The Battlefield of History: Megara, Athens, and the Mythic Past
from 600 BC to 250 BC

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Abstract

In ancient Greece, history and myth were intertwined. The mythic past was a realm where heroes walked alongside gods to found the cities of the classical period. Diplomatic relations, military endeavors, and local identity were justified and created using the mythic past. Myth was not a static body of stories, however. Mythology, and the mythic past, was malleable. Local identity was created through an active and constant process of selection that rewrote the content of the mythic past to create the history best suited to the needs of the present. The cities of Athens and Megara were two such cities that engaged in this process of identity formation through myth. The mythic discourse between the cities shows, however, that the alteration of myth was also an act of aggression that would be met with retaliation and resistance. Myth was used to create local identities, and it was in a city’s best interest to undermine the identity of its enemies.

Through iconographic remains and fragmentary textual evidence, the mythic discourse of Athens and Megara can be reassembled from its disparate parts. The most prominent and frequently contested myths were those most important to the political process of identity formation and attack. This thesis examines the evolution from 600 BC to 250 BC of the myths of Pandion and Nisus, Theseus and Skeiron, Athena Skiras, and Theseus and Ariadne to show that the mythic past in Greece was a political tool used to express hegemony over and attack the foundation of other cities. Control over the mythic past demonstrated a city’s political control over a region. Economic, political, and military action was accompanied by an ideological war waged on the battlefield of the mythic past.
Acknowledgments

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I would also like to thank those who helped shape my project in its early stages. My thesis seminar leaders, without whom I would still be floundering for a topic: Professor Alexander Kitroeff, who forced me to find a way to articulate the ideas stuck in my head; and Professor Annette Baertschi, who despite e-mail struggles still gently pushed me back toward more reasonable research questions, and who did not stop me even when she realized I don’t speak Greek.

I would finally like to thank those who were with me every step of the way: my parents, who never quite understood my topic or the project but were always happy to hear it was going well; my suitemates for letting me ramble and for helping me carry all my books back to the library; and especially my fellow History major Abigail Brown, who was always willing to hash out a difficult and with me try to figure out what exactly a thesis was supposed to look like.
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## Timeline of Important Moments in Athenian-Megarian History

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<td>Megara conquers Salamis</td>
<td>Athens and Megara begin to dispute ownership of Salamis</td>
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<td>599 BC</td>
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<td>Dispute over Salamis</td>
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<td>Sparta arbitrates Salaminian Dispute, Athens wins</td>
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<td>Democratic government collapses in Megara</td>
<td>Sparta arbitrates Salaminian Dispute, Athens wins</td>
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<td>541 BC</td>
<td>527 BC</td>
<td>Peisistratus’ tyranny in Athens</td>
<td>Megara enters the Peloponnesian League</td>
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<td>520 BC</td>
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<td>Megara allies with Sparta</td>
<td>Megara enters the Peloponnesian League</td>
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<tr>
<td>510 BC</td>
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<td>490 BC</td>
<td></td>
<td>Battle of Marathon</td>
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<td>478 BC</td>
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<td>Delian League</td>
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<td>445 BC</td>
<td>Megara defects from Peloponnesian League to Athens</td>
<td>Athens has a substantial physical and military presence in the Megarid, and Megara becomes dependent on the Athenian military</td>
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<td>459 BC</td>
<td>450 BC</td>
<td>Athenian presence in the Megarid</td>
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<td>Peace between Athens and Sparta</td>
<td>Athens is required to return the towns of Nisaea and Pagae to Megara, which it had taken in the aftermath of Megara’s defection</td>
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<tr>
<td>Year</td>
<td>Event</td>
<td>Summary</td>
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<tr>
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<td>Athens institutes Megarian Decree</td>
<td>The Megarian Decree placed on embargo on Megara. Pericles justified the decree with accusations of Megarian encroachment on the sacred land of Eleusis.</td>
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<td>431 BC</td>
<td>424 BC</td>
<td>Athenian policy to ravage Megara</td>
<td>Athens took every available opportunity in the second half of the Peloponnesian War to ravage the Megarian countryside and attack its towns and ships.</td>
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<td>421 BC</td>
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<td>Megara rejects Peace of Nicias</td>
<td>Megara refuses to agree to the Peace of Nicias because Megara would have been required to give Nisaea and Pagae to Athens, cutting off Megarian access to the sea. The Peace of Nicias is ratified regardless.</td>
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<td>409 BC</td>
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<td>Megara re-conquers Nisaea</td>
<td>In the wake of the Peloponnesian War, Megara is military and economically weak, so the various hegemonic states accept its neutral status.</td>
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<td>300 BC</td>
<td>Megara adopts a policy of neutrality</td>
<td>Without wars to occupy its resources, the Megara flourished. General prosperity rose, a wealthy commercial class developed, and the city grew to its largest size.</td>
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<td>380 BC</td>
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<td>Megara begins economic recovery</td>
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<td></td>
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Introduction

Mythology in classical Greece was more than the basis of a religious system or a moral guide. It was a vital tool for politics, the means through which identity was created and attacked. Cities and ethnic groups were differentiated through the myths they called their own, the heroes they looked up to, the ideals they valued as codified in mythology. Identities were created through an active process of selection among the content of mythology, making myth an important tool of political formation and action in the Greek world. It also made myth a weapon. Mythology was used to challenge the stories another city called their own, undermining the identity built on those myths. Through myth, cities expressed ideas of power and authority, of superiority, of strength. Conflicts found voice through regional myths, and mythology was a battleground as important as that of physical armies. Authors crafted histories to appeal to specific audiences, participating in an ideological war through the constant process of adapting mythology to reflect the interests of contemporary audiences. An audience at war needed to be assured its fight was just. An audience gaining pan-Hellenic power needed to know it was acting as part of a long tradition of supremacy throughout Greece. A single mythic variant rarely appeared political, but the adaptation of myth over time in response to historical events shows that the mythic past within Greece was a valuable political tool and a means of ideological war.

Mythology in Greece was also a historical record, as real as any recent history. The mythic past was both pan-Hellenic and local. A mythic history shared by all Greek cities was articulated in the writings of early authors such as Hesiod and Homer, and contained events like the Trojan War that formed the cornerstone of later myths and generated a sense of common community throughout Greece. The mythic past was not canonical, however. Myth was malleable, open to embellishment and reinterpretation. Acceptance of a particular variant was a

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1 Hall, Ethnic Identity in Greek Antiquity (1997), 182.
matter of popularity: a myth that was loved was retold; a myth found displeasing fell into obscurity. A myth needed to win popular favor to survive, and so local mythic history came to mirror the opinions of its intended audience. In the gaps and silences of the pan-Hellenic tradition, local authors created the regional myths that formed the cornerstone of a city’s identity.

The identity formed around local mythic history was vitally important to a city. The mythic past justified behavior in the present, provided a precedent for future action, was a lens through which to explain contemporary events, and gave meaning to diplomatic relations. Mythic history was an expression of a particular relationship with the past and with the broader Greek community. The articulation of identity through the mythic past connected a city to important moments in history. A city’s identity was actively created in reaction to contemporary events and the needs of the city. Sparta, for example, went through great effort to associate itself with the myths of Orestes because the hero had gained hegemony over the Peloponnese in the mythic past just as Sparta was trying to rule the Peloponnese in the present. In claiming Orestes as their own, Spartans could hold forth Orestes’ precedent as a basis for their own actions. Mythic history defined contemporary behavior, articulating relationships with history that formed the basis for political action in the present.

The discourse between the cities of Athens and Megara demonstrates that the formation of identity through the mythic past was a process of aggression that elicited defensive reactions and answering assaults on mythic history. Athens and Megara were close neighbors in ancient Greece. Athens occupied a wide region known as Attica, the city located near the coast. Megara was also a coastal city, and occupied a place in a narrow isthmus that connected Attica to the Peloponnese—a position that situated Megara between the major powers of Athens, Corinth,

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Boeotia, and Sparta. Megara was a powerful city in the 8th and 7th centuries BC, trading throughout the Aegean and controlling much of the economic productivity of the region.\(^4\)

Megarian attempts to influence and dictate Athenian politics were not unknown in the 7th century BC.\(^5\) As Athens began to consolidate its power and gain greater economic importance, the rising power came into conflict with its close neighbor. Border tensions and territorial wars culminated in the Athenian seizure of the island of Salamis at the end of a decades-long war with Megara. The transfer of Salamis to Athens signaled the beginning of Megara’s decline. The city quickly lost its economic and naval strength as Athens expanded its hegemony over the Aegean.

Athens looked to usurp Megara’s recent pan-Hellenic position. Megara did not have the military or economic strength to oppose Athens on its own, so Megarians turned to the mythic past and continued the struggle with Athens by other means, waging an ideological war on history. Megara attacked the Athenian mythic past and resisted Athenian efforts to rewrite history. The proximity of Athens and Megara meant that modifications to the mythic past in one city implicated the identity of the other. Attempts to form identity through mythic history became a Megarian-Athenian battle over the mythic past. The right to define the mythic past and craft a specific identity had important implications for a city’s pan-Hellenic standing and authority. Megara tried to retain and regain its lost position, and Athens tried to stretch its authority over the Aegean through control of the mythic past.

Much of the struggle over mythic history in Athens and Megara centered on heroic figures that played important symbolic roles in the cities. Founding figures, legendary kings, and notable heroes were all important to the formation of regional identities. Theseus and Skeiron were two such heroes that became the center of the struggle to define the mythic past. Their

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stories helped to define many elements important to identity formation, and their myths intersected at the moment of Skeiron’s death. Alterations to Theseus’ story directly impacted Megara’s Skeiron, and changes to Skeiron’s reception altered Athens’ Theseus. As Athens rose to power and articulated a new identity to reflect their increased pan-Hellenic status, Athenian authors came into conflict with Megarian voices that looked to maintain Megara’s fading pan-Hellenic prestige and oppose Athenian hegemony.

Changes to the mythic past, and the relationship between recent historical circumstances and evolving identity, highlight the role mythic history played in Greek politics. Examining the mythic discourse in Athens and Megara from 600 BC to 250 BC, I compare mythic variants as expressions of contemporary popular feeling the cities. The changes to the mythic past demonstrate the impact of altering myth. Even seemingly apolitical myths served an important political function by creating, maintaining, and attacking identity during moments of external conflict and internal tension. I focus specifically on the myths of a) Pandion and Nisus, b) Skeiron, c) the origins of the cult of Athena Skiras, and d) Theseus and Ariadne. The development of a myth over time reflects the purposeful rewriting by local authors. One can view these changes to the mythic past against a timeline of Megarian-Athenian history in order to highlight periods of conflict and tension that threatened self-identity and made myth a politically useful tool. The mythic past emerges as a means for a city to assert its own position in the pan-Hellenic world and to affect the standing of its neighbors.

