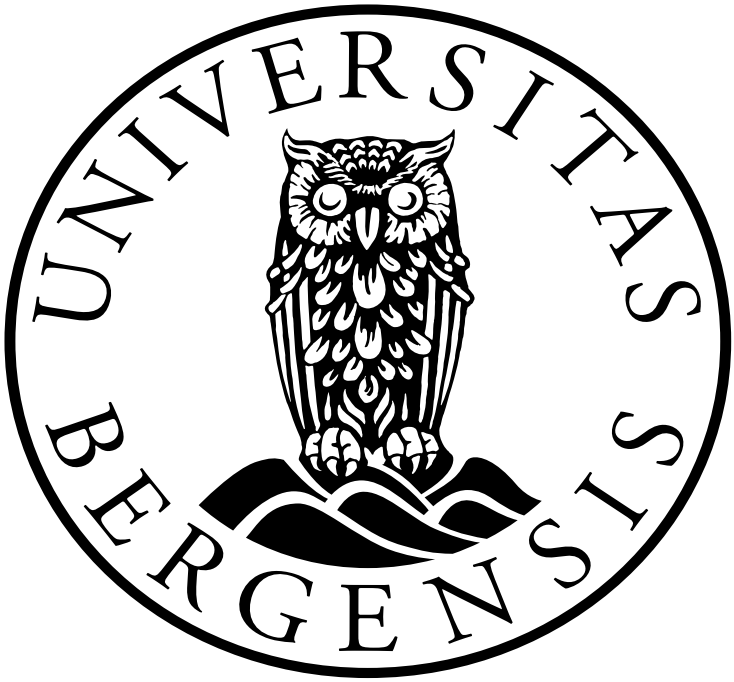
A Trireme Democracy?

Ideological Aspects of the 5th century Athenian Fleet



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Sammendrag

I denne oppgaven tar jeg for meg hvordan den atenske flåten har blitt skildret som en ideologisk aktør i forbindelse med det atenske demokratiet, og perioden jeg fokuserer på er i all hovedsak Peloponneserkrigen (431-404 f.kr). Oppgaven tar utgangspunkt i den historiske tradisjonen som forbinder flåten med demokratisk ideologi, og som hevder at Athens herredømme til sjøs var en medvirkende faktor til at demokratiet forble den dominerende styreformen gjennom mesteparten av bystatens historie.

Oppgaven baserer seg hovedsaklig på det skriftlige kildematerialet fra det femte og fjerde århundre f.kr. det være seg historiografisk, skjønnlitterært eller filosofisk, og oppgaven legger derfor ekstra vekt på kildekapitlet. Det er totalt tre drøftingskapitler, hvorav det første fokuserer på flåten og dens ledende generalers rolle i Peloponneserkrigen samt de generalene som i størst grad var ansvarlige for Athens krigføring. Deretter tar jeg for meg flåtens organisering og mannskap, samt argumenter for og imot flåtens ideologiske karakter og dens rolle som støttespiller for det athenske demokratiet. Til slutt undersøker jeg kontrasten mellom skildringen av flåtemannskap og hoplitter i de antikke kildene, og særlig Platons mange observasjoner rundt den tidligere nevnte forbindelsen mellom demokrati og flåte. Drøfting og delkonklusjoner gjøres fortløpende, og oppsummeres på siste side av hvert kapittel.

Til slutt konkluderer jeg med at forbindelsen mellom demokrati og flåte i all hovedsak er en kobling tilføyd av senere historikere og filosofer, og en av årsakene til den overveldende negative omtalen av demokrati og flåtemakt i disse kildene er de to institusjonenes rolle i Peloponneserkrigen.

ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

You won't find a new country, won't find another shore.
This city will always pursue you.
- C.P. Cavafy

16. 3. 2017. The Piraeus.
Having roamed the museum for the better part of an hour, I found myself face to face with a vertical object of rusted bronze, roughly the size of a small anvil. Compared to the rest of the exhibition, it is quite unremarkable. Its sharpened tip barely visible after two milennia of wasting away on the ocean floor. Through the information plaque, I find that I am looking at a trireme ram, spearpoints of the Greek warships. Possibly influenced by the somewhat saccharine but nevertheless beautiful rendition of Cavafy's *Ithaca* by Sean Connery (of all people) played in the neighbouring exhibtion, I This was the javelin with which an armada of desperate Athenians had speared the Persian Leviathan, bringing it to a halt in the outskirts of Europe. I found the thought utterly captivating then, and still do now.

23. 11. 2021. Bergen
For all the acknowledgments and tributes usually banded about on pages such as this, I'll begin with a brutal honest omission: writing a master's thesis is mainly a process of long days and even longer evenings and often nights. But it also a timely reminder of the old adage that no man is, in fact, an island, and I owe sincere thanks to a number of people.
Chiefly among them is my supervisor Ingvar Mæhle, who showed remarkable patience in dealing with two rather abrupt changes of the thesis subject, and a writing process that was erratic as best. He has been an immense help in gathering secondary sources, recommended reading and providing invaluable, no-nonsene commentary on a number of drafts.
Then there are Sigrid, Jarli and Svein, who all took the time to help with text commentary, unravelling the mysteries of Microsoft Word and providing the best pub company one could wish for when spirits needed raising. Speaking of which... ah dammit. Robert, Alban and Kristian, here's to you too.

Finally I wish to offer thanks to Apollo and Diana for their grace and forbearance, and underline just how comforting their occasional presence has been for me. I am here of course referring to Ingvar's two Golden Retrievers.

CONTENTS

1. INTRODUCTION

He who controls the sea controls everything.
– Themistocles

In this paper, I aim to explore the ideological connotations of the fifth-century Athenian fleet, in particular its perceived connection to democracy. The theory of a link between Athenian maritime power and democracy is far from new: its inception can be traced to several sources from ancient Athens, among them historians, playwrights and some of the most prolific thinkers of all time. It emphasizes the role of ordinary citizens as rowers in what became the most powerful navy in the Aegean, thus securing their political rights in the world's first democratic state and enabled the growth of Athens from an ordinary Greek *polis* to a maritime empire. If this link is to be believed, then Athenian *democracy*, the rule of the people, was intrinsically linked to Athenian *thalassocracy*, their rule of the sea.

What is striking about this theory is that instead of framing it through a lens of triumphalism or pride, most of the ancient sources describe it in overtly negative terms. Modern historians may –and usually do– find the idea of rich and poor citizens contributing to the navy together, through financial donations and manning of the rowing benches respectively, to be an admirable way of merging military demands with democratic civic interest. Many Athenians must have agreed, but few of them left much in the way of written testatement to their conviction. Instead, we are left with an abundance of texts that fiercly criticise the naval-democratic complex not only in time of crisis for the Athenians, as might be expected, but as a matter of principle.

The main questions before us are the following: to what extent, if at all, was this purported link between Athenian naval power and democracy true? Was there in fact a distinct form of naval ideology that propelled the rise and fall of the fifth-century Athenian empire? And if so, what caused so many of Athens' own intelligentsia to actively oppose this ideology?

Due to the complexity of these subjects, certain delimitations have been necessary: with the exception of the inception of the Athenian fleet by Themistocles and the career of Cimon, I have primarily focused on the events of the Peloponnesian War (431-404) as well as some sources from the fourth century. This provides us with a timespan in which the various

aspects of Athenian society was pushed to its absolute extreme, and in which the navy reached its highest ever point of activity and, arguably, political importance. It also allows frequent use of Thucydides, the pre-eminent historian of the ancient world.

I have split the paper in a total of eight chapters. Apart from the most obvious ones, the majority of material is found in the three discussion chapters (4, 5 and 6) who each deal with a topic related to the main questions. The first of these evaluate the major Athenians generals during the Peloponnesian War, their success and failures in command and their relationships with the Athenian *demos*. This chapter also serves as a chronology of the conflict, the fluctuating fortunes of Athens and Sparta continually assessed. The second chapter is an in-depth look at the nature of the Athenian fleet itself, or more precisely its crews. In this chapter I first discuss the supposed dependence on the Solonic *thetes* class as rowers, a dependence often stated as fact but not necessarily true. Following this is a discussion of the term *nautikos ochlos* ("Naval Mob"), its use by Thucydides and Aristotle and what it can tell us about contemporary views on trireme crews and the fleet in general. Finally, the third discussion chapter compares the treatment of rowers and hoplites in the ancient sources, in particular why the latter has enjoyed a significantly more generous appraisal than the former among contemporary writers.

As discussed in chapter 3.2. on methodology, this paper makes use of a rather straightforward, possibly simplistic approach: I have based my research almost entirely on careful reading of the ancient literary sources themselves, eschewing the use of more advanced tools such as data tables. I am also well aware that the structure of chapter 4, based as it is on a chronology of the Peloponnesian War with a special focus on Athens' most prominent generals, may raise some eyebrows. I have chosen this approach because I think it is valuable for the thesis to establish a chronologial frame of the conflict, and trace the changes in Athenian generalship abroad and its political repercussions at home. Ultimately, the reader will be the judge of the merits of these choices.

Unless stated otherwise, all dates are B.C.

2. THE ANCIENT SOURCES

I am bound to tell what I am told, but not in every case to believe it.
– Herodotus

It is incumbent upon any student of ancient Athens to acknowledge just how spoilt we are in regards to source material. Classical Athens was a great many things, above all a hub of literary productivity where historians, philosophers, playwrights and poets combined to produce one of the richest and most influential cultural legacies in history. This chapter will deal with the writers most relevant to the subject of this thesis, namely Herodotus, Thucydides, Xenophon and Aristotle, and to a lesser degree also Plutarch and Diodorus. I have also made extensive use of Aristophanes, but he and the nature of his works are discussed in-depth in a chapter of its own.

Before reviewing each individual source, however, a few general observations can be made.

As Michael Grant points out in *Greek and Roman Historians: Information and Misinformation*, ancient historiography was a very different discipline from the modern variant and the Greek sources present numerous problems for any academic study. For this particular subject, one of the most frustrating aspects to deal with is the absence of reliable numbers in most, if not all the literary sources: most ancient writers lean heavily towards the fantastical in their estimations, and have a tendency to contradict each other.[1] They routinely invoke divine powers as explanations for human events, although the frequency of supernatural interventions vary from writer to writer.[2] There is also the problem of vested interests and personal bias, more or less inevitable considering many of our sources wrote about people they were personally aquainted with and conflicts in which they themselves had played an active part. This will be dealt with individually in the case of each writer.

[1] Michael Grant: *Greek and Roman Historians: Information and Misinformation*. London: Routledge, (1995), p. 54 and 73-74.
[2] Grant (1995), p. 53.

2.1. Herodotus

Herodotus of Halicarnassus and the *Histories* scarcely need an introduction. Widely regarded as the underlining text of the entire historical discipline, this account of the Greco-Persian wars remains a captivating read two and a half milenna after the deceisive Greek victory at Platae. It is during this conflict we find the inception of the Athenian fleet by Themistocles and its first triumph at the pivotal battle of Salamis, and so the *Histories* makes for a natural starting point in exploring the political nature of Athenian thalassocracy. A well-travelled individual, Herodotus based his account on multiple interviews and enquiries conducted across the Mediterranean. His narrative is not merely the chronology of a war, but a full account of the Greek peoples' endeavours in the transition from the Archaic to the Classical age.[3] Herodotus' spirit of enquiry, insatiable curiosity and impressive reach makes him a remarkable storyteller and invaluable historian, but he is also a deeply flawed source in many respects.

As previously mentioned, ancient historians are notoriously unreliable in their treatment of numbers and Herodotus can very well be considered a chief culprit of this questionable tradition: his estimates of a Persian invasion force of 5,283,220 men is self-evidently absurd[4], and he operates under a suspension of belief that allows him to include elements of questionable historical value (such as Xerxes' foreboding visions of doom prior to his invasion, or the escalating madness and gory suicide of Kleomenes).[5] His attention to social and economic factors is negligible at best, and though the *Histories* for the most part gives a remarkably fair treatment to Greek and Barbarian alike, Herodotus does display some undeniable biases: his narrative often favours the Athenians[6], and he displays a curiously negative disposition towards the Spartan helots.[7]

It should be noted that Herodotus lived into the first years of the Peloponnesian War, and

[3] Grant (1995), p. 5.
[4] Herod. 7.185-186. According to Herodotus, he estimates half of them to be fighting men and the rest to be camp followers and supply crew.
[5] Herod. 7.12-15 and 6.82. Though in his defence, this may very well be a subtle way of communicating that the Spartans probably had their increasingly unstable king discreetly murdered.
[6] Grant (1995), p. 67 and Luraghi (2001) p. 179. It is worth noting that this assertion has been challenged by some shcolars, such as Strasburger, Stadter and Blösel.
[7] The only recognition of the Helot contigent at Thermopylae is a terse comment on how one of them flees the battlefield after leading his blind master Eurytus towards the Persian lines [Herod. 7.229], and at Platae he accuses them of misappropriating part of the booty from the Persian camp [Herod. 9.80].

there has been some speculation among scholars on just how much of its influence can be found in the *Histories*. There are some rather ominous warnings on future misery in store for Athens[8] and Aegina,[9] but the latest date we can certainly find a reference to in this regard is the mention of how Eurymachus, son of the Theban commander Leontiades, was eventually executed at Plataea after a failed assault on the city.[10] This is corroborated by Thucydides as taking place in 431.[11]

An often overlooked but essential characteristic of Herodotus' work is his emphasis on moral commentary. This results in his subject matter, the clash between Greeks and Persians, being frequently laced with judgements and evaluations of individuals and states alike, a practice his successors would eagerly continue and in many cases expand on.[12] This is particularly evident in his analysis of Persian ambition and overreach: through various transgressions the Achaemenid kings all fall foul of *hubris*, excessive and sacrilegious pride, and are in turn subject to *nemesis*, divine punishment.[13] As becomes evident in the later case of Themistocles and the rise of Athenian naval power, Herodotus' theme of mortal hubris is by no means limited to the Persians:[14] Themistocles and the Athenians themselves are portrayed as degenerating into egoism and hubris as a direct result of their maritime strength, which allows them to oppress and extort the rest of Greece.[15] This portrayal of Themistocles is emblematic of a wider Greek disposition towards early fifth century Athens: nominally the foremost champion of Greek liberty and freedom, but equally notorious as an avaricious oppressor.[16] This can, and indeed has been attributed to Herodotus' own personal agenda: as an Ionian Greek he may very well have regarded the tribute collections of the Delian League as a direct successor to the Persian yoke.[17]

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[8] Herod. 7.133.
[9] Herod. 6.91.
[10] Herod. 7.233.
[11] Thuc. 2.5.7.
[12] Grant (1995), 81-82.
[13] For various examples, see Cyrus' treatment of Spargapises and subsequent grisly fate at the hands of Tomyra [Herod. 1.214], Xerxes' destruction of the Acropolis [Herod. 3.29] or his mutilation of the corpse of Leonidas [Herod. 7.238].
[14] Ober, J. *The Athenian Revolution: Essays on Ancient Greek Democracy and Political Theory*. New Jersey, Princeton University Press (1996), p. 24. Nor was Herodotus the only Greek who held hubris to be a very serious matter: the Athenian constitution officially forbade its commission, though they unfortunately failed to properly define it.
[15] Luraghi (2001), p. 196-97.
[16] Luraghi (2001), p. 181.
[17] Luraghi (2001), p. 179.

And so we have not only our first descripiton of Athenian thalassocracy, but also the first example of a critical, albeit veiled, analysis of it as well.

2.2. Thucydides

Whereas Herodotus provides an historical account based on compiling various retellings of past events, Thucydides offers a contemporary history where he serves as both narrator and occasional actor in his primary subejct, the Peloponnesian War. An Athenian citizen of possible Thracian ancestry, Thucydides survived the Great Plague at the onset of the war and went on to be elected as *strategoi* in 424. His military tenure would prove to be an unsuccessful one, and he was recalled to Athens and exiled for twenty years after failing to defend Amphipoli from the Spartan general Brasidas.[18] He would spend the next thirteen years chronicling his own observations of the war as well as those of multiple others, extensively travelling the Greek world as Athens and Sparta vied for supremacy. For unknown reasons, his account ends abruptly in 411.

Thucydides remains the most universally praised historian the ancient world ever produced (in Grant's words possessed of "*an exceptional intelligence … the cleverest and most deeply thoughtful of all historians"*)[19]and it is not hard to see why. Like Herodotus, his central theme is that of a war. But whereas his predecessor is first and foremost a storyteller, Thucydides expands and in many ways transcends his role as historian: his approach in the *History of the Peloponnesian War* (from here on cited as *Thucydides*) is consistently didactic and instructive, the insight and analysis on offer that of a social scientist and philosopher rather than just a chronicler of events.[20] Thucydides himself underlines the timeless quality he was aiming for, describing the intention of his work "not as an essay which is to win the applause of the moment, but as a possession for all time".[21] It is to his immense credit that the *History of the Peloponnesian War* makes for not only a thoroughly captivating but also believable and relatable read well two milennia after its creation.

As Hanson notes, Thucydides went to great lengths in order to produce an obejctive account of the war, interviewing combatants from both sides and personally examining written

[18] Grant (1995), p. 6.
[19] Grant (1995), p. 7.
[20] Grant (1995), p. 7.
[21] Thuc. 1.22.4.

treaties and inscriptions. This in turn makes his political observations and leanings surprisingly complex, especially given his Athenian heritage: he is critical of the flaws inherent in Athenian democracy, yet appriciative of its resilience in times of crisis and openly admires democratic leaders like Pericles and Nicias. As general he spent most of his tenure in command of Athenian triremes, but like many Athenian writers he express a deep admiration for the Peloponnesian heavy infantry and its leaders, particularly his own vanquisher Brasidas.[22]

For all his undoubted qualities, Thucydides needs to be read with a certain sceptical disposition. Unlike Herodotus he seldom presents divergent accounts if he himself regards them as dubious, leaving the reader with no other option than to trust his judgement.[23] Kagan cautions any reader of Thucydides that there are essentially two ways to approach his work: *"his report of facts, which have the highest claim to our belief, and his interpretations, which are open to greater question."*[24]

He is not ignorant of economic matters, but sometimes errs when reporting on them and routinely dismisses the financial nature of the war effort in favour of the political.[25] Perhaps inevitably, especially considering his own involvment in events and personal acquaintance with many key players in his narrative, his quest for neutrality and objectivity occasionally falls short. The main beneficiaries of this are arguably Nicias and Brasidas, who are treated with marked generosity if not outright reverence (this is particularly surprising in the case of Nicias, considering his somewhat mixed track record as both politican and general). On the other hand, his treatment of Cleon is uncharacteristically vicious and unbalanced, to the point where it is clear Thucydides lets personal animus override his usual sobriety.[26]

A regular point of contention among historians is the degree of authenticity in the many speeches recorded in the *History.* These speeches number forty in total, and comprise nearly a quarter of the entire work.[27] This paper finds itself in agreement with Donald Kagan, that the speeches are far closer to *"verbatim reports of what the speakers actually said"* than to

[22] Hanson (2005), p. 7-8.
[23] Grant (1995), p. 42-43
[24] Donald Kagan. *The Fall of the Athenian Empire*. Ithaca: Cornell University Press (1987), p. 114.
[25] Grant (1995), p. 55 and 63.
[26] Grant (1995), p. 59-60.
[27] Grant (1995), p. 44.

"fictions completely invented by Thucydides".[28]

Thucydides himself provides the following explanation in regards to his method:

> With reference to the speeches in this history, some were delivered before the war began, others while it was going on; some I heard myself, others I got from various quarters; it was in all cases difficult to carry them word for word in one's memory, so my habit has been to make the speakers say what was in my opinion demanded of them by the various occasions, of course adhering as closely as possible to the general sense of what they really said.[29]

Perhaps the most regrettable thing of Thucydides' account is its missing conclusion. For whatever reason, the *History of the Peloponnesian War* is cut short, practically mid-sentence, soon after the Athenian victory at Cynossema in 411. And so we are left without his verdicts on the final chapter of Alcibiades' career, the rise of Lysander, the cataclysmic Ionian war and the final defeat of Athens, as well as the aftermath of the conflict. Thus we can only speculate on how his narrative might have been infuenced by witnessing the eventual triumph of the Spartan fleet, or the Athenians' decision to exile Alcibiades and three other capable commanders following the setback at Notium, a decision that may very well have cost them their fleet and thereby the war itself.

2.3. Xenophon

Taking on the heavy mantle of Thucyides, Xenophon produced one of the most prominent sources for Greek history in the period 411-362: his *Hellenica* traces the final years of the Peloponnesian War, as well as the Spartan hegemony that followed and its eventual overthrow by Thebes. His more famous work *Anabasis* is arguably the superior literary product, but for this particular subject *Hellenica* will be the most relevant of the two. In many important aspects, Xenophon's life mirrored that of Thucydides: Born into the Athenian *hippeis*, Xenophon personally participated in the Peloponnesian War before relocating following Athens' defeat and the brief oligarchic revolution. In 401 he departed for Mesopotamia as a mercenary in Cyrus the younger's failed rebellion against his older brother, and later served in this capacity under various Thracian and Spartan kings.

[28] Donald Kagan. *The Outbreak of the Peloponnesian War*. Ithaca and London (1969), preface.
[29] Thuc. 1.22

No other ancient Greek historian has a military record as extensive as that of Xenophon, and his career as a mercenary and later life as leisured aristocrat brought him into personal contact with some of the most prominent characters of his age. Xenophon's authorship is greatly strengthened by his military competence, extensive travels, high-level connections and intelligeble style of writing, but it is by no means flawless. Grant describes him as *"more of a story-teller than a historian*"[30], though this critique is probably aimed primarily at *Anabasis.* In *Hellenica* the major problem is widely considered to be Xenophon's distinct Lacedaemonian and oligarchic bias, to the point where he outright omits information unfavourable to Sparta.[31]

Taking into account his equestrian background, military career as an infantry commander and friendship with Socrates, one would expect Xenophon's attitude to the Athenian democratic and naval institutions to be wholly negative. This would certainly correspond to his reputation as an aristocratic laconophile, but upon closer inspection he proves to be a nuanced and often unconventional commentator. True, he is deeply critical of the democratic process that condemns the generals of Argusinae[32], and several speakers in his works voice clear opposition to democracy.[33] At the same time he criticises the post-404 Spartan hegemony, in particular their establishment of the Thirty in Athens and the occupation of the Theban Cadmeia,[34] and reports speeches by democrats like Euryptolemus and Thrasybulus that casts them in an overwhelmingly favourable light.[35] Thrasybulus' speech in particular is notable, as he praises the piety, military courage and tactical ability of the democrats, and Xenophon himself repeats the same praise in favour of Iphicrates' leadership of the Athenian relief force that broke the siege of Corcyra.[36]

Xenophon makes a telling observation in the introduction to *Cyropaedia*, where he reflects on the political unrest in Greece and the potential for instability inherent in governments:

[30] Grant (1995), p. 59.
[31] See his justification of Spartan annexation of Mantinea [Hell. 6.2], his neglection of Epaminondas and Pelopidas at the battle of Leuctra [Hell. 7.4] and the similar avoidance of any mention of Messenia and Megalapolis [Grant (1995), p. 18].
[32] Hell 1.7.
[33] See Alcibiades in *Memorabilia*, Charmides and Kallias in *Symposium* and Kritoboulos in *Oikonomikos*.
[34] Hell. 2.2.20-2.3.11 and 5.4.1.
[35] Hell. 1.7.12-32 and 2.4.1-43.
[36] Hell. 6.2.27-39.

> The thought once struck me how many democracies have been overthrown by people who would prefer to live under some other type of constitution besides democracy; and similarly, how many monarchies and oligarchies have been overturned by the people; and further how many would-be tyrants have either been deposed quickly and completely or, if they manage to stay in power for any length of time, they are marveled at, having come to be wise and prosperous men.[37]

Taking into consideration this reflection, his professed disillusionment with contemporary Sparta and the varying degrees of criticism and praise he lavishes on Athens, it becomes hard to subject Xenophon to any meaningful ideological categorisation. Perhaps it is most fruitful to consider him primarily as a historian and military thinker whose political philosophy was that of the mercenary: regularly shifted by the events and personalities he encountered throughout his life, and in the end one born more out of pragmatism than anything else.

It is also worth noting that another writer by the name of Xenophon was active during the Peloponnesian War, known for producing a fiercly anti-democratic diatribe known as the *Constitution of the Athenians*. Known today as Pseudo-Xenophon or alternatively The Old Oligarch, little is known of him except his pro-oligarchic sympathies and corresponding disdain towards Athenian democracy. The *Constitution*'s exact purpose is unknown, but it may have been intended as a speech.

2.4. Aristotle

Few writers of antiquity have left a more extensive mark on our understanding of the period than that of Aristotle: one of history's great polymaths, his work encompasses an exhaustive list of subjects, and while he is primarily remembered as a philosopher his works contains a vast amount of history as well. Unlike his historiographical predecessors however, Aristotle shows a distinct interest for the social rather than the military aspect of history[38], and his *Politics* and *Constitution of the Athenians* will almost invariably provide a cornerstone for any student of ancient Athens. Born in the northern Greek region of Macedonia in 384, Aristotle spent most of his life as a student at Plato's Academy and as a tutor at the Argead court in Macedonia. He later returned to Athens where he founded the famous school of the

[37] Xen. Cyr. 1.1.1.
[38] Grant (1995), p. 56.

