THREE. THESSALY BEFORE PHILIP II

Thessaly was not the sort of place Socrates cared to visit, even when the alternative was death, but the area and its proverbial wealth did have attractions for other famous contemporaries who liked their luxuries, such as Gorgias the sophist.\(^1\) The luxuries which Thessaly had to offer were those of a region fertile enough to produce more agricultural products than its population consumed, an especially fortunate status in rocky and mountainous mainland Greece, where other areas could find themselves dependent on imported foodstuffs.\(^2\) Thessaly lacked the mineral resources to compare with the silver deposits of Attica or the veins of gold in Thrace, and she had neither the harbors nor the geographical location to become a prosperous commercial crossroads like Corinth or Megara.\(^3\) But the broad plain of Thessaly made up for these deficiencies with its abundant production of grain and ample pasture for raising horses.\(^4\) The revenue supplied by such products made possible the purchase of commodities which Thessaly lacked by nature, such as the silver necessary for the raw material of the coinage which various Thessalian cities began to mint in the fifth century B.C. and continued to produce in the fourth century.

\(^1\) Plato, *Meno* 70a-b; Isocrates, *Antidosis* 155–156. On the luxury of the Thessalians, see Critias, frag. 31 (Diels-Kranz, *VS* 6).


\(^4\) For the geography of Thessaly, see Michel Sivignon, *La Thessalie. Analyse géographique d’une province grecque* (Lyon, 1975), pp. 13–16, 23–33.
The geography of Thessaly set it apart from the rest of Greece, and in a fundamental way the social organization of the land reflected that separateness. If any region of Greece was appropriate to become a Macedonian province, Thessaly was it. Hemmed in by mountains on all sides with only a narrow access to the sea and the easier routes of communication and commerce with other regions of Greece which the sea offered, while bordered on the north by the Macedonians, who were only semi-Hellenized in Greek eyes, and on the west by the rough and ready Epirotes, the Thessalians maintained their traditional social organization on into the classical period, despite its contrast to that of almost all their Hellenic neighbors to the south. As we will see, the social organization of Thessaly resembled that of Macedonia in important ways.

In Thessaly, an aristocracy of powerful families dominated the social and political scenes. These aristocrats controlled large numbers of people who were in a state of subordination to them, the *penestai*. One such aristocratic master in the early fifth century B.C. was Meno of Pharsalus, an ancestor of the eponymous interlocutor in Plato's dialogue *Meno*. The earlier Meno had the private resources to help the Athenians financially in a military campaign in the north of Greece to the truly enormous total of twelve talents (enough money to pay the crews of twelve fully manned warships for a month), and militarily with two hundred private cavalrymen (perhaps three hundred; the sources disagree). By comparison, the city of Athens herself at the start of the Peloponnesian War in 431 B.C. mustered only twelve hundred

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cavalry. Whether Meno’s astounding private resources in men and money were typical of many Thessalian aristocrats is impossible to say, but tradition in the fourth century had it that in very early times one “share,” the minimum holding of an aristocrat, was supposed to furnish forty cavalry and eighty heavy infantry. Meno is the proof that this tradition of men of enormous personal power as the rule in Thessaly must be taken seriously, and the conservatism of the social organization of Thessaly reflected this reality of a necessarily limited number of extremely powerful aristocratic families as the holders of real political influence in Thessaly.

When city-states of the familiar Greek type developed in Thessaly, the aristocrats wasted no time in establishing themselves as the sources of power and influence in them. Throughout the classical period, as all the sources make clear, the famous aristocratic families were closely linked to and even identified with the cities they dominated, as for example the family of the Aleuads with the city of Larissa. At the very beginning of the fifth century B.C., the poet Pindar saw fit to stress the intimate relationship between the aristocrats and the cities they controlled in an ode which referred in its second line to “blessed Thessaly.” For this poet from neighboring Boeotia, it was both flattering and true to tell his audience that “ancestral and trusty governance of cities belongs to the aristocrats.”

Aristocratic domination produced unrest among the *penestai* and the nonaristocratic but free population of Thessaly. But the

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9 *Pythian* 10, lines 71–72.

real trouble came from the top, and the most serious Thessalian political problem was the chronic inability of the aristocrats to get along with one another. Factional strife was a way of life in Thessalian cities, as the power of one group of aristocrats in a city was from time to time violently supplanted or superseded by that of another group. In even the most important cities, stasis could become so severe that the feuding aristocrats found themselves reduced to the unhappy expedient of choosing a mediator at the head of a peace-keeping military force. If things went well, the mediator used this private army to reconcile the hostile factions and to restore the status quo ante, but it was also possible for the mediator to use his force to tyrannize those whose stability and security he was supposed to restore. 11 This same sort of violent strife existed on the regional level between the rival aristocratic oligarchies in different cities as they attempted to win dominance over each other. 12

Perhaps as a response to the dangers posed by so much strife and lack of cooperation, in the archaic period the Thessalian aristocrats put together a confederacy to provide both an organizational framework for concerted military action when necessary and an institutional channel for diverting their competitive energies vis-à-vis one another into what they could hope would be a constructive form of leadership by consent. The confederacy consisted basically of an assembly of members who voted on matters of common concern (national security and foreign policy) and of an elected leader whose principal duty was to lead the military forces of the confederacy when common action had been decided on. Since, so far as we can tell, the truly nonmilitary duties of the leader were few if any, the rhythm of the confederacy’s military expeditions determined the activity level of the leader in his official capacity. In times of peace he had essentially nothing to do. 13 But this institution had its uses. An

11 Xenophon, Hellenica 6.1.2–3; Aristotle, Politics 5.1306a26–30.
12 Thucydides 1.111.1, 4.78. For a brief discussion of stasis in Thessaly until the time of Philip II, see Andrew Lintott, Violence, Civil Strife and Revolution in the Classical City 750–330 B.C. (London, 1982), pp. 269–271.
elective office for the leadership of the considerable military forces of a united Thessaly and the supervision of the minimal national administrative machinery required to make the system work provided a suitable goal for aristocratic ambition. It was after all easier, safer, and cheaper to win glory and status in competition with one’s fellow aristocrats by securing election to the leadership than by trying to defeat them in the field or wear them down by siege. And a national army, even if in existence only when summoned to fight, represented the best defense of a fertile land not on good terms with its neighbors.\textsuperscript{14} If the aristocrats were lucky, their confederacy would protect them from their own tendencies toward civil war, as well as from outside enemies more prone to attack a divided country than a unified (when necessary) whole. The Thessalian confederacy was the weapon to defend the traditional and cherished Thessalian way of life, so comfortable for those at the top, against internal and external threats. The function of the confederacy was, in the end, social as well as military.\textsuperscript{15}

