, hospitality, an old-fashioned political system – turned more and more into modes of disparagement. Thessalian voices are not, however, lost to hearing, and we see signs of Thessalians trying to enhance their collective standing in the eyes of other Greeks. This is even more visible in Chapter 7, in which the conditions of the Hellenistic world offer new opportunities both for interaction with other communities across the Greek world and for collective representation in myth and religion. In many ways these new opportunities were used by Thessalians – groups and individuals – to control the narrative about their character, their deeds and their identity. We see a return to some of the themes prevalent in the Archaic period: a close connection between Thessaly and the origins of Hellenism, a positive association between Thessaly and natural wealth, horses and horsemanship, traditional aristocratic values. But between the Archaic and the Hellenistic

<sup>8</sup> Jost (2007), 264–69; Roy (2011) discusses especially the relationship between the Arkadians' reputation for 'backwardness' and themes of conservatism and primordiality in their self-representation.

<sup>9</sup> Hellenistic and Roman Sparta embellishing and advertising famous Spartan traditions: Kennell (2017). See also Flower (2002).

periods so much has happened: the *idea* of Thessaly has achieved potency, in a way that is not visible in Archaic sources, and has become freighted with cultural, ethical and political associations in the eyes of other Greeks. Hellenistic Thessalians, while reclaiming Archaic myths in particular, did so in the light of centuries of such cumulative discourse-building.

Before commencing this exploration, however, it is necessary to consider some key preliminary aspects of method and approach, and to set the stage by discussing some of the basic manifestations of Thessaly as a natural, political and linguistic entity. It will be shown that no one measure reveals Thessaly to us as having inherent or straightforward regional unity; rather, such factors – landscape, political co-operation, language, material culture – all played a part in the process by which Thessalians deliberately shaped and articulated their shared identity, the subject of this book.

## 2. Studying regional identity in ancient Greece

One of the most significant advances in ancient history since the 1980s has been the reassessment of the *ethnos*. The word itself was used in various ways by the Greeks to denote a range of groups, categories and communities, one of which was a tribe seen as bound together by consanguinity, kinship and shared origins.<sup>10</sup> It is in this specific sense that the present book, in keeping with most modern scholarship, uses the term, while retaining awareness of its relative flexibility in ancient usage. Even in the tribal sense, *ethnos* could, for the Greeks, denote a geographically diffused group, such as the Dorians, the Ionians, or even the Hellenes. A Hellene did not have to live in Hellas to be a Hellene; long before the cultural expansion of the Hellenistic period, Hellenes identifying themselves as such were to be found in western Asia, in north Africa, in Magna Graecia. There was, however, a second tier of *ethnos*, smaller, more land-based (though still potentially mobile). The Thessaloi were one such; to the south of them there were others, not only large and important ones such as the Phokians and Boiotians but also a patchwork of micro-*ethnē* in and around the Spercheios valley, such as the Oitaians, Malians, Ainianes, Dorians of the Metropolis. Unlike Hellenes, such *ethnē* were firmly grounded in the reality of territory and territorial possession; land and its occupation dominated their lives, but also their myth-histories.

Stories of arrival were especially significant; *ethnē* (including the Thessaloi) move from one region to another, finally to take up residence in their historical homeland. The alternative is autochthony, the claim that a group is so absolutely indigenous as to have been sprung from the very land in which it lives. Myths of migrating *ethnē* used generally to be considered

<sup>10</sup> Hall (1997), 34–40; Fraser (2009), 1–5; McInerney (2001), 55–56.

records of historical reality, in particular the movements of peoples after, or accompanying, the decline of Mycenaean civilisation.<sup>11</sup> As a consequence, it was thought, the *ethnos* was a primordial unit.<sup>12</sup> The tribe predated the polis. It was the earliest component of social organisation. It had inherent coherence. These assumptions have been challenged from two main angles. First, Catherine Morgan's *Early Greek States Beyond the Polis* dispelled the easy assumption that the *ethnos* was always an earlier, indeed a primitive, phenomenon, supplemented and effectively supplanted (except in certain 'backwaters') by the innovation of the polis. Thessaly is one of the regions she examines in detail to demonstrate that, if we set aside the conviction that only the polis (defined according to rather narrow Aristotelian criteria) is the true measure of political maturity and cohesion, we can recognise the many tiers of identity operating in Early Iron Age society.<sup>13</sup> Second, regional studies have identified the importance of ethnogenesis as the process by which a sense of ethnic belonging within a certain group is forged through reference to shared myths, cults and customs.<sup>14</sup> Salient examples of this latter approach are McInerney's *The Folds of Parnassos: Land and Ethnicity in Ancient Phokis*, Luraghi's *The Ancient Messenians: Constructions of Ethnicity and Memory*, and Larson's *Tales of Epic Ancestry: Boiotian Collective Identity in the Late Archaic and Early Classical Periods*. What such regional studies have in common – and what this book also shares – is that *ethnos*-identity is approached as a process, rather than an inherent reality. Societies – diverse in landscape, stories, cults, material culture – build a sense of collective belonging.

As well as establishing the *ethnos* as the product, in part at least, of a process of manufacture, this trend in scholarship has had the crucial effect of enhancing our understanding of the role of the *koinon*, or federal state. Political institutions used to be given the prime role in how a community beyond the polis – or across poleis – interacted. The federal state was implicitly or explicitly valorised: when an *ethnos* united in this fashion, often for military purposes, it was seen as successful; an apparent lack of formalised political co-operation was regarded as a sign of weakness or decline. This narrative is pervasive in the past scholarship on Thessaly, and will be encountered and challenged at various junctures. The apex of

<sup>11</sup> E.g. Hammond (1931–1932); discussion of the approach in Hall (1997), 41–42.

<sup>12</sup> See, for example, Snodgrass (1980), 86–87; he uses Thessaly as his main example of the 'primitive *ethnos*'.

<sup>13</sup> Morgan (2003), 4–16, 85–104, 135–42.

<sup>14</sup> Among the many studies of ancient Greek ethnicity and ethnogenesis see, for example, Ulf (1996), McInerney (2001), Hall (1997 and 2002), Lund (2005), Freitag (2007) and the articles in McInerney ed. (2014), especially those of Reger, Luraghi and Ganter.

the Thessalian achievement is typically located in the sixth century BC, when the Thessalians had formed a federal state under the leadership of Aleuas Pyrrhos, and when – partly as a consequence – they had been able to assert military dominance over the adjoining *ethnē* and their neighbours to the south. The current book does not remove the *koinon* from the picture altogether, but political co-operation is situated alongside developments in religion and myth to create a diverse understanding of regional co-operation in all its discernible forms.

The ethnogenetic process does not happen *ex nihilo*, but it does cut across some aspects of the tangible daily reality of Thessalians' lives. It is important that those of us studying communities from the regional perspective do not unconsciously come to see our view as more important on the practical level than it actually was. Two caveats have to be made and kept in mind. The first is that the discernible production and consumption of myths and cults expressing Thessalian identity happen among elites. The project of Thessalian ethnogenesis in its active form cannot be claimed to be truly shared by all Thessalians. This is not to deny a degree of organic diffusion within Thessalian communities, occasionally visible. But most of the material we are able to assess – coins, inscriptions, non-Thessalian historical writing – reflect decisions made on the civic level and among relatively narrow groups of influential individuals. The second caveat is that the polis, so far from being weak and under-developed in Thessaly as used to be claimed,<sup>15</sup> was actually the prime unit of religious, civic and political life. Citizenship was citizenship of the polis, not of 'the Thessalians'. Cults served, and reflected the priorities of, poleis or parts of poleis. Unlike the *ethnos*, the polis involved regular face-to-face contact, within public spaces and for the purposes of practical daily life. We have no evidence that even a truly representative sample of 'the Thessalians' ever gathered together for political or religious reasons, such as would ground their shared identity in physical interaction. The greatest achievement of Mili's *Religion and Society in Ancient Thessaly* is to have examined cult on different levels – households, poleis, groups of poleis, the region – and the interaction between these levels. Archaeological and epigraphic work in Thessaly in the later twentieth and the twenty-first century have shed more and more light on the unique societies of specific settlements in all periods.<sup>16</sup>

<sup>15</sup> For example by Westlake (1935), 31–33.

