On the Border in Arizona and Greece: Border Studies and the Boundaries of the Greek Polis

Gary Reger
Department of History
Trinity College

ABSTRACT: Border studies is a growing and dynamic field, founded in part on study of the Mexico-United States border. Its results, however, have not yet been applied much to the study of the ancient Greek world, where the existence of hundreds of independent cities (poleis) in the Archaic, Classical, and Hellenistic periods created multiple borders. Some ancient commentators, notably Aristotle in his *Politics*, did notice the impact of borders and border culture. This paper offers a preliminary effort to bring together some of the results of present-day border studies with scholarship on the borderlands of Greek poleis, in the hope of contributing to both areas of research and showing where each field can learn from the other.

No matter how clearly borders are drawn on official maps, how many customs officials are appointed, or how many watchtowers are built, people will ignore borders whenever it suits them.¹

Like many states ancient and modern, the *poleis* (“city-states”; singular, *polis*) of the Greek world (see Figure 1) were separated from each other by borders. These borders ran through mountains, valleys, gorges, along rivers and roads, and across flat arable land. Disputes about where borders lay and rights of use of the land adjacent to the border – the “borderlands” – bedeviled the poleis from their earliest days in the Archaic period (roughly 800-500 BCE) through the Classical (500-323 BCE) and Hellenistic (323-31 BCE) periods down into the centuries when Greece was under the rule of the Roman Empire. Although abundant evidence exists for the nature of such disputes, the ways they were resolved, and the conceptualizations of borders and borderlands that shaped Greek thinking about borders, the Greek case has not played much if any role in the articulation of border studies and historical geographic work on borders and borderlands. It is the aim of this essay to present some of this material and show ways in which it may help enrich ongoing research into the study of border formation, articulation, and control, and the various ways in which different past polities (and no doubt some present ones too) have conceptualized the land that sits on either side of a political boundary.²

Present-day nation-states expend a good deal of time, money, and ideological energy on defining and defending their borders with neighboring states. President Trump’s budget proposal for the coming fiscal year included $1.6 billion for a physical “border wall” between Mexico
and the United States. Meanwhile, technological patrols – drones, cameras, tethered balloons, helicopters – have increased the effectiveness of surveillance; some argue that such means are much more likely to secure the border than a physical barrier. Behind the political rhetoric lies a fundamental conceptualization of the border as a precisely demarcated “line in the sand,” up to which the nation-state’s full sovereignty applies. In the case of the US-Mexico border wall, the insistence on maintaining full sovereignty on every inch of US land is confounded, in Texas, by the fact that the actual border runs, in places, down the middle of the Rio Grande, where the channel is deepest.³

The urge to draw a virtually dimensionless, precisely and perfectly defined line of demarcation can be illustrated conveniently by the efforts of the United States and Mexico to set their borders over many decades following the Mexican-American War. The ceding through the Treaty of Guadalupe Hidalgo of millions of acres of western territory by Mexico to the United States demanded figuring out where the territory of one country ended and the other began. Both governments appointed members of a joint commission to draw the border; they faced considerable logistical and personnel difficulties, exacerbated by poor drafting of the Treaty itself. Subsequently several new commissions were directed to re-survey the line, the most important of which, starting in 1896, set in place the border markers that can still be seen. Today the border is overseen by the International Boundary and Water Commission, established in 1889; it has US and Mexican divisions.³

Cutting against this urge to establish firm, dimensionless, and fully articulated lines as borders, a model for border-construction that some scholars have called “Westphalian” after the efforts in the Peace of Westphalia (May-October 1648) to define European national borders,⁵ runs a congeries of contrary, opposing, or simply different notions about what borders and borderlands are. A good deal of this scholarship derives from work on the US-Mexico border, which has been studied intensively both empirically and theoretically. As a prolegomenon to the core of this essay, which examines border and borderland construction and conceptualization in the late Classical and Hellenistic world (fourth-first centuries BCE) of the Greek polis, I first review some ideas about borders and borderlands articulated by scholars working in the US-Mexican context, and then explore some border/borderland phenomena elsewhere in time and space that contrast with or even undermine the notions of borders and borderlands that derive from the North American context. Using some salient remarks in a recent, perceptive essay by Sarah Green,⁶ I then suggest some ways that bringing the Greek polis example into the discussion may offer additional material to help advance thinking about borders and borderlands as a basic question in historical geography. I wish to emphasize at the outset that this review should not be regarded as comprehensive. The literature on borders and borderlands is enormous,⁷ and I discuss here only such material as has come to my attention and seems to offer food for thought relevant to the ancient Greek situation.

Some ideas about borders and borderlands – a brief review

We may begin with a relatively recent overview of borders and borderlands by David Newman:

The demarcation and management of borders are closely linked to each other. The former (the process of demarcation) determines the way in which the latter (the management of borders) is put into effect. Demarcation is not simply the drawing of a line on a map or the construction of a fence in the physical landscape. It is the process through which borders are constructed and the categories of difference
or separation created. Demarcation is the process through which the criteria of inclusion/exclusion are determined, be they citizenship in a country, membership of a specific social or economic group, or religious affiliation. The borders enabling entry to, or exit from, these diverse spaces and groups are normally determined by political and social elites as part of the process of societal ordering and compartmentalization.

These same elites determine the extent to which such borders are closed or open and the ease with which they can be traversed. Borders constitute institutions that enable legitimation, signification, and domination, creating a system of order through which control can be exercised.

Newman’s formulation rests in the first instance on precisely the “Westphalian” model: the view that states are driven to establish absolutely clearly demarcated lines between them. But he also insists on the larger social processes that accompany border formation and also serve as drivers of the need to create borders: the definition, put most simply, of insiders and outsiders, whose privileges and duties are shaped by which side of the border they belong on. These privileges include the benefits of citizenship and especially economic activity; his mention of “religious affiliation,” interestingly, has resonances in the Greek polis, as we will see (but perhaps not in the ways he imagines). Finally, Newman sees social and political elites as the controllers of the border; they determine its salience by rules over movement across it.

As a lapidary formulation, Newman’s remarks are useful. But they elide three matters. First, his definition is ahistorical; he has not considered how border construction may have differed in the past or how the processes he describes may have changed over time. Second, he has not engaged other theoretical formulations of border and borderland interactions outside the quasi-Westphalian model he applies. Finally, he has not considered polities, societies, and cultures, whether past or present, that may approach the problem of borders from a completely different perspective.

Michiel Baud and Willem Van Schnedel have offered a different model, which runs on two dimensions, a geographic one that starts from the border itself and moves out, and a developmental one that accounts at least in part for change over time. They postulate “three geographical zones” that borderlands might present: a “border heartland,” which lies on the border and presents “social networks [that] are shaped directly by the border, depend on it for their survival, and have no option but to adapt to its vagaries.” Farther from the border sits an “intermediate borderland,” which “always feels the influence of the border but in intensities varying from moderate to weak.” A last region, their “outer borderland,” only rarely comes under the spell of the border. This conceptualization of borderlands as “changeable spatial units clashes with the visual representation of borders that we find on maps.”

They also offer a developmental/chronological model for change in the characteristics of borders over time. Their “infant borderland” has just been drawn, leaving preexisting networks and interactions within the new borderland region active and largely unregulated; people living in the borderland move back and forth easily, and may even decide to make their future on the other side. Their “adolescent borderland” retains strong cross-border links even as the new border asserts an “undeniable reality.” Once, however, the social and other networks in the borderland accept and are determined by the existence of the border, an “adult borderland” appears. This may later become a “declining borderland” if new cross-border relations develop; and if the border is abolished, one has a “defunct borderland.” Baud and von Schnedel themselves admit
these typologies are ideal types, bearing perhaps a too-heavy sense of determinism; but they represent an effort to offer a comparative history of borderlands.\(^9\)

Baud and von Schnedel’s models recur, although without reference to their essay, in the borderlands discussion that Jeremy Adelman and Stephen Aron set forth in a very influential 1999 article. Adelman and Aron were interested in how borderlands and frontiers operated in the North American world. In essence, their argument revolves around the conflict between imperial states and expansionism, with Native Americans as actors operating in the space between and separating zones of imperial conflict. They contrast a frontier, which they see as “the meeting place of peoples in which geographic and cultural borders were not clearly defined” where in these “borderless lands . . . intercultural relations produced mixing and accommodation as opposed to unambiguous triumph,” with a borderland, which formed “the contested boundaries between colonial domains.” In their view, this struggle eventually replaced frontiers with borders and borderlands, spaces that generated hybridity but also “inscribed in notions of citizenship new and exclusivist meanings” and “formalized but did not foreclose the flow of people, capital, and goods.”\(^10\) This is essentially a description of what Baud and von Schnedel would call an “adult border.”

