GENOCIDE IN ARCHAIC AND CLASSICAL GREECE

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"Chares the Athenian general sailed into the Hellespont and captured the city of Sestos, then executed the adult men and sold the rest into slavery" (Diodorus 16.34.3). Massacres of this type are familiar from Homer onwards, so one can understand why one account of Chares' career merely remarks that it was "a common fate of a conquered city" and moves on (Pritchett 1974, 81). Yet when Chares committed this massacre in 353/2 BC, it had been two whole generations since Athens last destroyed another community – Melos in 416 BC – and it was to prove the last time (on record) that any Greek city-state destroyed another.[1] If such extreme brutality was perhaps not 'common' after all, it is equally indefensible to say, as some have done, that it was alien to the chivalrous, 'agonistic', spirit of Greek warfare and began to occur only in the late fifth century when incessant conflict caused emotions to run high and the rules to break down.[2] The destruction of an entire community was in fact always regarded as in certain circumstances a legitimate course of action in Greek warfare, but it was only occasionally the actual outcome of a war.[3] We need to try and understand *when* it was deemed legitimate, and *why* it happened when it happened.

In order to bring home the importance of these questions, I propose to call the form of violence perpetrated by Chares at Sestos 'genocide'. This may seem anachronistic because the concept is recent – it was coined in Rafael Lemkin's *Axis Rule in Occupied Europe* (1944)[4] – and closely associated with the Holocaust and other campaigns of extermination waged against ethnic and religious minorities within nation-states, unparalleled in Greek history. However, the UN definition of genocide does not confine the act to such instances:

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[1] See the surveys in Pritchett 1991 and Ducrey 1968.

[2] E.g. Hanson 2005: esp. 180, 182; 1995: 257-8 ("completely absent from the mind" of archaic Greeks "was any intention of genocide" until the "later fifth and fourth centuries"; Ober 1996: esp. 56, rule of war no. 8 ("punishment of surrendered opponents should be restrained") and no. 9 ("non-combatants should not be primary targets of attack").

[3] For fuller discussion, see van Wees 2011; 2004: 115-17, 124-6; Dayton 2006.

[4] For Lemkin's use of the concept, see Moses 2010.

> Genocide means any of the following acts committed with the intent to destroy, in whole or in part, a national, ethnical, racial or religious group, as such: (a) killing members of the group; (b) causing serious bodily or mental harm to members of the group; (c) deliberately inflicting on the group conditions of life calculated to bring about its physical destruction in whole or in part… (*UN Convention for the Prevention and Punishment of the Crime of Genocide*, 9 Dec. 1948)

The inclusion of 'national' groups means that the destruction of a city can count as genocide, since city-states were the primary political entity in most parts of archaic and classical Greece, even if they were part of wider regional and supra-regional 'ethnic' groups (e.g. Boeotians, Thessalians; Aeolians, Ionians). And the inclusion of means of destruction other than killing means that collective sale into slavery must also count a form of genocide.

Not only is use of the term thus formally justified but it is helpful, indeed necessary, to reconceptualise Greek warfare by making explicit that it sometimes involved what we would call 'genocide'. Take for example the legendary sack of Troy, which ended just like the siege of Sestos with the killing of all men and the enslavement of the women and children. Alluded to by Homer, described by numerous later poets and often portrayed in art, the story is very familiar to us, but the distance created by time and by the conventions of literary and artistic fiction makes it hard for us to absorb its full significance. The point is perfectly illustrated by the response of an anonymous referee to an earlier draft of this chapter: 'comparing the atrocities of the sack of Troy to those of modern ethnic cleansing seems to be a stretch, equating mythical acts of heroic violence to very unheroic modern behaviour'. This sort of mental compartmentalization, which regards the annihilation of a community in ancient literature or history as somehow categorically different from the same event in the contemporary world, is precisely what I hope to overcome by pointed use of the term 'genocide'. The "intent to destroy" a national group "as such" was present from the fictional sack of Troy to the historical sack of Sestos, and only if we accept that some ancient Greek states and generals *did* have something in common with contemporary ethnic cleansers and genocidal governments can we fully appreciate the gravity of what they did and the urgency of the question why they did it.

The Greeks had their own word for it, and one could argue that it might be better to use the indigenous term and avoid any concerns about anachronism. The word is *anastasis*,

literally 'raising up', i.e. forcing a community to get up and leave its home, and it covered a range of actions from driving an otherwise unharmed population out of its city and territory to the ultimate fate of execution or enslavement.[5] Even the mildest form of *anastasis* entailed scattering a city's population and turning them into refugees, and as such would still fall under the UN definition's clause (c): 'deliberately inflicting on the group conditions of life calculated to bring about its physical destruction in whole or in part'. The disadvantage of the Greek term, however, is that is in effect a euphemism, and English translations such as 'raising up', 'removal' or even 'uprooting' fail to bring out the sheer violence involved, which 'genocide' by contrast powerfully evokes.

