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a cura di
MARCO BETTALLI ED ELENA FRANCHI



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How to challenge the master of the sea

Reviewing naval warfare in the Classical period from a non-Athenian perspective

by ALESSANDRO CARLI *

ABSTRACT: Taking distance from previous studies where naval warfare in Classical period is considered as an Athenian uniqueness concerning her military results, this paper aims to review the battles which took place during the Peloponnesian War from a different perspective. After a brief analysis of the Athenian military tactics, understood as their specificity difficult to implement unconditionally, we try to shed light on the Others opted for their ways to conduct naval warfare.

KEYWORDS: PELOPONNESIAN WAR, THUCYDIDES, ATHENS, PELOPONNESIANS, SYRACUSE, NAVAL WARFARE

During the fifth and fourth centuries, did the Greeks lead the naval battles in a single and undifferentiated way? If we raised this question taking into consideration land fights with massive picked battles toward coalitions, skirmishes and ambushes, the swift reply would be negative without there being, it is assumed, conflicting reactions: interpreting the Greek world as monolithic reality falls into disuse even in its military history. In recent years, according to scholars it has been commonly accepted that the poleis, on the basis of their traditions and practises, could conduct warfare through some specific behaviours to route the enemies, who, conversely, opted for other ways for the same aim¹. However, this worthwhile approach is still enclosed within land

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1 Taking the cue from the preliminary remarks of Matthew LLOYD – Roel KONIJNENDIJK – Cezary KUCEWICZ, «Introduction: Beyond the Phalanx», in Roel Konijnendijk – Cezary Kucewicz – Matthew Lloyd (eds.), *Brill's Companion to Greek Land Warfare Beyond the Phalanx*, Brill, Leiden – Boston, 2021, pp. 1-16, on this topic, see Joshua R. HALL, «The Western Greeks and the “Greek Warfare” Narrative, in Roel Konijnendijk – Cezary Kucewicz – Matthew Lloyd (eds.), *Brill's Companion to Greek Land Warfare Beyond the Phalanx*, Brill, Leiden – Boston, 2021, pp. 266-292 highlights how we should avoid an universal narrative of Greek warfare.

warfare, meanwhile naval warfare carries on being dealt with a broader outlook focusing sole on Athens. She shines like the only beacon of nautical profitable skills against other contemporary fleets². Instead of being regarded as an Athenian specificity³, as we aim to prove, their tactics are the yardstick as the unique way of fighting toward Greeks: as a consequence, those who did not deal with sea battles employing the same tactics appear inexperienced or less efficient at first sight⁴. Before wondering if that is faithful, we shall put forward where and why this interpretation comes from. On this point, we believe that the viable solution lies in the Thucydidean narrative of what occurred at Sybota. The great naval battle which took place two years before the flare-up of the Peloponnesian War gets a hint of the problem. In the summer of 433, the Corinthian fleet was challenging Corcyra, their dissident colony stood by ten Athenian triremes which should not have step in unless strictly unavoidable⁵. Not unexpectedly if we bear in mind the tricky diplomatic period toward the poleis, Thucydides delves into the narrative highlighting the tactics opted for this battle⁶: both sides owned numerous hoplites on their decks, such as archers and javelin throwers, since the opponents

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- 2 This reading is predominant among the warfare's handbooks expressly or implicitly: cf. Louis RAWLINGS, *The Ancient Greeks at war*, Manchester University Press, Manchester, 2007 p. 122. Philip DE SOUZA, «War at Sea», in Brian Campbell – Lawrence A. Tritle (eds.), *The Oxford Handbook of Warfare in the Classical World*, Oxford University Press, Oxford, 2013, pp. 377-378. This view is pervasive still in John S. MORRISON – John COATES – Boris RANKOV, *The Athenian Trireme. The history and reconstruction of an ancient Greek Warship*, Cambridge University Press, Cambridge, 2000, p. 69.
 - 3 In this regard, it is interesting the reflection of William L. RODGERS, *Greek and Roman Naval Warfare. A Study of Strategy, Tactics, and Ship Design from Salamis (480 b.c) to Actium (31 b.c)*, United States Naval Institute, Annapolis, 1937, p. 11: «The Athenian skills in ship handling was such that their fleets depended more on the ram than on personal struggle, but this was a very brief period in the history of naval warfare».
 - 4 While admitting that they were maritime powers endure the weighty Thucydidean argument: see Hans VAN WEES, *Greek Warfare. Myth and Realities*, Duckworth, London, 2004, p. 227.
 - 5 Since the Athenian assembly ordered the admirals not to take action if Corcyra was not attacked firstly (Thuc., I 45.3), the fact that, during the battle, the Athenians were involved in the fight (Thuc., I 49.7) was probably a sensitive question especially after the return at home. Regarding the convoluted diplomacy: Giovanni PARMEGGIANI, *Atene e l'epimachia con Corcira (433 a.C.)*, *Erga – Logoi*, 4, (2016), 29-47.
 - 6 On this battle cf. Nicholas G. L. HAMMOND, «Naval Operations in the South Channel of Corcyra 435-433», *The Journal of Hellenic Studies*, 65, (1945), pp. 30-37; John WILSON, *Athens and Corcyra. Strategy and Tactics in the Peloponnesian War*, Bristol Classical Press, Bristol, 1987, pp. 42-57.

were prepared rather inexperienced according the old-fashion way (πολλοὺς μὲν ὀπίτας ἔχοντες ἀμφοτέρω ἐπὶ τῶν καταστροφμάτων, πολλοὺς δὲ τοξότας τε καὶ ἀκοντιστάς, τῷ παλαιῷ τρόπῳ ἀπειρότερον ἔτι παρασκευασμένοι). Moreover, as the Athenian historian expressly dwells on, Corinth and Corcyra were facing a massive fight but not for their nautical ability, rather the combat was closer to a land battle (Ἦν τε ἡ ναυμαχία καρτερά, τῇ μὲν τέχνῃ οὐχ ὁμοίως, πεζομαχία δὲ τὸ πλεον προσφερῆς οὖσα). The enemy relied more on their soldiers deployed on the decks (μᾶλλον τι πιστεύοντες τοῖς ἐπὶ τοῦ καταστροφάματος ὀπίτας). Instead of employing διέκπλοι – in other words, as we will see, the Athenian way of achieving victories consistently with their perspective –, the challengers managed the naval battle more through bravery and strength than owing to nautical knowledge (διέκπλοι δὲ οὐκ ἦσαν, ἀλλὰ θυμῷ καὶ ῥώμῃ τὸ πλεον ἐναυμάχουν ἢ ἐπιστήμῃ). In the presence of this oriented description, we are in front of one specific standpoint, a child of Thucydides' military expertise⁷ as well as a predictable product of a person coming from the Athenian culture. Actually, this peculiar judgment could be delivered only from a society which, for the fifth years before this battle and maybe more, upgraded its military skills equally importantly brought about its own way of taking up naval situations⁸.