Ramón A. Gutiérrez and Elliott Young, reviving Herbert E. Bolton’s arguments about Spanish borderlands as essential to understanding North American history, insist on the need to see borders and borderlands not simply from a nationalist perspective that defines and excludes, but rather to consider how borders fail; this approach reflects a commitment to transnationalist history and appreciation of flow and movement. They come to what they see as a new view of borders and borderlands as liminal zones where cultural hybridity and transculturation emerge and may thrive. These ideas, developed out of study of the US-Mexican borderland, have been championed also by anthropologists and sociologists who have studied intercultural elements along this border.\(^11\)

The Boltonian thesis is treated also in an essay “On Borderlands” by Pekka Hämäläinen and Samuel Truett. Like Gutiérrez and Young, they emphasize the distinctions between borderland and frontier. Borderland histories, they write,

are not traditional frontier histories, where empires and settler colonists prepare the stage for nations, national expansion, and a transcontinental future. The open-ended horizons of borderlands history cut against that grain. If frontiers were the places where we once told our master American narratives, then borderlands are the places where those narratives come unraveled. They are ambiguous and often-unstable realms where boundaries are also crossroads, peripheries are also central places, and the end points of empire are also forks in the road. If frontiers are spaces of narrative closure, then borderlands are places where stories take unpredictable turns and rarely end as expected. Borderlands become spaces of “informal autonomy, fluidity, and isolation from states and markets”; they invite a revision of American history as one of “entanglements” rather than “expansion.” But they also criticize a “Manichean” bipolarity between state and borderland and, in the end, seem to call for a transnational approach that also recognizes and uncovers the violence, racism, cultural entrenchment, and resistance to the Other concealed, or at least muted, by “stories [that] may have been too upbeat, too engrossed with the integrationist underpinnings of American history. . . .”\(^12\)

Another characteristic of borderlands that has been emphasized in some studies is that of borderlands as wildlands, as Samuel Truett writes,
land that time forgot, places where renegades and bandits have [today] given
way to new barbarians: narcotraficantes, immigrant desperados, and camouflaged
vigilantes. . . . [B]orderlands remain ensnared in their “wild west past.” In this
state-centered view, citizens are the legitimate bearers of history, and enemies of
the state haunt the frontiers of the body politic like forces of nature, taunting the
narrative logic of the nation. The historical borderlands are thus as unstable as
they are divided.13

Truett seeks to complexify and challenge aspects of this borderland stereotype, which, however,
continues to hold a firm place in some American conceptualizations of the borderland world.

The study of borders and borderlands in places and times decoupled from the US-
Mexican world has revealed very different notions about what such spaces are, how they are
to be defined and defended, and what people do with them. Cultures in other times and places
have had very different understandings of their borderlands, very different notions about the
definition and defense of a state border. In the first half of the nineteenth century, as the British
moved into Burma, they came to feel a keen need to get the border between their new colonial
possession and the independent neighboring kingdom of Siam (modern Thailand) clearly drawn.
But when British colonial officials began conversations with the court of the kingdom of Siam
over setting a boundary with Burma, misunderstandings arose over the fundamental notion of
what a border was and what purposes it served. While the British conceived the border as a clear,
fixed, essentially dimensionless line separating two sovereign states that exercised full authority
right up to that border (a “Westphalian” line), the Siamese entertained quite different notions.

To the Siamese court the border was of limited interest, “a tract of Mountains and forest,” as a
British official complained, “which is several miles wide and which could not be said to belong to
either nation”, largely a matter for the local inhabitants to worry about. The border was a corridor
between two kingdoms uncontrolled by either, where locals could work, travel, and settle with
relative freedom; the central polities in fact might not even interface, and where mechanisms of
control were imposed, on roads with guardhouses, for example, this action did not spell a claim
to the corridor itself, or to territory on either side of the point of control.14

The puzzlement of the British derived from a failure to grasp that their Siamese counterparts
were operating from a completely different conceptualization of the function of a border and
its borderlands; unlike their colonial interlocutors, the Siamese court had little or no interest in
expenditure time, energy, or resources in fixing and policing a border in conformity with British
expectations. The two parties were functioning, quite literally, in two different mental landscapes.

Another example can be found in the contemporary Chad basin in central Africa.15 In a study
of its borderlands with Chad itself, Nigeria, Cameroon, and the Central African Republic, Janet
Roitman has argued that in the early nineteenth century, before the arrival of French colonialists,
“political relationships were for the most part established in a context of constant circulation
and movement that defined nomadic and semi-sedentarized communities” where “domination
often took place through nonspatial and nonterritorial forms.” French colonial administrators,
like their British counterparts in Burma, found this situation politically intolerable, and sought
to impose “true” borders and to categorize the populations they contained. (It should be noted
that, at first, the administrative region was simply the “Soudan”; only later did the French divvy
it up among units like Burkina Faso, Chad, and so on, that became the basis for the post-colonial
nation-states.) The shifting peoples whom the French found there and labeled the population
flottante challenged, in Sarah Green’s words, “the French colonial logic of border and territory
that required controlled borders and a territorially fixed way of classifying populations. . . .”
The Chad basin looked chaotic to the French precisely because this “floating population” failed
to fit pre-conceptualized notions of the one-to-one relationship between people and territory.
Thus the border world existing before the French – and it needs remembering that this was not a world without large-scale polities like the Sokoto Caliphate – presented a fundamentally different notion from the post-Westphalian European idea of what a border and its surrounding area were supposed to be like.\(^\text{16}\)

French colonialism played an analogous role in the disruption of previous notions of boundaries in the North African Maghreb, according to a study by Fatima Ben Slimane. Once again, before the arrival of the French, this region, which had been under the control of multiple polities including the Ottoman Empire, operated under a sense of fuzzy boundaries between states, arenas through which people and goods moved more or less without interference: at best, the terms deployed to name these spaces simply designated “a swath of land, a more or less broad zone, separating two political entities.” It was French political expectations, which called for post-war “border negotiations, demarcation treaties, terrain surveys, and cartographic techniques” that ultimately imposed fixed borders inherited later by post-colonial national states.\(^\text{17}\)

The region where today’s Turkish-Syrian national border runs was, in centuries after 650 CE, the locus of a “frontier zone” between the Christian Byzantine Empire and the various Islamic states that controlled Syria, mostly from metropoles in Iraq. As A. Asa Eger has recently argued, this world, called 
\textit{al-thughūr} by the Arabs and 
\textit{eremos} by the Byzantines, subsisted on two poles, ideological/religious and physical/environmental, “articulated as the distance away from the capital or urban center. . . [on] a core-periphery model” increased. It was one of those complex zones that were defined both by their inhabitants and by their character as peripheral lands in relation to their central ruling bodies. . . dynamic processes embodying the cultural interactions taking place within these diverse societies, including adaptation, acculturation, assimilation, and the cultural ambiguity of ethnic and religious groups. In some cases these interactions created new societies (ethnogenesis), uniquely born out of living within a peripheral sense of place.

As part of the articulation of this frontier as a peripheral space, it was accorded the status – by both sides – as a “mythic wilderness” on which notions of ideological opposition could be imposed.\(^\text{18}\)

Again, though, neither side viewed this zone as a line or exerted control from the metropole; the construction of this arena as a wilderness where endless conflict ensued, carried out more or less on behalf of – but not necessarily in the interest of – distant ruling powers looks very different indeed even from the borderlands of the United States and Mexico, where the final expectation was the vindication of \textit{la línea} and the land running right up to it.\(^\text{19}\)

These issues come together in a nice way in a magisterial essay by Sarah Green. Green, whose own work has focused especially on the Greece-Albania border, argues that “there is little that could be called inherent about [borders’] characteristics as borders. Not even the tendency for borders to change regularly is an inherent characteristic of borders.” Her case rests in part on drawing distinctions between the Westphalian system, whose “binary. . . logic generates the idea of an ideally homogeneous state that clearly and cleanly comes to an abrupt end at its neatly defined edges” from an imperial system “of internally differentiated places and populations. . . that become progressively more marginal the further away from the center one travels.” This center-periphery view of borders and borderlands does not require a carefully delineated border and leaves open space in the periphery for the emergence of all kinds of social, cultural, and political formations that may operate in multiple relations to the institutions of the political center. She uses several examples of non-European empires (two of which I have cited above) to help make the case. Finally, she borrows the concepts of statements about places as indexical or nonindexical to stress that borderlands are indexical places: they “do not mark something like a line on a map; rather, they are always specific places, with distinctive characteristics that are
dependent upon both their relations with other places and things, and their particular location.” In contrast, a border as a geometric line is nonindexical: “an abstraction...[that] takes up no actual space.” Thus seen, borders and borderlands stand in contradiction, contrast, and conflict with each other. 

As widely differing as some of the empirical and theoretical work we have reviewed may seem, there are some common thematic elements. First, all deal in one way or another with empires or large-scale polities. The Greek polis, in contrast, was a very small entity. In the Classical period only five known poleis could claim a territory larger than 500 square kilometers; fully 60% had territories under one hundred square kilometers, 80% under two hundred square kilometers. For comparison, the metropolitan area of New York City is 789 square kilometers, London, 1572 square kilometers, and Albuquerque, New Mexico, home of *Historical Geography*, 491 square kilometers – if it were a polis, it would surpass all but a tiny fraction. Second, much of the work just reviewed presupposes a dualist take on borders and borderlands. Either political entities are intent on imposing a Westphalian system of logical and sharply delineated borders, “lines in the sand,” that separate distinct political realms, or they take a relaxed approach to the distant parts of their realms, where they are content to let their authority fade away across an ill-defined and sometimes nebulous region where neither the one imperial center nor the other really exercises control. Finally, the idea of center and periphery plays a fundamental role in all this thinking; even the Westphalian model recognizes the need to assert control over the periphery from the center, while of course the imperial model Green explicates rests explicitly on a looser relation between periphery and center.