<sup>16</sup> A few examples among many: Doulgeri-Intzesiloglou (1994, 1996, 1997) on Pherai; *I.Atrax*. (Tziafalias et al. 2016) on the inscriptions of Atrax; and the Canadian–Greek Kastro Kallithea Project directed by Sophia Karapanou and Margriet Haagsma (see Haagsma 2014 for an overview; a recent report in Haagsma et al. 2015). An important forerunner to such sub-regional studies is the work of Béquignon on Pherai (1937a) and on the Spercheios valley (1937b).



The present book focuses chiefly on the *ethnos*/regional level, while frequently examining its intersection with the local. After all, expressions of *ethnos*-identity normally took place on the local level, when a group or an individual chose to espouse the pan-Thessalian perspective for reasons driven by the particular conditions of the time and place. And the formation of *ethnos*-identity stimulated divergence and dissent, as communities chose to emphasise an alternative myth-history, such as an origin before the Thessaloi arrived. The regional focus will reveal, not obscure, these divergent voices wherever they may be discerned. Nonetheless, it is important constantly to recognise the superficiality of the project of ethnogenesis, at any rate many of its ingredients, compared with routine realities of Thessalian lives. An example is the hero Thessalos himself; for all that he and his descendants are pivotal in the development of the Thessalian story, for most Thessalian communities he would have been a figure of fleeting importance (if any), compared with the heroes and deities of their own local area.

### 3. Thessaly as a natural and political space

So ethnogenesis in Thessaly as elsewhere was a project, a process of intentional manufacture. But the land of Thessaly was entirely real, and from the bird's eye perspective of the Barrington Atlas seems to have its own inherent coherence. Historians have attributed to the distinct and distinctive Thessalian landscape a key role in promoting political unification in the Archaic period.<sup>17</sup> However, this simple equation requires critical examination. As Chapter 1 establishes, Thessaly was by no means precocious in either ethnogenesis or *koinon*-formation, seeming to engage in these processes a little after regions with far less geographical unity. Moreover, borders and border conflicts are important stimuli behind a community's desire to articulate its distinct identity, and the sheer size of Thessaly meant that many poleis would not have been near the boundary between Thessaly and not-Thessaly; rather, the edges they would have experienced routinely were those between the *chōra* of one polis and that of the neighbouring one, and we know – albeit largely from later sources because of the dating of most inscriptions – that territorial disputes between poleis were a reality of Thessalian life.<sup>18</sup> It is instructive to compare the vast expanse of the Thessalian plains with the micro-*ethnē* of

<sup>17</sup> See, for example, McInerney (1999), 173: 'Although Thessaly in the fifth and fourth centuries was eclipsed by the poleis of southern Greece, in the Archaic period it achieved a degree of unity and organization unmatched elsewhere in Greece. This was the result of a variety of factors. Environmentally, Thessaly is well suited to unification ...'

<sup>18</sup> See, for example, Chandezon (2003), 75–91, nos 16–18.

the Spercheios valley and central Greece, where grazing land, passes and routes were frequently contested and identities forged in the crucible of endemic low-level conflict. Such a geopolitical environment was as likely to stimulate ethnogenesis as was Thessaly's extensive land, perhaps more so. Moreover, Thessaly's geographical unity is in part the product of the kind of map-gazing that is a staple of the modern historian's craft but which the ancients did not often do.

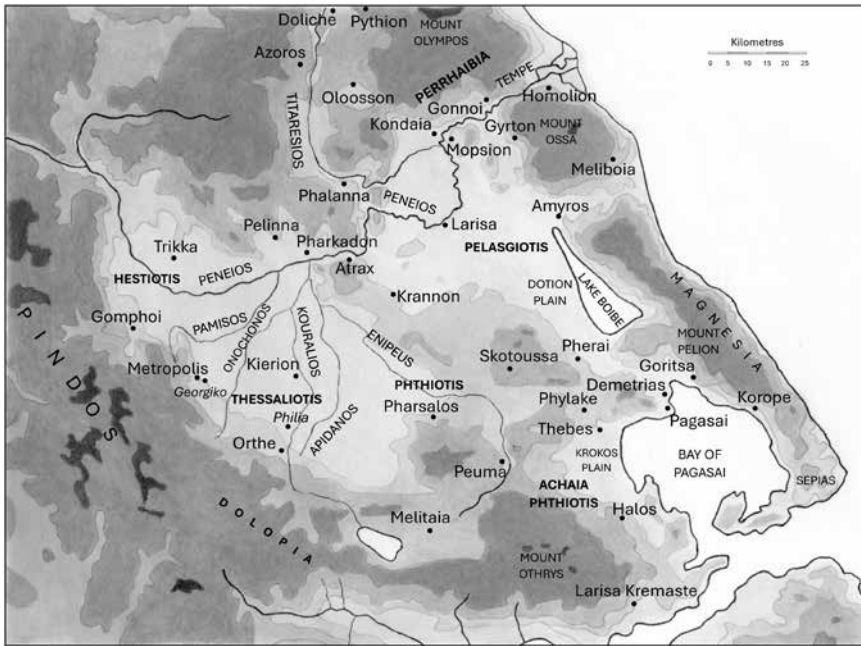
From the bird's eye view, Thessaly takes the form of two large interlinked plains (see Map 1). For convenience, these will be referred to as the east and west plains, though because their alignment is diagonal the terms are somewhat inexact.<sup>19</sup> Most of the eastern plain consisted of the tetrad of Pelasgiotis, comprising poleis (such as Larisa, Atrax, Krannon and Pherai) that bulk disproportionately large in ancient literary accounts, in the production and the modern publication of inscriptions and in the amount of archaeological excavation and publication. The western plain – which has tended to be far less explored and understood by historians,<sup>20</sup> though this imbalance is diminishing<sup>21</sup> – comprises Hestiotis, in the north-western corner (whose most famous polis is Triikka, home of an important Asklepios-cult); Thessaliotis, comprising the poleis of Kierion and Metropolis and the sanctuary of Athena Itonia at (modern) Philia; and Phthiotis. Phthiotis, whose foremost polis was Pharsalos, occupies the south-eastern corner of the western plain; east of it, across a chain of hills projecting north from Mount Othrys, is the coastal plain of Achaia Phthiotis, one of the perioikic regions of Thessaly.

At this point it is necessary to stop and consider the terms tetrads and *perioikis*. As we shall see, the tetrads were created in the late sixth century

<sup>19</sup> The region's geology consists of two zones, their shared boundary running diagonally NW–SE: see Schneider (1979), 47.

<sup>20</sup> Through most of the twentieth century western Thessaly benefited far less, and more slowly, from advances in economics, education and agriculture entering Thessaly from the eastern side, and this broader difference is certainly a factor in its historiographical obscurity. See Sivignon (1979), 40–41. In fact, however, it was the attempt in the 1970s to boost its agricultural productivity and economic importance that did most harm to the preservation of archaeological material: in this process, ancient mounds (settlement and burial) were levelled and land cleared and drained. See Orenge et al. (2015).

