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MYTH AS PROPAGANDA: ATHENS AND SPARTA

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## MYTH AS PROPAGANDA: ATHENS AND SPARTA

The title of our section ‘Mythos als Argument’ seems to suggest that in antiquity myth played a role in rational discussions.<sup>1</sup> This is of course hardly the case. Already in 1951 Martin Nilsson published his classic study *Cults, Myths, Oracles and Politics in Ancient Greece*, in which he showed that myths were used to further political claims, to legitimate dynasties and so on.<sup>2</sup> In other words, instead of using the word ‘argument’, we, moderns, would rather employ the term propaganda. With propaganda, we mention a subject that has received much attention from sociologists and historians. In recent years, to limit myself to Germany, we have had a fine study of the term in the invaluable *Historische Grundbegriffe*, the 1994 study *Propaganda. Meinungskampf, Verführung und politische Sinnstiftung 1789–1989* and, announced as I was working on this paper, *Propaganda in Deutschland*.<sup>3</sup> It is hardly surprising that these studies have little to contribute on antiquity, let alone Greek antiquity – a feature they share with most studies of modern propaganda.<sup>4</sup> On the other hand, modern studies can sharpen our attention for certain features which students of myth are not normally interested in. So what could we learn from the study of propaganda?

The origin of the term propaganda is generally credited to the Roman Catholic *Congregatio de Propaganda Fide*. It is clear that in this combination the verb *propagare* still had a positive meaning. In fact, the negative connotation which most of us would attach to the term is relatively late. It is only in 1929 that an Englishman will write about propaganda: ‘it has not the sinister meaning in Europe which it has acquired in America’.<sup>5</sup> And in 1933 the German national-socialist government could still institute the *Reichsministerium für Volksaufklärung und Propaganda*, a term absolutely impossible to imagine as the name for a ministry in contemporary politics. Interestingly, it was Lenin who in his *What is to be done?* (1902) distinguished between the reasoned use of historical and scientific arguments to indoctrinate the educated public and the use of slogans, parables and half-truths to exploit the grievances of the uneducated. For the latter approach, he used the term ‘agitation’ and he combined the two approaches in the term ‘agitprop’. Lenin’s distinction is still attractive, but modern research has made some progress. Naturally, this is not the place to elaborate upon modern theories, but they are useful for formulating questions which are rarely put in any systematic way. Slightly varying the insights of the contemporary propagandist employing behavioral theory, we may put the following questions:

1. What is the social and political background for the propaganda? 2. What is the goal? 3. Who is the agent? 4. Which media and symbols are used? 5. At what audience is the propaganda aimed? 6. Can we measure the effect? 7. Can we notice counter-propaganda? 8. How long do the effects of the propaganda last?

With these questions in mind I want to discuss two mythical cases which we today would surely consider as propaganda. As Nilsson has already made an important contribution to the subject, I will

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<sup>1</sup> This paper was my contribution to the classical section of the German Historikertage in Munich, September 1996. I am most grateful to Professor Hatto H. Schmitt for his invitation and hospitality. For their comments on my manuscript I would like to thank Annette Harder and Bob Fowler, who also kindly corrected my English.

<sup>2</sup> M. P. Nilsson, *Cults, Myths, Oracles and Politics in Ancient Greece* (Lund, 1951, repr. New York, 1972).

<sup>3</sup> W. Schieder and C. Dipper, ‘Propaganda’, in *Geschichtliche Grundbegriffe* 5 (Stuttgart, 1984) 69–112; U. Daniel and W. Siemann (eds.), *Propaganda. Meinungskampf, Verführung und politische Sinnstiftung 1789–1989* (Frankfurt, 1994); G. Diesener and R. Gries (eds.), *Propaganda in Deutschland* (Darmstadt, 1996).

<sup>4</sup> But see H. Buchli, *6000 Jahre Werbung. Geschichte der Wirtschaftswerbung und der Propaganda I* (Berlin, 1962) 65–134 (Rome and Early Christianity); O. Thomson, *Mass Persuasion in History* (Edinburgh, 1977) 55–67 (Rome). Note now also S. Hornblower, ‘Propaganda’, in *idem* and A. Spawforth (eds.), *The Oxford Classical Dictionary* (Oxford, 1996<sup>3</sup>) 1257f.

<sup>5</sup> G. Seldes, *You can’t print that: the truth behind the news, 1918–1928* (New York, 1929) 427.

concentrate on two examples for which we have had additional material since the publication of his book. The choice is somewhat arbitrary, but as it could be illuminating to take two contrasting cases, I have decided to focus on the myths of Athenian Ion and Messenian Kresphontes. Both mythical figures played a role in the relations of Athens and Sparta with, respectively, their allies and subjects. The place of Ion in fifth-century Athenian propaganda has been the object of lively discussions in recent years, whereas the myth of Kresphontes has recently received attention because of the publication of new papyri of Euripides' homonymous tragedy. As so often, we are of course much better informed about Athens than Sparta, but this is virtually always the case and one of the 'facts of life' in ancient history.

