

Imagined superpowers: Isocrates' opposition of Athens and Sparta

Introduction

Isocrates has been comparatively neglected as a source for political and cultural history and theory. However, the many works of his long career show a continuing engagement with Athenian political culture and the education of its political class, and his assessment of Sparta is significant for both of these. He imagines and explores the struggle for hegemony between Athens, Sparta and other Greek *poleis*, before the rise of Macedon reshaped the Greek political landscape, and does so through a series of works that aim to create and modify Athenian political identities, and to examine claims to lead any Panhellenic project, through his novel use of literary discourse. Although the tendency in recent scholarship has been to focus on the rhetorical and educational aspects of Isocrates' work, he is a highly political writer.¹ He is interested not just in the construction of his own authorial persona, but the individual personae of other political leaders and the collective personae of city-states, and the use of these constructions in political and educational debates, particularly in furthering his Panhellenic project.

This paper explores some of the difficulties in making use of Isocrates' texts to understand the political culture of Athens and in particular Athenian assessments of the power of Sparta. It shows how Isocrates' literary style lends itself to the creation of artificial or exaggerated oppositions, and that the opposition between Athens and Sparta as political exemplars is one that Isocrates himself identifies from the political discourse of Athens. A tension emerges within his discussion of Athens between his own evaluation of Sparta and its capabilities, and that of a group that he identifies as consisting of excessive enthusiasts for all things Spartan.² It is perhaps in his

¹ Assessments of Isocrates as a political writer include Bringmann 1965; Cloché 1963; Kehl 1962; Mathieu 1925, as well as the influential and widely circulated but unpublished Bloom 1955. Mathieu and Cloché both situate Isocrates directly in the political life of Athens, while Bloom, Kehl and Bringmann argue that his work should be read as political theory. More focused on Isocrates' intellectual context in rhetoric and education are Poulakos 1997 and Wareh 2012. Haskins 2004 and Too 1995 both connect Isocrates' idiosyncratic literary style to his political and intellectual context; Eucken 1983 interprets Isocrates' thought as a dialogue with Plato, while Wareh and Haskins assess Isocrates in the context of Aristotelian political and rhetorical thought.

² In this respect Isocrates is a key witness to the phenomenon of the 'Spartan mirage' (Ollier 1943; Tigerstedt 1965; see also Vivienne Gray (1994: 223-29) on Tigerstedt and Norlin's (Norlin and Van Hook 1928-45: 2.370-71) attempts to position Isocrates' thought in terms of the Spartan mirage.

Imagined superpowers

interactions with these pro-Spartan readers that Isocrates' thought on Sparta provides us with interesting evidence for the contested nature of perceptions of Sparta among the political elite of fourth-century Athens. Isocrates rejects the Laconophiles' idealised account of Sparta, first in his initial call to Athens-led Panhellenism, the *Panegyricus* (c.380 BCE), and especially in his final work, the *Panathenaicus* (c.342-339 BCE). In between these two works his attitude to Sparta is refined in works presented as speeches by or addresses to individual rulers; the *Archidamus* (dramatic date 366 BCE) evaluates Sparta in defeat after Leuctra, while *To Philip* (346 BCE) acknowledges the disruption to the contest between Athens and Sparta for Greek hegemony caused by the rise of Macedon.

Isocrates' focus on individual leaders such as Archidamus and Philip represents a fourth-century shift from idealising the collective citizenry (such as the Athenian citizens at Marathon, or the Spartans at Thermopylae) to idealising, and even heroising, the individual leader. The signification and evaluation of important symbols of civic identity, such as the heroes Theseus and Heracles, change in line with this. Isocrates also uses the conflict for Greek hegemony between Athens and Sparta as an analogy for the conflict between different educational schools, with Sparta representing his rivals, particularly those from the Platonic Academy.³

The political role of the virtuous leader was an important element for both schools (and for Aristotelian models too). Isocrates' innovation was to re-use the way that Athenians thought about their mythical kings so as to import the monarchical element into the mixed constitution via the political imaginary, and then to use this to hint at a way that Athenian independence could co-exist alongside Macedonian imperialism. Sparta, with its historical although limited dual kingship, provided an alternative model, although Spartan kingship as such is rarely the focus of Isocrates' analysis.⁴

Thomas Blank has written a comprehensive survey of Isocrates' use of Sparta as an exemplum (Blank 2014).

³ This becomes particularly clear in the later works. While the general rivalry between different educational schools is clear across Isocrates' works (for example, in *Against the Sophists*), the specific rivalry with the Academy under Speusippus emerges in the *Panathenaicus* (Markle 1976).

⁴ Thomas Blank concludes that Isocrates largely approved of Sparta's kingship (Blank 2014: 604-05), but no Spartan king receives the praise Isocrates gives to the Cypriot rulers Evagoras and Nicocles.

Entering Isocrates' imaginary

Readers hoping to use Isocrates' complex literary confections to understand the political discourse of fourth-century Athens have found two significant difficulties in using them as evidence for the political culture of Athens.

Firstly, the internal dramatic dates of Isocrates' texts may not match their composition date, making it hard to use them as historical evidence for attitudes or responses to specific events. In-text references may be no guide to composition date; Phillip Harding has argued against precise dating of works that might be schoolroom exercises rather than direct interventions in contemporary politics.⁵ Although shifts in Isocrates' argumentation from work to work, and subtle changes of position, do seem to tie these texts to their apparent date, within the artificial world of the Isocratean imaginary the historical presentation could be as illusory as everything else.

A second concern is the identity of Isocrates' intended audience. While these works have a defined internal audience, it does not match the external audience. Isocrates' 'politics of the small voice', in Yun Lee Too's description, means that these are not public addresses, but private documents with a small circulation among the Athenian intellectual elite.⁶ That does not mean that Isocrates lacked influence; responses to him by Plato and Aristotle suggest that he represents views in circulation in Athens, although views circulated through private rather than public networks.⁷ Plato's *Euthydemus* illustrates intellectual rivalries in Athens; in the closing scene, Crito describes his encounter with an educator who falls between philosophy and politics (*Euth.* 305c5-d1); this is usually taken to be a reference to Isocrates. Isocrates in turn, in his *Helen* (1) and *Against the Sophists*, identifies networks of rival educators and theorists competing for elite custom in Athens, and takes other opportunities to criticise the teaching of Plato and the Academy as irrelevant and abstract.⁸ This debate between providers of elite higher-level education perhaps provides Isocrates' most compelling context, and one that, as the *Antidosis* shows, links directly to

⁵ Harding 1973. Although the idea that Isocrates' writings are educational exercises rather than actual contributions to political discourse evades the problem of interpretation, it also devalues them as evidence through excluding them from the political discourse of the city. See also Eucken 1983: 173-83; Too 1995: 42-25.

⁶ Too 1995: 74-112.

⁷ Eucken 1983, 2010.

⁸ *Antidosis* 261-9, *Panathenaicus* 26-29 (which suggests that geometry, astronomy and eristics are for youths, while mature citizens should leave them behind); cf. Xen. *Mem.* 4.7.1-9 on the usefulness or otherwise of studying natural science.

Imagined superpowers

political realities through his students; Isocrates participates in politics through educating and advising leaders, and debating educational methods with other providers.⁹

A more fruitful way to explore Isocrates' work is to focus on his construction of artificial identities, not just of the personal identity explored by Yun Lee Too, or the political and public identity identified by Ober, but of the shared identity constructed by the citizens through political and civic discourse, a construction described as the political or social imaginary.¹⁰ This concept, theorised in the writings of political theorist Cornelius Castoriadis, provides a way of exploring processes of construction and change in the evolution of a city's political myths.¹¹ Castoriadis saw the deliberative and performative spaces of fifth-century democratic Athens as a paradigm of the collective construction of civic identity, and civic society as itself constructed by the engagement and participation of citizens in these acts of construction.¹²

Attempting to reshape the social imaginary (effectively, that body of myths and ideas shared by the citizens of the polis) by retelling myths, particularly those of the Athenians' mythical great deeds, was an established mode of political discourse in Athens; the rhetoric of the public funeral speech is perhaps the most prominent example.¹³ It is also apparent in fifth-century tragedy, as well as in later historiographical and philosophical appropriations of both those genres.¹⁴ Writers

⁹ Isocrates' intellectual autobiography, the *Antidosis*, with its long excursus on the political career of his student Timotheus, also supports this contextualisation (Ober 1998: 256-76; Too 2008).

¹⁰ Castoriadis 1987; Taylor 2004. This concept informs, for example, Nicole Loraux's analysis of the rhetoric of the Athenian funeral speech, an important site for the construction of the Athenian political imaginary (Loraux 1981, cf. Loraux 1976). Social and intellectual historians have made productive use of this concept to explore ancient mentalities and emotions, such as courage (Balot 2014: 17-18) and envy (Eidinow 2016: 4), in the context of democracy and its ideology. Benedict Anderson's work on the imaginary nature of the sense of community that underlies contemporary nationalist thought and ideology is also relevant to Isocrates' project (Anderson 1991, especially pp. 5-7).

¹¹ Political myth is explored in Flood 1996 and Tudor 1972; Bottici 2007 explores the intellectual history of the interpretation of political myth, and sets Castoriadis' project in the context of the distinction between myth and history (203-226); see Calame 1998 for political myth in a Greek context.

¹² Castoriadis 1991, 1997.