Before we proceed any further, two points of correspondence between the social and political organization of Thessaly and of Macedonia should be made. First, Macedonian society at the level which mattered was, like Thessalian, constituted of important aristocratic families jealous of their status and power. The term “baronial” has been used to describe both societies, and with justification. The lords of Macedonia and of Thessaly were the mainsprings of power and of potential discontent in the respective lands. Second, both Macedonia and Thessaly had governments organized on monarchical lines. Macedonia had a true king in the normal sense of the word, but his tenure of the throne depended on his ability to marshall and to maintain a consensus among his fellow aristocrats, rather than on constitu-

\textsuperscript{14} Neighboring Phocis was an ancestral enemy: Herodotus 8.27. See G. A. Lehmann, “Thessaliens Hegemonie über Mittelgriechenland im 6. Jh. v. Chr.,” \textit{Boreas} 6 (1983), pp. 35–43.

\textsuperscript{15} The propaganda associated with the confederacy and its leadership makes this point clear. See section 4 below on “the nomos of the Thessaliens.”
tional arrangements. In Thessaly, the government was the confederacy, but its elected leader closely resembled a king in his power and prerogatives, as other Greeks recognized (as we will see). The Thessalian “king” held his office expressly at the will of his fellow aristocrats, from whose ranks he had been chosen. Neighbors together to the north of the contemptuously proper Greeks of the mainland, the Macedonian and the Thessalian aristocrats shared certain fundamental assumptions about the way a society should be arranged which would have made the union of the two lands at least theoretically plausible. The question to be answered is whether there was an intersection between possible theory and actual practice.

The Thessalian confederacy endured into the classical period, and its main features are the points which require discussion in order to compare the political organization of Thessaly before the intrusion of the Macedonian kings in the mid-fourth century B.C. with that afterward. If the political organization of Thessaly looked significantly different in the later fourth or early third centuries from the way it did earlier, we can then try to reconstruct Macedonian policy from the changes. There is, however, one important methodological problem in making an accurate comparison. Since some of the evidence on the earlier political organization of Thessaly comes from sources which themselves date to the period of Philip II and later, it is possible that the picture of earlier times presented by these sources incorporates distortions of, or even falsehoods about, earlier history created under the influence of later developments. That is, even an unbiased later source could misrepresent little-known earlier institutions by incorrectly extrapolating from a later and better-known situation, while a tendentious later source could consciously distort or completely falsify the past in order to provide a precedent for contemporary action. In other words, thanks to the state of the evidence, the question remains open as to how much of the early history of the Thessalian confederacy (or to

put it in Greek terms, the history of Thessaly’s “ancestral constitution” was accurately known in the mid-fourth century B.C, and how much, if any, of this history was made up at that time (or later) for tendentious reasons to justify innovations in the structure and organization of the confederacy in the interests of the Macedonian kings. The best propaganda for a new policy was an old precedent, even if ancient history had to be created to find one.\(^{17}\)

For present purposes, therefore, an analysis of the evidence requires an approach different from that of the comprehensive modern works which describe the confederacy in detail.\(^{18}\) Strict attention will be paid here (so far as is possible) to the dates of the sources. Since any innovations in the confederacy made by a Macedonian king belong to the years of Philip’s reign or later, the first step in each relevant category of evidence will be to examine the sources which are earlier than Philip’s reign, to see what picture of the confederacy emerges from them, before trying to integrate this earlier evidence with that from sources of Philip’s reign and later. Naturally, this procedure will not produce a full and integrated picture of the federal organization of Thessaly in the classical period. That sort of treatment is already available in the works of Sordi and Larsen cited in the previous note. What is needed is to look at the evidence in such a way that the chances for misunderstanding the meaning of the actions of the Macedonian kings in Thessaly are reduced as much as possible. To serve that goal, the evidence has been organized into

\(^{17}\) For the hypothesis that the First Sacred War was just such an invention to serve the purposes of Philip in Thessaly and Phocis, see N. Robertson, “The Myth of the First Sacred War,” \textit{CQ} 28 (1978), pp. 38–73. For a different view, however, see Lehmann, “Der ‘Erste Heilige Kreig’—eine Fiktion?” \textit{Historia} 29 (1980), pp. 242–246, and \textit{Boreas} 6 (1983), p. 37, n. 12, with reference to others who reject Robertson’s argument.

four categories which will be discussed in turn on the basis of the information available from sources earlier than the reign of Philip. This chapter will then close with two additional points about Thessalian political traditions which facilitate the transition to the period of Philip.

1
Regional Organization: The Tetrads

By the time the sources have anything to tell us about the Thessalian confederacy, we find that Thessaly as a geographical unit was divided into four unequal areas referred to as tetrads.\(^{19}\) This fourfold division existed before the appearance on the scene of Philip of Macedon in the 350s B.C.\(^{20}\) The political significance of this division is obscure. One hint, however, can be extracted from two inscriptions found in Athens which date to the mid-fourth century just before Philip became deeply involved in Thessaly. They concern a treaty between the Athenians and the Thessalian confederacy which, in the usual fashion, must be sworn to by both sides. In the general agreement, polemarchs appear in the list of officials of the confederacy who must swear to the treaty, and in the second inscription, which gives the names of those who actually did swear, the polemarchs are four in number and designated by the name of a tetrad.\(^{21}\) The combined evidence of these two texts shows that the polemarchs had a connection both with the confederacy and with the tetrads, which means that the tetrads in turn had some official connection with the confederacy. Unfortunately, we are at a loss to know how that connection worked, and to what, if any, extent it con-

\(^{19}\) See the map at the end of Friedrich Stählin, *Das hellenische Thessalien* (Stuttgart, 1924).

\(^{20}\) *Iliad* 2.711–759; Hecataeus, *FGrH* 1 F 133; Simonides frag. 198 (Bergk); Hellanicus, *FGrH* 4 F 52; Herodotus 1.56–57.

