

Copyright Notice

Staff and students of this University are reminded that copyright subsists in this extract and the work from which it was taken. This Digital Copy has been made under the terms of a CLA Licence which allows you to:

- Access and download a copy
- Print out a copy

This Digital Copy and any digital or printed copy supplied to or made by you under the terms of this Licence are for use in connection with this module or course of study. You may retain such copies after the end of the course, but strictly for your own personal use.

All copies (including electronic copies) shall include this Copyright Notice and shall be destroyed and/or deleted if and when required by the University.

Except as provided for by copyright law, no further copying, storage or distribution (including by e-mail) is permitted without the consent of the copyright holder.

The author (which term includes artists and other visual creators) has moral rights in the work and neither staff nor students may cause, or permit, the distortion, mutilation or other modification of the work, or any other derogatory treatment of it, which would be prejudicial to the honour or reputation of the author.

Title of extract: **Athens on the Sea**

Name of Author: **Starr, C.G.**

Title/Author of book/edition (if applicable): **The Influence of Sea Power on Ancient History. Starr, C.G.**

Name of Visual Creator or other acknowledgement (if applicable):

Journal details –title/Vol/Year (if applicable):

Publisher: **Oxford University Press**

Pages scanned: **29 - 49**

Course of Study (Module name and number): **Armies and Navies CLAH6003**

Name of Designated Person

authorising scanning: *E.L. Hamm*

Date authorised: 21.03.17.

Moodle/Powerpoint

Athens on the Sea

In 499 the Greek states on the western seaboard of Asia Minor rebelled against their Persian overlord and sent the Milesian leader Aristagoras to implore the aid of Sparta, the balance wheel of the Greek state system which usually answered cries of help. Unfortunately he made the mistake of showing a map of the world, a novel invention to the Spartans; when they discovered that the Persian capital was a three-month march inland they bade him be gone by nightfall, and his efforts to bribe king Cleomenes failed. At Athens, on the other hand, the envoy secured the support of the nascent Athenian democracy; Herodotus wryly deduced that "it seems indeed to be easier to deceive a multitude than one man." The Athenians sent 20 warships and Eretria added four. Herodotus accounted this aid which helped the rebels sack the Persian regional center of Sardis but then was withdrawn "the beginnings of ills for the Greeks and barbarians alike";¹ in another light it may be reckoned the first of a train of events that were to lead to remarkable results.

After initial successes the Ionian rebels had to face the full might of the Persians, who like all empires took time to assemble their forces, including a fleet provided by the Phoenician ports. For the first time in Aegean history the decisive turning point was a sea battle; off Lade in 495 the League navy was defeated when many of the Greek ships retreated.² Miletus was taken early in the next year and was destroyed as an object lesson. To punish the Athenians for their aid, a small amphibious force was despatched in 490 straight across the Aegean. The Athenians dared

not try to meet it on the sea even though it was encumbered by horse transports, but at Marathon on the east coast of Attica they secured a great victory by land. The Spartans, who had promised assistance, were delayed by a religious festival and arrived only after the battle was over, to marvel at the Persian dead. For the first time the Greek world could venture to feel that the Medes, as the Persians were often called, were not invincible.³

Then Darius died, and his son Xerxes had to spend several years consolidating his rule before he could return to the Greek problem; the Persian empire had many frontiers in Asia and Africa, and its leaders probably considered the Greeks as no more than a minor set of far-off barbarians, divided in internal friction. This time Xerxes majestically decided to lead the expedition himself to gain military glory. So a huge army and navy, twice the size of any force the Greeks could field, was assembled in Asia Minor during the fall of 481.

By this time two events had taken place at Athens; one might even say that the goddess Athena had worked two miracles for her favorite *polis*. The first was the discovery of a very rich lode in the state silver mines of Laurium. Normally the revenues were divided among the citizen body, but such was not to be the case this time. Second, Themistocles had become undisputed leader of Athens by ostracizing his opponents; praised by Thucydides as a man who "could best divine what was likely to happen in the remotest future," he persuaded his fellow citizens to expend the money on building the first major Athenian fleet, 200 triremes in all, and to begin fortifying the port of Piraeus as a base. As Thucydides sums up his policy, "It was he who first ventured to tell the Athenians that their future was on the sea."⁴ One can only speculate as to how so many ships could be built in a short space of time and whence the timber and hemp were secured.⁵ The four-drachma coins struck in great profusion by the Athenians at this point were among the most poorly designed ever to be issued by a Greek mint, and the ships must have been an equally scratch job even though Themistocles insisted on a sleek and maneuverable design.⁶

Still, these ships were to be the salvation of Greece; "the fate

of Hellas depended on her navy," as Athenian envoys later reminded the Spartans.⁷ The Greek states that refused to surrender were only a small fraction of the multitude of mainland *poleis*, but they drew the proper lesson from the earlier dissensions of the Ionian rebels and concentrated command by land and by sea in the hands of Spartan leaders. In the spring of 480 they met at the isthmus of Corinth to concert their resistance. The Peloponnesians insisted on building a wall across the isthmus itself, a naïve plan that quite overlooked the fact that the Persian fleet could outflank its defense and the likelihood that Argos, which had remained neutral out of hostility to Sparta, would join the Persians as soon as they drew near.