My sources are primarily textual and fragmentary. Megarian voices are represented by Hereas, Dieuchidas, Praxion, and anonymous Megarian historians. Athenian authors are

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6 All fragmentary evidence and its translation is that provided by the Brill Online New Jacoby unless stated otherwise in bibliography.
Pherekydes, Bacchylides, Sophocles, Androtion, Demon, Kleidemos, and Philochorus. Pan-Hellenic views are preserved in the writings of Homer, Hesiod and Epimenides. Roman Empire era historians record both pan-Hellenic and regional mythic history, and are represented by Strabo, Hyginus, Apollodorus, Plutarch, and Pausanias. The fragmentary textual evidence will be supported by iconography, preserved in monumental remains and pottery fragments intended for popular consumption.7

Iconographic evidence offers one window into the classical past. The audience for a particular work, and the nature of its reception, must be carefully considered when attempting to analyze the impact of a particular image. Monuments constructed for an entire city are constrained by different rules than drinking cups intended for private use. Iconography is a valuable source, however, because the dating of iconography is often more precise than that of textual evidence. Artistic trends allow scholars to precisely date pottery fragments to within a decade of their production, and monumental structures are not built without mustering city-wide support that finds its way into other records. Used to support and complement the textual evidence, iconography creates a more complete picture of the mythic discourse of Athens and Megara.

The fragmentary textual evidence is used carefully. The fragments are preserved in the writings of later authors who actively selected or rejected particular ancient sources. The extant evidence is not a complete record, but rather that which later historians deemed important and worthy of preservation. The preservation of text through quotation additionally means that portions of the original context are lost. The valence of a particular statement can be difficult to discern, though often the discussion of a mythic event—regardless of valence—is an important

7 All iconography is that recorded in the Lexicon Iconographicum Mythologiae Classicae (LIMC) unless otherwise stated.
act of recognition in itself. The precise date of production for a fragment is impossible to
determine. However, through an author’s biography, a fragment’s relation to history events, and
references to and in other texts, historians have become adept at dating fragments to within
decades of their production.

Another trait of fragmentary evidence, and fragmentary mythic evidence in particular, is
the manner in which 2nd century AD Roman Empire historians incorporated the sources into their
texts. Plutarch, for example, brought together the works of various classical Greek writers to
create a unified picture of history. He wanted to construct a narrative of Theseus’ life that
resolved the many contradictory versions of the past and presented a coherent biography rather
than a series of disparate moments. In doing so, he cited and therefore preserved the works of
multiple classical Greek authors who are otherwise unknown in the modern era. Plutarch became
one of the foremost sources for ancient fragments by bringing together individual accounts of the
classical past into a single narrative. This thesis is concerned with the individual accounts. What
Plutarch—and other Roman historians—unified into a cohesive narrative this thesis picks apart
and presents as individual entries in a larger debate over the content of the mythic past. This
thesis takes the unified historical narrative and analyzes its individual parts. The separate
fragments can then be dated, attributed to specific Athenian or Megarian authors, and analyzed
as entries in the struggle to articulate the mythic past.

Though much of the evidence survives through the process of transmission as references
and citations in other texts, the works of the praise poet Bacchylides have survived unaltered—a
direct historical witness to the events of the early 5th century BC. Performing throughout Greece,
Bacchylides’ works provide a record of the opinions and perspectives of his elite patrons. His
odes written for Athenian patrons encapsulate the views of the politically and culturally
influential families within the city. Having avoided the process of transmission through quotation and transcription that can misrepresent the content of a source, or destroy surrounding context, Bacchylides stands alone as an unquestionably early 5th century BC Athenian voice, representing the tenor of Athenian politics and the popular views of Athenian elites around 480 BC.  

The theoretical concepts of collective memory and intentional history underlie my approach. Hans-Joachim Gehrke defines intentional history as the communal generation of group identity through the construction of connections to the distant past. The active creation of a collective past for the purposes of defining self-identity is a cornerstone of my analysis of the mythic past. Myths were created and performed in “specific social, political, economic, and geographic/spatial contexts” that made a myth immediately relevant to the needs of a community. For Athens and Megara, the creation of intentional histories was both an act of identity affirmation and ideological aggression. The concept of collective memory, as explained by Simon Price, is equally important to my analysis. Price views history as a collective memory, a remembrance of a common past. History is a shared recollection of distant events, a view that coincides with the assertion that individual authors represent the beliefs and feelings of an entire community. Through the perspectives of Gehrke and Price, mythic history can be seen as an actively created, commonly shared articulation of a city’s identity as expressed through its relationship with the past.

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8 The preservation of Bacchylides’ works to the present day is a particularly notable case of the fortunes of time. Bacchylides, prior to 1896, was known only through small fragmentary references found in other texts. A papyrus discovered in Egypt in 1896 was found to preserve 20 choral poems written by Bacchylides, a corpus nearly as large as that of Pindar. It was a momentous find for classical scholars, as Bacchylides is one of the few remaining undiluted eyewitnesses to the event of the 5th century BC.
10 Gehrke, “Greek Representations of the Past” (2010), 16.
Scholarship specific to mythic history and its connection with contemporary events is sparse. Research on Megara and Athens has focused almost entirely on the war for possession of Salamis as an impetus for shaping mythic history. The clear connection with Salamis highlights the overt political nature of the myths associated with the island and the aftermath of the war. Though the war had important implications for identity formation and myth, such a focus is too narrow and too strongly privileges a single historical moment as the determinant of all mythic modification. Other scholarship that examines myth and cult more generally has focused on broad surveys of Greece during a single period rather than examine the traditions of a single region over a span of time. Focusing in a single set of local myths and the changes those stories underwent over time, it becomes clear that all of myth could function as tool for identity formation and politics.

This thesis is divided into four sections, moving from largely regional myths to stories with greater pan-Hellenic importance. The first section is a case study, examining stories of Pandion and Nisus. The trends found in the myths of Theseus are expressed on a local level through the stories of Pandion and Nisus, Theseus’ grandfather and uncle respectively. The myths of these minor regional figures show that all myths, not just those of great pan-Hellenic heroes, were the subject of identity formation and contention. The second section features stories of Theseus and Skeiron, and the political importance of the mythic past becomes clear. The death of Skeiron was unimportant on a pan-Hellenic stage but hugely significant locally, a situation that allowed for the radical alteration and attack of the mythic past as a tool of resistance and aggression. The third section examines a particular moment of Megarian aggression, the

questioning of the origins of the cult of Athena Skiras. Megarian efforts prompted a defensive Athenian response, indicating the dangerous nature of questioning the mythic past. The focus of the debate on the territories of Eleusis and Salamis further demonstrates the way immediate political concerns shaped and dictated the content of the mythic discourse. The final section looks at myths of Theseus and Ariadne, examining Athenian attempts to sanitize Theseus’ image and Megarian opposition to those efforts. The struggle emphasizes the aggression inherent in the appropriation and alteration of other cities’ mythic histories. To seize and change the mythic history of another city was to exert authority and influence over that city’s history and politics. The mythic past was a political tool used to express identity and attack the foundation of other cities. Contention of the mythic past, and the fight for the right to define history, became an important element of Megarian resistance to Athenian hegemony and of Athenian imperial expansion throughout the pan-Hellenic world.
Section I: Pandion and Nisus

All stories of the mythic past could become a political tool, from tales of pan-Hellenic heroes known throughout Greece to stories minor regional characters known only within a particular city. The examination of the myths of Pandion and Nisus reveals the way in which myth as a whole was able to serve as a political tool for Athens and Megara. Lesser figures with little pan-Hellenic recognition nevertheless held great regional importance as kings and founders. Pandion and Nisus were two such local kings who became pawns in the Megarian and Athenian struggle to define the past. The myths surrounding Pandion and Nisus were contested over centuries by Megarian and Athenian authors as external and internal threats led to the reevaluation of local identity. During the struggle for dominance between two physically close neighbors, and the territorial battles the struggle generated, authors turned to stories of Pandion and Nisus to claim authority and ownership over each other and over contested territories.

Early Megarian accounts presented Pandion and Nisus as individuals of great authority and power within Megara. Skeiron—a prince of Megara—“married the daughter of Pandion and afterwards disputed with Nisus, the son of Pandion, about the throne.”¹³ The dispute was arbitrated by an outside party “who gave the kingship to Nisus and his descendants, and to Sciron the leadership in war.”¹⁴ Pandion appeared as a man whose power and connections made him worthy of alliance with the king of Megara. The success of Nisus’ challenge for the throne suggests that Pandion held a position of power and authority within Megara that legitimized his son’s bid for the throne. Both men occupied positions of great authority and successfully wielded political power within the city.

¹³ Anonymous, on Megara as quoted in Pausanias, Description of Greece, 1.39.6 (BNJ 487 F 3)
¹⁴ Anonymous, on Megara as quoted in Pausanias, Description of Greece, 1.39.6 (BNJ 487 F 3)
The early Athenian view of Pandion\textsuperscript{15} and Nisus was found in the works of the praise poet Bacchylides. In his Ode 17, Bacchylides referred to Theseus as “the descendant of Pandion,” representing Pandion as an important member of the Athenian royal line.\textsuperscript{16} Descent from Pandion was a notable trait attributed to Theseus in a work of praise, suggesting that Pandion was a venerable figure within the Athenian tradition. Pandion’s lineage was further explained in Ode 18, which described Theseus as the son of King Aegeus, who himself was the son of Pandion.\textsuperscript{17} Pandion was important in Bacchylides’ account for his ability to legitimize Theseus’ claim to the Athenian throne and to suggest Theseus’ autochthonous Attic origins—emphasizing his status as a true native Athenian.\textsuperscript{18} Furthermore, descent from Pandion created continuity between the distant mythic past of Athens’ earliest kings and Theseus, Athens’ greatest hero. Such continuity legitimized Theseus’ growing symbolic importance within Athens. Emphasis on Theseus’ innate connection to Athens and his embodiment of Athenian values allowed Athenian citizens to claim the deeds of Theseus for their own enjoyment and symbolic use. In turn, Theseus came to more fully represent not only Athenian values but to become a symbol for Athens itself.\textsuperscript{19}

Later Athenian sources focused on the figure of Nisus as a means of asserting ownership and superiority over the Megarid. The playwright Sophocles wrote that Aegeus’ father “chose out the neighboring country of Sciron’s shore” to give to his son Nisus.\textsuperscript{20} Nisus’ inclusion on an Attic pot that depicted the sons of Pandion demonstrates that Nisus was known amongst

\textsuperscript{15} It is worth noting that in the Athenian genealogy of mythic kings, there are two kings named Pandion. The Pandion who also ruled Megara is referred to by modern scholars as Pandion II. However, ancient sources did not number the kings and referred to him only as Pandion. As it is not clear when the lineage came to have two Pandions, I use Pandion rather than Pandion II so as to avoid making a distinction my sources do not make.
\textsuperscript{16} Bacchylides, Ode 17.15.
\textsuperscript{17} Bacchylides, Ode 18.
\textsuperscript{18} For a discussion of myths of Athenian autochthony and their important to identity formation, see John Peradotto, “Oedipus and Erichthonius” (1984), 188-194.
\textsuperscript{19} Farnell, \textit{Greek Hero Cults} (1921), 339-340.
\textsuperscript{20} Sophocles, \textit{Aegeus}, fr 24.
Athenians during Sophocles’ time as a son of Pandion.²¹ Sophocles’ Pandion had the right to hand the Megarian territory and kingship to whomever he wished—a position of absolute authority over Megara. For an Athenian to have such authority over the Megarid asserted Athenian power over the region, and created a narrative of historical Athenian control in Megara.