<sup>21</sup> Some recent archaeological projects have started to redress the balance somewhat, illuminating both individual sites (see, for example, the report on striking new discoveries at Vlochos, in Vaiopoulou et al. 2020), and the area more widely (e.g. Orenge et al. 2015; Krahtopoulou et al. 2018). The IGEAN project (*Innovative geophysical approaches for the study of early agricultural villages of Neolithic Thessaly*) applies new archaeological methods to recovering lost landscapes in Thessaly, across the region. See <https://igean.ims.forth.gr/>.



Map 1. Thessaly. © Rosemary Aston 2023

BC, an event of great significance for this study; thereafter, they appear with reasonable frequency in non-Thessalian texts and occasionally in Thessalian inscriptions. However, their practical importance appears to have been slight. Chapter 5 will identify some of their functions within Thessalian political organisation, but their impact on the daily lives of ordinary Thessalians was probably limited. They are the cornerstone of Aleuas' military reforms as envisaged by Helly, but, as we shall see, there is good reason for scepticism in that regard. In this book they will be used rather as Strabo and his ilk used them, as convenient ways of referring to sub-regional zones. This convenience reflects the fact that they do mirror, and must have emerged out of, the interaction of certain settlement clusters, as will be discussed below. However, it was possible for a community on the boundary between tetrads to belong to one or the other depending on the date and the source, and which side of the line it was considered to fall would have made little difference to life within the polis in question.

The picture is comparable when we consider the *perioikoi*. This term was not in common usage in this sense in antiquity,<sup>22</sup> but in modern historiography it is routinely used to designate the immediate neighbours of the

<sup>22</sup> The term is only used, in fact, by Xenophon (6.1.19): discussion in Sprawski (2008), 131–35.

Thessalians: the Perrhaiboi to the north, the Phthiotic Achaians to the south-east, the Magnetes along the eastern seaboard and the Dolopes on the southern fringe of the Pindos, adjoining Thessalotis. This book will, for practical purposes, refer to ‘*perioikoi*’ and ‘perioikic *ethnē*’, in contrast with the tetrads, or ‘tetradic Thessaly’, the home of the Thessaloi. The ancients recognised a difference: the Perrhaiboi, Magnetes, Achaioi and Dolopes were not Thessaloi. At times, this ethnic distinction was extremely important to the process of defining and demarcating the Thessalian *ethnos*. However, in practical terms the distinction was shaky. People travelled freely between tetrads and *perioikoi*; with them went livestock, goods, customs, speech patterns. Thessaly may look on the map like a bifurcated bowl with steep and definite sides, but those sides were in fact highly permeable, pierced by passes through which armies (famously) and herdsmen (more obscurely) moved into and out of the region.<sup>23</sup>

#### 4. Thessaly as a linguistic area

The permeability of Thessaly’s boundaries is amply reflected in the linguistic tendencies of the Thessalians, in as much as they can be reconstructed from the epigraphic record, scant as it is before the Hellenistic period. Handbooks of ancient Greek dialects will invariably supply a list of forms in use in Thessaly, as revealed by inscriptions.<sup>24</sup> Behind this list, however, various complexities lie. When we talk of the Thessalian dialect, what we chiefly mean is the dialect found in the inscriptions of Pelasgiotis, especially Larisa; this is in part because this area is disproportionately represented in the available epigraphic record, but it is also the case that when one moves into west Thessaly one encounters some differences, especially influence from North West Greek.<sup>25</sup> Even at the level of individual poleis there were probably local variations in usage. All in all, to speak of the Thessalian dialect as if it were a homogeneous and immutable thing is, of course, misleading.

<sup>23</sup> See Kilian (1975). More recently, the work done by Pikoulas on the passes linking Thessaly with neighbouring regions to the north and west has emphasised the permeability of the region’s boundaries. See Pikoulas (2008, 2009 and 2012). Hammond (1931–1932), 139–47, retains its value: the discussion is old, but based on a great deal of personal observation, including of early twentieth century pastoralism. See also Helly (1973, vol. I, 8–12) on routes between Thessaly and Macedon in the area of Gonnoi; Reinders and Prummel (1998) on pastoral mobility in the territory of Hellenistic New Halos.

<sup>24</sup> Buck (1955) retains its essential utility; see also, however, García-Ramón (1975); Blümel (1982).

<sup>25</sup> On the dialect variations of Hestiaiotis see Helly (1970), 164–82.

Nonetheless, as long as one bears in mind the inevitable shades of variation on the subregional level, it is possible to describe the region's linguistic tendencies as distinct from those of other regions.<sup>26</sup> There is enough consistency across the region to make it clear that certain forms – such as, for example, *ov* for *o* and the patronymic adjective<sup>27</sup> – would have had a 'Thessalian flavour'.<sup>28</sup> There are also forms that would have caused some challenge of comprehension for, say, an Athenian visitor, and would have left him or her with the clear sense of having been in a region with its own linguistic character.<sup>29</sup>

This is enhanced by the fact that on the whole the use of dialect in the adjoining perioikic *ethnē* was relatively slight once the Hellenistic koine was in circulation.<sup>30</sup> The difficulty underlying this observation is that the vast majority of available inscriptions from these areas are Hellenistic and later, so

<sup>26</sup> Helly (2018) supplies an important collation and reconsideration of the key documents that illustrate Thessalian forms and their shades of variation across the region, interacting with 'the diffusion of the same type of alphabet across all parts of Thessaly' (p. 352).

<sup>27</sup> Morpurgo-Davies (1968).

<sup>28</sup> Surely features such as *ov* for *o* tell us about the Thessalian accent; however, it is interesting that Thessalian speech is not 'spoofed' in Attic comedy, as Boiotian and Laconian are. There is, however, a possible sign of Athenian awareness of the Thessalian dialect in the form of the famous dinos from Pharsalos, painted by Sophilos (Athens NM 15499). The chariot-race scene on the pot (or, rather, on a large surviving fragment) is labelled by the painter ΠΑΤΡΟΚΛΥΣ ΑΤΛΑ, 'games of/for Patroklos'. Baurain-Rebillard (1998) observes that Sophilos was probably perfectly capable of writing the 'correct' Attic *Patroklous* (*Patrokleos*, contracted), and suggests that he was trying to capture the Thessalian dialect to match the linguistic tendencies of the pot's destination. If so, Sophilos was intriguingly wrong: vowel shifts to *v* are somewhat more noticeable in Boiotian. Would his attitude have been 'Well, it's all Aeolic'? Finally, it is worth mentioning Parthenios' *Erotica Pathemata* 24, in which a man wishing to hide his identity puts on a Thessalian accent (θετταλιζων τῆ φωνῆ), indicating not only an external awareness of the Thessalian linguistic character but also perhaps a perception that Thessalian speech was distinctive enough to be a useful vocal disguise.

<sup>29</sup> For example, *δαύχνα* for *δάφνη* ('laurel'), or *βέλλομαι* instead of *βούλομαι* ('I wish/want'). The same Athenian, visiting Larisa for example, might have been baffled by an apparent reference to the harbour, *λιμήν*; surely Larisa had no access to the sea? Walking confusedly thither he would have found himself in the market-place, for Thessalians in Pelasgiotis sometimes used *λιμήν* where an Athenian would say *ἀγορά*. (See, for example, *IG IX.2* 517, line 40.)

