

# Argos in Greek Inter-Poleis Relations in the 4th Century BC

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## Abstract

The relevance of the research topic is determined by the fact that the 4<sup>th</sup> century BC for the Greek poleis was the time of regular inter-poleis conflicts in which a special role was played by Argos. Argos is poorly studied in modern historiography; its place in the historically developed system of Greek poleis has not been properly investigated and evaluated. The paper is aimed at examining the course of foreign policy of the polis of Argos in the 4<sup>th</sup> century BC and indicating its role in the inter-poleis conflicts. The key methodology of the research is made up by a set of methods based on the study of various data on the topic. The paper indicates the position of Argos in inter-poleis conflicts, reveals the facts of its aggressive foreign policy that was oriented to rival Sparta, presents the stages of activity of the Argives in establishing the state. The paper findings may be useful in academic studies while compiling general works on the military history of ancient Greece, or while running special courses devoted to the history of the political development of ancient Greece.

**Keywords:** Argos, the Union of Corinth, Boeotian League, Arcadian League

## 1. Introduction

The military science has always been an integral part of human culture, and military conflicts are closely connected with the socio-political relations in the polis itself. Thus, while considering the Greek policy, one of the major problems of studies of antiquity is connected with inter-poleis relations in ancient Greece (Kelly, 1974; Lazenby, 2004; Pritchett, 1972). The 4<sup>th</sup> century BC is of special interest, as during this period Greek poleis were experiencing a crisis, which brought to the establishment of various inter-poleis alliances. In this relation the role of the Argos polis acquires a great significance. It was one of the most powerful and remarkable poleis in the Hellenic world. Thus, compared to Athens and Sparta, it gets far less attention from the researchers of antiquity. We are strongly inclined to think that the studies of the history of Argos' foreign policy and particularly its position in inter-poleis relations in the 4<sup>th</sup> century BC make sense, since modern historiography is not much concerned with this topic. Besides, the 4<sup>th</sup> century BC is characterized by regular military conflicts between Greek poleis and Argos, which similar to such poleis as Sparta, Athens, Corinth, pursued active foreign policy mostly oriented to rival Sparta for hegemony over the Peloponnese.

## 2. Methodological Framework

### 2.1 Research Objectives

During the research the following main objectives were indicated:

- 1) to reveal the role of Argos in the major inter-poleis relations in the 4<sup>th</sup> century BC;
- 2) to investigate the main stages of the annexation of Corinth to the state of Argos.

### 2.2 Theoretical and Methodological Background of the Research

The methodology of the research draws on the complex approach including the study of various data on the topic.

Besides, during the research the following methods were applied: historicism, academic objectivity and historico-philological method. The principle of historicism implies examining historical events and processes in their development in relation with their interdependence. The principle of academic objectivity involves the analysis of the research topic based on the narrative database that is not at variance with the objective reflection of the reality.

### 2.3 Body of Data

The body of data is made up of writings of ancient Greek authors (Thucydides, Xenophon, Pausanias, Diodorus Siculus, Polyaeus, Polybius, Plutarch), speeches of orators (Andocides, Demosthenes), and also works of the Russian and foreign scientists.

## 3. Results

### 3.1 Argos in the Corinthian War between the Years of 395 and 387 BC

In the 4<sup>th</sup> century BC, the inhabitants of Argos resumed rivalry with Sparta and that was not by accident. It is a known fact that rivalry between Argos and Sparta began in the Archaic period (Venidiktova, 2010; Kelly, 1970). So, antique historians agree on the opinion that Argos and Sparta were "inveterate enemies" (Thucydides, 1993; Pausanias, 1994). This opinion is confirmed by recently explored fragments of papyrus that belonged to the Spartan poet of the 7<sup>th</sup> century BC Tyrtaeus. They contain mentions about the Argives as enemies of Sparta in the context of war. Another confirmation of the opinion can be found in Xenophon's writing. Firstly, during the war of Sparta with Persia in 399–394 BC, the Persians provided financial support for political leaders in Athens, Thebes, Corinth and Argos so that they could induce fellow citizens to come out against Sparta. Secondly, Pausanias points to certain Cylon and Sodam as political leaders of Argos in 396–395 BC, but we do not possess any details of their activity. Thirdly, in the subsequent battles of Nemea and Chaeronea in 394 BC, Argos conducted active military operations against Lacedaemon but failed. Since that time, the Athenians, Boeotians, Argives and their allies were at war with Corinth, that was a major stronghold on the one hand, and, the Lacedaemonians carried on war with their allies in Sicyon, on the other hand.

