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THUCYDIDES ON EARLY GREEK HISTORY

The introduction to Thucydides' history was wrong-headed and stylistically inept, according to the historian and literary critic Dionysius of Halicarnassus. This 'proem' would have been much better, he thought, if Thucydides had not 'stretched it out to 500 lines' but skipped straight from chapter 1 to chapter 21. So convinced was Dionysius that he proceeded to quote the whole of the remaining introductory text to show how well it read without the padding (*On Thucydides* 19-20). No modern reader will agree: the text that our critic wanted to edit out, a sweeping history of Greece known as 'the Archaeology' (*archaiologia*, 'account of ancient times'), is now universally regarded as a landmark of historical analysis.

But Dionysius did have a point: a more conventional introduction along the lines he preferred could have worked perfectly well. Thucydides could have begun with his claim that the Peloponnesian War was the 'greatest' war ever fought (1.1.1-2), addressed the difficulty of finding reliable evidence (1.1.3, 1.21-22), and concluded that the Peloponnesian War was the greatest war because it lasted much longer than the previous greatest conflict, the Persian War, and involved 'sufferings' (*pathēmata*) greater than ever before in the same span of time (1.23.1-3). Notable 'sufferings' were certainly an important feature of Thucydides' narrative, dramatically evoked, carefully analysed, or both, as in the case of civil war and plague (see Ch. 1, this volume). So what need was there to insert a long account of early Greece?

The purpose of the Archaeology is to introduce another dimension of Thucydides' history: the analysis of power. The Archaeology defines the greatness of the Peloponnesian War not by the damage suffered but by the power deployed: the war involved greater military resources and larger numbers of Greeks than any other (1.1.1, 21.2).¹ Thucydides is not

¹ Some argue that in Thucydides' mind the scale of power and the scale of suffering were

content merely to measure the scale of military power, but seeks to explain how it came into being. Rather than a list of earlier, less impressive, wars, the Archaeology is an ambitious analysis of the growth of Greek power over nearly a millennium. This chapter explores both the nature and the factual reliability of Thucydides' model of historical development.

<1>Military resources and modernity: Thucydides' criteria of development

Thucydides states that from the outset he expected the war to be a great conflict 'on the evidence that both sides were at a peak of complete preparation (*paraskeuē*) for it' and the whole Greek world was being drawn in (1.1.1). The Archaeology expands on this statement and tries to demonstrate that 'this movement (*kinēsis*) was the greatest among the Greeks and a part of the barbarians, indeed, one might say, among most of mankind' (1.1.2). The closing sentence of the Archaeology (1.21.2) states clearly that the war itself was 'great' (contra Tsakmakis 1995, 41-5) but the choice of the word 'movement' here, rather than simply 'war', shows that Thucydides meant to include the preparation for war and mobilization of allies as 'great' in their own right (Hammond 1952, 130-3). 'Preparation' is a term often used by Thucydides, with a range of meanings difficult to render into English (Allison 1989): in a military context, it corresponds closely to 'armament', both the process of getting ready to fight and the resulting resources made ready for war. The Archaeology thus aims to show that the armaments and allies gathered and deployed in 431 BC had never been surpassed.

The result is, according to some, a one-sided history 'which leads from barbarism to the Athenian empire' (de Romilly 1956, 285). Others see a scrupulously maintained balance

closely linked (Gomme 1945, 89-90), and that the ultimate purpose of the Archaeology is to explore the destructive consequences of armament (Foster 2010, 4-43), but there appears to be no hint at this link in the Archaeology itself. One may note that some of the 'sufferings' listed are attributed to 'barbarians' (1.23.2) or to natural and supernatural causes (1.23.3), so are not linked to Greek armament. Moreover, the Archaeology is closed off by ring-composition at the end of 1.21 (e.g. Hornblower 1997, 59; Nicolai 2001, 264-6), and thus separated from the comments on suffering (contra e.g. Connor 1984, 30-1; Ellis 1991, 362-5, who identify a 'ring' enclosing the whole of 1.1-23).

between the development of Athens and Sparta (Allison 1989, 14-27; Tsakmakis 1995, 44-6). Neither view seems quite right. The histories of Athens and the Peloponnese (not just Sparta) are indeed juxtaposed and balanced quite carefully, but ultimately the two are structurally unequal because the growth of Greece is described almost entirely as matter of moving closer and closer towards the military strengths of classical Athens, while the weaknesses of early Greece coincide exactly with the relative weaknesses of Peloponnesian armament at the start of the war, as identified by a series of speakers in Thucydides' account.

In 432 BC, the 'intelligent' Archidamos of Sparta (1.79.2) tells his people that they are 'unprepared' to make war, and will need two or three years to get ready (1.80.3, 82.2, 5). They have better and larger land armies (1.81.1), but the Athenians 'are highly experienced at sea and are very well equipped in every other way, with private and public wealth and ships and horses and weapons and a mass of people not matched in any other single place in Greece, and they also have many allies who pay tribute' (1.80.3, 81.4, 86.3). Sparta falls far short in number of ships, has no public funds, and its citizens are unwilling to contribute their own money (1.80.4), yet 'war is largely not a matter of weapons, but of expenditure which enables the use of weapons' (83.2). Moreover, the Peloponnesians do not all share the same goals, and a war would serve only the 'private interest' of some (1.82.5-6). A Corinthian speaker counters that the coastal and inland cities of the Peloponnese do, in the long run, have shared interests (1.120.2, 122.2, 124.1) and that Spartan leadership will ensure unity (1.120.1, 121.2; cf. 2.11.9). They insist that the Peloponnesians enjoy military superiority on land (1.121.2, 4), and will be able to find funds to create a navy, from the cities' own resources and by borrowing from the temple treasuries at Delphi and Olympia (1.121.3, 5); with practice they will eventually match Athenian naval skill (121.4). The Peloponnesians thus accept that their resources are inferior to those of Athens, even if they disagree on how

serious their weaknesses are. Accordingly, they spend a year preparing for war (1.125.2), in part by raising ships and money from Sparta's allies in Italy and Sicily (2.7.2; cf. 1.82.1).

Armament is revisited in a speech attributed to Pericles, who says that the Peloponnesians may have a larger army (1.141.6, 143.5), but 'they have no private or public money', and as a result can wage only brief wars against one another, no long wars overseas (1.141.3). Sustained warfare requires 'surplus' (*periousia*), not *ad hoc* levies (141.5; 142.1). If the Peloponnesians somehow do raise funds to build a navy, they will still not have a chance to acquire naval expertise, or any access to professional crews (1.142.5-9, 143.2). Moreover, they 'do not use a single Council hall' (1.141.6), so each state will pursue its own interests (1.141.7). In a second speech, Pericles sketches Athens' strengths, above all a large 'surplus of money', mainly derived from tribute and other revenue from allies (2.13.2-5). This surplus funds a large and highly proficient navy (1.142.7), consisting of 300 triremes; in addition Athens has more than 30,000 troops, more than half of which guard 20 miles (178 *stadia*) of fortification wall (2.13.6-8). Thucydides notes shortly afterwards that the population of Attica had been politically unified since the days of the 'intelligent' king Theseus, who had forced them to 'use a single Council hall and *prytaneion*' (2.15.2), and that Pericles managed to preserve Athenian unity despite Sparta's best efforts to foment internal division (2.20.1-22.1).

This state of armament on both sides explains why the Archaeology is by and large interested in only two criteria of greatness and weakness: growing financial surpluses and navies, and increasing unification of Greek states under powerful leaders. These features of the Greek world are pursued as far back as the generation after the Flood. Thucydides does not adopt Herodotus' strategy of dismissing legends as beyond knowable history and confining himself to 'the human age' (Hdt. 1.5-6; 3.122.2; cf. 2.118.1). Instead, he tackles tradition head-on and argues that the military resources of the Greek world of his own day are

even greater than those of the heroic past. The Archaeology thus represents history as a story of progress that culminates in a superior modern world, a conception which has been widespread in western culture since the nineteenth century but was unusual in antiquity.