¹³ The canonical set of great deeds includes the retrieval of the Argive dead, the support given to the returning Heraclids, the defeat of Eumolpus at Eleusis and the defeat of the Amazons; *Lys. 2* is the best exemplar, with Loraux 1986 providing detailed analysis of the genre. A counter-trend, exemplified by the use of the genre by historians in their speeches, is the marked omission (or *praeteritio*) of the mythical material in favour of more recent history: the Athenians at Plataea (Hdt 9.27.4-5) and Pericles in Athens (Thucydides 2.35.3).

¹⁴ The political function of Athenian tragedy has been much disputed (as in Griffin 1998, with response by Seaford 2000), with Saïd 1998 and the essays in Carter 2011 providing overviews of the debate.

participated in this discourse, using refurbished and reshaped myths for argument and analysis; Euripides' *Ion*, with its assertion of Athens' close relationship with the god Apollo, demonstrates this process.¹⁵ Myths, in the sense of stories about the distant past, from an age of heroes, provide a different set of examples than the history of the recent past, as documented by 'contemporary historians' such as Thucydides.¹⁶ The distinction made in fourth-century texts between different kinds of past temporalities, identifiable as myth and history, is used to polemical effect by Isocrates.¹⁷

Asserting the historical importance of these stories is a move frequently made by fourth-century Athenian conservative writers; the attention given to Athens' mythical kings by the Atthidographers represents part of the same process.¹⁸ Isocrates takes this process further, and uses both kinds of past, the blurred, mythical heroic past and the accurate, well-known past of recent documented history, within his works. By constructing models of both Athens and Sparta that draw extensively on established myths and tragic retellings of them, Isocrates creates a discourse that can run counter to the relative standing of the cities at the time that he is writing.

Isocrates makes extensive use of the contrast between mythical/distant and historical/recent pasts. In the *Evagoras*, for example, he contrasts the status of heroes of the long-past Trojan war with that of the recent king Evagoras of Salamis, who has opposed all of Asia on his own (*Evagoras* 5-6, 65-69); Evagoras, recipient of honorary Athenian citizenship and an honorific statue, is a suitable candidate for praise in Athens.¹⁹ Isocrates also contrasts an allegedly historical past, just beyond living memory, with the present day, when he uses *patrios politeia* arguments. These

Edith Hall's paper in this volume provides an insightful reading of Euripides' combative assessment of Sparta, and presentation of Athenian views of Sparta, in his tragedies.

¹⁵ Bremmer 1997: 10-13.

¹⁶ Although Thucydides himself notes that even the relatively recent past is subject to mythicisation, as with the Athenian idealisation of the Tyrannicides based on inaccurate oral accounts (Th. 6.54-9).

¹⁷ The myth/history distinction has been much explored, in terms of whether it exists for ancient historiographers, and whether it represents a distinction between different kinds of past or sections within a continuous past: see Baragwanath 2012; Calame 1998; Leyden 1949-50; Nickau 1990; Saïd 2007, as well as Finley 1965. Isocrates' manipulation of the different kinds of past shows a sophisticated awareness of this distinction and the rhetorical possibilities it offers.

¹⁸ Atthidographers surveyed by Harding 2008; Rhodes 1990, 2014, neither of whom support the politicised interpretation pioneered by Jacoby (Jacoby 1949, 1954). However, the 'intentional history' model suggests that a political function or motivation usefully explains many Hellenistic local histories (Foxhall et al. 2010; Gehrke 2011); Atack 2014 explores the use of Athenian kings in both the Atthidographers and Isocrates.

¹⁹ Calame 1998: 136 n.14; Gotteland 2001. Evagoras' honours in Athens: *IG* II² 20=RO 11, *IG* I³ 113; Isocrates *Evagoras* 54.

Imagined superpowers

look to the political qualities of an alleged Athenian ancestral constitution, where the ancient is provided by pre-Marathon Athens, and the recent by contemporary politics.²⁰ The pre-eminent ancestral constitution valued by fourth-century Greek political theorists was not an Athenian one, but the Lycurgan constitution of Sparta, and Isocrates' comments at *Panathenaicus* 41 most likely point to that enthusiasm.

Isocrates is of course not alone in manipulating myth to influence the civic and social imaginary. Plato, in the *Republic*, proposes the introduction of an almost completely new, although allegedly Phoenician, set of foundation myths, the Noble Lie, to maintain the established order in the imaginary city of Kallipolis (*Resp.* 3.414c4-415e4).²¹ Isocrates, addressing the changing world around Athens, stays closer than Plato does to established stories from the past, but reshapes them, either by mapping established characters to new references, or by subtly switching the agency for key deeds from collective to individual. In this way Isocrates' praise of the Athenian past can undermine the traditional appeal to the collective great deeds of the citizens celebrated in the rhetoric of the funeral speeches.

Isocrates' *Archidamus* and the opposition of Athens and Sparta

Isocrates' opposition of Athens and Sparta invokes the mythical past, and their mythical and historical kings, to attempt to modify the political imaginary of Athens. By retelling selected civic myths, Isocrates constantly re-affirms Athenian superiority to Sparta, even when, as in the *Archidamus*, his words are placed in the mouth of a Spartan. To Isocrates, Sparta is a second-rate power, an imperfect imitation of the Athenian ideal (*Panath.* 153-4), albeit one that is excessively valorised by some rival educators in Athens.

However, Sparta remains a necessary component of Isocrates' attempts to praise Athens. His comparative method and balanced style require an equivalent Other to act as the foil to the object of his praise, a process that encourages the construction of oppositions and comparisons. The first-century BCE critic, Dionysius of

²⁰ The *Areopagiticus* sets out Isocrates' praise of what he is pleased to regard as the ancestral constitution of Athens most clearly; Isocrates describes a golden age of Athens which produced the generation responsible for Athens' greatest historical victory at Marathon. Finley 1975 dissects the ideological use of such constructed appeals to an idealised past, but fails to acknowledge the significance of the fourth-century context of such appeals (see also Atack 2010).

²¹ Plato also creates a new set of ancestral myths for Athens in his *Timaeus-Critias*, in the story of primeval Athens and its encounter with Atlantis: see Morgan 1998, 2012.

Imagined superpowers

Halicarnassus, discussing the *Panegyricus*, observed this: οὐκοῦν τὸ γραμμάτων καὶ συνθημάτων ἄριστον καὶ τὸ πολλῶν καὶ ὀλίγων καὶ κοινῶν καὶ ἰδίων ἀντίθετα (‘Here “law” and “agreements” are balanced, “many” is contrasted with “few” and “public” with “private”).²² Dionysius goes on to suggest that reliance on this rhetorical device is a sign of immaturity (μειρακιώδεις), although we will see it continue at a structural level in Isocrates’ later work. But this balancing process means that Isocrates’ Athens could not be constructed without its Spartan counterpart, and can be praised only through disparaging its rival, but even in Dionysius’ summary one can see the potential for political analysis within the artificial sentence structures.

Isocrates makes his comparative method explicit in his final work, the *Panathenaicus*.²³ Just as, in comparing valuable objects such as purple-dyed cloth or gold, one would compare them against other examples ‘which have the same appearance and are valued at the same price’ (τῶν καὶ τὴν ὄψιν ὁμοίαν ἐχόντων καὶ τῆς τιμῆς τῆς αὐτῆς ἀξιουμένων, 39), so in the case of cities one should seek examples ‘that have similar power and have engaged in the same actions and have enjoyed similar resources’ (τὰς παραπλησίαν καὶ τὴν δύναμιν ἐχούσας καὶ περὶ τὰς αὐτὰς πράξεις γεγενημένας καὶ ταῖς ἐξουσίαις ὁμοίαις κεχρημένας, 40) in order ‘to praise accurately and fairly one of the cities’ within the comparison (ἐγκωμιάσαι τινα τῶν πόλεων ἀκριβῶς καὶ δικαίως, 39).

For many Athenians, Isocrates observes, that comparable city will always be Sparta, a city praised moderately by some but excessively by others, who talk about it ‘as if demigods had conducted the government there’ (ὥσπερ τῶν ἡμιθέων ἐκεῖ πεπολιτευμένων, 41).²⁴ Even in establishing Sparta as the city with which Athens should be compared, Isocrates distances himself from accepting that it deserves that status, and sets up an opposition between himself and those over-enthusiastic supporters of Sparta, which will be amplified later in the work.

²² DH *de Isoc* 14, translation Usher; Dionysius here uses *Panegyricus* 75 as his example.

²³ Written in his 90s, between 342 and 339, according to claims made within the text (*Panath.* 3).

²⁴ Which Laconophiles Isocrates intends to criticise here is unclear. It seems too simplistic to identify Plato as the target, unless one equates the *Republic*’s Kallipolis and the city of gods and their children (*Laws* 5.739b-e) to Sparta. But a broad-brush attack on Plato’s followers might well be intended; such followers could include, as Danielle Allen suggests, the Athenian politician Lycurgus (Allen 2000), although he did not achieve prominence until the 330s. The earlier criticism of Sparta in the *Busiris*, which purports to show a constitution like that of Callipolis ruled by the Egyptian king Busiris rather than a philosopher-king, includes much criticism of the Spartan constitution (especially at 17-20) as a failed version of that of Busiris’ Egypt (Blank 2013: 18-19; Livingstone 2001: 48-56). Blank sets out (2013: 24 n.65) how Isocrates manipulated the myth familiar to Athenians to do this.