### 1. Ion

Let us start with Ion, who played a role in the mythological claims between Athens and the Ionians and between Athens and Sparta.<sup>6</sup> The postulation of a genealogical relationship between Ionians and Athenians is certainly old, since in *Iliad* XIII Homer already equates the Athenians with the Ionians (685 and 689). Evidently, the connection between Athens and Ionia was well attested around 600 and, therefore, Solon can call Athens 'the eldest land of Ionia' (fr. 4a.2 West). The two communities are also closely connected in another text, which is far more specific about the relationship. When Carl Robert, more than seventy years ago in his *Die griechische Heldensage*, discussed the figure of Ion, he commented: 'Der Vertreter der Ionier heißt in den hesiodeischen Katalogen Xuthos, Sohn des Hellen und Bruder des Aiolos und Doros. Daß schon dort Ion und Achaios seine Söhne waren, ist zwar nicht ausgeschlossen, aber weder überliefert noch wahrscheinlich.'<sup>7</sup> At the time, Robert was undoubtedly the best expert of Greek mythology, but how wrong he was! A papyrus of the *Katalogoi*, published some twenty years ago, showed that pseudo-Hesiod wrote of Kreousa, 'the daughter with the beautiful cheeks of the divine Erechtheus', that 'she bore Achaeus and Ion famous for his horses'; actually, Ion's name has disappeared from the papyrus, but the supplement is obvious and uncontested (fr. 10 (a) 23 M–W). On the other hand, the history behind the genealogy is rather complicated. As Martin West has observed, Xouthos' place in Athenian history is only superficial and originally the genealogy will have been at home in Euboea, which seems to have been Xouthos' origin. This suggestion gains support from Burkert's observation that the uncontracted form of the name Ionian, as it appears in Hebrew *Jawan*, Persian *Yauna* or Assyrian *Iawan(u)*, probably derives from contact with the Euboeans.<sup>8</sup> Moreover, the few references to a cultic worship of Ion also point to the east coast of Attica, namely his tomb at Potamoi and a sacrifice of a sheep during the main Suniac festival of the Salaminioi, which for obscure reasons took place only in alternate years;<sup>9</sup> his father Xouthos is equally at home in this region.<sup>10</sup> The name Ion derives from Iones, and not the other way round, and it is most intriguing that the name

<sup>6</sup> On Ion see most recently R. Parker, 'Myths of Early Athens', in J. Bremmer (ed.), *Interpretations of Greek Mythology* (London, 1988<sup>2</sup>) 187–214, esp. 206f; E. Kearns, *The Heroes of Attica* (London, 1987) 108–110, 174–175; B. Smarczyk, *Untersuchungen zur Religionspolitik und politischen Propaganda Athens im delisch-attischen Seebund* (Munich, 1990) 132–134; N. Loraux, *The Children of Athena* (Princeton, 1993) 184–236; R. Parker, *Athenian Religion: A History* (Oxford, 1996) 144–145, 313.

<sup>7</sup> C. Robert, *Die griechische Heldensage* II.1 (Berlin, 1920) 145.

<sup>8</sup> M. L. West, *The Hesiodic Catalogue of Women* (Oxford, 1985) 58; W. Burkert, *The Orientalizing Revolution* (Cambridge MA, 1992) 12–13; add A. M. Shastri, 'Yavanas in Western Indian Cave Inscriptions', *Yavanika. Journal of the Indian Society for Greek and Roman Studies* 3 (1993) 58–66.

<sup>9</sup> Paus. 1.31.3 (tomb); Parker, *Athenian Religion*, 313f. (Sunium). Smarczyk, *Untersuchungen*, 370 n. 103 also mentions a *genos* Ionidai, but this is refuted by Parker, *ibidem*, 325.