Lyceum in 335 before, like Thucyides and Xenophon before him, he fell foul of the Athenian citizenry. Facing the similar charges of impiety that had doomed Socrates, he avoided the same fate by absconding to Chalcis where he died in 322. Ironically, the year of his death coincided with the suicide of Demosthenes and the final defeat of the Athenian navy by Macedon at Amorgos.[39]

Being both didactic and scientific, Aristotle makes for an interesting source. It is highly unlikely that he considered his own works to be historiographical, but rather regarded the study of history as a necessary component in philosophical analysis of the human condition and society in general.[40] Nevertheless, his historical input is extremely valuable for a number of reasons: having personally lived through first the downfall of Sparta's post-404 hegemony, the Social War and finally the Macedonian Wars, he is in an excellent position to analyse the rise and fall of Athenian thalassocracy, and evaluate the polis' naval and democratic institutions. It is in *Politics* we find the passage that has become perhaps the most prominent argument in favour of a 'democratic navy' among scholars, on which more later.[41]

Aristotle's authorship is nonetheless marked by many of the same problems as the other ancient sources. His works are frequently shaky in regards to numbers, sometimes self-contradictory on important issues and their own sources are not always reliable.[42] One also has to take into account that Aristotle writes from his own distinct political perspective, classifying democracy as a 'deviant' form of government.[43] He is equally critical not only of maritime imperialism, but also the extension of political rights to the crews and dockyard workers.[44]

2.5. Plutarch

By the turn of the milennium Greece had long since been reduced to a province of the burgeoning Roman Empire, even as Greek culture seeped into Roman society on nearly every conceivable level. It is hardly surprising then, that the first century AD should produce a character such as Plutarch: born Greek, he would hold several political and religious offices

[39] John R. Hale: *Lords of the Sea*. London: Penguin Books (2009), p. 331.
[40] Grant (1995), p. 91.
[41] Aris. Pol. 5.1304.
[42] Grant (1995), p. 120.
[43] Aris. Pol. 3.7.
[44] Aris. Pol. 7.1327b.

throughout his life, eventually attaining Roman citizenship and giving several lectures in Rome itself.[45] Plutarch's most famous work is without doubt his biographies, usually referred to as *Parallel Lives*. While his style of pairing a famous Greek with a Roman counterpart in order to compare and contrast their deeds, virtues and flaws has ruffled the feathers of modern as well as ancient historiographers, it deos make him exceptionally readable.[46] *Parallel Lives* is a primarily ethical rather than historical study, which Plutarch goes into some detail to explain and justify to his readers.[47] The numerous digressions and anecdotes serve to amplify his main goal, which is to give the reader a detailed idea of what the Greek or Roman in question was like, not just as a general or politican, but as a person:

> For it is not Histories that I am writing, but Lives; and in the most illustrious deeds there is not always a manifestation of virtue or vice, nay, a slight thing like a phrase or a jest often makes a greater revelation of character than battles where thousands fall.[48]

It is nevertheless a work of considerable historical significance, and an important supplement to characters such as Themistocles, Pericles, Cimon, Nicias and Alcibiades. Besides his talent for depicting human emotion and motivation, one of Plutarch's chief qualities as a writer is his eye for detail, which imbues the aforementioned digressions with valuable insight into the time period under discussion.[49]

Perhaps inevitably, Plutarch's theme of "illustrious deeds" does lead him straight into hero worship on several occasions. As far as bias is concerned, Plutarch has his share: his perspective that of a defeated and subjugated Greek who, while accepting Roman rule, is nevertheless determined to promote his Greek protagonists as on par with their Roman counterparts.

Among other things, this Greek chauvinism leads him to accuse Herodotus of being a *philo-barbaros* (lover of barbarians), ostensibly for *The Histories'* supposed kindness towards the

[45] Grant (1995), p. 17.
[46] Grant (1995), p. 20. Among them his near-contemporary fellow historian, Suetonius.
[47] Plut. Alex. 1.2.
[48] Plut. Alex. 1.2.
[49] Grant (1995), p. 79 and 51.

Persians.[50] At the same time, he tweaks his narrative in accordance to which characters are under discussion, and so while the Athenian demos are portrayed largely favourably in *Demosthenes*, they are depicted as a volatile and menacing mob in *Phocion*.

2.6. Diodorus

Our final main source, and arguably the one held in least regard by modern scholarship, Diodorus Siculus was a Greek historian born around 90 BC in Agira, Sicily. Preciously little is known about his life and he is chiefly remembered as the author of the massive *Bibliotheca Historica (Library)*, an ambitious attempt at chronicling a proper universal history in forty books. As previously mentioned, Diodorus' reputation is a lackluster one: Grant dismisses the *Library* as "undistinguished, superficial and unoriginal"[51], and there is a near universal consensus that it is a compilation from other, lost Greek writers rather than an original work. For all the criticism levelled at Diodorus, he does provide an encyclopedic library that offers information on events that for various reasons have been neglected by other historians, such as the Peace of Callias or Tolmides' capture of Naupactos. Thus he occasionally provides a valuable counterweight to Xenophon, supplying details that either collaborates or challenges the narrative of the *Hellenica*.[52]

Diodorus also provides a certain degree of access to Ephorus of Cyme, a fourth century historian and pupil of Isocrates who wrote a (now lost) universal history similar to that of the *Library* spanning over 700 years. Although disliked by some historians (particularly Polybius), he seems to have been well regarded in the Greek world and Diodorus is believed to have aquired most of the information on Greece in the years 480 to 360 in his *Library* from Ephorus.[53] Curiously enough, one of the few things Polybius credits Ephorus for is his strong grasp of naval battles, going so far as praising his description of the battles of Cyprus and Cnidus. However, he immediately contrasts this with Ephorus' equally poor understanding of land warfare and lacklustre reports on Leuctra and Mantinea.[54]

[50] Grant (1995), p. 70. Among other things, Herodotus reports deeply critical comments about the Greeks made by the barbarians, such as Mardonius' haughty dismissal of the folly inherit in hoplite battle [Herod. 7.93.1].
[51] Grant (1995), p. 97.
[52] An example of the latter, explored in greater detail later in chapter 4.4., is the infamous trial of the generals following the Battle of Arginusae.
[53] Grant (1995), p. 104.
[54] Plb. 12.25.

3. MODERN HISTORIOGRAPHY AND METHODS OF INQUIRY

Historians are like deaf people who go on answering questions that no one has asked them.
– Leo Tolstoy

3.1. Recent Historiography

What follows is a short overview of the historiography of the subject matter, as well as an elaboration on the main literature chosen for this thesis and an explanation of the methodology in use. A work of this nature will inevitably rely on a copious amount of books, chapters, articles and other sources, and so I will limit my commentary to those most commonly used. One notable exception is Michael Grant's *Greek and Roman Historians: Information and Misinformation* which forms the basis of chapter 2, and is dealt with there.

As mentioned in the previous chapter, the literary source material available from ancient Athens is one of, if not the most extensive of all antiquity. This in turn resulted in a steady stream of analysis and commentary by various luminaries: Cicero was an avid reader of Plato and Egidio Colonna produced commentaries of nearly all the works of Aristotle, who became one of the most influential thinkers in Medieval Europe. While he was understandbly more preoccupied with the Roman republic, Machiavelli's potent brew of history, political science and deliberations on philosophy strongly mirrors that of Thucydides (and to a lesser extent, Xenophon). Hobbes admiringly incorporated Thucidydes in his political writings and Thomas Jefferson regularly read Homer, Herodotus and Euripides in their original Greek.

In the case of ancient military history, this stream became a full-blown waterfall as a generation of German soldier-scholars entered the fray in the late nineteenth and early twentieth century, among them Hans Delbrück, Johan Gustav Droysen and Johannes Kromayer. Delbrück in particular stands out, and not just for his background as an army officer during the Franco-Prussian War, tutorship of Prince Waldemar and later professorate in history at the University of Berlin: he developed *Sachkritik*, a method of analysing ancient military operations through a modern, scientific approach, leading him among other things to point out the inflation of armies in Herodotus, the impossibility of the hoplite sprint at

Marathon and the decisiveness of superior logistics in victorious Roman campaigns.[55] This approach made him something of an outcast in both academic and military circles: the contemporary humanities disapproved of his specialization, preferring to leave military matters to the formidable Prussian military. The Prussian army in turn did not think much of this meddling civilian, the dominant Schlieffen school of historical strategy believing as they did that he lacked any basic understanding of warfare.[56] Nevertheless, his standing among military historians has risen in recent years, and today he is considered a pioneer of the field.

Another seminal work was produced by W.K. Pritchett of the Univeristy of California in *The Greek State at War*, a study of ancient Greek warfare consisting of no less than five volumes published between 1975 and 1991. Pritchett's approach was unusual in the sense that he placed great value on not just the ancient texts themselves, but also the social ramifications of the economics, culture and religion of the Greek world, devoting almost the entirety of volume three to the latter. The latter half of the twentieth century also saw Moses Finley employ an interdisciplinary approach to his *The World of Odysseus* published in 1954 along with several other works combining history, anthropology and ethnology in his analysis of the ancient Greek world.[57]

In more or less the same timespan, and of particular interest for this thesis, Donald Kagan wrote what is probably still the definitve modern narrative of the Peloponnesian War, tracing the conflict through a copious work of four volumes. *A New History of the Peloponnesian War* is an excellent companion to this bizarre conflict, Kagan's clear and vivid prose and continual analysis of Thucydides' account as well as that of other sources making him an obvious choice for a prime overview of the war. I have not always agreed with Kagan's takes on the war, above all his excessively harsh analysis of the Periclean strategy and the later career of Alcibiades, but that is hardly surprising for a four-volume work totalling nearly 2,000 pages.

Another cornerstone is Victor Davis Hanson. Whereas Kagan provides an overview of the

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[55] Hanson, V.D. in Philip Sabin, Hans Van Wees and Michael Whitby: *The Cambridge History of Greek and Roman Warfare. Volume I: Greece, the Hellenistic World and the rise of Rome.* Cambridge University Press (2007) p. 7.
[56] Arden Bucholz. *Hans Delbrück and Modern Military History*. The Historian: Vol. 55, No. 3, p. 517-526 (1993), p. 518.
[57] Hanson in Sabin, Van Wees and Whitby (2007), p. 9-10.

Peloponnesian War in its entirety, Hanson's *The Western Way of War* (1994) is a seminal work on the hoplite phalanx and its social, cultural and political ramifications. He also provides a most useful supplement to Kagan in *A War Like No Other* (2005), a companion to Thucydides focusing on the experience of battle in the various theatres of the Peloponnesian War. Hanson's style is remarkably elegant, and his classicist background lends a distinct cultural and literary quality to his works. Some of these works, in particular *The Other Greeks* (1995), rests on a fairly ambitious assumption in regards to the hoplite class emerging from an agrarian middle class in Archaic Greece, which would later correspond to Solon's *zeugitai*. This assumption has been challenged by numerous other scholars, showing the archeological evidence for this theory to be faulty while also obejcting to some of his interpretations of the ancient Greek sources.[58] Hanson himself admits to writing from a deeply personal agrarian perspective, and while this does add some notable substance to his insight on topics such as the mechanics of ravaging a countryside, it is a self-declared point of bias in his works that cannot be overlooked.[59]

Hans Van Wees deals with many of the same topics as Hanson, but his reading of the sources and approach to ancient Greek warfare in general usually leads him to very different conclusions. His chapter *Politics and the Battlefield* in Anton Powell's *The Greek World* (1995) makes a number of key observations on the military of Classical Athens, among them the evidence for an early influx of thetic hoplites in Greek armies and the deployment of rowers as light troops on campaign.[60] In *Greek Warfare: Myths and Realities* (2004) he expands on these topics, adding further insights on several aspects of ancient Greek warfare. In many ways, Van Wees' revisionist outlook and original approach serves as a valuable counterpart to the more orthodox views espoused by Hanson, and this is particularly evident in his chapter in *Men of Bronze* (2013) where he spends most of his chapter directly challenging Hanson's model of middle class yeoman farmers and presents his own, alternative model.[61] The broad outlook and original approach favoured by Van Wees is often a strength, but it also leads him to some arguements that are curious at best: a chief example is the claim that Archaic age hoplites favoured a fluid, loose style of fighting over the

[58] See Van Wees and Foxhall in Kagan and Viggiano (2013).
[59] Victor Davis Hanson. *The Other Greeks: The Family Farm and the Agrarian Roots of Western Civilization.* New York: The Free Press (1995), p. 8-9.
[60] Hans Van Wees. *Politics and the battlefield: Ideology in Greek warfare*, p. 153-78 in Powell (ed.), *The Greek World,* London (1995) p. 163.
[61] See Van Wees in Kagan and Viggiano (2013), p. 222-256.

traditional phalanx based on the example of modern, more or less naked tribesmen in the highlands of New Guinea whose only similarity to the heavily armoured hoplites is their use of spears and shields.[62]

An indispensable volume for anyone studying the ancient Athenian navy is Vincent Gabrielsen's *Financing the Athenian Fleet* (1994). Works on the fiscal aspect of the Athenian fleet had been done before, but Gabrielsen's book is the first –and to my knowledge, last– full-length contribution to the issue, meticulously mapping out the navy's logistical and financial organization. Besides the use of the usual literary sources, Gabrielsen also draws heavily on the available epigraphic texts from the fourth century that served as naval records in the Piraeus. Not all of the book's more in-depth chapters are equally useful for the purpose of this thesis ('Misappropriation of Equipment by Officals' springs to mind), but Gabrielsen's work on the Trierarchy and the socio-political profile of the navy as a whole is excellent.

Gabrielsen states that "some, but not all, of my conclusions may safely be extrapolated to apply to the fifth century"[63], and there are some portions of the book regarding the fifth centuray I take issue with. Among them is his early claim that the limitations of the triremes, particularly their dependence on the close proximity of coastal bases, made any sustained thalassocracy on the part of Athens impossible, contradicting both Herodotus and Thucydides without providing much in the way of satisfactory argument.[64] He is also unequivocally dismissive of the annual training program instituted by Pericles reported by Plutarch, on what ultimately is a very thin reasoning.[65]

Any work dealing with Classical Athens must to some degree also deal with its radical form of democracy and the scholarly debate surrounding it. This paper is no different, though as the specifics of the democratic system is not my primary topic it has been allocated rather less attention than what is usual. Seeing as the evolution of Athenian democracy is still a subject

[62] See the plates and accompanying text (XIV-XVII) in van Wees (2004).
[63] Gabrielsen, V. *Financing the Athenian Fleet: Public Taxation and Social Relations*. Baltimore: The Johns Hopkins University Press (1994), p. 12.
[64] Gabrielsen (1994), p. 5.
[65] Gabrielsen (1994), p. 111. Essentially, Gabrielsen argues that the logistical burdens and provisional costs were too much for a peacetime undertaking, ignoring the fact that Periclean Athens were both in the process of maintaining an empire built exclsively on naval strength as well as constantly guarding against Persian efforts to rebuild their own fleet.

of debate, I have made use of an exchange of articles between Josiah Ober and Kurt Raaflaub, as well as Ober's collection of essays on the matter called *The Athenian Revolution* from 1996. Their disagreement is largely based on the question of what constituted the time when Athens became a true democracy: Ober holds the view that Athenian democracy began with the reforms of Kleisthenes and the Athenian popular overthrow of the Spartan occupation in 508/07, whereas Raaflaub argues that democratic enfranchisement of the demos was a gradual process that was not finalised until the reforms of Ephialtes and Pericles.

This debate is important precisely because of the longstanding tradition linking the navy with democracy, allowing us to compare the respective timelines of these two institutions. Ober also goes into great detail on the issue of citizen participation in the Assembly, and the possibility of uncovering any discernible naval presence in the Assembly meetings of the fifth century.

The choice of the archeologist John R. Hale' *Lords of the Sea*, a work of popular history from 2009, may seem somewhat out of place. But while Hale's flair and playful prose clearly shows his intent to appeal to a wider audience, this book is a valuable companion for a number of reasons. Firstly, it focuses solely on the history of the Athenian navy and its influence on Athenian democracy, making it a perfect fit for the subject of this thesis. Secondly, the author draws in decades of experience in not only Greek archeology, but also on research on the technique of ancient Greek rowing. This lends the book a practical touch that is often missing in more orthodox academic works, and Hale goes to great lengths in his effort to portray the life and work of Athenian rowers of the fifth century as accurately as possible. Thirdly, having collaborated closely with the Zea Harbour Project that began in 2002, Hale has had more access to relatively new archeological information than most other writers on these subjects.

Besides its quality the book is also a prime example of exactly the embrace of an ideological link between Athenian thalassocracy and democracy that I intend to explore. The very first drafts of this thesis was essentially a review of the story Hale tells in *Lords of the Sea*, and while his storytelling is exquisite I take issue with some of its conclusions.

Finally, a fairly recent academic work that has been of great value is Samuel Potts' PHD thesis at the University of Cardiff, *The Athenian Navy: An investigation into the operations, politics and ideology of the Athenian fleet between 480 and 322 BC* from 2008. Potts explores many of the same questions as I have and makes use of more or less the same sources, although his time frame is much broader and his research obviously far more in-depth.

3.2. Methodology

As explained in the introduction, this paper makes fairly limited use of advanced research techniques. I very early on made the decision to base my work on a careful reading and assessment of the relevant sources, as well as a selected range of modern scholarship. There are two principal reasons behind this decision: firstly, I believe the subject of the thesis itself necessitates a predominantly qualitative approach. We are after all dealing with a historical field where exact, reliable numbers are near impossible to come by even through the application of modern archeological studies, and on the subject of political ideology numerical hard data can only be of so much use. That is not to say they would not be appreciated: extensive census data of fifth century Athens and undisputed population numbers in regards to social classes would have been useful, especially in chapter 5. But as netiher are available, I have chosen to solely focus on the primary literature and its modern interpretations, drawing on archeological data when available and relevant.

Because of the very limited use of research techniques, as seen above I have devoted more time and space to assess the six main primary sources. Apart from these six, the works of Aristophans and Plato also feature heavily, though these two writers are discussed in other chapters (6.3 and 6.4 to be exact).

Finally, to many modern eyes it is often hard to see terms such as 'democracy', 'oligarcy' etc. without making subtle, but no less real moral judgements on them based on our own time. I have done mye best to be aware of this instinct, and to ignore it as best I can in order to best relate to the experiences and points of view of the Athenians of the fifth century, be they fervent democrat or reactionary oligarch.

4. ATHENIAN GENERALSHIP IN THE FIFTH CENTURY

Ah! the Generals! they are numerous, but not good for much!
– Aristophanes

One of the recurring ironies in Athenian history is the polis' long tradition of producing, then devouring military leaders of exceptional talent. For various reasons hardly any Athenian commander of note was able to see out his career without at some point incurring the wrath of the Assembly, and in turn suffer heavy fines, disgrace, exile or even execution. As this chapter will often deal with the trials of various generals, let us start with a brief overview of the judicial workings of the Athenian state and its impact on the Athenian military leadership.

Before the reforms of Cleisthenes in 501, Athenian armies are believed to have been under the command of ten *strategoi* (generals) under the overall leadership of a polemarch. After the reforms in 501 and further adjustments in 487/6, the office of polemarch was phased out.[66] Instead, the *ekklesia* (citizen Assembly) convened on a hill called the Pnyx, where it was responsible for voting on state issues such as declarations of war, peace treaties and the election of ten generals annually. Originally the ten generals were all supposed to be drawn from each of the ten Attic tribes, but this practice seems to have been gradually phased out or ignored and had disappeared alltogether by the time the Aristotelian *Athenian Constitution* was written. In advance of each meeting the agenda was set by the *boule* (popular council) of 500 citizens drafted annually. In theory, the Assembly was open to all male Athenian citizens, and Ober estimates that the average attendance figures in the fifth century would have been somewhere along the lines of 6,000-8,000 out of the city's 30,000. In addition, a people's court known as the *dikasterion* settled private and public suits, where the accused faced a jury composed of between 200 and 500 citizens chosen by lots and paid for their jury service. [67]

This aspect of Classical Athens was criticized even in their own day, but what can it tell us

[66] Debra Hamel: Athenian Generals: Military Authority in the Classical Period. Leiden: Brill (1998), p. 79-82. Note that there is still some uncertainty on the exact dates of this transition, largely depending on whether one accepts Herodotus' version of the events at Marathon in 490 [Herod. 6.109-6.111.] See also Hans Van Wees. *Greek Warfare: Myths and realities*, London (2004) p. 96-99.
[67] Ober (1996) p. 23.

about the relationship between democratic ideology and the navy? After all, if the fleet was indeed an instigator and guarantor of democratic government, it would seem reasonable to assume the democratic Assembly would treat the leaders of said fleet with a certain degree of leniency. But as we shall see, that was far from the case.

4.1. The *Strategoi*

Before examining the careers of Athens' most prominent military leaders, it is necessary to elaborate on the peculiarities of traditional generalship in Athenian warfare. Their manner of appointment, limitations of authority and democratic accountability makes them a very different kind of commander to their contemporary peers in Ancient Greece.

By the time of the Peloponnesian War, the responsibilities of a general was a curiously convoluted one. While expected to lead the Athenian armed forces on campaigns, they themselves had no authority over when and where a campaign was to take place: this decision was left to the *demos* of the Assembly.[68] This resulted among other things in generals leading their fellow Athenians into wars they themselves had opposed, as was the case with Nicias' command in Sicily in 415. Others found ways to play the democratic process in order to get a specific command they personally wanted, such as Cleon's surprising appointment leading up to the Battle of Sphacteria in 425.[69] It is hardly surprising that of all the Athenian generals appointed during the Classical Period, none proved to be more skillful in leveraging his generalship for an unproportional amount of political power than Pericles. To use military assignments as a means to further a political career was far from uncommon: as noted by Hanson, most battle commanders during the Peloponnesian War were already experienced politicians.[70] In fact, roughly 15% of the Athenians known to have delivered speeches to the boule or the ekklesia were serving generals at the time.[71]

In contrast to later Hellenistic commanders like Alexander, Hannibal or Pyrrhus, the Greek strategoi of the fifth century were for the most part unassuming tacticians. Indeed, compared to contemporary Greek innovations in the fields of architercture, statecraft, cartography, astronomy, mathematics and numerous other disciplines, it is rather surprising just how little

[68] Hamel (1998), p. 5-6.
[69] Or not, depending on whether or not one believes Thucydides' version of events. More on this later.
[70] Hanson (2005), p. 141.
[71] Hamel (1998), p. 12.

progress was made in terms of land warfare in the Archaic and Classical ages. Instead, the compact singularity of the hoplite phalanx limited the tactical flexibility of Greek armies and ensured archaic and classical Greek warfare on land would remain relatively static for over three centuries. It is telling that Epaminondas' masterstroke at Leuctra, the victory which compelled Diodorus to hail his military qualities as *"far superior"* to any of his contemporaries,[72] consisted of a fairly simple oblique maneuver that his fellow Theban Pagondas had already employed at the battle of Delium half a century earlier.[73] Sparta, by far the most dreaded land army in Greece until their downfall at the hands of Thebes at Leuctra, rarely made use of any tactical ploys at all, routinely trusting in their fierce reputation, the superb discipline of their rank-and-file and their crack Spartiates to quickly blow apart the enemy left wing, then turn and roll up the rest of their line.[74]

Rather, Greek commanders were expected to enforce discipline and morale among their troops before battle, then maintain it through leading by example as the front lines collided. One of the consequences of this policy was an astonishing mortality rate among these generals: the battlefield commander of any defeated army inevitably perished with most of those stationed alongside him in the first rank, as did a surprising number of victorious generals.[75] As a result, few Greek generals were able to hold repeated commands before succumbing to death on the battlefield, or shortly afterwards as a result of injuries. This tradition is reflected in the writings of later military theorists like Xenophon and Onasander, who both urged aspiring generals to exercise caution and avoid hand-to-hand combat altogether.[76] With the rise of the Athenian navy, this would change. As there was no technical terms distinguishing between a general and an admiral, elected generals were expected to lead trireme fleets as well as land armies.