Defeats in the two fights couldn't but disturb the rivals of Sparta in Greek poleis as they knew full well that if they could not manage to eliminate supporters of peace, their states would again suffer the threat of getting under the influence of Laconia. For this reason they ran riots in Corinth in 392 BC, as a result, Corinth annexed the Argos state (Xenophon, 1993). It is quite probable that the annexation of Corinth to Argos underwent two stages. The first stage includes 392 BC when isopoliteia was established (Hamilton, 1972; Griffith, 1950).

The full annexation of Corinth to Argos happened only in 389 BC. It is obvious from Xenophon and Diodorus' writings, who connected this event with Iphikrates' exile from Corinth after the defeat at the Spartan sea in 390 BC and his mission to Hellepont which took place in 388 BC. According to Xenophon (1993), after that both warring sides stopped big military campaigns, all the states were engaged in protecting their fortresses, sending garrisons: one – to Corinth, the other – to Sicyon. However, military clashes of Argos with Sparta didn't end at all, as Sparta was deeply concerned with the current situation in Corinth. Therefore, taking into consideration the fact that the Argives quietly reaped the fruits of the earth and war only pleased them, in 391 BC the Lacedaemonians conducted a campaign to Argos under the command of the king Agesilaus.

Having devastated the country, the Spartan king invaded the Corinthian area and took control of the walls which were erected by the Athenians. The next year, when in Corinth the Argives were committing a sacrifice to Poseidon, the Lacedaemonians again invaded the Corinthian area so that the Corinthian exiles could make sacrifices and organize competitions in honour of Poseidon. Then Agesilaus with his army withdrew from Corinth, the Argives and Corinthians in their turn could hold the Isthmian Games. In 389 BC the Lacedaemonians under the command of another king Agesipolis again undertook a campaign to Argos, the news about which disturbed the Argives. Therefore, they sent two messengers to the king with the claim for a truce, referring to future festive months. Though Agesipolis rejected their offer, the military clash didn't take place as the Lacedaemonians soon got some evil signs. We can explain such behaviour of the Argives. During this period their state was weakened by frequent collisions between the supporters of oligarchical system and democrats. Moreover, Artaxerxes II of Persia became an ally of Lacedaemon, and Sparta declared a campaign to Argos. For this reason the Argives began to lean forward peace which was concluded in 387 BC. It marked the end of the Corinthian war. Immediately after establishing the Peace of Antalcidas the Lacedaemonians declared that they would launch war to the Corinthians and Argives in case the first didn't force the Argives to leave Corinth and the latter didn't do it on a voluntary basis. As a result, the Argives had to bring their troops out of Corinth; consequently, this polis again became independent.

### 3.2 Argos, Thebes and Arcadian League

After the restoration of Spartan hegemony in Greece, for nearly more than a decade the Argives didn't undertake any active measures against Sparta (in particular, they didn't participate in the battle of Leuctra in 371 BC). But after the failure of the Lacedaemonians, the Argives resume military operations against them. It was also caused by the events which occurred in Argos in 370 BC which put an end to the fight between the supporters of

oligarchy and democrats. So, the Argives joined the troops of the Boeotian League during their campaign against the Lacedaemonians. And when the Lacedaemonians withdrew from Mantinea, the members of the Boeotian League, provoked by the Argives and Elians, sent a force to Sparta. However, they didn't manage to capture Lacedaemon. The Argives, being the closest neighbors of the Spartans, carried off prisoners and booty with themselves. According to Pausanias, in 369 BC the Boeotian army set off for Messenia to restore its independence, the Argives also took part in this campaign (1994). The next year when the Boeotians went on another campaign against the Lacedaemonians, the Argives, having joined their allies, took part in a military expedition to Sicyon and Pellene, then to Epidaurus. Hence, all the territory of Epidauria had been devastated. Later the Argives during the campaign of the Lacedaemonians against the Parrhasians took the side of the last. Besides, the Argives joined the Arcadian expedition to Phlius and gave them military support in the war with the Lacedaemonians; it led to the Spartans' victory (Xenophon, 1993). Further, the Argives took part in the last campaign of the Boeotians against the Lacedaemonians which resulted in a win over the Spartans in the battle of Mantinea in 362 BC. The relations of the Argives with the Lacedaemonians became more complicated when the Argives defeated the Lacedaemonians in the battle of Eunoia, which probably strengthened anti-Spartan moods in Argos. So, Demosthenes' speech makes it obvious that in 344 BC the Argives waged war jointly with the Messenians upon the Lacedaemonians, in which they were supported by Philip, who sent mercenaries and money (Demosthenes, 1994-1995). Thus, it would be right to assume that by that time the Argives had concluded an alliance with Philip of Macedon. Having received support of the Macedonians, in the same year the Argives under the command of Nicostratus took part in the Persian expedition against Egypt (Diodorus, 1775-1776). These actions of the Argives became possible due to the assistance provided by Philip who was most likely to send his troops to Peloponnese. It affected the Spartans' decision to conclude an agreement about peace with their rivals (Griffith, Hammond, 1979).