<sup>30</sup> Alternatives to dialect did exist before Alexander the Great, as Niehoff-Panagiotidis reminds us (1994, 197–222). However, for the most part, it is only from the Hellenistic period that we have sufficient Thessalian inscriptions to be able to observe the patterns at work. It should be noted that the relative scarcity of dialect inscriptions from Hellenistic Magnesia and Achaia Phthiotis surely reflects the high degree of Macedonian involvement in those areas (on which see Chapter 7), rather than purely linguistic factors.

that we cannot accurately gauge their linguistic habits before the establishment of the koine; nonetheless, from the third century onwards we can see a clear disinclination on their part to adopt the dialect forms used so frequently by their Thessalian neighbours, especially for public documents.<sup>31</sup> Nowhere is this more starkly visible than in the dossier of third-century *asylia* inscriptions from Kos. The communities granting *asylia* passed decrees to that effect at home; the texts of these decrees were then displayed by the Koans in the Asklepieion itself. On one large block were inscribed decrees from Gonnoi (Perrhaibia), Phthiotic Thebes (Achaia Phthiotis), Homolion (Magnesia) and Megara.<sup>32</sup> Each records the favourable decision of the community in question; there are some repeated formulae and phrases, but apart from that a different wording is used in each. The whole text is in koine, without obvious dialect variation according to place. As Helly remarks, this use of koine ‘est conforme aux habitudes de chancellerie de ces cités au 3<sup>e</sup> s. av. J.-C.’<sup>33</sup> A different situation is encountered in *SEG* 53.851[1], which contains two further decrees from Thessalian poleis, unfortunately unidentifiable. Here the dialect throughout is Thessalian, and this takes us from the *perioikis* into (probably) Pelasgiotis. It seems very likely that Larisa was one of the cities, since she was especially energetic in prosecuting trans-Aegean connections at this time (see Chapter 7). Thus we have a clear and deliberate distinction between perioikic *ethnē* and ‘Thessaly proper’, a distinction that is also indicated through language (koine for the *perioikoi*, dialect for the Thessalians).

The ethnic significance of dialect is enhanced rather than reduced by the practice of code-switching of which Thessalians, in certain circumstances, were perfectly capable.<sup>34</sup> Dialect – like material culture, as the next section will discuss – does not have to be automatic and unthinking: it can

<sup>31</sup> Perrhaibian Gonnoi illustrates this especially clearly because of its copious and well-published epigraphic record. All of its public inscriptions from the third century are in pure koine. In the second century some dialect forms are allowed to creep into a small number of public inscriptions. On the other hand, dialect usage is far more strongly represented in private texts such as dedications. For the figures and discussion see Bubeník (1989), 146–47.

<sup>32</sup> *SEG* 53.850. See Rigsby (1996), nos 19–22; however, no. 21 could be identified as a decree of Gonnoi only with the discovery of a new fragment of the stone: see Bosnakis and Hallof (2003), 229–31.

<sup>33</sup> ‘In keeping with the practices of the administration of these cities in the third century BC’: Helly (2004a), 89; *contra* Rigsby (1996), 132, who finds the koine surprising (but without good reason).

<sup>34</sup> There is scope for a far more extensive analysis of this topic than this book can undertake; moreover, such a study could also take into account variations in the use of epichoric letter-forms, now that much of the relevant material has been collated in Doulgeri-Intzesiloglou (2000); see also Jeffery (1990), 96–99; Johnston (2021), 115–17. Jeffery’s broad conclusion concerning the material she examined (which was in itself a limited and unrepresentative corpus) was that Thessaly had a regional repertoire of

be employed to make statements about identity. It is fascinating to observe that the Thessalians maintained the co-existence of dialect and koine with relative tenacity. Bubeník's comparison of Thessalian with Boiotian habits in this regard is illuminating, despite some problematic aspects of his data.<sup>35</sup> In the two regions, both using a form of the Aeolic dialect, the adoption of koine followed quite different patterns. Boiotia was far slower to adopt it than Thessaly; however, pure dialect was retained in Thessalian usage into the first century BC in public documents at the polis level, whereas in Boiotia it had ceased to be used for public documents by the end of the second century. Therefore, the ready adoption of koine in Thessalian public documents did not spell the swift eradication of dialect across the board. In Boiotia, the rise of koine, though slower to start, was more rapid than in Thessaly, in both public and private texts. And the trajectory is different in shape as well as in velocity: in Thessaly, the use of koine for public documents actually peaked in the second century BC; in Boiotia the peak was in the first. Also noteworthy is the fact that a far larger proportion of Boiotian inscriptions than Thessalian are in dialect with some koineisation. The Boiotians resisted pure koine, and retained their dialect, more assiduously than the Thessalians in the third and (to a lesser extent) second centuries; however, they allowed a greater 'contamination' of dialect with koine. In Thessaly, there was a greater tendency to keep dialect and koine apart; when creating an inscription, a clearer choice was made between dialect and koine, and less mingling of the two occurred.<sup>36</sup> This shows a strong awareness of the linguistic distinction, and a desire to maintain it.

The operation of code-switching is especially striking on the rare occasions when shifts between dialect and koine are made within a single inscription.<sup>37</sup> The famous Thessalian example of an inscription of this type is from Larisa and dates to the late third century BC.<sup>38</sup> It records two letters sent consecutively to the polis by the Macedonian king Philip V; both letters are quoted in full. The first letter instructs the Larisaians to overcome their economic troubles and population depletion by enrolling new citizens from among the other Thessalians and Greeks of other areas who are living in

letter-forms, but one that showed strong affinities with regions to the south, especially Phokis. On this see also Helly (2018).

<sup>35</sup> Bubeník (1989), 138–47. He appears to classify Gonnoi as Pelasgiotic, whereas in fact it was a Perrhaibian town and its dialect profile is rather different from those of the other poleis he examines. See Bubeník (1989), 142–43. However, the effect of this error is actually to exaggerate koine use rather than dialect use, and it does not invalidate his basic findings, merely the actual figures. Further on the co-existence of dialect and koine see Niehoff-Panagiotidis (1994), 247–72. Specifically on the Boiotian situation: Vottéro (1996).

<sup>36</sup> As noted by Bubeník (1989), 161.

<sup>37</sup> For an instructive non-Thessalian example, see Minon (2009).

<sup>38</sup> *IG IX.2* 517. For the dating of the letters see Habicht (1970), 273–79.

the city. This is followed by the text of a decree of the city, passed in 217 BC, essentially doing as the king instructed. Next comes the text of the second letter, rebuking the Larisaian for having erased the names of the newly enrolled citizens and so essentially transgressing the terms of their first decree. Finally there is a second decree, passed in 215 BC, that the city should carry out the terms of the king's second letter and re-enrol the citizens. As far as we know, Philip's instructions were adhered to thereafter.

That the letters are in koine is of course natural. However, koine is not used for the preamble or for the two decrees; these are in full Pelasgiotic dialect. This serves to differentiate the two types of document that the stone carries; however, Bubeník is surely right to see it as a gestural decision as well. In the face of ultimate and undeniable Macedonian power, the polis of Larisa chooses its local mode of language to assert its separate identity and preserve something of its cultural autonomy, even if its political autonomy is largely fictional at this point. Because the decrees follow the wording of the letters very closely in places, the visual and linguistic effect is very striking: we find the bland koine of the king transformed – translated, almost – into a very different mode of language. To give one small sample: 'Πετραῖος καὶ Ἀνάγκιππος καὶ Ἀριστόνουσ ὡς ἀπὸ τῆσ πρεσβείασ ἐγένοντο,' writes Philip, 'ἐνεφανίζόν μοι ὅτι καὶ ἡ ὑμετέρα πόλις διὰ τοὺσ πολέμουσ προσδεῖται πλεόνων οἰκητῶν.' ('Petraios and Anankippos and Aristonous, when they returned from their embassy, made clear to me that your polis, because of the wars, is seriously short of inhabitants.')39 The decree coverts this to: 'Πετραῖος καὶ Ἀνάγκιππος καὶ Ἀριστόνοουσ, οὺσ ἀτ τᾶσ πρεισβείασ ἐγένονθο, ἐνεφανίσσοεν αὐτοῦ, πόκ κί καὶ ἄ ἀμμέουν πόλις διὲ τὸσ πολέμουσ ποτεδέετο πλειόνουν τοῦν κατοικεῖσόντουν'.

