

Athens Journal of Mediterranean Studies

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The **Athens Journal of Mediterranean Studies (AJMS)** is an Open Access quarterly double-blind peer reviewed journal and considers papers from all areas of Arts and Humanities, Social Sciences, Business and Law, Urban Planning, Architecture and Environmental Sciences. Many of the papers published in this journal have been presented at the various conferences sponsored by the [Center for European & Mediterranean Affairs \(CEMA\)](#) of the [Athens Institute for Education and Research](#) (Athens Institute). All papers are subject to Athens Institute's [Publication Ethical Policy and Statement](#).

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The current issue is the fourth of the twelfth volume of the *Athens Journal of Mediterranean Studies (AJMS)*, published by the [Athens Institute for Education and Research](#).

Gregory T. Papanikos
President
Athens Institute



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20th Annual International Conference on Mediterranean Studies

22-26 March 2027, Athens, Greece

The [Center for European & Mediterranean Affairs](https://www.atiner.gr/) organizes the 20th Annual International Conference on Mediterranean Studies, 22-26 March 2027, Athens, Greece sponsored by the [Athens Journal of Mediterranean Studies](https://www.atiner.gr/). The aim of the conference is to bring together academics and researchers from all areas of Mediterranean Studies, such as history, arts, archaeology, philosophy, culture, sociology, politics, international relations, economics, business, sports, environment and ecology, etc. You may participate as stream leader, presenter of one paper, chair a session or observer. Please submit a proposal using the form available (<https://www.atiner.gr/2027/FORM-MDT.doc>).

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Important Dates

- Abstract Submission: **29 September 2026**
- Submission of Paper: **22 February 2027**

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14-19 June 2027, Athens, Greece

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Important Dates

- Abstract Submission: **17 November 2026**
- Acceptance of Abstract: 4 Weeks after Submission
- Submission of Paper: **17 May 2027**

Academic Member Responsible for the Conference

- **Dr. Yannis Stivachtis**, Director, [Center for European & Mediterranean Affairs](#) and Associate Professor, Jean Monnet Chair & Director of International Studies Program, Virginia Tech – Virginia Polytechnic Institute & State University, USA.

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Echoes from Stone: Engaging with Autoethnography, Active Embodiment and Mythical Residue in the Cave of the Nympholept Near Vari, Greece

*By Tanja Sakota**

This paper explores the Cave of the Nympholept near Vari, Greece through an autoethnographic reflection, engaging with the site as a physical space, a protected archaeological location and a place of mythical significance. Drawing on embodied memory, the cave becomes a site of introspective inquiry—where personal narrative intersects with historical relevance and collective mythology. Using an experiential and embodied experience, the discussion engages with the traces of those who have walked within this historic cavity across different moments in time. The cave becomes a chamber of transformation where the self remains suspended between myth and memory, past and present, self and society. Autoethnography creates a space for critical interrogation that collapses the linearity of time, allowing the researcher to inhabit multiple temporalities that converge forgotten rituals with scientific enquiry and personal narrative. Drawing on Mnemosyne as the mother of memory, her daughters the Muses, Hesiod, Plato and Plotinus including modern scholars like Castagnoli and Ceccarelli and autoethnographic thinkers including Adams, Ellis and Bochner, this paper starts to unravel the mysteries of the ancient past and why they remain relevant in the present. The cave of the Nympholept is not just a site of ancient history, it is a living archive that invites the researcher to listen, remember and re-position the story of the self. The cave is a haven that holds stories about ancient symbols, myths and practices that prompt us to think about who we are and where we come from through collective narratives across time.

Keywords: *cave of Nympholept, memory, Mnemosyne, Autoethnography, myth*

Introduction

It is July and the Greek summer heat is living up to its reputation. It is swelteringly hot and there is very little shade to offer some comfort or protection from the scorching sun. I am walking along a small, winding, mountainous road. There are numerous hills all around me, shaped by a seismic prehistoric event that leaves them frozen as if they were attempting to reach towards the sky. Today, I walk through the magnificent hills of Mount Hymettus in the heart of Attica near Athens in Greece. Beyond, I see the deep blue sea, stretching all the way to the edge of the world. The cicadas remain hidden but deafen the silence with their song. With each step, the rubber soles of my shoes seem to melt into the hot, black tar beneath me. In ancient times, this road must have been gravel. For a moment,

*Associate Professor, University of the Witwatersrand, South Africa.

my present is disrupted by the memories of the ancient world. I see the silhouettes of ordinary folk such as tradespeople, fisherfolk and philosophers making their way across the hills. This place has relevance and meaning. I feel it through every sense of my body. My presence is not random. My aim is to visit the Cave of the Nympholept and communicate with its memories, to understand how an embodied experience can function as a tool of memory. My intention is to consider how my own narrated bodily experience as the researcher becomes a metanarrative, a story of how stories within this space unfold and what methodological framework can account for this reflexive duality? This paper centres on an autoethnographic encounter, drawing on archaic memory practices relating to the mother of memory Mnemosyne, her daughters the Muses, the poet Hesiod, and the ancient philosophers Plato and Plotinus, through to modern thinkers Castagnoli, and Ceccarelli. The cave acts as a source and site for the embodied, philosophical reflection with memory rather than an object for archaeological analysis. It functions as a reference and source to actively engage with memory through the echoes of the past and uncover the mysteries it holds.

Between Encounter and Text: Approach and Method

My theoretical framework moves across four particular moments, starting with myth and ending with metaphysics to create a philosophical structure around the autoethnographic experience. Mnemosyne, the original source of memory brings forth her daughters, the nine Muses to breathe song into the poet Hesiod so that the messages are understandable within the human form. This mythical interpretation is personified through Archedimos¹, who carves out the layout of the cave through the messages and instruction of the nymphs. The site becomes a place of memory based on the songs of the nymphs but it also triggers a philosophical interplay with memory. For Plato, the truth is timeless, it belongs to the soul and exists somewhere beyond the physical world. When we remember in the physical state, we are searching for what the soul already knows deep inside of us. The cave site acts as a trigger for the soul to search for and recall, deep within itself, the timeless truth it already possesses. This offers an alternative approach to how myth through Mnemosyne and the Muses look at memory. Plotinus extends Plato's interpretation by offering why the soul needs to remember at all. He argues that the soul used to exist in a perfect state. When it got trapped in the human body form, it fell out of time which created the need for memory.

The philosophical foundation of this paper is extended through the autoethnographic experience. My physical presence in the site becomes the point of intersection of the four moments. The physical and sensory experiences of being in the cave trigger the memories hidden within this space. Like Hesiod, I interpret these memories by writing about my encounter as I remember the nymphs. However, my interpretation of that experience can never be the original truth, only a gesture pointing towards it (Plato). In acknowledging this limitation, I turn to Plotinus: it is only by being

¹There are numerous versions of the spelling of Archedimos' name across different literatures. For the sake of consistency, I have used the spelling of Archedimos as it appears in the Mari et al. article.

physically present in the cave and using my senses that I can uncover its memories and offer an interpretation in a written form that others can read and understand.

The methodology draws on the embodied encounter, field notes and reflective writing before, during and after the visit to the cave. This material forms the data, which is then interpreted through autoethnography to construct the account. The personal interaction frames the recurring themes of memory that emerge through the four-part framework of Mnemosyne, Hesiod, Plato and Plotinus so that each moment is located within the sensory experience, the embodied encounter, the narrative context and the written account.

I also refer to phenomenological archaeology as outlined by Christopher Tilley who recognises that meaning emerges through an embodied movement and sensory engagement, reflecting the methodological premise of the paper.

The Relevance of Autoethnography

The term autoethnography is rooted in classical Greek linguistics. The structure of the word offers insight into its intellectual lineage: *auto*, relates to the self, one's own personal narrative. This points towards the reflexive positioning of the researcher which foregrounds subjectivity as a legitimate source of knowledge. *Ethno* meaning the socio-cultural, such as people, groups and tribes. *Ethno* points towards the anthropological grounding of the method. It signals that the individual or self is always rooted within a cultural matrix, since the self is never separate from the larger reality it belongs to. Finally, *graphy* refers to writing, description and research. *Graphy* points towards how the research is documented. This can include many forms that extend beyond academic writing, such as poetic, visual, creative and other innovative and expressive methods. From this breakdown, it becomes apparent that autoethnography is a qualitative research method where the researcher is both the participant and the observer (Ellis & Bochner, 2000, p.740) focusing on the lived experience to understand broader social and cultural contexts. A key thinker in the field, Ellis (2013) writes that autoethnography, 'asks that we rethink and revise our lives, making conscious decisions about who and what we want to be. And in the process, it seeks a story that is hopeful, where authors ultimately write themselves as survivors of the story they are living' (p. 10). It is important to understand that this approach and method is not appropriate for all forms of research but it is effective for research that calls for an interpretative and unconventional approach that extends beyond the anonymity of the third person position. In many ways it challenges conventional methods and processes. It, therefore, makes sense that autoethnographic research will take on its own structure and format and will not follow traditional practices in terms of the way it uses and embeds the methodology, literature review and theoretical framework concerning how the research is conducted and how it is reported.

I continue through the relentless heat as I search for the natural sign, the marking that ushers me towards the cave. It is subtle and if I am not aware of it, it is easy to miss. I veer off the road and meander through the stones and rocks, desperately trying not to fall. I am from South Africa, and I have hiked through the

bush many times, but this is a new experience. I am not accustomed to nor am I familiar with the insects, stones and boulders of this natural habitat. I am the intruder, perhaps even the unwelcomed guest. I make my way along the twists and turns of the uneven pathway until I reach the protective cage-like structure covering the entrance to this ancient place. The grid stands incongruously within this natural setting, unwelcoming and looming over this fragile spot, reminding me of the present. Simultaneously, I am invited into the depths of this mountainous ravine, captivated by the mystery of the past with the present and what waits patiently for me below the surface. The prison bars that cover the entrance are a harsh and bold reminder of the need to protect this site. The Monument Cave of the Nympholept is under the guardianship of the Ephorate of Palaeoanthropology and Speleology and belongs to the Greek Ministry of Culture. They have unsealed the lock and granted me permission to enter this sacred place. It has taken some time to gain access but now I am here, finally. I walk towards the natural entrance and peer into the cavity.

I hold onto the rope linked to a bolt permanently attached to the rock, and slowly make my way into the cave. The entrance has two tiers, an outer layer and then what looks like a second, indented, sunken layer. Carefully, I descend towards the inner layer of the cave. I stand upright and look at the site before me. The cave has two natural chambers to my left and right. There is a natural pathway leaning towards the right. This side of the cave extends deep towards the belly of the mountain at the back of the cave. To the left is the larger chamber, lit from the sunlight coming through the natural entrance above. The gentle warm hues of beige from the limestone blend with the yellow hues from the rays of the sun above, creating a warm ambience that welcomes me into this space. I have visited many caves in my lifetime, but this one is special, not only because of its natural layout but because of the memories it holds.

The Story of the Cave of the Nympholept

The cave (also known as the Cave of Pan or Cave of Archedimos) is located ‘at an altitude of 260 metres on Krevati Hill, north of Vari, on the southern slopes of Mount Hymettus’ (García 2025). It belongs to the Municipality of Vari Voula Vouliagmeni and ‘was formed within the calcareous rock, with an almost circular ground plan comprising a vertical, inconspicuous entrance, at the W [western] edge’ (Mari et al. 2019, p. 69). The cave was sculpted in the fifth century BCE by Archedimos when he moved to Attica from the island of Thera (probably the Cycladic island). Archedimos believed he was a nympholept, meaning he had the ability to communicate with the Nymphs and carved all his work according to their instruction (Mari et al. 2019, p. 68). Through his interaction with the nymphs, Archedimos transformed this natural grotto into a sanctuary dedicated to several deities who played a significant role on the lives of the women (namely those entering into adolescence, the phase of marriage, conception, pregnancy and of giving birth and raising children) (Mari et al. 2019, p. 67). The cave was also created to the everyday life of shepherds and farmers (in terms of securing the fertility of their land and of their flocks) (Mari et

al. 2019, p. 67). The inscriptions throughout the Cave show it is dedicated to the Nymphs, Pan, Apollo and possibly Hermes².

The passage leading towards the darker chamber allures my attention. I walk along it, captured by the remnants of the ancient rituals. There are inscriptions which are not clearly visible, but it seems they provide worshippers instructions to wash and cleanse any offerings outside of the cave (Mari et al. 2019, pp. 68–69). To my right, I see a perfectly carved-out spring, ‘about a metre in diameter, and half a metre deep’ (Weller 1903, p. 274). Today it stands empty but remains embossed with watermarks, resonating its previous function. I stop for a moment, imagining the visitors from the ancient world cleansing themselves as they enter this spiritual place. Ritual washing was considered (and in some religions remains) a symbolic act that heightens one’s awareness and prepares the body and mind for ethereal encounters. The natural spring acts as a doorway or landmark, separating the world outside with the inner sanctuary beyond. The pathway is carved quite clearly in front of me but I proceed with caution as I make my way towards the darkness that dominates the back of the smaller chamber. The stalactites and stalagmites stand bold and strong, frozen and forever held through time. I cross the threshold, my body casting its silhouetted shadow across the back wall. It is believed that navigating this short, dark passageway charges the emotions and prepares the soul to elevate and participate in the cult practice in the bigger, naturally lit chamber. I am conscious of what each section of the cave symbolises. I must be aware of how my presence resonates within particular sections of the cave, because I am here to interact with its memories. I must remember the signification of the passage and I must acknowledge what my short journey through it evokes on an embodied level. I am not here to conduct any Pagan ritual but I cannot ignore that for the Pagans this grotto held deep spiritual relevance and meaning.

I follow the path into the larger chamber, thinking about the nymphs, Archedimos, Apollo and Pan and the ancient people who used this space. I stand here today, bringing my own life experiences and knowledge into this space. Time, the past, present and what is still to come become enmeshed. I experience the past within my own existence in this space. I cannot ignore that my embodiment has its own, unique interaction with the memories of the past.

Walking through Whispers of Silence

My presence in this cave site is not random. My maternal positionality within this context allows me to interact with its memory and heritage, a space that was made to honour different moments in the everyday experiences of women (Mari et al. 2019, p. 67). My interest is to find synergies across my identity as a researcher, writer and mother, three positions that have very clearly defined roles. As a researcher, my role is to investigate and explore. As a writer, I document, share and

²Because the Cave of the Nympholept is under the guardianship of the Ephorate of Palaeoanthropology and Speleology and belongs to the Greek Ministry of Culture, no images are allowed to be published. It is possible to view the cave by clicking on the following link: <https://www.heritage-daily.com/2024/09/the-vari-cave-sanctuary/153547> (Milligan 2024).

shape my experience and findings. As a mother, my body relates instinctively from a position of care and vulnerability through time. These three identities create tensions which add to and shape the encounter. I cannot escape my own identity and how it moulds my interaction with the space. This layered relationality is not incidental but influences what I notice, what memories are triggered, and what I record and remember about being in the space. I must therefore embrace who I am and what I bring to this encounter. Physical spaces act as memory holders because they assist in how we remember across time. Assoulin (2021, p. 166) argues that there are two reasons why memory attaches itself to space, place and the self. Firstly, it aligns with how we remember because we recollect through images, mainly of places and 'the visual detailed richness of places serves as a hanger for our emotional memories' (Assoulin 2021, p. 166). The environment, therefore, plays a crucial role because it creates the surroundings for the narrative of the memory. Secondly, places provide the framework for remembering defining moments of the self. For a moment to be considered 'defining', it must carry a distinct character, and place is what gives it that character (Assoulin 2021, p. 166). In other words, the moment needs to be remembered in terms of its context in space and time. We do not merely remember an event but rather we remember it in terms of its spatial and temporal structure that also includes how we move through it. In other words, the experiences that memory is capable of across physical and temporal dimensions contributes to the constitution of the self. This is possible because memory is not merely a repository of past events, it is a medium of narratives in locations. This becomes important when engaging with an embodied interaction with a past that does not always include my own physical memories. I am not interacting with my personal memories within this space but it is necessary to recognise that my cognitive and physical encounter is shaped by my own recollections. These memories are not mine but are deeply rooted in the past, which will influence my interaction with the residue of memory in the cave.