<sup>10</sup> IG I<sup>3</sup> 255A.13, cf. Smarczyk, *Untersuchungen*, 101 n. 142 and *SEG* 40.4 (date); Eur. *Mel. Sophe* 9–11 (I quote from the new edition in C. Collard et al., *Euripides. Selected Fragmentary Plays I* [Warminster, 1995]); Strabo 8.7.1; Konon FG<sup>h</sup> 26 F 1.

already may have occurred in Mycenaean times, witness the probable name *I-ja-wo-ne* on a Linear B tablet from Knossos (KN X 146,4).<sup>11</sup>

The precise date of the *Katalogoi* is of course hard to establish, but various indications within the poem and comparisons with the work of Stesichorus and the pseudo-Hesiodic *Aspis* strongly suggest a date about 580/570.<sup>12</sup> The late date of the Athenian ‘adoption’, if not actually invention of Ion explains why there is no place for him in the Athenian king list, although his sons were credited with supplying the names for the four old Athenian tribes, a tradition which is at least as old as Herodotus (5.66.2). The highest position Athenians could find for him was that of polemarch, a function which is relatively late and postdates the monarchy; in fact Herodotus still calls him *stratarches*, although he knows the title *polemarchos*.<sup>13</sup> Ion’s lack of a more elaborate and sizeable identity also reflects itself in his complete absence from Athenian vase painting. Admittedly, Erika Simon has proposed to identify Ion on one of the façades of the Parthenon, but she herself recognises the completely speculative nature of this identification.<sup>14</sup> It is therefore not surprising that cultic worship of Ion is only attested twice in Athens.<sup>15</sup>

What can we say about this genealogy in response to our set of questions regarding propaganda? Not that much, since we have little evidence, but some observations can be made. Smarczyk has attractively suggested that the relationship between Athenians and Ionians played a role in the Athenian struggle for Salamis in the time of Solon.<sup>16</sup> We need not follow his, necessarily, speculative reconstruction, but his suggestion forms an excellent background for our genealogy, which, together with the proposed date for the *Katalogoi* of 580–570, perfectly fits the early decades of the sixth century. The poet of the *Katalogoi*, then, may well have proposed his genealogy in order to support the Athenian territorial claims.

Although there are strong archeological and linguistic arguments that Ionia was colonized from Athens, there is no need to assume that Homer, when equating Athenians with Ionians, recorded a collective memory of the Ionians.<sup>17</sup> Rather, the relevant verses are probably a testimony to the importance of Athens as a locale for epic performances before Homer became definitively fixed in writing; similarly, the *Katalogoi* will also owe their Athenian references to Athenian recitation, if the poem was not actually composed in Athens, as Martin West has suggested.<sup>18</sup> Epic recitations must have taken place at great festivals, such as the predecessor of the Panathenaea before it became reconstructed in the middle of the sixth century. These festivals often drew visitors from abroad and so the new genealogy was probably aimed not only at the Athenians but also at the immediate neighbours, who were partners in the conflict about Salamis.

It is not that easy to reconstruct the success of the genealogy. In any case, in Athens it was not overwhelming, considering the relative few references to Ion. Regarding the Ionians, it is impossible to say anything about sixth-century reactions to the new genealogy, but it has not yet been observed in this connection that in the fifth century various Ionians were called Ion. We have, to mention only the most famous, the poets Ion of Chios (*OCD*<sup>3</sup> s.v. Ion 2) and the rhapsode Ion of Ephesos, immortalised by Plato’s homonymous dialogue. It fits in with this onomastic observation that Herodotus explicitly says that the Asiatic Ionians took their name from Ion (7.94, 8.44).

<sup>11</sup> But see A. Heubeck, ‘Zum Namen der Ἴωνες’, *Münchener Studien zur Sprachwissenschaft* 48 (1987) 139–148; less sceptical, C. J. Ruijgh, *Scripta Minora I* (Amsterdam, 1991) 268.

<sup>12</sup> J. March, *The Creative Poet* (London, 1987) 157–159; R. Janko, *The Iliad: A Commentary IV* (Cambridge, 1992) 14.

<sup>13</sup> Jacoby on Hellanikos FGrH 323a F 23; P. J. Rhodes, *A Commentary on the Aristotelian Athenaion Politeia* (Oxford, 1981) 100 (Her. 8.44.2; Thuc. 2.15.1; Philochoros FGrH 328 F 13 etc.).

<sup>14</sup> E. Simon, *LIMC* V.1 (Basel, 1990) s.v. ‘Ion’.

<sup>15</sup> Sunium (above) and IG I<sup>3</sup> 383.147–149. This hardly makes him ‘a central figure’ in Athenian cult, as is suggested by E. Kearns, ‘Ion’, *Oxford Classical Dictionary*<sup>3</sup>, 763.

<sup>16</sup> Smarczyk, *Untersuchungen*, 374–378.

<sup>17</sup> For the problem see now the subtle discussion by R. Osborne, *Greece in the Making* (London, 1996) 33–37.

<sup>18</sup> West, *The Hesiodic Catalogue*, 169–171.