Like the hoplite clashes on land, early Greek sea battles were relatively straightforward affairs of boarding actions between fleets consisting mainly of penteconters. The penteconter

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[72] Diod. 15.88.
[73] Thuc. 4.93.4.
[74] Hanson (2005), p. 138. and 156. The deployment of elite troops on the right wing was almost ubiquitous in Greek armies, owing to the tendency of the individual hoplites to seek cover behind the shield of the man next to his speararm, causing the phalanx as a whole to drift to the right.
[75] Thuc. 5.16 and Plut. *Pelopidas* 32.7.
[9] Victor Davis Hanson: *The Western Way of War: Infantry Battle in Classical Greece*. London: University of California Press, (1994), p. 112-14. Brasidas at Amphipolis, Pelopidas at Cynoscephalae and Epaminondas at Mantinea springs to mind.

was essentially a combination of freighter carrier and warship that could be used for sea trade and troop transport as well as warfare.[77] Then, in the mid-500's, two fleets of triremes defeated penteconter fleets twice their own size at Alalia and Samos through the use of ramming maneuvers. As the rest of the Mediterranean powers adapted the trireme, a new phase of naval warfare began that allowed far greater tactical flexibility and innovation than was to be found on land. Unlike the pentekontors and their Persian and Phoenician counterparts, the Athenian trireme was a ship that sacrificed carrying capacity for maximum speed and maneuverability, and besides encouraging tactical innovation among the generals, this would have another important side effect:[78] for various reasons, the commander of a trireme fleet was far more likely to survive a battle than a hoplite general, even if he should find himself on the losing side.[79]

4.2. Generals of the fifth century

As noted in the beginning of this chapter, Athens had a knack for fostering talented commanders then destroying them, and the first example of this dubious tradition was an aristocrat of the Phileid clan called Miltiades. Herodotus credits Miltiades with both persuading the Athenians to engage the Persian army at Marathon in 490, as well as devising the tactics that ensured Greek victory.[80] One year and a botched invasion of Paros later, Miltiades was put on trial, charged with defrauding the Athenian people by waging war on the Parians for personal reasons (Herodotus attributes this to an old grudge held against one Parian in particular, by the name of Lysagoras). Miltiades was found guilty, and only his status as the hero of Marathon saved him from execution. He was instead fined 50 talents, but died of an infected wound before the fine could be paid.[81]

A similar fate befell the architect of the Athenian fleet itself, Themistocles. In 472 or 471, less than a decade after his triumph at Salamis, Themistocles was ostracized by his fellow citizens. Intending at first to spend his exile in Argos, he would eventually relocate to Persia

[77] Vincent Gabrielsen: *Financing the Athenian Fleet: Public Taxation and Social Relations*. Baltimore: The Johns Hopkins University Press, (1994), 2010. P. 25.
[78] Hale (2009), p. 17-20.
[79] Eksempler og begrunnelser. Brasidas og hele karrieren til Conon.
[80] Herod. 6.109 – 6.118. As previously mentioned, Greek tactics of the time were rather rudimentary. At Marathon it seems to have consisted of closing the distance to the enemy lines before the Persians were fully embarked then charging into their center as soon as they were within range of the Persian bows.
[81] Herod. 6.136.

and see out his life as an advisor and later satrap to the Achaemenid king.[82] Themistocles is widely credited with persuading the Athenians to channel their newly acquired wealth from the silver mines at Laurion into a supreme armada of triremes, as well as the strategy that brought about the downfall of the Persian fleet at Salamis. He was also, if Herodotus is to be believed, a devious opportunist who fully appreciated the political and military leverage a fleet of this magnitude provided: less than a year after ostensibly defending Greek freedom from Persian tyranny at Salamis, Themistocles was using the threat of Athenian triremes to blackmail and extort Greek cities all over the Aegean. Meanwhile, he dispatched messengers to Xerxes claiming Themistocles had personally persuaded the Athenians not to set off in pursuit of the Persian king, allowing him a safe retreat back across the Hellespont. It seems like the *"subtle serpent of Greece"*, as Plutarch would later dub him[83], was already hedging his bets in preparation for a possible fall from grace in his own city.[84]

It is important to note that in leeching hapless islanders for money behind the backs of the rest of the navy, Themistocles was acting entirely on his own agency in the same manner as Miltiades was believed to have done. This would not be the last time an accomplished commander was accused of using his standing in the military to pursue personal goals, and may go some way in explaining the disdain later writers would show for the navy. In addition, the rhetoric employed by Themistocles in his shakedown of Andros provides an example of a nascent Athenian chauvinism that would only grow stronger as their grip on the Aegean tightened: *"We Athenians have come accompanied by two mighty gods: Persuasion and Compulsion. That being so, you had better produce your cash"*.[85]

The aforementioned debt left by Miltiades would be paid by his son, Cimon, who embarked on a military career to rival and perhaps even eclipse that of his father. Having already served as a marine at Salamis, the highlight of this career came in 466 when he led the Delian fleet to a tremendous victory against Persia at the Eurymedon River, which effectively ended Achaemenid ambitions in Thrace and the Aegean and consolidated Athenian supremacy in

[82] Diod. 11. 55 – 11. 58.
[83] Plut. Them. 29.
[84] Herod. 8.110.
[85] Herod. 8.111.

the Eastern Mediterranean.[86] The trajectory of Cimon's career would mirror that of his father in another important respect: five years after the triumph at Eurymedon, Cimon was ostracized as a result of his perceived pro-Spartan and anti-democratic convictions. On his return in 451 Cimon was allowed to resume command of the allied fleet, but his second stint in command was cut short when he fell ill and died during the siege of Citium, Cyprus the following year.[87]

Cimon's career coincided with a power shift that would profoundly change the Athenian state. As the son of Miltiades and a Thracian princess and heir to the Philaid clan, Cimon's pedigree could hardly have been more aristocratic. Combined with his earlier stint as a hoplite and his professed admiration for oligarchic Sparta (going so far as naming one of his own sons Lacedaemonius)[88], Cimon makes for an unconventional admiral of a supposedly democratically inclined navy. Nevertheless, he seems to have enjoyed support both in the navy and the ekklesia: after another successful campaign in Thrace he was accused by Pericles of having accepted bribes from the Macedonian king, only to be duly acquitted in the Assembly.[89] But then, after his attempt to aid the Spartan crackdown on a helot revolt in 462 was humiliatingly snubbed, his support in Athens collapsed and the democratic faction at last succeeded in having him ostracized.[90] Meanwhile the reforms of Ephialtes were enacted and most of the city's political power was transferred from the aristocratic Areopagus Council to the boule and the dikasterion, or as Plutarch notes disapprovingly: *"They made themselves masters of the courts of justice and plunged the city into unmitigated democracy"*.[91]

Cimon's ideological leanings and Laconic sympathies may have earned him the enmity of Pericles' democratic faction, but his skills as a general seems to have outweighed them as far as the city's willingness to welcome him back was concerned. His return from exile came shortly after a double setback in Egypt where Persian forces had routed both an Athenian garrison on the island of Prosopitis and the trireme fleet sent to relieve them, and neither

[86] Plut., *Cimon* 5 and Hale (2009), p. 92-94. One of the consequences of this victory was the erection of a temple in the Piraeus to mark the induction of a new divine hero in the Athenian pantheon, evocatively named Eurymedon.
[87] Hale (2009), p. 93-108.
[88] Thuc. 1.45.
[89] Plut. *Cimon* 14.
[90] Hale (2009), p. 98.
[91] Plut. *Cimon* 15.

Pericles nor the other generals broached any objections as Cimon immediately took command of 200 triremes and set sail for Cyprus.[92] Hale's take on this is that while Pericles' radical politics may clashed with Cimon's conservatism, ideological differences could be set aside when the need arose:

> The decree which provided for his return was formally proposed by Pericles. To such a degree in those days were dissensions based on political differences of opinion, while personal feelings were moderate, and easily recalled into conformity with the public weal. Even ambition, that master passion, paid deference to the country's welfare.[93]

With the death of Cimon and the subsequent Peace of Callias, the Persian Wars were over. No Greek commanders had inflicted greater losses on the Achaemenids than Miltiades, Themistocles and Cimon, nor would any until Alexander brought down the empire itself in 330. All three had risen to prominence through military triumphs, then brought low by accusations of leveraging said triumphs for personal political and/or economical gains. And so it was hardly surprising that the next rising star of Athenian leadership made sure to be in excellent tune with the various fluctuations of the city-state's political scene.

For whereas Cimon's pro-Spartan profile and his staunch support of the Areopagus council during the revolution of Ephialtes lost him the favor of the Assembly, Pericles sided firmly with the democratic reformers and subsequently reaped the benefits (and in stark contrast to Cimon naming his son Lacedaemonius, Pericles named his firstborn Paralos after the sacred trireme of the navy).[94] Unlike Miltiades, Themistocles and Cimon, Pericles' military record was solid but hardly outstanding: he had commanded a fleet of fifty triremes during the Wars of the Delian League, then willingly ceded command of the navy to Cimon when the latter returned from exile, then resuming overall command after his death. The single military campaign waged during the so-called Athenian Golden Age, the Samian War, was essentially a crackdown on an unruly member of the Delian League (at this point an Athenian empire in everything but name). The city of Samos was taken, its oligarchic regime ousted, and a Phoenician fleet dispatched by the Persians to aid them was soundly defeated.[95]

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[92] Hale (2009), p. 98.
[93] Hale (2009), p. 108.
[94] Plut. Per. 24.5.
[95] Hale (2009), p. 130-132 and Plut. *Cimon* 17.6.

At the outbreak of the Peloponnesian War, it fell to Pericles to organize the defense of Athens against an encroaching Spartan army. It should be noted that Pericles' position as leader of Athens was never a formal capacity: his highest official rank was always that of general, a position he was reelected to for an astounding 29 years. Pericles' real power came from his oratory skills in the Assembly, his position as leader of the democratic faction of Athens and his considerable sway over contemporary Athenian culture.[96] This led Thucydides to acknowledge that *"In short, what was nominally a democracy became in his hands government by the first citizen."*[97] Plutarch is no less clear in his account of how Pericles secured his suppport among the people, stating his policy was one of *"amusing them like children with not uncouth delights"*.[98]

As the Peloponnesian War began in earnest and the 60,000 strong army led by King Archidamus descended on Attica, Pericles wisely decided against marching Athens' 13,000 hoplites out of the city to face almost certain annihilation. He decided instead on a sort of strategic rope-a-dope: Pericles had the Attic countryside evacuated and sheltered in Athens, leaving the Lacedaemonians free to roam Attica but unable to strike at Athens itself. The Spartan inability to conduct siege warfare is attested in numerous ancient sources, and while they were now free to ravage the surrounding farmlands they proved unable to force a direct engagement with the Athenian army.[99] In Thucydides' words:

> He told them to wait quietly, to pay attention to their marine, to attempt no new conquests, and to expose the city to no hazards during the war, and doing this, promised them a favorable result.[100]

This was, ironically, the exact scenario Archidamus himself had warned his fellow Lacedaemonians about at the eve of the conflict, and which led him to oppose the Spartan vote for war.[101] Meanwhile Pericles sent the Athenian navy to plunder and harass the

[96] See chapter 6.2.
[97] Thuc. 2.65.9.
[98] Plut. Per. 11.4
[99] Scott M. Rusch: *Sparta at War: Strategy, Tactics, and Campaigns, 550-362 BC*:.London: Frontline Books (2014). P. 81-84. It is particularly indicative of this inadequacy that even at the head of 60,000 troops, the largest army fielded in Greek history up to that point, Archidamus was unable to take the walled countryside town of Oenoe in the first year of the Peloponnesian War.
[100] Thuc. 2.65.7.
[101] Kagan, D. (1974) p. 48-49.

Peloponnese, gambling that a drawn-out war of attrition would ultimately force the Spartans to relent and sue for peace.[102] It is here we see most clearly just how much leeway Pericles was able to wring out of his generalship, and what made Thucydides observe that he was at this point effectively the ruler of Athens. Sensing early on that his defensive strategy was deeply unpopular among the citizenry,[103] Pericles knew all too well that a vote in the Assembly could force his hand into a more offensive direction that in the worst case would end up giving the Peloponnesians exactly the kind of pitched battle they were looking for. And so, rather than taking the risk of having the Assembly vote contrary to his strategy, Pericles simply made sure they were not given the opportunity. Exactly how he made this happen is unclear. Plutarch simply states that:

> [Pericles] would not call the people together into an assembly, fearing that he would be constrained against his better judgement, but, like the helmsman of a ship, who, when a stormy wind swoops down upon it in the open sea, makes all fast, takes in sail, and exercises his skill, disregarding the tears and entreaties of the sea-sick and timorous passengers, so he shut the city up tight, put all parts of it under safe garrison, and exercised his own judgement, little heeding the brawlers and malcontents.[104]

There is no indication in the ancient sources that an Athenian general had the power to summon the Assembly on their own or prohibit one from taking place, that was the function of the boule and their executive *prytaneis*. There has been some debate on exactly what transpired in Athens during the summer of 431, and this discussion is well covered by Hamel.[105] This paper takes the view that it would be entirely in character for Pericles to have pulled the strings necessary to effectively force a moratorium on an inopportune ekklesia. Not only would he have judged –probably correctly– that a 180 degree turn on strategy with 60,000 Peloponnesians camped outside the city walls would have been a disaster, but he was also awaiting the results of the raiding parties he had dispatched to Megara, no doubt expecting them to boost public opinion of his leadership. Thucydides is uncharacteristically silent on the issue, noting only that the next ekklesia was summoned after the Peloponnesian

[102] Victor Davis Hanson: *A War Like No Other*. New York: Random House (2005). p. 45-48.
[103] See p. in the chapter The Spear and the Oar.
[104] Plut. Per. 33.5.
[105] Hamel (1998), p. 9-12. It should be noted that Hamel takes the opposite view, proposing that no appeals for a Assembly meeting where made from any faction and that the prytaneis may have decided for themselves to wait out the first Peloponnesian invasion before enabling an ekklesia that could result in a change of strategy.

army had left Attica.[106]

The so-called Periclean strategy has been the source of much debate: Thucydides is mostly sympathetic to Pericles, arguing that the fault for Athens' defeat lay with the mistakes of his lesser successors: *"More on a level with one another, and each grasping at supremacy, they ended by committing even the conduct of state affairs to the whims of the multitude."*[107] Delbrück was whole-heartedly supportive of the Periclean strategy, likening its approach to that of Frederick the Great in the Seven Years' War and arguing that a strategy of exhaustion was the only viable choice for Athens at the time.[108] Kagan disagrees, arguing that Pericles underestimated Spartan resolve and stubbornness, was rather ineffective in his use of the fleet as a means to counterattack the Peloponnese and that Athens held out as long as it did because it abandoned the strategy shortly after his death.[109] Ultimately, it is hard to pass a definite judgement. Athens was turned on its head by the plague early on in the war, and Pericles himself perished in the second year of the conflict. There simply is no telling what measures he may have taken to modify his strategy had he lived, or if he might have adopted an entirely new one in the face of the stalemate of the Archidamian War.

In any case, when the Periclean strategy did backfire in the second year of the war, it did so in a far more lethal way than any Spartan phalanx as plague broke out among the city's by now extremely crowded population. Among the thousands who perished in the Great Plague was an estimated one third of the Athenian hoplite class, and corresponding numbers among other segments of the population are probable.[110] Pericles' long-standing popularity as benefactor to both the Assembly and the navy did little to shield him from the backlash that followed, as besides a substantial fine Pericles was also stripped of the generalship to which he had until then been habitually re-elected. After less than a year, public opinion had turned once again, and Pericles was reinstated as overall commander of Athens. By then the death of much of his immediate family and his own declining health had taken its toll on the ageing statesman, and he finally died of the Great Plague in 429. [111]

[106] Thuc. 2.24.1.
[107] Thuc. 2.65.10.
[108] Kagan (1974), p. 33-34.
[109] Kagan (1974), p. 359-60.
[110] Hale (2009), p. 152-153.
[111] Kagan (1974), p. 118.

Pericles was not the only notable Athenian to be scapegoated during the plague, then recalled shortly afterwards. Phormio's career as general had begun during the Samian War in 440, and he later served with distinction at the siege of Potidaea and two campaigns in the Chalcidice.[112] While successful in taking Potidaea, Phormio was later censured by the Athenian scrutiny board for the supposedly exuberant financial costs of the campaign and fined 100 silver minai. Unable to pay the fine, Phormio had left Athens and relocated to his family's ancestral home in Mesogaia. He was recalled to Athens in 429, and his debt cleared through a shrewd ruse by the Assembly.[113] Phormio, by now in his late fifties, went on to lead a heavily diminished Athenian fleet (a mere 20 triremes, compared to the 180 deployed at the outbreak of the war) to two decisive victories at Rhium and Naupactus against Peloponnesian fleets twice and thrice as large as his own. These victories, achieved through brilliant tactics and at a point when the Athenian fleet was at its weakest since its original inception by Themistocles, effectively ended Sparta's attempts to challenge the naval power of Athens until the second half of the Peloponnesian War.[114]

As a side note, Phormio's tenure as general may go some way in explaining how Socrates' assessment of democracy came to be somewhat pessimistic. He had served under Phormio at Potidaea and would later see firsthand how Athens' most able general fell victim to scapegoating and lost his favour with the public, only for the demos to change their mind and desperately recall him when the war turned against Athens.[115]

As previously mentioned, a recurring theme in Thucydides' narrative is the steady decline of Athenian leadership following the death of Pericles. Nowhere in his account is this more evident than the visceral assessment he provides of Cleon.[116] First emerging as a vocal opponent of the Periclean strategy in 430, Cleon would spend the early stages of the war agitating against first Pericles and then Nicias, all the while positioning himself as a champion of the Athenian people (the most infamous example of Cleon's demagoguery came in the notorious Mytilene debacle of 427, where he advocated the slaughter of the entire

[112] Thuc. 1.117, 1.65 and 2.29.
[113] Paus. 1.23.10 and Hale, p. 154-156. The Assembly appointed him to decorate the sanctuary of Dionysos, granting him a fund of 100 silver minai which he promptly used to clear his debt with the scrutiny board instead.
[114] Hale (2009), 169-170.
[115] Hale (2009), p. 154-156.
[116] Hanson (2005), 116.

island's population).[117] In 425 he attained a generalship from Nicias, and together with the experienced general Demosthenes he immediately shocked the Greek world by defeating and capturing a stranded detachment of Spartans at the battle of Sphacteria.[118] This unprecedented success against the feared Lacedaemonian infantry established him as the new first man of Athens, and when Athenian colonies in Thrace came under threat from a Spartan army in 423 it was Cleon who was sent to deal with them. An initial Athenian relief force under the command of Thucydides had failed to stop the Spartans from occupying Amphipolis, and Cleon now aimed to repeat his earlier triumph at Sphacteria. In the ensuing battle, both Cleon and the Spartan general Brasidas were killed as the Lacedaemonians handily defeated the Athenians.[119] With the deaths of their two most bellicose commanders, Athens and Sparta would eventually broker a peace treaty known as the Peace of Nicias and bring the first half of the Peloponnesian War to an end.

The treatment of Cleon in contemporary sources deserves further scrutiny. Cleon may very well have played a part in Thucydides' exile following his failure at Amphipolis, and the usually sober and even-handed historian describes him in overwhelmingly negative terms.[120] Cleon is named *"the most violent man of Athens"*[121] and later contrasted unfavorably with Brasidas:

> Now, however, after the Athenian defeat at Amphipolis, and the death of Cleon and Brasidas, who had been the two principal opponents of peace on either side—the latter from the success and honor which war gave him, the former because he thought that, if tranquility were restored, his crimes would be more open to detection and his slanders less credited.[122]

This comparison might have its merits, but it would be naïve to ignore the notion that Thucydides may not have been entirely without personal motives for emphasizing the qualities of the general who had defeated him at Amphipolis, while simultaneously discrediting a domestic rival he clearly had plenty of personal animus towards. Even more telling is Thucydides' description of Cleon's appointment as general in 425. Here, a brash

[117] Thuc. 3.36.
[118] Thuc. 4.40.
[119] Hale (2009), 183-184.
[120] Hanson (2005), 116.
[121] Thuc. 3.36.6.
[122] Thuc. 5.16.1.

and arrogant Cleon harangues the sober and judicious Nicias for not attacking the Spartans on Pylos, to which Nicias responds by offering to transfer his generalship to a perplexed Cleon:

> Cleon fancied that this resignation was merely a figure of speech, and was ready to go, but finding that it was seriously meant, he drew back, and said that Nicias, not he, was general, being now frightened, and having never supposed that Nicias would go so far as to retire in his favor.[123]

As A.G. Woodhead notes, it is never explained how Thucydides can claim to know Cleon's mind on this matter.[124] Nor is the absence of any kind of critique towards Nicias for handing over an important command to a man he clearly considers to be incompetent, or the cavalier attitude of the Assembly:

> And as the multitude is wont to do, the more Cleon shrank from the expedition and tried to back out of what he had said, the more they encouraged Nicias to hand over his command, and clamored at Cleon to go… The Athenians could not help laughing at his fatuity, while sensible men comforted themselves with the reflection that they must gain in either circumstance; either they would be rid of Cleon, which they rather hoped, or if disappointed in this expectation, would reduce the Lacedaemonians.[125]

Again, Thucydides here presents his own speculation about Cleon's ulterior motives as facts, and his Pylos campaign is reduced to the reluctant and embarrassing fulfilment of a responsibility he had no intention of taking on in the first place. It is hard to disagree with Woodhead's conclusion that *"Cleon in Thucydides thinks what Thucydides wants him to think"*.[126] Furthermore, it is frankly absurd to contemplate that an Athens recovering from years of devastating plague would risk thousands of soldiers – not to mention the strategic and political repercussions of a Spartan victory so close to Attica – simply to humble a single individual, no matter how unpopular. A more likely explanation is that Thucydides, despite his honest intentions to chronicle the war impartially, already had a substantial axe to grind and simply could not accept that a radical rabble-rouser like Cleon had succeeded in what venerable statesmen like Pericles and Nicias had not even attempted: engaging and defeating

[123] Thuc. 4.28.2.
[124] A. G Woodhead: *Thucydides' Portrait of Cleon.* (1960), p. 308.
[125] Thuc. 4.28.3 and 4.28.5.
[126] Woodhead (1960), 313.

the feared Spartans.[127]

This was certainly true of Cleon's other contemporary detractor: Aristophanes had made himself a sworn enemy of Cleon two years earlier by mocking him in his play *Babylonians*, to which Cleon retaliated by having him accused of slander and fined by the Assembly. A few months after Cleon's moment of glory at Pylos, Aristophanes struck again through a new production called *Knights*.[128] The play entered and won first prize at the prestigious Lenaea festival and is crammed with personal insults and direct accusations against Cleon, referring to him among other things as *"a Paphlagonian tanner, an arrant rogue, the incarnation of calumny."*[129]

Perhaps the most acrimonious of them all is the claim that credit for the victory at Sphacteria belonged not to Cleon, but rather to Nicias and Cleon's co-commander Demosthenes:

> Then the Paphlagonian filches from one of us what we have prepared and makes a present of it to our old man. The other day I had just kneaded a Spartan cake at Pylos, the cunning rogue came behind my back, sneaked it and offered the cake, which was my invention, in his own name. He keeps us at a distance and suffers none but himself to wait upon the master.[130]

The context here is that Nicias, Demosthenes and Cleon are presented as slaves of a master by the name of Demos of the Pnyx, ie. the Athenian people themselves, described as *"very brutal"*, *"a perfect glutton for beans, and most bad-tempered"* and "*an intolerable old man and half deaf*".[131] Aristophanes would produce a third play deeply insulting to Cleon two years later called *The Wasps*, but by then the general had greater concerns in the form of Brasidas and the Spartan occupation of Amphipolis. The Peace of Nicias that followed the deaths of Cleon and Brasidas would prove to be little more than a ceasefire, but one that allowed both sides to lick their wounds and reassess their respective strategies so far.

[127] Hanson (2005), 116.
[128] Alternatively translated as *Horsemen* or *Hippeis*.
[129] Hale (2009), p. 180-81. and Aristoph. Kn. 40.
[130] Aristoph. Kn. 40.
[131] Aristoph. Kn. 40.

4.3. The Lion Cub

Cleon may have been a polarizing character, but he was nothing compared to his successor as Athens' chief warmonger. Born into the powerful Alcmaeonid family, Alcibiades would be assigned to Pericles himself as a ward following his own father's death at the battle of Coronea in 447. He would go on to attain a Byronian celebrity status among his fellow citizen: as proud sponsor of Olympic chariot racing champions, incorrigible student and rumored lover of Socrates and perpetrator of numerous sex scandals, Alcibiades could hardly have cut a more controversial figure.[132] More importantly, he also had personal battlefield experience from Delium and Potidaea and had served a stint as trierarch. Now in his mid-thirties, he clearly felt ready for bigger things and the arrival of emissaries from the Sicilian town of Segesta asking for military assistance against their local rivals, Syracuse, presented him with the perfect opportunity. As he had done when Cleon urged his assault on Pylos, Nicias tried in vain to argue against the expedition and was again defeated in the Assembly, and so a massive invasion force of 40,000 men and 134 ships was assembled. Along with Alcibiades, the reluctant Nicias and a veteran general by the name of Lamachus would command the expedition.[133]

For Alcibiades, leading this army to glory on an exciting new western front must have seemed like the perfect next step in what was promising to be a glorious career. For Athens as a whole, it is hard to think of a worse strategic decision. Despite their Doric origins, Syracuse was not an oligarchy, nor had they shown any interest in aiding the Spartan-led coalition. The sheer distance between Athens and Sicily and the size of the army made communications and logistics a veritable nightmare. And finally, Syracuse was probably the biggest Greek-speaking city in the world at the time, protected by strong fortifications and soon to be bolstered by reinforcements sent by their newly aquired allies in Lacedaemonia and Corinth.[134] Somehow, Alcibiades had convinced his fellow Athenians to divert their attention from nearby and still hostile Sparta and Thebes, and instead commit a vast amount of resources and manpower to attack a democratic neutral eight hundred miles away while driving said neutral into the arms of the Peloponnesian League.[135] Not for nothing had the

[132] Hale (2009), p. 185-86, Plut. Alc. 6.1 and Plat. Sym. 215a-218b.
[133] Thuc. 6.43.1.
[134] Hanson (2005), p. 204-5.
[135] The objection can be made that Athens and Sparta were not hostile at this point, seeing as the Peace of Nicias was officially still in effect. In practice this was little more than a technicality: while the two city-states avoided direct confrontation they continued to engage in what was essentially a proxy war as Sparta sent Gylippus to

notorius misanthrope Timon at one point stopped Alcibiades on his way home from the Assembly to shake his hand, offering some choice words of gratitude and encouragement: *"It's well you're growing so, my child; you'll grow big enough to ruin all this rabble."*[136]

Ultimately, the expedition proved an abject disaster: after their infantry was thrown back from the Epipolae and their ships sunk or captured in the cramped harbour, the defeated and utterly demoralized Athenians tried to retreat inland, their numbers gradually whittled down by Syracusan cavalry and light troops. The final destruction of the army arrived at the Assinarus river, where most were killed and the rest taken capture and later sold into slavery. Nicias and his co-commander Demosthenes were executed.[137] Thucydides provides the following verdict on the scope of the calamity that had transpired in Sicily: *"This was the greatest Hellenic achievement of any in this war, or, in my opinion, in Hellenic history; at once most glorious to the victors, and most calamitous to the conquered."*[138]

Only Alcibiades, the main instigator of the entire expedition, escaped unscathed. As was his way, his name had been caught up in a lurid scandal concerning the desecration of phallic statues dedicated to Hermes before departing for Sicily, and he left the city with an offcial expedition pending. While preparing for the siege from their base near Catana, Alcibiades was recalled to Athens to face questioning for both the desecration of the statues as well as a multitude of other incidents from his scandalous past. Well aware of the fickle nature of his fellow Athenians and presumably deeply irritated by this turn of events, he duly absconded to Sparta to offer his services there.[139]

In Sparta, Alcibiades' brilliant if mercurial talents were put to good use. On his advice, the normally reactive Spartans dispatched one of their generals, a most competent man by the name of Gylippus, to Sicily to lend his considerable tactical prowess to the Syracusans. Gylippus was to play a key part in the successful defence of the city as well as the later

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Syracuse to aid in their defence against the Athenians, and Athens dispatched 1,000 hoplites to fight Sparta at Mantinea in 418.

[136] Plut. Alc. 16.6.

[137] Kagan (1981), p. 340-45. The fate of these men, some 7,000 in total, are among the grimmest of any found during the Peloponnesian War. They were sent into the stone quarries of Syracuse to toil their life away in inhuman conditions, where none survived for more than eight months.