Local Athenian historians soon came to consensus that the sons of Pandion included Aegeus and Nisus and that “once Attica had been divided into four parts, Nisos got the Megaris as his lot and founded Nisaia.”²² The now-standardized genealogy conveyed ideas of historical Athenian authority over Megara. Phanodemos of Athens wrote that “Aigeus, son of Pandion,” was “ruling Athens.”²³ The son of Pandion “succeeded his father to the monarchy.”²⁴ The royal Athenian blood and legitimate claim to the Athenian throne of Pandion and Aegeus—and Nisus—were emphasized, highlighting their political authority as well as their Athenian-ness. A myth in which Pandion gave Megara to Nisus was the story of an Athenian king giving the territory of Megara to an Athenian prince. Megara was imagined as an Athenian possession completely under Athenian authority and rule.

The common Attic version also emphasized Nisus’ foundational role in Megara, suggesting that Athens was a more ancient city than Megara. Such a claim allowed Athenians to claim a stronger connection to the mythic past. Nisus founded a new city in the Megarid that would become one of Megara’s most important ports. For Nisus to shape the landscape to his own desires showed Athens’ authority over Megara. It additionally suggested that Megara was still experiencing foundation when Athens was a fully established city. The age of Athens was important in conveying ideas of Athenian superiority, as Greeks constantly looked back to

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²¹ Cited in Gantz, Early Greek Myth (1993), 248.
²² Atthidographers, as quoted in Strabo, Geography, 9.1.6. (BNJ 329 F 2)
²³ Phanodemos of Athens as quoted in Natale Conti, Mythologiae, 9.10. (BNJ 325 F 5)
²⁴ Natale Conti, Mythologiae, 9.10.
tradition, preferring that which was done in the past to that which was new. For Athens to assert its age over Megara was to assert a higher status as a more ancient and therefore more venerable city, one more closely tied to the heroic past. For an Athenian prince to be a Megarian founding figure emphasized both Athenian seniority and that Megara’s very existence was thanks to the deeds and good-will of Athenians.

Individual historians expanded upon the common Attic version of history, using the exact boundaries of Nisus’ territory as a means of expressing Athenian dominance. Andron of Athens specifically defined the territory given to Nisus by Pandion, asserting that the land extended “as far as Eleusis and the Thriasian Plain.” His statement created a precedent within the mythic past of Athenian dominance of Megara and Eleusis that aided Athens’ contemporary territorial struggles. Plato similarly encoded ideas of Athenian territorial dominance over the Megarid, describing in his *Timaeus* the realm of ancient Athens that included Megara. Plato’s version presented an unequivocal ancient precedent of Athenian imperial domination over the Megarid and all surrounding territories. Philochorus similarly stated that Nisus’ “domain extended from the Isthmos as far as the Python.” Writing during a time of Macedonian rule, Philochorus used the mythic past as a reference for understanding the present. Athenian imperial ambitions and territorial claims were limited by Macedon’s presence, yet the Athenian identity still valued ideas of imperialism and defense of Greece. Philochorus turned to the mythic past to create an intentional history that recalled the dominance Athenians could not claim in the present.

The evolution of Pandion and Nisus’ mythology in Athens seems uncontested, but 2nd century AD historians record unattributed instances of Megarian resistance to the Athenian narrative of authority and dominance. The Roman era historians looked to create a single

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25 Andron of Athens, as quoted in Strabo, *Geography*, 9.1.6 (BNJ 329 F 2)
27 Philochorus, as quoted in Strabo, *Geography*, 9.1.6. (BNJ 329 F 2)
coherent historical narrative from the many disparate versions of the past. Sources that directly traced to the classical period of Greek history were highly valued and almost exclusively relied upon, making the works of 2nd century AD historians a compilation of classical Greek sources from the 6th to 3rd century BC.28 The existence of a separate body of Megarian sources can be seen in moments when the narratives of the 2nd century AD historians diverge from the Athenian sources. The different accounts present an opposition to the Athenian representative of Pandion and Nisus, suggesting that preserved within the 2nd century AD histories are instances of Megarian resistance to the Athenian representation of Pandion and Nisus.

The Bibliotheca, written by an unknown author referred to as Apollodorus, was one such later history that compiled the legends of the mythic past into a single history of ancient Greece. Apollodorus’ account of Pandion and Nisus’ lives included details not preserved in Athenian sources. Since the details challenge the Athenian depiction of Pandion and Nisus, and since scholars agree that the Bibliotheca is a work of research based upon no-longer-extant sources, rather than a creative fabrication, the details can be viewed as Megarian responses to the Athenian narrative of authority enacted through Pandion and Nisus.29 Apollodorus asserted that Pandion reigned in Megara after he was forced from Athens by hostile Athenians, exiled “by the sons of Metion in a sedition.”30 “After the death of Pandion his sons marched against Athens, expelled the Metionids, and divided the government in four” with Aegeus ruling as most powerful.31

The Megarian assertion that Pandion was exiled from Athens countered Athenian claims to Megara’s king by emphasizing Pandion’s stronger loyalty to Megara. Instead of battling the

29 Cameron, Greek Mythography in the Roman World (2004), vii.
30 Apollodorus, Bibliotheca, 3.15.5.
31 Apollodorus, Bibliotheca, 3.15.6.
Athenian origins of Pandion, Megarians instead stated that any Athenian loyalties ended when Athenians exiled Pandion. The king was rejected by Athenians, the coup and exile proof that Athenians did not want him. Pandion came to Megara where he was accepted and welcomed as ruler, becoming Megarian in the process. He did not attempt to reclaim his Athenian throne and instead ruled Megara, showing that Pandion’s loyalties no longer lay with Athens. Pandion may have come from Athens, but he was cast out by Athenians and lived the majority of his life as a Megarian who felt hostility toward an Athens that rejected him. An exiled Pandion undermined Athenian efforts to claim Pandion by emphasizing the Athenian denunciation of Pandion and his stronger allegiance toward Megara.

Similarly, the invasion and conquest of Athens by Pandion’s sons undermined Athenian attempts to claim Nisus by emphasizing Nisus’ loyalties to Megara. Nisus was presented as the son of a Megarian king who participated in a successful invasion of Attica. Rather than peacefully enter the city and attempt to influence the political situation, or win support amongst the populace as an Athenian citizen might do, the sons of Pandion attacked Athens—the actions of foreigners, of Megarians. The success of the mission projected Megarian greatness and superiority over Athens. Megara attacked Athens, won, and installed its own leaders into Athens’ political structures. Such actions are those of conquerors, and serve to highlight Megarian superiority over Athens. As Athenian authors were using Nisus to express their long-standing authority over Megara, the narrative of Megarian conquest using the same figure challenged Athenian voices and presented an alternative history.

Pausanias’ *Description of Greece*, also written in the 2nd century AD, recorded a pro-Athenian version of Pandion and Nisus’ lives. Pausanias wrote that Pandion “was deposed from
his kingdom by the Metionidae” with his children who “were banished with him.” In Pausanias’ eyes, it was through Pandion that Megara belonged to Athens in ancient times, Pylas the king having left it to Pandion” and Nisus “himself made king of Megara and of the territory as far as Corinth.” He expanded further on Nisus’ legends, noting that in Athens “behind the Lyceum is a monument of Nisus, who was killed while king of Megara by Minos, and the Athenians carried him here and buried him.”

Pausanias’ account was strongly pro-Athenian, reflected in his outright assertion of Athenian authority over and ownership of Megara since mythic times. He further emphasized the point through the relocation of Nisus’ body back to Athens. Nisus and all of Pandion’s children were born in Athens and grew up in the city. Despite their potentially violent return to reclaim the Athenian throne, Pandion’s children were Athenian citizens. That Athens claimed Nisus’ body on his death and brought it back to Attica shows that the Athenians themselves viewed Nisus and his brothers as Athenians, not Megarians. Nisus may have ruled Megara, but upon his death it was Athens, not Megara, that had rights to his body. Such a version was another element of Athenian efforts to claim Pandion and Nisus as true Athenians, emphasizing both men’s Athenian allegiances despite involvement with Megara.

Over the centuries Athenian authors made an effort to claim Megarian figures for Athenian history, or to insert Athenian kings into Megara’s past, as a way of advancing Athenian superiority. The construction of this intentional history allowed Athens to make territorial claims about both the past and present. Athenian manipulation of myth created a historical precedent for

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32 Pausanias, Description of Greece, 1.5.3.
33 Pausanias, Description of Greece, 1.5.4.
34 Pausanias, Description of Greece, 1.39.4
35 Pausanias, Description of Greece, 1.19.4
Athenian authority over the Megarid. The evidence preserved in Apollodorus and Pausanias suggested the Megarian response was not to deny the existence of Pandion and Nisus but instead to emphasize their Megarian allegiances. The narrative negated Athenian dominance, allowed Megara to make its own territorial claims, and asserted Megara’s own antiquity and superiority over Athens.

The deployment of the mythic past to protect territorial claims or assert dominance over another city was not a trait unique to the myths of Pandion and Nisus, but rather a feature of mythic history in general. The modification and conflicting interpretations of the stories of Pandion and Nisus were seen in greater detail in the myths of Theseus, where the use of the mythic past to create identity was even more explicit. The qualities of Megara’s and Athens’ interaction with Pandion and Nisus—struggle to define a particular element of the past, connection with immediate historical circumstances, the importance of territorial claims, the past as a reference and model for the present—were present in the myths of Theseus. Mythic history was the medium for creating intentional histories, in which both important and incidental moments conveyed ideological concepts about identity, territory, and power that greatly impacted relationships and actions in the present.
Section II: Theseus and Skeiron

Local hero cults were of particular significance in creating identity for Greek city-states. Allegiance to a specific hero created a sense of place and purpose on the pan-Hellenic stage. For Athenians, much of their identity was structured around the deeds of Theseus, who came to represent an idealized version of Athens itself. For Megara, the role was filled in part by Skeiron. The stories of Theseus and Skeiron overlapped, however, at the moment of Skeiron’s death. In Athens, Skeiron was a common brigand killed by Theseus in an act of civilizing justice. In Megara, Skeiron was a foundational hero who defended the city and died treacherously at Theseus’ hands in defense of Eleusis. Athenian attempts to recast Theseus’ past and symbolic role made Skeiron a figure of great regional importance. Theseus’ role in Skeiron’s death, and whether Skeiron deserved his fate, became important elements of Athenian attempts to redefine their identity. Similarly, the moment of Skeiron’s death became the means through which Megarians asserted their independence and opposition to Athens’ increasing sphere of influence. As circumstances required Athenians and Megarians to re-evaluate their identity and mythic history, the two cities became embroiled in a struggle to defend and assert their own version of the mythic past.

The first recorded accounts of Skeiron came from late 6th century BC Megarian historians. The late 6th century BC in Megara was a time of great political upheaval, when long-held territories were lost and factionalism divided the city. After decades of intermittent war, Megara lost the island of Salamis to Athens in 560 BC during a Spartan arbitration.