Having established that Ion's role in Athens' history was of limited importance in the sixth century, we are now in a better situation to judge his place in the fifth century, when he twice plays a noteworthy role, viz. on two identical Samian inscription and in Euripides' tragedy *Ion*. The inscriptions run 'boundary marker of the sacred precinct belonging to Ion at Athens' (IG I<sup>3</sup> 1496). The stones once were an important argument for John Barron's thesis of an export of Athenian cults to its colonies in order to propagate unifying cults.<sup>19</sup> However, Barron's dating of the relevant inscriptions has been refuted by Smarczyk, who has persuasively argued that the inscriptions must date from the period after suppressing the Samian revolt, around 439.<sup>20</sup> The inscriptions are part of a series of boundary markers, which have been found in Samos, Chalcis, Aegina and Kos, of which the majority mentions 'Athena (who rules Athens)' (IG I<sup>3</sup> 1481–99, 1502). They all, therefore, stress the Athenian provenance. As was the case with other boundary stones, the Samian ones marked the land as the property of an absentee landlord, an Athenian hero (or god). The explicit mention of Ion's Athenian origin makes one wonder whether the hero had not acquired some form of worship from the Samians themselves. In any case, the stress on the Athenian character of the other gods and heroes makes it likely that Ion was meant to personify here the dependence of the Ionians on their Athenian ancestor and not the 'an der Einheit der Ionier erinnernde Heros'.<sup>21</sup>

About a quarter of a century later, in 412/11, Athens experienced the traumatic revolt of its allies, with the exception of Samos. The Athenians now realised that their only hope for survival lay in their alliance with the Ionians. This change of heart becomes clear in 411, when the protagonist of Aristophanes' *Lysistrata* speaks of bringing together 'all the states which are colonies of this land' (582). But the next year, 410, the strategical and political situation had taken a turn for the better and in his *Ion* Euripides once again used the myth to proclaim the ancestral role of Athens regarding the Ionians.<sup>22</sup> In his tragedy the real father of Ion now became Apollo Patroos, the ancestor of all the Ionians, whereas his paternal uncle Doros, the ancestor of the Dorians, was demoted to become Ion's brother by the mortal Xouthos, who equally was demoted and is no longer a son of Hellen (*Ion*, 292, 1297, 1589–94). With such a divine ancestor – how could the Ionians not support Athens! One last time, the myth of Ion was put at the service of the Athenian claims.

There are no parallels for this version of the Ion myth and there is no reason to deny this innovation to Euripides, since it seems very much determined by the situation of 410.<sup>23</sup> At the same time, this moment in history was too exceptional to make this particular version attractive. Subsequent generations did not accept it, but Ion continued to keep a modest place in the hearts of the Athenians. His cult remained alive and his name remained popular well into the Roman period.<sup>24</sup> The Ionians, on the other hand, seem to have distanced themselves completely from Athens in the succeeding centuries. The name and the figure of Ion continued to be relatively popular in the fourth and third centuries. For example, in the second half of the fourth century an Ion of Samos added an epigram to the Delphian monument for Lysander after the battle of Aegospotami and Hermocles of Chios even gave a public speech on Ion in

<sup>19</sup> J. P. Barron, 'Religious Propaganda of the Delian League', *JHS* 84 (1964) 35–48 and 'The Fifth-Century Horoi of Aegina', *ibidem* 103 (1983) 1–12.

<sup>20</sup> Smarczyk, *Untersuchungen*, 58–153 (with extensive bibliographies), who is followed by Parker, *Athenian Religion*, 144f.

<sup>21</sup> *Contra* Smarczyk, *Untersuchungen*, 134. Parker, *Athenian Religion*, 145 well speaks of the 'grim propriety' of the dedication of the confiscated land to the 'hero who symbolized their duties to the native city'.

<sup>22</sup> For the date see the elegant argument of R. Klimek-Winter, 'Euripides in den dramatischen Agonen Athens. Zur Datierung des Ion', *Gymnasium* 103 (1996) 289–297.

<sup>23</sup> We know next to nothing of Sophocles' *Ion* and *Creusa*, cf. W. Luppe, *ZPE* 67 (1987) 1–3.

<sup>24</sup> Cult: IG II<sup>2</sup> 4711. Name: M. J. Osborne and S. G. Byrne, *A Lexicon of Greek Personal Names II* (Oxford, 1994) s.v. Ion.

late third-century Delphi.<sup>25</sup> In imperial times, however, the name became very rare in Ionia, although Alexander of Abouoteichos still requested the emperor to change the name of his birthplace to Ionopolis.<sup>26</sup> It fits this gradual disappearance of Ion from the Ionian onomastic tradition that Strabo tells us that 'Ionia was called after the Ionians, just as Attica was named Ionia after Ion the son of Xouthos' (8.7.1); the latter detail is slightly elaborated later, when he says that in early times Attica was called Ionia and Ias from the Iaones (Strabo 9.1.5). In other words, Ionia and Ion had become fully separated by the Ionians.