Therefore, by taking the cue from his Athenian background and delineating the Corinthian and Corcyrean fight style as antiquated, here Thucydides moulds a vertical framework: almost at the pinnacle, were settled the Athenians⁹ and,

7 On his military knowledge: cf. Simon HORNBLLOWER, *Thucydides*, John Hopkins University Press, Baltimore, 1987, pp. 156-159; Peter HUNT, *Warfare*, in Antonios Rengakos – Antonios Tsakmakis (eds.), *Brill's Companion to Thucydides*, Brill, Leiden – Boston, 2006, pp. 385-413; Ugo FANTASIA, *La Guerra del Peloponneso*, Carocci, Roma, 2012, pp. 16-31 Edith FOSTER, *Campaign and battle narratives in Thucydides*, in Ryan K. Balot – Sara Forsdyke – Edith Foster (eds.), *The Oxford Handbook of Thucydides*, Oxford University Press, Oxford, 2017, pp. 301-315; Jason CROWLEY, «Thucydides and War», in Polly Low (ed.), *The Cambridge Companion to Thucydides*, Cambridge University Press, Cambridge, 2023, pp. 129-131.

8 For the debate on the so-called “Athenian naval revolution” Barry O'HALLORAN, *The Political Economy of Classical Athens. A Naval Perspective*, Leiden, Brill, 2019, pp. 116-127.

9 As clearly exposed in the so-called *Archaeology* (Thuc., I 13.2-3; 14.1; 14.3), according to Thucydides, there is a straight connection between power and control of the sea: among the several see the analysis of Lisa KALLET-MARX, *Money, Expense, and Naval Power in Thucydides' History 1-5.24*, University of California Press, Berkeley – Los Angeles – Oxford, 1993, pp. 21-35. Regarding sea-power in the Greek thought always a starting point Arnaldo MOMIGLIANO, «Sea-Power in Greek Thought», *The Classical Review*, 58.1,

on the opposite side, the lowest one, he relegated the others. As a matter of fact, if it is pointless to call into question the Athenian naval skills and their trained use, at the same time the Thucydidean assessment may mislead his readers. At Sybota, in truth, the battle did not take place between land forces, such as notoriously for instance Sparta or Thebes, yet both the enemies were two naval powers with an enduring seafaring practice and well-established tradition. In conjunction with the proficient naval supply during the Persian Wars, Corinth was the main triremes' provider within the Peloponnesian League and the only real nautical challenger for Athens on the western front¹⁰. Similarly, in quality of troublesome naval power for her mother city, Corcyra emerged as possible enticing ally for both the coalitions due to her remarkable fleet¹¹. Therefore, cognizant of Thucydides' Athenian background, comes the problem up whether we can put faith in his judgment without hesitation or rather we should cross-examine the sources to work out this thorny question: firstly, given the diversified fighting ways according to the Sybota's battle, are we really entitled to appraise the only Athenian method as the unrivalled one to defeat the enemies by sea or should we be more

(1944), pp. 1-7. The bibliography on the *Archaeology* is endless: always fascinating the analysis of Jaqueline DE ROMILLY, *The Mind of Thucydides*, Cornell University Press, 2012, pp. 144-179 and the reflections of Virginia HUNTER, *Past and Process in Herodotus and Thucydides*, Princeton University Press, Princeton, 1982, pp. 17-49.

- 10 On the Corinthian naval power in the period of Sybota: John B. SALMON, *Wealthy Corinth. A History of the City to 338 BC*, Clarendon Press, Oxford, 1984, pp. 286-288. Her pivotal role among the Peloponnesian allies during the Archidamian War: Caroline FALKNER, *Sparta and the Sea: A History of Spartan Sea-Power; c. 706 – c. 373 B.C.*, National Library of Canada, Edmonton, 1992, pp. 99-108.
- 11 In sight of the 120 ships available in the 433 (Thuc., I 25.4; cf. I 33.1), the same ambassadors stressed the opportunity of the Athenian affiliation with Corcyra instead of her alignment with the Peloponnesians (Thuc., I 36.3; cf. I 44.1-2). For their fleet: Selene E. PSOMA, «Corcyra's Wealth and Power», in Claudia Antonetti – Edoardo Cavalli (eds.), *Prospettive corciresi*, Pisa, pp. 158-162. On the Athenian advantages through this alliance: Silvio CATALDI, *Prospettive occidentali allo scoppio della guerra del Peloponneso*, Edizioni ETS, Pisa, 1990, pp. 16-17; James V. MORRISON, «Preface to Thucydides: Rereading the Corcyrean Conflict (1.24-55)», *Classical Antiquity*, 18.1, (1999), pp. 113-114; Ugo FANTASIA, «Formione in Acarnania (Thuc., II 68, 7-8) e le origini della guerra del Peloponneso», *Incidenza dell'Antico*, 4, (2006), pp. 84-85. On the Corinth's hate for her colony: Edith FOSTER, *Thucydides, Pericles, and Periclean Imperialism*, Cambridge University Press, Cambridge, 2010, pp. 44-50; Jeffrey RUSTEN, «Four Ways to hate Corcyra: Thucydides I 24-55 against the Background of Odyssey 13, Herodotus III 48-53, and VII 168», in Georg Rechenauer – Vassiliki Pothou (eds.), *Thucydides – a violent teacher? History and its representations*, V&R unipress, Göttingen, 2011, pp. 108-111.



Fig. 1. Fragment of a bas-relief representing an Athenian trireme with 9 oarsmen, discovered in 1862 in the Acropolis near the Erechtheum by Lenormant and dated ca 410/400 BCE. Two other fragments of this relief exist in the National Museum and in apothèques. According to L. Beschi's reconstruction, the original composition represented a large trireme with its 25 rowers, the navigator and the commander. A young man on the right probably represents the hero Paralos, inventor of navigation. Photo Marsyas 2006, CC SA 2.5 Generic (Wikimedia Commons).

nanced case by case? Therefore, following a succinct review of the Athenian *modus operandi* in naval engagements in order to grasp what her enemies had to challenge, the aim of this investigation is to shine a new light on Greek naval warfare by considering the non-Athenian methodologies employed in battle scenarios.

The consummate execution of specific manoeuvres achieved through rowing coupled with the constant striving towards of the spaces in the sea, constituted the successful combination for the Athenian fleets. Primarily, among these manoeuvres there were the δῖεκπλους, wherein the Athenians rammed through the gaps of the enemy formation¹², and the περίπλους, when they rowed round either opponent's flanks¹³. A third dexterous manoeuvre was the ἀναστροφή, which was masterfully employed by one Athenian ship against one pursuing Leukadian triremes at the battle of Naupaktos: it consisted in a sort of rounding a real or imaginary weather mark being close-hauled and then, after the complete execution of the veer, the triremes gained speed again until the collision with the enemy¹⁴. The latter, a target of these manoeuvres, was always rammed on the broadsides where the oars were shorn off with the consequent unusableness of the ship as well as on the stern. Both two sections were the structural weakest points of the triremes and served as focal point for the Athenians¹⁵. After the targeted violent impact so as to undo the opponents' mobility, the Athenians should back off as fast as possible to avoid being rammed and then boarded by another enemy ship¹⁶. The impression

12 The seminal research on the δῖεκπλους: John F. LAZENBY, «The Diekplous», *Greece & Rome*, 34.2, (1987), pp. 169-177. *Contra*: John S. MORRISON, «The Greek Ships at Salamis and the Diekplous», *The Journal of Hellenic Studies*, 111, (1991), pp. 196-200, is not resolute. Some objections are put forward then by Boris RANKOV, «Ancient Naval Warfare», in Michael Whitby – Harris Sidebottom (eds.), *The Encyclopedia of Ancient Battles. Volume I*, Wiley Blackwell, Hoboken, 2017, p. 29, however the study of Lazenby remains mostly accepted by scholars.