[138] Thuc. 7.87.5.

[139] Hale (2009), p. 188 and 191-92. Unsurprisingly, the Assembly condemned him to death *in absentia* when news of this reached Athens.

annihilation of the Athenian army.[140] Alcibiades also persuaded the Spartans to establish a permanent fort at Decelea in 413 that would cause the Athenians no end of troubles for the reminder of the war.[141] His stay in Lacedaemonia was predictably cut short for personal reasons: within three years he was suspected of seducing and impregnating the wife of King Agis II, and realising he had overstayed his welcome Alcibiades followed in the footsteps of Themistocles by fleeing East to take up service with Tissaphernes, the Persian satrap of Lydia and Ionia.[142] His stay in Persia was similarly successful, though if Thucydides is to be believed he had been positioning himself for a return to Athens for quite some time, and within a year he was one the move again.[143]

Athens was still reeling after the Sicilian disaster, but by tooth and nail they were still in the war despite their losses in the west and the Peloponnesians receiving increasing backing from Persia. It was the grit and determination shown by the Athens after the defeat in Syracuse that caused Thucydides to remark that democracies, for all their faults, were at their best when the circumstances were at their worst.[144] Perhaps this is also what convinced Alcibiades to gamble on a return to Athens, the calculation that the dogged resiliance of his countrymen combined with their still deadly triremes just might enable him to turn the war? He certainly stood a better chance of reconciliating with the Athenians than with the Spartans after his alleged affair with the wife of Agis II. In any case, he seems to have been determined to return to Greece: as Kagan points out, Tissaphernes probably regarded him as no more than useful tool to be put into use then discarded when his usefulness came to an end, a fact Alcibiades no doubt was fully aware of.[145]

What happened next was a pivotal moment in the history of the Peloponnesian war and Athenian democracy as a whole. Thucydides reports that Alcibiades contacted the Athenian fleet docked at Samos, informing their leaders that if the democratic system of governance in Athens was to be replaced with an oligarchic one, then he would be open to a return. As they were informed that this would entail not just his own competence as a general but also the

[140] Thuc. 6.89-90.
[141] Thuc. 7.18.
[142] Hale (2009), p. 207 and Kagan (1987), p.42. The child born to Agis II and Timaea, Leotychides, was later denied succession to the throne on the grounds of these suspicions.
[143] Thuc. 8.47. For a more detailed account of Alcibiaddes' stay in Persia, see Kagan (1987), p. 72-82.
[144] Thuc. 8.1.4.
[145] Kagan (1987), p. 112-13.

considerable backing of Tissaphernes, the naval leadership at Samos readily agreed and set about orchestrating the event that would come to be known as the Revolution of the Four Hundred in 411.[146] The democratic system in Athens was overthrown and for a time replaced by an oligarchy, while a similar attempt at a coup at Samos was thwarted by some of the leaders of the fleet, who countered the coup by establishing a democracy on their own in the naval base.[147] The rule of the so-called Four Hundred in Athens was to be a short-lived one, as they were themselves overthrown and replaced by a more moderate entity known as the The Five Thousand. This form of government was abolished within ten months, replaced by the same untrimmed democracy the Four Hundred had set out to stamp out.[148]

The exact role of Alcibiades in these events is still a matter of debate. It is certainly true that he was no democrat, once describing that form of government as a "patent absurdity", and it is more than likely that he still distrusted the whims of Athenian democracy and would have liked to see its overthrow.[149] The question is how much influence he really had in the coup of 411. Kagan makes an important point when he notes that in this instance, Thucydides is demonstrably wrong on important matters such as the political allegiance of Thrasybulus.[150] In any case the negotiations between Alcibiades and the conspirators eventually broke down, and the Four Hundred themselves wasted little time in judging him unfit for office when they came into power. Instead, through the machinations of Thrasybulus it was the the rebellious fleet at Samos that eventually recalled Alcibiades and reinstated him as general.

While this was probably not the return Alcibiades himself had hoped for, it did provide him with the military comeback he had sought as well as abolishing his pending death sentence.[151] Events seemed to be heading for a clash between the Four Hundred in control of Athens and the rebel fleet now commanded by Alcibiades, but as it turned out the Four Hundred were more than capable of undoing themselves: with most of the fleet in open rebellion at Samos, Athens' lacked their most experienced crews and captains, and so when a Peloponnesian fleet

[146] Thuc. 8.47.2.
[147] Hale (2009), p. 208.
[148] For a full account of these events, see chapters 5-8. Of Kagan (1987), p. 106-211.
[149] Thuc. 6.89.6.
[150] Kagan (1987), p. 115. In an uncharacteristic case of self-contradiction, Thucydides describes him as a devout and stedafast democrat while grouping him in the same cabal of conspirators who were "eager to destroy democracy" [Thuc. 8.76.2.].
[151] Kagan (1987), p.206.

appeared off Euboea the oligarchs hastily organized a fleet of their own to meet them. The result was a comfortable victory for the Peloponnesians and the erosion of whatever public support was left for the Four Hundred.[152] The failure of Sparta to take advantage of the vulnerable state of the Piraeus and immediately attack deprived them of a golden opportunity to end the war there and then, and led to a characteristically Thucydidean reflection on just how unsuited the Spartan character proved to be in making war on the Athenians:

> But here, as on so many other occasions the Lacedaemonians proved the most convenient people in the world for the Athenians to be at war with. The wide difference between the two characters, the slowness and want of energy of the Lacedaemonians as contrasted with the dash and enterprise of their opponents, proved of the greatest service, especially to a maritime empire like Athens. Indeed this was shown by the Syracusans, who were most like the Athenians in character, and also most successful in combating them.[153]

Alcibiades may have been back in the fold, but he no doubt recognised that his newly found forgiveness hinged entirely on the change of fortunes he was expected to inspire. The card he had played to its greatest effect in his speech to the fleet at Samos had been his close relationship with Tissaphernes and therefore the possibility of bringing Persia over to the side of Athens, had probably been little more than an empty boast.[154] And so rather than returning to Athens he turned his attention to the emboldened Peloponnesian fleets now roaming the Hellespont where they sought to cut off Athens' corn supply from the Black Sea. Here he duly went to work in an inspired manner: in a mere two years he defeated the Spartan-Persian alliance three separate encounters at Cynossema, Abydos and Cyzicus, capturing or sinking between 130 and 160 enemy triremes.[155] These three defeat shook Sparta to the core, causing them to send ambassodors to Athens in the hope of securing a truce of possibly even a lasting peace.[156] The resurgent Athenians were having none of it, dismissing the peace envoys. Why Athens did not press their advantage at this point remains one of the most enduring

[152] Hale (2009), p. 209.
[153] Thuc. 8.96.5.
[154] Thuc. 8.88.1.
[155] Hanson (2005) p. 277 and Hale (2009), p. 210-217. It was after the devastating defeat at Cyzicus, where the general Mindarus was killed and Sparta lost an entire fleet of as many as 80 triremes, that a report by the vice-admiral Hippocrates was sent back to Sparta perfectly demonstrating the laconic style the Peloponnesians were so famous for: "*The ships are gone. Mindarus is dead. The men are starving. We know not what to do."* [Xen. Hell. 1.1.23]
[156] Hanson (2005), p. 277.

conundrums of the war: it was as if Athens were unsure of how to utilize their momentum, and so rather than tracking down and destroying the Peloponnesian fleet they sat back and allowed it to rebuild.

Three years after Cyzicus Alcibiades finally dared return to Athens in the spring of 407, receiving a hero's welcome at the harbour of the Piraeus. Having almost single-handedly turned the war in Athens' favour he was appointed *strategos autokrator*, supreme commander of the Athenian armed forces, and charged with leading the sacred procession to Eleusis for the Eleusian Mysteries.[157] The summer of 407 had finally delivered the glory and acclaim Alcibiades had been chasing for most of his adult life, and he had every intention of continuing to do so. The following year, seeking to engage a new Spartan general by the name of Lysander, Alcibiades led a fleet of 100 ships out of the Piraeus and into the Aegean. He would never return.

While assisting an Athenian siege at Phocaea, Alcibiades had left his fleet under the command of an inexperienced minor officer by the name of Antiochus with the singular order not to engage Lysander's fleet until Alcibiades had returned. The order was disobeyed, and Antiochus was killed in a failed attempt at baiting the Peloponnesian fleet before Lysander counterattacked and defeated the startled Athenian fleet in the Battle of Notium.[158] Antiochus may have made the decision to attack, but the decision to entrust him with the fleet had been made by Alcibiades and so repsonsibility for the defeat fell squarely on him. In material terms, the defeat at Notium was a bitter setback but hardly a catastrophe: 22 triremes were lost, and while a significant number it paled in comparison to the damage Alcibiades had inflicted on the Peloponnesian fleet in the previous years.[159] Moreover, Alcibiades still had 108 triremes at his disposal, and every reason to believe he could draw out and defeat Lysander in a battle of his choosing. But unlike his predecessor Minander at Cyzicus, the Spartan general refused to take the bait, content to wait his opponent out from the safe confines of the Ephesus harbour.[160]

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[157] Plut. Alc. 32-33.
[158] Kagan (1987), p. 316-317. As far as we can tell, Antiochus was trying to emulate Alcibiades' triumph at Cyzicus by mimicking his tactics. Unfortunately for him, there was no element of surprise at Notium, and he was up against a very different caliber of opponent in Lysander than the one Alcibiades had faced in Mindarus.
[159] For a full account of the numbers at Cynossema, Abydos and Cyzicus, see Thuc. 8.106, Diod. 13.46.5/Xen. Hell. 1.1.5-5. and Xen. Hell. 1.1.18. respectively.
[160] Kagan (1987), p. 319.

In a decision probably borne out of frustration and the desire to strike back as soon as possible, Alcibiades turned his attention to the city of Cyme in Aeolia, raiding the coast before being thrown back by a surprise attack from the invaders. Enraged, he then summoned his infantry and tried to force a battle outside the city, but as the Cymeans refused battle he was forced to call a humiliating withdrawal and set sail once again.[161] To make matters worse, Cyme was an Athenian ally whose triubutary payments had contributed significantly to the coffers of the Delian League. Alcibiades, seemingly channeling Themistocles at Andros, had resorted to an obviously thin pretense of disloyalty as justification for his actions.[162] Combined with the defeat at Notium this made for an embarrassing but not irreversible phase of the war for Alcibiades, or so one might think. Instead, it was to be the final end of his career in Athens.

The citizens of Athens had forgiven him for the scandals of his early life, the disaster at Sicily he was responsible for instigating and his service in Sparta and Persia, but they had not forgotten. And it now became readily apparent that this forgiveness was based solely on the maintenance of his present winning streak: after the setback at Notium and the humiliation at Cyme, the Assembly worked itself up into a distinctly unforgiving mood as Alcibiades' scandalous past and foreign affiliations were again dragged up and used against him. Representatives from Cyme also made their displeasure known, not unreasonably deploring the unprovoked attack on an ally. Several private lawsuits were also being prepared, and before long the Assembly had voted to strip him of his office in a move that also disgraced his closest affiliates, Thrasybulus, Theramenes and Critias.[163] By then, Alcibiades was already on his way north. He had probably anticipated this turn of events as soon as the debacle at Cyme played out, and now out of favour with all three major players of the war he was out of options save for one: setting himself up as a local warlord based in a private fortress at Pactye, by the Sea of Marmara, constructed years before for in case of an emergency such as this.[164] Middle age may not have succeeded in tempering Alcibiades' rash nature, but it does seems to have provided him with a certain degree of self-awareness.

[161] Kagan (1987), p. 320-321.
[162] Diod. 13.73.3-5.
[163] Kagan (1987), p. 322-24. In Kagan's view, the loss of these three captains was just as, if not even more damaging to the Athenian war effort than the loss of Alcibiades.
[164] Hale (2009), p. 222.

To fully assess the career of Alcibiades is a daunting task for any historian. His was a character that could inspire or divide a city like no other, his fleeting genius and larger-than-life ego as capable of turning a war in the favour of his chosen patron as it was to plunge them into scandal and crisis. A common contention among modern historians has been that while Athens sorely missed Alcibiades' inspired leadership in the last years of the war, he lacked the sober and judicious character to unite the city exemplified by Pericles as well as any sense of long-term strategy. He did after all goad the Athenians into their disastrous Sicilian venture, and his only real military accomplishments as general took place in the relatively short span of four years between 411 and 406.[165]

The prevalence of this view is hardly surprising, echoing as it does the one expressed by Thucydides that none of Pericles' successors were fit to don the mantle of the man his fellow citizens sometimes referred to as "the Olympian".[166] Both were Alcmaeonids, but it is hard to imagine a sharper contrast than the one between the haughty Pericles and his lewd and hedonistic ward, who seduced the wives of Spartan kings and went to war bearing a golden shield emblazoned with the god Eros holding a thunderbolt.[167] But for all his scandal and decadence, what Alcibiades brought to the table was a keen military mind and the kind of inspired leadership the Athenians had been sorely lacking since the days of Phormio. He also seems to have been developing a formidable bond with his peers Thrasybulus and Theramenes, as seen in their brilliant co-operation at Abydos and Cyzicus.[168] As the Ionian War dragged on it became evident that in order to defeat Sparta, Athens would have to sever the Persian sponsorship that allowed them to constantly rebuild their fleet and launch new offensives. As Thrasybulus regained their Thracian territories, Theramenes kept the Persians busy on the Eastern straits of the Bosphorus and Alcibiades conquered Byzantium and established an iron grip on the Black Sea trade, the Persian investment in Spartan naval power was looking increasingly unprofitable.[169] The defeat at Notium was no doubt a bitter setback, but it was a setback Athens could have easily recovered from.

It is very telling that in the aftermath, Alcibiades feared for his life to the extent that he fled

[165] Kagan (1987), p. 324.
[166] Hale (2009), p. 126.
[167] Plut. Alc. 16.2.
[168] Hanson (2005), p. 276-277.
[169] Hale (2009), p. 218.

Athens and quit the war as a whole rather than face the *demos*. It is even more telling that he was probably right to do so.

This cuts to one of the major defects of the Athenian conduit of the war, and arguably the one most fundamental to their ultimate defeat: none of their generals were able to operate without the shadow of an increasingly volatile public at home looming over their every decision, ready to pounce on any setback and mete out wildly unproportional punsishments, no matter scope or context. While this tendency arguably grew worse as the war dragged on, it was always a feature of democratic Athens at war. And so while Kagan is probably right to argue Alcibiades was not able to provide Athens with the same unity as the one inspired by Pericles, this did not stop the city from turning on Pericles himself in 430 before backtracking on their decision less than a year later.[170] Unlike their Spartan counterparts like Brasidas, who suffered two defeats at the battles of Pylos and Lyncestis before his spectacular campaign in Thrace, Athenian military leaders were almost never allowed to learn from their setbacks and draw experience from them.[171] The tendency to punish generals for any degree of failure would serve to not only deprive Athens of seasoned individuals like Alcibiades, but also cut short careers such as that of Thucidydes himself (who knows what a mind like his might have contributed to the war effort, had he not been exiled for the majority of it?).

In 405, the penultimate year of the war, an increasingly worried audience of Athenian citizens gathered to see Aristophanes' newest play, *Frogs*, be performed at the annual Leneia festival. With Athens sliding ever closer to defeat, there was likely already talk of a potential second return of Acibiades, something directly referenced to at various points in the play.[172] One of the final exchanges between Euripides and Aeschylus, both attempting to show they are the one most worthy of being returned to life by the god Dionysus, deals directly with the potential return of Alcibiades. Here Dionysus asks the two poets what opinion Athens holds of her brilliant, if debacuhed, prodigal son:

> **Dionysus**: What opinion?

[170] Kagan (1987), p. 324.
[171] See Thuc. 4.11-14 and 4.125.1-128.3 respectively for these two battles. In fairness, the defeat at Lyncestis was more of an orderly retreat than anything else owing to the Spartans being abandoned by their Macedonian allies early on.
[172] See Aristoph. Frogs 686 in particular.

She longs for him, but hates him, and yet she wants him back.
But tell me what you two think about him.

Euripides: I hate that citizen, who, to help his fatherland,
seems slow, but swift to do great harm,
of profit to himself, but useless to the state.

Dionysus: Well said, by Poseidon! What's your opinion?

Aeschylus: You should not rear a lion cub in the city,
but if one is brought up, accommodate its ways.[173]

Aeschylus is chosen by Dionysus shortly after, leaving us in no doubt about Aristophanes' opinion on the matter. Nor does this seem to have been an unpopular view, as *Frogs* was awarded first prize at the Leneia that year.[174] In the end it made little difference, as Alcibiades remained holed up in his Thracian fortress. However, before the war ended there was still time for one last moment of glory for the Athenian navy, and a crowning moment of madness for the democracy.

4.4. Endgame: Arginusae & Aegospotami

Now, Alcibiades' role as overall commander passed to Conon, a determined but ultimately somewhat mediocre general.[175] In Sparta, Lysander was replaced as navarch due to the Spartan constitutional demand that each navarch be relieved of his duties after his annual term. His replacement was a young firebrand by the name of Callicratidas.[176] An interesting detail here is noted by Kagan, who points out that both Callicratidas and Lysander were *mothakes*, men born of Spartan fathers and Helot mothers, as was also the case of Gylippus before them.[177] Evidently, the war was having an impact on the social mobility of even this, Greece's most stubbornly traditionalist city-state. Unlike the taciturn and calculating Lysander, Callicratidas proved to have a flair for rhetoric, one of his first acts as navarch being to send Conon a message warning him *"that he would put a stop to his playing the*

[173] Aristoph. Frogs 1414.
[174] Hale (2009), p. 234.
[175] In short, Conon's military record is notably primarily because of its longevity: he was defeated by Callicratidas in 406 and by Lysander at Aegospotami in 405, before restoring his honour somewhat by triumphing over a Persian fleet at Cnidus in 394.
[176] Xen. Hell. 1.6.1.
[177] Kagan (1987), p. 298-299. Or alternatively, children of impoverished Spartiates.

wanton with his bride, the sea."[178]

Bold words, and words he would soon back up. After a string of minor victories he caught up with Conon and defeated him at Mytilene, though most of the Athenian fleet including Conon survived and were surrounded and blockaded inside the harbour. For an ambitious young man like Callicratidas, nothing less than a gloriously decisive victory would suffice, and when he received reports of a large Athenian fleet on the horizon coming to relieve Conon, he immediately turned and offered battle. Callicratidas may have been disconcertingly young for generalship, but he already had a victory against Athens' most experienced general under his belt, and at his command was the same fleet that had been trained by Lysander.[179]

Facing Callicratidas was a fleet like no other the Athenians' had put to sea. With the navy's best 14,000 rowers and crewmen locked down at Mytilene with Conon, the Athenians had to come up with some 22,000 men in order to muster a fleet capable of taking on the Peloponnesians.[180] The shortage of manpower was in part due to the recent defeat at Notium but no doubt Lysander's ploy of increasing wages in the Peloponnesian fleet was also encouraging mass desertion among Athens' mercenary rowers.[181] The problem of desertion was addressed by the Athenian general Philocles, who was notorious for throwing captured rowers overboard and persuading the Assembly to allow fleet captains to cut off the right hand of any prisoner taken at sea.[182]

They could count on some forty ships from Samos and other allies, but in order to man their own fleet they proceeded as follows:

> They voted to go to the rescue with one hundred and ten ships, putting aboard all who were of military age, whether slave or free; and within thirty days they manned the one hundred and ten ships and set forth. Even the knights went aboard in considerable numbers."[183]

[178] Xen. Hell. 1.6.15. Or, in Van Wees' less solemn translation: *"I will stop you screwing my sea"*. Van Wees (2004), p. 199.
[179] Kagan (1987), p. 338.
[180] Kagan (1987), p. 338-39.
[181] Kagan (1987), p. 327.
[182] Hanson (2005), p. 248.
[183] Xen. Hell. 1.6.24-25.

Furthermore, so desperate were the Athenians that they promised not just freedom to any slaves who served in the fleet, but even citizenship.[184] In the absence of Conon, leadership of the fleet was split between eight generals of equal standing, of whom the only notable was Thrasyllus, a veteran of the Ionian war who had played a key role at Samos and fought at Cynossema and Abydos. As for the fleet itself, over half of the ships themselves had been hastily constructed over a mere thirty days.[185]

In short, it was a remarkable fleet that faced the Peloponnesians in the Battle of Arginusae and not necessarily for the right reasons. But even more remarkable is the fact that they won: the generals deviced a brilliant tactic incorporating the Arginsae islands themselves into their battle line[186], and after Callicratidas was killed early on in the encounter they went on to claim a decisive victory: at the cost of only 25 Athenian ships they had sunken or claimed over 70 Peloponnesian vessels.[187] The victory was stunning enough on its own merit, made even more so by the circumstances. All that remained was to gather the dead as well as any survivors still out at sea, and set up the traditional victory trophy before returning home. But these plans were thwarted by a storm, and on their arrival in Athens they were immediately deposed and put on trial on charges of abandoning the dead and shipwrecked.[188]

As discussed in chapter 6.5. death by drowning was considered by the ancient Greeks to be one of the most horrible ways to die, and the retrieval and burial of the dead after a battle was a practice firmly enshrined in Greek warfare, both on land and sea. But as Strauss points out, retrieving and identifying floating corpses in the wake of a storm is no easy undertaking, hardly less so today than in the fifth century.[189] Furthermore, the battle itself took place further from the mainland that what was normal in Greek sea battles, and even the surviving crews of the Athenian fleet argued against trying to brave the storm in

[184] For full discussion on this, see Hunt, Peter. *The Slaves and the Generals of Arginusae*. The American Journal of Philology Vol. 122, No. 3. pp. 359-380. (2001)
[185] Xen. Hell. 1.6.24.
[186] Xen. Hell. 1.6.29-34. Kagan (1987) provides an excellent retelling of the battle at p.341-353, see also the shorter analysis by Hale (2009) at p. 226-228.
[187] Xen. Hell. 1.6.34. Xenophon places their losses at nine Spartan ships and "more than sixty of the allies."
[188] Xen. Hell. 1.7.1.- 3. and Diod. 13.101.
[189] Strauss, Barry S. *Perspectives on the death of fifth-century Athenian seamen* in Van Wees, H. *War and Violence in Ancient Greece*. Swansea: The Classical Press of Wales (2009) p. 271.

order to retrieve their fallen comrades.[190] This is further corroborated by Xenophon, who reports that Callicratidas had orginally intended a night attack before the day of the battle but was prevented from doing so by a thunderstorm and heavy rain.[191]

In any case, what happened next was arguably the darkest episode in the history of Athenian democracy: the six remaining generals (two had caught scent of what awaited them and wisely fled into exile) were duly found guilty and executed. On the exact procedure of the trial, Xenophon and Diodorus are not in complete agreement: *Hellenica* lays most of the blame at the feet of Theramenes, while the *Library* holds the demos as a whole accountable.[192] What is obvious is that the already dubious affair quickly devolved into a full-blown kangaroo court where the presiding Socrates tried to convince the boule to follow Athenian law and let each general stand jury trial individually, rather to judge them collectively as they had proposed. Instead, the collective trial was upheld and the Assembly cast their votes, condemning the six generals to death by hemlock poisoning.[193]

In less than a year, Athens had intimidated three of her generals to flee into exile and executed six others, while effectively excluding three of their most able captains from the war effort. Instead of learning anything from their mistakes after Notium, the Athenians appeared hell-bent on doubling down on them instead. Less than a year after victorious generals of Arginusae downed their poison vials, in October 405 Lysander trapped the Athenian fleet embarked at Aegospotami and utterly routed it. Just as in Syracuse, the Athenians had failed to plan for proper provisioning of their huge fleet, and were caught unawares while most of the rowers were out foraging for food.[194] Philocles was among the captured Athenians, and possibly as payback for his earlier treatment of prisoners Lysander had his throat slit and ordered the 3,000 Athenian captives executed after the battle.[195] With 160 of their remaining 180 ships lost and Athens capitulated in March the following year.[196] In a remarkable twist of fate it was insular, rural Sparta that had succeeded in producing the admiral to finally win

[190] Diod. 13.100.2.
[191] Xen. Hell. 1.6.28.
[192] See Kagan (1987), p. 354 for a full discussion, where he concludes that in this instance Diodorus seems the most reliable owing to his use of the *Hellenica Oxyrhynchia.*
[193] For the trial as whole, see Kagan (1987) p. 354-375.
[194] Hanson (2005), p. 259.
[195] Hanson (2005), p. 248.
[196] Diod. 13.106. and Xen. Hell. 2.1.27-30. For Athenian losses, see Plut. Alc. 37.3. This remained the single largest slaughter of Greeks in one day until Alexander razed Thebes in 335.

the war, not the maritime powerhouse of Athens.

In a final, bitter irony, the generals in charge at Aegospotami had been warned of their vulnerable position by none other than Alcibiades, who from his nearby fortress had a prime view of the Athenian encampment and Lysander's scout ships monitoring it. Perhaps hoping for another miraculous comeback, Alcibiades rode into the Athenian camp to personally urge the generals to move their camp to nearby Sestus, thereby gaining a proper harbour where they could dock their ships, and a city from which to obtain a steady food supply. They ignored him.[197]

[197] Xen. Hell. 2.1.24-26.