Themistocles analyzed matters quite differently. The Persian army numbered perhaps 180,000 men (Herodotus gives the incredible figure of 1,700,000), but its lightly equipped battalions were no match in open battle with the disciplined phalanxes of Greek spearmen. On the sea conditions were less favorable. The Persian navy had over 600 warships; the backbone consisted of the Phoenician contingents, far more skilled in rowing techniques than the Greeks. Yet there was a serious weakness in the Persian plan of invasion, which Themistocles' keen mind spotted. The army was so large that it had to move close to the shore to receive seaborne grain; the navy in turn hugged the coast to protect the supply vessels. If only the Greeks could defeat the Persian navy, Xerxes' army would be a less serious threat. To secure the proper conditions for naval victory two steps were necessary. The maritime powers among the Greek allies, especially Athens, must concentrate all their energies on the sea; and then the Greek admirals must inveigle the superior Persian navy into narrow waters where its numbers and the skill of the Phoenician galleys would be less effective. By dextrous argument Themistocles secured agreement that the Greeks would send their naval forces north with a small army to delay and, if possible, cripple the enemy.

At first the Greeks selected the vale of Tempe in northern Thessaly as a suitable line of defense but discovered that the position could be turned if the Persians made a short inland detour. Accordingly, they fell back to Thermopylae, where the

coastal road was hemmed between sea and mountains to a path only 50 feet wide; the other routes from Thessaly south into Boeotia lay so far inland that the Persian strategic necessity of keeping army and navy together prevented their use. Off Thermopylae lay the island of Euboea, which would force the Persian navy to come into a narrow strait; to block its entry the Greek fleet anchored at the northern end of the strait at Artemisium, while a minor detachment guarded its southern exit. Since this was a delaying position, limited forces were committed by land. The Spartan king Leonidas led 300 Spartan elite with allies to total some 9000 men; the Spartan admiral Eurybiades, however, had most of the Athenian and other naval contingents, numbering 271 triremes in the main fleet.

The mighty panoply of Xerxes made its way slowly across the Hellespont via two bridges of boats; along the north coast of the Aegean, where a canal had been dug for his fleet across the dangerous Mt. Athos peninsula, and down into Greece. Everywhere the native peoples and states surrendered. As Xerxes approached Thermopylae, his fleet encountered a violent storm that raged three days and sank many ships; the Greek forces, in the sheltered lee of Euboea, were not damaged. The enemy navy suffered further damage when Xerxes sent a large detachment around Euboea to bottle up the Greek fleet, for another storm blew the 200 Persian ships of this flotilla onto the rocks of the island.

The main fleet then fought three battles with the Greeks off Artemisium, in which neither side could secure a decisive victory. While his fleet was trying to force a passage by sea, Xerxes also launched an attack by land at the defenders of the narrow pass of Thermopylae. For two days his Persian "Immortals" died in droves before the stern Greek lines; but on the second night a local traitor revealed the existence of a trail up the mountains behind the Greeks. The movement of the Persian flanking force was detected by Leonidas in time to send off most of his army; he and his Spartans sacrificed themselves to delay the main Persian thrust. The Greek navy had no recourse but to retreat to the island of Salamis, off Attica.

The Greeks could gain comfort from their success in whittling

down the enemy navy, yet as their council of war met on the shore of Salamis they could see smoke spiraling up from the Athenian Acropolis, where the Persians had quickly overcome the resistance of the priests and set fire to the temple roofs. All other Athenians had abandoned their homes and were now on the island of Salamis or at Troezen in the Peloponnesus.

Some of the Greek admirals wished to withdraw to the isthmus of Corinth and anchor off its wall. Themistocles argued forcefully that the only Greek hope lay in sticking to the main line of strategy of naval action and in response to a taunt that he no longer had a country or a right to speak threatened to sail off with the Athenian ships and citizens to found a new state in the western Mediterranean. Since all realized the Greeks had no chance without the strong Athenian navy, they yielded once more to his keen analysis and agreed to hold their position. So both sides remained indecisive, for Xerxes could not settle whether to advance by land on the isthmus of Corinth or deal with the Greek naval forces off his flank.

As dissensions arose again in the Greek naval command, the wily Themistocles took the dangerous course of sending by night a trusted slave, Sicinnus, to the Persians to tell Xerxes that the Greeks were quarreling, that the Athenians were willing to turn traitor, and that if he wanted a great victory he needed only to attack. Xerxes fell into the trap and ordered his fleet to advance for the final blow; to make victory doubly sure he sent a detachment around to the west end of the strait to bottle up the Greeks. He himself sat upon a throne on a hill overlooking the battleground so that he could award prizes to the most valorous of his subjects.

On a morning in late September the Persian fleet, now reduced to some 350 ships, rowed in line abreast from its anchorage on the Attic shore toward Salamis. The Greeks, who had about 300 ships in the action, knew that they were encircled from the rear and prepared for the decisive battle; Athenian hoplites were embarked on the ships. As the Persians closed in, their line was split by the little island of Psyttalia; the resulting confusion was heightened by the apparent retreat of the Greeks, who backed water on seeing the Persians enter the narrow reaches of the bay.

