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2 The origins of piracy from the Bronze Age to Alexander

It would be tempting to trace the history of ancient piracy well back into the second millennium BC, to the era when the peoples of the Eastern Mediterranean began to travel regularly by sea and to trade across long distances. Nautical and terrestrial archaeology, and the records of Egypt and the Near Eastern civilizations, show that ships carrying valuable cargoes were sailing between Egypt, Cyprus, the Levantine coast and the Aegean by c. 1200 BC. There were also busy sea lanes in the Red Sea and the Persian Gulf. Ships capable of carrying large cargoes and numerous warriors are depicted on various artefacts and in carvings and wall paintings from Egypt, Crete and the Cyclades.¹ There are even some scenes which illustrate fighting at sea, most notably the Medinet Habu reliefs from Thebes, which depict the triumph of the Egyptians under Rameses III against the 'Sea Peoples' c. 1190 BC.² When the available historical records for the Mediterranean in the Bronze Age are analysed, however, reliable evidence of piracy is found to be lacking.

It might be argued that the earliest records of piracy are the legends preserved by the Greeks about Minos, the powerful ruler of Crete. Both Herodotus and Thucydides claim that Minos ruled the seas, and the latter says of him: 'It is likely that he cleared the sea of piracy as far as he was able, to improve his revenues' (Thuc. 1.4). Herodotus also associates the Karians with Minos, saying that they were his subjects and that they manned his ships, thus acquiring a reputation for prowess in war (Hdt. 1.171). The Athenians preserved a tradition that they had once paid tribute to Knossos, a tribute which they associated directly with Minos and the story of Theseus.³ Some scholars have argued that the so-called Minoan Thalassocracy can be associated with the period of Minoan cultural pre-eminence in the Aegean in the second millennium BC, perhaps around the periods Middle Minoan II, IIIA and IIIB (c. 1700–1400 BC).⁴

¹ See Casson (1971): chs. 2–3; Bass (1972): ch. 1.

² Illustrated in Casson (1971): fig. 61 and Bass (1972): 21, fig. 18.

³ Philochoros, *FGrHist* no. 328, fr. 17; Plut. *Thes.* 16–19.

⁴ Buck (1962); Hägg and Marinatos (1984).

If so, then the fact that Minos and his successors 'ruled the sea' could be held to show that they had the power to suppress piracy. I do not subscribe to this view of an historical Minoan Thalassocracy. The explanation of Thucydides' account which was advanced by George Grote still holds good today: 'Here we have conjectures, derived from the analogy of the Athenian Maritime Empire, in the historical times, substituted in the place of fabulous incidents, and attached to the name of Minos.'⁵ In short the Minoan Thalassocracy is a myth, and it has no sound historical basis.⁶ Legendary exploits of the ancestors of the Greeks reported in the authors of the Classical period cannot be taken as evidence for the history of piracy in the Bronze Age.

In any case, what does it mean to talk of piracy in this period? The scanty written sources for the history of the Mediterranean in the second millennium BC contain no mention of piracy, because there was no such concept. Warfare and piracy had not come to be differentiated in this early period. Ormerod and others have taken Egyptian and Near Eastern records which speak of groups like the Lukka and the Sea Peoples as evidence of piracy in the fourteenth, thirteenth and twelfth centuries BC.⁷ Yet it seems to me that there is no distinction between piracy and warfare in these records. For example, letters from the late thirteenth-century BC king of Ugarit, 'Ammurapi, to the king of Alashiya (probably Cyprus) speak of ships and attacks by sea. In one letter the Ugaritic king says that he has no ships available to defend his city against the ships that have been sighted off the coast: 'My father, did you not know that all my troops were stationed in the Hittite country, and that all my ships are still stationed in Lukka and have not yet returned? So that the country is abandoned to itself...' This letter has been associated with a tablet of the Hittite king Suppiluliuma II (c. 1210 BC), recording a victory at sea, and the two assumed to refer to piracy against Ugarit: 'The ships of Alashiya met me in the sea three times for battle, and I smote them; and seized them; and I seized the ships and set fire to them in the sea.'⁸ While it is tempting to associate these references to fighting at sea with an attempt to suppress piracy in the Eastern Mediterranean, it seems to me that the most appropriate term for this activity is warfare. It might help if some motivation could be established for these conflicts, whether they were attempts to obtain territory, or just to plunder, but in general the sources are not full enough to analyse them in such a fashion. Similarly, attempts

⁵ Grote (1888): 220–1. See below pp. 26–30 on the Athenian Empire and piracy.

⁶ See the excellent discussion by Starr (1955).

⁷ Ormerod (1924): ch. 3; Sandars (1985).

⁸ Nougayrol (1968): 87–9; see also Sandars (1985): 142. On the often uncertain chronology of the Ugaritic and Hittite rulers in this period see Kuhrt (1995): 229–32, 264–66, 305–14.

to find in references to the land of Ahhiyawa and its people an early record of Mycenaean piracy and raiding, of the kind sometimes thought to be reflected in the Homeric poems, also fall foul of the lack of any criteria for differentiating piracy from warfare.⁹ It cannot be said that there is evidence of piracy in the historical records without some distinctive terminology. People using ships to plunder coastal settlements are not called pirates, so they cannot really be said to be practising piracy.

Piracy in the Archaic Greek world

It is only in the Archaic period of Greek history, roughly 800–500 BC, that the concept of piracy starts to emerge. As was noted above, the Homeric poems are the earliest written sources which refer to individuals and groups who are labelled *pirates*. The Homeric poems were probably composed in Ionia around 750–700 BC. They portray a society and a culture that is largely based upon the poet's contemporary world, but which has fantastical elements in it, particularly the attributes of the gods and heroes.¹⁰ I am in agreement with the widely held view that the values and ideals of the Homeric poems also reflect contemporary society, so that, in general terms, the poems can be used as a reasonable source of evidence for the social history of the Greeks of the late eighth century BC. An obvious difficulty is that separating 'fact' from 'fantasy' is not an easy thing to do, since even what seems plausible may not necessarily be true to life. Comparison is possible with a few references in later literature to the activities of the early Greeks, and the comparison seems to indicate that the picture of plundering and raiding which emerges from Homer was at least partly based on contemporary conditions.

It would be possible to write an entire book on the subject of Homeric piracy alone, but that is not my purpose here. Instead I shall present a brief study of piracy in the Homeric poems to illustrate certain fundamental points. The first is that although pirates are, from their earliest appearance in ancient literature, regarded with some disapproval, it is also possible for a pirate to achieve high status as a result of his plundering, so that in the Homeric world piracy was not necessarily a shameful or

⁹ See Sandars (1985); Bryce (1986) and (1989); Kuhrt (1995). Note also Catling (1975) and Barnett (1975) on Sea Peoples, Alashiya, and Ahhiyawa. See below pp. 17–22 on the Homeric poems and history.

¹⁰ On the fantasy world of Homer see van Wees (1992): ch. 1. The bibliography on 'Homeric society' is vast and ever-increasing; for recent discussions with further references see Osborne (1996): ch. 5; Raaflaub (1998). The *Iliad* was apparently composed earlier than the *Odyssey*, but the two poems share a similar set of values and may well be the work of the same poet.

deplorable activity, as Thucydides noted in the introductory section of his history of the Peloponnesian War, known as the *Archaeologia* (Thuc. 1.5). A further important point is that piracy is so closely related to warfare in both aims and methods that they are virtually indistinguishable in the Homeric world.¹¹

The passage which best illustrates the ambiguous nature of pirates in Homer is a formulaic greeting used twice in the *Odyssey*, and also once in the *Homeric Hymn to Apollo*.¹² The first time the greeting is encountered is at Pylos, the second in the cave of the Cyclops: 'O strangers, who are you? From where have you come along the sea lanes? Are you travelling for trade,¹³ or are you just roaming about like pirates,¹⁴ who risk body and soul, bringing harm to other people?' (*Od.* 3.71–4; 9.252–5). The first time the greeting is employed, after Nestor has welcomed Odysseus' young son Telemachos and his companions to a feast, dispels any sense of realism in its use. If they were pirates the king and his followers would all know the answer by now, and would probably have died as a result. The second instance, when the Cyclops discovers Odysseus and his companions hiding in his cave, confirms this conclusion. The essence of the question seems to be something between, 'Are you friend or foe?' and, 'Are you good or bad?' There can be no doubt that this elaborate formula implies some disapproval for the activities of pirates. They are 'bringers of harm' whose presence may be less beneficial than that of traders, but there is also a suggestion that pirates are more 'glamorous', since they risk so much in their pursuit of gain. It is important to note that in neither case does the party questioned answer affirmatively, either by claiming to be traders or more like pirates. The audience, of course, knows in each case that they belong to the group called *basilees*, or aristocrats, as all Homeric heroes do.¹⁵ Some specific persons are called pirates in the *Odyssey*. Odysseus himself, when he is pretending to be the son of the Cretan Kastor, describes his companions on plundering raids as pirates (*Od.* 17.425). The swineherd Eumaios says that his nurse was captured in Phoenicia by 'Taphian pirates' (*Od.* 15.427). It is significant, however, that no individual Achaian hero is directly called a pirate, and especially not Odysseus. There seems to be a definite separation between heroes and

¹¹ The arguments put forward here differ somewhat from those advanced in de Souza (1995a). I have benefited enormously from discussions of Homeric society with Hans van Wees.