Moreover, appropriation of the term genocide for ancient Greece may serve not only to reconceptualise an important aspect of Greek warfare but also to reconceptualise the place of genocide in modern war. The common assumption that genocide is a modern phenomenon is liable to limit our understanding of it, at best, to the conditions under which it occurs in the contemporary world. If we accept that genocide also occurred under quite different conditions in the ancient world, we may be led to a deeper understanding of its fundamental causes across human history.[6] With this in mind, we will investigate what motivated acts of genocide in archaic and classical Greece, and suggest that amongst other things it was typically an act of 'conspicuous destruction', a display of force designed to assert the power and status of the perpetrator in the face of a perceived challenge.

'Cutting open pregnant women': the ancient rhetoric of genocide

The ancient evidence for the destruction of communities is not easy to interpret. When a Greek historian claims that a city was 'razed to the ground' and its population massacred, is this a record of genocide or merely a boast that the enemy suffered an overwhelming defeat? When a Greek playwright laments the fate of an annihilated city, does his imagery reflect contemporary practice or merely a nightmare vision of the worst that could possibly happen? We do not always have enough evidence to determine the extent and intent of

[5] For this mildest form of *anastasis*, see n. 24, below.

[6] For an attempt at greater historical depth, see Bloxham and Moses 2010, chapters 12-16, including Van Wees 2010a; much of what follows is adapted from that paper.

the destruction inflicted. Yet even when we cannot tell what reality lay behind the words, the rhetoric is valuable because it reveals ancient ideologies of genocide.

During the first battle described in the *Iliad*, Agamemnon notices that Menelaus is about to spare the life of a Trojan captive, so he runs over and shouts to his brother:

> 'Not a single one of them must escape sheer destruction at our hands. Not even if a mother carries one in her belly and he is male, not even he should escape. All together they must be exterminated from Troy, their bodies untended and invisible.'

The poet adds: "With these words the hero swayed his brother's mind, since he gave *aisima* advice" (6.54-65). Scholars debate the precise meaning of *aisima*; I would argue that its nearest English equivalent is 'due', and that the poet implies that Agamemnon as supreme commander of the Greek army was entitled to give such advice. This falls just short of an outright endorsement of Agamemnon's sentiments, but it is certainly no rejection. The *Iliad* sympathises deeply with the sad fate of individual Trojans, but it also contains numerous passages that place the blame for the war squarely on the Trojans' collective shoulders and treat the annihilation of the Trojans as a legitimate goal of war.[7]

Parallels for Agamemnon's exhortation appear in Assyrian and Babylonian poems and the Bible, where victorious besiegers 'cut open pregnant women'. The theme first appears in an Assyrian poem which probably glorifies a military victory of Tiglat-Pileser I, c. 1100 BC:

> He slits the wombs of pregnant women; he blinds the infants.
> He cuts the throats of their strong ones. …
> Whoever offends the god Asshur will be turned into a ruin.[8]

The same sequence of images, in reverse order, occurs in biblical prophecy:

> Samaria shall bear her guilt, because she has rebelled against her God; they shall fall by the sword, their little ones shall be dashed in pieces, and their pregnant women ripped open.[9]

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[7] See e.g. Goldhill 1990: 373-6; Yamagata 1990; Van Wees 1992: 176-81. For *aisa* (and *aisima*) as 'what is due to a person', see esp. *Il*. 18.327, 'an *aisa* of spoils', not just neutrally a 'share' but specifically the share that he was 'due' (by fate or by merit) to receive.

[8] VAT 13833, rev. 3-6: text and translation in Cogan 1983: 755-8.

[9] *Hosea* 14.1; cf. 2 *Kings* 8.11-13 for an almost identical prophecy about the fate of Israel.

The mutilation of pregnant women is here not a random atrocity but part of a programme of systematic violence: adults will be killed by the sword, children beaten to death or blinded so as to render them helpless, and foetuses ripped from their mother's wombs. The message is the same as Agamemnon's: the entire enemy population must be destroyed, even the unborn. This is an explicit and extreme rhetoric of genocide.[10]

Did this brutal rhetoric correspond to an equally brutal practice? One could not, of course, selectively kill only male foetuses; the pregnant women and their unborn girls, too, would die. Conceivably this was seen as acceptable 'collateral damage' of the symbolically important extermination of all males. However, since the motif of killing unborn boys as an act of war does not reappear in Greek literature it was perhaps a piece of extreme rhetoric rather than a Greek genocidal practice. It may indeed have been a borrowing from the Near East[11] which even as a rhetorical conceit proved too strong for later Greek tastes. This form of genocide thus served as the ultimate threat, but may never have been perpetrated.

