

**Sarah BOLMARCICH**

## **Thucydides 1.44.1 and the Terminology of Athenian Diplomacy**

The definitions of the ancient Greek words *symmachia* and *epimachia* rest largely on the evidence of a single passage, Thucydides 1.44.1: "Thus spoke the Corinthians. The Athenians, having heard both sides, had a second meeting of the Assembly; although at the first meeting they were not unaccepting of the Corinthians' arguments, in the second meeting they changed their opinion in favor of the Corcyraeans, not to make a *symmachia* that they would have the same friends and enemies (for if the Corcyraeans ordered them to sail with them against Corinth, the *spondae* with the Peloponnesians would have been broken by them), but they made an *epimachia* to help each other [lit., "to help each other's territory", Hornblower 1991, 87], if anyone should attack Corcyra or Athens or their allies." On the basis of this passage, *symmachia* has traditionally been defined as a full-fledged offensive and defensive alliance, in which the parties swear to have the same friends and enemies, while an *epimachia* has been defined as a subset of *symmachia*, but a defensive alliance only, since it is explicitly contrasted with *symmachia* here (Adcock and Mosley 1975, 189–90; de Ste. Croix 1972, App. 5, 13). These definitions need reconsideration and refinement, based on evidence outside of this passage. Without such a study, it is impossible not only to understand Thucydides' description of the events at Corcyra, but also to study Athenian diplomacy accurately.

This paper will redefine *symmachia* as an agreement in which two parties swear the same oaths to one another, a definition largely evident in the epigraphical evidence (e.g., IG i(3) 54.20–27, SVA 2.263.16–38). It is not an agreement in which the parties involved swear to have the same friends and enemies. That oath is specifically reserved for unequal agreements, and is always sworn by the lesser party to an agreement (Thuc. 3.70.6, 75.1, 7.33.5, Xen. Hell.2.2.20, 5.3.26, Aesch. 3.100, Plut. Pel.27, IG i(3) 76.18, 89.28). The Corcyraeans request both a *symmachia* (Thuc. 1.32–36 *passim*) and recognition that the Athenians have the same enemies (and by extension, friends) as they do (Thuc. 1.35.5). To an Athenian, the two cannot co-exist, and they refuse such a *symmachia* not only because it might lead to attack on the Corinthians, but also because it requires them to take what in their eyes would be a subordinate position. The Delian League allies swear to have the same friends and enemies as Athens ([Arist.] Ath. Pol.23.5); Athens does not have her friends and enemies dictated to her by anyone.

The solution is to make an *epimachia*, an unusual word: there are six instances in classical Greek literature. No epigraphical instance is preserved. An *epimachia* is indeed a *symmachia*, and so involves reciprocal oaths, but it is contrasted in the passage with *symmachia* because the oath "to have the same friends and enemies" makes the first, highly irregular option offensive. It is concerned with defense, but a special kind of defense: it is the defense one needs when one's territory is threatened directly by a specific opponent. Although the terms the Athenians and Corcyraeans make are general ones, the only threat to Corcyra at the time was Corinth. That *epimachiae* are concerned with attack on one's territory specifically is emphasized by Thuc. 1.45.3, 1.50.5, and 1.53.4 (pace Hornblower 1991, 90, 96), as well as the other literary examples of *epimachia* (Thuc. 5.27, 48; Xen. Cyr.3.2.23, Arist. Pol.1280b, [Dem.] 12.7).

This reconsideration of symmachia and epimachia has ramifications for the immediate scenario of the beginning of the Peloponnesian War and the study of Athenian diplomacy in general. In the first instance, these new definitions explain why Athens, although justified by the terms of the Thirty Years' Peace in making a symmachia with Corcyra, does not do so; she, a hegemon herself, does not wish to subordinate herself to another naval power. Since Corcyra will accept an alliance only if Athens swears to have the same friends and enemies as she does, an epimachia is made instead; Athens takes great care that the overweening and demanding (Thuc. 1.39.2) Corcyraeans cannot call upon her to do more than defend her.

Studies have been made of the roles such reciprocal relationships as *xenia* (Herman 1987) and *philia* (Mitchell 1997) play in ancient foreign relations. Certainly they play a cultural role; but their historical role has not been established. What effect do they actually have on events? Reciprocity is a powerful force; when it is transgressed, as it was in 431 BC, war results. To keep one's reciprocal obligations gives one honor, and the devaluation not only of reciprocity but also the personal reputation dear to the Greeks requires violent punishment in the form of war.