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## THE STATUE OF HERACLES *PROMAKHOS* AT THEBES: A HISTORICAL RECONSTRUCTION\*

MARGHERITA CARUCCI

### Introduction

In the description of Thebes in Boeotia, Pausanias mentions a temple dedicated to Heracles. The Heracleion contained a marble statue of Heracles *Promakhos* made by the Thebans Xenocritus and Eubius and the colossal statues of Athena and Heracles made by Alcámenes; the pediment was decorated with the Twelve Labours of Heracles, which had been carved by Praxiteles; a gymnasium and a stadium were adjoining the temple.<sup>1</sup>

The sculptural decoration of this sanctuary is neither described nor cursorily mentioned in other literary sources; moreover there is no archaeological evidence that may support Pausanias' information. Nevertheless, the passage contains some significant elements for the historical reconstruction of the cult statue of Heracles *Promakhos*.

### Pausanias as source

The lack of evidence for the statue of Heracles *Promakhos* at Thebes in other literary sources raises the question as to whether Pausanias' *Periegesis* is a reliable

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\* The topic of this article was firstly discussed in my "tesi di laurea", *Promachoi. Tipi di Atena, Eracle, Ermes nella statuaria greca*, which I submitted to the Università degli Studi di Bari in the academic year 1999–2000. My supervisor, Prof. Luigi Todisco, published an article on the iconographic types of Athena, Heracles, and Hermes as promakhoi (L. Todisco, "Promachoi", *Ostraka* 9.2 (2000) 445–54). The present article will not focus on the pictorial representation of the promakhos-type: it is rather a revised and updated version of more historical issues, which had been analysed in my dissertation.

<sup>1</sup> Paus. 9,11,4.

source. The *Periegesis*, which is a kind of travel book about Greece in the second century AD, contains a large amount of information about the places that Pausanias visited: monuments, local anecdotes, peculiar rituals, variations of standard histories or myths, and names of artists that would have otherwise been forgotten or unknown. In spite of its high value for archaeologists and historians, the *Periegesis* has caused much discussion and controversial positions among past scholars about the use of this travel book. Some scholars, such as the philologist Wilamowitz, claimed that the *Periegesis* is a fantasy-cum-pastiche, written by a charlatan who did not visit most of the places that he described.<sup>2</sup> Some others praised the high value of the Greek work, which was used to stroll around the ruins in order to reconstruct the layout of the ancient towns.<sup>3</sup> The complexity and the multiple uses of the *Periegesis* explain the richness and variety of nineteenth-century studies on the Greek work. In recent years, a more careful analysis of the *Periegesis* in terms of genre, author's literary aims, typology of the readers, and culture of the Greek East of the Roman Empire have contributed to emphasise Pausanias' high value.<sup>4</sup> In fact, the progress of archaeological research and the larger amount of evidence show that in spite of its occasionally unwarranted inferences or mistakes, Pausanias' book may be a useful link between the scattered evidence and the whole ancient landscape, its religion, culture, and politics.

In the description of ancient sites, Pausanias seems not to use the same methodology: some public buildings are described at length while some others are mentioned only in passing. This apparent incoherence may be explained as the result of his selective process. In fact, as the writer's selection of the buildings worth recording includes only the monuments of the Classical period and particularly the ones that could be connected to some ancient stories, Pausanias had to rely on what local people remembered and on oral traditions of local history that had been adapted and manipulated throughout times. Thus in the description of the Heracleion at Thebes, the mention of the ancient wooden statue of Heracles

<sup>2</sup> U. von Wilamowitz, "Die Thucydides-Legende", *Hermes* 12 (1877) 326–67.

<sup>3</sup> See, for instance, J. E. Harrison – M. de G. Verrall, *Mythology and Monuments of Ancient Athens, being a translation of a portion of the "Attica" of Pausanias by M. de G. Verrall, with introductory essay and archaeological commentary by J.E. Harrison*, London and New York 1890, viii.

<sup>4</sup> See, for example, C. Habicht, *Pausanias' Guide to Ancient Greece*, Berkeley – Los Angeles – London 1985; J. Akujärvi, *Interpretational Problems in Pausanias' Attika: I 18,1,6 and 9*, Stockholm 1999; S. E. Alcock – J. F. Cherry – J. Elsner (eds.), *Pausanias: Travel and Memory in Roman Greece*, Oxford 2001; W. Hutton, *Describing Greece. Landscape and Literature in the Periegesis of Pausanias*, Cambridge 2005; M. Pretzler, *Pausanias: Travel Writing in Ancient Greece*, London 2007.