I do not mean here to caricature these various views. They contain much more subtlety and empirical work than my brief summaries can capture. I have laid them out because I want to explore whether an examination of boundary-making and borderland behavior in the world of the Greek poleis can contribute anything new to this dialogue. To anticipate again, it will turn out, I think, that the Greek world displays aspects of both the Westphalian idea of borders and the “imperial” notion of a less-controlled periphery. We will also see that the Greeks were perfectly aware that borderland inhabitants might have interests, socio-cultural formations, and even political views different from, sometimes even in conflict with, their counterparts in the center. Finally, we will also see that certain pan-Hellenic practices, including transhumant herding and religion, could trump the interests of the central polis state in defining and policing a border.

**Taking border studies to the polis**

My purpose here, then, is to provide some insight for non-specialists into the ideational world of borders and borderlands in the Greek polis system. To anticipate my conclusions: we will find that Greek ideas about borders and borderlands were complex and, to some degree, self-contradictory, and elements of all the treatments of borders and borderlands just reviewed appear in the Greek world. Newman’s view that borders help create, define, and maintain citizenship is highly salient in the Greek context, helping to explain the fierce commitment of many poleis to establishing clear lines and defending them with equal insistence. Some of Baud and von Schnedel’s typologies can be applied to the historical development of the borders between some Greek poleis. Notions of hybridity, intermixing, and cultural syncretism certainly apply to many poleis borderlands, and are neatly uncovered, as we will see, in arbitration agreements seeking to define a border when local residents are called to witness.

At the same time, however, borders and borderlands between poleis in the late Classical and Hellenistic periods were not the consequence and completion of imperial and nationalist struggles among great states for vast territorial control; in most cases they involved small but independent entities arguing over a few square kilometers of land. While sometimes resolved by
violence, disputants often resorted instead to outside arbitration (not always successful) to settle their differences. And, as we will see, a kind of pre-existing “transnationalism” and expectation of cross-border movement was built into the conceptualization of what a border could and could not do.

There is also evidence for a “borderlands world,” a locus of culture and practice different from and sometimes in conflict with that of the metropole. This culture was, sometimes, confected out of cross-border interactions between neighbors for whom the border was less salient than the central state might have liked; political theorists like Aristotle were perfectly alive to such conflicts, and took them into account in their advice about constructing an ideal state. In both these realms, much of what we will see will be perfectly familiar, and it will seem that the Greek world offers simply yet another example of state border formation along the lines of any present-day nation.

But there are also other sides to Greek views about their borders. In ways that resemble the Siamese, poleis sometimes abdicated claims to a thorough-going, totalizing sovereignty right up to the border. Instead, some borders display an intentional fuzziness: land left purposefully unassigned to one side or the other; rights of use, especially pasturage and wood-cutting, but also sometimes farming and fruit-gathering, or even exploitation of high-value resources, accorded to
residents on either side of the border, irrespective of citizenship; and regulations forbidding the
construction of military installations in the borderland. In addition, there was a fundamental and
centrally important question that affected essentially every discussion of borders and borderlands:
religious cult and the presence of sanctuaries. Polis interest in enforcing a border typically could
not override the claims of a god and his or her worshippers to access to the physical space where
that worship took place. Religion, that is to say, often trumped any other consideration in the
definition of a border and the conceptualization of the use and character of a borderland. In
a recent and thorough-going look at one borderland region in Greece (to which we will have
occasion to return) Sylvain Fachard has drawn up a “flow-chart” of borderland and cross-border
relations that reflects nicely some of these complexities (Figure 2).

The presence of gods and their sanctuaries in borderlands was also connected at times
to a sense of borderlands as “wildlands,” for some of the deities who stalked the borderlands
were not urban gods like Athena, patroness of Athens, but wild and dangerous figures: Artemis
the hunter; Dionysos, god not just of drunkenness and revelry but of violence and passion (as
in Euripides’ Bacchae); and especially Pan, who was “not the happy little goat of later myth
and pastoral” but an inciter of panic and terror (see, for example, Herodotus 9, 69). As a quintessential
god of wilderness, Pan could also bring aid to the traveler, if worshipped with proper care. And,
in general, as Jeremey McInerney notes, “places farthest from society will be marked by disorder,
the abandonment of restraint, and have powerful associations with the female.” Women, for the
Greeks, were dangerous along many dimensions, which is why they had to be subjugated to male
control; likewise, “[m]arginal territory ... gender[ed] female through a series of associations with
female gods and cults directed at women” demanded “the presence of sacred land ... to anchor ... transient activities and these marginal figures within a religious system.”

This complex and sometimes contradictory congeries of ideas about borders and borderlands infuses the historical geography of the Greek poleis in both concrete and ideational understandings and representations of the bordered world. Most notable is the tension between attitudes perceptible in the urban elite, for whom borderlands require clear definition (the drawing up of border lines was often entrusted to members of the leading socio-economic classes of the poleis) and are regarded with some of the trepidation of “wildlands” infested with dangerous and capricious gods, with the quotidian experiences of border dwellers and frequent visitors, for whom these landscapes are home, places where they live, farm, herd, and bury their dead. Indeed, socially distinct senses of “ownership” of the land may be operating in the minds of these groups: on the one hand, urban elite for whom the borderland is an integral part of the polis and must be protected from intrusion by outsiders; on the other, the border residents, whose sense of ownership derives from day-to-day interaction with the land and the other people who live and work there, including those across the border and those who pass through as herdsmen, traders, worshippers. At the same time, we must be careful about drawing too firm a dichotomy between urban and rural; in most poleis there were people who lived in the city or in the chora near it but also interacted with the borderland as landowners, herdsmen, or exploiters of borderland resources like wood (see, for instance, the landowner Phainippos in Demosthenes 42.

The world of the Greek polis

It will be useful to begin with some general background on terminology and the history of the Greek world and the polis. By “the Greek world” historians generally refer to the territories of modern-day Greece including the Aegean islands, western and parts of southern coastal Turkey (called “Asia Minor” in antiquity – see Figure 1), and those parts of modern Italy where Greek-speakers had settled (roughly, Italy from Naples south and the eastern part of island of Sicily). There were Greek settlements as well on parts of the northern coast of Africa, in today’s Egypt and Libya, and ringing the Black Sea.

The polis was one of the main forms of political organization in the Greek world between roughly 800 BCE and the end of antiquity (roughly the seventh century CE). The origins of the polis have been much discussed but do not concern us here; suffice it to say that by the sixth century BCE much of the Greek world as described above was organized in polis-type polities (there were also federal states, koina, singular koinon, like that in Aitolia, but again, we leave these aside here). In its most basic sense, a polis geographically consisted of an urban center (asty in Greek) and a rural hinterland (chora). Poleis depended on their rural hinterlands for agricultural production and, when the resources existed, other economic activity, like mining; but most poleis also required some imports and extracted some income from exports. Poleis culled revenue through the imposition of taxes on individuals, occupations, the import, export, and transit of goods, and other means, although land taxes were not typical.

In a socio-political sense, however, a polis was most fundamentally an organization of citizens: people who derived benefits from, and had obligations and duties toward, the polis as a political, social, cultural, and religious entity. In the fullest sense, citizenship was restricted to males above the age of eighteen, although minors and women usually played some role in the expression of polis identity through religious celebration and other activities; political participation, on the other hand, was strictly confined to men. (Some of the strictures relaxed as time went on, but this matter lies outside our purview here.) Among the most important benefits accruing from citizenship was the right to own land in the chora of the polis (and/or real estate in the asty). Poleis guarded fiercely this privilege, whose importance can be seen in the so-called proxeny decrees awarded to honored foreigners. These decrees often included “the right to own
land and a house,” and could only be granted by a vote of the polis assembly (the *ekklesia*), which consisted of the entire male citizen body of the state.31

The bond between citizenship and land-owning (and, more broadly, land use) informed the salience of boundaries and borderlands for Greek poleis. The articulation of a firm, clear boundary between poleis played a central role in the emergence of the polis as a politico-social form of state organization and in the ongoing identity of the polis and its citizens. In other words, boundaries were fundamental to the polis and much energy and time were devoted to defining and policing them, as we will see in the case studies explored below.