## 2. Kresphontes

Let us now move from the relatively transparent world of Athens to the dimly lit traditions of Sparta. Whereas for Athens we could mostly rely on early testimonies, Spartan tradition often comes to us via the refracted picture of Pausanias. Moreover, for Messenia the picture is even further complicated by its subjugation to the Spartans in the course of the 8th century, its liberation in 371 and the new foundation of the city of Messene in 369. Yet some figures are just mentioned often enough to be of a certain use for our purpose. Whereas Athens only managed to dominate its allies, Sparta had conquered Messenia at an early stage in its history. Its relationship with Messenia therefore was different and this difference reflects itself in the second figure I want to discuss here, the Messenian king Kresphontes.

As was the case with Ion, in recent years our knowledge about the relevant traditions has been slightly enlarged. As a result of papyri from Oxyrhynchus and Michigan, Euripides' tragedy *Kresphontes* is now more than the few *gnomai* it was in the time of Nauck's collection of Euripidean fragments.<sup>27</sup> Although Euripides is the only known tragedian to have written on the period of the return of the Heraclids, we do have now some insight into Spartan and Messenian myth before the independence of Messenia, even if through Athenian eyes, and thus can trace the myth over a longer period of time. We cannot date the *Kresphontes* with the same precision as the *Ion*, but it seems fairly certain that it was produced first between 430 and 424.<sup>28</sup> Unfortunately, we cannot with any certainty connect the play with the impact of some of the dramatic events of that particular period, such as the Spartan defeat at Pylos in 425.

So what is the myth of Kresphontes? The myth is part of the complex of the return of the Heraclids, the myth which legitimated the territorial claim of the Spartans in the Peloponnesus. We need not here discuss the historical background of the myth, but it is sufficient for us that it established the Spartans as new arrivals.<sup>29</sup> Thetory was probably part of epic poems, as seems suggested by Herodotus (6.52), and told how the Heraclids conquered the Peloponnesians and then divided the area between them by casting lots. Euripides relates this division in varying ways in his *Temenos* and *Temenidai*, of which the content has also become clearer in recent decades due to new papyri.<sup>30</sup> In the *Temenidai* it is Oxylus who divides the Peloponnesians into three parts, of which the eldest son Temenos received the best part (the Argolid), Kresphontes Messenia, and the sons of Aristodemus Sparta. In the *Temenos*, on the other

<sup>25</sup> Name of Ion: P. M. Fraser and E. Matthews, *A Lexicon of Greek Personal Names I* (Oxford, 1987) s.v. Ion; L. Robert, *Opera Minora Selecta V* (Amsterdam, 1989) 233 n. 7; H. Solin, *Die stadtrömischen Sklavennamen II* (Stuttgart, 1996) 364. Ion of Samos: P. A. Hansen, *Carmina epigraphica Graeca II* (Berlin and New York, 1989) no. 819.5, 13; A. Cameron, *The Greek Anthology from Meleager to Planudes* (Oxford, 1993) 1 note 3 (date). Hermocles: SIG<sup>3</sup>.579 = FD III.3.224, cf. A. Chaniotis, *Historie und Historiker in den griechischen Inschriften* (Stuttgart, 1988) 304f.

<sup>26</sup> Luc. *Alex.* 58, cf. L. Robert, *A travers l'Asie Mineure* (Paris, 1980) 408–414.

<sup>27</sup> See now A. Harder, *Euripides' Kresphontes and Archelaos* (Leiden, 1985); Collard et al., *Euripides. Selected Fragmentary Plays I*, 121–147.

<sup>28</sup> Harder, *Euripides' Kresphontes*, 3f.

<sup>29</sup> See most recently I. Malkin, *Myth and Territory in the Spartan Mediterranean* (Cambridge, 1994) 33–45.

<sup>30</sup> See especially Annette Harder, 'Euripides' *Temenos* and *Temenidai*', in H. Hoffman and eadem (eds.), *Fragmenta dramatica* (Göttingen, 1991) 117–135, whose reconstruction of the two plays I here follow.

hand, Kresphontes receives by lot Messenia and the sons of Aristodemus Sparta, after they had voluntarily conceded the Argolid to Temenos. The whole procedure is an interesting, if neglected, testimony for both the important position of the eldest son and the dividing of an area by lots, just as Zeus, Poseidon and Hades did, when dividing the universe between them.<sup>31</sup>