made by Daidalos is inserted because of its connection to a mythical story. It also gives the writer the opportunity to express his personal opinion ("the Thebans are of the opinion that ...and it appears to me that this was really the case"). The colossal statues of Athena and Heracles are also connected to an episode of Greek history: the statues were dedicated by Thrasybulus and the Athenians who had descended from Thebes to dissolve the government of the Thirty Tyrants. The description of the pedimental sculptures of the Twelve Labours with the omitted and replaced episodes serves to highlight Pausanias's taste for art. Pausanias concludes the description of the sanctuary complex with a cursory mention of a gymnasium and a stadium, which had been already cited by the poet Pindar in the fifth century BC.<sup>5</sup> The whole passage is organised so that any reader has the perception that Pausanias is describing what he really saw in his tour to Thebes, though there is no archaeological evidence to support this impression.<sup>6</sup>

Notwithstanding, the use of Pausanias' passage as a trustworthy source raises a number of questions, which are to be analysed with the support of other sources, either literary or archaeological. Why was the cult statue of Heracles *Promakhos* dedicated to the temple in Thebes? Was it related to a specific episode of Theban history? Why was Heracles venerated as a *promakhos*? What value and meaning had the image of Heracles *Promakhos* for the inhabitants of Thebes?

### The term *promakhos*

The term *promakhos*, that Pausanias introduced as epithet to Heracles is widely attested in Greek literature from archaic times to the tenth century AD.<sup>7</sup> As a word composed of two elements (*pro* + *makhos*), it can be translated as "fighting before or in front", the "champion", or the "defender". In fact, the prefix *pro-* may indicate either location ("in front of, before") or priority of rank ("champion") or also type of action ("in defence of"); the second element *-makhos* refers to a war context, may it be the real combat between opposing armies or the metaphorical fight between ideas.

<sup>5</sup> Pind. *Nem.* 4,19; *Isth.* 4,61.

<sup>6</sup> For a discussion of archaeological evidence in Thebes along with the analysis of Pausanias' description, see S. Symeonoglou, *The Topography of Thebes from the Bronze Age to Modern Times*, Princeton 1985.

<sup>7</sup> There is record of more than 200 literary references to *promakhos* in both Stephanus, *TGL*, s.v. "*promakhos*", vol. VII, Graz 1954, column 1774, and in the digital version of the *TGL*, 2001.

In the plural use, the term *promakhoi* describes the heroes or the soldiers that fight in the front line. However, as the front position increases dramatically the chances of death, the *promakhoi* are the men mostly endowed with valour and courage. Local position and moral value are thus closely entwined in the same word *promakhoi*. While the plural use of the term emphasises the concept of *arete* as a necessary condition for the position in the front line, the singular form points to the defence as the reason for fighting. In both forms, however, the term *promakhos* is used when the political, social, and moral order is endangered and it describes the champion, a word that is to be intended in its double meaning as a stout fighter and a man of valour. In situations of danger, the *promakhos* fights in defence of the freedom of the group to which he belongs (city, country, community, or class)<sup>8</sup> and of the ideals in which he believes.<sup>9</sup>

The singular form of *promakhos* is also attested in Greek literature as epithet of Hermes, Athena, and Heracles. Why were they worshipped as *promakhoi*? Why were they the only ones in the whole pantheon of Greek gods to be described as *promakhoi*?

### **Hermes *Promakhos***

The only reference to Hermes as *promakhos* appears in Pausanias' description of Tanagra in Boeotia.<sup>10</sup> The Periegete says that the temple of Hermes *Promakhos* was established in memory of an episode during the war between Tanagra and Eretria. During the Eretrian attack of the Boeotian town by sea, Hermes led the ephebes to battle and the god himself in the guise of a youth armed with a strigil routed the enemies. Pausanias also tells us that inside the temple the remains of a tree were dedicated, because it was believed to be the tree at the foot of which Hermes had been reared. The literary passage does not mention any statue of the tutelary god as a *promakhos*. Because of Pausanias' method of handling information, it is difficult to ascertain whether the silence about the image of Hermes *Promakhos* is due to the writer's voluntary, yet inexplicable, omission or to the actual lack of a cult statue.

<sup>8</sup> See, for instance, Plut. *Luc.* 38,2; *Anth. Pal.* 15,50, *ibid.* 16,62,106.

<sup>9</sup> See, for example, Porphyrius, *Adversus Cristianos* 41,20; Romanus the Melodist, *Hymns* 63,12,1–4; Georgius Monachus, *Chronicon* 9,34,10.

<sup>10</sup> Paus. 9,11,24.