13 Following the theories of Lazenby regarding the δῖεκπλους, on the περίπλους although it is not always shareable: Ian WHITEHEAD, «The Periplous», *Greece & Rome*, 34.2, (1987), pp. 178-185.

14 Andrew TAYLOR, «Battle Manoeuvres for fast Triremes», in Boris Rankov (ed.), *Trireme Olympia. The Final Report. Sea Trials 1992-4. Conference Papers 1998*, Oxbow Books, Oxford – Oakville, 2012, pp. 236-237.

15 For the sources on some “structural” weakness up to the triremes cf. Peter HUNT, «Military Forces», in Philip SABIN – Hans VAN WEES – Michael WHITBY (eds.), *The Cambridge History of Greek and Roman Warfare. Volume I: Greece, the Hellenistic World and the Rise of Rome*, Cambridge University Press, Cambridge, 2007, p. 125.

16 Among the exhortations, Phormio highlights how the ships should have the necessary space to retreat (Thuc., II 89.8). See Ugo FANTASIA, *Tucidide. La Guerra del Peloponneso. Libro II*, Edizioni ETS, Pisa, p. 566. On the baking off: Barry S. STRAUSS, «Democracy, Kimon, and the Evolution of Athenian Naval Tactics in the Fifth Century B.C», in Pernille Flensted-Jensen – Thomas Heine Nielsen – Lene Rubinstein (eds.), *Polis & Politics. Studies in Ancient Greek History. Presented to Mogens Herman Hansen on his Sixtieth Birthday, August 20, 2000*, Museum Tusulanum Press, Copenhagen, 2000, p. 300-301.

is that they attempted any way to abstain from deck-fighting. In addition to the proficiency of the oarsmen, especially the θρανίται on the highest thwart¹⁷, in order to carry out the several manoeuvres, played a pivotal task the κυβερνήτης, the helmsman. As the master of the ship, he was metaphorically linked with the ship's safety due to his determining role¹⁸. In compliance with his expertise, given the esteemed counsel of the helmsman, it could happen that some generals may have still entrust him with the charge over the battle¹⁹. To team up with the κυβερνήτης there was also the crew, known as ὑπηρεσία, a highly qualified equipage²⁰. The helmsman and the crew constituted a real motive of pride for Athens²¹.

The effective employment of these manoeuvres hinged upon a congruous utilisation of the wide sea spaces, where still limited skilled ships could be resolute

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- 17 The encomiastic verses represent the public opinion on them: Aristoph., *Ach.*, 162-163: «Υποστένοι μὲντῶν ὁ θρανίτης λεώς, ὁ σωσίπολις», and the double pay they received in the 415: Thuc., VI 31.3: «τῶν <δὲ> τριηράρχων ἐπιφοράς τε πρὸς τῷ ἐκ δημοσίου μισθῷ διδόντων τοῖς θρανίταις τῶν ναυτῶν». On their highly performative role: Jean TAILLARDAT, «La trière athénienne et la guerre sur mer aux V^e et IV^e siècles», in Jean-Pierre Vernant (ed.), *Problèmes de la guerre en Grèce ancienne*, Seuil, Paris, 1968, pp. 199-201. On their special salary: Victor GABRIELSEN, *Financing the Athenian Fleet. Public Taxation and Social Relations*, The John Hopkins University Press, Baltimore, 1994, p. 122, cf. Lisa KALLET, *Money and Corrosion of Power in Thucydides. The Sicilian Expedition and its Aftermath*, University of California Press, Berkeley – Los Angeles, London, 2001, pp. 233-234. On their judgment in the Comedy: David PRITCHARD, *Athenian Democracy at War*, Cambridge University Press, Cambridge, 2019, pp. 130-131.
- 18 Despite the traditional standpoint, even the so-called Old Oligarch concedes the nautical experience up to the helmsman (Ps.-Xen., 1.19). See Dominique LENFANT, *Pseudo-Xénophon. Constitution des Athéniens*, Les Belles Lettres, Paris, 2018, pp. 101-102.
- 19 During the battle of Notium Alcibiades decided to leave the fleet under his trusted helmsman Antiochus (Xen., *Hell.*, 1.5.11). On the sources of this battle and how to harmonise them: Cinzia BEARZOT, *Alcibiade. Il leone della democrazia ateniese. Stratega, politico, avventuriero*, Salerno Editrice, Roma, 2021, pp. 177-179.
- 20 The whole ὑπηρεσία is mentioned by the Old-Oligarch (Ps.-Xen., 1.2) and the sources always highlight her subordination to the helmsman, as a consequence remains noteworthy the etymological study made by Leopold J. D. Richardson, «ΥΠΗΡΕΤΗΣ», *The Classical Quarterly*, 37.1/2, (1943), pp. 55-61. His interpretation is followed by John S. MORRISON, «Hyperesia in Naval Context in the Fifth and Fourth Century BC», *The Journal of Hellenic Studies*, 104, (1984), pp. 48-59.
- 21 The Periclean words before the war are exemplary: Thuc., I 143.1: «νῦν δὲ τόδε τε ὑπάρχει, καὶ ὅπερ κράτιστον, κυβερνήτας ἔχομεν πολίτας καὶ τὴν ἄλλην ὑπηρεσίαν πλείους καὶ ἀμείνους ἢ ἅπανα ἢ ἄλλη Ἑλλάς». On this text: Arnold W. GOMME, *A Historical Commentary on Thucydides. Volume I*, Clarendon Press, Oxford, 1945, pp. 460-461. Cf. the reflections of Moshe AMIT, «The sailors of the Athenian fleet», *Athenaeum*, 40, (1962), pp. 168-169.

against a superior adversary fleet. In this context, the concept of εὐρυχωρία assumed an indispensable landmark for the Athenians. They were able to carry out their tactics inflicting substantial damage upon the enemies whilst sustain conspicuous harms. Owing to the vagueness of our sources pertaining the Pentecontaetia²² and, specifically, those detailing naval battles during that period²³, from the outset of the Peloponnesian War Athens had already improved her technics and was used to looking for the right place to challenge the enemy in consistence with her tactical requirements. Exemplifying this approach, at Patras Phormio sought out and damaged the Peloponnesian fleet taking advantage from the wide spaces. Then, some weeks later, at Naupaktos he made the same effort in spite of a different situation²⁴. In other circumstances, when it was feasible, εὐρυχωρία was always the first purpose²⁵. Conversely, the enemies exerted considerable

22 On Athenian naval and imperial grow during this period see the review of Philip DE SOUZA, «The Athenian Maritime Empire of the Fifth Century BC», in Philip de Souza – Pascal Arnaud (eds.), *The Sea in History. The Ancient World*, The Boydell Press, Woodbridge, 2017, pp. 412-425 with a detailed bibliography.