5. ROWERS, VOTERS, SLAVES, MERCENARIES: THE *NAUTIKOS OCHLOS*

There is nothing but a plank between a sailor and eternity.
– Thomas Gibbons

An enduring subject of debate in regard to the Athenian fleet has been the class belonging, or lack thereof, of the rowers. A long-standing scholarly tradition has associated the Solonic classes with Athenian military organization, each class serving in their own distinct branch of the army. In this system the lowest class, the *thetes*, has traditionally been linked with the role of rowers in the Athenian navy, while the wealthier *hippeis* and *zeugitai* served as cavalry and hoplites respectively. The modern origins of this view can be traced to August Böckh's translation of the Aristotelian *Athenian Constitution* ('Die Staatshaushaltung der Athener', first published in 1817), with Böckh basing his interpretation on a passage from Thucydides concerning the preparation of Athens' ill-fated Sicilian expedition in 415:[198]

> After this the Athenians weighed from Corcyra, and proceeded to cross to Sicily with an armament now consisting of one hundred and thirty-four galleys in all (besides two Rhodian fifty-oars) of which one hundred were Athenian vessels—sixty men-of-war, and forty troopships—and the remainder from Chios and the other allies; five thousand and one hundred heavy infantry in all, that is to say, fifteen hundred Athenian citizens from the lists at Athens and seven hundred Thetes shipped as marines, and the rest allied troops, some of them Athenian subjects… [199]

This in turn is seemingly corroborated by Aristotle's observation in *Politics*, that political factions gain power and prestige according to their military contributions to the state in times of conflict:

> And also revolutions to oligarchy and democracy and constitutional government arise from the growth in reputation or in power of some magistracy or some section of the state; as for example the Council on the Areopagus having risen in reputation during the Persian wars was believed to have made the constitution more rigid, and then again the naval mob, having been

[198] Vincent Rosivach: *The "Thetes" in Thucydides 6.43.1*. Hermes 140. Jahrg., H. 2 (2012), pp. 131-139
[199] Thuc 6.43.1.

> the cause of the victory off Salamis and thereby of the leadership of Athens due to her power at sea, made the democracy stronger … [200]

Finally, Pseudo-Xenophon weighs in with what looks to essentially be a confirmation that Athenian democracy was entirely dependent on the lower classes' contributions to the fleet, who in turn received increased political power for their services:

> First of all, I maintain that it is appropriate that in Athens the poor and the common people should seem to have more power than the noble and the rich, because it is this class that provides the rowers for the fleet and on which the power of the city is based; for the steersmen, boatswains, pursers, look-out men, shipwrights- these are the men on whom the power of the city is based, far more than the hoplites, the noble and the respectable. Since this is so, it seems appropriate that they should all share in the offices of state by the process of lot and election, and that anyone of the citizens who wishes should have the right to speak before the citizens.[201]

On the basis of these excerpts, three questions arise: Firstly, was the Athenian fleet primarily crewed by the lower-class thetes? If not, what exactly was the nature of the naval mob and the trireme crews? And thirdly, did the navy as an institution empower Athenian democracy?

5.1. The Thetes

As previously mentioned, the class scheme instituted by the lawgiver Solon in 594/3 divides the citizens of Athens into four distinct property classes, its political dimensions elaborated on in Aristotle's *Politics*, the previously mentioned *Constitution of the Athenians* and Plutarch's *Solon*.[202] Solon's overall goal seems in any case to have been introducing legal reforms that constitutionalised citizen rights, while putting an end to the debt slavery that was causing massive social unrest in Athens.[203] While sympathetic to the lower classes, it is clear Solon was in fact engineering a political compromise that would keep them satisfied enough to keep the peace, while also sufficiently placating the aristocracy.[204]

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[200] Aris. Pol. 5.1304a.
[201] Pseud-Xen. Const. Ath. 1.2.
[202] Aris. Ath. Const. 7.3, Aris. Pol. 1274a16-22 and Plut. Solon 18.1-2.
[203] Ober (1996), p. 38.
[204] G. E. M. de Ste. Croix. *Athenian Democratic Origins and other Essays*. Oxford: Oxford University Press. (ed.) av David Harvey, Robert Parker og Peter Thonemann. (2004) p. 75. De Ste. Croix credits Solon with being one of the few members of the higher classes that did not adress the lower classes contemtuously, though it is up

This is shown clearly in Solon's own words, at least those reported in the *Constitution*, where he explains the reasoning behind his reform in the following manner:

> For to the people gave I grace enough,
> Nor from their honor took, nor proffered more;
> While those possessing power and graced with wealth,
> These too I made to suffer nought unseemly;
> I stood protecting both with a strong shield,
> And suffered neither to prevail unjustly.
>
> Thus would the people with the chiefs best follow,
> With neither too much freedom nor compulsion;
> Satiety breeds insolence when riches
> Attend the men whose mind is not prepared.[205]

The exact threshold between the Solonic classes in terms of farm size, annual income and harvest produce is still a matter of debate, and modern scholarship is divided on the issue. One of the more extensive models of interpretation is found in Victor Davis Hanson's *The Other Greeks*, which follows the Aristotelian narrative of firmly placing the zeugitai as the basis of the hoplite class, thus making them an entirely agrarian "middling" rubric of men between the wealthy hippeis and pentakosiomedimnoi and the poor thetes.[206] In this interpretation, the thetic class could indeed seem to fit neatly into the role of naval manpower, while the zeugitai deployed as hoplites and the hippeis supplied the cavalry.

However, this view has been challenged by several scholars, among them Hans Van Wees. Instead of the middling yeomen envisioned by Hanson, Van Wees considers the zeugitai to have been land owners of leisure rather than working farmers, a claim he backs by the property qualifications of zeugitai being an annual harvest of at least 200 measures.[207] As for the thetes, he estimates the thetic class envisioned by Solon to have been landless, hired

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to the individual reader to decide whether to interpret this as the sign of a sympathetic aristocrat or a skilled politician (or indeed both).

[205] Aris. Const. Ath. 12.

[206] Hanson (1995).

[207] Hans Van Wees: *Farmers and Hoplites: Models of Historical Development* in Donald Kagan and Gregory Viggiano: *Men of Bronze: Hoplite Warfare in Ancient Greece.* New Jersey: Princeton University Press, (2013), p. 230.

labourers which would make up around 85% of the Athenian citizen population.[208] Following the Aristotelian lead, the Solonic compromise would abolish the crippling debts that led many of the thetes to be sold into slavery as well as exempting them from the military service required of the three wealthier classes, though at the same time excluding them from the political rights gained in exchange for said service in order to placate the leisured classes.[209] A third option is presented by Gabrielsen. He notes that the specific requirements for each property class has been found to be untenable by several modern scholars, and that the *Constitution* is unreliable and even self-contradictory on important details.[210] Gabrielsen concludes that while the property classes were still around in the fourth and fifth centuries, their actual grounding in economic realities by that time was probably minimal, thus accounting for examples of well-off thetes and relatively poor pentakosiomedimnoi.[211]

As previously mentioned, much of the argument for a nautically connected thetic class rests on the description of how the fleet preparing for the Sicilian expedition was manned, which is found in Thuc. 6.43.1. Here we find 100 Athenian ships carrying 1500 Athenian citizens drafted from the *katalogoi* (lists) and 700 thetes deployed as marines. It should be noted that since regular triremes by design were ill suited for the transportation of large armed forces, two specialized transport ships were introduced: the troop carriers converted by Cimon, and later the horse carriers (*hippagogos*) that first saw use during the first year of the Peloponnesian War.[212] Because of the Athenian emphasis on ramming tactics and maneuvers, it was necessary to keep the regular vessels intended for battle as light as possible: a trireme could be a sleek and fast warship or a troop carrier, but not both.[213]

If Thuc. 6.43.1. could be shown to be the regular procedure for manning the Athenian fleet, it would indeed add considerable credence to the theorized link between the thetic class and the navy. However, this interpretation too has been called into question by several scholars, among them Rosivach, Gabrielsen and Van Wees.[214] Both Rosivach and Gabrielsen argue

[208] Van Wees in Kagan and Viggiano (2013), p. 232.
[209] Van Wees (2004), p. 56.
[210] Gabrielsen (1994), p. 212-13.
[211] Gabrielsen (1994), p. 213-14.
[212] Hale (2009), p. 92 and 149.
[213] Hanson (2005), p. 258.
[214] Hans Van Wees: *Politics and the battlefield: Ideology in Greek warfare*, p. 153-78 in Powell (ed.), *The Greek World,* London (1995), p. 155.

that there is no reason to connect the Solonic classes with any specific forms of military service, while Rosivach further doubts wether Thuc. 6.43.1. refers to the Solonic classes at all and that '*thetes'* in this instance is used in purely socio-economic terms.[215] Gabrielsen also points out several examples in Thucydides of Athenian expeditions being prepared in different manners than the one in 415 (notably in 428, 413/14 and 411), and concludes that the procedure of manning the fleet in all likelihood was a question of circumstance and necessity rather than principle or class belonging.[216] Thucydides' description of the expedition in 428 does make use of the Solonian classes for recruitment purposes to a certain extent, but only insofar as stating that the hippeis and pentacosiomedimnoi did not embark.[217]

In Rosivach's view, the shift in the Athenian balance of power that took place in the fifth century goes a long way in explaining how the Solonic system was gradually phased out (thus accounting for the absence of any mention of thetes in Thucydides apart from the one found in 6.43.1), as well as its minimal relevance by the time Aristotle wrote his *Politics*:

> From the late fourth Century the Statement at AP 7.4 that candidates for public office were still asked their Solonic class, though no one would ever say that it was thetic. The passage tells us that the Athenians never formally extended eligibility for public office to the thetes, but rather ceased to consider the matter of one's Solonic class to be of any importance. The question of one's class was simply a formality, a tradition carried over from an earlier time. Note also that if the Athenians had to ask a candidate his class this strongly suggests that, at least at this date, they did not have a master list showing who belonged to which class.[218]

Let us turn our attention back to the 700 thetic marines mentioned in Thuc. 6.43.1. The standard loadout of an Athenian trireme at the time of the Peloponnesian War was 200 crewmen in total, of which 170 were rowers, 16 petty officers (*hyperesia*), 10 marines (*epibatai*) and 4 archers (*toxarchoi*).[219] These marines were a formal part of the trireme complement, and are not to be confused with regular hoplites being transported on troop carriers (*hoplitagogoi*).[220] Their role on the ship was mainly a defensive one: a trireme

[215] Gabrielsen (2002) and Rosivach (2012) p. 136.
[216] Gabrielsen (2002), p. 205-207.
[217] Thuc. 3.16.1.
[218] Rosivach (2012), p. 133.
[219] Gabrielsen (1994), p. 105-06.
[220] Gabrielsen (1994), p. 106.

without any marines was extremely vulnerable to boarding actions by enemy hoplites who would be able to slaughter the unarmed oarsmen at will.[221]

As described at length in chapter 6, the hoplite infantry of Athens enjoyed a distinct cultural and ideological prestige that was never extended to the rowers of the fleet. In that context, these *epibatai* present an intriguing conundrum: would they be defined and acknowledged chiefly by their thetic origins and naval affiliation, or by their military role as fighting hoplites? As the following examples show, the sources of the time lean heavily towards the latter. An early example, historically if not historiographically, is found in Plutarch: here Cimon answers the call of Themistocles to enlist on a trireme in order engage the Persian invaders at sea in 480, inspiring other members of the nobility to join in:

> Cimon was first to act, and with a gay mien led a procession of his companions through the Cerameicus up to the Acropolis, to dedicate to the goddess there the horse's bridle which he carried in his hands, signifying thus that what the city needed then was not knightly prowess but sea-fighters.[222]

Admittedly, this is one anecdote among many in a biography that is prone to fawning over its protagonist, but it is one corroborated by other sources. In the first recorded military action of the general Demosthenes, in 426 he leads an Athenian invasion of Aetolia, a mountainous region overlooking the Gulf of Corinth. The invasion, ostensibly undertaken on the advice of Athens' Messenian allies, ends in disaster when the Athenians fall victim to an Aetolian ambush and are routed:

> Many of the allies were killed, and about one hundred and twenty Athenian heavy infantry, not a man less, and all in the prime of life. These were by far the best men in the city of Athens that fell during this war. Among the slain was also Procles, the colleague of Demosthenes.[223]

As noted by Van Wees, it is more or less unthinkable that Thucydides would refer to the slain marines as *"by far the best men in the city of Athens that fell"* unless they were men of some

[221] Hanson (2005), p. 242.
[222] Plut. Cim. 5.2.
[223] Thuc. 3.98.4. These hoplites are specifically referred to as marines earlier, in Thuc. 3.95.2

standing.[224] In 399/400, a few years after the Peloponnesian War, the logographer Lysias produced the speech *Against Andocides*. In the speech, Lysias lists several examples of civic duties that Andocides has failed to engage in, thus proving his unpatriotic credentials:

> He has never gone on any expedition from the city, either in the cavalry or in the infantry, either as a ship's captain or as a marine, either before our disaster, or after our disaster, though he is more than forty years old.[225]

Note here Lysias' omission of any other notewothy role in the navy, save that of a ship's captain or marine: it seems reasonable to assume that in the context of a court speech, fighting on a trireme as a marine would strengthen Andocides' case while service as a rower or among the petty officers would not. As Gabrielsen points out, this passage also makes it clear that a wealthy man such as Andocides should be expected to serve his polis in some military capacity, be it as cavalryman, hoplite, marine or trierarch. His membership of a Solonian class is not mentioned, and is in any case shown to be irrelevant in regards to the wide spectre of military service seemingly open to him.[226]

Finally, after admitting the necessity of a strong navy for any aspiring city-state, Aristotle draws a clear line between the proper granting of political rights to the marines as opposed to the rest of the trireme crews:

> But when we come to the question of the number and size of this force, we have to consider the state's manner of life if it is to live a life of leadership and affairs, it must possess maritime as well as other forces commensurate with its activities. On the other hand it is not necessary for states to include the teeming population that grows up in connection with common sailors, as there is no need for these to be citizens; for the marines are free men and are a part of the infantry, and it is they who have command and control the crew; and if there exists a mass of villagers and tillers of the soil, there is bound to be no lack of sailors too.[227]

It is hard not to connect this statement with Aristotle's earlier observation (Pol.1304a) of how the Athenian "naval mob" had gained power through the dominance of the navy, which in

[224] Van Wees (2004), p .210.
[225] Lysias 6.46.
[226] Gabrielsen (2002), p. 211.
[227] Aris. Pol. 7.1327b.

turn empowered the democractic faction of Athens. As a result, Aristotle is here presenting a solution that would allow a city-state to develop their naval power, without simultaneously nurturing the democratic grassroots among the nautical part of the population.

All things considered, the link between the thetes and the rowing benches of the fleet is an –at best– unstable one. The thetic class certainly does appear in *connection* to the fleet, as one would expect from a class supposedly consisting of 85% of the citizen population. The times they do so as a direct consequence of their membership of a Solonic class is limited to the examples from 428 and 415, which are almost certainly not representative of a customary way of manning the fleet –if indeed there was one– and they also appear to have served as hoplites on several occasions.

5.2. The Naval Mob

Firstly, a short discussion of the term "naval mob" is probably in order. The original Ancient Greek term *ochlos*, in conjunction with *nautikos* (naval), is usually translated as either "mob", "multitude" or "rabble". "The naval mob" has become something of a staple term in modern scholarship on ancient Athens, despite its use in the sources being limited to one passage found in Thucydides and two in Aristotle.[228] The translations may vary, but there is no doubt that the term is a pejorative one.

Thetic or not, there is no doubt that the manpower required to sustain the Athenian navy was considerable, not to mention the substantial financial costs inherent in its maintance. It is hardly surprising then, that a naval mob of some sorts should emerge and make their presence felt in the polis. Thucydides is the first to make use of the term, referring to them in his account of the oligarchical coup of 411:

> They also sent ten men to Samos to reassure the army, and to explain that the oligarchy was not established for the hurt of the city or the citizens, but for the salvation of the country at large; and that there were five thousand, not four hundred only, concerned; although, what with their expeditions and employments abroad, the Athenians had never yet assembled to discuss a question important enough to bring five thousand of them together. The emissaries were also told what to say upon all other points, and were so sent off immediately after the

[228] These are Thuc. 8.72.2, Aris. Pol. 5.1304a and Aris. Pol. 1327b4-15.

> establishment of the new government, which feared, as it turned out justly, that the naval mob would not be willing to remain under the oligarchical constitution, and, the evil beginning there, might be the means of their overthrow.[229]

This indicates that the naval mob, at least in the eyes of the new government, was comprised of Athenian citizens: an oligarchic regime might implement changes that would affect the Athenian population as a whole, but it would only threaten the political rights of actual citizens. The aforementioned excerpts from Aristotle's *Politics* more or less confirms this: in 5.1304a he is specifically referring to the rowers at Salamis in a political context concerning political power, and in 7.1327b he is arguing for exclusion of the naval mob from the citizen body (with the exception of the *epibatai*). As such, it seems reasonable to interpret the term "naval mob" as to signify those Athenian citizens who served in the navy professionally. But were they solely responsible for manning the fleet?

While the prominent role of the Athenian fleet in the battles of Artemisium and Salamis hardly needs emphasizing, the actual organization of said fleet is far less clear-cut. At Artemisium, Herodotus claims that the Athenian contingent numbered 127 ships:

> The Athenians provided one hundred and twenty-seven warships: these were crewed both by the Athenians themselves, and the Plataeans, whose courage and enthusiasm compensated for their lack of sea legs… An additional twenty warships, though provided by the Athenians, were crewed by the Chalcidians.[230]

At Salamis he puts the number of Athenian ships at 180, this time *"manned exclusively by their own crews, since at Salamis the Plaetaeans did not serve alongside them"*.[231] Are we to take it then, that by '*the Athenians themselves'* Herodotus refers specifically to Athenian citizens rather than slaves or mercenaries, and that the presence of Plataean and Chalcidian allies demonstrates an Athenian aversion to deploy slaves as rowers? Hale argues this was indeed the case, and points out that Attica's slave population would have been more than sufficient to man the remaining triremes rather than enlisting inexperienced allies.[232] However, if his earlier silence on the contributions of the Spartan helots at Thermopylae is

[229] Thuc. 8.72.1-2.
[230] Herod. 8.1.
[231] Herod. 8.44.
[232] Hale (2009), p. 41-42.

anything to go by then Herodotus needs to be read with a certain skepticism on this matter: as detailed in the chapter 2.1. there is no shortage of conscious omisssions in *The Histories* and other ancient sources.

Corroborating Herodotus we come again to the *Constitution of the Athenians* and *Politics*, which respectively claims the rowers at Salamis were paid eight drachmas by the Areopagos Council, and that the "naval mob" that won the battle in turn strengthened Athenian democracy.[233] Although not stated explicitly, the implication seems to be that the rowers enjoyed wages and political significance, neither of which were available to the slave population. Finally, the Troezen Decree (also known as the Themistocles Decree) provides a detailed account of the events leading up to Salamis and the Athenian preparations for the battle. It should be noted that the decree has been a subject of controversy since its discovery and publication in 1960, and scholars are still divided on the issue of its authenticity. This paper largely agrees with Hale's observation that the decree is supported by the accounts of both Herodotus and Thucydides, while also acknowledging John Fine's advice to treat it as an amalgamation of several decrees released at different times.[234] It describes the organization of the Athenian rowers as follows:

> A list shall be made also of the rowers, ship by ship, by the generals, on notice boards, with the Athenians to be selected from the lexiarchic registers, the aliens from the list of names registered with the polemarch. They shall write them up, assigning them by divisions, up to two hundred divisions, each of up to one hundred rowers, and they shall append to each division the name of the warship and the captain and the specialist officers, so that they may know on what warship each division shall embark.

Note the lack of any reference to the socio-economic status of the rowers, nor any other categorization save from the distinction between Athenian citizens found in the lexiarchic registers and the "aliens" (ie. metics). Curiously, the decree only calls for up to 100 rowers each, rather than the 200 a fully operational trireme requires. Van Wees believes this is an indication that Athenian manpower at the time was stretched to its absolute limit, and that the eligible citizenry could only make up roughly 60% of the requried numbers. Contrary to

[233] Aris. Const. Ath. 23 and Aris. Pol. 5.1304a.
[234] Hale (2009), p. 343 and Fine 310-311. For a more thorough representation of opposing views, see Donald Kagan's *Problems in Ancient History: The Ancient Near East and Greece*.

Hale, he stipulates that the Athenians covered this shortfall by mobilizing "thousands of their slaves".[235] The issue of slave rowers will be explored further below, but it is important to note the possibility that mobilizing slaves in the fleet was a factor of Athenian warfare as early as 480. Further on, the decree mentions certain qualifications for the commanding officers:

> Appointment will also be made of captains, two hundred in number, one for each ship, by the generals, beginning tomorrow, from those who are owners of both land and home in Athens and who have children who are legitimate. They shall not be more than fifty years old and the lot shall determine each man's ship. The generals shall also enlist marines, ten for each ship, from men over twenty years of age up to thirty, and archers, four in number.

The requirement that captains of the fleet should be recruited from the higher classes is hardly surprising: a recurring theme throughout ancient Greek military history is that leadership in the armed forces was a privilege reserved for members of the upper echelons of society. This was reflected in the writings of Archilochos and Aristophanes, who lampooned the swagger of ostentatious commanders lording it over their men, only to panic and lose control of their bowels as battle commences.[236] This falls in line with Hale's view that early imperial Athens was *"in fact less a democracy than a commonwealth governed by its richest citizens"*, and concludes that until the reforms initiated by Ephialtes in the late 460'ies their democratic influence on the fleet was limited to choosing their leaders rather than any chance of obtaining leadership themselves.[237] Van Wees states his case in a similar, slightly more terse way: *"Classical Athenian warships had very rich captains and very poor crews."*[238]

In the early days of the Athenian navy, the evidence can indeed be interpreted to support a fleet rowed by their own citizens or those from allied city-states. But as the fleet grew in size and further demands were put on its operational capacity, this seems to have changed: in 432 a bellicose Corinthian delegation to a summit of Spartan allies remarks that Athenian power is *"more mercanary than national"* and suggests using bribes to lure away foreign sailors in the Athenian fleet.[239] The first point is essentially conceded by Pericles later on, while he rebuts the second point by claiming Athens can counter this by conscripting more citizens

[235] Van Wees (2004), p. 208.
[236] Hanson (2000), p. 45, 102 and 110.
[237] Hale (2009), p. 95.
[238] Van Wees (2004), p. 209.
[239] Thuc. 1.123.3.

and metics.[240] It is important to note this exchange takes place *before* the great plague of 430, which rules out the possible objection that Athens would only make use of non-citizen manpower as a last-ditch resort in the face of significant population loss. During the Sicilian expedition of 415, Nicias openly addresses a portion of the fleet's oarsmen in a manner that makes it clear they are metics:

> Bear in mind how well worth preserving is the pleasure felt by those of you who through your knowledge of our language and imitation of our manners were always considered Athenians, even though not so in reality, and as such were honored throughout Hellas, and had your full share of the advantages of our empire, and more than your share in the respect of our subjects and in protection from ill treatment.[241]

Thucydides is not the only writer to point this out. In the context of the year 407, as the war drew closer to its end and Persian funding became ever more deceisive for the Peloponnesian war effort, Xenophon reports the following exchange from the negotiations between Lysander and Cyrus:

> The ambassadors thanked him, and urged him to make the wage of each sailor an Attic drachma a day, explaining that if this were made the rate, the sailors of the Athenian fleet would desert their ships, and hence he would spend less money.[242]

In the following year, Xenophon notes that the shortage of crews leading up to the battle of Arginusae forced the Athenians to conscript all men of military age, *"whether slave or free"*, including considerable numbers from the *hippeis* class.[243] Echoing Xenophon's statetement is Diodorus' account:

> The Athenians, who had suffered a continued series of reverses, conferred citizenship upon the metics and any other aliens who were willing to fight with them; and when a great multitude was quickly enrolled among the citizens, the generals kept mustering for the

[240] Thuc. 1.143.1.
[241] Thuc. 7.63.3.
[242] Xen. Hell. 1.5.4.
[243] Xen. Hell. 1.6.24.

> campaign all who were in fit condition.[244]

Nor is the practice of hired hands confined to the desperate times of the Peloponnesian War: several decades after the war's end, Demosthenes laments the continued Athenian reliance on mercenaries to provide manpower for the navy, even as he concedes that their inclusion, at least on a small scale, is unavoidable:

> Of mercenaries I propose—and beware of the mistake that has so often thwarted your efforts. Thinking that the utmost is too little for the occasion, you choose the biggest scheme in your resolutions, but when it comes to performance, you fail to realize even the smallest. You should rather act and provide on a small scale, adding more if this proves insufficient. So I propose that the whole force should consist of two thousand men, but of these five hundred must be Athenians, chosen from any suitable age and serving in relays for a specified period—not a long one, but just so long as seems advisable; the rest should be mercenaries.[245]

One of the core tenets of the idea of a fleet rowed exclusively by citizens is the cameraderie, stability and loyalty that resulted when the free men of Athens took up oars to defend their polis. Hale provides a good summarization of this view: *"Triremes were not pressure cookers of hostility between high-handed officers and resentful crews. There were no press-gangs, and mutinies were almost unheard of."*[246] But while mutinies may have been rare, they did take place: after a series of setbacks in the Great Harbour of Syracuse, the crews under Nicias and Demosthenes flat out refused orders to embark,[247] while in 395 Conon's Cypriot oarsmen mutinied after hearing that a Persian payment of 220 talents were to be dispersed solely among the Athenian petty officers and the marines.[248] In 362, Apollodorus claims to have suffered three cases of defection from his crews during his term as trierarch as well as one episode where the rowers refused to work unless they received extra payments, and suggests this was a widely known problem with contemporary Athenian crews given the demand for skilled oarsmen all over the Aegean.[249]

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[244] Diod. 13.97.
[245] Dem. 4.20-21.
[246] Hale (2009), p. xxvi.
[247] Thuc. 7.72.4.
[248] Gabrielsen (1994), p. 123.
[249] Dem. 50.11-16 and Gabrielsen (1994) p.123.

