Religious Crisis in the Greek Mainland during the Fourth Century B.C.
The Third Sacred War: Diplomatic Initiatives, Propaganda and Final Settlement

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Introduction

In world history, politics and religion are always two factors of state infrastructure and interstate relations, which go together or quite frequently being always in delicate combination lead to critical conflicts.

In nineteenth century, leading figures of social studies such as Auguste Comte, Max Weber, Karl Marx, and Sigmund Freud attempted to reconsider the role of religion in a new economic, social and intellectual environment regarding that religion would gradually fade in importance and cease to be significant with the advent of industrial society. In the twentieth century C. Wright Mills in tune with his predecessors expressed his view as follows: “Once the world was filled with the sacred—in thought, practice, and institutional form. After the Reformation and the Renaissance, the forces of modernizations wept across the globe and secularization, a corollary historical process, loosened the dominance of the sacred. In due course, the sacred shall disappear altogether except, possibly, in the private realm.”

In accordance with the above stated idea, social sciences study sacred in juxtaposition with secularization forming a principal argument that secularization of modern societies causes religion to decay; nevertheless, this argument seems to come under growing criticism in the last decades proving that it is currently experiencing the most sustained challenge in its long history, since in the United States and Western Europe the emergence of New Age spirituality, together with the growth in fundamentalist movements and religious parties, bring back religious influence on societies in an enhanced form.

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1 Norris & Inglehart: 3 citing Mills: 32-33.
2 Norris & Inglehart: 3-4.
The Third Sacred War

Going back to the fourth century BC Greece, in an idiosyncratically religious society, we come across Delphi, the prestigious and influential religious centre, which faces a political-imperialistic ambition of the Phocian people within a religious-political coalition namely, the Amphictyonic Congress, comprised by the cities living nearby the Delphic shrine.

The allegations that the Phocians committed sacrilege cultivating illegally the sacred land of Cirrhaea caused the Third Sacred War, which began in 356 and ended in 346. The charge was brought against Phocis by Thebes and as a response Phocis seized the temple of Apollo in Delphi. The Thebans and the Locrians tried to defend the temple and a violent war started in which all the powerful states of Greece took part (Lacedaemonians, Peloponnesians and Athenians supporting Phocians and on the other side Boeotians, Locrians and Philip with Macedonians and Thessalians against the Phocians).³

Among other sources presenting the ten years war, we have Diodorus of Sicily who writes on this war in book 16 of his Library and especially chapters 14 (sections 3-5), 23-31, 35 and 56-64.

Already in 16.14.3, Diodorus seems to disclose his source for the events of the Sacred War included in book 16 by referring to Demophilus, son of Ephorus, from the Euboian Cyme. Demophilus had been passed over by his father, beginning his account with the capture of the shrine at Delphi and the looting of the oracle by the leader of the Phocians Philomelus.⁴

The war was given different names such as τῷ Φωκέων πολέμῳ (Dem. 19.83), ὁ Φωκικὸς πόλεμος (Dem. 2.7, 10.47, 18.18 and Aeschin. 3.148). However, this war was also given the name ιερὸς (=sacred), which may point to a rhetorical or propagandistic use of the adjective (see Callisthenes F.Gr.Hist. 124 F1; Aristot. Pol. 1304a 12-13).⁵ In reality, this was not the only war which was given such a name, since we know at least four wars named as Sacred declared by the Amphictyonic Council of Delphi against cities accused for committing sacrilege against