Although modernity is measured primarily in scale of armament and degree of unification, the Archaeology also reflects a broader sense of ‘cultural’ modernity felt by late fifth-century Athenians. For instance, comic plays of the 420s BC mock as old-fashioned a certain hairstyle for men which had fallen out of use sometime after the Persian War.² This kind of awareness of recent cultural change explains why Thucydides devotes a lengthy passage of the Archaeology to contemporary dress, which is otherwise barely relevant to his theme. After describing the traditional ‘luxurious’ appearance of older Athenians, he notes that ‘the Lacedaemonians were the first to adopt moderate dress in the modern style’ (τὸν νῦν τρόπον, 1.6.4). They were also the first to exercise naked rather than in loincloths, as was the Greek custom until ‘not many years’ (οὐ πολλὰ ἔτη) ago, and still is the non-Greek custom (1.6.5). Thucydides’ conclusion reveals why the apparent digression has been included: ‘one could point out many other ways in which the ancient Greek people lived in the same manner as barbarians do now’ (1.6.6). In other words, habits of (un)dress illustrate how Greeks have continued to develop while other nations have stood still.

The idea that developments in Greece represent something fundamentally new in history helps explain why Thucydides claims that armament, alliances and the war were the greatest ‘among most of mankind’. To an extent, this claim is justified by some interventions by non-Greeks, especially the attacks in 429 BC of a coalition of non-Greeks in the north-west as allies of Sparta (2.80-81) and of a huge Thracian army as allies of Athens (2.95-101), but such episodes hardly amounted to the participation of ‘most of mankind’. If Thucydides meant, however, that most of the world had never witnessed such a mobilization of resources,

² Aristophanes, *Knights* 1324-34; *Clouds* 984-5. Also: Asios fr. 13 West; Heracleides of Pontus (cited by Athenaeus 512bc; Aelian *VH* 4.22).

his claim is less absurd (Hornblower 1997, 6, 62). Elsewhere, he hints at comparisons between Greek and other powers. The Thracians of the Odrysian empire are, he notes, the greatest power in the north, with a large army and ‘the greatest revenues of money’ (2.97.5), but, we may understand, no navy. The Persian empire had been defeated, according to the Athenians, by the superiority of the smaller but better Greek fleet (1.73-5). According to another version, the Persians had lost because large military expeditions tend to ‘fail on foreign soil from a lack of supplies’ (6.33.5-6; cf. 1.69.5), suggesting that even the Persians suffered from inadequate ‘preparation’. A similar criticism is made by Thucydides himself of the Scythians who, if united, would have a greater army than either the Thracians or the Persians, ‘but they are not at all the equal of others in sound thinking or intelligence as far as their means of living are concerned’ (2.97.6), i.e. as nomads they have no surpluses of wealth to fund warfare. For different reasons, then, none of the greatest powers of Europe and Asia could match the sophistication of ‘modern’ Greek, or at any rate Athenian, armament.

<1>**Pacification and unification: the process of development**

The navy is the engine of growth for Thucydides. Navies pacify the seas, which leads to private and public material prosperity, which produces the funds to wage naval wars, which leads to the unification of states under the greatest naval power, which produces greater security and revenues for all, and so on in a virtuous circle of growth. The three main elements of this model – public finance, naval power, and political unification – are thus closely connected, but for clarity and convenience will be discussed separately.

<2>*The growth of ‘surplus’ and public finance*

Thucydides imagines that the earliest Greeks ‘had no strength in size of cities or other armament’ (1.2.2), because their lives were constantly disrupted by violence. Plundering

raids forced men to carry weapons at all times (1.5.1-6.2), ‘civil wars’ (*staseis*) divided communities and made them vulnerable to outside attack (1.2.4, 6), and whole populations were forced to migrate away from danger (1.2.1). As a result, ‘everyone used their own territory only as far as necessary for survival and they had no surplus of money and did not plant the earth, since they never knew when someone might attack and they were unfortified as well so another might take it from them’ (1.2.2; cf. 1.6.1). The absence of planting does not mean that agriculture did not exist: the verb ‘to plant’ (*phyteuein*) denotes cultivating vines, olives and fruit trees, as opposed to grain.³ Moreover, Thucydides refers to ‘power’ derived from ‘good land’ even at this very early stage (1.2.4). He evidently believed that the earliest Greeks were subsistence farmers but were unable to produce wine or olive oil, crops which require long-term investment (Marshall 1975, 32), on account of endemic violence.

Sea travel was not safe at this stage (1.2.2, 1.6.1), but it was possible: Thucydides stresses its importance in later stages of development, but never describes it as a new phenomenon; he merely says that it became more common (1.3.4, 5.1, 7.1, 13.1 and 5). However, ‘there was no trade’ (*emporía*, 1.2.2), presumably because this would have involved primarily the exchange of high-value produce such as wine and olive oil by sea: in the beginning, violence curtailed both the use of trade routes and the production of commodities to be traded.

Conditions changed when Minos of Crete ‘acquired a navy’ and used it to clamp down on ‘piracy’ (*lēisteia*), i.e. sea-borne plundering expeditions, a common and acceptable way to make a living at the time (1.5.1-2), which caused cities to be founded a long way from the sea (1.7). ‘The pirates, naturally (ὡς εἰκότως), he cleared from the seas as much as he could, so that more revenues would come to him’ (1.4; cf. 1.8.2). Thucydides may have in mind the two actions undertaken by Athens near the start of the Peloponnesian War: the protection of

³ E.g. Hesiod *Works & Days* 22, 780-1; Xenophon, *Hellenica* 3.2.10; *Cyropaedia* 1.5.10.

Euboea from Locrian plundering raids in 431 (2.32) and the protection of merchant shipping from the Levant from attacks by Peloponnesian pirates in 430 (2.69.1). Such measures created a safer environment in which people could accumulate ‘greater surpluses of money’ (1.7; cf. 1.8.3), and afford to build fortified settlements on coasts and isthmuses ‘for the sake of trade’ (1.7). Evidently, a reduction of raiding made more profitable forms of production possible while the suppression of piracy at sea boosted trade, and both kinds of economic growth enabled Minos and others rulers to raise more taxes, duties or tribute.

This image of Minos as a peacemaker is quite a departure from the Athenian legend that he was a despot who demanded tributes of human victims for the Minotaur (e.g. Hellanicus fr 164 Fowler), or even from the Cretan version of the legend, which represented him as a straightforward conqueror, who did not expel the natives but integrated them into his navy (Herodotus 1.171.2-5). Whether Thucydides found his version in another source or formulated it himself, his picture of Minos reflects Athens’ self-image as an enemy of pirates. In addition to the two anti-piratical actions already mentioned, Athens expelled the Dolopians from Scyros in 475 BC (1.98.2), and in so doing eliminated a notorious pirates’ nest, according to a later source (Plutarch, *Cimon* 8.3-6). In the mid-fifth century Athens is said to have tried to organize an international congress to discuss ‘how everyone might sail safely and keep the peace at sea’ (Plut. *Pericles* 17.1). These claims may or may not be true (de Souza 1999, 26-30, 38-41), but the parallel with the policies attributed to Minos shows that they reflect a fifth-century *ideal* of sea-power, which Minos had supposedly put into practice.

Not only is classical Athens foreshadowed here, but early Athens itself is imagined as playing a special role in the process of pacification. From the start, the city was an exception to the rule of violence: Attica had only ‘thin soil’, but this lack of agricultural potential meant that civil war and migration did not occur (1.2.5); instead, exiles and migrants from the rest of Greece moved to Athens ‘because it was stable’, so that the population grew (1.2.6). In

view of their stability, it is no coincidence that ‘the Athenians were the first to put down iron’, i.e. stopped carrying weapons in daily life, and, ‘relaxing their lifestyle, changed to something more luxurious’ (1.6.3). The context suggests that this is supposed to have happened before the Trojan War. A plausible period for the adoption of more peaceful habits is the time of Theseus’ unification of Attica, which put an end to internal wars (2.15.1-2).