\(^{21}\) *IG* II\(^2\) 116 (361/0 B.C.), 175. For discussion of the context, see *SVA* II, no. 293; Jack Cargill, *The Second Athenian League: Empire or Free Alliance?* (Berkeley, 1981), pp. 83–87.
cerned more than military administration and organization.\textsuperscript{22}

One final piece of evidence remains to be mentioned at this point. In Euripides’ \textit{Alcestis}, which was set in Thessaly, Admetus tells “the city-dwellers and all the tetrarchy” to celebrate the recovery of his wife from the dead (lines 1154–1155). Some of the modern translators of Euripides have thought that he meant Thessaly as a whole to be understood by this term, but the word, taken by itself, should refer to one of four areas of rule rather than to one area which was divided into four parts. It seems better to think that in using this word Euripides was anachronistically looking forward to the situation of his own day when Pelasgiotos (where the action of the drama takes place) was one of four administrative divisions of Thessaly and could plausibly be called a “tetrarchy.”\textsuperscript{23} Strictly speaking, this passage does not tell us that officials called tetrarchs existed in Thessaly at the time of Euripides. That tetrarchs do not appear in the Athenian inscription of 361/0 B.C. which lists the officials who must swear to the treaty with the confederacy suggests that they were not in existence in the mid-fourth century. This point about the existence of tetrarchs before the time of Philip has to be made because it is often assumed that tetrarchs existed in the early period and were replaced by polemarchs in a major reform in the first half of the fifth century B.C.\textsuperscript{24} In fact, all the sure evidence for the existence of tetrarchs in Thessaly comes from sources no earlier than the time of Philip. Discussion of this evidence will therefore be postponed for the moment, in the interest of looking first at the evidence from the period before the time of Philip.


\textsuperscript{23} See the commentary on these lines of A. M. Dale, \textit{Euripides. Alcestis} (Oxford, 1954).

2
Neighboring Peoples: The Perioikoi

By the classical period, the Thessalians had brought several neighboring groups under their control: the Magnesians on the east and southeast, the Perrhaebians on the north and west, and the Phthiotic Achaeans on the south and southwest. In addition to these major groups, the Thessalians also controlled other, smaller peoples who are difficult to identify precisely. The ordinary contemporary description of all these peoples seems to have been "all the tribes round about," which is as precise as the Thessalians needed or cared to be, but the same thing could be summed up by the word *perioikoi*. These neighbors did not, however, become Thessalians in the political sense by a merger of their territory in a union with Thessaly, as we can tell from the continued presence of the perioikic groups as voting representatives of the Delphic Amphictyony. The Thessalians were also members of the Amphictyony, and they remained separate from their neighbors in this organization throughout this period. The relationship between "all the tribes round about" and the Thessalians was one of control of inferiors by superiors.

For the other Greeks, this control meant that the surrounding peoples were the subjects of the Thessalians. The interesting questions for our purposes are to whom of the Thessalians these peoples were subject, and what exactly their subjection entailed. Thucydides says without qualification that each of the perioikic groups was subject to the "Thessalians," which could mean that he was being imprecise if these peoples were, properly speaking, subject not to the Thessalians as a whole but only to a certain group, for example, each people to a certain city. On the other

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27 Thucydides 2.101.2, 4.78.6, 8.3.1; Xenophon, *Hellenica* 6.1.7, 6.1.9.
hand, Thucydides’ usage would be correct if the perioikic groups
were subject not to separate cities but to the Thessalian confed-
eracy, which was referred to as “the Thessalians” in this sort of
political context. Herodotus provides the evidence which shows
that Thucydides was formally correct. He reports that in or
shortly before 510 B.C., the Thessalian “king” and a thousand
cavalry were sent to Athens to help the tyrant Hippias against
his enemies.28 This help was dispatched in accordance with a
treaty between the Thessalians and the family of Hippias, the
Peisistratids, and the Thessalians sent their “king” and their
troops “by common decision.” This latter expression indicates
that the Thessalian confederacy as a group representing all the
Thessalians voted to send its leader and some nationally
marshalled troops to Athens.

The explicit involvement of the confederacy is important here
because Herodotus is much more succinct slightly further on in
his work when he describes the offers of help made to this same
Hippias after his defeat and forced withdrawal from Athens.
The tyrant’s friends were genuine, and he received from them
generous offers of new locations in which to govern. One of
these offers, Herodotus says, came from the Thessalians, who
offered Hippias the harbor town of Iolkus.29 The significant
point about this offer is the location of Iolkus. It was a city in
the perioikic area of Magnesia.30 The Thessalians who offered to
give away Iolkus can only have been the confederacy, which was
allied with Hippias. It appears, therefore, that the Thessalian
confederacy, when so moved, could dispose of perioikic territory
as it wished. Whether this ability was, strictly speaking, a matter
of right or of power, or of both, does not really matter. The
point is that the subjection of the perioikic areas was to the con-
federacy.31 How this worked in everyday practice, when affairs
were not so pressing that a common decision was made to give
away territory, is difficult to say. From Xenophon’s description

28 5.63.3.
29 5.94.1.
30 On the location of Iolkus, see Stählin, Das hellenische Thessalien, pp. 75–76.
31 Sordi, LT, pp. 340–343, followed by Griffith, HM, p. 291, argues that
these areas were subject to individual cities.
of the arrangements made by Jason of Pherae for the perioikic peoples after his election to the leadership of the confederacy in the first half of the fourth century B.C., one receives the impression that the subjection of these groups entailed, in other than extraordinary circumstances, the fulfilling of financial and military obligations. According to Xenophon, one of Jason's arguments in favor of his own election to the post of leader of the confederacy was that the "tribes round about" were subject when Thessaly had a leader and that they then furnished considerable numbers of light-armed troops and paid tribute. This indeed proved to be the case once Jason became the leader of the confederacy. He acquired a huge number of peltasts for his national army and received tribute in the amount set (according to Jason) in the distant past by Scopas, presumably one of his predecessors in the leader's office.

