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CHAPTER 1

Athenian Democracy at War

1.1 Introduction

Ancient Athens developed democracy to a higher level than any other state before modern times. It was the leading cultural innovator of the classical age. Classical Athens is rightly revered for these political and cultural achievements. Less well known is this state's extraordinary record of military success. Athens was directly responsible for transforming Greek wars and for raising their scale tenfold. By the 450s it had become the eastern Mediterranean's superpower. The first major reason for this success was this state's demographic advantage. With twenty times more citizens than an average Greek state, Athens could field armies and fleets that were much larger than all but a few others. The second major reason was the immense income that Athens got from its empire. This allowed it to employ thousands of non-elite citizens on campaigns and to perfect new corps and combat modes. There is a strong case that democratic government was the third major reason. The military impact of Athenian democracy was twofold. The competition of elite performers before non-elite audiences resulted in a pro-war culture. This culture encouraged Athenians in ever-increasing numbers to join the armed forces and to vote for war. All this was counterbalanced by Athenian democracy's rigorous debates about war. This debating reduced the risks of Athenian cultural militarism. It also made military reforms easier and developed the initiative of the state's generals, hoplites and sailors. Political scientists have long viewed Athenian democracy as a source of fresh ideas. Presently they cannot satisfactorily explain the war-making of modern democracies. Consequently ancient history can provide political science with new lines of enquiry into

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how modern democracy impacts on international relations. Importantly this relationship between the two disciplines does not have to be one-way, for political science can help ancient historians to understand better how Athens' war-making affected its development as a democracy.

1.2 The Democratic Revolution

Classical Athens is famous for direct democracy and for a cultural revolution that set down foundations for the literature and the arts of the ancient and modern worlds. In 508/7 BC the Athenian *dēmos* ('people') rose up against a leader aiming for tyranny, expelled him and the foreign troops backing his attempt, and arrested and killed his upper-class supporters ([Arist.] *Ath. Pol.* 20.1–21.2; Hdt. 5.65.5–74.1). They had had enough of the disruptive struggles of their elite and now demanded the decisive role in their state's decision-making.[1] This popular demand was quickly realised by the reforms of Cleisthenes. His reforms made the assembly and a new democratic council of 500 members the final arbiters of public actions and laws ([Arist.] *Ath. Pol.* 20–1; Hdt. 5.63–73).[2] By the 450s the people had consolidated their *dēmokratia* ('democracy') by making decisions on an ever-wider range of public business and completely taking over the law-courts and the surveillance of magistrates.[3]

Admittedly, Athenian politicians were still elite members struggling for pre-eminence with each other.[4] Yet, now, their struggles were played out in political and legal *agōnes* or debates, with the final decision to support this or that leader resting with predominantly non-elite assembly-goers and jurors. In order to win over such popular audiences, politicians and litigants were forced to articulate the viewpoints of lower-class Athenians. Out of this dynamic of mass adjudicators and elite competitors emerged a pro-democratic culture that affirmed the poor's freedom and political capability, the rule of law and open debate.[5]

Today we know that several other Greek *poleis* ('city-states') experimented with early forms of democracy in the course of the sixth century.[6] Therefore

[1] Forsdyke 2005: 133–42; Ober 1996: 32–52; 2007; Pritchard 2005a: 141–4. *Contra* Raaflaub 2007a: 105–54.
[2] Hansen 1991: 33–6; Ostwald 1986: 15–28; Meier 1990: 53–81.
[3] Hansen 1991: 36–8; Pritchard 1994: 133–5.
[4] See p. 115.
[5] On this pro-democratic culture see e.g. Balot 2006: 48–85; Pritchard 2013: 17–18; Raaflaub 1989; Robinson 1997: 45–62.
[6] Keane 2009: 90–5; Robinson 1997: 65–122. Yet Hansen 1999 suggests that we lack enough evidence for half of Robinson's seventeen early Greek *dēmokratiai* to put beyond doubt that they were indeed democratic.