**The character of the evidence**

While there are a number of literary references to the borders of Greek poleis, some of which I treat below, the richest set of source material consists of epigraphy: inscriptions, mostly on stone, in Greek, recording the outcome of boundary disputes. Two collections present much of this material, with considerable overlap: Sheila Ager’s *Interstate Arbitrations* (1996) and Anna Magnetto’s *Gli arbitranti interstatali* (1997). Several other recent collections also contain useful texts, such as Christophe Chandezon’s book on pasturage (2003), which reprises some of the same texts, interpreted from the point of view of land-use for herding.32 Many of these inscriptions are poorly preserved, missing letters, words, and whole lines; they are often broken, lacking the start or end; and since they were written for contemporaries whose familiarity with the issues could be presupposed, they often omit basic information we need to understand them. Despite these problems, these texts, as a body, provide remarkable insight into how the Greeks worked their borders.33

In general, the mechanism for resolving boundary disputes as recorded in the texts was to appoint a commission to hear claims from the disputants about the border, often after taking testimony from locals who may have known about past assumptions about where the boundary lay; specialists then sometimes surveyed the boundary and implanted actual boundary markers.34 But such procedures were hardly the only mechanisms the poleis deployed to reify their borders. As is well-known, religion stood in the center of the polis: each polis had its tutelary or guardian deity, like Athena for Athens or Hera for Argos. Religious celebrations were public events in which the whole polis participated, and served, among other things, to shape and reinforce polis identity as an entity separate from other poleis. It comes then as no surprise that the gods also played central roles in defining and claiming boundaries. In a famous discussion François de Polignac argued that the setting of polis boundaries in the later Geometric and Archaic periods was accomplished by the implantation of extra-mural sanctuaries by a polis out on the border with its immediate neighbor(s); processions undertaken between the *asty* and the sanctuary rendered visible the claim of the polis to its *chora* right up to that boundary. Examples are legion: de Polignac used as his type case the Heraion (sanctuary to Hera) of Argos on its western border with neighboring Mycenae, but many other examples exist.35

For de Polignac these performances served to explain the origin and nature of the polis; although his theory has met with critique, it does emphasize one of the important uses to which the borderlands were put: the performance of religious rituals central to polis identity. Consider the example of Athens and Eleusis. Eleusis hosted a sanctuary to Demeter and Kore (*kore* means “daughter” in Greek; she is usually known by her later name of Persephone) which undertook the celebration of mysteries. Initiation was complex and overseen by Athenian priests and administrators who were public officials; they kept thorough records, many of which are preserved on inscriptions. The link between the sanctuary and the *asty* was strong and clear, for the annual procession began from the center of Athens and the goddess had another sanctuary right in the heart of the city, just below the Akropolis. Simply put, the sanction of civic deities lay
over and guarded the sanctity of the polis boundary and polis citizens acted regularly and highly visibly to enact this sanction.  

Borderlands also played a role in the economic life of the polis. In some cases – and we will explore this matter more below – the border lay in mountainous territory unsuitable for agriculture. Instead, such landscapes served for the herding of ovicaprids, the cutting of wood used for construction or heating and cooking, or the extraction of stone or metals. In other cases, however, a border might run right through good arable land; a fine example comes from the island of Rhodes, where, before the whole island was unified, in 408 BCE, as a single polis, the border between Lindos and Ialysos fell in farmland. The boundary was marked here by a temple to Apollo Erethimios. Likewise the boundary between Argos and its neighbors, activated by the Heraion, ran through highly desirable cultivated land.

This quick survey should suffice to show the ways that Greek poleis defined and guaranteed their boundaries and the importance that such boundaries had for polis identity along multiple dimensions. It will not have escaped anyone that, except perhaps for the religious function of the border, all these aspects of the salience of borders and borderlands could easily be paralleled in the historical geography of the Mexican-United States border region. These parallels, while neither precise nor, perhaps, related, suggest that some of the phenomena we can see in this more recent border region may also have played out in the borderlands of the Greek poleis. On the other hand, as we will see, there are aspects of polis border behavior that look more like that of Siam or the other examples reviewed above. To anticipate a little, this is not to say there is a one-to-one correspondence, nor that border phenomena are universal – far from it, as we will see later – but rather that as a heuristic device it may be useful to ask whether such parallels have a deeper significance and, more generally, whether an exploration of border phenomena in the Greek world may benefit from, and make a contribution to, border studies and historical geography more generally. But I reserve discussion of these matter for later, after turning to a few case studies of border disputes between Greek poleis to see what tensions and questions they suggest.

Exploring the borderlands of the Greek poleis

There are four issues I would now like to explore in a brief and very preliminary way. First is the tension between the metropole, the asty, and the borderland, the eschatia, of the polis. This tension represents in part the tension between core and periphery; it is also bound up with the notion that borderlands are rough and wild places, remote not just geographically but also socially from the civilized center. Second is the interest of the central state in imposing its authority on and control over the borderland, including the establishment of a clearly defined border line. Third, I would like to try to look at borderlands from the inside, so to speak, to see what the people there were like, what sort of cultural and social interests they displayed. Finally, there is the matter of the borderland as metaphor – this is tied up intimately with borderlands as wild spaces, but issues more broadly into questions of the drawing of lines between people in social, cultural, economic, and other senses – not geographically but, as it were, mentally. I have found it difficult to sort these themes out in such a way that I can treat them serially and separately; they interweave. I begin by considering some evidence for the efforts by the state, the central organ, to exert control over its borderlands.

Drawing the border

Sometime in the third century BCE two small Phokian poleis, Phanoteus and Stiris (see Figures 3 and 4), could not agree on the border between their respective chorai. They called in “land arbitrators” (gao dikai) from a neighboring polis to make the determination for them:
The following has been decided by the land arbitrators sent by the Aleians to the Phanoteoi and the Steirioi concerning the land they were disputing. It shall belong to the Phanoteoi according to the following boundaries. The Phokion; from the Phokion to the Kalydon; from the Kalydon to the pass; from the pass to the Petrachos in the middle of the lake; from the Petrachos to the hills with a good view; from the hills with a good view to the lookout tower in the middle of the

For our purposes here it will suffice to notice three points. First, as so often happened, contention between the two parties about the precise location of the border was too intense for them to settle themselves; they were forced to rely on the offices of a nearby polis, or a distant one, as when the Delphians asked the Rhodians to send judges (dikastoi) to settle a boundary dispute with the Amphissians. This intensity needs no emphasis – earlier in Greek history it might well have issued in a war – except in that it reminds us of the signal importance states place on clearly defined borders. Second, the land arbitrators thought it sufficient to define apparently straight lines between a series of points on the landscape in order to fulfill their brief. Because the stone is incomplete we do not know whether provision was also made for the setting of boundary-markers, which would have fixed the border precisely; but what we do have, it seems, must have left a measure of ambiguity: since none of these points on the landscape were dimensionless, one could still have disputed exactly to and from where on the pass, for instance, the line should run. Finally, one of the points, evidently determined to be in the territory of Phanoteus, was a watchtower (skopia).

Here is another example, one of a series of settlements dealing with disputes around Delphi that stipulates that
the land on the left, as the river flows, shall belong to the Delphians as far as Aigoneia. And from Aigoneia, as the water flows, through the gully; the hill called Kerdon as far as the road running to the oak. The land on the right shall belong to the Phygonians and Ambryssians, but that on the left to the Delphians.42

The text continues in a similar vein for several more lines. More precision, though again, without some markers on the ground, one could imagine uncertainty arising.

Figure 4. Denis Rousset and Photios P. Katzouros, “Une delimitation de frontière en Phocide,” Bulletin de correspondance hellénique 116 (1992), p. 211, Fig. 7. (Used with permission of Denis Rousset and the École française d’Athènes.)
It is notable what kinds of markers on the landscape might be used as endpoints of the lines drawn. In some cases, as above, the points might be named locales, clearly well-known to the locals but often opaque to us. In a delineation to settle a dispute between the Melitæiæs and the Peumaitians we hear of places like “the precinct (aulë) called Graia” (which was a sanctuary of Demeter; see below), Nape, a “wooded valley”, and rivers called Krouson, Bouleia, and so on. Here we see a set of natural features noted as the boundary definers. Mountain peaks, valleys, more rivers, and springs appear in other texts. However, human constructions also served. Graves – whose meaningfulness in the landscape went well beyond simply serving as fixed points, as we will see – are attested; watchtowers appear in a number of texts; roads, perhaps not surprisingly, can do the trick; and likewise massive public structures like the fortification wall, the diateichisma, set as a boundary line by the gauliæ in a dispute of the Oinidæ against the Metropoliai, to which we will return.

The passage of time could require re-examining borders. Sometime during the reign of the emperor Hadrian (117-138 CE), the Roman governor was asked to deal with a land dispute between Delphi and Antikyra which arose in part because “the evidences of certain parts [of the boundary] were in dispute and the names of the places in the boundary delineation of the hieromnenones being no longer recognized because of the length of time have provided impetus to them [i.e., the disputants] to act to their advantage.” In this case, changed toponyms could no longer be associated with locales named in an earlier arbitration document. In other cases, poleis simply refused to resign themselves to the results of an arbitration and sought again and again to have the dispute treated, usually by appealing to new powers. The poleis of Priene and Samos summoned judges from Rhodes in the later 190s BCE to arbitrate a dispute over land and a fort.