Some scholars argue that the image of Hermes *Promakhos* appears on a coin minted at Tanagra under Trajan's rule.<sup>11</sup> The god is naked and holding a caduceus in his right hand and an unidentified object (perhaps a strigil) in his outstretched left hand; he is standing in contrapposto with his weight on his left foot and his head slightly inclined to the left. The Polyclitean type suggests that the image on the coin would reproduce a statue of the fifth century BC and more specifically the statue of Hermes *Promakhos* on display in his temple at Tanagra. However, the presence of a cult statue of the god is not attested in literary record nor is the image of Hermes as a fighter so popular in ancient art. It is, then, difficult to suggest a possible iconography of the god as a *promakhos*. Rather the analysis of Pausanias' passage along with archaeological evidence may hint at the meaning and function of Hermes *Promakhos* at Tanagra.

The local tale about the battle between Tanagrans and Eretrians with the appearance of Hermes *Promakhos* may refer to a real event. Herodotus reports that the Gephyraeans from Eretria moved to Tanagra, where they dwelt until their expulsion by the Boeotians and their flight into Athens.<sup>12</sup> The *Suda* also observes that the Gephyraeans moved to Tanagra, after they gave the caduceus to the leader and weapons to the young people left behind.<sup>13</sup> The *Suda*'s report is very interesting, because the image of the commander armed with a caduceus and of the youths at war also appears in Pausanias' tale about Hermes *Promakhos*. As the caduceus is the typical accessory of Hermes and the god was especially venerated in Tanagra, perhaps this episode, which would have taken place during the migrations of people in Boeotia at the end of the Bronze Age, was later modified and adapted by the Tanagrans. The association of Hermes with youths and the motif of the appearance of the god in situations of danger appear again in two more cults of the god in Tanagra. Pausanias reports that, after Hermes averted a pestilence from the city by carrying a ram around the wall, Calamis carved the image of the god carrying a ram on his shoulder (Hermes *Kriophoros*) and during the festival of Hermes the most handsome ephebe went around the wall carrying a ram on his shoulder.<sup>14</sup> The Scholiast to Lycophron tells of the temple of Hermes

<sup>11</sup> I. Imhoof-Blumer – P. Gardner, *Ancient Coins Illustrating Lost Masterpieces of Greek Art. A Numismatic Commentary on Pausanias*, Chicago 1964, 115 n.5, pl. X 13; J. C. Frazer, *Pausanias's Description of Greece*, London 1913<sup>2</sup>, 90; G. Siebert, s.v. "Hermes", *LIMC V* (1990) 358 n. 856.

<sup>12</sup> Hdt. 5,57.

<sup>13</sup> *Suda*, *Doru kerukeion*.

<sup>14</sup> Paus. 9,22,1.



*Leukos*, which was built after a boy and a girl were sacrificed in accordance with an oracle, during the Eretrian attack.<sup>15</sup> The Boeotian city then was provided with three temples in honour of its tutelary god.

As Pausanias mentions a *porticus* and a theatre nearby the temple of Hermes *Promakhos*, it is possible that the latter lay in the southern part of the citadel (Fig. 1). Here, in fact, old excavation reports mention remains of seats and of a *cavea*, which have been destroyed by the flood of the river Kerykios and by the building of an aqueduct in 1950.<sup>16</sup> To the east of the supposed theatre are remains of a platform, a Corinthian capital of Roman times, and the base of a statue: perhaps they decorated the temple of Hermes *Promakhos*.<sup>17</sup> The location of the temple seems to support and to emphasise the role of Hermes as a combatant in the front line or as a defender. The temple, in fact, lay in the upper part of Tanagra from which it was possible to control the residential area in the lower city and the main roads to Thebes (west), Chalcis (north) and Athens (east), while to the south the river Aisopos obstructed the passage from Attica into the Boeotian city because of its rushing stream.

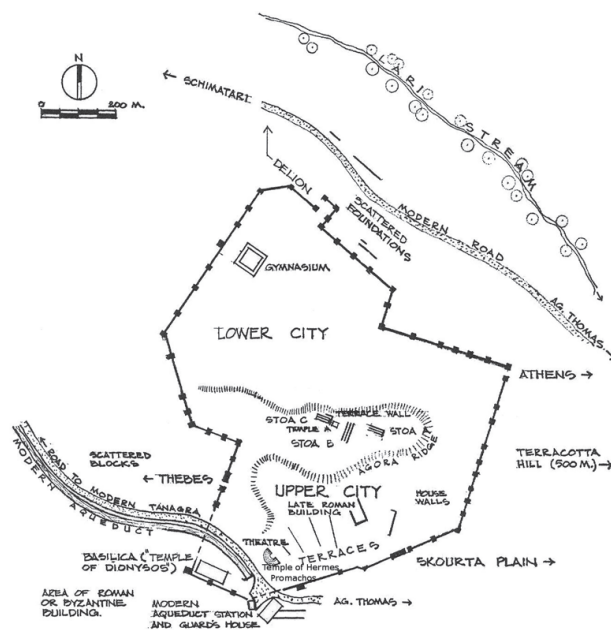


Fig. 1: Map of Tanagra, adapted from the map of D. W. Roller, "A New Map of Tanagra", *AJA* 78 (1974) 152–6: figure at p. 153.