If mercenaries provided a source of manpower for the Athenian fleet throughout the fifth and fourth centuries, so did slaves. As noted above there are reasons to believe this practice was in use as early as the battle of Salamis, and by the time of the Peloponnesian War it was certainly a regular feature of Athenian fleets: in the winter of 413 a despondent report from Nicias was read aloud on the streets of Athens, describing how both slaves and mercenaries are deserting their invasion force in Sicily:

> The loss of our previous superiority emboldens our slaves to desert; our foreign seamen are impressed by the unexpected appearance of a navy against us, and the strength of the enemy's resistance; such of them as were pressed into the service take the first opportunity of departing to their respective cities; such as were originally seduced by the temptation of high pay, and expected little fighting and large gains, leave us either by desertion to the enemy or by availing themselves of one or other of the various facilities of escape which the magnitude of Sicily affords them. Some even engage in trade themselves and prevail upon the captains to take Hyccaric slaves on board in their place; thus they have ruined the efficiency of our navy.[250]

This is echoed by Pseudo-Xenophon, who comments:

> For of necessity a man who is often at sea takes up an oar, as does his slave, and they learn naval terminology. Both through experience of voyages and through practice they become fine steersmen. Some are trained by service as steersmen on an ordinary vessel, others on a freighter, others - after such experience - on triremes.[251]

Another contribution – albeit a slightly confusing one – come from the rhetorician Isocrates, here contrasting the triremes and hoplite armies of Periclean Athens with the sorry state of affairs in his own day:

> In those days, when they manned their triremes, they put on board crews of foreigners and slaves but sent out citizens to fight under heavy arms. Now, however, we use mercenaries as heavy-armed troops but compel citizens to row the ships, with the result that when they land in hostile territory these men, who claim the right to rule over the Hellenes, disembark with their cushions under their arms, while men who are of the character which I have just

[250] Thuc. 7.13.2.
[251] Ps. Xen. Const. Ath. 1.19-20.

described take the field with shield and spear![252]

Finally, a remarkable episode preluding the battle of Arginusae is often used to underline the argument for an Athenian navy free of slaves: with the main fleet under the command of Conon blockaded at Mytilene, a relief force is hastily drafted. However, the shortage of manpower drives the Athenians to not only draft members of the *hippeis* class, but also offer freedom and even citizenship to any slave who volunteers to serve as an oarsman. Thousands volunteer, and in retrospect this has been seen by some as proof of just how desperate the Athenians had to be in order for the enlisting of slaves as rowers to be an option.[253] But surely the remarkable aspect of this episode is *not* that slaves manned the rowing benches, but that they were so generously rewarded –not to say rewarded at all– for performing a service they in all probability had some experience with beforehand.

At this point, it may be helpful to take a look at the numbers involved. As discussed in chapter 2, obtaining exact numbers from ancient sources is a slippery and often outright impossible affair: the numbers presented here should be regarded more as estimates than anything else, though I will try to refrain from engaging in overt guesswork. Mogens Hansen estimates the population of Athens in 431 to have been somwehere around 60,000 citizens and 25,000 metics, as well as an unrecorded (but certainly enormous) number of slaves. The citizen population was then reduced to between 25,000 and 30,000 by 400 as a result of the Plague of 430 and the Peloponnesian War.[254] These numbers are reflected in the operational fleet: in the first year of the war, Athens was able to launch a war fleet of 180 triremes, while by the time Phormio took command in 428 he had a grand total of 20 triremes at his disposal.[255] Supposing only the free citizens of Athens manned the fleet, this makes for a demographic impossibility: a fleet of 180 triremes with full complement would require a total number of 36,000 crewmembers, and it is simply inconceivable that the Athenians would embark over half their total number of citizens at any given time, no matter their status within the Solonic scheme.

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[252] Isoc. 8 48. The reference to rowers carrying cushions (*hyperesion*) may at first seem like a hyperbolic slur, but the use of rowing cushions are attested by Thuc. 2.93.2. For more information on the maladies of trireme crews and the necessity for cushions and rowlock thongs, see Hale (2009) p. 114-15.
[253] Hale (2009), p. 224.
[254] Hansen, Mogens Herman. *Three Studies in Athenian Demography*. Copenhagen: The Royal Danish Academy of Sciences and Letters. Commissioner: Munksgaard. (1988) p. 28.
[255] Hale (2009), p.157.

Before reaching a conclusion on the matter of these *nautikos ochlos*, there is also the nature of their work in the fleet to consider. Or to me more precise, the volume of it: according to Plutarch, the navy of Periclean Athens was able to keep a formidable amount of ships in comission even in peace time, sending out sixty triremes annually on which the crews served for eight months under pay.[256] This would leave the crews with preciously little time for other endeavours and makes them superior seamen to anything their Peloponnesian rivals could muster, as Pericles himself points out at the eve of the war:

> For our naval skill is of more use to us for service on land, than their military skill for service at sea. Familiarity with the sea they will not find an easy acquisition. If you who have been practising at it ever since the Median invasion have not yet brought it to perfection, is there any chance of anything considerable being effected by an agricultural, unseafaring population, who will besides be prevented from practising by the constant presence of strong squadrons of observation from Athens? With a small squadron they might hazard an engagement, encouraging their ignorance by numbers; but the restraint of a strong force will prevent their moving, and through want of practice they will grow more clumsy, and consequently more timid. It must be kept in mind that seamanship, just like anything else, is a matter of art, and will not admit of being taken up occasionally as an occupation for times of leisure; on the contrary, it is so exacting as to leave leisure for nothing else.[257]

A pragmatically inclined reader may point out that Pericles was seldom restrained in his praise of Athenian excellence, a point unlikely to be contradicted. But as Gabrielsen demonstrates there is a definite track record of trierarchs dismissing their conscripted rowers in order to hire other, more capable oarsmen: while there was no shortage of able petty officers in Athens, trained rowers became an ever more valued commodity as the war dragged on and their numbers steadily dwindled.[258] Compared to a Spartan infantryman in full hoplite panoply, the semi-naked Athenian rower armed only with an oar and a cushion may not have made for an inspiring sight but their technical abilities and physical condition were of utmost importance.

Full oar power for maximum speed was only used in combat, but was extremely energy

[256] Plut. Per. 11.4
[257] Thuc. 1.142.
[258] Gabrielsen (1994), p. 107-109.

consuming when in use and would demand a high fitness level on the part of the crew.[259] As it turns out, not all Greeks were ready to put up with these demands. Herodotus reports that when Dionysius the Phocaen attemped to train the Ionians for rowing service during their revolt against the Persian Empire, they lasted exactly one week before refusing to carry on training or even boarding their ships. As one of the disgruntled Ionians remark:

> Surely, there are no evils so terrible that they could be worse than those we suffer now? Better to take our chances with the slavery that is to come than be yoked together in the servitude that is our current lot.[260]

They were subsequently routed by the Persian fleet at the Battle of Lade and Dionysius gave up on the Ionian cause and abandoned the Aegean, instead setting himself up as a pirate in Sicily to prey on Carthaginian and Etruscan merchants.[261] As experienced by these Ionians, and as anyone who has ever taken up an oar themselves – or opted for a modern rowing machine – can attest, high intensity rowing is a gruelling activity. The physical effort required of rowers to move the ship at full speed, engage in battle maneuvers and then pursue or retreat after the battle would cause massive fatigue, a fact acknowledged by Nicias in Sicily:

> Now I need not remind you that the time during which a crew is in its prime is short, and that the number of sailors who can start a ship on her way and keep the rowing in time is small.[262]

And so it is hardly surprising that apart from two exceptions (the aforementioned conscriptions of 428 and 415), every instance of recruitment of rowers found in the ancient sources applies the criterion of membership of an *age* class, rather than a property class.[263] The upper age limit of oarsmen reported by the sources vary, but only to a small degree: Aeschines and Diodorus agrees on 40 years old, while Demosthenes draws the line at 45.[264] What are we then to make of the "naval mob" of Athens, that Aristotle and Thucydides somwehat pejoratively depicts as the prime enablers of Athenian democracy? While he

[259] Gabrielsen (1994), p. 118-19.
[260] Herod. 6.12.
[261] Herod. 6.17.
[262] Thuc. 7.14.2 This is all the more revealing, seeing as Nicias at the time of the Sicilian expedition probably had access to the best oarsmen Athens had to offer.
[263] Gabrielsen (2002), p. 211.
[264] Gabrielsen (2002), p. 220.

disapproves of the term in general, Potts suggests that we view this "mob" as the portion of the Athenian population that derived their living from crewing triremes, either as a sole or primary occupation.[265] This portion may very well have been made up entirely of citizens originally, but were in then joined and eventually outnumbered by mercenaries, metics and slaves as the fifth century progressed and Athenian imperial ambitions grew, necessitating an ever larger fleet. A salient point is made by Gabrielsen, who points out that with the massive casualties suffered in the final battles of the Ionian War,[266] sending triremes manned exclusively or even mainly by citizen voters would be tantamount to demographic suicide and severely crippe the democratic government and administration.[267]

I think it is safe to assume that by the time Thucydides began to record the Peloponnesian War, the fleet was certainly Athens' most feared and cherished military asset, but the Athenian citizens crewing it were far from a dominant group and may even have constituted a minority.

5.3. A Trireme Democracy?

As mentioned in the introduction to this chapter, the three most prevalent sources that support the link between Athens' navy and its democracy are found in Thucydides, Aristotle and Pseudo-Xenophon. That said, Plutarch also provides a telling summarization of this link in his biography of Themistocles, here describing the admiral's impact on social and political life in Athens following his ascendance to first man of Athens:

> And so it was that he increased the privileges of the common people as against the nobles, and filled them with boldness, since the controlling power came now into the hands of skippers and boatswains and pilots. Therefore it was, too, that the bema in Pnyx, which had stood so as to look off toward the sea, was afterwards turned by the thirty tyrants so as to look inland, because they thought that maritime empire was the mother of democracy, and that oligarchy was less distasteful to tillers of the soil.[268]

[265] Potts, S. *The Athenian Navy: An investigation into the operations, politics and ideology of the Athenian fleet between 480 and 322 BC*. ProQuest LLC: Cardiff University (2008), p. 94.
[266] See chapter 6.5.
[267] Gabrielsen (2002), p. 211.
[268] Plut. Them. 19.4.

If we assume, as Plutarch puts it, that maritime empire indeed was the mother of democracy, and that a substantial amount of the Athenian citizenry were involved in the navy and democratically inclined, then it would seem highly likely that the navy itself constituted a democratic bulwark in Athenian politics. But how exactly can the validity of such a proposition be measurable? For a start, a comparative look at the chronology of Athenian democracy and thalassocracy might be in order.

In their exchange of articles, Raaflaub and Ober each propose a different period as the definitve starting point of Athenian democracy. Raaflaub advocates that democracy was a gradual evolution that may have begun with the reforms of Solon, but was then accelerated by Cleisthenes before its final adjustments were put in place by Ephialtes. As such, according to Raaflaub, the final, defintive form of Athenian democracy did not arrive until around 450.[269] On the contrary, Ober dismisses that democracy was the discovery or creation of individual Athenians, but rather a mentality that spread among the people of Athens during the events og 508/07. In Ober's view, Cleisthenes and Ephialtes are supporting actor who help shape and form this idea into practical policy, but the revolutionary school of thought itself was for all intents and purposes a grassroots movement.[270] As a consequence, they also disagree on how the events of the Peloponnesian War shaped the democracy: Raaflaub argues that the conflict made the demos more balanced and inclined to compromise, while Ober makes the case that hardline democratic ideology continued to dominate Athens well into the fourth century.[271]

Whichever chronology one prefers, if we trace the inception of the fleet to Themistocles' machinations in the 480'ies –which I believe we should– then the fact remains that neither matches the rise of Athenian sea power very well. Instead, it is striking how little the the volatile situation at home seems to have impacted the fleet: when anti-orligarchic sentiments soared at the end of the 460'ies, the popular push to exile Cimon orginated in the city-state, not the fleet under his command. Neither did the democratic faction or the fleet object when he returned to resume command before the end of his 10-year exile, despite this being a clear

[269] Raaflaub, K. A. *Power in the Hands of the People: Foundations of Athenian Democracy*. Morris, Ian and Raaflaub, Kurt (ed.), Democracy 2500? Questions and Challenges. (p. 67-85). Dubuque, Iowa: Kendall Hunt Pub Co (1997), p. 46-52.
[270] Ober in Morris, Ian and Raaflaub, Kurt (1997), p. 72-80.
[271] Ober in Morris and Raaflaub (1997), p. 81-82.

breach of Athenian law. Later on, the fleet did not seem to have any objections to the return of Alcibiades in 411, despite his recent service in both oligarchic Sparta and monarchic Persia.

Let us instead turn to the naval presence that Aristotle and Pseudo-Xenophon claims dominated the Assembly and in turn Athens as a whole. As noted by Potts however, to analyse exact Assembly participation by any one social group is near-impossible. Not only did the boule's decision on agenda limit the direct influence of any majority group, but the evidence for said majorities are extremely thin, usually compromised of remarks on the topic from Aristophanes' plays or Socratic interlocutors in Xenophon and Plato's dialogues. And when they appear, these remarks primarily reference farmers as the dominant group in the Assembly, rather than rowers or members of the hyperesia.[272]

One fairly basic obstacle to the notion of a nautically dominated Assembly does present itself, and it is the question of sheer practicality. If the *Athenian Constitution* is to be believed, the Assembly gathered four times every prytani, that is to say 40 times in a modern calendar year.[273] Taking into account that the sailing season in the Aegean took place between April and late September, a considerable number of citizen sailors would be absent from roughly half of the scheduled Assembly meetings every year.[274] Even when not actively serving on a campaign, a large number of rowers would also be stationed at the naval base in Samos rather than at home in Athens or in the Piraeus, and/or engaging in the peactime routines for the navy put in place by Pericles.[275] Xenophon does mention that the generals on trial after Arginusae called on witnesses from the crews present at the battle, but he does not mention their number and in any case they obviously failed to make much of a difference in the subsequent verdict.[276] There is also the problem of attributing political convictions to social groups and economic classes *en masse*: the farmers of Attica may have shared certain common interests when it came to the running of the polis, but there is no reason to regard them as a political monolith in every question but before them in the Assembly. The same is

[272] Potts (2008), p. 113-14.
[273] Ath. Pol. 43.4.
[274] Hale (2009), p. 59.
[275] Hale (2009), p. 126.
[276] Xen. Hell. 1.7.6. Another "witness" appears in [Xen. Hell. 1.7.11] to tell of how he survived the battle by hanging on to a tub of grain and promising the Athenians drowning around him to return to Athens and bear testimony against the generals, but this is strongly implied by Xenophon to be a stooge.

certainly true of trireme crews.

There is also the other functions of the fleet to consider, as it was not exclusively a military organ: besides obvious advantages of being able to coerce nearly 200 Greek city-states in and around the Aegean, the fleet ensured a formidable trading economy that significantly boosted Athens' revenues and fuelled its rise to Greek hegemon.[277] Even Pseudo-Xenophon, who could not be more outspoken in his disgust at the naval crews crowding the streets of Athens and the Piraeus, is unabashedly admiring of the wealth and power secured by Athenian thalassocracy.[278] We cannot know for certain whether the crews who manned the triremes in times of war sought employment in the merchant fleets in times of peace, but considering the flourishing trade economy and the increasing demand for skilled rowers throughout the fifth century, it is very likely. As for the link between thalassocracy and democracy proposed by Pseudo-Xenophon and Aristotle,[279] it is worth bearing in mind that the Athenians were not the sole practicioners of either: as Potts comments, Corinth was a naval power before Athens and never showed any interest in a democratic government, while Argos remained a democracy for most of the Classical Age and never ventured into sea power.[280]

Finally, the example of Samos in 411 is often used to underline the democratic nature of the navy and its role in keeping democracy alive during the occupation of Athens by the Four Hundred, a view summarized well by Hale:

> Defiantly, the mass of citizens serving with the fleet repudiated the tyrannical oligarchs, set up a democratic assembly on the island, and declared themselves to be the true, legitimate Athens. Democracy now resided not in the Agora, or on the Pnyx but in the triremes of the navy.[281]

In this case, I believe Hale has the cart before the horse. The Athenians did indeed set up what was effectively a trireme democracy at Samos, but surely it is more reasonable to attribute this to a desire to keep what they saw as the legitimate form of Athenian government, rather than a purely ideological instinct? What I mean by this is that while the

[277] Hanson (2005), p. 265-66.
[278] Ps. Xen. Const. Ath. 2.2.-4.
[279] Chapter 4.1.
[280] Potts, p. 108.
[281] Hale (2009), p. 208.

administration set up by the fleet undoubtedly was democratic, it was probably done in order to maintan the legitimacy of the Athenian state and thus underline the illegitimacy of the oligarchic Four Hundred in an attempt to secure support from Athens and its imperial, democratic subjects. The generals at Samos may have very well been sworn democrats every one, but I suggest that their primary loyalty lay with Athens rather than democratic ideology. Also, they seemingly had no inhibitions of welcoming back and reinstating Alcibiades even after his service in the courts of Lacedaemonian oligarchs and Persian monarchs, after which little doubt could remain of his oligarchic leanings and fiercly opportunistic nature, suggesting they at the very least were pragmatists more than ideologists. It is also worth noting that this is the point where Thucydides' account breaks off, and the alternative narratives of Xenophon and Diodorus provide nowhere near as much detail of the events at Samos.

6. THE SPEAR AND THE OAR: HOPLITE IDEOLOGY AND THE NAVY

Ionia's people shrink not from the spear.
– *Persians*, Aeschylus

As the muscle, blood and sinews that provided the Athenians with the heartbeat of their fleet, and by extent their empire, one might have expected the crews of said fleet to have been a well regarded and celebrated group in Athenian society. From Salamis and Eurymedon to Cyzicus and Naxos, the triremes of Athens scored a number of remarkable victories, their fearsome navy essentially turning the Aegean into an Athenian sea under the aegis of the Delian League. And so it is quite surprising to find so many of the ancient Athenian sources to be permeated by a distinct scepticism, and sometimes outright hostility, to their own fleet. This narrative becomes even more evident when contrasted with that of the city-state's other major military institution, namely that of the hoplite phalanx. This chapter will explore the contrasting treatment of the hoplite class and the navy crews among ancient writers, and hopefully answer how they came to be the objects of almost polar opposite assessment.

6.1. The Hoplite debate

In the period 1846-56 the British historian George Grote published his major work, the 12-volume *A History of Greece*. Here, Grote launched his theory of the hoplites as a militarized middle class who held a prestigious political status in their respective city-states because of their military role as heavy infantry, a view heavily influenced by Aristotle. The outlines of this position is found in *Politics*, where Aristotle chronicles the evoloution of the Greek *polis* as well as making the case that hoplites acquired their political rights as a direct result of their battlefield prowess:

> Indeed the earliest form of government among the Greeks after monarchy was composed of those who actually fought. In the beginning that meant cavalry, since without cohesive arrangement, heavy armament is useless: and experience and tactical knowledge of such hoplite systems did not exist in ancient times, and so power again lay with mounted horsemen. But once the poleis grew and those with hoplite armor became stronger, more people shared in government. That is why what we now call Polities were formerly called

> democracies. The ancient communities were of course oligarchically and monarchically ruled.[282]

In the following century or so, most historians and archeologists based their work on the hoplite class of Ancient Greece on Grote's account.. The hoplite orthodoxy founded by Grote holds the hoplite class to have been a middle class emerging in the Archaic age, not as wealthy as the kings and aristocrats preceding them but resourceful enough to hold property and purchase their own weapons and armour. This made them both the foremost representatives of the polis in times of war, and also guarantors of stable and constitutional political systems.

Gradually, this orthodoxy has been called into question, in particular on the issues of whether a Greek 'middle class' can be said to have existed at all and on the specifics of hoplite warfare. The ensuing debate can be briefly summarized along the following lines: The orthodox view holds the hoplite class to be a distinct, politically aware and agricultural middle class (*hoi mesoi*) in the Ancient Greek city-states. The revisionist views are naturally less uniform and spans a multitude of different theories, but the two most common obejctions are as follows: firstly, that the hoplite class was far from a clear-cut 'middle class' in any reasonable sense, instead compromised of lower-class thetes as well as rich and leisured landowners. Secondly, that hoplite units engaged in a far more loose and fluid form of fighting than that of the tightly packed phalanx which only arrived later in the Classical age. This is usually, but not always asserted in combination with the claim that light troops and skirmishers *did* play a greater role than previously believed, but that this information was intentionally obscured by the ancient sources.

The goal of this thesis is not to present a new take on the hoplite debate, although it does lean decisively towards the orthodox stance as far as hoplite warfare is concerned. It is nevertheless necessary to acknowledge that the traditional views on the background, social status and battlefield role of the hoplite class has been challenged in recent years, and that the debate itself is far from over.[283]

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[282] Aris. Pol. 4.1297b16–24.

[283] For a full representation of the orthodox and revisionist arguments, see Donald Kagan and Gregory Viggiano's *Men of Bronze: Hoplite Warfare in Ancient Greece,* (2013).

6.2. Spearmen of Athena

As mentioned above, the exact origins of the hoplite phalanx is still a disputed matter. Precisely when and where the first Greeks donned the peculiar hoplite panoply, organised themselves into a phalanx and met another group of similarly equipped and organised Greeks head on is unclear. It is usually a question of whether one takes Homer's description of Greek warriors in the *Iliad* to signify an early form of phalanx or not, a question which is thoroughly discussed by Anthony Snodgrass in *Men of Bronze*.[284] Irrespective of their first appearance, they did become an established military institution in the Greek polis and coveted mercenaries abroad. By the end of the Archaic age, hoplite battles was the prime means of settling serious disputes between the various city-states. As Herodotus has the Persian general Mardonius remark:

> I am reliably informed that the way of war as invariably practised by the Greeks is, due to their ignorance and general ineptitude, a thoroughly ridiculous one. Whenever they declare war on one another, they will find the best and most level stretch of ground, and then go off to it for a battle – with the result that even the victors only ever leave the field after sustaining massive casualties. As for the losers – a topic I do not want to get started on – they end up utterly annihilated.[285]

By the time of the first Persian invasion they were the primary, if not sole element in any Greek army, and would prove decisive at the battle of Marathon in 490. The rout of a Persian army at least twice their size naturally became a point of immense pride for Athens, but the limitations of hoplites were in fact already beginning to show. The agrarian roots and farmwork obligations of most members of the phalanx ensured they were not a feasible option for long-term engagements on foreign soil, as they sorely the lacked logistical support to sustain themselves out in the field for more than a few days at a time without resorting to plundering the countryside.[286] At Marathon they had some luck in form of the Persians' decision to face the Greek heavy infantry head on in flatland terrain, as well as the

[284] Anthony Snodgrass. in Kagan and Viggiano, (2013) p. 85-94.
[285] Herod. 7.9. There is obviously a case to be made for Herodotus to being intentionally quoting Mardonius in the most arrogant and hubristic way possible here, especially considering he is subsequently defeated and killed by the practicioners of this "thoroughly ridiculous" way of war. Nevertheless, it is also true that Persian warfare with its focus on archers, mostly unarmoured infantry and devastating cavalry, was the polar opposite of that practised by the Greeks.
[286] Victor Davis Hanson. *The Other Greeks: The Family Farm and the Agrarian Roots of Western Civilization.* New York: The Free Press (1995), p. 332.

unexplained absence of the feared Persian cavalry. During the second Persian invasion it took the naval victory at Salamis to force Xerxes to quit his campaign along with most of his army, which enabled the Greek allies to defeat the elite force left behind under the command of Mardonius at Plataea in 479. As that closely fought battle showed, hoplites were vulnerable to light skirmishers, mounted archers and uneven terrain, and the Greeks would instead rely increasingly on light troops, mercenaries and warships in the wars to come.[287] This was not reflected by contemporary writers, however: poets such as Aeschylus and Euripides as well as Thucydides all show a marked disdain for skirmishers and missile troops such as peltasts and archers, considering their ability to kill braver warriors from a distance as effeminate and 'un-Greek'.[288] The cultural and philosophical preference for warriors who enganged in hand-to-hand combat with the enemy was not going anywhere.

But while the hoplites of Athens would remain the city-state's most prestigious military unit, in terms of sheer efficiency they were being overtaken by the navy. As if to underline this new duality, the next great Athenian victory arrived courtesy of the amphibious Battle of the Eurymedon in 466, when the fleet commanded by Cimon smashed their Achaemenid counterpart before the hoplite marines disembarked to defeat the Persian land army. Among the other results of this victory, the Athenian pantheon was expanded to make room for a divine hero by the name of Eurymedon, whose temple was fittingly constructed in the Piraeus.[289] Predictably enough, the Persian Wars would figure dominantly in the Athenian cultural sphere for decades to come and among the most cherished contributions was the first of Aeschylus' tragedies, titled *Persians*. Aeschylus had personally served at Marathon, Salamis and Plataea, and in *Persians* he immortalized the latter two battles. It is here that we find the first example of a thoroughly skewered representation of Athens' fleet in contrast to their hoplites: first when Xerxes' mother Atosse enquires exactly who these troublesome Athenians are, and the emphasis is duly put on the hoplites:

> **Atossa**: Does their army have such a multitude of men?
> **Chorus**: Yes, it is an army of such magnitude that it has caused great disaster for the Medes.
> **Atossa**: Is the bow-stretching arrow particularly suited to their hands?

[287] Hanson (1995), p. 333.
[288] Hanson (1995) p. 15-16 and Van Wees (2004) p 62-64.
[289] Hale (2009), p. 93-94.