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37 Anonymous, on Megara as quoted in Plutarch, Theseus 10.
Sparta’s support of Athens’ claim to Salamis reflected Megara’s declining pan-Hellenic influence, as they could no longer muster the economic, military, or diplomatic might to convince the Spartans of their rightful claim. Possession of Salamis had allowed Megarians to align themselves with a particular set of myths and project a specific pan-Hellenic identity. The loss of the island changed what it meant to be Megarian, both within the city and on the pan-Hellenic stage. With Salamis gone, Megarians needed to reassess their history and identity. Megara was further weakened by successive revolutions, and tensions within the city continued into the second half of the century when Megara sent a colonizing expedition to found Herakleia Pontica. As colonization in Greece functioned as a valve to relieve social pressures caused by overpopulation and political unrest, Megara’s expedition was a sign of continued political uncertainty, discontent, and factionalism during the 6th century BC.

In these circumstances, the Megarian historians crafted a Skeiron to appeal to elite Megarian patrons with emphasis on Skeiron’s noble lineage, admirable character, and embodiment of the traditional founding hero archetype. Skeiron was “a punisher of robbers” and “a kinsman and friend of good and just men.” His lineage included Ajax, one of Greece’s greatest heroes. As it was unlikely “that the best would enter into family relationships with the worst,” Skeiron’s noble lineage was evidence of his good character and great deeds. These deeds involved “leadership in war,” marriage into the royal family of Megara, and giving his life in defense of Eleusis during an Athenian invasion. Skeiron was a hero worthy of any city, one

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41 Buckley, Aspects of Greek History (2010), 31-35.
42 Anonymous, on Megara as quoted in Plutarch, Theseus 10. (BNJ 487 F 1)
43 Anonymous, on Megara as quoted in Pausanias, Description of Greece, 1.39.5. (BNJ 487 F 3)
44 Anonymous, on Megara as quoted in Plutarch, Theseus 10. (BNJ 487 F 1)
45 Anonymous, On Megara as quoted in Plutarch, Theseus 10. (BNJ 487 F 1)
who dedicated himself to the defense of his homeland and acquitted himself well in pan-Hellenic eyes.

For a Megarian populace divided by political upheaval, such an archetypal founding hero was a unifying symbol. Citizens could take pride in their common heritage with Skeiron, and in their affiliation with his noble deeds. In the wake of the loss of Salamis, his gracious acceptance of the loss of the throne to his brother-in-law, Nisus and his dedication to his new role as polemarch, was a model for citizens to emulate.\textsuperscript{46} The shared, admirable history helped construct a Megarian identity that galvanized collective pan-Hellenic purpose rather than divisive individual action. Equally important, the variant emphasized Skeiron’s unjust death through deceit at the hands of Theseus. This intentional history reassured a Megarian populace that had recently lost Salamis through Athenian deception that Athenian dishonor was a pattern of immoral action that tarnished the city that might otherwise claim greatness over Megara. Megara, remaining noble, could be assured of its superior position in the pan-Hellenic world.

The Megarian conception of Skeiron, with its aspersions on Athenian history, did not go unchallenged in the turmoil of the 5\textsuperscript{th} century BC. In 510 BC, the established tyranny in Athens was overthrown by Cleisthenes and radical democracy was implemented for the first time.\textsuperscript{47} The political uncertainty opened the door for periodic Spartan involvement and interference in Athenian politics that divided the city into pro- and anti-Spartan camps. Meanwhile, the Persian Empire was a growing threat to all of Greece that culminated with the Battle of Marathon in 490 BC. Single-handedly defeating the Persian army, Athenians adopted an identity as saviors and champions of Greece.\textsuperscript{48} Integral to this identity was Theseus. Soldiers at Marathon claimed to

\textsuperscript{46} Anonymous, On Megara as quoted in Pausanias, \textit{Description of Greece}, 1.39.5. (BNJ 487 F 3)
\textsuperscript{47} Buckley, \textit{Aspects of Greek History} (2010), 128.
\textsuperscript{48} Buckley, \textit{Aspects of Greek History} (2010), 141-42.
have seen him fighting on the battlefield with them.\(^{49}\) He was positioned as a defender and champion of the oppressed.\(^{50}\) Political leaders tried to align themselves with Theseus to enhance personal prestige. The hero became a lens for discussion of political structure and purpose in Athens, through his role as unifier of Athens and through the aristocratic authority he lent the new democracy.\(^{51}\) Such a hero needed to be unquestionably noble to match Athenian rhetoric and ambitions.

In an environment of Athenian pride in themselves and in Theseus, the praise poet Bacchylides in the 480s BC performed his Ode 18 for elite Athenian patrons.\(^{52}\) Bacchylides lauded Theseus for his “indescribable” and “mighty” deeds during his journey from Troezen to Athens—including the slaying of “reckless” Skeiron.\(^{53}\) Bacchylides challenged the image of a noble Skeiron crafted by the Megarian historians only decades prior. Theseus’ slaying of Skeiron could not be lauded as a heroic act unless Skeiron was transformed into a wicked and evil brigand. Theseus as a murderer of neighboring politicians was not a symbol to rally around. Athenian portrayals of Skeiron transformed the Megarian into a villain so that Theseus could become an even more heroic symbol of growing Athenian pride and ambitions.

Trends in popular iconography that began around 510 BC reinforced the conception of Skeiron as a villain, suggesting that Theseus’ rising prominence was connected to the institution and success of the radical democratic regime in Athens. Pottery fragments increasingly showed Theseus’ violent interaction with Skeiron as an integral part of Theseus’ triumphant deeds.\(^{54}\)

\(^{49}\) Plutarch, \textit{Theseus} 35.5.  
\(^{50}\) Farnell, \textit{Greek Hero Cults} (1921), 339.  
\(^{53}\) Bacchylides, 18.19-25.  
\(^{54}\) LIMC shows an increase in the number of surviving fragments bearing Theseus’ image. While this could be attributed to earlier fragments needing to survive longer than more recent pottery, even within a span of a few decades when we would expect pottery survival rates to remain relatively consistent, the number of fragments bearing Theseus’ image increases.
The fragments were intended for popular consumption and so displayed images appealing to the majority of the Athenian populace. By the early 5th century BC, Theseus’ iconic journey along the Isthmus from Troezen to Athens always included the defeat of Skeiron. Theseus was shown upending Skeiron before a large rock representing the cliffs the villain used to knock travelers from (Fig 1), forcibly throwing a resisting Skeiron from a cliff (Fig 2), and similarly violent scenes.55 The Athenian Treasury at Delphi (Fig 3) in 490 BC presented Skeiron being forcefully overpowered and hurled, defenseless, from a cliff.56 A monumental structure positioned at the heart of Athens’ rising naval empire, the Treasury was intended for a pan-Hellenic gaze and its friezes were meant to convey messages of Athenian superiority and dominance to all who saw it. The weakness, failure, and ineptitude of Skeiron were an integral part of the past Athens tried to disseminate. Furthermore, the presence of Skeiron on the Treasury suggests that depictions of Skeiron as a victim were recognizable throughout Greece. Athenian authors were already achieving a degree of success in advancing their history over the Megarian version, and monumental structures like the Treasury at Delphi were a platform to further spread the message of Skeiron’s villainy and Theseus’ overwhelming physical superiority.57

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Fig 1: Theseus attacks Skeiron at the top of image, tipping him from a cliff (Theseus 33, Attic cup, ~510 BC)

Fig 2: Theseus attacks a resisting Skeiron, pushing him off a cliff (Theseus 102, Attic pelike, ~500 BC)
The Athenian version of history undermined the Megarian identity built around Skeiron. Athenian stories that emphasized Skeiron’s wickedness directly challenged Megarian tales of Skeiron’s nobility. Such challenges served Athenian interests, as Megara had recently occupied a place of economic and political importance that Athens wished to assume. In using their growing imperial platform to spread the Athenian version of history, Athenian authors asserted their right to define the problematically shared moments of Athens’ and Megara’s mythic pasts. Athenians tried to prove their power over the declining Megara. Furthermore, Megarian stories of Skeiron could undermine the idea of a noble Theseus, and so Athenians worked to erase the ancestry, prestige, and heroics that could challenge their own hero. They re-imagined Skeiron’s death as deserved and just, bolstering Theseus’ position as an archetypal founding hero by removing a
potential stain on his character. Theseus was positioned as a civilizing figure, someone who fought against lawlessness and brought order to the isthmus.

The idea of Theseus as a unique civilizing figure was important to Athenians during the early 5th century BC. Athenians positioned Theseus as a parallel to Hercules, who was himself a great foundational figure. Assertions that Theseus brought a new age of civilization to Attica and created the contemporary political units of Athens represented Theseus as a true founding hero—despite the fact that he arrived in an already established city. Theseus was a symbol of the democratic regime, which positioned itself in opposition to lawlessness, making civilizing Theseus the ideal hero. Amidst external threats from Persia and the internal tensions of revolution, a figure renowned for his unification of Attica and defeat of lawlessness consolidated the power of the democratic regime by unifying the Athenian populace behind a laudable shared past. The identity built around Theseus as a great hero and civilizing figure was an identity that allowed Athenians to present a united front to both its growing empire and to Persia. In the face of an external threat, Athenians could rally behind a shared identity to increase political, economic, and military strength abroad.

The tone of Skeiron’s representation in Attica shifted around 470 BC, as seen in the writings of Pherekydes of Athens. Megarian-Athenian relations were unusually cordial during the decade. Megara and Athens had allied against the shared threats of Persia and Sparta, and Athens occupied the Megarid to defend the interests of its smaller neighbor. Megara quickly became dependent on Athenian intervention. Concurrent with Megara’s increasing reliance on Athens was the rise of the Delian League with Athens at its head. Athens used the mechanisms

of the League to transform the joint-protection alliance into an Athenian Empire, giving Athens increasing influence among the island that had previously supported Megarian trade. Athenians felt they had little to fear from a Megara that was increasingly irrelevant in the pan-Hellenic world.

With Megara apparently defeated, Athenian hostility toward Skeiron diminished. Pherekydes wrote for elite Athenian patrons and recorded changing views toward Skeiron brought on by shifting political relationships with Megara. His work included the noble lineage of Skeiron previously suppressed in Athens. Skeiron’s position as a great-grandfather to Ajax, one of the greatest Greek heroes, was openly expressed with no mention of Skeiron’s place as a villain in Athenian mythic history. The recognition of the noble Skeiron Megarians tried to maintain suggests a shift in Athenian views toward Megara. With Athens holding power in the Megarid, Megara was no longer a threat. Skeiron’s ability to undermine Theseus was likewise discounted.

Iconography beginning around 470 BC reinforces ideas of growing Athenian neutrality toward Skeiron. Though hostile depictions of Skeiron never disappeared, with greater frequency images of Theseus’ confrontation with Skeiron showed not the moment of Skeiron’s violent death but instead scenes of their initial meeting. Theseus approached a seated Skeiron on one cup (Fig 4). In another, the confrontation was nonphysical as Theseus leaned on a spear but did not touch his opponent (Fig 5). A third pottery fragment from the 460s BC showed Theseus standing before a seated Skeiron (Fig 6). Considering the earlier propensity for violent scenes

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63 Morison, “Pherekydes of Athens” (2013), Brill Online.
64 Pherekydes as quoted in Apollodorus, *Bibliotheca*, 3.12.6. (BNJ 3 F 60)
of Skeiron being overpowered, the neutral representations reflect a new conception of the Megarian hero. For those familiar with Theseus’ myths the potential for violence was present, but the scenes themselves refrained from hostility. Pherekydes’ use of Skeiron’s noble lineage and character, along with the trend of non-violent iconography, suggests the intentional creation of an Athenian history that accepted Skeiron and Megara.