Memory is not fully cognitive but also embodied. I see the man Archedimos, the nympholept possessed by the nymphs, carving according to their call and command. In Greek mythology, the nymphs 'represent the spirit of nature and are considered the personifications of the life force found in the natural world. Nymphs are seen as divine entities and supernatural creatures that embody the beauty, vitality, and mystery of the natural environment, and they play important roles in maintaining the balance and harmony of nature (Eidinow 2023, p. 24). Although Nymphs remain minor nature goddesses, they reside and remain on earth, taking care of their natural surroundings (Atsma n.d.a). They are able to communicate with the gods and mortals as mystical and mysterious beings who exist in both worlds. They are often portrayed as young and graceful maidens, with 'their feet unshod, their arms bare to the shoulder, their hair loose over their necks, their eyes sweetly smiling' (Connor 1988, p. 170). I stand at the back of the grotto, looking at what remains of the inscriptions and carvings, contemplating Archedimos, the nymphs, the Pagans, the Romans and the Christians, each making their mark according to their own belief system. Today, I bring my own beliefs, customs and agenda that combines the mystical with the scientific and my own corporeality. I will not make my mark on a physical level, but my presence and

movement within this space will leave its own invisible brush strokes. My movement within the cave shapes my understanding of it, aligning with a phenomenological perspective that meaning arises from a lived and bodily encounter. Tilley (2004, p. 1) explains that phenomenology ‘attempts to reveal the world as it is actually experienced directly by a subject as opposed to how we might theoretically assume it to be’. It is a ‘style or manner of thought rather than a set of doctrines, rules or procedures that may be followed, a way of Being in the world and a way of thinking in it (Tilley, 2004, p. 1). Autoethnography provides the method that allows me to record, reflect on and provide a written account that links my experience to my thinking.

My interest is to focus on why the cave was created and perhaps to have my own spiritual connection with the residual memory of Mnemosyne and the nymphs. My presence in this space embodies particular aspects of my being: mother, researcher/participant, writer. This is why I turn to autoethnography as a research method and process because it eschews ‘rigid definitions of what constitutes meaningful and useful research; this approach also helps us understand how the kinds of people we claim, or are perceived, to be, influence interpretations of what we study, how we study it, and what we say about our topic’ (Ellis, Adams & Bochner, 2011, p. 275). I am the participant who sits at the centre of this embodied encounter, but I am also the researcher and the writer. This cave is also dedicated to the lives of women; my identity, role and personal experience further shape my scholarly engagement with it. As a mother, I am connected to the women this cave commemorates through a shared, embodied lineage of memory, yet I am also separated from them by time, culture, and the particularity of my own experience. I cannot deny this influence and what it ignites when standing here. Autoethnography gives me the space to acknowledge and accommodate the ‘subjectivity, emotionality, and the researcher’s influence on research, rather than hiding from these matters or assuming they don’t exist’ (Ellis et al. 2011, p. 274). Who I am plays a significant part in why I am here and how I am interacting with this site.

Archedimos was inspired by the call of the nymphs but as I stand and look at the various inscriptions and carvings I cannot ignore the significance and connections of nature to archaic memory. Apollo’s altar reminds me of his interaction with the nymphs in his role as god of light, truth, music and prophecy. Mnemosyne acts as the epistemic site of memory, whereas the Muses are the agents and voice of memory. Apollo shapes how memory is articulated and crafted through poetry and song whereas the nymphs activate memory through body, place and experience. They dance ‘insofar as Pan plays his pipes and provides the music for their movements (Laferrière 2019, p. 207). The trigger, however, remains embodied through a sensational act of being in a space, encounter and/or experience. As an autoethnographer, memory does not exist as a repository that needs to be called on but takes shape through the visceral and creative process (whether this is writing or any other medium). My presence in the cave of the Nympholept ignites a conversation around the archaic notions of memory that emerges through my physical presence within the cave. I engage with memory as an active site that takes shape alongside my impressions and perceptions. Contemporary autoethnographic practice is often considered a ‘new’ or modern approach to research that emerged and became prominent during the 1980s due to the ‘crisis of

confidence inspired by postmodernism' (Ellis et al. 2011, p. 273). It changed the positionality of research by shifting the focus towards the researcher but actually the philosophical approach towards inward enquiry and reflection has a legacy that takes us back to Archaic and Ancient Greece.

Remembering through Passages of time

I am in a natural, protected site that stores memories of the nymphs but in trying to remember, I must consider the roots of memory itself. I will start with the Archaic and Ancient world because I am in Greece. The poet Hesiod, a humble shepherd, claims to have received messages from the Muses (the daughters of Zeus and Mnemosyne). Hesiod calls upon them for knowledge, truth and inspiration because they are seen as 'benevolent guides and powerful forces that influence human creativity' (Rogerson 2024). The reference to creativity is relevant to me because I am also a writer and filmmaker. My interest in Hesiod and the Muses also points towards their mother, Mnemosyne who in Greek mythology embodies the concept of memory itself. In Hesiod's *Theogony*, Mnemosyne is referred to as the 'Titan goddess of memory and remembrance and the inventress of language and words ... required to preserve the stories of history and the sagas of myth before the introduction of writing' (Atsma n.d.b) see also (İşman 2017, p. 135). Mnemosyne is important as the beholder of memory that extends beyond personal experience. She embodies the curation of collective stories and preserves the memory of the past. I identify with Mnemosyne because I find myself in a place that oscillates between the preservation of stories through research and writing but I am also a mother who has a familial role to play as the beholder of memories and the curator of stories. My own position as mother in a place that historically is tied to fertility and childbirth places me in an unexpected proximity to Mnemosyne. We are not metaphors of each other; my body and the accumulated memory of the site are linked through my own lived experience rather than a symbolic comparison. My maternal role is not incidental but places me directly within the same thread of memory that has characterised this site. In addition, I cannot ignore that my own experiences extend and influence my academic journey. For example, my presence in the cave ignites the memories of the nymphs, Archedimos, Apollo, Pan as well as my own recollections of innocence and youth. Both these interactions (academic and maternal) are deeply intertwined and it would be ignorant to try and separate them. I, therefore, focus on the point of connection, the synapse that links my intellectual enquiry of being in the space with my own personal encounter of it. I am also aware of the particularities of my own existence in a modern time and culture which inhibits me from fully inhabiting the experience. Perhaps it is my responsibility to use what I have learnt about memory to offer a greater understanding about time concerning how past experiences shape and prevail in the present.

I stand at the far end of the larger chamber. In front of me, a clearly carved staircase reaches up towards the cavity above, which opens onto the surface. At the base of the chiselled staircase is a carving, a self-portrait of Archedimos himself.

He confirms this by carving his name twice next to the relief, once to identify who he has carved and once to acknowledge himself as the artist. I look at the self-portrait. It is quite remarkable. Simple, but so clearly a reflection of the man who made these carvings. Archedimos is wearing an *exomis*, holding a hammer and chisel, the tools of his trade. He is carved in composite view and his head points towards the entrance up above. Alongside the figure lies the remains of a shrine, unfortunately, it is no longer possible to read the inscription as the 'shrine has suffered serious mutilation, and a valuable inscription has been lost' (Weller 1903, p. 271).

My presence within the cave is to search for synergies that prevail across time. One cannot speak about memory without considering time. In trying to understand my current context, memory plays a crucial role here because it is the only way I can connect to a world that no longer exists in my present. The archaic and ancient worlds are relevant to me because they are the origin of Western philosophy, critical thought and the search for truth and knowledge. In archaic Greek culture, memory is not seen merely as a cognitive function but a divine principle that connects the past to the present. Mnemosyne, the goddess of memory 'advocates that the past is never truly lost; it can be revisited and reinterpreted through memory' (Greek Mythology 2024) Memory is all I have left to work through what has occurred previously, within the present moment and the possibilities of the future.

Castagnoli (2020) looks at memory in terms of its divine origins, firstly, with reference to truth and secondly, with reference to time. He turns to Hesiod to discuss how true knowledge is inseparable from memory and that divine knowledge is a direct consequence of the creative, performative and poetic power of the Muses. He starts with Mnemosyne and her role as the Memory goddess, holding the 'intuition that memory can give us access to something that is remote from us in space and time [which] is embodied in the genealogy and power of the Muses' (Castagnoli 2020, p. 83). This positionality suggests that memory is not merely psychologically human but extends beyond us. It is something we can mediate through the Muses because in archaic Greece 'the Muses represented omniscient sources of super-human knowledge to which human beings can have only indirect access' (Castagnoli 2020, p. 84). This interpretation suggests that the Muses hold divine memory, which humans can tap into but because humans are receiving a narration of true memory, Hesiod reminds us that the Muses may speak truths or falsities (Castagnoli 2020, p. 84). This explanation points towards the creative and poetic power of memory.

Castagnoli also draws our attention to memory as not being something that is retrospective because for the Muses, 'memory-knowledge concerns not only the distant past ... but also the present and the future: the Muses sing "what is, what shall be and what was"' (Castagnoli 2020, p. 84). With this interpretation, memory precedes us as individuals because it is associated with true knowledge rather than a cognitive recollection of an event that has taken place. What is, presents the present truth, what shall be, presents the future truth and what was, addresses the past truth. This interpretation of memory is non-linear and omni-directional implying it exists outside of us but also across, through and within all perspectives of time. Humans can only remember the past but the Muses and Mnemosyne remember everything, for they are the 'goddesses and are in all places and know all things, while we hear only report and

know nothing' (Castagnoli 2020, p. 84). Perfect memory comes from the divine. It is the source of sagacious, preeminent and celestial knowledge that exists in a multidirectional interpretation of time. This is where the poet comes in because the poet is not merely a historian or storyteller but the mediator between the gods (who hold true memory) and humans (who do not).

This multi-lateral approach to time is important to me because in trying to work with the memories within this space requires a different approach to my perception of time and memory. Hesiod's perception of the Muses' ability to think through the past, present and future defies the linearity of the remembered, the lived and the imagination of what is to come. My interaction with the memories of this cave places me in a continuous present that is simultaneously haunted by the void in the present with the memories of the past and the ability to know that the future will always be tainted by what has come before. The memory of the past becomes synonymous with an ancient relic because it is considered a material trace of true memory. However, as humans, true memory is an impossible plight because we will always be plagued by forgetting. For Hesiod, memory is not static, it is an act of constant creation because 'the poet (*aoidos*), like his counterpart the Muses, sings the songs of heroes and, most importantly, can be called the "servant" of or "ritual substitute" (*therapôn*) for the Muses themselves' (Collins 1999, p. 242). Memory is therefore a divine, communal and culturally embodied force where the Muses preserve and ensure cultural knowledge for the collective. The poet becomes the conduit of communicating ancestral memory, which may include conflicts, traumas and pain. As I work through the layers of memory, I realise that my body remembers what my mind cannot always express.

The poet's connection to the Muses becomes a synonymous model for how we remember through cultural and familial memory. Autoethnography follows a similar pattern because it draws on and links personal experience to cultural meaning-making. Our self-identity in the world is shaped and formed by what has preceded it. Although our experience of the world is individual, it is also positioned and framed by other contexts whether they are social, political, cultural, familial, or ancestral narratives. I am also engaging with the cultural memories of the deep past that have no inherent link to me but somehow become enveloped in my visceral experience and engagement with them. My understanding of what I am experiencing in the present includes the rupture, destabilisation and transformation of the self, which in many ways are all defining moments as discussed by Assoulin (2021, p. 166). My response is also influenced by my emotions which are framed by what I carry through my genealogy as well as my inherent physical and metaphysical embodied encounter within this cave. I am working across and through time but also across and through ethereal realms. Autoethnographers 'seek to put their readers *in the experience*, appealing to their hearts and senses as well as their intellects' (Bochner 2022, p. 9). From a phenomenological perspective, 'language flows from the body rather than the mind, or, rather, from a mind that is embodied, bound up with the sensorial world' (Tilley 2004, p. 26). My sensorial experience within this site shapes how I think about this space. It is filtered through my body (mother), my eyes notice what others may miss (researcher), and my hands will shape this encounter into words (writer). I cannot ignore this within an autoethnographic framework because I cannot separate myself

from what I experience here, nor can I separate what I experience from what I create. In addition, I must also acknowledge that the world I live in and am shaped by will influence how I read the silence of the stone.

In front of me is the altar of Pan. Next to the altar, to the right there is a clearly carved three-dimensional statue of a headless figure. It is believed that the head was made of a different material and was destroyed along with many of the other Pagan remnants by the Christians (Mari et al. 2019, p. 69). The statue 'most likely depicted Apollo. God of light, patron of herdsmen and farmers, leader of the Nymphs' (Mari et al. 2019, p. 69). Towards the end of February in 1901, archaeologist Charles H. Weller conducted the initial excavations with many of his findings including his topographical outline of the grotto remaining the most accurate and primary record of the site. This includes an image of the '*omphalos*', (Weller 1903, p. 268), which once stood beside the figure, indicating the cave's spiritual significance, but has since been lost or removed. I stand, I watch, trying to tap into the memories left by so many who entered this grotto to acknowledge and request divine instruction, advice and inspiration. In seeking guidance beyond the physical world, these pilgrims were, perhaps unknowingly, reaching towards the distinction Plato would later draw between the visible, material world and the realm of the eternal.

Plato argues that the world exists of two realms 'the *physical world* [original emphasis], which people could comprehend with their five senses, and the *World of Ideas* or *Forms* [original emphasis], which people could comprehend on with their intellect, or in other words, by thinking' (Burgin 2018, p. 7). In many ways, my embodied experience is engaging across these two realms. I am using my senses to engage with the space and engage with its memories but I am also trying to tap into the spiritual significance and sanctity of the space. Plato transforms 'the traditional divinely-grounded *mnemonic* [original emphasis] wisdom into a human *recollective* [original emphasis] process of learning' (Castagnoli 2020, p. 85). For Plato memory becomes 'the label for the (re-)discovery of the truth within ourselves, by means of individual philosophical inquiry and dialectical reasoning, and the re-appropriation of our true, best (divine) natures' (Castagnoli 2020, pp. 85–86). Plato creates the conceptual space that forces an individual to look inward to find their deepest potential through questioning, reasoning, self-reflection and personal meaning making. Memory becomes something that unwinds not just in the cultural and mythic field but it is also a presence that exists deep within the immortal soul.

Plotinus inherits Plato's metaphysical approach but extends the interpretation to include different levels of the soul. Firstly, there is the intellect in its highest form which has no memory because it is timeless and is already fully knowing. Second is the body, which is the lowest level and has no memory because it is instinctual. In between these two lies the self (*hēmeis*), which according to 'Plotinian terminology, the *hēmeis* is neither god nor animal, but rather the power to become either one' (Aubry 2014, p. 310). This is the embodied, self-conscious, practical, narrative subject who is shaped by experience. The moral, psychological and narrative self has the capacity to move towards being driven by instincts and impulses (animal) or to be governed by the intellect and contemplation (god). The self is a field of becoming, implying that we are not a static entity but rather a dynamic source that is in a state of transformation and change. For Plotinus,

memory is an active power and ‘not just a conservation of impressions’ (Plotinus 2018, p. 481). My maternal body and embodied experience does not simply reflect on memory as an abstract concept, it enacts it, embodying the active power of memory that Plotinus describes, rather than merely theorising it. What I touch, sense and feel in this place becomes memory in the moment of the experience, before it is ever theorised or documented. Yet my body is a modern one that exists in the present, it is not an ancient or archaic one. I reach back through the sensations in my body to a past I can never fully recover. This is not a failure to recover the past but a living validation of the separation Plotinus claims gives rise to memory itself.