Figure 5. Christophe Chandezon, L’élevage en Grèce (fin Ve – fin Ier s. a. C.). L’apport des sources épigraphiques (Bordeaux: Ausonius, 2003), p. 176, Figure 6. (Used with permission of Christophe
called Karion; sixty years later, another appeal to the Roman Senate resulted in a confirmation of the earlier decision; sometime thereafter the Rhodian decision was confirmed again; and the two poleis may have continued to conflict into the next century. On occasion it took more than one try to get the border demarcation right. Sometime between 242/1 and 238/7 BCE Corinth and its neighbor Epidauros disputed possession of a territory called the Sellas and the Spiraion. They appealed for help to Argos, which sent a panel of 151 judges to adjudicate in accord with a decision of the Achaian League, to which both cities belonged. The panel awarded the territory to Epidauros. Rejecting the determination of the boundary (but not the decision itself), the

Figure 6. Christophe Chandezon, *L’élevage en Grèce (fin Ve – fin Ier s. a. C.). L’apport des sources épigraphiques* (Bordeaux: Ausonius, 2003), p. 87, Fig. 2. (Used with permission of Christophe Chandezon.)
Corinthians demanded a re-delineation. Argos responded by sending a new panel of 31 drawn from the previous 151, who set the boundary between the claimants; the inscription records a lengthy border demarcation involving multiple mountain peaks and ridges and a wagon road.\(^{48}\)

Borders are politically meaningless unless the state can control movement across them, and there is plenty of evidence of the interests of poleis in so doing.\(^{49}\) Arbitrations settling boundary disputes often mention surveillance structures. In the Heleia, land disputed between two Kretan poleis, Hierapytna and Itanos, there was a fort, chorion (Figure 5), and in the territory disputed by Kondaia in Thessaly a tower (Figures 6 and 3).\(^{50}\) The border fortification system of Attika, particularly where it faced Boiotia, has been particularly well studied (Figure 7). The forts responded to a long-standing dispute between Athens and Boiotia about control of their shared borderlands, which seems to have begun after 507/6 BCE (inferred from Herodotus 5, 77, 1-2), when the Athenians attacked Oropos and seized both town and territory. They held Oropos until 412/11 BCE, when the Boiotians wrested it back. Oropos may have enjoyed a loose freedom from both disputants between 404/3 and 395 BCE, but in the latter year the Boiotians asserted control by bringing it into their league. This back-and-forth persisted, with the entrance of another contestant briefly in 367/6 BCE, until finally, in 287, the poor city was finally permanently attached to the Boiotian League.\(^{51}\)

Eventually a series of fortresses, towers, and rubble forts stretch along the highlands between the territories from Aigosthena in the west to Rhamnous in the east. Several overlook

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main routes of travel between Boiotia and Attika, including Eleutherai on the road with branches leading to Plataia and Thebes, Phyle on the road with branches to Thebes again and Tanagra, and Dekeleia and the fort at Katsimidi, on the road to Oropos. The Athenians constructed roads as part of their project of opening up and laying claim to the borderland territory. Starting in the late fourth century BCE these forts were staffed by young Athenian men called *epheboi* ("ephebes"), who were required to undergo a two-year initiation procedure focused on military training. Their second year, spent patrolling the polis boundary, instilled in them a keen and physical sense of the meaning and importance of the border as basic to the self-definition of the Athenian state.

Mention of the Athenian border forts inevitably brings up Pierre Vidal-Naquet’s famous structural analysis of the experiences of the ephebes sent to man them, and the mythology he sees as framing it. In Vidal-Naquet’s analysis, the ephebe, because not quite yet a full Athenian citizen, existed in a metaphorical space of marginality – a space we might be tempted to call a "land" somewhere “between borders,” as Thucydides calls literal physical spaces like the Thyreatis and Kynouria, disputed borderlands between Argos and Lakonia. “[T]he ephebes’ relation to the world of the frontier is complex,” Vidal-Naquet writes. “As young soldiers, they occupy the frontier zone of the city, which is expressed physically as a ring of fortlets. . . [and] when they take the oath that makes them full hoplites, they mention the boundary-stones that separate them from their neighbors.” Vidal-Naquet argues that myths connected with the Boiotian-Athenian border and the combat between Melanthos and Xanthos (see further below) form the backdrop to a transitional move from boyhood to adulthood in which both an actual, physical border over which two polities disputed and an unreal, metaphorical border between boyhood, when a young Athenian male cannot yet enjoy his privileges as a full citizen and hoplite, and adulthood, when the doors open, play out together in ways that reinforce the salience of both. While in the borderland the ephebes inhabit a psychological and social borderland of metaphor between youth and adulthood.

Vidal-Naquet’s reconstruction of ephebic experience has received a good deal of criticism, which I will not repeat here. I would make only two observations. First, his analysis depends on a rather uncritical acceptance of the topos of the borderland/frontier as a “wild land,” in Samuel Truett’s phrase about the Sonoran-Arizonan borderland, quoted above. But it is clear – and I will return to this presently – that borderlands are not wilder than, necessarily, but different from the center, and this has been shown in particular for the Athenian-Boiotian borderland. Seen from the center, that difference may indeed be read as wildness or inferiority; but we must be cautious about accepting too easily that centro-centric view. (There was a lot going on in the Athenian-Boiotian borderland, as recent archaeological work has made clear.)

**Border culture, a borderland world**

And yet – as we have seen from our brief survey of some specific issues related to borderlands in recent borderland studies, borderlands have a way of escaping control from the political center. Borderland people develop their own interests, in the full range from political and economic through social, cultural, and personal. And it is evident that the same was true of borderlands between poleis.

Aristotle was perfectly aware of the different interests of borderland dwellers. In Book 7 of the *Politics*, as he develops his model city, he expounds his view on the division of the polis’ territory. Half of the territory, which is reserved for private ownership, is to be divided in half again, “one part in the borderlands, the other part by the city, in order that, two lots having been distributed to each citizen, everybody shall have a share in both places.” His justification for this provision is notable. “Thus this is equal and just and more conducive to agreement on wars with
neighbors. For wherever this is not the case, some citizens care little about hatred of neighbors, while others worry about it a lot, indeed beyond what is good. For that reason among some there is a law that those who live by the neighbors [i.e., near the borders of the polis] should not participate in deliberation about wars against them on the ground that because of private interest they cannot deliberate well."

The sense of a certain identity as a person dwelling in the borderland must have developed, at least in part, from ongoing, local experiences. People living in a borderland simply interacted more frequently and intensely with their neighbors, whether they were fellow-citizens or inhabitants of the polis just across the way. This local experience sometimes crops up in the boundary arbitration texts. Toward the end of the third century BCE, commissioners asked to adjudicate the boundaries of the polis of Kondaia in Thessaly relied on the knowledge of borderland dwellers (fig. 6). One was a certain Ladikos of Askyris, whom the inscription recording the matter quotes in the first person:

I know the territory, which I, being present, showed to the judges from the top of the Nyseion, descending the place by us as far as the ravine which the Kondaieis also showed to the judges, and I heard from my elders that it belongs to the Kondaieis at this place, and I myself know, because I’ve been a herdsman in this place for a very long time, that the Kondaieis keep the right of passage in this place.

Another witnesses from a polis called Mopsion added, “I know that the Kondaieis farm here around the tower below Minye.” These two small towns were apparently situated in the

Figure 8. Christophe Chandezon, *L’élevage en Grèce (fin Ve – fin 1er s. a. C.). L’apport des sources épigraphiques* (Bordeaux: Ausonius, 2003), p. 30, Fig 2. (Used with permission of Christophe Chandezon.)
immediate neighborhood of the territory disputed between Kondaia and its antagonist, which is not named in the text but may have been Gonnoi or possibly Gyrton. From the point of view of borderland matters, it is striking that so many people from so many poleis were interacting in this border territory. Ladikos of Askyris and four men from Mopsion bear witness on behalf of the Kondaieis. These witnesses claim to know quite specific details about land use patterns in quite specific places on the landscape – the land around the tower below Minye, for example – and to know it both in depth of time, from their elders, and from longtime personal experience, as a shepherd, at least in the case of Ladikos. Surely there were ties of some kind binding these witnesses to their Kondaian friends in whose interests they testified to the judges; and surely these ties must have been fostered in the borderland world where they came into regular contact.

Consider another boundary arbitration in the same area and of about the same date, between Gonnoi and Herakleion in Thessaly (see fig. 3). Here again the precise words of a witness named Menippos are cited in the decision:

I used to pasture above --- the sheep both in the sanctuary (temenos) of Apollo --- and in the disputed places --- overseen by the Gonnois, nor the places used as pasture or overseen in Limne and the buildings in Pothnaieus. . . . and I know --- (much missing) the land (?) in Pothnaieus and in --- which the Gonnoi gave him. He was also buried along the road leading from --- to Limne. And I heard from my elders with respect to the buildings in Pothnaeius that they belonged to

Figure 9. Josiah Ober, Fortress Attica. The Defense of the Athenian Land Frontier, 404-322 B.C. (Leiden: Brill, 1985), p. 105, Fig. 4: "Mazi Region." (Used with permission of Joshua Ober.)
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the Gonneis Kallias and Philonbrotos, who used to farm and live there until the war against Sosthenes.