Fig 4: Theseus hails a seated Skeiron (Thesus 100, Attic stemless cup, ~470 BC)
Given Athens’ new position of authority and Megara’s lesser role in formal alliance, Athenians no longer needed to emphasize Skeiron’s wickedness. A Megara reliant on Athens benefitted Athenian political and economic interests, but a Megara weakened through internal instability due to a weak identity would drain Athenian resources, requiring defense from
external threats and Athenian support to prop up weak regimes. Faced with this political balancing act, a neutral Skeiron suited Athenians who would not risk harming themselves by continuing to undermine the identity of a weaker ally. Skeiron was too integral to Theseus’ role as a civilizing figure to remove entirely from Theseus’ story. However, neutral representations allowed Athenians to offer a middle ground in which Theseus and Athens remained strong, and Skeiron resumed a more positive role in Megara. Skeiron could not stop being a villain for Athens, but with Megara assigned non-threatening status Skeiron could stop being vilified by Athenians.

The remainder of the 5th century BC saw a return to hostility between Athens and Megara, and a return to hostile representations of Skeiron in Athens. Megara increasingly accused Athens of ignoring Megarian interests and violating treaty terms. In 446 BC the smaller city defected from its Athenian alliance to join Sparta’s Peloponnesian League. Athens and Sparta had positioned themselves as diametrically opposed forces, and Megara’s changing allegiance was met with Athenian aggression and contributed to the resurgence of the Peloponnesian War. Tensions reached their height around 432 BC, when Athens instituted an embargo on all Megarian goods while simultaneously blockading Megarian ports to stifle trade with the Peloponnese. The embargo coincided with a policy of pillaging the Megarian countryside at every opportunity, and considering the proximity of Megara and Athens, the opportunities were numerous. A satirical depiction of Megarians in Aristophanes’ The

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Acharnians suggests that by the end of the Peloponnesian War, Athens had reduced Megara to a state of near-starvation and desperation.\textsuperscript{72} Iconography on monuments and pottery reflected popular sentiment in Athens toward Skeiron and Megara during this time. After 450 BC, neutral depictions of Skeiron decrease, and disappear altogether by 420 BC.\textsuperscript{73} Violent images of Skeiron dominated iconography, showing the moment of Skeiron’s death in which he is under attack by Theseus.\textsuperscript{74} Often Theseus used elements of Skeiron’s own iconography, such as the basin, to kill Skeiron. The fight was an expression of overwhelming physical superiority.\textsuperscript{75} The Temple of Hephaestus at Athens (Fig 7), begun around 450 BC, showed Theseus looming over a sprawled Skeiron who dangles off a cliff.\textsuperscript{76} The Temple of Poseidon, completed around 430 BC, similarly showed Skeiron as a recipient of Theseus’ violence.\textsuperscript{77} These monumental structures showed the pan-Hellenic world a villainous Skeiron whose sole purpose was to be defeated by Theseus in violent physical confrontation, echoing the trends on local Attic pottery that indicate a resurgence of hostile feelings toward Skeiron and Megara.\textsuperscript{78}

\textsuperscript{73} Neils and Woodward, “Theseus” (1994).
\textsuperscript{74} Neils and Woodward, “Theseus” (1994), images 47-49.
\textsuperscript{75} Von den Hoff, “Media for Theseus” (2010), 171.
\textsuperscript{76} Neils and Woodward, “Theseus” (1994), image 55.
\textsuperscript{77} Neils and Woodward, “Theseus” (1994), image 56.
\textsuperscript{78} Von den Hoff, “Media for Theseus” (2010), 175.
Fig 7: Theseus lunges toward a prone Skeiron (Theseus 55, Temple of Hephaestus at Athens, ~450 BC)

Athenian outrage over Megara’s defection fueled attacks on Megara’s mythic past. Skeiron’s role as a villain with no noble qualities was re-emphasized, once again attacking the Megarian identity built on the idea of a heroic Skeiron. Furthermore, with the rising pressures of war and unrest among its imperial subject-allies, Athenians needed to present a united front and articulate an identity of strength and purpose. In reinforcing Skeiron’s wickedness, Athenians were able to emphasize Theseus’ excellence and the violent punishment of those who broke the law. The projection of a strong and uncompromising Theseus was beneficial to a city-state trying to intimidate reluctant allies into submission. With a history of bringing justice to surrounding territories, Theseus reinforced Athens’ right to police its allies while also suggesting a long history of Athenian influence and control over Greece.

In the wake of the Peloponnesian War and the Athenian defeat by Sparta, Megara entered a period of independence and strength unlike anything it had experience since the loss of Salamis. With Athens reeling from defeat and Sparta trying to retain disgruntled allies, Megara was temporarily free from the threat of intervention from both powers. At the turn of the century, Megara was independently governing itself for the first time in decades, and adopted a policy of
neutrality in all future pan-Hellenic confrontations. Neutrality allowed Megara to enter a period of economic growth and recovery beginning around 380 BC that returned to the city a measure of its pre-Salamis prosperity.80

A Megarian historian writing during the early 4th century BC seized the opportunities offered by independence and championed the idea of a heroic Skeiron while explicitly attacking Theseus.81 The historian suggested that the local Isthmian Games “were instituted in memory of Sciron, and that Theseus thus made expiation for his murder, because of the relationship between them.”82 The author presented Theseus and Skeiron as maternal cousins, making Skeiron’s death an act of kin-murder anathema to the Greeks.83 Someone who would murder his own family was someone who deserved exile, not someone who matched Athens’ idealized image of Theseus. Furthermore, the foundation of the Isthmian Games in Skeiron’s memory emphasized Skeiron’s heroic and virtuous status; games were only founded in memory of those worthy of remembrance. That the foundation of the games was also an act of cleansing and atonement further articulated Skeiron’s death as a murder rather than an expression of civilizing justice. Theseus immediately recognized his crime and sought to make amends, demonstrating the severity of Theseus’ guilt and reinforcing his pan-Hellenic shame.

For newly autonomous Megara, the articulation of a distinct and strong identity was more important than ever. The Megarian historian presented a noble Skeiron worthy of Megarian pride whose mythic history could be used to craft a new, independent identity. By reasserting Skeiron’s nobility and symbolic role, Megarians rejected Athenian oversight and asserted their independence. Altering Skeiron’s image challenged the Athenian right to articulate Skeiron’s

82 Anonymous, on Megara as quoted in Plutarch, Theseus 25.4.
83 Anonymous, on Megara as quoted in Plutarch, Theseus 25.4.
history. The Megarians additionally acted to undermine Athens during its time of weakness by emphasizing the pan-Hellenic recognition of Skeiron’s unjust death, questioning the narrative of Theseus’ nobility and civilizing status. Skeiron’s wrongful death also allowed for a sense of outrage toward Athens. A mythic history in which Skeiron was wrongfully killed by Theseus created an identity that positioned Megara in opposition to Athens. Megarians turned to the mythic past to articulate a legacy of independence and opposition, rejecting their more recent history as Athenian subjects and victims.

Megara exhibited greater strength during periods when Skeiron’s conception and mythic past were most clearly articulated and defended within the city. Megara’s ability to maintain its mythic past and identity both reflected and bolstered the city’s political strength. A strong state—one free from the interference of other cities, one with economic freedom and political stability—was a state with the ability to maintain and defend its past against outside attacks. A strong state was a state with a stable identity, one that brought citizens together behind a shared sense of local and pan-Hellenic purpose. A strong state could rally historical circumstances and mythic connections to defend immediate interests. When Megara began to suffer political revolution, experience factionalism, and lose military and economic strength abroad the city also began to lose control of its intentional history and corresponding identity. With identity in a state of flux, defenses could not be rallied to stand independent against Athenian and Spartan encroachment, and Megara’s political, economic, and military crisis accelerated. A stable mythic past allowed a city to muster its full strength, and a city at full strength was able to defend its mythic history.

The struggle to articulate an identity for Skeiron and lay claim to a specific version of mythic past shows that regional histories were realms of political opportunity for the cities of
Greece. It was the means through which identities were both constructed and attacked as immediate historical circumstances altered a city’s role in Greece and relationship with the past. Political upheaval was met with attempts to strengthen the symbolic power of local heroes in order to increase unity through the development and acceptance of a shared historical narrative. Weakness in an enemy was met with efforts to further undermine the already-struggling political systems by eroding the historical basis for a city’s identity. Myths without pan-Hellenic significance were more changeable, and variants were more easily accepted locally and throughout Greece without the weight of pan-Hellenic preference behind a particular version. As the case of Theseus and Skeiron shows, it was when intentional histories dealt with the malleable past that identity could be most radically altered or attacked, and that the strongest defenses needed to be maintained to protect the mythic past.
Section III: Athena Skiras

The production of pottery within Megara during the 3rd century BC featuring a villainous Skeiron suggests that Athenian voices were ultimately successful in dictating the presentation of Skeiron’s death. Megarians did not fight Athenian encroachment on their mythic past on just a single front, however. With the Athenian imperial platform reaching and persuading a wider audience, Megara attacked a different area of myth in efforts to undermine the Athenian narrative. Megarians questioned the origins of the epithet of the goddess Athena Skiras, a local cult popular in Attica, forcing Athenians to defend and justify their cultural practices and everyday traditions. The struggle over Athena Skiras’ epithet became another means through which Athens and Megara expressed territorial claims, reflecting the immediate needs of each city.

Megara’s target was well-chosen, for the origins and meaning of Athena Skiras and the Skira festival frustrated scholars even in classical Greece. Ancient scholars pointed to the important winds blowing off the Skironian Rocks—where Skeiron murdered his victims—as giving both the month Skiron and the Skira festival its name. Modern interpretations suggest the Skira festival was closely tied to the territorial concerns Megara and Athens often fought over. In some views, the festival was connected to Eleusis. It was a harvest celebration shared by Athena and Demeter eventually supplanted by the rites of Eleusinian Demeter. The festival also commemorated the victory of the Athenian king Erectheus over Eumolpos at Eleusis, reinforcing Athenian territorial rights to Eleusis. Other modern interpretations see the worship of Athena

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84 Robertson, “Athena’s Shrines and Festivals” (1996), 74.
Skiras as evidence of ties between Athens and Salamis, with implications for Athenian sovereignty over the island. The Attic family that conducted the cult practices of Athena Skiras had ancient ties to both Attica and Salamis.\textsuperscript{87} Scholars believe that when Athens won the struggle for Salamis, the island had to be incorporated into the myths of Attica through the adoption of Salaminian cults or through the admittance of Salaminian immigrants to Attica.\textsuperscript{88} Athena Skiras and her worship were closely tied to the territories of both Eleusis and Salamis, two regions Athens contested with Megara. For Megarians to attack Athena Skiras not only undermined Athenian religious practice, it challenged Athenian rights to two valuable, formerly Megarian territories.