¹² *Hom. Hymn Apoll.* 452–55. These hymns were composed at intervals after the two main epics.

¹³ κατὰ πρῆξιν.

¹⁴ οἷά τε ληϊστῆρες ὕπτερι ἄλλα.

¹⁵ On the nature of the Homeric *basilees* see van Wees (1992): 31–6 and 78–83.

pirates in the poet's mind, although there is very little difference between them in terms of their actions in the poems.

What do heroes and pirates regularly do in the Homeric poems? The best illustration of this is provided by Odysseus' Cretan guise:

Farming I never cared for, nor life at home, nor fathering fair children. I revelled in long ships with oars; I loved polished lances, arrows in the skirmish, the shapes of doom that others shake to see. Carnage suited me; heaven put those things in me somehow. Each to his own pleasure! Before we young Achaians shipped for Troy I led men on nine cruises in ships to raid strange coasts, and had great luck, taking rich spoils on the spot, and even more in the division. So my house grew prosperous, my standing therefore high among the Cretans. (*Od.* 14.222–34)

But Zeus the son of Kronos brought me down. No telling why he would have it, but he made me go to Egypt with a company of pirates – a long sail to the South – for my undoing. Up the broad Nile and in to the river bank I brought my dipping squadron. There, indeed, I told the men to stand guard at the ships; I sent patrols out – out to rising ground; but reckless greed carried my crews away to plunder the Egyptian farms; they bore off wives and children, killed what men they found.¹⁶ (*Od.* 17.424–33)

In short, both pirates and heroes set off in their long ships to distant shores to plunder and kill. The difference between those who are heroes and those who are pirates seems only to be their god-given fate. It cannot be coincidental that the luck of the son of Kastor changes when he joins a group identified as pirates. Their greed and lack of discipline cause them to be slaughtered and their new recruit to be sold as a slave. Yet the raids which they undertake are indistinguishable. The Homeric poems, especially the *Odyssey*, contain a large amount of this kind of robbery with violence, often, but not always, in the context of a larger-scale conflict which merits the description of warfare. It is significant that Odysseus makes his Cretan claim that he earned high status among his countrymen because of the booty he obtained from his raids. This same idea can be seen in the way that Zeus ensures Odysseus himself will have a suitable amount of 'booty' with him when he finally returns to Ithaca, twenty years after setting off for the Trojan War, although in this case it is not the result of warfare, but of the generosity of the Phaiakians: 'They will send him in a ship back to his own country with gifts of bronze, gold and many garments, even more than he would bear if he had returned unharmed from Troy, laden with his share of the booty' (*Od.* 5.37–40).

The hero's booty can consist of metals and objects of value, as in the last quotation, but it can also consist of cattle or slaves.¹⁷ It is an essential

¹⁶ Both passages are quoted from the translation of Fitzgerald (1961), with minor alterations.

¹⁷ See *Il.* 18.28; *Od.* 1.397–8 for slaves; *Od.* 23.356–8 for cattle.

aspect of Homeric warfare that the heroes should amass plenty of booty. As well as the wealth which this brings, there is also a direct equation of booty with status, hence the deeply damaging quarrel between Achilles and Agamemnon is over a woman who is part of the spoil. Without his booty an Homeric hero is incomplete. Homer does not, however, neglect the other side of the story, the victims of plundering are taken notice of by the poet as well. It should not be overlooked that Odysseus, in his attack on the Kikones (*Od.* 9.39–52), or the raids of his fictional Cretan, brings misery to the victims. It is noticeable that most of these raids seem to go wrong because of the greed of the perpetrators, which gets them into trouble with their victims' neighbours. It seems to me that this represents a feeling of moral indignation and disapproval for such actions. The poet is indicating that they deserve to suffer for what they have done.

Nevertheless, it cannot be denied that the acquisition of booty through violence brings prestige and status to most of those who engage in it. It is contrasted implicitly with trading, an activity which also involves the accumulation of wealth through maritime expeditions, but which is unsuitable as an occupation for a hero.¹⁸ The story of the kidnapping of Eumaios, who became Odysseus' swineherd after he was taken from the island of Syrie (*Od.* 15.403–84), shows the Phoenician traders who abducted him in the worst possible light, as liars and cheats, rather than warriors. That which is honourable and will confer prestige and status in Homer can be defined as that which is done by the heroes. If it comes to a choice between trader or pirate, as in the greeting quoted above, the more honourable and prestigious title is the latter. But the ambiguous and potentially disapproving label pirate is never applied to Odysseus. Ideally a hero like Odysseus will engage in warfare, which is essentially a communal or public activity, but he will be competing with his peers for individual honour, prestige and status. The Trojan War itself represents the highest level to which this violent competition can rise, but the piratical raids of Odysseus and others carried out in reprisal for previous attacks, for example Nestor's youthful exploits, as described to Patroklos (*Il.* 11.685–762), reveal a wide range of activities which might be described as warfare, raiding or piracy. A private raid, whether it is carried out in reprisal for previous injuries or simply to obtain booty, may escalate into a public confrontation involving whole communities.

It would seem, therefore, to be very difficult for the modern student of Homeric society to determine exactly, or even approximately, where any boundaries between warfare and piracy might be drawn, although it has

¹⁸ See *Od.* 8.159–64 for Odysseus being insulted with the label 'trader'; *Od.* 14 and 15 for the low status of Phoenician traders.

been argued by some scholars that there is a clear distinction between war and piracy in the Homeric poems.¹⁹ Piracy or raiding for plunder is considered by Nowag to be less important than warfare, which conveys a higher status on the (successful) combatants. He contrasts small raids with the sacking of major cities, such as Troy. But the *Iliad*, because it focuses on the siege of Troy in such a spectacular fashion, is bound to make all other raids appear petty in comparison, although, as Nowag acknowledges, they are conducted in a very similar fashion. Most of the warfare in the *Odyssey* is on a smaller scale, and it is this poem which seems to me to present a wider and more comprehensive picture of Homeric values. In his important study of Homeric warfare and society van Wees has argued that there is an important distinction between what he calls predatory warfare (carried out by 'freebooters') and status warfare (carried out by heroes). I do not think that this distinction is easily maintained either. A significant case for the demonstration of van Wees' argument is the Cretan guise of Odysseus, the son of Kastor. Van Wees argues that the reluctance of this Cretan to participate in the Trojan War (*Od.* 14.235–9) is due to his preference for predatory rather than status warfare. Yet the passage quoted above shows that his plundering raids, which in van Wees' scheme must be predatory warfare, have nevertheless earned him high status. He goes to Troy because, if he does not, he will lose that status, which also seems to indicate that he is just as involved in status warfare as he is predatory warfare; the two cannot be easily separated.²⁰

It may have been Helen's face that launched a thousand ships, but it was Homer's poems that provoked a thousand academic debates. Alternative interpretations of piracy and warfare in Homer can be argued just as persuasively as my own. I am confident, however, that the main points are valid. Pirates and their activities can be, and are, looked upon with disapproval in the Homeric poems. Piracy is an evil business from the victims' point of view, yet for the heroic practitioner it brings high status and prestige, largely because of the fighting involved and the booty that is obtained. Warfare and piracy are virtually indistinguishable in Homer. The ingredients of violence and booty are equally important in both, and the methods of war and piracy are essentially the same.²¹ Warfare can also be motivated by other factors, such as honour, vengeance and pride, all of which are to be found in the poems. In the historical world of the early Archaic Greeks the difference between the two was probably a

¹⁹ E.g. Bravo (1980): 975–7; Nowag (1983): chs. 2 and 3, especially 94–106; Jackson (1985) and (1993).