The details here rest firmly on local borderland knowledge unavailable to the arbitrators or, presumably, the denizens of the central place. Menippos grounds his assertions in his borderland experience as a shepherd and in what he has heard “from his elders”; he knows about the use of land in the sanctuary of Apollo and elsewhere for herding; he knows that another borderland resident, whose name unfortunately is lost, was given land by the Gonneis and – a powerful claim to ownership – is buried there, by the side of the road; and he knows about two farmers, citizens of Gonnoi, who lived and farmed there till war drove them away (or killed them). The shepherd is testifying “on behalf of the polis of the Gonneis,” which may well mean, as in other cases, that he was himself not from Gonnoi – his testimony being the more convincing if he had no parti pris.

Undefined space: movement of people, wasteland, and sanctuaries

Sometimes border disputes failed to find a definitive resolution, and these cases suggest still more strongly the challenges a polis might face trying to compel the borderland into full, subject compliance. I am thinking of instances where the arbitrators found it impossible or impractical to assign disputed territory to either of the contesting poleis. In a dispute between Epidauros and Hermione (fig. 8), for instance, which was settled by arbitrators from Miletos and Rhodes, probably around the end of the third century BCE, the arbitrators declared the land under dispute “to be common to the Hermioneis and the Epidaurians, belonging to the Didyma according to the boundaries which are implanted stones lying from the so-called Philanoreia, and at the top of the hills as far as the Strouthoun in a straight line as far as the sea to the south as the waters flow.” A dispute about the boundaries of Meliteia near Delphi in the third or second century BCE, judged by dikastoi dispatched from Kassandreia, determined that multiple stretches of land where Meliteian territory bumped up against two other poleis was to be held in common as between each neighbor and Meliteia.

Another striking example relates to the territory around the fort of Panakton in the Athenian-Boiotian borderlands (fig. 9). Among the terms of the Peace of Nikias (421 BCE, marking what turned out to be a pause in the Peloponnesian War) reported by Thucydides was an obligation by the Boiotians to return the fort, which they had captured, to the Athenians. Before complying, they destroyed it because, Thucydides relates, “There were ancient oaths between the Athenians and Boiotians, from a dispute over it, that neither side would occupy the place but would graze it in common” (Thuc. 5, 42, 1). The borderland territory including Panakton and, perhaps, other places (various sources speak of Melainai, Oinoe, and Panakton), had been the subject of a dispute in the deep past between the Athenians and the Boiotians which was supposed to have been settled by single combat between the Boiotian king Xanthos and the Athenian king Thymoites. When Thymoites, however, refused the challenge, one Melanthos took it up and killed Xanthos by a trick, apate. This incident provided the etiology for the Athenian festival of the Apatouria.

In talking briefly about the Athenian ephebic system we saw how borderlands of poleis can be seen as wild, under-populated, and dangerous. This is a topos in Greek thinking about borders in general, be they the mountain terrain or marshy bogs on the boundary of two poleis, or Eastern Desert of Egypt, abode of Pan, or the ends of the earth. But this take, which as I have suggested may derive from a stereotype about borderland regions common to many center-focused views, elides some complexifying evidence. The land under contention between Hierapytna and Itanos on Krete in 112 BCE adjoined a rural sanctuary of Zeus Diktaios. For the sacred land, “it
had been forbidden that anyone herd or build a sheepfold or sow or cut wood,” and so since the disputed “land neighboring to the sanctuary was not sacred and not excluded from farming,” its attraction clearly related at least in part to its availability. Likewise, in the arbitration between Priansos and Hierapytna the citizens of the latter are explicitly permitted the right to sow crops on land belonging to Priansos. There had also been a farm in the contested borderlands between Gnooi and Herakleion which two citizens of Gnooi owned and worked, as we have seen.66

A border arbitration between the poleis of Othorne and Polichne dated to 186/5 or 161/0 BCE recognized the rights of anyone who “in former times” had herded or cut wood in the disputed territory to continue to do so (assuming this understanding of the fragmentary text is correct).67 Other agreements create zones of “common land” shared in one way or another between the two disputants, or left unassigned. When the two poleis of Messene and Phigalia were united in an isopoliteia agreement, the two agreed “to enjoy the use of the land each, both the Messenians and the Phigaleians, just as we enjoy the use now.”68 Striking is a decision about disputed land in an arbitration between Epidauros and Hermione. Here the arbitrators declared the land “to be common to the Epidaurians and the Hermioneis” in accord with the boundary-markers. Further, they lifted any fines or punishments connected with the dispute, permitted no complaints to be lodged about herding or agricultural produce on the land by either city, and ordered “the previous decision about the taxation of goats” to continue in force.69

One of the most detailed arbitrations dealing with common land and resources occurred between 163 and 146 BCE, when ambassadors and judges dispatched by the Ptolemaic king of Egypt resolved a serious dispute between Troizen and Arsinoe (formerly Methana).

Concerning the land called common of both Chersonesus and Praxoneion, both these and the isthmus Stenita are to be common. Let no one in any way prevent those who buy (the right to) quarry stone or cut wood from departing and landing and passing through (the land). . . . If not [i.e., if there is a violation], let the city pay ten thousand drachmai and the individual one thousand drachmai and whatever is necessary to the kingdom (of the Ptolemies). . . . Concerning the common land and concerning the fruits from the land and concerning the income from the tuna fisheries that arose in previous time, no one is to bring a lawsuit.70

In addition to the land itself, its use for agriculture, quarrying, and cutting wood, there were also salt pans which were likewise held in common and apparently leased in the same way. Fishing for tuna depended on the erection of towers along the shore, from which fishers could watch for passing schools and direct boats to net a catch. All of these resources were valuable, and the decision here to compel the disputants to share them in common – a decision resting fundamentally on the determination that the land on which they resided would be held in common – represents a striking instance of a refusal to draw a definitive boundary between the two poleis. At the same time, the decision also confirmed the property rights of persons who had possessions in the common land. Since those persons would have been citizens of Troizen or Arsinoe, we have a situation in which property ownership rights, a basic feature of the Greek polis, were embedded in land not in fact belonging exclusively to either polis.71

Not all shared borderland was common land, however. A striking and so far unique example of a sharing out of access to land but with explicit ownership by one party appears in a recently published inscription from Lykia in ancient Asia Minor (today more or less the Turkish province, il, of Antalya). The text is an arbitration undertaken by the polis of Kos between the Lykian polis of Tlos and its northern neighbor Termessos by Oinoanda; it dates, in all likelihood,
to roughly 160-150 BCE. The agreement lays out rights of use and access to a certain Mount Masa which straddles the territory of the two poleis. The inhabitants of Termessos by Oinoanda are granted in perpetuity the right to pasturage and wood-cutting on certain parts of the mountain, but explicitly forbidden to build structures, plant, or sow seed. In case there should be any ambiguity, the agreement states unequivocally, “Let Mount Masa belong to the Tloeis.” So here, as Denis Rousset has rightly emphasized, ownership of the land has been assigned strictly to one party in the dispute. Rights of erecting structures and establishing farms, which are typically unambiguous markers of ownership (although, as we have seen, there are some exceptions) bound up with citizen rights, are reserved for Tlos. So that there would be no question about where the citizens of Termessos could exercise their restricted access, the inscription recounts in detail the setting of boundary-markers.72

Sanctuaries served too as boundary markers, as, for example, in a dispute between three poleis in Thessaly, where the boundary line starts at a sanctuary of Demeter (called the “enclosure of Graia”) and runs through a sanctuary of Borra; Anna Magnetto has reasonably suggested that Demeter’s sanctuary may have been the point where all the disputants’ territories met.73 But even more important for our purposes are the cases where sanctuaries or other spots where religious activities were celebrated were not assigned to any disputants. This practice has been examined in detail by Jeremy McInerney in an exhaustive study.74 In the prologue to the Peloponnesian War (431-404 BCE), the Athenians complained that their neighbors the Megarians had intruded on the Orgas, land called “sacred and unbounded,” aoristos, that is, land without boundary-markers, by farming it and allowing runaway slaves to seek refuge there. Later (352/1 BCE) the Athenians set up boundary-markers with the permission of the Megarians; an oracle of Apollo also declared the territory on the border, the eschatiai, should be sacred and unfarmed. Here, then, is a clear case where the boundary between two poleis was assigned to neither because, as the Athenians noted in a decree, it was “right and better that it be left sacred and unused.”75

Conclusions

This excursion into some aspects of border disputes, boundary drawing, and borderlands among the poleis of later Classical and Hellenistic Greece may offer some food for thought for border studies and their historical geography more generally. It is apparent that Greek poleis had a conception, long before the Peace of Westphalia, of borders as strong, clearly demarcated lines separating polities. The impetus to draw such lines came from a number of directions: the resolution of disputes about where one polis ended and another began was the primary driver, but the salience of the question rested on and derived also from deeper considerations. Access to land ownership and resources, including farmland, pasturage, quarries and mines, woodlots, and other valuable physical resources, was restricted, in Greek political practice, to citizens, or persons who had been granted citizenship rights. In consequence, it was crucially important for a polis to assert unequivocally its exclusive authority over all the land that belonged to its chora.