This tactical maneuver, however, was designed only to suck the enemy farther in; suddenly the Greeks rowed forward from front and flanks and threw themselves into hand-to-hand battle with the Persians, who had no chance to use maneuvering tactics. By the close of the day the despondent Xerxes could see his remaining ships rowing away in utter defeat. Some 200 Persian warships, mostly of the Phoenician contingent, were lost, as against only about 40 Greek ships.

Xerxes struck his tents and returned speedily to Asia Minor. Since the Persians could no longer be sure of supplies by sea, he also took back much of his army. As has usually been the case in history, the proper use of sea power can facilitate victory, but the final step must come by land. In the next year (479) at Plataea the allied army under Spartan command was equal in strength to the Persian force and routed it in a very untidy battle.

Salamis made possible the almost unbelievable Greek deliverance, and Themistocles was the indomitable agent to help engineer the success. True, others had a hand in the glorious days of 480-79: the Spartans provided leadership, which the allies accepted without demur; after the battle of Salamis it was the Aeginetans who got first prize for their role. The Athenians did not have sufficient manpower for all their warships by themselves; at Artemisium they provided 127 galleys, but some were rowed by Plataeans, and 20 by men from Chalcis. At Salamis all 200 were present, but again Chalcis manned 20.⁸ Even so, Herodotus' judgment was sound:

At this point I find myself compelled to express an opinion which I know most people will object to; nevertheless, as I believe it to be true, I will not suppress it. If the Athenians, through fear of the approaching danger, had abandoned their country, or if they had stayed there and submitted to Xerxes, there would have been no attempt to resist the Persians by sea; and in the absence of a Greek fleet, it is easy to see what would have been the course of events on land. . . . It was the Athenians who—after God—drove back the Persian king.⁹

So too it was the Athenians who were to capitalize on the Greek success by moving steadily if unintentionally to consoli-

date the first great thalassocracy, one of the most productive and important in Western history. In this development Themistocles, the initial *fons et origo*, played no part; he soon fell victim himself to the bitter fights of Athenian politics and eventually wound up a pensioner of the Persian king in Asia Minor.

The Spartans, having done their duty in 480-79, were ready to stop; to counter the strong possibility that the Persians would regroup their strength, as they had in the Ionian revolt, the Spartans suggested simply moving the people of the cities on the coast of Asia Minor to the Greek mainland. The Ionians were reluctant to leave the homes and graves of their ancestors, and Athens stepped forward, willing to serve as the leader in taking revenge on the Persians and securing the liberty of the Aegean states. As Thucydides put it, the Spartans "were anxious to be rid of the war against the Medes. They thought that the Athenians were capable of undertaking the leadership and that at that time they were well disposed towards them." This may be too simple, but the Spartans did have enough troubles at home to keep them preoccupied, and political direction at Athens by this point had passed to the aristocrat Cimon, a pro-Spartan figure.¹⁰

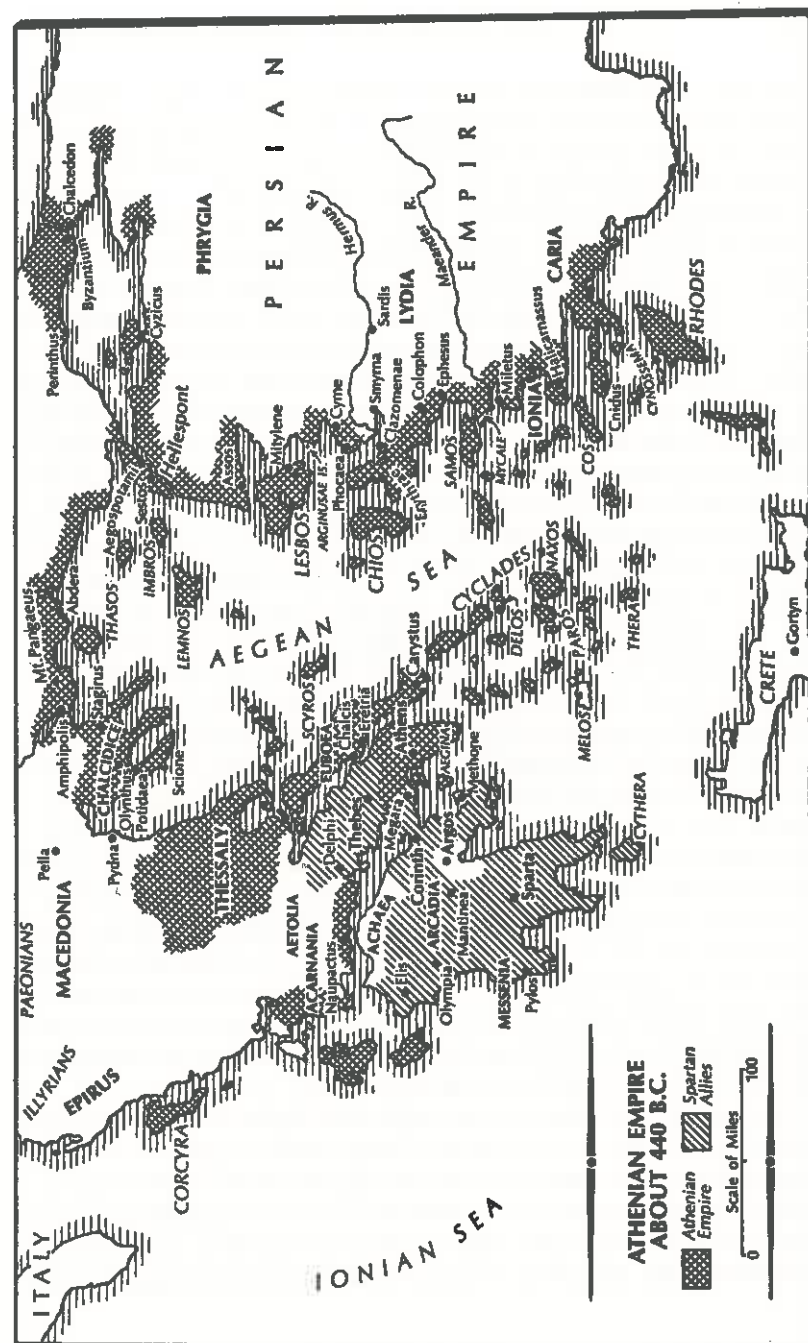
A number of Asiatic and island states met at the sacred island of Delos in the summer of 477 and formed a league; each state was to provide warships or, in the case of smaller states, cash to help defray the expenses of war. Leadership was voluntarily assigned to Athens, which would furnish admirals (and the largest fleet), treasurers, and presidents of the league assembly. In flamboyant fashion the allies threw lumps of iron into the sea and swore to remain united until the iron floated; but in reality none of them probably expected lasting military involvement. As a modern historian succinctly observed, "What they had neglected to stipulate was the time for which they were to remain allies."¹¹