²⁰ See van Wees (1992): ch. 4, especially 207–17.

²¹ Note that no Homeric pirate (or hero) attacks ships at sea. See below pp. 22–36 on the development of trade and the threat of piracy to it in the Archaic and Classical periods.

matter of perceptions and labels. Many of the activities which a status-conscious aristocrat would have felt made him worthy of the title *basileus* would seem to his victims to have justified their labelling him a pirate.

References in later literary sources to the activities of the Archaic Greeks in both the Eastern and the Western Mediterranean do lend some support to the view that the image of war and piracy in the Homeric poems reflects a contemporary reality quite closely. According to a brief remark in Thucydides' Sicilian *Archaeologia*, the city of Zankle (later called Messina), the establishment of which can be dated to about 730–720 BC on archaeological grounds,²² was founded by pirates from the existing settlement of Kyme (Thuc. 6.4.5). They were later joined by people from Chalkis and other parts of Euboea. What can a reference like this mean? Were the founders of Zankle looking for a base from which to practise piracy, and chose this one because it was situated on the straits between Italy and Sicily? Or did they found a city first, and then carry out raids which their victims labelled piracy? Such references, fascinating though they are, cannot easily be interpreted. Thucydides seems to imply that piracy was common among the colonising Greeks of the eighth century, as does Strabo when he reports the claim of Eratosthenes that the Early Greeks sailed abroad for both trade and piracy (Str. 1.3.2). Herodotus also mentions Greeks from Ionia voyaging to Egypt for plunder in the time of the first Saite pharaoh, Psammetichos (664–610 BC). These particular men, equipped with bronze armour, stayed and were recruited as mercenaries (Hdt. 2.152).²³ In slightly different circumstances, the Phokaiaians who settled in Corsica in the mid sixth century BC began to plunder their neighbours, until they provoked war as a reaction from the Carthaginians and Etruscans which culminated in an inconclusive battle at sea (Hdt. 1.166). There is abundant archaeological evidence for Greek trade and settlement across the Mediterranean in the Archaic period,²⁴ but the lack of reliable and clear literary evidence makes it very difficult to assess to what extent piracy was also practised by the people who were involved in this trade. Nevertheless it seems clear, on the basis of the Homeric poems and the later literary references, that not all interaction between those who roamed the Mediterranean in the Archaic period was of a peaceful or 'commercial' nature.

Trade and piracy are both forms of economic activity. They can have a similar motive (the accumulation of wealth) and achieve similar results (the movement of goods and/or persons across long distances). The dif-

²² See CAH III.3.162.

²³ See Lloyd (1975–88): ad. loc.

²⁴ See CAH III.3; Boardman (1980); Wells (1980).

ference between them is that piracy involves violence and the forceful obtaining or transfer of property. Maritime trade has a longer history than piracy. The oldest known shipwrecks in the Mediterranean, found off the coast of Turkey at Ulu Burun and Cape Gelidonya, were almost certainly trading vessels, operating between the coasts and islands of the Eastern Mediterranean in the fourteenth and thirteenth centuries BC.²⁵ They carried mixed cargoes of basic necessities and luxuries, as well as all the paraphernalia required to trade in several different lands and with several different peoples. There is, however, little that can be said about the relationship between trade and piracy until the end of the Archaic period. By the sixth century BC it seems that there was a clear distinction in the Mediterranean between cargo ships, short and rounded in most cases, powered only by sails, and warships, longer and slimmer, powered by oars and sails and with a ram on the prow.²⁶ The Greeks began to use specific words for merchants, and to create institutions for the facilitation and practice of trade.²⁷ An Athenian law attributed to the time of Solon (c. 594 BC) and preserved through a quotation in the *Digest of Roman Law* (Dig. 47.22.4), recognizes the swearing of oaths for associations of citizens for the conduct of religious rites, burials, revelling, trade and plundering. Jackson has suggested that a fragmentary sixth-century inscription from the oracle of Apollo at Didyma relates to raiders wanting to establish the 'legitimacy' of their proposed targets.²⁸

Thucydides says that the Corinthians were among the first to put down piracy in order to help traders (Thuc. 1.13), but there is no secure date for this remark, which may be an invention on the basis of contemporary attitudes to piracy and trade.²⁹ Mention has already been made of the distinction between pirates and traders in Homer, the latter apparently not receiving the same high status as the former, although this may not reflect the prevalent attitude among the poet's contemporaries and his upper-class audience. It would seem reasonable to suppose that as trade became more significant for the élite in Greek society their attitude to indiscriminate piracy would have started to change. As the Greeks expanded their trading connections and colonized many places in the Mediterranean, it is likely that the status of traders could have become higher and relatively better in moral terms than that of pirates, although this would have been a very gradual process. There is plenty of evidence from

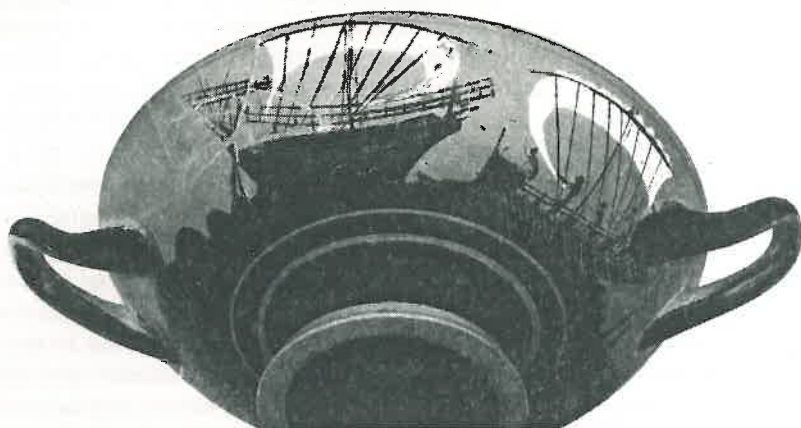
²⁵ See Bass (1967) and (1987); Parker (1992). The cargoes included pottery, semi-precious stones, metal ingots and some foodstuffs.

²⁶ See, for example, Pls. 1 and 2.

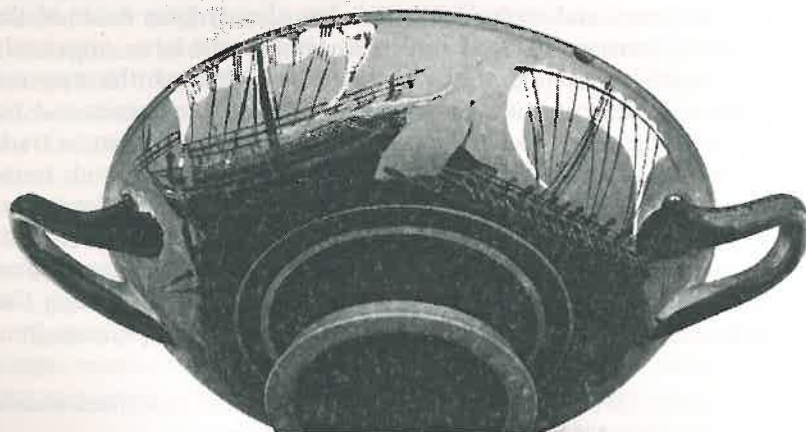
²⁷ Reed (1984).

²⁸ Jackson (1995).

²⁹ See below pp. 26–9 on this and other passages from Thucydides' *Archaeologia*.



Pl. 1. Athenian Black Figure drinking cup of the mid sixth century BC, showing a merchant ship, propelled by sail, and a warship, propelled by sail and by oars rowed at two levels. A smaller ship is being towed behind the warship. The merchant ship is broad-beamed and has a deep draught, while the warship is long and narrow, with a ram on its prow.



Pl. 2. Opposite side of the cup in Pl. 1. The crew of the warship appear to be furling the sail. This scene may be an attempt to depict pirates preparing to attack the merchant ship.

the Classical and Hellenistic periods that piracy could be perceived as a considerable threat to merchants and long-distance trade.³⁰ The origins of this view may lie in the Archaic period.