The same linguistic contrast continues throughout. Did the Larisaian choose to mirror the text of the letters so closely, or did the king actually stipulate that his letters be quoted in full? Or was it simply customary practice? Although royal letters abound from the Hellenistic period, this is our only surviving example of letters and decrees inscribed together, so we cannot ascertain what was usual. If the arrangement of the inscription – letter, decree, letter, decree – was decided by the Larisaian rather than by Philip, as seems likely, the effect is very striking: it comes across as an assertion of loyalty, of taking the king's words *very seriously indeed*, while all the time dialect is used to turn the situation into a matter of local decision-making. The king's words become the words of the Larisaian leaders.<sup>40</sup> Using koine for the decrees would not have achieved this effect.<sup>41</sup>

<sup>39</sup> Note that, throughout this book, translations are my own unless otherwise specified.

<sup>40</sup> Brixhe and Vottéro (2004), 18–20.

<sup>41</sup> The well-known historical circumstances of this example make the code-switching relatively easy to understand. Motivations are more obscure in cases where context



Code-switching is one form of deliberate and significant linguistic usage; another is the avoidance of dialect. In Thessaly, as indeed elsewhere, verse inscriptions adopted a literary register from which epichoric elements are deliberately excluded despite their prevalence in prose inscriptions of the time.<sup>42</sup> And, indeed, it is noteworthy that the content of the verse inscriptions also sometimes stresses the non-local, as in the following two examples.

You have in no way disgraced the glory of the city to lie here,  
the glory of broad-landed Atrax,  
Theotimos son of Menyllos, together with the best men  
of the Greeks in the plain of Tanagra.<sup>43</sup>

And:

This earth hides Menon, the son of Pothon, who  
Hellas hoped would decorate Thessaly with  
garlands. Orestes honoured his grave, and all  
his city feels grief because of the dead man's moderation.<sup>44</sup>

is wholly lacking. Such a case is the late fourth- or third-century dedication by one Tolemaios, in Larisa (*IG IX.2* 598). The white marble statue-base of the votive carries on one side *Τολεμαῖος/ἀνέθηκε*, while on the other side is *Τολεμαῖος/Λεόντειος/ὄνέθεικε*. Hence, one side speaks in koine, the other in dialect (complete with patronymic adjective). It is interesting that no patronymic is included in the koine text; this might indicate non-citizen status. Was the dialect inscription carved in later than the koine one, after citizenship was formally conferred, as a celebration of that elevation? We cannot know. Overall, Tolemaios seems to have wanted to signal a certain duality of affiliation: he was both a Thessalian and part of the wider Greek world that koine represented. See Kontogiannis (1985), 115–16.

<sup>42</sup> That is not to say that epichoric touches cannot be discerned: see Helly (2019) for examples. For the occasional mixture of dialect elements in verse inscriptions see also Lorenz (2019), 100; *I.Atrax* 161, 162 (later fifth and early fourth century BC respectively). Such inclusions are surely accidental, and would have occurred naturally when the local dialect was being deliberately suppressed to achieve a literary tone.

<sup>43</sup> Lorenz (2019), no. G51; *I.Atrax* 160 (discussion in Helly 2004b):

οὐ τι κατασχύνας πόλεος κλέος ἐνθάδε κείαι  
Ἄτραγος εὐρυχόρῳ Θεσσαλίᾳ στέφανον  
τεύχῳν, ὃ Θεότιμε, Μενύλλου παῖ, σὺν ἀρίστο<ι>ς  
ἀνδρ<ά>σιν Ἑλλένων ἐν Τανάγρας πεδίῳ.

(trans. Osborne and Rhodes, adapted).

<sup>44</sup> Peek (1960), 76–77, no. 81; Lorenz (2019), no. G34:

κρύπτει μὲν χθῶν ἦδε Μένωνα Πόθωνος, ὃν  
Ἑλλὰς | ἤλπισε κοσμήσειν Θεσσαλίαν στεφ[ά]-  
νοις | οὐ τύμβον τίμησεν Ὀρέστης, σωφρο-  
σύνης δὲ | οὐνεκα πένθος ἔχει πᾶσα πό-  
λις φθιμένου.

This is the standard language of funerary inscriptions;<sup>45</sup> moreover, in keeping with the linguistic register, the dead men in both instances are cast as valued members not only of their respective poleis but also of the wider Greek community. It is quite predictable, and in line with Greek epigraphic practice more generally, to find this type of text shunning epichoric language in favour of the panhellenic language of praise and accomplishment, though, as Morpurgo-Davies points out, some Aeolic elements would have resembled epic and so would potentially have been quite suitable for a lofty tone of praise-verse.<sup>46</sup> Nonetheless, they are generally excluded.

The deliberate avoidance of dialect in verse inscriptions of a certain gravity is made more apparent by the case of Astioun son of Souos and his religious and poetic activity in Atrax in the early third century. Astioun signs himself as the composer of an elegant verse recording the creation of a nymph-sanctuary near the Peneios at Atrax:

‘Do tell: who laboured over this structure and everything which stands in front of it,  
 setting up votives with many sacrifices,  
 below a flowering hill along the banks of the Peneios,  
 where Naiads in delicate dress twirl with their feet?’  
 ‘To the Naiad Nymphs, in a beautiful-looking place,  
 eagerly Arneklos erected a rock-made structure and  
 silver horns(?), as soon as he pushed away  
 his illness and regained his health.  
 Elevating it with honours appropriate to immortals,  
 the son of Souos gave splendour to the Naiads’ precinct’.  
 Astioun.<sup>47</sup>

<sup>45</sup> Helly finds faint shades of Thessalian linguistic colouring in the Theotimos epitaph, overlaid with panhellenic language and themes: Helly (2004b), 19–20. A further example of banal funerary language in a Thessalian epitaph is discussed by Santin (2008).

<sup>46</sup> Morpurgo-Davies (1987), 10–11.

<sup>47</sup> *I.Atrax* 83:

[εἰπόν, τίς τόδε δῶμα]α καὶ ἀ[ντί]α πᾶν ἐπόνη[σεν],  
 [στήσας σὺν πολλοῖς θύμασιν ἀνθέματα,  
 [ῥχθαισιν Πηγνεῖοῦ ὑ]πὸ λόφον ἀνθεμ[ό]ε[ντα],  
 [ἦ]ι ποσὶ δινούνη]αι Ναιάδεξ ἀβρόπεπλοι.  
 Ν[α]ϊά[σ]ιν Νύμφαισι κατ’ ἀγλαοε[ι]δέα χῶρον  
 [δ]ῶ[μά] τε ἰδρ[υ]σ[ε] π[έ]τροις καὶ [κέρατ’ ἀ]ργυρέα  
 Ἄρνεκλος προφρώνως, ἐκλυομ[ένην ὄθ’] ὑγείαν  
 ἐξ[α]ἵτις] λά[χ’] ἔην, νοῦσον ἀποσ[ά]μενος]  
 αἷς πρέπει ἀθανάτους αὖξων τιμαῖσιν ὁ Σούου  
 υἱὸς ἐπηγλάισεν Ναιάδων τέμενος.  
 Ἀστίου.