At the other extreme of the rhetorical range, we have one-word notices that so-and-so 'sacked' or 'destroyed' a city, without any elaboration on what happened to its people, or bald statements that a defeated people were 'sold into slavery.' Sometimes such elliptic statements simply reflect the brevity of our sources, but even otherwise detailed accounts often say little more. The surviving Greek and Roman historians mostly belong to a school of thought which did not like to elaborate on the suffering caused by war, partly because this usually involved imaginative generic description rather than recording specific historical facts, and partly because it appealed to readers' emotions without serving any analytical purpose. Polybius criticised his predecessor Phylarchus in these terms, mocking his account of the sack of Mantinea in 223 BC as 'base and effeminate' because it described

> women's embraces and disarrayed hair and exposures of breasts, as well as tears and laments of men and women led away in motley crowds with their children and elderly parents. And he does this throughout his history, trying each and every time to place the horrors before our eyes.

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[10] Contra Kern 1999: 84, who argues that "the killing of a foetus was considered peculiarly abhorrent" and was "a literary motif about the moral chaos of war"; cf. Kuhrt 2001: 7-8.The focus on men/male foetuses in the *Iliad* may be specifically Greek: see below.

[11] The *Iliad* dates (in my view) to c. 700-650 BC, while most of the biblical passages are set in the years 750-700 BC, though the books in question were probably composed only in the seventh century BC or later.

This irritated Polybius not only because it offended against his historiographical principles, but also because he felt that the annihilation of Mantinea was a justified act of revenge, so that the Mantineans did not *deserve* the sympathy elicited by dwelling on their misery (2.56.7-12).[12] The ideology that a non-partisan, non-sensationalist historian should record no more than the bare fact that a city was destroyed or a people enslaved leaves us with a record which may understate rather than exaggerate the frequency and extent of destruction. But this record is in its own way a no less telling expression of the common ancient view that under certain circumstances genocide could be a legitimate, desirable and even necessary course of action.

The cities of men: targets for annihilation

In studying ancient Greek genocide, we should not simply include every instance of large-scale killing in war. The countless sieges which caused huge damage and loss of life but did not end with the entire population of the besieged cities being eliminated, in one way or another, ought to be excluded. Also to be excluded are massacres committed by soldiers running amok and wiping out entire towns, without being ordered to do so, or indeed in defiance of orders to stop killing. Only where the population of a city was executed or permanently dispersed by the design of military or political authorities does the label 'genocide' seem appropriate.

The massacre of all inhabitants of a city was quite rare, though not unknown. More typical was the execution of all free men of military age, while women, children and slaves were sold into (further) slavery.[13] Some scholars have imagined that men were killed because they were 'more difficult to control than women and children', so that enslavement was not feasible. This is not a tenable view, given that countless men were in fact reduced to chattel-slavery and other forms of forced labour, throughout antiquity and beyond. Conversely, the youngest children and the elderly were spared despite being no use as slaves: they would often find no buyer and be left to die of exposure, hunger or attack by

[12] For the ancient historiography of sacking cities, see d'Huys 1987; cf. Livy's blasé account of the sack of a city: 'not a single one of the misfortunes which authors usually regard as noteworthy on such occasions was omitted' (21.57.13-14).

[13] E.g. *Iliad* 6.448-65; 9.591-5; 22.62-8.

wild animals.[14] If a distinction by gender and age was made, it was rather because Greek communities were conceived of as consisting essentially of adult men. Women, children and the aged were mere dependants. The death of the men amounted to the annihilation of the community; killing the others was not necessary.

We have good contemporary evidence for instances of genocide which took this sharply gendered form, as we shall see, but the impression created by literary sources that it was standard practice is probably misleading, since a range of different treatments of sacked cities is also attested. Mass enslavements occurred with some frequency in the Greek world.[15] Not even nuclear families were kept together when they were sold into slavery, so the result was complete dispersal of a community. The irrevocable destruction of a group in this way counts as a form of genocide, even if few were killed.