Two points of special interest emerge from this crucial and unique passage in Xenophon. First, Jason won election by winning over (by force and by persuasion) cities in Thessaly, and he assigned the military obligations of the members of the confederacy by city. In other words, the important constituent units of the confederacy in the fourth century were the various cities of Thessaly. Whatever the formal role of the tetrads and their officials like the polemarchs, the cities were the entities that mattered. This situation naturally reflected the reality of the political organization of Thessaly in the fourth century, by which time there were various cities in the region large enough to issue their own coinages. When one thinks of the Thessalian confederacy, it is important to think of the cities of Thessaly as its functional reality and not of some elaborate federal organization with a large-scale and effective bureaucracy.

32 *Hellenica* 6.1.9, 6.1.12, 6.1.19.
33 6.1.5, 6.1.7, 6.1.19, 6.4.29.
34 Larsen's discussion in *Greek Federal States* perhaps conveys the wrong impression. The cities of the Perrhaebians seem to have constituted the functional units of their koinon. See B. Helly, "Une liste des cités de Perrhébie dans la première moitié du IVe siècle avant J.-C.," in "La Thessalie, Actes de la Table-Ronde 21–24 Juillet 1975 Lyon, ed. B. Helly (Lyon, 1979), pp. 165–200.
his orders to the cities because they were the sources of the confederacy’s strength.

The second point is to be found in Jason’s remarks about the subjection of the perioikic peoples when Thessaly had a leader. His argument in favor of having a leader reveals what we should have expected in any case in the light of the geographical and social background of the situation. The perioikic peoples were not always in actual subjection to the Thessalians, regardless of whether the Thessalians or anyone else considered them to be their subjects. It is easy to understand why. When the aristocrats of Thessaly in their characteristically faction-ridden fashion could not agree on a leader of their confederacy, they were unable, in the absence of an acknowledged supreme military commander, to marshal a national army strong enough to compel all the perioikic peoples, safe in their mountain strongholds, to fulfill their obligations. And in any case, those obligations may have been rather hazy in times of peace when no troops were needed and when, in the absence of an expensive federal bureaucracy to maintain in peacetime as well as in war, no obviously justifiable use could be found for tribute otherwise destined for and justified by the demands of a common defense. Financial exploitation of the perioikic peoples by the confederacy was simply not possible without a strong national army and a dynamic leader.

When the confederacy was unable to exploit the neighboring peoples for its corporate benefit, the various most powerful cities situated near the perioikic territories could step in to demand that their neighbors fulfill certain financial obligations to them.35 One hint from the period before Philip II that this was so is provided by the fifth-century coinage of the Perrhaebians, which exactly resembles that of Larissa, their very powerful immediate

35 Griffith, HM, p. 291–293, is right to emphasize the de facto nature of this arrangement. Sordi argues, LT, p. 343, that the confederacy officially condoned the practice.
neighbor, and the coinages of several other smaller cities near Larissa.\textsuperscript{36} One might imagine that this coinage was designed to facilitate commercial transactions in the area, with Larissa serving as some sort of central market. But the subordinate status of the \textit{perioikoi} perhaps suggests another explanation. That the Perrhaebians minted a coinage mimicking that of their powerful neighbors suggests that they had to make payments to the Larissaeans. This suggestion can be confirmed later when we turn to the evidence on the perioikic peoples from the time of Philip and beyond. In any case, it would be a mistake to try to construct an elaborate and precise model of the legal relationship (to use an anachronistic expression) among the confederacy, the cities of Thessaly, and the \textit{perioikoi}. A reasonable reconstruction of actual practice would be that the confederacy, through its leader, administered and exploited the \textit{perioikoi} by means of the cities, which alone were in any practical position to check on the fidelity of the neighboring peoples in fulfilling their obligations to the general community. It is easy to imagine the leader of the confederacy sending instructions to Larissa, the gist of which was "Make certain the Perrhaebians pay their tribute on time and in the proper amount, and then send it along to me as soon as possible." It is also easy to imagine the Larissaeans making certain that the Perrhaebians paid even when no instructions were sent by the leader, or no leader was there to send them. The people of the city of Pherae could do the same for the perioikic Magnesians, who were nearby, and so on. For the receivers of tribute, it is simpler and more profitable to keep a system of tribute-payment in operation continuously rather than to crank up the necessary machinery intermittently. The \textit{perioikoi} were the subjects of the confederacy, but the cities were the confederacy.

\textsuperscript{36} F. Herrmann, "Die thessalische Münzunion im 5. Jahrhundert," \textit{ZfN} 33 (1922), pp. 33–43, whose conclusions on the "Münzunion" are open to question. The status of the small cities in Larissa's orbit can be compared to those which Jason is made to describe as "dependent on" the Pharsalians (Xenophon, \textit{Hellenica} 6.1.8).
CHAPTER THREE

3

The Leader of the Confederacy

Since, as we will see, Philip and after him Alexander served as the leader of the Thessalian confederacy, it was through this post that they would have made any changes in the political organization of Thessaly. We need to know what they inherited as the traditional prerogatives and limits of their office in order to be able to judge the significance of what they did while holding it.

The most significant evidence for this discussion is the consistent reference by fifth-century authors to the leader of the confederacy as a "king." In an ode of 498 B.C. which refers to "blessed Thessaly," Pindar describes the race of men descended from Heracles as ruling over Thessaly as kings. Pindar meant the Aleuads of Larissa. Herodotus also describes the Aleuads of the time of the Persian Wars in the early fifth century B.C. as "kings" of Thessaly. This was not, however, a term exclusively for the well-known Aleuads as leaders of the confederacy because Herodotus also calls the obscure Cineas who was sent by the confederacy to help Hippias a "king." Thucydides uses the same term to describe Echecratidas, father of the exiled Thessalian whom the Athenians tried unsuccessfully to restore in the mid-fifth century B.C. It is instructive that non-Thessalian writers in the fifth century, who had to convey the nature of things to their audiences in a comprehensible way, perceived the nature of the office as monarchical and royal. Whether or not the Thessalians themselves used the title "king" before the fourth century to


38 Pythian 10, lines 64–72.


40 1.111.1.
refer to the leader of their confederacy we cannot tell because no
evidence from Thessaly itself is extant. But the evidence for at
least the perception of the leader as a king by other Greeks must
be kept in mind as part of the background for discussion of the
election of Philip to the leadership of the confederacy.\footnote{A king at the head of a confederacy is attested for the Paeonians in the third century B.C. See Luigi Moretti, \textit{Iscrizioni storiche ellenistiche}, vol. 2 (Florence, 1975), p. 25, on \textit{SIG}^3 no. 394, with references to other such arrangements in the north of Greece. He refers to “il problema della coesistenza di due forme politiche teoricamente antitetiche: regno (\textit{βασιλεία}) e federazione (\textit{κοινόν}).” The case of Thessaly shows that this coexistence was feasible for a long period of time and suggests that theory mattered little in such arrangements.}