23 It needs to bear in mind how the sources go into the Eurymedon's battle: if the Thucydidean outline is extremely brief (Thuc., I 100.1: «Ἐγένετο δὲ μετὰ ταῦτα καὶ ἡ ἐπ' Εὐρυμέδοντι ποταμῶ ἐν Παμφυλίᾳ πεζομαχία καὶ ναυμαχία Ἀθηναίων καὶ τῶν ξυμμάχων πρὸς Μήδους; cf. Diod., XI 60), Plutarch delves into the narrative deeper, yet, intriguing, the fight consisted more in a land battle on the coastline (Plut., *Cim.*, 12.7). On Plutarch's sources: Carlo CARENA – Mario MANFREDINI – Luigi PICCIRILLI, *Plutarco. Le vite di Cimone e di Lucullo*, Mondadori, 1990, Milano, pp. 239-242. On this battle and the problems concerning the sources: Matteo ZACCARINI, *The Lame Hegemony. Cimon of Athens and the Failure of Panhellenism ca. 478-450 BC*, Bononia University Press, Bologna, 2017, pp. 119-127. For the debated triremes' structural changes by Cimon: Matteo ZACCARINI, «Dalla "triere leggera" alla "triere pesante": l'evoluzione della flotta ateniese tra Temistocle e Cimone», *Rivista di Studi Militari*, 2, 2013, pp. 7-27. The same problems concern the Athenian expedition in Egypt and the Ctesias' laconic narrative BNJ 14(36); cf. the allusion in Hdt., III 12) on the naval battle against Persians at Papremis: cf. Dominique LENFANT, *Ctésias de Cnide. Le Perse – L'Inde*, Le Belles Lettres, Paris, 2004, p. 267; For this battle: Ennio BIONDI, *La politica imperialistica ateniese a metà del V secolo A.C.*, LED Edizioni, Milano, 2016, pp. 33-37.

24 Regarding this point, a section in his exhortation before the battle is pivotal (Thuc., II 89.8). On the Phormio's nautical expertise: cf. Henry D. WESTLAKE, *Individuals in Thucydides*, Cambridge University Press, Cambridge, 1968, pp. 43-59; John HALE, «General Phormio's Art of War: A Greek Commentary on a Chinese Classic», in Charles D. Hamilton – Peter Krentz (eds.), *Polis and Polemos. Essays on Politics, War, and History in Ancient Greece in Honor of Donald Kagan*, Regina Books, Claremont, 1997, pp. 85-104.

25 We can consider this goal a sort of tactic obsession (Thuc., IV 13.4; VII 36.6; VIII 102.1), and it is also connected with seafaring ability (Thuc., VII 49.2). As rightly highlighted by Hans VAN WEES, *Greek Warfare*, cit. p. 224 we should not grasp the intention of fighting in

effort to avoid the wide spaces and, when unpreventable, they usually placed themselves in a vast circle devoid of gaps to allow the Athenians to employ the movements²⁶. Despite the apparent initial efficacy of this defensive strategy, its shortcomings became manifest as soon as the Athenians launched the first attack “sinking” one admiral ship, and, few years later, the same questionable tactic was employed even when the situation did not necessitate such a defensive stance²⁷.

Unfortunately, we are not able to take in why the Athenians developed this way of fight, even though probably the several wars during the Pentecontaetia induced Athens to figure out how to avoid outrageous losses improving their mobility with ships, so as to avoid fighting on desks where the outcome could be more unpredictable²⁸. As we will see, it is likely they kept away from the customary enemy’s objective.

According to the interpretation just proposed, the Athenian fleet usually achieved proficient results against the enemies, whenever the situation allowed or rather when they could fight in an advantageous space and, therefore they could carry out their tactical movements. In confirmation of this way of naval

a wide space as a sort of “agonal” ideology, actually they looked for a place more fruitful for winning.

26 It is the *κυκλός*, employed the first time at the Artemisium’s battle (Hdt., VIII 11.1) and in the famous defeat of the Peloponnesian fleet in 429 (Thuc., II 83.5). For this tactical choice: William L. RODGERS, *Greek and Roman Naval Warfare*, cit., pp. 131-132; Karl-Joachim, HÖLKEKAMP, «La guerra e la pace», in Salvatore Settis (ed.), *I Greci. Storia, cultura, arte e società*. 2. *Una storia greca. II. Definizione*, Giulio Einaudi Editore, Torino, 1997, pp. 508-509.

27 During the battle of Corcyra, despite a conspicuous numerical superiority, the Peloponnesian opted for the *κυκλός* in front of few Athenian ships (Thuc., III 78.1). We do not share the reading of Joseph ROISMAN, «Alkidas in Thucydides», *Historia: Zeitschrift für Alte Geschichte*, 36.4, (1987), pp. 408-409. Barry S. STRAUSS, «Sparta’s Maritime Moment», in Andrew S. Erickson – Lyle J. Goldstein – Carnes Lord (eds.), *China Goes to Sea. Maritime Transformation in Comparative Historical Perspective*, Naval Institute Press, Annapolis, 2009, p. 42 criticizes the Alcidas’ faults, but we should not forget how much the previous defeats in the Corinthian gulf biased the oarsmen’s moral.

28 Cf. Barry S. STRAUSS, «Democracy, Kimon, and the Evolution», cit., p. 317, although we do not share the author “democratic” view of military development. For the fallen during sea battles: BARRY S. STRAUSS, «Perspectives on the death of fifth-century Athenian seamen», in Hans van Wees (ed.), *War & Violence in Ancient Greece*, The Classical Press of Wales, Swansea, 2009, pp. 261-284. Remains, however, the question regarding the percentage of population employed in the fleet: for the debate see Ben AKRIGG, *Population and Economy in Classical Athens*, Cambridge University Press, Cambridge, 2019, pp. 76-83.

warfare as specifically Athenians²⁹, it is necessary to investigate what took place when the others might carry out the same strategy. Apparently, the only occasion which the other Greeks, in that case the Peloponnesians, sought to employ the διέκπλοι and the περίπλοι was the battle of Arginousae. This fight, nevertheless, is the exception that proves the rule. First of all, even in that engagement, we are not certain if the Peloponnesians, on the practical side, employed the same Athenian tactics due to the over-condensed Xenophontean narrative. On the other hand, considering still the distinctive behaviour of the general, the “old-fashion” Spartan Callicratidas, it is very likely that the Peloponnesians did undertake the battle through a differentiated way, avoiding to take into account, as we will see at length, some nautical needs according to their way of war³⁰. Having shed light on these tactics whose we are entitled to consider an Athenian specificity, the thorny issue springs up whether, in absence of the right spaces for movements, the Athenians remained still proficient. Otherwise, we should question if this way stood as unique advantageous manner of fighting at sea. In this regard, it is necessary attempt to understand how the “Others” set about naval battles, what were the main goal, which situations were considered favourable according to their strategy and how they attained the hoped purpose.