Although financial resources were growing, they were still relatively small by the time of the Trojan War, Thucydides argues, and this limited the scale and effectiveness of Greek armies. He calculates that 102,000 Greeks came to Troy, but concludes that this is ‘not many, given that they were sent out from the whole of Hellas collectively’ (1.10.5). More manpower would have been available but ‘lack of money’ (ἀχρηματία) and ‘a shortage of supplies’ (τῆς γὰρ τροφῆς ἀπορία) meant that Agamemnon brought only as many men as could be sustained from local resources, by raiding and by cultivating land in the Chersonese opposite Troy (1.11.1). ‘If they had come with a surplus of provisions’, the Greeks would have overwhelmed Troy, but the manpower devoted to *ad hoc* provisioning undermined the war effort (1.11.2). All other Greek powers also remained ‘weak on account of a lack of money’ (ibid.). Thus early Greece shared the most serious weakness in the armament of the contemporary Peloponnese, and suffered the same lack of supplies which in one version of events had caused the Persian invasion to fail. Athens, by contrast, was able to pay wages which its soldiers and rowers used to buy provisions from merchants or in local markets, or on occasion even from shiploads of supplies sent along by the city itself (Thuc. 6.21.2-22).

Thucydides states simply that ‘it is apparent’ that a lack of finance forced the Greeks at Troy to cultivate their own food as well as raid for supplies. This is remarkable because, although raids are often mentioned (e.g. *Il.* 9.328-9; *Od.* 3.105-6), the epics say nothing about farming the Chersonese. I would suggest that this story was a local Athenian tradition, because an ancient commentator on Thucydides (1.11.1) explains that the cultivators ‘were

led by Acamas and Antimachus', and Acamas was a son of Theseus, who ought to have been at Troy but embarrassingly for the Athenians was not mentioned in the *Iliad*. The story may thus have been invented in order to provide a respectable reason for Acamas' absence from the action, while simultaneously staking a claim to ownership of the Chersonese, which was colonized by Athens from c. 550 BC onwards (Hdt. 6.34-9).

After the Trojan War, Thucydides imagines, Greece once again suffered civil wars (1.12.2) and migrations, 'so that they could not experience growth in tranquillity' (ἡσυχάσασαν ἀὐξηθῆναι, 1.12.1). It took a long time for Greece to be 'stably pacified' again (1.12.4) and reach the next level of economic prosperity: people 'engaged still more than previously in the acquisition of money' and 'revenues became greater' (1.13.1). Corinth led the way: always 'powerful in wealth' owing to transit trade by land, they made the most of the rise of sea-faring: 'acquiring their ships, they put down piracy and by providing a trading-post (*emporion*) for land and sea, they kept their city powerful through revenues of money' (1.13.5). Again, the suppression of violence, especially maritime raiding, stimulates the growth of private and public wealth, especially through trade and taxes on trade.

At this point, the story of economic growth ends, but the story of the development of navies and the unification of Greek states continues, and accelerates.

<2>*Ships and navies*

For most of Greek history, navies consisted of the same type of ship used by pirates and raiders. Thucydides demonstrates this in detail for the vessels in the *Iliad*'s Catalogue of Ships, which mentioned crews of 120 and 50 men (*Il.* 2.510, 720-1), 'indicating, it seems to me, the largest and the smallest', consisting of soldiers who did their own rowing (*Il.* 2.720-1), and leaving no room for passengers because their vessels were not 'enclosed', i.e. with decks, but 'built in a more piratical style in the ancient manner' (1.10.4). During the Trojan

War and for many centuries thereafter, even the greatest navies were formed of such ‘pentekontors and long ships’ (1.14.1, 3). The implied contrast is with the classical Greek warship, the trireme, which had crew of 200, mostly specialist oarsmen, and enough room on deck for up to 40 ‘passengers’ (Hdt. 6.15.1; Morrison et al. 2000, 107-26). The only advantage which early navies had over pirate fleets would thus have been their size, but Thucydides does not go into the details of their scale or organization.

After the first creation of a navy by Minos, the next major development took place only when the highest level of economic growth was reached:

Greece equipped navies, and they embraced the sea more. The Corinthians are said to have been the first to handle matters relating to ships in much the same way as we do now, and triremes were first built in Greece at Corinth. (1.13.1-2)

Since Thucydides has told us very little about the nature of earlier navies, it remains obscure to what innovation, apart from the building of triremes, he refers. The verb ‘to handle’ (μεταχειρίσαι), however, suggests a change in organisation, and such a change would certainly have been necessary when triremes replaced pentekontors. Pentekontors were used in private raiding ventures, and early navies almost certainly consisted simply of privately-owned ships mobilized for public expeditions, so that little central naval organisation was required. The trireme, by contrast, with its large crew and small number of soldiers, was too expensive for almost all private ship owners and unsuitable for piratical activity. Building and maintaining triremes required public intervention, and this centralization of naval resources is surely what Thucydides had in mind (van Wees 2013).

The creation of navies is closely associated with the establishment of ‘tyrannies’, ‘as revenues grew larger; previously there were hereditary kingships with agreed privileges’ (1.13.1). The precise connection between tyrants and navies is left obscure, perhaps because Thucydides will later show tyrants in a negative light and does not want to give them credit

for playing positive role here, but the elliptically expressed idea is evidently that some individuals acquire so much wealth that they are able to acquire a position of greater power than traditional rulers were able to wield (Hornblower 1997, 42). Tyrannies thus represented a centralization of power, and this facilitated the development of modern navies.

The third stage of naval development involved the complete replacement of pentekontors by triremes, which had initially been built only in small numbers. This happened in Sicily and Corcyra c. 490 BC (1.14.2), and at Athens shortly before 480 BC, when Themistocles instigated expansion and modernisation of the fleet (1.14.3), so that the Athenians ‘became naval people’ (*nautikoi*, 1.18.2); he ‘was the first who dared propose that they embrace the sea’ (1.93.3-4). In 480 BC Athens contributed ‘a bit less than two-thirds’ of 400 Greek vessels in total (1.74.1), i.e. 250 triremes, which for Thucydides was as large as the Athenian fleet ever became; he records that 250 ships, including 100 patrol vessels, was the highest number of Athenian ships at sea during the Peloponnesian War (3.17).

Straining to find any further naval development after the Persian War, Thucydides can only point to the trivial fact that triremes acquired ‘full-length decks’ (1.14.3), and, as we have seen, to the high level of skill acquired by the Athenians in naval warfare (1.18.3). The most significant development after the Persian War was a new kind of political unity.

<2>‘*Slavery for the sake of profit*’: *the unification of Greece*

‘It seems to me’, says Thucydides (twice), that Greece was originally so divided that it did not even have the name ‘Hellas’ yet, but each region was named after its own ‘tribe’; hence non-Greeks were not yet collectively known as ‘barbarians’ either (1.3.2-3). This personal opinion is based on a skewed reading of the evidence, as we shall see, but the notion that Greece moved from extreme division and lack of any collective action to the point where the whole Greek world was involved in the Peloponnesian War is central to his model of history.

The first step towards unification was the spread of the name Hellenes from the subjects of Hellen, son of Deucalion, in Phthiotis (1.3.3) to other places, ‘as Hellen and his sons grew strong ... and they were brought in by the other cities to their benefit’ (1.3.2). In other words, cities asked powerful outsiders for help, presumably to settle internal disputes or to provide military aid – much as Athens and Sparta later intervened in other states and brought these under their leadership (see e.g. 1.19; 1.75.2) – and this created a sense of unity.