In the case of the *Temnidai* there is mention of some injustice done to the sons of Aristodemus, but the papyrus stops at this very point. What kind of injustice could have occurred during the casting of the lots appears from the third allusion in Athenian tragedy to this division. When in his *Ajax* Sophocles says: ‘And again when he came against Hector, man to man, by lot and without orders, having thrown in a token (i.e. into a helmet) that was no runaway, no lump of wet earth, but one that was bound to leap first out of the helmet?’ (1283–7), he clearly refers to the division of the Peloponnesus. Later sources relate how the three competitors put lots in an urn filled with water. The man whose lot would come out last would receive the best part, viz. Messenia. Kresphontes threw in a clod of earth which dissolved in the water. Naturally, the other two lots came out first and we may safely assume that at that point Kresphontes claimed Messenia.<sup>32</sup>

It is obscure at what precise moment in time this myth was created, but the allusions in Sophocles and Euripides show that it was well known in Athens in the fifth century. This knowledge also extended to Ionia, where in fifth-century Miletus (*SIG*<sup>3</sup>.58) and in fourth-century Apollonia (*IGBulg* I.449), its colony, the name Kresphontes occurred – surely in memory of the Messenian Neleids, the founders of Miletus.<sup>33</sup> Connoisseurs of Greek mythology will have focussed attention on the myth of Kresphontes in the course of the Peloponnesian War. The message of this version is clear: the Spartans, whose double monarchy was said to have derived from the sons of Aristodemus, were wrongly cheated of the rule of Messenia. It is noteworthy that in fifth-century versions of the myth of the division of the Peloponnesus the Argolid is never claimed by the Spartans in any way. It is only Herodotus (6.52f. 7.204, 8.131) who mentions that Aristodemus had married a woman called Argeia. This close connection of Sparta and Argos most naturally belongs to the period after the battle of Sepeia (about 495 B.C.) and firmly locates the cheating of Kresphontes in the sixth century, if not earlier.<sup>34</sup>

This bad beginning had to end badly as well, and here Euripides’ tragedy *Kresphontes* comes in. As Carl Robert already saw, Euripides’ tragedy is reflected in Apollodorus’ and Hyginus’ accounts in that Kresphontes was murdered by his brother Polyphontes, who also had killed two of his sons; only the third, Aepytyus, escaped and returned in order to avenge himself and to reclaim the kingdom:<sup>35</sup> in a typically Euripidean way, he killed Polyphontes, who had married his widow Merope, during a sacrifice.<sup>36</sup> The prologue of *Kresphontes* does indeed confirm, as we now know from a more recently published papyrus, that Polyphontes slew Kresphontes and married his widow (fr. 66 A, fr. 1, 2 Harder). The change of name of young Kresphontes into Aepytyus makes it likely that he was not a fixed character in the Spartan-Messenian tradition, since it is not customary for Greek myth to alter the names of significant males; the names of females are often much less stable. This possibility becomes even a

<sup>31</sup> For more examples see Bremmer, ‘Why did Medea kill her brother Apsyrtus?’, in J. Clauss and S. I. Johnston (eds.), *Medea* (Princeton, 1997) 83–100, esp. 91; add the division of Argos between 3 sons of Phoroneus in Hellanikos *FGrH* 4 F 36.

<sup>32</sup> Apollod. 2.8.4; Polyaeos 1.6; Schol. *Ilias* 7.170ff. Paus. 4.3.3 is somewhat different and is closer to the version of Euripides’ *Temenos*.

<sup>33</sup> L. Robert, *Études épigraphiques et philologiques* (Paris, 1938) 200.

<sup>34</sup> For the various genealogical constructions of Sparta see C. Calame, ‘Spartan Genealogies: the Mythological Representation of a Spatial Organisation’, in Bremmer, *Interpretations of Greek Mythology*, 153–186.

<sup>35</sup> Apollod. 2.8.5; Hyginus, *Fab.* 137. Note that the modern editions of Hyginus by Rose (1933) and Marshall (1993) follow the emendations of Bursian, which were apparently overlooked by Robert.

<sup>36</sup> Marriage: add this example to similar marriages between a successor and the widow of the previous sovereign in Bremmer, *Interpretations of Greek Mythology*, 47; M. Finkelberg, ‘Royal Succession in Heroic Greece’, *CQ* 41 (1991) 303–316. Sacrifice: Bremmer, ‘Modi di comunicazione con il divino: la preghiera, la divinazione e il sacrificio nella civiltà greca’, in S. Settis (ed.), *I Greci I: Noi e i Greci* (Turin, 1996) 239–283, esp. 269.



probability, when we observe that none of the names of the protagonists of Euripides' play – Polyphontes, Merope and young Kresphontes – is attested in independent sources. The conclusion, therefore, suggests itself that Euripides has invented this mythological tradition.<sup>37</sup>

