

The Reaction of Athens on the Mutilation of the *Hermai* in 415 B.C.

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Contents

- Introduction	p. 3
- 1. Primary Sources on the Mutilation of the <i>Hermai</i>	p. 4
- 2. The Role of <i>Hermai</i> within Athenian Society	p. 8
- Conclusion	p. 12
- Notes	p. 14

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Introduction

During the Peloponnesian War (431-404 B.C.) the Greek *polis* of Athens prepared an expedition to Sicily in 415 B.C. According to Thukydides (ca. 460-400 B.C.), Athens wanted to conquer Sicily for various reasons.¹ In the same year, just before the Athenian fleet set sail, a great amount of the Athenian *hermai* were mutilated. These were four-sided pillar statues with the face of the god Hermes, which were set up at the entrances of private houses and sanctuaries. They were supposedly damaged by the *hetaireiai*², who mutilated the faces of these *hermai*.³ Only a few of these statues survived. The multitude of the Athenian citizens were shocked after this act of vandalism. In response they called for witnesses who could provide information about the act. Citizens, aliens and even slaves could offer information. The state would provide rewards in return. According to Thukydides, information was given.⁴ However, this information did not directly concern the mutilation of the *hermai* since witnesses spoke about other images being deliberately damaged by young men who were drunk. Other information was brought forward about another act that included mock celebrations of the Eleusinian mysteries. These celebrations would have taken place in private houses of members of the *hetaireiai*.

The mutilation of the *hermai* was both seen as a bad omen for the Sicilian expedition and part of a conspiracy to take down and destroy democracy.⁵ A witch-hunt took place and fingers were pointed at members of the *hetaireiai*, amongst them Alkibiades (general during the Sicilian expedition) and Andokides. Some of the suspects fled, some went into exile, while others were being executed. Properties of men charged with mutilating the *hermai* and participating in the profanation of the Eleusinian mysteries were being confiscated and sold.

The mutilation of the *hermai* in Athens caused a stir in Athenian society. Some modern scholars have studied the situation and offered various explanations on the reason for damaging the *hermai*. A few of these scholars argue that the mutilation was seen as sacrilege: perhaps a small group of Athenian citizens wanted to sabotage such an expedition via an impious act.⁶ Others

¹ Thukydides, *The Peloponnesian War*, VI.1 (trans. M. Hammond) (New York 2009)

² To explain *hetaireiai* J.F. McGlew (1999: 5) provides a short description: 'The *hetaireiai* were informal groups of Athenians that met to drink, dine, recite poetry to the accompaniment of the flute, discuss and enjoy the other amenities offered by *symposia*. *Hetaireiai* were exclusive organisations, but what made them exclusive were the property and class requirements associated with their entertainments.'

³ Thuk.VI.27.1

⁴ Ibidem, VI.27.2

⁵ Ibidem, VI.27.3

⁶ W. Furley, 'The Mutilation of the Herms', in: *Bulletin of the Institute of Classical Studies*, vol. 41 (s.65 1996), p. 22; A. Rubel, *Fear and Loathing in Ancient Athens* (first ed. 2000, English ed. 2014), p. 82 f.f.

believe the damaging of the statues was part of a conspiracy to overthrow democracy.⁷ It seems as if the reason remains a mystery. This paper will not search for an answer regarding the reason for the mutilation of the *hermai*. It will be concerned with the reaction of the Athenians after the act occurred. As mentioned before, two reactions followed the mutilation. The question, why the Athenians were shocked after the *hermai* were damaged in 415 B.C., will be central. It is the purpose of this paper to analyse why the Athenians were shocked and why they reacted as they did.

The first part discusses three main primary sources regarding the mutilation and the reaction of the Athenian citizens. By using the sources I want to clarify the situation by focusing on what is described. The second part of this paper will shed some light on the role of the *hermai* in Athenian society. It will be useful to gather information about the statues in order to understand why citizens reacted as they did after the *hermai* were damaged.