The Athenians, who were displeased with the current situation (they were rivals of Macedonia), made an attempt to convince Philip's supporters that he was deceiving them and further he would become their master (Demosthenes, 1994-1995). According to Kutergin V.F., the Athenians threatened by invasions into Attica began establishing contacts with political leaders of Argos, Messenia and Megalopolis (Kutergin, 1991). For the very reason the Argives and many other allies of Philip kept neutral at the battle of Chaeronea in 338 BC that was between the Macedonians and the joint forces of the Greek troops in which Philip won a decisive victory.

### *3.3 Argos in the Corinthian League*

The position of the Argives in the Corinthian league is of considerable significance as well. It is known that the direct consequence of the battle of Chaeronea was the convocation of the Corinthian Congress in 338/37 BC where the obedience of the Hellenic poleis to the Macedonian king was documented (Frolov, 1974, Kutergin, 1991, Holod, 2003). At the Corinthian Congress, Argos, being an ally of Macedonia, strengthened the ties with Philip (Frolov, 1974, Holod, 2003), and, having taken advantage of it, the Argives together with Peloponnesian allies invited Philip to Peloponnese to reinforce their position. Following these requests, Philip in the fall of 338 BC invaded Laconia and ruined it. This invasion resulted in passing Spartan border lands to Macedonian allies (Polybius, 1994-1995). Just then the Argives received Thyreatida back which had been cause of controversy between the Argives and the Lacedaemonians since the archaic times (Pavsany, 1994).

Mention should be made about the inscription found in Smyrna, dated 337 BC (Ager, 1996) which informs that the Argives acted as an arbitrator between Kimolos and Melos (Tod, 1946-1948). The inscription reads about the judicial decision of Argos spread by "the Hellenic council" in the dispute between Melos and Kimolos for the dominance over three small islands. Such actions were usually practised by the league: the liability of the judgment was attached to the neutral polis which was also the member of the league (Ager, 1996). In this case, Argos was an arbitrator who established relations between the two poleis of the island of Cyclades that demonstrates the participation of Argos in the Corinthian league.

## **4. Discussions**

The historiographical analysis allowed us to indicate that the issue of the correct time of Corinth's accession to Argos causes the greatest difficulty among modern researchers, as even ancient authors couldn't achieve consensus about including it in a certain chronological context. In this relation modern historiography tends to develop several points of view. Based on Xenophon's writings, some researchers such as Kegan D. "Corinthian Politics and the Revolution of 392" (1962) and Tuplin C. "The Date of the Union of Corinth and Argos" (1982) assume that Corinth's accession to the Argos state happened in 392 BC. Other researchers like Griffith G.T. "The Union of Corinth and Argos (392-386 BC)" (1950), Hamilton C.D. "The Politics of Revolution in Corinth, 395-386 B.C." (1972) believe that annexation of Corinth to Argos was carried out stage by stage. According to

the aforementioned researchers, 392 BC was the first stage, when isopoliteia was established between Argos and Corinth; 389 BC is considered to be the final stage of the annexation when Argos acquired a total control over Corinth (Cartledge, 2002). Certain data on the Corinthian Congress and accession of Corinth to Argos may be found in the works of Frolov E.D. (1974), Holod M.M. (2003), Whitby M. (1984).

## 5. Conclusion

The research which was carried out in accordance with the aim and objectives allows us to draw several conclusions.

The above data shows that in the 4<sup>th</sup> century BC the Argives took active part in inter-poleis relations, pursued aggressive foreign policy oriented against the Lacedaemonians. Moreover, at the beginning of the century the Argives, having taken part in the Corinthian war, created a powerful state which kept the Lacedaemonians in threat. Besides, they took active part in campaigns against Sparta, which were conducted by members of the Boeotian and Arcadian Leagues. They also concluded an alliance with Philip of Macedon. As a result, using diplomatic means, they got back Thyreatida which had caused hot debates as far back as in the Archaic period.

## 6. Recommendations

The practical importance of the given research is that the paper findings may be useful while compiling general works on the military history of ancient Greece, in educational process while running lectures and practical classes on the topic under study, or in working out special courses devoted to the history of the political development of ancient Greece.

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