> **Chorus**: Far from it; they have lances for close fight and shields that serve them for armor.[290]

A messenger arrives to tell of the disaster at Salamis, and a description of the battle follows. Then, Aeschylus inexplicably waives the importance of the sea battle away, instead introducing an even graver event: *"Be assured of this, not even half of the disaster has as yet been told. A calamity so dreadful as to outweigh these ills twice over befell them."*[291]
This turns out to be the slaughter of the Persian garrison at Psyttaleia by a group of Athenian hoplites led by Aristides, an event Herodotus ascribes little importance apart from stressing the '*unrivalled qulities'* of Aristides' character.[292] In Aeschylus' play however, the action at Psyttaleia takes centre stage:

> For when some god had given the glory to the Hellenes in the battle on the sea, on that same day, fencing their bodies in armor of bronze, they leapt from their ships and encircled the whole island, so that our men were at a loss which way to turn … At last the Hellenes, charging with one shout, struck them and hacked to pieces the limbs of the poor wretches, until they had utterly quenched the life of all … This, besides the one already told, is the disaster you must bewail.[293]

The dichotomy between sailors and hoplites could hardly be clearer: "some god" gives the Hellenes glory at sea, but on land the bronze-clad infantrymen claim the glory all by themselves through sheer martial prowess. There is also the level of detail to consider, as the play greatly magnifies the action at Psyttaleia while merely going through the motions of the sea battle. This is wildly unproportional to the respective importance of both events: while the loss of a small infantry garrison bordered on insignificant for an army that numbered in the tens of thousands (and possibly more), the destruction of the fleet and its logistical consequences doomed the invasion as a whole, forcing Xerxes and most of the army to retreat to Persia. One could attribute this peculiar framing of events to Aechylus' own bias, seeing as he himself was of the hoplite class and his brother Cynaegirus was one of the relatively few hoplites to fall at Marathon.[294] It is certainly not incidental that Aeschylus asked for the

[290] Aesch. Pers. 232.
[291] Aesch. Pers. 435.
[292] Herod. 8.95.
[293] Aesch. Pers. 445-40.
[294] Herod. 6.114. Ironically, while trying to latch onto a fleeing Persian ship.

following inscription to be engraved on his gravestone, omitting any mentions of his achievments as a playwright in favour of his contribution at Marathon:

> Under this monument lies Aeschylus the Athenian
> Euphorion's son, who died in the wheatlands of Gela.
> The grove of Marathon, with its glories, can speak of his
> valor in battle
> The long-haired Persian remembers and can speak
> of it too.[295]

Biased or not, as Van Wees comments the play was performed in front of an Athenian audience shortly after the war, even going on to win first price for tragedy at the prestigious Dionysia festival in 472.[296] This clearly indicates that the audience at the Theatre of Dionysus had no problem with slanted renditions of recent history, as long as the rendtion was slanted in the favour of Athens' most prestigious warriors. It is also important to keep in consideration that the occupation of a playwright was seldom that of an apolitical role free of ideoligical constraints and demands: at the turn of the century, a pupil of Thespis by the name of Phrynicus had moved an Athenian audience to tears with his play *The Fall of Miletus*, a tragedy commemorating the Persian conquest of that city in 494. The play was banned from ever being staged again, and the playwright fined 1,000 drachmas.[297]

In 476, facing an ever increasing hostility in the Assembly and his growing reputation for corruption and avarice finally catching up with him (see chapter 4.2), Themistocles commisioned Phrynicus to to produce another tragedy focusing on the Greco-Persian conflict.[298] Like *The Persians*, *Phoenician Women* is told through Persian eyes and was essentially an attempt to rehabilitate Themistocles' standing among the Athenians by reminding them of his role in defeating Xerxes' fleet. This point is further driven home by the the play's titular chorus of wailing women, widows of the Phoenician sailors that had

[295] Vit. Aesch. 119. 45 as quoted in Hanson (1994), p. 46. There is a marked tendence in Athenian poetry from the Classical Age to favour Marthon over Salamis that has perplexed several classicists and historians. One possible explanation is that while Marathon was a pre-emptive strike that stopped the Persian invasion in its tracks, the victory at Salamis was only achieved *after* giving up Athens and seeing the city torched by Xerxes' army.
[296] Van Wees (2004), p. 82.
[297] Herod. 6.21.
[298] Hale (2009), p. 88

perished at Salamis.[299]

In the case of Aeschylus, his sponsor in 472 was none other than Pericles. The Athenians would quickly develope a taste for advancing political agenda through the medium of theatre: Hale notes how Aeschylus' next work *The Suppliants* was written as to explicitly champion the Athenian engagment in Egypt, an issue hotly debated in the Assembly and the Agora at the time. The same held true for the *Oresteia*, a trilogy where Aeschylus again voices strong support for Athenian adventures on foreign soil, invoking Athena herself: *"Let our wars rage on abroad, with all their force, to satisfy our powerful lust for fame."*[300] As for Pericles, Hale claims he made sure Sophocles was rewarded with a tenure as general for the success of his play *Antigone*, despite knowing that the playwright possessed little martial talent and thus making sure to keep him out of harms way.[301] Sophocles would later make good use of his tenure at sea in future plays, perhaps drawing on his own experiences when describing Menelaus' outburst against a blustering but ultimately cowardly trierarch in *Ajax*.[302]

As the fifth century progressed and their navy continued to ensure Athenian dominance at sea, the hoplites of the city-state fared less well. In the first year (460/459) of the First Peloponnesian War, an Athenian army disembarked at Haliae and was promptly defeated by a Corinthian army, while the Athenian fleet subsequently engaged and won two battles against Peloponnesian and Aeginian fleets at Cecruphalia and Aegina.[303] A close encounter on land between Athens and Corinth at Megara followed, ultimately decided twelve days later as the Corinthians were routed after attempting to return to the battlefield to erect a victory trophy.[304] Another Athenian land battle, this time with the Spartans at Tanagra in 457, saw heavy casualties on both sides but eventually resulted in a Lacedaemonian victory.[305] Two months later a regrouped Athenian army was able to defeat a Boeotian host at Oenophyta and reassert control of central Greece, but this was followed by a series of defeats in Egypt that ended with the final expulsion of the Athenian expeditionary force in 455 and

[299] Hale (2009), p. 88. By Herodotus' account [Herod. 6.96] , the Phoenician contingent comprised the finest vessels and mariners in the Persian fleet.
[300] Hale (2009), p. 103.
[301] Hale (2009), p. 131.
[302] Soph. Aj. 1142-46.
[303] Thuc. 1.105.1-2.
[304] Thuc. 1.105.6.
[305] Thuc. 1.108.1.

the rout of a relief fleet of fifty vessels as it was encamping on the banks of the Nile.[306] At Cyprus the army of the recently deceased Cimon won another double battle against the Persians mirroring their triumph at the Eurymedon sixteen years earlier, forcing the Achaemenid king Artaxerxes to sue for peace.

With the Peace of Callias Athens was freed to turn its attention to the their Greek rivals in Sparta and Boeotia, who had not taken kindly to the expanding Athenian orbit that was causing an increasing numbers of Greek cities to overthrow their oligarchic rulers and install pro-Athenian democracies.[307] With the Athenian fleet occupied in the East several Boeotian cities were forcefully returned to oligarchic rule, and under the command of Tolmides 1,000 Athenian hoplites and an unspecified number of allied troops marched out to halt the pushback. The result was a crushing defeat for the Athenians at Coronea in 447 where Tolmides fell and a large number of Athenian hoplites were taken hostage, forcing Athens to relinquish all claims to Boeotia to secure their release.[308]

A clear pattern emerges: working in conjunction with the fleet, either as marines or as embarked troops, the Athenian hoplites could still be deadly effective. But by the mid-fifth century, they were regularly coming up short in classical infantry battles, especially against the Spartans and the increasingly formidable Boeotians.[309] Throughout the period known as the Age of Pericles, Athenian military action was limited to a single campaign, that being the Samian war of 440/439. As discussed in chapter 4.2. this campaign more closely resembled a punitive expedition than anything else, and was effectively ended by an Athenian fleet blockade.[310] The needs and requirements of empire made the navy indispensable, while the traditional hoplite infantry saw less and less use and was essentially reduced to either performing marine duty or staying at home as a respected, but more or less non-essential home guard.

When the Peloponnesian War broke out, this degression became more evident than ever. Whether or not the Periclean strategy had its strategic merit, its emphasis on defense and

[306] Thuc. 1.109.1-110.4.
[307] Hale (2009), p. 109.
[308] Thuc. 1.113.1-4.
[309] Donald Kagan. *The Outbreak of the Peloponnesian War*. Ithaca and London (1969), p. 19.
[310] Kagan (1969), p. 175-76.

sporadic naval aggression must have cut deeply into an already wounded pride on the part of the hoplites. As the Peloponnesians resorted to ravage the countryside in the hope of provoking the pitched battle they were undoubtedly counting on, the hoplite class was forced to watch passively as their vineyards, orchards, grain fields and olive groves were trampled and burned. As Thucydides puts it:

> The territory of Athens was being ravaged before the very eyes of the Athenians, a sight which the young men had never seen before and the old only in the Median wars; and it was naturally thought a grievous insult, and the determination was universal, especially among the young men, to sally forth and stop it… In short, the whole city was in a most excited state; Pericles was the object of general indignation; his previous counsels were totally forgotten; he was abused for not leading out the army which he commanded, and was made responsible for the whole of the public suffering.[311]

However, there are reasons to suspect this tactic was more damaging to Athenian martial and patriotic pride than it was to the countryside itself: Hanson argues convincingly that the 200,000 acres of arable land in Attica was simply too vast for the 60,000 Peloponnesians to ravage efficiently during their rather short stay, and points out that post-war sources including Sophocles claims the Attic countryside had escaped the war lightly.[312] Thucydides himself describes the pain and humiliation of the evacuated farmers in exceedingly emotive terms, but later concludes that *"Previously the invasions were short, and did not prevent them enjoying their land during the rest of the time."*[313] Any hopes that ravaging the countryside would result in Athenian famine were short-lived, as supply ships carrying grain from Egypt and the Black Sea continued to regularly make port in the Piraeus. This was noted well over a decade after the first season of the Archidamian War, as Archidamus' successor Agis II lamented the futility of repeatedly marching his hoplites around in Attican farmlands while Athenian sea lanes continued to operate unobstructed.[314]

This was obviously of little comfort to the Athenians at the time, and as the earlier excerpt from Thucyidedes shows the Periclean strategy soon caused a furious backlash. In

[311] Thuc. 2.21.2-3.
[312] Hanson (2005), p. 53-57.
[313] Thuc. 7.27.4.
[314] Xen. Hell. 1.1.35.

Acharnians and *Peace* Aristophanes' evacuated farmers laments not only the destruction of the countryside, but also the lacklustre leadership of the city that denies them the opportunity to sally out and take back their homesteads.[315] His fellow comic poet Hermippus (already on bad terms with Pericles after serving as prosecutor in a court trial against his mistress Aspasia)[316] launches a far more direct and visceral attack in his play *Fates*:

> King of the Satyrs, why won't you ever lift a spear but instead use dreadful words to wage the war, assuming the character of the cowardly Teles? But if a little knife is sharpened on a whetstone you roar as though bitten by fierce Cleon.[317]

They may not have succeeded in baiting Pericles into a pitched battle by stoking the "angry pride" of the Athenians, but there is no doubt the Lacedaemonian provocations were stirring up strong emotions in the packed city.[318] It probably didn't help matters that for the first months of the war, the cavalry and navy were the only branches of the Athenian military to engage in any kind of retalitory action against the invaders, leaving the hoplites to huddle inside the city walls.[319] This may in fact have been the reason why Pericles in the autumn of 431 embarked a massive force of 10,000 Athenian hoplites as well as 3,000 metic hoplites and an unnumbered group of light troops on an armada setting out to ravage Sparta's allies Megara. This predictably ended with the Megarians mirroring Pericles' strategy of evacuating their fields and bunkering up inside their city, but both Kagan and Hanson agree the mission served a more psychological purpose in presenting the hoplites with an opportunity to avenge the humiliations and damages inflicted on their own properties.[320] Unlike the Spartans, Pericles was no doubt fully aware that sending out an annual army (or rather biannual, as the Athenians would double down on their raids on the Megarians up until 424)[321] to ravage their enemy's territory would not bring the enemy to their knees, but rather saw it as a useful way of boosting morale and scoring political points at home, as well as allowing the frustrated

[315] Hanson (2005), p. 56.
[316] Plut. Per. 32.1.
[317] Kagan (1974), p. 54, here referencing Plut. Per. 33.7. Note the reference to "fierce Cleon": evidently, Pericles was not the only Athenian politican to have grasped that the theatre could make for an effective proxy arena for poltitics.
[318] Plut. Per. 33.3.
[319] Van Wees (2004) p. 66 claims the cavalry in particular was vital in limiting the damage done by the Peloponnesian armies, referencing Thuc. 4.95.2.
[320] Kagan (1974) p. 64-65.
[321] Hanson (2005) p. 59.

hoplites to blow off some steam.

In *Constitution of the Athenians,* probably written some time during the Archidamian War, Pseudo-Xenophon cuts to the core of this ideological nexus by describing the situation in words dripping with acidic sarcasm:

> First I want to say this: there the poor and the people generally are right to have more than the highborn and wealthy for the reason that it is the people who man the ships and impart strength to the city; for the steersmen, boatswains, pursers, look-out men, shipwrights- these are the men on whom the power of the city is based, far more than the hoplites, the noble and the respectable.[322]

As earlier mentioned, Greek warfare was becoming more and more reliant on ships and light skirmishers than on the hoplite phalanx. Not that this shifting importance is reflected in the sources: in 426, a botched invasion of Aetolia leads to the slaughter of 300 hoplite marines, and as elaborated on in 5.1. Thucydides goes to great length in describing their value. However, as Van Wees rightly points out he makes no mention at all of the fates of the 5.000 rowers that accompanied the expedition and must have served on land in some capacity, even as he explicitly states the Athenians by then were more than aware that they were lacking in light troops.[323] The prestige of the hoplites may still have massively outweighed that of skirmishers and rowers, but their contribution to the war effort was already being ecplised. In no case is this more evident than the events at Pylos in 425. Here, the 420 trapped Spartan hoplites at Sphacteria were soundly defeated by an Athenian force comprised of 800 hoplites and 2,000 archers and lightly armed troops, but the effectiveness of the latter meant the Athenian hoplites never even had to engage the Spartans in melee.[324] When they did eventually face off three years later at Amphipolis, 600 Athenian hoplites were cut down during Cleon's disorganised retreat at the cost of a mere seven Spartans.[325]

In all the 27 years of the war only two major hoplite battles took place, at Delium in 424 and at Mantinea in 418. And at both occasions, Pericles' decision to avoid pitched battles against

[322] Pseud-Xen. Const. Ath. 1.2
[323] Van Wees (2004), p. 63-64.
[324] Kagan (1974), p. 246-248.
[325] Hanson (2005), p . 150.

the Peloponnesian League was vindicated as a Boeotian army crushed Athens at Delium and the Spartans of Agis II made short work of an allied army of Argives, Mantineans and Athenians at Mantinea.[326] Of the 7,000 Athenian hoplites that fought at Delium, around 1,000 were killed, making it one of the deadlier hoplite battles in Greek history, and another 200 perished at Mantinea.[327]

These encounters would have important repercussions for the rest of the war: following the defeat at Delium, Athens never again attempted a land invasion of Boeotia, and Mantinea would mark the last time Athens or her allies engaged the Spartan phalanx in a pitched battle. With nearly 2,000 hoplites killed in the space of six years and suffering three clear defeats, Athens could no longer pretend otherwise: for all the glory of Marathon (and, in Aeschylus rather peculiar emphasis, Psyttaleia), there simply was no getting away from the fact that late fifth-century Athenian hoplites were not up to scratch compared to their contemporary peers in Sparta and Thebes. This is commented on by Pseudo-Xenophon, who bluntly states that the Athenian infantry has a reputation for being *"very weak"*.[328]

Does it make sense then, to talk of a specific hoplite *ideology*? I think it does, the nature of which is well summarized by Hanson:

> Not only did such men find it in their own economic and political interests to fight decisively – they had no wish to be absent from their farms on long campaigns and no desire to tax or spend to hire others to do so – but also spiritually such fighting reaffirmed the free farmers' preeminence in Hellenic culture at large. In Greek art, literature, and popular culture only the free landowning citizen – the hoplite – was willing and able to endure the spear carnage of phalanx warfare, and thus alone deserving of the honors and prestige of his polis at large.[329]

The exact socio-economic background of the hoplite class can be debated, and while Hanson believes the majority of them were middle class yeomen Van Wees arrives at the conclusion that a substantial number of hoplites were probably drawn from the lower classes, and not

[326] Thuc. 5.71.1-5.74.1.
[327] Hanson (2005), p. 145.
[328] Ps. Xen. Const. Ath. 2.1.
[329] Hanson (1994), p. 184.

granted the political rights that were awarded to those of higher class.[330] What *is* safe to say is that there existed a prevalent culture of respect and prestige for the hoplites of the Greek polis, probably already in place by the time of the Persian Wars and the further enchanced by it. This makes them one of the first examples of a kind of soldier who, along with their obvious martial value, inhibits an *ideological* role in their society akin to that of the knigthly orders of Medieval Europe or the Samurai caste of early-modern Japan. This not only explains the prevalence of the hoplite class in ancient Greek culture, but the continuity of this prevalence long after they had been ecplised as the most valuable branch in Greek armies.

This role was by no means limited to Athens: the crack Spartiates of Lacaedaimon, "one mass of bronze and scarlet" as Xenophon describes them[331], were uniquely feared by other Greeks to the extent they would sometimes flee from an advancing Spartan phalanx before the lines even met.[332] And under the leadership of Epaminondas, Sparta's eventual vanquisher, Thebes developed the deadliest phalanx ever seen in Classical Greece.[333]

As Hanson points out, besides the obvious horrors of pitched infantry battle this kind of warfare did have some practical merits: they were for the most part relatively short encounters with low mortality rates (well under 20%), and would usually lead to a clear and decisive victory that could effectively finish a war in an afternoon.[334] There is also the social merit and prestige detailed above to consider, a prestige that saw them celebrated as the primary shield and spear of their respective city-states. For the Athenian hoplites, this must have made their minimal role in the Periclean strategy all the more bitter to digest, coming as it did on the back of three decades of evident decline in their military usefulness.

6.3. Aristophanes

This decline was not lost on Athens' most prolific poet. In *Frogs*, Aristophanes has his character Aeschylus bemoan the inferior quality of present-day hoplites (compared to those

[330] Van Wees (2004), p. 81. This subject is extensively covered in Van Wees and Hanson's respective chapters in Kagan and Viggiano (2013). The fact that both Hanson and Van Wees arrives at their separate conclusions on their respective readings of the samme passages from Aristotle amply illustrates the complexity of the issue.
[331] Xen. Ages. 2.7.
[332] Hanson (1994), p. 99.
[333] Van Wees (2004), p. 196.
[334] Hanson (1994), p.33-37.

of his own day in the Persian Wars:

> Consider now what kind of men he first received from me
> if they were generous and six feet tall, no runaway citizens,
> no loafers, rascals, like now, nor miscreants,
> but men who breathed spears and lances, white-crested helmets,
> and headgear, and greaves and sevenfold oxhide tempers.[335]

The context of the play is Dionysus travelling to the underworld in order to revive either Aeschylus or the more recently deceased Euripides, both laying claim to being the greatest tragic poet. The above excerpt is part of a dialgoue where Aeschylus scolds Euripides for essentially picking up where he himself had left off as Athens' prime playwright and cultural figurehead, and overseeing the decline of Athens' fighting men. This point is further expanded upon as Euripides challenges Aeschylus' own legacy in fostering a martial culture in Athens:

> **Euripides**: And what did you do to teach men to be so noble?
> **Aeschylus**: I composed a drama filled with Mars.
> **Dionysus**: Which one?
> **Aeschylus**: The Seven against Thebes.
> Everyone who saw it fell in love with being fierce.
> **Dionysus**: That was a bad thing you did, since you made the Thebans
> more courageous in war. For that at least get whacked.
> **Aeschylus**: You could have trained for this as well, but you weren't so inclined.
> Then, producing The Persians after that, I taught them to yearn
> to beat the enemy; this finest feat did I honor.[336]

Unlike the tragedies who usually provided nostalgic throwbacks to the mythic past, Aristophanes' comedies were set in the present, with characters and political troubles from contemporary Athens. His formula usually consisted of placing an ordinary citizen in absurd circumstances where the rest of society has gone mad, only to turn the situation in his favour

[335] Aristoph. Frogs 1006.
[336] Aristoph. Frogs 1006.

through an equally absurd scheme.[337] Throughout the Peloponnesian War, Aristophanes would produce this kind of playwright commentary on a regular basis. Targets of his criticism included Lysicles (*Knights*) Pericles and his mistress Aspasia (*Acharnians*), Socrates (*Clouds*) and Lamachus (*Peace*) as well as his fellow poet Euripides, but the most vitriolic of Aristophanes' barbs are reserved for Cleon.[338] He was not the only poet who engaged in this kind of playwright commentary, as Sophocles was more than happy to convey his views on matters such as the return of Alcibiades through his plays (in this case *Philoctetes*, where the main theme is the return of a prodigal son to aid in turning a desperate war).[339]

Aristophanes is a tricky character to pin down politically: Hale rightly points out it is worth remembering that the citizens who sponsored his plays came from the same elite that served as trierarchs of the fleet, which is often reflected in the generally pro-navy sentiments in his plays.[340] However, he equally often speaks up for the rowers on the hard nature of their work and issues such as missing payments, and so while certainly no man of the people he is hardly a typical elitist either. An often ambigious writer, in the early stages of the conflict Aristophanes is vigorously anti-war, using the god Hermes as his interlocutor to criticise the Athenians for their raids on Megara that took place during the Archidamian War:

> They, being as shamelessly greedy as they were faithless in diplomacy, chased off Peace with ignominy to let loose War. Though this was profitable to them, it was the ruin of the husbandmen, who were innocent of all blame; for, in revenge, your galleys went out to devour their figs.[341]

In *Lysistrata*, written in the aftermath of the Sicilian disaster of 413, the titular heroine of the play weighs in on the issue of Athens' recent crisis of manpower (one of many issues she is being quizzed about by an Athenian magistrate, to whom she consistently responds by using mundane household terminology):

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[337] Morris, I. and Powell, B.B. *The Greeks: History, Culture and Society*. Harlow: Pearson Education Limited, (2014), p. 344.
[338] See chapter 4.2. for a more in-depth discussion.
[339] Soph. Phil. 1445.
[340] Hale (2009), p. 179-80.
[341] Aristoph. Peace 601.

> That verminous plague of insensate place-seekers soon between thumb and
> forefinger we'll crack. All who inside Athens' walls have their dwelling into one great
> common basket we'll pack.
> Disenfranchised or citizens, allies or aliens, pell-mell the lot of them
> in we will squeeze. Till they discover humanity's meaning.... As for disjointed and far
> colonies,
> Them you must never from this time imagine as scattered about just like
> lost hanks of wool. Each portion we'll take and wind in to this centre, inward to Athens each
> loyalty pull,
> Till from the vast heap where all's piled together at last can be woven
> a strong Cloak of State.[342]

In weaving this "cloak of state", Aristophanes is seemingly arguing in favour of the enfranchisement and inclusion (ie. the granting of citizenship) of the multiple metics and colony population at Athens' disposal, ostensibly as a reward for serving in the Athenian fleet. He would return to this subject in *Frogs*, advocating the same measures and even including slaves into the equation:

> Because it's disgraceful that those who fought just once at sea
> should suddenly be Plataeans and masters instead of slaves.
> No, even this I couldn't say wasn't well and good,
> in fact, I praise it. It's the only sensible thing you did.
> But it's also fair, for people who've fought so much at sea
> with you, as did their fathers, people who are related to your race
> that you let pass their one misfortune, as they request.
> But letting up on your anger, you who are wisest in nature,
> let's gladly make everyone our kinsman
> and full-fledged citizens too, who's ever fought for us at sea.[343]

In *Acharnians* he further refers to the rowers of the fleet as "the bulwark of Athens" while insisting they should expect to be paid at least as much if not more than some recently arrived

[342] Aristoph. Lys. 551. The emphasis put on rhyme by this particular translator necessitated a somewhat crammed style in order to limit what would otherwise be a considerable length.
[343] Aristoph. Frogs 686.

Thracian mercenaries.[344] In *Knights* the issue of payment is broached once more, this time in a manner that makes it clear the rowers were not always paid on time.[345] Returning to *Archanians*, he credits the rowers at Salamis unequivocally for their service (unlike Aeschylus), and in *Wasps* he makes the case for limiting the jury pay of citizens unless they themselves have contributed to the city in a military capacity:

> Finally, we have among us drones, who have no sting and who, without giving themselves the least trouble, seize on our revenues as they flow past them and devour them. It's this that grieves us most of all, to see men who have never served or held either lance or oar in defence of their country, enriching themselves at our expense without ever raising a blister on their hands.[346]

This argument ties in very well with the sentiments of a distinct hoplite ideology expressed by Hanson above, but here Aristophanes also includes those citizens who are ready to wield an oar in defence of the polis, as well as the traditional spearmen. This political nexus is discussed again in Aris. Pol. 7.1327b,[347] who tries to rein in the kind of inclusive sentiment here expressed by Aristophanes by arguing that the political rights in citizenship should still be limited to hoplites and marines, ie. members of the infantry. Aristotle makes a further distinction that draws this line even tighter by recommending specific property qualifications for the hoplites, ensuring a selective enfranchisment of hoplites that would mean only the wealthiest among their number.[348]

Considering the hoplite forces of Athens possibly already included lower-class fighters before the Peloponnesian War, and certainly did as pestilence and various battles took their toll on the city-state's manpower, this raises some interesting questions about possible emerging divisions within the hoplite class. It is not unthinkable that, following major catastrophies such as the plague and the Sicilian disaster, a desperate elevation of lower-class men into the ranks of the hoplites ensued in order to maintain the heavy infantry in the same way as had previously been done with the fleet. The exact background of these new recruits

[344] Aristoph. Ach. 134. However, the tone of this particular line suggests that the character Dicaepolis may be expressing himself somewhat ironically.
[345] Aristoph. Kn. 1362.
[346] Aristoph. Wasps 1102, see Van Wees (2004), p. 82. for further discussion.
[347] See discussion in 5.2.
[348] Van Wees (2004), p. 80-81.

largely depends on whether one accepts the orthodox view, that the zeuigitai class was numerous enough to have been able to provide all the hoplites in Athens' armies, or the revisionist take championed by Van Wees and others that the thetic class was also heavily involved.[349] Whatever their background, perhaps these new hoplites are the inspiration for Aeschylus' denounciation of the "runaway citizens", "loafers", "rascals" and "miscreants"[350] he sees among the spearmen of Athens in *Frogs*? This play was after all written at the very end of the war, more than a decade after they had effectively yielded the Greek mainland to the superior infantry of Sparta and Boeotia.