1. Primary Sources on the Mutilation of the *Hermai*

To get a view of the reaction of the Athenian people, three sources are selected. The purpose of this first part is to analyse what these sources mention about the event. Next, I want to know whether the Athenians thought the mutilation was a bad omen or if it was an act against their democracy, according to these sources. Was their reaction based on religion or on the threat of democracy?

In discussing and analysing the three sources I want to begin with the account that Plutarch (45-120 A.D.) provides. The reason that I want to start with Plutarch is because he mentions at least three views the Athenians had on the mutilation done by unknown offenders. It means Plutarch's description of people's reaction is the most extensive, compared to the two other sources. Four centuries after the mutilation occurred Plutarch wrote his description of the event as follows:

[...] the mutilation of the Hermae, most of which, in a single night, had their faces and forms disfigured, confounded the hearts of many, even among those who usually set small store by such things. It was said, it is true, that Corinthians had done the deed, Syracuse being a colony of theirs, in the hope that such portents would check or stop the war. The multitude, however, were not moved by this reasoning, nor by that of those who thought the affair no terrible sign at all, but rather one of the common effects of strong wine, when dissolute youth, in mere sport, are carried away into wanton acts. They looked on the occurrence with wrath and fear, thinking it the sign of a bold and dangerous conspiracy. They therefore

⁷ J.F. McGlew, 'Politics on the Margins: The Athenian "Hetaireiai" in 415 B.C.', in: *Historia: Zeitschrift für Alte Geschichte*, bd. 48, h. 1 (1, 1999) (1999: 17)

scrutinized keenly every suspicious circumstance, the council and the assembly convening for this purpose many times within a few days.⁸

The views Plutarch describes are: (1) the Corinthians damaged the statues to stop the war; (2) the mutilation was done by drunken youth; (3) it was a sign of a conspiracy (whatever the conspiracy may be). As will be clear in the text below the first view is only mentioned by Plutarch. The second and the third views were also mentioned by the next two sources. As in the narrative of Plutarch there appears to be no clear sign of the existence of an idea about the mutilation as a bad omen. The reader only knows the majority was alarmed, because they saw the act as a sign of a conspiracy.

Thukydides also provides a short account of the event. Although Thukydides was not in Athens at the time⁹, and thus had to rely on information from hearsay, he wrote down the following description:

‘While these preparations were still in train, most of the stone Herms in the city of Athens had their faces mutilated in one night (these Herms, square-shaped in the local fashion, are common outside the doors of both private houses and temples). Nobody knew the perpetrators, but large rewards were publicly offered for information leading to their detection, and a decree was also passed giving immunity to any citizen, foreigner, or slave who volunteered knowledge of any other desecration. The Athenians took the matter more seriously still, thinking that it had ominous import for the expedition and was the prelude to a conspiracy for revolution and the overthrow of democracy.’¹⁰

Unknown offenders damaged most of the *hermai* during the preparations of the Sicilian expedition. As a result, Athens decided to reward any person who could offer information since the act was taken very seriously. However, any information about any impious act was welcome and this suggests that the Athenian people did not think of the mutilation as an isolated sacred offence: more desecrations had taken place that had to be dealt with. In line with the naming of other desecrations Athens saw the mutilation as a bad omen for the expedition. Furthermore, the *polis* interpreted the act as a sign of conspiracy against democracy, or so Thukydides describes it.

Another fragment describes the following:

⁸ Plutarch, *Alcibiades*, 18 (trans. B. Perrin) (London repr. 1967-1970)

⁹ Thukydides was living in exile and could not have experienced the event first-hand, as mentioned by D. Hamel, *The Mutilations of the Herms* (Lexington 2012), p. 3

¹⁰ Thuk.VI.27

‘Information came from some metics and their servants, not about the Herms, but concerning some earlier mutilations of statues by young men in a drunken frolic: and they also alleged that the Mysteries were being parodied in private houses, naming Alcibiades among the offenders they accused. This was seized on by those who had particular reason to resent Alcibiades for blocking their own path to any clear political supremacy, and thought that if they could get rid of him they would take over the leadership of the people. So they were concerned to blow up the whole affair and make strident claims that the profanation of the Mysteries and the mutilation of the Herms were part of a plot to subvert the democracy, and that Alcibiades was behind it all: as contributory evidence they cited the undemocratic excesses of his general lifestyle.’¹¹