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the invention of democracy can no longer be attributed to Athens.[7] But Athenian democracy was different in that it avoided the *stasis* ('civil strife') that disrupted so many other Greek democracies.[8] With the exception of two short periods of oligarchy, it enjoyed two centuries of continuous existence. With incessant wars and an empire to administer, Athenian democracy also had a lot more public business.[9] This state's stronger fiscal position allowed it to employ thousands of Athenians to conduct this business.[10] In the 420s, for example, their *misthos* ('pay'), along with clerical assistance, added up to 150 talents per year.[11] The talent ('t') was the largest weight of Athens' silver currency. It was the equivalent of about 26 kilograms. The most commonly used weight was the drachma ('dr.'). There were 6,000 dr. in 1 t. One dr. was a standard daily wage of an unskilled labourer or a combatant in the armed forces. This subsidisation of the poor's participation in politics was, apparently, innovative, as no evidence for it exists elsewhere until the fourth century.[12] It ensured that a much wider social spectrum of non-elite Athenians could be politically engaged (e.g. Arist. *Pol.* 1293a1–10). The result of these differences was that Athenian democracy was more fully developed than any other pre-modern example.

1.3 The Cultural Revolution

Athens was also the leading cultural centre of the classical Greek world. The disciplines of the visual arts, oratory, drama and literature were developed to a higher level of sophistication in this state than in any other. Many of the works produced there became canonical for Graeco-Roman antiquity. Admittedly, these innovations were dependent on the immense wealth of classical Athens and its elite, and the ability of both to spend significant sums on festival-based contests. Between 430 and 350, for example, *khorēgoi* ('chorus sponsors') and the state's magistrates spent a total of

[7] But democracy's invention probably can still be attributed to the ancient Greeks, for while there have long been attempts to push democracy back to Mesopotamia (e.g. Isakhan 2007; Jacobsen 1943; 1957; Keane 2009: 101–26), they founder for want of evidence that the assemblies in this region's much earlier city-states had the same broad membership and political pre-eminence as those in a Greek *dēmokratia* (e.g. Barjamovic 2004; Cartledge 2016: 35–6; Robinson 1997: 16–25).

[8] For this prevalence of *stasis* among Greek states, see e.g. Gehrke 1985; Hansen and Nielsen 2004: 124–9. For classical democracies outside Athens, see e.g. O'Neil 1995; Robinson 2011.

[9] Pritchard 2010a: 58.

[10] Pritchard 2015d: 7–9.

[11] Pritchard 2015d: 52–90.

[12] De Sainte Croix 1975; 1981: 602–3 n. 24; Rhodes 1981: 338; Finley 1978: 310, n. 53; 1983: 34.

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29 t. on each celebration of the City Dionysia.[13] Total spending on the full programme of state-sponsored festivals was probably 100 t. per year.[14]

But ever since J. J. Winckelmann, who was the eighteenth-century pioneer of classical archaeology, many ancient historians have put this cultural revolution down to Athenian democracy.[15] Certainly the new requirement for elite playwrights, politicians and litigants to compete for the favour of mass audiences drove rapid innovations in oratory and drama.[16] The famous plays of ancient Athens are a good example. They may have been written by upper-class Athenians, but they were performed at *agōnes* ('contests') before thousands of predominantly lower-class theatre-goers.[17] Officially the judging of these *agōnes* was in the hands of ten judges, who had been selected by lot. But they were greatly influenced by the vocal reactions of the predominantly non-elite audience.[18] By going to the theatre regularly the *dēmos* gained an increasingly sophisticated appreciation of drama.[19] Consequently playwrights realised that their chances of winning were increased if they pushed the boundaries of their genre, whether it be tragedy, comedy, satyric drama or dithyramb.[20]

1.4 The Military Revolution

Athens is rightly revered for such achievements; by contrast, its contemporaneous military revolution is not widely recognised. Fifth-century Athens 'widened, amplified, and intensified' the waging of war, regularly attacked other democracies, and was 'a constant source of death and destruction' among the Greeks.[21] More than any other *polis* ('city-state'), Athens invented or perfected new forms of combat, strategy and military organisation. It was directly responsible for raising the scale of Greek warfare by an order of magnitude. In so doing the Athenian *dēmos* overcame the traditional conception of courage that elsewhere tended to limit military innovations. By the time that they had consolidated their *dēmokratia*,