Athens duly marshalled Greek strength to sweep the Persians out of the Aegean and then the south coast of Asia Minor, also largely occupied by Greek states; the greatest triumph was the destruction by Cimon of the re nascent Persian fleet at the battle of the Eurymedon river, early in the 460's. By this time the nature of the league was subtly altering. When the small state of Carystus on the island of Euboea had been liberated, it was then,

against its will, forced to join the league; the crusade must not be weakened by local unwillingness to participate. Soon the island of Naxos grew weary of the annual burden of providing ships, but Athens quickly compelled it to resume its role in the common effort. Worst of all was the "revolt" of Thasos, a large state, in 465, which had to be recalled to its fealty by a siege. Voluntary league, in sum, slowly, almost unconsciously, was becoming empire. Modern students date the point at which the process was complete to 454, when the treasury of the league, safeguarded at the temple of Apollo on Delos, was moved to Athens, where Athena and her priests could better protect it on the Acropolis in the event of a sudden Persian foray into the Aegean.

This peculiar pattern of imperialism does not accord neatly with modern theories of the rise of imperialist powers as explicable entirely in economic terms. Hobson, the fountainhead of this view, who was followed by Lenin, built his thesis almost entirely on the career of Cecil Rhodes, a very untypical example of English expansion; perhaps we should keep in mind an alternative explanation. Schumpeter, for instance, described the rise of the Persian empire as a good illustration of the ambition of upper classes throughout history; a recent powerful assessment of Roman imperialism by W. V. Harris attributes Roman conquests to an "ideology of *laus* and *gloria*" among the leading Roman families and only secondarily to the profits gained from victory.¹² To return to Athens, the main objective driving the Athenians was, in the words of Jacqueline de Romilly, "the desire which they have for fame, renown, and honours. In its highest form, their ambition aims at glory, in its lowest at the use of power."¹³

Financial profit was an incidental by-product, though Athenian leaders were well aware that their mastery could be used economically for political purposes, and in particular they controlled by means of Hellespontophylakes, or guards of the Hellespont, the import of Russian grain by other states. One of the first salvoes in the events leading to the outbreak of the Peloponnesian War in 431 was the Megarian decree of the Athenian assembly, under the instigation of Pericles, which



banned Megarians from the harbors and markets of the Aegean; later, at a meeting of Spartan allies at Sparta to discuss going to war, the Corinthians warned that the sea was vital, even for those who lived inland off the main trade routes.¹⁴

Although it was useful to suppress piracy and protect Athenian grain supplies, the main objective of thalassocracy was Athenian political and military mastery of the Aegean world. At its height Athens ruled directly 179 states which included perhaps 2,000,000 Greeks; the most remote of these were only an eight-day voyage (200–250 miles) from Athens. But Athenian naval power could be projected over the Mediterranean from Sicily to Egypt and the Black Sea, so that the world which had to consider Athenian policy seriously embraced perhaps 20,000,000 people.¹⁵

The fruits of Athenian naval mastery were many and varied. On the Acropolis rose the Parthenon, the most perfect and expensive Doric temple ever built, thanks to imperial revenues; beside it stood the Erechtheum and the Propylaea. Down below in the Agora appeared other religious and secular buildings; farther afield the hall of mysteries at Eleusis, the temple crowning the crags of Sunium, and other magnificent edifices were constructed as visible testimony to Athenian hegemony. In earlier days Athens had not been distinguished as a literary center. Now the tragic and comic stages came into existence; Herodotus spent some time at Athens, and by the end of the century Thucydides was writing his somber tale of the Peloponnesian War; then too Socrates was exploring the way a man should live. It would be too much to ascribe the birth of tragedy, comedy, and history to Athenian imperialism—Aeschylus, after all, was a mature man in 480 and fought in the battle of Salamis—but the vibrant, optimistic tone of Athenian life certainly helped to incite the support of the audiences attending the plays in the theater of Dionysus or the auditors of the Father of History.