Similarly, autoethnography is ‘both process and product’ (Ellis et al. 2011, p. 273) which forces the researcher to consider their own experiences when finding relevance to why they are conducting research. Critical investigation is not merely about finding the information but rather looking at what you find through the self. This is transformative because the research process repositions the self as a valid object of enquiry to create new possibilities of knowledge, understanding and meaning. Autoethnography does not delve into the complexities of the self, the soul and the divine (like Plotinus) but it does see the self as a fragmented entity that is constantly evolving through and with experience. For Plotinus, the self is multilayered, ‘a microcosm, on the model of the intelligible universe rather than the physical universe’ (Regnier 2021, p. 150). Autoethnography relies on working through the self as a source of knowledge rather than focusing on external observation. In other words, the self is a legitimate site of knowledge that is philosophically significant and not just a product of reason. According to Bochner (2016, p. 15), we are drawn to a life of research according to life experiences that changed and deeply affected us. In working through the emotions that accompany my perceptions, I oscillate and negotiate an understanding that moves between my instinctive impulses and raw emotion with my intellectual critique.

My interaction within the cave is not merely narrating my story, but rather creates an opportunity to look at how my story discloses something beyond and before my existence. The experience reminds me that memory does not only exist in the mind, but also in the body. The sensations and triggers of being in the cave also form part of a collective engagement that extends beyond physicality. The big question – how is this achievable?

Memory, a Thread Across Time

One answer would be to look at memory itself from a modern perspective. Castagnoli and Ceccarelli (2019, p. 1) acknowledge that the interpretation towards memory in the present day is no longer seen as merely a cognitive function. They argue that it is also ‘essential to our self-definition as individuals, to direct our actions and shape our experiences and feelings in our everyday life’ (Castagnoli & Ceccarelli 2019, p. 1). They extend this understanding to include larger communities and groups. For them, memory is a ‘way to locate ourselves in the world, as individuals or communities, [and] is central to our human existence: deprived of memory, as individuals we lose not only a fundamental share of our knowledge of

the world, but also our sense of self; and without shared memories a society loses its unity and coherence in time' (Castagnoli & Ceccarelli 2019, p. 1). Within this space, memory is not individual but socially rooted in engaging and sharing experiences and stories across time. Collective memory, which Mnemosyne embodies and communicates through her daughters, plays a crucial role in cultural narratives, influencing how communities remember their past and envision their futures (Greek Mythology 2024). Autoethnography encourages us to look at our own stories and experiences within a cultural and social demographic. It is not only about telling the story but about how our story is shaped by cultural perceptions as well as how the story is perceived by its audience/reader. In essence autoethnography focuses on the position of the reader because the 'I' in the story can tell us a lot about how the 'I' fits within culture and a way of life. For Ellis (2004), 'Personal narratives propose to understand a self or some aspect of a life as it intersects with a cultural context, connect to other participants as co-researchers, and invite readers to enter the author's world and to use what they learn there to reflect on, understand, and cope with their own lives' (p. 46). My layered identity shapes my interaction with the site but also how my experience frames my theoretical engagement with it. This speaks to Castagnoli and Ceccarelli's perspective that different memory practices (which rely on personal memory and narrative) can 'reveal fundamentally diverse conceptions of human psychology, the relation between human nature and the divine, and the way in which human beings, as individuals and societies, construct and preserve their knowledge, identities and interactions through time' (Castagnoli & Ceccarelli 2019, p. 2).

We cannot rule out that memory is also a cognitive experience that consciously involves the act of remembering or recalling past experiences. It brings events from deep within our mind back into our present. How and what we remember will always be influenced by our present, because our need for recollection will always be triggered by something that is taking place in the now. Because we can never return to the past as it was, we therefore, rely on memory to re-member the past. This aligns with the archaic interpretations that human memory is mediated and reconstructed rather than repeated, the only difference to the original archaic thinkers is that we are now the mediators of our thoughts which are biologically reconstructed rather than reliant on a divine and sacred source. Memory turns into an experience through the act of remembering. Narrative is the structure that allows us to re-tell the events. It is a cyclical pattern which suggests that events may recur, but they are always influenced by the memories of those who lived them, who remembers and how (Castagnoli & Ceccarelli 2019, p. 20). Memory is recalled, rewritten and reconstructed through narrative, which draws attention to its instability because it is subjective and personal but more importantly, it is always accompanied by forgetting. How I remember today will more than likely differ, even partially from how I may remember the same sequence of events tomorrow. Autoethnography aligns with this unfixed process because it treats memory as active, changing and something that crystallises and manifests according to circumstances. Autoethnography also allows us to engage with our experience of a narrative, which in turn may change and draw on a different reaction each time we read it (Bochner & Ellis 2026). Our present context will therefore, not only shape our recollection of an event but it will also influence our interpretation of that recollection.

It is not possible to look at memory without considering forgetting or amnesia. My aim is to keep memory alive with the understanding that my memories are forever changing and situationally triggered. I must also acknowledge that each memory is accompanied by a certain degree of forgetting because 'memory is fallible, that it is impossible to recall or report on events in language that exactly represents how those events were lived and felt' (Ellis et al. 2011, p. 282), see also (Tullis et al. 2009). According to Castagnoli and Ceccarelli (2019), 'Choosing what to remember must entail also the choice of what to forget, what to pass over in silence, and what to obscure' (p. 20). It brings me back to how the present shapes how memories are triggered. For example, my interaction with Archedimos and his callings from the nymphs triggers my memories and interactions which are shaped by who I am. My memories are also be shaped by how I perceive myself in the world at each moment in time. The exact details will change each time I remember because they will be influenced further by what prompted them in the present. Each role mother, researcher and writer, does not simply shape how I experience this site; it determines the theoretical framework I reach for instinctively, and how that experience is ultimately translated into words.

Today, I stand in the Cave of the Nympholept enveloped by the rock formations all around me. I engage with what each of my senses trigger in this natural cavern. The enclosure is washed by the warm rays of sunlight protruding through the entrance above creating a sense of peace and tranquillity. I imagine others who have walked through this space over thousands of years. Each footprint remains embedded on the granular terrain whilst the spores and molecules released with each breath linger in the air and on the rock surface.

Moving Forward with the Echoes from Stone

I remain standing at the bottom of the cave in the larger chamber, looking up at the entrance above me. The cavity takes the shape of a ripple-like crease moving across the ceiling of the larger chamber, almost as if it is protecting me from the world outside. Gently, it allows the natural light to filter its way through. I close my eyes and take a deep breath, sensing the smell of the stone entering and amalgamating with my body. I absorb the smells accompanied with my own memories and the residue of those that remain within this space. With my eyes still closed, I engage my thoughts with the darkness and the silence.

The act of recollection has been relevant across philosophical contemplation from its archaic inception of Mnemosyne, as the mother of memory and the authority of cultural recollection to her daughters, the Muses and the custodians of collective memory. The shepherd Hesiod becomes the mortal link to this mythical world when he claims the Muses breathed into him wondrous voice, so that he 'should celebrate things of the future and things that were aforetime' (Hesiod 1988, p. 4). He constructs himself as a vessel of memory, which is divinely sourced and created to preserve historical and cosmic order. He becomes the point of origin of collective memory which is later internalised and transformed by philosophers such as Plato and Plotinus. Plato alters memory from external, cultural authority (Hesiod) to an

internal, epistemic event of recollection (*anamnesis*). Plato creates and provides a philosophical framework for which collective memory is subjectively experienced because all human souls have access to the same realm of Forms from which they originated. He alters and remodels ‘the traditional idea of divinely grounded, orally transmitted mnemonic wisdom’ (Castagnoli & Ceccarelli 2019, p. 12) into a ‘human, creative, *recollective* [original emphasis] process of learning to be pursued through dialogical inquiry’ (Castagnoli & Ceccarelli 2019, p. 12). For Plato, the process of recollection involves the soul remembering the divine Forms it once knew before it became part of the body (Castagnoli & Ceccarelli 2019, p. 12). As mortals, we can access this knowledge by looking inward through philosophical reasoning. Plotinus extends Plato’s metaphysical hierarchy into a multi-layered structure where the soul does not remember the Forms from a position of recollection but rather the act of remembering is something that exists continuously and divinely within the soul, across time. Plotinus ‘develops the singular theory of the two memories: two distinct memories correspond to the separated soul and to the soul linked to the body, one that preserves the intelligible trace of the object, the other, the sensible trace’ (Gwenaëlle 2014, p. 312). Plotinus develops the position by introducing the idea that the soul has the timeless, higher soul which is untouched by mortal emotions, the lower soul which understands and experiences temporal memory and the third, which sits in between. This is the level of the conscious ego which has the potential to look up towards the divine or below towards material and physical experiences. For Plotinus, ‘the study of memory has the crucial role of revealing the soul’s internal structure, with its different and hierarchically ordered metaphysical and cognitive levels’ (Castagnoli & Ceccarelli 2019, p. 46). This interpretation identifies that memory is not only about how we recall but it also gives us insight into the inner layers and structure of the soul. The metaphysical level refers to the spiritual essence of being whereas the cognitive level can relate to perception and intellect or to instinctual drive and sensory perception.

Autoethnography speaks to many of the ideas originated by Plato and Plotinus because it relies on that inward turn that identifies the lived experience of the researcher as a site of knowledge and truth within larger cultural contexts. For Ellis and Bochner (2000),

Autoethnography is an autobiographical genre of writing and research that displays multiple layers of consciousness, connecting the personal to the cultural. Back and forth, autoethnographer’s gaze, first, through an ethnographic wide-angle lens, focusing outward on social and cultural aspects of their personal experience; then, they look inward, exposing a vulnerable self that is moved by and may move through, refract, and resist cultural interpretations (p. 739).

By working through the layers of consciousness and considering how the personal connects to the cultural opens pathways for interactions. The focus is inward towards the vulnerable self that possibly finds and proposes new interpretations and understandings. Reflexivity becomes not simply about my story but more importantly about how my story discloses something beyond my existence. This positionality could align with Plotinus because it relies on multiple layers of meaning. The raw feeling and emotion that comes with experiencing life equates to Plotinus’ lower level of the soul. This is the place that is immediately impacted by the physical

world because it is closely connected to the body, senses, emotions and reactions. My identity as mother, researcher and writer does not demonstrate my autoethnographic method, it is the place where autoethnography takes place. Each of the three roles shapes what I notice, what I remember and what I write.

Memory plays a fundamental role in this process. In this place of memory, the recollections of my life experience interact with the historical, spiritual and philosophical residue that remains in this place. My thoughts frame how I see this place, it speaks to me because its relevance triggers my engagement with my own past through the mythical, metaphysical and philosophical. The space itself becomes synonymous with how I am interacting with my raw emotions, intellectual perceptions but also the need to engage with the metaphysical world. How do my memories and experiences shape and reveal deeper truths about the very structure of my soul?

I open my eyes as I exhale the residue of my memories now forever entangled with the memories of this place. Silently, I acknowledge the altar of Apollo and Hermes as well as the altar of Pan. I turn to the sculpture of Archedimos' self-portrait. His carvings throughout the cave are quite extraordinary ... perhaps he really was possessed by the nymphs ... My attention turns towards the perfectly carved out staircase against the natural slope that leads towards the entrance. It is time. As I ascend the stairs, I make my way towards the exit, taking with me the echoes from stone.

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Some Remarks on the Pig in the Egyptian pBrooklyn 47.218.156, x+IV, 1

*By Stefan Bojowald**

This article examines the Egyptian pBrooklyn 47.218.156, x+IV, 1. Specifically, it addresses the question of the meaning of the pig. The explanation recently proposed by Theis with a Sethian creature is further expanded. The solution offered here lies in a connection to the aspect of impurity. The principle is well-known in Egyptian literature. A comparison with Akkadian literature supports this explanation.

Keywords: *Egyptian literature, pBrooklyn 47.218.156, x+IV, 1, impurity of the pig*

Introduction

This article takes a new approach to the Egyptian pBrooklyn 47.218.156, x+IV, 1. The following lines aim to elucidate the meaning of an ominous pig in greater detail. Previous research has rarely addressed this topic. However, there seems to be some recent movement in this area. A definite breakthrough, however, has not yet been achieved. The emphasis here is placed on the aspect of impurity. Comparison with Akkadian literature provides the necessary clarity.

Material

The manuscript must first be briefly described. The most important technical data can be summarized as follows: Its provenance points to the city of Elephantine, located on the southern border of Egypt. The same origin applies to other hieratic magica from the Wilbour Lot. Based on palaeographic criteria, the text can be dated to the 26th dynasty (Verhoeven 2001, 304-328). Converting to modern dates, this corresponds to the 6th century BC. The division of Egyptian history into dynasties goes back to the Hellenistic writer Manetho, who compiled the annals of his own land for the Ptolemaic rulers (for Manetho cf. Helck 1956, passim, Hornung 2012, sp. 1-6). The Greek occupiers were thus made aware about the achievements of this ancient civilization. Posterity coined the term „Saitic Renaissance“ for that era, a time of rediscovery of historical heritage and the large-scale, faithful copying of artworks from the past. The phenomenon describes a cultural movement during the Late Period of Egypt, characterised by a strong focus on great models from phases such as the Middle Kingdom. The modern name for this cultural phenomenon was

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borrowed from the capital city of the time. Some of the pieces created at that time, are, even to experts, virtually indistinguishable from the older models. Similar trends can be observed in Mesopotamia at that time. The intellectual climate thus dominated the entire Near East. The much-discussed Axial Age casts its long shadows before it. The name Karl Jaspers as its founding father should be recalled in this context. The concept of the Axial Age describes an era in which new philosophical and religious systems emerged independently across the globe – in China, India, Persia, Palestine, and Greece – transcending mythical thinking and shaping modern humanity. The papyrus under consideration likely originates from a temple library, which deviates from the usual pattern due to the absence of manuscripts from the normal temple cult (Quack 2021, 392). The content deals with the threat to the king posed by various evils. The manuscript, as a small piece of supplementary information, belongs to the most important accounts of multi-headed Bes figures. The dwarf god Bes was primarily invoked for the protection of pregnant women and newborns. The crucial text reads as follows:

„dd mdw ‘h^c=tn (sic!)² d3<ii> d3<ii>.t hḏr.t š‘r.t ‘m3m.t n.t imn.tt śnd nb ‘
nb n iwiw mwt mwt.t šhm(.t) d3<ii> d3<ii>.t hft(i) hft(i).t nti iw=śn r ii r
Pr-‘3 ‘nh wḏ3 śnb m grḥ m hrw nw nb n r’ nb“ (Sauneron 1970, 23; x+IV, 1)

„Words to be spoken: You shall stand still, adversary (and) adversary-woman, pig, door-guardian, devourer of the west, every³ fear, every influence of a dog, dead man (and) dead woman, adversary (and) adversary-woman, foe (and) foe-woman, who might act against the Pharaoh by night and day, every hour of the day.“

Discussion

The explanation of the meaning of the pig is of utmost importance here. The greatly abbreviated statement places considerable obstacles in the way of the task. The individual puzzle pieces must be fitted together to form the most convincing overall picture possible. Contemporaries faced fewer challenges, who had the advantage over their modern-day descendants of possessing the necessary prior knowledge. They were so deeply rooted in their own cultural environment that this ability can safely be assumed. Today’s interpreter is more or less reliant on conjecture. The only glimmer of hope is to coax one or two secrets from the text. In this sense, the following remarks are intended only as a working hypothesis.

²The emendation of Theis 2025, 89, who adds „=tn“ behind „h“ and cancels „n.t“, is unnecessary if one understands „nt“ as a defective spelling of „tn“.

³The rendering of „nb“ as „irgendein“ by Theis 2025, 90, is far too weak and should therefore be rejected. The present author can not completely avoid the suspicion that this translation was inspired by Coptic.