What are we to make of Aristophanes, not as a playwright but as an historical source? First of all, the nature of his work entails some evident limitations: his plays are after all comedies written primarily for entertainment purposes, and it is entirely possible for a character to provide both sensible commentary and comedic absurdities in the same play. It is quite telling that the exact tone and therefore meaning of some of his passages are not entirely understood even today.[351] Aristophanes' own ideological convictions are often fluctuating, as perhaps should be expected from any one citizen of a democratic republic going through pestilence, political upheaval and a prolonged war. There is also an unmistakable nostalgia in his plays for the good old days of Periclean Athens before the Peloponnesian War, an Athens Aristophanes can hardly have had more than a childhood memory of considering the war broke out when he was no more than fifteen.[352] I also has to be noted that the many criticisms of military ability and valor –or rather, the lack of it– that the poet levels at Pericles, Lamachus and Cleon does ring somewhat hollow considering Aristophanes himself was among those who, to use his own words, "never served or held either lance or oar in defence of their country".[353]

Be that as it may, along with his fellows playwrights Sophocles and Euripides he is the closest we can get to an eyewitness account from the streets of Athens during the Peloponnesian War, especially the events after Thucydides' history ends abruptly in 411.

[349] Van Wees (2004), p. 55-56.
[350] Aristoph. Frogs 1006.
[351] See the example of Dicaepolis in Acharnians, over.
[352] Morris and Powell (2014), p. 344.
[353] Aristoph. Wasps 1102.

6.4. Plato

Among the legacies of Classical Athens, few if any have been as prominent and celebrated as those of the city's democratic governance and extensive maritime power. It is undeniably quite ironic then, that those two institutions were subject to harsh criticism from a third prominent Athenian institution, namely that of the city's revered philosophical tradition. Socrates, Plato and Aristotle were all sharp critics of Athenian democracy, and Plato in particular also directed his ire towards Athens' maritime ambitions. There is a broad understanding in modern scholarship that Socrates in Plato usually serves as an interlocutor for Plato's own ideas, though what we know of Socrates does give him some reasons to distrust the Athenian democracy.

As a member of the hoplite class, Socrates was called up to military service in his late thirties and fought with distinction in at least three battles of the Peloponnesian war: the victory at Potidaea and the defeats at Amphipolis and Delium.[354] He later presided as *epistates*, (overseer) at the notorious trial in the aftermath of the battle of Arginusae, where he objected in vain as the Assembly condemned six of Athens' most promising generals to death. He would eventually share their fate in 399, as the demos turned on him and convicted him of impiety and corruption of the minds of Athenian youth.[355] Perhaps this fuelled the sentiments expressed in his dialogue with Adeimantus, where Socrates presents his famous allegory of the ship of fools as a critique of inept government:

> The sailors are quarrelling among themselves over captaincy of the ship, each one thinking that he ought to be captain, though he has never learnt that skill, nor can he point to the person who taught him or a time when he was learning it. On top of which they say it can't be taught. In fact they're prepared to cut to pieces anyone who says it can … If this is the situation on board, don't you think the person who is genuinely equipped to be captain will be called a stargazer, a chatterer, of no use to them, by those who sail in ships with this kind of crew?[356]

Nor was this antagonism contained to the philosopher's Academy: many among the city-state's aristocracy deeply resented the power of the democratic Assembly and the prestige awarded to the navy, a prestige often perceived as being at the expense of the hoplite class.

[354] Hanson (1994), p. 17 and 17.
[355] Hale (2009), p. 231 and 244.
[356] Plat. Rep. 6.488a – 489a.

The naval professions, Plato scoffs are so toxic they even corrupt the marines who serve aboard triremes:

> So Homer, too, was aware of the fact that triremes lined up in the sea alongside of infantry fighting on land are a bad thing: why, even lions, if they had habits such as these, would grow used to running away from does! Moreover, States dependent upon navies for their power give honors, as rewards for their safety, to a section of their forces that is not the finest; for they owe their safety to the arts of the pilot, the captain and the rower — men of all kinds and not too respectable —so that it would be impossible to assign the honors to each of them rightly.[357]

Like Socrates, Plato's personal experience with the institutions in questions were hardly positive: his uncle Critias had been one of the oligarchic Thirty Tyrants and was killed during their overthrow in 403, and his mentor Socrates would a few years later be executed by the reinstated democratic government that followed.[358] Plato himself grew up during the closing stages of the Peloponnesian War (in which his brother Glaucon fought as a hoplite at Megara in 424), and like Socrates he would have been able to witness the military debacles and erratic political decisions that so characterized the last phase of the conflict. Unlike Socrates however, the fact that Plato survived into the early 340'ies allowed him to witness the unlikely rebirth of Athenian sea power, and he would devote much of his considerable intellectual output to vehemently criticize his city's renewed maritime ambitions, even more so than its democratic government. In an astonishing act of historical revisionism, in *Laws* he deems the celebrated triumph at Salamis to have been not only inferior to the one at Plataea, but even *detrimental* to the Greeks as a whole:

> But we—that is, I myself and our friend Megillus—affirm that it was the land-battle of Marathon which began the salvation of Greece, and that of Plataea which completed it; and we affirm also that, whereas these battles made the Greeks better, the sea-fights made them worse,—if one may use such an expression about battles that helped at that time to save us (for I will let you count Artemisium also as a sea-fight, as well as Salamis).[359]

In Plato's eyes, the rise of Athenian sea power was a disaster for the polis as a whole, and in

[357] Plat. Laws 4.707a-b.
[358] Hale (2009), p. 269-270.
[359] Plat. Laws 4.707c.

Gorgias he further disparages the legacy of three of Athens' most famous admirals and statesmen:

> For with no regard for temperance and justice they have stuffed the city with harbors and arsenals and walls and tribute and suchlike trash; and so whenever that access of debility comes they will lay the blame on the advisers who are with them at the time, and belaud Themistocles and Cimon and Pericles, who caused all the trouble.[360]

For Plato, the contrasting value and respectability between the dependable, noble hoplites and the sailors is so steep that even the oppression inflicted on Attica by the mythical king Minos of Crete was preferable to imitating the Cretans' naval proficiency:

> Hence they were unable quickly to copy the naval methods of their enemies and drive them off by becoming sailors themselves. And indeed it would have profited them to lose seventy times seven children rather than to become marines instead of staunch foot-soldiers; for marines are habituated to jumping ashore frequently and running back at full speed to their ships, and they think no shame of not dying boldly at their posts when the enemy attack; and excuses are readily made for them, as a matter of course, when they fling away their arms and betake themselves to what they describe as "no dishonorable flight." These "exploits" are the usual result of employing naval soldiery, and they merit, not "infinite praise," but precisely the opposite; for one ought never to habituate men to base habits, and least of all the noblest section of the citizens.[361]

What makes these outbursts so remarkable is not the vitriol with which Plato speaks of Athenian sea power *per se*, but rather that he regards the sea itself as a inherently corrupting influence on society. Unlike Aristotle, who concedes that a degree of sea power is necessary, Plato rejects any dealings with the ocean whatsoever:

> For the sea is, in very truth, "a right briny and bitter neighbor," although there is sweetness in its proximity for the uses of daily life; for by filling the markets of the city with foreign merchandise and retail trading, and breeding in men's souls knavish and tricky ways, it

[360] Plat. Gorg. 519a.
[361] Plat. Laws 4.706b-d.

> renders the city faithless and loveless, not to itself only, but to the rest of the world as well.[362]

This seems like a fairly obvious reference to the Piraeus, the harbour founded by Themistocles after the Persian Wars that would eventually become arguably the most important deme in Attica. By Plato's time the Piraeus had long been something of an entity in and of itself, home to a huge metic population that may have outnumbered the Athenian one as well as a myriad of shrines and temples dedicated to Thracian, Egyptian, Phoenician and Carian deitites, among others.[363] For a staunchly conservative, aristocratic landowner like Plato, the cosmopolitan Piraeus, packed as it was with lower-class citizens, foreign sailors, strange gods and exotic merchandise, must have been akin to a monument to just how far his countrymen had strayed from their humble, rural origins.[364] It is hardly surprising that his Athenian interlocutor in *Laws* strongly advises founding a city by the coastline:

> For if the State was to be on the sea-coast, and to have fine harbors, and to be deficient in many products, instead of productive of everything,—in that case it would need a mighty savior and divine lawgivers, if, with such a character, it was to avoid having a variety of luxurious and depraved habits.[365]

In this outburst against the maritime culture adapted by his fellow Athenians, lamenting as he does the replacement of a rural, agricultural society, Plato is not entirely wrong. There *had* been a notable shift in Athenian culture as the importance of the navy grew: sometime during the mid-fifth century, the mythographer Pherecydes had rewritten the myth of Theseus, Athens' legendary founder, adding several nautical elements such as transforming the Minotaur into a Cretan admiral and Theseus' defeat of him into a naval battle.[366] Several triremes were named after democratic civic virtues such as *Eleutheria* ("Freedom",) *Parrhesia* (Free Speech) and *Dikaiosyne* (Justice), not to mention the less than subtle "Demokratia".[367] He had also lived to see the deforestation of Attica carried out to provide timber for the ever-growing fleet, lamenting its effect on the countryside by describing the

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[362] Plat. Laws 4.705a.
[363] Camp, John M. *The Archaeology of Ancient Athens.* New Haven and London: Yale University Press (2001), p. 298-77.
[364] Raaflaub, K. A. in Morris, Ian and Raaflaub (1997), p. 54.
[365] Plat. Laws 4.704d.
[366] Hale (2009), p. 85-86.
[367] Hanson (2005), p. 253.

barren hills that resultated as *"like the skeleton of a sick man."*[368]
As Hale rightly points out, this hostility to both the sea and the mariners sailing it would eventually reach its zenith in Plato's most famous allegory, a dire warning against the hubris and downfall of nations.[369] In the dialogues *Timaeus* and *Critias*, Plato recounts how the modest island kingdom of Atlantis descends into imperial greed and decadence, and how their growing ambition leads them to push ever further eastwards into the Mediterranean.[370] Their onslaught is finally halted by primeval Athens, an entity that could hardly be more different than the Athens of Plato's own times: in contrast to the cosmopolitan, democratic naval hub of Classical times, we find a rural Athens governed by an enlightened class of elite warriors. This oligarchic land power, with their subdued population of serfs and communal dining halls, has undeniable parallels to Athens' rival Sparta. The City of Atlantis, with its three circular harbors, trireme armada and unquenchable apetite for sea power, is an even more obvious nod to Plato's contemporary Athens.[371]

In what is arguably the best chapter of *Lords of the Sea*, Hale concludes that Plato's description of Atlantis was in fact inspired by the design of the Piraeus, and that his dire vision of the rise and fall of a hubristic thalassocracy was aimed squarely at Athens itself. His message is clear enough, and in some ways echo that of Herodotus' verdict on the Persian defeat in 480: naval power leads to hubris, hubris provokes divine wrath and divine wrath inevitably ends in destruction.[372] Plato's meaning could hardly have been more clearly expressed.

6.5. Fields of Ares, Abyss of Poseidon

Finally, in order to fully understand the emerging ideological schism between the hoplite class and the fleet, it is crucial to look at their respective roles in war, more precisely the differences between land-based hoplite warfare and the trireme clashes at sea. While the infantry and the navy often co-operated and fought simultaneous amphibious battles, they were for the most part wholly separate entities and the battle experience of a hoplite and a rower could hardly have been greater.

[368] Plat. Criti. 111b.
[369] Hale (2009), p. 276.
[370] Plat. Tim. 24-25.
[371] Plat. Criti. 117d-e.
[372] Hale (2009), p. 276-79.

As has been estblished, the dense phalanx was a battle formation that emphasised discipline and personal bravery above all else. A staple of Greek martial culture since Homer's description of courageous warriors rewarded by Ares, the spearman had been the most prevalent warrior among the Hellenes since at least the Archaic age: in the hoplite phalanx, he would be implemented into a infantry unit that would dominate the battlefields of Greece for over 300 years.[373] It is telling that honours handed out post-battle rewarded unit cohesion as a whole rather than individual achievments such as kill counts, and that both Athenians and Spartans were merciless in their mockery of cowards (in the case of Sparta, they were even subjected to legal as well as social sanctions.[374] The clash between phalanxes resulted in the bloody mayhem described above, but for all their horrors, they were usually fairly short affairs, and their casualty rates relatively low. Because of the short duration of the battles, the importance of experience and the deep lines of the phalanx, it was not unusual to see older men participate: Socrates and Demosthenes must both have been in their forties at Delium and Chaeroneia, and there are mentions of men approaching 60 who deployed in the phalanx along their younger compatriots, not to mention Homer and Tyrtaios' gory descriptions on the tragical state of these elders' corpses after a battle.[375]

The experience of the rowers was an altogether different experience. This point is made by Phormio, addressing his sailors before the battles of Chalcis and Naupactos:

> In the first place, the Peloponnesians, already defeated, and not even themselves thinking that they are a match for us, have not ventured to meet us on equal terms, but have equipped this multitude of ships against us. Next, as to that upon which they most rely, the courage which they suppose constitutional to them, their confidence here only arises from the success which their experience in land service usually gives them, and which they fancy will do the same for them at sea.[376]

In short, the frontline bravery that decided hoplite battles were of little use at sea, were deft maneuvering, skilled hyperesai and the tactical skills of the commanders were decisive. In

[373] Hanson (1994), p. 30.
[374] Van Wees (2004), p. 194-95 and Hanson (1994), p. 62. The Greeks even had a perjorative verb, *rhipsaspia*, to denote throwing one's shield in battle in order to flee.
[375] Hanson, (1994), p. 90-95.
[376] Thuc. 2.89.2.

sharp contrast to the hoplites meeting their enemy face to face, 108 out of the trireme's 170 rowers probably never even saw the enemy they were fighting during the actual battle.[377] Whereas the generals conducting infantry battles were expected to lead by example and instill courage and resolve in their troops (see chapter 3), a clash between two trireme armadas would usually be decided by the *metis* (cunning) and *techne* (skill) of its commanding officers.[378] There were several consequences of this shift in Greek warfare, but we will focus on two of them in particular, one ideological and one practical.

Firstly, the mounting discontent about the diminishing importance of the hoplite class in the Athenian military now had a scapegoat: Aeschylus and Herodotus may have preferred to wax lyrical over the bravery of hoplites, but they were never condescending or downright hostile to the rowers of the fleet. In Thucydides, this tone changes subtly. He not only goes to great length to elevate the merits of infantry over those of the trireme crews (see his previously mentioned remarks on the dead infantry at Aeotlia),[379] and while he acknowledges the might of the navy and its importance to the Athenian war effort, he writers disparagingly of the crews serving in it. In a brawl involving the Spartan navarch he describes the volatile crews acting *"in typical sailor fashion"* as they band together to chase their superior officer into a temple,[380] implicates that they are less reliable than hoplites[381] and is continuously chooses to omit the number of casualties among sailors while striving for the greatest possible accuracy in the case of hoplite dead.[382] It it not hard to agree with Strauss' observation that while Thucydides *"may have loved the ships, but not the men who rowed them."*[383]

The most damning judgements of the trireme crews were not written during the war, however, but in its aftermath: as we have seen Aristotle was deeply sceptical about these men and the notion of granting them political rights (see chapter 5.2.), and Plato is positively vitriolic in his discourse on anything related to maritime matters (see above). Some of this hostility can and should be attributed to the fleet eclipsing the hoplite infantry in importance,

[377] Hanson (2005), p. 240.
[378] Hale (2009), p. 6.
[379] Thuc. 3.98.4.
[380] Thuc. 8.84.3.
[381] Thuc. 7.63.2-3.
[382] See Strauss, B. in Van Wees ed. (2009), p. 274-75.
[383] Strauss, B. in Van Wees ed. (2009), p. 267.

thus rewarding *"men not too respectable"* rather than the *"noblest section of the citizens."*[384] But I would submit that there is another reason for this growing antagonism in the sources, one often overlooked by modern scholarship.

For whereas less than 2,000 Athenian hoplites fell in the two major hoplite battles of the Peloponnesian War during its first two decades,[385] the Ionian War that ended the conflict claimed at least 50,000 sailors from Athens and her allies.[386] This is, by some accounts, nearly half of the total number of estimated Athenian casualties in the entire war, including the dead from the devastating Great Plague.[387] Besides the sheer monstrosity of this tally, there is also the manner of the deaths in the Ionian War to consider: after a regular hoplite battle, it was a widely accepted Greek custom to allow the loser to collect their dead in order to provide their families to properly bury them.[388] This emphasis on the sanctity of the fallen even extended to the Greeks' barbarian foes: when an Aeginean suggests to the Spartan general Pausanias that the Greeks should decapitate the fallen Persian commander in the same manner as had been done to Leonidas after Thermopylae, the furious Pausanias rebukes him, stating that the Aeginean is lucky to keep his life after such a shameful suggestion.[389] As the Ionian War progressed, this veneer of civility was irreperably ruptured: the Athenians captured in Sicily were either executed or worked to death in horrible conditions,[390] and the savagery recommended by Philocles was repaid in kind by Lysander at Aegospotami.[391]

But perhaps even more apalling to the Athenians was not the scope of the crewmen lost at sea, but the manner of their deaths and subsequent fate of their remains. Whereas a spear trust was utlimately only capable of killing a single combatant, a rammed trireme very quickly turns into a veritable death trap for its 200 crew members.[392] Their survival would depend on their ability to flee the vessel, no easy task as enemy marines and archers would seek to spear them or fetter them with arrows, and even if they made it to open water a remarkable number of Greek sailors were not able to swim. Even for those who made it ashore, an enemy

[384] Plat. Laws 4.707a-b and Plat. Laws 4.706b-d.
[385] See chapter 5.2.
[386] Hanson (2005), p. 287.
[387] Hanson (2005), p. 296. For a more detailed discussion, see p. 377.
[388] Strauss in Van Wees ed. (2009), p. 267.
[389] Herod. 9.79.
[390] See chapter 4.3.
[391] See chapter 4.4.
[392] Gabrielsen (2002), p. 211.

detachment of hoplites was often waiting on land to kill or maim any survivors.[393] After the battle, the losing side had no chance of retrieving their dead, and even the victors were often unable to retrieve theirs due to the stormy conditions of the Aegean.[394] Nor, due to the unpleasant of effect sea water on human corpses, were the dead always possible to properly identify.

There are also the huge cultural and religious ramifications to consider: the fate of the drowned was considered to be a nightmarish one in the ancient Greek world, their unrecovered and unburied souls forever restlessly roaming the shadowy underworld. This goes a long way of explaining not just the rage of the Assembly in the aftermath of Arginusae, but also just how far removed many of the Athenian civilians at home were from the harsh realitites of the Ionian War.[395] Unlike the previous Greek wars, mostly fought thorugh the straightforward clash between hoplites, the Peloponnesian War in general and the Ionian War in particular had introduced a multitude of new horros: from indignity of watching the Attican countryside ravaged by the Spartans, to the Great Plague that wiped out as much as 25% of the Athenian population including Pericles and most of his family.[396] As many as 8,000 Athenian prisoners of war had been worked to death in Sicily, over a dozen generals executed or driven into exile by their own hand, and in the final phase of the war tens of thousands of the crew members in their prized fleet had perished abroad. Thousands had been executed or maimed by the ruthless Peloponnesians, but most had been claimed by the abyss of Poseidon, their corpses lost forever or slowly washed up on the shores of the Sea of Marmara and the northeastern Aegean.[397]

As these realities gradually dawned on the Athenians, I think it is fair to assume that they brought a new dimension to not just *what*, but also the way *in which* they thought about the war. The fleet may have replaced the hoplite infantry as the most important branch of the Athenian military, but now that it had finally been brought down by a most unexpected opponent –there is still an intriguing debate to be had on just how the passive, fiercly reactionary Peloponnesians managed to turn the tables on the innovative and no less

[393] Hanson (2005), p. 242.
[394] Strauss in Van Wees ed. (2009), p. 267.
[395] Hanson (2005), p. 247.
[396] Kagan (1974), p. 71.
[397] Strauss in Van Wees ed. (2009), p. 271-72.

avowedly nautical Athenians, rather than the other way around– so too did it probably receive the majority of the blame in the eyes of many Athenians.

This was then reflected not only in the increasingly rabid behaviour of the Assembly but also in the later hostility to maritime affairs expressed by writers such as Plato, and their longing for a past in which the phalanxes of Greece settled their conflicts in the good, old way of straightfoward hoplite battles.

7. CONCLUSIONS

The power of fate is a wonder; dark, terrible wonder. Neither wealth nor armies, towered walls nor ships, black hulls lashed by the salt, can save us from that force.
- *Sophocles*

And so we return, at long last, to the research questions posed in the introduction. In order to begin answering them, let us start with retracing the three discussion chapters and the findings made there.

While it is true that the command structure of the Athenian military was organized around the ten annually elected generals, it is equally true that in times of conflict the overall command tended to gravitate towards one individual in particular, such as in Cimon's campaign on Cyprus and Pericles' dictating of the defensive strategy of the Archidamian War.[398] This usually happened by implication, but occasionally also by bestowing extended autonomous powers through extraordinary titles such as the one of strategos autokrator, given to Alcibiades in 407.[399] On their return to Athens the generals were subjected to regular euthynai, then put on trial for misconduct should they be suspected of such. As we have seen, this process produced increasingly erratic and vindictive results as the Peloponnesian War wore on, to the extent that many generals decided not to return to Athens at all.[400] But while the Athenians could prove merciless to those found guilty of failure or misconduct in victory, they were nonetheless willing to roll back their judgements in the face of imminent catastrophe, even if it meant compromising their democratic principles. This was certainly the case with the reinstatements of Cimon and Alcibiades, both of whom were connected with oligarchic factions.[401] The same holds true with Phormio, who was brought back into the fold by what was essentially a deliberate manipulation of the Athenian legal system.

As such, from the perspective of military leadership there is very little to suggest the leadership of Athenian fleet had any distinct ideological leanings towards democracy. Anti-democratic political sympathies *could* be used against a general to justify having him

[398] Chapter 4.2.
[399] Chapter 4.3.
[400] Chapter 4.4.
[401] An argument can be made that there was hardly any faction Alcibiades had not had dealings with by the end of the war, but whatever else this makes him, it is certainly not a democrat.

removed from office or worse, but this charge was usually only brought forward *after* public momentum had already begun to turn against him.

On to the presence of the thetes in the Athenian fleet, and the fleet's role in empowering Athenian democracy as a whole. In my view, we can almost certainly dispose with the idea that Solonic classes were used as a formal scheme for assigning military duties, owing to the flimsy evidence for this practice (see below), its practical unsustainability and the multiple literary sources to the contrary. As the clear majority of Athenian citizenry, it is more or less unavoidable that they would also make up the majority of the arguably least prestigious, and as the Peloponnesian War progressed clearly most dangerous, role in the army.

There *may* be a case to be made for the earliest Athenian fleets being manned exclusively by citizens, with most of these hailing from the thetic class. However, the evidence for this remaining the customary procedure to man the fleet is very thin, composed as it is of the same, irregular incidents of 428 and 415 discussed in chapter 5.2. There is little doubt that citizens continued to serve in the navy, and I agree with Potts' assertion that it was this group that constituted the "naval mob" referred to by Thucydides and Aristotle.[402] But as the fleet and the military demands put on it throughout the fifth century grew, the citizen rowers were almost certainly reinforced with, and probably outnumbered by, alternative sources of oarpower such as metics, mercenaries and slaves. The notion of a general connection between democracy and thalassocracy is similarly unfounded, considering other Greek city-states were perfectly willing to engage in one without the other. As for the role of the fleet in sustaining and empowering Athenian democracy, I simply can not see much evidence to support this claim. Nor am I convinced by the claim that the events at Samos in 411 is evidence of a fleet with a pronounced political identity of its own, and instead regard their Athenian identity and loyalty to the polis to be their defining ideological trait.[403]

Finally, in the third discussion chapter I have examined the contrasting natures of hoplite ideology and the varying manner in which the Athenians considered their trireme fleet and its crews. Firstly, I believe there *was* a distinct, ideological frame in which the hoplites regarded themselves, and were in turn viewed by the rest of the polis. This ideological identity was

[402] Chapter 5.2.
[403] Chapter 5.3.

based on their long-standing role as the premier protectors of the polis, their willingness to face down an advandcing enemy phalanx and fight, bleed and die in pitched battles against the hoplites of other city-states qualifying them for a prestigious and honourable place among the polis' upper echelon.[404] This primacy was gradually challenged throughout the fifth century, first by Themistocles' inception of the fleet and then by its triumph at Salamis. As the Delian League evolved into an Athenian maritime empire, their military importance faded as the power of the fleet increased. During the Peloponnesian War, it was revealed just how far behind the Athenian hoplites had been left compared to their Spartan and Theban rivals, causing Pericles to more or less omit them from his strategy and contemporary writers to openly comment on their perceived weakness.[405]

I believe the notable hostility found towards the Athenian fleet in Plato's writing to be the clearest example of just how multifaceted the legacies of the Peloponnesian War truly was. One of them was a fundamental –perhaps not entirely untouched of personal convictions– belief on behalf of Athens' most revered philosophers that the misfortunes the polis suffered towards the end of the fifth century could be pinned on two central institutions: the democracy and the navy. And so, many decades after the decisive defeat at Aegospotami, this elevation of the fleet from a formidable branch of the Athenian military to the very torch bearers of democratic politics would receive its considerable philosophical wrappings.

In short, my conclusion is that the link between Athenian democracy and thalassocracy is real only inasmuch as it was a connection manufactured by writers hostile to both. This hostility has several different origins –note Herodotus' early observation of Athenian nautical chauvinism[406]– but it was was greatly accelerated by the perceived failure of both institutions during the Peloponnesian War. I hold that this conflict scarred the ancient Greeks in ways we probably still do not fully comprehend, causing an intellectual backlash in the forms of Plato and Aristotle who both held the democracy and the fleet jointly responsible for Athens' ruination. And so, an ideological connotation was born between the two institutions that has lasted to this day.

[404] Chapter 6.2.
[405] Ps. Xen. Const. Ath. 2.1.
[406] Chapter 2.1.

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