Imagined superpowers

Isocrates' comparisons of Athens and Sparta depend on the contrast between status derived from myth and status derived from recent events. This contrast is particularly acute in the *Panegyricus*, where Isocrates describes his methods for relating events from the different kinds of past.²⁵ Isocrates insists, in describing how orators should present familiar stories, that they need both 'to recount the old stories in a novel way, and to tell recent events in the established manner' (καὶ τὰ τε παλαιὰ καινῶς διελθεῖν καὶ περὶ τῶν νεωστὶ γεγενημένων ἀρχαίως εἰπεῖν, *Paneg.* 8).

How to narrate τὰ παλαιά in accordance with the key historiographical value of *akribeia* became an established topos of methodological statements in fourth-century historiography; Ephorus, possibly a student of Isocrates, argues that different modes of narration are appropriate to the distant and recent past and that too much detail about the distant past should arouse suspicion, on account of the lack of precision possible in narrating the distant past; 'we think that those who relate ancient deeds in this way are most unbelievable' (περὶ δὲ τῶν παλαιῶν τοὺς οὕτω διεξιόντας ἀπιθανωτάτους εἶναι νομίζομεν).²⁶ Isocrates subverts this well-established historiographical concern by asserting the priority of the distant past over the recent past, mythical strengths over recent failures.

The mythical past is overlaid by distant history. A further layer of argument addresses these distant times, from the foundation of cities and the establishment of constitutions. This hybridised mythistorical past is where Isocrates positions his political utopia, the Athenian *patrios politeia*, the ideal constitution of Athens. Again, Isocrates argues that Sparta is secondary and subsequent to *patrios politeia* Athens. Even the revered constitution of Lycurgus is revealed as simply an imitation of the Athenian *patrios politeia*.²⁷ Isocrates considers recent history only through these frames of the mythical and distant pasts.

He also moves from the κοιναί to the ἴδιον; the shared heritage of all is transformed by the careful usage and practice of the wise individual: 'for the deeds that happened before have been left as a common bequest for all, but making use of them at the right moment is the private concern of the wise' (αἱ μὲν γὰρ πράξεις αἱ προγεγενημέναι κοινὰ πᾶσιν ἡμῖν κατελείφθησαν, τὸ δ' ἐν καιρῷ ταύταις καταχρησασθαι... τῶν εὖ

²⁵ Calame 1998.

²⁶ *FGrH* 70 F9= HARPOKR. s. ἀρχαίως; Schepens 1977.

²⁷ *Panath.* 153-4; see below.

Imagined superpowers

φρονούντων ἴδιόν ἐστιν, *Paneg.* 9).²⁸ This motif of the replacement of the collective by the individual is thematic in Isocrates' work.

In this respect, Sparta has an advantage over Athens, in the continuing presence of kingship within its constitution. The limited power of the Spartan kings (as analysed by Aristotle, *Politics* 3.14.1285a3-16), meant that they were free of the taint of despotism or tyranny, and could therefore generate a good rather than despotic form of empire.²⁹ Their political position is one that should be emulated and imitated ('we must copy the royal institutions of Sparta', δεῖ γὰρ ἡμᾶς... μιμήσασθαι τὰς ἐν Λακεδαίμονι βασιλείας, *Peace* 142), especially the supreme loyalty that they command from citizen-soldiers (143). Isocrates, here, regards the position that the Spartan kings hold relative to their citizens as the position that Athens should hold relative to the other Greek *poleis*. But the idea of the Spartan kings as being at their best on campaign (with Agesilaus as exemplar) will complement ideas that Isocrates develops in the later *Panathenaicus* about the ideal hands-off relationship between king and *polis*.

This replacement of collective by paradigmatic individual may explain Isocrates' use of culture heroes in his speeches. He uses Theseus and Heracles, well-established characters in political discourse as founder figures and heroes, within his mythical narratives. They are associated strongly with Athens and Sparta, Theseus representing Athens or its citizens and either Heracles or the Heraclids representing Sparta (and later, Philip of Macedon).³⁰ These individuals come to exemplify personal virtues and, especially in the case of Theseus, political capability.³¹ This transvaluation is one of the more significant changes that Isocrates promotes in the Athenian political imaginary, and follows from his claim in the *Panegyricus* that shared myth becomes a resource for the wise individual. Political excellence ceases to be a collective virtue, shared by all citizens, and becomes an individual virtue, instantiated in the king and

²⁸ Note also that this usage depends on access to the *kairos*; whereas Plato's *politikos* uses his grasp of the *kairos* to weave together an actual polis (cf. Lane 1997: 139-45), Isocrates' thinker creates new stories from old and reconstructs the city's imaginary image of itself.

²⁹ Davidson 1990: 32.

³⁰ Of course Isocrates is not the only writer to make use of these heroes: Theseus' role in Athenian civic political discourse is explored by Calame 1996, Mills 1997 and Walker 1994, while Heracles is much used by the Socratics (see n. 34 below).

³¹ Gotteland 1998; Too 1995: 129-32.

Imagined superpowers

imperfectly copied by his subjects. As Vincent Azoulay notes, this is a key change evident in Greek political thought of the time.³²

Isocrates' comparative evaluation of the pair of heroes is best shown in the *Helen* (23-25), probably dating from around the same time as the *Panegyricus*, and providing a complex response to the genre of praise speeches.³³ This emphasises the political utility of Theseus' deeds, in comparison with Heracles'. For Isocrates, Theseus is superior to Heracles because he was *kurios*, in charge of himself ('he actually was his own master'; ἀὐτὸς αὐτοῦ κύριος ὢν, 25). This establishes Theseus as a political actor benefiting the city, and as a self-conscious euergetist; 'he chose the deeds by which he intended to become a benefactor to either the Greeks or his own native land' (προηρεῖτο τῶν ἀγόνων ἐξ ὧν ἤμελλεν ἢ τῶν Ἑλλήνων ἢ τῆς αὐτοῦ πατρίδος εὐεργέτης γενήσεσθαι). Heracles, in contrast, is considered to have acted as an individual for his personal benefit, performing 'labours from which he intended not to benefit others but to endanger himself' (πόνους, ἐξ ὧν ἤμελλεν οὐ τοὺς ἄλλους ὠφελήσειν ἀλλ' αὐτὸς κινδυνεύσειν).³⁴

The second move made by Isocrates is to change the signification of mythical characters. Analogies between Theseus and noteworthy Athenian politicians were a commonplace of Athenian history and rhetoric, as seen in Thucydides' invocation of Theseus' synoecism when he narrates Pericles' gathering of the Athenians into the city at the start of the Peloponnesian War (2.15.2).³⁵ But towards the end of his career, Isocrates begins to identify both Athens' Theseus and Sparta's Heracles with the same individual, Philip of Macedon.³⁶ The appeal to Philip's Heraclid ancestry is more conventional, while the *Panathenaicus*' revision of Theseus myth represents a

³² Azoulay 2006b.

³³ A problem with Isocrates' mythical speeches, the *Helen* and the *Busiris*, is that they lack the historical detail that would assist in dating. While there has been a tendency to treat them as early works, later dates might account better for the awareness of developments in Plato's thought (itself of course highly difficult to date); the difficulty in attempting to determine the relative dates of the *Busiris* and the *Republic* exemplifies this problem; Eucken 1983: 173-83 a late date, to maximise links to Platonic ideas, while others have argued for an earlier date (Livingstone 2001: 40-47).

³⁴ As in Xenophon's retelling of the story of the Choice of Heracles (Xen. *Mem.* 2.1). Heracles was also well-established in Athenian discourse (Galinsky 1972), and a presence in both fifth-century drama and fourth-century Socratic political theory (Giannantoni 1990: 4.309ff; Höistad 1948: 22-73).

³⁵ Mitchell 2008; see also Mills 1997; Walker 1994.

³⁶ *To Philip* 114, *Panathenaicus* 126-130.

significant innovation.³⁷ After 346, Isocrates has conceded, there is one super-power and that is Macedon, even though it is said that Athens' defeat at Chaeronea in 338, a few days before his death, broke his heart.³⁸

***Panegyricus* – positioning Sparta**

The *Panegyricus*, from 380 BCE, sets out Isocrates' view of the relationship between Athens and Sparta in the context of his Panhellenic programme. It is also his first attempt at the combination of epideictic and symbouleutic oratory, analysing current events and advising on how to proceed, the format of many of his subsequent works.³⁹ As the title suggests, it is modelled on the festival speech, using that established rhetorical genre to deliver written political analysis. That does not mean that it was delivered to a Panhellenic festival audience; it seems unlikely that this far-from-Laonic speech would persuade any actual Spartans to subscribe to Isocrates' worldview, or his political programme. His target audience for this speech, although ostensibly Panhellenic, is more likely to be Athenian, a small group of possibly Laconising elite politicians and intellectuals.⁴⁰ So the Sparta in this work is the Laconist imaginary Sparta, set against an equally imaginary Athens.