It begins to be possible to differentiate between warfare and piracy in the Greek world towards the end of the Archaic period. The general trend from the Archaic into the Classical period (c. 500–330 BC) is towards the development of organized states with citizen and/or mercenary armies which engage in more sophisticated and large-scale forms of warfare.³¹ The activities of Polykrates, tyrant of Samos (c. 546–522 BC), characterized in Herodotus as plundering, seem to amount to a kind of early imperialism.³²

All his campaigns were victorious, his every venture a success. He had a fleet of a hundred fifty-oared galleys and a force of a thousand bowmen. His plundering raids were widespread and indiscriminate – he used to say that a friend would be more grateful if he gave him back what he had taken than if he had never taken it. He captured many of the islands and a number of towns on the mainland as well. Amongst other successes, he defeated at sea the Lesbians, who had sent their whole fleet to the help of Miletos; the prisoners he took were forced to dig, in chains, the whole moat which surrounds the walls of Samos.³³ (Hdt. 3.39)

Polykrates' capture of many cities and his large fleet and army seem to be characteristic of warfare, a public activity involving a political entity – the *polis* of Samos – rather than piracy. It is also around this time that naval warfare begins to be reported in the sources, here among Greek states, and earlier in Herodotus' reference to the adventures of the Phokaians among Greeks and non-Greeks (Hdt. 1.166).

The limitations of piracy as a method of waging warfare are illustrated by the Ionian revolt (499–494 BC). A plundering raid against Sardis in 498 BC, conducted by an allied force of Ionians, Eretrians and Athenians, served only to aggravate relations with the Persian king (Hdt. 5.97–101), and the various piratical enterprises of Histiaios of Miletos achieved nothing of value either (Hdt. 6.5 and 26–30). It seems to me that a greater variation in Greek warfare develops clearly in the fifth century BC. Some campaigns and expeditions are more politically motivated than others. Clashes of city-states with each other, and with the Persians, produce organized violence on a very large scale. Plunder can still be an important motivation, however, and there is still a close correspondence between

³⁰ See below Chs. 3 and 4.

³¹ Garland (1972): ch. 1A distinguishes a political form of warfare from 'la forme "sauvage"'. This is probably too crude a characterization, but the aims and intensity of Greek warfare do seem to change with the rise of the *polis*; see also de Souza (1998b).

³² On the nature of the Polykratean regime see Shipley (1987): chs. 4 and 5.

³³ Translation by de Sélincourt (1972).

piracy and some types of warfare. In 490 BC the unsuccessful expedition of Miltiades of Athens to Paros seems to have combined a political motive (or excuse), to punish the Parians for their alleged medizing, with a less noble motive, namely to obtain money for the Athenians (Hdt. 6.132–5). The point at which the distinction between warfare and piracy can be most clearly marked is, perhaps, the creation of the Delian League in 478 BC. Some scholars have tried to characterize this as just an association of Greek states to practise piracy against the Persian Empire by plundering the king's lands.³⁴ The early campaigns of the League produced far more than mere plunder, however, as they involved conquest of territory. The members of the League soon become involved in inter-state warfare, and the imperialist ambitions of the Athenians took precedence over the idea of exacting reparations from the Persians. Warfare and piracy are no longer the same thing in the fifth century BC, although, as will be seen, there is still a certain amount of overlap between the two.

Athens and piracy

It has often been suggested that the Athenian maritime empire of the fifth century BC took an active role in controlling piracy, and that the suppression of piracy was an important, if undeclared, justification for the establishment of its precursor, the Delian League, in 478 BC.³⁵ There is evidence that the idea of suppressing piracy was current in Athens in this period, principally in the history of the Peloponnesian War by the Athenian Thucydides. He suggests that the legendary king Minos, who he claims was the first Greek ruler to establish a navy, would probably have put down piracy in the Aegean in order to increase his revenues, and he later attributes a similar policy to the Corinthians (Thuc. 1.4; 1.13). It is obvious that Thucydides is here making a connection between the exploits of Minos and the Corinthians in the earlier history of the Greeks and the recent achievements of the Athenians. The extent of that connection is a matter for careful interpretation, however, since nowhere in his work does Thucydides *explicitly* credit the Athenians with any action to suppress piracy outside the operations of the Peloponnesian War.³⁶ What Thucydides seems to be doing in his introductory section is emphasizing the importance of sea power in the turbulent history of the Greeks, and the

³⁴ E.g. Sealey (1966), who argues that the original purpose of the League was piratical. See the convincing response of Jackson (1969) on the language used in Thuc. 1.96.

³⁵ E.g. Hornblower (1983): 30–1; Hornblower (1991): 21–2 and 150; Ormerod (1924): 110. Ormerod notes, however, that '...this very real benefit is passed over almost in silence by our authorities'.

³⁶ See below pp. 31–2 for action taken against pirates during the Peloponnesian War.

way that sea power could only be exercised by states which had substantial revenues at their disposal. By giving a brief account of the powerful states and rulers of earlier Greek history, stressing the themes of revenues and sea power, he encourages his readers to see the maritime empire created by the Athenians in the period leading up to the start of the Peloponnesian War as the greatest manifestation of military power the Greek world had ever seen. This in turn serves to substantiate his claim that the Peloponnesian War, which resulted in the downfall of that empire, was the greatest conflict in the history of the Greeks, surpassing the Trojan War and even the Persian Wars (Thuc. 1.1–19).³⁷

It is clear that Thucydides perceived a marked difference between the nature of warfare in his own time and in the Heroic era of Minos and the Homeric epics. He seems to envisage the heroes as pirate leaders, and he links the growth of seaborne trade and the appearance of walled coastal cities to a reduction in the prevalence of piracy (Thuc. 1.5–8).³⁸ He is dismissive of the length and scale of the Trojan War, saying that it lasted so long because the forces involved were relatively small and the Greeks spent much of their time cultivating the land in the Chersonese and carrying out plundering raids (Thuc. 1.10–11). The main 'evidence' for these conjectures must have been the *Odyssey* and the *Iliad*, in which there is a heavy emphasis on the predatory nature of warfare and the individualistic values of the heroes.³⁹ Thucydides must have been struck by the 'progress' in military organization and political aims which the hoplite and trireme warfare of his own day represented in comparison with the crude, predatory style of the warfare in the Homeric epics.

It is, however, often overlooked that Thucydides implies at several points in his *Archaeologia* that such piracy is no longer as widespread a phenomenon among the Greeks as it was in earlier times. He presents the archaic world of the Homeric heroes as one in which, among other things, piracy was so common that a formal greeting to a stranger would include the question, 'Are you pirates?' Furthermore, he connects Corinthian prosperity with the suppression of piracy, in both cases implying that conditions are very different in his own time (Thuc. 1.5; 1.13).

For Thucydides, then, the suppression of piracy played a very important role in the establishment of earlier sea powers, like Minos and the Corinthians, but in the recent rise of the Athenian Empire it was not an essential matter and therefore he does not mention it in his summary ac-

³⁷ See especially 1.1, 1.10 and 1.18–19. On the structure and themes of the *Archaeologia* see Hornblower (1991): 3–56.

³⁸ His argument is essentially that trade generates revenue which provides the resources to build the walled cities.

³⁹ See above pp. 17–22 on Homeric piracy and plundering.

count of the development of this empire, usually called the *Pentecontaetia* (Thuc. 1.89–118). How did he reach these conclusions? One explanation could be that Thucydides believed that there was much less piracy around in the Greek world to threaten the revenues and security of the Athenian Empire. Whereas the earlier Greeks had frequently made piratical attacks on each other and on the barbarians, necessitating the carrying of arms at all times and the building of cities away from the coast, in his own time it was only the rather backward regions of Greece north of the Gulf of Corinth where such behaviour was still the norm (Thuc. 1.5–6). That is not to say that piracy was completely eradicated, but it had been reduced to a level which presented far less of a threat, partly as a result of the actions of Minos and the Corinthians, and also partly as a consequence of the development of that great social and political phenomenon, the Greek city-state – the *polis*. A further explanation could be that the Athenians, in spite of their thriving overseas trade, did not depend upon maritime commerce for their revenues in the same way that the Corinthians did. Their principal sources of income were the tribute of their allies and the products of their own land. They could be vulnerable to pirates, as the occasional mentions of piracy in the course of the Peloponnesian War indicate, but they were not, in Thucydides' view, dependent upon the suppression of piracy to maintain their revenues and their power in the period 478–431 BC.