Regarding the considerable efforts devoted to interdicting enemy coastlines and impending the transport of annexed boarded troops, the main objective of

29 Ingratiating words of Barry S. STRAUSS, «Naval Battle and Sieges», in Philip Sabin – Hans Van Wees – Michael Whitby (eds.), *The Cambridge History of Greek and Roman Warfare. Volume I: Greece, the Hellenistic World and the Rise of Rome*, Cambridge University Press, Cambridge, 2007, p. 230 who employs the expression “Athenian way of war”.

30 The Megarian helmsman Hermon suggested the Spartan admiral to flee away since the situation was not appropriate to engage the battle: «Ἐρμών δὲ Μεγαρεὺς ὁ τῷ Καλλικρατίδῃ κυβερνήτῳ εἶπε πρὸς αὐτὸν ὅτι εἶη καλῶς ἔχον ἀποπλευσαι· αἱ γὰρ τριήρεις τῶν Ἀθηναίων πολλῶ πλείους ἦσαν». On this Spartan cf. Ughetto BERNINI, *ΛΥΣΑΝΔΡΟΥ ΚΑΙ ΚΑΛΛΙΚΡΑΤΙΔΑ ΣΥΓΚΡΙΣΙΣ. Cultura, etica e politica spartana fra quinto e quarto secolo a. C.*, Istituto veneto di scienze, lettere ed arti, 1988, pp. 79-83. Noteworthy the reflection of John L. MOLES, «Xenophon and Callicratidas», *The Journal of Hellenic Studies*, 114, (1994), pp. 81-82. Regarding this episode Angelos KAPELLOS, *Xenophon's Peloponnesian War*, De Gruyter, 2019, p. 127 notices that in this occasion Xenophon is moulding a parallelism between the helmsman Antiochus disobeying to Alcibiades, so here Callicratidas should not have fight. We ignore if it is the helmsman's point of view or a Xenophontean explanation (the reading relies on the γὰρ), however this idea is clearly not Athenian one. The Athenians were used to challenge many times the enemy despite the numerical inferiority. This judgment, as we will see, is based on a specific view of naval warfare where outstripping with the ships was a key tactical factor.

engaging in a naval battle was capturing the enemy ships as much as possible. In a world where the triremes brought on outrageous expenses from the construction to the ordinary repairs, the only Athens alone was capable of sustaining a systematic shipbuilding due to her incomes³¹. Therefore, the prospect of getting possession of a fleet fitted out by the enemies looked to be extremely enticing. In compliance with that goal, during the Archidamian war, the Peloponnesians regularly attempted to commandeer Athenian triremes, until the Persians provided the well-known financial support during the Ionian War³². However, even in this last period of the conflict, they persisted in the same attitude. As a result, it was not a coincidence that, during the first ten years when they owned few resources, the Peloponnesians undertook some expeditions in order to raise their fleet, as when they sailed to Corcyra in the late 427³³. Besides, when it happened that they lost the naval power recently collected after the Navarino bay's battle in the 425, they did not assemble again another fleet for years³⁴. Adhering to a strategic framework prioritizing the

31 For the Athenian naval spending for the fleet: among the countless studies, pivotal the synthesis of Vincent GABRIELSEN, «Financial and Human Material and Economic Resources Required to Build and Operate Navies in the Classical World», in Philip de Souza – Pascal Arnaud (eds.), *The Sea in History. The Ancient World*, The Boydell Press, Woodbridge, 2017, pp. 426-442. Cf. George STEINHAEUER, *Piraeus: Harbors*, «Navy and Shipping», in Jennifer Neils – Dylan K. Georges (eds.), *The Cambridge Companion to Ancient Athens*, Cambridge University Press, Cambridge, 2021, pp. 231-243 and Eleonora PISCHEDDA, *L'economia pubblica di Atene. Stato, finanze e società nel IV secolo a.C.*, Carocci, Roma, 2022, pp. 133-140 with further bibliography.

32 Conversely, given some preoccupations, Athens made any effort to gain money (Xen., *Hell.*, I 1.12; 14; 20; 21; 22; II 4.17; III 2.4; 8; 9). On Persian financial support toward Sparta: see concisely Anton POWELL, «Sparta's foreign – and Internal – History. 478-403», in Anton Powell (ed.), *A Companion to Sparta. Volume I*, Wiley Blackwell, Hoboken, 2018, pp. 315-316.

33 Thuc., III 69.2: «πλέον τὸ ναυτικὸν ποιήσασθαι». On this enterprise: Peter A. Brunt, «Spartan Policy and Strategy in the Archidamian War», *Phoenix*, 19.4 (1965), p. 272; Thomas KELLY, «Thucydides and the Spartan Strategy in the Archidamian War», *The American Historical Review*, 87.1, (1982), pp. 46-47; Michael P. FRONDA – Chandra GIROUX, «Spartan Strategies in the Early Peloponnesian War, 341-425», *Phoenix*, 73.3/4, (2019), p. 307; Paul RAHE, *Sparta's Second Attic War. The Grand Strategy of Classical Sparta, 446-418 B.C.*, Yale University Press, New Haven – London, 2020, pp. 124-125.

34 Thuc., IV 14. On the naval battle in the Navarino's bay: Henry D. WESTLAKE, «The Naval Battle at Pylos and its Consequences», *The Classical Quarterly*, 24.2, (1974), pp. 211-226; Loren J. SAMONS II, «Thucydides' Sources and the Spartan Plan at Pylos», *Hesperia: The Journal of the American School of Classical Studies at Athens*, 75.4 (2006), pp. 525-540; Philippe LAFARGUE, *425 av. J.-C. Athènes contre Sparte. La bataille de Pylos*, Alma Editeur, Paris, 2015, pp. 70-72.

enlargement of their naval forces, whenever situations rendered their own ships unmanageable, the Greeks were inclined to burn their unusable fleet³⁵. At first sight, this form of naval scorched earth strategy may seem drastic; nevertheless, at the same time, it highlights doubtless how much they prevented enemies to increase their naval capabilities³⁶. In compliance with this foremost objective, naval warfare during classical period and with his *formal* facet identified with the open battle embodied still a raid-oriented mentality³⁷ and even Athens was no exception in this approach on equal footing of other communities³⁸. It can seem paradoxical that, taking into consideration what has just emerged, the main opportunity to acquire additional triremes continued to be the battle itself. Thus, we can state that the engagement at sea was more oriented to hoarding than destroying. In addition, regarding this point, even when the ships were rammed in their vulnerable points, the complete wreck did not come about, allowing the attackers to tow away enemy boats to the coastline after the boarding³⁹. The inherent structure of the trireme avoided a possible sinking and even when the sustained damages were critical with a large quantity of bilge water on board⁴⁰. A corroboration of this conclusion lies in the losses' counting practices after the fights in Thucydides and Xenophon.