[13] Pritchard 2015d: 6.
[14] Pritchard 2015d: 27–51.
[15] E.g. Boedeker and Raaflaub 1998; de Romilly 1996; Despotopoulos 1996; Dawson 1995: 4–5; Ober 2008: 81–2. *Contra* Samons 2001.
[16] For this performance dynamic's impact on oratorical practice, see e.g. Yunis 1998: especially 228–32.
[17] See pp. 122–3.
[18] E.g. Ar. *Av.* 444–7; *Ran.* 771–80; Pl. *Leg.* 659a–c, 700a–1b.
[19] Revermann 2006: especially 113–15.
[20] For the general innovation that competition caused in each of these genres, see, respectively, Burian 1997: 206; Bremer 1993: 160–5; Seaford 1984: 44; Zimmermann 1996: 53–4.
[21] Quotations from Hanson 2001: 4, 24. For the lack of peace between classical Greece's democracies, see e.g. Robinson 2001, 2006, *pace* Russett and Antholis 1992; Weart 2001.

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the Athenians were the eastern Mediterranean's superpower and had long moved huge forces across large distances for campaigns that lasted months, or in the case of sieges, up to a few years.[22] War had come to dominate politics, and the lives, each year, of thousands of elite and non-elite Athenians. The *dēmos* believed that every citizen was duty-bound to fight regularly for the state.[23] In the fifth century they waged war more frequently than ever before, doing so, on average, in 2 out of 3 years.[24]

Chapter 4 shows how the Athenians were now spending more on war-making than on anything else. The major public activities of their consolidated democracy were wars, festivals and politics. In the 420s, for example, public spending on fighting the Spartans was 1,500 t. per year. This was ten times more than what the *dēmos* was spending on running the government. It was fifteen times higher than the total cost of worshipping their gods. Even in times of peace fifth-century Athenians devoted more money to their armed forces than they did to politics *and* festivals combined. The *dēmos* closely controlled all this spending. They had acquired a good general knowledge of the various costs of their state's activities. This made it possible for them to change what they spent on one type of activity relative to others. Through their votes in the assembly the *dēmos* could therefore spend more on what they saw as a priority. Over time the sums for which they voted came to reflect the order of their priorities. The enormous differences between the costs of these major activities leave no doubt about what this order was: the fifth-century *dēmos* judged their topmost public priority to be war.

This expensive war-making represented a qualitative change from the Athenian military record before democracy.[25] Sixth-century Athenians went to war usually only to capture agricultural land on Attica's borders or in overseas colonies (e.g. [Arist.] *Ath. Pol.* 14.1; Hdt. 1.59.4, 139.2; 6.36). A good example is the last war between Athens and Megara for the control of Salamis.[26] Solon re-kindled Athenian interest in taking this small island by performing a 'nationalist' poem in the *agora* ('civic centre') and promising its land to those wishing to volunteer to fight (Plut. *Vit. Sol.* 9.2). Five hundred Athenians did so, with those who had been tasked with capturing Salamis' settlement fitting on one warship (9.3). Archaic Athenians also, apparently, went to war very infrequently, because we know only of

[22] Ferejohn and Rosenbluth 2017: 48.
[23] See p. 45.
[24] See p. 157.
[25] Pritchard 2010a: 7–15.
[26] E.g. Dem. 19.252; Diog. Laert. 1.46–8; Polyaen. 1.20.1–2; Paus. 1.40.4; Plut. *Vit. Sol.* 8–10.