We cannot reconstruct the precise content of the play and to what extent Euripides used this mythological plot for contemporary propaganda. However, despite its recent invention, and presumably because of its anti-Spartan content, the play was enthusiastically taken up by the Messenians after their return and new independence in the fourth century,<sup>38</sup> when they were searching for material to reconstruct – 'invent' would be a better word – their own past. As their independence was still precarious, they used the occasion to connect the myth with the recent federal state of Arcadia. Kresphontes was given a new wife, the daughter of King Kypselos of Arcadian Basilis, and young Kresphontes was renamed Aepytyus after an old Arcadian hero.<sup>39</sup> The construction firmly dates this version of the myth to the early 360s when Messene must have been looking for a recognisable past and the Arcadian league had not yet disintegrated.<sup>40</sup> In fact, Pausanias tells us that during the 'inauguration' of Messene in 369 (DS 15.66), the Arcadians had produced sacrificial victims, and the Messenians had invoked their own heroes to return and live with them, Kresphontes and Aepytyus amongst them (4.27.6). It seems reasonable to suspect that the full Messenian myth is visible in Pausanias, who tells us that Aepytyus killed his father's murderers and 'won over the governing men in Messenia by courtesies and the people by presents, and became so respected that his descendants were called the clan of the children of Aepytyus rather than of Herakles' (4.3.8, tr. P. Levi). The importance of Aepytyus was further enhanced by making the national Messenian hero Aristomenes one of his descendants (Paus. 4.5.4).

It is very doubtful whether Kresphontes senior had ever been an original Messenian hero. There are no indications for such an origin, and the fact that the temple of Triopas' daughter Messene (the Messenian 'hall of fame'), where paintings of Kresphontes and the other kings of Messene were exhibited, contained mostly Homeric and Spartan heroes,<sup>41</sup> makes this even improbable.<sup>42</sup> Nevertheless, it is clear that, together with the play of Euripides he, too, was enthusiastically embraced by the Messenians, presumably by lack of other, more impressive national heroes. Like Aepytyus, he was invoked during the 'inauguration' of Messene and one of the Messenian tribes was named after him (IG V.1.1433, 1.40). His memory remained alive in Messenia over a long period of time. In the beginning of the second century of the Christian era Messenians were still named after him (IG V.1.1469), and even in the third century the sacred council of elders of Oupesia, state officials responsible for the temple and the cult of Artemis Ortheia in Messene, traced its descent from Kresphontes.<sup>43</sup>

The Messenian mythological propaganda did not go unanswered in Sparta. In his *Archidamos* Isocrates' young Spartan relates that the Messenians murdered Kresphontes, 'the founder of their city'. His sons escaped the assassination and offered the rule of the land to the Spartans (6.22, 31). The peculiar mention of the 'city' and the various references in the oration to the peace congress of 366 firmly

<sup>37</sup> Names of females: Bremmer, *Interpretations*, 45. Protagonists: differently Harder, *Euripides' Kresphontes*, 9, who considers the possibility of 'un otherwise unknown local myth', which is also accepted by P. Müller, in *LIMC* VI.1 (1992) s.v. Kresphontes II.

<sup>38</sup> D. Asheri, 'La diaspora e il ritorno dei Messeni', in E. Gabba (ed.), *Tria Corda. Scritti in onore di A. Momigliano* (Como, 1983) 27–42.

<sup>39</sup> Robert, *Griechische Heldensage*, 674; Harder, *Euripides' Kresphontes*, 54; add Paus. 8.29.5.

<sup>40</sup> Cf. J. Roy, 'Thebes in the 360s B.C.', in D. Lewis *et al.* (eds.), *Cambridge Ancient History*<sup>2</sup> (Cambridge, 1994) 187–208.

<sup>41</sup> Paus. 4.31.11 = J. Frey-Brönnimann, in *LIMC* V.1 (1992), s.v. Kresphontes I, no. 1.

<sup>42</sup> This was already seen, in a perceptive study, by B. Niese, 'Die älteste Geschichte Messeniens', *Hermes* 26 (1891) 1–32, esp. 14f. E. Schwartz, 'Tyrtaios', *Hermes* 34 (1899) 428–468, esp. 449 not only does not mention Niese, but he also suggested that Euripides' *Kresphontes* combated the version of Isocrates and Plato.