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³ For more about the Third Sacred War see Buckler (1989) and Ehrhardt (1961). We may more or less reconstruct from various texts (sc. [Dem.].17.14, 18, 26) Philocrates’ final proposal, which was accepted by the Assembly; so, the final provisions of the peace of 346 were: i) Peace and alliance between Athens and Macedonia; under the provisions of the alliance Athens and her allies were bound to take part in any military operation which Philip might choose (for the dilemma which the Athenians faced because of this clause see Aesch. On the False Embassy 137). Athens could obviously have been forced to attack even Phocis, Halos and Cersobleptes, if Philip attacked them. Callisthenes is referred also as a historian who wrote, a monograph Περί του Ιερού πολέμου (=on the Third Sacred War). Diyllos from Athens also wrote on the Third Sacred War; see also Efsthathiou & Pylarinos: 424.
⁴ See also Diod. 16.76.5, where it is stated that Ephorus’s work was comprised by thirty books reaching as far as the capture of Perinthus. However, it was Demophilus, who probably wrote book 30, since books 28 and 29 (fr. 149-150) contained the history of the West and book 27 (fr. 148) included the early years of Philip’s period of rule. For the period of Ephorus’s history see also Clement of Alexandria Stromateis, 1.21.139.4-5: Ephorus may have covered 735 years between the Return of the Heracleidae and the archonship of Evaenetus, namely 335/4 B.C. See for more Efsthathiou & Pylarinos: 422-423.
⁵ For more see Pownall: 35-55.
Apollo. All of them, despite their initiatives, mainly political, economic and other were presented as sacred for reasons easy to understand. It was also the war against the Persians which was promoted as sacred once initiated by Philip II and finally completed by Alexander the Great; the idea was that the Macedonian leaders wished to revenge the sacrilege committed by the Persians against the shrines of Greece about 150 years before.

Thus, in 16.23 Diodorus presents the initial events with a superficial attempt to comment on the reasons of the crisis. The text discusses the leadership of the Phocians referring to Philomelus; this man characterized of unusual audacity and lawlessness seized the shrine in Delphi. However, this case was not the first one, since the Lacedaemonians had fought the Leuctrian War with the Boeotians and had been defeated, the Thebans brought a serious charge against the Lacedaemonians in the Amphictyonic Council, because of their seizure of the Cadmeia (by the Lacedaemonian Phoibidas in 382 BC) and obtained a judgment against them for a large indemnity. Pointing to the reasons for attributing sacrilege against the Phocians, Diodorus mentions the cultivation of a large portion of the consecrated territory named Cirrhaean. For this sacrilege, the Phocians were arraigned in the Council and were fined a large number of talents. When they did not discharge the assessments, the hieromnemones of the Amphictyons brought charges against the Phocians and demanded of the Council that if the Phocians did not pay the money to the god, they would lay the land of those who were cheating the god under a curse.

On the other hand, the text presents the reaction of the Phocians, who after the ratification of the Amphictyons’ decisions by all the Greeks and when the territory of the Phocians was about to be placed under the curse, Philomelus spoke before his fellow countrymen using the following arguments: first of all that the Phocians were unable to pay the money on account of the magnitude of the fine, and that to allow the territory to be cursed was not only cowardly but involved them in danger since it was the destruction of the means by which they all lived (the Greek text says: ἀλλὰ καὶ κίνδυνον ἐπιφέρειν τῇ τῶν ἀπάντων τοῦ βίου άνατροπῇ), implying that the sacrilege brought forth a new way of life with wealth or maybe luxury based on the god’s money, which the Phocians now refuse to return back to the Shrine. The allegations of Philomelus also included the thesis that the judgments of the Amphictyons were unjust in the highest degree; in any case the synedrion of the Amphictyons had inflicted huge fines for the cultivation of what was a very small portion of land. Philomelus’ final advice to the Phocians was to treat the fines as null and void; he argued that he could be based on strong grounds for their case against the Amphictyons, since in ancient times they had held control and guardianship of the oracle.

Diodorus’ narrative is given in the English Translation by Oldfather with minor or major amendments.
Finally and quite importantly, Philomelus offered as witness the most ancient and greatest of all poets, Homer quoting from the *Iliad* book 2, 517-519. With no doubt, poetic quotations, especially Homer, and myth, which are found within texts and originated at the bulk of the Greek poetic tradition, build arguments by themselves or most commonly support the original secondary author’s argumentation through appropriate use.