Research has recently rediscovered this topic. In a new edition of the papyrus, Theis (2025, 89) seeks to define the pig as a Sethian creature. The term, derived from the fratricidal god Seth (to the god Seth cf. still Te Velde 1977, *passim*), refers to all kinds of evil powers. The pig thus acquires an extremely dubious character. The next lines start the attempt to get a little bit beyond Theis in the contribution just mentioned. The interpretation is retained here, but a somewhat different cause is sought.

In the next few lines, particular importance is given to the aspect of impurity. The concept behind it is by no means new. The Egyptian idea of the uncleanness of pigs can also be found in other texts. A brief overview of the relevant sources is provided below. The already illusory claim of completeness should not even be made. However, the examples mentioned can be considered representative. The impurity of pigs is also encountered in the calendar omens from the New Kingdom (Vernus 1981, 91), which contains reports of a boar which proximity causes an illness. The Book of the Dead is the next example which is part of the funerary literature of the New Kingdom and was intended to protect the non-royal deceased from the dangers of the afterlife. The content is made up of around 190 spells. Knowledge of the topography there should be conveyed as a further task. The Book of the Dead represents, in chronological order, the third largest text corpus of this type after the Pyramid Texts of the Old Kingdom and Coffin Texts of the Middle Kingdom. The postscript to BD 125 contains the requirement for soil that no pig has stepped on (Lapp 2008, 286a-287a). The containment from the pig should be kept away from the deceased. The line can even be extended to Late Antiquity. The decisive example consists of the Greek-written decree of the strategos of Ombos and Elephantine, which dates from the year 248/249 AD (Eide et al. 1988, 977). The inscription is on the wall of the pronaos of the temple of Mandulis in Kalabscha. The decree is directed against the pig owners of Kalabscha, who should keep their animals out of the temple. The uncleanness of the pig can also be imagined as a reason here. The Egyptian idea of the impurity of pigs is – incidentally – already mentioned by Herodotus (Herodot II, 47, for Herodotus cf. Erbse 1991, *passim*; Dewald and Marincola 2006, *passim*, Rengattos 2001, 338-380). The message dates only a little later than pBrooklyn 47.218.156. The statement must therefore definitely be taken serious. The explanation would also make a good sense with the pig motif in pBrooklyn 47.218.156, x+IV, 1. The example there can thus be placed in a larger context. The procedure should be methodologically permitted. The aspect fits well into the ranks of the other evil forces and is not a foreign body at all. As likely as this solution is, it remains hypothetical for now. To be absolutely sure, you have to look for further arguments

In my opinion, the correct understanding cannot be found by considering the passage in isolation. The meaning only becomes really clear when the passage „*nb n iwiw*“ „every influence of a dog“ is included in the analysis. The connection between pig and dog – to put it in another way – must not be severed by force. The fact that these two animals were chosen is not based on mere arbitrariness. In truth, it is almost certain that a very specific calculation lies behind it. The alleged misplacement of the pig, which Theis (2025, 89) speaks of, meets with

fierce resistance because of the clearly predetermined agenda (for the pig see Fischer-Elfert 2014, 43-50, Redding 2024, *passim*). The decisive prerequisite is the aspect of that same impurity, resulting from the status as commensally animals and scavengers. The remnants of humanity's throwaway society served as a food source for both animals. The religious and ritual background of the dog is not even acknowledged by Theis in any commentary. However, the role of the canine is most easily explained in the manner just described. The following argument might also help a small step further: The dog's impurity is also reflected in other Egyptian texts, primarily an inscription from the temple of Isis at Philae (Philae III, 70, for this passage cf. Kühnemund 2021, 626). The temple of Philae was visited by the southern Nubians as a pilgrimage until the 6th century AD and was only been closed under the Byzantine Emperor Justinian I as the last Egyptian religious building. The passage in question certainly offers itself as a source. The dog is mentioned there in a row with other typhonian apparitions that could desecrate the temple. The text dates to the Greco-Roman period, meaning the time gap remains within reasonable limits. The difference is only three quarters of a millennium, which, based on experience so far, is not all that much by Egyptian standards. Oral tradition, which played an important role in many ancient culture, should also not be underestimated in such cases. Other explanations are all ruled out upon closer examination. The dog-like form of demons only appear in Late Antiquity, which is why it must be rejected for anachronistic reasons in such an early text as this one. The idea of an older precursor seems highly improbable. The dog was at least partly in bad reputation in Egypt, as can be seen from the comparison of the subjugated enemies with this animal. The development already began in the Middle Kingdom. The heyday saw this perspective in the war reports of the Pharaohs of the New Kingdom. The impurity of the dog can – by the way – also be observed in Palestine, where reference can be made to the Persian period dog burials in Askelon (Borowski 2002, 420). The admittedly late evidence is compensated for by the Roman bishop Kallist's paraphrase of Gen 7, 1-3, where the dog also appears among the unclean animals on Noah's Ark (Hausmann 2001, 142). The message about this paraphrase comes from Hippolyte. The Egyptian word „“ „influence“ only appears in this instance directly next to the dog. The context suggests that it refers to something negative. The nuance apparently needs not to be enhanced by a complementary adjective. In this case you may be dealing with a certain sociolect or idiolect. The existence of technical languages in Egypt has been sufficiently proven, with the soldier's language playing a special role (for the special idiom of soldiers cf. Breyer 2002, 53-56, Breyer 2011, 448, Schneider 2008, 181-205, Jansen-Winkel 2016, 274). The series could be supplemented by a reference to the language of metal craftsmen (Fecht 1996, 247ff., Bojowald 2018, 260-263) or butchers (Grunert 2001, 43-57). The expression “” “influence” in our text would then belong to the magical language. The possibility is not excluded that the word refers to the uncleanness of the dog. The solution appears to be the most convincing given all the remaining uncertainties. The theory that was initially put forward so blatantly now needs to be further substantiated.

The text itself leaves the reader in the lurch during further interpretation. The statement appears again in the same text, but a different pig name is chosen and the dog is omitted. The text passage is therefore even darker at first glance, so no help can be expected from this side. In the past, no one has dared to thoroughly interpret this passage. The reason for the change in pig names is not immediately obvious. In the absence of a better alternative, poetic freedom or the well-known principle of “*variatio delectat*” could be considered as the cause. In any case, the meaning does not seem to change. The assumption is that both pig names refer to the same animal. However, the last word on this topic may not have been spoken yet. The question should be deferred here until further notice. If you still want to make progress, an interdisciplinary comparison with Akkadian literature would be worthwhile. This could shed even more light on the obscurity. The same scenario can be observed in Akkadian texts, where dogs and pigs also appear together as waste consumers (Cooper 1996, 51). The connection is there secured on a sufficiently broad basis. The similarity is immediately apparent. The situation there is therefore suitable as support. For the sake of completeness, it should be said that the pig was only considered unclean relatively late in Sumerian-Akkadian literature (Guichard and Marti 2013, 48-49). However, this does not change the fundamental matter. Additionally, the pig was not decried as unclean in all oriental cultures. The Hittites, for example, saw no problem in using the pig as a sacrificial animal in magical rituals (McMahon 2023, 227). The reservations about the pig do not seem apply to the Aegean world, as the excavations from Nopigeia-Drapanias show (Chahoud and Vila 2023, 280). The osteological findings speak for themselves in this regard. The phenomenon can nevertheless be transferred to the Egyptian passage without hesitation. The explanation also serves very well here. The details are discussed in more detail below.

Conclusion

The text in pBrooklyn 47.218.156, x+IV, 1 shudders at the contamination caused by the impurity of the two condemned animals. The Egyptian’s thoughts had always revolved around the problem of purity and impurity (Quack 2013, 115-158). If this line of reasoning is justified, it becomes evident that the magical power of the word protects the king from a very real danger. The proposal is by no means isolated. This also explicitly acknowledges the possibility of a threat from worldly powers. Viewed from this angle, the king should then be protected from a possible illness caused by the transmission of the pig’s miasmas. The passage from the calendrical omens could have a pilot function for this. The validity of this explanation remains to be seen, since illnesses are not explicitly addressed in pBrooklyn 47.218.156, x+IV, 1. It seems possible that they were subject to a certain taboo, with complete marginalization depriving them of their harmful effects. The descriptions were apparently sufficient for those initiated into the matter. If this is too specific, the interpretation can also be generalized somewhat. The Egyptian king was surrounded by a semisacred aura, from which all impurity had to be kept away.

The gist of the statement can also be grasped more or less accurately in this way. The decision between these two alternatives is left to the reader.

The fact cannot be emphasized strongly enough, that pigs and dogs are not mentioned in such close proximity anywhere else in Egyptian literature. In this case, a Semitism could be fictionally considered on the basis of the much better confirmed Akkadian examples. Semitic influence could also be inferred from the use of the loanwords „ḥḏr.t“ (for this word cf. Theis 2011, 85) „pig“ and „š'r.t“ (for this word cf. Hoch 1994, 273 (Nr. 390); for the possible connection to Arabian “s'l” cf. Vittmann 1998, 285) „door-guardian“. The fact that Egyptian magical incantations occasionally show Semitic influence (Bojowald, in preparation) could also be called a support. However, the entire circumstantial process is on weak ground. In truth, such a conjecture would not only be unprovable, but also extremely unlikely. The assumption of a non-Egyptian origin of the motif is – formulated even more sharply – completely wrong. The reason for this reluctance lies in the following consideration: the motif has a longer history in Coptic (von Lemm 1923, 150, Nagel 1983, 117, Pearson and Vivian 1993, 72-73, Lanzillotta and van der Vliet 2023, 196, Balestri and Hyvdernat 1955, 115, for the combination of dog and pig in Coptic cf. recently Bojowald 2024, 171-175), which significantly increases the chances of an autochthonous origin, even in Egypt. The sight of stray dogs and pigs rummaging through the village and urban garbage heaps must have been part of everyday life on the banks of the Nile as well. In this case, we are therefore dealing with a pan-Oriental phenomenon. Incidentally, Dosoo (2022, 532) and Peled/Saar (in press) share this same opinion. The Akkadian example has already been mentioned above. The assumption of a survival in Coptic is therefore unnecessary. The term “survival” serves as a designation for the pharaonic remains in late ancient Christian Egypt (Behlmer 1996, 567-590, Krause 1985, passim, Zentler 2011, passim). The phenomenon has given rise to its own branch of science called “survival research” (Morenz 1963, 54-59). The targeted search would probably yield further material. However, the current amount is definitely sufficient as an initial basis. The Coptic evidence itself covers a period of approximately one thousand years. Coptic marks the most recent stage of Egyptian; today's church service uses the Bohairic dialect as its liturgical language (Loprieno and Müller 2012, 102-144). The motif's history can now be traced in Egypt for almost three millenia. The lack of even older examples is likely due to the randomness of transmission. The methodological difficulties of this approach are known but are accepted. The evidence base could therefore still shift, meaning this is only a snapshot in time. The proposal presented here may also aid the interpretation of the contemporaneous inscription of the statuette Paris Louvre, E 11554, 49f, where, however, only a pig without a dog appears. This brief reference should suffice. The detailed treatment of the topic would go far beyond the scope of this article. Perhaps someone else will take up this suggestion.

Finally, this new development necessitates a partial modification of my own remarks in an earlier work (Bojowald 2024, 174). Despite their cautious

formulation, the words there could have unintentionally given the impression that pharaonic literature in such cases was limited to mentioning only the dog. According to the above, this exclusivity is no longer accurate. The situation has changed thanks to the fortunate discovery of the missing link. The pair of pig and dog is now also documented in literature for Pharaonic Egypt. If the ideas presented here are correct, the number of Egyptian evidence for the impurity of pigs continues to increase. The phenomenon is often encountered in a sacred or ritual sphere. In this respect, a consistent pattern emerges. The quantity is still manageable, so every new example is welcome. In this way, the flexible term “Sethian” by Theis is simultaneously made concrete and precise. The publication generates a certain profit for this reason alone. The future will show whether this will remain just one evidence or whether more will be added. To close with a little anecdote, we should remember Schenkel’s well-known bon mot that one secure evidence counts more than a thousand uncertain one. In this sense, the above comments may be understood as a preliminary sketch.

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Financial Education of Children in Primary and Lower Secondary Education: Parents' Perceptions and Children's Experiences in the Albanian Context

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Financial education is an essential component of an individual's personal and professional development, and its importance becomes even greater when it begins in childhood. This paper examined the perceptions of parents and children in primary and lower secondary education on children's financial education. The results, analysed using descriptive statistics, showed high parental awareness of the importance of children's financial education from an early age and strong children's interest in saving and managing money, while the school's role was perceived as very limited. The discussions support the family's primary role in children's financial education, highlight the challenges it faces, and underscore the need to embed this education in school curricula. Parental modelling, giving money as an educational tool, and family dialogue about needs versus wants are issues analysed in more depth in the paper. The study's recommendations are relevant to parents, education policymakers, and curriculum developers. Drawing on empirical evidence, this study contributes to the existing literature from a developing context, highlighting the need to strengthen school-family collaboration to develop children's and adolescents' financial literacy and to create a financially responsible generation.

Keywords: *financial education, financial literacy, parental influence, student attitudes.*

Introduction

Financial literacy in childhood is defined as the knowledge, understanding, and skills needed to manage personal finances and make effective decisions throughout various financial contexts to improve personal well-being (Fabris and Luburić 2016). This competence is increasingly recognised as a lifelong process that begins with simple habits, such as using a savings box, and evolves over time towards complex asset management (Fabris and Luburić 2016). Students' skills are essential for making appropriate and responsible decisions in order to achieve financial well-being in adulthood (OECD 2020).

Childhood up to the age of eight is considered a key period in human life, often referred to as a “golden age,” during which 50% of intelligence develops,

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rendering it a critical window for laying the foundations of cognitive and socio-financial skills (Wahyuni et al. 2023). However, “the level of financial literacy among children remains unsatisfactory both globally and regionally”, commonly leading to debt overload and financial difficulties later in adulthood (Fabris and Luburić 2016). Findings state that “26% of children lack basic financial literacy skills, meaning they are unable to apply their knowledge to real-life situations involving financial issues and decisions” (OECD 2025). Therefore, educating children with financial literacy is very important for the times we live in, as children of the modern generation face complex choices, such as electronic transactions and credit accessible through advertising, which requires early intervention to prevent "premature wealth" - the tendency to spend immediately as soon as they gain access to resources (Fabris and Luburić 2016).

Studies on children's financial education in Albania are completely lacking. Regarding financial education among young people and adults in Albania, several studies have shown low and insufficient levels of financial knowledge (Shehi et al. 2025, Ribaj et al. 2020, Gremi et al. 2024, Nano and Istrofor 2017). This study aims to fill a gap in the existing literature on children's financial education and enrich the debate on the importance and influence of the family in shaping children's financial management habits. The study's recommendations assist parents, education policymakers and teachers. The purpose of the study is to examine the perceptions of parents and children in primary and lower secondary education on children's financial education. This study attempts to answer these research questions:

- How is the financial literacy situation of children?
- How does family education affect the formation of financial skills?
- Is the family sufficient in the financial education of their children?

Literature Review

The General State of Financial Literacy in Albania

Financial literacy in Albania is significantly lower than regional and global averages. Data from the OECD (2020) shows that only 29% of Albanians possess basic financial literacy, a figure lower than in neighbouring countries. The literature shows that while there is high awareness of basic products such as bank accounts (73%) and debit cards (57%), there is a considerable lack of familiarity with investment instruments such as bonds and investment funds, which range from 5% to 16%. Furthermore, the transition to a free-market economy in the 1990s was not accompanied by a commensurate expansion of financial education, leaving many individuals, especially those at a disadvantage, unable to engage in basic financial planning (Shehi et al. 2025).