35 After Cyzicus, the Athenians captured all the ship excepts the Syracusans ones which were burned by their owners (Xen., *Hell.*, I 1.18). See Peter KRENTZ, *Xenophon. Hellenika I-II.3.10*, Aris & Phillips, Warminster, 1990, p. 98. On this battles: Antony ANDREWES, «Notion and Kyzikos: The sources Compared», *The Journal of Hellenic Studies*, 102, (1982), pp. 19-25.

36 During the exhortation before the battle of Naupaktos, Phormio incited to break down the enemy's aspiration to own a fleet: Thuc., II 89.10: «ὁ δὲ ἀγὼν μέγας ὑμῖν, ἢ καταλῦσαι Πελοποννησίων τὴν ἐλπίδα τοῦ ναυτικοῦ». Arnold J. GOMME, *A Historical Commentary on Thucydides. The Ten Years' War. Volume II. Books II-III*, The Clarendon Press, Oxford, 1956, p. 228; Ugo FANTASIA, *Tucidide*, cit., p. 567.

37 For the concept of raid-mentality see the reflections of Vincent GABRIELSEN, «Economic activity, maritime trade and piracy in the Hellenistic Aegean», *Revue des Études Anciennes*, 103.1/2, (2001), *Les îles de l'Égée dans l'Antiquité. Bordeaux, 12-13 novembre 1999*, pp. 223-228. Cf. briefly Philip DE SOUZA, *War at Sea*, cit., pp. 375-376; Jean-Marie KOWALSKI, «Thucydide, témoin des opérations navales dal la première phase de la guerre du Péloponnèse (431-415 av. J.-C.)», *Dialogues d'histoire ancienne*, 40.1, (2014), pp. 28-33.

38 For the epigraphical evidence see now Eleonora PISCHEDDA, *L'economia pubblica*, cit., p. 136.

39 Thucydides is clear-cut regarding the end of the Sybota's battle (Thuc., I 50.1; 3; 54.1) and what happened at one of the admirals at Arginusae (Xen., *Hell.*, I 7.32). See Boris RANKOV, *Ancient Naval Warfare*, cit., p. 29 for the quotation and explanation of these sources.

40 Philip DE SOUZA, *War at Sea*, cit., p. 377.



Fig. 2. Replica of Athenian trireme (trieres). Athens War Museum.
Photo Dimitri Kamaras 2025. CC SA 2.0 Generic. (Wikimedia Commons).

In contrast to land battles where casualties' count may be approximate with rounding off⁴¹, both the historians meticulously enumerate the ships sunk, captured with the oarsmen or without them⁴². Taking into consideration the primary objective of these fights, as a consequence the question arises whether the well-known Athenian tactical obsession for εὐρυχωρία was always required or the other Greeks, according to their standpoint, strived for alternative advantageous situations and how they benefited from them.

Capitalizing a conspicuous numerical superiority, a large fleet could arrange the battle in the tight spaces, aiming to drive the enemies towards the coastline and, if possible, culminate the fight on the land. They attained this purpose

41 Always pivotal the reflections of Catherine RUBINCAM, «Casualty Figures in the Battle Descriptions of Thucydides», *Transactions of the American Philological Association*, 121, (1991), pp. 181-198. For the use of numbers by ancient historians regarding military matter, the most exhaustive research based on statistics is Catherine RUBINCAM, *Quantifying Mentalities. The Use of Numbers by Ancient Greek Historians*, University of Michigan Press, Ann Arbor, 2021, pp. 76-99.

42 Barry S. STRAUSS, *Perspective on the death*, cit., pp. 273-275 interestingly highlights how much Thucydides, for example, is more zealous to count the lost ships than the human casualties due to his some aristocratic-political biases regarding the oarsmen's social class.

through three specific tactics: encirclement, strengthening the ship's structure to cripple the enemy boats and, when feasible, concocting a deception.

To counter the Athenians to shove off on the open sea where they could carry out their dexterous tactics, larger fleets found successes confining the fight within restricted spaces⁴³. They might push the adversaries gradually toward the shore. As a result, if we bear in mind the systematic research of εὐρυχωρία pursued by Athenian admirals (maybe the outcome of the Arginousae battle was not a simple coincidence⁴⁴), the other Greeks indeed favoured her opposite, the στενοχωρία⁴⁵. Within such situations, teamed up ships could proficiently board the enemies, fight on the deck and consequently transport captured triremes. Rather than emulating Athens, they developed distinct ways to naval warfare. The strict similarities between the fights which took place at Naupaktos and Cynossema were evident in this context: during the battle of 429, the Peloponnesians initially mirrored the Athenian coastal sailing interrupting through an abrupt veer to port with the following enclosure of the Athenian triremes⁴⁶. They brought about a

43 Illustrative is the exhortation of Phormio before the battle of Naupaktos when the Athenian admiral stresses how much a conspicuous fleet could overwhelm an inferior one such as during a land battle. Thuc., II 89.8: «διέκπλοι τε οὐκ εἰσὶν οὐδ' ἀναστροφαί, ἄπερ νεῶν ἄμεινον πλεουσῶν ἔργα ἐστίν, ἀλλὰ ἀνάγκη ἂν εἶη τὴν ναυμαχίαν πεζομαχίαν καθίστασθαι, καὶ ἐν τούτῳ αἱ πλείους νῆες κρείστους γίνονται». See Ugo FANTASIA, *Tucidide*, cit., p. 566.

44 When the deployment took place, the Athenians had the prows facing the open sea (Xen., *Hell.*, I 6.29: «οἱ δ' Ἀθηναῖοι ἀντανήγοντο εἰς τὸ πέλαγος»), since they have the chance to avoid the possible enemy encirclement. For a detailed description of the battle of Arginousae especially for the problems concerning the deployment: cf. Bernard W. HENDERSON, *The Great War between Athens and Sparta*, Arno Press, New York, 1973, pp. 457-460; KAGAN, Donald, *The Fall of the Athenian Empire*, Cornell University Press, Ithaca – New York, 1991, pp. 343-353.

45 It was the real tactical problem for the Athenians admirals. The words of Nicias (Thuc., VII 62) are exemplary of the fact that the unavoidable τοῦ λιμένος στενότητι (in other words the στενοχωρία), from a simple bugbear from the Athenian point of view, becomes reality during the following battle (Thuc., VII 70). See at length Sebastiano AMATO, *Dall'Olimpeion al fiume Assinaro. La seconda campagna ateniese contro Siracusa (415-413 a.C.) Volume II 2. Il ciclo operativo inverno 414 – settembre 413 a.C.*, Verbavolant Edizioni, Siracusa, 2005, pp. 263-292. For this battle cf. the reflections of Pietro JANNI, *Il mare degli Antichi*, Edizioni Dedalo, Bari, 1996, pp. 169-181 regarding the different employment of the ram.