Minos unified much of the Aegean by conquest, and expanded the Greek world by expelling native Carians from Cycladic islands and settling the first Greeks there (1.4; 1.8.2). This was only one example of a more general phenomenon: ‘for in their desire for profits the lesser put up with slavery to the stronger, and the more powerful with their surpluses made the smaller cities their subjects’ (1.8.3). Thucydides here offers a striking vision of an international order which is based on coercion – rich cities convert their wealth into military power and conquer poorer cities – but is nevertheless materially advantageous even to the subjects. Political ‘slavery’ is a price worth paying for greater security and prosperity. The contemporary parallels with the hierarchical leagues of Athens and Sparta are obvious, and the Athenians liked to stress that their alliance benefited all members (Thuc. 1.73.2-75.2).

The process of integration by force culminated in Agamemnon’s leadership of all Greeks. ‘He predominated in power’, contrary to the legend that said he merely led a coalition of his peers (1.9.1). ‘Because he had a stronger navy than the others’, he assembled an army ‘not so much by asking favours as by inspiring fear’ (1.9.3), and ‘we must infer from this expedition what the earlier ones were like’ (1.9.4). In other words, unity was achieved by submission to the greatest naval power, and any earlier wars uniting part of Greece must also have been led by sea-powers. Once again, Thucydides flags up this notion as his own (μοι δοκεῖ, twice, 1.9.2-3), and it is indeed unusual. A more obvious approach would have been to treat Agamemnon as a forerunner of Sparta’s hegemonic position, achieved primarily

by land-based expansion. This notion was cultivated by Sparta itself and reflected in Spartan cults for Agamemnon's son and his herald (Herodotus 1.67; 7.134, 159). Archaic poets even called Agamemnon king of Sparta (Stesichoros fr. 216; Simonides fr. 549 Page). Thucydides, however, ignores all this and makes Agamemnon a thalassocrat, like Athens.

After the Trojan War, the Greek world expanded. 'The Athenians settled the Ionians and most of the islanders; the Peloponnesians most of Italy and Sicily and some places in the rest of Greece' (1.12.4). This formulation again departs from tradition, which linked the so-called Ionian migration from Athens with the migrations of Thessalians, Boeotians and Dorians not long after the Trojan War. Thucydides notes the early dates of the latter, 60 and 80 years after the fall of Troy, and treats these movements as evidence of instability (1.12.1-3; cf. 1.2.3-6), but he does not date the Ionian migration, associates it with the much later colonization of southern Italy and Sicily (cf. 6.2.3, 5), and treats it as evidence of growth and prosperity (1.12.4; cf. 1.2.6). Thucydides does not mention the post-Trojan War migration of Aeolians at all, although is aware of it (3.2.3; 7.57.5; 8.100.3). Migration traditions are thus manipulated to give the impression that Greek expansion was evenly shared between the protagonists of the Peloponnesian War: Athenians went east, Peloponnesians went west.

In this new, larger Greek world, the new, modern navies built by Corinth and others again coerced communities into larger political units. Polycrates, tyrant of Samos, 'made the other islands subject' (1.13.6), the tyrants in Sicily also acquired considerable power (1.17), and generally naval warfare 'increased strength in revenues of money and rule over others' (1.15.1). However, the tyrants did not use their funds and fleets as much as they might have done, because they were interested only in personal security and private wealth, so 'they administered their cities as much as possible in safety', rather than wage war. The pursuit of self-interest also prevented unity among states: 'everywhere, Greece was for a long time in a condition where it could achieve nothing conspicuous collectively, and individual cities were

quite risk-averse' (ἀτολμοτέρα, 1.17). The inhibiting effect of self-interest is, as we have seen, repeatedly identified as a key Peloponnesian weakness in 431 BC, too.

Even more remarkable is Thucydides' claim that the main strength of the Peloponnesian coalition, its infantry army, had contributed nothing to the political unification of Greece.

On land, no war took place which resulted in any increase in power. Such wars as did occur were all fought by cities against their own neighbours, and the Greeks did not venture out on foreign campaigns far from their own territory in order to conquer others. Subjects did not unite with the greatest cities, nor did the latter campaign together as equals, but they waged war by themselves, each against their neighbours (1.15.2).

This bold statement is in direct contradiction with what Thucydides himself says elsewhere about Sparta, which had 'strength on land' (1.18.2) but lacked a navy and public funds, yet somehow 'occupied two-fifths of the Peloponnese and led the whole of it as well as many external allies' (1.10.2), having put down tyrannical regimes across the Greek world (1.18.1), and made itself 'preeminent in power' in Greece by 480 BC (1.18.2). Sparta's role in Thucydides' model is not as an expansionist power in its own right, but as a facilitator of development in other states by removing the control of self-interested tyrants and so enabling the liberated cities to make full use of their financial and military potential. Sparta is able to intervene in this way, not because of its great army, but because it avoids all internal conflict. The Spartans have enjoyed 'good order' and absence of tyranny for 'a little more than 400 years until the end of the present war ... and because of this they were able to regulate matters in other cities, too' (1.18.1). This radical denial of the role of land warfare shows just how crucial naval power is in Thucydides' thinking, along with political stability.

The final stages of political unification are the creation of Athens' league of former subjects of the Persian Empire, described in much more detail later (1.94-97.1), and the process by which the Greek world outside the Spartan and Athenian alliance systems gradually joined either side (1.18.2). One last time the superiority of Athenian power is

emphasised. Sparta did not levy tribute, but imposed on their allies ‘an oligarchic regime orientated towards the Spartans alone’ (1.19; cf. 1.144.2). Athens, by contrast, used its power to generate more money and military resources. ‘Over time, the Athenians took the ships from the cities ... and ordered everyone to contribute money. And their individual armament for this war was greater than when they were at their most flourishing while the alliance was intact’ (1.19). Despite the ambiguous wording, the general drift of Thucydides’ argument makes its meaning clear enough: by 431 BC, Athens alone possessed greater resources than the whole Greek alliance had done at the time of the Persian War (Hornblower 1997, 56).

In short, navies pacify and unify the Greek world, by force but ultimately to the benefit of all, because greater stability and unity afford greater opportunities for individuals and cities to pursue ‘profits’, albeit at the cost of political ‘slavery’. This vision reflects Thucydides’ perception at the start of the war that Athens’ financial resources, armaments, and even aspects of its way of life, represented a peak of power and modernity, while their opponents remained to some degree stuck in the past. Until summer 424 at least, most Athenians will have shared this view: ‘they thought nothing could stop them, and they would achieve the possible and the quite unfeasible alike, just as easily with great as with inadequate armament’ (4.65.4); they even set their sights on the conquest of Carthage.⁴ Soon after, the first military setbacks occurred, and Thucydides himself was exiled as a result, but even so the city remained in a position of great strength when the Peace of Nicias was concluded in 421. The Archaeology’s criteria of historical progress had not yet been seriously undermined.

Athens’ superiority was much less obvious after the failure of the Sicilian expedition in 413, let alone after the final defeat of the city, when Sparta had acquired public funds and a large navy thanks to Persian funding. After 413 or 404, one might have expected Thucydides no longer to see the Athenian empire as the culmination of Greek history. A less positive

⁴ Aristophanes, *Knights* 1303-4; cf. Thuc. 6.15, 90; Plut. *Pericles* 20.3.

attitude to naval power and public finance can indeed be detected in the second part of his history (Kallet 2001). However, if the *Archaeology* was written not long after 421 BC – the end of ‘the first war’ as Thucydides originally conceived it before he decided to cover later events as well (5.24.2-26.4) – it is not surprising that in Thucydides’ vision contemporary Athens was the model for all earlier powers, and ancient Athens a leading force for progress.

<1>**The Archaeology and early Greek history**

Thucydides tries to persuade the reader that he was right to think, from the start, that the Peloponnesian War would be the greatest conflict ever. In order to do so, he needed to refer as much as possible to historical ‘facts’ with which his audience was familiar, rather than rely on obscure or unorthodox traditions (Luraghi 2000), and to select and interpret his material in a way that supported his particular argument, rather than to give a balanced, comprehensive survey of history. The result is in many respects a seriously distorted account of early Greece.