Although most citizens continued to be land-rooted, the industrial and commercial sectors of Athens and its port of Piraeus became far more important. In the decades before 500 the city of Athens had numbered no more than about 10,000 inhabitants; by the close of the fifth century they had swelled probably to about 100,000, including “naval architects, shipbuilding contrac-

tors, merchants who now dealt exclusively in timber and pitch from the northern Aegean, cinnabar from Kea, hemp and flax, and leather” as well as tavernkeepers, ladies of the night, bands of cutthroats, and other fruits of naval power.¹⁶ The port itself was restructured by Hippodamus of Miletus, the first urban planner to take into account economic as well as religious and political requirements; one comic poet could even proclaim, “Just as the Parthenon is beautiful so is the Piraeus.”¹⁷

Athens had been fully democratic since the reforms of Cleisthenes, but across the fifth century the assembly of citizens became ever more the font of political power. Oddly enough, Thucydides, though discussing early Greek history almost exclusively as measured by the rise of interest in the sea, does not comment on the interconnection of imperialism abroad and democracy at home, but another writer known as the Old Oligarch saw these ties in his ironical comment:

It is only just that the poorer classes and the common people of Athens should be better off than the men of birth and wealth, seeing that it is the people who man the fleet and have brought the city her power. The steerman, the boatswain, the lieutenant, the lookout-man at the prow, the shipwright—these are the people who supply the city with power rather than her heavy infantry and men of birth and quality.¹⁸

Pericles, the political leader from about 450, instituted pay for jurors, who were the older part of the population, and according to Plutarch initiated his building program partly to provide work for the poor.

Not everyone in Athens approved either of overseas imperialism or its internal political and social effects. The Old Oligarch rhetorically proclaimed that “in a country which bases its power on the navy . . . we become slaves of our slaves,” and a foreigner, Stesimbrotus of Thasos, laid the responsibility on Themistocles who “degraded the people of Athens to the rowing pad and the oar.”¹⁹ In 445 Thucydides son of Melesias (not the historian) challenged Pericles in an ostracism as using imperial monies for the decoration of Athens, but himself lost; the citizen body as a whole followed Pericles, who later told the assembly

that sea power implied tyranny but was justified by Athenian greatness. Loyalty to democracy then and later was always centered in the Piraeus.²⁰

The most evident burden on the empire itself was the requirement of paying tribute to Athens. By 431 the voluntary contributions set half a century earlier had turned into forced payments. Very few states still had the option of furnishing ships, and by the Currency Decree of 449, which ordered the use of Athenian coinage, weights, and measures throughout the empire, the funds now came in the form of standardized Athenian tetradrachms, the "owls," struck in greater abundance than any previous Greek coinage.²¹ These funds were safeguarded by Athena and like a good banker she took her fees by exacting one-sixtieth of each state's payment. These amounts were duly inscribed on stone slabs that fortunately have survived more or less intact and give us a detailed picture of imperial receipts.²² The funds from the subjects also met the heavy expenses involved in maintaining a fleet that was at sea a great part of every year to keep the empire under control.²³

Unlike the Roman Republic, which required from its Italian "allies" not cash but men for the Roman wars, the Athenian empire does not appear as a rule to have levied contingents of subjects for its galleys. There is one reference to impressment for the great expedition to Syracuse; otherwise considerable numbers of allies were tempted by pay to serve as mercenaries alongside the poorer Athenian citizens drafted for the rowers' benches;²⁴ Athens could never have manned its large fleets in the Peloponnesian War from its own citizen body. Daily pay rose across the fifth century from three obols to six, partly out of this necessity.

To supervise the empire, however, the Athenians made considerable use of garrisons and settled clumps of individual citizens called *cleruchs* on the lands of doubtful subjects; "residents" also served as standing checks, and traveling inspectors (*episkopoi*), whose arrogance was mocked by Aristophanes, toured the empire. The fourth-century work, *Constitution of the Athenians*, reckons these supervisors at 700 a year. In various decrees the independence of local courts was trimmed to require that capital penalties (death, exile, and loss of public rights) could be in-

flicted only by Athenian juries—as the Old Oligarch observed, this was good for the Athenian hotel business.²⁵

These and similar measures, largely in place by 431, helped safeguard Athenian mastery, but they also directly violated the basic principle of Greek political life, *autonomia*, the right of a state to use its own laws.²⁶ Athens could accept any form of local government, including tyranny, but in the case of a revolt had no hesitation in imposing democracy on the rebels. In an ingenious article some years ago Ste. Croix sought to prove that the subjects generally were happy with Athenian rule inasmuch as it did protect local democracy, but a number of rebuttals have properly carried the day in opposition.²⁷ Stripped to its essence the Athenian empire produced "slavery" (*douleia*), and in the Peloponnesian War the Spartans were able to raise the battle cry of liberation from that enslavement by an Athenian elite. The true judgment of the subjects is evident in that whenever they saw a chance to escape from Athenian naval domination they revolted, and in 404 toppled the Athenian empire. It was most unfortunate that Athenian leaders could not know the pellucid and sagacious memorandum of Sir Eyre Crowe on the underlying responsibilities of naval powers if they were to keep their position:

Sea power is more potent than land power, because it is as pervading as the element in which it moves and has its being. Its formidable character makes itself felt the more directly that a maritime State is, in the literal sense of the world, the neighbour of every country accessible by sea. It would, therefore, be but natural that the power of a State supreme at sea should inspire universal jealousy and fear, and be ever exposed to the danger of being overthrown by a general combination of the world. Against such a combination no single nation could in the long run stand, least of all a small island kingdom not possessed of the military strength of a people trained to arms, and dependent for its food on overseas commerce. The danger can in practice only be averted—and history shows that it has been so averted—on condition that the national policy of the insular and naval State is so directed as to harmonize with the general desires and ideals common to all mankind, and more particularly that it is closely identified with the

primary and vital interests of a majority, or as many as possible, of the other nations.²⁸

In 431 Athens with its empire and Sparta with its allies came to open war, the famous Peloponnesian War immortalized by Thucydides, who decided at its outbreak that it was to be the greatest conflict ever in Greek history. For him the root cause was Spartan fear of the ever growing power of Athens, but though he tried to exculpate Pericles it is clear that the political leader of Athens did much to bring about the war at the time it broke out. For modern students of sea power this protracted conflict provides as valuable guidance as the vicissitudes of British naval history from the seventeenth to the twentieth century, both in understanding the utility of sea power and also in the dangers of overreliance on this one factor.

The first phase of the war from 431 to 421 was a contest of the elephant and the whale. The Peloponnesian league had only limited naval strength and did not possess the funds either to build a large navy or hire the necessary rowers. Although its powerful army invaded and laid waste Attica, it could not attack Athens proper, which was safe behind its stone walls and drew much of its food from overseas; nor were the Spartans able to keep their army active throughout the agricultural season. Sparta stood for liberty, but it could not aid Athenian subjects overseas to secure their freedom. When Mitylene rebelled in 428-27 the Athenian fleet inexorably reduced it once more to obedience.

On the other hand Athens could not force Sparta to surrender, for it dared not meet the invincible Spartan hoplites by land. Pericles had laid down the fundamental lines along which Athens would fight. When the enemy invaded Attica its citizenry abandoned their ancestral homes and poured into the safe refuge of the city until the Spartans retreated. Although they raged against Pericles and even temporarily removed him from office, he calmly adhered to his policy of wearing down the enemy by naval raids about the Peloponnesus. Above all, Athens must keep its fleet intact, on which rested its imperial revenues and its overseas supplies of grain. This cautious approach, very similar to the En-

lish naval strategy during the Napoleonic wars, could not bring victory, but it could avoid defeat.

Down to 421 the Athenians had the better of the widely scattered actions. Sparta itself they could not touch, but at points about the Peloponnesus they set up coastal forts to which disaffected helots and others might escape. Corinth, on the other hand, suffered severely. The Athenians secured naval mastery in the Gulf of Corinth through the brilliant battles of their admiral Phormio, and from their base of Naupactus they virtually prevented Corinthian trade to the west. By a chance of war the Athenian fleet cut off a whole battalion of Spartans on an island at Pylos and forced it to surrender. Among other prisoners were 120 Spartan "Equals," a sizable proportion of the Spartan citizen body, and the Spartans thereafter dared not invade Attica lest these hostages be executed.²⁹

The last major actions in the first phase of the war took place along the coast of Macedonia, where a brilliant Spartan leader, Brasidas, was able to get at Athenian subject states by land and incite them to rebel. In a battle at Amphipolis both he and the radical Athenian leader Cleon were killed (422). Both sides were ready to call a halt to the inconclusive struggle, and the Spartans acquiesced in a peace treaty that led to massive discontent and defection of their allies, whose grounds of complaint against Athens were almost ignored in the treaty.

Athens had done as well, or better, than could have been expected. The Aegean empire was intact; in western waters its power had risen; the Peloponnesian league had been sorely shaken. Throughout history a naval power has usually been able to defeat a land power only if it secures a powerful land ally; but no major Greek state had been willing to link itself to Athenian imperialism. Argos, the one possibility, had been bound to neutrality by a treaty with Sparta that expired in 421.

Yet the Athenians were far from satisfied inasmuch as their eager expansionism had been essentially checked. During the strains of war the temperament of the assembly became steadily harsher, especially after Pericles died in 429, a victim of a great epidemic akin to typhus; the more vengeful rabble-rouser Cleon

had then become its main adviser. The epidemic and overcrowding affected everyone; the devastation of the countryside and the losses of the army in several land battles damaged the rural classes especially.

Now that the war was over, Athenian opinions were sharply divided, and so was Athenian leadership. Nicias, a conservative aristocrat, was a second Pericles, except that his religious piety and high sense of duty were not matched by equal firmness and clarity of thought. Far more radical was the handsome and popular Alcibiades, a pupil of Socrates. First Alcibiades persuaded the Athenians to ally themselves with Argos and attempt land operations in the Peloponnesus; though the upshot was a defeat of the Argives and a small Athenian force at Mantinea (418), the peace was not formally broken.