<sup>15</sup> Schol. Lycoph. *Alex.* 679.

<sup>16</sup> D. W. Roller, "A New Map of Tanagra", *AJA* 78 (1974) 152–6: 155–6.

<sup>17</sup> D.W. Roller, "Recent investigations at Grimàdha (Tanagra)" in J. M. Fossey (ed.) *Boeotia antiqua I. Papers on Recent Work in Boiotian Archaeology and History*, Amsterdam 1989, 129–63: 154.

### **Athena *Promakhos***

While the cult of Hermes *Promakhos* is attested only in Tanagra, the image of Athena as *promakhos* is strictly linked to the city of which the goddess was the patron par excellence, Athens.

Zosimus tells that the king of the Visigoths Alaric desisted from invading Athens, when he saw Athena *promakhos* walking along the wall as the goddess is represented in statuary, in armour and ready to attack those who oppose her. Before the walls the king also saw Achilles standing in a heroic posture as Homer describes the hero fighting furiously against Hector in revenge for the death of Patroclus.<sup>18</sup> The image of Athena that defends her city occurs also in Alciphron, who prays Athena *promakhos* and *polioukhos* (who protects the city) to make him live and die in Athens.<sup>19</sup> The two epithets complement each other, as the action of fighting for and defending (*promakhos*) the city guarantees the protection of the city itself (*polioukhos*). In the description of Athena *promakhos* as the goddess appears to Alaric, Zosimus reminds his readers of the statues representing Athena equipped with weapons and in the attitude of attack. This particular detail suggests the popularity of this iconographic type in ancient art: in fact, the image of Athena in fighting pose has appeared since the sixth century BC on a number of artistic media such as sculpture, pottery, and coins.<sup>20</sup> However, the identification of this iconographic type as *promakhos* is a modern convention that is not attested in any ancient source: the mention of Athena *Promakhos* with reference to the sculptural work by Pheidias occurs only in the Scholium to Demosthenes.<sup>21</sup> The scholiast lists three images of the goddess on the Acropolis: the so-called Athena *Polias* for being the tutelary goddess of Athens; Athena *Promakhos*, which was made in bronze after the victory at Marathon; and Athena *Parthenos*, a chryselephantine statue erected after the victory at Salamis. The material (bronze) and the location (Acropolis) of the statue are significant details for the identification of the Athena *Promakhos* with the great bronze Athena by Pheidias, as it is referred

<sup>18</sup> Zos. 5,6,1.

<sup>19</sup> Alciph. *Letters* 3,15,4.

<sup>20</sup> The bibliography on the iconography of Athena as *promakhos* is huge. See, for example, H. G. Niemeyer, *Promachos. Untersuchungen zur Darstellung der bewaffneten Athena in archaischer Zeit*. Waldassen/Bayern 1960; J. Boardman, *Athenian Black Figure Vases*, London 1974, 167–77; L. Lacroix, *Les reproductions de statues sur les monnaies grecques. La statuaire archaïque et classique*. Liège 1949, 116–29, 281–6.

<sup>21</sup> Schol. Dem. *Against Androtion* 22,13.

to in other literary sources.<sup>22</sup>

Several attempts have been made to reconstruct the appearance of Athena *Promakhos* on the basis of coins, lamps and statues of Roman times along with a few miniatures in Byzantine manuscripts. However, none of the suggestions so far put forward as a copy or version of Athena *Promakhos* is convincing.<sup>23</sup> More interestingly, literary evidence allows us to reconstruct the context in which Athena *Promakhos* was dedicated. The battle of Marathon (490), which is associated to Athena *Promakhos* in some literary sources,<sup>24</sup> had important consequences for the Greek cities, since it marked the end of the first Persian invasion of Greece. The battle was a defining moment especially for Athens, which won in spite of the lack of external aids and the numerical advantage of the Persians. The young Athenian democracy became then the symbol of the whole Greece that always fights for its freedom.<sup>25</sup>

The statue of Athena *Promakhos* was located on the Acropolis (Fig. 2), which was the most important religious centre of Athens. Any visitor approaching this area through the monumental gateway of the Propylaea would have immediately faced the great statue of Athena *Promakhos*, which stood to the left of the Erechtheion and to the right of the Parthenon.<sup>26</sup> The image of the goddess was thus placed between the most representative monuments of the Acropolis: the Erechtheion was built in honor of Erechtheus, the first king and re-founder of Athens; the Parthenon was the largest building dedicated to Athena as the tutelary goddess of the Greek city. The colossal image of Athena, which was visible

<sup>22</sup> Dem. *On the false embassy* 428,272; Aristid. *Oration* 50,408,15; Paus. 1,28,2.