<2>*The skewed chronology of cultural history*

Modern scholars have tended to accept Thucydides’ argument that a collective ‘Hellenic’ identity did not yet exist in Homer’s time (esp. Hall 2002: 125-34; Ulf 1996). Yet this is a clear instance of Thucydides’ eagerness to play down the level of development in earlier ages getting the better of him. While it is true that Homer does not use ‘Hellenes’ for all Greeks, it is incorrect to say that he has no single name for all Greece or the Greeks. In Homer, ‘Argos’ often refers to the whole of Greece, rather than to the city of that name (e.g. *Il.* 1.30; 2.115; *Od.* 3.263; 4.99), and ‘Achaeans’ is used almost 700 times as a collective designation of all Greeks (e.g. *Il.* 1.2; *Od.* 1.90); ‘Argives’ (inhabitants of Argos) and ‘Danaans’ (descendants of the daughters of Danaos) are also frequently used as a common name for all Greeks. Indeed, the Greeks at Troy are described as ‘Pan-Achaeans’ (e.g. *Il.* 2.404; 7.73; 9.301; *Od.*

1.239; 14.369; 24.32), which implies a strong claim to shared identity. As Thucydides could have known, the poet Hesiod, generally regarded as a near-contemporary of Homer's, did already call the Greeks of his own day 'Panhellenes' (*Works & Days* 527-8), yet usually called the Greeks of the Trojan War 'Achaeans' (*W&D* 651-3; frs. 23(a).17; 165.14; 198.16; 204.47; cf. fr. 130 M-W). Thucydides – and modern scholars – should have drawn the conclusion that for Homer and Hesiod the Greeks, although not yet all called Hellenes, were at the time of the Trojan War already a single ethnic group ('Achaeans') with a defined territory ('Argos') and shared descent from Danaos' daughters.

This misuse of Homer to support the historical model is compounded by the omission of Homeric evidence when it is in conflict with this model. The custom of bearing arms in daily life is crucial evidence for the theory that in the earliest phases of development violence was pervasive but was much reduced in the wake of Minos' elimination of piratical raiders. Yet Homer still portrays his heroes as being armed at home (*Od.* 4.307-11), at feasts (*Od.* 21.119; 22.74), at games (*Od.* 8.403-6) and at dances (*Il.* 18.597-8); they carry spears in public even for informal visits to the agora (*Od.* 20.124-7) and attendance at formal assemblies (*Il.* 2.42-7; *Od.* 2.2-14). Whether one takes this as evidence for the time of the Trojan War or the time of the poet, it does not fit the chronology of the model and is accordingly ignored. Instead, Thucydides cites 'ethnographic' proof of his view: the Ozolian Locrians, Aetolians and Acarnanians, as well as many non-Greeks still 'bear iron' today, a relic of what was once universal custom (1.5.3-6.2). This evidence had two advantages for Thucydides: it could not be chronologically fixed, and it was familiar to Athenian audiences in or shortly after 426 BC, when Athens in alliance with Acarnanians and Ozolian Locrians attempted to conquer the Aetolians (Thuc. 3.94-8), whose 'warlike' culture and habit of living 'scattered far apart in unfortified villages' drew attention at the time (3.94.4; cf. 97.1).⁵

⁵ Similarly, Thucydides' evidence for Carians living in the Cyclades was a discovery of 426/5,

The true date of the change from ‘bearing iron’ to a more relaxed and luxurious lifestyle, as described by Thucydides, is indicated by early Greek art. Men with swords and spears in non-military contexts are commonly depicted in Late Geometric vase-painting (c. 750-700 BC); swords are still occasionally worn by men in ‘civilian’ dress in art down to c. 650 and spears are carried by ‘civilians’ in Attic vase painting as late as c. 530 BC. Men stopped carrying swords when they adopted a new type of cloak, wrapped around the body in a way that severely restricted movement, and they stopped carrying spears when dress styles became still more luxurious (van Wees 1998). Thucydides’ history of Greek dress is thus accurate in broad outline, but implies a date many centuries too early for the major change.

Conversely, the innovations attributed to the Spartans appear to be dated much too late. The narrative suggests that a moderate lifestyle was introduced at Sparta not long before luxurious dress and hairstyles were abandoned at Athens after the Persian War, and the introduction of athletic nudity is said to have occurred ‘not many years’ ago. Yet Sparta’s famous ‘austerity’ was universally attributed to the reforms of Lycurgus, which Thucydides himself dates to ‘a little more than 400 years before the end of this war’ (c. 825 BC, if he means the Peace of Nicias; 1.18.1). As for Spartans exercising naked, the observation that athletes had previously worn loincloths ‘even at the Olympic games’ (1.6.5) clearly alludes to the story that athletic nudity was invented by a sprinter at one of the earliest games, and Thucydides must have in mind the version in which this runner was Acanthos of Sparta (Dion. Hal. 7.72.2-4). This event was normally dated as early as 720 BC. ‘Not many years ago’ is an odd way to describe three centuries, but rather than assume that Thucydides adopted an idiosyncratic date, we should recognize the phrase as a rhetorical gambit: it suits his model of

when the Athenians purified Delos and found that ‘more than half’ of the exhumed graves were Carian (1.8.1; Cook 1955, 267-9, shows that they mistook for ‘Carian’ Greek burials of the Geometric period). The evidence from ‘the ancient poets’ for the acceptability of piracy (1.5.2) included the *Homeric Hymn to Apollo* (452-5; also *Od.* 3.71-4; 9.252-5), later quoted at length (3.104), probably performed after the purification at the revived festival of Apollo.

progress to suggest that all things modern were recent innovations, and in a span of almost a millennium one can just about claim legitimately that 300 years is a relatively short time.⁶

When these changes really happened is a matter of debate. In Homer, boxers and wrestlers still wear loincloths (*Il.* 23.685, 710; *Od.* 18.67, 76), and the earliest naked athletes appear in art c. 650 BC (McDonnell 1991), so this change is likely to have happened at about the same time as the abandonment of ‘bearing iron’. The reforms attributed to Lycurgus which established a uniform dress code and lifestyle at Sparta, however, have been assigned widely different dates by modern scholars: some make it around 650, but others favour a date around 550, and a few have argued for a still later date, c. 500 BC (see Van Wees 2016).

<2>A grudging history of Corinth

What Thucydides tells us about Minos, Agamemnon and the heroic age derives from legends and epic poetry and is of little value as evidence for Bronze Age history. The Dorian, Ionian and other migration stories, too, are in the realm of legend rather than Early Iron Age reality (MacSweeney 2013). Greek expansion into Italy and Sicily is the first unquestionably historical event, but although Thucydides later reveals a detailed knowledge of Greek settlement in Sicily (6.1-5), he does no more than touch upon it in the Archaeology. Much more significant for his model is the subsequent establishment of tyrannies and navies across the Greek world, and, for better or worse, his discussion of these developments has had a deep impact on modern accounts of the history of archaic Greece.

The potted naval history of Corinth that opens Thucydides’ discussion poses particular problems of interpretation and chronology. It begins with the comment that the Corinthians ‘are said’ to have been the first to create a ‘modern’ navy (1.13.2), and continues:

⁶ An alternative version made the athlete a Megarian (Pausanias 1.44.1; *IG* VII.52.5-6), but Thucydides apparently preferred the symmetrical juxtaposition of Athens and Sparta. Plato, *Republic* 452cd also dates the change ‘not long ago’; see further McDonnell 1991.

It is indeed apparent that Ameinias, a Corinthian shipwright, made four ships for the Samians; it is about 300 years before the end of this war that Ameinocles came to the Samians (13.3). The oldest naval battle of which we know was waged by Corinthians against Corcyraeans; this too is about 260 years down to the same time (13.4).

This is followed by a discussion of how Corinth had always benefited from trade even before sea travel was common, and had subsequently turned itself into a wealthy naval power (13.5).