From Xenophon, we learn the term which was usually em-
ployed in a technical sense to indicate the leader of the confeder-
acy in the fourth century. Xenophon reports that Jason of
Pherae needed to explain to another prominent Thessalian his
desire to become \textit{ταγός} of all the Thessalians. To secure this
post, Jason required the agreement of the cities of Thessaly, the
constituent units (practically speaking) of the confederacy. Xe-
nophon applies the same term to the successors of Jason.\footnote{\textit{Hellenica} 6.1.8–9, 6.1.12, 6.1.18, 6.4.28, 6.4.33–37.}\footnote{\textit{IG IX.2}, 257 and 517. Cf. Pollux 1.128.} There
is no other literary source which allows us to confirm Xenophon’s
usage, nor does any epigraphical source provide indisputable
proof of the use of \textit{ταγός} for the leader of the confederacy. But
inscriptions do show that the word was used in Thessaly in an
official sense, and its rarity in the prose of Xenophon’s time
means that Xenophon was not simply using a common word to
describe an uncommon institution.\footnote{IG IX.2, 257 and 517. Cf. Pollux 1.128.} Although the dangers are
obvious in relying on the etymology of a word as indicative of the
function which the word described at any one time, espe-
cially when the function in question could have changed over
time, it is nevertheless worth noticing the basic meaning of the
word \textit{ταγός}. This noun is related to the verb \textit{τάσσειν} (“to draw
up into battle order”) and should refer in the first place to a mili-
tary leader or commander, to the head of an army. For the basic
meaning of the term, any notion of civil rule would probably be secondary to that of military command.  

The leader of the Thessalian confederacy in the fourth century was, it seems, principally, and perhaps exclusively, a military leader whose duties and responsibilities were the same as those carried by leaders like Cineas, who led the Thessalian cavalry to Attica at the end of the sixth century, and like Jason, who organized a national army and its finances. The leader's political role was to carry out the will of the members of the confederacy on matters of national security and foreign policy once they had reached a common decision, as they did, for example, in the case of Cineas' mission, and might have done if they had had the time in the case of Brasidas' transit of their land with a military force in 424 B.C. A strong leader would naturally have a considerable influence on the decisions reached by the confederacy, as the case of Jason makes clear. Jason had his own force of mercenaries to make his efforts at friendly persuasion quite compelling, and the grandiose plans for the conquest of Greece, Macedonia, and Persia which Xenophon has him outline as the program of the Thessalian national army were his own initiatives, which the confederacy would rubber-stamp.

The leader of the Thessalians had the opportunity to make of the office what he could, based on his personal ability to compel,

44 See H. Frisk, Griechisches etymologisches Wörterbuch, vol. 2 (Heidelberg, 1970), s. v. ταγός; τάγησω. This contrasts with, for example, the primary association of rex with civic responsibilities. On rex, see Emile Benveniste, Le vocabulaire des institutions indo-européennes vol. 2 (Paris, 1969), pp. 9–15. Without reference to Thessaly, Robert Drews, Basileus. The Evidence for Kingship in Geometric Greece (New Haven, 1983), ch. 4: "The Hereditary Basileis of the Archaic and Classical Period," pp. 116–128, argues that military responsibilities were often the primary concern of Greek "kings."

45 The reference to the leader of the confederacy as the ἄρχων in IG II2 116, lines 23, 33, 34, of 361/0 B.C., is explicable on historical grounds. Since Alexander of Pherae had prior claim to the title of ταγός, his opponents who made this treaty with the Athenians had to use another title for the moment to refer to the leader of their rival version of the confederacy.

46 Thucydides 4.78.3–5. Brasidas crossed the region with the help of various Thessalian friends, despite the opposition of other Thessalians who said that he should not cross without the consent of the Thessalians as a whole.

47 Xenophon, Hellenica 6.1.8–12.
to persuade, and to unite. He needed to use that ability to become an acknowledged leader of a powerful national army, and in addition he had to be able to make certain that the requisite tribute was collected from the *perioikoi* and deposited in the federal coffers rather than exclusively in those of the various large cities which dominated the respective perioikic regions. There was, to be sure, a good deal of room for sharp accounting practices and outright cheating in the collection and forwarding of funds because the confederacy lacked an elaborate federal bureaucracy to oversee federal finances on a long-term basis. The financial arrangements of the confederacy were necessarily *ad hoc* because they were limited and determined by the willingness of the cities to contribute to the federal treasury. But the willingness of the cities to pay depended, in the final analysis, on the ability of the leader of the confederacy to ensure their cooperation. To be effective, the leader had to be able to finance his army as well as to lead it in battle. He had to dominate the cities of the confederacy and the peoples of the perioikic territories.

If a leader could perform his duties successfully, how long was he expected to continue in office? The fifth-century references to the leader as a king imply that he served for life. Local confirmation of a term of office that was at least longer than annual comes from a fifth-century inscription at Delphi which refers to polemarchs to indicate chronology. 48 The highest federal official, the leader of the confederacy, would have been the natural choice as an indicator of chronology if his office had been annual, as the choice of the general as the eponymous magistrate of the reconstituted Thessalian confederacy in the Hellenistic period demonstrates. 49 Since the polemarchs are the eponymous officials in this fifth-century inscription, we must conclude that the term of the leader’s office made him inappropriate.


for indicating chronology (on the assumption that there was a leader of the confederacy at the time). The same seems to have been true in the fourth century as well. This fact alone, however, does not prove that the leader served for life. Any term longer than a single year would have been useless for chronological purposes in the Greek system, which reckoned on the large scale in units of one year.