According to Thukydides, information was provided by non-Athenians, who spoke about the earlier mutilations of statues by youngsters who were drunk. It is not clear if these other statues were *hermai* since there is no reference to similar statues¹². Furthermore, the non-Athenians mentioned the parody of the Mysteries performed in private houses and accused Alcibiades (who was one of the generals in the Sicilian expedition) for participating in the act. Men, who wanted to get rid of the general, since he was blocking their way for achieving ‘any clear political supremacy’, supported the latter accusation¹³. It seems the political supremacy stood against the Athenian democracy, because of the group who wanted to take over the leadership of the *demos*. Moreover, it was not Alcibiades who wanted to overthrow democracy, but these accusers who blew up the affair of the Mysteries¹⁴. Also, they incorporated the mutilation of the *hermai* as a way for providing an extra boost to the whole accusation, as suggested by Thukydides. Alcibiades was ready to stand trial, knowing that his enemies would damage his status while fighting in Sicily. But the Athenians wanted the general to join the expedition, and in his return to Athens face trial ‘within a period of days’¹⁵.

The mutilation of the *hermai* was both seen as a bad omen and a sign of a conspiracy for overthrowing democracy. However, further reading of Thukydides’ narrative shows the act was considered as a political threat and not so much as an attack on religion. After the mutilation was performed, arrests of potential offenders did not end after the accusation of Alcibiades. During the time of the arrests one suspect was persuaded by his fellow-prisoner to admit he was one of the mutilators. Admitting such a crime and providing information about other participants

¹¹ Thuk.VI.28

¹² If Thukydides would have used ‘such statues’ or ‘similar statues’ then one might suggest other *hermai*.

¹³ Thuk.VI.28

¹⁴ Thukydides creates the suggestion that those who had the interest for accusing Alcibiades blew up the whole accusation for their self-interest.

¹⁵ Thuk.VI.29

brought him ‘immunity for turning state’s evidence’¹⁶. According to Thukydides, Athenians were ‘relieved to gain what they supposed clear evidence of the truth, having previously seethed at the possibility that they might discover who was plotting against their democracy’¹⁷.

The last selected source is the narrative given by Andokides (ca. 440-391 B.C.), who was being accused of mutilating the *hermai* in 415. Andokides was probably the man Thukydides was writing about, who was persuaded by a fellow-prisoner to admit the crime in order to gain immunity. In his *On the Mysteries* Andokides wrote down what he had said during his own trial. But before he mentions his own words he first tells the story about his accuser Diokleides as follows:

‘Diocleides’ tale was that he had had to fetch the earnings of a slave of his at Laurium. He arose at an early hour, mistaking the time, and started off on his walk by the light of a full moon. As he was passing the gateway of the theatre of Dionysus, he noticed a large body of men coming down into the orchestra from the Odeum. In alarm, he withdrew into the shadow and crouched down between the column and the pedestal with the bronze statue of the general upon it. He then saw some three hundred men standing about in groups of five and ten and, in some cases, twenty. He recognized the faces of the majority, as he could see them in the moonlight. [...] after seeing what he had, he went on to Laurium; and when he learned next day of the mutilation of the Hermae, he knew at once that it was the work of the men he had noticed.’¹⁸

Instead of directly accusing the men he saw the night of the mutilation, Diokleides decided to see the men and asked them for their money for not telling the *demos* what had happened. Looking at the fragment, Diokleides had no clear evidence the group he saw committed the crime. His story seems to be not waterproof. The men swore to give Diokleides money but never made their promise. As a result, Diokleides decided to reveal the truth, naming all the men he knew he had seen during that night, Andokides amongst them. In his own speech Andokides attempts to prove Diokleides had lied in front of the whole *demos*¹⁹ by telling his side of the story, namely his indirect role in the mutilation affair. Andokides names four men who would have participated in the act. Amongst them it was Euphiletos who suggested the idea of mutilating the *hermai* at one of the *betaireiai* drinking parties.²⁰ Andokides claims he refused to partake in the act. Furthermore, he explains that he was not able to participate while recovering from bone fractures he suffered while working-out at a gymnasium sacred to Herakles in Athens.²¹ Euphiletos lied to the other