The Megarian attack was not without difficulties, however, for the manner in which Greek deities acquired epithets was a multi-faceted process. Another epithet of Athena, that of ‘Pallas’, demonstrates the complexity associated with epithets in Greek thought. Pallas Athena was a common name for the goddess, but there were many ancient explanations of how Athena came to be called Pallas. Some suggested the epithet was associated with her iconography or defining traits, such as brandishing (\textit{pale\'\i n}) her aegis.\textsuperscript{89} More often stories of Athena’s murder of Pallas were turned to for explanation. Pallas, however, appeared as a foster-sister Athena mourned,\textsuperscript{90} a giant killed and flayed by the goddess,\textsuperscript{91} and even the father of Athena killed attempting to rape his daughter.\textsuperscript{92} The ideas that Athena could take on the name of either a close friend, hated enemy, or a defining personal characteristic coexisted within Greek thought.

\textsuperscript{87} Parker, \textit{Athenian Religion: A History} (1997), 312.
\textsuperscript{88} Parker, \textit{Athenian Religion: A History} (1997), 312.
\textsuperscript{89} Plato, \textit{Cratylus}, 406d-e.
\textsuperscript{90} Apollodorus, \textit{Bibliotheca}, 3.14.4.
\textsuperscript{91} Apollodorus, \textit{Bibliotheca}, i.6.2.
\textsuperscript{92} Cicero, \textit{De Natura Deorum}, 3.23.
Megarian attacks on the epithet of Athena Skiras were attacks on a malleable concept, one open to manipulation, interpretation, and a multiplicity of associations.

The earliest evidence of Megara’s attack was from the 4th century BC, when Athens was recovering from the Peloponnesian War and attempting to revive its former empire. Megara was recovering under newly independent governance, as well. Over the century the city’s wool industry flourished, commerce revived, a wealthy commercial class developed, and the city began to mint its own coinage. With Megara and Athens in such close proximity, the rising power and prominence of one city was a threat to the other that needed to be answered. Attempts to exercise increased pan-Hellenic influence resulted displays of superiority and in incursions into each other’s territories. The cities soon came into conflict, and around 350 BC a border struggle over Eleusis broke out.

Eleusis was one of the most important cult sites in all of Greece and the rites practiced there were critical to Athenian identity. The performance of specific cult practices was considered vital to maintaining the fertility of the earth and ensuring the success of agriculture throughout the world. The keeping of the Eleusinian mysteries was a critical part of maintaining the year’s harvest and the continued existence of the world, and Athens took seriously its role in preserving the mysteries. Athenian identity was closely bound to the idea that Athens performed the mysteries and every year ensured that Greece and the wider world continued to exist. Further highlighting the importance of Eleusis was the surrounding fertile farmland, a rarity in both Athens and Megara. Greek soil was notoriously poor, and with its large population Athens needed to retain the productive grain regions around Eleusis. Megara too

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sought to claim the farmlands for its own use. The combination of economic, religious, and ideological factors made retention of Eleusis critical to both cities. For Megarians to attack the Athenian relationship with Eleusis, then, in conjunction with an attack on Theseus, was to strike at the very heart of Athenian identity and Athenian prosperity. Although the Megarian historian Praxion may not have been the first to make such an accusation, it was the form the debate over Athena Skiras’ epithet took after his attack.

Praxion wrote between 375 and 350 BC. His works recorded common views of the past for a local Megarian audience. Praxion included in his histories of Megara that Athena Skiras “was called after Skiron.” Praxion’s statement in a history of Megara functioned not only to question the origins of the epithet but to suggest that her origins and cult were a part of Megara’s history and therefore open for Megarian reinterpretation. He suggested that Athena Skiras was famous and worshipped because of Skeiron, asserting a close tie between Athens’ favored goddess and Megara. Though the relationship could be one of enmity or favor, ties with Athena would make Skeiron famous throughout Greece, a figure worthy of immortalizing in the mythic record, even if only for his misdeeds. Considering the success of Athens’ reinvention of Skeiron, it may have been more important to emphasize Skeiron’s fame in general than fight for his good character. Megara claiming a relationship with a figure of questionable morality but unquestionable fame was not alien to the ancient Greeks. Megara still benefitted from its association with Skeiron. Skeiron’s fame would become Megara’s fame, worship of Skeiron’s cult would still bring favor to Megara, the mythic past could still provide a model and justification for present behavior, and Skeiron could still serve as a platform from which Megara could assert their independence from Athens.

97 Liddel, “Praxion of Megara” (2013), Brill Online.
98 Praxion, as cited in Harpokration, Lexicon v. Skiron (BNJ 484 F 1)
Praxion also used the relationship between Athena Skiras and Skeiron to advance Megarian claims to the territory of Salamis, where the cult was also practiced. The relationship Praxion asserted between Athena Skiras and Skeiron suggested that the cult originated not in Athens but in Megara. In the Greek world conquering cities often took on the cults and gods of the conquered as a show of strength. A defeated city had clearly lost the favor of its gods, who were taken on by the new favorites. Athens may have taken the worship of Athena Skiras from Megara, but Praxion implies that Megara adopted the cult after its conquest of Salamis where Athena Skiras was also worshipped. The origins of ‘Skiras’ in Skeiron and the worship of Athena Skiras on Salamis acted as proof of Megara’s prior and therefore more legitimate claim to Salamis. Athens might possess Salamis in the present, but the Megarian ruled Salamis first—and in Greece, the older precedent was preferred.

Reference to the centuries-old dispute over Salamis was reference to past economic and political greatness that contemporary Megarians wanted to emulate and exceed. In making connections to Salamis, Praxion directed his audience to remember a Megarian past when they were the unchallenged naval and economic power of the region. Megarians could be inspired by past greatness, and use the past as a model for attempts to gain present glory. Furthermore, the struggle for Salamis provided a framework through which contemporary Megarians could interpret the territorial conflict over Eleusis. The present clash was positioned as a parallel to the now-mythologized battle for Salamis, reinforcing Megarian precedent to both territories while providing a warning of the Athenian deception that won Salamis. Additionally, in the Megarian tradition Skeiron was deceitfully killed by Theseus when defending Eleusis from Athenian invasion. Praxion’s Skeiron narrative aligned with the framing of contemporary events, and provided another warning against Athenian deception. Skeiron became a representative of

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Anonymous, on Megara as quoted in Plutarch, *Theseus* 10. (BNJ 487 F 1)
Megarian greatness, a symbol of Megara’s rightful territorial claims, and a rallying figure for defense of the land. Amidst the tensions of the 350s BC, Megara’s intentional history created a symbol to unite and inspire the Megarian populace.

The border struggle for Eleusis continued into the later 4th century BC. Though Athens had held the region for centuries, in Megarian history Eleusis was traditionally a Megarian territory and so, bolstered by rising pan-Hellenic prestige, Megara invaded Eleusis in a bid to reclaim the town. Athens was too concerned with events in the pan-Hellenic sphere to deal with Megara at home.100 Athens was forced to cede supremacy of the northern Aegean to Macedon in the 340s BC, relinquishing its former territories.101 Less than a decade later, Macedonian forces decisively defeated the allied Greek states and crushed the Athenian forces.102 Continued Athenian resistance led to the decisive defeat of the former naval empire by the Macedonian navy, and to the forceful dissolution of democracy in Athens.103 Once the center of a vast empire and a bastion of democracy and liberty—at least in its own eyes—Athens entered a period of decline, under attack at home and abroad. Macedonian rule devastated the Athenian populace, destroying the ideology of a free Athens and requiring a radical reappraisal of Athenian identity for a world where Athenian supremacy was merely a fond memory.

In an environment of subjugation and lost glory, Philochorus authored his seventeen book history of Attica. His history of Athens included a discussion of the origins of Athena Skiras, who Philochorus claimed was named after “Skiros, a certain Eleusinian soothsayer.”104 As it is unlikely both Megara’s Praxion and Athens’ Philochorus decided to discuss the origins of a small Athenian cult, Philochorus was likely responding to Megarian authors and entering the

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101 Buckley, Aspects of Greek History (2010), 454.
102 Buckley, Aspects of Greek History (2010), 463 and 466.
103 Ferguson, Hellenistic Athens (1911), 21.
104 Philochorus, as cited by Harpokration, Lexicon v Skiron. (BNJ 484 F 1)
debate about Skeiron. For Athena Skiras’ epithet to have originated with an Eleusinian figure strengthened the tie between Athens and Eleusis, making the statement that Athens alone worships a uniquely Eleusinian Athena. The unique cult must come from a unique connection to Eleusis, asserting Athenian territorial rights to the important cult center. Furthermore, for Athens’ patron goddess to have a special connection with Eleusis suggests that Athens, through their relationship with Athena, likewise had a claim to Eleusis since the origins of the city. In the face of Macedonian rule, loss of territory abroad, and loss of influence at home, Athenians sought to present a picture of undeniable rule over the cult site so important to their identity.

Philochorus’ statement also served to undermine Megarian identity, implicitly calling into question the Megarian tradition that placed Skeiron at Eleusis as a defender of the territory. The Megarian version of Skeiron’s death threatened Theseus’ image as protector and civilizer. For Theseus to deceitfully kill Skeiron in an invasion of Eleusis made Theseus an aggressor with little respect for the law. In creating Skiros, however, Philochorus implied that Megara’s tradition confused two men with similar names, and that the Athenian version that places Skeiron on the Isthmus road as a brigand was the truth. Philochorus’ statement also denied Megara the advantages of a connection between Athena and Skeiron that allowed them to make claims to Salamis, while bolstering Athenian territorial claims to Eleusis and Salamis. At a time when the centuries-old Athenian identity as a protector of Greece and bastion of democracy and freedom was under attack, focusing on a mythic past in which Athenian territorial claims were confirmed and celebrated helped bolster a populace whose sense of itself as a pan-Hellenic power no longer matched reality.

The defensive response of the Athenian authors suggests Megara’s attack on the mythic past was truly threatening for Athens. Once the mythic past was called into question, Athenians
had to reply. To ignore Megara’s reinvention of the mythic past would tacitly accept and agree with that version of history. As Athenians’ sense of self was already threatened by subjugation to Macedon, Megarian attacks on Athenian identity further undermined the precarious political and social environment in Athens. The mythic past was as a realm of opportunity for those looking to wage an ideological rather than military war on a neighboring city. To successfully question the mythic past was to attack the political, diplomatic, and social structures built around a particular version of mythic history.