<sup>23</sup> For a discussion of the evidence relating to the Athena *Promakhos* and same conclusions, see B. Lundgreen, "A Methodological Enquiry: The Great Bronze of Athena by Pheidias", *JHS* 117 (1997) 190–7.

<sup>24</sup> Aristid. *In Defence of the Four* 218,9; Paus. 1,28,2; Schol. Dem. *Against Androtion* 22,13.

<sup>25</sup> Some other literary sources (Dem. *On the false embassy* 428,272; Schol. Arist. *Panatenaico* 187,20), by contrast, report that the statue of Athena *Promakhos* was dedicated after the Persian Wars. The generic reference to the Persian Wars does not allow us to relate the dedication to a specific event, as the wars may be seen concluded either with the Athenians victory by the river Eurymedon in Pamphilia (465) or with the Peace of Callias (445). However, the close association of the goddess with Athens, as it is often underscored in ancient literature and art, and the parallels with Hermes and Heracles as *promakhos* (which will be evident in the course of the present discussion) suggest that the statue of Athena *Promakhos* was dedicated in memory of an external attack to the city, like at Marathon.

<sup>26</sup> G. P. Stevens, "The Periclean Entrance Court of the Acropolis of Athens", *Hesperia* 5 (1936) 443–50; A. Linfert, "Athenen des Phidias", *MDAI(A)* 97 (1982) 57–77; B. Conticello et al., *Alla ricerca di Fidia*, Padova 1987, 160.

beyond the walls surrounding the Acropolis, would have appeared as a strong combatant ready to rise in the front line and to defend her city, as her epithet *promakhos* also emphasises.

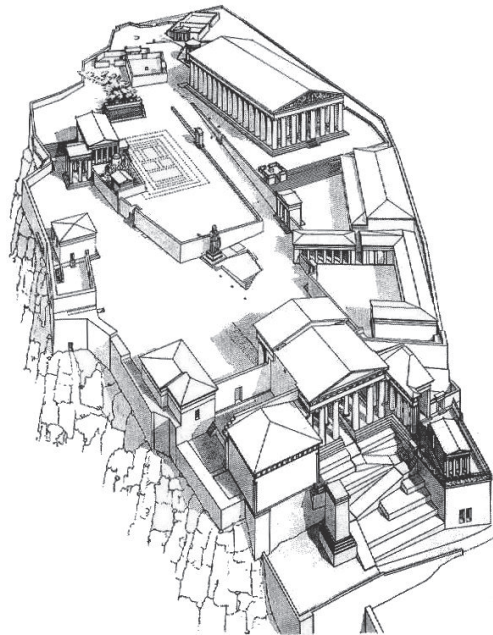


Fig. 2: Drawing of the Acropolis of Athens, from J. M. Camp, *The Archaeology of Athens*, New Haven and London 2001, fig. 241.

### **Heracles *Promakhos***

The analysis of literary and archaeological evidence for Hermes and Athena as *promakhoi* shows some similarities. Both gods held a special position in their cities (Hermes for Tanagra and Athena for Athens) and were honoured by them with a number of rituals and remarkable monuments. Both gods played the role as a guardian and protector of their cities in situations of danger: Hermes and Athena were celebrated as *promakhoi* respectively by the Tanagrarians after the Eretrian attack and by the Athenians after the Persian invasion. The temple of Hermes *Promakhos* and the statue of Athena *Promakhos* were both dedicated as a reminder of the divine help and human victory but also as a form of insurance that the gods will protect their people again in further difficult moments. Both monuments, in fact, stood in the upper part of the city from which the control over a large area was easy. The special relationship between the god and the city, the *aition* for *promakhos* linked to the motif of the war, and the location of the monuments in a strategic point of the urban area are the elements that recur for both Hermes *Promakhos* at Tanagra and Athena *Promakhos* at Athens. Do they also occur in the cult of Heracles *Promakhos* at Thebes?