¹⁶ Thuk.VI.60

¹⁷ Ibidem,VI.60

¹⁸ Andokides, *On the Mysteries*, 1.38-39 (trans. K.J. Maidment) (Cambridge 1968)

¹⁹ Ibidem, 1.60

²⁰ Ibidem, 1.61

²¹ Ibidem, 1.61

offenders that Andokides would join them in the act, and that he was willing to mutilate the herm, standing close to the house of his own family. This was one of the *hermai* that was not damaged.

Whether or not Andokides' story is true remains unclear. The reason why Andokides told the Athenians what happened could provide some information on how the Athenian people thought about the act. Andokides had two reasons: the first was to gain immunity from punishment for himself and also for accused members of his family. The second reason is that Andokides provided information to the state because of his 'concern for the state as a whole'²², suggesting that he shares in the concern of Athens. This concern is explained in chapter 36 in which Andokides describes that the 'members of the commission of inquiry, (...) maintained that the outrage was not the work of a small group of criminals, but an organised attempt to overthrow the popular government'²³. Providing some names, including his name, brought relief to the Athenian society, as mentioned by Thukydides.

It seems as if the sources explain that the Athenians saw the mutilation of the *hermai* as a crime against their constitution, i.e. that the people's reaction was based on fear for losing their democracy. However, since Thukydides did mention the belief in a bad omen, the act can also be seen as something the Athenians saw as a religious crime. To understand which reaction was more credible, a study on the role of the *hermai* within Athenian society will be useful.

2. The Role of *Hermai* within Athenian Society

Before I focus on the role of the *hermai* within Athenian society, I will start discussing their origin. Even though ancient sources mention *hermai*²⁴, the explanation of their origin remains problematic. The 'first literary attestation of herms'²⁵ occurred in the accounts of their erection by one of the sons of the tyrant Peisistratos (d. 527 B.C.), namely Hipparkhos. In a narrative on Hipparkhos, which was ascribed to Plato (427-347 B.C.), it is said that this man wanted to educate the Athenians in order to gain intelligent subjects. He even placed *hermai* in the countryside, which were inscribed with verses to educate people outside the city of Athens.²⁶ The story implies Hipparkhos used the *hermai* as a tool for distributing "wise words" (or rules or even

²² Andok.1.56

²³ Ibidem, 1.36

²⁴ Herodotus, *The Histories*, 2.51 (trans. A.D. Godley) (Cambridge 1920); Pausanias, *Description of Greece*, 1.24.3 (trans. W.H.S. Jones) (Cambridge 1918)

²⁵ R. Osborne, *Athens and Athenian Democracy* (Cambridge 2010), p. 343

²⁶ Ps.Plato, *Hipparchus*, 228d-e (trans. W.R.M. Lamb (Cambridge 1955)

values) through Athens and her countryside. Besides being tools of education, the *hermai* were land markers that could provide information and guidance for travellers on the road. However, it is unclear if these statues still had the same function by the time the *hermai* (if they were the same statues) were mutilated in 415.