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twelve recorded campaigns before 514/13.[27] These campaigns usually went only for days or weeks and were settled by a solitary clash of hoplites. They were initiated not by the state's basic political institutions but by leaders of aristocratic factions. The hoplites of such campaigns, who numbered only in the hundreds, came predominantly from the upper class.[28] Indeed H. Singor concludes that 'the typical hoplites of archaic Greece' were 'generally those belonging to the elite'.[29]

This small-scale and infrequent war-making of the Athenians was transformed in the first instance by the political reforms that Cleisthenes introduced immediately after the democratic revolution. These reforms massively increased the readiness of non-elite Athenians to serve in the armed forces and to initiate wars. In 506 their army defeated those of Chalcis and Boeotia in back-to-back battles (Hdt. 5.74–7). In 499 they sent twenty warships to help Anatolia's Greeks to revolt against the Persian empire (5.97–103), while, in 490, at the battle of Marathon they deployed 9,000 hoplites (Nep. *Milt.* 5). These reforms effectively integrated Athens and its *khōra* ('countryside') for the first time.[30] Each free male who lived in Attica was now registered as a citizen of Athens in his village or city-suburb and groups of them from across the *khōra* were linked together in ten tribes.[31] These new tribes served as the subdivisions of the new democratic council and a new publicly controlled army of hoplites. These registers of citizens were used to conscript hoplites. This was the Athenian state's first-ever effective mechanism for mass mobilisation. Attica was around twenty times larger and more populous than the *khōra* of an average-sized *polis*.[32] Therefore this mobilisation mechanism gave Athens a huge military boost. Demography would be a major reason for the military success of Athens in the fifth century.[33]

Chapter 2 shows how this demographic advantage gave the Athenians three military benefits. The first benefit was the huge size of the military forces that it could easily field. In the late 430s, for example, Athens had 13,000 citizens who fought as frontline hoplites. Consequently by itself it could field a land army that was larger than that of almost any other *polis*. With 30,000 citizens in the navy, it had the capacity to man 150 triremes

[27] Frost 1984: 283–94.
[28] E.g. Thuc. 6.56–8; Singor 2000; 2009: 585–603.
[29] Singor 2000: 67.
[30] Anderson 2003: 13–42; Pritchard 2005a: 137–40.
[31] Rhodes 2014: 44–5.
[32] Hansen and Nielsen 2004: 70–3; Ober 2008: 84–6.
[33] Brock and Hodkinson 2000: 9; Ober 2008: 60; Pritchard 2010a: 15.

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without the need to hire non-citizens. No other Greek state had a comparable naval capacity. The second benefit was that with such manpower reserves hoplites and sailors needed to fight only periodically. In a normal year Athens only ever needed to mobilise a fraction of them. Although the *dēmos* strongly held that everyone was duty-bound to fight for the state, a hoplite or a sailor was generally expected to do so only once in 2 or 3 years. This helps to explain why the Athenians did not grow weary of almost non-stop war-making. The third benefit was the sheer number of wealthy Athenians. The Athenian state required such citizens to do a lot more militarily. It relied on the ability of elite horsemen to pay for warhorses. In the navy elite trierarchs needed to command their warships and to pay non-salary running costs. With a huge population, Athens had an elite that was larger than almost all other Greek *poleis*. Consequently it could create central Greece's best cavalry corps. It always had enough ship commanders for what was Greece's biggest navy.

The events of the late 480s and the early 470s set in train a second wave of Athenian military innovations. In order to get ready for the return of the Persians, the Athenian people decided, in 483, to direct a windfall of public income from local silver mines towards the massive expansion and upgrading of their publicly controlled navy.[34] The 200 triremes that they had at the end of this shipbuilding represented the largest-ever fleet of state-owned warships. Three years later the Great King launched his expedition to subjugate the Greeks of the mainland as he had recently done to those of Anatolia and the Dardanelles.[35] The final destruction of this huge Persian force, in 479, saw the Athenians invited to found the Delian League. Initially this league was a voluntary alliance of states contributing ships and soldiers or annual tribute to Athenian-led expeditions.[36] For the first few decades the league campaigned frequently to expel Persians from their remaining bases across the Aegean.

At the same time the Athenians began eroding the independence of their allies, who, by the 450s, were obliged to pay annual tribute and had long been forcefully prevented from pulling out of what was now called the *arkhē* ('empire'). By 432/1 the income from this empire had reached 600 t. per year (Thuc. 2.13.3). From this income Athens created the cash reserves that enabled it quickly to wage war on a truly massive scale.