46 Cf. Thuc., II 90.5-6: «τὰς δ' ἄλλας ἐπικαταλαβόντες ἐξέωσαν τε πρὸς τὴν γῆν ὑποφενγούσας καὶ διέφθειραν, ἄνδρας τε τῶν Ἀθηναίων ἀπέκτειναν ὅσοι μὴ ἐξένευσαν αὐτῶν. καὶ τῶν νεῶν τινὰς ἀναδοῦμενοι εἶλκον κενὰς (μίαν δὲ αὐτοῖς ἀνδράσιν εἶλον ἦδη)» with Thuc.,

numerical superiority similar to the customary encirclement during land warfare. Indeed, at Cynossema, the last naval battle described by Thucydides in the *Histories*, the quick veer compelled the Athenians to row closer the coastline⁴⁷. Subsequently, the Peloponnesians overwhelmed them after a battle on the sand. Land fighting always lay as the preferred choice when feasible⁴⁸. However, if full-comprehensive enclosure by the outnumbering Peloponnesian fleet was not achieved, the escaped Athenian triremes could counterattack, owing to the fact that they had reached the desired εὐρυχωρία. As a compelling repercussion for the Athens' enemies, the fleet which had failed in the pursuing had to challenge again the Athenians fast manoeuvres. That happened partially at Naupaktos and, with more severe consequences, at Cynossema. Considering the divergent approach to the battle in comparison with the Athenians, if the first encirclement was not accomplished flawlessly, the Peloponnesians could fail into a panic with disastrous outcomes as a consequence of the enemy counterattack⁴⁹. Therefore, they should have achieved their tactic as soon as possible. They endured even the risk of being joined by enemy support troops on the shore if they were at disposal. At Naupaktos, meanwhile the Athenian left wing was escaping pursued by some fast triremes, the outnumbering Peloponnesians prevailed over the few enemy's ships, but the dexterous Messenians swam to the allied fleet to engaging in a deck-to-deck struggle and recapturing some triremes. Regarding this last point, which is a sort of unicum among our sources compared to the Athenian attitude

VIII 105.1: «προσπεσόντες οὖν οἱ Πελοποννήσιοι κατὰ τὸ μέσον ἐξέωσαν τε ἐς τὸ ξηρὸν τὰς ναῦς τῶν Ἀθηναίων καὶ ἐς τὴν γῆν ἐπεξέβησαν, τῷ ἔργῳ πολὺ περισχόντες». On the manoeuvres at Cynossema: Marc G. DESANTIS, *A Naval History of the Peloponnesian War. Ships, Men & Money in the War at Sea, 431-404 BC*, Pen & Sword, Barnsley, 2017, pp. 200-202.

47 For a full-detailed description of this battle, see John F. LAZENBY, *The Peloponnesian War. A Military Study*, Routledge, London – New York, 2004, pp. 196-199.

48 Even at Cyzicus, after the begging moments, then Mindarus chose to continue the battle by land, where he died at least (Diod., XIII 50.6-7). See Owen REES, *Great Naval Battles of the Ancient Greek World*, Pen & Sword, Barnsley, 2018, pp. 116-117

49 Despite the interesting study of Brian BERTOSA, «The Social Status and Ethnic Origin of the Rowers of Spartan Triremes», *War & Society*, 23.1, (2005), pp. 1-20, the real origin of the Peloponnesian crews and oarsmen remains problematic. It is likely that ordinary people who were not used to usually row could be caught by panic at the first disadvantage. Regarding this point, the description of Lysias of a naval battle (Lys. 2.38) is pivotal: we can consider this account as the prototypical situation whom his audience was well-experienced. Cf. Barry S. STRAUSS, *Naval Battle and Sieges*, cit. pp. 233-237.

as we have seen, conversely the Others were many times zealous to have fresh troops on the seashore. Right here, as well as being a real encouragement for the comrades at sea⁵⁰, during several occasions other soldiers were all set to take action. They bore down against the enemies in route and supported their ships if the battle was taking a bad turn in contrast with the expectations⁵¹.

In connection with the presence of land troops, a clever method for overcoming a skilled fast enemy lay in arranging the battle near the coastline as well as in strengthening the structure of own triremes, with the so-called ἐπωτίδες, a sort of cat-heads⁵²: in addition to cushioning the impact with another ship and diverting it, they allowed the helmsman to mount a head-on ramming. The following collision disabled enemy ships with the outriggers shorn off, therefore, given the impossibility of shoving off, the Peloponnesians were eased in boarding and with subsequent ships' capture. Markedly, instead of reaching the alleged Athenian level according to the Thucydidean passage which we had seen at the beginning, the Others preferred to figure out a solution consistent with their customary meth-

50 The reference to a “friendly land” where the soldiers could take part in the fight until that time held at sea appears in the Gylippos’ intention: Thuc., VII 53.1: «βουλόμενος διαφθεῖρειν τοὺς ἐκβαίνοντας καὶ τὰς ναῦς ῥᾶον τοὺς Συρακοσίους ἀφέλκειν τῆς γῆς φιλίας οὐσης». The expression φιλίας οὐσης should be read in comparison with the next Nicias’ words: Thuc., VII 62.4: «ἄλλως τε καὶ τῆς γῆς, πλὴν ὅσον ἂν ὁ πεζὸς ἡμῶν ἐπέχη, πολεμίας οὐσης».

51 Gylippos’ decision of waiting the Athenians along the coastline, while they were struggling with the ships is prototypical (Thuc., VII 53.3). On this episode cf. Peter GREEN, *Armada from Athens*, Hodder and Stroughton, London – Sydney, 1970, pp. 301-302; Donald Kagan, *The Peace of Nicias and the Sicilian Expedition*, Cornell University Press, Ithaca – London, 1981, pp. 325-326; Alexander O. BOULTON, *Democracy and Empire. The Athenian Invasion of Sicily, 415-413 BCE*, Hamilton Books, New York – Toronto – London, 2021, p. 122. For some quotations on this topic: Barry S. STRAUSS, *Democracy, Cimon*, cit., p. 118 n. 14, however we cannot share his view of what happened at Demosthenes in 424 when disembarked at Sycion, and the local soldier arrived on the coastline for killing the enemies. This episode, actually, does not fall within the tendency of having troops on the land during a naval battle.

52 For the noteworthiness of this structural improvement within the Thucydidean narrative Jaqueline DE ROMILLY, *Thucydide. Livre VI-VII*, Les Belles Lettres, Paris, 1963, p. xxiii. Cf. John S. MORRISON – R. T. WILLIAMS, *Greek Oared Ships 900-322, B.C.*, Cambridge University Press, Cambridge, 1968, pp. 176-179. At length: John S. MORRISON – John COATES – Boris RANKOV, *The Athenian Trireme*, cit., pp. 163-167; Evangelos E. TZAHOS, «The Athenian Trireme: form and function of “epotides”», *Tropis VII. 7th International Symposium on Ship construction in antiquity. Pylos 1999*, Hellenic Institute for the Preservation of Nautical Tradition, Athens, 2002, pp. 775-789.

ods. A similar technical escamotage was employed in the 413 during the battle of Erineus by the Corinthians⁵³, who, after the earlier bitter defeat at Naupaktos for a long-standing naval power, made a pivotal step on the war at sea, becoming the advisers of the Syracusans subsequently⁵⁴. The ἐπωτίδες, indeed, proved to be an incisive thorn in the side for the Athenians, who due to the head-on ramming underwent a defeat pressed in the tight spaces and with the enemy waiting on the coastline to step in⁵⁵. Accordingly, instead of employing the Athenians tactics with emulation and adaptation, the enemies of Athens were consistent with their way of naval warfare adding one technical improvement. As tangible proof of this peculiarity, given his well-known Athenian milieu, Thucydides does not endorse the ἐπωτίδες along with the consequent head-on ramming, but, in the wake of his assessment of Sybota battle, the historian stigmatizes them as a real mark of naiveness by the helmsmen⁵⁶.