As I have already indicated, Homer is one of the favourite authors, who was reworked by later authors and poets through the myths and ideas he offers; it is evident that Homer established his ideas and even his characters within the frame of later literature and tradition and thus adaptation of Homeric material was a usual cultural phenomenon and sometimes a routine process not only for classical literature but also for political procedures.7

From the late archaic period onwards, myths were used as a means of political propaganda (e.g. Plut. *Sol*. 10 on the dispute about the possession of Salamis). “Heroic mythology” was seen as describing historical reality, and thus it was for the Greeks their earlier history; heroic conquests, the foundation or possession of lands and towns, played much the same part in ancient political propaganda as do contemporary nationality claims. Mythical foundations and conquests justified the possession of countries in post-heroic times and heroic myth. Markle8 argues that in the fourth century myth was still a language “familiar to all Greeks”, and that there were no alternative means to it “in inter-state or hegemonic political theory”; he supports his opinion with examples, especially from the letter of Speusippos to Philip,9 which contains myths used by Antipater to justify Makedonia’s claims to Amphipolis, against that of Athens.10

In this Homeric two verse excerpt of Iliad book 2, 517-519, Phoci is presented as a distinctive geographical and political unit, and the Phocians are described by an ethnic name (see for parallels v. 494 for the Boeotians and v. 527 for the Locroians; on the contrary there are references simply to inhabitants of Orchomenos-Aspledon contingent at v. 511). The leaders of the Phocians are Schedios and Epistrophos. While Epistrophos is not yet mentioned elsewhere in the Iliad, Schedios is mentioned twice in 17.306-11, where a certain Schedios was killed by Hector during the struggle for the body of Patroclos; the comment following the reference to Schedios by name makes sure that it is truly the Phocian leader: this man is referred to as far the best of the Phocians (vv. 306-307: ὃ δὲ Σχεδίον μεγαθύμου ᾿Ιφίτου υἱὸν Φωκήων ὄχ’ ἄριστον, who lived in famous Panopeus and ruled over many men (vv. 307-308:

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7 See also Efsthathou (2016): 117 in Efsthathou-Karamanou.
8 Markle: 98.
9 Speusippus *Epistula ad Philippum regem* [Sp.] (E. Bickermann and J. Sykutris (eds.), see pp. 9 f. and 12.
10 For more about myth see Pozzi & Wickersham: 16-25; Nilsson: 743-748; Markle: 80-99; Bremmer: 9-17.
ὅς ἐν κλειτῷ Πανοπῆϊ οἰκία ναετάασκε πολέσσ’ ἄνδρεσσιν ἀνάσσων). However, a reference at 15.515 to another Schedios, also a Phocian commander ‘son of Perimedes’ killed by Hector, makes the issue more complex. We may suppose that there was a certain reference to Schedios as a Phocian king, but the oral tradition of the epics mixed up various versions of his parentage.\footnote{Cf. Kirk: 199.}

Thus, homeric material adapted or appropriated by Diodorus (or even by Philomelus) here is planned to support the argument at issue, the Phocian thesis. Thus, the appeal to myth is used as an alternative form of argument. A reference to a myth is always manipulated by the reporting author as a preface to the argument about contemporary politics.

Further down in chapter 24 of book 16, Diodorus presents in his narrative the political initiatives adopted by Philomelus in order to prepare his position before the final showdown over the Thebans and the Amphictyons in general. First, Philomelus preferred to visit Sparta; his choice may have been based on the solid ground of mutual interest between Phocis and Sparta, since Archidamus had plans to render the judgments of the Amphictyons null and void, for there were also serious and unjust pronouncements of that Council to the injury of the Lacedaemonians. Philomelus revealed to Archidamus that he had decided to seize Delphi and that if he succeeded in obtaining the guardianship of the shrine, he would annul the decrees of the Amphictyons. Although Archidamus approved of the proposal, he preferred to offer his assistance not openly, he would co-operate secretly in every respect, providing both money and mercenaries. The final outcome of this exchange is that Philomelus, having received fifteen talents from him and having added at least as much on his own account, he hired foreign mercenaries and chose a thousand of the Phocians, whom he called peltasts. Then, after Philomelus had gathered a multitude of soldiers and had seized the oracle, he slew the group of Delphians called Thracidae who sought to oppose him and confiscated their possessions; but, observing that the others were terror-stricken, he exhorted them to be of good cheer since no danger would befall them. When news of the seizure of the shrine was noised abroad, the Locrians, who lived nearby, straightway took the field against Philomelus. A battle took place near Delphi and the Locrians were defeated with the loss of many of their men and fled to their own territory. On the other hand, Philomelus, being ecstatic by his victory, made his political position absolutely clear by cutting the pronouncements of the Amphictyons from the slabs, deleting the letters recording their judgments, and personally causing the report to be circulated that he had resolved not to plunder the oracle nor had he purposed to commit any other lawless deed. Finally, in support of the ancestral claim to the guardianship and because of his desire to annul the unjust decrees of the Amphictyons, he defended the ancestral laws of the Phocians.