Since the account of the erection of *hermai* by Hipparkhos is one of the few narratives that are available²⁷, I want to continue with the functions of the statues. As became clear in the latter description, *hermai* were used as tools in the aid of a certain educational programme, and also functioned as land markers. Before I provide more information about the *hermai*, I first want to give some short information about the god Hermes, with whom the statues are linked. The god had various functions e.g. messenger of the gods, mediator between the divine and the human world, guide of travellers of any kind and protector against thieves.²⁸ Since the *hermai* were closely connected with Hermes, not only by name but also by appearance, the statues were used as being representations of the god with its divine powers and functions. According to Thukydides, *hermai* were placed at entrances of both private houses and sanctuaries. In accordance with the description Thukydides provides, W. Furley argues that in both contexts (private houses and sanctuaries) the *hermai* had two functions, which differ from the functions of the statues Hipparkhos erected. According to Furley, ‘the herm protects the homestead against unwelcome intruders: it also acts as guardian spirit to anyone legitimately crossing the threshold, and when they venture forth beyond the domestic threshold’²⁹. R. Osborne argues that the herm ‘represented the individual Athenian to himself (...) every time he set foot outside his house’³⁰. Furthermore, before an Athenian made contact with another person he/she first had to make contact with ‘the other that was himself/herself in the herm’³¹. In order to make this contact the face of the herm was crucial. According to Osborne, this was the reason that the offenders mutilated the heads/faces of the *hermai* in 415.³² It is not exactly clear what Osborne means by making contact with the other that was oneself in the herm. It seems that what both Furley and Osborne attempt to say is that the mutilation was an attack partly on the Athenian as an individual. But before discussing what the act meant for the Athenians, let us continue with the description on the function of the *hermai*.

So far, the function of the *hermai* in Athens was that the statues were used as practical tools (e.g. land markers) and as representations both of the god Hermes and of the Athenians

²⁷ Herodotus also provides a description about *hermai* that were placed by the Athenians: Herod.2.51

²⁸ Furley (1996: 13-30)

²⁹ Ibidem (1996: 20)

³⁰ Osborne (2010: 363-364)

³¹ Ibidem (2010: 364)

³² Ibidem (2010: 364)

individually. The herm as a statue was both practical as sacred. In line with the account Thukydides provides on the idea that the act in 415 was a sign of a bad omen, it is credible the mutilation of the *hermai* was considered as sacrilege. However, the general outcome concerning the whole event (the mutilation, the view of the Athenians on the act and the persecutions afterwards) implied that the reaction of Athens on the damaging of the *hermai* was seen as an act against democracy. In her paper from 2007, Crawley Quinn studied the relation between the statues and Athenian democracy. Crawley Quinn attempted to answer the question: ‘What was so very democratic about the herm?’³³ In order to answer this question Crawley Quinn focused on the role of the body, following the study of Osborne and his argument that the faces of the *hermai* represent the faces of all the Athenians.³⁴ Instead of looking at faces, Crawley Quinn turned her attention to the phallus in Greek art. According to Crawley Quinn, the herm’s penis represented ‘the citizen’s power, not in a violent sense, but with implications of potency, authority and maturity – and, crucially, the reproduction of the democratic citizen body’³⁵. Again, the herm, its face and its phallus, can be linked to the individual Athenian citizen. Although both explanations of Osborne and Crawley Quinn are quite vague and interpretative, it is credible to believe such explanations can be true regarding the function of *hermai* that were placed at entrances of private houses.

The latter scholars were searching for the function of the *hermai* via a symbolic interpretation, which is not satisfying as for the function of the statues is still difficult to understand. Is it possible to make an interpretation that is less symbolic? Perhaps. In order to explain the function of the herm and the way this statue was used H. Versnel analysed vase paintings from the fifth century B.C. These paintings show the ‘intimate and familiar nature of the various forms of contact’³⁶ with Hermes via the herm. Individuals are making gestures of supplication or intimate conversation. It is striking to see that the paintings show individuals who are seeking contact with the herm. Individuals communicate in whispers with the statue and ultimately with the god. Versnel speaks of ‘close companionship’³⁷ between humans and Hermes, as if the individual seeks a friend or a guide to help him/her for any particular reason. In an attempt to make it more concrete, Furley explains the images on vases as scenes in which Hermes or the herm functions as intermediary between men and gods. The *hermai* were set up ‘to facilitate the conveyance of

³³ J. Crawley Quinn, ‘Herms, Kouroi and the Political Anatomy of Athens’, in: *Greece & Rome*, vo. 54, no. 1 (2007), p. 83

³⁴ Ibidem (2007: 83)

³⁵ Ibidem (2007: 90)