Isocrates' aim is to persuade all Greeks to unite behind Athens against Persia. He describes how Athens and Sparta are the leaders of the Greek world, each with their own followers or subjects, before concluding that they should end their rivalry and unite against the Persians (170-187). This survey is not an accurate view of historical realities at this point, when 'the power and influence of Athens were at a low ebb,' and the King's Peace or Peace of Antalcidas of 386 BCE had left the city humiliated and stripped of power, albeit not as complete as the defeat of 404 BCE.⁴¹ This was arguably the point at which Sparta was the most powerful Greek city of the Greek

³⁷ Atack 2014; Masaracchia 1995: 109-10; Roth 2003: 162. The Macedonian Temenid dynasty claimed descent from Temenus, a great-grandson of Heracles from Argos (see Hdt. 8.137-9 for a mythicised account of the Temenid origins of the Macedonian kings).

³⁸ ps-Plut. *Vit. Dec. Or.* 837e.

³⁹ Buchner 1958; Masaracchia 1995: 48-49.

⁴⁰ An audience, as noted above, made explicit in the person of the student with pro-Spartan sympathies in the later *Panathenaicus*. The views of this group are those identified by Malcolm Schofield, in his paper here, as the idealised view of Sparta evident in parts of Aristotle's *Politics*; Gray 1994.

⁴¹ Cartledge 1987: 196-99, 2002: 245-46; Norlin and Van Hook 1928-45: 1.116.

Imagined superpowers

mainland, a time at which deft and creative argument would be required to present Athens as its superior.⁴²

Isocrates uses myth to assert a perspective distinct from that offered by historical analysis, a perspective in which Sparta needs Athenian superiority; Athens provides the model that it should copy. Isocrates uses the mythical past to assert an Athenian domination that cannot be justified by the current political status quo. He surveys the current state of the Greek world, divided in terms of political influence and style of constitution between Athens and Sparta (16), before arguing that any external observer would think it madness (*μανίαν*) that the two cities remain in dispute with each other (133). He first needs to dismiss the Spartans' account of their claim to hegemony. Their 'false account' (*ψευδῆ λόγον*, 18) misrepresents their origins and is 'held in bad faith', or 'difficult to believe', *δυσπείστως*. What Isocrates is criticising is a Laconising account of politics, one circulating in Athens and taking Sparta as an originary paradigm for good laws and government.

Isocrates presents his version of the Athenian case at length. The stories of the great Athenian deeds are reinforced with the idea of Athens as first finder of a range of political and cultural goods, always prior and superior to Sparta. Athens has the first laws and constitution (*πρώτη γὰρ καὶ νόμους ἔθετο καὶ πολιτείαν κατεστήσατο*; 'it was the first to put laws in place and establish a constitution', 39), and its superiority was shown by Demeter and Kore bringing grain (28-33), and by the first fruits of wheat and barley still brought to Eleusis by other Greeks (31).⁴³ Although all the great deeds are mentioned here, the most significant is the help Athens gave to the Heraclids in defending them against Eurystheus and enabling them to retake the Peloponnese (61-63). This myth, familiar from tragedies such as Euripides' *Heraclidae*, defines the Athens-Sparta relationship throughout Isocrates' work, and will reappear, in different forms, throughout many of his speeches.⁴⁴ The Heraclid debt to the Athenians, safely positioned in the mythical past, will always outweigh recent history, and gratitude for the restoration of the Heraclids should prevent further Spartan invasions of Attica (62).

⁴² This was a relatively brief moment, as Xenophon notes (*Hell.* 5.3.27-5.4.1).

⁴³ Isocrates asserts the relevance of this *μυθώδης... λόγος* (28), arguing that the survival of the story provides some proof of its veracity (30), and that the continuing practice of sending first fruits provides separate contemporary corroboration for it (31).

⁴⁴ *Helen* 31, *Archidamus* 17.

Imagined superpowers

Isocrates' imaginary model generates the following conclusion. If Sparta is successful now, that is due to past Athenian generosity, and Sparta's recent successes reflect well on Athens. Whatever Sparta achieves in the present or the recent past, myth always positions it as Athens' supplicant and beneficiary.

Isocrates' argument shows that the story of the Heraclids is central to Athenian self-definition against Sparta.⁴⁵ It emphasises Athenian good rule and piety, that Athens is the more ancient city, and stresses Athenian autochthony in comparison with Dorian migration into the Peloponnese (24-25, 63). By this argument, even Sparta's heroic founder kings are more recent and weaker than their autochthonous Athenian counterparts. Sparta acts as the Other, the lesser power, and the persistence of myth means that it can never escape this identity, except by being mapped to a different mythical paradigm. Sparta cannot do this for itself; it can only be defended, as it is in the *Panathenaicus*, by its Athenian supporters.

Isocrates cannot completely overlook recent history, but by presenting Athenian dominance through myth the near past becomes secondary, filtered through the lens of an established hierarchy. Once he turns to recent events, his framework is established, and reinforced by comparing the 380s with the 5th century, when Athens could assert a claim to hegemony; Athens again is prior. Sparta is subjected to a harsh assessment, both of its military performance (85-98) and of its subsequent conduct as hegemonic power (123-133). In the Persian Wars, Isocrates suggests, Athens and Sparta competed with each other for honour as rivals (φιλοτίμως πρὸς ἀλλήλους εἶχον, 85) to obstruct the king, rather than enslave each other to him, and their contest was only in terms of which city should be regarded as the saviour of the Greeks, a common goal shared by both cities (τῆς κοινῆς σωτηρίας ὁμονοοῦντες, 85).⁴⁶

Isocrates' take on the Peace of Antalcidas assimilates current Spartan foreign policy to the distant past of the creation of Sparta and its enslavement of the surrounding cities, a theme further explored in the *Archidamus*.⁴⁷ In this new world, the Spartans

⁴⁵ Tigerstedt 1965: 186-87 suggests that all Heraclid references in Isocrates are a sop to Philip, but this seems unlikely by this date; the *Panegyricus* substantially pre-dates Philip's rise to power, and is closer to his 382 birth-date, so too early for Isocrates' to respond to Philip's rise.

⁴⁶ Cf. Hdt. 7.139. Cartledge 2013: 122-67 on the mythicisation of the battle of Plataea documents one focus of this rivalry; see also Blank 2014: 201-12.

⁴⁷ And also the focus of Plato's Spartan history in *Laws* III, which I read as, in part, a response to Isocrates' *Archidamus*.

Imagined superpowers

fail to uphold the values of the polis world; whereas once they overthrew tyrants, now they have reversed (μεταβεβλήκασιν, 125), their policy:

καὶ πρότερον μὲν τοὺς μὲν τυράννους ἐξέβαλλον, τῷ δὲ πλήθει τὰς βοηθείας ἐποιούντο, νῦν δὲ [εἰς] τοσοῦτον μεταβεβλήκασιν ὥστε ταῖς μὲν πολιτείαις πολεμοῦσιν, τὰς δὲ μοναρχίας συγκαθιστᾶσιν (125).

Previously they used to overthrow tyrants, and provide assistance to the people, but now they have reversed their policy to such an extent that they make war on constitutional governments and establish monarchies.

Where Athens established democracies, Sparta gives cities to the Persians to enslave. Sparta is here copying itself, mirroring its original activity in enslaving its neighbours and exporting oligarchic oppression (131), while failing to enslave barbarians to protect its Greek allies. Isocrates' language is clear here; Athens is the city of freedom, Sparta of slavery. The distortions of history presented here were recognised by Isocrates' contemporaries, notably Plato in the *Menexenus*.⁴⁸

It might seem difficult for Isocrates to go on to argue that Athens and Sparta should unite in a new campaign against the Persian king after subjecting Sparta to such sustained abuse. But, as this speech is not aimed at Spartans but at non-Spartan Laconists, the goal is to persuade them that their pro-Spartan enthusiasm is misplaced, that Spartan-led political change leads to domination and tyranny under the Persian king. Further, a Panhellenic expedition is the only cause that can unite the Greeks and spread *homonoia* across the Greek world (173). Although he presents it as an appeal to the whole Greek world, Isocrates uses opposition between Athens and Sparta to argue for unity within Athens, or intellectual unity among a segment of Athens.

Archidamus – the liminal Spartan

Isocrates did not have to wait long for Sparta to conform more closely to his analysis. Its brief period of hegemony ended at Leuctra in 371; after further reverses it faced a humiliating settlement including the confirmation of the loss of Messene, the main

⁴⁸ The Corinthian War (244d-245b) and Athens' continuing resistance to Persia (245b-246a) are the concluding elements of Socrates' funeral oration in Plato's *Menexenus*; that the speech is counterfactually given by Socrates, long dead at the dramatic date of the dialogue, emphasises the satire of Athenian rhetoric constructed by Plato.