The education system in Albania does not equip children and young people with the necessary financial literacy skills. Research conducted in the Elbasan region shows that 68% of schools do not offer dedicated financial literacy modules,

and 72% of young people report not receiving any formal financial education in their curriculum. Students often demonstrate frustration, with 85% stating that their education has not adequately prepared them to manage personal finances (Gremi et al. 2025). There is also a significant gap in teacher qualifications: many teachers responsible for economics-related subjects lack economics degrees and do not understand the financial products they are supposed to teach (Ribaj et al. 2020).

Due to the lack of formal education, family remains the primary source of financial literacy in Albania, with 32% of respondents citing it as the dominant factor in their financial decision-making. Albanian families have a strong tradition of informal savings and reciprocal support, frequently sacrificing personal pleasures to save or seeking loans from relatives on the basis of trust rather than turning to banking institutions. However, this trust in family has a “double-edged” effect: on the one hand, it gives a safety net, but on the other, it can hinder young people's financial independence. The literature shows that family often leads to the transmission of bad financial habits or a persistent distrust of formal banking systems. (Shehi et al. 2025, Ribaj et al. 2020)

Studies reveal gender differences and urban-rural inequality in financial literacy in Albania. Given cultural norms, men have historically been seen as the primary decision-makers in the most important family matters, including finances. The gap is largest among older adults and smaller among young people. Several studies show that Albanian women are more financially vulnerable than men, reporting less protection against income shocks and higher levels of anxiety about debt. While in terms of differences by residence, young people in rural areas demonstrate only 21% sufficient knowledge of key financial concepts, compared to 43% in urban centres (Gremi et al. 2025, Dushku et al. 2023).

The Role of the Family in Financial Education

The financial knowledge that children acquire in school is important, but its foundation is laid at home. The family is considered the primary and most influential agent of financial socialisation, often exceeding the combined influence of schools, the media and peers (Fabris and Luburić 2016). Parents educate their children through modelling (demonstrating behaviours), monitoring, and parent-child discussions (LeBaron et al. 2020). Modelling and teaching financial concepts is seen as influential in the formation of financial knowledge until adolescence (Clarke et al. 2005). Discussions about family financial issues promote children's motivation and ambition. Researchers provide evidence that effective family financial communication – which includes budgeting, saving, and clarity about costs – is positively associated with higher education aspirations, as children learn to view education as an important investment rather than simply an expense (Sharma and Gera 2025). The opposite occurs in some cultures, where discussing money within the family is considered taboo, limiting children's involvement in family financial management and impeding the development of their critical thinking (Sulistiyowati & Suryanto 2025).

From an Islamic perspective, financial literacy is seen as an essential “goodness” that parents are obligated to learn themselves to protect their families' well-being and to teach their children. From this perspective, educating children in

Islamic financial literacy is of great importance to prepare them to make sound decisions in accordance with Sharia (Tazkiyyah et al. 2025). The new findings of these works are the facts that parental financial communication directly affects the "push" and "self-confidence" of children's upcoming academic and professional goals, and the embedding of Sharia principles (such as avoiding usury and emphasising social solidarity) in the framework of childhood financial literacy (Sharma and Gera 2025, Tazkiyyah et al. 2025).

The Role of School and Curriculum in Children's Financial Education

Although we all agree that the education of every individual begins at home, schools play a role in creating opportunities to provide structured, comprehensive financial education that breaks the vicious cycles of poverty, especially for children from disadvantaged families (Sulistiyowati and Suryanto 2025). Various countries are undertaking very positive initiatives to implement national financial education strategies. Thus, 48 countries have developed such strategies to embed financial knowledge in school curricula. We mention here the "New Pangea" program of Colombia or the "5 Years National Strategy for Financial Literacy" (Fabris and Luburić 2016, Murugiah et al. 2023).

However, the knowledge included in the curricula remains limited, as most of it focuses on mathematical calculations such as interest rates and percentages (Mazzi et al. 2025). The literature shows that recent pedagogical changes support Critical Mathematics Education (CME) and Mathematics Education for Social Justice (MESJ), which encourage students to investigate structural problems such as inequality, bank profits, and the "dissolution of responsibility" in financial algorithms (Mazzi et al. 2025).

New methods include "practical learning methods through games" and digital games to develop creative economic skills, facilitate understanding, and increase engagement (Murugiah et al. 2023). Despite the above innovations, major obstacles still remain to be overcome, such as overloaded curricula, insufficient teacher training and often a lack of political will (Moreira et al. 2024, Sulistiyowati and Suryanto 2025). The proposal for a multidimensional curriculum that includes personal, family, and social axes, as well as the use of game-based media to teach financial concepts, is the innovation these works suggest (Wahyuni et al. 2023).

Methodology

This study employed a quantitative research method, administering questionnaires. The use of this method is consistent with the purpose of our study, as we were interested in obtaining opinions from a large number of people (Creswell 2018).

Data Collection

Data were collected through two quantitative questionnaires designed to elicit parents' and children's opinions and practices regarding children's financial literacy. The questionnaires were designed by the working group in Google Forms and

contained demographic, dichotomous, and Likert-scale questions. Item content was based on the reviewed literature on children's and youth's financial literacy in Albania and internationally and was adapted by the research team to the reading level and everyday context of children aged 8 to 15. The instruments were reviewed internally by the team for lucidity and relevance before distribution. The questionnaire for parents included 15 closed questions, of which 3 were demographic questions and 12 questions that sought to measure the way parents educate children about money management, the difference between needs and desires for spending money, the level of school-family cooperation in children's financial education, the value of financial education at an early age in future financial behaviour, to the challenges that parents face in children's financial education. The questionnaire for children contained 10 closed-ended questions: 2 were demographic questions, and 8 aimed to measure children's behaviour in managing their personal money, the sources of information for their financial education, the spending-to-saving ratio, and their emotions when making purchases from personal savings. Data collection was carried out in January 2025. Data were analysed using descriptive statistics, focusing on frequencies and percentages to summarise responses. Ethical aspects included voluntary participation and respondent anonymity.

Sampling

A total of 277 people were surveyed, including 132 parents and 145 children in grades 3-9 of primary and lower secondary education. A total of six 9-year schools from rural areas of the Shkodra district were purposively included in the survey using a convenience (non-probability) sampling procedure. Rural schools were chosen because empirical evidence on children's financial education in Albania has so far concentrated on urban populations and on youth or adults, leaving the rural primary and lower-secondary schoolchildren largely unstudied. These schools were also more accessible to the research team through existing contacts with teaching staff, which enabled data collection.

The questionnaires were sent to teachers via a link, who then distributed them to children's parents for completion. The sample included children aged 8-10 years (N=33, 23%), 11-13 years (N=47, 32%), and 14-15 years (N=65, 45%). The gender ratio of the student sample consisted of 58% girls and 42% boys. 85 families had three or more children (64.4%), 8 families had one child (6.1%), and 39 families had two children (29.5%). Table 1 presents the age distribution and educational level of parents. As shown in the table, almost 60% of parents were under 40 years old, and among them, almost half had completed Lower Secondary Education.

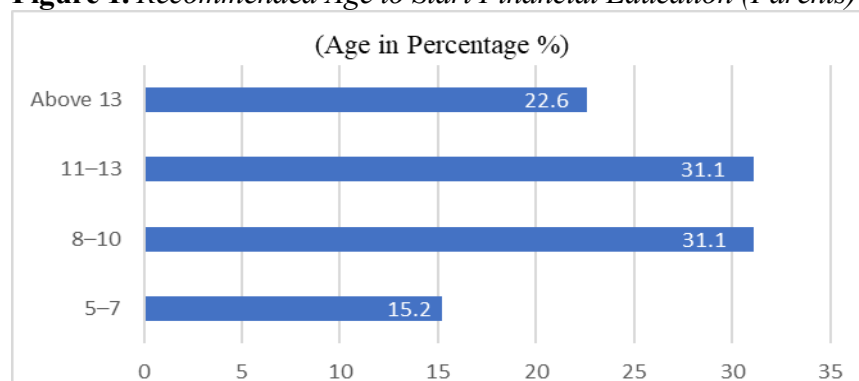
Table 1. *Age Distribution and Educational Level of Parents (N = 132)*

Issues	Category	Frequency (N)	Percentage (&)
<i>Age group of parents (years)</i>	20-30 years	14	10.6%
	31-40 years	65	49.2%
	41-50 years	43	32.6%
	Over 50 years	10	7.6%
	Total	132	100%
<i>Educational Level</i>	Lower secondary education	63	47.7%
	Upper secondary education	46	34.8%
	Higher education	19	14.4%
	No response	4	3.1%
	Total	132	100%

Results

This section presents the study's results, with tables, figures, and descriptions. The survey results showed that 91% of parents believed their children should learn about money management from a young age. 96% of parents considered children's financial education very important, and 78% agreed that children should learn more about it.

Figure 1 presents parents' opinions on the age at which children's financial education should begin. Almost 2/3 of parents think the appropriate ages for children to learn about money are 8-10 and 11-13, with a small percentage believing children's financial education should begin at 5-7.

Figure 1. *Recommended Age to Start Financial Education (Parents)*

Money management was discussed regularly at home by 40% of families, occasionally by 45%, and sometimes by 17%. These results show that they have such conversations with their children (Fig. 2).

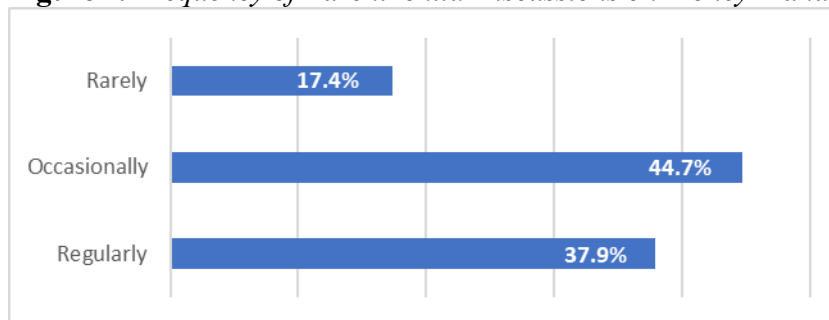
Figure 2. *Frequency of Parent–child Discussions on Money Management*

Figure 3 presents the data regarding the environment in which the child should receive financial education. Almost 4/5 of the parents believed that this aspect should be taught both at school and at home; 1/5 believed that the family is the only environment responsible for teaching financial skills and knowledge.

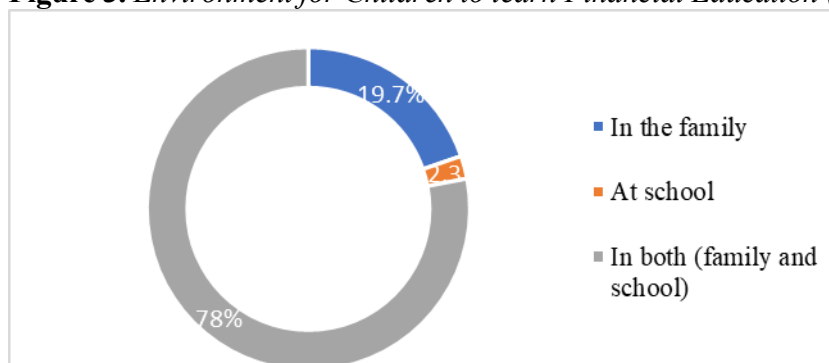
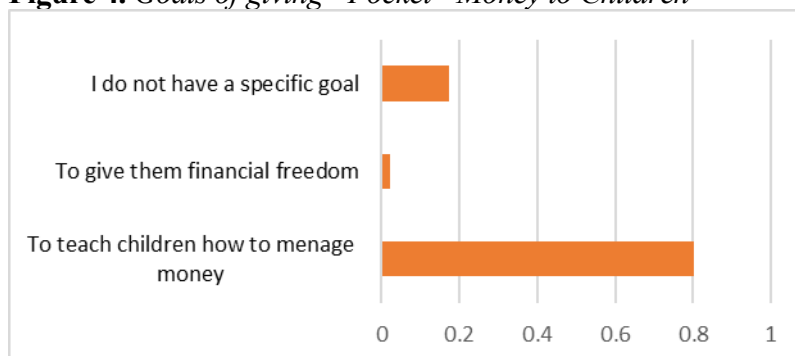
Figure 3. *Environment for Children to learn Financial Education (N = 132)*

Figure 4 illustrates parents' main objectives when providing "pocket" money to their children. The majority of parents indicated that the primary goal was to teach children how to manage money (80%), followed by having no specific goal (18%), while only a small proportion aimed to promote financial freedom (2%).

Figure 4. *Goals of giving "Pocket" Money to Children*

The data revealed how children use money and the spending-saving ratio. 85% of parents said their children spent some of the money and saved some; 12%

were convinced their children spent it immediately, and only 3% said their children saved all the money they were given.

Table 2 presents parents' opinions on whether their children understood the distinction between "need" and "want" when spending money. More than half of the parents thought that their children partially understood the difference between what is necessary to buy/spend and what is desired to have, 38% had a good understanding, and 10% of parents thought that their children did not understand the need/want relationship.

Table 2. *Parents' Opinion on whether Children understand the difference between "Needs" and "Desires" to spend Money*

Level of understanding	Frequency (N)	Percentage (%)
Good understanding	50	37.9
Partial understanding	69	52.3
Poor / no understanding	13	9.8
Total	132	100

The survey results showed that 89,9% of parents completely agreed that financial education should be part of the school curriculum, 7% were undecided, and only 2% were against this idea.

Parents evaluated school-family cooperation in acquiring financial knowledge in different ways. 39% of parents reported joint initiatives, 30% often but not enough, and 32% reported no cooperation. The data showed that 84% of parents rated children's financial education as having a very high impact on their children's future financial behaviour, and 15% as having little or no impact. This means that good financial education can be valuable to children for the future. Figure 5 presents the challenges and difficulties parents face in teaching their children money management.

Figure 5. *Parents' Challenges in teaching Children Money Management*

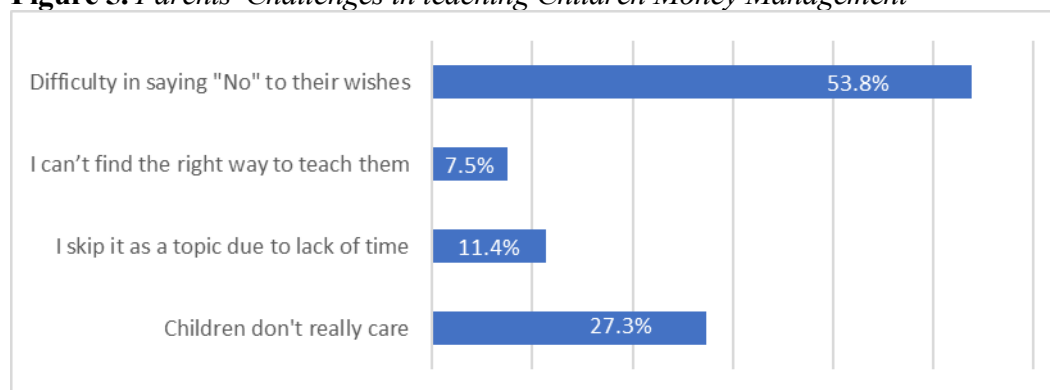


Table 3. *Student Questionnaire Results (N = 145)*

Issues	Category	Frequency (N)	Percentage (%)
<i>Provision of Money by Parents/Relatives</i>	Yes, every day	81	55.9
	Yes, every week	17	11.7
	Yes, when needed	44	30.3
	No	3	2.1
	Total	145	100.0
<i>Use of money</i>	Spend all on small purchases	28	19.3
	Save part of it	100	69.0
	Give to someone else when needed	13	9.0
	Save all	4	2.7
	Total	145	100.0
<i>Decision-making behaviour</i>	Spend immediately without much thought	11	7.6
	Ask parents' or friends' opinion	58	40.0
	Think carefully before buying something	76	52.4
	Total	145	100.0
<i>Having a place to save money (e.g., a small savings box)</i>	Yes	127	87.6
	No	18	12.4
	Total	145	100
<i>Perceived importance of knowing how to save and manage money</i>	Yes, very important	114	78.6
	Yes, important	28	19.3
	Slightly important	2	1.4
	Not important	0	0.0
	I do not know	1	0.7
	Total	145	100.0
<i>Source of financial learning</i>	Parents / other adult family members	136	93.8
	Teachers at school	4	2.8
	Peers / social environment	3	2.0
	No one	2	1.4
	Total	145	100.0
<i>Interest in Learning More About Financial Education</i>	Yes	137	94.5
	No	8	5.5
	Total	145	100
<i>Emotional Attitudes Toward Saving</i>	I am happy because I do it willingly	99	68.3
	Feel good because it is necessary	43	29.7
	I am upset because I can't spend it right now	3	2.0
	Total	145	100

The biggest challenges that parents had in teaching their children how to manage money were difficulty in saying "No" to their wishes (54%), children's lack of interest in learning how to manage money (27%), parents not discussing it due to lack of time (11%) and (8%) not finding the right way to do this education (Fig. 5). Table 3 presents the data obtained from the student questionnaire.