Rape did not play the ancillary part in genocidal campaigns which it has played in more recent history. A few brief and rather euphemistic references leave no doubt that many women, and indeed young men, were raped during the sack of cities, as one would expect, but our sources tend to treat this as an incidental and distasteful aspect of siege warfare. Unlike killing and enslavement it was not a matter of public policy. A concerted campaign of rape may just be hinted at in the *Iliad* when the Greeks are told: 'Let no one be in a hurry to go home until he has slept with the wife of a Trojan, in revenge for the shocks and sobs of Helen' (2.354-6). But this could be explained instead as a reference, not to rape, but to soldiers having sex with Trojan women who were allocated to them as slaves – a form of sexual coercion which was regarded as legitimate, and is repeatedly mentioned in Greek epic and tragic poetry. The institution of slavery allowed men to establish a form of control over women which was far more lasting and comprehensive than a brief and limited exercise of power through ad hoc sexual violence, and this is surely why the enslavement of women was a prominent feature of the public face of genocide, while rape was largely passed over in embarrassed silence as a gratuitous private form of violence.[16]

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[14] Xenophon, *Agesilaos* 1.21-2.

[15] For mass enslavement, see again Ducrey 1968; Pritchett 1991; for the Hellenistic and Roman worlds, see also Volkmann 1990; Chaniotis 2005: 132-3, 142.

[16] For Greek and Roman evidence, see Vikman 2005; Kern 1991: 154-62, 235-6, 345-7; ancient attitudes to rape: Deacey and Pierce 1997; omission of women from classical historiography of war: Hornblower 2007: 42-7.

A final target for destruction was the physical site of the city itself. Cities are forever being 'burnt down' and 'razed to the ground' in ancient records, and in many cases this may be no more than a formulaic reference to the damage done in the course of the siege and haphazard vandalism by pillaging soldiers. At least a few cities, however, were literally flattened. In 510 BC, one of the richest and most powerful cities of the Greek world, Sybaris, was deliberately flooded after it its population had been driven out by its rival Croton.[17] The cultivation of the territory of a destroyed city might be forbidden, sometimes by dedicating it to a god, so that the land "reverted to a sheep-walk". A less dramatic partial sanctification of a destroyed site occurred when the Spartans used the ruins of Plataea to construct a temple complex for Hera, complete with hotel facilities for visitors.[18]

The purpose of the physical destruction of buildings and land was to obliterate not only the enemy but even the memory of their existence. For the same reason, Agamemnon insisted that the Trojans should not only be killed, but their corpses be 'untended and invisible:' they should have no tombs to keep their memory alive. The destruction of cities was usually no doubt only partial, or merely symbolic, but the constant rhetoric of razing towns and the occasional comprehensive destruction suggest the genocidal intent of the attackers: ideally, their victims were to be eliminated without leaving any trace at all.

Alternatives to annihilation: genocide in context

International relations in the ancient world were complex, with a wide range of recognised relationships between states, including kinship and friendship as well as formal treaty-obligations, and sophisticated diplomatic mechanisms, from inviolable envoys and ambassadors, via exchanges of letters and gifts, to international arbitration. Despite some modern claims to the contrary, peace was always considered the norm and ideal, even if it was often interrupted by the necessary evil of war.[19] When war did break out, its goals usually stopped well short of annihilating the enemy, and we need to consider the full

[17] Strabo, *Geography* 6.1.13; cf. Herodotus, *Histories* 6.21; Diodorus of Sicily, *The Library* 12.10.1; Athenaeus, *Deipnosophistai* 521d.

[18] "Sheep-walk": Isocrates, *Orations* 14.31 (Kirrha, c. 590 BC); Diodorus of Sicily, *The Library* 15.63.1. Plataea: Thucydides, *History* 3.68.2-3.

[19] For a brief survey of ancient international relations, see van Wees 2010b; Bedermann 2001. On Greece and Rome, see also the relevant chapters in Hartmann and Heuser 2001;

range of options which an ancient state had in dealing with a hostile city before we can try to determine why sometimes a state chose to resort to genocide.

Wars could be concluded with pacts of non-aggression, treaties of equal alliance, or unequal treaties which imposed on the defeated side the military obligation to 'have the same friend and enemy,' and 'help in the most vigorous manner possible'. Decommissioning of military materiel – fortifications, warships – might be required.[20] The outcome of the vast majority of wars in archaic and classical Greece fell somewhere within this range, and in such cases, communities were left wholly intact, apart of course from any casualties suffered in combat, and often retained a high degree of local autonomy as well, losing little more than their international standing.