According to the tradition, Heracles was conceived and born at Thebes,<sup>27</sup> where he spent his childhood and youth, leaving in order to perform the Labours. Because of his link to Thebes, the hero was especially worshipped by the Thebans, as the number of rituals and monuments dedicated to Heracles shows.<sup>28</sup> In his address to Philip II of Macedon in 344–346 BC, Isocrates says that the Thebans honor the founder of their race both by processions and by sacrifices, beyond all the other gods.<sup>29</sup> Because of his special relationship with Thebes, the hero promptly secures his presence and helps his natal city in situations of danger. For instance, when the ambassadors, who had been sent by the Orchomenians to demand tribute, arrived at Thebes, Heracles cut off their noses: as a reminder of that episode, the Thebans erected an open-air sanctuary to Heracles *Rhinocollustes* ("nose-clipper").<sup>30</sup> And when the king of Orchomenos, who felt insulted by this action, attacked Thebes, Heracles defeated the Orchomenians and imposed on them to pay twice the tax Thebes was obliged to pay. After his victory, the hero dedicated a lion of marble to the temple of Artemis *Eucleia*.<sup>31</sup> These mythical stories probably reflect the conflict between the kingdom of the Mynies and the Thebes of Cadmus. Nevertheless, for the rest of antiquity, Heracles was identified with the Theban city.<sup>32</sup>

This process of identification is particularly evident in the silver stater coins that Thebes issued in the years 446–426 BC.<sup>33</sup> The coins show the Boeotian shield (symbol of the Boeotian League) on the obverse and Heracles on the reverse. The hero is portrayed naked and youthful and in a variety of action poses, such as shooting an arrow, carrying off the Delphic tripod, stringing his bow; or

<sup>27</sup> The mythical tale of Heracles' birth is analysed by M. Rocchi, "Galinthias/Gale e la nascita di Herakles a Tebe", in P. A. Bernardini (ed.) *Presenza e funzione della città di Tebe nella cultura greca. Atti del Convegno Internazionale (Urbino 7–9 luglio 1997)*, Pisa – Roma 2000, 83–98.

<sup>28</sup> The cult of Heracles at Thebes and the celebration of the Heracleia in the honour of the hero are discussed by A. Schachter, *Cults of Boiotia. 2. Herakles to Poseidon* (BICS Suppl. 38.2), London 1986, 14–30.

<sup>29</sup> Isocr. *Phil.* 32.

<sup>30</sup> Paus. 9,25,4.

<sup>31</sup> Paus. 9,17,2.

<sup>32</sup> For a brief summary of Theban history in the classical period, see P. Cartledge, *Ancient Greece: A History in Eleven Cities*, Oxford 2009, 131–41.

<sup>33</sup> E. Babelon, *Traité des Monnaies Grecques et Romaines*, Paris 1914, 225–36; B. V. Head, *Historia Numorum: A Manual of Greek Numismatics*, 2<sup>nd</sup> ed., London 1963, 70–2.

as an infant strangling snakes. These coins illustrating the Labours of Heracles seem appropriate to evoke the labours which Thebes had recently undergone.<sup>34</sup> Heracles killed his children – Thebes supported the Median cause in the Persian wars; to expiate his crime, Heracles was required to carry out the labours – after the Persian defeat, Thebes had to work hard for its material and moral restoration; Heracles was persecuted by the jealous Hera – Thebes suffered under the burden of Athens' jealousy. While the labours and achievements of Heracles symbolised Thebans' struggle and hope for freedom and prestige, the Athenians portrayed the hero as a glutton and buffoon as a way of expressing a similar opinion about the Thebans themselves. In 404 the Thebans gave refuge to Thrasybulus and those democratic Athenians who were forced into exile by the Thirty Tyrants. After the instauration of the democratic regime in Athens, the exiles dedicated the statues of Athena and Heracles by Alcámenes in the Heracleion of Thebes<sup>35</sup> as a visual expression of their gratitude to the Thebans for their help. The dedication of Athena, the tutelary goddess of Athens, and of Heracles, the national hero of Thebes, symbolised the reconciliation of the two cities.

The figure of Heracles is associated with a further episode of the Theban history. In the eve of the battle of Leuctra in 371 BC, the arms kept in the Heracleion had disappeared which indicated that Heracles himself had gone forth to the battle.<sup>36</sup> Polyænus says that this was a stratagem used by the Theban commander Epameinondas to raise the spirits of his soldiers, who were alarmed by the superior numbers of the Spartan troops:

"He had arranged previously with the priests of Hercules to open the temple at night, take out the arms that lay there, clean them off and place them by the god's statue, and he and his temple-servants were to leave without saying anything to anyone. When the soldiers came with their officers to the temple, they saw the doors open, though none of the temple-servants was present, and they also saw the old arms, recently cleaned and shining, in front of the god's statue. They shouted and were filled with divine courage, just as if they had Hercules as their general in battle. So it turned out that, filled with courage, they defeated the 40,000."<sup>37</sup>

<sup>34</sup> N. H. Demand, *Thebes in the Fifth Century: Heracles Resurgent*, Norfolk 1982, 2–3.

<sup>35</sup> Paus. 9,11,4.

<sup>36</sup> Xen. *Hell.* 6,4,7; Diod. 15,53; Cic. *div.* 1,74.