In order to seize more enemy ships and engaging the fight on land warfare, deception⁵⁷ emerged as an effective tool if the battle could be engaged with the

53 Thuc., VII 34. On this battle: John S. MORRISON – John COATES – Boris RANKOV, *The Athenian Trireme*, cit., 163-167; Marc G. DESANTIS, *A Naval History*, cit., pp. 157-159. Cf. Nicholas J. MCKENZIE, - Patricia A. HANNAH, (2013), «Thucydides' Take on the Corinthian Navy. οἱ τε γὰρ Κορίνθιοι ἠγήσαντο κρατεῖν εἰ μὴ καὶ πολὺ ἐκρατοῦντο. "The Corinthians believed they were victors if they were only just defeated"», *Mnemosyne*, 66.2, (2013), pp. 206-227.

54 On their effectiveness in the battle that took place in the Syracuse's harbour see John F. LAZENBY, *The Peloponnesian War*, cit., p. 155. Regarding the Syracusan naval power: cf. Andreas MORAKIS, «The Fleet of Syracuse (480-413)», *Historikà. Studi di Storia Greca e Romana*, 5, (2015), pp. 263-276; Ugo FANTASIA, «La potenza navale di Siracusa nel V secolo a.C.», in Carmine Ampolo (ed.), *La Città e le città della Sicilia Antica*, Edizioni Quasar, Roma, 2022, pp. 235-254.

55 On this battle: Daniel BATTISTI – Laurène LECLERCQ, «Les expéditions Athéniennes en Sicile, ou la difficulté pour une marine de garder sa supériorité», in Philip de Souza – Pascal Arnaud (eds.), *The Sea in History. The Ancient World*, The Boydell Press, Woodbridge, 2017, pp. 456-457.

56 Thuc., VII 36.5: «τῆ τε πρότερον ἀμαθία τῶν κυβερνητῶν δοκοῦση εἶναι, τὸ ἀντίπρῳρον ζυγκροῦσαι, μάλιστα' ἂν αὐτοὶ χρῆσασθαι· πλεῖστον γὰρ ἐν αὐτῷ σχῆσειν· τὴν γὰρ ἀνάγκρυσιν οὐκ ἔσεσθαι τοῖς Ἀθηναίοις ἐξωθουμένοις ἄλλοσε ἢ ἐς τὴν γῆν». Arnold W. GOMME – Antony ANDREWES – Kenneth J. DOVER, *A Historical Commentary on Thucydides. Volume IV. Books V 25-VII*, Clarendon Press, Oxford, 1970, pp. 415-416.

57 On the role of deception in Greek warfare: Peter KRENTZ, «Deception in Archaic and Classical Greek Warfare», in Hans van Wees (ed.), *War and Violence in Ancient Greece*, The Classical Press of Wales, Swansea, 2009, pp. 167-200. For the concept of μῆτις during naval warfare: John R. HALE, *Lord of the Sea: The Epic Story of the Athenian Navy and the*

technical innovations or by land too. At Syracuse, the Corinthian helmsman Ariston put forward a sharp ruse, bring the supplies near the coastline to have lunch and then be prompt for the battle⁵⁸. The Athenians would be enticed away from the naval battle. Actually, since the enemy assumed that the Syracusans were retreating and putting off the fight, the Athenians put ashore and had the launch too. Yet suddenly the Syracusans sailed against them and, also with the employment of ἐπωτίδες on their strengthened triremes, achieved a deciding victory. It is likely this trick inspired Lysander when concocted his notorious deception at Aigospotamoi, where the Athenians lost definitively their naval power due to a land battle⁵⁹.

Returning to the first question posed at the beginning of this study, we are able to infer that, during Classical period, naval warfare was not the only Athenian apanage with absolute profitable military results, as it can seem at the first sight according to the Thucydidean judgment of the battle of Sybota. In this respect, taking advantages from specific situations which allowed them to employ some manoeuvres, the Athenians developed an own way to challenge their enemies. The positive outcomes produced by a methodical improvement are under everyone's eyes, yet their tactics did not work indiscriminately. Instead, despite alternative tactical needs and methods, the "Others", especially the Peloponnesians and the Syracusans who were compelled to face the Athenian fleets, were inclined to approach the fight in a different way so as to overwhelm an adversary deeply skilled in his own manner. As the several episodes occurred during the Peloponnesian war clearly reveal, in view of upcoming research a new understanding of seamanship should be conducted by sifting through the sources at our disposal, keeping in mind that there was not an only one way of handling naval warfare.

Birth of Democracy, Viking Press, New York, 2009, pp. 156-157.

58 Thuc., VII 39.2 sgg. Peter GREEN, *Armada from Athens*, cit., pp. 278-280; Paul A. RAHE, *Sparta's Sicilian Proxy War. The Grand Strategy of Classical Sparta 418-413 B.C.*, Encounter Books, New York – London, 2023, pp. 206-207.

59 For a review regarding the source of the battle see: Jean-Françoise BOMMELAER, *Lysandre de Sparte. Histoire et traditions*, Bocard, Paris, 1981, pp. 103-111 and Elisabetta GRISANZIO, *Senofonte. Elleniche. EAAHNIKA. Libro II*, Edizioni di Pagina, Bari, 2023, pp. 72-74. For the reconstruction of this last fight: Barry S. STRAUSS, «Aegospotami Reexamined», *The American Journal of Philology*, 104.1, (1983), pp. 24-35. Cf. Eric W. ROBINSON, «What happened ad Aegospotami? Xenophon and Diodorus on the Last Battle of the Peloponnesian War», *Historia: Zeitschrift für Alte Geschichte*, 63.1, (2014), pp. 1-16.

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So called Missorium of Kerch, 4th century Found: Bosporan Necropolis, vault on the Gordikov estate. Near Kerch, the Crypt in the North-Eastern Slope of Mount Mithridates, 1891 This silver dish was a diplomatic gift from the Byzantine Emperor to a representative of the Bosporan government. In this fine example of the early Byzantine art traditional Classical themes are combined with a new artistic style. The vessel shows a composition typical of Roman coins: the Emperor on horseback is piercing the enemy with a spear. The rider was usually accompanied by one or several warriors and Nike crowning the winner. In contrast to the Classical composition showing the final scene of a battle, here we see the scene of triumph: Emperor Constantius II sits on a horse, triumphantly raising his spear. To emphasize the Emperor's highest rank and divine power, the artist used special pictorial devices including, for example, the distortion of proportions. The images were produced by a chisel. Part of the ornamentation is nielloed. The outer surface is gilded and a loop is soldered onto it. Hermitage Museum. Saint Petersburg. CC BY-SA 4.0 (Wikimedia Commons).

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