Equally important, the emphasis on territorial claims shows that contemporary needs shaped interactions and reinventions of the past. Athena Skiras was contested during a period when Megara disputed Athenian claims to Eleusis, and attempted to assert its pan-Hellenic power abroad. Megarians benefited from questioning Athenian claims to Eleusis while reinforcing their own history as an economic and military power. Athenians looked to emphasize their ownership of existing territory while bolstering Theseus as a unifying figure. Though Athena Skiras was not originally connected to the territorial struggle, the immediate needs of Athenians to Megarians to make territorial claims shaped the content and interpretation of the Athena Skiras debate. The existing content of the mythic past lacked the means through which Megara could attack Athenian history, and so Megarian authors used myth to create an intentional history useful and relevant to contemporary needs.
Section IV: Theseus and Ariadne
Modification to the mythic past was hugely important to the maintenance of identity. Altering the past opened a city to retaliation and aggression, however, if alterations too freely reinvented the histories of neighboring states. Such action was an attack on that city’s identity, and was met with reprisals and attempts to reinforce regional histories. Athenian modification of the myth of Theseus and Ariadne for changing audiences demonstrates the aggression inherent in modifying another city’s history. Theseus’ history formed much of Athens’ mythic past. As Athens rose to pan-Hellenic prominence, Athenian authors attempted to sanitize problematic elements of his history to present a more idealized hero. One such element was Theseus’ relationship with Ariadne. In the common tradition, Ariadne fell in love with Theseus when he came to Crete to kill the Minotaur, yet Theseus married Ariadne’s sister Phaedra after abandoning Ariadne on a deserted island. It was a problematic circumstance for Athenians. An immoral Theseus did not match the law-giving image Athenians had created, and his insignificance in Ariadne’s story was troubling for authors trying to represent a pan-Hellenic hero. Athenians needed to contend with the troubling aspects of Theseus’ presentation. Their efforts to emphasize Theseus’ importance and erase his guilt eventually prompted a Megarian counter-attack using Athens’ own history.

In the early pan-Hellenic tradition, Theseus was largely unimportant where Ariadne was concerned. He appeared as either a footnote in her life or the cause of her tragic demise. Ariadne’s relationship with Dionysus was the true focus. In Homer’s version, Theseus tried “to bear” Ariadne “from Crete to the hill of sacred Athens” but “had no joy of her” as “Artemis slew
her in sea-girl Dia because of the witness of Dionysus.”

Theseus and Ariadne were a love-match, but it was Ariadne’s relationship with Dionysus that was ultimately important. Theseus’ actions were ambiguous; he loved Ariadne but seduced a god’s beloved, a transgression that could only result in Ariadne’s death. Hesiod similarly focused on Ariadne’s marriage to Dionysus, who made her “deathless and unaging.” Ariadne was important as a consort to the god. Theseus was only mentioned when Hesiod noted that he “transgressed the oaths he made with Ariadne” by seducing two of the Athenian maidens he had just rescued. Theseus was unimportant in Ariadne’s life, and what attention he did get was focused on his wrongdoings.

Theseus’ insignificant presence in stories of Ariadne continued in the writings of Epimenides in the 6th century BC, shortly before Athens’ rise to prominence. Epimenides again focused on Ariadne and Dionysus. Theseus appeared only in relation to the crown that Dionysus gave Ariadne as a betrothal gift. It was “on account of this crown” that “Theseus survived the Labyrinth, the crown serving as a light.” How Theseus came to possess the crown was not explained, and Theseus faded into the background of Ariadne’s grand story of immortality and true-love.

Theseus’ pan-Hellenic insignificance was problematic for Athenians as they gained power throughout Greece. Increased power meant adjustments to identity to reflect Athens’ new status. Theseus was the ideal figure through which Athenians could create a new narrative of the past. He was known throughout Greece as an Athenian hero, and his myths allowed him to function within Athens as a powerful symbol of strength and righteousness. Stories that he was fathered by Poseidon allowed Athens to claim ties with the sea god as the city became a rising

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107 Hesiod as quoted in Athenaios 13.557a. (BNJ 3 F 153)
108 Epimenides as quoted in Diodorus 5.79. (BNJ 457 F 17)
109 Epimenides as quoted in Eratosthenes, *Catasterismi* 5. (BNJ 457 F 19)
naval power. His later deeds focused on his role in reforming the Athenian state and bringing together a diverse populace, a political role that allowed Theseus to be positioned as a figure of law, reform, and unification—the perfect symbol for a populace undergoing political and social reform during the establishment of radical democracy. However, modifications to the Athenian mythic past that highlighted Theseus’ greatness needed to be reconciled with a pan-Hellenic tradition that saw Theseus as insignificant. The footnote of Ariadne’s story could not also be Athens’ greatest king, and so Athenian authors recreated Theseus’ past so that the hero could become the great hero throughout Greece that he was in Athens. For Theseus to become a symbol of order and justice, problematic elements of his past that suggested a disregard for rules—such as the seduction and abandonment of Ariadne—needed to be re-conceptualized or erased from Athens’ intentional history.

Early Athenian re-imaginations of Theseus and Ariadne’s story emphasized elements of the existing myth that appealed to the Athenian populace. In the earliest pottery fragments, Ariadne’s active participation in the flight from and events on Crete was featured. Beginning around 560 BC in Athens, pottery fragments meant for popular consumption increasingly depicted Theseus and Ariadne together. Theseus was shown battling the Minotaur with Ariadne standing behind, emphasis on her presence in Theseus’ past (Fig 8). 110 Her role became more active after 510 BC when Cleisthenes instituted radical democracy, a period that required a major reassessment of Athenian identity. Ariadne was shown extending her hand in help, holding out the crown spoken of by Epimenides, and appeared with bandages that suggest active involvement in Theseus’ fight. 111 Rather than the passive victim of a seduction and kidnapping, Attic iconography emphasized Ariadne’s active role. Her presence with Theseus became

voluntary. It was not abduction or passive seduction for Ariadne, but rather an active flight with Theseus from Crete after choosing to aid the Athenian hero against the Minotaur.

Authors such as Bacchylides looked to bolster Theseus’ importance in comparison to Ariadne, combating Theseus’ problematic insignificance in her story. Writing around 480 BC, Bacchylides asserted that the crown Theseus traditionally used to navigate the labyrinth was in fact a gift to Theseus from his father Poseidon, given as proof of his divine parentage. In the pan-Hellenic tradition, the crown was a gift from Dionysus to Ariadne, who then gave the crown

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112 Bacchylides, Ode 17.
to Theseus to help him in his quest. The crown became a constellation as a reminder of the myth.

When the crown was associated with Ariadne, the constellation was a reminder of her importance as consort to Dionysus. Theseus’ relationship with the crown was unimportant. However, for Bacchylides to assert that the crown was purely Theseus’ downplays Ariadne’s importance while bolstering Theseus’. The constellation became a reminder of Theseus’ heroics, divine parentage, and general greatness. Bacchylides removed Ariadne entirely from the narrative of the crown’s origins in order to present Theseus as a figure of divine interest and pan-Hellenic greatness.

Around 470 BC, iconographic depictions in Athens began to show Ariadne’s abandonment as unproblematic. Theseus was absolved of responsibility for his actions and their consequences through emphasis on Ariadne’s happy fate as Dionysus’ wife and the divine intervention that forced Theseus to leave. One fragment showed Ariadne led away by Dionysus while Theseus was welcomed by Athena, suggesting that Ariadne achieved her proper fate as Dionysus’ wife and that the gods—especially Athens’ patron goddess—approved of Theseus’ behavior. Another fragment showed Theseus abandoning a sleeping Ariadne on the orders of Athena. Divine intervention pardoned Theseus for his otherwise immoral actions. A third image depicted Hermes and Eros standing by as Theseus abandoned Ariadne, indicating divine approval and implying that Theseus had received a message from the gods ordering him to leave (Fig 9). By 460 BC, images of Ariadne focused on her happy fate with Dionysus. Dionysus was shown approaching Ariadne with Eros hovering overhead, signaling their divine love and marriage, as Theseus sailed away, crowned by Athena to signal her approval of his actions.

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Another showed Ariadne, Dionysus, and Eros in a bedroom, indicating their happy divine marriage (Fig 10). Theseus’ responsibility for the abandonment was eliminated, and Ariadne’s fate was shown to be happy, further excusing Theseus of any culpability.

Pherakydes produced a written account around 470 BC that reinforced the iconographic trends absolving Theseus of responsibility. Pherakydes wrote a genealogy of Athens’ greatest heroes and most prominent families. His writings appealed to popular opinion amongst his elite Athenian patrons.\footnote{Morison, “Pherakydes of Athens” (2013), Brill Online.} Pherakydes wrote that “Ariadne fell in love with” Theseus and “gave him a ball of thread,” actively helping Theseus kill the Minotaur and flee from Crete.\footnote{Pherakydes as quoted in Scholiast on Homer. (BNJ 3 F 148a)} When Theseus left Ariadne on the island of Dia, it was because “Athena stood beside him and ordered that he abandon Ariadne.”\footnote{Pherakydes as quoted in Scholiast on Homer. (BNJ 3 F 148a)} Emphasis on the romance between Theseus and Ariadne made her seduction less problematic, and the abandonment was positioned as the will of the gods and therefore beyond Theseus’ control.

Pherakydes mitigated any lingering concerns for Ariadne by describing her happy fate as wife of Dionysus. Pherakydes wrote that “when Ariadne bewailed her lot, Aphrodite appeared and advised her to be strong, for she would be Dionysus’ wife and become famous. Whence the god appeared and mated with her, and gave her a golden crown.”\footnote{Pherakydes, as quoted in Scholiast on Homer (BNJ 3 F 148a)} Ariadne’s happy fate as consort of Dionysus was ordained by the gods who intervened to ensure her marriage would occur. Pherakydes also addressed stories of Ariadne’s death on the island of Dia, recognizing that some say “she suffered death at the hands of Artemis” but emphasizing that the punishment was “for throwing away her virginity.”\footnote{Pherakydes, as quoted in scholiast on Homer (BNJ 3 F 148a)} Ariadne either enjoyed a happy fate or was the active agent of her own destruction, rather than a passive victim of seduction. Blame was shifted from Theseus’ shoulders and the hero emerged from the story unscathed and unquestionably heroic.

Considerable intellectual and cultural effort in Athens was directed crafting an intentional history that re-wrote Theseus’ relationship with Ariadne so as to highlight Theseus’ importance.
while absolving him of responsibility for Ariadne’s abandonment or death. The new Theseus bolstered Athenian identity while aligning more fully with the civilizing and law-defending stories popular in Athens. The modifications focused on those areas of the mythic past that pertained specifically to Athens. Authors did not appropriate and alter the histories of other cities by removing Theseus from Crete entirely—altering Cretan history—or saying that Ariadne never left Crete at all—affecting the histories of Naxos and Dia. Rather, Athenians modified only those parts of the past that impacted themselves, suggesting awareness of the limits of Athenian hegemony on the pan-Hellenic stage. Theseus was positioned over the decades as an increasingly heroic figure, one whose questionable past was eliminated through divine intervention, a man Athenians could proudly name their champion. Through stages of emphasis that shifted over the decades, Athenians altered perceptions of Theseus and, with him, the Athenian identity built around his life, deeds, and pan-Hellenic reputation.