[34] See pp. 67–8.
[35] Rhodes 2014: 58–62.
[36] Thuc. 1.94–8; Meiggs 1972: 42–9; Rhodes 2014: 66–73.

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Chapter 5 shows how, for example, on the Peloponnesian War's first phase this state spent a staggering 16,000 t. or thereabouts. This unprecedented supply of money, clearly, was a second major reason for the military success of fifth-century Athens.

Imperial income allowed the Athenians to employ thousands of lower-class citizens as hoplites and sailors, and to perfect forms of warfare that broke decisively from the traditional conception of courage.[37] This conception was based on what hoplites needed to do to win their pitched battles.[38] Among numerous innovations, they could afford to man large fleets and to train their naval crews for long periods.[39] So trained, each crew could manoeuvre their trireme autonomously or as part of a formation in order to break through or outflank the line of an enemy's fleet.[40] As the Athenians quickly acquired more skill as sailors than the other Greeks (e.g. Thuc. 2.85.2–3), they pioneered a highly mobile form of combat in which they sought to win by ramming and hence disabling as many enemy ships as possible (e.g. Aesch. *Pers.* 408–20). This represented a decisive change from traditional sea warfare where the *agōn* ('battle') had been decided by the hand-to-hand struggles between soldiers on the decks.[41] In this new 'Athenian way of fighting at sea' a standard tactic was retreat.[42] Retreat was a sign of cowardice and caused *aiskhunē* ('a feeling of shame') among hoplites.[43]

Before Philip II of Macedon siege warfare was rudimentary in the eastern Mediterranean: besiegers tried to starve a *polis* into capitulation by blockading its harbour and using counter walls to cut access to its *khōra*.[44] Since this could take more than a year to be effective, the Athenians of the early fifth-century were forced to abandon sieges for want of sufficient resources (e.g. Hdt. 6.135, 9.75). But imperial income allowed them to conduct sieges successfully, from which they gained a reputation for exceptional expertise in this form of warfare (e.g. Thuc. 1.102.2). The Athenians also set themselves apart by building fortifications that were unprecedented in their

[37] On these military innovations, see e.g. Hanson 2001: 7–17; Pritchard 2010a: 17–21; Raaflaub 1991; 1999: 141–4.
[38] Pritchard 2013: 179–84.
[39] E.g. Plut. *Vit. Cim.* 11.2–3; [Xen.] *Ath. Pol.* 1.19–20; Thuc. 1.80, 142.6–7; 2.84–6, 2.89. In themselves the archer corps and the 1,200-strong cavalry corps were further innovations (see pp. 55, 59 and 68).
[40] Morrison 1974; Morrison, Coates and Rankov 2000: 62–79.
[41] E.g. Thuc. 1.49.1–4; 7.62.3–4; Strauss 2007: 229–36. For the use of *agōn* to describe a sea battle, see e.g. Aesch. *Pers.* 405; Thuc. 2.89.8, 10.
[42] E.g. Thuc. 2.91.1–92.2; Arrington 2015: 104; Pritchard 1999a: 115–17. Quotation from Strauss 2007: 231.
[43] E.g. Aesch. *Sept.* 411; Eur. *Tro.* 401–2; *Heracl.* 700–1.
[44] Hanson 2001: 11–12; Strauss 2007: 237–9; van Wees 2000: 94, 101–4.

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scale and for linking an *astu* ('urban centre') to a relatively distant port.[45] With tens of kilometres of walls in place, they developed a new way of responding to the invasion of a hoplite army.[46] They no longer had to send their own hoplites out for a pitched battle, when their *khōra* was invaded. Instead they could withdraw their farmers and moveable property within the Athens–Piraeus fortifications.[47] They could rely on the imported grain that their seapower guaranteed.