The table shows that children's own reports are broadly consistent with parents' descriptions and provide a more detailed picture of daily practice. Regarding access to money, most children (55.9%) receive money every day, a further 30.3% receive it when needed, and very few (2.1%) receive none. This daily or on-demand pattern gives children frequent, low-stakes opportunities to practice spending and saving decisions rather than a single periodic allowance. In terms of how this money is used, 69% save part of it, 19.3% spend all of it on small purchases, and only 2.7% save all of it, indicating that partial saving, rather than pure spending or pure saving, is the dominant pattern among the children in this sample.

Children's decision-making shows a similar profile to what parents perceive: 52% report thinking carefully before buying something, 40% ask a parent's or a friend's opinion first, and only 7.6% spend without much thought. A large majority (87.6%) keep a specific place to save money, such as a savings box, which is consistent with the saving behaviour reported above and suggests that the habit of setting money aside is already established in practice, not only in intention.

Children rate the value of financial skills very high: 78.6% consider knowing how to save and manage money "Very important" and a further 19.3% "important", together accounting for almost all respondents, with virtually no child reporting it as unimportant. Asked where this knowledge comes from, 93.8% named parents or other adult family members, compared with only 2.8% who named teachers and 2% who named peers, paralleling the discussion findings and confirming, from the children's own reports rather than only their parents', that the family is by far the dominant channel of financial learning. Consistent with this, interest in learning more about financial education is very high (94.5%), suggesting that the school's low involvement is not due to a lack of interest among children.

Finally, children's emotional attitudes toward saving are predominantly positive: 68.3% say they are happy to save because they do it willingly, 29.7% feel it is necessary, and only 2% report frustration at not being able to spend immediately. Read together, these results show that children in the rural sample already display favourable saving habits and a strong appetite for financial learning. The gap the report identifies is not in children's attitudes but in the near absence of a school-based channel to complement what they currently learn almost exclusively at home.

Discussion

Our research found that 91% of parents believe that children should learn money management from a young age, with nearly two-thirds suggesting that the optimal age to start is between 8 and 13. This result corresponds to international

conceptual models that identify childhood as a “golden period” for intellectual development, specifically up to age 8, when children develop basic cognitive and socio-financial skills. Furthermore, early intervention is seen as a necessary tool to prevent “premature affluence,” a tendency of modern children to spend resources as soon as they gain access to them. (Fabris and Luburić 2016, Wahyuni et al. 2023). In the Albanian context, this indicates that primary school age is a realistic starting point for structured financial education, although most parents tend to favour starting at a later stage, in lower secondary education.

A central finding of the current paper was that family was the primary source of support: 94% of children reported learning about money from parents or other adult family members, while only 2.8% learned from teachers. The primary influence of parents in forming young people’s financial views and behaviours has also been explored by other researchers (Jorgensen and Savla 2010, Fabris and Luburić 2016). In our view, the main concern raised by this study’s findings is that children rely almost entirely on a single channel for financial learning: the family. Unlike settings where schools and families share this responsibility, financial socialisation in this rural sample depends almost entirely on what each parent knows and chooses to model. This leaves children whose parents lack sufficient financial knowledge, time, or confidence without any other meaningful source of learning.

This “family first” model is consistent with other Albanian studies related to the financial literacy of young people and adults. These studies identify the family as the dominant factor in economic decision-making and a primary source of income for young people’s survival. While this shows a strong tradition of informal savings and reciprocal assistance, researchers argue that the lack of structured and formal education can hamper financial independence and transmit unstable knowledge (Shehi et al. 2025, Gremi et al. 2025).

Parenting style, providing “pocket money” as an educational tool, and family discussions about money management were among the elements with which parents in our study conducted their children’s financial education. This tactical pedagogical tool allows children to learn through real-world experience, including low-risk mistakes. Kim and Chatterjee (2013) have proven that early childhood financial participation, facilitated by parental monitoring, is a key predictor of responsible credit management and savings in adulthood. In Shkodra, parents demonstrated a very purposeful approach to this practice: 80% of respondents stated that their main goal in providing pocket money is to teach their children to manage money, rather than simply to meet immediate needs. This practical involvement seems to produce positive results in the local context, as 69% of the children surveyed choose to save some of their money, and a significant 87.6% maintain a specific physical location, such as a savings box, for storing their funds.

Despite these habits, our study’s evidence presents a conceptual gap: 52.3% of parents believed that their children only partially understood the difference between “needs” and “wants.” So, despite children’s prudent habits, parental scepticism suggests that they may have an incomplete conceptual understanding of money management, which might undermine long-term stability. However, we are convinced that children’s partial and limited understanding of the difference between “needs” and “wants” when it comes to spending money may be due to

their age, given the age range of the children surveyed, which ranged from 8 to 15 years old (the younger the children, the less understanding of the difference between wants and needs to spend money). Researchers argue that mastering the distinction between “needs” and “wants” is a fundamental issue for conscientious consumption and for developing the self-control necessary to avoid debt practices in adulthood. (Dushku et al. 2023, Suwarsi et al. 2025).

There was a strong consensus among parents in Shkodër (89.9%) that financial education should be integrated into the school curriculum. This demand is mirrored among young people in other regions of Albania, where 89% expressed enthusiasm for adding such subjects to schools. The current work also revealed a systemic failure, as children reported almost zero financial learning from the school environment. This is supported by other Albanian data, which pointed out a lack of dedicated financial literacy modules in 68% of schools and of specific training for economics teachers on financial products (Ribaj et al. 2020, Gremi et al. 2025). Other studies in this area have argued that integrating financial education into the curriculum could reinforce existing household knowledge and practices (OECD 2020, Amagir et al. 2018). Previous research in Albania has highlighted this gap at the school level, primarily through accounts from adolescents and adults. Our evidence confirms that this gap also exists at the primary and lower secondary levels, with a significant parental demand (89.9%) for schools to take on this responsibility. Consequently, the main barriers to acquiring financial literacy in school stem from the current inability of the school system to respond, rather than from any reluctance on the part of parents.

Taking advice from parents or friends and thinking carefully before buying something were the decisions most of our children made. A majority of children (52.4%) report thinking carefully before making a purchase, while 40% seek advice from parents or friends. Children in our study demonstrated positive saving habits: 69% chose to save some of their money, and 87.6% had a specific place to save. Children’s statements about spending decisions, careful thought before making purchases, and their saving habits were very positive. These results are consistent with those of Moreno-Herrero et al. (2018). In PISA 2015, understanding the value of saving and talking about financial issues with parents were part of children’s financial knowledge.

The current study identified the difficulty of saying “No” to children’s wishes as the main challenge parents face in teaching their children to manage money (54% of parents). This “psychological barrier” is important because parental modelling is the most influential form of financial literacy. Evidence from other Albanian studies suggests that children from middle-income families often have better financial literacy and, as a result, act more responsibly because their parents actively model “money matters.” Whereas children from high-income families may lack the discipline to track spending. The research supports our current study’s finding that early parental financial communication (reported as regular or occasional in 85% of families in the Shkodra district) leads to healthier financial management in adulthood (LeBaron et al. 2020, Nano and Istrofor 2017, Sharma and Gera 2025). Among the challenges parents in the Shkodra district faced when trying to teach their children about money management were a lack of time and

difficulty finding the right approach. In line with our findings are those of Fabris and Luburić (2016), who found that, among other reasons, parents hesitated to teach their children because of "the desire to protect children from difficult topics, or simply not knowing where and how to start".

The findings of the Shkodra study revealed a motivated but unsupported parent base. While parents are using "pocket money" strategically to teach management (80%), the lack of collaboration between schools and families, reported by 32% of parents as non-existent, remains an obstacle. Together with the almost total lack of self-reported learning in school, this points to a specific, rather than a general, gap: Albanian families are already undertaking the informal work of financial socialization of their children, and the priority is not to convince them of its importance, but to ensure that schools develop the modules, teacher training, and structured collaboration mechanisms necessary to share this role with families. To move Albania beyond its current situation, where only 29% of individuals have basic financial literacy, it is essential to align family practices with a structured national curriculum that goes beyond mathematical calculations to include practical simulations of "life events". (OECD 2020, Mihalcova et al. 2020).

Conclusions and Recommendations

The findings of this study give essential answers to the three research questions we sought to investigate. This study confirms, in the so far unexamined settings, the primary role of the family, already documented among Albanian youth and adults. However, its main contribution consists in demonstrating that the same pattern manifests significantly earlier in life – among primary- and lower-secondary-aged children in a rural context that had not previously been the subject of empirical investigation - and in observing this phenomenon simultaneously from the perspectives of parents and the children themselves. The findings show a high degree of parental awareness of the importance of cultivating children's financial competence from an early age, along with a pronounced interest among children in saving and managing money independently, while the school's contribution to this process was perceived as significantly limited. The findings additionally emphasised insufficient collaboration between schools and families, as well as a systemic deficiency that policymakers and curriculum developers must urgently address.

Therefore, our main recommendation is that family-based practices should be coordinated with a structured national curriculum that goes beyond elementary calculation exercises and includes practical simulations of everyday financial situations. We recommend developing financial education modules designed for children's developmental ages. To fully implement this idea, teachers should receive the necessary training. Therefore, we also recommend the design and implementation of specialised teacher training in this area, organised by the state agency ASCAP, with specialists in finance and pedagogical knowledge appropriate for children aged 8-15. The inclusion of financial education in the school curriculum would constitute an important advance, as it would cultivate children's competencies in money management and would contribute to the formation of a more responsible and capable generation in financial decision-making and behaviour.

Study Limitations and Recommendations for Future Research

Getting opinions only from a rural context and relying on self-report are limitations of this study, as they prevent us from making generalisations. For other studies, we recommend conducting similar research for these age groups in an urban context. Comparing the two contexts could highlight their similarities and differences in children's financial knowledge. Triangulating data from schools, families, and children themselves would provide a more complete picture of children's financial knowledge and education.

In spite of these limitations, the study adds to the existing literature by providing empirical evidence from a developing context and highlighting the need to strengthen school-family collaboration to develop children's financial literacy and create a more financially responsible generation.

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Dynamics of Regional Security in the Mediterranean Basin

*By Gregory T. Papanikos**

This paper examines the Mediterranean Basin as a dynamic regional security complex characterized by deep interconnections across economic, political, social, cultural, and environmental domains. Drawing on Regional Security Complex Theory (RSCT), it introduces the concept of hyper-regional power to better capture how power relations extend beyond geographically bounded regions. Using recent developments in the Eastern Mediterranean as an illustrative case, the paper demonstrates that conflicts—ranging from military confrontations to energy insecurity, migration, and climate-related shocks—are increasingly interrelated and transnational in their effects. The Mediterranean thus emerges not merely as a geographic space but as a complex system in which local disruptions generate regional and global consequences. The paper concludes that, because such crises transcend regional boundaries, their effective management requires coordinated action at the hyper-regional or global level. The European Union is proposed as one such hyper-regional power capable of playing a leading role in the non-European Mediterranean regions.

Keywords: *Mediterranean Basin, Regional Security Complex Theory, Interdependence, Geopolitics, Energy Security, Migration, Climate Change, Political Instability, Regional Dynamics*

Introduction

Since 2008, the Athens Institute has organized its annual international conference on Mediterranean studies. In 2015, the Institute launched the *Athens Journal of Mediterranean Studies*, a quarterly, open-access, peer-reviewed academic journal. To date, scholars from numerous countries have presented more than one thousand papers at these conferences, with nearly 180 subsequently published in the journal.

The Mediterranean region offers a particularly valuable empirical setting for the study of regional dynamics and aligns with the theoretical foundations of Regional Security Complex Theory (RSCT), as extended here to include hyper-regional effects. This framework emphasizes that geographically proximate states become interconnected through patterns of linkages, shared vulnerabilities, and historically embedded relationships of harmony (manifested in friendships or alliances) and antagonism or rivalry (manifested in conflict and mistrust).

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¹This speech was delivered as the opening address of the 19th Annual International Conference on Mediterranean Studies, organized by the Athens Institute, 30–31 March 2026. It is based primarily on my previous work on these issues, as well as a number of relevant papers published in the *Athens Journal of Mediterranean Studies*.

In such a system, security challenges rarely remain confined to national borders; rather, they spill across political, economic, and societal domains, producing cross-border effects that shape the region and, by extension, the wider world. A clear example, employed in this study, is the recent (2026) and ongoing conflict in the Eastern Mediterranean. As of March 2026, a total of 24 actors are involved—comprising 22 states and two non-state actors—in the ongoing Israel–US–Iran conflict. These actors can be analytically categorized as shown in Table 1.

Table 1. *Classification of Actors in the Eastern Mediterranean Conflict (2026)*

Category	Actors
Direct Combatants	United States; Israel; Iran
States Directly Targeted (Missile/Drone Attacks)	Bahrain; Saudi Arabia; Kuwait; Qatar; United Arab Emirates; Jordan; Oman
States Affected (Territory, Airspace, Infrastructure)	Türkiye; Iraq; Syria; Azerbaijan; Cyprus
States Providing Military Support / Deployments	United Kingdom; France; Italy; Greece; Netherlands; Spain; Germany
Non-State Actors	Hezbollah (Lebanon); Houthi Movement (Yemen)

Direct combatants include the United States, Israel, and Iran, with the United States and Iran also engaging in naval and missile operations. States directly targeted by missile or drone attacks include Bahrain, Saudi Arabia, Kuwait, Qatar, the United Arab Emirates, Jordan, and Oman. States whose territory, airspace, or infrastructure has been affected include Türkiye, Iraq, Syria, and Azerbaijan. States providing military support or deployments include the United Kingdom, France, Italy, Greece, the Netherlands, Spain, and Germany, while Cyprus has been affected through attacks on UK military bases located on its territory.

The regional scope of the conflict is further expanded by the involvement of non-state actors, most notably Hezbollah in Lebanon and the Houthi movement in Yemen, both of which have engaged in missile and drone operations linked to broader conflict dynamics. These actors operate in contexts where state authority is uneven; in the terms of Jackson (1990), such environments display elements of quasi-statehood—more prominently in Yemen and, to a lesser extent, in Lebanon. Many other countries have remained effectively silent, including numerous European states, as well as Russia, China, and India. The reasons for their silence, however, constitute a separate question that is not addressed in this paper.

All these states constitute different types of powers, as discussed in the next section of the paper. Before moving on, it is worth noting—particularly in light of the Mediterranean’s long history—that on 1 March 2026, a Persian-made drone struck Cyprus, specifically targeting a UK-based military base on the island, as part of the wider regional tensions. The last time Cyprus and Persia were at war was in the mid-5th century BCE, under the leadership of the Athenian general Kimon, son of Miltiades, the hero of Marathon; Kimon died in that conflict. In a striking historical echo, the modern Greek naval ship dispatched to assist Cyprus, along with France and other European countries, was the frigate *HS Kimon* (F-601), a French-built FDI HN (Belharra-class) frigate of the Hellenic Navy, named after the same ancient commander.