This assertion of authority was tied up with an ideological sense of what a polis was. Fundamentally, the polis consisted of its citizen body, and the rights and privileges (as well as duties and responsibilities) that flowed from that fact needed to be policed sedulously to maintain a sense of polis security. There is a great deal of evidence that could be cited to illustrate the nervousness poleis felt at the threat of the intrusion of persons who did not belong but pretended to, and usurped the right to own land or otherwise participate in the polis’s activities as if a legitimate citizen. Thus the drawing of a firm boundary carried not only a physical meaning but also an ideological charge; the metaphorical boundary citizen/non-citizen operated along with the actual insider/outside dichotomy so basic to Greek polis self-identity.
At the same time, other factors worked against the urge to draw firm boundaries. The existence of a borderland social and cultural world that played out on both sides of a putative boundary line might push back against the salience of the border. People who lived there enjoyed frequent contact with people technically belonging to another polis but in fact nearer neighbors and more familiar than fellow-citizens in the asty. This situation led to distrust on both sides: a sense, so obvious in Aristotle, that borderlanders were not fully to be trusted, because their interests might differ in meaningful ways from those of their putative fellow-citizens in the metropole. Pre-existing claims to borderland use – herding especially, but, as we have seen, even matters like quarrying, wood-cutting, and ownership of a house – might weaken polis control of land that was technically part of its chora, or even result in decisions to define “unallocated land” along a border to which neighboring poleis might both claim a share. This way of looking at a borderland has more in common with the relinquishment of, or disinterest in, a firmly defined border that we see in Siam or Morocco, and has long been noted by historians and archaeologists working on questions of land ownership and border demarcation.76

Finally, religious matters carried great weight. On the one hand, people living in the metropole might regard the borderland, the eschatia, with fear and loathing, home of dangerous and unpredictable gods like Pan. For them, the borderland might stand as a wildland, a home to a certain type of desperado,77 certainly a place where, in the worst case, the civilization of the polis faded away into nothingness. (The local residents, of course, might well scoff, living as farmers and herdsmen with homes and families and the graves of their ancestors.) On the other, border-making could not intrude on religious practice. Altars, sanctuaries, sacred woods, any markers of religious celebration and worship, enjoyed a pre-existing claim to respect, and worshippers had to be afforded access to these spots.

Thus, border-making and -policing in the world of the Greek polis shows elements of various kinds of borders studied in the more recent historical geographic literature reviewed at the start of this essay. I have by no means exhausted the complexities of this aspect of polis self-identity creation and claims to land, resources, and the right to exclude the outsider. I have only touched obliquely on certain important changes over time, most notably the imposition of new, monarchical authority first by the great kingdoms of the Hellenistic period and then later, and perhaps even more profoundly, the Roman Empire, which shifted the center of power to far-distant places and changed the ways that poleis operated to assert their rights. But I hope at least to have shown that the historical geography of ancient Greek border-making has something to contribute to a broader study of borders and borderlands.

Abbreviations

FD = Fouilles de Delphes, multiple volumes, various editors.
IG = Inscriptiones graecae, 14 vol., various editors.
NOTES


7. A colleague recently shared with me a bibliography she and her students and collaborators compiled; it runs to thousands of items.


10. Jeremy Adelman and Stephen Aron, “From Borderlands to Borders. Empires, Nation-States, and Peoples in Between in North American History,” *American Historical Review* 104 (1999), 814-841, trace exactly a process of border “maturation” along Baud and van Schnedel’s lines; see especially 840; 813-814, 815 (hybridity), 840 (their emphasis in both quotations). Their analysis owes a good deal to the notion of the “middle ground” most clearly argued by Richard White, *The Middle Ground. Indians, Empires, and Republics in the Great Lakes Region, 1650-1815* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1991). The idea, however, that the Native American populations were operating in a zone between imperial powers requires some rethinking in light of arguments that several groups, notably the Comanches and Apaches,


12. Pekka Hämäläinen and Samuel Truett, “On Borderlands,” *Journal of American History* 98 (2011), 338, 346-351. These remarks put me in mind of the reflections of Héctor Aguilar Camín in the second edition of his *La frontera nómada. Sonora y la Revolución Mexicana* (Mexico City: Nexos Sociedad Ciencia y Literatura, 2012) 18-19, where he remarks on the ideological use for state-building the actors along the border have been put to, a process that required suppression of a major part of the historical facts.


15. I owe my knowledge of this example and that of the Maghreb to Green, “Sense of Border,” 581-583 and 578-579.

16. Janet L. Roitman, *Fiscal Disobedience. An Anthropology of Economic Regulation in Central Africa* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2005), 102, 129; Green, “Sense of Place,” 583. The first French effort to penetrate the Chad basin occurred in 1899, when the infamous Voulet-Chanoine expedition was dispatched from Dakar and St. Louis in Senegal; see Bertrand Taithe, *The Killer Trail. A Colonial Scandal in the Heart of Africa* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2009) 1-41. A problem posed for the expedition was the recent drawing of a line to separate British and French territory in West Africa; Voulet and Chanoine were ordered to stay in French territory, but the logic of the landscape and routes of travel forced them to ignore the order. They never made it to Lake Chad; it was the contemporaneous trans-Saharan expedition of Foureau-Lamy that finally claimed the region for France.


stance of the sources that stress the religious conflict. It is interesting to consider the similar ways in which Americans constructed their “frontier” as a wilderness, uninhabited, writing the Native Americans off the landscape. See Daniel Power, “Introduction. A. Frontiers: Terms, Concepts, and the Historians of Medieval and Early Modern Europe,” 9-12, for some reflections on this use of frontier in a European context.

20. Green, “Sense of Border,” 575, 577 (her emphasis), and 586-587. An indexical statement about a place depends on the location of the speaker: “New York is north of here” is true only relative to the position of the observer; the nonindexical statement “New York is north of Miami” is true no matter where you stand. She borrows these concepts from Alfred Gell, “How to Read a Map. Remarks on the Practical Knowledge of Navigation,” Man 20 (1985), 271-286. It would be hard to overstate my debt to Green’s brief but penetrating essay.
22. Some poleis grew during the Hellenistic period by the absorption of neighbors; we will examine some instances of this process, called sympoliteia or synoikismos, depending on the way the process worked. The largest such expanded polis known to me, the island of Rhodes, which began as three separate poleis that combined willingly in 408 BCE, covered 1409 km², not counting possessions on the mainland; IACP 1196-1210. See in general Gary Reger, “Sympolitai in Hellenistic Asia Minor,” in The Greco-Roman East. Politics, Culture, Society, ed. Stephen Colvin (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2004), 144-180, and now Jeremy LaBuff, Polis Expansion and Elite Power in Hellenistic Karia (Lanham: Lexington Books, 2016).
23. The ancient Greek world seems to have been largely left out of the conversation in border studies. Wilson and Donovan’s recent edited volume Companion to Border Studies, has not a word to say about it; there are plenty of references to “Greeks,” but only in the sense of contemporary Greeks. Power, “Introduction,” 4, remarks briefly, “In Classical Antiquity there was no notion of frontiers as linear borders” but then adds “[l]ocal administrative boundaries certainly did exist, and, indeed, were often hallowed with a sacral function; although sometimes defined by a broad natural feature such as a forest, these were often linear. . . .” To be fair, Power focuses on the Roman imperial state, not the polis.

27. Fachard, “Resources of the Borderlands,” 25-27, on the complexities of “ownership” in the Greek context.


32. Sheila L. Ager, *Interstate Arbitrations in the Greek World, 337-90 B.C.* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1996); Anna Magnetto, *Gli arbitrati interstatali greci. Introduzione, testo critico, traduzione, commento e indici* (Pisa: Scuola normale superiore, 1997); Christophe Chandezon, *L’élevage en Grèce (fin Ve – fin 1er s. a. C.). L’apport des sources épigraphiques* (Bordeaux: Ausonius, 2003). In general, I have relied on the Greek texts printed in one or the other of these collections. In the notes, I indicate the source of the text I have followed, with other important editions in parentheses (these other texts are not necessarily identical to the one I have used, and I have not thought it useful here to enter into detailed discussion of differences, where they exist), but my references are not comprehensive. Those who want to follow up are referred to Ager and Magnetto; subsequent literature can be tracked through the “Bulletin épigraphique” published in the *Revue des études grecques* and the annual *Supplementum epigraphicum graecum*. Denis Rousset has published several important articles on frontiers (aside from the inscription cited later): “Les frontières des cites grecques. Premiers réflexions à partir du recueil des documents épigraphiques,” *Cahiers du Centre Gustave Glotz* 5 (1994), 97-126; “Centre urbain, frontière et espace rural dans les cites de Grèce centrale,” in *Territoires des cites grecques. Actes de la table ronde internationale organisée par l’École française d’Athènes*, ed. Michèle Brunet (Athens-Paris: De Boccard, 1999), 35-77; “Terres sacrées, terres publiques et terres privées à Delphes,” *Comptes rendus de l’Académie des belles-lettres* 2002, 215-241; and “The City and its Territory in the Province of Achaia and ‘Roman Greece’,” *Harvard Studies in Classical Philology* 104 (2008), 303-337; and a book dealing with Delphi: *Le territoire de Delphes et la terre d’Apollon* (Paris: De Boccard, 2002). It is probably useful to say something about epigraphic conventions here. Dashes (- - - -) indicate lost text; dots (. . . .) likewise, except that each dot represents a letter. In my translations I have made no effort to distinguish restored letters and words, which in the original Greek text are enclosed in square brackets ([ ]). Words in parentheses (so, for instance) are not in the Greek but added by me as aids to English comprehension. Explanatory comments are enclosed in square brackets.