At first glance, it may seem that the first three sentences (1.13.2-4) list a series of events in chronological order, so that the first ‘modern’ trireme navy was constructed before the export of ships to Samos, c. 721 BC (if ‘the end of this war’ refers to the Peace of Nicias) and the first naval battle, c. 681 BC. However, this is difficult to reconcile with Thucydides’ later statement that there were ‘few triremes’ anywhere in Greece until c. 490 (1.14.1) and with the lack of contemporary evidence for triremes in Greece until the late sixth century BC (e.g. Casson 1995, 43-81). Closer attention to the text suggests a different reading.

Thucydides does not make the claim in the first sentence about Corinthian priority on his own authority, but reports it as something that ‘is said’ (λέγονται). Only here in the *Archaeology* do we find this non-committal expression (Westlake 1977, 357-61; Rood 2006, 244-6), which contrasts sharply with the certainty and precision of the next two statements: ‘it is indeed apparent’ (φαίνεται δὲ καὶ)⁷ that Ameinocles went to Samos 300 years ago and ‘we know’ (ἴσμεν) of a sea-battle 260 years ago. In other words, Thucydides does not list three events of equal status in chronological order, but first reports a major claim which he uniquely avoids endorsing, and then moves on to cite a couple of firmly stated and dated ‘facts’ about Corinth’s naval history. Moreover, the vessels which Ameinocles built and those which fought the first naval battle are not explicitly triremes but simply ‘ships’ (ναῦς; Meijer 1988). It is therefore possible that no chronological sequence is implied, but rather a contrast

⁷ φαίνεται plus participle, ‘it is apparent’, indicating certainty (as opposed to φαίνεται plus infinitive, ‘it seems’, indicating uncertainty), is a favourite expression in the *Archaeology*: 1.2.1, 3.1, 9.4, 10.5, 11, 13.3, 14.1. Its significance is noted by Hornblower 1997, 44.

between Corinth's reputation as a great innovator in naval matters, and the lesser, conceivably earlier, naval achievements that Thucydides is prepared to accept as fact.

Corinth, more than Sparta, had been Athens' main enemy since 460 BC (Thuc. 1.103.4), so it would not be surprising if Athenians wished to play down the pioneering role of the Corinthian navy. The Athenian version of the battle of Salamis claimed that the Corinthian ships had fled before the battle even started, whereas 'the rest of Greece testifies' that they actually 'fought among the foremost' (Herodotus 8.94). Corinth, for its part, tried to make political capital from having been a greater naval power than Athens by reminding the Athenians that once, before they became enemies, they had graciously let them have 20 vessels (Thuc. 1.41.2; Hdt. 6.89). Thucydides thus probably prefers not to endorse what 'is said' so as not to lend support to Corinthian claims in a politically charged matter.

The other Corinthian achievements, by contrast, could be unambiguously accepted because, if anything, they were politically charged *against* Corinth. The first-ever naval battle was 'waged by the Corinthians' (γίγνεται Κορινθίων), and is thus presented as an act of aggression against the Corcyraeans. Athens had made an alliance with Corcyra against Corinth in 434 (Thuc. 1.31-55), so the story of the battle may have circulated in contemporary political discourse as an example of long-standing Corinthian aggression against Athens' new ally (cf. Hdt. 3.48-53). As for Ameinocles, his ship-building is in itself hardly a spectacular historical feat, and one suspects that the point is rather that a Corinthian 'came to the Samians' and worked 'for the Samians'. In 440 BC, Athens had fought a hard war against Samos, and the Corinthians claimed credit for preventing a Peloponnesian intervention at the time, arguing that Athens should repay the favour by not intervening against Corinth in support of Corcyra (Thuc. 1.40.5, 41.2). Thucydides does not tell us how the Athenians countered that argument when they chose Corcyra's side, but one imagines that

they would have seized upon any evidence of Corinth being friendly with Samos. The story of Ameinocles may have surfaced in that context.

On this reading, Thucydides gives no further clue to when the first modern trireme navy was created, since Ameinocles and the naval battle may well date to an earlier period, just as Corinth's revenues from trade by land, mentioned next, originate at a much earlier time. The sole indication of when public triremes were first constructed is the position of the episode after the colonisation of Italy and Sicily, and at the same time as the rise of tyrants. Later sources tell us that Periander, tyrant of Corinth c. 625-585 BC, 'continually mounted expeditions and was warlike; he built triremes and made use of both seas', i.e. the Aegean and the Ionian sea (Nicolaus of Damascus *FGrH* 90 F 58.3; cf. Ephorus *FGrH* 70 F 179). His revenues from trade were so great that he never imposed any other form of taxation (Aristotle fr. 611.20 Rose). The centralization of power and revenues in Corinth under this tyrant fit Thucydides' model perfectly, and it is likely that the historian was aware of this tradition but preferred not to credit Periander explicitly, partly in order to remain vague about Corinth's main naval achievements and partly also because in his model tyrannical regimes were supposed to inhibit development, not act as a driving force for modernity.

We have no other evidence for the three naval achievements attributed to Corinth, but it seems plausible that Periander was the first to build public triremes, since his contemporary, the Egyptian Pharaoh Necho (610-594 BC), built triremes in Egypt (Hdt. 2.159) and Corinth may have been part of a wider development. On Thucydides' dates, the first naval battle and Ameinocles' ship-building pre-dated Periander and occurred under the oligarchy of the Bacchiads (to which he alludes at 1.24.2; 6.3.2).⁸ A naval battle between Corinth and Corcyra at this time is possible, given that the two are said to have been enemies from the foundation of Corcyra onwards (Hdt. 3.49; cf. Thuc. 1.25). Samos may have needed state-of-the-art ships

⁸ There is no justification for the common modern view that Thucydides' dates are based on unrealistically long 40-year generations and that these events happened much later.

(probably biremes, Casson 1995, 53-60) in the late eighth century to defend Samian settlers at Nagidos and Kelenderis in Cilicia from Assyrian expansion in this region; both contemporary Assyrian records and later Greek sources mention naval battles with ‘Ionians’ in this region.⁹

<2>*The stunted growth of Ionia*

The discussion of Corinth is followed by a brief account of Ionia, once again juxtaposing the Peloponnesian and Ionian power blocs. During the reigns of Cyrus and Cambyses (546-522 BC), Ionians acquired large navies, though these included only ‘few triremes’ (1.13.6, 14.1).

When they fought against Cyrus they controlled the sea in their region for some time. And Polycrates, as tyrant of Samos under Cambyses, gained in naval strength and made the other islands his subjects and after capturing Rheneia dedicated it to Apollo Delios. The Phocaeans, settling Massalia, defeated the Carthaginians in a naval battle (1.13.6).

This selection of facts about Ionian naval power is best understood as a reflection of the particular interests of the Athenians. The Ionians’ collective superiority to the Persians anticipates Athens’ achievement during the Persian War. By contrast, Herodotus says that the Ionian cities were captured in sieges by land (1.161-2) and that the Persians under Cyrus had no fleet at all (1.143.1; cf. 151). Even allowing for Herodotus’ hostility to Ionians (1.143-7, 153.3), it is hard to avoid the impression that Thucydides makes a lot of what may have been merely the lack of a Persian challenge at sea (Luraghi 2000, 235), in order to balance Corinth’s naval achievements with a significant Ionian counterpart.

Polycrates gets short shrift compared to Herodotus’ fulsome account of his deeds (3.39) and effusive obituary (3.122.2, 125.2). The sole achievement of Polycrates’ career that Thucydides cares to note, the capture of the tiny island of Rheneia (recalled at 3.104.2), is hardly the best evidence of his power, and does not even rate a mention in Herodotus. The grudging recognition given to Polycrates, who could easily have been written up as a great

⁹ E.g. *State Archives of Assyria* 19 025; Abydenos *FGrH* 685 F 5; Berossos *FGrH* 680 F 7c.

Ionian pioneer, is presumably the result of a reluctance to give much credit to a tyrant or to Samos, Athens' recently defeated rival (cf. Irwin 2009). Competition between Athens and Samos explains why Thucydides singles out the dedication of Rheneia, twice: this gesture had been Polycrates' response to a partial purification of Delos by Athens under Peisistratus (Hdt. 1.64.2), and was in turn trumped by Athens' complete purification of Delos in 426 BC.