The Mediterranean thus exemplifies a dynamic regional security complex with deep historical roots, in which intra- and inter-state crises rapidly acquire regional significance, and the distinction between internal and external sources of instability has become increasingly blurred. The ongoing conflict has already expanded beyond this geographic complex, drawing in external powers and transforming it into a hybrid, primarily hyper-regional confrontation. As a rule, wars tend to originate as regional conflicts within a security complex but, depending on factors such as external intervention, alliances, and strategic interests, they can escalate into hyper-regional—and, very rarely, global—confrontations.

Including this introduction, the paper is structured as follows. Section two proposes a new typology of powers in the international relations context, introducing the concept of a *hyper-regional power* alongside internal regional powers, external-to-the-region powers, hyper-regional powers, and superpowers (or monosuperpower). Section three demonstrates the regional interrelationships of these powers in the Mediterranean and examines their interactions through three examples: political, energy, and military. This section builds on my previously published work (Papanikos, 2015, 2017, 2023). Section four emphasizes the uniqueness of the countries that constitute the Mediterranean complex and illustrates, with examples, the types of crises the region has faced in the 21st century. Finally, section five serves as the epilogue of the discussion presented here.

Towards a Typology of Powers: Introducing the Hyper-Regional Concept

Regional Security Complex Theory (RSCT) provides a compelling and dynamic framework for understanding the Mediterranean as a deeply interconnected security environment. According to Buzan and Wæver (2003), geographically proximate states become linked through patterns of harmony, antagonism, and interdependence, creating a system in which security dynamics cannot be meaningfully analyzed in isolation. Security concerns in such complexes rarely remain contained; instead, they diffuse across borders through shared military fears, economic linkages, and sociopolitical networks. This logic applies not only to traditional military threats (e.g., invasions) but also to political governance, energy dependencies, and defense–economic interactions across the Mediterranean Basin. It is not the purpose of this paper to review the theory in detail or its proposed extensions.

The origins of Regional Security Complex Theory (RSCT) can be traced back to the writings of Herodotus and Thucydides. Herodotus was among the first to describe warfare in the Mediterranean Basin, providing one of the earliest systematic accounts of conflict and illustrating how the historical rise of the Persian Empire followed the decline of preceding regional powers. By the end of this process, Persia expanded to the Aegean and confronted the Greek city-states of Asia Minor and mainland Greece. Thucydides, by contrast, analyzed a civil war within the Greek world that, consistent with RSCT, developed its own internal dynamics and complexity, extending to Asia Minor and the Italian peninsula—far beyond the historical geographical boundaries of the two major powers, Athens and Sparta.

Buzan and Wæver (2003) neglect the important historical insights of Herodotus and Thucydides. Ironically, on p. 192, they note that “Westerners tend to forget that the

Ottoman Empire, which controlled the Eastern Mediterranean littoral and most of the Arab world from the sixteenth century to 1918, was regularly at war not only with Europe, but also with the Persian Safavid Empire to its east.” Herodotus, however, shows that Persia engaged in sustained conflict with surrounding regions from very early antiquity, even describing the Greek–Persian war of the early 5th century BCE as a war between continents—a war between Europe and Asia.

Table 2 summarizes the typology of powers in the world today, inspired by Herodotus’ account of the Mediterranean and surrounding regions in the early 5th century BCE. Herodotus illustrates how states become great: small states must first achieve independence and consolidate internal power. Once secure, they typically look to their borders for expansion. Consistent with the logic of Regional Security Complex Theory (RSCT), these emerging powers initially extend influence into neighboring regions, through war or the credible threat of war. Over time, some actors expand their strategic influence beyond immediate neighbors, shaping security dynamics across multiple regional systems. Such actors can be conceptualized as *hyper-regional powers*, as defined below.

Regional powers are states whose security involvement, political influence, and economic engagement are primarily concentrated within their own geographic region. These states can shape regional outcomes, mediate conflicts, and project influence over neighboring countries, but they do not possess the global reach or permanent military presence characteristic of hyper-regional or global powers. Regional powers often serve as leading actors within their region and significantly affect regional stability, alliances, and economic integration, yet their influence typically diminishes beyond regional boundaries.

External powers are states whose security, political, and economic influence extends beyond their home region into other regions of the world. External powers can shape events outside their immediate geographic sphere, often through alliances, military deployments, economic leverage, or diplomatic initiatives. Unlike regional powers, their influence is not confined to a single region; however, they do not necessarily maintain permanent global military presence or exercise the comprehensive global dominance characteristic of superpowers or monosuperpower. In RSCT, the category of external power traditionally refers to actors outside a regional complex that can influence its security dynamics. This definition is often too broad, as many states can affect developments in a region without maintaining a sustained presence or demonstrating genuine strategic commitment.

To address this limitation, the concept of a *hyper-regional power* refers to an external actor whose strategic concerns extend beyond its immediate neighbors and who maintains a committed military presence in the region, such as permanent bases, deployments, or operational infrastructure. Hyper-regional powers thus represent a subset of external powers distinguished by sustained engagement and strategic depth. The concept has been applied to states extending influence beyond a single region, exemplified by Türkiye’s foreign policy strategy in the early 21st century (Druzhilovski & Avatkov, 2013). This distinction separates hyper-regional powers from both simple external powers and superpowers, whose strategic interests span multiple continents.

Table 2. *Typology of Powers in the Eastern Mediterranean Security Complex: Illustrative Cases from the 2026 Conflict*

Type of power	Definition in International Relations Context	Examples
Regional powers	State whose security involvement and influence is primarily confined to its own region.	Israel; Iran; Türkiye; Saudi Arabia; United Arab Emirates; Qatar; Bahrain; Kuwait; Oman; Cyprus; Iraq; Syria; Azerbaijan; Jordan; Hezbollah (Lebanon); Houthi Movement (Yemen)
External power	Any actor, small or great, outside the region that may influence it but is relatively weak or unwilling to intervene. Influence can be military, political, economic, cultural, etc., and may be formal or informal.	Germany; Norway; Netherlands; Spain; Italy; China; India
Hyper-regional power	External actor whose strategic security concerns extend beyond its immediate neighbors and who maintains—or can quickly deploy—a sustained military presence in the region.	France; United Kingdom; Russia
Superpower / Monosuperpower	Actor with strategic interests spanning the entire world. Historically, two superpowers can coexist, each with strategic concerns and effective military presence across all continents. If only one exists, it may be termed a monosuperpower.	United States

A *superpower* is an actor with strategic security, economic, and political interests, coupled with the willingness to maintain an effective military presence on every continent. Being a superpower is therefore a matter of choice: a state becomes a superpower because it decides to exercise its global capabilities. In contrast, a *unipolar power* (Krauthammer, 1990/1991; Wohlforth, 1999) is ontological—it occupies the first position in the global hierarchy based on objective criteria such as military strength, economic capacity, and political influence, regardless of whether it chooses to project power globally. Today, the United States is both unipolar and the only global superpower, or *monosuperpower*, because it possesses the leading position and chooses to exercise worldwide reach. A unipolar state that decides to act as a superpower can influence whether other states achieve superpower status through strategic, economic, and military means, thereby consolidating and maintaining its position as the monosuperpower. Other countries may still develop global military capabilities, but only one state can be unipolar, and only one can be a monosuperpower at a time; the existence of a monosuperpower precludes any other state from achieving the same level of permanent global reach. The term *monosuperpower* is rarely used in the literature, although it appears in some documents (United Nations Security Council, 1976; Kokoshin, 2007).

This typology is dynamic. The role of any given country may change depending on the conflict, the strategic context, or the evolving balance of power within the regional system. A state that functions as a regional power in one scenario may act as an external

or hyper-regional power in another, reflecting shifts in interests, capabilities, and alliances over time. This approach is consistent with Herodotus' broader insight that the role of powers is not static but evolves in response to leadership, resources, and even contingency.

A classic illustration of the role of fortune is the story of Croesus, king of Lydia (c. 595–546 BCE), and Cyrus the Great of Persia, who defeated him around 547 BCE. Early in his reign, Croesus invited the Athenian lawmaker Solon to identify the happiest man. Solon famously refused to name Croesus, arguing that true happiness can only be judged at the end of one's life. Despite his wealth and power, Croesus later miscalculated his campaign against Cyrus and suffered a decisive defeat. As recounted by Herodotus, Cyrus' success was not solely the product of superior skill but also of favorable circumstances and timing, illustrating how *tyche* (fortune) can decisively shape the fate of states. This example underscores the importance of understanding power as dynamic and contingent not only on resources and leadership but also on the unpredictable role of fortune—an insight that aligns with the RSCT framework for analyzing contemporary regional and hyper-regional powers in the Mediterranean.

The concept of a *hyper-regional power* proposed here is intended as a first step toward a broader analytical framework and requires further theoretical refinement and systematic empirical testing. In this paper, it is introduced in a deliberately parsimonious form and applied to the contemporary dynamics of the 2026 Eastern Mediterranean conflict. Future research should examine which actors are best positioned to assume the role of hyper-regional power in the Eastern Mediterranean. Individual states such as Germany and the United Kingdom are potential candidates, but the most institutionally significant contender is the European Union acting as a collective entity.

In the longer term, the European Union may also be viewed as a potential candidate for broader global influence, possibly evolving toward superpower status if deeper political and military integration were achieved. This perspective echoes earlier geopolitical reflections by Henry Kissinger (1994) and Homer Lea (1912), who both identified a unified Europe—effectively led by Germany—as a potential strategic counterweight to the United States. Recent developments, including the war in Ukraine and tensions in the Eastern Mediterranean, have renewed debate about Europe's role in global security. Many view this as a fortunate opportunity for Europe, while others perceive it as a strategic threat. I tend to align with the first group.

Since 1972, when the European Community launched its Global Mediterranean Policy at the Paris Summit, Europe has sought to construct a unified framework for managing relations with non-European Mediterranean states. This effort evolved through the Renewed Mediterranean Policy (1992–1995), the Euro-Mediterranean Partnership (Barcelona Process) launched in 1995, the European Neighborhood Policy introduced in 2004, and the Union for the Mediterranean established in 2008. Despite these successive initiatives, the EU's performance as a coherent Mediterranean actor has remained limited, constrained by member-state divergence, institutional complexity, and a persistent gap between declaratory ambition and operational capability. Whether a more integrated EU could effectively exercise hyper-regional power in the Mediterranean—deploying not only economic leverage but also sustained political and, where necessary, military commitment—remains an open and pressing question for future research. In Herodotean terms, Europe must first achieve internal coherence

before it can become a regional hyper-power. Since 1957, Europe has become increasingly integrated, but it will take time before it can emerge as a true hyper-regional power.

Political, Energy, and Military Interdependence: Empirical Evidence from the Mediterranean

This section is based on my published work on three issues—democracy, energy, and the military (see Papanikos, 2015, 2017, 2023). These studies also provide a comprehensive review of the relevant literature, which is not repeated here. In this sense, they offer empirical support for RSCT, particularly when considered alongside the analysis in the previous section, with emphasis on the role of different types of power. The insights from these studies are also applied to the current war in the Eastern Mediterranean, consistent with the approach of this paper. I also briefly discuss how the European Union has attempted to play the role of what this paper calls a hyper-regional power. Both the role of the EU as a potential hyper-regional power and the implications of the 2026 war for Mediterranean security are touched on here only as illustrative applications of the concept; they merit dedicated treatment in future research.

RSCT emphasizes interconnections, with the political dimension of this interdependence underscored in Papanikos (2023) in *“Whither Democracy in the Mediterranean Basin.”* The study demonstrates that democratic trajectories in the region are influenced by both domestic pressures and cross-border dynamics, including economic interdependence, migration flows, and geopolitical competition. Two widely recognized democracy indices, the EUI and Freedom House, were employed to assess cross-country variations in both the level and the temporal evolution of democracy across the Mediterranean Basin.

From this analysis, two principal conclusions can be drawn. First, significant differences exist among countries and regional groupings within the Mediterranean, largely shaped by geographical factors. Second, the overall evidence indicates a decline in democratic governance throughout the Mediterranean Basin.

The European Union has sought to institutionalize this political interconnection through successive democracy-promotion frameworks, most notably the conditionality provisions of the Euro-Mediterranean Partnership (1995) and the European Neighbourhood Policy (2004), both of which linked trade and aid to democratic reform in southern and eastern Mediterranean states.

This aligns directly with RSCT's core insight that political developments in the Mediterranean are embedded within a broader regional pattern of interconnected vulnerabilities, an insight that this paper extends to include the role of a hyper-regional actor.

The ongoing 2026 Iran conflict provides a contemporary illustration of this mechanism. The conflict has already triggered regional political pressures, including internal security concerns in Gulf states, heightened geopolitical polarization, and the activation of transnational networks and proxy actors. These developments demonstrate how political instability and conflict dynamics diffuse across borders, reinforcing the

argument that democratic governance and political stability in the Mediterranean cannot be understood independently of wider regional interactions.

Energy interdependence further reinforces this dynamic. In *“Energy Security, the European Energy Union and the Mediterranean Countries”* (Papanikos, 2017), the Mediterranean is identified as central to Europe’s energy architecture, particularly through natural gas corridors, maritime transport routes, and the strategic positioning of North African and Eastern Mediterranean producers. Energy security challenges—such as supply disruptions, maritime insecurity, and competition over offshore resources—therefore reverberate across the region. This aligns with RSCT’s emphasis on how economic and infrastructural linkages bind states together, amplifying the regional impact of crises and positioning energy as a key vector of Mediterranean interconnections.

Papanikos (2017, p. 351) underscores this point, noting: “Energy may compel the non-European Mediterranean countries to collaborate in other areas of social, political and economic interest. Unfortunately, as things stand now, regional collaborations in the non-European Mediterranean countries cannot be promoted for a number of reasons, including lack of infrastructure, appropriate regulatory framework and, above all, political will.”

The EU has explicitly acknowledged this interdependence through the Energy Union initiative (2015) as discussed in Papanikos (2017), which sought to integrate European and Mediterranean energy markets, diversify supply routes away from Russian gas, and elevate North African and Eastern Mediterranean producers as strategic partners in a common European energy architecture.

The current conflict strongly validates this argument. Disruptions to shipping routes and threats to critical chokepoints such as the Strait of Hormuz have already driven sharp increases in oil prices, destabilized global markets, and created uncertainty in energy supply chains. These developments highlight how energy insecurity originating in the Gulf rapidly transmits economic and political shocks to the Mediterranean and Europe, confirming my earlier claim that energy dependency constitutes a central pillar of regional security dynamics.

The defense-economic dimension adds a third layer of interconnectedness. In *“Military Spending, International Trade and Economic Growth in the Mediterranean Basin”* (Papanikos, 2015), the interaction between military expenditures, trade flows, and economic performance across Mediterranean states is examined. The findings suggest that defense spending is not merely a national policy choice but part of a broader regional pattern shaped by shared security concerns, arms competition, and economic relations. Military spending in one state can influence trade balances, growth trajectories, and security perceptions in others, reinforcing RSCT’s argument that security dynamics in the Mediterranean are mutually constitutive and regionally embedded.

Papanikos (2015) draws three key conclusions, highlighting both differences among countries and regional interconnectedness. First, and most importantly, increases in trade between countries are associated with decreases in military spending. Second, the determinants of military spending differ between European and non-European Mediterranean countries, as well as between eurozone and non-eurozone states, indicating that higher levels of economic integration tend to reduce defense expenditures. Finally, the study finds that military spending and economic growth are not positively correlated.