In the latter part of the 4th century BC, Athenian efforts to re-imagine Theseus and Ariadne’s story appropriated and changed the histories of other cities. Athenian appropriation was an aggressive act that was met with resistance from neighboring Megarians, who had long experience with Athenian willingness to alter others’ mythic past. Concurrent with Athenian ideological aggression was the rising popularity of rationalized myths. Rationalization attempted to remove fantastical elements from the mythic past, presenting events as they could occur in the modern period. The new mode of discussing myth erased the divine intervention Athens had used to justify Theseus’ behavior. However, Athenians adopted the rationalizing mode of discussing myth and found new ways to sanitize Theseus’ history. Authors reshaped the myths of other cities, appropriating, rewriting, and attacking the content of other local histories in order to present Theseus in the best light.
In 350 BC, Kleidemos of Athens recorded a version of Theseus and Ariadne’s myth that rationalized away the fantastical elements and recast their relationship as a diplomatic negotiation. Theseus killed Deucalion at the Labyrinth, not the Minotaur, thereby allowing Ariadne to take the throne of Crete. “Ariadne became the ruler” and Theseus “made a treaty with her and recovered the youths.”\textsuperscript{123} The attraction, seduction, and drama of Theseus and Ariadne’s complicated relationship were removed along with the fantastical elements, replaced by favorable diplomatic negotiations. Such a version removed the problematic moments of Theseus history, and appealed to the patriotic feelings of the Athenian populace.\textsuperscript{124} Theseus appeared as both a strong warrior and a strong politician who exercised authority throughout Greece—a narrative that justified Athenian attempts to extend their influence abroad through both military and diplomatic means. However, in excising the problematic relationship with Ariadne from Theseus’ past, Athenians also removed Ariadne from the pasts of Dia and Naxos and suggested a fundamental change to the early history of Crete. A more positive Theseus was created through an act of ideological aggression that signaled both Athenian power over its neighbors and willingness to act against those cities.

In the early 3\textsuperscript{rd} century BC, Philochorus also rationalized the story of Theseus and Ariadne. He stated that Theseus visited Crete where “Minos was holding funeral games” and “asked for the privilege of entering the lists.”\textsuperscript{125} The Minotaur became a man named Taurus who “was expecting to conquer all his competitors, as he had done before” and who was “accused of too great intimacy with Pasiphae.”\textsuperscript{126} Ariadne was “smitte[n] with the appearance of Theseus, as

\textsuperscript{123} Kleidemos, as quoted in Plutarch, \textit{Theseus} 19.8 (BNJ 323 F 17)
\textsuperscript{124} McInerney, “Politicizing the Past” (1994), 22.
\textsuperscript{125} Philochorus, as quoted in Plutarch, \textit{Theseus} 19.2. (BNJ 328 F 107)
\textsuperscript{126} Philochorus, as quoted in Plutarch, \textit{Theseus} 19.2. (BNJ 328 F 107)
well as filled for admiration for his athletic prowess.”

Again, the entire love affair of Theseus and Ariadne, with its human sacrifices, monsters, flight from Crete, and divine involvement was replaced with Ariadne’s passing admiration for Theseus’ skill with javelin and discus. Philochorus’ version allowed Theseus to assume a symbolic role as civilizer and protector of laws by removing any problematic associations with Ariadne. The alteration of Theseus and Ariadne’s story was again accomplished through the appropriation and modification of other local pasts, existing mythic content reshaped into a more pleasing intentional history. The past of Crete was entirely rewritten, the histories of Dia and Naxos were omitted, and Athenian authors demonstrated the authority they felt they held over the identities of other cities.

Neighboring Megara did not let Athenian aggressions go without comment. Familiar with Athenian aggressions toward the mythic past, Megarians drew attention to the Athenian attempt to extend hegemony over Greece. Around 315 BC, Hereas of Megara accused Athens of editing the pan-Hellenic past shared by all of Greece. Instead of addressing contemporary instances of Athenian sanitizing history, however, Hereas accused Peisistratus, during the 6th century BC, of editing Hesiod to remove the fact that Theseus left Ariadne after “falling in love with another.”

Hereas additionally accused the Athenian tyrant of inserting “into Homer’s Book of the Dead the line ‘Theseus and Perithoos renowned sons of the Gods’ to please the Athenians.”

Hereas’ statements echoed the 330 BC writings of Dieuchidas of Megara, who wrote that “Peisistratos…introduced certain words to his [Homer’s] poem.”

Both Megarian historians turned to history to make their accusations, using the now-mythic past to express diplomatic frustrations in the present. By locating their complaints in the

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127 Philochorus, as quoted in Plutarch, Theseus 19.2. (BNJ 328 F 107)
128 Hereas, as quoted in Plutarch, Theseus 20. (BNJ 486 F 1)
129 Hereas, as quoted in Plutarch, Theseus 20. (BNJ 486 F 1)
130 Dieuchidas, as quoted in Diogenes Laertios, Lives of the Philosophers, 1.57. (BNJ 485 F 6)
past, the historians drew parallels between past Athenian aggression and present Athenian misbehavior, ensuring that contemporary Athenian action would be recognized as an act of aggression and imperialism. Where contemporary editing could be viewed as unlikely to alter the pan-Hellenic tradition, the actions of Peisistratus provided an unambiguous example of harmful modifications to history. Peisistratus extended Athenian power throughout Greece during his rule and his modifications of the past part of the extension of Athenian influence abroad. Past Athenian behaviors became a frame of reference for Athenian action in the present. The distance of time allowed judgments to be made about the actions of Peisistratus, and the parallels between past and present allowed those judgments to be cast forward into the present. Where one might doubt the impact of Philochorus’ re-articulation of Theseus and Ariadne’s relationship, one could not doubt the importance of Peisistratus’ editing of Homer. In the classical Greek world where the past was often looked to as a model for the present, such references were powerful arguments. In attacking the actions of Peisistratus, Hereas and Dieuchidas continued a tradition of looking to the past for understanding in the present. They provided their audience with an unambiguous precedent through which Athenian behavior could be interpreted, judged, and attacked.

Modification of the mythic past greatly benefited local identity. It was tempting to erase foreign slights from the mythic record. However, modification of a neighbor’s history was an act of aggression that would be met with resistance and retaliation. In appropriating the histories of neighbors, Athenian authors gave themselves greater flexibility in their modifications of Theseus’ history. However, they also opened themselves up to the criticism and attack. In accusing Athens of altering the shared pan-Hellenic past, Megara drew attention to and fought the extension of Athenian hegemony. For Athenian alterations to the larger mythic past to be
accepted would be an implicit acceptance of Athenian authority over a region. Hereas and Dieuchidas called attention to Athenian action through reference to past Athenian aggressions that were accompanied by changes to the mythic past. Megara looked to muster pan-Hellenic opposition against the Athenian use of intentional history to attack the mythic past.
Conclusion

The mythic past within Greece was a tool of identity formation, ideological aggression, and political propaganda. Because no mythic canon existed, mythic history retained a malleable quality that allowed cities to modify stories to reflect the immediate needs of the city. These needs were expressed in the desires and consumption of the citizens. A version of history pleasing to political elites was most often a version that reinforced the existing regime and strengthened the symbols of the state. Similarly, the intentional history that most appealed to the populace was a history that reflected popular opinion and generated feelings of collective pride and unity. Individual authors may not have been consciously concerned with the identity-forming implications of changes to the mythic past, but in acting to appeal to a particular audience the men who altered the mythic past continually updated history to reflect the desires of contemporary audiences. The mythic past was shaped by and mirrored the opinions of local citizens, and was used to present a particular identity to the broader pan-Hellenic world.

The stories that made up the mythic past were not a respectable set of tales, which makes the Megarian and Athenian efforts to sanitize their mythic histories particularly striking. Hercules was renown throughout Greece despite of—or because of—his frequent drunkenness, sexual misadventures, and murderous rampages. Cleomedes of Astypalaea earned fame and cult worship after collapsing a school full of children. The Greeks were not bothered by the misdeeds and immoral actions of their heroes and gods, yet the Athenians and Megarians devoted centuries of intellectual effort to erasing and suppressing Theseus’ and Skeiron’s checkered pasts. Athens had tied Theseus to the democracy, and to the democratic regime’s vision of itself as the champion of freedom and order in a chaotic world. The democracy’s hero could not uphold
civilizing justice while sowing chaos and lawlessness in his own adventures, and so Athenian authors began the atypical task of sanitizing Theseus’ past. The extension of Athenian hegemony provoked Megara to resist Athenian efforts to rewrite history, resulting in Megarian attempts to maintain Skeiron’s nobility in opposition to Athens’ efforts to alter the mythic past.

Megara’s and Athens’ mythic discourse demonstrates that mythic history was the subject of contention and renegotiation. The modification of myth could be an act of aggression, as evidenced by Megara’s and Athens’ repeated attacks on the mythic past, and the strength with which those attacks were repudiated. A city’s identity was closely bound to the mythic past, and minor changes to mythic history could impact a city’s ability to effectively wield a symbolic hero or moment of history on the pan-Hellenic stage, where the mythic past justified and was precedent for current action. Perhaps more importantly, questions about the mythic past undermined the everyday traditions based on the worship of particular heroes and the observance of specific rites. Questioning or altering the mythic past was an effective strategy of resistance and aggression.

The importance of the mythic past as a realm for debate during the war for Salamis, and its continued use by both Athenians and Megarians in the ensuing centuries, suggests that mythic history was both an alternative to physical resistance and a support for military power. When Megara could no longer wield effective military power it waged an ideological war on Athenian history. Similarly, Athenian attempts to undermine Megarian myth and identity during a time when Athens was attempting to usurp Megara’s former position as a pan-Hellenic naval power show that the mythic past was an effective tool of hegemony and ideology. The ability to successfully and permanently modify another city’s mythic traditions was evidence of power and authority. When that ability was turned to crafting anti-Megarian ideology, Athens not only
demonstrated their influence over Megara but used that influence to further decrease Megarian prestige on the pan-Hellenic stage.

Mythic history in Greece was not only a basis for religious action or a learning tool for morality and behavior. Myth was political, as stories with no explicit connection to contemporary concerns were used to express territorial claims and justify conflicts. The needs of a city shaped the content and presentation of the mythic past. Megarian concerns with Athenian imperial ambitions found expression through myth. Spirits were kept high during hard times through emphasis on the great mythic past. Mythic history provided a guideline and precedent for future action, and a framework through which events of the present could be understood and reacted to. Myth was a political tool. A strong city always had a strong identity built around the mythic past, and a well-defended and strong mythic past was the mark of a strong city.

The mythic past so important to identity in classical Greece continued to hold a place of prominence in the minds of 2nd century AD Greeks and Romans. Just as in the 5th century BC, history was the means through which the present could be redefined and understood. An idealized past provided a way to endure conditions in the present, a goal to which contemporary Greeks could aspire, or simply a source of pride. Ruled by Rome with limited independence, Greeks turned to a past where Hellenic power stretched beyond the borders of Greece. Just as Megarians looked to Peisistratus to criticize Athens, or to Salamis to articulate the border struggle with Eleusis, so Greeks under Roman rule turned to the past as a realm in which identity and understanding in the present could be shaped.

The presence of the past in the present was particularly prominent in Athens, which was viewed as the heart of both the classical and contemporary Greek world. The past was reenacted.

in the present through religious processions and festivals that maintained their archaic form.\textsuperscript{132} Athenians actively attempted to preserve a connection to the glories of the 5\textsuperscript{th} and 4\textsuperscript{th} centuries BC—including reinitiating quarrels with Megara.\textsuperscript{133} The ideological war with Megara over the mythic past became so important to defining Athenian identity and behavior that its revival and continuity became a part of efforts to cling to and recreate Athenian glory. Athens had no political importance in the contemporary world, but in looking to a history of prestige and glory Athenian citizens created an identity they could still take pride in—an identity that purposefully included opposition with Megara as a defining characteristic of the Athenian past.\textsuperscript{134}

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