The poem itself is in the high register of formal verse, and almost dialect-free, including the patronymic genitive on line 9.<sup>48</sup> When it comes to signing his own name, however, Astioun maintained the ‘ou for ō’ tendency of his region, and did not convert his name to Astiōn.<sup>49</sup> In a way, this fits in with a general tendency – not, however, without exceptions – that occurs when an artist signs a sculpture commissioned, as a dedication, by someone from a different region.<sup>50</sup> In such cases, the words of the dedication tend to be in the dialect of the dedicator, whereas the artist’s signature is in the artist’s own dialect. However, our cases do not mark ethnic separation, but rather the verse/prose distinction.<sup>51</sup>

This section has shown that to treat Thessaly simply as an undifferentiated linguistic area – or, to put it another way, to treat dialect as a simple indicator of ethnicity – is misleading. Instead, Thessaly would have been a patchwork of subregional linguistic variations, much of it now lost to view, all of it also subject to change over time. Moreover, though linguistic usage could be a matter of unthinking habit, it was not always so. Thessalian stonecutters, or the authorities behind them, quite often used language to emphasise or to play down their Thessalian identity. The picture is just as nuanced when we consider the relationship between identity and material culture.

(trans. Wagman, adapted). Wagman (2015, 92–93) suggests that Astioun was a local Pharsalian poet.

<sup>48</sup> A shade of dialect exists in the form Souos, rather than Soös.

<sup>49</sup> Note that in the same area of his city’s land the same man put up a short text to accompany a dedication to the nymphs and Dionysos (*SEG* 45.554; *I.Atrax* 75): Νύμφαις: Διονύσου/Ἀστιῶν Σούειος ὀνέθεικε. Here the patronymic adjective is employed, as is the dialect form ὀνέθεικε and the geminated *nu* in the god’s name.

<sup>50</sup> Buck (1913).

<sup>51</sup> That we are not dealing with a situation particular to authors’/artists’ signatures is, furthermore, indicated by an example from third-century BC Larisa, where a grieving woman commissioned a white marble funerary stele for her dead son (*SEG* 42.522); here the deceased is named Thersōn in the metrical text, but underneath is the name Θέρσουν Θερσούνδαιος (Thersoun son of Thersoundas). Who is this Thersoun son of Thersoundas? Is the name of the deceased being repeated, extra-metrically? Or is it a family member who commissioned the monument or perhaps even composed the verse? That it is the deceased is strongly suggested by a comparable example in which the name and key signifiers of the deceased appear in dialect as a heading: (Πουτάλα Πουταλεία κόρα, Ττυρέια γυνά); under that are four lines of verse – elegiacs – in which the deceased reappears in koine, as Pötala. *IG* IX.2 638; Lorenz (2019), no. 56 (Larisaian, third century BC). Plainly it is the verse/prose distinction that governs the dialect usage in such instances. For more juxtapositions of metrical koine and non-metrical dialect see Santin and Tziafalias (2013), 269. For further discussion of this feature of the Thersoun and Poutala texts, and the cultural context of Hellenistic Larisa see Santin (2018), 228–30.

## 5. Landscape, identity and material culture

We can identify some regional pottery styles and region-wide artefact distribution, but material culture is as likely to divide the region as to unite it, as likely to connect Thessalians with other Greeks as to tie them in to each other.<sup>52</sup> It would, of course, be simplistic to assume that we might locate Thessalian identity through an obvious regional coherence of object types and styles. A straightforward relationship between material culture and ethnicity has long since been dealt a fatal blow by the work of such as Jonathan Hall.<sup>53</sup> Nonetheless, it is interesting to observe the flourishing of certain sub-regional material trends, combined with others whose scope is, on the face of it at least, more regional. A separate book would be required to analyse them all (and such a volume would have great merit). Here, however, two examples will suffice to make the point.<sup>54</sup>

The first relates to Thessaliothis. This area seems to have had and fostered a strongly demarcated identity from a very early period. In it was the sanctuary of Athena Itonia at (modern) Philia, which, though much later accorded a federal role, in the Early Iron Age served a more local network of worshippers with ritual probably centred round dining in an open-air sacred space. Within the ambit of this important religious site, between the eighth and the fifth century BC, archaeologists have identified a distinctive material habit: the construction of apsidal houses.<sup>55</sup> These are known from sites elsewhere in the Greek world, such as Lefkandi,<sup>56</sup> and exist at other Thessalian sites in the Bronze Age,<sup>57</sup> but in the Early Iron Age and Archaic period their Thessalian distribution forms a strong cluster within

<sup>52</sup> See, for example, Coldstream (2003), 40–41: even here, however, the number of artefacts particular to Thessaly is significantly outnumbered by those shared with adjoining and connected places. For the pitfalls of trying to read ethnicity from the material record in any simplistic way based on the distribution of material homogeneity or trends see Morgan (2009a), 19–21.

<sup>53</sup> See esp. Hall (1997), 111–42: he argues that the true value of artefacts to the study of ancient ethnicity is not as an indication of ethnic identity in some absolute sense but as potentially involved in the ancient process of expressing ethnic affiliation or separation. Cf. Morgan (2001), 84–91; at p. 91 she observes that ‘it is plain that artifact study must not mean ascribing ethnic significance to cultures – understanding material patterning (or assemblages) is useful only insofar as it reveals the symbolic resources available to those making strategic selections and the inherited burden of selections on which the next generation must act’. See also Luraghi (2014), 215–17.

<sup>54</sup> See now Canlas (2021), who analyses in detail the self-consciously archaising trends in Thessalian sanctuary and funerary architecture, especially in the later Classical and the Hellenistic periods.

<sup>55</sup> Karagiannopoulos (2017–2018).

<sup>56</sup> Lemos (2002), 140–50.

<sup>57</sup> For Middle Bronze Age examples in the vicinity of Pherai see Agnousiotis (2014).

the south-western part of the region, being found at Philia itself, Orphana, Neo Monastiri (ancient Proerna), Ermitsi (ancient Peirasia) and Anavra.<sup>58</sup> Strikingly, Pharsalos – on the eastern edge of the area and in a different tetrad – also had apsidal houses. Within this group of sites, the ceramic record also displays some consistencies. In addition to the geographical coherence of the group, we see a remarkable continuity of the apsidal house type over several centuries, the maintenance of a material tradition against the backdrop of wider political and historical change. Such patterns in the archaeological record are unsurprising, and reflect in part practicalities such as the circulation of craftsmen. However, the presence of strongly interrelated cult sites – the sanctuary of Athena Itonia, that of Apollo at Lianokokkala near Metropolis and the probable *heroön* of Aiatos at Georgiko – suggests the more self-conscious development and maintenance of shared culture. As we shall see in Chapter 3, this area had a special role in the formation of Thessalian origin-mythology; it was part of the development of regional identity, but was careful to maintain its own place within it.

A very different picture is given when we turn to patterns in burial types across Thessaly. On the one hand, Early Iron Age Thessalian communities were marked by the diversity of their funerary preferences, with cist graves, pits graves, tholos tombs and chamber tombs all in use.<sup>59</sup> On the other hand, a regional specificity is discernible in the prevalence and the remarkable persistence of the construction and use of corbel-vaulted tombs covered by earth mounds and containing round (tholos) or rectilinear chambers.<sup>60</sup> Even in the Early Iron Age, the distribution of these tombs in Thessaly was significant enough for them to constitute a regional practice. Interestingly, Thessaly is one of the regions that do not fully accord with Luce's observations concerning the overlap between the dialect map of Greece and the map of tomb types and funerary practices.<sup>61</sup> It shares some funerary features with Boiotia, with whom its linguistic affinities are clearly discernible, but not sufficient to create a definite continuum between the two regions; at the same time, the use of tholos tombs is clearly widespread enough in Thessaly – given the variations of archaeological excavation and publication – to justify Stamatopoulou's description of it as 'a diagnostic trait of Thessalian funerary archaeology'.<sup>62</sup> The complete absence of tholos-tombs in adjoining regions is also significant.

<sup>58</sup> In general in Thessaly the apsidal building habit endures from the ninth to the fifth century BC: Karagiannopoulos (2017–2018); Stamatopoulou (2019), 32.