Herodotus' version of Phocaeen history emphasises their earlier leading role in exploring the western Mediterranean, and their migration to Alalia on Corsica after Cyrus' conquest of Ionia (1.64-7). One can see why Thucydides chose not to use this material, because it involves defeat by the Persians, casts the Phocaeans in the role of pirates (1.163.2, 166.1), and ends with them suffering such losses in battle that they end up abandoning Alalia (1.166-7). Instead of piracy and defeat, Thucydides' narrative requires expansion and naval victory, which he duly provides by drawing on a Massaliot naval victory over Carthage which was commemorated by a statue dedicated at Delphi (Paus. 10.18.7) and may have been well-known, even if Herodotus chose not to mention it.

Scholars have usually taken the Phocaeen 'settling' of Massalia to refer to the city's original foundation, dated to 600 BC (Timaeus *FGrH* 566 F 71), so that the episode would be too early to fit Thucydides' chronological scheme. However, 'settling' (οἰκίζοντες) is as ambiguous in Greek as it is in English and does not necessarily mean the *first* settlement of a place. What Thucydides has in mind is probably Phocaeans emigrating after the Persian conquest and 'settling' in a city they had founded earlier, as at Alalia (Hdt. 1.165.1, 166.1). Carthage may have intervened to stop increased piratical activity in the region, again as at Alalia. This interpretation is supported by a version of the story which explicitly dates the episode after the Persian conquest, and adds that it involved 'a part' (*moira*) of the Phocaeans, i.e. the migrants split, some going to Alalia, others to Massalia (Pausanias 10.8.6; cf. Isoc. 6.84). If Thucydides' choice of words suggests something grander – the foundation of an

important city in the face of Carthaginian opposition – that is surely deliberate, and analogous to his inflation of minor successes against Persia into a fully-fledged Ionian thalassocracy.

Despite the brevity of his remarks, Thucydides intends to suggest the emergence of a major naval power, with ‘Ionian affairs progressing towards greatness’ (ἐπι μέγα, 1.16) when they were stopped by Persian expansion. Had their rise not been curtailed by external factors, the Ionians might apparently have achieved the kind of dominance later enjoyed by Athens. However, this is not the full story: Herodotus provides evidence which implies that Ionian (and Aeolian) naval power actually flourished under Persian rule.

Not all Ionian cities were subjected by Cyrus’ generals, but Miletus made a treaty (Hdt. 1.141.4; 169.2) and the islanders ‘gave themselves up’ (1.169.2), so that they retained the semi-independent status which they had occupied as allies of the Lydian kingdom (1.22.4, 27.5). This must mean that Polycrates built up his naval power while he was in effect a vassal of the Persian empire, though with enough independence to make an alliance with Egypt (3.39.2) and to raid Persia’s other Aegean vassals. (The Persians did allow their Greek subjects considerable military freedom before 493 BC: 6.42). Herodotus reports that Cambyses summoned the Ionians and Aeolians to provide ships for his campaign against Egypt in 525 BC ‘because he regarded them as his slaves by inheritance’ (2.1; cf. 3.1), but he implicitly suggests that Polycrates was not subject to this obligation: his story is that the tyrant secretly volunteered his ships to Cambyses as part of a devious scheme to get rid of political opponents (3.44). It seems clear that in reality Polycrates was indeed a vassal of Persia who was obliged to join the invasion of Egypt, and that it was the outbreak of hostilities between Persia and Egypt that put an end to his alliance with Egypt, rather than the Pharaoh’s alarm at Polycrates’ good fortune, as a famous folktale suggested (Hdt. 3.40-43).

Miletus, too, flourished as a Persian ally: by 500 BC, it was ‘at its greatest peak and Ionia’s showpiece’ (Hdt. 5.28). Its rulers took a leading role in pushing Persian expansion

across the Aegean, to the River Strymon in the north and Naxos in the centre.¹⁰ A vessel from Mytilene was one of Cambyses' leading ships (3.13.1), a commander from Mytilene was one of Darius' most loyal advisers (4.97; 5.11, 38) and ships from Lesbos conquered Lemnos and Imbros for Persia (5.26). Even Athenian settlers in the Chersonese provided ships for Persian expeditions (4.137), presumably as dependent allies, a relation they also seem to have enjoyed with Lydia (6.37). If anything, the Persian conquest thus seems to have boosted Ionian naval power.

The first triremes in Ionia appear under Persian rule. Polycrates sent 40 triremes to Egypt in 525 BC (Hdt. 3.44); Cambyses' Mytilenean flagship, too, was a trireme (implied at 3.14.4-5). Mytilene, Miletus and several of its neighbours in the Carian region provided ships for a fleet of 200 triremes (Hdt. 5.32-3, 37), and by 494 BC, Samos had 60 triremes, Lesbos 70, Miletus 80 and Chios 100 (6.8). Athenian settlers in the Chersonese had 5 triremes (6.41). The contrast between the ubiquity of triremes in the Persian sphere of influence from 525 onwards and the exclusive use of pentekontors by Samos (Hdt. 3.39, 41; cf. 124) and Phocaea (1.163-4) until at least 540 BC strongly suggests that Persian naval expansion under Cambyses, who 'won Egypt and the sea' (3.34.4), was the catalyst for the spread of the trireme. The Persians may well have funded the building and equipment of triremes by their subjects and vassals, at least until the Ionian Revolt forced them to centralize control (van Wees 2013, 30-7, 147-8).

At a time when Athens led an alliance of Ionians and other eastern Greeks against the Persian Empire, the story of how these same cities had benefited from collaboration with the Persians was obviously not one that anyone wanted to hear. In Thucydides' case, it could further be argued that the story is irrelevant to his argument about the growing ability of

¹⁰ Histiaeus of Miletus is 'given' Myrcinus on the Strymon (Hdt. 5.11), but this lies further west than the Persian conquest by land under Megabazus had yet reached (5.2, 10, 14-16), so its occupation must have involved naval military force (cf. 5.124-6). Naxos: Hdt. 5.30-34.

Greek cities to engage in collective military action. However, what happened in Ionia under Persian rule is crucially important to his argument about the role of the trireme in modern navies and public finance, and his omission of this material distorts the historical picture.

<2>*Stagnation in mainland Greece*

Thucydides' cautious assessment of Corinth and his underestimation of the development of naval warfare in Ionia under Persian rule are as nothing compared to his devastating assessment of the insignificance of warfare in the archaic age: on land, nothing but border disputes, no wars that resulted in conquests or were fought by coalitions (1.15); in general, no wars waged by tyrants that showed any ambition beyond fighting neighbouring cities (1.17). He allows two partial exceptions: the Lelantine War, and the wars of the tyrants in Sicily.

We have already noted that these claims contradict what Thucydides himself says about Sparta's acquisition of territory and power, and by Herodotus' report that by 550 BC 'most of the Peloponnese was already subjected to the Spartans' (1.68.6). Although Thucydides argues that the Spartans were somehow able to overthrow tyrants because they were never ruled by a tyrant (cf. Hdt. 5.92α1-2, η5), it is obvious that in practice such interventions relied on military force. Thucydides' only specific example, the deposition of Hippias at Athens (1.18.1; 6.53.3, 59.4), involved four military actions according to Herodotus: two to oust the tyrant (5.63, 64) and two to support the new regime (5.72, 74-6). A fifth large expedition intended to restore Hippias did not get beyond the planning stage (Hdt. 5.90-3). Herodotus also notes the large expedition by Sparta and Corinth against Polycrates of Samos in 525 BC (3.54-6). Plutarch lists numerous other tyrants taken down by Sparta: 'the Cypselids at Corinth and Ambracia' (c. 580 BC), Lygdamis of Naxos (c. 525-515), Aeschines of Sicyon (probably c. 550 BC) and three otherwise unknown tyrants in Thasos, Phocis and Miletus (*On the Malice of Herodotus* 21; *Mor.* 859a). An anonymous

papyrus fragment (*FGrH* 105 F 1) attributes the putting down of tyrants to the campaigns of king Anaxandridas (c. 560-520 BC), and the ephorate of Chilon (traditional date 556 BC).