³⁶ H. Versnel, *Coping with the Gods* (Leiden 2011), p. 337

³⁷ Ibidem (2011: 342)

worshippers' prayers and offerings³⁸ to the addressed gods. This implies that the *hermai* could be used by every individual Athenian to personally communicate with Hermes or the other gods. If these interpretations are true, damaging the *hermai* made the personal communication problematic. But could the mutilation of 415 have caused a shock amongst the Athenians, knowing that the citizens had a "close companionship" with the *hermai*? Since it was an individual "companionship", damaging the statues could only have caused a shock on the individual level. I want to continue with discussing the role of the *hermai* on a communal level, namely the statues' connection with democracy, as discussed by Crawley Quinn. In an attempt to understand this connection, I want to focus on *hermai* at public spots, since these areas contained buildings or monuments of democratic value. I want to state that this is hypothetical.

A couple of public places can be named: Athens' Acropolis, her Agora and an area on the Agora, named "The *Hermai*". According to Pausanias (ca. 115-180 A.D.), a herm was placed at the entrance of the Acropolis, called the 'Hermes of the Gateway'³⁹. Besides having the role of marker, a divider of the private/public sphere or the secular/sacred world, this herm can also be seen as mediator between the goddess and the Athenians. Other *hermai* were placed as to mark the entrance to the Agora, 'underlining its role as the centre of the *polis*'⁴⁰. As the Agora contained the important buildings of democratic Athens, the *hermai* that were placed in or at this public area might be considered as the 'symbols of the power of the state and of the democratic order'⁴¹. One example that might offer an explanation was placed in the Agora, at a place called "The *Hermai*". According to J. Winkler, the Eion monument is perhaps the clearest example that explains the democratic ideology of the herm.⁴² The Eion monument (sometimes called "the Herms of Kimon"⁴³) was set up somewhere around the year 476 B.C., after the Athenians defeated the Persians at Eion. As a token of gratitude, the Athenian citizens dedicated a group of *hermai* to this victory. In his speech *Against Ktesiphon* Aiskhines (389-314 B.C.) gives an account on this event as follows:

'There were certain men in those days, fellow citizens, who endured much toil and underwent great dangers at the river Strymon, and conquered the Medes in battle. When they came home they asked the people for a reward, and the democracy gave them great honor, as it was then esteemed—permission to set up three

³⁸ Furley (1996: 21)

³⁹ Paus.1.22.8

⁴⁰ A. Rubel, *Fear and Loathing in Ancient Athens* (first ed. 2000, English ed. 2014), p. 81

⁴¹ Ibidem (2014: 81)

⁴² J. Winkler, 'Representing the Body Politic, The Theater of Manhood in Classical Athens', in: *Perspecta*, vol. 26, Theater, Theatricality, and Architecture (1990), p. 222

⁴³ Rubel (2014: 81)

stone Hermae in the Stoa of the Hermae, but on condition that they should not inscribe their own names upon them, in order that the inscription might not seem to be in honor of the generals, but of the people.⁴⁴

The three *hermai* were set up by the people of Athens on the Agora and were inscribed with verses that described what happened and for what reason the statues were placed in the Stoa of the *Hermai*.⁴⁵ Since the soldiers and their generals asked Athens for a reward, it is striking to see that no name of any general or other member of the army was mentioned on the *hermai*. Winkler suggests that the particular meaning of the Eion monument was democratic. Furthermore, he mentions that the absence of names on the *hermai* suggests that the monument was a ‘symbol of the sameness and equality of all its capable fighters’⁴⁶. Because the Eion monument was a dedication brought by the people of Athens, a democratic basis or idea behind the set up of the three statues is plausible but at the same time difficult to prove, due to the lack of evidence.

Hermai can be considered as religious, personal and communal monuments. The god Hermes, with all its functions and powers, is partly represented in the herm. The fact that *hermai* were placed at entrances of private houses suggests that the statues were linked to Athenian individuals, whatever the connection really meant. The Eion monument shows the communal relationship with the herm and shed perhaps some light on the democratic function of the *hermai* as dedications, brought by the whole *polis* of Athens at times of victory. Regarding the modern interpretations on the role of the *hermai* in Athenian society, getting a clear understanding on their function remains problematic.