Given that Thucydides is explicit in his description of the ways in which the Athenians, like Minos and the Corinthians, and others whom he mentions in the *Archaeologia*, increased their revenues and established their rule over other Greeks, if he took the view that suppression of piracy was in any sense a significant feature of their rise to power, then he would surely have mentioned it at some point in his work, most logically in Book 1. Since he does not do so, it is a reasonable conclusion that, in Thucydides' eyes, controlling piracy was not a function of either the Athenian Empire or the Delian League out of which it developed.

A possible objection to this analysis is the argument that the model for the relationship between increasing revenues and suppressing piracy on the part of Minos and the Corinthians was furnished for Thucydides by the Delian League and the Athenian Empire. Since, by his own admission, Thucydides was basing his account of the early history of the Greeks on probable deductions from uncertain sources (Thuc. 1.20–1), then he would have taken the fifth-century Athenians as an analogy for the behaviour of earlier sea powers, and his emphasis on controlling piracy could, therefore, reflect contemporary Athenian practice.⁴⁰ The answer

⁴⁰ This interpretation goes back at least as far as Grote (1888): 220–1. See above pp. 15–16.

to this objection is that, as has already been noted, Thucydides saw *leisteia* (encompassing both piracy and banditry, but particularly the former) as a major feature of the early Greek world, preventing safe communications and so hampering the growth of long-distance trade. This view was based largely on his reading of the Homeric poems, in which predatory warfare and piracy are very prominent. His conclusion that the suppression of piracy must have been necessary in order to permit commercial development was a logical one which did not require a fifth-century model.

Evidence that piracy was still a common problem for the Greek *poleis* in the mid fifth century BC comes from epigraphic sources. An inscription from Teos on the western coastline of Asia Minor, dated to c. 470 BC, details curses to be pronounced against the betrayal of the community by the *aisymnetes*, an important local magistrate. The death penalty (for families as well as magistrates) is prescribed for several offences including committing banditry or piracy, and sheltering men known to be bandits or pirates who have plundered the territory of Teos or have committed piracy out at sea.⁴¹ From this text it would appear that the Teians were likely to be troubled quite often by pirates raiding their territory. Another, slightly different practice, the taking of plunder by way of reprisals, is mentioned in an inscription of c. 450 BC, recording an agreement between Oiantheia and Chaleion, which restricts the custom to the seas outside the harbours of the two cities, where seizures are deemed to be lawful.⁴² This form of piracy was apparently very common in the fifth century BC, as the instances from the Peloponnesian War discussed below indicate. It is also noteworthy that these two *poleis* are located in the region of central Greece where Thucydides claims that 'old-fashioned' attitudes to warfare and piracy persist (Thuc. 1.5–6).

The only evidence for the Athenians and their allies taking direct action against pirates before the Peloponnesian War occurs in literary sources which are much later than the fifth century and cannot be given as much weight as Thucydides. One instance is Plutarch's account of the Delian League expedition to the island of Skyros which occurred in 476 BC, led by the Athenian general Kimon. The conquest of the island is mentioned by Thucydides, but Plutarch's version in his *Life of Kimon* is much more detailed (Thuc. 1.98; Plut. *Kim.* 8). According to Plutarch the island was inhabited by Dolopians whose constant plundering of ships, including those which were trading with them, eventually resulted in a request for Athenian intervention, addressed directly to Kimon, whose expedition

⁴¹ *SIG* 37, 38 = Fornara (1983): no. 63. This text is very specific about the distinction between piracy and banditry, using the rare word *κιζάλλης* for 'bandit'.

⁴² Tod (1946): no. 34.

'cleared the sea of pirates'. Plutarch says that it was the Dolopian pirates themselves who invited Kimon to invade and seize control, because they were anxious to avoid paying compensation to some Thessalian merchants who had complained to the Delphic Amphictyony. Kimon also 'discovered' the bones of the Athenian hero Theseus on the island and returned them to Athens. Thucydides' version is much less elaborate than Plutarch's. He simply says that the Athenians enslaved the local population and established a colony of Athenian citizens there. The description of Dolopian piracy in Plutarch is not very credible, and the whole account has many features which look like attempts to justify Athenian 'imperialism'. It would seem that the capture of Skyros was intended to benefit the Athenians collectively, by providing them with an island to colonize, and Kimon in particular through the prestige of the conquest and the return of Theseus' bones to Athens. The suppression of piracy would appear to be a later addition to the story, included by Plutarch because it places Kimon in a better light as a benefactor of the Greeks in general.⁴³

In his *Life of Perikles* Plutarch gives an account of what is known as the 'Congress Decree' (Plut. *Per.* 17). This was a proposal apparently put to the Athenian assembly by Perikles for a congress of Greek states to be held at Athens. Plutarch does not clearly date this measure, but modern scholars have assigned it to 448/7 BC, after the 'Peace of Kallias'. Among the items on the agenda for this congress was ensuring the safety of the seas, which has led some scholars to conclude that Perikles was looking to obtain general Hellenic approval for existing or proposed Athenian naval operations against pirates, although there is no other evidence for Athenian naval actions against pirates around this time.⁴⁴ Many scholars believe, however, that this decree was a forgery, composed in the fourth century BC, and that no such congress was ever proposed.⁴⁵ The fifth-century Athenians had no policy of suppressing piracy in general, nor do their imperial activities and alliances seem to have had much indirect effect on the prevalence of piracy, at least as far as the Teian inscription indicates. Indeed, as the power of the Athenians caused alarm among the Peloponnesians, the incidence of piracy in the Aegean sharply increased.

⁴³ See Podlecki (1971) on the significance of Theseus' bones. A similarly untrustworthy claim that an Athenian leader of the period suppressed piracy occurs in Nepos' short life of Themistokles: Nepos, *Them.* 2.3.

⁴⁴ E.g. Ormerod (1924): 108–9. Plutarch, *Per.* 11 refers to regular expeditions of Athenian triremes, but does not indicate that these had anything to do with piracy. At *Per.* 19 he mentions an expedition to the Thracian Chersonese c. 447 BC which dealt with 'groups of bandits' (*leisterion*), but there is no suggestion that piracy was a particular problem in this region.

⁴⁵ E.g. Seager (1969) and Macdonald (1982).

War and piracy

The Peloponnesian War (431–404 BC) was, according to its historian Thucydides, greater than any previous conflict in Greek history, involving thousands of soldiers and sailors, and hundreds of ships. Thucydides also notes the diverse forms which the war took in its many theatres of conflict, ranging from full-scale hoplite and trireme battles of the traditional kind, to 'guerrilla' actions and plundering raids by forces which Thucydides often describes as pirates.⁴⁶ He makes a distinction between formal warfare and what he calls *leisteia* (plundering), a form of warfare which the Spartans in particular were unused to before this time (Thuc. 4.41). It seems that the Peloponnesian War also saw widespread use of the principle of taking reprisals against an enemy for injuries perceived to have been done, by carrying out (or promoting) plundering raids on their territory and their shipping, or that of their allies. Thus, in 416 BC, in response to the provocation of Athens' subjugation of Melos and the Argive invasion of Phliasia, the Spartans announced their support for plundering against the Athenians, their intention being to encourage their citizens and their allies to raid Attica without actually abandoning the treaty concluded in 421 BC (Thuc. 5.115).

The nature of the raids clearly varied according to circumstances. In such cases as the Corcyran oligarchs who raided their former homeland from bases on the mainland in 427 BC, the main intention was to harass the inhabitants and undermine the authority of their political opponents (Thuc. 3.85). A similar aim lay behind the attacks carried out by the raiders who were established by the Athenians on Lakonian territory, or the Peloponnesian flotilla which attacked merchant shipping from its base at Knidos in 411 BC (Thuc. 4.41; 7.26; 8.34). Whether these raiders used ships, or only operated on land like bandits, their objectives were essentially political ones, although their methods, in the eyes of Thucydides at least, lay beyond the bounds of formal warfare. Wherever raiding was carried out those who claimed to be the legitimate political leaders would naturally be expected to justify their authority by protecting the local population from the attackers. Failure to do so could result in their downfall. In a like manner any occupying force or garrison which could not deal with plundering raids would be shown to be weaker than its opponents and, therefore, find it harder to control the subject population. As a result various measures were undertaken to control or prevent such raids, such as the fortification of Atalante to guard Euboia and the dispatch of a small Athenian flotilla in the region of Karia and Lycia to

⁴⁶ E.g. 2.32; 2.69; 3.51; 3.85; 7.26; 8.35.

prevent 'Peloponnesian' pirates from attacking the merchant shipping coming from Phaselis and Phoinike into the Aegean (Thuc. 2.32 and 69).⁴⁷ Another method which the Athenians seem to have adopted during the War was to demand that their allies should not to allow pirates to use their harbours as bases. A clause specifying this is found in two treaties of c. 427–424 BC, between Athens and Mytilene, on the island of Lesbos, and between Athens and Halieis in the eastern Peloponnese.⁴⁸ The latter treaty states: 'The people of Halieis are to make available to the Athenians their harbour and to help them readily. They are not to admit pirates, nor to practise piracy, nor are they to join in a campaign against the Athenians. . .'⁴⁹ The requirement to make the harbour available to the Athenians would seem to allow the possibility of its use as a base for Athenian vessels to plunder the Peloponnesian coastline. The distinction between enemies and pirates does not mean that enemies might not set sail in search of plunder, but allows some differentiation between the Spartans and their allies, who are the Athenians' enemies in the current war, and anyone else, including the people of Halieis, who might seek to raid Attica from a base at Halieis.