Then came a tempting opportunity to intervene in the affairs of Sicily. During the war the Athenians had made some diplomatic and naval gestures toward unseating its main power, Syracuse; now an appeal from the native state of Segesta promised more extensive local support. Nicias stood in opposition and pointed out the basic strategic requirement that Athens remain powerful in the Aegean, but Alcibiades successfully rallied the spirit of excitement and possible economic profits among the citizens. The assembly not only voted to send an expedition but also set its size on the large scale that Nicias had proclaimed necessary; and it placed in command a triumvirate consisting of Nicias, Lamachus (a professional general), and Alcibiades. That in itself was almost enough to ensure disaster for the greatest amphibious operation ever launched in Greek history, but the fleet of some 100 triremes and troopships rowed out of the harbor of Piraeus in gala array (June 415), met a further contingent off Corcyra, and set course for Sicily.

The main Syracusan leader, Hermocrates, tried in vain to convince his fellow citizens to meet the Athenians on the sea;⁸⁰ but the Athenian leaders gave the Syracusans time to prepare by land as they fell to wrangling among themselves about the proper course of action. Alcibiades was soon recalled by his enemies in Athens on grounds that he had profaned the sacred Eleusinian mysteries during a drunken revel. Rather than return to face the

probability of death, Alcibiades fled to Sparta where he urged the Spartans to aid Syracuse and to resume the war against Athens. Although Sparta sent only the general Gylippus to command the Corinthian relief expedition to Syracuse, this leader invigorated the Syracusans to withstand a great siege by the Athenian force.

Lodged in a swampy corner of the great harbor of Syracuse, Nicias grew more and more despondent and called for help, which was provided by a further expedition in 413. When the Athenians still failed to carry the city, their commanders decided to retreat by sea; but since an eclipse of the moon had just occurred, Nicias refused to leave for 27 days. During that period the Syracusans strengthened their ships and in a hand-to-hand naval battle in the great harbor defeated the Athenian forces. When finally Nicias led off his dejected army by land, they were cut to pieces by Syracusan cavalry. Nicias and the other Athenian leaders were executed, the Athenians died of hunger and thirst in the quarries where they were imprisoned, and the Athenian subjects were sold into slavery. All told 50,000 men and over 200 triremes were lost in one of the most poorly conceived amphibious operations ever attempted in history.

By 413 Sparta was again at war with Athens. Finances were so imperiled that Athens had to shift to a general tax of 5% on seaborne commerce; the Athenian empire tottered amid widespread disaffection and even revolt among its subjects. Spartan fleets could cruise the Aegean almost at will and were aided by contingents from Syracuse and other west Greek states, but the Athenians stubbornly held on, aided by Spartan indecisiveness—"the Spartans proved to be the most remarkably helpful enemies that the Athenians could have had."⁸¹

In the earlier stages of the war the Persian satraps of Asia Minor remained uncommitted, but from 411 on they came to the aid of Sparta by providing funds with which it could really challenge Athenian hegemony. Spartan admirals, unfortunately, lost battle after battle, but finally the able commander Lysander took charge and on September 1, 405, swooped across the Hellespont, where the Athenian fleet lay anchored at Aegospotami, and seized its ships while the crews were mostly on shore. He then

swept down the Aegean, driving ahead of him all the Athenian colonists to Athens, which helplessly endured a siege by sea and land for several months before starvation forced surrender.

Athenian thalassocracy had failed but not entirely through its own inherent weaknesses. True, the Athenians could never get a useful land ally, as the British were generally able to do in their wars with France, Spain, and Germany; they also treated their dependent states as subjects while the Spartans presided over an alliance in which the allies had a real voice. The fundamental cause of defeat nonetheless was the ability of the Spartan political and military system to endure the stress of war and produce able commanders whereas Athenian democracy proved unstable and was led ever more poorly by demagogues. The Spartans also discovered that victory could be reached only by attaining naval mastery; they and the Romans later are almost unique in all history in facing the need to gain naval power and actually securing it.

After the surrender of Athens the allies of Sparta wished to see the oppressor city destroyed, but Sparta was content to tear down its Long Walls to the accompaniment of flute-girls, restrict its navy to 12 ships, and install an oligarchy. Sparta remained master of the Aegean world by land and by sea until it fell at odds with Persia over the Greek states of Asia Minor, which were to be surrendered to the Persians in repayment for their financial aid; when Sparta went back on its bargain the Persians re-enforced the Phoenician fleet, hired the former Athenian admiral Conon, and in 394 defeated the Spartan navy in the battle of Cnidus. Thereafter Persia was the hidden master of Greek politics until the rise of Macedonia. When Athens ventured to interfere in Asia Minor during the reign of Artaxerxes he threatened to send his navy into the Aegean, and Athens evacuated Asia at once.

As this event may suggest, Athens had quickly recovered its democratic structure, its economic strength, and its cultural position; during the fourth century Athens was far more the center of the Greek world than it had ever been. It rebuilt its Long Walls, constructed a great arsenal at the naval port of Zea on the east side of the Piraeus promontory, and even had the financial

strength to fashion a new navy that had 120 active ships in 356 and 170 in 322 (its dockyards inventories eventually list no less than 360 trireme hulls).³² Although Athens dared not incur Persian hostility it was at least master of the western Aegean waters.