Confirmation that the ταγός usually did serve for life, at least by the first half of the fourth century, comes from Xenophon’s account of the careers of Jason of Pherae and his successors. When Jason was made leader of the confederacy by consent, there was no leader already in office because the violent efforts of Lycophron of Pherae to become leader of Thessaly at the end of the fifth century B.C. had split the confederacy. This sort of internal strife among the Thessalian aristocrats was probably far from rare when it came time to elect a new leader, and one can imagine that long periods could pass while no leader was in office. Jason based his arguments in favor of his own election to the post on the military benefits to be expected under his leadership in preparation for war on Macedonia, Greece, and Persia. There is no indication that Jason expected his term of office to

50 Sordi, LT, pp. 107–108, believes that the leader’s office was in abeyance after the battle of Tanagra, when the inscription was set up.

51 Werner Peek, “Griechische Inschriften,” Athenische Mitteilungen 59 (1934), p. 57, no. 15: the Thessalians make a proxeny award which appears to be dated by the names of two groups, who are designated as the προστατεύοντες, not by the name of the individual leader of the confederacy. See Sordi, LT, p. 333. It is conceivable, however, that the reference to the groups in this text served to indicate not the year but only a certain period within the year, as is the case, for example, with the references to prytaning tribes in Athenian decrees.

52 The reference in IG IX.2, 257 (Thetonium, fifth cent. B.C.), to ταγός and ἀταγός has been taken to refer to the office of the leader of the confederacy, in which case an indefinite tenure of the office would be implied. The words may refer, however, only to “wartime and peacetime,” and not to the leader’s office. For discussion of these words, see C. D. Buck, The Greek Dialects (Chicago, 1955), p. 226; J. Chadwick, “ταγός and ἀταγός,” in Studi linguistici in onore di Vittore Pisani (Brescia, 1969), vol. 1, pp. 231–234; J. T. Hooker, “Thessalian ΤΑΓΑ,” ΖPE 40 (1980), p. 272.

53 Hellenica 6.1.2–19, 6.4.20–37.

54 Hellenica 2.3.4.
be anything less than lifelong, and his successors certainly tried to hold the office for life. Their opponents elsewhere in Thessaly were no doubt unhappy about this fact, but that dissatisfaction made no difference unless backed by superior military force, which the opponents on their own could not marshall.

The perception of the leader of the confedercy as a king and his lifetime tenure of office raise an additional issue concerning the office. What happened when one leader died and a new one had to be selected? What were the criteria of selection? Obviously the most important ones should have been the ability of the candidate to gain the support of the majority of the Thessalian aristocrats and to perform the military duties demanded of his office, but the evidence from the period before Philip suggests that another criterion figured in the selection process which again helps to explain why non-Thessalians thought of the leader of the confedercy as a kind of king. That criterion was kinship. If the family tree sketched by J. S. Morrison for the Aleuads is right, that family practically monopolized the leadership of Thessaly in the late sixth and early fifth centuries, passing the highest federal office from father to son, or perhaps to a close male relative. This situation obtained without any doubt by the fourth century, as we see from the careers of Jason and his relatives at Pherae as the leadership of the confedercy passed from one male member of the family to the next. Once a strong family had one of its members elected as the leader of the confedercy, it evidently tried hard to keep the office in its male line. Of

56 Sordi, LT, p. 336, states that by this period the office was "elective" rather than "dynastic," a legalistic conception which underestimates the strength of the tendency for a family to keep a firm grip on its prerogatives. Alexander of Pherae claimed the office as his by inheritance (Diodorus 17.4.1). Cf. Arnaldo Momigliano, "Tagia e tetrarchia in Tessal gia," Athenaeum 10 (1932), pp. 52–53. One might profitably compare the history of the Hapsburgs, who struggled to establish a hereditary right to be elected monarchs. See, for brief discussion, Fritz Hartung, Deutsche Verfassungsgeschichte vom 15. Jahrhundert bis zur Gegenwart 7 (Stuttgart, 1950), pp. 34–36; R. A. Kann, A History of the Hapsburg Empire 1526–1918 (Berkeley, 1974), pp. 54–62, 125–129.
57 The story of Thargelia the Milesian as "queen of Thessaly" for thirty years after the death of her husband the "king" is a romantic fiction. For the story, see H. Dittmar, Aischines von Sphettos (Berlin, 1912), p. 277, frag. 21 = Anonymi
course, it is very unlikely that the office became an automatically inherited one _de jure_ in the way that a proper kingship was because the selection of the leader had to be accomplished by the members of the confederacy. But the tendency for the office to be inherited _de facto_ nevertheless was present, as a result of the realities of family politics and also of the natural inclination to give the office to a man who could be expected to provide the same qualities of leadership as had his father or his uncle or his brother. From time to time, the office moved from one family to another as conditions in Thessaly changed, in much the same way that royal lines change in countries ruled by proper kings.

The nature of the leader’s office as revealed by evidence earlier than the reign of Philip II is easy to summarize. It was overwhelmingly military with concomitant financial responsibilities. A very important component of these military and financial responsibilities was the enforcement of the “subjection” of the people of the perioikic areas in the interest of the confederacy. The leader was not ordinarily concerned with other areas of government such as the administration of justice on the civic level. There was, however, no set of hard and fast rules on the federal level to define precisely the scope of the leader’s power, nor the extent of the cooperation required of the members of the confederacy. The situation remained fluid. A strong leader could go further than others of lesser strength or charisma in exercising his prerogatives for the “common interest.”

In this type of constitutional situation, the possibilities for disagreement and even violent strife were many. Given the tradition of factional strife among the Thessalian aristocrats, one has no difficulty understanding how disputes arose over whether the leader of the confederacy was doing his duty in the proper way. In the absence of explicit constitutional guidelines in codified form, arguments were inevitable over what the proper way was. That the Thessalians in fact had a strong tradition that there was a proper way for their leader to behave can be seen from the

fourth and final category of evidence on the political organization of Thessaly before the time of Philip II of Macedon.