More violent measures began with the elimination of a city's leadership, which was particularly common in dealing with 'rebels,' i.e. cities which in some way offended against the terms of their subordination, or sometimes simply refused to be subordinated. Tension between a ruling class and the rest of population was a constant feature of political and social life in Greek cities, and in order to strengthen or regain control over their subject allies, Athenians and Spartans exploited such divisions by executing or exiling hostile or rebellious political elites.[21] In a famous passage, Thucydides has the Athenian assembly debate the pros and cons of killing only the responsible members of the ruling class versus massacring the entire population of Athens' rebellious ally Mytilene. The argument in favour of the former is essentially that it will in the long run be less costly not to destroy the whole community. The historian characteristically plays down moral qualms about genocide, which in reality surely played its part, but his view that the main appeal of confining violence to the elite lay in its material advantages may well be justified, and may be more widely applicable. The Athenians decided in the end to kill 'only' a thousand leading Mytileneans.[22]

Elsewhere, elites were not executed but driven into exile or deported. The Athenians in 506 BC expelled 'the Horsemen' who ruled Chalcis, and sent settlers to occupy the estates of these exiles (Hdt. 5.77.2). The displacement of people was not confined to elites: whole

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Sabin et. al. 2007; Raaflaub 2007.

[20] Low 2007; van Wees 2004: 12-15.

[21] Classical Greece: Gehrke 1985; Lintott 1982; archaic Greece: van Wees 2008.

communities might be driven from their homes. One early Greek poet pictures the families of a defeated city wandering as refugees, disliked and dishonoured wherever they end up. In 546 BC, under attack by the Persians, two Greek communities simply evacuated their towns and resettled far away, and such 'urban relocation' was regarded as perfectly acceptable.[23] When the victims were unable to escape, the victors sometimes let them leave their city unmolested when they surrendered, typically allowing them to bring literally only the clothes on their backs. Even after a very long, bitter and costly siege, Athenian generals once agreed to let the Potidaians vacate their city on such terms, and allowed each person some travel money as well – although admittedly they were censured by the Athenian assembly for letting the enemy off too lightly.[24] One could go on listing yet other ways of dealing with defeated enemies, including such idiosyncratic hybrid forms as the decision by Gelo, ruler of Syracuse, to resettle the ruling elites of defeated cities in Syracuse itself, with full citizen rights, but sell the rest of their populations into slavery because 'he regarded the common people as something very unattractive to live with' (Hdt. 7.156). But enough has been said to make the point that genocide was far from the only or normal outcome of hostile inter-group relations in the Greek world. This brings us back to the question of what motivated genocidal actions by ancient states and armies.

Conspicuous destruction: profit, honour and genocide

Sometimes we can do little more than guess at the reasons for genocide, as in the case of Chares' annihilation of Sestos. Here, economic factors are likely to have played a role: the Athenian treasury was virtually empty at the time, the poverty of the Athenian lower classes was posing acute problems, and there were grain shortages. Sestos was so strategically vital to Athens' grain import that one politician called it "the bread bin of Piraeus" (Arist. *Rhet*. 1411a14), but Athens had struggled for at least a decade to retain control of it, and of the rest of the Thracian Chersonese, where Athenians had begun to settle two centuries earlier. Chares' action not only gave them back Sestos, but also led to the Thracian king Cersobleptes handing over 9 of the 10 other towns in the Chersonese to

[22] Thucydides 3.36-50, with Hornblower 1991: 420-41.

[23] Refugees: Tyrtaeus, frg. 10.3-10; cf. Homer, *Iliad* 22.383-4; 24.381-4. 'Urban relocation' is a concept coined by Demand 1990.

Athens, which promptly "sent settlers (*klerouchoi*) to the cities" (Diodoros 16.34.4; cf. Xen. *Hell*. 3.2.10). Moreover, at least part of Chares' army consisted of mercenaries, whom the Athenian treasury could ill afford to pay, and as *strategos autokrator* he had the power to decide to raise funds by sacking the city (Demosthenes 23.173). One might imagine, then, that this episode of genocide was simply a show of extreme force designed to solve several economic problems at once through direct seizure and intimidation.

However, the Athenians' financial and economic problems had been endemic for several decades before 353, and Chares and other Athenian generals had conducted numerous other campaigns with mercenary armies, yet they had not resorted to genocide as the solution. The last time Athens *had* previously resorted to genocide, against the Melians in 416 BC, the city had been at a peak of power and prosperity, and their victim was a small island of little economic or strategic significance. The economic benefit of the annihilation of the Melians was limited to land for 500 of the more than 30,000 adult male citizens.[25] Non-economic motivations were decisive here, as we shall see shortly, and they may also have tipped the balance against Sestos, when so many other cities escaped genocide.