Imagined superpowers

proposal at the peace conference in 366, although already a political reality.⁴⁹ The theme of separating Sparta and Messenia was an Athenian favourite, dating from the failed attempt to do so early in the Peloponnesian War. This in itself had generated patriotic tragedies on the theme, such as Euripides' *Cresphontes*, which dramatises the foundation myths of Messene that Isocrates will explore here.⁵⁰

In Isocrates' hands, the theme of Spartan national unity receives a paradoxical treatment, arguing against such a separation so vigorously that Dionysius of Halicarnassus regarded it as an exemplum of patriotism.⁵¹ Isocrates' commentary and proposals on this situation are placed in the mouth of Archidamus, son of one of the two ruling kings, Agesilaos. It is notable that Isocrates does not give this speech to a ruling king, or to an established or senior figure, but a relatively young man, a full adult at around 35 years of age, in the early stages of his political and military career (he had led Spartan recent campaigns against the Arcadians and Messenians), albeit one dictated by his status as effective crown prince.⁵²

The historical Archidamus III was a controversial figure. His youthful interventions in Spartan politics, in the Sphodrias affair (378 BCE), had precipitated a crisis in Sparta. His intervention helped to secure Sphodrias' acquittal after the latter's disastrous raid on the Piraeus, recounted by Xenophon as a paradigm of Spartan bad leadership.⁵³ Isocrates' selection of him as mouthpiece therefore seems pointed and to set up possible ironic readings of the surface praise for Sparta. In letting a junior and controversial Spartan speak, he re-iterates his usual presentation of Sparta as junior and inferior.⁵⁴ Thomas Blank suggests that Isocrates presents Archidamus as an Athenian demagogue.⁵⁵

Some have suggested that Isocrates is using the young Archidamus to comment on the Peloponnesian war activities of Archidamus II, themselves interpreted through Thucydides' structured account.⁵⁶ The earlier Archidamus had led the allied

⁴⁹ Xenophon *Hell.* 7.4.7-10; Cartledge 2002: 256-7; Cartledge 1987: 387-8.

⁵⁰ Bremmer 1997: 13-17; Collard and Cropp 2008. See also Edith Hall's paper.

⁵¹ DH *De Isoc* 9.

⁵² Cartledge 1987: 387.

⁵³ Xen *Hell* 5.4.20-33; Blank 2014: 312-15; Cartledge 1987: 136-38.

⁵⁴ Isocrates' letter to Archidamus, if genuine, may provide evidence of a connection between Isocrates and the prince, but it seems more likely that it is a derivative work (cf. Smith 1940).

⁵⁵ Blank 2014: xxx.

⁵⁶ Th. 1.80.1; Azoulay 2006a: 529-30.

Imagined superpowers

Peloponnesian forces' attacks on Athenian ally Plataea, an attempt to sever territory that was joined; the younger Archidamus effectively opposes his grandfather's political strategy and military tactics. Isocratean comparison and balance are very thorough.

But although Archidamus is young, he makes grand claims to authority based on his proximity to royal power and his descent from Heracles (γεγονὼς μὲν ἀφ' Ἡρακλέους, τοῦ δὲ πατρὸς βασιλεύοντος; '(I was) born from the line of Heracles, while my father was a ruling king', 8). He will make careful use of this mythology to further his argument; he also wants to present himself as an Achilles figure, willing to risk early death for future glory (8). His goal is to prevent *oiketai* from ruling Messenia (8), an aim that is dismissive of the altered political status of the Messenians, released from Spartan rule.

Sophie Gotteland has shown in detail how the presentation of Heraclid myth in this speech (17-21) is carefully selected to avoid mention of Athens' role in that myth, in contrast with the *Panegyricus* where it became the focus.⁵⁷ The episodes where the Heraclids seek Athenian support against Eurystheus, are passed over here in a brief reference to the return to Dorian lands after the death of Eurystheus.

Archidamus begins by asserting the Heraclid claims to the various parts of Spartan territories. The claim to Messene is separate, given in a second level of argument, after the claim to Lacedaemon and other regions has been proven (16).⁵⁸ The Spartans gained Messene from the heirs of the Heraclid Cresphontes, after they had been displaced by his killers (22).⁵⁹ The children of Cresphontes promised their territory to the Spartans, if they could avenge their father (23). That Cresphontes had originally secured Messene by trickery is omitted from this version (24). Isocrates creates a parallel between Athenian service to the Heraclids, and Heraclid service to the Cresphontids, perhaps hinting at an original Athenian generosity in not claiming Spartan territory at the time of the Heraclids. The structure of the story of Heraclid support to the Cresphontids mirrors that of the Athenian aid to the Heraclids, with this pointed difference.

⁵⁷ Gotteland 1998: 385-86.

⁵⁸ Gotteland 1998: 384.

⁵⁹ Paus. 4.3.3-8; 8.5.6-7; cf. Euripides *Cresphontes* (see Collard and Cropp 2008: 493-95 for a discussion of the context of Euripides' play).

Imagined superpowers

Again, once a mythical framework has been constructed, Isocrates positions Archidamus' plans within it. The prince suggests that the Spartans should evacuate the vast majority of inhabitants from Sparta and fight a guerrilla campaign from a new location (73-74). Vincent Azoulay has suggested that the plans suggested by Archidamus re-enact the Spartan *crypteia*.⁶⁰ By presenting Archidamus as an ephebic figure, fighting from the margins, rather than engaging in full-scale adult conflict, Isocrates further underlines the junior status of Sparta. Archidamus' proposal conforms to the Athenian view of Sparta, or at least to the Spartan mirage. He does not propose heroic hoplite fighting to death in battle formation, the other paradigm of Spartan military activity typified by Thermopylae, and grudgingly acknowledged by Isocrates elsewhere.⁶¹

Archidamus is clear that Athens was the first to employ this strategy, in its evacuation during the Persian Wars (83); the Athenians evacuated their city for the common benefit of Greece, rather than simply their own good. Isocrates is suggesting that Sparta should restore itself from this low point by replaying Athenian history, and the Athenian response to disaster; Sparta should provide an example (*παράδειγμα*) for others by 'imitating the deeds of the Athenians' (*μιμήσασθαι τὰς ἐκείνων πράξεις*, 83).⁶² Again, this repeats the structure generated in the mythical section, where Spartans copied Athenians in helping supplicants; Spartans would succeed by copying a model already proven by Athenians. But they would act purely for their own benefit, not like Athens, acting for the benefit of all Hellenes. Spartan ambition is narrowly circumscribed.

Throughout the speech, Archidamus is little more than a cipher for Isocrates' political models, especially when compared with other Isocratean young princes.⁶³ The Spartan prince is much less assured in his performance than Nicocles, also a young man but one who is assuming power after the death of his much-praised father Evagoras. Nicocles, from the small and once Persian-ruled polis of Salamis on Cyprus, should be a more marginal figure, but Isocrates has a special affection for the rulers of Salamis. The *Nicocles* sees its youthful speaker set out a confident presentation of the special qualities of monarchy as a political regime (*Nic.* 25-26). He delivers Isocrates'

⁶⁰ Azoulay 2006a.

⁶¹ *Archidamus* 99-106; contrasting with *Panegyricus* 92, *Philippus* 148, *Panathenaicus* 187.

⁶² Mossé 1953.

⁶³ Blank 2014: 315-17.

Imagined superpowers

most complete account of his theory of virtue monarchy (29-42, esp. 37-38), in which the king says 'I set up my own conduct as a model for the other citizens', ἅμα δὲ παράδειγμα καταστήσαι τὸν τρόπον τὸν ἐμαυτοῦ τοῖς ἄλλοις πολίταις (37).

Archidamus, in comparison, merely exhorts his people to leave their city and fight like ephebes (*Archidamus* 73-74), providing an example by imitating the Athenians. Isocrates explains this difference; Sparta, like Carthage, is an oligarchic polity at home (οἴκοι μὲν ὀλιγαρχουμένους, *Nic.* 24) which becomes a kingdom on the battlefield (...παρὰ δὲ τὸν πόλεμον βασιλευμένους). At home, Spartans are part of a mixed oligarchical system, one that Isocrates criticises extensively elsewhere for the performance of its institutions. This claim, that Spartan kings exercise monarchical power only when on campaign outside Sparta, explains Isocrates' general lack of interest in Spartan kings, despite his overall enthusiasm for monarchy, or at least the unique contribution that monarchs can make as moral exemplars.⁶⁴ Sparta's kings cannot be treated, as Evagoras and Nicocles are, as exemplars of virtue monarchy.⁶⁵

Athens and Sparta as superpowers and the rise of Macedon

Isocrates takes a different approach in addressing the truly powerful, as shown in his *To Philip* (346 BCE), which also concerns a single ruler, but one recognised by Isocrates as the most powerful of rulers. This work is separated from the *Archidamus* by about 20 years, and even further from the *Panegyricus* in which Athens and Sparta are plausible contenders for the hegemony of Greece.⁶⁶ Isocrates can no longer attach superpower status to any of the present-day Greek *poleis*; only Philip of Macedon is now capable of taking on the role of Panhellenic leadership that Isocrates had previously assigned to Athens over Sparta. In a survey of Greek cities, Isocrates finds that none of Sparta (47-50), Argos (51-52) or Thebes (53-55) is in any position to assume this role, although he does not argue his case against Athens (56).⁶⁷ But although the *Philip* can be read in the context of Isocrates' political and intellectual

⁶⁴ Although Thomas Blank concludes (2014: 610-11) that Spartan kingship is the part of the Spartan *politeia* most admired by Isocrates, this hardly constitutes an Isocratean endorsement of Sparta.

⁶⁵ Aristotle *Politics* 3.13-18, especially 3.16-17 on the possibility of the absolute monarch or *pambasileus*.

⁶⁶ Mathieu 1925: 155-6, followed by Norlin and Van Hook 1928-45: I.244-45 and Markle 1976: 80, base this composition date on the date of the Peace of Philocrates.

⁶⁷ Isocrates had already written an analysis of the comparative misfortunes of Athens and Sparta as imperial powers in *On the Peace*, probably written around 355 BCE; this includes a scathing indictment of Spartan weakness as an imperial power (95-8), and of both cities' abandonment of their ancestral customs, which he likens, in the case of Sparta, to maintaining a relationship with a courtesan (103).