Conclusively, in 16.24, Diodorus presents the first initiatives taken by Philomelus starting
with his contact with Archidamus of Sparta. The two cities, Sparta and Phocis, were well associated as both accused with the dishonorable charge of sacrilege. Although Sparta’s case went back as far as 382 B.C., Archidamus seems to know very well how serious the case is, and he presents himself as chary of supporting Phocis openly.

This is a case of secret diplomacy which may be regarded as necessary during this period for various reasons:

i) Sparta was in a period of recession, but having as her own priority the opposition to Boeotians, considered a war in central Greece serious enough to keep the Boeotians busy. We need to emphasize on the enmity between Boeotians and Sparta in 360’s onwards, when Boeotians had plagued Laconia with a great number of invasions.

ii) However, we need to underline the seriousness of the charge, which may be also revealed in Phocis’ continuous attempts to find mercenaries by offering salaries increased by one half (see 16.25: ἀναβιβάσας τοὺς μισθοὺς καὶ ποιήσας ἡμιολίους). It seems that wealth, foreign citizenship or even powerful association could be the goals for the mercenaries to remain in service. However, these mercenaries, offering service to the Phocians during the Third Sacred War, may be discouraged to engage due to the risk of condemnation and even death as temple-robbers and even more due to the ongoing enmity of Philip II. After the end of the War, these men agonizing to escape central Greece joined Phalaecus and went to Crete with him as a long term professional soldiers.\(^\text{12}\)

iii) There was also a real need from the part of the Phocians, out of fear of the judgment (διὰ τὸν τῆς καταδίκης φόβον) to elect Philomelus as a general with absolute power (στρατηγὸν αὐτοκράτορα), to set about energetically to fulfill his promise. He asked for the assistance of Lacedaemonians and got 15 talents from Archidamus, in order to hire mercenaries. Then, after the gathering of a multitude of soldiers, he seized the oracle and slew the group of Delphians called Thracidae.

iv) The designation of Phalaecus as strategos autokrator points to a military and – inevitably political – post with enhanced power and extensive authority than ordinarily; designed for a period of crisis strategos autokrator or – in important and difficult diplomatic missions – ambassador autokrator (πρεσβευτὴς αὐτοκράτωρ) were officials whom the demos invested with more extensive authority, without reference to regular democratic procedures (see for example Thuc. 8.67.1, Lys. 13.9, Aeschin. 3.63, Dem. 19.173).\(^\text{13}\)

v) Evidently, the mutual interest of Sparta and Phocis especially was to react against the judgments of the Amphictyons, which, although a risky act, could have had

\(^{12}\) Trundle: 69-70 citing Diod. 16.59.3, 63.5, 78.4; Plut. Tim. 30.

\(^{13}\) For more see Hamel: 201 ff.
a precedent in the case of Athens’ reaction against the decree-decision of the Amphictyons to impose the penalty of lifelong exile to Astycratis in 363/362 (see IG ii 2 109).

Cutting down the narrative, we reach straight to the conclusion of this ten-year sharp war as exposed in 16.59 and 60. In 16.59, Diodorus’ narrative gives us details of the final unfulfilled armed confrontation. After a ten-year war, the Phocians elected Phalaecus as a general, who ruled over the main body of the mercenaries. In the final confrontation, Philip prepared to decide the war by a pitched battle and Phalaecus realizing that he was no match for Philip, sent ambassadors to the king to treat for an armistice. Finally, an agreement was reached whereby Phalaecus with his men should go wherever he wished, and he then, under the terms of the truce, withdrew to the Peloponnese with his mercenaries to the number of eight thousand. Moreover, the Phocians, with no hope, surrendered to Philip. It was a real surprise even for Philip himself to terminate a particularly harsh war without a battle. In the end, Philip decided to call a meeting of the Amphictyonic Council and leave to it the final decision on all the issues at stake.