<sup>43</sup> *SEG* 23.215–217, cf. P. G. Themelis, 'Artemis Ortheia at Messene. The Epigraphical and Archaeological Evidence', in R. Hägg (ed.), *Ancient Greek Cult Practice from the Epigraphical Evidence* (Stockholm, 1994) 101–122, esp. 111, 115.

date the oration to the period around 366. This means that the oration presupposes the Messenian use of the myth – and thus confirms our dating – but also attempts to subvert it by introducing a new version. More details about the Spartan counter-propaganda can be gleaned from Nicolaus Damascenus (FGrH 90 F 31–34) and his source Ephoros (FGrH 70 F 116). They tell a slightly more sophisticated, presumably somewhat later story, in which they add to the Messenian version that Aepytyus eventually got into conflict with both the aristocracy and the people, just like his sons, until Sparta conquered Messenia – so no honour and wisdom there!<sup>44</sup>

It is time to draw some conclusions. Taking the cases of Ion and Kresphontes, we have located the uses made of their myths in particular moments of time. We have identified their respective goals and also seen that these myths could be put to different goals in different moments of time. Evidently, the oral nature of myth made it into a very flexible instrument. In the case of Ion, we could also identify poetry as an important medium of mythical propaganda. The occasions during which the poetry was performed, religious festivals, must have lent authority to the claims of the poetry, but Isocrates and Ephoros demonstrate that in later times historiography and public orations became new areas of propaganda. As in modern times, where historical rights and bad behaviour of the opponent are often important parts of political propaganda, Greek myth employed the argument from chronology (Ion as ancestor) and of defamation (Kresphontes as cheat). The reactors of the propaganda could be potential allies (the Ionians) or present foes (the Messenians), but the propaganda was not always accepted at face value. We have seen that the Ionians for a time accepted Ion but in due course rejected their Athenian ancestor, whereas the Messenians had appropriated but completely transformed the Spartan myth of Kresphontes. Evidently, despite the solemnity of religious poetry mythical propaganda was always up for negotiation. Last but not least, the various versions of the myth of Kresphontes demonstrate that at least in the fourth century myth and counter-myth could be produced at very short notice. We may think of public relation offices as modern inventions, but Greek history demonstrates that the manipulation of public opinion has a long tradition.

Let us conclude with a more general observation. ‘Myth as argument’ presupposes the existence of the category ‘myth’, but the Greeks themselves will have thought of the discussed myths as history; myth is our modern term. In a very recent book Claude Calame has rightly stressed that Greek *mythos* only very late acquires the contours of our term ‘myth’ and in classical times is not yet opposed to *logos*.<sup>45</sup> Unlike Calame, I would not draw the conclusion that therefore our ‘myth’ does not exist, but we must keep in mind that it is a modern concept: for the Greeks themselves part of what we call myth is what they called history. Mythical history or historical myth is, what the Egyptologist Jan Assmann has called, ‘das kulturelle Gedächtnis’, which has a ‘Sinndeutung’ over the normal ‘Zweckbedeutung’. This so-called ‘cultural memory’ is often closely connected, as Assmann observes, with questions of national identity, since loss of independence often entails the loss of a people’s ‘cultural memory’.<sup>46</sup>

This process is clearly illustrated by the prominence of originally Spartan mythical figures in the new Messenian mythology. Evidently, in the course of the Spartan domination the Messenians had lost their own mythological past. Unfortunately, we have no further information, but it would be interesting to know whether this past had gradually disappeared or whether the Spartans had eradicated it by certain measures, for example by eliminating the Messenian cultural elite, just as in the recent Bosnian War the

<sup>44</sup> L. Pearson, ‘The Pseudo-History of Messenia and Its Authors’, *Historia* 11 (1962) 397–426, esp. 405–407.

<sup>45</sup> C. Calame, *Mythe et histoire dans l’antiquité grecque* (Lausanne, 1996); add now to his bibliography of the various meanings of myth, J. J. M. van Dijk, ‘Ἐκ τῶν μύθων ἄρξασθαί. Greek Fable Theory after Aristotle: Characters and Characteristics’, in J. G. J. Abbenes *et al.* (eds.), *Greek Literary Theory after Aristotle. A Collection of Papers in Honour of D. M. Schenkeveld* (Amsterdam, 1995) 235–258.

<sup>46</sup> J. Assmann, *Das kulturelle Gedächtnis* (München, 1992); note also the reflections of O. G. Oexle, ‘Memoria als Kultur’, in *idem* (ed.), *Memoria als Kultur* (Göttingen, 1995) 9–78.

monuments of the Bosnian Islamic past were systematically destroyed and even the National Library in Serajevo purposefully bombarded.<sup>47</sup>

Conversely, the intensification of an alliance or the foundation of a new ethnic identity may entail the construction of a new or the revival of an old 'cultural memory', as in the cases of the Delian League or Messenian independence. 'Mythos als Argument', then, touches upon important aspects of ancient Greek history.

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<sup>47</sup> For the destruction of the Library see Th. Werner, 'Vernichtet und vergessen? Bücherverbrennungen im Mittelalter', in Oexle, *Memoria als Kultur*, 149–184.