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Amphictyony, Delphic (all periods)

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The Pylaeo-Delphic Amphictyony (from *amphi* + *ktionos*, “those dwelling around”) was a religious association of the *ethne* of Northern and Central Greece, which was in charge of the two sanctuaries of Demeter at Anthela, near Thermopylai, and of Apollo at Delphi.

In the archaic period, the association consisted probably of the following twelve tribal communities: Thessalians, Dolopes, Perrhaibians, Magnetes, Phthiotic Achaeans, Ainianes, Malians, Boiotians, Phokians, Lokrians, Dorians (Metropolitan and Peloponnesian), Ionians (from Euboea and Attika). Each tribe had two votes, cast by their delegates, the *hieromnemes* (“those keeping in mind the sacred matters”) at the two annual meetings, called *pylaiiai*. Each tribe also sent an unknown number of *pylagoroi* or *agoratroi* (“those speaking at [Thermo]pylae / at the *agora*”), and we hear once from an *ekklesia* of the Amphictyons.

The two sanctuaries of Demeter and Apollo were located at the crossroads of important land and maritime trade routes, with a convenient harbour nearby (Aiai and Kirrha/Krisa), and Delphi was also the seat of a famous oracle. People gathered there early for religious and commercial purpose, and the Amphictyony was born out of the necessity to organize the festivals and markets, and to administer and protect the sacred property of the gods: its mission was to prevent neighbouring tribes from claiming for themselves control over the sanctuaries and their resources, and to guarantee safe access for the pilgrims, competitors and merchants from all the Greek world. It could issue sacred laws and decrees, and had judicial powers to enforce them, over individuals and states alike. It could inflict fines, banishment from the sanctuary, and declare a sacred war on those who had occupied by force the sacred land of Apollo. The

Amphictyony had however no real political power, and it never became the common council of the Greeks or a court of interstate arbitration: such views rest upon the dubious testimony of late sources, and upon the oath quoted by Aischines (*Legat.* 115), which says that the Amphictyons had sworn not to destroy themselves in wars, but is probably a forgery of the fourth century BCE. Nevertheless, the Amphictyony could be, and actually was used for political purposes by the leading powers struggling for hegemony in Central Greece, perhaps already in the fifth century BCE, and clearly so between the fourth and the early second century BCE.

We can infer from the terms *pylaia* and *pylagoros* that the original meeting place of the Amphictyony was the sanctuary of Demeter at Thermopylai, and that the council was put in charge of the temple of Apollo at Delphi only later. This event could have been either the cause or the consequence of the First Sacred War, early in the sixth century BCE, during which the Thessalians and other amphictyonic states destroyed the city of Kirrha and consecrated its territory to Apollo. In 582 BCE, the local festival of the Pythia was given a panhellenic status and put under the supervision of the Amphictyony. When the temple of Apollo was destroyed by fire in 548 BCE, the Amphictyons were asked to collect money and to commission the rebuilding of the monument. We hear little from the council during the fifth century BCE, except when military operations or politics turned the attention of the leading powers of Greece on Delphi or Thermopylai: in the aftermath of the great Persian invasion; during the Second Sacred War waged by Sparta and Athens on behalf of, respectively, the Delphians and the Phokians in 449-448 BCE; and when the Spartan colony of Heraklea was founded near Mount Oita in 427 BCE. It may have been during this period that some changes were brought to the organization of the council, which are attested in the epigraphic lists of the fourth century BCE: the Spartans are sometimes allowed to sit instead of the Metropolitan Dorians, Heraklea votes with the Malians, and the city of Delphi has two votes, distinct from those of the Phokians, while the Dolopes and the Perrhaibians form one artificial *ethnos*. During the fourth century BCE, the Thessalians and Boiotians tried to use the Amphictyony to assert their hegemony over Central Greece, while the Phokians claimed for themselves the control of the resources of

Apollo and occupied the sanctuary by force. The ensuing Third and Fourth Sacred Wars (356-346 and 341-339 BCE) gave Philip of Macedon the opportunity to gain control over Central Greece: he expelled the impious Phokians from the sanctuary, he received their two amphictyonic votes and the presidency of the Pythia, and he managed to complete the rebuilding of the temple, which had been damaged by a mudslide before 370 BCE: Delphi and the Amphictyony became the showroom of Philip's power and piety. During the third century BCE, the Amphictyony fell under the control of the Aetolians, who exercised the votes of all the amphictyonic states of Central Greece which they had conquered or incorporated into their *ethnos*. The festival of the Soteria was instituted after the Gallic invasion of 279 BCE; the Dionysiac *technitai*, sanctuaries and cities from all the Greek world asked the Amphictyony to proclaim and recognize their inviolability, and the Ptolemies and Seleucids invited them to their newly founded festivals. The Aetolians were eventually expelled from the Amphictyony and the council was restored to its original organization in the course of the second century BCE, under the supervision of Rome. The following period was characterized by financial malpractice at Delphi, conflicts over the borders of the sacred land, and disputes over the Dorian, Ionian and Lokrian votes. These quarrels went on under the Empire, and the Amphictyony was reorganized three times by Augustus, Nero and Hadrian: the number of seats was eventually raised from twenty-four to thirty, the Macedonians and the city of Nikopolis, founded by Augustus, were incorporated, next to the Thessalians, with six votes each, and the council became a kind of representative body of Northern and Central Greece. We lose track of the institution after the third century CE.

Cross-references

SEE ALSO: Boundary disputes; Calaurian Amphictyony; Delphi; Festivals, Greece and Rome; Laws, sacred (in Greek inscriptions); Phokis region; Pythia; *Technitai*; Thermopylai; Wars, Sacred.

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