Imagined superpowers

position at Athens, it also marks an important change in his assessment of Sparta, beyond the historical survey of its political decline.⁶⁸

One might read Isocrates' self-portrait in this speech as an analogy for the enfeebled state of Athens herself. He emphasises his great age and the weakness it causes, almost as if he is the aged, weakened city of Athens himself (27), emphasising the difference between himself/Athens and Philip/Macedon. Too's 'politics of the small voice' become explicit in this work, creating a space in which Isocrates can correspond with the Macedonian king separately from Athenian public debate on the rise of Macedon.⁶⁹

Isocrates follows his methodological restatement (81-2) with a survey of the capabilities of individual Greek leaders of the historical and mythical past. He compares Philip with the historical leaders of major expeditions, as a potential leader against the Persian king. On the historical side, Isocrates focuses on two Spartan leaders, Agesilaos in his abandoned venture towards Persian territory (86-8), and Clearchus, the Spartan leader of the mercenary expeditionary force that supported Cyrus the Younger's failed attempt to win the Persian throne (93-98).⁷⁰ The Persian kings, who defeated the expeditionary force and remained unthreatened by Greek opposition, also enter the comparison. In this company, Agesilaos looks less impressive; he could not complete the expedition he had planned and created risk for all the Greeks, and domestic dispute reduced his capacity to carry out his plans ('on account of the unrest happening there he had neither the leisure nor the capacity to make war against the barbarians', *διὰ δὲ τὴν ταραχὴν τὴν ἐνθάδε γινομένην μὴ σχολὴν ἄγειν μηδὲ δύνασθαι πολεμεῖν τοῖς βαρβάροις*, 87). Agesilaos' plan lacked a single purpose (such as the attack on Persia that Isocrates proposes), and the Spartan king could not meet all his goals even before domestic events forced him to turn back. Clearchus, too, was inexperienced; Philip is the clear winner of a comparison with him (97-8).⁷¹

Although this speech addresses precise political issues, and contains historical analysis, Isocrates retains and re-uses his mythological framework. Heracles and the

⁶⁸ Bringmann 1965: 103-08; Markle 1976; S. Perlman 1957, 1969.

⁶⁹ *To Philip* 81-82; Too 1995: 74-89.

⁷⁰ It is not clear to what extent Isocrates' analysis here depends on that of Xenophon's critical portrait of the Spartan general (Xen. *Ana.* 2.6.1-15).

⁷¹ Markle 1976: 84.

Imagined superpowers

Heraclids, the symbols of Sparta, are re-evaluated and repositioned to match them to the Macedonian king. Whereas he had presented the Spartan prince Archidamus touting his Heraclid ancestry to win support from the Spartans, Isocrates now appeals to Philip to position himself and operate through the imagery of Heracles, to win the support of all the Greeks (32-4).⁷²

The Heraclid ancestry of Macedonia's Temenid dynasty makes this change possible, and enables Isocrates to position Philip within the same model that he had previously used to discuss Sparta and its kings. Philip's ancestral links to the four main Greek cities should lead to friendly relations between them, because of past benefits conferred ('much friendship and great benefits', πολλήν φιλίαν... καὶ μεγάλας εὐεργεσίας, 32). Athens has a special status, beyond that of the others, in preserving the lives of the children of Heracles; without Athens' support, Philip's line would not exist and enjoy its current good fortune ('they both live and enjoy their current good situation on account of us', διὰ γὰρ ἡμᾶς καὶ ζῶσι καὶ τῶν ὑπαρχόντων ἀγαθῶν ἀπολαύουσι, 34).⁷³

But while the Spartans are always presented as the descendants of the Heraclids, Isocrates makes a distinctive change in comparing Philip directly to Heracles himself. This subtle distinction plays an important role in Isocrates' conclusion to the speech; Philip is not just a Heraclid but a potential Heracles, who can 'consider the whole Greek world to be his country' (ἅπασαν τὴν Ἑλλάδα πατρίδα νομίζειν, *To Philip* 127) 'just like the one who begot you all' (ὥσπερ ὁ γεννήσας ὑμᾶς). The comparison is appropriate in terms of Philip's relation to the Greek cities, because both Heracles and Philip can be represented as outsider benefactors.

But Philip's identity as a Heraclid remains important too. It marks him as irrefutably a Hellene, distinct from the non-Greeks he rules ('others', ἄλλους, 107; 'not a people of the same ancestry', οὐχ ὁμοφύλου γένους, 108).⁷⁴ This distinction between ruler (Greek) and ruled (the non-Greek Macedonian subjects) legitimises Philip's kingship, and sets Macedonian monarchy apart from the faults of tyranny normally associated

⁷² Höistad 1948: 48-49.

⁷³ *Apolausis* as a concept in fourth-century Greek political thought often conveys the idea of free-riding or enjoying the benefits of others' political labour; cf. Xen. *Cyr.* 7.56, *Mem.* 1.6.2, Plato *Rep.* 1.330d2, and further discussion in Aristotle's *Politics* (*Pol.* 1.10.1258a3, 5.11.1314b28).

⁷⁴ Although Isocrates regards the Macedonians as non-Hellenes, they are not barbarians either, simply a *genos* distinct from the Hellenes.

Imagined superpowers

with one-man rule (107-8); it is a distinctive form of kingship ('the kingship became differed much from others', τὴν βασιλείαν γεγενῆσθαι πολὺ τῶν ἄλλων ἐξηλλαγμένην, 108) that has not brought the destruction that tyranny brings to ruler and ruled alike. Greeks are not able to accept such rule, but Philip's subjects are. This distinction separates Philip from the Persian king, a barbarian ruling over other barbarians as a despot, but with whom he otherwise can be compared in terms of extent of power and military capability, and provides the structure with which Isocrates closes the speech, presenting Philip as protector of the Greeks in freeing them from the risk of barbarian despotism (154).

Heracles is a good exemplar for Isocrates to provide for Philip, because he also led a Greek campaign against Troy (111-12), defeating the city much more easily than the later Greek expedition did. Heracles also enjoyed a Panhellenic status (127), which Isocrates urges Philip to share. The Spartan Heraclids, on the other hand, are effectively marginalised by Isocrates' presentation of Philip as the descendant of Heracles with the potential to match his deeds, while Athenians can console themselves with Heracles' dependence on their own Theseus and the Heraclids (34). If Isocrates' Athens needs a partner for an expedition against Persia, Philip is the best candidate, Heracles and Theseus engaged in a joint venture. Isocrates' final speech will take this argument further.

***Panathenaicus* – last words**

The *Panathenaicus*, written at the very end of Isocrates' long career, contains his most complex statements on Sparta. Like the *Philip*, the *Panathenaicus* is represented as written in distinct phases, and suffering from the declining health of its extremely aged author.⁷⁵ However, its use of reported speech represents a more explicit engagement with philosophical dialogue than elsewhere in his work; this seems to represent a direct engagement with the Academy, as is suggested by the mention of mathematics, science and eristic dialogue (26).⁷⁶ That this dialogue discusses and problematises the assessment of Sparta shows the importance of Sparta within Isocrates' imaginary, even when it is presented negatively.

⁷⁵ Panath. 1-4, 34. It also continues some of the structural devices used in the *Philip*, particularly the theme of amending existing works in response to criticism; Athenian criticism of Isocrates' views in the opening section of the *Philip*, the Spartan sympathiser's critique of Isocrates' views on Sparta here: Gray 1994: 248-51 shows the precise structural similarities of the *Philip* and *To Nicocles*.

⁷⁶ Blank 2014: 510-15; Murphy 2013: 316.

Imagined superpowers

Sparta, although rejected by Isocrates as a potential partner for Athenian military adventures, remained an important cultural construct against which Isocrates defines Athenian excellence. Vivienne Gray has shown how the opposition between Sparta and Athens is central to Isocrates' complex argument, and that Isocrates must intend the criticisms he makes within the epilogue to the speech to be treated as valid and significant.⁷⁷ Sparta, despite Isocrates' insistence on its deficiencies, remains central to his imaginary constructions, perhaps because of its continuing appeal to his Athenian rivals, although their enthusiasm for Sparta might now seem an easy target. Sparta has itself become a symbol in Isocrates' imaginary world for the intellectual opposition that the Academy represented. A further benefit of identifying Isocrates' intellectual rivals with the Sparta they praised is that Isocrates can then use his Athens/Sparta opposition to represent himself as the true Athenian patriot. His patriotism had been suspect precisely because of his interest in and partiality for Philip.

In the extended critique of Sparta generated by this new use of the opposition, Sparta's political arrangements are represented as a copy, secondary and inferior to Athens, even in respect of its praised constitution (153-4); Lycurgus created his *politeia* not through 'discovery or intellectual effort', εὐρόντος ἢ διανοηθέντος, but through *mimesis*, μιμησαμένου, of the 'best possible example of government provided by the ancestral Athenians', τὴν διοίκησιν ὡς δυνατὸν ἄριστα τὴν τῶν προγόνων τῶν ἡμετέρων. Isocrates emphasises this critique by returning to it throughout the speech.⁷⁸

However, he was not the only political theorist to challenge the priority granted to Sparta's Lycurgus in this way. Aristotle points to arguments that the Spartan constitution is modelled on Crete, while Plato in the *Laws* regards them as closely related.⁷⁹ Isocrates' critique of the Spartan constitution is part of this dialogue within Athens. For Isocrates, the Athenian *patrios politeia*, in place when the city was guided by the aristocratic Areopagus Council, is the best possible form of government, or rather, as in this final statement, the best possible version with which to succeed the

⁷⁷ Gray 1994: 228-9.