We should in any case remember that while one Greek form of genocide, mass enslavement, was indeed very profitable, the characteristic massacre of adult men reduced these potential profits. The choice was not between killing an enemy and letting him go, but between selling captives or executing them and going empty-handed. When Menelaus hesitated to kill a Trojan, and needed reminding of the Greeks' genocidal mission, his hesitation was due not to any humanitarian feelings but to the fact that he had just been promised 'an infinite ransom' for his prisoner. The profit-motive thus encouraged enslavement but discouraged killing, and only when it was countered by even more powerful motivations were states likely to resort to genocidal massacres.

An endless variety of such motivations is mentioned in ancient sources, but the majority have at least one feature in common: those perpetrating the massacre saw themselves as inflicting revenge or punishment for what one may call an 'aggravated' challenge to their power and status as a community and/or to the power of a god whose cause they championed. A few typical scenarios will have to suffice to illustrate this point.

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[24] Thuc. 2.70.2-4; Pritchett 1991: 297-308; van Wees 2004: 261 n.44 .

[25] Thucydides 5.116.4; for population size, see Hansen 1988.

First, imperial powers sometimes destroyed small independent towns on the grounds that their very independence constituted an affront which made the empire look weak. This was the decisive factor in the case of Melos, according to Thucydides' 'Melian Dialogue', where the Athenians explain bluntly why they must incorporate this small, neutral island into their naval empire: 'Since you are islanders, and weaker than the others, you cannot be allowed to escape from those who rule the sea.' The Melians refused to submit, so the Athenians killed all the men and enslaved the women and children.[26] Refusal to submit implied that the opponent regarded himself as somehow the 'equal' of the empire, which was more insulting when it came from an insignificant little town than from a serious rival. The destruction of defiant small towns was therefore not just a matter of consolidating imperial power, but of upholding *status*, or in Greek terms 'honour' (*timê*). The demands of power politics might have been satisfied by merely forcing Melos to submit to imperial authority, but the demands of honour required that the Melians be destroyed to wipe out the insult.

A second scenario involves the destruction of a roughly equal opponent who is regarded as in some way too persistent in his hostility. For instance, while relations between Athens and most of its rivals alternated between hostility and alliance, the Athenians saw the neighbouring Aeginetans as implacable enemies, who had started hostilities in the dim past and kept attacking without provocation. In 431 BC, the Athenians drove the Aeginetans out of their island, forcing the refugees to find new homes all over Greece; a large group settled in Thyrea. Not content with this, in 424 BC the Athenians sent a fleet to attack Thyrea, which they captured, looted and burned down. All Aeginetans captured alive were taken to Athens, where a formal decision was made to execute every last one "on account of the hostility which they had always shown in the past".[27] Power-political motivations clearly played a prominent role, but it is striking that the Aeginetans were destroyed at a time when they no longer posed a serious threat to their old rivals, however dangerous they might once have been. Athens did not occupy the Aeginetans' land in Thyrea, so their

[26] Thuc. 5.97, 101 (there were in fact survivors: Xenophon, *Hellenika* 2.2.9); Hornblower 2008: 216-25. Cf. Thuc 4.122.5-6 for similar sentiments behind an earlier massacre at Scione: "it made them angry that even those who actually lived in islands dared rebel".
[27] Thuc. 2.27; 4.57; for the Athenian tradition of an age-old feud with Aegina, see Hdt. 5.81-9, written at around the time of the events described above.

destruction brought no material benefit. Their annihilation was thus strongly symbolic: a demonstration by the Athenians of how great a superiority they now enjoyed.

Also common was a third scenario: the destruction of a formerly friendly or allied city which was deemed to have committed a particularly heinous act of treachery, which seriously endangered the city betrayed. This situation features in another of Thucydides' set-pieces, the 'Mytilenean Debate', concerning a proposal to execute all the men and enslave the women and children of Mytilene. This city had changed sides in the middle of major war, raising the spectre of a general defection to Sparta of all Athens' allies; its destruction, it was argued, would act as a deterrent to other would-be rebels (3.37.2, 39.7-8, 40.4-7). Here we have genocide carried out for calculated political effect, as a means of intimidation. Yet political pragmatism was not always the whole story even in these cases. A major argument used in favour of the massacre of all men of Mytilene, according to Thucydides, was that this ally's betrayal did not just create a serious threat to security but entailed a serious breach of trust, because relations between Athens and Mytilene had been unusually close and privileged. "They were not ruled by Athens, like the others", but retained autonomy "and were treated with the highest respect by us". Their betrayal was all the more culpable because there was evidence that they had been planning to defect for a long time. "We should never have treated them with more respect than anyone else", he adds, "then they would not have become so arrogant; for it is human nature to despise those who show deference and to admire those who concede nothing" (3.36.2, 39.2 and 5). Once again, emotive matters of honour creep into the picture alongside political calculation: a failure to reciprocate respect and friendship calls for violent retaliation.