<sup>59</sup> Georganas (2009); Panagiotopoulou (2020), 7.

<sup>60</sup> Tholos tombs were made in Messenia until the ninth century BC, and there are examples also from Crete. However, on the Greek mainland Thessaly was unique in retaining the tholos type so long. Luce (2007), 44–47.

<sup>61</sup> Luce (2014).

<sup>62</sup> Stamatopoulou (2016), 182.

Their use was not a material practice that flowed over the edges of Thessaly by simple processes of influence and diffusion; it was obviously cultivated by the Thessalians as a marker of their shared regional character.

Whether in the Early Iron Age this diagnostic trait really amounts to *ethnic* self-consciousness, as Luce argues, we cannot say with any certainty. But the element of the intentional becomes more marked with the passage of time, as Thessalian communities maintained the tholos type long after their use had been abandoned elsewhere in Greece. By adapting Mycenaean burial structures, the tomb type recycled tradition in a way that would have become more and more striking as the Archaic period advanced into the early Classical.<sup>63</sup> Not only did the tomb type persist, but individual tholoi – at least, the larger earlier examples – were used for multiple burials over large periods of time.<sup>64</sup> Recent scholarship has rightly seen this not as an unthinking adherence to conservative practices, symptomatic of the artistic and technological sluggishness of the Thessalians,<sup>65</sup> but as the deliberate cultivation of links to the past and the status those links could bring.<sup>66</sup> The visibility of the structures made them ideal as declarations of status, and would have encouraged their competitive diffusion.<sup>67</sup> Especially at Krannon and Pharsalos, the later sixth and earlier fifth centuries seem to have seen a deliberate revival of the tomb type, and the fact that this coincides with the

<sup>63</sup> Georganas (2000); Georganas (2009), 197–98; Georganas (2011); Karouzou (2017), 354; Knodell (2013), 242–43; Knodell (2021), 168. A recent summary of the material is provided by Stamatopoulou and Katakouta (2020). For a detailed examination of an important example, at Chloe to the north of Pherai, see Arachoviti (1994). The date range of the tombs' production is extended if we accept the suggestion of Stamatopoulou and Katakouta (2020, 154) that the built chamber tomb with a corbelled pyramidal roof is essentially an adaptation of the tholos tomb; this type was in use at Krannon as late as the fourth century BC.

<sup>64</sup> Georganas (2009), 198.

<sup>65</sup> Thessalian backwardness: e.g. Westlake (1935), 17–18, 22; Larsen (1968), 13. While this perception no longer has currency among those working in the field, it is remarkable how prevalent it remains on the fringes of Classical scholarship; the entry on Thessaly in the *Encyclopedia of the Ancient Greek World* (Sacks 2005) is a good example. It is of course such mainstream publications aimed at a general readership that carry most weight beyond the narrow confines of academia, so if non-specialists have any view of Thessaly at all it is probably the old-fashioned one of the 'self-contained, horse-ranching aristocracy' and the land that 'remained politically and culturally backward'.

<sup>66</sup> Stamatopoulou (2016). See also Canlas (2021), 329–46: he makes an important connection with styles of sanctuary and temple in Thessaly, in which he detects a comparable preference for traditional and modest forms as a persistent and pervasive trend in Thessalian material culture.

<sup>67</sup> As Karouzou observes (2018, 170–71), there was a significant tendency to situate tholoi in flat areas with extensive sight-lines, and/or on major road-ways, thus ensuring their visibility.

period in which, for the first time, the Thessalian *ethnos* was being energetically articulated in Thessaly is surely not coincidental.<sup>68</sup> Therefore we can see that a material habit present in the Early Iron Age was perpetuated for ideological reasons amid a steady accumulation of archaizing significance. As the custom persisted, it became an ever-stronger mode of signalling Thessalian identity.

At the same time, the tomb-type was neither universal nor unvaried. Even within specific cemeteries, the tholos tombs and their rectilinear-chambered counterparts were combined with very different burial modes; clearly the relatives of the dead had a range of possibilities to choose from, and there was no single mode for the expression of identity. Exactly why they chose as they did we cannot fully know, but, as Stamatopoulou has argued, the tholos type with its evocation of the myth-historical past can plausibly be connected with the activities of competing elite families.<sup>69</sup> The tholos and chamber tombs with earth mounds were widespread enough through the region to serve as a statement of Thessalian identity, while at the same time showing considerable local variation in their form. Thus even a clear regional style is shot through with a far more nuanced local aspect, constituting a competitive gesture. This combination of regional and subregional material tendencies is discernible also in the archaeological traces of cult.<sup>70</sup> We shall see, throughout this book, a very similar pattern pertain to the development of mythic traditions: stories about being Thessalian co-existed with stories allowing individual groups to strike out on a limb and claim a somewhat divergent identity.

Geography and landscape clearly have a part to play in shaping such tendencies in the material record, by shaping patterns of settlement and travel. In general, rivers are powerful agents of connectivity in Thessaly. From a map – or indeed from reading Strabo<sup>71</sup> – we might see rivers as borders in Thessaly, and therefore imagine that they limited movement and interaction; but in fact they are just as likely to draw together different communities living on opposite banks and along their course. The Spercheios and the Peneios exemplify this cogently. In Chapter 1 we shall see that the Spercheios sat at the heart of an area of transit between

<sup>68</sup> Kravaritou (2012), 510.

<sup>69</sup> Stamatopoulou (2016), 191–95; cf. Morgan (2006), 246–47.

<sup>70</sup> Stamatopoulou observes (2021), 687: ‘The similarities in both dedicatory practices and votives among the known Archaic Thessalian sanctuaries hint at the existence of a “koine” irrespective of the various population groups that are recorded as inhabiting the respective regions. Differentiations, such the deposition of weapons and tripods and the concentration of imported “valuable” goods at Philia and, to a lesser extent, Pherai, are related to the specific role of each site.’

<sup>71</sup> Strabo 9.5.1: Thessaly as bracketed by the Peneios in the north and the Spercheios to the south.

northern and central Greece, where a patchwork of small *ethnē* shared passes, grazing lands and religious sites. As for the Peneios, it might seem a clear boundary between Thessaly and Perrhaibia, but in fact it probably heightened interaction between those ethnic groups. In addition to its importance as a pastoral resource, for watering livestock, it supplied fish for human consumption.<sup>72</sup> That it linked Thessalian communities on the east–west axis is clear from the co-operative coinage of the early fifth century, produced chiefly by poleis on or near the Peneios and its major branches.<sup>73</sup> So the Peneios, flowing from the north-west corner of Hestiotis (Fig. 1) to its debouchment east of Tempe, breaks down the divide between west and east.

The Peneios has numerous tributaries, one of which, the Enipeus, flows near Pharsalos; the settlements around the Enipeus were strongly interconnected, Pharsalos being especially prominent in the grouping from the Early Iron Age.<sup>74</sup> Key aspects of its material culture pull Pharsalos westward and suggest contact with the poleis of Thessalotis.<sup>75</sup> At the same time, important aspects of its mythology reveal a design to align itself eastwards and southwards, and its archaeological remains from the Early Iron Age also reveal links with eastern Thessaly and, further afield, with the area of the so-called Euboian koine.<sup>76</sup> The name Phthiotis ensured the preservation of its connection with the Homeric kingdom of Phthia, realm of Achilles, and it maintained an important cult of Achilles' mother Thetis within its territory. Achilles' contingents at Troy included also the Phthiotic Achaioi and the peoples of the Spercheios valley. Its epic credentials angled Pharsalos in this direction. Thus it was genuinely liminal; geography shaped behaviour and connections but was not the only factor in the formation of political and cultural alignment.