The identity of the pirates involved in episodes related by Thucydides is often difficult to establish. Sometimes he is specific about the origin of ships and/or their crews,⁵⁰ but often he gives no indication or only a vague generalization. Those whom the Athenians were trying to prevent establishing themselves in Karia and Lycia in 430/29 BC are described by Thucydides as 'Peloponnesian', but this term is not specific enough to be of much help. They might have come from anywhere in the Peloponnese, or indeed from areas closer to hand. All that can be deduced from the label is that they were operating on behalf of the Spartans and their allies against the interests of the Athenians and their allies (Thuc. 2.69).⁵¹ When the Spartans proclaimed reprisals against Athens in 416 BC they invited 'anyone of their own people' to raid the Athenians, but this would not have been intended to include only Spartans, especially as it was their allies and friends who were most likely to have the ships to carry out seaborne raids (Thuc. 5.115). By the end of the war the Peloponnesian fleet seems to have attracted some 'hangers-on' who were looking for

⁴⁷ The Karian/Lycian expedition was not very successful. Its commander Melesandros marched inland (presumably to collect tribute) and was defeated by Lycian forces. On the nature of his operations see Hornblower (1991): 354–5.

⁴⁸ *IG I³* nos. 67 and 75.

⁴⁹ *IG I³* no. 75, lines 6–10 (424/3 BC).

⁵⁰ E.g. Thuc. 3.85; 4.41; 8.35.

⁵¹ Similarly in 3.51 Thucydides refers to pirates 'sent out' by the Peloponnesians, but their identity is unclear.

opportunities to carry out piratical raids against their opponents. When Lysandros wanted to send news of the Spartan victory at Aigospotamoi in 405 BC back to Sparta he chose a Milesian pirate called Theopompos as his messenger (Xen. *Hell.* 2.1.30).

In the latter stages of the Peloponnesian War another objective seems to become prominent – obtaining funds and/or supplies to prosecute the war. The Athenians, as they became more and more desperate for funds, resorted to the methods of piracy in order to obtain them. Their unfortunate victims tended to be the Greeks of Asia and the Hellespontine cities. The renowned politician Alkibiades is a prime example of the general turned plunderer. In 410/9 BC he plundered the territory of the Persian satrap Pharnabazos. Plutarch says that he generously allowed priests and priestesses to go free without demanding a ransom, but he attacked the city of Chalkedon with the intention of obtaining as much money as he could. Unfortunately he found that the wealth of the city had been sent to Bithynia for safekeeping, presumably because the Chalkedonians had anticipated his actions. Alkibiades then approached the borders of Bithynia with his army and forced its people to hand over the booty to him and conclude a treaty of friendship (Plut. *Alc.* 29.3). After defeating both Pharnabazos and the Spartans outside Chalkedon he sailed to the Hellespont and then into the Aegean to collect money, his purpose being to impress upon the allies of Athens the importance of staying loyal to her, and to obtain from them the funds he needed to pay and provision his forces. Diodorus describes the process even more bluntly than Plutarch, recounting Alkibiades' actions in 408 BC, after the capture of a stronghold on Andros: 'He then sailed off with his forces to ravage Kos and Rhodes, and he also collected huge amounts of booty for the maintenance of his soldiers' (Diod. 13.69.5). Another raid on the city of Kyme in 407 BC yielded much booty and many captives, and caused the Kymeans to protest strongly to the Athenian assembly (Diod. 13.73). It is clear that Alkibiades exploited the mobility his ships enabled and the capacity for intimidation which his army provided. He cannot be called a pirate, but his methods could easily be termed piratical.

Such methods continued to be used by the armies and fleets of the Greek city-states in the fourth century BC. The famous Athenian general Iphikrates, for example, used *leistai* in the Hellespontine region during the Corinthian War (395–387 BC), as did his opponents, and there were several other generals who were accused of operating like pirates in the fourth century (Xen. *Hell.* 4.8.35).⁵² The Thessalian tyrant Alexander of Pherai, one of the leaders prominent in the power politics of the mid

⁵² See the evidence collected in Pritchett (1974): 82–5 on Chares and 85–9 on Charidemos.

fourth century, is called a pirate in the main historical accounts. He seems to have earned this label more as a result of his attacks on the Cycladic islands than for his operations on the Greek mainland, but his methods were no different from those of his contemporaries (Diod. 15.95.1; Xen. *Hell.* 6.4.35).⁵³

The practice of raiding in reprisal became a considerable problem for the Athenians (and others) in the first half of the fourth century BC. A lawcourt speech of 399 by Lysias notes that the Athenian *polis* is desperately short of money and that while the Spartans are making threats because of the non-payment of the amount owing to them, the Boiotians (whose territory borders Attica) are already taking reprisals for unpaid debts (Lys. 30.22). In 389 BC, during the Corinthian War, the Spartan *harmost* Eteonikos, who was based on Aigina, with the full backing of the Spartan *ephors*, invited volunteers from among the island's inhabitants to plunder Attica. In response the Athenians sent a force of hoplites under the general Pamphilos to Aigina. They built siege walls to blockade the main city by land and sent ten triremes to cut it off by sea. A Spartan admiral, Teleutias, was able to drive off the Athenian ships, but the fortifications were held for several months, until another Athenian squadron removed the occupying force (Xen. *Hell.* 5.1.1–5).⁵⁴ After a subsequent Athenian attack on Aigina had inflicted a defeat on the Spartan forces and embarrassed Eteonikos they refused to sail out again because they had not been paid. Teleutias, returning to take command of them, resorted to attacking the merchant ships in the harbour at Piraeus and seizing ships and boats along the coastline of Attica. He sold his booty and captives in Aigina, where there must have been quite a market for Athenian plunder by now, and used the proceeds to pay his sailors and keep his operations going (Xen. *Hell.* 5.1.14–24).

This series of raids and counter-attacks illustrates how unclear the distinction between warfare and piracy could be in the fourth century BC. Xenophon is careful to note that the Aiginetans had been peacefully trading with the Athenians prior to Eteonikos' declaration of reprisals, so that they effectively swapped one method of obtaining profit from the Athenians (trade) for another (piracy). They presumably did not have any specific dispute with the Athenians, but were simply taking advantage of the justification offered by the Spartan declaration of reprisals, which was itself intended to increase the pressure on the Athenians' own territory and resources without any increase in the size of the Spartan forces.⁵⁵

⁵³ Compare Evagoras of Cyprus in Diodorus 15.3.

⁵⁴ Quoted in de Souza (1995a): 184.

⁵⁵ Aigina is ideally situated for attacks on Attica and its coastal shipping, and Xenophon reports the Athenians suffering from Aiginetan-based piracy again in 374 BC (Xen. *Hell.* 6.2.1).

The fact that reprisals might not even have been declared against a particular state would not necessarily prevent the seizure of property, since opportunists would strike (in the best tradition of pirates) wherever the chance arose. This would tend to make almost anyone at sea, on coastlines, or in a harbour fair game. One of the private lawcourt speeches in the Demosthenic corpus tells how, in about 369 BC, Lykon of Herakleia, having deposited some money in the bank of Pasion at Athens for payment to his partner Kephisiades, set out on a voyage to Libya: 'But misfortune befell this Lykon, so that as soon as he had set out on the voyage across the Gulf of Argos he was attacked by pirate ships, his goods were taken to Argos, and he was shot with an arrow and later died' (Demos. 52.5). The speaker says no more about the pirates, so their identity and their possible allegiance is unknown. Indeed, a record of the whole episode survives only because a court case developed out of a dispute over the money which had been deposited with Pasion. Thus, when in his *Panegyric*, written about 380 BC, Isokrates complains that 'the pirates rule the seas', he is surely referring to the activities of a whole range of evildoers who might be individual opportunists, with or without the 'legitimation' of a declaration of reprisals, or they might belong, however loosely, to one or other of the many naval detachments operating in the Aegean at this time (Isoc. 4.115).