A final scenario is the annihilation of a community for committing a religious offence. A city which trespassed against the temples and images of others' gods was sometimes punished with destruction. The destruction of Kirrha in Greece was punishment for aggression against the oracle of Apollo at Delphi, a sanctuary in the charge of a league of states which swore an oath to 'uproot' any city which committed offences against it.[28]

By extension, cities might be destroyed for breaking rules sanctioned by the gods. The flooding of Sybaris is said to have been provoked by the violation of diplomatic envoys,

[28] Aeschines *Orations* 2.115; 3.107-9 (there are doubts about historicity, which I regard as unjustified: van Wees 2006: 139-42); for 'uprooting' (*anastasis*), see above.

regarded as sacrosanct (Strabo 6.1.13). The *Iliad* implicitly justifies the annihilation of Troy by showing the Trojans accumulating offences with a religious dimension: they threaten to kill Menelaus when he visits Troy on a diplomatic mission, they break the divinely sanctioned bond of hospitality in abducting his wife, and finally they break a truce which they had sworn to uphold on pain of destruction by the gods.[29] Since all treaties and truces and many other aspects of international relations in the ancient world were under the protection of the gods, it was rarely difficult to accuse an opponent of a religious offence. Yet sacrilege was not often adduced as a reason for destruction, and one rarely finds religious offences alone, without other aggravating circumstances, inspiring genocide.

Ethnic or racial motivations for genocide, so prominent in the modern world, never seem to feature in our sources. Classical Greeks did have a sense that cities belonging to the same ethnic group – Aeolian, Ionian or Dorian – ought to be on friendly terms and that war between them was less acceptable than war against an enemy from a different ethnic group.[30] One might infer that the threshold for genocide was lower for those of different ethnic origins, and as it happens several of Ionian Athens' victims belonged to different ethnic groups: Sestos and Mytilene were Aeolian cities, Aegina and Melos Dorian islands. But the pattern is by no means consistent,[31] and no ancient author makes it explicit. There is certainly no sign of perceived ethnic inferiority being cited as justification for annihilation.

A concept of ethnic or racial inferiority did emerge as part of the theory of 'natural slavery', which held that non-Greeks were by nature incapable of governing themselves and needed Greek masters. On this view, the enslavement of these 'barbarians' was a kind of hunting, and as such did not need special justification, but massacring 'barbarians' was neither more nor less justified than massacring Greeks.[32] The two main forms of enslavement of non-Greeks which were justified by the theory of natural slavery were slave-raiding, which could do great damage to a community but probably did not usually aim to destroy whole political or ethnic groups, and the collective subjection of non-Greek

[29] Trojans breaking oath: Homer, *Iliad* 3.67-4.222; cf. 4.235-9; 7.351-3. Threats to Menelaos as ambassador: 11.123-5, 139-42; cf. 3.205-24. Discussion: van Wees 1992: 176-81.

[30] This is implied, for instance, by Thucydides' catalogue of ethnic groups fighting one another during the Sicilian expedition (7.57). For Greek ethnicity, see Hall 2002.

[31] For instance, Aeolian Methymna destroyed Aeolian Arisbe (Herodotus 1.151.2), and Ionian cities joined forces to destroy Ionian Melie (Vitruvius 4.1.4; *I. Priene* 37).

populations to a serf-like or at least tributary status, which so far as we can tell usually left their native communities intact. A unique appeal to ethnic distinctions as a justification of genocide is Xenophon's comment on Lysander's enslavement of the entire population of Cedreai in 405 BC: 'they were half-barbarians' (*mixobarbaroi*: *Hellenika* 2.1.15). This is evidently an attempt to excuse Lysander's action by contrast to previous Athenian acts of genocide against Greeks which Xenophon was about to denounce (2.2.3), rather than an attempt to explain why Lysander destroyed Cedreai in the first place. Even more than ethnic distinctions among Greeks, the Greek-barbarian distinction served to lower slightly the threshold for violence against those who belonged to a different group, but it nevertheless played no obviously significant role in justifying or motivating genocide.

The fundamental premise of common legitimations of genocide in ancient Greece is rather that a challenge to the power of a community and/or its gods must be answered with a display of force in proportion to the seriousness of the challenge and may require an act of 'conspicuous destruction' which completely eliminates the challenger. What determined the seriousness of a challenge was partly its impact on security and power politics, but often its symbolic significance and impact on status counted at least as heavily. A challenge from a treacherous friend, an inveterate enemy or a low-status opponent required a harsher response than an otherwise equally dangerous challenge from an open and equal rival. The more powerful a community, the more it might be inclined to demand respect in proportion to its status and to respond violently to even the slightest, least dangerous, challenge. The same was true of gods, who were imagined as responding to offences with greater force in proportion to their vastly greater power.