33. One major issue which I leave completely aside here is the identification of the toponyms in boundary definitions. Readers interested in these matters are referred to the sources cited in the notes.
For details, see Rousset, "Frontières,” 101-112.


41. See, for instance, Plat., Rep. 373d-e; Hell. Oxy. 18, 3-4, which records war over pastureland around Parnassos between the Phokians and the Lokrians (cf. Giovanna Daverio Rocchi, Frontiera e confine nella Grecia antica [Rome: “L’Erma” di Bretschneider, 1988], 132-142, for the dispute).

42. Ager, Interstate Arbitrations, 347-350 no. 126 (FD III, 2, 136).

43. Magnetto, Arbitrari 187-191 no. 30 (Ager, Interstate Arbitrations 99-101 no. 31), dated 260-250 BCE.

44. Mountain peaks: Ager, Interstate Arbitrations 310-314 no. 116; valley, spring, rivers: Magnetto, Arbitrari 332-338 no. 54 (Ager, Interstate Arbitrations 151-153 no. 55); spring, rivers: Magnetto, Arbitrari 339-348 no. 55 (Ager, Interstate Arbitrations 153-157 no. 56).

45. Graves: Magnetto, Arbitrari 103-106 no. 15 (Ager, Interstate Arbitrations 69-70 no. 16), Ager, Interstate Arbitrations 288-290 no. 107 and 396-404 no. 146; also for a road; diateichisma: Magnetto, Arbitrari 238- no. 39 B (Ager, Interstate Arbitrations 124-126 no. 41). Rousset, “Frontières,” 117, for a list of natural and artificial points of reference for boundaries.

46. Choix Delphes 432-435 no. 247, 6-8 (Ager, Interstate Arbitrations 238-244 no. 88 II C-D); I translate the Greek version.

47. IK Priene² 132 (Rhodian decision, 196 BCE, as shown by Nathad Badoud, Le temps de Rhodes. Une chronologie des inscriptions fondée sur l’étude de ses institutions [Munich: C. H. Beck, 2015] 177 A 53), 134 (Roman Senate, 135 BCE), 135 (yet another confirmation of the Rhodian decision, after 135 BCE), and 136 (possible dispute of second century BCE). Four of the boundary-markers have been recovered: IK Priene² 137-140.

48. Magnetto, Arbitrari 212-224 no. 36, II (Ager, Interstate Arbitrations 113-117 no. 38, II); see Rousset, “Frontières,” 106-107. The difference between the tasks of the two panels is made clear by the terms used to designate them. Corinth: IACP 465-468 no. 227; Epidaurus: IACP 606-608 no. 348; Argos: IACP 602-604 no. 347.


50. Ager, Interstate Arbitrations, 431-446 no. 158, 46 and 86 (SIG3 685); Chandezon, L’élevage, 173-175, no. 46; Daniela Cavallo, “Arbitrato di Magnesia sul Meandro nella disputa tra Hierapynta e Itanos (IC III IV 9 – IC III IV 10),” Quaderni del dipartimento di filologia A. Rostagni (2002), 417-431.


58. Fachard, “Resources of the Borderland,” esp. 31-37 and 48-52, and in more detail the reports cited in n. 51.

60. Chandezon, L’élevage, 83-84 no. 18, 8-18 and 28-30 (Ager, Interstate Arbitrations, 184-186 no. 70). For a striking modern parallel, see the local shepherd informants about the Skourta plain in the Athenian-Boiotian borderland reported by Munn, “New Light,” 234.

61. Chandezon, L’élevage, 80-81, no. 17, 11-23 (Magnetto, Arbitrari, 298-309 no. 49; Ager, Interstate Arbitrations, 147-150 no. 54). Sosthenes was a Makedonian general who operated against Gauls south of Makedon in 279-277 BCE.

62. Chandezon, L’élevage, 29 no. 5, 15-19 (Magnetto, Arbitrari, 405-416 no. 69; Ager, Interstate Arbitrations, 170-173 no. 63).


64. See Fachard, “Resources of the Borderlands,” 34-37.


66. Chandezon, L’élevage, 173-175 no. 46, lines 75-84 only; Chandezon, L’élevage, 80-81 no. 17, 20-23.

67. Ager, Interstate Arbitrations, 288-290 no. 107. Othorne: IACP 698-699 no. 405 (as Orthos); Polichne: not in IACP.

68. Magnetto, Arbitrari, 230-237 no. 38 (Ager, Interstate Arbitrations, 119-124 no. 40), c. 240 BCE. Messene: IACP, 561-564 no. 318; Phigaleia: IACP 527-528 no. 292. An isopoliteia agreement combined two previously independent poleis into a single entity. Sara Saba will soon publish a fresh and welcome look at this institution.


70. See now C. Carusi, “Nuova edizione della homologia fra Trezene e Arsinoe (IG IV 752, IG IV² 76+77),” Studi ellenistici 16 (2009) 79-139, for a very detailed study (Ager, Interstate Arbitrations, 381-385 no. 138). I have omitted some passages, marked by the ellipsis; words in parentheses and square brackets are not in the Greek but added for clarity. Troizen: IACP, 615-617 no. 357; Arsinoe (as Methana; its name was changed in the Hellenistic period): IACP 611 no. 352. The drachma was the basic monetary unit in the Greek world. To give a sense of the size of the fines, in this period about five drachmai could buy enough wheat to feed a family of four for about a month. The words translated as “departing” and “landing” refer to ships, used no doubt to transport stone and wood.

71. The dispute between Troizen and Arsinoe had escalated to levels of virtual violence before the arbitration; the inscription speaks of forts or places (choria, an ambiguous term), houses, and slaves seized by one polis or the other, whose status had to be resolved. In one notable case, the border between two towns was drawn right through a third, and any movable property therein was divided half and half between the parties: Angelos Chaniotis, Die Verträge zwischen kretischen Poleis in der hellenistischen Zeit (Stuttgart: Franz Steiner Verlag, 1996), 296-300 no. 44 (Ager, Interstate Arbitrations, 356-359 no. 128).

72. Denis Rousset, De Lycie en Cabalide. La convention entre les Lyciens et Termessos près d’Oinoanda (Geneva: Droz, 2010), 6 line 27 for ownership, 6-10 lines 31-91 for the boundary-making, 43-61 for discussion of the boundary.

73. Magnetto, Arbitrari, 179-186 no. 29 (Ager, Interstate Arbitrations, 99-101 no. 30), her suggestion at 183. The disputants: Chalai: not in IACP; Melitaia: IACP, 715 no. 438; Peuma: IACP, 715-716 no. 439.


77. A matter I have left aside, but that a thorough treatment of Greek borderlands ought to include, is that of crime, including smuggling. Crime too, of course, is partly in the view of the beholder; a good place to start thinking about this problem might be the excellent essay about mountain and plain by Brent Shaw, “Bandit Highlands and Lowland Peace. The Mountains of Isaura-Cilicia,” Journal of the Social and Economic History of the Orient 33 (1990) 199-233 and 237-270. This paper started life as a presentation in a series called “Freedom, Dependency, and the Greek Polis,” organized by John Ma and given at Corpus Christi College, Oxford University, on February 29, 2012. I am very grateful to the attentive audience’s comments and suggestions, especially those of John and Peter Thonemann. It was revised for a conference held at the Trinity College Center for Urban and Global Studies in April 2013, organized by Xiangming Chen and Garth Myers; both offered very helpful comments and suggestions on that version. My friend and colleague Sylvain Fachard, whose work on the borderlands of Attica and Boiotia is groundbreaking, has been generous with advice and assistance; I am very grateful to him and Pierre Ducrey, director of the Fondation Hardt, for permission to reproduce figure 2. Figures 1 and 3 were compiled by Cheryl Cape of Trinity College using data freely available from the Barrington Atlas of the Greek and Roman World. Figures 7 and 9, drawn by Adrienne Ober, are used with permission of Josiah Ober (and assistance of Nancy Smith). Christophe Chandezon kindly gave permission to reproduce figures 5, 6, and 8; I owe permission to reproduce figure 4 to Denis Rousset and the École française d’Athènes. This final version, much revised, has benefitted enormously from suggestions by Maria Lane and the two anonymous reviewers for Historical Geography, all of whose comments I have tried to incorporate. My greatest debt is owed to Maria for her support throughout the process of review and revision and her willingness to consider for Historical Geography a paper lying rather far from the usual topics the journal treats. Any errors or omissions or idiocies that remain belong to my account, or stubbornness.