⁷⁸ Gray 1994

⁷⁹ Plato *Leg.* 1.628e, 630d, 634de, Aristotle *Pol.* 2.10.1271b22-24; P. Perlman 1992.

Imagined superpowers

ideal virtue monarchy of Theseus.⁸⁰ This vision of an idealised Athenian politics as a deliberate mixture of aristocracy and democracy (τὴν τε δημοκρατίαν καταστήσαντος παρ' αὐτοῖς τὴν ἀριστοκρατίαν μεμιγμένην, ἥπερ ἦν παρ' ἡμῖν, 153), an interpretation that Isocrates had long espoused, makes the assertion that the Athenian ancestral constitution is the model for Lycurgan Sparta more plausible than a more conventional reading of the non-idealised deficiencies identified in Athenian democracy would have done.⁸¹

Isocrates also revisits the other mythical models with which he expresses his political analysis. Theseus' handover of Athens to the people now mirrors Philip's departure from Macedon on campaign (129), in contrast with the *Helen* (*Helen* 36), where the people insist on his continuing rule.⁸² Throughout the historical Athenian democracy, Theseus the democratic king served as a symbol of Athenian citizenship, a super-everyman who represented the citizen in the confines of the tragic stage. Thucydides used Theseus myth to explore Pericles' deeds, the confrontation between Athenian ideals and practicalities as land was abandoned at the outbreak of war.⁸³ Isocrates' bold move here is to identify Philip, barely regarded as Greek at all by his opponents, with the most important and unifying figure in Athenian political myth.

This is a significant move because it marks a new version of the idea of the mixed constitution, in which the monarchical element exists without being a permanent physical presence in the polis. Isocrates' analysis of Spartan kingship, and his view that the Spartan kings were most truly kings when on campaign outside Sparta (*Nic.* 24), must contribute to this model, although here it is Theseus' campaigns that provide the explicit model for the hands-off relationship that a king should have with a polis. This new model provides a way to combine the monarchical rule of a polis with the self-rule of the polis, a political problem that would emerge in the Macedonian conquest of the polis world.

However, Isocrates does not draw the reader's attention to the bold reconstruction of patriotic myth that the return to the Theseus story contains, but to his criticism of Sparta. The remarkable dialogue scene (*Panath.* 199-232), in which a Laconist

⁸⁰ An argument made most fully in Isocrates' *Areopagiticus*.

⁸¹ Blank 2013: 19 suggests that Isocrates' point is that the Athenian and Spartan ancestral constitutions are the same, due to their common origin.

⁸² See n. 37 above.

⁸³ Calame 1996; Mills 1997; Walker 1994.

Imagined superpowers

student critiques Isocrates' attacks on Sparta, is emphasised over the other innovations within Isocrates' argument.⁸⁴ This dialogue is far from the cut and thrust of Socratic debate, and closer to the ponderous exchanges of the Athenian Stranger and his Cretan and Spartan foils in Plato's *Laws*, also its author's final work, although probably composed about a decade earlier than the *Panathenaicus*. The *Laws* too is concerned with the establishment and imitation of constitutions, and the limitations of Sparta as a model for the ideal city.

Sparta remains a useful way to label the political inclinations of Isocrates' rivals. But again, his mythological framework shows that he and Athens occupy the prime positions of teacher and original, the student a clone of Isocrates and Sparta a clone of Athens. The opposition between Athens and Sparta has become an intellectual opposition, but one in which Isocrates, in his conclusion (*Panath.* 264-272) can present himself as an original compared with the student copyists (and by implication, their other teachers). Even though the opposition of Athens and Sparta as superpowers is by this stage possible only within this imaginary space, it remains a useful structure for Isocrates.

Conclusion

Isocrates' long writing career covered many changes in the balance of power between Greek cities, and the most suitable leader for the Panhellenic projects for which he argued. However, in framing his analysis in terms of the mythical past, he was able to emphasise those aspects of change and continuity that best supported his views. He never regards Sparta as Athens' equal, but uses the city and its culture to show Athenian pre-eminence. Athens' superiority is established from mythical times; even at the height of Sparta's success, Isocrates is able to argue that this only reflects Athenian strengths in establishing the Heraclids. But in a sense Sparta itself becomes a symbol for Isocrates, representing the Academy as his rival in educating the Athenian elite. This symbolic use of the Athens-Sparta opposition enables Isocrates to reassert the patriotism made questionable by his willingness to accommodate Philip's ambitions.

⁸⁴ Gray 1994 provides a compelling analysis of the use of Sparta in this speech, and addresses the use of Athens and Sparta as symbols of rival forms of education (259-261); see also T. Blank 2014: 563-79 and Murphy 2013.

Imagined superpowers

The traditions of the Athenian civic imaginary, the patriotic rhetoric in funeral and festival speeches, provide a foundation which Isocrates can reshape in the new written discourse of political argument and analysis which he develops. The Isocratean imaginary differs substantially from that democratic ideal of the fifth-century version identified by Castoriadis. Although Isocrates draws on the myths of Athenian funeral speeches that present this imaginary vision of the city, his adaptations and inventions of patriotic myth have much in common with Plato's use of myth to create political alternatives to the usual narratives of Athenian democracy.

The emphasis on the virtuous individual as political actor creates a space within which Isocrates can praise Spartan kingship as part of the desirable mixture of elements within an ideal constitution. But in his imaginary model these elements of the Spartan constitution originate in the Athenian ancestral constitution, in which Theseus represents an instance of kingship superior to the limited successes of historical Spartan kings such as Agesilaus.

Bibliography

- Allen, D.S. (2000), 'Changing the Authoritative Voice: Lycurgus' *Against Leocrates*', *Cl. Ant.*, 19 (1), 5-33.
- Anderson, B.R.O.G. (1991) *Imagined Communities: reflections on the origin and spread of nationalism* (Rev. and extended edn.; London: Verso).
- Atack, C. (2010), 'Ancestral constitutions in fourth-century BCE Athenian political argument: genre and re-invention', MPhil dissertation (University of Cambridge.).
- (2014), 'The discourse of kingship in classical Athenian thought', *Histos*, 8, 329-62. <<http://research.ncl.ac.uk/histos/documents/2014A12AtackDiscourseofKingship.pdf>>.
- Azoulay, V. (2006a), 'L'Archidamos d'Isocrate: une politique de l'espace et du temps', *Rev. Ét. Grec.*, 119 (2), 504-31.
- (2006b), 'Isocrate, Xénophon ou Le Politique Transfiguré', *REA*, 108, 133-53.
- Balot, R.K. (2014) *Courage in the Democratic Polis: ideology and critique in classical Athens* (Oxford: Oxford University Press).
- Baragwanath, E. (2012), 'The mythic plupast in Herodotus', in J. Grethlein and C.B. Krebs (eds.), *Time and Narrative in Ancient Historiography: the 'plupast' from Herodotus to Appian* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press), 35-56.
- Blank, T.G.M. (2014) *Logos und Praxis: Sparta als politisches Exemplum in den Schriften des Isokrates* (Berlin: De Gruyter).
- (2013), 'Isocrates on paradoxical discourse: An analysis of *Helen* and *Busiris*', *Rhetorica*, 31 (1), 1-33.
- Bloom, A.D. (1955), 'The Political Philosophy of Isocrates', PhD Dissertation (University of Chicago).
- Bottici, C. (2007) *A Philosophy of Political Myth* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press).
- Bremmer, J.N. (1997), 'Myth as Propaganda: Athens and Sparta', *ZPE*, 117, 9-17.
- Bringmann, K. (1965) *Studien Zu Den Politischen Ideen Des Isokrates* (Göttingen: Vandenhoeck u. Ruprecht).
- Buchner, E. (1958) *Der Panegyrikos des Isokrates: eine historisch-philologische Untersuchung* (Wiesbaden: F. Steiner).