The European Union's efforts to translate recognition of these interconnections into collective action are reflected in successive Common Security and Defense Policy (CSDP) missions in the Mediterranean—most notably Operation Sophia (2015–2020) and its successor, Operation Irini (2020–present)—which exemplify the Union's attempt to project coordinated military and security capacity into the basin, albeit within the constraints of a limited operational mandate. As such, the EU constitutes a significant hyper-regional power in the Mediterranean, particularly with regard to the non-European countries of the region.

The 2026 Iran conflict further exemplifies this dynamic. The rapid escalation of military operations, combined with the deployment of forces and the activation of proxy networks across multiple countries, demonstrates how defense policies in one part of the region reshape security calculations elsewhere. Moreover, the economic consequences—ranging from disrupted trade routes to increased defense expenditures—illustrate the tight coupling between military activity and economic performance that my earlier work identifies. Furthermore, the war prompted the EU to respond with a common statement by the European Commission in support of Cyprus, the first time an EU member state had been attacked by an external force. The naval deployments were part of a wider European defense mobilization around Cyprus after the strike, illustrating how a single attack on a member state can activate collective security responses at the hyper-regional level.

Taken together, these contributions (2015, 2017, 2023) provide empirical support for the RSCT framework, particularly as it has been extended to incorporate the concept of hyper-regional powers. The ongoing 2026 Iran conflict further underscores the central argument that political governance, energy security, and defense-economic dynamics are deeply intertwined across the Mediterranean. The conflict illustrates in real time how crises—whether political, economic, or security-related—propagate throughout the region via dense networks of interconnections, reinforcing the view that the Mediterranean should be understood as a complex regional security system rather than a collection of discrete national cases.

Diversity and Crisis Density in the Mediterranean Security Complex

The analytical importance of the Mediterranean is reinforced by the exceptional diversity of the states that border it. Encompassing more than twenty countries across Europe, the Middle East, and North Africa, the region brings together a wide spectrum of religions, languages, and ethnic identities, including Christian, Muslim, and Jewish communities, as well as Arab, Berber, Greek, Italian, Turkish, and other cultural groups. As Aammari (2018) notes, these cultural encounters have historically shaped a shared Mediterranean identity, while Albayrak (2017) highlights the enduring influence of Greek–Turkish cultural relations in fostering both cooperation and contestation. The region's political landscape spans consolidated democracies, hybrid regimes, and authoritarian systems, creating marked asymmetries in governance capacity and institutional resilience. Yet, despite these profound differences, the Mediterranean Sea itself constitutes the central connective element of the region—an enduring geographic anchor that binds these societies together, for better or worse. It facilitates trade, cultural

exchange, and interdependence, but it also serves as a channel for conflict spillovers, irregular migration, and geopolitical competition. In this sense, the sea is not merely a physical space but a structuring force that shapes the region's shared opportunities and collective vulnerabilities.

Over the past twenty-five years, the Mediterranean has become one of the most crisis-dense regions in the international system, shaped by the convergence of geopolitical conflict, structural political fragility, climate-driven disasters, and large-scale human mobility (examples are provided in Table 3). Wars and armed conflicts—from the Second Intifada and the Iraq War to the Syrian and Libyan civil wars—have redrawn political boundaries, destabilized state institutions, and generated unprecedented displacement flows. The rise of ISIS and recurrent Gaza conflicts have further entrenched cycles of violence, while the 2022 Russian invasion of Ukraine added new layers of geopolitical tension, disrupting energy markets, food supply chains, and maritime security dynamics that directly impact Mediterranean economies.

Table 3. *Wars and Armed Conflicts*

Year	Incident	Countries Affected
2001	Second Intifada	Israel, Palestine
2003	Iraq War	Iraq; Italy, Spain (coalition)
2006	Second Lebanon War	Israel, Lebanon
2008	Gaza War — Operation Cast Lead	Israel, Palestine (Gaza)
2011	Libyan Civil War (First)	Libya; France, Italy, UK, Spain
2011	Syrian Civil War begins	Syria, Lebanon, Turkey, Jordan
2014	Rise of ISIS	Syria, Iraq, Libya
2014	Gaza War — Protective Edge	Israel, Palestine (Gaza)
2014	Libyan Civil War (Second phase)	Libya
2020	Greece–Turkey naval standoff	Greece, Turkey
2021	Gaza escalation — Guardian of the Walls	Israel, Palestine (Gaza)
2022	Russia's full-scale invasion of Ukraine	Ukraine; Mediterranean energy shock
2023	Hamas attack & Gaza War	Israel, Palestine (Gaza), Lebanon
2024	Israel–Lebanon War	Israel, Lebanon
2025	Gaza War expands	Israel, Palestine (Gaza), Lebanon, Iran, Yemen
2026	US–Israel–Iran War	Iran, Israel, Cyprus; France naval presence

Political crises have unfolded in parallel, revealing deep structural vulnerabilities within Mediterranean governance systems (see Table 4). The Arab Spring uprisings, as analyzed by Abdel Hadi (2016) and applied to Jordan, exposed long-standing grievances related to corruption, inequality, and authoritarianism, producing divergent outcomes across the region.

Southern Europe faced its own economic and political systemic shocks, most notably the Greek sovereign debt crisis, which strained the cohesion of the European Union and reshaped economic policy (Tables 4 & 5).

Table 4. Political Crises

Year	Incident	Countries Affected
2005	Beirut assassination & Cedar Revolution	Lebanon
2009	Greek sovereign debt crisis	Greece; Italy, Spain, Portugal
2010	Arab Spring begins	Tunisia
2011	Egyptian Revolution	Egypt
2013	Egyptian coup	Egypt
2016	Turkey coup attempt	Turkey
2019	Eastern Mediterranean gas rivalry	Turkey, Greece, Cyprus, Egypt, Israel, Libya
2020	Beirut port explosion	Lebanon
2021	Tunisia self-coup	Tunisia
2024	Fall of Assad	Syria

Papanikos (2024) and Arroyo Fernández et al. (2024) demonstrate how the Great Recession and subsequent austerity measures exacerbated unemployment and social discontent in Greece and Spain. Similarly, Aimar (2015) highlights economic vulnerabilities in Algeria, underscoring the broader regional pattern of structural fragility. Episodes such as the Beirut port explosion, Turkey's attempted coup, and Tunisia's constitutional crisis further illustrate how institutional weaknesses can rapidly escalate into national emergencies with regional implications.

These political disruptions have interacted with transnational threats, including terrorism (examples are given in Table 5), which manifested in high-profile attacks in Madrid, Paris, and Brussels, reinforcing the securitization of borders and migration policies across Europe. As Afailal and Fernandez (2018) argue, the European Union's externalization of border controls has reshaped migration governance in the Mediterranean, often at the expense of human rights and regional cooperation.

Table 5. Terrorism

Year	Incident	Countries Affected
2002	Ghriba Synagogue Bombing	Tunisia
2003	Casablanca Bombings	Morocco
2003	Istanbul Bombings	Türkiye
2003	Palestinian terrorists bomb a US Embassy motorcade, killing three diplomatic security contractors	Gaza
2004	Madrid train bombings	Spain
2005	Former Prime Minister Rafiq al-Hariri is assassinated by car bomb in Beirut; UN investigation in October finds Syria responsible	Lebanon; Syria
2007	Fatah al-Islam extremists clash with military and security forces in Nahr al-Bared refugee camp; 150 killed.	Lebanon
2008	Bomb attack on police station in Naciria kills four, wounds more than 20; al-Qa'ida in the Lands of the Islamic Maghreb claims	Algeria

	responsibility	
2009	Twelve civilians wounded in attack on Palestinian community in Bayt Safafa; no claim of responsibility but Israeli settlers believed responsible	West Bank
2010	Four settlers killed by gunfire in Qiryat Arba'; spokesman for HAMAS's military wing, Izz al-Din al-Qassam Brigades, claims responsibility	Israel
2011	Attack on Coptic church in Alexandria kills 23, wounds almost 100; Army of Islam blamed but group denies responsibility	Egypt
2011	Family of five settlers in West Bank stabbed to death while in bed; no claim of responsibility	Israel
2011	Bomb kills 15 in Marrakech café frequented by Westerners in first major attack in country since May 2003; government blames AQIM but group denies responsibility	Morocco
2012	US diplomatic facilities in Benghazi attacked; Amb. Christopher Stevens and three other Americans killed	Libya
2013	Suicide bomber attacks US Embassy in Ankara, killing himself and a guard; DHKP/C claims responsibility	Turkiye
2015	Attack on <i>Charlie Hebdo</i> magazine office kills 12 in Paris; AQAP claims responsibility on 14 January	France
2015	Bardo Museum Attack	Tunisia
2015	Sousse Beach Attack	Tunisia
2016	March Istanbul Bombing	Turkiye
2016	Suicide bombing	Syria
2016	Vehicular Assault	France
2017	Car bombing, suicide bombing	Syria
2017	Vehicular attacks, Stabbings, Bombings, Attempted massive truck bombing	Spain
2018	A bomb exploded in a mosque	Libya
2018	Suicide bombings, shootings, hostage taking	Syria
2023	Hamas attack	Israel

Note: A comprehensive global list of terrorist attacks is provided by the Office of the Director of National Intelligence (ODNI) and is available at: <https://www.dni.gov/nctc/timeline.html> and Wikipedia.

Environmental and humanitarian crises (Tables 6 & 7) have intensified regional instability, highlighting the Mediterranean's acute vulnerability to climate change and ecological degradation. Extreme weather events—such as the 2003 heat wave, the 2023 Kahramanmaraş earthquakes and Morocco earthquake, and the catastrophic floods in Libya—have caused mass casualties and exposed deficiencies in disaster preparedness and infrastructure resilience. Ghanem (2023) emphasizes that countries such as Egypt face mounting risks from rising sea levels and water scarcity, threatening both livelihoods and national security. The COVID-19 pandemic added an additional layer of systemic stress, affecting all Mediterranean states simultaneously and exacerbating existing socioeconomic inequalities.

Table 6. *Natural Disasters*

Year	Incident	Countries Affected
2003	European heat wave	France, Italy, Spain, Portugal, Greece
2012	Costa Concordia shipwreck	Italy
2020	COVID-19 pandemic	All Mediterranean countries
2023	Kahramanmaraş earthquakes	Turkey, Syria
2023	Morocco earthquake	Morocco
2023	Storm Daniel floods	Libya, Greece, Bulgaria, Turkey

A closer reading of Tables 6 and 7 reveals several important patterns. First, the frequency and clustering of major disasters—particularly in recent years—suggest an acceleration of high-impact events rather than isolated occurrences. Second, many crises exhibit clear transnational spillovers, affecting multiple countries simultaneously (as in the case of Storm Daniel or the COVID-19 pandemic), highlighting the deeply interconnected nature of the Mediterranean security environment. Third, the geographical distribution of these events points to a shared basin-wide vulnerability, albeit with uneven impacts: southern and eastern Mediterranean states often face more severe consequences due to comparatively weaker institutional capacity and infrastructure resilience.

Moreover, the tables illustrate the growing convergence of different types of risks—natural, technological, and biological—blurring the boundaries between environmental and human security. The inclusion of incidents such as the Costa Concordia disaster alongside large-scale natural hazards underscores how systemic fragility can manifest across sectors. This multidimensional risk landscape reinforces the argument that security in the Mediterranean cannot be understood solely in military or political terms, but must incorporate environmental stressors and humanitarian pressures as core components.

At the same time, the Mediterranean Sea has become one of the world's deadliest migration routes, with tragedies such as the Lampedusa shipwreck symbolizing the human cost of geopolitical fragmentation and economic precarity. Taken together, these overlapping crises reveal a region defined not by isolated shocks but by deeply interconnected disruptions, in which political, environmental, economic, and security dynamics continuously reinforce one another.

Table 7. Humanitarian Crises

Year	Incident	Countries Affected
2001	Multiple fatal small-boat sinkings during early irregular migration from North Africa (no single mass event recorded)	Morocco, Spain
2002	Dozens drown off Sicily as smuggling routes expand	Tunisia, Italy
2003	Fatal sinking near Lampedusa marks rising Central Mediterranean danger	Libya, Italy
2004	Major shipwreck off Tunisia kills over 60 migrants	Tunisia, Italy
2005	Western Mediterranean deaths spike as crossings toward Spain increase	Morocco, Spain
2006	<i>Crisis year</i> : Thousands attempt Canary Islands route; >1,000 deaths	Mauritania, Senegal, Spain
2007	Large-scale capsizing off Malta kills ~200	Libya, Malta
2008	70+ migrants drown off Libya in worsening Central Mediterranean conditions	Libya, Italy
2009	200+ die in multiple shipwrecks near Libya	Libya, Italy
2010	Deadly shipwreck near Lampedusa signals pre-Arab Spring instability	Libya, Italy
2011	<i>Arab Spring exodus</i> : Hundreds die fleeing Libya; one boat with ~600 missing	Libya, Italy
2012	Dozens drown off Turkey–Greece route as Syrian war drives displacement	Turkey, Greece
2013	Lampedusa disaster: 366 confirmed dead	Italy
2014	Deliberate ramming near Malta kills ~500 — one of the worst pre-2015 events	Egypt, Malta
2015	April 2015 shipwreck (~800–900 dead) — deadliest in Mediterranean history	Libya, Italy
2016	Record year: 5,136 deaths recorded across Mediterranean routes	Libya, Italy, Greece, Spain
2017	3,139 deaths; major Libya–Italy shipwrecks continue	Libya, Italy
2018	2,337 deaths; Central Mediterranean becomes extremely lethal	Libya, Italy
2019	1,885 deaths; high mortality despite fewer crossings	Libya, Tunisia, Italy
2020	COVID-19 restrictions worsen risks; 1,450 deaths	Libya, Tunisia, Italy, Malta
2021	2,048 deaths; major incidents off Libya and Tunisia	Libya, Tunisia, Italy
2022	2,411 deaths; multiple mass drownings	Libya, Tunisia, Italy, Greece
2023	Pylos shipwreck (Greece): hundreds feared dead — one of the worst in Greek history	Greece, Libya
2024	2,573 deaths; continued high-risk Central Mediterranean crossings	Libya, Tunisia, Italy
2025	2,185 deaths; persistent shipwrecks near Libya and Lampedusa	Libya, Italy
2026	Ongoing fatal incidents; latest recorded March 2026	Libya, Tunisia, Italy, Spain

Epilogue

The Mediterranean has always been more than a sea; it is a mirror in which humanity contemplates its oldest tensions—between openness and closure, cooperation and conflict, memory and forgetting. Yet for some, this mirror has proven catastrophic: like Narcissus, entire civilizations have gazed upon the Mediterranean “lake” with such intensity that they were consumed by it, swallowed by the very waters that once defined them—the Phoenicians, the Carthaginians, and the Hittites among those whose greatness ultimately dissolved into history. Others, however, have endured across the millennia: the Greeks, the Jews, and the Egyptians remain living civilizations today, their identities stubbornly intact despite conquest, dispersion, and catastrophe.

And yet the myth is not only a lesson of the past — there are states today that stand at the shores of this ancient sea, admiring their own power and beauty with the same fatal confidence of Narcissus; let them be warned that the Mediterranean has swallowed greater civilizations than theirs, and its waters are patient.

As we gather here in Athens — itself a testament to that capacity for endurance — we must ask what it is that allows some societies to survive the mirror while others drown in it, and whether scholarship such as ours can help illuminate that difference.

One answer, at least, is suggested by the evidence assembled in this paper. The conflicts that define the contemporary Mediterranean do not stop at the water’s edge, nor at any border drawn on a map; they travel along the same networks of dependence that bind the region together. If that is so, then the logic of their mitigation must follow the same path. Responses conceived and applied at the regional level alone are structurally insufficient — not for lack of will, but because the scale of the problem has already exceeded the scale of the remedy. What the Mediterranean’s crises demand, and what its history consistently demonstrates, is intervention at the hyper-regional or global level: coordinated, sustained, and grounded in a recognition that in a deeply interdependent world, no region’s instability remains its own.

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