In his speech *Against Timokrates* Demosthenes describes an incident which occurred in 355 BC and shows how the informal 'rules' concerning reprisals might be ignored or manipulated in particular circumstances. Some Athenian ambassadors, who were on their way to Mausolos of Karia in a trireme, captured a ship from Naukratis in Egypt and seized 9½ talents' worth of property. It was decided by the people that, although the Athenians and Egyptians were not at war and had no current disputes, Athens' friendly relations with the king of Persia, from whom the Egyptians were in revolt, justified the seizure of Egyptian plunder. The goods became the property of the state, since they had been taken by men on an official mission, and a tithe of the proceeds was paid to Athena. With such a large sum involved it was not difficult to find an excuse for this opportunist act (Demos. 24.11–12 and 120). The frequency with which Athenian ships and their commanders made seizures is often commented on in the speeches of the Demosthenic corpus. In his criticism of a decree proposed in 352 BC by Aristokrates in favour of Charidemos, which sought to make it a crime to harm him, Demosthenes argues that it prevents someone from resisting the Euboian mercenary turned Athenian general should he make an unjust attempt at seizure. This, says Demosthenes, is a very likely scenario, because generals are constantly taking people and property by force. Thus, someone may legitimately be resisting Charidemos and kill him, only to be arrested for contravening Aris-

tokrates' proposed decree (Demos. 23.60–1). Another speech, of c. 359 BC, delivered before the Athenian *boule*, claims that the many instances of Athenian trierarchs carrying off people and property have provoked reprisals against Athenian citizens, making it very dangerous for them to travel abroad. This problem is illustrated by the case of the Athenian Nikostratos who was pursuing some runaway slaves when he was captured by a warship and sold into slavery on Aigina. His new owner eventually ransomed him for twenty-six minai, doubtless a huge profit ([Demos.] 53.6–7; c. 366 BC).

The rise of Macedon

In the 350s BC, after more than a century of warfare among the *poleis* of central and southern Greece, often involving the Greek communities of the Aegean and western Anatolia, and sometimes drawing the Greeks of Sicily and South Italy into the fray, the political balance of the Greek world was changed by the rise of a new power – the kingdom of Macedon. In fourth-century Athens complaints about piracy seem to have been made fairly often, to judge from the works of Demosthenes and his fellow orators. Philip of Macedon and his allies were a favourite target for accusations of promoting piracy. In his speech *On the Crown*, delivered in 330 BC, Demosthenes claimed that, but for his strong policies towards Philip, the Athenians would have suffered attacks from pirates based on the island of Euboia. His rival Aischines had earlier accused Philip of being responsible for an attack by pirates on Phrynon of Rhamnous which violated the sacred truce during the period of the Olympic games, a charge which Philip appears to have accepted (Aeschin. 2.12). The Macedonian monarch is also directly accused of acting like a pirate, preying on commercial ships to provide himself with resources, a practice which led Demosthenes to call him, 'the pirate of the Greeks' (Demos. 10.34).⁵⁶

Although he frequently condemned such actions on Philip's part, Demosthenes was fully aware of the usefulness of piratical methods and even went so far as to advocate using such tactics in the war against Macedon (Demos. 4.23). The difference between legitimate warfare and piracy was often only a matter of opinion and interpretation,⁵⁷ leaving Athenian generals open to criticism over their indiscriminate plundering for the

⁵⁶ See also Demos. 4.32–4. The great orator himself is called a *leistes* by Aischines 3.253.

⁵⁷ Philip himself attempted to allay Athenian fears by releasing their citizens without demanding any ransom in 348 BC, after the fall of Olynthos (Aeschin. 2.12). He also tried to counter what he saw as biased presentation of his actions by politicians like Demosthenes by writing his side of the story in a letter to the Athenians in 342 BC (Demos. 7.33–5).

purpose of obtaining supplies. Thus, in 342 BC, Demosthenes was called upon to defend the actions of Diopieithes, an Athenian general who had been in command of some mercenaries escorting Athenian kleruchs to a settlement in Thrace. In the course of defending the Athenian settlers against the neighbouring Kardians he carried the conflict deeper into Thrace and ravaged some of Philip II's territory. Philip, who had a peace treaty with Athens at this time, wrote a letter to the Athenians complaining about Diopieithes' activities ([Demos.] 12.2–4), which added to the criticisms of other allies whose ships had been seized in the Hellespontine area and forced to make 'contributions' to the Athenian funds. In response Demosthenes argued that Diopieithes was only doing what was necessary in order to maintain an effective army. The Athenians had not granted him any resources for his pay, so he had to manage as best he could (Demos. 8.9 and 24–34).⁵⁸ Nor is he doing anything unusual, claims Demosthenes, since virtually all Athens' generals have taken money from the islanders and mainland inhabitants of the Aegean and Hellespontine area, operating a kind of 'protection racket' by promising to leave ships and harbours alone, or offering 'escorts' in return for 'gifts' which will be used to finance the Athenian navy (Demos. 8.24–5).⁵⁹

Philip II also accused the Athenians of turning a blind eye to acts of piracy carried out by others, especially in the important Hellespontine region, which the Athenians claimed as their special area of responsibility, largely because it commanded the vital trade route from the Black Sea ([Demos.] 12.2). A further case of piracy which the Macedonian king held the Athenians responsible for was the actions of Kallias of Euboia, who captured numerous cities allied to Philip, in spite of the peace treaty between them which specifically covered these cities. Nor, claims Philip in his letter to the Athenians in 340 BC, did he stop there:

He captured and sold as slaves all those sailing to Macedonia, treating them as enemies. And you decreed him a vote of thanks! So I find it hard to imagine how things could be worse, if you were actually to declare war on me. For when we clearly had our differences you also used to send out pirates and make slaves of those sailing to us, you helped my enemies and harmed my territory. ([Demos.] 12.5)

The Athenian attitude towards Kallias is similar to their tolerance of the mercenary leader Charidemus, mentioned above, who was also accused of piracy and supporting pirates. Demosthenes' description of Charidemus' career in his speech against Aristokrates shows clearly how the actions of

⁵⁸ See Pritchett (1974): 92–3 for a full set of references and discussion of this episode.

⁵⁹ Quoted in de Souza (1995a): 182.

such a man could be considered acceptable while they were in the interests of Athens, but could be condemned as wanton plundering and piracy when they were directed against those interests (Demos. 23.148–9 and 166–7).

The suppression of piracy

Given the apparent ubiquity of pirates in the Eastern Mediterranean in this period it is hardly surprising that the idea of concerted action to suppress piracy became an important political issue. Both Philip of Macedon and the Athenians claimed the right to carry out the job of locating pirates and destroying their bases in the interests of all the Greeks. Although both sides argued that they were acting out of a wish to make the seas safe for all, it is clear from the way that they practised and promoted acts which, from their victims' point of view, were indistinguishable from piracy, that they were not seriously concerned with the matter beyond their own short-term political advantage. They saw an opportunity to justify their aggressive and acquisitive military and naval policies in terms of the suppression of piracy. The political significance of the debate is brought out in the speech *On the Halonnesos*, probably written by the Athenian politician Hegesippos c. 343 BC ([Demos.] 7). The island of Halonnesos had been captured by Sostratos, who is called a pirate in the speech, but he was expelled by Philip's forces. The king offered to give the island to the Athenians, but they claimed it as their own and sent an embassy to Philip to demand, among other things, its immediate return. Early in his speech Hegesippos warns the Athenians that Philip wishes to demonstrate to all the Greeks that his superior military power has won Halonnesos, and that the Athenians can get it back only as a gift from him. Accepting this would amount to an admission that Athens is not strong enough to protect even her own possessions from pirates, let alone those of her allies ([Demos.] 7.6–8). In general Hegesippos shows more concern for the preservation of Athenian prestige than for the actual suppression of piracy:

Regarding pirates, Philip says that you and he are duty-bound to co-operate in guarding against evildoers at sea, but what he is really after is to be established at sea, by your agreeing that without Philip you do not have the strength to mount guard at sea, and, furthermore, by giving him free rein to go sailing from island to island, stopping off on the pretext of guarding against pirates, corrupting the exiled islanders and taking them away from you. ([Demos.] 7.14–15)

This speech clearly shows the level of concern which existed among many Athenian politicians that their naval standing in the Aegean, already badly compromised by the Social War (357–355 BC), was in danger of

being completely lost unless they could reassert their power in the face of the growing might of Philip of Macedon. It is in this context that an Athenian decree mentioned in another speech of the 340s BC should be considered. In the speech *Against Theokrines* the speaker refers to the decree of Moirokles which enjoined the Athenians and their allies to guard against those who injured shipowners or merchants travelling by sea. Moirokles is known to have been a contemporary of Demosthenes and Hypereides, and it appears that he also advocated anti-Macedonian policies ([Demos.] 58.53).⁶⁰ The speaker mentions a fine of ten talents to be imposed upon the Melians, in accordance with the provisions of Moirokles' decree, for harbouring pirates ([Demos.] 58.56).⁶¹ On the face of it this seems to be an example of the Athenians making a firm stand against pirates, and that is doubtless the way that their actions were meant to appear. With so many accusations of piracy being flung around it would have been very important for the Athenians, who depended heavily on seaborne commerce, to be able to reassure merchants that they could expect some protection from them against pirates. Yet fining the Melians (a relatively small and weak community) would also have been a way for the Athenians to flex their political muscles and demonstrate their readiness to punish those whom they considered to have committed some misdemeanour. In both respects rivalry with the growing power and authority of Macedon may have been the primary motive behind the measures taken.⁶²

A further reason for doubting Athenian claims to be actively suppressing piracy in this period is the obvious impracticality of such an enterprise. On the one hand piracy was still an accepted method of conducting maritime warfare in the fourth century BC, as can be seen from the references in the Attic orators discussed above. Suppressing such activities would have seriously hampered Athenian efforts to maintain their military power in the Greek world. Even a campaign to identify and punish selected pirates would require an enormous military effort to tackle them in the most effective way, that is by denying them the bases from which to operate. It was not without reason that the possession or control of

⁶⁰ On Moirokles' opposition to Philip II see Arr. *Anab.* 1.10.

⁶¹ The provision of Moirokles' decree under which the Melians were liable to a fine may have been similar to the clauses in the treaties between Athens and Mytilene (427–424 BC) and Athens and Halieis (424/3 BC) *IG* I³.67.7–8; 75.6–10; see above p. 32. The difference in the case of Moirokles' decree was that it applied to all allies of the Athenians. There is no indication that the decree of Moirokles, which perhaps dates to the 350s BC, committed the Athenians to undertaking any military actions.

⁶² This atmosphere of political rivalry provides a plausible context for the forgery of the so-called Congress Decree of Plut. *Per.* 17, discussed above on p. 30. See Seager (1969) and Macdonald (1982).

islands and coastal sites was so prominent in both Athenian and Macedonian strategy. In friendly hands they could be used as bases from which to harry the opposing sides' territory and disrupt commercial and military traffic, as had been done during the Peloponnesian War.⁶³ In the hands of enemies they could represent a serious threat to one's own security. In a region littered with such potential pirates' nests it was difficult for one state to control even a few of them, and the capability to ensure the safety of the seas in general was probably beyond even the combined resources of Athens and Philip of Macedon, whatever the wily Macedonian king may have claimed.

According to the Attic oration *On the Peace with Alexander*, when Alexander renewed the peace treaty between the Greek states known as the Common Peace in 336 BC a clause was included to the effect that all the participants in the Peace should be allowed to sail the seas safely and without hindrance. The speaker of this oration, which is not the work of Demosthenes himself, claims that the treaty has already been broken by the seizure of some Athenian ships by Macedonian forces at Tenedos ([Demos.] 17.19).⁶⁴ This special provision, which bears some similarity to the Athenian decree of Moirrokles mentioned above, suggesting a possible Athenian origin, was presumably intended to deter the kind of piracy and seizure in reprisal which had been such a danger to maritime traffic in the previous hundred years. That it did not ensure safety at sea is hardly surprising. 'Enemy' ships and seafarers remained a tempting and vulnerable target. In practice it seems to have been left to individual states to protect their own maritime interests as far as they could. Accounts of the naval operations undertaken along the coast of Anatolia in 332 BC indicate that pirates continued to seek opportunities to profit from warfare even against the forces of Alexander the Great (Arr. *Anab.* 3.3.4; Curt. 4.5.18 and 21).⁶⁵ Alexander is credited by the Roman historian Quintus Curtius with sending one of his admirals, Amphoteros, on a mission to deal with piracy in 331 BC, which some historians have seen as an attempt to realize the ideal of clearing the seas of pirates put forward by Philip II in the 340s BC (Curt. 4.8.15).⁶⁶ It is difficult to tell what Amphoteros was supposed to do in this respect, and no mention is made of pirates in the generally more reliable narrative of Arrian.⁶⁷

⁶³ See above pp. 31–4.

⁶⁴ The Athenians despatched a 'rescue' force of 100 triremes.

⁶⁵ *IG* XII.2.256 mentions *leistai* among the forces of the tyrants who controlled the Lesbian city of Eresos in 324 BC, but these need not have been pirates.

⁶⁶ See Ormerod (1924): 121–2. The mission is connected with King Agis III of Sparta's revolt against Macedonian rule in 331 BC by Bosworth (1975).

⁶⁷ See Bosworth (1975).

There is also some evidence of Athenian military efforts to deal with the problem of piracy at this time, although they seem to have been intended only to protect Athenian interests. An entry in the records of the naval magistrates for 335/4 BC mentions the despatch of some triremes under the command of Diotimos, 'to take guard against pirates', but there is no further information about the nature of this expedition. To see it as some kind of regular patrol or police action to suppress piracy would be a mistake, as such arrangements were not practical. The triremes must have had some specific destination and a particular mission: they could not have simply sailed around looking for pirates. Nor is there any substance to the suggestion that Diotimos was honoured for his successful completion of this particular mission.⁶⁸ In 325/4 BC the Athenians founded a colony on the Adriatic, partly to provide a safe haven against attacks by Tyrrhenians.⁶⁹ According to Diodoros pirate ships had made the whole of the Adriatic coastline unsafe for merchants in the mid fourth century BC (Diod. 16.5.3).⁷⁰ He also credits the Corinthian Timoleon with capturing and executing in 339/8 BC a pirate leader called Postomion, whose twelve galleys had been plundering the coast of Sicily (Diod. 16.81.3).⁷¹

Pirates in the Classical Greek world

It can be seen that in the Classical period the term pirate was widely used in the Greek world to refer to almost anyone who attacked people by sea. Although the attackers might have considered themselves to be engaged in legitimate raiding or warfare, their victims (and their allies) were likely to label them pirates as a way of illegitimizing their actions. Piracy had become a potentially deplorable activity among the Classical Greeks, but it was still a common feature of warfare and, in the form of reprisals, an alternative or supplement to larger-scale conflict. The ways in which the sources refer to the activities of Athenian generals and other 'condottieri', especially in the mid fourth century BC, indicate that there was a growing conflict between, on the one hand, recognizing a general need to reduce the danger of piracy and to accept collective responsibility for actions taken on behalf of a particular state, and, on the other hand, the desire of

⁶⁸ *IG* II².1623, lines 276–85. Contra Pritchett (1991): 337–8. It may be significant that Diotimos was one of those named by Alexander for extradition after the sack of Thebes: Arr. *Anab.* 1.10. His 'mission' could have been a convenient form of exile, to protect him from the Macedonians.

⁶⁹ *IG* II².1629, lines 217–33.

⁷⁰ Recorded under the events of the year 359/8 BC, but the situation is likely to have prevailed for a considerable period of time.

⁷¹ No other sources mention this Postomion. See below pp. 51–3 on the general problem of identifying 'Tyrrhenian' pirates in this period.

some Greeks to take advantage of any opportunity for booty on their own initiative, without regard for the niceties of 'international relations'. The various individuals and groups who are called pirates in this period are often far more than mere 'outlaws'. In many cases, however, it seems to have been their misfortune to fall victim to accounts generated by enemies who have sought to justify opposing them by describing them as pirates.