Conclusions: genocide and its limits

By giving the name 'genocide' to a type of military action well-known from Greek history, we set it apart from a range of military activities which start with the trampling of cornfields and setting fire to farmhouses and end with the sacking of cities, and we indicate that it was a distinct and deliberate form of warfare, not merely an accidental extreme of violence that might occur when passions got out of hand. By reconceptualising the destruction of city-states in this way, we force ourselves to ask why Greek armies and states, like their

[32] 'Natural slavery: Garnsey 1996. Treatment of barbarians in war: Lonis 1969: 31-70.

modern counterparts, from time to time felt driven to resort to this form of violence. The answer we find in archaic and classical Greek sources is that genocide was regarded as an ultimate punishment which could be legitimately inflicted when a community had committed a serious collective offence which called for such measures.

The explanations for genocide offered in ancient texts probably did not tell the full story. Some might argue that the sources' emphasis on the symbolic, religious and status-related nature of offences does not tell the true story at all, and that the extermination of communities must in reality have been motivated by a search for more power, resources and territory. In support of that view, one might point to other periods of ancient history in which the ideology of genocide was most widely accepted, and genocidal campaigns most common, among states which were engaged in rapid military expansion. Macedonian armies, for instance, destroyed many cities during their campaigns in Greece and in the Persian Empire under Philip II and Alexander III the Great, but once these conquests had been consolidated into three fairly stable new kingdoms, a century went by without a single genocidal campaign being recorded. Similarly, the Romans enslaved and massacred on a huge scale while they extended their power across the Mediterranean, but once their control was established, very few further acts of genocide are attested.[33] The pattern is not so clear-cut in archaic or classical Greece, but one could conceivably argue instead that a disproportionate number of genocidal campaigns occurred to preserve the long-established hegemonies of the Spartans and Athenians when these were in danger of losing their power and resources. It was certainly at this time, in the late fifth and fourth century BC, that genocidal warfare came to be the subject of serious moral debate in Greece.[34]

Yet there are enough instances of genocide which did not result in any political advantage or material gain for the perpetrators – the Athenian massacre of Aeginetan refugees in Thyrea is a striking example – to show that it was not always merely a means to achieve or secure expansion. I would argue that we must accept at least the basic premise of the sources: whatever its political or economic motivations, genocide was always also, and sometimes mainly, an act of 'conspicuous destruction' which served to display the power of the perpetrators and to restore or enhance their 'honour'. A concern with status might not

[33] See for further discussion Van Wees 2010a.

[34] See Ducrey 1968: 313-32; Karavites 1984; Volkmann 1990: 71-91.

only lead to the destruction of a city which brought its destroyers no additional power or wealth, but also, just occasionally, save a city when purely political and economic reasons might have favoured its destruction, as when the Spartans after a long and bitter war spared Athens in deference to the city's eminent international status.[35] Genocide was most commonly perpetrated by the most aggressively expansionistic states not only because such states pursued their own material interests with more ruthless calculation, but also because they pursued prestige more competitively and with greater emotional intensity than others. Those who aimed for the highest possible status in the world order were least able to tolerate any challenge to their honour and most willing to eliminate without a trace those who seemed to show insufficient respect.[36]

The conclusion that ethnic, racial and religious distinctions play very little, if any, part in ancient Greek genocidal wars is perhaps most relevant for those who study genocide in the modern world, where such distinctions seem all-important. The Greek evidence shows that the existence of ethnic or religious division is not a necessary precondition for genocide, or a sufficient cause, and it raises the question of whether we should look for other structural causes. It is tempting to suggest that the concerns of about status which emerged as a powerful motivation for the Greeks also underlie much modern genocidal conflict: perhaps ethnic distinctions and religious affiliations are ways of defining the kind of collective hierarchies that the Greeks expressed and contested in terms of 'honour'. Whether this line of enquiry is worth pursuing is for others to decide, but to note that there is a question to be addressed seems a point worth making – and it is a question that emerges only if we reconceptualise ancient warfare by acknowledging that there was a place in it for genocide.

[35] Xenophon, *Hellenica* 2.2.19-20. Admittedly, political considerations in this case were double-edged: removing the Athenians by genocide would eliminate Sparta's greatest rival, but also risked creating a new powerful rival in the shape of Thebes.

[36] See Lendon 2000; van Wees 2004: 19-33, on the role of honour in international relations in ancient Greece. Conversely, barbarians were legitimate targets for slave-raiding (see above) because they were not regarded as part of the international status hierarchy.

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