<sup>37</sup> Polyænus, *Stratagems of war* 2,3,8, edited and translated by P. Krentz – E. L. Wheeler, vol. 1 (Books I–V), Chicago 1994, 159. The political and religious aspect of Epameinondas' strategy is analysed by M. Sordi, "Propaganda politica e senso religioso nell'azione di Epameinonda", in M. Sordi (ed.) *Propaganda e persuasione occulta nell'antichità* (Contributi dell'Istituto di

Polyaenus tells us of weapons being laid before the god. The term *theos* in reference to Heracles is not surprising: because of his special link to Thebes, the hero was worshipped there as a god<sup>38</sup>. However, since the earlier references to the same episode do not mention any god or statue of god, it is not clear whether Polyaenus was referring either to the statue of Heracles *Promakhos* as it was still visible in the temple at his time<sup>39</sup> or to the ancient wooden image of the hero made by Daidalos, which is mentioned by Pausanias, or else he has arbitrarily introduced this detail.

Nevertheless, what is more interesting is the number of similarities that this account shows with the tales about Hermes and Athena as *promakhoi*. Like Hermes, Heracles took his weapons and led his city's army to the battle and to the final defeat of the enemies;<sup>40</sup> like the Battle of Marathon for Athens, the Battle of Leuctra marked the start of a golden age of material prosperity and military power for Thebes.<sup>41</sup> The Theban success mainly depended on the so-called Sacred Band (*hieros lochos*), a troop of 300 chosen soldiers who fought in the front line as *promakhoi*.<sup>42</sup> It is then arguable that the Battle of Leuctra was the *aition* for the dedication of the statue of Heracles *Promakhos* at Thebes.

The erection of the statue may have been conveniently inserted in a program of redecoration of the ancient Heracleion, in these years of Theban hegemony. Pausanias, in fact, reports that the pediment of the temple was ornamented with the motifs of Heracles' Labours, which were carved by Praxiteles. The Periegete also mentions the names of the two Theban sculptors of the Heracles *Promakhos*, Xenocritus and Eubius. The activity of these two artists, which is not recorded in other sources, is dated to the years 370–330 BC in modern scholarship for reasons that are not grounded in any kind of certain evidence. The dedication of the

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storia antica 2), Milano 1974, 45–53.

<sup>38</sup> Pindar describes Heracles as hero-god in *Nemea* 3,22.

<sup>39</sup> Polyaenus and Pausanias were almost contemporary. Polyaenus also wrote a book *On Thebes*, which has been lost.

<sup>40</sup> There are more similarities between Heracles at Thebes and Hermes at Tanagra: they were both born and reared in the Boeotian city where they were venerated as *promakhos* and they were also both described as ephebes.

<sup>41</sup> J. Buckler, *The Theban Hegemony 371–362 B.C.*, Cambridge 1980.

<sup>42</sup> G. Daverio Rocchi, "'Promachoi' ed 'epilektoi': ambivalenza e ambiguità della morte combattendo per la patria", in M. Sordi (ed.) *"Dulce et decorum est pro patria mori": La morte in combattimento nell'antichità* (Contributi dell'Istituto di storia antica 16), Milano 1990, 13–36: 31–2.

Heracles *Promakhos* by the two Theban sculptors, in fact, is linked to the decoration of the pediment with sculptures carved by Praxiteles, whose career spanned from the 370s to the 340s.<sup>43</sup> However, the hypothesis that the statue of Heracles *Promakhos* was dedicated as a visual expression of the Thebans' gratitude for the hero's help in the battle of Leuctra may support the scholars' date of Xenocritus' and Eubius' activity in the fourth century BC.

The image of the hero as a foremost fighter and as a defender of the city was conveniently displayed in the Heracleion, which lay outside the Elektra gates to the south of the Cadmeia (Fig. 3).<sup>44</sup> The arrangement of the temple nearby the road leading to Athens and Plataea emphasised the protective role of the god-hero. The Heracleion adjoined to the east the temple of Apollo Ismenios whose entrance was decorated with the statues of Athena made by Skopas and of Hermes made by Pheidias: they were both named as *Pronaoi*.<sup>45</sup> Significantly, the two divinities who had been titled as *promakhos* in other cities are both associated as a group in Thebes as *pronaioi*. The epithet *pronaos*, in fact, refers to the arrangement of these images "before the temple", but it also underlines the role of the gods as guardians.<sup>46</sup> Thus the southern area outside the gates was defended and protected by three divinities (Heracles, Hermes, and Athena) for whom only there is record of their cult and/or representation as *promakhoi*.<sup>47</sup>