1.5 Challenging Realism and Popular Beliefs

A striking feature of ancient Greek history is the timing of this military revolution. The transformation of war by the Athenians directly follows the democratic revolution of 508/7. It coincides with the cultural revolution that was partly brought about by Athenian democracy. The near contemporaneousness of these revolutions opens up a challenging possibility: the general bellicosity of fifth-century Athens may be another product of Athenian democracy. It may constitute the dark side of the Athenian cultural revolution. Consequently democracy might be the third major reason for the military success of fifth-century Athens. Among contemporary witnesses of Athenian warfare the perception of democracy's positive impact was more widespread than is usually assumed.[48] For example, Herodotus put down the unexpected Athenian victories of 506 over Boeotia and Chalcis to the new democracy: the personal liberty and the *isēgoria* ('equal right of public speech') that Cleisthenes had institutionalised transformed the Athenians into the world's best soldiers (5.78–9). In his funeral speech of 338/7 Demosthenes similarly argued that the *parrhēsia* ('freedom of speech') of the Athenians guaranteed their strong feeling of shame about cowardly behaviour and so supported their unsurpassed resolve on the battlefield (60.25–6).

This historical example of a militarily successful democracy challenges the realist school that has dominated the discipline of international relations since the Second World War.[49] The antecedents of this school go back to the famous translation of Thucydides by T. Hobbes.[50] Realism's

[45] Hanson 2001: 10–1; Raaflaub 1999: 142; Rhodes 2006: 41–2; Strauss 2007: 239–40. Thucydides implies that the Athenians pioneered the building of 'long walls' between Megara and its port of Nisaea before doing the same in Attica a few years later (1.103.4, 107.1).
[46] Pritchard 2010a: 20–1. Hermippus fr. 46 Kassel and Austin; [Xen.] *Ath. Pol.* 2.16.
[47] E.g. Thuc. 1.143.4–5.
[48] E.g. Isoc. 16.27; Ober 2010.
[49] For the realist school, see e.g. Keohane 1986.
[50] Crane 1998: 61–71; de Sainte Croix 1972: 26–9.

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advocates believe that every state rationally calculates its foreign policy on the basis of what will maximise security and prosperity, regardless of what type of political regime it has. In addition classical Athens confounds two pieces of popular wisdom about democracy. The first of these popular beliefs is that democracies are bad at prosecuting wars.[51] This assumes that democratic freedom undercuts military discipline, while the fear that democratic politicians have of the voters means that the tough policies that are necessary for security are not always introduced. This ancient example of democratic bellicosity also challenges the cherished view of our post-war era that democracies are peace-seeking.[52] According to this popular belief, democracies dislike violence in foreign affairs, prefer non-violent forms of conflict resolution, and fight wars reluctantly and only in self-defence.

These popular beliefs and the wide influence of realism explain why democracy's impact on war has hardly ever been studied.[53] In this respect ancient historians are not an exception.[54] Most of their studies have only focused on one or another corps of the Athenian armed forces or this or that type of combatant on the Greek battlefield more generally. V. D. Hanson writes: 'Often the parameters of present investigations simply reflect old controversies of the nineteenth century, while fruitful new fields of enquiry are left unexamined. For example, there are dozens of new treatments of traditionally narrow topics such as the hoplite push or the battle of Marathon, while we still have no wider enquiry into the role of ancient political organization – oligarchy, democracy and autocracy – on military efficacy.'[55]

1.6 Democratic Peace and War Theories

In the last 25 years *some* international-relations theorists have broken from the realist school by focusing on differences between the war-making of modern democracies and other regime types. From their statistical analyses, which have been rigorously debated and repeatedly tested, they have made three important findings. First, B. M. Russett, among others, has demonstrated that democracies do not fight each other.[56] But this does not

[51] Merom 2003: 244; Reiter and Stam 2002: 2–3, 146–7.
[52] Keane 2004: 17–20; Mansfield and Snyder 2005: 1–2, 23–4; Merom 2003: 244–5; Reiter and Stam 2002: 2–3, 146–7, 150.
[53] Merom 2003: 3–18, 250; Reiter and Stam 2002: 2.
[54] Pritchard 2010a: 30–1.
[55] Hanson 2007: 19.
[56] E.g. Russett and Oneal 2001; Huth and Allee 2002; Weart 1998; cf. Brown, Lynn-Jones and Miller 1996.

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