4

The *Nomos* of the Thessalians

The Greek word *νόμος* presents notorious difficulties to the English translator because it simultaneously embodies notions of what the modern interpreter must call "custom" and "law." Although the word can mean "statute law," it would be misleading to think of this sense for *νόμος* and its associated adjectives and adverbs in the context of Thessalian tradition. In the history of Thessalian social and political life, the expression "the *nomos* of the Thessalians" refers to the notion that there was a way in which things should be done, and that was the way in which they had traditionally been done to the satisfaction of the aristocratic community in Thessaly. If this notion seems short on specifics, that is only proper. Customs change or evolve into new forms, and therefore ideas of what is proper can change. But the idea that *something* is proper endures. As a result, there is always the possibility of arguing that the customs of the day have gotten away from the "genuine" old style of behavior. In a society with minimal record keeping at best (with no permanent federal headquarters for the confederacy, archives are inconceivable), the "ancestral constitution" was going to be a matter of dispute among those who wanted to remember its provisions to their own political advantage. But there were certain very important points about the *nomos* of the Thessalians which could not be disputed. These are the points one must consider as the background for understanding the significance of what happened once the *nomos* of the Thessalians had to find room for a direct Macedonian influence.

Once again the discussion begins with Pindar's ode in honor of a young Thessalian athlete. At the conclusion of the poem, Pindar praises the family of his patron, Thorax the Aleuad, because "bearing on high the *nomos* of the Thessalians they increase it. Ancestral and trusty governance of cities belongs to
the aristocrats." Pindar did not mean his audience to think of any particular event when they heard these flattering words. Rather, he was emphasizing the idea that the Aleuads deserved praise because they were behaving in the traditionally accepted and proper fashion for the aristocratic rulers of Thessaly. In the case of the Aleuads, the rule in question covered both their ancestral city, Larissa, and the confederaCy. Since Pindar speaks here of governance of cities in the plural, his reference is to the confederaCy, which was made up of cities by the fifth century B.C., and all indications are that Thorax was indeed the leader of the confederaCy by the date of the poem.  

Xenophon's account of Jason's rise to leadership of the confederaCy reveals the specifics which Pindar's poetry conceals. Xenophon, Jason's contemporary and therefore in a position to know his reputation, says that Jason was great in Thessaly because, to be sure, he had a large army of well-trained mercenary soldiers and many allies, but also because he became leader of the Thessalians "in accordance with their nomos." The speech which Xenophon wrote for Jason to explain his motives for wanting to become the leader shows what this nomos was. The leader had to receive the recognition of the cities of Thessaly; that is, he had to be elected by the members of the confederaCy. Although Jason had the power to compel the cities to recognize him by defeating them in battle, he wanted to be elected by the power of persuasion rather than by force. Jason got his wish and was made leader "by common agreement."  

The text of the Thessalian-Athenian treaty made less than a decade after Jason's death proves that Xenophon is presenting an accurate picture of the nomos of the Thessalians. There one reads that the leader of the confederaCy whom the Athenians agree to

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58 *Pythian* 10, lines 69–72 (Snell): ἀδελφεσθαι ἐπαινήσομεν ἐσθοῖς, ὅτι / ὑπὸ φέροντι νόμον Θεσσαλῶν / ἀδελφίτες. ἐν δ' ἀγαθοῖς κεῖται / πατρίωται κείναι θελλών κυβερνάσεις.


60 *Hellenica* 6.4.28: διὰ τὸ τῷ νόμῳ Θεσσαλῶν ταγός καθεστάναι.

61 6.1.5–13, esp. 7–8.

62 6.1.18: ὴμολογουμένως ταγός τῶν Θεσσαλῶν καθεστήκει.
defend is the one “whom the Thessalians chose.”

The same treaty is also revealing in its stated intent to defend the confederacy and its leader against tyranny. The threat of tyranny at the time the treaty was made came from Alexander of Pherae. He had apparently gained the leadership of the confederacy in what could be construed as the traditional fashion, but now he had betrayed the tradition of his office (so his opponents claimed) by ruling by force, contrary to “nomos.” So, it seems, not only did the leader of the confederacy have to secure his election by common consent; he also had to retain the common recognition of his status by the cities of Thessaly as time passed. He would become a tyrant if he lacked the “common agreement” of the Thessalians. It was probably Isocrates’ aim to persuade the successors of Alexander of Pherae to secure this common agreement when he wrote to them advising against trying to become tyrants in Thessaly, as their local advisers were pressing them to do. Those advisers, said Isocrates, were the sort of men who undertake deeds “most contrary to nomos.” As usual, Isocrates’ advice went unheeded, but his letter does provide further contemporary evidence for the acknowledged importance of the tradition of appointing a leader of the Thessalian confederacy by consent rather than by force.

There is one other important constituent of the nomos of the Thessalians as it applied to the leader of the confederacy. Jason of Pherae was murdered by a band of young conspirators before he could launch any of the great campaigns of conquest which Xenophon claims as his intention. No motive for the killing is reported, although Xenophon says that the Greeks were relieved at the news of Jason’s death because they feared he was turning into a tyrant. Jason was succeeded as leader of the confederacy

63 IG II2 116, line 18 (SVA II, no. 293).
64 Lines 19, 31.
65 Diodorus 15.61.2–3; Plutarch, Pelopidas 26, 31–32.
by his brother Polydorus, and then by his brother Polyphron, who murdered Polydorus to take his office. Xenophon comments that Polyphron made his short tenure of the office like a tyranny, and fortunately Xenophon explains how. While leader of the confederacy, Polyphron executed nine prominent citizens of Pharsalus and exiled many from Larissa. Polyphron clearly overstepped the bounds of his office by interfering in the affairs of the cities, in this case by undertaking to administer "justice" on the civic level by the use of force. In other words, noninterference in the affairs of the cities of the confederacy by its leader was part of the nomos of the Thessalians. Only when a tyrant threatened the confederacy or its leader could the leader justifiably interfere in a Thessalian city, or at least that is the implication of Xenophon's account and the text of the treaty with the Athenians. Under normal circumstances, civic concerns were not the business of the leader of the confederacy.

Whatever else it might have meant, then, the nomos of the Thessalians by the fourth century demanded that the leader of the confederacy win and keep the consent of the cities to his holding office, and that he eschew interference in the affairs of the cities unless a tyrannical conspiracy was in the making. If he respected the nomos of his land, the leader of the Thessalian confederacy had the chance to function as the commander of a formidable military force which was drawn from the manpower of the cities of Thessaly and its neighboring areas and was financed by the resources of both. If he proved to be popular with his fellow aristocrats, the leader could usually pass his office on to his heir with the consent of the confederacy. In sum, the nomos of the Thessalians stood for the mutual expectations of the Thessalian aristocrats that they would govern themselves by persuasion and not by force. One can see from the best documented example of the selection of a leader of the confederacy that such expectations were more utopian than realistic. Jason of Pherae was able to persuade the other cities of Thessaly and the aristocrats who controlled them to support his election because he

47-77.
68 Hellenica 6.4.33–34.
possessed the personal mercenary army to compel obedience to his wishes, if it came to that. But it should not be overlooked that Jason did achieve a real measure of popularity in Thessaly by his insistence on his respect for custom and his reluctance to use force. His propaganda worked. The lesson was there for anyone who cared to learn it.