In 16.60, Diodorus makes reference to the final decisions and arrangements concerning the conclusion of this war. Thus, it was decided that Philip and his descendants would have granted with the two votes in the Amphictyonic Council formerly held by the Phocians. It is worthy of note that the two votes of the Phocians were given to Philip only (and his descendants) and not to Macedonians collectively; 14 this may be a clear recognition for his personal involvement to the solution of the Third Sacred War as an avenger of the god and as a pan-Hellenic leader. The sacrilege was a serious charge for depriving a league member, here the Phocians, of its votes, and this also happened in the end of the First Sacred War in 582; Aeschines (3.107-109 and 114-117) narrates another case of impious behaviour, the one of Cirraeans and the Cragalidae who repeatedly committed sacrilege against the shrine at Delphi and its dedicated offerings transgressed against the Amphictyons.

They also voted to take down the walls of the three cities (probably in Boeotia) and that the Phocians should have no participation in the temple of Delphi or in the Council of the Amphictyons.

The decision included that the Phocians should not be permitted to acquire either horses or arms until they should have paid off to the god the monies they had robbed; this measure was taken in order to ensure that they were not capable to resist the conditions imposed on them by the Amphictyons. 15

14 Cf. Paus. 10.3.3, where it clearly mentions that the Phocians were deprived of their share in the Delphic sanctuary and in the Greek assembly, and their votes were given by the Amphictyons to the Macedonians (and not to Philip personally).
15 McQueen: 136.
The punishment was also extended to those of the Phocians and any others who had had a share in the temple-robbery, to all those who had fled and were to be under a curse and subject to arrest wherever they might be caught. We know of various groups of Phocians who had fled, firstly Phalaecus and his associates and secondly the citizens of Phocis who took refuge in Athens.  

An important provision of the overall decision was that all the cities of the Phocians were to be razed and the men to be moved to villages, no one of which should have more than fifty houses, and the villages were to be not less than a stade apart from one another, and this is a case of dioecism, a political consequence of a conflict imposed on the losing party; that the Phocians were to possess their territory and to bring a tribute of sixty talents to the god each year until they should have paid off the sums registered at the time of the pillaging of the sanctuary. The Pythian games were planned to be held by Philip together with the Boeotians and Thessalians, since the Corinthians had shared with the Phocians in the sacrilege committed against the god. The Amphictyons and Philip were to smash the weapons of the Phocians and those of their mercenaries down the crags, burn the remains of them and sell the horses. In a similar manner, the Amphictyons made arrangements for the custody of the oracle and other matters affecting due respect for the gods and the general peace and concord of the Greeks. Thereafter, when Philip had assisted the Amphictyons gave effect to their decrees and had dealt generously with all, he returned to Macedonia, having not merely won for himself a reputation for piety and excellent generalship but having also built a sure foundation for the aggrandizement that was destined to be his. For he was eager to be designated commander-in-chief of Hellas with full powers and as such to prosecute the war against the Persians. And this was what actually came to pass. […]

Conclusion

In a form of a short conclusion, the crisis of the fourth century BC in Greece, which has been called the Third Sacred War involving the majority of Greek cities, may be viewed within a complex religious but also political frame. Lawlessness and arrogance caused the initial illegal act of the Phocians to cultivate law-protected sacred land. Propaganda and myth used to support Phocis’ rights to own this land or to rule over the Amphictyonic Congress were in
essence unfruitful. The position of Phocis to face a coalition of Amphictyons and the stigma of committing sacrilege was difficult to overcome. Mercenaries have to be paid with 50% more or even double the usual salary, and thus the treasure of the Shrine and the valuable votive offerings have been used to make gold talents for the needs of the war.

Most importantly however, a seemingly religious crisis caused a very serious political result: Philip, the ambitious Macedonian-northern Greek leader found the opportunity to be involved in Amphictyonic Congress, to get the two votes of the Phocians for himself and now to be so close to Athens and the rest of the Greek mainland in order to rule over the whole of Greece and to prepare his ambitious project to conquer Asia Minor and Persia.

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