Another striking example of variation and flexibility is the polis of Pherai. In the Bronze Age Pherai was part of a network of settlements otherwise focused on the Bay of Volos.<sup>77</sup> It was one of the major centres

<sup>72</sup> See, for example, *IG IX.2* 521 (esp. lines 30–37) – this late 3rd-century BC boundary record mentions *keletrai*, a word that Helly plausibly argues to refer to fish-traps: Helly (1999); Chandezon (2003), 129.

<sup>73</sup> As Kaczmarek observes (2015, 68–76), pre-Classical settlements in Thessaly tend to be distributed near rivers and in the prime cultivable land of their alluvial basins. In the Classical period a 'prolific building phase' (80) sees settlements established in less prime farmland as population growth necessitates fuller exploitation of the region's natural resources.

<sup>74</sup> Katakouta (2012): she emphasises the place of Pharsalos within a local landscape in which the river shapes herding and travel practices.

<sup>75</sup> Apisidal buildings have been noted above; coinage is also significant in this regard: see Georgiou (2015), 58–60.

<sup>76</sup> Stamatopoulou (2012–2013), 45–46.

<sup>77</sup> Pantou (2010).





Fig. 1. The Peneios in north-western Thessaly, looking east, near Kalambaka. Photograph: author's own

of Bronze Age Thessaly and its significance received no discernible check when the Mycenaean culture ended in the region, despite a slight temporary diminution of the site.<sup>78</sup> Its importance was largely the result of a highly favourable position with sea access and connection to major roads, and these factors did not lose their importance.<sup>79</sup> Signs of civic significance in the late Archaic period include the construction of the Doric temple of Ennodia in the sixth century, a major project to enhance an existing cult site of local

<sup>78</sup> Apostolopoulou-Kakavoyanni (1990); Georganas (2008), 279; Doulgeri-Intzesiloglou (1994), 77–79; Doulgeri-Intzesiloglou and Arachoviti (2009); Adrymi-Sismani (2012), 120–21; Karouzou (2017), 346–47. The fact that the modern town of Velestino is located exactly on the ancient site has hampered archaeological investigation of the ancient urban space. Geophysical survey techniques have recently identified interesting features such as a rectilinear street pattern, but the dating of this arrangement is not elucidated (Donati et al. [2017]).

<sup>79</sup> Di Salvatore (1994); Georganas (2008), 274; Knodell (2021), 94. Pagasai is called the harbour of Pherai by Theopompos (*FGrH* 115 F 53) but this connection was a longstanding one. Whereas the settlements on the Bay of Volos itself diminished in their independent power, Pherai expanded its dominance in that zone.

importance.<sup>80</sup> As well as being archaeologically attested, this situation is reflected in mythology, such as in the family relationship between Iolkian Jason and the Pheraian family of Admetos. In later centuries, Pherai retained its maritime connection, unusual in Thessaly, controlling the port at Pagasai.<sup>81</sup> Politically, however, it was part of Pelasgiotis, and it was an active part of the group of poleis minting the first Thessalian coinage in the early fifth century BC. This exemplifies the way in which the landscape of Thessaly is cross-hatched in different ways by different forms of association, with political organisation, myth-history and topography connecting communities in different directions and configurations.

So geography did not create a simple primordial unity in Thessaly. It was, however, a vital part of the process of articulating the shared identity of the Thessalian *ethnos* from the early fifth century. The myth-cult bundle promoted on early fifth-century coinage minted by several Thessalian poleis is strongly related to landscape. It presented Thessaly as the birthplace of the first horse, because the region's ability to produce excellent horses was well recognised by this time – had been, in fact, as early as the *Iliad*. It presented the fertile Thessalian plains as the work of divine engineering, and it gave the Peneios and its tributaries a starring role too, distributing vital waters but also preventing their harmful accumulation. It advertised arable wealth through the grain motif. When Thessalian poleis sought clear emblems of what Thessaly was and meant, it was to the natural landscape and its fruits that they had recourse. They were able, too, to contrast their land with that of the perioikic *ethnē*. Their land produced horses, Magnesia produced centaurs. Centaurs were not universally rejected by the tetradic Thessalians; Cheiron, in his cave home on Mount Pelion, was the lynchpin of early Thessalian mythology, linking west-Thessalian Asklepios with Iolkian Jason and south-Thessalian Achilles. The *phēr theios* retained his potency as a way of thinking about the past of the region through the childhood of its heroes. But rowdier specimens of the centaur race could provide an antithesis to the world of settled and prosperous agriculture, and they lived in the mountainous fringe, sometimes under the control of the Thessaloi but representing a very different symbolic space.

## 6. A note on beginnings and endings

Broad as it is in its chronological range, this book may still seem to raise questions about its time parameters. Why does it cover this particular span of time, beyond the sheer necessity of keeping it within manageable bounds?

<sup>80</sup> On the earlier importance of the sanctuary see Georganas (2008); Karouzou (2018), 126–27. It was an important metallurgical centre: Orfanou (2015).

<sup>81</sup> Theopompos *FGrH* 115 F 53.

Its starting point is governed by the material itself, in effect, because it is only in the Archaic period that the Thessaloi as an idea actually appear in our surviving textual sources. To this an obvious rejoinder is that regional identity need not depend on a shared name, and that Bronze Age (even, for that matter, Neolithic) Thessaly repay just as amply the study of how the region operated as a unit and how its sense of collective being was articulated through material culture. It is indeed true that Thessalian society in these periods emerges fascinatingly from the archaeological record and that the study of interactions between groups and communities in Neolithic and Bronze Age Thessaly has produced some especially important recent scholarship.<sup>82</sup> However, this is not really the *version* of Thessaly, of Thessalian identity, that this book pursues. As stated above, my theme is the manufacture and subsequent adaptation of the entities Thessaloi and Thessalia as political mechanisms for achieving a new kind of regional coherence from the sixth century onward. At no point do I mean to claim that this Thessaly is the only one, or even the most important. That said, it will be essential at various points to consider the legacy of Bronze Age culture in later Thessalian society, especially in mythology.

Where the book should end is, if anything, a thornier question. On the one hand, the arrival of strong Roman involvement after Flamininus' declaration of Greek freedom in 197 BC is obviously a significant juncture, and the dedicated study of Roman Thessaly is a very valuable strand in recent and current scholarship,<sup>83</sup> stopping at that point of major change is sensible. And yet the cut-off cannot be complete. Some aspects of third-century Thessaly can only make sense when we look forward to developments in the second century; and of course some crucial ancient sources are later still. Of these, the most significant is obviously Strabo. Steeped as Strabo is in the Homeric depiction of Thessaly,<sup>84</sup> nonetheless he is a product of his own Augustan age, and that perspective must be taken into account. To sum up, the chief focus of this book reaches up to the beginning of the second century BC, but there will be many points at which it will be necessary to look past that terminus.

<sup>82</sup> For example: Pentedeka (2012) on the production, circulation and exchange of pottery in Neolithic Thessaly; Eder (2009) re-evaluating Thessaly's role as a northern frontier region in the Mycenaean world; Pantou (2010) and Adrymi-Sismani (1999–2001, 2006) on the Mycenaean settlements around the Pagasitic Gulf.

<sup>83</sup> For example, Graninger's treatment (2011a) of the post-196 Thessalian *koinon* is a seminal contribution to this area. To this should be added, in particular, several important articles by Bouchon (esp. Bouchon 2008) and the doctoral thesis of Kaczmarek (2015).

<sup>84</sup> On the place of Homer in Strabo's work and the connection with the key theme of ἔκλειψις, extinction, see Wallace (1979), 171; Clarke (1999), 248–49; Biraschi (2005); Lightfoot (2017).