This brief analysis of the political organization of Thessaly before the time of Philip II based on the sources of the period is not meant to present a full picture, but only to present the evidence in such a way that our idea of what Thessaly was like before the entry of Philip remains uncontaminated by inference drawn from potentially tendentious sources of Philip's own time and later. Before we proceed to the history of Thessaly in the latter half of the fourth century B.C., however, two further points must be made in preparation for the discussion to follow. These points concern not Thessalian political institutions properly speaking but, rather, Thessalian political traditions.

At the beginning of this chapter, reference was made to the factional strife which characterized Thessalian political life and the remedy adopted in desperate times of putting affairs completely in the hands of a mediator backed by troops. We know for certain that in the fourth century a "mediating magistrate" with full powers was appointed in Pharsalus and in Larissa, two of the three most important cities in Thessaly. The third of these cities, Phereia, could have used one as a remedy for the string of political murders it experienced in the same period. These incidents reveal a traditional tendency to look to a strong individual at the head of an army to bring back social and political harmony when ordinary institutions had failed to preserve it. In a sense, the need for a confederate leader to head the national army in times of danger or of opportunity was analogous to the need for a mediating archon to fight political fires and to resolve social crises. But crisis-management by committee, such as the Athenians tried in 413 B.C., was not for the Thessalians. Only a truly dominant individual could harness the energies of the

69 Hellenica 6.1.2–3; Aristotle, Politics 5.1306a26–30.
70 Thucydides 8.1.
powerful and fractious aristocrats of Thessaly.

This tendency to look for help in times of strife from a strong third party also lies behind the second point to be made here. The aristocrats of Thessaly, like the participants in civil wars elsewhere in Greece, made it a habit to call for military aid from nonlocal sources in their violent disputes with one another or with their neighbors. One party or the other often turned for assistance to powerful Greek states like Sparta, Athens, or Thebes. But the Aleuads of Larissa made it a habit to look for help from sources beyond Greece as well. In the early fifth century, they called on the king of Persia to invade their homeland in hopes of furthering their own advantage, and again at the end of the same century the king was asked to supply troops to help Larissa combat her domestic enemies. In the fourth century, the Aleuads called on the Macedonian king for the same reason. These collaborations with foreign kings presented the same difficulties as did placing the city in the hands of a mediating magistrate. The mediator could turn out to have designs on despotic control that were inimical to the interests of those he was supposed to help. In the early 360s B.C., in fact, King Alexander of Macedonia treacherously occupied Larissa when called in by the Aleuads. But when faced in the 350s with the threat of tyranny from Pherae, their southern neighbor in the rich plain of Pelasgiotic, the aristocrats of Larissa apparently had no choice but to continue to seek their salvation by submitting to the leadership of a non-Thessalian commander who could get the job done. Moreover, the happy experience the Aleuads had with Pelopidas of Thebes shortly before the appearance on the scene

71 Diodrus 14.82.5–6 (Medius of Larissa asks for troops from the anti-Spartan synedrion formed at Corinth and then takes Pharsalus, which had a Spartan garrison); Xenophon, Hellenica 6.1.2–16 (Pharsalus asks Sparta for aid against Jason of Pherae); IG II² 116 (SVA II, no. 293: the confederacy asks Athens for aid against Jason); Diodorus 15.80.1; Plutarch, Pelopidas 31–35 (the “Thessalians” ask Thebes for help against Alexander of Pherae).

72 Herodotus 7.6.2; Damastes, FGrH 5 F 4; Xenophon, Anabasis 1.1.10; Diodorus 15.61.3.

73 Diodorus 15.61.4–5. See the general comment of Isocrates, On the Peace 118, on the occupation of Thessalian citadels by foreigners as a consequence of the Thessalian propensity for civil war.
of Philip of Macedon shows what they could hope to get from leadership supplied by the right person. Since the example of Pelopidas provides important background for understanding the election of Philip as the leader of the Thessalian confederacy, this episode provides an appropriate transition to the discussion in the following chapter.

When Alexander of Pherae as leader of the confederacy began to behave in tyrannical fashion, the Aleuads of Larissa, from fear of his παρανομία, conspired to overthrow him with Macedonian help. After Alexander of Macedon proved a treacherous ally, the Aleuads turned to Thebes for help. The Theban commander Pelopidas came with an army to Thessaly and succeeded in freeing Larissa from the Macedonian Alexander and in warning Alexander of Pherae to govern according to nomos. Harmony was restored. When it failed to endure, Pelopidas returned. At first, Alexander of Pherae had the upper hand, even holding Pelopidas prisoner for a while, but eventually Pelopidas led a predominantly Thessalian army against the forces of Alexander. According to Plutarch, Pelopidas persevered because he hoped to win the glory which came to a man who opposed tyrants ruling “contrary to nomos and by force.” Unfortunately Pelopidas died in the trying.

The Thessalians who had called upon Pelopidas mourned his death as if he were a Thessalian national hero. The confederacy (as constituted in opposition to Alexander) passed decrees in his honor and set up a statue with a verse inscription at Delphi. The cities sent honorific delegations to the funeral, which was carried out by the Thessalians at their special request. They mourned the loss of their commander and, they declared, their freedom as well. The historical accuracy of Plutarch’s life of Pelopidas is certainly open to question because its hero consistently comes off so well, but there is no reason to quarrel with Plutarch’s assessment of Pelopidas’ standing with the Thessalians after his death.

74 Diodorus 15.67.3–4; Plutarch, Pelopidas 26.
The extravagant honors paid the dead man by foreigners marked him as supreme in the fortune of his reputation. The historian of Philip's career in Thessaly does well to remember how the Thessalians felt about a non-Thessalian military man who could lead Thessalian troops effectively in defense of their nomos against a tyrant from Pherae. By now, the background should be clear against which the actions of Philip in Thessaly must be seen.