Why the new navy? Largely because it was useful in protecting the route of supply from south Russia; Athenian warships went as far as the Crimea to convoy grain ships and Athens' might was exerted against such states as Byzantium when they sought to interfere with the flow of grain. By law Athenian traders had to bring grain to Athens, and only one-third could again be exported; "the foreign policy of the Athenians was largely a grain policy."³³ Athenian commerce also needed protection against pirates; several naval cruises were designed specifically to put down these predators, and Athens even established a colony at the head of the Adriatic to protect its merchants from Illyrian marauders.³⁴ Trade had become ever more important to Athens; an envoy could assert in its assembly, "The majority of you derive your livelihood from the sea, or things connected with it. . . . The sea is your natural element—your birthright."³⁵ Also important in nurturing naval interest was the memory of Athenian greatness on the sea in the past; by the fourth century orators and pamphleteers such as Demosthenes and Isocrates often incorporated in their arsenal of arguments an appeal to the pride of the Athenians in their earlier history.

Athenian public finances were always hand-to-mouth, and in the fourth century were burdened by far greater charges to support the poorer citizens by payment for attending the assembly and even the public festivals. Yet there were sufficient resources to build and maintain the navy. For a time there was a second Athenian confederacy, supported by the willingness of the island states to aid in assuring peaceful seas, but the limited contributions of the league came to an end by 357, when Athens again showed signs of imperialistic tendencies. Thereafter Athens had to depend on its own income, tapped by means of a revision of the system of trierarchs.³⁶

In the fifth century each trireme had had a captain or trierarch, appointed for a year by the board of generals, who had not

only to command his vessel but to keep it in good order. Through the opening years of the Peloponnesian War this post was more a responsibility than a burden, and one citizen, Clinias, had even provided his own ship and crew in the Persian wars.³⁷ The stresses after 431 made the task so onerous that at times two wealthy men were appointed to share the position, as remained the custom in the fourth century. In 357 a panel of the 1200 richest citizens was organized, with subpanels or symmories to provide trierarchs and the funds for the running expenses of ships. Resident aliens could be appointed and even a man such as Isocrates could serve as trierarch when over 80 years of age, operating through a contractor.³⁸ About 340 Demosthenes carried out a further reorganization that limited the panel of possible trierarchs to the 300 wealthiest citizens.

Theoretically, a trierarch secured his warship at the beginning of the year from the 10 overseers of the dockyards, complete with tackle and sails; the oarsmen were drafted by the local units of government, the demes. Provision of food and so on was the responsibility of the generals. In practice, nonetheless, the system worked poorly. Apollodorus, a new citizen, was proud in 360 to be appointed trierarch but had largely to recruit his own rowers, provide better tackle, and pay his men for their food when the general failed to do so; moreover much of his crew deserted. "My men, knowing that they were skilled oarsmen, went off to take jobs wherever they figured they could get the highest pay."³⁹ It is a marvel that the navy remained a valuable asset to Athens.

Across the middle years of the fourth century Philip of Macedonia wove his way through the complicated tissue of Greek politics to become ever more powerful; in 338 his army met and defeated the citizens levies of Athens and Thebes at Chaeronea. Thebes he treated brutally; to Athens he was much more forgiving, partly because of its proud cultural inheritance but also because he needed the aid of its navy. When his son Alexander succeeded to the throne and carried out Philip's plan to invade Asia Minor, he actually made little use of Aegean naval resources, and instead carried out the most ingenious scheme of dealing with hostile sea power ever executed in history; he simply marched along the Levantine coast as far as Egypt, taking the

Persian ports as he went. The strategy required two major battles by land and the long-protracted siege of Tyre, the most famous in antiquity, but was in the end successful.

A recent eulogy of sea power asserts, "The sea has supplied mobility, capability and support throughout Western history, and those failing in the sea power test—notably Alexander, Napoleon and Hitler—also failed the longevity one."⁴⁰ Whatever may be the truth concerning Napoleon and Hitler, this is meaningless rhetoric as applied to Alexander. When he had reached the farthest end of his conquests in India he had a fleet constructed to operate in the Persian Gulf, and only the fact that neither he nor his admiral Nearchus was aware of the monsoon winds prevented his ships from providing food and water for the return march to Babylon across the Gedrosian desert. In preparation for his next adventure, the conquest of Arabia, he even had warships disassembled and transported overland from Phoenicia to Babylon.⁴¹ It was Caesar, not Alexander, who several times came close to disaster by failing to make proper use of the sea.

After the death of Alexander in 323 his Macedonian regent Antipater faced a general revolt in Greece, which he put down without mercy. To counter the Athenian navy he summoned Phoenician forces which eliminated that fleet in the battle of Amorgos in 322. So ended almost two centuries of Athenian naval power, which had helped to protect and nourish one of the most remarkable cultural outbursts of all time. The future on the sea lay in the hands of the great monarchies carved out of Alexander's empire and also to a state that thus far had played no role in naval history.⁴²