The reliability and details of this evidence are open to challenge, but since Thucydides himself says that Sparta's hegemony rested on having supportive regimes in allied cities, the replacement of popular tyrannies with oligarchies was surely an integral part of Sparta's 'subjection' of the Peloponnese and therefore practised for most of the sixth century (cf. Yates 2005; Cawkwell 1993). Interventions in Ambracia, Samos, Naxos, Thasos and Miletus required naval expeditions, and some naval expeditions were directed even against targets that could have been reached by land: Athens in 512 (Hdt, 5.63) and Argos in 494 (6.76). Moreover, the dominant Ionian naval powers asked Sparta for military aid: Phocaea (Hdt. 1.141, 152), Samos twice (3.45-6, 148), and Miletus (5.49-51). The ships may have been provided by Corinth and other allies, but evidently archaic Sparta's military campaigns were more varied in kind and ambitious in scope than Thucydides' model could accommodate.

The same may be said of the wars fought by supposedly unadventurous tyrannical regimes. Herodotus, too, thought that Athens 'began to grow' only after its tyrants were expelled: under their rule the Athenians were 'no better in warfare than any of their neighbours, but when they were rid of the tyrants they became by far the foremost' (5.78; cf. 5.91). Yet Herodotus himself provided the evidence to disprove this claim: Peisistratus reconquered Sigeion on the Hellespont (5.94), and imposed a tyrant on Naxos (1.64). The Athenian occupation of Boeotia south of the Asopus (Hdt. 6.108) occurred in 519 BC, i.e. under Hippias (Thuc. 3.68.5; cf. 3.55, 61). Thucydides later commends Peisistratus and Hippias for 'completing their wars' without resorting to heavy taxation (6.54.5). Nor are the Athenian tyrants the only exception to the alleged rule: the naval power of Periander of Corinth is tacitly conceded in the *Archaeology*, and Polycrates of Samos is reluctantly given his due. Thucydides makes a further exception for 'the tyrants in Sicily', i.e. Gelo and Hiero

of Syracuse above all: ‘they advanced most in power’ (1.17), were not overthrown by Sparta (1.18.1), and were the first (alongside Corcyra) to acquire large navies of triremes (1.14.2).

Later tradition credits the tyrants of Sicyon and Pheidon of Argos with a record of expansionist warfare, and Aristotle states as a rule that ‘in the old days’ most tyrants came to power because they were successful generals as well as popular leaders (*Politics* 1305a7-15). Thucydides’ and Herodotus’ idea that tyrannical government inhibited warfare thus has very little to recommend it. The notion springs from hostility towards this type of regime, and in Thucydides’ case also from the need to find a reason why earlier powers did not reach the same heights as contemporary Athens. In reality, archaic tyrants seem to have regarded wars of conquest as an effective way to achieve and maintain their position (van Wees 2003).

The reason why Thucydides acknowledges the military success and naval enterprise of the tyrants of Syracuse and Samos at all is no doubt that they were too famous to be ignored, as illustrated by Herodotus’ comments about the ‘magnificence’ of both (3.125.2). Rather than expose his model to criticism by omitting well-known evidence, he incorporated these figures in a minimal fashion. The same reason led him to acknowledge one exception to the rule that no wars were fought by coalitions of states, the Lelantine War: ‘the Greek world was divided to the greatest extent into alliances with either side for the war of the Chalcidians and Eretrians once upon a time’ (ἐς τὸν πάλαι ποτὲ, 1.15.3). This conflict was very well-known, and several of the allies were named by Herodotus (5.99) and Aristotle (*Politics* 1289b38-9; fr. 98 Rose; cf. Plut. *Mor.* 760e-761a). The episode may have been of particular interest to Athens, which in 506 BC occupied the territory of Chalcis (Hdt. 5.77). Rather than ignore this war, Thucydides noted it as an exception, and by dating it ‘once upon a time’ suggested that it happened a very long time ago and was unlike anything seen since.

Modern scholars have tended to follow suit and dated the Lelantine War around 700 BC, noting allusions to war in Euboea in the poems of Hesiod (*W&D* 650-60) and

Archilochus (fr. 3 West). However, there is no good evidence that these early sources refer to the Lelantine War specifically. Moreover, a treaty banning the use of long-range missiles attributed to this war by Strabo (10.1.12) has been taken as evidence that it was near-ritual border dispute, but Strabo also says that the objective was the Lelantine Plain (*ibid*; cf. *Plut. Mor.* 153f), which constituted the bulk of the territory of Chalcis, so the conflict must have been an attempt by Eretria to conquer its neighbour. So far from being an anomaly, the Lelantine War may have had much in common with Sparta's campaigns, as well as with other land-based wars involving coalitions of states mentioned in later sources, such as the First Sacred War, the campaigns of Pheidon of Argos, or the expansion of Sybaris in Southern Italy. The evidence for all these conflicts is problematic, but not necessarily false (van Wees, forthcoming). Thucydides' omission of these wars is dictated by his historical model, not proof that they never happened. His overall assessment of archaic wars waged on land or by tyrants as mere neighbourly squabbles is highly questionable, evidently based on little more than his premise that only contemporary Athenian sea-power was truly historically significant.

As for Athens itself, the idea that the city, like other mainland Greek states, had very few triremes and no naval tradition until Themistocles proposed his ship-building programme (cf. Herodotus 7.144.2) is manifestly a caricature. For one thing, it ignores the Corinthian pioneers, who provided 40 triremes at Salamis in 480 BC (*Hdt.* 8.1, 43) and had presumably been building up their 'modern' navy since the days of Periander. The rest of the Greek fleet at Salamis consisted of hundreds of triremes and only a handful of pentekontors (*Hdt.* 8.43-8, 82), which implies that the trireme was established as the normal warship across mainland Greece well before the Persian War. The suggestion that Athens built 200 triremes to wage war against a neighbour, Aegina, which supposedly itself had only a small fleet of pentekontors, is absurd. Nor is it credible that Athenians had not been 'naval people' before 483 BC, despite their well-attested overseas interests from c. 600 BC onwards. An alternative

tradition plausibly claims that Athens built only 100 new triremes in 483 BC and thus had up to 100 triremes already ([Aristotle] *Ath. Pol.* 22.7; Plut. *Them.* 4.2; Nepos, *Them.* 2.2.).

Thucydides will have been aware of these points, but he chose to ignore them because for him the Athenian fleet represented modernity, and it suited him to treat it as a recent creation.

The true nature and size of mainland Greek fleets before the Persian War is hard to gauge, but one way of piecing together the evidence suggests that publicly-owned trireme-based navies were established at Athens and elsewhere almost simultaneously with their emergence in Ionia, c. 525-500 BC (e.g. van Wees 2013; Wallinga 2005; 1993).

Many features of the Archaeology reveal that it represents early Greek history as imagined by an Athenian, probably in the 420s, looking for forerunners of Athens at the peak of its power, while simultaneously trying to show that even the greatest of these forerunners never reached Athens' level. An effort is made to balance the histories of Athens' Ionian allies and its Peloponnesian opponents, but the second-greatest powers on each side, Corinth and Samos, rivals to Athens' naval power and formerly at a peak under the rule of tyrants, do not fit the model and are given relatively short shrift. Sparta gets credit for major contributions to cultural and political 'modernity' by the introduction of an egalitarian lifestyle, athletic nudity, and the abolition of tyranny, but its methods of public finance and warfare are presented as old-fashioned and inadequate. Everything else that does not fit the model, such as expansionist warfare by land or internationally ambitious tyrants, is played down. Everything that represents modernity is presented as a very recent development, even if Greek tradition dated it centuries earlier and the true historical date may be generations earlier. However impressive as an intellectual feat, as an account of events and developments before the Persian War, the Archaeology is highly selective and often misleading.

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