<sup>43</sup> J. Overbeck, *Die antiken Schriftquellen zur Geschichte der bildenden Künste bei den Griechen*, Leipzig 1868, 299 n. 1578; G. Lippold, *Die griechische Plastik: Handbuch der Archäologie*, III, 1, Berlin 1950, 248; G. Fogolari, s.v. "Eubios", *EAA*, vol. 3, Roma 1960, 512; P. Moreno, s.v. "Xenocritos", *EAA*, vol. 7, Roma 1966, 1234; Schachter 1986 (above n. 28) 23 note 3; L. Todisco, *Scultura greca del IV secolo. Maestri e scuole di statuaria tra classicità ed ellenismo*, Milano 1993, 44. A. Rumpf (s.v. "Xenocritos (5)", *RE IX A2*, 1967, column 1533) dates the Heracles *Promakhos* about the end of the fourth century BC, while C. Robert (s.v. "Eubios (7)", *RE*, VI, 1, 1907, column 851) is more cautiously talking of unknown period.

<sup>44</sup> Paus. 9,11,4; Pind. *Nem.* 4,19, *Isthm.* 4,61–2; Symeonoglou 1985 (above n. 6) 133. Pindar's odes contain many references to the Theban monuments as well as to the Heracleion: see R. Sevieri, "Cantare la città: tempo mitico e spazio urbano nell'Istmica 7 di Pindaro per Strepisade di Tebe", in P. A. Bernardini (ed.) *Presenza e funzione della città di Tebe nella cultura greca. Atti del Convegno Internazionale (Urbino 7–9 luglio 1997)*, Pisa – Roma 2000, 179–92.

<sup>45</sup> Paus. 9,10,2.

<sup>46</sup> P. Cloché, *Thèbes de Béotie. Des origines à la conquête romaine*, Namur 1952, 188.

<sup>47</sup> B. Currie (*Pindar and the Cult of Heroes*, Oxford 2005, 213–14) suggests the possibility that Hector too was venerated as a *promakhos* at Thebes and in the Troad. The scholar mentions coins from the Troad which portray Hector in fighting pose and literary descriptions of the hero as a saviour. Currie's suggestion is interesting, but the title *promakhos* attached to Hector is not supported by any kind of evidence. I thank Prof. Mika Kajava for bringing this reference



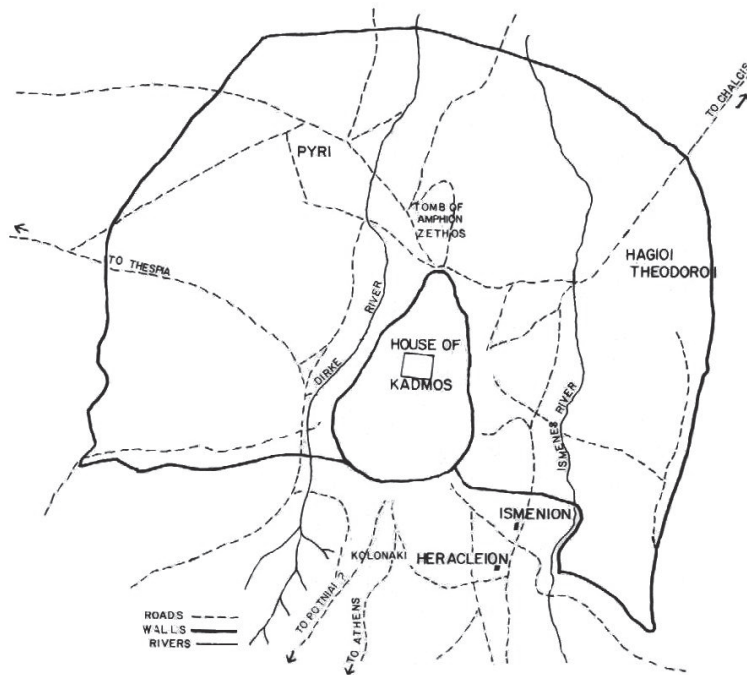


Fig. 3: Map of Thebes, adapted from the map of N. H. Demand, *Thebes in the Fifth Century: Heracles Resurgent*, Norfolk 1982, Fig. 2.

## Conclusions

The analysis of textual sources and historical events suggests that the title *promakhos*, as it is used in literary record to describe Hermes at Tanagra, Athena at Athens, and that Heracles at Thebes was introduced later than the erection of Athena's and Heracles' statues and the building of the temple to Hermes.

In fact, in his descriptions of Heracles *Promakhos* at Thebes and Hermes *Promakhos* at Tanagra, Pausanias uses the words *kaloumenon*, *legousin* and *nomizousin* to signify the oral traditions and local beliefs on which the Periegete is drawing his account. Similarly, the reference to the statue of Athena *Promakhos*, which only appears in a late Scholium to Demosthenes, contains the verb *ekaleito* to indicate a late habitual practice of using that title. However, even in later times, the term *promakhos* kept its original meaning and association to fight and defence.

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