Imagined superpowers

- Calame, C. (1996) *Thésée et l'imaginaire athénien: légende et culte en Grèce antique* (2nd. edn.; Lausanne: Editions Payot).
- (1998), '« Mûthos », « lógos » et histoire : usages du passé héroïque dans la rhétorique grecque', *L'Homme*, 147, 127-49.
- Carter, D.M. (ed.), (2011), *Why Athens? a reappraisal of tragic politics* (Oxford: Oxford University Press).
- Cartledge, P. (1987) *Agesilaos and the Crisis of Sparta* (London: Duckworth).
- (2002) *Sparta and Lakonia: A Regional History, 1300-362 BC* (2nd edn.; London: Routledge).
- (2013) *After Thermopylae: The Oath of Plataea and the End of the Graeco-Persian War* (New York: Oxford University Press).
- Castoriadis, C. (1987) [1975], *The Imaginary Institution of Society*, trans. K. Blamey (Cambridge: Polity).
- (1991), 'The Greek Polis and the Creation of Democracy', in *Philosophy, Politics, Autonomy* ed. & trans. D.A. Curtis (Oxford: Oxford University Press), 81-123.
- (1997), 'The Greek and the Modern Political Imaginary', in *World in Fragments*, trans. D.A. Curtis (Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press), 84-107.
- Cloch e, P. (1963) *Isocrate et Son Temps* (Paris: Les Belles Lettres).
- Collard, C. and Cropp, M. (2008) *Euripides: Fragments*, 2 vols. (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press).
- Davidson, J. (1990), 'Isocrates against Imperialism: An Analysis of the *De Pace*', *Historia*, 39 (1), 20-36.
- Eidinow, E. (2016) *Envy, Poison and Death: women on trial in classical Athens* (Oxford: Oxford University Press).
- Eucken, C. (1983) *Isokrates: Seine Positionen in Der Auseinandersetzung Mit Den Zeitgen ossischen Philosophen* (Berlin: de Gruyter).
- (2010), 'Der platonische « Menexenos » und der « Panegyrikos » des Isokrates', *MH*, 67 (3), 131-45.
- Finley, M.I. (1965), 'Myth, Memory, and History', *History and Theory*, 4 (3), 281-302.
- (1975)[1971], 'The Ancestral Constitution', in M.I. Finley, *The Use and Abuse of History* (London: Chatto & Windus), 34-59.
- Flood, C. (1996) *Political Myth: a theoretical introduction* (New York, NY: Garland).
- Foxhall, L., Gehrke, H.-J., and Luraghi, N. (eds.) (2010), *Intentional History: spinning time in ancient Greece* (Stuttgart: F. Steiner).

Imagined superpowers

- Galinsky, K. (1972) *The Herakles theme: the adaptations of the hero in literature from Homer to the twentieth century* (Oxford: Blackwell).
- Gehrke, H.-J. (2011), 'Myth, history, politics – ancient and modern', trans. M. Beck, in J. Marincola (ed.), *Greek and Roman Historiography*, (Oxford: Oxford University Press), 40-71.
- Giannantoni, G. (1990) *Socratis et Socraticorum reliquiae* (4 vols; Naples: Bibliopolis).
- Gotteland, S. (1998), 'Généalogies mythiques et politique chez les orateurs attiques', in D. Auger and S. Saïd (eds.), *Généalogies Mythiques* (Paris: Les Belles Lettres), 379-93.
- (2001) *Mythe et Rhétorique: Les Exemples Mythiques Dans Le Discours Politique De l'Athènes Classique* (Paris: Les Belles lettres).
- Gray, V.J. (1994), 'Images of Sparta: Writer and Audience in Isocrates' *Panathenaicus*', in A. Powell and S. Hodkinson (eds.), *The Shadow of Sparta* (London: Routledge), 223-72.
- Griffin, J. (1998), 'The Social Function of Attic Tragedy', *CQ*, 48 (1), 39-61.
- Harding, P. (1973), 'The Purpose of Isokrates' *Archidamos* and *On the Peace*', *California Studies in Classical Antiquity*, 6, 137-49.
- (2008) *The Story of Athens: the fragments of the local chronicles of Attika* (London: Routledge).
- Haskins, E.V. (2004) *Logos and Power in Isocrates and Aristotle* (Columbia, SC: University of South Carolina Press).
- Höistad, R. (1948) *Cynic Hero and Cynic King: studies in the Cynic conception of man* (Uppsala).
- Jacoby, F. (1949) *Atthis, the local chronicles of ancient Athens* (Oxford: Clarendon Press).
- (1954) *Die Fragmente der griechischen Historiker: commentary (T.3, Geschichte von Staedten und Voelkern (Horographie und Ethnographie). b (supplement), Commentary on the ancient historians of Athens (nos. 323a-334)*; Leiden: E.J. Brill).
- Kehl, H. (1962), 'Die Monarchie im politischen Denken des Isokrates', PhD dissertation (Friedrich-Wilhelms-Univ, Bonn).
- Lane, M.S. (1997) *Method and Politics in Plato's Statesman* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press).

Imagined superpowers

- Leyden, W. von (1949-50), 'Spatium Historicum: the historical past as viewed by Hecataeus, Herodotus and Thucydides', *Durham University Journal*, 11, 89-104.
- Livingstone, N. (2001) *A Commentary on Isocrates' Busiris* (Leiden: Brill).
- Loraux, N. (1976), 'Problèmes Grecs de la Démocratie Moderne', *Critique*, 32 (355 (Décembre)), 1276-87.
- (1981) *L'invention d'Athènes: histoire de l'oraison funèbre dans la 'cité classique'* (Paris: Mouton).
- (1986) *The Invention of Athens: The Funeral Oration in the Classical City*, trans. A. Sheridan (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press).
- Markle, M.M., III (1976), 'Support of Athenian Intellectuals for Philip: A Study of Isocrates' *Philippus* and Speusippus' *Letter to Philip*', *JHS*, 96, 80-99.
- Masaracchia, A. (1995) *Isocrate: retorica e politica* (Roma: GEI).
- Mathieu, G. (1925) *Les Idées Politiques d'Isocrate* (Paris: Les Belles Lettres).
- Mills, S. (1997) *Theseus, Tragedy, and the Athenian Empire* (Oxford: Clarendon Press).
- Mitchell, L.G. (2008), 'Thucydides and the Monarch in Democracy', *Polis*, 25 (1), 1-30.
- Morgan, K.A. (1998), 'Designer History: Plato's Atlantis Story and Fourth-Century Ideology', *JHS*, 118, 101-18.
- (2012), 'Plato and the Stability of History', in J. Marincola, L. Llewellyn-Jones, and C. Maciver (eds.), *Greek Notions of the Past in the Archaic and Classical Eras: History Without Historians* (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press), 227-52.
- Mossé, C. (1953), 'Sur un passage de l'Archidamos d'Isocrate', *REA*, 55, 29-35.
- Murphy, D.J. (2013), 'Isocrates and the Dialogue', *Classical World*, 106 (6), 311-53.
- Nickau, K. (1990), 'Mythos und Logos bei Herodot', in W. Ax (ed.), *Memoria rerum veterum: neue Beiträge zur antiken Historiographie und alten Geschichte: Festschrift für Carl Joachim Classen zum 60. Geburtstag* (Stuttgart: Steiner), 83-100.
- Norlin, G. and Van Hook, L.R. (1928-45) *Isocrates*, 3 vols. (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press).
- Ober, J. (1998) *Political Dissent in Democratic Athens: Intellectual Critics of Popular Rule* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press).

Imagined superpowers

- Ollier, F. (1943) *Le Mirage Spartiate: Étude Sur L'idéalisation De Sparte Dans L'antiquité Grecque Du Début De L'école Cynique Jusqu'à La Fin De La Cité* (Paris: Les Belles Lettres).
- Perlman, P. (1992), 'One Hundred-Citied Crete and the "Cretan Politeia"', *C Phil*, 87 (3), 193-205.
- Perlman, S. (1957), 'Isocrates' *Philippus*: A Reinterpretation', *Historia*, 6 (3), 306-17.
--- (1969), 'Isocrates' *Philippus* and Panhellenism', *Historia*, 18 (3), 370-74.
- Poulakos, T. (1997) *Speaking for the Polis: Isocrates' Rhetorical Education* (Columbia, S.C: University of South Carolina Press).
- Rhodes, P.J. (1990), 'The Atthidographers', in H. Verdin, G. Schepens, and E. de Keyser (eds.), *Purposes of History: studies in Greek historiography from the 4th to the 2nd centuries B.C.: proceedings of the international Colloquium Leuven, 24-26 May 1988* (Leuven: Kathol. Universiteit), 73-81.
--- (2014) *Atthis: the ancient histories of Athens* (Heidelberg: Verlag Antike).
- Roth, P. (2003) *Der Panathenaikos Des Isokrates: Übersetzung Und Kommentar* (München: K.G. Saur).
- Saïd, S. (1998), 'Tragedy and politics', in D. Boedeker and K.A. Raaflaub (eds.), *Democracy, Empire, and the Arts in Fifth-century Athens* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press), 275-95.
--- (2007), 'Myth and History', in J. Marincola (ed.), *A Companion to Greek and Roman Historiography* (Vol 1; Oxford: Blackwell), 76-88.
- Schepens, G. (1977), 'Historiographical problems in Ephorus', in T. Reekmans, E. Van 't Dack, and H. Verdin (eds.), *Historiographia antiqua. Commentationes Lovanienses in honorem W. Peremans septuagenarii editae* (Leuven: Leuven University Press), 95-118.
- Seaford, R. (2000), 'The Social Function of Attic Tragedy: A Response to Jasper Griffin', *CQ*, 50 (1), 30-44.
- Smith, L.F. (1940) *The Genuineness of the Ninth and Third Letters of Isocrates* (Lancaster, Pa.).
- Taylor, C. (2004) *Modern Social Imaginaries* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press).
- Tigerstedt, E.N. (1965) *The Legend of Sparta in Classical Antiquity* (Stockholm: Almqvist & Wiksell).
- Too, Y.L. (1995) *The Rhetoric of Identity in Isocrates: Text, Power, Pedagogy* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press).

Imagined superpowers

--- (2008) *A Commentary on Isocrates' Antidosis* (Oxford: Oxford University Press).

Tudor, H. (1972) *Political Myth* (London: Pall Mall Press).

Walker, H.J. (1994) *Theseus and Athens* (New York: Oxford University Press).

Wareh, T. (2012) *The Theory and Practice of Life: Isocrates and the philosophers* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press).