Conclusion

After the mutilation of the *hermai* in 415 B.C., the majority of the Athenian citizens were shocked. Why were they shocked exactly, and why did the *demos* of Athens react as it did? According to the selected primary sources, Athens’ reaction was caused by the fear for losing the democracy, which was perhaps influenced by demagogues who wanted to get rid of the existing constitution.

According to Thukydides, it were the *hermai* in the city that were damaged. As modern historians argue, the *hermai* were placed on public areas that had special importance for Athenian democracy. Also, some of the *hermai* were dedications made by the *demos*, such as the Eion monument. If such dedications can be linked to democracy or a democratic ideology, damaging the *hermai* could be considered as an act against democracy.

⁴⁴ Aiskhines, *Speeches: Against Ctesiphon*, 3.183 (trans. C.D. Adams) (Cambridge 1919)

⁴⁵ Ibidem, 3.184-185

⁴⁶ Winkler (1990: 222)

I believe some Athenians saw the mutilation as a bad omen. Perhaps some feared Hermes would take revenge for the impious act. However, regarding the crime that occurred in 415, I believe that the reaction of Athens and her citizens was based on a fear of losing the democratic constitution. Moreover, it is striking to see the Athenians did not take any action to restore their relationship with the god. Athens could have consulted oracles, offered sacrifices or could have performed any other action to purify the city. As far as the sources show, none of this occurred and the expedition continued. Even Alkibiades, who was accused of participating in the act, and thus could be considered as impure, was sent to Sicily. It seems that the mutilation was not immediately linked with the Sicilian expedition. The idea that the crime was seen as a bad omen for the expedition can be refuted.

The motivation for mutilating the *hermai* remains unclear. The fact that the *hermai*, amongst other statues, were damaged was not a new phenomenon.⁴⁷ It is imaginable citizens were not happy when public property was damaged and that punishment was involved. Moreover, damaging the *hermai* could cause problems in the intimate and individual communication with Hermes and the other gods via the statues, as described by Versnel and Furley. In case of the individual contact with the *hermai*, the mutilation can be seen as an act against every Athenian individual. On the communal level, the vandalism could be regarded as an act against democracy. However, understanding the herm's real function remains unclear, even though modern scholars attempt to create some clearance.

In providing a conclusion I will rely on the information the ancient sources provide. I believe the act, whatever its reason, was used afterwards as a tool by certain men (perhaps demagogues), who were attempting to get rid of their political enemies, by accusing them for violating the one thing citizens of Athens cherished, namely democracy. It was for this reason that men, such as Alkibiades and Andokides, were charged of being a threat against democracy, and thus against Athens.

In conclusion, the Athenians were shocked because they believed the mutilation of the *hermai* was seen as an act against democracy. By following the ancient sources, the whole affair was based on a search for enemies of the state. However, it seems these enemies, the *hetaireiai*, were perhaps not the ones who formed a threat for the democratic constitution. Both Thukydides' and Andokides' account imply it were the accusers, the ones who tried to obtain the

⁴⁷ see Thuk.VI.28

‘direction of the people’⁴⁸, who were the real “errors” in Athenian society. By influencing the *demos* they tried to create a feeling of fear, a fear for losing democracy.

Notes

Primary

Aiskhines, *Speeches: Against Ctesiphon* (trans. C.D. Adams) (Cambridge 1919)

Andocides, *On the Mysteries* (trans. K.J. Maidment) (Cambridge 1968)

Herodotus, *The Histories* (trans. A.D. Godley) (Cambridge 1920)

Pausanias, *Description of Greece* (trans. W.H.S. Jones) (Cambridge 1918)

Ps.Plato, *Hipparchus* (trans. W.R.M. Lamb) (Cambridge 1955)

Plutarch, *Alcibiades* (trans. B. Perrin) (London repr. 1967-1970)

Thukydides, *The Peloponnesian War* (trans. M. Hammond) (New York 2009)

Secondary

Crawley Quinn, J., ‘Herms, Kouroi and the Political Anatomy of Athens’, in: *Greece & Rome*, vo. 54, no. 1 (2007), p. 82-105

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⁴⁸ Ibidem, VI.28.2

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